



## The 2018 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize

Kurodahan Press is pleased to announce the 2018 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize, awarded for translation excellence of a selected Japanese short story into English. The winning translation will be published in the upcoming Kurodahan Press anthology *Vampires!*, and the translator given full credit under a separate contract.

### 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/wp/khpprize/2018prize.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

「パラソル」 by 井上 雅彦

The submission package, including a PDF of the story, style sheet and instructions, is available as a downloadable PDF.

### 4. Application Deadline

Translations must be received no later than September 30, 2018, 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. The winning story will be published in the upcoming Kurodahan Press *Vampires!* anthology 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.



## Style Guide for Kurodahan Translation Contest Submissions

v4 of May 2018

### 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 clearly legible font (for example, Times, Palatino, Calibri, Arial) at one size (10.5 to 12 points) throughout your document.

Use italics for emphasis.

**Do not start paragraphs with tabs. Insert blank lines ONLY in places where you want blank lines to appear in print. If you insert a blank line after every paragraph, we will assume you want the published book to have a blank line after every paragraph, and it will look silly.**

**Please do not put your name, contact information, etc. in headers or footers.**

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 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. 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! If you don't include this information it will not invalidate your entry, but if we can't locate you we can't tell you whether you won or not. And if you do win, we can't pay 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 even 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.

#### 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 DELETED** 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.

#### 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" 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.** The winning translation will be edited and laid out properly for actual publication later, but the jurors need to see a complete story to make an effective evaluation.

One last word:

**DON'T FORGET TO TRANSLATE THE TITLE, TOO!**

## パラソル

パステル・カラーの沖海の遠景のみならず、常緑樹の深い森林、芳しい果樹園と薔薇庭園、日没と黎明の雲の彩光に、蒼く冴え冴えと映える月……と、この保養地を無量の輝きで満たす色彩を、ひとつひとつ、丁寧に、掬いあげるがごとく描いてきた老婦人の絵筆のモチーフが、少し変わりはじめたのは、つい最近。

あの優雅な人々の陽傘が、砂丘のそこかしこで見られるようになってから……なのだった。

「あの陽傘どもは、やっぱり怪しい」

彼女の食器を片づけながら、彼女の同居人は言った。「何処の町から流れてきたんだか。いい男どもが、あんな色とりどりの傘を……」

「いいじゃないの。マリ。美しい趣味だわ」

キャンパスの風景に、薄荷色の傘を上塗りしながら、彼女は答えた。「それに、あの人たち、男性ばかりじゃないですよ。女の人もあるし、ごく僅かだけれど、子供もいる」

「あの顔色の悪さったら、尋常じゃありませんよ」

マリは、別の点を指摘してきた。「陽傘の色が反射しているのかと思ったけれど、そうじゃない……彼ら、どんなものを食べてるんでしょう？」

「失礼よ。それは」

「いいえ。なにかの宗教だったら、怖いじゃないませんか」

「やあ、ナオミさん、今日は」

窓から、ひよいと、薄荷色の陽傘の主が覗いた。

「今日は、どんな画が描けましたか？」

同居人は、そそくさと引込んだ。

ナオミは、くすくすと笑いながら、

「今、陽傘のことを話していたんですよ、薄荷色さん」

「ほう？」

「みなさんのこと、つい描きたくまりましたので。」

後ろを向いていたマリの肩が、大きく盛り上がり、また下がるのが見えた。

「生ける死人？」

ミントは、しばらく黙っていたが、やがて、大きく笑い出した。

「まるで、四月の小雨のようなジョークですな」

「そうなんでしょう？」

夫人は悪戯っぽく、笑った。

「そうですよ」

ミントも、くすくす笑って、「では、われらは墓に帰りますので、御用の節は、花束なぞを」

「あんたって人は」

緑の傘が去っていくと、マリがかんかんになって飛び出した。

「あんたって人は、昔から、そうだった」

「彼が、私たちの知っている死人に似ているから

ほら、橙さんに、群青さん、檸檬さんに、重さん」

「ほう。こりや、見事だ」

ミント——本名は尋ねていない——は、白い顔

——葡萄園の石灰質の土に塗されたような白さを綻ばせながら、微笑んだ。手の先で、薄荷

色の陽傘をくるくる廻している。陽傘というより、蝙蝠傘だ。英国人なら細く巻いて絶対開かず、濡

れて歩く蝙蝠。

でも、この人たちは、いつも、開いた傘の下にいる。先週、突然、現れて幾つかのコテージを借り切った、この陽傘愛好者たちは、みんな、そう

だ。

「で——私たちの噂というところ？」

「うちの同居人が言いますの」

ナオミは、にこやかに言った。「あなたがたが、生ける死人ではないかって」

でしよ」

ナオミが言った。「あの人と私が喋るのをあなたがいやがるのは、そういうことなのよ、マリ」

「どうして、蒸し返すの、ナオミ」

マリは言った。「大昔のことだわ。どうせ、彼は、あんたと結婚する気なんかなかったのよ」

「それが、御節介というんだわ」

「どうしたのよ、ナオミ。なぜ、今になって絡むの。いったい、何十年前のこと」

「仲直りするチャンスだってあったのよ。でも、あなたが手紙を隠してしまった。あの手紙が、あなたの宝宝箱のなかから——香水瓶だの、押し花だのに混ざって、出てきた時には、もう、彼は」

「何十年も前のことよ」

「そうよ」

ナオミは小さな声で言った。「彼は、とつくに、

生まれ変わってしまったわ」

「だとしても、あの傘男じゃないわね」

同居人としてではなく、今はプロ意識にめざめた看護師らしい声で、マリは言った。

「さあ、薬の時間よ」

薄荷色を先頭に、群青、藍色、橙、檸檬、金色、銀色、朱、桃色などの陽傘の群れが、そろそろと、コテージから出てきた。

海の見える緑の芝生まで来ると、一本の傘を地になてる。蕁<sup>ウライオレット</sup>色の陽傘だった。

それぞれが、深々と頭を下げたところに、老婦人がゆっくり歩いてきた。

気配に気づいて、薄荷色<sup>ミント</sup>が振り向いた。そして、会釈した。

「どうなさったのですか？」

ナオミが尋ねた。

った。

「あなたは……？」

「私は」

ナオミは言った。「もう、長く保たないのです。

……ご存知だったのでしょうか」

ミントは、目を見開いて、頷いた。

「……はい」

「それなら、お願い」

ミントは、他の仲間のほうを向いた。

傘たちが、ゆっくりと頷いた。

「いいでしょう……」

ミントが、ナオミに言った。「では、僕の傘のなかに」

雨の日の接吻<sup>せつぶん</sup>のようにも見えた。

蜘蛛<sup>ちゅう</sup>に捕まった蝶<sup>ちょう</sup>のようにも見えた。

薄荷<sup>ミント</sup>色の傘のなかで、ナオミの軀<sup>からだ</sup>が、ぶるぶると震えた。

「われわれは、このために来たのです」

ミントが答えた。「もともと、われわれは、旅から旅の生活です。ひとつのところには留<sup>とど</sup>まらない。ただ——蕁<sup>ウライオレット</sup>色<sup>カラー</sup>さんは、そんな暮らしにも疲れたんです。そこで、生まれて、育ったこの土地に——」

「そうだったんですか……」

ナオミが、頭を垂れた。

「では、あなたがたは」

「はい」

ミントが、陽傘ごと頷<sup>うなず</sup>いた。「また、旅に出なければなりません」

「それならば」

ナオミが言った。「私も連れて行って、くださらないでしょうか」

ミントは、目を見開いた。驚いて、というよりも、彼女の顔を、しげしげと眺めるためのようだった。

外に出た時、ナオミは、一本の傘を手にしていった。

「今日から、君は薔薇色<sup>ローズ</sup>さんだね」

ナオミは、薔薇色の傘を開いた。

新しい色彩を加えた陽傘の群は、果樹園<sup>こみち</sup>の小径<sup>みち</sup>を西へ向かった。

「ナオミ。——何処<sup>どこ</sup>に行ったのよ」

マリの声が、洋館じゅうに響きわたる。「いったい、いつまで、すねているの」

夕方から強くなってきた風の音に、少し怖くなったマリが、沖海<sup>おき</sup>に繋がる空の端を見あげると、あまりにも美しい日没の光彩を遮って、影が舞った。まるで大きな蝙蝠<sup>こうもり</sup>が羽ばたくように、蕁<sup>ウライオレット</sup>色の陽傘が一本、優雅に、空を旋回していたのである。



ID	Score	Rank	ID	Score	Rank
2018.092	160	1	2018.040	120	47
2018.025	159	2	2018.044	120	47
2018.064	157	3	2018.047	120	47
2018.033	152	4	2018.026	119	51
2018.054	152	4	2018.046	119	51
2018.051	144	6	2018.083	119	51
2018.016	141	7	2018.011	118	54
2018.058	140	8	2018.057	118	54
2018.008	139	9	2018.076	118	54
2018.013	139	9	2018.077	118	54
2018.056	139	9	2018.035	117	58
2018.024	138	12	2018.079	117	58
2018.069	137	13	2018.084	117	58
2018.005	136	14	2018.062	116	61
2018.006	136	14	2018.073	116	61
2018.090	135	16	2018.074	116	61
2018.002	133	17	2018.081	116	61
2018.078	132	18	2018.004	115	65
2018.088	132	18	2018.042	115	65
2018.001	131	20	2018.059	115	65
2018.039	131	20	2018.043	114	68
2018.052	131	20	2018.060	114	68
2018.029	130	23	2018.045	112	70
2018.048	130	23	2018.061	112	70
2018.089	130	23	2018.065	112	70
2018.093	130	23	2018.012	111	73
2018.021	129	27	2018.030	111	73
2018.055	129	27	2018.034	111	73
2018.071	129	27	2018.082	111	73
2018.087	129	27	2018.018	109	77
2018.032	128	31	2018.080	108	78
2018.068	127	32	2018.017	107	79
2018.070	127	32	2018.085	107	79
2018.072	127	32	2018.027	106	81
2018.091	126	35	2018.037	105	82
2018.049	125	36	2018.014	104	83
2018.050	125	36	2018.031	104	83
2018.075	125	36	2018.022	103	85
2018.019	123	39	2018.053	103	85
2018.020	123	39	2018.009	102	87
2018.038	123	39	2018.094	102	87
2018.063	123	39	2018.067	101	89
2018.041	122	43	2018.066	100	90
2018.007	121	44	2018.015	98	91
2018.036	121	44	2018.028	98	91
2018.086	121	44	2018.003	97	93
2018.010	120	47	2018.023	90	94

## Parasol

The pastel hues of the sea in the distance. The dense copse of evergreens. The ever-aromatic orchards and rose garden. The light hitting the clouds just so, at sunset and daybreak. The moon, a cheerful blue... All as if the old woman's brush had soaked up every tint of the health resort's landscape in order to transfer the boundless glitter and gleam onto her works, the motifs of which had begun to change in recent days. Yes, ever since she'd come to spot the elegant troop's parasols dotting the dunes.

"Something not quite right about those people with the umbrellas."

The painter cleared dishes from the table as her housemate complained.

"I mean, where on earth do they come scuttling in from, even? No decent man would be caught dead with those garish things..."

"Oh, let them be, Mari. I find them lovely," replied the woman, now adding a mint-colored parasol to her canvas. "Besides, it's not just men. Women too, and even the odd child."

Mari changed tack.

"Have you seen their pallid faces, though? Downright unnatural. I thought at first it might be the light reflecting off those horrid things they carry, but no. ...Could it be their diet, perhaps?"

"Now that's just unkind."

"Nonsense. What if they turned out to be a cult, or the like? I can't stand the thought."

"Hey there, Miss Naomi."

The owner of the mint-colored parasol poked his face through the open window.

"What did you manage to paint today?"

Mari nearly leapt from her seat in quick retreat.

"Goodness, we were just having a conversation about your parasols, Mint," said Naomi with a chuckle.

"Is that so?"

"I was inspired to immortalize you all, in fact. See? There's Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"My, my. Now isn't that something."

The man only known as Mint broke into a wide smile, his face no less white than had he coated it with a vineyard's chalky earth. The mint-colored parasol spun between his fingers, though in truth it was an ordinary folding umbrella. The sort the English were wont to carry yet never open while out on a stroll, even if it meant a proper drenching.

These particular people, however, could always be found beneath theirs. The passel of parasol enthusiasts had descended on the resort just the previous week, renting out a number of cottages.

"Gossiping about us, were you?"

"My friend here was, at any rate," said Naomi, beaming. "She wonders if you might in fact be the living dead."

Mari was facing away from the conversation, but at this, her shoulders bounced up.

"The living dead, are we?"

Mint paused a beat but then burst out laughing.

"You mean, because we're like May flowers, brought back to life by April showers?"

"Aren't you, though?" teased Naomi, chuckling.

"Without a doubt," laughed Mint. "So be sure to bring a bouquet or two once we return to the grave."

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"I swear, you can be so..."

No sooner had Mint departed than Mari started in.

“And what’s worse, you’ve always been this way.”

“It must be because he reminds me of you-know-who, rest his soul. Which also explains why you don’t like me talking to him, Mari.”

“Good gracious, Naomi. Why dredge up the past? What’s done is done, and besides, you know full-well he never had any intention of making you his wife.”

“Only thanks to a certain busybody.”

“Must you pick this fight now, after all this time? How many decades has it been?”

“We might’ve reconciled, if only you hadn’t hid those letters in that jewel box of yours, amongst the perfume, the pressed flowers... And by the time I laid eyes on the letters, he was already...”

“It was a lifetime ago.”

“It was.”

Naomi’s voice dropped.

“Yes, he’d long since made that fresh start.

“Whatever the case, the umbrella man isn’t him. And now it’s medicine time,” said Mari as if coming to her senses, sounding less like Naomi’s housemate and more like a professional caregiver.

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Ultramarine, indigo, apricot, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, pink, and so on; Mint led the procession of parasols streaming from the cottages, and when they reached a spot of lawn with a view of the water, violet was planted fast in the earth. The crowd was in the middle of a deep bow when the old woman approached slowly from behind. Sensing her presence, Mint turned and acknowledged her with a tilt of his head.

“What are you all doing?” asked Naomi.

“This is why we’ve come,” came Mint’s answer. “By nature, we move from one journey to the next, never staying put for long. But Violet is weary of that life, and has decided to end it here, where they were born and raised.

“I see...” said Naomi, hanging her head. “So the rest of you will be moving on?”

“Yes.”

Mint’s parasol nodded with him.

“We must be off on the next journey.”

“In that case...”

Naomi hesitated.

“Well, I suppose it would be ridiculous to ask you to take me with you?”

Mint’s eyes grew wide – not in surprise, but rather as if to examine the woman’s face.

“You want to come...?”

“Mhm. I don’t have long. ...But then, you already knew as much?”

Another nod, eyes bulging.

“...We did.”

“Please. May I?”

Mint turned to his companions, whose parasols bowed in assent.

“Very well... Under mine, then. Come on.”

Like a lover stealing a kiss in the rain or perhaps a butterfly snared by a spider, Naomi ducked under Mint’s parasol, and her entire body shuddered. Upon emerging, she held a parasol of her own.

“Starting today, you will be ‘Rose.’”

She opened up her namesake.

With a new hue added to its palette, the group turned west, towards the orchard path.

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“Naomi? Where’ve you gone now?” echoed Mari’s voice throughout the house.

“It won’t do to sulk about this forever.”

The howls of the strong evening winds frightened her a bit, and Mari stared out at the seam between sea and sky where shadows danced, obscuring the full splendor of a gorgeous sunset.

Like a great bat with wings spread, a single violet parasol spun gracefully into the waiting sky.

Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

It wasn't just the pastel sea, the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the illumination of the clouds at sunset and at sunrise by the brilliantly clear, bluish moon... The motifs of the old woman's brush, painted delicately, scooped up, one by one out of the hues of immeasurable light contained in the health resort had begun, only recently, to change.

That is, ever since those elegant figures had begun to be seen here and there on the sand dunes with their parasols.

"Those folks with the parasols are shady, huh," said her roommate as she put away the kitchen utensils. "Where did they come from? They're fine guys, but all those colored umbrellas..."

"What's the big deal? Mari. They have lovely taste," she replied, painting a mint colored umbrella onto the scenery on her canvas. "And you know, they aren't all men. There's women, and though there are only a few, there are kids as well."

"Their complexion is terrible. It's not normal," Mari said, marking a separate point. "I thought the color of their parasols were being reflected onto their faces, but that's not it. What on earth could they be eating?"

"How rude. That kind of talk."

"Please. If it's some kind of cult, you'd be scared, wouldn't you?"

"Hey, Naomi-san, good day to you," called the owner of the mint parasol, who had suddenly appeared, peering in through the window. "What kind of picture did you paint today?"

Her roommate quickly sunk back from the window.

Naomi replied, giggling, "We were just talking about the parasols, Mint-san."

"Oh?"

"And well, I just got to wanting to draw everyone's. Look, there's Orange-san, Blue-san, there's Lemon-san, and Violet-san."

"Wow. They're magnificent."

Mint, whose real name she'd never asked, and whose face was as white as if it had been plastered with the chalky dirt of the vineyard, warmed and grinned. The mint-colored parasol twirled round and round in his fingers. It seemed larger, more arched and more bat-like than a parasol should. It was the sort of umbrella an Englishman would take out for a walk, winding it tight and refusing to open it even if it meant getting wet.

But they were always underneath their unfurled umbrellas. It had been the week before when some number of them appeared out of the blue and reserved cottages—all of them devotees of the parasol.

"And—you've heard the rumor about us?"

"From my roommate, yes," she said, grinning. "That you might all be the living dead."

Turned away, Mari's shoulders visibly heaved up and then back down again.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a moment before bursting out laughing. "It's like the joke about April showers, isn't it."

"It is?" she said, grinning mischievously.

"It is," Mint giggled. "Well, we must return to our graves, and therefore, you should bring us flowers or something."

"What is it with you," said Mari, bursting forth, fuming, as the green umbrella moved off. "What is it with you, that you've always been like this."

"It's because he looks like someone we know who died, isn't it," said Naomi. "You just don't like that I talk to him because of that, Mari."

“Why do you have to go and bring that up again, Naomi?” said Mari. “That was such a long time ago. And anyway it’s not like he wanted to marry you or anything.”

“This is what they call sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

“Come on, Naomi. You want to get into it now? God, how many decades has it been?”

“We had a chance to make up you know. But you hid my letter. And by the time it got out of your jewel box—mixed in with all your pressed flowers and bottles of perfume, he was already—”

“That was a long time ago.”

“Yeah,” said Naomi in a small voice. “A long time ago now he was already reborn into a new life.”

“Even if he was, he’s not one of these umbrella men.”

She spoke now, not like a roommate, but with the authority of a nurse, “Well, it’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint in the lead, Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, Peach and the rest, all in a flock of parasols departed their cottages one by one.

They came to the point on the lawn in which the ocean just became visible where a single umbrella had been thrust into the earth. It was Violet’s.

As they each in turn bowed their heads deeply to the parasol, the old woman walked slowly out to them. Becoming aware of her presence, Mint turned to face her and gave her a nod.

“What happened?” asked Naomi.

“We came here for this,” replied Mint. “We are travelers who live on the road. We do not linger in any one place. Only, Violet-san became tired of such a life, and he wanted to be at the land of his birth—”

“I see…” said Naomi, her head flagging. “And so, you will all.”

“Yes,” Mint nodded along with his parasol. “We must depart once more.”

“If you must,” said Naomi. “If I asked you to take me with you, would you?”

Mint’s eyes widened. Rather than showing shock, it seemed he intended only to better fix his gaze on her.

“You would…?”

“I don’t have much longer,” she said, pausing. “You knew that, didn’t you.”

Mint’s eyes grew wide and he nodded, “Yes.”

“So, please.”

Mint turned to the others.

“Any objections?” Then, to Naomi, “Alright, enter under my umbrella.”

It would have looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It would have looked like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Beneath Mint’s umbrella, Naomi’s husk trembled. When she came out, she had an umbrella in her hand.

“From now on, you will be Rose-san.”

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

The flock, complete with their new color, turned West on the small path through the orchard.

“Naomi! Where are you!?” Mari’s voice echoed through the house. “Come on, how long are you gonna sulk?”

Frightened by the crash of the strong evening wind, Mari, looked out to where the sea met the sky and saw that the beautiful crepuscular light of dusk was being interrupted by the dancing of shadows. A violet parasol was circling elegantly in the sky, almost as if upon the wings of a great bat.

## Parasols (Inoue Masahiko)

Distant seascapes in pastel hues, thickly growing evergreen forests, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, brightly tinted clouds at dawn and sunset, the pale light of the moon... The motifs in the old lady's paintings of the health resort were painstakingly filled out each time in infinitely shining colours, as if scooped up from the depths of the canvas. Just recently, they'd begun to exhibit a subtle change.

It started when she observed an elegant group's parasols appearing here and there among the sand dunes.

"There's definitely something fishy about those parasol types," her roommate said while clearing away her plates. "Where have they drifted here from? Good-looking men carrying sun umbrellas, and they're all different colours..."

"Why shouldn't they, Mari? I think it's exquisite," she replied, adding a final coat to a mint-green parasol in the background of her canvas. "And they aren't all men. There are women too, and even a very few children."

"Those pale faces aren't normal," Her roommate took up another line of attack. "I thought it was the colours from the sunshades reflecting but it isn't... I wonder what they eat."

"That's rude."

"Not at all. Wouldn't you be terrified if it was some kind of cult?"

"Naomi! Hello." The owner of the mint parasol suddenly appeared at the window. "What have you been painting today?"

Mari hurriedly withdrew. Giggling, Naomi said, "We were talking about your parasols, Mr Mint."

"Indeed?"

"Just because I felt the sudden desire to paint you all. Look here. Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"How marvellous." Mint—she had not asked his real name—smiled broadly across his wan face, which was as white as if it had been dusted with a vineyard's limestone soil. He twirled the handle of the mint parasol with the tips of his fingers. It was more like an umbrella than a sunshade. The kind of bat-like contraption a British man would always keep tightly furled, getting ever wetter as he walked.

Yet these parasol enthusiasts all kept theirs constantly open. The group had appeared out of nowhere last week, and started renting several cottages.

"And so, what is the gossip about us?"

"My roommate suspects," Naomi's eyes twinkled, "That you are the living dead." Mari had turned her back, but Naomi saw her shoulders rise high and then fall again.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a few moments before bursting with merriment. "How charming. A joke very much like an April shower."

"Isn't it?" Naomi laughed mischievously.

"It is," Mint chortled. "Well, we must return to the grave, so if you need to see us, please bring flowers."

"You," Mari dashed over in a fury as the green parasol receded. "You've always been like that, since the old days."

"It must be because he looks like someone dead we once knew. That's why you hate it when I talk with him, Mari."

"Why drag that up again, Naomi? That's ancient history. He had no thought of marrying you."

"It's nothing to do with you."

“What’s wrong with you, Naomi? Why get caught up in that old business? It was decades ago.”

“We could have made it up again. But you hid his letter. When I found it in your jewel box, among the perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he was already—”

“It was decades ago.”

“It was,” Naomi murmured. “He moved on to his next life so long ago.”

“Even if that’s the case, he’s not that parasol person.” Then, assuming the tone of a professional nurse rather than a housemate, Mari said, “It’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint in the lead, the crowd of parasols streamed out of the cottages: Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, Peach, and more. When they arrived at a green lawn with a view of the ocean, they planted a parasol in the earth. It was violet. As the gathered members were bowing deeply, the old lady shuffled over. Sensing her presence, Mint turned and greeted her.

“What happened?” Naomi asked.

“This is why we came here,” Mint replied. “Ours is essentially a life of travel. We do not rest in one place. Yet Violet was weary of endless wandering, and so we came to where he was born and raised—”

“So that’s why.” Naomi lowered her own head. “And now your group will…”

“Yes,” Mint nodded, simultaneously dipping his parasol. “We must leave on our travels again.”

“In that case,” Naomi said. “Please take me with you.”

Mint opened his eyes wide, but less from surprise it seemed than to scrutinise her face. “You…?”

“I don’t have long left,” Naomi said. “Perhaps you know that.”

Again, Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded. “Yes.”

“Then, please.”

Mint turned to his companions and the gathered parasols dipped slowly in agreement. “Of course,” he said to Naomi, “Would you step under my shade?”

Naomi’s body shook beneath Mint’s parasol. It was like a kiss on a rainy day, or else the struggles of a butterfly trapped by a spider. When she emerged, she too held a parasol.

“From this day, you are Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose-coloured parasol, adding a new shade to the band that now headed westward along an orchard lane.

“Naomi, where are you?” Mari’s voice echoed through the villa. “How long are you going to sulk for?” As the wind’s howling grew louder that evening, Mari began to feel a little scared. When she looked up to where the sky joined the sea, a shadow danced against the spectacular colours of sunset. Like a giant bat flapping its wings, a lone violet parasol circled gracefully through the air.



## Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

The pastel hues of a distant coastline. Deep evergreen forests. Sweetly scented orchards and blooming rose gardens. A shining blue moon, radiant in the sun-rimmed clouds of dusk and dawn. These motifs, inspired by the endless brilliance of color that filled this health resort, dripped delicately from the old woman's paintbrush. However, a quiet shift had begun in recent days...ever since she first laid eyes on the cluster of elegant people and their sun parasols dotted across the sand dunes.

"Those umbrella-loving newcomers are nothing but bad news," the woman's housemate said as she cleared their table. "After all, they suddenly came flooding here from who-knows-where, and I don't see how men who carry around colorful umbrellas like that can *possibly* be decent."

"Come now, Mari. I think it's lovely," the older woman replied as she added glaze to the mint parasol on the canvas before her. "Besides, it isn't just men. I saw women and a few children as well."

"Even their poor complexions seem unnatural!" Mari continued on.

"I thought perhaps it was from the color reflecting off their umbrellas, but there must be another reason. What in the world do you think they eat?"

"Don't be rude."

"I'm not being rude. I mean, what if they turn out to be a cult or something?"

"Hello there, Miss Naomi."

The owner of a mint parasol was suddenly peering at them through the window.

"What have you painted for us today?" he asked.

Mari immediately drew back from him.

However, Naomi giggled and replied, "We were *just* talking about the parasols, Mint."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Well, I had felt inspired to paint everyone. Look, here's Orange, Ultramarine, Lemon, and Violet."

"Incredible. You've got some real talent."

Mint's pale face (she had never asked his real name) broke out into a chalky smile the shade of calcareous earth scattered across a vineyard. He twirled the parasol that carried his namesake between his hands. It was actually more of a western-style umbrella whose shape was reminiscent of a bat. Any proper English man or woman would have kept it tightly bound until a rainy day.

Yet, these people, who had appeared out of nowhere only a week ago to rent a few of the cottages, were always under the shade of their beloved parasols.

"So...I take it we're the talk of the town, then?"

"Well, according to my housemate," Naomi began cheerfully, "you might be the undead."

Mari had her back toward them, but Naomi saw her shoulders sigh heavily.

“The undead…?”

Mint was silent for a moment, then burst into laughter.

“Wow, can’t say I saw that coming! Thanks, I needed a good laugh.”

“Oh? Are you sure it’s a joke?” the woman questioned mischievously with a smile.

“Yes, I’m sure,” Mint chuckled back. “Well, my comrades and I must return to our graves. If you’d like to call upon us, perhaps you could bring an offering of flowers?”

“You…!”

When the green parasol had finally left them, Mari exploded all at once.

“You’re always like this!”

“Mari, you’re only acting out because he looks like a certain *someone* we know who passed away,” Naomi retorted, “and that’s why you get irritable whenever I talk to him.”

“Why bring up the past now, Naomi?” she shot back. “That was years ago, and he wasn’t even going to marry you!”

“Thanks to your meddling.”

“What’s gotten into you? Why fight about something that happened decades ago?”

“Because there was still a chance for us to make amends. Yet, you hid the letter among the perfume bottles and pressed flowers in your jewelry box. By the time it was fished out, he had already…”

“As I said, that was decades ago.”

“Yes,” Naomi whispered quietly. “And now, he’s finally been reborn.”

“Even if that’s true, I assure you he is *not* that man with the umbrella.”

The trained nurse in Mari awakened and colored her voice.

“Come now. It’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint at the forefront, a stream of parasols in virtually every color—including Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, and Peach—filed out of the cottages. When they arrived at the verdant lawn overlooking the sea, one parasol stood up from the ground. It was Violet’s. An old woman slowly walked toward them as they lowered their heads with respect.

Noticing the newcomer, Mint turned around and dipped his head in acknowledgment.

“What is happening?” Naomi asked.

“This is the reason we’ve come,” Mint answered. “We have long been nomads, never resting in one place for long. However…Violet tires of that life. They wish to return to this land, the land they were born and raised.”

“I see…” Naomi hung her head. “Then, you and everyone else will…”

“Yes,” Mint and his parasol nodded affirmatively. “We must journey once again.”

“In that case,” Naomi began, “will you take me with you?”

Mint’s eyes grew wide. Not as much in surprise, but rather as if he were trying to get a better look at her.

“You wish to…?”

“I do,” she said. “I’m not long for this world…but you already knew that, didn’t you?”

Mint’s eyes widened even further, and he nodded. “…I did.”

“Then, please. I beg of you.”

Mint turned toward his companions, and they slowly nodded their consent. "Very well," he said to her. "Come, enter my parasol."

It was like a kiss on a rainy day. A butterfly caught in the spider's web.

Naomi's body trembled under Mint's parasol. When she returned to the outside world, she held one of her very own.

"From today onward, you are Rose."

Naomi opened her umbrella. The group headed west down a narrow path through the orchard with their newest member in tow.

"Naomi! Naomi, where are you?" Mari called out, her voice reverberating through the house. "How long do you plan on sulking?"

The sound of the fierce wind that had been blowing since early evening rattled as Mari's fear rose. She looked out toward the furthest corners of the sky that met the coastal horizon. Shadows danced against the striking sunset, and there, like the flutter of a large bat's wings, a single violet parasol twirled elegantly in the sky.

Parasol  
Inoue Masahiko

The old woman had slowly and carefully painted pastel-colored ocean views, deep evergreen forests, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the sun breaking through the clouds at dawn, bright, clear moons shining overhead. Her paintings brought so much color and vibrancy to the rest home. But lately, they had begun taking on a different theme.

It all started when she began seeing the people carrying those graceful looking parasols pop up everywhere on the beach.

"I don't know about those parasol people. They're suspicious!" Her roommate said as she cleaned up the old woman's dishes. "Who knows where they came from? What kind of grown men go around carrying those gaudy umbrellas, anyway?"

"What's the matter with it, Mari? I think they're beautiful." The old woman answered as she added more light green paint to the parasol on the canvas. "And it's not just men. There are women and a few children with them, too."

"They're not normal, I tell you. Why, have you seen how sickly pale they are?" Mari pointed out, focusing on something different now. "At first I thought it was just the color of those parasols bouncing off onto their faces, but it's not! Who knows what those people eat."

"Now you're being rude."

"I am not. Aren't you scared they belong to some kind of cult?"

"Hello there, Naomi." Suddenly, the owner of the mint green parasol popped his head through the window. "What are you painting today?"

Her roommate immediately withdrew, turning away from them.

Naomi answered with a chuckle. "We were just talking about your parasols, Mr. Mint!"

"Oh, is that right?"

"Yes, I just couldn't stop myself from painting you all. See, there's Mr. Orange, and Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, Miss Violet..."

"Well, will you look at that! Just beautiful." Mr. Mint's (she hadn't asked his real name) very pale face eased into a smile. He twirled his mint green parasol between his fingertips. It actually reminded her more of those huge rain umbrellas than a parasol, the kind that looked like a big bat spreading its wings. For some reason, people never seemed to open those up in the rain, though; they just walked around getting wet.

But these folks always had theirs open. They showed up out of the blue the week before and rented those cottages, and they all seemed to have an affinity for parasols.

"So, you were talking about us?"

"That's right. You know, my roommate..." Naomi smiled. "She thinks maybe you folks are the living dead."

She glanced over at Mari, whose shoulders jumped in response, then slowly sunk back down again.

"The living dead?" Mr. Mint fell silent for a moment, then finally burst out laughing. "That's some kind of joke! Like 'a little rainstorm!'"

"You think so?" The old woman teased with a laugh.

"That's right." Mr. Mint chuckled, too. "Well, we'd best be getting back into our graves now. Feel free to leave us flowers anytime."

"I can't believe you!" Mari rushed over as soon as the green umbrella disappeared, and she was fit to be tied. "You know, you've always been like this!"

"He looks just like a certain someone we knew who passed on, doesn't he?" Naomi remarked. "That's the real reason you don't like me talking to him, Mari."

"Now, why do you have to dredge that up again, Naomi?" Mari asked. "That was a long time ago. He was never going to marry you, anyway!"

"Only because you had to meddle!"

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why bring this up again now? That was decades ago!"

"I had a chance to make things right with him, but you hid that letter from me. You hid it in your keepsake box with your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers, and by the time I found it, he was already—"

"Decades ago!"

"That's right." Naomi's voice was quiet now. "By the time I found it, he'd already passed on and been reborn."

"Well, he certainly wasn't reincarnated into that umbrella man!" Mari's tone of voice suddenly changed from that of her roommate to her nurse. "It's time to take your medicine now."

The group of people with the parasols slowly came out of their cottages, one by one. Mr. Mint appeared first, followed by Mr. Blue, Mr. Navy, Mr. Orange, Mr. Lemon, Miss Gold, Miss Silver, Mr. Red, and Miss Peach.

They walked up to the grassy hill where they could see the ocean, and drove one of the parasols straight into the earth. It was the violet one.

The old woman slowly walked over to them as they all deeply bowed their heads.

Mr. Mint turned, sensing her presence. Then he bowed slightly to greet her.

"Did something happen?" Naomi asked him.

"This is why we came here." Mr. Mint explained. "We've always been nomads, always traveling. Never stopping to stay in one place. But Miss Violet was tired of living this way. So she wanted to come back to the place where she was born and raised and..."

"Oh, I see..." Naomi bent her head. "So then you folks will...?"

"Yes." Mr. Mint nodded, his parasol bobbing up and down, too. "We have to continue our journey."

"Well..." Naomi started. "Couldn't you please take me along with you?"

Mr. Mint widened his eyes. But it seemed like he did it to get a better look at her face rather than because he was surprised. "You...?"

"I..." Naomi paused briefly. "I don't have much time left. But you knew that, didn't you?"

Mint nodded, his eyes still big and wide. "...Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint turned and looked over at his friends.

The umbrellas all slowly bobbed up and down in unison.

"Very well, then," he said to Naomi. "Come under my umbrella."

It was like a kiss in the rain.

Or a butterfly, trapped in a spider's web.

Naomi's body trembled and shook beneath Mr. Mint's umbrella.

And when she emerged, she was carrying an umbrella of her own.

"Now, you are Miss Rose."

Naomi opened up her rose-colored umbrella.

The new color joined the group of parasols as they walked down the orchard path, heading west.

"Naomi? Where are you?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the house. "Don't tell me you're still mad at me."

The wind had grown stronger since evening fell, and Mari was beginning to feel a little frightened. She cast her gaze towards the horizon, which melded seamlessly into the sea. A shadow suddenly interrupted the dazzlingly gorgeous sunset. A single rose-colored parasol spun gracefully through the sky, reminding her of a large bat spreading out its wings.

## Parasols

by Inoue Masahiko

It was not only the pastel-coloured expanse of ocean, but also the deep forest of evergreen trees, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the clouds flaring scarlet at dusk and dawn, the moon gleaming pale and cold... The views filled the hospice with an immeasurable radiance, and when the old lady painted them, appraising each with care and setting them one by one to the page, she seemed to distil the very light from the scenes. It was only recently that the motifs she painted had begun to change.

Yes, it was when the elegant figures began appearing with their parasols here and there among the sand dunes.

"I must say that I find them very queer."

The old lady's companion was tidying her dishes for her. "Where in the world could they be from? Grown-up men like them, parading around with such gaudy parasols..."

"I don't mind, Marie. I find them beautiful."

The old lady dabbed mint-coloured paint onto a parasol on her canvas. "Besides, they aren't all men. Some of them are women, and though there aren't many, there are children too."

"Well, there's something odd about how pale they are."

Marie changed tack. "I thought it might be the reflection of their parasols' colours, but that wasn't it... What do they eat to look like that?"

"That was rude."

"Not at all. Wouldn't you be worried if they turned out to be some sort of cult?"

"Well, hello there, Ms. Naomi."

The owner of the mint-coloured parasol suddenly poked his head in through the window. "What sort of picture have you painted today?"

The old lady's companion hurriedly withdrew.

Chuckling, Naomi said:

"We were just talking about your parasols, Mint."

"Oh?"

"When I saw you all I just had to paint you. Look, here's Orange, and Ultramarine, and Lemon, and Violet."

"Well. It's excellent."

His face—as white as if it had been daubed with the limestone soil of vineyards—broke into a smile. The man, Mint—the old lady had not asked for his name—was spinning his mint-coloured parasol between his fingers. It wasn't really a parasol: more like an umbrella, sleek and shaped like a bat, the sort an Englishman might keep tightly bound and never open, preferring to go wet—like a wet bedraggled bat.

These people, however, were always under their parasols. There was not one of them—these parasol lovers who had appeared out of nowhere and booked up several cottages last week—who was not so.

"So—what were you saying about us?"

"It was my housemate who said it."

Naomi was smiling. "She said you looked like the living dead."

Marie was facing the other way, but you could see her shoulders jolt upwards, then slowly go down again.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent for a while, but at last he broke out into a guffaw.

"If that was a joke, it was one like an April shower."

"Wasn't it completely?"

The old lady laughed with mischief.

"Completely!"

Mint chuckled. "In which case, we have graves to return to. If you have further need of us, do bring a bouquet."

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"I can't believe you."

The moment the green parasol vanished from sight, Marie burst out, fuming:

"You've *always* been like this."

"Well, doesn't he look like a dead person we both know?"

Naomi said, "That's why you don't like me talking to him, Marie."

"Why must you bring it up, Naomi?"

Marie said, "It happened so long ago. It's not like he ever thought of marrying you anyway."

"That was something you could have left for me to judge."

"Really, Naomi. Why do you have to go back over it now? How many decades has it been?"

"We had every chance of getting back together. But you had to hide the letter. You had to put it in your little treasure chest—mixed in with your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers—and when you finally took it out, he was already—"

"Decades!"

"You're right."

Naomi's voice was subdued. "He would have been reborn long ago."

"Well, if he was, it certainly wasn't into that parasol man."

Marie spoke again, this time aiming for a voice not of the old lady's housemate but with the professional tone of a nurse:

"Come on, it's time for your medicine."

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One by one, with the mint-coloured at their head, the group of parasols, ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermilion, peach, and more descended from their cottages.

When they reached the start of the grass, from where you could see the ocean, they stopped and planted a single parasol in the ground. It was the violet-coloured parasol.

Deeply, each one lowered his or her head. The old lady slowly made her way toward them.

The mint-coloured parasol sensed her approach and turned to face her. He nodded in greeting.

"What has happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is what we came for."

Mint said, "We ordinarily live from journey to journey: we never stay in one place for long. However—Violet grew weary of that way of life. He wanted to come back here, to see for one last time the place where he was born and raised, before he—"

"One last time..."

Naomi hung her head.

"And that means that you will soon be..."

"Yes."

Mint nodded with his whole parasol. "We must soon be journeying again."

"If so—"

Naomi continued: "Would you be kind enough to—take me with you?"

Mint widened his eyes. But rather than being in shock, it seemed more as if he was intently studying her face.

"Are you...?"

"I am."

Naomi said, "I do not have much longer left... as I'm sure you were aware."

Mint nodded, his eyes wide.

"... I was."



“So please take me.”

Mint turned to the other people with parasols.

The parasols bent down in a slow nod.

“Very well...”

Mint said to Naomi: “Come inside my parasol.”

It was like a kiss shared on a rainy day.

It was like a butterfly caught in a spider’s web.

In the casket of the mint-coloured parasol, Naomi’s body shuddered.

When she stepped out, she was holding a parasol of her own.

“I suppose from today onwards, you’re Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose-coloured parasol.

With one more brilliant colour added to their midst, the group of parasols went down the orchard path to the west.

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“Naomi!... Where could she have gone?”

Marie’s voice echoed through the cottage. “How much longer are you going to sulk for?”

The wind had been growing stronger since the evening, and when, a little frightened by its noise, Marie looked up at where ocean touched the hem of the sky, she saw a shadow dancing and blocking out the rays of an ineffably beautiful sunset. Looking like a large bat flapping its wings, a single elegant violet-coloured parasol was spinning in the air.

*Parasols*

By Inoue Masahiko

She painted the colours that flooded the sanatorium with immeasurable light as if patiently scooping them up one by one... not only the scene of the distant pastel sea, but also the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the light through the clouds at sunset and sunrise, and the moon glowing clear and blue. It's only recently that the subject of the old painter's brush has started to change somewhat. When the parasols appeared all over the beach in the hands of those elegant figures... that's when.

"I'm really not sure about those folk with the parasols," said her friend while tidying away the dishes. "Where have they come in from? Parasols of so many colours, in the hands of gentlemen..."

"I don't see what's wrong with them, Mari. I think it's a nice fashion," she replied, painting a mint-green parasol into the scene on the canvas. "And they aren't all men, anyway. There are women as well, and children, if only a few."

Mari changed tack, "What about their awful complexions, they're unnatural. I thought it was the colours from the parasols reflecting off of them, but that isn't it... What must they be eating?"

"You're being rude."

"No I'm not. What if it's some kind of cult, wouldn't that be terrifying?"

The owner of the mint green parasol suddenly looked in through the window. "Ah, hello Naomi. What have you painted today?"

Her friend hastily withdrew as Naomi chuckled and replied, "We were talking about parasols just now, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"I've become quite taken with painting you all. Look, there's Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"Well, isn't this splendid."

Mint – they hadn't asked his real name – broke into a smile, his face as pale as if coated in the chalky earth of a vineyard. He spun the mint-green parasol round and round with his fingertips. It was perhaps more of an umbrella than a parasol, unfurled like the wings of a bat – a bat that an Englishman would keep wound up tight as he walked, preferring to get wet than ever thinking to open it. But every single one of these parasol enthusiasts who had suddenly appeared a week before and rented out some of the cottages, they were always to be found under an open parasol.

"So, what were you saying about us?"

"My friend was saying," Naomi said cheerfully, "that you might be the living dead!" Mari, who had turned away, flinched visibly – her shoulders hunching all the way up before falling back down.

After remaining silent for some time, Mint finally burst into laughter, "The living dead? That's quite the bolt from the blue."

The lady laughed mischievously, "Aren't you?"

"Of course we are," chuckled Mint, "Well, I'd best get back to the graveyard. If you need me, leave a bouquet."

"What are you like?" Once the mint parasol had left, Mari jumped out in a rage. "Why do you always have to be like that?!"

"Well he does look like a certain deceased gentleman we know, doesn't he?" said Naomi. "If you don't want me to talk to him, you should say so, Mari."

“Why bring that up again, Naomi?” Mari asked. “That’s ancient history. He didn’t want to marry you anyway.”

“You were meddling!”

“What is this all about, Naomi? Why get into all that again now? For heaven’s sake, that was decades ago!”

“We had a chance to reconcile. But you hid his letters. By the time I found them in your jewellery box - all mixed in with your perfumes and pressed flowers - he’d already…”

“That was decades ago.”

“That’s right,” Naomi said quietly, he died and was reborn a long time ago now.”

“In any case, that man with the parasol isn’t him.” Mari now spoke not as a friend, but with the professionalism of a nurse remembering her station. “Well, it’s time for your medicine.”

\* \* \*

With Mint at their head, the crowd of parasols came streaming out of their cottages – Blue, Violet, Orange, Scarlet and all the rest. When they came to some grass where they could see the sea, they planted one of the parasols, the violet one, into the ground. Their heads hung in silence as the old woman slowly approached. Noticing her, Mint looked around and nodded in greeting.

“What’s going on?” asked Naomi.

“This is why we came,” Mint replied. “We have always lived as travellers, never settling at any single place. But Violet has grown tired of such a life. This is where he was born and raised…”

“Is that so…” Naomi bowed her head, “So, all of you…”

“Yes,” Mint nodded, along with his parasol. “We must continue our travels.”

“If you have to go,” said Naomi, “couldn’t you take me with you?”

Mint opened his eyes wide. Not out of surprise so much as to scrutinize her face more closely. “You…?”

“Me,” Naomi replied. “I’m not much longer of this world…perhaps you already knew.”

Mint nodded, eyes wide, “…I knew.”

“Then, I beg of you…”

Mint turned towards the others. The parasols nodded slowly.

“I don’t see why not…” Mint said to Naomi. “Well, come under my parasol.” It looked like a kiss on a rainy day. It looked like a butterfly caught in a spider’s web. Underneath the mint parasol, Naomi’s body trembled.

\* \* \*

Naomi had a parasol in her hand when she left.

“From today, you’ll be Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose-coloured parasol. With the addition of this latest colour, the crowd of parasols headed west on the little orchard path.

\* \* \*

“Naomi…where have you gone?” Mari’s voice echoed through the whole building. “How long are you going to carry on sulking?” When Mari, a little frightened at the sound of strong evening wind, looked out to where sky met distant sea, a shadow danced up, blocking the luster of the wonderfully beautiful sunset. It was a single rose-coloured parasol, arcing gracefully in the sky, like a bat in flight.

Parasols by Inoue Masahiko

From the vista of ocean with its pastel shades to the dense forest of evergreens and sweet-smelling orchards and rose gardens; from the clouds glowing at sunrise and sunset to the moon that shone with a pale brilliance ... colours saturated the health resort with immeasurable radiance. The elderly lady had been painting as if she was carefully scooping up these colours one by one but, just recently, the motifs taken up by her brush had begun to change slightly.

It was after those elegant people and their parasols had started appearing here and there among the sand dunes...

"I reckon they're a funny lot, those folk."

Her companion spoke as she was clearing away the dishes. "Where did they blow in from? A fine lot of men going around with those parasols, all different colours..."

"There's nothing wrong with that, Mari. It's a lovely hobby to have," Naomi replied, putting the finishing touches to a mint green umbrella in the scene on her canvas. "And besides, they're not all men. There are women as well; and some children, though not very many."

"And as to being so pale, it's not natural!" Mari went on, making another point. "I thought it was the reflection from their parasols but it's not that ... I wonder what they've been eating?"

"That's not nice!"

"No, but aren't you afraid they're some kind of cult?"

"Hey, Naomi! Hello!" The owner of the mint green umbrella suddenly appeared at the window. "What have you been painting today?"

The companion moved away hurriedly.

Naomi said with a chuckle, "We were just talking about parasols, Mr Mint Green!"

"Oh?"

"Because I couldn't help wanting to paint you all. See, here are Mr Orange and Mr Blue, Mr Lemon and Miss Violet."

"Why, that's wonderful!"

Mint - she hadn't asked his real name - broke into a smile. His face was so white it looked as if it had been coated with the chalky soil of a vineyard. He twirled his green parasol with the tips of his fingers. It was more of a Western-style umbrella than a parasol: the type that an Englishman would carry, tightly furled, when he was out walking, never putting it up even if that meant getting wet; the type that the Japanese nickname "bats".

But these people never left the shelter of their umbrellas. None of them did, these parasol devotees who had appeared suddenly the previous week, taking several of the cabins.

"So ... I guess you've heard the rumour about us?"

"My companion told me," Naomi said with a smile. "Aren't you supposed to be the undead?"

Mari was facing the other way. Her shoulders could be seen rising and falling.

"The undead?"

Mint was silent for a moment but soon burst out laughing. "That joke's just like an April shower, isn't it!"

"Really?" Naomi laughed impishly.

"Yes, it is!"

Mint chuckled too. "Well then, since we're returning to the grave, please don't hesitate to remember us with a bunch of flowers or something..."

"You've *always*..."

As soon as the green parasol had gone, Mari let fly. "You've *always* been like this!"

"It's because he's like the person we knew who died, isn't it, Mari?" Naomi said. "That's why you object to me talking to him!"

"Why are you bringing that up, Naomi?" Mari said. "It's water under the bridge. He wasn't interested in marrying you or anything, anyway!"

"That was down to your interference."

"What's the matter, Naomi? Why on earth are you picking a quarrel with me now? About something that happened - how many years ago?"

"I even had a chance to get back together with him. But you went and hid his letter. By the time it turned up from inside your jewellery box, mixed up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers and I don't know what, he was already..."

"That was years ago!"

"I know!"

Naomi said in a small voice, "He must have been reincarnated a long while back."

"Even so, that parasol man is not him."

Then Mari's tone changed. Gone was the companion; in her place was a nurse with a reawakened sense of professionalism. "Come along now," she said, "it's time for your medicine."

Ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach ... the procession of parasols in all their various colours came streaming out of the cabins with the mint green in the lead.

When they came to a verdant lawn in sight of the sea, they set one of the parasols in the ground. It was violet.

Each had just made a deep bow when Naomi came walking slowly up to them.

Becoming aware of her presence, Mint turned round. He greeted her.

"What has happened?" Naomi asked.

"We came here to do this," Mint replied. "We have always travelled around. We don't stay in one place for long. Only...Miss Violet became weary of such a life. So here where she was born and brought up..."

"So that's it ..." Naomi looked down. "Then what about the rest of you?"

"Yes," Mint and his parasol bowed. "We have to set off on our travels again."

"In that case," Naomi said, "please let me come with you."

Mint's eyes opened wide. He did not appear surprised. Rather it was as if he was searching her face with his gaze.

"You...?"

"Yes, me," Naomi said. "I can't keep going any longer...you knew, didn't you?"

Mint nodded, his eyes still wide.

"...Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint turned to his companions.

The parasols bowed slowly in assent.

"That's settled then..."

Mint addressed Naomi. "Come under my umbrella."

It was like a kiss on a rainy day; or a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under the mint green parasol Naomi's body trembled.

When she emerged, Naomi was holding something in her hand.

“From now on you’ll be known as Miss Rose.”

Naomi opened the rose-coloured parasol.

With the new colour in its midst, the group of parasols made its way westwards along the path through the orchards.

“Naomi!...Where have you got to?” Mari’s voice resounded throughout the house. “For heaven’s sake, when are you going to stop this sulking?”

A little unnerved by the sound of the wind which had picked up at dusk, Mari looked up at the sky where it met the open sea. Obscuring the brilliance of a sunset that seemed excessive in its beauty, a shadow was dancing. Just like a great bat flapping its wings, a violet parasol was circling elegantly in the air.

## The Parasols by Inoue Masahiko

Not only the pastel colors of the distant sea, but the evergreens of the dense forest, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the light of the clouds at sunrise and sunset, the bright bluish glow of the moon—all of the boundless splendor of the sanatorium, every nuance of which the old woman was able to capture with her brush. But recently, the motif had begun to change. It all started when a group of distinguished men and women and their parasols appeared on the beach.

“There is something suspicious about those parasols.”

The old woman’s housemate was clearing away the dinnerware. “I wonder what town they come pouring in from. Such refined men carrying around colorful parasols…”

“It’s so nice, isn’t it, Mari. What a delightful hobby.” To complete the scene on the canvas, she was putting the final touches on a mint-colored parasol. “Oh, and there aren’t *only* men. There are women, too. And there are even a few children.”

“The pallor of their faces seems abnormal somehow.” Mari had now begun to address yet another point of contention. “I thought it might reflect the color of their parasols, but that doesn’t seem to be the case… What kind of food do you think they eat?”

“It’s rude, that question.”

“No, it isn’t. If it is some kind of cult, doesn’t that scare you?”

“Ahoy. Naomi-san. Hello there!” Suddenly, the owner of the mint-colored parasol peeked his head in from the window. “What are we painting today?” Mari quickly disappeared.

Naomi giggled. “We were actually just talking about the Parasols, Mr. Mint.”

“Really?”

“I just now finished painting everyone. Look: Here’s Mr. Orange. There’s Ms. Blue...and Mr. Lemon and Mr. Violet.”

“Wow. This is incredible!” Mint--no one had ever asked his real name--had a white face the color of limestone. Upon looking at the painting, this white face had broken into a smile. He was twirling his mint-colored parasol in his hands. In actuality, it wasn’t a parasol at all; it was a regular umbrella, its skeletal structure resembling the wings of a bat. If Mr. Mint were British, he’d never open his umbrella, keeping it rolled up tightly, like a walking bat with a big black coat getting soaked in the rain.

But these people were always under their parasols. Last week without warning, every last cottage was rented out, and it was the Parasols who were responsible.

“So, what kinds of things do people say about us…?”

“Well, my housemate has been wondering...” Naomi grinned as she spoke. “...whether you’re not someone who’s come back from the dead.” Mari, who’d had her back to them, raised her shoulders as high as her body would allow and then dropped them again.

“Back from the dead?” Mint fell silent for a time, and before long he let out a huge laugh. “That’s terrible--worse than April showers!”

“Is that so.” Naomi’s laughter was laced with mischief.

Mint giggled. “I think it is. Well, we’re going back to the grave now, so if you feel like visiting, feel free to bring some flowers!”

“I hate you!” The minute the green umbrella was out of sight, Mari flew into a rage. “You always do this to me!”

“Why, because he looks like someone we know who died? That’s why you’re upset, isn’t it, Mari? And, you’re annoyed because I was talking to him.”

“Why did you have to bring that up, Naomi? It was a long time ago. Besides, he didn’t want to marry you anyway.”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Why are you picking a fight with me now, Naomi? That was decades ago!”

"There *was* a chance for us to reconcile, you know. But you had to go and hide that letter. You put it in your jewelry box--mixed in with all your perfume bottles and pressed flowers. And by the time it turned up, he was already--"

"That was decades ago!"

"I know that." Naomi's voice faltered. "And by then...he was well into his next incarnation."

"Even so, that man with the parasol is not him." Mari was no longer speaking only as her housemate, but with the conviction of her expertise as a nurse. "Alright, it's time for the meds."

With Mint leading them out from the cottage, Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, and Peach all followed in succession. Once they reached the green lawn that offered a view of the sea, they stopped and plunged a single parasol into the earth. It was violet-colored. While each Parasol stood in a deep bow, the old woman walked slowly toward them. Sensing her presence, Mint turned to her and bowed.

"Is something the matter?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we have come." Mint replied. "We live a life that is constantly on the move. We never stay in one place. But Mr. Violet was tired of that kind of life. And since this is the land where he was born and raised..."

"I understand." Naomi cast down her eyes.

"So, you will..."

"Yes."

Mint nodded together with his parasol. "We will be leaving once again."

"If that's the case," Naomi began, "will you take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened. Rather than in surprise, he fixed his gaze steadily on Naomi's face. "Are you also...?"

"I am...I'm not long for this world. I'm sure you knew that."

Mint widened his eyes again and nodded. "...Yes."

"Please take me with you."

Mint turned to look at his companions. The other Parasols gave a slow nod. "Okay, you can join us. For now, come under my parasol." Like a kiss on a rainy day, like a butterfly caught by a spider, Naomi's body trembled under the mint-colored parasol.

It was time to depart. "From now on, you will be called Ms. Rose." Naomi opened her parasol, adding rose to the mosaic of colors heading westward down the orchard path.

"Naomi. Where are you?" Mari's voice echoed through the halls of the Western-style building. "How long are you going to pout for?" Since evening began, a powerful wind had been howling and Mari had been mildly frightened. She looked out at the edge of the sky hugging the shoreline, where the shimmer of the beautiful sunset prompted the shadows to dance. And just like a giant bat flapping its wings, a single violet-colored parasol was gracefully making circles in the distance.



## Parasol

Far more than Okinawa's pastel-colored vistas, there were deep evergreen forests, fragrant rose gardens and orchards, exquisite shades of light permeating the clouds at sunset and sunrise, the radiant indigo moon...the old woman's brush had painted the colors adorning this health resort with an endless brilliance—carefully, as if gathering them one by one—but it was only recently that the motifs of her paintings began a subtle transformation.

It was right around the time when *their* stylish parasols began to appear in places upon the sandy beach.

"I just can't help thinking there is something strange about those parasols."

Her roommate spoke while putting away the dishes. "I wonder what city they swarmed in from. Such good men, carrying such colorful umbrellas..."

"There's nothing wrong with that, Mary. I think they have lovely taste!" she said while painting a final coat onto a mint-colored umbrella on the background of the canvas. "Besides, it's not just men. There are women and even children—though only a few."

"With those pale faces, they're no ordinary people," pointed out Mary. "I thought that maybe the parasols' colors were being reflected, but it's something else...What kind of food are they eating anyway?"

"What a rude thing to say!"

"I beg to differ. Wouldn't it just be frightful if they were all part of some cult?"

"Hey, Naomi! How are you?"

The owner of the mint-colored parasol suddenly peaked in from the window. "What kind of picture did you paint today?"

Naomi's roommate quickly withdrew into the shadows.

"Mint, we were just talking about the parasols," said Naomi with a chuckle.

"Is that so?"

"I just felt like painting everyone today. You know—Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"Oh my, how delightful!"

Mint—she had never asked his real name—laughed as a smile expanded across his face, white as if sprinkled with the chalky dirt of a vineyard. He twirled a mint-colored parasol in one hand, although it looked less like a parasol and more like a bat-shaped umbrella (\*)—the kind that Mint, had he been British, would have carried around tightly wrapped, like a drenched bat walking around without ever opening its wings.

(\*) *Footnote: The original text uses the word "koumori gasa" (literally: "bat umbrella"), a term for a type of umbrella with rigid ribs that bears a likeness to a winged bat, here creating a comical wordplay.*

But this crowd was invariably under open umbrellas. That went for every one of the parasol-aficionados that had appeared suddenly last week, renting out a few cottages.

"So...what rumor did you hear about us?"

"I heard it from my roommate," Naomi said, beaming. "She said maybe you're all members of the living dead."

Facing away from them, Mary's shoulders visibly heaved.

"Living dead?"

Mint was quiet for a moment, then burst out laughing.

"That joke of yours was quite unexpected, much like a sudden shower in April."

"Oh, so you really *are* the living dead?" The woman grinned mischievously.

"Of course we are!"

Mint too chuckled and said, "Well then, since we will be returning to the cemetery, leave us some flowers if you happen to stop by."

"How could you?!"

The moment the green umbrella disappeared from sight, Mary, burning with anger, rushed up to Naomi.

"You haven't changed a bit in all these years!"

"It's because he bears a likeness to one of our friends who has passed away, isn't it?" said Naomi. "That's the reason you can't stand it when I talk to him, Mary."

"Why are you bringing that up again?" said Mary. "That was ages ago. He was never interested in marrying you anyway."

"Now *that's* what I call being nosy."

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why are you picking a fight about this after all this time? How many decades ago was that..."

"There *was* a chance of us getting back together. But you kept that letter from me. By the time I found it in your jewelry box—mixed in with perfume bottles and pressed flowers—he had already..."

"That was decades ago."

"That's right," Naomi said quietly. "He had already been reborn."

"Even so, that man with the umbrella isn't him."

When Mary spoke next, it wasn't with the voice of a roommate, but of a nurse with a newfound sense of duty.

"Alright, it's medicine time!"

With Mint in the lead, the parasols paraded out of the cottage: ultramarine, indigo, orange, yellow, gold, silver, scarlet, and pink.

When they arrived at a grassy lawn overlooking the sea, Mint thrust a single umbrella into the earth: a violet parasol.

The old woman slowly approached the group, where each head was lowered in silence.

Sensing her presence, Mint looked back. He made a slight bow.

"Might I ask what is going on here?" said Naomi.

"This is why we have come here," said Mint. "We spend our days traveling from place to place. Never do we stay too long in one area. However, Violet has grown tired of this life. That is why she has decided to return here, to the land where she was born and raised, and..."

"Oh, that's why you're here," said Naomi, head hung low. "So you're all going to..."

"Yes." Mint's umbrella nodded with him. "We must continue our journey."

"In that case," said Naomi. "Would you please consider taking me with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide—a gesture seemingly performed not out of surprise, but rather to gaze intently into Naomi's face.

"You have..."

"I have," said Naomi, "very little time left...But I presume you already knew that."

"...Yes."

"Then please, permit me this."

Mint turned towards the rest of his companions.

The umbrellas slowly nodded.

"That shouldn't be a problem..."

"Well then," Mint said to Naomi. "Come under my umbrella."

The moment brought to mind a lovers' kiss in the rain—or a butterfly in the clutches of a bat.

Naomi's body trembled inside Mint's umbrella.

When Naomi came out, it was with an umbrella in hand.

"Starting today, you'll be Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

A new shade added to their ranks, the parasols headed west down a lane through the orchard.

“Naomi...where have you gone?”

Mary’s voice reverberated through the Western-style house. “How long are you going to sulk about this?”

Having grown apprehensive of the whistling wind that had picked up since evening, Mary gazed up at the edge of the Okinawan horizon and spotted a shadow floating above, blocking the dazzling beauty of the sunset. A lone violet umbrella twirled elegantly through the sky, like the flight of a giant bat.

Parasol  
Inoue Masahiko

The view of the pastel-coloured sea in the distance, the dense forest of evergreens, the sweet-smelling orchards and rose gardens, the light and colour of the clouds of dawn and sunset, the moon shining pale and clear... The subjects of the old woman's paintbrush, depicting the colours that filled the health resort with immeasurable brilliance as if she were carefully scooping them up one by one, began to be transformed a little. This change had come only recently, after people with elegant parasols started appearing here and there on the sand dunes.

"There's definitely something suspicious about those parasols," her lodger said as she cleared away the dishes. "What town have they flooded here from? Why would grown men have such colourful parasols?"

"What's wrong with that? It's a lovely hobby," the woman replied while adding the final coat to a mint-coloured parasol in the scene on the canvas. "Besides which, it's not just men with those parasols. There are women as well, and even a few children."

"It's not normal to have such a bad complexion." Mari focussed on something else. "I thought it was the colours reflecting from the parasols, but it seems that's not the case.... I wonder what they've been eating."

"Don't be rude."

"I'm not. It would be scary, wouldn't it, if it was some kind of cult."

"Hello, Naomi." The owner of the mint parasol suddenly looked in through the window. "What sort of painting did you do today?"

Her lodger hurriedly drew back. Naomi chuckled and said, "We were just talking about the parasols, Mr Mint."

"Oh?"

"I suddenly felt like painting everyone. Look, there's Mrs Orange, and Mr Blue, and Miss Lemon, and Miss Violet."

"Oh, this is splendid."

Mint — no one had asked his real name — had a big smile on his face which was as white as if it were plastered with the chalky soil of a vineyard. He twirled a mint-coloured parasol with the tips of his fingers. In fact it was more like an umbrella than a parasol, an umbrella that an Englishman would keep tightly closed while he walked along getting wet. But they were always under their open umbrellas, these parasol enthusiasts who had appeared suddenly the previous week

and rented several cottages for their own use.

"So what is this rumour about us?"

Naomi smiled cheerfully. "According to my lodger, you're the living dead."

Mari had her back to them, and she could see her shoulders rising and falling.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a while, but eventually burst into laughter. "It's a joke as predictable as an April shower."

"I suppose it must be." She laughed playfully.

"It is." Mint chuckled as well. "Well, we're going back to our tombs, so bring flowers when you visit."

"You!"

When the green parasol had gone Mari rushed out angrily. "You've always

been this way."

"He looks like someone we know who's died," Naomi said. "That's why you don't like it when I talk to him, Mari."

"Why are you bringing that up now, Naomi?" said Mari. "It happened ages ago. He

was never going to marry you, anyway."

"It's what I call not minding your own business."

"Why are you still blaming me, Naomi. It was decades ago!"

"I had the chance to make things up. But you hid that letter. When it turned up among a perfume bottle and pressed flowers and so on in your jewellery box, he was already—"

"It was decades ago!"

"I know," Naomi said quietly. "He's already been reborn."

"Even if he has, he's not that umbrella guy."

Rather than that of a lodger, Mari now spoke in the tone of a nurse who had been awakened to a sense of professionalism. "It's time for your medicine."

The group of parasols, with Mint in the lead followed by Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, Peach and the rest, streamed out of the cottages.

When they reached the green lawn with a view of the sea, they planted one umbrella in the ground. It was a violet parasol.

The old woman came walking up slowly just as they all bowed their heads deeply.

Mint became aware of her presence behind him. He turned around and gave a slight nod.

"What happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came here," Mint replied

"Originally we lived from one trip to another, without settling in one place. Only — Miss Violet grew tired of that kind of existence. So we came back here to where she was born and grew up, and —"

"I see." Naomi hung her head.

"Then you are...?"

"Yes." Mint bowed with his parasol. "We'll have to set off on another trip."

"If you do," Naomi said, "Won't you take me with you."

Mint opened his eyes wide. It was so that he could study her face more closely, it seemed, rather than because he was surprised.

"So you are..."

"I am," Naomi said. "I won't last much longer... You knew, didn't you."

Mint opened his eyes and nodded. "...Yes"

"Then please..."

Mint turned toward his companions. The umbrellas slowly bowed in assent.

"It's alright," Mint said to Naomi. "Come under my parasol."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day, or a butterfly caught by a spider.

Naomi's body trembled under Mint's parasol. When she emerged she was holding a parasol.

"From now on you're Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-coloured parasol.

The flock of parasols, now with one new colour among them, headed west along the lane in the orchard.

"Naomi! — Where are you?"

Mari's voice echoed through the house. "How long are you going to sulk?"

Mari felt a little scared of the sound of the wind which had been growing stronger since evening. When she looked up at the edge of the sky that lead to the sea, shadows fluttered there, blocking the colours of the exquisite sunset. As though a huge bat were flapping its wings, a violet parasol twirled elegantly in the sky.

## Parasol

The moon shines pale and clear not only on the distant vista of the vast, pastel-colored sea, but so too on a deep forest of evergreens, on fragrant fruit-tree orchards and rose gardens, on the iridescent clouds of sundown and daybreak ... and at last onto a motif out of the paintbrush of an elderly woman who's painted her picture by gently bringing the hues to rest one by one onto this health resort, the hues filled with an immeasurable glimmering, the motif having only just started to change.

Just when the shade-giving umbrellas of those elegant people came into view here and there on the sand dunes... it was just at that moment.

"Those umbrellas are strange after all," her flatmate said, tidying up the old woman's dishes. "And where could those people be streaming in from? They're nice men, but all those differently colored umbrellas..."

"It's fine. Really, Mari. I think it's a beautiful way to pass the time," the elderly woman answered, putting the final layer of color on a spearmint-tinted umbrella in the canvas's scenery. "Besides, they're not all men. There are women, too, and children, even if just a few of them."

"Their faces are so pale, it's not normal," Mari pointed out. "I thought maybe the color of the umbrellas was reflecting on their faces, but that's not it at all. And don't you wonder what they eat?"

"Pardon me, but it's..."

"No! If it was some kind of cult, wouldn't they be more frightening?"

"Hi, Miss Naomi, good afternoon." From the window, the owner of the spearmint umbrella popped his head in. "What sort of picture have you painted today?"

The flatmate swiftly withdrew.

Naomi chuckled. "We were just talking about your umbrellas, Mr Mint."

"Oh?"

"I suddenly wanted to paint you all, so I did. Look, here's Mr Orange, Mr Blue, Ms Lemon, Mr Violet."

"Oh! That's beautiful."

Mint -- she didn't ask his real name -- peered closer with his white face -- a whiteness like he'd been covered with the ashey, calcified dirt of a vineyard -- and smiled. With the tips of his fingers, he spun his spearmint umbrella round and round. It wasn't so much an umbrella as a bat on a pole. If he'd been British, it would have been the sort of bat that stayed wrapped up tight and was absolutely never opened, both the bat and its owner getting soaked as they walked along.

These people, though, always had their umbrellas open. They'd shown up quite suddenly last week, and reserved a few cottages, every one of them an umbrella aficionado, apparently.

"Say-- You've heard the rumors about us?"

"What my flatmate says," Naomi answered, grinning. "She wonders if you aren't the living dead."

Mari's shoulder was just visible as she turned around, rising up large and then falling back again.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent a while, but eventually, he let out a big laugh. "What a little April shower of a joke."

"Was it now?" The old woman grinned mischievously.

"Indeed it was." Mint chuckled, too. "Well then, we will be returning to the grave, so a bouquet of flowers on the occasion of your visit?"

"I swear, you have always--" As the green umbrella departed, Mari flew savagely

from the apartment. "I swear, you have always been like that."

"Probably because he looks like a corpse we know," Naomi said. "The fact that you don't like he and I chatting is further proof of that, Mari."

"Why do you bring that up again, Naomi," Mari said. "It's a thing of antiquity. Anyway, he never had any intention of marrying you."

"Thanks to your meddling, I believe."

"What's happened, Naomi? Why are you so fixated on this today? Honestly, how many decades ago was it?"

"We had a chance to reconcile. But you hid the letter. And by the time it came out of your jewelry case, with the pressed flowers and those bottles of scent, he was already--"

"How many decades ago was it?"

"Indeed," Naomi said in a quiet voice. "He must have been reborn a long time ago."

"Even if he was, he's not that umbrella man, dear," Mari said. Then, not as a flatmate, but in a voice like a nurse who's awakened to her professional consciousness, "Okay, medicine time."

With spearmint at the head, the colony of umbrellas left the cottage in a great stream, ultramarine, indigo, bitter orange, lemon, gold, silver, cinnabar, peach.

When they'd come as far as the green lawn where one could see the ocean, they stood a single umbrella up in the ground. It was a violet umbrella.

Just as they each bowed their heads deeply, the old woman walked slowly up to them.

Sensing her there, Mint turned around. He nodded a greeting.

"What is it you're doing?" Naomi inquired.

"This is why we came here," Mint answered. "By nature, we live journey to journey. We don't settle in one fixed place. Except-- Mr Violet has gotten tired of living this way. So here, in the land where he was born and raised--"

"Oh is that right..." Naomi lowered her head. "So then, you all...?"

"Yes." Mint nodded his umbrella. "We must leave again on another journey."

"In that case," Naomi said, "take me with you, if I might be allowed to ask such a thing."

Mint's eyes opened wide. He didn't seem so much surprised as like he was trying to stare more fixedly at the elderly woman's face.

"You...?"

"Me," Naomi said. "I won't last very long. But I think you knew that."

Mint opened his eyes wider, and nodded. "...Yes."

"So then, please?"

Mint turned towards his companions.

The umbrellas slowly nodded.

"Alright I suppose..." Mint said. And then, to Naomi. "Under my umbrella, then."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It looked like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under that mint-colored umbrella, Naomi's body shivered and trembled.

When she re-emerged, she had an umbrella in her hand. "From now on, you'll be Miss Rose, yes?"

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

The colony of shade-giving umbrellas, including the new color, turned west along a small orchard road.

"Naomi. Where on earth did you go?" Mari's voice echoed around the manor-house. "How long are you going to sulk, then?"



A bit frightened by the sound of a strong wind from the evening, Mari looked up at the edge of the sky where it met the deep sea, and saw a form dancing there, interrupting the splendor of a too-beautiful sunset. It looked just like a big bat flapping about, that single violet umbrella circling through the air.

## Parasol / Inoue Masahiko

Pastel colors of the ocean, deep evergreen forest, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, brilliant clouds at sunset and at dawn, fresh and bright moon – the old lady depicted carefully each and every thing in this resort area, as if she was scooping the radiant hues onto a canvas with her brush. Recently, however, the motifs of her paintings started to change slightly.

In fact, it all began when the parasols of some elegant people started to dot the sand dunes.

“These parasols are quite peculiar,” said the woman companion, who lived with the old lady, while clearing out the dishes, “What wind has blown them here? Nice fellows, but such colorful parasols…”

“They are actually rather lovely, Mari. Quite tasteful,” answered the old lady, adding a mint-colored parasol to the painted scenery. “And they are not only men. There are also women, and even a few children.”

“Such an awful complexion is surely abnormal,” Mari changed her tack, “I thought it was the reflection of parasols, but that’s not it… I am wondering about their diet.”

“It is quite rude of you.”

“Not at all. What if they belong to some cult? Wouldn’t that be scary?”

“Why, Ms. Naomi! How are you?” The owner of the mint-colored parasol popped his head through the window. “What have you painted today?”

The companion hurriedly retreated.

Naomi chuckled and answered, “We have just been discussing the parasols, Mr. Mint.”

“Really?”

“I was simply overcome by desire to paint each and every one of them. Look, Mr. Orange and Ms. Blue, Mr. Lemon and Ms. Violet.”

“Oh my, that’s fantastic!”

Mint’s – she didn’t ask for his real name – white face – as if it was covered in a chalky soil of a vineyard – lit up with a smile of joy. His fingertips span the mint-colored parasol round and round. It was more of a bat-wing-shaped western style umbrella than a Japanese style parasol. Like the one that an Englishman might roll tightly and walk, soaking wet in the rain, without opening it. That kind of bat.

But the parasols of these people were always open. All of these parasol enthusiasts are like that. A few weeks ago they appeared out of the blue and rented a few cottages.

“And what does the rumor say about us?”

“If you ask my companion,” said Naomi, “you must be the living dead.”

Mari was facing away, but they could see her shoulders shoot upwards and sink down again. Mint was quiet for a while, then burst out laughing.

“The living dead? Is it some kind of an April showers joke?”

“If you say so,” the lady smiled mischievously.

“I say it is,” Mint chuckled. “Well then, I will be returning to my grave. You are welcome to favor me with a bouquet of flowers whenever you fancy.”

When the mint-green parasol left, Mari started with a fury.

“Oh you! You have always been like that.”

“You just hate it when I talk to him because he resembles a deceased man we used to know,” said Naomi.

“Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi? It was ages ago. And he never intended to marry you anyway.”

“That’s called meddling.”

“What happened, Naomi? Why are you getting involved with him now? It has been decades…”

"We had a chance of reconciliation, but you hid that letter. When it finally came out of your jewelry box, after it was mingled with perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he has already..."

"It was decades ago."

"That's right," said Naomi in a low voice, "he has already been reborn."

"Even if that were true, he is not that parasol man." Mari's tone of voice changed from that of a companion to that of a nurse who remembered she was a professional, "It's time to take your medicine."

With mint color in the lead, ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, golden, silver, scarlet, peach and otherwise colored parasols came in droves out of the cottages. When the old lady approached the green lawn overlooking the sea, she saw a parasol standing on the ground. It was violet. The old lady slowly came over to where everyone stood with their heads deeply bowed. Mint sensed her approaching and turned around.

"What happened?" asked Naomi.

"That is what we came here for," replied Mint. "We lead a nomadic life. We never stay in one place. It's just... You see, Ms. Violet got tired of this way of life. So we came here, to the place where she was born and raised."

"I see..." Naomi hung down her head, "So you are..."

"Yes" Mint nodded along with his parasol, "we have to set out on our journey once again."

"Then would you be so kind as to take me along with you?" asked Naomi.

Mint opened his eyes wide, though not because he was astonished, but in order to better survey her face.

"You are...?"

"I," said Naomi, "will not last long... but you already knew it, right?"

Mint nodded, his eyes still open wide.

"Yes."

"Then, please..."

Mint turned to his companions. The parasols nodded slowly.

"Very well, then," said Mint to Naomi, "step under my parasol"

It might have looked like a kiss on a rainy day. It also might have looked as if a butterfly got caught in a spider's web. Naomi's body shuddered under the mint-colored parasol. When she emerged, in her hand she held an open parasol.

"I see that from now on you are Ms. Rose."

Naomi's parasol was rose-colored.

The group of parasols, with the newly added color in their midst, headed West along an orchard path.

"Naomi, where are you?" Mari's voice echoed through the house. "How long are you going to sulk?"

The sound of strong wind that came towards the evening frightened Mari a little bit, and when she looked up at the sky in the direction of the ocean, she saw a fluttering shadow that obstructed the beautiful brilliance of the sunset. Like a bat fluttering its wings, a violet-colored parasol was circling elegantly in the sky.

## The Parasol People

Written by Inoue Masahiko

It was not only in the distant view of the pastel-colored sea, but also the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the lighting of the clouds at sunset and dawn, and the pale, crisply shining moon... the subjects of the old woman's brush—that painted all the colors that filled this health resort with an immeasurable brilliance, as if they had been carefully scooped-up one by one—had only recently started to slightly change.

It was after reaching the point where you could see the parasols of those refined people all over the dunes.

"That lot with the parasols is definitely strange." Her housemate said, as she cleared away the woman's dishes. "Which town did they stray in here from? They're a fine looking bunch of men, but seeing them walk around with all those different colored umbrellas is just..."

"What's the problem with it, Marie? It makes for a lovely aesthetic." She answered, as she applied the finishing touches to a mint-green umbrella in the landscape painting on her canvas. "Besides, it's not like they're all men. There are women and, though not very many, children too."

"I'm telling you, it's not normal to be that pale." Marie countered, pointing out another reason. "I thought it might be the color of the umbrellas reflecting onto their faces, but that's not it... What sort of things are they eating to look like that?"

"Now you're just being rude."

"I am not. Aren't you scared that they could be some kind of cult?"

"Well, hello there, Miss Naomi." The owner of a mint-green parasol was suddenly peeking in from the window. "What did you paint today?"

Marie hurriedly drew back further into the room.

Giggling, Naomi answered, "We were talking about parasols just now, Mister Mint."

"Oh, were you now?"

"I just had the urge to paint all of you, is why. Look, there's Mister Orange, Mister Blue, Miss Lemon, and Miss Violet."

"Oh! Well, this is marvelous." He remarked, as his white face—so white that it was as if it had been smeared with the chalky soil of a vineyard—cracked and broke into a smile. Mint—Naomi had not asked his real name—was spinning the mint-green parasol with his fingertips. Seeing it up close now, it was an ordinary umbrella rather than a parasol. If he were a proper Englishman, he would get wet walking around in the rain with a slim rolled umbrella that he would absolutely never open, like a sleeping bat's wings during the daytime.

However, these people were always under an open umbrella. All of these parasol lovers appeared, out of the blue, last week and reserved a number of the cottages for themselves.

"So—dare I ask what sort of rumors are going around about us?"

"Well, the one my housemate tells," Naomi cheerfully said, "is that you all might be the living dead."

She could see Marie, who was turned away from them, flinch; her shoulders shooting straight up, and then slowly back down.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a while, but in the end he burst into a fit of laughter. "It's like that joke about April Showers, May Flowers, and Pilgrims."

"It's silly isn't it?" Naomi laughed mischievously.

"It certainly is." Mint, also giggling, added, "Well then, since we will be retiring to our graves now, if you should have some business with us don't forget to bring some flowers."

“You fucking bitch!” Enraged, Marie rushed over to Naomi after the green umbrella left. “You’ve always been such a fucking bitch!”

“It’s because he resembles the dead man we know, right?” Naomi said. “That’s why you hate that I chat with that man, isn’t it Marie?”

“Why are you dredging all that up, Naomi?” Marie dodged her question. “That’s all ancient history now. It’s not like he ever had any intention of marrying you, anyway.”

“No thanks to some busybody.”

“What is the matter with you, Naomi? Why, now of all times, are you picking a fight about that? For God’s sake, it was decades ago.”

“Because there was still a chance that we could have made up! But you hid his letter. When that letter—jumbled together with all your perfume bottles and pressed flowers—popped out of your jewel box he was already...”

“That was decades ago.”

“That’s right,” Naomi said in a tiny voice. “He’s already been reborn.”

“Even if he has, that umbrella man isn’t him.” Now, not as a housemate, but in a voice that sounded like a nurse roused by a sense of professional pride, Marie declared, “Alright, it’s time to take your medicine.”

The phalanx of umbrellas emerged from the cottages in succession: mint-green at the front, and followed by blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, pink, and all the rest.

When they came to a green lawn with an oceanfront view, they planted a single umbrella into the ground.

It was a violet parasol.

As each of them bowed their heads deeply, Naomi slowly walked up to where they were standing.

“What are you doing?” Naomi asked.

“This is what we came here for,” Mint answered. “It is in our nature to lead lives of endless travel. We cannot remain in any one place. However—Miss Violet has grown tired of even that life. And now she has returned here, to the place where she was born and raised.”

“So that’s what it was.” Naomi hung her head.

“Yes.” Mint and each of the parasols nodded. “We must set out on our journey once again.”

“In that case,” Naomi asked, “could you take me along with you?”

Mint opened his eyes wide. It seemed it was so that he could scrutinize her face rather than in surprise. “Are you...?”

“I,” Naomi pleaded, “don’t have much longer left...you knew that didn’t you?”

“...Yes.”

“If you already know, then please.”

Mint turned to the others.

The umbrellas slowly nodded.

“Very well...” Mint agreed, and told Naomi, “Now, come step under my umbrella.”

It looked like two lovers kissing on a rainy day.

It looked like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Naomi’s body trembled and shook under Mint’s umbrella.

When she stepped out from under Mint’s umbrella, Naomi was holding an umbrella in her hand.

“From today on you will be Miss Rose.”

Naomi opened the rose-colored umbrella.

A new color added to their ranks, the phalanx of umbrellas headed west towards

the orchard path.

“Naomi, where are you?” Marie’s voice echoed through the house. “For God’s sake, just how long are planning on sulking?”

Becoming a little frightened by the wind that had grown stronger since evening, Marie looked up at the point where the ocean meets the sky and saw a shadow fluttering about, blocking the brilliance of an unbelievably beautiful sunset. What looked like a giant bat flapping its wings was a single violet parasol, gracefully pirouetting across the sky.

Parasols

Inoue Masahiko

The old woman used to paint, with great care, the colours that filled this recreational haven with immeasurable brilliance, as if gently scooping them into her paintings: distant pastel-coloured seas, deep evergreen forests, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, coloured clouds in dusk and dawn, and the bright, blue moon.

It was only recently that the subjects of her paintbrush had changed—when the umbrellas belonging to those elegant people became a common sight around the dunes.

“I still think those Brollies are weird,” said her roommate as she put away the old woman’s dinnerware. “I wonder which city they came from. For good, decent men to be carrying such colourful umbrellas…”

“Oh hush, Marie. I think it’s beautiful,” the old woman replied while painting a mint-green umbrella on the canvas. “Besides, they’re not all men. There are women and even some children, however few.”

“But that horrible complexion, it’s just not normal,” Marie pointed out. “At first, I’d thought that it was because of the light reflecting off the umbrellas, but that’s not it... I wonder what they eat…”

“Don’t be rude, Marie.”

“But if they were some sort of cult, wouldn’t that be terrifying?”

“Hello, Naomi. Fine day isn’t it?” The owner of the mint-green umbrella gazed in the window. “What are you painting today?”

Her roommate beat a hasty retreat.

Naomi chuckled. “We were just talking about your umbrellas, Mint.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“You see, I got the urge to draw your congregation. See, there’s Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet also.”

“Oh, this is quite the work of art.”

Mint—for she had never asked his real name—smiled; his pale face (white, as though painted with the calcareous soil from the grapevines) stretched into a broad grin.

In his hands, he was spinning his mint-coloured umbrella round and round. It looked more like a bat than an umbrella. Had he been English, that bat’s wings would have never been allowed to unfurl; the English preferred to get rained on as they walked.

These people, however, were always under their umbrellas. These umbrella-lovers were all the same; they had arrived the previous week out of the blue and rented out several cottages.

“So, about those rumours of us.”

Naomi told him with a smile, “My roommate says that you might be the living dead.”

Marie had had her back turned to them then; one could see the sharp rising of her shoulders before they relaxed again.

“Living dead?” Mint was silent for a few moments before he finally burst into hearty laughter. “Why, that’s as amusing as April showers.”

“Isn’t it, though?” The old lady laughed cheekily.

“Indeed.” Mint chuckled. “Well, we shall be returning to our graves then. Should you be in need of us, bring flowers.”

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When Mint finally left, Marie rushed to Naomi in a frenzy and exclaimed, "I can't believe you! You've always been like this."

"The fact that you don't like me talking to him can only mean one thing, Marie," Naomi replied. "It must be that he looks like a dead man we once knew."

"Why must you bring him up, Naomi?" Marie grumbled. "That was ages ago. Not to mention, that man never had the intention of marrying you."

"It was none of your business."

"What's the matter, Naomi? Why are you still so hung up on that? It's been decades."

"I had the chance to make things right with him, you know, but you hid my letter in your jewellery box, where it got mixed up with all your perfume bottles and your flower pressings and what have you. By the time my letter made it out of there, he'd already..."

"Like I said, it's been decades."

"Right," Naomi agreed quietly. "He's probably been reincarnated a long time ago."

"Even if he had, that Brolly man is not him," Marie asserted. Then, shedding her roommate persona, she announced with a professional nurse-like voice, "Now, it's time for your medicine."

---

The congregation of azure, indigo, orange, yellow, gold, silver, red and pink umbrellas emerged from their cottages in a drove with mint in the lead.

They came to a patch of greenery overlooking the sea where they planted a single umbrella in the ground. It was Violet's umbrella.

The old woman slowly approached where they stood with their heads bowed.

Sensing her presence, Mint turned around and nodded to her in greeting.

"What's happening?" Naomi enquired.

"This is what we came for," Mint explained. "By nature, we live our lives travelling. We never settle down in a single place. Violet, however... he grew tired of this life. So, here we are, where he was born and raised..."

"I see..." Naomi bowed her head. "In that case, all of you..."

"Yes"—Mint nodded slowly, and his umbrella too dipped slightly— "we must set off again."

"In that case," Naomi spoke up, "can you take me along?"

Mint's eyes widened, but rather than out of surprise, it was as though he did it to take a good, long look at her face.

"You...?"

"I don't," Naomi explained, "have much longer. You must already know that."

Mint's eyes widened, and he nodded. "...Yes."

"So please."

Mint turned to his companions.

The Brollies slowly nodded.

"Very well," Mint told Naomi. "Get under my umbrella."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

She looked like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.

In the shade of Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body shuddered.

When she emerged, Naomi had a single umbrella in her hand.

"From today on, you shall be known as Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-coloured umbrella.



With a new colour in their midst, the congregation of umbrellas headed west on the path through the orchard.

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“Naomi! Where are you?” Marie’s voice echoed throughout the mansion. “Until when are you going to be sulking?”

The sound of wind that had grown stronger in the late afternoon spooked Marie. She looked out to where the edge of the sky met the sea to see dancing shadows blotting out the light of the indescribably beautiful sunset. Like a large bat in flight, a single violet-coloured umbrella twirled elegantly in the sky.

“The Parasols”  
By Masahiko Inoue

The pastel-colored seascape, the lush forest of evergreen trees, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the radiant beams of light that shined through the clouds at sundown and daybreak, and the clear blue-tinted moon... With her brushstrokes, the old woman brilliantly captured each and every color that breathed life into this resort. It was only recently that her canvas began to see slight changes.

It all started when the parasols, flaunted by their elegant owners, became deeply ingrained into the daily landscape of the beach.

“Those parasols strike me as suspicious.” The old woman’s companion spoke while tidying up the tableware. “I wonder where those people came from. All those nice men, but they’re holding those garish parasols...”

“Where’s the harm in that, Mari? They have beautiful taste,” she responded, putting the finishing touches on the mint green parasol on her canvas. “Besides, they aren’t all men. Some of them are women, and, though only a few, there are kids among them too.”

“There’s something off about them. Their complexions look unhealthy,” Mari said, bringing up a different point. “I thought it was due to the light reflecting off of their parasols, but that’s not it. ...I wonder if it’s something they’ve been eating?”

“That’s quite rude.”

“No, it’s not. Wouldn’t it be scary if they were all part of some cult?”

“Oh, Naomi, hello there.” The owner of the mint green parasol suddenly peeked in through the window. “What have you been painting today?”

The old woman’s companion slunk deeper into the room.

Naomi giggled. “We were discussing the parasols just now, Mint.”

“Oh?”

“I felt the urge to paint everyone. Look, here’s Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet.”

“Well, how marvelous!”

Mint—his real name remained a secret—smiled, his beaming face as white as the chalky soil one might find in a vineyard. He twirled his mint green parasol around and around with his fingers. It was not so much a parasol as an umbrella, one with ribs not unlike the jointed wings of a bat. The kind of umbrella that an Englishman would surely keep rolled up tightly while strolling in the rain.

However, these people kept exclusively to the shade of their parasols. That was true for all of these parasol fanatics, who appeared out of the blue last week and rented out a number of cottages.

“So, you have been gossiping about us?”

“It’s my companion,” Naomi said, a giggle in her voice. “She wonders if you all are undead.”

Mari, who was facing the other way, visibly hunched her shoulders up, before relaxing them again.

“Undead?” Mint fell silent for a moment, before bursting into laughter. “That joke is as dreary as an April shower.”

“You think so?” The lady laughed impishly.

“Indeed,” Mint replied, giggling as well. “Now then, we must return to our graves. If you wish to summon us, bring us an offering of flowers and the like.”

“You...” Mari flew into a rage as the green parasol went off into the distance. “You’ve always been like this, haven’t you?”

"It's because he resembles a departed acquaintance of ours, isn't it?" Naomi said. "That's why it irks you to see the two of us talking, Mari."

"Naomi, why are you bringing this up?" Mari said. "That matter is far in the past. Besides, marrying you was the last thing on his mind."

"That's none of your business."

"What's wrong, Naomi? Why on earth are you picking a fight now of all times over something from decades ago?"

"We had a chance to make amends. But you concealed that letter. When that letter finally found its way out from between those perfume bottles and pressed flowers and whatnot inside your jewelry box, he had already—"

"That was decades ago."

"Yes, I know," Naomi said in a soft voice. "He's long been reincarnated."

"Even so, that man with the parasol isn't him." Mari's voice now echoed not as a companion, but rather with the professional tone of a nurse. "Now, it's time for your medicine."

With mint green out in front, the flock of blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach, and more parasols emerged from the cottages in succession.

Once the group reached the green lawn overlooking the sea, they thrust one parasol into the ground—a violet parasol.

While they were deeply bowing their heads, the old woman ambled up towards them.

Noticing her presence, Mint turned his head and greeted her with a slight bow.

"What's going on?" Naomi asked.

"This is the reason we have come," Mint replied. "From the outset, our lives have consisted solely of one wandering journey after another. We do not linger in one place for very long. However, Violet has tired of such a lifestyle. That is why we have returned here, to Violet's birthplace—"

"I see..." Naomi hung her head. "So that means that you all..."

"Yes." Mint, along with his parasol, nodded. "We must embark on our next journey."

"If you must leave..." Naomi said. "Would you please take me along?"

Mint opened his eyes wide, not out of surprise, but rather to get a careful look at her face.

"You...?"

"I..." Naomi continued. "I do not have much time remaining. ...Although I suppose you were well aware of that."

With his eyes still wide open, Mint nodded. "...Indeed."

"Then please, I beg of you."

Mint turned to face his companions.

The parasol-wielders responded with deep nods.

"As you wish..." Mint said to Naomi. "Now, come under my parasol."

The scene resembled a kiss on a rainy day.

Or perhaps, a butterfly ensnared in a spider's web.

Naomi's body trembled and quivered under Mint's parasol.

Upon reemerging, Naomi held a parasol in her hand.

"From this day forth, you shall be known as Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored parasol.

The flock of parasols, now joined by a new shade, headed west down the orchard path.

“Naomi. Where did you run off to?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the house. “Just how long are you going to sulk for?”

Mari grew a little frightened by the howling of the wind that had strengthened through the evening. As she gazed up at the horizon that linked the sky with the sea, she spotted a shadow fluttering in the sky, obstructing the splendid light of the sunset. Like a large bat flapping its wings, a single violet parasol twirled elegantly in the sky.

## The Parasols

Starting from the pastel-coloured a distant view, but also deep forest of evergreens, a fragrant rose garden and an orchard, colourful light of sunset and daybreak, and the shining blue moon— It is only recently, that the motifs for the old lady's paintings have started to slightly change, that she had been meticulously capturing the delicacy of the colours that fill this health resort with infinite radiance.

It is since the parasols of these graceful people have started to be witnessed at the sand dune.

"There's definitely something suspicious about these parasols."

The housemate said, as s/he puts away the old lady's dishes away. "I wonder which town they've come from. Grown-up men using such colourful parasols..."

"Why should they not, Mari? They have an elegant taste."

She answered as she painted a mint parasol over the scenery on the canvas. "And, not all of them are males, there are females and, although a very few in number, there are children."

"It's completely out of the ordinary how pale their complexion is."

Mari made a different point. "I thought the colours of the parasols were reflecting on their faces, but it's not... Whatever kind of food do they eat?"

"It's rude to say that."

"No, it is not. It would be creepy if they are into some sort of cult or other."

"Hello, Naomi. How has your day been?"

The owner of the mint-coloured parasol popped his head behind the window.

"What have you painted today?"

The housemate left the conversation in a hurry.

Naomi said as she chuckled, "We were just talking about the parasols, Mr Mint."

"Well?"

"I felt like to place you all in my painting. Here, Mr Orange, Mr Blue, Mr Lemon and Ms Violet."

"Ah, it's stunning."

Mint- Naomi hadn't asked his real name-put a smile on his pale face-as if it has been covered in calcareous soil at the vineyard. He was spinning the mint-coloured parasol with his fingers. It was in fact, an umbrella rather than a parasol. It was one of these umbrellas that British people would tightly wrap and never open it hence they would rather choose to get wet on the street instead.

However, these people are always under open umbrellas. These parasol aficionados, who suddenly came here last week and rented a few cottages exclusively to themselves, all do so.

"And...what was it you were talking about us?"

"My housemate says."

Naomi spoke, with a gentle smile. "That you ladies and gentlemen might be living dead."

Naomi saw Mari's shoulders, showing her back, bumped up and then went down.

"Living dead?"

Mint was silent for a while, but he eventually started laughing out loud.

"Your joke sounds like an April Shower."

"Are you not?"

The lady put a playful smile on her face.

"Yes, we are."

Mint giggled and said, "So, we will go back to the graves now. Some bouquets would be much appreciated when you visit us."

"How dare you!"

When the green umbrella was gone, Mari rushed out.

"You've never changed a bit."

"You say so because he looks like the deceased person we know."

Naomi said, "That's the reason why you don't like the man and I talking."

"Why would bring that up all over again, Naomi."

Mari said. "It happened a very long time ago. He wasn't going to get married to you, anyway."

"That's what I'd call an interference."

"What's wrong with you, Naomi. Why are you trying to argue with me after all these years?"

"I did have a chance to make it up, but you hid the letter. By the time that letter was found in your jewellery box, mixed together with a perfume bottle and pressed flowers, He was already..."

"It was decades ago."

"Yes."

Naomi whispered. "He must have been reincarnated long ago."

"Even so, he can't be that parasol man."

Now as a nurse, in a voice who is aware of her professional conducts rather than a housemate, said Mari.

"Come on. It's time to take your medicine."

Came out a crew of parasols in a row from the cottages, the mint was the first, followed by an ultramarine, an indigo, an orange, a lemon, a gold, a silver, a vermillion, a pink, and more.

When they reached a lawn where they could see the sea from, they put up one umbrella on the ground. It was a violet parasol.

As each person finished to take a deep bow, an old lady slowly walked towards them. Mint sensed her and looked back and made a slight bow.

"Could you tell me what happened?"

"This is what we have come here for."

Mint answered. "By nature, we travel around all the time. We do not stay in one place, but...Mrs Violet is tired of such a lifestyle. So, here, where she was born and grew up, she will..."

"Oh, I am sorry..."

Naomi hung her head down.

"So you gentlemen are..."

"Yes"

Mint nodded with his parasol. "We must leave and go on for a journey again."

"Well then,"

Said Naomi. "Would you be able to take me, with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. It was not because he was surprised, but rather it was to gaze carefully at her face.

"Are you...?"

"I haven't got long to go..... I suppose you knew it, didn't you?"

".....Yes."

"Now, I do ask you, please..."

Mint turned to the other parasols.

The parasols nodded, slowly.

"I'll take your request....."

“So, get under my parasol now.”

It seemed like a kiss on a rainy day.

It seemed like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under Mint’s parasol, Naomi’s body shivered.

When she stepped out, Naomi had a parasol in her hand.

“You are Ms Rose from today.”

Naomi opened the rosy parasol.

The palette of parasols added a new colour and followed a path in the orchard to the West.

“Naomi… wherever have you gone?”

Mari's voice echoed everywhere in the European-style mansion. "When will you stop having the sulks?"

Mari, a little scared of the noise of the wind as it grew stronger in the evening, looked up the edge of the sky connected to the open sea, a shadow danced as it cut the indescribably beautiful settling sunlight. Like a flying bat, one violet parasol was gracefully circling in the sky.

### The Parasols

It was just recently that a pencil motif by an old woman slightly started to change. She not only drew a perspective of a distant sea in pastel colours, but also evergreen deep forests, aromatic orchards and rose gardens, colourful lights of clouds at the break of dawn and sunset with a moon shining clear blue... She painted as if she had carefully scooped up each colour that filled the resort with infinite sparkles. In fact, it was so since the sunshades of those elegant people were seen in every dune...

"After all the sunshades are unusual," said her roommate cleaning up her dishes. "Which town did they wander from? Handsome guys with such multi-coloured umbrellas...."

"Who cares, Mary? Fine taste!" she answered repainting the canvas scenery with mint umbrellas. "And these people are not only the men, but the women and children too, though very few."

"They look pale! That's not common."

Mary pointed out another thing. "I thought the colours of the sunshades reflect, but that's not the case...What are they eating there?"

"That's rude."

"No. Scary, if it's a cult. Don't you think?"

"Hello, Naomi." Suddenly the owner of a mint sunshade looked through the window.

"What kind of painting could you draw today?"

The roommate left hurriedly.

Naomi was chuckling.

"Now I was talking about the sunshades, Mr. Mint."

"Huh."

"And I just want to draw pictures of everyone. See, Mr. Orange with Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon with Mr. Violet."

"Hah, that's beautiful!"

Mint, I didn't ask his real name, broke into a smile with his white face (whiteness as if painted with the calcareous soil of a vineyard). He was spinning the mint sunshade around with the tips of his fingers. It's more of a Western-style umbrella than a sunshade. An Englishman would roll this umbrella up neatly, would never open it, and would get wet while walking. But these people always stay under opened umbrellas. All of these sunshade lovers who suddenly showed up last week and chartered a couple of cottages are like that.

"And the rumour about us?"

"My roommate is telling," Naomi said serenely. "She asked if you were a living dead."

Mary was looking behind. I saw her shoulders rise considerably and drop.

"A living dead?"

Mint was silent for a while but soon began to laugh loudly.

"It's exactly like a joke about April shower."

"Do you think so?" The lady smiled wickedly.

"That's right!"

Mint also chuckled. "Now we'll get back to the grave so take a bunch of flowers if necessary."

"You asshole."

Mary got mad and ran out when the green umbrella had left.

"You've been like that for a long time."

"Because he looks like the dead that we know."



Naomi said. "You hate when I am chatting with him and that's what it's all about, Mary."

"Naomi, why are you raking over the ashes?" Mary said. "It's from a distant past. Anyway he wasn't going to marry you."

"Mind your own business."

"What's the matter with you, Naomi? Why are you involved in this now? It's from a few decades ago."

"I even had a chance for reconciliation. But you hid the letter. When the letter mixed with perfume bottles and pressed flowers came out from your jewel box he was already..."

"It really was decades ago."

"Yes," Naomi said in a small voice. "He has already become a new man."

"In that case he is not the same umbrella man, right?" Mary said now not in the voice of a roommate but a nurse who became conscious of her professionalism.

"Now, it's time for your medicine."

A group of mint sunshades in the lead, followed by ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, pink, and others came out of the cottages one after another.

When they arrived at the green grass with a sea view, they stood an umbrella on the ground. It was a violet sunshade. After each of them had made a deep bow, an old woman walked up slowly.

The mint noticed the sign, looked around, then bowed.

"What's the matter?" Naomi asked.

"We came for this," Mint answered.

"From the very beginning our lives have been from one trip to another. We don't stay in one place. Only Mr. Violet is tired of this life. And now, at this place where we were born and brought up..."

"Oh, really?" Naomi drooped her head.

"Now, you."

"Yes," Mint nodded with his umbrella. "We have to set off on a trip again."

"If that's the case," Naomi said. "Could you take me there with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. On account of gazing at her face rather than of surprise.

"And you?"

"Me," Naomi said. "I won't stand this any longer...You might have known."

Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded. "Yes..."

"Then I beg a favour of you." Mint looked at his friends.

The umbrellas nodded slowly.

"OK?..." Mint said to Naomi. "Now under my umbrella."

It also looked like a kiss of a rainy day or like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Naomi's body trembled under Mint's umbrella.

When they went out, Naomi had one umbrella in her hand.

"From today you are Ms Rose." Naomi opened a rosy umbrella.

The group of sunshades with a new colour left westward from the orchard alleys.

"Naomi...Where have you been?" Mary's voice rang around the Western-style building.

"When on earth will you stop being sulky?"

Mary was a little afraid of the wind sound which was stronger in the evening. When she looked up into the connection between the end of the sky and the distant sea, she covered such beautiful sparkles of the sunset and her picture danced. One violet sunshade was whirling around the sky with grace as if a big bat fluttered.

### Parasols

Pastel-colored seascapes were one of several motifs Naomi chose to paint. She also painted scenes of the evergreen forest, of the fragrant fruit orchards and of the rose gardens. Diligently, she captured with her brush the dazzling colors that flooded the clouds at dawn and dusk, as well as the bluish hues of the moon in all its serenity. With the weight of all her years, it was a blessing to be here, away from it all, where the colors she had to choose from were inexhaustible. But recently, the focus of her art had shifted — ever since she had begun to see people with their graceful parasols dotting the sandy beach dunes.

“Those parasol people — I do not trust them,” said Mari as she cleared Naomi’s dishes from the table. “I do not know where they are from, but I cannot believe grown men would be parading around with such colorful parasols. It is preposterous.”

“I do not see any problem with it. I think their colorful parasols are beautiful,” Naomi replied as she painted a mint-colored parasol into the scene already laid out on her canvas. “And it is not as if they are all men. There are some women in their group, and even a few children.”

“But have you seen how sickly they look? It is not normal,” Mari insisted. “At first, I thought their faces were discolored by the light coming through their parasols, but no — they are really just that pale. What do you think it is they eat?”

“You do not have to be so rude, Mari.”

“I am just saying. What if they are part of some sort of cult? Are you not the least bit worried?”

“Hello, Naomi,” came a voice from the window, as a man with a mint colored parasol peeked in.

“What is it you are painting today?” he asked.

Mari hastily retreated.

“We were just talking about you and your friends, Mint,” Naomi chuckled.

“Really?”

“I just felt the urge to paint all of you. Look — there is Orange, Aquamarine, Lemon and Violet.”

“Well, isn’t that splendid.”

The man Naomi referred to as Mint, for she had not asked his real name, had a very pale face. As she watched him break into a smile, she thought it looked as if he had powdered his face with the same chalk she often saw in the earth around the vineyards. As Mint smiled, he spun his mint-colored parasol around in his hand. Indeed, it felt strange to call the thing in his hand a parasol, even if it was being used to shield from the sun rather than rain. It more resembled the large umbrellas you might expect an Englishman to carry around, tightly wound and never opened, like drenched walking bats.

But these lovers of parasols always had their umbrellas opened over their heads. Naomi never once saw them without one or with it shut, not one of them, since the group arrived suddenly the previous week and rented several cottages.

“So… you said you were talking about us?” Mint asked.

“My roommate was,” Naomi replied with a smile. “She thinks you are all undead.”

Mari was turned away from them, so Naomi could not see her face, but she saw her body tense up before slowly relaxing again.

“Undead?” Mint was silent for a few moments, but then broke the silence with a boisterous laugh. “Why that delivery reminds me of a joke I heard about April showers and May flowers!”

“Ridiculous, don’t you think?” Naomi said with a playful smile.

"Absolutely," Mint replied with a chuckle. "Well then, we will be returning to our resting place soon, so if you plan on stopping by, do not forget to bring a bouquet of flowers to set at our graves."

"I cannot believe you said that!" Mari flew at Naomi as soon as the man with the mint green parasol was gone. "Why do you always have to be so difficult?"

"You just hate to see him and I talking together because he resembles a certain special someone we knew who passed away, am I wrong?" said Naomi.

"Why do you have to go and bring him up?" said Mari. "That was a long time ago, and it was not as if he ever intended to marry you anyway."

"You have no business saying that."

"What is the point of making a fuss about this now? It happened decades ago."

"We had a chance to make up. But you... you hid his letter from me. You took his letter and stuffed it in your jewelry box filled with perfume and pressed flowers... By the time I found it, he was already..."

"That was decades ago."

"Yes," Naomi said softly. "He has long since been reborn."

"Even if that is the case, that man with the umbrella is not him." Mari then changed her tone of voice, from that of a live-in companion to that of a professional nurse. "Come now, it is time for your medicine."

Mint, with Aquamarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, and Peach trailing behind, among others, streamed out of their cottages and made their way to a green field with a view of the sea. When they arrived, they stuck a violet parasol into the ground. Then, as they all bowed their heads, Naomi came walking up slowly from behind them. Once Mint realized she was there, he acknowledged her presence with a slight nod.

"Did something happen?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we have come," Mint replied. "We are travelers. We do not stay long in any one place. However, Violet grew tired of our way of life, and wanted to return here, where he was born and raised."

"So that is why..." Naomi bowed her head. "Then, does that mean..."

"Yes," Mint replied with a nod. "We must soon return to our travels."

"If you are leaving," Naomi said, "would you take me with you?"

Mint's eyes opened wide. But rather than it being a simple expression of surprise, he seemed more intent on examining her face.

"You're..."

Naomi interrupted. "I do not have long to live... I believe you may have noticed."

Mint's eyes opened wider as he nodded. "Indeed."

"Then please," Naomi implored.

Mint turned to his companions. Slowly they nodded, their parasols in sync.

"Very well," Mint said. "Come under my umbrella."

It looked not unlike lovers kissing under an umbrella in the rain, or a butterfly caught in a spider's web. Under Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body shivered. By the time she stepped back out from under it, she had a parasol in her hand.

"From now on, you are Rose," declared Mint.

Naomi opened her rose-colored parasol.

Then the group of parasols, with their new color among them, headed west along a path through the orchards.

"Naomi... Where did you run off to?" Mari's voice echoed through the halls of the house. "Just how long are you going to be upset at me?"

As the wind picked up that evening, Mari, with a frightened shiver, looked out at the sun setting over the sea. Cutting across that beautiful sunset, she saw a shadow

dancing like a giant bat flapping its wings. What she saw was a violet parasol, twirling gracefully into the sky.

## PARASOL

Each stroke of her paintbrush was careful—refined. There was no sign of her age in the way she brought her brush across the canvas. The pastel colors of the sea stretching out to the horizon, the deep evergreen woods, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the brilliant colors of the clouds tinted with sunset and dawn alike, and the moon shining down its warm blue light, each element was brought to life in dazzling colors that illuminated the resort town she lived in. Though of late, ever since the elegant troupe of people had come and crowded the sands with their parasols, her motif had begun to change.

“I don’t like the look of those parasol people one little bit,” her housemate said, putting away the dishes. “Where are they from? And what kind of men frolic about with umbrellas of such colors?”

“You can think whatever you want, Mari. I think it’s beautiful,” she replied, adding the finishing touches to a mint-colored umbrella in the scenery on the canvas. “Also, it’s not only men. There are women, and I’ve seen a few children as well.

“It’s not natural. Have you seen the color of their faces?” Mari continued unabashed. “At first I thought maybe it’s just the way the light shines off their umbrellas. But I was wrong.” Mari’s voice lowered. “I think it’s something they eat.”

“Oh stop it.”

“For all we know, they could be part of a cult.”

“Good day, Naomi,” a voice beamed out from under a mint-colored parasol. The visitor poked his head through the open window. “What lovely scene are you painting today?”

At the sound of the voice, Mari quickly ducked away. Naomi, seeing this, barely suppressed a laugh before turning to her visitor. “Good day to you too, Mint. Why, we were just talking about parasols.”

“Parasols?”

“Yes, the parasols of you and your friends. I was inspired by them. Look, here is Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet.”

Mint, whose real name she had never asked, looked at the painting. A smile lit up on his white, chalky face. “It’s breathtaking,” he said, twirling the mint-colored parasol with his fingers. The parasol had a broad canopy that formed the brooding silhouette of a bat. It was the kind likely to be seen rolled up and carried by an Englishman at his side even while walking in the rain. Mint, however, never stepped out from the protection of his parasol. It was the same for all of them, the group of parasol lovers who suddenly appeared last week renting up the cottages.

“You were talking about us?”

“Not me exactly. My housemate.” Naomi’s eyes twinkled. “She thinks you are the living dead.” Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Mari’s shoulders tense.

“The living dead?” Mint went silent for a moment. Then out came a burst of laughter. “Your friend jokes like April brings showers.”

“You deny it then?” Naomi laughed with a mischievous look in her eyes.

“Oh I confess, it’s true!” said Mint, laughing. “And so m’lady, I bid thee farewell. My companions and I must be returning to our graves. Bring flowers should you require an audience.

“You are unbelievable!” Mari cried, bursting forth the moment the green umbrella was out of sight. Her face was red with anger. “You haven’t change one little bit, even after all this time.”

“Oh calm down, Mari. You think I don’t know why you don’t like me talking to him? It’s because he looks like *him* isn’t. But, as you and I both know, *he* is dead.”

"You're dragging that up now, Naomi? It all happened so long ago. Besides, we both know that he would never have married you anyway."

"Well you certainly made sure of that."

"Naomi, why now? Where is this resentment coming from? It was a lifetime ago."

"I had a chance to explain. That letter would have put things right. But you hid it away in your box of treasures. And when it came out again with your perfume and your pressed flowers, he was ..."

"It was a lifetime ago."

"He was gone." Naomi's words fell softly.

"And he is *not* that umbrella man," Mari said before silence gripped the both of them. Then, as if a switch had been flicked inside of her, Mari's nurse-like instincts kicked in. "It's time for your medicine."

The parasols came out of their cottages. Like a swell they gathered—a mint-colored parasol at the head, followed by parasols of blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet, pink, and all the other colors. The group stopped upon a green lawn that looked out over the ocean. There, a single violet parasol was set in the ground. Everyone's head was bowed low as Naomi walked solemnly towards them. Noticing her presence, Mint turned and bowed in greeting.

"What is this?" Naomi asked softly.

"This is why we are here," Mint replied simply. "We are travelers—we never stay in one place for too long. It is our way." He paused and turned to the violet parasol. "But, Violet has grown weary of this life. And so we have come here, to her homeland, to honor that."

"I see." She looked down. "And then?"

"And then we shall leave this land as well."

Naomi straightened. She looked at Mint. "When you leave, may I accompany you?"

Mint's eyes widened, but there was no hint of surprise in them. He looked at Naomi appraisingly. "You—"

"I don't have much time left." Naomi said, matter-of-factly. "But you already knew that, didn't you?"

Mint's eyes didn't waver. He nodded.

"Please, take me with you."

Mint turned and looked at the others. One by one, each nodded slowly, their umbrellas dipping in turn.

"Then it is settled," said Mint turning to Naomi. "Come, step under my umbrella."

The next scene looked for a moment like two lovers embraced on a rainy day, then in the next, like a spider descending upon its prey. Under the mint-colored umbrella, Naomi's body shook. When it was over, Naomi stepped out into the sun with an umbrella in her hand.

"From this day forth, your name is Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella. Then, with a new color amongst them, the group of parasols set off to the west along a path through the orchard.

"Naomi! Where are you Naomi?" Mari's voice echoed through the house. "You can't stay mad at me forever you know." Dusk had brought strong winds. Mari, trembling ever so slightly, cast her gaze out to the horizon where the sky met the sea. The brilliant colors of the sunset entranced her for a moment, before a shadow flew in front of her vision, breaking the spell. Looking like a bat with its wings outstretched, a single violet parasol twirled gracefully through the air.

## Parasol

One by one, the old lady's paintbrush carefully scooped up all the colours that filled the health resort with their infinite glow: not only the distant view of the pastel-coloured sea, but the thick evergreen forest, the sweet-smelling orchards and rose garden, the moon that shone a clear blue in the light of the clouds at sunset and dawn. It was only recently that the motifs it depicted had started to change a little.

It was after the parasols of the elegant people had begun to appear here and there amongst the sand dunes.

"Those parasols are certainly odd." Her companion remarked as she was putting away the crockery. "Which town have they strayed from, I wonder. Good men or not, walking around with multicoloured parasols like that..."

"What's wrong with them, Mari? They're beautiful." The old lady replied, applying the final touches to a peppermint coloured parasol on her canvas landscape. "What's more, they're not just men you know. There are women too, and even a few children."

"As for their sickly complexions, it's not normal." Mari commented further. "I thought it might just be the reflection of their parasols, but it's not... What do they eat, do you think?"

"That's very rude!"

"It's not. Wouldn't it be dreadful if they were some sort of cult?"

"Hey, Naomi! Good afternoon." All of a sudden, the owner of a peppermint coloured parasol peered in through the window. "What are you painting today?"

Mari hastily backed away.

Naomi, giggling to herself, replied "We were just talking about parasols, Mr Mint."

"Oh?"

"Because for some reason I felt like painting everyone. Look – Mr Orange, Mr Blue, Mr Lemon, Mrs Violet."

"Why, that's wonderful."

Mr Mint's white face (she hadn't asked his real name) – so white it was as if it were covered in calcareous vineyard soil – broke into a wide grin. With the tip of his fingers, he twirled his peppermint coloured parasol. Although, it was more of an umbrella than a parasol. An umbrella which an English person would roll up carefully, never opening, whilst walking around and getting wet.

However, these people were always underneath their open umbrellas. They were all like that, these parasol enthusiasts who had appeared suddenly last week and booked up several of the cottages.

"So... are there any rumours about us?" Mr Mint enquired.

"My friend has one," Naomi replied, smiling. "She says you might be the living dead."

Mari, who was facing the opposite direction, hunched her shoulders dramatically, then let them drop again.

"Living dead?"

Mr Mint was silent for a while, but finally burst out laughing.

"It's like an April fool's joke, isn't it?"

"Is that right?" The old lady laughed mischievously.

"Yes, it is." Mr Mint said, chuckling also. "Well then, we will go back home to our graves so bring us a bunch of flowers when you get the chance."

"You pig!" Mari spat furiously once the green umbrella was out of sight. "You've always been like that."

"It's because he looks like a dead person we both know." Naomi said. "That's why you get annoyed when I talk to him, Mari."

"Why are you bringing that up again Naomi?" Mari asked. "It was a long time ago. He wasn't going to marry you anyway."

"That's all because of your meddling."

"For goodness sake Naomi. Why are you picking a fight now? It was how many decades ago?"

"We had a chance to fix things." Naomi replied. "But you hid the letter. By the time it came out of your jewellery box - all jumbled up with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers and things - he was already..."

"It was decades ago."

"Yes." Naomi said in a small voice. "He was reborn a long time ago."

"Even if that's true, he is not that umbrella man." Mari said, in a voice which made her sound more like a nurse who had suddenly woken to her professional duties than Naomi's friend. "Right, it's medication time."

With Mr Mint at its head, the procession of parasols - blue, indigo, orange, lemon yellow, gold, silver, crimson, peach - streamed out of the cottages. When they came to a patch of green lawn overlooking the sea, there was a parasol planted in the ground. It was violet.

As they all bowed their heads deeply, the old lady strolled past at a leisurely pace.

Registering her presence, Mr Mint turned around. He gave a slight bow.

"What's going on?" Naomi enquired.

"This is what we came here for" Mr Mint replied. "Right from the start, we have always been travelling folk. We don't stay in one place. Only... Mr Violet grew tired of that lifestyle. And so, in this land where he was born and raised..."

"Is that so?" Naomi bowed her head. "And so you all..."

"Yes" Mr Mint nodded, along with his parasol. "And now we must go off on our travels again."

"In that case," Naomi said, "won't you please take me with you?"

Mr Mint opened his eyes wide. Rather than indicating surprise, it was as if he was trying to study her face more closely.

"You...?"

"Me." Naomi said. "I won't live much longer... you know that don't you?"

Mr Mint, eyes open wide, nodded. "Yes."

"Well then, I beg you."

Mr Mint turned to face his other companions. The parasols slowly nodded.

"I suppose it's ok..." He told Naomi. "Well then, inside my umbrella."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day. Or a butterfly, captured by a spider.

Inside Mr Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body trembled all over. When she stepped back outside, she was holding a parasol of her own.

"From today onwards, you will be Miss Rose."

Naomi opened her rose coloured parasol. With a new colour amongst their midst, the procession of parasols headed westward on the path through the orchard.

"Naomi! Where on earth have you gone?" Mari's voice echoed throughout their Western style house. "Just how long are you going to sulk for?"

When Mari, a little frightened by the sound of the wind which had grown stronger since dusk, looked out to where the edge of the sky blended into the sea, she saw a shadow dancing, obstructing her view of the beautiful sunset. Like a large bat beating its wings, a violet parasol was gracefully circling the sky.



Parasol (Inoue Takehiko)

The motifs of the old woman's paintbrush that had depicted the colours that filled this health resort with immeasurable brightness, carefully, as if scooping them out one by one, starting with the distant view of the pastel coloured open sea, the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the beautifully coloured light that streamed through the clouds at sunset and at dawn, the moon that shone clearly in shades of blue...began to change when the parasols of those elegant persons started appearing here and there along the sand dunes.

'Those people with the parasols are suspicious after all', said the woman's housemate as she put away her tableware.

'Wherever have they come from? To think that grown men would carry such colourful parasols...'

'It's fine, isn't it? It's pleasing to look at'

The woman replied as she applied the final coat of paint on the mint coloured umbrella depicted in the scenery on the canvas.

'Besides, there are not only gentlemen amongst them. There are some ladies too, and, although few, some children as well'

'Look how pale they are, that's not normal' Mari pointed out another feature, 'I thought it was merely the reflection of the colours of the parasols, but it seems it's not so...I wonder what kind of food they're having'

'That's impolite, you know'

'No. What if they belong to some kind of cult, wouldn't that be frightening?'

'Hey! Naomi, good day'

Suddenly, the owner of the mint coloured parasol peeked through the window.

'What kind of painting did you create today?'

The housemate hurriedly withdrew.

'We were talking about the parasols just now, Mint' Naomi said as she chuckled.

'Oh?'

'I suddenly had this wish to paint you all. Look, there is Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet'

'Wow. This is magnificent'

Mint – his real name wasn't inquired for – smiled, his pale face – pale as if it were covered with limestone ash – cracking into a broad smile. He spun the mint coloured umbrella round and round with his fingers. Rather than a parasol, one could say it was an umbrella. An umbrella which one would, if they were an Englishman, by no means ever use, keeping it tightly wrapped and walking while getting drenched. However, these people were always found under open umbrellas. These parasol loving fellows, who had suddenly appeared last week and rented a few cottages, were all like that.

'And, what about this gossip about us?'

'It was my housemate saying those things' Naomi said smiling. 'She thought you might be living corpses'

Mari was facing away at that moment and it could be seen how her shoulders rose greatly and once more sank down.

'Living corpses?'

Mint was silent for a few moments, but soon burst into laughter.

'That sounds just like an April fool's joke'

'Is that so?' The woman teasingly laughed.

'Very much so'

Mint, also giggling, added 'Well then, we shall be returning to our graves now. Don't forget to bring a bouquet when visiting'

‘Oh, you...’

When the green parasol left, Mari, who had grown angry, jumped out, ‘You’ve always been like this’

‘It’s because he resembles a dead man we had known, right?’ Naomi said. ‘That’s why you don’t like it when the two of us talk’

‘Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi’ Mari said. ‘It’s a thing of the past. In any case, he had no intention of marrying you’

‘That’s what they call meddling in other people’s affairs’

‘What’s wrong, Naomi? Why are you still trying to pick a fight even now? For god’s sake, that was decades ago’

‘There was even a chance to make up. But you hid the letter. By the time that letter was found in your jewel box, where it lay amongst the perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he had already – ‘

‘That was decades ago’

‘That’s right’

Naomi said in a low voice.

‘He has long been reborn’

‘Even if that’s so, it’s not that man with the parasol’, Mari said, now with the voice not of a housemate, but of a nurse, whose awareness as a professional had awakened.

‘Now, it’s time for your medicine’

Led by the mint coloured parasol, groups of ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet, pink and parasols of many other colours, emerged from the cottages in succession.

Once they reached the green lawn from which the sea could be seen, they placed one parasol on the ground. It was a violet parasol.

As they each deeply hung their heads down, the old woman came slowly walking by.

Noticing her presence, Mint turned around and greeted her.

‘What’s the matter?’ Naomi asked.

‘We have come here for this purpose’ Mint replied. ‘Originally, we led our lives travelling from one place to another. We don’t stay in one place for long. However, Violet got tired even of this way of life. So, in this land where he was born and raised – ‘

‘I see...’ Naomi lowered her head. ‘So, you are’

‘Yes’ Mint nodded, his parasol moving in unison with him. ‘We must set out again’

‘If that’s so, would you be willing to take me as well?’ Naomi said.

Mint opened his eyes widely. It seemed as if it was in order to closely inspect her face, rather than out of being surprised.

‘You...?’

‘I...don’t have much left’ Naomi said. ‘...were you aware of this?’

Mint nodded, widely opening his eyes.

‘...Yes’

‘In that case, please’

Mint turned towards the others. The parasols slowly nodded.

‘Very well...’ Mint told Naomi ‘Then, come beneath my parasol’

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

Like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under Mint’s parasol, Naomi’s body was trembling violently.

When she went out, Naomi was carrying a single parasol.

‘From today on, you will be Rose’

Naomi opened her rose coloured parasol.

The flock of parasols, with the addition of a new colour, headed west, along the orchard pathway.

‘Naomi. Where are you?’

Mari’s voice echoed throughout the building.

‘Just how much longer are you going to sulk’

When Mari, who had grown a bit scared of the sound of the wind that had got stronger since evening, looked up to the point where the sea met the sky, a silhouette was dancing, intercepted by the coloured light of a truly beautiful sunset. A single violet parasol, gracefully circled the sky, like a large bat flapping its wings.

The Parasols  
by Inoue Masahiko

Not only the pastel color of the sea in the distance, but also the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard, and the rose garden; the sunset, the dawn's light illuminating the clouds, and the pale blue moon crisply shining. These were the motifs flowing from the tip of the old lady's paintbrush as if the colors filling this picturesque resort with limitless brilliance were being carefully scooped up one by one onto the canvas, until suddenly, her paintings began to change.

The change began as the elegant ladies' and gentlemen's parasols first appeared near the sand dunes.

"There's something off about those people with parasols," her roommate said as she cleared the table for her. "What sort of town did they pour in from—grown men with those colorful parasols?"

"What's wrong with them, Mari? I think their beautiful colors are in good taste," Naomi answered as she layered a mint colored parasol onto the scene. "Besides, they're not all men. Some are women, and there are even a few children."

"But those sickly complexions. They don't look at all well," Mari commented from another angle. "I thought it was the reflection of the color from their parasols, but that's not it. Have they eaten something that didn't agree with them?"

"That's uncalled for."

"No, it's not. What if they're all part of a cult? Wouldn't that be frightening?"

A man with a mint parasol suddenly peeked in through the window.

"Ahh, hello there Ms. Naomi. What kind of picture did you paint today?"

Naomi giggled as Mari left the room. "We were just talking about the parasols, Mr. Mint," she said.

"Is that so?"

"I suddenly got the urge to paint you all. Look. There's Mr. Orange and Ms. Azure, Mr. Lemon and Ms. Violet."

"Well look at all this. Very impressive."

Mr. Mint (she had never asked his real name) drew his white face—white as though it had been dusted with the chalky soil of a vineyard—into a smile. He spun the mint-hued parasol around and around in his hands. It was actually more of a bat-like umbrella than a parasol. Something like what a Briton would keep tightly closed, definitely never opening it as he walked along getting wet in the rain. But these people were always underneath open umbrellas. That's how it was with all these parasol lovers who suddenly showed up last week to rent out a few of the cottages at the resort.

"So, what did you two say behind our backs?"

"Do you know what Mari said? She implied that you all look like the living dead," relayed Naomi, with a grin.

They could both see Mari looking the other direction, her shoulders heavily rising and falling.

"The living dead?" Mr. Mint was silent for a few moments then finally burst into laughter.

"Wit as refreshing as the springtime rain!"

"Isn't it?" the lady laughed mischievously.

"It is," Mint said with a chuckle. "Well, we're heading back to our graves, so if you need anything, come with a bouquet of flowers or something!"

“Oh, you’re at it again!” As the green umbrella faded into the distance, Mari lunged forward in anger. “After all these years you never change!”

“I suppose you’re just mad because he resembles a dearly departed man we both used to know,” reasoned Naomi. “That’s why you’re so put off when he and I talk, Mari.”

“Now why would you bring him up again Naomi?” asked Mari. “That was a long time ago. He was never planning to marry you anyway.”

“How he felt about me was none of your business.”

“What’s wrong with you Naomi? Why do you want to get into this now, after all this time? How many decades has it been?”

“You even had a chance to patch things up, but you hid the letter,” Naomi continued. “By the time that letter came out of your hope chest, along with the perfume bottles, pressed flowers and the like, he was already—“

“That was decades ago!”

“Exactly,” said Naomi. Then she lowered her voice. “And he was reincarnated some time ago.”

“Even if that’s true, that parasol man of yours is not him.”

Changing her tone from that of an old friend to that of a professional caregiver, Mari said, “Alright, it’s time for your medicine.”

The parasol-brandishing crowd streamed out from the cottages with Mr. Mint in the lead, followed by Azure, Violet, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, Peach, and the others.

When they came to a green thicket with a view of the sea, they thrust one parasol into the ground. It was Violet’s.

Just as they were each bowing deeply to Violet in respect, an elderly woman walked slowly toward them.

Mr. Mint, sensing her presence, turned around. Then he gave a curt nod.

“What happened?” Naomi asked.

“This is what we came for,” Mr. Mint replied. “We have always lived the life of travelers. We never stay in one place. Ms. Violet grew tired of our lifestyle, so here on the soil where she was born and raised—“

“So that’s what’s going on…”

Naomi hung her head.

“And all of you will…”

“Yes,” Mint nodded along with his umbrella, “We must continue our travels.”

“In that case,” ventured Naomi, “would it be possible to take me along with you?”

Mr. Mint’s eyes grew wide. Not so much in surprise but as to carefully examine her face, hoping to uncover her intentions.

“Are you…” his voice trailed off.

“I am,” Naomi responded. “I won’t be able to hold out much longer, but you knew that didn’t you?”

Eyes still wide, Mr. Mint paused then nodded in assent. “Yes”

“In that case please do me this last favor.”

Mint looked toward his fellow parasol holders. They all slowly nodded.

“It seems it will be fine…” said Naomi.

“Well then, come under my umbrella,” Mint said to Naomi.

Then, in a scene that looked like a kiss shared under an umbrella on a rainy day and yet also like a butterfly being trapped in a spider web, Naomi’s body shook violently underneath the mint parasol.

When she reemerged, she had her own umbrella in her hands.

“From this day forward you will be known as Ms. Rose”

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

Then the band of parasol holders, now with a new color among them, headed west down a path through the orchard.

“Naomi, where did you go?” Mari’s voice reverberated throughout the room. “How long do you plan on sulking?”

As Mari, a bit frightened by the sound of the evening wind as it grew stronger, looked toward the horizon where the sea met the sky, she saw a dancing shadow blocking the exceedingly beautiful hues of the setting sun. It was one purple parasol gracefully making circles in the sky, just like a giant bat flapping its wings.

## Parasol

Not only the distant view of the pastel colored coast, but the dense forest of evergreen trees, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the light on the clouds at dusk and dawn, the chill blue of the moon... and also, the motif of paintbrushes which delicately draw hues one by one, hues which fill this health resort with immense brilliance, as the brushes are lifted by the hands of elderly women; these were all things that began to change slightly, only recently. It was from that time when it all began... When that elegant lot of people appeared here and there with their parasols on the sand dunes.

"They can't be trusted you know, the ones with the parasols."

Her roommate spoke as she washed her dishes.

"What kind of place did they come from anyways? Fine men with colorful parasols like that..."

"What's the matter, Mary? I think it's quite lovely," she replied as she painted over a mint colored parasol. "Besides, it's not only men. There are women too, and there aren't many but there are children as well."

"Their demeanor though, it's just not normal." Mary chose something else to criticize. "I thought their faces were reflecting the color of the parasols, but I guess I was wrong... What on earth are they eating?"

"Don't be so rude."

"I'm not, what if it's related to some cult? How frightening would that be?"

"Good day, Naomi!" Suddenly, a man with a mint colored parasol peeked in from the window. "Good day, what are you painting?" Naomi's roommate removed herself from the conversation in a hurry.

Naomi let out a chuckle and said, "Why Mint, we were just talking about parasols."

"Is that so?"

"All of sudden I had the urge to paint everyone. Look, here are Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet too."

"Wow, this is brilliant!" Mint—I've never asked his real name—showed a frank smile with a face that looked like it was colored with calcium white earth taken from a vineyard. At the end of his hand he spun a mint colored parasol. Well, it was more of an umbrella to be more accurate, those which resemble bats' wings. Something that would be left unopened while walking through the rain if the owner were British, that sort of umbrella. But, for some reason, these people always leave them open and hold them downwards. The parasol enthusiasts who appeared suddenly and rented out the cottages here last week all do the same.

"So—what could the rumors about us be?"

"Well, according to my roommate," Naomi said with a smile, "you all might be the living dead." Mary's shoulders could be seen significantly rising and coming back down again as she faced the other direction.

"The living dead?" Mint briefly fell silent, but after a short while, gave way to a hearty laugh. "That must be some sort of joke, like April showers."

"Don't you think so?" She laughed jokingly. "It truly is."

Mint laughed as well and said, "Well then, I'll be returning to my grave, so if you need me please pay me a visit with flowers."

"You," Mary approached Naomi heatedly as the green umbrella began to disappear from sight. "You've always been like this."

"It's because he looks like someone you know that's passed away, isn't it?" asked Naomi. "That's why you hate talking to him, Mary. I'm right, aren't I?"

"Why do you have to bring that up all over again Naomi?" Mary asked. "That was ages ago. Either way, he never planned on marrying you."

“That’s a little too much now, wouldn’t you say?”

“What’s wrong with you Naomi, why would you get involved now? It’s been tens of years.”

“I had the chance to make things right with him, but no. You hid that letter. By the time it showed up, he was already—”

“That was years ago.”

“I know,” Naomi said softly. “I’m sure he’s long since been reborn.”

“Even if he has, he’s not that man with the parasol.” This time Mary spoke not as a roommate, but with the air of a nurse—“Come on then, it’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint at the front, Blue, Indigo, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, Pink and the others came from their cottages in succession. When they came to a grass field where the ocean could be seen, one parasol was placed on the ground. It was Violet’s parasol. An elderly woman approached them as they were bowing. Mint noticed and turned towards her. He greeted her with a nod.

“What’s the matter?” asked Naomi.

“This is the reason why we came,” replied Mint. “We are a people who travel from place to place. There’s no one place where we stay extensively. However, Violet has become tired of living such a life. For that reason, we’ve come back to where she was born and raised—”

“So that’s why you’ve come…” Naomi looked at the ground. “That means…”

“Yes,” Mint acknowledged. “We must be off again on our next journey.”

“If so,” said Naomi, “then I bid you take me with you, please.” Mint’s eyes widened. He wasn’t quite surprised, but he beheld her face intently.

“But you…?”

“I… I won’t be able to hold out for very long,” said Naomi. “… I’m sure you’ve noticed.” Mint widened his eyes, and gave her a nod.

“… I understand.”

“Thank you.”

Mint faced the others. They all nodded gently in response.

“Alright then,” Mint said to Naomi. “Come now, under my parasol.” It was like a kiss on a rainy day. Like a butterfly caught in a spider’s web. Naomi’s figure shivered under Mint’s parasol. As they left, Naomi held a parasol in her hand. “From today, your name is Rose.” Naomi opened the rose colored parasol. With a new hue added to the company, they departed to a small orchard road in the west.

“Naomi—where have you gone?” Mary’s voice reverberated through the walls of her home. As Mary gazed at the sun which melted into the horizon of the ocean, slightly frightened by the strong wind that came with the evening, her shadow danced as it was formed by the brilliant sunset light spreading over her.

As a bat spreads its wings to fly, a single violet colored parasol spun elegantly in the air.



Parasols  
Inoue Masahiko

Set against the pastel-coloured backdrop of the open sea was a deep forest of evergreen trees, a fragrant orchard and a garden of roses, and a moon that shone crisp and pale in the clouded lighting of the setting sun and the greying morn... The old woman, whose brush's motif had recently begun to change a little, was painting in all the brilliant, immeasurable hues that filled the health resort almost as though she were carefully scooping each one up.

It had begun to change... ever since those elegant people and their parasols had started to appear here and there on the sand dunes.

"Those folk with the parasols over there really are suspicious," said the woman's housemate as she cleared her dishes from the table. "I wonder which godforsaken town washed them down here; fine men strutting about with those rainbow coloured umbrellas."

"Oh hush, Marie. Do you not think they have gorgeous taste?"

As she added the finishing touch to the mint coloured umbrella on the canvas, the woman continued, "Besides, there aren't *only* men over there you know. There are women and, although just a few, children as well."

"But look at how pale they are. That doesn't seem normal to me." Marie retorted, pouncing on a different matter. "I'd thought at first that it might have been the light reflecting off the parasols, but it is not. I wonder...what exactly it is they eat."

"You are being rude."

"I am being no such thing. Won't you be frightened if they all belonged to a cult of some sort?"

"Hello there, Miss Naomi. How are you?" The gentleman who owned the mint coloured parasol suddenly peeked in through the window. "What have you been painting today?"

The housemate hastily withdrew to the far corner of the room. "We were just talking about parasols, Mr Mint," said Naomi, chuckling.

"Oh?"

"I just felt like rendering you all in a painting. Look, there's a Mister Orange, a Mister Blue, a Miss Lemon and a Miss Violet."

"My, this is quite magnificent," said Mint (his real name had not been enquired) with his face – as white and chalky as though smeared with the blanched soil of a vineyard – slit open in a broad smile. He turns the mint coloured parasol round and round in his hands. It was more of a large umbrella than a dainty parasol, really. The kind that an Englishman would keep wound thin and tight, choosing instead to get drenched walking in the rain rather than opening it.

But these umbrella enthusiasts, who had appeared out of thin air all of a sudden last week and rented out several cottages here, are all the same. They always stayed underneath their umbrellas – those bat-like umbrellas.

"So, I hear we're the subject of gossip lately?"

"Yes, my housemate was just telling me," said Naomi, smiling, "That you all might be the living dead."

With her back turned to them, Marie's shoulders rose in a large, shuddering swell and fell back down.

"The living dead?" After saying nothing for a moment, Mint finally gave a bark of laughter. "A stimulating joke, if I've ever heard one, Miss."<sup>i</sup>

"Isn't it?" She giggled, teasingly.

"Indeed it is," said Mint, chuckling. "Well then, it is time we returned to our graves. Be sure to bring us a bouquet of flowers when the occasion arises."

"You."

As soon as Mint left, with his mint-green umbrella, Marie stomped over to Naomi angrily. "You've *always* been like this."

"It's because he resembles someone we once knew, isn't it. Someone who died," said Naomi, "And that is the sole reason why you seem to hate it when he and I talk, Marie."

"Why must you bring that up again, Naomi?" said Marie. "It's ancient history. Besides, I'm sure he had no intention of marrying you either way."

"And that's exactly what we call 'being meddlesome,' my dear."

"What on earth is wrong with you Naomi? Why are you quarrelling with me about something that happened ages ago?"

"There was a chance to set things right, you know. But you went and hid the letter. And by the time we fished it out of your jewellery box – all mixed up with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers – it was too late. He'd already..."

"It's been years since then."

"Yes," said Naomi softly, "He'd already been born anew..."

"Nonetheless, that umbrella man is not him."

And now, suddenly with all the air of a professional nurse, Marie said, "Now then. It's time for your medicine."

With mint leading the way, lapis ultramarine, deep indigo, bright orange and lemon yellow, rich gold and silver, scarlet red and peach pink coloured parasols flocked out of the cottages in quick succession. Upon arriving at the lush green lawn where one could regard the ocean from, they erected a single parasol in the earth. It was a sombre violet.

The old woman slowly walked up to them just as they were bowing low their heads to the ground. Sensing another's presence, Mint turned around and nodded in greeting.

"What has happened?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came here," answered Mint. "Our way of life is one of endless travel. It is not in our nature to stop at one place. But, this harsh lifestyle took its toll on Miss Violet. So, we thought to put her to rest here – in the land where she was born and raised."

"I see..." Naomi hung her head. "Then that means –"

"Indeed," Mint nodded, parasol and all. "We will have to set forth on our next journey."

"If you do," said Naomi, "won't you please take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, not in surprise, but to closely regard her face.

"Are you...?"

"I," said Naomi, "I won't last very long...as you already know, I'm sure."

Eyes as round as saucers, Mint nodded. "...Yes."

"Well then, if you would please."

Mint turned to his other companions. The umbrellas slowly nodded in answer.

"Very well then," said Mint to Naomi. "Please step underneath my umbrella."

It almost looked like a kiss shared in the rain. Or rather, a butterfly caught in a spider's embrace. Naomi's body trembled and shook underneath Mint's umbrella. When she stepped outside, she held a single parasol in her hands.

"From this day forth, you will be Miss Rose." Naomi unfurled her rose coloured umbrella.

With a brand new colour added to their ranks, the parasols flocked westward – down the narrow little pathway through the orchards.

"Naomi! Where have you wandered off to?" Marie's voice echoed through the house. "Haven't you sulked enough for one day?"

Growing fearful of the loud gale that evening brought, Marie found herself gazing toward the far reaches of the ocean. There, where the sky met the sea, she saw the dazzling brilliance of the setting sun marred by a fluttering shadow. A single violet coloured parasol pirouetted

slowly, elegantly, across the sky, almost as if a large bat were soaring in the air with its wings spread wide.

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## Parasol

Written by Masahiko Inoue

The pale, distant sea was one of several motifs in her painting. So too, were the thick evergreen forest, the sweetly fragrant orchard, and the rose garden. The clear blue moon gleaming against the beautifully colored light of the clouds at sunset and sunrise. All of these colors filled the resort with such infinite brightness. Carefully, the old woman painted these colors one by one. Lately, the motifs began to change. That was when the figures with the parasols appeared on the sand dunes.

"Those parasol people are really strange," said the woman's housemate, as she put away the dishes. "Where could they have come from? Grown men carrying such ridiculously colorful parasols!"

"Oh, they're perfectly harmless, Mari. I think they have lovely taste." The old woman added a layer of mint green to the parasol in her painting. "Besides, they aren't only men. There are also women and a few children."

"Their faces are so pale, that can't be healthy," Mari pointed out. "At first I thought that the parasol's colors reflected in their faces, but I was wrong. Must be something they ate."

"That's a bit much."

"Well, what if they're some kind of cult?"

"Why, hello Miss Naomi." The man with the mint green parasol casually stopped by their window. "So what kind of painting did you work on today?"

Her housemate quickly backed away.

Naomi giggled, "Mr. Mint, we were just talking about your parasols."

"Oh?"

"I just couldn't help painting all of you. See? Here's a gentleman with an orange parasol, another with blue, another with yellow and a lady with violet!"

"Why, this is splendid."

Mint (she hadn't asked what his real name was) had a face as white as the chalky soil of the vineyard. It was as though his skin were smeared with the soil. His face broke into a smile. He began to twirl the mint colored parasol with his fingers. It looked more like a black umbrella than a parasol. If he were an Englishman, he would have held it tightly closed and walked in the rain.

Yet, these people always stood under their opened parasols. Last week, they suddenly showed up and rented all of the cottages to capacity. These parasol enthusiasts were all the same.

"So . . . what is the rumor about us?"

"Like my housemate says . . ." Naomi grinned. "You're the living dead."

Mari stood with her back to the room. Her shoulders jerked up and fell.

"Living dead?" Mr. Mint was quiet for a while, then burst out laughing.

"This joke is like an April shower. Isn't it?"

The lady of the house laughed mischievously, "Exactly!"

"Then, we'll go back to our graves. When you visit us, be sure to bring flower bouquets for everyone."

"You . . ." Mari stormed into the room as the green parasol slipped away.

"You've always been like this."

"It's because he looks like a dead person we both know," Naomi replied. "That's why you can't stand to see us talking, isn't that right, Mari?"

"Why are you bringing that up again Naomi?" asked Mari. "He never intended to marry you anyway."

"That, is what you call prying." Naomi snapped.

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why are you picking a fight now? That happened decades ago!"

"We had a chance to make up. But you just had to hide the letter. That letter was in your jewelry box; all jumbled up with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers. By the time I found it, he . . ."

"That was decades ago."

"I know." Naomi said softly. "He was already reincarnated."

"Anyway, he's not that man with the parasol." Mari's tone became brisk. Sounding like a nurse, she announced, "It's time for your medication now."

The people with the parasols streamed out of the cottages in succession. First, the mint parasol. Then the ultramarine, indigo-blue, bitter-orange, lemon-yellow, gold, silver, vermillion and peach. When they reached the lawn, they stuck one violet parasol into the ground. Facing the parasol, they bowed deeply. The old woman walked towards them. Sensing her presence, Mint turned around and nodded.

"What's going on?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came here." answered Mint. "From the beginning, we've led a nomadic life. Always on the move. But Mr. Violet got tired of traveling all the time. He returned to this town where he was born and raised so . . ."

"I see." Naomi looked down solemnly. "So you are . . ."

"Yes." Mint nodded, holding his parasol. "I'm afraid we must be going again."

"If you must go," Naomi said quietly, "could you take me with you?"

Mint looked at her closely for a while.

"Are you . . . ?"

"I . . ." Naomi continued. "You know that I don't have much time."

Mint opened his eyes and nodded, "I know."

"Then, may I ?"

Mint faced the rest of the group. The parasols all nodded as one.

"It's okay with us." said Mint. "Now, step under my parasol."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It also looked like a butterfly trapped in a spider's web.

Underneath his parasol, Naomi began to shiver.

When they stepped outside, Naomi was carrying one parasol.

"From now on, you are Miss Rose."

Naomi opened the rose-colored parasol. The group, with their newly colored parasol stood on the orchard's path, and began moving west.

"Naomi? Where are you?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the mansion. "Are you going to sulk all day and night?" Mari was a bit frightened from the wind that blew stronger since earlier that evening. She saw the distant horizon where the sky met the sea. There, a shadow hovered over a sunset so unspeakably beautiful. Looking like a large, flying bat, a violet parasol floated gracefully in the air.

## Parasols

It was more than just the pastel colors of the ocean vista, it was also the deep evergreen forest, the sweet-smelling orchard and rose garden, the radiance of the clouds at sunset and sunrise, and the cold blue glow of the moon... In the elderly woman's hand, the brush seemed to scoop up the colors that filled the retreat with an immeasurable brilliance and pour them into her motifs. But recently, changes had started creeping in. It must have been since the parasols of those elegant figures started appearing here and there across the dunes.

"There's definitely something off about those parasol people," the woman's companion said as she put away the dishes. "Where did they wander here from? I mean, they're fine men, but those different color umbrellas..."

"But it's nice isn't it, Mari? I think it shows beautiful taste," she replied as she dabbed a mint-colored parasol onto the scene stretched across the canvas. "Anyway, they're not all men, those people. There are women too, and children, although not very many."

"I tell you, those pale complexions aren't normal." Mari had started on a different line of attack. "I thought it was a reflection of the color of their parasols, but it isn't. I wonder what it is they're eating?"

"Hey. That's rude."

"No it isn't. What if they are some kind of cult? Isn't that a scary thought?"

"Hullo! Good afternoon there, Ms. Naomi." Suddenly a figure under a mint parasol was looking in through the window. "What have you been painting today?"

Mari hurriedly backed away. Naomi giggled.

"Actually, Mr. Mint, we were just talking about parasols."

"Oh?"

"It's just that I've suddenly started wanting to draw you all. Look, here's Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"Oh! That's wonderful!"

Mr. Mint – she hadn't asked his real name – smiled, a grin stretching across his pale face, a face that was as white as if it had been smeared with chalk earth from the vineyard, and he gave a little laugh. He was spinning his mint parasol around and around with his fingertips. No, not a parasol, it was more of a western-style umbrella, the kind a British gentleman might carry, tightly wound up as he got soaked by the rain, definitely never to be opened.

However, Mint and the others were always under their open umbrellas. That's how they all were, these parasol enthusiasts who had appeared suddenly last week and hired a bunch of cottages.

"So, what were you saying about us?"

"My companion reckons," Naomi said cheerfully, "That you might be the living dead."

She saw Mari, who had her back turned to them, raise her shoulders sharply and then lower them again.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent for a moment and then let out a loud laugh.

"Why, that would be as shocking as an April shower."

"Is that so?" Naomi asked, smiling playfully.

"That's so," Mint chuckled. "Well, we'll be returning to the grave now, but if you need anything, just put down a bouquet..."

"Why you..." Mari spat angrily as the green umbrella disappeared, "You've always been like this."

"It's probably because he resembles a certain somebody we knew who died," Naomi said. "That must be why you don't like it when I'm talking to him, Mari."

"Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi?" Mari said. "It's ancient history. That man had no intention of marrying you anyway."

"That's none of your business."

"But why Naomi? Why are you picking a quarrel about it now? It was decades ago."

"It's because we had a chance to make up. But you went and hid the letter. And by the time it emerged, from your jewelry box, from that perfume bottle, mixed in with the pressed flowers... by then he was already..."

"But it was so long ago."

"I know," Naomi said in a quiet voice. "He was already reborn long ago."

"Even if that were true, it wasn't as that umbrella man," Mari said. Her voice was no longer like the voice of a companion, but of a nurse whose professional instincts had been aroused. "Right, it's time for your medicine."

The parasols emerged from their cottages in succession, starting with Mint, followed by Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, Peach and the others. They walked up to the green lawn overlooking the ocean, where a single parasol had been planted in the ground. It was the violet parasol. As they each bowed their head deeply, the old woman ambled slowly towards them. Mint became aware of her presence and turned to greet her with a nod.

"What are you doing?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came," Mint answered. "We have always lived as wanderers, never stopping at any one place. However, Mr. Violet became tired of that life. So we returned here, to the place he was born and raised..."

"I see." Naomi bowed her head. "And you..."

"Yes." Mint bowed back, together with his parasol. "We must return to our wandering."

"If that's so," said Naomi, "Would you please take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, not so much in surprise, but like he was taking a close look at her face.

"You?"

"I..." Naomi replied. "I don't have long left. But you probably already knew that."

Mint's eyes widened further, and he bowed his head.

"Yes."

"Well then. If you would be so kind."

Mint turned to the others. They each nodded slowly.

"That's settled then," Mint said to Naomi. "Well, come under my umbrella."

It was like they were sharing a kiss in the rain. It was like a butterfly had been caught by a spider. Naomi's body shuddered under Mint's umbrella. When she emerged, it was with an umbrella in hand.

"From today, you will be known as Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened the rose umbrella, and the group started heading west along the path through the orchards, a new color among their ranks.

"Naomi? Where have you gone?" Mari's voice echoed around the grand building. "Really now. How long are you going to continue sulking?"

The noise of the wind, which had been getting stronger since dusk, had started to worry her a little, and as she looked out into the distance where the ocean met the sky, the beautiful splendor of the sunset was interrupted by a dancing shadow. A single, violet umbrella spun elegantly across the sky, like a large bat flapping its wings.

The Parasols  
By Inoue Masahiko

The old woman's paintings weren't restricted to the pastel-colored backdrops of the Okinawa seaside. She also painted the deep evergreen forests, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the vivid sunsets and glowing dawn clouds, and the bright pale shine of the moon. She painted the health resort in all its immeasurable vibrance, one color at a time, delicately, as if drawing up its essence with her brush. It was only recently that these motifs began to change.

Yes, recently... when the elegant group of parasols began to appear all across the dunes.

"There's definitely something fishy about that parasol gang," the old woman's roommate grumbled as she put away the dishes. "What town did they drift in from? No respectable man carries an umbrella in colors like that..."

"Oh, let it be, Mari. They have beautiful taste," the old woman replied, adding the final coat of paint to the mint-green parasol in the background of her canvas. "Besides, they're not all men. There are women too. And children, though not many."

"Their complexion is awful. It's not normal." Mari switched to another argument. "I thought it was just the reflection of their parasols, but it's not. What exactly do you think they're eating?"

"That's rude."

"No it's not. What if they're part of some cult, isn't that a scary thought?"

"Hullo, Miss Naomi. How do you do?"

Suddenly peering in through the window was the owner of the mint-green parasol. "What are you painting today?"

The roommate hastily withdrew. Naomi snickered and said, "We were just discussing your parasols, Mister Mint."

"Oh?"

"I was struck with the urge to paint you all. Look, here's Mister Orange, and Miss Blue, and Mister Lemon, and Miss Violet."

"Well, well. It looks splendid."

Mint – she hadn't asked his real name – smiled broadly, his face as pale as if it had been caked in the chalky soil of the vineyard. With his fingertips, he twirled the handle of his mint-green parasol around and around. Although it was more of a western-style umbrella than a traditional parasol. The kind Englishmen would keep tightly closed as they walked through the rain, its bat-like shape at their sides.

But these parasol enthusiasts, they were always under their umbrellas. Every single one of them, ever since last week when they had appeared out of nowhere and rented out all the cottages.

"So, what kind of rumors were you spreading about us?"

"My roommate was the one who was spreading them." Naomi spoke brightly. "She was wondering if you might be the living dead."

She saw Mari's shoulders heave high, and then slump back down again. She was still facing the other way.

"The living dead?" Mint was quiet for a long moment. Then, finally, he let out a hearty laugh. "That almost sounds like an April Fool's prank."

"Does it?" The old woman gave a mischievous smile.

"It sure does." Mint snickered along. "Well then, we'll be returning to the grave. If you need anything from us, please bring flowers."

"You know, you—!"



As the green umbrella receded in the distance, Mari flew out of her hiding place in a fury. "You have always, *always* been like this!"

"This is all because he looks like a certain late someone, isn't it," Naomi said. "I know that's why you don't like me talking to him. Right, Mari?"

"Why are you dredging that up, Naomi?" Mari asked. "That was such a long time ago. And he wasn't going to marry you anyway."

"Thanks to your meddling, you mean."

"Naomi, what's gotten into you? Why are we getting into this now? That was decades ago."

"I had a chance to make up with him. But you hid the letter from me. I found it in your jewelry box, mixed in with your perfumes and pressed flowers, but by then he was already—"

"That was decades ago."

"It was." Naomi's voice was quiet. "He was reborn a long, long time ago."

"Even if he was, that umbrella dandy isn't him." Mari's tone changed. It was no longer that of a roommate, but took on the professional sharpness of one who had once pursued nursing. "Come on, time for your medicine."

From the cottages streamed a procession of parasols – blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet, peach, and more, with mint-green in the lead. They reached the green lawn with a view of the sea, and there stood a single umbrella propped up in the ground. It was the violet parasol.

As they were each taking turns bowing before it, the old woman made her slow approach. Noticing her presence, Mint turned. He gave her a nod.

"What happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is what we came here for," Mint replied. "By nature, we live a wandering life. We never stay long in one place. However... Miss Violet grew tired of such a lifestyle. She wanted to return to the land she was born and raised on before she..."

"Oh." Naomi bowed her head. "Then you'll be..."

"Yes." Mint's parasol nodded with him. "We must be leaving on our travels again."

"In that case," Naomi said, "might I ask you to take me along?"

Mint's eyes widened – not quite in surprise, but to get an acute look at her face. "You..."

"Me," Naomi said. "I won't last much longer. But you already knew that, didn't you?"

Mint, his eyes still wide, nodded.

"...Yes."

"Well then, please."

Mint looked to his companions. The parasols nodded slowly.

"Very well..." Mint spoke to Naomi. "Then come beneath my umbrella."

It might have looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It might have looked like a butterfly trapped in a spider's jaws.

Beneath the mint parasol, Naomi's body shuddered violently.

When she stepped out, she held a single umbrella in her hand.

"From now on, you are Miss Rose."

Naomi opened the rose-colored parasol.

The flock of parasols headed west down the orchard path, a new shade among them.

"Naomi, where'd you run off to?" Mari's voice rang throughout the western-style house. "How long, exactly, are you going to sulk?"

The wind had been picking up since evening fell, and the sound of it frightened Mari a little. When she looked up to the horizon where the sky met the Okinawa sea, a shadow obstructed the splendor of the sunset. It was a single violet parasol, spinning elegantly through the air like a huge bat in flight.

## Parasol – by Inoue Masahiko

The pastel-colored ocean in the distance, the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the clouds lit up by sunset and dawn, and the pale, crisply shining moon...all of these had the elderly lady made the motif of her brush. She carefully painted them one by one, seeming to scoop up the colors that filled this sanatorium with innumerable sparkles. It was only very recently that her motif began to change.

Only recently...after those elegant people with the parasols began to appear here and there among the dunes.

"Those people with the parasols are definitely suspicious," her roommate said while cleaning up utensils. "What town did they wander in from? And for handsome guys, they're carrying some very colorful umbrellas..."

"I think it's fine. Mari. It's a beautiful hobby," she replied, putting a topcoat on the mint-colored umbrella depicted on her canvas. "Also, those people are not all men. There are women too, and while there are only a scant few, there are also children."

"Their faces are such an unhealthy color; it's not normal!" Mari tried a different point of attack. "I thought it was the color of their parasols reflecting on them, but it's not. ...I wonder, what do you suppose they eat?"

"That's rude."

"No. What if they're some kind of cult? Wouldn't that be scary?"

"Hey, Miss Naomi, good afternoon!"

The owner of a mint-colored parasol suddenly peeked his head in the window. "So, what sort of painting have you made today?"

Her roommate hurriedly withdrew.

Naomi said, snickering slightly, "Actually, we were talking about parasols just now, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"Well, I suddenly felt like drawing all of you. See, here's Miss Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"Ohh. Well, this is marvelous." Mint – she hadn't asked his real name – smiled. The smile spread slowly across his pale face – pale like the limestone dust that covers the ground of a vineyard. In his hand, he spun his parasol around and around. Although, it was more of an English-style umbrella than a parasol, with fabric spread like a bat's wings. An Englishman would have it tightly rolled up and never open it, carrying it along looking like a drenched bat.

However, these people were always, always beneath an open umbrella. All of these parasol-loving people who suddenly appeared last week, renting out several cottages, were the same way.

"So – what sort of gossip is there about us?"

"Well, this is just what my roommate says," Naomi said, grinning. "She says, maybe all of you are living corpses."

Mari, standing with her back turned, visibly hunched up her shoulders, and then lowered them again.

"Living corpses?" Mint was silent for a moment, but he finally burst out laughing. "Well, that joke is refreshing just like an April shower!"

"Oh really?" the old lady said teasingly, laughing.

"Yes, it is!" Mint said, also snickering slightly. "Well then, we shall be returning to our graves now, so if you should have time, please leave us a bouquet or two."

"You are impossible!"

After the green umbrella had withdrawn, Mari flew out in a fury. "Just impossible! You've always been like this!"

"It's because he looks like a dead person we know, isn't it?" Naomi said. "That's why you hate it so much that we talk to each other, isn't it, Mari?"

"Why bring that up again?" Mari said. "It's ancient history. Anyway, he never had any intention of marrying you."

"That is what one would call 'meddling'."

"What's wrong, Naomi? Why are you quarreling about this now? I mean, how many decades ago was it?"

"We had a chance to make up. But you hid the letter. By the time that letter came out of your jewelry box – all mixed up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers – by that time, he was already –"

"It was decades ago."

"Yes it was," Naomi said in a small voice. "He has already been reincarnated, for a long time now."

"Even if he has, he isn't that man with the parasol," Mari said, speaking less as a roommate and more as though she had come to her senses as a professional nurse. "Now then, it's time for your medicine."

A group of parasols of various colors came crowding out of the cottages: blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, pink, with mint in the lead.

They came to a stretch of green grass overlooking the ocean, and then set a single umbrella upright in the ground. It was the violet parasol.

As they stood there, bowing their heads deeply, an elderly woman slowly approached.

Mint turned around when he sensed her presence, and nodded to her.

"What happened?" Naomi asked.

"You see, this is why we came," Mint replied. "Fundamentally, we live our lives traveling from one journey to the next. We don't stop in one place. However, Mr. Violet had gotten tired of that lifestyle. So he wanted to return to the land where he was born and raised..."

"I see..." Naomi hung her head. "So then, what about the rest of you?"

"Right," Mint nodded his head along with his parasol. "We must set out on a journey once again."

"In that case," Naomi said, "I wonder, might I ask you to take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened. It seemed that he did it to more closely examine her face, rather than out of surprise. "You want...?"

"Yes," Naomi said. "I don't have much longer to live. ...I think you knew that."

"Yes," Mint nodded, his eyes wide.

"In that case, please."

Mint turned to the rest of his companions. The group of parasols slowly nodded.

"Okay then..." Mint said, turning back to Naomi. "All right, come under my umbrella."

It looked like a light kiss on a rainy day.

It also looked like a butterfly trapped in a spider's web.

Under Mint's umbrella, Naomi trembled.

When she left, Naomi carried a single umbrella.

"Starting today, you are Miss Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

With a new color added to the group, the crowd of parasols took a small path through the orchard and headed west.

“Naomi! - where did she go?” Mari's voice echoed throughout the small Western-style house. “Come now, just how long are you going to sulk?”

The wind had gotten stronger since evening fell, and Mari was a little frightened by the sound. When she looked out the side of a window adjacent to the seashore, she saw a dancing shadow obscuring the overly-brilliant light of the setting sun. A single, violet parasol was turning elegantly through the sky. It looked just like a large bat flapping its wings.

## PARASOL by Masahiko Inoue

A pastel color sea, green forest, sweet-smelling vineyard, rose garden, sunset and morning clouds, and a bright blue moon... The old lady had painted them all with the endless colors of the health resort. The motif of her painting, however, seemed to have changed the day she had witnessed a group of gentlemen walking with their parasols everywhere.

"Those gentlemen with their parasols are suspicious." The old lady's housemate said whilst putting her dishes away. "I wonder where they came from? I mean, they looked fine and all until I saw their colorful umbrellas..."

"It's fine, Mary. I think they are beautiful." The old lady answered her as she painted a mint color parasol on her canvas. "Besides, not all of them are gentlemen. There are ladies and a number of children too."

"With that pale complexion, I suppose I can overlook it." Mary brought up an interesting point. "I thought the color of the parasol is what makes them look like that, but no. I wonder what kind of food they eat?"

"Now you're just being rude."

"No, I'm not. What if they are part of a cult? Won't you be scared of them?"

"Hello there, Ms. Naomi. Good day." The owner of the mint color parasol popped out of the window all of a sudden. "What kind of painting did you do today?"

The old lady's housemate drew back in an instant. Naomi chuckled. "We were just talking about you and that parasol of yours, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"Anyhow, I had the urge to draw everyone somehow. Look, there are Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"Oh. How lovely." Mr. Mint - is how she called him as she never bothered to ask his name - had a face as white as a ground limestone. He couldn't help but smile broadly as he twirled the handle of his parasol with his fingers. Truth be told, his parasol looked more like a Western-style umbrella. If he was British, he would never open his umbrella, even when it rained. He would rather let himself soak. But these people always seemed to have walked with their umbrella open. Last week, these parasol-loving folk showed up all of a sudden and rented some cottages nearby. "So, what were you talking about us?"

"My housemate said," Naomi told him whilst smiling. "She said that you guys are a living corpse." Mary shrugged her shoulder. Her back was facing Naomi.

"A living corpse?" Mr. Mint was silent for a moment before he bursted out laughing. "It's like an April shower joke, isn't it?"

"Is it?" The old lady gave him a naughty laugh.

"Yes, indeed." Mr. Mint laughed with her before he continued, "Well, then. We shall return to *our* grave now. If you ever come visit, do bring us *a bouquet of roses*."

"I can't believe you." Mary flared up as soon as the owner of the green umbrella had left. "You haven't changed a bit. You're still the same old Naomi."

"Is it because he looks like the man we knew?" Naomi asked her. "That's the reason you were irritated when I talked to him, isn't it, Mary?"

"Why did you bring it up again, Naomi?" Mary said to her. "It was a long time ago, and he had never wished to marry you anyway."

"That's what I call meddling."

"What is it with you, Naomi? Why did you bring the matter up again? It happened decades ago."

"I had a chance to reconcile with him, but you'd hid my letter. When I found the letter in your jewelry box, along with a perfume and pressed flowers, it was too late."

He was already..."

"It happened decades ago, for goodness' sake."

"Yes." Naomi said in a low voice. "He must have been born again now."

"Even so, it can't be that parasol guy." This time, Mary did not speak to her as a housemate, but a sober nurse. "Come now, it's time for your medicine."

The mint color parasol left the cottage, followed by the ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, golden, silver, scarlet, and peach parasols. As they reached a green lawn with the ocean view, a parasol fell to the ground. It was the violet one. The old lady came slowly when the people bowed their head, one by one. Realizing her presence, Mr. Mint turned around and nodded.

"What happened?" Naomi asked.

"We came here for this very purpose." Mr. Mint answered her. "From the beginning, we have always been a traveller. We have never settled down. But it seems that Mr. Violet was tired of such a life, so he chose to return to the land he was born and grew up in..."

"I see." Naomi bowed her head. "So, it means that you..."

"Yes." Mr. Mint nodded with his parasol. "We must continue our journey."

"In that case," Naomi said to him. "Will you take me with you?"

Not a bit surprised, Mr. Mint opened his eyes and looked at her closely. "You are...?"

"I," Naomi said to him. "I can't take it any longer, and you knew that, didn't you?"

Mr. Mint opened his eyes and nodded. "Yes." "Please, everyone." Mr. Mint turned to the others as they nodded leisurely. "Very well..." Mr. Mint said to Naomi. "Come here and take shelter." It was like a kiss in the rain, like a butterfly caught in a spider's web. Naomi's body was shivering under Mr. Mint's umbrella. When she left the resort, she brought an umbrella with her. "From now on, you'll be Ms. Rose, I suppose?"

Naomi opened her rose color umbrella. With a new color added, the group passed through a small vineyard and walked to the west.

"Naomi, where are you?" Mary's voice echoed in the whole building. "Stop sulking and come out already." The wind had gotten strong in the evening that it scared Mary a little. She was looking at the horizon when she noticed a shadow dancing in the beautiful sunset. The violet color umbrella was travelling gently in the sky like a big bat flapping its wings.

## Parasols

by INOUE Masahiko

The soft pastels of the sea blend into the distant horizon, deep emeralds of the evergreen forest fade into dusk. The many colors of the fragrant orchard and rose garden dance in the wind. Crimson sets the clouds aflame at sunset and pinks and apricots illuminate them at sunrise, pale blue reveals the crisp reflection of the moon.

The images had been painted delicately, the old woman carefully lifting each of the radiant colors that made up the health resort's grounds to the canvas. It was only recently that her themes had begun to change slightly. It was when those fancy people with their parasols started appearing on the beaches.

"I am just not sure about those people and their umbrellas," said her roommate as she cleaned up the old woman's dishes. "I wonder where they all came from. Perfectly normal men don't carry such flamboyant umbrellas..." she continued.

"There's nothing wrong with it, Mari," the old woman responded as she painted a pale green parasol into the scenery of the canvas. "They have good taste. And it's not just men, there are women with parasols too, and even a few children."

"And that terrible skin color is just not normal," said Mari as she picked something else to harp on. "At first I thought it was just the color of the umbrellas reflecting off their skin, but it's not. I wonder what they eat..."

"Oh that's just rude," said the old woman.

"It isn't!" replied Mari. "What if they're some sort of strange cult? Doesn't that scare you?"

"Hello Ms. Naomi!" called the owner of the pale green umbrella, who was looking into the open window. "What have you painted today?"

Mari quickly retreated further into the house.

"Today Mr. Mint, we've been talking about parasols," Naomi said with a smile.

"Oh?"

"I've just had the urge to paint everyone, look," she gestured towards her painting. "Mr. Orange, Ms. Blue, little Ms. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"It's beautiful!"

Mr. Mint—Naomi hadn't asked his real name—smiled, his face, as chalky white as the soil in the vineyards, splitting open as he twirled his pale green parasol. It really was more of a heavy duty umbrella than a parasol to keep the sun off. The kind that a Brit might carry around but never open despite the rain, like a hanging wet leathery bat that never spreads its wings. And yet, these people were always walking around under their open umbrellas. Last week they rented a number of cottages, and they were all the same, these parasol loving strangers.

"So, what have you been saying about us?" asked Mr. Mint.

"My roommate's the one running the gossip mill," replied Naomi with a smile. "She says you lot are living dead people."

Mari, who had her back to the two, tensed her shoulders before slumping down again.

"Living dead people?" said Mr. Mint. He was silent for a moment before bursting into laughter. "I can see why someone might think that!"

"Oh?" replied Naomi with a teasing smile.

"Sure!" said Mr. Mint, with a chuckle. "Well, we'll be returning to our graves then. If you need anything, leave me a bouquet of flowers."

"You!!" anger written on her face, Mari came flying out the moment the green parasol disappeared from sight. "You're always like that!"

"It's because he's so much like *him*," said Naomi. "That's why it bothers you that I talk to him, isn't it Mari?"

"Why would you bring something like that up Naomi?" Mari replied. "It was so long ago. And it's not like he had any intentions of marrying you."

"And that's just you sticking your nose in my business."

"What's going on Naomi? Really, it's been decades. Why bring it up now?"

"We could have fixed things," retorted Naomi, "but you hid that letter. By the time you took it out from your little treasure box, with its dried flowers and perfumes...he had already..."

"It's been decades," Mari repeated.

"I know," Naomi said softly, "but it's like he's come back to life."

"Even if he has," said Mari, "that umbrella man isn't him."

After a moment of silence, Mari's tone changed from that of a roommate to that of an experienced nurse, "Now, it's time to take your medicine."

Pale green in the lead, umbrellas of all different colors came streaming out of their cottages: blue, orange, yellow, gold, silver, scarlet, pink. They walked onto the grass, up to where they could see the ocean. There was a single umbrella stuck in the earth, a violet umbrella. When the old woman softly walked up, they all had their heads bowed deeply. Mr. Mint looked up as she approached and nodded in greeting.

"Has something happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came here," replied Mr. Mint. "We are a traveling people. We don't stay in one place. But...Mr. Violet had become tired of our lifestyle. This is the land that he was born from, that raised him."

"Oh," Naomi said, hanging her head. "So then you..."

"Yes," answered Mr. Mint, the other parasols nodding along. "We must depart again."

"In that case, could you please take me with you?"

Mr. Mint opened his eyes. Not out of surprise as such, but to study her face. "You..." he asked.

"Me," she answered. "I don't have much longer. But...you knew that already, didn't you."

"...yes."

"Then please."

Mr. Mint looked at the other members of the group, who slowly nodded their heads.

"Ok then," he said to Naomi. "Come under my parasol."

Seeing the two, a passerby might be reminded of some romance movie's rainy kiss scene, or perhaps of a butterfly in her cocoon. Naomi's body shook inside Mr. Mint's umbrella. When she stepped out, she held one of her own.

"From now on, you will be known as Ms. Rose," said Mr. Mint. Naomi opened her blush colored umbrella and the group, one color more, headed west along the path through the orchards.

"Naomi!" called Mari, her voice echoing off the high ceilings of their home. "Where have you gone? Just how long are you going to sulk?"

Startled by the growing wind outside, Mari looked out to the distant horizon where the ocean bled into the sky. It was a beautiful sight. A shadow cut through the glittering sunset. It was a single violet umbrella twirling in the wind, like a great bat fluttering through the sky.



## Parasols

The pastel-colored expanse of ocean, the deep hue of the evergreen forest, the orchard and rose garden ripe with a plethora of scents, the hand-painted color of the clouds at both dawn and dusk, the crisp blue light of the moon, and all the other countless colors that made up this paradise were delicately scooped up, one by one, from the landscape and placed gently on the canvas by that old woman. However, just recently, the motif of her work began to change. Right around the time when those elegant people began to place their parasols here and there in the sand dunes for everyone to see, that is when it was.

"That good-for-nothing lot of parasols, there's something off about them," Mari muttered as she put away the clean plates. "Lord knows what shady town they wandered in from. All those men with their gaudy umbrellas..."

"Oh let them be, Mari," Naomi retorted. "I think there's something rather charming about it all." She was painting a mint-colored umbrella over the landscape already present on the canvas. "Besides, those people with the umbrellas, they're not all men you know. There are women of course, and though they're a bit hard to spot, even some children among them."

"The complexion of their faces...something about it doesn't sit well with me. It's not normal I tell you." Mari tried pointing out other things about them. "I initially thought the colors of their parasols were being reflected in their faces, but that's not the case...I wonder what things those kind of people eat."

"That's a bit rude, don't you think?"

"Not at all. It could be some kind of cult. Does that not scare you?"

"Good day to you, Naomi." Before Naomi could respond to Mari, another voice chimed in from somewhere. A man holding a mint-colored parasol was peeking in from the window. "What picture have you painted today?"

Mari quickly retreated into the depths of the house.

Naomi was unable to keep herself from cracking a smile. "We were just talking about the parasols, you know, Mint."

"Is that so?"

"After seeing everyone's parasols, I can't help but be inspired to draw them. See, you have Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet too."

Mint—whose real name no one ever asked—cracked a gentle smile of his own. "Isn't that just marvelous?" He had a face so white, it was as if someone had smeared it with the calcium-rich earth of a vineyard. Dexterously moving his fingertips, he twirled his parasol around and around. The ends of the umbrella spread out majestically like the wings of a bat. It was the kind of umbrella the British carry around, never opening even in the case of rain, always wrapped up tightly by their sides as they walk.

However, these people always stayed under their umbrellas when they went outside. The parasol-loving people that appeared suddenly the previous week, renting out a number of cottages, they were all like this.

"So," Mint paused briefly. "Any rumors regarding us?"

"My roommate talks about you," Naomi responded cheerfully. "She says you all are living corpses."

Mari, her back facing the two of them, heard this and perked up, then once again slouched her shoulders back down.

"Living corpses?" Mint echoed before falling silent. After a few moments he gave out a hearty laugh. "Well if that joke isn't just like a downpour on an April day."

"Isn't it?" Naomi said with a mischievous smile.

"Indeed." Mint chuckled as well. "Well, we have got to be getting back to the grave now. If you get the chance, come by and bring a bouquet or something."

As soon as the green parasol was out of sight, Mari sprang out of her hiding spot, visibly angry. "You've always been like this, even from way back then."

"He looks like that person you and I both knew, the one who died way back then," Naomi said. "That's why you hate it whenever he and I talk, right Mari?"

"Why would you bring that up Naomi?" Mari said. "That was so long ago. It's not like that person ever had any intention of marrying you anyway."

"Well, now you're just trying to get a rise out of me."

"What wrong with you, Naomi? Why are you all of a sudden reopening old wounds now, after all this time? How many decades ago was it?"

"I had a chance to fix things. But you hid that letter. By the time that letter came out of that little jewel box of yours, along with the perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he was already gone."

"*Decades* ago, Naomi."

"I know." Naomi paused and said in a quiet voice, "It was so long ago that he died and was reincarnated."

"Even if he was, he certainly didn't come back as that man with the umbrella." Mari changed her voice, from that of a roommate, back to her well-practiced tone of a nurse. "All right, it's time for your medicine."

Out of the cottage the horde of parasols came out slowly one by one, starting with Mint, followed by Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, and finally Pink.

On the patch of grass overlooking the sea, there stood one parasol planted in the ground. It was Violet's. Naomi slowly approached the scene to find each of them, in turn, facing the umbrella and bowing deeply.

Mint noticed her presence, and turned around to face her. He gave a slight bow.

"What has happened here?" Naomi asked.

"We came here for this," Mint replied. "You see, we live a life of going on journeys, one after another. We don't stay long in any one place. However, Violet grew weary of such a lifestyle. That is why her parasol is here, in the place where she was born and raised."

"I see." Naomi lowered her head. "And as for you?"

"Yes." Mint nodded, parasol and all. "We have to be leaving on another journey again."

"If that is the case," Naomi said. "Would you consider taking me along with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide, not so much out of astonishment, but more so as if he was trying to look deeper into Naomi's face. "You..."

"I...don't have much time left," Naomi said. "You were already aware of that, correct?"

Mint paused, opening his eyes wide again, and nodded. "Yes."

"Then, will you please?"

Mint looked back at the others. They nodded slowly and spoke. "It's okay."

Mint turned back to Naomi. "All right, come under my umbrella."

She looked like a lover sharing a kiss on a rainy day, or like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.

Under Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body started to tremble.

When she stepped outside, she was holding an umbrella in her hand.

“From today onwards, you are Rose,” Mint said.

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

The horde of parasols, now with a new color among them, started off on a small path through the orchard, headed west.

“Naomi? Where did you run off to?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the entire house. “How long are you going to sulk for?”

As the sun fell the wind began to pick up, howling menacingly in Mari’s ears. She looked to where the vastness of the ocean met the expanse of the sky. As she did, the radiating beauty of the sunset was suddenly blocked by a shadow dancing before her. Like a giant bat taking off in flight, the violet parasol rose up in the air, elegantly tracing circles in the sky.

*The Parasol*  
by Inoue Masahiko

Not just the landscapes the old woman painted—the pastel-colored distant view of the open sea, the dense evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and the rose gardens, the mists of dusk and dawn, and the clear blue shining moon that fill the resort with boundless radiance—but the colors she paints them with, carefully ladled out one by one, began to change only recently as the elegant visitors' parasols dot the sand dunes.

"Something fishy about all those parasol people, I'm telling you," her companion muttered, clearing away her food. "Just what town did those men come wandering out of? Decent folk don't carry umbrellas all colors of the rainbow like that, it's just..."

"Oh, hush, Mari. They're fine," the old woman replied, dabbing a final coat onto a mint-colored umbrella in the scene on the canvas. "I think they have lovely taste in umbrellas. Besides, they're not *all* men. Some are women, and there are children, too, though perhaps not many."

Mari found another point to pick at. "Then what about the unhealthy pallor of their skin? It's unnatural! I thought it was just light reflecting off their parasols that made their skin look like that, but it seems not. It must be caused by something they eat, right?"

"You're being rude, Mari."

"Am not. It would be simply dreadful if they were some kind of religious cult, wouldn't it?"

"Hello there, Ms. Naomi! Good day!" The master of the mint parasol suddenly popped up and peered in through the window. "And what are you painting today?"

Her companion hurriedly withdrew.

"We were *just* talking about your parasols, Mr. Mint," Ms. Naomi giggled.

"Oho?"

"I wanted to paint everyone. Look, there's Mr. Orange, Mr. Ultramarine, Mr. Lemon, Ms. Violet..."

Mint—she never asked his real name—Mint's face—so pale it was like the chalky earth of a vineyard was smeared all over it—stretched and cracked into a smile as he laughed. "Oho. How splendid!"

He spun his mint parasol round and round with the tips of his fingers. It was actually a hefty rain umbrella, ribbed like the wings of a bat, rather than a parasol. If the folks using the umbrellas had been British, they would never open them. They keep them furled tight and get soaked while they walk, looking like wet bats themselves, but the parasol enthusiasts who suddenly showed up last week and rented out several cottages for the foreseeable future always stayed beneath their open umbrellas.

"So, you two were gossiping about us?"

"My companion was saying," Naomi replied, beaming, "You lot are the living dead, aren't you?"

Mari had turned away, her shoulders drawn, and now they drooped.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a time, then finally burst into a roar of laughter. "What an April showers joke!"

The madam smiled impishly. "Isn't it?"

"It is!" Mint replied, chuckling. "Well then, we're headed back to our graves... better bring flowers."

"Ooh, I can't *believe* you!" Mari raged, leaping out after the green umbrella left. "I should've known! You've always been like this!"

"Mr. Mint is a lot like a certain late friend we both knew, isn't he?" Naomi asked. "That's why you don't like me talking to him."

"Why beat that dead horse again, Naomi? That's all over with, and it has been for ages. He had no intention of marrying you anyway."

"Nobody asked you, you nosy busybody!"

"Oh dear, Naomi. Why, it's been years and years. You're still upset about all that?"

"We had the chance to make up! But you hid his letter to me. And when it came out of your jewel box... all mixed up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he had already... already been born again, made a fresh start."

"That may be, but he wasn't reborn as that umbrella man."

Then Mari said, not as her companion, but in the voice of a nurse who had just remembered her duties, "All right, it's time for your medicine."

The mint umbrella at the lead, a whole flock of parasols—ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon—came streaming out of the cottages. They came as far as the green lawn from where the sea could be viewed and placed a single umbrella so that it stood upright in the dirt. It was the violet parasol.

Just after each umbrella had bowed deeply to the parasol, Naomi slowly walked up to them. Mint noticed her presence, turned, and gave a slight bow. "What's going on?" she inquired.

"This is why we came here," he answered. "By nature, our lives are those of wanderers—traveling from place to place, never staying put. But Ms. Violet grew tired of living like that and returned to this land where she was born and raised..."

"So that's it, is it?" Naomi asked, her head bowed. "All of you are leaving?"

"Yes." Mint nodded with the umbrella. "We must journey on once again."

"If that's the case..." she said, "Won't you please take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened. He didn't appear to be surprised so much as intently examining her. "Take you...?"

"That's right." She replied. "You knew, didn't you? I don't have long left."

Mint nodded, eyes wide. "Yes, I knew."

"Then please, take me with you."

Mint looked at his fellow umbrella folk. They nodded, slowly. "All right, then..." Mint said to her. "Come inside my umbrella."

Their embrace resembled a kiss on a rainy day—or a butterfly caught in the spider's grasp. Her corpse-like body trembled and shook within his umbrella.

She emerged from his umbrella holding one of her own in hand.

"From today forth, you will be Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened the rose-colored umbrella. With a new hue added to their ranks, the crowd of parasols headed west along the orchard path.

"Naomi, where have you gone?" Mari's voice echoed through the mansion. "Good heavens, just how long are you going to sulk?"

The wind began to rage as evening fell. Slightly frightened, Mari looked up to where the open sea met the sky. A shadow danced across the heavens, obscuring the brilliance of the excessively beautiful sunset. A violet parasol circled elegantly in the sky exactly like a big bat flapping its wings.

## Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

All of the colours whose immeasurable light fill the health resort appeared meticulously one by one, as though scooped up by the elderly woman's paint brush: not just the pastel colours of the Okinawan sea, but the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the moon's shimmering blue cast upon the clouds of the sunset and dawn... It was just recently that her paintings had begun to change. Had it begun when the umbrellas of those elegant strangers could be seen, scattered across the sand dunes?

"They're suspicious after all, those parasol carrying characters," said her companion, as she cleared the women's dishes. "What city did they drift in from, I wonder. They're a group of fine-looking men, but with those multicolored umbrellas..."

"There's nothing wrong with it, Mari...and it just looks in such fine taste," she replied, while adding a light green parasol to the canvas's scenery. "And I'll have you know, they're not just men. There's also women, and there are children as well, although very few of them."

"For all of them to be that unhealthily pale is just unnatural you know," Mari chose another fault to point out. "At first, I thought it was just the reflection from their parasols, but it's not. I wonder what kind of things they eat..."

"That's rude," came the abrupt reply.

"It's not. What if they're some kind of cult? Doesn't it scare you at all?" Mari continued, undaunted.

"Ah, Naomi, good morning!" the owner of the light green parasol said as he unexpectedly peeked his head in through the window.

Naomi's companion jumped back in haste.

"Why hello Mint, we were just talking about your parasol," Naomi giggled.

"Oh, really?" he said.

"Yes, because I suddenly felt the urge to draw all of you. Look, there's Tangerine, Indigo, Lemon, Violet," Naomi babbled giddily.

"I say, how splendid!" he replied, and his face split into a wide grin as he laughed heartily.

Mint- whose real name they had never enquired after- had a peculiar face, a face with a white cast as though it had been coated in the chalky soil of a vineyard. He was twirling his light green parasol around and around at the end of his arm. In truth, it was less of a dainty parasol, and more of a thick, bat-like umbrella made for the rain. Had he been an Englishman, he would have held it tightly wound, without ever opening it, like a dampened bat walking with its wings furled around itself. Yet instead, he and his companions seemed to always be standing underneath their opened umbrellas. Those parasol loving people, who were all just the same as Mint, had appeared out of no-where last week, and rented several cottages.

"So, what are the rumors about us?" inquired Mint with a smile.

"My roommate has one," Naomi replied slyly. "She wonders if you're not all members of the undead."

Although Mari was facing the opposite direction, her shoulders could be seen to rapidly rise, and fall again.

"The undead?" Mint was momentarily silent, but quickly let out a boisterous laugh. "Why, that sounds like an April Fool's joke!" he laughed.

"Doesn't it just?" she giggled teasingly.

"It does," he replied. Mint continued to laugh heartily, "well then, my brethren and I will return to our graves. If you wish to summon me, you need but bring an offering of flowers to my grave. "

"I wonder who they are," Naomi murmured to herself.

When the green umbrella disappeared, Mari rushed forward again fuming. "*They* never change," she said.

"You only think that because he looks like someone we know who died, don't you," said Naomi. "That's the reason you hate it when he and I talk, Mari" she continued.

"Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi?" Mari replied. "That's old business, and besides he didn't have any intention of marrying you anyway."

"That's because you meddled in it you know," said Naomi matter-of-factly

"What's the matter Naomi, why pick a quarrel about this now? Exactly how many decades has it been?" Mari scolded.

"There was a chance to make things right, but you hid the letter. That letter, all mixed in with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers, by the time you pulled it out of your jewelry box it was too late, he was already..." Naomi trailed off.

"That was decades ago," said Mari firmly.

"Yes, it was," Naomi said in a small voice. "He's long since been reborn."

"Even so, he's not that strange umbrella carrying man," insisted Mari. Then, suddenly, as though a switch had been flipped, from the voice of a quarrelling companion to the professional voice of a nurse, "well, it's time for your medicine!" she brightly exclaimed.

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A rainbow of umbrellas exited the cottages in droves: a light green at the head, followed by ultramarine, indigo, bright orange, pale yellow, gold, silver, vermillion, pink, and so forth. The group stuck a singular umbrella in the ground when they reached the part of the green lawn with a view of the ocean. It was Violet's umbrella. Just as they began to bow their heads deeply, the elderly woman slowly approached them. Mint turned around and gave a slight bow when he noticed her presence.

"What are you all doing?" inquired Naomi.

"This is the reason we came," replied Mint. "We live the life of travellers, moving on from one town to the next, never staying in one place. However, Violet has become tired of this lifestyle. This is the land she was born and raised in..."

"Is that so... Then you're all..." Naomi trailed off mid-sentence and hung her head.

"Yes," Mint nodded deeply, his umbrella dipping down with him. "We must depart on another journey."

"If that's so," Naomi paused hesitantly, "please do me the honour of taking me with you."

Mint's eyes widened, not in shock, but rather as though he was deeply observing her face. "You...?" Mint said slowly.

"Yes, me," replied Naomi firmly. "I won't last much longer... but you already know that, don't you?"

Mint's eyes widened once again, and he nodded his head. "...yes," he replied.

"Please then," she said earnestly.

Mint turned towards his other companions. Slowly, the umbrellas bent in unison, nodding.

“It’s settled then,” Mint said to Naomi. “Please, come under my umbrella if you will.”

Their silhouettes merged and resembled a couple embracing on a rainy day. Or perhaps it was more like the silhouette of a butterfly being trapped by a spider. Naomi’s body trembled underneath Mint’s umbrella. When she emerged, she too held an umbrella in her hand.

“From today forth, your name is Rose,” Mint proclaimed.

Naomi opened the bright red umbrella. The flock of parasols, with their newly acquired colour, headed west on the path towards the orchard.

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“Naomi, where have you gotten to?” Mari’s voice echoed off the walls of the house. “Exactly how long do you plan to sulk for?” she continued to call out into the silence.

The sound of the wind had grown stronger with the dusk, and Mari had slowly grown afraid. When she looked out over the ocean towards the horizon, it seemed that a large, fluttering shadow was blocking the normally beautiful rays of the sunset. It looked as though an enormous bat was flapping its wings, but in fact, a singular umbrella of a deep purple colour was elegantly spinning in the sky.



### Parasols – Inoue Masahiko

The abundant colours which filled the health resort were picked out, one by one, in detail by the old woman's paintbrush: not just the pastel colours of the ocean vista, but also the dense evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and the rose garden, the light of the dawn and sunset clouds, the brightly shining pale moon. Recently, they began to change little by little.

It was since those elegant people with parasols began to be seen all over the sand dunes...

"Those parasols really are mysterious," The woman's roommate said as she cleared the table, "I wonder where they drifted in from, those men with the colourful parasols...?"

"Is there something wrong with that, Mari? I think it's a beautiful hobby."

"Besides," she replied, while painting a mint-coloured parasol onto the canvas, "it's not just men. Look there are women and even some children, too."

"That complexion just isn't normal!" said Mari, making a different point, "I thought it was the reflection from the parasol, but it's not. What on earth are they eating?"

"That's rude, Mari."

"Not really. I mean, what if they were a cult? Wouldn't that be scary?"

"Oh, hello there, Naomi," Suddenly, the owner of the mint-coloured parasol peeked through the window, "What kind of picture were you able to paint today?"

Naomi's roommate, Mari, quickly drew back into the room.

Chuckling, Naomi said, "We were talking about parasols today, Mr Mint."

"Oh?"

"For some reason, I felt like drawing all of the parasols. Look, Mr Orange, Ms Blue, Mr Lemon and even Miss Violet."

"Oh, I say! It looks splendid!"

Mr Mint – she didn't ask his real name – broke into a smile, his face as pale as if it were coated in chalky vineyard soil. He twirled the parasol in front of him. Well, rather than a parasol, it was more like a European umbrella than a parasol. If he were an Englishman, it would be wrapped up tight, never opened, like a sodden bat. But these people always stood under open parasols. They had appeared suddenly the previous week and rented several cottages. They all seemed to be parasol enthusiasts.

"So," Mint continued, "was it gossip about us, then?"

"It was my roommate who said that, not me," Naomi said, smiling, "She said you look like living corpses."

Mari's shoulders could be seen rising and falling, as she faced away.

"Living corpses?" Mr Mint was quiet for a moment but burst out laughing before long. "That's such a boring joke."

"Oh really?"

His wife gave a mischievous laugh. "It's true".

Mr Mint also chuckled, "Well, we are returning to our graves, thank you for the flowers and such."

"Who are you people?!" Mari shouted, jumping out angrily as Mr Mint turned to leave, "you people have been like this for a long time."

"Isn't it just that he resembles that man we knew who passed away?" Naomi said, "You hated that he and I talked. That's what it is, Mari."

"Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi? That was a long time ago," Mari said, "Anyhow, he didn't want to marry you, Naomi."

"Mind your own business."

"What's wrong with you Naomi? Why are you picking a fight now? That was decades ago."

"You had your chance to make up with him, but you hid the letters. They were in your jewellery box, mixed in with your perfume bottle and pressed flowers and such. By the time they came out, he had already –"

"I said that was decades ago."

"Right."

"He was already reborn a long time ago."

"Even if you say that, this man is not him."

"Right, it's time for your medicine." Mari said, at that moment sounding less like a roommate and more like a nurse using her professional expertise.

Parasols in shades of blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach and many other flowed out of the cottages, with Mr Mint at the head. They came up to the ocean-like green lawn, a lone parasol standing in the ground in front, a violet parasol. As an old woman walked out, each member lowered their head. Noticing her presence, Mr Mint turned to look over his shoulder and dipped his head in acknowledgement.

"Is anything the matter?" Naomi inquired.

"This is the reason we came here." Mr Mint answered, "From the start, we were drifters, never stopping in one place. However, Miss Violet has grown tired of such a life. Therefore, we came back to her native soil –"

"Is that so..."

Naomi's head sunk, "Then you are..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, his umbrella mimicking his movements, "we have to leave again."

"If that's the case..." Naomi said, "Then would you be kind enough to take me along with you?"

Mr Mint's eyes widened. Rather than looking surprised, he looked as though he was scrutinizing her face closely.

"You want to..."

"I do," Naomi said, "I won't last much longer.....I wonder if you knew that already."

Mint nodded, his eyes still wide open, "...alright."

"In that case, if you don't mind..."

Mint turned towards his companions. The group of parasol holders all slowly nodded.

"It seems to be alright," Mint said to Naomi, "Well then, come under my umbrella."

It looked like a rainy-day kiss, or a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under the mint-coloured umbrella, Naomi's body trembled. When she emerged, she held a parasol in her hand.

"From this day forward, you'll be Miss Rose, ok?"

Naomi opened the rose-coloured parasol. With their new member, the group of parasols turned West onto the path through the orchard.

"Naomi, where did you go?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the house, "Just how long are you planning to sulk?"

As the evening wind got stronger, Mari, a little scared, looked up as a shadow blocked the light coming from the magnificent sunset. A lone violet parasol tumbled gracefully across the sky, like a giant bat flapping its wings.

## Parasols (INOUE Masahiko)

It was just recently—after the parasols of certain elegant people appeared dotted about the neighbouring dunes—that the old lady's paintings began to exhibit a somewhat disquieting shift in tone. In addition to a panoramic sea view in pastel colours, she had depicted a forest thick with evergreen trees, a fragrant orchard and rose garden, the moon glowing with bluish cast set off by iridescent clouds at dusk and dawn... and hues imbuing the resort with an illimitable radiance. These motifs she carefully rendered one by one with a scoop of the paintbrush.

'The parasol crowd do worry me though,' said her housemate, clearing away her dishes. 'Where did they come drifting in from? They're cultivated gentlemen, and yet looking at that assortment of gaudy umbrellas...'

'You should lighten up, Mari. They have lovely taste,' she replied, in the midst of adorning the landscape on her canvas with a mint green umbrella. 'And it's not only men, you know. There are women too, as well as the odd child.'

Mari moved on to her next point: 'You must admit those pallid complexions are peculiar. I thought it may be the reflectiveness of the parasol colours, but that's not the reason... What sort of things do they eat, I wonder?'

'You're being intrusive.'

'But they could be a cult of some kind. It's a scary thought.'

'Hello there, Naomi,' said the owner of a mint green parasol, peering suddenly through the window. 'What have you painted today?'

Her housemate swiftly drew back.

'I was just having a discussion about parasols, Mint,' said Naomi, giggling. She hadn't enquired after his real name.

'Oh?'

'You see, I have this irresistible urge to represent all of you on canvas. Look, there's Orange and Blue... Lemon and Violet.'

'I say, truly splendid.'

Mint's white face—it was as though it had been bedaubed with a vineyard's chalky soil—broke into a smile. Then he twirled his mint green parasol with the tips of his fingers.

Actually, it was a regular brolly—the kind a besuited Englishman might carry tightly rolled up as he strode through the rain. But since turning up a week earlier to rent some cottages, these parasol enthusiasts were always to be found beneath an open umbrella. All of them.

'And... has there been any gossip since our arrival?'

'My housemate has a theory,' said Naomi cheerfully. 'She says that you may be *the living dead*.'

Mari's shoulders could be seen to jerk right up and then drop down again as she looked out the back.

'The living dead?'

There was a long silence before Mint finally burst into a loud laugh. 'A joke not unlike an April shower, wouldn't you say?'

'Oh, you think so?' The lady laughed mischievously.

'Indeed I do,' said Mint, also chuckling. 'Well, we should be getting back to our coffins. If you need any assistance, bring an offering of flowers or something.'

'That's typical of you!'

Once the green umbrella was out of sight, Mari made her anger known.

'You've always been like that.'

'I suppose it's because he bears a resemblance to that man who died,' said Naomi. 'That's why you don't like me talking to him, Mari.'

‘Why do you have to bring that up again, Naomi?’ said Mari. ‘It was so long ago. He had no intention of marrying you.’

‘It wasn’t any of your business.’

‘What’s up with you, Naomi? Harping on about it after all this time! It was decades ago.’

‘There was a chance we would get back together, but you hid that letter in your jewellery box, intermingled with perfume bottles and pressed flowers and whatnot. When it finally materialised, he’d already…’

‘It was decades ago.’

‘Yes, it was,’ Naomi said softly. ‘He passed on to the next life a long time ago.’

‘In any case, that man with the umbrella isn’t him.’ Mari now spoke in the peremptory tone of a nurse aware of her professional duties. ‘Come, it’s time for your medicine.’

They filed out of the cottages sporting parasols in blue, indigo, orange, lemon, scarlet and pink amongst others, mint green leading the way. When the troop reached the grass lawn looking on to the sea, an umbrella was planted in the turf. It was a violet parasol.

After they each had made a deeply respectful bow, the old lady came ambling towards the assembly. Mint sensed her presence and turned to greet her with a slight nod of the head.

‘What’s the matter?’ Naomi asked.

Mint responded: ‘By nature we lead an itinerant existence, never remaining for long in one place. But Violet has grown weary of that life, so we came to where she was born and raised.’

Naomi’s head dropped. ‘I see. So you’ll be…’

‘Yes.’ Mint, along with his parasol, bowed his head in confirmation. ‘We have to embark on our travels again.’

‘In that case, please take me with you,’ Naomi entreated.

Mint’s eyes widened. Not in surprise apparently, but rather to gaze intently at her face. ‘You?’

‘I won’t endure for much longer. I think you probably knew that,’ Naomi said.

Mint nodded with eyes staring. ‘Yes.’

‘Then, I beg you.’

Mint looked to the others. They gave a slow nod of approval.

‘Very well,’ he said to Naomi. ‘Step under my umbrella.’

It could have been mistaken for a kiss on a rainy day; the butterfly was in the jaws of a spider.

Naomi shuddered under Mint’s parasol. When she re-emerged from its shadow, there was an umbrella in her hand.

‘From this moment on, you will be Rose.’ Naomi opened her rose umbrella.

With a new colour among their number, the company of parasols headed westwards down the path through the orchard.

‘Naomi! Where are you?’ Mari’s voice resounded through the house. ‘You can’t go on sulking forever.’

That evening the sound of the strengthening wind had made Mari a little fearful, and she looked up to where the sky met the sea. There, a shadowy form flitted in silhouette against the splendour of an inordinately beautiful sunset—it was a violet parasol circling gracefully across the sky, like some great bat on the wing.

## The Parasols

Not only the pastel colours far out to sea but the evergreens of the dense forest, the sweet fragrances of the orchard and the rose garden, the way that at sunset and dawn light emits from clouds and the moon has a clear, bluish hue; the limitless, radiant colour that filled this resort district; had, only very recently, been seemingly scooped up, with deliberate care, one by one, in the newly emerging themes depicted by the elderly matron's paint brush. Ever since those elegant visitors with the parasols began to be seen all over the sand dunes. ↵

"There's something fishy about that lot with the parasols." remarked the woman's live-in companion as she removed the woman's plates. "What town have they blown in from? Grown men with such an array of coloured umbrellas."

"Nothing wrong with such exquisite taste, Mari." responded the woman as she applied the finishing touches to the mint coloured parasol in the scene on her canvas. "In any case not all of them are men. There are some women amongst them and although few and far between, even some children."

"Those pale complexions certainly aren't normal." remarked Mari before suggesting a different viewpoint. "I thought the colour from the parasols might be reflecting onto their faces, but that's not it. I wonder what sort of food they eat?"

"Don't be so rude."

"I'm not, what if they belonged to some religious cult, wouldn't that give you the creeps?"

"Hello there Naomi." came the greeting from the owner of the mint coloured parasol, popping his head out of the window. "What picture have you painted today?" he asked as the live-in companion retreated in a flurry.

"We've just now been talking about the visitors with the parasols Mr. Mint." giggled Naomi.

"Oh really?"

"I somehow seem to want to include all of you in my paintings, look, there's the Orange parasol, the Blue, the Lemon and the one with the violet parasol. "Oh indeed, that's marvellous." Mint's- his real name had not been enquired of- white face - a kind of white that might have been painted on with the lime soil from a vineyard-gradually softened into a smile. He twirled the mint coloured parasol with his fingers. It would be better described as a batwing style umbrella than a parasol. The tightly rolled kind an Englishman might carry but never open, strolling along like a damp bat. But these visitors were always under open umbrellas. All of these aficionados of open parasols had appeared suddenly last week and entirely booked out the limited number of cottages. "So what is this talk about us?"

"My companion has been saying," responded Naomi, beaming a wry smile. "You may all well be the living dead." Mari, facing away from them, visibly jerked her shoulders upwards and then lowered them.

"The living dead." Mint was silent for a while and then gave out a walloping laugh. "That's just like an April shower joke."

"It's true then?" asked the woman with a mischievous laugh.

"Quite so." responded Mint with a snicker. "Since we will return to our graves, if you require our services you must bring bouquets of flowers and the like." ↵

"What kind of a person are you?" shrilled Mari, rushing out in a rage, once the owner of the green umbrella had gone. "You haven't changed."

"It's because he resembles someone departed that we both knew, isn't it?" quizzed Naomi. "Mari, you find it so abhorrent to see the two of us talking because of what happened."

"Why are you rehashing that all over again?" retorted Mari. "It's all in the past now. In any case he had no intention of marrying you."

"Mind your own business."

"What is it Naomi? Why are you picking a quarrel now, after all these years?"

"There was a chance we could have made up. Then you had to hide the letter. By the time I found it in your jewellery box; mixed up amongst the perfume bottle and pressed flowers. Well, he had ..."

"Its all decades in the past."

"That's right." whispered Naomi. "By now he has well and truly been reincarnated."

"Even if that were true he's not the man with the umbrella." The tone of the next utterance was not that of a companion, but the professional voice of a nurse, reawakened to her role. "Time for your medication." ↵

The parasol group emerged in a steady stream from the cottages, with the mint coloured parasol at the head, followed by the Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, Pink and more. When they arrived at the green lawn with the view of the ocean, one parasol was on the ground. It was the violet parasol. As each one bowed deeply the elderly matron slowly walked over to them. Sensing her approach, Mint turned around. Then he gave a slight bow.

"What is going on?" enquired Naomi.

"This is why we came here." answered Mint. "We live a life of constant travel, going from one journey to another. Never staying in one place. Only...it's just that Violet is tired of such an existence. This place where one was born and raised..."

"So that's it." said Naomi lowering her head in acknowledgement. "Well what about all of you?"

"Yes" answered Mint, nodding with his umbrella. "We must again set out on a journey."

"In that case." said Naomi. "I wonder if you would be good enough to take me along?" Mint's eyes opened widely, not so much with surprise but in order to fix his gaze on her face. "You...?"

"Me" answered Naomi. "My remaining time is short. ...as I'm sure you are aware." "...Yes." nodded Mint, his eyes widening.

"That's why I'm requesting this favour."

Mint turned to face his companions. The parasol visitors slowly lowered their heads.

"It's alright..." Mint assured Naomi. "Now come under my umbrella." It seemed like a couple stealing a kiss in the rain. Perhaps also a butterfly caught in a spider's web. Under the cover of Mint's umbrella Naomi's body trembled. When she came out, Naomi was carrying an umbrella in her hand. "From today you can be Madam Rose." Naomi pulled open the rose umbrella. The visitors with the parasols, including this new shade, turned westward along the path through the orchard. ↵

"Naomi, where have you gone?" called out Mari in a voice that resounded throughout the European style building. "For crying out loud, how much longer are you going to sulk?" Feeling a little trepidation at the sound of the wind that had been building in strength since the late afternoon, Mari looked out to sea, to where the sky met the horizon, to see a gliding shadow blocking out some of the brilliance of the exquisite sunset. Almost like a large bat with wings flapping, a single violet coloured parasol circled elegantly in the sky.

## Parasol

Not just the view of the pastel sea, but that of the deep forest of evergreens, the fragrance of the orchard and rose garden, the lighting of the clouds at dusk and dawn, and the clear, pale glow of the moon... The slow change in motif of the old lady's brush, who would elegantly paint, as if scooping up the immeasurable brilliance of individual hues at the resort, began quite recently.

When the parasols of the elegant folk popped up everywhere on the beaches... That's when it began.

"Even *that* umbrella is questionable," said Naomi's housemate, putting away her silverware. "Where did these people come from? Where even respectable men have such varied colors of parasols."

"Hush, Mari. It's a beautiful hobby," Naomi answered, while adding a mint parasol to the landscape of her canvas. "And in any case, it's not just men, you know. There are women and, though few in number, even children."

"That paleness of face... It's not normal," Mari pointed out. "I thought it was just the reflection of the parasols, but that isn't the case. I wonder what kind of food they eat."

"You're being rude."

"Not at all. What if they were in some sort of cult? That would be frightening, would it not?"

"Oh, Naomi! Good afternoon." The owner of the mint colored parasol suddenly peeked out of a window. "What kind of picture did you paint today?"

Mari suddenly retreated.

Naomi responded, giggling, "We were just talking about parasols, Mint."

"Oh?"

"I felt the urge to paint all of you. Look, Orange with Blue, Lemon with Violet."

"Oh. My, how marvelous!"

Mint—her real name had never been asked—smiled broadly with her pale face—a face as white as if she had used the chalky earth of a vinery to cover her face—and laughed delicately. The tips of her fingers twirling her mint colored parasol. Or rather, her umbrella—the kind that the English would wrap up tightly and use for walking, never opening them, choosing instead to get wet.

But these people were always beneath their open parasols— every single one of these parasol enthusiasts, who had suddenly appeared last week and rented out every cottage.

"So, then," Mint asked, "What's the gossip on us?"

"Well, my housemate," Naomi said cheerfully, "says perhaps you are all the living dead."

Mari's shoulders—she had been facing the other way—rose and fell dramatically, Naomi noticed.

"The living dead?" Mint fell quiet for a moment, but before long let out a big laugh. "Why, it's just like an April Shower's joke, isn't it?"

"Is that so?" Naomi laughed jokingly.

"That's right." Mint giggled. "Well then, we are headed back to the grave, so if you need anything, be sure to bring a bouquet."

"You," Mari flew out in a rage after the green parasol disappeared, "you have always been that way."

"It's because he reminds you of our departed, isn't it?" said Naomi. "That's why

you hate it so much when I talk with that person.”

“Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi?” said Mari. “It’s ancient history. Besides, he didn’t want to marry you anyway.”

“That’s because of your meddling.”

“Naomi, what’s going on? Why are you picking a fight now? That was decades ago!”

“I had a chance to make peace with him! But you hid his letter. When it came out of your jewelry box, mixed in with your perfume and pressed flowers, it was already too late.”

“It was *decades* ago.”

“It was.” Naomi said in a small voice. “He’s made a fresh start.”

“Even so, that parasol toting man isn’t him.” This time she didn’t sound like a house mate, rather she sounded like a nurse. “Now, then. It’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint at their head, the parasolers all streamed out of the cottages—Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, Peach. Upon reaching the green lawn with a view of the sea, there was a sole umbrella erected in the ground. It was a violet parasol. Naomi slowly walked up to the group, their heads hung low, deep within their parasols.

“What ever has happened?” Naomi inquired.

“This is what we came for” Mint answered. “Since long ago, we have always lived travelling from place to place. We don’t ever stay anywhere long. But, Violet has become tired of that life. She wanted to come back to this place, where she was born and raised.”

“Oh, is that right?” Naomi drooped her head. “So then, you’re…?”

“Yes.”

Mint bowed with her umbrella again. “We must begin travelling again.”

“If that’s the case,” Naomi said, “would you please take me with you?”

Mint’s eyes widened, not in surprise, but rather as if to better look at her. “Are you…?”

“I am.” Naomi said. “I won’t last much longer, as I am sure you are aware.”

Mint opened her eyes wide, and nodded “...Yes.”

“In that case; please.”

Mint turned to her companions.

They slowly nodded.

“Alright” Mint told Naomi. “Well, then. Under my parasol.”

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It could also be seen as a butterfly being caught by a spider.

Under Mint’s parasol, Naomi’s body shook. When they went back outside, Naomi had a single umbrella in her hand.

“From today, you are Rose.”

Naomi opened up a rose colored parasol.

The group, with its newly added hue, headed west, down the orchard’s path.

“Naomi. To where has your mind wandered now?” Mari’s voice reverberated throughout the western-style house. “Just how long are you going to sulk?”

Mari—her nerve lost in the ever louder howl of the wind—looked up at the point where the sea met the sky, and then, sending shadows dancing about, blocked the splendor of the most beautiful sunset. As if a large bat had spread its wings, a sole violet parasol was twirling elegantly in the sky.



**The Parasols**  
*Inoue Masahiko*

Only recently had the old woman's paintings had begun to change – ever since those elegant people and their parasols were spotted here and there on the dunes. Each colour, ripe with the immeasurable beauty of this resort, was rendered carefully, stroke by stroke; the pastel hues of the distant ocean vista, the deep evergreen forests, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the setting sun and the glow of clouds at day break, the crisp blue glint of the moon.

"Those guys are so strange," said her housemate as she cleared away the tableware, "I wonder where they drifted in from. A bunch of guys carrying around such colourful parasols like that..."

"What's wrong with that, Mari? I think it's lovely," she replied, adding the final touches to a mint-green parasol on the canvas, "It's not just men, either. There are women, and children, too, although only a few."

"They're all so pale – that can't be normal." Mari pointed out, "I thought it was just the reflection from the parasols, but that's not it." She paused, "I wonder what that lot eat?"

"Don't be so rude."

"Hardly. What if they're part of a cult or something? Are you not scared?"

Suddenly the owner of the mint parasol himself appeared at the window. "Hello, Naomi!" he called, peering in. "How's the painting going today?"

Naomi giggled as her housemate quickly recoiled. "Actually, Mint, we were just chatting about parasols."

"Really?"

"I just felt like adding everyone to the painting, is all. Look, here's Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet, too."

"Look at that, how splendid!" A broad smile crept over his pale face – a face so pale it was as if it had been daubed with the chalk-white soil you might find at a vineyard. Mint – likely not his real name – twirled the mint-coloured parasol around in his hand. Perhaps umbrella is a more fitting term – a western style one with the canopy like the wings of a bat. They say the English always carry around an umbrella tightly fastened and never use it, despite the rain – these parasol enthusiasts, though, always went around beneath their open umbrellas. They had appeared last week out of the blue, completely booking up some of the local cottages.

"You must have heard the rumours about us?"

"My housemate here seems to think you're all undead," said Naomi with a smile.

Mari, who had been facing away all the while, heaved her shoulders.

"Undead?" Mint was silent for a moment before bursting into laughter.

"You really had me going for a moment there!"

"I can imagine!" Naomi laughed mischievously.

"Well," said Mint with a chuckle, "We best be getting back to our graves. If you drop by, feel free to leave some flowers."

As the green umbrella receded from view, Mari leapt up angrily. "You're unbelievable. You've always been like this, haven't you? All I'm saying is that he's the spitting image of one of those undead you see in the movies."

"Getting so annoyed at me talking with him is just like you, Mari," said Naomi.

"Why'd you have to bring that up again, Naomi?" said Mari, "That all happened so long ago. Look, he just didn't feel like marrying you is all."

"That's got nothing to do with you."

"What's wrong with you? That was decades ago. Why can't you let it go?"

"I still had a chance with him, but no, you had to go and hide that letter. When I finally found it in your jewelry box, all mixed up with your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers it was too late, he'd..."

"That's all in the past, now."

"I know," Naomi said in a small voice, "He moved on a long time ago. Either way, it's all got nothing to do with Mint."

"Well now," said Mari, sounding calm and professional, less like a housemate and more like a nurse, "It's time for your medicine."

They left the cottage one-by-one, each clutching their parasols – first mint, then blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet, pink... When they reached the green patch of lawn overlooking the sea, there stood a single violet umbrella. An old woman was slowly walking towards the group as they each bowed deeply. Sensing something, Mint turned around and acknowledged her.

"What happened?" asked Naomi.

"We came here for this," replied Mint, "We've always been nomadic, never settling in one place. Violet, though, became tired of this life. He was born here, raised here..."

"I see," said Naomi, lowering her head, "You and your friends..."

"Yes," said Mint, nodding, umbrella moving in unison, "It's time for us to leave again."

"If that's the case," said Naomi, "Won't you take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, not out of surprise, but as if to get a better look at Naomi's face.

"You?..."

"I—" replied Naomi, "I've not got much time left. I'm sure you realised that."

Mint nodded, eyes opened wide, "...I see."

"Please, I'm asking you."

Mint looked towards the group, who all nodded slowly. "I see no problem with it..." Mint said to Naomi, "Very well, step under my umbrella." Looking on, it could have been a kiss on a rainy day. At the same time it almost looked like a butterfly had been caught by a spider. Underneath the mint umbrella, Naomi's body trembled.

Naomi was holding an umbrella as she stepped outside.

"From this day on, you'll be Rose."

She opened the rose-coloured umbrella. With a new colour among their ranks, the parasol bearers headed out west along the orchard path.

"Naomi, where have you gone?" Mari's voice reverberated throughout the house, "Just how long are you going to sulk for?" The sound of the wind picked up as the evening wore on. Mari, a little frightened by the sound, gazed out at the horizon. A silhouette fluttered before the brilliance of the setting sun. Like some giant bat unfurling its wings, a single violet parasol gracefully spun round in mid-air.

## Parasols

A distant view of the sea in pastel shades; a forest profuse with evergreens; a fragrant orchard and a rose garden; illuminated clouds at dawn and sunset; the pallid moon glowing crisply. Each and every one of these colors that fill this health resort with infinite glitter had been captured by an elderly lady's paintbrush, as if to scoop it all up with care. These days, however, there has been a slight change to the painter's motifs.

The presence of those graceful people's parasols, spotted here and there in the dunes, has been the cause.

"That parasol bunch...I *know* there's something fishy about them," said the elderly lady's companion while clearing away the dishes for her.

"Where did they wander off from? With those colorful umbrellas...they are grown men, for God's sake."

"I think it's fine, Mari. They have beautiful taste," the lady responded while giving a final touch to the scene on her canvas by painting in a mint-colored umbrella.

"Plus, they're not all men. There are some women, too, and even a few children."

"And look how pale they are. It's not normal," Mari pointed out. "At first I thought it was the reflection of the parasol colors on their faces, but it's not so... What could they be eating?"

"Don't be rude, now."

"I'm not. But imagine if they're part of a cult or something. It's scary."

"Hi, Naomi. How are you?" The owner of the mint-colored parasol peeped in unexpectedly from the window. "What did you paint today?"

Her companion hurried off into the back.

Chuckling, Naomi answered: "We were talking about the parasols just now, Mr. Mint."

"Yes?"

"I just couldn't resist painting you all. Look, this is Orange. Here are Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"Wow, that's really something."

The pale face—a kind of paleness as if coated on the lime-rich soil of a vineyard—of Mint (she had never asked his real name) broke into a smile. He is turning his mint-colored parasol with his fingers. Actually, it is a Western-style umbrella rather than a parasol—the ones that the English never open, choosing to get wet walking while their umbrellas are ever so tightly wound up.

But these people are always under open umbrellas. They're all like that—those parasol lovers, who turned up out of the blue last week and rented several cottages for themselves.

"So... you said you were talking about us?"

"It's something my companion says," Naomi said with a smile. "That you all may be the living dead."

The shoulders of Mari, who had her back to them, appeared to rise noticeably and then fall again.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent for a minute, but then began to roar with laughter.

"A real April showers' joke, that is."

"Isn't it, though?" The lady giggled mischievously.

"Yes, indeed." Mint also chuckled. "Well, we'll be heading back to our graves now. If you need something, please come by. And don't forget an offering of flowers."

“You…” As soon as the green parasol was out of sight, Mari was suddenly back again, furious. “You never change.”

“It’s because he resembles someone dead we knew,” said Naomi. “That’s why you don’t want me talking with him. Isn’t that right, Mari?”

“Why bring it up again, Naomi?” asked Mari. “It all happened a long time ago. He never meant to marry you, anyway.”

“It’s none of your business.”

“What’s wrong, Naomi? Why obsess about it *now*, after all these years?”

“He and I could’ve been friends again. But you hid his letter. By the time I found that letter in your jewelry box, mixed up with your perfume bottle and pressed flowers and all that, he had already…”

“It was decades ago.”

“I know.” Naomi added in an undertone: “He had long since transformed.”

“Even so, it’s not that parasol guy.” Mari concluded, not as a mere companion now, but as a professional nurse who felt pride in her job: “It’s time for your meds.”

A group of parasols, one by one, emerged from the cottages; the mint-colored one in the lead, followed by those colored blue, indigo blue, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermilion, and pink, among others.

Once they arrived at some green grass with a nice view of the sea, one parasol was erected on the ground; it was violet.

Just as each one of them bowed deeply, the elderly lady slowly came walking toward them.

Mint noticed her presence and turned around. He gave a slight bow.

“Is something the matter?” asked Naomi.

“This is what we came here for,” Mint replied. “Actually, traveling from one place to another has always been our life. We never stay in one place. Only… Violet became tired of such a life. That’s why we came here, where our friend was born and raised—”

“I see…” Naomi hung her head. “Then, you all…”

“Yes,” Mint nodded, his parasol tilting forward and back slightly as he did so. “We have to be on our way again.”

“Then,” said Naomi, “could you take me with you?”

Mint opened his eyes wide—not with surprise, but with the intent to study her face closely.

“But you…?”

“I don’t have long to live,” said Naomi. “… You knew, right?”

Mint answered, his eyes still wide open, “…Yes.”

“Then, please.”

Mint turned around to face his party.

The group of parasols slowly nodded in agreement.

“Very well…” Mint told Naomi, “come in under my umbrella.”

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

Also like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Naomi’s body quivered violently under Mint’s umbrella.

When she stepped out, she was holding an umbrella of her own.

“From this day on, you are Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose umbrella.

The group of parasols, now with the addition of a new color in their midst, headed west on the orchard lane.

“Naomi!—where did she go?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the Western-style building. “When will she stop sulking?”

Beginning to feel a little uneasy at the sound of the wind that had been growing stronger since dusk, Mari looked up at the edge of the sky where it emerged from the offing. A shadow fluttered across the inexpressibly beautiful splendor of sunset: like a big bat in its flight, it was a violet parasol gracefully circling in the sky.

## Parasol

By Inoue Takehiko

Not only the distant, pastel-colored sea, but also deep evergreen forests, sweet-smelling orchards and rose gardens, clouds illuminated by dusk and dawn sunlight, the moon glowing its clear, clear blue: these were the countless hues whose brilliance infused the health resort and which the old woman had come to paint neatly, one by one, as though scooping them onto canvas, but recently, the motif beneath her paintbrush had begun to change a little.

It had begun with the elegant people, with their parasols scattered on the dunes.

"Those parasol people are frightening," Mari said as she cleaned up the dishes. "What town did they come from? To think, respectable men with all those garish umbrellas..."

As Naomi painted a mint-green umbrella onto the scenery of the health resort, she said, "I think it's fine, Mari. It's a lovely little proclivity. And those people aren't all men. There are women, too, and a very few children as well."

"They're so pale. It's not normal," Mari said, pointing out another problem. "I thought it was just the reflection of their parasols on their skin, but it's not. What in the world are they eating?"

"How rude."

"I don't think so. Wouldn't it be scary if they were some sort of cult?"

"Oh, Naomi, hello there!" Suddenly, the owner of the mint-green umbrella was peeking in through the window. "What sort of painting are you making today?"

Mari hastily withdrew.

Naomi snickered and said, "We were talking about your parasol just now, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"Against my better judgment, I've started to want to paint all of you. Look. Mr. Orange and Ms. Blue, Mr. Lemon and Ms. Violet."

"Oh, how lovely."

Mint—she hadn't asked his real name—his face white—white like the chalky earth sprinkled over a vineyard—smiled broadly and warmly. With the tips of his fingers, he spun and spun his mint-green parasol. No, not a parasol; more like a true umbrella, with ribs like the fingers of bat wings. If Mint had been British, he would've kept the umbrella tightly furled and never opened it, a bat walking along wet in the rain.

But these people were always under their open umbrellas. They had appeared suddenly last week and rented a few cottages, these parasol-loving folk, all canopied.

"You were saying? The rumors about us?"

"My roommate was saying," Naomi said cheerfully, "that you're all the living dead." She saw Mari, her back to them, raise her shoulders high and drop them again.

"The living dead?" Mint was quiet for a moment, but then burst out laughing. "What a thing! A joke like an April shower!"

"Is it?" Naomi said, smiling impishly.

"It is," said Mint, chuckling. "Well then, we'll be returning to our graves. Should you have the time, do leave a bouquet."

Once the green umbrella had retreated, Mari clamored out, furious. "You are something! You've always been something."

"It's because he looks like our dearly departed friend," Naomi said. "That's why you don't like it when I talk to him, Mari."

"Why do you have to bring that up again, Naomi? It was a long time ago. And besides, he never wanted to marry you anyway."

"That was uncalled for."

"What's happened, Naomi? Why are we fighting about this now? It was decades ago."

"We had a chance to get back together. But you hid that letter. That letter in your jewelry box, mixed in with your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers, and by the time I found out, he was already—"

"It was decades ago."

"That's right," Naomi whispered. "He's already been reincarnated."

"Even if that's true, he's not that umbrella man." Then, not as a roommate, but now with the voice of a nurse awakening her professional knowledge, Mari said, "Come on. It's time for your medicine."

Mint in the lead, Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Red, Peach, the herd of parasols streamed out of the cottages. When they reached the lawn that overlooked the sea, they thrust one umbrella into the earth. It was Violet's parasol.

Only after each of them bowed deeply to the umbrella did the old woman slowly walk forward. As though sensing her presence, Mint turned. He bowed in greeting.

"What happened?" Naomi asked.

"We came here for this," Mint answered. "By nature, we go from one journey to the next. We never stay in one place. Ms. Violet was tired of that way of life. That's why we came to this land, where she was born, where she was raised."

"I see." Naomi's head drooped. "So then you all..."

"Yes." Mint nodded with his entire parasol. "We must be journeying again."

"If that's so," Naomi said, "take me with you. Please."

Mint's eyes widened. It was not so much from surprise, it seemed, but rather to examine her face more closely. "You...?"

"I," Naomi said, "don't have much time left. But you knew that."

Mint, his eyes still wide, nodded. "Yes."

"Well then, please."

Mint turned to his companions. The umbrellas all nodded slowly.

"Very well," Mint said to Naomi. "Please come under my umbrella."

It looked very much like a kiss on a rainy day.

It also looked very much like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.

Beneath Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body trembled.

When she emerged again, she had an umbrella in hand.

"From today, you are Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-pink umbrella.

The herd of parasols, with the addition of the new hue, turned west, following the narrow orchard path.

“Naomi? Where are you?” Mari’s voice echoed through the house. “Just how long do you plan to sulk?”

At the sound of the wind, grown stronger with evening, Mari, now a little afraid, looked out at the point where sea and sky were joined, where against a dusk whose splendor was too beautiful to bear, a shadow suddenly flitted past, cutting off the light. Like a giant bat fluttering its wings, a single violet parasol gracefully spun through the sky.



Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

The pastel colors of the distant ocean, the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, and the pale, crisp moon that shone among the hues of the clouds at sunset and dawn...the immeasurable brilliance of these colors that saturated the health resort and were one-by-one taken in and reproduced with the old woman's paintbrush had recently begun to change.

The parasols of the elegant people that could be seen here and there throughout the dunes....they were the cause.

"Those parasols are awfully suspicious," her roommate said as she tidied up the dishes. "I wonder what town they drifted in from. It's certainly odd to see nice-looking men carrying those multi-colored parasols..."

"And what's wrong with it, Mari? It's a lovely hobby," she replied as she added the final touches to the mint-colored parasol in her canvas landscape. "And there's not just men, you know. There are women too, and even some children, although there's very few of them."

"Their faces are unnaturally pale," said Mari, pointing out another oddity. "At first I thought it was just the color reflecting from the parasols, but it's not....I wonder what they've been eating?"

"That's a bit rude."

"No, what if they're part of some kind of cult? Wouldn't that be frightening?"

"Ah, hello Naomi." Suddenly, the holder of the mint-colored parasol was peering into the window.

"What kind of picture have you painted today?"

Her roommate quickly withdrew.

Naomi chuckled, saying, "We were just talking about your parasols, Mint."

"Oh?"

"Because I recently began wanting to paint everyone. Look, it's Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"Oh, how wonderful."

Mint—Naomi had not inquired about his real name—broke into a wide smile that split his white face—so white that it could have been painted with the chalky, white earth of a vineyard. At his fingertips, the mint-colored parasol was spinning round and round. It was really more of an umbrella than a parasol. The kind of umbrella than an Englishman would wrap thinly and then not open, instead getting drenched as he walked.

However, these people were always underneath their open umbrellas. The parasol enthusiasts had appeared last week, out of the blue, and rented up several cottages, and they were all the same.

"So...are there rumors about us then?"

"My roommate was telling me some," said Naomi, smiling. "She thinks you're the living dead."

Mari was facing the other direction, but her shoulders visibly tensed, and then fell.

"The living dead?"

Mint was quiet for a moment, and then finally burst into laughter.

"That's like an April Fool's joke."

"Yes, isn't it?" The woman laughed mischievously.

"Definitely." Mint chuckled as well, saying, "Well, we'll be returning to the grave then, so bring us a bouquet or something."

"Honestly, what are you doing?" Mari suddenly confronted her as the green

parasol took its leave. "Doing the same as long ago."

"He looks like a certain dead body we've seen," said Naomi.

"That's why you dislike me speaking to him, Mari."

"Why do you keep bringing that up, Naomi?"

"That was a long time ago. Anyhow, he wasn't interested in marrying you," said Mari.

"That's rather nosy of you."

"There's nothing to be done, Naomi. Why are we still arguing about this? Something from how many decades ago?"

"We had a chance to make up. But you hid the letter. By the time the letter made it out of your jewelry box, mixed in with perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he was already..."

"That was decades ago."

"Yes," Naomi said in a small voice. "He had already been reborn."

"Even so, that man with the parasol is not him."

"Time for your medicine," said Mari, with the professional feel of a nurse rather than a roommate.

A group of parasols left the cottages, with Mint in the lead and Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Red, Pink, and so forth following after.

As they reached the green lawn that extended like an ocean, one parasol was set on the ground. A violet-colored parasol.

The old woman slowly walked over to where they stood, each with their head deeply bowed.

Sensing her approach, Mint turned to look at her. He gave a slight nod.

"What happened?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came," answered Mint. "It's our nature to live a wandering life. We don't stay in one place. But Violet was tired of that life. So, in this land where Violet was born and raised, we..."

"I see..." Naomi bowed her head. "So now you'll..."

"Yes." Mint nodded at the parasols. "Now we must travel on once again."

"If that's the case..." said Naomi, "could you take me with you?"

Mint's eyes opened wide. Rather than in surprise, it was as if he were scrutinizing her face closely.

"You...?"

"I...don't have much longer," said Naomi. "But you knew that, didn't you."

Mint's eyes widened, and he nodded. "Yes."

"So, please."

Mint turned to face his other companions. The parasols slowly nodded.

"Why not," Mint said to Naomi. "Come under my umbrella."

It was like a kiss on a rainy day. Or like a butterfly caught by a spider. Underneath Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body trembled.

When she stepped out, Naomi had an umbrella in her hand.

"From today onward, you will be Rose."

Naomi opened a rose-colored umbrella.

The group of parasols, with the new color added, turned west along the orchard path.

"Naomi, where did you go?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the building. "How long are you going to sulk?" The sound of the wind had gotten stronger since evening fell, and Mari was frightened. She looked out in the distance to where the sky touched

the ocean, and saw a shadow whirling, obstructing the beautiful colors of the sunset. Like a large bat spreading its wings, a single violet-colored parasol elegantly spun in the air.

Parasol  
Inoue Masahiko

The parasol colours were not only in the vista of the sea but in the deep evergreen of the forest, in the fragrant fruit trees and rose gardens, in the setting and rising light of the sun through the clouds, and in the crisp blue reflection of the moon. All of these countless brilliant colours had only recently – gradually, as if carefully scooped up one by one – become the subject of the old lady's paint strokes. This began with the appearance of those elegant people's parasols here and there on the sand dunes.

'There's definitely something strange about those parasols,' her roommate said as she cleared away her cutlery. 'What town exactly did they drift in from? For grown men to be carrying around multi-coloured parasols like that...'

'There's nothing wrong with them, Mari. I think they're beautiful,' Naomi replied while applying a final coat to the mint green parasol in the scene on the canvas. 'Besides, not all of those people are male. There are women and, even though there aren't many, there are children too.'

'Well, there's definitely something not normal about their pale faces,' Mari also pointed out. 'I thought the colour of the parasol would reflect, but it doesn't. What do you suppose they're eating?'

'That's rude.'

'But aren't you scared they might be a cult?'

By coincidence the mint green parasol man then spoke, peering through the window. 'Oh, hello Naomi! What have you painted today?'

Naomi's roommate hurriedly withdrew.

'We were just talking about the parasols, Mint,' Naomi replied, chuckling.

'Is that so?'

'Because I suddenly got the urge to paint all of you. Look! There's Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet.'

'Very impressive.'

The pale face of Mint (she had never asked his real name), seemingly coated with white chalky vineyard soil, broke out into a smile. With the tip of his finger he rotated his mint green parasol. Although, it was shaped more like those western, bat-like umbrellas than a parasol. It was the type that if he were English would be tightly wrapped and never opened, a drenched walking bat. But these people were always beneath opened parasols. These parasol lovers, who had suddenly appeared last week after renting several cottages, were all that way.

'So, what were you saying about us?'

'It was something my roommate said,' Naomi smiled. 'She wondered whether you might all be the living dead.' From behind she could see Mari's shoulders rise steeply and then fall.

'The living dead?' For a moment Mint was silent, but he eventually broke out into a roar of laughter. 'It's just like the saying "April showers bring May flowers".'

Naomi laughed playfully. 'That's right.'

Mint laughed again. 'Well then, as we'll be returning to the grave, please lay a bouquet or something when you visit.'

'You're always like that,' Mari burst out angrily as soon as the green parasol had left. 'You never change.'

'Isn't this is all because he looks like that man we knew, the one who died?' Naomi said. 'That's why you don't like the two of us talking, Mari.'

‘Why do you have to drag that back up, Naomi?’ Mari said. ‘That was a long time ago. He had no intention of marrying you anyway.’

‘That’s none of your business.’

‘What’s the matter, Naomi? Why are we still fighting about this even now? How many decades has it been?’

‘Because I had a chance to make things right with him. But you hid the letter. When I found it in your jewellery box among perfume, pressed flowers and whatnot, he was already…’

‘That’s ancient history.’

‘That’s right,’ Naomi said in a small voice. ‘And after such a long time, he has been born again.’

‘Even if that were true, that parasol man isn’t him.’

Mari spoke now not as her roommate but like a professional nurse. ‘Now, time for your medicine.’

With Mint at their head, Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, Peach and the others in the parasol group came out from the cottages in succession. When they arrived at the green lawn overlooking the ocean, they erected a parasol in the ground. It was Violet’s parasol. As each of them bowed their heads deeply, the old lady walked steadily towards them. When Mint noticed her presence, he turned. Then, he nodded in greeting.

‘Did something happen?’ Naomi asked.

‘This was the reason we came here,’ Mint replied. ‘We originally lived from one trip to the next, never staying in one place. But Violet was tired of that life. So we came back to the place she was born and raised to…’

‘Is that so…?’ Naomi said, lowering her head. ‘So then, you’ll all be…?’

‘Yes.’ Mint nodded along with his parasol. ‘We have to set out again.’

‘In that case,’ Naomi said, ‘could you please take me with you?’

Mint’s eyes widened. It was not so much with surprise, but so that he could look at her more closely. ‘Take you?’

‘Take me,’ Naomi said. ‘I’m sure you already know…but I don’t have long left.’

‘…Yes.’

‘Then, please.’

Mint turned to his companions. The parasols nodded slowly. *Fine with us.* Mint addressed Naomi. ‘Well then, step under my parasol.’

It looked like a kiss in the rain. It looked like a butterfly being caught by a spider. Inside of Mint’s parasol, Naomi’s body trembled.

When she stepped out, Naomi took a parasol in her hand.

‘From now on you are Rose.’

Naomi opened the rose parasol. With their new additional colour, the parasols headed west down the orchard path.

‘Naomi. Where are you?’ Mari’s voice echoed around the house. ‘Just how long are you going to sulk for?’

When Mari, startled by the sound of the wind that had strengthened since the evening, looked up at the line where the ocean met the edge of the sky, a dancing shadow obstructed the excessively beautiful sunset. Like a bat flapping its wings, a lone violet parasol was twirling elegantly in the air.

## Parasol

Not only did she paint the pastel colors of the open sea, but also the evergreens of the deep forest, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the colorful show of lights at sunset and daybreak on the clouds, the pale moon shining brightly... One by one, as if she was carefully scooping up every small detail, the old woman painted in the colorful hues and tints that filled this nature retreat with immeasurable beauty. However recently, the motif of her paintings had begun to change.

It all started... with the arrival of that group of elegant strangers – the parasols they carried occasionally standing out here and there against the sand dunes.

“Those parasol men are definitely suspicious,” said her roommate as she cleaned up the old woman’s flatware. “Heaven knows what town they drifted in from. A group of handsome gentlemen carrying around such brightly-colored, pretty parasols!”

“What’s wrong with it, Mari? I think it’s lovely,” the old woman replied as she painted a spearmint-colored parasol into the landscape on her canvas. “Besides, those people aren’t all men. There are women and, albeit very few, children as well.”

“Have you seen their faces? They’re so very pale. It’s not normal,” said Mari, pointing out another anomaly. “I thought maybe the color of the parasols was reflecting on their faces, but it’s not that... What in the world have they been eating?”

“That’s rude.”

“I think not. What if they’re part of some cult? How frightening...”

“Hey Miss Naomi. Good afternoon.” The owner of the spearmint-colored parasol suddenly poked his head in through the window. “What kind of piece have you painted today?”

Naomi’s roommate hurriedly shrank away.

Naomi replied with a giggle, “We were discussing your parasols just now, Mr. Mint.”

“Oh?”

“Because I found myself wanting to paint all of you. Look! Here’s Mr. Orange, there’s Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and this one is Miss Violet.”

“Oh! Marvelous work!”

Mint’s – Naomi hadn’t asked his real name – face, white as if it were covered in the chalky soil of a vineyard, broke into a smile. He twirled around the spearmint-colored parasol with his fingertips. Rather than a parasol, it may have been more appropriate to refer to it as an umbrella for the sun, the shape being less decorative, and the fabric stretching around the frame in a way reminiscent of a bat’s wings – wings that Mari was sure an Englishman would keep wrapped tightly and never open, instead choosing to walk in the rain.

However, every single one of these people were always under their open parasols. The group of parasol lovers had appeared suddenly in the last week and rented-out several cottages for themselves.

“So, what were you saying about us?”

“My roommate has been saying,” Naomi said cheerfully, “that she’s worried you’re all living dead”

Mari’s was turned away from the window, but her shoulders visibly tensed up and then deflated.

“Living dead?” Mint went quiet for a moment. Then, finally, he burst into laughter. “Now, there is a joke as unexpected as an April shower!”

“Isn’t it?” The old woman laughed mischievously.

“Indeed, it is.”

Mint chuckled, “Well then, we shall be returning to our graves now, so if you should come to call, please leave an offering of flowers or whatnot.”

"I can't believe you..." fumed Mari, rushing over as the green parasol bobbed away. "You've always been like this. I can't believe you."

"It's because he's similar to *him*, right? Our late acquaintance..." said Naomi. "That's the only reason you don't like me talking to him, Mari."

"Naomi, why are you trying to bring this up again?" said Mari. "It happened forever ago. Anyway, that man didn't have any intention of marrying you."

"That's what we call 'being a busybody.'"

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why now, after all this time, are you getting involved with him? How many decades have passed since then?"

"I even had the chance to make up with him! But because *you* hid the letter in your jewel box – mixed in with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers and things – by the time it came out, he was already –"

"It was decades ago."

"Yes, it was." Naomi said in a small voice, "He would have been reborn as someone else ages ago."

"Even so, it's not that parasol man."

Mari's tone switched from that of a roommate, to that of a nurse who had awoken to her duties. "It's time for your medicine!" she said.

With mint in the lead, a flock of parasols – blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, red, pink, and other colors – streamed out of the cottages.

They came down to the green lawn that overlooked the ocean and thrust one parasol into the ground. It was violet-colored.

As each of them gave a deep bow, the old woman ambled over.

Noticing her arrival, Mint turned around. He gave a slight bow, acknowledging her presence.

"What's happening?" inquired Naomi.

"This is what we came here for," replied Mint. "We usually lead a nomadic lifestyle, traveling from place to place, never staying anywhere for too long. However, Miss Violet grew weary of that lifestyle. That is why we brought her here, to the place where she was born and raised, so that she could..."

"I see..." said Naomi, hanging her head. "So, you all will be..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, the parasol nodding along with him. "We must continue our travels."

"Then," said Naomi, "will you please take me with you?"

Mint widened his eyes. However, rather than in surprise, it seemed that he did so more to closely examine her face.

"You...?"

"I," said Naomi, "don't have much time left. You knew, right?"

Mint, widening his eyes again, nodded. "...Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint turned towards his companions.

The parasols gently nodded.

"Very well..." Mint said to Naomi. "Then, please step under my parasol."

It looked almost like a kiss on a rainy day.

It looked almost like a butterfly being caught by a spider.

Underneath the mint parasol, Naomi's body shook and shivered.

When she came out, Naomi was grasping a single parasol in her hand.

"Starting today, you're Miss Rose."

Naomi unfolded the rose-colored parasol.

The flock, with a new color in their midst, flowed along the orchard's path, toward the west.

“Naomi! Where did you go?” Mari’s voice echoed through the Western-style house. “How long are you going to keep sulking?”

Mari, who had grown a tad frightened with the sound of the wind that had grown stronger since the evening, looked up at the horizon. Cutting through the overwhelmingly beautiful lights and colors of the sunset, a shadow danced. As if a large bat were spreading its wings, a single, violet-colored parasol sailed gracefully across the sky.



## Umbrella

The vast ocean in the distance, the deep evergreen forest, the sweet-smelling orchard, the fragrant rose garden, the brilliant light of the clouds at sunrise and sunset, the crisp blue of the moon... One by one, each of the colours that illuminated the health resort with their immeasurable brightness was painstakingly recreated by the elderly woman. Just recently, however, the pattern of her brushstrokes had started to change.

The reason for this change was the parasols, held by those beautiful people, that had started appearing over by the sand dunes.

"There's something strange about those parasols all right," said one of the woman's fellow residents, clearing away the dishes. "God knows where they came from. I'm sure they're nice boys, but all those colours, it's so..."

"Leave them be, Marie. They have impeccable taste," the elderly woman responded as she added the finishing touches to the mint-coloured parasol on her canvas. "Besides, it's not only men. There are women there too, some children even."

"Their skin's so pale, it's not right," Marie continued undeterred. "At first I thought it was the light from the parasols reflecting onto them, but that's not it... What on earth have they been eating?"

"That's a bit harsh."

"I don't think so. I just hope they aren't a cult or some such."

"Oh, hello Naomi."

All of a sudden, the owner of the mint parasol peeked out from a window.

"What are you painting today?"

Marie hurriedly drew away.

"We were just taking about parasols, Mint", said Naomi, with a glib smile.

"Excuse me?"

"I was taken by the urge to paint all of you. Look, there's Clementine, Sapphire, Marigold, Violet..."

"Wow, it's really quite something."

Mint – his real name was a mystery – had a face so white it looked like he had plastered it with chalk from the vineyard. He burst into a smile, turning his parasol in his hands. Actually, parasol wasn't quite right. It was more of an umbrella, the kind that an English person might carry as they walk in the rain, tightly wrapped and not to be opened under any circumstances.

Mint, however, always had his umbrella up. The same was true of all these people who had appeared so suddenly last week, booking up many of the cottages. They seemed to really love their umbrellas.

"So, what's the gossip?"

"The people around here," said Naomi with a smile. "They say you're living corpses."

Marie was facing away from them, but her heavy shrug was quite apparent.

"Living corpses?" Mint was silent for a while, then burst into laughter. "That's a bit of a bombshell I must say."

"It's true, isn't it?" Naomi gave a mischievous grin.

"That's right," Mint chuckled along, "well, we'll be heading back to our tomb now. Just make sure you lay some flowers down for us."

"People like you," Marie flew into a rage once the green umbrella had departed. "People like you have always been like that."

"It's because he looks like the dead body of someone we know, right?" said Naomi. "That's why you have such a problem with me talking to them, Marie."

"Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi?" said Marie. "It's ancient history. He didn't really want to marry you anyway."

"That's none of your business."

"What's gotten into you? Why are you getting hung up on this now? It was decades ago for Christ's sake."

"We had the chance to get back together. But you went and hid the letter. By the time it came out of your jewellery box, mixed in with all your perfume and pressed flowers, he was..."

"It was years ago."

"I know," Naomi said meekly. "He had already changed by then."

"In any case, that boy with the umbrella isn't him," Marie said, adopting a tone less like that of a fellow resident and more like a professional nurse. "Now, it's time for your medicine."

Ultramarine, indigo, orange, yellow, gold, silver, vermillion, crimson; a train of umbrellas came streaming out of the cottage, with a mint one at the head of the group.

A lone umbrella was already standing on the lawn overlooking the sea. It was violet.

As each member of the group offered a deep bow, an elderly woman slowly made her way over to them.

Noticing her presence, Mint turned and acknowledged Naomi.

"What's the matter?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came here," Mint replied. "We've always had a nomadic existence, never staying in one place. Violet grew weary of that way of life, so she wanted to go back to the place where she was born and raised."

"Is that so?" Naomi asked, lowering her head. "Then I suppose the rest of you..."

"Yes." Mint tipped his parasol. "We have to be on our way again."

"If you really have to go," said Naomi. "I don't suppose you'd consider taking me with you, would you?"

Mint's eyes widened, not in surprise, but rather as if he was trying to read her facial expression.

"You...?"

"Yes, me." said Naomi. "I don't have long left... but you already knew that, didn't you?"

Mint's eyes widened again, he lowered his head.

"... I suppose I did."

"Well then, please..."

Mint turned to his other companions.

The umbrellas nodded slowly.

"In that case..." Mint said to Naomi. "You'd better come under my umbrella."

It was like a kiss in the rain. Like a fly caught in a spider's web, Naomi's body began to tremble under Mint's umbrella.

When she emerged, she was holding an umbrella of her own.

"From now on, you shall be Rose."

Naomi opened her umbrella.

The train was one colour richer than before as it headed West along the lane by the orchard.

"Where are you, Naomi?" Marie's voice was echoing around the house. "What are you playing at? How long are you going to sulk for?"

As evening came and the sound of the wind grew, a slightly fearful Marie looked out to where the ocean met the sky and saw a fluttering shadow cast against the last rays of sunlight. Like the beating wings of a great bat, a purple umbrella was floating serenely across the heavens.

Parasol  
(by Inoue Masahiko)

The pastel coloured backdrop of the open sea, the dense forest of evergreens, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the vivid colours cast upon clouds at dusk and dawn, the brilliant blue moon... and its myriad hues of light which wash over the villa, her place of convalescence. These form the motifs which the old lady's paintbrush depicts—carefully, in detail, almost as though plucked from the very thing—but recently, that has begun to change.

Ever since she first saw the parasols of those graceful people dotted across the sand dunes, that is.

"There's just something very strange about those parasol people." The old lady's housemate spoke while putting away the tableware. "I wonder where they drifted in from. What kind of grown men go around with such gaudily coloured parasols?"

"What's the matter, Mari? I think they have lovely taste," the old lady replied while adding a mint-green parasol to the scenery on her canvas. "Besides, they aren't all men. Some are women. A tiny fraction are even children."

"That unhealthy complexion of theirs simply isn't normal," Mari went on, raising a different point of grievance. "At first, I thought it was merely an effect caused by their coloured parasols, but that's not it... Say, what do you suppose they eat?"

"Now that's just rude."

"Hardly. Aren't you worried they're some kind of cult?"

"Ho there, Miss Naomi. Good day." The owner of a mint-green parasol was suddenly there by the window, looking in. "So, what have you drawn today?"

Mari hastily scrambled back and away.

Naomi giggled as she replied, "We were actually just talking about your parasols, Mr Mint."

"Oh?"

"I had a sudden fancy to draw you all. You know, Mr Orange and Mr Blue? Ms Lemon and Ms Violet?"

"Oh my, how splendid."

Mr Mint—they never asked for his actual name—reacted by causing his white face—white as if smeared with the chalky soil of a vineyard—to break out into a wide smile. The parasol was spun in his fingers, round and round. Unlike a typical dainty parasol, though, it was more a western-style, bat-like umbrella. The type an Englishman would roll tight and then never open, preferring to get wet in the rain.

However, these people were invariably seen beneath one. They showed up without warning a week ago, renting several cottages, and they were all equally enthusiastic in their use of parasols.

"So... What's these rumours about us, then?"

"According to my housemate," Naomi led with a grin, "you might all be a bunch of living corpses."

Mari had her back turned towards them; her shoulders could be seen to drastically flinch upwards for a moment.

"Living corpses?" Mr Mint fell silent, but burst into laughter before long. "That joke's rather like an April shower, isn't it?"

"You think so?" The lady laughed mischievously.

"Oh, yes," Mr Mint chuckled. "Well then, it's about time we return to our graves. If you need anything, simply bring along some flowers or the like."

“Really, now!” Mari erupted in fury once the green parasol was far away. “You just always have to be like that, don’t you?”

“He reminds you of *him*, doesn’t he? The one who passed away,” Naomi replied. “That’s why you can’t stand me talking to him. Isn’t that so, Mari?”

“Why can’t you let it go, Naomi? It’s ancient history now. Besides, it’s not as if he ever intended to marry you.”

“I don’t believe I ever asked your opinion.”

“Seriously, Naomi. Why are you getting all worked up over this now? It’s been decades since then.”

“I had a chance to make things right with him, you know? But... you hid that letter. By the time I fished it out of your jewellery box—hidden amongst perfume bottles and pressed flowers and so on—he was already—”

“Look, that was decades ago.”

“Indeed,” Naomi murmured. “He’d have reincarnated long ago and be living a whole new life now.”

“Even so, it wouldn’t be as that parasol man.”

Mari then spoke; not as a housemate, but with the steely professional tone of a nurse.

“Now then, it’s time for your medicine.”

A colourful array of parasols emerged from the cottages—ultramarine and indigo blues; orange and lemon; gold, silver, scarlet, peach—and at the head of the procession was mint-green.

After arriving at an area of green grass with a view of the sea, a single parasol was stood on the ground—Violet.

While their heads were deeply bowed, the old lady slowly made her way there.

Sensing her approach, Mr Mint turned around. He gave a slight bow in greeting.

“What might you be doing?” Naomi inquired.

“This is what we came here for,” replied Mr Mint. “We normally live our lives apart from *other people*, never settling down in any one place. However... Ms Violet had grown weary of such a life. She wished to return to the land where she was born and raised...”

“I see...” Naomi hung her head, crestfallen. “Then that must mean...”

“Yes,” Mr Mint nodded, dipping his parasol in the process. “We must continue on our journey.”

“In that case,” Naomi said, “could you take me along as well?”

Mr Mint opened his eyes wide. Rather than in surprise, it was more so that he could better gaze upon her face.

“Are you...?”

“I am,” said Naomi. “I don’t have much longer... But I’m sure you knew that already.”

Eyes still wide open, Mr Mint nodded, “...Yes.”

“So please, grant me my request.”

Mr Mint turned towards his companions.

Gentle nods were given beneath the multitude of parasols.

“Very well, then...” Mr Mint said to Naomi. “Come under my parasol.”

It seemed like a kiss on a rainy day.

It seemed like a butterfly, seized by a spider.

Naomi’s body trembled, shivering beneath Mr Mint’s parasol.

When she came out from under it, she had a parasol of her own in her hand.

“I suppose this makes you ‘Ms Rose’ from now on,” Mr Mint said as Naomi opened up a rose-red parasol.

Now enriched with a new colour, the gathering of parasols then followed the path in the orchard and headed west.

“Naomi! Where have you gotten yourself to?” Mari’s voice rang out across the villa. “You can’t keep sulking forever, you know?”

As dusk fell and the rustling of the wind grew louder, Mari—now a little unsettled—looked up, out towards the horizon where the sky met the open sea. There, amid the exquisite brilliance cast by the setting sun, a shadow danced. A single violet parasol drifted in the air like a giant bat flapping its wings, twirling and tumbling gracefully across the sky.

## Parasol

by Masahiko INOUE

It was just recently that her motifs had begun to change slightly. The old lady carefully teased them out with her pencils one by one, filling the nursing home with hues of immeasurable brilliance. There were not only the pastel tones of a distant bay but those of a thick forest of evergreen trees, a fragrant orchard and rose garden, light on snow at sunset and sunrise, and the irradant silvery blue of the moon.

It had started when the parasols of the newcomers that parade around with them so grandly became a common site in and around the beach.

"You know, those guys with the parasols are just plain strange" the resident nursing aide commented as she tidied away her dishes. "A bunch of good-looking guys with colorful parasols. From what town did they come and what on earth brought them here?"

"What's wrong with it, Mari?" she replied as she put the finishing touches to a mint-colored parasol against the background of her canvas. "I think it's a beautiful way to occupy oneself." "And don't forget, they're not all men either; there are women too, and even a few children as well."

"There's something not right about their pasty faces," Mari said, sharing another observation. "I thought it was the reflection from the parasols, but it isn't . . . What can they be eating?"

"Now that's just rude."

"But what if they're some kind of cult? Doesn't that scare you?"

"Hey Naomi, hello there!"

All of a sudden the owner of the mint-colored parasol was peering in the window.

"What kind of picture did you draw today?"

The nursing aide promptly made herself scarce.

Naomi gave a chuckle as she replied, "We were just talking about parasols, Mint."

"Is that so?"

"I just got an urge to draw all of you. You see—we've got Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet."

"Well that is just beautiful."

His white face broadened into a smile. They knew him as Mint but had never asked for his real name. His complexion was a shade of white that made it appear as if his face had been pasted with the limey earth of a vineyard. He was twirling a mint-colored parasol between his fingers. It was actually more like one of those umbrellas whose resemble the wings of a bat; an umbrella you could imagine an Englishman carrying rolled up tightly, not even thinking to open it to avoid getting wet.

But those parasol devotees—who had appeared last week out of the blue and moved into some rental cottages—always kept them up. Every one of them.

"And you said you were just talking about us?"

"Our resident nurse said it," Naomi replied cheerily. "She thinks you lot are the walking dead."

Facing the other way, Mari's shoulders rose sharply, then fell.

"The walking dead!"

Mint rested silent for a moment or two before letting out a loud laugh.

"Well isn't that a good joke, just like an April shower."

"Isn't it just," snickered the old lady.

"Well we had better get back to our tomb then, you might want to prepare a bouquet of flowers for us too," chuckled Mint.

Once the green parasol was out of sight, Mari came bolting out in a rage.

"You're the one. It's you who was just like that in the past."

"It's because he looks like someone we used to know, right?"

"Well that is just the reason why you don't like to see me talking with him, Mari."

"Why are you dragging that up again, Naomi?"

Mari continued: "It happened a very long time ago. And either way he never had any intention of marrying you."

"I'm afraid that is none of your business."

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why are you getting yourself caught up in this now? How many tens of years has it been?"

"We did have a chance to make up you know. But you hid the letter. And by the time that letter came out of your jewelry box, jumbled up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he was . . ."

"It was decades ago."

"That's right."

Naomi breathed softly, "And he's been born again."

"Well even if he has, he is not that man with the parasol."

"Anyway, it's time for your medicine now," Mari replied, sounding less like a live-in aide now and more like a nurse who had just reminded herself to act professionally.

With the mint-colored parasol leading the way, the troop of parasols filed out of the cottage: Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver and Peach

When they reached the green grassy plot overlooking the sea, they stuck one parasol—violet in color—upright in the ground.

As each of them bowed deeply the old lady slowly walked up to them.

Feeling her presence, Mint turned around and nodded to her.

"What's happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came," Mint replied.

"Our way is to go from voyage to voyage. We don't stay in one place. But Violet is tired of that life. So that's why we've come here, where she was born and raised."

"Oh really?"

Naomi hung her head, "So all of you are . . ."

"That's right," Mint replied, his parasol nodding with him.

"It's time for us to leave on another trip."

"In that case . . ." Naomi said "won't you please take me with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide, not so much out of surprise but rather to fix his gaze on her face.

"You are . . .?"

"I'm . . . not going to last much longer," Naomi said, "and you know it, don't you."

" . . . Yes," Mint nodded, opening his eyes wide.

"Do it then. Please."

Mint turned to the other members of the group. The parasols slowly nodded.

"Okay then, come inside my parasol," Mint said to Naomi.

Like a kiss on a rainy day, like a butterfly caught in a spider's web, Naomi's body trembled inside Mint's parasol.

When she reappeared she had a parasol in her hand.

"From today on you'll be known as Rose."

Naomi opened the rose-colored parasol.

The troop of parasols, with a new color in their midst, moved west along the orchard path.

Mari's voice echoed through the halls of the western-style building.

"Naomi—where are you? How long are you going to be sulking for?"

Growing a little scared of the sound of the wind that had grown stronger from that evening, Mari looked up at the horizon line of the bay and saw a shadow flit across her line of vision, briefly blocking the almost-too-beautiful dusk-lit scene. Like a great bat in flight, a single violet colored parasol circled elegantly in the sky.



## Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

It was not only the pastel views of the open sea, but also the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the light on the clouds at sunset and sunrise, the bright blue glow of the moon...and this health resort, with its each and every colour immeasurably vibrant; these motifs, created by the old woman's paintbrush, painted carefully and as if they were being scooped onto the canvas, had only recently started to change, ever so slightly.

The parasols of those elegant people could now be seen all around the sand dunes...that was why.

"Those parasol people really are suspicious," the woman's housemate said while clearing away the woman's plate. "Where have they even come from? They might be good men, but all those coloured umbrellas are..."

"It's fine, isn't it? It's a beautiful hobby, Mari," the woman replied, while adding a final coat to the peppermint-coloured umbrella amid the scenery on the canvas. "Besides, those people aren't all men. There are women as well, and children, too — although their numbers might be very few."

"It's not normal for someone's face to be that colour!" Mari pointed out, changing course. "I thought that maybe the colours of their parasols were reflecting on their faces, but that's not it...I wonder what those people eat?"

"That is very rude of you."

"No, it's not. Wouldn't you be scared if they turned out to be some sort of cult?"

"Hey, Miss Naomi, good morning." Suddenly, the owner of the peppermint-coloured parasol peeked through the window. "What kind of painting have you made today?"

The housemate quickly withdrew.

Naomi giggled, and said, "We were talking about your umbrellas just now, Mint."

"Oh?"

"I've been wanting to draw everyone recently, you see. Look: it's Orange, Blue, Lemon, Violet."

"Oh, why, that is wonderful!"

Mint — she did not ask his real name — grinned, and his white face — it was so white, it seemed dyed in the chalky soil of a vineyard — opened up. He twirled his peppermint-coloured parasol in his hands. Rather than a parasol, it was more of an umbrella, wide like the wings of a bat; the kind of bat that would be tightly curled up, its wings most certainly not open, had it been with an Englishman walking through the rain.

However, these people were always under their open umbrellas. After suddenly appearing the previous week and booking out several cottages, it seemed as if they all behaved the same way, these parasol lovers.

"So, what about that rumour...about us?"

"My housemate did mention it," Naomi told him as she beamed. "That your people might be the living dead."

She saw Mari's shoulders tense up, greatly, and then fall again, her back to them still.

"The living dead?" Mint didn't say anything for a moment, but soon burst into a roar of laughter. "That is just like an April Fool's joke!"

"Is that so?" The old woman laughed as if it were a joke.

"It is!" Mint chuckled too. "In that case, we shall be returning to our graves, but should you need us, please do bring a bouquet or the like."

“*You*...” After the green umbrella had slipped away, Mari came bursting in, furious. “You have *always* been like that!”

“It’s because he looks like our deceased acquaintance, isn’t it?” Naomi said. “That’s why you’re angry that I spoke with him, Mari.”

“Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi?” Mari asked. “That was a long time ago. Besides, *he* didn’t seem like he wanted to marry you.”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Naomi, what happened? Why are you picking a fight now? I mean, it happened decades ago.”

“We had a chance to make up. But you hid the letter; you kept that letter inside your jewellery box — and by the time I’d pulled it out from among your perfumes and pressed flowers and everything else, he had already—”

“That was decades ago.”

“You’re right,” Naomi said in a small voice. “He has long since started his new life.”

“Even so, he’s not that man with the umbrella.” And then Mari spoke again, but not with the voice of a housemate; rather, with that of a nurse, who had just awakened to her duty: “Come now, it’s time to take your medicine.”

Following their peppermint-coloured leader, the cloud of parasols – ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach – came pouring out of the cottage in droves.

They arrived at the green lawn overlooking the sea, where a single umbrella stood upright in the ground. It was the violet parasol.

As they bowed their heads, deeply and one after another, the old woman walked over slowly.

When he noticed her presence, Mint turned around. Then, he bowed his head in greeting.

“What happened?” Naomi asked.

“This is why we came here.” Mint answered. “We have always lived from one journey to the next; we do not stop in one place. However — Violet was tired of that way of life. And so, born and raised on this ground—”

“I see...” Naomi hung her head. “So, your group...”

“Yes.” Mint nodded, umbrella and all. “We must once again set off on our journey.”

“If that is the case,” Naomi said, “perhaps I could ask you to take me with you?”

Mint’s eyes widened. Rather than being surprised, he seemed to be closely watching her face. “You...?”

“Me,” Naomi said. “I do not have long left, now...I’m sure you’ve realised.”

Mint nodded, his eyes still wide. “...Yes.”

“In that case, I beg you.”

Mint turned towards his crew.

The umbrella holders nodded slowly.

“It should be fine...” Mint said to Naomi. “Well then, come under my umbrella.”

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It looked like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under Mint’s umbrella, Naomi’s body trembled violently.

When she stepped out, Naomi held a single umbrella in her hand.

“From today, you will be Miss Rose.”

Naomi opened the rose-coloured umbrella.

With the addition of a new shade, the colony of parasols headed west along the small orchard path.

“Naomi...Where did you go?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the house. “Honestly, how long are you going to sulk for?”

With the sound of the wind getting stronger as night fell, Mari became slightly frightened, and looked towards the sky’s end, where it met the open sea – there danced a shadow, obscuring the dazzle of the painfully beautiful sunset. The single violet-coloured parasol twirled elegantly through the sky, for all the world like a huge bat wanting to take flight.

Parasol  
by Inoue Masahiko

With the pastel color of the open sea in the background, a deep evergreen forest, a fragrant orchard and rose garden, the shadowy light of sunset and dawn, and the clear pale light of the moon...all of the sparkling, infinitely full colors of the resort, one by one, each carefully scooped up, meticulously mixed and painted with the old woman's paintbrush, were part of a motif that in an instant, shifted. When those people and their elegant parasols came into view, dotted along the sand...that was when the transformation began.

"Those parasol people are definitely suspicious," her maid said while setting the table. "Where are they be flooding in here from? What kind of men carry umbrellas with those colors?"

"What's wrong with that, Ari? They just have good taste." Painting a mint-colored umbrella into the scenery on the canvas, she continued, "Besides, there aren't only men. There are women too, and a few children."

"Their strange complexions, that can't be normal." Ari continued making her point. "At first I thought it was the reflection from their parasols, but that's not it...what could those people possibly be eating?"

"Don't say that. It's rude."

"No it's not. What if it's some kind of cult? Wouldn't that be scary?"

"Hey, Naomi, how are you?" Suddenly, the man holding the mint parasol appeared at the window. "What did you paint today?"

The maid quickly drew back from the window.

Naomi, giggling, answered, "Mint, we were just talking about the parasols!"

"Really?"

"I suddenly felt the urge to paint all of them. Look, it's Orange and Lemon."

"Wow, they're beautiful!"

Mint (they didn't ask his real name), his face white as if it had been smeared with a vineyard's chalky earth, broke into a smile. He twirled the mint-colored parasol with his fingertips. Not so much a parasol, it was really more of an umbrella, resembling a bat's wings, one a British person would carry tightly closed, never opening, and getting wet as they walked. However, these people were always under their open umbrellas. Last week, out of nowhere, they appeared and rented a few cottages. All of these parasol lovers were the same.

"So...rumors about us?"

"My maid was just telling me," said Naomi smiling. "She said maybe you're all the living dead?" She saw Ari, facing away from them, shrug her shoulders high and drop them.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a moment, but then burst out laughing. "That could be an April Fool's joke."

"Could it really?" The older woman laughed impishly. "It could!"

Mint, also giggling, said, "Well, it's time to return to our graves now, so bring some flowers when you visit."

"You're terrible!"

As the green umbrella left, Ari stormed back in.

"*You're* terrible. You've always been that way."

"It's probably because he reminds me of someone I knew who died," Naomi said. "That's why you hate it when I talk to that guy. Isn't it Ari."

"Why bring that up again Naomi?" Ari said. "It was so long ago! Anyway, he didn't want to marry you."

"That was because of your meddling."

"What's going on Naomi? Why bring that up again now? It's been years and years."

“There was still a chance we could have made up. But, you hid that letter. That letter I took out of your jewelry box...there were bottles of perfume, and even some pressed flowers mixed in, and when I took it out...ah! He...”

“That was so long ago!”

“True,” said Naomi in a small voice. “He’s was reborn a long time ago. But even so, he’s not that man with the umbrella.”

Not like a maid this time, but with a nurse-like professional tone, Ari said, “Anyway, it’s time for your medicine.”

With Mint in the lead, Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Crimson, Peach, and the rest of the parasol colors, emerged from the cottages one-by-one. When they reached the ocean-like green of the lawn, one umbrella stood on the earth. It was a violet parasol.

Each one silently bowed their head, and at that moment an old woman slowly approached them. As if on cue, Mint turned around. Then he nodded.

“Do you mind me asking what you’re doing?” inquired Naomi.

“This is the reason we came here,” answered Mint. “By nature, we’re nomadic. We can’t stay in one place. But...Violet is tired of this life. There, in the earth, in the place where she was born and raised...”

“I see...” Naomi lifted her head. “So, you are...”

“Yes.” Mint nodded to the other parasols. “We have to leave again.”

“If that’s the case,” Naomi said. “Would you please take me with you?”

Mint opened his eyes wide. It wasn’t so much that he was surprised but that he was staring closely at her face. “You...?”

“Me” Naomi said. “You’ve already...known for a while, haven’t you?”

Mint widened his eyes and nodded. “If you’re ready,” Mint said to Naomi, “Then, step under my umbrella.”

It was like a rainy day at the beginning of spring. She was like a butterfly caught in a spider web. Under the mint-colored umbrella, Naomi’s body began to shake. When she emerged, Naomi was holding an umbrella.

“From now on, you’ll be called Rose.”

Naomi opened the rose-colored umbrella.

With their added color, the line of parasols turned west, up the orchard path.

“Naomi...where did you go?” Ari’s voice echoed in the house. “How much longer are you going to stay angry?” Becoming a little frightened as night began to fall and sound of the wind grew stronger, Ari looked out at where the ocean met the sky and saw that the overwhelming beauty of the sunset was interrupted by a fluttering shadow. It was as if a violet umbrella, like a large bat flapping its wings, was gracefully circling the sky.

## Parasol

It was only very recently that the old lady's paintings began to change. The pastels of the mid-sea horizon, the thick evergreen forests, the sweet smelling orchards and rose gardens, the bright blue of the moonlight - the colours which flooded the health resort with such radiance each diligently sketched, as if scooped up from life. Ever since the parasols and their elegant masters began to appear along the shoreline...

"Those people with their parasols, they're so odd." Naomi's companion remarked as she cleared away the crockery. "Where did they roll in from? They seem gentlemanly enough, but such colourful umbrellas - it doesn't seem right."

"Come on now, Mari. I do love painting" Naomi replied, adding a mint green umbrella to the canvas. "And anyway, they're not all men - there are women too and even a few children."

"They're all so pale, it's just not natural" Mari moved on to her next point of attack. "The colour of the parasol is supposed to reflect the sun...what do you suppose they eat?"

"You're being rude, now."

"No I'm not. What if they're part of some sort of cult? It's frightening."

"Ah, Naomi! Good day to you!"

The owner of the mint green parasol was peeking through the window. "What have we been painting today?"

Mari quickly took herself away.

"We were just talking about you and your parasols, Mr. Mint" Naomi replied, chuckling.

"Really?"

"I just suddenly felt as if I wanted to paint you all. Look - Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Violet."

"Goodness. This something to see!"

Mr. Mint...She'd never thought to ask his "real" name. His face was pale, white like the lime they used to sprinkle on the ground at the vineyard, even as a smile broke out across it. He whirled the mint green parasol around with his wrist. Rather than a parasol it was more like one of those bat-like Western umbrellas. The kind Englishmen carry but never use, preferring to walk along in the rain. These people, however, were never not under an open parasol. They were all like that - the parasol enthusiasts, appearing all of a sudden the previous week and renting up god knows how many cottages.

"So, we've become a hot topic, have we?"

"According to my companion" Naomi jokingly replied. "She thinks you're the living dead."

Mari's shoulders rose and then fell sharply as she sat with her back to the room.

"The living dead?" Mr. Mint was silent for a moment before laughing loudly. "How funny, it's like an April fool."

"Isn't it just!" Naomi laughed impishly.

"It's hilarious" Mr. Mint carried on chuckling. "Well, it's high time we were all getting back to our coffins. Be sure to send a bouquet or something if you need us!"

"Those people!" Mari erupted with rage after the green umbrella retreated. "There've always been people like that!"

"He reminds me of someone we knew." Naomi said. "Isn't it more that you didn't like me talking to him?"

"What are you bringing that up again for, now?" Mari replied. "That was ages ago, it's not like he wants to marry you!"

"Don't meddle, Mari."

"Where's all this coming from, are you trying to pick a fight with me? How many years ago must that have been?"

"Now's your chance to make it up to me. It was you who hid the letter, putting it away with your keepsakes mixed in with the perfume bottles and the pressed flowers. By the time you gave it to me he was already..."

"That was decades ago..."

"Yes. It was." Naomi continued in a small voice "He must have been born again long ago."

"Even so, that man with the umbrella - it isn't him" Mari replied. "Anyway, it's time for your medicine." She added, reverting to the cheerfully professional tones of a nurse.

With mint green at the head, the other umbrellas - ultramarine, navy blue, bitter orange, lemon, gold, silver, crimson, and pink, began to form a small crowd emerging from the cottages. When they came to the green lawn that overlooked the ocean, a single umbrella lay on the grass. It was a violet umbrella. As they lowered their heads deeply, Naomi slowly walked up to them. Sensing her presence, Mr. Mint turned around.

"What's going on?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came." Mr. Mint explained. "We're a travelling people. We don't stay anywhere for long. Mr. Violet has grown tired of our way of life. As he was born and raised here..."

"Oh I see..." Naomi lowered her head. "But the rest of you..."

"Yes" Mr. Mint nodded with his umbrella. "We'll have to be moving on soon."

"If you have to go..." Naomi said, "do you think I could come with you?"

Mr. Mint opened his eyes wide. Less in surprise than to examine her face more closely.

"You're..."

"I've not long left." Naomi said. "I'm sure you must have known."

Mr. Mint nodded, still gazing at her. "...Yes."

"Can I come?"

Mr. Mint looked back towards the others who nodded slowly in unison.

"It seems they agree. Come under my umbrella."

From a distance it looked like a kiss on a rainy day, but also like a butterfly caught in a spider's web. Under Mr. Mint's umbrella, Naomi trembled but as they left she had an umbrella of her own in her hand.

"From now on, you shall be Miss Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-coloured umbrella and the crowd of parasols, now more colourful, made its way west along the orchard path.

"Naomi, where are you?" Mari's voice echoed through the house. "For heaven's sake, are you going to sulk forever?"

Frightened by the sound of the evening wind as it gathered in strength, Mari looked out towards the intersection of sky and sea where shadows danced, blocking out the all too beautiful colours of the sunset. Like a great bat flapping its wings, a purple parasol turned, elegantly, in the sky.

## Parasol

Distant, pastel-colored seascapes, deep green woods, luscious orchards and rose gardens, amber glowing clouds of sunset and sunrise, luminous pale blue moons... the old lady had painted these scenes as if gently scooping up each color on to her canvas, filling the resort landscape with an abundance of light, but recently her subject matter had begun to change.

It started when the parasols, and their elegant owners, appeared on the sand dunes.

"I still think those people with the parasols are odd," said her companion as she put away the old lady's dishes. "I mean, where did they come from? Men, with colorful parasols."

"Why should it bother us, Mari? Anyway, I think it's beautiful."

The old lady added some more mint green to the parasol on the canvas. "And you know, it's not only men. There are women too. And even a few children, though not many."

"And their complexion, it's not natural," Mari continued. "At first I thought it was just the parasols reflecting onto their faces, but it isn't... What must they be eating?"

"Mari, you shouldn't say things like that that."

"Why not? What if they are some kind of cult? That would be frightening, wouldn't it?"

"Hello, Naomi, and good day to you!"

The owner of the mint green umbrella appeared at the window. "And what are you painting today?"

Her companion hastily withdrew.

Naomi chuckled lightly, "We were just talking about your parasols, Mint."

"Oh?"

"I had a sudden desire to paint you all. See, here is Orange, and Blue, and Lemon, and Violet."

"Well now, isn't that wonderful!" said Mint – he hadn't been asked his real name – as a broad smile spread across his pale face, a face as pale as the chalky-white of limestone. In his hand he twirled his mint green parasol, which looked more like an umbrella than a parasol. Like the bat-black umbrellas favored by English gentlemen, wrapped tightly closed even in the rain.

But these people, these parasol lovers who arrived suddenly last week and rented out the cottages, they always kept their umbrellas open.

"So, what was it you were saying about us?"

"My companion thinks," Naomi said, smiling brightly, "that you are the living dead."

Mari with her back to them tensed her shoulders cringing.

"The living dead?" Mint paused and then broke into loud laughter. "That's as funny and fresh as an April shower!"

"It is, isn't it" she said with a mischievous laugh.

"Yes, it is," said Mint laughing too. "Well, I think it is time to return to our graves. Don't forget to bring flowers when you visit us."

"You really are impossible sometimes," said Mari, jumping out and seething with anger as the green umbrella disappeared into the distance. "You've always been like this, from way back."



"It's because he looks like him, who died," said Naomi. "That's why you don't like the two of us speaking. Isn't it, Mari?"

"Why do you have to bring that up, Naomi?" Mari continued, "That's all in the past. And he never had any intention of marrying you anyway."

"That's meddling, you know."

"What is wrong with you, Naomi? Why now? That all happened so long ago."

"We had a chance to make up. But you hid the letters. In your treasure box, amongst your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers and whatever. When the letter was discovered, he had..."

"That was years ago."

"Yes, it was," said Naomi. And then quietly, "He'll have become a new person by now."

"Even if that were so, he is not that man with that umbrella." And switching from her role as companion to her role as nurse, Mari said, "It is time for your medicine."

The mint green parasol led the way, as out of the cottages poured parasols of ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach, and more. When they came to the grassy hill by the sea, they placed one parasol on the ground. It was a violet colored parasol.

As they bowed their heads in silence, the old lady walked slowly towards them. Noticing her there, Mint turned around and greeted her with a bow.

"What is happening?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came here," answered Mint. "We travel from one place to the next, never staying anywhere long. But, Violet was tired of that life and so we came here, where Violet was born and raised."

"I see." Naomi looked down. "So now you'll..."

"Yes," Mint and his parasol nodded. "We will be moving on."

"If that is so," Naomi said, "then, would you please take me with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. Not from surprise, but to get a good look at her face.

"Are you..."

"Yes." Naomi said. "I don't have much longer. But you knew that already."

Mint, wide-eyed, nodded. "...Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint looked towards the others. The parasols nodded slowly.

"It is settled then." Mint spoke to Naomi, "Come under my parasol."

Like a kiss on a rainy day.

Like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under Mint's umbrella, Naomi trembled.

When she stepped out, she held a parasol of her own.

"From today, you will be Rose"

Naomi opened up her rose colored parasol.

The new color added to the spectrum as the parasols took the small path through the orchard and headed west.

"Naomi. Where on earth are you?" Mari's voice echoed through the large house. "You can't stay sulking forever, you know!"

The sound of the wind, which had been growing stronger since evening, startled Mari and she looked up towards the distant horizon to see a shadow cut across the radiantly beautiful sunset. Like a bat with unfurled wings, a violet colored parasol was turning gracefully through the air.

*Parasol* by Inoue Masahiko

Not merely a distant view of the pastel-colored vast ocean, but a deep evergreen forest, an aromatic orchard and rose garden, the pale moon shining brightly in the lustrous clouds between nightfall and daybreak... the colors that fill this resort with an abundance of shine were all, as if gently scooped up, applied one by one as the old lady drew with her brush, a motif which only just began to change slightly. The elegant people's parasols beginning to appear all over the beach... was the reason why.

"Those parasols sure are mysterious," the girl's housemate said as she put away her tableware.

"I wonder which city they poured in from. They're fine gentlemen, but those colorful umbrellas..."

"What's wrong with that, Marie? It's a wonderful interest to have," she replied as she applied a final layer onto the mint green parasol in the canvas' landscape. "Besides, they aren't only men. There are women, and although not many, children too."

"Such paleness isn't normal, you know." Marie made another remark. "At first I wondered if it was just the reflection of the colored parasols, but that's not it ... What do those people eat?"

"You're being quite rude."

"Not at all. Wouldn't it be scary if they were part of some cult?"

"Why hello, Naomi." The owner of the mint green parasol suddenly peeped through the window. "What painting have you made today?"

The housemate quickly disappeared. Naomi giggled as she replied, "Today, we talked a bit about the parasols, Mint"

"Oh?"

"Because I happened to feel like drawing everyone. Look, Orange and Ultramarine, Lime and Violet."

"Wow, this is fantastic!" Mint, whose real name I haven't asked, bore a smile across his pale face, white as the paint used for calcareous soil of the vineyard. With his hands, he twirled his mint green parasol. It was more of an umbrella than a parasol. The kind British people would roll up tightly and never open, like a drenched, walking bat. However, these people always walked with their umbrellas open. All of the parasol enthusiasts, who were occupying several cottages that suddenly appeared last week, did.

"So, what's the gossip about us?"

"My housemate was talking about it," Naomi said smilingly. "About whether you are the living dead."

Marie, who was facing away, visibly raised her shoulders before lowering them again.

"The living dead?" Mint was silent for a while, but soon burst into laughter. "That really is an April shower kind-of-joke."

"You think so?" The lady laughed mischievously.

"It is," Mint giggled. "Well, we will be returning to the graves now, so, if it pleases you, there are bouquets and the like."

"That person."

As the green umbrella left, Marie angrily came rushing.

"That person has always been like this."

"It's because he resembles a deceased loved one, isn't it?" Naomi said. "I know that's why you don't like it when him and I talk, Marie."

"Why do you keep bringing that up, Naomi?" Marie said. "That was forever ago. He didn't even have the desire to marry you, anyway."

"You're so meddlesome."

"Why, Naomi? Why are we fighting about this? For goodness' sake, this was decades ago."

"There have been plenty opportunities to reconcile. However, you decide to hide that letter from me. A letter from inside your jewelry box – complete with a bottle of perfume, pressed flowers and everything, but by the time it finally surfaced, he already-

"I said it was decades ago."

"It was," Naomi said quietly. "He became a new man a long time ago."

"But even so, you must realize he is not the umbrella man," Marie said, not with the voice of a housemate, but as if awakened into the pride and professionalism of a nurse. "Now, time for your medicine."

With Mint in the lead, a group of Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lime, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, Pink and other colors of parasols came out of the cottages. When they arrived at the green lawn looking out over the sea, one umbrella was placed in the ground. It was the violet parasol. When everyone had bowed deeply, the old lady slowly walked over. When Mint noticed, he turned around. Then, bowed down.

"What is everyone doing?" Naomi asked.

"This is what we came here for," Mint replied. "Originally, we spent our lives travelling. We never stayed in one place. However, Violet has become very tired from living like that. They were born and raised here, on this land."

"I see," Naomi said as she looked down. "So, you..."

"We will," Mint nodded, "Be going back to travelling again."

"Then," Naomi said, "could you take me with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. Rather than looking surprised, he appeared as if closely examining the woman.

"You...?"

"I," Naomi started, "do not have much longer to live ... You are aware, perhaps."

Mint continued to stare with his eyes wide, and nodded. "Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint turned to his friends. They all silently nodded.

"I suppose we could," Mint replied to Naomi. "Well then, inside my umbrella."

It was like a kiss on a rainy day. Like a butterfly caught by a spider. Naomi's body trembled inside Mint's umbrella. When she came out, she was holding an umbrella.

"As of today, you will be known as Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened up her rose colored umbrella.

The group of parasols, now with one more color added, followed the path in the orchard, heading west.

"Naomi ... Where have you gone?" Marie's voice echoed through the Western-style building. "For goodness' sake, how long are you planning to stay resentful for?"

Marie, slightly intimidated by the strong and loud gusts of evening wind, looked up to the very end of the sky touching the offing, intercepting the magnificent brilliance of the sunset, causing the lighting to dazzle and dance. Like a large bat taking flight, the violet parasol elegantly whirled up into the air.

## Parasol

The distant view of the pastel-colored sea, as well as the deep forest of evergreen trees, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, and the moon shining crisply blue through the vibrant light of dusk's clouds...It was just recently that the motifs of the elderly woman's paintbrush, illustrating the colors and hues that fill the resort with immeasurable radiance as though gently scooping up each one by one, began to change.

It was when the parasols of that exquisite group came into sight here and there on the sand hill.

"That bunch with the parasols is awfully suspicious," the housemate said as she cleaned up the woman's dishes.

"What town did they wander in from? They're handsome men, but what's with those colorful parasols?"

"What's the big deal, Mary? They have beautiful taste," she replied, applying the final coat of paint to the mint-colored parasol on the canvas landscape. "And they're not just men. There are women, and children, too, albeit very few."

"Those pale complexions aren't normal," Mary shifted to a different point. "I thought it was the colors reflecting from the parasols, but that's not it. Just what are they eating?"

"Now you're being rude."

"But what if they're some cult? Wouldn't that be creepy?"

"Ah, Naomi. Hello." From the window, the owner of a mint-colored parasol nimbly peered in.

"What kind of picture did you draw today?"

The housemate hastily withdrew from sight.

"We were just talking about your parasols, Mint," Naomi said, giggling.

"Oh?"

"See, I've been wanting to draw you all. Look, here's Orange and Blue, and Lemon and Violet."

"This is superb."

Mint (they hadn't asked his real name) widely broadened the mouth on his ashen face—the pallidness of which made it seem as though it had been coated with charcoal soil from a vineyard— and broke into a smile.

He was twirling the mint-colored parasol in his hand. It was more like a bat-like umbrella, which, if British, you would finely wrap and absolutely never open—a dripping, walking bat. But these people are always under their umbrellas. Last week, they suddenly appeared and rented out a number of cottages, and, that's right, all of these parasol lovers are—

"So, what are these rumors about us?"

"My roommate says," Naomi said, smiling, "that maybe you're all living dead."

Mary, who had turned her back, visibly tensed up her shoulders and lowered them back down.

"Living dead?"

Mint was quiet for a short time before bursting into laughter.

"That's like that 'April showers' joke."

"Right?" she said, laughing playfully.

"Indeed."

Mint also chuckled. "Well, with that, I'm back off to the grave. If you have an engagement, please bring flowers."

"That person," said Mary, jumping out excitedly after the mint-colored parasol left. "That person...from back then...yes, that's it."

"It's because he looks like that dead person we know, right?" Naomi said. "That's why you get in a huff when I chat with him. Isn't that right, Mary?"

"Why do you bring that up again, Naomi?" Mary said. "That was a long time ago. And he never intended to marry you in the first place, anyway."

"That's none of your business."

"What happened, Naomi? Why get caught up in that now? Why in the world, with something that happened decades ago?"

"We could have made things right. But you hid the letter away. By the time that letter, buried in perfume bottles and pressed flowers, came out of your jewel box, he was already..."

"That was decades ago."

"You're right," Naomi said quietly. "He was already reborn long ago."

"Even if so, not into that parasol man."

"Well," Mary said, not in the voice of a housemate, but as a caretaker who had snapped back into a professional mind set. "It's time to take your medicine."

With Mint leading in front, Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet Red, Pink, and other colors of the parasol group streamed out of the cottages.

When they arrived at the green lawn from where the sea came into view, they stuck one parasol into the ground. It was the violet parasol.

As each of them deeply lowered their heads, an elderly woman slowly walked up to them. Sensing her presence, Mint turned around and gave a slight bow.

"What are you doing?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came here," Mint answered. "Customarily, we live traveling from one place to the next. We don't stay for long. Violet, however, grew tired of this way of life. And so we've come here, to the soil from which Violet was born and raised."

"Oh, I see..." Naomi lowered her head. "So that means you will—"

"Yes." Mint and his parasol nodded. "We must depart once again."

"In that case," Naomi said, "can you please take me with you?"

Mint widely opened his eyes, not out of surprise, but as if in order to closely gaze at her face.

"You are...?"

"I," Naomi said, "won't be around for much longer. But you knew this, didn't you?"

Mint widened his eyes and nodded. "...yes."

"Then please."

Mint turned to his compatriots. The group of parasols nodded gently. "Very well," Mint said to Naomi. "Join me under my parasol."

It looked like a kiss in the rain, like a butterfly caught by a spider. Naomi's body quivered under Mint's parasol.

When she stepped out, Naomi had a parasol in hand.

"From today you are Rose."

Naomi opened her rose parasol.

The group of parasols, joined by a new color, proceeded west on the orchard path.

"Naomi, where did you go?"

Mary's voice echoed throughout the house. "Just how long do you plan to pout about?"

When Mary, frightened by the sound of the wind which had intensified since the evening, looked up and out to the sky intertwined with the sea, a shadow fluttered, blocking the vibrant light of the stunningly beautiful sunset. Like a large bat fluttering its wings, a violet parasol gracefully circled the sky.

## Parasol

It wasn't long ago that the subject matter painted by the old woman's brush began to change slightly; the careful strokes that seemed to scoop up the colors of this immeasurably brilliant resort scenery one by one, from its pastel seascape, to the forest thick with evergreen trees, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, and the pale moon that glows clearly amongst the illumination of the clouds at dawn and dusk. The change started...when the parasols of those elegant people began to dot the sand dunes.

"I'm telling you, that parasol lot is suspicious," the woman's roommate announced as she was cleaning up the woman's tableware. "I don't know where they came from, but a bunch of dashing men carrying around such colorful umbrellas is..."

"What's wrong with that, Mari? I think it's lovely," the woman responded as she put the final touches on a mint colored parasol that lie amidst the scenery found on her canvas. "And they aren't all men. There are some women in their group as well, and even a few children."

"Skin that color isn't natural," Mari declared, shifting the focus of her critique. "At first I thought it was just the light from the parasols reflecting off their faces, but that's not it. I wonder what they eat to end up looking like that?"

"That was uncalled for."

"What if they're some kind of cult? That would be disturbing."

"Hello there Naomi," The owner of the mint colored parasol suddenly chimed in as he peered in from the window. "What have you painted today?"

Naomi tried to conceal her laughter as her roommate retreated in haste. "We were just discussing your parasols, Mint."

"Is that so?"

"I can't help but want to paint everyone. See, there's Orange, and Blue, and here's Lemon, and Violet."

"This is quite the work of art."

Mint's (whose real name she never asked) white face—which had the appearance of being covered in the kind of chalky soil found in some vineyards—broke into a smile as he spun the parasol with his fingertips. His parasol was more like a regular umbrella in design, with a profile that resembled the wing of a bat. It was the kind of umbrella an Englishman would wrap tightly, and never open as he walked in the rain.

These people, however, were constantly under the shade of their umbrellas. A group of parasol lovers who appeared suddenly last week and rented out a number of cottages.

"So, what's this rumor concerning us?"

"My roommate has a suspicion," Naomi said with a grin, "that you might be the living dead."

Although Mari's back was turned, her shoulders could be seen rising emphatically before falling.

"The living dead?" Mint remained quiet for a moment, but eventually burst into laughter. "That's almost like an April Shower' joke."

"It is, isn't it?" the woman said with an impish grin on her face.

"Truly." Mint replied with a snicker. "Well then, we'll be off to our graves now. Don't forget flowers if you plan on visiting."

"I can't believe you!" A furious Mari reappeared after the green umbrella was out of sight. "You've always been like that."

"It's because he resembles a dead person we used to know, isn't it?" Naomi said. "Is that why you get upset when I talk with him?"

"Why are you bringing that up again Naomi? That was a long time ago; and it's not like he actually intended on marrying you anyhow."

"That's none of your business."

"Why are you trying to make an issue out of it at this point, Naomi? How many decades has it been?"

"I had a chance to make up with him, but you hid the letter. By the time it turned up in your jewel box, mixed in with the bottles of perfume and pressed flowers, he was..."

"It was ages ago."

"You're right" Naomi said softly. "He must have already been reborn by now."

"Even if he was, it wasn't as that umbrella man." The tone of Mari's voice then shifted from roommate to that of a nurse who had just discovered her professional calling. "Now then, it's time for your medicine."

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The flock of parasols came streaming out of the cottages, with Mint at the fore, followed by Ultramarine, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Scarlet, Pink, and the others. They arrived at a stretch of green lawn with a view of the ocean, where a single, violet parasol was planted in the ground.

The old women slowly approached the scene where each member of the group was bowing deeply.

Mint noticed her presence, greeting her with a nod.

"What's happening here?" Naomi asked.

"This is the reason we came," Mint answered. "We normally live a traveling lifestyle, not staying in any one spot. But Violet...grew weary of that life. Which is why we returned here, to the place where Violet was born and raised."

"I see..." Naomi lowered her head. "Does that mean you'll soon be..."

"Yes" Mint nodded, his parasol mirroring the movement, "We must return to our travels."

"In that case," Naomi said, "would you consider taking me along with you?"

Mint's eyes opened wide, not so much out of surprise, but as if to observe her more closely. "What are you..."

"I don't," Naomi said, "have much time left. Although you were probably already aware of that."

Mint opened his eyes wide, nodding, "...Yes."

"Then please, take me."

Mint turned towards the rest of the group. The parasol bearers nodded slowly. "Very well..." Mint turned to Naomi, "now then, come under my parasol"

To some it might have appeared like a kiss on a rainy day; to others a butterfly being captured by a spider. Naomi's body trembled beneath Mint's umbrella. When at last she stepped out from underneath it, Naomi was holding an umbrella of her own.

"You'll be known as Rose from now on."

Naomi opened the rose umbrella, and with a new color among their ranks, the flock of parasols headed west along the orchard path.

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"Naomi...where did you run off to?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the house. "How long do you plan on sulking for?" The sound of the wind, which had grown stronger in the evening, frightened Mari momentarily. As she looked up however, her attention was captured by the scene playing out above the horizon connecting sky and sea. Traveling across the overwhelming beauty of the radiant sunset was a shadow



fluttering about like a large bat flapping its wings. It was a single, violet parasol spinning gracefully in the sky.

Parasol

Inoue Masahiko

The pastel colors of the distant shore, the evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the clear blue light of the moon reflected brilliantly in the clouds at sunset or daybreak ... just recently, it was as if the old woman's paintbrush were one by one, with great care, scooping up the colors suffused with the boundless light of the sanitarium grounds.

Perhaps it was because of the parasols of the elegant people that could be seen strolling here and there about the sand dunes.

"There's something funny about those parasol people," her living companion said while clearing away the dishes. "Where did they drift in from? They seem like gentlemen, but all those different colored umbrellas..."

"What's the harm, Mari? They look beautiful," she said, putting a last daub of paint on a peppermint green parasol in the canvas landscape. "And they aren't all men. There are ladies with them and even a few children."

"There's something I don't like about the color in their faces." Mari pointed at a different spot on the picture. "I thought it was the color of the parasols reflected on their skin, but it's something else, I'm sure of it. What on earth do you suppose they eat?"

"What a horrible thing to say."

"Not at all. Aren't you scared? They might be some kind of cult."

"Miss Naomi, good afternoon." The owner of the mint green parasol suddenly appeared at the window. "What are you painting today?"

Her companion hastily withdrew.

Naomi said, giggling, "We were just talking about your parasols, Mr. Mint."

"Oh yes?"

"I was suddenly taken with the thought of painting all of you. Look, here's your friend with the orange parasol, and the blue, the lemon yellow one, and here's the violet."

"I see. That's splendid."

Mint--she had never asked his name--parted his lips in a smile, his face as white as the ground of a vineyard treated with lime. The mint green parasol twirled in his hand. It was really more of an umbrella than a parasol. An umbrella an Englishman might keep tightly furled while getting damp on a walk.

But, these people were always under their umbrellas. They had suddenly appeared here last week, renting out a number of cottages. These parasol lovers were never without them.

"So--what tales have you been spinning about us?"

"My companion was just telling me," Naomi said, smiling. "She thinks you're the dead come back to life."

Mari, facing away, hunched up her shoulders in protest before leaving the room.

"The living dead, am I?" Mint was silent for a moment, then burst out laughing. "That's a joke like an April shower."

"Do you think so?" She smiled mischievously. "I suppose it is."

Mint smiled again. "In that case, when we return to our graves, I hope you will come to lay flowers on them."

"You and that man." Mari burst in angrily after the green umbrella had gone. "You were always this way with people."

"It's only because he reminds me so much of someone we lost," Naomi said. "It's you who doesn't like me talking to him, Mari."

"Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi? That was a long time ago. You know he never intended to marry you."

"That was because of your meddling."

"Naomi, what's the matter with you? Why are you picking a quarrel about this now? That was all over ages ago."

"I had a chance to patch it over with him. But you kept his letter from me. It was in your jewelry box, all mixed up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers, and by the time I found it, he had already--"

"That was years and years ago."

"You're right," Naomi said in a small voice. "He'll have been reborn somewhere long ago."

"That's as may be, but he's not your umbrella man," Mari said, in a tone that was less like a companion and more like someone who had just remembered her professional duties as a nurse. "Now, it's time for your medicine."

With the mint green in the lead, the crowd of parasols, the blue, the indigo, the orange, the lemon yellow, the gold, the silver, the scarlet, the peach, all streamed forth from the cottages.

When they reached the lawn in sight of the sea, a single parasol--the violet--was planted in the ground. As they stood with their heads bowed deeply, the old woman walked slowly towards them.

When he noticed her presence, Mint turned to greet her.

"What are you doing?" Naomi asked.

"This is what we came here for," Mint replied. "We have always been travelers. We never stay in one place for long. However--Violet has tired of this life. Here is where he was born and raised, and so--"

"I see ..." Naomi looked down. "And you?"

"Yes." Mint nodded his umbrella along with his head. "I must travel on."

"If that's the case," Naomi said, "I wonder if you might take me with you."

Mint's eyes opened wide. Out of surprise, or perhaps to gaze more deeply at her face.

"Are you ... ?"

"I--" Naomi said, "I won't last much longer. Did you know that?"

Mint nodded, his eyes still wide. "Yes."

"Then, will you?"

Mint looked over at the others. The umbrellas slowly nodded in reply.

"If that is what you wish," Mint said to Naomi, "then come under my umbrella."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It looked like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.

Under the mint green umbrella, Naomi's body trembled violently. When she emerged, she held a parasol in her hands.

"With us, you will be Miss Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored parasol.

A new color in their midst, the parasols moved west along the path through the orchard.

"Naomi! -- where has she got to?" Mari's voice echoed through the halls. "How long is she going to keep sulking like this?"

The sound of the evening wind grew stronger, and Mari, beginning to grow a little frightened, looked out to the edge of the sky against the distant sea. A shadow was whirling above, cutting off the view of the brilliant colors of the sunset. A violet parasol, like the fluttering wings of an enormous bat, was elegantly sweeping in to cover the sky.

## Parasol Masahiko Inoue

Pastel-coloured seaside scenery and deep forests of evergreen trees; fragrant fruit orchards and rose gardens; radiant clouds at dawn and dusk, and the crisp, ashen glow of the moon – the health retreat was filled with an infinite brilliance of hues, each one captured by the old lady's paintbrush as though carefully scooped up onto the canvas. Only recently had the subject of her paintings begun to change slightly.

That is, since the parasols of those elegant individuals began to appear here and there amid the sand dunes.

"Those parasol folk sure do seem strange," said the old lady's roommate while tidying her dishes. "Where did they drift in from? Proper men wouldn't be seen with such colourful umbrellas..."

"Oh, let them be Mari. They have beautiful taste," responded the old lady as she painted a mint-coloured umbrella into the scenery on her canvas. "Anyway, they're not all men – there are women among them. Even a few children."

"Those pale faces, it's just not normal," said Mari, trying a different angle. "I thought it might be a reflection of the parasol colours, but that's not it. What do those people eat, I wonder?"

"You're being rude."

"No I'm not. What if they're in some sort of cult? Doesn't that scare you?"

"Ah, good afternoon Naomi."

The owner of the mint-coloured parasol peeped his head through the window.

"What have you painted today?"

Naomi's roommate hurriedly withdrew.

Chuckling, Naomi answered. "We were just talking about parasols, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"I felt the urge to paint you and your friends. See, there's Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon and Ms. Violet."

"Oh, this is magnificent."

Mint – she did not inquire about his real name – smiled broadly, his face a pale whiteness that could have been carved out of vineyard limestone. His fingertips twirled the mint-coloured parasol. It was more umbrella than parasol, with edges curved like bat wings. The kind of umbrella that an Englishman would rather keep stylishly furled, even when caught in the rain.

These people, however, always held their umbrellas open overhead. Every one of these parasol enthusiasts, who had appeared suddenly last week and booked out several cottages, did the same.

"So... what are the rumours going around about us?"

"My roommate," said Naomi with a smile, "thinks you may be the living dead."

Her back turned, Mari's shoulders rose visibly before dropping again.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent for a moment, then erupted in laughter.

"That joke was as unexpected as an April shower."

"Is that so?" the lady laughed mischievously.

"It sure was." Mint was also chuckling. "Well then, we'll be heading back to our graves – if you come calling, don't forget to bring some flowers."

--

"You!" As the green umbrella departed, Mari flew into a rage. "You've always been like this."

"It's because he looks like a certain someone who died, right Mari?" asked Naomi. "That's why you don't like it when I talk to him."

"Why do you have to bring that up again, Naomi?" said Mari. "That's way in the past. And anyway, he had no intention of marrying you."

"That's what they call meddling."

"What do you want Naomi? Why are you trying to pick this fight now? It was decades ago."

"We even had a chance to make up, but you hid the letter. By the time that letter came out of your jewellery box, jumbled among the perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he was already..."

"It was decades ago."

"Yes, it was," said Naomi softly. "And he has long since moved onto the next life."

"Even so, he's not that umbrella man."

Mari's voice was no longer that of a roommate, but a nurse suddenly aware of her professional duty.

"Come, it's medicine time."

With Mint in the lead, the flock of parasols emerged en masse from the cottages – various shades of blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet and pink.

Upon reaching the lush lawn overlooking the ocean, they planted a single umbrella in the ground. The parasol was violet in colour.

As they stood, each head deeply bowed, the old lady walked slowly forward.

Sensing her presence, Mint turned. He acknowledged her with a nod.

"Is anything the matter?" Naomi enquired.

"This is what we have come here for," Mint replied. "We have always led nomadic lives, never remaining in a single place. However, Ms. Violet has grown weary of this way of life. And so, she wanted to return to this place, where she was born and raised."

"I see." Naomi lowered her gaze. "So that means the rest of you..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, the parasol an extension of his body. "We must set out once more."

"If that's the case," said Naomi, "I don't suppose you could take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, seemingly less out of surprise than to fix his gaze on her face. "You...?"

"Me," said Naomi. "I don't have long left - but you must have known that."

Mint nodded, his eyes still wide. "Yes."

"Well then, please allow me."

Mint turned to face the rest of the group.

The umbrellas nodded slowly.

"Alright then," Mint said to Naomi. "Join me under my umbrella."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

Or a spider trapping a butterfly.

Under the mint-coloured umbrella, Naomi's body trembled.

When she stepped back out, she held an umbrella in one hand.

"From today, you will be known as Rose."

Naomi opened the rose-coloured umbrella.

Embellished by an extra hue, the flock of parasols headed west along the orchard lane.

"Naomi, where have you gone!" Mari's voice rang out through the building. "How much longer are you going to sulk?"

The wind had picked up since evening, and the sound of it made Mari feel uneasy. Looking out to where the edge of the sky slipped into the sea, she saw a whirling shadow obstructing the splendid colours of the setting sun. Like a giant bat flapping its wings, a single violet parasol spiralled gracefully through the air.

Parasol by Inoue Masahiko

Besides the distant view on the pastel-colored open sea, there were also deep evergreen forests, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the hues of the clouds at sunset and dawn, and the pale moon was shining brightly... The whole sanatorium was brimming with the boundless brilliance of its colors. One by one, carefully, almost as if she were gently scooping them up, the old woman painted them. Only recently had her paintbrush motifs begun to change a little. It was when the parasols of those graceful people had begun appearing all over the beach.

"There is definitely something fishy about those parasol people." As she tidied up her tableware, her housemate continued. "I wonder which town they have flowed in from. Fine, grown up men carrying such colorful parasols..."

"Well, why not? Mari. They have such a lovely taste," she answered, while coating the mint green parasol on her canvas landscape with paint. "Besides, not all of them are men. There are women and – although only a few – children, too."

"Their paleness is unnatural, you know." Mari pointed out another matter. "I first thought it was due to the reflection of their colored parasols, but that's not it... What could they be eating?"

"That's rude."

"No, it's not. Wouldn't it be frightening if they belonged to some kind of cult?"

"Hello, Naomi, how are you?"

The owner of the mint green parasol suddenly peaked out of the window. "What kind of picture have you drawn today?" Her housemate hastily drew herself back. Chuckling, Naomi replied, "We were talking about your parasols just now, Mint."

"Oh?"

"I suddenly felt the urge to draw you all. See, here are Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet."

"Ah. It is magnificent."

Mint's – she hadn't asked him for his real name – white face, which seemed to be covered in the pallor of the chalky earth of a vineyard, broke out into a smile. With his fingertips, he was twirling his mint green parasol. Rather than a parasol, it was more a European-style umbrella akin to a bat. An umbrella an Englishman would keep thinly folded and never open, but rather walk while becoming wet. However, these people always stood underneath their opened umbrellas. All of these parasol loving people, who had suddenly appeared the week before and rented out a few cottages, were like that.

"So, what about the rumors about us?"

"My flat mate says," Naomi told him cheerfully, "that you might be living corpses."

Mari, who was facing the other side, lifted her shoulders in one big motion and visibly lowered them again.

"Living corpses?" Mint fell silent for a short while, but eventually burst out laughing.

"Your joke is almost like a sweet April shower."

"Is that so?" The woman laughed mischievously.

"That's right," Mint also chuckled and replied, "Well then, we shall return to our graves. If you want to, you may bring flowers."

"You!" As the green parasol went away, Mari angrily jumped to her feet. "From way back, you've always been like that!"

"It's only because he looks like a deceased person we knew," said Naomi, "that's the reason you dislike speaking to him, Mari."

"Why do you have to bring that up again, Naomi?" said Mari. "That was ages ago. He had no intention of marrying you anyway."

"That's called being meddlesome, you know."

“What has come over you, Naomi? Why do you have to pick a fight now, after all this time? How many decades do you think have passed since then?”

“We still had the chance to reconcile. But you ended up hiding the letter. When that letter appeared from your jewelry box, among your perfumes and pressed flowers, he was already…”

“That was decades ago.”

“Yes,” said Naomi softly. “He has already been reborn.”

“Even if that were the case, he’s not that parasol fellow.” Her voice changing from the one of a housemate to the one of a professional nurse, Mari said, “Come on, it’s time for your medicine.”

With the mint green parasol in the lead, a flock of parasols in marine blue, indigo, orange, lemon green, gold, silver, scarlet, and pink, streamed out of the cottages. Once they had arrived at a meadow with a view on the sea, they stuck one umbrella into the ground. It was a violet umbrella. As each of them had bowed their head deeply, the old woman slowly approached them. Sensing her presence, Mint turned around. And bowed slightly.

“Is anything the matter?”, inquired Naomi.

“This is why we came,” Mint replied. “Originally, we live by traveling from place to place. We do not remain in one place. However, Violet was already tired of this lifestyle. This is the place where she was born and raised, therefore…”

“I see…” Naomi lowered her head. “Then, all of you will…”

“Yes,” Mint nodded along with his parasol. “We will have to set off once again.”

“In that case,” Naomi said, “couldn’t you please bring me along with you?”

Mint widened his eyes. Apparently, not because he was surprised, but rather to watch her face intently.

“You are…?”

“I,” answered Naomi, “don’t have long left to live anymore… You probably already knew that.”

Mint stared and nodded. “…yes.”

“Then, I beg you.”

Mint turned to his comrades. The parasols slowly nodded. “All right…” Mint told Naomi. “Well then, come inside my parasol.”

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day. It also looked like a butterfly ensnared by a spider. Under Mint’s parasol Naomi’s body trembled violently. When she appeared outside, Naomi was holding a single parasol in her hand.

“From this day forward, you are Rose.” The flock of parasols headed west on the small path in the orchard with their new colored addition.

“Naomi! Where have you gone?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the villa. “Until when will you continue to sulk?” Mari was slightly frightened by the howling wind that had grown louder in the evening. When she looked up at the horizon connecting the sea and the sky, she saw a shadow dancing, cutting through the beautiful sunset hues. Almost like an enormous bat flapping its wing, a single violet parasol was gracefully circling in the sky.



“Parasols”  
Inoue Takehiko

A backdrop of pastel-colored oceans, thick forests of evergreens, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the illumination of the clouds at dusk and dawn, the moon glowing healthy and pale ... these motifs of the resort, which the old woman painted with detail and care, as if her brush scooped up colors replete with immeasurable luster, began to change slightly quite recently.

It began after the elegant people and their parasols started popping up all over on the sand dunes.

“There surely is something strange about those parasol people,” said her housemate, as she cleaned up her plates and utensils. “Just where did they drift in from? Gentlemen don’t have umbrellas of such color...”

“And why not? Mari. I think they have fine taste,” she answered, putting the finishing touches on a mint-colored parasol in the scene on the canvas. “Besides, those people aren’t all men, you know. There are some women, too, and children, though just a few.”

“And their complexions, they’re awful. It’s not normal,” said Mari, moving on to the next point. “I’d thought that it might be the parasols’ colors reflecting in their faces, but that isn’t it. ... Just what have they been eating, I wonder?”

“How rude!”

“Wouldn’t it be scary if they were some sort of a cult?”

“Hey, Naomi! Good afternoon!” The owner of the mint green-colored parasol suddenly peered in through the window. “What did you paint today?”

Her housemate beat a hasty retreat.

Naomi, chuckling, said, “We were just talking about parasols, Mr. Mint.”

“Oh?”

“I began to feel like painting all of you for some reason. Here, have a look... Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Ms. Lemon, and Ms. Violet.”

“Wow. That’s really something!” he said, his white face, as though coated with chalky vineyard soil, cracking into a smile. Mint—she hadn’t asked his real name—twirled his mint-colored parasol around in his fingertips. A bat-like umbrella, rather. If he were an Englishman, a tightly rolled umbrella, never opened, as he got damp walking.

These people, however, were always under their opened parasols. They were all like that, these parasol lovers who appeared out of the blue last week and rented out several cottages.

“And so... you were gossiping about us?”

“My housemate said it,” Naomi said cheerfully. “You all might be the living dead.”

Facing the other way, Mari’s shoulders visibly rose then fell.

“The living dead?” After a brief silence, Mint burst out laughing. “What a joke, just like *April Showers*.”

“I know, right?” The lady smiled mischievously.

“She’s right, you know,” Mint chuckled. “Well then, we shall be returning to the grave, so please do bring flowers when you chance to visit us.”

\* \* \*

“You!” Mari angrily flew back into the room as soon as the green umbrella went away. “You always have to be like that.”

“It’s because he looks like a dead man we know, isn’t it?” Naomi said. “You dislike me talking with that man, don’t you? That’s it, isn’t it, Mari.”

“Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi?” Mari said. “That’s long past. Anyhow, he had no intention of marrying you anyway.”

“That’s none of your business.”

“What’s the matter, Naomi? Why pick a fight now? For goodness sakes, it happened decades ago.”

“We even had a chance to get back together. But, you hid his letter from me. By the time I found it in your jewelry box—mixed in with all your bottles of perfume and your dried flowers—he had already...”

“It happened decades ago.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Naomi said softly. “He has long since been reborn.”

“Even if it that were true, he isn’t that umbrella man.” Instead of a housemate, Mari sounded like a nurse with a reawakened sense of professionalism.

“Well, it’s time for your medicine.”

\* \* \*

The parasol group filed out from the cottages: blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach, and mint green leading them.

Reaching the verdant grass overlooking the sea, they put up a single umbrella in the earth. It was the violet-colored parasol.

They were deeply bowing when the old woman came walking up slowly.

Sensing a presence, Mint turned around. He nodded in greeting.

“What are you doing?” Naomi inquired.

“What it is that we came to do,” Mint replied. “Ours is a life of one journey to the next. We do not stay in one place. Yet— Ms. Violet had grown weary of living that way. And so, back to the land where she was born and raised…”

“Is that right…” Naomi’s head drooped forward. “And so, you all are…”

“Yes.” Mint nodded along with his parasol. “We must set out again.”

“In that case,” Naomi said, “Couldn’t you take me with you, please?”

Mint opened his eyes wide, to peer closely at her face rather than in surprise.

“You?”

“Me,” Naomi said. “I won’t last much longer. You know it, don’t you?”

Mint nodded, eyes wide open. “… Yes.”

“So, then, I beg you.”

Mint turned toward the others. The umbrellas slowly nodded.

“Alright, I suppose…” Mint said to Naomi. “Step under my umbrella, then.”

It looked like a rainy-day kiss. Or like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Naomi began to shiver beneath the mint-colored umbrella.

When she stepped out, Naomi was holding an umbrella in her hand.

“From today, you shall be called Ms. Rose.”

Naomi opened the rose-colored umbrella.

The group of parasols, joined by the new hue, headed west along the orchard path.

\* \* \*

“Naomi? Where are you?”

Mari’s voice echoed throughout the house. “Just how long are you going to sulk?”

Somewhat frightened by the sound of the wind, which had been growing stronger since evening, Mari glanced up to where the tip of the sky touched the open ocean. A

shadow flittered about, obstructing the splendor of a too beautiful sunset. A single rose-colored parasol circled gracefully in the sky, just like a huge bat beating its wings.

## Parasol

By Inoue Masahito

Against the distant pastel backdrop of the open ocean, the deep evergreen forest, the perfumed orchards and rose gardens, the dawn and dusk clouds glowing through the window, and the clear blue moon, the elderly woman's brush moved delicately as if scooping dazzling colors one-by-one from the health resort onto her canvas. It was only very recently that a new motif had begun to appear in her works.

...Only since those parasols, carried by elegant figures, could be seen scattered about the beach.

"I'm sure of it. There's something off about those parasol maniacs."

The woman's housemate spoke as she gathered her dishes. "What town do they come from where men play with brightly colored—"

"What's wrong with that, Mari? I think it's a beautiful hobby."

The woman answered, adding the final touches to the mint-green umbrella on her canvas. "Besides, they aren't all men. There're women, and even a few children, too."

"Look at their complexions! There's nothing normal about that."

Mari added. "I thought it might have been the light off their parasols, but it's not... What in the world do they eat?"

"Come, now. That's rude."

"Hardly. Just imagine. What if it's a cult?"

"Hullo! Good day to you, Miss Naomi!"

The mint-green parasol's owner peeked in from the window.

"And what did you paint today?"

Hurriedly, her housemate withdrew.

With a chuckle, Naomi replied,

"We were just talking about your parasols, Mister Mint."

"Oh?"

"I had this sudden urge to paint you all. See, there's Orange, and Blue, Lemon, and here's Violet."

"Well, that is quite something."

Mint—she hadn't asked his real name—Mint's pale face—white as though it had been slathered with the vineyard's chalky soil—broke into a smile. He twirled the mint-green parasol in his fingers. It was more an umbrella than a parasol—canvas on ribs like a bat's wings. The type an Englishman might wind tightly and carry, unopened, as he strolled through the rain.

But these parasol-lovers could always be found beneath open umbrellas. They had appeared suddenly the week before and rented out several cottages.

"And, speaking of us...?"

"My housemate was saying"

Naomi said, brightly, "That perhaps you're the living dead."

Back turned, Mari's shoulders visibly hunched, then fell.

"The living dead?"

Mint was silent for a moment. At last, he let out a great laugh.

"What a joke! Like an April shower!"

"Isn't it?"

She laughed mischievously.

"It is."

Mint chuckled in reply. "Well, then, to the grave I return. Summon me with a bouquet, should you have need."

"You're unbelievable."

With the green umbrella's retreat, Mari sprang out in a fury.

“Unbelievable. You haven’t changed a whit.”

“He reminds you of someone we lost.”

Naomi said. “That’s why you can’t stand seeing me speak to him.”

“Why would you bring that up again, Naomi?”

Mari said. “That happened a long time ago. Besides, he was never going to marry you.”

“That wasn’t any of your business.”

“Why are you starting something now? How many decades do you think it’s been?”

“We could have made up, but you hid the letter. I remember, it was in your jewelry box, jumbled in with perfumes and pressed flowers... but by then, he was already—”

“That was decades ago.”

“It was.”

Naomi murmured. “And he’s long since been reborn.”

“Maybe, but he won’t be that umbrella man.”

Mari spoke now not as a housemate, but with a nurse’s crisp professionalism in her voice.

“Now then, time for your medicine.”

The flock of parasols filed out of the cottage: Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermilion, Peach... and at their head, Mint.

Arriving at a patch of green within view of the sea, they stood a single umbrella upon the grass. Violet’s parasol.

As they each lowered their heads, the elderly woman slowly made her way towards them.

Sensing her presence, Mint turned, bowing slightly in greeting.

“What’s happening?”

Naomi inquired.

“This is what we came here for.”

Mint answered. “We have always gone from one journey to another, never staying in one place. But... Violet had tired even of that life, and wished to return here, with its childhood memories, to...”

“I see...”

Naomi hung her head.

“Then, you will be...”

“Yes.”

Mint’s umbrella nodded with him. “Our next journey awaits.”

“Then,”

Naomi said. “Would you... take me with you?”

Mint’s eyes widened. Not with surprise, but to gaze searchingly upon her face.

“You wish...?”

“I do.”

Naomi spoke. “I haven’t long left... you know that?”

Mint nodded, wide-eyed.

“...Yes.”

“Then, please.”

Mint turned to his fellows.

Slowly, the umbrellas nodded.

“Very well...”

Mint said to Naomi. “Come under my umbrella.”

It looked like a kiss in the rain.

Like a butterfly entrapped by a spider.

Beneath Mint’s umbrella, Naomi’s frame shivered.

When she stepped away, she held another in her hand.

“Now, your name is Rose.”

Naomi spread the rose-colored umbrella.

Joined by a new color, the flock of parasols made their way westward along the orchard path.

“Naomi! ...Where have you gotten to?”

Mari’s voice echoed through the villa. “Just how long are you going to sulk for?”

The wind had risen as dusk had fallen. Spooked by the noise, Mari glanced out to where sky met open ocean. Outlined against the sunset’s dazzling beauty, a shadow flitted across the window. A solitary violet umbrella whirling through the sky, elegant, as a great bat taking wing.

## The Parasols

Not just the pastel-colored vista of the seaside but the forest, thick with evergreens; the fragrant orchard and rose garden; the glow of the clouds at sunset and sunrise; and the moon, shining pale and bright—such were the motifs of the paintbrush of the elderly woman, who had been painting the colors that filled this health resort with immeasurable splendor, each one, lovingly, as if scooping them from the palette of nature. It was just recently that the motifs had begun to change slightly.

After those elegant people's parasols started to be seen here and there on the dunes...that had been it.

"There's just something queer about those umbrella people," said her housemate, clearing the elderly woman's dishes. "Really, where on earth did they blow in from? Respectable men don't walk around with such colorful—"

"Oh, Mari. Who cares? I find it a beautiful aesthetic," she replied as she painted a mint umbrella onto the landscape on her canvas. "Also, they are not all men, you know. They have women, and although extremely few, there are even children."

"And the their sickly complexion—it is not normal!" Mari said, moving to another point. "At first I thought it was the colors of their umbrellas reflecting back onto them, but it's not.—What do you think they eat?"

"Now that's just rude."

"No it isn't. I mean, if they're some kind of cult, wouldn't it be creepy?"

"Oh hey, Naomi. Good morning." The owner of the mint parasol popped his head into the window. "What have you painted today?" he asked, peering in.

Mari retreated nervously.

Naomi chuckled as she replied, "Oh, we were just talking about you and the other Parasols, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?" he responded.

"I just suddenly felt like painting you all. See? Here's Mr. Orange and Mr. Blue, Mr. Lemon and Ms. Violet."

"My, my. This is quite something."

As he looked at the painting, the features on his pallid face—a pallor that was as if his face had been coated with the lime-rich soil of a vineyard—softened. Mint—she had never inquired about his name—smiled. He had been twirling his parasol on his fingers. Technically it was not a parasol but an umbrella, with the material stretched tight between the ribs like the wing of a bat. It was the kind of umbrella a Brit would keep wrapped tightly closed and never open, preferring to walk around getting slightly wet.

But they were always under their opened umbrellas. These parasol enthusiasts, who had suddenly appeared the previous week and rented all of the several cottages, were *all* like that.

"So—what were you saying about us?" Mint asked.

"Well, as my housemate tells it," Naomi began with a grin, "you ladies and gentlemen just might be living dead."

Mari had turned her back toward him, but he saw her shoulders rise markedly and then return to normal.

"Living dead?"

Mint stayed silent for a while, but before long he barked out an enormous laugh.

"Why, that joke is just like an April shower."

"Isn't it though?" the madam replied with mischievous laughter.

"It really is." Mint agreed and announced, now also chuckling, "Now, we must return to our grave. Should you have business with us, do bring flowers."

"You're horrible!" said Mari, reappearing furious upon the green umbrella's departure.



"You've always behaved that way."

"It's because he resembles a certain dead man we knew, isn't it?" Naomi said. "That's why it upsets you when I chat with him, Mari."

"Why would you dredge that up, Naomi." said Mari. "It was such a long time ago. And anyway, he was never going to marry you."

"That's what is meant by sticking your nose in other people's business."

"What's wrong, Naomi? Why harp on this now? How many decades has it been?"

"I even had a chance to make up with him! But you hid his letters. By the time I found his letters in your jewel box...mixed in with bottles of perfume and pressed flowers and things, he was already...."

"It was many decades ago"

"Exactly." said Naomi, her voice growing quiet. "He has long since been reincarnated."

"Supposing he has, that umbrella guy is not him." Mari said. But when she continued it was not as a housemate, but as a nurse snapped back into professional mode, "Come. It's time for your medicine."

With the mint parasol at the head, ultramarine, indigo, tangerine, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, salmon, and others—a congregation of parasols—streamed from the cottages.

When they came to the green lawn from which one could see the ocean, they fixed a single umbrella into the ground. It was Violet's parasol.

When the elderly woman slowly walked up to them, they each had their heads bowed deeply.

Noticing her presence, Mint turned around. He nodded to her.

"What happened?" Naomi inquired.

"This is what we came here to do." Mint replied. "By nature we live a life of travel, from one journey to the next. We do not tarry in one place. However, Ms. Violet grew tired of that life. Thus here, in this land where she was born and raised—"

"I see..." Naomi hung her head. "Then, you all are..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, his umbrella following along in the motion. "We must set off again."

"In that case," said Naomi, "Take me with you—could you find it in your heart to?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. Not in surprise, it appeared, but to study her face.

"Do you...?"

"I," Naomi began. "I don't have much longer.—I suppose you were aware."

Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded.

"...Yes."

"Then please"

Mint looked toward his other comrades.

The umbrellas slowly nodded.

"Very well..."

Mint spoke to Naomi, "Come. Under my umbrella."

It was like a Setsubun festival in the rain, a new springtime, a new beginning.

It was like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.

Inside Mint's umbrella, Naomi's body trembled and shook.

When she emerged, Naomi held an umbrella in her hand.

"From today forward I suppose you will be Rose." Mint told her.

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella.

Having added a new color to their ranks, the congregation of Parasols headed west down the path through the orchard.

"Naomi!...Where did you go?" Mari's voice rang through the house. "How long are you going to sulk?"

Unsettled by the sound of the wind, which had been growing stronger as the evening continued, Mari looked up into the part of the sky above the ocean. When she did, a shadow shot up and blocked the incredibly beautiful light of the sunset. Just like a giant bat flapping its wings, a single violet parasol was circling the sky, graceful and alone.

## Parasol

An elderly woman often sat to paint the colors that filled her retreat with endless iridescent splendor, rendering each and every detail so delicately it was as if she were scooping them up between cupped hands: Pastel colors of the vast sea alongside thick evergreen forests, fragrant orchards and rose gardens, swathes of light across the clouds at sunset and dawn, and the crisp, pale blue glow of the moon. Very recently, something new had started to creep into her paintings—ever since an elegant group of parasol-carriers started appearing all around the sand dunes.

“There’s just something so off about those men with parasols,” said the woman’s housemate as she tidied up her dishes. “Where on earth did they come from? And what are such fine gentlemen doing with those colorful parasols?”

“What’s wrong with it, Mari? It’s a beautiful preoccupation,” she answered, painting a mint-colored parasol onto the scenery on her canvas. “And they’re not all men, you know. There are women and even a few children.”

“There’s nothing normal about those pale complexions,” said Mari, finding something else to pick at. “I thought it might just be the reflection of the colors of their parasols, but that’s not it. What on earth are they eating?”

“How rude.”

“It’s not rude. Wouldn’t it be scary if they were a cult?”

“Hello there, Naomi, how are you doing?” The owner of a mint parasol peeked in through the window. “What did you paint today?”

Her housemate quickly retreated.

“Why Mr. Mint, we were just talking about parasols,” said Naomi, giggling.

“You were?”

“Yes, because I found myself wanting to paint you all. Look—Mr. Orange, Mr. Blue, Ms. Lemon, and Mr. Violet.”

“Well I say. Isn’t that something?”

A smile filled Mint’s—she hadn’t asked his real name—white face. So white, in fact, that it looked like he had covered it with the chalky soil of a vineyard. He was twirling a mint parasol between his fingers. “Parasol” might not be the best word to describe it. It was more like one of those umbrellas with curved edges that looked like the wing of a bat—a *bat umbrella*. If he were British, he would have wrapped the umbrella tight, never opening it, like a wet, walking bat. These parasol fanatics who suddenly showed up last week to rent out a couple of cottages were different. They were always stood under open umbrellas, all of them.

“And what of these rumors about us?”

“My housemate,” said Naomi, cheerfully, “thinks you’re the living dead.”

Mari had her back turned, and her shoulders could be seen shooting upwards before falling down again.

“The living dead?” Mint was silent for a while, before finally giving out a hearty laugh. “That joke is quite the downer, isn’t it?”

“Right?” She laughed mischievously.

Mint also chuckled. “Well then, we shall be returning to the grave. If you need us, leave some flowers, would you?”

“What’s wrong with you?!” As the green parasol disappeared into the distance, Mari leaped forward, enraged. “I swear, you’ve always been like this.”

“He looks like a dead person we know, right?” said Naomi, “that’s why you got annoyed by me talking to him, Mari.”

“Why do you have to bring that up again, Naomi?” said Mari, “That all happened so long ago. It’s not like he wanted to marry you anyway.”

“You could call it meddling.”

“What’s the matter with you, Naomi? Why do you have to start an argument now? About something from god-knows-how-many decades ago.”

“There was a chance to make things right. But you hid the letter. That letter got mixed up with perfume bottles and pressed flowers in your jewelry box and when it got out he was already…”

“This was decades and decades ago.”

“It was.” Naomi whispered, “he was born again a long time ago.”

“Even if that’s true, it’s not that man with the umbrella, is it?” Mari then spoke in a tone more akin to a nurse who had woken up to the call of duty than Naomi’s housemate. “Right, it’s time for your medicine.”

Led by Mint, the herd of parasols filed out from their cottages—Blue, then Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, and Peach. When they reached a green grassy patch with a view of the sea, they stuck an umbrella in the ground. It was Violet’s parasol. Naomi slowly approached as the group were deeply bowing. Mint, noticing her presence, turned around and greeted her with a nod.

“What’s happening?” asked Naomi.

“This is what we came here to do,” answered Mint. “We lead a life of traveling, never settling down in one place. But Violet has grown tired of this life. So, we have come to where he was born and raised—”

“I see…” Naomi hung her head. “So, you’re…?”

“Yes.” Mint nodded along with his parasol. “We have to be on our way once again.”

“In that case,” said Naomi, “could you take me with you?”

Mint opened his eyes wide. Not out of surprise so much as to take a long, hard look at her face.

“You…?”

“I,” said Naomi, “won’t last much longer, which I’m sure you know.”

Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded. “…Yes.”

“Well then, please.”

Mint looked back at his companions. The umbrella-holders slowly nodded.

“Very well…” Mint said to Naomi. “Come under my umbrella, then.”

It looked like a kiss in the rain. It also looked like a butterfly being caught by a spider. Naomi’s torso trembled violently underneath Mint’s umbrella.

When Naomi stepped out, she had an umbrella in her hand.

“From today, you’re Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose umbrella. The herd of umbrellas, joined by a new color, walked westward down the path in the orchard.

“Where in the world are you, Naomi?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the residence. “Just how long are you going to be sulking?” Mari had grown somewhat afraid of the sound of the wind, which had been growing stronger since evening fell. As she looked up into the distance where the sky met the sea, she saw a shadow dance across the dazzlingly beautiful sunset. It was a violet parasol fluttering elegantly across the sky, just like a bat flapping its wings.

## In the shade of parasols

There was pastel coloured sea and a forest of evergreens in the background, while a sweet-smelling orchard and rose garden occupied the front. Above a vivid glow formed on the clouds, signalling sunset or dawn and the moon shined brightly... Then the sparkling lights of the sanatorium were added one by one, calmly, as the paint-filled brush of the old women traced the motives and changed a little here and there.

And of course there were the parasols, sprung up like mushrooms on the dunes lately, carried elegantly by their owners.

'Those parasols, I say, very suspicious', said her roommate while putting away spoons and forks. 'I wonder where did they all come from. Respectful gentlemen do not carry such colourful umbrellas.'

'I think it's all right. It shows good taste, Mary', answered the old lady, while adding a peppermint coloured umbrella to the landscape on the canvas. 'Besides, they are not just men. There are some women, and a few children as well.'

'And the shade on their faces, so pale, it is not in the least healthy', picked Mary another point. 'First, I thought it is just the reflection of those parasols, but no, it is their face... I wonder what do they eat.'

'Enough, this is rude.'

'Not at all. Aren't you afraid that they may belong to some kind of cult?'

'Ahoy, Miss Naomi, how are you doing?' appeared suddenly the peppermint umbrella and its owner in the window. 'What kind of picture did you paint today?'

Naomi chuckled to herself as her roommate hurriedly withdrew, before answering.

'Just now, we were talking about your parasols, Mr Mint.'

'Really?'

'Yes, as I decided to draw them all. Look, here is Mr Orange, Ms Marine and Ms Lemon, and there is Mr Violet.'

'I must say, it is beautiful!' cried Mr Mint (his real name no one knew), while a smile cracked its way onto his white face (which looked like it was covered with chalk powder from the vineyard). In his fingers, the peppermint parasol was slowly spinning. It looked more like a bat-shaped umbrella, rather than a parasol. Most Englishmen would have just walked around with it rolled up tightly, risking to be wet bats themselves.

But Mr Mint and his friends had their umbrellas open all the time and kept to their shade. They appeared all of a sudden last week, and rented out several of the cottages around. They formed a kind of parasol-fan club.

'So I take there are some rumours about us?'

'Only my roommate has her theories', smiled Naomi. 'But surely, you are not dead corpses walking around, are you?'

Even though she turned her back on them, they could see Mary's shoulders rise suddenly, then slowly sagging back.

'Dead corpses?' asked Mint after a moment pause, then break into a laugh. 'It sounds like a joke from April's foul day!'

'Does it?' laughed the old lady mischievously.

'It does, come on', chuckled Mint. 'But now, excuse me, I have to return to my grave, so if you want to pay your respects, just come along with a bouquet.'

'That man!' flared up Mary as soon as the green umbrella disappeared. 'It is just like that time!'

'Yes, he does resemble him. But he died, didn't he?' murmured Naomi. 'That's why you don't like when we are talking to each other, do you, Mary?'

‘Why do you bring that up now, Naomi?’ grunted Mary. ‘That’s ancient history. And after all, he didn’t really want to marry you.’

‘Only, because you kept us apart.’

‘What are you saying, Naomi? Why do you pick a fight just now? For God’s sake, it happened decades ago.’

‘We could have reconciled. But you hid his letters. I found them in your jewel box… next to bottle of perfumes and pressed flowers… But by that time, he was…’

‘It happened decades ago’, repeated Mary.

‘True’, replied Naomi in a small voice. ‘He had already made a fresh start by then.’

‘Even then, this parasol one is not him’, said Mary, then continued more like a nurse, than a fellow roommate: ‘And now it’s time for our medicine.’

Led by the peppermint umbrella, the blue, the indigo, the orange, the lemon, the gold, the silver, the scarlet, the peach-coloured and all the other parasols gathered like a herd, and walked away from the cottages in groups. As they reached the end of the lawn and looked out onto the sea, one of the umbrellas, the violet, was lowered to the ground.

As they all stood there, with their heads bowed, the old lady slowly walked up to them. When Mint noticed her, he turned around and nodded in greeting.

‘What happened?’ asked Naomi.

‘This was the reason, why we all came’, answered Mint. ‘By nature, we lead a travelling life. We never stop for long at any place. Mr. Violet, however…, he became tired of this. He was born and grown up here, so…’

‘Oh, I see’, lowered her head Naomi. ‘So you will…’

‘Yes’, nodded Mint. ‘We soon will be leaving.’

‘If that’s so’, said Naomi, ‘can I ask you to take me along?’

Mint’s eyes opened wide. It was not so much by surprise, but rather to allow him to inspect her face better.

‘You…’

‘Yes, me’, replied Naomi calmly. ‘I don’t have much time left… surely you noticed it.’

‘Well, yes…’, answered Mint still wide-eyed.

‘Then, please, take me with you.’

Mint looked at his companions. The parasols slowly nodded in agreement.

‘All right’, turned back Mint to Naomi. ‘Come then, under my umbrella.’

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day. It looked like a spider catching its prey. In the shade of Mint’s parasol, Naomi’s body shook and trembled as the cold spread over her.

When she was ready to step out, they gave her an umbrella: ‘From now on, you will be called Miss Rose.’ And the rose coloured parasol opened in Naomi’s hand.

The herd of parasols, now including a new hue in their midst, turned west toward the little path in the orchard and started to walk.

‘Naomi! Where are you?’ the voice of Mary echoed through the whole building. ‘Oh, come on, how long do you want to sulk?’

The wind became strong since evening, and the roar of it scared Mary a bit. When she looked out at the sky, it seemed to touch the sea. Then a fluttering shadow blocked the brilliant rays of the sunset for a moment. It looked just like a giant bat flapping its wings, only it was a violet parasol, swirling gracefully towards the sky.

The Parasols

INOUE Masahiko

The distant view of pastel-coloured coastal waters, and then the deep forest of evergreens, the fragrant orchard and rose garden, the moon gleaming pale and bright in the radiant light of the clouds at sunset and daybreak, together with the colours which imbued the health resort with infinite brilliance—the old woman had been painting these, one by one, meticulously, as though scooping them up, and only recently had the motifs of her brush begun to change a little. This had been prompted by the appearance, here and there on the sands, of the sunshades of the elegant people.

“No matter how you look at it, there’s something uncanny about that sunshade lot,” the woman who lived with her said as she cleared away the old woman’s dishes. “Where have they even drifted in from? What decent fellows would go around with multicoloured umbrellas like that?”

“What’s wrong with them? Come, Mari. It’s a lovely hobby to have,” she answered, applying the final coat to a mint green umbrella in her canvas scene. “Besides, they’re not only men, either. There are women as well—and children, even if there are hardly any.”

Mari tried another tack. “I’m telling you, that terrible complexion isn’t normal. I thought it might be a reflection of the colours of the sunshades, but it isn’t… What *do* they eat?”

“Now you’re being rude.”

“I’m not. Wouldn’t it be horrifying if they were some sort of religious cult?”

“Hallo there, Mistress Naomi. Good afternoon.” Without warning, the proprietor of the mint green sunshade looked in at the window. “What kind of painting have you been able to make out today?”

Her companion withdrew hastily.

“We were actually just discussing the sunshades, Mr Mint Green,” Naomi said, stifling a laugh.

“Oh?”

“Because I had the sudden urge to paint everyone. Look, Mr Bitter-Orange, and Mr Ultramarine Blue, Mr Lemon, and Mr Violet.”

“Oh—how wonderful!”

Mint (she had not asked his real name) split his white face—a whiteness as though he were dusted with the calcareous soil of a vineyard—in a smile. He was spinning a mint green sunshade round and round in his fingers. It was less a sunshade than an umbrella in the Western style—a ‘bat umbrella’ in Japanese. A bat-wing umbrella, such as an Englishman would keep always unopened, tightly furled, and walk with, getting wet. These people, however, were always beneath an opened umbrella. They were all like that, these sunshade devotees who had appeared out of nowhere last week and hired several cottages.

“So… when you say you’ve been talking about us…?”

“Well, my companion has been saying,” Naomi said smilingly, “that you might all be living dead.”

They could see Mari’s shoulders tightly hunch and then lower again as she stood with her back to them.

“Living dead?” Mint was silent for a moment, but presently burst into a fit of laughter. “A joke fit for the April showers, I would say.”

“Would you?” the old matron laughed mischievously.

“Absolutely.” Mint was snickering too. “Well then, we will return to our tombs, so if you should have need of us, be sure to bring a sympathy bouquet or the like.”

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“You—!” Mari flew towards her in a fury once the green umbrella was out of sight. “You’ve always been like this!”

"I know what is that you don't like about us chatting, Mari," Naomi said. "It's because he resembles a certain dead man of our acquaintance."

"Why are you bringing this up again, Naomi?" Mari said. "It's ancient history. It's not like he was interested in marrying you, anyway."

"And that's none of your business."

"What's the matter with you, Naomi? Why are you picking a fight now? Why, that was decades ago."

"Because we *did* have a chance of making up our quarrel. But you went and hid the letter. When that letter came out of your jewellery box—mixed in with your perfume bottles and your pressed flowers and whatnot—he was already—"

"It was *decades* ago."

"Yes," Naomi said in a small voice. "He will have been reincarnated long ago."

"Be that as it may, he's not that umbrella man, is he now?" Mari said, no longer speaking as her companion, but with the voice of a nurse who takes her professionalism seriously. "All right, time for your medicine."

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With the mint green at their head, the throng of sunshades came filing out of the cottages—ultramarine, indigo, bitter-orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermillion, peach, and so on. When they came to the green lawn with its views to the sea, they erected a single umbrella on the ground. It was the violet sunshade. Just as they had all deeply bowed their heads, the old woman came slowly walking towards them.

Sensing her presence, Mint Green turned around; he gave a slight bow.

"What has happened?" Naomi asked.

"This is why we came," Mint answered. "We are a travelling people by nature. We do not stay in one place. And yet—Mr Violet has grown weary of that life. And so, in this place, where he was born and brought up—"

"Is that so...?" Naomi hung her head. "So, you are..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, as did his sunshade. "Once again, we must voyage on."

"If that is the case," Naomi said, "would you be so kind as to take me with you?"

Mint widened his eyes. It appeared to be less in surprise than in order to gaze fixedly upon her face.

"You...?"

"I do," Naomi said. "After all, I don't have long left, now." She paused. "You knew, didn't you?"

Mint, widening his eyes again, nodded. "... Yes."

"In that case, please."

Mint turned towards the rest of his party. The umbrellas nodded slowly.

"Very well..." Mint said to Naomi. "Then, won't you come and share my umbrella?"

It looked a little like a kiss on a rainy day; it looked a little like a butterfly captured by a spider.

Under Mint Green's umbrella, Naomi's small, bent frame trembled violently.

When she stepped out from underneath, Naomi was holding a single umbrella in her hand.

"From this day forth, my dear, you shall be Mrs Rose Pink."

Naomi opened the rose-coloured umbrella.

Their ranks swelled by a new colour, the throng of sunshades struck westwards on the pathway through the orchard.

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"Naomi! Where have you got to?" Mari's voice echoed throughout the Western-style building. "Just how long are you going to sulk?"

Grown a little fearful of the sound of the wind, which had strengthened since the evening, Mari looked up at the line where the sky met the open sea off the coast, and there a shadow



danced, obstructing the splendour of an exceptionally beautiful sunset. It was a single violet sunshade, elegantly wheeling in the sky, exactly like a great bat beating its wings.

## Parasols

The old lady had been painting the seaside resort carefully, as if trying to capture every hue that filled this place with infinite brightness: the offshore view in pastel shades, the thick evergreen forest, the aromatic orchard and the rose garden, the luminous clouds at sunset and dawn, and the pale glowing moon. It was just recently, though, that her subjects started to change slightly.

It started when those graceful people with parasols began to appear here and there on the dune.

"Those parasol guys are absolutely shady," her roommate grumbled, cleaning the table after the woman's meal. "Those vagabonds came out of nowhere. Colorful parasols just don't belong to men."

"I like them, Mari. They are chic," she reprimanded, adding a mint green parasol to the landscape on canvas. "You know what? They are not all men. Some of them are women, and there are even a few young children, too."

"They look so pale. That's odd."

Mari continued, pointing out from a different angle. "I first thought their faces reflected the colors of parasols, but actually it isn't so. What kind of food do you think they eat?"

"That's a rude question."

"No, it's not. I mean, what if they belong to a religious cult or something? They could be dangerous."

"Hello, Naomi, how are you?"

The owner of the mint green parasol peeked into the window.

"What did you paint today?"

Naomi's roommate hurried out.

Naomi said, chuckling, "We were talking about your parasols, Mint."

"Oh?"

"I felt like painting you folks. Here, besides you, Mint, I painted some others. Orange, Blue, Lemon, and Violet."

"Boy, this is lovely."

Mint, whose real name she had never asked, broke into a smile, his face as white as if painted with calcareous earth from the vineyard. He was spinning his mint green parasol in his hands. It looked more like an umbrella than a parasol, one of those that British gentlemen would carry tightly closed all the time and never open even in rain.

But these people never failed to stay under open parasols. It was true of all the parasol owners who had come out of nowhere the previous week and rented some of the cottages.

"Well, what did you ladies say about us?"

"My roommate says that you folks could be the living dead," said Naomi, beaming.

In the back, Mari, facing the other way, raised and then dropped her shoulders.

"The living dead?"

Mint said nothing for a while before bursting into laughter.

"That joke is just like an unexpected April shower."

"But it's true, isn't it?" asked Naomi with a mischievous giggle.

"Yes, it is," replied Mint, amused, and went on with a chuckle.

"So, it's time to go back to our graveyard homes. If you need us, you could visit us with a bouquet."

"How dare you!"

Mari stormed in furiously as soon as the mint parasol had gone out of sight.

"You never change, do you?"

"You are upset because you see some resemblance between him and someone dead, whom we both know well, right?" Naomi reasoned, "That's exactly why you don't like it when I talk with him, Mari."

"Why do you have to bring it up now, Naomi?" Mari rattled on.

"It's an ancient history. I knew he wasn't even thinking about marrying you."

"So what? That's none of your business."

"Why, Naomi? How come you are picking a fight with me now? It was ages ago."

"We had a chance to get back together. Even though you hid the letter. When I found it in your jewelry box, among perfume bottles and pressed flowers, he had already ..."

"I say it's an old story," Mari cut in.

"I know." Naomi mumbled, "He should be reborn to another life by now."

"Even so, it wouldn't be that parasol man."

Then Mari suddenly declared professionally, turning herself from a roommate to a nurse.

"Now, it's time for your medication."

From the cottage, the mint parasol led the group of others in varied colors: blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermilion, peach and so on.

They came down to the lawn overlooking the ocean, and they stuck a parasol on the ground. The parasol was violet.

All the bearers bowed deeply, when the old woman walked up slowly.

Mint turned back, acknowledging her, and nodded.

"What's going on?" asked Naomi.

"We came here for this ceremony," replied Mint.

"We are travelers. We don't stay at a place. But Violet got tired from such a life. She wanted to come home to this place where she was born and raised."

"I see." Naomi looked down.

"Then I suppose you are ..."

"Yes," Mint nodded, with his parasol synchronizing.

"We are going back on a journey."

"Then," Naomi directed an abrupt question, "could you take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, apparently more in order to scrutinize her face than in surprise.

"Sorry if I'm wrong, but you ..."

"Yes, I won't live long." After a pause, Naomi added, "You knew it, didn't you?"

Mint widened his eyes again, and answered hesitantly with a nod. "Yes."

"Then, please."

Mint turned to his fellow travelers.

The other parasols nodded back slowly.

"All right, then." Mint turned to Naomi and said, "Come inside of my parasol."

It looked like a kiss in the rain.

It looked like a butterfly trapped by a spider.

Naomi's body shivered under the mint parasol.

When she came out, she had a parasol in her hand.

“You have a new name now, Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose-colored parasol.

The group of colorful parasols, now with newly-added color, headed west along a passage in the orchard.

“Naomi, where are you?”

Mari’s voice echoed in the house. “You should stop pouting by now.”

The wind was growing stronger now at dusk. Mari, feeling a little scared, looked up at the sky just above the horizon, and saw a swirling silhouette against the indescribably beautiful sunset. It was a violet parasol, just like a giant bat fluttering its wings, circling gracefully in the sky.

### The Parasols

One by one, the old lady painted, not only a pastel colored open sea, but a deep forest of evergreens, aromatic orchards, rose gardens, the light through the clouds at sunrise and at sunset, and the blue tinged brightness of the moon. It was if she were carefully scooping up with her paintbrush every one of the myriad radiant colors that infused this resort. Just lately however, her preferred motifs had begun to change a little.

It began when those elegant people with their sunshades started to appear here and there about the dunes.

"Those parasol people really are fishy," said her roommate while tidying up the dishes. "Where did they drift in from? Grown men with colored parasols..."

"Oh why not, Mari? I think they have lovely taste." As she said this she added a peppermint parasol to the scene on her canvas. "Besides, they aren't only men. There are ladies too. And a few children."

"Those unhealthy complexions - they aren't normal." Mari began listing her doubts. "You would think those colors would reflect on their faces. But they don't. Those people. What are they eating?"

"Don't be rude."

"No. Wouldn't you be appalled if they were in some kind of cult?"

"Ah, Naomi, good day to you," came a voice. It was the owner of the peppermint parasol, who had suddenly popped his head in at the window.

"What kind of picture could you paint today?" he asked as Mari hurriedly withdrew.

"We were just talking about your sunshades, Mr. Mint," Naomi chuckled.

"Is that so?"

"I had an urge to paint you all. Look: Mr. Orange, Ms. Blue, Mr. Lemon, and Ms. Violet.

"Well. How splendid!"

Mr. Mint (for she had not asked for his real name) cracked a smile, his face as pale as chalky vineyard earth. The peppermint parasol was spinning at his fingertips. Though it looked more like a western style umbrella than a parasol. One of those batty umbrellas the British carry, all tightly wound up and never unfurled, even in the rain.

These people though, are always beneath an open umbrella. That's how they are, these parasol lovers, who suddenly appeared last week and occupied the cottages.

"So... what do people say about us?"

"My roommate says," said Naomi with a smile, "that you could be the living dead."

Mari had turned her back to them, but at this her shoulders visibly shook.

"The living dead?"

Mr. Mint was silent for a moment, but then he burst out laughing.

"Your jest is as refreshing as an April shower."

"Isn't it though?" she said with an impish smile.

"It is," said Mr. Mint, and chuckling, bid her adieu. "We shall now return to our graves," he declared. "But when the opportunity arises, do please bring us flowers."

As the green parasol departed, Mari flew out of her corner in a rage.

"You! How could you? You were always like this!"

"It's because he resembles that man we knew, isn't it?" said Naomi. "The one who died. That's the reason why you don't like me talking to him. Isn't it, Mari?"

"Oh Naomi, why bring that up again? It's ancient history. He was never going to marry you anyway."

"Thanks to your meddling."

"What's wrong with you, Naomi? Why pick a fight after all this time? Good heavens! How many years back is that?"

"We could have been reconciled. But you hid his letter. In your jewel box, hidden away with bottles of perfume and pressed flowers. By the time it came out he was already - "

"That was decades ago."

"It was," said Naomi. And then in a small voice, "He must have been reborn a long time ago."

"Even so. He is not that parasol man." Mari spoke now with the confident voice of a nurse rather than a roommate.

"Come now. Time for your medicine."

With peppermint at their head, a stream of parasols came out of the cottages: blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, scarlet, and peach. But on a vantage point over the sea, one violet parasol stood alone, planted into the earth of a grassy lawn.

The old lady walked out to them, and each one in turn gave her a deep bow. Noticing her arrival, Mr. Mint turned towards her and also gave a bow.

"What is happening?" asked Naomi.

"This is why we came here," said Mr. Mint. "By nature, we are ever on our travels, and never stay too long in one place. However, Ms. Violet is tired of this way of life. And so in this place where she was born and raised..."

"So that's how it is," said Naomi hanging her head. "And you are all - "

"Yes." Mr. Mint and his parasol nodded as one. "And now it is time for us to be on our way again."

"If that is so," said Naomi, "won't you take me with you?"

Mr. Mint opened his eyes wide, but rather than being surprised, it seemed more that he wished to contemplate her closely.

"You would...?"

"I would," said Naomi. "I don't have much longer. You knew that I think."

Eyes still wide, Mr. Mint nodded, "Yes".

"Then, if you would be so kind."

Mr. Mint turned to his companions, and all the parasols slowly bobbed in assent.

"Very well..." said Mr. Mint to Naomi. "Here, come in under my umbrella."

It might have looked like a rainy day kiss.

It might have looked like a butterfly snared by a spider.

Under the peppermint parasol, Naomi's body trembled and shook.

When she came out she too had a parasol in her hand.

"From today, you are Ms. Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-colored parasol.

With a fresh hue added to their group, the parasols headed west along a little pathway through the orchard.

"Naomi. Where have you got to?" Mari's voice echoed through the villa. "Just when are you going to stop sulking?"

As evening fell and the wind grew stronger, Mari grew a little afraid. Looking up toward where the distant sea met the clouds, the splendor of an extraordinary sunset was interrupted by a fluttering shadow. Like a great bat spreading its wings, a single violet parasol wheeled gracefully about the sky.

## Parasols / Inoue Masahiko

The motifs of the old lady's painting had been somewhat altered recently; formerly the images of her paintings were not only confined to the scenery of the pastel colours of the distant shore, but also included the evergreens of the deep forest, the rich aromatic orchards and rose gardens, the glowing clouds at sunset and sunrise, the shining pale moon. She used to paint all those colours which fill the health resort with their brilliant hues, as if scooping up them gently with a paintbrush, one by one.

The change had started since the elegant people's parasols began to be seen here and there on the beach.

"These parasol people are a bit fishy."

The old lady's housemate said while she tidying up her dishes, "What town did they drift in from? Their parasols are too gaudy for them to be truly classy men."

"Why not? Mari. They have good taste."

Dabbing and overlaying a mint green parasol on the landscape she was painting on the canvas, the old lady replied, "Besides, the new people aren't just men. There are women and a few children too."

"Their faces are so extraordinarily pale."

Mari brought up the different point. "I thought the colour of the parasols was reflected on their faces, but no. ...I wonder what kind of food they eat."

"It's bad manners to ask that kind of question."

"No it's not. Wouldn't you be worried if they are a religious cult or something?"

"Hello, Naomi, how are you?" – a new voice belonging to the man with the mint green parasol called through the window.

"What kind of picture have you painted today?"

The housemate withdrew in haste.

Naomi said giggling, "We were talking about parasols now, Mr. Mint."

"Well?"

"I just wanted to paint everybody. See, Orange, Blue, Lemon and Violet."

"Hah, that's brilliant."

Mr. Mint - she never asked his real name - broke into a broad smile on his pale face, like a coating of whitish earth of limestone from a vineyard. With his tip of fingers, he was spinning the mint green parasol. Maybe it was more like an umbrella than a parasol – the kind Englishmen roll up tightly, never opening, and getting wet walking in the rain.

However, these people are always under their open umbrellas. Out of nowhere, these parasol-lovers just suddenly appeared last week and hired some cottages, always under their umbrellas.

"Well... what were you gossiping about us?"

"My housemate says", Naomi said graciously, "that you must be all like the living dead."

She noticed that Mari's shoulders tightened sharply as if startled, then dropped back down again.

"The living dead?"

Mint kept silent for a while, and then he burst out laughing.

"It's a chilly kind of joke, like an April shower, isn't it?"

"Well, are you?"

The old lady laughed mischievously.

"Yes, we are."

Mint also giggly smiled, "Well then, we are going back to the tomb. So if you need anything, just visit with some flowers."

"How dare you!" Mari sprang out with anger from behind when Mr. Mint left. "You're always doing things like that!"

"It's because he reminds us of dead people we used to know."

Naomi said, "That's the reason you don't want me to talk to him, Mari."

"Why are you bringing that up again, Naomi?"

Mari said, "It was a long time ago. I am sure he had no intention to marry you."

"It's so meddlesome!"

"What's wrong, Naomi. Why are you blowing up at me like that now? What the heck, it was decades ago!"

"We had a chance to make our peace, but you hid a letter. When that letter came out from your jewellery box – from among a perfume bottle, a pressed flower and so on, he was already –"

"That was many decades ago."

"True."

Naomi said with a small voice. "He might have already died and been reborn a long time ago."

"Even so, that parasol man is not his reincarnation."

Mari said, as not a housemate, but with her best nurse voice.

"Come, it's time for your medicine."

With Mint in the lead, a flock of parasols - ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, red, pink, and other colours - trooped out from the cottage.

When they come to the green lawn with a sea view, they planted one parasol in the ground. It was the violet parasol.

Then each person bowed deeply in the violet parasol's direction. At the same time, the old lady slowly strolled towards them.

Sensing someone's approach, Mint turned his head around. And he bowed his greeting.

"What's going on?"

Naomi asked.

"We came here for this."

Mint answered. "Originally, we travelled from one place to another. Never staying at the one place. But – Mr. Violet was tired of such travelling life. And we came to the land where he was born and raised..."

"Really..."

Naomi dropped her head.

"Well then, all of you..."

"Yes", Mint nodded with a parasol. "We must be on our way again."

"If that's the case,"

Naomi said, "... would you please take me with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. Seems gazing hard at her face rather than out of surprise.

"Are you..."

"I..."

Naomi said. "I don't have much time to live... You may have known this already..."

Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded.

"...Yes."

"Well then, please take me!"

Mint faced his fellows.

The parasols slowly nodded.

"Very well..."

Mint told Naomi. "Then, please get inside my parasol."

It looked like a kiss on a rainy day.

It looked like a butterfly caught by a spider.

Under the Mint coloured parasol, Naomi's body trembled.

When she left it, Naomi had a parasol in her hand.

"From today, your name is Miss Rose."

Naomi opened the rosy red parasol.



A group of parasols, now with a new colour not seen before, headed west toward a lane of the orchard.

"Naomi? – Where are you?"

The voice of Mari echoed in the Western-style building. "How long are you sulking?"

Shivering nervously as the sound of wind picked up in the evening breeze, Mari looked up at the edge of the sky where it met the ocean. The shadow danced, interrupting the glow of the surpassingly beautiful sunset. Like a giant bat flapping and spreading its long wings, a violet parasol gracefully whirled in the sky.

## The Parasols

It wasn't just the distant view of the gulf in pastel hues. There was the deep forest of evergreens, the sweet-smelling orchard and rose garden, the shimmer in the clouds during sunset and dawn, the pale shiny moon... The elderly lady's paintbrush had been picking out the myriad brilliant colours that filled this health resort, one meticulous stroke at a time. It was only recently that the theme in her paintings started showing hints of change.

Ever since the parasols of those elegant people became a common sight on the sand dunes, that is.

"Something's definitely up with the parasol-toting bunch," said her housemate, putting away the elderly lady's tableware. "Who knows where this influx of people came from? A bunch of grown men with umbrellas in every colour."

"I don't see why not, Mari. It's a lovely pursuit."

The elderly lady replied, giving the mint umbrella in the landscape on her canvas another coat of paint. "Besides, they aren't all men. There are women too. And children, although only but a few."

"Their pasty complexion is out of the ordinary, I tell you."

Mari was now directing her comments at something else. "I thought it was the colours reflecting off their parasols but that's not it. I wonder what they eat."

"Now that's rude."

"Oh no, it's not. What if it's a cult of some sort? That'd be scary."

"Hello there, Miss Naomi. Good day to you."

The owner of the mint parasol popped up from the window and peeked in. "What have you painted today?"

Her housemate beat a hasty retreat.

Naomi giggled. "We were just talking about parasols, Mr. Mint."

"Oh?"

"I simply couldn't resist painting all of you, you see. Look, Mr. Orange and Mr. Blue, Miss Lemon and Miss Violet."

"Oh, my. This is magnificent."

Said Mint, whose real name she didn't ask, his white face breaking into a broad smile. The whiteness in his face looked like it was coated with the calcareous soil that is found in vineyards. His hands were spinning the mint parasol round and round. Actually, it was less a parasol than a western-style umbrella, its canopy bat-like and all. One that English men would carry slenderly furled and never walk with opened, getting themselves wet as a result.

These people, however, were always under theirs opened. All of them. These parasol enthusiasts suddenly arrived the week before and rented a few cottages all to themselves.

"So, what is it about us?"

"My housemate was saying," Naomi said, smiling, "that maybe you people are the living dead."

With her back facing them, Mari's shoulders could be seen to rise high and then fall.

"The living dead?"

Mint fell into a brief silence. Then he burst out laughing.

"Just like the joke about the April shower."

"I know, right?"

The lady laughed mischievously.

"The living dead indeed."

Mint, too, chuckled. "Very well then. We're going back to our graves. Please bring a bouquet of flowers when you visit."

"Honestly!"

Mari stormed out in fury after the green umbrella had left.

"Honestly, Naomi! You haven't changed, not even after all these years."

"It's because he resembles someone we both knew, right? Someone who's already dead," Naomi said. "That's why you hate it when I speak to him."

"Why bring that up again?" Mari said. "That was ages ago. He had absolutely no intention of marrying you anyway."

"That's what they call a busybody."

"What's the matter with you, Naomi? Why are we having this fight now? It's been decades."

"There was a chance for reconciliation. But *you* hid the letter. By the time it emerged from your jewelry box, from among the perfume bottles and pressed flowers and what have you, he'd already--"

"It happened decades ago."

"Indeed it did," Naomi said quietly. "He'd long since reincarnated."

"Even so, not as that umbrella man."

Mari was no longer speaking as the housemate. Instead, her tone was now reminiscent of a nurse who'd awoken to her sense of professionalism.

"Come now. Time for your medicine."

Led by the mint parasol, the group of parasols came streaming out of the cottages. Blue, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermilion and peach, among others.

Upon reaching a green lawn looking out on the sea, they planted an umbrella in the ground. It was Violet's parasol.

The elderly lady came walking over slowly, after everyone had taken a deep bow.

Sensing her presence, Mint turned around. And then he nodded.

"Is anything the matter?" Naomi asked.

"This was what brought us here," Mint replied.

"We've always led a nomadic life, never settled in one place. But Miss Violet has tired of such an existence. So here we are, at the place where she was born and raised."

"I see," Naomi said, her head lowered. "So that means..."

"Yes."

Mint nodded, parasol and all. "We must set off on our journey again."

"In that case, would you be so kind as to take me along with you?"

Mint opened his eyes wide. It wasn't so much out of surprise than out of the desire to take a good, long look at her face.

"Are you...?"

"My time," Naomi said, "is running out. I believe you may already be aware."

Mint opened his eyes wide and nodded.

"Indeed I am."

"In that case, please do me this favour."

Mint turned towards the others in his group.

The group of umbrellas nodded slowly.

"Very well," he said to Naomi. "Step this way please, under my umbrella."

They looked like a couple kissing on a rainy day.

They looked like a butterfly held in a spider's captivity.

Naomi's body trembled under the mint umbrella.

She had an umbrella in hand when she stepped outdoors.

"Starting from today, you shall be Miss Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-coloured umbrella.

With yet another new colour in the group, the parasols took the path in the orchard and headed west.

"Naomi? Where *are* you?"

Mari's voice reverberated through the western-style building. "How much longer are you going to sulk?"

The winds had grown louder in the evening. It frightened Mari a little. She looked up at the horizon, where the edge of the sky and the gulf met. The brilliance from the sunset was all too beautiful. So beautiful that the shadows were dancing in the obscurity. Like a large bat with its wings wide spread, a violet umbrella was twirling about gracefully in the sky.

### Parasols

A bay stretching far into the distance in vivid pastel colours, the thick lush forests of evergreen trees, sweet smelling orchards and rose gardens, the moon brightly shining through the clouds at dawn and dusk...

An elderly woman sat by a window, her brush painstakingly recreating each of the shimmering splendours found in the health retreat that surrounded her. However, just recently, a slightly different motif had come to dominate her paintings, ever since those splendidly refined looking characters holding parasols could be seen dotting the sand dunes.

"Those men with their parasols are very suspicious looking", her housemate said as she cleared away the dishes. "Where did they come from, these blow-ins? Sure, they look like fine upstanding men but those umbrellas, in all those different colours..."

"Come now, Marie, what is the harm? I happen to think that they are quite a beautiful passion to have", she answered, while putting the finishing touches to a mint coloured umbrella on a canvas landscape.

"It's not just men, by the way. There are some women, and while only a few, there are some children as well".

"They are so pale though. It's not normal!" interjected Marie, changing the subject. "I thought it was the reflection of the sun, but it appears not... What must they be eating?"

"Don't be rude Marie!"

"But what if it is some form of cult? Oh my, it scares me even to think of it!"

The pair were interrupted. "Ms. Naomi! How are you?" The voice emerged suddenly through the window, from the owner of a mint umbrella who was peering in. "What type of painting did you do today?"

Marie retreated hurriedly.

Naomi, while chuckling to herself, replied, "Well it just so happens that we were talking about the sun umbrellas, as you arrived Mr. Mint".

"Oh!" Mr. Mint exclaimed.

"You see I have finally taken an urge to paint you all. See, here is the gentleman with the orange one, and here's the blue one, and lemon and violet too".

"Wow, this is really something."

Mint (whom she had never asked for his real name) stretched his white face into a broad smile. It was the white of the limestone rich soil of a vineyard. He was spinning a minty green coloured umbrella in his hand, a dreary, plain umbrella, the kind a British person would keep tightly wound on a rainy day while walking around getting wet.

However, the group he belonged to were always seen under an open umbrella. They appeared as if from nowhere last week, booking out a number of cottages, and every single one had the same habit, they were always under their beloved parasols.

"By the way... have you heard the rumours about us?"

"My housemate mentions them", Naomi said smiling. "That you are the living dead."

Marie, who was turned away from them, scrunched her shoulders tightly, then released them.

"The living dead?" Mint paused in silence for a moment before finally erupting into a laugh. "What a damp squib of a rumour."

"Isn't it?" the lady replied, with a derisive laugh.

Mint continued stifling a laugh of his own, "Well then, I must be getting home to the graveyard, if you need anything, just present me with a bouquet of flowers or whatever the custom would demand."

"People like you..." Marie thundered forward as soon as the holder of the mint green umbrella had departed. "People like you have always been the same."

"You think the way you do because he looks the same as that dead man we knew, isn't that right?" said Naomi. "That's the reason you hate to see us talking, isn't that so Marie?"

"Why are you dragging that up again, Naomi? Its ancient history now. I'm sure he had no intention of marrying you!"

"It sounds like you are meddling in my affairs *again*."

"What has happened to you Naomi? Here you are tying together these things. It was something that happened decades ago!"

"We had chances to build bridges and make it work, but you had to hide the letters. I found them strewn between the bottles of perfume and pressed flowers in your jewel box."

"It happened decades ago!"

"Yes, it did..", Naomi's voice quietened to a whisper.

"He left us a long time ago Naomi. He has surely already passed on to the next life."

"Even if you are right, he is not the same as the man with the umbrella."

Marie's voice changed. She no longer spoke as a housemate but instead with the strong voice befitting of a professional care worker. "It's time for your medicine, Naomi."

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A large swarm of parasols emerged the cottages; indigo, pink, marine blue, orange, gold and silver. They were headed by the owner of the mint coloured umbrella.

They stopped at the edge of a patch of luscious green grass that looked out over the sea. A single rich, floral violet parasol stood in the ground.

As they all stood deeply bowing their heads, an elderly woman approached them. Mr Mint, sensing her presence, turned to face her and offered a slight bow.

"Whatever happened?" inquired Naomi.

"This was our reason for coming here" began Mr. Mint. "We travel from place to place, never staying too long in one spot, but Ms. Violet, well it seems as though she had tired of this life and here, in the very place where she was born and raised she..."

"Is that so?" came Naomi's meek response, her head dropping.

"So that means that you will be ...?"

"Yes", Mr. Mint interjected, his parasol and himself bowing in tandem. "We must move on to our next voyage."

"If that is the case," Naomi spoke, "could you take me with you?"

Mr Mint opened his eyes wide. Rather than looking surprised, he appeared to be staring into the face of Naomi.

"You want us to take you with us?"

"Yes," replied Naomi. "Of course, I am not long for this world. ...However, I think that you already knew that?"

Mr Mint opened his eyes wider still, and gently nodded. ".....I did."

"Then I hope you will agree to take me with you."

Mr Mint turned to face his comrades. They all gently nodded.

He turned to speak to Naomi, "Ok, join me under my umbrella."

The pair looked as though they were sharing a kiss on a rainy day, or like a bat who had captured a butterfly. Naomi's body trembled.

When she emerged from under the mint green umbrella she held in her hand another singular parasol.

"From today, you will be Ms. Rose", said Mr. Mint.

Naomi opened a splendid rose coloured parasol.

The now enlarged group more colourful than before headed west on a small path past the orchard.

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"Naomi? Where are you?"

Marie's voice echoed throughout the old house, built in a traditional pre-war aesthetic. "Just how long do you plan on sulking for?"

The sound of the strong evening wind left Marie with a chill and as she looked out on the horizon she saw the breath-taking setting sun, which was casting a shadow on the shore. There, uncannily resembling a large bat with outstretched wings, a solitary violet parasol fluttered through the sky.

## Parasols

She'd painted them all: the pastel colors of the sea out beyond the coast, the deep evergreen forest, the fragrant orchard and the rose garden, the rays of brilliant light streaming among clouds at sunset and at daybreak, and the pallid moon set with crisp edges against the night sky. The old woman had captured each of the hues that filled that seaside retreat with their boundless radiance. She reproduced the scenes one by one, with great care and precision, as if scooping them right out of life itself. Yet the dotting of her brushes had begun to shift ever so slightly.

The shift came with the arrival of the parasols. They milled about the dunes, held in the hands of their elegant owners.

"There's something strange about them, all right," Mari, the housemate, said as she cleared the old woman's dishes from the table. "I can't imagine what kind of town they must call home. Grown men walking around with flashy things like that."

"Oh, what's so disagreeable about it, Mari? I think it's a lovely choice of fashion." As the old woman replied, her brush fleshed out a mint-colored umbrella set among the most recent landscape. "And besides, they're not all men, you know. There are women, too. I've even seen a few children, though certainly not many."

"And their faces are so pale," Mari continued. Her line of attack had already changed. "At first I thought it was just the parasols—reflections from those strange colors. But no! What on earth could they be eating to make themselves look like that? It's not natural."

"That's not a very nice thing to say."

"Heaven forbid they're part of some cult."

"Ah. Greetings, Naomi." A man holding a mint-colored umbrella peered in through the open window. "Tell me, what images grace your canvas today?"

At their visitor's appearance, Mari quickly turned and occupied herself elsewhere in the room.

Naomi stifled a laugh. "We were just discussing you and your friends, my dear Mister Mint."

"Oh, yes?"

"And as for the painting, I just couldn't resist any longer. I had to capture you all. See? Here's Mister Orange, Mister Blue, Miss Lemon, and Miss Violet, too."

"My, my. Truly remarkable work."

Mint's countenance softened. His face was white, as if smeared with the chalky clay soil of a vineyard. He twirled the mint-colored parasol under which he stood.

The parasol itself was a luxurious, great-canopied thing: the size of brolly an English gentleman might carry, always kept tightly rolled no matter how badly the weather threatened to drench its owner. Unfurled and in profile, it resembled the outstretched wings of a bat.

Yet, quite unlike that imagined Englishman, these parasol enthusiasts kept their own canopies perpetually open. They'd arrived abruptly the week before, taking over the majority of the rental cottages and only moving about within the shelter of their portable circles of shade.

"You said you'd been discussing us?"

"It was something my housemate brought up," said Naomi cheerfully. "You see, she's quite convinced that you must be the living dead."

They saw Mari's shoulders jerk upward and settle back down, but the housemate remained turned away.

"The living dead?" Mint repeated. He fell silent for a moment. His lips formed a broad smile before speaking again. "I'd say your housemate's humor has all the impact of a light April shower."

"I thought the very same thing," the madam replied with a mischievous grin.



"As you should have." Mint stifled a laugh of his own. "Well then, I'm afraid we must get back to our resting places. If you should have need to call on us, please don't forget a graveside offering. Some flowers, perhaps."

"How very like you!" Once the green umbrella and its owner had departed, Mari stormed back over. "How very like you, indeed! You're as stubborn now as you've always been!"

"It's because of who he resembles, isn't it?" Naomi replied. "A certain man we once knew, rest his soul. *That's* what has you so upset about my chats with our new visitor."

"Oh, now why'd you have to go and dredge that up?" retorted Mari. "It's ancient history. Besides, it's not like the man ever had any intention of marrying you."

"No thanks to your meddling."

"Heavens, Naomi. Why are you picking a fight about this now? It was decades ago!"

"The two of us could have reconciled. But *you* hid his letters. I found them, years later, strewn among the bottles of perfume and pressed flowers of your jewelry box. And by that time, he'd already..."

"Like I said. Ancient history."

"Quite so."

In a small voice, Naomi added, "He must be well into his next life by now."

"At any rate, that man with the umbrella certainly isn't him."

Satisfied she'd had the last word, Mari shifted her tone from that of housemate to skilled nurse. Years of experience reawakened, she announced, "Now, then. I think it's time for someone to take her pills."

Parasols swarmed forth from their cottages: Mint at the head, followed by Blue, Indigo, Orange, Lemon, Gold, Silver, Vermillion, and Peach. They arrived at a patch of green grass with a view of the sea, where they huddled and planted one lone umbrella in the ground. It was that of Violet. Each in the group faced it and gave a deep bow.

The old woman slowly made her way toward them. Sensing her presence, Mint turned. He nodded in greeting.

"Has something happened?" Naomi asked.

"You see now the reason we have stopped here," replied Mint. "Ours is a restless life. We travel from one location to the next, never tarrying long. Violet had grown tired of that existence. So we brought her here, to the place she was born and raised..."

"Oh." Naomi's head drooped. "I see. Then I suppose that means you'll be..."

"Yes." Mint and his parasol nodded once in unison. "We must soon resume our travels."

"Perhaps..." Naomi began. "Perhaps you might take me with you?"

Mint's eyes widened, not so much with surprise as with desire to examine her face more carefully.

"You...?" he asked.

"Yes. Me." Naomi responded. "I don't have much longer. I'm sure you could see that."

Mint's eyes widened again, and he nodded. "I could."

"Then please, take me with you."

Mint turned to his fellows. The other parasols slowly dipped in consent.

"Then you shall travel with us," Mint said, turning back to Naomi. "Come. Step under my umbrella."

To any observer, it was a kiss on a rainy day. To any observer, it was a butterfly snagged by a spider. Naomi's flesh shuddered under the mint parasol. When she stepped back out, she was holding a rolled canopy of her own.

"Henceforth, you shall be known as Rose."

Naomi spread her rose-colored parasol, and the group—with its newly added hue—began west along the orchard path.

“Naomi? Where are you?” Mari’s voice sounded throughout the old mansion. “Come now, haven’t you sulked long enough?”

The wind had grown stronger with evening, and Mari found herself a bit frightened by its howls. She glanced out the window, and there, just at the seam between sky and sea, a small shadow danced, interrupting the brilliant rays of sunset. Like a large bat with wings spread in flight, a single, violet-colored parasol elegantly circled its way through the sky.

**Parasol**

Masahiko Inoue

It was not just pastel color of the open sea in the distance. It was the greens of the deep forest, the fragrant orchard and the rose garden, too. It was the highlights on the clouds, seen when the sun both rises and sets, and the azure tint of a moon shining at its clearest...

Nature's immeasurable brilliance bathed the resort in all sorts of colors that, one by one, the old woman used on her canvas, so precise that it was as though she had dipped her paintbrush into the landscape itself. But recently, her motif began to change a little.

It was over amongst the sand dunes that the parasols of many elegant people could be seen.

"Those parasol-wielding fellows really *are* a suspicious-looking bunch."

The old woman was tidying away a few dishes when her companion spoke.

"From what city did they come pouring out? All these handsome men with such colorful parasols..."

"Well *I* think they all have rather beautiful taste. Wouldn't you agree, Mari?" the old woman replied, adding the final touch of paint onto a mint-colored parasol in the scenery of the canvas. "Besides, there aren't just men. There are also women and, even though you can't see them, children."

"If *that* is the actual tone of their complexions, it's not normal, I tell you," Mari added on a side note. "The color of their parasols...I thought they were just reflections of the light, but now that I think about it, I don't think they are...Those people...what on earth do they eat?"

"Oh, stop it. That's –"

"No. What if this is all part of some sort of cult? How terrifying would that be?"

"Why, good afternoon, Miss Naomi."

Suddenly, a mint-colored parasol appeared at the window. Under its shade, its owner repeated, "Good afternoon. What are you painting there?"

Mari drew back instantly.

Naomi giggled and said, "Your timing is excellent. We were just talking about parasols, Mr. Mint."

"Is that so?"

"Why, I just couldn't help but want to paint you all. Look here. Here's Mr. Orange and Miss Blue. There's Miss Lemon. And look, I even have Miss Violet."

"My, this is splendid work!"

Mr. Mint – whose real name Naomi had never asked for – smiled, his face as white as though it had been powdered with the chalky soil used at vineyards.

He spun the mint parasol around in his fingers.

It was in fact, not a parasol, but a Western-style umbrella where the canopy resembled the wings of a bat. An Englishman would coil the canopy around the thin shaft of the umbrella and clip it in place so that it could not open in times of no rain. But the people at the resort were always under the cover of open umbrellas.

It was last week that a few several cottages within the resort were suddenly rented out to the parasol enthusiasts.

"So...what sort of rumors are they saying about us?"

"Are you referring to the neighbors?" Naomi replied to Mr. Mint, playfully. "They wonder whether you all really *are* the living dead."

From behind, Naomi saw that Mari had turned around, her shoulders clearly stiffened up before lowering back down again.

"The living dead?" Mr. Mint was silent for a moment before his lips curled back into its big smile.

"Sounds like something someone would say as a prank on April Fools'."

"You think so?"

The old woman laughed mischievously. "Yes, I do think so."

Mr. Mint chuckled. "Well then, I'd better be returning to my grave now. If you ladies have time, be sure to drop by with a bouquet of flowers."

"You," As soon as the mint parasol disappeared from the window, Mari jumped out from the shadows in a rage. "You never change! You were always like this, even from before!"

"Well he does look like the dead man, doesn't he?" said Naomi. "You just don't like the idea of me talking to him. Admit it, Mari."

"Are you really going to bring that up again, Naomi?" Mari asked. "That was in past. And anyhow, it's not like *he* has any intention of marrying you."

"Stop meddling with other people's business."

"What's gotten into you, Naomi? Why on earth are you suddenly picking a fight now? That was who knows how many decades ago!"

"We had the chance to make up! But you had to go and hide that letter. You hid that letter in your jewelry box...with your perfumes and dry flowers. All mixed up together. And by the time you decided to take it out again, he had already--"

"That was decades ago!"

"I know," Naomi said quietly. "He had already become stranger to me long before then."

"In any case, you know that *that* man with the umbrella is not him." Then, with the voice of not a friend, but like a nurse with an expert sense of wisdom, Mari said, "Now, it's time for your medicine."

With mint leading, followed by ultramarine, indigo blue, bitter orange, lemon, gold, silver, vermilion, and peach and so on, the succession of parasols streamed out from the cottages. Making their way out onto the stretch of grass where the ocean could be seen, one parasol stood further ahead of the rest. It was the violet parasol.

As the old woman slowly walked towards the assembly, they each bowed their heads deeply. Sensing her presence, Mr. Mint looked over his shoulder and bowed slightly too.

"What's going on?" Naomi asked.

"We all came here for this reason," Mr. Mint answered. "You see, we are all originally of the traveling life. We cannot stay in one place. But...Miss Violet's life is wearing out. This is where she was born and raised, here on this land..."

"I'm sorry to hear that..." Naomi hung her head down. "Then, that means--"

"Yes." His parasol dipped as if in agreement with him. "I must continue on my journey again soon."

"If that's the case," said Naomi. "Can't you take me with you?"

Mr. Mint's eyes widened, but not because he was surprised. It was so he could fix his gaze properly on her face.

"You...?"

"I..." Naomi said. "I will not last much longer...you know that."

Mr. Mint, with his eyes still wide open, nodded. "...I know."

"Then, please."

Mr. Mint turned to face the others. The parasols nodded slowly.

“If that is what you wish…” Mr. Mint said to Naomi. “Then, come under my umbrella.”

The scene was like a kiss on a rainy day.

And like a butterfly caught in a spider’s web.

Under Mr. Mint’s umbrella, Naomi’s body trembled as though cold. In her hand was her own umbrella, one she had taken with her when she left to go outside.

“From this day forth, you will be Miss Rose.”

Naomi opened her rose-colored umbrella. With the addition of a new color, the group headed west along the path to the orchard.

“Naomi, where are you?” Mari’s voice echoed throughout the house. “Just how long do you plan to continue sulking?”

The evening was accompanied by the sounds of a strong wind. Mari, who had arrived a little too late, looked out of the window to the edge of the sky that was connected to the open sea. There in the distance, blocking a small portion of the sunset’s beautiful splendor, was the silhouette of something dancing about in the wind.

Like a great bat flapping its wings, the lone violet parasol twisted gracefully in the sky.

## The Parasols

Inoue Masahiko

The old woman's studio was filled with depictions of the beauty surrounding her resort home. She ever-so-gently captured their every splendour and radiance with each stroke of her brush: beautiful ocean scenes of pastel colours, endless evergreen forests, fragrant lemon orchards and rose gardens, the light dancing between ocean clouds as the sun sets, and the glow of the clear moon on a still night... These were her favourite subjects—until recently.

Her paintings had taken on a new theme ever since the parasols descended upon the sand dunes.

"Those parasol fellows don't sit right with me," her housemate muttered as she tidied up their dishes. "God knows where they came from. Do those men have no shame, prancing about with those colourful things?"

"I don't have a problem with it, Marie. It seems like a lovely pastime," responded the painter as she added the finishing touch to her landscape—a mint-coloured parasol. "And they're not just men, you know. There are women, and even a few children, too."

"Their complexions need medical attention if you ask me," Marie scoffed. "I thought it was just the light reflecting from their parasols, but no. What kind of diet gives you skin like that?"

"That's rude, my dear."

"Nonsense. What if they're some strange new cult? I get chills just thinking about it."

"Good day, Miss Naomi." The owner of the mint-coloured parasol poked his head through their open window. "What are you painting today?"

Marie quickly skulked away, but Naomi let out a gentle laugh. "We were just talking about your parasols, Mister Mint."

"Were you now?"

"Seeing all your colours inspired me. Look! Here's Mister Orange, Mister Blue and Miss Lemon, and here's Missus Violet."

"Goodness, that sure is something."

Mister 'Mint'—whose real name she never dared ask—smiled at her with a face as white as chalky vineyard soil. His fingertips gently twirled his parasol, which seemed less like a sun shade and more like the thin type of umbrella the Brits love to carry but never open, the type that sways like an upside-down hanging bat.

The parasol-fanciers had arrived last week, renting a handful of cottages. However, she had yet to see any of them outside the shade of their parasols.

"So, what's the talk about us?"

"Oh, my housemate is just concerned," Naomi grinned, "that you kind folks might be the living dead, or some such thing."

Through the side of her eye, Naomi glimpsed back to see Marie raise her shoulders in an angry huff.

"The living dead, you say?"

Time passed them by for a moment, until Mister Mint let out a loud laugh.

"What a horrible joke! Almost as bad as April showers!"

"Isn't it just?" Naomi let out a cheeky laugh.

"It certainly is," Mister Mint laughed back. "Well then, it's time for me to head back to the graveyard. Feel free to bring us some flowers."

"... I can't believe you!"

Once his parasol was out of earshot, Marie flew back in a rage. "Why must you always treat me like this!"

"We both know he happens to look like a certain deceased someone," Naomi said. "That's why you can't stand to see us talking. I know what's going on."

"Why do you have to bring that up, Naomi?" Marie returned, exasperated. "That's ancient history. And he probably had no intention of marrying you anyway."

"Perhaps one day you'll know when to keep your opinions to yourself."

"What's wrong? Why must you get so worked up over this? It was decades ago, Naomi."

"We could have patched things up between us. But you happened to steal that letter from us, hiding it away in your jewelry box with your perfume bottles and pressed flowers! By the time I found it, he had already—"

"It was decades ago, Naomi!"

"You're right," Naomi breathed. "... He had already been reborn."

"Well even if he had, he wouldn't have come back as a parasol man."

Putting on the airs of an overly-professional nurse, Marie changed her manner and spoke, "I think it's time for your medicine."

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Led by the mint-coloured parasol, a whole procession of colours spilled from their cottages: ultramarine, indigo, orange, lemon, gold, silver, crimson and peach, all slowly bobbing along. They stopped at a grassy green patch with the ocean at the horizon, and planted one of the parasols in the earth—a violet parasol.

By the time the old lady approached, each parasol-bearer was bowing their head in solemnity. Mister Mint turned around and gave her a nod.

"If it's not too rude, may I ask what's going on?"

"This is what we came here to do," Mister Mint spoke. "Our lives are those of eternal travellers. We can't ever stay in the same place for long. But Missus Violet grew tired of travelling. That's why we came back here, to her homeland, so we could—"

"I think I understand now." Naomi looked down at the grass below. "So, you're all...?"

"Yes." He nodded, and his parasol bobbed too. "We must leave again."

"In that case," She wavered, "would you be so kind as to... t-take me with you?"

His eyes grew wide, not from surprise, but as if he were carefully studying her face. "Are you...?"

"I'm—" She stopped. "I'm not long for this world, though I'm sure you already knew that."

He nodded thoughtfully. "I did."

"Please, do this for me."

He glanced towards his companions... And each parasol bobbed in gentle agreement.

"As you wish. Jump inside, my dear," he proposed.

It could have been mistaken for a chaste kiss on a rainy day—or a spider stealing the life of a butterfly ensnared in its web.

As if overtaken by a sudden chill, Naomi's flesh shuddered inside the mint-coloured parasol. When she emerged, she held a parasol of her own.

"From today onwards, you'll be our Rose."

Naomi opened her rose-coloured parasol.

With their new colour in tow, the rainbow palette headed down a trail through the orchard towards the setting sun.

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"Naomi? Where have you gone?" Marie's voice echoed through their empty mansion. "Surely you aren't still sulking...?"

A rush of the evening wind gave Marie a fright, and as she gazed up from the ocean to the sky above, she saw a most beautiful sunset—and a dark shadow dancing amidst its rays. Like a giant bat soaring through the air, a single violet parasol twirled up into the sky.