

TRANSLATED,
from the JAPANESE,

IN FEBRUARY, WHEN MY MIND WAS UNCLOUDED ENOUGH TO APPRAISE EVERYTHING, I DECIDED WE WOULD RETURN TO CALIFORNIA. YOUR GRANDMOTHER, AUNT, AND UNCLE DID NOT AGREE WITH THIS CHOICE, AND WE LEFT ON UNHAPPY TERMS. IT WAS ALL VERY UNDERSTANDABLE.





ON OUR PREVIOUS FLIGHT, IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, YOU SLEPT AND SQUIRMED ON TOP OF MY LEGS. WHAT A SURPRISE WHEN THE AIRLINE TOLD ME YOU WERE TOO OLD FOR THAT NOW, AND I WAS REQUIRED TO PURCHASE A SEAT FOR YOU. IT WAS COSTLY, BUT I THINK A RELIEF TO BOTH OF US.

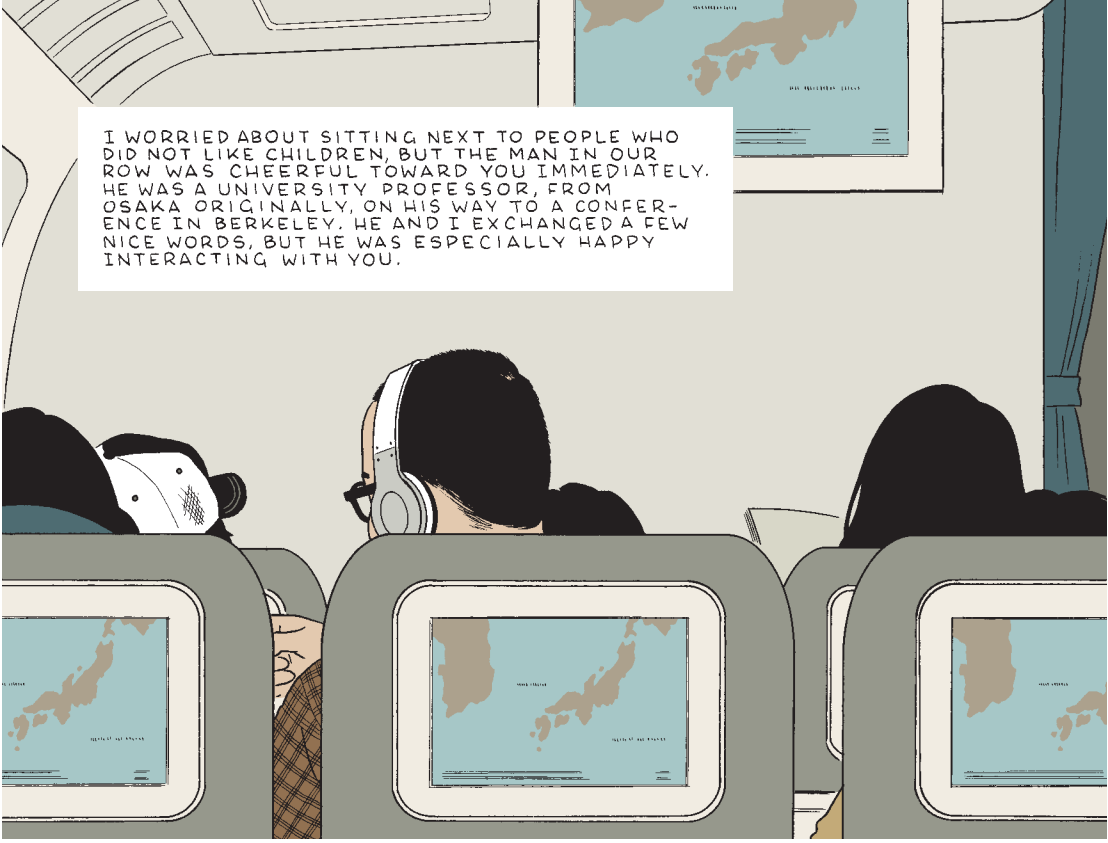
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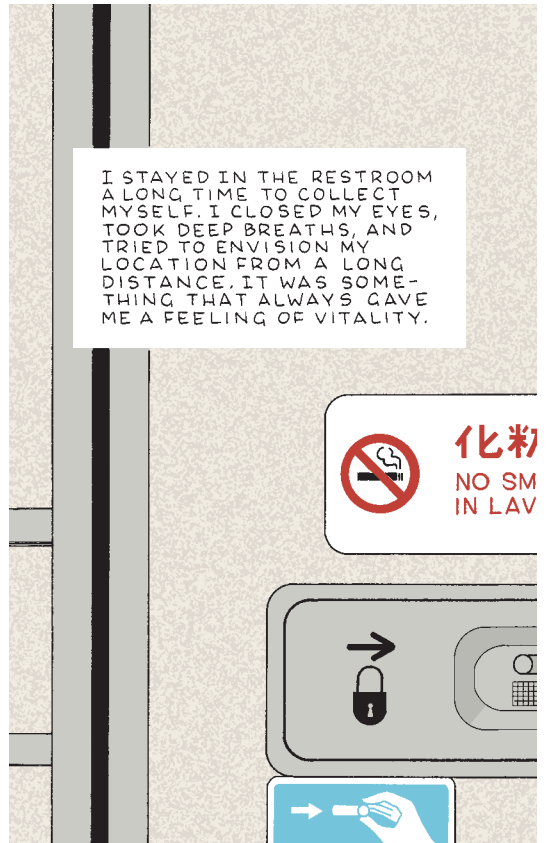
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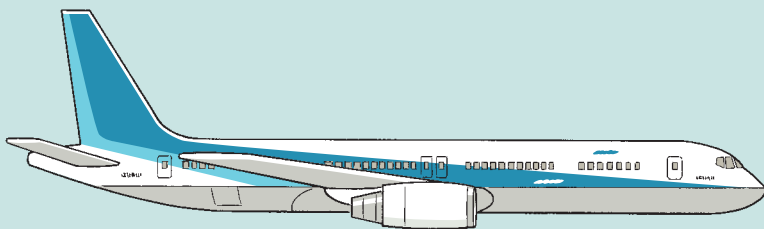
I WORRIED ABOUT SITTING NEXT TO PEOPLE WHO DID NOT LIKE CHILDREN, BUT THE MAN IN OUR ROW WAS CHEERFUL TOWARD YOU IMMEDIATELY. HE WAS A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, FROM OSAKA ORIGINALLY, ON HIS WAY TO A CONFERENCE IN BERKELEY. HE AND I EXCHANGED A FEW NICE WORDS, BUT HE WAS ESPECIALLY HAPPY INTERACTING WITH YOU.





BEFORE RETURNING TO MY SEAT, I ASKED A STEWARDESS FOR WATER. SHE HANDED ME A BOTTLE AND ASKED IF I WOULD ALSO LIKE SOME SNACK FOR YOU, AND PERHAPS A DRINK FOR MY HUSBAND.

I LAUGHED SLIGHTLY, BUT DID NOT BOTHER TO CORRECT HER. DID SHE NOT NOTICE YOUR HAIR? MOVING SLOWLY DOWN THE DARKENED AISLE, I HAD THE STRANGE THOUGHT THAT MAYBE SHE WAS NOT MISTAKEN AFTER ALL.



FOR THOSE MOMENTS, IT WAS VIVID TO ME. WE WERE GOING ON VACATION TO AMERICA: ME, YOU, AND YOUR FATHER, A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR FROM OSAKA.



WHEN WE LANDED, THE PROFESSOR LEFT THE PLANE WITH US IN SILENCE. AFTER TWELVE HOURS TOGETHER, HE WAS A STRANGER AGAIN. HE BOWED TO US BOTH AND DISAPPEARED INTO THE CROWD OF PEOPLE WAITING FOR TAXI CABS.



YOUR FATHER WAS WAITING AT THE BAGGAGE CLAIM AREA, AS HE SAID HE WOULD BE. HE LOOKED LIKE HE HAD JUST WOKEN UP. YOU ASKED ME FOR PERMISSION BEFORE RUNNING TO HIM.

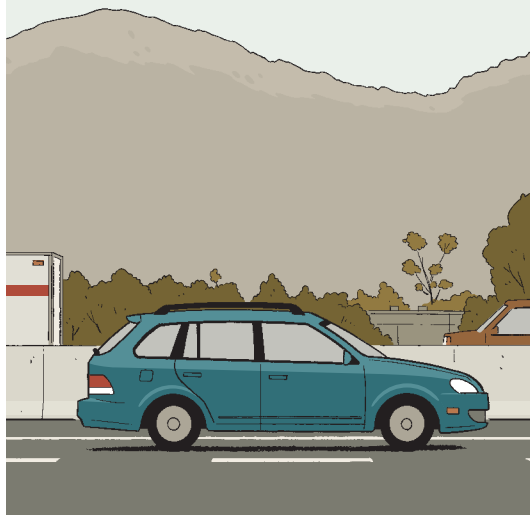


I HAD NOT THOUGHT AHEAD TO THAT MOMENT SOMEHOW. STANDING THERE ALONE, I WANTED TO BE INVISIBLE, TO EVAPORATE.



AS HE PICKED YOU UP IN HIS ARMS, YOUR FATHER SURPRISED ME AND MOTIONED ME OVER. BUT HIS FACE WAS UNREADABLE. IT WAS A LOOK OF MANY OPPOSITE EMOTIONS NEUTRALIZING EACH OTHER PERFECTLY. I SMILED GRACIOUSLY AND SHOOK MY HEAD "NO."

WHEN YOUR FATHER ASKED HOW OUR FLIGHT WAS, I TOLD HIM ABOUT THE PROFESSOR AND HOW GOOD HE WAS WITH YOU AND THE STEWARDESS'S MISTAKE. IT WAS HURTFUL TO HIM, AND I ACTED SURPRISED, AS IF THAT HAD NOT BEEN MY INTENTION AT ALL.



YOU WERE HUNGRY, SO WE STOPPED AT A DINER NEAR THE FREEWAY. YOUR FATHER ORDERED YOU MILK AND PANCAKES MADE TO LOOK LIKE BASEBALLS. YOU ATE THEM ALL, VORACIOUSLY.

HE QUESTIONED YOU WITH EXCITEMENT, LIKE YOU WERE AN ASTRONAUT JUST BACK FROM SPACE. "COMPLETE SENTENCES" WERE THE ONLY WORDS HE SAID TO ME, WITH THAT SAME BLANK FACE. I DIDN'T KNOW IF I SHOULD SMILE WITH SHARED PRIDE OR APOLOGIZE, SO I DID NEITHER.

