



The 2013 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize

Kurodahan Press is pleased to announce the 2013 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize, awarded for translation excellence of a selected Japanese short story into English. The winning translation will be published in the upcoming Kurodahan Press anthology *Speculative Japan Volume 4*, which is scheduled for publication in 2014–15, and the translator given full credit.

1. Eligibility

There are no restrictions whatsoever on translator participation. All translators are encouraged to apply, regardless of whether or not you have worked with us before.

2. Submission

Send your translation to the below address, by regular postal mail or (preferably) E-mail.

Please be sure to read the submission instructions, which cover formatting requirements (for both printouts and electronic files) and provide information on Kurodahan Press standards and other points. Submission instructions are given in the style sheet included in the contest package at:

<http://www.kurodahan.com/mt/e/khpprize/2013prize.pdf>

Submitted translations will not be returned, but the translator will retain all rights to the translation. Kurodahan Press will receive first publication rights to the winning translation, to be arranged under a separate and specific agreement.

No information about any submissions, including the names or contact information for people submitting translations, will be made available to any third party, including the judges, with the exception of the name of the winner (or a pseudonym, if the winner prefers). Translators are of course welcome to tell anyone they wish that they have made a submission.

3. Source material

The story to be translated is

「断章」 by 皆川博子 Roughly 1,700 字

The submission package, including a PDF of the story, style sheet and instructions, is available as a downloadable PDF. The source book is not currently in print, but is available second-hand, including at Amazon Japan:

<http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4331606759/kurodahanpres-22>

4. Application Deadline

Translations must be received no later than September 30, 2013. A notice confirming receipt will be issued. The results should be announced by the end of the year.



5. Submission address and contact

Grand Prize / one winner

30,000 yen prize money. At a later time we will invite the winner to publish the story in an upcoming Kurodahan Press anthology (*Speculative Japan Volume 4*) for an additional payment of 30,000 yen, to be covered by a separate contract (first English publication rights; translator keeps all other rights to translation).

Note: Prize payments will be subject to source-tax deductions as required by Japanese law.

Submissions should be sent to:

Kurodahan Press

3-9-10-403 Tenjin

Chuo-ku, Fukuoka

810-0001 Japan

Electronic submissions preferred via our website.

6. Notification

All contest entrants will be informed of the contest results. The winner's name (or a pseudonym if desired) will be posted on the Kurodahan Press website.

7. Judging

All decisions will be final and except in extremely unusual circumstances the reasons for the decision and the specific votes of the judges will not be revealed. The goal of the contest, simply stated, is to produce an English translation faithful to the original, which can be read and enjoyed by someone with no specialized knowledge of Japan or Japanese.

The winner will be selected by a panel of three jurors, to be announced:

Nancy Ross

Seth Jacobowitz

Juliet Carpenter



Style Guide for Kurodahan Translation Contest Submissions

v1.2 of June 30, 2011

This document is in two parts. The first part refers to the technical specifications we expect to see in documents submitted to us. The second part covers conventions of usage we prefer to see. As one might expect, the first part is less open to modification than the second part.

Part One: Technical Specifications

Word processing:

Please submit documents in Microsoft Word DOC format if possible. RTF or TXT files are also acceptable, but DOC files are preferred. If you would like to use a file format other than one of these, please contact us in advance.

Document formatting:

Use a common font (such as Times) at 10 or 12 point size.

As much as possible, use only one font at one size throughout your document. See part two for a discussion of special accented characters.

Use italics for emphasis.

Do not start paragraphs with tabs, and do not insert an extra return between paragraphs.

If there is a blank line in the source text, use "***blank line" in the document.

You can use headers and footers if you wish, but do not put important information in headers or footers if it does not also appear somewhere else. If possible (depending on your software), put page numbers and your name in either the header or footer on every page.

This will result in a pretty boring layout, but we do not want typographical games in the submissions... before the submissions are given to the judges, all formatting (font, font size, etc.) will be made uniform (italics will of course be preserved), and legible. Everyone will be using the same formatting, and judges will have to judge you on the merits of your translation, not your skill as a book designer.

Document layout:

On the first page of your document, include the following information in the following order. Please put

(1) Your name. (This line can also include the translator's assertion of copyright.) You may of course specify a pseudonym for public release if you prefer, but please make it very clear which is which.

(2) Your contact information (current mailing address, telephone number and email). This information will be kept confidential from everyone except KHP administrative personnel and Japanese tax authorities. Specifically, it will not be released to other contestants, judges or the general public. It is required for Japanese tax purposes, however.

File name conventions:

Please give the file your own name, without spaces and using only letters and numerals. If your name is Fred Smith, for example, name your file something like FredSmith.doc. Please add the correct extension for the file type if you are using a Macintosh, UNIX or other non-Windows system.

In general:



Avoid fancy formatting of all types. The contest judges your translation and writing abilities, not your artistic skills.

Make your document plain and simple. It may not be as attractive as you might like, but it will keep problems and file sizes to a minimum.

Part Two: Style Conventions

For the sake of convenience and to aid in mutual understanding, Kurodahan Press turns to the Chicago Manual of Style to answer questions as they arise. We will not always follow the Chicago Manual's advice, but we will start there to explain what we prefer to see in print.

For information on handling uniquely Japanese situations, we refer to the style guide of Monumenta Nipponica, which is available as a downloadable PDF from

http://monumenta.cc.sophia.ac.jp/MN_Style.html

Kurodahan Press uses American English as the basis of its own documents and most of its publications. If a translator prefers to use a different set of spelling and usage conventions, we will not object, but we will insist on internal consistency. Punctuation will follow American usage as outlined in the Chicago Manual.

We also use the following general reference works as authorities: Encyclopaedia Britannica, and for U.S. spelling, and Webster's Third New International Dictionary (the big heavy one that was in your school library).

We view matters of style and usage as conventions, not laws, and so we are open to reasoned argument if a translator wishes to do something other than what we initially require. Please be aware that "this is right" and "this is wrong" are not in themselves convincing arguments.

Representing the source language in the translation:

While Kurodahan Press normally romanizes extended vowels with macrons, people submitting translations may have difficulty with these special characters. For that reason, while we welcome the use of macrons or circumflexes over extended vowels, they are not required and will not be considered when judging a submission.

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean names are given in Asian order (for example: Murakami Haruki). Western names are given in Western order (for example: Tom Hanks). The general principle we follow is this: we wish to represent names as they would be represented in the source language culture. We recognize that this gets tricky sometimes, so discussion is possible in special cases. The name of a character in a Japanese novel is not, in our view, a special case.

Recasting passages:

Recasting is often necessary to make an original text read smoothly in English. Our goal is to produce texts that will appeal to general readers: translations should read smoothly, and should not attract attention to themselves in places where their original authors did not intend to attract attention.

Allusions in the source text:

A source text will often refer to a work of art or literature, to a cultural practice, proverb, famous place, or other aspect of common culture that readers of the original can be expected to understand. In cases where English readers could be expected to follow the allusion, the translation should attempt to reproduce it as closely as possible. If the source text refers to



something which would be unfamiliar to English readers, the translation should recast the passage to retain the flavor of the original as much as possible. This may involve brief, discreet definitions (something like: "Amaterasu, the sun goddess") or more substantial recasting.

Quoted titles of works in the source language:

If a work makes reference to a publication in the source language, the translator should (a) romanize the reference if the work is not available in English translation, or (b) replace it with a reference to the most recent published English translation. If the atmosphere conveyed by a title, rather than the specific text being referred to, is most important to the meaning of a passage, the translator might choose to translate the title. This applies to works of fiction intended for general readers – specialist texts, nonfiction, and bibliographies require different treatment.

Unusual dialects

This is a constant problem, and many attempts at dialect can be way off course. You should try to suggest regional accents or bumpkin-ness through a few well-chosen words and phrases, and leave most of the sentences as standard speech.

Many translators have suggested or used many different ways of doing this, but (in our considered opinion) none of them is really successful. For example, "Them people up there" as opposed to "those people" is preferable to "Them people uppa yonder." We want to suggest something of the flavor of the original, but we can't slow readers down, or make them laugh when the scene isn't funny, or (the worst) make them stop and think "that's odd." Using prohibition-era gangster slang for a yakuza speaking Osaka dialect just doesn't work.

Translator notes

If you wish to add notes about your translator you are of course welcome to. However, your translation will be judged on its merits as a finished translation. You will have to come up with appropriate answers for your questions, and write the story to reflect them. **With the exception of design and layout issues, what you write should be ready for publication.**

『断章』皆川博子

『死の泉』の吉川英治文学賞受賞式の二次会は、日本の幻想文学の担い手——極東におけるボ一の末裔たちの集いとなった。

主役・皆川博子からのこれからも「幻想小説を」との声に、心の奥に熱いものが燃った。

直後に南米へ取材旅行に出かけた皆川博子が、旅先から、ぼつり、ぼつりと、送ってきた宝石のとき詩篇を、ここに陳列する。

篇中の、水の入った宝石の話は、南米で実際に聞いた話をもとにしているとのことだ。

+

マニキアを落としたら、透明な爪と指の肉のあいだのわずかな隙間が水にみたされ、何か泳いでいる。また鑿りつぶした。

+

「そこは、歩いてはだめ」

異母姉の言葉のきつさに、びくりと足をとめると、「歩きたけりや、歩いたっていいけどさ」
そっけなく異母姉は言い足した。

「落ちたって、あたしのせいじゃないからね。あたしは、一度教えただから」

異母姉の言うとおりなら、この家は、歩いてはいけない場所、触ってはいけない場所だらけだ。

この家に来てから、一月あまりたつけれど、まだ、異母姉の命じる禁忌をおぼえきれない。二階の子供部屋から一足出ると、道に迷う。

今日、はじめて、異母姉が庭に連れ出してくれたのだ。雑草だらけだ。

「井戸だよ」

空を指す異母姉の指の先を見ながら、つい足を踏み出したら、空にむかって落ちた。

+

中身が溶けはじめたのは小指の先からで、皮膚の下がたはたほゆれる。針を突き刺してみた。他愛なく、全部入ってしまった。心臓までいくといやなので、揉んだり押したりして、苦勞して抜き出した。針の穴に、金色の長い髪の毛がとおっていた。

+

貴女の飼う水が卵生種であるか否かを初期において見極めるのはきわめて困難である。不可能であると断言してもいい。

ペットショップで扱われることはない。貴女が水に出会うのは、ふとゆきずりの草原であつ

たり、U字溝のへりであつたりする。

水がどのようにしてそこに産み捨てられたか、貴女は知らない。

母胎は、卵形の鉱石なのである。ざらついた表皮はいたって醜い。大小さまざまで、きりげなくころがつている。専門の業者は、するどく見抜く。それが貴石を秘めていることを。業者は、鋭利な裁断具をもちいて、石を半分に断ち割る。見込みがはずれ、割っても必までただの石であることもある。うまくいった場合、石の断面は、まことに美しい。まず、外郭は瑤瑤である。空洞になった内側に、紫水晶の結晶が、空洞の中心に先端をむけて林立する。

業者にはこれで十分なのである。虹色の瑤瑤が艶を帯びるように断面を磨けば、高価な商品になる。

内部をみたしていた水は、不要なのである。一顧だにせず、投げ捨てる。

通りかかった貴女は、たまたま、捨てられている水に目をむけてしまう。

文字通りうるんだ、愛らしい、そして哀しげな瞳でみつめられたら、貴女はもう、見捨てて行くことはできなくなる。

貴女は水を飼う気になる。水は、もつともつこちよい住処を貴女に求める。それは、貴女の胎内にほかならない。すくい取り、口にふくむ。

凡庸な水であれば、なにごともない。排泄されるだけである。しかし、卵生である場合、水は貴女を卵化することにいそしみはじめる。

内部から貴女は次第に変質し、石化する。水の母胎となるのは、飼い主の宿命であって、貴女がよい資質をもっていれば、醜い外皮の内に瑤瑤の層を持ち、水晶を孕む空洞となることのできる。資質が水と合致しなければ、腐敗する。

外側の醜さに惑わされず、貴女の本質を見抜いた業者は、貴女を拾い上げ、二つに断裁する。磨きをかけ、高価な値札がつけられる。

内部をみたしていた水は、一顧もあたえられず、投げ捨てられる。

こころやさしい飼い主は、貴女の後にもまたあらわれるであろうから、水は不安は持たないのである。私もそのようにして石化し、瑤瑤の層の内側に紫水晶を生やした空洞となった。水は私の内部に安住した。私が愛した水が卵生種であったこと、そして私のよい資質をもっていたことは、凡庸な私の生に光輝をあたえてくれたというべきだろう。腐敗はまぬがれた。だが、業者にみつかり、私は切断されてしまった。水は捨てられた。私はいまだに買われず、土産物屋の棚にさらされているが、水は私から貴女、そしてまた別の飼い主を誘惑している。まったく、あの子の目の可愛らしいことといったら……。

十

泣いて涙はどこへゆく。砂漠をわたる舟に積む。女の皮を帆にはって、胎児の群れが海をめ

ざす。

水妖

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	Entry No.	Total score	Rank
	2013.020	49.6	1
	2013.030	48.6	2
	2013.025	48	3
	2013.006	47.5	4
	2013.003	47	5
	2013.010	47	6
	2013.024	47	7
	2013.016	45.2	8
	2013.035	44.6	9
	2013.015	44.4	10
	2013.036	42	11
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	2013.005	39	18
	2013.018	39	19
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	2013.031	39	21
	2013.021	37	22
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“Literary Fragments”
by Minagawa Hiroko

When I removed my polish the slight crevice between my translucent nail and the flesh of my finger was flooded with water, and something swam therein. I painted it once again.

**blank line

“You shouldn’t walk there!”

Taken aback at the sternness of my elder half-sister’s words, I stopped in my tracks, whereupon she added brusquely, “If you want to walk you can walk...”

“Even if you were to fall, it wouldn’t be my fault—I’ve warned you once already.”

If my half-sister is to be believed, this house is riddled with places one mustn’t tread, places one mustn’t touch.

A little more than a month has elapsed since I arrived at this house, yet already the taboos my half-sister has dictated are too numerous to commit to memory.

I take a single step out of the children’s room on the second floor, and I am lost.

Today my half-sister took me to the garden for the first time. It is choked with weeds.

“A well!”

While gazing at my half-sister’s fingertip pointing toward the sky, unwittingly I stepped forward and, facing the heavens, plummeted.

**blank line

My insides started to liquefy originating at the tip of my little finger, with a quaking *squish* beneath my skin. I inserted the needle. Greedily, I injected every last drop. It gave rise to an unpleasant sensation as it traveled to my heart, and so I massaged and applied pressure, then arduously withdrew it. At the hole left by the needle, a long, golden strand of hair poked through.

**blank line

Discerning whether or not your water is an egg-laying variety has always been quite the perplexing matter. Might as well consider it impossible.

This isn’t the type of transaction handled by a pet shop. Your encounter with the water transpired suddenly, incidentally, on a grassy field—

**four blank lines

there you were, at the edge of a U-shaped gully.

How the water had been brought into being then discarded there, you have no idea.

Its mother’s womb is an egg-shaped aggregate of minerals. Her coarse epidermis is exceedingly unbecoming. Large and small alike, these objects are unobtrusive, ordinary. But specialized dealers perceive sharply. They hoard the precious stones. Employing their keen judgment, dealers divide them in half. There are those that fail to meet expectations, split open only to be comprised entirely of rock to the very core. But if one is lucky, the stone’s profile is truly beautiful. For a start, the outer layer is agate. Inside its hollowed interior, crystallized amethyst faces the apex of the central cavity, standing clustered together.

For dealers, this is gratifying. Once its cross-section has been polished to bear the luster of its multi-colored strata, it becomes a high-priced commodity.

The water whose interior has been violated is expendable. Without even the slightest consideration, it is cast away.

You come along, chancing to look upon the forsaken water.

You are literally choked by tears, it's so lovely, and then, struck by the gaze of a doleful pupil, you find yourself unable to abandon it and walk away.

You long to keep the water. And of you it asks a comfortable home. Nothing other than your own womb. You scoop it up, hold it in your mouth.

Because it is ordinary water, nothing happens. You just excrete it. But being an oviparous type, the water begins striving to transform you into an egg.

You metamorphose from the inside out, by degrees evolving into a rock. To become her water's womb is an owner's fate, and assuming you have a suitable constitution the inner portion of your unbecoming outer skin will take on a stratified formation, and you will develop a cavity pregnant with crystals. If your disposition and the water's are unharmonious, you will deteriorate.

The ugliness of your outer surface unchanged, a dealer who has perceived your true substance singles you out and cuts you in two. He polishes you, and an exorbitant price tag is affixed.

The water that had filled your interior is provided nothing at all, merely dispensed with.

A kindhearted owner is likely to appear after you, and so the water worries not. In this way I have also transformed into a rock, and beneath my stratification has developed a hollow that propagates crystals. The water took sanctuary inside of me. The water that I loved was of an egg-laying variety, and I possessed a good temperament, so I should say this has imparted a brilliant luster to my mundane existence. I have eluded deterioration. But, spied by a dealer, I've been severed. The water has been discarded. Having yet to be bought, I am exposed atop a souvenir shop shelf, yet from me to you and still other owners, as well, the water seduces. How charming indeed are that child's eyes...

**blank line

I weep, and where do the tears go? Stowed aboard a ship traversing the desert. Spreading out a woman's skin for their sail, a crew of embryos makes for

**four blank lines

the sea.

Beneath the manicure, water fills the tiny space between the clear nails and the flesh of the fingers, and something was swimming in it. Once again it was covered up.

*

"Don't go there."

My feet froze at the severity of my half-sister's tone. Then she added, unconcerned, "But if you want to go there, I don't care."

"It's not my fault if you fall in. I warned you."

If everything she said was true, then this house is full of places where you should not go and things that you should not touch. I have been staying in this house for more than a month now, and still the list of forbidden things was endless.

Step out of the children's room on the second floor to lose one's way immediately.

Today, my half-sister brought me out into the weed-filled garden for the first time.

"That's the well."

I looked at the sky to which my sister was pointing to, stepped out, and fell into the sky.

*

First to dissolve was inside the tip of the little finger; beneath the skin, something stirs and trembles. I tried to poke it with a sewing pin, and the whole pin went in without any resistance. Fearing that it would travel up to the heart, I rub and massaged and pushed until it came out after much effort. Through the hole of the sewing pin passed a long golden hair.

*

At the beginning, it was extremely difficult - nay, outright impossible - to tell if her pet Water was oviparous.

No pet shop would have sold it. She might have met Water passing by the meadows, or perhaps in a roadside ditch.

She has no idea how Water was born, nor how it came to be left there.

Its womb is an egg-shaped ore with an unsightly, grainy outer skin, of no fixed dimensions, rolling about unnoticed. But keen-eyed professionals see the precious stones hidden within and bring with them razor-sharp cutters, cutting the stones in half. Sometimes they miss the mark and all that is there is plain and unremarkable stone down to the very core. But if all goes well, there is great beauty to be found within the cross-section of the stone. The outer layer is fine agate, and within the hollow core, forests of crystallized amethyst stand pointing towards the center of the hollow.

To the professionals, this is all they need. The beautiful rainbow hues of finely polished agate makes for a highly-coveted commodity. The Water contained within is worthless and discarded without a second thought.

By sheer chance, the Water that was discarded catches her eye as she passes by.

It gazes at her with lovely yet sorrowful eyes, as gives justice to those very words, and she could not leave it behind.

She begins to keep Water as a pet. Water seeks from her a safe and comfortable abode, and there is no better place than inside her own body. She scoops it up and pours it into her mouth.

If it was ordinary water it would be passed out of the body, and there would be no issue. But Water is oviparous, and it begins to diligently transform her into a new womb.

Her body begins to transform and harden from within. It is the fate of Water's owners to become its womb, and if she has the makings of a good host, she would come to possess the unsightly outer skin with agate layer beneath, and crystals nurtured within the hollow core. If she was not compatible with water, she would decay and decompose.

The professional who is not fooled by her unsightly appearance and sees her true nature within would pick her up, cut her in half, polish her finely, and place an exorbitant price tag on her. The water that filled the hollow inner part is discarded without a second thought.

Water is not worried, because there will be another kind-hearted owner after her. I, too, turned into stone, with amethyst growing in the hollow inside the agate layer. Water dwelled within me. The fact that my beloved Water was oviparous, and the fact that I had the makings of a good host, should be a great honor to an unremarkable person like me. I have avoided the fate of decay. But a professional found me, cut me in half, and threw Water away, and now I lie on a souvenir shelf without a buyer, and Water has moved on from me to her, and then on to seduce yet another unsuspecting owner. Oh, those eyes, such lovely, lovely eyes...

*

Tears fall and flow beyond, onto a boat crossing the desert. The Unborn Ones hoist her skin as sail, and embark on their great voyage.

2013 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize Submission

“Excepts” by Minagawa Hiroko

When I removed my manicure, the narrow gap between the translucent nails and the flesh of my fingers filled with water, almost swimming in it. I repainted them.

**blank line

"You shouldn't walk over there."

When I stopped short, startled at the severity of my half-sister's tone, she added curtly, "You can if you want to. It's not my fault if you fall in, though. I warned you."

If my half-sister was to be believed, this house was full of places that I couldn't walk and things that I couldn't touch. It had been more than a month since I first arrived, but I still couldn't keep track of all the things I wasn't allowed to do. The moment I stepped out of the second-floor nursery, I was lost.

Today, for the first time, my sister had taken me out to the garden. It was full of weeds.

"That's the well."

I stepped unconsciously forward, following her pointing finger, and fell into nothingness.

**blank line

My insides began to melt starting from the tips of my little fingers, rippling beneath my skin. I stuck a needle in. The whole thing slipped in easily. Afraid it would go all the way to my heart, I pushed and massaged until, at last, it came out. There was a long, golden hair threaded through the eye of the needle.

**blank line

At first, it is difficult to tell whether a lady's pet water is the egg-spawning type. One might even say impossible.

Pet shops don't deal in water. Ladies find the water in gutters or in meadows they chance to pass.

They don't know how the water came to be abandoned there.

The wombs are egg-shaped crystals. Their rough skins are exceedingly ugly. Their sizes vary, and they lie around aimlessly. A dealer can spot the gems hiding within at a glance. Dealers use sharp cutters to split the stones in half. Sometimes they misguess, and the stones are mere stones all the way to the core. When things go well, however, the cut surface of the stone is truly beautiful. The outer layer is agate. In the inner cavity, dense-packed amethyst crystals jut out into the hollow center.

That's all the dealers care about. If you polish the cut faces until the rainbow agate shines, they fetch a high price.

The dealers have no use for the water that fills the inside. They toss it out without a second glance.

Sometimes, a lady will happen to spot some abandoned water in passing.

When the water fixes her with its sweet, sorrowful, literally liquid gaze, she can't pass it by.

She begins to worry about keeping the water. The water wants a more comfortable dwelling place. There is nowhere else but her own womb. She scoops it up and puts it into her mouth.

If it is ordinary water, that is the end of that. She simply passes it out. But if it is egg-spawning, the water will set earnestly about trying to turn her into an egg.

The lady changes gradually from the inside, fossilizing. Becoming the water's womb means that, if the lady has a good nature and is fated to be a host, she can gain an agate layer within an ugly outer skin and become a crystal-filled hollow. If her nature does not suit the water, she will rot.

A dealer who, unperturbed by her ugly exterior, can see the lady's true nature within will pick her up and split her in two. He will polish her and attach a high price tag.

There will surely be more kind owners after this lady, so the water does not worry. I myself fossilized and grew amethyst crystals inside an agate crust, too. The water dwelled peacefully within me. One might say that the fact that my water had been egg-spawning, and that I had been good-natured, gave a luster to my otherwise unremarkable life. I had avoided decay. But a dealer found me and split me open. He threw my water away. I was left to sit, unpurchased, on a souvenir shop shelf, but my water was off beguiling another lady, another host. My, but that child has pretty eyes!

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Where do tears go when we cry? They load them onto a ship crossing the desert. They stretch a woman's skin as a sail, and the crowd of embryos heads for the sea.

Fragments

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When she removed the polish, the tiny space between the flesh of her finger and the transparent nail was filled with water and something was swimming in it. She painted over it again.

**blank line

“Don’t walk there.”

Startled by her half-sister’s harsh tone, she stopped suddenly. “But I want to walk there. I can walk there if I want to.”

“If you fall, it’s not my fault. I warned you,” her half-sister added dismissively.

If what her half-sister said was true, the house was full of places you couldn’t walk and places you couldn’t touch. She’d been there for over a month and she still couldn’t remember all her half-sister’s prohibitions. If she took one step out of the children’s room on the second floor, she became disoriented.

Today, for the first time, her half-sister had taken her to the garden. It was overgrown with weeds.

“Look out! The well!”

Her eyes on the tip of her half-sister’s finger pointing upward, she put her foot down without thinking and fell toward the sky.

**blank line

The melting inside started from the tip of her little finger, the flesh wobbling under her skin. She tried sticking in a pin and the whole length of it went inside without any resistance. She didn’t want it to get as far as her heart, so she spent a long time pushing and pressing until the pin came out again. A long golden hair emerged from the hole where the pin had been.

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In the early stages it’s extremely difficult to determine whether your water comes from eggs or not. You might as well say that it’s impossible.

They don’t have water in the pet shop. You come across it unexpectedly walking through fields, or on the edges of drainage pipes.

You don’t know how water is born and abandoned there.

It’s born from egg-shaped ore deposits, with extremely ugly gritty skin. Coming in all sizes, these deposits can be found everywhere, lying unobtrusively. Expert dealers look deep into the heart of them to discover whether precious stones are hidden inside. The dealers have sharp cutting tools, and split the rocks in two. Sometimes their

predictions are wrong and there's only rock right through to the core. When they are successful the broken surface of the rock is magnificent.

First of all, the outer edges are agate. Then in the hollow interior, bristling formations of amethyst crystal point their tips inward toward the center.

Dealers are satisfied with this. If they polish the surface until the rainbow-colored agate shines they can sell it for a good price.

They don't need the water that's inside. They throw it away without a thought.

You happen to see the water that's been abandoned there as you're passing by.

When it looks at you with those literally brimming, adorable, but sad eyes, you can't just ignore it and walk on by.

You decide to look after the water. It's begging you to give it a good home. It will live inside you. You scoop it up and drink it.

If it's ordinary water, nothing will happen. It will just go through you. But if it's the kind that comes from eggs, it will start working to turn you into an egg.

You transform slowly from the inside outward, turning into stone. An owner's fate is to give birth to water and if you contain good qualities, you'll have a layer of agate inside that ugly skin and a hollowness where crystals will form and grow. If your qualities aren't right for the water, you'll rot.

Dealers who've seen through to the heart of you, undecieved by your ugly appearance, pick you up and split you in two. After polishing, you're given a high price.

The water that's inside you is thrown away without a thought.

Another kind owner will come along after you, so the water doesn't worry. I turned into stone like that too and became hollow, growing amethyst crystals inside a layer of agate. The water lived peacefully inside me. You could say it brought a radiance to my humdrum life that the water I loved was the kind that comes from eggs and that I contained the right qualities. I didn't rot. But I was found by a dealer and split in two. The water was thrown away. Nobody has bought me yet, and I sit exposed on the souvenir store shelf, as the water seduces first you and then another owner. Oh, to think of her darling eyes...

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When you cry, where do the tears go? They're loaded onto a ship that crosses the desert. Raising a woman's skin for a sail, a crew of fetuses heads for the sea.

2013 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize Submission

On Severance

By Minagawa Hiroko

I removed my nail polish, and the thin space between the clear nail and the flesh of my finger filled with water. Something was swimming there. I repainted the nail.

**separator

"Don't step there."

I started, my foot in mid-air at the intensity of my half-sister's words. "If you want to keep walking, go right ahead," she added coldly. "Not my fault if you fall down. You can't say I didn't warn you."

To hear my half-sister tell it, I was supposed to keep my hands and feet off just about everything in the house. It had been a whole month since we'd come here, but I still couldn't remember all of the "don't's" that she had declared. One step out of our bedroom on the second floor and I was lost.

Today, my half-sister took me out to the garden for the first time. It was full of weeds.

"It's a well." She pointed to the hole. Gazing at her fingertip, I took a step despite myself and fell into the darkness.

**separator

The melting of my insides began at the tip of my pinky with a rumble and a sloshing under my skin. I tried to stick it with the needle. Foolish of me—the entire thing went in. I didn't like the idea of it getting all the way to my heart, so I pushed and squeezed until, after much difficulty, I was able to draw it out. Threaded through the eye of the needle was a long, golden hair.

**separator

Figuring out whether the water you're tending to originated from an egg is exceedingly difficult in the early days. You might well say it's impossible.

It's not a matter that's handled at any pet shop. When you encounter your water, you might be chancing across it in a meadow, or at the edge of a gutter.

How it came to be abandoned there, you won't know.

Now, a womb is an egg-shaped stone, with a rough outer skin that's extremely unattractive. Large, small, or in between, they can be found casually lying around. The professionals see right through this, knowing that the stones hide precious gems inside. An expert will use a sharp needle to split one of them in two. It can happen that their hopes are disappointed, and that even after separating the halves, they find it's an ordinary rock through and through. If things go well, though, the stone's cross-section is truly beautiful. The contours are agate, to start. And the interior hollow is lined with a thicket of amethyst crystals, their tips pointing centerward.

For the professionals, this is far enough. But if you polish that agate cross-section until its rainbow hues turn glossy, it can fetch a high price.

As for the water that filled the interior cavity, it's useless, and disposed of without further thought.

Passing by, you'll happen to turn your gaze on this castaway.

If you can keep looking, with your lovely, mournful eyes brimming with tears, you'll know you can no longer leave it there. You'll fret about taking care of it. The water will find a better home in you: none other than the inside of your womb. Scooping it up, you'll lift it into your mouth.

If it were common water, nothing would happen. You'd merely pass it through. But if that water did come out of an egg, it'll begin to labor at turning you into an egg of your own.

Gradually, you'll transform, and mineralize from within. Becoming a new womb for the water is the fate of the caretaker. Provided that you have a good nature, underneath your unsightly crust will be a seam of agate, and you'll become a cavity for the conception of a new crystal. If the water and your disposition are not in harmony, you'll decay.

Experts who aren't fooled by your outside unseemliness will pick you out and cut you in two. They'll polish you up and stick a nice price tag on you.

The water filling your insides will be thrown away without second thought.

Note that another kind caretaker is likely to appear after you, so the water won't have any worries. I, too, mineralized in this way, and the cavity within my agate seam began to nurture an amethyst crystal, while my water lived peacefully inside of me. That the water I fell in love with was of the special sort, and had my pleasant disposition to call its own, I must say imparted some splendor to my banal life. I escaped decay. For all that, a professional still found me, and severed me in two. My water was discarded. To this very day I sit on the shelf of a souvenir shop, still unbought. But from me, the water will go on to tempt you and someday another caretaker after you. Truly, the loveliness of that young girl's eyes...

**separator

Where do tears go when cried? Onto a ship that crosses the desert. Hoist the sail of a woman's skin; a flock of fetuses has its eye on the sea.

Fragments
by Minagawa Hiroko

She took the polish off her nails, saw something swimming around in a little well of water under her pale quick. Then she painted them again.

**break

“You can’t walk over there,” said her half-sister. The harshness in her voice stopped her in her tracks. “Fine,” she went on coldly. “You want to walk over there, go ahead.”

Then: “But don’t blame me if you fall. I warned you.”

There wasn’t a place she could go or a thing she could touch in this house, if she listened to her half-sister.

She’d lived in this new house for more than a month, but she still couldn’t remember all of her half-sister’s rules.

One step out of their playroom on the second floor and she’d be lost.

Today her half-sister took her out into the yard for the first time. It was full of weeds.

“There’s a well.”

She looked at her half-sister’s finger thrust toward the sky, and she had only taken a single step before she fell up into it.

**break

It started in the tips of her pinkies. Her insides were dissolving, sloshing around inside her skin. She poked herself with a needle, but it just slipped inside and disappeared. She couldn’t let it reach her heart, so she worked hard, pushing and pulling at the skin until she could finally take it out. The needle was threaded with a long, golden hair.

**break

It’s tough to tell at first whether the water you’ve decided to keep has come from an egg. It’s impossible to tell, really.

It’s not like you can take it to the pet shop. You’ve found it quite by chance in a field, along a drainage ditch.

Why the water was abandoned there, you don’t know.

I will tell you where it came from. It was born of a rock, a mineral in the shape of an egg. Rough on the outside and quite ugly. They come in all sizes, these rocks, and you can find them anywhere. They look common enough. But they don’t fool the mineral dealer. He knows they hide gems. He uses a sharp tool and splits them in half. Sometimes he’s wrong, and he breaks one open to find that it’s just an ordinary rock. But when he’s right, the inside gleams. First a rim of agate. Then shards of purple amethyst bristling toward a hollow center.

The dealer is satisfied. He’ll polish the face till the rainbow-hued agate shines, and he’ll have an expensive item to sell.

The water inside, though, he won’t need. He’ll toss that out without a second thought.

Then you come passing by, and you happen to see the discarded water.

Once you’ve gazed upon it—with genuine tears in your eyes, your lovely, sad, eyes—you can’t leave it behind.

You make up your mind to take care of the water. You’ll need to give it a cozy place to live. What could be cozier than inside your body? So you scoop it up and swallow it.

Now, if this were ordinary water, nothing would happen. Your body would just pass it. But egg-water will start working on you immediately, turning you into an egg.

And so you will transform, bit by bit, hardening from the inside out. There is no way around it—once you are a keeper of water, it is your fate to become a bearer of water. If you have all the right qualities, underneath your ugly exterior you will become hollow and hold crystals in your agate walls. If your qualities aren’t congenial to the water, you will rot.

But your ugly exterior won't fool the dealer, he'll see through to your core, pick you up, and cut you in two. He'll give you a polish and a high price tag.

The water that once filled you, well, he'll toss that out without a second glance.

But not to worry. The water knows that another kind soul will soon come along. I was one of them, and that is how I became hard and hollow inside, rimmed with agate and amethyst. The water was content to live inside me. I suppose it let some light into my humdrum life, knowing that this water I loved had come from an egg, and that I had the right qualities inside. I was spared from rotting. But then the dealer found me, and he cut me open. He threw my water out. And here I am, left on this shelf in a souvenir shop, still unsold, while that water has already seduced me, you and its next keeper. And my, what lovely eyes she has...

**break

And where do all the tears go? Onto a ship that will cross the desert. A ship with a woman's skin for a sail, steered by a crew of the unborn toward the sea.

Removing the nail polish revealed a slender water-filled gap between nail and finger – something was swimming. I daubed over again.

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“Don’t walk *there*.”

I halted in astonishment at my elder half-sister’s harsh words, which were followed coldly with, “Well, you can walk there if you want to... but, if you fall, it’s not my fault, because I’ve already told you once.”

If her orders were to be followed, this house was full of places you could not walk or touch.

About a month had passed since I had arrived at this house, but I had yet to commit to memory the taboos she had laid down. I only had to set one foot outside of the second-floor nursery to go astray.

Today, for the first time, she took me out into the garden – absolutely choked with weeds.

“That’s a well.”

Looking at her finger indicating a hole, I unconsciously moved toward it and fell in.

**blank line

My substance started to dissolve from the tip of one of my little fingers, with hollow subcutaneous rumblings. So, I tried sticking a needle in. It sunk completely in so easily. Not wanting it to reach my heart, I kneaded and pushed until, with difficulty, it came out, the eyelet threaded with a long, golden strand of hair.

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Initially, it will be really hard to tell whether or not the water you, missy, shall have will be the oviparous kind. In fact, it would be truer to say it will be impossible to tell.

It is not stocked in pet shops. You, missy, will have stumbled across it when passing by a meadow or gutter edge.

You will not have a clue how the water has been abandoned there after birth.

Sure enough, the wombs are egg-shaped lumps of ore, the rough rinds exceedingly ugly. Casually strewn about, they come in various sizes, big and small. Skilled traders shrewdly and beadily pick them out in search of hidden gems. They come with sharp cutting tools to cleave them in two. Following up on a wrong hunch may just reveal stone stuffed to the very core. But when the choice is good, the halved faces are exceptionally beautiful. First off, the outer walls are agates. And, the cavities within

bristle with amethyst crystals, tips trained toward the hearts of the inner voids.

This is more than enough for a trader, who will buff up the cross sections until the iridescent agates shine worthy of expensive merchandise.

Not being needed, the brimming water within is discarded, without a second thought.

You, missy, in passing by, will happen to turn your eyes upon the forsaken water.

Of course, you will be unable to leave it behind, having been observed by its moist, enchanting but doleful gaze.

You will feel inclined to keep it. It will demand of you a comfier home to nestle in. And, that could be no other than your womb. So you will scoop it up and embrace it in your mouth. Nothing special in this if it is plain water, as it would just be excreted out. However, when oviparous, it will begin to unremittingly eggify you.

From inside, you will gradually change in nature and petrify. It is the owner's fate to become the water's womb. And, if you, missy, have good attributes, the ugly rind will hold within stratified agates capable of producing a cavity swollen with crystals. Yet all will be addled if your attributes are not well-suited to the water.

A trader, not caring about the ugly exterior, will spot your true substance, pick you, split you and polish up the pieces, so that hefty price tags can be tacked on.

Unheeded, the brimming water from within will be discarded, without a second thought.

But it has nothing to worry about, as doubtless another caring owner will come along after you. I too hardened, to be replaced in such a way, a belt of agate encircling a lacuna where amethysts have grown. The water dwelled safely in me. And, I ought to say that as my beloved water was the oviparous kind and my attributes good, it doubtless gave splendor to my ordinary being. I was spared addling. Yet, I was found by a trader, split in two and the water thrown away. I have yet to be purchased, left sitting on a souvenir shelf; but, the water from me will find you, missy, enticing yet another owner. Good grief, you might say, that water-babe has an adorable glint.

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Where do spilt tears go? They are stowed away on a desert-voyaging ship. With womanly skin hoisted as sails, the embryonic brood head to sea.

Excerpts

断章

by

Minagawa Hiroko

When I removed the nail polish from my finger, I noticed water had filled the little space between the clear nail and the flesh. Something was swimming down there. I paused, then daubed new polish over the nail.

†

“You can’t go there!”

My big stepsister’s harsh tone caused me to shudder to a halt. Then she bluntly added, “If you *want* to go there, I guess you can.”

“But when you say ‘I fell,’ don’t blame me. I told you so.”

Big Stepsister’s word was law. Our home was filled by things you couldn’t touch and places you couldn’t go.

†

It had been over a month since I came to this house, yet I still couldn’t remember all of Big Stepsister’s prohibitions. I would get lost if I ever took one step outside our shared bedroom on the second floor.

Today Big Stepsister brought me outside for the first time, to the garden, but it turned out to be just a bunch of weeds.

“That’s the well.”

I was so focused on the tip of Big Stepsister’s finger pointing to the sky, that when I did take my first step forward, I ended up falling skyward into the air above.

†

My insides began to liquefy, starting with the tip of my pinky; then I noticed the stuff under the skin beginning to shift around like jelly. I tried to prick the area with a needle. Oh dear. The whole needle went in and got stuck. It would be awful if it went so deep that it travelled to my heart, so I went at massaging and squeezing the flesh until, after a lot of hard work, I got it out. Then I found that – through the hole made by the needle – there ran a long golden thread of hair.

†

My lady, for you to determine at this early stage exactly whether the water you are raising is oviparous, well, it is quite a difficult endeavor. I should say it is nothing other than impossible.

This is not the kind of transaction one can have at a pet shop. When my lady encounters her water, it can occur next to a U-shaped gutter on the road or in a grassy field she happens upon. Such are the places where one meets one’s water.

There is no way for my lady to know how the water’s birth and separation will be triggered there.

In the womb, one finds an egg-shaped mineral. When the cuticle is scratched, it is quite unsightly. The minerals form in all sizes, big and small. A person specialized in the trade is keen and knows right away if the egg material is hiding precious stone. A tradesman only requires a sharp scalpel to slice the stone in half. Often, after he has cut it apart, he fails to find what he is looking for: only barren rock to the core. When things turn out well, however, the rock’s cross-section will look truly

exquisite. On the outside surface, you have agate; on the inside of the circular cavity is a forest of amethyst crystals shooting forth, stretching their tips toward the center.

These are the conditions that satisfy a tradesman. He can polish the cross-section and make the rainbow-colored agate glimmer magnificently. Then one has a product that can fetch a nice price.

The water that has passed through the interior section is quite useless. Discard it without the slightest hesitation.

Occasionally my lady may, by chance, pass by water that has been previously abandoned and find herself looking at it.

Once she stares at it with tender and loving eyes, welling up with tears, she will no doubt feel unable to look away.

My lady will worry about how to raise and care for the water. The water asks that she give it the most comfortable dwelling space. There is no better place for it to dwell than my lady's womb. Scoop it up and let it be held in your mouth.

With ordinary water, nothing happens; it is simply excreted. However, with oviparous water, this is just the start of its effort to transform my lady into an egg.

Gradually as my lady's body transforms from the inside, it will lithify. The water's womb transformation is a matter of fate, dependent upon my lady. Should she possess the right disposition, she will develop an agate later on the inside of that unsightly exterior layer. This then makes possible the formation of a cavity that in turn will conceive crystals. The egg addles if the water does not properly match the nature of its owner.

The tradesman who can see my lady's true nature will not be distracted by her ugly exterior and will pick her up and slice her apart. With some polish, she will get a high price tag attached to her.

The water that has passed through the interior section should be ejected from her body without absolutely no regret.

The water feels no anxiety about my lady after they are separated, because another new compassionate owner will come for it. I also once lithified like that and became a cavity, proliferating purple crystal life under a layer of agate. The water contentedly dwelled inside me. I suppose two things have brought a sparkle to my otherwise ordinary life: that the water I loved turned out to be oviparous, which meant, in turn, that I was by nature worthy. At least I was spared from being addled. But you know, once discovered by the tradesman, I was thereafter sundered. My water was separated from me. To this day I go unpurchased, sitting on the shelf in a souvenir shop, but my water calls for a new owner, the way it called me and called you, my lady. Alas, to think of those darling childlike eyes...

†

When a woman cries, where do her tears go? They fill a boat that will cross the desert. A throng of fetuses unfurl the sail of her skin and set out for the sea.

Fragments
by Minagawa Hiroko

When I remove my nail polish, the space between the transparent nail and the flesh is filled with water, and there is something swimming inside. I paint on more polish to cover it up.

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"You can't walk there".

The sharpness in my older half-sister's voice startles me, stopping me short. "If you really want to, go ahead", she adds coldly.

"If you slip and fall, it's not my fault. Don't say I didn't warn you".

According to her, the house is full of places where you can't walk, can't touch anything.

Although I've been living here for a month, I still can't keep track of all of her taboos and decrees. The moment I set foot outside the child's bedroom on the second floor, I am lost.

Today, for the first time, she took me out into the yard. It's full of weeds.

"There's a well there, she tells me.

Watching the tip of her finger as she points at the sky, I take an unthinking step forward, face toward the sky, and I fall.

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The tip of my little finger was the first part of me that began to melt, starting with an undulating feeling under the skin. I tried pricking it with a pin. Not realizing what I was doing, I pushed the pin all the way inside. I didn't want it to go all the way to my heart, so I pressed and pulled the skin around it to draw it back out. Protruding from the hole the pin had made was a long, silver-colored hair.

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You are just beginning to figure out whether or not the water you are carrying is egg-born, and this is causing you great hardship. You may feel it is all for nothing. This water is not something handled by a pet shop. You may chance to find it out in the prairie, or on the edge of a open drain. You don't know how it came to be born there and then abandoned. The womb it came from is an egg-shaped stone. The surface of these stones is coarse and ugly. Big and small stones are jumbled together haphazardly. They are carefully examined by the experts. But the stones conceal a secret. The experts have sharp cutting tools, with which they split the stones in half. Sometimes they fail, cutting down to the core only to find nothing more than ordinary rock. But if all goes well, the stone in cross section is simply beautiful. To begin with, the outer layer is agate. Purple crystals of amethyst are arrayed in an inner cavity, pointing in toward the center. That is what the experts are looking for. A trace of glazing covers the rainbow-colored agate, and if the cross-section is polished it will take on great value.

The water that fills the inside is worthless. It is disposed of without a thought.

Sometimes when you pass by, you look over at the discarded water.

When you see it gazing up at you with literal tears filling its pleading eyes, you find that you cannot resist anymore.

You take it in. It implores you to give it a home. Your own womb, and nowhere else. You scoop it up and hold it in your mouth.

Normal water would just pass through your body. But if it is egg-born, it begins to effect a metamorphosis in you.

You begin to change inside; you turn into stone. The destiny of those who take in the water is to become its mother's body. If your nature is good, you will form a rough, ugly surface that conceals an agate, and a hollow space will grow to hold the crystal you conceive.

If your nature does not agree with the water, it will decay.

The experts will not be deceived by the ugliness of your skin. They will recognize you for what you really are, and you will be collected and cleaved open. You will be polished and priced for sale.

They will disregard the water inside you, and will throw it away.

But there are many other kindhearted takers to come after you, so the water is not concerned. I too was transformed to stone, and inside my agate walls a hollow formed to hold my purple crystals. The water lived peacefully inside me. It was egg-born and I loved it; along with my good nature I suppose I can say that it brought light to my ordinary life. Decay was avoided. But then I was found by the experts, and I was cut open. The water was discarded. Now I sit unsold, exposed on a shelf in a souvenir shop; the water has left me, but it will lure you in, and other takers after you. Surely, the sweet innocence in that child's eyes . . .

****blank line**

The tears have been shed, and are on their way. They board a ship which will take them across the desert. Filling the sails to billow against a woman's skin, a swarm of those yet to be born heads for the sea.

“Fragments”

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I took off my manicure. There - in the small, waterlogged gap between the transparent nail and my finger - something was swimming. I painted over it again.

**blank line

“Don't walk there.”

I stopped, surprised by the sharpness in my stepsister's voice.

“Or just do what you want,” she said, coldly. “I mean, it won't be my fault if you fall. I already warned you once.”

If it were up to my stepsister, I wouldn't be allowed to walk anywhere, to touch anything in this house.

It's been over a month since I came here, but I still can't remember everything my stepsister has ruled out of bounds. I get lost as soon as I step out of the children's room on the second floor. Today, for the first time, my stepsister took me out into the garden. It's full of weeds.

“Look, a well.”

I watched her finger, pointing up at the sky, and then I stepped forward and fell, looking up at the sky.

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I began to rot from the tip of my little finger. Its insides jiggled under my skin. I stuck a needle into it, and the needle slid through effortlessly. I didn't want it to get to my heart, so I pinched and pushed until I finally pulled it out. A long golden hair was threaded through its eye.

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At first it is very difficult to tell whether or not the water you keep is fertile. It may be impossible.

You didn't get it from the pet store. You met it by chance as you passed by a field, or perhaps at the edge of a gutter. You don't know how the water was born, how it came to be abandoned.

The womb is an egg-shaped mineral. Its rough surface is extremely ugly. The womb can be of many different sizes. It lies there, nonchalant. But a specialist knows. He knows that the rock hides a precious jewel inside. He cracks the rock in two with a sharp chisel. Sometimes he's wrong – the rock is nothing but an ordinary rock to its core. But when he's right, the cross section of the rock is exceptionally beautiful. The rim is agate. The hollow inside is lined with amethyst crystals that bristle toward its center.

For the specialist, this is more than enough. Once he polishes the rim til its agate rainbow shines, the rock will be an expensive commodity.

The water inside is unnecessary. He will throw it away without the slightest thought.

You, passing by, will happen to glimpse this abandoned water.

Once you have seen it with your perfectly wet, angelic, and sorrowful eyes, you will be unable to walk away and leave it behind.

You want to make the water your pet. The water will find a more comfortable home in you, and there is no better place for it than your womb. You will scoop it up, and swallow it.

If it is ordinary water, nothing will happen. It will simply pass through you. But, if it is fertile, the water will begin to transform you into its nest.

You will gradually change, become rock. It is the destiny of the water's mistress to become its womb. If you have the potential, inside your ugly outer skin there will grow a layer of agate, a hollow pregnant with crystals. If you have no affinity with the water, you will decay.

The specialist can see into the real you, past the ugliness of your exterior. He will pick you up, and break you in two. You will be polished, and dressed with a high price tag.

The water inside you will be thrown away without a second glance.

After you there will come another kind mistress. The water does not worry. In this way I too became a rock, a shell of agate around a hollow overgrown with amethyst. The water lived a life of peace inside me. The water I loved was fertile, and I had promise – these truths should have given my ordinary life brilliance. After all, I escaped decay. But the specialist found me, and broke me in half. My water was cast away. I still sit, unsold, exposed on the shelf of a souvenir shop, but the water has moved on, is seducing you, and will seduce someone after you. Oh, her eyes are so lovely...

**blank line

Where do the tears I cry go? They're piled onto a ship that will cross over the desert. The fetuses stretch a woman's skin into a sail, and off they embark, for the sea.

I removed the nail varnish, and water filled the narrow gap between the limpid nail and flesh. I see something is swimming in it. Varnish is on again.

**blank line

“Don’t go there.”

As soon as I coiled at my half-sister’s thorny warning, she added bluntly, “though I don’t give a damn if you do.”

“You can’t blame me if you fall, because I’ve warned you once.”

Supposing she is right, this house is almost entirely untouchable, nowhere to set my foot or hands on.

It has been over a month since I came to this house, and I’m still overwhelmed by her numerous strict orders. One step out of the nursery upstairs and I am lost.

Today, the half-sister was leading me out into the garden for the first time, and it was overgrown.

“That’s a well.”

With my eyes fixed on her finger pointing at sky, I put my foot out without thinking. I fell into the sky.

**blank line

Initially, it started in the tip of my little finger that the content gradually loosened, wobbling uneasily under the surface skin. I could not resist the temptation to prick it with a pin, and it was admitted all too easily. I struggled, pushing and poking, to retrieve, fearing the pain of it reaching the heart. The pin is finally out, with a lingering thread of long, golden hair showing through the hole.

**blank line

It is very difficult to discern it from early days if the water you keep is an oviparous kind or not. I would say it *is* impossible.

It never comes from a place like a pet shop; you come across it where you happen to be, like in a weedy ground or on an edge of a roadside gutter.

You have no notion of how it ended up there.

A receptive woman is an egg-shaped ore. She looks quite horrid with its rugged shell. She could be large, or small, here and there on the ground without ever asserting. Traders can, with their keen specialist eyes, perceive the jewel secreted within. The trader then cuts the stone into halves with his razor-sharp blade. He may be disappointed, at times, to find that it was a mere stone through and through. The right one, however, exposes the aspect so mesmerizing—agate in a circumference, and a

hollow, lined with a density of amethystine quartz, all pointing to the center of the cavity.

The trader is satisfied; some polishing to give sheen to the iridescent agate will turn it into a high-priced commodity.

The water, hitherto filling the cavity, is no use to him, and it is dumped on the ground, no mercy spared.

Happened to be passing by, you throw an unintended glance at the water being cast.

A gaze of literally damp, sweet and yet sorrowful eyes catches you, stealing you of indifference.

You are seduced to keep the water. It demands an adobe more comforting, that is, in your very womb. You pick it up and let in your mouth.

Ordinary water would be of no consequence. It will pass and cause no trouble. Oviparous water will, on the other hand, start turning you into a gamete.

You begin changing from within, hardening like a rock. She who keeps the water is destined to become a receptor. With your nature so disposed, agate will form underneath your unsightly skin, enclosing the hollow with bushy quartz. If your disposition is incompatible with the water, there will be a rotting end.

Undeceived by your ugly exterior, the trader recognizes your true being. You are picked up and torn apart. You are given some polishing and adorned with a pricy tag.

The water that hitherto occupied the cavity is rejected like rubbish.

The water is undismayed, for there will be more out there, someone like you, soft and tender. I, for one, have come to become the cavity after some hardening, with amethystine quartz lining the interior of the agatoid layers. The water comfortably settled inside me. It is fair to say the facts that the water I cherished was of the oviparous kind, and that I was suitably predisposed, together brought glory to my unremarkable life. Although I did not rot, I was caught by the trader and separated. They threw out the water. No one has ever bought me and I am still on display in a shop window. Meanwhile, my water has moved on from me, flirting with you or any other prospective patrons. Who can blame him for that irresistible gaze of his?

**blank line

Do you know the destiny of the shed tears? They end up on a vessel voyaging across a desert. Sailing in woman's skin, a hoard of fetuses head to the ocean.

2013 Kurodahan Press Translation Contest Submission

Removing my nail polish, aqua fills the fraction of space between the transparent nail and the flesh. Something is swimming there. I paint over it again.

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I stop, surprised by the harshness of my stepsister's words: "You can't walk there!"

Next, tersely: "Well, you can if you want to. But I've told you once, so don't blame me if you fall over."

Going by her account, this house is mostly out-of-bounds, and full of things I mustn't touch.

The moment I leave the children's room upstairs, I am out of my depth.

Today is the first time she has brought me out to the garden. It is overgrown with weeds.

"That's a well."

My eyes are fixed on the tip of my stepsister's finger, pointing to the sky. One step, and I tumble towards the azure.

**blank line

A subcutaneous quivering in the tip of my pinky, from where I began to come undone. I pricked it with a pin. Effortlessly, it became completely submerged. Fearing it could reach my heart, I squeezed and pushed, removing it with some effort. A long, golden hair threaded through the pin prick.

**blank line

Woman, knowing whether the aqua you possess can bear *ovum* is initially near impossible. I can say that with certainty.

Aqua is not to be found in a pet store. A chance meeting on a meadow, or the edge of the gutter, is where you first encounter aqua.

Woman, you know not how it is that aqua is born and discarded there.

The *matrix*: an ovoid mineral. They lay about, all shapes and sizes, covered in rough, most unsightly skin. A keen specialist's gaze can penetrate, can spy a hidden gem. This lapidist—armed with a sharp cutter, splits the rocks in two. Should his hunch prove wrong, there is nothing to be found. But if Lady Luck smiles upon him, the stone reveals its gorgeous profile. Enclosed in agate, the cavernous interior bears amethyst, a

cluster of spears reaching into the void.

The cutter is satisfied. A worthy price awaits once the surface, buffed, reveals its prismatic agate ring.

The aqua, which filled the midst, has lost its use. Discarded, unnoticed.

Woman, chancing by, espies the forsaken liquid.

You can no longer avert your gaze, with those wet, pretty, forlorn eyes.

You desire to possess it, and the water longs to nest in you. “My *matrix*, where else?” as you scoop it to your lips.

Ordinary aqua would just be excreted, inconsequentially. Yet fertile aqua sets to work, to impregnate you.

This gradual petrifying change starts from within. It is the fate of the possessor to bear aqua. Stone woman, is it in your nature to produce agate under that loathsome crust? Will your cavity conceive crystal? If your attributes do not accord with aqua, you putrefy.

Unperturbed by external appearance, the gem hunter garners then dissects you, perceiving what you possess.

Polished, you are valuable.

Aqua, which filled you, is thoughtlessly discarded.

But aqua is calm, knowing there will be other kind mistresses. I too was petrified. And within my void grew an agate wall, within which bloomed the amethyst. Aqua found contentment in me. You could say I was possessed of favourable properties, and this aqua I adored was fertile, which brought glory to this banal woman. I averted degeneration. Yet I too was discovered and dissected, the water forgotten. I still sit, exposed on that souvenir shop shelf, awaiting a buyer. But my aqua seduces you, and will lure yet another. “Your child’s eyes are irresistible!”

**blank line

Our tears flow whither? Stored on a ship, traversing the desert. Hoisting the sail, a woman’s skin, the spawn of her womb set course to sea.

Fragments

When the nail varnish was removed, the little crevice between finger and bare fingernail filled with water. Something was swimming in it. I repainted my nails.

‘You mustn’t walk there.’

I stopped walking, startled by my half-sister’s harsh tone.

‘Well, you can if you want to,’ she added curtly. ‘But if you fall, it won’t be my fault. ’Cause I did tell you not to.’

According to my half-sister, this house was full of places you couldn’t walk, places you couldn’t touch.

We had come to the house over a month ago, but I still hadn’t managed to memorise all of the taboos she prescribed. If I took one step out of our room on the upper floor, I was lost.

Today, for the first time, she took me out into the garden. It was full of weeds.

‘That’s a well.’

As I watched my half-sister’s finger pointing to the empty space, I stepped forward without realising, and fell towards the void.

The dissolution of my body started with the tip of the little finger, which became soft under the skin. I tried poking it with a needle. The entire needle slid in easily. I didn’t want it to go all the way to my heart, so I rubbed and pushed at it and managed, with great effort, to get it out again. Threaded through the eye of the needle was a long blonde hair.

You see, madam, at first it’s extremely difficult to ascertain whether the water you are raising is oviparous or not. One could even assert that it is impossible. It’s not something you could get at a pet shop. Your meeting with the water was accidentally in passing - in a meadow, maybe, or on the edge of a gutter. You didn’t know how the water had come to be born and abandoned there.

The water’s womb is an egg-shaped crystal, whose rough epithelium is very ugly. They roll nonchalantly about - some big, some small. An expert gem trader can see through this exterior: it conceals precious stones. The trader takes a sharp cutting tool and cuts the stone in two. There is a small possibility that, when cut, it will turn out to be ordinary stone right down to the core. But if things go according to plan, the cut face of the stone will be extremely beautiful. The outer layer is agate. In the hollow inside, amethyst crystals crowd close together, their pointed tips facing the centre.

For the trader, this is enough. If they polish the rainbow agate until it shines, it will fetch a high price.

The water inside the stone is useless to them. They throw it away without a backward glance.

This discarded water happened to catch your eye as you were passing. Your compassion overflowed; it was adorable, and when it looked at you with its sad eyes, you found yourself unable to abandon it as well. You wanted to keep it. The water

came closer, asking you for a home. That home was none other than your own womb. You scooped it up and put it in your mouth.

If you do this with ordinary water, nothing will happen to you: it will simply pass through you. But if it's oviparous water, it will start to work at making you into an egg.

You will gradually transform from the inside, turning into stone. Becoming a womb for water is the owner's destiny - if you have the right disposition, you can have a layer of agate inside an ugly exterior, you can become hollow and pregnant with crystals. If your disposition does not agree with the water, you will decay.

Undeceived by your ugly exterior, a trader who has discerned your contents will take you up and split you in half. If you are polished, you'll fetch a high price.

The water inside you will be thrown away without a backward glance.

The water won't have to worry, though - doubtless another soft-hearted owner will appear after you. I too turned to stone like that, became hollow, sprouted amethyst crystals inside a layer of agate. I kept my water safe inside me. You could say that the fact that my beloved water was oviparous, and that I had the right disposition to raise it, brought splendour into my ordinary existence. I have avoided decay. But I was found by a trader and split in half. My water was thrown away. I have not yet been sold - I am on display on the shelf of a souvenir shop - but the water seduced me as it seduced you, and as it will its next owner. Its eyes are just so adorable...

Where do tears go when they have been cried? They accumulate in boats that cross the desert. Unfurling sails made of women's skin, herds of embryos head towards the sea.

Morsel by Minagawa Hiroko

I took off the nail polish. In the water-filled bit of space between nail and finger, something floated. I painted it out again.

**blank line

"You're not allowed there."

At the harshness of her words, my foot jerked to a stop.

"Go ahead if you want," she added flatly. "It's not my fault if you fall. I warned you."

Based on my half-sister's words, this house is nothing but rooms I'm not supposed to enter, things I'm not supposed to touch.

It's been a little over a month since I came, but I still haven't memorized everything she's forbidden me. One step outside of the second floor nursery and I'm lost.

Today, for the first time, she brought me out to the garden.

It's full of weeds.

"That's the water well."

My eyes on her fingertip pointed at the sky, I took a step and fell face up.

**blank line

My insides began dissolving from the tip of my pinky finger. There were tremors beneath my skin. I pierced myself with a needle to see. The entire thing slipped in unhindered. I didn't want the needle getting all the way to my heart so I pressed and squeezed, and painstakingly drew it out. Threaded through the needle's eye was a long strand of blonde hair.

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Early in the term, it is exceedingly difficult to discern whether the water you are raising will produce eggs. One might even say it's impossible.

You did not go through a pet shop. You happened upon the water in some grassy field or at the edge of a gutter.

How it came to be there, birthed, then abandoned, you don't know.

The womb is an egg-shaped mineral. Its rough skin is extremely ugly. It's found in various sizes just lying about. A specialized dealer can distinguish between them -- between those that hold hidden gems and those that don't. Such a specialist would utilize a sharp instrument to slice the ore in half. Sometimes the dealer is mistaken and the ore is nothing more than stone throughout. When things go according to expectation, however, the cross-section revealed is dazzling indeed. The outer layer is agate, and at the center of the inner cavity are closely grouped amethyst crystals.

This is enough for the dealer. Polished until the rainbow-colored agate is lustrous, the ore becomes a costly merchandise.

The water that filled the ore is without use and discarded without a second thought.

It catches your eye as you happen to pass by.

Just as its name indicates, the water is wet, and the sight of its lovely, plaintive eyes, leaves you unable to continue on your way without it.

You decide to keep it. The water seeks in you a home: your womb. You pick it up and place it in your mouth.

Were the water ordinary, it would be nothing. The water would merely be discharged. However, if it is the egg-producing kind, the water promptly begins to soak through you and transform you into an egg.

You gradually begin to metamorphose and petrify from the inside out. Becoming a womb for the water is the fate of a water's owner. If you are possessed of superior qualities, you may develop a layer of agate beneath an unsightly outer shell, and bear crystals in the

hollow inside of yourself. If your innate qualities are not compatible with the water, you decay.

The dealer who sees past your repugnant exterior to your true nature will pick you up and cut you in two. They'll polish you up, then attach an expensive price tag to you.

The water that filled your inside will be thrown out.

The water is never anxious, though, because there will be other kind-hearted masters after you. I, too, became stone in this way, growing amethysts in my hollow beneath my layer of agate. The water lived peacefully within me. The water I loved being an egg-bearer, and my pleasing qualities, brought brightness to my unexceptional life. I was freed from decay.

Still, I was found by a dealer and sliced in half. My water was thrown away. I remain unsold, sitting on a shelf in a gift shop. But the water has moved on from me, to you, and after, she lures in a new owner. Ah, but the loveliness of her eyes...

**blank line

Where do the tears go? In a boat to cross deserts. Under a sail of her skin, a swarm of embryos set out for the sea.

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Fragments

by Hiroko Minagawa

*

After I had removed the nail polish, water filled the small spaces between my clear fingernails and the flesh of my fingers. And inside this water, something swam. I painted my nails once more.

*

“Don't walk there!”

The harshness of my older stepsister's words stopped me in my tracks.

“Well, you can if you want,” she added coldly.

“But if you fall over, it won't be my fault. I've already warned you once.”

If I followed my stepsister's advice, the entire house would be nothing but places I couldn't walk and things I couldn't touch. A month had already passed since I came to live here but I still couldn't remember all of her rules about the things I couldn't do. As soon as I stepped out of our room on the second floor, I was lost.

Today, for the first time, my stepsister took me out into the garden. Nothing but weeds.

“Look. The well,” she said.

As I gazed at her skyward pointing fingertip, I stepped forward, falling towards the sky.

*

Beginning with the tip of my little finger, my insides melted away, flesh quivering beneath the skin. I took a needle and effortlessly thrust it all in. I did not want it to travel to my heart, so I prodded, kneaded, and yanked the needle out. Its eye held a strand of long, golden hair.

*

Knowing early on whether or not the water a woman nurtures will be egg-bearing is extremely difficult. It is impossible, I swear.

You will not find this water in a pet store. You will only discover it when walking through a meadow, or at the edge of a U-shaped drain. Nor will you know how that water came to be born and then abandoned in this place.

Its womb is found in egg-shaped minerals with rough and ugly surfaces. The rocks come in various sizes, large and small, and lie about unobtrusively. The merchants have expert eyes for finding the right rocks, the ones with precious stones hidden inside. The merchant uses a sharp cutting tool to split the rock in two. Sometimes the merchant is mistaken and cuts it in half to find nothing but rock. But if they have chosen carefully, they will find a stunningly beautiful cross-section inside. To begin with, an agate skin. Then, inside the cavity, a mass of amethyst crystals grows toward its centre. This is all the merchants need. They now have only to polish the rainbow-coloured agate to make expensive products.

For the merchants, the water that filled the cavity is useless. They throw it away without a second glance. But you will be drawn to the discarded water as you pass by. Its sweet, sad, teary eyes will look back at you. You cannot abandon it. You begin to want to care for the water. It asks you for a more comfortable home. And this home will be inside your womb. You cup the water in your hand and drink. If it is ordinary water, nothing will happen. It merely passes through. But if the water is egg-bearing, it will begin to transform you. You will mutate from the inside out and gradually turn to stone. It is the host's destiny to become a womb for the water. If you are a good match you will grow layers of agate within an ugly outer shell and become a cavity that can bear crystal. But if you are a poor match for the water, you will rot.

A merchant who is not deceived by the ugliness of your outer shell and is able to see your true quality will pick you out and split you in two. You will be polished and labelled with an expensive price tag. The water that filled the cavity is thoughtlessly tossed away. But the water is unafraid; there will be another kind-hearted host just like you. I was transformed in this way and calcified into stone. I became a cavity that bore amethyst. The water lived peacefully within me. I am moved to say that the egg-bearing nature of this water I nurtured, as well as my being such a good match, cast a shining light onto my otherwise mediocre life. I escaped decay.

And then a merchant found me and cracked me into pieces. The water was abandoned. And now I sit, still unsold, on the shelf of a gift shop. The water has left me and is now seducing you, its next host, and will then seduce another. Ah, just look at its alluring eyes...

*

Where do your tears go when you cry? Loaded aboard a ship that crosses the desert beneath a sail of female skin, they are a flock of embryos travelling towards the sea.

----- End of Translation -----

Extracts

by: Minagawa Hiroko

The solvent revealed something swimming in the narrow, water-filled fissure between the flesh and the fingernail—the transparent nail was painted over, polished once again.

“You can’t walk there.”

Taken aback by the overly harsh words of her stepsister, she stopped dead in her tracks.

“You can walk there if you want, of course, but don’t say I didn’t warn you if you fall in—you have been warned,” her stepsister added bluntly.

If she obeyed her stepsister’s rules right down to the very letter, there was nothing she could do, and nowhere she could go in the entire house—it had been just over a month since she came to stay at the house, but she still hadn’t memorized all of the rules that had been laid down by her stepsister—she would have gotten lost if she set even one foot outside of the nursery on the second floor.

That day was the first time that her stepsister had brought her out into the yard; it was overgrown with weeds.

“Well,” her stepsister pointed.

At the moment when she went to step, she looked up at the tip of her stepsister’s outstretched finger, and fell down into the well as she gazed up at the sky.

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The solvent started to dissolve the fingertips; the flesh beneath the skin had, by then, already liquefied.

Devoid of all compassion, she penetrated the skin with the tip of her needle and thrust in the shaft up to the hilt—careful not to prick the heart, she squeezed and massaged the needle along its course up until its withdrawal—a long, gold-colored hair had been threaded through its eye.

****blank line****

In the nascent stage, it was very hard (presumably inconceivable) to determine whether the lady was carrying egg-laying water; that vital fluid of life forms wasn’t something to be found in pet shops or aquariums. The lady had encountered the water (although it had not been planned) at a u-shaped drainage ditch along the skirt of a green grassland—all the while unaware of how the water came to be delivered, and discarded, in a place of such degree.

The vivariums were wombs of egg-shaped crystal ores; the outer layer of their skin was gritty and grotesque; they were as varied in proportions as they were scattered in location.

Experts with a keen eye could see; they could see through to what the precious stones hid beneath. They used a sharp-edged cutting-tool to split the stones in half—misjudge and there was the possibility of finding nothing more than stone down to the core; if the splitting of the stone went just as was expected, the cross-section that resulted was a thing of beauty and perfection. The outer layer of the stone was a variegated agate; the cavernous center was a cluster of purple quartz, crystallized and aiming towards the central core like the tapered bows of a fleet of ships jutting into the harbor. By polishing the rainbow-colored agate to a glossy luster, the stones become highly value merchandise—enough to satisfy the experts. The water that filled the central core was a waste product, and was discarded at once without any reluctance.

****blank line****

Word for word, this is how it went down:

The lady just so happened to turn her eyes towards the discarded water as she was walking by, and seeing those sad, adorable, puppy-dog eyes gaze at her, she could not turn her back on the water, so she decided to carry it, and it sought the most comfortable environment in her; that place was no other than inside the lady’s uterus. She scooped up the

water and held it between her lips. Nothing would happen if the water were ordinary; it would simply be excreted through the urinary tract. Something would happen, however, if the water were egg-laying; it would incubate itself inside the lady.

The lady stagnated gradually from inside, and eventually petrified. Manifesting as a surrogate womb for the water was dependent on the destiny of the host: if the lady had a habitus that wasn't suitable for the water, the lady would merely stagnate; if the lady had a habitus that was suitable for the water, the lady could become a surrogate—she would grow hollow in her pregnancy of crystals, and her unsightly outer skin would be covered in a shiny layer of agate.

Not to be misled by an ugly exterior, the experts detected the inner beauty of a lady's interior. They selected, then, a specimen based on what was growing in the abdomen, and sliced the hosts, from pillar to post, in half about their navels—if cut just right, and polished nice, they could fetch a handsome price. That liquid source of life filling the lady's core could be discarded without thinking twice; another kind-hearted host would surely come along, so there was no reason for the water to carry any misgivings.

I, too, was petrified in that fashion. The water I carried was of the egg-laying variety, and I had a suitable habitus; the water was satisfied where it sat inside me. I grew hollow. Purple crystals lived within, growing beneath an agate layer. In a sense, my banal existence had been given some luster—I avoided stagnation.

I was discovered by the experts, however, and mutilated. The water was discarded, of course, but I am on display on the shelf of a souvenir shop, waiting to be sold. The water had seduced me, the lady, and many other hosts. If anyone as much as mentions the sweetness of that child's eyes—

****blank lines****

I weep tears cast off to shadows.

Loaded onto vessels that cross over sands of rainless lands—set with the sails woven from the skins of fair, young maidens—a horde of fetuses set out for the seas on distant shores.

Fragments – Minagawa Hiroko

Taking off the nail polish, I saw that the slight gap between the clear nail and the flesh was filled with water. Something was swimming. I painted over it.

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“You can’t walk there.”

I stopped suddenly in mid-step at the severity of my elder half-sister’s words.

“Of course, if you wanna walk there, you can...” she quickly added. “But it’s not my fault if you fall. ‘Cause I told you not to.”

Were I to do what my half-sister tells me to, this house would be full of places I mustn’t walk and things I mustn’t touch. Though more than a month has passed since coming here, I cannot possibly remember the prohibitions she has imposed. I become lost when I step one foot out of the second floor children’s room.

Today, for the first time, she took me out into the garden. It was full of weeds.

“That’s a well.”

While looking at my half-sister’s fingertip pointed at the sky, I took a step forward without meaning to, and I fell skyward.

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It was from the tip of the little finger that the contents began to melt. The area under the skin jiggled. I tried pricking it with a needle. The whole thing slid in all too easily. Thinking it would be bad news if made it to my heart, I pressed and pushed and removed it with effort. A long, golden hair had passed through the needle’s eye.

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It is extremely difficult to determine in the first trimester whether you, my lady, bear the type of water that lays eggs or not. An impossibility, even.

The water is not found in pet stores. You came across it casually passing in a field or at the edge of a U-shaped ditch. You do not know how the water came to be abandoned there.

Wombs are egg-shaped geodes. Their epithelial tissue is rough to the touch and exceedingly ugly. They come in all shapes and sizes, and are quite common. A specialty trader can keenly perceive which of them are secreting away precious stones. He splits the rock in half with a sharp cutting tool. Sometimes, contrary to expectation, it is plain rock to the core after splitting. But when all goes well, the cut surface of the rock is truly beautiful. The outer rim is agate. Amethyst crystals line the hollowed out inside, all pointing toward the center of the cavity.

For the trader, this will do. After he polishes the cut surface so that the rainbow-hued amethyst takes on a luster, the geode becomes valuable merchandise.

The water that had filled the inside is unnecessary. It is thrown out without a second thought.

Passing by, you happen to notice the discarded water. You are unable to just leave it when it looks up at you ruefully, its adorable eyes literally moist with tears.

You feel an urge to care for it. The water seeks a more comfortable habitat from you – inside your womb. You scoop it up and hold it in your mouth.

Nothing special happens if it is commonplace water; it would just be excreted. In the case of an egg-laying type, however, the water begins its work of turning you into an egg.

You begin a gradual transformation from the inside, turning into stone. It is the destiny of the water’s caretaker to become its womb. Should you possess high qualities and talents, you may become a cavity swollen with crystals, having an agate layer beneath an ugly outer crust. If your characteristics are not compatible with the water, you will decay.

The trader who is undeceived by the outward ugliness and discerns your true nature will pick you up and split you in two. After polishing, he can put a high price tag on you.

The water that had filled you inside is thrown away without further consideration. It is not anxious, because after you, another kind-hearted caretaker shall appear.

In this way, I, too, became rock, became a cavity sprouting amethyst within an agate layer. The water dwelled within me. I should probably tell you that my beloved water was an egg-laying type, it had my good qualities, and it brought a brightness and splendor into my commonplace life. I avoided decay. But, I was found by a trader and split apart. The water was discarded.

Here I am, still on a gift shop shelf, fading and unsold. The water has passed from me, to you, and on to tempt another caretaker. Such lovely eyes that child has ...

**blank line

Where do tears go after crying? They are stacked aboard a boat that plies the desert. Attaching the skin of a woman to the sail, a group of unborn children sets a course for the sea.

Fragment, by Minagawa Hiroko

After I'd removed the nail polish, the tiny gaps between my translucent nails and the flesh of my fingers were filled with water, as though they were swimming. Then I filled them in again.

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"Don't walk over there."

But no sooner had the harshness of my stepsister's words brought my feet to a sudden stop then she added curtly:

"Well, walk there if you want, but if you fall it won't be my fault, because I already told you once not to do it."

It was just like she had said—this house was full of places you couldn't go and things you couldn't touch. It had already been more than a month since I'd come here, but I still couldn't remember everything that my stepsister had ordered me not to do.

As soon as I set one foot out of the kids' room on the second floor, I'd be lost.

Today, my stepsister had taken me out into the garden for the first time. It was choked with weeds.

"It's a well."

As I looked up in the sky where my stepsister was pointing, my next step took me tumbling towards the sky.

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My insides began melting from the tip of my little finger, and there was a soft tapping and shaking under my skin. I tried inserting the needle. Out of idle curiosity, I pushed it in all the way. I didn't want it to hit my heart, so I massaged and pushed, and had a hard time getting it out. A long golden hair ran through the eye of the needle.

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It is initially almost impossible—no, it *is* impossible—to tell whether the water you're keeping is oviparous or not.

This isn't something that you can have taken care of at a pet shop. You come into contact with water by, say, casually passing by it on a prairie, or along the edge of a U-shaped ditch.

You don't know how the water ended up there.

A womb is an egg-shaped ore. Rough skin is so very ugly, just nonchalantly scattered everywhere in big and small pieces. An expert dealer has a fine eye for telling. Whether an ore contains any precious stones. A trader uses precision instruments to split a rock in two. Sometimes he gets it wrong, and when he breaks a stone in half it's nothing but stone all the way through. When he gets it right, though, the cut face of the rock is just gorgeous. The outer crust is agate, but a hollow has formed within, and amethyst crystals are arrayed like trees inside, all growing up toward the hollow's center.

For the trader, this is enough. If you polish up the cut face so that the iridescent agate shines, then you can sell it for a good price.

The water that had filled the inside is useless. It's tossed out without so much as a second thought.

And you just happen to pass by and glance down at the water that has been discarded. Once you'd been seen in those literally glistening, charming, sad-looking eyes, there was no way you could have just forsaken them and walked away.

You wanted to keep the water, like a pet. The water is asking you for the most comfortable place ever to live. And that place has to be within your womb. You ladle it up, and hold it in your mouth.

If it were just any old water, then nothing would happen. It would just be excreted later

as waste. If it's oviparous, though, then the water will start working powerfully to make you into an egg.

You gradually change from the inside. You fossilize. It's the destiny of the keeper to become a water womb. If you're of good disposition, then your ugly outer skin will form an inner layer of agate, and you'll be able to develop a hollow space that will conceive a crystal. If your disposition doesn't match the water, you'll rot.

Heedless of your external ugliness, the trader who discerns your true nature will pick you up and split you in two. He'll polish you up, and you'll be able to wear a price tag showing a high price.

The water that filled you up inside will be tossed out without even a second thought.

The water isn't concerned, though, because a compassionate keeper might show up after you, too. That's also how I fossilized, and grew into a hollow space that gave birth to amethysts in an inner layer of agate. The water lived in peace within me. Maybe I should say that the fact that the water I loved was oviparous, and the fact that I had a good disposition, shone a light into the life of run-of-the-mill me. I avoided rotting. But, I was found by a trader, and cut open. The water was thrown away. No one has bought me yet, even though I sit on the shelf of a gift shop for all to see. The water calls out from me to you, or to another keeper.

What? Now that you mention that girl's lovely eyes...

**blank line

Where do the tears go when you cry? They cross the desert and get loaded into a boat. A woman's skin is the sail, and a crowd of unborn children goes looking for the sea.

Literary Fragment by Minakawa Hiroko

When I mess up my nail polish, the small space between the clear nail and the flesh of my finger is filled with water; it seems to run together. I paint it over again.

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“Don’t walk there!” Surprised by my half-sister’s harsh tone, I stop my foot. “But if you wanna walk there, you can,” she added curtly. “If you fall, it’s not my fault. Because now I’ve warned you.”

If I follow what my half-sister says exactly, this house is littered with places where it isn’t okay to walk or that aren’t okay to touch. It’s been over a month since I came to this house, but I still can’t remember all of my half-sister’s taboos. If I take one step outside of the children’s room on the second floor, I get lost.

Today, for the first time, my half-sister took me out to the garden. It was full of weeds.

“That’s the well.”

As I looked to the sky where my half-sister was pointing, I accidentally stepped forward, and I fell facing the sky.

**blank line

My insides started melting from the tip of my little finger, and things started to waver underneath my skin. I tried poking in a needle. The entire thing slipped in easily. I didn’t want it to go all the way to my heart, so I massaged and pushed and carefully extracted it. There was a long, yellow hair through the eye of the needle.

**blank line

It is very difficult to ascertain in the beginning whether or not the water you are keeping is oviparous. You could even claim it is impossible.

It is not held in any pet shop. You just happen to meet the water, perhaps when passing through a meadow or on the edge of a drainage ditch.

You don’t know how the water came to be thrown away there.

Its womb is an egg-shaped crystal. The crystal’s rough skin is extremely unattractive. They come in various sizes, and can be found casually scattered around anywhere. An expert merchant would detect them with pinpoint accuracy. They could tell that it is hiding a valuable stone. The merchant, using sharp cutting tools, would strike and break the rock in half. Sometimes, their guess will be off, and it will just be a plain rock all the way through. If all goes well, the exposed cross-section of the rock is genuinely beautiful. Firstly, the surroundings are agate. The hollowed-out center bristles with fragments of purple crystal thrusting their points out into the empty space.

For a merchant, this is enough. If you polish the exposed face so that the iridescent agate glistens, it becomes a valuable commodity.

The water that filled the cavity is unnecessary. It is ignored and thrown away.

As you pass by, your glance happens to fall upon the discarded water. It is adorable, literally wet with tears; and as it gazes at you with seemingly sad eyes, you can no longer overlook and pass it by.

You feel like keeping the water. The water seeks in you a more pleasant place to reside. That can only be found in your womb. You scoop it up, and hold it in your mouth.

If this were ordinary water, there would be no problem. It would simply be excreted. However, if it is oviparous, the water will begin working to turn you into an egg. You will slowly change from the inside out, becoming stone. Becoming the water’s womb is the fate of the one who keeps it; if you have good qualities, you could contain a hollow space laden with crystals, a vein of agate under an unattractive shell. If your qualities do not match up perfectly with the water, you will decay.

Not being fooled by your outward ugliness, the merchant who sees your true qualities will pick you up and break you in two. You will be polished and given a high price tag.

The water that filled you up will be thrown away without a second thought.

The water is not afraid, for another kindhearted person will come along and care for it after you. I also turned to stone that way, and became a hollow space in which purple crystals could be born within an agate vein. The water lived peacefully inside me. I would have to say that the fact that the water I loved was oviparous, and that I possessed good qualities, was a source of radiance in my ordinary life. I escaped decay. However, I was found by a merchant and cut apart. The water was thrown away. Even now I am sitting unpurchased on the shelf of some gift shop, and the water has gone on to lure you, and then some other caretaker. Honestly, its eyes seemed so sweet...

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When you cry, where do the tears go? They load themselves onto a ship to cross the desert. With a woman's skin set as the sail, a group of fetuses sets its sights on the sea.

Fragments
by Minagawa Hiroko

When I take off the nail polish, the tiny space between my sheer fingernail and the flesh of my finger is filled with water, with something swimming through it. I painted over it again.

*

"I wouldn't walk over there."

I stopped short at the harshness of my half sister's words. "Go ahead and walk there if you want," she added coldly.

"Cause it's not my fault if you fall. 'Cause I told you not to."

If everything is just as my half sister says, this house is riddled with places you can't walk, places you can't touch.

It's been a little over a month since I got here, but I still can't remember everything half sister has made rules against.

I take one step out of the kids' room upstairs and I lose my way.

Today is the first time half sister has ever taken me out to the garden. It's covered in weeds.

"Look, it's a well."

As I looked up at half sister's fingertip pointed at the sky, before I knew it I had taken a step, and fallen toward the sky.

*

When my insides began to melt, it started from the tip of my little finger, with a jiggling underneath my skin. I tried sticking it with a needle. Just like that, the whole thing slipped right in. It'd be a pain if it went all the way to my heart, so I rubbed it and pushed it, and eventually managed to pull it out. There was a long golden hair running through the eye of the needle.

*

In the early stages, it is extremely difficult to determine whether the water you are caring for is the type that hatches from eggs. In fact, one could call it impossible.

It's not something they sell at pet stores. When you come across the water, it's in a grassy field you just happen to be passing by, or at the end of a roadside gutter.

How the water comes to be there, abandoned at birth, you do not know.

The womb is an egg-shaped ore. Its gritty outer skin is terribly unattractive. They come in all sizes, rolling around lackadaisically. The expert shopkeeper has an eye for these things. He knows when they harbor gems. Using a sharp cutting tool, the shopkeeper splits the stone in two. Sometimes his hopes are dashed, and he splits it open to find nothing but rock down to the core. When it goes well, though, the cross section of the stone is truly beautiful. For one thing, the outer edge is lined with agate. Inside of that, clusters of amethyst crystals extend their points into the hollow center.

That's all the shopkeeper needs. If he polishes up the surface so the rainbow-colored agate takes on a nice luster, it will fetch a nice price.

He has no use for the water that was filling the inside. He throws it out without giving it a second thought.

As you pass by, you just happen to turn your eyes toward the discarded water. It looks up at you with those (literally) watery eyes—charming, with a touch of sadness. You can no longer leave it behind.

Now you want to care for the water. The water is begging you for a comfier place to live. Where better than inside your womb! You scoop it up, and take it into your mouth.

If it were just ordinary water, nothing would happen. It would simply be flushed out. But, if it's the kind that hatches, the water goes to work turning you into an egg.

You gradually transform, turning to stone from the inside out. Becoming the water's womb is its master's fate, and if you have a good nature, you can grow a layer of agate under your ugly outer skin, and your hollow inside can become pregnant with crystals. But if your nature doesn't agree with the water, you rot.

Not fooled by the ugliness of the outside, the shopkeeper sees through to your true nature. He picks you up and splits you in two. He applies some polish and sticks a high price tag on you.

The water that had filled you up inside, he throws away, never giving it a second thought.

Even after you're gone, some other kind and gentle master will probably show up, so the water isn't

worried. I, too, turned to stone this way, hollowed out and growing amethysts inside a layer of agate. The water lived peacefully inside me. I suppose I should say it was a gift, that it brought some light into my ordinary life to know that the water I loved was the kind that hatches from eggs, that I had a good nature. I was able to avoid rotting. But I was found by the trader, and I was cut in two. The water was thrown away. And I still haven't been sold. I'm just sitting here on display on the souvenir shop shelf, while the water has gone from me to you, and then moved on to bewitch a new owner. Honestly, when I remember how lovely that child's eyes were...

*

Where do tears go when you cry? They're loaded up in a boat that crosses the desert. The throng of unborn children hoists a sail of woman's skin, heading for the sea.

“Fragmented”

by Minagawa Hiroko

I removed my nail polish to find the crack between translucent nail and flesh brimming with water, and something swimming in it. I painted over it again.

†

Don't walk there!

I stopped in my tracks, taken aback by the harshness of my half-sister's words.

But you can if you want to, she added curtly. *If you fall, it won't be my fault. You can't say I didn't warn you.*

According to my half-sister, just about everything in this house is out of bounds. I've been here just over a month now, but I still can't figure out where exactly I'm allowed to go or what I can touch. The moment I step out of the upstairs children's room, I'm lost.

Today, for the first time, she brought me out into the garden overrun with weeds.

That's a well, you know.

Following the tip of her finger with my gaze, I inadvertently took a step forward and fell into space.

†

The substance began to dissolve and wobble beneath the skin on the tip of the little finger. I inserted a needle, but it somehow slipped all the way in. I didn't want it to reach the heart, so I kneaded and pushed at it until at last it came out again—threaded with a long, golden hair.

†

Initially you didn't know whether the water in your care was of the egg-birthing type or not. It was impossible to tell.

It wasn't from a pet shop. You just happened to encounter it in grass, at the edge of a gutter.

How it came to be abandoned there, you don't know.

Its womb is an egg-shaped crystal with a rough outer layer that is quite unappealing. These come in various sizes and lie there unobtrusively, but a trader can see right through them, to the gem concealed within. He takes out his sharp cutter, and severs them in two. Sometimes he is mistaken, and the core turns out to be just an ordinary stone. If he is right, though, a cross section of pure beauty is revealed: first, an outer band of agate; then, in a hollow cavity, amethyst crystals bristling from the center to the tip.

This is what the trader was after. He will polish the cross-section of iridescent agate to produce the glow that will transform it into a valuable commodity. He has no need for its inner water, and throws it away without the slightest consideration.

You happen to be passing by, and your eye chances upon the discarded water. Fixed in its literally moist gaze, endearing and sorrowful, you cannot bring yourself to abandon it. You make up your mind to keep it. It demands the utmost in comfort from you—to be kept in your womb, no less. You scoop it up, and take it into your mouth.

With ordinary water, nothing would happen—it would simply be excreted. Egg-birthing water, however, immediately sets about turning you into an egg.

You gradually transform from within. You begin to mineralize. It is the destiny of the keeper to become the water's womb, and if you have the right qualities your unsightly outer skin will develop an inner band of agate capable of birthing a cavity pregnant with crystals. If you are not suited to the water, you will decay.

Undeterred by your unsightly outer skin, the trader sees through to your essence, picks you up, and cuts you in two. He polishes you, and places a high price tag on you. He discards your inner water without a second thought.

The water is unconcerned, certain that another loving keeper will appear after you. With the water living peacefully within me, I too mineralized into a cavity and grew amethysts within a band of agate. I was a good match for my beloved egg-birthing water, and it added brilliance to my mediocre life. I was saved from decay. But a trader found me and cut me open, discarded my water. I am still here on the gift shop shelf, waiting for someone to purchase me, but my water passed from me to you, and is already enticing yet another. Really, when I think of her alluring eyes...

†

When I weep, where do my tears go? I load them onto a ship that will cross the desert. With a sail made from the skin of women, a group of unborn babies put out to sea.

FRAGMENTS OF WATER TALES

Minagawa Hiroko

I removed my nail polish to discover the slight crevice between translucent nail and flesh filled with water. Something was swimming there. I blotted out the sight with a fresh coat of polish.

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“Don’t walk there.” The harshness of my half-sister’s words brought me up short. “You can walk there if you like, though,” she added brusquely. “But don’t blame me if you fall. You’ve been warned.” To hear my half-sister tell it, this house is full of places where you mustn’t walk, where nothing is to be touched. More than a month has passed since my arrival, yet I am still unable to remember all the taboos she’s imposed. The moment I step out of the children’s room on the second floor, I don’t know which way to turn.

Today my half-sister took me out to the garden for the first time. It was choked with weeds.

“The well.” She pointed at the sky. My eyes followed her finger. I unthinkingly stepped forward and fell skyward.

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The inner tissue started dissolving from the tip of my little finger. I could feel the slosh of liquid beneath my skin. I tried inserting a needle; it sank in all the way unresisted. I didn’t want it to reach my heart, and with much massaging and pushing I barely managed to get it out. It was threaded with a long strand of golden hair.

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At first it’s awfully difficult to tell whether your pet water is of the hatched variety or not. In fact, it’s virtually impossible. They don’t sell hatched water at pet shops. You may stumble across it in a field you happen to pass or next to a roadside gutter. But how it ended up forsaken there you do not know.

The water comes from egg-shaped mother-rocks with a surface so coarse as to be positively ugly. These can be found casually lying around in various sizes. Professional prospectors, expert at detecting the hidden presence of gemstones inside, cleave them in half with keen-edged cutters. Sometimes the prospector’s hunch is off, and he splits one open only to discover it’s solid rock to the core. But with a bit of luck the exposed cross section proves truly beautiful: an outer layer of agate and, within, serried crystals of amethyst pointing toward a hollow center.

That’s all the prospector is after. Once the cut surface is polished to give the iridescent agate a sheen, he has a valuable piece of merchandise to sell. The water filling the inner

cavity is useless to him, and he throws it away without a thought.

As you walk by you happen to notice the discarded water. Fixed on by its tearful, endearing, melancholy gaze, you don't have the heart to abandon it. So you decide to keep it. What it seeks of you is that snuggest of homes, your womb. You scoop it up into your mouth.

If it's just ordinary water, nothing happens. It's simply expelled from the body. But if it's of the hatched variety, it sets to work metamorphosing you into an egg.

You gradually turn to stone from the inside. As the water's new master, you are destined to be its mother-rock. If you possess the right qualities, you too can become a crystal-bearing cavity beneath a layer of agate enclosed in an ugly outer crust. If you're incompatible with the water, you decompose.

A prospector, not deceived by your ugly exterior, recognizes you for what you are, picks you up, and cleaves you in two. You are polished and labeled with an expensive price tag.

The water filling your innards is thrown away without a thought. But it has no fears, for another kindly master is bound to come along in your place. I too was turned to stone and became a hollow rock with amethyst crystals growing inside a band of agate. The water dwelt securely within me. My beloved water was of the hatched variety and I possessed the right qualities: that, I suppose, has brought glory to my humdrum life. I escaped decomposing. But I was found by a prospector and hewn open. The water was discarded. I sit gathering dust on the shelf of the gift shop, yet to be bought; but the water entices one person after another to adopt it — me, then you, then another. Who can resist those adorable eyes?

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Where do tears go upon being shed? They're loaded on a boat to cross the desert, a brood of unborn babies making for the ocean on sails of female skin.

When I removed the nail polish, the slight space between the transparent nail and the nail bed filled with water, and inside, something was swimming around. I painted over it again.



"Don't walk there."

My legs stopped, surprised at the stern tone of my maternal half-sister's warning.

"I mean, you can if you want," she added brusquely. "But it's not my fault if you fall; I warned you."

If it's as she says, then this house is full of places where one mustn't walk, that one mustn't touch.

It's been over a month since I came to this house, but I still haven't been able to remember all of the rules set in place by my half-sister. If I set one foot out of the second-floor nursery I become lost.

Today, my half-sister is taking me out to the garden for the first time. There are weeds everywhere.

"That's a well," she says.

Gazing at my half-sister's fingertip, pointed toward the sky, I take a careless step and fall skyward.



The melting of my insides began from the tips of my pinkies where, beneath the skin, there was a slight trembling, like the dripping of water. I tried piercing it with a needle. There was little resistance, and the needle slid all the way in with almost no effort at all. I didn't want it to get to my heart, so I massaged and pushed at it and, after some suffering, managed to extract it. Threaded through the eye of the needle was a single, long, golden strand of hair.



Determining during the early stages whether or not the water you're keeping is oviparous is extremely difficult. You could even assert that it can't be done.

They don't sell them at pet shops. You come across the water by chance when passing by grass fields and storm drains.

How the water came to be there, you don't know.

A mother's womb is ore in the shape of an egg. Its rough skin is quite ugly. They come in all different sizes and can be found lying around just about anywhere. Merchants specializing in them have a keen eye and recognize immediately that being hidden away inside is a precious gem. They use sharp cutting tools to split the stones in half. There are times when their hopes are dashed and, when split, the stone is just a plain stone all the way to the core. In other cases, the stone's cross section is truly beautiful. The outer enclosure is composed of agate. On the inside, which has become a hollow, a forest of amethyst crystals focus their tips on the center of the cavity.

For a merchant, this is enough. If the cross-section is polished to give luster to the rainbow-colored agate, it will become a very valuable piece.

The water that filled the hollow isn't needed. It's thrown out without a second thought.

You, who just happened to be passing by, saw the water being thrown away.

Once you've gazed into its literally wet, sweet, and forlorn eyes, you become unable to leave—you can't just abandon it.

You decide to care for the water. It demands an intimate dwelling from you: that is none other than the inside of your womb. You scoop the water up and contain it in your mouth.

If it's ordinary water, nothing will happen. It will just be excreted. However, if it's oviparous, it will begin working diligently to turn you into an egg.

You gradually begin to transform, petrify from the inside. It's the destiny of the keeper to become a womb for the water, and if you possess the right qualities, you may form a layer of agate under your ugly outer skin and become a vessel that will give birth to crystal. If you are not compatible with the water, you will decay.

Not led astray by the ugliness of your exterior, the merchants, who have seen through to your true nature, will pick you up and cut you in two. They'll polish you up and slap a hefty price tag on you.

The water that had filled your interior is cast away without a second thought. After you, another kind-hearted keeper will probably come along, so the water isn't concerned. I also, in this way, was petrified and became a hollow, cultivating amethysts on a layer of agate in my interior. The water lived content inside of me. Perhaps I should say the fact that water that I loved was oviparous, and the fact that I was compatible with it, gave splendor to my commonplace life. I was saved from decay. But I was found by merchants and parted, my water cast away. Now, I sit exposed on a souvenir shop shelf, unbought, and the water is off seducing yet another keeper, as it did me, and then you.

Good grief, that one really knows how to use those sweet eyes.



When one cries, where do the tears go? They pile up on boats that cross the desert. Hoisting a sail of women's skin, a group of fetuses head for the sea.

Severed division

By MINAGAWA Hiroko

†

Removing my nail polish revealed a water-filled gap—barely visible, lying between my transparent nail and the skin of my finger—in which something swam. I reapply more nail polish over top.

†

“You can’t just go walking there!”

The cutting words emanating from my older stepsister’s mouth make me stop with a start, but then she adds, indifferently, “but if you do wanna go there, go, it’s up to you.”

“Because if you fall in there, it’s not my fault, you got that? I’ve told you now, right.”

If it really was the way my stepsister said it was, this house would be a mere assortment of places where you couldn’t walk and of things that you couldn’t touch.

While it’s been more than a month since I came to this house, I still don’t seem able to remember all of the taboos she’s laid down.

Stepping out of the second floor kids’ room, I lose my way.

Today, for the first time, my stepsister took me out into the garden. It was nothing but weeds.

“It’s a well!”

Looking at the tip of my stepsister’s finger as she points to the sky, I step forward without really meaning to and fall towards that sky.

†

The tip of my little finger began to dissolve from the inside first, with the area under the skin sloshing about. I tried piercing it with a needle. Absurdly, the whole thing went in. Not wanting it to pass through to my heart, I massaged and pushed it about, and painstakingly got it out. A long, blond strand of hair lay in the eye of that extracted needle.

†

It’s exceedingly difficult to ascertain, at such an early stage, whether the water that you, my dear young lady, keep is a species produced from eggs or not. I could even go so far as to say that it is indeed impossible to say either way.

One wouldn’t find this for sale at any pet shop. The likely places in which you, my dear, are likely to have come across this water are in meadows that you’ve happened to pass by, or in the lip of a U-shaped ditch.

You, my dear, have no inkling of how the water came into this world and was then promptly left abandoned there.

It’s mother’s womb was an oval made of minerals. The coarse epidermal layer exceedingly ugly. Inconspicuously these wombs lie around, in all manner of sizes. A specialist dealer would be able to see it well. That it hides a precious stone. Using a precise instrument to ascertain its true value, the specialist would split the stone in half. Sometimes, even when the stone is split, it shows that the object is merely a stone all the way to its core. If things go well then the cut face of the stone shows itself to be truly beautiful. The outer hull

will, firstly, be of agate. The hollow inside will bristle with crystallized amethysts, their tips pointing toward the hollow centre.

This is enough for a real dealer to know. If they polish the cross section so the agate shows off the lustre of its rainbow hues they will have obtained a valuable piece of merchandise.

The water filling the inside section is a waste product. Without the slightest glance, they'll throw it away.

You, my dear, just happened to be passing by when you fully turned your eyes toward that abandoned water.

When its, literally, moist, adorable, and sad eyes stared at you, my dear, you were rendered unable to leave it where it lay.

You, my dear, made up your mind to keep and protect that water. And the water in turn wants from you, my dear, the most pleasant of residences imaginable. And that could only mean inside your womb, my dear. Scooping it up, you hold the in your mouth.

If it were merely ordinary water then it would have been without note. It would have just been eliminated. But when we are dealing with egg-born entities, however, the water begins to work hard at getting you, my dear, to be an egg.

You, my dear, gradually began to transform from the inside. Petrification. 'Tis the water keeper's fate to be the one to provide the womb for the water. And if you, my dear, had the right natural qualities, then you could possess an inner layer of agate on the inside of that unsightly outer skin, one that could become a cavity where you could conceive crystals. If one's nature isn't in harmony with the water then this: decay.

Without being misled by the ugliness of that exterior, the dealer perceived your dear lady's true essence, picked you up, and cut you in two. With a little polishing you'd receive a high price tag.

The water that filled the inside section is a thrown away without the slightest second glance.

Another kind-hearted keeper will likely appear after you, my dear, so the water has no need for unease. I, too, petrified in the same way, and became a cavity where I grew amethyst crystals on the inside of a layer of agate. The water lived peacefully inside me. One ought to say this: in so loving a species of water that was produced from eggs, and in being blessed with a good nature, those two things combined to bring me glory in an otherwise un-extraordinary life. I was able to avoid decay. I was, however, discovered by a dealer and sundered. The water thrown away and abandoned. I still remain unsold, and lie here exposed on a shelf in a souvenir shop. From me, to you, my dear, and on to another, different keeper, the water has tempted us all. My word, oh how utterly, beguilingly adorable were that child's eyes



When we cry where do the tears go? They are loaded onto ships that cross the desert. Raising up the sail of the woman's skin, the throng of embryos aim for their destination: the sea.

When I took off my varnish, the tiny gap between the transparent nail and the flesh of my finger was full of water. Something was swimming. I painted the nail again to cover it up.

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‘You mustn’t walk there!’

I stopped, startled by the severity in my half-sister’s voice.

‘You can if you want,’ she added brusquely. ‘But it won’t be my fault if you fall. Not now I’ve told you.’

If you believe my sister, the house is full of places you shouldn’t walk, places you shouldn’t touch.

It’s over a month since I came to the house, but I still haven’t got to grips with all her taboos.

I take one step out of the children’s room upstairs and I’m lost.

Today she took me out into the garden for the first time. It was full of weeds.

‘That’s the well,’ she said, pointing at the sky.

I looked where she was pointing, took a step forward, and fell - skywards.

***blank line

The softening began at the tip of the little finger, fluid quivering beneath the skin. I pushed a needle in. It sank in the whole way without resistance. I didn’t want it to reach my heart, so I rubbed and pushed the skin till eventually I managed to get it out again. There was a strand of blonde hair through the needle’s eye.

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It’s extremely difficult to tell whether water you’re looking after is from egg-laying stock or not. In fact one could say it’s impossible.

The water’s not available in pet-shops. You came across it in a casual walk across a field, or at the edge of a gutter.

You don’t know how it came to be abandoned there.

It was born of a womb of egg-shaped rock, with a rough, most unattractive surface. Such rocks lie scattered about, large and small. People in the trade have a good eye for them and can judge when they conceal precious minerals. They take a sharp instrument and cut them in two. Sometimes they’re wrong and it’s just ordinary stone the whole way through. When they’re right, the sliced halves are truly beautiful. At the edge is a band of agate and within, a cavity packed with spines of amethyst crystal, pointing towards the centre.

This is what they’re after. They polish the halves till the rainbow-colored agate shines, and then they have expensive merchandise.

The water inside isn’t required. It’s thrown aside without a thought.

You happen to be passing and you see the water.

It looks at you with its lovely, sad, literally liquid eyes. You can’t walk past.

You want to take it home and look after it. It’s looking to you for the most comfortable home possible. That home must be your womb. You scoop the water up and put in your mouth.

If it’s just dull, ordinary water, nothing will happen. It will just be excreted. But if it is born from an egg, it will set about turning you into an egg.

Starting from the inside, you gradually transmute. You turn to stone. It’s the keeper’s destiny to become the water’s womb, and if your disposition is right you can, beneath an ugly outer crust, become a cavity banded with agate, pregnant with crystal.

Should your disposition not match the water, you rot.

Somebody in the trade picks you up. Oblivious to the ugly exterior, they see your real quality within. They cut you in half and polish you. Then you get a price tag, showing how expensive you are.

The water that filled the rock is thrown aside without a thought.

The water doesn't worry. After you, another kind-hearted keeper will appear.

I too turned to stone, a cavity full of amethyst within a band of agate. Water lived peacefully inside me. The water I loved was born from an egg and my disposition was right. I suppose I should say this lent some brilliance to my dull, ordinary life. I escaped rotting. But then, I was found by someone in the trade and cut in two. The water was thrown away. I'm still unsold, lying on the shelf of a souvenir shop; but the water went from me to you, and now it is seducing another keeper. They were such lovely eyes...

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Cry, and where do the tears go? They're packed onto a boat across the desert. A woman's skin is hoisted as a sail. A crowd of foetuses head for the sea.

Fragments
by Minagawa Hiroko

She removed the polish from her nails, and found that the narrow spaces dividing the meat of her fingers from the nails' transparent surfaces were filled with water. There were things swimming around inside.

She painted them over again.

**line break

"Stay away from there!"

The harsh tone of my half-sister's words surprised me, bringing my footsteps to a halt, but then she casually added, "Oh, you can walk there if you want to. Just don't blame me if you fall. I gave you your one warning."

If things were as my half-sister had told me, this house was filled with places one mustn't walk and mustn't touch.

It had been just over a month since I came to this house, but still I could not remember all the things my half-sister had told me not to do.

I got lost if I took so much as a step outside the children's room upstairs.

Today, for the first time, my half-sister had taken me out to the garden. It was overgrown with weeds.

"This is a well," she told me.

Staring at my half-sister's skyward-pointing fingertip, I took an impulsive step forward, and fell into the heavens.

**line break

The internal dissolution began from the tip of her little finger, with a sloshing about of liquid beneath the skin. She tried piercing it, and the needle, encountering almost no resistance, slid all the way inside. She didn't want it to reach her heart, though, so she kneaded and pushed, and at last managed to work it back out. The needle was threaded with long, golden hair.

**line break

In the early stages, it had been extremely difficult – impossible, one might well conclude – to discern whether or not the noblewoman's pet water was of the egg-laying variety.

Pet shops didn't carry it. The noblewoman's first encounter with this water had come unexpectedly as she was passing by the edge of a U-shaped ditch on a grassy plain.

She knew nothing of the water's birth and abandonment there.

Its mother had been an egg-shaped piece of ore, and her rough, gritty exterior had been most unattractive. Many such stones, both large and small, lay scattered about haphazardly on the ground. The sharp-eyed specialists could see right through their façade. They knew that these rocks concealed gemstones. Although there were times when they missed their guesses – when they split the stones open to find they were nothing but rock all the way to the center – if things went well, the cut surfaces of the stones would be truly beautiful, with an outer shell was made of agate and a hollow interior enclosed by crystalline forests of amethyst, each crystal pointed toward the center of the hollow.

This was enough to satisfy the workers. When the cut faces were polished to bring out the sheen of the particolored agate, these stones could sell for a lot of money.

What was not needed was the water that filled their hollow spaces. It was thrown out without a second thought.

It was this abandoned water which had by chance been noticed by the passing noblewoman.

When it looked back at the woman with sad, adorable, and literally moist eyes, the woman was unable to simply abandon it and go on her way.

And so she decided to raise it. She scooped it up and put it in her mouth. Inside the woman, the water sought out the most comfortable place to live, which was none other than the noblewoman's womb.

If it had been just ordinary water, nothing would have happened; it would have merely passed through her body. This egg-laying type, however, set diligently to the task of the noblewoman's ovumization.

Gradually, the noblewoman was transformed from the inside out, turning into stone. The fate of one who raises pet water is to become its womb, and because the noblewoman had the right qualities, she could grow layers of agate beneath her ugly outer skin, and gain a swollen hollow interior, pregnant with crystals. If her qualities had not agreed with the water, she would have rotted.

Later, a specialist who will not be fooled by her outer ugliness, who will see through to the noblewoman's true qualities, will pick her up and saw her in half. She will be polished and tagged with a sticker showing a high price.

The water that had filled her interior will be thrown out without a second thought.

And after the noblewoman, another kindhearted person will most likely come along to raise the water as a pet, so the water will feel no unease. I, too, turned to stone in this way, and became a hollow space, grown round about with amethyst crystals and wrapped in layers of agate. The water lived in peace and contentment within me. The fact that the water I loved was of the egg-laying variety... The fact that I had the right qualities... I

should probably say this has shown a glorious light into my otherwise mundane life. I avoided rotting. However, a worker found me, and cut me in half. My water was thrown away, and even now, I sit exposed and unsold on the shelf of a souvenir shop, and the water moved on from me to the noblewoman, and is now tempting other passersby to take it in. Good heavens, its darling eyes are precious...

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Where do tears go when the crying's over? They're loaded onto ships that ply across the desert. They hoist up sails made of women's skin, and set sail with crews of the unborn.

Fragments (Hiroko Minagawa)

Having removed the nail polish, something trembled in the space between clear nail and the flesh of my finger. I painted over it again.

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"You can't walk there."

The harsh shock of my stepsister's words halts me in my tracks. "But if you wanna walk there, go ahead," she adds bluntly.

"Cause if you fall, it won't be my fault. 'Cause I already told you once."

According to her, this house is full of places you can't walk, things you can't touch.

It's been a month or so since I came to this house, but I still can't remember all the taboos she enforces. If I step outside the nursery on the second floor, I'm immediately lost.

Today, for the first time, she has taken me out into the garden. It's overgrown with weeds.

"That's the well."

As my stepsister points out the sky, I take a step forward without thinking and fall, still gazing skyward.

**blank line

The substance started dissolving from the tip of my little finger, wobbling softly under the skin. I tried inserting a needle. Without any resistance, the whole thing slipped in. Worried that it would reach my heart, I pushed and massaged, and finally managed to get it out again. Through the eye of the needle was a long golden hair.

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It is very difficult to tell in the initial stage whether your water is egg-laying. It may be declared impossible.

It is not a matter handled by the pet shop. Your first encounter with water could be inadvertently in a grassy meadow you happen upon, or on the brink of a U-shaped gully.

How the water came to be birthed and abandoned there, you don't know.

Mother's womb is an egg-shaped crystal. The rough outer skin is exceedingly ugly. Large and small, casually lying tumbled together. The expert lapidarist keenly spies one out. That hides precious stone inside. He splits the stone in half with a sharp cutting tool. Sometimes the guess proves wrong, and even when broken open it is just ordinary rock to the core. All going well, the cross section of stone is truly beautiful. First, the outer contour is agate. In the interior, which has become a hollow cavity, amethyst crystal bristles points into the centre.

For the lapidarist, this will suffice. If the cross section is polished so the iridescent agate takes on a sheen, this will be a high-priced commodity.

The water filling the inner part is superfluous. It is dumped out without the slightest consideration.

As you happen to pass by, by chance, you see the discarded water.

Once you see those plaintive eyes, literally watery-eyed, adorable, you can't just desert it.

You decide to look after the water. It asks for the best habitat from you. That is, nothing less than inside your womb. Hold it in your mouth to scoop it up.

If it is ordinary water, nothing will happen. It would just be excreted. However, in the event of egg-laying, the water will begin to work diligently at changing you into an egg.

From inside, you will transform accordingly, and petrify. The fate of the owner makes the womb of water, and if you possess good innate qualities, inside the ugly outer skin you can bear a cavity pregnant with crystal, and a layer of agate. If your quality does not match the water, it rots.

The lapidarist, spotting your true quality and unafraid of the ugly exterior, picks you up, cuts you in two. You are polished and a high price tag is attached.

The water filling the inside is tossed away without a qualm.

The water isn't troubled, because after you, another soft-hearted owner will turn up. I too was turned to stone that way, and became a cavity which grew amethyst and a layer of agate inside. The water found peaceful refuge in my inner part. Should I mention that the fact that the water I loved was egg-laying, and that my qualities were good, gave radiance to my ordinary life? I was spared the rot. But discovered by the lapidarist, I was cut. The water was discarded. I am still not bought yet, exposed on the shelf of the souvenir shop, but the water has seduced me, you, and now a new owner. Honestly, don't tell me how adorable that child's eyes are...

**blank line

Crying, where do the tears go? On a small boat to cross the desert. Woman skin pinned to the sail, the flock of fetuses heads for the sea.

Fragments, by Minagawa Hiroko

I clean the varnish from my nail. The gap between the transparent cuticle and the skin is full of water; there is something swimming there. I splash on more varnish.

**blank line

“That way’s off limits.”

My half-sister’s sharp tone stops me in my tracks.

“Look...you can go if you want,” she remarks coldly. “Just don’t blame me if you fall. You’ve been told, okay?”

According to my half-sister, the house is full of places you can’t go and things you can’t touch. It’s been over a month since I arrived, but I still can’t remember them all. I get lost the moment I leave the kid’s room on the second floor. Today my half-sister took me to the garden for the first time. It’s a mess of weeds.

“Watch the well!”

My half-sister points towards the sky and I turn towards the tips of her fingers; I step forwards and tumble into a void.

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My insides first begin to dissolve below the ends of my little fingers, they turn flabby and sway under the skin. I prick at them with a needle and it slips all the way in. Scared it might get to my heart, I press and massage until it comes out. There is a long, golden lock of hair woven through the eye.

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During the early stages it is incredibly difficult to tell whether the liquid is oviparous. Perhaps impossible. It is not found in pet stores but rather chanced on in fields, hidden in gutters. You don’t know the liquid’s origin, or of how it came to be discarded. The womb itself is egg-shaped and crystalline, with a rough and uninviting outer-skin. They are plain, and come in all sizes.

A trader with a sharp eye is quick to recognize the precious stone concealed within. The trader uses a sharp tool to part the rock in two. If his appraisal is wrong, this reveals nothing but a core of rock. If he is correct, he finds a cross-section of stunning beauty. The inner-wall is formed of fractal layers with swathes of bristling amethyst crystal that teem in towards a hollow center. This is good for the trader. He polishes the cross-section until it shines crimson; the stone becomes prize stock. The water in the core has no value, so the trader discards it without hesitation.

You wander by, and glance at the forsaken liquid. It appears charming and sad; its damp eyes turn to you and you understand that you cannot leave it there. You decide to keep it. It solicits you for comfort, for a place inside your womb. You scoop it up and take it in your mouth. If it was regular water nothing would come of this, it would simply pass through the body. If it is oviparous, however, it begins its work of transforming you into an egg.

You change, becoming stone from the inside. The role of the host is to act as a womb, to house the liquid. If the conditions are right, you grow layers of fractal agate that weave a crystal-infused hollow within a plain skin. If your body does not match the liquid’s conditions, you begin to decay.

The trader--never fooled by such external squalor--realizes your true nature; he plucks you up and cleaves you in half. He discards the liquid without pause, then polishes you to shine and slaps on a lofty price tag. The water is hardly perturbed, confident that another kind-hearted host will appear in your wake.

This is how I became stone, how I formed a place for the amethyst crystals to grow inside the layers of agate. The liquid was content inside me. The liquid I cared for was oviparous--and possessed with the right qualities, as I was, it was able to inject a brilliance into my otherwise bland existence. I did not decay. Yet a trader found me--he cut me in two and the liquid was discarded. Now I sit on the shelves of a novelty store, awaiting sale while the water travels on to seduce you and any others that follow.

If not for the charm in those eyes...

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Where do tears go when we cry? Why, they traverse the desert on barges. With sails hewn from the skins of women, they grant the masses of unborn children passage to the ocean.

Fragments by Hiroko Minagawa

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After removing the nail polish, the small gap between my transparent nail and the flesh of my finger filled with water. Something was swimming in it. I painted over it again.

**blank line

“You're not allowed to walk there.”

Alarmed by the sharpness of my younger half-sister's words, I stopped. “If you want to walk there, you can, though,” she added bluntly.

“It's not my fault if you fall. I've told you once.”

If what my half-sister says is true, this house is full of places where you're not allowed to walk and things that you're not allowed to touch.

A little over a month has passed since I arrived here, but I still haven't been able to memorize all of her rules.

I lose my way as soon as I step foot outside the second-floor nursery.

Today is the first time my half-sister has taken me out to the garden. It is full of weeds.

“There's a well there.”

As I looked at her fingertip pointing to the sky, I carelessly stepped forward and, facing the sky, I fell.

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My insides began to melt from the tip of my little finger, sloshing about under the skin. I pricked the finger with a needle. It easily went all the way in. I couldn't risk the needle getting to my heart, so I squeezed and pressed and, with some effort, pulled it back out. Threaded through the eye of the needle was a long blond hair.

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Determining whether the water you keep is oviparous or not is very difficult at first. You could even say that it is impossible.

The water isn't handled by pet shops. You might come across it by chance when passing through a grassy plain or on the edge of a gutter.

You won't know how the water came to be abandoned there.

The womb is an egg-shaped ore. The rough skin is exceedingly ugly. Of every size, they lie around unceremoniously. Professional traders shrewdly see through. Through to the precious stones held inside. The traders use sharp cutting tools to split the stones in half. Sometimes their predictions are wrong and the split stone is just normal stone all the way through. When it goes well, the cross section of the stone is truly beautiful. The outer shell is agate. The cave inside bristles with amethyst crystals pointing toward the center.

This is enough for the traders. Once the cross section is polished to bring out the luster of the rainbow-colored agate, it becomes expensive merchandise.

The water that filled the inside is not needed. Without the slightest thought, it is cast aside.

As you pass by, you may happen to look towards the discarded water.

Once gazed upon by those pupils, moist, lovely and sorrowful to the letter, no longer can you abandon it and move on.

You make up your mind to raise the water. It seeks the most comfortable nest in you. That can only be your womb. You scoop it up and hold it in your mouth.

If it were normal water, this would be nothing. It would just be excreted. But if it is oviparous, the water will begin to work at turning you into an egg.

From the inside you gradually transform and petrify. Becoming the water's womb is the fate of a guardian and, if your nature is good, you can develop a layer of agate under your ugly skin and become a cave heavy with crystals. If your nature does not match the water, you

will rot.

The professional trader that, undeceived by your ugly exterior, sees through to your true nature will pick you up and split you in two. You will be polished and have an expensive price tag stuck on you.

The water filling your inside will be cast aside without the slightest thought.

Another kindhearted guardian ought to appear again soon, so the water will not be anxious. In that way I too was petrified and became a cave with amethyst growing inside a layer of agate. The water settled inside me. Perhaps I should say that the fact that my beloved water was oviparous and the fact that my nature was good brought a radiance to my ordinary life. I avoided decay. However, I was discovered by a trader and split open. The water was thrown away. I have not yet been bought and sit on the shelf of a souvenir shop, but, after me, the water will tempt you and then other guardians. Really, when it comes to the loveliness of its eyes...

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Where do tears go when we cry? They are loaded onto a boat crossing the desert. With girls' skin flown as a sail, a pack of embryos heads for the sea.