

Nakahara Chuya

Translated from Japanese by Marissa Skeels

## Good Girl

“When you grow up, you’ll go off and get married, won’t you?” said the fishmonger boy with the bright red face and hands once Yoshiko’s grandmother had gone deeper inside the house to fetch a bowl. He came by every day.

“*No way.*” The narrow hallway stretched between the kitchen and storeroom, and Yoshiko ran into a gap in it. She would be seven this year, and had just started school.

“Hey, the fishmonger is an iidiot.”

“Hey, Miss is an iidiot.”

Yoshiko thought about how he was of poor character, but because she’d run and was now grinning, drool pooled inside her lower lip as she puffed.

“Dum-dum.” This time, she poked her head out a tad. The boy was as quick as her, and spun his head around to face her, smiling.

She dropped down from the gap between the eaves and the roof, feeling sunshine cover the length of her back bit by bit. By the time she could see her own bobbed hair, she could hear her grandmother talking with the boy.

She poked her head out once again and said, “Dum-dum”, but the fishmonger boy was turned away, facing her grandmother.

“Dum-dum!” She dashed at them.

“Would you mind letting me know about the mackerel, if you’d like to stop getting it?”

Yoshiko clicked her tongue at the change that had come over him, his charm when speaking to Gran. She wondered about his expressions—the one which smacked of seriousness, and the one just before when he’d called her “Miss”—why was there no difference between them?

When Gran went into the kitchen, the boy hefted his carrying pole onto his shoulder, saying, “Thank you very much for your custom”, then, swinging his red hands, passed through the hallway where Yoshiko had hidden earlier. Just before he was out of sight, he glanced back over his shoulder and called in a teasing tone, “Goodbye, Miss.”

Yoshiko watched his every move.

When she couldn’t see him anymore, she whirled around on the sandal of the right leg stuck out in front of her, and started to sing. She stared up at the sky, fluttering her hands and fingers.

“Yoshiko, it’s time to practise.” Gran’s hoarse voice came from inside the house.

“Okaaay.”

She went inside and looked around. Gran was next to the wall, folding Yoshiko's hakama, not looking her way. This room was where Yoshiko and Gran slept. When night came, they slept side by side on a futon. A small desk was near the side of a pillar set into the wall. Clouds raced in across the sky outside.

Directly opposite Yoshiko was a big, old persimmon tree planted close to the mud wall. Ants were crawling busily at its roots. Seeing them, Yoshiko tried to click her tongue.

"Ha-ta, ta-co, co-ma, ha-to..." *Flaaag, ooctopus, spinnning top, piiigeon.* She read up to there in her book, then wondered about the ants she'd been watching—where it was that an ant which had splintered off from the throng was going, her eyes on the roots of the persimmon tree. But she'd already lost sight of that one ant.

"Ko-tori, tamago, ha-kama, haori." *Baaaby chick, egg, trooousers, jacket.*

"A-me, kasa, ka-rakase, asehi..." *Raaain, umbrella, paaarasol, sunset...* "Matsu, tsuru, shika no..." *Pine tree, crane, deer's...* "Tsun, ushinshi-n." *...horns, cow's hooorns.*

She flipped through the pages, wanting to know what she'd studied up to now, and pinched from the first page to the page where she'd stopped between her fingers. "Gran, I learned this much already."

"Oh, well done."

"I learned all of these. Nasutouri, monseshitohasemi, kagamikaarimasu, ikunifune..." *Eggplantsandmelons, rulersandscissors, haveyouamirror, we'llgobyboat.* Yoshiko sped through the words as she read aloud, but ran out of breath at this point and gasped in air. "Aah... Ah." She grinned at Gran.

"Go a bit slower, you have to read clearly."

"But my teacher reads fast."

Gran said nothing. She looked like she was smiling.

A fat drop of rain plopped down. Gran leaped up and went to bring in the drying fish from outside. For her, the fish drying pole that hung across the branches of the persimmon tree was almost too heavy to handle. The space between her eyebrows wrinkled and stretched taut as she struggled to prop up both ends of the pole on the veranda.

“Hurry up, Gran, my singlet will get wet!”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine,” Gran said.

Yoshiko’s adopted brother came thundering down the stairs from the second floor, heading for the toilet at the end of the veranda. He saw a dish full of food set down on the veranda floorboards for the cat and, glaring at Gran, kicked the plate into the garden.

“Not again!” Gran also made a fearsome face, scowling after him. He ignored how scary she was and went into the toilet, then kicked the door shut.

Yoshiko didn’t know why, but the night before he and Gran had fought about who it was he was going to marry.

Rain collected on the plate that had been kicked into the garden and was now lying on the ground. As long as her brother stayed in the toilet, Yoshiko couldn’t look around and wonder about the plate at her leisure. Gran was making simmering noises in the kitchen, as well as grumbling sounds from time to time.

Yoshiko’s father had died when she was five. No less than a year passed before her mother wasn’t there anymore either, but Yoshiko didn’t know where she went. After her parents had been married for twelve years, they still hadn’t had any children, so they’d adopted one—her brother, whom Gran had argued with last night.

“Gran?” Yoshiko called out to the shadow she cast on the kitchen’s sliding door.

“What is it, Yoshi?” Gran answered impatiently. Yoshiko didn’t know what she should say back.

Her brother came out of the toilet, passed Yoshiko, and thundered up the stairs again.

“I’m hungry.”

As her brother had gone straight past her, the way the tatami mats warped underfoot had given her the feeling of her legs were being stacked on top of one another where she sat, and sadness began to set in. “Hey, Gran, I’m hungry.”

“It won’t be long until dinner’s ready, so study.”

“Fu-nenio, hobashiraniba-ta, koigaimasu, higoimoimasu...” *We leeeave on the boat, which has two saails, there are koi fish there, red ones and gold too.*

Rain bucketed down. The trunk of the persimmon tree didn’t seem to be getting wet. And a toad had started croaking at some point, while hopping around in the center of the garden.

“Yes! Doesn’t this feel nice?” she called out piercingly as she went out onto the veranda. Through gaps in the mud wall, she looked out over the neighborhood’s roofs, watching the rain fall in sheets upon them. On a tiled roof a bit more than a hundred yards away, it looked like koi fish were swimming, their colors all blurry, like soaring birds. Somewhere out there, a maid pulled up her hem and watched where she stepped as she drew nearer to home.

“Gran, look, Gran.”

Gran was grumbling about something in the dark kitchen, and couldn’t hear a thing.

“Come here, please! It’s falling so hard.” The rain had washed the cat’s dish clean, turning it bright white.

When Yoshiko looked over her shoulder at the desk, the house was dark inside. There was a pond on top of the desk, with koi fish and ships in it. On its banks stood two hand-drawn boys, stilled. Their feet were hidden in grass or something. Watching them, Yoshiko furrowed her brow slightly.

“Gran, where’s the cat?”

“In here.”

Yoshiko ran into the kitchen. With her right hand firmly grasping the sliding door, she raised her left leg and wrapped it around her body, and watched Gran put their respectively-sized helpings of sesame seeds and miso into bowls.

The rain was still rushing down hard.

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良子

中原中也

「お嬢ちゃん大きくなったらお嫁に行くんでせう？……」良子の家に毎日やってくる真っ赤な顔や手の魚屋の小僧は、いまお祖母ちゃんばあが鉢を出しに奥へ行つたと思ふとそんなことを云つた。

「いやーよ。」さう云ふなり良子は、走つて台所と物置との間の、狭い通路に這入つてしまった。

彼女は今年七ツになる、先達小学校に入学したばかりだつた。

「お魚屋さかなさんのばーかやい。」

「お嬢ちゃんのばーかやい。」

彼女はその小僧を、悪い人間なんだろうと思つた。……でも、彼女は、今にここにこして、下唇に涎をいっぱい溜めて、走つたのでハアハア云つてゐた。

「ばかア。」さう云つて今度は頭をのぞけた。すると小僧も大急ぎで、その方に頭を突きだして笑つ

た。

彼女が屋根と屋根との間から落ちる、やつと自分の背幅程の日向に、自分のおかつぱの影を見つけた時に、小僧とお祖母さんの話声が聞え出してゐた。

もう一度彼女は頭をのぞけて、「ばかァ」と云つたが、魚屋はお祖母さんの方を向いたツきりだつた。

「ばかァ！」——彼女は飛び出して来た。

「あじの方はおよしなりますか、ごついでにいかがです、およしなりますか？」

良子は、さう云ひながらあじとお祖母さんとをかはるがはるに見てゐる小僧の顔を、ヂツとみてゐた。彼女には、その真面目臭つた顔の小僧と、先刻「お嫁さん」と云つた時の小僧とが、どうしておんなしなんだろう？　と思つてゐた。

お祖母さんが台所に這入ると、小僧は天秤棒を担ぎあげて、「ありがと、存じました」といふや、赤い手を振りながら、さつき良子が隠れた、あの通路の方へ行つた。見えなくなろうとする前に彼は一寸振向いて、「お嬢さんさよなら」と、高い声で巫戯けて云つた。

良子はそれらをズツと見てゐた。

小僧が見えなくなると、彼女は右足の下駄の先でクルリとからだを廻して、それから唱歌を歌ひ出した。空の方を眺めながら、手や指も動かしてゐた。

「良子ちやん、おさらひをするんだよ。」

家の裡からお祖母さんのダミ声が聞えて来た。

「はい。」

彼女が部屋に行つて見ると、お祖母さんは彼女の方を見向きもしないで、壁の傍で良子の袴を畳んでゐた。

其処が、良子とお祖母さんとの部屋である。夜になると、良子とお祖母さんとはその部屋で一緒の床に這入る。

小さい机が、庭に面した側の柱の傍に置いてある。空が急に曇つて来てゐる。

彼女の真正面あたりに、土塀に近く植つてゐる古い大きい柿の樹の根元には、蟻達が忙しうに働いてゐる。彼女はそれを、ヂツとみてゐる。

「ハータ、ターコ、コーマ、ハート……」そこまで読むと彼女は、ほんの今まで見てゐた、群から一寸外れて歩いてゐた蟻は、もうどのへんに行つただらうと思ひながら柿の樹の根元を見る。が、もう、どれがどの蟻だか分らなくなつてゐる。

「コートリ、タマゴ、ハーカマ、ハオリ……」

「アーメ、カサ、カーラカサ、アサヒ……マツ、ツル、シカノ……ツノ、ウシノツノ。」そして彼女は、何処まで習ったかと、先の方をパラパラめくってみる。さうして第一頁から、習った所までの頁を指で摘んでみる。

「お祖母さん、もうこんなに習ったのよ。」

「あーあ、よく覚えるんですよ。」

「みんな覚えてるわよ。——ナストウリ、モノサシトハサミ、カガミガアリマス、イケニフネ……」大急ぎでそれだけ読んだが、そこで息が切れた。「あ……ア」と息を吸ひながら、お祖母さんの方をみてにつこり笑った。

「もつとゆつくり、はつきりと読まなくつちや。」

「だつて先生は、はやく読むんですもの……」

お祖母ちゃんは黙つて笑ひさうにしてゐた。

大粒な雨が、パラツ、パラツ、と降り出した。お祖母ちゃんは、忽ち起つて、干物を入れるために庭に下りた。

お祖母ちゃんには、この柿の樹と、塀とに渡してある重さうな干物竿が却々持扱へなかつた。眉と眉との間に皺を寄せたり伸ばしたりしながら、竿のあちらの端とこちらの端をかはるがはるに見てゐた。

「はやくしないと、あたしのジバンが濡れちやふわよう、お祖母さん！」

「いいから大丈夫だよ。」

そこへ二階からドヤドヤドヤと降りて来た良子の義理の兄さんが、便所に行かうとして椽側に出ると、其処に猫の食べ物を入れてやるお皿が置いてあるのを見ると、お祖母さんの眼を怖い顔で見ながら、そのお皿を庭の方へ蹴り棄てた。

「また！」と云つてお祖母さんも怖い顔になつて兄の方を睨んだ。兄はお祖母さんの怖い顔には頓着しないで、便所の中に這入ると、きつく戸を閉めてしまった。

お祖母さんと兄とは、昨日の晩、兄の嫁のことから喧嘩をしてゐたが、良子には、それはどんな理由なのか分らなかつた。

蹴り出されたお皿は庭の土の上で、だんだん雨に濡れてゐた。良子はそれを、兄がまだ便所にゐるのが気になつて、なぜかゆつくり見てゐることが出来なかつた。お祖母さんは台所の方で、ゴトゴト音を立てながら、時折呟いてゐるのが聞えた。

良子のお父さんは、良子が五つの時に死んだ。それから一年ばかり経つとお母さんがゐなくなつたが、何処に行つたのか彼女は知らなかつた。お父さんとお母さんとは、結婚してから十二年経つても



子供が生れなかつた。それで養子したのが、ゆんべからお祖母さんと喧嘩してゐる兄であつた。

「お祖母さん……」と良子は、台所の障子のかげにゐるお祖母さんの方へ呼んでみた。

「なんですよツ」と、お祖母さんは気短かに、返答した。良子は、それからなんと云つてよいのか分らなかつた。そこへ兄が便所から出て来て、良子の傍を通つて、またドヤドヤと階段を上つていつた。

「あたしおなかが空いたの——」

兄が傍を通る時に、畳の座板がひわるのが、良子の重ね合せて坐つてゐる足に感じられた、彼女は悲しい気持になつてゐた。「ねえ、お祖母さん、あたしお腹が空いたの——」

「ぢきに御飯にしてあげるから、勉強してるんですよ。」

「フーネニホ、ホバシラニハータ、コヒガキマス、ヒゴヒモキマス……」

雨がザアーツと降り出して来た。柿の幹も見える間に余りなく濡れていつた。と、<sup>ヒキガヘル</sup> 蟄蛙が一匹、ピクピクしながら何時の間にか、庭の真中に匍ひ出してゐた。

「ああ！ 気持がいいわねえ。」と金切声をあげながら、彼女は椽側に出て行つた。土塀を越して見える屋根といふ屋根に、一度落ちた雨がまた跳ねあがつてゐる。一丁ばかり先の練瓦建の家が、泳いでゐる緋鯉のやうに、ボンヤリトキ色に見える。何処かの女中が裾をからげて、下ばかりみながら近づいて来る。「お祖母さんお祖母さんみてごらんナさいよ。」お祖母さんは暗い台所でゴトゴト何かしてゐて、何も聞えないふうだ。「……来てごらんナさいよ！ あんなに降つてるわよ。」

猫のお皿は一寸の間に、雨でキレイに洗はれて、真ッ白になつてゐた。

良子は机の上に振り向くと、家の中は暗くつて、机の上に池の中の鯉や舟を、<sup>ふち</sup> 縁に立つて見てゐる二人の男の子の描かれた挿絵がボンヤリ出てゐる。二人の男の子の足は、草かなんかでかくれてゐる。それをみると、彼女は一寸<sup>シカメ</sup> 顰顔をした。

「お祖母さん、猫どこ？」

「こつちですよ。」

良子は台所の方へ走つて行つた。右手で障子につかまりながら、左の足を浮かせてからだをまはすやうにし、彼女はお祖母さんが摺鉢でゴマと味噌とを摺合せてゐるのを見入つてゐた。

雨はまだ、ひどい勢ひで降り続いてゐる。

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