FOIS GRAS AND THE PUBLIC SERVANT

A Play by Kyoko Hayashi
Translated into English by Nobuko TSUKUI *

A Note about the Author

Born in Nagasaki in 1930, Kyoko Hayashi spent most of the first 14 years of her life in Shanghai, until she returned with her family to Nagasaki in March 1945. When the atom bomb exploded on August 9th, she and other girls from her high school were at the Mitsubishi munitions factory, where they were assigned to work as part of the wartime student mobilization. She escaped from the debris with no apparent external wounds but suffered from severe radiation sickness for two months. Seventeen years later, prompted by the realization of what profound problems August 6th and 9th have created for the human race, Hayashi began to write primarily on the subject of the bombing, deliberately choosing to be the reciter of the Nagasaki experience. In her works, for which she has received the prestigious Akutagawa Award and other literary prizes, the atomic bombing of Nagasaki with all its implications is often referred to as the "August 9th."

Her Shanghai years also play an important part in Hayashi's writing, as she says: "In me I have two roots: Shanghai and August 9th." A number of her stories unite the two subjects through a fundamental concern for individual human beings. Another distinctive feature of

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Hayashi's writing is a strong sense of continuity — an awareness that the past continues to live in the present. Hayashi's writing is essentially based on her own experience, or on her "two roots." At the same time, however, past experiences continue to live into the present, where they are given a new perspective and re-examined in a broader social, historical, and geographical context. Her recent drama entitled *Foagura to Koboku* (*Foie Gras and the Public Servant*) is an excellent example of her role as the uniter of the past and the present.

In this play, which was broadcast as a radio drama in October 1995, a Japanese doctor, named Okita, who was a member of the first medical corps to enter the atomic wasteland of Nagasaki in August 1945, visits Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, D.C. and meets the ghost of an American war veteran. This veteran, named Bob, spent three years as a POW in Japan and later returned there with the American Occupation Forces. The conversation in the cemetery, the meeting place of the dead and the living, as it were, recalls the entire course of the Pacific War — Pearl Harbor, the Bataan death march, the atomic bombing. The play concludes with a letter written by Bob's Japanese widow. Dated September 1995, it refers to the bitter controversy over the Smithsonian exhibit on the atom bomb.

This play is characteristic of Hayashi's writing in yet another way. The two men, one a civilian and the other a member of military, emphasize the human cost of the war in which they were involved, albeit in different roles and capacities. Bob, as a young soldier, was caught up in the fierce war and witnessed many deaths around him, having barely survived life-and-death situations. Okita, as a member of the medical team entering Nagasaki, could do nothing but watch helplessly as atom bomb victims died one after another.

In her works, Hayashi maintains a remarkable degree of objectivity,
even detachment, as well as a pervasive sense of irony. The ending of her prize-winning story, "Matsuri no ba" (Ritual of Death), is an epitome of her irony. The fundamental theme of all of Hayashi's writing is that the death and destruction of August 6th and 9th in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are human acts; that the pain and suffering are human experiences; and that, ultimately, individual human beings must stand up for the survival of the human race and peace on earth.

**Fois Gras and the Public Servant**

Characters

Yuko: A widow, 56 years old, curtain and drapery designer.
Okita: A medical doctor, 63 years old, a tourist.
Hanna: Granddaughter of Yuko and Bob, 6 years old.
Carisa: Granddaughter of Yuko and Bob, 4 years old, Hanna's younger sister.

*Also men and women passengers on the train heading for Nagasaki immediately after the bombing.*

Time: September 6, 1987, the anniversary of Bob's death. The day is bright and clear, shortly after noon, in intense heat.
Place: Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia, U.S.A. in front of Bob’s grave. Yuko stands before Bob’s gravestone, which is white, dry, flat, and arched. On the ferocious American lawn grass lies a bouquet of yellow roses, which Yuko has brought.

Hanna and Carisa, both wearing straw hat, are running about, singing and shouting, on the lawn-covered hill, among the rows of soldiers’ gravestones.

At the foot of the hill stand two or three tall tulip trees, which create shade. Otherwise, we see short, dark shadows of the neatly aligned gravestones against the green slope. The scene creates a contrast of green, white, and black.

Seventeen-year locusts’ turbid voices sound heavy, like the accordion stretched to its full width. Incessant . . .

Hanna: (To the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”)
“Lock arms with everybody,
And you’ll very soon be friends.”

Carisa: “John Brown’s body lies a mould’ring in the ground.”

Hanna: Carisa, don’t sing “John Brown’s body.” Mommy said you must learn some songs of Grandma’s country too.

Carisa: But Grandpa is American, and on this mountain . . .

Hanna: It’s a lawn hill.

Carisa: . . . hill, in the graves at Arlington, everybody is American.

Hanna: (In a haughty tone) I am your big sister, Carisa. Come, now.
“The sun is in the sky;
The earth is at our feet.
(Carisa joins in) Come, all.
Let's sing together.
Ichii, ni, let's all sing.
One, two, let's all sing.
Eins, zwei, let's all sing —"

Yuko: (After the two girls) Uno, dos, let's all sing . . . . Hanna, go play where you can see Grandpa's grave. Carisa, don't let the wind blow your hat away. Look at all the cicadas lying on the ground and dying. Don't you step on them.

(Instead of an answer, the girls' laughter is heard as they climb the hill.)

Yuko: (Patting Bob's gravestone with the palm of her hand) Hi, Bob. Oh, my! The gravestone is as hot as an oven. I'll pour some cold water for you right away. It's been a strange summer (She pours water from an aluminum cup.) this year.

We don't have those showers that always used to strike the tips of the tulip tree leaves. The sky and the ground are full of those seventeen-year locusts with eyes the color of a ripe ground cherry.

Are you cooled off now?

Yes, this water is from our house, Bob, in Virginia. You used to drink it, saying how sweet it was, as you watched the sun going down over the Potomac.

(Clasping her hands before the gravestone, muttering to herself) To think that the survivor of Corregidor should have gone before me! (Recovering her spirit) By the way, Bob, what are you doing now? I'm sewing drapes every day. I have to

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make $1000 every month. Oh, don't worry. I'm getting your pension from the federal government. (In a whisper) I make the mortgage payment with the pension all right.

Hanna: (From a distance) Grandma, we have a visitor —

(From the top of the hill, with a faint sound of footsteps on the grass, Okita comes down. He carries his jacket over his arm. He is casually dressed. He lightly clears his throat, standing behind the gravestone.)

Yuko: (Surprised, looking up) Oh, who are you?

Okita: I'm sorry to startle you. My name is Okita. I have come from Japan. The young ladies chasing the insects on the hilltop told me, "Grandma is a Japanese."

Yuko: (In an ironic tone) Are you sightseeing in Arlington Cemetery?

Okita: . . . Until a while ago, I was. I was moved by General Lee's mansion standing white on the hill. Before the perpetual flame at Mr. Kennedy's grave, I took a picture to remember. I was a tourist tracing the history.

Yuko: Suit yourself. This is a Mecca for tourists.

Okita: But I'm not one now. As I read the date of death and the age of the dead engraved on each tombstone, I noticed so many had died young — 20, 21, in 1942, 1943. They are the war dead of World War II, aren't they? As one who has lived through the same period, my soul has been wounded.

Yuko: (Bowling slightly) I'm sorry . . . .

Okita: No, I should apologize. It was very impolite of me, but I came down the hill, because I felt it most unusual that a Japanese woman should be praying in this Arlington Cemetery, where

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the American, or the most nationalistic war dead are laid to rest.

Yuko: Here, the wives of the war dead also sleep. I will, too, eventually. (In a tender tone) Now, let me introduce (Tapping on the tombstone) my husband, Bob Langer.

Okita: Well, now. How shall I introduce myself to your husband in the other world?

Yuko: Bob, here is Mr. Okita. A gentleman, perhaps five years younger than you. He looks nice in his striped shirt. Bob was a war veteran. He died of a heart attack.

Okita: . . . He had a bad heart? I practice medicine in downtown Tokyo. (Hesitantly) You appeared to be talking with your husband in the grave.

Yuko: I do it all the time. “What are you doing?” It’s our greeting.

Okita: And what did he say he was doing?

Yuko: “Nothing.” From our basement, which was his castle when he was alive and well. There he used to have his model war ships scattered all over like the locusts this summer. He would say in a loud voice, “Nothing.”

Okita: Always “nothing”! I’m envious. (Looking down toward the road beneath the hill) Oh, here come the soldiers, with their guns. Is there some trouble, I wonder?

Yuko: On the white road over that section of the cemetery, too. (Remembering) It’s a soldier’s funeral. When I arrived here, I parked my car in the shade under that tulip tree, see, down the hill. I was asked to park the car on the road behind, as there was a funeral. (In a loud voice) Hanna, Carisa.

Hanna: (Hanna and Carisa come back, laughing) The wind came whishing, Grandma, and blew the red flowers away from the
tomb up on the hill.

Carisa:  *(Folding her arms)* They were artificial flowers, so I don’t care if they blew away.

Yuko:  There’s going to be a funeral. Let’s sit here quietly for a while.

Okita:  Is it all right if we stay here?

Yuko:  They say so. On the far side of this hill, do you see a mausoleum? Yes, the one with the stainless steel doors reflecting the sun. Arlington Cemetery is full. The dead sleep in those compartments, I hear.

Hanna:  *(In a whisper)* A shiny limousine is coming, slowly, slowly, like walking.

Carisa:  *(Also in a whisper)* The devil rides in a black limousine, sister.

Okita:  *(Also in a whisper)* Is the casket inside the car?

Yuko:  The family members must be in the car. The casket is carried by a seven-horse carriage. *(As if soliciting Okita’s confirmation)* You can barely hear horses’ hoofs, can’t you? But it’s all for show. In recent years cremation is usual. The casket is empty. It was like that for Bob. Six years ago today. September 6, 1981.

Okita:  The death of a soldier — thank heavens, we don’t have that in post-war Japan.

Yuko:  It’s no rare event in Arlington. The war dead during the Vietnam war in the 1960’s. Young soldiers dying in small-scale war; we even have accidental deaths of test pilots.

Okita:  I see. *(To himself)* In Japan, too, members of the Self-Defense Force die in accidents during maneuvers . . .

Yuko:  Just the other day, a military plane carrying soldiers on reassignment crashed and all died. And the death of war vet-
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erans like Bob. Ever since Arlington Cemetery opened in 1864, new bodies have been buried from every war. The first residents of this hill must be the heroes of the Civil War.

Okita: I feel as if I'm watching the post-war histories of two countries. But it must be hard on you to have to watch a funeral.

Yuko: To me, Bob was "my rock, and my fortress," weren't you, dear? (Laughing a little) "I'm no lord, just a petty sailor," he says.

Okita: Is that what your husband said?

Yuko: Yes. I'd be very happy if he'd make an appearance today, the anniversary of his death. I'd like to warm his cold body as that beautiful maiden did for King David.

Okita: (To the tombstone) You are a lucky man. (With a flourish) Now, sir, this Arlington is a nebulous area, with no distinction between the worlds of the living and the dead. Would you be so kind as to appear, and, as a witness to the time past, would you tell me in your own words about America in the days of glory?

Bob: (Wearing a Hawaiian shirt, a potbellied Bob appears beside the tombstone. In a casual tone) A summons to 'the witness from the other world,' is it?

Okita: (Uttering a small cry at Bob's appearance) Oh! 'The witness from the other world,' that is exactly right. Even at that famous "Tokyo War Trial," as 'the witness from the other world,' Lord Fumimaro Konoe . . .

Bob: I'm just kidding. (Pointing to the lawn-covered ground) But many of them want to speak up.
(Incessant singing of seventeen-year locusts. From a distance, horses’ hoofs are heard more distinctly than before.)

Yuko: (Her voice becomes more lively with Bob’s appearance.) Around the graves, so many locusts, all dried up, lie dead. They live for 17 years in the ground, Bob. This is the year for them to see the sun. At the beginning of this summer, there was no break in the locusts’ singing, as if someone put a boom box in the sky.

Okita: They are singing even now . . . What ugly voices!

Bob: (Coming to himself) As for that, in the ground, honey-colored larvae were crawling everywhere. I held my breath.

Yuko: (In a voice with a tinge of laughter) Bob is so afraid of locusts and thunder. Do you remember that day when you came to eat at the Sukiyaki House for the first time, Bob? Vancouver was wild with thunder and lightning.

Bob: It rained too.

Yuko: “Blow, winds! Spout, rain! And thou, all-shaking thunder . . .” (In tune with Yuko’s theatrical tone, rain, wind, thunder and lightning beating the city.)

Bob: (His voice blown about by the wind) Is that your favorite, King Lear? Then, I’ll play my part as usual.

Okita: I’ll be a well-behaved audience. I’ll sit on this hot lawn as my seat.

Yuko: Now, let us turn the clock back 26 years, to the early evening of September 6, 1961. This is Vancouver, Canada. All right, Bob?

Bob: All right. (In the severe rain and wind, we hear the footsteps running up the open steel-stairway. In the tone of reciting the
stage direction) Opening the oak door to the Sukiyaki House. 
(Imitating the sound of the door opening) ghi, ghi, ghi-i.

Yuko: (In the professional tone of a waitress) Hi, how many of you?
Bob: (Shaking off the drops of rain on his shoulders and arms) One more friend to follow. I'm soaking wet.

Yuko: My! You speak Japanese. Help yourself to this handkerchief to dry your hair.

Bob: Don't I look like a stray dog. (Winking and smiling) Thank you.

Yuko: Would you like the round table in the center? Or, would you prefer the table by the window, as the Japanese customers do?

Bob: No! I'd like the table furthest from the thunder, even by an inch. That noise and light gives me the shakes. Look over there, the top of that maple tree beside the road. It looks like a woman tearing her hair!

Yuko: (Smiling) Would you care for something to drink?
Bob: Well —— If the President is giving this veteran another present, let me have a full bottle of the best champagne in the house. If it's my money, let me just have a bourbon.

Yuko: Are you an American?
Bob: An engineer who came to work in Canada, all the way from Chicago. What's your name?

Yuko: Cherry.
Bob: Isn't that just your name at work?

Yuko: I'm Yuko.
Bob: So you're Japanese, just as I thought. The kimono uniform is very becoming.

Yuko: Are you familiar with Japan?
Bob: From the summer of 1942 to early September, 1945, I was in Japan.

Yuko: From 1942 to 45. That's from the year 17 to 20 in Showa. In the middle of war, was there any American in Japan? (Yuko catches herself.) Pardon me.

Bob: That's all right. I was a captive on the island of Corregidor. I was taken to Uozu of Toyama Prefecture and forced to work in the mines till the end of the war. Why are you here, Yuko?

Yuko: You must be with the CIA.

Bob: (Snapping his fingers) Yes, I want to investigate you, Yuko.

Yuko: (Laughing) Counting on my friend in Vancouver for help, I came, carrying my yukata and obi... I was planning to work for the Sukiyaki House. I exchanged everything for American dollars, even the ashes that my parents had left behind, to buy plane tickets. I had only $57 left on me. I put the cash in my vinyl purse and flew from Haneda to Vancouver. That was half a year ago. I am female. Age 30. My zodiac sign is a sheep.

Bob: I'm 42. What about your Dad and Mom?

Yuko: They were burnt to death in Nagoya by the B29 air-raid in 1945. I am a war orphan, all alone in the world. I intended to hunt a husband. So I carried with me ten kanset hagaki, when I boarded the plane. That's all.

Bob: Kanset hagaki?

Yuko: Postcards. (Back in the real world) Around 1961, Japan had matrimonial agencies. When you registered, you needed to give the office ten postcards. They would let you know the dates of interviews with spouse candidates by sending these postcards. (Laughing) I must have believed that the Japa-
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nese postcards would be good all over the world.

Okita:  (Hesitantly) Mr. Langer.

Bob:  You may call me Bob.

Okita:  The island of Corregidor means the battle of Bataan . . .

Pardon me, both of you, to intrude on your past, but how old were you?

Bob:  I was captured by the Japanese forces on May 7, 1942. I was 23, in the Navy. How old were you then, Okita?

Okita:  In August 1945, I was 21, a medical student.

Yuko:  I guessed right. You are five years younger than Bob.

Bob:  In August of that year the war ended. Oh, my! I've an unpleasant premonition. Then Okita was in Hiroshima.

Okita:  I was in Nagasaki. But on August 9, the day the atom bomb was dropped, I wasn't there.

Bob:  You aren't a hibakusha, then.

Okita:  In the strict sense of the word, I'm not a hibakusha. But, as a member of the rescue team, I entered the ground zero area with university professors three days after the explosion. And so I've been issued a hibakusha health card. I wish to keep myself in the record as a case of radiation sickness; a witness of the atomic, or nuclear age, that the human race was encountering for the first time.

Bob:  "The Bataan battle," "Atomic bombs," "War orphan." The actors of this century have gathered here in Arlington.

Okita:  I interrupted your reminiscence. Please continue with the story of the President's champagne.

Yuko:  (The wind and the rain hitting the windows; back to Vancouver.) Here is your bourbon whiskey. Your friend must have forgotten the appointment with you. Shall I now grill

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the meat?

Bob: Won't you eat with me, Yuko? September 6 is my anniversary. Sixteen years ago today, I returned to America as a veteran.

Yuko: Congratulations! But I can't eat with you.

Bob: Then, let me pick you up at 6 tomorrow evening. Let me return your handkerchief then, Okay? Don't worry. I have no wife. Like the storm out there, she waved her hand and went bye-bye two years ago. She said my body reeked with the jungle humidity —

Okita: The smell of death seems to rise from my body, too, occasionally.

Yuko: . . . Bob and I dated three times in a week. On the 8th day after we first met, he proposed. We had a church wedding. Our witness was Bob's friend who showed up late at the Sukiyaki House. The baby arrived next year.

Bob: Kamikaze, all right!

Yuko: An American man and a Japanese woman fell in love at first sight in the stormy Vancouver. Didn't you hate the Japanese, Bob?

Bob: Yuko doesn't know this — before the Pacific War began, I had come to Kobe on a warship, guarding the remains of a Japanese diplomat who had died in Washington. The second time, as a prisoner of war. The third time, as a member of the Occupation forces, I came to Sado in 1947. Japan and I are like the chewing gum that got stuck to a shoe.

Yuko: A sticky nuisance.

Bob: A fate. Like the saying, "To Sado, to Sado." An irresistible force. Therefore, God has given me a good Japanese.
Yuko: It's a fate that God has given Bob a good Japanese. It was a fate, too, that he met bad Japanese. He doesn't resist time.

Bob: When the time comes from the future, an unpredictable gift is wrapped inside like a bubble in the fruit punch.

Yuko: Were the Japanese soldiers in the POW camp good to you?

Bob: Well, as good as I. I met one absolutely good Japanese. One day, when the work was finished, we were marching down the mountain path, limping.

Yuko: McQueen in "The Great Escape" was splendid!

Bob: They must have had food on the European front. . . . When we came to the front of an old farm house, a woman beckoned to us from inside the gate. She was a small, white-haired woman. When our eyes met, she showed a package wrapped in newspaper and beckoned to me. I mustered my courage and went to her. She made a gesture of eating, saying "food, food," in English. I hid the package inside the front of my tattered shirt and brought it to the prisoners' camp.

Yuko: Weren't you caught by the Japanese soldiers?

Bob: The mountain path was in the bush. Also, they must have had trouble getting food. They didn't say anything. We opened the package in our room. There were ten sweet potatoes, warm. We divided them among us and we all had a bite. We cried. We were very happy and very sad.

Yuko: Near the end of the war, we had very little food left. One sweet potato a day. We filled our empty stomach with water. Even for farmers, sweet potatoes must have been a precious staple. But, Bob, why were you sad?

Bob: Pride, or vanity, I suppose. We were given bread harder than a rock.
Yuko: It was called *mushi pan*, or steamed bread, unleavened bread.

Okita: What about after August 15, the surrender of Japan?

Bob: Our forced labor came to a stop, too.

Yuko: *(In a carefree voice)* The third time, as a member of the occupation force of the victor nation. *(Humming “The Star-Spangled Banner”)* Did you go visit Uozu?

Bob: The first thing! I looked for that lady and that farm house which had seemed brilliant as an oasis, but I couldn’t find either. I climbed up and down the mountain path leading to the mine repeatedly to find them.

Yuko: You were a starving POW. You must have been bewitched by a mountain fox.

Bob: No. Yuko, I don’t resist fate, because God gave me a wonderful heart and life at Uozu.

Okita: *(To himself)* No, God can be extremely cruel sometimes. Bob, may I interrupt?

Bob: All right. Sure.

Okita: I’m very glad that you met a rare Japanese. Moments ago you said, “If the President is giving another present.” Did you know him? In 1961, was the President Truman or Kennedy?

Bob: *(Laughing loudly)* The highest-ranking friend I have is the postmaster of a country post office. From Corregidor to Uozu, from Uozu to Kobe, from the port of Kobe to the port of Oakland, California, where I landed as a veteran. . . .

Okita: That was September 6, 1945. Is it Oakland, with the famous Golden Gate Bridge, beyond which is San Francisco?

Bob: It’s the same Oakland. Truman was President. He gave us
veterans the reward. The President called the tune: Eat and drink all you can. For one whole week, no charge at hotels and restaurants. Everything included.

Yuko: Was it for everybody? A private, a general, all?
Bob: As far as I knew. It was the victory immediately after Truman took office. Hallelujah, hallelujah! (Slowly) That summer, the light shone like the transparent wings of an angel.
Okita: I would love to hear about your week in Oakland.
Bob: After I hear about Okita's August.
Okita: My summer of that year was Asura's summer. Bob's summer was brilliant like an American dream. I'm envious.
Bob: The American dream was over in one week.

(The sound of hoofs as the horse-drawn carriage approaches.)

Hanna: Two girls got off the limousine. Next . . . (Pointing into the distance) Mommy and Grandma, maybe . . . . . , those blond ladies. They are grown-ups but they're holding their hands, Grandma.
Carisa: White horses are drawing the carriage — one, two, there're seven.
Yuko: Seven white horses and three men in Army uniform on horseback. It was an Army man in the casket draped by The Stars and Stripes.
Carisa: On the road down the mountain, I mean the hill, two, three, again seven, soldiers — they're carrying guns. They look like Andersen's lead soldiers.
Hanna: There are eight, Carisa. Look, the black soldier with a saber. He's saying "Fall in." (The soldier's deep voice is heard giving

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a command.)

Bob: (Deeply moved) Hanna was just born. Now she's a young girl who looks good in a dress. The little red-haired Carisa wasn't even born... My family whom I don't know. Now, Okita. Let me hear your story of that summer.

Okita: For an American, wouldn't that be an unpleasant fact? I will tell the real story as a medical student who treated hibakusha.

Bob: "The Bataan death march" must not be a pleasant story for Okita, either.

Okita: As an act of the human race, that includes myself, I won't be able to remain calm. Therefore I wish to know past facts. I have no intention of comparing atrocities.

(The sound of explosion followed by the low sound of the train)

Okita: The news that Nagasaki had been attacked by a new type of bomb reached our university outside Nagasaki Prefecture on the same day, the 9th. Several professors from the School of Medicine and we students formed a rescue team and headed for Nagasaki.

Bob: That was three days later?

Okita: (The sound of the train continues.) During the war, Japan was experiencing an unimaginable shortage of everything. The train windows were all broken. There was no window glass for replacement or repairs. The coal smoke came into the passenger cars unhindered. Normally it would take 5 or 6 hours by train to Nagasaki, but then it took 12 or 13 hours.

Yuko: When the Grumman fighters raided, the huge black steam
The train was packed full of people concerned about the safety of their kin in Nagasaki. (*People's commotion*) Until Isahaya or Okusa, there was a kind of animal excitement, as people talked about their families in danger — their parents living in Nagasaki or their daughters working in the student mobilization forces. About the time the train came to the mountainous region at Michino-o, a quiet station two stops this side of Nagasaki, shouts were heard here and there in the train.

(*The commotion changes to sharp cries.*)

**Man:** *(In a subdued voice)* Is that — a person? His face, chest, hands and feet look like a red-earthenware doll.

**Woman:** *(Her fingers over her lips)* That one, too — by the tracks, lying on his stomach across the gravel, and something glitters on his back. With their arms stretched, as if swimming, they're walking — are they human beings? Why are they wearing tatters all over their naked bodies?

**Man:** That's not tatters. Their skins have come loose and hanging. *(Muttering)* How terrible. . . But, why?

**Woman:** My daughter. What shall I do. I wonder if she's alive. She is in the student mobilization force.

(*Commotion dies down. Silence prevails in the train. The sound of train wheels alone keeps a regular beat.*)
Passengers were crowding over the connecting decks between cars. The *hibakusha* approached the slow-moving train. But people were in the state of stupefaction. They must have been pondering the situation of their family members that lay ahead. All was silent. No one coughed. The silence was broken the moment the train pulled into the platform of Michino-o.

*(Commotion of fear rises in the train.)*

Bob, Joe's wife also met the atomic bomb in Nagasaki.

(Surprised) I'd never heard Joe or his wife tell me that.

The wife was stowed on a cargo train at Michino-o to go to Yamaguchi Prefecture.

At that time, the platform at that station had no roof. The *hibakusha* who had fled from Uragami were laid on the platform directly under the high noon sun. — Did you know that the *Fukuryu-maru* V was exposed to the atom bomb in Bikini? When I saw in the news film that the Bikini tuna was being unloaded to be discarded, it overlapped the scene at Michino-o branded in my memory. The *hibakusha* were laid like the tuna — the people who had been burned all over their body. The sky was absolutely clear.

Why do the big names want to fight wars?

Not just big names, Bob. My father also told me to fight to death.

The town where my university is was also attacked by firebombs. Since I was a doctor in the making then, I treated many people who were burned and brought to the hospital.
But it was different. The *hibakusha* and their cases were completely different from those who were injured by fire-bombs or conventional weapons.

Yuko: *(After a pause)* In mid-summer, Joe's wife wears a hat that shades her entire shoulders. She says she is *roasted* by the sun.

Bob: The *asakusanori* that Yuko likes — you used to roast that over the gas burner. Is that what you mean?

Okita: People screamed when they saw the sight on the platform. Village people carried those *hibakusha* on the shutters or wooden storm doors. To take them to hospitals, temples, and grade schools. But the platform was filled up with burned people in no time.

Bob: Nagasaki was annihilated —

Okita: The train started to move again. Nagasaki is a city that spreads along a valley. The train slowed down as it entered the valley of Nagasaki.

*(As the commotion continues, new cries of astonishment rise from the people who have witnessed the situation in the valley. After the cries that spread like waves, a deep silence.)*

Okita: I held my breath. Not a thing moved. The silence was not just inside the train. The city was quiet — it was the scorched land where no branches of trees or grass remained to sway in the wind — the world of silence. The train stopped. The rails were twisted like candy canes and stuck out in mid-air. They must have been melted by heat rays. The train could not move further. Just before the Uragami
station, we jumped onto the tracks.

Yuko: The next stop from Uragami is Nagasaki — that area was ground zero.

Okita: It was three days after the explosion. So, the dead bodies were swollen and had turned brown. The smell was hideous. On the seats of a streetcar that was burnt black sat human bodies, already rotten. Perhaps even their souls could not recognize their own death.

Yuko: In the great air-raid of Nagoya, my father turned to ashes underneath the western-style tableware, which was his merchandise. He, too, didn't think he was dead, perhaps.

Bob: (Nodding) Did Yuko's family sell Wedgwood, too?

Yuko: They were the wholesalers. So, as soon as I married Bob, I bought the Wedgwood coffee set. I also bought silver knives, forks, and spoons. With Bob's salary, I kept burying one piece at a time, until I collected enough to serve dinner for ten people. Then you were gone.

Hanna: (Patting Yuko on the arm) Grandma, the carriage stopped. (Imitating the soldier's tone of giving a command) He's giving orders again, "Woh-woh."

(At a distance, the soldiers' footsteps and commanding voice)

Okita: They are about to remove The Stars and Stripes, it seems. The soldiers are close by the casket.

Yuko: The funeral now begins. The lady . . . probably the wife. The children stand in line, waiting for the carriage. The sun is glaring.
(Watching the funeral)

Yuko: The soldiers hold the four corners of The Stars and Stripes and fold it once, lengthwise. Now the flag is oblong. They fold it again lengthwise. It looks like a pennant. Now the long narrow flag is being folded into a triangle. A black cover is placed over the casket.

Bob: She's a young widow. What a pity.

Carisa: (In a whisper) May I go play? I won't make any noises like swans in the pond. (Before Yuko answers) Sister, let's have a race to the hilltop. (Two girls start to run, singing in a low voice, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Their singing changes to a tune. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" flows at a slow tempo, as if crawling over the hill.)

("The Battle Hymn of the Republic" dies down. The sound of the wind is heard.)

Bob: How quiet! Look at the trees. Some of these branches are dead.

Yuko: On the tips of branches the seventeen-year cicadas have laid eggs — their off-spring that will appear above-ground 17 years hence. The branches where eggs are deposited die and fall to the ground. The larvae burrow into the ground. They suck the sap from the roots and wait for the summer of the next cycle. For human beings there is a border between this and the other world, but the cicadas live on and on, rotating between aboveground and underground.
So do human beings. In place of me and Yuko, Hanna was born and then Carisa.

I married Bob, a citizen of our former enemy, and a daughter was born with green eyes. Of a Japanese mother with black eyes, Mr. Okita. Our daughter of mixed blood married a French American when both were college students. Hanna and Carisa were born. Hanna’s eyes resemble her father’s, a blue as deep as the blue in the French flag. Carisa is exactly like Bob. She has green eyes. Her personality, too, is like his — naughty.

I’m Yuko’s servant. Now, Okita, were the hibakusha saved?

At the first rescue station — about 700 meters from ground zero — where I worked, the hibakusha who were brought there were barely living, shall we say. But they all died.

Bob, you are an American. I want you to know something. Doctors use boiling water to destroy germs on their instruments, or boil them to kill germs completely. That is exactly — the atomic bomb, I mean — the idea of sterilization. But, Bob, please listen. We are not germs.

We sent those hibakusha who could be moved, to hospitals outside the prefecture, putting them on a cargo train, like the one you were talking about earlier. According to the rescue team members who accompanied the victims, before reaching their destination, nearly all had expired. An older medical student in our rescue team died of leukemia later.

How can we survive?

The prescription for survival? It doesn’t exist as yet. Even without quoting from Camus’ The Plague, “Human beings ought to stop killing.”
Bob: But some did survive. Joe's wife is one of them.

Okita: And I, too — is that it? That kind of argument of substitution is dangerous. Bob, why is a hibakusha issued the hibakusha health card? Every six months, we receive a notice from the public health center for our regular physical examination.

Bob: Even now?

Okita: They check the red blood cell count, white blood cell count, hemoglobin count, and the like. We get the test result as "normal" or "need further testing." Of course, no one is forced to take these tests.

Bob: Okita, what do you think of human beings?

Okita: Life is unconditionally precious. Ever since August 9th, when I learned how fragile life was, I feel this way even more strongly.

Bob: But, don't you hate some people?

Okita: Yes, on a personal level, I do have likes and dislikes.

Bob: (Smiling) I'm glad to hear that. Me too. In Corregidor, a comrade was starving to death, and I let him eat my last chocolate . . . the size of those Daily Vitamin tablets Yuko used to take.

Yuko: Because you had a piece of chocolate with white mold on it, you survived, Bob.

Bob: He was the most obnoxious guy in the whole platoon. I had never spoken to him before, but you understand, don't you? I just didn't like him. I agonized over it — "To let him live or die — is the question."

Yuko: even he has the right to live.

Bob: (tut-tut [the unvoiced interjection of disapproval made by the tongue]) Yuko, that line is hypocritical.
Yuko: But, if you hadn't given him anything, you'd have been bothered all your life.

Bob: No, I regret I did. He returned home alive and is now the head of a gun shop.

(Laughter)

Okita: (In a quiet tone) I believe Bob gave chocolate for the life of the person who was at the absolute limits of existence... I have an experience involving a shot of blood coagulant. It occurred after I moved to a second rescue station.

Bob: Was the war over then?

Okita: As a social phenomenon the war had ended. Bob, I believe that war of ours will end only when all who endured it have died.

Bob: Let me think, Okita. From September 6, 1945, when I landed in Oakland to September 6, 1981, when I came here to Arlington, for me these 36 years were my war bonus. Since the war, I have no memory that would destroy my past —

Okita: The battle against the atomic bomb diseases had just begun. We greeted August 15 in the boiler in Hell. Even though the war had ended, hibakusha continued to die. When I moved to a second rescue station, those hibakusha who were doomed to die were all dead, and the survivors' conditions were relatively stable. In October, at the beginning of fall, we started to experience a mental serenity, of sorts, as we considered our own youth within the context of nature. A friend of mine who participated in our rescue mission sat on the stone steps of the Suwa Shrine and sang a children's song. (Singing in a

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low voice)

Across the far away desert in the moon light (Yuko joins in the singing.)

A pair of camels went on a journey —
The setting sun shone on the slanted remnants of the town, sheltered by the mountains. It was really beautiful. But it felt hollow. Is this quiet peace real? In this state of lethargy, symptoms never seen before began to appear in the hibakusha.

Yuko: (Looking up at the sky) Fall arrives early in Arlington. In this clear, blue summer sky, very thin patches of clouds have already drifted over.

Bob: Nothing is more hollow than a battle on a fine day, when the sky is so blue that you feel pain in your cheeks. Why, why, why? You ask yourself, as you fight with your gun.

Yuko: The sky was blue, too, the morning after my father and mother were burnt to death.

Okita: The earth doesn't feel pain or itch, whether we live or die. The earth follows its own law and continues to revolve. The hibakusha's hair started to fall off, in the bright autumn sunshine, no less. In addition, they suffered from severe anemia. The girls with bald heads, too, suffered from subdermal hemorrhage. Blood spots the size of a needle point cover the body. When these appeared, the patients always died within two or three days.

Bob: Oh.

Okita: They would vomit an incredible amount of blood, pass bloody stool, and die. The hibakusha would hide in the corner of a room, avoiding the eyes of others, and check their
own arms, rolling up sleeves.

Bob: In the battle field we were afraid of not being able to walk. When your legs began to trip up, you would feel the cold eyes of your comrades. You would be a burden on them.

Okita: About that time, the International Red Cross sent us blood coagulants. But we didn't receive enough. We had to be selective.

Bob: You were in God's territory, Okita.

Okita: I could not choose. Blood spots started to appear in one family — the mother and four children; the oldest was a son, 16 years old. Blood spots appeared in the children one after another. At that point the mother said: what my children need the most right now is their mother. I am their mother. Please give the shot to me.

Yuko: I guess I could understand.

Bob: (Decisively) My mother was not like that. When the newspaper wrote I was killed in action, she stopped eating bread for one whole week. "I was on diet, because I was too heavy," she said, laughing.

Okita: As I, too, believed in the motherhood myth, I was shocked. But as requested, I gave the one shot to the mother.

Bob: Did the children say Okay?

Yuko: . . . Bob, before the war in Japan, the parents were the absolute. Children had no rights.

Okita: In the end everyone in the family died.

Yuko: Good — that the mother could die with her children. It would have been too painful if she had lived.

Okita: What I realized at that time was that she was at once a mother and a human being. I learned as a fact of life that it was
natural that a human being should assert her own life, insist on living. No one but the self can criticize the instinctive ego to preserve one’s life.

Bob: That’s right. Human society became ambiguous when it lost instinctive nature. The fellow who snatched my chocolate was nothing but instinctive nature. With his vacant eyes, he grabbed at me and devoured my chocolate. We ought to be aware of this fact.

Yuko: You let him share it, didn’t you?

Bob: No, he snatched it. I had no mind to share anything. — By the way, Okita, did your outlook on life change?

Okita: I feel I was made to see the limitation of medical science. The new semester started at my university. The administration warned me if I didn’t return, I would be expelled. Let it be, I thought. I could not abandon dying people.

Yuko: We were each born in an unfortunate age.

Okita: Bob, do you know the reason why the hibakusha died?

Bob: Weren’t they burned by the energy of the atom bomb?

Okita: Human beings have a lymph system. Cell growth, regenerative functions, and others were all damaged or destroyed. The intestinal tract contains many young cells, which are destroyed by radiation. This is called necrosis. When American military doctors arrived, we opened up the bone marrow of the dead. Blood-forming cells had been completely destroyed — muddy like red clay mud. Anyone whose regenerative functions have been destroyed has no choice but to die. This is the atom bomb. We human beings must know this fact.

Bob: (In a tender voice) I won’t forget, Okita.
Okita: As military doctors returned from war, medical service secured enough personnel. So I went back to school. I had nowhere else to return but school. That was three months later. The train service was also restored. I took the train at Nagasaki. On the day I left Nagasaki, I wrote my one and only haiku poem in my life. Would you care to hear it?

Bob: Of course.

Okita: “Kokujitsu ni kusariyuku mono hito ni arazu.” (In the cruel sun the decomposing thing is not a human being.) “Koku” of “Kokujitsu” (the cruel sun) is “koku” of “zankoku” (cruelty or atrocity). Cruel, fierce bitterness. I’m not sure whether such a phrase exists.

Yuko: (Without emotion) “Kokujitsu ni kusariyuku mono hito ni arazu.”

Okita: Fortunately, the defeat changed Japanese mind set 180 degrees. The university administrator who had informed us that we had been expelled for over three months’ absence simply rescinded his decision and declared: From now on, I will serve as the students’ koboku.

Bob: Koboku?

Okita: It means a person in office who serves the public, us. That was the first time I heard the expression koboku (public servant). Looking back on the post-war period, I feel that this “public servant” signified the beginning and end of post-war democracy.

Bob: You mean democracy did not grow?

Okita: For me, it was a momentary gleam of hope.

Yuko: It was like the Fois gras that Bob ate for the first time in his life.
To think that such a delicious thing existed! It was like Okita's koboku. You must watch out if something slips through your throat without your chewing it.

(With a feeling) The funeral is over.

Isn't that The Stars and Stripes that draped the casket? How neatly it's folded into a small triangle!

The wife will take it to her heart. Bob's Stars and Stripes was also folded into a firm triangle, and I took it to my heart. It remains on Bob's bed in the same shape it was given that day.

What an honor! The death of an ordinary sailor should turn into a national flag.

"To mourn the brave soldier's death"—a condolence from President Reagan arrived.

Ha! A nice gesture!

(Staring at him slightly) Bob! At that time, I realized that I was the wife of an American. Bob is Bob, right?

(Each of seven soldiers fires three shots, with six intervals.)

Hanna and Carisa: (They come, running and crying.) Grandma, what's happened?

(The gun salute continues.) It's Okay. (Embracing both girls) To send the soldier in the carriage to Heaven. (She counts the gun salutes.) 17, 18, . . . 21. It was the same way at Bob's.

(Silence after the gun salute. The sound of the wind caressing the lawn grass.)
Bob: I'm tired of the sound of bullets.

(The sound of fairly strong wind blowing across the tombstones. The scene shifts to the exchange of artillery fire on the island of Corregidor. The fierce sound of bombardment gradually dies down.)

Bob: (Remembering in a trembling voice) It's terribly cold at night in Corregidor. We prisoners of war were given only one blanket each. You'd think it's hot, day and night, since it's a southern country. With only one blanket, you can't screen out the humid air of the jungle in the night that licks your skin. Okita, even the American forces were miserable in the battle field. We weren't fighting, wearing polished lace-up boots like the Occupation Forces after the war. Some soldiers wore blue jeans. My comrades died of hunger and cold—

Okita: At the time of "the death march" in the Bataan Peninsula, where were you, Bob?

Bob: From Bataan to O'Donnell Prison Camp... My comrades were Americans and Filipinos. It was a big march of death. Just before our surrender, I fled with a few soldiers to Corregidor, in order to carry a message.

Okita: Corregidor is a small island covered with jungle at the southern edge of the Bataan Peninsula, isn't it?

Bob: The Philippines are countless islands scattered like the gems on a crown. And they are made of fire-spouting volcanoes and jungles. In addition, the Philippine Deep, which is the deepest in the world and as gigantic as Texas, surrounds these...
islands. The sea current is *Running his hand swiftly across his face, as if whistling*! We escaped from Bataan on a PT boat. It was a miracle that we made it. I owe it to the wisdom from my experience as a sailor on the cruiser *Marble Head*.

**Yuko:** Do you mean those patrol torpedo boats that the American Caesar and high-ranking officers used?

**Bob:** Yes. The American Caesar, MacArthur, and the company escaped in three PT boats from Corregidor to Australia. A boat can carry only a dozen or so men. Some ten thousand American and Filipino troops and Lieutenant General Wainwright, who succeeded MacArthur as the commander, were left behind.

**Okita:** Before the fall of the Bataan Peninsula MacArthur escaped, didn't he? According to the record, four torpedo boats were used.

**Bob:** Is that what's called a historical fact? In Corregidor even a single blade of grass on the island was a fortress. The small island had countless cannon aimed toward the sky and the sea, like a porcupine. For us it was the perfect and the last stronghold.

**Yuko:** The American forces surrendered on May 7, 1942.

**Bob:** I was 23. *(Clapping his hands)* I remember! May 7 is the anniversary of something else, too. A complete coincidence. It's the date when *the Marble Head* arrived at the East Coast of the United States from Borneo after three months' voyage! The JAP — oh, I beg your pardon.

**Yuko:** We too talked about "*kichiku beiet*" (fiendish brute American and British). You also kept that Chicago newspaper hidden in
your desk drawer, the one with the photos of you and your brother Jan as the war-dead brothers. That headline also had JAP in large type the size of a fist. The "kichiku" and "JAP" were honest historical sentiment.

Bob: The direct attack by the Japanese forces — after I got off the Marble Head — destroyed the steering gear and the ship was about to founder. They pumped the sea water out and continued to sail 13,000 miles. It was exactly like my own life.

Okita: Were the ship's suction pumps also destroyed?

Bob: The Japanese forces started to attack the island about 20 days after the Bataan Peninsula had fallen. The silence from the peninsula across the sea destroyed the fighting spirit of the American forces. On the island we could even hear the sound of the tides scraping the jungle shore. If that silence was a strategy, it was quite successful. My heart froze with fear and anxiety. On the 5th, late in the evening, past ten o'clock, in the pitch-black sky above the cape, suddenly a fiery column appeared. Then the shelling. (Bob mimicking) Bah, bababah, babah! Flare bombs like lightning.

Yuko: That's why Bob is afraid of lightning.

Bob: No, the thunder and lightning in Chicago winter had gotten into my bones. But, isn't it funny that what comes back in my memory is always the bluish-white flare bombs.

Yuko: (Suddenly in a high-pitched voice) The lightning reminds me of something — Bob, when you came to the Sukiyaki House for the first time, you gave me a $6 tip. I was very happy if my tips of the day totaled $10. You tipped me $4 on your second visit. On your third visit... The tip went down. Why was that, Bob? I wanted to ask you. Why?
Bob: (A big laugh) I am busy with war right now.

Okita: (Laughing) After ten in the middle of the night, the battle started, did you say? How typically Japanese! I can almost see the fleet coming for attack, holding their breath, over the deep, dark Deep. There was fear on both sides.

Bob: Next day, the 6th, after noon, we surrendered. The battle ended in half a day.

Okita: Is MacArthur the American Caesar?

Bob: We called him that. He considered himself an emperor capable of everything. But those who admire him might have a different idea.

Yuko: From the prison camp of Uozu you made a triumphant return to the United States.

Bob: Changing places with MacArthur, who landed in Atsugi on August 30, 1945, I left Kobe for Oakland. (The military band playing the "Double Headed Eagle") Is it fate? — I know it's absurd to compare myself with a genius like MacArthur, but, he and I are both military men, aren't we? Still, he always appears in the lime light as a victor, with a corncob pipe in his mouth. He's a celebrity. I am also an American soldier, and a victor, right? But, for some reason, I have to sneak out. That's been my past. My memory of Japan was also as a captive. In Corregidor I was among the conquered. MacArthur has no record of defeat. Even though he escaped on a PT boat, he walked on the path of victory as the Commander of the Allied South-West Pacific Forces.

Okita: You have your triumphal return to Oakland. (With a feeling) I have nothing.

Bob: That was the brightest day in my life.
(The ships at the port; the ships sounding their welcome horns; on the pier, the wind instruments of the military band playing cheerful music; women's voices.)

Bob: The port was filled with paper streamers, the military band and women. I stood on the deck and shouted!

Yuko: You shouted — Mother, I'm back!

Okita: She came to meet you.

Bob: No, because I was reportedly killed in action.

Yuko: God makes a very neat arrangement, Mr. Okita. Jan, who supposedly was killed in action, returned to Oakland, also.

Bob: I thought it was God's bad joke. I could not believe it, even when he patted me on the shoulder and hugged me. I had been told by his senior officer that Jan was killed in action, even the date and hour he was shot in the jungle.

Yuko: (Laughing) Did you keep on drinking the President's champagne with the ghost of Jan for a whole week?

Bob: Super-first-class champagne with foie gras and caviar to boot!

(The joyful voice of soldiers in the excitement of victory; the clatter of dishes and silver touching one another; and jazz music.)

Bob: If I use Okita's expression, it was the day the President became the soldiers' koboku. Okita's post-war democracy apparently ended with koboku coming to a skidding halt. It seems that my foie gras remained undigested in my stom-
ach and controlled the post-war period for 36 years. Listen, Okita, you can't resist the time that comes from the future, but the time that is piling up behind you also strangles you. They are in collusion.

Yuko: You've shortened your own life, Bob. Mr. Okita, Bob had a bad heart. And so, I tried very hard to tell him that *fois gras* and chocolate were both bad for the heart. But he'd say, "The President encouraged me to eat." Well, as *fois gras* was expensive, we didn't buy it except for the anniversaries.

Bob: As soon as we landed, Jan and I ran to a public phone and called Mother in Chicago. Hello, Mom. *(Mimicking Jan)* Hello, Mom.

Yuko: While Bob and Jan talked, their mother couldn't stop crying. Bob is Mom's baby.

Bob: "Come on home right away. I want to see your face," Mother said, crying. I answered, "Of course," and went directly to the number one hotel in Oakland. *(In a theatrical tone)* "Say, let me have the most expensive wine in this hotel, the stuff you hide in the back of the basement, and the most expensive food! For one week, everything to drink and eat is free." The hotel was filled to the capacity with the soldiers who had never tasted *fois gras* or caviar.

Okita: Did it really happen?

Bob: Yes, it did. I ate *fois gras* for the first time in my life. I ate even the portion that my dead comrades would have eaten. That still remains undigested in me.

Okita: How brilliant your curtain fall was at the end of the war!

Bob: I just ate and ate. When the week was over, I drank bourbon and ate popcorn. The popcorn tasted like a downtown movie

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theater. The party was over. How should one live after it's over, Okita?

Okita: ... I, too, have lived, asking myself the same question.

Bob: Before the age of 25, I had seen most of what this world was about. After the party was over, it was hard to live without committing suicide. It was my salvation that I met Yuko.

Yuko: Thank you, Bob. Me, too. My post-war period felt very long. It began when I walked away from the charred ruins where I lost my father and mother.

Okita: Your war ended here in this quiet Arlington, Bob.

(The trumpet playing the Funeral March is heard from the scene of the funeral. TAPS is heard, high and free.)

Yuko: This tune makes me sad, Bob.

Bob: I'm always here, Yuko.

(The carriage begins to move in time with the trumpet playing the Funeral March.)

Yuko: Covered in black, the casket is going away.

Hanna: Children and Mommy are going back in the limousine.

Yuko: Everybody is going back. Let's go home, Hanna and Carisa. Your Mommy is waiting. Good-bye, Mr. Okita. Nice meeting you.

Okita: I'm grateful that we met. Good-bye, Bob. Someday, somewhere, I hope to see you again.

Bob: Good-bye. Say hello to the people of your country for me.

Okita: I will. I'll also tell them that the lovely ladies with the blood
of a Japanese woman and an American soldier are now living happily as citizens of our sometime enemy.

Yuko: Good-bye, Bob. See you again.

(TAPS resounds high. Hanna's and Carisa's lively singing voice. Yuko, Bob, and Okita leave. The sound of hoofs fades into the girls' concluding song.)

Hanna and Carisa:

"If the world unites in friendship,
We have nothing more to fear.
We are setting out for Africa,
And Polynesia, green . . .
(In a gradually lower voice)
The sun is in the heavens and
The earth is at our feet . . ."

Epilogue


The melody (or women's chorus) of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is heard. Birds chirping, occasionally. Yuko
recites the letter she’s just finished writing.

Yuko:

Dear Mr. Okita:

On the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, here in the United States, we have had a commotion over the canceled photo exhibit of the atomic bombing and the exhibition of the *Enola Gay*, the polished platinum atomic bomber, and its bomb, Little Boy, at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. Do you remember me, Yuko Langer? Eight years ago, in 1987, on that hot summer day, we met at Arlington National Cemetery. I am writing this letter, trusting the address on the calling card which you gave me then.

I am sending you a copy of the newspaper that I mentioned, the one my husband Bob had kept hidden in his desk drawer. It was published in Chicago, dated Monday, December 8th, 1941, or the 16th year of Showa. On the front page, the huge headline reads, “JAPS ATTACK U.S.” The line below, “American Fleet at Hawaii.”

The second page carries the photograph in profile of Ambassador Nomura and Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary Kurusu, each wearing a black fedora, as they leave the State Department after their meeting with the Secretary of the State Hal. The article begins with “LOOKING GLUM” — to me their faces look exactly like Japanese men’s everyday sulky faces — and says, “just as they were meeting with the Secretary, Japan had started their war against the U.S.”
It is the article on the day Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, 50 years ago. A clipping from another paper, The Chicago Daily, showing photographs of a large number of men, has June 24, 1942 in Bob’s handwriting. He must have added the date when he returned from the war. The headline reads, “NAVY ANNOUNCES 315 CASUALTIES in CHICAGOLAND.” Bob’s face is included, too. In a sailor’s uniform, he looks too young. As you can see, he is smiling. Not only Bob but all these men are smiling. And they are young, too. Half a century has gone by since these men with smiling faces became dead, injured, or missing. During that period this country, America, has gone through several wars. And now, the photo exhibit of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war record of 50 years ago, planned for showing at the Smithsonian, has been canceled. Because of the strong opposition by the veterans’ organization, I hear.

An American friend of mine said, “Whenever the veterans get involved, nothing good will come out.”

America, after all, is a nation of victors. No blemish is allowed to appear on that war, in which they are the victors. The families who gave the photos of their young men’s smiling faces to The Chicago Daily must have had the same idea. Perhaps it is necessary for them to justify the war, so that they may bury their sorrow for their losses. For the victors and losers alike, war renders everything sacred. Herein lies the devilishness and pleasure of war.

However, even in the U.S., the victorious, there are many old soldiers, like Bob, who have lived, after the war, carrying the wound of the defeated, spiritually speaking. Some young people consider the canceling of the photo exhibit as an unfortunate choice for the future of humankind.
Mr. Okita, they say that crocodiles and human beings cannot coexist. How about the atomic bomb and the human race? I understand that the doctor who has been treating the hibakusha for the last fifty years has recently told Joe's wife that their regenerative functions have not been restored after fifty years.

Dr. Okita, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are the trees and grass the only things that have been resurrected? According to the logic of those who justify the dropping of the atom bomb, do the lives of those on whom the bomb is dropped count for nothing?

Standing in front of the Enola Gay and Little Boy, visitors have their pictures taken. Even the merry citizens of this country face the camera with serious looks, with Little Boy in the background — a strange sight. I had my picture taken there, too. I have lived in the U.S. for over 30 years. Even though I feel a burning sensation on my back, it seems that I, too, have come to behave like the people on this side.

But, still, these things should be exhibited as the record of human beings and nuclear weapons. Neither as the victors' record, nor as the losers' record.

If this were done, then, to exhibit even a single photograph of the hibakusha, those who were burned so badly that their identities as men or women cannot be determined, would be meaningful — that's how I feel as one born in the country where the atom bombs were dropped. Now I am a naturalized American citizen.
Quiet summer dusk floats outside the windows. It seems that the leaves are slow to put on fall colors this year.

Praying that this letter will reach you safely.

September 6, 1995

Yuko Langer

(Again, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" playing quietly.)

[The End]

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