

Results of the 2019 Kurodahan Press Translation Contest

The scoring system was changed this year to reduce the load on the jurors, who donate their time free of charge.

As a result there are no scores this year for most people.

Ten finalists were selected from the received 70 entries by a special evaluator who was not involved in the final selection.

The three jurors were then asked to score those ten entries, and the highest score was the winner.

The winner this year Kenneth Weld of Florida, USA.

There was a tie for runner-up, Nos. 4 and 56 (there really should have only been one runner-up...).

The scores of all ten entries were:

3	39	
4	45	Runner-up
16	35	
18	35	
42	34	
43	48	Winner
44	42	
47	43	
56	45	Runner-up
68	40	

Thank you to everyone who participated this year.

It was a tough story, with different words for “I” used to signify age and gender of the speaker, and background information (details of the disaster, especially the school tragedy) was crucial. I was curious myself to see what sorts of translations would result, and we did indeed get some interesting ideas!

Hopefully we’ll see you all again for the 2020 prize.

Best,

Edward Lipsett

KHP



The 2019 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize

Kurodahan Press is pleased to announce the 2019 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize, awarded for translation excellence of a selected Japanese short story into English. The winning translation is planned for publication in an upcoming Kurodahan Press anthology, to be handled under a separate, future contract.

1. Eligibility

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

2. Submission

Send your translation to the below address, by regular postal mail or (preferably) email (use the contact form on the Kurodahan website).

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:

<https://www.kurodahan.com/wp/khpprize/2019prize.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 jurors, 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

「AIR」 by 瀬名秀明

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

The story is contained in the following collection of the author's work:

Title: 夜の虹彩

Publisher: ふしぎ文学館

ISBN: 978-4882934561

Amazon Japan URL: <https://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4882934566/?tag=kurodahanpres-22>

4. Application Deadline

Translations must be received no later than September 30, 2019, Japan time. An email confirming receipt will be sent. 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. In addition, we plan to publish the winning translation in a future Kurodahan Press book for an additional payment of 30,000 yen, to be covered by a separate contract (first English publication rights; translator retains all other rights).

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

Email submission is preferred, but snailmail submissions should be sent to:

Kurodahan Press

2305-9 Yunomae Machi

Kuma-gun, Kumamoto 868-0600 Japan

6. Notification

All contest entrants will be informed of the contest results. If you do not receive confirmation within a day or two, please contact us via the Kurodahan website Contact page. 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, but **the scoring system has been changed**. There were simply too many entries to continue our previous method. A small group of finalists will be selected from the list of all submissions by one juror, and only the translations of those finalists submitted to the selection jury (three different jurors).



Style Guide for Kurodahan Translation Contest Submissions

v5 of March 2019

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.

Please turn revision tracking off and get rid of all comments and revision information. **All revisions will be AUTOMATICALLY ADOPTED, and then all revision information and comments DELETED. Footnotes will be automatically deleted.**

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.

If you want to show blank lines between paragraphs, or indents on every paragraph, please define them in the Word paragraph style, so I can get rid of them all easily later.

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, paragraph formatting, etc.) will be stripped off (italics will of course be preserved) in favor of simplicity. The jurors will have to judge you on the merits of your translation and English usage, 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 (feel free to 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. Yeah, that's also boring, but we want to minimize accidents.

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 changing "Amaterasu" to "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 none of the jurors will even see 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!

きみは忘れないだろう。あの日、未来と出会ったことを。

あなたは忘れないでしょう。あの日にかけがえのないものと巡り合ったことを。

週末の冬の午後に、あの大地震と津波はやってきた。きみは黒い水が車道を遡り、果てしなく増えて迫ってくるのを見ただろう。避難して校庭に集まり、整列したまま座れの合図もなく、きみは立ち尽くして先生たちの混乱した状況を受け止めていた。

あなたはまだ小さくて、体育着姿で、手には縄跳びを持っていた。学校の裏手の道から近隣の人々が逃げてきて、やがてその向こうから津波がのつそりと、眠りから覚めた怪物のようにやってきた。たくさんのごみが泥水とともに接近してもなお、先生た

ちは動かなかった。あなたはひっくり返った自動車や、屋根だけになった住宅が、信じがたい運動をすることに目を奪われていたでしょう。時間は逆戻りしないと知ったのは、水嵩がどこまでも増えていくように減らないと気づいてからだ。ついに校長先生が拡声器で叫び、あなたは校舎へと駆け込み、階段を走って上った。

きみは三階の教室で、海の質量が襲ってくるのを見た。それは圧倒的な塊で、人は抗うことなどできなかった。空は薄汚れた灰色で、激しく粉雪が散り始めた。あまりに寒く、凍えそう、この世の終わりだときみは感じた。そのとき初めて泣き声を聞いた。振り返ると同じ教室に逃げ込んだ見知らぬ女子が、痙攣しながら嗚咽を漏らし、周りの人に抱えら

れていた。きみはその様子を見つめていたが、衝動を覚えて近くのノートを一枚破り取った。罫線の入った白紙を無言で折り、飛行機のかたちに仕立てて窓に向き直った。泥水はすでに学校の一階を呑み、国旗掲揚のポールは折れ、鉄棒にはワゴンカーが引つかかっていた。視界の隅には押し流されてゆく住民の姿が映っていたが、きみはきつく目を瞑り、そして大きく開き、怒りを込めて、世界へ向けて飛行機を放った。行け、行け、どこまでも行け。地震や津波なんかに負けずに行け。きみは心のなかで叫びながら、ましろな紙飛行機の行方を見つめた。翼の上にひとつ、ふたつと粉雪がぶつかり、やがて校庭の真上まで届いたとき、ついに掻き乱された風に煽られて、機体はきりもみしながら消えていった。そうしてきみの胸の内には、飛行機の慣性だけが残ったのだ。

そしてあなたには縄跳びが残った。千切れそうなほどの冷たさのなかで、あなたは無言で生きていった。救助の大人たちがやってきて、あなたは数え切れないほどのインストラクターメンを囁いたわ。大人たちは泥を掻き出し、いろいろなものを段ボール箱で持ってきてくれた。たくさんのまんがもあった

けれど、誰かの読み古した汚い本を恵んでもらっても嬉しくなかった。だからあなたは言葉を失ったまま、いつも校庭の隅でひとり、縄跳びをして遊んだ。なぜならそれはすべてを流されてしまったあなたにとって、たったひとつ遺された、かけがえのない自分のものだったから。

きみは支援の人が持ってきたつまらない玩具のなかから、ひと包みの折り紙を見つけた。きみはそれを大切に使った。ボランティアの医師が飛行機の折り方を教えてくれた。真四角の紙から折るだけでなく、一部を切り取って長方形にしてからつくる方法も。コツは前方に重心を寄せ、翼の後ろを少し反らせることだった。親も親戚も失ったきみは、汚泥を洗い流した体育館で飛行機を飛ばした。小さな児童が溺れかかった舞台の上に立ち、すべてを託してまっすぐに放った。つばさは空気を捉え、揚力を得て、体育館の端まで駆け上った。

あなたは決して忘れない。昨夜あなたの写真をウェブで見つけた。ほんの偶然的な検索で巡り合ったあなたは、とても姿が小さくて、わたしでなければわからないかったでしょう。泥や瓦礫で汚れた校舎に、ぬかるん

だ校庭。正門脇の二宮金次郎像は、本を持つ左手を失ったまま傾いていた。あなたは桜の木の下で縄跳びをしていた。手を伸ばした先まで浸かったはずの桜は、あなたの頭上で五分咲きだった。灰色の空の下でいのちを発し、それはモノトーンフィルムに彩色された息吹のように、ほんのり滲んで春の訪れを教えていた。あなたは古着のジャンパーを着ている。ひとり縄跳びに興じている。跳んでいるときだけあなたは孤独を忘れた。縄を跳ぶときだけ大地の縛りから解放された。大きな余震は続いており、あなたは夜中に何度も目を覚ました。背中が地球にくっついていて、震動が心を揺さぶった。身体が接している限り、あなたは地球の一部だった。だからあなたは縄跳びで、跳ぶ一瞬を幾重にも繋ぎながら、その身をひとりで癒していたの。

きみは校庭で飛行機を飛ばした。誰にもじやまされずに翼を追いかけた。地面の揺れは飛行機に影響を及ぼさなかった。空へ浮かぶ見えない力は、大地が震えようと消えなかった。だからきみは翼を見上げた。天は濁り、景色は単色に汚れて、だからきみの翼だけが折り紙の虹色だった。翼は永遠のものではない。ぬかるみに落ちたら紙は崩れる。きみは少しでも確かな大

地を探して、校庭の端へと飛行機を放ち——そうしてきみは出会ったんだ。
「やあ」といって名乗ったわ。
「こんにちは」とはにかみながら応えた。
「きみ、縄跳び、うまいね」
「それ、あなたの飛行機？」
それが、

初めて交わした、私たちの言葉だった。

きみは飛行機を差し出し、後ろに回って右手を支えた。翼を左右対称に、ほんの少しだけ上に向ける。あなたのかけ声で振りかぶった。機体は美しい航跡で飛んでいった。

「すごい、すごい！」と、あなたは笑った。

「縄跳びも教えてよ」と、きみも笑った。

「いっしょに飛ぶ？」

——そうしてきみは縄跳びに出会い——

——あなたは飛行機と巡り合ったの。

ぼくは決して忘れない。手元に一枚の写真がある。わずかに褪せたポラロイド写真だ。あのころはその場で自分のものになる、ポラロイドが何よりも宝物

だった。ポランティアの男性が、飛行機を飛ばすあ

なたを撮った。いま見るとあなたと呼ばれた少年は痩せて、髪は伸び、窮屈な殻に閉じこもっているように思える。だがぼくは知っている。利き足を前に出し、背筋を伸ばして振りかぶる後ろ姿のあなたは、あるとき確かに未来と繋がっていたのだ。フレームからは外れているが、正門近くの桜の下では、あの子がひとり縄跳びをしていた。もう少しであなたは手を止め、桜のほうへと目を向ける。紙飛行機の汚れを丁寧に払い、かたちを整えて両手で包む。一歩踏み出す直前のあなたを、この写真は捉えて届けてくれた。

そうよ、きみと呼ばれた少女は無心で跳んでいた。

言葉も、心も一瞬ごとに忘れて、縄のリズムと共に鳴っていた。でもあなたは休むたびに、あの子のことを思い出したでしょう。手元から飛び立った折り紙飛行機の強さを、胸の内に取り戻したでしょう。振り向けばそこにいるという、予感さえきみは覚えていた。それでもきみは振り向かなかった。縄跳びがきみを前に向かせて、地面に接するつま先を縛っていた。地球に触れているときのきみは、あと一歩の勇気がつかめなかったの。

きみは怖いのだね。

わかるわ。あなたは怖い。

だからぼくはいま声を上げる。写真に向けて、ありったけの気持ちを含めて。踏み出せ。前へ進め。きみのなかには跳ぶ力がある。

だからわたしはウェブのあなたにエールを送る。

あなたは振り返って、息を繋ぐことができる。あなたの吸い込む見えない空気は、あなたの翼に力を与える。

そうだ、進め。きみの背中を後押しする光が、いま輝く。

ああ、わたしはあの光を憶えている。あるとき不意に世界が明るくなり、わたしは縄を止めて大地に両足をつけ、空を見上げた。

ぼくはその輝きに目を細めた。掌で額を隠したが、そんなことは久しぶりだと気づいた。

ずっと灰色だった空の隙間から、目映い陽射しが降り注いだ。わたしは思わず顔をしかめ、その光を全身で浴びた。

ハレーションを起こした世界は、ゆつくりと色づき、暖かみを取り戻していった。ぼくはあのくつきり

とした影を憶えている。足下に目を落とすと影があった。ぼくを象^{かたど}った力強い黒い影があった。両腕を広げると影も腕を広げ、その手のなかにはぼくの折り紙があった。

大きな影が校庭を横切っていった。ローター音が鳴り響き、わたしは上空のヘリコプターを仰いだ。自衛隊が校舎の上を飛んでゆく。もっと厳しい被災地へと向かうために。もつとつらい人たちへ手を伸ばすために。

きみはヘリコプターの影を仰ぎ、そして静かに前を見据える。きみは彼女の姿を認める。

あなたは振り返り、彼が歩み寄ってくるのを認める。その手に折り紙飛行機があるのを見て、あなたは将来を確信するの。自分は飛行機のパイロットになる。翼の力でどこまでも飛んで、苦しむ人たちを助ける大人になるのだと。

まだ知らないだろうが、きみは縄跳びを生涯の友とするのだ。数え切れないほどの回数を、きみは縄で空気を切って跳び続ける。いくつもの技を学び、いくつものパフォーマンスを編み出して、きみはその身と大地にリズムを刻む。きみはたくさんの大会に出場するだろう。縄ひとつで世界に出て行くだろう。多くの素

晴らしい出会いがあるだろう。きみは縄跳びで世界中の人と語り合うのだ。その一步をいまきみは踏み出そうとしている。

もちろん翼は永遠ではない。人は大地から得たエネルギーで空を進む。いつかは翼も大地へと戻り、果てのない飛行はありえない。それでもあなたは空を飛び続けると決意するの。なぜならあなたは大地の子だから。すべてのあなたも、すべてのきみも、私たちは皆、この大地の子なのだから。

ぼくはきみに約束しよう。いつか必ずこの縄とともに、ぼくはあの子と再会しよう。ぼくにかげがえのないものを与えてくれた彼女を、ぼくはそのかげがえのない力で捜し出そう。きみがどこまでも行けるように、いまのぼくも遠くへ行ける。

桜の下のあなたにいま、わたしは胸を張って伝えられる。わたしは翼を広げてどこまでも行きましよう。ひとりでも多くの人を救うために、わたしは地平線を目指しましょう。大地を蹴って、いのちをこの手に抱き、明日もわたしは降り立ちましよう。その向こうにいつかきつと、あの子と出会えるときがくる。翼を覚えてくれた彼のもとへ、わたしは必ず辿り着ける。

さあ、行くがいい。あの先はきみの未来だ。

さあ、お行きなさい。あの光のなががあなたの未来。

いいとも、ぼくが請け合おう。空を跳び続けている限り、きみはあの日を忘れはしない。

そうよ、わたしを信じなさい。空を飛び続けている限り、あなたは未来を忘れない。

AIR

She'll probably never forget how, on that day, she met with her future.

He will probably never forget how, on that day, he met with something that would become priceless for him.

The earthquake hit in the afternoon of a winter weekend, bringing the tsunami with it. She saw the menacing dark water rising, flowing through the roads. After the general evacuation into the school garden, she had to stand there, still, in line with the others, looking at teachers who were too shocked to even tell everyone that they could sit down.

He was still a child, wearing his physical education uniform and holding a jump rope in his hands. People from the neighborhood flowed into the school from the back entrance, as the tsunami slowly crept over behind them like an ancient monster who had just woken up from its long sleep. Even as the muddy water, full of trash, inched closer, the teachers did nothing. He watched as the water turned cars upside down, tore the roofs off of buildings, and made these and other things move around in ways which he had never seen before. He realized that, in the same way that the water was flowing out of the sea without receding in the least, time, too, only flows in one direction. At last, when the headteacher started shouting orders into a megaphone, he ran into the school building and up the stairs.

From the window of a classroom on the third floor, she looked down upon the sea's rampage. It was immense, powerful, and unstoppable. Fine, powdery snow started falling from the bleak gray sky. Surrounded by the cold, freezing air, she felt as if the world was coming to an end. It was then that she heard the first of many crying children. She turned around and saw a girl she didn't know, who'd taken refuge in the classroom and who was now trembling and weeping. Looking at that girl being held up by several people made her feel a sudden, unexplainable urge. She grabbed a page from a ruled notebook close to her, silently folded the empty page into an airplane, and then faced the window. The muddy water had already engulfed the first floor of the school, the flagpole in the garden was bent in half, and a car was stuck into the playground climber. She saw people being washed away by the wave, but she shut her eyes off as tight as she could, opened them again, then loaded all of her anger onto the plane and sent it off flying out of the window. Fly. Fly. Fly to far away. Fly over the earthquake. Fly over the tsunami. While she looked at the path the white airplane was taking, she silently shouted words of encouragement to it. A snowflake hit the airplane's wings. A second snowflake followed the first. Finally, as it reached the schoolyard, the airplane got hit by a headwind and started spinning around, falling to where she couldn't see it anymore. The sound of the paper airplane cutting the air was the only thing left to echo inside her empty heart.

All he had left in his heart was rope jumping. He silently endured the harsh, violent cold. When adults came around with supplies, he ate one cup of instant noodles after the other. These adults had fought their way through the mud to bring boxes full of things. They had also brought a lot of comic books, but being handed down those old, beaten up things did not make him happy in the slightest. All he enjoyed doing was staying in a corner of the schoolyard, by himself, without speaking a word, jumping with his rope. Jumping helped wash away the tragedy. It was the only thing that he had left. It was priceless.

She looked through all the boring toys that the volunteers had brought and found a bundle of origami paper. She handled it with great care and had one of the volunteer doctors teach her how to fold paper airplanes. She learned that you can cut the square paper to make it rectangular and create narrower, longer airplanes. She learned that paper airplanes fly better if their center of gravity is closer to the nose and if you build little spoilers on the back of the wings. She had lost her parents and all of her relatives, and all that she could do was to stand in the school gym, now cleaned of all the mud, and fly her paper airplanes. She stood on the same stage where, not long ago, some younger children, trying not to drown, had barely managed to escape to. She loaded the airplane with all of her feelings and launched it straight forward, where its wings grasped the air creating lift, and propelling it to the other side of the gym.

I will never forget him. Last night, by complete chance, I found his picture on the internet. His figure in the picture was so small that I doubt anyone but me would have recognized him. The school had been defaced by the mud and debris, and the schoolyard was still wet. The statue of scholar Ninomiya Sontoku near the main entrance had lost its left hand, which used to hold a book in it, but still stood, albeit tilted, by

the school gates. He was rope jumping below a cherry tree which, despite having been hit by waves taller than he was, still had half of its petals. That lone stain of bright pink under the monochrome grey sky was the only shy greeting that the coming Spring could muster. He is wearing a worn-out jacket while enthusiastically jumping the rope by himself. Jumping made him forget about his loneliness, it freed him from the chains that he had to wear while on the ground. During the night, the earthquake's strong aftershocks woke him up over and over. Sleeping on the ground, with his back in contact with the earth, made the shocks travel right to his heart. As long as he is touching the earth, he is one with it. That is why he rope jumped, collecting short moments of freedom to alleviate his pain.

She was flying airplanes in the schoolyard. She ran after them, with nobody in her way. The airplanes were oblivious to how much the earth would shake. Earthquakes could not stop that invisible force keeping them flying, and that is why they were such an inspiration to her. As the sky turned grey, robbing all hue from the landscape below it, the colorful airplanes she made with the origami paper were the only glimpse of color. But wings cannot fly forever. When it falls onto the mud, the paper gets wet and the airplane can't fly anymore. Searching for a place where the ground wasn't as wet, she ended up flying her airplane to the edge of the schoolyard. And then, she ran into someone. She said hi and introduced herself. "Hi", that someone replied shily. "You are very good at rope jumping!", she said. "You're the one that made this airplane, right?", she was asked in turn.

Those were the first words that the two of us ever exchanged.

She gave me the airplane and walked behind me, taking my right hand into hers. She helped me keep the wings straight and the nose slightly pointed upward. At her signal, we launched the airplane together. It took off and flew away, drawing a beautiful path through the air.

Impressed with the flying airplane, he let out a laugh.

She also laughed and said, "teach me how to rope jump next!"

"Wanna jump together?"

And so she fell in love with rope jumping, and...

...he fell in love with airplanes.

I'll never forget. I still own that picture that one of the volunteers took. It's an old, almost discolored Polaroid. Back then, being able to get the picture as soon as you shot it was invaluable. You, that boy, her "he", had long hair and a thin, scrawny physique. More than a body, it looked like a shell out of which you wanted to escape. But in that picture, with your back straight, your arm held over your head, and one foot forward, you were taking your first step toward the future. The picture doesn't show her, but she was under the cherry tree near the school's entrance gate, rope jumping by herself. Just after the picture was taken, you stopped your hand and looked under the tree. You gently cleaned the dirt off of the airplane, fixed its bent wings, and delicately took it in your hands like a wounded bird. This picture showed me the very moment you took your first step toward the future.

You, his "she", was just jumping, and jumping, and jumping. You let go of all words and of all thoughts, one moment at a time, to the rhythm of the rope hissing through the air. But whenever you rested, you would think about him. All the strength that you had flown away on the paper airplane was now back in your heart. You knew that if you looked over your shoulder, he would be there. But you did not look. The rope jumping kept you looking forward, and it kept your toes from lingering on the ground. When your feet were planted on the earth, you just could not find the courage that you needed to take that first step.

She's scared, isn't she?

He is scared, is he not?

That's why I'm rooting with all of my strength as I look at this picture. Go ahead, take that step. She can make that leap. She has it in her.

That's why I am rooting for him as I see him on the internet. He can look back, and still be strong enough to look forward once again. The air that he breathes is the same air that lifts his wings.

Go ahead, don't stop. Let the light shining on your back push you forward.

Yes, I remember that light. All of a sudden the whole world was flooded with light. I stopped the rope and looked at the sky with both feet on the ground.

I squinted. I put my hand above my eyes to shield them from the light. I had almost forgotten what

light felt like.

Sunlight broke through the grey sky, showering us with its warmth. With my face scrunched up, I bathed in the light.

The blurred world slowly became warmer as it regained its color. I remember that shadow. I looked at my feet, and there it was, stark and black. It was my shadow. I lifted my arms, and my shadow did the same, holding in its hand the airplane that I had folded.

A large shadow swam on the ground across the schoolyard. When I heard the sound of the engine, I looked up to see the helicopter. The troops were flying over the school to bring their help where it was most needed, to help those who were suffering the most.

She looked at the helicopter's shadow and then silently looked in front of her. And there, she saw herself.

He looked back and he saw himself, slowly getting closer with the paper airplane in his hand. And that is when his future became clear to him. He would become a pilot. He would grow into a man who, with his wings, could fly to where there are suffering people in need of his help.

She didn't know it yet, but rope jumping will become her whole life. She'll cut through the air countless times, jumping with her rope. She'll learn a lot of complex techniques and create beautiful performances, with her body keeping the rhythm against the ground. She would enter many tournaments. She would travel the world with nothing but a rope. She would make a lot of wonderful friends and talk with people from many different countries. She's so close to taking that one step.

Of course, wings cannot fly forever. People need to take energy from the earth in order to fly through the sky. Sooner or later those wings will have to rest. No airplane can stay in the sky forever. But he is determined to keep on flying. Because he is one with the earth. He, and she, and I, and you, and everyone. We all are one with the earth.

I promise. One day, I'll take this rope and go meet her again. She gave me this force, this invaluable gift, and I'll use this gift to search for her. She can fly far away, to wherever she likes. And I, too, can fly just as far.

I can proudly say this to that boy under the cherry tree. With my wings, I will always travel. I will fly toward the horizon to save as many people as I can. With the world in my hands, I will jump and I will fight every day. And one day, I will find the boy who gave me my wings. I know that we will meet again.

Go ahead. Your future is in front of you.

Go ahead. That light is your future.

I'll guarantee you this one thing. As long as you stay in the air, you'll never forget that day.

There is one thing I am sure of. As long as you stay in the air, you will never forget your future.

AIR

You won't forget it, right: that day, that meeting with the future.

— *You wouldn't forget it, would you: that day's chance meeting with something irreplaceable.*

One afternoon on a winter's weekend, that massive earthquake and tsunami came. You must've seen the endless swell of black water pressing upstream on every road. Without even a signal to evacuate and gather in the schoolyard, to sit down in lined rows, you stood still in reaction to the teachers' chaos.

— *You were still young, clothed in sports attire as you held a skipping rope in your hands. From a road behind the school people in the neighbourhood ran forth, and soon behind them the tsunami came with impassive slowness, like a monster wakened from sleep.*

Yet even as that colossus of trash approached, carried by muddy water, the teachers did not move. Your gaze must have been stolen by that unbelievable movement of overturned vehicles, of houses that'd become mere roofs. The moment when you learnt that time knew no reversal was when you realised that the swollen water would keep rising boundlessly high without diminishing. Finally the school principal shouted over the loudspeaker, and you ran to the school building for refuge, rushing up the stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor, you saw the ocean's mass strike. That was an overwhelming enormity, one that man couldn't possibly fight. The sky was tainted thin with grey, and an austere powder of snow began to fall. So cold, almost freezing, that you felt this must be the end of the world.

That was when you first heard the sound of crying. On looking back, there was an unknown girl who'd run into the same classroom. She shook with the sobs that escaped her, as those around hugged her. You watched her, but recalling your impulse, you tore a page from a nearby notebook. Wordlessly, you folded the white lined paper into the shape of an airplane, and once again turned towards the window.

The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school. The pole from which the national flag flew had snapped, and a station wagon was caught on the iron bar. In a corner of your vision were residents being washed away by the water, but you squeezed your eyes shut. Then you opened them wide, launching that airplane out into the world and all your fury with it.

Go, go, far away and further yet. Go undefeated by neither earthquake nor tsunami. You shouted this in your heart as you watched the pure white paper plane go. Powdery snow hit upon its wings in small scatters. Just as the plane reached right above the schoolyard, it was finally blown by a wild wind, spiralling away and vanishing. Then all that was left in your heart was the inertia of that plane.

— *Then you were left with the skipping rope. In that near-cutting cold, you lived on, wordlessly. The rescue adults arrived, and you slurped uncountably many cups of instant noodles. The adults raked away the mud and brought you all sorts of things in cardboard boxes. There was lots of manga, too, but there wasn't any happiness in being donated someone's grimy and dog-eared books. That's why you, still lost for words, were always skipping rope, playing alone in a corner of the schoolyard. Because for you, who'd had everything washed away, that was the only remnant, the one thing that was irreplaceably yours.*

Among the boring toys that the relief crew had brought, you found one package of paper for folding. You used that with great care. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold paper planes; even a method that began not by folding the square paper, but by first cutting away part of it and leaving a rectangle to fold with. The trick was to move the centre of gravity forward and bend the ends of the wings just a little. You, who'd lost both your parents and relatives alike, flew paper planes in the gymnasium with its wash of sludge. Standing atop that place where little children had drowned, you entrusted everything as you sent them flying straight

out. Wings catching the air, they found lift, and flew right to the end of the gymnasium.

— *I definitely shan't forget you. Last night, I found a photo of you online; stumbled upon you in a random search. You were so very small, and no one would've recognised you but me, surely. A school building stained with mud and debris, amidst a schoolyard sloppy with mud. The statue of the diligent thinker Ninomiya Kinjiro by the main gate leaned to one side, having lost his left hand with its opened book.*

You had been skipping rope beneath a cherry blossom tree. The blossoms that should've come down to where one's hands could reach were only half-bloomed above you. A burst of life beneath the grey sky, like a breath of colour into monochrome film, telling ever so faintly of spring's coming. And you, wearing a second-hand jacket, absorbed in skipping rope alone.

Only in those moments of jumping, you forgot the loneliness. Only when jumping over the rope were you freed from the ground's bindings. The major aftershocks had continued, awakening you countless times in the middle of the night. Whenever your back was pressed up against the earth, the tremors shook your heart. As long as your body was touching the earth, you were a part of it. That's why by skipping rope, and connecting a moment's jump to the next and the one after that, you healed that body alone.

You flew planes in the schoolyard. Chased after those wings, undisturbed by anyone. The ground's shaking affected nothing of the planes. The invisible power that bore them skywards didn't vanish even when the earth trembled. So you looked up at the wings. The sky was muddy with clouds, the scenery stained to monochrome, so your wings were the only paperfolds of rainbow colour. The wings were not eternal. If it fell into the mud the paper would crumble. Searching for ground that was even a little more certain, you sent a plane flying towards the end of the schoolyard... and thus, you met.

— “Wah!” an exclamation, then introductions.

“Hello,” a bashful answer.

“You're good at skipping rope...”

“Is that your plane?” —

Those were *our* words, that we first exchanged.

You held out the plane, turned around and supported your right hand. The wings were turned ever so slightly upwards, symmetrical on both sides. Raised it aloft — at *your* shout. The plane flew in a beautiful arc.

— “Wow, amazing!” you laughed.

“Teach me to skip rope too!” you also laughed.

“Let's fly together?” —

And thus you met the skipping rope...

— *...thus, your chance meeting with planes.*

I definitely won't forget. I have one photo with me, a slightly-faded Polaroid. Back then, a Polaroid had been an unmatched treasure, as something that could become yours right then and there. A volunteer man had snapped a photo of you flying a plane. Looking at it now, you — the boy I call *you* — were skinny, with hair growing long, looking as if you'd shut yourself away in a tight shell.

But I know. In this photo of you from behind, with your dominant foot forward and your back extended high; you were definitely connected to the future in that moment. It wasn't in the frame, but under the cherry blossoms near the main gate, *that girl* had been skipping rope alone. Just moments later, you would halt your hands, and turn your gaze towards those blossoms. Would carefully clean the dirt off the paper plane, fix its shape and envelope it in both hands. This photo had captured that you, from the instant right before you took one step

forth.

— *That's right, you – the girl I call you – had been jumping innocently. Forgetting it all in every moment, words and heart both, resonating only with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you rested, you recalled that boy, didn't you. And in your heart you regained the power of that folded paper plane which had flown out from his hands. You even remembered the premonition that he'd be right there if you turned around. But even so, you didn't turn around. Skipping rope made you face forward, and the tips of your toes were bound where they contacted the ground. When you were touching the earth, you couldn't grasp the courage for that one more step.*

You must've been scared.

— *I know. You were scared.*

That's why I raise my voice now. Towards the photo, putting all of my feelings into it. Step out. Move forward. In you there is the power to jump.

— *That's why I cheer in support for you, over the web. You can turn around and live on. The invisible air that you breathe deep gives power to your wings.*

That's right, onwards. The light supporting you shines now.

— *Yes, I still remember that light. In that moment the world suddenly brightened, and I halted the rope, both feet firm on the ground as I looked up at the sky.*

I squinted in that brightness. Shaded my eyes with a palm against my forehead, realising how long it'd been since I had last done so.

— *From the gaps in the always-grey sky, a dazzling torrent of sunlight shone forth. Unconsciously I scrunched up my face, bathing my whole self in that light.*

The white-haloed world slowly took on colour and regained warmth. I still remember that distinct shadow. When I looked down at my feet, the shadow was there. A jet-black shadow painted in my shape. When I spread out my arms the shadow spread them too, and within one of those hands was my paper plane.

— *A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. At the echoing sound of rotors, I looked up at the helicopter high in the sky. The nation's armed forces flying across, above the school building. For the sake of reaching someplace even more severely hit by disaster. For the sake of extending a hand to people suffering even worse.*

You gaze up at the helicopter's shadow, then quietly set your gaze forward. You look steadily upon her profile.

— *You turn around, and look steadily on as he walks closer. On seeing the folded paper plane in his hand, you will believe firmly in the future. Believe that you will become an airplane pilot; become an adult who can fly however far on with the power of wings, to help people in suffering.*

Surely you don't yet know, but you'll make rope-skipping a lifelong friend. Countlessly many times you will keep jumping, cutting the very air itself with your rope. Learning dozens of techniques, devising dozens of performances, you shall carve out a rhythm between your body and the ground. Undoubtedly you will appear in many a tournament, will go out into the world with one rope, will have so many splendid encounters. For you'll speak to people all across the world, through the skip of your rope. And now you are about to make that first step.

— *Of course, wings are not eternal. Mankind moves forth in the sky with energy harnessed from the ground. Even wings will return to the ground someday, and unending flight is impossible. Despite this you will resolve to keep flying in the sky. Why? Because you are a child of the earth. Because all of you — and all of you, too, — we are children of this earth, all of us.*

Let me make a promise to you. Someday, without fail, let me meet that girl once again, along with this rope. She who gave me something irreplaceable; let me find her with that same

irreplaceable power. Just like how you can go anywhere at all, I can go now too, however far.

—— *Towards you beneath the cherry blossoms, I can now say with pride. By spreading my wings, I'll go anywhere, however far. For the sake of saving even one more person, I'll aim for the horizon itself. Breaking away from the ground, holding my life in these hands, I'll land firmly tomorrow, too. And on the other side of it, surely, someday, the time will come when I can meet that boy again. I'll definitely be able to find my way to him, he who taught me these wings.*

Well then, go on. Beyond that lies your future.

—— *Well then, go forth. Within that light is your future.*

Oh, and let me assure you. For as long as you keep jumping through the sky, you shan't forget that day.

—— *Yes, trust me. For as long as you keep flying through the sky, you will not forget the future.*

Air

I know you'll probably never forget it. Meeting your future that day.

I know you'll probably never forget it. That chance meeting with something indispensable that day.

On a winter weekend afternoon, that great earthquake and tsunami came. Surely you saw the black waters coming, spilling up over the road, unending and vast. You fled to the schoolyard, all lined up with no one to tell you to sit, and you stood there, simply accepting the state of panic that the teachers were in.

You were still small, dressed in your gym clothes with a jump rope in hand. The people living nearby had fled into the schoolyard from the road behind the school, and from behind that, the tsunami came, limbering, like a monster rising from its long slumber. And despite all the trash and the mud that encroached upon us, the teachers did not move. You must have been transfixed by the inconceivable way in which overturned cars and houses that were now just roofs moved. When you realized that the waters would not recede, would only rise, rise, and rise, that's when you knew that there was no going back from this moment. At last, the principal shouted into a megaphone, and you ran into the school building, racing up the stairs.

You saw the great depth and breadth of the ocean rise up in violence from a classroom on the third floor. A sheer overwhelming shape that humans simply could not fight. The sky was a pale and dingy grey, and from it, powder-light snow began to fall in a rage. It was so cold, so cold you felt you would freeze, so cold it felt like the end of the world. It was then that you first heard someone cry. When you turned to look, an unfamiliar girl who had fled into the same classroom as you was convulsing, body racked by sobs, in the arms of those around her. You watched her for a moment, but were then struck by something and rushed to rip a single page from a nearby notebook.

Silently, you folded the lined white paper, turned it into a plane, and then turned to face the window. The brackish water had already consumed the first floor of the building. The flagpole was bent, and a small van was stuck on the metal pole. In the far corners of your vision, the bodies of people being pushed and swept under appeared, but you shut your eyes tight and then pushed them wide open, unleashing your plane into the world with fury. Fly, fly, fly to the ends of the earth. Rise above the earthquakes and tsunamis of this world and fly. This you shouted in your heart, watching the bright white paper plane as it flew. One snowflake and then another hit the wings of the plane, and when it was directly over the schoolyard, it was heaved upward by a surge of wind, and then, in a great downward spiral, vanished from sight. Having vanished, it left only the nature of planes to remain in your heart.

And for you, jump rope remained. In a cold that threatened to cut you to ribbons, you silently kept on living. Grown ups from rescue teams came and you sucked down more instant ramen than you could ever count. The grown ups shoveled away the mud and brought you many things in cardboard boxes. There was alot of manga, but you weren't particularly happy to be given someone else's worn and dirty old comic books out of pity. That's why you always jumped rope, alone in the corner of the schoolyard, still unable to find your words. Because when everything else was swept away from you, that was the only thing that remained, the one precious thing that was yours.

Of all the dull playthings that the volunteers brought, you found a single pack of origami paper. You treasured that paper. A doctor who came as a volunteer taught you how to fold a plane. And not just how to fold one from the square origami paper, but how to cut off a piece and fold one from a rectangle shape too. The trick was to put the weight on the front of the plane and to slightly curl the backs of the wings upwards. Having lost your parents and relatives, you flew paper airplanes in the gym that had been washed of all the muck and mire. Standing on the stage where small children nearly drowned, you put everything into that plane and threw it even and straight. The wings took on air, gained lift, and soared all the way to the end of the gym.

I will never forget you. Last night, I found your picture on the internet. You were so small then, in the picture I found on a random search, so small that I'm probably the only one who would recognize you. That school building filthy with muck and debris, the muddy schoolyard. The slanted

statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō, the self-made scholar, still missing his left hand to hold his book. You were jumping rope under the cherry blossom trees. The cherry blossoms, once mired in mud high above where you could reach, were half way in bloom over your head. The ever so slightly blurred blossoms told of the coming of spring like a single, technicolor breath on a black and white film, radiating life under the grey skies. You're wearing a second-hand jumper. Just enjoying skipping rope by yourself. Being in mid-air was the only time you could forget that you were all alone. Jumping rope was the only time you were free from the binds of the earth. Strong aftershocks continued, waking you up over and over in the middle of the night. When your back was stuck to the earth, the tremors shook your heart. As long as your body was flush with it, you were an inseparable part of the earth. And that is why by jumping rope, by connecting all those moments together in mid-air, you were healing yourself.

You were flying paper airplanes in the schoolyard. Chasing its wings without anyone to get in the way. The shaking of the earth had no effect on the plane. No matter how much it shook, that invisible power which made the plane float into the sky didn't vanish. And that's why you looked to its wings. The sky was muddled, the backdrop tainted monochrome, and that's why your wings and your wings only were a rainbow of origami paper. Wings don't last forever. When paper falls into mud and mire, it loses its shape. Looking for even the smallest bit of solid ground, you let your paper airplane fly to the end of the schoolyard--that is where you met.

"Hey," I said, telling you my name.

"Hi," you replied sheepishly.

"You're really good at jumprope."

"Is that your plane?"

Those were

the very first words

that we spoke to each other.

You held out your plane to me and then steadied my right hand from behind. Balance the wings evenly, then tilt it slightly upwards. On your mark, I let it fly. The plane flew on a glorious path.

"I can't believe it, wow!" you said, grinning.

"Teach me to jump rope," you said, grinning too.

That's how you were introduced to jump rope for the first time
and how you found airplanes.

I will never forget. There's a single photograph that I have. It's a polaroid picture, color slightly faded. Back then, polaroids meant more than anything in the world because they became yours right then and there. One of the volunteers, a man, took a picture of you flying your paper airplane. Looking at it now, the boy who was once you is thin, hair unkempt, seeming somehow trapped in shell much too tight. But I know the truth. Back to the camera, with your dominant leg out in front, posture perfect and poised to throw, at that moment, without a doubt, you were connected to your future. And outside of the frame, under the cherry blossom tree near the main school gate, they were jumping rope all by themselves. In a moment, you'll stop and turn your eyes to the cherry blossoms. You'll brush the dirt from the paper airplane, adjust the shape, and wrap it in both your hands. This picture caught you then, delivering to you the very moment before you took that step forward.

That's right, the girl who was once you was immersed in jumping rope. With each jump, forgetting her words, her heart, in time with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you stopped, you would remember him. You took the strength of that origami plane as it left your hand back into your heart. You even felt it, like if you looked back, it would be there. But you didn't look back. The jump rope forced your eyes forward, planting your toes firmly on the ground and in place. With your feet on the ground, you couldn't find the courage to take the next step.

You're scared, aren't you.

I can tell. You're scared.

That's why I raise my voice to you now. To your picture, with every single thing that I feel inside. Take that step. Move on. You have the strength to fly inside you.

That's why I'm cheering you on from behind my computer screen. You can look back, can keep

breathing. That invisible air that you breath gives strength to your wings.

That's right, go forth. The light that pushes you forward shines now.

Oh but I remember that light. When, unexpectedly, the world brightened. I stopped jumping rope and with both feet on the ground, I looked up at the sky.

I squinted at that light. I held my palm up over my forehead and then realized it had been so long since the last time I had done that.

From a slight break in the ever-grey skies, a brilliant ray of light spilled down. My face scrunched itself up and I bathed my entire body in that light.

In its halation, the world slowly regained its color and its warmth. I remember that sharp shadow. When I looked down at my feet, there was a shadow; a powerful black shadow that took my shape. Stretching out both of my arms, the shadow does the same, and in his hand is my origami.

A large shadow drifted across the schoolyard. The sound of a rotor roars and I looked up at the helicopter above me. The Self-Defense Force is flying above the school. Flying toward places hit much harder by the disaster. To help those who are suffering so much more.

You looked up at the shadow of the helicopter, and then quietly looked straight ahead. You acknowledged her then.

You looked back, acknowledging him as he walked towards you. Seeing the origami paper airplane in his hand, your future is set. You will become an airplane pilot. You know that you'll fly anywhere and everywhere with the power of those wings and become someone who helps those who are suffering when you grow up.

You probably don't know it yet, but you will make jump rope a lifelong friend. Cutting through the air, you'll keep jumping, jumping so many times you can't even keep track. You'll learn tricks and come up with routines, creating a rhythm with your body and the ground. You'll probably go to competitions; venture out into the world with just one jump rope. Meet so many wonderful people. Through jump rope, you'll talk to people all over the world. The very first step to all of that is the very step you're trying to take right now.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People move through the sky with the power that they get from the earth. Someday the wings will return to the earth; unending flight is simply not possible. Despite all this, you are still resolved to keep flying. The reason being that you are a child of the earth. All the yous and all the mes, all of us: we are all children of the earth.

Let me make this promise to you. Someday, together with this jump rope, I will meet her again. I will find her, the girl who gave me this indispensable thing, with that irreplaceable power. Just like you are free to go to the ends of the earth, now I too can go far.

I can say this to the you that stood under those cherry blossom trees now with my head held high. I'll spread my wings and fly to the ends of the earth. I'll aim for the horizon to save as many people as I possibly can. Kicking off the earth and holding life in the palm of my hand, tomorrow I will land again. And it's there that I'm certain I'll meet him again. I'll reach him, I know I will, the boy who taught me about wings.

Now go. Your future is just ahead.

Go forth. Your future is inside that light.

I'll heed that call and I'll wager you this: as long as you keep flying, you'll never forget that day.

That's right, trust me. As long as I keep flying, you won't forget the future.

AIR
SENA Hideaki

I know you will never forget how you discovered your future that day.

I know you will never forget how you encountered something invaluable that day.

The great earthquake brought with it the tsunami, that wintry afternoon, on a weekend. You would have watched as the inky waters gushed up the roads, swelling without end. You had evacuated to the school grounds with everyone else, watching the chaos that reigned among her teachers. With no instructions to line up or sit down, you found yourself simply standing around.

You were still a small boy. Dressed in your gym clothes, you had in your hands a jump rope. Residents flooded in from the school's back entrance, and before long the tsunami followed them in like a titanic monster that had just awoken from its slumber. Even as the mass of debris approached, transported by murky waters, the teachers remained unmoving. You would have been captivated by the sight of upturned cars and houses with only their roofs still visible performing gravity-defying acts. You might have believed that time itself was moving backwards, had you not realized that the body water was expanding, with no signs of subsiding at all. When the principal finally shouted orders through a megaphone, you ran into the school building and up the stairs.

You watched from the third-floor classroom as the contents of the sea plundered the land. Its overwhelming mass left humans at its mercy. Powdered snow fell mercilessly from the dreary gray skies. It had been so cold, to the point of freezing, that you had felt like the world was ending. It was then that you first heard a sob. You turned to find that a girl you didn't know had taken refuge in that same classroom. The girl was sobbing and shivering, and was being cuddled by those around her. You were struck by an impulse. You tore a piece of paper from a notebook nearby, and wordlessly, began to fold the lined white paper in the shape of an airplane, before turning back to the window. The mucky waters had already engulfed the entirety of the first floor. The flagpole was bent, and a van had been washed up against the pull-up bar. From the corner of your eye you could see townspeople being swept away by the currents, but you closed your eyes, before opening them again wide and, with all the rage you could summon, releasing the paper airplane into the world. *Go, fly, anywhere but here. Fly away, unhindered by the earthquake and the tsunami,* you screamed in your heart as you tracked the flight of the white paper airplane. A snowflake collided with its wing, then two, until a burst of demented wind blew it off course just as it flew right over the school grounds, and it spun wildly out of sight. Just like that, all that was left of the plane, in your heart, was its inertia.

And all that you had left was your jump rope. You lived on wordlessly in the biting chill. The adults from the rescue squad had come, and you had been slurping up countless cups of instant noodles. The adults had dug through the mud and brought in cardboard boxes full of various things. Amongst them had been lots of comic books, but you could not find it in yourself to feel happy at being provided with dirty, second-hand books. Thus, unable to communicate in words, you often retreated to a corner of the school to jump rope, all alone. It was the only thing you had left, an invaluable possession that had not been swept away like everything else had been.

You found a single packet of colored papers among the otherwise uninteresting toys that the volunteers had brought you. These you used sparingly. A volunteer doctor had taught you how to fold paper airplanes. You learned not to fold them using square papers but to cut off a section and turn it into a rectangle before folding it. The trick was to shift its center of gravity forward by turning the ends of the wings up slightly. Having lost your parents and relatives, you flew paper airplanes in the gymnasium newly rinsed of mud.

You stood on top of the stage where a child had almost drowned before and entrusted your everything into the planes you sent straight forward. Their wings caught air, gaining lift, and soared into the far corner of the gymnasium.

You will never forget. Last night, I found a photograph of you on the web. I am perhaps the only one who can recognize your very small form in that photo I had chanced upon in a random search. In the picture, the school buildings were filthy with mud and debris, and the school grounds gunky. Beside the main gate, a statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro lay on its side with his left hand missing, the book it had been holding gone along with it. You were jumping rope beneath the cherry blossom tree. The flowers on the tree, which should have been shoulder-deep in water, were in half bloom above your head. That spark of life in the lifeless gray skies bled into the monochrome photograph like a breath of color, signaling the advent of spring. You were wearing a used jacket, and enjoying yourself as you jumped rope alone. Only when you jumped did you forget your loneliness. Only when you jumped were you free from the earth's bonds. You would often wake in the middle of the night as the violent aftershocks continued. When your back was pressed to the earth, those tremors would make your heart jolt. As long as you were connected to the earth, you were a part of it. Jumping rope allowed you to spend moment after moment in the air, allowing you to heal.

You sent an airplane flying in the schoolyard. No one stopped you as you chased after its wings. The quakes on earth exerted no influence on the airplane. The forces keeping the plane in the air did not disappear however the earth shook. For this reason, you looked up at its wings. In the foul, monotone scenery that accompanied the turbid sky, your wings alone bore the rainbow colors of the colored paper. Those wings were not everlasting. Once they landed in the sludge, the paper dissolved. In search of relatively dry land to fly your planes, you came to a corner of the school grounds. It was there that you met him.

"Hey," you said, and introduced yourself.

"Hello," you replied bashfully.

"You jump well."

"Is that your airplane?"

Those were

the first words

that we had exchanged.

You presented him the airplane, before moving behind him to support his right arm. Together, you positioned the plane so that it was laterally symmetrical but angled slightly upwards. On his cue, both of you swung the plane forward. The airplane cut through the air in beautiful flight.

"Wow, cool!" You exclaimed, laughing.

"Teach me how to jump rope too!" You joined in on the laughter.

"Want to jump together?"

That was how you discovered rope-jumping,

and how you encountered airplanes.

I will never forget. I have this one photo—a slightly faded, monochrome, instant photograph. Back then, I had cherished instant photography more than anything, for the photos became my own right there and then. A volunteer had taken that photograph of the boy flying airplanes. As I study the picture, I see that the boy's frame is slight, and his hair grown out, as though he has been trapped in a constricting shell. His back is to the camera, and he has his dominant foot forward, his spine straight mid-swing. Yet I know that time moved for him beyond that photo. Outside the frame, under the cherry blossom tree near the main gate, there would be a girl jumping rope. In just a moment, he would

stop flying airplanes and turn to look in the direction of the tree. He would gently clean the paper plane of dirt, fix its form, and cradle it in his hands. This photo captured and immortalized him the moment before he stepped forth.

Indeed, she had been engrossed in jumping. Moment after moment, she had forgotten her words and her cares, focusing only on keeping rhythm with the rope. Nevertheless, he probably remembered her every time he took a break. He probably retrieved the folded airplane he had sent flying, restoring it to its optimal form close to his chest. It was a premonition that he would be there, if she only turned around. Even so, she did not. Her rope-jumping kept her facing forward, binding her toes that touched the ground. When she was touching the ground, she could not garner the courage to take that step.

She was scared.

I understand. He was scared.

That is why I now raise my voice and shout, with all I have, at the photograph of her: Take that step. Move forward. You have the power to jump inside you.

That is why I cry out to him, inside the picture on the internet: you can turn around and take your next breath. The invisible air you breathe in is the same air that gives your wings the power to fly.

Go on, move forward. There is a light shining behind you now, giving you a push.

Yes, I remember that light. Back then, the world had suddenly brightened. I stopped jumping, planted my two feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I narrowed my eyes at its brilliance. I lifted a hand to my forehead, then realized how long it had been since I last did that.

From cracks in the gray skies, rays of dazzling sunshine streamed. I winced involuntarily even as my body basked in the light.

Color and warmth slowly returned to the irradiated world. I remember the sharp shadow that had been cast on the earth at my feet—a strong, black shadow, shaped like me. When I lifted my arms, the shadow had followed, one of its hands holding my folded airplane.

A large shadow passed over the school grounds. Hearing a loud rotor noise, I looked up to see a helicopter high in the sky. The Self-Defense Forces flew over the school, headed for areas affected even worse by the disaster—headed there to lend a helping hand to those who were suffering even more.

You looked up at the shadow of the helicopter, then silently turned to look forward at her.

You turned around to see him walking towards you. Gazing at the paper airplane in his hand, you made a decision. You would become a pilot in the future. You would grow up and become an adult who can fly anywhere and help anyone in need, armed with the power of wings.

You do not know it yet, but rope-jumping will accompany you for the rest of your life. You will keep jumping, cutting through the air with your rope countless times. You will learn many tricks and choreograph many performance routines, carving a rhythm using your body and the earth. You will then compete in many tournaments. You will go and see the world, armed only with a single piece of rope. You will have many memorable encounters, converse with people around the world thanks to rope-jumping. At that moment, however, you were only trying to take the one step to that future.

Your wings are, of course, not everlasting. Humans soar through the skies with energy they have received from the earth. Eventually, those wings would have to return to earth; eternal flight is impossible. In spite of this, you were determined to keep flying. Why? Because you are a child of the earth. Each and every one of her, each and every one of him—each and every one of us is a child of the earth.

I shall make you a promise: someday, together with my rope, I will see you again. I

will seek the girl out with the invaluable power she had given me. I can now go far, just like you can go anywhere.

I can now proudly tell the boy under the cherry blossoms: I will spread these wings and go as far as they will take me. I will aim for the horizons, aiming to save as many people as I can. I will take off from the earth, cradling their lives in my arms, and descend back to earth the next day. And someday, after all this, I will meet you again. I will reach the boy who had taught me about these wings.

Go. Your future is just ahead.

Go. Your future is within that light.

Very well, I guarantee that for as long as I am jumping, you will never forget that day.

Yes, believe me when I say that as long as I am flying, you will never forget the future.

AIR by Sena Hideaki

You will never forget the day you met your future.
And you, you shall never forget that you chanced upon something dear that day.

On a wintery afternoon during the weekend, the country was hit with a large earthquake and tsunami.

You watched the approaching black water as it endlessly filled and rose up the road. You stood, standing in line without any instruction to sit after evacuating and gathering in the schoolyard, and took in the confusion of the teachers.

And you, you were still small, clutching onto a jump rope in your gym clothes.

Residents from the neighborhood came running for safety from a road at the back of the school. Soon, the tsunami slowly flooded in from the opposite direction like a beast awakening from its slumber. Despite the immense amounts of garbage piling up in the muddy waters, the teachers did not move a muscle.

You were captivated by the incredible movements of bicycles being toppled over and homes with nothing but their roofs. You knew that time wouldn't reverse once you realized that the water wasn't decreasing at all, but was instead increasing. Finally, the principal shouted into the loudspeaker. You rushed into the school and up the stairs.

In a classroom on the third floor, you watched as a mass of water descended upon the school. It was an overwhelming mass that mere humans were unable to defend against. Powdery snow began to fall heavily from the dirty gray sky; in the freezing cold, you sensed the end of the world.

It was then that, for the first time that day, you heard a cry. You turned to see a stranger that had taken refuge in the same classroom, sobbing as she shook uncontrollably. She was being held by the people around her. You stared at them and, with a sudden urge, ripped a piece of paper from a nearby notebook. Silently, you folded the white lined paper into a paper airplane and turned to the window.

The muddy water was already flooding into the first floor of the school, breaking the school flagpole and causing a minivan to catch onto the iron pole. In the corner of your eyes, residents were being swept away by the water. You tightly closed your eyes, then opened them wide and furiously launched your airplane into the world.

Go, go, go to the ends of the earth. Don't yield to the earthquake and tsunami, just go.

Shouting this mantra in your mind, you watched the paper airplane fly. One, then two pieces of powdery snow fell onto its wings. It soon flew above the schoolyard, eventually flapping in the restless wind before disappearing as it spun. And so, only the momentum of the airplane was what remained in your heart.

And, for you, your jump rope was all you had left. You wordlessly existed in the tingling cold. The rescue workers came and went. You inhaled innumerable amounts of instant ramen as adults scraped away the mud and brought various things in cardboard boxes. There were stacks and stacks of comic books, but you didn't even feel happy with being presented with someone else's dirty, worn books. That was why, with a loss for words, you were always jumping rope by yourself in a corner of the schoolyard. For you, who had everything swept away, that was the only important belonging you had left.

You found a single packet of origami among the boring toys brought by the disaster relief group. You used it very carefully. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold a paper airplane, not only teaching you how to fold it from square-shaped paper, but also how to make one after cutting the paper into a rectangle. The trick was to bring the center of gravity to the front and slightly bending the back of the wings.

Having lost both your parents and relatives, you threw your airplane in the gymnasium,

washed of its grime, alone. Standing on a stage that nearly sunk under the weight of the water was a small child placing all her trust in a straight flight. Its paper wings caught onto the air, gaining lift, before it soared to the back of the gymnasium.

I won't ever forget you.

Last night, I found a photo of you on the internet. The you that I had discovered in a mere coincidental search was awfully small. Had it not been me, no one would have realized that it was you.

School buildings dirtied by debris and a muddy schoolyard. The statue of the studious Ninomiya Kinjiro near the main gates was tilted and missing its left hand that held a book. You were jumping rope underneath the cherry blossom tree. The tree, which must have been soaked to the tips of your outstretched arms, was partially in bloom above you. It gave the image life under a gray sky, like a breath painted by a monotone film, blurred slightly, and told of the coming of spring. You were wearing an old jersey and entertaining yourself by jumping rope. Only when you were jumping into the air did you forget your loneliness. Only when the rope leapt up from the ground were you released from the limits of the earth.

Large aftershocks continued into the night, waking you up several times. Your back clung to the ground; heart shaken by its tremors. As long as it was touching your body, you were one with the earth. Thus, you healed your own body while jumping rope again and again, connecting with each and every moment.

For you, you flew your paper airplane in the schoolyard. Without anyone hindering you, you chased after its wings. The tremors in the ground had no effect on the airplane, the unseen power that allowed it to stay suspended in the air not dissipating despite the shaking of the ground. So, you look up at its wings. The sky was dull, the scenery blotted with a single color. Only your wings were the rainbow color of the origami paper. But wings are not everlasting objects. The paper would crumble if it were to ever fall into the mud.

You were searching for even the slightest bit of secure ground to fly your paper airplane to the edges of the schoolyard when we met.

"Hey," you said and introduced yourself.

"Hello," I bashfully responded.

"You're good at jumping rope."

"Is that your paper airplane?"

Those

were the *first* words

we exchanged.

You extended the paper airplane forward and supported it with your right hand. It was slightly turned upwards to give the wings symmetry. And with your shout, it flew into the air, traveling a beautiful trail.

"Wow, that's so cool!" I grinned.

"Teach me how to jump rope," you smiled.

"Want to jump together?"

Thus, she came across the jump rope.

And he happened upon airplanes.

I will never forget. In my hand, I have a single photo; a slightly faded polaroid photo. A polaroid was the most treasured object at the time because it was yours then and there. A male volunteer had taken a picture of you flying a paper airplane. Seeing it now, the young boy I called "you" was thin with long hair, as if you were withdrawn into a tight shell.

However, I know. You, the view of your straightened back as you stepped forward with your arm high in the air, were certainly connected to your future back then. Not shown in the frame was a young girl jumping rope by herself underneath the cherry blossoms by the main

gate. In a few seconds, you would stop what you were doing and look towards the cherry blossoms. You would carefully brush off the dirt from your paper airplane, fix its shape, and cover it with both hands. This photo was taken the moment before you stepped forward, then sent to me.

That's right, the young girl I called "you" had been absorbed in jumping. Forgetting both your words and thoughts in each moment, you resonated with the rhythm of the rope.

But you, the young boy, remember her every time you lie to rest. In your heart, you've regained the power in the folded paper airplane flown from your very hands.

You even had the feeling that if you turned, he would be there. And yet, you didn't look back. You swung your jump rope to your front and brought your toes together on the ground. On the ground, you didn't have the courage to take the step forward.

You're scared.

I understand. He, too, is scared.

That is why I raise my voice, placing all my feelings into that photo. Take that step forward. Move forward. You have the power to leap.

That is why I am sending you my support through the internet. You can look back and live on. The invisible air that you're breathing will give you power in your wings.

Yes, move onwards. The light pushing your back is shining.

Oh, I remember that light. The world had suddenly brightened then. I stopped the rope, placing both feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

My eyes narrowed at its brilliance. I shaded my forehead with my palm, then realized how long it had been since I did such a thing.

We were drenched in gleaming sunlight that slipped from the crevices of the continuously gray sky. I instinctively grimaced, bathed entirely in that light.

The world in halation slowly changed colors and regained its warmth. I remember that clearly defined shadow that appeared when I looked down at my feet. It was a strong, black shadow shaped like me. When I stretched my arms, so did my shadow, and in my hands was my folded origami.

A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. The sounds of a rotor echoed in the air. I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky; the Japan Self-Defense Forces were flying over the school, traveling to more severely disaster-stricken areas, to extend a hand to the less fortunate.

You looked up at the helicopter's shadow, then quietly stared in front of you, acknowledging her presence.

You looked over your shoulder, nothing him approaching you. Seeing the paper airplane in his hand, you were confident of your future. You would become an airplane pilot. You would become an adult, endlessly flying with the power of your wings, to help those that were suffering.

You don't know it yet, but you will make the jump rope your lifelong companion. You will continue to jump, cutting through the air countless times with your rope. You will learn many skills and invent many performances, engraving a rhythm into your body and the earth. You will go on to compete in many tournaments and venture out into the world with a single rope. You will have many wonderful encounters. You will converse with people from around the world through jumping rope. Now, you are attempting to take that one step forward.

Of course, wings are not forever. Humans travel the skies using energy from the earth and someday your wings, too, will return to the earth. An endless flight is inconceivable.

Despite that, you are determined to continue flying through the skies. Why? Because you are a child of the earth. All of you are children of this land.

Let's make a promise. Someday, I will meet her again with this rope. I will find the girl that gave me something precious with an irreplaceable strength. I, too, can go the distance as I am now, just like how you can go on forever.

To you, standing under the cherry blossoms, I can puff out my chest and tell you: that I will spread my wings and go wherever they'll take me. I'll aim for the horizon to save hundreds of people, even alone. Kicking off the ground with my life in my hands, tomorrow, too, I shall land. Surely, someday, the time will come when I will meet him again on the other side. I will make my way to him, the person that taught me about my wings, no matter what.

Come, you should go. Ahead is your future.

Go on now, your future is in the light.

Yes, I guarantee it. You will remember that day as long as you continue to jump in the air.

That's right, believe me. As long as you continue to fly through the air, you will never forget the future.

Air
Sena Hideaki

He won't forget the day he found his future.

She won't forget the day she caught hold of something irreplaceable.

The massive earthquake and tsunami came on a winter afternoon at week's end. He saw the black water climbing up the road, endlessly swelling, chasing. Evacuees gathered at the school, still standing in rows because they had not been signaled to sit; he stood motionless and watched the overwhelmed teachers.

She was still small, wearing her PE uniform and holding a jump rope in her hand. People from the neighborhood fled up the road behind the school, and before long the lumbering tsunami followed them, like a monster woken from sleep. Mountains of debris encroached along with the muddy water, but the teachers made no move. She couldn't tear her eyes from the improbable movement of a capsized bicycle and a house reduced to only its roof. When she realized that this great volume of water wouldn't fall, that it would continue its boundless advance, she knew there was no turning back time. At last, the principal screamed into a megaphone, and she rushed headlong into the school building, racing up the stairs.

From a third-floor classroom, he watched the ocean's mass make its attack, an overwhelming crush that no one could withstand. The sky was a lightly sullied grey, and powdery snow began to fall hard. In this cold so bitter it might freeze him, he felt it was the end of the world. That's when he heard the first cries. Turning around, he saw people holding a girl, a stranger to him, who had fled into the same classroom and was now wracked with violent sobs. He gazed at the scene but then, on an impulse, tore a page out of a notebook lying nearby. Silently folding the lined white paper, he formed it into an airplane then faced the window. Muddy water had already gulped down the school's first floor. The flagpole was bent, a wagon caught on its iron rod. Unmoored houses floated in the corners of his vision; he shut his eyes tight, then opened them wide and let the plane fly, hurling his anger at the world. Go, go, to the ends of the earth! Go beyond the reach of even earthquakes and tsunami! His heart screaming, he followed the progress of the pure-white paper plane. One snowflake, then two, hit the top of its wings, and when it was nearly right above the schoolyard, its little frame was tossed in the churning wind and, tail-spinning, disappeared. Only the plane's inertia remained lodged in his chest.

She was left with a jump rope. Amid a chill so fierce she felt it would tear her to shreds, she silently lived on. Rescue workers arrived, and she wolfed down more instant ramen than she could count. The adults raked out the mud and brought various things in cardboard boxes. Although these included a number of comics, being bestowed with someone's worn-out, grubby books didn't make her any happier. So she, still lost for words, always jumped rope alone in a corner of the schoolyard. Everything she knew had been washed away, and the rope was all that was left, irreplaceable because it was the only thing that was hers.

He found a pack of origami paper among the boring toys brought by the aid workers. He used it with care. A volunteer doctor taught him how to fold it into paper planes. Not only a method for the original origami squares but also one that involved cutting off a piece to make the paper rectangular. The trick was to bring forward the plane's center of gravity and to bend the ends of its wings a little. In the school gymnasium, newly cleaned of sludge, this boy who had lost all his family flew planes. From atop the gym's stage, where a small child had drowned, he let them go. Sailing straight forward, the plane's wings caught the air, lifting it all the way to the far side of the gym.

There's no way she could forget. Last night, I found a photo of her online. I came across it purely by accident, and her figure was so small that I bet only I could have recognized her. The photo shows the school building, dirtied with grime and debris, and the muddy schoolyard.

Beside the main gate stood a tilting statue of philosopher Ninomiya Sontoku; it was missing its left hand, which had held a book. She was jumping rope underneath the cherry tree. Although it must have been submerged as far as she could reach, its buds were opening above her. The faint hues of new life blended into the grey sky like a breath of color on black-and-white film, heralding the coming spring. She was wearing a second-hand jacket. Alone, she diverted herself by jumping rope. Only when she was jumping could she forget her loneliness. Only when she leaped over the rope was she released from the ground's tethers. The large aftershocks continued, snapping her eyes open in the dead of night countless times. With her back pressed against the earth, the tremors shook her to her core. As long as her body touched it, she was part of the earth. But as she weaved together small moments of weightlessness with her rope, she began the solitary process of mending.

He flew his plane in the schoolyard. Without getting distracted by anyone, he chased after its wings. The ground's tremors had no effect on the plane. The invisible power that lifted it through the air didn't disappear when the earth shook. So he raised his eyes to its wings. The sky was murky and the landscape stained monochrome, so only his wings contained an origami rainbow. But wings don't last forever. The paper broke down if it fell into the sludge. He looked for even a small patch of safe ground, then let fly his plane toward the edge of the schoolyard – that's where he found –

“Hey.” An introduction.

“Hello.” A shy reply.

“You're great at jump rope.”

“Is that your airplane?”

Those were

the first words

we exchanged.

He proffered his plane then moved to stand behind her, supporting her right hand. Ever so slightly, he pointed the plane's nose upward, keeping its wings even. She called “Ready?” then wound up and threw. The plane's frame flew with a beautiful slipstream.

“Wow, amazing!” she said, smiling.

“Teach me jump rope too,” he grinned back.

“Want to play together?”

That's how *he* found jump rope –

– And *she* discovered airplanes.

There's no way I could forget. I have one photo, a slightly faded Polaroid. Back then, the Polaroid was my most precious treasure, something I could call my own. A volunteer took the photo of you flying your paper plane. Looking at it now, the skinny, long-haired boy she called “you” seems to have locked himself away inside a rigid shell. But I know the truth. The photo shows you from behind, winding up your throw, back straight and dominant foot thrust forward; in that moment, you were reaching out to your future. Although she is out of frame, the girl was jumping rope by herself under the cherry tree near the main gate. Moments later, you paused and looked toward the cherry. Carefully brushing off the paper airplane's dirt, you adjusted its form and held it in both hands. The photo reminds me of the boy you were just before you took that step forward.

That's right, the girl he called “you” was jumping, focused. The tumult of words and feelings were cleared from her mind with every leap, in perfect resonance with the rope's rhythm. But every time she took a break, she remembered the boy. The strength she had found when the origami airplane took wing from her hand remained lodged in her chest. You even remembered the feeling that if you turned around, he would be there. But even so, you didn't turn. The jump rope compelled you to face forward, tying your toes to the ground. While you were touching the earth, you couldn't muster the courage to take that step.

He was scared.

She was afraid. I understand.

That's why I'm calling out now to the little boy in the photo, with all my heart. Take that step. Go forward. Inside him, he has the strength to jump.

That's why I'm cheering on the little girl I found online. She can turn with uninterrupted breath. The invisible air she gulps down will give her wings their strength.

That's right, go on. The light has begun to shine, the light that will nudge him forward.

Ah, I remember that light. The world suddenly brightened; I stopped the rope, planted both feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I narrowed my eyes against the brilliance. As I shaded my face with my open palm, I realized how long it had been since I had last done so.

A dazzling ray of sunlight poured down from a crack in the ever-grey sky. Unconsciously, I screwed up my face, my whole body bathed in light.

In this natural halation, the world slowly regained color and warmth. I remember the shadows' sharp relief. I lowered my gaze to my feet, and there mine was. It sketched my form, strong and dark. When I stretched out my arms, the shadow did so too, my origami in its hand.

A large shadow crossed the schoolyard. Amid the rotors' roar, I raised my eyes to the helicopter above me. It was the Self-Defense Forces flying over the school building. They flew to help an area hit even harder by the disaster, to stretch out their hands to those in even worse trouble.

He looked up from the helicopter's shadow, then, quietly, ahead. There she was.

She turned and noticed him walking toward her. When she saw the origami airplane in his hands, she understood her path forward: to become a pilot and save those who are suffering, strong wings carrying her to the ends of the earth.

Although he doesn't know it yet, he will make jump rope a lifelong companion. He will keep jumping, slicing through the air with his rope more times than he can count. Learning techniques and devising performances, he will beat a rhythm between his body and the ground. He will enter many competitions, a single rope taking him around the world. So many wonderful experiences await him. Through jump rope, he will speak together with the world's people. Now he is about to take his first step.

Of course, wings aren't forever. People push into the sky with energy they received from the earth. Eventually, even wings return to the ground; there is no such thing as an endless flight. Even so, she resolved to keep soaring into the sky. Because she is a child of the earth. Because all of you, all of *us* are children of this earth.

I will make him a promise. Someday, rope in hand, I will see that girl again. She gave me an irreplaceable strength, and I will draw on it to find her. Just as he can go anywhere, now I too can journey far.

Now I can proudly tell her, as she jumps under the cherry tree. I will spread my wings and go as far as I can. In order to save as many people as possible, I will aim for the horizon. I will kick off from the ground with lives in my hands, then alight again on the morrow. The day will surely come when I can see that boy again. I am certain that, at long last, I will reach the one who gave me my wings.

Come, it's time to set out. Little boy, your future lies ahead.

Now, go on. Little girl, your future is shining bright.

No problem, I'll give it my all. As long as he's leaping toward the sky, he won't forget that day.

That's right, you can count on me. As long as she's soaring through the air, her eyes will be fixed on the future.

AIR by Sena Hideaki

You'll never forget, will you. That day when you encountered the future.

You will never forget, will you? That day when you met with something irreplaceable.

On that wintery, weekend afternoon the great earthquake and tsunami came. You would have seen the limitless black water surging up the street. You evacuated to the playground, but made no sign to sit in a line, rather standing motionless and watching the confusion of the teachers.

You were still small, wearing your gym clothes, and in your hand you held a jump rope. From the street behind the school people of the neighborhood came to take shelter, and soon the tsunami came lumbering from the same direction, like a monster awakened from its slumber. Large amounts of garbage mixed with the muddy water approached, and yet the teachers did not move. Watching the incredulous movement of the overturned cars and roofs torn from their houses must have fascinated you. When you realized that the water volume was increasing and not receding, you knew time would not go back. Finally, the principal yelled on the loudspeaker, and you ran into the building and up the stairs.

In a classroom on the third floor you watched as the mass of sea hit. It was an overwhelming mass, and people were powerless to fight against it. The sky was a slightly ashen color, and a powdered snow began to fall violently. It was too cold, and you felt you would freeze to death. Then, for the first time, you heard a cry. Turning around you saw a girl you didn't know who had sought refuge in the same classroom; convulsed with sobs, she was being held by those around her. Keeping an eye on that scene, on impulse you tore a sheet of paper out of a nearby notebook. Silently you folded the ruled paper, made an airplane, and turned toward the window. The muddy water had already submerged the first floor of the school and the flagpole was bent, a car impaled on it. Out of the corner of your eye you saw the bodies of residents who had been swept away, but you shut your eyes tight, opened them wide, faced the world and furiously threw the plane. Go, go, go as far as you can. Go, and never mind earthquakes or tsunamis. While yelling this in your heart you watched the progress of the white paper plane. Onto the wings fell one or two snowflakes, and soon it flew directly above the playground, where it was blown about by a chaotic wind before finally disappearing in a tailspin. Only the airplane's inertia remained in your breast.

And for you the jump rope remained. In the biting chill you kept silent. Rescue adults arrived, and you slurped down countless helpings of instant noodles. The adults scraped away the mud and brought some things in a cardboard box. Though there were lots of comics, you were not happy to receive someone's dirty old books, even if they were donated. So, while keeping silent, you played jump rope alone in a corner of the playground. This was the only precious thing left that was truly yours; everything else had been swept away.

From among the boring toys brought by support workers you saw a pack of origami folding paper. This you treasured. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold an airplane. Not just ones folded from a perfectly squared piece of paper, but a way to tear off a piece and make it from a rectangle as well. Move the balance to the front, and bend the back of the wings slightly. You, who had lost parents and relatives, flew the plane in the gym, which had been cleaned of sludge. A small child standing on the waterlogged stage, you put your all into it, and launched it straight. The wings caught the air, gained lift, and flew to the end of the gymnasium.

You will never forget. Last night I found a picture of you on the Web. By a chance search I came across you, your figure was very small, and surely nobody else but me would have known it was you. There was the schoolhouse, dirty with mud and debris, and the muddy playground. The statue of the sage Ninomiya Kinjirō next to the front gate was tilted to its side, having lost its left arm which usually holds a book. You were skipping rope under the cherry tree. The cherry blossoms, which should have filled your outstretched hands, were only half open above

your head. They began life under that ashen sky, and like a breath colored by monotone film blurrily told of the coming of spring. You are wearing an old jacket. Playing jump rope by yourself. Only when jumping rope did you forget your loneliness. Only when skipping rope were you freed from the bonds of the earth. The great aftershocks continued, and you awoke countless times at night. With your back close to the earth, the vibrations jolted your heart. As long as your body was connected to it, you were a part of the earth. So, by jumping rope, by repeatedly clinging to that moment of the jump, you were healing your body by yourself.

You flew the plane on the playground. Bothered by no one, you ran after its wings. The tremors on the ground had no effect on the plane. The unseen power that soared into the sky did not vanish as the earth made to shake. So you looked up at the wings. Because the sky was muddy, the view a sullied monochrome, only your wings were a rainbow of origami. Wings are not something eternal. If they fall in the mud the paper crumples. In search of just little bit of ground you let it loose toward the edge of the playground—and there the encounter took place.

You introduced yourself with a “Hey!”

“Hello,” you answered shyly.

“You’re pretty good at jumping rope.”

“Is that your airplane?”

Those were the first words—we—exchanged.

You held out the airplane, supporting the right side from behind. The wings were symmetrical, and it faced up slightly. You gave a shout and raised it above your head. The plane flew, leaving a beautiful wake.

“Wow! Great!” I said, and you laughed.

“Teach me how to jump rope, too” I said, and you also laughed.

“Shall we fly together?”

In that way one met the jump rope—and the other encountered the airplane.

There is no way I will forget. In my hand I have a single picture. It is a polaroid, slightly faded. I got it back then, and it was more valuable than anything. A male volunteer took it of you launching a plane. Looking at it now you as a boy are skinny, with long hair, and one might think you’re shut up in a tight shell. But I know. The back of your figure, strong leg forward, back straightened, hands lifted above your head, you were connected with the future. It’s out of the frame, but under the cherry tree near the front gate, that child was skipping rope alone. After a bit you pause and look in the direction of the cherry tree. You carefully brush the dirt off the paper plane, fix the body and hold it in both hands. The picture captured you right before you took a step forward.

That’s right, you, that little girl, were absorbed in your jumping. Words, feelings, all were forgotten in the moment as you resonated with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you took a break, you thought of him, didn’t you? The strength of the paper airplane taking off was restored in your breast, wasn’t it? You felt that if you only turned around he would be there. But you did not turn around. Jumping rope kept your face forward, and the tips of your toes tied to the earth. When shaken by the earth you could not grasp the courage to take that final step.

You are scared.

I know. You are scared.

That’s why I’m calling out to you right now. Face the photo, and with all your feeling step forward. Go forward. You have the power to jump within you.

That’s why I am sending a message to you on the Web. You can look back and live. The unseen air you breathe in gives power to your wings.

Yes, go forward. The light that supports you from behind shines now.

Yes, I remember that light. At that moment the earth had suddenly brightened, and I

stopped the rope, put both feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I narrowed my eyes at the light. I shaded my forehead with my palm, and realized that it had been a while since I had done so.

From a crack in the sky that had been completely ash colored a dazzling light poured down. Without thinking I grimaced, my whole body bathed in the light.

Having given rise to a halation, the world slowly turned color and recovered its warmth. I remember that distinct shadow. Dropping my eyes to my feet there was a shadow. It was a strong, black shadow shaped like me. If I stretched my arms the shadow also stretched, and in its hand was my origami.

A big shadow cut across the schoolyard. There was the sound of a rotor, and I looked up at a helicopter above. The Self-Defense Forces fly over the school. They are headed toward a worse disaster area. They are going to help people who are more in need.

You face the helicopter's shadow, and quietly stare in front of you. You recognize her figure.

You turn around, and see him walking toward you. You see that he has a paper plane in his hand, and you have confidence in the future. You will become a pilot. You will grow up to be someone who helps others, and will fly anywhere on the strength of wings.

You probably don't know it yet, but the jump rope will be your lifelong friend. You'll cut through the air and jump an infinite number of times. Learning any number of techniques, devising any number of performances, you'll keep time with the rhythm of the earth. You'll enter many competitions. With one rope you'll go forth into the world. You'll encounter many wonderful things. Through jumping rope you'll meet and talk with people all over the world. You're about to take the first step.

Of course, wings are not eternal. People fly through the sky with energy they take from the earth. At some point the wings also return to the earth, there is no perpetual flight. Nevertheless, you are resolved to continue flying in the sky. Because you are a child of the earth. All you boys, all you girls, all of us are children of this earth.

I'll make you a promise. At some point, with this rope, I will meet that child again. She who gave me something irreplaceable, with that irreplaceable strength I will find her. Just as you can go anywhere, I can go far as well.

To you under the cherry tree, I can tell you proudly now. I will spread my wings and go someplace far. Even alone, in order to help many people I will aim for the horizon. Kicking off the ground, seizing life in my hand, I will land tomorrow. And at some point, on the other side, surely I will be able to meet him. No matter what, under he who taught me to fly I will get there.

So go. In front of you is the future.

Go ahead. In the light is your future.

I'll make you a promise. As long as you continue to jump, you'll never forget that day.

Yes, trust me. As long as you continue to fly, you will not forget the future.

AIR
Hideaki Sena

You won't forget. That day, that meeting with the future.

You won't forget, either. Chancing upon that irreplaceable item.

One winter weekend afternoon, the great earthquake and tsunami came. You must have seen the black water come up the roadway, more and more of it drawing ceaselessly near. Everyone took refuge in the schoolyard, but the teachers were in total disarray, and never gave the signal to sit down, so you stood there in line until you were exhausted from it.

And you, you were still small, and in your gym uniform, holding a jump rope. The neighborhood residents fled down the road behind the school, and eventually, from beyond that, came the tsunami, sluggish, like a monster awakened from its slumber. Even with all that muddy water and trash drawing near, the teachers still didn't move. Your eye caught on the implausible movement of upturned cars and homes that had been reduced to just the roof. You realized the waterline was rising and rising and never going down, and you knew you couldn't turn back the clock. At last, the school principal called out through the megaphone, and you rushed towards the school building, racing up the stairs.

In the third floor classroom, you saw the hulking sea come to attack. Such an overwhelming mass, no human could resist it. The sky was a thin, dirty, ash color, and clumps of powdered snow began to fall. It was too cold, almost freezing, and you felt like it was the end of the world. That was the first time you heard someone crying. When you turned around, a girl you'd never seen before, who'd fled into the same classroom, was sobbing convulsively, and being held by the people around her. As you watched the scene, you felt an urge, and ripped a page out of a nearby notebook. You folded the white, lined paper silently, forming it into the shape of an airplane, and then you turned back to the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the school's first floor, and the pole that normally held the national flag had folded, a minivan caught on the iron rod. In the corner of your vision, you could see people being washed away, but you shut your eyes tight, and then open them wide, pouring all your anger into that airplane, turning to the world and releasing it. Go, go, fly forever. Don't lose to some dumb earthquake or tsunami. You called out to that pure white paper airplane in your heart, staring intently at it. One clump of the powdered snow, two clumps, knocked into the wings, and although the plane made it to a point directly above the schoolyard, eventually it was shaken by an upsetting wind, and the fuselage disappeared in a tailspin. Only the inertia of the airplane remained in your heart.

You, though, lived silently in that freezing cold, so icy it almost seemed to julienne you. The rescue adults came, and you slurped on instant ramen that almost seemed endless. The adults scrapped off the mud, and carried things out in cardboard boxes. There was even a bunch of manga, but who would be happy to be blessed with a load of dirty books someone else had already read. That's why you were always in the corner of the school yard by yourself, not speaking, playing jump rope. Everything had been washed away, and you had only one thing left to you, something your own, something irreplaceable.

And you, you found a pack of origami paper among the boring toys the aid people brought. You used it with such care. The volunteer physician taught you how to fold a paper airplane. Not just from a perfect square, either, but also how to make them by cutting off one section of paper to form a long rectangle. The trick was to bring the center of gravity forward, to turn the wings back just a little. You'd lost parents and relations both, and you flew the airplane in the gym after it had been rinsed of the dirty mud. Standing atop a stage where small children had drowned, you entrusted everything to that plane and sent it off in a perfectly straight line. The wings grabbed the air, generated lift, and raced all the way to the other end of the gym.

You'll never forget, either. Last night, I found a photograph of you on the web. It really

was just a coincidence. You're so very small in that photo, and if I hadn't been there myself, I might not have realized. The school building filthy with mud and rubble, the slushy school yard. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjirou, scholar, beside the front gate was leaning, having lost its left hand, the one that holds his book. You were playing jump rope under a cherry tree. The tree must have been submerged all the way as far up as your hand could reach, but it's all five-pointed blossoms above your head. It sent out rays of life under that ash-colored sky, telling of the arrival of a spring that barely seeped through the cracks, like a breath of color on monochrome film. You're wearing a hand-me-down windbreaker. You're amusing yourself with the jump rope, by yourself. Only when you jumped over that rope were you set free from the bonds of the earth. Major aftershocks followed the initial earthquake, and you kept waking up in the middle of the night again and again. With your back glued to the earth, the vibrations shook your heart. As long as your body was in contact with the ground, you were a part of the earth. That's why you jump, layering each jump over the last, healing that body on your own.

You, on the other hand, flew your airplane in the school yard. You chased after those wings without anyone getting in your way. The swaying of the earth's surface had no effect on the airplane. The invisible power keeping it up in the sky didn't suddenly disappear when the ground seemed to shiver. That's why you kept your eyes on those wings. The heavens were muddy, the scenery monochromatically dirty, but your wings, only your wings, were an origami rainbow. But wings aren't eternal. When they fall into the quagmire, the paper collapses. You search the certain earth for just a minute, and then release the plane towards the end of the school yard -- that's how the meeting occurred.

"Wah!" you said, and introduced yourself.

"Good afternoon," you answered, being shy.

"You're good at jump rope, huh."

"Is that your airplane?"

That,

the first exchange,

our first words.

You offered the airplane, then turned and leaned on your right hand. You turned the wings up symmetrically, just the tiniest bit. You held the plane aloft at your shout. The fuselage flew, leaving a beautiful wake behind it.

"Amazing, amazing!" you said, and laughed.

"Teach me jump rope, too," you said, laughing too.

"Should we fly together?"

And thus you met the jump rope--

--and you happened upon the airplane.

I never will forget. I have a photograph in my hand. A barely faded polaroid. It was given to me on that day, in that place, a polaroid that became my greatest treasure. A male volunteer snapped a picture of you flying the airplane. Looking back now, this boy I've been calling "you" is so skinny, his hair stretched long, someone might think he'd been locked away in a tiny shell. But I know. Viewed from behind as he puts his dominant foot forward and stretches his back muscles, holding the plane aloft, he was surely connected to the future in that moment. It's outside the frame, but under the cherry tree near the front gate, the other kid is jumping rope alone. In just a little while, your hands will stop, and your eyes will turn towards that tree. You'll gently shake the dirt from the paper airplane, adjust its shape, and cup it in both hands. That moment just before you take that first step has been captured by this photograph and brought to me.

That's right, the girl I've been calling "you" flew with such an innocence. Forgetting everything in that instant, words, heart, she resonated with the rhythm of the rope. But each time you rested, you remembered that other kid, didn't you. The strength of the origami airplane

as it took off from his hands is a strength you regained in your heart. You even sometimes felt like if you turned around, he'd be there. Even so, you never turned around. The jump rope makes you look forward, lashes the tips of your toes as they come in contact with the surface of the earth. And when you're touching the earth, you can't hold on to the courage it takes to take another step.

You're scared, aren't you.

And you, you get it. You're scared, too.

That's why I'm speaking up now. I turn to the polaroid, pour all my feelings into it. Step off. Move forward. The power to jump is within you.

And that's why I'm sending air to the you I found on the web. Turn around, and we could link our breaths. The invisible air you breath in gives strength to your wings.

Yes, that's right, move forward. The light that pushes on your back sparkles in the here and now.

I still remember that light. That day, unexpectedly, the world brightened, and I stopped the rope and put both feet on the ground, looking up at the sky.

Me too, I narrowed my eyes against that glittering. As I put my palm up to my forehead, I realized it had been a long time since I'd done that.

Dazzling sunlight poured down through cracks in the eternally grey sky. Without thinking about it, I knit my brows, and bathed in that light with my entire body.

Halos of color rose up, and the world slowly saturated and regained its warmth. I can remember those distinct shadows, too. When I dropped my eyes to my feet, there was a shadow there. A strong black shadow, modeled on me. When I spread my arms, the shadow spread its arms, too, and in its hand was my origami.

A large shadow cut across the school yard. The sound of rotor blades rang out, and I looked up at a helicopter in the skies above. The Self-Defence Force is flying in above the school building. So they can head out for places struck even harder by the disaster. So they can reach out to people in still rougher shape.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow, too, and then quietly stare into the space ahead of you. You're confirming the shape of that other kid, the girl.

You turn around too, make sure he's walking closer. Seeing the origami airplane in his hand, you are assured of the future. I'll become an airplane pilot. Flying forever on the strength of wings, I'll become an adult who helps people in pain.

And you don't know it yet, but you'll be a life-long friend of the jump rope. So many times, you'll slice through the air with that rope and keep jumping. You'll learn all the techniques, get through all the performances, and carve the rhythm into the ground with that body. No doubt you'll enter a lot of tournaments. No doubt you'll go out into the world with that rope by your side. No doubt you'll have lots of wonderful meetings. You'll talk to the people of the world through that jump rope. You're taking that first step now.

Of course, wings aren't eternal. People only make it into the air with energy earned from the ground. One day every wing returns to the ground, and there's no such thing as a flight that never ends. But even so, you decide to keep leaping into the air. Because you are a child of the ground. Everything you are, and everything you are too, all of us, we are all children of the ground.

I'll promise you. I will be reunited with that child one day, with the rope. That little girl gave me something irreplaceable, and I shall use that irreplaceable strength to find her again. I can go far now, so that you can fly forever.

And to you, too, under that cherry tree, I will puff out my chest and let you know. I spread my wings and fly forever. Even by myself, I shall aim for the horizon, so I can help lots of people. I shall kick off the ground, and embrace life with these hands, and tomorrow I shall

land again. This way, surely, one day the time will come when I can meet that kid. I will struggle along until I reach the side of the boy who taught me about wings.

So you should go. Your future is up there.

You, too, your future is in that light.

Absolutely, I will take that on. As long as you keep leaping into the air, you won't forget that day.

Yes, please believe in me. As long as you keep flying through the skies, you won't forget the future.

AIR by Sena Hideaki

You will never forget that day – the day when your future revealed itself to you.

You will never forget that day – the day when you came across the object that would become your most treasured possession.

It was on a weekend afternoon in winter that the big earthquake struck, causing a tsunami. You must have seen the black water surging up the road towards you, rising inexorably and you fled to the school. You stood in line in the playground with the other children gathered there, waiting for someone to give the signal to sit down. The teachers were running around in confusion but you waited patiently, accepting the situation.

You were still young. You were wearing your sports kit and held a skipping rope in your hand. The people from the neighbourhood came fleeing from the road behind the school; and soon, from the opposite direction, the tsunami arrived, lumbering like a monster roused from sleep. A dangerous amount of debris was caught up in the muddy water bearing down on the school but still the teachers didn't do anything. The overturned bicycles, the roofs that were all that remained of houses – you must have watched in fascination as this incredible procession of objects approached. You realised that the waters were showing no sign of abating. They were rising relentlessly and you knew then that things would never be the same again. When the school principal finally barked an order through his megaphone you ran into the school building and sprinted up the stairs.

You watched the onslaught of the sea from a second floor classroom: an overwhelming mass of water which no human could withstand. The sky was a dirty grey and fine flakes of snow started to pelt down. You were numb with cold and you felt as if the end of the world had come. Then you became aware that someone was crying. Turning round you saw a girl you didn't know who had taken refuge in the same classroom; she had broken down in tears and was being comforted by the people around her. Watching this scene, on an impulse, you grabbed a notebook lying nearby and tore out a page. Without a word you folded the lined white paper into the shape of a plane and then turned back towards the window. By this point the muddy water had engulfed the ground floor of the school. The flagpole had snapped and a small van was entangled in the gymnastic bars. You shut your eyes tightly against the sight of people swept away by the tsunami which appeared in the corner of your field of vision. But then you opened them wide and angrily flung your plane out towards the world. "Go! Go!" In your mind you encouraged the plane. "Keep going! Don't let earthquakes and tsunamis stop you!" You followed the trajectory of the small scrap of white paper with your eyes. A few snowflakes struck the upper side of its wings. Soon it was over the playground; but eventually, buffeted by the rising wind, the fuselage went into a tailspin and was lost from view. And then the only thing left for your heart to hold on to was the plane's inertia.

And you held on to your skipping rope. In the biting cold you silently carried on living. Adult rescuers arrived and you devoured bowl after bowl of instant noodles. The adults shovelled up the mud and brought cardboard boxes filled with supplies. These included lots of second-hand manga but you couldn't get that excited about a bunch of grubby old books. Instead you always played quietly by yourself in a corner of the playground. You played with that skipping rope – the one precious item that still remained in your possession after everything else had been swept away.

Among the uninspiring toys which the helpers brought you discovered a packet of origami papers. These were something that you cherished. A volunteer doctor showed you how to fold an aeroplane properly: not just the basic method using one paper square, but how to tear off a strip to create a rectangle and make the plane from that. The trick was to bring the centre of gravity forward and bend the back of the wings slightly. The school gymnasium had now been washed clean of mud and it was there that you flew the plane – you who had lost both parents and family. Small children had nearly drowned on the stage but you stood up there,

putting all your trust in that small paper craft, and sent it flying off in a straight line. Seizing the air, the wings gained lift and the plane went soaring to the end of the hall.

You will never forget. Last night by pure chance I came across your photo on the internet while I was searching for something else. In the photo you looked so small – only I would have recognised you. There in the background was the school building covered with muck and debris and the muddy playground. The statue of Ninomiya Sontoku, the famous boy scholar, which stood by the main entrance, was leaning over to one side and had lost its left hand – the one which held his book. You were playing with your skipping rope under the cherry trees. During the tsunami, those trees must have stood trunk-deep in water, up to where your outstretched arm now reached as you circled the rope; and yet they had started to bloom. This emergence of life under the grey sky, like a smudge of colour on a monotone film, was a tiny message hinting that spring was on its way. You were wearing a hand-me-down jacket as you played a solitary game with your skipping rope. Only when you were skipping did you forget your loneliness. Only when you jumped over the rope were you liberated from the bonds that attached you to the earth. Strong aftershocks continued, waking you up time and time again in the middle of the night. With your back pressed to the ground, the tremors shook you to the core. As long as your body was in contact with the earth, you were part of it; so all by yourself, jump by jump, you soothed your body with the help of your skipping rope.

You flew your planes in the playground. With no one around to bother you, you chased after them. The shaking of the ground did not affect the planes. The invisible force which held them up did not fail even when the earth trembled. So you fixed your eyes on their wings as they floated above you. They were the only brightly-coloured objects in the grimy landscape which lay in shades of monochrome under a murky sky. Planes don't last forever. If they land in the mud the paper falls apart. Trying to find even a small amount of firm ground you sent the plane towards the edge of the playground — and that's how I met you.

"Hey," I announced myself.

"Hello," you replied shyly.

"You're good at skipping!"

"Is that your plane?"

Those were the first words that we exchanged.

You held out the plane, turning to support your right hand. The wings slanted upwards very slightly in symmetry. *With a yell you held it aloft. The craft flew off on a graceful flight path.*

"Wow, Wow!" you shouted, laughing.

"Teach me to skip!" you demanded, laughing too.

"Shall we fly it together?"

That was how you came across skipping —

— *And you encountered a plane.*

I will never forget. I have a photo next to me, a slightly faded Polaroid. It was my most treasured possession back then; one of the male volunteers took it of you as you were flying the plane and gave it to me then and there. Looking at it now, the thin boy with long hair in the picture seems shut in on himself. But I know. Seen from behind as you held the plane aloft, with your weight on your front foot and your back straight – at that point there was no doubt that you were being drawn towards your future. Beyond the frame of the photograph the girl was playing by herself with the skipping rope under the cherry trees by the entrance to the school. You turn your gaze in the direction of the cherry trees, almost stopping what you're doing. You carefully wipe some dirt off the paper plane, adjust its shape and cup it in your hands. The photo caught you just as you were about to step forward and gave you into my possession.

That's right; the girl was absorbed in her skipping, oblivious. Words and emotions were forgotten in an instant as she responded to the rhythm of the rope. But whenever you stopped for a moment, you thought about her, didn't you? And as it flew away from your hand, the strength in that origami plane was restored to your heart. Something told you that if you turned round, the boy would be there. But you didn't turn round. The skipping rope made you face forwards and tied your toes to the ground; and while you were still in contact with the earth, you couldn't quite summon the courage.

You're scared, right?

I get it. You're afraid.

So now, gathering all my emotions, I address the photo and say out loud: Go on! Take a step forward! You have the strength to jump within you.

So, finding you on the Web, I cheer you on. You are able to turn round, keeping your breathing steady. The invisible air you inhale gives strength to your wings.

Yes. Go on. A light is now shining behind you, urging you forward.

Ah, I remember that light. At that moment, all of a sudden, the world became bright. I stopped turning the rope, planted my two feet on the ground and looked up at the sky.

I squinted in the glare. As I shaded my eyes with my hand I realised that it had been a long time since I'd done that.

The sky – grey for so long – had cracked open; and through the gap poured dazzling sunshine. Instinctively I screwed up my eyes as my whole body was bathed in the light.

The world glowed with a halo of radiance as it slowly took on colour and regained warmth. I remember the shadows which appeared, clearly defined. When I looked down, there was one at my feet – a reassuring black shadow the same shape as me. I opened my arms wide and the shadow opened its arms too. In its hand was the origami plane.

A big shadow passed across the playground and the sound of rotors thundered overhead. I looked up to see a Self Defence Force helicopter flying over the school – heading off to areas which were more severely affected by the disaster, to provide relief to people who were in greater distress.

You look up at the silhouette of the helicopter and then calmly focus your gaze in front of you. You notice the girl.

You turn around and observe the boy stepping closer. Seeing the origami plane in his hand, your future is assured. "I'm going to be a pilot," you say. "When I grow up I'm going to use the power of my wings to fly all over the world and rescue people who are in trouble."

You don't know it yet but that skipping rope will become a friend for life. You will go on to jump countless times, slicing the air with your rope. You will learn lots of tricks and devise whole routines, beating out a rhythm on your body and the earth. You will take part in lots of competitions. With that one object you will travel the globe. You will have many wonderful encounters, using your skipping rope to communicate with people throughout the world.

Now you are about to take that first step.

Of course planes don't last forever. People travel through the sky using energy drawn from the earth and sooner or later that is where the plane will have to return – there is no such thing as endless flight. Despite this, you make up your mind to keep flying through the air. Because you are a child of the earth. Because you and I – and every one of us – are children of this earth.

I'll make you a promise. Someday, without fail, we will meet her again, this rope and I. Using all the powers in my possession, I will track down the girl who gave me this precious object. These days I can go as far as it takes.

I can tell the child under the cherry trees proudly now: I will spread my wings and go to the ends of the earth. I will head towards the horizon all alone to rescue as many people as I

can. I will take off, cradling life in these hands – and tomorrow I will come back to earth again. Sometime in the future I will surely meet him again. I have no doubt that I will find myself beside the boy who taught me how to make planes.

C'mon. It's time to go. Your future lies ahead.

Come on. Off you go. Within that light lies your future.

Sure thing. I guarantee it. As long as you keep jumping through the air, you will never forget that day.

That's right. Trust me. As long as you keep flying through the sky, you will never lose sight of the future.

AIR

I guess you'll always remember. That day and your encounter with your future.

I suppose you'll never forget. On that day finding something you could never replace.

It was an afternoon on a winter weekend when the earthquake and tsunami hit. You watched as the black water came climbing up the roadway, rising unceasingly. You took shelter in the schoolyard and lined up with the others. With no signal to sit down you stood rooted to the spot, faced only with your teachers' confusion.

Still so young, you were in your gym kit a skipping rope in your hand. Some locals came running along the road behind the school, then at last, from the same direction the wave approached, sluggishly, like a monster waking from its slumber. Even as the debris and muddy water drew closer the teachers still did not act. You yourself seemed transfixed by the implausible motion of a car turned upside down, and the roof of a house detached from its foundations. As the water level kept rising it became clear the flood would not subside, and it dawned on everyone there would be no going back. Finally the school principal shouted out over a loudspeaker and you ran into the school building and up some stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor you watched the assault of the sea's mass. It had become a solid body with an overwhelming irresistible power. The sky was a dirty gray and a blizzard of fine snow had begun to fall. It was so bitterly cold you felt as if the world were ending. At that moment for the first time you heard the sound of crying. Turning round you saw a small girl you'd not seen before. She'd fled into the same classroom as you and was being comforted as she sobbed convulsively. Watching this scene, on impulse you tore a page from a nearby notebook. Silently you folded the white, lined sheet into the shape of an aeroplane then turned towards a window. The murky water had already swallowed up the first floor of the building. Outside a small people carrier had got caught on the school flagpole which had twisted over. On the edge of your field of vision you saw a figure being swept away, but you shut your eyes tightly, then opened them wide and filled with rage hurled the plane out into the world. *Fly, fly, fly forever! Earthquakes and tsunami cannot beat you, just fly!* You cried these words to yourself as your eyes followed the paper dart. Once, twice, falling snow buffeted its wings, then when right above the schoolyard it was caught in a gust of wind, span into a nosedive, and finally disappeared from view. All that was left inside of you was the sense of that plane's momentum.

All you were left with was your skipping rope. In the biting cold you moved about silently. Rescuers arrived and you slurped down countless bowls of instant ramen. The adults raked through the mud and brought in cardboard boxes of junk of all kinds. There were even many comics but you were not cheered by the grubby, dogeared copies they gave you. You stayed in one corner of the schoolyard, not speaking, playing alone with your skipping rope - because for you, who'd seen your whole life washed away, this one irreplaceable possession was all that remained.

You found a bundle of origami paper from among the dull looking toys the helpers carried in, and this you treated with great care. A volunteer doctor taught you many new ways to fold paper planes. Not just with square sheets but rectangular ones too by cutting away one side of the paper - the trick was to move the center of gravity forward and curl the wings at the back slightly - you, who'd lost your parents, your relatives, flew paper planes in the gymnasium, now cleared of sand and sludge. Standing on the stage where a small child had fought for breath you launched your planes straight and true, placing all your trust in them. Their wings grasped at the air and they were lifted higher, gliding to the end of the hall.

You will never forget. Last night I found your photo online. The image - that I came across by chance as I searched the internet - was so small I guess only I could have known who it was. The school building is filthy with mud and rubble, the schoolyard like a quagmire. By the front gate the statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō leans over to one side, and the young scholar's

left hand in which he'd held his book is missing. You are under a cherry tree playing with your skipping rope. The tree, which must have been in water as deep as you can now reach, is half in bloom. Under the gray sky it radiates life, like a faintly blurred breath of color on black and white film, it tells of the coming of spring. You are wearing an old jacket and playing on your own. Only when leaping do you forget your solitude. Only when you jump rope are you released from the bonds of the earth. Powerful aftershocks have continued and you wake many times in the night. The tremors are unsettling when your back is so close to the ground. As long as your body is in contact with the earth you are a part of it. So by skipping all alone you calm yourself, while connecting yourself to those layered moments of flight.

You flew your planes in the schoolyard. Chasing after their wings not disturbed by anyone. The effects of the ground tremors did not reach these paper darts. Though the earth shook the invisible force that gave the planes lift did not dissipate. So you looked up. The sky was turbid and the scenery a dirty monochrome, except for your wings of rainbow colored paper. But they could not fly forever, and when they came down in the wet mud the paper crumpled. Searching for firmer ground you launched one to the edge of the schoolyard.

And there you met.

"Hey", you said, and introduced yourself.

"Hi", came the bashful reply.

"You're good at skipping rope."

"Is that your plane?"

That,

was the first time,

we spoke.

You held out the plane for the girl to hold, moved behind her and supported her right hand, turning both wings upwards a little. Then to cries of encouragement you drew her arm back. As the plane flew it made a glorious trail in the air.

"Again! Again!" you cried, laughing.

Also laughing you asked, "Now show me how to skip rope".

"We'll fly together?"

That's how we met.

You and the skipping rope.

And you and the paper plane.

You will always remember. I have a photograph, a somewhat faded Polaroid image. A snapshot that would become mine in that time and place, more precious to me than anything. It is a picture of you flying your plane taken by one of the volunteers. When I look at it now that skinny, long-haired boy - "you" - seem locked away in your own cramped shell. But I know better. In the photograph you are seen from behind, with one foot planted forward, your back straight and your hand held aloft. In that instant you're assuredly connected to the world to come. And just out of frame under the cherry tree near the school's front gate that young girl plays alone with her rope. In a little while you will pause and turn your gaze to that cherry tree. You will carefully brush the mud from your plane, straighten it out and enclose it in both hands. The photo captures you just before you take this next step forward.

That's right - "you" - the young girl innocently skipped on. With each passing moment you abandoned words, lost yourself in sympathy with the rope's rhythm. But each time you stopped to rest you thought about that boy didn't you? Reclaiming inside of you the force of the paper planes launched from his own hand. You even knew if you turned the boy would be there, but you did not look back. The rope held you in position, your toes bound in contact with the ground. When touching the earth's surface the courage to take another step failed you.

You were afraid.

I understand. You were afraid. That's why I cry out now. At the photo, with all my heart. Step forwards. Go straight ahead. You have the power of flight.

That's why I shout at the image of you on the screen. Turn around. You can survive this. The air that you breath, that you can't see, gives power to your wings.

That's it, go forwards. The light at your back is now sparkling.

Ah, I remember that light. Just at that moment the world suddenly brightened and I stopped my skipping, and with both feet on the ground stared up at the sky.

I narrowed my eyes against the dazzling glare, shading them with my hand raised above my forehead, and it occurred to be how long it had been since I'd done this.

From a gap in the interminable gray clouds blinding sunlight now poured down. Instinctively I screwed up my face and let the rays wash over my body.

The world had become a hazy mirage regaining its color and warmth. I remember seeing my sharply defined shadow. Looking down I saw a stark black reflection of myself. When I extended my arms the arms of my shadow extended too, and in its hand my folded paper plane.

A larger shadow crossed the schoolyard. The sound of rotor blades reverberated in the air and I looked skywards to see a helicopter. The defense forces were flying overhead. Towards somewhere even more devastated, to reach out to people in even more pain.

You stare up at the helicopter's silhouette then silently fix your gaze forwards, and notice the figure of a young girl.

You turn to see the boy approach. In his hand a paper aeroplane and your fate is sealed. You will grow up to be a pilot. You will help those in need, using the power of winged flight to take you far away.

You don't know it now but a skipping rope will be your lifelong companion. Again and again you will leap, slicing the air with that thread. Learning countless techniques, devising numerous tricks of performance, marking out a rhythm between your body and the earth. You'll appear at hundreds of events, making your way through the world with that single strand of rope. You'll have so many extraordinary experiences, and through this talent you'll speak to people from every corner of the globe. Right now is your first step towards this.

Of course wings can't fly forever. By harnessing some energy we launch ourselves from this world and travel skywards, but our wings soon fall back to earth. Flight is never endless. Even so you resolve to keep on soaring. Because you are a child of the earth.

All that you are.

Everything that you are.

We are both children of this earth.

Let me make a promise to you. Someday I'll meet that girl again, accompanied as ever by my skipping rope. I'll seek out that that girl who gave me something I could never replace, using its own irreplaceable power. Just as there is no limit to how far you can fly, I can also now travel great distances.

I'm able to proudly say to that girl under the cherry tree. I will spread my wings and fly far. I will set my eyes to the horizon and save however many there is to save. I will kick free of this earth, take hold of life in my own hands. Tomorrow I will touch down again. And beyond this waits the day I can meet that boy once more. There's no doubt in my mind I'll find my way to him, the boy who taught me how to fly.

Well now, it's time for you to go. Your future lies ahead.

Please don't wait any longer. Your destiny is within that sparkling light.

Take my word for it. As long as you keep jumping you'll never forget that day.

Don't worry, you can trust me. As long as you keep flying you won't lose sight of what's to come.

Air
by Sena Hideaki

You probably won't forget that day. That was the day you encountered the future.

You will likely not forget that day. That was the day you met something that would become irreplaceable to you.

It was a weekend afternoon in winter when the great earthquake and tsunami came. You probably saw the black water surging up the roads from the sea, swelling endlessly as it rushed toward you. You evacuated to the school yard where, as you stood in line with other students, no teacher gave instructions, not even to sit down. You stood and watched the chaos among the teachers.

You were still small then, dressed in your PE clothes and holding a skipping rope in your hand. People from the neighbourhood ran in from the road at the back of the school, and before long, the tsunami followed behind like a monster rising from slumber. Even as it neared the school, bearing rubbish and muddy water, the teachers did not move. The sight of cars flipping on their backs and of houses, reduced to their roofs, moving in ways that you could not believe must have transfixed you. You knew that time would not turn back when you realised that the volume of water was still rising and showed no sign of decreasing. At last the principal shouted instructions through a megaphone, and you ran into the school building and dashed up the stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor, you watched the invading mass of the sea. It was an overwhelming force against which man could not resist. The sky was a dirty grey, and a thick powder snow began to fall. It was so cold you felt about to freeze, and it seemed to you like the end of the world. That was when you first heard the crying. You looked behind, and saw a girl you didn't know who had escaped to the same classroom, convulsing with sobs as people around held her in their arms. Watching her, you were overcome by the urge to tear a sheet out of a nearby notebook. You mutely folded the lined white paper into the shape of an airplane and faced the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, the flagpole was bent, and a van had caught on the pull-up bars. In the corner of your vision you saw residents being swept away, and you squeezed your eyes shut; then, opening them wide, you mustered your anger and threw the airplane into the world. Fly, fly, fly as far as you can go. Don't let an earthquake or a tsunami stop you. Fly! Shouting the words in your heart, you followed the pure white paper airplane with your eyes. A piece of snow hit its wings, and then another, and when it finally reached the space above the school yard, it was shaken by the turbulent wind, and spun out of sight. The airplane's inertia was all that remained in your heart.

And what remained for you was the skipping rope. Mutely, in the piercing cold, you lived on. Adult rescuers came for you, and you gulped down countless mouthfuls of instant noodles. The adults cleared away the mud and brought you many things in cardboard boxes. There were even a lot of comic books, but who would be happy receiving worn and dirty hand-me-downs? Still unable to speak, you always just played alone with your skipping rope in the corner of the school yard. After everything had been washed away, it was the thing remaining that was yours and irreplaceable.

Among the boring toys that the support people brought, you found a pack of origami paper. You treated it like something precious. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold paper airplanes. Not only how to fold one from square paper, but also how to cut one side to make it a rectangle, and to fold from that. The trick was to put the plane's weight forward, and to fold up slightly the backs of the wings. Having lost your parents and your relatives, you flew the airplanes in the gym now cleaned of mud. You stood on the stage where a small child had almost drowned and entrusted everything to the plane. The wings caught the air and gained lift, and the plane sped all the way to the end of the gym.

You will never forget that day. I found your picture on the web last night. By sheer coincidence you turned up in my search results, looking so very small that nobody other than me could likely have known it was you. The school building was dirtied with sludge and rubble, and the yard was a muddy slush. The Ninomiya Kinjirō statue next to the school gates, which had been placed to inspire children to study, had lost its book and its left hand, and tilted at an angle. You were playing with your skipping

rope under the cherry blossom tree. Once submerged as high as you might reach with an outstretched hand, the tree now put out blossoms halfway to full bloom above your head. They emanated life under the grey sky, like a breath of colour diffusing into monotone film paper and telling of the arrival of spring. You were wearing a second-hand jumper. You were alone and immersed in playing with your skipping rope. Only when you were in the air did you forget your loneliness. Only when you were skipping were you free from the fetters of the earth. Big aftershocks kept happening, and again and again you woke up in the middle of the night. With your back flat against the earth, the tremors shook your heart. As long as your body was touching the earth, you were part of it. That was why you played with the skipping rope. Alone, linking into a continuous whole each instant that you spent in the air was your way of healing yourself.

You flew your airplanes in the school yard. With no one to stop you, you chased after the wings. The ground's shaking did not touch them. The invisible force that kept them aloft did not vanish with the shaking of the earth. This was why you looked up to the wings of your airplanes. The sky was leaden, and everything had been dirtied into monochrome: this made your wings the only spot of rainbow-coloured origami there was. The wings did not last forever. Once they fell into the mud the paper disintegrated. In search of ground that was even the slightest bit firmer, you flew your airplane toward the edge of the yard—and that was when you met.

"Hey," he said, giving his name.

"Hello," she replied shyly.

"You're really good at the skipping rope."

"Is this airplane yours?"

Those were

the very first words

that we exchanged.

You held out the airplane, and then, going around her, supported her right hand from behind. Keeping the left and right wings balanced, you raised the nose of the airplane just a little. *On your signal he and you flung the airplane. The craft sailed out in a beautiful flight path.*

"That's so cool!" you said, smiling.

"Hey, teach me how to skip too," you said, smiling as well.

"Do you want to do it together?"

That was how you met the skipping rope—

—and how you encountered airplanes.

I'm never going to forget that day. I have a photo from it. A slightly faded Polaroid. Back then, a Polaroid photo was more valuable than anything, because it could make things yours on the spot. A volunteer man had taken the photo of you about to fly an airplane on the day the girl asked you if the airplane was yours. You were a skinny boy, with long hair, who looked like he was shut up in a shell too confined for him. But I know. In that shot of you, taken from behind, with your strong leg forward and your back straight as you flung the airplane, you were *connected* to the future. Outside the photo's frame, the girl was playing alone with the skipping rope under the cherry blossom tree near the school gates. In a while you'd pause and direct your sight to the cherry blossom tree. You'd carefully brush the dirt off the paper airplane, fix its shape, and cup it in your hands. That was the sight this photo preserved: you, just as you were about to take a step forward.

Yes, you were playing blithely with the skipping rope on the day the boy talked to you. Instant by instant, you resonated with the rope's rhythm, clearing your mind of words and thoughts. But you must have remembered the boy whenever you took a rest. You must have recalled in your heart the power with which the paper airplane took off from your hand. You even had the presentiment that you could find the power right there if you turned around. Yet you did not turn around. Rope-skipping kept you facing ahead and tied the tips of your toes to the ground. Because you were still touching the earth, you could not seize the courage to take a step forward.

You're scared, right?

I understand. You're scared.

That's why I'll raise my voice for you. I'll throw every ounce of support I have into this photo. Step forward. Press on. You have the power to jump in you.

That's why I'll cheer you on through the web. You can turn around and breathe. Your wings will gain power from the invisible air that you inhale.

Yes, move forward. The light is shining to propel you onward.

Ah, I remember the light. The world unexpectedly grew bright, and I stopped skipping and put my feet back on the earth, and looked up at the sky.

I squinted at the radiance. Raising my hand, I shaded my eyes, and realised that I hadn't done so in a long time.

Blinding sunlight streamed through a crack in the hitherto grey sky. Wincing unconsciously, I let my whole body bathe in the light.

Gradually, the world haloed by light took on colour and regained warmth. I remember the sharply defined shadow from that day. It was there when I lowered my eyes to my feet. A strong black shadow in my own image. When I spread my arms it spread its arms as well, and in its hand was my origami paper.

The enormous shadow crossed over the school yard. The sound of rotors rang through the air, and I craned my neck at the helicopter in the sky above. The Self-Defense Forces flew on over the school building. They were flying to attend to more devastated regions. To reach out to people who were suffering more.

You crane your neck at the helicopter's silhouette, and then quietly return your gaze to before you. You register the figure of the girl.

You look behind you, and register that the boy is walking toward you. Seeing that there is a paper airplane in his hands will make you believe in the future. You will become an airplane pilot. You will grow up to be someone who flies as far as she has to with the power of her wings, in order to give aid to those in need.

You probably don't know it yet, but you will make your skipping rope your lifelong companion. You will skip on and on, making innumerable revolutions of the rope through the air. You will learn many tricks and choreograph many performances, and beat a constant rhythm against the earth with your body. You'll probably enter many competitions. You'll probably make your way in the world with just a rope in your hand. You'll probably have many wonderful encounters. With rope-skipping, you will converse with people all over the world. Right now, you are trying to take that first step forward.

Of course, no pair of wings can last forever. Man advances through the skies with energy gained from the earth. Someday your wings will return to the earth. There can be no such thing as infinite flight. Yet you will still resolve to fly on through the skies, because you are a child of the earth. Every one of you—and every one of you—we are all children of the earth.

This is my promise to you. Someday, with my rope in hand, I will meet that girl again. For the irreplaceable treasure she gifted to me, and with the strength of that treasure, I will seek her out. In the same way that you can go anywhere from here, I can go far to find her.

Now I can tell you with pride, as you skip under the cherry blossom tree, that I will spread my wings and fly. I will fly everywhere. I will make for the horizon if it means saving one more person. Kicking off from the earth and cradling life in my arms, I will alight safely again tomorrow. At some point in the future there will be a day when I meet that boy. I will definitely find my way to the one who taught me to fly.

Go on. Your future lies just ahead.

Step forward. Your future is waiting in the light.

I guarantee you. As long as you and your rope keep soaring through the air, you won't forget that day.

Yes, trust me. As long as you and your wings keep soaring through the skies, you will not forget

the future.

Air

You won't forget that you met your future on that day.

You won't forget that you met your precious treasure on that day.

It was in the afternoon in winter, that earthquake and great tsunami attacked you. You must have seen the black water going ascend a roadway and approaching you as it endlessly rose. You had evacuated and gathered to the schoolyard, kept lined up without a sign to sit down. You stood motionless and comprehended the teachers' chaotic confusion.

You were still little and wearing a sports uniform and had a skipping rope in your hand. People who lived nearby evacuated into the school from the road at the back of the school, and soon the tsunami slowly came over like a monster awakened from sleep. Even when tons of debris approached with muddy water, teachers didn't move. I know your eyes were glued on overturned cars and houses only left of its roofs, that they make an unbelievable motion. You realised that time won't be reversed only after you had noticed water rose forever and never gone down. Finally, the Principal screamed into a loudspeaker, so you rushed into the school building, and run up the stairs.

You witnessed the mass of the sea attack, in a classroom on the 3rd floor. It was an overwhelming block, and people could not resist. The sky was filthy grey and powder snow intensely started to fall. It was too cold and freezing, so you felt it was the end of the world. It was just then you heard a sob for the first time. When you looked back, it was a girl you didn't know, who had escaped into the same classroom. She was sobbing while convulsing, and those around her supported under the shoulder. You were gazing at the event, but you felt an urge and ripped one page off a notebook you'd found nearby. You folded the ruled white paper in silence, made it into a shape of a plane and faced to the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the school's ground floor, the pole for the national flag was bent, and a van was caught on a horizontal bar. At the edge of your field of vision, you saw the town residents swept away. You still closed your eyes tightly and opened them wide, then released the plane, filled with anger, into the world. Go, go, go forever. Don't ever let the earthquake or tsunami beat you. Shouting in your mind you were, you watched the path the pure white paper plane took. Powder snow hit the plane, once, twice, and when it eventually reached right above the school ground, the disturbed wind finally overturned it and the plane disappeared in a spinning motion. Therefore, in your mind, only the inertia was left.

Then you were left with your skipping rope. In the coldness that could tear everything and anything apart, you survived. Adults came for the rescue, and you gulped countless instant noodles. Adults scraped mud out and kindly brought various goods in cardboard boxes. There were many manga books in the box, but it didn't make you happy to receive dirty hand-me-down books from someone else. So, you played with your skipping rope at the corner of the school ground alone. The reason was that it was the only treasure you had left of your own after everything was washed away.

Out of the boring toys the supporters had brought, you found one packet of origamis. You spent them carefully. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold them into planes, not only from square papers but also from rectangular papers after cutting a part of origamis. The gist was to place the centre of balance towards the front and slightly curve the back of the wings. You, who had lost parents and relatives, flew the paper plane at a gym where sludge had been washed off. You stood on the stage where a small schoolboy nearly drowned and threw the plane straight, leaving everything to it. The wings seized the air, obtained lift and glided to the edge of the gym.

You will never forget. Last night, I found a photo of you on the internet. You, whom I happen to meet by merely a little coincidence, were so small and wouldn't have been recognised if it wasn't me who found you. The school building was filthy from sludge and

debris, and muddy schoolyard. The statue of Kinjiro Ninomiya beside the main gate was tilted without his left hand holding the book. You were skipping rope under a cherry tree. The cherry tree that soaked up to the height where you stretch your hand, was half-blooming above your head. It expressed life under the grey sky, and as if painted in colour on a monochromatic film, it told the arrival of spring with softly blurred touch. You were wearing a second-hand jacket. You entertained yourself alone with the skipping rope. You forgot your solitude only when you were doing rope skipping. You were freed from the constraint of the ground only when you were doing rope skipping. Major aftershocks continued to attack, so you woke up many times in the middle of the night. When your back is in contact with the ground, the tremors shook your heart. Whenever your body is in contact with the ground, you were a part of the earth. That was the reason you soothed yourself with the skipping rope, connecting many fractions of the skipping moments.

You throw the paper plane in the school ground. You chased the wings without anyone interfering. The tremor of the earth didn't affect the planes. The invisible force that flows in the sky didn't disappear no matter how the ground shook. So, you looked up to the wings. The sky was impure, the scenery was monochromatically filthy. The wings were not eternal existence. If they fell in the mire, the paper will lose its shape. You looked for ground as firm as possible, threw a plane to the corner of the schoolyard—Then, you two met.

I said, "G'day," and I told her my name.

I shyly responded, "hello."

"You are good at rope skipping."

"Is that your plane?"

They were

our first words

ever exchanged.

You offered the plane and supported her right hand behind her back. Slightly upturned the wings symmetrically. She upswept the plane to your shout as a cue. The airframe drew a beautiful locus of flight.

"Brilliant! Awesome!" You smiled.

"Teach me how to skip with the rope." You smiled too.

"Wanna skip together?"

——That's how 'you met the rope skipping,
and how you met the planes——

I will never forget. I have one photo of me. It is a slightly faded instant photo. I treasured these instant photos the most back in the olden days because they would instantly be mine on the spot. A male volunteer captured you flying the planes on the camera. Having a look at it now, the boy called "you", was skinny, had your hair all grown, and looks as though you had sheltered yourself in a tiny shell. Nonetheless, I do know. From your back I saw, stepping your dominant foot forward, keeping your back straight, held the paper plane aloft and threw it. For that moment, you were certainly connected with your future. Although she was out of the frame, under the cherry tree near the main gate, that girl was skipping with the rope on her own. You would soon stop throwing the plane and look at the direction of the cherry tree. You would carefully remove the dirt off the paper tidied its shape and covered it with both of your hands. This photo has captured you, just before you stepped your foot forward and delivered that moment to me.

Yes, the girl called "you" were absorbed in rope-skipping. Every moment, you forgot about your mind or your words. You resonated with the rhythm of the rope. Still, you thought of that boy every time you took a break, didn't you? I know that you gathered the strength you gained from the paper plane made of origami again in your heart. You even had a feeling that

he will be there if you look back. Still, you didn't look back. The skipping rope forced you to face the front and constrained the toes that meet the ground. When you were standing on the earth, you couldn't gather the courage to take one more step forward.

You must be scared.

I know. You are scared.

That is why I speak out now, to the photo with all my emotions. Step forward. Go forward. The force to jump lies within you.

That's why I cheer for you who appears on the internet. You can look back and continue to breathe. The invisible air you breath in, gives strength to your wings.

Yes, march on. The light that encourages you now shines behind you.

Oh, I remember that light. That moment, the world suddenly became a brighter place. I stopped skipping with the rope, landed both of my feet onto the ground and looked up the sky.

I kept my eyes half shut for the light. I cast my palm over my forehead, and I realised I hadn't done this for a long time.

Sparkly sunshine came through showering between the sky that had been grey forever. I loured at it on an impulse and bathed my entire body in the light.

The world of halation slowly regained its colours and got its warmth back. I remember the clear shadows. There was a shadow when I looked down for my feet. There was a strong black shadow that formes the shape of me. When I stretched my arms wideout, the shadow stretched his arms too, and he had my origami in his hand.

A giant shadow went across the school ground. The rotor roared, and I looked up to the helicopter in the sky. The Defence Force flies across the sky, to the areas affected more severely, to reach out for people in even greater pain.

You looked up the helicopter's shadow and quietly fixed your gaze straight forward. You recognised her.

You look back and recognised him walking towards you. Seeing an origami plane in his hand, you are in full conviction of your future, that you will be an aeroplane pilot, that you will be a grownup who flies anywhere to help those in need.

I am sure you are not aware of it yet, but the skipping ropes will be your lifelong company. You will skip countless times on the rope, cutting the air. You will learn many tricks and create many performances. You will engrave the rhythm into the earth and your body. You will compete in many championships. You will be up against the world just with your rope. You will meet many wonders. You will converse with people all around the world through the skipping rope. Now you are taking the first step of it.

Of course, the wings are not eternal. Humans travel the sky by the energy gained from the earth. Someday, the wings will return to the ground and there will never be an eternal flight. You will still decide to keep flying in the sky. The reason is that you are a child of the earth. All of you girls, all of you boys, we all are children of the earth.

I promise you. With this skipping rope. I will meet that girl again someday. I will find her who gave me the treasure, with the precious power she gave me. I can go far away places as you can keep going forever.

I can now proudly tell you under the cherry tree. I shall travel forever. I shall travel to the horizon to save as many people as possible. I shall kick the ground, embrace lives in my hands, and land on the ground tomorrow as always. Beyond these moments, I am sure I shall find the day I will see the boy again. I am certain I shall reach the place where he is, who taught me about the wings.

Go on. The future lies beyond that point.

You should go now. The future lies in that light.

Pleasure. I'll assure you. As long as you are flying in the sky, you will never forget the

day.

Yes. You should believe me. As long as you are flying in the sky, you will never forget the future.

「AIR」 by 瀬名秀明

You'll always remember the day you had an encounter with the future.

You will never forget the day you stumbled upon something priceless.

It was midday during a weekend in Winter when the earthquake and tsunami hit. You must've watched the endlessly approaching wave of dark water grow bigger as it ran rampant over the roads. You sought shelter in a school campus and stood still in line while you waited for instructions from the teachers who were overcome with panic.

You were still small. You were wearing your gym clothes and holding a jump rope in your hands. People around the area came running from the road behind the school. Not far behind them followed the tsunami, like a beast that had awakened from its slumber. Even as waste and grimy waters reached the school, the teachers stood paralyzed. You must have been mesmerized by the sight of upside-down cars and destroyed houses violently swaying in the water. The moment you knew there was no turning back was the moment you realized the waters kept rising and wouldn't abate. Once the principal shouted into the megaphone, you finally ran inside the school building and rushed up the stairs.

You watched from a classroom on the third floor as the flood coming in from the sea came striking down. It was an overpowering body of water that people couldn't escape from. The skies were a dusty gray, and a light snowfall began to come down. The freezing cold made you feel like it was the end of the world, and it was at that moment that you first realized someone was crying. You turned around and saw a group of people carrying a girl who was convulsing and crying hysterically. You kept staring at the scene until you felt the urge to take a notebook and rip off a piece of paper. You quietly folded the lined paper into the shape of a plane, then turned to face the window. The murky waters had already swallowed up the first floor. A van was crashed into the school's flagpole. Out of the corner of your eye you could see people being washed away, but you shut your eyes closed and opened them once more before channeling all your rage and throwing the plane out into the world. You cried out in your own head, "Go! Go! Keep going! Screw the tsunami and earthquake and GO!" as you watched the journey of the colorless paper airplane. A few bits of snow fell over the wings, and eventually it reached the center of the schoolyard, where it finally got whisked up by the wind until it completely disappeared. Just like that, the only thing remaining was its momentum inside of you.

And just like that, the only thing remaining was your jump rope. You were living silently inside a world that was so cold you could shatter. Then a rescue group arrived. You devoured more instant noodles than you could count. The rescue gathered several things, scraped the mud off them, and brought them over in boxes. There were lots of comics in there but getting grimy secondhand books didn't make you happy. That's why you were always jumping rope in your own little corner of the schoolyard, without saying a word. Because it was the only thing that remained after having everything washed away that was your own.

The help brought over some toys that didn't catch your attention, except for one pack of origami paper that you found and treasured dearly. You were taught how to fold an airplane by a volunteer medic. He didn't just teach you how to fold a square piece of paper, but also how to cut it into a rectangle and fold it. The trick was to focus the weight towards the front part and bend the back of the wings a bit. And there you were, having lost your parents and relatives, throwing your paper airplane across the recently washed out gymnasium. You stood on the site where a small child almost drowned not long ago, and there you channeled everything you had into the plane before sending it flying. The wings caught air, the plane gained altitude and flew all the way over to the corner of the gym.

You will never forget. You found a picture of yourself on the internet last night. You looked so tiny in that picture you came across by chance, that only I could have guessed it was you. The school building was covered in dirt and debris, and the ground was muddy; the statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō was slanted and had lost its left arm. You were jumping rope under the cherry blossom tree. Even though the tree had been previously submerged under water as high as your arms could stretch, the cherry blossoms still remained in half bloom. Like monochrome film being brought to life with color, the flowers flourished vibrantly under the gray skies, as if to announce the arrival of Spring. You were wearing a hand-me-down jacket, jumping rope by yourself. It was only when you were jumping that you could

distract yourself from the loneliness. Only when you jumped could you free yourself from the hold of the earth. The persisting aftershocks kept you up at night. When your back was resting against the Earth, every jolt of the ground made your heart tremble. So long as your body was touching the ground, you were a part of the Earth. That's why every time you jumped it soothed your mind.

You flung your airplane and ran around the schoolyard chasing after it. The ground's vibration couldn't reach the plane. No matter how much the earth shook, the invisible force that kept it floating through the air wouldn't be affected. That's why you fixed your eyes on its wings. The sky was cloudy and everything around you was devoid of color, except for the rainbow-colored wings of your origami paper airplane. Wings don't last forever. If it falls in the mud, the paper will crumble. You looked for more solid ground and sent your plane flying once more—that's when you met.

"Hey", he said before introducing himself.

"Hi", she replied timidly.

"You're pretty good at jumping rope."

"Is that your airplane?"

Those were the first words we exchanged.

You held out your airplane and, standing behind her, lift it with her right hand. You aligned the plane straight and aimed it upwards. When she called out, you launched the airplane. The movement as it flew was mesmerizing.

"That's so cool!" You exclaimed while smiling.

"Now you teach me how to jump rope!" You smiled back.

"Wanna play together?"

And thus, you encountered a jump rope.

You stumbled upon an airplane.

I will never forget. I'm holding a faded polaroid picture in my hand. That polaroid I got back then was my greatest treasure. It was a picture a volunteer took of you throwing a paper airplane. Looking back now, that young boy in the picture was skinny and hadn't cut his hair for a while. He looked like he was trapped in a tight shell. But I know better. That silhouette of you standing straight, putting your dominant foot forward as you throw the plane, is tied to your future. It's not within the frame, but that girl was jumping rope by herself under the cherry blossom tree near the school entrance. Soon enough, you'll stop what you're doing and look in that direction. You'll dust off your paper airplane, fix its shape, and hold it in your hands. This picture captured the moment right before you took your first step forward.

Ah, that's right. That young girl in the picture had nothing on her mind while jumping rope. Every second jumping helped you forget words and thoughts as you became one with the rope. I bet every time you stopped, you remembered that boy. The strength of that paper airplane as it left your hand circled back into your heart. You knew that if you turned around, he would be there. And yet, you didn't turn around. The jump rope kept you facing forward and tied your feet to the ground. Every time your feet were touching the Earth, you lost your courage.

You're scared, right?

I know. You're scared.

That's why I'll muster up all my emotions and call out to this picture. Take the step. March forward. You have the power to leap. *That's why I will cheer for you. You have the power to steady your breathing. Though you cannot see it, the very air you breathe will raise your wings up.* Don't stop. Keep going forward. The light that gives you that one final push will shine bright now.

Oh yes, I remember that light. The world suddenly became bright in that moment. I stopped jumping rope and planted my feet on the ground as I looked up to the sky. I strained my eyes at the shining light. I used my hand to shield my eyes before realizing it's been a long time since I've had to do that. The skies that had for so long been gray were pierced by the sun's vibrant rays. I scrunched up my face and basked in the light of the sun. The world recovered its colors as the light covered everything in its warmth. I remember looking down at my feet and seeing a clear-cut shadow. It was comforting to see my own shadow being cast on the ground. When I held my arms out, the shadow followed. I could see the paper airplane in my hand. This big shadow was cast over the campus. I heard the sound of

rotors and looked up to see a helicopter. The Self-Defense Force was flying over the campus. It was heading towards a much more gravely affected area, where it could lend a hand to people who were suffering through worse.

You looked up and saw the helicopter for a bit before silently gazing forward. You see her there. You turn around and watch as he walks towards you. In his hand, you see that paper airplane... and that's when you know for certain. You'll become an airplane pilot. With those wings, you'll fly around helping people in need. You might not know it yet, but that jump rope will become your lifelong friend. You'll keep cutting through the air with more jumps than you could ever count. You'll learn countless tricks, develop several performances, and embed rhythm into your body and the ground. You'll get to enter so many competitions. You'll go out into the world with just that one jump rope. You'll have so many wonderful encounters. With rope in hand, you'll go on to have conversations with people all around the world. At this moment, you're about to take that first step. Of course, wings don't last forever. People fly across the skies with energy they receive from the earth. Eventually, those wings must come back down to the ground. There's no such thing as a never-ending flight. Even so, your mind is made up. The reason is because you're a child of the earth.

All of you, and all of you, we're all children of the earth.

I promise you. One day I'll take this rope and find that girl again. She gave me something irreplaceable, and I will use this irreplaceable power to look for her. Just like you can go anywhere now, I can also go as far as I want. I can proudly tell you, the girl standing under the cherry blossom tree. I'll spread my wings and go wherever. I'll go across the horizon to save as many people as I can. Day after day I'll take off, have someone's life in my hands, and come down once more. One of those days I'll be able to come across that boy again. I have no doubt that I'll find my way to that boy who showed me these wings.

It's time to go now. Your future lies ahead.

It's time to move forward now. Your future lies within that light.

Don't worry, I guarantee it. As long as you keep jumping towards the sky, you will never forget that day.

That's right, believe me. As long as you keep flying through the skies, you won't ever forget your future.

AIR

by Sena Hideaki

You won't forget about it, right? That day you discovered the future.

You won't forget about it, will you? On that day, you had your fateful encounter with the thing that would change your life.

On that winter weekend afternoon The Great Earthquake and Tsunami came. You saw it right? The black water coming up the street, endlessly rising and drawing closer and closer. You stood there frozen in place. A reaction to the confusion of the teachers, who couldn't even give the signal to evacuate the building, gather in the schoolyard, line up and sit down.

You were still little, wearing gym clothes and holding a jump rope. People from the neighborhood came running from the road behind the school. Sluggishly, like a monster awakened from its slumber, the tsunami also came from that way in the end. Even as lots of garbage and muddy water approached, the teachers didn't move. You were captivated by the unbelievable movements of overturned cars and houses that were now only roofs. You knew that time wouldn't rewind itself when you realized the volume of water only kept on rising and not falling. The school principal finally screamed into his megaphone, and you rushed into the school and ran up the stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor you saw the assault of the ocean's mass, a forceful lump that people couldn't hope to fight against. The sky was covered in a slightly dirty gray and a heavy, powdery snow began to fall. It felt too cold, like you were being frozen solid. You felt like it was the end of the world. That was when you first heard the crying voice. Turning around, you saw a girl you didn't know had fled into the same classroom. She was being held by one of the people around her, shaking as her sobs leaked out. Your eyes were fixed on her but, struck by a sudden impulse, you ripped a page out of a nearby notebook. You silently folded the lined, white paper into a plane and turned back to face the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, bent the flag pole, and caught a van on the playground's horizontal bars. The figures of the people being washed away hovered at the edge of your vision, but you shut your eyes tight and flung the window open. Filled with anger, you faced the world and launched the plane. GO! GO! GO all the way to the ends of the earth! Don't get beaten down by something like an earthquake or a tsunami, and just GO! As you screamed those words in your head, you watched where the pure white paper plane went. One, then two flakes of the powdery snow hit the tops of the wings. In the end, when it was almost directly over the school, a gust of wind stirred up and shook it, sending the plane into a tailspin as it disappeared. Just like that, only the sensation of the plane's inertia remained in your chest.

All you had left was a jump rope. You lived silently in a coldness that seemed like it would tear you to pieces. Grown-ups that were aid-workers came, and you slurped down more cups of instant ramen than you could count. The adults scooped out the mud and brought various things in cardboard boxes. There were a ton of manga in them but, even if you were lucky enough to get someone's dirty, dog-eared books, you weren't happy. Remaining in a state of shock, you were always alone in a corner of the school playing jump rope by yourself. Because it was the one thing that was yours and yours alone that was left to you, who had everything carried away by the water.

Out of all the boring toys that the aid-workers brought, you found a pack of origami paper. You used it sparingly. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold a paper plane. Not just from the square origami paper, but also how to make one after cutting off part of the paper to make it into a rectangle. The trick was to put the center of gravity at the front and to slightly bend the back of the wings. You, who lost his parents and relatives, flew the plane in the gym that had all the dirty mud washed out of it. You stood on the stage where a small child had drowned. Entrusting all of your feelings to the plane, you launched it straight ahead. The wings caught the air, gained lift, and soared to the end of the gym.

You will never forget. Last night I found your picture on the web. It was only through dumb luck that I happened to see it when I searched. The figure in the picture was so small that probably no one but me would know it was you. There, in the muddy school yard, stood the school building, filthy from all the mud and debris of the tsunami. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro by the main entrance was slanted and missing its left arm that held a book. You were jumping rope under the cherry blossom tree. The

blossoms overhead, which should have been so full that you could reach out and touch them, were only at half bloom. You were wearing a second-hand jacket. Amusing yourself by jumping rope alone. You only forgot your isolation when you were jumping. The big aftershocks continued and you woke up time after time in the middle of the night. When your back was stuck to the ground the vibrations racked your heart. You were only freed from the earth's shackles when you jumped over the rope. So you piled on moment after moment of jumps to soothe yourself. Life sprang forth under the ashen sky, faintly spreading like a breath of color into black and white film, announcing the arrival of spring.

You flew your paper plane in the schoolyard. You chased after those wings without anyone bothering you. The shaking didn't affect the plane. That invisible power floating up into the sky didn't disappear when the ground shook. So you looked up at those wings. They were the only color in the muddy sky, and the washed-out landscape. An origami rainbow. Wings aren't something that can last forever. They crumple when they fall down into the muck. You looked for more firm ground and launched your airplane to the end of the schoolyard—and that was when you met.

"Hey," you said and told me your name.

"Hello," you shyly answered.

"You're really good at jump rope."

"Is this your airplane?"

Those

were the very first

words that *we* exchanged with each other.

Holding the plane in your right hand, you turned around and offered it back to me. I tweaked the symmetry of the wings just a tiny bit and gave it back to you. I held it up in time with your countdown. The plane flew with a beautiful wake.

"You're a natural!" you laughed.

"I'll show you how to jump rope, too," you also laughed.

"Want to fly together?"

And that was how *you* discovered jump rope—

—that was *your* fateful encounter with airplanes.

I'll never forget. At that time, at that place, I made you mine. There's a single photo I always keep on me. A slightly faded polaroid. That photo is my greatest treasure. A male volunteer worker took the picture of you flying the plane. Looking at it now you, the skinny, long-haired boy, seem to be shutting yourself away in a rigid shell. But, I know. Seeing you from behind, right leg forward, back straight, holding the plane up high, at that moment you were surely connected to the future. She was out of frame, but that girl was jumping rope alone under the cherry blossom tree by the school gate. In a little bit you'll stop and turn your eyes toward the cherry blossom tree. You'll carefully brush off the dirt from the paper plane, straighten out its shape, and cover it with both hands. This photo captured and recorded the moment just before you took your first step forward.

That's right, you, the girl innocently jumping. You forgot both words and thoughts in time with the rhythm of the jump rope. But every time you rested, you remembered that boy, didn't you? The force of the paper airplane taking off from your hand came back to rest inside your chest, didn't it? All you could feel was a hunch that if you turned around he would be there. Even so, you didn't look back. Jump rope forces you to look ahead, binding your toes that touch the ground. When you were touching the ground you couldn't muster up the courage to take even one more step.

You're scared, aren't you?

I know. You're scared.

So now I'm going to face that picture, put all of my feelings into it, and shout. STEP FORWARD! ADVANCE! YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH TO JUMP INSIDE YOU!

So I'm sending my support to the you I found on the web. You can look back on this and know that you survived. The unseen air that swallows you up empowers your wings.

That's right, advance. The light pushing you on is shining right now.

Ah, I remember that light. At that time the world suddenly became bright. I stopped the rope,

planted both feet on the ground, and looked up.

I narrowed my eyes against that shine. I raised my palm up to shield my forehead, but then I realized it had been awhile since I had done something like that.

From a gap in the always ashen sky, dazzling sunshine came pouring down. My whole body was bathed in that light and I unconsciously frowned.

Color and warmth slowly returned to a blurry world. I remember a shadow standing out in sharp relief. When I dropped my eyes to my feet there was a shadow. There was a reassuring black shadow in my shape. When I spread my arms, the shadow also spread its arms, and in its hands was my paper plane.

A big shadow cut across the schoolyard. Hearing the echo of rotors I looked up at the helicopter overhead. The JSDF were flying over the school building. They were heading for an even worse disaster area. To lend a helping hand to people who were suffering even more.

You looked up at the helicopter's shadow, and then silently stared ahead. You noticed the figure of the girl.

You turned around, and noticed the boy walking towards you. Seeing the paper airplane in those hands you were certain about your future. That you will become a pilot. That you will become an adult that uses the power of her wings to go anywhere and everywhere to save those who are suffering.

You probably don't know it yet, but jump rope will be your lifelong friend. You'll cut through the air with your rope and keep on jumping more times than you can count. You'll carve that rhythm into your body and the ground, learning an endless number of tricks, and thinking up an endless number of routines. You'll appear in many competitions. With that one rope you'll go out into the world. You'll have many wonderful encounters. You'll be able to talk to people all over the world with your jump rope. You're taking that first step right now.

Of course, wings can't hold out forever. Man advances through the skies with the energy gained from the earth. Endless flight is impossible. Someday those wings must also return to the ground. Even so, you made up your mind to continue flying in the sky. It's because you are a child of the land. Because all of you boys, all of you girls, each and every one of *us* are the children of this land.

I'll make a promise to you. Someday I will, together with this jump rope, definitely be reunited with that girl. I'll find the girl who gave me the thing that changed my life, using the life-changing power of jump rope. Like you, who can go anywhere and everywhere, I can also go pretty far as I am right now.

Now I can puff out my chest with pride and tell all of this to the you under the cherry blossom tree. I'll spread my wings and go anywhere and everywhere. I'll aim for the horizon to save many people, even if I have to do it alone. And I'll do it again tomorrow. I'll kick off the ground, embrace life with these hands, and touch back down. And on the other side, someday, surely, the time will come when I can meet that boy. I'll definitely arrive at the side of the boy who taught me about the power of wings.

Now go. Your future is ahead of you.

Now, get going. Your future is in that light.

It's a sure thing, I guarantee it. As long as you keep on jumping in the air, you won't forget that day.

That's right, believe me. As long as you keep flying in the sky, you won't forget your future.

Air

by Sena Hideaki

You, I know, won't forget. You'll always remember that day when you crossed paths with the future.

You, I know, won't forget. You'll always remember that day when you encountered something priceless.

It was the end of a week in winter, an afternoon, when the great quake came with its tsunami. You must have seen the black water, rising the wrong way up the road, spreading and spreading until it seemed to go on forever. You evacuated to the schoolyard, lined up, but no one ever said to sit down, and so you stood there, watching the teachers, who were even more confused than you.

You were still small, wearing your gym clothes, a jump rope in one hand. People you knew came fleeing along the road behind the school, and at length the wave came ploddingly after them, like a monster just roused from sleep. Even when the water with its trove of trash and great masses of mud crept oh so close, the teachers did nothing. Maybe you were distracted by the unfathomable acts of the wave, the cars overturned and the houses reduced to floating roofs. This was your first inkling that time flows only forward, never back: you saw that the water out there rose and rose and never receded. And then the principal was shouting through a megaphone, and you rushed into the school building, running up the stairs.

In the third-floor classroom, you watched all the weight of the sea attack, an irresistible mass of water no human could hope to prevail over. Snow began to fall from the dirty gray sky, flakes insistent and dense. The cold was unbearable, freezing; it felt to you like the world's end. That was when you first heard the crying. You turned, saw a girl you didn't know who had fled to this room, convulsing and howling in the arms of those with her. You watched her and, shaken, you tore a piece of paper from some notebook nearby. You started to fold the lined paper, wordlessly, into the shape of an airplane, before you turned back to the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school: the pole on which they used to raise the flag, our nation's flag, was broken, the metal rod tangled up with a small truck. Drifting neighbors nagged at the edge of your vision, but you squeezed your eyes shut tight, then opened them wide, and with all your rage you sent that airplane out into the world. Go, go, and don't ever stop. The hell with some earthquake, some tsunami, just go! A cri de coeur that accompanied the snow-white airplane as you tracked its flight with your eyes. On the wings a few snowflakes landed, and by the time it was over the schoolyard, the wind had caught it, whipping it into a tailspin as it spiraled out of view. All that was left in your own heart was the inertia of that paper plane.

And what was left to you was that jump rope. Wordlessly, you went on living, though the cold threatened to break you. Rescuers came, grown-ups, and you had more cups of instant ramen than you could count. The grown-ups sifted through the mud, putting some of the things they exhumed into a cardboard box and bringing them to you. There were lots of comics, but the bounty of dog-eared, finger-greased books didn't please you. Instead, still speechless, you retreated to a corner of the schoolyard, always there, always alone, jumping rope. Why jump rope? The wave had washed away every other thing that was yours except this one, precious object.

Amidst the selection of trivial amusements the volunteers brought to you, you found a packet of origami paper. You treated it as though every sheet was precious. A doctor who had come to help taught you how to fold an airplane, not just from a square, but by cutting away part of the paper, making it rectangular before you started to work. The trick was to make sure the weight was toward the nose, and to open the space behind the wings a little. They had cleaned the dreck out of the gymnasium, and now you, bereft of your parents and relatives, flew your planes around that great space. You stood on the

stage where the littlest children had drowned and let the plane take everything as it carved a path away from you. Air darted under the wings, the plane gained lift, and didn't stop flying until it hit the wall on the far side of the gym.

I know you won't forget. I found your picture on the web last night. It was only a chance search result, and in the picture you were so small that I am probably the only one who would have recognized you. The picture showed the filthy, ruined school standing over the mud-racked schoolyard. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro, that model student, at the main gate stood at a wild angle, robbed of his left hand, the one that was always holding a book. The cherry blossoms that should have come as close as your outstretched arm were only half in bloom over your head. They had burst into life under the ashen sky, a breath of color in a black-and-white photograph, the one small telltale sign of spring. You were wearing a tattered jumper, absorbed in jumping rope all by yourself. For only when you were jumping, freed from the tyranny of the earth, did you forget your aloneness. The parade of large aftershocks woke you up nights more than once. Your back pressed against the globe transmitted the trembling to the very core of your being: so long as you touched the ground, you were a part of the earth. So you jumped, one second of flight following another. It was how you healed yourself.

You flew your airplane through the schoolyard; everyone left you alone as you chased those paper wings. The convulsions of the earth meant nothing to a flying craft. Whatever numinous power ferried it through the air was unconcerned with the tremors below. So you looked up: the sky clouded over to a grim monotone, your wings alone all the colors of a packet of origami paper. Wings, though, are all too short-lived. Crash-landing in the muck ruined the paper. In search of any surer ground, you piloted your plane toward the edge of the schoolyard – and so came an encounter.

"Oh, hi," and you gave your name.

"Hullo," the shy response.

"You're real good at jump rope."

"Is that your airplane?"

Those

were the first words

we exchanged.

You hold out your airplane, coming around behind to support the right hand. Make sure the wings are even, angle it upward ever so slightly. It overlaps with your voice. The plane leaves a beautiful trail behind it.

"That's awesome!" you laughed.

"Teach me to jump rope, too," you smiled.

"It's like we can both fly."

Thus you discovered jump rope—

—and you learned about airplanes.

I'll never forget. I have a picture here with me. A Polaroid, partly faded. At that moment, a photograph that belonged to me and me alone was an incomparable treasure. One of the volunteers, he took a picture of you flying a plane. Looking at it now, it shows a young boy who seems so thin, his hair so long. He looks almost closed off, in a shell of his own. But I know better. I know that, back straight and best foot forward pull your arm back, you're flying into the future. I know that somewhere just outside the frame, under the cherry tree by the school's front gate, a girl is jumping rope, alone. In a moment you'll pause and look toward the blossoms. Then you'll brush the dirt off your plane delicately, straighten it out with utmost care. This photo has captured for me the sight of you, about to take that crucial step forward.

And you, that little girl, you jumped with such abandon. All you might have said, all you might have felt, forgotten instant by instant, in time with the rhythm of the rope. But each time you stopped, you thought of her. You took the strength of the little folded airplane, flying from your hand, back into yourself. You even had the sense that if you only turned around, he might be standing just over there.

But still you never turned back. The rope kept you facing forward, your curled toes barely brushing the ground. In those brief seconds of contact with the earth, you never could quite summon the courage to take that next step.

You were afraid, I know.

I understand. You were afraid.

That's why I'm going to speak out, now. Shout to that photograph with everything I hold in my heart. Take that step! Go forward! You have the strength not just to jump, but to fly.

That's why I'm going to cheer, now, to that photo of you on the web. You can look back. You can take that next breath. The invisible air you gather into your lungs will give strength to your wings.

Forward, go forward. There is a light that pushes you on, brilliant and shining.

Ah, I remember that light. It came so suddenly, making the whole world clear, and I planted both feet on the ground and looked up at the sky.

I squinted at the light. Shielding my eyes with my hand, I realized how long it had been.

Blinding sun pierced through a sky so long gray, pouring down and washing over me even as I scrunched up my face against it.

Color began to seep back into everything, a flare of light turning upon the world. It was gradually reclaiming its warmth. I remember how boldly the shadow stood out. There it was, at my feet, when I looked down: a stark, black image of myself. When I held out my arms, the shadow did the same, and there in our hands was a paper airplane.

A great shadow swam across the schoolyard, accompanied by a roar of rotors; I looked up at the helicopter overhead. The JSDF was flying past our school, headed to worse disaster zones than ours. Going to offer a hand to people who were suffering more than we were.

You looked up at the helicopter's silhouette, and then silently forward again. You saw that she was there.

You turned back, and recognized him walking toward you. Seeing the folded plane in his hand made you sure about the future. You would become an airplane pilot, flying anywhere and everywhere on those great metal wings; they would take you to help those who were in distress. That's what you would do when you grew up.

I doubt you knew it then, but the jump rope would become your lifelong friend. That rope would slice through the air more times than you could ever count as you jumped, jumped. You would learn tricks, learn to perform, your very body mediating your own rhythm the ground. You would appear in many a competition. That one rope would usher you out into the world. Many fantastic encounters awaited you, no question. Through that jump rope, you would talk to people all over the world. And at that moment, you were preparing to take the first step.

Then, of course, wings never last forever. People need the strength they gain from the earth to take to the sky. Everything that rises one day settles back to the ground; there is no flight that never ends. Even so, you choose to keep jumping, keep lifting yourself into the air, because you are the offspring of the earth. All the jumpers, all the fliers, all of us, the progeny of the great, vast land.

I'll make a promise with you. This rope and I, we'll see that girl again. She gave me something beyond price, and now I'll search for her with something equally priceless, with everything I am. I will go as far as I can, so that you can go on forever.

Now I can turn to you, under those cherry blossoms, and speak with pride. I can tell you I'm going to spread my wings and go on forever. I'll cross the horizon if it will help even one person. Kick off the ground, holding fast to life, alighting in tomorrow. Somewhere beyond that horizon, beyond that tomorrow, I'll see that boy again. He showed me the wings I had, and one day I will reach him.

Now, go. Your future is out there.

Please, go. Your future is in that light.

I'll do it, I'll listen to you. So long as I'm leaping into the air, I know you won't forget that day.

Yes, trust me. So long as I'm flying through the air, I know you won't forget the future.

AIR

I suppose you won't ever forget how you came across your future on that day.

You won't forget, will you? That was the day when you chanced upon something invaluable.

The great earthquake and tsunami came on a weekend winter's afternoon. You saw the black waters gushing up the driveway, rising incessantly and closing in around you. Upon evacuating to the schoolyard, you received none of the usual signals to sit down in a row, so you stood paralyzed, absorbing the chaos of the teachers.

At that time you were still small, and you were wearing sports gear as you held your skipping rope in hand. Local residents came fleeing in from a road to the back of the school and shortly thereafter, the tsunami advanced sluggishly from beyond as if a beast awoken from slumber. The teachers remained motionless despite the impending deluge of debris and muddied water. Your own gaze was transfixed by the surreal motions of upturned cars and houses diminished to mere roofs. When you noticed the waters rising in every direction without any hint of abate, you understood there was no turning back. At last, the principal yelled through the loudspeaker. Then you dashed into the school building and up the stairs.

You observed the ocean's invasion from a third-floor classroom. It was an overwhelming mass which could not be repelled by the likes of humankind. The sky was a dreary grey, and powdery snow had begun to lash downwards. It was all too cold, and you felt chilled to the bones, as if the end of the world had drawn nigh. That was when you first heard the cry. Turning back, you saw there an unfamiliar girl who had escaped into the same classroom. She was being held up by the group of people around her as she convulsed with sobs. An impulse seized you as you watched her. Tearing out a single sheet of white lined notepaper, you folded it wordlessly into the form of an airplane and turned it towards the window. Muddy waters had already swallowed the first floor of the school building. The metal flagpole had broken, and there was a station wagon snagged onto it. In the corner of your vision, silhouettes of residents flashed as they were swept away, but you clenched your eyes shut against them. Then, opening them wide again, you released the plane out into the world together with your rage. Go, go, go out wherever you will. You mustn't let the earthquake and tsunami defeat you. Thus, your heart cried out as you gazed after the course of that white paper plane. Against its wings, first one, then two flakes of snow collided. Presently it reached the middle of the schoolyard, where, battered by the tumultuous wind, the craft finally spiralled into oblivion. Then, all that was left within your chest was the plane's inertia.

And as for you, the skipping rope remained. You lived on in silence amidst the sundering cold. Grown-ups came along on aid missions, while you sipped up immeasurable amounts of their instant noodles. The grown-ups raked out the mud and brought in a variety of cardboard boxes. There were plenty of comics in there too, but it was not like being blessed with a couple of somebody's grimy hand-me-down books could make you happy. So it was that you kept on skipping rope in that corner of the schoolyard, alone and silent as ever. Because having lost everything, that rope was now your single remaining possession, and to you it was invaluable.

You had discovered a pack of origami paper amongst the uninteresting toys brought along by the support workers. You used it with great care. A volunteer physician had taught you different methods for folding airplanes – not just the one using square paper, but also one where you could make it with rectangular paper created by cutting a section off. The trick was to centre the weight towards the front and then curve the back of the wings a little. There you were, a girl who had lost both parents and relatives, flying airplanes in the gymnasium, now washed clean of mud. Just a small child standing on the previously flooded stage, unleashing the plane with everything in her. Gathering the air in its wings, the plane gained lift, soaring all the way to the edge of the gymnasium.

You could never have forgotten. Last night, I found a picture of you on the internet. I had happened upon it quite by accident during a search, but you seemed so small that if it had been anyone else looking they wouldn't have known it was you. There was the school complex strewn with mud and rubble, and

the sludgy schoolyard within it. At the front gate, the statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro, the peasant sage, was keeled over. His left hand, which had once held a book, was now missing. You were skipping rope beneath the cherry tree. The tree had been submerged in water higher than the tips of one's outstretched fingers, but now the blossoms were just beginning to come to life overhead. Underneath the grey sky, the half blooms seemed tinted with colour on the monotone film. They hinted at the arrival of a faint smudge of spring, like a breath on the air. You were wearing a second-hand jumper, revelling alone in the act of skipping. Only when skipping could you forget the loneliness. Only in jumping rope were you released from the bonds of the land. During the dead of night, you awoke time after time in the wake of immense aftershocks. Back pressed against the earth, the tremors shook your very heart. So long as your body touched the land, you were a part of the earth. So it was that you skipped rope, soothing your body autonomously in a chain of momentary flights, over and over again.

You flew airplanes in the schoolyard, chasing those wings without a soul to interrupt. The tremors of the land had no effect on planes. That imperceptible power to float in the sky did not vanish with the quivers of the earth. That's why you looked up to those wings. Against the murky sky and bleached landscape, your wings alone brought colour in a splash of origami rainbow. But wings are not forever. The paper crumbles if it falls into muck. You were constantly on the search for even a small stretch solid ground, over which you would release the plane out towards the borders of the yard – and that was how you came across it.

“Hey”, you greeted.

“Hello”, you replied bashfully.

“You're good at skipping rope.”

“Is this your plane?”

These

were the first words

we exchanged with one another.

Proffering a plane, you looped around my back and supported my right hand in yours. After adjusting the balance of the wings, you tipped it upwards ever so slightly. On your vocal cue, the plane took flight in a magnificent arch.

“That's amazing!” You grinned.

“Teach me how to skip rope too”, you laughed back.

“Do you want to try together?”

That is how you came across rope skipping –

-- and that is how you chanced upon planes.

I will never forget. I have that single photograph in hand. It is a mildly faded polaroid. In those days, I had treasured this polaroid which had become mine in that time and place more than anything. It was a photo that a male volunteer had taken of me flying a plane. Looking back, the youth I had been then was a skinny one with overgrown hair, like something shut into a shell that was too small to contain it. But I know. I can tell with certainty from the back of this boy with his arched spine and good foot forward that in this moment, he was linking to the future. Outside of the frame of the picture, that girl was skipping rope by herself underneath the cherry tree beside the front gate. Soon I will pause my hand and turn my gaze towards that cherry tree. Carefully brushing the dirt off the paper plane, I will adjust its shape and cradle it within both hands. This photo was taken of me just as I was about to take a step forward.

Indeed, the young girl that I was back then had skipped with abandon; forgetting all language and self in the moment, resonating to the rhythm of the rope. But in every pause, I remembered that girl. And in remembering, the strength of the origami airplane that had soared from my hand filled my chest once more. I can even recall that sense of anticipation that if I turned around, she would be there. But even so, I did not turn. The skipping rope kept me twisted forward, and the toes which touched the ground were anchored. I simply lacked that one extra ounce of courage.

You're scared.

I understand, you're scared.

That is why I will now raise my voice in encouragement towards that photograph, from the depths of my heart. Take a step. Move forward. You have the strength to leap within you. That's why I will send on a cheer to the boy in the picture on the internet. You can look back and live. The imperceptible air that you breathe will lend strength to your wings.

That's it, go on now. The light that spurs you onwards now gleams.

Ah, I remember that light. How the world had lit up all of a sudden. Pausing the rope to plant both feet upon the ground, I peered up into the sky.

I squinted my eyes against the brilliance. Shading my forehead with my palm, I realised that it had been a long time coming.

From the crevices of an ever-grey sky, dazzling sunlight spilled forth. Crinkling my face unwittingly, I bathed in the light with the full length of my body.

The world slowly regained colour and warmth as it burst with halation. I remember that stark shadows too. When I lowered my eyes there was a shadow at my feet. It was a bold shadow chiselled out in my own shape. When I spread my arms, the shadow spread its arms too, and in its hand was my origami.

A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. The sound of rotors rang out and I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defence Forces were flying over the school, heading towards disaster areas which had been worse affected. They were going to offer their aid to people who were more in need.

You looked up to the shadow of the helicopter, then stared in front of you quietly. You came to accept her.

Looking back, you recognise his approach. Seeing the origami airplane in your hand, you had decided on your future. You would become an airplane pilot. Flying wherever you will on the strength of those wings, you would become an adult who would rescue those in suffering.

You don't know it yet, but the skipping rope will become your lifelong companion. You will carve the air innumerable times with its length. You will learn multiple tricks and weave countless performances, beating out a rhythm with your body and the ground. You will go on to compete in many contests. Taking on the world with a single length of rope, you will surely come by many fantastic encounters. Through skipping rope, you will converse with the people of the world. You are taking that step forward now.

Wings are not forever, of course. People take to the air using energy derived from the land. Perpetual flight is an impossibility, and one day those wings must return down to earth. Even so, you choose to fly the skies. For you are a child of the earth. All of you, all of me, every single one of us – we are all children of the earth.

Let me make a promise to you. One day for sure, I will meet you again with this rope in hand. To the girl who had given me something invaluable, I swear that I will use this invaluable strength to seek you out. Now I've learned to fly out afar so that you may also reach for any distance.

I can now say this to the boy under that cherry tree with my head held high. I'll spread my wings and fly out to every corner. I will aim for the horizon so as to save one more person. Tomorrow I will alight again, kicking the earth and embracing life within these hands. One day hereon after, a time will surely come when I will meet him. Invariably, I will return to him who had shown me my wings.

So there, go on. Your future is in front of you.

There, go forth. Your future lies within that light.

Very well, I will assure you. So long as you keep skipping, you will not forget that day.

That's right, believe in me. As long as you continue to fly those skies, you won't forget the future.

AIR

She can't forget meeting the future that day.

He will not forget about coming across something irreplaceable then.

That big earthquake and tsunami came on a wintry weekend afternoon. She could see dirty water going up the roadways, then increasing infinitely and approaching. Without a signal to sit down after they evacuated and gathered, forming into a row in the schoolyard, she remained standing still, and accepted the teachers being in a state of chaos.

Still small and in a gym attire, he held a skipping rope in his hands. Neighbors ran in from a backstreet of the school, and soon the tsunami came from that side slowly like a monster woken up from a sleep. Even though a lot of rubbish with muddy water approached, the teachers didn't move yet. He could have his eyes glued to an impossible motion of overturned cars and houses which became mere roofs. He understood that the time wouldn't turn back since he realized that the volume of water had increased everywhere and didn't drop off at all. Finally, the principal screamed through a megaphone, and he rushed into the schoolhouse, then ran up the stairs.

In the classroom on the third floor, she saw a mass of sea suddenly crashing on. It was a devastating mass the people couldn't resist. The sky was gray, slightly dirty, and fine snow began to fall heavily. It was very cold, almost freezing, and she sensed the end of the world. Then, for the first time, she heard a cry. Looking back, a strange girl who sought refuge in the same classroom, sobbed with spasms and was embraced by the people around her. She was staring at them, but she felt an impulse and tore out a sheet of paper from a nearby notebook. She folded the ruled whitepaper silently, making up a shape of a plane and turned around to the window. The muddy water already swallowed the first floor of the school, the pole of the hoisted national flag broke, and a wagon caught on an iron rod. The figures of the residents who were being carried away were reflected in the corner of her sight, but she closed her eyes tight, then opened them widely. She let the plane loose with anger towards the world. Fly, fly, fly to the end of the world. Fly and don't give in to the earthquakes and tsunamis. She stared at the course of the snow-white paper plane while giving a loud cry in her heart. One, two flakes of powder snow hit onto the top of the wings, and when it soon arrived right above the schoolyard, finally it was stirred by mixed-up wind. The aircraft's body disappeared, spinning around. Now only the inertia of the plane remained within her mind.

And the skipping rope was left with him. He was living silently in almost tearing coldness. Adult rescuers came over, and he slurped uncountable instant noodle soups! The adults scraped the mud off and brought him various things in cardboard boxes. There were many comics, but even though they gave him someone's dirty books which had been read until they got old, he wasn't happy. So he always played with the skipping rope speechlessly, alone in the corner of the schoolyard. As for him, whose everything was washed away, this was the only precious thing left with him.

She found a wrapped *origami* out of uninteresting toys the supporters had brought. She used that with good care. A volunteer doctor taught her how to fold a plane. It is not simply about folding from square papers, but there is also a way to make them from cutting a part out to form a rectangle. The trick was to move the center of gravity forward and turn the rear of the wings over a bit. She, who lost both her parents and relatives, flew the plane in the gym where the sludge was washed away. She stood on the stage with small drowning children and flew it straight leaving everything. The wings settled down in the air and ran to the end of the gym with a lifting power.

She will never forget the boy. She found a picture of him on the Web last night. He, who she came across only by a casual search, had a very small figure. If it wasn't her, no one would have known. The schoolhouses, dirty with debris and mud, plus the muddy schoolyard.

The statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō¹ on the side of the main gate slanted and its left hand which held a book was missing. He was skipping a rope under a cherry tree. The cherry that must have soaked up to his fingertips when he stretched his hand was at half bloom over his head. Giving a life under a gray sky, it told about coming of spring, with slight blurs from thin openings, like a breath colored by a monotone film. He wore an old jumper, amusing himself with rope skipping. He forgot about loneliness only when he was jumping. He was freed from the ties of the earth only when he skipped the rope. Big aftershocks continued, and he woke up many times in the night. Once his back stuck to the earth, the vibrations moved his heart. As long as his body stuck there, he was a part of the earth. So by skipping the rope he healed his body alone, connecting the moments of jumping several times.

She flew the plane in the schoolyard and ran after the wings undisturbed by anyone. The earthquake didn't affect the plane. Despite the earthquake, the invisible power of floating in the sky didn't fade away. So she looked up at the wings. The sky got cloudy and the scene got dirty with one monochrome. That's why her wings only had iridescent colors of *origami*. The wings are not eternal. If they fall into the mud, the paper will crumble. She looked for a little more solid ground and flew the plane towards the edge of the schoolyard. Then, she joined him.

"Hi," he said and gave his name.

"Good afternoon," she answered shyly.

"You're good at skipping a rope."

"Is that your plane?"

Those were the first words *they* exchanged.

She gave him the plane, turned around behind and held his right hand. She set the wings bisymmetrically, only a little bit higher. It raised with his shouts. The body of the plane flew away with a beautiful wake.

"Awesome. That's awesome!" he smiled.

"Teach me how to skip a rope," the girl also smiled.

"Shall we skip together?"

And *she* joined skipping the rope.

He came across the plane.

The man will never forget it. He has a picture in his hand. A slightly discolored Polaroid photo. This Polaroid that instantly belonged to him was the most precious thing at that time. The volunteer men took pictures of him flying the plane. When the man sees the picture now, it seems that this young boy slimmed down, his hair grew and he withdrew into his tight shell. But he does know. His back silhouette of rising it above his head, with a stronger leg put forward and back muscles stretched, was surely connected with the future at that time. It was out of the frame, but the child was skipping the rope alone under the cherry near the main gate. He would soon stop his hands and look at the cherry tree. He would carefully dust the paper plane, fix the shape and wrap it up with both hands. This picture captured him and brought to others just before he made a step.

"Yes!" this young girl was skipping innocently. She forgot her words and mind each moment and sympathized with the rhythm of the rope. But every time she had a rest, he could recall that girl. He might take back to his heart the strength of the *origami* plane that did a takeoff from her hand. She even had a hunch that he would be there if she turned her head toward him. Nevertheless, she didn't look around. Skipping the rope made her look ahead and tied her toes connected to the ground. Once she touched the earth, she couldn't have the courage to take the next step.

She must be afraid.

But she just knows that he is afraid.

¹ an innovative agriculturist from the end of Edo period

“So I will now share my thoughts. Towards the picture, with all my feelings. Take a step! Move forward! The girl has the power to jump.”

“So I will send my cheers to the boy on the Web. He will be able to look back and keep breathing. The invisible air that he breathes will give the strength to his wings.”

“Right, move! The light that pushes her back from behind, will shine now.”

“Oh, I remember the light. At that time, the world was suddenly bright, then I stopped the rope, put my both feet on the ground, and looked up into the sky,” said the woman.

“I squinted at the sparkling sunshine. I held my palm over my forehead, but I noticed that such a thing happened after a long time,” said the man.

The dazzling sunshine fell from a gap in the constantly gray sky. The woman frowned involuntarily and bathed in the sunlight with all her body.

The world that caused halation slowly got colors and was taking the warmth back. The man remembered the sharp shadows. When he looked down at his feet there was a shadow. This strong black shadow impersonated him. Once he spread his both arms, the shadow also spread the arms, and his *origami* was inside the hand.

The big shadow crossed the schoolyard. The sound of rotor rang, and the woman looked up at the helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defense Forces were flying over the school buildings towards more severe disaster areas, to reach more miserable people.

She looks up at the shadow of the helicopter and keeps her eyes front in silence. She recognizes her figure.

He turns around and notices him walking up. When he sees him holding the *origami* plane in his hand, he strongly believes about the future, that he will be a pilot of a plane and an adult who will fly everywhere with the power of the wings and will help those who suffer.

She may still not know, but she will go hand in hand with skipping the rope throughout her whole life. She will cut the air with the rope countless times and will keep skipping. She will learn many skills and work out many performances, carving the rhythm with the earth and the body. I guess she will start in many competitions. She will go out to the world with a single rope and have many wonderful meetings. She will chat with many people from all over the world while skipping the rope. She is now trying to make the step forward.

Of course, the wings are not eternal. People move in the sky by the energy gained from the earth. Someday, the wings will also return to the earth, and the endless flight is impossible. Nevertheless, he will be determined to keep on flying in the sky, because he is a child of the earth, because all of the boys and girls here and there with *the man* and *the woman* are the children of this earth.

The man will promise her. One day, he will certainly meet that girl with the rope again. He will find her with the precious strength she gave him. Now, he can go as far as she could go.

While he is under the cherry, the woman can now tell him with confidence that she will spread her wings and go everywhere. She will aim at the horizon to rescue even one more person. She will kick the ground, with her life in her hands, and will land tomorrow, too. The day will come when she will certainly be able to meet that child over there. The woman can reach the place for sure, where he told her about the wings.

Well, she should go. Her future is ahead of her.

Now, please go there! His future is in the light.

“Sounds good.” The man gave her his assurance. She will never forget that day as long as she keeps skipping in the sky.

“Yes, do believe me!” the woman exclaimed. He will not forget about the future as long as he keeps flying in the sky.

Air

By: Hideaki Sena

I don't think you'll forget. That day you found your future.

I hope you won't forget. That day you chanced upon something irreplaceable.

It was afternoon during a winter weekend when the great earthquake and tsunami came. You saw, I think, the black water travel up the road, growing ever closer and larger. Taking shelter in the school yard and with no signal given to form a line, you stood stock still, watching the teachers panic, accepting it.

You were still small, in your gym clothes, jump rope in hand. Nearby people were fleeing from the school's back road as, like a waking beast, the tsunami lumbered towards them. Garbage mixed with dirty water drew closer, yet the teachers did nothing. For you, the flipped-over cars, the buildings that had become nothing but roofs, the unbelievable change of it all captivated you. And only after seeing the water level rise endlessly, noticing how there's no chance of it receding, did you know that time cannot go back. Finally, the principal's shouts through a bullhorn sent you rushing with the others up the school stairs.

You were in a third floor classroom, watching the ocean's bulk approach and assault; its victims couldn't resist its overwhelming presence. A relentless snow began to fall from the dingy grey sky. It was so cold you thought you would freeze, and you felt that the world was at its end. It was at that moment you first heard someone sobbing. You turned your head, and in the same classroom, taking shelter, was an unfamiliar girl, shaking and weeping, being held by a nearby person. You took in the situation and, acting on impulse, ripped a sheet of paper from a nearby notebook. Silently folding the lined white page, you made an airplane and turned to face the window. The muddy water had already engulfed the first floor, and a car had struck the flagpole, leaving it crooked. Out of the corner of your eye you saw people being washed away, but you closed your eyes, gathered your determination, and snapped them open angrily. You faced the world and flung the airplane out. Fly, fly, fly as far as you can. Fly without mind to the earthquake or tsunami. Your heart cheered it on as you tracked the white paper airplane's flight. Snow hit the wings once, twice, and as it arrived over the school yard, the wind kicked up and caused the plane to fall into a spin, tumbling toward the ground. And all that was left in you was the plane's stillness.

All that was left to you was a jump rope. You seemed to live silently in a cold of your own that could rip to shreds. Relief workers came, and you slurped through countless bowls of instant ramen. Adults came to scrape through the mud, and they brought boxes of goods with them. There was plenty of manga, but they were all old, second-hand books that had been given to the school, and you weren't satisfied. So while still saying nothing, always alone in a corner of the playground, you jumped rope. Because for you, cast adrift and alone, your jump rope was irreplaceable.

You were looking through all the boring toys brought by relief workers when you found one package of origami. You used it carefully, preciously. The volunteer doctor showed you how to make an origami airplane. Not only how you can use a square piece of paper, but a torn-off rectangular piece as well. The nose was heavy, the backs of the wings bent just a bit. With no parents or relatives, you flew your plane in the gym, now cleaned of mud. Standing on a stage where children had recently almost drowned, you trusted everything to the plane as you let it go. The wings captured the air, rose, and soared into the depths of the gym.

You definitely won't forget. I found your photo online last night. You, who were so small, who I found by some slight chance, wouldn't have known your future without me. The playground muddy, the school building filthy with mud and debris. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro by the front gate, leaning forward and missing his left hand and book. You were jumping rope under the cherry tree. Stretching its arms into the air as if reaching for safety, above you only half of the tree had blossomed. Life fled under the grey sky, and the tree was like a breath of color on monochrome film, a blurry spring announcing itself. You were wearing an old jacket, and enjoying yourself with nothing but a single jump rope. It was only when you were jumping that you forgot your loneliness. It was only when jumping that you broke free from the ground's hold. As the powerful aftershocks continued, you woke countless

times during the night. Your back stuck to the ground, the tremors rocked you. Your body was at its limits, you were one with the earth. So with your rope, alone, you healed yourself with every jump, over and over again.

You were in the school yard, flying your plane, chasing it with all your focus and might. The ground's shaking meant nothing to it with the plane's unseen ability to float in the sky. So you looked up to its wings. The heavens were bleak, the landscape a single dirty color, but your wings were a folded paper rainbow. The wings weren't built for eternity; they fell apart after falling into the mud. You searched for a bit across the firm earth, then went to the school yard's end to throw your airplane - when you ran into someone.

"Hey," they said, and gave their name.

"Morning," you answered shyly.

"You're really good with that jump rope, huh?"

"Is that your airplane?"

That was

our first

conversation.

You held out your plane, turned around, then readied your right arm. The wings were perfectly symmetrical, tilted up just a bit. Your shout of encouragement echoed. The plane left beauty in its wake.

"Whoa, amazing!" you said, smiling.

"Show me your jump rope, too!" you said, grinning.

"Can we jump together?"

And just like that you met through your jump rope -

- with your airplane, you happened to meet.

I will never forget. I have a single photograph. It's a slightly faded Polaroid. That time, that place has become mine, a Polaroid that is my treasure, more than anything else. One of the volunteers, a man, took a picture of you flying your plane. I look at it now, and that boy, you, were thin with long hair; I remember it was as if you had shut yourself away in a shell. But I know. Putting your best foot forward, your back straight, you were tied to your future. They're out of frame, but by the front gates, underneath the cherry tree, that child is jumping rope alone. You almost stop, noticing something in the cherry tree's direction. The filth on the paper airplane had been carefully wiped away, its body straightened and both wings tucked back. This picture was taken just one step in front of you and delivered to me.

Yeah, the girl - you - simply jumped. You forgot about words, about your feelings, just for a moment as you resonated with the rhythm of your rope. But every time you rested, you remembered that kid, didn't you? You recalled the strength with which that origami airplane leapt from the hand, and the feelings inside you returned, didn't they? Even if it's only a feeling you remembered, you felt as if you would be there if you turned around. And yet, you didn't turn. With your jump rope you faced forward, and your feet were tied to the ground. At that moment, your feet touching the earth, you couldn't seize the courage to take a step forward.

You're frightened.

I know, you're frightened.

So I'm going to make myself heard: I'm going to take this photo, and fill it with all that I feel. Step forward. Continue onward. You have the power to leap forth within you.

So I'm going to send the you I found online a cheer. Look back at it, and you can survive. The very air you breathe will give your wings power.

All right, move on. There's light pushing you forward, and it's shining now.

Ah, I remember that light. That time when the world suddenly became bright, my rope stopped, and my feet came to the ground as I looked to the sky.

My eyes narrowed against that brilliance. I held my hand up over my eyes, but it took me some time to understand what I was seeing.

From a crack in the long grey sky poured out a dazzling ray of sun. I grimaced reflexively, my whole body bathed in light.

The world was enveloped in a blinding halo, slowly changing color, regaining its warmth. I remember that sharp, distinct shadow. My eyes dropped to my feet and the shadow was there. That powerful shadow, seeming to be me, was there. The shadow and I opened our arms wide, and inside my hand was my plane.

A huge shadow crossed the school yard. The sound of rotors echoed, and I looked up at the helicopter hanging in the sky. The Self-Defense Force was flying above the school building. They were headed towards the hardest hit disaster areas; they were here to help the people suffering most.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow, then quietly face forward. You notice the girl's silhouette.

You turn your head, recognizing him walking up to you. You see the hand holding an origami airplane, and you're sure of the future. He will become a pilot. He will fly where he chooses with the power of his wings, and he will grow up to be someone who helps those in need.

While I'm still not sure, your jump rope will be your lifelong companion. With your rope you'll jump and slice through the air a sky high number of times. How many types of rope will you learn, how many new performances will you invent, you who keeps rhythm with the earth? I think you'll appear in many different competitions; with only a rope you'll make your way out into the world, I bet. There will be many wonderful new encounters for you, I'm sure. You'll be able to talk to people with your jump rope throughout the world. You just have to be willing to take that first step.

Of course wings aren't built for eternity. People take the energy to soar from the ground. Sooner or later wings too must return to the earth; flight without limits is impossible. Nevertheless, you've decided to continue flying, if only because you're a child of the earth. All that "you" are - all that "you" are - us both, it's because we're children of the earth.

I'll make a promise with you. Someday, no matter what, along with this rope, I'll meet you again. That girl who gave me something irreplaceable; I'll find her with it. Wherever you may go, I'll follow.

I can tell you that I'm so proud of you as you stand under the cherry tree. My wings are wide, so let's fly wherever we may. Let's save as many as we can, and aim for the horizon. Kick off, embrace life, and alight in tomorrow. Someday, surely, I'll meet that kid again. I'll surely, finally arrive to where that boy is, who taught me to use my wings.

Come on, it's time to go. Your future lies just beyond.

Go on. Your future lies within that light.

All right, I'll do it. I'll continue jumping for as long as I can; don't you forget that day.

Of course, I must believe. I'll keep on flying as far as I can; don't forget the future.

AIR

I haven't forgotten. That day when we first met. I hope you didn't forget. That day was irreplaceable. That winter weekend afternoon, when the earthquake and tsunami hit. When I saw the black water fill the road; boundless, unceasing, and ever on the chase. We took refuge at the schoolyard, but without the signal to sit in a single file, I was stuck with our teacher's confusion. You were so small, then, holding a jump rope in your gym clothes. The people in our neighborhood had evacuated down a road behind the school, but before long, the tsunami had sluggishly followed them like some chemical sludge. The muddied water brought along plenty of waste in its wake, but the teachers didn't move. The unbelievable movements of overturned vehicles and the roofs of destroyed homes caught your eyes. You knew then that time would not reverse, because the water flowed everywhere by the volume as soon as you saw it. At long last, the school principal shouted through the megaphone, you rushed into the school building and ran up the stairs. At the third-floor classroom, you saw the water amass and assault. Mere humans couldn't do a thing against such an overwhelming flood. The sky was the soiled color of ashen grey and a fierce snowfall had begun. It was so cold, so freezing, that you felt as if the world were ending. That was the first time I ever heard you cry. Looking back, an unfamiliar girl who took refuge at the same classroom was also having a sobbing fit. A nearby person took her under their arm. I was staring at that scene, but impulsively remembered to tear out a nearby sheet of paper. I silently folded the lined paper into an airplane and prepared to face the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, the flagpole was bent, and an iron rod was caught in a station wagon. The images of people being washed away were reflected from the view of the corner. My closed my burning eyes at first, but then opened them wide, enveloped with anger. I released the paper airplane out into the world. *Fly! Fly! Fly anywhere you can! Fly from the earthquake and tsunami without fail!* My heart was shouting as I stared at the flight of the white plane. It pierced one or two snowflakes above its wings, and before long, it came out just above the schoolyard, until at last the stirred winds shook the paper frame, as the plane spun and vanished. Only the its inertia was left beneath my chest. Your jump-rope was also left over. The cold had torn you apart so thoroughly, that you lived on only in silence. The relief workers had arrived, and you were slurping countless noodles of instant ramen. They scraped out the mud and brought various things over by cardboard box. There were also a lot of manga but, no one was happy to have been blessed with worn out and dog-eared volumes. There was always one jump rope left over from play in the corner of the courtyard. That's why, for you, everything was washed away, the only thing was left behind, was the one thing irreplaceable to you. The relief workers had also brought with them boring toys, but I found a single bundle of origami paper. I handled the it with care. A volunteer medic taught me a new way of folding paper airplanes. You didn't only have to fold the paper into a square, but there was another method of tearing off a rectangular piece. The trick is to bring together the front of the rectangle to the center and then bend the back of the wing a little. I had lost parents and relatives, but my plane flew past it, it flew past the gym that had been washed away by the soiled mud. It rose above the theater where a small child had drowned, as everything we had put our trust in was washed right down the current. Its wings captured the air, gaining a powerful lift, until it reached the edge of the gymnasium. You would never forget it. I found your picture on the web last night. Just by chance I happened across you, your very image was small, but I didn't have to understand why, did I? The schoolyard was filthy with rubble and mire, a schoolyard of slush. The Kinjiro Ninomiya statue nearby the front gate was sinking, having lost the left hand which held all his books. You played jump-rope beneath the cherry blossom tree. You needed only to put your hand out in front of you, and it would be immersed in cherry blossoms. They bloomed and scattered for five minutes right above your head. Life emerged beneath the ashen skies, like a breath of color on a monotone film strip, it taught us that spring arrived with a faint blur. You were wearing your old pinafore

dress and kept yourself amused with only that jump-rope. Only when you were skipping rope did you forget your isolation. Only when you skipped rope were you freed from your ties to this world. You woke up many times through the night from the great continuous aftershocks. You clung to the earth on your back, while my heart shook with every tremor. By doing little more than touching the earth, your body became a part of it. That's why, when you skipped rope, in the moment of a single jump, multiple layers connected, and your body healed itself. I flew a paper plane in the courtyard. Everybody chased those wings without hindrance. The paper plane was unaffected by the shaking of the ground. While by an unseen force, it floated up into the sky, the trembling of the earth did not cease. So instead I looked up to those paper wings. The heavens were murky, and scenery was dirty with monochrome, which is why only your wings were colored with rainbow origami paper. But wings are not eternal things. The paper plane fell into the sludge. If only for a little bit, I searched the reliable grounds, and at the edge of courtyard where I had thrown my plane—we met. “Yo” I said, introducing myself. “Hello,” you shyly replied. “Your...jump-rope...is really good.” I said. “Oh,” you replied, “is that your paper plane?” Those were the words of *our* first exchange. You held up the plane, twirling from behind with your right hand. The wings' bilateral symmetry was tilted slightly upwards. My shouts of encouragement held it aloft. The plane's paper frame glided with a beautiful wake. “Amazing! Amazing!” I cheered with laughter. “Should I now teach you to jump-rope?” you said. “Will we fly together?” *I* had chanced upon the jump rope—and *you* had chanced upon a paper plane. I will definitely never forget it. I even still have the photo nearby. It's a slightly faded Polaroid now. In those days, at that spot, we became our own people. That Polaroid is my most prized possession. I value it more than anything else. A male took a photo of you flying that plane. And the boy that called your name has now grown thin, stretched out his hair, and appears to have shrunk into a shriveled husk, but I know him. At that time, you definitely shooting for the future. You put forward your dominant foot, straightened your back, and put yourself ahead. Outside of the frame, where the cherry blossoms had fallen by the front gate, that child was skipping rope by herself. For a brief moment, your hands stopped, and all your attentions shifted to the direction of the cherry blossoms. The paper plane's filth had been thoroughly cleaned away. You adjusted its shape and covered it with both hands. Just before taking one step forward, this photo was taken and given to me. That's right, the girl that called to me had innocently flown away. In a single moment, my words and heart were forgotten in the rhythm and resonance of that jump-rope. But every time you rest, the memories of that child return. From those hands, the strength of the origami plane that flew away, returned to your heart. If you thought back to that place, you would even remember the premonitions, but even then, you didn't turn around. The jump-rope you threw ahead of you was bound to the toes that touched the Earth, but when you touched it, you failed to seize your courage. You were scared. I know. You were scared. That's why I raise my voice. I turn towards the photo, and I am swallowed whole with emotion. I step forward. I advance ahead. The power to fly still resides inside of you. That's why I encourage you online. When you remember those times, you can breathe out. In the sky where your bated breath could not be seen, when you gave your wings the power to fly. Yes, *fly*. The light on your back is glittering now. Ah, how I remember that light. The world suddenly became brighter that day. You let go of my rope with both feet planted firmly into the ground and looked up into the sky. My eyes squinted at the glow. It had been a long time since I'd felt that. I held my hand over my forehead to see. Dazzling sunlight poured down from the cracks in the grey ashen skies. I couldn't help but tremble when my whole body was bathed in that light. That world which sparked the halo slowly changed color. Its heat had returned. I distinctly remember that shadow. My eyes feel to the shadow at my feet. That powerful black shadow was made in my image. When I extended my arms, so did the shadow's, and in his hand was the origami. The great shadow crossed the courtyard. The sound of an engine rotor echoed throughout, and I looked up to see a helicopter. The JSDF flew away from the school. They were on to worse-stricken places, extending a hand to those most in need.

You turned to the helicopter's shadow and gazed ahead with confidence. You recognized the image of a woman. You looked back and recognized his step. You saw the hand that held the paper plane and believed in the future. You became your own plane pilot. You flew anywhere with the power of your wings and became an adult that helped the suffering. I still don't know why, but you treated that jump-rope like a lifelong friend. For countless times you cut through the sky with your rope and continued to jump. You studied numerous branches and worked out numerous performances, your body cutting through the Earth's rhythm. With one rope, you left the Earth. You had many wonderful meetings. With that rope, you walked with all the world's people. It were as if by that one step, you moved across the planet. Of course, wings are not eternal things. Humans rise into the skies with energy gained from the Earth. And someday, our wings will return to the Earth. Flight without end is impossible. Nevertheless, you decided to keep flying into the sky. You continued because you were a child of the Earth. All of me, and all of you, we were, *the two of us*, children of the Earth. I promise you. Someday, no matter what, with this rope, I will find my way back to that child again. The irreplaceable thing you gave to me, with its irreplaceable power I will find you. It looked like you would go just about anywhere, and I can also go as far. You are beneath the cherry blossoms now. My chest constricts and speaks. My wings outstretched and I now I can fly anywhere. For the sake of saving many, I reach for the horizon by myself. I kick off the Earth and cradle my life in my own hand. Not just today, but also tomorrow, I rise and fall. In that direction, surely someday, the time when I meet that child again is coming. You will definitely pursue and return to the boy who gave her wings and taught her to fly. Yes, flying is great. Just ahead is my future. Yes, please keep flying on. Inside of that light was her future. Sounds good, I'll do it. I will keep flying on into the sky for as far as I can. I will never forget that day. That's right, you believe. Keep flying into the sky for as far as you can, I will never forget your future.

AIR by Sena Hideaki

Him: I guess you'll never forget. You had an encounter with your future on that day.

Her: I suppose you will never forget. You happened upon something invaluable on that day.

Him: The big earthquake and tsunami came that winter weekend afternoon. You must have seen the street with the black water rushing uphill, relentlessly approaching. Taking shelter in the schoolyard, in a straight line—but without the usual instruction to take a seat—you just stood there, observing the panicked state of your teachers.

Her: You were only a child, dressed in your gym clothes, jump rope in hand. Fleeing neighbors came in from the road behind the school. Then moments later the tsunami came, slowly, like a monster waking from its slumber. Even as the muddy water littered with garbage drew near, the teachers didn't move. You must have been mesmerized by the unbelievable motion of the overturned cars and houses reduced to nothing but roofs. You understood that time couldn't go backwards when you realized the water level was rising but there was no peak. It was never receding. Finally, the principal began screaming into the bullhorn, and you rushed back into the building, dashing up the stairs.

Him: From the window of a third-floor classroom you saw the weight of the sea attack. It was an overwhelming mass, which no human could hope to defy. The sky was a dingy gray, and snowflakes began to fall in earnest. So cold you could almost freeze, you felt like it was the end of the world. At that moment you first heard the sound of someone crying. Turning around you could see an unfamiliar girl who had fled into the same classroom, shaking as she sobbed, while those around her supported her with their arms. Even with such a scene unfolding before you, you were struck with an impulse to grab a nearby notebook and tear out a page. You said a silent prayer as you folded the blank, ruled paper into an airplane and aimed it out the window. The muddy water had already engulfed the first floor and snapped the flagpole in two, a minivan was snagged on the monkey bars. Townspeople being swept away crossed the edge of your vision, but you closed your eyes tightly, then opened them wide and flung the paper airplane into the world, filled with your rage. Go, go, go on forever. No earthquake or tsunami can stop you. Go. Cheering on the inside, you followed the path of the stark white airplane. A snowflake or two brushed the wings, and right as it finally reached the point directly over the schoolyard, the wind kicked up, knocking it into a tailspin as it disappeared from sight. Then, the only thing remaining in your heart was the airplane's inertia.

Her: And you still had the jump rope. In the biting cold, you remained wordless as life continued on. The grownups came to your rescue, then who knows how many bowls of instant ramen you ended up eating. The grownups waded through the mud to bring you cardboard boxes filled with various things. They brought lots of manga, but you weren't that excited to have people's old dog eared books, even if they were given as gifts. So you just played with your jump rope, alone in the corner of the schoolyard, still not saying a word. After all, it was the one and only possession you had left.

Him: You found a bundle of origami paper among the boring toys brought in by charities. You were careful not to waste it. A volunteer doctor showed you how to make a paper airplane. Not just the way where you use the square as-is but also the way where you cut off part of the paper to make a rectangle first. The trick is to bring the center of gravity towards the front and fold the wings back slightly at the rear. After losing both parents and all your relatives, you flew paper airplanes in that gym, recently washed of the filthy mud. Standing on the nearly submerged stage you, a small child, filled that paper airplane with all your troubles and flung it straight ahead. Its wings caught the air, achieved lift, and carried it to the edge of the gym.

Her: You will never forget. I found your picture on the Internet last night. It was just a random search, and you were so young that I don't think anyone would have recognized you besides me. The school building was soggy and filthy with mud and debris. The leaning statue of young Ninomiya Kenjiro adjacent to the school entrance was still missing his left hand, where he should have been holding a book. You were jumping rope under the cherry blossom tree. The tree that would have been submerged up to the top of your fingertips was in half-bloom above your head. Bursting with life under

the gray sky, it was like a breath exposed on monochrome film, subtly blurred, hinting of the coming spring. You were wearing a second-hand jacket. You entertained yourself jumping rope alone. Jumping was the only thing that made you forget your loneliness. Jumping rope was the only time the bound earth would be freed. Relentless, massive aftershocks woke you in the middle of the night, time after time. With your back against the earth, the vibrations shook your soul. As long as your body was right up against it, you became part of the Earth. That's why each moment you left the ground connected into a chain of moments where you could be alone—moments of healing.

Him: You flew the airplane in the schoolyard. You chased after the wings with no one to hold you back. The shaking ground had no effect on the airplane. The shaking ground had no bearing on the presence of the invisible force enabling flight. So you looked up at the wings. The sky was hazy and your surroundings were colorless with filth, so the rainbow-colored origami paper of your wings stood in contrast. Wings aren't forever. Paper falls apart when it lands in the mud. You flung your airplane to the edge of the schoolyard, in search of more stable ground—that's when you had the encounter.

Her: He said, "Hey," and told you his name.

Him: She replied with a shy, "Hello."

Her: He said, "You sure are good at jumping rope."

Him: She said, "Is that your airplane?"

Those were

the first

words we shared.

Him: You handed her the airplane then went behind her to steady her hand, keeping the left and right wings symmetrical while tilting them up ever so slightly. She cocked the airplane back on your starting call. It flew in a beautiful arc.

Her: "Amazing! Amazing!" you said with a smile.

Him: You smiled as well and said, "Why don't you teach me to jump rope too."

Her: "Do you want to lift off together?" you said.

He encountered the jump rope—

—She happened upon an airplane.

Him: I'll never forget. I carry a photo with me. A slightly faded Polaroid. It was given to me at that time, at that place. I treasured it more than anything. A picture of you taken by one of the men volunteering. When I see you now, a little boy, you look so skinny, so in need of a haircut, and you seem as if you've been squeezed into a shell one size too small. But I know. The way you looked from behind as you took that leading step, stretched your back, and lifted your arm above your head—back then, you were definitely connected to the future. She wasn't in the frame, but that girl was jumping rope alone under the cherry blossom tree by the entrance. You would soon stop mid-windup and look towards the tree. You would carefully dust off the paper airplane, bend it back into shape, and cup it with both hands. Someone gave me this picture, which captures the moment before you took that first step.

Her: That's right. You, such a little girl, were innocently jumping rope. You would forget about the words, forget about the pain in your heart, moment by moment in sync with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you took a break I bet you remembered him. I suppose the strength of that origami airplane leaving your fingers was taken right back into your soul. You even had a feeling that he would be there if you turned around. But you didn't turn around. The jump rope kept you looking straight ahead and restricted where your toes could touch the ground. When you were touching the earth, you couldn't muster the courage to take a single step.

Him: You were scared, weren't you?

Her: I get it. You were scared.

Him: So now I raise my voice. I look at the picture and say with all my might, "Take a step. Move forward. The power to jump is within you."

Her: So I cheer you on across the Internet. You can turn and look behind, and you will keep on

breathing. The invisible air you breath becomes the wind in your wings.

Him: That's right. Move. The light pushing you ahead is shining, right now.

Her: Ahh, I remember that light. That moment when the world suddenly brightened, I stopped my rope, planted my feet on the ground, and looked to the sky.

Him: The light made me squint. I shielded my eyes with my hand at my brow and suddenly realized how long it had been.

Her: A beam of blinding sunlight was pouring through the sky that had been gray for so long. I instinctively flinched as my entire body was bathed in light.

Him: Halos began forming around objects as the world slowly began to take on more color and regain its warmth. I remembered my crisp shadow. Looking down at my feet I saw my shadow—a powerful, black shadow in the shape of myself. When I spread my arms wide, the shadow spread its arms too, and my origami airplane was in its hand.

Her: My long shadow cut across the schoolyard. I heard the sound of rotors, then looked up to see a helicopter overhead. The Self-Defence Force flew over the schoolyard. They were passing by on the way to somewhere with graver devastation. They were on their way to offer rescue to those who faced still greater suffering.

Him: You looked up at the silhouette of the helicopter, then silently gazed ahead. You acknowledged her presence.

Her: You turned around and acknowledged his approach. Seeing the origami airplane in his hand, your future was decided. You would become a pilot. You would become a woman who flies to the farthest reaches, by the power of your wings, to help those in distress.

Him: You probably don't know it yet, but the jump rope will be your lifelong companion. You will cut the air with your rope with countless revolutions as you keep on jumping. You will learn all kinds of tricks and choreograph all kinds of performances. You will play out rhythms between your body and the ground. You will surely enter all kinds of tournaments. With that single rope, you will make a name for yourself. You will surely meet all kinds of wonderful people. You will speak with people the world over through your jumping. You are now on the verge of taking that first step.

Her: Of course wings don't fly forever. People are propelled through the sky with energy from the ground. Even wings have to come back to the earth. Eternal flight is impossible. Even so, you have made up your mind to continuously fly through the sky. Because you're a child of the earth. Because all the boys and all the girls, each and every one of us, are children of the earth.

Him: How about I make you a promise? Someday, somewhere, this jump rope and I will meet that girl again. That girl gave me something invaluable, and I will find her with that invaluable power. Just as you could go to the ends of the Earth, I now can also go far.

Her: Girl under the cherry blossom tree, I am now able to tell you this with my head held high. I'll spread my wings and go to the ends of the Earth. I will aim for the horizon to save just one more person. I will kick off the ground, save lives with my hands, and do it again tomorrow. Surely someday, in some far off place, I will meet that boy again. I will surely find my way to him, he who taught me to fly.

Him: Hey. You should get moving. Your future is just ahead.

Her: Hey. Go ahead. Your future lies within the light.

Him: Definitely. I'll make it happen. As long as you keep jumping to the sky, you will never forget that day.

Her: That's right. Believe me. As long as you keep flying through the sky, you will never forget the future.

AIR

You'll never forget the day you came face to face with your future.

I'm sure you won't forget the day you encountered the irreplaceable.

The great earthquake and tsunami arrived on a winter afternoon at the end of the week. You must have seen how the black waters swept away the road and kept on rising ceaselessly. You took refuge in the schoolyard where people were gathering. But they didn't sit down in neat lines, like in the evacuation plans. You stayed standing, watching the chaos amongst the teachers.

You were only little. You were dressed in your PE kit, and you had a skipping rope in your hand. From the road behind the school, people from the neighbourhood came running, and at last from the same direction the tsunami came lumbering, like a monster awoken from sleep. Even as the tide of debris and muddy water got closer, the teachers didn't move. Your eyes were fixed on the unbelievable movement of overturned cars and houses stripped down to just their rooves. You knew there was no turning back when you realised that the water everywhere was rising, and not going down at all. At last the headteacher shouted into a megaphone, and you rushed into the school and ran up the stairs.

In a classroom on the third floor, you watched the mass of water charging forward to attack you. It was a merciless demon, one no human could fight. The sky was a filthy grey, and powdered snow had begun to swirl violently. It was so cold you thought you would freeze. It felt like the end of the world. At that point, for the first time, you heard someone crying. When you looked behind you, there was a girl there you didn't know who had taken refuge in the same classroom. She was sobbing convulsively in the arms of a neighbour. As you watched the scene, you felt a sudden impulse to pick up a notebook that was lying nearby and tear out a single page. Silently, you folded the lined white paper into the shape of a plane and turned to face the window. The muddy waters had already swallowed the first floor of the school. The flagstaff had snapped, and a minivan was caught on the iron pole. Out of the corner of your eye, you could see human bodies being swept along. You closed your eyes tightly. Then you opened them wide and, full of rage, let the plane loose into the world. 'Go! Go! Go to the ends of the earth! Don't let any stupid earthquake or tsunami! get the better of you!' Inwardly crying out, you watched the path of your pure white plane. One snowflake, then another, struck the wings of the plane, and finally, just as it reached the sky right over the schoolyard, at last, flapping in the churning wind, the plane went into a tailspin and disappeared. In your heart, only the inertia of the plane was left.

And you still had your skipping rope. You had managed to stay alive, silent, in the midst of that cold so extreme it seemed likely to tear you to shreds. The grown-ups on the rescue team arrived, and you slurped up pot after pot of instant noodles. The grown-ups cleared out the mud, and brought you lots of different things in cardboard boxes. There were a lot of manga, too, but you weren't happy to be given someone's old rejected books. So you kept on playing by yourself in the corner of the schoolyard, skipping, still wordless. Everything else had been swept away from you; that skipping rope was all that remained. It was your only possession, and you treasured it.

Amongst the useless toys that the rescue workers had brought you, you found a packet of origami paper. You treated that paper with great care. One of the volunteer doctors taught you how to fold a plane - not just how to fold one from a square of paper, but also how to make one out of a rectangle by tearing off some of the paper to make a square. The trick was to bring the plane's centre of gravity forward and bend the wings back a little. You had lost your parents and relatives, but in that gym - now washed clean of mud - you made planes fly. You stood on the stage where small children had almost drowned, and sent your plane forward with all your might. Catching the air with its wings, it gained lift and raced to the end of the gym.

...

You'll never forget it. I found your photo on the internet last night. I stumbled across it while searching for something else; you were so small, only I would have recognised you. The mud-filled schoolyard in a school filthy with debris. By the main entrance, the statue of the agriculturalist Ninomiya Sontoku still leant, but his left hand and the book it once held were gone. You were skipping underneath a cherry tree. The cherry blossoms ought to have saturated the air down to your outstretched fingertips, but instead they were half in bloom above your head. Exuding life under the grey sky, showing through faintly like a breath of colour in a black and white photograph, they spoke of the arrival of spring. You were wearing a second-hand jumper. You were amusing yourself skipping alone. It was only when you jumped that you could forget your isolation. Only in that moment when you jumped over the rope were you released from the stranglehold of the earthquake. Huge aftershocks were continuing, and you woke up in the night time and time again. When your back was close to the earth, the shaking rocked your heart. As long as your body was touching the earth you were part of it. And so, by skipping, connecting those repeated moments of flight, you comforted yourself, alone.

You flew planes around the schoolyard. You chased their wings, and no-one got in your way. The trembling of the ground had no effect on the planes. The mysterious force which lifted them to the sky did not go away when the earth began to shake. You looked on the wings of your planes with admiration. The sky was grey, the landscape stained monochrome; only your wings made an origami rainbow. Now, wings don't last forever. When they fall into the mud, the paper gets torn. You were searching for stable ground, even just a little of it. You let your plane fly to the end of the schoolyard – and that's when we met.

"Hey," you said, to get my attention.

"Hello," you replied, shyly.

"Aren't you great at skipping!"

"Is that your plane?"

Those were

the first words

we spoke to one another.

You offered me the plane. Turning away, I held it up in my right hand so that the wings were symmetrical and the plane pointed up a little. I was buoyed up by your shout of encouragement. The plane traced a beautiful trajectory.

"Wow, that's great!" you laughed.

"Teach me how to skip, too!" you laughed.

"Shall we go flying together?"

And so you encountered the skipping rope...

...And so you encountered the plane.

...

I'll never forget it. I have a single photograph in my hand. It's a slightly faded Polaroid.

This Polaroid, something which belonged to me at that time, in that place, was more precious to me than anything. One of the male volunteers took it of you flying your plane. Looking at it now, the boy called 'you' seems thin, his hair unkempt, as if he's trapped in a cramped shell. But I know. With your dominant foot forward and your back straight, holding yourself upright with your back to the camera, you were in touch with the future then. She's outside the frame, but that girl was skipping alone under the cherry tree near the main entrance. After a little while, you stopped flying your plane and looked over at the cherry tree. You carefully brushed the dirt off the paper plane, straightened it out and cradled it in both hands. This photo was taken of you just before you took that step forward.

That's right. The girl called 'you' was innocently skipping. Every instant, you forgot words and thoughts and became one with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you stopped, you thought about that child. The strength of the paper plane which had taken flight from his hands returned to your heart. You knew that, if you turned around, he'd be there. But you didn't

turn around. The skipping rope forced you to look in front of you, and bound your toes, which were touching the ground. While you were touching the earth, you couldn't work up the courage to take another step.

You're scared, aren't you?

I get it. You're scared.

So I'll raise my voice now. Turn towards the photo, holding all those feelings in your heart. Take that step forward. Keep going. You have the power to fly.

So I'm cheering for the you who's on the internet. You can look back and connect your breaths with mine. The unseen air that you breathe in will give power to your wings.

That's right, go forward. The light at your back is shining.

...

Ah, I remember that light. The world became bright suddenly; I stopped skipping, and looked up at the sky with both feet on the ground.

I squinted at the light, framing it with my palm, and realised I hadn't done that in a long time.

From a chink in the uniformly grey sky, a ray of dazzling light came pouring down. Without thinking I screwed up my face and bathed my whole body in the light.

Slowly, warmth and colour began to return to this world where this halo effect had been produced. I remember the shadows thrown into sharp relief. When I looked at my feet, there was a shadow, a reassuring black shadow in my shape. When I stretched out my arms, so did the shadow, and my origami was in its hand.

A big shadow fell across the schoolyard. The sound of rotor blades rang out, and I looked up at the helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defence Force was flying over the school. It was heading for a worse-hit area, to reach out to people who were suffering more.

You looked up at the figure of the helicopter, then stared silently ahead. You recognised her.

You looked back and saw that he was walking closer. Seeing the paper plane in his hand, you were certain of the future. You were going to become an aeroplane pilot. You were going to be an adult who used the power of your wings to fly all over the world and help people who were suffering.

You might not know it yet, but that skipping rope will become your lifelong friend. You'll cut through the sky with it countless times and carry on flying. You'll learn lots of tricks, put on lots of performances, and carve its rhythm into your body and the earth. You'll appear in lots of competitions with it. You'll go out into the world, just you and your skipping rope. You'll have many wonderful encounters. You'll talk to people all over the world about skipping. You're about to take that step now.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People take the energy that they've gained from the earth up into the sky. At some point, even wings return to the earth; there's no such thing as flying forever. Even so, you're determined to keep flying through the sky. That's because you're a child of the earth. All of you – all of us – are children of the earth.

I'm going to promise you something. Someday, without fail, I'll meet that child again with this rope. With the irreplaceable power in it, I'll track down that girl who gave me the irreplaceable. The present me will go far in order that you can go anywhere.

Puffed up with pride, I can now say this to the you under the cherry tree. I will spread my wings and fly anywhere I wish. In order to save many people, even though I'm alone, I'll set my sights on the horizon. Planting my feet on the ground, I'll hold this life in my hands and alight on tomorrow, as well. Over there, someday, there will surely come a time when I can meet that child. Without fail, I will reach the boy who gave me wings.

'Well, go, then. That's your future.'

'Well, go, then. Your future is in the centre of that light.'

Sure, I'll take that on. As long as you keep flying through the sky, you shouldn't forget

that day.

That's right. Please believe in me. As long as you're flying through the sky, you won't forget the future.

Air

You won't forget. That you met the future that day.

You won't forget. That you discovered something irreplaceable that day.

One weekend afternoon in Winter, that great earthquake and tsunami struck. You saw the black water coursing up the highway, swelling in size and drawing inexorably closer. You fled, joining the gathering in the school grounds where, without a signal to sit down, you stood rooted to the spot in your place in line and absorbed the teachers' state of panic.

You were still very young, dressed in your P.E. kit and holding a jump rope in your hand. People from the local neighborhood came running from the road at the back of the school, and before long the tsunami appeared in the distance in lumbering pursuit, like a monster awoken from its slumber. Even as the murky water drew nearer along with its mountain of debris, still the teachers did not move. You must have been captivated by the incredible acrobatics performed by overturned cars and houses that had been reduced to just their roofs. You knew there was no turning back time when you realized that the volume of water was not decreasing at all, but rather just kept rising. At last, the principal yelled into his megaphone and you ran up the stairs to take refuge on the school roof.

From a classroom on the third floor, you watched the wall of sea water strike. It was an overwhelming mass, which nobody could fight against. The sky turned a dirtyish gray color, and powdery snow started to fall in a relentless torrent. It was so cold it seemed likely to freeze, and it felt to you like the end of the world. At that moment you heard crying for the first time. When you turned around, a girl you didn't recognise who had taken refuge in the same classroom was convulsed in a fit of weeping and being comforted by the people surrounding her. You watched this intently, but then on an impulse you ripped out a piece of paper from a nearby notebook. Silently, you folded the piece of white lined paper, making it into the shape of an airplane, then turned to face the window.

The muddy water had already swallowed up the first floor of the school, the pole which had held the national flag had snapped, and a people carrier was speared onto the metal rod. At the edge of your field of vision you could see the figures of fellow citizens being swept away, but you screwed your eyes up tightly, then opened them wide and, fueled with anger, you faced the world and threw the airplane. Go, go, go as far as you can! Go, don't give in to the likes of the earthquake and tsunami. You stared after the pure white paper plane, while your heart screamed out. One, two snowflakes landed on its wings, and before long, when it was directly above the school grounds, the aircraft was swept up at last by a rousing wind, went into a tailspin and disappeared from view. Only the inertia of the airplane remained inside your chest.

And for you, the jump rope remained. You were living silently inside a coldness that seemed sharp enough to cut you into pieces. The adults from the rescue teams came, and you slurped up endless cups of instant ramen. The adults scraped off the mud and brought you various items in a cardboard box. There was a lot of manga, but the gift of someone else's dog-eared, grubby old books did not cheer you up. So you remained silent, and always played by yourself in the corner of the schoolyard, jumping rope. For after everything else had been swept away, this was the one precious, irreplaceable thing left that belonged to you.

You found a pack of origami paper amongst the boring toys that had been donated. You used it very carefully. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold a paper plane. Not only from a square piece of paper, but also the method where you cut off a section and make it from a rectangle. The trick was to move the center of gravity to the front, and fold it up slightly behind the wings. You, having lost your parents and all your relatives, flew your airplane in the gymnasium where the sludge had been washed away. You stood on the stage where the little children had drowned and threw it straight ahead of you with everything you had. Its wings gained purchase in the air and soaring upwards, it glided to the other end of the gym.

You will never forget. Last night, I found your photograph online. I came across it completely by chance in an online search, your figure so small that no one but me would have recognised you. At the

school covered in dirt and rubble, the muddy schoolyard. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō beside the front gates was tilted to one side, the left hand which holds his book still missing. You were jumping rope beneath the cherry tree. The cherry blossom, which must have been submerged up to the point where your hand reached, was in half bloom above your head. Beneath the grey sky it glimmered with life, and like a breath of technicolor in a black and white movie blurred slightly, heralding the coming of Spring.

You were wearing a secondhand sweater. You were absorbed in your solo game of jump rope. Only when you were jumping did you forget your solitude. Only when you were jumping rope were you free from the earth's ties. The large aftershocks continued, and you woke up several times in the middle of the night. If you were lying with your back flat against the earth, the tremors shook your heart. As long as your body was in contact with it, you were a part of the earth. So, with your jump rope, clinging to the moment of jumping over and over again, you healed that body all by yourself.

You flew airplanes in the schoolyard. Without anybody to get in the way, you ran after their wings. The earth's tremors had no effect on the airplanes. The invisible force that floated them up to the sky did not disappear when the ground shook. And so, you looked up at the wings. The sky was muddy, the landscape smeared over into monochrome, so only your wings were the color of an origami rainbow. The wings were not everlasting. When they fell into the mud, the paper disintegrated. You were searching for just a little bit of solid ground, and propelled your airplane towards the edge of the schoolyard – and that's when you met.

"Hey," you said, and introduced yourself.

"Hello", you replied shyly.

"You're good at jump rope aren't you."

"Is that your airplane?"

These were

The first words

We exchanged.

You held out the airplane, then put your right hand behind your back. Keeping the left and right wings perfectly symmetrical, you tilt it upwards ever so slightly.

At your shout he held it high above his head. The airplane soared in a beautiful trajectory.

"Amazing! Amazing!", you grinned.

"Teach me jump rope too," you smiled back.

"Shall we jump together?"

And that's how *you* encountered the jump rope...

And *you* came across the airplane.

I will never forget. I have a photograph close to hand. A slightly faded polaroid photograph. The polaroid, which instantly renders that time into something belonging to me, was a treasure beyond compare. A volunteer took a photo of you flying a plane. When I look at it now, the little boy that you were seems thin, hair overgrown, as though he had withdrawn into a cramped shell. But I know. With your best foot forward, your back straight and your arms held high above your head, you were without a doubt connected to the future at that time. It's out of the frame, but near to the front gates beneath the cherry blossom, that kid was jumping rope by herself. In just a little while you would still your hand and look in the direction of the cherry blossom. You would carefully clean the dirt off the paper plane, fix it back into shape and grasp it with both hands. That photo captured you just before you stepped forward, and delivered that moment to me.

That's right. The little girl that you were was completely absorbed in jumping. Forgetting both words and feelings in every instant, you became one with the rhythm of the rope. But I bet you remembered that kid every time you stopped to rest. I bet you felt in your chest once again the strength of the origami plane that took off from his hands. You even had the premonition that he would be there if you turned around. Even so, you didn't turn around. Jump rope made you face forward, and bound the tip of your toe that was connected to the ground. When you were touching the earth, you couldn't

muster up the courage for one more step.

You're scared, aren't you?

I understand. You're scared.

That's why I am raising my voice now. Towards the photograph, with every ounce of feeling I have. Step forward. Go ahead. You have within you the strength to jump.

That's why I am calling out to you on the internet. You can look back and survive. The invisible air that you breathe will give power to your wings.

That's right, go on. The light which drives you forward is shining now.

Ah I remember that light. At that moment the world was suddenly illuminated, and I stopped the rope, planted both feet on the ground and looked up at the sky.

I squinted at its brilliance. Although I shaded my eyes with the palm of my hand, I realized it was the first time this had happened for a long time.

Dazzling sunlight came streaming down from a chink in the sky that had been gray for so long. I screwed up my face instinctively, and bathed my whole body in the light.

The world which had produced the halation gradually changed color and regained its warmth. I remember that clear image. When I looked down at my feet, there was a shadow. A strong black silhouette shaped like me. When I stretched out both my arms, the shadow also stretched out its arms, and in its hand was my origami plane.

A large shadow traversed the schoolyard. The sound of a rotor reverberated, and I looked up at the helicopter flying overhead. The Self-Defense Force was flying over the school. Heading for a more terrible disaster site. To extend a hand to people in greater hardship than us.

You look up at the shadow of the helicopter, then calmly gaze straight ahead. You notice her presence.

You turn around and notice him walking towards you. You see an origami plane in his hands and you feel certain of the future. You will become an airplane pilot. You will become an adult who can fly anywhere with the power of her wings and save people in trouble.

You don't know this yet, but the jump rope will become your lifelong friend. You will keep jumping, slicing through the air with your rope more times than you can count. You will learn a great many tricks and devise a great many performances; you will carve your rhythm into the earth with this body. You will take part in many competitions. With one rope you will emerge into the world. You will have many wonderful encounters. With your jump rope, you will speak to people all over the world. Now you are about to take that step.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People rise into the air using energy derived from the earth. At some point, even wings come back to earth; there is no such thing as an infinite flight. Nonetheless, you are determined to keep flying through the sky. Because you are a child of the earth. Every you, every me – we are all children of this earth.

Let me promise you something. One day, no matter what, I will meet that child again, accompanied by this rope. I will search with this invaluable strength, for the girl who gave me such a precious gift. The person I am today will travel far to make sure that you can go anywhere too.

I can tell you now beneath the cherry blossom with my head held high. I will spread my wings and go anywhere. I will aim for the horizon so that even by myself I can save many people. I will reject the earth, grasp onto life with these hands, and tomorrow I will land once more. One day, somewhere out there, the time will surely come when I can meet that child again. Without a doubt, I can find my way to where he is, the one who taught me how to fly.

Well, you should go. Your future is over there.

Oh, please go. Your future is inside that light.

It'll be ok, I promise. As long as you keep jumping into the sky, you won't forget that day.

That's right, please believe me. As long as you keep flying in the sky, you won't forget the future.

AIR

By Sena Hideaki

You will probably never forget: that day, when you came face to face with the future.

You will probably never forget: that day, when *you* stumbled upon something irreplaceable.

It was a weekend afternoon in the winter when the tremendous earthquake and tsunami hit. You must've seen the black water climbing up the roadway and swelling up indefinitely. You took refuge with everyone in the schoolyard and stood in line for what felt like forever without any direction to sit, just watching and taking it all in as the teachers moved about in chaos.

You were still young—wearing a gym uniform, *you* were holding a jump rope. People from the neighborhood came running from the road behind the school, the sluggish tsunami slowly approaching like a monster that had just awakened from slumber. A mixture of garbage and mud water advanced, but the teachers wouldn't budge. *You* were probably shocked at the unnatural movements of the flipped-over bikes and rooftops that used to be houses and didn't want to believe *your* eyes. *You* finally realized that time was irreversible when the water kept swelling and never receding. Finally, the principal yelled into a megaphone and *you* ran into the school building and up the stairs.

You watched the sea's assault from a third floor classroom. It was an overwhelming mass and there was no way people could fight it. The sky was murky and gray, powdered snow beginning to fall aggressively. It was so cold that you were on the verge of freezing—it was beginning to feel like the end of the world. That was when you heard a wail for the first time. You turned around and saw a girl you'd never seen before convulsing from her sobs, the people around her holding onto her. You were watching all of this, but then instinctively you ripped a page out of a notebook lying nearby. You folded a piece of white paper with ruled lines on it into an airplane without saying a word, and then faced the window. The dirty water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, the flagpole had snapped, and a minivan was stuck on the horizontal bar. In the corner of your field of vision was the image of residents being washed away, but you shut your eyes tight, then opened them wide, and full of rage, threw the airplane out into the world. Go, go, go as far as you can. Don't let earthquakes and tsunamis defeat you—just go. You shouted this in your head as you watched the white paper plane fly into the distance. One—and then two snowflakes collided with the wing, and when it got to the top of the schoolyard, the paper plane was finally stirred up by the wind and spun away, disappearing. And inside your chest remained only the inertia of the plane.

And *you* were left with a jump rope. In a frigidity that could tear *you* to shreds, *you* lived in silence. The rescue workers came, and *you* slurped on so many instant noodles *you* lost count. The adults raked out the dirt and brought lots of things in cardboard boxes. There were so many mangas to choose from, but *you* didn't feel excited receiving dirty, used book donations. That's why, without uttering a word, *you* would always go to a corner of the schoolyard and play with *your* jump rope. Everything else got washed away. The jump rope was the only thing that remained—the only thing that was still *yours*.

Among all of the boring toys that the aid brought in, you found a single pack of origami papers. You used it carefully. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold an airplane: not only how to fold it from a square piece of paper, but also by cutting it up into a rectangle and making a plane out of that. The trick was to put weight on the front of the plane and to slightly bend the back of the wings. You—who'd lost your parents and relatives—flew the paper plane in the gymnasium, where they'd washed away all of the sludge. You stood on the small stage that the little kids almost drowned on, put all of your trust into it, and let go of the plane in a straight path. The wings caught air, defied gravity, and raced to the other side of

the gym.

You will never forget. I found *your* photo online last night. I stumbled upon it by chance—*you* were very small, and only I would've recognized it. The school building dirtied by mud and debris... the slushy schoolyard. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro at the main gate was crooked and still missing his left hand, which held a book. *You* are jumping rope under the cherry blossom tree. It was supposed to have dipped low enough for *you* to just be able to reach it, but it was only half-blooming way above *your* head. It began its life under the gray skies, and like a breath painted on a monotone film, it signaled the blurry beginning of spring. *You* are wearing a second-hand jacket. *You* are entertaining yourself with *your* jump rope. *You'd* forget about *your* loneliness when *you* were in the air. Only when *you* were jumping rope would *you* escape from the grip of the earth. There were numerous aftershocks, and *you'd* wake up many times throughout the night. When *your* back was glued to the earth, the tremors shook *your* spirits. When *your* body was in contact, *you* were a part of Earth. That's why *you'd* jump rope, staying in the air for tiny moments over and over, in an attempt to heal—by *yourself*.

You flew airplanes across the schoolyard. Without anyone's interruption, *you'd* chase after the plane. The shaking of the ground had no effect on the airplanes. The invisible force that made the plane float in the air never disappeared, despite the tremors of the ground. That's why *you'd* look up at the wings. The sky was dull and the sights were dirtied into a single color—only *your* wings had colors: the rainbow origami. The planes were not meant to last forever. When they fell to the muddy ground, they would crumble. *You'd* try your best to look for a clearing and release your plane towards the corner of the schoolyard—and that's where the two of *you* met.

"Hey," *you* said, and introduced yourself.

"Hello." The response was bashful.

"You're good at jump rope."

"Is that your airplane?"

Those
were the first
words that *we* exchanged.

You showed your airplane off, turned around, and held onto your right arm. *You* made sure to even out both wings and pointed the tip slightly upwards. *You* let out a shout of encouragement. The plane flew in a beautiful trajectory.

"Wow, wow!" *you* said, laughing.

"Show me how to jump rope," *you* said, also laughing.

"Wanna jump together?"

---And that's how *you* came across a jump rope;

---And *you* a plane.

I will never forget. *I* am holding a photo. It's a fading Polaroid. Since people could keep the photos right there on the spot, Polaroids were treasured back then. A man who was volunteering took a snapshot of *you* flying the paper plane. In the photo, the boy referred to as "*you*" is skinny with long hair and seems trapped in a tight shell. But *I* know. With *your* right foot forward and *your* back outstretched, this moment is without a doubt connected to your future. It's not in the frame, but next to the main gate under the cherry blossom tree, the other child is jumping rope. *You're* about to stop and look in the direction of the cherry blossoms. *You* will brush the dirt off from the paper plane carefully, reshape it, and encase it in *your* hands. This photo captures *you* right before taking that first step.

That's right, the girl referred to as "you" was jumping in silence. You forgot words and feelings with the rhythm of the jump rope. But every time you took a break, you probably thought about him. Deep within your heart, you kept the strength of the origami airplane that leapt out of your hands. You even kept that feeling—like you could see it there if you turned around. But you never turned around. The jump rope kept you facing forward, and kept your toes from touching the ground. When you were in contact with the earth, you couldn't grasp that courage you needed to take the first step.

You were scared.

I understand. *You* were scared.

That's why *I* raise my voice now. Towards the photograph, with all *I've* got. Take that step. Keep moving. You have the strength to jump.

That's why I send *you*, after finding *you* online—a message. *You* can turn around and keep breathing. The invisible air that *you* swallow gives strength to *your* wings.

That's right, keep going. The light that would push your back is about to shine.

Yes, I remember that light. Suddenly, the world became bright and I stopped jumping, put both feet firmly on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I narrowed *my* eyes at the glow. *I* put *my* hand to *my* forehead to shade *my* eyes, and realized that it had been a while since *I'd* done that.

From a crevice of the gray-painted sky, a dazzling light poured down. Without thinking, I screwed up my face and bathed my entire body in the light.

After the halation, the world slowly began to regain color and warmth. *I* still remember *my* sharp shadow. When *I* dropped *my* eyes toward *my* feet, *I* saw it. A powerful black shadow with an outline of *my* body. When *I* spread out *my* arms, the shadow also spread out its arms, and in *my* hand was *my* origami.

A huge shadow cut across the schoolyard. The sound of the rotor reverberated as I looked up at the helicopter in the sky. The self-defense force was flying above the school building. It was headed to an area more heavily stricken, helping those in even greater need.

After looking up at the helicopter in the sky, you stare ahead in silence. You recognize her.

You turn around and realize that he is walking towards *you*. *You* see the folded plane in his hand, and recognize *your* future. *I'm going to become a pilot*. With the power of wings, *you* want to fly to places and provide help to those in need.

You probably don't know it yet, but the jump rope would become your lifelong friend. You can't even count the number of times, but you jump and continue to jump rope, cutting the air with each jump. You learn all sorts of tricks, create various performances, and figure out the rhythm between your body and the earth. You would probably go on to compete. You would probably enter the world with just your jump rope. You would probably meet many wonderful people. You are going to talk to people from all over the world through the jump rope. You are about to take that first step now.

Of course, wings are not forever. People are only able to move from the energy that the earth provide them. Even wings eventually return to the earth—it's impossible to fly forever. But *you* decide that *you* want to keep flying. Because you are a child of the earth. All of *you*, all of you, us, everyone—we're all children of the earth.

I will make you a promise. One day, *I* will meet her again, with this jump rope. The girl who bestowed something invaluable upon me—I will find her, using that invaluable strength. Just as you have gone far, far and beyond, *I* will also go to the ends of the earth.

With pride now I can tell *you*, underneath the cherry blossom tree, that I will spread my wings and soar far and wide. I will reach for the horizon so that I could save as many people as possible. I'll kick the earth, grab life with my own hands, and stand up again tomorrow. Far beyond, someday, I will meet him again. The one who showed me my wings, I am

certain I will reach him one day.

Come on, you should go. Over there is your future.

Come on, *you* have to go. That light is *your* future.

It's okay, *I* guarantee it. As long as you're jumping in the air, you will never forget that day.

That's right believe me. As long as *you're* flying in the air, *you* will never forget the future.

AIR

by Sena Hideaki

I don't think you'll forget. On that day, you met with the future.

I do not think you will forget. On that day, you happened across something irreplaceable.

On a winter afternoon at the end of the week, that huge earthquake and tsunami hit. You saw the black water flood up the roadway, watched it spread and advance without end. You all evacuated and gathered in the schoolyard, and you stood there all lined up, with no signal to sit down, quietly watching the teachers' confusion.

You were still small then, wearing your gym clothes, carrying a jump-rope in your hand. People from the neighborhood came fleeing down the road behind the school, and soon the tsunami came creeping up after them, like a beast awakened from sleep. Even now, as the muddy water carried mounds of garbage closer, the teachers did not move. Your eyes were probably entranced by the sight of an overturned bicycle, a house that now was only a roof, all moving in unbelievable ways. When you realized that no matter how the volume of water increased it never went back down, you knew that time could never be turned back. All of a sudden the principal gave a shout over a megaphone, and you crowded into the school building, fleeing up the stairs.

In a third-floor classroom, you watched as the full volume of the sea attacked. It was an overwhelming mass; no human could stand against it. The sky was a dirty gray, and violent hail started to fall. It was incredibly cold, almost freezing, and you felt that it was the end of the world. That was when you first heard a crying voice. When you turned around, a girl you didn't know who had fled to the same classroom was sobbing in great, heaving spasms, and the people around her were holding her tightly. You were staring at this scene, but then on impulse you turned to a nearby notebook and tore out one page. Without a word you folded the lined, white paper, making it into an airplane, and turned back to face the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the school's first floor, and the flagpole for flying the nation's colors was broken, with a station wagon stuck on the metal pole. In the corner of your vision you saw the form of a person being swept away, but you firmly closed your eyes. Then you opened your eyes wide again, put all your anger into the airplane, and set it flying out towards the world. 'Go, go, go forever! Don't lose to earthquakes and tsunamis and just go!' You screamed in your heart as you watched the progress of the pure white paper airplane. Pellets of hail hit its wings, one, two, and just as it finally got right above the schoolyard, it was blown aside by the agitated wind, the fuselage went into a tailspin, and it disappeared. And in your heart only the plane's inertia was left.

And you still had the jump-rope left. Amid a chill so cold you felt you would break into pieces, you wordlessly continued to live. The rescue workers came, and you slurped down uncountable amounts of instant ramen. The adults scraped away the mud and brought various things in a cardboard box. There were lots of comic books, but you could not be happy for receiving someone's dirty old comic books out of charity. Instead you continued not speaking, and played in the corner of the schoolyard alone with your jump-rope. It was because, after everything else had been swept away, this alone was the one irreplaceable thing that remained and belonged to you.

Among the boring toys that the aid workers brought, you found a single pack of origami paper. You used it very carefully. The volunteer doctor taught you how to fold paper airplanes. You learned to start by cutting off a piece to make a rectangle, rather than starting with a simple square piece of paper. The trick was to shift the center of gravity towards the front end, and slightly raise up the back part of the wings. And you, who had lost your parents and relatives, stood in a gymnasium washed clean of sludge and flew your airplane. You stood on a stage drowning in small children, entrusted all your feelings to the plane, and let it fly straight ahead. The wings caught the air, gained lifting power, and flew all the way to the end of the gymnasium.

You will surely not forget. Last night I found your picture on the Web. I came upon it completely coincidentally during a search. You were so small, and I do not think anyone other than me would have recognized you. A muddy schoolyard, and a school building dirtied with mud and rubble. The image of famous thinker Ninomiya Kinjiro next to the school gate had lost its left hand and the book it held, and was hanging crookedly. You were playing jump-rope under the cherry blossom tree. The tree that had been submerged up to the height of your outstretched hand was now partially in bloom over your head. Under the ashen sky it still produced life, and its monotone-film-stained colors were a slightly blurred sign of the coming of spring. You were wearing a secondhand jacket. You were amusing yourself by jumping rope alone. You only forgot your loneliness when you were jumping. You were only released from the ground's restraints when you jumped over the rope. Large aftershocks continued, and you awakened many times during the night. With your back sticking to the Earth, the trembling shook your heart. As long as your body was pressed against it, you were a part of the Earth. That is why you jumped rope, accumulating the moments that you jumped, soothing your body in solitude.

You flew airplanes in the schoolyard. You chased after those wings, no-one stopping you. The ground's tremors had no effect on the airplane. The invisible power that lifted it to the sky didn't disappear, no matter how the Earth shook. That's why you raised your eyes to those wings. The heavens were clouded, the scenery all muddled with one color, and so your wings alone were a rainbow of origami paper. Wings are not eternal. If it fell in the mud the paper would tear. In search of even slightly surer ground, you flew your airplane towards the edge of the schoolyard – and in doing so, that's when you met.

You said, "Hey," and stated your name.

And you were all shy as you answered, "Hello."

"You're really good at jump-rope."

"Is that your airplane?"

And those were
the first words
that we exchanged.

You held out the plane, turning around and holding up your right hand. The wings were symmetrical on the left and right, and ever so slightly tilted upwards. At her shout of encouragement you held it aloft. As it flew the fuselage created a beautiful wake behind it.

"Oh, that is amazing!" you cried, smiling.

"Hey, teach me jump-rope, too," you said, smiling.

"Shall we fly together?"

That's how *you* met with jumping rope
and *you* happened upon airplanes.

I'll definitely never forget. I've got a single photograph in my hand. It's a slightly faded Polaroid picture. This Polaroid is an incomparable treasure, making that place and that moment in time mine alone. One of the volunteers took a picture of that "you" flying the airplane. Looking now at that little boy known as "you," you are thin, and your hair is grown long, and you look like you're confined in a tight shell. But I know. You, seen from behind putting your dominant foot forward, stretching your back muscles, and holding the plane aloft. You were definitely connecting to the future that day. It's out of the frame, but underneath the cherry blossom tree near the school gate, that girl is playing jump-rope alone. In a little while your hand will stop, and you'll look towards the cherry tree. You'll neatly brush off the paper airplane's dirt, fix up its shape, and hold it in both hands. This picture has captured you just before you take that step forward, and delivered that "you" to me.

That is right, the little girl known as "you" was innocently jumping. You were resonating

with the rhythm of the rope, forgetting words and your heart for just a moment. But as you rested, I am sure you thought of that boy. I am sure you recalled a feeling in your chest, the power of the paper airplane as you let it fly from your hand. You remembered so strongly that you felt it would be there if you turned around, like a premonition. But still, you did not turn around. The jump-rope made you face forward, and the tips of your toes touching the ground bound you. While you were touching the Earth, you could not manage to grab a single second of courage.

You're scared, huh?

I understand. You are scared.

That's why I'll raise my voice to you now. I'll face this picture and put all of my emotions into this. Take that step. Walk forward. The power to fly is inside you.

That is why I will send a cheer to the you on the Web. You can turn around, and you can breathe. The invisible air that you draw in will give power to your wings.

That's right, go forward. The light that shines at your back is sparkling now.

Ah, I can recall that light. At that moment the world unexpectedly brightened, and I stopped my rope, put both feet on the ground, and raised my eyes to the sky.

I narrowed my eyes against the sparkle. As I raised my palm to my forehead to shield my eyes, I realized it had been a long time since I'd done that.

A dazzling beam of light came pouring out from a gap in the perpetually gray sky. I unthinkingly scrunched up my face and bathed my body in the light.

The world took on a halo effect, slowly regaining its colors and warmth. I remember that crisply defined shadow. When I lowered my gaze to my feet I had a shadow. There was a strong, black shadow in my image. When I raised both my arms the shadow raised its arms, and in its hand was my piece of origami.

A large shadow was cutting across the schoolyard. I raised my eyes to a helicopter high in the sky, the sound of the rotor ringing out. The Japanese Self-Defense Force is flying over the school. They are heading to an even worse disaster area. They are heading to lend a hand to people in even worse condition.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow, and then quietly fix your gaze forward. You recognize her form.

You turn around, and recognize him coming toward you. You see that he holds the origami airplane in his hand, and you believe in the future. You will become an airplane pilot. You will fly anywhere with the power of your wings, and become an adult who would help those who are suffering.

I'm sure you don't know this yet, but you'll make the jump-rope your lifelong friend. You'll cut the air with your rope an uncountable number of times and keep on jumping. You'll learn all kinds of techniques, and build up many performances, and carve your rhythm into the Earth. I'm sure you'll appear in many competitions. You'll go out into the world with your single jump-rope. You'll have lots of wonderful meetings. You'll speak to the people of the world by jumping rope. You're about to take that first step now.

Of course, wings do not last forever. People travel through the air with the energy they get from the earth. Eventually those wings must also return to the ground; there is no such thing as eternal flight. Still, you are determined to keep flying in the sky. The reason being that you are a child of the earth. Every "you" out there, and every other "you"; all of *us* are children of the earth.

I'll make you a promise. One day, with this jump-rope, I will definitely meet that child again. That girl gave me something irreplaceable, and I will use this irreplaceable power to go out and search for her. Now I too can go far, so that you can go anywhere.

To the "you" under the cherry blossom tree, I can reach out my heart and speak to you. I will spread out my wings and go everywhere. I will aim for the horizon, so that even alone I

can save many people. I will kick off from the earth, hold my life in my hands, and tomorrow I will land again. I am sure that one day, on the other side of my journey, the time when I can meet that child is coming. I will definitely arrive by his side, by the boy who gave me wings.

Now then, you'd better go. Your future is ahead.

Now then, you should go on. Your future is within that light.

Don't worry. I'll take on this task. As long as I keep jumping for that sky, you'll never forget that day.

Yes, believe in me. As long as I fly in the sky, you will not forget the future.

AIR by Sena Hideaki

You can never forget the day you met your future.

You could never forget the day you encountered something irreplaceable.

The earthquake and tsunami hit on a winter's Friday afternoon. You probably saw the black waves surge up the street, suddenly swelling towards you. Everyone had evacuated to the school playground, still standing in lines without any indication to sit, you were frozen in place as the teachers panicked.

You were still so small, wearing your P.E. uniform, a skipping rope in your hand. People from the neighbourhood fled in from the road behind the school, soon followed by the creeping water which abruptly burst forward like an awakened beast. Muddy water with mounds of debris drew closer and closer, but the teachers didn't move. Your eyes were locked onto the incomprehensible movement of turned over vehicles and homes reduced to roofs. The moment you knew things would never be the same again was when the waters kept rising with no sign of receding. The headmaster finally screamed through a megaphone and you stampeded into the school and up the stairs.

You saw the ocean's assault from the second floor of the school. No one could fight that overwhelming mass. Violent flurries of snow began to fall from the ashen grey sky. It was so cold, it felt as if everything would freeze, like it was the end of the world. That was when the crying started. You turned to see a girl you didn't know who had fled into the same classroom. Her whole body trembled with sobs and the people around her held her. Seeing this unfold you felt the urge to rip a piece of paper out of a nearby notebook. Silently you folded the blank lined paper into a plane and turned back to the window. The dirty waters had already engulfed the ground floor, the flagpole in the playground had bent and a kei car was caught on the high bars. You could see people being swept away out of the corner of your eyes but you shut them tight before you snapped them wide open and then, filled with rage, you threw the paper aeroplane out into the world. *Go. Go. Get out of here. Don't let earthquakes or tsunamis drag you down, go,* you screamed internally as you watched the pure white plane fly. One, two flakes of snow splattered the wings before being suddenly swept up by an agitated breeze just as it flew above the centre of the playground, causing it to fall into a tailspin and vanish. All you were left with was the sensation of the plane's momentum.

All you had left was the skipping rope. You silently survived in the cold that felt like it would tear you apart. When the adults finally saved you, you slurped down countless bowls of instant ramen. They had scraped the mud off the playground and brought over a cardboard box of stuff. It was chock-full of manga comics, but you weren't exactly thrilled by someone else's muddy old books. So you remained voiceless, alone in the corner of the playground with your skipping rope. Because everything else had been swept away. It was your irreplaceable treasure; it was all that remained of them.

You found a single packet of origami paper among the humdrum toys the rescuers had brought over. You used it carefully. A volunteer doctor showed you how to fold proper paper planes. Not just from square origami paper but rectangular sheets as well after you'd cut a slice off. The trick was to put the centre of gravity in the front of the plane and to fold the wings back just a little. You, who had lost your parents, your whole family, flew your plane in the now muck-free gym. A tiny child standing on a washed-out stage who poured everything into the plane and threw it straight. The wings caught the air which caused them to lift, carrying them all the way to edge of the hall.

You could never, ever forget. You found a photo of yourself online one evening. It was completely by chance that a search led you to that tiny child; you probably wouldn't have recognized yourself if you didn't know it was you. Standing in the muddy playground by the muck and rubble-covered school. The statue of the boy Ninomiya Kinjiro next to the main gate was crooked, the arm that normally held the book he read missing. You were playing with the skipping rope under the sakura cherry tree. The tree was stained with mud as high as you are tall with your arms stretched up but was in half-bloom above your head. It was like a burst of colour in the monotone image; still breathing life under the ashen sky, indicating the faint trickle of spring. You were wearing an old thick jacket. Amusing yourself with the skipping rope. It was only when you jumped that you forgot you were alone. It was only when you

jumped that you were released from the confines of the Earth. You kept waking up in the night from aftershocks. Your heart quaked with the earth when your back was flat against the ground. You'd always be a part of the land as long as your body touched it. That's why you jumped; you could heal alone by connecting those rhythmic moments of flight.

You flew your plane in the playground. You chased after its wings without anyone getting in your way. The shuddering ground couldn't do anything to your plane. The unseen force that flew it made the tremors vanish. That's why you looked up at those wings. The sky was dirtied, the landscape stained a single colour, your wings alone a rainbow of folded paper. But wings don't last forever. Paper fallen in mire can break apart. So you looked for a good place to fly, perhaps by the edge of the playgrou— And that's when you met.

"Hello." You said, giving your name.

"Hey." You replied shyly.

"You're really good at that skipping rope."

"Is that your plane?"

Those were
the first words
we ever shared.

You gave me your plane, moved behind me and took my right hand. You balanced the wings and tilted it up ever so slightly. Then, with a shout of encouragement from you I held the plane up. It flew in a beautiful arc.

"Oh wow! Amazing!" You chortled.

"Now you teach me how to skip rope." You laughed back.

"Do you want to jump together?"

That's when you met the skipping rope—
—and when you encountered planes.

I could never ever forget. I keep a single photo with me. A slightly faded polaroid. That moment back then, back there, is mine, and this polaroid is my most prized possession. A young man, a volunteer, took a picture of you flying the plane. I look at this image now and remember the boy I called 'you'; rake-thin with long hair who was always shut away in his cramped little shell. But I know. The sight of you with your dominant foot forward, back straight, brandishing the plane over your head was the moment you connected with your future. The girl's out of shot but she's playing skipping rope alone under the cherry tree by the gate. It wouldn't be long before your hand stopped and you glanced over there. Before you carefully wiped the dirt off the plane, straightened its shape and cradled it in both hands. This picture captured you in that moment right before you took the first step.

That's right, the girl I called 'you' jumped without a care in the world. Every moment you forgot words and worries, becoming one with the rhythm of the rope. But you remembered that kid every time you took a break. The strength you felt from the folded paper plane leaving your hand reverberated in your chest once more. You remembered the sensation that if you looked back, I'd be there. But you didn't look. The skipping rope turned you forward, tying you to the ground by your tiptoes. You couldn't summon the strength to take that step forward when you were touching the Earth.

You're scared.

I understand. You're frightened.

That's why I'm calling out to you now. Directing all this emotion into this image. Take the step. Move on. The strength to jump is inside you.

That's why I'm cheering you on online. You can look back and still breath. The unseen air you inhale gives your wings strength.

That's it. Keep going. The light pushing you on still shines.

Oh right, I remember that light. The world was suddenly so bright I stopped the rope, both feet on the ground, looking up at the sky.

I squinted at the glare. Shielded my eyes with my hand and realised I hadn't done that in a long time.

The dazzling sun beamed through a break in the eternally grey clouds. I scrunched my face without thinking, my whole body awash with light.

The colour of the world now bathed in a ring of light slowly returned and the warmth with it. I remember that distinct shadow. My eyes fell to it at my feet. There was a clear-cut dark imitation of myself. I spread my arms wide and the shadow spread its own, my paper plane in its hand.

A large shadow fell across the playground. The din of a rotor reverberated, and I looked up to see a helicopter. The Japanese Self Defence Force flew over the school. Moving onto an even worse disaster area. To give aid to those suffering even more.

You looked up at the shadow of the helicopter then silently stared ahead. You see her.

You turned back and I watch you walking towards me. I see the paper plane in your hands, it's clear your future has been decided. You will be a pilot. You will become someone who flies anywhere with his strong wings, saving people in need.

You don't know it yet, but the skipping rope will be your life-long companion. You'll slice through the air with countless rotations as you continue to jump. You'll learn all sorts of tricks, come up with all sorts of performances, carving the rhythm of the rope into the earth and your body. I know you'll perform at a number of major events. You'll tour the globe with your rope. You'll have so many wonderful encounters. You'll talk with people from all around the world with your skipping rope. You're about to take your first step towards all of that.

Of course, wings don't last forever. Humans fly using energy taken from the earth. Wings also always return to the ground, there's no such thing as eternal flight. Even still, you want to fly forever. It's because you're a child of the earth. All of you, all of me, all of *us*, are children of the Earth.

I promise you. I'll see that kid with this rope again. I'll use my unparalleled strength to track down the girl that gave something irreplaceable. I can go anywhere, just like you can go anywhere.

I can now tell the child under the cherry tree that I am holding my head up high. I will spread my wings wide and go to the ends of the earth. I will look towards the horizon to save as many people as I can, even if it's just one person. I will kick the earth, take this life into my own hands, and tomorrow I'll touch down again. I know that someday I'll meet that child again over the horizon. I know I'll finally reach the boy who taught me how to fly.

Alright, get going then. Your future's just ahead.

Now then, off you go. The light inside you is your future.

Don't worry, I promise you, you'll never forget that day so long as you continue to fly.

That's right, believe me, you'll never forget the future so long as you continue to fly.

AIR by Hideaki Sena

You probably will not forget that day you met the future.

You probably will not forget that day you happened to meet someone irreplaceable.

One afternoon weekend in the winter, a big earthquake and tsunami struck your town. Didn't you see and endless increasing stream black water coming upstream and chasing down the roadway? You evacuated the building and gathered in the school yard, forming a line with no signal to sit down. You grew tired of standing as your teachers were reacting to the mayhem.

You were still a small child, wearing a school uniform with a jump rope in your hand. People in the vicinity of the schoolyard came running out from the street behind the school. As expected, however, from that direction, the tsunami slowly drew near like a monster waking up from a slumber. Furthermore, your teachers could not move as a bunch of garbage mixed with the muddy water came closer. You were likely captivated by the overturned automobiles and the houses that have been reduced only to roofs. Knowing time doesn't go back, you realized the volume of water would not decrease, as it completely filled up the area. Finally, the school principal shouted over a megaphone, and you made a rush to the school building and ran up the stairs.

You were in a classroom on the third floor and saw the mass of water from the ocean make its assault. It was an overwhelming mass, and the people could not fight against it. The sky was a slightly dirty gray color, in which powder snow started to violently scatter about. It was excessively cold, like it was freezing, and you felt that the world had come to an end. At that moment, for the first time, you heard a cry. When you turned around, you realized it was you, the strange girl who took refuge in the same classroom, sobbing while sitting there shivering, and being supported by the surrounding people in the room. You were looking hard at the situation around you, but then, by impulse, you tore out a piece of paper from a nearby notebook. You silently folded the white paper full of creases into the shape of an airplane and turned it to the window. The muddy water had already submerged the first floor of the school. The national flag hoist had broken off, and got caught in the wagon car of the playground equipment outside. The silhouettes of the residents being swept away reflected in the corner of your eye. However, you squint your eyes intensely, and then open them wide. You put your anger into the paper plane, and let it fly. Go! Go! Go wherever you can! Go without succumbing to the earthquake or tsunami! As you shouted from the bottom of your heart, you were looking hard at the direction of the pure white paper plane. One...two little drops of powder snow fell down on top of the wings, and as it reached the top of the school building, the violent winds blew it away. The plane disappeared as it did a tailspin. And thus, only the inertia was left inside your heart.

And the jump rope was left with you. You went on living, silently, in a world cold enough to tear you to pieces. But then relief workers came to your aid, and then you were sipping on what seemed to be an endless supply of Instant Ramen! The workers scraped out the mud and brought you various items in cardboard boxes. There was a lot of manga in the boxes. However you were not happy...since you were gifted with dirty worn-out books someone had read many times. So, at a loss for words, you went to the corner of the school building, and played with your jump rope by yourself, like always. Why did you make everything wash away, but leave one thing behind? Because to you, that one little thing left behind was a part of you that was irreplaceable.

Inside the box of boring toys the relief workers gave you, you found a package of origami paper. You put that paper to good use. The volunteer doctors taught you how to make an origami airplane. They didn't just teach you how to make it from a perfect square, but also from a rectangular piece. The trick was to bring the center of gravity forward to the

rectangular front and slightly make the back of the wings turn over. You, having lost your parents and relatives, flew in the gymnasium where you washed all the slime off. The small child who nearly drowned in the mud stood on the stage, put all of their feelings into the paper plane, and set it off. The wings captured the wind, gaining a dynamic lift, and dashed to the edge of the gymnasium.

You will never forget it. You found your picture on the web late at night. You happened to find it in a search by pure chance. You were so small then. You would probably have forgotten if it wasn't for me. In the school building full of dirt in rubble is the schoolyard. The left hand of the Kinjirou Ninomiya statue near the front gate was slanted, about to fall off, holding a book. You were playing with a jump rope under the Sakura tree. The sakura petals should have covered your hand as far as it stretched out, but 50% of them were in bloom on your head. Under the gray sky a life force was emitted. It was like a monotone colored breath of fresh air, slightly blurry, and informing us of spring's arrival. You are wearing an old jumper, indulging in playing jump rope by yourself. Only when you were flying have you forgotten loneliness. Only when you were jumping rope were you released from the earth's bind. The big aftershocks continue, and you have woken up many times in the middle night. Whenever your back clung to the earth, the tremors would jumpstart your heart. You were part of the earth, as long your body came in contact with it. So, with your jump rope, you were healing your body yourself while maintaining the moments you'd jump.

You flew your paper plane at the school, chasing after the wings without anyone interfering. The shaking ground did not affect the plane. The invisible power floating towards the sky would not disappear, even as the earth attempted to shake it. So you looked up at the wings. The heavens were muddy, the scenery stained with a single color, so only your wings were an origami rainbow. Your wings are not eternal. The paper will crumble if it were to fall in the mud. You search just a little for the right place, and let your plane loose at the edge of the schoolyard. And like that, you met me.

“Hey!” you said as you introduced yourself.

“Hi...” I replied bashfully.

“Your jump rope is really cool!”

“Is that your plane?”

That was the first time we exchanged messages.

Those were *our* words.

You presented your airplane, turned behind you and held up your right hand, the symmetric wings turned slightly upwards. You brandished it with a shout, and it went flying.

“So cool! So cool!” I said, smiling.

“Teach me how to jump rope!” I said, smiling.

“Shall we go flying together?”

And thus, *you* came across the jump rope.

You came across the airplane.

I will never forget. I have a picture in my hand. A slightly faded polaroid picture. In those days, I become myself. The polaroid was a treasure to me like nothing else. It was a male volunteer that took a picture of me flying the plane. Looking at it now, the boy that was I was thin with long grown out hair, and it seems like he was secluding himself in a narrow shell. But I know. You, stepping forward on your dominant foot, brandishing your muscles on your retreating figure, have certainly been leading to the future. From the frame it might be out of place, but near the gate under the Sakura tree, that girl is playing with a jumprope by herself. So you stop what you're doing for a bit and point your eyes to the Sakura tree. You

gently wipe the dirt off the plane, straighten it out and hold it in your hands. This picture captured you just before you took a step forward.

Yes, the girl that is I flew on innocently. You were resonating with the rope's rhythm, pretending to separate from your words and your heart for a moment. But every time you stop doing it, you'll recall that girl. The plane that took off from your hands will likely regain its strength from within your heart. If you were to turn around, you would remember, even if it was only premonition. Yet still, you didn't turn around. The jump rope would have made you face forward, and chain you to the earth that your toes are standing on. You didn't quite grasp the courage of touching the earth.

It's because you are afraid.

I understand. It's because you are afraid.

Go on! You have the power to fly within you!

So I will send you a yell to the you on the web. You can turn around and sync our breathing together. The air with your unseen breaths gives me the power of your wings.

Yes, go on. The light pressing on your back will now shine.

Ah, I remember that light. The sky suddenly lit up. I stopped playing jump rope and put my feet on the ground to look up at it.

That brightness made me squint my eyes. I covered my head with the palm of my hand, but then I realized it's been a while since something like that happened.

From the crevice of the formerly gray sky was a dazzling ray of sunshine that kept pouring downward. I instinctively put on a face and bathed my entire self in the light.

The halo effect brought the world its color back and it regained its warmth. I remember those distinct shadows. I saw those shadows when I looked down at my feet. There were powerful dark shadows that symbolized me. When I spread my arms, the shadow also spread its arms. And inside that hand was my origami airplane.

A big shadow crossed over the schoolyard. I heard a rotor echoing and looked up at the helicopter in the skies. The self defense force goes flying over the school building, in order to go to an area more severely affected by the disaster. In order to lend a hand to the people suffering more.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow and silently gaze forward. You notice her form.

You turn around and recognize the boy coming to meet you halfway. You see him holding the origami plane in his hand, and you come to believe the future. You yourself have become the plane's pilot. You can go anywhere with the power of your wings. You realize you become the adult to help those people suffering.

Maybe you don't know yet, but you will decide to be the jump rope's lifelong friend. You will continue to use the rope to cut through the skies a countless number of times. You learn many techniques, devise many performances, and you etch your form into your mind to the rhythm of the earth. You will probably perform at many rallies. You will likely go on from the world with one rope. I hope you have many wonderful encounters. I hope you will be talking to people around the world with the rope. You will now be taking that one step forward.

Of course your wings are not eternal. People live on with the energy they got from the earth. Someday your wings too will return to the earth, and you no longer fly endlessly through the sky. Still, because of that, you decide to continue flying. Why? Because you are the earth's child. All of you, all of you, we are everyone, because we are the earth's children.

I shall promise to you someday the rope will eventually come together and I will meet that girl again. I will go find the girl that gave me something irreplaceable, with the irreplaceable power within me. I will go now to the far ends of the earth, so that you can go

anywhere.

You, from under the Sakura tree, have given me pride. I shall spread my wings and go wherever I can. I will go to the horizon to rescue as many people as possible. Tomorrow even, I will go down there, kicking the ground, holding my life in my hands. The time will come someday on the opposite side where I can meet that girl. I will eventually reach you. The one who taught me how to fly.

So, you can go! That path ahead is your future.

Go now! Inside that light is your future.

Damn straight I promise you! As long as I continue to fly through the sky, you will not forget that day.

Yes, believe in me! As long as I am flying through the sky, you will not forget the future.

AIR

By Sena Hideaki

I'm sure you will never forget the day you first encountered the future.

I'm sure you will never forget the day you chanced upon something irreplaceable.

It was on a wintery weekend afternoon that the earthquake and tsunami came. You must have seen the black water come up at you from the road in endless black waves. You evacuated to the schoolyard and lined up with your classmates, but the teachers failed to tell you to sit down, and you stood stock still trying to come to grips with their confusion.

You were still little, dressed in a PE uniform and clutching a jump rope. Local residents came running from the road back behind the school, and soon there followed the tsunami, coming along sluggishly like a monster awakened from slumber. Even as the muddy, garbage-choked water drew near, the teachers remained still. You probably couldn't take your eyes off the unbelievable gymnastics of overturned bikes and houses reduced to roofs. Once you noticed the ever-increasing water level, you knew things would never be the same. Finally, the principle screamed over the loudspeaker, and you stampeded into the school and up the stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor, you saw the ocean's mass charging in for the kill. It was an overwhelming bulk no human could withstand. A flurry of snow began falling from the dirty grey sky. Shivering in the frigid cold, you felt that this was the end of the world. That's when you first heard someone crying. Turning around, you found it was a girl you didn't know. She had run into the same classroom as you and was now convulsively sobbing as those nearby restrained her. You stared at them, then on a sudden urge ripped a page from a nearby notebook. Silently, you folded the neatly lined paper up into an airplane and turned to the window. The dirty water had already engulfed the school's first floor, the flagpole had snapped in two, and a wagon hung from the playground crowbars. Out of the corner of your eye you could see people being washed away, but you shut your eyes tight, then opened them wide and launched the airplane at the world with all the anger you could muster. Go, go, go to the ends of the earth. Go further than any lousy earthquake or hurricane. You screamed this in your mind, staring fixedly at the path of the pure white paper airplane. Its wings struck against a snowflake, then another. Once it was directly over the schoolyard, it was blown about by turbulent wind and disappeared in a tailspin. That plane's inertia was all that remained in your heart.

As for you, all you were left with was a jump rope. Never uttering a word, you survived amidst the piercing cold. Then adults came to rescue you, and you slurped up countless cups of instant ramen. They splashed through the mud, bringing with them cardboard boxes full of all sorts of things. There were plenty of comics, but you weren't happy getting someone else's grubby old books. So, you played by yourself over in the corner of the schoolyard, jumping rope and still never uttering a word. Because that rope was irreplaceable, your sole remaining possession. All else had been washed away.

Among the stupid toys the aid workers brought, you found a single-wrap origami set. You used it with care. A volunteer teacher showed you how to fold a paper airplane; both from a square sheet of paper, and from a rectangular one after first tearing off a piece. The trick was placing the center of gravity towards the front and bending the wings back a little. Orphaned and with no remaining relatives, you threw a paper airplane in the school gym once they had rinsed out all the grime. Standing atop the stage where children nearly drowned, you launched it straight ahead with all your might. As its wings caught the wind, it lifted off and raced to the end of the gym.

You could never forget. Last night I stumbled upon your picture on the web during a random search. In it, you were so small that I doubt anyone else would have recognized you. It showed a dirty schoolyard in front of a school stained with mud and rubble. Beside the main gate, a statue of scholar Ninomiya Sontoku tilted over to one side, missing both his book and the left hand that held it. You were jumping rope beneath the cherry blossom tree. Once, you could have reached out your hands and submerged them within the thick cherry blossoms, but now only a few bloomed up over your head. The tree radiated life beneath the grey sky, faintly blurred like breath caught on monochrome film, a signal

of spring's arrival. You wore a secondhand jacket and amused yourself jumping rope alone. It was only when jumping rope that you could forget your solitude. Only then were you released from the pull of the earth. The aftershocks still constantly woke you during the night. Placing your back on the ground meant that the tremors shook you to your core. So long as your body was connected, you were a part of the Earth. By jumping rope, you healed yourself, linking together each moment in the air.

You threw a paper airplane in the schoolyard, where you could chase after it without anyone getting in your way. The ground's tremors had no effect on the plane. The earth might shake, yet it could never erase that invisible power of being suspended in air. That's what you admired about planes. The sky was murky, the scenery stained one color, making those paper wings the sole specks of color. Wings are not eternal. Paper crumbles once it falls into the muck. In search of more stable ground, you went to the edge of the schoolyard to throw your airplane—and found someone.

"Hey." The introduction.

"Hello." The bashful reply.

"You're really good at jump rope"

"Is that your plane?"

That was *our* first exchange.

Sticking out your airplane, you turned around and held up your right hand. The plane headed up slightly, keeping its wings symmetrical. You kept it aloft with shouts of encouragement, and it flew in a beautiful trajectory.

"Wow!" you laughed.

"Teach me how to jump rope." you laughed along.

"Wanna play together?"

That was *your* introduction to jump rope--

--And *your* introduction to airplanes.

I could never forget. I have the photograph in my hand, a slightly faded Polaroid. I obtained it then and there and treasured it above all else. One of the volunteer men snapped a picture of you throwing an airplane. Looking at it now, you were a skinny, long-haired boy, who seemed shut up inside a tight shell. But I can tell. Seeing you from behind, your right foot forward, back muscles stretched, holding the plane aloft: at that moment, you were truly a link to the future. Outside the frame, underneath the cherry blossom tree by the main gate, that girl was jumping rope all alone. Just a little while longer and you stop your hand and gaze towards the cherry blossoms. Carefully cleaning the gunk off the paper airplane, you straighten it out and fold it with both hands. This photo shows you right before taking that first step forward.

That's right, you were there, a girl innocently jumping rope. Forgetting words and thoughts for one brief moment to harmonize with the rhythm of the rope. Yet you remembered him each time you stopped to rest. Once it left his hand, you took the paper airplane's strength back into your own breast. Your sixth sense told you he'd be there if only you turned around. Yet even so, you didn't. Jumping rope kept you facing forward and bound your toes to the ground. In the grip of the Earth, you lacked the courage for that final step.

You're too afraid.

I can tell. You're scared.

That's why I yell at that photo with all my heart: take that step. Go forward. You have the power within you to fly.

That's why when I found your picture on the web, I cheered you on. You could turn around, turn and survive. The invisible air you breathe empowers your wings.

That's it, move forward. The light pushing you onward now shines.

Oh, I remember the light. At that moment, the world suddenly got brighter. I stopped jumping rope, planted my two feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I squinted my eyes at the radiant light, shielding them with my palm. It had been a long time since

I'd done so.

From amid cracks in the sky that had been grey for so long poured down dazzling rays of sunlight. Frowning unconsciously, I bathed my entire body in that light.

The world turned a blinding white, then gradually regained its color and warmth.

I remember that distinct shadow. When I gazed down at my feet, there it was. A strong black shadow in my own image. I stretched out my arms and it followed suit, my origami plane in its hand.

A large shadow crossed the schoolyard. At the roar of a rotor, I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky. The Self Defense Force was flying over the school, on their way to somewhere more severely hit by the disaster. On their way to lend a helping hand to those in even greater misery.

You stare up at the helicopter's shadow, then silently turn your gaze straight ahead. She is there.

You turn around and see him approaching. Looking at the paper airplane in his hand, you are now certain of what the future holds. You will grow up to be a pilot. Through the power of flight, you will help those everywhere who suffer.

You probably don't know it yet, but you will make jump rope your lifelong companion. Your rope will slice through the air countless times as you keep on jumping. Learning numerous techniques, crafting numerous performances, you engrave that rhythm into your body and into the earth. You'll enter lots of tournaments. Travel the world with just a rope. Meet lots of fabulous people all around the globe. You are about to take that first step.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People travel the skies with energy from the earth. Eventually, even wings return to the earth; perpetual flight is impossible. Regardless, you resolve to keep on flying. Why? Because you are a child of the earth. All of you and all of *us*, each a child of the earth.

I promise you. Make no mistake, someday I will take this rope and meet that girl again. The girl who gave me something irreplaceable, I will track her down with that same power. Just as you can go anywhere, I too can now journey far.

Beneath the cherry blossoms, I puff out my chest and declare to you that I will spread my wings and go anywhere. Even to save just one more person, I will aim for the horizon. I will kick off the ground, holding life in my hand, and alight in tomorrow. Someday on the other side, I can meet that boy again. Nothing can keep me from he who taught me to fly.

Well, better get going. Up ahead is your future.

Well, move along. Your future awaits within that light.

Alright, I swear to you. So long as you stay in the air, you will never forget that day.

Yes, trust in me. So long as you continue to fly, you will never forget the future.

AIR

Can you forget? That day you found the future.

Can *you* forget? That day you found the one thing you could not replace.

That wintry Friday afternoon, a terrible earthquake and tsunami came to town. You must have seen the black water sweep up the roads, growing, rising, with no end in sight. You evacuated with the others and formed lines in the schoolyard, but when the teachers forgot to give the instruction to sit down, you stayed standing and watched them in their confusion.

You were still small, dressed in your gym outfit, clutching a jump rope in your hands. People from the neighborhood came running up the road behind the school, and then the tsunami followed, oozing up like a great monster woken from sleep. As the muddy, debris-laden water came closer and closer, the teachers became more and more frozen. The strange watery dance of the overturned cars and houses with their roofs floating like icebergs must have filled your vision. As you watched the waters rise and rise and never retreat, you realized: time never moves in reverse. Finally, the principal bellowed into the megaphone, and you rushed into the school building and ran up the stairs.

Through the windows of the third-floor classroom, you saw the mass of the ocean coming for you. No human could think of standing against such an overwhelming force. Then, snow started to fall thickly from the dirty gray sky. You were so cold, nearly frozen, that to you this felt like the end of the world. That was when you heard her cry. Behind you, a girl you didn't know who had fled to the same classroom was weeping, rocking back and forth as people nearby held her close. You took in that scene, and out of impulse, ripped a sheet of paper out of a notebook that happened to be at hand. You folded the lined paper in silence, then turned to face the window with your finished paper plane. By now the muddy water had engulfed the first floor; out in the schoolyard, the flagpole was bent, and a station wagon was snagged on the monkey bars. In the corners of your vision, you saw townspeople being pushed and swept away by the current, but you squeezed your eyes tight; then you opened them wide, harnessed all of the anger inside of you, and threw that paper plane out into the world. Go, go on, as far as you can. Soar on, stronger than any earthquake or tsunami. Your heart yelled out silently as you watched the path of the paper-white airplane. A fat snowflake, then another, landed on its wings. When it finally went in for a landing in the schoolyard, battered and shaken by the wind, it did a tailspin, and disappeared. Nothing remained but its momentum preserved in your heart.

All that *you* had left was the jump rope. In cold so intense you thought you'd shatter, you lived on in silence. Adults came to help with relief efforts, and you slurped more bowls of instant ramen than you could count. The adults scraped away the mud, and brought you many things in cardboard boxes. They even brought a ton of comic books, but the tattered and dirty secondhand volumes were a gift that didn't make you any happier. After all, words had abandoned you, and you spent all your time alone in the corner of the schoolyard, jumping rope. That rope was the only thing left to you that hadn't been swept away by the tsunami; the one thing you could not replace.

In the box of otherwise uninteresting toys the volunteers had brought, you found a stack of origami paper. You used the paper very carefully. One of the volunteer doctors took the time to show you different ways of folding paper planes. You could fold from a square, but you could also cut off a section and start folding from a rectangle. The trick was to concentrate the weight of the plane at its nose, and fold the back tips of the wings up slightly. You flew those planes in the gymnasium reclaimed from the mud of the tsunami, even though your parents and relatives were no longer around to watch you. You stood on the stage at one end, and, in the same spot where a small child had nearly drowned, you put your everything into flinging them straight in front of you. Their wings caught the air, took its lift, and sailed to the other end of the gymnasium.

I'm sure *you* can't forget. Last night, I found a photo of you online. I just happened to see it while searching— you were so small when I met you, and I doubt anyone but me would have recognized you. The schoolyard in the photo was slushy, and the school building was littered with mud and scattered debris. To the side of the main school gate was the statue of scholar Ninomiya Kinjiro, tilted and missing its left hand which should have held a book. You were there jumping rope underneath the cherry tree. The same tree that had been submerged as high up as I could reach was now half covered in blossoms. That burst of life under the gray skies was like a scene from a monotone film that had been colored in— a breath of fresh air that welled up to show the coming of spring. You were wearing a hand-me-down jumper against the slight chill. You were content jumping rope by yourself. Being up in the air was the only time you could forget your loneliness. Jumping rope was the only time you could break free from the earth. In the midst of the great aftershocks that followed the earthquake, you awoke many times in the middle of the night. Your back touched the ground through your futon, and the earth's vibrations shook you to your core. Any time your body was touching the ground, you were part of the earth, so you jumped rope and connected one fleeting moment of flight to the next, finding comfort all alone.

You sent a plane flying in the schoolyard. You chased those wings without anyone around to hold you back. The shaking of the ground had no effect on planes. The invisible force that lifted them into the sky could not be extinguished, no matter how much the earth rumbled, so you looked up at those wings. The sky was cloudy and the landscape was a muddy monotone, so it was only your wings that flashed the rainbow colors of origami paper. Wings don't last forever. The paper fell to pieces when it dropped into the slush. You were searching for some small piece of solid ground, and so you kept launching your planes from one end of the schoolyard to the other— and that was when you met.

"Hey," you said, and gave your name.

"Hello." *You* answered, shyly.

"*You're* so good at jump rope!"

"Is that... your plane?"

And those

were the first words

we spoke to each other.

You held out your plane, came around behind *me*, and held up my right hand with yours. We held the plane with its wings symmetrical, its nose tipped slightly up. You counted to three, and we launched the plane. Its path through the sky was incredible.

"Wow! That was amazing!" *You* laughed.

"Teach me jump rope!" You said, and laughed too.

"Want to soar together?"

And that was how you found jump rope—

—and how *you* found airplanes.

I'm sure I'll never forget. I look again at the photo I have close at hand. It's a slightly faded Polaroid. At a time like that, the greatest treasure of them all was a photo that could be printed immediately, to hold and keep. A man working as a volunteer took a photo of *you* throwing a paper plane. In it, you look like a skinny little boy with too-long hair, curled up in a too-tight shell. But I know better. The photo shows you from the back, but you have your good foot forward and your back is straight when you're about to launch that plane, and I have no doubt that in that moment, you were in touch with the future. She's not visible in the photo because she's outside the frame, but underneath the cherry tree near the main gate, that girl is by herself jumping rope. After a moment, you will put your hand down, and look over at the cherry tree. You will brush the dirt off the paper plane, straighten up its folds, and clasp

it gently in both hands. This photo will be taken and handed to you, right before you go to take that step.

That's right, that girl was soaring without a care on her mind. Moment to moment, she forgot her words, even her thoughts, and melded with the rhythm of the rope. But as *you* rested with the plane, *you* remembered that girl, didn't you. The strength of launching that paper plane restored something that had been missing. If you just turned around, you had the feeling she would be there. But you didn't turn around. The rope you were jumping kept you facing forward, and fastened your toes down to the earth. When you were touching the ground, you couldn't summon the courage to take another step.

You're scared, aren't you.

You're scared. I understand how you feel.

That's why now, *I'm* raising my voice. Looking at the photo, filled with emotion, I say: Take a step. Go forward. You have the power in you to soar.

That's why now, I'm cheering you on from the other side of this web page. *You* can look back and take a deep breath. The invisible air you breathe gives power to your wings.

That's right, go on. A light shines now at your back, pushing you forward.

Ah, I remember that light. In that moment, the world suddenly brightened. I stopped jumping, planted both feet, and looked up at the sky.

I squinted in the brightness. I raised my hand to shade my face, and then I realized it was the first time I'd done that in a long while.

A sunbeam was pouring down from a break in the sky that had been gray for so long. Without thinking I screwed up my face and soaked it all in.

In that moment, everything was smudged around the edges, the tints and borders blurred as the world slowly regained its color and warmth. *I* remember the sharp outlines of the shadows. When I looked down at my feet, there it was— a strong, black shadow in the shape of me. When I spread my arms wide it did too, and in its hand was my origami paper.

A large shadow crossed over the schoolyard. The sound of rotors echoed, and I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky over me. The Self-Defense Forces copter soared over the school building on its way to where the disaster had been worse, to hold out a helping hand to people in even greater need.

You looked up at the shadow of that helicopter, and then quietly fixed your eyes ahead. You recognized her outline there.

You looked back, and recognized him coming towards you. You saw that in his hands was a paper plane, and you knew what was in your future. You would become a pilot. You would soar as far as you could with the power of your wings, and become an adult who would help those in need.

You probably haven't figured it out yet, but you will make that jump rope your lifelong friend. More times than you can count, you will slice through the air and keep on soaring. You'll learn many techniques and put together all kinds of performances as you carve that rhythm through yourself and through the earth. I'm sure you'll take part in lots of competitions. I can see you now: with nothing more than a rope, you will make your way in the world. I'm sure you'll have so many wonderful encounters. You'll speak with the people all over world through your jump rope. You're about to take the first step towards that future.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People use energy from the earth to fly through the sky. Eventually those wings return to earth; there is no such thing as endless flight. Even so, *you* are determined to keep soaring, because you are a child of the earth. Because all of you, and all of me, and all of us- we are all children of the earth.

Let *me* make you a promise. Someday, I'll meet that kid with the jump rope again. I'll find the girl who gave me that thing I could not replace, using that strength that I could not replace. Now I can go far too, just like you.

Now, I can tell *you* under the cherry tree with confidence: I will spread my wings and say, let's go as far as we can. So that we can save many people, or even just one, I say— let's aim for the horizon. Let's kick off from the earth, take the reins of life, and alight in tomorrow. On the flip side, surely the time will come for me to meet that kid again. Without fail, I will make it to that boy who showed me my wings.

You should go now. Your future is waiting.

Now, go on ahead. *Your* future lies within that dazzling light.

Very good, *I* accept. As long as we continue soaring, you can be sure you won't forget that day.

I'm sure, believe me. As long as we continue soaring, *you* won't forget the future.

AIR

Sena Hideaki

You won't ever forget that day, will you? The day you met with the future.

You'll never forget that day, right? The day you came across something irreplaceable.

It was the weekend, another wintery afternoon, when the great earthquake came, followed by the tsunami. You would have seen the black waters run up the roads, rising and chasing without end.

Having evacuated to the school grounds but without a cue to sit down, you stood stock-still in horror as you came to grips with the teachers unravelling into chaos before you.

With that small frame and wearing gym clothes, you held a jump rope in your hand. Some people from the neighboring houses had come running out from the path that led to the back of the school building. Before long, the tsunami appeared in that direction like a sluggish monster rising from its slumber. The teachers froze as the muddy and trash-filled waters drew further closer. Your sight was being robbed by unimaginable images; cars were being overturned and houses had become mere rooftops above the waves. As the water level continued to rise without any sign of stopping, you knew that time could not be reversed. It was only when the principal finally yelled out on the megaphone that you rushed into the school building and up the stairs.

In a classroom on the third floor, you watched as the mass of water struck. It was an overwhelming force that could not be fought against. The sky had turned a filthy gray with the start of a relentless powdered snowstorm. With the unbearable cold, you felt as though not only you would freeze, but that the world was going to end. It was then that you heard someone start to cry. You turned to see an unfamiliar girl in the classroom, convulsing as she sobbed into the arms of the people around her. Watching the scene unfold, you suddenly felt the urge to tear out a page from a nearby notebook. In silence, you folded the white ruled paper into the shape of an airplane before facing the window. Outside, the murky waters had already swallowed the first floor of the building; the pole that held the national flag was bent; and a minivan had been caught up in the horizontal bars on the playground. Reflecting in the corner of your vision were human figures being washed away, but you shut your eyes tightly before widening them again and, with all of your anger, released the paper plane into the world. *Go. Fly. Fly away anywhere! Fly away from the shaking and the waves!* While yelling from the bottom of your heart, your eyes trailed after the path of the white plane. The tops of its wings took one, and then two hits from the snowfall; it wasn't long before the airframe finally got caught up in an agitated wind as it made its way just above the schoolyard, and disappeared with a tailspin. The plane had changed nothing. That was all that remained in your heart.

The jump rope was all that remained. With a coldness that was enough to feel like it was ripping your inside to pieces, you fell into silence. When the rescue workers finally arrived, how you slurped up countless cups of instant ramen! The grown-ups had put various items into cardboard boxes after wading through the mud. Included in them were stacks of comic books, but it wouldn't have brought you joy to receive someone else's dirty and old comic books anyway. That's why, having lost all words, you were always jumping rope alone in the corner of the schoolyard. For you, it was the only belonging of yours that remained and was precious. Everything else had been lost to the waves.

Among all the trivial toys that the supporters brought, you found a pack of origami paper. This you treasured and used. There was a volunteer doctor who taught you how to make a paper plane, not just out of a squared sheet of paper, but also from a rectangle after cutting the paper into two. The trick was to move the plane's center of gravity forward and to bend the backs of the wings a little. You, who had lost parents and relatives, flew the plane in the gymnasium which had now been rinsed of all the sludge. Standing on a stage where small children had drowned, you entrusted everything to the plane and released it straight on. The wings caught hold of the air, gained lift and raced to the edge of the gymnasium.

*

You never forgot. Last night, you found your picture on the Web. It was just a mere coincidence that you were looking it up, but there it was, laid out by fate. You looked so small. If I hadn't been there, I'm sure you wouldn't have recognized yourself. Both the school building and yard were covered in mud and debris. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro, the 19th-century agrarian reformer, beside the school gate was slanted and missing the left hand that was holding a book. You were jumping rope under a sakura tree. Although it must have been submerged in waters as high as the arm could stretch, its flowers were in half-bloom above your head. A faint rainbow could also be seen signaling the arrival of spring. Its presence in a gray sky under which many lives had been taken was like breathing color into a black-and-white movie. You were wearing a hand-me-down sweater. Alone, you entertained yourself by jumping rope. It was only when you were jumping that you forgot your loneliness. It was only when the rope bounced that you were free from the shackles of the earth. You woke up many times in the middle of the night as the big aftershocks continued. Lying with your back pressed to the ground, the tremors shook your heart. As long as you were touching the ground, you were a prisoner to it. But with the jump rope and by connecting all those moments of being in the air, your body healed on its own.

You flew the paper plane in the schoolyard. Without anyone interrupting, you chased after its wings.

The plane was out of reach from the earth's tremors. It floated through the sky under an unseen force that would remain even if the earth started to tremble. That's why you marveled at those wings. The origami paper offered the only rainbow colors in a sky that was dark and a land that was stained in a single shade. Wings, of course, are not eternal – if they were to fall into mud, the paper will lose its shape. *But if it could touch someone's life, even if just by a little...* With that in mind, you released the plane towards the edge of the schoolyard and...

...just like that, you met.

'Hey,' you said before introducing yourself.

'Hello,' came the timid reply.

'You're pretty good at jump rope, huh?'

'Is that your airplane?'

That's how it started.

Those were the words we exchanged.

You presented your paper plane, turning it around in your left hand. The wings were perfectly symmetrical, both pointing slightly upward. *With an exclamation of excitement, you brandished it about. The airframe took off leaving behind a beautiful wake.*

'Wow, look at it go!' you laughed.

'Teach me jump rope too,' you said, laughing along too.

'Shall we fly together?'

And that's how you came across jump rope...

...how you came across origami planes.

*

I will never forget. Close at hand, I keep a photograph, a slightly faded Polaroid. That time and place had become a part of me, so I treasure this Polaroid more than anything else. The man with the Polaroid camera had taken a picture of you flying the plane. Looking at it now, the boy you were then was thin and his hair long. You looked as though you had shut yourself away in a tight shell. But I know better. With your dominant foot forward and back straightened with pride, you were already connected to the future then. That kid would have been jumping rope under the sakura tree by the school entrance just outside of the Polaroid frame. In just a moment, you would stop what you were doing and look toward the tree. You would carefully brush off the dirt from the plane and fix its shape, cradling it with both hands. This photograph captured you just before you made that first step.

That's right. The girl you were then jumped freely in the air. Forgetting both words and thoughts with every instant, the rhythm of the rope alone resonated within you. But every time you stopped, you

would remember that kid. The strength of the flying paper plane coming from that small grip would echo inside your chest again. *You even remembered the feeling that they would be there when you turned around. You turned nevertheless. When the jump rope is laid out in front of you, you are bound to the earth at the toes that connect you to it. When you were touching the ground, you could not seize the courage to make that one step.*

You were scared, right?

I understand. You are scared.

I'm speaking up now because of that. Look at the photograph and with all the feeling you have, step forward. Progress straight on. *The power to fly lies inside of you.*

That's why I give the boy I see on the Web a shout of encouragement. Look back, hold your breath. That invisible air you've breathed in is what powers your wings.

That's it, move forward. The light pushing at your back is now shining through.

*

Oh, how I remember that light and how the mysterious world suddenly began to look promising. I stopped jumping rope then, planted both feet to the ground and turned to the sky.

I squinted at the light. As I held my palm over my forehead, I realized that it had been such a long time since I last saw that kind of brightness.

Dazzlingly rays of sun poured out from a gap in the encompassing gray sky. With an unconscious frown on my face, I bathed my whole body in that radiance.

Rimmed with a halo, the world slowly regained its colors and warmth. I remember a crisp shadow being at my feet when I dropped my eyes, a powerful black thing imitating me. When I spread both arms, the shadow would do the same, and in those arms was my origami paper.

A big shadow traversed across the schoolyard. The sound of an engine echoed and I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky. It was the Japan Self-Defense Force flying over the school building. It was heading to the aid of more severely affected areas. To extend a hand to others in more pain.

You looked up at the shadow of helicopter and then quietly stared ahead. You then recognize her figure.

You turned your head and noticed him approaching. Seeing the paper plane in his hand, you believed in the future. You were going to become a pilot of your own plane. With the strength of wings that could go anywhere, you were going to become an adult who could help others in need.

Perhaps you don't know it yet but that jump rope will become a lifelong friend to you. You will continue to jump countless times, cutting the air with the rope. Learning many new techniques, devising several performance routines, you will carve a rhythm into the earth with that small body. You will also appear in various tournaments. With just one jump rope, you will go out into the world. You will have many wonderful encounters. With just that jump rope, you will meet and get to talk to people from all around the world. All of that stems from that one step you are about to make.

Wings are, of course, not eternal. People travel through the skies with energy obtained from the earth. Someday, those wings will also return to the earth. They cannot fly without end. Nevertheless, you are determined to continue flying in those skies. That's because you are a child of the earth. Everything you are...**Everything you are...is because we are all children of this earth.**

I will make a promise to you. Together with this jump rope, I promise to someday meet that girl once again. I will find her using the strength I gained from her teaching me something irreplaceable. Just as you can go anywhere you like, I can also go just as far now.

To you standing under the sakura tree, I can now fill up my lungs to say it. I will spread my wings and go anywhere I want. If it's to save a lot of people, I will aim for the horizon even if alone. So kick off the ground, embrace life with those hands and tomorrow, go back down and stand tall. The time when you will meet that kid again will surely come. I will definitely find my way back to the boy who taught me how to fly.

So come now, go. Your future is just ahead.

What are you waiting for? Your future lies within that light.
Don't worry, I promise. As long as you keep leaping into the sky, you won't forget that day.
That's right, believe me. As long as you keep soaring in the sky, you won't forget the future.

AIR

You'll never forget. That day. You came across the future.

You'll never forget. That day. You stumbled across a day like no other.

One weekend winter afternoon a huge earthquake brought a tsunami. Just a little boy, you saw water streaming up the road towards you. It loomed ahead with no end in sight. You ran into the schoolyard and since no one told you to sit down you lined up with the other children. You were frozen to the spot as you absorbed the complete confusion on the faces of the teachers.

Just a little girl, wearing your sports kit, you held a skipping rope in your hands. Villagers fled from the road behind the school. Rising up behind them, the tsunami lumbered forwards like a monster awakened from sleep. The teachers didn't move even though black water strewn with rubble grew ever closer. It was impossible to process the surreal image of overturned cars and devastated houses. As the water flooded the landscape, sprawling in all directions with no sign of retreat, you knew things would never be the same. Finally the Headmaster shouted instructions through a loudspeaker and in the nick of time you sped towards the school building and up the stairs.

Oh my. From a classroom on the third floor a huge body of water rose up in front of you. Overwhelming emotion seized your soul. Heavy snow tumbled down against the backdrop of a thinly veiled grey sky. You worried you might freeze to death in the brutal cold. Was this the end of the world? You heard crying for the first time. Peering over your shoulder you saw a weeping trembling girl huddled in the arms of a stranger. They too had fled to the same classroom. Despite being fixated by the scene of the sobbing girl a sudden urge came over you. You grabbed a notebook lying nearby and tore out a page. In silence you folded the white lined paper into an airplane and turned to face the window. Blackened water engulfed the ground floor. An iron bar could be seen entangled in a station wagon. The national flagpole was bent. You squeezed your eyes tightly shut to block out the images of bodies being washed away then flicked them open once more. Wide-eyed with anger you catapulted your airplane at the world. *Go! Go! Go anywhere! Don't let the trembling earth or the giant waters stop you!* You screamed in your head as you watched the route of the brilliant white airplane intently. One, two snowflakes collided with the top of the wings. When the airplane was finally over the top of the schoolyard it succumbed to the raging winds and vanished in a tailspin. The lifelessness of the airplane remained etched in your mind.

All you had left was your skipping rope. Torn to pieces you were numb inside. You took on a silent existence. Help arrived. You survived on cup after cup of instant noodles. People shoveled away the mud and brought all kinds of provisions in cardboard boxes. In an act of kindness they brought comics too - but you were sad. They were filthy and dog-eared. So you remained mute, taking to playing with your skipping rope alone in the corner of the school playground. Everything you held dear had washed away and just one thing remained, the empty shell of a precious little girl.

You spotted a bundle of origami paper amongst the uninteresting toys. You used it with great care. The volunteer doctors showed you how to make airplanes from it. They taught you how to make things from a rectangle by tearing a piece off a square. The trick was to fold the paper into the centre line and bend the tips of the wings a little. You washed away your despair at the loss of your parents and family by flying your airplanes in the school hall. A young boy, you stood on the flooded stage firing your airplane straight ahead in a show of grief. The wings caught the air, lifting the plane and swooping it to the far end of the gymnasium.

It's forever imprinted in your mind. I came across your photograph on the Internet last night. It was just a random search. You were so tiny. Only I could have understood. The playground is a pool of mud. The school building reduced to rubble and dirt. Near the main

gates a statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō teeters forwards – its famous left hand that holds a book, still missing. You are skipping under the cherry blossom tree. It should have been under water but it reaches out its branches, half in bloom above your head. It buds under an ashen sky, like it is breathing colour into a black and white film. The buds spread just a little signaling the arrival of spring. You are wearing an old jumper, playing alone with your skipping rope. Only skipping could dampen your loneliness and unshackle you from the ground. In the dead of night aftershocks awakened you repeatedly. Sleeping with your back against the ground the tremors tortured your mind. Touching the earth meant you were still part of it so you jumped time and time again, even though your jumps were over in a flash. The skipping ropes healed your soul.

You played with your airplanes in the schoolyard. You chased the wings bothering no one. The shaking ground didn't stop your airplane. When the earth groaned the invisible force that reached the skies held firm. So you gazed up at the airplane. The skies were hazy. Your paper airplane the only rainbow of colour in a solid grey landscape. The wings were not invincible. If they crashed down into the mud the paper crumpled. You hunted for a small area of safe ground and fired your airplane to the end of the schoolyard...and then you bumped into her.

“Yo!” you shouted out.

“Hello,” you replied shyly.

“You’re good at skipping aren’t you?”

“Is that your airplane?”

This was the first time we met. These were our first words to each other.

You held out your airplane, turned it around and held it up in your right hand. You pointed it upwards slightly, the wings symmetrical. You held it aloft with a rallying cry. The airplane soared off in a sweet current of air.

“Woah! Amazing!” you laughed.

“Can you show me how to skip?” you laughed back.

“Shall we throw the airplane together?”

You came across the skipping rope... You stumbled across the airplane...

I’ll never forget. I’ve got a photograph in my hands. A slightly faded Polaroid. Polaroids were treasured because you could get your photograph on the spot. A volunteer captured you flying your airplane. They called you a little boy. In the photograph you look like you are hiding away from the world, just skin and bone with long hair. But I know the truth. You put your best foot forward. With your back held up straight your future was secure. Under the cherry blossom tree, out of the frame, near the main gates, *that child* was skipping alone. After a while you stilled your hands and turned to face the sun just like the cherry blossom trees. You carefully cleaned the dirt off the airplane, reshaped it and wrapped it in your hands. The photograph was taken just before you stepped forward.

They called you a little girl. Yes, you skipped and jumped innocently. You cherished the rhythm of the skipping rope and in the blink of an eye were able to clear your mind.

But each time you stopped you remembered *that child* didn’t you? The origami airplane that soared from your hands gave you back your strength.

You sensed someone behind you. And yet you didn’t turn around. The skipping rope forced you to look forward and kept you grounded. Every time your feet hit the earth you just couldn’t find the courage to look back. *You’re scared aren’t you?*

I understand you know. You’re scared. Please listen to me. I’m looking at you in the photograph and I’m begging you with everything I have inside of me - *Go forward! Go on!*

There is power inside you soaring up.

So I’m sending air to the girl on the Internet. You can look back and hold your breath. The invisible air that you breathe now will give power to your wings.

It’s true, carry on. The light that has your back boy is shining now. Oh how I remember

the light. The world suddenly lit up. I stopped the rope, put both feet on the ground and looked up to the sky.

I narrowed my eyes at the brightness. I shielded my eyes with my hands and realized it had been a long time since I felt the sun.

From a gap in the never-ending grey sky, brilliant rays of sunshine streamed down. Squinting I basked my entire body in the light.

The radiant world quietly changed colour and became warm once more. I remember a clear shadow. When I looked down at my feet there was a silhouette. A solid black outline of my body. If I held out my arms, the shadow did the same. My origami in its little boy hands.

A large shadow spread across the playground. The skies shook with the sound of propellers. I looked up at the helicopter flying high overhead. The Japan Self-Defense Force was soaring over the school building. Heading towards an even more severely affected area and even more desperate people than us. You looked up at the helicopter's shadow then quietly looked ahead. You saw the girl.

You looked back. You saw him coming towards you. You saw the paper airplane in his hands and saw your future. You became a pilot. With the power of the wings you flew everywhere helping people in need.

You didn't know it yet but the skipping rope was to become your life. Innumerable times you cut through the air with your rope. You created countless performances and learned countless skills, beating a rhythm into the solid earth with your body. You entered many tournaments. Just a boy and his skipping rope you went out into the world. Many wonderful experiences came your way. Thanks to your skipping rope you met people from all over the world. Now, you are about to take your first step.

Of course wings are not everlasting. People cross the skies with energy born from the earth. Eventually the wings return to the ground too – there are no endless flights. But you still chose to fly. Because you are a child of the earth. Because all of you,

all of you,

all of us, are children of this earth.

I'm going to promise you something. I'm going to meet *that child* and her skipping ropes again. I won't stop until I find the girl who gave me a pearl beyond all price. I can travel far too, just like you.

I am speaking loudly now to the boy standing under the cherry blossom tree. I will spread my wings and travel far and wide. I will put my eyes on the horizon and save thousands of lives alone. I will reject the earth and embrace life in my hands. Soon I'll come down to land. There will most surely come a time when I'll cross paths with *that child* somewhere out there. I will find the boy who taught me the wings. Come now boy. You must go on. Your future is in front of you.

Come now girl. Please go on. Your future is inside the light. Everything is good. Let me promise you something.

For all the time you soar in the skies, that day will haunt you. You must believe me. It's true.

For all the time you soar in the skies, the future will haunt you.

AIR

I doubt you'll ever forget that day, the day you encountered your future.

And I'm sure you'll never forget it either, that day that you happened across something that would be so precious to you.

It was a cold winter's afternoon when the earthquake and tsunami hit. You probably saw the never-ending black water climb higher and higher up the roads. You evacuated with the other children and gathered in the schoolyard. They never told you to sit, so you stood there still in line, watching the teachers scramble in confusion.

I saw you from where I was standing in line. You were so young, wearing your gym clothes and carrying a jump rope. The people who lived in the area were starting to run our way from behind the school. Not far behind them came the water, slow and sluggish like a beast just woken from its slumber. It carried so much trash and mud. The teachers didn't move. Your eyes must have been drawn to the unbelievable flow of overturned cars and houses which had turned into nothing but roofs. You knew we couldn't simply turn back time because that water would only keep rising, it would never retreat. Eventually, the principal shouted into a loudspeaker and you turned to dash into the school and climb the stairs.

After I climbed the stairs, I saw you in a classroom on the third floor, staring out at the menacing mass of water, an overwhelming force against which no one could fight back. The sky was a dirty gray and snow flurries started to fill the air. It was so cold you thought you would freeze. It felt like the end of the world to you. That's when we heard the first sobs. You looked back to see a girl you didn't recognize taking refuge in the same room as you. Her shoulders quivered as she wept and others nearby pulled her into a comforting embrace. You watched, but only felt an urge to go to a nearby notebook and tear out a page. Silently, you folded the lined white paper into an airplane then went back to the window. The murky water had already swallowed the school's first floor and the flagpole had broken when a washed away van caught on it. From the corners of your eyes you could see people torn away by the waters, but you squeezed your eyes shut tight. You opened them wide, felt your anger, and threw your paper plane out at the world. Your heart screamed at it to fly, fly, fly to the ends of the Earth. It screamed for the plane to never give in to something as stupid as an earthquake or a tsunami. You watched the white paper plane go as your heart screamed. First one, then two snowflakes crashed onto its wings. When it finally reached the air above the schoolyard, it was suddenly buffeted by a fierce gust, sending it into a tailspin which made it disappear from sight. All that remained in your heart was the plane's momentum.

And you still had your jump rope. It was so cold I felt my hands would freeze off, but you just continued to exist there in silence. Rescue workers eventually came and you ate more instant ramen pots than I could count. The adults wiped the mud off us and gave us some things in a cardboard box. There were a lot of comic books. Those dirty used books were more than we could ask for, but you weren't happy. That's why you just jumped rope in the corner of the playground, lost for any words. Everything you had was washed away, except for that jump rope. It was your last precious possession.

You found a pack of craft paper in that box of stupid toys the rescue workers brought us. You used it carefully. The volunteer doctor taught you how to fold paper planes properly. Instead of folding it straight from the square sheets, the doctor showed you how to cut it into a rectangle then fold it. The trick was to move the center of gravity forward and curve the back of the wings ever so slightly. You'd lost your parents and family, but you flew those paper planes across the gym after it'd been cleaned of mud. You stood on the stage where a small child had almost drowned and launched one straight ahead, putting all your emotion into it. Its wings caught the air, giving it lift, and it glided all the way to the far end of the gym.

I will never forget you. Last night I found a picture of you online. It was a complete accident that I came across it in my search. You were so small. I don't think anyone but me would have recognized you. There you were, in front of the mud-stained and debris-covered school building, the playground

turned into a soggy swamp. The statue of the philosopher Ninomiya Sontoku beside the main entrance had lost his left hand and the book it held in it as it sagged to the side. You were jumping rope under the cherry tree. The buds as far as you could reach above your head should have been drowned, but instead they were just starting to bloom. Life sprung up there beneath the gray sky, like a tiny breath of color flowing into a black and white photograph. It was a small and blurry sign of the coming of spring. You were wearing a second-hand sweater and entertaining yourself with your jump rope. It was only when you were jumping that you forgot how alone you were. It was only when you hopped over that rope that you were freed from the shackles the earthquake had put on you. Huge aftershocks continued for a while and you'd find yourself waking in the middle of the night. If you pressed your back to the ground, you could feel the tremors shaking your heart. As long as you touched the ground, you were just another part of the earth. And so you jumped, healing yourself with the succession of tiny moments where you were no longer connected.

You were throwing paper planes in the playground. No one stopped you as you chased after those wings. The ground's shaking had no effect on the planes. No matter how much the earth shook, it didn't destroy that invisible power that kept the planes aloft. That's why you looked up at those wings. The sky was murky, the sights around us were stained a single dull color. The only color was on your wings, made from the rainbows of craft paper, but they didn't last forever. The paper was destroyed when the planes landed in the mud. You searched for firmer ground and launched your plane towards the edge of the playground—and that's when we met.

"Hi there," I said, and told you my name.

"Hello," I replied nervously.

"You're good at jumping rope."

"Is that your paper plane?"

That was

our very first exchange,

our first words to each other.

You held out a plane to me, went around my back and held up my right hand. The wings were symmetrical, its nose upturned slightly. I held it aloft like you said and shot it off. It flew gloriously.

"Wow, wow!" you cried with a smile.

"Teach me to jump rope," you said with a smile.

"Do you want to fly together?"

And that's when you first encountered jump rope—

—and that's when you happened across paper airplanes.

I won't ever forget. I have this photo I keep with me. It's a slightly faded polaroid. At the time, a polaroid was the greatest treasure of all. It instantly belonged to you. One of the men volunteering took a photo of me flying planes. Looking at it now, the boy you knew then was thin, his hair long. He looked like he was trapped in a cramped shell. But I know. That image of the boy from behind, one foot forward as he stretched his back and held aloft a plane, was connected to the future. Just outside the picture frame, under the cherry tree by the front gate, was that girl as she jumped rope by herself. In just a moment, the boy would stop and glance toward the cherry tree. He would carefully brush the dirt from the paper airplane, straighten its bent wings, and hold it precious in his hands. This photograph captured the moment just before the boy took a step towards the girl.

That's right, the girl you knew was absorbed in jumping rope. Words and thoughts were forgotten a moment at a time as she resonated with the rhythm of the jump rope. But I'm sure every time you stopped for a moment, you would remember that girl. The strength that the paper planes flew forth with was strength returned to your soul. She knew that you, the boy, would be there if she turned around, but she didn't turn around. The jump rope made her face what was ahead. She couldn't get the courage to take another step forward when her feet were on the ground.

You must have been scared.

I know, you were afraid.

That's why I call out now to that photograph, with all the emotions pent up inside me: Take that step, go forward. You have the power in you to jump.

And that's why I cheer to you through the internet: Turn around, you can keep on living. The invisible air that you breathed in was the same air that gave your wings power.

Yes, keep going. The light supporting you from behind still shines.

Oh, but that light scares me. The world suddenly turned so bright then. I stopped jumping rope, both my feet planted firmly on the ground as I looked to the sky.

The light made me squint. I raised my hand to shade my eyes, and realized I hadn't done that in a very long time.

A blinding ray of light poured from a crack in the sky that had been gray for so long. I couldn't keep my face from screwing up as the light bathed my entire body.

Color slowly returned to the world flared with light, as did the warmth. I'm afraid of those sharp shadows. I looked down at my feet and there was a shadow, a strong black thing copying my form. I stretched my arms out and the shadow stretched its own, my plane in its hand.

A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. I heard the sound of rotor blades, and looked up to the helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defense Force was flying over our school, heading to areas hit worse by the disaster, to offer aid to people worse off than us.

You looked up at the helicopter's shadow, then quietly in front of you. You were accepting the girl you were.

You turned around and accepted that the boy you were was walking over. You saw the paper plane in his hand and knew what you wanted to do in the future. You would become an airplane pilot. You would use the power of wings to fly anywhere, to help the suffering.

You didn't know it yet, but jumping rope would become your lifelong friend. You'd cut the air with a rope more times than anyone could count, and you'd keep jumping. You'd learn all kinds of tricks, put on all sorts of performances, marking out the rhythm between your body and the earth. You'd probably participate in lots of competitions, get to go out in the world because of your one rope. You'd probably meet all sorts of wonderful people, you'd communicate with people throughout the world with your rope. You were just now taking the first step towards that.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People soar through the sky with the energy they get from the earth. Even wings have to return to the ground sometime. Endless flight is impossible. Even so, you were determined to keep flying through the sky, because you are a child of this earth. Everything you are, everything I am, *all of us* are children of this earth.

I'm going to make you a promise. Someday I will meet that girl again and that jump rope. She gave me something very precious to me, I'm going to seek her out with the strength it gives me. Just like you can go anywhere, the person I am now can go just as far.

Now I can proudly tell that boy under the cherry tree: I'm going to spread my wings and go to the ends of the earth. Even if I have to go alone, I'm going to aim for the horizon and help as many people as I can. I'll kick off from the ground, embrace life in my arms, and tomorrow I will come back down again. Somewhere out there is the day when I can meet that boy again. I will make it to where he is, the person who showed me my wings.

Right, you should go. Your future is ahead of you.

Yes, go. Your future is inside that light.

I guarantee that as long as you keep jumping through the air, you will never forget that day.

That's right, believe me when I say that as long as you continue soaring through the sky, you will never forget your future.

AIR

You remember, don't you? The day that we came face-to-face with our futures.

You haven't forgotten, have you? That day we encountered our irreplaceable fates.

One weekend afternoon in the dead of winter, that massive earthquake hit, bringing a tsunami in its wake. You watched as a seemingly endless wave of black water crept ever nearer. As everyone took refuge in the schoolyard, sitting in rows without having been told to, you stood, motionless, as the teachers attempted to contain the chaos.

You were still so small, standing there in your gym clothes, holding onto a skipping rope. As people from the neighborhood were racing into the grounds from the path behind the school, the tsunami lumbered along behind them, like some terrible beast that had been roused from its sleep. As the mass of muddy water drew near, even the teachers couldn't move. You watched in disbelief as bicycles were flipped upside-down, and houses became nothing more than rooftops. Even though you knew that there was no turning back, it took some time before you realized that the water was only going to continue to increase. It wasn't until the principal called out through a megaphone that you raced into the school, dashing up the stairs.

You looked out from a classroom on the third floor as the ocean continued to swell. The crushing force was impossible for anyone to defy. A tempestuous flurry of snowflakes started to tumble from the ashen sky. It was unbelievably cold. You were convinced that hell had frozen over and the world was ending. The first cry finally pierced the silence. Turning, you saw that the sound was coming from a girl you didn't know, who had hurried into the same classroom as you. Her body was wracked with shuddering sobs, and the people nearby tried to comfort her. For some reason, this compelled you to tear out a page from a nearby notebook. Without a word, you folded the blank sheet of lined paper into the shape of an airplane and headed towards the window. The muddy water had risen up to the first floor of the school, dragging a van past the now crooked flagpole. Out of the corner of your eye, you could make out the reflections of villagers who had gotten swept up by the wave. You screwed your eyes shut before you flung them open wide again, throwing all of your anger and frustration into that paper airplane you set loose into the world. You willed it to fly, to fly as far as it could, up above the tidal wave and the tremors. Your heart cried out to that white paper airplane as you watched it soar, praying for it to not to succumb to anything. However, it wasn't long before one snowflake, then another, landed on the fragile wings. Right when it reached the center of the schoolyard, the battering winds sent it spinning into obscurity. In the end, all that remained was the lethargy of that half-hearted flight, which settled deep in your chest.

You still had your skipping rope. In the bitter cold that felt like it would tear us to pieces, you were a silent survivor. When help finally arrived, you slurped back countless cups of instant noodles. As the grown-ups cleared away the mud, they brought in all kinds of objects, packed in cardboard boxes. There was a mountain of manga — but no one was too thrilled about receiving someone else's tattered, old comic books. Still keeping your words to yourself, you were constantly out skipping in a corner of the schoolyard. If I had to say why, well, because that was the only thing of yours that hadn't gotten washed away.

You managed to find a package of origami paper tucked in with the boring supplies that the support workers had brought in, which you cherished. One of the volunteer doctors taught you how to fold paper airplanes. You learnt that rather than using a regular square sheet of paper, cutting off a section to make a rectangle was better. The trick was to shift the center of gravity towards the nose, and to make sure that the wings turned up slightly at the back. You'd lost your parents, all of your relatives, but you still had the mud-stained gymnasium, where you flew your paper airplanes. Standing on the same stage where so many young children had drowned, you threw everything into your paper airplanes, casting them out straight and true. Those wings rose as they harnessed the air, racing to the edge of the gymnasium.

Who could forget that day? Last night, I found a picture of you online. It was a coincidence — I had been looking for something else. You were so little that I don't think anyone but me could have recognized you. The schoolyard was a quagmire, the school itself coated in mud and other debris. On

the other side of the main gate, the statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro stood slightly askew. His left arm, which once held his beloved books, was missing. You were skipping underneath the cherry trees. Just beyond your reach, the trees, which had been submerged up until then, were in partial bloom above your head. That burst of life under the grey sky was like a breath of fresh air in our monochromatic surroundings. A slightly blurred sign of spring. You were wearing a hand-me-down jacket, utterly engrossed in your skipping. That was the only time you could forget about your loneliness. Jumping over the rope, you could break free from your connection to the ground. There were still strong aftershocks, which would wake you up in the middle of the night. While you kept your back to the ground, the tremors rattled your core. As long as your body was connected to the earth, you were a part of it. So, for that one, brief moment when you were in the air, you could heal.

You were flying planes in the schoolyard, chasing after the paper wings out where no one would bother you. The trembling of the earth had no effect on paper airplanes. While you kept your gaze high on the wings above you as they soared through the air, floating on some invisible power, you would forget that the ground could shake. The heavens were muddy, making your paper airplanes the only flashes of color in the scenery that had been dredged in the same hue. But they couldn't last forever. The paper would crumble and fall into the sludge. Looking for a patch of ground that was even the slightest bit firmer, you launched your airplanes out to the edges of the schoolyard. ...And that's how I met you.

"Hey," was how you'd introduced yourself.

"Hello," you had said in reply.

"You're really good at, um, skipping."

"Is this your paper plane?"

Those were...

The first words...

That we ever exchanged.

You pulled out another plane, holding it steady with your right hand. After checking that the wings were symmetrical, you only had to flick it upwards to launch it. *The paper airplane seemed to rise with your voice, gliding along a beautiful wake.*

I said, "Wow, that's amazing!" which made you smile.

I said, "Teach me how to jump rope, too!" and you smiled back.

"Want to soar together?"

That was when you connected with skipping...

...When your fascination with airplanes took off.

How could anyone possibly forget? I still have that picture. Just a single, flimsy polaroid. At a time when I had nothing to call my own, that picture was worth more than anything. It was one of the male volunteers who took the photo, when you were flying paper airplanes. *Looking at it now, you were such a slender boy, your hair grown out long. It felt like you had been crammed into a narrow husk of a body. But I knew. Even then, I knew that the boy standing behind me was somehow connected to my future. That child was skipping alone under the cherry trees near the school gate, just outside of the frame. It wouldn't be long before you would stop and look at the blossoms, to see a paper airplane land in the mud. You'd pick it up and carefully brush the dirt away, straightening it up before cradling it in your hands. That picture captures the moment before you would take your first step forward.*

That's right. And you were a girl who found her freedom in flight. *For a brief moment, you could forget about your feelings, or the words to describe them, through the rhythmic echo of the skipping rope. But you'd think of that child, wouldn't you? When you stopped.* As they slipped past your fingertips, the sight of your paper airplanes taking flight transformed into a strength that you held inside. I remembered stopping to look at you when I somehow sensed that you were nearby. You didn't turn around, though. The skipping rope served as a kind of boundary, keeping your toes firmly anchored to the ground. *So long as your feet were touching the earth, you couldn't find the courage to make the next move.*

Besides, you were scary.

No, I get it. You frightened me, too.

That's why I finally called out to you. To take all of the feelings I had bundled up and turn towards that picture. To step out of my shell. You held the power to fly inside you.

That's why I shouted back when I saw you wave. You glanced back, your breath catching in your throat. But the air that you gulped down became the strength that fueled your wings.

Exactly. The strength to move onward. The light that propelled you forwards is still burning bright.

Oh, I remember that light. I stopped skipping the instant the world suddenly brightened, planting my feet on the ground to look up at the sky.

It was so dazzling, it made me narrow my eyes. Holding my hand up to my forehead, I thought about how long it had been since I'd had to do that.

The sunlight started streaming in from the cracks in the sky, which, until then, had been a solid mass of grey. Without a second thought, I looked up, letting my entire body bathe in the light.

The color slowly started to seep back into the newly awakened world, bringing the warmth back along with it. I remember looking down at my feet, and seeing a crisp shadow stretching out into the distance. I held my arms out wide, still holding a paper airplane in my hand.

Long shadows cut across the schoolyard. I could hear the sound of a motor running, and I looked to the sky to see a helicopter passing by. It was the Self-Defense Force flying overhead, on their way to areas that had been struck even harder by the disaster. They were going to lend a hand to people who were suffering more than we were.

You looked up at the helicopter, then quietly lowered your gaze to the horizon. *You looked over at the girl nearby.*

You turned around, and I started walking back towards you. *As you looked at the paper airplane in your hands, you saw your future unfold before you. You would become a pilot and fly wherever your wings would take you, becoming an adult who would use their strength to help those in need.*

You might not have known it then, but you'd found a friend for life in skipping ropes. You cut through the air with your cord, jumping more times than anyone could count. You would learn all sorts of techniques, stringing them together into different routines, carving their rhythms into both your body and the ground below. You'd even go on to compete. Skipping rope in hand, you were going to head out into the world. All kinds of marvelous encounters awaited you. Through skipping, you would find a common language to speak to people all across the globe. You've been moving forward ever since you took that first, fateful step.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People rely on borrowed energy to soar through the sky, and one day, those wings will return to the ground. There's no such thing as endless flight. After all, you're a child of the earth. Every boy, just like you — and every girl, just like you — we are all children of the earth.

I'll make you a promise. Someday, along with this rope, I'll definitely meet that kid again. I'll be looking for the girl who helped me find my inner strength, using that same irreplaceable gift. Just like you're trying to see how far you can go, I'm setting my sights as high as I can.

That boy standing under the cherry trees is still tucked away in my heart. When I spread my wings, there's no telling how far I'll go. As long as I can help even one person, I'll keep my eyes locked on the horizon. Kicking off from the ground, I'll take my life in my own two hands. Then I'll stand tall and do it all over again the next day. Beyond that, I'm positive that I'll meet you again one day. Without fail, I'll find my way back to that boy who taught me how to fly.

So, you'd better get going. Your future lies ahead.

Well, go on then. Inside that light is your destiny.

That's fine, I'll accept that. As long as you keep leaping into the sky, you'll never forget that day.

That's right, just trust me. As you soar through the air, don't ever forget about what's to come.

AIR

By Sena Hideaki

You'll never forget the day you crossed paths with the future.

You will never forget the day you came across something precious.

On that wintry weekend afternoon, a massive earthquake and tsunami struck. You watched as murky waves flooded the streets, growing ever fiercer as they approached. Once everyone evacuated to the schoolyard, you stood patiently in line—waiting for a signal to sit that never came—as the teachers before you descended into chaos.

You were but a child in gym clothes, holding a jump rope in your hand. People in the vicinity flocked in through the backstreets behind the school. The tsunami in the distance slowly clawed its way forward, like a beast awakening from a deep slumber. The teachers remained motionless even as heaps of garbage flowed in with the muddy water. You stared in awe and disbelief at the overturned vehicles and residential rubble swirling about. The rising sea level, which showed no signs of falling, made you painfully aware of the cruel, irreversible march of time. When at last the principal's voice echoed through the megaphone, you dove into the school building and dashed up the stairs.

From a classroom on the third floor, you witnessed the oceanic mass continue its relentless assault. Its size was on a scale no mortal could dare oppose. Powdered snow began to pelt down from the gray skies above. The bitter, freezing cold convinced you that the end of the world was nigh. But then, you heard someone crying. You turned around to find an unfamiliar girl, who had taken shelter in the same classroom as you, shaking and sobbing in the embrace of a crowd. You stared for a moment before springing into action, and tore a page out of a nearby notebook. Without a word, you folded that sheet of lined paper into a plane and turned to face the window. The first floor was submerged by murky waves, the flagpole was bent out of shape, and a station wagon was caught against the horizontal bars in the playground. In your peripheral vision, you noticed someone being swept away by the waves. You shut your eyes for a moment before opening them wide, and flung the plane out into the world in a fit of rage. *Fly, fly, as far as you can. Keep flying, and don't let earthquakes or tsunamis get in your way*, your heart cried out, as you followed the path of the pale paper plane with your eyes. One drop of snow struck its wings. Then two. Right as it drifted over the playground, the wind kicked up and sent it spiraling into the ether. From then on, all that lingered in your chest was the flutter of the plane.

The jump rope was all you had left. In the bone-chilling cold that threatened to tear you apart, your life ticked away in silence. Once the first responders arrived, you slurped up bowl after bowl of instant ramen. They cleared out the mud and brought in cardboard boxes filled with all sorts of items. There were plenty of comics to go around, but you weren't thrilled by the idea of reading dirty old books once owned by some stranger. Thus, you kept quietly retreating to a corner of the schoolyard where you played with your jump rope in solitude. To you, who had lost everything else to the waves, it was the last precious thing you could call your own.

Among the boring trinkets the aid workers brought in, you discovered a pack of origami paper. You treasured it. The volunteer medics taught you multiple ways to fold planes—not only from square sheets, but also from rectangular sheets made by cutting off part of the paper. The trick was to shift the center of gravity to the nose and slightly bend the wings at the tips. Having lost your parents and relatives, you went to fly your plane alone in the gym, which had been cleared of sludge. You stood on the stage where small children had nearly drowned, and channeled everything into your throw. The plane caught air, gained lift, and soared to the opposite end of the room.

You will never forget. Last night, by pure coincidence, I stumbled upon a photo of you

online. No one but I could have recognized your tiny frame. There was the school building, strewn with dirt and debris. The schoolyard, covered in grime. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjirō by the main gate, tipped over and missing the left hand that always held a book. And then there was you, jumping rope beneath the cherry tree. The blossoms within your reach should have been drenched, but instead, they were in half bloom overhead. They breathed life into a world enveloped by ashen skies, like a splash of color in a black-and-white film, and gave the faintest hint of spring's arrival. You were happily jumping rope by yourself with a worn-out jacket on. Only while leaping were you freed from your loneliness. Only while jumping rope were you released from your earthly tether. There was no end to the powerful aftershocks, which shook you awake countless times in the night. With your back against the ground, your heart quaked with every tremor. So long as your body touched it, you were part of the earth. That was why you jumped and jumped with rope in hand, healing yourself bit by bit through your solitary moments of flight.

No one bothered you as you flew your paper planes and chased them around in the schoolyard. The tremors of the earth had no effect on your planes. No matter how much the ground shook, the invisible forces that kept them airborne never went away. That's why you looked up to those wings—folded from colorful sheets, they drew a rainbow across the dreary skies and drab scenery. But the wings wouldn't last forever. If they fell into mud, the paper would be ruined. Standing on the first piece of dry land you could find, you flew a plane to the edge of the schoolyard. That was when you crossed paths.

"Hey," he called out, introducing himself.

"Hello there," she replied bashfully.

"You're pretty good at jumping rope."

"Is that airplane yours?"

Those were...

...the first words...

...we exchanged.

You held out your plane, circled behind her, and lifted her right hand. You made sure its wings were balanced, and tilted its body ever-so-slightly upward. On your signal, the two of you pulled it back. The next moment, the plane was tracing a beautiful arc in the air.

"It's flying, it's flying!" you exclaimed with a smile.

"Hey, show me how to jump rope," you suggested with a smile of your own.

"Shall we fly together?"

And so, you crossed paths with the jump rope...

...And you came across the airplane.

I'll never forget. I have a photo with me—a slightly faded Polaroid. At the time, Polaroids were highly prized as personal items that could be generated on the spot. It's a photo of you flying a plane, taken by one of the volunteers. Looking back, the boy she called out to that day was skinny and long-haired, and appeared as though he'd been cramped inside a shell. But I know you. Sure enough, in that instant—with your dominant leg in front, your back fully straightened, and a plane raised above your head—you connected to the future. Just out of frame, the girl was under the cherry blossoms by the main gate, jumping rope all by herself. Shortly thereafter, you would pause your hand and shift your gaze toward the cherry tree. You would gently dust off your paper plane, readjust its shape, and cup it with both hands. This photo captures you right before you took a step forward.

Yes, the girl he called out to was jumping without a care. With every hop, your fears and doubts faded away in rhythm with the beat of the rope. But whenever you took a break, your thoughts turned to him. Each time a paper airplane was released, its strength was transferred to your heart. You had a hunch he would be right there if you turned around. Despite that, your gaze was fixed straight ahead. Jumping rope kept your body facing forward and your toes

locked onto one spot on the ground. So long as you made contact with the earth, you were unable to find the courage you lacked.

You're scared, aren't you.

I get it. You're afraid.

That's why I'm raising my voice. I'm pouring my emotions into my words and directing them at this photo of you. Take a step forward. Keep going. The power to jump is within you.

That's why I'm cheering you on through the screen. You can look back and still live on. The invisible air filling your lungs will imbue your wings with power.

Go on. The light pushing you from behind is shining bright.

Ah, I remember that light. Back then, the world suddenly lit up. I stopped jumping and stared into the sky with both feet planted firmly on the ground.

The brilliant flash hurt my eyes. I shielded my face with my palm as a familiar glow washed over me.

Dazzling sunlight poured through the cracks of the once-unrelenting gray skies. I involuntarily grimaced as my body basked in its rays.

Color and warmth seeped back into the world as the blinding light subsided. I remember the distinct silhouette I saw when I looked down at my feet. It was a crisp, black shadow shaped just like me. I threw my arms wide open and the shadow followed suit, revealing in its hand an origami plane of my creation.

An enormous shadow loomed over the schoolyard. As the whirl of propellers filled the air, I glanced up at a helicopter passing overhead. The Self-Defense Forces were flying past the school to reach an area more severely afflicted by the disaster, to lend a hand to those more desperately in need of help.

You looked up at the belly of the helicopter before quietly shifting your gaze forward. That's when you saw her.

You turned around and watched as he approached. You spotted the paper airplane in his grip and felt assured of your future. You would become a pilot. You would grow up and fly to every corner of the world, powered by your wings, rescuing people from despair.

You didn't know it yet, but you'd make the jump rope your lifelong companion. You'd cut through the air with your rope countless times as you continued to jump. You'd learn all sorts of tricks and choreograph all sorts of performances, tapping out a rhythm on the ground with your body. You'd enter numerous competitions. Equipped with a single rope, you'd venture out into the world. You'd have so many wonderful encounters. Thanks to jumping rope, you'd interact with people all around the globe. That's the future you're preparing to step into.

Of course, wings don't last forever. Man takes to the sky using energy from the land. Since endless flight is but a dream, all wings must return to the surface eventually. In spite of that, you resolved to keep soaring through the heavens. Because you are a child of the earth. All of you, all of me, all of *us* are children of this earth.

I swear to you: With this rope by my side, I'll reunite with that girl someday. I'll find her through the power of the precious gift she gave me. Just as how you can go as far as you want, I too can go the distance.

To the girl jumping beneath the cherry blossoms, I say to you with pride: With my outstretched wings, I will fly to the ends of the earth. I will set a course for the horizon and save as many people as I can. Soaring into the sky, I will take my life into my own hands and stand tall when I descend tomorrow. Sooner or later, I will reunite with that boy. I know I can make my way to him, the one who gave me wings.

Now, it's time to go. Your future awaits.

Now, go forth. Your future lies within the light.

Let me promise you this: As long as you continue jumping into the air, you'll never forget what happened that day.

Yes, believe me when I say: So long as you continue soaring into the air, you will never lose sight of the future.

AIR

by Hideaki Sena

You will never forget that you met your future that day.

You will never forget that *you* came across that day what would become irreplaceable to *you*.

On that weekend afternoon, the great earthquake occurred and tsunami hit our town. You saw dark water closing in along the roads, growing endlessly. You and other children evacuated to the schoolyard. With no instruction to sit down, you just stood there and watched the teachers in chaos.

You were so young, in school sportswear, holding a jump rope in *your* hand. Neighbors came running up from the path behind the school building. Behind them, *you* saw tsunami creeping up slowly like an awakened monster. Muddy water brought tons of rubbish so close to the schoolyard, but the teachers made no move. *You* were probably stunned by overturned vehicles and skeletal houses only with roofs making unbelievable movements. *You* realized time would never go back only when *you* learned the volume of water grew bigger endlessly and never grew less. Finally the schoolmaster hollered into a loudspeaker, and *you* rushed into the building and ran up the stairs.

From the classroom window on the third floor, you saw the whole volume of sea approaching to invade. It was such an enormous mass that no human could fight back. The sky was grimy and gray, starting to scatter heavy snow flurries. It was so cold and freezing that you felt like it was the end of the world. Then, you heard the first cry. You looked back to find an unfamiliar girl, who had sought shelter in the same classroom, cramping and sobbing, hugged by some adults. You were looking at it before you felt a sudden urge and tore off a page from a notebook at hand. Without a word, you folded the blank ruled sheet into a paper plane and turned to the window. Muddy water had gulped the ground floor of the school building, broken a flag pole, and pushed up a van on horizontal bars. At the end of your eyes, you caught a glimpse of people being washed away, but you closed your eyes tightly once, then opened them widely, and pushed the paper plane towards the world with your anger on its wings. Go on, go on, go on forever! Don't let the earthquake or tsunami get in your way! Mentally yelling, you were staring in the direction the white paper plane headed. Powdery snow hit the wings one flake after another. When it finally reached above the schoolyard, stirring wind blew it and made it spin, and flicked it out of sight. Inertia of the plane was all that was left in your mind.

And the jump rope was what was left for *you*. *You* lived on without a word in freezing cold. Rescuers came, and *you* slurped up countless cups of instant ramens. They scraped mud away and brought in various things packed in cardboard boxes. There were lots of mangas, but *you* didn't appreciate dirty secondhand copies. So *you* would rather be jumping rope alone without uttering a word in a corner of the schoolyard, because the rope was the only possession left for *you*, for everything else was washed away.

You found a package of origami papers among junk toys that supporters had brought in, and cherished them. A volunteer doctor taught you how to make a paper plane. He taught you not just how to start from a square sheet but how to start from an oblong sheet, which was made from a square sheet by cutting away a part of it. You learned the tricks to position the center of gravity in front and to curl up the backside of the wings a little. With no parents or relatives survived, you flew paper planes alone in the gym where all the mud had been washed away. You stood on the stage where a young schoolkid had almost got drowned, and pushed those paper planes straight forward with all your wishes. Their wings caught air and, getting lift, flew all the way to the far end of the gym.

You will never forget. I found *your* photo on the Internet last night. I came across *your* image while searching something else. It was so small that no one would recognize you

besides me. The school buildings were dirty with mud and debris. The schoolyard was sloughy. Beside the main gate, the statue of Kinjiro Ninomiya, a hardworking student and later a prominent philosopher, stood askew, missing its left hand and the book held by it. *You* were jumping rope under a cherry tree. The tree had obviously been gulped by the water up to the height beyond *your* reach, but it was in half bloom over *you*. It looked like radiating life under the gray sky, announcing that spring was coming, slightly blurred as if it were a breath painted with watercolors on a black-and-white negative. *You* were wearing a hand-me-down jacket. *You* were jumping rope alone. Only jumping made *you* forget the loneliness. *You* were liberated from the binding power of the earth only while jumping rope. Major aftershock lingered and kept on waking *you* up during the night. When *your* back was next to the earth, the trembles shook *your* heart. As long as *you* were attached to the earth, *you* were a part of it. So *you* were healing *yourself* alone by jumping rope, connecting one moment of jumping to another, then another.

You flew planes on the schoolyard. *You* chased the wings with no one getting in *your* way. The trembles of the earth didn't affect *your* paper planes. The invisible power to float in the air didn't go away even if the earth shook. So *you* looked up at the wings. The sky was murky and the world around *you* looked dirty in monochrome. So *your* wings of origami in rainbow colors are the only colors *you* could see. Wings don't last forever. If they fall in the mud, they would collapse. *You* threw *your* planes towards the corner of the schoolyard, trying to make sure they wouldn't get wet, and—you met *me*.

“Hi,” *you* said and gave me *your* name.

“Hello,” I said, shyly.

“You're a good jumper.”

“Is that *your* plane?”

They were

the first words

that *we* exchanged.

You invited *me* to take *your* plane and came behind *me* to support *my* right hand. *You* balanced the wings and slightly tip up the plane. *You* cued me in and I took a backswing. The plane glided away, drawing a beautiful track.

“Awesome!” *You* said, smiling.

“Teach me how to jump rope,” *you* said, also smiling,

“Wanna fly together?”

Then *you* came to know jump rope and—

—*you* came to know planes.

I will never forget. *I* have a photo. It's a slightly faded Polaroid. At that time, Polaroids were *my* most valuable treasures, which were given to *me* instantly. A volunteer supporter took one that captured *you* throwing a paper plane. Looking at it now, the boy referred to as <*you*> were skinny with longer hair, and looks as if *he* locked himself up in a cramped nutshell. But *I* know something else. With *your* dominant foot forward and *your* back straight, *you* were certainly connected to the future. It's not in the photo, but *I* know that the girl was jumping rope alone under the cherry tree by the main school gate. *You* would soon stop throwing and look in the direction of the tree. *You* would brush some dust off the plane carefully, reshape it, and wrap it in *your* hands. The photo captured *you*, who was about to step forward, and showed the image to me.

Yes, the girl referred to as <*you*> was absorbed in jumping. With every jump, she resonated with the rhythm of the rope, forgetting words and mind moment by moment. But, every time *you* took a break, I know *you* would recall her. And I know *you* would take back to *your* mind the strength of the paper plane flown away from *your* hand. *You* even remembered the hunch that *you* would find *me* when *you* turned back. Nevertheless *you* didn't look back.

Jumping rope fixed your gaze ahead and bound your toes that touched the ground. While you touched the ground, you didn't have courage to take a step forward.

You are afraid.

I know. *you* are afraid.

So, now *I* say it out loud. To the photo, with all *my* heart, *I* say, take a step forward. Go on. You've got the power to jump.

So, I'm sending cheers to *you* in the image on the web. *You* can look back and take a breath. The invisible air *you* take in gives strength to *your* wings.

Yes, go on. A bright light now gives you a push in your back.

Oh yes, I remember that light. The world became bright all of a sudden then. I stopped jumping, standing on my both feet, and looked up in the sky.

My eyes narrowed at the bright light. *I* held up *my* hand at *my* forehead to make shade, which *I* realized *I* had not done in a while.

Blinding sunlight came down like a shower from clearance of gray clouds that had been covering the sky. It made me frown, but I caught the light with my whole body.

The world fogged by halation started to show colors again and brought back warmth. *I* remember those defined shadows. Looking down, I saw *my* shadow. It had the shape of *me*, strong and dark. When *I* spread *my* arms, so did the shadow, with *my* paper plane in my hand.

I saw a large shadow moving across the schoolyard. I heard a blasting rotor, and looked up to find a helicopter. A troop of the Self-Defense Forces was heading to the other areas more devastated. To offer help to people suffering more.

You looked up at the helicopter once, before fixing the gaze straight ahead. And you saw her.

You turned back and found *him* walking in *your* way. A paper plane in *his* hand assured *you* of *your* future: "*I* am going to be a pilot. And *I* will fly on wings to wherever *I* could help people in need."

You don't know yet, but jump rope becomes your lifelong friend. You will jump an awful lot of times, slashing air with your rope. You will learn many tricks and work out various performances, beating rhythm both on your body and on the earth. You will be jumping at so many championships. You will set out to the world with just a single jump rope. You will have so many opportunities to meet wonderful people. You will talk with people in the world by way of jump rope. Now you are about to take the first step for all of those things.

Wings won't last forever, of course. People fly with the energy from the earth. Eventually wings will go back to the earth, and every flight has its end. Still, *you* make up *your* mind to fly on. It's because *you* are a child of the earth. All of *you* and all of you, we are all children of the earth.

I will promise to you that *I* will see that girl again with this rope in *my* hand. Some day *I* will find, with all *my* irreplaceable might, the girl who had given *me* something irreplaceable. In the same way as you can go as far as you wish, *I* can go far now.

Now I can say with confidence to *you* under the cherry tree that I will go, spreading my wings, as far as I wish. To save as many people as possible, I will be heading to the horizon. Kicking the ground, holding a life in my arms, I will touch down on the earth again tomorrow. Then some day I will see that boy again. I'm sure I will find him, who taught me how to fly on wings.

Go right ahead. Beyond that point, there lies your future.

Go straight ahead. Your future lies in that light.

All right, *I* will guarantee. As long as you are jumping in the sky, you will never forget that day.

All right, trust me. As long as *you* are flying in the sky, *You* will never forget the

future.

Air

Hey, young man, you'll never forget the day you encountered the future.

And, you, young lady, will never forget the day you stumbled across the one thing you could not replace with anything else.

That winter weekend afternoon, the earthquake and tsunami visited us. I can imagine you, young man, seeing that volume of black water coming in upstream, filling roads 'til no end and encroaching upon us. You evacuated to the school grounds, stood in queue awaiting the direction to sit down, and watched absentmindedly the chaos of the teachers all around you.

At that time you, young lady, were still small, grasping your jump rope with your gym clothes on. Neighbors rushed in from the street behind the school. It wasn't long before the tsunami lumbered vastly in our direction chasing behind them. Like a groggy monster it came, as if having just been startled from a deep sleep. Teachers were so entranced, they could hardly move despite the filth-filled waves of approaching trash. I imagine you must have been transfixed seeing the unfathomable display of undulating cars and rooves without homes. It was after you realized the water level would continue to increase without subsiding, that time would not reverse itself. Finally, the headmaster shouted into a loudspeaker, and you rushed inside to run up the stairs.

From a third floor classroom, you, young man, saw the mass of seawater rushing in upstream to engulf us—a volume of water so large, and so beyond compare, all were rendered helpless. The sky was grimy and gray. A powdery snow began falling fiercely. You were very cold and becoming frozen—feeling as though it was the end of this world. Then, for the first time, you heard someone crying. You turned around and saw a girl you were unacquainted with... a girl who had also escaped to the classroom. She was sobbing and twitching, cradled by those trying to console her. Your eyes remained fixed on the scene unfolding in front of you, and then impulsively tore a page from a notebook nearby. You folded the blank, lined-paper silently, formed it into an airplane and faced a window. Muddy water had already drunk up the first floor of the school, the pole for the national flag had bent, and a van was slung over an iron bar. The reflection of residents being carried away by the water could be seen in the corners of your eyes. You squinted tightly, then reopened your eyes wide. You released the paper airplane off into the world, carrying your anger with it. Go. Go, until no end... go. Proceed without surrendering... on through this damn earthquake and tsunami. You stared off into the distance to where the snow-white paper airplane had ventured, shouting from your heart all the way. One after another, powdery snowflakes landed upon the wings of the plane. When it descended over the school ground, a chaotic wind blew against it sending it downward 'til it could be seen no more. All that remained in your heart was the image of that airplane being carried down by its own inertia.

And, you, young lady, were left with a jump rope. In the chill so cold... almost torn to pieces, you continued living silently. Rescue workers arrived and you slurped untold amounts of instant ramen noodles. They scooped the mud out and brought in all sorts of things in cardboard boxes. Many a manga was available, but receiving someone's old, dirty pity-books failed to make you happy. So, you remained... without words. Always alone, you jumped rope in a corner of the school ground because everything you owned had been washed away, and that rope was the one and only irreplaceable item you could call yours.

You, young man, found a packet of origami folding paper among a bunch of rather boring-looking toys the rescue people brought. You handled it with great care. A volunteer doctor came by and demonstrated how to fold the paper into an airplane. First with the square paper you had, then by cutting that paper into a rectangle and fashioning a plane from that new shape. The trick to good plane-making it seemed was to gather the center of gravity near the front of the craft and bend the rear tips of the wings up a bit. You, who'd lost your parents

and relatives, would fly your paper airplanes in the gymnasium where the sludge had been rinsed off. You stood on the auditorium stage, where earlier a small student had almost drowned, and released your plane... commending everything within you, upon it. The wings caught air, gathered lift and flew fast toward the end of the gymnasium.

You'll never forget. I found a picture of you, young lady, online last night. After so long and by sheer chance, we'd met again. The view of you was very small, and if it weren't me, no one really would have noticed. The school buildings were dirty with mud and debris. The school ground wet with mire. The statue of Kinjiro Ninomiya was tilted, having lost its left hand—along with the book carried in it. You jumped rope beneath the cherry blossom tree. Had you extended your hand upward, you should have been able to dip it deep in blossoms, but the tree above your head had only advanced to its puffy white stage. It came alive beneath the shadow of gray skies and foretold of spring's arrival—a sign of life seeping gingerly through mono-chrome film stock. You were wearing a used jumper, all alone... entertaining yourself with your jump rope. Your loneliness could be forgotten only when spinning that rope—emancipation from the earth's grasp, only possible when jumping that rope. Big aftershocks continued, and you were awoken again and again in the middle of the night. When your back was attached to earth, these quakes shook your heart—as long as your body was touched to earth, you were part of it. So you skipped rope. A way to compile those off-ground moments, connecting them... and on your own, heal yourself.

Young man, you flew airplanes throughout the school ground. Chasing their wings without interruption. No shaking of the ground could disturb those planes—the invisible force that floats in the sky was always there, no matter the earth's desire to shake. So you looked up to the wings. The heavens were murky, and the scenery unpleasantly monochromatic. The only rainbow of color came from the wings of your origami aircraft. But wings are not to be forever. When the paper planes fall into the mire, they buckle. You searched for steady ground... even just a little bit, and released your plane toward the end of the school ground. Then, you met someone.

“Hey,” you introduced yourself.

“Hello,” you bashfully responded.

“Girl! You're good at jumping rope.”

“Is that your airplane?”

Those were the first words we ever exchanged.

You handed over your airplane, stood behind her and stabilized her arm. The wings were perfectly balanced, the plane pointed just a bit upward. She entered the windup and counted down... the airplane set sail... launching into a beautiful arc.

Laughing... “Wow! Great!” she said.

You also laughed and said, “Teach me how to jump rope too!”

“Do you want to jump rope together?”

And so, this is how you, young man, were introduced to the jump rope.

And, how you, young lady, stumbled upon paper airplanes.

I'll never forget. I have a picture in my hands. A slightly faded Polaroid. Polaroids were the best kinds of treasure because I could instantly make them mine. A volunteer shot a picture of you, young man, flying airplanes. Looking back at this picture, that boy called *anata*¹ was skinny, with his hair left grown and seeming as though he'd imprisoned himself within the confines of a tight shell. But there's something only I know. I can see your figure from behind. You had set your dominant foot forward... your back was straight, and you were in your windup. You were, in that moment, surely connected to the future. Though outside the

¹ Anata means “you” in Japanese.

frame, the girl jumped rope by herself under a cherry blossom tree near the front gate. You, young man, almost stopped what you were doing to turn your eye toward the tree. You brushed dirt off the paper airplane with care, fixed its shape and cradled it. This picture, which found its way to me, was captured a second before you placed your foot beyond that threshold.

Yes, you girl, called *kimi*² jumped rope as if your heart was set free. The voices inside your head and your heart diminished moment by moment as you resonated with the rhythm of the rope. But whenever you took a break, you thought of the boy. And, the strength of that paper airplane flying out of your hand being resorbed into your heart. You even sensed that he might have been right there if you turned around. Even so, you wouldn't turn around. Jumping rope forced you to face forward, and fastened your toes so they remained in contact with the ground. When you were in touch with the earth you couldn't grab the courage needed to take that one step.

You, young man, are scared.

I know you, young lady..., you're scared.

So now I raise my voice. To the picture, I summon everything my heart can pour into it. Step ahead! Go forward! Young man! You have the power to leap.

So, I send my yell to you across the web. Young lady! You can turn around and breathe. That which is in the air you breathe can give your wings power.

Yes, young man, go forward. Your back is supported by light, and this light now shines.

Aah! I remember that light. At that moment, all of a sudden, the world became bright. I stopped jumping rope. Both my feet touched the ground. I looked up at the sky.

I squinted my eyes because of the brightness. I put my palm over my forehead and realized it had been a long time since the last time that happened.

Very bright sunlight shined through between the everlasting gray skies. My face wrinkled-up involuntarily and then I invited the shower of light with my whole body.

The universe, which brought about the halation was gradually regaining color and warmth. I remembered the distinct shadow of my body. I dropped my eyes toward my feet and there was the shadow—the shadow that molded itself to my body. The shadow spread its arms, as I spread both my arms. And there was my paper airplane in hand.

A giant shadow crossed the school ground. The sound of a helicopter rotor echoed throughout, and I looked up as the Self-Defense Force flew over in the sky above. Their destination, though, was to a more harshly afflicted place. People worse off than us needed their help more.

You, young man, looked up at the shadow the helicopter cast, then silently stared straight in front of you. The girl came into view.

You, young lady, turned around and saw the boy walking toward you. As you noticed the paper airplane in his hand, you became sure of your future. "I'm going to be a pilot of airplanes. I'll fly to every place with the power of wings. When I'm an adult, I'll help people who are suffering."

You, young man, probably don't know this yet, but you're going to make that jump rope your lifelong friend. You'll keep jumping rope, slashing air with it countless times. You'll learn many techniques, conjure up performances, and curve rhythm into your body and the ground. You'll go to many tournaments. Just you and your jump rope alone... you'll make expeditions abroad. You'll have many valuable encounters. With your jump rope, you'll talk with people from all over the world. You're now about to take that first step.

Alas, wings are not forever. Humans sail through the sky using energy they acquire from the earth, and someday those wings must return to the earth. Endless flight is impossible.

² Kimi means "you" in Japanese.

Even so, you young lady, decided to continue to fly because you're a child of the earth. All *anatas* and *kimis*—all of us—are children of the earth.

I promise you, young man, that I'll surely meet the young lady again, carrying my rope. I'll search her out with all my might, she who gave me something invaluable. Just as you can set sail everywhere, I too can now go to far-off places.

To you under the cherry blossom tree, I can now tell you, young lady, in full confidence: I'll spread my wings and go till no end. I'll set out on the horizon in order to save as many people as possible. I will plant myself firmly on the earth, shelter life beneath my arms, and do it all again tomorrow. Surely there will come a day when I can someday meet the boy over the horizon. I can absolutely reach him, he, the person who showed me the wings.

Yes, young man, you should go. Your future is beyond that threshold.

Yes, young lady you should go. Your future is in the light.

Yes, young man, I'll guarantee. As long as you are in the air flying, you'll never forget that day.

Yes, young lady, trust me. As long as you are in the air flying you'll never forget the future.

AIR

by Sena Hideaki

Surely you won't forget. You happened upon your future that day.

Surely you won't forget. You chanced upon something precious that day.

The mega-earthquake and tsunami struck one weekend afternoon in winter. You must have seen the black water flow back up the roads, swelling with no end in sight and closing in on you. Seeking safety, people assembled in the schoolyard. With everyone still lined up and no one even motioning them to sit down, you just stood there, taking in the confused state of the teachers.

You were still little, dressed in your gym clothes and holding a jump rope in your hands. From the road behind the school people living nearby came seeking refuge, and it was not long before the tsunami trailed after them, like a lumbering beast that had just awoken from its slumber. Even after a lot of trash closed in along with the muddy water, the teachers still didn't make a move. You must have been transfixed by the unbelievable movements of the overturned cars and houseless roofs. After you noticed that the water was rising and rising with no signs of receding, that's when you learned that time doesn't flow backwards. Eventually the principal shouted into a megaphone, and you took shelter inside the school and ran upstairs.

In a classroom on the third floor, you watched the mass of the ocean make its assault. It was an overwhelming mass, and people were powerless to resist it. The sky was a filthy gray, and a powdery snow began falling heavily. It was so cold you thought you'd freeze. You felt like it was the end of the world. It was then that you heard someone crying. You turned around to see an unfamiliar girl who had come to seek refuge in the same classroom sobbing convulsively, supported under the shoulder by the people around her. You watched the situation unfold intently, then acting on impulse, you ripped a page out of a nearby notebook. You folded the lined, white page in silence, made it into the shape of an airplane, and turned to face the window. Muddy water had already inundated the first floor of the school, the flagpole had snapped, and a station wagon had gotten stuck on the horizontal bars. Reflected on the edge of your field of vision were the figures of residents being swept away. You closed your eyes tightly, then opened them wide, and with all your anger, you launched your airplane toward the world. Go, go, go all the way. Go, and don't give in to some dumb earthquake or tsunami. As you cried out inside, your eyes followed the path of the white paper airplane. One, then two powdery snowflakes struck the tops of the wings. In a little while, when the plane was directly above the schoolyard, it was battered by a turbulent wind and, going into a tailspin, disappeared. And then, you were left with only the inertia of the airplane inside your heart.

And then, you were left with a jump rope. In a coldness so severe it froze you to the bone, you lived on in silence. The rescuers came, and you slurped down so many bowls of instant ramen that you lost count. The grownups scraped out the mud and brought you various things in cardboard boxes. There were even a lot of comic books, but getting used, grimy books that someone donated didn't make you the least bit happy. That's why you, still speechless, always played in a corner of the schoolyard jumping rope. Because after everything you had was washed away, it was the only thing of yours left that was precious to you.

From among the boring old toys the relief workers brought, you found a package of origami paper. You used it with great care. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold paper airplanes. How to make them not only from the square paper but also after trimming one side to make the paper rectangular. The trick was to put the weight in the front and curve the back of the wings slightly. You, having lost your parents and your relatives, launched an airplane in the gymnasium from which the sludge had been washed clean away. Standing on the stage

where small children had nearly drowned, you launched it straight ahead, entrusting it with everything. Its wings caught the air, and gaining lift, it soared to the other end of the gymnasium.

You will never forget. Last night I found your photo on the web. Seeing your tiny figure again after just a random search, surely no one but I could've known it was you. The schoolhouse was filthy from mud and debris, and the schoolyard was muddy. By the front gate the statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro, which encouraged children to read and study hard, was tilted, his left hand and the book he carried in it still missing. You were jumping rope under a cherry tree. The cherry tree, which must have been submerged by the tsunami up to the tips of your raised hands, was half in bloom over your head. Under the gray sky the blossoms emitted their life force, and like a breath of vitality colored onto monochrome film, faintly bled and signaled the coming of spring. You were wearing a secondhand bomber jacket. You were having fun jumping rope alone. You forgot your loneliness only while jumping. You were freed from the earth's shackles only while jumping rope. Strong aftershocks continued, waking you up many times during the night. Whenever your back was to the ground, the tremors shook your soul. You were part of the earth as long as your body touched it. So you healed yourself by jumping rope, stringing together jump upon jump.

You flew airplanes in the schoolyard. You chased their wings, and no one got in your way. The ground's tremors had no effect on the planes. The invisible, gliding force did not disappear even when the earth shook. That's why you looked up to the wings. The heavens were murky, and the scenery was a dingy monochrome. For that reason, only your wings had the iridescence of origami paper. Wings aren't something that lasts forever. When a plane falls in the mud, the paper loses its shape. Searching for any solid ground, you launched an airplane toward the end of the schoolyard—and that's how we met.

"Hey," you said and introduced yourself.

"Hello," you replied shyly.

"You're good at jumping rope."

"Is that your airplane?"

THOSE WERE
THE FIRST WORDS
WE EXCHANGED.

You held out the airplane, then went around behind and supported the other child's right hand. You made the wings balanced and turned them ever so slightly upward. *On your signal, you held the plane aloft. The plane flew off leaving a beautiful wake.*

"That was awesome!" you said, laughing.

"Teach me how to jump rope, too," you said, laughing as well.

"WANNA TAKE TO THE AIR TOGETHER?"

—That's how YOU happened upon jumping rope—

—And YOU chanced upon airplanes.

I will never forget. I have a picture with me. It's a slightly faded Polaroid picture. Back then Polaroids, which became yours right then and there, were prized more than anything else. A male volunteer took a picture of you flying airplanes. Seeing it now, you were a thin, young boy with your hair grown out, looking as though you'd withdrawn inside a cramped shell. But I know the truth. Facing away from the camera with your dominant leg forward, back straight, and hand holding the plane aloft, at that moment there was no doubt you were connected to your future. Outside the frame, under the cherry tree near the front gate, that girl was jumping rope by herself. A short time after you would stop and look toward the cherry tree. You would brush the dirt carefully off the paper airplane, mold it back into shape, and cradle it in your hands. This picture shows you just before you took that step forward and captures that

moment for me.

Yes, you were a young girl jumping with determination. You resonated to the rhythm of the rope, forgetting both the power of language and yourself with every jump. But whenever you took a break, you must have remembered that boy. You must have felt the strength of the origami airplane leaving your grip return deep inside you. You even had a sense that if you looked back he would be there. But you didn't look back. The jump rope had made you face forward and bound the tips of your toes that were touching the ground. As long as you were in contact with the earth, you couldn't find the courage to take the next step.

You're scared, aren't you.

I understand. You're scared.

So now I'll cry out. Toward the picture, with all the feeling I've got. Take that step. Move forward. The power to jump lies within you.

So I'll give you, that child on the web, a cheer. You can look back and take a breath. The invisible air you breathe in will give power to your wings.

That's it, go on. The light that will give you a push from behind will shine now.

Ah, I remember that light. That moment the world suddenly got brighter, and putting aside the rope and planting both feet on the ground, I looked up into the sky.

Its brilliance made me squint. I shaded my eyes with my hand and realized that it had been a while since I'd done that.

From a crack in the sky that had been completely gray up until then, a brilliant beam of light shined down. I knitted my brows in spite of myself and basked in its light.

The world that produced this halation slowly regained its color and warmth. I remember that sharply-defined shadow. When I looked down at my feet, there it was. A powerful, black shadow shaped like me. When I stretched my arms out wide, the shadow stretched its arms too, and in its hand was my origami.

A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. The sound of a rotor whirred, and I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defense Forces were above the schoolhouse, flying away. Heading toward a more severely disaster-struck area. In order to extend a hand to people that were suffering more.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow and then quietly fix your eyes in front of you. You spot her.

You look back and spot him walking toward you. You see the origami plane in his hand and feel certain about your future. You will become an airplane pilot. You will grow up to help suffering people, flying to the ends of the earth using the power of your wings.

You probably don't realize it yet, but you will make the jump rope your lifelong friend. You will jump again and again countless times, slicing the air with your rope. You will learn many moves and devise many acts, beating out a rhythm with your body and the earth. Surely you will compete in many tournaments. Surely you will venture forth into the world with your rope alone. Surely you will have many wonderful encounters. You will talk with people all over the world through your jump roping. You're just about to take that first step now.

Of course wings don't last forever. People move through the air using energy taken from the earth. One day even wings will return to the earth; endless flight is impossible. Nevertheless you will decide to keep on flying through the air. Because you're a child of the earth. Every girl, every boy, WE are all children of the earth.

I'll make you a promise. One day without fail I, along with this rope, will meet her again. I will find the girl that gave me something precious, using its precious power to track her down. Just like you can go to the ends of the earth, the person I am now can also go a great distance.

To you who are under the cherry tree, I can now proudly exclaim. I will spread my wings and go to the ends of the earth. So that I can rescue as many people as I can, I will

head toward the horizon. I will push off from the ground, and holding lives in my hands, I will descend again tomorrow. Over there one day I'm certain the time will come when I can see him again. Without fail I will be able to reach the boy that taught me about wings.

Go on. Your future lies just ahead.

Go on. Your future lies within that light.

Very well, I'll give you my word. As long as you keep jumping in the air, you won't forget that day.

Yes, believe me. As long as you keep flying through the air, you won't forget your future.

AIR

You won't forget about it. The day when you meet the future.

He will never forget about it. The day he came across the irreplaceable incident.

The weekend of the winter afternoon, the earth was shaken by the incoming tsunami. When you were moved along the driveway against the black current, the water force was pressing onto you. Gathering in the school yard for evacuation, everyone was seated in rows. You stood among the confused teachers who were trying to control the situation.

He was still young, holding onto a skipping rope in his hands while wearing his sports clothes. The people nearby were running away using the sideroad behind the school while the tsunami was closing in from the other side; like a monster that has been awoken from its sleep. None of the teachers moved as the muddy water drew in with the rubbish. The unbelievable movements of the bicycle that was returning and the house that was only left with a roof, must have captivated his eyes. Knowing that the time will never reverse; the water level has increased significantly. Finally, the principal has shouted out using a loudspeaker that he was chased out of the school compound using the emergency staircase.

From the classroom on the third floor, you saw the incoming volume of the seawater. It was an overwhelming clod, which human could not possible resist. The sky was polluted in grey as powdered snow has started scattering intensely. It was so cold, as if the era will be ending soon, like you were freezing. That was the first time when you heard someone crying. When you returned to the same classroom that you ran away from, you saw a girl sobbing quietly in convulsions as the surrounding people hugged her. When you saw the child, you felt the urge to pull apart a nearby note. You folded the plain paper quietly on its borders into the shape of a plane, which was flown through the window in a straight line. With the muddy water covering the first floor, the iron pole that held the national flag was broken into halves and has stuck to the wagon. At the corner of your visual field has portrayed the vision of the flowing water pushing against the residents; you shut your eyes quickly and re-opened them once more with anger filled in your eyes as the plane set off towards the world. Go, go, go anywhere reachable. Don't lose to the earthquakes and tsunami. You shouted deep within your heart, as you watched the plain white paper plane travelled along the path. You saw some powdered snow clashing onto the wings of the paper plane as it reaches the school yard. Soon, it was raked up again by the disordered blowing wind as the body disappeared among it. Only the leftover inertia of the plane was left within your heart.

Then, he was left only with the skipping rope. Tingling in cold, he kept silent as he continued to live on. Finally, the rescuers arrived as he enjoyed a good time with the countless instant noodles. The adults started raking the muds out as they placed down several reinforced cardboard boxes filled with various items. There're many old, stained manga books within, which wouldn't make the bestowed happy. That's why, he remained silent as he wandered at the corner of the school yard with his skipping rope. Everything has been washed away as the only thing left was what he held onto.

Among the boring toys that were brought over by rescuers, you found a pack of origamis. You used that carefully. The volunteer doctor told you the way to fold paper planes. Not only the way to fold them with a squared paper, but also the way to cut them and fold them with a rectangle paper. The trick is to gather the gravity on the front with the wings bent towards the back slightly. You, who have lost all families and relatives, boarded the plane in the gymnasium after washing off all the muds on your body. Standing on the stage where a child drowning, you entrusted everything to the rest and left. The wings caught onto the wind and gained lift, soaring off above the gymnasium.

He will definitely not forget. He saw the photos from the website last night. He, who met the retrieval team by chance, was timid in appearance and wouldn't have been found if it was not for me. Mud and rubbles polluted the school dorm and the school yard. The Ninomiya Kinjiro statue that stood next to the front gate, has lost the book on it left hand. He was skipping with the skipping rope below the cherry blossom tree. With his hands basked in cherry blossom petals, he found a five petalled cherry blossom on his head. Below the grey sky, monotone film was emitted as if it's the arrival of the colourful spring. He was wearing an old jumper and skipping excitedly with the skipping rope. He was only able to forget about his loneliness as he skipped. He can only be released from the bondage of the world as

he skipped. Huge aftershocks continued as he was woken up several times in the middle of the night. With his back against the earth, the trembles have shaken his heart. As he reached his limit, he became a part of the earth. That's why when he skipped, he was tied with a heavy weight, as the body healed itself.

You flew off with the plane from the yard. No one would be able to catch up with the wings. The shaking of the ground was not able to disturb the plane. Floating above the sky with an unseen power, the shaking of the earth has not stopped. That's why you looked up to the wings. The sky was turbid, the view was dyed in monotone; so only your wings were origami's rainbow colour. The wings did not last forever. The paper broke apart as it fell in the mud. You had wanted to make sure of it as you began to search the ground while the plane set off on the other side of the yard. And there, we met.

"Hey", I called out to you.

"Good afternoon", you replied.

"Are you, good at, skipping ropes?"

"That, is your plane?"

That was, the first conversation we had, when we associated.

You turned to the plane, looked back and held out your right hand. Both wings were parallel and it would have soared off above the sky. You shouted out loud as the body soared off beautifully.

"Amazing, amazing!" as you laughed.

"I'll teach you how to jump with the jump rope too", I laughed too.

"Let's fly together?"

And so, he took out his skipping rope as you went around the plane.

I will definitely remember. I have a photo in my hand. A photo of a slightly thin volunteer. At that time, that place belonged to me, and so, the polaroid became a treasure for me. The photo of the male volunteer was taken when the plane departed. The boy who was looking and calling out to him was thin with long hair as if he has been shut in a cramped shell. That's why I know. As he stepped out his dominant foot, stretched out his back; he has been connected to the future. Outside of the frame, under the cherry blossom tree next to the main gate, that child was skipping with a skipping rope. Just before he reached out, his eyes met with the one under the cherry blossom tree. The dirtied paper plane swept away courteously as he held onto it carefully with both hands. As he stepped out, the photo of the scene was taken.

And so, both the girl and you sprang up unintentionally as he called. At that moment, you were lost for words, as the rhythm of the skipping rope reflected this. However, as he paused for the moment, the child has regained his composure. The strength of the origami plane that flew off from your hand, has returned to my chest. You had the feeling that you will see it, if you turned around. Even so, you did not turn. With the skipping rope, you faced forward, as your toes were tied in contact with the ground. As you touched the earth, you have gained more courage.

You were scared.

It's understandable. Your fear.

That's why I raised my voice. I've included as much emotions as I could, within the photo. Stepping out. Stepping forward. You have the strength within you to jump.

That's why I've sent you an ale for him on the website. As he looked back, he was able to catch his breath. The unseen air that have attracted him so much, has given him much strength for his wings.

That's right, go on. The lights that have been burdening your back, is now glowing.

Oh, I remembered the glowing light. It has brightened up the work unintentionally, I've stopped skipping as I held out my arms to hold the ground and looked up to the sky.

That glow was fine for my eyes. I've forgotten both my palm and forehead; it was a feeling that I haven't felt for a long time.

In the gap of the greyish sky, the amount of sunlight which penetrated it was low. Unknowingly, I frowned as the sunlight bathe on my body.

The world with variation, slow and colourful, I can still clearly recall the image. The shadow reflected beneath my feet as the sunset. The powerful black shadow imitated me. The shadow extended

his arms too as I extended my arms, and within my hands, I was holding onto the origami.

A big shadow traversed the school yard. When the sound of the rotor blared aloud, I looked up to the helicopter in the sky. The defense team were flying on top of the dorm. They were heading towards the more severe disaster site. It was to lend out their helping hands for people who were suffering more.

You looked up to the silhouette at the helicopter, and quietly moved forward. You had wanted to affirm her figure.

She has returned, he had to depend on his steps to move and to confirm. I saw the paper plane in his hands, and has firm conviction towards the future. I have become the pilot of my own plane. It was able to fly to anywhere with the power of the wings, I have wanted to become an adult that was able to help the suffering people.

It was still unknown, that you will become lifelong friends with the skipping rope. There were countless of them, as you continued jumping while the rope cut through the air. You've learnt some singing skills, and arranged some singing performance, with the rhythm of the earth that has been etched onto your body. You've went to many conventions before. Going around the world, you've had many splendid meetings. You'll have common topic regarding skipping ropes with people around the world. That step was the same as the step you've just taken.

The wings were definitely not forever. The people who have gained energy from the earth was able to move forward. The singing was returned to the wings and the earth, it was not an endless flight. Even so, he has decided to continue flying. Because he was a child of the earth. All of you, and all of him; all of us, were all children of the earth.

Let's make a promise. I will definitely meet the child again, using this skipping rope. I has wanted to give her the irreplaceable, as I searched with the irreplaceable strength within. So that you would be able to go anywhere you wanted, I will go further away too.

The you under the cherry blossom tree, I've transmitted to you with my arms opened. With my wings wide opened, I was able to go anywhere I wanted. So that I would be able to save many people even though I'm alone, I headed out to the horizon. Kicking up the earth, holding the lives within my hands, I will still get off tomorrow. I will surely meet that child again, on the other side. Back to his side with the wings that he taught me, I will definitely go along with it.

Now, let's go. Your future is before you.

Now, move on. Your future is within the light.

It's alright. I can vouch for it. As long as you are still skipping, you will never forget that day.

That's right, believe in me. As long as I am still flying in the sky, I will not forget your future.

AIR by SENA Hideaki

— You won't forget your encounter with the future that day.

— I don't think you will forget finding something precious that day.

— The great earthquake and tsunami struck one weekend in winter. On that afternoon you saw the deluge of black water flow up the road, swelling inexorably as it approached. You had been evacuated to the school playground, and absent any further signal you simply remained stood in a line and took in the sight of the teachers in disarray.

— You are just a small boy with a skipping rope waiting in your PE kit. People have begun fleeing from the road behind the school, and eventually the tsunami looms into view from that same direction, like some ancient behemoth emerging from a long hibernation. The teachers offer no reaction, even as the mixture of debris and filthy water draws close.

You seem mesmerised by the extraordinary parade in the water before you—here an overturned vehicle, there the roof of a partially submerged house. The surging floodwater shows no sign of abating. You realise there will be no going back to the past. Finally the school principal yells into his loudspeaker, which is your cue to make a dash for the school building and climb the stairs.

— Looking on from a classroom on the third floor, you watched the vast body of water besiege the school building with a force no human being would be able to resist. Snow began to fall heavily from the dreary grey sky, and the bone-chilling cold felt like the portent of a dying world.

At that point, you first heard the sound of crying; you turned your head and saw another girl had taken refuge in the classroom. Her face was unfamiliar. As she sobbed convulsively, some people nearby tried to comfort her. You gazed at this scene for a while, and then, following an impulse, tore out a blank sheet of paper from a notebook. Without uttering a word, you folded it into the form of an aeroplane and turned towards the window: the polluted water had now engulfed the first floor of the school, and an estate car was jammed against the toppled flagpole hoisting the national flag. Out of the corner of your eye you could apprehend human figures swept away by the floodwater, which impelled you to shut your eyes tight. Then you opened your eyes wide and defiantly launched the pristine paper aeroplane into the world outside. Watching its course, you cheered it on within your heart. *Fly. It doesn't matter where to, just fly. In spite of nature's adversities, fly.* The odd snowflake nestled on its wings, and soon it was right above the school playground, where, buffeted by the blustery wind, it entered a tailspin and finally disappeared. All that remained was an after-image of the aeroplane's trajectory.

— The skipping rope remains in your possession as you live a mute existence in the biting winter cold. After the relief workers turned up you gulped down endless amounts of instant noodles. Some grown-ups cleared away the mud and brought various items in cardboard boxes. There are a number of manga comics, but you aren't interested in somebody's tatty old books. Without saying a word to anyone, you go off alone to a corner of the playground and play with your skipping rope. Apart from that single precious belonging, everything of yours is lost.

— A support worker brought an assortment of toys, amongst which you discovered a bundle of origami paper. You resolved to use it sparingly. One of the voluntary doctors gave a demonstration of how to make a paper aeroplane: not just by folding a square sheet of paper, but also a method that involved cutting away part of the sheet to make it rectangular. The trick lay in shifting the centre of gravity forward, while bending up the back of the wings slightly.

Since the mud had been cleaned out of the gymnasium, you hurled your paper aeroplane there, the scene of a small child's near drowning. You, who had lost your parents and other family members, surrendered yourself entirely to the moment and launched it straight as an arrow. The wings caressed the air to confer lift as it shot to the other side of the gymnasium.

— Last night, I happened upon some old pictures of you while doing an online search. You look so young I think only I would have recognised you.

The school building is strewn with debris, and the playground overlaid with mud. By the main gate the statue of pedagogue Ninomiya Sontoku is tilted at an unnatural angle and his left hand is missing—the one which characteristically holds an open book. You play with your skipping rope under the cherry tree. If you stretched up your arm it would indicate how far the tree had been submerged. Above your head the blossoming cherry tree signals the rejuvenation of nature beneath an ash grey sky; those faint pink blotches heralding the return of spring, as though the breath of life had furnished monochrome film with traces of colour.

You are alone as you amuse yourself with the skipping rope. The jumper you have on is second-hand. Often, you are awoken during the night by the continuing aftershocks; the tremors perturb you when you are laid down against the floor. As long as there is that physical contact, you are bound to the earth. But when you are skipping, the ground's fetters loosen and your isolation is forgotten. You heal yourself as you thread together the moments of uplift with the skipping rope.

— No one hindered you as you gave chase to your paper aeroplane in the school playground. The earth's tremors had no effect on it. The shaking ground couldn't counteract the hidden force that lifted it skywards. You looked up as it winged its way through the air: only the multi-coloured origami paper offered any contrast to the murky sky and drab monotone landscape. But wings formed of paper don't last forever; falling in the dirt makes them deteriorate. You searched for ground that was a bit firmer and released the paper aeroplane towards the perimeter of the playground... which led to the encounter.

— You introduce yourself with a casual 'Hi.'

— 'Hello,' you responded shyly.

— 'You're good at the skipping rope.'

— 'That aeroplane; is it yours?'

These were the words exchanged when we first met.

You presented me with the paper aeroplane and moved close behind, guiding my right hand so as to angle the wings upwards a little.

— With a cry, you brandish it above your head. And then it is airborne, the stable fuselage according a passage of such grace. 'Ah, it's amazing!' you say gleefully.

— 'You have to teach me the skipping rope!' you said with a laugh.

'Can we fly together?'

That's how you encountered the skipping rope.

— And that is the moment you discover the paper aeroplane.

— There is a slightly faded Polaroid photograph which came into my possession around that time, and I treasured it above everything. One of the volunteers took a picture when you were throwing a paper aeroplane. Looking at it now, that boy appears detached. He has lost weight and his hair needs cutting.

— But I knew things were changing.

— The photo shows you from behind with your arm poised; you have placed one foot forward and straightened your back. I am sure at this point you had found the path that leads to the future. It's outside the frame, but there was a solitary girl using her skipping rope under the blossoming cherry tree by the main gate. A little afterwards you cast your eyes in the direction of the cherry tree as you take a pause. Carefully brushing the dirt from the paper aeroplane, you make some adjustments and then cradle it in your hands. This photo revealed the moment you were ready to take a forward step.

— That's right. You were focused purely on your skipping. Your mind had been cleared of all thoughts as you jumped in rhythm to the skipping rope.

— But doesn't that girl come back into your own thoughts whenever you take a break?

Your mental balance had been restored by feeding off the power of the origami aeroplane.

— Actually, you had a presentiment that if you turned your head that boy would be there, and yet you didn't. The skipping rope kept you looking ahead; your toes, pressed into the ground, had been fettered. And being connected to the earth meant you were unable to find the resolve to take that extra step.

I expect you are afraid, aren't you? Look, I will tell you something. Use the photo as a source of inspiration. Take a forward step. Because within you lies the power to soar.

— I can tell you are afraid, so I will offer a supportive cheer to the boy I came across online. Take a backwards look and it will give you breathing space. You can strengthen your wings by absorbing that impalpable atmosphere.

— Yes, go on. Do it. There is now a brilliant light at your back to aid you.

— Ah, I remember that light when the world suddenly brightened up. I stopped skipping and with both feet planted on the ground looked up in the air.

— That powerful glare made me squint and I shielded my eyes with my hand. It occurred to me I hadn't needed to do that for quite some time. Dazzling sunlight poured down from a breach in the sullen sky and instinctively I screwed up my face and basked in the light from head to toe. As the world gradually became suffused with variegated colours, its frigid cast disappeared. I can remember the bold shadows; there was one at my feet which delineated my form on the ground. When I spread my arms, the silhouette did likewise. And all the while a piece of origami was in my grasp.

— The playground was traversed by a large shadow as it reverberated with the sound of rotor blades and I looked up to see a helicopter. It was an aircraft from the Self-Defence Force flying over the school in order to reach a severely affected disaster zone. To search out people in hardship.

— After gazing up at the helicopter, you calmly look forward and recognise the figure of a girl.

— You take a backwards glance and see a boy steadily walking your way. The fact he is holding an origami aeroplane assures you of your future course. You are destined to be an aeroplane pilot who uses the power of flight to rescue people wherever they are in distress.

— It remains to be seen, but I don't believe the bond you have with the skipping rope will ever be broken. You continue to leap over a rope as it cleaves the air in countless iterations, and by the study of different techniques and the working out of new moves you will become the embodiment of rhythm. Then I see you taking part in many tournaments. Your emergence into the world equipped with nothing but a skipping rope will lead to a multitude of inspirational encounters and interactions with people from all walks of life. Now is the time for you to take that initial step.

— Naturally, no set of wings can fly forever. People steer a course through the air by taking sustenance from the earth, and ultimately those wings have to descend back to earth. But even if boundless flight is impossible, you nevertheless have a determination to stay aloft. Because you are born of the earth. Because each and every one of us shares that connection.

— Here is a promise. Someday I am going to meet that girl with a skipping rope again. With this precious power I will track down the girl who gave me an irreplaceable object. For I can now traverse the four corners of the earth, just as you do.

— To the boy under the cherry tree: I can now speak to you with confidence. It is time to spread my wings and travel far and wide. My aim is to extend my horizons so that I can help as many people as possible; and by taking a purposeful stride forward, I shall affirm life and head for the approaching dawn. In the future, there will surely come a chance to meet that boy under the cherry tree. I will finally reach the one who taught me to fly.

— Okay, you should be off. Your future lies ahead of you.

— Well then, it's time for you to depart. Your future lies within the light.

— Sure, I can guarantee it. As long as you keep soaring through the air, that day will stay with you.

— Yes, please trust me. As long you carry on flying in the air, you will be alive to the future.

“AIR” by *Hideaki Sena*

You won't forget the day you saw your future.

You won't forget the day you found something irreplaceable.

In the winter afternoon of the weekend, that great earthquake and tsunami occurred. The boy would have seen the black water flowing upstream on the road, increasing endlessly and approaching gradually. Though the pupils had evacuated and gathered in the schoolyard in line, there was no instruction to sit down, so he just stood there accepting the teachers handling of a chaotic situation.

The girl who was wearing a Physical Education uniform and holding a skipping rope in her hand, was still small. People from the neighbourhood fled to the schoolyard from the back road of the school, and before long, the tsunami wave came heavily and quietly from behind, like a monster waking up from its sleep. Even when a huge amount of debris rushed in with the muddy water, the teachers didn't spring into action. Her eye would have been caught by an incredible movement on the overturned bicycles and roofs missing the bodies of houses. People couldn't learn that time will never turn back until the volume of water was ever-increasing and never-decreasing. Finally the principal ordered a full evacuation of everyone with a loudspeaker and the girls rushed into a school building and ran up the stairs.

The boy saw from the second floor classroom, the mass of the sea surging and striking. It was an overwhelming mass which no person could resist. The sky was a dingy ash colour, and powdery snow began to scatter intensely. Too cold and freezing, it made him to feel that it would be the end of the world. At the time, he heard someone's cry for the first time. Looking back, an unknown girl who escaped into the same classroom was twitching and sobbing, and was held by other people around her. The boy stared at them, then he got carried away by an impulse to rip one piece of notebook nearby. He folded in silence the blank paper with the ruled lines, made it into the shape of an airplane and turned around toward the window. Muddy water had already swallowed up the ground floor of the school building, the flagstaff-pole was broken, and a van was caught on the iron bar. In the corner of his vision, there were figures of residents being washed away, but he closed his eyes tightly and opened wide again, and released the paper airplane towards the world with anger. Fly, fly, fly forever. Never to be beaten by earthquake nor tsunami and – just fly. His mind screamed as his eyes followed the path of the paper airplane. When a couple of powdery snowflakes fluttered down on the wing and the airplane reached just above the schoolyard in time, it was finally fanned by the disturbed wind and disappeared in a whirl. Only the flight path of the airplane was left in his mind.

And for the girl, only a skipping rope was left of her world. She was patient and silent in the cold, freezing almost to death. An adult member of the rescue team came over to help, and she slurped up instant noodles without measure. The adults scooped out the mud and brought various things in cardboard boxes. There were a lot of comic books there, but she wasn't happy to receive someone's second-hand ruined books. So she was skipping with her rope, alone in silence at the corner of the schoolyard. Because it was the only irreplaceable thing for her for whom everything had been swept away.

The boy found a pack of origami paper among the dull toys that the supporters brought. He handled it like a precious thing. A volunteer doctor taught him how to fold the airplane. He learned how to fold the airplane not just from square paper, but also better from a rectangle made by cutting a piece off the square. The knowledge being to fly it well: bring the centre of gravity forward, and make the back of the wings point slightly upwards. He who had lost both parents and relatives flew the paper airplane in the gymnasium where the sludge was washed away. He stood on the stage where small children had drowned, pinning his hopes and everything on the paper airplane, to let it fly straight. The wing caught the air, gained lift, and flew away to the edge of the gymnasium.

That past me would never be forgotten. I found a photo of the past me on the website last night. It was purely an accident that I found you, I would be the only person who able to recognize you who was so small. I could see there were dirty school buildings with mud and rubble, and a muddy schoolyard. The statue of *Kinjiro Ninomiya*, (the great teacher as a small boy reading while carrying firewood on his back) on the side of the front gate, had lost his left hand that had held the book. The past me was skipping rope under a cherry blossom tree. The cherry blossoms which should have been submerged in the muddy water to the level your arm stretched, were half full bloom above your head. It was telling of the arrival of spring and breathing new

life with soft colour in the air under the gray sky, like tinting on black and white film. You were wearing a used zip-up jacket. You were skipping a rope alone. The skipping rope has kept you from loneliness. You only became free from the earth's restraint when you skipped the rope. The big aftershocks continued and it made you wake up many times in the middle of the night. The vibration shook your heart as well while your back was touching to the earth. As long as your body touched to the ground, you were a part of the earth. That's why the past me skipped rope, and you healed yourself by connecting the layers of each moment you left the ground.

The boy flew a paper airplane in the schoolyard. He chased it without being disturbed by anyone. The ground's shaking did not affect the airplane. No matter how much the earth shook, the invisible power floating in the air did not disappear. That's why he looked up at the wings. The sky was a murky colour, the scenery was stained in a single hue, and therefore only his wings gave a rainbow of origami paper. The wings are finite. Were it to stick in the mud, the paper would break down. He flew a plane to the corner of the schoolyard, searching for a certain ground – and he met her.

"Hey", the boy said.

"Hi", the girl answered shyly.

"You're good at skipping rope".

"Is that your airplane?"

Those were, the first words, we exchanged.

The boy held out his airplane, he turned around her back and supported her right hand. He made the wings symmetrically, pointing up slightly. He took a swing with her voice. The aircraft flew with a graceful trail.

"Wow, great!" the girl smiled.

"Please teach me how to skip rope", the boy smiled, too.

"Let's skip together?"

Therefore *the boy* met a skipping rope-

- and *the girl* met an airplane.

I will never forget. I have one photo at hand. It's a slightly faded Polaroid photo. Polaroid cameras were more precious than anything else at that time, because you could get a photo developed instantly and have it immediately in your hand. A volunteer man took a photo of the past me flying an airplane through the air. Looking back the photo, the past me who was called 'the boy' seems thin, your hair was growing and you were withdrawing into a cramped shell of yourself. But I know. Past me with the shot of your back in the photo, your dominant foot in front, stretching your spine and taking a backswing, was definitely connected to the future at that time. It came off from a photo frame, but under the cherry blossom tree near the front gate, the girl had been skipping a rope alone. In a little while, the past me would stop your hand and look towards the cherry blossom tree. You gently cleaned the dust off the paper airplane, pulled it into shape and wrapped it softly with both hands. This photo has captured and showed the moment just before the past me takes a step forward.

Yes, the past me called 'the girl' was absorbed in skipping a rope. You were resonating with the rhythm of the rope, without word nor mind getting in the way in every moment. But every time you took a break, you must have remembered that boy. You returned in your mind a sense of the strength that the origami airplane flew from your hand. The past me memorized even the presentiment that he would be there if you turned around. And yet you didn't. A jumping rope made your face forward and bound your toes touching the ground. While the past me was touching the ground, you couldn't have the courage to take another step.

The boy was scared.

I know. The girl was scared.

Now I raise my voice. Towards the Polaroid photo, with all the feeling now I have. Take a step. Move forward. The past me has the power in you to jump over.

That's why I send hearty cheers to the past me on the website. You can turn back and get through life. The invisible air you breathe in gives power to your wings.

Yes, move on. The light that boosts your backs is sparkling now.

Oh, I remember that light. Suddenly the world brightened, past me stopped skipping the rope, put your feet on the ground and looked up at the sky.

Past me narrowed your eyes to that brightness. You held your face with your palm, and realized that it was the first time to do such thing after so long.

Dazzling sunlight was pouring down to the ground from the gap of the clouds which had been always grey. The girl's face frowned and bathed the light with her whole body.

The world formed by mist gradually regained colour and warmth. I remember the clear shadow. When past me dropped your eyes under your feet, there was shadow, which was a bold inky shadow imitating past me. As you extended your arms, the shadows also spread its arms, and in its hand there was your origami airplane.

A big shadow moved across the schoolyard. As a rotor sound resonated, past me looked up at the helicopter in the sky. The helicopter of the Self-Defence Force flew over the school building. To head to a more severely affected disaster area. To stretch out helping hands to people in painful situations.

Past me had gazed at the shadow of helicopter, and then looked straight ahead. You found the girl's figure.

Past me had turned back and found that the boy was approaching. Seeing he had an origami airplane on his hand the past me was convinced of your future. That you would become an airplane pilot. You would become an adult who would fly with the power of wings to everywhere to help suffering people.

The past me might not know yet, but you would have made a skipping rope a lifetime friend. An innumerable number of times, you cut the air with the rope and kept skipping. You will learn many techniques, create several performances, and beat rhythms on your body and the ground. You may compete in many tournaments. You may go out to the world with a skipping rope. There will be splendid encounters. You will talk with people all over the world with your skipping rope. Now you are about to take the first step.

Of course the wings are not eternal. People travel in the sky with energy obtained from the earth. One day the wings will return to the ground, because one cannot fly forever. Nevertheless, the past me girl will decide to keep flying in the sky. Because you are a child of the earth. All of you, all of us, all we are children of this earth.

I will promise the past me. Someday, I will meet that girl again with this skipping rope. I will seek out her who has given me an irreplaceable thing, I will seek out her with my irreplaceable power. Just as you can go anywhere, I can go far anywhere.

Now, I can confidently tell the past me, who was under the cherry blossom tree. I will spread my wings to go everywhere. I will head for the horizon in order to save many people. I will kick the earth and come down again to the ground, holding lives in this arm tomorrow and the day after. Beyond that, the time will come when I can meet the boy someday. I will surely reach to him who taught me the wings.

Go ahead. Your future is waiting over there.

Go ahead. Your future is inside that light.

That's all right, I will undertake it. While the past me keeps skipping in the air you won't forget that day.

Yes, believe me. While the past me keep flying in the sky you won't forget the future.

Air

By Hideaki Sena

You'll never forget it. That day when you happened to meet the future.

You will never forget it. That day when by chance *you* came across something irreplaceable.

It was a winter's afternoon one weekend when the massive earthquake and tsunami hit. You watched as the black water endlessly seethed up the road. Everyone was gathered at the evacuation point in the school yard, but there were no instructions to sit in lines. You stood petrified as the teachers tried to come to grips with the chaos of the situation.

You were still small then, standing in your P.E. gear and holding onto your skipping rope. People from the neighbourhood were fleeing along the road at the back of the school and before long the tsunami approached slowly like a beast waking from slumber. Even with the garbage-filled muddy water approaching, the teachers did not move. Seeing the unbelievable motion of an overturned vehicle and a house reduced to only its roof, *you* could not believe your eyes. As the volume of water increased without subsiding, *you* came to the realisation that not even time could reverse this. Finally, upon hearing the principal's voice calling out over the loud speaker, *you* dashed inside the school building and ran up the stairs.

You were in a classroom on the third floor when you saw the vast sea attack. People couldn't fight against the overwhelming mass. A powder snow began to fall heavily from the dirty light grey sky. The cold was so freezing that you felt this was the end of the world. It was then you began to hear someone crying. You turned around and glimpsed a girl you'd never seen before who had escaped into the same classroom. People held her as she convulsed in uncontrollable sobs. You watched this scene intently and had a sudden urge to tear a page from a nearby exercise book. Silently you folded the white lined page into the shape of an aeroplane and then you turned around to the window. The muddy water had already consumed the first floor of the school building and a station wagon had become stuck on the collapsed flag pole where the national flag usually flew. In the corner of your field of view you saw residents swept away, but you shut your eyes tight, then opened them wide again and with all your strength released your plane into the world. Fly, fly, fly away. Fly in defiance of the earthquake and tsunami. As your heart screamed this, you watched where the white paper aeroplane flew. One, then two, flakes of powder snow landed on the wings. Before long, when it was just above the school yard, the aircraft finally struggled, disturbed by the wind. It went into a tailspin and disappeared. Only the plane's inertia remained within your heart.

Now *you* only had your skipping rope. The biting cold rendered *you* silent and unable to move. When the rescuers arrived, they gave *you* as much instant ramen as *you* could eat. They bailed out the mud and brought a range of items in cardboard boxes. There were lots of comic books, but *you* were not content with someone's old and dirty books even if they had been given out of kindness. *You* were at a loss for words about the corner of the school yard where *you* could always be found quietly playing alone with your skipping rope. That's because it had all been swept away and taken from *you*. And this was the one thing for *you* that was irreplaceable.

You found a pack of origami paper among the dull toys brought by the rescuers. You looked after it very carefully. One of the volunteer doctors taught you how to make a paper aeroplane. Rather than fold the four corners of the square paper, it was also possible to cut a section into a rectangle and make a plane from that. The trick is to put the centre of gravity towards the front, and to slightly bend the back of the wings. You who had lost your parents and relatives flew your plane in the gymnasium where the sludge had been washed away. This small child stood on the drowned stage and put everything into the throw to send the plane in a straight line. The wings of the plane caught the air, generated lift, and flew all the way to the edge of the gymnasium.

You never ever forget. Last night I found your photo on the internet. It was merely by chance that *I* came across *you* in a search. *You* were so small in the photo and so barely discernible that *I* nearly did not notice *you*. In the muddy school yard, the school building was covered in dirt and rubble. At the main gate, the statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro was at an angle and his left hand, the one that always held a book, was missing. *You* were jumping with your skipping rope below a cherry blossom tree. Each time *you* extended your hands they would have been immersed in the cherry blossom flowers in half bloom above your head. Under the ashen sky where life had departed, that slightly blurred revelation that told of spring's arrival was like a breath of colour on a monotone film. *You* were wearing an old jumper and playing with your skipping rope on your own. *You* only forgot your loneliness when *you* were jumping. It was only when *you* jumped over the rope that *you* were free from the earth's bindings. Large aftershocks followed and *you* woke up many times during the night. With your back stuck to the Earth, *you* felt the vibrations shaking your heart. As long as your body was touching the Earth, *you* were part of it. So as *you* skipped, jumping over and over several times while holding onto this connection, *you* were able to heal your body on your own.

You flew the aeroplane in the school yard. No one disturbed *you* as *you* chased those wings. When the ground shook it did not have any effect on the aeroplane. It floated up into the sky on an invisible power and the tremors could not bring it down. *You* admired the wings of the plane. The wings of your iridescent origami that stood out against muddied sky and the dirty monochrome scenery. But wings are not eternal. If it falls in the mire, the paper will fall apart. *You* searched for suitable ground, a part of the school yard where *you* could throw your aeroplane. And that's how we happened to meet each other.

"Hey," *you* said, introducing yourself.

"Hello," came a shy response.

"You're really good with the skipping rope."

"Is that your aeroplane?"

Those were the first words we said to each other.

You held up the plane in your right hand and turned around. The symmetrical wings were tipped slightly upwards. *You* let out a shout and the aircraft flew on a beautiful wake.

"Wow! Wow!" *you* laughed.

"Show me how to use the skipping rope," *you* laughed.

"Shall we fly together?"

It was then *you* happened to meet the skipping rope while *you* by chance came across the aeroplane.

I'll never forget it. I have the photo nearby. A slightly faded polaroid photo. That polaroid photo is my most treasured item, and those days immediately become yours. One of the volunteer men took the photo of *you* flying the plane. Looking at it now, the boy called '*you*' is thin, has long hair and seems to be trapped inside a cramped shell. But I know. For *you* who put his best foot forward and held his head high, at that time there was surely a connection with his future. Although it's outside the frame of the photograph, under the cherry blossom tree near the main gate was a girl alone with her skipping rope. After a while *you* stopped what *you* were doing and looked towards the cherry blossoms. Gently cleaning the paper aeroplane, *you* fixed its shape and held it closely with both hands. Just before *you* took a step forward, this photo had been captured and handed to me.

That's right, the girl called '*you*' jumped without a care in the world. For an instant she forgot both her words and how she felt and she resonated with the rhythm of the skipping rope. Every time *you* took a break, *you* remembered her. The strength of the origami aeroplane that flies from your hand returns to your heart. *You* even had a premonition that if *you* turned around, *you* would be there. But *you* did not turn around. *You* faced forward with your skipping rope, the tips of your toes bound to the ground. When *you* came into contact with the Earth,

you could no longer keep up your courage.

You're scared, aren't you.

I get it. *You* are scared.

So I'll speak up now. With all my feelings poured into this photo. Take a step and move forward. You have the strength to jump inside you.

So *I* am sending my support to '*you*' who *I* found on the web.

You think back and it's possible that your breath is the connection. The invisible air that *you* inhale is what gives power to your wings.

That's right, press forward. Your light of encouragement is now shining.

Yes, *I* remember that light. That time when the world suddenly brightened, causing me to stop skipping. With both feet firmly on the ground, *I* raised my eyes to the sky.

I squinted at the brightness. *I* brought my hand to my forehead and realised it had been a long time since *I* had done that.

Through a crack in the eternally grey sky, dazzlingly beautiful rays of sunlight poured out. *I* was frowning in spite of myself, and my whole body was bathed in light.

The world that had been awakened by halation slowly returned its warm colours. *I* remember the clearly defined shadows. *I* lowered my eyes to see a shadow at my feet. A powerful black shadow. *I* spread my arms wide and the shadow spread its arms and in those hands was my origami.

A large shadow crossed the school yard. The sound of a rotor reverberated and, looking up, *I* saw a helicopter in the sky. The Japan Self-Defense Force helicopter passed over the school building and flew away. They were heading to severely affected areas. They would be reaching out to those in more dire circumstances.

The helicopter's shadow caught your attention. You looked up at it and quietly watched its course into the distance until you stared straight ahead again. It was at that moment you noticed her.

You looked back and realised he was walking towards you. In his hand was the origami aeroplane and *you* knew then exactly what *you* wanted to be in the future: an aeroplane pilot. With the power of wings *you* could fly anywhere and help those who are suffering.

You don't know it yet, but you're a lifelong friend. Countless times your skipping rope will whistle through the air as you jump. You will learn many tricks and take part in many performances and your body will etch a rhythm on the ground. You'll participate in a number of competitions. With just your rope you will leave this place and have many wonderful experiences. Your skipping rope will allow you to communicate with people all over the world. Now you're going to take that first step.

Of course, wings are not eternal. People move in the sky with energy obtained from earth. Someday wings also return to the earth as there is no such thing as endless flight. *You* have resolved, however, to continue flying. That is because *you* are a child of the earth. All of *you* and all of you, we are all children of the earth.

I'll make a promise to you. Someday with this skipping rope in hand I'll reunite with that girl. She gave me something irreplaceable and with that irreplaceable power I'll find her. No matter where you want go, I will go far for you too.

To *you* now under the cherry blossom tree, *I* will explain everything in my heart. To save as many people as possible, *I* will aim for the horizon. Kick the earth, hold life in my hand and tomorrow *I* will land. *I* am sure that the day will come when *I* will happen to meet that boy again. To the boy who taught me about wings, *I* will reach you.

OK, I'm good to go. The future is yours.

OK, time for *you* to go. Inside that light is your future.

It will be good, I'm certain of it. As long as you continue to jump in the air, you'll never forget that day.

That is right, *you* must believe me. As long as *you* continue flying in the air, *you* will not forget the future.

“Air” by Hideaki Sena

You will never forget. You met your destiny that day. Beloved dear, you will not forget. That day, you came into finding something irreplaceably precious.

That unforgettable earthquake and tsunami came that winter afternoon, that weekend.

You witnessed that ominous black water creep up the roadway and threaten to overtake endlessly. You stood amidst the school yard where people gathered because of the emergency evacuation alert. You witnessed where people stood around in lines of disarray with no signals to sit or anything from the teachers in all that confusion.

You were still a child, jump ropes in your hands, still dressed in your PE uniform. Towns people came from the back road behind the campus fleeing the tsunami that crept slowly like a sluggish monster awakened from sleep. So much masses of trash flooded in the mud waters approached but still, the teachers took no action. Your eyes were affixed on the unbelievable movements of rooftops without the house underneath and bicycles flipped up-side-down. You became aware that time does not go back in time when water mass steadily increased. Finally, the school principal yelled over the bullhorn, so you dashed into the school and ran up the stairs.

You watched from the third floor classroom as the massive ocean water attacked and flooded everything in sight. The attack came with overwhelming force and people could not fight back with any resistance. The sky turned dim grey and snow began to fall harshly. You felt the end of the world as you never felt so freezing cold. This is when you heard someone cry for the first time. There was an unknown girl who had also ran into this same classroom, shaking and crying, held by those around her. You were watching this girl breakdown into sobs but an impulse made you tear a page off a notebook at hand. Silently you folded a paper airplane with that lined white paper and turned to the window. Mud water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, the play yard's flag pole was broken and a mini-van caught in the horizontal bars. In your peripheral vision you saw townspeople being washed away, but you closed your eyes tightly. Then, opened them widely, and with all your anger, launched the paper airplane out into the world. Go, FLY far far beyond and away! Unbeaten by earthquake and tsunami, GO ! You were yelling in your heart as you watched the trajectory of the paper airplane take flight. One snow flake hit the wings, then another, and as it came right above the school yard, it spiraled out of control beaten by a gust of wind to disappear out of sight. Deep in your heart remained, only the inertia of that flight felt.

Then in your hands only those jump ropes remained. In the tattering freezing cold, you lived in silence. Multitudes of grown-ups came to the rescue and you slurped countless bowls of instant ramen. These grown-ups scraped out the mud and brought many things in the cardboard boxes. There were lots of comic books but you were not particularly thrilled with gifts of old dirty books that were cast offs from someone else. That's why you remained wordless and kept to yourself at the corner of school yard jumping ropes. That jump rope was the only thing left that belonged to you when all other belongings were taken, washed away to never return again.

This is when you, the beloved, found a package of origami from a box filled with silly toys a volunteer brought. Beloved, you used the origami with great care. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold a paper airplane. He taught you a way to not only fold a square paper but also a method where you cut off a section and fold from a rectangular paper. The trick was to fold with more weight into the front, then to bend the ends of wings a bit backwards. You had lost your parents and all your relatives. That day, you lost your family. You flew paper airplanes in a school gymnasium where all the dirty mud was being cleaned out. As a child you stood on top of a drowning stage, then you let it go straight into the air with all your might. The wings captured the air and gained the lift and momentum to fly to the other end of the gymnasium.

You will never forget. Last night your photo was found on the internet. It was such a coincidental search that brought you to my attention. Your image so small, you would not have been recognizable had it not been for me who found you. There stood that school structure covered with dirt and rubble and there laid a muddy school yard. The Ninomiya Kinjiro statue by the gate stood half falling, with the left hand which holds the book, still missing. You were jumping rope under the cherry blossom tree. A tree that has submerged as high the arms reach, now had half of the blossoms blooming, right above your head. Under the grey sky, life force is emitted, and like that slightly smudged colors you get when blowing on a stencil, colors signaled the arrival of spring. You are wearing an old jacket. You are amused jumping rope. Only when jump roping, you were able to forget loneliness. When you jump roped, you felt the exhilarating liberation from otherwise being tied down to the ground. You were woken up many times during the night hours due to big aftershocks. When your back was grounded to earth, jarring vibrations shook your heart. As long as any part of your body was in contact with the earth, you could not get away from being part of it. Living in the moment when you jump roped, you prolonged the moments connecting them in multi-folds to heal yourself, alone, all by yourself.

You flew paper airplanes in the school yard. You kept on chasing the wings without anyone bothering you. The aftershocks shook the ground but did not influence the paper airplane. The invisible force in the sky was not lost no matter how much the earth shook. That's why you looked up at the wings. The heavens may be turbulent, the scenery monochromatic and stained, but the wings remained the rainbow colors of origami. Paper wings do not last forever. Paper crumbles when it falls into the mud. You searched for an ever more solid ground to launch a paper airplane to the farthest edge of the school yard ... And that's how we met.

"Hey" and introduced yourself.

"Hello" I responded a bit shyly.

"You are so good at jump roping"

"Is that your airplane?"

These are the words we exchanged at our first meeting.

You pulled out a paper airplane; then stepped back to support the right hand to bring right and left sides into symmetry and directed slightly upwards. When you yelled your cue to let go, then I thrust to launch for the plane to soar into a beautiful trajectory.

"Awesome, Great !" you laughed.

"Teach me jump rope then" we laughed.

"Wanna jump together? Let's!"

That's how you found the joys of jump roping

And you, made a fateful encounter with an airplane

I will never forget. I have one photo. It's a faded polaroid photo. Back then, a polaroid photo was a treasure, valued above all else because upon the shoot, we owned that photo instantly. A volunteer photographer on site took a photo of you flying the paper airplane. Looking at it now, the boy was skinny, with grown out hair, and looks as though he was confined in a cramped shell unable to come out. Yet, I knew this much. From the back image of that boy with one foot in forward lunge and stretching back and plunging forward a launch, convinced me with certainty that he was connected to the future. Off the frame, near the front gate under the cherry blossom tree was that child jump roping alone. You almost stopped your hand to look over to the cherry blossom tree. Carefully you brush off the dirt off the paper airplane, reset the shape, and wrap in your hands. The photo captures that image of you about to launch into ascent.

That's right, that girl was absorbed in jumping rope. The rhythm of the jump rope resonated each

moment to moment as she jumped to forget words, even thoughts and feelings. Still, whenever you rested, you recalled him. You recalled the power of origami airplane as it flew out of your hand. You even recalled having that intuitive feeling that felt as though if you were to turn to look back, you will find him. Even then, you did not turn back. Jump roping made you face forward, and your tip toes that came in contact with ground felt tied down. When in contact with the earth, you could not muster the courage to take that next step forward.

You are scared.

I get it. You are scared. We are scared.

That's why I now raise my voice. Facing the photo, I put all the feelings I have to say this: Take a launch forward. Take a step forward. You have the power to leap forward.

That's why I send you my encouragement to cheer you on. You have the ability to look back and take such an extended breath. The invisible air that you breath gives your wings the power. Yes, go forward. The light that pushes your back for you to move forward shines bright.

Oh, how I remember that light. That time, suddenly, the world brightened so much that I stopped jump roping and landed on both feet, fully grounded, I looked up the sky.

That time, I had to narrow my eyes because of the brightness. I had to bring my hand by my forehead to shade my eyes, and realized what a rare occurrence it is. Beams of bright sunshine poured down from a crack between what had been perpetually grey sky. I frowned because of the glare but that light covered every being of my body. As the halation phenomenon took place, the world slowly regained vivid colors and warmth. I still remember how the shadows surfaced so clearly. If I looked down, there was a shadow. There was a powerful black shadow in my shape. When I spread out my arms, the shadows spread out the arms too, and the hand held my origami.

A big shadow crossed the school yard. Rotor sounds were loud and I looked up to see a helicopter fly overhead. Self-Defense Force flew over the school. They are going to a disaster area even more hard hit. They are going to reach out to help those who are struggling more.

You look up at the helicopter's shadow, quietly staring forward. You accept the image before you. Then you turn around to accept that he is walking towards you. In seeing that folded paper airplane held in the hand, you believe with conviction your future. You tell yourself that you will be a jet pilot. With powers of the wings, you want to grow up to be an adult who will fly to any distance to help those people who are suffering.

You may not know this yet but you will have a jump rope as a lifetime friend. Your rope will cut through the air so you will continue to jump countless times. You will learn numerous skills, and weave together performances where your rhythm will chisel into your body and earth. You will be in so many contests and only with a jump rope, go out into the world. You will have wonderful opportunities to meet people. Through jump rope, you will talk to so many people around the world. That first step, you are about to make.

Of course wings are not eternal. We source our energy from this earth and proceed into the sky. Someday, wings will return to this earth as no flight lasts forever. Even then, you will decide to fly on continuously. That's because you are a child of this earth. All of you and all of me, and all of us, are children of this earth.

I will promise you that someday, with this rope, I will reunite with that child. I will search and

find that girl who gave me this calling with all my powers. Just like you can go anywhere, now I am able to go far to find you.

To you under that cherry blossom tree, now I can tell you with my chest held high in confidence. I will spread my wings wide and go anywhere. I aim beyond the horizons ahead to rescue as many people as possible. To kick off the ground, to hold and embrace life in my hands, I too will get off tomorrow. Over there beyond, I know I will see that child again. I am certain to get to him, as he taught me about powers of wings - I will get to where he is some day for sure.

So you go girl - your future right beyond there.

So you go - your future shines in that light.

Sure, I assure you. As long as you keep jumping into the sky, you will never forget that day.

That's right, believe in me. As long as you keep flying through the sky, you will not forget your future.

AIR

I bet you still remember, right? That day. When you encountered your future.

I'm sure you remember still, don't you? That day when you discovered something now quite irreplaceable.

One weekend on a winter afternoon, the great earthquake struck and the tsunami came. You'll remember the endless torrent of black water, of course. And the way it surged relentless through the streets. You evacuated to the schoolyard along with the others, but remained standing, motionless, still within ordered lines as you waited for the confused, panicked teachers to provide further guidance.

You were still small, back then. And dressed in your gym clothes, skipping rope in hand. People from the surrounding area came streaming in from the road at the back of the school, and eventually, so too did the tsunami. It followed sluggishly, like some huge beast just recently roused from its slumber. The large mass of debris and mud drew ever closer, but even so, the teachers still did nothing. I imagine you couldn't help but stare, enthralled by the unbelievable display before you that saw cars overturned and houses rendered into nothing more than a series of roofs. It was only as water levels continued to rise that it became apparent that it would not let up any time soon, and that there would indeed be no way of turning back the clock on any of this. The principal shouted into the megaphone at long last, and you fled into the school building, racing up the stairs.

You watched the voluminous onslaught of the sea from a classroom on the third floor. It was overwhelming and far beyond what one could ever hope to resist. A fierce deluge of powdery snow then began to fall from the dirty ash-grey sky. Freezing in the intense cold, you felt as if the world was coming to an end. All of a sudden, you heard someone begin to cry. You looked around and saw an unfamiliar woman who had sought refuge in the classroom as well. Comforted in the arms of another, her body heaved as it was wracked with heavy sobs. As you took in the situation before you, a sudden impulse led you to tear out a page from a notebook close at hand. Working in silence, you folded the piece of ruled white paper until it was in the shape of an airplane, and then, turned towards the window. The 1st floor of the school building was engulfed in muddy water by then. The flagpole outside had snapped, a minivan having smashed against the metal pole. You could spot people being swept away in the edge of your vision, so you did your utmost to shut them out. You opened the window wide and flung the paper plane out into the world, the full force of all your raging emotions behind its launch. Fly, fly! Fly off and away to the ends of the world! Fly unbowed by either earthquake or tsunami! Such were the thoughts you screamed deep down inside as you watched the flight of the paper plane. One by one, light flakes of snow fell, crashing into the wings. In the end, it got no further than the schoolyard just ahead when it was caught in the turbulent wind, the plane spiralling down and out of sight—all that was left of it was the driving passion that lingered undiminished within your heart.

What you had left was a skipping rope. It was so cold that it was almost as though you might shatter, but you bore with it all, never saying a word. Adults arrived bearing aid, and you found yourself slurping through countless packets of instant ramen noodles. The adults cleared away the mud and brought with them cardboard boxes filled with all manner of objects. There were many volumes of manga comics, but you felt no joy at all in receiving a bunch of worn and dirty old books. And so, bereft of speech or even words, you would always be found in a corner of the schoolyard, alone, playing with your skipping rope. Because that was the one single precious little thing left behind that was truly yours, after all else had been swept away.

You found a package of origami paper among all the pointless toys brought over by the aid workers, and you used it with the utmost of care. A volunteer doctor had taught you how to fold paper planes—not just from perfectly square paper but even from torn oblong strips. The trick was to shift the centre of gravity forward along the body, and to bend the back of the wings ever so slightly up. Robbed of parents and relatives, you launched your planes in the school gym—now washed clean of all the tainted mud. You stood on the stage at the front of the gym—the very spot a young child had

drowned, in fact—and simply let them loose, your every thought riding upon them. The wings caught upon the air, generated lift, and raced off away to the other end of the gym.

There's no way I could ever forget you. I found a photo of you on the internet last night. I came across it quite entirely by chance. You were so very small in it, I doubt anyone other than me would have known it was you. The school building was strewn with debris and mud. The schoolyard was a sludgy mess. The statue of Ninomiya Sontoku—a true testament to the uplifting power of self-study and education—still remained by the main gates, though it now stood at a slant and without the left arm in which a book was normally held. And then there was you, playing with your skipping rope beneath the cherry tree. The tree had been submerged at a depth far beyond one's height, but the branches above your head were now in the midst of blossoming; that expression of life beneath the ashen sky—much like a misty breath caught in sepia tones—was the only subtle indication that spring was just arriving. You wore an old, second-hand jumper as you distracted yourself with your skipping rope. Indeed, it was only during those moments of flight that you felt free, released from the fetters of the ground. Aftershocks still rumbled by, waking you up again and again throughout the night. You felt the tremors resonate deep into your heart when your back was pressed to the ground, and the effect was still the same no matter the slightest contact between your body and the earth. And so with your skipping rope, you leaped, repeatedly stringing together those brief instances of flight in an attempt to heal yourself of all your pains.

You threw your plane in the schoolyard, chasing after those wings, unbothered by anyone. The shuddering ground had no effect on its flight. The tremors of the earth seemed to disappear in the face of the unseen power that saw it float through the air. That was why you admired those wings. The muddy sky stained the landscape a dull monotone hue. Because of that, your multi-coloured origami wings alone formed the only rainbow to be seen. But they weren't eternal. As the paper would crumble if they fell into the mud, you looked for suitable areas and then, launched your plane towards the other side of the schoolyard—and *that* led to your encounter.

"Hey," I called out.

"Hello," I replied shyly.

"You're pretty good with that skipping rope, huh."

"Is that paper plane yours?"

That...

...was the moment...

...when our selves first intersected.

Extending your right arm, you held the plane out in front of you, and then drew it back behind you. You held the wings level with one another, the nose pointed just slightly up. You let out a great cry as you held it aloft—then it flew, its body tracing a graceful path through the air.

"Whoa, awesome!" you said with a smile.

"Teach me how to skip, okay?" you replied, grinning as well.

"Sure, let's fly together."

That was how you encountered rope skipping—

—And how you discovered planes.

I'll definitely never forget. I have in my hand a photo. A slightly faded Polaroid. That moment back then, back there—it all became a part of me, and the Polaroid became my most precious of treasures. A male volunteer had taken a picture of a boy launching a plane. When I look at it now, I see the boy you spoke to was gaunt and had long hair. He comes across as if he were imprisoned within the cramped narrow cell that is his own body. But I know better. Snapped from behind, the boy was bound to the future at the very instant when his dominant foot was moving forward, his back straight, and plane held aloft. The cherry tree located near the main gate wasn't captured by the camera, but the girl had been at its foot, skipping rope by herself—the boy had paused a moment to look over at the cherry blossoms. Using both his hands, he adjusted the folds on a paper plane to maintain its

desired shape, carefully brushing off any dirt that was on it. The photo was taken just as he was stepping forward to release the plane, capturing that moment and preserving it into the future.

Ah, yes, the girl you spoke to cleared all thoughts from her mind while skipping rope. Words and thoughts alike were banished in a flash as she became one in rhythm with the rope. I suppose that the boy's thoughts drifted towards the girl whenever he had an idle moment. That the subtle strength of the paper planes in flight would in turn be recovered and used to shore up his heart. The girl certainly felt as though he would be there if she but turned around and looked behind. However, she never looked. The skipping rope kept her always facing forward, the tips of her toes anchored to the ground. The girl couldn't find the courage to take the next step while still in contact with the earth.

The girl was scared, huh.

As indeed was the boy.

That's why I'm speaking out loud now as I face the photo, channelling the entirety of my feelings as I do so. Go on! Step forward! The power to take that leap already lies within you!

That's why I'm now yelling at you through the internet. Look back behind and you'll know that you truly are alive! Even if you can't see it, the very air that you breathe in provides all the lift your wings need!

That's right, go forth! The light that'll guide you onwards shines down upon you even now.

Yes, of course, I still recall that light. The world was enveloped with a sudden brightness. I stilled my skipping rope, planted both feet on the ground, and looked up into the sky.

I narrowed my eyes against the brilliance of that light. Raising my hand to cover them, I noted how unfamiliar I was now with such an action.

A dazzling ray of sunlight shone down at last through a crack in the ashen skies, and I bathed in it, my face a grimace in spite of myself.

Now lit in a radiant glow, the world slowly filled again with warmth and colour. I sharply recall the shadow that was at my feet. I had cast a deep, dark shadow. When I spread my arms wide, so too did the shadow, and within one of the hands was my paper plane.

A large shadow spread out, cutting across the schoolyard. Hearing the sound of a rotor, I shifted my gaze upwards, spotting a helicopter high in the sky. A Self-Defence Force helicopter was flying above the school building, heading towards an area that was stricken more severely than ours. Reaching out to people whose suffering was much worse than ours.

You followed the silhouette of the helicopter a while before calmly gazing forward. You looked upon your shadowed self in acceptance.

You looked behind, watching your shadowed self approach as it grew in familiarity. Seeing the paper plane in hand blew away all doubts as to your future path. You would become a pilot. You would become an adult with the power of wings, able to fly anywhere, able to reach whoever was in need.

Though you'd never have expected it, your skipping rope would become a lifelong companion. The rope would cut through the air time and time again as you continued to jump. You'd learn innumerable tricks, and devise a plethora of performances, your body beating out a rhythm against the earth. You'd enter many competitions, no doubt, experiencing many wonderful encounters along the way. You'd speak to people around the world through your skipping rope, and it is towards all that which you now take the very first step.

Naturally, wings cannot last forever. People draw energy from the earth in order to move across the sky, but no flight can continue without end. Even wings must eventually return to the earth. Even so, you were determined to always keep at it. Why? Because you are a child of the earth. Because you, me, and us all, are children of the earth.

I promise you this. I will, without fail, meet with that girl and her rope again. The very irreplaceable power given to me by that girl will be used in turn to seek her out once more. Just as you are able to go anywhere, I too am now able to go ever so far.

I say this now with all my pride, to you beneath the cherry tree. I'll spread my wings and go

wherever my heart desires. I'll help as many people as I can even if all alone, and to that end, I'll always head on towards the horizon. I'll kick off against the earth, taking my life into my own hands, always landing in tomorrow. And up ahead someday will surely be another encounter with that boy—the one who taught me the true nature of wings. I will reach his side once more.

Now, go. Your future waits just ahead.

Go on, now. Your future lies within that light.

I tell you now, it'll all be fine. That day will never fade from your mind, while you carry on leaping across the air.

Trust me. You will never lose sight of your future, while you continue soaring across the sky.

Air
by Sena Hideaki

You probably won't forget it. That day, when you saw your future.
You may never forget it. That chance meeting of that unforgettable day.

It was the final day of the weekend when the big earthquake and tsunami hit. You saw how the blackness of the water swallowed the road, how it rose unstoppable. The schoolyard was the place to gather in case of disasters, so you lined up there and stood still, while the teachers were at a loss what to do.

You were still a small boy, wearing your gym clothes, jumping rope in your hand. People living in the neighbourhood streamed in through the back gate of the school, but before long the road was consumed by the tsunami, waking like a monster from its sleep. The muddy water brought all kinds of trash with it, and the teachers still could not decide what to do. You were hypnotised by the sight of flipped over cars flowing by, rooftops passing with no house belonging to them. You knew that there is no way back, that time cannot be turned back. And the level of water just increased and increased, with no sign that it ever wanted to stop. At last the headmistress took matters and the megaphone into her hands and upon her commands you rushed into the school and up the stairs.

You observed from a classroom on the third floor, how the waves attacked. No people stood a chance against this sheer amount of water. From the ash coloured clouds swirling snowflakes started to fall. It looked like the world gonna end on that cold, freezing day. That was the first time that somebody started to cry. It was an other girl, who escaped to the same room. She was sobbing as tears flowed down on her cheeks, and the people around tried to comfort her with a hug. As you watched her, by a sudden impulse you tore out a page from a notebook nearby. You silently folded the lined page into an airplane and turned towards to window. The muddy waves already engulfed the first floor. The flagpole was bended as a pick-up car crashed into it. From the corner of your eyes you glimpsed vague shapes, people who could not reach safety in time, so you shut your eyes tight and pretended not to seen them. When you opened them, you hurled the airplane furiously out to the world. Fly, fly, fly as far as you can! Don't let any earthquake or tsunami stop you! You watched the white paper plane's flight without a word, but inside your heart you were shouting angrily. A few snowflakes hit the wings of the plane, but it flew out straight until the middle of the schoolyard, before a whirl of a wind flipped it over, and it spiralled out of sight. The plane was nothing more than dead weight in the end. And inside your chest you felt just as heavy from being able to do nothing.

All what was left for you was the jumping ropes. In that frozen coldness, you kept on stubbornly skipping it without a word. The aid workers arrived after a while, and you ate so many cup noodles you lost count. They cleaned away the mud and brought many cardboard boxes full of stuff. There were lots of manga as well. But you weren't interested in the worn out books even though given with good intentions. You only wanted to be left alone and keep on skipping the rope in a corner of the courtyard. This was the only thing left from you, left from your past, when all other things were washed away.

The only thing which you took from the heap of useless stuff the people brought was a pack of origami paper. You took care not to waste it uselessly. One of the volunteer doctors taught you many techniques to fold a paper plane. Not only from square paper, but also from elongated rectangular, where you had to cut the paper into shape. The trick was to bring the centre of gravity closer to the nose of the plane and to bend the wings the right way. You lost your parents and all your relatives, but you had your airplanes and you kept flying them in that mud-washed gym. You stood on top of the battered stage and sent your planes straight on

their way. Their wings grabbed the air and carried the planes as far as the end of the hall.

Surely, you won't forget it. You know, last night I found your picture on the internet. It came up accidentally when looking for something. You looked so small on it, if it wasn't me, you may have gone unrecognized. Muddy school walls, muddy schoolyard, debris everywhere. Next to the main gate, the left hand holding the book from the statue of Ninomiya Sontoku was missing. The cherry tree was also smeared with mud until the height of the missing hand. Yet, above your head there were five blossoming flowers. Under that grey sky their message was clear, a new breath, the coming spring, the promise of new life. That black and white picture managed to capture it all. You were wearing some hand down jumper, frozen in the moment of just rising above the skipping rope. Only in that fleeting moments, when your feet left the ground, could you leave behind your loneliness. The jumping rope made you able to escape the gravity of the Earth. There were many big aftershocks, waking you up countless times in the middle of night. As you lied on your back, shaken by the tremors, your heart trembled. After all, you belonged to Earth. But you desperately repeated over and over again those seconds of skipping the rope, those seconds of freedom, and slowly but surely you patched yourself together.

You kept on flying your airplanes all over the courtyard. You stayed out of the way, and stubbornly pursued that perfect wing shape. Even if the ground was shaking, your planes were safe in the air. No earthquakes could stop that invisible force, which propelled the planes towards the sky. So you kept your eyes on those planes, the only colourful things in that pale greyish sky. Of course, they did not last forever. If they fell into the mud, the wings crumbled. But you didn't care, you just kept looking for the right spot and the right plane, to cross the courtyard in its full length. This is how I met you.

"Hi!" you called out to me.

"Hello!" came my rather shy answer.

"You are pretty good in skipping the rope."

"And those ones, are they your airplanes?"

These were the first words we exchanged.

You extended your right arm with the plane behind you, balanced out the left and right wing, turned the nose just a little bit more upward.

You yelled encouragingly, and I let the airplane go in a perfect arc.

"So cool!" you laughed.

"Maybe you can teach me how to skip the rope!" I smiled back.

"And let's fly together?"

This is how you met the jumping rope.

And you the planes. Just by chance.

I will never forget. There is a faded picture in my hand. This polaroid picture was my only treasured possession at that time. A volunteer took the picture of that small boy, who were just flying a plane. Looking at it now, he seems to be some kind of an escaped prisoner, with his slim torso and jungle-like hair. But I know it now. At that moment, with his right foot a bit before the other, muscles flexing along his back, hand stretched behind towards the camera, he took a step towards his future. Out of focus at the side, close to the cherry tree at the main gate, there is an other kid skipping the rope all alone. A bit afterwards you will stop your arm and look towards that cherry tree. You carefully wipe away the dirt from the paper body of the plane and readjust its wings with your hand. But this picture captured just that moment, when your stepped on the road to the future.

That girl, who skipped the rope so single-mindedly, was you. You focused so much on the rhythm of the rope, that you forgot everything else around you. But when you took a break, you probably thought about that child. As the paper formed into a plane in his hands, so did his strength awaken. You knew that if you turn around, he would be there. But you did not turn. You moved the rope around and around, jumping over it with just your tiptoes reaching the ground, a never-ending catch me, trip me if you can game. Your feet touched the ground again and again, and you refused to think about what it take not to give up.

You were afraid.

I understand, you were afraid.

That's why I am raising my voice now. Facing that picture, pouring all my emotions into it. Take that step. Go forward. You have the power to fly.

So I am sending some air over to you through the web. Turn around and take a breath. That unseen power, the air you inhales will raise your wings.

Just continue. Even the sparkling sunshine falling on your back seems to be pushing you forward.

I do remember that ray of sunshine. It suddenly illuminated the world, and I stopped the rope, standing with my two feet on the ground, and looked up towards the sky.

My eyes narrowed into tiny slits blinded by that brilliant light. I shaded them with my hand against my forehead, and I realized how much time passed since I last shaded my eyes.

There was a tiny gap among the ash grey clouds, where the sunshine poured through. Instinctively I turned my face towards that ray of light and allowed my whole self to bath in it.

Thanks to that light, the world slowly regained its colours and the warmth returned to my limbs. I still remember the sharpness of my shadow. That there was actually a shadow at my feet. A real, strong, black shadow. I spread my arms and the arms of the shadow spread as well. And inside that hand was my paper plane.

A large black shape crossed over the schoolyard. The sound of rotors echoed around and I turned towards the helicopter above. It was from the self-defense forces, planning to land on top of the school building. They wanted to reach the areas destroyed even more than ours. They wanted to help those who suffered even more than us.

You looked up at the dark patch of the helicopter then silently gazed in front of you. You became aware of the girl not far away.

You turned around and saw that he was walking towards you. In his hand you saw the paper airplane, and suddenly you realized what the future holds for you. It will make you a pilot yourself. You will harness the power of the wings and fly anywhere where there is need. You will grow up to help those, who are suffering.

You may not have realized yet, that that rope will be your friend for a lifetime. Countless times you will jump up and down, skipping over that rope forever. You will learn tricks and perform them on the stage many times afterward. You will jump in synchrony with the ground under you. You will go to many competitions. You will fly around the world with that rope. Probably you will encounter many wonderful things. You will skip that rope all over the world and meet people and listen to their stories. And you just took the first step on that very long journey.

Of course, wings do not last forever. We, people, use energy gained from Earth to conquer the sky. The planes have to return to the ground sooner or later. They cannot fly forever. Nevertheless, you will choose to continue pursuing flying. Because you are one of the Earth children. All of you and all of me, we are all children of the Earth.

I make a promise to you. Somehow, sometime, I will meet again that child with the rope. I will search for you, for the girl, who gave me power when I had no voice. I will track you down with my newfound strength. Wherever you go, I will follow you without hesitation.

Today, I will open my heart for that child who stood below the cherry tree. If I spread

my wings, I have the feeling that I can go anywhere. I want to help as many people I can, so I aim for the horizon to reach them. I refuse to give in. I will aim to reach all I can, to protect their life with my hands, so I will continue to descend into areas in need. Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and forever. And I am sure, that at one of those landings, I will meet that kid again. He gave me my wings, he taught me how to fly, and I will find that child again.

It is time to go. The future is before you.

You must go now. In that ray of light lies your future.

No problem, I get this. As long as I continue flying the skies, I will not forget you and that day.

Trust me. As long as you continue flying in the skies, I will not forget you and that day.

AIR*By Sena Hideaki*

Don't tell me you forgot what happened that day. That day you came to meet your future.

You couldn't have forgotten about that day, could you? That day you encountered what would become an irreplaceable part of you.

It was a winter afternoon, a weekend, that day when the earthquake and the tsunami hit. You saw it. How the black mass of water moved up the roads, rising and rising without end. You stood there in the schoolyard, the evacuation point; watched as the teachers panicked, too overwrought to remember to tell you children to form a line and to sit down.

You were still so little back then, dressed only in a PE tracksuit, a skipping rope clutched in your tiny hand. People were streaming in from around the back of the school, trying to escape the disaster; and in their wake crept the tsunami like a monster that'd been awoken from its slumber. The water was drawing close now, swirling with mud and debris, but the teachers just didn't budge. But your attention was seized instead by the sight of cars doing backflips, of houses – or at least the roofs that peeked over the water – engaged in fantastic acrobatics. Only when the water level continued to rise without any sign of falling did you maybe begin to realise that things would never return to the way they were. Then the principal's voice came blaring through the loudspeaker and you were dashing into the school building, charging up the stairs.

You watched from the third-floor classroom as the innumerable gallons of seawater forced their way into the schoolyard. Nothing human could survive the onslaught of such a volume of water. Brittle snow began to fall from the gray, overcast sky. It was cold; freezing even; it felt like it was the end of the world. Then you heard the crying. You turned and saw a girl who had run into the same classroom you did now being supported by worried onlookers as great sobs wracked her body in convulsions. You watched; then an impulse struck you and you picked up a notebook and tore a sheet from it. You worked the lined paper silently, turning it into the shape of an aeroplane. You went back to the window. The first floor was already gone, the murky water had swallowed it whole; the school flagpole had been broken off and wedged into a family car. Out of the corners of your eyes you saw figures being swept away by the water and you squeezed your eyes tightly shut; then you flung them wide open again as you propelled the aeroplane with all the force of your fury out into the world. Fly, fly, as far as you can! you cried out in your heart. Don't let the earthquake and the tsunami bring you down! You fixed your eyes on the flight of the white aeroplane. As it flew, snow struck its wings once, twice; and when it was over the schoolyard a flurry of winds swirled up and sent it corkscrewing away. Now the aeroplane was gone, but the momentum of its flight had left its impression in your heart.

You'd held onto your skipping rope throughout the whole ordeal. Even though the cold was threatening to tear you apart, you'd remained a mute survivor. When the rescue teams arrived, you ate so much of the instant ramen that those grown-ups gave you – too many cups to count! Other grown-ups dug through the rubble, or opened up big cardboard boxes of the stuff they'd brought. There were a lot of comic books, but they were all so dog-eared and worn – nothing that you were happy to have. So you'd remained a wordless child, skipping your days away in a corner of the schoolyard alone. You'd had everything you'd ever known swept away from you, except for the skipping rope; to you, the skipping rope was the sole irreplaceable thing that you could call your own.

You thought that the toys that the relief workers brought were boring – but among them you did find a pack of origami paper that you liked. You took care to use it properly. A volunteer doctor taught you how to fold aeroplanes with it. Not just how to fold it from a square piece of paper, but also how you could cut away a small strip, turn it into a rectangle, and fold from that. The trick was to make sure the weight of the aeroplane rested near its nose, and that the wings were turned up slightly at the back. You lost your parents and your family; now you flew your aeroplane in the gymnasium that had just been washed free of mud. You stood on the stage where children had almost drowned and released the plane like a prayer. Its wings caught the air and converted it to lift, sending the plane the whole distance to the gymnasium's far wall.

You definitely won't forget. I found your photo when I was online last night. I'd been browsing randomly when I encountered the old you, the you from back when you were still small, the you that only I could have recognised. In the photo, the school building still bore the mark of mud and debris, and the schoolyard was slick with filth. The statue of the great peasant scholar Ninomiya Sontoku had lost the book he was always reading as well as the left hand that held it, and was standing with a slight tilt. There you were, skipping under the cherry-blossom tree. The flowers were almost at full-bloom, belying the fact that not too long ago the tree had been standing in water as high as the tip of an outstretched hand. The cherry-blossom tree was a small effusion of life under the gray sky, a breath of colour on a strip of monotone film – an intuition of Spring's slow but certain arrival. You had on a second-hand jumper. You were playing with your skipping rope all by yourself. You'd forget all your loneliness when you jumped up into the air. Every leap off the rope released you from the trammels of the earth. There still used to be aftershocks back then, big ones; you'd lost count of how many times you'd been startled awake at night. Laying your back against the planet meant giving the tremors a direct passage to your heart. As long as you remained in contact with the planet, you remained a part of it. Skipping was, for you, a way of connecting together all your jumps, all the moments you were off the earth. It was your way of trying to heal.

You flew your aeroplane in the schoolyard. There was no one around to bump into now and you could follow the course of its wings at your leisure. The shaking of the ground held no power over the aeroplane. The unseen force that kept the aeroplane aloft in the air could not be quelled by the quaking of the earth. So you trained your eyes on the wings soaring high above. The clouded sky had cast a pall over everything, reducing them to uniform, dull tones; so your wings stood out in their bright origami colours. But wings don't last forever. Paper breaks down when it lands in mud. You tried to find a dryer piece of land and launched your aeroplane towards the far end of the schoolyard — and that was when you came to meet each other.

“Oh, hey,” – came this bold greeting.

“Hello,” – haltingly came this diffident response.

“You're good at skipping.”

“Is that your aeroplane?”

And those

where the first words

we exchanged.

You held up your aeroplane, flipped it around on your right hand. You turned up the ends of the wings slightly, making sure that both right and left wings were even. You flung it mightily to her countdown. The plane glided in an elegant arc through the air.

“Wow! Wow!” you'd exclaimed, overcome with delight.

“Teach me how to skip.” You smiled yourself too.

“Can we fly it together?”

That was how you came to meet the art of rope-skipping —

— *that* was how you encountered the aeroplane.

I definitely won't forget. I've got a photograph in front of me – a slightly faded Polaroid. With the Polaroid, you could get your hands on the photo as soon as it was taken – something that made them a highly prized treasure back in the day. One of the volunteers took this photo of you flying your aeroplane. Look at you in the photo now – a skinny boy, his hair grown too long, his demeanor listless and withdrawn. But appearances deceive. The photo might only show your back, but from your back alone I know that in that moment, you – with your right foot planted forward and your arms stretched out in a throwing motion – were certainly connected to the future. That kid is in the photograph too, off-centre but visible under the cherry-blossom at the main gate, skipping alone. You're about to stop throwing and turn in the direction of the cherry-blossom tree. You're going to brush the mud off the paper aeroplane, give it a careful straighten, and cradle it in your two hands. This photograph is

depicting you – instants before you take your first step forward.

That's right, you were skipping like you were possessed, one girl against the whole world. In those moments you forwent your tongue and your heart, traded its beating for the rhythm of the rope. But whenever you rested, you must have thought of that kid. The memory of the strength of the origami plane that soared off of the launching hand must have awoken a similar strength inside you. You knew for sure that if you'd just turn around you'd see that kid there. But you did not turn around. The skipping rope was forcing you to look forward, had fettered those tips of your feet that maintained contact with the ground. So long as you were touching the planet, you were unable to summon the courage to move.

You're scared.

I see. You're afraid, aren't you?

In that case I will raise my voice for you. I will shout my heartfelt support to this photo to you. Take the step! Move forward! You have the strength to make the jump!

In that case I'm going to cheer for you from across the Web. You *can* turn around and still go on living. The unseen air that you breathe will bring strength to your wings.

That's right, keep moving! There is light now shining in the world again; it will give you the push on the back that you need.

Oh, I remember the light. The world grew bright all of a sudden and I stopped the rope, stood with both feet on the earth, turned my head to look up at the sky.

I had to squint to see in the glare. I shaded my eyes with a palm, thinking to myself that it had been a good while since I'd had to do that.

It was sunlight, brilliant and blinding, streaming through breaks in what had been a perennially gray sky. My nose tickled and I scrunched up my face, but allowed my body to greedily soak up the light.

The world took on an overexposed aspect; gradually, colours – and the familiar contours of objects – began to return. I remember seeing an unusually vivid shadow. This shadow stood at my feet – I saw it when I looked down. It was my shadow, dark and strong. I held my arms wide open and the shadow did the same; in its hand it held my origami folding.

A large shadow now cut across the schoolyard. Hearing the whirring of a rotor I looked up and I caught sight of a helicopter. It was the Self-Defense Force, I realised, as the helicopter vanished behind the school building. They were headed towards an even worse-hit disaster zone. They were heading there to help people in even greater suffering.

You regard the passage of the helicopter's shadow, then silently turn your gaze to what's in front of you. In your eyes, you register the figure of the girl.

You turn around and register the figure of a boy approaching. You see the origami aeroplane in his hands, and that's when you're struck by a sudden conviction: one day, you're going to become a pilot. When you grow up, you'll fly your wings as far as they'll go to save people in misery.

You don't know this yet, but the skipping rope will become your lifelong companion. With it, you'll cut the air in your jumps more times than you can count. You'll master untold techniques, star in untold performances, inscribing your rhythm into your body and into the earth. You'll take part in all kinds of competitions. You'll travel the world with your rope in hand. You'll come to meet many wonderful people. Through skipping, you'll be able to speak to the whole world. All you need to do is take this one step forward.

Of course, wings won't last forever. People take to the skies using energy obtained from the earth. At some point, all things – even wings – must return to the earth, because you cannot have a flight with no end. But it's not like that's going to change your determination to continue to fly. That's because you are a child of the earth. Because all the yous here, and all the yous there – we are all of us children of this earth.

I shall promise you now – one day, with this skipping rope, I will surely find a way to see that girl again. What she gave me has become an irreplaceable part of me, and I vow to find her with that

same irreplaceable strength. Just like how you will go great distances, I vow to travel any distance to find her.

To the you under the cherry-blossom tree: today, I can stand tall and tell you proudly that I shall spread my wings and take to the skies. I shall fly to the farthest reaches of the horizon if it means I can save even just one more person. Cradling a life in my arms, I shall kick off from the earth and descend, in return, upon the morrow. And one day, I will surely come to meet that boy again, he who taught me about wings. I will definitely make my way to where he is.

It's about time you went. You have your future waiting ahead of you.

Go on, it's time to go now. Your future is waiting inside that light.

Alright, you got it. As long as we continue to take to the air on our rope, you will never forget what happened that day.

Yup, you can have faith in me. As long as we continue to take to the air on our wings, you will never forget your future.

Air

You haven't forgotten, have you Kimi? Meeting your future that day.

You still remember, don't you Anata? Coming across that irreplaceable thing that day.

In the afternoon on a winter weekend, that major earthquake and tsunami struck. You must've seen the black water climbing up the road, Kimi, ever growing and pressing closer. Having evacuated to the school yard and formed into rows, with no signal to sit down you were standing stock still taking in the chaos of the teachers.

Anata, you were so young, and still in gym clothes. In your hand, you held a skipping rope. People from the neighbourhood were running in through the school's back entrance, and before long the tsunami came lumbering up from behind them like a beast woken from its' slumber. Though a lot of rubbish and muddy water was drawing nearer, the teachers were not moving. Anata, you must have been gripped by the unbelievable sight of flipped over cars and roofs from houses being swept away. You learnt that time does not flow backwards after you realised the water was rising endlessly, never diminishing. Finally, when the principle called out over the megaphone, you dashed into the building and ran up the stairs.

From the third-floor classroom, Kimi, you watched the assault from the ocean-mass draw nearer. Its' singular, overwhelming power wasn't something people could oppose. The sky was a faint, dirty grey and fine snow began to fall beautifully. You felt it would be the end of the world, you were so cold and frozen. That was the first time you heard anyone cry. When you turned around, a girl who had run into the same classroom, convulsing in a fit of crying, was being cradled in the arms of people around her. You were staring at this scene, but then on impulse you tore out a page from a nearby notebook. Silently you folded the ruled white page into a plane and then turned back toward the window. The muddy water had already engulfed the school's ground floor, the flag pole was broken, and a van was caught on the gymnastic poles. Images of people floating away passed before your eyes, but you shut them out. You drew it back as far as you could, putting all your fury into it and hurled the plane out into the world. *Go! Go! Go as far as you can! Go further than the tsunami and earthquake!* You screamed to yourself and you gazed after the pure white paper plane. One, two snowflakes collided with the wings and eventually, as it flew directly over the school yard, a gust of wind knocked it and the frame disappeared in a tail-spin. Then all that was left in your heart was the plane's inertia.

And Anata, your skipping rope remained. You lived silently in a coldness so cold it looked like it could break at any moment. Grown-up rescue workers came and you slurped endless cups of instant ramen! They scraped away the mud and brought you so many things in cardboard boxes. Although there were lots of manga comics, they were used and dirty, so you put on a brave face and looked appreciative, but you weren't happy. Not being able to say anything, you played with your skipping rope alone in a corner of the school yard. Because after everything else had been washed away, that was the single thing left behind that was irreplaceably your own.

Among all the boring toys the rescue people brought you, Kimi, you found a bundle of origami paper. You used it carefully. A volunteer doctor taught you how to make a paper plane. Not just from using a perfectly square piece, but how to make it from a piece cut out to make the paper rectangular too. The trick was to focus the center of gravity towards the front and to bend the end of the wings up slightly. In the gymnasium washed clean of sludge, you Kimi, who lost both parents and relatives, flew your plane. Standing on the stage where small children had almost drowned, you put everything into it and hurled it straight out. The wings caught the air, it gained lift, and soared to the end of the gymnasium.

Anata, you will never forget. I found your photo on the web last night. It was such a coincidence that I came across it. You were so small in that photo that no one else would have recognised you. Inside the school, dirtied with sludge and debris is a muddied school yard. The Ninomiya Kinjirō statue beside the main gate is missing its' left hand holding the book and leaning to one side. You are skipping under a cherry tree. The cherry tree that should have been submerged to beyond your reach was instead half in bloom above you head. Giving forth its' life under that grey sky, it was like a breath of colour slowly

spreading on a monotone film and showing the approach of spring. You are wearing an old jumper. You're amusing yourself by skipping alone. You only forgot the loneliness when you were flying. Only when you jumped over the rope were you released from the land's binding. As the large aftershocks continued, you woke up many times in the middle of the night. Whenever your back was stuck to the Earth, the tremors jolted your heart. So long as you touched the Earth, you were part of it. So you healed yourself by skipping, by continuously repeating the moment you were flying.

You flew the plane in the school yard, Kimi. You chased after its' wings without anyone disturbing you. The ground tremors didn't affect the plane. Even if the land trembled, the invisible power that floated in the sky didn't disappear. So, you looked up at those wings. The heavens were murky, and the landscape was a sullied monochrome so, your wings alone were the rainbow colour of origami paper. Wings don't last forever. If they fall into mire, the paper will crumble. You went looking for a land that was even slightly solid and you threw your plane to the edge of the school yard – and you encountered it.

"Hi," I said introducing myself.

"Hello," you replied bashfully.

"Kimi, good at skipping, aren't you?"

"Is that your plane?"

Those,

were

our first words.

Kimi held out her plane, walked behind him and held his hand up. Ever so slightly, she curled the wings up evenly. At Anata's call she drew back the plane. It glided out beautifully

"Wow, amazing!" Anata laughed

"Now, teach me how to skip," Kimi laughed.

"Wanna fly together?"

And so, Kimi encountered the skipping rope –

– Anata met the plane.

I'll never forget. I'm holding a single photo in my hand. It's a slightly faded polaroid. Those days, that polaroid I was given right there on the spot was something I treasured more than anything else. A volunteer man took a photo of Anata flying his plane. As I look at it now, the boy called Anata is thin, has long hair and looks trapped inside a cramped husk. But *I* know. With your dominant foot forward, holding your head high and your back straight, Anata, you were certainly linked to the future. Though outside the shot, alone under the cherry blossoms near the main entrance that child was skipping. A bit longer and Anata would stop and look toward the cherry blossoms. The child would carefully wipe off the mud, straighten the plane and flatten it between both hands. For me this photo captured Anata just before he took his first step forward.

And the girl called Kimi was flying innocently. Each moment she forgot words and thoughts, resonating with the ropes' rhythm. But Anata, whenever you rested you thought of that child, didn't you? In your heart you must have regained the strength of the paper plane flying out of your hand. Kimi remembered even the feeling that if she had turned around, you would be there. Still, she did not turn around. The rope faced her forward and bound her toes touching the ground. While she brushed the Earth, she was one step short of enough courage.

Kimi was scared, weren't you?

I understand. Anata was scared.

So, I'll cry out to this photo. With everything I have. Step forward! Keep going! You have the strength to fly.

So, for you, Anata, on the web, I'll cheer. You can look back and breathe. The air you inhale gives your plane power.

That's right keep going! The light pushing you forward is shining.

Ah... I remember that light. Suddenly, the world brightened, I stopped skipping, planted both feet on the ground and gazed up at the sky.

I squinted at that brightness. I shaded my brow with my palm, but then realised how long it'd been since I'd done that.

Brilliant sunlight poured down through a crack in a sky that had been ever grey. I unconsciously furrowed my brow, and bathed my whole body in that light.

The world that caused a halation slowly coloured, regaining its' warmth. I remember that sharply defined shadow. Whenever I dropped my eyes down to my feet, there was a shadow. It was a powerful, black shadow modelled after me. If I spread my arms, the shadow did so too, and in its' hand, there was my origami.

A large shadow had traversed the school yard. I heard a rotor reverberating and looked up at the helicopter high in the sky. The Self-defence force was flying over the school headed for a more severe disaster area. To stretch their hand out to people struggling more.

You looked up at the shadow of the helicopter and, surely, focused on what was ahead. You, Kimi, acknowledged her figure.

You Anata, turned around and acknowledge him walking towards you. Seeing the origami plane in hand, you felt conviction in your future. You will become a pilot. To think that you will fly anywhere on the strength of wings and became an adult who saves suffering people.

You probably don't know it yet Kimi, but you will make a lifelong friend of skipping. You'll slice the air countless times with your rope while you continue flying. You'll learn many tricks and invent many performances and you'll carve out a rhythm in the land and that body. You'll probably go in lots of tournaments. With one rope, you'll go out into the world. I'm sure you'll have lots of wonderful encounters. You'll probably talk with people from all over the world. You're about to take that step now.

Of course, wings are not forever. People move through the sky using the energy from the land. At some point wings return to the land an endless flight is impossible. Even so, you will be determined to continue flying through the sky. Because you are a child of the land. Because every Anata and every Kimi, we are, all of us, children of the land.

I promise you, Kimi. One day, together with this rope I'm sure I will reunite with that child again. With that irreplaceable strength, I will find the girl who gave me what is irreplaceable. Just as you can travel far and wide, I can now go just as far.

I can now say proudly to you, Anata, who was under the cherry blossoms, I will spread my wings and we can go as far as we want. To save as many people as possible I will aim for the horizon. I will kick off the land, embrace my life in these hands, and tomorrow too I shall touchdown. I'm sure someday beyond that, there will come a time when I will encounter that child again. I know I will be able to reach the boy who showed me my wings.

Go now. Your future is ahead of you.

Go on now. In that light is your future.

Yes, I'll do that! As long as you keep jumping in the sky, you'll remember that day.

That's right, trust me. As long as you keep flying through the sky, you will remember that day.

AIR

You will probably never forget. That day when *you* met the future.

You will probably never forget. How **you** met by chance something irreplaceable that day.

On a weekend, winter afternoon, the big earthquake and tsunami came. *You* probably saw the black water climb up the road, drawing near and increasing without end. *You* evacuated and gathered on the school yard, organized into lines but without any signal to sit down, and *you* stood there as if paralyzed, taking in the state of confusion the teachers were in.

You were still small, wearing **your** school gym clothes, and in **your** hand **you** held a jump rope. People from the neighborhood came running from the street behind the school, and before long, from behind them came the tsunami, ponderous, like a monster that had awoken from a slumber. Even as the large amount of garbage mixed with muddy water drew closer, the teachers did not move. **You** were probably captivated by the unbelievable movement of flipped over cars and residences reduced to rooftops. It was after **you** realized that the flood of water was increasing to no end, not decreasing in the slightest, that **you** learned time does not go back. The school principle finally yelled into a megaphone to get inside the school building, and **you** rushed in and ran up the stairs.

You saw the mass of ocean coming to attack from the third floor. It was a demon of overwhelming force, and there was no way people could even hope to resist it. The sky was a smoggy gray, and a powder snow began to fall with a fury. It was too cold, so much so that *you* thought *you* might freeze, and *you* felt it was the end of the world. *You* heard crying for the first time then. *You* turned *your* head to find an unfamiliar girl who took refuge in the same classroom, convulsing and sobbing, being held in the arms of the people around her. *You* stared at the scene in front of *you*, but then felt an urge and tore out a piece of paper from a nearby notebook. *You* folded the lined, white paper without saying a word, made it into the shape of an airplane, and turned to face the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school, and a van had gotten caught on the broken national flagpole. In the corner of *your* eye *you* saw the figures of the nearby residents being washed away, but *you* shut *your* eyes tight, then opened them wide, and with anger *you* faced the world and hurled the airplane. Go. Go. Go as far as you can. Don't give in to the likes of a stupid earthquake or tsunami and just go. Screaming those words inside *your* heart, *you* followed the flight of the pure white airplane with *your* eyes. The powder snow fell, one, then two, onto the top of the wings, and when it eventually came to be directly above the school yard, the aircraft finally got hit by a sudden gust of wind, and it vanished as it spiraled out of control. And so it was that only the inertia of the airplane remained in *your* heart.

And with **you** remained the jump rope. Amidst a coldness that **you** thought would break **you** to pieces, **you** silently continued to live. The grownup rescuers came, and oh, how many packages of instant ramen **you** must have ate. The grownups, knocking the mud off their feet, came in bringing various things in cardboard boxes. There were lots of comic books, but **you** weren't happy being gifted with someone's dirty, worn-out books. That is why **you**, still without saying a word, always played alone in the corner of the school yard with **your** jump rope. The reason for that was because to **you**, whose everything had been washed away, it was the sole remaining irreplaceable thing that was **your** own.

Amongst the boring toys that the aid people brought, *you* found one package of origami paper. *You* treasured it. A volunteer doctor taught *you* how to fold a paper airplane. They taught *you* not only how to make one from a square piece of paper, but also how to make one by first cutting off a piece and making it into a rectangle. The trick was to move the center of gravity to the front, and to curve the ends of the wings up a little bit. *You*, who lost *your* parents and *your* relatives, flew the plane in the school gym that had been washed clean of the sludge. Small children stood on top of the stage that had nearly been submerged in water, entrusted their

everything to the planes and hurled them. The wings caught the air and were lifted up, soaring to the other end of the gym.

There is no way **you** will ever forget. *I* found your picture on the internet last night. *I* just happened across **you** on a random search, and if it hadn't been *me* probably no one would have recognized it. The school buildings dirty from the mud and debris; the muddied school yard. The statue often seen in front of schools of the 19th century thinker, Ninomiya Kinjiro, was missing its left hand that held a book and was leaning to one side. **You** were jumping rope beneath the cherry blossom tree. The cherry blossoms that should have been within arm's reach were only half-bloomed overhead. Under the grey sky they came to life, and like a breath colored on monochrome film, it came through every-so faintly, telling of the arrival of Spring. **You** are wearing a second-hand jacket. **You** are amusing **yourself** with **your** jump rope. **You** forgot **your** solitude only when **you** were jumping. **You** were freed from the shackles of the earth only when **you** were jumping rope. Big aftershocks continued, and **you** woke up in the middle of the night countless times. When **your** back was attached to Earth, the tremors shook **your** heart to the core. As long as it was in contact with **your** body, **you** were a part of Earth. That is why, by jumping rope, even if it was by adding together the repeated seconds **you** were in the air, **you** comforted **yourself** on **your** own.

You flew *your* airplane in the school yard. *You* chased after those wings and no one got in *your* way. The tremors in the ground had no effect on the airplane. Even if the earth shook, the invisible power to float in the sky did not disappear. That is why *you* looked up at those wings. The heavens were murky and the scenery stained black and white, so only *your* wings were an origami rainbow. Wings are not forever. When paper falls into the quagmire it is ruined. *You* looked for some at least partially firm ground, fired the airplane to the other side of the school yard, and... that is how we met.

"Hey," **I** said, stating my name.

"Hello," *you* replied, bashfully.

"That jump rope, *you're* pretty good."

"Is that **your** airplane?"

And those

were the first words

that **we** exchanged.

You hand *your* airplane to **me**, go around behind **me**, and hold up **my** right hand. *You* make sure the wings are parallel to the ground and point it just a bit upwards. With **your** encouragement *I* cocked it back. The airframe flew beautifully.

"Woah! Awesome!" **you** said, smiling.

"Teach *me* how to jump rope, too," *you* said, also smiling.

And that is how *you* met the jump rope...

... and **you** got to meet the paper airplane.

There is no way **I** will ever forget. **I** have a picture here with **me**. It's a slightly faded Polaroid picture. At the time, a Polaroid that became yours right then and there was more precious than anything. A male volunteer took a picture of **you** flying **your** airplane. When **I** look at it now, the young boy referred to as "**you**" had lost weight, his hair had grown out, and it was as if he had been shut inside of a cramped shell. But **I** know. When **I** saw **you** from behind with **your** strong foot forward, standing up straight, lifting **your** airplane up to throw, at that moment **you** connected to the future for sure. **You** can't see it in this picture, but that child was off to the side jumping rope alone under the cherry blossoms near the front gate. Just after that **you** would stop and turn **your** eyes toward the cherry blossoms. **You** gently brush the dirt off the paper airplane, put it back to its proper shape, and cradle it with both hands. This picture captured **you** just before **you** took a step forward and delivered **you** to **me**.

That's right, the young girl referred to as "*you*" was jumping rope without a worry. For a moment *you* forgot *your* words and *your* heart and became one with the rhythm of the rope. But when **you** stopped to rest, **you** probably remembered that child. Inside **your** heart **you** regained the strength of the paper airplane that took off from **your** hand, didn't **you**? *You* remembered even the feeling that if *you* turned around they would be there. Even so, *you* did not turn around. The jump rope kept *you* facing forward and bound *your* toes that came into contact with the ground. When *you* were touching Earth, *you* couldn't find the courage to take one more step.

You're scared, huh?

I know how **you** feel. **You're** scared.

That's why **I'll** raise **my** voice now. **I** will face the picture, putting all the feeling **I** have into it. Take a step. Move forward. *You* have the power to fly inside of *you*.

That's why *I'll* cheer for **you** on the internet. **You** can look back and live on. The invisible air that **you** breathe in will give power to **your** wings.

Yes; forward. The light that will give *you* a push from behind shines now.

Ah... *I* remember that light. At that moment the world abruptly brightened and *I* stopped jumping, planted both feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I squinted my eyes in the light. **I** held my hand up to shield **my** eyes and realized it had been a long time since **I** had done something like that.

From a crack in the sky that had been grey up until that point burst forth a dazzling ray of sunlight. Without thinking *I* furrowed *my* eyebrows and bathed *my* whole body in that light.

The world that created this halation was slowly returning to color and regaining its warmth. **I** remember that clearly defined shadow. When **I** looked down at **my** feet there was a shadow. It had a powerful, black shape that resembled **me**. When **I** spread my arms wide the shadow's arms spread wide too, and in its hand was **my** origami.

A big shadow traversed the school yard. There was a continuous rotor noise, and *I* looked up at the helicopters in the sky. The Self-Defense Forces were flying over and past the school yard. To head to even harder hit disaster areas. To give a hand to people who were in even more pain.

You look up at the shadow of the helicopter, then quietly fix *your* gaze ahead of *you*. *You* acknowledge her presence.

You turn around, and **you** acknowledge him approaching **you**. **You** see the origami airplane in his hand, and **you** become certain of the future. Certain that **you** will become an airplane pilot. That **you** will fly anywhere on the power of wings and become an adult that saves people who are hurting.

You probably still don't know it, but *you* will make a lifelong friend out of the jump rope. With the rope *you* will continue to cut the air and jump a countless number of times. *You* will learn many techniques, put together many performances, and with *your* body *you* will carve the rhythm into the earth. *You* will probably enter a good number of competitions. *You* will probably go out into the world with just the one rope. *You* will probably meet a lot of wonderful people. With *your* jump rope *you* will talk with people throughout the world. *You* are trying to take that first step now.

Of course, wings aren't forever. People move through the sky with the energy they get from the earth. In time the wings will return to the earth as well, for there is no such thing as an endless flight. But **you** resolve to continue to fly even so. And that is because **you** are a child of the earth. Because all of **you**, and all of *you*, all of **us** are children of the earth.

I promise *you*. One day, together with this rope, **I** will reunite with that child no matter what. **I** will search for the girl that gave **me** something irreplaceable using that irreplaceable power. In order for *you* to be able to go anywhere, the **me** right now can also go far.

To **you** under the cherry blossoms, *I* can now say with confidence. *I* will spread my wings

and go anywhere. In order to save as many people as *I* can, *I* will aim for the horizon. *I* will kick off from the earth, hold lives in these very hands, and *I* will go down tomorrow, too. And someday beyond that, *I'm* sure the time will come when *I* can meet that child again. No matter what, *I* will be able to reach the side of the boy who showed me wings.

Come now; it is time to go. *Your* future lies just beyond.

Come now; **you** must go. Inside that light is **your** future.

Very well; **I'll** take this on. As long as *you* keep jumping into the sky, *you* will never forget that day.

That's right; believe in *me*. As long as **you** keep flying through the sky, **you** will not forget the future.

AIR

You won't forget. That day, that you first met your future.

You won't forget, will you. On that day when you came across something irreplaceable.

It was a winter afternoon, on the weekend, when the great earthquake and tsunami hit. You watched, as the black water rushed up the streets, expanding to no end. Everyone evacuated into the school grounds, and with no command to be seated, you were left standing, taking in the confusion of the teachers around you.

And you, you were so small then. Still in your gym clothes, with a jump rope in your hands. People from the neighborhood had come running from the street behind the school, and then slowly, like a monster starting to wake, the tsunami came creeping along after them. Even as it started to approach, carrying piles of garbage and muddied water along with it, the teachers didn't move. Your gaze had been stolen by overturned cars and roofs of what used to be houses as they were swept away in hard to believe acrobatics. It was when you realized the water wasn't receding that you knew this time could never be turned back. Finally, the principal's shouts came over the loudspeaker, and you fled into the school and up the stairs.

You watched from the third-floor classroom as the massive wave attacked. It was too overwhelming. No one could even put up a fight. The sky turned a dirty gray and it started to snow violently. It was so cold, you felt as if you would freeze there. As if it were the end of the world. Then you heard someone crying. When you turned to look, you saw an unfamiliar girl convulsing with sobs as the people around her tried to comfort her. You gazed blankly at what was happening around you, then impulsively reached for a notebook nearby and tore out a page. You folded the lined paper silently into an airplane, then aimed it out the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school. It had bent the flagpole outside, and a minivan had gotten caught on the horizontal bars. You could see people being swept away in the corner of your eye. Immediately, you shut your eyes tightly, then opened them wide again. With all the anger inside you propelling it onwards, you sent the airplane off into the world. Fly. Fly. Doesn't matter where to, just fly. Don't let these earthquakes and tsunami beat you. Fly! With a shout in your heart, your gaze followed that white, paper airplane. One, two snowflakes crashed onto its wings. Eventually, once it had made its way up directly above the school yard, the strong winds took hold of it and sent it hurtling off. It spun around and around, and out of sight. And then only the inertia of the airplane remained in your chest.

As for you, all that remained was a jump rope. Feeling as if you were about to shatter in the bitter cold, you kept living, silently. Adult rescuers had come, and you slurped down more packs of instant noodles than you could count. The adults scraped off the mud covering the school walls and brought with them many cardboard boxes filled with different things. Among them were some comic books, but you weren't interested in someone else's used, dirty old books. That's why you, still without words, would head off to a corner of the school alone and jump rope. For you, who had had everything swept away in the currents, it was the only thing left that was your own, that could never be replaced.

You had found one pack of origami paper among all the boring things the rescuers had brought. You used it with great care. One of the volunteer doctors had taught you how to fold a paper airplane. Not just the normal way, where you use a square sheet of paper, but also how to tear off a piece first and fold it from a rectangle, too. The trick is to move the center of gravity forward and bend the wings up just a bit. You, who had lost your parents and all your family, flew paper planes in that gymnasium, washed away of all the mud. You stood on the stage, where a small child had earlier drowned, and sent it flying with all the strength left in you. The wings caught in the wind, gained lift, and propelled forward, gliding to the edge of the gym.

You won't ever forget. I found a picture of you on the internet last night. By a small accident, you showed up in my search results, so small and frail. If it were anyone else, they probably wouldn't have recognized you. The school, covered in dirt and debris, and the muddy school yard. The statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro was leaning by the front gate. His left hand, which had been holding a book, was

missing. You were jumping rope underneath a cherry blossom tree. The cherry blossoms, just out of reach, which should have been engulfed by the sea, were in half bloom above your head. Like a breath of color on a monotone film, they emitted life under the grayed skies. Slightly blurring, telling of the arrival of spring. You're wearing a used jumper. Playing jump rope by yourself. When you were jumping rope, only then would you forget the loneliness. Only then could you escape your ties to the earth. The large aftershocks continued, never letting you sleep through the night. With your back laid across the earth, the shakes would rattle deep into your heart. As long as you were connected to the earth, touching it, you were a part of it. So by jumping rope, connecting your jumps over and over again, you were freeing yourself.

You flew airplanes on the school grounds. You chased after its wings in places where no one would get in your way. The shaking ground had no effect on the airplane. The invisible power to soar through the skies didn't disappear when the ground quaked. So you looked up to those wings. The sky was grayed and everything had been muddled into a monotone. So only your wings of origami paper were rainbow colored. Wings don't last forever. If they fell into the mud, they would fall apart. You looked for an open space and sent the airplane to the edges of the schoolyard—and then you met.

"Hey" the boy introduced himself.

"Hello" the girl replied shyly.

"You're pretty good at jump rope"

"Is that your airplane?"

Those were,
the first words,
we exchanged.

You held out the airplane and twisted backwards with your right hand. With the wings aligned symmetrically, you aimed it slightly upwards.

On your call, I swung. Off it flew, in a beautiful wake.

"Wow!" the girl laughed.

"Now show me how to jump rope!" the boy laughed, too.

"You wanna jump together?"

And that's how you met jump rope---

---And how you came across airplanes.

I won't ever forget. I have a single photo in my hands. It's a slightly faded Polaroid picture. This Polaroid, which was to become mine soon after it was taken, is, above all, a precious treasure. One of the volunteers had captured the boy flying airplanes. Looking at it now, the boy who had simply been called "you" was thin, with messy hair, as if he were closed up inside a tight shell. But I know. Looking at the back of him, with his dominant leg stretched forward, back straight, getting ready to swing, even then he was connecting to the future. A bit out of frame, underneath the cherry blossoms near the front gate, that girl was jumping rope by herself. In just a little bit, he'll stop and look toward those cherry blossoms. Being careful not to get the paper airplane dirty, he'll take hold of it with both hands. This photo captures him right before he takes that first step and sends him on his way.

That's right. The girl who had simply been called "you" was jumping absentmindedly. Words, thoughts, disappearing with every jump, resonating with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you would take a break, you would remember that boy. The strength of that folded paper airplane, taking off from within his hands, kept coming back into her mind. She remembered the feeling of knowing that if she were to only turn back, he would be there. But even so, she didn't. By jumping rope, she was made to face forward, and her toes were stuck on the ground. At that time, the girl who was still bound to the earth was unable to find the courage to take one more step.

You're just scared.

I understand. You're scared.

That's why I'm calling out to you now. With all the encouragement I can muster, toward this picture in my hands. Step out. Move forward. You have the power to jump inside you.

That's why I'm sending all of my cheers to you, here on my computer screen. You can look back and connect breaths. The air you're breathing in, you can't see it, but it will give your wings power.

That's right. Go on. There's a light shining, pushing you forward.

Yes. I remember that light. In that moment, the world suddenly became a bit brighter. I stopped my rope and planted both feet on the ground. Then I looked up at the sky.

I squinted my eyes toward the blaze. Shading my eyes with my palm, I realized how long it had been since I last had.

From a crack in the sky that had been gray for so long, glaring sunlight poured through. Without realizing, my face contorted, and I bathed my whole body in the light.

The world that had caused halation was slowly turning colorful again, taking back its warmth. I remember that profoundly defined shadow. When my eyes dropped to my feet, there was a shadow. A strong, dark shadow in the shape of me. When I stretched out my arms, the shadow did, too, and in its hand was my folded origami.

A large shadow cut across the school yard. The roaring sound of blades spinning could be heard, and I looked up to the helicopter in the sky. The self-defense force flew on above the school. To disaster areas that were even worse. To people who were suffering even more.

You'll look down at the helicopter's shadow, then stare quietly ahead. You'll recognize the figure of that girl.

You'll turn around and recognize that boy walking toward you. You'll see the paper airplane in his hands and glimpse your future. I'll become a pilot. I'll grow up to use the power of wings and fly anywhere to save people in need.

You don't know it yet, but that jump rope will be your lifelong friend. You'll jump, cutting through the air, and continue to jump, more times than you could ever count. You'll learn many different techniques, you'll put on many performances, and you'll carve out a rhythm into your body and the earth. You'll go to a lot of competitions, too. With a single rope, you'll set out into the world. So many wonderful things are waiting for you. Through jump rope, you'll be able to talk with people all around the world. Right now, you're about to take the first step.

Of course, wings don't last forever. People can only continue on into the sky because of the energy they get from the earth. Eventually wings also have to come back to the ground. There's no such thing as a flight that doesn't end. Even so, you're resolved to continue jumping, off into the sky. That's because you're a part of the earth. All of you. And all of you. Because *we're all* a part of this earth.

I'll make you a promise. Someday, this rope and I will reunite with that girl. Using the power of this irreplaceable gift, I'll seek out that girl who gave it to me. Just like you can go anywhere, I, too, can go far away.

I can proudly say it to you now, standing there under the cherry blossoms. Let's spread our wings and fly, off to wherever. Even if I'm alone, in order to save others, we can set our sights far off into the horizon. Let's kick off from the ground, with our life in our own hands, and continue to take off into tomorrow. Someday, somewhere out there, I'm sure the time will come when you reunite. I know I'll make it there, to where the boy who taught me how to fly is.

Okay, get going. Your future is just ahead.

Okay, let's go. Your future is inside that light.

I can guarantee it. As long as you continue to jump, you won't forget about that day.

That's right. Trust me. As long as you continue to fly, you won't forget about the future.

Soaring Through the Air
by Sena Hideaki

Him: I bet you'll never forget that day when you met your future.

Her: And I bet you'll never forget that day when you encountered that thing that became so indispensable to you.

Him: It was the afternoon of a winter weekend when that massive earthquake and tsunami struck. No doubt you saw the ever-swelling black water encroaching as it made its way up the road. Standing in line after evacuating to the schoolyard, you could detect the teachers' state of confusion from the fact that they neglected to give the pupils the signal to sit down.

Her: You were still small. And you were wearing your gym clothes and holding a skipping rope. People from the town were fleeing along the street at the back of the school. They were followed by the sluggish tsunami waters, advancing like some monster awakened from its slumber. The approaching muddy waters were loaded with all sorts of debris, but still the teachers remained motionless. You couldn't tear your eyes away from the surreal sight of inverted vehicles and house roofs floating by. You could tell that time hadn't stopped by the way that the waters kept increasing without respite. Finally, the head teacher issued an order through a megaphone, and you ran into the school and up the stairs.

Him: You surveyed the ocean's advance from a third-floor classroom. It was an overwhelming mass of water — not something a mere mortal could hope to stand against. The sky was a dirty gray and it started to snow heavily. It was so cold and the waters looked so icy that you felt that the end of the world had come. Hearing someone crying, you looked around and saw a girl you didn't recognize who had sought refuge in the same classroom. She was sobbing and convulsing, while those around her hugged her. But you just stared at the scene. Then, on an impulse, you tore a page from a nearby notebook and proceeded to fold the ruled sheet without uttering a word. Having folded it into a paper plane, you turned towards the window. The muddy water had already engulfed the first floor of the school. The flagpole in the schoolyard was bent crooked, and a floating station wagon had been snagged by the climbing frame. In the corner of your eye, you caught a glimpse of some people from the town being swept away by the waters, but you closed your eyes tight. Then, opening them wide, you released the plane into the world in a fit of rage.

"Go, go, go as far as you can! Don't succumb to the earthquake or tsunami, but go!" Thus you cried in your heart as you gazed on the trajectory that the white paper plane carved. A couple of snowflakes collided with the plane, and when it was right above the schoolyard, it was assailed by a gust of swirling wind, which caused it to go into a tailspin and disappear from sight. Only a sense of the plane's inertia in your heart remained.

Her: And for you, the skipping rope remained. In that piercing cold, you lived on in silence. Some relief workers arrived and you consumed countless servings of instant noodles. They scrapped the mud away and brought cardboard boxes containing many things. There were lots of manga, but you weren't thrilled at the prospect of reading soiled books that someone else had already read. That's why you always snuck off silently to a corner of the schoolyard and skipped alone. To you who had lost everything in the tsunami, it was the one and only thing you had left.

Him: Out of the uninspiring toys that the relief workers brought, you discovered a wad of origami paper. It became your treasured possession. A volunteer doctor showed you how to fold paper planes. He taught you to form a rectangle first by cutting off a strip rather than starting by folding the square paper. The trick was to weight the plane towards its nose and to bend the back of its wings. You who had lost your parents and relatives threw paper planes in the gym, which had been washed to remove the mud brought by the tsunami. Standing on the stage on which children had nearly succumbed to the rising waters, you threw the planes straight forward with all your pent up strength. The planes cut through the air, gaining lift, and flew all the way to the other end of the gym.

Her: You definitely won't forget that moment when you stumbled on a photo of you on the internet while doing a random search. You looked so diminutive in it — if I hadn't been in the photo,

you won't have recognized it. The school building was a mess, being full of mud and debris, and there was mud everywhere in the schoolyard. The statue of the philosopher Sontoku Ninomiya next to the front gate was leaning, and his left hand, which was holding a book, had broken off. You were skipping under the cherry tree. The tree, which must have been under water to as high as you could raise your hand during the tsunami, was half way to being in full bloom. Radiating life under the dull grey sky, it subtly announced the approach of spring and breathed vitality into the scene in the same way that a tint of color does in a black-and-white photo. Wearing a second-hand jumper, you were engrossed in your skipping. Only when you were jumping could you forget your loneliness. Only when you were jumping over the rope could you temporarily escape the shackles of the ground. The big aftershocks woke you up many times at night. With your back lying on the ground, the tremors shook your heart. While you had your feet firmly planted on the ground, you were just a part of the Earth. That's why you were able to find healing when skipping through repeatedly experiencing that liberty you felt in mid-air.

Him: You were throwing paper planes in the schoolyard. Without getting in the way of others, you ran after them. The planes were indifferent to the tremors of the earth; the invisible force that caused them to soar in the air didn't go away when the ground shook. That's why you gazed up at the planes. Because the sky was dull and overcast and the landscape was a dreary monotone, you made the planes from red origami paper. The planes weren't indestructible, but crumpled whenever they nosedived into the sludge. In search of less muddy ground, you came to the edge of the schoolyard and started throwing your planes there. That was when we met.

"Hey," you said and gave your name.

"Hello," you replied bashfully.

"You're good at skipping."

"Is that your paper plane?"

Those were the first words we exchanged.

You held out the plane, with your right hand wrapped around it, supporting it from behind.

The symmetric wings were angled up ever so slightly. At your instigation, I let it fly, and it traced a graceful path through the air.

"Amazing! Amazing!" you cried, laughing.

"I'll teach you to skip," I offered, and you also laughed.

"Let's fly together!"

And that was how skipping entered your life.

Her: And that was your encounter with planes.

Him: I'll never forget that slightly faded polaroid photo in my hands. At that time and place, I made it my own and treasured it above everything. A male volunteer had taken a photo of you throwing a plane. Looking at it now, you — a small boy at the time — appear thin and your hair was long. You look like you're confined within a husk. But I know the truth. Taken from behind, the photo shows you with your best leg forward and your back extended, in the process of throwing a plane. There's a sure connection between that boy in the photo and the future. And beyond the frame of the photo, under the cherry tree near the main gate, that girl is skipping by herself. Shortly after the photo was taken, you stopped throwing planes and turned your eyes towards the cherry tree. You carefully removed the dirt from the plane and restored its shape, cupping it carefully in both hands.

Her: That's right. Oblivious to all else, that girl was skipping away. Momentarily forgetting her thoughts, she jumped in synch with the rope. But every time you took a break from throwing planes, you thought of that girl, didn't you? Your heart gained strength from those paper planes you threw. You sensed that if you turned around, I would be there. But despite that, you didn't look behind you. The skipping rope kept you looking forward and held the tips of your toes that contacted the ground. When you were in contact with the ground, you couldn't pluck up the courage to take a step towards me.

Him: You were scared.

Her: I know. You were scared too.

Him: That's why I raising my voice now. Look at the photo, and, mustering all your feelings, step out! Advance! You have the ability to fly within you.

Her: That's why I cheered you on via the internet. You looked behind you and could connect with breathe. The invisible air that you breathe in imparts lift to your wings.

Him: Right. I've got to go forward. The light that's propelling from behind is shining now.

Her: Ahh! I remember that light well. The world suddenly lit up. I stopped skipping and, with both feet firmly planted on the ground, gazed up at the sky.

Him: I squinted at that brilliance and raised my hand to my forehead to shield my eyes. It dawned on me that I hadn't done that for a while.

Her: Blinding light broke forth from a break in the sky, which had been continuously gray until then. I squinted reflexively as my body has bathed in that light.

Him: A halo encircled the world, and color and warmth were slowly restored it. I recall the sharp shadows that formed. Glancing downwards, I noticed a shadow at my feet — a dark and powerful shadow, shaped in my form. When I extended both arms, the shadow did likewise. I was holding a paper plane in my hand.

Her: That large shadow traversed the schoolyard. I gazed up at the helicopter as the din of its rotor reverberated. The self-defence force flew over the school on their way to help worse-hit areas and to extend help to people in even more desperate circumstances.

Him: You looked up at the helicopter's form. And you quietly fixed your eyes ahead, acknowledging her presence.

Her: You looked back and acknowledged that he was walking up to you. You saw he was holding a paper plane in his hand and felt certain about what the future would bring. When you grew up, you would become a pilot and, using the power of flight, you would travel to distant places and help people in trouble.

Him: You didn't realize then, but the skipping rope became your lifelong friend. You cut the air with the rope times without number. Constantly refining your skill and devising new routines, you beat out rhythms between your body and the ground. You'll appear in many shows. With one skipping rope, you'll travel the world. You'll have had many remarkable encounters. Through skipping, you'll converse with people from all over the world. You're on the verge of taking that step.

Her: Of course, planes don't last forever. People fly through the air using energy acquired from the ground. Planes have to return to the ground — it's inconceivable that a flight would never end. But despite that, you've resolved to continue flying. That's because you're a child of the Earth. Everyone, including you and me, we're all children of the Earth.

Him: I'll make a promise to you. Sometime in the future, without fail, I will bring the skipping rope and met that girl again. I will empower that girl who endowed me with something indispensable. Just as you will be able to go anywhere, so I myself will also go far.

Her: I will hold my head high and tell of you, who are now sitting under the cherry tree. I will extend my wings and go to faraway places. I will set my sights for the horizon to save one more person. I will leap from the ground and embracing life in my hands, will alight tomorrow. And over there, I feel certain that I will meet that boy again sometime. I'll definitely reach him who first taught me to fly.

Him: Well, you should go. Ahead lies your future!

Her: Please go. Your future lies in that light!

Him: That's good for both of us. I'll wager that you'll never forget that day for as long as you continue to jump into the sky.

Her: That's right. Believe me; you won't forget the future for as long as you continue to fly the skies.

AIR

Sena Hideaki

I doubt you will forget. How, that day, you saw the future.

I doubt you will forget. How, that day, you came across something irreplaceable.

That great earthquake and tsunami hit on a weekend afternoon in winter. You must have seen how black water came flooding up the road, how it grew and grew, never ending. Having evacuated and gathered in the schoolyard, you stood frozen in shock, all lined up, waiting for permission to sit down, taking in the teachers' pandemonium.

You were little, still in your gym clothes, holding a jump rope. People from the neighborhood came running up the road behind the school, and before long the tsunami followed, moving slowly, like a beast roused from its slumber. Even as lots of trash and muddy water drew near, the teachers did not move. You must not have been able to tear your eyes away in disbelief, cars overturned and houses reduced to nothing but rooftops. You knew time could not be turned back when you noticed the volume of water growing bigger and bigger, not receding even a little bit. Finally, the school principal shouted into a megaphone, and you ran up the stairs of the school building in a stampede.

You watched from the third-floor classroom as the body of seawater charged forth. It was an overwhelming mass, nothing people could have stood up against. The sky was a dirty grey, and a furious, powdered snow began to fall. It was far too cold, almost freezing, and you felt like the world was ending. Then, you heard someone crying. When you turned around, you saw a girl you did not know taking refuge in the same classroom, weeping and shaking, held by the people around her. You were staring at her, then, remembering, tore a page out of a notebook nearby. In silence, you folded the lined white paper, made it into the shape of an airplane, and turned back to the window. The muddy water had already swallowed up the first floor, the flagpole broken and a minivan caught on its metal rod. Out of the corner of your eye, you could see the shapes of people washed away by the water, but you closed your eyes tight, then opened them wide, and with all your anger, let the plane go. Go, go, go all the way. Do not lose to earthquakes or tsunamis, or anything else, just go. Screaming out in your heart, you fixed your eyes on the pure white plane and its path. A snowflake hit its wing, then another, and once it was almost directly over the schoolyard, the plane got caught by the wind and disappeared in a tailspin. Just like that, nothing but the plane's paralysis remained in your heart.

And for you, only the jump rope remained. In the midst of a coldness that threatened to tear you apart, silently you went on living. Adults from the rescue operation came, and you slurped down countless cups of instant ramen. The adults cleaned out the mud and brought all sorts of things in cardboard boxes. There were lots of manga, but someone's dirty, worn-out paperbacks did not interest you. And so, speechless, you were always alone in the corner of the schoolyard, playing jump rope. Having lost everything to the waters, it was the only thing left behind that was your own, that was irreplaceable.

Among the boring toys brought by the relief crew, you found one pack of origami paper. You used it with great care. The volunteer medic taught you how to fold planes. Not only from square paper, but also how to tear off a part, and fold from a rectangle. The trick was to have its center of gravity in the front, and to bend the tips of the wings a bit. Having lost your parents and all your relatives, you flew your planes at the gym, now washed free of the sludge. Standing on the stage where a small child had drowned, you put everything into the plane and let it go straight ahead. The wings caught air and gained some lift, racing toward the edge of the gym.

You will never forget. I found your photo on the web yesterday. I only came across it by chance, and you looked so small, you would have probably been unrecognizable to anyone else. The schoolhouse covered in dirt and debris, and the schoolyard all muddy. The statue of the boy next to the front gate was tilted, the hand in which he held his book now missing. You were jumping rope underneath the cherry tree. The tree that had must have been submerged an entire arm's length was half-bloomed above your head. Bringing forth life underneath these grey skies, like a breath of color in a black-and-white film, it seeped through just slightly to announce the coming of Spring. Your jacket was secondhand. You entertained yourself jumping rope, alone. It was only when you jumped that you forgot your loneliness. It was only when you jumped that you were free of the bonds of the ground. As the aftershocks continued, it woke you up at night countless times. With your back flush to the ground, the earthquakes shook your heart. While your body was connected to the ground, you were part of the Earth. And so, alone with your jump rope, each jump connecting to the Earth over and over again, you were healing yourself.

You flew planes in the schoolyard. You chased after wings, unbothered by anybody. The tremors of the ground could not affect your planes. As much as the Earth shook, that unseen power that let them take to the sky did not disappear. And so, you looked up to wings. The sky was murky, the landscape stained in monochrome, and only your wings were crimson origami paper. Wings are not forever. If they fall into mud, the paper disintegrates. In search of safer ground, you launched your plane toward the edge of the schoolyard. — Then, we met.

“Hey,” you spoke up.

“Hello,” you answered shyly.

“You’re good at that, jumping rope.”

“Is that your plane?”

Those were,

the first words that,

we exchanged.

You held out the plane, right hand behind your back. The wings were symmetrical, and just slightly upturned. Your voice cheered me on, and the plane left a beautiful trail as it flew.

“How cool!” you laughed.

“Teach me to jump rope, too,” you laughed also.

“Let’s fly together?”

And so, **you** found my jump rope –

–And so, **you** chanced upon my airplanes.

I will never forget. There is a photo in my hand. It is a slightly faded Polaroid. This Polaroid that I got back then, I treasure more than anything. The volunteer man had taken a photo of you flying a plane. Looking at it now, you were thinner, with longer hair, looking like you were shut up inside a tight

shell. But I know better. You put your best foot forward, stand up straight, and hold yourself up. Back then without question that you were connected to the future. It is outside the frame, but under the cherry tree by the front gate, that boy was jumping rope, alone. You stopped for a moment, and you looked toward the tree. Carefully you brushed the dirt off the paper airplane, you fixed its form and cradled it in both hands. The photo captured you in that moment, right before you took your next step.

That's right, you were jumping innocently. With each moment, you forgot your words, you forgot your mind, tuning in to the rhythm of the rope. But, when you stopped to rest, I am sure you thought of her. I am sure the strength of those paper airplanes she flew returned to fill your chest. You had nothing but a hunch that she would be there, if only you turned around. And yet, you did not. The jump rope kept you facing forward, kept your toes bound as they touched the ground. As you made contact with the Earth, you could not catch hold of that one last bit of courage.

You are scared.

I know. You are scared.

So, let me shout this out. I will shout it at this picture with everything I have. Step forward. Keep going. You have the strength inside you to jump.

So, let me cheer you on across the web. You can look back, you can breathe. This invisible air you take in will give your wings strength.

That's right, go on. There's a brilliant, shining light, pushing you forward.

Yes, I remember that light. The world suddenly brightened, back then. I stopped jumping, both feet on the ground, and looked up at the sky.

I narrowed my eyes at that shine. I shielded my forehead with my hand, realizing it had been a while since something like that.

Dazzling sunlight was pouring down through a crack in perpetually grey skies. Unconsciously I frowned, basking in that light with my whole being.

The world was taking on a glow, slowly changing color, reclaiming its warmth. I especially remember the bold shadows. I looked down and there was a shadow on the ground. It was a powerful, black shadow of me. When I opened my arms, the shadow did too. In those arms was my origami.

A large shadow cut across the schoolyard. Hearing a rotor reverberate across the school, I looked up to see a helicopter in the sky. The Self-Defense Force hovered above. They were going to other disaster areas, worse off. They were going to help people who had it harder.

You looked at the helicopter, then quietly set your eyes straight ahead. You observed the girl.

You turned around, making sure he was coming. You saw the paper airplane in his hand, and confirmed the future. You would become a pilot. You would become an adult who saves those who suffer, carried by the strength of your wings.

Maybe you don't know yet, but the jump rope will be your lifelong friend. You will go on to jump countless times, each time cutting the air with your rope. You will learn many skills, and you will think up many performances, all striking a rhythm between yourself and the ground. You will probably

participate in many tournaments. You will go out into the world with just your one rope. You will have many wonderful encounters. Thanks to your jump rope, you will connect with people everywhere. You are taking the first step right now.

Of course, wings are not forever. People take to the sky with the energy given to them by the ground. Even wings return to the ground eventually – every flight must come to an end. And yet, you are determined to continue flying in the sky. All because you are a child of the Earth. All of you, and all of you, **we** are all, children of this Earth.

Let me make a promise to you. Someday, I will see that girl again, her with that rope. The girl who gave me something irreplaceable, I will look for her with that irreplaceable strength. Just like you can go as far as you want, now I can go far, too.

I can proudly tell you now, you beneath the cherry tree. I can spread my wings and go anywhere. I am setting my sights on the horizon, so that even if alone, I can save many others. I will kick the ground, take my life in my hands, and I will land again tomorrow. On the other side, there will come a time when surely, I will be able to meet that boy again. Without fail, I will reach him, the boy who taught me about wings.

Alright, you'd better go. That's your future ahead.

Well then, go ahead. That's your future in that light.

Of course, I promise. For as long as you keep jumping, you will not forget that day.

That's right, believe me. For as long as you are flying in the sky, you will not forget the future.

Air

You would not forget your encounter with the future that day.

You would not forget your life-changing encounter that day.

It was a winter afternoon at the end of the week when the earthquake and tsunami hit. You saw the body of black water backing up the road, advancing endlessly. You ran into the school yard and took your place in line. Never receiving permission to sit, you remained standing, taking in the teachers' confusion.

Just a little boy, you were dressed in your phys ed uniform, a skipping rope in your hands. You saw people running up the road at the back of the school. After some time, the tsunami lumbered after them, like a monster awakened from its sleep. The wave of debris was now approaching the school, and still the teachers did nothing. You were distracted by the sight of upturned cars and dismembered roofs moving in a manner you had not believed possible. It was the sight of the waters rising without ever receding that made you realize that time does not go backwards. At last, the principal barked instructions through a megaphone. You ran inside and up the stairs.

From a third floor classroom, you watched the sea attack. People were defenceless against the sheer mass of the water. Heavy snow started to fall from the dirty grey sky. In the freezing cold, you felt like the world was ending. That was when you first heard the sound of crying. You turned around to see an unfamiliar girl who had taken refuge in the classroom convulse and retch while the children beside her held her. After watching the scene for a few moments, something possessed you to tear a page out of a nearby exercise book. Without saying anything, you folded the lined, white sheet into a paper aeroplane before turning back to face the window. By now, the ground floor of the school building was already submerged under muddy water. The flagpole had snapped, and a car had washed up against the jungle gym. Out of the corner of your eye you could see people being washed away. You immediately closed your eyes tight, then opened them again, wide. Angrily, you threw the paper plane.

As you followed the white plane with your eyes, you silently willed it to fly away from the earthquake and the tsunami.

A snowflake struck the plane, followed by another, but the plane flew on until it was directly above the school building, only to be buffeted by a sudden gust of wind and spiral out of view. The inertia of the plane was the only thing in your mind.

You silently went on living. You were still holding your skipping rope, which was so cold it seemed it might snap. Later, a rescue team arrived, and you ate so many containers of instant noodles that you lost count. The adults shovelled mud and handed out boxes of supplies. There were lots of manga, but you weren't interested in someone else's grimy old comics. Instead, you skipped by yourself in the corner of the quad, never talking. After all, your skipping rope was the only one of your possessions that had not been washed away.

Among the other crappy toys in the aid boxes, you found a pack of origami paper. It would become a cherished possession. One of the volunteer doctors showed you how to fold paper aeroplanes, including a method that involved trimming the squares of paper into rectangles first. The way was to bring the centre of gravity forward and bend the trailing edges of the wings up slightly. Newly orphaned, you flew paper planes in the gymnasium, which was now free of mud. Standing on the stage where a small child had nearly drowned, you threw the plane with all your might. The wings caught the air and developed lift, taking the plane to the other end of the gymnasium.

I will never forget you. Last night when browsing the Internet, I happened upon a photo of you, so small that no else would have recognized you. The sodden school grounds were covered with mud and debris. The statue of Ninomiya Sontoku at the entrance was on a lean, its book-holding left hand snapped off. You were skipping under the cherry tree. At one time submerged to the height of a person's upstretched hands, the tree was now coming into bloom above your head. As the tree came to life, it announced the beginning of Spring under the grey sky, its colours bleeding ever so slightly as if it were a recoloured black and white film. You are wearing a second hand sweater and skipping intently. It is the only thing that lets you forget your loneliness. Only when you were in mid-air were you free from the power of the Earth. The aftershocks continued, waking you in the middle of the night. With your back in contact with the Earth, the tremors shook your very soul. As long as your body was connected to the Earth, you remained a part of the Earth. That is why you comforted yourself by skipping, linking together a multitude of moments spent in mid-air.

You flew your paper plane in the quad. You chased after it, not bothered by anyone else. Paper planes were not affected by the shaking of the ground—even the trembling of the ground could not destroy the invisible force that resided in the sky. That is why you kept your eyes on your plane. Against the overcast sky and the dirty, monotonal scenery, your wings alone were rainbow coloured. But wings do not last forever, and paper becomes soggy when it comes into contact with muddy ground. It was when you had found a firm patch of ground as were preparing to throw the plane toward the edge of the quad that you met.

“Hi”, you said, introducing yourself.

“Hello”, you replied, bashfully.

“You’re good with the skipping rope.”

“Is that your paper aeroplane?”

It was our first ever conversation.

You handed him the plane then stood behind him to guide his right arm so that the plane’s wings were balanced and its nose was angled very slightly upward.

On the count of three you threw the plane with all your might.

It made a beautiful arc through the sky.

“Wow!”, you exclaimed, laughing.

“Teach me how to skip!”, you said, laughing.

“Why don’t we skip together?”

And thus, you discovered skipping.

And you discovered paper planes.

I will never forget. I keep a photograph with me, a slightly faded Polaroid. In those days, the tangible nature of Polaroids made them highly prized. It was a shot of the boy and his paper plane, taken by a volunteer. A thin boy with longish hair, he seemed to be trapped in an uncomfortable shell. However, I know that in that moment, standing straight with his right foot forward and his arm raised up and back, he was unmistakably connected to his future.

Out of the shot, the girl was skipping on her own, under the cherry tree near the school gate. In a moment, you would stop what you were doing and look in the direction of the tree. You would carefully brush the dust off the paper plane, fold it back into shape and cradle it in both hands. The camera captured you about to take a first step into something new. The young girl was skipping indifferently. In her own world, she was at one with the rhythm of the skipping rope. Whenever you paused, you thought of her, didn't you? You took the power of the paper plane that took flight from your hand and secreted it inside you.

You sensed him behind you. And yet you did not turn around. The skipping rope made you face forward, binding the tips of your toes as they touched the ground. As long as you were touching the ground, you could not muster that last ounce of courage.

I can tell that you're scared. That's why I am calling out to your photograph with all my might.
"Go on! You can jump!"

That's why I am shouting encouragement at the photo of you on the Internet. It's ok to turn around and breathe. It is the invisible air that you breathe that supports your wings.

That's right—walk forward. The light that pushes you forward is shining.

I remember that light. Everything suddenly became light. I stopped skipping and looked up at the sky with both feet on the ground.

I narrowed my eyes in the light. I used my hand to shade my eyes, realising that I had not needed to do so for some time.

Shafts of sunlight filtered through chinks that had appeared in the grey sky. I screwed up my face and bathed in the light.

The sun-flared environment gradually regained its colour and warmth. I remember how a sharp shadow formed at my feet. A strong, black silhouette shaped like me. When I spread out my arms, my shadow did the same, in its hand, the paper plane.

A large shadow cut across the school grounds. The sound of a rotor made me look up. It was a Self Defence Force helicopter, flying over the school, off to visit worse hit areas. To help those even harder hit.

You look up at the shadow of the helicopter and then quietly survey the scene in front of you. Then you see her.

You turn around and see him walking towards you. Seeing that he is holding a paper plane makes you resolved about the future. You will become a pilot. An adult who flies long distances to help people in trouble.

You don't know it yet, but you will become lifelong friends with your skipping rope. You will skip too many times to count, learning tricks and devising routines as you create rhythms with your body and the Earth. You will take part in many competitions. It is with your skipping rope that you will make a name for yourself. Your rope will be the start of many wonderful encounters and interactions with people from all over the world. You are about to take the first step on that journey.

Wings, of course, do not last forever. People can only fly with the energy they gain from the Earth. Eventually, those wings must return to the earth, as it is impossible for an aeroplane to fly forever. Nonetheless, you resolve to keep flying. You do so because you are born of the Earth, as are all those like you, and all

those like her, and all of us.

I will make you a promise. One day, I will take my skipping rope and reunite with that girl. I will use the precious gift she gave me to search for her. I will embark on a long journey to enable her to go wherever she pleases.

I can now proudly take my message to you as you stand under the cherry tree. I will spread my wings and fly far, far into the distance. With my sights set on the horizon, I will fly far and wide to rescue as many people as possible. I will stamp the ground and cradle life in my hands and tomorrow I will land. And then, someday, I will reunite with him. I promise to come back to the boy who taught me about wings.

Go! That's your future ahead of you.

Go! That light is your future.

I promise that as long as you are jumping through the air, you will never forget that day.

Trust me. As long as you are flying through the sky, you will never forget your future.

Air

You won't forget, will you. That day when you met with your future.

You won't forget, will you. That day you discovered that irreplaceable thing.

The earthquake and tidal wave happened on a Friday afternoon in winter. You saw the black water coming for you, surging up the street, endlessly swelling. Everyone was evacuated to the school and you could sense how confused the teachers were, as you stood in lines waiting to be told you could sit down.

You were still so young. You held a skipping rope in your hand as you stood there in your sports gear. People evacuating from the surrounding area were coming up the road to the rear of the school. The tidal wave came crawling up not far behind, lumbering like a beast woken from sleep. The muddy water and debris drew closer and still the teachers didn't move. You were transfixed by the unthinkable things you were seeing; houses reduced to nothing but roofs, cars tossed upside-down. When you realized the water was not going to stop increasing but keep growing endlessly, that's when you knew that things had changed forever. Finally, the school principal made an announcement through the loudspeaker and you rushed into the building and up the stairs.

From the third-floor classroom, you saw the wall of ocean sweep in. A volume of water so overwhelming no one stood a chance against it. Heavy powder snow started to fall from the drab sky and you were so cold you thought you might freeze. It felt like the world was ending. That was when you first heard crying. You looked back and saw a girl you didn't know who had sort refuge in the same classroom. Her whole body shook as she let out a sob and the people around her held her in their arms. Looking at the scene, you had a sudden urge to tear a page from a nearby notebook. Without a word, you folded the lined paper into the shape of a plane and turned to face the window. The muddy water had already swallowed the first floor of the school. The flagpole had been snapped. A van was caught in the jungle gym. In the corner of your vision there was the shadow of people being swept away but you shut your eyes tight against it, then opened them up wide, screwed up your anger and sent the plane out into the world. Go, go, as far as you can! No earthquake or tsunami can stop you! You shouted silently to yourself, your eyes fixed on the flight of the white paper plane. A snowflake or two hit the wings and before long the plane was flying right above the schoolyard until finally a flurry of wind sent it into a tailspin and it disappeared. Only its inertia remained inside you.

You still had your skipping rope. You were living, without a word, in a cold that could have torn you to a thousand pieces. A rescue team of adults arrived and you slurped up bowl after bowl of instant noodles. They swept out the mud and brought you different things in cardboard boxes. There was plenty of manga, but you were hardly thrilled at being given books that were dirty and worn from use. So, without a word, you played alone, skipping in the corner of the schoolyard. Everything else had been washed away and it was the only thing you had left, the one thing that could not be replaced.

The toys the support workers brought with them didn't interest you, but among them you found a stack of origami paper which you used with great care. A doctor who was volunteering at the center taught you how to fold a paper plane, not just from a square piece of paper, but also by cutting the paper into a rectangle before you started folding. The secret is to bring the center of gravity to the front of the plane and fold the back of the wings up slightly. You had lost your parents and everyone who was close to you, so you went to the school gym where the sludge had been cleaned out and flew paper planes. Standing on the stage where the children had nearly drowned, you put all your hope into the plane and sent it off in a straight line. The wings caught an updraft and it soared to the other end of the gym.

You will never forget. Entirely by chance, I found a photo of you while searching online last night. You were very small in the shot and I doubt anyone else would have recognized you. The rubble-covered school building, the mud-filled schoolyard. Beside the main gate, the statue of child scholar Ninomiya Kinjirō was leaning to one side, the hand holding his books was missing. You were skipping beneath the cherry tree. An arm's length above your head, the sopping tree was in half bloom. Coming to life under the grey sky, it was announcing that spring had arrived and was slowly seeping in, like color being breathed into black and white film. In the photo you're wearing a second-hand jacket, contentedly skipping on your own. Only when you were skipping could you forget your loneliness. Only when you

were jumping over the rope could you be free from your connection to the earth. The strong aftershocks woke you up repeatedly each night. With your back flat against the earth, the tremors retraumatized you. Whenever you were touching it, you became a part of the earth. That's why you were skipping - for a moment with each jump, one after another, over and over, you were healing yourself.

You launched the plane and followed it through the schoolyard. No one got in the way. The rocking of the ground couldn't touch it. The shaking of the earth couldn't extinguish the invisible power of its flight. That's why you looked up at it. The origami paper was the only rainbow in the murky sky and the whole filthy, monotone scene. But it could not last forever. Paper crumples if it falls into the mud. Looking for firmer ground, you shot the plane toward the edge of the schoolyard...that is when I met you.

You introduced myself with a "hey".

"Hello," you replied shyly.

"You sure are good at skipping."

"Is that your plane?"

*Those were
the first words
we exchanged.*

You held out the plane to me then supported my right hand from behind. The wings were symmetrical and turned up just slightly.

"Now!" you cried and sent it flying. The plane flew beautifully.

"I love it!" you smiled.

"Teach me how to skip," you smiled back.

"Do you want to skip together?"

And with that, you started skipping...

...you first learned about planes.

I will never forget. I have a photograph, a fading polaroid. In a time and place like that, a polaroid of your own was something to be treasured. One of the volunteers took a picture of you flying the plane. Thinking about it now, "you" were on the skinny side back then, long-haired for a boy, curled up tight in your shell. But I knew. From behind I could see you straightening up, leading with your best foot. You knew what the future held for you. Just out of shot is the school gate and a cherry tree. Under the tree, the girl is skipping on her own. In a moment your hand will stop, and you'll look towards the cherry tree. You'll carefully wipe the dirt from the plane, fix the shape and hold it in both hands. This photo captured you just about to take that first step.

"You" were skipping without a care. A girl who forgot all words and thoughts, for just a moment at a time, in symphony with the rhythm of the rope. But every time you stopped jumping you remembered the boy. You kept in your heart the strength of the origami plane as he let it fly from his hand. You could even sense that if you turned around now, he would be right there. But you kept looking forward. You couldn't turn around while you were skipping, it kept you tied to the spot. When you were touching the ground, you couldn't muster the courage to take even a single step.

You are afraid.

I know. You are afraid.

That's why I am calling out to you now, calling out to this photo with everything inside me. Step out! More forward! Within you, you have the strength to jump.

That is why I am cheering you on online. If you turn around, you will survive. Breathe in and the air you cannot see will strengthen your wings.

Yes, keep moving! The light which pushes you forward is shining on your back.

Ah, I remember the light. The world became bright all of a sudden. I stopped skipping, planted both feet on the earth and turned my face to the sky.

I squinted in the brightness and put my hand up to my forehead to stop the light getting in my eyes. I realized then that it had been a long time since I'd seen the sun.

All this time the sky had been grey, but now a crack appeared and sunshine came pouring in.

Without meaning to I screwed up my face as I showered in the light.

In the flaring light, the world was coming slowly into color and its warmth was returning. I remember how clear the shadows were. I looked down and saw one had formed at my feet: a strong, black shadow, imitating me. When I spread my arms, it spread its arms, my origami in its hand.

A large shadow crossed the schoolyard. I heard the sound of rotors and looked up to see a Japanese Self-Defence Force helicopter flying overhead, on its way to a more severely hit disaster area to help people in even more distress.

You looked up at the helicopter, then quietly gazed out in front, watching her.

You look back over your shoulder and watch him walking toward you. You see he's holding an origami plane and you know there'll be a future for you. You'll become a pilot. When you grow up, the strength of your wings will take you everywhere so you can help those who are suffering.

You don't know it yet but all your life you'll have a connection with skipping. Your rope will cut through the air over and over, more times than can ever be counted. You'll learn all sorts of skills and perform many times, carving out your rhythm on the earth. You'll participate in tournaments all over the world and skipping will bring you no end of wonderful encounters, meeting people from all sorts of places. You're taking your first step toward that life now.

But wings cannot fly forever. People use the earth's energy to propel themselves through the sky. At some point, their wings must be returned to the earth and their flight must come to an end. Still, you are determined to keep flying, for you are a child of the earth. Every boy and girl — each of us — is a child of the earth.

I'll make you a promise. One day for certain, this skipping rope and I, we will see that child again. I'll seek her with an inexhaustible energy, she who gave me something no one else could. I can travel far now, just as you can.

I can tell you with pride now, as you stand under the cherry tree. I can stretch out my wings and fly forever. Even if I have to do it alone, I'll aim for the horizon and I'll save so many people. My life is in my own hands and I'll land on my feet. I am certain that one day on the other side I'll meet that child, the one who taught me how to fly. I'll not give up until I do.

So, you should get going. Just ahead is where your future begins.

So, go ahead. Your future is in that light.

Yes, I will guarantee it. As long as you are skipping, you will not forget that day.

Yes, you must believe me. As long as you are flying, you will know your future.