

Selected Poems of Kawaguchi Harumi in English Translation**tr. Rina Kikuchi & Melinda Smith**Welcome Home おかえり (from *Map of the Peninsula*, 2009)The Fruit of Summer Drips like Blood 夏の果は血のように滴る (from *Tiger is here.*, 2015)Map of the Peninsula 半島の地図 (from *Map of the Peninsula*, 2009)Artificial 人造 (from *Tiger is here.*, 2015)My Seat 席 (from *Map of the Peninsula*, 2009)

Welcome Home おかえり

Happy Birthday! He came home with a box, more than an armful, and held it out to me, grinning
Instinctively taking it from him and staggering a little at the unexpected weight
I messed up the timing of saying Thank you but this was because my birthday was over nine months away
— and since there is no question that this man who has been living with me for years would mistake the date,
I thought perhaps
just for a moment, that I myself was misremembering it
but that is, of course, unlikely <grin>
I tear open the wrapping paper with gusto, and a glass aquarium appears is born
But it is empty
We don't own any beautiful tropical fish, cute turtles, gorgeous chameleons. I don't know what to do with it
To start with I try putting it on top of the TV unit, where our television that stopped working used to be. It goes
there unexpectedly well
Perhaps they are the same kind of thing
In saying that that time the two of us carried the long-ago broken TV in our arms to the large waste drop-off
to throw it away, we looked back at it again and again, as if we had abandoned a *child* in the woods,
and we ran, the two of us. The blue of the dawn sky lit up my skin like a broken screen and I felt as if the colour
would never come off
He has changed out of his work clothes, and opens a can of beer on the sofa in front of the TV unit
It might be nice to sit next to him and stare together at the empty aquarium, but since this is a special occasion
I decide to try getting inside it
Straddling with my right leg, guiding my left leg in what was it made that faint creaking sound? The aquarium?
The TV unit? Me?
When I hug my knees and make myself round, I fill it out just right
I'm so happy. This is just what I wanted. Who said that? Me? The TV unit? The aquarium?
The glass panels kiss the skin of my arms and the soles of my feet, like cool fresh water
It is unexpectedly good
He is smiling, drinking his beer, looking at the aquarium with the same face he used to watch the TV with.
Nothing in his head
I changed into my pyjamas, and climbed in again without really thinking. I was so comfortable like that I fell fast
asleep. And so
as if it were the natural course of things, from the next day on it became my nest
Every time I come back after going out I say 'I'm home' throw my bag aside take off my clothes discard them say
Goodnight and climb
inside it
<squeak>

He comes home, quietly seats himself on the sofa, and draining the can of beer he has opened, gazes
 at me, sleeping
 at the empty aquarium
 or the blank screen of the no-longer-there broken television
 head full of nothing
 I'm home goodnight *welcome home* I'm home welcome home *goodnight* welcome home *welcome home*
 I am full of nothing
 When I get broken this time he'll be on his own, perhaps he'll need a trolley, for the day he'll have to take me
 to the large waste drop-off
 I'd better give him a trolley for a birthday present
 Happy Birthday!
 I'm home My skin is the blue colour of dawn

The Fruit of Summer Drips like Blood 夏の果は血のように滴る

My father died in summer
 It's already a long time ago now
 At the moment he died, I was thinking my head hurt so much from the heat of the full noon sun
 it was about to split
 I was far away, walking the Tokyo streets, knowing nothing at all
 (it's not like anyone had mobile phones yet)
 That night, when I got home, I listened to my messages, made a return call,
 my mother said my name then just 'It's sad' nothing more sounded like she was crying
 Next day, early morning, I met up with my little brother at Tokyo station and we rode the four and a half hours
 back to Obama
 When we got home, of course the heat was terrible
 The tiny house noisy with gathered relatives and neighbours
 Set out in the corner of the kitchen were some *sōmen* noodles someone had boiled up ready:
 'there, eat, rest yourselves a moment'
 but I couldn't taste them from then on I don't know how many years it was I couldn't eat *sōmen*
 In this town on the sea, nestled in the hollow of the hills, my father worked his whole life as an electrical engineer
 That high summer noon something fell and struck him on top of his head.
 It had just gone break time. He had taken off his helmet and was wiping the sweat away as he started to walk off
 That's the simple version
 We got a slightly more complicated version a few days later, in the meeting room at my father's company

I thought, oh. Accidents really do happen

Not to say any one person was in the wrong, but this is humans doing things as a group, so accidents will happen
Anywhere, to anyone

Because the two of them cared for each other, my mother cried terribly,
and because she clung to the coffin, saying, I'm going with him,
my mother's elder sister and I spent two days without leaving her side, as if we had placed her under surveillance
At last, in the emptied-out house, in the strangely bright kitchen
when the three of us were absorbed in washing up innumerable cups and plates
(this was after the wake, after the funeral)

my mother burst out: 'The key-ring is missing!'

Not knowing what she was talking about, my aunt and I exchanged glances, but
my mother trotted out the back door to the garbage bag, which had been tied firmly and put out behind the house,
picked it up, brought it back inside

Once she was on the packed dirt in the little space next to the kitchen, she untied it

'In winter, we went to a hot-spring together' (it ended up being their last trip together)

'He bought it as a memento, and he never parted from it, he should have had it with him,
attached to his wallet or something, but

it wasn't with the personal effects the hospital returned to us'

insists my mother

Inside the garbage bag was the work uniform my father was wearing at the time of the accident

It was two full-summer days since large quantities of blood had soaked into the fabric

— unwrapped, it gave off a dreadful smell

I grew up in a harbour town with fish markets but I have never smelt a smell like it

This blood, which should be very close to what is now flowing inside me,

this is what it becomes when it all drains out of a living body

I thought, in blank amazement, and held my breath

My aunt too, my always-bustling, always-chattering aunt, stayed mute and stock still

Only my mother was able to keep talking (which meant also she was still breathing in)

She shoved both her hands into the garbage bag, spreading out the work uniform which had completely changed
colour with blood

With her bare hands, rooting around, she found the key-ring at the bottom of the inside pocket, and pulled it out
laughing joyfully 'ah, there it is!'

Who is this person?

It isn't that mother, abnormally neat, nervous and timid, so unable to deal with meat and raw fish, she hated to
touch them even for cooking

She is grinning like a beast in the midst of the stench of blood

I do not know this person

In the depths of the saturated summer twilight
I nodded, barely managing to turn up the left and right corners of my mouth
I dare say it is the one and only time in my life
I have stood in awe of my mother

blood flowed
blood is flowing
outside me
inside me
a beast which might be me is right there
letting drip a howling that no one can hear

To my father who died in the summertime
from all sorts of places, pieces of luscious fruit were delivered and laid out as offerings
grapes bananas peaches pears melons grapes peaches peaches mandarins watermelons pears
the sweet smell wafting from the family altar becoming in no time sticky and cloying
and soon after, tiny black insects beginning to cloud the air
My mother and I, as if driven,
day after day, took the fruit in order as it was about to go bad, cut it, peeled off its skin
and kept eating
in the silent house, everything over,
the fruit flesh melting and coming apart as soon as we bit into it, the juice dripping from our fingers,
our arms, in a network of veins
already not knowing if it was delicious or not, we drooled it from our lips to our breastbones, slurping it noisily
back into our mouths
That was a hot summer

Map of the Peninsula 半島の地図

The path I walked in summer follows the sea
— at night, alone, I trace it with my finger
This autumn paper is pleasantly cool, smooth,
dried out
Just there, at the tip of the peninsula, where I couldn't go any further,
where I stopped still and looked up, beneath the sky

— that wetness which welled up, spilled over,
where on earth did it dry up to?
They say the waves have been at the lone offshore island, wearing it away;
that day, it was glinting there in the open sea
but on this map it is nowhere to be found

'Wet Island'

My lips, pronouncing the unrecorded name
quiver slightly as they open, and so
my finger leaves the paper
and plucks a single grape from the bunch on the autumn table
Sealed inside,
the sweet wet young juice has deepened
I bring it to my lips, I make it feel like summer's mouth is on mine
it pulls the glimmer of night along with it and drips,
trickling along my arm — my peninsula —
and dropping onto the cooled map
records my fever with a small round mark.

Artificial 人造

The lake is warming in the afternoon sunlight
Don't let go of my hand, OK?
There where the Swan Boat floats, the surface of the water is drowsy
I was walking slowly, murmuring this over and over to my daughter
or perhaps my daughter was sing-songing it over and over to me
Every time, her fingertips like stalks of cold grass give a little shiver
linked with my fingers they shiver
Don't let go of my hand
On the other side of the promenade is a little amusement park
hidden among manicured shrubs. A jet coaster
swerves close and swings away at regular intervals, with a rising-fading RRRROOOOooaaaaarr
The sound of delighted shrieks carries to us
Instinctively she grips harder with her fingers and, just a little, her fingernails dig in
Yes, like that

Keep holding on like that, OK?

She was supposed to keep holding on like that

but before I know it, my daughter has disappeared

On the paving stones of the esplanade, a stain where an ice cream has melted and dripped

Where did you go to?

The public seating on the second floor of the rent-a-boat place is still closed

The vivid flowers decorating the windowsill never wither

The smoked-glass sky is coming down on top of our heads, as if closing the lid on the artificial lake

Echoes swerve close and swing away with a RRRROOOOooooooooarr

The shrieks are fading

parted

lost

Hunting my daughter who is not here I circle the lake

searching for a thing not here, my eyeballs make ripples

Every one of the silhouettes flickering in the souvenir shop seems to be my daughter

No, perhaps that is me, searching for something I am not sure if I want or not

She isn't anywhere

It may be she was never here to begin with

My daughter, never anywhere

A slow melody slurring from a far-away speaker

She was never here to begin with

I wonder if I have thrown my daughter away

because I have always been on my own

Or perhaps my daughter has thrown me away

having no further use for me

You can never get to anywhere from the edge of the artificial lake

The breeze blowing faintly across toward me here has a dusty nostalgic scent, like skin

Now I see, maybe it was me who was the daughter,

who lost hold of linked fingers and found her way here

RRRROOOOooooooooarr

swerving close and swinging away

my daughter is not here

swerving away and swinging close

my daughter is here

inside me

an artificial lake

Don't let go of my hand OK?

because you'll disappear

over and over
Even as they fade the shrieks reverberate
She was inside me
A something, who may have been there, disappeared
A something, who may not have been there,
this thing, which has formed itself into bright water and is spreading out,
is it me, is it my daughter, me who has no daughter, am I here?
All that remains is a gaze, trying to fix on a thing not there
The still-shivering fingertips,
with fingernails like water droplets swelling on the tips of damp grass
touch the lake
Things that have been lost and things that are not there,
things I can't recall and things I can't forget, melted and mixed, into the skin of the water
digging in, just a little, to leave a mark
tangled together like fingers

My Seat 席

At dusk, I sit at a window table on the second floor of this restaurant
I take a sip of sweet wine
In the building facing this one, which juts out into the narrow street,
in the coffee shop at the same height, in the window seat, someone is drinking coffee
It is a profile I don't know
but I too have drunk coffee sitting in that seat
Today it is just by chance I am on this side
It would not be strange at all if I were the one drinking coffee over there
Perhaps that was actually me

Long ago, in a far country, I was on a boat coming down a river
In the shade of the thick wild growth on the bank I could see a boy standing alone
I made him out, absent-mindedly watching the boat move off, his naked upper body deeply tanned by the sun,
and straight away I could no longer see him
This boy may never go to another country his whole life
He may see no other place besides the village where he was born

We passed each other just the once, this boy and I
We will almost certainly never meet again
but
perhaps I was him
It was just by chance I was the one who was on the boat passing through
It would not be strange at all if I had been born a boy who passes his whole life in a village on a riverbank
I wonder what that would feel like

Hey there, me who is not me,
is the coffee good today?
Is the river flowing wide and calm?
The sweet wine will flow down through this body and on to somewhere we can't see, it will soak in
and spread out
On the floor below the coffee shop across the way, in the greengrocer's, the lights are coming on
The rows and rows of autumn fruit, their numberless colours and shapes, begin to glow

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