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## A Window with Cyclamen (1)

— 田辺聖子「篝火草の窓」\* —

学芸学部 国際英語学科 小森 道彦

学芸学部 国際英語学科 Jennifer Rose Smith

**要旨：**主人公の戸沢瑠璃は 64 歳。独身で、生命保険会社を定年後大阪ミナミのブティックで働いている。彼女の家の出窓に置かれた鉢植えの花を通して、塚田と出会う。塚田は通勤途中、電車の窓から見える鉢植えに心楽ませ、お礼にシクラメンを携えて現れる。出会いは唐突であったが、瑠璃は「男は使い捨てや」と心の中で思いつつも同世代の塚田との出会いと会話を楽しみ、次第にその人柄や人生観に惹かれていく。この翻訳は、短編の冒頭から塚田と出会う前までの導入部分である。

**キーワード：**田辺聖子、翻訳、メタファー、異文化理解

Approaching the station, a private railroad train that serves the suburbs slows down. Because the tracks curve sharply just before the station, the train almost brushes against the edges of the roofs of houses built close to the track. As the train slides into the station, the view of the houses from the station platform is interrupted by many billboards. Billboards for places such as an obstetrics and gynecology hospital, a money-lending shop, a seafood restaurant, and at the end of the platform, a shopping center looms in front of the station.

— Just before the curve, the train leans toward the crowded line of houses along the track. Among them can be seen a one-story house and inside a bay window, a white lace curtain, folds neatly pressed, and a pot of flowers.

There are cyclamen from winter to spring, and begonias or geraniums in the summer and fall. They are always red flowers.

Ruri puts the flowerpot in the bay window, which gets a good amount of sunlight because it is south facing, and due to the railroad tracks in front of the house, there is nothing to interrupt the sunlight. But she has never imagined these flowers please the eyes of commuters.

From inside the house, she notices dim shadows of people on the hurtling train doors and windows, but it is for such a fleeting second that she does not care about it.

Ruri has been living alone in this house for ten years. After the death of her mother, she sold half of the land to the knick-knack shop next door, paid property tax, and rebuilt the house to be small and suitable for living on her own.

Since she decided to prepare herself for getting old alone, she chose a one-story house instead of two. The time would certainly come when climbing up and down the stairs would be hard, and even dangerous for her. Foreseeing that future calmly, Ruri had a small bathroom and the kitchen designed to be convenient for an elderly person to use. No steps in the house and easy access to the bathroom from the bedroom. For security reasons, she asked the designers to make an escape door in the bedroom which cannot be seen from outside, the windows to be made of safety glass, and a double lock on the front door. She replaced her telephone with a new one that could be silenced in order to deter nuisance calls. It was a few years ago that she installed the automatic lighting in the rooms to turn on when it gets dark.

For a long time, her mother disliked the house alongside the railroad tracks. It seemed that her father also disliked it, planning to live in the house only as a temporary residence. But after his business as a wholesale dealer of towels did not go well, he closed his shop on Dobuike Street in Osaka and started working for a company, finally settling down in the house alongside the railroad track in the suburbs.

Although her mother used to always complain of the shudder of trains passing every morning and evening, her father fell ill and by the time he passed away, she had given up complaining. Full of vigor, she started working a part-time job in a nearby town. She seemed happy saying, "I like being close to the station." At that time, Ruri was still working. The life insurance company she was at had many female workers, and she felt comfortable there because quite a few of them worked until retirement age. When her mother heard the price of land was soaring, and the price of such places were XXX yen per square meter, she got greedy and began to ask again to move to somewhere more quiet, a genteel suburb. But it seemed to be a big hassle for her and Ruri, and just the thought of it made them feel down.

However, when her mother passed away, Ruri had to do something about the house. Because of the taxes.

She thought about selling the land and moving to a new town. But, she finally decided to rebuild the house and continue to live in it because of the memories of her parents, the advantage of being close to the station, and the only 20-minute train ride from the station to Osaka. The knick-knack shop 'Akane-ya' was on the right, the Chinese restaurant 'Meiroken' on the left...she had known both for a long time, and felt reluctant to move to a new place that she did not know well.

It was talked about a great deal at one time that gangs would force locals to sell their land and cause lots of trouble, but she stopped hearing of this as the economy declined into a recession.

After retirement from her company, she has been working at a boutique 'Irene' in Osaka for

four years.

The boutique is located in the Southern Downtown Osaka, on the first floor of a building on the corner of Suomachi Street (also called "Europe Street") and Tatamiyamachi Street. The woman who introduced Ruri to 'Irene', traveled with her on a sightseeing tour in Europe. Both Ruri and she were traveling with the tour alone, so they shared a room and became good friends. They found that they were both single and working, and they felt at ease with each other during the tour. The woman was about the same age, still living with her parents. She was cheerful, and liked fashion. She was a customer at the boutique 'Irene'. She said, "The shop owner is looking for a decent clerk, not too young, so I think you're perfect for the position," and recommended Ruri to the owner.

After retirement from the life insurance company, Ruri had nowhere to work. There was nothing wrong with her health, and she had the intension of working as long as she could. One of her senior colleagues, living alone, poured all of her retirement pay to reside in a nursing home, but she was told that no pets were allowed, so she gave away her dog to someone else (she said she was asked to never meet the dog again), and held her tame pet bird tight in the palm of her hand and squeezed it to death.

The story gave Ruri chills, and reinforced her belief to draw her last breath here, although small, on her own property, in her own house. She might change her mind in the distant future, but she thought that she would rather be a small fish swimming freely in the vast ocean, even if it is full of enemies and dangers, than a big fish trapped in an aquarium.

She applied for the job at 'Irene' hoping to work in a shop handling beautiful products, and seemed to win the favor of the owner. It was a small shop, with only a young clerk. The woman who owned it was not usually there because she had another shop in the northern part of Osaka, so she needed someone like an assistant shop manager.

The owner seemed to have obtained information from someone in the life insurance company at which Ruri had worked for a long time. The owner took the information into consideration, thought Ruri was reliable, and decided to hire her.

Ruri has spindly body with a long torso, but nice legs. She has a long neck and narrow shoulders. Though her hair is thinning, it looks luxuriant because she dyes it chestnut. She trims it under the ears, curls it inward, and fluffs it up with an old-fashioned curling rollers. She has fair skin and no wrinkles. She thinks that it is because she has been taking care of skin diligently since she was young, and that it is the result of her 'force of will' (though she wouldn't say that to anyone).<sup>1</sup>

Although people will think of her as having a meek and modest personality from her small face, small features, calm and gentle face, Ruri is getting inflexible with age.<sup>2</sup> She has been living with the understanding from her experience that people and things in the world are endlessly terrifying, so she does not underestimate or discount them. She has always lived as if she were treading on thin ice. Instead, when there is nothing to be done, or when nothing will change no matter what is said, she believes it is past the point of no return. She will not accept instructions or criticism any longer. People might say, "You are becoming more stubborn as you age," but she would answer inflexibly,

"It can't be helped."

That may be her 'force of will' she thinks to herself. With no one to protect her but herself, she lives her single life taking much care, and at the same time, she cannot be too careful. Although somebody whispered to start moneylending business or about how to make a fast buck, Ruri did not get greedy. With an inflexible attitude, she did not give ear to those offers. She kept papers such as some stable stock certificates, the title deeds for her house and land in a safe-deposit box in a bank, and occasionally bought clothes or went on a short trip domestically in Japan with the interest from the fixed deposit.

Starting to work in the boutique, she found

that a whole new life opened in front of her again. She was washed in a breeze from downtown southern Osaka, and she felt as if she would never get old and remain the same, forever.

Men from the supply company which deals with imported clothes were kind to Ruri. The young guys seemed to estimate her to be in her forties, while the elder people were keenly observant as expected, and say,

"You're probably over fifty, but you don't look your age. You look young."

"Me? I'm thirty-eight. I might look older than my age 'cause I'm chic," Ruri answers smiling.

"There's lots of things that you guys don't know about the world," Ruri wants to give them a piece of her mind. 'About the world' could be restated as 'about a woman's world.' One of Ruri's friends, forty-five years old actually, lied that she was twenty-seven and lived with a college student boyfriend for a long time. She said that she ran away from him, leaving no forwarding address, because he graduated from college, got a job, and asked her to marry him.

Ruri thinks that women are those who can pass through time freely, like Takamura Ono passed between this world and the realm of the dead.<sup>3</sup> Ruri, sixty-four years old, does not have special beauty methods of her own, nor has had plastic surgery.

Ruri ridicules the ones who do such things. She reflects that this is because of stubbornness as she ages, while she also thinks that they lack force of will. If someone says she is old-fashioned, she would turn and say,

"It can't be helped. What's wrong about being old-fashioned?"

Thinking to herself, "I'm so inflexible!"

But no one probably notices that from her appearance. She wears nicely tailored, and high-quality black dresses, pale-black stockings, and black low-heeled shoes, with her neckline a little low showing her white, smooth skin. A single diamond suspended by a thin golden chain hangs around her long, graceful neck, placed in the

center of her white chest. Of course, this diamond is genuine. She bought this for herself as a reward when she reached retirement age without mishap.

This is the only accessory Ruri wears, no rings or earrings. As she ages, she thinks that they are hard on her skin and her mind, even though they are very small. She wears a brooch watch believing that wearing a watch on her wrist is bad for blood circulation.

Ruri herself wears simple clothes, but she is good at getting the young clerks to buy the boutique's clothing at a staff discount and wear it. They are like walking mannequins that arouse customers' interest.

The shop closes at seven. Ruri lets the young clerks go home (from three in the afternoon the number of young clerk is increased to two), Ruri cleans up and shuts down the shop. When the shop owner is there, she goes straight home; when she is alone, she drops by the safe deposit at night and then gets on a train. Long ago, she had the faint hope that she would meet Tsukada, but he is not in Osaka now. The commuter trains are full of men and women she does not know. Ruri is tired of people. The faces of commuters, the faces of human full of apathy and causeless viciousness, tires her much more than the workplace that requires a lot of standing. It is at times such as these that she wants to see Tsukada.

(to be continued.)

#### Notes:

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- 1 「精神力」は mental power、inner strength, force of will などの訳例が考えられたが、mental power が事故やトラブルに屈しない強さとする、ここで選んだ force of will は物事を成し遂げる強さであるといえる。(以下、原文からの引用は「 」で示す。)
- 2 「ふてぶてしい」という語が、この短い導入部分にも6箇所現れる。また「(しゃないやん.....)」という呟きも、小説全体を通して7箇所ある。いずれも主人公瑠璃の64歳という年齢の性質をあらわすキーワードで、これらにより瑠璃は周囲に合わせて自分を変えることを好まないと宣言している。「ふてぶてしい」の訳例としては imprudent (無分別な)、audacious (無礼な、ずうずうしい) などが考えられたが、ここでは「老人性頑固」(98、99ページ)と表現されている内容に近い意味をもつ inflexible (頑固な、強情な) を選んだ。
- 3 Takamura Ono (小野纂、802-853) was a poet and a courtier in Heian era. There are lots of legends that he was also an officer of Hades (冥官), and it was said that he could come and go between this world and realm of the dead. (『日本古典文学全集』今昔物語集(3), p. 148.)