

## KIM Eugene

### Extract from the novel [Summer]

Taking off her slippers, Y stepped up to the bathroom. Each step slow and heavy, Y's bare feet moved forward as if walking through water. Yellowish footprints appeared on the white rug. Y's feet looked delicate and soft. They had no callouses or dead skin, and only the toes and tops of her feet were tanned, as if they belonged to a boy splashing in a creek. Before undressing, Y picked up a few strands of hair off the carpet. The short, thick ones were hers, while the thin, curly ones belonged to B. In the bathroom Y continued to stand on her toes. She faced the mirror. The first thing she noticed were her calf and thigh muscles, tense from standing tip-toed. White cement dust was stuck all over her head. She tried to brush her hair back, but it didn't budge. Y examined her nape. There was a rash where the skin met her hair. Her flexed calves trembled.

Only in the tub did Y finally stand flat-footed. It was one of her more peculiar habits. Y rarely put her heels to the floor. Y carefully adjusted the shower curtain so as to not get the carpet wet. She used water to seal both sides of the curtain to the tile walls of the bathtub. As soon as she spread out the curtain, a picture of two men appeared. They were big and ruddy-looking—and naked.

Carefully adjusting the water temperature, Y turned the shower lever down slightly. Y didn't like high water pressure. She always bathed with hot water, even in the heat of summer.

Dust flew around B's workshop. He straightened out the wooden boards, cut according to the plans, and smoothed all concrete surfaces using a sander. Originally a garage, B's workshop had no doors. Some of the sawdust landed on the nearby flowering trees and on the gravel near the entrance, but the flour-like fine cement powder was carried by the wind into the house. It settled onto the windowsills, the living-room floor, the tabletop, the kitchen shelves, the coffee machine on the corner of the counter, the glass jar used to store coffee grounds, and in between the kitchen table and chairs. There was dust on top of everything that had a surface. Dust was continuously born, and moved around, as if alive. It reproduced. Dust hid in all four corners of the living room, on the small notches of the house's only bookshelf, and in between books on various subjects. Y cleaned their humble household twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. She cleaned the antiquated wooden floors, the table with a loose leg, and their two mismatched chairs, switching between a wet rag and a dry one. For the dust in the floor's crevices or between the floor and the doorsill, she used a paintbrush. Having finished her shower, Y stood in front of the kitchen sink. She spotted a few tea cups and plates on the dish rack. B had placed them there, unaware that the dust was reaching the kitchen. Y took the plates off the rack and started rinsing them.

Startled, Y dropped the lid of the drain she was holding. The circular lid landed on top of her foot. Y opened her mouth as if to scream, but no sound came out. Stepping back, she looked inside the kitchen sink. Her earlobes turned red.

Having finished the dishes, Y was opening the lid of the drain-hole filter when an insect crept out. With two long antennae, many joints, and an infinite number of legs, the bug was as long as a grown adult's forefinger, and considerably thicker. Playing dead, it flattened itself onto the floor and stopped moving. Still smeared with dish soap, its shell was shiny. It wasn't poisonous and didn't have any wings, but Y felt a sense of either fear or revulsion. Though frozen stiff a few moments before, Y now shook with disgust and stepped away from the sink. Looking out the window in front of her—the azalea petals that seemed inseparable from the surrounding weeds,

scarlet sages that had blossomed into a row, and clouds so low they appeared to touch the ground—everything moved slowly into the distance. The new shoots from the vines outside swayed in the wind. B was digging up the plant's roots because they had not been properly set in the ground, causing the plant to list. As she watched B from behind, he slowly disappeared from her field of vision.

Y headed toward the bedroom. She took off her slippers and put on some socks.

B was a person who made things. B was a person who cut things and demolished them.

B got the house for a bargain. Considering what he had paid, it was a big house, but it was old and dilapidated. When they first opened the door, they were greeted with a whiff of stale, musty air. For a moment, the house's eerie atmosphere gave them the chills. Y said quietly, as if whispering, that the house looked like it had been neglected for much longer than what the agency had reported. The front doorway was partially blocked by an old-fashioned shoe rack that tilted to one side. The ceiling was a maze of electric wiring, some of it still useful, some of it kaput. While examining the absurdly small kitchen sink, B had already started to imagine how he would upgrade the house. He particularly liked the garage that faced the patio outside the living room. B stared at the old cherry tree, which cast its branches as if about to hug the makeshift garage. Even when observing B from behind, Y could see he was giddy with anticipation. B talked to Y, who was clearly dissatisfied, about the house's "potential." He said the house had the potential to be beautiful. Instead of answering, Y simply turned her eyes toward a pile of dead stock rose blossoms. The warped front door had a hard time closing properly.

First, B scraped off the mold on the cement walls near the bathroom. Leaving only a few essential pieces of furniture, he threw everything else away.

Y put in her earphones and placed a tape in her Walkman. She pushed the play button.

As soon as summer arrived, Y began setting her alarm for 4 a.m. Upon hearing the garbage truck approach the street outside; the sound of the garbage men getting off and dragging the compost, recycling, and trash bins to the truck; the sound of garbage bags piling up and the roar of the truck engine before taking off, Y was slowly dragged out from her slumber. Y worked for about four hours each day. Because B woke up earlier when the days began to have more sunlight, she woke up an hour earlier. Y always liked to work in a quiet environment. She cherished the still calm just before sunrise, the coolness and humidity of dawn. Fumbling in the darkness, Y took her laptop and placed it on the living room table. Only after closing the bedroom door could she turn on the lights. B was sensitive to light, and even dim lighting disturbed his sleep.

The interviewer's voice was a familiar one. Magazines and publishers usually hired her to transcribe recordings. Interviews and panel discussions were usually around sixty minutes long. Interviews started with a few ceremonial questions or jokes to ease the tension. She occasionally received assignments for interviews that were to be used for critical biographies or essay collections. These were the biggest assignments and thus took the most time. Such recordings were long, with enough material to fill a book.

Y always followed a set process when working. First, she quickly typed out what she could gather from an initial listen. Anything uncertain was left blank. After typing, she would listen to the tape again to check what she had written. She listened to any uncertain words again and again. Such words always felt awkward, their tone alien, and she needed time to adjust to them. She also checked all of the professional terminology. To Y, this was the most excruciating stage. After confirming everything, she refined the sentences to make them easier to read.

The spoken word was almost always handicapped. Most spoken language was grammatically flawed, and sentences either ended without a proper finish or dragged on endlessly. People

often omitted predicates. They would reverse a sentence's syntax and replace one word with another of a completely different definition. It was Y's job to find omitted words and place them where they were needed. She had to resolve the gaps between sentences, the rifts between conversations, the look someone gave before saying something or the gestures they used to replace words—leaving no room for misunderstanding.

Although she had no guidance, Y had gradually learned the ropes of her trade. After inspecting the quality of the recording, she rewound the tape to the beginning.

"There were a few pals I used to play Go with. One of them was a dentist. An odd fella. . . . Would only treat patients from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. No patients were admitted after 3 p.m., no matter what the circumstances. After that, he would take the subway to a café—the coffee shop where we always met. After that, what do you think? We played Go. Until one in the morning. We didn't drink. When we got the munchies, we'd shift to a pho joint nearby. Always a guys' night with him. My dentist pal, he didn't even like cilantro, but that was the only place open at that time. . . . He had no family, no girlfriend. I heard that he had a daughter somewhere . . ."

"What about you, K? Tell me about yourself, too."

"Ah, you mean me? Well, I'm . . ."

When the water started boiling, the smell of coffee filled the living room. Mixed with the early morning dew, it produced something similar to the tart aroma of menstruation.

As if handling a child, B grabbed Y by her waist, lifted her up, and set her on top of the wooden boards. Y's black knit sweater and blue jeans were suddenly smeared with the sawdust and sweat from B's body. After absorbing the rain's humidity and then drying in the sun, the plywood had become slightly warped. Y used her body weight to steady the top board, which had drifted from its support beam. Meanwhile, B used a few nails to secure the board back into place. Sweat instantly gathered on his forehead. B was building a desk big enough to fill one side of the room. He put two boards of plywood together. The bottom layer was cheap Douglas fir pine, and the top was birch with a decent wood grain. Now that it had been sanded, the wood was as smooth as a baby's bottom. He was going to stain the desk with a chestnut tone, which was to be applied in three stages. After staining the desk and then sanding it again, the desk needed a wood finish, which was normally applied in five or more stages. That way, the desk doesn't incur any scratches, even if you kick it, B said. I'm going to make the legs out of concrete. Every time B secured a screw with the drill, Y's body trembled from the vibration. The noise was so loud that Y could only hear about half of what B said.

B showed Y four palm-sized pieces of wood, one by one, and placed them on top of the plywood. Shaped into a cat, leaf, whale, and heart, they were colored light pink, green, sky blue, and yellow, respectively. Beverage coasters, B said briefly, spreading out his arms and hugging Y. Y grabbed onto B's shoulders and stretched her legs toward the ground. Confronted with the scent of his sweaty body odor, Y made a face and turned away—before she even realized what she was doing. B's palms and arms were slippery with sweat. The odor was foul. Y carefully held up the coasters. Her eyes kept glancing at her now dirtied clothes.

Y escaped from the workshop as quickly as she could. B looked like he was going to follow, but stopped at the entrance and coughed loudly. He spit some phlegm onto the gravel. Although he used the sander every day, B never wore a mask. Y looked up at the cherry tree. Shiny like polished marbles, the cherries hung in bunches on each branch. The thinner branches drooped,

as if about to snap. Although cherry trees grew at an extremely slow pace, its trunk was thicker than its neighbors', and it was the yard's tallest tree. Its fruit was already dark red.

As soon as she got into the house, Y took off all her clothes and threw them into the laundry basket. After fiddling with the coasters for a while, she put them in the kitchen sink drawer.

Y was thinking about the bug she saw in the kitchen sink a few days earlier. With dish soap still on its shell, it hid in the corners of her mind and popped up every so often. By the time she had put on some socks and returned to the kitchen sink, the bug was gone. Since it wasn't dead, the bug must have been somewhere in or near the house. There was something about the bug that differentiated it from all the others she'd seen there. After the sighting, Y was in a constant state of tension. Every time she opened the refrigerator door, stood in front of the kitchen sink to do dishes, opened the window, or even pushed her chair back from the desk, she thought she saw the bug playing dead on the floor. From that day onward, Y wore socks—even when she slept. Despite wearing slippers as well, she occasionally walked around on her tiptoes. The thought of encountering the bug, dead or alive, was unbearable. Opening the lid of the sink drain required immense effort. She even asked B for help once. Totally oblivious of the circumstances, B came in from his workshop to answer Y's summons, opened the drain lid for her, and went back outside. How a bug of that size had managed to sneak through the tiny crevice underneath the lid and crawl into the filter was beyond Y's comprehension. Born and raised in the city, Y was clueless about insects.

Y stared at a dark corner of the living room. Looking into the darkness was Y's way of overcoming her fear. After looking again and again into a darkness that eclipsed her vision, after realizing her inability to distinguish or perceive anything—only then did she feel at ease.

The sound of B coughing came from the bedroom. The tape had already stopped playing. Y took the tape out from the cassette player, flipped it over, and put it back in. She pressed play. The tape had a sticky note that had "Interview A-1" written in scrawled letters. She was never given any information about the interviewer or interviewee.

The interviewers were always experts at removing all emotion from their voices. As their skill increased, they either reunited completely with their original voices or completely drifted away from them. The interviewees would also occasionally reveal their real voices during interviews. Before they knew it, they would let out a tone or some inflection they wanted to keep hidden, or make tasteless exclamations or utterances they couldn't censor. Y had a sharp ear for such things. Upon realizing their mistake, interviewees always felt a sense of shame, regardless of whether their interviewer had sensed their error or not. After their mistake, they either paused or laughed awkwardly. Such gaps and fillers made Y uncomfortable. She would then take out her earphones and get some fresh air before returning to work. Y massaged her aching wrist.

Y held a plastic bag in each hand, one with five bottles of fifty-proof liquor and one with six one-liter glass bottles. With every step, glass clanged against glass and against her knees. Y couldn't differentiate between the sounds made by the glass' friction and the sound of the intense sunlight that filled the alleyway. Like two bulls wrestling each other with their horns, Y pushed against the sunlight with her forehead and charged forward. The sunlight fell on her nape and shoulder, above her flexed arms. Y's shadow wavered behind her before taking the lead, but it was now withered beneath her feet, unable to grow anymore. The high walls on both sides of the alleyway stretched all the way to the end of the street. The round heads of shaped trees peeked over the walls. They offered no shade.

Y turned her head toward the sound of small wheels grinding against the cement, stopping, and then grinding again. A young woman was approaching from the opposite direction, pushing a baby stroller. She used one hand to wobble it along. Carrying the baby's weight, the stroller

would roll for about five meters before coming to a stop. Dragging her slippers along, the woman slowly approached the stroller, grabbed the handle, coiled back, and gave it big push. Grazing Y, the stroller went a little farther this time. Tiny rocks got caught underneath the wheels and produced a rattling noise. Y's eyes turned to the paper cup in the woman's other hand. Inside the cup were a few fried-chicken skins stuck on a toothpick. The baby boy, who looked about two years old, had dark face and no expression. Y's vision suddenly went blurry. Drowsiness descended upon her. It was probably because of the heat.

"All boxes need to be made by hand, whether they're five centimeters or one centimeter in width. That way, subtle the differences develop between each box. Later on, when you arrange hundreds of boxes on a canvas in a set pattern, those subtle differences will form tiny spaces between boxes. Such spaces provide both transformation and balance. I don't focus too much on each individual box. I try to see the bigger picture. I place importance on the texture formed by thousands of corners, on the complex emotions inspired by shapes with vague boundaries. To me, a landscape consists of shapes with emotions.

"I want to talk about the summer of that year. When I was young, I really didn't like my mother. That's because she was completely stubborn. She was always calling for me, the whites of her eyes flashing among her dark face. Back then, the only thing I wanted was to leave my hometown. At dawn, she would drag me out of the shed, where I always hid, and make me and my younger sister pick apricots.

"Relying on a shred of daylight just bright enough to see a few steps in front of us, we would head to the orchard. It was about a thirty-minute walk, and by the time we got there the sun would start to appear over the horizon. First, we would feed ourselves with any apricots that were slightly rotten or those that had been eaten by bugs. I shook the trees, and my sister would pick up the fruit and gather it in a basket. My sister was small, so she only had to bend over a little. For half the day, we would pick apricots until our faces were red with sunburn. Because the only thing we ate was apricots, we often got stomachaches. My sister must have eaten the unripe ones, because she frequently complained about stomachache. At first, she would poop underneath the apricot trees and cover it up with dirt, but she got sick of doing that after a while, and just left it. My sister had squatted in the shade of one of the trees again. Already burned by the sun, her face turned even redder when she tensed up. Apricots trees aren't very big, and their leaves are sparse, so the shade they offer isn't much. Sunlight splashed over my sister's exposed butt and the pile of shit next to her, which was from the morning and had started to harden. After witnessing that scene of the light illuminating her face and the shit, I left my hometown. That was the last thing I saw there."

B said he wanted to make liquor with the cherries. For several years now, he had often talked about two cherry trees that grew in the garden in front of his house when he was a boy. He reminisced about watching his mother cut cherry stems, and about the flavor of the fermented cherries he would secretly sample from liquor bottles that were kept on the high shelves in the garage during the cold winters. There was a theatrical quality to B. He often ruminated over childhood experiences and other things in the past, and tried to recreate them. By doing so, he hoped to at least partially alleviate the sense of loss that comes with getting older. Much like his father, B spent his days fixing the house or working with wood. He explored different herbs, and acquired various strains of eggplants and tomatoes. Every time he watched a documentary about animals, he would go on about a white parrot that his dad had raised. He also talked about a table mat that he missed, one his mother had made from real leather. He nagged Y about wanting to eat the braised meat he used to get during the holidays. Y struggled by herself to find

simple recipes for dishes she'd never even tasted before. B had once told Y that it was meaningful to achieve things together.

There were baskets full of ripe cherries in the yard. Y used the garden hose to rinse them off. She planned to take them to the backyard, where the dust couldn't reach, and dry them off. Y put a cherry in her mouth. Although it was sweet and pleasant, Y found its flavor alien: Cherries were a part of B's nostalgia, not hers.

B was busy salvaging a few whole roots from the dying plant. The *fatsi* had endured the winter pretty well, but had started withering as soon as spring passed. Watering it regularly and providing enough shade to protect it from harsh light did not apparently benefit it very much. The *fatsi* had been one of the few plants that B had succeeded in cultivating, despite moving from place to place. While transferring the cherry baskets, Y stole a few glances at B's hands meticulously sifting out the stalks that hadn't dried, shaking off the dirt, and handling any remaining roots with care. B rinsed the *fatsi*'s roots in a basin he'd filled with water. As the dirt washed away, the roots revealed their startlingly white color. Y watched the fragile roots sway in B's hands, responding to his touch, and she suddenly thought of a child's bare legs—a child's naked lower body, legs with short and chubby joints, and small feet appeared before her eyes. Pale appendages dangling in mid-air overlapped with scattered *fatsi* roots cut away by garden scissors, forming a single image. B's hands looked big and beastly. Y suddenly felt like vomiting.

Y turned her head. She laid out the cherries on a wicker tray. Leaving around a centimeter of leeway, she cut the tops off all the stems. She struggled to fix the look on her face, but she couldn't stand looking at B's hands any longer. Every time B gave one of his habitual coughs, she barely suppressed the urge to vomit.

"I don't want to talk about the wife and kids."

"What about your reason for returning home after twenty years?"

"Someone . . . this girl I was seeing . . . said that I should go back. You know, 'cuz it's my home. She said people back home would understand."

"Do you regret it?"

"I'm not sure."

Y opened the refrigerator and took out the pan she'd put in the day before. Inside were square cuts of meat that she'd marinated with alcohol. Y used another wicker tray to filter out the juices. Two kilograms of beef, one white onion, two carrots, three garlic cloves, and three laurel leaves laced with ground cloves fell out onto the wicker tray. Saturated with blood, the mixture was thick and gave off a black-reddish hue. Y heated the broth over a low flame. As she hadn't tasted the dish before, she didn't know what to aim for. A slightly sanguineous odor filled the air. Using tongs to individually transfer each slice of meat and remove any extra liquid, Y's back became drenched in sweat. Heating food over a flame and letting it simmer didn't suit the season, but Y didn't really care. She continuously wiped the sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand.

One day, Y recalled the names of dishes she heard about from B. It was mostly seasonal food from the provinces, for families to gather around and eat in the middle of winter. Y enjoyed fixing them for B, as he hadn't tasted them since leaving home. Y moved around busily. Although

her intentions were unclear, her actions were resolute, even desperate.

Y laid the smoked pork out on the cutting board. After the strokes of her knife stopped, she began to rinse the pork, then the hard surface. The plastic tarps that traversed the middle of the living room fluttered like curtains. B had started working on the living room and, based on his experiences while making the desk, he was worried about dust and cement powder covering the table, bookshelf, and kitchen. Contrary to B's declaration that the dust wouldn't get past the tarps, the sediment extended to the table and chairs at its shortest, and to the sauce dishes inside the kitchen cupboards at its farthest. Dust could travel wherever it pleased. Y already knew this would happen, but said nothing. Due to B's child-like temperament, such a protest could easily turn into a fight. Y now had to clean all household items even more meticulously than before. B placed wooden casts where he would build the desk's legs. He placed the desk's wooden boards against the wall.

As he had vowed to do, B was attempting to make the desk's legs out of concrete. He liked the cold and rough feel of the substance. He had always said that no modern material matched with wood as well as concrete did. B planned to build a massive desk with two concrete legs. Although the desk's main board would be supported by strategically placed wooden props, from the side, the desk and legs would look separated, giving the former the appearance of floating in mid-air. After making a basic wooden mold, B started to build a number of props. Given that cement was heavy on its own, one had to be mindful of the wood buckling. Three forty-kilogram bags of cement would make one leg.

With every breeze, the tarps billowed up and settled back down like a skirt.

First, Y fried the smoked pork in a heated pan. She cooked some thinly sliced garlic and two sliced red onions until they were brown. Using the leftover grease in the pan, she layered all four sides with beef and cooked them to the point of nearly burning them. That way, the meat wouldn't break up during the simmering process. She stirred in a little flour. After laying the onions and pork on the bottom of the cast-iron pan, she carefully added each slice of beef. As soon as she opened the lid to thicken the sauce, a wave of sanguineous odor hit the air again. Y placed the pan back down. She suddenly thought of B's herbs. Hiding the basket in her two hands, she carefully poked her head and shoulders through a gap between tarps.

B was in the shade of the cherry tree. He ripped open a bag of cement and poured the powder onto the ground. He turned on the garden hose onto the pile of cement, mixing it skillfully with a shovel. He gathered the mixture and molded it into a tall pile. As cement solidified quickly, you had to wash it off as soon as you were finished working with it. He needed to divide the mixture into portions and move it using washbowls. Sensing someone was nearby, B turned his head. He saw Y carrying a basket. Upon making eye contact with B, Y unconsciously turned away. Y panicked. Feeling apologetic for avoiding B for no clear reason, Y tried to raise her lips into a smile and made eye contact with B again. At that moment, B started to cough. He leaned against the shovel he'd stuck into the cement pile. With every cough, his body rattled. Y hesitated, unsure of whether or not she should offer him support. The basket she was holding, the meat that was waiting to be seasoned, and her freshly cleaned hands all went through her head one by one. Meanwhile, B had started to cough even more violently. Alarmed, Y moved her feet to go to him, but B suddenly coughed up blood.

There was a substantial amount of blood. Every time he coughed, blood came out like water spilling from a cup. B immediately covered his mouth, but the blood squeezed through his fingers and splashed onto the cement. A blackish-red color covered B's hands and clothes, the cement and ground. Only after hacking up a large bowl's worth of blood did B stop coughing. With his mouth and chest covered in blood, B looked at Y, who was frozen stiff.

The cicadas were singing. It was the first time they sang that year.

"I was born in the middle of a heat wave. It was the greatest heat wave in thirty years, the kind of event that people joke about now. I've therefore spent my life embracing the idea of a heat wave being the unofficial twin of my birth date. Every time I told people my birthday, they would just talk about the heat wave. Of course, I don't remember the summer of my birth, but I can tell you about the summer when I first opened the door to that house.

"The first thing I encountered in that place was a gigantic spider web. Splayed across the corner of a wall and the shoe rack, it was the biggest spider web I'd ever seen. As nobody had been in that place for years, the spider had obviously had lots of time to work. Yet the web seemed abandoned. That's because the only thing caught in the web was a single baby's breath blossom that looked like it would fall apart if anyone touched it. I don't know why, but I couldn't take my eyes off that withered flower. I took a closer look at the spider web, and then spent a long time looking at the dead, withered flower, faded as if burnt by the sun.

"There were two fruit trees in the garden. They were at different stages of development. One bore plenty of ripe fruit that fell to the ground in batches, while the other had just started to bear fruit. Although they all grew on the same tree, each individual leaf seemed to mature in its own time; no two leaves resembled each other in size. There was a fresh leaf with peach fuzz on its surface and a dry, nearly dead leaf on the same branch. I also looked at the fruit that had pushed past the dry flowers to freshly sprout, at a black bee casting its antennae over the moist fruit, the sizzling sunshine illuminating its wings."

Y took off her slippers and stepped up to the bathroom. She rubbed her feet into the rug several times. She blew off the gray dust that had settled on the doorknob. Y undressed quickly. Her sweat-drenched clothes stuck to her body, making them difficult to remove. A tart odor filled the air. Y turned her body toward the full-length mirror. Her collarbone, ribcage, and pelvis bulging outward, her body almost looked sexless. Y carefully lowered her heels onto the floor. She felt the carpet's rough texture with the bottom of her feet. A shiver ran all the way to the top of her head. Y raised her right foot and took a step forward. She lifted her head and looked at the mirror. Her face had a contorted forehead and protruding eyebrow ridge.

Y stepped into the tub, secured the showerhead along the wall, and turned the lever to "cold." She gave it a good pull upward. Cold water splashed onto the crown of Y's head and onto her breasts. Her body, which had been raging hot, cooled down immediately. Soon, she started to shiver. Her hearing was dulled.

When she bent forward to squeeze shampoo into her hand, Y thought she heard a voice. She stood up straight and roughly ran her hands along her face. It could have been the unfamiliar roar of the showerhead's high water pressure. Y bent forward again, put some shampoo into her hands, and massaged it into her hair. She then realized that the voice she heard was that of a child. It was whispering something she couldn't understand. Y listened carefully to a child's laughter. Y turned down the shower lever. She brushed the curtains aside and leaped onto the bathroom floor. The force of her opening the door managed to slightly stir the dust that had gathered on the doorsill.

The house was empty. After changing his clothes, B had taken himself to the doctor. There was a dim impression of Y's hand on the bathroom's outer doorknob.

Y brought the cherries she'd gathered in the baskets into the kitchen. The cherries on the



bottom had softened quickly and were getting crushed. Y poured the cherries into the kitchen sink and started extracting those that had begun going bad. She cleaned some glass bottles and put them into the microwave. It hadn't rained for twenty days. It was a dry region, with little precipitation. Although the sky was clear, not a single cloud could be seen, and the dust made the house look like it was sheathed in fog. After filling the completely dried glass bottles with cherries, she poured in the liquor. Although making a fruit liquor wasn't difficult, Y still had no idea which flavors she was supposed to be trying to create. Y gathered the broken cherries left in the kitchen sink. Her hand, covered in red, trembled slightly as she went to open the drain lid.

Two years before, Y and B had gone on a trip together to the South Sea. While B was haggling with a ship owner over the price of a fishing boat rental, Y sat on the breakwater and read a paperback. But as Y's eyes kept wandering over to the unfamiliar sight of the sea, she couldn't concentrate on her book. Suddenly, she felt something rush over the top of her foot. She looked down and froze with fear. What she had thought were mussels or shellfish, stuck in clusters along the breakwater, were actually bugs. These bugs feared neither humans nor saltwater; after all, the sea was their habitat. The bugs gathered in clusters and moved themselves from the sea to the breakwater. They moved with perfect discipline, without hesitation. Y looked helplessly at the sea bugs that crawled past her fingers, at the cluster that skittered between her knees.

Y wanted to look back, but she couldn't move. She called for B as loudly as she could. She had never called for someone with such desperation ever before. Sobbing, Y continued to shout for B, but she felt no human presence. Y closed her eyes, staying as still as a rock. Taking deep breaths, she tried to listen to the bugs' movements. Y distinguished all the big and small noises around her—the waves, the wind, her own breathing, the dim sounds of B's conversation with the boat owner—and banished them from her mind. Soon, the sound of the bugs, similar to the scribbles of a pencil, was all that remained, and that, too, slowly disappeared. After a while, Y opened her eyes to a serene silence. Placing a hand on the cement, she raised herself up. Her ears, which had momentarily been deafened, heard the sound of the wind and waves crashing against the breakwaters. Her legs were trembling. Her book was floating in the water, swaying according to the waves. Y turned around. She looked back and forth between B, who was arguing intensely while placing one hand on a quayside mooring post, and her book, which was getting farther away from the shore.

The cherry liquor filled five glass bottles. Y took the sealed bottles to B's workshop. B had built some shelves right beneath the ceiling with just enough room for the bottles. Using a ladder, Y placed the bottles on the shelves. B said that they needed to wait until next winter, for the cherries to properly ferment.

Y stopped in front of the cherry tree. In the tree's shade the cement had hardened into a mound, its top stained with blood. The wind blew. It was the most refreshing breeze that year's summer had sent thus far. Ripened cherries, unable to resist their own weight, fell continuously to the ground. The fallen cherries gathered around the tree, forming a loose garland. Y stepped inside the garland of cherries. She spotted some dark green leaves, close to black, and a few cherries that were ripening late in the mid-summer sun. Using all her strength, Y jumped up, grabbed onto a long, sagging branch, and broke it off.