

SENILE CASUALTY

Tomonari:

Now, I beg you, please tell me your names

Old couple:

What need do we have to continue the secret?

Takasago and Sumiyoshi,

the paired spirit of husband and wife,

are in front of you

From "Takasago", by Zeami.

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Osaka, Satsukigaoka.

Finally, I found a western style silent place, without rigorous perfection, with the warmth of the whispering and the newspaper sound. Colombian coffee and tables higher than my knees, French croissant, a window towards an artificial garden. I was in need of a place like this, without *tatami* and bows. After several months here I have lost weight, and some customs, silly ones perhaps, to say hello with a kiss on the cheek, to hold hands, those kinds of things.

To my left, two *ojisan* with a newspaper wall, wrinkling their eyes to interpret the little signs that are, and will be, a mystery for me. To my right, an *obāchan*, lady in her eighties, chatting with her small plant, which she brought in her bicycle basket. I pretend not to be surprised (as the waitress), a bit because of courtesy and a bit because I'm used to it. The third age is in Japan the base of the population pyramid, nomads from cafes to restaurants to gardens, carrying on their own conversation and swinging the tone of their voice from kindness to hatred, depending on the weather.

In her table for two persons, the small plant occupies one chair and the old lady another one. She orders an American coffee and a glass of water (without ice, *onegaishimasu*) for her plant. Afterwards, her eyes stop scarcely on me and I hide behind Takasago's work in English, a banner of I don't want to talk to anybody in Japanese Language. Even though I understand the motion of the whispers I prefer to occupy another space, non spoken: big-round eyes of an observer cat.

These pines mean leaves of speech that doesn't fall: words

(Sumiyoshi)

You are about to give birth a flower – says the old woman – aren't you looking forward to it? The plant doesn't answer, maybe because at that moment the woman poured a glass of water in the dry soil. The plant seems happy. Again, the eyes (also dry) of the woman are nailed into mine. I read, I read, I read and I read, I say to myself and my head obeys. The woman gets up and says: "Excuse me, could you please watch my things while I go to the restroom?" It's a Japanese form very common and familiar, as if she was my mother's friend, without noticing that I am a big *gaijin* girl that very probably would'nt understand whatever is said to her (a behavior very common among the *nihonjin*). I answer that of course, no problem. When she comes back she pours some more water in the plants' soil, drinks some coffee, cleans the stem with a humid towel.

The branches of pine glow

with ever green

leaves of speech: dew pearls

that in the heart search for refined grace

(chorus)

Yes, a plastic bag. The waitress sees her shaking her eyelashes. *Onegaishimasu*,

begs the old lady. The waitress asks the manager if she can respond to such an assignment. When the woman receives it, she explains: is just that they are both traveling in the same bag, inside of the same basket, with no comfort. A second small plant appears on the table, shyly. It's thinner, slightly weak. It receives the day-care in each leave, too, and a set of words that comfort me as well, intruderly, even though I don't know such words. The *obāsan* turns her anxious look towards the next tables (that is, towards mine). She asks at what time will I leave the restaurant. Crosses through my mind the idea of enjoying once more of these errand old ladies' sponsorship and so I answer that very soon. Oh, what a shame – she responds- I was going to ask you to take care of my plants while I go to the supermarket and come back, too bad, they are tired of going here and there, the poor things. Saying this she stands up and pays her check. I have the impression that she is forgetting something. I revise her place and nothing. No excuse to follow her and chat. I observe her pedaling her bicycle and becoming a gray point, far away. In my table, a pine flower, wide open and dry. It's the Irish coffee decoration.

*People say
that plants and trees
are insensitive beings
but flower and fruit never mistake their timing
(chorus)*

I end up believing what I cannot longer see, as Tomonari.

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