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WEEEPING WOMAN WAY
...when we traveled to Tohoku before our wedding.

Mako ended up in a bizarre condition because of what happened last month...

It can be fun to stop somewhere on a whim.

Toward the end of the trip, we got off at a station on the local line.

Mako.

Yuzu-Ru.

It sure is.

Nice to be out in the country, hm?

What?

Hm?
SOMEONE'S CRYING...
CAN'T YOU HEAR IT?

AAAAA

IT'S COMING FROM THAT HOUSE.

SOB SOB SOB

YOU'RE RIGHT. SOUNDS LIKE A WOMAN.

SOB

DOESN'T SOUND LIKE NORMAL CRYING, EITHER.

SOB

*SIGN: IN MOURNING
Huh... so it's a funeral.

AAAA

AAAAAAA

AAAAAAA

AAAAAAA
I haven't seen one in a while myself. Even so, she seems extra sad.

Sob sob sob sob sob.

Aaaa

She's a weeping woman.

I haven't seen one in a while myself.

Are you travelers? I guess you wouldn't know this custom.

Mmmm.

A weeping... woman?
IT WAS THE ULTIMATE SERVICE FOR THE DEAD.

BACK IN THE DAY, PEOPLE USED TO ALWAYS CALL ONE TO FUNERALS.

THEY KNOW REAL SADNESS. THEY COULDN'T BE WEEPERS IF THEY DIDN'T.

THE WEEPING WOMEN AROUND HERE ARE NO FAKEERS.

SHE IS REALLY CRYING.

SO THAT'S A JOB... BUT IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S REALLY CRYING.
SORRY... I WAS JUST BACK THERE. I KNOW OTHER PEOPLE CRYING MAKES YOU CRY, BUT STILL.

YOU SURPRISED ME SO SAD.

UH-HUH.

ALL DONE CRYING?

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB
SOB
SOB
SOB

IT'S
THAT
WEENING
WOMAN.

OH!

SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

SOB

SOB

SOB
...she never stopped crying.

In fact...

That was when Mako started acting weird.

After we got back from the trip, she would burst into tears at the smallest things.

But isn't this a bit much?

I mean, I know you felt for the weeping woman.

Mako. Why are you constantly crying?

I'm... I'm so sad.

Yuzuru, it's just...
PRE-WEDDING JITTERS...

I DON'T KNOW. BUT I'M SAD.

BUT WHAT IS IT THAT'S SO SAD?

SOB SOB SOB

MAYBE THAT WAS IT.

MAYBE THE WEEPING WOMAN WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A CATALYST.

MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL OFF THE ENGAGEMENT FOR NOW.

NO... IT'S NOT THAT.

MAKO, ARE YOU UNHAPPY WITH ME?

IT'S WEIRD, THOUGH. I MEAN, CRYING FOR NO REASON.

I DON'T KNOW IF WE CAN LIVE TOGETHER LIKE THIS.

I DON'T KNOW IF WE CAN LIVE TOGETHER LIKE THIS.
SOB
SOB
AAAH!
UNH... WAAAH!

THE NEXT MORNING...
WAAAH!
SO PLEASE DON'T CRY.
NO, NO! I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU, MAKO.

SOB
SOB
AAAH!

THE BED'S SOAKED!

M-MAKO.

I'M COLD!

HM?

YANK
BUT WHEN I TOOK HER TO THE HOSPITAL, THEY COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING.

AND THE ANTIDEPRESSANT THEY PRESCRIBED DIDN'T WORK AT ALL.

I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE IT WAS SOME KIND OF WEIRD DISEASE.

W-HAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME?

UNH...

FORTUNE-TELLING?

THE KEY IS IN TOHOKU!

HMPH!!
WE WERE GRASPING AT STRAWS.

TRUE, IF THIS WAS CAUSED BY THAT TRIP, THEN MAYBE THE SOLUTION WAS THERE, TOO.

TOHOKU...

WE WERE GRASPING AT STRAWS.

WE HAVE TO FIND THAT WEEPING WOMAN.

ANYWAY.

WE WENT TO THE HOUSE WHERE THE FUNERAL HAD BEEN HELD.

WE WENT TO THE HOUSE WHERE THE FUNERAL HAD BEEN HELD.

WE WENT TO THE HOUSE WHERE THE FUNERAL HAD BEEN HELD.

NO IDEA.
OF WEeping WOMen DIED OUT WAY BACK WHEN.

THE TRADITION...

BUT ...

WHAT?

BUT WE DIDN'T INVITE A WEEPING WOMAN.
WE DID HAVE THE FUNERAL HERE.

MAYBE SHE WAS A FOX SPIRIT PLAYING TRICKS.

WHAT'S GOING ON? EVERYONE IN TOWN SAYS THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

YUZURU.

MAKO.

SOB

SOB

SOB

SOB

I FEEL LIKE CRYING, TOO.

MAKO...
A AAAA

A H!

DIRECTION OF THE CRYING.

A A
A AA

AA

THAT WAILING ...

WHO KNOWS HOW FAR WE WALKED.

S O B  S O B  S O B  S O B

WE KEPT WALKING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CRYING.
HMP?

MOSQUITOES....?
AH!

WAS THAT REAL?

AAAAAAAAAA SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

AH!
A TOWN ALL THE WAY OUT HERE?
AA BOOOOOB SOB AAAAAA

WAA-AH

THANK YOU SO MUCH.
IT'S WHERE WE REMEMBER THE DEAD AND THE WEEPING WOMEN CRY FOR THEM.

THE ONE IN THERE IS ESPECIALLY POWERFUL.

THIS IS WEEPING WOMAN WAY.

IT'S WHERE WE REMEMBER THE DEAD AND THE WEEPING WOMEN CRY FOR THEM.

I THINK THE DECEASED IS AT PEACE NOW.
I REMEMBER YOU FROM THE FUNERAL.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

IT'S YOU.

OH!

I'VE CRIED A GREAT DEAL, HM?

YES...

I ESPECIALLY WANTED TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL SADNESS.

YOU KNOW TRUE SADNESS.

PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE RARE.
BUT IT BECOMES VISIBLE TO THEM WHEN THEIR SPIRIT LEAVES THEIR FLESH.

YES... PEOPLE KNOW TRUE SADNESS WHEN THEY DIE.

THE AVERAGE PERSON CAN'T SEE THE FUNDAMENTAL SADNESS OF THIS WORLD.

AND THE AMOUNT IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE NUMBER OF DEAD.

I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYONE SHED AS MANY TEARS AS YOU.

JUST AS OUR TEARS ARE.

YOU UNDERSTAND THAT SADNESS.

THE TEARS THAT POUR FROM YOUR EYES ARE THOSE OF THE DEAD.

SO YOU ARE CALLED MAKO, THEN?

...THE GREATER THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SHE HELPS REST IN PEACE.

THE MORE TEARS A WEEPING WOMAN SHEDS...

MAKO...

AAAH...
ORUI ...

... EVEN BEST ORUI.

YES.

... HERE IN WEeping WOMAN WAY 200 YEARS AGO.

ORUI IS THE LEGENDARY WEeping WOMAN WHO MADE A NAME FOR HERSELF...

ALL ALONE, ORUI SHED TEARS OF GRIEF AND SADNESS.

THERE WAS A DROUGHT AT THE TIME, WHICH LED TO FAMINE, AND MANY OF THOSE AROUND HER DIED.
THEY SAY HER SOBS SPILLED OVER TO BECOME A LAKE AND WET THE THROATS OF THE PEOPLE.

THE TEARS THAT FLOWED CEASELESSLY FROM HER EYES MOISTENED THE EARTH, AND THE FIELDS WERE FRUITFUL AGAIN.

PLEASE FOLLOW ME.

I’D LIKE TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

RUIG SWAMP OUT THERE IS WHAT REMAINS OF THE LAKE OF HER TEARS.

MY, THAT GIRL.

WHERE? LET ME SEE.

HAS SHE BEEN REBORN?

WHAT? LADY ORUI?
FLOWING DOWN HER CHEEKS HAVE BEEN THE TEARS OF THE INNUMERABLE DEAD WHO HAVE DEPARTED THIS WORLD.

HER FACE IS CAVING IN BECAUSE SHE HAS CONTINUED TO CRY OVER THE 200 YEARS SINCE HER DEATH.

...THERE ARE THAT MANY MORE DEAD UNABLE TO FIND PEACE.

AND INDEED, ALL THINGS MUST END.

BUT IN RECENT YEARS, THOSE TEARS SLOWED...

...UNTIL THEY FINALLY DRIED UP LAST YEAR.

BUT THE FACT THAT HER TEARS HAVE STOPPED MEANS...
...many spirits have lingered in this area, unable to move on.

We worked hard to try and keep Orui's tears flowing, in vain.

We could do nothing with our limited power.

If Rui swamp dries up...

...who knows what spiritual obstacles will arise?
HANG ON A MINUTE.

WAIT.

YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO RENEW ORUI'S TEARS.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WEEP BEFORE ORUI.

PLEASE CRY. ALONG WITH US.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

MAKO!

BAM

BUT MAKO... YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO IT.

PLEASE CRY. ALONG WITH US.
SOB
AAAAH.

SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

SOB

SOB
SOB
PRAISE BE! PRAISE BE!

THE DEAD ARE FINDING PEACE.

OH!
TH
THIS
IS...

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

SSHPUSH

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
ITNT RISES!

We have to get out of here.

Lady Orui's come back to life! She's come back.

Come back to life, I mean, come on! Her back just swelled up from the moisture of the tears and forced her up!
MAKE LADY ORUI CRY EVEN MORE!

YOU! KEEP CRYING HERE!

WAIT! DON'T GO!

LET GO!

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS!

I'M GOING TO BE A WEEPING WOMAN.

YUZURU... I'M STAYING.
L-LADY ORUI...

LADY ORUI!

N-NOOO!
PAY

...DO NOW?

WHAT WILL WE...

...MUST STAY HERE.

YOU TRULY...

CHAK

KLAK

KLAK

COME ON!

BA NG
COME ON, MAKO!

L-LET GO!

EEE!

SOB
SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB
SOB
STRANGELY, WHEN I SEARCHED ONLINE, NOT ONLY DID I NOT FIND...

...WEeping woman way, I couldn't even find mention of weeping women.

I don't remember how Mako and I got home.

But somehow, we made it back.

They kept spilling out of her eyes.

I'm so sad.

But Mako's tears didn't stop.

Surprised at her condition, her father and aunt...

She grew weaker by the day.

The constant crying exhausted her.

...came to take her.
I WAS ALLOWED TO PAY MY RESPECTS.

GOOD-BYE.

I TOLD THEM ABOUT THE WEEPING WOMEN, BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE ME.

YUZURU, FOR THE TIME BEING, THE ENGAGEMENT IS OFF.

WHY IS MAKO CRYING SO MUCH, YUZURU?

WEAKENED FROM THE CONSTANT CRYING...

...MAKO DIED THREE MONTHS LATER.
BUT SHE’S COLD. HER EYES ARE SO SWOLLEN.

THERE’S NO WAY YOU WOULD HAVE MADE MAKO CRY.

YUZURU, I’M SORRY FOR DOUBTING YOU.

HER ENGAGEMENT TO YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ONLY TIME SHE WAS HAPPY.

WE HAD OUR ISSUES AS A FAMILY. I CAUSED MAKO SO MUCH PAIN OVER HER LIFE.

I WAS A TERRIBLE FATHER.

WE NEED TO REPLACE THEM.

AAH. THE TOWELS ARE ALREADY SOAKED.
AAAAAAA
AAAAAAA

W-WHAT IS GOING ON?!
AH!

PSSSSHH

SPLSH

SPLSH
WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
WHAT? HOW IS —?!
AAAH!!
AAAAA   AAAAA

PSSSH

AH!

AAAAH!
EHHH!

EEAAH!!
THE BODY IS—!!
I JUST KNOW THAT THE WEEPING WOMEN RAN OFF WITH HER.

IN ALL THE CONFUSION, MAKO'S BODY DISAPPEARED.

I'M SO HAPPY... IT'S THE SECOND COMING OF LADY ORUI.

SO VERY MANY TEARS.

EITHER WAY, SHE WAS NO DOUBT AT WEEPING WOMAN WAY.

WAS SHE ALIVE? OR WAS IT HER CORPSE THAT WAS CRYING?

...I STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND THE PLACE AGAIN.

BUT...

I SOMETIMES TRAVEL TO TOHOKU EVEN NOW.
FOR THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT US GLORY AND PROSPERITY SINCE THE FOUNDING OF TENSEI ACADEMY... ON BEHALF OF THE ACADEMY, I, YUKIRO TENJO, BOARD CHAIR AND PRINCIPAL... WITH SINCERE GRATITUDE.

WE OFFER UP OUR MONTHLY PRAYERS OF GRATITUDE.

...MOST SINCERE GRATITUDE.

...OFFER UP OUR...
I THINK THE PRINCIPAL'S STARING AT YOU!

HEH, MARIA?

LIKE, MAYBE HE LIKES YOU?

WHAT, RISA?
IT'S BEEN A MONTH SINCE I TRANSFERRED TO TENSEI ACADEMY.

NO WAY. I MEAN, I DO FEEL HIS EYES ON ME.

THAT WOULD JUST BE CREEPY, BUT...

I'M MORE CURIOUS ABOUT HIS WIFE.

THE CAMPUS WAS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL, AND YOU NEEDED PERMISSION TO CONTACT THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

SHE'S SO PRETTY. LIKE A REAL-LIFE MADONNA.

THAT'S THE NEW TRANSFER STUDENT, MARIA AMANO.

IN PARTICULAR, THE VICE CHAIR, WHO WAS ALSO THE PRINCIPAL'S WIFE, WAS REMARKABLY STRICT.

IT WAS A MISSIONARY GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL, AND THE RULES WERE EVEN STRICTER THAN I'VE HEARD.
THE PRINCIPAL’S WIFE IS SUPER INTIMIDATING, THOUGH.

AAAH, THE WEEKLY PRAYER’S FINALLY OVER.

...THE CHARACTER MEANING “ANGRY WITCH WOMAN.”

WE CALL HER THAT, TOO, BUT WE SPELL IT WITH...

AND SHE THINKS SHE’S THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. SHE MAKES HIM CALL HER MADONNA.

...THE ONE WHO’S ACTUALLY IN CHARGE. I HEARD THE PRINCIPAL DOESN’T DARE GO AGAINST HER.

MADONNA!

SPEAK OF THE WITCH...

*MADEONNA: 魔女マドンナ = 魔（EVIL）怒（ANGRY）女（WOMAN）
AS PUNISHMENT, YOU WILL KNEEL BEFORE THE CROSS FOR TWO HOURS!

SUCH DISRESPECT FOR OUR SACRED PRAYERS!
I CAN'T ANYMORE...

MARIA...

MA'AM/ P-PLEASE FORGIVE RISA!

I'LL DO HER PRAYERS!

RISA!

THUD

SUCH A TERRIBLE NAME!

MARIA!

MARIA AMANO.

ADMIRABLE SPIRIT.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
I COULDN'T MOVE, ALL DEER-IN-THE-HEADLIGHTS.
I WAS SO SCARED.

AND THEN SHE STARTED TO CHANGE.

RUMOR HAS IT THE PRINCIPAL CHEATED ON HER, AND HER ANGER TURNED HER FROM THE MADONNA INTO THE ANGRY WITCH WOMAN...

I WAS SHAKING WHEN SHE YELLED AT US.
LIKE IT WAS BEING SQUEEZED IN A VISE...
MY HEAD JUST STARTED HURTING LIKE CRAZY ALL OF A SUDDEN.

BUT YOU KNOW, I HEAR SHE DIDN'T USED TO BE LIKE THAT.
SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL AND KIND BACK WHEN SHE MARRIED THE PRINCIPAL.

SHE RULES THIS SCHOOL WITH TERROR.

YEAH. SHE REALLY IS AN ANGRY WITCH WOMAN.

Yeah.
She's so beautiful that some girls secretly call her Miss Madonna.

He even had a lover here at school.

His first wife went missing, and she ended up marrying him.

What?!

But, you know, the witch woman used to be the principal's lover, too.

Oh, sorry. You rest, Risa. I'm going to bed. Aaaa, Maria... I feel so out of it.
 ARE THEY SOME KIND OF ART THING?

THERE ARE ALL THESE WEIRD-SHAPED STONES ON THE SCHOOL GROUNDS.
ISN'T IT GROSS LICKING THAT ROCK?

NOW THAT I'M THINKING ABOUT IT, THERE ARE SOME WEIRD STUDENTS AT THIS SCHOOL.

MAYBE IT'S ROCK SALT?

SALTY?

ACTUALLY, NOT JUST STUDENTS, TEACHERS, TOO.

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY. EVERYONE, HURRY BACK TO THE DORMS.

AMANO!

YES?

YEAR 1 CLASS B

A FEW DAYS LATER...
THE PRINCIPAL WANTS TO SEE YOU. GO TO HIS OFFICE STRAIGHT-AWAY.

WHAT COULD THE PRINCIPAL WANT WITH ME?

THANKS FOR COMING.

SHOW YOU AROUND, SINCE YOU JUST TRANSFERRED IN.

I THOUGHT I'D...

MARIA AMANO.
IT'S NOT SIMPLY GOD'S GRACE THAT HAS LED TO OUR ACADEMY'S CURRENT PROSPERITY.

SO OUR ACADEMY HAS A STRONG CONNECTION TO THE WORLD OF POLITICS.

SOME EVEN WENT ON TO BECOME IMPORTANT POLITICIANS LATER.

THESE PHOTOS ARE OF THE PREVIOUS BOARD MEMBERS OF OUR PEDIGREED ACADEMY.

IT'S NOT SIMPLY GOD'S GRACE THAT HAS LED TO OUR ACADEMY'S CURRENT PROSPERITY.

THERE'S NO HINT OF THAT KINDNESS NOW.

SHE USED TO BE VERY BEAUTIFUL...

FROM 20 YEARS AGO. SHE LOOKS QUITE DIFFERENT NOW.

Oh, this is my wife.

...AND SO KIND.

8TH VICE CHAIR MISUZU TENJO

CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?
AND NEXT TO HER IS OUR SON, KIRIHITO.

MISUZU RAISED HIM AFTER HIS MOTHER DISAPPEARED.

AND THIS IS MY FIRST WIFE.

SHE WAS ALSO SO BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY CALLED HER THE MADONNA OF THE ACADEMY BACK IN THE DAY.

7TH VICE CHAIR HARUYO TENJO

BUT SHE WAS MUCH MORE STRICT.

SHE WAS ALWAYS SO SALTY WITH ME.

SHE WAS ALSO SO BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY CALLED HER THE MADONNA OF THE ACADEMY BACK IN THE DAY.

WAS ALSO SO BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY CALLED HER THE MADONNA OF THE ACADEMY BACK IN THE DAY.

SHE WAS ALWAYS SO SALTY WITH ME.

SO I SECRETLY CALLED HER "SALT WOMAN." HEH HEH HEH HEH.

MISUZU RAISED HIM AFTER HIS MOTHER DISAPPEARED.

BUT HE AND HIS STEPMOTHER HAD A FALLING-OUT, AND HE LEFT THREE YEARS AGO. NO IDEA WHERE HE IS NOW.

HE WAS ALSO APPOINTED TO THE BOARD.

BUT HE AND HIS STEPMOTHER HAD A FALLING-OUT, AND HE LEFT THREE YEARS AGO. NO IDEA WHERE HE IS NOW.

HE WAS ALSO APPOINTED TO THE BOARD.
WE HOLD SERVICES THERE THAT ONLY THE VERY SPECIAL ARE ALLOWED TO TAKE PART IN.

HOW ABOUT YOU OBSERVE THEM TONIGHT?

THAT’S AN ORDER FROM THE PRINCIPAL.

WHAT? BUT...

HEH. HEH. HEH.

THERE IS A SMALL CHURCH ON THE CAMPUS.

Y-YES?

BY THE WAY, MARIA.
WE WILL WORSHIP YOU...

SHE OF THE DEEPEST MERCY.

OUR HOLY MOTHER IN HEAVEN AVE MARIA.

YOU GAVE BIRTH TO OUR LORD AND THUS ARE THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE.

PLEAS FORGIVE US OUR SINS.

AMEN.
BLESSED MARY... PLEASE FORGIVE MY SINS.

PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

EVERYONE'S REALLY AFRAID...
IT'S LIKE THEY'RE WORSHIPPING MARY AS A GOD. BUT I'M PRETTY SURE SHE WASN'T.

AND THIS SERVICE... SOMETHING'S WEIRD ABOUT IT.

LIKE SHE'S THE BLESSED VIRGIN HERSELF.

PLUS, THE VICE CHAIR ACTING LIKE THAT.

AND THE STATUE OF MARY'S CREEPY, TOO.

IS THAT RED STUFF... BLOOD?
IT'S YOUR TURN, AKEMI.

...DO YOU HESITATE?

WHY ...

I BEG FORGIVENESS!

BLESSED MARY...
"But to be that afraid..."

"And now she’s here too."

"She was licking the rock."

"THAT GIRL..."

"Oh! It was very interesting."

"How did you like the special service, Maria?"

"Are admitted to the special class. Only those qualified to serve the blessed virgin."

"Only those with deep faith, excellent grades, and beautiful features..."

"Yes."

"You’re year one in the regular program, yes?"

"SPECIAL CLASS?!"

"I’d like to recommend you for the special class."
AND I WAS FINALLY MAKING FRIENDS. NOW I HAVE TO START ALL OVER.
I NEED TO CHANGE DORMS, TOO.
HE BASICALLY FORCED ME TO SWITCH TO THE SPECIAL CLASS.

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU.

THIS IS YOUR ROOM.

OH...

SHE'S ALSO IN CHARGE OF THE DORM.

THIS IS SATOMI KIYOKAWA, HEAD OF THE SPECIAL CLASS.

I'LL SHOW YOU AROUND.

 MARIA AMANO, YES?

OH!

...YOUR ROOMMATE, AKEMI SAYAKO.

THIS IS...
NICE TO MEET YOU.

AKEMI... MY NAME'S MARIA AMANO.

I'LL FIX THEM FOR YOU.

YOUR BRAIDS ARE COMING LOOSE.

UM.

AKEMI?

OH! AKEMI, THERE'S ... WHITE STUFF IN YOUR EAR.

SALTY.
Hey, Akemi? I’ll clean your ears for you. Lie down.

You really are the blessed virgin.

Blessed Maria.

Holy Maria.

You’re so nice, Maria.

It’s weird that salt would build up in here.

I am not. Don’t say that in front of anyone.

The inside’s so dark, I can’t see anything.

Oh! Speaking of the Madonna, what’s the principal’s wife like, Akemi?
...she learned that she had conceived from the Holy Spirit.

Before the blessed Virgin Mary was with her fiancé Joseph...

"Fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife."

"Joseph..."

"An angel came to him in a dream and said..."

When Joseph was about to leave Mary...

"They're all so pretty, but off somehow."

Everyone in the special class...
THE PRINCIPAL WANTS TO SEE YOU.

AH!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

SALT? THAT POWDER'S IN HER EAR, TOO.

YES.

AMANO.

BING BONG.

WHAT'S GOING ON?!

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY.

IT'S IN EVERYONE'S EARS.

OKAY...

PLEASE GO TO HIS OFFICE.

THE PRINCIPAL WANTS TO SEE YOU.
I'm sure you've already noticed, but we set the Blessed Virgin Mary as a being above all others. The truth is, everyone in the special class seems strange. It's a sacred deepening of their faith, a very good sign. I wanted to ask you something first.

I was young and convinced that this beauty was Mary's second coming, so I married her. Ironically, she believed she was the blessed Virgin reborn. Salt? Yes. Salt is a sacred substance. An offering to God. And speaking of salt...

My first wife was a real salty woman, and I don't mean that as a compliment.
I THOUGHT MY WIFE SHOULD HAVE ALSO BEEN TURNED TO A PILLAR OF SALT.

BUT SHE GRADUALLY TURNED INTO A DEEPLY ANGRY WOMAN.

AT FIRST, MISUZU WAS KIND AND BEAUTIFUL.

WHEN I MET MY WIFE MISUZU, I WAS SURE SHE WAS IT.

I SEARCHED FOR THE REAL SECOND COMING OF THE HOLY MOTHER.

BUT SHE DIDN'T HAVE A SHRED OF MARY'S MERCY.

IN THE BIBLE, LOT'S WIFE IS TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT FOR TURNING HER BACK ON GOD'S WORDS.

NOT ONLY WAS SHE NOT THE SECOND COMING OF MARY...

...SHE DESERVED TO BE STRUCK DOWN BY THE HEAVENS.

SHE WAS SELF-RIGHTEOUS AND JEALOUS, ARROGANT, COLD, A SADIST WHO LOOKED DOWN ON OTHERS.

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BUT SHE DIDN'T HAVE A SHRED OF MARY'S MERCY.
YOU ARE THE BLESSED VIRGIN HERSELF.

YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL.

WHAT?

THIS WAY!

MORIA!

FSH

SLAM

KARLIE
SUFFERING.

I HAVE BELIEVED THAT I WAS REBORN.

BUT THAT FAITH WAVERS IN ME NOW.

I HAVE BELIEVED THAT I WAS REBORN.

HOLY MARY... PLEASE HEAR MY SUFFERING.
I'M ALREADY PAST 50. IF HE DOESN'T COME TO ME SOON...

HOLY MARY. WHEN WILL I BE BLESSED WITH MY JESUS?

MICHELANGELO SAID THAT THE BLESSED VIRGIN NEVER AGES... BUT.

AND MY GREATEST PAIN IS...

AND...

AND...

I CANNOT ESCAPE AGING.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AH!

HE'S GONE.

...THAT CHEATING HUSBAND!

AT STUDENTS WHO LACK FAITH.

I SHOULD BE FILLED WITH MERCY LIKE YOU, AND YET...

AHH, BLESSED MARY! I CANNOT CONTROL MY ANGER OVER THE SLIGHTEST THINGS!

AT SLOPPY TEACHERS.

STUDENTS I SHOULD BE FILLED WITH MERCY LIKE YOU, AND YET...

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND...

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.
I WONDER...

...IS THIS THE CURSE OF MY HUSBAND'S FIRST WIFE?

WHY CAN I NOT CONTROL THESE FEELINGS?

THE LEAST APPROPRIATE EMOTION FOR THE HOLY MOTHER.

ANGER.

IS THIS THE TRIAL SET BEFORE ME?

...IS SHE BLOCKING MY WAY WITH HER CURSE?

...AND YET...

EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD NOTHING OF THE VIRGIN ABOUT HER.

SHE NEVER HESITATED TO PROCLAIM Herself THE SECOND COMING OF THE MADONNA.

PLEASE...PLEASE SAVE ME FROM HER.

I AM THE TRUE SECOND COMING. THE HEAVENS SIDED WITH ME.
YOU UNDERSTAND MY SADNESS.

AAH, THE BLESSED VIRGIN CRIES TEARS OF BLOOD AGAIN.

WHO IS THERE?!
YOU WON'T GET AWAY!

WHERE ARE YOU?!

COME OUT!

SLAM
WHAT IS THIS...?
...THERE IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SAY.

BEFORE OUR PRAYERS...

SOMEONE TRYING TO LEARN THE SECRETS OF OUR SCHOOL!

WHAT?!

...ONE OF THE SPECIAL CLASS STUDENTS IS A SPY.

REGRETTABLY...

STEP FORWARD BEFORE I CALL YOUR NAME, AND YOU CAN AVOID THE WORST PUNISHMENT.

NOW! NAME YOURSELF!

THEN I WILL NAME YOU.

WELL, I SEE.
NO, SHE'S NOT!

YOU ARE A SPY!

AKEMI SAYAKO!

HELP ME!

HELP!

I'M SCARED!

EEE!

SO SCARED!

KNOW THE PUNISHMENT OF MARY!

YOU CAN'T RUN FROM ME.
Eeeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!
THOSE WHO
ANNOY MARY
SIMPLY HAVE THEIR
BRAINS TURN
TO SALT.

BUT THOSE
WHO ANGER HER
ARE TURNED
TO PILLARS OF
SALT WHERE
THEY STAND!
TAKE HEED, ALL
OF YOU!

IT WASN'T
AKEMI.
IT WAS
ME!

AKEMI!
I'M
SORRY!

I WAS
THE ONE
WATCHING
YOU!

WHISPERING
WASN'T
AKEMI.
IT WAS
ME!
THE BLESSING OF MARY.

AND THEN YOU CAME ALONG...

...EXPLAIN WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT.

THE PRINCIPAL ASKED ME TO COME TO THE CHAPEL FOR A SECRET RITE.

YOU... MARIA AMANO?

YOU RECEIVED THE BLESSING OF MARY FROM THE PRINCIPAL?

WAIT JUST A MOMENT.

I DID!

WHY WOULD YOU PERFORM THIS SACRED RITE ON A MERE GIRL?

YOU REALIZED YOUR MARRIAGE TO YOUR FIRST WIFE WAS A MISTAKE.

THE CEREMONY WAS TO AFFIRM THAT I WAS THE TRUE SECOND COMING OF MARY, YES?

THE BLESSING OF THE VIRGIN MARY, THE RITE YOU PERFORMED FOR ME 20 YEARS AGO.
YOU CLAIMED I WAS THE BLESSED VIRGIN, PURER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN ANY OTHER.

AND I BELIEVED YOU THEN.

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?!

MariA Amano.

I'VE SEARCHED MANY YEARS FOR THE TRUE REINCARNATION OF THE VIRGIN.

MISUZU, I'M SORRY. MY MARRIAGE TO YOU WAS ALSO A MISTAKE.

YOU ARE NOT MARY EITHER.

YOU ARE THE REAL BLESSED MARY.

AND I'VE FOUND HER AT LAST.
MR. TENJO!

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

...INSISTENT THAT I WAS THE ONE.

BUT MR. TENJO... YOU WERE SO...

KIYO-KAWA?!

SO THEN... YOU'RE SAYING I'M A FAKE?!

...NAME HIM JESUS.

I WAS GOING TO...

I'M SURE IT'S A BOY.

AND I WAS FINALLY BLESSED WITH YOUR CHILD. THREE MONTHS ALONG NOW.
I AM THE REAL MARY!!

HOW DARE YOU! IF I'M A FAKE, THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS MYSTERIOUS POWER?!

THE LOVELY MARIA AMANO IS THE TRUE SECOND COMING OF MARY.

UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'RE BOTH FAKES.

THE WOMAN WHO GIVES BIRTH TO JESUS CHRIST!!
ZZZ

KRRK
KLAK
CRACK

EEE-
AAH!
YOU SAID YOU BURIED HER IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WHY IS THIS WOMAN INSIDE OF MARY?

YOUR FIRST WIFE...

THAT'S... HARUYO.

H-HOW COULD YOU...!

AND THE QUICKEST WAY TO DO THAT WAS TO IMPRISON HER INSIDE OF THE STATUE OF MARY!

HEH HEH HEH.

I THOUGHT HARUYO SHOULD STAND ETERNALLY, LIKE LOT'S WIFE AS A PILLAR OF SALT RISING UP ON MOUNT SODOM.

IS THERE ANY GREATER HUMILIATION?!

SO I'VE BEEN ENTREATING THE CORPSE OF YOUR FIRST WIFE FOR THE LAST 20 YEARS?
WHERE DID YOU RUN OFF TO?!

WHERE ARE YOU?
THE LIGHTNING STRIKE MUST HAVE STARTED A FIRE.

KAPH. BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF ALL THOSE WHO ANGERED THAT WITCH WOMAN.
BUT HE WAS A FALSE CHILD OF THE LORD. FIT TO BE A PILLAR OF SALT.

...HE COURTED MISUZU'S ANGER THREE YEARS AGO AND WAS TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT.

HIM LEAVING HOME WAS A LIE. THE TRUTH IS...

THAT IS THE SON, KIRIHITO, I HAD WITH MY FIRST WIFE.

BUT HE WAS A FALSE CHILD OF THE LORD. FIT TO BE A PILLAR OF SALT.

...HAS YET TO BE BORN.

THE TRUE CHILD OF GOD...

PREGNANT WITH... THE TRUE...

...AND BECOME...

YOU WILL MARRY ME...

MARIA, YOU ARE THE TRUE MADONNA. I'VE FOUND YOU AT LAST.
I FOUND YOU, MARIA! HOW DISGUSTING THAT YOU BEAR THAT NAME!

I WILL MAKE SHORT WORK OF YOU!

FOOL! THERE’S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.

AH!

SOMEONE!
HA HA HA!
YOU TOO
SHALL
BECOME
SALT
ON THIS
MOUNTAIN
OF IT!!
I INSISTED ON IT, NO ONE BELIEVED WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT.

THE NEXT DAY, IN THE BURNED-OUT CHURCH, MIXED IN AMONG A LARGE AMOUNT OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE ROCK SALT...

...THE BODIES OF MISUZU AND HARUYO WERE DISCOVERED.
THE SPIRIT FLOW
OF AOKIGAHARA
His girlfriend Mika came with him, saying they would go together.

Despairing after falling ill with a progressive disease, Norio Taniguchi entered Mount Fuji’s Sea of Trees to die on his own terms.

Let’s set up the tent tonight and do it tomorrow.

Mika, it’s dangerous to keep on walking.

... looking for a place to die.

But the area began to grow dark while they were...

Look there.

Oh! Norio.

Okay.
It's glowing and moving through the woods.

Yeah, what is that?

A beam of light... flowing?

The strange light continued well into the night.
IT KEEPS GOING TO EITHER SIDE, LIKE A BELT. THIS WAY'S MOUNT FUJI.

WHY JUST HERE?

NO, IT'S NOT JUST HERE. LOOK.

I'M GOING TO DIE ANYWAY.

TOWARD MOUNT FUJI.

Yeah, let's follow it for a bit.

I FEEL LIKE THAT LIGHT LAST NIGHT'S PART OF THIS.

DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD.

YOU CAN'T TAKE A BREAK?

NORIO, YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE A BREAK?

HOW FAR DOES IT GO?

AH!
IT... IT LOOKS KIND OF LIKE A DRAGON'S FACE.

THE WEIRD THING WITH THE TREES ENDS AT THE CAVE HERE.

I KNOW THERE ARE A BUNCH OF CAVES FROM WHERE LAVA FLOWED THROUGH FUJI'S FOREST, BUT THERE'S NOTHING ONLINE ABOUT A CAVE LIKE THIS.
People have been saying it exists forever, but I heard it’s really hard to get to.

I guess Dragon’s Mouth is the exit for the “Spirit Flow.”

Supposedly, the spirits spill out of the Dragon’s Mouth.

And it looks like the Dragon’s sticking its tongue out, so the flow’s also called the Dragon’s Tongue.

It’s this phenomenon where spirits move together in a cluster.

There’s a network of countless caves beneath the forest, and some people say the spirit flow actually runs freely in all directions.

Oh! Maybe it’s that cave, Dragon’s Mouth.

Spirit Flow?

It’s this phenomenon where spirits move together in a cluster.

Or they’re sucked back into another cave. Lots of theories.

The spirits go on to paradise afterward.
IT'S NOT SURPRISING THIS KIND OF STRANGE PHENOMENON WOULD HAPPEN.

MOUNT FUJI IS JAPAN'S MOST SACRED MOUNTAIN.

MIKA, YOU GO ON HOME.

I'M STAYING HERE TO WAIT FOR THE SPIRIT FLOW.

I WANT TO SEE IT WITH THESE EYES BEFORE I DIE.

IF THIS REALLY IS DRAGON'S MOUTH, THEN THE SPIRIT FLOW'LL SHOW UP AGAIN.

I'LL WAIT, TOO!

NO! WE SAID WE WOULD DIE TOGETHER!

WHAT ?!

I DON'T CARE. AS LONG AS I'M WITH YOU!

BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHEN IT'LL HAPPEN. AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY FOOD.
YOU THINK IT'LL HAPPEN TONIGHT?

IT'S GETTING DARK.

QUIET! SHH. AND SO THIRSTY. I'M HUNGRY.

RRRRRRRRRRR
They're all trying to reach the land of the dead!

Incredible! A raging torrent of souls!

I'm scared!

Mika, look! The spirit flow!

Norio! Don't!

Mika! I'm jumping in!

Maybe I can get there too if I'm swallowed up in this flow.

If you're coming, then come!

What?!
WHD

NORIO!

RRRRRRSSHHH

RRRRRR

139
IN THERE, I GOT SCARED AND GRABBED ME ALL ALONE!

YOU CAN'T GO OFF AND LEAVE ME ALL ALONE!

AH!

NORIO!

NORIO! THE NEXT DAY ...

NORIO ?!

NORIO!

WHEN I ACTUALLY GOT IN THERE, I GOT SCARED AND GRABBED ON TO A TREE.

M-MIKA...

YOU'RE ALIVE.

140
THE FORCE OF THE SPIRIT FLOW WAS OVERWHELMING... I CLUNG TO THE TREE, AND THE SOULS PUSHED PAST, LICKING ME.

MY BODY'S STILL SLICK WITH IT.

I'M NOT IN AS MUCH PAIN AS USUAL.

MIKA, IT'S WEIRD. I FEEL REALLY GREAT SOMEHOW.

I-IT'S JUST...

WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?

THANK GOD...

I DON'T WANT TO DIE ANYMORE.

WHAT? REALLY?!

THAT'S WONDERFUL.

MAYBE THE SPIRIT FLOW HAS SOME KIND OF POWER.
BUT WE'LL NEED FOOD AND WATER FOR THAT. I'M ALREADY STARVING.

I'M GOING TO STAY HERE FOR A WHILE.

MIKA, I WANT TO SOAK IN THE SPIRIT FLOW. I FEEL LIKE I COULD GET EVEN HEALTHIER.

STRANGELY, I'M NOT HUNGRY. MAYBE THIS TOO IS THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT FLOW.

WHAT? BUT...

WE'LL EAT, AND THEN YOU HAVE TO GO HOME.

LET'S GO THAT WAY FIRST.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? NO! YOU HAVE TO EAT!

I'M FINE. THERE'LL BE A STORE OUT ON THE HIGHWAY.

WORRIED, MIKA RETURNED TO AOKIGAHARA.

BUT TWO WEEKS PASSED, AND NORIO STILL DIDN'T COME BACK.

REALLY? FOR REAL?! MAKE SURE YOU DO!

YOU GO NOW AND I'LL COME NEXT WEEK.
I just have to find the traces of that spirit flow...

Will I be able to make it to Dragon's Mouth Cave?

And the sun's setting soon.

It's no use... I can't find any sign of it.

A-a suicide...

Aah!
IT'S DANGEROUS TO COME OUT HERE BY YOURSELF.

IT IS ME. ARE YOU SURPRISED TO SEE ME LOOKING SO HEALTHY?

AHH, YOU SCARED ME. NORIO? THAT'S YOU, RIGHT?

THERE'S THAT, BUT LOOKING AT YOU, SOMETHING'S...
HE'S ONLY BEEN IN A FEW TIMES, BUT HE'S ALREADY IN LOVE WITH SPIRIT FLOW BATHING, TOO.

HEY, NORIO. I CAME TO GET YOU. THAT'S ENOUGH SPIRIT FLOW.
MITSUYA AND I AREN'T LEAVING YET. WE WANT TO SOAK IN THE SPIRIT FLOW.

THE SENSATION OF THE SPIRITS LICKING YOU ALL OVER IS REALLY SOMETHING ELSE. RIGHT, MITSUYA?

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! YOU CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER!

I'M SURE IT'S THANKS TO THE SPIRIT FLOW'S POWER.

MIKA, YOU CAN'T LIVE HERE.

THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU TO GO ON AHEAD. WE'LL LEAVE ONCE WE'RE DONE HERE.

I CAN, TOO! I BROUGHT FOOD AND WATER JUST IN CASE.

LOTS! ENOUGH FOR YOU, TOO.

NO! I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT YOU.

WE DON'T NEED ANY.

WE'RE NOT HUNGRY AT ALL. RIGHT, MITSUYA?

WHAT?!

UH-HUH...

UH-HUH.

HEH HEH HEH!
YES, IT'S COMING.

THE SPIRIT FLOW WILL COME TONIGHT.
HOO-EEE!

HERE IT COMES!

EEE!

PPPPRRRR
PLRT

YAHOO!

OKAY! DIVE IN!
...THE EXTRAORDINARY SPIRIT FLOW CAME, NORIO AND MITSUYA WOULD JUMP IN.

EVEN TIME...

CURIOUSLY, WITH EACH DIVE, THE PAIR SEEMED TO BECOME MORE AND MORE POLISHED.

HE SAID HE WAS A YOUTUBER.

ONE DAY, A STRANGE MAN CAME ALONG.
WHOA! THIS CAVE IS HUGE! IT'S NOT IN THE GUIDEBOOK.

NOTHING. CAMPING.

HELLO. WHAT ARE YOU ALL DOING HERE?

BUT AFTER AN HOUR...

AFTER A BRIEF CONVERSATION, THE MAN WENT INTO THE CAVE.

NO. WE HAVEN'T GONE IN YET.

HAVE YOU ALL GONE INSIDE?

WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU OKAY?

...HE CAME BACK IN AN AGITATED STATE.
WELL, IT IS THE SPIRIT FLOW CAVE. YOU CAN'T JUST WALTZ IN THERE.

WHAT? STREAM-LINED...

S-STREAM-LINED...

WELL, IT IS THE SPIRIT FLOW CAVE. YOU CAN'T JUST WALTZ IN THERE.

WHAT DID THAT GUY SEE? STREAM-LINED!

DASH
NO, WE DON'T NEED CLOTHES. THEY'LL JUST GET RIpped UP WHEN WE DIVE INTO THE FLOW.

MITSUYA, IS MEDIUM GOOD? WHAT'S YOUR WAIST SIZE?

HEY, YOU'RE BOTH NUDISTS NOW, HUH? I'LL GO BUY YOU SOME CLOTHES TOMORROW.

YUP, EXACTLY.

COME ON! I DON'T WANT TO DEAL WITH YOU NAKED!

YOURS TOO, MITSUYA.

NORIO, YOUR BODY'S GORGEOUS.

THAT'S RIGHT. WHY NOT? IT'S A SHAME TO HIDE OUR BEAUTIFUL BODIES.

HONESTLY, NOW THAT I HAVE THIS BODY, A NORMAL ONE LOOKS SO CRUDE.

TH-THIS IS WEIRD... I LOVED THE OLD NORIO.

OF OUR BEAUTIFUL BODIES?

ARE YOU JEALOUS?

YUP.
Perhaps any excess fat is licked away by the spirits.

But why do our bodies shape up when we soak in the spirit flow?

Yeah. When you lick a lollipop, it gets skinnier. Kinda like that, huh?

You should bathe in the spirit flow, too, Mika.

Aah! Stop it! That tickles!

Lick

Oh ho! Like this?

She isn't brave enough for that.

The spirit flow... is it really just spirits flowing?

By the way, Norio, lately I've been feeling like...
...More substantive. Different from the spirits brushing past.

I do feel... something...

It's just...

Where'd that come from? What a strange thing to say.

Yeah, now that you mention it...

...I feel like there's some special thing mixed in with it.

Yes, it's something only we would know because we've tried it.

Right? You can't know without trying it.

...Are you believing me?

W-What... Are you two...
LOOKS LIKE IT'LL COME AGAIN TONIGHT.

YES, IT'S COMING.

I MEAN, I —!!

DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME!

WHOA! LOOK IT HER GO!

OH! MIKA JUMPED IN!

DASH

PLRRFK
THE FLOW IS INTENSE. SHE COULDN'T STOP HERSELF.

NORIO... SHE WENT ON TO THE OTHER SIDE.

SHE HAD BEEN WASHED AWAY.

THE SPIRIT FLOW LEFT, AND MIKA WAS ALSO GONE.

THE FLOW IS INTENSE. SHE COULDN'T STOP HERSELF.

NORIO, ARE WE EVEN FURTHER POLISHED?

STREAM-LINED?

ALMOST STREAM-LINED.
IT'S PRETTY DARK...
WHAT EXACTLY DID HE SEE IN THIS CAVE?
YEAH, HE DID SAY THAT.
THAT'S WHAT THAT YOUTUBER SAID—"STREAMLINED."

OH! A FLASHLIGHT. THAT YOUTUBER MUST HAVE DROPPED IT.

IT WORKS!

AH!

SHH/QUIET.

IT'S PRETTY DEEP.

SOMEONE'S IN HERE.

HEE HEE.

HEE HEE.
BUT WE CAME BACK THROUGH THE UNDERGROUND CAVES.

THE SPIRIT FLOW DISAPPEARED AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST.

MIKA? YOU'RE OKAY? BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

NORIO.

HEE HEE.
ANCESTORS WHO CAME TO KILL THEMSELVES AND BECAME SLAVES TO THE SPIRIT FLOW.

YES, THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HERE FOR A LONG TIME.

"THESE PEOPLE"? THOSE ARE HUMAN BEINGS?!

SO THEN... THE SHADOWS IN THE SPIRIT FLOW...

... TO TRUST EVERYTHING TO THE SPIRIT FLOW?

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU TWO HAVE THE COURAGE...

W-HAT?

BUT THEY DON'T CLING TO THE TREES LIKE YOU DO.

THEY'VE BEEN GOING ROUND ALL THIS TIME.

HEY! SPIRIT FLOW'S COMING!

OH, WE'LL DO IT!

DAMMIT!
AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE SPIRIT FLOW TRULY EXISTS IN THE FOREST OF AOKIGAHARA...

AND SO THE STRANGE WOULD-BE SUICIDES GO ROUND IN ECSTASY AGAIN TONIGHT IN THE VIOLENT FLOW OF THE SPIRITS.

ONLY THOSE WHO REACH THE CAVE OF DRAGON'S MOUTH KNOW. LET'S JUST LEAVE IT AT THAT.

THE SPIRIT FLOW OF AOKIGAHARA/END
SLUMBER

I AM...

TAKUYA TERADA.
A MOMENT OF UNPARALLELED BLISS.

ALMOST AS THOUGH I HAD RETURNED TO CHILDHOOD.

IN THE MORNING, WHEN I WAKE UP FROM A DEEP SLEEP...

...THERE IS A MOMENT WHEN MY MIND IS NEW.

THE MORE SEVERE THE GAP BETWEEN SLUMBER AND REALITY, THE MORE THE MEMORIES RUSH INTO MY BRAIN LIKE AN ANGRY WAVE.

BUT THIS ECSTASY IS FLEETING. IN THE NEXT INSTANT, MEMORIES OF A HARSH REALITY CLOSE IN ON ME.

HAVE YOU HAD THIS EXPERIENCE?

I HAVE.

I AM TORTURED BY THE PAIN OF REALITY.

FOR INSTANCE...

ON THE MORNING AFTER KILLING SOMEONE.
...another attack took place last night around 3 a.m.

after last week's seemingly random murder...

we're live at the scene.

the m.o. and items at the scene are similar to last week's incident, and police are assuming both crimes are the work of the same person.

...and wrapped in a long, hooded sweater thought to have been worn by the murderer.

they are currently questioning people in the area, looking for leads.

the victim was stabbed with a weapon...
MS. KUBOTA WAS ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED NEXT MONTH.

THE VICTIM WAS AI KUBOTA, AN OFFICE WORKER WHO LIVED IN THE CITY.

AI KUBOTA (DECEASED)

...DID IT AGAIN.

I...
...A-BYE, BABY.

HUSH...

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS...

ON THE TREE TOP.

...THE CRADLE WILL ROCK.
AND THEN I CRAWLED INTO BED, STILL EXCITED.

WHEN I GOT HOME, I WASHED THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS AND FACE.

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

...AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL...

WHEN THE Bough breaks...

AFTER DEFTLY FINISHING IT, I HURRIED AWAY.

IT WASN'T A DREAM. THE PROOF IS...

...HOW THE CRIME SCENE, THE METHOD—AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, THE VICTIM'S FACE—ARE EXACTLY WHAT'S IN MY MEMORY.
I've already failed the bar exam three times.

I'm so anxious about the future, I feel like I'm losing it.

I'm sure I went to bed around one last night after studying for the bar.

And when did I buy the hooded parka?! And the knife and the gloves...

Aah, I'm so confused!

But... I mean, to kill people because of that...

That's absurd. It just doesn't make any sense.

Why am I randomly attacking people?!

I got my parents to rent this apartment so I could live by myself and study, but they're not going to support me forever.

Takuya Terada, future lawyer.

I-it's true life's kind of hard right now.
I REMEMBER NOW.

AAAH...

AAH!

I DID BUY A HOODED PARKA AND A KNIFE AND GLOVES.

I'M A MURDERER.

THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO DOUBT NOW.

AT SETAGAYA HAPPY MALL.

I DID BUY A HOODED PARKA AND A KNIFE AND GLOVES.

How could I have forgotten?
THE VICTIM WAS AN OFFICE WORKER.

ANOTHER MURDER OCCURRED LAST NIGHT!

HE SAW ME.

NO.
IT'S ALL OVER NOW. HE SAW ME.

...THAT COULD LEAD TO THE MURDERER.

SOME OUTLETS ARE REPORTING THAT THERE IS INFORMATION THIS TIME...

LIFE SENTENCE.

TRIAL.

SURRENDER.

MEDIA.

INVESTIGATION.

WITNESS.

ARREST.

MEDIA.

TRIAL.

APPEAL.

DEATH PENALTY.

DISMISSAL.

HANGING.

APPEAL.

DEATH PENALTY.

DISMISSAL.

HANGING.
DEATH PENALTY.

RE-TRIAL.

HANGING.

DEATH PENALTY.

TRIAL.

HANGING.

DEATH PENALTY.

SURRENDER.

MEDIA.

FAMILY DE STROYED.
I'M OVER-THINKING THIS.

BECAUSE I WAS GOING TO TURN MYSELF IN.

OH! IT'S OPEN.

I DIDN'T LOCK IT.
THERE'S PAPER TAPED TO THE MIRROR... I DON'T REMEMBER DOING THAT.

SOMETHING'S WEIRD...

HUH? A BURGLAR?

WAS SOMEONE IN HERE WHILE I WAS GONE?

NO WAY.

AH ?!
WHEN DID I BUY ALL THESE?

SO MANY HOODED PARKAS...

GARBAGE COLLECTION
MON/THU

KACHAK
I could escape from reality and sleep without dreaming.

Sleeping used to be my favorite thing.

And I could enjoy a moment of pure ecstasy in the first seconds of waking.

I’m afraid to go to sleep.

The bliss right before makes the reality afterward even more horrible.

But reality is too scary now.

Even if it was only for a second and then harsh reality came back to me.

That kept me going.

Scared ...

I’m scared ...

Sleep ...

...to sleep.
...THE CRADLE WILL ROCK.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS...
ON THE TREE-TOP.
HUSH-A-BYE, BABY.

...CRADLE AND ALL—

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL.
AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

WHEN THE Bough BREAKS...
VIDEO OF WHAT IS THOUGHT TO BE THE MURDERER CAUGHT ON A SECURITY CAMERA HAS BEEN RELEASED BY THE INVESTIGATION.

AND HERE WE HAVE NEW INFORMATION.

YET ANOTHER VICTIM WAS FOUND LAST NIGHT.

THIS MAKES FOUR IN TOTAL.

They are proceeding with analysis of the video and...

...asking residents to call in with any information.

ARREST.

HANGING.
OPEN THE DOOR! YOU'RE IN THERE, AREN'T YOU?!

TAKUYA!

WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK AWFUL.

HUH?

T-TAKUYA...

W-WHAT? KANAMI?!

YOU TURNED YOUR PHONE OFF, DIDN'T YOU?

TAKUYA!
I'M JUST TIRED...

I KNOW THE BAR EXAM'S TOUGH, BUT YOU HAVE TO SLEEP.

SO? HOW IS IT?

LET'S WATCH THAT DVD.

I KNOW.

GREAT.
YOU WOULD NEVER DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

I'M THE KILLER!

WHAT'S WRONG, TAKUYA?!

I DID IT!

IT'S ME.

TAKUYA?!

KANAMI.
WHY WOULD YOU SUDDENLY WAKE UP AND KILL PEOPLE?

I MEAN, YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ASLEEP AT THE TIMES OF THE CRIMES.

I REMEMBER IT, THOUGH.

BUT IT'S STRANGE.

SOMEONE?

SUDDENLY WAKE UP?

AND YOU DIDN'T REMEMBER BUYING THE PARKA OR THE KNIFE AT FIRST.

PEOPLE ONLINE ARE SAYING THAT THE M.O. IS THE SAME AS THESE CASES.

AND YOU HEARD OF TOMO YANO?

IT'S TOO WEIRD THAT YOU'D REMEMBER LATER.

WHY?

HE'S THE SAME AGE.

REMEMBER BUYING THE PARKA OR THE KNIFE AT FIRST.

HE MURDERED SEVERAL PEOPLE TEN YEARS AGO AND GOT THE DEATH PENALTY LAST YEAR.

PEOPLE ONLINE ARE SAYING THAT THE M.O. IS THE SAME AS THESE CASES.

HE MURDERED SEVERAL PEOPLE TEN YEARS AGO AND GOT THE DEATH PENALTY LAST YEAR.

DISMISSAL OF THE FINAL APPEAL. ENSRCHED UPON DEATH SENTENCE.

Tomo Yano, Condemned Prisoner

Condemned Prisoner
AND THE REAL MURDERER IS SOMEONE ELSE.

IN WHICH CASE, YANO WAS EXECUTED EVEN THOUGH HE DIDN'T DO IT.

BUT SOME PEOPLE SAY IT'S ACTUALLY THE WORK OF THE SAME PERSON.

MAYBE THE MURDERER IS COPYING THE KILLINGS FROM BACK THEN.

AND NOW YOU'RE TORTURED WITH THIS GUILT.

AFTER SUCH GRUESOME CRIMES, CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?

ALSO, WHAT'S WEIRD IS THAT YANO TURNED HIMSELF IN.

SO THEN WHAT IS IT? THE REAL KILLER'S SOMEONE ELSE, AND HIS MEMORIES ARE PLAYING IN MY HEAD?

THEN IT ALL MAKES SENSE.

MAYBE I HAVE A SPLIT PERSONALITY.

...I HEARD YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY REMEMBER THE OTHER PERSONALITY'S MEMORIES, THOUGH.

WITH SPLIT PERSONALITY— OR RATHER, DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER.

I DON'T KNOW.
I'll go get a camera tomorrow. You make sure to stay home at night, okay?

And if you're here at the time of an incident, then you have an alibi.

We'll tape you so there's a record.

Okay, how about this?

We'll set up a camera in here.

It's definitely not you.

Don't worry!

If it does, I'll kill myself.

But, Kanami, I'm scared... what if the video shows me putting on a parka and going out?

Okay, got it.

Thanks.

Kanami, stay with me.

I will.
I CAN STILL MAKE THE LAST TRAIN.

I HAVE A THING, SO I HAVE TO GET HOME.

TAKUYA... I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW.
AAAAAH!

THRRK

THRRK

SHRR

SHRR

EEEE!

NOOO!

AAAAAH!

KANAMI!

GASP

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY, CRADLE AND ALL.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS... THE CRADLE WILL FALL.
HER INJURIES ARE SERIOUS, BUT NOT FATAL.

WHAT'S THE VICTIM'S CONDITION?

WHAT? WHO IS IT?

SHE SAID SHE KNEW HIM.

YES.

DID SHE SAY ANYTHING ABOUT HER ATTACKER?

THE ATTACKER WAS LIKELY BLINDED BECAUSE SHE USED HER PEPPER SPRAY WHEN HE ATTACKED, SO HE DIDN'T HIT ANY ORGANS.

A MAN WHO LIVES ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF HER BOYFRIEND'S APARTMENT BUILDING.

REALLY? GOT IT!

C'MON! HURRY IT UP!

SHE'D SEEN HIM BEFORE, AND THE WAY HE LOOKED MADE AN IMPRESSION ON HER.
A suspect has been arrested for the string of murders that has rocked the nation.

A self-proclaimed therapist, Ryoji Gobara, age 35.

Moreover, journals alluding to the crimes were discovered...

...and the police are examining these as evidence.

In addition to the traces of blood in the bathroom of his apartment...

...blood-stained clothing thought to belong to the victims was found in the closet.
I've held out all this time, but I'm getting antsy. I'm thinking it's about time to start again. Gotta find a new confidant. :}

Waking up is the worst when I kill people! I'll share it with someone else. :P It's nice to share! S-H-A-R-E! I'll split my troubles with someone else! I found someone whose sensibilities are like mine. I'm sure he can help.

Today, I made the biggest mistake of my life!! I mean, forgetting to lock the door! :o And of all things, he mistakes my place for his and comes right in?! All those parkas I bought, he trashed.

The instant you wake up is your most defenseless moment. It's easy to invade your memory. I'm a genius at all kinds of things. The trick is to become him completely. :) I set our apartments up exactly the same way.

Sept. 17
I guess my confidant Tomo Yano was executed. Such a shock. :o Tomo took in my joy and my sadness... Thank you for saving me.

February
I did it again tonight. Killing people feels so good. :D But a little a lot of regret after the killing... :(

25th
I did it again tonight. Killing people feels so good. :D But a little a lot of regret after the killing... :(

Feb. 1
Today, I made the biggest mistake of my life!! I mean, forgetting to lock the door! :o And of all things, he mistakes my place for his and comes right in?! All those parkas I bought, he trashed.
...WAS GOBARA HIMSELF REFLECTED IN A WINDOW.

THINKING ABOUT IT NOW, THE MAN I SAW OVER THE FENCE DURING THE THIRD MURDER...

APPARENTLY, THE MURDER MEMORIES WERE PUSHED INTO MY BRAIN BY YOJI GOBARA.

A MAN WHO COULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT... WHO IS THIS GOBARA?

BUT THE TERROR'S NOT ENDING ANYTIME SOON.

I GAVE UP ON THE BAR EXAM AND WENT BACK TO MY PARENTS' HOUSE.

HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN SINCE THEN? YOJI GOBARA WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH AND IS NOW IMPRISONED AT THE TOKYO DETENTION HOUSE.

...AFTER I WAKE FROM MY SLUMBER IN THE MORNING, HIS MEMORIES POUR IN.

BECAUSE EVEN NOW...
TAKUYA TERADA.

I AM...

SHK

SHK

SHK

I AM...

SLEEP.

SLEEP.

BE STILL...

WHAP

CRACK

GASP

HAAH.

HAAH.
NO. 957, GOBARA.
LET'S GO.
ANY LAST WORDS?
PLESE SIT DOWN.
...I AM TAKUYA TERADA.
I'M GOING TO BLINDFOLD YOU NOW.
AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

...CRADLE AND ALL.

KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK
...came an avalanche! Ryujin Gamba's entire Life!

They say that a person's life flashes before their eyes at the time of death.

A whole life's worth of memories!
TEN YEARS, HM? I WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR FROM YOU OUT OF THE BLUE.

IT’S ME. KANAMI.

THAT’S YOU, ISN’T IT?

TAKUYA?

TAKUYA, HOW ABOUT YOU?

I HAVE SCARS ALL OVER MY BODY, BUT THE MENTAL SCARS HAVE MOSTLY HEALED.

AND IT’S NO WONDER. YOU WERE STUCK WITH THE MEMORY OF TRYING TO KILL ME.

YOU WERE AFRAID TO SEE ME AFTER THE ATTACK.

EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE A VICTIM, TOO.
I'M TOTALLY OVER IT NOW, TOO. BUT IT WAS HARD. THAT MORNING.

THE SPINE FOLDING AWAY FROM THE SKULL. BLINDFOLDED, ROPE BITING INTO MY NECK.

THE SKIN ON HIS NECK PULLING AWAY...

I GOT TO SHARE THE PAIN OF MY CONFIDANT, SO IT WAS OKAY.

BUT...

KANAMI.

SLUMBER/END
AFTERWORD

COVID-19 has been running rampant globally and shows no signs of slowing down now, at the beginning of 2021. It feels like I spent most of my time during this coronavirus storm locked up in my studio drawing The Liminal Zone.

The Liminal Zone is a collection of short stories serialized on the LINE manga app.

This was the first time I've been serialized on a manga app, and I was so excited by how different it was from serialization in a magazine. There were no strict page limits. In a magazine, you have to make sure you draw the specified number of pages. For a long-form series, this isn't too much of an issue, but for a one-shot—if, for instance, you have thirty-two pages—you must finish the story in those thirty-two pages. A professional manga artist can neatly pack their story into the set number of pages, but for some reason, I'm not very good at this. When I draw storyboards—the blueprint for the manga—I generally go over the page limit. Then I have to whittle away the excess to fit it in, but when I still can't get it down to size even after that, I will go so far as to change the ending. It's embarrassing—or rather, it's unbecoming of a professional.

But with this series, I had the flexibility to increase the number of pages, and I happily went over the page limit to draw exactly what I wanted. I won't be able to judge whether or not that's good for the work itself, though, until a little time has passed and I go back over the stories. While I was doing the revisions for “Weeping Woman Way,” I started to wonder if it wasn't a bit too long.

Still, perhaps I'm tired after drawing manga for years on end, I'm out of good ideas. The stories in this book were created drawing on ideas that I'd left unused in an old notebook of possible topics.

I drew “Weeping Woman Way” with the (Japanese ballad) enka-style topic of a woman who cries too much and gutters form on her cheeks where the tears roll down. Those gutters are called sobbing roads. I didn't really make much use of that keyword “sobbing roads,” though. (Incidentally, the sobbing road was inspired by Fujiko A. Fujio’s “manga road.”)

The entire foundation for “Madonna” was the silly idea of “write characters for an angry witch woman, read it as Madonna.” Below that in my notebook, there is a scribble added of unclear meaning “witch husband (madonna—a play on ‘donna,’ the word for husband and Madonna)” and that was the end of it.

With “The Spirit Flow of Aokigahara,” I originally was going to make it a story of the evolution of the bodies of a new species of humanity into a streamlined shape. The idea was “eventually, humanity evolves to avoid a powerful solar wind or something that assaults the Earth with streamlined bodies.” But I dismissed it as being too absurdly science fiction, and once the supernatural element was added in, it became a deeply bizarre story.

“Slumber” is an idea I asked to wake up after I let it sleep for a very long time. (So only the idea gets to sleep. Of course.) “The moment you wake up in the morning, you forget all of the unpleasant things of everyday life and are immersed in a feeling of pure bliss, but memories of harsh reality quickly come back to you”—I think a lot of people have likely experienced this moment, and I decided to make a horror story about it, but I couldn't quite pull it together into a narrative.

And so The Liminal Zone ended up being a collection of four longish stories.

I'd like to take the opportunity here to express my gratitude to LINE Manga for giving me a new challenge in drawing these works, my editor Makiko Hara and everyone in the Asahi Shimbun Publications comic editorial division for helping me craft these stories, the designer Kazuhiko Fukami for yet another wonderful cover, and everyone else involved in the production of the book.

—JUNJI ITO
January 26, 2021