

"Falls FROM The SKIES"

by Haneko Takayama

(2014)

Tak, the toad's neck cut off by her knife.

She puts her thin white fingers in it. The fresh guts of the toad are dragged out. It's chilly outside even in the afternoon.

Though it is a cold-blooded animal, fluffy and white steam is coming out of the guts, then gets cold immediately. The viscera drifts away like a flimsy string.

A crow cried twice watching vigilantly on the big stone in the river. The body was thrown into the tub by the cold hand of the woman. The blood of it is washed away completely with clear spring water of Tsukuba mountain. She cleans twenty more small toads in the same way.

Then the woman pats her lower back and stands up. She stretches and looks up at the direction of the Mt. Nantai. A modern white building stands out from evergreen

mountains.

It is the National Climate Observatory, which was renovated a while ago.

She imagines him watching numbers with a serious on his face there. Distant clouds spreads thinly into the color before dusk . She often sees such clouds in these days. The color of the sky seems separated by horizontal clouds.

I have a feeling of expectation in the air, woman and hurries along home with a tub full of toad heads and bodies.

She steeps peeled skin of toads in boiling water to clean away odors and poison ,then dresses them in a vinegared miso sauce.

Heads are blanched to soften them for several times, then they are shimmered in a sweetened soy sauce. She makes extra of

them as preserved food.

The bodies can be minced for meat ball soup with ginger.. It's hearty.

Or they can be soaked in soy sauce and sweet cooking rice wine to be baked slowly with charcoal fire for flavor. With finishing pepper, it will be a good snack for him..

But, for today...

After some consideration, she pickes up a bag of rice flour.

“Welcome back”

She takes his coat and receives his hat. And she hangs them. He wipes his hand carefully with a washbasin, and puts a sleeve through a clean and smooth yukata. He seemed quite tired, but after breathing in his nose a few times,he say

“The smell of deep-fried”

She smiles and nods.

All the menu is prepared at the most delicious and hot condition on the table.

Applying a small amount of roughly baked salt to the meat passed through a light oil, he put into his mouth. Delicate toad meat loose, then light white meat mix with oil of the flour.

“good”

He says Keenly. She says blushing and smiling,

“I think that you will get tired if it is the same food as usual. Even this is use a my little wisdom.”

“Somehow, I feel bad...”

When the man says with holding chopsticks, she awakes

“Oh, no, please don't worry. I don't mean that. I'm sorry”

With downcase his eyes,he man is chewing.
She say again.

“So,these things are usual,I thnk.Womans living near the sea cook fish the same way as I do toads, and womans of mountains think hou to cook edible wild plants. “

“Though, you feel inconvenient,dont'you?”

“No exactry.In addition,I don't like town so much with troubling. I feel relieved.”

She said exaggeratedly.

The man and the woman keep silent a while.then she talks to him.

“Around here...It is around the observatory, isn't it? Town at the foot of mountains has no problems,doesn't it?”

He puts chopsticks on the table.

“Today, there was a tour from the central observatory, We examined it in various ways. However, I can not predict the phenomenon.”

“For now”

“Um, I am an amateur who has not studied professionally ...If you do not observe it, you will not suffer from such a result ...”

Man smiles,

“That's so you.”

He relaxes. She Relieves and thinks.

It is only a few things that people can observe,

If the phenomenon is bothering him, it is because of observation or observation.

If the clouds I saw and the phenomena observed by this person were harmonized just a little.

When a woman thinks about it, there is a sound from the other side of the Storm door.

She shuts down the shutter door beforehand on the day she thought it might fall.

For the hope of him which It is may not be

falling until the next morning opening a shutter door.

“Bonk boing clap plop”

He sighed without a spirit of voice

"Not again."

While she imagined the sight of the other side of the shutter, She thinks That's right, let's try miso grill tomorrow.

Miso is sweetly,will surely become delicious if it is lightly burnt and burned fragrantly.

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About the Author: Haneko Takayama



- Biography

Born in Toyama, Japan, Haneko Takayama is a Japanese award-winning author.

She received a B.A. in Japanese painting from Tama Art University in 2001.

Her works were acclaimed in both fields of science fiction and literary fiction. Her first

collection *Udon, Kitsunetsuki no* (Unknown Dog of Nobody (UDON)) was nominated for the Nihon SF Taishō Award and Seiun Award in 2015, both of which are the most prestigious sci-fi awards in Japan.

She won the Fumiko Hayashi Award in 2016, which is a literary fiction award for young writers. Her style is often described as genre-mixing or slipstream-ish, like as Kelly Link .

Haneko has worked as a magazine editor, a TV production assistant , a mistress of a board game cafe and others.

- Career

2009:

Her short story "Udon, Kitsunetsuki no" (Unknown Dog of Nobody (UDON)) got the second place of the Sogen SF Short Story

Prize. It was the first sale for her, which appeared in the anthology *Genshoku no Sōzōryoku* (Imagination of the Primary Colors) from Tokyo Sogensha .

2014:

Her first collection *Udon, Kitsunetsuki no* was published by Tokyo Sogensha. It was shortlisted for the Nihon SF Taishō Award and got the seventh place in *SF ga Yomitai!* (We want to read SF!) annual poll for the Best Japanese Short Story.

A short story "Radio Meme" in the collection was also shortlisted for the Seiun award for Best Japanese Short Story.

2016:

A short story "Taiyō no Gawa no Shima" (The Island on the Sunny Side) won the Fumiko

Hayashi Award. It was also reprinted in a year's best anthology.

Mail: takahiro0509@hotmail.co.jp

HP: <http://highmounthnk.wixsite.com/haneko>

不和
ふろつきぬず

高山
羽根子

たん、と清冽な音をたてて、女の包丁が蝦蟇の頸を落とす。

白く細い指が切り口から差し込まれ、瑞々しい蝦蟇の中身が引き摺り出される。昼下がりとさえいっても外の空気は沁みるほど冷たく、引き出された中身からは変温動物のそれであるにもかかわらず、ふわりと白い湯気が一瞬立つが、瞬間間に冷えた臓腑は心許なげに漂う紐になって下流へ引き流されていく。それを狙って、河原の大石に鳥が二つ啼いた。澄んだ筑波山の湧水で内側を漱がれ、すっかり血の気の抜けた蝦蟇の胴体を、女の冷えきった手がぽいと桶に放る。

そうやって小ぶりの蝦蟇を二十は捌いただろうか。女は腰をとんと拳で叩いて立ち上がる。伸びをして見上げると、男体山の方角に、常緑の山肌から白く近代的な建築物が見える。先ごろ改築された国立の気候観測所で、あの人は今日も小難しい顔をして数値と睨めつくらしているのかしらと女は思う。女体山の方角には遠く、夕暮れの手前の色の中

へ薄く広がる雲が見えた。雲というよりそれは平たい板切れのような、このところ頻繁に出る雲だった。水平に広がる雲を境にして、上と下の空の色がきつぱりと違って見える。これは今夜あたり来るかもしれない、と女は気持ち足を速め、蝦蟇の頭と体でいっぱいになった桶を抱えながら家を目指す。

皮はよく晒して臭味や蟾毒を抜き、湯引きしたのち酢味噌で和えてぬたにする。頭は幾度か湯がいては湯を捨て、すっかりとホロホロになった所を、髓ごと佃煮にする。これらは常菜として数日持つので、すこし多めに拵えておく。

身のほうは、良くたたき、生姜と併せてつみれ汁にすると体が温まり滋養がつく。または醤油と味噌とで幾度も重ね塗りながら遠火の炭火でじっくり炙るのは、淡白な蝦蟇の身を香ばしく深い味わいにさせる。

仕上げに山椒をふつてお出しすれば、あの人の晩酌もさぞ進むだろう。
でも今日は……

少しの間考えて女は、上新粉の袋を手に取った。

「おかえりなさいまし」

男の上着を取り帽子を受け取ると、女は手早く衣文掛けにして納めた。
男は洗面で丁寧 hands をぬぐい、ぱりつと伸された浴衣に袖を通す。憔悴
しきった様子だったが、二、三回鼻を鳴らすと、

「今日は衣揚げか」

と呟いた。女は微笑んで頷く。食卓には全ての献立が、一番美味しい状
態で温かい膳の上に用意されている。

衣をつけ少なめの油に通された身に、粗く焼いた藻塩を少し付け、さ
くりと歯を入れる。

繊維の細かい蝦蟇の肉がほろりとほぐれて、衣の油とさっぱりした白身が混ざり合う。

「旨いな」

男はしみじみ言う。女ははにかんで、

「いつもと同じようじゃあ、貴方様も飽き飽きかと思つて。これでも少ない知恵を絞っております」と笑つた。

「なんだか、申し訳ないな……」

男が箸を持ったまま項垂れて言うのに、女ははつとして、

「あ、いえ、違いますの。そんな意味ではなくて。すいません」

男は下を向いたまま、口に残る身を咀嚼する。女は再び口を開く。

「でも、でもよ、こんなことは、例えばどこのご婦人もお考えなすつてることではないのかしら。港のご婦人なら、毎日上がるお魚の調理、と

か。山のご婦人なら山菜をどういふふうにいただくかしら、なんて」

「でも、毎日いろいろ、不便だろう」

「そんなこと。三河屋さんは十日と開けず御用を聞いてくださいますし、
だいいち、街は煩くてあまり好みませんもの。清々するくらいだわ」

女は大袈裟に声を弾ませて言う。

二人、暫く黙って、口を開いたのは女のほうだった。

「……観測の結果は思わしくありませんの？ ……私、貴方様が随分と
お疲れみたいで……それだけが……」

男が箸を置いて口を開く。

「今日、中央観測所の視察があつて、様々手を尽くして下すつたんだが。

予測の立てようがない」

「この辺りの……観測所の周りだけなのでしよう？ 麓の街は、平気な
のでしよう？」

「今のところは」

「あの、私ね、門外漢の素人でございますけれど……貴方様が観測さえしなければ、かえってそんな結果に苦しまれることもなくなるんじゃないかしらって……」

男は口の端に笑みを産んで、

「お前さんらしいな」

と言う。男が緊張を解いたのに安心して、女は思う。人が観察することができるのはほんの一部の事柄だけで、観測したことで、あるいは観測したからこそ、この人を苦しめているとしたら。もし自分の見た雲と、この人の観測した数値がほんの少しでも、調和したなら。

女が言い終わらぬうちに雨戸の向こう側からどん、ぺち、と一つ、また一つ音がする。

降るかもしれないと思った日には、女は前もって必ず雨戸を固く閉め

ておく。翌朝、雨戸を開けるまでは降っていないかもしれないと思わせ
てやりたいという、そのなけなしの救いのために。

ばら ばら ぺち ぺち ばら

またか、という声を出す気力も無いといった風に、男は息を一つつく。
女は、固く閉じられた雨戸の向こう側の光景を想像しながら、そうだ、
明日は味噌焼きにしてみよう。こっくりと甘くした味噌だれが軽く焦げ
香ばしく焼きあがったらきつと美味しかろう。と考えていた。

了