

HAIKU MIND

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PART I.

Travel

Leave the city. Take a long blue and white train out of the gaseous, gray, polluted energy mass known as Tokyo and head down the Izu peninsula. Buy a bag of mandarin oranges and pop them into your mouth as the panorama opens like a Saturday matinee: lovely green hills dropping off sharply to a deep blue sea, clusters of fishing boats and beaches, a cloudless sky and penetrating quiet. Get off at a station where no one else gets off and find a hotel. Go in November, after the first winter chills have emptied the hotels of their seasonal guests. Wander on the beach. Close your eyes to the whipping sand whirlwinds, open your eyes to the light sparkling on the waves. Talk with the flowers that grow straight out of solid rock. Ask them how they do it. Wait for the answer.

Change into the hotel's *yukata* and slipper your way downstairs to the hot spring pool. Scrub yourself on a plastic stool and step into the pool, stinging hot until you stop moving. Listen as your heartbeat goes up, and the sweat beads gather on your scalp. Step out and feel the faintness and refreshing cool air. Sit down to a steaming meal of fresh seafood and vegetables, rough and earthy, naturally spiced. As the table is cleared away and the *futon* laid out for the night's rest, take what it was that you came for: the peace, yourself, nature, a human chance.

The parched branches lean
over the thundering surf
like cranes taking flight.

The sea wind rips at
the ragged pine trees... Autumn
needles in the sand.

The shrine is boarded
against icicles and storms.
Snow upon the coins.

Soft rain on blue tiles.
Rivers in the garden.
Blossoms on the waves.

Celebrate the New Year. Travel to Hakone, the old mountain pass and government barrier. Ride into the mountains by bus, along narrow roads bordered by antique shops and leafless trees with an occasional crow. Go during the first few days of January, when somber men in dark suits and women in bright *kimono* are visiting the hillside Shinto shrine to pray to the past for the future. Buy good-luck charms. Pay twenty yen and draw a stick from a box and find that you'll have #2 Good Luck on the *omikuji* fortune paper; buy a wooden arrow with little bells and white feathers to take home and hang inside your door against sickness and disaster. Watch the crowds pull the ropes and ring the metal gourdlike bells, calling the gods to hear their prayers, then ringing the bells to send the gods home again. Give money to the shrine for a jug of *sake*. Give *two* jugs.

Take a room with a view of Mt. Fuji from the veranda, and sit there in communion with it, a perfect cone, covered completely with snow and contrasting starkly with the brownish hills and blue mountains around it. Relax. Throw *futon* on the floor and slide away the little *shoji* sliding windows built on the floor level. Denude the refrigerator of its little jars of One Cup Sake, stretch out on the *futon* and view Fuji propped up on one arm. Think of the millions of poems, stories, paintings, and postcards of that extinct volcano. Hear Fuji mumble in its earth that none of the likenesses have been adequate yet. Wake up in the morning, roll over, and look at it again: Japan's tallest, noblest creation.

Karasu flying,
black sheen on his wings as he
alights on the branch.

Pine trees shoot upward,
straight arrows bringing good luck
at the New Year shrine.

Icy Fuji cone,
waiting outside my window,
ready for licking.

Winter stars shiver,
crowning the black mountain tops,
hugging them for warmth.

Take the highway to Yamanaka and run right into Mt. Fuji. Go fishing. Before sunrise, wrap yourself in winter clothes and rubber boots and walk down to Lake Yamanaka. Thread your way through the boats drawn up on the beach, half-filled with water to keep them from drifting off with the wind, and the long wooden poles stacked by the fishermen. Rent your equipment from a hotel owner with a baseball cap and a pick-up truck, and move out onto the lake in a row boat. Grumble and hook your numb fingers baiting the line. Pull your collar up around your ears as a sharp wind froths the water and freezes your face. Drop the line overboard and look at Mt. Fuji, a massive presence, rising alone on the plain directly before you. In the half-light before sunrise, watch it glower at you, and glower back. Got tell it on the mountain: with a red nose and hand-line, you're poaching against the gods.

Molded in mountains,
tickled by shoreline rushes:
Lake Yamanaka.

Water in the boat,
the boat half in the water.
Sinking— not sinking?

The sun rays on Fuji,
reflected as a sheet of light,
split the heavens blue/white.

The long wooden poles,
like the ribs of a teepee,
wait for the fishermen.

By sunrise, catch your anchor line four times. Take your boat ashore, pull out a hot thermos of green tea, sit down on the beach, and wait for the fishermen, too.

Evaluate the coming of Spring. Get on a commuter train and head south to Yokosuka. Peek in at the U.S. Naval Base, where Mt. Fuji blends in with the ship's riggings and masts, warehouses and booms, and is quietly saluted in the mornings by sailors returning to home port after a tour at sea. Walk around Yokosuka City,

gaudy neon signs and bars, trinket shops and new department stores. Find a tea shop and buy some *chawan*, large ceremonial tea bowls with their own colors and characters. Tell your friends you're going to use them for soup.

Drive down the Miura peninsula, past exclusive yachting harbors and seaside homes with boats moored to the backyard steps. Watch the fishermen repairing their nets. Look closely to see if those rugged fishermen aren't company executives from Tokyo on weekend vacation. Examine the rows of seaweed drying on clotheslines, on wooden racks, on apartment roofs, on the beaches. Watch the slippery green seaweed turn black and wispy like the ashes of a fire floating in the air. Look down into the ocean inlets where the seaweed is being farmed. Watch the seaweed slushing back and forth and imagine it growing, multiplying, invading the valleys, crossing the mountains, and taking over the world. Drive down a crooked, dusty sideroad and find men in leggings climbing around with bundles of straw repairing a thatched roof. Tip your hat to Oshima, an island still huffing and puffing white smoke from a live volcano; hold your hat carefully at Jogashima, where the gales have driven more than one boat aground on the ragged rocks. Turn in time to see the sun set behind Mr. Fuji. Tell the mountain it's going to be a good Spring.

The U. S. Navy
floats in the sunrise water,
Fuji at the dock.

Oshima volcano
sucks the clouds into the earth,
inhaling slowly.

The oldest pine trees
lay down with the yellow grass:
Jogashima wind.

The cloud above Fuji
looks like a Chinaman's hat,
doffed to the sunset.

PART II. The City

Return to the city. Feel your pupils begin to narrow as the green disappears and the train rolls into bright metal roofs and billboards. Feel your mind begin to clog with the ugly concrete bunker-like buildings, the oil derricks, the warehouses, the expressways. Resist being swept into it. Look for the tiny rice fields which still survive next to elevated highways, parking lots and factories. Wonder if the rice tastes different, suffocated in auto fumes and industrial waste.

Rice paddy under
massive ferro-concrete slabs:
road to Tokyo.

Step out into the noise, the clanging of bells and beeping of trucks, the honking and loudspeakers and shouting. Step out into the crowds at the train station, pushing and shoving, tangled and jammed. Turn yourself off. Let your body sway with the crowd, back and forth, toward the platform exit. Return to the city during a “go slow” strike, when the crowd no longer sways, but pins itself in, wall to wall, and the pressure of bodies inside the stopping trains is so strong that the automatic doors won’t open.

The platform is packed.
The train stops: no one gets out,
and no one gets in.

Make your way out of the station. Feel the photochemical smog entering your lungs, swelling your glands, drying your throat, burning your eyes. Curse the men who made this hell. Curse the companies which poison the people, and the government which smiles so benignly on public death and sickness in the name of the GNP. Curse them all, and the power of the city which draws you into the nightmare. Curse yourself, and the Japanese language you came to study— the *Nihongo* which speaks so hesitantly of the human rights and needs of modern man. Take the bus and go home, still cursing.

The drunkard vomits
doubled over in his seat:
the odor rising.

Itching in my eyes,
burning down inside my lungs.
More deaths in the news.

Neighbor children scream.
Nihongo on the table.
Nothing in the glass.

Go to the university. Walk past the gray police vans, and the rows of riot policemen in their Martian glass faces, heavy boots and padded uniforms, standing behind their body shields conversing on walkie-talkies. Walk through the gate as sixty young men in blue helmets charge down the center of the campus brandishing lead pipes. Listen to the blaring loudspeakers, the harangues at fever pitch, the hoarse voices and responding cheers. Listen to the constant whistles and chants as rival factions parade around the campus. Safe on a roof, watch the snake-dances grow longer and longer, two hundred students in a chain of arms and shoulders, tramping along behind a horizontal bamboo pole. Watch the lines turn and twist like angry dragons. Remember the student who was tortured to death last week, beaten and then hung.

The snake-dance moving
around the Founder's statue:
Leftist festival.

The sound of lead pipes,
smashing the helmets and skulls
of rival factions.

Dispute on world peace,
the victims carried out on
plywood poster boards.

A yellow helmet,
spinning slowly on the ground,
full of bright red blood.

Adjust. Turn yourself off. Ignore the jostling, buzzing, beeping, jabbing, ringing, clanging. Ignore the stench of the gutters, the vomit, the men pissing in the streets. Ignore the ugly concrete, the sludge in the rivers, the thick white chemical air. Adjust. Survive.

Look for the little things. Celebrate *tatami* mats, rice straw woven in narrow rows, yielding to the feet and eyes. Celebrate the tingling thrill of hot water splashed over your body from the basins while washing, and stepping into the *ofuro*, the hot bath which warms body and soul. Discover good sounds, like the kettle boiling over when you make green tea late at night. Appreciate chance, like finding money on the pavement during an international monetary crisis.

Sun on tatami
brings to life yellow straw fields
here in my bedroom.

Hot water to my nose:
nostrils fanning the surface,
mustache floating upward.

The tea kettle boils,
and the flapping lid sounds like
geta on the walk.

Shining in the leaves,
a hundred yen on asphalt,
revalued in my hand.

Be grateful for the big things. Be grateful for friends, and the innate hospitality of the people. Go with them to *sushi* shops, and dine away the hours with *sake*, squid, shrimp, and raw fish. Talk about the hopes and dreams, foibles and tragedies you share in common. Let the *sushi* shop owner tell you how he lost money in the stock market and broke his leg skiing last winter. Go with a company colleague to sing lusty German drinking songs at a bar in Ginza, and talk with the girl at the neighborhood meat shop about the ten years she has spent playing the twelve-stringed *koto*. Be invited to dinner so often that you forget how to do your own cooking.

Delicate tuna,
carved from the big red belly,
served on wooden blocks.

Disciplined fingers
pluck sounds from the air and place
them on the *koto*.

I have been a guest
too long: scrubbing the dust from
my old cooking pans.

Finally, put it into focus. Find a quiet temple garden, and sit there until time no longer matters. Let the sand and rocks, the old wooden floors, the moss and stone lanterns speak to you. They, too, have survived, hundreds of years and more to come. Sense the peace, and feel the calm flood your body and mind. Discover what you don't need. Listen to the sound of a single bird.

The peace of old things,
Floating lightly in the sun,
Heavy in the earth.