



The 2017 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize

Kurodahan Press is pleased to announce the 2017 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize, awarded for translation excellence of a selected Japanese short story into English. The winning translation will be considered for inclusion in the upcoming Kurodahan Press anthology *Speculative Japan Volume 5*, which is scheduled for publication in 2017–18, 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/2017prize.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 agreement when the book project gets under way.

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

「とんでるじっちゃん」 by 大沼 珠王

The submission package, including a PDF of the story, style sheet and instructions, is available as a downloadable PDF. The story won the ゆきのまち幻想文学賞, and was published in the 23rd collection of ゆきのまち short stories. Information on the ゆきのまち通信 and the ゆきのまち幻想文学賞 can be found here:

<http://www.prism-net.jp/0y-yuki/y30-bungaku-syo/yb-bosyu.html>

4. Application Deadline

Translations must be received no later than October 15, 2017, Japan time. A notice confirming receipt will be issued. The results should be announced by the end of the year.

However, the prize may be cancelled, or the deadline extended, if we haven't received at least twenty submissions by the initial deadline.



5. Submission address and contact

Grand Prize / one winner

30,000 yen prize money. At a later time we plan to 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

2305-9 Yunomae Machi

Kuma-gun, Kumamoto 868-0600 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 jurors 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, all translators working in the field.



Style Guide for Kurodahan Translation Contest Submissions

V2 of Oct. 2016

Word processing:

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

Document formatting:

As much as possible, use only one font at one size throughout your document.

Use italics for emphasis.

Do not start paragraphs with tabs, and do not insert blank lines between paragraphs.

If you require a section break of some sort, please insert

*** * ***

alone on that line.

BLANK LINES WILL BE DELETED ALONG WITH FANCY FORMATTING!

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, most formatting (font, font size, etc.) will be made trashed (italics will of course be preserved) in favor of simplicity. The jurors 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. 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 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 or jurors. The winner will have to provide it for Japanese tax purposes, however. The point is, we need to know where to contact you!

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.

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.



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.

Footnotes and translator's notes:

The goal is to produce an English work that is ready for publication. Footnotes may be included if you feel they should be included in the published story. **TRANSLATOR'S NOTES WILL BE DISCARDED** and the jurors will not see them.

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 translation you are of course welcome to. However, your translation will be judged on its merits as a finished translation, and it is entirely possible that nobody will read your notes. 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.**

One last word:

DON'T FORGET TO TRANSLATE THE TITLE, TOO!

◎大賞 とんでるじっちゃん 大沼珠生 ●Tamaki Onuma

わしは飛べるんじゃ。本当だとも。ピーターパンという話な、子供らは大きくなると飛べなくなるな、帽子を投げておっかけて飛ぶこともできなくなるじゃろ、切ないなあ、わかるなあ。飛ぶことを体は覚えておるのになあ。

飛田のじっちゃん。通称じっちゃん。施設だから入所している人は苗字で呼んでいるが、じっちゃんはじっちゃんでも通用する。家族はいなくて寝たきりでぼけていて手はかかるが、起きているときはしゃべるしゃべる、それも自慢話や人の悪口がなく嘘かほんとかわからない話ばかり。だから彼は入所者の中でもダントツの人気者だ。わしは飛べるんじゃ…介護士の小橋君は真似が一番うまい。ピーターパンていいよねえ。創作の才能あるよ。ところが看護婦の由理さんが、じっちゃんが言ってる場面はほんとに小説「ピーターパン」の中に出てるという。じっちゃんはあれで案外物知りよ。小橋君はピーターパンをディズニーのキャラクターだと思っていたので口をあんなぐり開けた。

施設は目が回るほど忙しいから気がつかなければわからない程度だが、小橋君は3月が近づくとも元気がなくなる。昔の恋人が津波で亡くなったことを知っている人はそと目配せして静かに通り過ぎる。

じっちゃんに入浴をさせていたある日小橋君はつぶやいた。「やっぱり言うておけばよかったのかなあ」小橋君の後悔は彼女にプロポーズしそになったこと。別れた彼女は田舎に帰ってお見合い結婚してその後亡くなった。「僕のせいかなあ」じっちゃんは寝ているように見えたから独り言のつもりだった。すると突然じっちゃんがはつきりした口調でしゃべり出したのであやうく手を離しそうになった。

「コウジくん。コウジくんと呼んでる」

小橋君は目を見開いた。昔の恋人が結婚した相手の名前ではないか。彼女は夫といっしょに海で死んだのだ。じっちゃんも驚くほど力強い明瞭な声で言った。

「お前のことは呼んどうらん」そして「自分から進んで行ったんじゃ、選んだ人生だ、それでいいんだ」じっちゃんは今何を見ているのだろうか。本当に心が空も時も飛んであの日の海を見ているのだろうか。せきこむようにたずねた。

「彼女は苦しんでなかったかい。僕を恨んだりしていないか」

「そんなこと忘れて飛んでおるよ」

「どこを」

じっちゃんの声がびたっと止まったと思ったらはや寝息が聞こえる。

「そこで寝るなよじじい」

小橋君は毒づいたが急に涙がこみあげてきて、お湯をじゃあじゃあ流しながら大声で泣いた。

こんなこともあった。その日も小橋君がそばにいたとき突然じっちゃんがしゃべりだした。

「歩道橋に女の子がおって飛びたがっておった」

「それはいけないね」

「美人は死んじゃいかん」美人じゃない人はどうかという問題になるので口ごもったがじっちゃんはしゃべり続ける。

「クソババアの姑や安月給を気にし過ぎで重うなるとるから飛べるわけがない」小橋君は適当に相槌をうつ。

「でも悩み事は誰でもあるよ」

「ベンビと同じで詰まったら悪い。いきんで出せばよい」

「出すって…」小橋君が顔をあげると由理さんが真っ白な顔で立っている。

「なぜ歩道橋のこと知っているの」

ぎょっとして向き直った時にはいつぞやのようにはじっちゃんはいびきをかいていた。

わかったのは確かに由理さんがどうしようもなく辛くて高い歩道橋で佇んでいた時があったこと。死ぬというよりどこか違う次元にいつてしまったかったと由理さんは言う。

「よく覚えていないけど、ずっと誰かに見られている気がして手すりを越えられなかった」と由理さんは言った。

「美人は死んじゃいけないって」

小橋君はじっちゃんの口調を真似して言ったつもりだがあまりうまくいかなかった。由理さんは目元を抑えながら笑った。

じっちゃんは誰とでもよく話す。とんでもないことになったのはそれからだ。パートのおばさんが「がま口をなくした。家に飛んできて見つけて欲しいわ」と言った。すると「スリッパおきの下じャろ」とじっちゃんが言い当てる。たものだからえらいことになった。おばさんが興奮してテレビ局に電話し取材がきたのだ。所長が驚いて断ったが、パートのおばさんの仲間やら噂を聞いた見舞い客やらが押しかけてきた。じっちゃんと話をするに成功した人が携帯電話で動画を撮ってインターネットにアップした。失せ物探しから競馬の予想までめちゃくちゃな質問を浴びせ、じっちゃんも愛想よく話しかけられると調子に乗ってしゃべるしゃべる。答えにくいことになる。

途端に寝てしまう。動画は大評判になり、施設には見舞い客を装った侵入者が後を立たなくなってしまった。たいていは玄関で追い返すがそれでも巧妙に入り込まれてしまう。小橋君や由理さんが見つけ次第追い返すのだが、じっちゃんは「人が話をしているのに邪魔をするな」と怒り出す。じっちゃんが声を荒げ小橋君と言い争うのは人以来はじめてで、止めに入った由理さんは涙ぐんだ。

「どうしてこんなことになったの」

由理さんはひとりごちた。

「じっちゃんが皆と楽しくお話したのはよくわかるわ。でも小橋君はお話することを止めようとしているんじゃないくて、じっちゃんのことをただ面白おかしく取り上げようとしている人たちが嫌いな。じっちゃんを傷つけるんじゃないかと心配しているんです。小橋君だけじゃない、所長さんも私も皆、あなたのことを心配なのよ」

じっちゃんは施設のスタッフに対して人が変わったように不機嫌な顔を見せることが多くなった。今日も眉間に深いシワを寄せたまま険しい表情を変えない。そうしていると小さく貧相なただの年寄りでしかなく、由理さんはそっとため息をついた。見回りをしていた小橋君が入ってきたがじっちゃんはそちらに顔を向けようとしな。小橋君も口をつぐんだままささっと出ていこうとした時だ。

「明日は雪が降るよ」

ふとじっちゃんが言った。「え」と小橋君と由理さんが同時に振り向いた。

「明日は雪が降るよ」

じっちゃんは目をつぶったまま繰り返した。

「足元をよくみて両手は開けておく。しよるのはつばさだけでじゅうぶんじゃ」

小橋君が駆け寄りかけて、ためらうように止まり由梨さんに確かめた。

「つばさがどうとか言ったように聞こえた」

「ええ聞いたわ」

「意外と普通のことも言ったね、明日は雪になるって。天気予報も出ているからとくに知っているんだけど」

「この頃叱られてばかりだから気まずいのよ。あなたの機嫌をとりたくて急いで飛んでいつて新聞の見出しでも見てきたのしょう」

小橋君が笑ったのは久しぶりだ。由理さんもほっとした。

翌日は予報通り、いや予想以上の大雪になった。このあたりには珍しいほどの降りで道路は大混雑し電車も止まる騒動になり、さすがに今日は不審な見舞い客も訪れず職員と入所者だけの久しぶりに静かな一日となった。

この日小橋君は雪かきやドアの点検で施設内を駆けずり回りまだ一度もじっちゃんを見ていなかった。夕方近くになってやっと一息入れようと休憩室へ階段を上っている時だ。ふと廊下の奥の非常階段が気になった。施錠してあるはずだがもう一度見に行こうか。顔を向けた途端黒っぽい人影が外に見えるのに気づいた。網入りガラスにはたくさん雪がくっついてよく見えにくい。急いで近づくと小柄な男がこちらに背を向けて立っている。息を呑んだ。

「じゅちゃん」

小橋君はドアに飛びついた。凍りついてしまったのか、ハンドルが回らない。じゅちゃんらしい後ろ姿は非常階段の踊り場の柵の外側にある。そこは何もないはず、つまり空中だ。

小橋君の叫び声を聞いて控え室から由理さんが飛び出してきた。

ドアは小憎らしいほどの冷たさで揺るぎもしない。小橋君はガラスをげんこで叩いて叫んだ。

「何やってんだよ。部屋に戻ろう」

すると影がゆっくり振り向いた。はてんを着たじゅちゃんがしゃっきり立っている。ガラス戸越しに妙にはっきり声が聞こえた。

「面倒かけるからわしもう行くわ」

「行くってどこへだよ」

「わしにだって行くところくらいあるさ」

「寒いから中に入りましょうよ」

由理さんも懸命に叫んだ。歩けないはずのじゅちゃんが外にいる不条理を気にしている余裕はない。ただ呼び戻したいだけだ。

「いろいろ世話になったな、ありがとさんです」

じゅちゃんはちょっと殊勝な顔をして頭を下げたが、すぐにニヤッと笑って親指をつきあげてみせた。

「しょっちゃんいかん。しょっのはつばさだけでじゅっぶんじゃ」

と、はてんの背中がむくむくと動いた。ガラス戸のこっち側の二人が息を飲んで見守るほどに、はてんが裂けて白い綿が飛び散り雪と混じり合って散った。見る見るうちに幅が広がって立派な翼が出来上がった。じゅちゃんの小さな体は大きな翼に釣り上げられるようにぐわんと飛び上がって一時停止してからふきつける吹雪に逆らうように一、二度羽ばたいて一気に上昇した…

ガラス戸がようやく開いて小橋君が転げ出たときには踊り場には誰もいなかった。実際にはその時じゅちゃんは眠るように死んでいたわけだが、皆は翼を広げて飛んでいったほうを信じた。不思議なことにインターネットにアップされていたじゅちゃんの動画も世間の噂もかき消すように消え、お葬式はこちんまりと温かく行われた。めいごともし一緒に持って行ってくれたのかしらと由理さんは思った。

「行くところってどこだったんだろう」

「ああ見えて天使だったのよ」

「あれで天使なら僕でも天国に行けそっだ」

由理さんも小橋君も笑った。はてんをきた天使が一人くらいいてもかまわないだろうと小橋君は思った。あるとき飛び出た白い綿のようなこり雪が舞っている。

	ID no.	Score	Rank
	2017.001	162	1
	2017.002	96	39
	2017.003	92	41
	2017.004	100	36
	2017.005	125	11
	2017.006	120	13
	2017.007	118	15
	2017.008	102	33
	2017.009	92	41
	2017.010	158	3
	2017.011	118	15
	2017.012	130	10
	2017.013	118	15
	2017.014	106	29
	2017.015	88	45
	2017.016	102	33
	2017.017	96	39
	2017.018	80	47
	2017.019	138	6
	2017.020	118	15
	2017.021	112	24
	2017.022	136	7
	2017.023	104	32
	2017.024	110	25
	2017.025	102	33
	2017.026	78	48
	2017.027	145	5
	2017.028	108	27
	2017.029	90	43
	2017.030	106	29
	2017.031	159	2
	2017.032	120	13
	2017.033	146	4
	2017.034	116	22
	2017.035	110	25
	2017.036	108	27
	2017.037	118	15
	2017.038	90	43
	2017.039	88	45
	2017.040	98	37
	2017.041	106	29
	2017.042	118	15
	2017.043	118	15
	2017.044	98	37
	2017.045	116	22
	2017.046	132	9
	2017.047	135	8
	2017.048	124	12
	2017.049	74	49

	ID no.	Score	Rank
	2017.001	162	1
	2017.031	159	2
	2017.010	158	3
	2017.033	146	4
	2017.027	145	5
	2017.019	138	6
	2017.022	136	7
	2017.047	135	8
	2017.046	132	9
	2017.012	130	10
	2017.005	125	11
	2017.048	124	12
	2017.006	120	13
	2017.032	120	13
	2017.007	118	15
	2017.011	118	15
	2017.013	118	15
	2017.020	118	15
	2017.037	118	15
	2017.042	118	15
	2017.043	118	15
	2017.034	116	22
	2017.045	116	22
	2017.021	112	24
	2017.024	110	25
	2017.035	110	25
	2017.028	108	27
	2017.036	108	27
	2017.014	106	29
	2017.030	106	29
	2017.041	106	29
	2017.023	104	32
	2017.008	102	33
	2017.016	102	33
	2017.025	102	33
	2017.004	100	36
	2017.040	98	37
	2017.044	98	37
	2017.002	96	39
	2017.017	96	39
	2017.003	92	41
	2017.009	92	41
	2017.029	90	43
	2017.038	90	43
	2017.015	88	45
	2017.039	88	45
	2017.018	80	47
	2017.026	78	48
	2017.049	74	49

The Old Man with his Head in the Clouds

Written by Tamaki Onuma

I can fly you know. It's quite true. You're familiar with that Percy Pan story, I take it? The children, well they grow up and lose their ability to fly you see. Off with the hats, off with them and off with the flying. Dreadful shame as I'm sure you can imagine. Though the body itself would still remember. Terrible really.

Mr. Hida. Also known as Grandad. Here at the care home all the residents are called by their last name, but *Grandad* goes by *Grandad*. He has no family, can't move much and is a bit hazy mentally so requires a lot of care, but when he is awake it's talk and more talk. It's always talk with no rudeness or boasting though. Talk that would never know a lie. That's why, out of all the residents, he's top of the lot. "*I can fly you know...*" Kobashi, one of our care workers, his impersonation is the best.

"Percy Pan, how interesting. Grandad's got a real creative talent," Kobashi once ruminated.

"What Grandad was talking about is in an actual existing novel called *Peter Pan*. He is unexpectedly knowledgeable you know", Nurse Yuri informed him. Kobashi thought Peter Pan was just a Disney Character so his jaw dropped a bit when he found that out.

The care home is so busy that it makes your head spin so you wouldn't really notice, but when March draws near Kobashi gets a bit subdued. Those of us who know how he lost his girl in the tsunami give him space and pass quietly by.

One day, whilst giving Grandad his bath, poor Kobashi murmured... "I should have just asked her."

His regret is not having proposed you see. She separated from him, went back to the countryside, was arranged to be married and then after that she died.

"I guess it was my fault", Kobashi said to himself, or at least that's who he intended to say it to as Grandad looked as though he was sleeping. Then suddenly Grandad spoke out in such a distinctive tone that Kobashi nearly let go of his hand.

"Koji. She calls for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes widened. If it wasn't the name of the man his girl had married. She died along with him in the waves. Then Grandad in a voice of surprisingly strong clarity said, "She doesn't call for you." After that, "She went her own way, didn't she? It's the life she chose. That's how it is and it's fine that way." What could Grandad be witnessing now? Could his spirit, having flown through sky and time, really be looking out over the ocean of that very day? Kobashi blurted out questions like they were coughs.

"Didn't she suffer!? Doesn't she still hold it against me!?"

"She's forgotten that now. She flies."

"Where...?"

But before Kobashi even realised the old man's voice had stopped, his snores could be heard.

"Don't fall asleep now old man!!"

The hurt sank in. Kobashi suddenly welled and as the tap water roared out he wept.

Something else happened that same day. When Kobashi was by his side, Grandad suddenly spoke out.

"There was a girl on the overpass and she looked like she wanted to jump off."

"That's terrible, isn't it?"

“The beautiful ones ought not to die.” As for the ones who weren’t beautiful, that posed a problem, but Kobashi kept quiet and Grandad kept talking.

“She’d be so heavy from the weight of all her worries about her husband’s low salary and her awful mother-in-law that she’d never get off the ground.” Kobashi nodded along as appropriate.

“But then everyone does have their worries, you know.”

“It’s not good if you keep it all inside. Best to get it out. Like constipation.”

“Get it out he says...” When Kobashi looked up, Yuri was stood there with a white face.

“How do you know about the bridge?”

Kobashi, surprised, turned back to Grandad, but as always the old man was already snoring. What he realised then was that it had been Yuri, suffering and not knowing what to do, who had been perching on the overpass. She said that what she had wanted was not death, but rather to go off to somewhere different.

“I don’t really remember, but I felt like someone was watching me the whole time, so I couldn’t get myself over the handrail.”

“I said the beautiful ones ought not to die.” Kobashi tried to imitate the old man but it didn’t come out so well.

Yuri smiled tearfully.

Whoever it is Grandad will talk with them. That’s the reason it became such an extraordinary thing. One of the part time ladies once said, “I’ve lost my purse. It’d be nice if you’d fly off and find it.”

“It’s under the slipper box, isn’t it?”, Grandad said and was right as well, so it turned into a bit of a story. The lady got excited, rang the television station and they came to cover it. The boss got a surprise and had some bother though; all the visitors who had heard the rumours from the lady’s friends were pushing to get in the door.

Those who had been able to speak with Grandad took videos on their phones and put them online.

There was a sea of questions, everything from lost items to horse racing. Grandad was courteous and when talked to relished it, talking on and on. Then, if things would get a little difficult to answer, he would doze off half way through the conversation.

The videos got a reputation so there was no end to the intruders disguised as visitors to the facility.

Mostly they would be chased off at the entrance but even then, they would deftly sneak in. As soon as Yuri or Kobashi found them, they would be gotten rid of, but one-day Grandad lashed out. “Don’t get in the way of me talking with everyone!”, he shouted roughly at Kobashi, who shouted back, for the first time since entering the facility. Yuri, sobbing, cut in to stop them.

“How did things get like this?” Yuri said to herself.

“I understand that you want to enjoy talking to everyone. Kobashi isn’t trying to stop you from talking to people, he just hates the ones who are trying to take your stories and make a spectacle of them and of you. He’s worried that they are going to hurt you. It’s not just Kobashi. The boss, me, everyone, we are all worried about you. You’ve been scowling at us like we were different people so much recently. That expression with the furrow between your eyebrows hasn’t changed today either. You’re going to turn into nothing but a grumpy old man if you keep doing that.” Yuri gave a sigh.

Kobashi, who had been doing the rounds came in, but Grandad didn’t even look in his direction. He kept his mouth shut and tried to leave hastily. But just as he did so...

“It’ll snow tomorrow”, Grandad said suddenly.

“Eh?” Kobashi and Yuri said, turning around.

“It’ll snow tomorrow”, Grandad repeated with his eyes closed. “Keep an eye on your feet and spread out both arms. The wings are enough to carry you.”

Kobashi rushed over to Yuri, who as if in confusion had come to a halt, to check what he had said.

“I swore he said wings.”

“Yeah, I heard that too.”

“Strangely, he did say something normal though, didn’t he? Tomorrow will be snow he said. The forecast is already out so I knew that but...”

“He’s been told off a bit recently so he’s being awkward. He probably rushed to read the headlines so he could put you in a good mood by saying something plain for once”. It had been a while since Kobashi had laughed. Yuri felt better too.

The following day was as the weather forecast said. Well, there was much more snow than had been predicted actually. This time there was such an unusual fall that the roads came to a standstill and the trains too had stoppage troubles. So, as you might expect, it was a quiet day with just the staff and the residents and no visitations from questionable guests.

That day, Kobashi who had been busy with ice carving, door inspections and general running around the facility, hadn’t seen Grandad even once. As it was getting close to the evening, Kobashi was at last going to take a breather in the rest area. While he was ascending the stairs he suddenly noticed the emergency staircase.

“It should be locked but let’s go to have another look, shall we?” He thought.

As soon as he turned towards it he noticed the blackish figure outside. It was hard to see due to all the snow clouding up the wired glass. As he hurried, drawing closer, there was a small-framed man standing there with his back towards him. Kobashi gasped.

“Grandad.”

Kobashi flew toward the door but the handle was frozen up and wouldn’t move. There, past the fence of the landing for the emergency staircase, was what seemed to be the back of Grandad. There shouldn’t have been anything there, it should have just been air.

Yuri, who had heard Kobashi’s shouting came rushing in from the waiting room. The what seemed like harsh coldness of the door wouldn’t even allow it to shake. Kobashi hit the glass with his fist, shouting.

“What are you doing!? Go back to your room!”

The shadow slowly turned to face him. Grandad, who was in his hanten¹, stood up sharply. “As I’ll be a bother I’d best be off.” The strange thing was that his voice could be heard clearly despite the door.

“And where exactly would you go!?”

“Well there’s a place for me, you know.”

“It’s freezing. Let’s get inside!” Yuri was shouting with all her might too. There was no time to indulge this absurdity of Grandad being outside when he shouldn’t even be able to walk.

“You did an awful lot for me. For that I thank you.” Grandad had an almost noble expression and bowed, but soon cracked into a smile and gave them a thumbs up.

“Don’t bear too many troubles. The wings are enough as it is.”

Then, the middle of Grandad’s hanten billowed. Standing behind the door the two of them watched with bated breath. The hanten split open, its cotton poured out, was scattered and vanished into the snow. Before they knew it, a pair of brilliant wings had spread out. Grandad’s small frame rose as though it were being fished up. In one or two flaps he opposed the storm and had fully ascended. When the glass door finally opened and Kobashi stumbled out, there was no-one there.

At that time Grandad had actually already died a sleep-like death, but everyone chose to believe that he spread his wings and flew off. The strange thing was that all the uploaded videos of Grandad and the rumours vanished liked they had been erased, making the funeral a quiet but warm affair. Yuri

¹ A short sleeved winter coat filled with cotton.

thought that he had taken all the trouble and bother up with him.

“I wonder where it is that he went?” Kobashi said.

“Although he didn’t look it, he *was in fact* an angel.”

“If that’s what the angels are like, I’m definitely getting in”. Yuri and Kobashi both laughed. Well it’s nice that there’s at least one angel wearing a hanten, Kobashi thought.

The remnants of snow, white like the cotton that was scattered that day, danced.

Grandpa's Wings (Onuma Tamaki)

"I can fly alright. It's the truth. In this story *Peter Pon*, when the kids in it get older, they can't do it. Can't even fly after their hats if they throw 'em. Breaks your heart, you know. Though their bodies remember soaring through the air."

They called him Grandpa. It was a care home, so they should have addressed him as Mr Tobita, using his surname like for all the other residents. But Grandpa was known as Grandpa. He had no family and was bedridden and senile, so he wasn't easy to look after. He talked and talked when he was awake, but never boasting or backbiting. He just told endless stories and nobody could say if they were lies or not. This made him the most popular resident by far. *I can fly alright*. . . The care worker Kobashi did the best imitation. *Peter Pon* was a good one. He's really creative, Kobashi thought. But Yuri the nurse told him the scene Grandpa described was actually from the book of *Peter Pan*. He was surprisingly knowledgeable. Kobashi's mouth dropped open when he heard this. He'd thought Peter Pan was a Disney character.

The home was so hectic it was easy to miss how Kobashi grew despondent as March approached. People who knew his former girlfriend had died in the March 2011 tsunami exchanged furtive looks as they quietly passed him by.

One day while bathing Grandpa, Kobashi whispered, "Really, I should have asked her." He regretted not proposing. After they split up, his ex-girlfriend went back to the countryside and got married through a matchmaker. Then she died.

"Maybe it was my fault." As Grandpa seemed to be asleep, he thought he was talking to himself. But suddenly Grandpa spoke out in a clear voice, so Kobashi almost dropped him.

"Koji. She's calling for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes opened wide. Wasn't that the name of his ex-girlfriend's husband? They'd died together under the waves. Grandpa had said it with amazing strength and clarity.

"She's not calling for you." Grandpa said. "She moved on and chose her own life. Let it be."

What was Grandpa looking at now? Was his mind flying through time and space to gaze down over the sea that day?

"Didn't she suffer?" Kobashi asked hurriedly. "Didn't she hate me?"

"She's forgotten all that as she flies."

"Flies where?" he asked, but Grandpa's voice had stopped abruptly, giving way to the sound of peaceful breathing. "Don't sleep now, you old fool!"

Kobashi's anger soon became tears and he wailed as the hot water ran into the bath in great torrents.

Grandpa suddenly started speaking another time while Kobashi was there.

"A girl was on a bridge wanting to jump."

"That's terrible."

"Beautiful girls mustn't die. It's wrong." *And what if they're not beautiful?*, Kobashi had stammered, but Grandpa kept talking. "All heavy with cares, she was, fretting about her old bat of a mother-in-law and her low pay. So she couldn't fly."

"Everyone has worries," Kobashi replied without thinking.

"Wrong to keep 'em cramped inside, like constipation. Take a breath and squeeze 'em out."

"Out's to say..." Kobashi raised his head and saw Yuri, her face drained of colour.

"How do you know about the bridge?"

When he'd turned back startled, Grandpa had begun snoring.

Yuri had once struggled so hard with life that she hadn't known what to do. One day she'd lingered on a tall pedestrian overpass. She told Kobashi that she hadn't wanted to die so much as travel to another dimension.

“I don’t really remember. I felt someone was watching me the whole time, so I couldn’t go over the handrail,” she said.

“He said beautiful girls mustn’t die.” Kobashi tried to mimic Grandpa’s tone, but couldn’t get it right. Yuri smiled as she wiped her eyes.

Grandpa would talk with anyone. This led to a crazy situation. “I’ve lost my purse,” one of the part-time workers, a middle-aged woman told him. “Can you fly to my house and find it?”

“It’s under the slipper rack, ain’t it?” he replied, correctly, causing a huge fuss. In a flurry, she called the TV station, which sent over reporters to investigate. The care home manager refused in bewilderment, but the part-timer’s friends and visitors who’d heard the rumours kept coming. Someone managed to talk to Grandpa, record it on a phone, and upload it to the internet. Under a genial barrage of questions about everything from lost property to racing predictions, Grandpa got carried away, chattering on and on. Then when it got difficult to reply, he suddenly dropped off asleep.

The film was a big hit, so after that there was an endless stream of intruders pretending to be visitors. Mostly they were driven away at the entrance, but some would deftly slip by. When Kobashi and Yuri found them, they’d kick them out, and Grandpa snapped “Don’t get in the way of people talking.” It was the first time Grandpa had raised his voice to argue with Kobashi since he’d entered the facility. Yuri was crying when she stepped in to intervene.

“How did it come to this?” she muttered to herself. Then she addressed the old man. “I know you want to have a good time talking to everybody. But Kobashi isn’t trying to stop you from chatting. He just hates people who want to make fun of you. He’s worried they’re going to hurt you. And not only Kobashi. The manager, and me, and everyone is worried about you.”

More and more, Grandpa showed his visible displeasure to the care home staff. It was like he’d undergone a complete transformation. Today too, he was grimacing with a hard expression on his face. This made him seem like nothing more than a small, shabby, old man. Yuri sighed softly. Kobashi had come back into the room after checking nobody else was around, but Grandpa wouldn’t look in his direction. Kobashi had clammed up and was just about to go out again when Grandpa spoke.

“It’ll snow tomorrow.”

“Huh?” Kobashi and Yuri said simultaneously, turning to look at him.

“It’ll snow tomorrow,” Grandpa repeated with his eyes closed. “Watch your feet and open your arms wide. All you need are wings.”

Kobashi dashed over, then stopped to check with Yuri.

“He sounded like he was saying something about wings.”

“Yes, I heard him.”

“He said something surprisingly normal too. That it would snow tomorrow. I’d already seen it in the weather forecast though.”

“He felt bad getting told off all the time recently. He wanted to make up with you by flying down and quickly checking the headlines.”

It was a long time since Kobashi had laughed. Yuri was relieved too.

The next day it snowed, just like the forecast said—or no, much more than the forecast said. It was heavier than usual for the area, leaving the roads and rail network in chaos and confusion. As might be expected, this meant there were no suspicious visitors, and the staff and patients had the day to themselves for the first time in ages.

Kobashi was rushed off his feet, clearing snow and checking the doors, so he hadn’t been to see Grandpa yet. When it was almost evening, he finally took a breather and climbed up to the break room. Then the emergency staircase near the end of the corridor caught his eye. It was surely locked, but he went to have another look. As he headed in that direction, he

noticed a blackish figure outside. Great chunks of snow were stuck to the wire-reinforced glass, so it was difficult to see. When he rushed over, he saw a small man standing with his back to him.

Kobashi was so shocked he couldn't breathe. "Grandpa."

He grabbed for the door. Maybe it was frozen, but the handle wouldn't turn. Someone, who looked like Grandpa from behind, was beyond the railing for the emergency staircase landing. There was nothing out there. He was in mid-air.

Hearing Kobashi yell, Yuri sprinted out of the waiting room.

The door was horribly cold and would not budge. Kobashi thumped the glass with his fists, crying out, "What are you doing? Come back inside!"

The shadow turned slowly. Grandpa was wearing a padded jacket and standing up straight. His voice was strangely clear through the glass door.

"I only cause trouble here, so I'm leaving."

"But where will you go?"

"It's not like I don't have anywhere to go."

"Come inside. It's cold," Yuri yelled out with all her strength. There was no time to consider how absurd it was that Grandpa, who could not walk, was outside. She just wanted to call him back.

"You've done a lot for me. Thanking you kindly." Grandpa even looked a trifle moved as he made a bow, but he soon grinned and raised a thumb. "Nothing doing though. All you need are wings." As he said this, the back of his jacket started rising. On the inside of the glass door, the two staff members gasped, watching the jacket rip and white cotton scattering to mix with the falling snow. Then a gorgeous pair of wings extended and opened out. The huge appendages appeared to lift Grandpa's slight frame with a great thrashing sound as he flew upwards. He paused for a moment, as if to contend with the blustering blizzard, before flapping the wings two or three times and rising steadily. . .

When the glass door finally opened and Kobashi stumbled outside, there was no one on the landing. In reality, Grandpa had died just then, looking like he was sleeping peacefully, but everyone believed he'd spread his wings and flown away. The internet video of him mysteriously disappeared, as if to quash the rumours of the wider world. His funeral was a small, but amiable event. Yuri thought he might have borne his troubles away with him.

"I wonder where he meant when he said he had somewhere to go," Kobashi said.

"He looked like he'd turned into an angel."

"If that's how you become an angel, even I might go to heaven."

They both laughed. It wouldn't matter if there was one angel in a padded hospital jacket, Kobashi thought to himself. Just then, some lingering snowflakes danced in the air like flying cotton.

The Old Man Flying Free
By Onuma Tamaki

‘Cause I can fly, you know. Really, it’s true. In the story *Peter Pon*, the kids grow up and can’t fly anymore. Can’t even fly to chase the thrown cap. It’s so heartbreaking, right? You get it, yeah? But their bodies still remember flight.

* * *

Old man Tobita. “Old man” for short. The admissions folks call him by his surname, since this is an institution after all, but most still know him as the old man. He’s a real handful. Senile, bedridden, doesn’t have any family. But the minute he wakes up, he talks and talks - he does nothing but brag and tell lies that never hurt nobody, stories you never whether are true or not. That’s why he’s by far the most popular with the admissions folks. “I can fly, you know...” Nurse Kobashi does the best imitation of the old man. “*Peter Pon* is good, isn’t it? A real skilled piece of work!”

As a matter of fact, Nurse Yuri says, the scenes the old man talks about really are from the novel *Peter Pan*. He’s unexpectedly knowledgeable. Kobashi’s jaw dropped; he had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The institution was so busy it’d set your head spinning before you even knew what hit you, but Kobashi grew lethargic as March approached. Those who knew that his ex had died in the tsunami gave him sympathetic looks when they passed by. While he was giving the old man a bath, Kobashi murmured, “I still wonder if I should have told her.” Kobashi regretted that he had never proposed to her. They’d broken up, she had returned to the countryside, entered an arranged marriage, and, sadly, died.

“I wonder if it was my fault...”

Kobashi only meant to say it to himself; the old man looked like he was sleeping. He spoke so suddenly and so clearly that Kobashi nearly let go of his hand in surprise.

“Kouji. The name was Kouji.”

Kobashi opened his eyes. Wasn’t Kouji the name of the man his ex had married? She and her husband had died together in the ocean.

“It wasn’t you she called for,” the old man said, in a surprisingly strong voice. “She went where she chose to go, and lived the life she chose to live. And that’s good.” Now the old man seemed to be looking at something. Perhaps his spirit really was flying through time and space - looking at the ocean on that fateful day. He was overcome by a coughing fit.

“She didn’t suffer, did she? She doesn’t resent me, does she?”

“She’s forgotten all that and is flying free.”

“Where?”

The old man suddenly stopped talking, breathing the deep breaths of sleep.

“Don’t fall asleep in the bath, gramps,” Kobashi said bitterly, but the tears came welling up all of a sudden and he wailed while the water gushed loudly into the bathtub.

That wasn’t the only time something like this happened. On another day when Kobashi was at his side, the old man suddenly said, “There was a girl who wanted to jump and fly off the overpass bridge.”

“She shouldn’t do that.”

“It’s no way for a beautiful person to die,” continued the old man, not putting forth an opinion for the case of the ugly folks.

“Even having to bear the weight of having an awful old bat for a mother-in-law or living with unfairly low wages is no reason to jump”, Kobashi interjected half-heartedly. “But everybody resents something.”

“It’s just as bad as constipation. Strain enough and out it comes. It’s good for you.”

“Out?”

Kobashi looked up to see Yuri had stood up, her face gone pale.

"How do you know about the incident with the overpass bridge?"

Startled, the old man turned around, then began snoring.

Once, when she felt all was lost, Yuri had loitered atop a harsh, tall overpass. She said, rather than die, she'd go to a different dimension somewhere.

"I don't remember very clearly, but I feel like somebody was telling me the whole time not to go over the guardrail", Yuri said.

"Like I said, it's no way for a beautiful person to die," Kobashi said, trying to imitate the old man, but didn't pull it off very well. The corners of her eyes crinkled and she laughed.

The old man could talk with anybody. This led to some ridiculous things. A part-timer grannie told him, "I want you to fly around my house and look for the coin purse I lost."

"It's under the slipper shelf," replied the old man. A lucky guess, but it became something of a sensation. The grannie called a television station and asked them to cover it. Surprised, the boss of the institution refused, but the part-timer grannie's friends heard rumors and intruded on those visiting the sick.

Those who successfully spoke with the old man took videos and uploaded them on the internet. They showered him with ridiculous questions - from locations of lost items to horse racing predictions. The old man also chatted with them sociably and would get caught up in the excitement, talking on and on. And when the questions got difficult, he would just fall asleep. The videos became hugely popular, and the institution found itself invaded by imposters pretending to be guests visiting the ill. They were usually turned away at the front door, but some still cleverly snuck in. Kobashi and Yuri tried to turn them away when they found them, but the old man growled angrily, "I'm talking with these people, don't interrupt!"

This was the first time the old man had raised his voice against and quarreled with Kobashi since being admitted. It was the last straw. Yuri burst into tears.

"Why oh why has it come to this?" Yuri muttered to herself. "I get that the old man wants to have fun talking with everyone, but Kobashi has stopped speaking to him. The old man is the one interesting thing in this place, and I hate that these people have stolen him from Kobashi. I'm worried the old man's hurt his feelings. And it's not just Kobashi - the boss, me, everyone, we're all worried about you, you know!"

The old man had started making unpleasant faces at the staff. His brow remained furrowed with deep wrinkles today as well, and it wasn't simply a symptom of old age. Yuri sighed quietly. Kobashi came by on his patrol but the old man didn't look at him. Kobashi didn't say a word either, but, just as he was about to leave, the old man abruptly said, "It's gonna snow tomorrow!"

"Huh?" said Kobashi and Yuri in unison and turned to him.

"It's gonna snow tomorrow!" The old man repeated, his eyes still shut tight. "Keep your eyes on both feet and your hands open wide. It'll just be feathers, but it'll be enough."

Kobashi came running over, then hesitated, turning to Yuri for confirmation.

"Did he just say 'feathers'?"

"Yes, that's what I heard."

"He said something weirdly normal too - that it'll snow tomorrow. He must've wanted to butter you up, so you'd fly right over to look at the newspaper headlines, huh?"

Kobashi smiled for the first time in a long time. Yuri sighed in relief, too.

* * *

It snowed the next day, in accordance with the prediction - even more than expected. It snowed much more than was usual for this area, so the roads were badly congested, the trains were down and in turmoil, and as you'd expect, no strange visitors came calling that day. For the first time in ages, it was just the staff and admissions folks and it was quiet the whole day. Kobashi was so busy running around shoveling the driveway and inspecting the doors of the

institution that he never once looked at the old man. When night began to fall, he finally took a breather and climbed the stairs to the break room, where he suddenly noticed the emergency stairs at the entrance to the corridor. It ought to have been locked but maybe he should go to check one more time, just in case. When he turned his head, he caught sight of a dark figure outside. He couldn't see clearly with all the snow sticking to the webbed entry glass. He quickly drew closer and saw a short man standing with his back to him. His breath caught.

"Old man."

Kobashi flew out the door. The door handle was frozen and wouldn't turn. The figure who looked like the old man from behind was outside the fence of the landing area. There was nothing beyond that, only sky. Hearing Kobashi's shout, Yuri came flying out from the waiting room. He couldn't budge the door an inch, it was so cold. Kobashi pounded at the glass and shouted, "What are you doing?! Come back to your room!"

The shadow slowly turned to them in response. He stood straight as an arrow, wearing an old traditional half-coat. They could hear his voice with odd clarity through the door.

"It's getting troublesome, so I'll go on already."

"Just where will you go?!"

"I'll go where I'll go, at least."

Yuri shouted in earnest, too. "It's cold out, so let's come back in now!"

She made no mention of the fact that the old man, who shouldn't even be walking, had gotten outside. She just called for him to come back home.

"Thanks for looking after me and all."

The old man lowered his head, wearing a rather laudable expression, but soon grinned and gave them a thumbs up.

"It'll just be feathers, but it'll be enough," he said, and the back of his half-coat began to swell. Watching through the glass, they gasped as the half-coat ripped open, sending snow flying like bits of cotton. Long white wings unfurled in front of their very eyes. The huge wings lifted the old man's little body up into the air, pausing once to beat against the snow as if in defiance, flapping twice, three times, then he rose all at once...

When Kobashi finally got the glass door open and tumbled out, there was no sign of the old man or anyone else on the landing. In reality, the old man actually died in his sleep, but everyone preferred to believe he had spread his wings and flown away. The strange tales that had been written on the internet about the old man's videos and the world of rumors disappeared as if they had vanished in a puff of smoke, and his funeral was well-attended. Yuri wondered if he had carried off all those troubles.

"I suppose he got to the place where he said he was going."

"Yeah, he looked like an angel!"

"If *he's* an angel, guess even I'm getting into heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi both laughed. *It's probably all right if there's one angel who wears a half-coat*, Kobashi thought. Snow came fluttering down like cotton.

There Was an Old Man Who Knew How to Fly

By Onuma Tamaki

The old man told them he could fly.

"Honest," he said. "Like that Peter fellow, you know, and the children who can fly as long as they remain children, until they grow up and can't even fly after their own hats. It breaks the heart. I feel for them. But the body, it doesn't forget such a thing as flying so easily."

His name was Tobita; but everyone at the nursing home called him "Gramps". All the other seniors were referred to by their family names, but Gramps was "Gramps". He was all alone in the world, bedridden and senile, which made things difficult for the staff, but they all adored him. As soon as he was up, he would run like a faucet with all of his stories. He didn't boast or put others down, but you never could tell if he was pulling your leg.

The caregiver Mr. Kobashi did the best impersonations of Gramps. "I can fly, I tell you," he'd wheeze, scrunching up his face. He once told Ms. Yuri, one of the nurses, about his fondness for "the Peter tales", and how he thought the old man had a real imagination. Boy was he at a loss for words when she informed him that Gramps was describing a scene from the novel "Peter Pan" and that he was surprisingly well-read. As far as Mr. Kobashi knew, Peter Pan was just some Disney character.

The home kept everyone busy. It was enough to make your head spin. And if you weren't paying attention, you'd miss the fact that every time March rolled around Mr. Kobashi would grow a little bit somber. Those who knew he'd lost the love of his life to the great Tohoku earthquake and tsunami would offer a sympathetic glance as they passed him silently in the hall.

One day while giving Gramps a bath, Mr. Kobashi found himself deep in thought. "If only I had asked her," he sighed quietly to himself. His one regret was never proposing to his girlfriend. When their relationship ended, she had returned to her hometown and married a man introduced to her by her parents. A short while later, she would die.

Thinking Gramps was asleep, Mr. Kobashi continued with his self-reproach. "I could have stopped her..." he bemoaned when suddenly Gramps spoke up loud and clear, nearly sending him backwards.

"Koji. She's calling for Koji."

Mr. Kobashi's eyes opened wide. His love had married a man by that name. They had drowned in the ocean together.

"She's not calling for you!" Gramps continued in a surprisingly robust voice. "It was her choice, her life, and that's all." He seemed to be watching something, as though a part of his soul had flown across time and space to that very day.

Choking back his surprise, Mr. Kobashi mustered up the strength to speak. "Did she suffer? Does she hate me?"

"She flying. It's all behind her."

"Flying where?"

Silence. And then the quiet sound of snoring.

"Don't fall asleep on me now, you old fart," Mr. Kobashi cursed, tears welling up in his eyes until he could hold them back no longer and cried into the roar of the filling bath.

Something else happened a few days later. Again without warning Gramps turned to Mr. Kobashi and spoke.

"I saw a young woman on the pedestrian overpass. She wanted to jump." he said.

"That's no good," Mr. Kobashi replied.

"A beautiful woman shouldn't have to take her own life..."

Mr. Kobashi didn't know how to answer. And if you're not beautiful, then what? he thought to himself.

Gramps continued. "But a nagging mother-in-law and a low-paying job can really weigh a person down," he said. "How far are you supposed to get carrying all that?"

Mr. Kobashi returned a perfunctory response. "Everyone has their share of troubles."

"It's like constipation. You can't keep it all inside. You have to give it the old heave ho."

"The old heave ho..." Mr. Kobashi repeated incredulously, and looking up was surprised to find Ms. Yuri standing in the doorway, her face as white as chalk.

"How does he know about what happened on the overpass?" she asked.

Mr. Kobashi swung his gaze back to Gramps, who just as before was sound asleep.

One thing was clear: There was a time when Ms. Yuri had paced back and forth along a high pedestrian overpass, unable to go on with all of her suffering. She told Mr. Kobashi that at the time she had wanted a way out, in death or some other plane of existence.

"It seems so distant now, but I had the feeling that I was being watched. I couldn't bring myself to jump the railing," she recounted.

In an effort to lighten the mood, Mr. Kobashi attempted one of his imitations. "As Gramps said, 'A beautiful woman shouldn't have to take her own life.'" It was a poor imitation, but it made Ms. Yuri laugh nonetheless.

Gramps was real chatty, and this natural inclination to talk to whomever started a whole heap of trouble. A woman who worked at the home part time once asked Gramps to "fly" over to her house and help her look for a handbag she had misplaced. She was only teasing, of course, but when he correctly predicted that she would find it behind her slipper rack, things began to get out of hand. The woman excitedly fed her story to a television station, who then sent a crew to check it out. The director of the home was outraged but couldn't prevent them and other curious visitors from flooding in. Those who succeeded in talking to Gramps took videos on their phones and uploaded them to social media. They sure turned the faucet on Gramps, who thrived on the attention and was

more than happy to answer a slew of insane requests ranging from lost items to lucky numbers. But whenever the questions became too hard to answer, he'd all of a sudden fall asleep. The videos went viral, and a stream of people posing as visitors started sneaking into the home. Most were chased away at the reception desk; but others were far too crafty, and Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri had to hunt them down one by one. This eventually set Gramps off.

"It's rude to interrupt people when they're talking!" he yelled, and for the first time since coming to the home began arguing with Mr. Kobashi. Ms. Yuri was nearly in tears when she stepped in to break them up.

"Why? Why did this have to happen?" she sniffled to herself, and turning to Gramps tried to calm him down. "I understand that you enjoy talking to people. I do. And Mr. Kobashi wasn't trying to stop that. It's just that he can't stand to see you being treated like some circus animal. He's worried for your safety. And he's not alone. The director and me and everyone at the home, we're all worried sick."

Gramps became more and more irascible with the nursing staff. It was as though he were a different person. One day while attending to his needs, Ms. Yuri stole a look at his face: his deeply furrowed brow and the stern gaze that now looked out from beneath it. It made her sigh to think that Gramps had become just another small, shrivelled up old man. Mr. Kobashi entered the room on his rounds, but neither he nor Gramps seemed to acknowledge the other's presence. Then, as Mr. Kobashi was about to leave, a voice, Gramps' voice, rose up from behind.

"There will be snow tomorrow." Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri spun around in surprise.

"There will be snow tomorrow." Gramps repeated, his eyes shut. "Watch your stance, open your arms wide, and remember: all you need is a pair of wings."

Mr. Kobashi rushed over to Gramps, but stopped short and looked to Ms. Yuri instead.

"Is it just me, or did he say something about 'wings'?" he asked.

"No, I heard it too." Ms. Yuri replied.

"And before that, something surprisingly mundane: about there being snow tomorrow. Of course, I already knew that, having heard the weather report."

"We've all been pretty hard on him recently. He must feel terrible. I wouldn't be surprised if he'd flown out in a rush to read the headlines just to patch things up with you."

Mr. Kobashi smiled for the first time in weeks. Seeing this, Ms. Yuri sighed with relief.

The next day, there was a great snowstorm. It was beyond even what the weather bureau had predicted. It was extraordinary for this part of Japan. The roads were a mess and train platforms were overflowing, so nobody at the home was surprised that the snow had also spared them from another day of suspicious visitors. The staff hadn't had a quiet day alone with the residents in a long time.

Mr. Kobashi was so busy shovelling snow and inspecting all the doors of the home that he forgot to look in on Gramps all day. It was nearly sunset before he had found a moment to catch his breath. He decided to go upstairs to the break-room. When he had reached the second floor, his mind suddenly went to the emergency exit at the end of the hallway. Surely it was locked it, he thought, but it wouldn't hurt to double-check. Just then he caught a glimpse of a dark figure through the glass pane of the exit, but it was hard to tell. The glass was reinforced with wire and caked with snow. He rushed over for a closer look and was able to make out a man of small-build, his back to the window. Mr. Kobashi's face went pale.

"Gramps!"

Mr. Kobashi leapt at the door, but it seemed to be frozen shut, or maybe the handle was broken. A man who looked like Gramps was out there, just beyond the railing of the emergency staircase landing; out there, where there was nothing, nothing but air.

Hearing Mr. Kobashi out in the hallway, Ms. Yuri came running from a nearby waiting room.

The door wouldn't budge an inch because of the cold, so Mr. Kobashi banged on its glass with his fists.

"What do you think you're doing out there? You need to go back to your room!" he yelled.

The figure slowly turned to look back. It really was Gramps. He wore a short winter coat and carried himself taller than usual.

"I should go now. I've caused you enough trouble." His voice was oddly clear and unobstructed by the glass.

"But, go where?"

"Oh, I know of places."

"It's cold out there, Gramps. Please come inside."

Ms. Yuri also tried her best to call Gramps in. This was not the time to question what a senior with limited mobility was doing outdoors. It was necessary to bring him in at all costs.

Something like gratitude seemed to shine in Gramps' eyes. "Thank you for all that you have done for me." He bowed his head, and then raising it to reveal a grin, gave Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri a thumbs-up. "Travel light, and remember: all you need is a pair of wings."

On the other side of the glass door, Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri could see that Gramps' winter coat was beginning to heave. They held their breaths and watched as the coat tore, sending a flurry of cotton into the falling snow. In the next instant, they saw unfold a brilliant pair of wings that seemed to hoist Gramps' small frame into the air; there he hovered for a moment, his wings beating against the fast-falling snow, before shooting like an arrow into the sky.

Finally, the door gave way and Mr. Kobashi tumbled onto the landing. There was no sign of anyone having been there. In fact, it was at that moment that Gramps passed away peacefully in his sleep, although everyone at the home preferred to believe that he had really spread his wings and flown.

Oddly enough, the videos that had been uploaded to social media and all the gossip surrounding Gramps seemed to vanish overnight, allowing the staff to hold a small and intimate funeral. Ms. Yuri wondered if maybe Gramps had taken all the chaos and commotion with him.

Some time later, Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri recounted the day Gramps left.

“Where do you think he was heading?” Mr. Kobashi asked.

“Judging by the way he looked, I’d say he was an angel.” Ms. Yuri replied.

“If Gramps was an angel, then there’s hope for me yet,” Mr. Kobashi joked, and the two of them laughed. It probably doesn’t hurt to have at least one angel out there in a short winter coat, he thought.

Even though it was already spring, snow was falling. Mr. Kobashi and Ms. Yuri couldn’t help but be reminded of a flurry of cotton.

Grampa Takes Flight

By Tamaki Onuma

"I c'n fly. It's true! You know in that bit in Peter Pong, where the kids throw a hat and chase after it and fly? But they can't do it when they get older. It's sad, I tell you what. But the body remembers..."

Old man Tobita. A.k.a. Grampa. In the home, everyone else called him by last name, of course, but really he was just Grampa.

He didn't have any family, and was mostly bedridden and vacant, so he needed lots of care. But when he was awake, man would he talk and talk. But he never talked himself up, and he never badmouthed the other residents. He just told the kind of stories you never knew if you should believe or not, and so everyone in the home loved him.

"I c'n flah!" Kobashi had the best imitation of all the caregivers. "Love that Peter Pong. It is quite a piece of work!" But then Nurse Yuri said the scene Grampa described actually had happened in the novel Peter Pan, meaning the old man actually knew more than he let on. Kobashi, who'd thought Peter Pan was just a character in a Disney movie, didn't know what to say to that.

Every year around March Kobashi would get really quiet, not that most people noticed what with the home always being so busy no one could see straight. But the folks who knew that his old flame had died in the tsunami would trade quiet looks when they passed.

One day, when he was giving Grampa his bath, Kobashi was muttering to himself. "I should have told her." Kobashi's great regret was that he'd never proposed to his lost love. After they'd split up, she'd gone back to her hometown and married someone her folks had put her with, and there she died. "It's like it's my fault." Grandpa looked like he was asleep so Kobashi didn't think he'd hear any of it. But then Grampa started talking so sharp that Kobashi nearly dropped him.

"Koji. She's calling for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes went wide. Wasn't that the name of the guy his ex had married? The two of them had been washed away together.

Grampa went on, his voice shockingly strong and clear.

"She wasn't calling for you." And "She made her own choices, she lived the life she wanted, that's good enough for anyone." What could he be seeing? Was his spirit actually flying through time and space, to the sea on that day?

Kobashi choked out a question.

"Did she suffer? Does she blame me?"

"She's forgotten all that, she's flyin' now."

"Where?"

Grampa's voice fell quiet, and his words were replaced by deep, slow breaths.

"No, don't fall asleep now old man!"

Kobashi said, near to raging, then burst into tears. He sobbed as he rinsed the old man down. Then there was this other time. Kobashi was there for this one too, when Grampa started talking.

"There was a girl on the bridge, she was going to jump."

"Well, that's no good."

"A beauty like that's got no call to die." Which of course raises questions about non-beauties, but he went on.

"Letting that old bitch of a mother in law or your cheap salary get to you, that's no reason to jump." Kobashi made sounds of agreement.

"Well, everyone has their problems."

"You can't let 'em back up on you. It's like constipation. You gotta bear down and squeeze it all out!"

"Squeeze it..." Kobashi looked up and saw Nurse Yuri standing there, white as a sheet.

"How do you know about the bridge?"

Startled, Kobashi turned back to Grampa, but he just lay there snoring again.

It turns out that once, Nurse Yuri had fallen into such deep despair, she'd climbed up on a high pedestrian bridge to jump, but just stopped there. She said she hadn't wanted to die so much as just go Somewhere Else, like some other universe.

"I don't remember it all that well, but I know I felt like someone was watching me the whole time. That's why I couldn't make it over the railing." She said.

"A beauty like you's got no call to die, apparently."

Kobashi had intended to say this in Grampa's voice, but it didn't come out so well. Nurse Yuri laughed, covering her eyes.

Grampa would talk to anybody, which ended up being the source of no end of trouble. One time, one of the part time ladies told him "I lost my coin purse. Why don't you fly to on over my house and find it?" And he said "It's under the slipper rack."

Turned out he was right, and then things really hit the fan. The lady got all worked up and called the TV station, and they came with a film crew. The Manager, caught by surprise, turned them away, but some other part timers and family visitors caught wind of the rumors and started trying their luck.

The ones who made it took videos on their phones, which got onto the internet. They asked him all kinds of stuff, where they'd lost things or what the winning horse at the track would be, and since Grampa loved a friendly chat he was happy to talk and talk. When the questions got tough, he fell asleep on the spot. The videos went viral, and strangers started pretending to be legitimate visitors to sneak in.

Usually they got caught at the entrance, but a few made it through. Kobashi or Nurse Yuri ran these off too when they found out, but Grampa got mad. "Don't go interrupting people's conversations!"

This was the first time Grampa and Kobashi got into a real shouting match, and Nurse Yuri started crying when she tried to get between them.

"Why is this happening?" Nurse Yuri asked, almost to herself.

"We know you like talking to people, Grampa. But Kobashi and I aren't trying to keep you from talking, it's just that these people are bad. They're just trying to use you because they think it's funny. We're worried you're going to get hurt. Kobashi, me, the Manager, we're just worried about you."

Grampa started to act nasty to the staff, like he felt they'd all turned against him. One day not long after all that, Nurse Yuri stopped by his room. Grampa's brow was furrowed and his expression grim, as was usual lately. "When you get like this, you look like just another scrawny old man," Nurse Yuri sighed.

Kobashi came by on his rounds, but Grampa refused to look at him. Kobashi turned to leave without speaking a word.

"Snow tomorrow."

Grampa said.

"Huh?" answered Nurse Yuri and Kobashi in unison, turning back to him.

"Snow tomorrow."

Grampa faced them, his eyes closed.

"Keep an eye on your footing, and spread your arms. You just need a bit of lift."

Kobashi was about to step over to check on him, but he hesitated and turned to check with Nurse Yuri.

"Did you hear him say something about wings?"

"Yeah, I did."

"What was all that about snow tomorrow? It was in the weather report, everyone knows it's going to snow tomorrow."

"He just feels bad because you two were fighting. He probably just went out for a quick flight to see what was in the paper, looking for something to cheer you up."

It was the first time Kobashi had smiled in a while. Nurse Yuri was glad to see it.

The next day, as predicted, it snowed. In fact, it snowed way more than the forecast said. It was so heavy that the roads went chaotic and the trains stopped, so of course there were no suspicious visitors to ward off. It was a rare day when the only people around were staff and residents.

That day, Kobashi was busy going around the facility clearing snow and checking the doors, so he didn't have any chance to look in on Grampa. When evening came, he finally had time for a break.

He was on the way up the stairs to the break room when he noticed the emergency door at the end of the hallway. He knew it would be locked, but decided to check one last time. As he walked toward it he saw a dark human silhouette beyond the door. The wired glass was obscured by snow, but Kobashi went closer and recognized the silhouette of a small man with his back toward the door.

"Grampa!"

Kobashi rushed to the door. The handle wouldn't turn, like it was frozen shut. The Grampa-shaped shadow stood outside the railing of the fire escape platform. There wasn't anything to stand on there, so he must have been floating in mid-air.

Nurse Yuri burst out of the break room at Kobashi's cry. The bitter cold door wouldn't budge.

"What are you doing out there? Come back inside!"

Kobashi yelled, and the silhouette slowly turned toward them. Grampa stood tall, dressed in his bathrobe. Kobashi pounded on the glass with his fist and shouted.

"I'm just causing you all trouble, so I'm gonna go..."

“Go? Where can you go?!”

“Hey, I got somewhere!”

“It’s cold, come back inside now.”

Nurse Yuri ordered, shouting now as well. There was no time to wonder how Grampa could be standing there, when he shouldn’t even be able to walk. She just kept trying to call him back.

“I thank you for all you done.”

Grampa turned his face down, an embarrassed look on his face, but quickly looked back up with a grin and a thumbs up.

“Nothing to it. You just need a bit of lift.”

And then his back started bulging outward. From the other side of the glass, the two watchers held their breath as his bathrobe parted and grew into a puff of white blending with the whirling snow. As they watched, the white robe spread open like great wings. Grampa’s tiny body was pulled into the air on the huge wings as they paused, then with a couple of mighty beats they pulled him upward against the blowing snow.

The glass door finally opened, but when Kobashi burst through, no one was on the fire escape platform.

In truth, at just that moment, Grampa had passed on quietly, like going to sleep, but everyone preferred to believe he’d spread his wings and flown away. Oddly, all the videos and rumors about Grampa that had been spreading over the internet just disappeared, and his funeral ended up being a small, warm affair. It was like he’d taken all the fighting away with him, Nurse Yuri felt.

“I wonder where he headed off to.”

“He looked like an angel up there like that.”

“If he gets to be an angel, then I reckon even I’ve got a chance at heaven!”

Nurse Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Kobashi thought it didn’t sound too bad, having at least one angel up there wandering around in a bathrobe.

And the lingering snow whirled on, like that puff of white taken flight.

Grandpa Takes Flight

by Tamaki Onuma

"I can fly, I tell you. That story about Peter Whatsit, Peter Pat? The one where kids grow up and lose the power to fly? At first, they can fling their hats off and fly into the sky, but eventually forget how to do it. Well, I don't buy it – the body remembers how to fly, after all."

This was Grandpa Tobita. Other patients might use his family name, but to most people he was just "Grandpa". Grandpa had no family, and when he drifted off to sleep he became confused and difficult to deal with. However, once awake, he would talk and talk and talk. His stories were never boastful and had no unkind words about others, yet no one could tell if they had any truth to them whatsoever. This made him by far the most popular amongst the patients.

A young male nurse, Kobashi, was the best at imitating Grandpa - "I can fly, I tell you! That Peter Pat story, that's a good one. Real literary talent there."

Yuri, another nurse, mentioned that the scene Grandpa was describing actually appeared in the novel *Peter Pan*. Kobashi had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character, and his mouth opened in surprise. Grandpa was unexpectedly knowledgeable.

The pace of work at the facility was enough to make you keel over, so unless you were really paying attention you probably wouldn't notice that every year as March approached, Kobashi became gloomy. Those who did notice quietly exchanged looks and went about their business - they knew that long ago around this time of year, his girlfriend had died in a tsunami.

One day while bathing Grandpa, Kobashi sighed.

"I really should have asked her," he murmured, regretting his decision not to propose. After the breakup, his girlfriend had moved back to the countryside, begun seeing someone, and married before her death. "Maybe it's my fault she died."

Grandpa appeared to be asleep, and Kobashi had intended this to be something of a monologue. But suddenly, Grandpa spoke out in a clear voice. Kobashi almost jerked back in surprise.

"Koji. His name was Koji."

Kobashi stared wide-eyed. Wasn't that the name of his ex-girlfriend's husband? They had died in the sea together. Grandpa said in a remarkably clear and powerful voice: "I'm not talking about you. They chose their path, their life; leave it at that."

What was Grandpa looking at now? Could his mind truly have flown across time and space to see the ocean on that day?

"Was she suffering? Did she still hate me?" Kobashi asked urgently.

"I've forgotten those things, where I'm flying now."

"Where *are* you?"

But Grandpa had stopped speaking abruptly, and all Kobashi could hear was gentle breathing as the old man slept.

"Don't fall asleep now!" Tears had suddenly welled up in Kobashi's eyes, and he wept loudly while carelessly splashing the bathwater on Grandpa.

There was one other similar occurrence. One day, while Kobashi was nearby, Grandpa suddenly began talking:

"There was a woman on a footbridge, and she wanted to jump off."

"That's terrible."

"It's terrible if a beautiful woman dies."

And if they aren't beautiful, what then? Kobashi hesitated to bring up this point for a moment, but then Grandpa continued talking.

"A miserable grandma to take care of and measly monthly earnings – the burden of constantly worrying had driven her to jump off the bridge."

Kobashi's response was minimal. "Everyone's got problems."

"But bottling them up like you're constipated is bad. Much better to let it all out."

"Let it out, huh?" said Kobashi. He then looked up to see Yuri standing nearby, her face white as a sheet.

"How do you know that story about the footbridge?" she asked.

But when Kobashi looked back at Grandpa, he was snoring away as if he had never been awake in the first place.

It came out that Yuri had in fact been the one standing on the tall bridge, at a time when her life was very difficult and there seemed to be no way out.

"But I didn't want to die so much as go to a different dimension, a different place," explained Yuri. "I don't remember all too well, but it felt like someone was watching me, and I just couldn't bring myself to climb over the railing."

"Beautiful ladies shouldn't die." Kobashi tried to mimic Grandpa's style of speaking, but he didn't quite pull it off. Yuri laughed while drying her eyes.

Grandpa would talk to anyone - and something quite unexpected came of this.

A middle-aged woman, one of the part-time staff, mentioned she had lost her purse.

"Can you fly to my house and find it, Grandpa?" she asked.

"It's under your slipper shelf, I'd say," Grandpa replied after a moment.

This quite impressed the woman. She called a TV station in her excitement, and a reporter came. The facility director was surprised and refused the reporter entry, but somehow word got out, whether it was the woman gossiping with her friends or another visitor who had heard the rumors.

Some people who succeeded in talking with Grandpa filmed him on their phones and posted the video online. People showered questions on Grandpa, from requests to find lost items to predictions for horse races, and he responded excitedly to the eager requests, cheerfully talking on and on. And when he had difficulty answering a question, he would promptly fall asleep.

The video received quite a bit of attention, and soon intruders, pretending to be visitors, could not be kept away. Usually they were turned back at the entrance, but some clever ones still managed to sneak in. Kobashi and Yuri sent them away when they found them, but this angered Grandpa.

"These people are talking, and you are interrupting!"

This was the first time Grandpa had ever raised his voice and argued with Kobashi since entering the facility, and as Yuri intervened she teared up.

Why is Grandpa so upset about all this? she wondered to herself.

"I know you want enjoy yourself and talk with everyone, Grandpa. Kobashi isn't trying to stop that – he just doesn't like all the people who are trying to take advantage of you. He's worried that they might hurt you. And it's not just Kobashi – the director, and me, and everyone else is worried about you, too."

It was as if Grandpa had become a new person. He now often scowled at the staff. One day, as per usual, Grandpa's deeply wrinkled brow was set in a severe expression. He looked like nothing more than a small, frail old man now, and Yuri sighed softly. Kobashi, who had been making his rounds, now entered the room, but Grandpa didn't turn to look at him. Kobashi kept his mouth pressed shut and made to leave quickly, but then Grandpa spoke.

"It will snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" said Yuri and Kobashi, both wheeling around in surprise.

"It will snow tomorrow," repeated Grandpa, his eyes still tightly closed.

"Look hard at your feet and spread your hands. The wings do all the heavy lifting." Kobashi rushed over to confirm with Yuri, who was waiting hesitantly. "I think he was talking about how his wings work or something."

"Yeah, I heard."

"He also said that one oddly normal thing – that it will snow tomorrow. But the weather report is out so I definitely already knew that..."

“Well, he was scolded recently and probably felt bad. So, to try to get back on your good side, maybe he quickly flew out to take a look at the newspaper headlines?”

For the first time in a long time, Kobashi smiled. Yuri also was relieved.

It did indeed snow the next day – but Grandpa’s prediction was an understatement, if anything. The huge snowfall was rare for the area, causing congestion on the roads and halting the trains. Unsurprisingly, there were no suspicious visitors that day, and the staff and patients had a rare quiet day alone.

While shoveling snow and checking the doors around the facility, Kobashi didn’t see Grandpa once. When evening came, he decided to finally take a break and began climbing the stairs up to the break room. But just then the emergency escape stairs down the hallway caught Kobashi’s attention. The door should be locked, but just in case he thought he would go check it. But as he turned his head, he noticed a dark silhouette standing outside. Quite a bit of snow had collected on the wired glass window, making it difficult to see. Kobashi quickly came closer, and saw a small man with his back turned towards him. His breath caught.

“Grandpa!”

Kobashi sprang towards the door. The handle wouldn’t budge – perhaps there was too much ice on it. Though his back was turned towards Kobashi, the figure appeared to be Grandpa. He was on the opposite side of the railing of the emergency staircase landing. But there was nothing on that side – nothing but air.

Upon hearing Kobashi’s shouting, Yuri came running from a waiting room. The icy door still wouldn’t budge an inch.

“What are you doing?! Come on, get back inside!” Kobashi shouted, pounding on the glass with his fist.

Upon hearing this, the figure turned around slowly. Grandpa, in his short robe, was standing firm and upright outside. His voice was oddly clear, despite coming through the glass of the door.

“I’m causing problems here, so I’ll be off now.”

“What do mean? Where are you going?”

“Well, let’s just say I’ve got a place to go.”

“It’s cold! Please, why don’t you just come inside?” cried Yuri. She wasn’t even thinking about the strangeness of how Grandpa, who supposedly couldn’t walk, was standing outside. She just cared about getting him back into the building.

“You were both good to me. Thank you,” said Grandpa. His face was polite, and he bowed his head in thanks, but then he broke into a grin and gave them a thumbs-up.

“It’s easy – the wings do all the heavy lifting.”

With this, the back of Grandpa's gown began to move apart and rise upwards. Watching at the door, Yuri and Kobashi held their breath and looked on intently as the gown split and a white brocade spilled forth, whipping up and parting the snow. As they continued staring, it expanded and grew into a pair of magnificent wings. Grandpa's small body almost looked like it had been caught by the large wings and was being pulled upwards. He paused for a moment, flapped his wings a few times against the blizzard of snow blowing around him, and then ascended all at once.

The glass door finally opened, but as Kobashi burst onto the landing, there was no one there. Grandpa had in fact died in his sleep at that very moment, but everyone believed that he had spread his wings and flown away instead. Strangely, both the video of Grandpa that had been put online and the rumors surrounding it seemed to vanish, and a small, affectionate funeral was held for him. Yuri wondered if perhaps he had taken all the troubles with him somehow.

"I wonder where he ended up going?" mused Kobashi.

"It seems like he was an angel..." Yuri replied.

"Well, if *he* was an angel then I can go to Heaven, too."

Yuri and Kobashi shared a laugh. Surely having one angel in the world who wore a hospital gown couldn't be such a bad thing, thought Kobashi.

The lingering traces of snow danced like the white brocade that had unfurled that day.

The Old Man Who Flew

Ōnuma Tamaki

I can fly, y'know. I really can. You know that story about Peter Pon—the one where kids forget how to fly once they grow up, where they stop being able to fling away their hats and take to the air chasing after 'em—it's really quite heartrending. I know how it feels, y'know. My body remembers how it felt, flying.

Old mister Tobita. They called him “the old man”. He lived in a home, so most of the residents got called by their family names, but he was always just “the old man”. He was bedridden, senile, and had no family, so he needed a lot of attention—but when he was awake, he just wouldn't stop talking. And it wasn't just bragging or mouthing off. He'd say things so odd you couldn't tell if they were true or not. That's why he was by far and away the most popular of the residents. “I can fly, y'know...” Kobashi, one of the carers, was the best at imitating him. “Peter Pon's great, ain't he... what a talent for literature...” But Yuri, one of the nurses, said the scene the old man talked about really appeared in the novel Peter Pan. “Who knew he was so well read?” she said. Kobashi couldn't find an answer to that; he'd always thought Peter Pan was just a character in a Disney movie.

Things were always hectic at the home so you couldn't tell just by looking, but when it got to March, Kobashi lost some of his liveliness. Some people knew the reason—his old girlfriend had died in a tsunami. He saw them exchange gentle glances each time they passed him.

One day when he was giving the old man a bath, Kobashi whispered, “I guess I should've told her, after all.” He regretted not proposing to his girlfriend while he'd had the chance. After they'd parted, she'd gone back to her hometown, had an arranged marriage, and then passed away. “I wonder if it's my fault.” Kobashi was really only talking to himself; the old man looked like he was asleep. But suddenly the old man began to speak in a clear voice. Kobashi was so surprised he almost let go of him completely.

“Kōji. He's called Kōji.”

Kobashi's eyes widened. Kōji was the name of the man his old girlfriend had married. The man who had died together with her in the tsunami.

“Not you,” the old man said, with surprising strength and clarity. “You made the choice to move on yourself. You chose that life, so it's all right.” Whatever was the old man seeing? Was his spirit really flying across time and space—was he watching that sea where she had died?

“She didn't suffer, did she?” Kobashi asked quickly. “She didn't resent me?”

“I've forgotten all that—I'm flying.”

“Flying where?”

But the old man had finished talking. Kobashi heard him snore.

“Don't just go to sleep on me now, you old geezer!” Kobashi cursed. But suddenly his eyes welled up, and he broke down in tears.

Another time when Kobashi was there, the old man suddenly began to speak.

"There's a girl on the footbridge. She wants to fly."

"Well, that's no good," Kobashi said.

"We can't have no pretty girls up and dying on us," the old man said. Well, how about girls that aren't pretty, Kobashi tried to say, but the old man kept talking.

"Old women spend too much time complaining about their wages, so there's no way they could fly," he said.

Kobashi made a noise in his throat. "But everyone has something they're worried about."

"It's just like your bowels; you mustn't let it get all blocked up. You've gotta push harder, let it out."

"Push'?" Kobashi said. Suddenly he looked up. Yuri was standing in front of him. Her face was white.

"How do you know about the footbridge?" she asked.

But when they looked back, to their surprise, the old man was already snoring.

It turned out that once, when Yuri had been going through an unbearably difficult time, she certainly had lingered on top of a footbridge. Rather than wanting to die, she said, it had been more like wanting to go to a different dimension. "I don't remember it all that well, but the whole time I felt I was being watched. So I couldn't cross the railing," she said.

"Well, we can't have no pretty girls dying," Kobashi said. He meant it as an imitation of the old man's manner of speaking, but it didn't come out right. Yuri laughed, putting a hand to her forehead.

The old man would talk to anyone. And it was from then on that the unthinkable happened. One of the women working part-time said to him, "I've lost my coin purse; you should fly over to my house and find it for me!" The old man said, "How about you try looking under the slipper rack?" It turned out he was right, and that was when things really started getting out of hand. The woman was so excited that she called the TV station and reporters started coming by. The manager of the home was awfully surprised; he ended up turning them down, but the part-time woman's friends and some others who heard the rumour started dropping in uninvited. Those who did manage to talk to the old man took videos on their phone and uploaded them to the internet. Showered in absurd requests, from finding lost items to predicting the outcome of horseraces, the old man would get carried away when engaged in conversation, and just wouldn't stop talking. When faced with something difficult to answer, he could drop off to sleep in only a moment. The videos became an internet sensation, and the number of trespassers posing as visitors to the home became endless. Usually they would get turned away at the entrance, but some used their wits to slip through. Kobashi and Yuri asked them to leave as soon as they found them, but the old man became angry, saying, "Don't interrupt when we're talking!" That was the first time the old man had ever raised his voice to Kobashi. Yuri was in tears as she tried to stop the argument.

"How did it end up like this?" she sobbed to herself, before turning to the old man. "I know you just want to talk to everyone. But Kobashi's not trying to stop you from talking; he just doesn't like people trying to make fun of you. He's worried they'll hurt you. And it's not just Kobashi; the manager and me and everyone, we're all worried about you."

The old man started acting sullenly to the staff at the home. It was as if he were an entirely different person. The next day, too, a frown wrinkled his forehead, and his expression looked severe. When he made that face, he became little more than a shrivelled old man. Yuri sighed. Kobashi, who was

on duty, came into the room, but the old man wouldn't even glance at him. Kobashi said nothing, either, just turned on his heel and went to leave. As he did—

"It's gonna snow tomorrow," the old man said, all of a sudden.

"What?" Kobashi and Yuri said in unison, turning back to look at him.

"It's gonna snow tomorrow," the old man repeated, his eyes closed. "Watch your step and spread your arms. The only thing you gotta carry is the wings on your back."

Kobashi hurried over to his side. He hesitated, turning to Yuri for confirmation. "I heard him say something about wings."

"So did I."

"He said something unexpectedly normal, too, didn't he. That it's going to snow tomorrow. I checked the weather forecast, so I've known it for a while, but..."

"He's just unhappy because you've been scolding him all the time lately. He wants to get back in your good books so he went out and looked at the newspaper headlines or something."

Kobashi laughed. It had been a long time since he'd laughed. Yuri was relieved, too.

The next day was snowy, as predicted. Or rather, more snowy than predicted. Strangely, the snow had fallen so thickly in the area that the roads were congested. There was public outcry over the fact the trains had stopped running. As one would expect on such a day, there were no suspicious visitors, and the staff and residents had a quiet day—their first in a very long time.

It was on this day that Kobashi was bustling around shovelling snow and inspecting the doors. He was so busy he hadn't seen the old man even once. As it grew closer to dusk, Kobashi finally headed up the stairs towards the lounge room, hoping to take a moment's rest. It was at that moment that something around the emergency exit behind the corridor caught his eye. The exit was meant to be locked, but he thought he'd best check it one more time. The moment he turned to face the exit, he realised he could see a dark figure outside. It was hard to see because there was a lot of snow caught in the wired glass. He hurried closer to the door. A slightly built man was standing outside, his back to Kobashi.

Kobashi gasped.

"It's the old man!"

Kobashi leapt for the door. The handle wouldn't turn; it was frozen. The figure was outside the fence, on the landing of the emergency stairs. Yuri came running from the waiting room. She must have heard Kobashi's cry.

The door, frustratingly cold, wouldn't budge even a centimetre. Kobashi banged on the glass with his fists.

"What are you doing?" he shouted. "Come back to your room."

As he did, the figure turned to face him. The old man, wearing his short *hanten* coat, stood there, unwavering. Even through the glass door, his voice was strangely clear.

"I've put you to trouble, so I've gotta go."

“Go? Go where?” Kobashi said.

“Even I have someplace to go, y'know.”

“It's cold out there, so please come back inside!” Yuri screamed as hard as she could. They had no time to wonder why the old man, who shouldn't have been able to walk, was outside. They just wanted to call him back.

“You two did your bit for me, so thanks for that.” For a moment, he lowered his head in deference, but straight away, he broke into a smile and gave them a thumbs-up.

“Don't carry such a burden... The only thing you gotta carry is the wings on your back...”

As he finished speaking, his *hanten* coat billowed behind him. Kobashi and Yuri gasped from behind the glass door. The coat tore; white threads scattered, mixing with the snow around them as they fell. As they watched, the rip in the coat grew bigger, and a pair of handsome wings emerged. The old man's tiny body, pulled by the huge wings, rose into the sky, and after pausing for a moment, with a few flaps, took to the air, against the raging snowstorm....

The glass door finally opened, and Kobashi stumbled forward onto the landing. But there was no-one there. In reality, at that time, the old man had passed away in his sleep. But everyone chose to believe he'd spread his wings and flown away. The strange thing was, the videos of the old man that had been uploaded and the rumours that had flown around the world all disappeared as if they'd been erased. The funeral was a cosy and warm affair. Yuri wondered if the old man had taken all the trouble with him.

“I wonder where he was going,” Kobashi said.

“Looking at him that way, he was an angel,” Yuri said.

“If that's what it takes to be an angel, even I could go to heaven.”

Both Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Even if there were only one *hanten*-wearing angel, that wouldn't be such a bad thing, Kobashi thought. The last of the snow was fluttering and dancing, just like the white cotton had.

Grandpa Flies

By Tamaki Onuma

"I can fly! No, really! In the story about Peter Pon, the children grow up and forget how to fly. They can't just toss off their hats and fly after them anymore. I know how heartbreaking that must be. But your body still remembers how to fly."

That was Grandpa Tobita, or just "Grandpa" for short. Everyone else was called by their last name, this being an old people's home after all, but he was just known as "Grandpa." He had no family, just slept all the time and had pretty much lost it, so he was hard to handle, but boy, when he was awake, he could talk! Not bragging, or malicious gossip about other people, but stories that could have been either true or made-up, you just couldn't tell. This made him really popular among the other residents.

"I can fly!" Kobashi, one of the nursing aides, was the best at imitating Grandpa.

"I like that Peter Pon story. He's good at making things up, isn't he?"

But Yuri, one of the nurses, told him that Grandpa's story came straight from the novel *Peter Pan*.

"You might not think it possible of an old man like that, but he really knows a lot," she said.

Kobashi gaped in astonishment at her. He thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The nursing home was always so busy you couldn't see straight, so you wouldn't know unless you paid attention, but Kobashi always got out of sorts around March. Those of us who knew that his ex-girlfriend had died in the tsunami would exchange meaningful glances as we passed him quietly in the hallway.

One day when Kobashi was bathing Grandpa, he muttered, "I wonder if I should have just said it."

He regretted not having proposed to his girlfriend. When they broke up, she had gone back to the country, made an arranged marriage and then died.

"What if it was my fault?" Kobashi thought he was talking to himself since Grandpa appeared to be asleep, but then Grandpa spoke out in such a clear voice that Kobashi almost let go of him.

"Koji. She was calling Koji."

Kobashi stared, eyes wide. Wasn't that the name of the man his old girlfriend had married? She had drowned in the ocean with her husband.

Grandpa spoke in a surprisingly strong and clear voice. "She wasn't calling you. She left of her own free will—it was the life she chose. What happened, happened."

What was Grandpa looking at now? Had his mind really jumped through sky and time to actually see the ocean as it was on that day?

Agitated, Kobashi asked, "Did she suffer? Did she blame me?"

"She's forgotten all that and gone flying."

"Where?!"

But Grandpa's voice cut off suddenly and there was only the sound of his even breathing as he slept.

"Don't go to sleep on me like that, old man!" Kobashi lashed out at him, but suddenly his tears overflowed, and he sobbed loudly as he ran the hot water.

And there was this too.

As before, Kobashi was by his side one day when Grandpa suddenly started talking.

"There was a girl on a pedestrian bridge and she wanted to jump."

"Well, that's no good, is it?"

“Beautiful people shouldn’t die.” Grandpa mumbled a bit as he wondered if he was essentially saying it was okay for people who weren’t beautiful to die.

He went on, “You can’t jump just because of your old witch of a mother-in-law or pathetic monthly salary are weighing you down!”

“But everyone has worries.” Kobayashi responded offhandedly.

“You can’t let it build up like when you’re constipated—you just have to bear down and push it out!”

“What do you mean, push it out?” Raising his head, Kobashi noticed that Yuri was standing there, white faced.

“How do you know about that time on the bridge?”

Startled, Yuri turned around to face the old man, but he was snoring as if he’d been asleep for some time.

Kobashi learned that there was a time when Yuri, troubled and not knowing where to turn, had stood still on the high pedestrian bridge. It was more that she wanted to escape to a different dimension than that she wanted to die, she explained.

“I don’t really remember it, but the whole time I felt like I was being watched and just couldn’t climb over the railing.”

“He said beautiful people shouldn’t die.” Kobashi attempted to imitate Grandpa’s way of talking, but it wasn’t much of a success. Yuri smiled, holding back her tears.

Grandpa would talk to anyone. It was after this episode that things really began to go wrong. A middle-aged woman working part time at the home said to Grandpa, “I lost my coin purse. I wish you’d fly to my house and find it for me!”

Grandpa told her it was underneath the slipper rack, and when he turned out to be right, things really got crazy. The woman he’d helped got all worked up and actually called the television station. Someone came out to do a story, and although the startled nursing home director turned down the offer, the woman’s friends and visitors of the residents who had heard the rumors pushed their way in. Those who succeeded in talking to Grandpa recorded it on their phones and uploaded it to the Internet. They threw all kinds of preposterous questions at Grandpa, asking him to pinpoint lost objects and predict horse races. Whenever anyone talked to him in a friendly way, he would fall for it and just talk and talk. And if they asked him something difficult, he would instantly fall asleep!

The videos of Grandpa were very popular, triggering an endless stream of infiltrators pretending to be visitors. Most were turned back at the entrance, but some would find clever ways to get in. They would be chased away as soon as Kobashi and Yuri found them, but Grandpa got mad, telling them not to interfere when he was talking to someone. This was the first time that Grandpa had raised his voice and quarreled with Kobashi since he first came to the nursing home.

Moved to tears, Yuri tried to intervene.

“How did it come to this?” she wondered aloud.

“Grandpa, I get that you want to talk to everyone, but Kobashi isn’t trying to stop you from talking to people, he just hates people who are just treating you like some kind of curiosity. He’s worried that you’ll get hurt. And it’s not just Kobashi—the director, myself, all of us are worried about you.”

More and more, Grandpa was grumpy with the staff, like he was a different person.

Today too his expression was unforgiving, his brow drawn into deep furrows. When he acted like this, he really was no more than a diminutive, shabby old man, Yuri thought as she sighed. Even when Kobashi came in after making his rounds, Grandpa stubbornly looked the other way, no change in his grim look.

Just when Kobashi was about to make a quick exit, mouth screwed shut, Grandpa said, "It's going to snow tomorrow."

"What was that?" Kobashi and Yuri turned around to face him at the same time. Eyes closed, Grandpa repeated, "It's going to snow tomorrow. You just look hard at the ground and spread out both arms. You don't need to carry anything but wings." Kobashi approached, but stopped, hesitating, and turned to Yuri for confirmation. "It sounded like he said something about wings."

"Yes, that's what I heard," agreed Yuri.

"That was a strangely ordinary thing for him to say—'it's going to snow.'" Of course I already knew that because I heard the weather report but..." said Kobashi.

"He's probably feeling embarrassed by all the scolding recently. I bet he flew off to check out the newspaper headlines to try and curry favor with you!"

Yuri was relieved to hear Kobashi laugh again after such a long dry spell.

The next day brought with it a blizzard, as forecasted, but it surpassed projections. The unusually heavy snow caused chaos in the streets and stopped the trains. This made for a welcome day of quiet, with no suspicious visitors, just the staff and residents.

Kobashi was so busy shoveling snow, checking the door and rushing around the building that he didn't see Grandpa all day. Toward evening, when he was able to take a breather, he was walking up the stairs to the break room when he noticed something strange about the fire escape at the end of the corridor. He knew the door should be locked, but he decided to check again. As soon as he looked in that direction, he noticed a black figure outside. The snow sticking to the wire-reinforced glass made it difficult to see, but when he rushed closer, he saw that a small man was standing there with his back toward him.

Kobashi drew in his breath.

"Grandpa!"

Kobashi ran to the door. The handle wouldn't turn. Maybe it was frozen? Someone who looked like Grandpa from behind was standing on the wrong side of the railing along the fire escape landing. But how could that be? Only empty space waited beyond the landing.

Hearing Kobashi's yells, Yuri came rushing out of the waiting room.

The door, almost insolent in its iciness, wouldn't budge.

Pounding on the glass panes with his fist, Kobashi yelled, "What do you think you're doing? Let's go back to your room."

The shadowy figure turned slowly toward them.

There was Grandpa, wearing a padded winter coat and standing upright and unwavering.

His voice came through the glass door surprisingly clearly.

"I'm just a nuisance so I'm going to go now."

"Go where?"

"Even I have places to go, you know."

"It's cold. Let's just go inside," Yuri entreated earnestly.

This was not the time to wonder how it was that Grandpa, defying all logic, was standing outside of the railings. They only wanted to get him back inside.

"You took good care of me and I thank you kindly." Grandpa bowed his head demurely, but quickly grinned and stabbed his thumb in their direction.

"You don't need to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, you know. All you need is your wings."

And with that, the back of his coat began to puff up. The two held their breath and watched from behind the glass as the coat ripped apart and the white cotton batting scattered, mixing with the snow and drifting away.

In a flash, the fabric billowed out, forming splendid wings. Grandpa's small body flew up, as if lifted upward by the large wings, and after remaining suspended in the air for a moment, he flapped his wings twice, then again, driving against the blowing snow, and then rose up into the sky in one burst.

When the glass door finally gave way and Kobashi tumbled through, no one was on the landing. In reality, Grandpa was dead at that point, lying as if asleep, but we all chose to believe instead that he had spread his wings and flown away.

In a surprising twist, all of the videos uploaded to the Internet and all of the rumors disappeared as if scrubbed clear. The funeral was a modest and warm affair. Yuri figured that Grandpa must have taken all of the troubles with him.

"What did he mean when he said he had somewhere to go?" Kobashi asked.

"Despite his appearance, he really was an angel," Yuri replied.

"If he's an angel, then even I could go to heaven!" Kobashi rebutted.

Yuri and Kobashi laughed together.

Kobashi figured that the world could certainly do with one angel in a padded winter coat. The last snow of the winter danced in the air like the white cotton that had flown from Grandpa's coat that night.

Flying Grandpa
by Onuma Tamaki

"I can fly, y'know. It's true. Y'know that story about 'Peter Pon,' how kids stop being able to fly when they get bigger? They throw their hats and run after them and they can't even fly anymore. It's sad, right? You understand, right? Even though the body remembers flying."

Old man Tobita. A.k.a. Grandpa. The inpatients at the institution were usually called by their last names, but the old man was also commonly known as "Grandpa." He had no family and was bedridden and senile. He took a bit of looking after, but when he was awake he would talk and talk. It was mostly bragging and stories that could be true or false, though he never spoke ill of others. That was why he was by far the most popular person among the staff. Caretaker Kobashi did the best impressions of him. "I can fly, y'know..." That 'Peter Pon' stuff is pretty good. He's got creative talent." But then Nurse Yuri pointed out that what Grandpa said was actually contained in the novel "Peter Pan." Grandpa was surprisingly knowledgeable. Kobashi's mouth dropped wide open; he thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The institution was extremely busy, so one wouldn't notice if one were not paying close attention, but Kobashi always became dispirited when March came around. The people who knew that his former lover had died in a tsunami would quietly pass him by, giving him sidelong glances.

One day, while giving Grandpa a bath, Kobashi muttered, "Maybe I should have said something after all." Kobashi regretted missing the chance to propose to her. When they broke up, his girlfriend returned to the countryside, got an arranged marriage, and later died. "I wonder if it was my fault." Grandpa seemed to be sleeping, so Kobashi thought he was just talking to himself. But then Grandpa suddenly started speaking in a very clear tone; Kobashi almost lost his grip on him.

"Kouji. He's called Kouji."

Kobashi's eyes grew wide. Wasn't that the name of the person his former lover married? She had died at sea along with her husband.

Grandpa spoke in a surprisingly clear and forceful voice. "She isn't calling you." And then, "She went this way of her own will; this is the life she chose, so it's fine."

What was Grandpa seeing now? Was his mind truly crossing the sky and time to look at the sea on that day? Kobashi, flustered and agitated, asked, "She wasn't suffering? She doesn't resent me?"

"She's forgotten all that and is flying."

"Where?"

Just then Grandpa's voice suddenly stopped, and he could already hear him snoring. "Don't fall asleep now, Gramps!" Kobashi cried bitterly, tears welling up. He suddenly burst out crying loudly, splashing the bath water around.

There was another incident. Kobashi was also there that day when Grandpa suddenly started talking. "There's a girl on the pedestrian bridge and she wants to fly away."

"Well, that's not good."

"Beautiful people shouldn't die." Grandpa kept talking, faltering over the question of what happens to people who aren't beautiful. "Horrible old mothers-in-law get weighed down worrying about low salaries, so they can't fly."

Kobashi gave a fairly standard answer. "But everyone has things that worry them."

"It's like with constipation: it's no good to bottle it up. You have to bear down and let it out."

"Let it out, huh..." Kobashi looked up and saw Yuri standing there looking pale.

"Why do you know about what happened on the bridge?"

When he sharply turned back to look, Grandpa was already snoring, just like the last time.

What he did understand was that there really was a time when Yuri, in her suffering, stopped and stood up on the tall pedestrian bridge. Yuri said that she really wanted to go away to a different dimension, not to die. "I don't really remember, but I felt like someone was watching me the whole time, and I couldn't cross the handrail," she said.

"Beautiful people shouldn't die," Kobashi said, trying to mimic Grandpa's tone. It didn't work too well. Yuri laughed, her face looking pinched.

Grandpa would talk a lot to anyone. Later on it became a problem. A lady who worked there part-time said, "I lost my purse. I'd like you to fly to my house and find it for me." But when Grandpa responded, "It's under the shoe rack," and turned out to be right, it became a huge deal. The lady got excited and called a TV station, and they sent a reporter. The institution's director was surprised and turned them away, but people like the lady's friends and others who had heard the rumors came crowding in to see Grandpa. Those who successfully talked to him took videos on their phones and uploaded them online. They flooded him with all sorts of questions, from locating missing items to predicting horse races. If one spoke to Grandpa in an amiable way, he would rise to the occasion and talk and talk. If asked a difficult question, he would suddenly fall asleep. The videos became well-known, and there was no end of people trying to infiltrate the institution under the pretense of visiting patients. They were mostly turned away at the door, but some found clever ways to sneak in. Kobashi and Yuri kept turning them out as soon as they found them, but Grandpa got angry. "Don't get in the way of people talking!" It was the first time since he came to the facility that Grandpa had spoken harshly to Kobashi. Yuri was brought to tears as she stepped in to stop him.

"Why is this happening?" Yuri muttered to herself. "Grandpa, I understand that you want to enjoy talking to everyone. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking; he just doesn't like the people who are trying to draw you out as some kind of joke or game. He's worried that they might hurt you. And it's not just Kobashi; the director and everyone at the facility is worried about you, including me."

It became more common for Grandpa to look at the facility staff with an expression of displeasure. He was like a different person. Today he again had an unchangingly stern expression on his face, his eyebrows knitted hard together. Yuri sighed softly; like that, he looked like just another thin, seedy-looking old man. Kobashi had come in to look after him, but Grandpa didn't even look his way. Kobashi also kept his mouth firmly shut, and he was about to leave promptly when it happened.

"Tomorrow it will snow," Grandpa said suddenly.

"What?" Kobashi and Yuri turned to him at the same time.

"Tomorrow it will snow," Grandpa answered, his eyes still closed. "Watch your footing and open both your hands. The only burden you need on your back is wings."

Kobashi ran over and hesitantly stopped before confirming with Yuri. "It sounded like he said something about wings?"

"Yes, I heard it."

"He also said something unexpectedly normal, about it snowing tomorrow. I mean, it said so on the weather forecast, so we've known that for a while."

"It's been unpleasant lately because he's done nothing but scold us. Maybe he wanted to improve your mood, so he just quickly flew out and saw a newspaper headline or something."

It had been a while since Kobashi laughed. Yuri felt relieved as well.

The next day, it snowed as forecast; actually, it ended up being a lot more than predicted. It was an unusual amount for this area; the roads were heavily congested and the trains were stopped, causing a disturbance. As one might expect, no suspicious visitors came that day. For the first time in a while, it was a quiet day with only the employees and the inpatients.

Today Kobashi was circling through the facility removing snow and checking doors, and so far had yet to see Grandpa. Evening was approaching, and he was climbing the stairs to the break room to finally take a quick breather. Suddenly he felt concerned about the emergency stairs in the middle of the hallway. They should already be locked, but why not check once more? As he turned his head, he realized he could see a dark figure outside. There was a lot of snow stuck to the wire-reinforced glass, and he couldn't see very well. When he hurriedly approached, Kobashi saw a small man standing with his back facing him.

He sucked in a breath.

"Grandpa."

Kobashi flew to the door. The handle wouldn't turn, perhaps frozen shut. The figure who looked like Grandpa was outside the fence on the landing of the emergency stairs. There was nothing on the other side, only empty air.

Upon hearing Kobashi's shout, Yuri came flying out of the waiting room.

The door was stubbornly frozen and refused to even move. Kobashi pounded the glass with his fist and shouted. "What are you doing? Please go back to your room!"

At his shout, the shadow slowly turned around. Grandpa was standing stock-still, wearing a half-length coat. His voice was strangely clear from behind the glass door. "I'm causing problems, so I'll be going now."

"Just where do you plan on going?"

"Even I have a place to go."

"It's cold out, so please come inside!" Yuri shouted fervently. She had no time to be concerned by the irrationality of Grandpa, who shouldn't be able to walk, standing outside. She just wanted to call loudly enough to bring him back.

"You've helped me out a lot; thanks for everything." Grandpa briefly bowed his head with a polite expression, but soon broke out in a grin. He gave a thumbs-up. "Don't be weighed down. The only burden you need on your back is wings."

As he spoke, the back of his half coat rippled. As the two on the other side of the glass door held their breath and watched, the coat split apart; the white cotton fell, mixing with the falling snow. As they continued to watch, it widened and became a splendid pair of wings. Grandpa's small body was lifted by the huge wings as if reeled up by a fishing line. He stopped briefly, flapping twice, three times against the snowstorm that blew around him. All at once he rose up and away...

When the glass door finally opened and Kobashi was able to move out onto the landing, there was nobody there. In reality, Grandpa passed away in his sleep at that time, but everyone believed the version in which he flew away on wings. Mysteriously, the videos of Grandpa that had been uploaded to the Internet and the worldwide rumors disappeared as if erased. His funeral was conducted quietly and warmly. Yuri thought that perhaps he took the troubles with him when he went.

"I wonder where he went?"

"He looked like an angel like that."

"If that was an angel, then maybe even I could go to heaven," Kobashi laughed. Yuri laughed as well.

Kobashi thought that perhaps one angel wearing a half-coat wasn't so bad. The lingering snow danced like the flying white cotton of that day.

The Old Man Who Could Fly

"I can fly. Honest, it's true! You know the story of Petey Pan, don't you? When the kids grow up, they can't fly no more. Can't even fly after their hats. Ah, breaks my heart. I know how they feel. Your body still knows how to fly, but your mind..."

Old Mr. Hida. Better known as Gramps. Here at the nursing home, patients are called by their last names: Mr. So-and-So or Ms. Such-and-Such. But everyone knows Gramps as Gramps. He's got no family. He's bedridden, senile, and a load of work to look after. But when he's awake, Lord, does he talk.

He's not one to boast about old accomplishments or sling mud around. The things he says are just plain mysterious; you don't know if they're true or not. But we all love his stories. There's no doubt he's the most popular resident in the whole home.

"I can fly..."

The young caretaker, Kobashi, does the best impression of him.

"Petey Pan. What a fine story that is. Boy, does that author know how to write."

The nurse, Yuri, says that the scenes Gramps talks about are real, that they're from the novel *Peter Pan*. Gramps knows a surprising number of things. Kobashi thought Peter Pan was a Disney character. He had a mouth like a big old codfish when he found out the truth.

The nursing home's a busy place. Busy enough to make your head spin. So it'd be easy to miss, but every time March draws near, Kobashi starts looking a little down. Those of us who've heard about his old flame just give a slight nod and walk quietly by when we see him in the hallway. Poor girl died in the tsunami.

One day, Kobashi was mumbling something as he gave Gramps a bath. "I should've asked her."

Kobashi's big regret is that he let his chance to propose slip by. After the two broke up, the girl moved back to her little hometown. She signed up for a matchmaking service, met a man, and settled down with him. Not long after that, she died.

"It's my fault."

Gramps looked as if he was sleeping, and Kobashi had just been muttering to himself. But suddenly, the old man spoke out in a clear and steady voice. Kobashi was so startled, he almost lost his grip; any more, and it might have been Gramps' last bath.

"Koji. She's callin' out for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes grew wide. Koji was the name of the man his old girlfriend had married. The two of them died together in the water. Gramps continued in a surprisingly firm, enunciated voice.

"She ain't callin' for you." Then, "Made up her own mind. It was the life she chose. Things is how they should be."

What on earth was Gramps seeing? Could his mind fly through time and space? Was he really witnessing what happened in the sea that day?

Kobashi's next words struggled out in a fit of coughs. "Was she in pain? Did she hate me?"

"She's flyin' now. Ain't bothered by no petty cares no more."

"Flying? Where?"

Gramps fell silent, and in the next moment he was snoring soundly.

"Oh, great timing, you sleepy old fart!"

The harsh words out, Kobashi next felt tears well up. He noisily scooped and poured the bathwater to mask the sound of his growing sobs.

Another time, Kobashi was sitting beside Gramps when the old man suddenly started up.

"There was a girl on the crossin' bridge. Wanted to spring out over the side."

"That's awful."

"Yup. Damn shame for a pretty lady to die."

Kobashi faltered. He wondered what that was supposed to imply about the death of anyone who *wasn't* a pretty lady.

Gramps carried on, unconcerned. "Got her thoughts all twisted up 'round a pushy mother-in-law and a job that don't pay so good. Ain't nobody gonna fly if they's carrying around weight like that."

Kobashi was lost, but he pretended to be following along. "Everybody's got problems, you know," he offered.

"But when they's all stuck up inside you like constipation? That's no good. Gotta grit your teeth and push 'em out."

"...Just like that, huh?"

But when Kobashi looked up, Yuri was standing straight as a board, her face drained.

"How do you know about the crossing bridge?" she whispered.

Kobashi jerked his head back toward Gramps, but the old man was snoring away as if he'd been asleep for days.

What Gramps had known about was the day Yuri hesitated atop a tall crossing bridge. She'd stood there, unsure if she'd be able to carry on. She told us that she hadn't wanted to die that day. Rather, she'd hoped she might fly away to some faraway place.

"It's been so long, but I remember a little feeling was nagging at me that day. It was like someone was there, watching me the whole time. I couldn't bring myself to climb over the railing," she recounted.

"Well, it'd be a damn shame for a pretty lady to die, right?"

Kobashi had tried to mimic Gramps' voice, but it didn't come out quite right. Yuri gave a short laugh as she held her hands up against her eyes.

Gramps would talk on and on to anyone, and it was around there that the trouble began. A lady working part time at the home said to Gramps one day, "I've misplaced my purse. I wonder if you could fly over to my house and find it for me?"

"Reckon you should look under the shoe rack."

After Gramps got that one right, things started to get crazy.

The lady got all excited and phoned up a TV station. A crew from the station showed up to do a story, and the nursing home director's eyes nearly popped out of his skull. No, he told them, but the word was already out. People started flooding in to see Gramps: the lady's friends, visitors who had caught wind of the rumor, and on and on.

Someone who managed to speak with Gramps took a video on his cellphone and posted it online. People were asking about everything, from lost items to which horse to bet on at the track. All it took was an enthusiastic greeting and a little flattery, and Gramps would prattle on and on, happy as can be. When he came up against something difficult to answer, he'd suddenly be fast asleep.

The video spread like wildfire. Soon, people were arriving in droves, trying to make their way into the home. They'd pose as friends or relatives come to visit. Most were turned away at the door, but the sneakier ones still managed to get in.

Kobashi and Yuri chased off any strangers they caught in Gramps room, but it made the old man angry.

"Dammit! Quit interruptin' my conversations!"

It was the first time Gramps had ever raised his voice at Kobashi. Yuri stepped between the two men, her eyes filled with tears.

"How did it get like this?" she cried softly to herself. Then louder, to Gramps, "We know how you like to speak with visitors. Kobashi's not trying to stop that. He's just upset about *who's* coming to talk to you. There are people trying to use you and make a spectacle of you. Kobashi's worried that you'll get hurt. And it's not just Kobashi... the director, me, everyone... we're all worried!"

But after that incident, Gramps' attitude toward the nursing home staff soured. It was as if he was a different person.

One day, when Yuri came by, Gramps' face was scrunched up into a bitter scowl, with deep creases along his brow. They'd seen more and more of that since the incident. Yuri sighed. Without his personality, Gramps was just a gaunt and withered old man. Kobashi entered the room to do his

rounds, and Gramps refused to even acknowledge him. The younger man finished up his work quickly, lips tightly sealed, and made for the door.

Just then, Gramps spoke up. "Gonna be snow tomorrow."

The words came out casually and caught both Kobashi and Yuri off guard. They spun around in unison. "Huh?"

"Gonna be snow tomorrow," Gramps repeated, eyes closed.

"Keep your eyes on your feet and your hands wide open. All you need on your back is your wings."

Kobashi rushed to the bedside, then hesitated and turned toward Yuri to confirm. "It sounded like he said something about wings."

"Yeah. I heard it, too."

"Snow tomorrow. That's a pretty bland prediction, coming from him. They were saying it was gonna snow in the weather report, too. Hardly a revelation."

"He's probably just as uncomfortable as we are, after all our scolding. Maybe he wanted to patch things up, so he decided to fly over to the newspaper rack to take a look at the headlines."

At that, Kobashi laughed. It was the first time he'd done so in quite a while. Yuri also breathed a sigh of relief.

As predicted—or really, far exceeding all predictions, the next day was marked by heavy snow. It fell with a tenacity unusual for the area, stopping trains and leaving roads in a mess. The silver lining was the absence of any suspicious visitors. For the first time in what seemed like ages, the home was quiet, and the only people there were the staff and residents.

That day, Kobashi was rushing to and fro, shoveling snow and checking on each of the building's entrances and exits. He hadn't been in to see Gramps all day.

As evening approached, the young caretaker finally found a moment to rest. He was heading up the stairs toward the break room, when suddenly the door at the end of the hallway caught his attention. It was the door out to the emergency stairwell running along the side of the building. The door was supposed to be locked, but Kobashi decided to go check it once more. As he made his way down the hallway, he thought he noticed a dark shadow outside on the stairs. The wired glass of the door was covered in snow, and it was hard to see. Kobashi hurried toward the door, and the figure of a small man, facing away, came into view. Kobashi caught his breath.

"Gramps."

Kobashi sprang the remaining few steps and grabbed at the door handle. It was frozen solid. The figure was facing away, but it looked to be Gramps. He was standing out beyond the railing of the stairwell's landing. Kobashi was certain there was nowhere to stand beyond that railing. Gramps appeared to be suspended in thin air.

Yuri, hearing Kobashi's shouts, came running from the staff room.

The door was icy to the touch, as if mocking Kobashi's efforts. It refused to budge.

Kobashi slammed on the glass with his fist and shouted, "Gramps! What are you doing out there!? Come on back to your room!"

At this, the figure slowly turned around. Gramps was standing straight as a bolt, wearing a short, cotton coat. His voice rang out strangely clear from beyond the glass door.

"Didn't mean to be causin' trouble. I'll be on my way."

"On your way!? Where are you going!?"

"Even I got me place to go to, you know."

"It's freezing out there! Come back inside!" Yuri shouted desperately.

How a man unable to walk had gotten outside in the first place was a matter for another time. All Yuri wanted was to get him back inside.

"You been good to me. Thanks kindly."

Gramps bowed his head, and for a moment he even seemed contrite. But then his face broke into its usual mischievous grin, and he gave the two staff members a thumbs-up.

"Ain't room to carry nothin' else. All you need on your back is your wings."

And with that, the back of his coat began to churn outward, as if something was bubbling up inside. The two behind the glass stood awestruck as the coat ripped open and puffs of white cotton sprayed outwards, mixing with the falling snow. A magnificent set of wings stretched out wide on either side of Gramps' back, then the old man's frail body swept upward as if plucked by the massive wings. He hung there for a moment. Finally, as if to beat back the oncoming blizzard, the great wings flapped twice, then three times, and Gramps shot off into the sky...

The glass door finally sprang open, and Kobashi tumbled out onto the now empty landing.

In truth, at that moment, Gramps was dead, his body lying peacefully in his room. But everyone continued to believe that he'd spread out his wings that day and flown away. Mysteriously, the video that had been posted online vanished, and the rumors ceased, as if they'd simply been rubbed out of existence. When the funeral was held, it was a small, intimate affair. Yuri believed Gramps had kindly taken all the ruckus away with him.

"I wonder where he went."

"You wouldn't have guessed it from the way he looked, but I think he must have been an angel."

"If there're angels like that, then I bet even I've got a shot at heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi both laughed. Kobashi decided that there was probably room in heaven to fit one angel dressed in a short, cotton coat.

Entry No. 12

Outside, a late snowfall belied the coming spring. The flakes danced about, just like the white puffs that had erupted from Gramps' coat the day he went away.

Pops Can Fly
Tamaki Onuma

I can fly. It's true, I tell you. You know the story of Peter Pon. Those kids that can fly. But then once they grow up, they can't. Couldn't even fly to catch their hat if you threw it. It's sad. I know. But your body never forgets what it feels like to fly.

* * *

That was Mr. Tobita, aka "Pops." In the home, everyone gets called by their last name, but Pops is just Pops to basically everyone there. He has no family, and he takes a lot of looking after when he's fast asleep and won't come to. When he's awake, he talks and talks and talks. It's not that he brags or talks badly about others, but you just never know what's true and what's not. This is something that has made him a huge hit with everyone else in the home. "I can fly!" Kobashi, one of the nurses, does the best impression. Peter Pon was a nice one, though. Whoever came up with that is a genius. Another nurse, Yuri, had said that there is a scene like the one Pops was talking about in the novel *Peter Pan*. It turned out he knows more than he might first seem to. Kobashi's mouth hung open. He had thought Peter Pan was just some character made up by Disney.

Kobashi was generally too preoccupied to think about it when the home was at its busiest, but as March approached, he began to become less cheerful. Those who knew that his girlfriend from years ago had died in the tsunami expressed their sympathies with knowing looks, but passed by silently.

It started with something Kobashi said while he had Pops in the bath. He was thinking about how he hadn't been able to propose to her. "Maybe I should have asked her," he muttered. When they broke up she went back to the town they were both from, got married to someone she had been set up with by a matchmaker, and then died.

"Could it be my fault?"

He had said this only to himself. Pops seemed to be sleeping. Kobashi just about dropped him when he suddenly started to speak with great clarity.

"Koji. She's calling for Koji."

Kobashi opened his eyes. That was the name of the man she had married. They had died together, washed out to sea. Pops spoke in a voice that was surprisingly clear and strong.

"She's not calling for you." He continued: "She moved on from you. She chose her life. And that's just fine." What was Pops seeing now? Could he really

have flown all the way through time and space back to that day, to the sea that took them? Kobashi barely managed to get his next two questions out.

“Did she suffer? Did she blame me?”

“She’s forgotten all that. She’s flying now.”

“Where?”

Pops’ voice stopped suddenly and completely. The next moment, he started snoring.

“You can’t fall asleep on me there, you old coot!”

Kobashi cursed, and then he felt the tears welling up. The hot tears now streamed down his face as he wailed and sobbed.

“There was a woman walking along the side of a bridge. She looked like she wanted to jump off it.”

“That’s no good, is it.”

“The beautiful should never die.” Kobashi didn’t know what to say to that. What about the less beautiful? Pops continued talking.

“No way anybody’d ever be able to fly weighed down with stuff like a mother-in-law and a low salary.” Pops went on. Kobashi only pretended to be listening.

Pops talked to anyone who would listen. It was after this incident that things began to get out of hand. A middle-aged woman who worked at the home part-time told him she had lost a little coin purse. He told her, correctly, that it had fallen under where she kept the slippers by the door. That was when things started to take off. The woman called a local news station and they came to do a story on it. The director of the home had turned them away at first, but friends and family of the woman, as well as other visitors who had heard the rumors going around, pressured the director into giving in. Some who had been successful in meeting Pops took videos, which they would then post online. Pops was bombarded with questions on everything from where people could find things they had lost to the results of horse races. When people were friendly with Pops, he had a tendency to get carried away in his talking. The minute he was asked something more difficult to answer, he would fall asleep. As the videos gained popularity, they led to an endless stream of people sneaking into make more, disguised as visitors.

The staff managed to detect and turn away most of these would-be intruders at the door, but a number of them were crafty enough to get through. Whenever one was exposed, they would be ejected from the premises immediately. All the staff was on alert for such intruders, including Kobashi and Yuri. Pops would get angry whenever this happened. “Don’t interrupt when I’m talking with people!” he would say. Yuri tried to step in to stop the argument between Kobashi and

Pops, as it was the first time she had heard fighting like this in the home. She ended up in tears. She asked aloud what could have possibly caused a fight like that.

Yuri tried to reason with him.

“Listen, Pops. We all know how much you love to talk with everybody that comes to see you. Kobashi’s not trying to stop you from talking altogether. He just hates to see people come in just to tease you. He’s worried that you might end up getting your feelings hurt. And it’s not just Kobashi. We’re all concerned. That includes the director and me, too. We’re only worried about you.”

After that, Pops was often cold toward the staff, acting as if he didn’t even know them. Even on this day, his face was a mask of disdain, its brow split by deep wrinkles. Seeing this, Yuri breathed a sigh of relief, feeling reassured that he was, after all, just another petty old man with nothing to do. Kobashi came in. He had been doing rounds. Pops made a show of taking no notice. Just as Kobashi was about to walk right back out of there without a word, Pops spoke to him.

“We’ll have snow tomorrow,” he said abruptly. Kobashi and Yuri turned to face him at the same time.

“Huh?”

“We’ll have snow tomorrow,” he repeated without opening his eyes.

* * *

“Have a good look at where you’re standing. Next you spread your arms. Then all you need is wings!”

Kobashi came running over. He hesitated, as if waiting for Yuri to confirm what he had heard.

“Sounded like something about wings,” he ventured.

“Yeah, that’s what I heard, too.”

“He said some pretty normal stuff too, didn’t he? Just like that it’s going to snow tomorrow. Everybody already knows, because everybody’s already seen the weather forecast for tomorrow.”

“He’s been upset because you’ve been on his case so much lately. He wanted to get on your good side again so he flew out early to check the newspaper so he could tell you that,” Yuri joked.

That was the first time that Kobashi had laughed in a long time. It made Yuri feel relieved, too.

* * *

The next day, it did snow, as forecast. Or rather, a bit more than was forecast, even. In fact, the amount of snow that fell was unusually large for the area,

leaving traffic a mess and the trains at a standstill. None of the usual suspicious visitors came to the home that day, making it the first quiet day in a long time. Only the staff and residents were around.

On that day, Kobashi didn't see Pops once as he went around the home shoveling snow and checking the doors. It wasn't until it was close to evening, as Kobashi was going up the stairs to the break room to finally get a short break in. For some reason, his attention was drawn to the fire escape at the other end of the hallway. There was no reason that the emergency exit leading out onto the fire escape would be open, but he thought he might as well go have a look. He saw a shadowy figure just outside the door. It seemed to be facing away from him. It was hard to see through the reinforced glass window encrusted with snow and ice. Kobashi rushed over to the door, and saw that it was a man, of small build, standing there with his back toward the door.

He took a deep breath.

"Pops!" he called, practically leaping onto the door. The handle wouldn't move. The door was frozen shut. The figure, which seemed to be Pops, was out there past the railing of the landing of the fire escape. In other words, he seemed to be standing where there should have been nothing to stand on but thin air.

Yuri heard Kobashi shout, and came running out of the break room.

The door's handle was still frozen, and refused to budge.

"What are you doing out there? Let's get you back to your room!" Kobashi called.

The figure turned slowly to face them. It was Pops, standing up straight and tall, wearing a *hanten*, one of those quilted housecoats. They could somehow hear him clearly, even through the glass door.

"I won't trouble you anymore. I'm out of here," he said.

"Out of here? To where?" Kobashi shot back.

"I've got places to be, too, believe it or not."

"Let's get you back inside! It's cold out there." Yuri called to him, too. They had no time to consider the absurdity of the fact that Pops, who was unable to walk on his own, was now standing outside the door. All they were focused on was convincing him to come back inside.

"Thanks for everything. Thank you kindly."

Pops bowed his head slightly, pulling a somewhat beatific expression. This melted quickly into a grin as he pointed with one finger.

When he did, the *hanten* he was wearing began to move like something was under it. Both Yuri and Kobashi held their breath as they watched this from inside the glass door. The quilted fabric of the *hanten* burst open, scattering

cotton that mixed with the snow as it fell. The mass spread as they watched, and became two magnificent wings. Pops' small frame was suddenly pulled upward by one flap of his great wings. After pausing momentarily, lifted by three more flaps, he ascended.

When the glass door finally came open and Kobashi tumbled out onto the landing, there was no one there. The truth was, however, that by that time, Pops was dead. Just like he was sleeping. But everyone preferred to believe instead that he had spread his wings and flown away. Mysteriously, the videos and rumors and everything else that had grown up around Pops had suddenly died down as well. A quiet and affectionate funeral was held for him. Yuri felt that perhaps he had taken the disputes and troubles away with him.

"I wonder where it was he needed to go."

"From the look of it, he was some kind of angel."

"If that's what an angel looks like, I guess even I've got a chance of getting into heaven," Kobashi said. They both laughed. Kobashi figured there wouldn't be anything wrong with one angel wearing a *hanten*. Snow fluttered to the ground like cotton batting.

Flying Ji-Chan

By Tamaki Onuma

"I bet you young'uns didn't know I can fly. Yep, I really can. In "Peter Pon," the kids can't fly anymore once they grow up. Even if they toss their hats into the air and try to fly after them, they just can't get off the ground. It's such a pity. After all, their bodies must remember what it was like to fly," said Mr. Tobita, commonly known as "Ji-chan."

Although he lives in a nursing home where everyone is called by their last name, Ji-chan is known by everyone simple as Ji-chan. He has no family. He's bedridden, senile, and requires constant care, but when he's awake, Ji-chan just talks and talks.

He never told boastful tall tales or complained about others. Rather, his stories were the sort that you could never tell whether they were true or made-up. These stories made him the most popular resident in the home.

"I bet you young'uns didn't know I can fly." Caregiver Kobayashi had the best impression of Ji-chan. "Peter Pon is really something, huh? Those Disney writers really have talent," he said.

Yuri, one of the nurses, interrupted, "It's *Peter Pan*. I think the scene Ji-chan is talking about is from the novel. Ji-chan is surprisingly well-read!"

Kobayashi's jaw dropped in surprise. He had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The home is busy enough to make your head spin, and you would never notice unless you paid close attention, but every year, as March approaches, Kobayashi looks very depressed. Those of us who knew that his old girlfriend had died in the tsunami would steal knowing glances as we quietly passed by.

One day, while helping Ji-chan into the bath, Kobayashi muttered to himself, "I knew I should have just asked her."

He regretted that he never proposed to her. After they broke up, she went back to her hometown in the countryside for an arranged marriage. After that, she died.

"Was it my fault?" he wondered aloud.

Ji-chan had looked like he was sleeping, so when he suddenly started speaking in a clear voice, Kobayashi nearly dropped him in surprise.

"Koji. She's calling Koji," he said.

Kobayashi's eyes opened wide. Wasn't Koji the name of the man his former love had married? They died together in the sea.

Ji-chan said in a surprisingly strong, clear voice, "She's not calling for you." He continued, "She went on her own. It was a life that she chose. So don't blame yourself."

What could Ji-chan be seeing right now? Could it be that his mind had flown beyond time and space, and that he was looking upon the sea on that day?

Breathless, Kobayashi asked, "Did she suffer? Was she upset with me?"

"I've already forgotten and flown off."

"Where have you flown off to?"

But Ji-chan's voice had abruptly given way to the soft breath of slumber.

"Don't sleep now, old man!" Kobayashi shouted, but his frustration quickly subsided as tears welled in his eyes, and he wept loudly as he noisily filled the bathtub with water.

Another time that he was with Kobayashi, Ji-chan suddenly said, "There was a girl on a

footbridge who wanted to jump.”

“That’s terrible!” Kobayashi responded.

“It would be terrible for such a beauty to die.”

Kobayashi wondered what Ji-chan would think if the girl *wasn’t* a beauty, but, not wanting to argue, only mumbled in response. But Ji-chan continued, “She’s upset about her haggish mother-in-law, and worried about her low monthly salary. The stress is bad enough that it would be easy for her to jump.”

Kobayashi wasn’t sure what to say. “Well, everyone has their troubles.”

“It’s like constipation. It’s not good for things to get blocked up. It’s best just to take a deep breath and get it out.”

“Get it out?”

Kobayashi looked up and saw Yuri standing in front of him, her face pale. “How do you know about the bridge?” she asked.

But, just like before, before you could turn around Ji-chan was already snoring.

Ji-chan apparently knew that Yuri had once, during a difficult moment in her life, lingered on a pedestrian bridge. She says that, more than dying, what she wanted was to escape to some other world.

“I don’t remember it very well,” Yuri said, “but I felt that I was being watched by someone the entire time, and I couldn’t bring myself to go over the railing.”

“It would be terrible for such a beauty to die,” Kobayashi tried to imitate Ji-chan, but he missed the mark, and Yuri laughed, her hands pressed against her eyes.

Ji-chan would talk to anyone, and this would be the root of great difficulties at the home. Once, a woman working part-time at the home told Ji-chan, “I lost my coin purse. I want you to fly over to my house and find it.”

Ji-chan replied, “It’s under the slipper rack.”

He had guessed right, which was the beginning of the trouble. The woman got very excited and called the television station, which sent reporters. The director of the home was surprised and sent them away, but a friend or acquaintance of the part-time woman had heard rumors and slipped in one day posing as a visitor. This person succeeded in talking to Ji-chan, took a video with their phone, and posted it on the internet. They bombarded Ji-chan with crazy questions, ranging from lost items to horse race predictions. Ji-chan reveled in the attention and chattered away. Whenever they would ask something that was hard to answer, Ji-chan would promptly doze off. The video was a bit hit, and there was no end to the intruders pretending to be guests. We usually turned these people away at the door, but even so they would somehow find a way to sneak in. When Kobayashi or Yuri would find these intruders talking to Ji-chan, they would try to escort them out, but Ji-chan would get angry and say, “We’re trying to have a conversation here. You’re getting in the way!”

On one of these occasions, Ji-chan began arguing with Kobayashi. It was the first time he had fought with anyone since he came to the home.

Yuri, who had tried to break up the argument, was moved to tears. “How did things get to this point?” she asked herself. She pleaded with Ji-chan, “We know you enjoy talking with everyone, and Kobayashi isn’t trying to stop you from talking. But he doesn’t like people who are just here to make a fool of you. He’s worried that these people are going to hurt your feelings. And it’s not just Kobayashi. Me and the director—everyone is worried about you!”

But after that, Ji-chan behaved like a different person to the staff, and often looked like

he was in a bad mood.

Today, his brows are once again furrowed in a deep scowl. When he does this he looks like nothing more than a poor little old man. When Yuri saw him, she sighed softly. When Kobayashi entered Ji-chan's room while making the rounds, Ji-chan didn't even look in his direction. Kobayashi was about to leave the room without saying a word, when Ji-chan suddenly said, "It's going to snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" Kobayashi and Yuri both turned around.

"It's going to snow tomorrow," Ji-chan repeated, his eyes closed shut. And then, "Watch your step and spread out your arms. The palms of your hands are all you need for wings."

Kobayashi started toward Ji-chan, but then hesitated and said to Yuri, "I think he just said something about wings." It was as if he couldn't believe his ears and wanted confirmation that he wasn't imagining things.

"Yes, I heard it too," Yuri said.

"And saying it's going to snow tomorrow is a surprisingly normal thing for him to say. I mean, he would have known that from hearing the weather report earlier."

"Lately he's done nothing but scold us, so it's been awkward for everyone," Yuri mused. "I bet he looked at the headlines in the newspaper to find something to break the ice."

Kobayashi laughed. He hadn't laughed in a long time. Yuri was relieved.

As forecast, it snowed the next day. Indeed, it was an even bigger blizzard than expected. So much snow was rare in this area. The roads were heavily congested, the trains stopped and everything was a mess. Unsurprisingly, there were no suspicious visitors today, and for the first time in ages it was a quiet day for the staff and residents. On this day, Kobayashi was busily running around the building shoveling snow and checking on doors, and he didn't see Ji-chan even once. Finally, as evening approached, he went up the stairs to the lounge to take a break. Just then, he thought of the emergency staircase at the end of the hall. "I'm sure it's locked, but I may as well check it one more time," he thought.

As he turned toward the emergency exit he noticed the dark shadow of a human figure outside, but there was a lot of snow stuck to the wired glass, making it difficult to see. As he hurriedly approached the door, he made out the figure of a small man with his back turned toward the building.

Kobayashi gasped. "Ji-chan!"

He leapt to the door, but it must have been frozen. The handle wouldn't turn. The Ji-chan-like figure, still with its back turned to Kobayashi, was standing outside of the railing around the emergency stair landing. But there was nothing there to hold the figure--only thin air.

Hearing Kobayashi's screams, Yuri ran out from the lobby. The door was stubborn as a mischievous child. Kobayashi's banged on the glass with a clenched fist, shouting, "What are you doing? Let's go back to your room!"

The shadow figure slowly turned around. It was Ji-chan, wearing a hanten jacket, standing straight as an arrow. His voice, passing through the glass door, was strangely clear. "I've caused a lot of trouble here. I'm going now."

"What are you talking about? Where are you going?"

"There's a place for me, a place for me to go."

"It's cold! Let's go inside!" Yuri shouted as loud as she could. She just wanted to get

him inside, and she didn't have the time to wrap her mind around the absurdity that Ji-chan, who supposedly couldn't even walk, was outside.

"Thank you for everything you've done for me," Ji-chan said. He made a serious face as he bowed his head in gratitude, but then he let out a childish laugh and gave Kobayashi and Yuri a thumbs-up. "You can't carry me forever. And as I said before, the palms of your hands are all you need for wings."

And with that, the back of his hanten jacket began to rise. Kobayashi and Yuri gasped, and as they watched from inside the glass door, the hanten split in two, and its white cotton threads began to mix with the snow and fall to the ground. In an instant, the threads expanded into great wings. Ji-chan's tiny body was pulled up by the wings as if it were a fish caught on the line. He was still for an instant, and then, working against the winds of the blizzard, he flapped his wings two or three times and flew into the sky. The glass door finally opened, and Kobayashi tumbled out, but there was no one on the landing.

In reality, Ji-chan died in his sleep that day, but everyone wanted to believe that he spread out his wings and flew away. Strangely enough, the videos of Ji-chan that had been uploaded on the internet, as well as the rumors about him, all vanished, and his funeral was a warm, quiet affair. Yuri wondered if he brought all of the trouble away with him.

"I wonder where it was—the 'place for me to go,'" Kobayashi wondered.

"He looked like an angel," Yuri said.

"If he was an angel, then even I should be able to get to heaven."

They both laughed.

"Well, I guess it's alright if there's one angel who wears a hanten," Kobayashi thought, as he watched what was left of the cotton-like snow that had fallen that day dance in the breeze.

Grandpa flies
by Tamaki Onuma

I can fly. It is really so. In the tale of Peter Pan, the children lose the ability to fly if they grow up, even if they cast away their hats, and try to run for it, they cannot fly. It is really sad, I know. Even when the body remembers flying.

Grandpa Hida. In short, Grandpa. In the Caring Home, people were usually called by their family name, but Grandpa was just called grandpa. Confined to his bed with no family, he was slowly fading away, but when he was awake, he kept talking all the time. He wasn't boasting or gossiping, but nobody knew when he was telling the truth and when not. Still, he was a main figure among the residents, the most popular of all. I can fly... The best to mimic him was Kobashi, the nurse. It is like Peter Pan. He could write a book. His fellow nurse, Yuri, said that actually, the scenes described by Grandpa, can be really found in the book version of Peter Pan. Grandpa must have known the book well. Kobashi always thought that Peter Pan was just a character from Disney, so he could just gape hearing this.

As the pensioners home was extremely busy all the time, it was easy to miss, that Kobashi became depressed as March drew closer. Those, who knew that his past girlfriend died in the tsunami, secretly exchanged a look, and silently passed him on their way.

One day, when Kobashi was helping Grandpa to take a bath, he absent-mindedly muttered to himself:

"No matter what, I should have asked her..."

Kobashi's greatest regret was, that he failed to propose to his then girlfriend. After they broke up, she returned to his hometown, got married, and died shortly after.

"It's my fault..."

As Grandpa looked like he fell asleep, Kobashi continued only to himself. So when suddenly Grandpa started to speak in a clear tone, Kobashi was so surprised, he almost let him slid from his fingers.

"Koji. Do you hear me, Koji?"

Kobashi's eyes got wide. Was it not the name of the man, who married her, his old girlfriend? She died together with her husband in the sea. Grandpa continued with an uncharacteristic strong and clear voice.

"I am not calling you to me," then, "I went on my way myself, chose the life I wanted, and that's just fine." Who knows, what were Grandpa's eyes looking at right then? Did

he really fly over the sea of that day, even when his mind was empty? Kobashi hurriedly tried to ask him:

“She did not suffer, didn’t she? Was she angry at me?”

“I forgot all that and flying free...”

“Where...”

Grandpa’s voice suddenly stopped, and before Kobashi realized, he started to snore.

“You cannot fall asleep right now!” cried Kobashi, as his eyes filled with tears. The sound of gushing hot water became mixed with his loud sobs.

There was another case as well. One day, when Kobashi was closeby, all of a sudden, Grandpa started to talk:

“A girl wants to fly from the crossing bridge.”

“That does not sound good...”

“Beautiful people should not die.”

People who are not beautiful may have a problem then, – murmured Kobashi, but Grandpa continued:

“But she is too heavy with worries of her old mother-in-law and low salary, so there is no way she will fly.”

Kobashi just said um here and there.

“Everybody has some problems.”

“But it is no good to keep them building up inside. You have to get them out!”

“How do you know about this bridge?”

But when he turned around, Grandpa was snoring as usual.

This happened, when Yuri, struggling and not knowing what to do, was standing on a tall bridge, pondering. Rather than dying, I wanted to be at some other place, – said Yuri later.

“I can’t remember well, but I had a feeling that somebody is watching over me, so I just could not climb over the railing,” explained Yuri.

“Beautiful people should not die...” repeated Kobashi Grandpa’s words, but this time he was unable to truly copy him. Yuri, keeping her eyes on the floor, was just laughing.

Grandpa was happy to talk with anybody. That’s why the whole thing became so out of control.

“I lost my wallet. Could you not fly-by at my home and look for it?” asked an old woman, who worked part-time there.

“It is under the slipper holder,” answered Grandpa, and as his guess proved to be correct, he became kind of a celebrity. The women called up a TV station, and eagerly asked for

an interview. Although the head of the station turned her down, but, upon hearing her story, her friends started to sneak in to the Home, disguised as visitors. Those, who managed to talk with Grandpa, made videos with their cell phones, and uploaded them to the internet. They kept asking him all kinds of questions, ranging from lost things to tips for the winning horse, and Grandpa, who enjoyed being at the centre of attention, chatted happily away. In case he found the questions too difficult, he just fell asleep. The videos became great hits, and the number of people trying to sneak in feigning to be visitors seemed to never end. Usually they managed to turn them away at the gates, but some of them got in using skilful ways. Kobashi and Yuri sent them straight away when they found them, which made Grandpa very angry

“There is nothing wrong with people wanting to talk!” yelled at Kobashi. It was their first fight since Grandpa came to the Home. This made Yuri’s eyes fill with tears, when she came in to stop them.

“How did it come to this?” she murmured sadly.

“I know that you just enjoy talking with everybody. And Kobashi doesn’t want to take this away from you. He just hates the people, who came to visit you to have fun. He is afraid that they will hurt you in the end. And it is not just him. The director, me, and everybody here, we are just worried about you,” she tried to explain.

But when it came to the staff of the Home, Grandpa increasingly acted like a whole new person. A person with sulky face. Today was the same, he was just frowning grimly, and the deep wrinkles on his forehead seemed to never want to go away. When he acts like this, he looks just like a thin, old man, – sighed Yuri. When Kobashi entered from his patrolling round, Grandpa did not even turn his head towards him. Kobashi also kept his mouth tightly shut, and tried to leave the room as soon as possible.

“It will be snowing tomorrow,” said suddenly Grandpa.

“What?” turned around at the same time Yuri and Kobashi.

“It will be snowing tomorrow,” repeated Grandpa with his eyes closed. “One can use out the opportunity and open the arms. The wings of a lifetime will be more than enough.”

“Did I hear correctly that he said wings?” muttered Kobashi.

“Yes, I also heard it,” replied Yuri.

“But surprisingly, he at least said something completely ordinary this time, about the snowing. I also heard the forecast mention it, so I know.”

“I am really ashamed that these days I was complaining all the time. When I saw it in the newspaper, I flew back as fast as I can, so I could lift your bad mood.”

It was a long time since Kobashi was last laughing at Grandpa words, and Yuri was happy to see it.

Next day, even more snow was falling, than the forecast predicted. In that area it was very unusual for so much snow to fall, and as both the roads became blocked and the trains got suspended, everything was in a state of turmoil. As expected, even the unpleasant visitors did not try to sneak in, so it became a quiet day with only the workers and inhabitants of the Home.

Kobashi was shovelling snow and checking on the doors around the place the whole time, so he did not have the chance to see Grandpa even once. At dusk, he finally found some time to take a break, and was about to climb the stairs for the resting room, when his eyes wandered to the emergency staircase of the corridor. Although the door towards it was supposed to be locked, he decided to check it again. Just as he was turning his head, a dark, human shadow caught his eyes outside. It was too hard to see through the snow covered glass door. As he hurried closer, he saw it was a small man, standing with his back towards him. Somebody wanted some fresh air?

“Grandpa!” jumped Kobashi to the door. But it was frozen over, and the handle did not turn. The figure, who looked like Grandpa, was standing at the outer side of the landing place’s handrail. There was nothing below it, just the abyss of several floors. Hearing his yells, Yuri came running from the waiting room. Frustratingly, the door did not even budge. With his fists banging on the glass, Kobashi yelled to outside:

“What are you doing? Come inside at once!”

The figure slowly turned around. It was really Grandpa, standing straight and wearing a Japanese traditional coat. When he spoke, strangely, his voice could be heard clearly at the other side of the glass door.

“I caused you enough trouble, it is time for me to go.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“There is a place waiting for me.”

“It is dangerous out there, please come back in!” pleaded Yuri as well.

None of them paid any attention to the fact, that Grandpa, who could not even walk, was suddenly standing outside. They just wanted him to get back in as soon as possible.

“Thank you for taking care of me,” bowed Grandpa his head serenely, just to push up his thumb grinning in the next second.

“Life is heavy. But a pair of wings is enough to lift it...” And with this, the coat’s back started to flap and billow around. As they breathlessly watched from the other side of the door, the coat bursted and its white cotton lining swirled around mixed with the snow. In a flash, the rip widened, and wings emerged from within. Grandpa’s small body was raised by the enormous wings, hovered for a second, then with a few strong beats of the

wings against the blizzard, started to ascend. When Kobashi finally managed to ram the door and blurted outside, there was no one at the landing.

Later, everybody believed, that Grandpa peacefully died in his sleep at the same time as the wings spread. Surprisingly fast afterwards, the videos of Grandpa and all the talks about him ceased as well. Therefore, his funeral was held in a small but sincere circle of friends. He probably took the problems away with himself, – thought Yuri.

“But I wonder, where did he go...” mused Kobashi.

“He looked like an angel to me,” replied Yuri.

“Well, if he is an angel, I want to go to Heaven as well.”

They both laughed. There is probably only one angel who is wearing a Japanese traditional coat, – thought Kobashi.

And just then, a late snowflake, resembling the white cotton padding of the coat, came dancing around them.

The Flying Pitapon

By Onuma Tamaki

I ken fly, yer know. It's true, I tell yer. Them kids in that Pitapon story, they couldn't fly no more after they'd gone and grown up, naw, couldn't even throw their hats up in the air and fly after 'em – I say that's mighty sad, I know, 'cos our bodies still remember what it's like to fly ...

Old man Tobita.¹ Commonly known as Gramps. Being a nursing home, all the other residents were known by their family names, but Gramps was just called Gramps. He had no family. Bedridden and forgetful, he needed a lot of care, but when he was awake, boy, could he talk and talk! He would never brag or gossip, but he could spin a yarn that would leave you wondering how to separate fact from fiction. This made him incredibly popular among the residents.

I ken fly, yer know ... the young male nurse, Kohashi, was really good at impersonations. *How cool is that Pitapon story? What a great imagination, hey.* But then Yuri, the female nurse, explained that Gramps was referring to the novel *Peter and Wendy* and the character Peter Pan. *Gramps is actually pretty knowledgeable, you know.* And Kohashi's mouth fell wide open in surprise, as he'd only ever heard of Peter Pan as a Disney character.

You might not have noticed it amidst the constant, whirling bustle of activity at this nursing home, but Kohashi would always grow quite despondent as March drew near. Those who knew he'd lost an ex-girlfriend in the tsunami would tiptoe past him, eyes averted.

One day when he was bathing Gramps, Kohashi mumbled, "Maybe I should have said something, after all." Kohashi regretted that he hadn't proposed to his girlfriend back then. Instead, they'd separated, and she'd gone back to her hometown and had an arranged marriage before her death. "Was it my fault, I wonder?" Kohashi was talking to himself because Gramps looked like he was asleep. Just then, Gramps spoke so suddenly and clearly that Kohashi almost let go of his body.

¹ The Japanese family name "Tobita" here is written "飛田," which literally means "flying rice paddy."

“Kōji. She’s calling for Kōji.”

Kohashi’s eyes widened. That was the name of the guy she’d ended up marrying! She’d perished with her husband Kōji at sea. Gramps spoke again in a surprisingly strong and clear voice.

“She’s ain’t calling you, you know.” He added, “She’s the one who decided to go off on her own. It’s the life she chose. Let it be.” What was Gramps looking at now? Was his spirit really flying across time and space to gaze at the fateful sea on that day? In a choked voice, Kohashi asked:

“Did she suffer? Does she regret what happened with us?”

“Naw, she’s forgotten all that. She’s off flying now.”

“Where?”

But Gramps’s voice came to an abrupt stop, and his breathing soon grew steady as he drifted off.

“Hey, don’t fall asleep there old man.”

Cursing, Kohashi felt the tears start to well up in his eyes, so he let the hot water spurt out noisily from the tap and wailed out loud.

There was another incident. Gramps again started talking when Kohashi was with him.

“There was a girl on the footbridge who wanted to fly.”

“That’s not good.”

“It ain’t right fer a beautiful girl to die.”

Kohashi hesitated. But what about if you weren’t beautiful? Not wanting to argue, he swallowed his words, but Gramps went on.

“Of course she can’t fly! All weighed down like that, worrying ‘bout her stinking mother-in-law and cheap monthly salary.”

Kohashi just grunted in acknowledgement. “Yeah, well, everyone is stressed about something.”

“It’s like constipation. Don’t let yerself get all blocked up. Breathe in real deep and let it all out.”

“Let it all out ...?” Kohashi looked up to see Yuri standing there, her face ashen. “How do you know about the footbridge?”

By the time their startled eyes turned back toward Gramps, he had already started snoring away as usual.

What they did find out was that Yuri had indeed once felt tormented to the point where she had stood at a high footbridge – she said it wasn’t that she wanted to die so much as she wanted to escape to a totally different dimension.

“My memory is a bit hazy, but it felt like someone was watching me the whole time and I just couldn’t go over the railing,” said Yuri.

“It ain’t right fer a beautiful girl to die ...”. Kohashi had tried to copy Gramps’s voice, but couldn’t quite pull it off. Yuri burst out laughing, hands over her eyes.

Gramps could talk like that to anybody. That was how all the fuss started. When the part-time cleaning lady mentioned, “I’ve lost my purse. Can you fly over to my house and find it for me?” Gramps happened to guess correctly, “Under the shoe rack, ain’t it?” That got her so excited that she called up the local TV station, and they rushed over to interview Gramps. The nursing home director had hurriedly sent them away, but the cleaning lady and her cronies, as well as visitors to the home who’d heard the rumors, wouldn’t let up. One of them managed to talk to Gramps and film it all on their cellphone, and the video was uploaded to YouTube. They asked all kinds of crazy questions about lost items or even horse racing predictions, and Gramps would amicably respond to them all. Boy, he could talk and talk. And if he encountered a question that was hard to answer he’d suddenly nod off.

The video became a huge hit, and the nursing home was suddenly besieged by people trying to see Gramps, pretending to be legitimate visitors. Most of them were shooed away at the entrance, but some would cleverly slip through. Kohashi and Yuri would send them away as

soon as they were discovered, but that made Gramps shout angrily, “Don’t interrupt when people are trying to talk!” Gramps and Kohashi had never fought like that before, not for the whole time Gramps had been living there, and Yuri would tearfully intervene.

“How did this happen?” agonized Yuri. She tried pleading with Gramps, “Gramps, I know you enjoy chatting with everyone. But Kohashi isn’t trying to stop you from talking. It’s just that he doesn’t like all these people who are coming here for fun, because they don’t really care about you. He’s worried that they might hurt you. It’s not only Kohashi. The director, me, all of us, we’re all worried for you, Gramps.”

Gramps was like a different person, often getting crabby with the staff at the retirement home. Even today his face remained fierce, a deep furrow between his eyes. When he was like that, he was simply a poor little old man. Yuri sighed to herself. When Kohashi came in on his rounds, Gramps didn’t even bother to turn to look at him. Kohashi pursed his mouth and made to leave the room, when Gramps suddenly declared:

“It’s going to snow tomorrow.”

“Huh?” Kohashi and Yuri both turned to look at him.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow,” repeated Gramps, his eyes closed.

“Watch them feet, arms open wide. Wings are all yer need on them shoulders.”

Kohashi ran toward him but hesitated, confirming with Yuri. “Did he say something about wings?”

“Yes, I heard that, too.”

“He said something pretty ordinary, too. Like it’s going to snow. We know that already because of the weather forecast.”

“It only seems strange because he’s been shouting at us so much lately. He probably wanted to make it up to you and flew over to check the newspaper before you did.”

Kohashi really hadn’t laughed like that for a while. Yuri felt relieved.

The next day, just as forecast, no, even more than forecast, it snowed heavily. Such heavy snowfall was rare for the region. It wreaked havoc on the roads, the trains stopped, and for once the staff and the residents could enjoy a day in peace without any intruders.

Kohashi had been rushing around all day, shovelling snow and inspecting doors, so he hadn't had any time to check on Gramps. It was just as dusk was falling, and he was heading upstairs to finally take a break in the staff room. The emergency exit at the end of the corridor bothered him. It was meant to be locked, but he thought he'd check again anyway. Turning toward the exit, a dark shadow caught his eye. It was hard to see through the glass, its wire screen smothered in snow. As he rushed over, he saw the small figure of a man standing there with his back to him. His breath caught in his throat.

"Gramps!"

Kohashi flew to the door. The handle wouldn't budge, maybe it was frozen. The figure that looked like Gramps was on the other side of the railing that enclosed the emergency landing. Nothing could be there. It was mid-air.

Hearing Kohashi yelling, Yuri came flying out of the staff room.

The door was ice cold and wouldn't budge. Kohashi beat his fists against the glass.

"What are you doing out there? Let's go back to your room."

The shadow slowly turned around. It was Gramps, standing tall in his *hanten*, a simple padded cotton jacket. His voice was strangely clear behind the glass door.

"I'm too much trouble fer y'all, so I'm going now."

"What do you mean? Where are you going?"

"Even I've got some place to go, yer know."

"It's so cold. Let's all go inside, Gramps." Yuri yelled earnestly, too. There was no time to wonder how Gramps, who couldn't even walk, was somehow able to stand outside the door like that. They just wanted to call him back.

“Much obliged to y’all fer everything.”

Gramps looked humble with his head down, but he soon flashed them a grin with a thumbs up.

“Don’t yer burden yerselves now. Wings are all yer need on them shoulders.” The back of his *hanten* started moving as he spoke. As the two nurses watched from one side of the glass door, the jacket tore open, scattering tufts of white cotton that fluttered about with the snow. A pair of magnificent wings grew and spread out wide in front of their eyes. Gramps’s small body was swept up by those wings, halting mid-flight to flap two or three times against the snowstorm before soaring up high and away...

By the time the glass door gave way and Kohashi had rolled out onto the landing, it was empty. In actual fact, Gramps was at that moment lying peacefully dead on his bed as though he were asleep, but everyone believed that he had grown wings and flown away instead. Mysteriously, the online video vanished and the rumors dissipated soon afterward, so they were able to hold a small, intimate funeral. Yuri surmised that perhaps Gramps had taken all those troubles away with him.

“I wonder where he meant by some place to go?” pondered Kohashi.

“He was an angel, you know, despite appearances,” Yuri replied.

“Well, if he’s what they call an angel, then even I might make it to heaven one day.”

Both Yuri and Kohashi laughed out loud. What does it matter, Kohashi mused, if there’s a *hanten*-clad angel out there somewhere? Still lingering in the early spring, feathery flakes of snow, like those flying tufts of cotton, fluttered gently outside.

Gramps Can Fly
by Suo Onuma

I'm a flyer. No joke. It's like in Peter Pan when the little ones grow up, and they lose their ability to fly. Poor things can't even fly to play catch with their hats — breaks my heart. If only their bodies could remember how to fly.

That was Mr. Tobita. His name means “flying field,” but we called him Gramps. This is a residential care facility, so people are generally referred to by their last names upon admission, but Gramps's nickname stuck with him.

His family was gone, and he did nothing but sleep away others' time, but when he was awake he was a talker. Regardless of whether he was bragging or badmouthing someone else, you never knew if he was lying or telling the truth. For this reason, he was the most popular amongst the residents.

“I'm a flyer,” nurse Kobashi had the best impersonation of him. “Peter Pan is great, there's a lot of talent in his story” he would mimic. Nurse Yuri said most of Gramps's stories came straight out of Peter Pan, though. He's an unexpected walking Peter Pan encyclopedia. Kobashi thought Peter Pan was only a Disney movie and was thus dumbfounded at its novel origins.

As March approached, the facility was so swamped with work not many realized Kobashi's waning mood. Those who knew he had lost his ex-girlfriend in the 2011 tsunami exchanged glances and quietly continued on their way.

“I should have done it,” Kobashi muttered one day while bathing Gramps. He regretted not proposing to her. After they had broken up, his ex-girlfriend had returned to the countryside to accept an arranged marriage, passing away soon after that. “Was it my fault?” Gramps looked like he was sleeping, so Kobashi was talking to himself. That was until Gramps's voice rose up from out of nowhere — Kobashi almost let go of the man's arm.

“Yuuji, call me Yuuji.”

Kobashi's eyes widened. Wasn't that the name of his ex-girlfriend's husband? They had both lost their lives to the ocean. Gramps continued with surprising clarity.

“I didn't call for you.” which he responded to himself with “You volunteered to go down this path, you chose this life, isn't that enough?” Kobashi wondered what Gramps was seeing right then. Could he be flying over the ocean from that day, that time, in that very sky? He began to sound incredibly flustered.

“Was she in pain? Did she blame me?”

“Forget about that. I'm flying.”

“Where - ”

Gramps's voice stopped abruptly, followed by a loud snore.

“Damnit, don't just fall asleep there old man.” Kobashi cursed but found himself overcome with tears. The gushing bath water drowned out his cries.

There were other occurrences similar to that. Gramps randomly started talking earlier that day as well.

“There was a girl that flew off the footbridge.”

“Well, that's no good.”

“The pretty ones can't die.” As for the not so pretty ones, well, they just caused problems, so he mumbled in continuation.

“Damn old bat always nitpicking over my mother or our measly wage. Picked and piled up so damn much, there's no way she'd fly.” Kobashi interjected randomly with ‘oh's and ‘uh-huh's to feign his attentiveness.

"Doesn't everyone have one or two things they worry about?"

"It's only bad if you constipate yourself. Just let it out."

"Let it out?" Kobashi lifted head to see Yuri standing — her face drained of all color.

"Why do you know about the footbridge?"

When Kobashi turned around, Gramps started snoring as if he'd been sleeping the whole time.

What he was able to gather was that Yuri had a moment of utter hopelessness and found herself loitering at the edge of a tall footbridge. Instead of dying, Yuri says she found herself in a whole different dimension.

"My memory is a bit foggy, but I felt someone watching me the whole time, and I ended up not going over the rail," Yuri explained.

"The pretty ones cannot die." Kobashi intended to impersonate Gramps, but it didn't come out right. Yuri's eye held their vacant gaze while she managed a slight grin.

Gramps talked with anybody who would listen. That's how things took a turn for the worst. One of the elder part-time ladies said she couldn't find her coin purse no matter where she looked — that it had "flown out of the house" and she wanted us to find it. That's when Gramps pipped up, "It's under your slipper holder" and hit the jackpot. She was so elated by his find, she phoned up some TV show, and they came to cover his story. Our boss was surprised and turned them away, but the old ladies friends and neighbors heard the rumor and forced themselves in as visitors. The ones who had successful encounters with Gramps recorded their interactions on their phones and uploaded them online. The questions they asked ranged from where their lost items were to which horse would win the upcoming race. Gramps, loving every minute of it, rode this social tidal wave and talked everyone's heads off. If he ran into something he couldn't answer, he would up and falling asleep. The videos went viral, and people came out in droves disguising themselves as visitors to sneak into the facility. The staff would turn the majority of them away at the lobby, but the crafty ones always found a way to sneak past. As soon as Kobashi and Yuri found about these infiltrators, they attempted to send them home, but Gramps screamed, "DON'T INTERRUPT PEOPLE WHEN THEY'RE TALKING!" It was the first time he had ever raised his voice at Kobashi since his admittance in the facility. Yuri froze upon entering the room, her eyes fogging up.

"Why did it have to turn out this way?" She whimpered.

"Gramps, we understand that it's fun to talk with all these people, but that's not what Kobashi wants to stop. He hates that people are coming to take videos of you just because they think you're some exotic circus act. He doesn't want you to get hurt. It's not only Kobashi either, me, our boss, everyone is worried about you."

After that, Gramps started wearing an unpleasant expression when around the facility staff. The deep wrinkle that formed right in-between his eyes was not leaving anytime soon. It gave him a seedy appearance despite it being another mark of aging. Yuri let out a small sigh. Even when Kobashi entered the room on his rounds, Gramps didn't turn to face him at all. Kobashi had planned to hold his tongue and be in and out as quick as possible but, Gramps spoke up.

"It's going to snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" Kobashi and Yuri questioned in unison.

Eye closed, he repeated, "It's going to snow tomorrow."

"You gotta watch your feet and spread both arms wide open. Your wings take enough of the work."

Hoping to confirm what he'd just heard, Kobashi ran up to Yuri who stood hesitantly.

"I heard something about wings again."

“Yeah, I heard it too.”

“He said something surprisingly normal, as well. The weather reports running now, so it’s not that strange for him to know.”

“It’s been one scolding after another, for me. I just want to take all this ill will away and fly right into headlines, you know?”

Kobashi let out a long missed laugh, and Yuri breathed a sigh of relief.

Heavy snow fell beyond what had been reported, or rather, predicted. Snow was rare around here leading to heavily congested roads and halted trains. As one would expect, even the nosiest of visitors stayed home leaving only the staff and patients to their first quiet day in a while.

Kobashi was busy doing his rounds — shoveling snow and manning the door — that he hadn’t seen Gramps all day. The sun was setting when he finally was able to catch his breath on his way up the stairs to the lounge. For no reason at all, he found himself curious about the emergency staircase. It’s supposed to be locked, but he felt he needed to check it regardless. The second he checked he noticed a black figure. Snow had piled up in front of the wire safety glass window obscuring his view. Hurrying closer to the window he met with the back of a petite man.

His breath froze.

“Gramps.”

Kobashi jumped at the door. Frozen or not the handle refused to turn. This Gramps-looking figure was on the other side of the emergency stair railing. There was nothing past that, nothing but air. From the waiting room, Yuri came bounding upon hearing Kobashi’s screams. The door stood increasingly cold and unwavering. Kobashi’s fist and cries beat against the glass.

“What are you doing? Get back to your room!”

The shadow slowly turned towards the glass. Gramps faced them, straight-backed and resolute. Despite the glass, his voice was crystal clear.

“I’ve caused quite a mess, so I’d best be going.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“I have places I can go.”

“Please, it’s cold, how about you come back inside!”

Yuri yelled like her own life was on the line. There was no time to question the absurdity of wheelchair-bound Gramps being outside and walking around. They just wanted him to come back.

“Thank you for everything.”

The smug look on his face right before he lowered his head changed when he lifted it up, donning a ridiculous smile and thrusting a thumbs-up into the air.

“Don’t shoulder it all by yourself. Your wings take enough of the work.”

The back of his hanten coat billowed upward, and the two onlookers on the other side of the glass door watched what unfolded before them in baited breath. His hanten coat ripped open sending white cotton fluttering down, indistinguishable for the snow. In an instant, a magnificent pair of wings outstretched themselves. This massive wings landed on Gramps’s fragile body. They hesitated and were met with a gust of frozen wind before they flapped twice, three times, and were off into the sky. Kobashi tumbled out as the door finally swung open to an empty ledge.

In actuality, Gramps peacefully passed away in his sleep that night, but everyone prefers to believe he took flight. All of the strange videos and rumors of Gramps also mysteriously disappeared from the internet, and his funeral emanated a warm and cozy atmosphere. Yuri contemplated that he might have brought any ill will he caused with him.

“I wonder what he meant by places he could go?”

“He was an angel, where else could he be going?”

“If he was an angel then I don’t have a thing to worry about getting into heaven.”

The two of them laughed. Kobashi didn’t mind if an angel or two wore a hanten coat. The snow outside danced around much like the white cotton had that night.

The Grandfather Who Wouldn't be Grounded

by Tamaki ONUMA

"I can fly you know. I'm not making it up. In that story of Peter Pop, the children can't fly anymore once they grow up. They can't even fling their hats into the air and chase them anymore. Even though flying is like walking to them. Pains me to think of it, and I totally understand how they must feel."

Grandpa Tobita just went by Gramps usually. In the retirement home the residents were usually called by their last names, but everyone knew Gramps just by Gramps. Without any family, bedridden and senile, he was quite the handful. But when he was awake, he could talk like there was no tomorrow. He didn't boast or speak ill of others, he just chatted away and nobody knew whether the things he came out with were true or not. He was far and away the most popular of all the residents.

"I can fly you know."

Ohashi, one of the younger male care workers was the best at taking him off.

"I love the way he says Peter Pop. He's got real creative talent."

Yuri the nurse replied, "The things he comes out with are actual episodes from the novel Peter Pan. Gramps is really a lot more knowledgeable than you might think."

Ohashi, who thought that Peter Pan was just a Disney character, was left speechless.

As the home was incredibly busy, if you weren't aware of the reason you wouldn't even notice but every year around late February, you would find Ohashi quite down in the dumps. The ones who knew that his former lover had died in the tsunami would just quietly pass by without making eye contact. One day when he was giving Gramps his bath, Ohashi murmured, "I should have told her." Ohashi's regret was never having proposed to her. After they broke up, she went back to her home in the country and an arranged marriage before she died.

"Was it my fault," Ohashi said to himself thinking that Gramps was asleep. It was then that Gramps suddenly spoke out in a clear tone of voice, causing Ohashi to almost let him fall.

"Kōji. She's calling Kōji."

Ohashi opened his eyes wide. It was the name of the man his ex-girlfriend had married. She had died together with her husband in the ocean. Gramps had said it in a surprisingly powerful and clear voice.

"She didn't call for you" he said and continued "It was her life, she chose her own path herself. And that's okay."

What was Gramps seeing this time? Was his spirit flying through space and time to witness what happened in the ocean that day? Ohashi coughed out a question.

"She didn't suffer did she? She didn't hold a grudge against me did she?"

"She's forgotten all that and she's flying now."

"Where?"

Just as he thought Gramps had gone quite all of a sudden, his deep, even breaths broke the silence.

"Don't fall asleep on me now, Gramps!"

Ohashi swore before the tears suddenly welled up and he wept loudly to the sound of the bath filling up.

That wasn't the only time it happened. One day, Ohashi was next to Gramps when he suddenly began to talk.

"There was a girl on the pedestrian bridge and she wanted to fly. We can't have that. A beautiful girl should never die."

Does that only apply to the beautiful girls Ohashi thought, but bit his tongue. Gramps went on.

"She'll never fly with the weight she's carrying, worrying about that old hag of a mother-in-law and her measly pay packet."

Ohashi just nodded.

"But everyone has their worries"

"It's the same as being constipated, it's not good to keep it inside. You have to get it out."

"What do you mean by get it out?"

Ohashi looked up to see Yuri standing there ashen-faced.

"How do you know about what happened on the footbridge?"

When they turned around in surprise, before they knew it Gramps was snoring soundly.

What had been revealed was that there was a time when Yuri, unable to fight the pain any longer, was standing on a high footbridge. Yuri said herself that more than wanting to die, she just wanted to leave for somewhere else.

She added, "I don't remember well, but I got the feeling that I was being watched the whole time so I wasn't even able to get over the railing."

"A beautiful girl should never die."

Ohashi's attempt at imitating Gramps fell flat. Yuri forced a smile as she dabbed at the tears welling in her eyes. Gramps would say anything to anyone and everyone. It was from that point on that the situation really began to get absurd.

One of the ladies who worked part-time at the home said to Gramps, "I've lost my purse, I want you to fly to my house for me and find it."

"I'd say it's under the slipper rack," Gramps responded, and it turned out he was right. Then things really got out of hand. The same lady called the television station in her excitement and reporters came to the home. Taken aback, the director forbid people from coming, but the ladies working part-time and visitors who got wind of the rumors wrangled their way in. Those who successfully managed to speak with Gramps took videos on their mobile phones and posted them online. They showered him with questions, from where to find things they'd lost to predictions for the horse races. When people engaged him in friendly conversation, Gramps would get carried away and just talk and talk. If it was something difficult to answer, he would just go straight to sleep. The videos proved to be highly popular and there was no end to people coming to the home pretending to be visitors. Most of them were turned back at the door, but even then some managed to sneak in. As soon as they noticed, Ohashi and Yuri would send them out, but Gramps would lose his temper and say, "Don't interrupt when people are talking." That was the first time that Gramps had raised his voice in a quarrel with Ohashi since he had moved in to the home. Yuri, in tears as she tried to make peace could only ask herself, "Why did it come to this?"

"I completely understand you wanting to enjoy talking with everyone. But Ohashi isn't trying to stop you from talking, it's because he can't stand to see these people trying to make you into some kind of monkey in a cage. He's worried they might end up hurting you. And it's not only Ohashi, but the director and myself are worried about you too, you know."

As if transformed, Gramps began to scowl at the staff in the home. Today too, he was shuffling around with brows furrowed and a stern expression. Yuri could only sigh softly to see him that way as

it made him seem nothing more than a small, withered old man. It was just as Ohashi, biting his tongue, was about to leave the room when Gramps blurted out, "It's going to snow tomorrow." And with that he turned over, eyes shut fast.

"Keep your eyes on the ground beneath you and spread your arms. Wings are enough for me."

Ohashi came flying over, stopped in hesitation and looked to Yuri for confirmation.

"I think he just said something or other about wings."

"Yes, I heard it too."

"He also said something unusually run-of-the-mill. He said it's going to snow tomorrow. Although I already saw them announce snow on the weather forecast."

"He was feeling bad with being scolded all the time these days. So in an attempt to get back in your good books, he flew out in a hurry and had a look at the newspaper headlines."

It had been a while since Ohashi had laughed. Yuri also felt a sense of relief.

The next day there was snow as forecast, and in the end it snowed a lot more than expected. The unusually large snowfall for the area caused quite a commotion, with big traffic jams and the trains brought to a standstill. As a happy result, there were no unwanted visitors that day. It had been a long time since the residents and the staff had a quiet day like that with the home all to themselves.

Ohashi was busily running around shoveling snow and checking the doors so he had not yet seen Gramps. As afternoon was turning to evening, he was just climbing the stairs to take a break in the staff room. It was then that he noticed something strange about the fire escape at the end of the hall. He decided to go and take a look to make sure it was locked. The second he turned his head he noticed the dark shadow of a person outside. The privacy glass of the door was smeared with a thick layer of snow, making it hard to see out. Hurrying over he found a slight man standing there with his back to him. He breathed in sharply.

"Gramps!"

Ohashi leapt toward the door. Perhaps because it was frozen stiff, the handle wouldn't turn. Before him was what looked like Gramps from behind, but on the other side of the fire escape railings. There shouldn't have been anything there; he seemed to be suspended in midair.

Yuri came running out of the changing room when she heard Ohashi's cry. To his annoyance the door was stuck fast with the cold. Ohashi hammered on the glass with his fist.

"What do you think you're doing, come back inside."

As he uttered those words the shadowy shape slowly turned to face him. There was Gramps standing sharply upright in his short coat. Bizarrely, his voice could be clearly heard through the glass door.

"I'll be going on my way so as not to disturb you anymore."

"And where is it you intend to go?"

"I've got places to go you know."

"Come inside, it's cold out there!" Yuri yelled as loud as she could.

She wasn't even able to consider the absurdity of the fact that Gramps was outside, even though he wasn't even supposed to be able to walk. She just wanted to call him inside.

"Thanks a lot for everything you've done for me."

Gramps lowered his head briefly and a look of determination fled across his face, but he soon smiled and gave a thumbs up.

"I'd better be on my way. A pair of wings is all I need."

With that something stirred under the back of his short coat. As Ohashi and Yuri stood on the inside of the door watching him with bated breath they saw the short coat rip and the tufts of white cotton dance in the air with the snow before falling to the ground. And before their eyes they saw a

magnificent pair of wings unfold. Like a puppet on a string, Gramps' small body flew up high, stopped as if the blizzard swirling around him was holding him back, and then with two or three wing beats he was skyward. When he eventually got the glass door open, Ohashi stumbled out onto the fire escape landing to find it empty. It was actually just at that moment that Gramps had died in his sleep. But everyone believed that he had spread his wings and flown away. Strangely enough, as if erased, the videos of Gramps that had been uploaded to the Internet disappeared and the rumors that had been going around just faded away. The funeral was a small and convivial affair, making Yuri wonder whether Gramps had taken all the disagreements with him.

"Where did he go I wonder?"

"He was an angel in disguise."

"If that was an angel, then I think I can make it to heaven myself."

Yuri and Ohashi smiled at each other. It couldn't do any harm to have at least one angel in a half coat out there, Ohashi thought to himself.

Snow like the cotton tufts that flew from Gramps' short coat was falling out of season.

Flying Grandpa
By Onuma Tamaki

I can fly. It's true. There's that Peter Pan story where children grow up and can't fly anymore –

can't toss a hat and chase it in the air. It's sad, you know, but the body remembers flying once...

Grandpa Tobita, or just Grandpa. At the nursing home residents usually went by their first name, but Grandpa was simply called Grandpa. He had no living relatives and was a bedridden, senile, handful. When he was awake, he would talk on and on. It also wasn't easy to tell if any of his blathering was true or false. That's why he was a favorite among the residents. "I can fly!" Kobashi, a caregiver, did the best imitation. "Peter Pan has a ring to it," he said. "He's got talent." To which Yuri, a nurse, replied, "Grandpa actually quotes from the short story Peter Pan. He's surprisingly knowledgeable." Kobashi's mouth was agape - Peter Pan was not only a Disney character as he had assumed.

Because it was dizzyingly busy at the home, it wasn't easily apparent that Kobashi grew glum near March. Those who knew he had lost a former lover to a tsunami passed him in silence, avoiding eye contact. Kobashi was giving Grandpa a bath when he murmured, "I should have told her." Kobashi rued missing the chance to propose to her. She left him and returned to her hometown for an arranged marriage, only to die soon after. "It's all my fault," he said aloud, thinking Grandpa was asleep. But immediately, Grandpa spoke so lucidly that Kobashi almost let go of him.

"Koji. He's called Koji."

Kobashi's eyes widened. Wasn't that the name of her husband, who had died with her? Grandpa's voice was shockingly firm.

"She didn't call for you. You did say it's the life you chose. Isn't that enough?" What could he possibly be seeing? Was his soul soaring through space and time to that day on the sea? He seemed about to have a coughing fit.

"Did she suffer? Did she blame me?"

"I forgot and I'm flying away."

"Where to?"

He thought Grandpa had abruptly stopped, but then heard snoring.

"What a time to fall asleep, gramps."

Kobashi cursed out loud, but without warning, his eyes welled up with tears. He wept loudly while the hot bath water continued to run.

Things like that would happen. Later again that day, when Kobashi was by his side, Grandpa suddenly spoke up.

"There was a girl at the bridge. She wanted to jump."

"That sounds bad."

"The beautiful shouldn't die." Kobashi wondered about those who are not quite beautiful, but Grandpa went on.

"She shouldn't be jumping 'cause of low pay and stress from her hag of a mother-in-law." To that, Kobashi riposted, "But lots of people have those kinds of anxieties."

"It's the same as being constipated. It's bad if it keeps building up. You've got to push through. Let it all out."

"All out..."

When Kobashi looked up, he saw a pale-white Yuri.

"How does he know about the bridge?"

They turned around, but Grandpa was already snoring.

Kobashi found out that there was a time when a hopelessly desperate Yuri lingered over a high pedestrian bridge.

Yuri told Kobashi how she had gone to a realm different even from death.

"I don't remember much, but I couldn't climb over the rails because it felt like someone was watching."

"The beautiful shouldn't die."

Kobashi had tried mimicking Grandpa's words but failed. Yuri suppressed tears from laughing.

Grandpa had a habit of speaking to anyone, and soon the most peculiar occurrence followed.

An elderly woman working part-time said to him, "I've lost my coin purse. I want you to fly over my house and find it." Grandpa answered back, "It should be under the shoe rack." He was right, and became quite a sensation. The woman got excited and reached out to a TV station to turn it into a story. The home's manager was surprised but refused the offer. Still, somehow the part-timer's friends and other fake visitors slipped in. Those successful in speaking with Grandpa uploaded videos of their visit with him. They inundated him with questions about lost belongings or horse track bets. Grandpa would lap it up and talk on and on when he was spoken to so enthusiastically. If it became difficult to answer the questions, he would fall asleep. The videos went viral, and eventually the invaders disguised as normal visitors were banned. Usually they were sent away at the front door, but even then they found clever ways of sneaking in. Kobashi and Yuri would send them away whenever they caught one. "Don't get in the way of our conversation!" Grandpa snapped on one occasion. It was the first time since Kobashi started at the facility that Grandpa had raised his voice and quarreled with him; Yuri cried as she intervened.

"How did it come to this?" she murmured.

"We know you want to have fun talks with everyone. Kobashi didn't mean to upset you. All these people are horrible, coming after you. We were worried you'd be hurt. Not just Kobashi, but me, the manager, everyone cares about you."

Now often moody, Grandpa's attitude toward the staff changed. His stern look remained cemented in deeply furrowed eyebrows. Looking at Grandpa, Yuri sighed and thought how it made him seem so small and seedy, just old. Making rounds, Kobashi came in, but Grandpa didn't turn to look at him. As he quietly wrapped up, Grandpa suddenly spoke.

"It's snowing tomorrow."

"Huh?" Both Kobashi and Yuri turned around at the same time.

"It's snowing tomorrow," he repeated with his eyes closed.

"Keep an eye on your feet and leave both hands open. The wings are enough to support."

Kobashi ran up; he paused to make sure it was Yuri.

"Did I just hear something about wings?"

"Yeah, you heard right."

"Kind of odd he says normal stuff like the snow tomorrow. Even though we've known about it from the weather forecast."

"It's been awkward since all he's done lately is scold us. Why doesn't he hurry up and fly away with his bad attitude and make the headlines."

For the first time in a while, Kobashi laughed. Yuri also felt relieved.

A blizzard larger than expected landed right on schedule the next day. It was rare for this much snowfall in the area, so the roads were a mess and trains stopped. There were no suspicious visitors for once, so the workers and residents enjoyed a peaceful day.

Kobashi wasn't doing his regular rounds in the facility, instead shoveling snow and inspecting doors. He had not seen Grandpa at all that day. On his way to the break room in the evening, the emergency exit at the end of the hall caught his attention. The snow that had collected on the wired-glass pane made it difficult to see through. He hurried over for a closer look and made out the back of a small-built man.

"Grandpa?"

Kobashi sprang to open the door. Perhaps frozen over, the knob did not budge. The Grandpa-like figure stood on the other side of the railing on the landing. There wouldn't have been anything in front of him; in other words, just air.

Yuri rushed over from the lobby when she heard Kobashi's yells.

The door was frustratingly frigid and unmoving. Kobashi shouted and banged on the glass with clenched fists.

"What are you doing? Let's go back in."

The figure slowly looked back. Grandpa was wearing a hanten jacket and stood straight-backed. Strangely, his voice was audible through the glass door.

"I've troubled you all enough; I'm leaving."

"Leaving? To where?"

"There's a place I need to be."

"It's cold out there so come back inside!"

Yuri also yelled with all her strength. There was no time to think about how absurd it was that a bedridden old man was outside on his own. All she could do was try to call him back.

"Thank you for everything, my dear."

Grandpa's venerable face lowered, but then he quickly burst out laughing and thrust a finger upward.

"This won't do. The wings are enough to support."

As he said it, the hanten began to billow at the back. On the opposite side of the glass door, the two could only hold their breath and watch as the hanten shredded into cotton tufts and scattered onto the snow. The next moment, a set of magnificent wings spread open. They took off unsteadily, dangling Grandpa's small body as if on a fishing line. After a few brief pauses, he flapped two or three times against the blizzard and then began soaring away...

The glass door finally opened, but nobody was there when Kobashi tumbled out onto the escape landing. In that same moment Grandpa had actually passed away in his sleep, but everyone preferred to believe that he spread his wings and flew away. Bizarrely, the videos disappeared and talk surrounding Grandpa stopped. The funeral was intimate and warm.

"Did he take away all the trouble, too?" wondered Yuri to herself.

"Where did he need to go?"

"Ah, I think we saw an angel."

"If he was an angel, looks like even I'll be going to heaven."

Both Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Kobashi thought how he did not mind if there was a hanten-wearing angel out there. Just like that day, the lingering snowfall danced like scattered white cotton.

Poppa Takes Flight

"I can fly, you know. Honest I can. In the *Peter Pon* story, when the boys grew up they couldn't even fly after their hats anymore. A crying shame, I can just imagine. Because your body still remembers how to fly."

Old Mr Hida; known as Poppa. The other residents at the home were addressed formally by surname, but Poppa was just Poppa. Without family, befuddled and bedridden, he was a handful to care for, but when awake he would natter away incessantly. He didn't go in for bragging or backstabbing; he just told stories that might be true or entirely made up. So Poppa was by far the most popular of the residents.

"*I can fly, you know*," echoed Kobashi, a young caregiver and the best mimic among the staff. "*Peter Pon* was a good one. Poppa can sure spin a yarn."

But nurse Yuri said that the scene Poppa was talking about really does appear in the novel *Peter Pan*. "Poppa's smarter than you might think."

Kobashi gaped at her. He'd always thought Peter Pan was a Disney character.

They were so hectically busy at the home that it could escape notice, but Kobashi always grew gloomy as March approached. Those who knew his ex-girlfriend had died in the tsunami would pass him quietly with a sidelong glance.

"Perhaps I should have asked her after all," Kobashi muttered as he was giving Poppa a bath one day. His regret was that he hadn't asked his girlfriend to marry him. She had returned to her home town in the country, entered an arranged marriage, and had afterwards lost her life. "Perhaps it was my fault," Kobashi said to himself, thinking Poppa asleep.

Then suddenly Poppa piped up and Kobashi almost dropped him. "*Koji! Koji!* she's calling," he said.

Kobashi's eyes widened. That was the name of the man his girlfriend had married. She had died in the sea with her husband.

"She's not calling you," Poppa insisted in a surprisingly strong, clear voice. "She went of her own accord. That's the life she chose. So be it."

What was Poppa seeing now? Could he really be seeing the sea that day, flying through space and time in his mind?

"She didn't suffer, did she?" Kobashi croaked. "She doesn't blame me, does she?"

"She's flying, that's all forgotten."

"Flying where?"

But Poppa's voice had broken off, replaced instantly by the sound of even breathing.

"Hey, you can't sleep there, Poppa!" Kobashi growled. Then the tears welled up and, letting water splash noisily from the hot tap, he burst into loud sobs.

Another day when Kobashi was with him, Poppa suddenly began nattering, "There was a girl on the footbridge, longing to take the leap."

"That's not good."

"A beautiful person mustn't die." The question of the unbeautiful people hung in the air. Poppa faltered, and then rattled on. "There's no way a person can fly, burdened and weighed down by an old grouch of a mother-in-law and a lousy income."

"Don't we all have our troubles, though," Kobashi replied blandly.

"The same when you're constipated, mustn't let things build up. Keep pushing and get it out."

"Get it out...?" Kobashi raised his head. Yuri was standing there, ashen-faced.

"How do you know about the footbridge?"

Shaken, Kobashi turned back to Poppa, already snoring in his familiar way. What he learned was that Yuri had indeed lingered once on a high footbridge, heart broken and desperate. Rather than die, she said, she had wanted to vanish into another dimension somewhere.

"I don't remember exactly, but I felt all the time that someone was watching, and I couldn't climb over the handrail."

"A beautiful person mustn't die." Kobashi had meant to mimic Poppa, but it fell flat. Yuri cupped her hand to her face, hiding her laughter.

Poppa would chat away to anyone. It was later on that things got weird. A part-timer said to Poppa, "I've lost my purse. I wish you'd fly home and find it for me." To which he had replied, "Under the slipper rack, I reckon."

He was right, and an awful state of affairs ensued. In her excitement the woman phoned the TV station and reporters had come. The astonished director forbade entry, but there were those who barged in – the woman's friends, or regular visitors who had heard the rumours perhaps. Someone who managed to talk with Poppa took a video on his phone and posted it online. Poppa was besieged with ridiculous questions, from the whereabouts of lost property to predictions on the horse races. He responded amiably, becoming animated and nattering non-stop whenever he was spoken to. If a question was difficult to answer, he would promptly fall asleep.

The video went viral and there was an endless stream of intruders pretending to be relatives of the residents. For the most part they were sent packing at the door, but some still inveigled their way in. Kobashi and Yuri roundly chased off whoever they discovered, while Poppa raged, "Don't you dare stop people talking to me!"

Never before had Poppa raised his voice and quarrelled with Kobashi. Stepping in to stop him, Yuri became tearful. "How did it come to this?" she murmured to herself.

"Poppa, I know you want to have a good chat with everyone, really I do. And Kobashi doesn't mean to stop you; he just hates it when people try to make fun of you. He's afraid they might hurt you. It's not just him. The manager too, and me, we all worry about you."

More frequently now Poppa gave the staff cross looks, acting quite out of character. Today his expression was again grimly set, his brow deeply furrowed. He was just a shabby, little old man, Yuri thought, breathing a small sigh. When Kobashi came in, back from his rounds, Poppa didn't give him a glance. He was about to walk straight out again, tight-lipped himself, when Poppa spoke up.

"It's going to snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" Kobashi and Yuri looked round simultaneously.

"It's going to snow tomorrow," Poppa repeated, his eyes still closed.

"Keep your eyes on your feet and stretch out your arms. Carry nothing but the wings on your back."

Kobashi started towards Poppa, and then stopped short in hesitation. "Something about wings, it sounded like. Did you hear?" he said, looking to Yuri.

"Yes, I heard."

"Isn't it odd that he made an ordinary remark too, about it snowing tomorrow. Of course, we knew that already from the weather forecast."

"Poppa feels out of sorts lately with everyone picking on him. He probably wanted to get into your good books, so he made a flying trip to check out the newspaper headlines." To Yuri's relief, Kobashi smiled for the first time in a long while.

The following day it snowed as forecast; indeed, harder than expected. An unusually heavy snowfall for those parts, it caused traffic jams, train stoppages and general mayhem. But for once, staff and residents spent a rare quiet day on their own, undisturbed by any suspicious visitors.

Kobashi was constantly on the go that day, clearing snow and checking doors, and had not once looked in on Poppa. It was almost nightfall when at last he climbed the stairs to the staff lounge to take a rest. For some reason, his attention was drawn to the fire escape at the end of the corridor. The door ought to be locked, but perhaps he should check. Heading over, he was immediately struck by a dark silhouette behind

the door. So much snow was stuck to the wire-mesh glass that it was difficult to see. He moved quickly forward. The small figure of a man stood there, back turned.

"Poppa!" Kobashi gasped.

He leaped to the door. The handle wouldn't turn, probably frozen solid. The figure resembling Poppa was facing away, on the other side of the fire escape railing.

Beyond the railing there was nothing; empty air, as it were.

Hearing Kobashi's shout, Yuri came flying from the nurses' station.

The door wouldn't budge in the blasted cold. Kobashi banged on the door with his fist.

"What the heck are you doing?" he yelled, "Come back to your room!"

Slowly the figure turned round. Poppa stood erect, wrapped in a padded *hanten* jacket.

Through the glass door his voice sounded strangely clear.

"I'll be off now. Troubled you long enough."

"Off where?"

"I got somewhere to go, don't you know."

"It's cold, Poppa. Come inside now." Yuri shouted frantically, too intent on calling him back to wonder at the absurdity of Poppa being outside when he was surely incapable of walking.

"Much obliged to you, for everything." Poppa bowed his head with a virtuous air, but then gave a burst of laughter and wagged a finger at them.

"Carry nothing with you. Nothing but the wings on your back."

The back of Poppa's *hanten* jacket began to billow and bulge. Watching through the glass door, Kobashi and Yuri gasped as the jacket split open, releasing tufts of white cotton batting that flew in the air, mingling and scattering with the snowflakes. The jacket expanded before their eyes and a magnificent pair of wings unfolded. As if hoisted by the great wings, Poppa's small frame swung gently upwards. He hung suspended for a moment, flapped his wings a few times against the pelting snow, and then rose straight up.

When the door finally gave and Kobashi tumbled outside, nobody was on the landing. Poppa, in fact, had passed away in his sleep at the time, although everyone preferred to believe he had flown away on outspread wings. Curiously enough, the online video and the gossip about Poppa evaporated overnight and he was given a warm, intimate funeral. Had Poppa borne away all their troubles, too, Yuri wondered.

"Where was that place he had to go, I wonder," Kobashi said.

"The way he looked, Poppa was an angel."

"If Poppa was an angel, I might get to heaven myself."

They both laughed. One angel in a *hanten* shouldn't be a problem, Kobashi thought.

The last snowflakes of winter danced like the wisps of white cotton that had flown in the air that day.

Flying Grandpa

Onuma Tamaki

* * *

I can fly. It's true. In the *Peter-pon* story, children lose their ability to fly when they grow up; they can't even fly after their hats, and that's a pity, you see. Because their bodies still remember how to fly.

* * *

Grandpa Tobita. His nickname is "Grandpa." This is a care home, so everyone calls the inmates by their family names, but in his case, "Grandpa" is enough. He has no family, and he is confined to bed and feeble-minded, so he is a hassle; but when he is awake, he talks and talks, and he doesn't boast nor does he speak ill of others, instead he tells stories that might be true or might be fibs. Because of that, he is far and away the most popular of the inmates. "I can fly..." Care worker Kobashi is the best at imitating him. "*Peter-pon* is excellent, isn't it. It's so imaginative." But nurse Yuri said the scene Grandpa was talking about does appear in the novel *Peter Pan*. So in fact Grandpa is surprisingly knowledgeable. Hearing this, Kobashi gaped in astonishment, as he had believed that Peter Pan was a Disney character.

The care home is extremely busy, so you wouldn't notice unless you knew, but, as March approaches, Kobashi becomes less cheerful. Those who know that he lost his former girlfriend in the tsunami glance at him gently as they silently pass him by.

One day, as he was bathing Grandpa, Kobashi grumbled, "Still, probably I should have said it." His regret was about failing to propose to his girlfriend. After breaking up, the girl returned to the countryside, had an arranged marriage, and then died. "Maybe it's my fault..." As Grandpa appeared to be sleeping, the young man was talking to himself. But then, Grandpa suddenly spoke so clearly that Kobashi nearly dropped him, "She is calling, 'Koji, Koji'."

Kobashi opened his eyes wide. That was the name of the man his former girlfriend married. She died together with her husband in the sea. Grandpa said in a surprisingly strong and clear voice, "She is not calling you," and, "she went there of her own accord, it was the life she chose, and that's ok." What could be Grandpa seeing? Was his heart really flying through space and time; was he looking at the sea on that day?

Kobashi asked hastily, "Didn't she suffer? Doesn't she hold a grudge against me?"

"She is flying, with no memory of such things."

“Where?”

Grandpa’s voice suddenly stopped, and immediately he started breathing peacefully—the breath of a sleeping person.

“Don’t sleep now, Grandpa,” said Kobashi bitterly, but suddenly his eyes filled with tears, and he cried loudly as the warm water gushed out.

On another occasion, again, Grandpa unexpectedly started talking when Kobashi was by his side.

“On a pedestrian overpass, there was a girl, and she wanted to fly.”

“She shouldn’t do that.”

“Pretty girls mustn’t die.”

Kobashi couldn’t find his voice to ask, what about unpretty girls. Grandpa continued.

“Too worried about her despicable witch of a mother-in-law and about her meager salary, she became heavy, so there was no way she could fly.”

Kobashi was just listening and nodding: “But we all have worries.”

“It’s no good if they build up like constipation. You should strain and get them out.”

“Get them out?” When Kobashi raised his eyes, Yuri was standing there, her face white as paper.

“How does he know about the pedestrian overpass?”

Kobashi jolted and turned back to Grandpa, but, like the last time, he was already snoring.

Apparently Yuri really had once stood on a tall overpass in helpless pain. She said that, rather than dying, she wanted to go to some different dimension.

“I can’t remember well, but I had a feeling that someone was watching me, and I couldn’t climb over the handrails,” she added.

“So, pretty girls mustn’t die,” Kobashi tried to imitate Grandpa’s tone of voice, but it didn’t come out very well. Yuri laughed, pressing her hands to her eyes.

Grandpa would talk to anyone. But then, things got out of hand. A woman who was working there part-time said, “I’ve lost my coin purse. I want you to fly to my house and find it.”

“It’s under the slipper stand,” answered Grandpa accurately, and that had serious consequences. The woman became excited and called a TV station, and a filming crew arrived. Startled, the care home manager turned them down, but the woman’s friends and the visitors who heard the rumor descended upon the care home. Those who

succeeded in having a conversation with Grandpa filmed it with their mobile phones and uploaded the videos online. People came with all kinds of questions, from the whereabouts of lost items to horse racing predictions; they were amiable, and Grandpa would get carried away and talk and talk. As soon as questions became difficult, he would instantly fall asleep. The videos were a sensation, and then there was no end of intruders pretending to be visiting their family. They were mostly turned away at the entrance, but nonetheless some were ingenious enough to get in. Kobashi and Yuri sent them away as soon as they spotted them, but once Grandpa burst out, “Don’t interrupt people when they are talking!” It was the first time since his admission to the care home that Grandpa argued with Kobashi in an angry voice.

Yuri came to intervene. She muttered to herself, unable to hold back her tears, “Why has it come to this?” She added, “We understand that you enjoy talking to people. Kobashi is not trying to stop your conversations, but he hates people who talk to you just because they find you hilarious. He is worried that you may get hurt. Not just Kobashi, but also I, and the manager, we all are worried about you.”

As if he had become a different person, Grandpa started often wearing a sullen look in front of the care home staff. On this occasion, too, he had a deep wrinkle between his eyebrows, and he wouldn’t soften his stern expression. When he was like that, he seemed to be just a small shabby old man, thought Yuri, sighing softly. Kobashi, making his rounds, entered the room, but Grandpa didn’t even look at him. It happened as Kobashi was swiftly leaving the room without a word.

“Tomorrow it’s going to snow,” said Grandpa unexpectedly.

“What?” Kobashi and Yuri turned around at the same time.

“Tomorrow it’s going to snow,” repeated Grandpa with his eyes still closed.

“I will carefully watch my step and I will spread my hands. The only thing I will carry is my wings.”

Kobashi rushed up to Yuri, then hesitantly stopped and asked her, “I think he said something about wings or such.”

“Yes, I heard that.”

“But he also said surprisingly normal things; that it’s going to snow tomorrow. I already know that much because it’s the forecast.”

“He’s feeling awkward—lately we have been doing nothing but scold him. He must have wanted to appease you, so he probably flew out in a hurry and looked at the

headlines of the newspapers.”

For the first time in a while, Kobashi laughed. Yuri, too, drew a deep breath.

* * *

The next day there was a heavy snowfall, just as predicted—in fact, more than anticipated. The unusual amount of snow caused disturbances: the roads were badly congested, and the trains stopped, and, as you would expect on such a day, there were no suspicious visitors, so it was a rare peaceful time for the staff and the inmates.

Kobashi was running about the care home, shoveling the snow, checking the doors, and he hadn’t seen Grandpa even once. As the evening was approaching, he was finally walking up the stairs to the lounge to take a brief rest. Suddenly he became worried about the emergency stairs at the back of the corridor. He was sure they were locked but decided to go and check once again. As soon as he turned to the door, he noticed a dark figure outside. There was a lot of snow sticking to the wired glass, so it was hard to see. He approached it in a hurry, and saw a small man standing with his back to him.

Kobashi gasped, “Grandpa!”

He rushed to the door. But the handle wouldn’t turn, maybe because it had frozen fast. Someone who looked like Grandpa was standing with his back to the glass, outside the railings of the stair landing. There was not supposed to be anything there but air. When she heard Kobashi’s calls, Yuri came running from the lobby.

The door was frustratingly cold and wouldn’t budge at all. Kobashi hit it with a clenched fist and shouted, “What are you doing? Go back to your room!”

Then, the figure slowly turned around. Grandpa was standing there firmly, wearing a short coat. They could hear his voice strangely well through the glass door.

“As I am only causing trouble, it’s time for me to go.”

“Where would you go?”

“Even for me, there is a place to go.”

“It’s cold, please come inside.”

Yuri, too, implored him. There was no time to be bothered about the absurdity of the fact that Grandpa, who was unable to walk, was outside. All they could do was try to call him back.

“You have taken good care of me, thank you,” Grandpa bowed his head with quite a virtuous expression, but then he sniggered and pointed his thumb up.

“I mustn’t carry anything. The only thing I will carry is my wings.”

Then, the back of his coat started to bulge. While Kobashi and Yuri were holding their breath and watching from inside the glass door, the coat split open, and white cotton flew into the air, mixed with snow, and scattered. In an instant, great wings were spreading out. The small body of Grandpa abruptly flew up as if lifted by the large wings; then he stopped for a while and, resisting the blizzard, flapped his wings a couple of times, and soared...

When they finally opened the glass door, and Kobashi rushed out, there wasn't anyone in the landing. Actually at that moment Grandpa was lying dead in his bed, as if he were asleep, but everyone believed he had spread his wings and flown away. All Grandpa's videos that had been uploaded online, as well as rumors about him, mysteriously disappeared as if erased; his funeral was cozy and warm. Yuri thought that maybe Grandpa had taken away with him all their disagreements.

* * *

"A place to go, where could it have been?"

"From the way he looked, he was an angel."

"If that's an angel, I could be an angel, too."

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Kobashi thought that he wouldn't mind if there were an angel with a short coat. Outside, spring snow was fluttering around, like on that day, when it exploded as if it were white cotton.

Grampa Pan

by Tamaki Onuma

I can fly. Yes, it's true. You know that story about Pitterpat—kids can't fly once they grow up, can't throw their hats in the air and soar to catch 'em, and that y'know that hurts? Because our bodies still know how.

Grampa Tobita, Grampa for short. The institution prefers to call people by their last names, but Grampa goes by Grampa. He has no family, he sleeps all the time, and he's senile, but when he's awake he's such a chatterbox. He never brags or speaks ill of a soul, but he tells stories that might be true or might be lies. It makes him a very popular fellow. I can fly, he says... and his caregiver Kobashi does an excellent impression of him. And Pitterpat is a creative idea, isn't it? Grampa could have been a writer. The nurse, Yuri, says the scenes he describes come straight from the novel *Peter Pan*. Grampa is better-read than you might expect. Kobashi's jaw drops when he hears that—he always thought *Peter Pan* was a Disney movie.

The institution is so busy that you might never notice, but when March rolls around, Kobashi loses his good cheer. Some of the others know that his ex-girlfriend died in March, in the earthquake, and they exchange significant looks as they pass him quietly in the hallways.

"Maybe I should have said it after all," Kobashi whispered one day as he gave Grampa a bath. He regrets missing his chance to propose to that girlfriend. She went back to her hometown out in the country, and married a man she met through a matchmaker, and then she died. "I wonder if it's my fault." Grampa looked asleep, so Kobashi thought he was talking to himself. But suddenly Grampa spoke, his voice clear, and Kobashi nearly dropped him. "Yuuji. She's calling for Yuuji." Kobashi's eyes went wide. Wasn't that the name of the man she married? She died with him, in the sea.

Grampa spoke with surprising clarity and force. "She isn't calling for you," he said. "She chose her own path, she lived her own life, and she doesn't regret it." Who knew what Grampa was seeing? Maybe his spirit was flying across space and time, seeing a certain stretch of ocean on a certain day. When Kobashi asked his question, his voice came out choked. "Did she suffer? Did she hate me?" "She's forgotten all that now. She's flying." "Where?" Grampa was silent, and then began to snore. "Don't fall asleep on me now, old man..." Kobashi's words were harsh, but tears welled up in his eyes. He ran hot water to cover the sounds of his crying.

That wasn't the only incident. The next time that Grampa suddenly spoke, Kobashi was with him again. "There was a girl on a footbridge, looking like she wanted to fly off it." "As long as she didn't jump." "Beauties like that shouldn't die." What about less beautiful people? Kobashi hesitated before he replied. "Between her wicked mother-in-law and her low pay, she's too heavy with worry to jump," he agreed. "Everyone has their troubles, though." "It's like constipation, you can't let it built up. You gotta push it all out." "Let it out, huh..." Kobashi looked up to see Yuri standing white-faced before him. "How do you know about the footbridge?" Kobashi whirled around in shock to find Grampa already beginning to snore.

It turned out that Yuri had once found herself standing in despair on a high footbridge. She said that she hadn't really wanted to die so much as to jump into some other dimension. "I

don't remember very well, but I felt like someone was watching me, and I couldn't bring myself to go over the railing," she said. "Beauties like you shouldn't die, he said." Kobashi tried to mimic Grampa's voice, but he didn't do it very well. Yuri kept a stiff hand on her tear ducts, but she smiled.

Grampa would talk to anyone. That was what got him in trouble. One of the middle-aged ladies on staff part-time told him she'd lost her bag. "I forgot it at home. Could you fly over and get it for me?" He didn't, but he answered her. "It's just under your shoe drawer." It caused quite a fuss, because it was. The woman was so excited, she got the local TV station to send people over for a piece. That took the director of the institution by surprise, and he turned them away, but next came a flood of visitors, some of them friends of the part-time woman, some who had heard the rumor. Someone who managed to talk to Grampa uploaded a cell-phone video to the Internet. In the video they flooded him with questions about everything from the whereabouts of lost items to horse-race predictions, and Grampa got so carried away by the friendly attention that he talked and talked. When the questions got too difficult, he fell asleep partway through. The video was a huge hit, and the facility was infiltrated by a string of questioners posing as visiting guests. Most of these were turned away at the door, but some found devious ways to slip through anyway. Kobashi and Yuri chased away those they caught, but Grampa snapped at them, "Don't interrupt me when I'm talking to people!" That was the first time he ever shouted at Kobashi since he was first brought in, and Yuri was crying as she separated the two. "Why is this happening?" she muttered to herself.

"I know you love to talk to everyone, Grampa. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking, he just hates these people who come in and treat you like some kind of novelty. He's worried they'll hurt you. And it isn't just Kobashi, the Director and I and everyone else worries about you too."

Grampa's attitude towards the staff became almost unrecognizably unfriendly. On this day, like every day of late, he wore a surly frown and a permanent wrinkle in his brow. When he acted like that, he seemed like nothing but a small, thin old man, and Yuri sighed at the change in him. Kobashi came in, and Grampa didn't even turn his head. Kobashi was trying to hurry out when Grampa spoke.

"It will snow tomorrow." It came out of nowhere. Kobashi and Yuri gasped in unison as they spun to face him. "It will snow tomorrow." Grampa repeated his prophecy with closed eyes. "Look down at your feet and spread your arms. Carry nothing but wings on your back." Kobashi made to rush over to him but hesitated and looked to Yuri. "He just said something about wings." "Yes, I heard." "He said something unusually normal, too, that it will snow tomorrow. It was already on the weather forecast, though." "We're so awkward from all the scolding. He must have flown off to peek at a newspaper headline so he could get back on your good side." Kobashi laughed, for the first time in a long time. Yuri felt better, too.

The next day it snowed as expected—but more than expected. It was more than the area was used to, and it caused a wild confusion, with congestion in the streets and stoppages of trains. This kept all the dubiously-intentioned visitors away, and gave the staff and their charges a rare quiet day alone.

Sweeping snow and checking doors kept Kobashi so busy running around the facility that he didn't run into Grampa all day. It was almost evening by the time he paused to rest. He was on the stairs on the way to the break room when he felt a pang of concern over the emergency stairwell connected to the hallway. It ought to be locked, but he might as well go to check. As soon as he looked over he saw a dark silhouette outside. It was difficult to discern through all the snow clinging to the wire mesh glass. He rushed over to see a small man standing with his back turned. He gulped. "Grampa."

Kobashi leapt to the door. The handle wouldn't move, like it was frozen. The man on the other side looked a lot like Grampa, but he was outside the railing around the landing of the emergency stairwell. There was nothing to stand on there. Yuri came running from the waiting room at the sound of Kobashi's scream. The door was so abominably cold that it wouldn't budge an inch. Kobashi slammed on it with a fist and yelled, "What are you doing? Let's go back to your room!"

The silhouette slowly turned. Grampa was standing straight, wearing a short winter coat. His voice came strangely clear through the glass door. "I'm causing trouble for you. It's time I go." "Go where?" "Even I have a somewhere to go." "It's cold, come back inside."

Yuri screamed. She was too worried to wonder how Grampa had gotten outside when he shouldn't even be able to walk. She wanted only to call him back in.

"You took good care of me. Thank you for everything." Grampa bowed his head seriously, but when he raised it he was smiling and flashing a thumbs-up. "Don't let this drag you down. Carry nothing but wings on your back."

His coat billowed around him. The two on the inside watched with bated breath as a tear developed in the fabric, scraps of white cotton mingling with the falling snow. As they looked on it stretched into a pair of beautiful wings. He seemed to float for a moment, suspended by great wings too big for his little body, but then he flapped two or three times and soared up against the falling snow...

The glass door finally opened, and Kobashi burst out, but as he emerged there was no one on the landing. In fact Grampa had died in his sleep, but everyone preferred to believe that he had spread his wings and flown away. Strangely enough, the videos online and the rumors about him vanished overnight, and the funeral was a warm and cozy affair. Maybe Grampa took all their worries away with him, Yuri thought.

"I wonder where he was going." "However he looked, he was an angel." "If that guy was an angel, maybe I'll make it to heaven too." Yuri and Kobashi smiled. An angel in a short winter coat—well, why not, Kobashi thought.

The snow fell softly like white cotton.

The Old Man Who Could Fly

'I can fly. No lie, it's true. According to the story of "Peter Pon," kids lose their ability to fly when they grow up. They can't even fly by throwing and chasing their hats. It's sad, isn't it? Even though their body remembers how to fly, it can no longer perform the act.

Grandpa Hida. A name everyone knows. Because he resides in a home for the elderly, just like everyone else, he is supposed to be called by his last name, however, when it comes to grandpa Hida, many just call him Pops. He has no family, is bedridden, has dementia and needs a lot of tending to, but when he is awake, all he does is talk. However, he only tells stories in which no one can separate the lies from the truth. So, even amongst the patients he is, by far, the most popular person there.

"I can fly" Kobashi mocked. Nurse Kobashi is really good at impersonations. "I like Pops' 'Peter Pon' story. He's actually pretty good at coming up with stories" he continued.

However, Yuri, another nurse, interrupted him and stated that Pops' story really comes from the novel *Peter Pan*. Pops knows a lot more than he lets on. Kobashi was surprised because he was sure that Pops made up the story himself, but that wasn't the case.

As March approaches it becomes very busy in the old folks' home, so not many notice how sad Kobashi becomes. For those who do notice and know the story of his past girlfriend who died in a tsunami around this time a few years ago, they tend to pass him by without saying a single word, just giving him a gentle look.

One day while giving pops a bath Kobashi mumbled to himself, "I should have just asked her." His voice was full of regret as he thought about how he didn't propose when he had the chance. Soon after he and his ex girlfriend broke up, she went back home to the countryside, took part in an arranged marriage and died soon after. Thinking Pops was asleep, Kobashi whispered to himself, "It's my fault." However, he was awake and suddenly shouted "Koji! Koji! I can hear someone calling this name." Startled, Kobashi almost dropped pops' head, but he recognized the name. *Isn't that the name of the person who my ex girlfriend married,* he thought to himself. She died with her husband at sea during the tsunami and that was the other name mentioned in the news.

"She's not calling for you, Kobashi. You followed your path. It's the life you have chose and it is just fine" Pops said with a powerful and clear voice.

What could pops be looking at right now? Maybe he's reliving the day the tsunami hit, Kobashi thought as he became more and more flustered. "Wasn't she in pain? Doesn't she hate me?"

"Just forget all of that and fly!"

"Fly? where?"

It fell silent and just when he thought Pops' voice stopped, out blew a light snore.

"Damnit old man! Don't fall asleep on me now!" Kobashi yelled as he cursed Pops' name. His eyes filled with tears and he began to cry loudly over the sound of hot water gushing from the sink faucet.

That was not the only time a conversation with Pops like that had happened. On another day, as Kobashi sat by Pops' side, Pops unexpectedly began to speak.

"It seemed like the girl on the footbridge wanted to fly."

"That's not good, is it?"

"Beautiful people should not die."

Kobashi wanted to mention and ask about those who aren't considered beautiful, but he refrained and Pops continued talking.

"...there's no way she can fly with all of the thoughts and stress about that old hag of a mother-in-law and her low salary weighing her down."

“Yeah, but everyone has their own problems and worries,” Kobashi responded.

“It’s like constipation; it’s bad to hold it all in. It’s best to just let it all go.”

“Let it go?” Just as Kobashi lifted his head, Yuri was standing there with a blank look on her face.

“Why do you know about my time on the footbridge?”

Surprised that Pops knew about this, Kobashi and Yuri both turned toward him, but just like before, Pops was fast asleep, snoring.

From all that’s been said, what’s understood is that there was a rough time in Yuri’s life when she stood on a footbridge and pondered the thought of taking her own life. Yuri said, more than dying, she wanted to go to a different dimension or point in time.

“I don’t fully remember, but I felt like someone was watching me the whole time. I was so afraid that I couldn’t pass the guardrail” Yuri said.

“Beautiful people shouldn’t die” Kobashi said, trying to mimic Pops’ words, but it just didn’t come out the same.

Almost in tears, Yuri suppressed her sadness and laughed.

Grandpa talks to just about anyone. Because of this, something surprising happened. The old lady who worked at the home part time said to Pops, “I lost my coin purse. I want you to fly to my house and find it for me.” And so Pops told her “it’s under the slipper, right?” To everyone’s surprise, it was the correct answer. In dismay, the old lady called the Television station and asked for coverage of the miracle that had just happened. When they arrived, the head of the home refused their entrance, but her friends and people who heard the rumors about what had happened forced their way, ignoring the words of the man in charge. The people who successfully spoke with Pops took videos and uploaded them to the internet. He was asked many kinds of questions from the location of lost items to the anticipated winner of horse races. When it was going well, Pops was very sociable and talked a lot, but when the questions became too difficult, he fell right asleep. The videos became a big hit and many intruders disguised as sympathetic customers visited. Normally those kind of people are stopped and turned away at the front gate, but they snuck in amongst the crowd. Kobashi and Yuri sought to find those intruders and throw them out, but Pops got angry and said “If these people want to talk to me, let them. Don’t interrupt!” It was the first time since Kobashi began working there that Pops raised his voice at him with such anger. Even Yuri was moved to tears.

“Why did it become like this?” She cried. “I understand that you are enjoying talking with everyone, but Kobashi isn’t trying to interrupt that. He dislikes those who are only here to take advantage of you and make you say funny things just for their delight. We are all worried about you being hurt. Not just Kobashi, but me, the head of the home...everyone. We are just all trying to look out for you!”

Recently, Pops had been in a bad mood to the point that it seemed like his entire personality changed. The blank and disgruntled looks Pops gave the staff began to increase as if he, himself, was a different person. And on this day as well, the severe look on his face with the deep wrinkle in the middle of his forehead did not change.

Yuri sighed softly in realization that if he kept that face and attitude, he’d look like nothing more than a poor old man. Even when Kobashi came into the room, Pops payed him no attention. He wouldn’t even look in his direction. So, without saying a word, Kobashi turned around to leave, but right before he hit the door, grandpa spoke. “It’s going to snow tomorrow.”

“Huh” both Yuri and Kobashi responded, looking over their shoulders.

With his eyes closed, he repeated, “It’s going to snow tomorrow.”

“Check your foot placement and spread your arms. Just the wings on your back is all you need.”

Kobashi went over to Yuri and confirmed with a hesitant voice, “Did he say wings?”

“Yea. I think so. That’s what I heard.”

“It’s unusual for pops to do this, but he said something normal too. He said tomorrow it will snow... but we already know that.”

“You were just scolded a bit earlier and things are a bit awkward, so I think he hurried to at least look at the headline of the newspaper and use it to try to cheer you up.”

Yuri felt a bit of relief as Kobashi laughed for the first time in a long time.

Just as the forecast predicted, the next day it snowed, but a lot more than expected. The amount of snow was so rare for that area that all roads became congested and trains stopped. As expected, no suspicious visitors came to the home to visit due to the bad weather. It turned into a quiet day with just the patients and staff members.

On this day, Kobashi was very busy running around the building, checking snow shovels and doors. Not even once did he see pops. As night approached, he was finally able to go upstairs to the break room and take a breather. He heard a sound and looked down the hallway toward the emergency staircase at the back of the corridor. It should’ve been locked, but he went to double check. Just as he turned his head, he noticed a suspicious-looking shadow outside, but there was so much snow gathered in the wired glass that he couldn’t make out the image. When he moved closer, there was a man standing there with a small build. Kobashi took a deep breath. “Pops!” Kobashi lunged at the door, but the handle was so iced-over that it wouldn’t turn. The Pops-like figure was on the outside of the fence of the emergency staircase’s landing moving further and further away. There wasn’t supposed to be anything there, but what was there may have gone airborne. Yuri heard Kobashi shouting Pops’ name and came running out of the waiting room.

The door was so frozen over by the cold that it wouldn’t even shake. Kobashi banged on the glass, yelling to the figure, “What in the world are you doing?! Go back to your room!”

The shadow slowly turned around. It was, in fact pops standing there with a firm stance, wearing a traditional short winter coat and strangely, his words traveled clearly through the window. “Since I’m causing so many problems, I will be going now.”

“Going? Going where?”

“I have places I must go to.”

“It’s cold. Come back inside!” Kobashi exclaimed.

Yuri also started to yell out to him as loud as she could. There was no time to give attention to the fact that this old man who wasn’t supposed to be able to walk oddly made his way outside alone. They just wanted to call out to him and get him back inside.

“You guys have done so much for me and taken care of me. Thank you.” Pops made an admirable face and lowered his head in a bow, but he then immediately laughed and flashed a thumbs up sign. “Don’t shoulder so much. Just the wings on your back is all you need.”

And with that, he turned and the back of his jacket swayed in the wind. Kobashi and Yuri took a deep breath and watched attentively from behind the glass door as the jacket tore and the, what appeared to be, white lines blended in with the scattering snow. As they looked, the width of Pops’ back began to grow and out sprang an elegantly complete set of wings. As if his small body could be lifted by those large wings, Pops leapt into the air. He paused for a brief second and just as though they were fighting against the pounding snow storm, the wings flapped once...twice...and all at once, grandpa’s body ascended into the sky.

Kobashi found a way to slip through the barely opened door, but when he did, there was no one there. In actuality, Pops passed away in his sleep that night, but everyone more so believed the story of him sprouting wings and flying away. What was strange was that the rumors and videos of Pops that were uploaded to the internet disappeared without a trace and

later only the few people close to him made an appearance at the funeral.

Yuri hoped to herself that pops had also took with him the troubles caused by all of the people constantly visiting the home to see him.

“I wonder exactly where it was that pops wanted to go” Kobashi said.

“He looked like an angel.”

“If he was an angel, then it seems like even I can get into heaven.”

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Kobashi thought to himself *as long as there's just one angel wearing winter jacket then everything will be okay.*

Just like the rush of snow that appeared when the wings sprouted from Pops' back, the last snow of winter came blowing in.

Title: Papa Flying

I can fly. I can indeed. In that story, Peter Pon, the kids stop flying once they've grown up, and they can't throw their hats in the air and chase after them anymore. That's sad, don't you think? Even though their body remembers how to fly.

Papa Tobita. Also known as Papa. The staff call him by his last name in the nursing home, but everyone knows Papa. He has no family, he's bed-ridden, and is generally a handful, but when he's awake he talks and talks, never boasting or ranting, but telling weird stories that may or may not be true. This made him the most popular resident in the home. *I can fly...* Kobashi, the carer staff did a perfect impression of him. *Isn't Peter Pon grand? Very good author.*

Nurse Yuri told Kobashi that Papa was referencing an actual scene from *Peter Pan*, the novel. *Papa knows more than he looks, you know.* Kobashi gaped his mouth in surprise, having believed Peter Pan was a Disney character.

Every year around March, Kobashi's mood would lower a little, although it wasn't obvious due to how dizzyingly busy the home was. His previous lover was lost in a tsunami, and out of respect, the people who knew this would leave him alone.

One day, while bathing Papa, Kobashi wondered to himself, "Maybe I should have told her." Kobashi's greatest regret was never being able to propose to his lover. His lover had gone back to the countryside, agreed to an arranged marriage, and died not long after. "Could it be my fault?" he meant to say to himself, thinking Papa was asleep. Papa replied so suddenly and clearly, Kobashi almost let him go.

"Kouji. She's calling for Kouji."

Kobashi widened his eyes. It was the name of his previous lover's husband. It was him that Kobashi's lover had died with in the sea. Papa spoke with a surprisingly strong and clear voice.

"I'm not calling for you." "This is the path I chose, the life I made, and that's all right." What could Papa be seeing now? Could his mind really have travelled through space and time to see that day at the sea? Kobashi asked with urgency.

"Was she in any pain? Does she blame me?"

"She's forgotten all that and flown away."

"Where?"

Papa's voice stopped abruptly, and Kobashi heard him snoring.

"Don't sleep yet, old geezer." Kobashi snapped at him, but quickly felt tears well up in his eyes. He turned the tap on full, and started wailing loudly.

On another occasion, Kobashi was again close by when Papa suddenly started talking.

"There's a gal, trying to fly off a bridge."

"We can't have that."

"Pretty gals shouldn't die."

Kobashi bit his lip, not asking about gals that were not pretty, but Papa continued talking.

"She'll never fly. She's too worried about that hag of a mother-in-law and her low pay, and it's weighing her down."

Kobashi replied nonchalantly. "Everyone has problems."

"No good keeping it all in, it'll get constipated. Got to push it out."

"Push it out?" When Kobashi looked up, Yuri was standing there with a pale face.

"How do you know about the bridge?"

By the time the two turned their attention towards Papa, he was snoring like always.

It was revealed there was a time when Nurse Yuri was in so much pain, and she stood waiting at a tall overpass. More than death, Yuri confessed she wanted to be taken to a completely different dimension.

"I don't remember it much, but I felt like someone was watching over me all that time, and I couldn't bring myself to jump." she said.

"He said pretty gals shouldn't die."

Kobashi tried to mimic Papa, but it didn't come out quite right. Yuri rubbed her eyes and laughed.

Papa can make conversation with anyone. That was how things got out of hand. A middle-aged part-timer remarked "I lost my wallet. I want you to fly home and find it for me." Papa said, correctly, that "They're under the slipper shelf", and started a storm. The woman got excited and phoned the TV station, who came in for an interview. The bewildered manager declined, but the part-timer's friends and other visitors who heard the rumors started to barge in. People who managed to talk with Papa took videos on their phones, and uploaded them on the internet. They asked all sorts of ludicrous questions, from finding lost property to betting on race horses, and Papa would chat with anyone who would listen. If there was anything he couldn't answer, he would simply fall asleep at once.

The videos went viral, and the home had to endure rubberneckers pretending to visit. Most of them were turned away at the front door, but even then, a few would somehow get in. Kobashi and Yuri would chase them away as they were found, but Papa would roar angrily, "Stop butting in when I'm talking!" It was the first time Papa raised his voice at Kobashi since coming to the home, and Yuri, who came in to stop them, was on the verge of tears.

"How did it come to this?" she mumbled to herself.

"I know how much you like chatting with people. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop that. He just doesn't want people to turn you into a freak show. He's worried that they might hurt you. It's not just him. even me, the manager, and everyone here are all worried about you."

From then on, Papa started looking at the staff disapprovingly, completely different to how he was before. Every day, he would furrow his brows with a frowned expression on his face. He had turned into a scrawny senile old man, and Yuri sighed quietly. Kobashi was doing the rounds and entered the room, but Papa didn't even turn towards him. Kobashi also kept quiet, and tried to leave quickly.

"It'll snow tomorrow." Papa commented.

"Huh?"

Kobashi and Yuri both turned towards him.

"It'll snow tomorrow." Papa repeated with his eyes closed.

"Look closely where you're standing and spread your arms out. Your wings are all you need to wear."

Kobashi rushed towards Yuri, hesitated for a moment, and asked her.

"I thought I heard him mention something about wings."

"I heard him too."

"He talked about some normal things too, that it'll snow tomorrow. They said so on the weather forecast earlier."

"After the constant scolding, he must be feeling uncomfortable. He must have felt sorry about you and checked a newspaper."

It was a while since Kobashi laughed. Yuri was relieved as well.

As predicted, nay, beyond predictions, there was a blizzard the next day. It was very unusual weather for the area, and there was chaos on the roads and the trains stopped running. Even the rubberneckers couldn't come today, so with only the staff and residents in the home, it was the quietest day in a long while.

On this day, Kobashi was busy around the home shoveling snow and checking locks, and he hadn't seen Papa yet. When it was almost evening, he climbed the stairs to take a break in the staff room. For some reason, the emergency staircase at the end of the corridor caught his attention. *It should be locked, but I'll check it once more.* He noticed a blackish figure outside on the other side of the door. He couldn't see well through the meshed window which was covered with snow. When he quickly approached the door, a small man was standing with his back towards Kobashi.

He gulped.

"Papa."

Kobashi flew towards the door. The door handle was frozen shut and wouldn't turn. The Papa-shaped figure was beyond the banister of the emergency staircase. There was nothing to stand on. In other words, he was in midair.

Hearing Kobashi shouting, Yuri flew out from the staff room.

The door was infuriatingly cold, and would not budge a bit. Kobashi thumped at the glass with his fist and yelled.

"What are you doing? Let's go back to your room."

The figure slowly turned towards him. Papa was wearing a warm cardigan and standing up straight. His voice could be heard unusually clear through the glass.

"I've been a lot of trouble, so I'll go now."

"Go? Where?"

"Even I have places to go to."

"It's cold out there. Please come inside."

Even Yuri called out fervently. There was no time to be wondering what Papa was doing outside when he couldn't even walk. They only wanted to call him back inside.

"You've all been such a great help. Thank you very much."

Papa had a slightly dignified look to his face and bowed his head, but then gave a quick grin and raised his thumb.

"Take nothing else. Your wings are all you need to wear."

The back of his cardigan started moving. The two people on this side of the door held their breath and watched as the cardigan tore open, the white fabric mingling with the snow. As they watched, the shape widened until a magnificent pair of wings were formed. Papa's small body was lifted up, as if he was pulled upwards by those giant wings, and after pausing for a moment, flapped a few times against the blizzard and ascended all at once.

The glass door eventually opened, and by the time Kobashi stumbled out, there was no one in the stairwell.

In reality, Papa had passed away in his sleep, but everyone chose to believe he had spread his wings and flown away. The videos on the internet and the gossip about Papa had all miraculously disappeared without a trace, and a small intimate funeral was held for him. Yuri wondered if he had taken away all these problems away with him as well.

"Where could have Papa gone?"

"He must have been a guardian angel."

"If that's what an angel is, even I might be allowed in heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi both laughed. Kobashi thought there was no harm in having at least one cardigan-wearing angel.

The last of the year's snow fell like the white fabric on the day he flew away.

Jicchan Flies

I can fly. Oh yes, it's true. There's this story, Peter Pon, where the children grow up, and then they can't fly anymore, they can't throw off their hats and fly after him anymore. It's very sad... I know how they feel. You can still remember what flying feels like, too.

Old Mr. Hida, commonly known as Jicchan, meaning "gramps." Normally, at that kind of home, the residents are all called by their last names, but everyone knew who "Jicchan" was. Bedridden, with dementia and no family, Jicchan needed a lot of care. But when he was awake, he talked and talked; not boasting or complaining about anyone, but always about things that might be true or might be made up. This made him very popular among the home's residents.

"Yes, I can fly..." Obashi, one of the caregivers, did the best Jicchan impression. "Peter Pon' is pretty creative. He's got talent."

But Yuri, a nurse, told him that the scene Jicchan was talking about really was in the novel *Peter Pan*. "You might not guess it, but Jicchan is surprisingly knowledgeable."

Obashi's jaw hung open. He had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The home was dizzyingly busy, so it was easy to miss, but Obashi was a little less perky than usual as March approached. Those who knew about his ex-girlfriend, who had been killed in the tsunami, kept a quiet eye on him whenever they passed by.

One day, while bathing Jicchan, Obashi was muttering to himself.

"Maybe I should have told her."

Obashi regretted missing his chance to propose to his ex-girlfriend. When they broke up, she went back to her parents' house in the country, got married through a matchmaking service, and then died.

"Maybe it is my fault."

Obashi didn't mean for anyone to hear; Jicchan appeared to be sleeping. But then Jicchan started talking, so clearly and suddenly that Obashi almost lost his grip on him.

"Kouji. She's calling out for Kouji."

Obashi's eyes widened. Kouji was the name of the man his ex-girlfriend had married. She and her husband had perished in the sea together. Jicchan went on, his voice strangely forceful and sharp.

"She's not calling out for *you*." And then, "She made the choice to go herself. She chose that life. So it's OK."

What was Jicchan seeing? Could his mind really be flying through space and time, seeing the ocean that day? Obashi choked out, "Did she suffer? Does she hate me?"

"She's forgotten about all that. She's just flying."

"Where is she?"

Jicchan abruptly stopped speaking. Obashi listened and then heard a snore.

“Don’t fall asleep on me *now*, stupid geezer!”

But even as Obashi cursed the old man, tears welled up in his eyes. Leaving the hot water running, he bawled.

There were other times, too. One day, again when Obashi was nearby, Jicchan suddenly started talking.

“There’s a girl, on a pedestrian bridge, who wants to fly.”

“Well, that’s not good.”

“Pretty girls mustn’t die.”

Obashi hesitated, wondering what this meant about the girls who weren’t pretty, but Jicchan continued, “She’s so weighted down, thinking too much about her nasty mother in law and her low pay, there’s no way she can fly.”

Not thinking much of it, Obashi responded, “Everyone has problems, though.”

“It’s not good to keep it bottled up. Like being constipated. Better to let it all out.”

“Out...?”

Obashi looked up and found Yuri standing there, her face ashen.

“How do you know about the bridge?”

Surprised, Obashi turned back to Jicchan. But, as usual, he was snoring again.

Yuri told Obashi that once, she had been so overwhelmed with pain that she had gone up a tall pedestrian bridge and lingered at the top. More than death, she said, she had wanted to slip to away to some other dimension.

“I don’t exactly remember, but I felt like someone was watching me the whole time, and I just couldn’t bring myself to go over the guardrail.”

“Pretty girls mustn’t die.” Obashi tried to imitate the way Jicchan had said it, but it wasn’t very convincing. Yuri pressed the corners of her eyes with her fingers and laughed.

Jicchan would talk with anyone. That was how things got out of hand. A middle-aged woman who worked at the home part-time said to him, “I lost my coin purse. I wish you’d fly to my house and find it.”

Jicchan responded, “Look under the slipper stand.” And he was right. This set off a chain of events. The woman excitedly called the TV station, which came to do a story. The home’s director, alarmed, turned them down, but the woman’s friends and visitors who had heard rumors came anyway. Someone who managed to talk with Jicchan took a video on their phone and put it online. They threw all manner of questions at him, from the locations of misplaced belongings to which racehorse to bet on, and Jicchan, pleased to have people conversing with him so nicely, talked and talked. The moment a question that was difficult to answer came up, he was suddenly asleep. The video was a hit, and soon there was no end to the people showing up, pretending to be acquaintances of Jicchan. Most of these were turned away at the entrance, but some were crafty enough to slip through. Obashi and Yuri

would chase the intruders away as soon as they discovered them, but this made Jicchan angry. "We were having a conversation. Don't interrupt!" he snapped. It was the first time Jicchan had ever spoken so harshly to Obashi. Yuri, intervening, was on the verge of tears. "How did this happen?" she asked herself. "I know you want to have fun talking to people, Jicchan. But Obashi isn't trying to keep you from talking, he just doesn't want to see people laughing at you. He's worried that they'll hurt your feelings. He's not the only one, either. The director, and me, and everyone, we're all worried about you, Jicchan."

Jicchan began to take a surly attitude he had never shown before with the home's staff. One particular day, seeing him once again wearing a hard, fixed expression, his brow furrowed, Yuri sighed. Acting that way, she thought, he was nothing but a small, shriveled old man. Obashi came in from making the rounds, but Jicchan would not look at him. Obashi said nothing and was about to hurry out again when Jicchan suddenly spoke.

"We'll have snow tomorrow."

Startled, Obashi and Yuri both turned toward him.

"We'll have snow tomorrow," Jicchan repeated, his eyes closed. "Look carefully at the ground and open your hands. All you've got to carry are your wings."

Obashi started to move toward Jicchan, then stopped, hesitating, and turned to Yuri.

"It sounded like he said something about wings."

"Yeah, I heard."

"He said something pretty normal, too. That it'll snow tomorrow. I mean, it's been in the forecast, so everyone already knows."

"Maybe he's feeling awkward, since he's been scolded so much lately. He probably flew off and looked at the newspaper headline to try and get back on your good side."

It was the first time in a while that Obashi had laughed. Yuri felt a sense of relief, too.

The next day brought snow, as forecast, or perhaps even more so. A snowfall so heavy was rare there, and the roads backed up, the trains stopped. So it was unsurprising that there were no suspicious visitors, and for once they had a quiet day, with just the staff and residents.

Obashi was running around busy all day, shoveling snow and checking the doors. He did not look in on Jicchan even once. As evening approached, he thought he would take a rest and was climbing the stairs toward the break room when he thought of the fire escape at the end of the hall. It should be locked, but perhaps he had better make sure. The moment he turned and looked, he realized that the dark shape of a person was visible outside. A great deal of snow had stuck to the safety glass, making it difficult to see out. Rushing over, Obashi saw that it was a small man, his back to the window. He gasped.

"Jicchan!"

Obashi flew to the door. Apparently frozen solid, the handle would not turn. The figure that looked like Jicchan, facing away from him, was outside the fire escape railing. There was nothing outside the railing. Meaning that he was in midair.

Hearing Obashi yelling, Yuri came running from the waiting room.

The door was horribly cold, and would not budge an inch. Obashi pounded the glass with his fists and shouted.

“What are you doing? Let’s get you back to your room!”

At this, the shadow turned slowly toward them. Jicchan, wearing an old *hanten* jacket, was standing up straight. His voice, coming from behind the glass, sounded oddly clear.

“I don’t want to cause any more trouble, so I’m gonna go.”

“Go? Go where?”

“Even I have places I can go, you know.”

“It’s cold, come back inside,” Yuri yelled, frantic. There was no time to wonder how Jicchan, who had not been able to walk, had gotten outside. She just wanted to get him to come back in.

“You’ve been good to me. Thanks.”

Jicchan lowered his head, his expression a little solemn, but then grinned and gave them a thumbs-up.

“Don’t try to carry this. All you’ve got to carry are your wings.”

Something on his back, under the *hanten*, began to wriggle. As Obashi and Yuri gasped, watching from behind the window, the coat split open, flinging tufts of white cotton into the air to mingle with the snow. In a moment, two large wings emerged and fanned out.

Jicchan’s small body was hoisted upward, seeming to dangle from the wings as they took flight. He paused there for a moment, then beat his wings two, three times, and shot upward, pushing through the snow and wind.

When the glass door finally opened and Obashi came tumbling out, there was no one on the fire escape landing. Jicchan, it turned out, had quietly passed away that day, as if drifting off to sleep, but everyone was more inclined to believe that he had spread his wings and flown away. Strangely, the videos of Jicchan online and the rumors about him seemed to suddenly disappear, and the funeral was an intimate, warm affair. Yuri wondered if Jicchan had purposefully taken all the trouble away with him.

“I wonder where those places he said he could go are.”

“He may not have looked it, but he was an angel.”

“If he was an angel, even I ought to be able to get into heaven.”

Yuri and Obashi laughed. Surely heaven could tolerate a single angel wearing a *hanten*.

The spring snow danced in the air, like the cotton that had burst from the jacket that night.

Flying Grandpa

By Onuma Tamao

"I can fly y'know.

It's the truth.

Y'know the story Peter Pon? The one about the kids who grow up and cannae fly anymore? They cannae even chase after their hats when they toss them. But their bodies remember how it feels to fly. Ain't that sad?"

Grandpa Tobita. Well, everyone just called him Grandpa. All the residents in the nursing home were referred to by their last name, but not Grandpa. Grandpa's always been Grandpa.

He didn't have any family though. Being bedridden and senile meant he was a lot to handle sometimes. But when he was awake, really awake, he never stopped talking. He mostly told stories about how great he was, but in a way that never painted anyone else in a bad light. Although saying that, you could never tell if any of his stories were true or not.

That's why he was the most popular resident there. The best of the bunch.

"I can fly yer know." Nurse Kobashi's impression of Grandpa was probably the best. "Ain't Peter Pon great? It's a literary masterpiece!"

"You know he's talking about the novels of Peter Pan." Nurse Yuri said. "It's surprising sometimes just how much Grandpa knows."

Kobashi was left speechless, mouth agape; he had thought Peter Pan was just some Disney character.

The nursing home was so busy that most people wouldn't have noticed Kobashi getting more and more depressed as March drew near. Those who did know, that the woman he had loved had died in the tsunami, didn't want to worry him. They kept quiet and kept working like nothing was wrong.

"Maybe I should have said something," he mumbled to himself as he was bathing Grandpa one day.

He had always regretted almost proposing to her, but never going through with it. She died when she went back to her hometown for her arranged marriage.

"It's my fault..." He said to himself next to Grandpa's seemingly dozing body. Then, clear as a bell, Grandpa spoke up. "Kouji. His name is Kouji."

Kobashi jumped, almost letting go of Grandpa. His eyes widened. Wasn't that the name of the guy his ex-girlfriend married? She had died with him, her husband, swallowed by the sea. Grandpa had said it with such clear clarity.

"She didn't call for you. She chose her own path. That life was her choice and that's ok." Grandpa was staring straight into space. It almost seemed like his soul was off somewhere else, like he was watching the ocean from that day.

"I often wondered if she suffered. If she ever hated me," Kobashi blurted out.

"She forgot all about it and just flew away."

"Where-?"

But Grandpa had stopped and all Kobashi could hear was his faint snoring.

"Don't nod off there Gramps."

Kobashi cursed as the tears began to well up, the sound of his sobs mixed with the rushing water.

Another time when Kobashi was with Grandpa he began talking seemingly out of nowhere.

"She wanted to jump off the footbridge."

"Shit. That's not good."

"Beautiful women shouldn't die."

What about the ugly women? Kobashi was tempted to ask, but Grandpa had already continued with his story.

"You can't fly if yer always worrying about yer mother-in-law or getting paid a pittance."

Kobashi nodded somewhat in agreement. "But you know everyone has worries like that."

"And just like shit it's bad when it builds up inside you. It's best to just grit yer teeth and let it out."

"Let it out?" Kobashi looked up to see Yuri standing in front of them, white as a sheet.

"How did he know about the bridge?"

He looked back at Grandpa in surprise only to find him snoring just like the other day.

Kobashi knew that Yuri hadn't known what else to do. She had been suffering so much that she had found herself at the footbridge in a daze. She told him that she hadn't wanted to die, she just wanted to go somewhere else.

"I don't remember it that well, but the entire time I had this feeling that someone was watching me. I never even took hold of the hand rail," she told him.

"He told ye beautiful women shouldn't die." Kobashi tried to mimic Grandpa but it didn't come out quite right.

The corners of her eyes crinkled as she smiled.

Grandpa would talk to anyone, which hadn't been a problem until the next incident.

"My purse has vanished! Can you be a dear and fly over to my house to find it?" One part-time nurse, a middle-aged woman, asked Kobashi. To which Grandpa piped up with "It's underneath the chest of drawers." He was right of course, and it became a huge deal.

The woman was so excited she called a television show to come investigate the old man. Of course, it was so out of the blue the director of the home objected immediately. But when the woman's friends and the home's guests heard the rumors they came to see him anyway.

One person even managed to slip in and talk to Grandpa. They recorded their conversation on their phone and uploaded the footage to the internet. Everything from finding lost items to predicting the horse races. Grandpa was hit with wave after wave of stupid questions, but he loved the attention and happily went along with it, yapping his gums off. The moment a question got too difficult to answer he fell asleep. The video went viral, and there were so many people pretending to be visitors that it was impossible to move.

The staff ended up turning away everyone at the entrance, but even then, there were a few that were clever enough to sneak in. Kobashi and Yuri chased them out the moment they found them, but Grandpa shouted, "Don't get in tha way of people wantin' to talk!".

That was the first time that Grandpa and Kobashi had ever had a shouting match.

Yuri tried to step in to stop them but ended up in tears. "How did this happen?" she mumbled to herself.

"I understand you love talking to everyone, Grandpa, but it wasn't like Kobashi was trying to stop you talking at all. He just hates it that so many people think of you as a novelty. He's just worried that someone will hurt you. And it's not just him, but the Director, me, everyone here is worried about you."

Grandpa began to act differently towards the staff after that. He looked progressively unhappier around them, and even that day his stern expression, a deep furrow in his brow, was unwavering. It made him look like every other small, frail, elderly man. Yuri sighed softly. She looked up just as Kobashi came in, but Grandpa refused to look at him. Kobashi clenched his jaw and spun around to leave when Grandpa suddenly said, "It's gonna snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" Kobashi and Yuri turned to him at the same time.

"It's gonna snow tomorrow," he said again, eyes shut. "Stand with both yer legs together. Yer don't need anything in your hands, just the wings on yer back."

Kobashi was about to rush over to Grandpa but hesitated and stopped, he turned to Yuri instead.

"Did he just say something about wings?"

"I think he did."

"Well at least he can talk about normal things like snow too. Although I already knew it was going to snow, the weather report mentioned it earlier."

"He's been feeling really ashamed since you told him off the other day. Maybe he flew over to get the newspaper extra early to get back on your good side?"

It had been a while since Kobashi had smiled. Yuri was a little relieved.

Grandpa wasn't kidding when he said it would snow the next day, only it snowed a lot more than anyone could have predicted. Such snow was so rare for the region that the roads were a disaster and the trains were forced to stop. Thankfully this meant there weren't any suspicious visitors skulking around, and the staff and residents were able to have their first quiet day together in a long time.

Kobashi spent the day shoveling snow, checking the doors, and generally keeping himself busy around the home. He didn't have time to look in on Grandpa once.

As evening approached he finally had a moment to rest. It was just as he approached the top of the stairs to the breakroom when the fire exit down the corridor caught his eye. It should have been secured but he felt the urge to double check. On his way to the door he noticed a dark shadow outside.

The snow had piled up against the latticework windows, making it hard to see. He hurried closer to see a short man standing outside, turned away from him.

His breath caught.

"Grandpa."

Kobashi flew at the door, but it was frozen shut. The handle refused to budge.

The figure that looked like Grandpa from the back was standing on the other side of the handrail of the fire exit stairway. But there shouldn't have been anything there, just air.

Yuri dashed out of the staffroom when she heard Kobashi shouting.

The door still refused to budge even a little. Kobashi pounded on the glass in frustration.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?! Get back to your room, now!"

The figure slowly turned. It *was* Grandpa. Standing bolt upright wearing a short traditional Japanese winter jacket.

He was on the other side of the door but they could hear him clearly, "I've caused yer enough trouble already. So I'll be off now."

"Off?! Off where?!"

"There's a place for me."

"Just come back inside! You'll catch your death of cold out there!" Yuri shouted as hard as she could. She didn't have time to process how absurd it was that bed-ridden Grandpa was standing outside. She just wanted to get him back inside as soon as possible.

"Thank yer for all you've done for me."

He seemed a little conflicted as he bowed, but quickly grinned and gave them a thumbs up.

"Yer needn't burden yourselves all the time. Yer just need the wings on yer backs."

Then he turned away again. The back of his jacket began to billow. Kobashi and Yuri, trapped on the other side of the door, could only watch with baited breath. The back of the jacket split open and white cotton flew everywhere, melting into the snow. A beautiful pair of white wings burst out from the increasingly ripped jacket, sending even more cotton flying. Grandpa's tiny body seemed to be lifted up by the massive wings. He jerked up but stopped for just a moment as he fought against the blizzard. He beat his wings once, twice, three times, then shot up...

The glass door finally gave way and Kobashi tumbled out into the snow, confused when he saw there was no one there.

The truth was that in that moment Grandpa had passed away in his sleep, but everyone wanted to believe he had sprouted wings and flown away.

One of the stranger things was that the footage of Grandpa that had been uploaded to the internet, along with the rumors of his amazing abilities, seemed to have just vanished. Thankfully this meant the funeral was small but cozy. Yuri wondered if Grandpa had taken all the trouble with him.

"What do you think he meant by 'there's a place for me'?"

"From the looks of it he was an angel."

"If he was an angel then that means even someone like me can go to heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi both laughed.

I can just imagine, out of all the angels Grandpa is the one wearing a shabby winter jacket, Kobashi thought.

What was left of the snow danced in the wind like white cotton.

The Flying Grandpa – Onuma Tamaki

I can fly, y'know. It's true. Remember in Peter Pon, once the kids grew up they couldn't fly anymore. Imagine, no more tossing your hat away and flying off after it. So sad. Oh, I feel for them. I mean, the body still remembers flying after all.

Old man Tobita. Or just Gramps, as they called him. Most of the folks in the retirement home went by Mr. or Mrs. something, but Gramps was just Gramps. He was bedridden and didn't have any family, and his mind was going. He took a lot of looking after, but when he was awake he babbled on and on. He didn't boast or badmouth others, but it was hard to categorize his tales as fact or fiction. Naturally this made him by far the most popular resident in the home. I can fly, y'know... Kobashi, one of the care workers, did the best impressions of him. His Peter Pon story is great, isn't it? He really is a creative genius. Actually, the scene Gramps described is straight from the novel of *Peter Pan*, one of the nurses, Yuri, said. Gramps knows a lot more than you think, you know. Kobashi's mouth dropped – he thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

Most of the care workers were too busy to notice, but Kobashi always lost his cheer as March approached. Those who knew that his ex-girlfriend had died in a tsunami exchanged gentle looks and passed by in silence.

One day, when he was giving Gramps his bath, Kobashi muttered, "I should have asked her..." He regretted not proposing to her. After they broke up, she went back to the countryside. There, she was introduced to a husband, and it was after that she died. "Was it my fault?" Kobashi said to himself, thinking Gramps was asleep. Just then, Gramps suddenly started speaking in a clear voice. Kobashi almost dropped him in the bath.

"Koji. She's calling for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes widened. That was her husband's name. They had died together at sea. Gramps spoke in a surprisingly clear, firm voice:

"She didn't call out for you." Then, "She left of her own free will, that's the life she chose. So no use worrying about it." What was Gramps looking at now? Had his mind really flown across space and time? Was he seeing the sea that day?

"Did she suffer? Did she resent me?" Kobashi asked, as if flustered.

"She forgot all about you. She's flying now."

"Where?"

Gramps' voice suddenly stopped, and it sounded like he was snoozing.

"Don't fall asleep now, silly old man."

Kobashi cursed at the old man, but he soon felt tears welling up inside and found himself weeping loudly while the hot water ran into the bath.

And then there was this. One day, when Kobashi was tending to Gramps, Gramps suddenly started talking:

"There was a girl standing on a footbridge who wanted to fly. Not good. It's not right that a beautiful person should die."

And what about the not-so-beautiful? Kobashi thought, but Gramps continued.

"She's so stressed about that old hag of a mother-in-law, her low salary. With all her problems piled up like that no way she'd fly, oh no."

Kobashi murmured in acknowledgment, pretending to listen.

"Well, everyone has their worries."

"Still, no good if you're all bunged up with them. It's like being constipated. You've got to strain and get it out."

"Get it out...?" Kobashi looked up to see Yuri standing there, her face pale.

"How did you know about the footbridge?"

Startled, Kobashi turned back to Gramps, but he was snoring away, as if he'd been asleep for some time. He realized it was Yuri who had found her herself on the footbridge, feeling hopeless, like there was no other option. She told him she didn't really want to die, just go to some other dimension somewhere.

"I don't remember really, but I couldn't jump because I felt like there was somebody watching me," she said.

"It's not right that a beautiful person should die," Kobashi said, making a bad attempt to mimic Gramps. Yuri laughed, trying to keep the tears flowing from her eyes.

Gramps' tendency to talk with anybody and everybody ended up causing problems. One of the part-time cleaning ladies said to him, "I've gone and lost my purse, you should fly over to my house and find it."

"Must be under the slipper rack," Gramps guessed correctly. It was then the trouble started. The cleaning lady got excited and called a TV station, and the station sent a team out to investigate. Surprised, the care home manager turned them away, but friends of the cleaning lady and those with relatives in the home who heard the rumors soon started flooding Gramps with requests. One of the people who managed to talk to Gramps shot a video on his phone and uploaded it to the internet. People started asking Gramps all sorts of questions: where this or that lost item was, which horse would win at the races. Gramps got carried away with their friendly questioning and talked on and on. Though when it came to a difficult question, he would suddenly start snoozing. The video of Gramps became a sensation. More people came, disguised as visitors to the home, one after another. Most were turned away at reception, but a few managed to sneak their way inside. Kobashi and Yuri threw them out when they caught them, but Gramps snapped back: "Don't interrupt people when they're talking!" That was the first time since entering the home that Gramps had raised his voice and argued with Kobashi. Yuri tried to stop them from fighting, but found herself getting upset.

"How did things get like this?" she muttered to herself. "I know you enjoy talking to everyone, Gramps, but you have to understand that Kobashi's not trying to shut you up – he just hates those jerks who are only doing it for a laugh. He doesn't want you to get hurt is all. And not just him: me, the manager, everyone – we're all worried about you."

After that, Gramps would often pout at the staff, as if he'd become a different person. Today, too, he has that deep furl in his brow, a sullen expression etched on his face. Nothing more than a thin little old man when he's like this. Yuri sighed softly. Kobashi came in after making his rounds, but Gramps didn't even try to look his way. Then, just as Kobashi was about to leave without saying a word –

"It'll snow tomorrow," Gramps piped up.

"Hm?" Kobashi and Yuri turned around at the same time.

"I said, it'll snow tomorrow," Gramps repeated with his eyes closed.

"Look down at your feet, and spread your arms. The only thing you need to carry are your wings."

Kobashi moved towards him, but stopped, as if hesitating, and confirmed with Yuri.

"It sounds like he said something about wings."

"Yeah, I heard."

"He said something weirdly normal too: it will snow tomorrow. Of course, the weather forecast already told us as much anyway."

“He feels bad since you’ve been telling him off so much recently. He must have quickly flown off to take a look at the newspaper headlines so he could get in your good books again.” Kobashi laughed for the first time in a long time. And Yuri felt better too.

The following day, as predicted – no, more than predicted – it snowed heavily. It was a rare for snow to fall so heavily in this area. Roads were blocked and the trains stopped running, causing chaos. No suspicious visitors turned up at the home, and for the first time in a long time the staff had a quiet day alone with the residents.

Kobashi rushed around the home, shovelling snow and checking the doors. He was too busy to check on Gramps. Towards evening, as he was climbing the stairs to the break room to take a well-earned rest, he suddenly remembered the emergency stairs at the end of the hall. They *should* be locked off, he thought, but he decided to go and check one more time anyway. Just after turning around, he noticed a shadowy figure outside. The wire mesh glass was stuck with snow and it was hard to see through. Kobashi approached in a hurry and saw that the figure was a small-framed man with his back turned to him. Kobashi gulped.

“Gramps!”

Kobashi jumped at the door, but the handle was frozen and wouldn’t turn. The figure, who looked like Gramps from behind, was out past the railing that surrounded the emergency staircase landing. Where there should be nothing, there he was: in the middle of the air in other words.

Yuri heard Kobashi yelling and came dashing out of the anteroom.

The door was frustratingly cold and wouldn’t budge. Kobashi cried out and beat the glass with his fist. “What the hell are you doing? Come back to your room.”

The figure turned around. Gramps, standing firmly, wearing a short winter coat. His voice was oddly clear through the glass.

“I’ve caused so much trouble. Time for me to go.”

“Go? Where?”

“Even I have places to go, y’know.”

“Come inside. It’s freezing.”

Yuri cried to Gramps with all her might. There was no time for them to consider the absurdity of the situation: this old man, who couldn’t walk, out there. They just begged for him to return.

“You took good care of me. I’m grateful.”

A little look spread across his face and he bowed his head. Then, with a little laugh, he gave them a thumbs up.

“This old man, the only thing he needs to carry is his wings.” The back of his winter coat began to bulge up. The pair trapped on the other side of the glass took a breath and watched intently as the coat ripped open and white cotton flew out, mixing with the falling snow. They watched as two fine wings appeared and spread out wide. Gramps’ small frame, as if being fished up by the huge wings, flew up, stopped for a minute, and, as if fighting against the blowing snow, the wings flapped, twice, three times, and, in one burst, he flew up into the air...

The glass door opened triumphantly and Kobashi came tumbling out onto the landing, but not a soul was there. The fact is, at that time Gramps had passed away as if falling asleep, but everyone preferred to believe that he had spread his wings and flown away. Strangely, all of the videos on the internet and the rumors about Gramps vanished into thin air, and the

funeral was a cosy little affair. Yuri thought that perhaps Gramps had carried away all of the troubles with him.

“So, where do you suppose he went?”

“Well, he may not have looked it, but Gramps was an angel, y’know.”

“If that’s what angels are like, even I’ll be able to get into heaven.”

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Well, I guess nobody minds if there’s one angel who wears a little winter coat, Kobashi thought. The last of the snow fluttered, like the white cotton that had burst out and flown away.

Sky-High Poppy

By Onuma Tamaki

“I can fly. I really can. In that Peter Pong story, the kids can’t fly once they’ve grown up. They can’t throw their hats and fly after them to catch them anymore. It’s so sad. I know that feeling. They still have the muscle memory of flight too.”

Poppy Tonda. But he went by Poppy. The staff at the care facility referred to all of the other residents properly by their last names, but Poppy was just Poppy. He had no family, was bedridden and senile, required a lot of extra attention, and when he was awake, he’d talk your ear off. But he never bragged nor spoke badly of others. Rather, he told nothing but stories you weren’t sure you could believe. And for that reason, he was the most popular resident at the facility.

“I can fly.” Kobashi, a nursing assistant, did the best Poppy impression. “Peter Pong, what an inspired name! He really shows some real artistry with his stories.”

“He is actually surprisingly knowledgeable.”

Kobashi’s jaw dropped when Nurse Yuri informed him that the scene Poppy mentioned was actually in the original story, as he had thought Peter Pan was nothing more than a Disney character.

The care facility is always busy—it can be enough to make your head spin—so it largely went unnoticed, but Kobashi seemed to be in low spirits when March approached. But those who knew of his lost love who had died in the tsunami gave each other secret knowing looks and silently walked past.

One day, while giving Poppy a bath, Kobashi muttered under his breath, “I should have just said it.” His regret was that he never proposed to her. When they broke up, she returned to her rural hometown to have a matchmaker find her a husband and got married. It was after this that she died. Poppy seemed to be asleep, so Kobashi continued talking to himself, “Maybe it was all my fault.” That’s when Poppy suddenly spoke in a clear voice, making Kobashi nearly drop the old man. ““Koji! Koji!’ she is calling.”

Kobashi’s eyes widened in surprise. Wasn’t Koji the name of the man his ex-girlfriend married? She and her husband had died together, the two of them pulled out to sea.

Poppy spoke with a surprisingly strong and penetrating voice.

“She’s not calling out for you!” And then, “She made her own choices and lived her own life. Leave it be.” What on earth was Poppy looking at now? Was he really flying through space and time and looking at the sea?

Kobashi blurted out his questions, “Did she suffer? Did she still hate me?”

“She’s already cast off those earthly things and is flying away.”

“Where?”

Poppy’s voice suddenly stopped and Kobashi soon heard the heavy breathing of sleep.

“Why’d you have to sleep now of all times, old man?”

Kobashi managed to curse Poppy, but immediately the tears began to flow. He loudly sobbed as his tears fell into the hot water in streams.

There was another time too. Again Kobashi was at Poppy’s side when he suddenly spoke.

“The young girl on the pedestrian bridge was looking fit to jump.”

“Oh dear, that’s no good.”

“It’s no good for a pretty girl to die.” Kobashi wanted to tease him, asking what he thought about those who weren’t pretty, but he hesitated too long and Poppy continued.

“If you’re weighed down with worries about a cruel mother-in-law or a low salary, there’s no way you can fly.”

Kobashi wasn’t sure what Poppy was going on about, but he responded anyway to appease the old man, “But everyone has something they’re worried about.”

“It’s just like being constipated. It’s no good to be blocked up, so you’ve just got to bear down and shit it all out.”

“*Shit* it all out?”

But when Kobashi looked up, he saw that Nurse Yuri was standing there with a pale face.

“How do you know about the pedestrian bridge?”

Kobashi was startled. By the time he had regained composure, Poppy was fast asleep and snoring as usual.

Yuri told him that there had actually been a time when she had felt desperate and lingered on the top of a pedestrian bridge. She said that she hadn’t actually wanted to die, she’d just felt like she wanted to go away, to another dimension even.

“I don’t remember it very clearly, but I had a feeling that someone had been watching me the entire time, so I couldn’t bring myself to climb over the guard rail.”

“I said, it’s no good for a pretty girl to die,” Kobashi tried to do an impression of Poppy, but it wasn’t very good. Nurse Yuri pressed her fingers to her eyes and let out an embarrassed chuckle.

Poppy will talk at length to anybody. That was the cause of the problem.

An older lady who was working part-time at the care facility said to Poppy, “I’ve lost my coin purse. Couldn’t you fly to my house and find it for me?”

Poppy accurately responded, “I’d reckon it’s under your slipper rack,” causing a headache for everyone as the lady got worked up and called the television station, who then came to the care facility to get footage for a story about it. The director of the facility refused their request in a huff, but still the lady’s friends and those who had heard about Poppy forced their way in to visit him. Those who managed to get in to speak to him took videos with their cell phones, which they then

shared online. Poppy was flooded with questions about lost items or racing predictions and when someone spoke to him in a friendly manner, he would really get going and talk up a storm. And when the question was something difficult for him to answer, he'd just fall asleep right in the middle. The videos were so well-received that soon there was an unending stream of gawkers posing as visitors. For the most part they'd be chased out from the care facility as soon as they came in through the entryway, but the crafty ones managed to work their way in. If Kobashi or Nurse Yuri found them, they'd be tossed out, to Poppy's ire.

"Don't interrupt other peoples' conversations!" he shouted. It was the first time since moving in that Poppy had raised his voice and argued with Kobashi.

"*What a nightmare,*" Nurse Yuri muttered to herself when she went in to stop their argument. She was nearly in tears. "Poppy, I understand that you want to enjoy yourself and talk to everyone. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking; he just doesn't like the people who come here to gawk at you and make fun of you online. He's just worried about you getting hurt. And it's not just Kobashi; the director and myself—everyone is worried about you."

After that, Poppy's temperament toward the staff of the care facility changed. As if he had become a completely different person, he often wore a cross face around them. Day after day his brows furrowed into an unchanging, stern expression. When he behaved like that, he was nothing more than a feeble old man, causing Nurse Yuri to let out private little sighs. Once, when Kobashi came around to check in on him, Poppy didn't even feign to turn and notice him, so Kobashi turned to leave without saying a word when Poppy spoke up.

"Tomorrow will be snow," he said suddenly.

"Huh?" Yuri and Kobashi turned toward him at the same time.

"Tomorrow will be snow." Eyes still closed, he repeated himself.

"I'll look down at my feet and spread out my arms. All I need to have weighing on my shoulders is my wings."

Kobashi began to rush over to Poppy, then hesitated to confirm with Yuri, "It sounded like he said something about wings."

"Yes, I heard it too."

"I'm surprised he said something as typical as commenting on the snow tomorrow. Of course, I already knew from the weather forecast though."

"Lately he's been scolded so much that he was just probably trying to improve your mood. Poppy probably only had time to fly out and look at the newspaper headline before rushing back."

Kobashi laughed for the first time in a while, to Nurse Yuri's relief.

The next day it snowed just as the weather forecast had said—no, it snowed even beyond what the reports had said. It snowed enough to say it was an anomaly for this area, and it caused real

problems with traffic and stopped the train service too. This made for the first quiet day in a while for the residents and staff, as of course no strange visitors would show up in this weather.

Kobashi spent the day running around shoveling snow and performing inspections on the entrances throughout the facility, so he hadn't had time to check in on Poppy even once. Just before evening came around, he decided to take a breather and was ascending the stairs to the breakroom when something caught his eye at the fire escape at the end of the hallway. The door should be locked, but Kobashi decided to check it one last time just in case. As soon as he turned toward the door, he realized that he could see the shadow of a person outside, but the wired glass window was covered in snow, obscuring his view. Kobashi rushed over and realized that he was looking at the backside of a small man standing outside the door.

He gasped. "Poppy."

Kobashi lunged toward the door, but the frozen handle wouldn't turn. The figure that appeared to be Poppy was standing beyond the guardrail of the stair landing, where there should be nothing to stand on. In other words: in thin air.

Nurse Yuri heard his yelling and dashed over from the back staff room.

The door was horribly cold and wouldn't even so much as tremor despite their efforts to open it.

Pounding on the glass with his fists, Kobashi yelled out, "What on earth are you doing?! Go back to your room!"

The shadow slowly turned around in response. It was Poppy wearing a padded housecoat and standing steadily on his feet. His voice was eerily clear for coming from the other side of the glass door.

"I'm causing you trouble, so I'll be moving along now."

"What do you mean you'll be moving along? Where could you go?"

"I have places to go."

"It's cold out there, so please just come inside!" Yuri cried out to him desperately.

There was no time to even consider that it was absurd that Poppy, who wasn't even supposed to be able to walk, could possibly have gone outside on his own. She just wanted to call him back inside.

"Thank you kindly for everything up until now." Poppy had a sincere expression on his face as he bowed his head, but immediately afterward it changed into a wide grin. He pointed his finger to the sky. "It's no good to let everything weigh on your shoulders. The only thing that should do that is your wings."

At once, something on his back began to stir beneath his housecoat. On the other side of the glass door the other two gasped and could only watch as the back of his housecoat split open, the bits of cotton padding spilling out and mixing with the snow as it fell. They watched as the halves of the coat split further and further apart until beautiful, strong wings emerged. Poppy's frail body looked as if it were strung up as the large wings pulled him upwards and paused for a moment before

flapping twice, three times as if being whipped around in the blizzard and launched up into the sky... At last the glass door opened, but there was nobody on the landing when Kobashi tumbled out. And while they actually found Poppy's body in his bed during all of this, looking every bit as if he had simply gone to sleep, everyone chose to believe the story that he had sprouted wings and flown off. In a strange coincidence, the videos and gossip about Poppy seemed to have all vanished at once, and his funeral was a quiet, cozy affair. Yuri wondered if he had carried the cause of all their disputes off with him.

"I wonder where he went off to."

"He really was an angel, despite how he looked."

"If a guy like that can be an angel, there must be a place in heaven even for me." Both Nurse Yuri and Kobashi laughed.

Kobashi thought that there could very well be at least one angel in a padded housecoat. Snow flurries resembling the falling bits of cotton danced through the air as they fell.

Flying Gramps by Tamaki Onuma

"I can fly. It's true. You know, in that Peter Pong story, how kids who grow up can't fly anymore, and how they can't toss their hats and fly after them anymore, either? Oh, the pain they must feel. Their bodies still remember how it feels to fly, even though they can no longer do it."

Mr. Tobita was commonly known as Gramps. Since this was a nursing home, residents were called by their surnames, but Gramps was so well known that that's the name he often went by. He had no family, and he could be quite the handful because he was bedridden and senile, but when he was awake he talked and talked. And he didn't brag about himself or say negative things about others—the topics of his ramblings consisted chiefly of things that teetered on the line between truth and fiction. That's why he was the indisputable star among all the residents. Caretaker Ohashi's impressions of Gramps (such as "I can fly...") were the best of all the staff. "Peter Pong"? That's great. Gramps has got to have some talent to come up with that." But his colleague Yuri, a nurse, told him that the scenes Gramps was talking about actually came from the novel *Peter Pan*. He knows a lot more than it seems, she added. Ohashi, who had thought that Peter Pan was just a Disney character, gaped in surprise.

The home was dizzyingly busy, so one wouldn't notice unless they were paying attention, but Ohashi became depressed when it got closer to March. Those who knew that his former girlfriend had lost her life to the tsunami around the same time years back would exchange understanding glances with him as they quietly passed him by.

One day, when bathing Gramps, Ohashi mumbled to himself. "I guess I really should have gone ahead and said it," regretting that he lost the chance to propose to her. Since parting ways with him, she moved back to her rural hometown, had an arranged marriage and died soon after. "I guess it's my fault." Gramps appeared to be asleep, and Ohashi wasn't intending to have a conversation with anyone but himself. So when suddenly, Gramps started speaking in a clear, cogent tone, Ohashi came dangerously close to letting Gramps slip out of his grasp.

"Koji. She's calling out 'Koji'."

Ohashi's eyes opened wide with shock. That was her husband's name. He died in the sea along with her.

Gramps continued in a powerful, lucid voice that shook Ohashi to his core.

"She's not calling for you. You went your own separate ways; those are the lives you chose; there's nothing wrong with that."

What is Gramps seeing? Ohashi wondered. Maybe his spirit really did fly through space and time and he was looking at the ocean on that fateful day.

"Did she suffer? Does she hate me?" Ohashi asked, growing agitated.

"She's forgotten about all of that. She's flying."

"Where?!"

Just when he thought Gramps' voice had come to a sudden halt, he heard him drawing deep, unconscious breaths.

"You picked a fine time to sleep, old man!"

Ohashi's biting words shortly gave way to a flood of tears. The splashing of hot water as he rinsed off Gramps mixed with his plaintive wails.

Then there was another incident. That day, Ohashi was next to Gramps when Gramps began speaking.

"There's a girl on an overhead bridge who wants to fly."

"Well, she shouldn't do that."

"Beautiful women mustn't die," stated Gramps. Ohashi wondered what he thought about people who weren't beautiful women, but he didn't want to cause any problems. He kept his mouth shut and let Gramps continue.

"Her nasty hag of a mother-in-law and her low salary weigh her down so much that there's no way she could fly."

Ohashi responded with a vague remark to extend the conversation. "But everyone has something on their minds like that."

"It's just like constipation. It's bad to let things get all jammed up inside. You should just push real hard to get them out."

"Get them... out?" Ohashi looked up to see Yuri standing there, her face pale white.

"How do you know about the bridge?"

When Ohashi snapped his attention back to Gramps in expectation of an answer, he was met by snores.

As Yuri explained it, she once went to an overhead bridge high above the road because everything had become too difficult for her to bear. She said that rather than wanting to die, she had wished that she could just slip into another dimension.

"My memory is pretty hazy, but I felt like someone was constantly watching me. That's why I couldn't bring myself to climb over the railing."

"Like he said, 'Beautiful women mustn't die!'" Ohashi's attempt to imitate Gramps this time fell flat. Yuri laughed, holding back tears.

Gramps was willing to talk with anyone and everyone—a trait which led to something outrageous. One day, a woman working part-time at the home said to Gramps, "I lost my coin purse, and I want you to fly over to my house and find it for me." "It's under your slipper rack," he told her. He was right, and things exploded from there. The excited woman called up TV stations, and soon the home was beset with requests to cover the story. Taken aback, the director of the home refused them, but the woman's friends and others who had heard the rumors began forcing their way in to see Gramps. Someone who succeeded in gaining an audience with Gramps recorded a video of their conversation on their phone and posted it online. Gramps was peppered with a barrage of questions ranging from the location of lost items to horse race predictions, and since he was asked in a friendly tone, he went along with it and responded freely.

Then, when the conversation turned to something difficult to answer, he immediately fell asleep. The video became a big sensation, and soon there was no end to people descending upon the home claiming to be his visitors. Most of them were turned away at the entrance, but some of the more determined ones ingeniously found ways in. Ohashi and Yuri would make these intruders leave whenever they discovered them, to which Gramps shouted in rage, “Don’t mess with these people talking to me!” It was the first time in his history as a resident at the home that Gramps had raised his voice to argue with Ohashi. Yuri stepped in, nearly in tears.

“Why did things turn out like this?”

Yuri continued, talking more to herself than the others.

“Gramps, I completely understand how you feel. You want to have fun talking with everyone. Ohashi isn’t trying to prevent you from doing that; he just hates it when people treat you as some kind of amusing spectacle. He’s worried that they’ll hurt you. And it’s not just Ohashi—the director, and I, and everyone else here—we’re all worried about you!”

From then on, Gramps’ mood towards the staff was more often than not sour. It was as if he had become a different person. Today, too, his stern expression, deep wrinkles furrowed between his brows, remained unchanged. His countenance made him appear as nothing but a small, scrawny old man, and Yuri let out a soft sigh as she looked at him. Ohashi, who had been on patrol around the home, then entered the room, but Gramps did not so much as look over towards him. Ohashi was ready to make a quick exit without saying a word when Gramps suddenly spoke.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow.”

“What?” said Ohashi and Yuri simultaneously, looking back at him.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow,” Gramps repeated, his eyes closed.

“Watch your feet closely and keep your hands free. Wings are all you need to carry with you.”

Ohashi rushed over partway, then stopped as if hesitating and confirmed with Yuri what he had heard.

“It sounded like he was saying something about wings or such.”

“Yeah, that’s what I heard, too.”

“He said something surprisingly normal, too, that it’s going to snow tomorrow. They’ve been saying that on the weather forecast, though, so it’s been known for a long time.”

“He’s done nothing but scold us lately so it feels weird to hear something like that from him. Maybe he wanted to win you back over, so he quickly flew out to check the newspaper headlines!”

Ohashi laughed for the first time in a while. Yuri felt relieved.

Just as the forecast predicted—or rather, moreso than it had predicted—snow fell heavily the next day. The amount of snowfall was quite unusual for the area, so the outside world became chaotic with heavy congestion on the roads and trains at a standstill. As would be expected on a day like this, no suspicious visitors for Gramps came by, and the staff and residents spent a rare quiet day just amongst themselves.

Ohashi was running all around the home that day, shoveling snow and inspecting the doors. He hadn’t seen Gramps even once yet. As evening neared, he decided to finally take a short rest, so he headed up the stairs towards the break room. Then, for some reason, the outside emergency stairs at the end of the hallway started tugging at his mind. The door to them should be locked, but it wouldn’t hurt to check again, he thought. The moment he turned towards the end of the hallway, he realized he could make out the dark figure of a person outside the door. It was hard to see clearly through all the snow clinging to the wired glass. He quickly approached to find the petite figure of a man standing with his back to the door.

Ohashi gasped. “Gramps!”

He dashed to the door, but the handle would not turn; the door seemed frozen shut. Someone, who appeared to be Gramps from behind, was standing on the landing of the emergency staircase, outside of the railing. There was nothing beyond there but air.

Yuri, hearing Ohashi’s yelling, flew out of the break room and towards the emergency stairs.

The door was maddeningly frigid and would not budge. Ohashi knocked on the glass with his clenched fist and continued to yell.

“What are you doing out there?! Come back to your room!”

The figure slowly turned around. Sure enough, wearing a short *hanten* coat, stood a strong and confident Gramps. Although they were separated by a glass door, his voice was oddly clear.

“I’m causing you trouble, so I’d best be on my way.”

“To where?!”

“Even people like me have places to go, you know.”

“Come back inside! It’s cold!” Yuri cried out in desperation. She did not have time to mentally process the irrationality of the fact that Gramps, who can’t even walk, was standing outside in front of her. Her whole being was focused on just bringing him back inside.

“You’ve helped me out a lot. Thanks a bunch.”

A slightly dignified expression flashed across Gramps’ face as he bowed his head, but he quickly shifted to a mischievous smile as he gave the two staff members a thumbs-up.

“You mustn’t carry things. Wings are all you need to carry with you.”

With that, the *hanten* started billowing from his back. Ohashi and Yuri could only watch in astonishment from their side of the glass as the *hanten* ripped apart, its white cotton scattering and mixing with the falling snow. As they watched, the tears in the *hanten* grew wider as a pair of magnificent wings formed. Gramps’ small frame flew up in one

swoop, as if he were hoisted aloft by the massive wings. He stopped for a moment in midair; then, countering the fierce winds of the snowstorm, he flapped his wings a second time, and then a third time, ascending to the heavens in an instant.

The door finally came open as Ohashi stumbled through the frame. There was no one on the landing. In fact, at that time Gramps had died in his sleep, but everyone chose to believe that he sprouted wings and flew away. Mysteriously, the video of Gramps that had been posted online, along with the rumors flying around about him, vanished into thin air. The funeral was a small, heartwarming affair. Yuri thought that perhaps Gramps had taken all the drama with him when he left.

“I wonder where he ended up going,” Ohashi said.

“From how it looked, he became an angel.”

“If someone like that can become an angel, then I guess even I have a chance at Heaven!”

They both laughed. God wouldn't mind if just one of His angels was wearing a *hanten*, Ohashi mused.

The final snow of winter danced outside, reminiscent of the white wisps of cotton that drifted about on the day Gramps soared.

Gramps Flying High

by Onuma Tamaki

“Ya know, it's true. I can fly. In *Peter Pon*, when children grow up, they forget how; you can't even throw a hat and meet it mid-air. It's sad... I feel for them. Because deep down, the body remembers.”

Mr. Tobita. Alias: *Gramps*. This is a nursing home, so residents are called by their last names. But Gramps is just Gramps. Bedridden and with no family, he can be a handful, especially since he's not all there. But when he's lucid, he's a motormouth. And it's never to brag, or drag on people, but you can never tell whether his stories are fact or fiction. That's why he's everyone's favourite, hands-down.

“Ya know, I can fly...” Kobashi-kun, one of the orderlies, does a great impression. “*Peter Pon*, that's a good one, eh? Creative!” But Ms. Yuri, one of the nurses, says Gramps was referring to the novel *Peter Pan*. “Gramps is surprisingly sophisticated, you know.” Kobashi-kun had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character, so his mouth fell open.

The nursing home is a dizzyingly busy place, so it's barely noticeable, but leading up to March, Kobashi-kun runs out of steam. Some of the staff know his ex-girlfriend was swept away by the tsunami. They exchange glances as they walk quietly by. One day, while he was giving Gramps a bath, Kobashi-kun muttered, “Maybe I should've said something...” He regretted not proposing to her. After they split up, she'd returned to her hometown, had an arranged marriage, and passed away soon after. “Was it my fault...?” Gramps seemed to be asleep, so the thought was private. But suddenly, the old man piped up, and Kobashi-kun nearly lost his grip. “Koji-kun. She's calling for Koji-kun.” Kobashi-kun's eyes opened wide. Koji. That was her husband's name. She'd died at sea with him. Gramps announced with startling clarity, “She 'aint callin' for you, boy.” He continued, “She went of her own volition. She chose her own destiny. And that's the way it should be.” What was Gramps seeing? Could his spirit really travel the skies, through time, to look down on the ocean that fateful day? Kobashi-kun asked, in a flurry of coughs, “Did she suffer? Did she resent me or anything?” “She's forgotten all about it, and now she's flying...” “Flying? Where?” The moment Gramps stopped talking, Kobashi-kun noticed the sound of rapid breathing. The man was fast asleep. “Why stop there, you old fart!” Kobashi-kun was spiteful, but his eyes welled up with tears. He went to the sink, ran the hot water full-blast, and cried hard and loud.

And this other thing happened. One day, while Kobashi-kun was within earshot, Gramps started talking, “There's a girl on a pedestrian bridge, wanting to jump.” “Well that's no good...” “Beauties 'aint allowed to die.” Avoiding the topic of non-beauties, Kobashi-kun kept his trap shut. But Gramps kept going. “Trouble is, her old bat of a mother-in-law and her minimum-wage job are weighing too heavily on her mind.” Kobashi-kun responded, congenial, “Well I guess everyone has their own issues...” “It's like constipation. Being stopped-up is no good. You gotta spew it all out in one go.” “Spew it all out...” When Kobashi-kun looked up, he caught Ms. Yuri's stare. She was white as a sheet. “How does he know about that bridge?” Freaked-out, Kobashi-kun turned to Gramps, but true to form, the old man was snoring.

What Kobashi-kun didn't know was that Ms. Yuri had once been in such a state that she'd stood on the ledge of a tall pedestrian bridge. She said it wasn't so much that she wanted to die, but to teleport to another dimension. “My memory's a bit foggy, but I couldn't cross over the side because it felt like I was being watched.” “Well, he did say, 'Beauties 'aint allowed to die...’” Kobashi-kun's impression didn't quite land. Ms. Yuri only smiled halfway.

Gramps would talk freely with anyone. So the craziest thing happened. One of the part-timer ladies said to him, “I misplaced my purse... Would you mind flying over to my house to find it for me?” Then, he said, “Come on now, it's under the slipper rack!” And he was right, so all hell broke loose. The lady got excited, called the TV station, and a camera crew showed up. The Director of the nursing home, startled, refused to grant access. But the lady's friends, and other people who'd heard the rumours, began to force their way in, masquerading as visitors. Someone who managed to reach Gramps recorded him on a cell phone and posted the video online. Gramps fielded all kinds of requests, from recovering lost items to giving racetrack predictions. And whenever he felt appreciated, he'd get carried away and talk and talk. But any time it was hard to answer, he'd promptly fall asleep. The video of him went viral and sparked a never-ending parade of intruders. They were routinely turned away at the door but lots slipped through the cracks. Kobashi-kun and Ms. Yuri would boot them as they found them but Gramps would get angry. “One does not interrupt when people are talking!” This was the first time that Gramps had raised his voice and argued with Kobashi-kun, so Ms. Yuri, who'd come to put a stop to it, choked back her tears: “How has it come to this?”

Ms. Yuri observed to herself, “I understand you enjoy chatting with everyone, Gramps. But Kobashi-kun isn't trying to stop you from doing that. He just doesn't like it when people treat you as entertainment or a curiosity. He's worried they'll hurt you, Gramps. And it's not just Kobashi-kun. The Director, me, and everyone else... we're all worried about you.”

Gramps' attitude towards the staff changed and he started sporting a pout. And today too, he was inaccessible, with a deep crease between his eyebrows. This made him look like nothing more than an emaciated senior, so Ms. Yuri breathed a sigh. When Kobashi-kun came by during his rounds, Gramps wouldn't even try to look in his direction. Kobashi-kun kept quiet, and was on his way out when it happened. "It's gonna snow tomorrow," said Gramps, out of nowhere. "Huh?" said Kobashi-kun and Ms. Yuri, looking back in unison. "It's gonna snow tomorrow," Gramps repeated himself, eyes closed. "Keep an eye on your feet and your arms open. All you need are the wings on your back." Kobashi-kun rushed back over to him, stopped hesitantly, and confirmed with Ms. Yuri, "I think he just said something about wings." "Yes, I heard it too..." "And he said some normal stuff, that it'll snow tomorrow. But the forecast's out so that's old news." "He's probably annoyed because he's been getting into so much trouble lately. My guess is he wanted to check on your mood, so he probably flew out and took a peek at the paper." Kobashi-kun laughed for the first time in a while. Ms. Yuri let out a sigh of relief.

Sure enough, the next day, it snowed. No, the snowfall was unexpectedly heavy. It was unusual for this area, to the point where the roads were jammed and all trains stopped; it was chaos. So no dubious visitors. It was a rather calm day, the first in a while, for both the staff and the residents. Kobashi-kun spent the day shoveling snow and maintaining the building's doors, so he hadn't yet dropped in on Gramps. As evening fell, he started climbing the stairs to the break room. But the emergency exit at the end of the hall drew his attention. It should've already been locked, but he figured he'd double-check. As he made his way toward the door, he noticed what he thought was a darkish shadow outside. It was hard to see because the wire-reinforced window was covered in snow. When he rushed up to it, he could make out the figure of a small man with his back to him.

He gasped. "Gramps."

Kobashi threw himself against the door. The goddamn handle was frozen and wouldn't budge. The figure resembling Gramps was beyond the landing of the emergency stairs. Where there should've been a void. Where it should've been mid-air. Ms. Yuri burst out of the waiting room when she heard Kobashi-kun yell. The icy door still wouldn't give. Kobashi-kun pounded the glass and shouted, "What do you think you're doing! Let's get back to your room!" Then, the shadow slowly turned around. Sure enough, it was Gramps, wearing a winter kimono jacket, standing firm. His voice was clearly audible from the other side of the door, "I've been a burden to you so I think I'll get going." "Going where?" "I have someplace to go too, you know." "It's cold. Come on back inside!" Ms. Yuri was yelling at the top of her lungs too. She had no room to entertain the absurdity of this immobile man being outside the building. All she wanted was to reel him back in.

"You've both been very good to me. Thanks a bunch!" Gramps tried on a noble expression and bowed his head, but then cracked a smile and hiked a thumbs-up. "You mustn't carry anything. All you need are the wings on your back." Then, the shoulders of his kimono jacket started to rustle. Stuck inside, all Ms. Yuri and Kobashi-kun could do was gasp and look on in disbelief. The jacket split open, and its white cotton stuffing wafted out, blending with the falling snow, the shoulders slowly expanding to reveal an impressive set of wings. Gramps' small body looked like it was being fished up by the momentum, zooming up and pausing, then going against the gusts of the snow storm, his wings flapping 2, 3 times before lifting him off into the night sky...

When Kobashi-kun tumbled out from the door that finally opened, the landing was deserted. By then, Gramps had passed away in his sleep, but everyone chose to believe the story of him spreading his wings and taking off. Strangely, the online video of him disappeared, along with any and all traces of rumours about him. His funeral was modest and intimate. And to Ms. Yuri, it was as if Gramps had taken with him all the conflict that had come up at the nursing home. Kobashi-kun mused, "I wonder what he meant by having someplace to go." "Well, he didn't look like much, but he must've been an angel." "If that's all it takes to be one, guess I've got a shot at heaven too." Kobashi-kun and Ms. Yuri laughed. Oh well, what's the harm in having one angel in a kimono jacket! Outside, the snow danced like the cotton floating off Gramps' shoulders.

The Flying Old Man

Onuma Tamaki

"I can fly! Really, I can! In *Peter Pon*, the kids can't fly anymore when they get older. *In time they could not even fly after their hats*. How sad. I know how they feel. Even though your body remembers what it feels like to fly..."

Old Mr. Tobita. Affectionately called *Jicchan*, Grandpa. While those who lived in the nursing home were called by their last names, Jicchan was known by all as Jicchan. He had no family, was bedridden, was a bit senile, and was a lot to handle, but when he was awake, oh how he would talk. His stories left you wondering whether he was telling the truth or making everything up, but he would never boast or speak badly of others. He was by far the most popular resident in the home.

"I can fly..."

Kobashi, one of the nursing home's caregivers, was the best at imitating Jicchan.

"His '*Peter Pon*' is a good story, isn't it? Really imaginative."

Yuri, a nurse at the facility, told him that the scene Jicchan described really does happen in the novel *Peter Pan*.

"He's surprisingly knowledgeable, you know."

Kobashi, who thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character, could only gape in astonishment.

Things were so busy at the nursing home that many did not notice, but when March approached Kobashi became sullen. Those who knew that Kobashi's ex-girlfriend had passed away in the tsunami would quietly exchange glances as they passed by.

One day when giving Jicchan his bath, Kobashi whispered, "I should've done it..."

He regretted not proposing to his girlfriend while he had the chance. After they broke up, she returned to the countryside, was found a suitable husband, and later passed away.

"I wonder if it's my fault..."

Kobashi only meant to say this to himself, as Jicchan appeared to be asleep. However, Jicchan began speaking so suddenly that Kobashi almost lost his grip on him in shock.

"Koji, she's calling for Koji..."

Kobashi's eyes opened widely. Wasn't that the name of her husband? Both she and her husband died together in the sea. Jicchan's voice rang so strong and clear that Kobashi was taken aback.

"She's not calling for you. You've chosen your own life for yourself and moved on, that's fine."

What was Jicchan looking at? Was he really looking out at the ocean on that day, his heart flying through time and space?

Kobashi hastily asked, "Was she in pain? Does she resent me?"

"She's forgotten all about that and is flying."

"Flying where?"

Jicchan suddenly stopped speaking. Kobashi could hear him snoring.

"Don't you dare fall asleep now!" Kobashi shouted angrily. His eyes welled up with tears, and he began crying loudly as the hot water came gushing out of the faucet.

Something else had happened. On that day too, Kobashi was nearby when Jicchan suddenly began to speak.

"A girl is on the overpass, wanting to jump."

"That's not good," Kobashi responded.

"Pretty girls shouldn't die."

"Then what about girls who aren't pretty," Kobashi stammered, but Jicchan continued to speak.

“She shouldn’t be able to fly, she isn’t burdened like some old hag or overly worried about money.”

“But everyone has things they worry about.”

“It’s like constipation. It’s bad if you let it get all backed up. You’ve got to strain and let it out.”

“Let it out...”

Kobashi looked up and saw Yuri standing there, her face pale.

“How come you know about the overpass?”

Frightened, Kobashi turned to face Jicchan, but like last time, he was already asleep.

Yuri indeed had once been in so much pain that she had stood on a high overpass. She explained that rather than die, she just wanted to go to some other dimension.

“I don’t really remember, but I felt like someone was watching me the whole time. I just couldn’t bring myself to climb over the railing,” she said.

“Pretty girls shouldn’t die,” said Kobashi. He meant to imitate Jicchan, but it came out wrong.

Covering her eyes, Yuri laughed.

Jicchan talked to everyone. And that is how the problem began. A part-time worker had said to him, “I lost my coin purse! I wish you could fly over to my house and find it for me.”

Jicchan told her, “It’s under the cubby where you keep the slippers.”

Amazingly, he was correct.

The woman excitedly called the television station and they came to cover the story. The bewildered head of the nursing home turned them away, but friends of the woman heard the rumors and came to visit Jicchan at the home. Those who successfully spoke with him filmed it with their phones, uploading the videos online. Whether finding lost objects or giving predictions on the winner of the horse races, Jicchan happily talked to anyone. As soon as something came up that was difficult to answer, he would fall right asleep. The videos became a sensation, and an endless stream of people tried sneaking into the nursing home posing as visitors. The majority were turned away at the door, but there were still some that managed to find their way inside. Kobashi and Yuri made them leave as soon as they were discovered, but Jicchan would angrily exclaim, “Don’t interrupt people when they’re talking!”

Jicchan had never raised his voice and argued with Kobashi before. Yuri’s eyes filled with tears when she came to stop them.

“How did it get like this...” she muttered to herself. “Jicchan, I understand that you want to have fun talking with everyone. But Kobashi isn’t trying to stop you from talking with others, he just doesn’t like those who are trying to portray you as some sort of strange person. We’re worried you might get hurt. Not just Kobashi—the head of the nursing home and me and everyone, we’re all worried about you.”

From then on, Jicchan became almost like a different person. He often glowered at the nursing home staff. Today, he had the same wrinkle between his eyebrows, a stern look on his face. When he was like this, he was nothing more than another short, shabby old man. Yuri sighed softly. When Kobashi entered the room on his rounds, Jicchan did not even bother to turn his head in Kobashi’s direction. Kobashi held his tongue and was about to leave when suddenly Jicchan spoke.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow.”

“What?” said Kobashi and Yuri, turning around.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow,” he repeated, his eyes still closed.

“Look carefully at your feet and spread your arms. Having *wings* is enough.”

Kobashi was about to approach him but faltered, looking at Yuri for confirmation.

“It sounded like he said something about wings,” he said.

“Yeah, I heard it too.”

“Saying it’s going to snow tomorrow, that’s a surprisingly normal thing for him to say. Since they’ve been talking about it on the weather forecasts I already knew about it though.”

“Lately it’s been awkward, getting lectured all the time. Maybe he quickly flew off to read the newspaper headlines as a way to get back on normal terms with you.”

Kobashi laughed for the first time in a while. Yuri gave a sigh of relief.

The next day it snowed just as the forecast predicted. Or rather, it snowed quite a bit more than predicted. Here, where it was rare for this much snow, the roads were backed up and the trains stopped. With this much commotion outside, no suspicious visitors showed up at the nursing home, and with just the residents and staff inside, the home was quiet for the first time in a while.

On this day, Kobashi was busy rushing around, shoveling snow and inspecting doors. He was so busy that he did not go to see Jicchan even once. In the evening things finally calmed down, so he climbed the stairs to head to the break room for a rest. But it was then that Kobashi became concerned about the door to the emergency stairs at the end of the hall. It was supposed to be locked, but he decided to double check it. As he turned his head, he noticed a dark shadow outside. The build up of snow made it difficult to see through the wired glass door. He quickly approached the door and saw a small man with his back to Kobashi.

Kobashi gasped.

“Jicchan!”

Kobashi leapt at the door. The handle would not turn, as though it were frozen. The Jicchan-like figure was outside of the landing of the emergency stairs, where there was nothing below him. That is to say, he was floating in the air.

Yuri, hearing Kobashi’s cries, came running from the waiting room.

The door was frustratingly cold and would not budge. Kobashi beat the glass with his fists and yelled.

“What are you doing!? Let’s get back to your room!”

Hearing Kobashi’s voice, the shadow turned around. Wearing his short, loose winter coat, Jicchan was standing up straight. Despite the glass between them, Jicchan’s voice was oddly clear.

“I’ve been causing a lot of trouble, so I’m going to go.”

“Go where?”

“Even I have places to be.”

“It’s cold, come on inside!” Yuri shouted as loudly as she could.

There was no time to process the absurdity of Jicchan, who should not have been able to walk, standing outside. They just wanted to call him back inside.

“Thanks for everything. ‘Preciate it,” said Jicchan, a pious look on his face as he lowered his head in a bow. He then raised his thumb to them with a smirk.

“You don’t have to worry. Having *wings* is enough.”

The back of Jicchan’s coat suddenly began to move. Kobashi and Yuri watched breathlessly from beyond the glass as the coat ripped apart, its white cotton shreds mixing together with the falling snow. Right before their eyes, wings spread out from Jicchan’s back. He rose up as though being fished from the sky, pausing to flap his wings several times as he resisted the winds of the blizzard before continuing his ascent into the sky...

The glass door finally gave way and Kobashi fell out onto the stairway landing, but no one was there. In reality, at that moment Jicchan had passed away, his face calm, as though he was sound asleep. But Jicchan sprouting wings and flying away was more believable.

Strangely, all the uploaded videos of Jicchan disappeared and the rumors stopped, as though

they had been erased away. A small, cozy funeral was held for him. Yuri wondered if he had taken all their troubles away with him when he died.

“He said he had places to be. I wonder where?”

“He did look just like an angel,” said Yuri.

“If that’s an angel then I guess even I can get into heaven, eh?”

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. *They probably wouldn’t mind just one angel wearing that short coat*, Kobashi thought.

Like the white cotton that had scattered about that day, the white, lingering snow fluttered around in the sky.

The Old Man in the Clouds
Tamaki Onuma

I can fly I can. Really. Like in that story, Peter Pan, when the children grow older and lose their ability to fly. And they can lose it too by throwing their caps, I think. It's painful, I know. Though their bodies remember how to fly...

He was an old man from Tobita, commonly known as Jitchan. Because it was a senior home we normally called people admitted here by their last name, but for him Jitchan worked as well. He was a handful as he had no family and was growing senile from being bedridden, but when he was awake he would talk and talk. And it would always be boasting or stories that, while harmless to others, would often make us wonder if they were actually truth or lie. Because of this, he was by far the most popular person among those admitted here.

I can fly I can...Kobashi, a care worker, was the best at impressions. Peter Pan is great. It's got talent.

Yet Yuri, a nurse, said the scene that Jitchan was talking about actually appears in the novel *Peter Pan*. Despite appearances Jitchan was amazingly knowledgeable. Kobashi, because he thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character, opened his mouth agape.

The home was so hectic that very few people would notice Kobashi sinking into low spirits as March neared. Those who knew that he had lost an old lover to a tsunami would steal glances at him and quietly pass on by.

One day when he was giving Jitchan a bath Kobashi started muttering, "I knew I should've said it."

His regret was failing to propose to her. She separated with him and returned back to the countryside to tie the knot in an arranged marriage. Soon afterwards she passed away.

"It's my fault."

He was going to mumble to himself as it looked like Jitchan was dozing off. Then, he almost slipped and lost his hold as Jitchan all of a sudden started speaking in a clear voice.

"Kōji. He is called Kōji."

Kobashi opened his eyes. Was this not the name of the husband whom his old lover married? She died together with him at sea.

"She didn't call you," stated Jitchan, his voice surprisingly strong and articulate. "She continued on her own, she chose the life she chose, and that is fine."

What could Jitchan be seeing? Did his mind really fly through space and time to see what happened on that day at the sea? Kobashi started asking impatiently.

"Was she not suffering? Does she not hold a grudge against me?"

"I forget those things when I'm flying."

"Flying where?"

As soon as Jitchan's voice abruptly stopped, Kobashi could already hear his quiet breathing.

"Don't sleep on me there, old man!"

Kobashi cursed but then tears welled up in his eyes, and while the hot water was gushing he sobbed loudly.

This type of encounter happened again. On that same day when Kobashi was nearby Jitchan once more suddenly began to talk.

“At the overpass there was a girl who wanted to fly.”

“That’s no good.”

“Pretty women don’t have to die.”

Kobashi faltered over the problem of what happened to people who were not beautiful, but Jitchan continued talking.

“No way an ugly old mother-in-law can fly. Neither can someone who gets heavy from worrying too much about a low salary.”

Kobashi chimed in, “But everybody has worries.”

“To get clogged up like being constipated is bad. Better to hold your breath and let it out.”

“Let it out...?”

When Kobashi lifted up his head he saw Yuri standing there with her face completely white.

“How did he know about the overpass?”

Startled, Kobashi turned about and Jitchan was, like the other day, snoring.

What Jitchan knew about was indeed the time when Yuri lingered desperately and dejectedly on a high overpass. Yuri said that it was less wanting to die and more wanting to go to a different world.

“I don’t really remember it well, but it felt like that I was being watched the entire time, so I couldn’t go beyond the handrails.”

“Pretty women don’t have to die.” Kobashi tried to imitate Jitchan’s voice but couldn’t do it very well.

Yuri wiped her eyes and laughed.

Jitchan would speak to anybody. Why circumstances became extraordinary is because of that fact.

One day, the middle-aged woman working here part-time said, “I lost my wallet. I wish you could fly back to my home to find it.”

“It’s probably under the slipper rack.”

Because Jitchan guessed correctly this incident escalated into trouble. The part-time woman got excited and called a TV station to cover it. The director of the senior home was taken aback and declined the coverage, but nevertheless the part-time woman’s friends and visitors who heard about the rumors started flocking in uninvited. Those who succeeded in talking to Jitchan took videos of him on phones and uploaded them onto the Internet. They showered him with a deluge of questions ranging from finding lost things to predicting horse races, and Jitchan, when spoken to, would get carried away and talk and talk. The moment the questions became difficult to answer, he would end up dozing off. The videos were a humongous sensation, and trespassers who were pretending to be his visitors started flowing in without stop. While most of them were turned away at the entrance, they ended up sneaking inside anyway.

Kobashi and Yuri would send them away as they found them, but Jitchan would get angry.

“Quit butting in when people are talking!”

This was the first time that Jitchan raised his voice and argued with Kobashi since he entered the home. Yuri stood between them in tears.

“Why did this end up happening?”

Yuri’s words were to herself.

"I really do understand that Jitchan wants to have fun and talk with people. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking; he just dislikes those who are trying to treat you simply like a source of amusement. He's worried that one of these people may hurt you. It isn't only Kobashi; the director and me and everybody else all worry about you."

Like a completely different person, Jitchan started showing his sullen face more often to the home's staff. Even on this day the scowl on his face with his brows deeply furrowed did not change. This made him no more than just a pitiful little old man, and Yuri softly sighed.

Kobashi, who was making his rounds, entered Jitchan's room but Jitchan did not even try to turn towards him. Kobashi also kept quiet as he promptly tried to exit.

"Tomorrow it's going to snow," said Jitchan suddenly.

"Huh?" Yuri and Kobashi simultaneously turned toward him.

"Tomorrow it's going to snow," repeated Jitchan with his eyes closed. "Make sure to watch your step carefully and open both your hands. The only burdens you need are your wings."

Kobashi started to rush towards to him, but then stopped hesitatingly and checked with Yuri.

"Did you hear him say something about wings?"

"Yes I did."

"Strangely he also mentioned something ordinary: that it's going to snow tomorrow. Though we already know this due to the weather report..."

"Lately he is always getting told off so things have gotten strained. Perhaps he is hurrying to fly to get back on your good side. He even went as far as reading the headlines of a newspaper."

It had been a long time since Kobashi last smiled. Yuri sighed in relief.

The next day, as was predicted—no, more than was expected—it snowed heavily. Due to such an unusual amount of snow around these parts it caused a big ruckus with roads getting clogged up and trains stopping. Naturally, the dubious visitors didn't show up, and for the first time in a long while the day was quiet with only the staff and the residents.

On this day Kobashi was running around the home shoveling snow and performing entrance checks and thus did not see Jitchan once. Only in the evening did he finally have time to go up the stairs to the lounge to take a breath. On his way by chance he took notice of the emergency staircase in the back of the hallway. Supposedly it was locked, but it wouldn't hurt to go check once more just in case. However, as soon as he turned his head towards the door he noticed a dark figure outside. Due to all the snow clinging to the wire-reinforced glass it was difficult to see. When he rushed closer, he saw a man of small build standing with his back towards him.

He held his breath.

"Jitchan."

Kobashi flew to the door. The handle seemed to be frozen so it did not turn. The Jitchan-like figure was standing on the other side of the fence surrounding the landing of the emergency staircase. But on the other side there was supposed to be nothing. In other words, it was midair.

Hearing Kobashi's yelling, Yuri ran out from the waiting room.

Due to how aggravatingly cold it was, the door did not budge an inch. Kobashi pounded on the glass with his fists and yelled.

"What are you doing? Get back to your room!"

At this the shadow slowly turned toward him. It was indeed Jitchan, standing up straight and wearing a traditional padded hanten coat. His voice could strangely be heard clearly through the glass.

"I've caused you trouble, so I will go soon."

"Go? To where?"

"Even for me I've at least got a place to go to."

"It's freezing so get back inside!"

Yuri was also shouting desperately. They didn't even have a moment to recognize how absurd it was for Jitchan, who supposedly couldn't walk, to be outside. They only wanted to get him back inside.

"I'm grateful for everything. Thank you."

Jitchan bowed his head with a slightly reverent expression on his face but then immediately broke into a grin and stuck his thumb in the air.

"Carrying a burden is not allowed! The only burdens you need are your wings."

Then, the back of his hanten coat started billowing. With the two people on the other side of the glass door looking on with their breaths taken away, the hanten coat ripped and the white cotton stuffed inside spread out and intermingled with the scattering snow. Before their eyes it spread out wider and became a magnificent pair of wings. As if Jitchan's little body was being lifted by the large wings he flew up into sky, stopped for a moment, and then, as if defying the snowstorm blowing against him, flapped his wings two or three times and ascended...

When the glass door finally opened and Kobashi tumbled out, nobody was at the staircase landing. Actually at that time the two thought that Jitchan passed away peacefully, but everybody else believed that he spread his wings and flew away. To their wonder, the videos of Jitchan that were uploaded on the Internet as well as the rumors about him among the public vanished into thin air, and the funeral was held modestly and warmly. Yuri believed that he carried their troubles away with him too.

"I wonder where his place to go to is."

"Looking like that he probably was an angel."

"If he's an angel then even I can go to heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi both laughed. Kobashi surmised that perhaps they wouldn't care too much if just one angel in heaven were wearing a hanten coat.

At that moment, like white cotton flying out of the sky, the lingering spring snow danced.

Tamaki Onuma: The Sensational Flying Grandpa

I'm gonna fly. No, really. In Peter Pan, kids can't fly once they get big, not even to go after the hats they've cast away, that's tragic, hey? You get it, doncha? Even though the body remembers how to fly, hey.

That's Grandpa Tobita. People in here get called by their last name, since this is a nursing home. They get called 'Grandpa' regardless of whether or not they're grandpas. Grandpa Tobita has no family. He's bedridden, senile, and his hands dangle, but when he's awake, he talks – not boasting or gossiping, just telling confusing, tall tales. That's why he's the most popular resident by miles. *I'm gonna fly...* Kobashi, a care assistant, is the best at doing an impression of him. *Peter Pan's great, hey. A top bit of work.* Nurse Yuri says the scenes Grandpa retells actually come from the book of *Peter Pan*, though. On hearing that Grandpa's unexpectedly well-read, Kobashi's mouth fell open; he'd always thought Peter Pan was a character Disney made up.

The nursing home's so busy it'd make your eyes spin, so if you didn't know to look out for it, you'd never be able to tell how much Kobashi loses his spark when March rolls around. Everyone who knows that his lover from way back when died in the tsunami swap silent glances as they go by, giving him a wide berth.

One day, while he was scrubbing Grandpa, Kobashi murmured, "It would have been better if I'd said it after all, wouldn't it?" He always felt bad about failing to propose to his girl. She dumped him, went back to her hometown, got hitched to a bloke she met through matchmaking, then passed away. "It was my fault, wasn't it?"

Grandpa looked like he was asleep, so Kobashi meant to talk to himself. He nearly dropped Grandpa's arm when heard him say suddenly, in a perfectly clear tone, "Kouji. Kouji, I'm calling you!"

Kobashi's eyes widened. Wasn't that what the guy who'd married his ex was called? She died along with him, in the water.

"No, not *you*." Grandpa spoke with a startlingly strong, clear voice. "I left of my own free will, I chose my own life, so it's fine." Where was Grandpa looking? Was his spirit really soaring through the skies and time itself, seeing the sea as it had been that day? Having a blustery look-in.

"She didn't suffer much, did she? Did she blame me?"

"Forget those kinds of things, I'm flying."

"Where are you?"

Grandpa's voice cut off, and Kobashi heard him breathing, already asleep.

"Don't sleep now, you old codger." Cursing him, Kobashi's eyes suddenly welled with tears. He splashed the warm water a lot while he washed Grandpa, sobbing.

Something else happened too. That same day, when Kobashi was beside him, Grandpa suddenly spoke. "A girl on the overpass footpath wants to go flying."

"She'd better not."

"Lookers can't die." Having turned the conversation to a matter of what would happen if she weren't a looker, Grandpa faltered, but kept talking.

"There's no way I'll ever go flying, 'cause I'm weighed down by a whinging mother-in-law and worrying over my monthly pittance," Kobashi retorted in a rote manner. "But everyone has problems."

"It's tough being all clogged up, same as being constipated. Better off spendin' a penny and going."

"Going, you say..." When Kobashi looked up, Yuri stood there, her face ashen.

"How do you know about the overpass?"

Startled, Kobashi whirled around, only to find Grandpa snoring just as he'd done in the bath earlier.

He gathered that there had indeed been a time when Yuri found herself loitering on a high overpass, struggling with what to do next.

Rather than dying, Yuri said she'd wanted to go to another dimension somewhere. "I don't remember it well, but I had a feeling that I'd been watched the whole time, so I didn't make it past the railing."

"Lookers can't die." Kobashi tried and failed to mimic Grandpa's tone. Dabbing her eyes, Yuri smiled.

Grandpa would always talk with anyone. From then on, it got outrageous. A woman working there part-time said, "I lost my purse. I want you to fly home and find it." Grandpa replied, "It's under the second pair o' slippers", which turned out to be right, and thus quite a feat. Chuffed, the woman called a television station, who sent out a news crew. The surprised home's director refused them entry, but the woman's friends, as well as visitors who'd heard rumors, made their way in.

Someone who managed to talk to Grandpa filmed him on their phone and uploaded the footage online. A battery of questions, ranging from where to find lost items to which horses to bet on, rained down on Grandpa, who followed their cue, chattering just as sociably. The moment a question cropped up that was hard to answer, he fell asleep.

The video took off, and interlopers, faking their reason for coming, would slip in behind real visitors to the home. They were usually turned away at the entrance, but some still shrewdly sneaked in. Kobashi and Yuri threw them out as soon as they found them, but Grandpa flared up, "Don't get in the way of people havin' a conversation!"

It was the first time since entering the home that he'd yelled at Kobashi in such a harsh voice. Yuri, who came in to stop him, teared up. "Why did such a thing have to happen?" she mumbled to herself.

To Grandpa, she said, "We know full well that you want to have fun chatting with everyone, but Kobashi's not trying to stop you from talking altogether. He doesn't like the people who just want to hear funny and strange things from you, Grandpa. He's worried they'll hurt you. It's not just him, the director and I worry about you, too."

After that, Grandpa tended to face the home's staff with a much changed, grumpy expression. On this day too, his sternness, and the deep furrow between his eyebrows was the same. Pulling that face made him look less like the small, frail, elderly man he was, which in turn made Yuri sigh.

She glanced around when Kobashi came in, but Grandpa didn't shift with her to see him. Kobashi held his tongue too, and in no time was ready to leave.

"It's gonna snow tomorrow," Grandpa blurted out.

"What?" Kobashi and Yuri turned towards him at the same time.

"It's gonna snow tomorrow," Grandpa repeated, his eyes closed. "Watch your step, and stretch both hands out. All I'll have is just wings, though."

Kobashi rushed over, but paused, hesitating, and checked with Yuri. "I heard him say something about wings."

"Yeah, I heard that. He said something weird, and something normal, didn't he, about how tomorrow it'll snow. The weather forecast is already out, so we've known that for a good while."

"All he does is tell me off, so we were on edge. He wanted to get rid of your mood, so he suddenly said something about flying, and what he must have seen in the papers."

It had been a while since Kobashi had smiled. Yuri too sighed with relief.

Heavy snow fell just as everyone had forecast, but no more than had been expected. Roads were highly congested and trains had stopped running, causing some strife, but only insofar as it that much snow wasn't seen in the area often. As one would expect, the day was indeed quiet for the home's staff and residents for the first time in a long time, as no suspicious visitors stopped by.

Kobashi bustled around the home shoveling snow drift from the doors, and was yet to see Grandpa even once. He finally had time for a breather and a chat in the break room when evening drew near. All of a sudden, the emergency stairway at the end of the corridor came to his mind. It ought to have been locked, but he supposed he should go check again.

As soon as he turned towards it, he noticed a dark figure visible outside. So much snow stuck to the wire-reinforced glass that it was hard to see well. Quickly striding over, he saw a slight man standing outside, his back to the door. Kobashi gasped.

"Grandpa!" Kobashi leaped to the door. The handle must have frozen stuck, as it wouldn't turn.

The silhouette that looked like Grandpa from the back was standing on the other side of the rail surrounding the emergency stairway's landing. There shouldn't have been anything there, that is, in mid-air.

Hearing Kobashi's yell, Yuri rushed out from the waiting room.

The maddening door was so frozen, it wouldn't budge. Kobashi pounded on the glass with his fists, shouting, "What are you doing? Get back to your room!"

The form slowly turned around. It was Grandpa, standing tall in his short, traditional, hanten winter coat. His voice, strangely clear, came through the glass door.

"Thanks very much for having me; I'll be takin' my leave now."

"Where can you go?"

"There's places to go, even for me."

"It's cold, you have to come in!" Yuri fervently pleaded.

The absurdity of Grandpa, who shouldn't have been able to walk, being outside, didn't hit them. They were too busy begging him to come back.

"Thank you for takin' care of me so nicely, alright?" Grandpa bowed his head, with a grateful expression due some admiration, but he soon smiled widely and, laughing, gave a thumbs up. "Well, I'm outta time. All I got to offer you is wings, but I reckon just them'll do."

The back of his hanten coat billowed in the middle. The two on the other side of the glass door gasped as they watched the coat tear, and saw white cotton scatter amid the falling snow. As they looked on, a pair of broad, splendid wings unfurled, until they were fully outstretched. Grandpa's small body rose, drawn up on those large, arching

wings, which paused as if resisting the snowstorm, then flapped twice, three times, and then he shot up, ascending...

When the glass door finally gave and Kobashi tumbled out, no one was on the landing. Grandpa was, at that time, in fact dead, as peacefully as if he were sleeping, but everyone believed he really had spread his wings and flown. Mysteriously, the footage of Grandpa that had been uploaded online, and all the public rumors regarding him, vanished as if into thin air. The funeral was a warm and intimate affair. Yuri thought that he might have taken all the trouble with him when he left.

"When he said he was going, I wonder where to?"

"Yeah, I saw, he was an angel."

"If he can be an angel, then even I'll probably get into heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi laughed.

Even if there was only ever one angel who wore a hanten coat, Kobashi thought, he didn't mind at all.

The last of the winter snow was fluttering, just like the white cotton that had all come flying out, back then.

Grandpa Takes Flight

Tamaki Onuma

“Yup, I can fly. It’s true! Just like in that story “Peter Pong”. Kids can’t fly anymore when they grow up. They can’t toss their caps in the air, chase after them, and fly anymore. Ain’t that a shame?”

Meet Mr. Highwind – also known as “Grandpa”. He lived in a nursing home, where the other residents were called by their last names. But Grandpa was always just “Grandpa”. He had no family, was bedridden and going senile, and was a real handful, but when he was awake he would just talk on and on. And when he talked, he wouldn’t brag or boast or badmouth others. No, all that came out of his mouth were stories, though you couldn’t tell if they were true or not. So he was the most popular of all the residents by far.

“Yup, I can fly.” Kevin, one of the caregivers, was the best at doing impressions of people. “Peter Pong’s a good name for your story,” he humored Grandpa. “You’re a real literary genius.”

But Julie, one of the nurses, retorted, “The scene Grandpa’s describing actually comes from the novel ‘Peter Pan’. Grandpa’s more knowledgeable than he looks. You’re just mouthing off like that because you thought Peter Pan was a Disney character.”

Kevin’s spirits had fallen as March approached – though you wouldn’t know it unless you paid attention, because the nursing home was so head-spinningly busy. People who knew that his old lover had passed away in a tsunami looked upon him with tender glances as they quietly passed by in the hallways.

One day, as he was giving Grandpa a bath, Kevin whispered, “Maybe I should have asked her...” Kevin’s regret was that he had missed his chance to propose to his girlfriend. They ended up parting ways, and she returned to her rural hometown, where she entered an arranged marriage and died thereafter. “Was it my fault?” he wondered aloud to himself, thinking no one was listening since Grandpa looked like he was asleep.

But then, Grandpa spoke in a clear tone of voice, causing Kevin to jump back in surprise. “Koji. His name’s Koji.”

Kevin went wide-eyed in amazement. Wasn’t Koji the name of the man his sweetheart had married – the man she had died alongside in the tsunami?

“It ain’t all about you!” said Grandpa in a surprisingly powerful and clear tone of voice. “She had already gone on her own way. That was the life she chose. That’s all.” What was Grandpa looking at now? Was he flying through space and time, looking at the sea on that day?

His voice tight, Kevin asked, “She didn’t suffer, did she? She didn’t hold a grudge against me, did she?”

“No. She’s forgotten about all that and now she’s off flying.”

“Where to?”

No answer. Kevin thought Grandpa had abruptly stopped talking. But then he heard slow, rhythmic breathing and realized Grandpa was fast asleep.

“Damn it, you old geezer,” Kevin snapped bitterly, “don’t fall back asleep yet!”

But then his tears started welling up and he sobbed loudly as the bath water roared in the background.

It wasn’t the only time something like that happened. On that same day, when Kevin was standing next to Grandpa, the old man blurted out, “I saw a girl on a highway overpass. She wanted to jump off it.”

“Oh, that’s not good.”

“Ain’t no sense in a pretty lady going out like that.” Demurring on the problem of what would become of a not-so-pretty lady in that scenario, Grandpa continued, “If you think too

much about your batty old mother in law and your pittance of a salary, those thoughts will weigh you down and then you can't fly."

"But suffering is something we all go through in life," Kevin chimed in.

"Ain't no sense in letting that crap build up like a case of bad constipation. You gotta just bear down and squeeze it out – let it all go."

"Let what go?" Kevin looked up to see a pale-faced Julie standing there. She asked Grandpa, "How do you know about what happened on the overpass?"

When a startled Kevin looked back down, Grandpa was snoring, as if he had been asleep for some time.

What he had learned was that there was definitely a moment at which Julie had felt helplessly heartbroken and had lingered about on an overpass high over a busy road. But Julie had not wanted to die. Rather, she had wanted to go away to some other dimension.

"I don't remember very well," she explained, "but I felt like I was being watched by someone the whole time, and I didn't jump over the overpass railing."

"Ain't no sense in a pretty lady going out like that."

Kevin tried to mimic Grandpa's tone of voice, but his attempt fell flat. Julie laughed while averting her gaze from Kevin.

Grandpa would talk a lot with just about anyone. This led to an outrageous turn of events.

One day, a middle aged woman who worked part time at the nursing home remarked, "I've lost my wallet. Wish I could run home and look for it." Upon hearing this, Grandpa told her, "I bet it's underneath the slipper rack..."

This premonition made him famous. The woman got all excited and called the TV station, which sent a news crew over to do an interview. The nursing home chief was taken aback and turned down the interview, but the woman's friends and visitors who had heard her gossiping descended upon the nursing home. Those who succeeded in talking with Grandpa took videos of their conversations with him and posted them online. They peppered him with all sorts of random questions ranging from how to find lost items to horse racing predictions, while Grandpa, for his part, got carried away with being engaged in such amiable conversation, and would go on and on talking. When he got tired of answering questions that came up, he would fall right back asleep. The videos became very popular, and the nursing home became deluged in an endless stream of intruders pretending to be visitors. Usually they were turned away at the front door, but they still found ingenious ways to sneak in.

Kevin and Julie wasted no time in kicking out the intruders when they found them. One day, though, Grandpa got angry and snapped at Kevin, "Don't y'all go barging in on folks while they're talking!"

It was the first time since he had arrived at the nursing home that Grandpa had ever raised his voice and quarreled with Kevin. His outburst stopped Julie in her tracks and brought her to tears.

"Why are you acting like this, Grandpa?" she muttered to herself. "We totally get that you want to enjoy yourself talking with everyone. But Kevin's not trying to stop you from talking. He's just suspicious of people who come here thinking you're just a source of fun for them. He's worried that they might hurt you, Grandpa. Not just Kevin, but me and the nursing home chief. We all worry for you."

Following his outburst, Grandpa would often wear a sullen expression around the nursing home staff. It was like he was a changed person. One day, while checking on him, Julie noticed the deep wrinkles creasing his forehead as he maintained his stern countenance. She let out a soft sigh. In this state, Grandpa resembled nothing more than a puny, scrawny old man indeed. Kevin, who was making his rounds, came into Grandpa's room at that moment, but Grandpa didn't even turn to look at him. Wordlessly, Kevin started to leave as quickly as he had entered.

Suddenly, Grandpa spoke "Gonna be snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" said Kevin and Julie simulatenously as they turned to face him.

"Gonna be snow tomorrow," repeated Grandpa as he closed his eyes. "Y'all best watch your step and hold both your hands out to keep your balance. As for me, my wings'll hold me up just fine."

Kevin rushed over to Grandpa's side but stopped short as if in hesitation. Not sure whether he'd heard correctly, he asked Julie, "Did you hear him say...wings?"

"Yeah, I heard him."

"He uttered something odd with something normal. 'Gonna be snow tomorrow,' he said, right? The weather forecast is out, so of course he would be aware of snow, but..."

"You've been in a funk since he's been doing nothing but yelling at you lately. I guess he wanted to cheer you up, so he flew outside in a hurry to go look for a newspaper."

Kevin laughed – it had been a while since he had done that. Julie felt a sense of relief.

The next day there was heavy snow, just as the forecast said, and in fact exceeding its predictions. Such heavy snowfall was rare in that area. The roads were horribly jammed with traffic and even the trains stopped running. It was a total mess. As you would expect, no suspicious visitors came calling at the nursing home that day, and the staff and residents were able to enjoy their first quiet day in a while.

That day, Kevin was busy running around the nursing home shoveling snow and checking the doors, and didn't see Grandpa even once. As dusk approached, at last it was time for him to climb the stairs to the break room to take a breather. But suddenly, his attention was drawn to the emergency exit stairwell in the middle of the hallway. "It must be locked," he thought, "but why don't I check it again." Just when he turned his head toward the door, which was made up entirely of safety glass, he noticed that a shadowy human figure was visible through the glass. It was hard to get a good look at the figure since a lot of snow was stuck to the glass. He hurried closer, and as he drew near he saw that the figure was that of a slightly built man standing with his back turned to the door.

Kevin gasped, "Grandpa!"

He ran to the door. The door handle was frozen solid and would not turn. The man looked like Grandpa from the rear, and he was standing outside the fence that enveloped the emergency exit stairwell. There was nothing on the other side of the fence – which meant Grandpa was standing in midair.

Julie heard Kevin's screams and ran over from the waiting room.

The door would not budge in such damned cold. "What the hell are you doing?" Kevin shouted as he banged on the door with his fist. "Go back to your room!"

Then the shadowy figure turned to face him. Grandpa, clad in an old, unfashionable winter jacket, stood fully erect, with a dignified air. Mysteriously, Kevin and Julie could hear his voice clearly through the glass door.

"I'm going away, seeing as I've been troubling y'all."

"Going? Where are you going?"

"I've got a place where I can go..."

"It's cold out there. Why don't you come back inside?" Julie shouted in desperation. She didn't give a damn about the absurdity of Grandpa being out there. She just wanted to coax him back inside.

"Thanks for looking after me. I'm much obliged to y'all."

Grandpa looked at them with a somewhat solemn expression and bowed his head. Right after that he broke into a wide grin, gave them a thumbs up, and said:

"Just let it all go. Your wings'll hold you up just fine."

With that, the back of his jacket started quivering and pulsating. The two nurses gasped behind the door as they watched Grandpa's jacket split open, its white threads pluming

outward and dispersing in the snow. As they looked on, the plume of threads grew wider as splendid wings took form. Grandpa's small body then jerked upward and briefly stopped short in midair, suspended from his large wings. He then beat his wings two or three times, as if defying the howling blizzard, before soaring upward like a rocket.

When at last the door opened and Kevin and Julie tumbled out, there was nobody on the staircase landing.

What had really happened was that, at that moment, Grandpa had died in his sleep, but everybody believed that he had unfurled giant wings and flown away. Mysteriously, the videos of Grandpa posted online disappeared and the rumors circulating around town died down, and a warm and intimate funeral was held for Grandpa. Julie wondered if Grandpa had taken their troubles away with him.

Just let it all go. Your wings'll hold you up just fine.

"I wonder where Grandpa went off to?"

"Ah... Well, from the looks of it, he was an angel."

"If a guy like him can be an angel, I guess even I can go to Heaven."

Julie and Kevin laughed. Kevin figured that it was okay by him if there was at least one angel clad in an old fashioned winter jacket like Grandpa. At that moment, late winter flurries fluttered about them like the white threads of his jacket.

The Old Man Who Flew

Tamaki Onuma

I can fly. It's true! In the story *Peter Pon*, the children lose the ability to fly when they grow up. They throw their hats into the air and try to make chase, but it's no use: they can't fly anymore. The body remembers flying, but—It's heartbreaking, you understand?

Old man Tobita. Known just as "Old man." In the facility, residents are usually called by their last names, but in the case of the old man, just "Old man" stuck. He has no family and is bedridden and senile so he can be a handful, but when he's awake he rattles off story after story—not stories of boasting or gossip but stories where that could be truth or fiction. That's why he is by and far the most popular of the residents. *I can fly...* Kobashi, the old man's caregiver, does the best impression of him. *Peter Pon is great, don't you think? Creative genius!* The nurse, Yuri, says that the scenes from the old man's stories actually appear in the novel *Peter Pan*. The old man is surprisingly well read. When Kobashi heard this his jaw dropped; he thought that Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

The facility is always busy, so you might not notice if you weren't paying attention, but as March nears Kobashi becomes despondent. His ex-girlfriend died in the tsunami, and those who know that give him sympathetic looks when they go by.

One day, while giving the old man a bath, Kobashi mumbled, "Maybe I should have asked her after all." He was regretting not having proposed to her. After their breakup, his girlfriend returned to the countryside, had an arranged marriage, then died in the tsunami. "I wonder if it's my fault." The old man appeared to be asleep so Kobashi thought he was talking to himself, but then the old man suddenly spoke in a clear tone, nearly causing the startled Kobashi to lose his balance.

"Koji! She's calling for Koji."

Kobashi's eyes widened. Isn't that the name of the man she married? They died together after being swept out to sea.

"She's not calling for *you*," the old man said in a surprisingly powerful and clear voice. "You went your own way. This is the life you chose. That's all that matters." Kobashi wondered what the old man was seeing now. Could he really be flying through the space and time, seeing the sea from that day.

Kobashi asked, flustered, "She didn't suffer, did she? She didn't resent me?"

"Who knows. I flew off already."

"Where?"

The old man's voice came to an abrupt halt, replaced by the sound of uneven breathing, signalling that he had dozed off.

"C'mon, don't fall asleep."

Kobashi cursed. Then without warning tears welled up in his eyes and he let out a loud cry, adding to the gushing sound of hot bath water.

On a different day, when Kobashi was by his side, the old man suddenly started talking.

"There's a girl on a pedestrian bridge longing to fly."

"That's not good."

"Beautiful women shouldn't die."

Kobashi mumbled a retort regarding the implication for all of the non-beautiful women, but the old man kept talking.

"She's worrying too much about her bitch mother-in-law and low pay. There's no way she'd be able to fly with all that weight." Kobashi grunted to show he was listening.

"But everybody has worries."

"Worries are like constipation: bad if they get plugged up. Best to bear down and push 'em out."

"Push 'em out,' ..." Kobashi repeated, raising his head to find Yuri standing there, ashen-faced.

"Why do you know about the bridge?"

Startled, Kobashi turned back toward the old man to find him snoring, as if he'd been sleeping the whole time.

What is certain is that there was a time when Yuri was standing on a painfully high pedestrian bridge. But, according to her, she wasn't longing to die but to escape to some different dimension.

"I don't remember it very well, but it felt like I was being watched the entire time—I just couldn't bring myself to go over the handrail."

"Like I said, 'Beautiful women shouldn't die.'" Kobashi made a poor attempt at imitating the old man. Yuri smiled weakly, pinching the bridge of her nose.

The old man will happily gab with anyone. Because of that the facility was plunged into chaos. It started when one of the part-time staff, a middle-aged woman, came to the old man with a request: "I lost my coin purse. I'd like you to fly to my house and find it." So the old man did and correctly answers that, "It's under the slipper cabinet." The woman got excited and phoned a TV station, which sent a crew to cover the story. The director of the facility, surprised by their sudden arrival, turned them away, but rumor spread and the woman's friends and such came posing as visitors and forced their way in. Those who were successful in seeing to the old man took videos on their phones and uploaded them to the internet. They showered the old man with a barrage of requests ranging from searching for lost items to predicting the outcome of horse races. When approached nicely the old man would get carried away and go on and on, but when a question had a unpleasant answer, he would suddenly fall asleep. The videos became a sensation, resulting in an endless stream of intruders descending upon the facility posing as visitors. Most of them are chased away at the entrance, but some of the crafty ones still manage to get in. Kobashi and Yuri chase them away as they find them, but the old man gets angry. "We're talking. Don't get in the way!" he snaps. It was the first time the old man had raised his at Kobashi since coming to the facility and it reduced Yuri, who had come to stop them, to tears.

"Why did this happen?" Yuri wondered to herself.

"We know you enjoy talking with everyone. Kobashi isn't trying to get in the way: he just doesn't like people who treat you like some kind of oddity. He's worried that you'll get hurt. And it's not just Kobashi: the director, me, everyone here is worried about you."

As if he had turned into a different person, the old man's attitude toward the facility staff changed, and his resentment showed on his face. Today, too, the deep wrinkles of his face are pulled close together in a stern, unchanging expression. When he's like this, he's no different from any other seedy-looking, little elderly person, Yuri thought, letting out a soft sigh. When Kobashi entered the room, on his rounds, the old man didn't even turn to look at him. Kobashi acted in kind, keeping silent and staying only a few moments before attempting to make a quick exit. But before he could the old man broke his silence.

"It's going to snow tomorrow."

"Huh?" said Kobashi and Yuri at the same time, turning to look at the old man.

"It's going to snow tomorrow," he repeated, eyes closed. "Watch your step and keep both hands open. These wings alone are burden enough."

Kobashi made to rush over to the old man, but hesitated, stopping to check with Yuri. "I heard him say something about wings."

"Yes, I heard it, too."

"He also said something unusually ordinary—that it'll turn snow tomorrow. I've seen the weather forecast, so I already knew that, but..."

"It's been awkward lately because he's being scolded all the time. Maybe he just wanted to get back on your good side so he flew out in a hurry to check the newspaper headlines."

Yuri was relieved to finally see Kobashi smile.

The next day, just as predicted—no, beyond what was predicted—the weather turned to heavy snow. The downfall was unusually heavy for these parts and was causing turmoil for the outside world: the roads became congested, and trains stopped running. With no suspicious visitors showing up, and only the residents and staff around, it was the first quiet day in a long time.

Today Kobashi was kept busy, bustling all around the facility shoveling snow and inspecting all of the doors, so he hadn't seen the old man even once. As evening neared he was climbing the stairs to the break room to take a breather when the fire escape at the far end of the hallway caught his eye. It's supposed to be kept locked, but he decided to check once more. As he approached he noticed the blackish figure of a person on the outside, but the snow stuck to the wire-mesh glass made it difficult

to see. Hurrying closer, he saw that standing there was a man of small stature with his back to the door. Kobashi's heart skipped a beat.

"Old man."

Kobashi threw himself at the door. The handle won't turn; it must be frozen shut. The figure, who looked just like the old man from behind, was on the outside of the railing that runs along the edge of the fire escape. There should be nothing there—just air.

Yuri, hearing Kobashi's shouts from the waiting room, came running.

The door was so horribly cold and wouldn't budge. Kobashi beat on the glass with his fist, yelling, "What are you doing? Let's go back to your room!"

The shadow turned around slowly. Standing upright and wearing a short down coat was the old man. His voice was strangely clear, despite the glass separating them.

"I only cause trouble for you, so I will go."

"Go? Where?"

"Even I have somewhere to go."

"It's cold out there. Come inside," Yuri shouted at the top of her lungs. Standing outside is an old man who isn't supposed to be able to walk. But now is not the time to pay mind to the absurdity of the situation; she had to get him to come back.

"Thank you for everything." The old man bowed his head slightly, humble expression on his face. Then he smiled, giving them a thumbs up. "You shouldn't try to shoulder it all. The wings on your wings are enough already."

Having said that he turned his back to them. The two on this side of the glass held their breath watching as the old man's coat ripped, scattering fluffy white feathers that blend into the falling snow. As they looked on, a pair of magnificent wings spread out before them. The old man's tiny body, as if drawn up by those large wings, rose up on the spot and stayed suspended in the air for a moment. Then, as if defying the blizzard, they beat two—three times before ascending out of sight.

When the door finally yielded, sending Kobashi rolling out onto the landing, there was no one else there. In reality, the old man had died, but everyone believed the version of the story with the wings. Strangely, the rumors and the videos of the old man that had been uploaded to the internet began to disappear, as if they had been erased, and the funeral turned out to be a warm cozy affair. Yuri wondered if maybe he'd taken all of the problems with him when he left.

"I wonder where he meant when he said he had somewhere to go."

"Looking back on it, he must have been an angel."

"If he was an angel, then even I can get into Heaven."

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Maybe I wouldn't mind there being one cheeky old angel, Kobashi thought. Outside, the lingering snow danced, like those white down feathers scattering in the wind.

Flying Grandpop

by Onuma Tamaki

I can fly. It's true. In *Peter Pan*, when the kids grow up, they forget how to fly—they can't even remember how to fly after their hats—it's heartbreaking, but I get it. They just don't know that your body always remembers how to fly.

* * *

Grandpop Tobita. But they just called him Grandpop. In the nursing home, most residents were known by their last name, but everyone knew Grandpop as just Grandpop. He didn't have family, couldn't get out of bed, wasn't always coherent and was a handful, but when he was awake he just talked and talked—not about himself or to gossip about other people, though. He told stories. It was hard to tell if these stories were real or not, but it was no wonder he was by far the most popular resident.

“I can fly. . .” Kobashi, one of the nurses, imitated him the best.

Peter Pan's a great movie—genius, even. But Nurse Yuri said that the scene Grandpop always talked about was only in the book version of *Peter Pan*.

“Grandpop's cleverer than he seems,” she told him.

Kobashi only knew Peter Pan as the Disney character, so he was shocked at the revelation.

Since the nursing home was usually dizzyingly busy, it was hard to notice unless you were paying close attention: when March rolled around, Kobashi became blue. His past lover was killed in the tsunami. Those who knew about it passed by him with brief, sympathetic glances.

While giving Grandpop a bath one day, Kobashi whispered,

“Maybe I should've asked her.”

Kobashi's biggest regret was that he didn't propose to her. After they broke up, she had returned to her hometown in the countryside and had gotten married to someone from there before she died.

"Was it my fault?"

Grandpop appeared to be asleep, so Kobashi thought he was talking to himself. But then Grandpop suddenly began to talk in a clear voice, and Kobashi nearly dropped his hand.

"Koji. She's calling out for Koji."

Kobashi widened his eyes. That was the name of the man his old lover had married. She had died with her husband in the ocean. Grandpop said with severe clarity:

"She's not calling out for you." And, "She chose to move on. It was her life—good for her."

What was Grandpop seeing? Had his spirit really flown across time and space and looked upon the ocean on that day? Flustered, Kobashi asked:

"Was she sad? Did she hate me?"

"She forgot all of that. She's flying."

"Where?"

Grandpop fell silent and was fast asleep.

"Don't fall asleep now, you old piece of shit."

Kobashi cursed, but tears quickly filled his eyes. He ran warm water in the bath and began to wail.

On another day, Grandpop again began to speak out of nowhere:

"There was a girl standing on a footbridge and she wanted to jump."

"That's not good," Kobashi said.

“Beautiful people shouldn’t die.”

Kobashi hesitated, wondering about those who weren’t beautiful, but Grandpop kept talking. “She was burdened by her bitch mother-in-law and low salary, though, so there was no way she could fly.”

“Everyone has problems,” Kobashi said hastily.

“It’s just like constipation: a toxic buildup. Gotta let it out,” Grandpop responded.

“Let it out . . .”

Kobashi raised his head at her voice and saw Yuri standing there with a ghostly pale face. “How does he know about the footbridge?” By the time she turned to Grandpop in shock, he was already snoring.

Yuri revealed that she had gone through a tough time when she would sometimes linger on a tall pedestrian bridge. It wasn’t exactly that she wanted to die, but she wanted to somehow enter a different dimension, she explained.

“I don’t remember it well, but it always felt like someone was watching, so I couldn’t get myself over the railing,” Yuri said.

“Beautiful people shouldn’t die.” Kobashi tried to imitate the way Grandpop said it, but it didn’t sound quite right. Yuri pushed down on her closed eyelids and laughed.

* * *

Grandpop was friendly to everyone. That was the reason things got so chaotic.

A lady who worked at the home part time told him, “I lost my coin purse. I want you to fly to my house and find it.”

Grandpop said, “It’s under the shoebox.”

He turned out to be right, which caused quite the frenzy. The lady got excited, called news reporters, and they came to film. The nursing home director was taken aback and turned them away, but those who heard the rumors from the lady snuck in, posing as visitors. Some of them were able to find Grandpop and talk to him. They uploaded videos of him all over the internet. They asked him to find things they misplaced, which horses they should bet on, and a whole bunch of other ridiculous questions, but Grandpop loved it and would talk and talk. When he didn't know how to answer something, though, he would just fall asleep. His footages became viral, and soon enough, it was hard to control the number of people coming into the facility pretending to be visitors. Most were stopped at the entrance, but some cunningly snuck in. Kobashi and Yuri would notice such people and immediately throw them out, but once, Grandpop got angry and said, "We were talking! Stop interrupting!"

It was the first time Grandpop had raised his voice at Kobashi, and Yuri intervened tearfully.

"How did all of this happen?" she muttered. "I understand—you want to be friendly to everyone, Grandpop. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking to people. He just doesn't like that people are using you for their amusement. He's not trying to hurt you—he's just worried about you. It's not just Kobashi. The director, me, and everyone else... We're all worried about you, too."

* * *

As though transformed into a completely different person, Grandpop's attitude toward the staff changed—he became very unfriendly.

Another day of him not un-wrinkling his forehead and refusing to change his grumpy look... When he was like this, he was nothing more than a frail old man,

which made Yuri sigh. Kobashi entered his room, but Grandpop refused to even turn his head towards him. Kobashi also stayed silent and was about to leave.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow,” Grandpop said.

“What?” Kobashi and Yuri gasped, turning to him.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow,” Grandpop repeated, his eyes still closed.

“Watch your footing and uncurl your fists. All you need to carry are your wings.”

Kobashi rushed over to Yuri to confirm.

“I think I heard him say something about wings.”

“Yes, I heard him too.”

“He also said something oddly normal—that it’s going to snow tomorrow. I mean, we already knew that because of the forecast...”

“He’s probably sad that everyone’s been upset at him lately. Maybe he wanted to make it up to you and flew to the newsstands to see if he could find something to talk about.”

Kobashi laughed for the first time in a while. Yuri also felt relieved.

The next day, it snowed as predicted—well, way more than predicted. It snowed heavily for that area, causing massive traffic on the roads and stopping all trains. At last, there were no uninvited visitors and for the first time in a long time, it was a quiet day with just the residents and the staff.

On this day, Kobashi was shoveling snow, keeping an eye on reception, and bustling about the nursing home. He didn’t see Grandpop at all. He was finally able to catch a break in the afternoon. He was climbing up the stairs to the break room when he noticed the emergency exit at the end of the hall. He thought to check on it to make sure that it was locked. When he raised his head, he suddenly saw a blackish figure outside. It was hard to tell what it was because of all of the snow that got stuck

on the wired glass window. He quickly got closer and saw that it was a small man whose back was turned. He swallowed.

“Grandpop.”

Kobashi jumped on the door. The frozen handle wouldn’t budge. The Grandpop-like shadow was beyond the fence that surrounded the landing of the emergency staircase. There shouldn’t be anything there... In other words, Grandpop was floating.

Hearing Kobashi’s screams, Yuri ran out of the break room.

The cold kept the door frozen shut. Kobashi hit the glass window with his fist and screamed.

“What are you doing? Let’s get back to your room!”

The shadow turned around slowly. Grandpop stood there confidently in nothing but his robe. Even with the door between them, his voice sounded eerily clear:

“I’m a burden, so I’ll be going now.”

“Going? Going where?”

“I have places to be, too.”

“It’s freezing, why don’t you come inside?”

Yuri also screamed as loudly as she could. There was no time to wonder how Grandpop, who couldn’t even walk, ended up outside. She just wanted to bring him back.

“You were all so kind, thank you.”

For a brief moment, Grandpop wore a humbled expression and lowered his head, but then he quickly raised it back up with a smirk and a thumbs-up. “Don’t carry everything on your back. The only things you need to carry are your wings.”

His back began to rise under the robe. While the two on the other side of the door held their breath and watched, the robe began to rip and white feathers mingled with the snow. The mighty wings grew before their eyes. Grandpop's small body was pulled up by these massive wings, and soon he was up in the air. He paused for a second, but then fighting against the blizzard, he flapped his wings twice—three times before shooting up into the sky...

When Kobashi finally got the door to open and ran out, there was nobody on the landing. While all of this was happening, Grandpop had died in his sleep, but everyone preferred the story where he flew away on his wings. Strangely enough, all of the footage of him on the internet disappeared, and his fame vanished, too. His funeral was intimate and quiet. Yuri believed that he took all of the fuss with him.

"I wonder where he went."

"He didn't really look it, but he must've been an angel."

"If he was an angel, maybe I can make it to heaven, too."

Yuri and Kobashi laughed. It's all right for heaven to have one angel in a robe, Kobashi thought. Snow drifted outside, just like the white fluffs that were floating on the day Grandpop flew away.

Old Man Tobita Flies- Onuma Tamaki

I can fly. Of course it's true. In "Peter Pan", when a child grows up they can no longer fly, and after Peter tosses his hat away he loses the ability as well, it's a tragedy, I understand. Yet my body still remembers flying.

Old man Tobita. Or, more popularly, just "old man". In an institution, once people have been admitted they are usually called by their last name, but for an old man "old man" works just as well. Only when his family isn't around and he's sleeping does his dementia take its toll, but when he is awake he talks and talks, and even then it's not boastful stories or the badmouthing of others, just stories so fanciful that you can't tell if they are the truth or lies. Because of that, he is by far everyone's favorite among the patients. The nurse, Kobashi, has the best impression of his "I can fly". It would be great to be Peter Pan, wouldn't it? The old man has a gift for theatrics. However, one of the female nurses, Yūri, says that the scene he's talking about actually does occur in the novel "Peter Pan". Despite his appearances, the old man really does know that. Kobashi was open mouthed with shock; he had thought that Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

Everyone at the institution is buried in their work to the point that they wouldn't notice unless they paid attention, but when March approaches Kobashi always loses his enthusiasm. The people who know that his past lover died in a tsunami quietly exchange looks as they pass by him.

"Maybe it would have been better to have said it after all", was what Kobashi muttered one day while he was bathing the old man. Kobashi's life's regret is that he failed to propose to his lover. After they split up, she returned to the countryside, and died after having an arranged marriage.

"Maybe it was my fault."

The old man looked as though he was sleeping, and this was all intended to be a monologue. Yet upon hearing this, the old man suddenly began to talk in a clear voice, and Kobashi drew his hands back.

"Kōji. She's calling to Kōji."

Kobashi's eyes widened. Was that not the name of his old lover's husband? She and her husband had died together in the ocean. The old man had said it in such a surprisingly strong, clear voice.

"She's not calling to you". Then, "She moved forward by herself, that was the life she chose, that's good enough." What exactly was the old man seeing right now? Maybe his heart had really flown over space and time and he was seeing the same ocean from that day.

Kobashi began to question him earnestly.

"She didn't suffer did she? She doesn't blame me?"

"She has forgotten those things and is flying away."

"Where?"

Just as Kobashi noticed that the old man's voice had suddenly stopped, he heard his sleeping breath pick up.

"You can't just go to sleep there grandpa."

Kobashi's bitter words caused him to well up with tears, and he loudly cried while the hot water gushed from the bath faucet.

This happened as well. On this day too Kobashi was by the old man's side when he suddenly started to babble again

"On the pedestrian bridge was a girl who wanted to fly."

"That's no good."

"It's no good for a beautiful woman to die." Kobashi became curious as to if he felt the same way about all people, not just beautiful women, and opened his mouth to ask, but the old man continued on babbling.

"I'm in no state to fly when I'm being weighed down worrying so much about this wretched mother in law and my low salary." Kobashi appropriately nodded his head in agreement.

"But everyone has troubles."

"What's bad is if you plug yourself up and constipate yourself with them. You just need to strain and get them out."

"When you say 'getting them out'..." When Kobashi raised his head Yūri was standing, with the colour drained from her face.

"Why do you know about the pedestrian bridge?"

In the instant that she turned around it was the same as the time before, the old man was gently snoring again.

What he had known was that there had been a time when Yūri had felt helpless, and out of that pain had stood on the edge of a tall pedestrian bridge, waiting. But Yūri began to say that rather than dying, she had just been hoping to end up somewhere different.

"I don't remember it well, but I felt that I was being watched by someone the whole time and I couldn't make it over the hand railing" was what Yūri said.

"It's no good for a beautiful woman to die."

Kobashi had intended to imitate the old man's tone of voice, but it didn't turn out very well. Yūri laughed with her eyes pinned to the ground.

The old man can talk well with anyone. Which is exactly why the unthinkable happened. One of the part time workers said, "My purse has gone missing. Would you be a dear and fly over to my house and find it for me?"

Immediately, "it's just under the lip of your slippers isn't it?" the old man correctly replied, and the incident became famous. The woman excitedly phoned a television station, and a news crew came. The Head of the Institution was shocked and refused them, but the rumor spread to friends of the part time worker and so on, and excited visitors began to intrude on the institution. People who were successful in talking to the old man took videos on their cellphones and put them on the Internet. Questions on everything from looking for lost items to predictions for sports matches were poured onto him, and as he was often covered in flattery by the visitors, the old man went along with the mood and babbled on and on. When it became difficult to answer something, he would fall asleep instantaneously. The videos turned into a sensation, and the back of the institution became crowded with people who had come expecting to watch the spectacle. They were usually turned away at the door, but even then some of them cleverly managed to force their way in. Kobashi and Yūri would turn them away as soon as they found them, but the old man would angrily say, "You're intruding on our conversation". When the old man raised his voice like this it was the

first time that he had fought with Kobashi since entering the institution, and Yūri, who had stopped upon entering the room, began to cry.

“Why did it have to end up like this?”

Yuri lamented to herself.

“I understand that you want to enjoy talking with everyone grandpa, but Kobashi isn’t trying to stop your conversation, he just can’t stand the people who are only here to laugh at you. He’s just worrying that they’re hurting your feelings. It’s not just Kobashi, the Head of the Institution, me, everyone, we’re all worrying about you.”

When faced with the institution staff it had become common for the old man to frown in such a way that he seemed like a completely different person. Even today his brow was drawn together in a stern, unchanging expression. It made him look like no more than a sparse old man, which caused Yūri to inhale sharply.

When Kobashi, who had been on patrol, came in, the old man didn’t even move his head towards him. It was when Kobashi kept silent and went to leave:

“It’s going to snow tomorrow”, the old man unexpectedly said.

“Huh?” Kobashi and Yūri both turned to look at him at the same time.

“It’s going to snow tomorrow”, the old man repeated with his eyes closed.

“Take care to watch your feet and open both your arms in preparation. My wings are enough to carry it.”

Kobashi began to rush over, but stopped as though hesitating and checked with Yūri.

“It sounded like he said, ‘How are my wings?’”

“Ah, you were listening?”

“He said something surprisingly normal as well; he said, ‘Tomorrow there will be snow’. It’s been in the weather forecast though, so I’ve known for a while that there would be.”

“I’ve only been scolded by you lately so it’s been awkward. You know, even a newspaper crew looking for a scoop came running wanting to take advantage of your good spirits.”

It had been a long time since Kobashi had laughed. Yūri chuckled as well.

As predicted, the next day’s snowfall was so large that it outdid even the worst forecasts. In the area around the institution the snow fell in such an unbelievable amount that the roads crowded over, and it became such a panic that even the trains stopped, so that no excited visitors came, and for the first time in a long while it was a quiet day with just the staff and the patients.

On that day Kobashi was busy rushing around the institution, shoveling snow and checking the doors, but he still did not see the old man even once.

It happened when night was approaching and Kobashi was climbing the stairs to the break room, thinking he could finally take a moment to breathe. He suddenly became worried about the emergency staircase inside the corridor. He was sure that it was locked, but thought that he had better go and check one more time. The moment he turned his head, he realized that he could see a dark shadow outside. But snow had piled up inside of the screen and it was difficult to see. When Kobashi quickly drew near, he saw that a small man was standing with his back towards him. He gulped.

“Grandpa.”

Kobashi ran towards the door. Maybe it was because it had frozen over, but the door handle wouldn’t turn. There was a retreating figure that looked like the old man outside of the barrier around the emergency stairway’s landing. There shouldn’t have been anything there, in other words, it was open air.

Hearing Kobashi’s shouting voice, Yūri came running from the staff room.

The emergency door still wouldn't budge in the slightest because of the deep ice.

Kobashi was clamoring against the glass with his fists.

"What are you doing? Come back to your room!"

When he yelled the form slowly turned around. The old man was standing firmly in his housecoat. His voice traveled through the glass with a strange clarity.

"I'm just causing problems so I'll go now."

"What do you mean by 'I'll go'? Where?"

"There are even places for people like me to go, you know."

"It's cold outside, please come in."

Yūri was also yelling in earnest. She didn't have enough composure to realize how absurd it was for the old man, who shouldn't even have been able to walk, to be outside there. She just wanted to call him back inside.

"I owe you a lot. Thank you for everything."

The old man made a slightly admirable face and looked down, but quickly laughed with a grin and showed them his thumb.

"It's no good to let this weigh you down. My wings are good enough to carry it."

With that, the back of his housecoat began to billow. As the two on the other side of the glass door stood with their mouths open and watched, his housecoat split open and white down burst forth from it and mixed with the falling snow. While they watched, it widened and made a beautiful pair of wings. The old man's tiny body was flying as though being pulled up by those massive wings, and time seemed to stop for a moment while they pushed against the blizzard, and he twice, three times flapped his wings, then rose up without stopping...

When Kobashi, who had finally managed to push the door open, tripped out onto the landing, there was no one there. In reality, at that moment the old man had peacefully died as though going to sleep, but what everyone really believed was him opening up his wings and flying. Strangely enough, the videos of the old man that had been put on the internet, and the rumors too, disappeared like they had been erased, and the funeral went along neatly with a warm feeling. Yūri wondered if he really had gone and taken away all of the trouble for them.

"Where exactly did he go?"

"Ah, what you saw was an angel."

"If *he* was an angel then even I might be able to go to heaven."

Both Yūri and Kobashi laughed. But it wouldn't really matter if just one angel wore a housecoat, would it? Kobashi thought to himself.

The lingering snow fluttered like the white down that had burst forth that night.

Flying Grandpa

“I can fly, I tell yer. It’s true, so ’tiz. Yer know the story of Peter Pon? How children get too old ter fly? Throw their caps in the air, they do, and chase after them – but they can’t fly any more, can they. ‘Ard ter bear, so ’tiz, I can tell – what with the body rememberin’ what it feels like.”

Grandpa Tobita.¹ Everyone calls him “Grandpa”. It’s a care home so they normally use the residents’ surnames, but everyone knows that “Grandpa” means Grandpa. He’s got no family, he’s bedridden and feeble-minded, so it’s not easy to look after him, but when he’s awake how he talks! Not that he’s bragging or making nasty remarks about other people, but he tells such stories that no one can tell whether they’re true or not. So out of all the other inmates he’s far and away the most popular.

“I can fly, I tell yer.” Young Kobayashi, the care worker, does the best impressions. “I like ‘Peter Pon’ so much. What a gift of creation!” But Miss Yuri, the nurse, she says that Grandpa’s tale is actually part of a novel called *Peter Pan* - so there’s more to Grandpa than you might realise. Young Kobayashi thought that Peter Pan was a Walt Disney character, so his jaw dropped when he heard this.

It’s not bad enough to draw attention amidst the hectic bustle of the care home, but when it gets near to March Kobayashi stops being his normal cheerful self. Those who know that his former sweetheart was swept away by the tsunami in 2011 exchange secret glances and give him space.

One day, while giving Grandpa a bath, Kobayashi murmured, “All the same, perhaps I should’ve asked her.” He couldn’t forgive himself for not proposing. After they separated, she’d gone back to her parents’ home and they’d found a husband for her. It was after this that she died. “I wonder if it’s my fault,” he asked himself.

Grandpa appeared to be sleeping so Kobayashi did not think that anyone was listening, but there was a sudden cry of “Kōji! Callin’ for Kōji she is.” Grandpa’s voice sounded so clearly and was so unexpected that Kobayashi nearly dropped him. He felt

¹ This surname is written with the characters meaning “to fly” (read as *tobi* here) and “paddy field” (*ta*).

stunned. Surely that was the name of the guy she'd married. They'd died together, swept out to sea.

Grandpa's tone was surprisingly strong and distinct. "It's not yer she's callin' for." "Went of 'er own accord, she did. It's the life she chose, so there's no need for regrets."

What can Grandpa see? Has his spirit really flown through space and time to look at what happened on the sea that day?

"Did she suffer any pain? Doesn't she bear a grudge against me?" Kobayashi couldn't get the words out fast enough.

"She's forgotten all that as she flies around."

"Where?" But Grandpa had suddenly fallen silent; all that could be heard were gentle snores.

"Don't fall asleep on me, you old goat." Kobayashi spoke harshly, but suddenly found himself overtaken by tears. He turned the hot water tap full on to hide the sound of his violent sobs.

The following incident also took place. Once again Kobayashi was with Grandpa when he suddenly began talking.

"Was a girl standin' on the footbridge. Wanted ter jump off and fly away, she did."

"Oh, that would never do."

"Pretty girls 'ave no business dyin'."

Kobayashi wasn't sure how to respond, since this begged the question of what girls who weren't pretty should do – but Grandpa went on talking.

"Weighed down as she was by worryin' too much over 'er low wages and her old cow of a mother-in-law, she could never 'ave flown."

"But everyone worries about something," replied Kobayashi without much thought.

"T's like constipation - yer don't want ter get blocked up inside. 'Ave to push as 'ard as yer can ter get it all out."

"Get it all out..." Kobayashi looked up and there was Miss Yuri, staring at them with a white face.

"How come you know about the footbridge?"

When he turned back in astonishment, Grandpa was snoring away just as before.

It seemed that at one point things had got so hard that Miss Yuri really had stood

all alone on a high footbridge. It wasn't so much that she wanted to die, only that she wanted to leave for some other plane of existence.

"I don't remember it clearly now, but all the time I had this feeling that someone was looking at me, and I couldn't bring myself to climb over the railing."

"He said that pretty girls 'ave no business dying.'"

Kobayashi tried to imitate Grandpa's voice, but it wasn't very convincing. Miss Yuri smiled tearfully at him.

It was after this that the trouble started. Grandpa would talk away to anyone. When one of the part-time ladies said, "I've lost my purse. If only you could fly to my house and find it for me," Grandpa told her that it was under the slipper rack. This guess turned out to be right, whereupon everything got out of hand. The lady who had lost her purse got all excited and rang a TV station, and the TV station wanted to send a crew. Quite taken aback, the manager turned them down, but people who knew the part-time lady, friends and relatives of the residents and so on, all barged their way in. Those who were actually able to talk to Grandpa would use their mobiles to film him and then post the results on the internet, or shower him with the most ridiculous questions, ranging from the whereabouts of lost property to forecasts of the racing results. When people talked nicely to him Grandpa would get carried away, so how he talked! And whenever there was a question that he couldn't answer, why, he would just go to sleep.

The videos became so popular that the home was plagued by intruders pretending to be friends or relatives of the residents. In most cases they were turned away at the entrance, but some were so cunning that they were able to get through. These people would also be turned out by Kobayashi and Miss Yuri as soon as they were discovered, but Grandpa was angry at having his conversations interrupted. He raised his voice against Kobayashi, something he had never done before, and Miss Yuri was almost in tears when she tried to intervene.

"Oh why did we have to get into this situation?" she would mutter to herself.

"Grandpa, I know how much you enjoy talking to everyone. But Mr Kobayashi isn't trying to stop you doing that. He just hates people who are only interested in making fun of you. He's worried that you'll end up being hurt in some way. And it's not only Mr Kobayashi. The manager and everyone else, me too, we're all worried about you."

Grandpa became so sullen in his dealings with the staff that he was almost like a

different person. Today he was once again wearing a stern frown on his face. This turned him into nothing more than a miserable little old man, making Miss Yuri breathe a quiet sigh. When Kobayashi passed by on his rounds, Grandpa refused to look at him. Kobayashi gritted his teeth and was just about to make a quick retreat when Grandpa suddenly spoke:

“There’ll be snow tomorrow.”

Kobayashi and Miss Yuri both turned towards him in surprise. “There’ll be snow tomorrow,” he said again, without opening his eyes. “Look round carefully and keep yer ‘ands free. Wings are quite enough ter carry.”

Kobayashi made as if to run towards him but then paused as if in doubt, and turned to Miss Yuri for confirmation.

“It sounded as if he was saying something about wings,” he said.

“Yes, I heard.”

“But saying that it would snow tomorrow – that was unexpectedly normal. Although of course I knew that already, because of the weather forecast.”

“He’s felt awkward with us because we’ve had to tell him off so often. I expect he flew off to get a quick look at the newspaper headlines so he could patch things up with you. “

On hearing this, Kobayashi smiled for the first time in a while. Miss Yuri felt some of the tension leave her body.

The next day it did snow - far more heavily, in fact, than the forecasts had suggested. Around here there was more snow than usual and this led to chaos, with traffic jams and no trains. Naturally this meant that there were no strange visitors, so both residents and staff had been left in peace for a change.

Kobayashi was kept rushing around all day, shovelling the snow and checking the doors, so he had no time to look in on Grandpa. It was getting on towards evening when he went upstairs to the staffroom, hoping for a breather at last. Suddenly, he felt anxious about the door to the emergency stairs at the end of the corridor. “I’m pretty sure it’s locked, but perhaps I should have another check, just in case.” No sooner had he turned in that direction than he caught sight of a dark figure outside. There was so much snow sticking to the wired glass that it was hard to see anything clearly. Hurrying closer, he was able to make out the shape of a small man standing with his back to the door.

Kobayashi let out a gasp.

“Grandpa!”

He flew at the door, but the handle must have been frozen on the outside and he couldn't shift it. The figure that resembled Grandpa was at the top of the emergency stairs, on the other side of the railing around the landing. But surely there was nothing on the other side, only empty air.

Hearing Kobayashi's cry, Miss Yuri flew from the duty room. The door was so infuriatingly cold that it refused to budge an inch. Kobayashi pummelled the glass with his fists and shouted, “What the heck are you doing? Come back inside.”

At this, the figure slowly turned. It was Grandpa, wearing a padded jacket and standing perfectly straight. It was strange how well they could hear his voice through the wired glass.

“I put yer ter so much trouble I've decided ter leave.”

“Leave? But where to?”

“Oh, I'm not so bad off that I've no place ter go.”

“It's so cold! Please come inside.” Miss Yuri joined Kobayashi's desperate shouts. There was no time to wonder how Grandpa had managed to get there when he couldn't even walk. All they wanted was to urge him back inside.

“I'm much obliged to you. Thanks for everythin',” said Grandpa, bowing his head with a solemn expression. But he quickly switched to a small grin and gave them a thumbs-up. “Don't weigh yerselves down. Wings are quite enough ter carry.”

As he said this, the back of his jacket began to swell. On the other side of the glass, they watched with bated breath as the jacket split. White cotton wadding flew out and flapped around, mixing with the snow. Spreading out right before their eyes, it turned into a magnificent pair of wings. Grandpa's little body flew right up, as if the wings were pulling him, and then stopped for a bit in mid air. The wings flapped once, then twice, as if they were fighting against the snowstorm, but after this he swiftly rose again...

When the door finally opened, allowing Kobayashi to stagger out onto the landing, there was no one there.

It turned out that while this was going on Grandpa had died in his sleep, but everyone preferred to believe that he had spread his wings and flown away. One strange thing was that the videos of Grandpa that had been put on the internet, and all the

rumours about him, had vanished without a trace, so he had a small and intimate funeral. Yuri wondered whether Grandpa had taken all the unpleasantness away with him too.

“What can he have meant when he said that he had somewhere to go?” said Kobayashi.

“Strange though it may seem, he must have been an angel.”

“If Grandpa was an angel, even I might get to heaven.”

Miss Yuri exchanged a smile with him. He felt that one angel in a padded jacket would surely do no harm.

As the late snow danced around them, it seemed to be echoing that flurry of white cotton wadding.

The Old Man Who Said He Could Fly

I can fly! I swear it's the truth! You know how that story Peter Pong says children don't fly anymore when they're all grown up? Can't toss their hats and expect to fly about catching them like they used to. How unfortunate it is to grow up, I know. Wish they knew their bodies still know how to fly.

Nobody called him Mr. Tobita. Everybody knew him as "Gramps". Of course, the rest of the residents at the nursing home were addressed properly by their last name, but Gramps was Gramps. He was one of the neediest residents at the home since he had no family and was bedridden and intermittently senile, but when he was awake his mouth shot off like a rocket. It wasn't the empty boastings of an old man or mean-spirited gossip; in fact, nobody could tell if it was the truth or a load of baloney. His wacky prattle charmed its way into the hearts of nurses and residents alike. Kobashi, one of the nursing aides, was the best at squawking out Gramps' "I can fly!", as well as Gramps' funny way of saying "Peter Pan." *Ain't Peter Pong sure something? Now that's what I call an imagination!*

One day Kobashi learned from Nurse Yuri that the scenes Gramps babbled about actually came from a book. *Gramps might seem crazy, but people shouldn't underestimate him*, she said. *He knows what he's talking about.* Kobashi was at a loss for words. He had thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

Life at the nursing home was so hectic, almost nobody would notice that Kobashi was quieter than usual whenever March came around. Those who knew that his ex-girlfriend was one of the victims claimed by the tsunami of 2011 kept at a safe distance, tiptoeing past if they saw him.

"Should have proposed to her when I had the chance," Kobashi muttered to himself while giving Gramps his bath. He had never forgiven himself for not taking the next step. After they had broken up, she had gone back to her hometown in the country, where she went on to marry a man introduced to her through her parents. The tsunami struck after her wedding. "It's my fault she died," Kobashi continued to mourn quietly, believing Gramps was asleep.

Suddenly, Gramps's voice rang out with such clarity in the bathroom that Kobashi almost lost his grip on him.

"Koji, she's crying out for Koji."

All Kobashi could do was stare blankly at the old man before him. How did Gramps know the name of the man whom his ex married? It was not just his ex who had drowned that day: her husband did, too. Gramps continued speaking in a voice that was unexpectedly lucid and hearty.

"Son, she ain't calling for you," he told Kobashi. "It was her decision, through and through. That's the road she chose to take, and that's the way these things go."

The look in Gramps's eyes was faraway, as if his spirit really was flying through time and space to witness the sea that day. Kobashi hurried to get his questions in before Gramps drifted off any further.

"Was it painful for her? She doesn't hate me or anything?"

"She don't remember a single thing, she's too busy flying."

"Where is she?"

Just as he thought Gramps was being too quiet, a snore rippled through the bathroom.

"Don't fall asleep on me now, Gramps!" Kobashi snapped, but the tears were welling up faster than he could stop them. He let the hot water spew out like a geyser as the bathroom echoed with his sobs.

It wasn't the first time this kind of thing had happened.

"Look out, she's about to throw herself off the bridge," Gramps piped up to Kobashi, who was taking care of him that day.

"Yikes."

"Pretty girls shouldn't die." What about the ones who aren't pretty, Kobashi wanted to ask, but he knew nothing would come of it if he did.

"Sweetie, you can't take off like that. You're thinking too much about that old hag of a mother-in-law, and how they pay you next to nothing, and it's weighing you down."

Uh-huh, Kobashi murmured absentmindedly.

"Everybody's got troubles."

"Don't let it plug you up like crap that don't come out. Take a deep breath, pop it out with all you got."

"Pop what out??"

Kobashi looked up to find Yuri standing there all of a sudden, her face deathly pale. "How does he know about the pedestrian bridge?"

Startled, she glanced over at Gramps, whose mouth opened this time to release a peaceful snore.

It was all making sense now. Once, something had happened to Yuri to push her to the brink of despair. She had climbed up to the top of a pedestrian bridge, thinking unsavory thoughts. *It wasn't that I wanted to die, I was more hoping something would zap me to a different dimension so I didn't have to be here*, she explained.

"I can't say for sure, but it felt as though someone kept watching me behind my back. I didn't even dare touch the railing."

"Pretty girls shouldn't die." Kobashi's imitation of Gramps fell flat this time. Yuri clutched her forehead as if to disapprove, but she was smiling.

Gramps chatted with anybody, everybody. He had always been popular, but even then nobody could have predicted what would happen next.

One of the older part-timers told him she'd lost her coin purse, and asked would he kindly go fly over to her house and find it? His reply of "musta fell where you keep your slippers" turned out to be true, and it caused a sensation. The woman got so excited, she called the local TV network, who showed up outside with their video cameras. Shocked, the director refused to let them in, but the number of the part-timer's friends and other visitors to the home who had heard the rumors only kept growing. Videos shot on cell phones by people who'd managed to get an interview

with Gramps started streaming all over the internet. He was asked about anything and everything, from missing items to which horse was going to be the next pursewinner. Gramps didn't mind. If they were respectful and asked pleasantly, Gramps would stay his whimsical self, chit-chatting with his new friend. If the question was a difficult one, suddenly Gramps was fast asleep, snoring.

The videos went viral, and soon the home was besieged by a horde of visitors pretending to be loved ones, trying to see Gramps. Usually the staff were able to send them away at the door, but there were a couple of determined ones who used every trick in the book to sneak in. If Kobashi or Yuri found a stranger in Gramps's room they would immediately try to send the intruders away but, to their surprise, it was Gramps who got upset first, furiously shouting, "Don't you know it's bad manners to interrupt?". It was the first time he raised his voice with Kobashi.

Yuri, who had stepped in when she heard them arguing, couldn't take it anymore. "How did things turn out like this?" she asked tearfully, under her breath. "Gramps, I understand you want to talk with everyone. But Kobashi isn't trying to stop you from talking to others, it's just that he doesn't want the ones who're only here as a joke. We're not going to stand back and let them make fun of you. It's not just Kobashi who feels that way, it's me and the director and everybody; we're all worried about you."

Like Jekyll and Hyde, these days Gramps was a completely different person around the staff. Usually now, the corners of his mouth were stretched downwards into an austere frown, an angry wrinkle clearly etched between his brows. His pitifully small and scrawny frame was more pronounced, so that he looked like just another ordinary old man. Yuri couldn't help but sigh. When Kobashi came in on his rounds, Gramps didn't acknowledge him. His mouth also grimly sealed, Kobashi was about to step right back out when Gramps spoke.

"Tomorrow it's gonna snow."

It was so out of the blue that Kobashi and Yuri simultaneously turned their heads and asked "What?"

"Tomorrow it's gonna snow." Gramps repeated to himself, his eyes shut. "Gonna plant my feet and spread my hands wide. Got wings on my back, that's all I need."

Kobashi ran up to Yuri, almost bumping into her. "What was that about wings?"

"Yeah, I heard him say something about wings too."

"So he can talk like a normal person after all. Of all things to say, 'it's gonna snow tomorrow'. Well, anyone who's seen the news could tell you that."

"It's because you were yelling at him the other day. He wanted to make it up to you, so he quickly flew over to the first newspaper he could find and skimmed the headlines."

Yuri was relieved to see Kobashi laugh at last.

To say it snowed the next day was an understatement. The raging blizzard brought a record snowfall for these parts. The snow clogged the streets, causing commotion everywhere as cars stopped driving in the middle of the road. The home of course didn't see any visitors that day, not even the pesky intruders that had tried to see Gramps. For once, both residents and staff could enjoy a day of peace and quiet.

Kobashi was running around the home, shoveling snow or checking up on the doors, so he hadn't had a chance to see Gramps all day. By the time he was finally able to climb the stairs to take a breather in the break room, the sun was low in the sky. Suddenly, he thought about the fire escape stairwell at the end of the hallway. I'm sure I locked it, but it won't hurt to check one last time, he told himself. When he turned to look at the glass door exit, however, he could see something like a blackish shadow outside. It was hard to make out with all the snow stuck to the wire mesh window. He rushed over to the door and, to his horror, saw the back of a familiar small figure standing outside.

Kobashi felt his breath catch in his throat. "Gramps!"

He flew at the handle, but it was frozen shut and wouldn't turn. The person who looked like Gramps was standing not on the stairwell platform, but outside the railing. There was nothing to support him there— in other words, Gramps was standing on air.

Yuri sprang out of the waiting room when she heard Kobashi's cry.

The door was ice-cold and wouldn't budge an inch. Kobashi banged on the glass with his fists. "What are you doing out there?! Get back in!" he shouted.

The shadow turned around slowly at the sound of his voice. Standing before them, proud and tall, was Gramps, wearing a traditional winter *hanten* jacket.

"Seems I've caused trouble to many good folks, so I'll be taking my leave." Despite the thick glass separating them, his voice rang loud and clear, as if he were standing right next to him.

"Where are you going?"

"Got places of my own to go, too."

"Gramps, please, come back inside. It's cold out," Yuri pleaded with all her might. There wasn't time to ponder about how in the world Gramps was floating in mid-air. All they could do was beg and plead.

"You folks all took good care of me. I give you my thanks."

Gramps bowed humbly to them, but in the next moment he was grinning from ear to ear, and gave them a thumbs-up.

"Take a load off, now. All you need are the wings on your back."

The back of his *hanten* jacket started to wriggle like a wild animal trapped inside. Both Kobashi and Yuri held their breaths, helpless to do anything but watch from their side of the glass window when suddenly the back of his jacket ripped open, shedding clouds of white cotton like the snow falling outside. Kobashi and Yuri continued to watch, fascinated, as the tear grew bigger and something began to gradually unfold and spread out into a magnificent set of wings. With a mighty flap the gigantic wings lifted the tiny man into the air. For a second it seemed he wouldn't make it as he just hovered there; then, as if defying the oncoming wind, the old man shot straight up in the sky with a couple more powerful beats of his wings and disappeared.

When Kobashi was finally able to yank the door open and scramble out to the platform, there was nobody there. He didn't know that at this exact moment, Gramps breathed his last in his room. But when everybody heard Kobashi's side of

the story, they all really believed Gramps had sprouted wings and flown away. Strangely enough, the frenzy surrounding the videos on the internet quickly died down, so much that his funeral was small and quiet, attended only by those who knew him. He even went so far as to take all the trouble with him when he left, thought Yuri sadly.

“Wonder where it was he had to go,” Kobashi mused.

“He looked like an angel out there, didn’t he?” Yuri asked.

“If that’s an angel, guess my soul’s got nothing to worry about.”

Both Yuri and Kobashi laughed. Kobashi secretly hoped that somewhere up there, one of the angels donned a *hanten* jacket. Looking very much like the cotton that had tumbled out of Gramps’ jacket, all around them clumps of snow drifted down from the sky, even though it was already spring.

The Old Man Who Could Fly - Tamaki Ohnuma

"I can fly, you know. No word of a lie. You know those kids in that story, Peter Pon? Well, when they grew up, they couldn't fly anymore. They could throw that cap all they wanted, but they couldn't fly. Ah, it's a sad tale. I know how they feel. They knew how to fly, but they just couldn't do it."

Old Mister Hida, better known as Gramps. Well, in the care home, he was officially called by his name, but when you said "Gramps", everyone knew who you were talking about. He had no family and was bedridden and asleep half the time. He could be hard work, and when he was awake, boy, could the old guy talk. And the stuff he came out with—this wasn't the usual ramblings about how great he was or how awful everyone else was. No, this stuff was pretty amazing, even if you never quite knew whether he was telling the truth or not. Either way, it made him a big hit with everyone in the home.

"I can fly, you know."

Kohashi, one of the male nurses, did the best impression of Gramps, hands down.

"I love all that stuff about Peter Pon. He's got no shortage of imagination, that's for sure."

But one of his colleagues, a nurse called Yuri, told him that all the stuff Gramps said was really in the book. He's not as dumb as he looks, she told him. Kohashi gaped at her. He didn't even know there was a book—he'd always thought Peter Pan was just a Disney character.

Everyone at the home was rushed off their feet pretty much the whole time, so if you didn't know what had happened, you might not have noticed any difference, but as it got closer to March, the more drained Kohashi looked. An ex-girlfriend of his had died in the tsunami, and anyone who knew this would give him this look as they went past, without saying anything, just to let him know they were thinking about him.

It happened when Kohashi was giving Gramps a bath. He thought the old guy was asleep so he was talking to himself more than anyone else.

"Maybe I should have just asked her," he muttered.

He hadn't proposed to his ex when he'd had the chance and that still stung. She'd gone back to her hometown and married someone her family had set her up with. And then she had died.

"Maybe it's all my fault."

Suddenly Gramps piped up, his voice as clear as anything. Kohashi was so shocked he almost let the old guy fall into the tub.

"Koji! Koji! That's what she's yelling!"

Kohashi looked flabbergasted. Koji was the name of the man his ex had married. She drowned alongside him when the wave struck. Kohashi was shocked at how clearly and powerfully Gramps spoke.

"She isn't calling your name," he said. "She chose to go back, didn't she? It was the life she wanted. Just let it go."

Just what could the old man see? Had he really travelled through space and time? Was he really seeing the ocean on the day it happened? Kohashi pressed Gramps to tell him more.

"Did she suffer? Did she hate me?"

"She's flying now. She's forgotten all that."

"Flying? Where to?"

But the instant Gramps had stopped speaking, he had fallen fast asleep.

"Come on, Gramps! You can't fall asleep now!"

Kohashi spat out the words but then he dissolved into tears. He turned the hot tap on full and bawled his eyes out.

But that wasn't the last time. One day Kohashi was by Gramps' bed when the old man suddenly started to speak.

"There's a girl on a footbridge. She wants to fly."

"Well, that's no good."

"No, we can't have pretty girls dying, can we?"

Kohashi was about to ask Gramps if he minded ugly girls dying, but the old man hadn't finished yet.

"Her mother-in-law is a nightmare and her pay is a joke. But how can she hope to fly with all that heavy stuff on her mind?"

Kohashi wasn't sure what the old man was getting at but nodded along anyway.

"Everyone's got stuff they're worried about, I guess," he said.

"It's just like constipation! You can't let things build up! You have to get them out of your system!"

"Get them out of your system?"

Kohashi looked up and saw Yuri standing there. She looked like she'd seen a ghost.

"How did you know about the footbridge?"

Startled, Kohashi turned back to Gramps, but he was snoring as if he'd been asleep all along.

Kohashi knew that Yuri had gone through a tough time and that she'd walked out onto a footbridge and stood right in the middle for a long time. The way she talked about it, she hadn't wanted to die. It was more like she wanted to be taken to some other dimension.

"It's all a bit hazy, but I remember I had this feeling that someone was watching me the whole time and in the end, I just couldn't do it. I couldn't climb over the railings."

"Well, we can't have pretty girls dying, can we?"

Kohashi had meant it to sound like Gramps but it hadn't quite come out right. Yuri laughed, but you could tell she was trying her best not to cry.

After that, things got a little crazy. The thing about Gramps was that he was always happy to talk to anyone. A woman who worked part-time at the home told him she'd lost her purse and asked if he'd mind flying over to her house and having a look for it.

Gramps told her it was under the rack where she kept her slippers. He was right, and after that nothing was the same. The woman was so excited she called a TV station and the next thing a film crew showed up. The head of the home was pretty taken aback and refused to let them on the premises, but that wasn't the end of it. People started turning up and barging their way into the home—friends of the woman who'd lost her purse, visitors who'd heard rumors about what was going, they all wanted a piece of Gramps. And when they got him to talk, they'd be filming it on their phones and the next thing, the videos would be all over the internet.

The questions just kept coming, everything from stuff that had gone missing to racing tips. And as long as people were nice to him, Gramps would be more than happy to take the bait and just keep talking. Then as soon as someone asked him a tricky question, he'd be out like a light.

The clips on the internet were a sensation and endless streams of people kept turning up, pretending they were visiting their relatives. Most of them got turned away at the entrance but there were always a few who managed to slip through the net.

When Kohashi or Yuri found strangers talking to Gramps, they'd ask them to leave but the old man would get angry and tell them he was having a conversation and not to interrupt.

The first time Gramps raised his voice with Kohashi, Yuri went in to stop them arguing. She had tears in her eyes.

"How did it come to this?", she muttered to herself as she entered the room.

"You enjoy talking to people, I get that. But Kohashi isn't trying to get you to shut up. He just can't stand people who don't take you seriously, people who are just talking to you because it amuses them. He's worried that people are no good for you. And it's not just Kohashi. The head of the home feels the same—we all do."

The way Gramps acted around the staff changed completely. It was like he was a different person. There were no smiles anymore—he just looked angry the whole time. That day was no different. He had a face like thunder. Yuri sighed to herself. When he was like this, he just wasn't Gramps anymore. He could be any pathetic-looking old man.

Kohashi had dropped by while he was on his rounds but Gramps didn't even look at him. Kohashi was just heading out the door without having said a word when Gramps spoke.

"It's going to snow tomorrow."

It came out of nowhere. Yuri and Kohashi both turned to look at the old man.

"It's going to snow tomorrow."

Gramps said it again, his eyes tightly shut.

"Watch your step and be sure to hold your arms out. If you've got a pair of wings, you'll be fine."

Kohashi hurried over to Gramps then seemed to hesitate and looked at Yuri.

"He said something about wings, right?"

"That's what I heard."

"But before that, he said something completely normal for a change. He said it was going to snow tomorrow. I mean, I knew that already. I've seen the weather forecast."

"I think he wanted to clear the air. Things have been awful recently, with you telling him off for speaking to strangers. I'm guessing when he saw you come in, he flew out to check the newspaper headlines so he'd have something to say to you."

It was the first time Yuri had seen Kohashi laugh in a long time. A sense of relief washed over her.

It snowed the next day, just as the forecast had said it would. In fact, it snowed even more than expected. This isn't a place that gets a lot of snow and before anyone knew it, the traffic was snarled up and the trains ground to a halt. Unsurprisingly, there were no unwelcome guests trying to get into the home that day. For the first time in a long time, it was quiet, just the staff and the residents.

Kohashi spent the whole day rushing around the place, shoveling snow and checking all the doors were properly closed. He hadn't had the time to stop by and see Gramps. Then it happened. It was evening and Kohashi figured he could finally afford to take a break. He was heading up to the staff room when he suddenly got an urge to check the door at the far end of the corridor that leads to the fire escape.

He was pretty sure it would be locked, but it wouldn't hurt to double check. As he turned towards the fire escape, he saw a shadowy figure outside. A layer of snow had built up on the wired glass making it hard to see out. Kohashi rushed over to the window and peered through it. A small man stood with his back turned towards him. Kohashi gasped.

"Gramps!"

Kohashi raced over to the door but the handle was jammed and wouldn't turn. Maybe it was frozen shut. Gramps—or someone who looked a lot like him—was standing outside the railings round the fire escape platform. Except he couldn't be standing there. There was nothing there to stand on.

Yuri had heard Kohashi's shout and raced out of the reception room. Kohashi tried the door again but it felt like it was frozen solid and wouldn't budge. He hit the glass with his fist and yelled.

"What the hell are you doing? Get back to your room!"

The figure turned slowly towards them. Gramps was standing there motionless, dressed in an old-fashioned half-length winter coat. Even through the glass, his voice was perfectly clear.

"I've caused you enough trouble, so I'll be heading off now."

"Wait! Where do you think you're going?"

"Oh, I've got somewhere to be. Don't worry about that."

"It's freezing out there! Get back inside this instant!"

Yuri was shouting at the top of her voice. Right now, all she was worried about was getting Gramps back inside. She didn't have time to think about how an old man could be standing outside in midair.

"Listen, thanks for everything. I appreciate it."

Gramps bowed his head with an earnest expression which was swiftly replaced by a broad grin as he looked back up at them and gave them a thumbs-up.

"Don't worry about me. If you've got a pair of wings, you'll be fine."

As he said this, the back of his coat began to billow and bulge. Kohashi and Yuri watched in amazement through the glass as the coat ripped and its white threads were scattered, becoming one with the

falling snow. As they watched, something sprouted from Gramps' back and began to unfold until it was revealed as a pair of magnificent wings. Gramps was lifted into the air as if the wings were dragging his frail frame upwards. He hovered there for a moment before his wings flapped two or three times as if fighting against the blizzard and he rose rapidly into the sky.

By the time Kohashi finally got the door open and reeled out onto the fire escape, there was no one there. The truth is that right at this moment, Gramps had died in his bed, passing away quietly in his sleep. But everyone preferred to think of him spreading his wings and flying away. Gramps was gone, and the strange thing was, the videos on the internet and all the stories about him disappeared too, as if they had never been there. The funeral was a small intimate affair. It was as if Gramps had taken all the trouble away with him when he left.

"Where do you think he went?"

"You'd never have guessed it, but it turns out he was an angel."

"Well, if he's an angel, maybe I have a chance of making it into heaven too."

Yuri and Kohashi laughed. There must have been a vacancy for an angel wearing an old-fashioned half-length coat. And just at that moment, the snow started to fall like white threads in the wind.