

We asked everyone who submitted an entry for permission to post their anonymized entry here.
Each individual submission is copyright the author, and you cannot publish it anywhere without explicit permission from the author.
If you are the author, you cannot publish it anywhere (including putting it up on the internet anywhere else) without explicit permission from the author.
I can help arrange permissions if necessary.

The nine finalists (there were ten, but now one is the winner) were:

002
006
020
028
061
064
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101
150

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide any more information unless you have a legal issue you need to discuss, such as IP usage permission.



The 2020 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize

We are pleased to announce the 2020 Kurodahan Press Translation Prize, awarded for translation excellence of a selected Japanese short story into English. The winning translation is planned to be published 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

Submit your translation by email, using 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/khppprize/2020prize.pdf>

Submitted translations will not be returned, but the translator will retain all rights to the translation. Kurodahan Press will receive only 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

「冬のアブラゼミ」 by 安土 萌 (Azuchi Moe)

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

The story was published in an anthology of strange tales, now unfortunately out of print:

Title: 物語のルミナリエ (異形コレクション No. 48)

Publisher: 光文社文庫

ISBN: 978-4334763442

<https://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4334763448/?tag=kurodahanpres-22>

4. Application Deadline

Translations must be received no later than September 30, 2020, 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 that date.



5. Prize money

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

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

v6 of May 2020

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. Translator's notes will be 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.

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 email address. Other contact information (current mailing address, telephone number, etc.) is optional. 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.docx. 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

Your translation will be judged on its merits as a finished translation, and none of the jurors will ever see any of 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!

冬のアブラゼミ

安土 萌

真冬だというのに、アブラゼミが飛んできた。

雪のちらつくなかを、あの迷っているような不器用な飛び方で、あつちこつち方向転換したあげく、ふいにパツと網戸にとまった。

え、そんな馬鹿な、と思うより先に、わたしはとてもうれしくなった。

わたしはセミが好きだ。とてもとても好きなのだ。

夏の訪れをしらせる、可愛い幼な子のようなニイニイゼミも、哀しいほどにエレガントなヒグラシも、すばしこくて陽気なタレ目のツクツクボウシも好きだけれど、やつぱり、暑い夏にさらに熱いアブラを注ぐような声のアブラゼミが一番好きなのだ。

でも、やつぱり今は、そんな馬鹿な、だ。

こんなに寒いのに。

アンゴラのとっくりセーターを着て、暖房をつけているというのに――。

「おいおい、キミは何者なの？」

わたしはガラス戸を開けて、夏からそのまんまの網戸に顔を近づけた。冷気が雪女の肌みたいにせまつてくる。

わたしの近眼の目とセミの（多分）近眼の目とがしばし見つめあう。やっぱりアブラゼミだ。

きゅつとしまつたお腹が白く粉をふいたようなオスのアブラゼミ。いまにも大音声で鳴きはじめそうな――。

わたしは網戸を少し開け、セミと見つめあつたまま、そろそろと右手をのばす。つかまえた！

手のなかであばれるセミ。小さなモーターで動く扇風機みたいな羽根。その羽根が傷まないようにそつとおさえる指にビクビク伝わつてくる羽根の付け根の力。

わたしは狂喜する。

手のなかに、なにかの目的をとらえたかのように充実する。

「ねえ、変だよ。冬なのにセミがいたよ、ほら」

わたしは思わず、居間でテレビを見ている父の後姿に声をかけた。そして後悔した。

「まだセミなんかつかまえてるのか、いい歳をして――」

「好きなものは、好きなんだから、勝手じゃない！」

わたしはムツとして語気を荒らげる。

父とわたしはすぐこんな調子だった。

そのとき玄関のチャイムが鳴った。

わたしはぶりぶりして、

「そういえば、昔はセミ娘つていつてたな」

と父が思い出したように言うのに背中を向けて玄関へ出た。

母の友人の上原さんが母の傘をもつて立っていた。

「お母さん、具合どう？ これ……」

上原さんは近くのスーパ－の袋に入つたミカンを上がり框に降ろしながら言った。

「ちよつと近くまできたから」

「あ、どうもすみません。母は――」

「傘、早く返さなくちゃと思つてただけだね――」

セミがひとあばれして指から逃れかけたので、両手で籠のようにしてとじこめた。セミの足がちくちくと動きまわり、その痛痒さが手のなかの秘密の快感のようだ。

「あら、いつでもよかつたのに……母は長期入院なんです」

「まあ、そうなの。大変ねえ」

セミが小型モーターを起動させ、羽根がバサバサと手のなかをくすぐる。

「ねえ、上原さん。冬なのにセミがいたんです。変でしょう？」

「え、そうなの？ 本当？ でもあたし、虫は苦手だから——」

上原さんはわたしの合わせた手の籠を不安気に見ながら、

「じゃ、ちよつと寄つただけだから。お母さんによろしくね」と言つて、帰つてしまった。

わたしはだれかにセミのことを話したかった。こんな寒い季節のなかで生きている不思議さを——。花ならば狂い咲きか。セミの生命力の進化なのだろうか。冬とはいえ、昔よりも暖かくなつたといわれる昨今、越冬する昆虫も増えているという。異常な気象のせいで、突然変異のようなことが起きたのだろうか。それとも、なにかのはずみで、小さなからだに——あの暑い夏を一身に負つて、反対側の、こちら側の季節へと迷いこんできたとでもいうのだろうか。わたしは沢地君に話してみることにした。

沢地君はずつと以前、飲み会で、

「うん、アブラゼミね。あいつはいい奴なんだ。なかなかいい奴なんだ。あいつには野心があるんだな」

と、水割りを空けながら言つたのだ。その言い方が気に入つて、だから沢地君のことも少し気に入つていたのだ。

わたしはセミをセーターの袖口にそつと差し入れておいて、ケータイを開いた。アドレス帳をさがすと、沢地君の名前がまだあつた。

発信音が鳴つて沢地君とつながる。

「……はい……」

わたしは心を落ちつかせながら、さり気なく、

「お久しぶり。ごめんね、突然電話して——」

「あ……もしかして君？ えー、しばらくだね」

わたしだとすぐにわかつてくれたらしい。

「あのねえ、早速だよね、セミがいたのよ。冬なのに。ねえ、変でしょう？」

「え……セミ？ いまごろ？ セミい？ えー、ゴキじゃないの」

やだ、もう、沢地君、やめてよ。

「ちつがうわよ。セミよ、アブラゼミ。不思議でしょう？ ねえ、どう思う？ 沢地君なら、そういうの詳しいと思つて——」

ケータイの向こう側に、とりかえしのつかない深い沈黙のときが流れ、そして広がつてゆくようだった。

沢地君はつぶやくような声になつて言つた。

「……不思議なことはいっぱいあるよ」

「……え？」

「不思議なことなんて、この世にはいっぱいあるよ。君がいま、僕に電話をくれたことだつて

……」

「答えになってないよ」

なんだか照れかくしのようなことを言ってみた。

「答え……か。そんなの僕にはわからないな。そんなのあるのかな。でもさあ、不思議なことは救いなんだよ。僕らにとつても、それに多分、世界にとつても——」

セミが袖口から顔を出した。

そろそろ逃がしてやらなければならない。あまりいつまでも人の手に留めておくと、セミは弱ってしまうのだ。とはいえ、暖かい室内と、雪のちらつく外に放すのと、どちらがセミのためになるのか、よくわからないのだが。

わたしは沢地君と、いつかまた飲み会をやろうと約束して電話を切った。

玄関を出ると、庭の柿の木の方へ行った。

柿の木は葉をすっかり落として、骨ばった枝々が灰色の空をわしづかみにしている。

その、溝のような筋と輝^{ひかり}とおおわれた幹にセミをそつととまらせた。セミはなにか考えごとをしているかのように、ときどき躊躇^{ちゅうちよ}しながらゆるゆると幹を登りはじめた。

見上げてみると、雪は果てしない高みから降ってくるかのようにだった。しだいにはげしく、わたしの顔にも冷たい結晶が当たってはとけて、いくすじにもなつて流れる。

いつしかセミの姿は柿の木の梢の、こわばつて迷路のようなシルエットのどこかに消えてし

まった。

わたしのからだはすっかり冷えきり、それなのに、セミをとらえていた両手はなぜか、いつまでも熱く、夏のように汗ばんでいた。そういえばセミはオスなのに、少しも鳴かなかつたな……と、ふと思った。

玄関にもどると、母の傘とミカンの袋が置いてあった。居間のテレビはつけっぱなしになっていた、父の姿はすでない。

わたしはテレビのスイッチを切り、ミカンの袋をいつものように台所のテーブルの上へ持っていた。

父は他界してすでに久しく、上原さんも二年前に亡くなっているはずだった。そして、沢地君も……。

ケータイには沢地君への発信履歴が残っていた。けれど、そこにもう一度かけなおしてみる勇氣はわたしにはない……。

雪が積もってきたのか、だれもない家のなかはしめつけられるような静寂に満たされてゆく。

あまりの静けさに、わたしは耳鳴りがしてきた。

それはまるで、遠い遠い夏の日の、アブラゼミの鳴き声のようだった。

A Brown Cicada in Winter

by Moe Azuchi

Here we are in the middle of winter and yet a brown cicada flew over.

Amidst a light snowfall, it changes direction this way and that way, flying around in that awkward manner as if lost and ultimately plopped onto the screen door.

Before I could realize how inconceivable this was, my first reaction was to be filled with joy.

I love cicadas. I love them a lot.

I love the Kempfer cicadas that are like adorable little infants ushering in the summer, the refreshingly elegant evening cicadas, and the nimble Walker's cicadas with their cheerful, drooping eyes. But the ones I love the most are the brown cicadas with their chirping that's like hot brown oil being added to an already hot summer.

But now that I think about it, this really is inconceivable.

It's way too cold.

I'm sitting here wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and have the heater turned on...

"Hold on a second. Just what are you exactly?"

I opened the glass door and pressed my face against the screen door that hadn't been opened since summer. Cold air like that's emanating from some sort of snow demon surges towards me.

Both my nearsighted eyes and the nearsighted eyes of the cicada (it's probably a cicada anyway) stare at each other for a while.

I was right. It is a brown cicada.

A male brown cicada with white powder-like spots on its firm stomach. A cicada that seems like it could start chirping loudly at any moment...

I open the screen door slightly and slowly extend my right hand towards it while retaining eye contact.

Gotcha!

The cicada squirms wildly within my hand. Its wings are like an electric fan powered by a small motor. I can feel the power exerted by the base of the wings through my fingers gently holding the cicada in place so as not to damage those wings.

I'm in ecstasy.

I'm filled with a sense of fulfillment as if I have some sort of attained goal wrapped in the palm of my hand.

"Hey, this is bizarre. I found a cicada even though it's winter. Look."

I impulsively called out from behind to my father who was watching television in the living room — and regretted it.

"Are you still catching cicadas? You're not a kid anymore."

"That's because I like them! What's wrong if want to catch them!?"

I became morose and raised my voice.

My father and I are quick to get into these kinds of disputes.

It was at that moment when the front doorbell rang.

I went to answer the door in a huff and turned my back on my father as he began to reminisce and said, "That reminds me — they used to call you cicada girl didn't they?"

Standing at the entrance to the house and carrying my mother's umbrella was her friend, Ms. Uehara.

"How is your mother doing? Here, this is for you," she said as she placed on the threshold mandarin oranges crammed into a bag from a nearby supermarket.

"I happened to be nearby so I decided to pay a visit."

"Oh. Thank you so much. My mother is..."

"I was thinking that I should hurry and return this umbrella."

The cicada was struggling and nearly escaped from my fingers, so I used both of my hands as cage in which to trap it. The cicada's legs poked at me as it moved around, and that slight discomfort was like a feeling of pleasure secretly kept within my hands.

“Oh. You could have come over whenever you felt like it. My mother will be hospitalized for a long while.”

“Oh, is that so? It must be difficult.”

The cicada turned on its miniature motor, and its wings flapped up and down tickling the insides of my hands.

“You know what, Ms. Uehara? It’s winter right now but I found a cicada. Isn’t that weird?”

“You did? Really? I don’t really like bugs though...”

Ms. Uehara looked uneasily at my clasped hands which formed a cage as she said, “Well, I was just dropping by. Give my regards to your mother,” and left.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada — about the marvel of it staying alive during such a cold season. If it were a flower, I suppose it would be considered “blooming out of season.” I wonder if this vitality is the result of some evolution in cicadas. Although it may be winter, they’ve been saying recently that it’s gotten warmer than it used to be and that there are an increasing number of insects that survive the winter. I wonder if some sort of mutation occurred due to abnormal weather conditions. Or could it possibly be that by some strange coincidence, this cicada, tiny as it is, took on the brunt of the hot summer and wound up straying into the opposite season — the winter season?

I decided to try talking with Sawachi about the matter.

At a drinking party a long time ago, Sawachi once said while emptying a glass of watered-down alcohol, “Yeah, brown cicadas. Those guys are great. They really are great. They’ve got ambition.” I liked the way he worded that and that’s why I kind of like Sawachi as well.

I gently placed the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and opened up my cellphone. Looking through the list of contacts, I found that Sawachi’s name was still registered.

The dial tone sounded and I was connected to Sawaguchi.

“...Hello...?”

I calmed my nerves and casually said, “It’s been a while. Sorry for calling you so suddenly.”

“Ah...is this...? Yeah, it’s been a long time.”

Happily enough, he seemed to recognize me instantly.

“I’ll get right to the point, but the thing is, I found a cicada. In mid-winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Huh...? A cicada? Around this time of the year? A cicada? I don’t know about that. It was probably a cockroach.”

“Oh, yuck. Sawachi, don’t say that,” I thought to myself.

“It’s not a cockroach. It’s a cicada. A brown cicada. Isn’t that strange? What do you think? I figured you’d be knowledgeable about this sort of thing.”

An unsalvageable moment of deep silence took place on the other end of the line and it seemed to be lengthening.

Sawachi then spoke in a low voice.

“...There are lots of strange things.”

“...Huh?”

“There are a lot of of strange things in this world. Even the fact that you’re calling me right now...”

“That doesn’t answer the question.”

It was an attempt at saying something to hide my embarrassment.

“You’re looking for...an answer, huh? I can’t say I have an answer. I wonder if there even is one. But you know, strange things are our salvation — for us and probably for the entire world too.”

The cicada’s face popped out from the cuff of my sweater.

I’ll have to set it free pretty soon. If a cicada is kept inside a person’s hand for too long, it will grow weak. Even so, I’m not really sure if being inside a warm room or being released outside where it’s snowing will be better for a cicada though.

I made a promise with Sawachi to go to another drinking party sometime and hung up the phone.

I went out the front door and towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

The leaves of the persimmon tree had all fallen away, and the scraggy branches looked as if they were the grasping the gray sky. I gently placed the cicada on the tree trunk, which was covered with

grooves and cracks. The cicada began to slowly climb the trunk, sometimes hesitating as if it were contemplating something.

I looked up and it seemed as if the snow was falling from someplace infinitely high in the sky. Over time, cold crystals would collide powerfully into my face only to melt again and again and form numerous flowing streaks of water.

At some point, the cicada disappeared into the rigid, maze-like silhouette of the treetop.

My body had become utterly frigid, and yet for some reason, my hands, which had captured the cicada, continued to feel warm and were sweating as if it were summer. It suddenly dawned on me that even though the cicada was a male, it didn't chirp even once.

I went back to the doorway and there stood my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarin oranges. The television in the living room was left on, and my father was no longer anywhere to be seen.

I turned off the television and placed the bag of mandarin oranges on the table in kitchen as I always do.

It's been quite some time now since my father passed away, and Ms. Uehara died two years ago as well. The same goes for Sawachi...

The record of my phone call to Sawachi remains on my cell phone. However, I don't have the courage to try and call him back again...

Perhaps it's because the snow might have piled up, but a stifling silence fills the empty house.

It's so quiet that my ears began to ring.

Very much like the chirping of a brown cicada from a summer day long, long ago.

The Winter Cicada by Azuchi Moe

A large brown cicada came flying up, despite it being midwinter.

After much clumsy wandering through the fluttering snow, flying about here and there, it finally came to rest upon the screen door. Before disbelief came happiness.

I liked cicadas. I really, really liked them. I liked the small, cute, and childlike kempfer cicadas that announce the coming of Summer, the sorrowfully elegant evening cicadas, and even the nimble and spry, droopy-eyed Walker's cicadas. Above them all, though, I liked the large brown cicadas and their cries like flowing, brown oil, sizzling in the Summer heat, the most.

Still, I couldn't believe it. It was so cold outside. I was wearing an angora, turtleneck sweater with the heater on. Yet still...

"Hey now, who do you think you are?"

I opened the glass door and brought my face close to the screen that had been there since Summer. A chill like that of the skin of a snow fairy assailed me. For a moment, our, I assume, mutually nearsighted eyes met.

It really was a large brown cicada. A male, with a pinched-in, white-like-snow abdomen, looking like it would start wailing at any moment. I opened the screen door slightly and carefully stretched out my right hand while maintaining eye contact.

Got it!

It struggled in my hand. I felt a twitching at the base of its fan blade wings in my gentle fingers and paid mind not to harm them. I was beside myself with joy. A sense of fulfillment permeated within me, as if I had grasped some kind of purpose.

"Hey, how weird is this? It's Winter, but there was a cicada. Look."

Without thinking, I spoke to my father's back as he watched the television in the living room, then regretted it.

"You're still catching those things at your age?"

"Who cares? I like what I like!"

I raised my voice indignantly. We always got like this.

Just then, the doorbell rang as I huffed.

"Oh yeah, they did used to call you 'Cicada Girl' before, didn't they?"

He sounded nostalgic, his back to me on his way out the front door. There stood my mother's friend, Uehara, holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's the wife doing? I brought a little something."

She set a bag from a nearby supermarket containing oranges on the doorstep inside.

"I was just in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd drop by."

"Oh, thank you. She's..."

"I figured it'd be better to return her umbrella sooner rather than later, you know?"

The cicada jerked around and nearly escaped my fingers, so I caged it up in my hands, the prickling of its scampering legs a secret pleasure for me alone.

"Oh, you could've done that whenever... She's been hospitalized, you see."

"Oh my, really? That's awful."

The cicada switched on its fan blades and tickled my hands.

"Hey, Uehara, it's winter, but I found a cicada. Isn't that weird?"

"Did you? Really? I'm not so good with bugs, though, so..."

She looked at my cupped hands anxiously.

"Well, I really was just stopping by, so tell her I said hello."

With that, she left.

I wanted to talk about cicadas with someone, about the mysteries of life in a season as cold as this. I suppose it was like a flower out of bloom. Perhaps it was an evolution in the cicada's vitality. They say more and more insects are starting to overwinter with how warm it's gotten recently. Maybe it was something like a spontaneous mutation due to the abnormal weather. Or maybe, by some impetus, it

took the sweltering Summer upon its tiny body and stumbled astray into the opposite season, *this* season.

I decided to try talking with Sawachi. We were at a drinking party together once, a long, long time ago.

“Large brown cicadas, eh? Yeah, they’re nice, real nice. They got ambition, alright.”

He spoke while downing his watered-down alcohol. I liked the way he talked, so I liked Sawachi, himself, a little, too.

I delicately put the cicada in my sleeve, opened my phone, and searched for his number. It was still there. After a few rings, it connected.

“...Hello...?”

I calmed myself and played it cool.

“It’s been a while. Sorry for calling you out of nowhere.”

“Oh... It’s you? Yeah, it sure has.”

He seemed to quickly recognize me.

“So hey, getting right to it, I found a cicada. In the Winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Uh... A cicada? Now? A *cicada*? You sure it wasn’t a cockroach?”

Come on, Sawachi, don’t be like that.

“Positive! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada. Isn’t that mysterious? What do you think? I thought you’d know a lot about stuff like this.”

An irreparably deep silence swelled on his end. His voice became a whisper.

“...Lots of things are mysterious.”

“...Huh?”

“This world is full of mysteries. Like you calling me right now...”

“That’s not an answer.”

I tried to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh? I don’t really have one. I’m not even sure that’s possible. But listen, mysteries are comfort. For us and, most likely, the whole world.”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve. I had to let it go soon. Cicadas weakened the longer you held them in your hand. Between the warm house and the snowy outdoors, though, I wasn’t sure which would be better for it.

I promised Sawachi we would go drinking again some day, then hung up. After going out the front door, I headed towards the persimmon tree in the yard. Its bony branches, completely free of all leaves, gripped the gray sky. I gently placed the cicada on the fissured trunk, crinkled into little ditches, and it started to make its way up while occasionally hesitating, as if lost in thought.

Snow fell down from a seemingly endless height. The cold crystals hit my face as it grew gradually more intense, then melted into flowing streaks. At some point, the cicada vanished into the treetop’s rigid, labyrinthian silhouette.

Although the cold pierced my body, the hands I had held the cicada in, for some reason, stayed hot and sweaty like the Summer. I suddenly realized that, despite it being a male, the cicada never once cried.

I returned to the entry hall where my mother’s umbrella and the oranges were. In the living room where the television was left on, my father was not. I switched it off and brought the oranges to the table in the kitchen like always.

My father was long departed and Uehara should have passed two years ago. Sawachi, as well...

His name still appeared in my call history, but I didn’t have the courage to try it again.

The empty house filled with a stifling stillness, as if piled with snow. My ears rang in the deafening silence. They rang with the cries of the large brown cicadas on a far off Summer day.

A Brown Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the dead of winter, a large brown *abura-zemi* cicada came flying by.

The brown cicada, after flying this way and that in its clumsy, lost sort of way in the flurries of snow, then landed unexpectedly right on our screen door.

Before I could even think of how absurd it was, I was overjoyed.

Cicadas are my thing. I mean, I really, really like them.

I love the adorable and childlike shrill-crying *nii-nii-zemi* cicadas that herald the beginning of summer, the *higurashi* evening cicadas with their elegant melancholy, and the droopy-eyed *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* cicadas that cheerfully nip about. But my absolute favorite is without a doubt, the brown *abura-zemi* cicada whose cries only fuel the blazing fires of the hot summer even more.

But for right now, my only thought it how absurd this is.

I mean, it's freezing outside.

I'm wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and the heat is on for goodness' sake.

"Just what are you, little guy?"

I opened the sliding glass door and pressed my face to the screen door, still up from the summertime. The cold air presses down on me like the skin of the Snow Woman of legend.

My near-sighted eyes and the (probably) near-sighted eyes of the cicada regard each other for a good while.

Yep, that's a brown *abura-zemi* cicada alright.

A male brown *abura-zemi* cicada with a tight, compact belly that looks like it's been dusted with white powder, like it might cry out in a mighty and powerful voice at any moment—

I open the screen door a tiny bit, and, with my eyes still locked with the cicada, slowly reach out with my right hand.

Gotcha!

The brown *abura-zemi* cicada struggles in my hand. Its wings like a fan moved by a small motor. The strength of the base of its wings makes itself known in beats which travel to my fingers that lightly hold the cicada so as not to harm its wings.

I am delirious with joy.

I feel so fulfilled, as if I've caught some kind of aspiration in the palm of my hand.

"Hey, it's so weird—there's a cicada here in the middle of winter, look!"

I called without thinking to my father who was watching TV in the living room, his back turned to me.

"You still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like what I like, leave me alone!"

I say roughly, annoyed.

This always happens with me and my dad.

The doorbell rang then in the entryway.

I was still fuming when my dad said, "Oh hey, they used to call you cicada girl when you were younger," as if it had suddenly come back to him. Even still, I turned my back on him and went to get the door.

There stood my mother's friend, Ms. Uehara, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mom doing? Here..."

She said, placing a local grocery bag full of mikan oranges down on the small step in the entryway, "I was in the neighborhood, so here I am."

"Oh, thank you. She's—"

"I thought I should get her umbrella back to her—"

The cicada had a fit in my hand and almost slipped from my fingers, so I used my hands to make a cage and keep it trapped. Its legs scratched at my palms as they flicked about, the itchy pricking like the thrill of a secret in my hands.

“Oh you didn’t have to rush...My mom’s been hospitalized for the long run.”

“My, is that so? That must be so hard.”

The cicada revved up its small motor of a body, its flapping wings tickling my hand.

“Hey, Ms. Uehara. I found a cicada, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Did you now? Really? Oh, but I’m not the biggest fan of bugs so—”

Peering nervously at the cage of my hands, she said, “Well, I just thought I’d stop by. Give my regards to your mom,” and left.

I wanted to tell someone about my cicada. About how strange that it was alive in this freezing cold season. It’s like a flower exploding into bloom. Maybe it’s a sign of cicada evolution. It might be winter but they say it’s warmer now than it used to be in the past and that more and more bugs make it through the winter. Maybe climate abnormalities caused some kind of mutation to occur. Or maybe, through some strange chance, and to this tiny creature—maybe it’s possible that having suffered the hot summer, this cicada somehow wandered to the other side, to this side of the season. I decided that I would tell Kiwachi.

When we were out drinking, Kiwachi had once said, “Ah yes, the brown *abura-zemi* cicada. Now that’s a good cicada, I mean, a really good cicada. Got ambition, that one,” as he downed his drink. I liked the way he said that, and that’s why I kind of liked him.

I gently pushed the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my mobile phone. Looking through the contact list, I found Kiwachi’s name.

The phone rings and Kiwachi is on the line.

“...Hello...”

I try to calm my nerves, casually opening with, “Hey, long time no see. Sorry for calling out of the blue like this—”

“Wait...is that you? Oh wow, yeah, it’s been awhile.”

It looks like he knew it was me almost instantly.

“Hey um, I’ll get right down to it: there was a cicada. In the middle of winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“What...? A cicada? Now? An actual cicada? I dunno, you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Come on now, Kiwachi, don’t be silly.

“I’m sure! It’s a cicada, a brown *abura-zemi* cicada. It’s so strange, right? What do you think? I thought you might know something about it since you know about cicadas—”

On the other side of the line, there was a length of profound and irreparable silence that began to spread and permeate.

“...strange things are all around us,” said Kiwachi in a voice like a whisper.

“...wha—”

“The world is full of strange things. I mean, even you calling me...”

“That’s not an answer,” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer...huh. I don’t know anything about answers. I wonder if they even exist. But you know, strange things are salvation. For me, and probably for the whole world—” The cicada peeked its head out from my sleeve.

I should probably let the cicada go soon. Cicadas get weak when they’re in human hands for too long. That said, not sure which is better for the little guy: the warm indoors or releasing him into the snow outside.

I made plans to go out drinking with Kiwachi again sometime and hung up the phone.

Through the front door, I made my way to the persimmon tree in the yard. The leaves had completely fallen and the bony branches clawed their way into the gray skies. It was on the trunk of that tree, with its trench-like gnarls and cracks, that I gently placed the cicada. It began to climb, hesitating from time to time as if in thought as it wound its way upwards.

Looking up, it was like the snow was falling from unfathomable heights above. The snow came down harder, cold crystals melting as they hit my face, running down it in so many thin streams.

Before I realized it, the cicada had vanished somewhere within the stiffened, maze-like silhouette that was the top of the persimmon tree. My body was frozen to the core, and yet, somehow, my hands

that held the cicada were left hot and sweaty as the summertime. Come to think of it, it occurred to me that even though the cicada was male, it never cried out even a little.

When I return to the entryway, my mother's umbrella and a bag of mikan oranges are sitting there. The TV has been left on, and my dad is already nowhere in sight.

I turn the TV off and put the bag of mikan oranges on the table in the kitchen like always.

It's already been ages since my dad passed, and Ms. Uehara, I thought she died two years ago. And Kiwachi too...

There's record of my phone call to Kiwachi in my mobile, but I don't have the courage in me to call him again.

Maybe the snow has started to pile up; a suffocating silence slowly fills my house, devoid of all people.

It's so quiet that my ears begin to ring.

The sound is like the cries of a brown *abura-zemi* cicada from a summer's day long, long ago.

The Cicada in Winter
By: Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the dead of winter, a large brown cicada flew by.

Amongst the fluttering of the snow, the cicada flew in its awkward manner as if lost. It flew here and there, changing directions as it went, before stopping right on the screen door.

Before I even had the chance to think 'impossible,' I felt very happy.

I like cicadas. I really really like cicadas.

I like the Kempfer cicada, with its appearance akin to that of an adorable toddler, informing us of summer's arrival; the evening cicada, elegant to the point of tears; the fast and cheery last-summer cicada, with its droopy eyes. However, my favourite is still the large brown cicada, whose cry enhances the summer heat like a splash of hot oil.

But, right now, I can really only think 'impossible.'

It's freezing.

I'm even wearing an angora turtleneck, with my heater turned on...

"Hey, there. Who are you?"

I opened the glass door and moved my face close to the screen door, which had never been touched since summer. The cold air, like the skin of the yuki-onna snow demon, hit my face.

With my near-sighted eyes, I gazed into the (probably) near-sighted eyes of the cicada for a little while.

It really is a large brown cicada.

It's a male cicada - apparent from the white specks dusting its tight stomach like powder. A cicada that looks seconds away from crying out at max volume...

I opened the screen door slightly, my eyes still meeting the cicada's, and reached out slowly with my right hand.

Caught it!

The cicada started to struggle in my hand. Its wings buzzed like the movement of an electric fan, as if powered by a small motor. I carefully placed my fingers at the base of the wings so as not to injure them, and felt beneath my skin its powerful twitching.

I was jubilant.

I felt a sense of completion, as if I held in my hands a goal of some kind.

"Hey, it's so strange. There's a cicada, even though it's winter. Look."

Without thinking, I spoke to the back of my father's head, while he was in the middle of watching television in the living room. But I regretted it.

"You're still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like the things that I like, and there's nothing wrong with that!"

My tone became sharp with my anger.

This always happened between my father and I.

At that moment, I heard the doorbell ring.

I angrily walked towards the foyer, hearing my father reminisce behind me, "Now that I think about it, I used to call you cicada girl, didn't I?"

My mother's friend Uehara-san was standing at the door, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mom doing? Here," Uehara-san placed a bag full of oranges from the nearby supermarket on the entranceway, "I was in the neighborhood."

"Oh, thank you very much. My mother is -"

"I thought, I have to hurry up and return the umbrella."

The cicada struggled in my hand, almost escaping from between my fingers, so I used my two hands to cage it in. The legs of the cicada moved, brushing against my skin, and the ticklish pain felt like a secret pleasure.

"Ah, you really could've returned it at any time. My mother's in long-term care at the

hospital.”

“Oh really? It must be hard.”

The cicada started up its miniature motor, and the frantic fluttering of the wings tickled my hands.

“Uehara-san, I found a cicada even though it’s winter. Isn’t it strange?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? But I’m not particularly a fan of insects...” Uehara-san looked nervously at the cage of my hands. “Well then, I was just dropping by. Please give your mother my regards.” And with that, she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. The absurd oddness of it living in the midst of such a cold season. If it were a flower, we could say that it bloomed out of season. Perhaps it’s a result of evolution, increasing the cicada’s vitality. In these times of global warming, with the Earth’s climate shifting ever warmer compared to previous generations, there’ve been stories of more insects passing the winter. Has something like mutation occurred because of the odd climate? Or could it be, by mere chance, the cicada’s small body received that hot summer heat and lost its way, wandering into the opposite side? The side of “this” season?

I decided to talk about it with Sawachi-kun. A long time ago, while we were drinking together, Sawachi-kun said, “Ah, the large brown cicada. That’s a good guy. A pretty good guy. They have ambition,” while emptying his glass of whiskey and water. I liked the way he talked about the cicada, and in turn, I kind of liked Sawachi-kun.

After carefully putting the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater, I opened my cellphone. I still had Sawachi-kun’s name in my contact list.

The ringtone sounded and Sawachi-kun picked up. “...Hello?”

I calmed down my beating heart and as casually as I could, said, “Long time no talk. Sorry about the sudden phone call.”

“Oh, is that you? Yeah, it’s been a while.”

He seemed to have immediately known it was me.

“Sorry to cut to the chase, but guess what? I found a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t it strange?”

“Huh? A cicada? At this time of year? A cicada, of all things? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Oh, stop joking around, Sawachi-kun.

“It’s not a cockroach! It’s a cicada. A large brown cicada, to be precise. Isn’t it odd? Hey, what do you think? I thought you’re pretty familiar with these types of things.”

On the other side of the cellphone, I could hear a deep and irretrievable silence, which seemed to stretch on for a long time.

In a soft murmur, Sawachi-kun said, “There are a lot of odd things in the world.”

“Hm?”

“Oddities aren’t as rare as you think in this world. Even the fact that you’re talking to me over the phone right now...”

“That’s not an answer.”

I said it as if trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh. I don’t know it. If there even is one. But you know, odd things can be a salvation. For us, and probably, for the world.”

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve.

I had to let it go soon. Cicadas become weaker the longer they stay in a person’s hand. Though, between keeping it in the warm interior of the house and releasing it back into the snowy outdoors, there was no telling which one is better for the cicada.

After promising Sawachi-kun that we would go drinking again one day, I hung up the phone.

Leaving the foyer, I went to the persimmon tree in the yard.

The persimmon tree’s leaves have all fallen, its boney branches grasping the grey sky. I gently let the cicada down on the trunk of the tree, which was covered by deep grooves of veins and

sinew. As if deep in thought, the cicada slowly climbed up the trunk, pausing occasionally as if in hesitation.

As I looked up at the cicada, the snow continued to fall, seemingly from a limitless height. The longer I stood, the stronger it fell, the icy crystals hitting my face and melting, flowing down in rivulets.

Before I knew it, the cicada disappeared somewhere into maze-like silhouette of the persimmon tree's treetop.

My body was freezing cold, and yet, my hands that held the cicada remained hot and sweaty, as if it were summer. Now that I think about it, the cicada didn't cry once, even though it was a male.

I returned to the foyer and saw my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges still there. The television in the living room was still on, but my father was already gone.

I turned off the television and placed the bag of oranges in its usual spot on the kitchen table.

It's been a long time since my father passed, and Uehara-san was supposed to have passed two years ago as well. And Sawachi-kun's also...

My call to Sawachi-kun was still in my call history. But I didn't have the courage to try calling that number again...

Perhaps due to the accumulation of the snow, the empty house was filled with a silence that seemed to tighten around me.

The quiet was so piercing that I could hear a buzzing in my ear.

A buzzing reminiscent of the cry of the cicada, on that far away summer day.

The Large Brown Cicada in Winter
Azuchi Moe

It was right in the middle of winter. Yet, a large brown cicada was flying towards me.

Amidst the lightly falling snow, the cicada flew clumsily, as if lost. Eventually, the cicada came to a sudden halt on the insect screen.

Impossible. But before I realized it, I was absolutely delighted.

I love cicadas. Really, really love cicadas.

I love the adorable, childlike Kaempfer cicada that announces the arrival of summer, the devastatingly beautiful evening cicadas, the quick and cheerful droopy-eyed cicadas, but above all, I love the large brown cicadas whose cries remind me of sizzling oil on a pan during the hot summer.

However, it should not have been possible.

Not in this freezing weather.

I was wearing my angora turtleneck sweater, and the heater was on. Yet, what was the large brown cicada doing here in front of me?

‘Are you serious? What in the world are you?’ I asked the cicada as I slid open the glass window and brought my face closer to the insect screen that had been left untouched since summer. I shuddered, feeling as if I had just been caressed by a snow spirit.

I stared into the cicada’s (probably) short-sighted eyes with my own, and we peered at one another for a while.

I was right. In front of me, was a large brown cicada indeed.

It was a male, I could tell, from its tight stomach that was dusted with what looked like white power. The cicada seemed like it would begin buzzing at any moment.

I opened the insect screen slightly, not letting the cicada out of my sight even for a moment, and carefully reached out my right hand.

Got you!

The cicada struggled in my hands. Its wings buzzing like a fan powered by a small motor. I relaxed my grip to ensure that I did not damage its precious wings, but felt the movements of the gentle, yet firmly attached wings against my fingers.

I was ecstatic.

Then, in my hand, it began to move excitedly as if it had gained some sort of motive.

‘Look, it’s so strange. It’s winter yet I found a cicada. See?’ I said thoughtlessly out loud, to my father’s back, as he watched the television in the living room. And I regretted it.

‘You’re still playing with cicadas? Don’t you think you’re a bit too old for that?’

‘*Let me be!*’ I spat back, harshly.

My conversations with Father always ended up like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

I huffed, turning my back to him and headed towards the entrance as my father added, ‘I used to call you my cicada girl, didn’t I.’

At the entrance I saw Mrs Uehara, Mother’s friend, standing there, holding my mother’s umbrella.

‘How is your mother doing? This...’ Mrs Uehara said while letting down a bag of oranges from the nearby supermarket down in front of her.

‘I was in the area so...’

‘Thank you but I’m so sorry. Mother is still...’

‘I thought I should return the umbrella soon,’ she interrupted before I could finish my sentence.

The cicada struggled and almost escaped, so I caged it in both of my hands. I felt it twitching around in my hands, and the prickling sensation in my palms felt ever so pleasant.

‘Oh, you didn’t have to hurry... Mother has been hospitalized for a while now.’

‘I see... it must be hard on you.’

The cicada started moving its tiny motors again, tickling my palms with its wings.

‘Say, Mrs Uehara, I found a cicada, in this weather. Isn’t it strange?’

‘Oh? You did, didn’t you? But I’m not really a fan of insects so,’ Mrs Uehara said, glancing uneasily at my clasped hands, before continuing, ‘Okay, that’s all I dropped by for. Send my regards to your mother please,’ and left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. I wanted to share with them the wonder of finding a cicada in this cold winter. Maybe it was like flowers blooming off-season. Maybe the life force of the cicadas was getting stronger. Despite it being winter, it was warmer than the typical winters we had been experiencing and the number of insects that were hibernating had increased. Maybe it was because of the strange weather, that many strange variations were occurring. Or maybe, with some momentum, in that small body contained the heat of summer from *that side*, and the cicada found itself lost in the winter on *this side*.

I decided to speak to Sawachi.

Long ago, when Sawachi and I were at a get-together, he had said ‘Yup, large brown cicadas. They’re good guys. Really good guys. They have ambition,’ while mixing his alcohol. I was intrigued by his words, which eventually resulted in me taking a liking to Sawachi himself.

I gently urged the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater. Flipping my phone open, I found Sawachi’s name in my contact list.

The phone rang for a while before connecting to Sawachi.

‘... Hello?’

I tried to calm myself down, before nonchalantly asking, ‘Hi, long time no talk. Sorry, this call came out of nowhere.’

‘Oh... is that you? It has been a while,’ Sawachi seemed to recognise me immediately.

‘Yeah, I know this is kind of sudden, but I found a cicada. In this winter. Don’t you think it’s strange?’

‘Huh...cicada? At this time? Are you sure it’s not a roach?’

Gosh Sawachi, why did you have to say that.

‘Not a cockroach, a cicada. A large brown cicada to be exact. Isn’t it strange? What do you think? Sawachi, you’re pretty knowledgeable about these things, aren’t you?’

On the *other side* of the line, a long silence passed. The moment seemed to last forever.

‘There are lots of strange things,’ Sawachi replied in a forced tone.

‘What...?’

‘There are plenty of strange things in this world. Your call to me now is one of them.’

‘You’re not giving me an answer...’ I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

‘Answer huh... I wouldn’t know. I wonder if there even is an answer. But these strange things, they might be our salvation. For us, and probably for the world too.’

The cicada peeked out from my sleeve.

I had to let it go soon. If it stayed in my hand for too long, it would weaken. Nonetheless, I did not know if it was better to let the cicada stay in the warm room or let it roam outside in the cold snow.

I cut the call with Sawachi after promising to meet up someday.

I went outside, approaching the persimmon tree in the yard.

The persimmon tree’s leaves had all fallen, and its bony branches had a seemingly tight hold on the gray skies above.

I gently released the cicada, resting it on the trunk of the persimmon tree, which was covered in groove-like streaks and wrinkles. The cicada seemed to be thinking of something, climbing the trunk and stopping occasionally as if hesitating.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from far, far away. Gradually becoming harsher, the icy crystals fell gently on my face but melted immediately afterwards, the melted ice leaving streaks as it flowed.

Before I realized, the cicada had moved onto the persimmon tree’s twig, its stiff and maze-like silhouette disappearing.

My body was chilled to the bone. Yet, for some reason, the hands that had held the cicada were still warm and sweaty as if it were summer. Come to think of it, the cicada was male, yet it didn’t cry at

all, I thought to myself.

When I returned to the entrance, Mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were still there.

The television in the living room was still on, but Father was nowhere to be seen.

I switched the television off, bringing the bag of oranges to the dining table in the kitchen as I always do.

It had already been some time since Father had passed away, and Mrs Uehara had supposedly passed on two years ago. Sawachi too...

The call log with Sawachi was still in my phone. However, I did not have the courage to call him again.

Maybe it was because the snow was piling up, but the silence in the empty house felt suffocating.

It was too quiet, and my ears started to ring.

It sounded as if, a large brown cicada was crying, somewhere in the summer far, far away.

Large Brown Cicada in Winter

by Moe Azuchi

Although it is midwinter, a large brown cicada flew in.
That awkward way of flying, as if it was lost in the wavering snow. After changing direction here and there, it suddenly came to rest on the window screen.
I was so excited before I thought, "What a joke!"
I like cicadas. Yes, I do like them very much.
I like a sort of adorable baby *Platypleura kaempferi* that tells about the coming of summer, a sadly elegant *higurashi*, a fast-moving and lively *Meimuna opalifera* with its drooping eyes, but after all, my favourite is the large brown cicada with a sound like pouring hot oil in the heat of summer.
But I just can't believe it anyway!
And it's so cold.
Even though I wore my Angora turtleneck sweater and turned on the heater...
„Hey, what are you?"
I opened the glass door and put my face near the window screen that was left untouched from the summer. The chill approached me like the skin of *yuki-onna*, a spirit of the snow woman.
My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) myopic eyes often gazed at each other.
As I expected, it was a large brown cicada.
A male brown cicada with a tight abdomen that looked as if it had wiped the white powder away. It was about to chirp loudly at any moment...
I slightly opened the window screen and, exchanging looks with the cicada, gradually reached out with my right hand.
I caught it!
A struggling cicada in my hand. Its wings were like a fan, powered by a small motor. The power of the wing roots transmitted with small vibrations through my fingers that softly suppressed the wings so as not to damage them.
I was overjoyed.
I felt satisfied as if I had caught a goal in my hand.
"You know, it's strange. Look, a cicada in winter!"
I spoke involuntarily to my father who was watching TV in the living room with his back turned towards me, and I regretted it.
"You still catch cicadas? Act your age..."
"I like what I like. It's none of your business!"
I was offended and raised my voice.
It soon went like that with my father.
The doorbell chimed at that moment.
I was in a huff,
"By the way, we called you a cicada girl in the past," my father said, recalling it. Then I turned my back and went out to the front door.
Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother, was standing with my mother's umbrella in her hand.
"How is your mother? Look..."
Mrs. Uehara said while putting down some mandarins in a bag from a nearby supermarket on the wooden entrance stair.
"I was in the neighbourhood."
"I'm sorry to bother you. My mother..."
"I just thought I should return the umbrella quickly..."
The cicada went a little wild and started to escape from my fingers, so I put both hands together like a cage and trapped it. The legs of the cicada tickled me as it was moving around. The painful itchiness was like a secret pleasure inside my hands.

“Oh, anytime was okay..., my mother has been in the hospital for a long time.”

“Oh dear. Really? That’s terrible.”

The cicada started its small motor and its rustling wings tickled my hands.

“Mrs. Uehara, you know what. There was a cicada despite the winter. Isn’t it strange?”

“Oh, was it really there?! But I don’t like insects.”

Mrs. Uehara looked uneasily at the cage of my hands put together.

“Well, I was just stopping by for a while. Give my best to your mother, will you?” she said and finally went home.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada. About the mystery of living in such a cold season... Would it bloom out of season if it was a flower? Did the vitality of cicadas evolve? They say that, although it’s winter, nowadays it is reportedly warmer than in the past, so the number of wintering insects increased. All of a sudden, something unusual must have happened due to the abnormal weather. Or, we could even say that, by mere chance, the small body took the hot summer upon its shoulders and strayed into *this* opposite season.

I decided to tell Sawachi about it.

“Yeah. The large brown cicada. That’s a good creature. Quite a nice, ambitious species,” said Sawachi at a drinking party while emptying a Scotch and soda a long time ago. I liked Sawachi a little for the way he spoke about it.

I put the cicada softly into the cuffs of my sweater and opened my mobile phone. When I searched the address book, there was still Sawachi’s name.

The dial tone rang and I was put through to Sawachi.

“Hello...”

“It’s been a long time. Sorry for a sudden call...”

I was calming myself down, and said casually.

“Oh, could it be you? Really, I haven’t seen you for so long,” he seemed to know at once that it was me.

“Guess what! I know this is sudden, but I had a cicada with me! Even though it’s winter. How strange!”

“What... A cicada? Now? A cicada?! Eh, not a cockroach?”

How disgusting... Sawachi, stop it now.

“You’re wrong! A cicada! A large brown cicada. A mystery. Sawachi, what do you think? I just thought you should know about them inside out.”

A moment of irrecoverable, deep silence fell on the other side of the mobile phone, and it seemed to spread further.

Sawachi’s voice became a murmur.

“There are plenty of mysterious things...”

“What...?”

“This world is full of mysteries. Even your call to me now...”

“It’s not the answer to my question...”

I tried to say something to cover up my embarrassment.

“The answer...? I don’t know about them. Is that really possible? But, well, a mystery is a relief! For us and probably for the world, too.”

The cicada stuck his head out of the cuffs.

I had to set it free soon. If you hold it in your hand for too long, the cicada will become weak. But I did not really know whether setting it off inside the warm room or outside into the wavering snow was better for the cicada.

I promised to have a drinking party with Sawachi at some point again and hung up.

As I left the entrance, I went to a persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had shed all its leaves and its bony branches clutched the grey sky.

I put the cicada down softly on the trunk covered with those trench-like chaps and strings. The cicada started to climb slowly up the trunk with occasional hesitation as if it had something to think

about.

When I looked up, the snow seemed to have fallen from an infinite height. It was getting heavier. As the icy crystals hit my face, they melted, and ran down in a few lines.

All too soon, the figure of the cicada vanished for good, somewhere in the maze-like silhouette of the stiff top of the persimmon tree.

I was completely chilled to the bone. Nevertheless, both my hands that had caught the cicada were, for some reason, always warm and sweaty like in summer. By the way, it was a male cicada, but I incidentally felt that it did not chirp at all.

When I returned to the door, there was my mother's umbrella and a bag of mandarins. The TV in the living room was left on, and my father was already gone.

I switched off the TV and brought the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as usual.

It has already been a long time since my father passed away. Mrs. Uehara must have been dead for two years, and... Sawachi, too.

Although the history of the outgoing calls to Sawachi remained in my mobile phone, I did not have the courage to call him back again...

Did the snow accumulate? A distressing quietness filled up the empty home.

My ears started to ring from too much silence.

It was exactly like a chirp of a large brown cicada from that distant summer day.

Brown Cicada in Winter
by Azuchi Moe

A brown cicada flies out of nowhere, even though it's the middle of winter. Its flight is clumsy, as if uncertain, as it navigates among a scattering of snowflakes, turning this way and that, before coming to an abrupt rest on the mosquito screen on the window. By the time I think what, no way, I'm already overcome with happiness. I like cicadas. I like them so very much. I like the Kaempfer cicada which signals the beginning of summer with its cute song like the fussing of a baby, the melancholic and elegant evening cicada, the fast and cheerful tsuku-tsuku-boushi cicada with its droopy eyes, but the large brown cicada, whose song is like sizzling oil searing through a hot summer day, is my favourite by far. But to see one now is just crazy. It's too cold for them. I'm sitting here, wearing an angora turtleneck sweater, with the heating on, you know.

'Come on, what do you think you're doing here?'

I open the window and peer closely at the mosquito screen, which I haven't moved since summer. The outside air drifts in, cold as the touch of the snow woman from folk stories. My near-sighted eyes meet the cicada's (presumably) also near-sighted peepers. It's a large brown cicada, without a doubt. A male, with its slimmer abdomen, white as if dusted with flour. It looks as if it could erupt into loud song any moment. I slide the mosquito net open a little and, never taking my eyes off the cicada, slowly reach with my right hand. Got it! The cicada thrashes wildly, its wings like the blades of a fan powered by a teeny tiny motor. I curl my fingers gently over its body so as not to damage the wings, their joints quivering against my skin. I'm ecstatic with the sense of fulfilment, having found a purpose, grasped it with my own hand.

'This is so strange! A cicada, in winter. Look!' I call out without thinking to my dad, who's sitting in the living room, facing away from me, watching the telly. I immediately regret it.

'There you go catching cicadas again, at your age!'

'Can't help what I like. Get off my back!' I reply, testily. Me and my dad just can't be civil to one another. The doorbell rings just then.

'You used to call me your little cicada girl, remember?' I say to Dad with reproach before turning away to answer the door. It's my mum's friend, Mrs Uehara, come to return Mum's umbrella.

'How's your mother feeling? Here, I brought these.' She sets down a bag of tangerines with the logo of a nearby supermarket on the entrance floor, and then adds as if to explain, 'I just happened to be in the neighbourhood, so I stopped by.'

'Oh, you didn't have to. And Mum, she's—'

'I just thought I should bring her umbrella back at the earliest opportunity.'

The cicada I'm holding intensifies its efforts to free itself, almost managing to escape my grip, so I cup both my hands over it. It crawls around in this makeshift cage, the prickly itchiness of its feet like the pleasant tingling of a secret.

'You could've taken your time. Mum's staying in hospital long-term.'

'Really? That must be very difficult for you.'

The cicada starts its little motor again, its wings tickling my palms.

'Uhm, Mrs Uehara? I caught a cicada, despite it being winter! Crazy, isn't it?'

'You did, really? I must say I don't like bugs very much...' She eyes my cupped hands anxiously. 'Well, I thought I'd stop here on my way, but I'd better be going. Please give my regards to your mother,' she excuses herself and leaves.

I want to talk to someone about the cicada. About the marvel of it being alive in this cold season. Flowers can blossom out of season. Did the cicada evolve to become more robust? It may be winter, but there's all this talk nowadays about the climate getting warmer, and more and more insects surviving winter. Maybe the climate anomaly led to a sudden mutation. Or maybe some kind of stimulus acted on this little body and it stumbled over to *this side*, carrying all the heat of that scorching summer.

I decid to give Sawachi a call. We went out for drinks together, a long time ago.

'Brown cicadas, yeah. They're good. Really good. They have ambition, ya know,' he said back

then, working his way to the bottom of a glass of whiskey. I liked the way he put it, and it made me like him somewhat, too.

I put the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and flip my phone open to search the address book for Sawachi's name. It's still there. A short dial tone later I have him on the line.

'...Hello?'

I calm my racing heart and feign nonchalance.

'Hey, it's been a while. Sorry about calling you out of the blue...'

'It's okay... Hold on, it's you! Wow, it's really been a long time since we spoke.' He seems to recognise me at once.

'So anyway, this is kind of sudden, but I found a cicada. In winter! Crazy, huh?'

'Say what, a cicada? Now? Seriously, a cicada? You sure it's not a roach?'

Come on, Sawachi, who do you take me for.

'Of course it's not a cockroach. It's a cicada, a large brown cicada. Bizarre, isn't it? So, what do you think? You're knowledgeable about this sort of thing, no?'

There's a long, heavy silence, which seems to spread over us. Sawachi lowers his voice to a mutter.

'There's lots of stuff that's bizarre.'

'Huh?'

'What I'm saying is, the world's full of mysteries. Like the fact that you called me and we're talking now...'

'But that doesn't answer my question,' I say, as if trying to cover up embarrassment.

'You want an answer, huh. I don't have one for you. Maybe there isn't one. But mysteries are what saves us. Not just us, but the whole world, probably.'

The cicada peeks out from my sleeve. I should release it soon. Cicadas grow weak if held for too long. But I'm not sure what's better for the cicada, my warm house or the outdoors, where it's snowing. I tell Sawachi we should do drinks again some time and hung up.

I step out the front door and head towards the persimmon tree. It lost all its leaves. Its bony branches reach up to the grey sky, as if to grab it. I gently place the cicada on the trunk, furrowed with a network of cracks and ridges. Hesitantly, as if thinking very hard about something, the cicada begins to climb at a slow pace. I gaze up. The snow's falling from an endless height. It's gradually intensifying, the icy crystals landing on my face, melting, dripping down in little rivulets. At some point the cicada can no longer be seen against the rigid, maze-like silhouette of the bare persimmon tree. I'm chilled to the marrow, but somehow my hands, which have held the cicada, are hot and sweaty as if it were summer. Then it occurs to me that the cicada didn't chirp even once, despite being a male.

I step back into the entrance hall, where Mum's umbrella and the bag of tangerines are still plopped down on the floor. The telly in the living room's on, but Dad's nowhere to be seen. I switch it off and carry the tangerines to the kitchen table, as usual.

It's been a very long time now since Dad passed away, and Mrs Uehara must have died two years ago. And Sawachi...

I can see the call history with Sawachi on my phone, but lack the courage to try calling him again. Maybe it's the muffling effect of snow coating the house, but a stifling silence fills its empty rooms. It's so quiet, my ears start to ring. It sounds just like the song of a brown cicada from a summer day long, long ago.

A Cicada in Winter (Azuchi Moe)

It was midwinter when the *aburazemi* made its unlikely visit.

The brown cicada looked lost, fluttering awkwardly through the lightly falling snow, turning this way and that, and then abruptly coming to rest on the screen door.

Before I could think “that’s ridiculous,” I was suddenly ecstatic.

I love cicadas. I’m crazy about them.

There’s the *nīnīzemi* like a darling child come to tell you it’s summer, the *higurashi* with its heartbreaking elegance, and the nimble *tsukutsuku bōshi* with its cheerful drooping eyes. I love them all, but my ultimate favourite is the *aburazemi*, the “oil cicada”—named after its cries that sound like the pouring of boiling oil, even hotter than the sunny season.

But now I had to think, “that’s ridiculous.”

It was *freezing*.

I was wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and the heating was on.

“Hey there, fellow. What kind of creature are you?”

I opened the glass door, and brought my face up to the screen that had been in place since summer. Air came at me in a rush—icy cold like the skin of the *yuki onna*, female spirit of the snow.

My short-sighted eyes lined up with the eyes of the cicada, probably also short-sighted.

It was definitely an *aburazemi*.

The male’s tight waist looked as if it had been dusted with white powder, and he seemed ready to break into ear-splitting cries at any moment.

I pushed the screen door open a touch and gradually reached out my right hand, looking him in the eyes all the time.

Gotcha!

He struggled inside my hand, his wings like electric fans powered by tiny motors. The power at their base conveyed his fear to the fingers that gripped him lightly, so I wouldn’t damage his wings.

I was wild with joy.

He felt substantial in my hand, like I’d achieved some goal.

“Hey, it’s so weird. It’s winter, right, but there’s a cicada. Look.”

I spoke without thinking in the direction of Dad’s back, as he sat in the living room watching TV. Then I regretted it.

“Still catching cicadas? At your age.”

“I like the things I like. It’s my life,” I yelled. It escalates right away with me and Dad.

The doorbell rang.

I was fuming and when Dad said, “Now you mention it, I used to call you Cicada Girl,” as if he’d just that moment remembered it, I turned my back on him and strode out to the entrance hall.

Mum’s friend Mrs Uehara was standing there with her umbrella. “How’s your mum? Here. . .” She put a bag from a local supermarket with mandarin oranges in on the step up into the house. “I was in the neighbourhood.”

“Oh, thanks. Mum’s. . .”

“I thought I should bring her umbrella back as soon as possible.”

The cicada began thrashing around, trying to escape from my fingers, so I put them together into a kind of cage to keep him in. His legs scratched against me as he moved, and the pain and itching were like a secret pleasure in my hand.

“Really, any time would have been fine. Mum’s going to be in hospital a long time.”

“Well now. How awful.”

The cicada started up his tiny motors and his wings tickled my fingers.

“Hey, Mrs Uehara. A cicada came, even though it’s winter. Weird, isn’t it?”

“A cicada? Really? But I’m not much for insects.” She peered uneasily at my finger cage. “Well, I just dropped by. Give my love to your mum,” she said and then she left.

I wanted to talk about the cicada with someone. The living mystery of it in the cold months. Like

flowers that bloom out of season perhaps. Or was it evolution in cicada survival? Winters recently were warmer than they used to be, and they said more insects lived through them. Maybe the abnormal weather had caused a mutation or something. Or was it some fluke that had allowed the cicada to carry sultry summer in his miniature frame and make a voyage of serendipitous discovery into the opposite season?

I decided to call Sawaji.

Ages ago, at a drinking party, he'd said, "The *aburazemi*? A great little guy. I mean it. He's a go-getter." And then he drained his whisky and water. I liked how he said it, which meant I got a little fond of Sawaji too.

I gently put the cicada in my sweater sleeve, and flipped opened my phone. Sawaji's name was still in my address book.

It started ringing and Sawaji came on the line.

". . . Yeah. . ."

Pulling myself together, I said to him, cool as you like, "It's been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue."

"Er, I guess it's you. Yeah. . . haven't heard from you."

He seemed to know me straight away.

"So, I'll tell you right off. There's a cicada here. I mean, it's winter. Weird, right?"

"Uh, a cicada? Right now? A *cicada*? You don't mean a cockroach, do you?"

Ugh! Sawaji, that's disgusting!

"No I don't! It's a cicada. An *aburazemi*. It's a real mystery, right? What do you think? I figured you're the expert on these things."

An irretrievable period of deep silence flowed by at the other end of the line, seeming to spread out in a pool between us.

"There are lots of mysteries." Sawaji spoke in a kind of whisper.

"Huh?"

"There are lots of mysteries in the world. Why you decided to call me up now. . ."

"That's not an answer," I said, trying to hide my confusion.

"You want an answer? I don't know about that. Whether there is an answer. But you know, mysteries can be life-savers. For us and probably the world too."

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve. I'd have to let him go soon. Cicadas lose their strength if they stay in people's hands too long. Still I didn't know if it was better to release him in the warm indoors or outside with the snow still coming softly down.

I arranged with Sawaji that we'd go out drinking again some time and hung up. Then I went out through the front door to a persimmon tree in the garden.

All of its leaves had fallen, and the bony branches clutched at the leaden sky.

I placed the cicada carefully on the trunk, which was covered with deep grooves and cracks. He began to climb leisurely, pausing at times, as if to ponder a question.

When I looked up, the snow seemed to be falling from an endless height. As it became heavier, chill crystals fell on my face and melted to flow in separate streams.

Before I realised it, the cicada had vanished somewhere into the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the persimmon treetop.

My body was cold all over, except for the hands that had caught the cicada, which remained somehow warm and sweaty like in summer. It struck me suddenly that although the cicada was a male, he hadn't made a single cry.

When I went back in the entrance hall, there was Mum's umbrella and the bag with the mandarins. The TV was still blaring away in the living room, but Dad was gone.

I switched the TV off, and put the mandarins on the kitchen table as usual.

It was a long time since Dad had died and Mrs Uehara must have passed away two years back. As for Sawaji. . .

My phone history showed a record of the call, but I couldn't summon the courage to ring him

again.

Maybe the snow had settled, because the house with nobody in it was filling up with tightly wound silence.

It was so quiet that my ears began to ring. Just like the cries of an *aburazemi* on a distant summer day.

The Brown Cicada in the Winter by: Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the dead of winter, a large cicada flew by, humming in the falling snow. It seemed to be a clumsy flier; zigzagging around a few times, until it suddenly slammed into the screen door. Before I could even think about how ridiculous this situation was, I started feeling overjoyed. I liked cicadas. I mean really, *really* liked cicadas. There are other cicadas that I like who inform me of summer's arrival: the Kaempfer Cicada—cute, like a small child, the Tanna japonensis—so elegant that it brings nostalgia, and the Meimuna Opalifera—nimble, lively, and droopy-eyed. However, when it comes down to it, my favorite during the hot summertime is the brown cicada, whose hums sound like hot oil being poured. Even so, I'm thinking about how silly this is. It's flying around even though it's so cold.

I put on my angora turtle-neck sweater and went to turn on the heater, but I got distracted. "Hey now, what's this?" I opened the glass door and brought my face up to the screen door that was placed there last summer. The cold air came blowing in like it did in the story of the Snow Maiden. The cicada's (probably) near-sighted eyes met mine, and it was as if we briefly stared at each other. Just as I thought—a brown cicada. It was a male with a stomach that looked like it was completely covered in white powder. It seemed like it could start singing in a loud voice at any moment. I slightly opened the screen door and stared at the cicada as I gradually stretched out my right hand. I caught it! He moved around in my hand in a rage. His wings fluttered like a small motor inside an electric fan and gently hit the fingers that restrained him, conveying his fear. An immense feeling of joy came over me. It was a feeling of completeness; as if I had captured some kind of purpose in my hand.

"Hey, isn't this strange? It's winter, but there was a cicada outside. Look!" I said, calling out to my dad from behind as he watched TV in the living room. Then...I regretted it.

"You're still catching things like cicadas? Act your age!"

"I like what I enjoy, so it's not dumb!" I became upset and raised my voice, which resulted in us yelling at each other. Then, the doorbell rang.

I was angry and, as if he'd suddenly remembered, my dad said, "Now that I think about it, we used to call you 'cicada girl'." I turned around and went to the front door.

When I opened it, I saw my mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, holding my mom's umbrella. "How is your mother? I brought this..." she said as she took mandarins out of a shopping bag from the nearby supermarket, placing them on the step in the entry hall where we take off our shoes. "Since I was nearby."

"Oh, why thank you. My mother is—"

"I was thinking that I should return her umbrella as soon as possible." The cicada was acting violent again and tried to escape from my fingers, so I clasped my hands together like a basket and shut him in. His legs moved around and created a tingly feeling—it was like I was secretly feeling pleasure within my hands.

"Ah, you could have returned this whenever...my mother is at the hospital as a long-term patient."

"Is that so? It must be hard on you."

The cicada started up his little tiny motor and his fluttering wings tickled my hands. "By the way, Ms. Uehara. There was a cicada, despite it being winter. That's strange, right?"

"Hm? Is that so? Really? Although, I don't really like bugs, so..." She looked at my clasped hands with an anxious face and said, "Well, I was just stopping by. Tell your mother I said hello." Then, she went home.

I wanted to talk about the cicada with someone and how miraculous it was for it to be alive during such a cold season. If it were a flower, it would be an off-season bloom, I guess. Could it be due to an evolution of their vitality? Although it's winter, the fact that it has recently become warmer than usual here means that more of the hibernating bugs will show up as well. Is it possible that some change suddenly occurred because of the abnormal climate? Or—might it even be that the cicada was responsible for bringing the hot summer along, but got lost along the way and ended up here, in the wrong hemisphere? I decided to discuss it with Sawachi.

Sawachi would always say the same thing as he gulped down his diluted drink at our get-togethers,

“Yeah, brown cicadas. They’re nice insects. Pretty good insects, actually. They got ambition.” The way he described them piqued my interest, so I became a little bit interested in Sawachi too. I gently placed the cicada inside my sweater’s cuff and opened my phone. I looked through my address book and saw that his name was still there. The phone rang as it tried to reach Sawachi and he picked up.

“...Hello...?”

I calmed myself down and nonchalantly replied, “It’s been a while. Sorry for suddenly calling you.”

“Ah...Are you by chance...? Huh, it *has* been a while.” It seemed that he immediately knew it was me.

“So, um, I’ll just cut to the chase. I saw a cicada. Even though it’s winter. That’s strange, right?”

“What? A cicada? At this time of year? ...A *cicada*? Hm— you sure it wasn’t just a cockroach?”

No, Sawachi. Stop it already. “Nope, it was a cicada. A brown one. It’s incredible, isn’t it? What do you think? I think you would know a lot about that.”

A flood of dead silence came in from the other end of the call. “...I mean, crazy things happen all the time,” Sawachi mumbled.

“Huh?”

“A lot of crazy things happen in this world. For you to call me about something like this just now...”

“That doesn’t answer my question.” I tried to say something to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh...I don’t know anything about that. Do things like that happen? But miracles are a source of comfort, you know. For us, and probably even the world.”

The cicada poked his head out of the cuff. It had to make its escape soon. Whenever they are kept in a person’s hand, cicadas end up becoming weak. However, they don’t really know whether it’s the warm indoors or the wintry outdoors that is good for them. I told Sawachi that we should meet up again for drinks sometime and ended the call.

I left the entryway and went towards the persimmon tree in the garden. All its leaves had completely fallen off and its bony branches were tightly gripping the gray sky. There, cicadas were allowed to secretly perch along its trunk, hidden among the thread-like streaks and cracks. The cicadas would occasionally start climbing the trunk, wavering with hesitation as if something worried them. Looking up, it was as if the snow was falling from a high, endless place. The cold snow crystals landed on my face and melted, causing some water to trickle down.

At some point, the cicada disappeared somewhere into the stiff, maze-like treetop of the persimmon tree. My body remained completely cold, but for some reason, the hands that previously held the cicada were consistently hot. They were sweating like it was summertime. “Come to think of it...that was a male cicada, but it didn’t make a single noise,” I suddenly recalled.

When I got back to the entryway, my mom’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins were there. The TV was left on in the living room and my dad was already gone. I turned off the TV and placed the mandarins on the kitchen table as always. Some time had already gone by since my father passed, and two years should have gone by since Ms. Uehara passed away. Sawachi too...My call history to Sawachi was still in my phone. However, I don’t have the courage to try calling him back...

I am not sure if it is because the snow has accumulated outside, but this empty home has an intense silence that continues to fill the rooms, pressing against the walls—and it is within that excessive silence, that my ears began to ring, sounding exactly like the cry of a brown cicada from a very, very distant summer day.

The Brown Winter Cicada

Even though it was the middle of winter, a brown cicada came flying inside. They were flying unskillfully in the snow, changing their direction like they have lost their way and ultimately stopping abruptly before the window screen. Eh? However, before the thought that this is absurd could cross my mind, I became happy. I like cicadas. They are my favorite things. I even like the kaempfer cicadas which are as cute as small children and notify me of the arrival of summer. They are so elegant that they make me sad. They are quick and cheerful, with drooping eyes that weep like the stars.

What I like the most is the sound that the brown cicadas make, which seems like they are being poured into hot oil during the hot summers. However, all of that is absurd at this time. It is so cold in spite of wearing a sweater made of anbury and switching my heater on. "Hey! Who are you?" I opened the glass door and I put my face close to the shutter as if it was summer. The cold air and snow make my body freeze. My short sighted eyes could only stare at the cicadas for a little while. As expected, they were all Brown Cicadas. I was suddenly blown away. Even now they are chirping in a loud voice.

I opened the window screen a little and upon seeing the cicadas I extended my right hand and caught one! The cicada was struggling in my hand. It was moving a little and its wings were like an electric fan. So that it's weak wings would not get hurt, I slowly opened my hand and learned that their weak wings were quite powerful. I was completely ecstatic. I felt fulfilled, like I had a purpose within my palm. "Hey, look! Isn't it weird that there are cicadas in spite of it being winter?" I thought. I heard my father's voice who was watching television in the living room. "Are you still catching cicadas or something? You have gotten old now. You cannot have your own way just because you like something". I spoke in a rude way and then I felt regret.

My father and I were always like this. At that time I heard the chime in the entrance ring. I was in a huff. "That reminds me, a long time ago, as a child, you liked cicadas". My father recalled that and then turned to go to the entrance. My mother's friend, Mr. Jogen was standing there to return her umbrella. "Here you go... How is your mother's health?" Mr. Jogen said while carrying a bag of oranges from a nearby supermarket which he placed on the door's frame. "I came from nearby...so sorry for this. I thought that I could quickly return her umbrella". Because cicadas desperately run away from people, I cupped my hands to trap it. The prickling feeling that came from the cicada's legs caused some pain and itching but actually felt pleasant.

"Ah well meeting sometime would be great. My mother has been in the hospital for a really long time". "Oh my, that must be so difficult". The cicadas tickled the inside of my hands by flapping their wings. "Mr. Jogen, is it weird for cicadas to be seen even in winter?" "Eh? Is that really so? I however, hate insects". Mr. Jogen looked at the cup of my hands with unease. Mr. Jogen said, "Anyway, I was just dropping by, please convey my regards to your mother" and left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicadas. It is very strange that they are alive in this cold season. Flowers can bloom wildly in this season. I wonder if the cicadas have evolved to live longer. Leaving aside that fact that it is winter, compared to the past, it has been getting warmer these days. It is also said that the insects that spend winter hibernating are also increasing in number. I wonder if mutations have occurred because of the abnormal climate. Nonetheless, something seemed weird; did they somehow store some warmth in their small bodies during the summer so that they may move about wherever they want regardless of the season?

I decided that I would try talking to Sawachi about this. Sawachi and I have always gone out to drink together over the years. "The brown cicada? That is a good insect... A considerably good insect... They are very ambitious, aren't they?" He said that while drinking alcohol. I was pleased with what he said because I have always been a little impressed with Sawachi. I put a Cicada in the cuff of my sweater. I took my phone and started looking in my address book and Sawachi's name was still there.

The phone rang and Sawachi answered it. "Yes?" I composed myself and casually said "It's been such a longtime, so sorry for calling you up suddenly. Could you possibly have some free time?" I wanted to know immediately, "Umm, I will tell you quickly, despite it being winter, cicadas seem to be around. Isn't that strange?" "Eh? Cicadas? At this time? Are you sure they aren't just cockroaches?" "Of course not! Sawachi stop it." "They are cicadas, brown cicadas. Isn't that strange? What do you

think? I think you will know about it in detail.” Sawachi was silent on the other side of the phone and he spoke in a whisper “It’s extremely strange” “Eh?” “The world is full of strange happenings just like you calling me right now”. “I don’t know what to say”. “What? I tried to say something illuminating. I also do not know the answer to your question. I do not know if they do that. However, maybe these strange occurrences are a sign for us and perhaps for the world”.

The cicada peeped out from the opening of my cuff. It had tried to escape quietly. They do not stay in people’s palms for a very long time because cicadas are weak. Although it must be mentioned that I am not too sure which is better for the cicada - releasing them in a warm room or outside where the snow is falling?

I ended the call by promising Sawachi that someday we will go out for a drinking party. I went out of the house and went to the persimmon tree in the garden. The leaves of the tree had completely fallen off. The bonelike branches looked like they were holding the grey sky. The cicadas rested quietly on those veins like trees which cover the cracks on the ditches. The cicadas looked like they had something to think about and would sometimes hesitantly sway and start climbing the branches.

If you look up at the sky then you would feel like the snow falls from a faraway place with no end. Depending upon how cold it is the ice crystals would hit and melt on my face. It happens countless times. Before I can even realize, the cicadas get exhausted and disappear in the maze of treetops. My body is completely cold and yet both my hands which I used to catch the cicadas are warm and sweating like it is summer. I suddenly thought that the cicada did not chirp even a little although it was being pressed.

I returned to the entrance and saw my mother’s umbrella and the bag of oranges. The television in the hall was on as well, and my father was nowhere to be seen. I switched off the television and kept the bag of oranges on the table like I always do. My father passed away a long time ago. Mr. Jogen too should have died two years ago and even Sawachi. I had Sawachi’s contact in the call history of my phone. However I have no courage to call him up. The snow kept piling, the silence in the empty house is stiffening but it satisfies me. I can hear buzzing in extreme stillness. That sounds exactly like the chirping of the cicadas that I heard on that distant summer day.

Winter Cicada

An aburazemi cicada came flying during what should be the height of winter.

It seemed lost as it traversed the trickling snow, flying tentatively with no discernable direction, until it suddenly latched itself on the screen door. Before it even registered how absurd it was, a feeling of joy came over me.

I am quite fond of cicadas, rather obsessively so. As heralds of summer's return, I adore the charming, juvenile appearance of the niinizemi, the tragic elegance of the higurashi, and the nimble and droopy-eyed tsukutsukubōshi. But my favorite of all is the aburazemi, whose sizzling cry resembles the sound of frying oil being poured, complementing the warm summer season.

Still, this is definitely out of the ordinary.

After all, it's freezing cold. So much that I was completely wrapped in an angora sweater inside a heated room.

"Just what are you, little one?" I opened the glass door and moved my face closer to the screen, as I normally would during the summer. The breeze that blew in might have felt as cold as the skin of a snow woman. For a brief moment, my nearsighted eyes exchanged glances with the (likely) nearsighted pair of the cicada.

There's no mistaking it. It's an aburazemi cicada. A male one, judging by the powdery white marks on its compact abdomen. And it looks like it's about to unleash its cry at any moment.

I opened my screen door a crack and trained my eyes on the cicada as my right hand inched slowly toward it.

Gotcha!

The cicada struggled frantically, its electric fan-like wings whirring, powered by its miniature motors. My fingers felt their strength as they tenderly pressed down on its wings so as not to damage them.

I was ecstatic. My hand felt fulfillment akin to having attained a goal.

"Take a look at this, it's so odd. There's a cicada out in the middle of winter." I blurted out to my dad, who had his back to me while watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

"You're still going on about catching cicadas? Grow up already."

"Well, it's not like we can just decide the things we enjoy!" I shot back, irritated. That's how things usually went between us.

Just then, the sound of a chime came from the entrance hall. I turned to leave, still upset, when he spoke in a reminiscent tone. "Come to think of it, you used to be called the cicada girl."

At the entrance hall stood Ms. Uehara holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? I brought these..." Ms. Uehara said as she laid on the front step a bag of oranges from the nearby supermarket. "I was in the neighborhood."

"Thank you, you really shouldn't have. Mom's—"

"And I figured I should return her umbrella whenever I get the chance."

The cicada was struggling hard to break free from my grasp so I clasped my hands around it, forming an enclosure. Its legs skittered about inside, producing a pleasant itching sensation that I savored discreetly.

"Oh, any time would have been fine... She's under long-term hospital care right now."

"Goodness. I didn't know... That sounds serious."

The cicada's miniature motors powered its wings into motion, ticking my palms.

"Ms. Uehara, don't you think it's strange for a cicada to be out in winter?"

"Oh? They're out there? I don't really like bugs so..." She made a wary glance at my hands as she continued. "Anyway, I was just passing by. Tell your mom I wish her well." Then she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about this cicada and how peculiar it is to be alive in the midst of such a cold season; if this were a flower, it would be like it bloomed out of turn. Maybe this somehow

hinted to a change in their resiliency, or perhaps it's a sign that more insects were coming out now that winters were becoming warmer. This could be a sudden anomaly brought on by an unusual climate. Or it could be some simple fluke—overcome by the intense heat of summer, it somehow mixed up “its season” for another.

I decided to call my friend Sawachi.

We had drinks together some time ago and he said this while emptying a glass of watered down whiskey: “That’s an aburazemi cicada, all right. And a fine and fascinating one, too. This little one’s got potential.” The way he put it intrigued me, which in turn made me quite fond of him.

I gently tucked the cicada into the cuff of my sweater, turned on my cell phone, and went through my list of contacts. His name was still present.

The call tone rang and Sawachi picked up.

“... Hello?”

In an attempt to calm my nerves, I spoke in a casual tone. “It’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue.”

“Wait... I know you. Wow, it *has* been forever.”

Apparently, he knew right away it was me.

“Say, I know it’s sudden but hear me out. It’s winter yet I found a cicada. Bizarre, right?”

“Really now... what? A cicada? At this season? Maybe it’s just a cockroach.”

Oh come on, Sawachi. Not now.

“I’m sure of it. It’s an aburazemi cicada. Fascinating, right? What do you think? I figure you’d know a thing or two about it.”

A deep, irreversible silence followed from the other line, seemingly expanding outward. Then Sawachi spoke as if muttering.

“... it never ceases to amaze.”

“What?”

“This world is full of amazing things, you know. For one thing, here you are, calling me.”

I demurred slightly. “That doesn’t tell me anything at all.”

“You’re looking for an explanation, huh... I can’t really think of one myself. Perhaps there’s no such thing. But you know, there’s merit to be had in the inexplicable. That applies to us and, quite possibly, the world as we know it.”

The cicada poked its face out from my sleeve.

I have to set it free sooner or later. Cicadas eventually weaken when kept captive like this. But which would be better for it—the warm indoors or the snowstorm outside?

I made plans with Sawachi to go out for drinks sometime and hung up.

I left the entrance hall and headed to the garden where a persimmon tree stood. Its leaves have completely fallen off, exposing its bony branches that reached high up to the ashen sky. Carefully, I released the cicada on the canal-like grooves that ran along the trunk. It then slowly clambered upward, occasionally faltering as if in thought. I looked up and watched the endless flurry of snow falling from above. It grew fiercer, its icy crystals hitting my face before melting into innumerable streaks. And before I realized it, the cicada had already disappeared into the labyrinthine silhouette formed by the tree’s branches.

Although my body was thoroughly exposed to the frigid cold, for some reason my hands that had held the cicada were sweating like it would on a hot summer day. It then occurred to me that for a male cicada, I never once heard its cry.

My mom’s umbrella and the bag of oranges were still in the entrance hall when I returned. The TV in the living room was still on but my dad was nowhere to be found. I switched off the TV, and placed the oranges at its usual place on the kitchen table.

My dad has long since passed on. Ms. Uehara should have as well two years ago... and perhaps even Sawachi...

My cell phone kept a record of my call with him. But I can’t muster the courage to call him again...

The snow must have begun piling up, further engulfing this empty house under its suffocating silence.

Then within this overwhelming muteness, I heard a sizzling cry.

It sounded like the song of the aburazemi cicada, coming from a distant, faraway summer day.

Winter Cicada
By Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the middle of winter, an *aburazemi* came flying over. It flew here and there amongst the fluttering snow in a clumsy and confused manner, before changing course and stopping abruptly on the mosquito screen. I was elated before I even had a chance to think how ridiculous it was. I love cicadas. I really, *really* love them; the adorable child-like *niinizemi* who signals the arrival of summer; the *higurashi* who is elegant to a sorrowful degree; I love the nimble, cheerful and droopy-eyed *tsutsukuboshi* too, but it is the *aburazemi* with its call like the pouring of hot oil whom I love best. But, naturally, at present it was absurd.

Despite how cold it was. Despite me wearing this sweater made with Angora hair and having the heater on. “Oi oi. What exactly *are* you?”

I open the glass door and draw my face close to the screen which we had had up since the summer. The cold air tightens like the skin of the *yukionna*¹. My short-sighted eyes and the cicada’s (perhaps) myopic ones meet briefly. Yes, it’s an *aburazemi*; a male *aburazemi* with its tightly packed abdomen speckled with white. He looks like he’s just about to start bellowing. I open the screen a little and, eyes still locked with the cicada, stretch out my hand slowly. Got him! The cicada rages inside my hand. His wings are like a little motor-powered fan, beating strongly against my gently restraining fingers. I was overjoyed. I felt complete, like I had captured a sense of purpose in my hand.

“Hey, this is odd. It’s winter but I found a cicada. Look!” I said, not really thinking about it, to my father who had his back to me and was watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it. “Are you still catching cicada? Act your age will you.”

“I like what I like, so I’ll *do* what like,” I raised my voiced sourly. My father and I are quick to get like this. Just then, the doorbell rang. I was in a huff so my father went to the door with his back to me saying reminiscently, “that reminds me, we used to call you cicada-girl, didn’t we?”

My mother’s friend, Uehara was standing at the door with my mother’s umbrella. “How is your mother feeling? Here...” she said lifting up some oranges in a bag from the nearby supermarket then putting them down by the door.

“I was just in the neighbourhood.” “Ah, thank you. My mother is - ”

“The umbrella. I was thinking I should return it sooner or later.”

The cicada rattled about and was beginning to escape through my fingers, so I closed him in with both hands. The cicada flapped around, and the itching sensation was like a secret pleasure within my hands.

“Oh, any time would’ve been fine...mum will be in hospital for a while.” “Oh, really. That must be tough.”

The cicada starts up his little motor, his wings tickling my hands with a buzz.

“Hey, Uehara-san. It’s winter, but I found a cicada. Isn’t that odd?”

“Is that so? Really? But I’m not great with bugs, so...”

Uehara-san looked at my boxed hands uncomfortably, “well, I was just stopping by. Give my regards to your mother,” she said and left for home.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada; about the strangeness of it being alive in such a cold season. A crazy iris² perhaps? I wonder if cicada’s survival powers have evolved. The say that wintering insects are increasing of late due to it being much warmer than in the past. Maybe some sudden mutation occurred due to an unusual meteorological phenomenon? Or perhaps by some twist of fate, his small body carries the hot summer with it, and, having gotten lost, he has come over from that side of the year to this side.

I decided to

¹ The name of a Japanese mythical creature. Literally means snow-woman.

² A flower blooming out of season. Also the title of a work by Masuji Ibuse in which the natural order of the seasons is disrupted by the dropping of the atomic bomb causing the irises to *go mad*.

try to talk to Sawachi-kun about it. A while back, at a work party, Sawachi-kun, cleaning up his whiskey-and-water, had said, “yeah, those *aburazemi* right. Those guys are good. Really something. Those guys have got ambition, you know.”

I had liked the way he said it, so I started to like Sawachi-kun a little too. I put the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater and opened my phone. When I look in my address book, Sawachi-kun’s name was still there. It rings and I connect with Sawachi-kun.

“....Yes?...”

I calm myself self and say causally “Long time since we last spoke. Sorry to ring so suddenly.”

“Oh...it’s you. Yes, it’s been a while,” he soon seems to know it’s me.

“Hey,

it’s kind of out of the blue but, I found a cicada. In the winter. It’s odd, right?”

“Ehhhh...A

cicada? Now? A *cicada*? Ehh..it’s not a cockroach?”

Gross!

Sawachi-kun cut it out, will you?

“No

way. It’s a cicada. An *aburazemi*. It’s weird right? Isn’t it? What do you think? I thought you’d know about this kind of thing.”

On

the other end of the phone a time of irrevocable deep silence passed and seemed to spread out.

“...There are plenty of mysterious things, you know.”

“...Eh?”

“Strange things, this world is full of them. Your ringing me *now* for starters...”

“That’s

not an answer,” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An....answer?”

I don’t really know about that kind of thing. I wonder if it’s possible? But hey, strange things offer salvation, you know. For me, and perhaps, for the world too.”

The cicada

stuck his face out from the cuff of my sweater. I have to let him go sooner or later. Cicadas grow weak if they stay in the care of people for too long. But saying that, I’m not sure which would be better for the cicada, the warm inside or releasing him outside into the fluttering snow. I promised to go drinking with Sawachi-kun again sometime, and hung up the phone. I left the house and went to my sister’s tree in the garden. Her tree had lost all of its leaves and its knobbly branches clawed out into the ashen sky.

I popped the cicada onto the trunk of the tree which was covered in cracks and furrowed sinews. The cicada, as though he were thinking about something, started to slowly ascend, hesitating here and there. When I looked up, the snow seemed to be falling down from an endless height. It gradually became more and more violent and the cold crystals hit my face, melted and streamed down in lines. Before long, the cicada had vanished into the stiff maze-like silhouette of the top of sister’s tree. I was freezing but despite that, both of my hands which had housed the cicada were hot and clammy like it was summer. Come to think of it, the cicada had been a male but he hadn’t called one bit, I suddenly thought.

When

I went back into the house my mother’s umbrella and the bag of oranges were sat at the entrance. In the living room, the television had been left on and my father was nowhere to be seen. I turned the television off and took the bag of oranges to the table in the kitchen as usual.

It

had already been a while since my father passed away, and I was sure Uehara-san had died two years ago. Sawachi-kun too...

The

call to Sawachi was still logged in my phone’s history, but I didn’t have the courage to ring again. Perhaps it was the snow piling up, or maybe the empty house, but a constricting silence began to fill up the place. The deep silence brought on a ringing in my ears; a ringing just like the calling of the *aburazemi* of those distant, far away days of summer.

The Winter Oil Cicada
By: Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the middle of winter, an oil cicada came flying.

It flew awkwardly, as if it was lost in the snowfall. After changing directions this way and that, it suddenly stopped at the screen door. Before I could even think, “What? How absurd,” I was extremely happy.

I love cicadas. I really, really love cicadas.

I love the cute, childlike Kaempfer cicadas that bring news of the coming summer and the evening cicadas which are so sorrowfully elegant. I even love the cheerful, nimble droopy-eyed weeping cicadas. But, as always, the oil cicadas with voices like hot oil being poured during a hot summer, are my favorite.

Still, this is definitely absurd.

It’s so cold that I’m wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and running the heater.

“Hey. Hey. Who are you?”

I opened the glass door, and brought my face closer to the screen door that has been up since summer. The cold air makes my skin as cold as a snow spirit’s.

The cicada and I stare at each other for a while. I stare with my near-sighted eyes, and it stares back with its eyes that are (probably) near-sighted too. Just as I thought, it’s an oil cicada. It’s a male oil cicada, with a tightly closed stomach that looks like it’s covered in white flour. Even now, it looks like it’ll start chirping with its extremely loud voice.

I open the screen door a little and gently stretch my right hand out, while continuing to stare at the cicada.

I caught it!

It struggles within my hands. Its wings move like a little motorized fan. As I gently hold down its wings so it doesn’t get hurt, its wings tremble against my hands, showing me the power in the joints of its wings.

I am ecstatic. I feel complete, as if I’ve captured some goal in my hands.

“Hey, this is weird. There’s a cicada, even though it’s winter. Look,” I said, without thinking, to my father’s back as he watches TV in the living room.

And I regretted it.

“Are you *still* catching cicadas? You’re old enough to know better!”

“I like what I like! It’s not stupid!” I raised my voice indignantly.

My dad and I easily became hostile like this.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

I was still angry when my dad said, “Oh yeah, we used to call you Cicada Girl didn’t we?” He said it as if he had just remembered. I turned my back to him and went into the foyer. My mom’s friend, Mrs. Uehara was standing there, holding my mom’s umbrella.

“How’s your mom? Here,” Mrs. Uehara said as she lifted a bag filled with mandarin oranges from a nearby supermarket and dropped it on the doorframe. “Since I was in the neighborhood.”

“Oh, thank you so much. My mom—”

“You know I was just thinking that I really needed to return this umbrella.”

The cicada was resisting me and escaping from my fingers. So, I made both of my hands into a cage and closed it inside. The cicada’s legs prickled me as it moved. That painful itchiness from the secret inside my hands was almost pleasant.

“Gosh, I wish you’d come sooner! My mom’s being hospitalized long term.”

“Oh! Is that so? That must be hard on you.”

The cicada was moving like a small motor and fluttering its wings inside my hands. It tickled.
“Hey, Mrs. Uehara. There’s a cicada even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? You know, I can’t stand bugs.” While looking uneasily at the cage I’d made with my hands, “Well then, I was just stopping by. Say hello to your mom for me,” said Mrs. Uehara as she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the mystery of it living in such a cold season. If it was a flower, I guess it would be flowering off-season.

I wonder if this is the evolution of cicadas’ vitality. It’s winter, but they say it’s warmer nowadays, so insects that hibernate are increasing. I wonder if it’s because of this strange phenomenon, that such a strange thing happened.

Or, is it by some chance that the cicada wanted to carry the hot summer on its tiny body and has gotten lost in the opposite season?

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

At a get-together a long time ago, while opening a can of alcohol, he said, “Yeah, oil cicadas are good little guys. They’re really good little guys. They have ambition.” I liked the way he said that, so I liked Sawachi a little too.

I softly put the oil cicada into the opening of my sleeve and opened my phone. Sawachi’s name was still in my address book, like always. The phone rang and Sawachi picked up.

“Yes...”

I calmed my heart and nonchalantly said, “It’s been a while. I’m sorry for suddenly calling.”

“Ah... is this you? Yeah, it’s been a while, hasn’t it!” It seemed like he immediately understood me.

“Hey, this is a little fast, but there’s a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Hey, it’s weird right?”

“What, a cicada? Now? A cicada? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?” No way! Stop that already Sawachi!

“That’s not it! It’s a cicada, an oil cicada. It’s strange isn’t it? Hey, what do you think? I thought you would know a lot about these kinds of things.”

On the other side of the phone, there was a deep silence that I couldn’t undo, and it seemed like it would keep growing. Sawachi said, in a voice like he was whispering, “There are lots of mysterious things you know.”

“Huh?”

“There are lots of mysterious things in this world. Like how you called me just now.”

“That’s not an answer, you know.” I decided to say something like I was hiding my embarrassment.

“An answer...? I don’t know about that kind of thing. I wonder if that kind of thing exists. But hey, mysterious things are a source of comfort. To us, and probably to the world too.”

The cicada showed its face out of my sleeve hole.

I have to let it go soon. If you stop a cicada in your hands for too long, it will get weak. Or so they say. Between being in the warm room and releasing it into the falling snow, I don’t really know which is better for it.

I made a promise with Sawachi that we would meet up to have a drink again sometime and I hung up the phone. When I left the foyer, I went to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had completely lost its leaves, and its bony branches were keeping a tight grip on the gray sky. I let the cicada onto its tree trunk that was covered in groove-like lines and cracks. The cicada slowly started climbing the tree trunk, hesitating every now and then, as if it was thinking about something.

When I looked up, it seemed like the snow was falling from a boundless height. Gradually more relentlessly, cold crystals hit my face, melting and flowing in little streams. At some point, the cicada disappeared from the tip of the persimmon tree branch to somewhere in the tree’s stiff, maze-like silhouette.

My body was completely cold, but for some reason, my hands that I caught the cicada with were still hot and sweaty as if it was summer. That reminds me, it suddenly occurred to me that even though the cicada was a male, it didn’t chirp even a little.

When I returned to the foyer, my mother’s umbrella and the bag full of mandarins were sitting there. The TV in the living room was left running and my dad was gone. I turned off the TV and brought

the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as I always did.

It's already been a while since my dad passed on to the next world, and I'm pretty sure Mrs. Uehara passed away two years ago.

And even Sawachi.

My call log with Sawachi is still on my phone, but I don't have the courage to call him again.

Whether the snow's piling up, the inside of this empty house is becoming satisfied by the silence closing in on it. I've developed a ringing in my ears because of the excessive silence.

That ringing is just like the chirp of oil cicadas on a far, far away summer day.

The Winter Cicada - Azuchi Moe

Although it was the dead of winter, I spotted a Large Brown Cicada flying around. In the flickering snow, it flew in its usual clumsy way as if it were lost. It darted back and forth, constantly changing course, and finally settled abruptly on my screen door.

Before I could even register how ridiculous this was, a feeling of joy washed over me. I love cicadas. Actually, I'm obsessed with them. I adore them all--the Kaempfer Cicada, so cute and childlike, which announces the arrival of summer; the Evening Cicada, so elegant with its mournful cry; the sprightly Tsuku-Tsuku-Boushi with its cheerful drooping eyes. But most of all, I love the Large Brown Cicada--or the "Abura" Cicada, named for its cry that sounds like pouring burning oil into the hot summer itself.

But right now, it was ridiculous to see one in such cold weather. I was wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and even had the heater on. "Hey there--who might you be?"

I opened the glass door and brought my face closer to the screen still unchanged from the summer. In came the chilly air like the skin of the Yuki Onna, the Snow Woman. My nearsighted eyes met with the cicada's eyes (which were also nearsighted I like to think), and we stared at each other for a while. It really was an Abura Cicada. It was a male whose tight belly looked as if it were covered in white powder, and that loud song of his seemed like it would begin at any moment.

I opened the screen door just slightly. Without ever taking my eyes off the cicada, I reached toward him with my right hand and...Got him! I was ecstatic: The cicada erupting into a frenzy inside my hand. His wings pulsing like the motor of a tiny electric fan. His trembling as I pressed my finger gently against his wings careful not to hurt him. It was as if inside my hand I had finally found my purpose.

"Hey--how strange is this? A cicada in winter. See?" Without even thinking, the words came bursting forth as I ran to tell my father who was watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

"You're still running around catching cicadas at your age?"

"What I like is what I like! I can do whatever I want!" I was offended, and my words were now spiteful. This was typical of conversations with my father.

Just then, the doorbell rang. "Now that I think about it, we did call you 'Cicada Girl' when you were younger," my father recalled. But I had already turned away from him and was heading to answer the door. My mother's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing there with my mother's umbrella in her hand.

"How's your mother feeling? I brought these..." As Ms. Uehara said this, she placed a bag of tangerines that she bought from a nearby supermarket onto the step of the front hall. "I was in the neighborhood, so--"

"Oh, thank you. You didn't have to. My mother--"

"I meant to bring the umbrella back to her sooner..."

The cicada was going berserk and on the verge of escape. So, I created a basket with my hands to keep him confined. As he moved around inside his new cage, his legs pricked my skin. The painful itch aroused in me a secret pleasure.

"Any time would have been fine, really. My mother is going to be in the hospital for a while."

"Really? That's terrible."

The cicada had started up his little motor, and the beating of his wings tickled my hands.

"Hey, Ms. Uehara? I caught a cicada--even though it's winter! Isn't that strange?"

"What? You did? It does seem odd, but I really don't like bugs." She was looking uneasily at my cupped hands. "Well, I'm off. I just popped in to see how your mother was. Tell her I said hi." And off she went.

I wanted to talk to someone about the mystery of this cicada, about how it could be that he was alive in the middle of winter. If he were a flower, we would say that he's blooming out of season.

Maybe cicadas had begun to evolve. Winters are warmer than they were in the past, and I've heard that the number of insects that hibernate has increased. Such abnormal weather could have caused a mutation of some kind. Or perhaps something compelled this cicada to carry all the heat of summer on its tiny back, and afterward it found itself lost on this side of the world in the wrong season. I decided to give Sawachi a call.

Some time ago, Sawachi and I had been at a party together: "Oh yeah, the Abura Cicada? Those guys are incredible. Really, really amazing...because they're ambitious." Sawachi said this as he downed his whiskey and water. I loved the way he talked about cicadas, which was why I was fond of him.

I carefully put the cicada inside my sleeve, and flipped open my phone. I searched my contacts, and Sawachi's name was still there.

The phone rang, and Sawachi answered: "...Hello?"

Maintaining my composure, I spoke casually: "It's been a long time. I'm sorry for calling out of the blue like this..."

"Wow. It *has* been a while!" He seemed to recognize my voice right away.

"I'll get right to the point. I've caught a cicada--in *winter*. Isn't that strange?"

"What? A cicada? At this time of year?...A cicada? Are you sure it's not a roach?"

Ew, no, Sawachi. Don't say stuff like that. "Definitely not! It's a cicada. An Abura Cicada. Isn't that mysterious? What do you think? I thought you might know about these things, so..." On the other side of the line, a deep, irredeemable silence fell and spread.

Sawachi muttered a reply: "...There are lots of mysterious things out there."

"...What?"

"The world is full of mysteries. Like you calling me right now."

"...That's not an answer." I wanted it to sound like I was trying to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer...huh. I don't have an answer. I wonder whether such things even exist. But I will say that mysteries offer salvation--for us, and probably for the world too."

Meanwhile, the cicada had popped his head out from my sleeve. I would have to let him go soon. If I kept him in my hand for too long, he'd get weak. However, I had no idea which one would be better for him--inside the warm room or outside in the snow?

I promised Sawachi that we'd get together again for a drink someday and ended the call. I left through the front hall, and headed toward the persimmon tree in the yard. Every last leaf had fallen from the tree, and the boney talons of the branches gripped the gray sky. I carefully placed the cicada onto the trunk which was full of divots and cracks. Stopping every so often as if he was thinking about something, he slowly worked his way up the tree. As I gazed upward, the snow seemed to be falling from a boundless height. The snow gradually became more intense; the cold crystals melted as soon as they hit me, creating tracks that ran down my face. Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared into the maze-like silhouette of the tree's bark. My body was completely frozen. But my hands, which had held the cicada, remained inexplicably hot and sweaty as if it were summer. It suddenly occurred to me that even though the cicada was male, he never once made a sound.

I returned to the front hall, and my mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines were sitting there. The TV was still on in the living room, but my father was no longer there. I turned off the television, and brought the tangerines to the kitchen table as usual.

It had been some time since my father passed away, and Ms. Uehara had died two years ago. And, Sawachi also... A call to Sawachi still appeared in my phone's history, but I didn't have the courage to call his number again.

The snow seemed to be piling up outside, and inside, the silence that filled my empty house made it hard to breathe. The intensity made my ears ring. And that ringing was just like the Abura Cicada's song heard on those summer days that were so very far away.

The Winter Oil Cicada

By Azuchi Moe

An oil cicada was outside. In the middle of winter.

It came flying through the fluttering snow in that clumsy way they have, as if it didn't know quite where it was going. It zigzagged this way and that and then, all of a sudden, alighted on the fly screen.

Before I could stop to think how crazy this was, I was filled with delight. I'm fond of cicadas – really, very fond of them. I love all the different kinds: the niinii-cicadas that herald the arrival of summer and remind me of cute little children; the sorrowfully elegant higurashi; and the agile tsukutsuku-boshi with their cheerful, drooping eyes. But the oil cicadas, with their cries that sound like sizzling hot fat pouring into an already scorching summer – those are the ones I love best of all.

Still, at this time of year, it *was* crazy. When it was so cold. When I was wearing my angora turtleneck sweater, and the heating was on...

"Hey there, little guy, what the heck are you?"

I slid open the glass door and brought my face up to the fly screen that was still in place from the summer. The cold air pressed in, chill as the skin of the snow-wraith Yuki Onna in the old tales. My eyes met those of the cicada – we were both (I guess) similarly short-sighted. We stared at each other for a moment.

Sure enough, it *was* an oil cicada – a male oil cicada with a taut stomach that looked like it had been dusted with white powder.

"Are you about to start making a racket—?"

I opened the fly screen a crack, and with my eyes still locked on the cicada's, slowly stretched out my right hand.

"Gotcha!"

The cicada struggled in my hand. Its wings were beating like a tiny motor-driven fan and I held the creature gently so as not to damage them. I could feel the power coming from the point where the wings met quivering through my fingers. I was ecstatic. I felt fulfilled as if some kind of goal had come within my grasp.

"Hey, this is weird. It's winter but there's a cicada here, see." Without thinking, I called out to my father who was watching TV in the living room, with his back to me. And then regretted it.

"You're a bit old to still be catching cicadas—"

"What's it got to do with you what I like doing?" I raised my voice, offended.

It didn't take much for Dad and me to get like this with each other. At that moment the doorbell rang.

"Come to think of it," Dad said, as if he'd remembered something, "They called them 'maiden cicadas' back in the old days." But I turned my back on him huffily and went to answer the door. My Mom's friend Mrs. Uehara was standing there holding Mom's umbrella.

"How's your Mom doing? I got you these..." As she spoke, she deposited a bag of mandarin oranges from the local supermarket on the step of the entrance hall. "Since I was in the neighborhood."

"Oh, thank you. Mom is—"

"You see, I thought, I gotta return this umbrella right away—"

The cicada was getting agitated and was on the point of escaping from my fingers, so I closed my hands around it like a cage. The creature's legs prickled me as they moved around, the itchy sensation a secret pleasure within my hands.

"Oh, but there was no rush... Mom's going to be in hospital for a while."

"Oh gosh, really? That's too bad."

The cicada started up its tiny motor and the fluttering of its wings tickled my palms.

"Mrs. Uehara – it's winter but there's a cicada here. That's strange, don't you think?"

"Uh, is there? Really? But I'm not good around bugs, so—"

Looking nervously at the cage made by my clasped hands, Mrs. Uehara said, "Well, I won't stay. Tell your Mom I'm thinking about her," and then left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. The strangeness of one being alive in the middle of

such a cold time of year— I guess if you were talking about a flower, you would say it was blooming out of season. Was it an evolutionary change in the cicada's ability to survive? It was winter, but they say these days, when it's gotten warmer than it used to be, more insects are making it through to spring. Maybe the abnormal weather caused some kind of mutation. Or could it even be that, by some chance, it had strayed over into *our* winter from a summer on the other side, its small body laden with the warmth of a whole season? I decided to try talking to Sawachi.

At a drinking party some time back, Sawachi had declared, while downing his whiskey-and-water, "Yup, oil cicadas. They're good guys. They're really not bad guys at all. They have ambition." This way of talking appealed to me and so I had a bit of a thing for Sawachi.

I gently tucked the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater and opened my cell phone. Looking through the contacts, Sawachi's name was still there.

The phone rang and Sawachi picked up.

".... Hello...?"

Keeping myself calm, I said casually, "Hi, it's been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue like this—"

"Hey...is that you? Yeah, it's been a long time." He seemed to know right away it was me.

"Um, I know this is kinda out of nowhere, but there's a cicada here. In winter. That's strange, isn't it?"

"What...a cicada? At this time of year? A *cicada*? Er—are you sure it's not a cockroach?"

Eew, jeez, Sawachi, gimme a break!

"No! It's a cicada! An oil cicada. Weird, right? Well, what do you think? I thought you would know about that sort of thing—"

At the other end of the line there was a pause: a deep silence that stretched on and on, and that neither of us seemed able to break.

"...There are so many strange things." Sawachi's voice had become a mutter.

"...Huh?"

"Strange things – there are so many of them in this world. Even your calling me now..."

"What kind of an answer is that supposed to be?" I retorted, trying to cover up the discomfort I was feeling.

"An...answer? I don't know about that. I wonder if there is such a thing. But strange things are a means of salvation. For us, and also maybe for the world—"

The cicada poked its head out of my cuff. I would have to let it go soon. Cicadas become weak if people handle them for too long. Though that said, I wasn't entirely sure what was better for the creature's welfare: a warm room or liberation into the snow flurries outside. I hung up, having agreed to go out for a drink with Sawachi again sometime.

I went out of the front door into the garden and headed for the persimmon tree. The persimmon had shed all of its leaves and its bony branches clutched at the gray sky. I placed the cicada gently onto the trunk which was covered with groove-like lines and cracks. The cicada started to climb the trunk slowly, hesitating every now and again as if thinking things over.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be coming down from an endless height above me. As it gradually became heavier, the cold crystals struck my face again and again, melting to form trickles that ran down my cheeks. Already the cicada had disappeared somewhere in the stiff, labyrinthine tracery at the top of the tree.

My body was frozen to the bone but for some reason my hands, which had been holding the cicada, remained warm and they were sweating as if it were summer. It occurred to me suddenly that though the cicada was a male, it hadn't made any noise at all....

When I went back into the entrance hall, Mom's umbrella and the bag of mandarin oranges were lying there. The TV in the living room was still on but there was already no sign of my father. I switched off the TV and carried the bag of oranges to the table in the kitchen as if everything were normal. It was a long time since Dad had passed away; Mrs. Uehara had also died - it must have been two years before. And Sawachi too...

My calls to Sawachi were still in the call history of my cell phone. But I didn't have the courage to try contacting him again...

Perhaps because the snow had begun to pile up, the empty house was filling with a crushing silence. The hush was so profound that my ears were buzzing – it felt just like I could hear the cry of an oil cicada on a far-off summer's day.

The Winter Cicada

By Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the middle of winter, I caught sight of a brown cicada flying outside. It buzzed about awkwardly amidst the falling snow, looking helpless and lost. After frantically zooming this way and that, it finally came to an abrupt stop on the screen door.

Before my brain could process how preposterous this was, my heart swelled with joy. I am a big fan of cicadas. In fact, I absolutely adore them. Naturally, that includes the harbinger of summer – the cute, child-like kaempfer cicada. I'm also quite fond of the evening cicada, with its elegant form that nearly makes me cry. And who can forget the nimble walker cicada, with its cheerful, slanting eyes. However, I have to say that my absolute favorite is the brown cicada, otherwise known as the oil cicada. True to its name, the oil cicada throws fuel onto the fire of summer with its intense cry.

But, as much as I love them, the thought of a cicada actually being here right now is absurd. I mean, it's freezing outside. I'm sitting here wearing a turtleneck angora sweater with the heater going at full blast.

"Hey there, little guy. Where did you come from?"

I slid open the glass door and brought my face up close to the screen that the cicada was clinging to. Normally, the screen door gets removed in the winter, but it had been left on. I could feel the freezing air slowly creep inside, as if the snow woman of yokai folklore were standing right beside me.

I used my nearsighted eyes to stare at the cicada, which used its own (presumably) nearsighted eyes to stare back. There was no doubt it was a brown cicada. Its slim belly looked to be covered in a white powder, indicating that it was male. I felt that it might start emitting its distinct cry at any moment.

I nudged the screen door open slightly. As I continued to lock eyes with the cicada, I gingerly brought my right hand around behind it. And then, *fwap!* I caught it! In my hand, I could feel the brown cicada start going into a frenzy. Its wings fluttered intensely, like the blades of a small, motor-powered fan. I gently tightened my grasp to hold down its wings and assure they would come to no harm. The strength of the muscles at its wing base sent a tremble through my fingers. What a rush! I was over the moon. Capturing the cicada felt like achieving some great task, which brought me a stark sense of fulfillment.

"Hey, I found something weird. There was a cicada outside in the middle of winter, look!"

Without thinking it over, I called out to my father who sat in the living room watching TV. I instantly regretted it.

"What're you doing catching bugs at your age? It's time to grow up."

"Everybody has a hobby they enjoy and this is mine! I can do whatever I want!"

His words hit a nerve and I let my voice ring out indignantly in response. The conversations that I have with my father always tend to go south quickly. In the next moment, the doorbell rang. As I was about to go answer it, I heard my father's voice again, this time taking on a nostalgic tone.

"That reminds me, you used to call yourself the Cicada Queen when you were little."

I turned my back on my dad in a huff and headed for the front door. One of my mother's friends, Mrs. Uehara, was standing in the foyer and holding my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother doing? Here, I brought these..."

Mrs. Uehara had a bag from the local supermarket, which she laid upon the wooden entranceway floor. It was filled with mikan oranges.

"I was in the neighborhood, so I figured I'd stop by."

"Oh, thank you so much. My mother is-"

"The poor dear, I thought it best to return her umbrella as soon as I could."

Inside my hand, the cicada renewed its struggle and came on the verge of escaping from between my fingers. I quickly used both of my hands to form a cage around it. The cicada's legs pricked at me as it moved about. The resulting itch I felt was like a secret fountain of delight flowing

from within my hands.

"Well, there was no need for you to rush. My mother is going to be in the hospital long-term, you see."

"Oh my, is that so? What an awful situation."

The cicada revved up its tiny motor and began flapping its wings in full, tickling at my fingers.

"Guess what, Mrs. Uehara? I found a cicada in the middle of winter. Don't you think that's strange?"

"Well I'll be. Really? But you know, dear, I don't do so well with bugs..."

Mrs. Uehara nervously glanced at the small cage I had formed with my hands before she continued.

"Anywho, I just wanted to stop by for a moment. Give your mother my regards!"

And just like that, she was gone.

I wanted to talk with someone about the cicada that I'd found. I wanted someone to appreciate just how mysterious it was to find one alive in the freezing cold of winter. It was like finding a flower that had bloomed out of season. Perhaps this was a sign that cicadas were evolving. Even though it was winter, the temperature had gotten relatively warmer in recent years. Supposedly, the number of insects that could rough it out through the cold were increasing. Maybe the abnormal weather conditions had triggered some kind of mutation in this particular cicada. Or perhaps, it had come from the other side. Maybe some unknown force had launched it from its home season and into this one, still carrying the heat of summer upon its tiny back. I decided to discuss all of this with Sawachi.

I had been at a party with Sawachi a long time ago. As he sipped away at his watered down alcohol of choice, he made a comment that stuck with me.

"Oh yeah, I totally dig the brown cicada. A pretty remarkable bug, if you ask me. I would say that it has a heart of ambition."

The way that Sawachi had phrased his thoughts really resonated with me. From that point on, I took a little more interest in him.

I gently relocated the cicada inside my sweater through the cuff, and then whipped out my cellphone. I scrolled through my contacts list and found that I still had Sawachi's number. I dialed it up and heard the line ring a few times before he answered.

"Hello..."

I took a moment to calm my nerves before taking a carefree dive into conversation.

"Hey, long time no see. Sorry to call you out of the blue like this."

"Ah... is this who I think it is? Yeah, it's been a long time."

He seemed to figure out who I was right away.

"So hey, this is random, but I found a cicada in the middle of winter. Doesn't that blow your mind?"

"Huh? A cicada? At this time of year? Seriously? Are you sure you didn't just find a cockroach?"

Ew, *gross*. Please don't go there, Sawachi.

"It's not a cockroach! It's a cicada, I swear. A brown cicada. Isn't that mysterious? So tell me, what do you think? I thought you might be pretty well-versed on the topic, Sawachi."

On the other end of the line, a deep silence began that once started, couldn't easily be stopped. It grew and expanded with each passing second. Then, in a mumbling tone, Sawachi spoke again.

"...There are many mysteries in life, you know."

"...Huh?"

"Mysterious occurrences like that aren't very rare, they actually happen all over the world. Even you placing this call to me right now is one of them..."

"But that doesn't answer my question."

I tried one of those lines that people often use to hide their embarrassment.

"You want an answer, huh? Well, I'm afraid that's something I don't have. I'm not even sure such a thing exists. But listen, mysteries like that are a source of solace. They bring comfort to us, and probably to the world itself."

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve. I knew I would have to let it go free sooner rather than later. A cicada grows weak if it spends too long in the hands of humans. Although, I wasn't entirely sure if releasing it to the winter wonderland outside was better than letting it stay in the warm house. I made a promise to Sawachi that we would go drinking again sometime and ended the call.

I left the house and headed for the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had already lost all of its leaves, and now its many branches looked like skeletal fingers that reached out for the ash gray sky. The trunk of the tree had many cracks and fissures that ran down it like little rain gutters. I gently perched the cicada on top of them and it began to leisurely climb up the tree. It seemed almost deep in thought as it paused every so often on its journey. Looking up, I saw a cascade of snowflakes falling from what seemed to be an endless distance away. The snowfall grew gradually stronger. A flurry of small ice crystals fell upon my face and melted away, becoming a series of streaking droplets.

At some point, the cicada had vanished within the rigid maze of a silhouette that was the treetop. The cold had now fully seeped into my body. Yet, the hands I had used to cradle the cicada remained warm and sweaty – almost as if it were summer. A thought suddenly hit me. Although the cicada had been male, it never emitted its cry once the entire time.

I returned to the foyer where my mother's umbrella and the bag of mikan oranges sat. The TV in the living room had been left on and my father was nowhere to be seen. Following the usual routine, I switched the TV off and lifted the bag of mikan oranges onto the kitchen table.

My father had already passed away long ago, and Mrs. Uehara was supposed to have died two years back. Even Sawachi was gone now...

My phone's history clearly showed the call that I had made to him. However, I simply didn't have the courage to try and dial the number a second time.

Perhaps it was because the snow had begun to pile up, but an oppressive silence steadily pervaded throughout the empty house. Everything was so still and quiet that my ears started to ring. It was as if I was listening to the sound of a brown cicada crying out on a summer day, far, far away.

“A Cicada in Winter”

by AZUCHI Moe

Despite being the dead of winter, a cicada came to my window.

It looked lost, flying clumsily this way and that through the snow flurry, until suddenly stopping at the window screen.

Before I could even think about how ridiculous this is, I was overcome with joy.

I like cicadas. Scratch that, I *love* cicadas. From the cute-as-a-baby Kempfer cicada whose cries signal the beginning of summer, to the so-elegant-it-hurts evening cicada, to the nimble, cheerful, but droopy-eyed Walker cicada, I like them all. But my favorite has to be the brown cicada, whose cries sound like a deep fryer on a summer’s day.

But seeing it now, in the middle of winter? No way.

It’s so cold, I’m running my heater and wearing an angora turtleneck.

“Hey, what are you doing?” I ask as I slide open the window.

I bring my face to the screen, having forgotten to take it off at the end of summer. The cold grips me like Cathy’s ghost gripped Mr. Lockwood.

I bring my face to the cicada, my nearsighted gaze meeting its (nearsighted?) gaze. We lock eyes for a moment.

It’s definitely a brown cicada. And, looking closer, I see it’s a he—his slim belly covered in white spots like someone dipped him in flour.

I feel like he could start screaming at any moment.

I open the screen part way and reach out my right hand, keeping my eye on him. Gotcha!

The cicada struggles in my palm, his wings moving like the blades of a fan. Careful not to hurt his wings, I hold him down gently with my finger. I can feel his strong wings trembling.

I’m ecstatic.

I feel satisfied having caught purpose with my own two hands.

"Hey, wanna hear something weird? I just found a cicada in the middle of winter. Look!"

Without even thinking about it, I had wandered into the living room where my dad was watching TV. I call out to his back, but I immediately regret it.

"What're you still doing playing with bugs? Start acting your age!"

"I like what I like! I'll do what I want!" I say indignantly.

Dad and I always fight like this.

The doorbell rings.

"Say, didn't we used to call you Cicada Girl when you were growing up?" Dad mentions like he's just had an epiphany, but I've already headed to the front door in a huff. I get to the hallway and I see my mom's friend, Mrs. Uehara, standing at the door holding Mom's umbrella.

"How is your mother feeling? These are for her," she says, placing a bag full of oranges from the local supermarket on the threshold. "I was in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd stop by."

"Oh, you shouldn't have. Mom's in—"

"I figured it was about time I returned her umbrella, too."

The cicada started struggling again and broke free of my grasp. Just as he started to get away, I cupped him with both of my hands. His legs dug into my palm as he began squirming around. It felt funny, but at this moment it was my secret pleasure.

"You could have kept her umbrella as long as you needed it. Mom's in the hospital, you see..."

"You don't say! That must be tough."

The cicada revs up his little motor again and starts tickling my hand with his fan blades.

"Mrs. Uehara? I found a cicada a second ago—at this time of year! Weird, right?"

"What? Really? But... I don't really like bugs," she says, eyeing my cupped hands wearily. "Anyway, I was just stopping by. Tell your mother I said hello." And with that, she was gone.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada, about how mysterious it was that he survived this late into the year.

If he was a flower, you could say he bloomed out of season. Have cicadas evolved to have longer life spans? They say that since winters are a lot warmer now than they used to be, more insects can just live through them. Did climate change cause something like a mutation in them?

Or maybe, by chance, this little guy got lost carrying the weight of the warm summer on his shoulders to the *other side* and ended up here.

I decided to try calling Sawachi.

"Yeah, brown cicadas. They're cool. They're really something. They're super ambitious," I recall him saying over a whiskey and water some time ago. I liked what he said about the brown cicada, so I liked him a little, too. That's why I've decided to call him.

I put the cicada up my sleeve and flip open my cell phone. Looking through my address book, I see that I've still got his number.

The phone rings and Sawachi answers.

"Hello?"

I'm nervous, but I try to play it cool.

"Hey, been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue like this," I say casually.

"Ah, hey. It has been a while, hasn't it?" he says, seemingly recognizing my voice.

"The reason I'm calling is—there was a cicada. In the middle of winter. Weird, right?"

"Huh. A cicada? This time of year? A *cicada*? You sure it's not just a roach?"

Ugh. I wish he wouldn't say that.

"No! A cicada, a brown cicada! Strange, right? What do you think, Sawachi? You know a lot about these kinds of things, right?"

An unbreakable silence flowed from the other side of the phone, until a small mutter filled the space.

"...There are lots of strange things."

"Hm?"

"There are lots of strange things in this world. For example, you calling me now is pretty strange."

"That's not a good answer," I say to hide my embarrassment.

"A good answer...? I don't know. Maybe things like that just happen. A little mystery every now and then helps us, you know. Us, and the world, too."

The cicada pokes his head out of my sleeve.

It's about time I let him go.

Keeping him in my hand forever is just going to kill him. That being said, I don't really know what's better for him, keeping him in my warm room with me, or letting him out into a snow flurry.

I promise Sawachi to get drinks sometime again soon and hang up the phone.

I open the front door and head to the persimmon tree in the yard.

The persimmon tree's leaves have all fallen, and its bony branches seem to grip the ash gray sky.

I find a good, bumpy, hidden place on the bark and gently place the cicada there.

He seems to think about something, hesitating, before finally shaking his way up the tree.

I look up, and the snow seems to fall from infinity.

The flurry strengthens, and the cold crystals hit my face and melt, hit my face and melt, flowing down my face in streams.

Before I realize it, the cicada has disappeared into the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the persimmon treetop.

My body goes completely numb from the cold, but my hands where I held the cicada are so hot they're sweating like it's summer.

Thinking it over, the cicada was male, but he never cried, even a little...

I head back inside. Mom's umbrella and the bag of oranges are still laying there. The living room TV had been left on, but Dad was nowhere to be seen.

I turned off the TV and carried the oranges to their usual place on the kitchen table.

It's already been many years since Dad passed away, and it must be two years now since Mrs. Uehara passed away. Sawachi, too...

I check my phone. His name is in my recent calls, but I don't have the courage to try calling again...

Either from the snow piling up outside or because there's no one else home, a silence fills the house.

It's so quiet my ears start ringing—ringing like a cicada's cry on a distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada

There was a cicada flying about even though it was the middle of winter. Snow fell gently from the sky while the cicada tumbled back and forth through the air as if lost before it suddenly plopped onto the screen door.

My first reaction wasn't to think what the heck was going on, but rather to feel overjoyed. I really liked cicadas. I really, really liked cicadas.

I liked the cute childlike ones that signaled the beginning of summer with their high-pitched chirrups. I liked the larger ones whose songs were so elegant they were almost mournful. I liked the energetic and cheerful ones with their gentle eyes. Out of all of them though, my favorite was this kind, the ones whose song sounded like a hot veil draped over an already hot summer's day.

But it was absurd for one to be here now. It was freezing, so cold I was wearing an angora wool turtleneck with the heat on.

"Hey you, what are you doing here?" I asked as I opened the glass door and brought my face close to the screen door that was still up from summer. My skin paled as the cold air rushed in. I stared into the cicada's (probably) near-sighted eyes with my own near-sighted eyes.

It was definitely a cicada and it was male, his slim white underbelly looked as if it had been dusted with powder. He actually looked like he was about to burst into a loud song then and there.

I cracked the screen door open, the cicada and I staring at each other the whole time. Eventually, I reached out my right hand.

"Got him!"

I had a cicada in my hand. His wings were vibrating like a fan run by a tiny motor. The strength of his wings sent vibrations through my fingers as I gently tried to hold them down so he wouldn't hurt himself.

I was ecstatic. I felt fulfilled, like I held in my hands the result of a goal I had finally achieved.

"This is so weird. I found a cicada even though it's the middle of winter," I called out without thinking to my dad, whose back was turned as he watched television. I immediately regretted it.

"Are you still catching cicadas? How old are you now?"

"I don't care what you think, I like what I like!" I shouted with a huff. Dad and I always got this way quickly.

That's when the doorbell rang.

I fumed and heard my dad say, "Now that I think about it, people used to call you Cicada Girl," like he was reminiscing, but I turned away and went to the front door.

Mrs. Uehara, one of my mom's friends, was at the door holding Mom's umbrella.

"How's your mom? I brought this..." she said as she lifted a bag of oranges from the nearby grocery store and set it inside the door.

"Oh, you didn't have to do that. Mom's—"

"I thought I should return her umbrella right away."

The cicada thrashed briefly in an attempt to escape, so I closed it in by using both my hands as a cage. His legs flailed about, poking me. The jabs felt like the joy of having a secret in my hands.

"You could have returned it any time... Mom's going to be in the hospital for a while," I said.

"Really? It must be tough on you."

The cicada activated his tiny motor, his wings tickled the palms of my hands.

"By the way, I found this cicada even though it's the middle of winter. Don't you think that's weird?" I asked.

"You did? Really? I'm not that good with bugs..." Mrs. Uehara looked uncomfortably at the cage my hands made and said, "Right, I just wanted to drop by. Tell your mom I said hello." Then she turned and left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada, about how strange it was that it was still alive despite the cold season. Was it just like a flower blooming out of season? Perhaps it was due to some development in the cicada's ability to survive. It was winter, but people did say it was warmer than it

had been in the distant past, which meant more insects could survive through hibernation. Maybe there was a sudden mutation caused by abnormal weather patterns. Or maybe by some freak occurrence, his teeny tiny body somehow bore that hot summer all the way here when he strayed into the season on the other side, on *this* side.

I decided to ask Sawachi.

A long time ago when a group of us were out for drinks, Sawachi said, “Ah, cicadas. They’re cool. Pretty cool indeed. They’ve got ambitions,” before downing his whiskey and water.

I gently placed the cicada inside the sleeve of my sweater and pulled out my phone. I scrolled through my phone book and found Sawachi’s number was still in there.

The phone rang, then Sawachi answered. “...Hello?”

I calmed my beating heart and casually said, “Hey, it’s been awhile. Sorry for calling you out of the blue—”

“Oh... Is that you? Huh, yeah it has been a while.” It seemed he recognized me right away.

“I guess I’ll just get to it. I found a cicada. In the winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Huh... A cicada? At this time of year? Like, a real cicada? You sure it wasn’t a cockroach?”

I couldn’t help cringing and wishing he’d give it a rest. “It’s not a cockroach! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada actually. Isn’t that strange? What do you think? I got the impression you knew a lot about this kind of thing...”

From the other end of the line came nothing but a flood of irreparable silence, a silence that felt like it would expand and drown me.

Eventually, Sawachi murmured, “...There are a lot of strange things.”

“... What?”

“There are a lot of strange things in this world. The fact that you’re talking to me right now, for example.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“Your question... Well, I don’t know the answer. Maybe that kind of thing just happens. But you know, sometimes strange things can save us. I think that’s true for both us and the world.”

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve. I had to let him go soon. He’d grow weak if he stayed stuck in a person’s hand forever. But which was better for the cicada, keeping him in the warm indoors or releasing him outside where the snow was settling? I honestly didn’t know.

After promising Sawachi we’d go out for drinks again sometime, I hung up the phone. I went out the door and over to the persimmon tree in the garden. It had lost all its leaves, and its knobby branches clutched at the gray sky. Gutter-like fissures and cracks covered the tree’s trunk.

I placed the cicada on the tree. He looked lost in thought as he meandered up the trunk, pausing occasionally with hesitation. I gazed up into the fathomless heights above from which the snow came. The snow gradually fell more thickly, the cold crystals hitting my face and melting into numerous streams. Before I realized, the cicada disappeared into the rigid maze of the persimmon tree’s upper branches.

My whole body was chilled to the bone, yet for some reason, my hands were hot and slicked with sweat like it were the middle of summer. I suddenly had the thought that even though the cicada was male, he never once sang.

I went back inside where I saw Mom’s umbrella and the bag of oranges. The TV in the living room was left on and Dad was gone. I turned it off and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table, like always.

Dad was already long gone from this world, and it must be two years now since Mrs. Uehara passed away. And Sawachi too...

My call history showed an outgoing call to him, but I didn’t have the courage to try calling again.

I didn’t know if it was because of the now high-piled snow, but I felt a suffocating silence come over me, like I was trapped inside this empty house. My ears started to ring from the unbearable silence. It was almost like the cicadas’ songs on a far distant summer’s day.

The Winter Cicada
By Azuchi Moe

In the middle of winter, a cicada came to me.

It flew its confused flight through the blustering snow, zigging and zagging until it stopped abruptly on the bug screen that was fixed to my window. I smiled and fondly thought to myself, "What a little idiot". You see, I love cicadas - I really, really love cicadas.

I love the noisy cicadas, chirping to announce the coming of summer like excitable children; I love the doleful and elegant *Tanna japonensis*; I love the quick-witted *Meimuna opalifera* with their wide, shining eyes - but my favourites are the *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, commonly known as the large brown cicada, with their cry, warmer than even the hot Japanese summer when they are active. But this one was definitely a *Littlus idiotus*.

Only a little idiot would be out in such cold weather. I had put on a thick angora sweater and turned the heating up, so how could this cicada stand it?

"Well, well... What might you be?"

I slid open the glass window and brought my face up to the wire screen, still left in place from summer. The cold brushed up against me like the touch of an icy princess from a childhood fairy tale. My short-sighted eyes met the cicada's - presumably - short-sighted eyes for the briefest of moments.

It was definitely *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, the large brown cicada. It was a male, with a pointed thorax that looked like it had been dusted with a fine white powder. He looked like he was about to unleash his loud cry at any moment. I opened the window screen slightly and - keeping my gaze locked with his - slowly held out my right arm until...

Got him!

The cicada was going crazy in my hand. His wings were like a tiny motorised fan. I felt the force from his insect muscles sending little taps through my fingers, holding him gently so as not to hurt those precious wings. It was pure joy. I felt a deep satisfaction, as if I had caught some sort of purpose right there in my hands.

"Hey, isn't this weird? There's a cicada in the middle of winter," I blurted out at the silhouette of my dad watching TV in the next room. I instantly regretted it.

"You're playing with cicadas again? At your age?"

"It's not my fault!" I raised my voice in indignation. My father and I were always like this. "I can't help liking the things I like..."

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. I turned my back on him and headed to the door.

"Oh yeah, you used to call me 'insect girl', didn't you?" I said huffily, churning up those memories as I went.

My mum's friend Mrs Uehara was standing outside under my mum's umbrella.

"How is your mother doing? This is just a small..." she said as she carefully placed a bag of clementines from the local supermarket on the raised porch, "well, I was in the area, so..."

"Oh, thank you. Mum is..."

"The umbrella!" she interrupted, "I thought I ought to get it back to you right away."

The cicada had managed to force his way out of my grip, so I clasped my fingers together to cage him in. His legs started pawing at me, and the itchy scratchy feeling felt good, a secret sensation inside of my hands.

"There's really no hurry! Mum is still going to be in the hospital for a long time."

"I guess that's right. It must be so difficult for you."

The cicada had started up its miniature motor again and the flickering flaps of its wings tickled my palms.

"Um, Mrs Uehara. I found a cicada, even though it's winter. Isn't that odd?"

"Did you? Really? A bug? It's just that I'm not very good with..." Mrs Uehara trailed off as her eyes fell uncomfortably on the cage of my hands, "I was just dropping by anyway. Please send my

best wishes to your mother," she called out, already leaving.

I wanted to talk to someone about my cicada, about the strangeness of him being alive in such cold weather. If he were a flower it would be an out of season orchid. Could he be some kind of brand new evolution? They say that winters are warmer now than they ever were, and that there are more and more hibernating insects too. Perhaps the changing climate caused some kind of new mutation. Maybe, somehow, he carried the hot summer inside his small body and then he got the seasons on this side and the other side confused and he turned up here by accident. I decided to try talking to Sawachi.

A long time ago, while we were out drinking one evening, Sawachi had talked to me about cicadas. "The large brown cicada, right? Oh, that's a good one. Such a good one! You know why?" He downed his drink. "Because it's got ambition!" I liked the way he spoke, and so I kind of liked Sawachi.

I hid my cicada in the sleeve of my sweater, and flipped open my phone. Searching my address book, I found that Sawachi's name was still there. It rang and then connected.

"...he..llo..." I tried to sound nonchalant, even while I was struggling to keep myself calm, "Long time no speak. Sorry for calling you out of the bl..."

"Oh! It's you! It has been a while." He'd recognised me right away.

"So, here's the thing. I found a cicada. Now. In the winter. Isn't that amazing?"

"A cicada? Now? What? Are you sure it wasn't a roach?" Ugh, no, Sawachi, shut up!

"No way. It was a large brown cicada, *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*. Isn't that weird? What do you think? I thought that you knew about this sort of thing."

An irrevocable void of deep silence seeped out from the other end of the line, spreading over everything. Sawachi's voice lowered to a mumble.

"...there are many strange things..."

"Huh?"

"There are many, many, many strange things in this world. Like, for example, you calling me right now."

"What kind of answer is that?" I shot back to hide my awkwardness, as if he might be able to hear me blushing over the phone.

"An... answer? I wouldn't know anything about that. I wonder if there is one. But things that are strange aren't necessarily bad. That's how I feel and maybe that's how the universe feels too..."

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve. At some point I would have to let him go. The longer a cicada remains in someone's hand, the weaker it becomes. But between staying in this warm room, or being sent out into the blustering snow, I really didn't know which would be worse for him. I promised Sawachi that we would go out for a drink again sometime and hung up the phone.

Leaving the porch, I headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden. All the leaves had already fallen from the tree, and the bare branches clawed at the ashen sky. I gently placed him into one of the grooves in the cracked and fissured trunk. My cicada gradually started to climb, hesitatingly, like he was considering something. I lifted my gaze to follow him, and the snow seemed to be falling down on me from an incredible height. It was getting heavier and heavier. The freezing crystals hitting my face were melting into streams and before I knew it, my cicada had disappeared into the stiff labyrinthine silhouette of the persimmon tree's branches.

My body was frozen through, but my hands which had caught the cicada were still hot, with palms as sweaty as if it were a summer's day. I suddenly realised that even though my cicada was a male he hadn't made any noise at all.

When I got back to the porch, mum's umbrella was still lying next to the bag of oranges. In the living room, the TV was still on, but any signs of my father had already disappeared. I switched off the television, and put the oranges in their usual place on the kitchen table.

My father had passed over a long time ago and Mrs Uehara must have been gone for two years now. Sawachi too. His number was still there, in my phone's call history, but since that day I've never

had the courage to dial it again...

A silence enveloped the empty house, as if everything had been buried by the endless snow. In this stillness, I heard the ringing in my ears. It sounded exactly like the cry of a large brown cicada on a long distant summer's day.

The Winter Cicada by Azuchi Moe

Even though it was almost mid-winter, a Cicada flew by.

In the flickering snow, the Cicada flew here and there in a very awkward and clumsy manner. Suddenly, it dashed on my insect window mesh. I was rather happy than thinking how foolishly it crashed on my window.

Cicadas mark the arrival of summer and I love all of them, from the cute and young Niinii or Kaempfer Cicada, to the cold, but elegant Higurashi or Evening Cicada, to the nimble yet droopy-eyed, Tsukutsuku-Boushi or Meimuna Opalifera Cicada. Certainly, what is a summer without the little boiling oil-like sound of buzzing Cicadas? And that is my favourite part about the season.

It is so cold outside right now that one can wear a thick woollen sweater in a room with the heater on and this is a weird time to see these bugs out.

"Hey! Who are you, my little friend?"

I opened the glass windowpane and took a close look at the insect panel that had been attached to the window since last summer.

It was freezing cold!

I stared at it for a while, trying to confirm if it was a Cicada. Definitely, it was a Cicada and more specifically a male one with a tight abdomen covered in white powder. It would start making that fluttering noise any moment.

I slightly opened the insect panel attached to my window and continued to stare at it, I extended my right hand and...

"Yes, I caught it!"

Wings like that of a small motor-fan, the Cicada's wiggling wings gave a tickling sensation inside my cupped hands which was almost overwhelming.

It moved as if it had a purpose in my hand.

"Hey, this is weird, a Cicada in winter! You have to see this..."

Without any thoughts, I called my dad who was watching TV in the living room and yet ended up regretting having done so soon after.

"I don't care what you think or say, I like what I like!" I argued.

A little dispute between my father and I had begun. Just at that moment, the doorbell rang, and I gave a huff.

"So, were you related to a Cicada in the past?" said my father acting as if he was trying to recall such a notion as he turned to open the door. Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother, was standing there with my mother's umbrella.

"Your mother, is she doing well now?"

Mrs. Uehara inquired while carrying the Mandarin oranges in a bag from the nearby supermarket.

"Since, I was in the neighbourhood..."

"Ah, sorry, Mother is..."

"I had been meaning to return the umbrella before, but..."

The Cicada began to lift away as if to slip from my fingers, so I closed it between my both hands. The legs of the Cicadas kept moving, and the tickling sensation felt like I was holding a secret pleasure in my hands.

"Oh, she used to always be so healthy, but this time she has been in the hospital for a long time."

"Oh, I am sorry to hear that."

The Cicada activated like a small motor, and its wings tickled my hands.

"Hey, Mrs. Uehara. There's a Cicada in the winter. Isn't it strange?"

"Oh, is that so? But I don't like insects."

Mrs. Uehara looked at my hands with a worried look on her face, saying "Anyway, I just wanted to pay a quick visit. Don't forget to give my regards to your mother", she abruptly left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the Cicada and the mystery behind finding it in such a cold season. Was it like the flower, which is blooming out of season, or is this the evolution of a Cicada's life

cycle? Also, even though it is winter, it is said that the temperatures are rising and nowadays many insects do not hibernate during winter. Was it an adaptation because of the abnormal weather? Perhaps, it was tiny and young, lost track of that hot summer and ended up on the other side of the season, I wondered.

Finally, I had decided to talk to my friend Sawaji. Long ago at a party, while pouring a drink Sawaji said, "Cicadas are cool, aren't they? They are pretty great and have vigour." Having liked his words, it was from that point on that I started liking Sawaji.

I gently inserted the Cicada into my sweater cuff and looked at my mobile phone. As I scrolled through the address book, I saw Sawaji's name was still there.

The dial tone beeped, then finally connected with Sawaji.

".....Yes....."

Calming myself, I casually said, "It's been a while, sorry to call you so suddenly..."

"Ah, is that you? It's been quite a long time."

It seemed that he immediately recognized me. "Hey, this is going to be quick but there's a Cicada here, even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"What? A Cicada? Right now? Are you sure it's not a cockroach?"

No, Sawaji. Stop kidding around.

"It is a Cicada. Isn't it strange? What do you think? I thought you might have some insight on it..."

There was a deep and lasting moment of silence flowing across the phone which seemed to spread.

"There are so many strange things...", Sawaji stated vaguely.

"What do you mean...?"

"There are so many strange things in this world, and you called me now to ask about that..."

"It's not an answer", I awkwardly muttered, trying to get the words out.

"Answer? I don't know if there is one. But the most mysterious thing of all is salvation. For us and maybe even for the world."

The Cicada buried his face out of my sweater cuff.

I had to release it. Since I had kept it in my hand for so long and that might have weakened it. However, I was confused. What kind of temperature will be better for the Cicada; a warm room or out in the snow?

I hung up with Sawaji, ending with the promise to meet at another party someday.

Leaving the foyer, I headed out to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The leaves of the persimmon tree had completely fallen, and the bare tree branches were standing against the grey sky.

I gently placed the Cicada on the tree trunk covered in grooves and streaks. The Cicada initially hesitated, but started climbing the trunk.

As I looked up, the snow seemed to fall from an endless height. It was intense, and when the cold crystals hit my face, it melted and flowed in a streak.

At some point, the Cicada seemed to disappear somewhere in the twisted bare tree branches that formed the silhouette of the persimmon tree top.

My body was completely cold, yet my hands that held the Cicada were somehow hot and sweaty like summer. Suddenly I realized that even though being a male the Cicada didn't make any sound.

When I returned to the home entrance, my mother's umbrella and a bag full of mandarin oranges were still left there. The TV in the living room had been left on, yet my father was no longer in sight.

I switched off the TV and left the bag full of mandarin oranges on the kitchen table as usual.

My father had passed away long ago, and Mrs. Uehara had also died two years ago... And even Sawaji...

There was a history of outgoing calls to Sawaji on my mobile phone. But I didn't have the courage to call that number again... I couldn't tell if it was because of the snow that was accumulating outside, but the house was filled with a deafening silence, making my ears ring.

It was like the sound of buzzing Cicadas on a distant summer day.

Winter Cicada

by Azuchi Moe

It was already the middle of winter and yet I managed to spot a large brown cicada flying outside. It flew across the fluttering snow, clumsily changed directions as though it had lost its way until it suddenly landed on the screen door with a bang. It made me really happy to see it until I realized how foolish I have been.

I've always loved cicadas. I loved them with fervent passion. I liked the small and cute *Platypleura kaempferi*, which usually signaled the arrival of summer, as well as the aloof yet sophisticated *Tanna japonensis*. I'm also fond of the agile and droopy-eyed *Meimuna opalifera*, but among them all, my favorite had to be the *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, or more commonly known as the large brown cicada, especially its loud chirping sound, similar to the sizzling hot oil in a frying pan where its Japanese name was derived. But it was foolish of me, after all. Even though it was so cold. Even though I've turned on the heat and was wearing an Angora wool turtleneck sweater.

"Hey there, what species are you?" I opened the glass door and placed my face close to the door, possibly the closest it had been since summer. The cold air instantly pierced through my skin. My myopic eyes came face to face with the cicada's eyes (which were probably also nearsighted). We had quite a staring contest for a while as I examined it closely. It was the *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, as I thought. Considering its hollow dome-shaped abdomen, it was undoubtedly male. It seemed like it was about to begin chirping loudly. It was said that only male cicadas sing, and they do it as a mating mechanism to attract female cicadas. I opened the screen door a little, kept my eyes on the cicada and reached out my right hand.

Caught it!

The cicada flailed in my hand; its wings were like a fan powered by a small motor. I could feel the power of its wings on my fingers as I held it gently to keep it from being damaged. I was beyond happy. It felt fulfilling, as though I'd found my purpose right on my very hand.

"How strange. It's winter and yet there's a cicada. Look!" I showed it to my dad, who was watching the television in the living room, and immediately regretted it.

"You're already old and you're still catching cicadas?"

"All that matters is that I like it!" I huffed, my voice breaking.

My relationship with my dad had always been like this. All of a sudden, the doorbell rang. It couldn't come at a better time as I was really getting irritated. I turned my back at him but as I was heading for the door, I heard him reminisce and say, "That reminds me, you used to call yourself the cicada girl." When I opened the door, my mom's friend, Mr. Uehara, stood there, holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother? Here, take this." He said as he gestured to the bag of oranges from the nearby supermarket before dropping them on the steps.

"I was nearby so it was great timing."

"Thank you. You didn't have to. I'm sorry but my mother's not here."

"I figured I ought to return the umbrella soon."

The cicada struggled in my grasp, so I trapped it with both of my hands to prevent it from flying away. Its legs moved around, and the itchy feeling it gave my hands secretly delighted me.

"Oh, you could've returned it any time. My mother's been hospitalized for a long time."

"I know, it must be difficult for you."

The cicada started powering up its little motor, and its wings tickled my hands.

"Look, Mr. Uehara. I saw a cicada even though it's winter. Strange, isn't it?"

"Really? That's cool. But I'm not really good with insects."

Mr. Uehara looked anxious as he looked at my hands. "Well, then, that's all I came here for. Send my regards to your mother for me." With that, he left and went home.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. I wanted to discuss how fascinating and mysterious it

was to find one despite the freezing weather. If it were a flower, would it have bloomed out of season? Or perhaps this was part of the evolution of cicadas? Even though it was winter, it was said that the number of insects around this time were increasing these days, as a result of global warming. Maybe some sort of mutation happened because of climate change? Or could it have been driven by the curiosity of what the summer heat was like on the other side of the world, and because it was small, it was easily pushed by some momentum?

After pondering over it, I decided to consult Sawachi. I remembered at a drinking party sometime ago, he downed his glass of whiskey and said, “Yeah, it’s a *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*. They’re a nice lot. Very nice. And ambitious.”

I was intrigued by what he said, so I figured it would be interesting to discuss it with him. I gently placed the cicada into the cuffs of my sweater and took out my phone. I looked up his name in my contacts and there it was. I dialed his number and the call instantly connected.

“Hello.”

I calmed myself and said, “Hi, it’s been a long time. Sorry to call you suddenly.”

“Oh, it’s you... Yeah, it’s been a while.”

He seemed to have recognized me right away.

“So, um, I saw a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“A cicada? Now? Really? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Oh, come on. Cut it out, Sawachi.

“It’s a cicada, I’m sure of it. It’s a *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*. Strange, right? I figured you’d know more about it. What do you think?”

On the other side of the phone, deep silence slowly stretched on. Then Sawachi muttered. “There are a lot of strange things...”

“What?”

“There are a lot of strange things in the world... Like the fact that you just called me out of the blue.”

“You didn’t answer my question.” I said, trying to mask the embarrassment in my voice.

“Well, I don’t know... I’m not sure that’s possible. But what it needs now is salvation. I guess the same goes for us and the world, too.” He answered.

“It’s time to let go of it. If you keep it in your hands for too long, it will weaken. Although, I’m not sure which is better for the cicada, being locked inside a warm room or being free outside the freezing snow.”

I hung up, promising Sawachi to hang out and meet another time. I left the house and went to the persimmon tree in the garden. Its leaves have all fallen, and its lanky branches seemed to reach out into the grey sky. I gently placed the cicada on its trunk filled with spiral grooves and streaks. The cicada began to slowly climb up the trunk, with a little hesitation at times, as though it was pondering over something.

I looked up at the sky and the snow seemed to fall from endless heights. The icy snowflake crystals hit my face and gradually melted, leaving a watery streak. Without noticing it, the cicada had already disappeared somewhere within the rigid, maze-like silhouette of the persimmon tree.

My body felt completely cold, and yet my hands which held the cicada felt hot and sweaty, as though it was summer. Come to think of it, that cicada was male and yet it didn’t sing at all... I only just realized.

When I returned to the front door, I saw my mom’s umbrella and the bag of oranges. The TV in the living room was still on but my dad was no longer there. I switched off the TV and carried the bag of oranges to the kitchen as usual.

My dad had long passed away and Mr. Uehara probably died about two years ago. And Sawachi... The call to Sawachi remained on my phone history. I considered calling him again but I couldn’t muster up the courage anymore.

Perhaps because it was snowing, the empty house was enveloped in deafening silence. The solemn

tranquility made my ears ring. Somehow, I could hear the singing of a large brown cicada on a distant summer day.

“Winter Cicada”

By Azuchi Moe

Although it was the middle of winter, an *aburazemi* cicada came flying in. After flying to and fro clumsily as if lost amid the flickering snow, it ran smack into the screen door.

Before thinking “what a dumb cicada,” my first response was utter joy.

I like cicadas. I like them so, so much.

I like the cute, child-like Kaempfer cicadas, the cool, elegant evening cicadas, and the quick *Meimuna opalifera* with their cheerful drooping eyes that signal the start of summer, but at the end of the day, my favorite is the *aburazemi* cicadas with voices that seem to pour heated oil on the already-hot summer.

But it is true that what this cicada just did was pretty dumb.

Even though it is so cold right now.

Even though I am wearing an Angola turtleneck sweater and have the heater on.

“Hey, who do you think you are?”

Opening the glass door, I peered closely at the screen door that was left there from the summer. The chill envelopes me like the embrace of a snow fairy.

My shortsighted eyes and the cicada’s (likely) shortsighted eyes meet briefly.

It is in fact an *aburazemi* cicada.

It is a male *aburazemi* cicada with a sucked-in stomach patterned like white powder was blown on it. It looks like he may start singing loudly any second now—.

I tilt the screen door ajar, eyes still locked with the cicada, and slowly extend my right hand toward him.

I got him!

The cicada rustles around in my hand. Wings like fans powered by a small motor. The strength of the base of his wings fluttering against my fingers, gently holding him captive so as not to hurt his wings.

My heart leaps.

I feel like I have caught a sense of purpose in my hand.

“This is weird. Look, a cicada’s here, even though it’s winter.”

Without thinking, I addressed the back of my dad watching TV in the living room. Then I regretted it.

“What are you doing still catching cicadas at your age—”

“What I like is what I like; I can do what I want!”

My temper flares up.

My dad and I always ended up bickering.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

While I was still bristling, my dad said, “now that you mention it, you were called ‘cicada girl’ as a child, weren’t you,” like that had just occurred to him, as I headed towards the door.

My mom’s friend Ms. Uehara was standing at the threshold holding my mom’s umbrella.

“How’s your mom doing? I brought this...”

Ms. Uehara said as she lowered a bag of clementines from the nearby grocery store, at our door.

“I was just in the neighborhood.”

“Oh, thank you for your thoughtfulness. Mom is —”

“I was thinking I should return her umbrella quickly but...”

The cicada had rushed against my fingers about to escape, so I trapped him in both my hands forming a cocoon. His legs skittered around, pricking at my skin, the sting of which was a secret pleasure in my hands.

“Ah, there was no rush on the umbrella... Mom is on a long-term stay in the hospital.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that. That must be tough.”

The cicada revved up his small motor, his wings brushing against and tickling my fingers.

“Ms. Uehara, here’s some food for thought. We have a cicada here even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? But I’m not a big fan of bugs—”

Glancing worriedly at my hand cocoon, Ms. Uehara said,

“Well, I was just dropping by. Please say hi to your mom,” and left.

I wanted to talk to somebody about the cicada, about the mystery of it living in this cold winter. If it were a flower, it would be an off-season blooming. Has the vitality of the cicada evolved? Despite it being winter, it has been said that these days are warmer than in the past, with more insects remaining after the fall season. Has a sudden aberration occurred due to the abnormal weather? Or did that small body somehow wander into this side of the calendar year carrying that hot summer of long ago?

I decided to ask Zawachi about it.

Once a long time ago at a bar hangout, Zawachi had said, “Yeah, those *aburazemi* cicadas are good guys. They’re just all-around good guys. They have ambition,” while opening a can of highball. The statement struck a chord with me, which made me like him a little too.

I gently nestled the cicada into the arm of my sweater and opened my phone. Searching my contacts, Zawachi’s name was still there.

The phone rang and Zawachi answered.

“...Yes...”

Trying to keep my composure, I casually remarked, “It’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue—”

“Oh...is it you? Yeah, it’s been a while.”

He seemed to recognize that it was me calling immediately.

“So, just to cut to the chase, I wanted to tell you that I saw a cicada. In the winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“What...a cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? Don’t you mean a cockroach?”

Ugh no, don’t say that, Zawachi.

“No, that’s not it, it’s a cicada, an *aburazemi* cicada. Isn’t that mysterious? What do you think? I thought you might have some insight on this.”

On the other end of the line, an irremediable, deep silence burgeoned and spread.

Zawachi’s voice sank to a mutter.

“...There are lots of mysteries.”

“...Hmmm?”

“There are a lot of mysteries in this world. Like you calling me now...”

“That’s not an answer,” I ventured, trying to smooth over the awkwardness.

“Hmmm, an answer. I don’t have an answer to this. Is there an answer? But you know what, mystery is salvation. For us, and probably also, for the world—”

The cicada poked his head out from my sleeve.

I need to let him go soon. If I keep him in my hands too long, he will weaken. Even so, I don’t know if it’s better for him if I release him into the warm room, or into the fluttering snow outside.

Zawachi and I said we would go for a drink again sometime and hung up the phone.

Heading out the front door, I approached the persimmon tree in the yard.

The persimmon tree’s leaves had completely fallen off, the lean branches gripping the gray sky.

I set down the cicada on the trunk, which was covered in groove-like sinews and cracks. As if deep in contemplation, the cicada started climbing the trunk floppily, hesitating occasionally.

Looking up, it seemed like the snow was falling from an endless height. Gradually thickening, the cold crystals hit my face, melting and dripping in streams.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared stiffly into the maze-like shadows at the top of the persimmon tree.

My body completely gave into the cold, but my hands that had held the cicada were somehow still warm, sweating like it was summer. Come to think of it, even though the cicada was male, it didn’t cry at all, I suddenly thought.

Returning to my door, my mom's umbrella and clementines were still there. The TV in the living room was left blaring, but my dad was no longer there.

I turned off the TV and brought the clementines to the kitchen table as usual.

It has already been years since Dad passed away, and Ms. Uehara had also passed two years ago. Zawachi also...

The call to Zawachi is still in my call history on my phone. But I don't have the courage to call that number again...

Perhaps because of the accumulating snow, a smothering silence fills the empty house.

In the deep silence, my ears started buzzing.

It sounded just like the cry of an *aburazemi* cicada from a summer day long, long ago.

A brown cicada in winter

We are deep in the middle of winter and yet, a brown cicada has come flying in.

Amidst flurries of snow, its disoriented fluttering, punctuated by haphazard changes in direction, finally finds an abrupt stopping point against the insect screen.

Before I can even start to be perplexed, I'm overjoyed.

I love cicadas. I absolutely adore them.

Whether we're talking about the baby-like kaempfer cicadas that announce the coming of summer, the evening cicadas, whose elegance borders on tragic, the nimble walker's cicadas with their cheerful, droopy eyes, I love all of them; however, more than any other, I am infatuated with brown cicadas, their singing voice is akin to a drip of hot oil added onto an already scorching summer air.

However... Now that I think of it, it is perplexing.

It's way too cold for this.

I mean, I'm wearing an angora turtleneck sweater, and the heater is on—.

"Hey little guy, what are you?"

I open the glass door, bring my face up to the window screen which had stayed motionless since the summer. A cold breeze is reaching through, much like the skin of a Yuki-onna¹.

For a good while, my nearsighted eyes meet the (probably) nearsighted eyes of the cicada.

This definitely is a brown cicada.

Its firmly built abdomen, which looks as though someone sprinkled white powder all over it, is without a doubt that of a male. It looks as if it were about to start singing at the top of its lungs at any moment—.

Carefully, I open the insect screen and, all while keeping direct eye contact with the cicada, extend my right hand.

I caught it!

Now bustling about inside my hands, the cicada's wings feel like fans powered by tiny motors. I make sure not to hurt them by keeping a soft grasp, I can feel the muscle strength of its wings tingling my fingers as they rustle against them.

I turn completely delirious.

A great sense of accomplishment swells up within me, as though I have caught it for a purpose.

"Hey, take a look, we're in winter and I found a cicada, it's so strange."

Instinctively, I call out to dad as he's watching TV in the living room. I regret it immediately after.

"Are you still going on cicada hunts? At your age—"

"I like what I like, isn't that up to me."

Muffled, I take on a harsher tone.

Every conversation dad and I have seem to go this way.

Moments later, the doorbell rings.

"Now that I think of it, back then we used to call you cicada girl."

Annoyed, I turn my back to my father's reminiscing and head for the door.

Mom's good friend, Mrs.Kamihara, is standing holding mom's umbrella.

"How is your mother? Here..."

Mrs.Kamihara begins taking mandarins out of a plastic bag from the local supermarket onto the edge of the entranceway as she talks.

"I just happened to be passing by, you see."

"Ah, thank you very much. Mom is—"

"I was thinking it's about time I give back the umbrella—"

The cicada is making a ruckus and nearly manages to escape, so I form a cage with both hands in

¹ Malevolent spirit in Japanese folklore, typically takes the form of a woman with otherworldly pale complexion and long black hair. It resides in snowy mountains and preys on travelers, often attacking them to feed on their life energy, or leading them astray.

order to keep it in. The gesticulation of its prickly feet induces a slight tingle, like a privileged stimulus concealed within my hands.

“Oh, you really didn’t have to, any time would have been fine... Mom is facing long-term hospitalization.”

“Oh, I see. That’s terrible.”

The cicada revs up its tiny engines, its wings are now tickling the inside of my hands as they flap about.

“Hey, Mrs.Kamihara. I found a cicada in the middle of winter. Isn’t it strange?”

“Erm, is that so? Really? Actually, I’m not good at all with insects—“

Sending an anxious look at my hand-cage, she declares

“Well, I was just passing by. Send your regards to your mother.”
and promptly heads out.

I want to talk about this cicada with someone. Talk about how strange it is that it is alive in such a cold season—. If it were a flower you’d call it off-season flowering. Is this the fruit of the evolution of the cicada’s capacity for survival? It’s true that we are in winter, but it is said that nowadays’ winter is much warmer in comparison to how it used be in the past; as such there are now many insects that live through the winter. Was abnormal weather the cause of a sort of mutation? Or is that by some driving force, within its tiny body— the cicada carried that hot summer, and managed to meander its way to *the other side* of the seasons.

I decided to talk to Sawachi about it.

Sawachi had once told me, at a get-together,

“Ah yes, the brown cicada. He’s a good guy. Pretty nice feller all around. He’s full of ambition I tell ya.”

He had made this statement while finishing a diluted spirit. I really liked Sawachi’s way of putting things, it was one of the reasons I had taken somewhat of a fancy to him.

I tenderly insert the cicada into my sweater sleeve, and take out my phone. After a quick browse through the address book, I’m glad to find Sawachi’s name is still on it.

The tone rings and I find myself connected with him.

“...Yes...”

Trying to keep my composure, I go for a casual approach.

“It’s been a while. Sorry for the sudden call—“

“Oh...Is that you? Hm— It has been a while.”

Seems it didn’t take him long to pick up it was me.

“Well, to get right into it, I found a cicada. In winter. It’s strange, right?”

“Hm...A cicada? At this time of year? A *see-ka-da*? Hm... You sure it’s not a cockroach?

Ew... Sawachi, don’t do this.

“No. It’s a cicada, a brown cicada. Isn’t it odd? What do you think? I thought you would be knowledgeable about this sort of thing—“

At the other end of phone, an irretrievable succession of dead silence elapses, increasingly growing in magnitude.

Sawachi’s voice, turned to whisper, breaks the silence.

“...There’s plenty of odd things all around us.”

“...Hm?”

“ This world is full of oddities. You deciding to give me a phone call now, for example...”

“You’re not answering my question.”

I tried a retort that would hide my embarrassment.

“Hm...An answer..uh. I don’t have one of those. I wonder if they really exist. But you know, oddities are salvation. For us, and probably for the rest of the world too—“

The cicada is peeking its head out my sleeve.

It’s about time for me to let it go. Kept too long in human hands, cicadas grow weak. Although,

in reality, I have no idea of which is best for the cicada, keeping it indoors where it is warm, or releasing it in the cold outdoors while it keeps snowing.

I make a promise with Sawachi to catch up over a round of drinks before hanging up the phone.

I go out the door, and head for the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree sits bare leaved, the branches, skeletal, are clawing at the grey sky above.

The trunk is covered with ditch-like cracks and ridges. I take great care placing the cicada on it. The little insect, as though lost in thought, initiates a tardy, at times hesitant, climb up the tree bark.

Looking up, the snow appears to be falling down from a point of incommensurable altitude. Progressively gaining in intensity, the tiny, cold crystals drop on my face, then immediately dissolve, eventually forming a small network of streams.

Before I know it, the cicada has disappeared beyond the tree's canopy and its thick, labyrinthine silhouette.

My whole body feels glacial and yet, my hands, which had until now been holding the cicada, are still as warm and sweaty as a summer day. It comes to me that even though it was a male cicada, it did not sing even once.

I make my way back to the entrance, passing mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins still left there. The TV in the living room is still on, but dad is already gone.

I turn off the television and, almost mechanically, bring the bag of mandarins onto the kitchen table.

Dad passed away a long time ago, so did Mrs. Kamihara, about two years ago. And then, Sawachi too...

My phone's history had my call to Sawachi still in its memory, but I don't have enough courage left in me to attempt to call him again.

Could it be snow starting to pile up? The empty house seems under the snare of an ever-tightening silence.

The quietness becomes so overbearing my ears start to ring.

It almost sounds like, reaching from a far, far away summer day, the singing of a brown cicada.

An Unexpected Visitor by Azuchi Moe

It was the dead of winter when the *aburazemi* made an appearance. Flitting about awkwardly in the snow as if attempting to navigate to some undetermined destination, it came to rest suddenly on the screen of my front door. As baffled as I was about the insect's appearance, I was more so overcome with joy. I am rather fond of cicadas. One could go as far to say I have an infatuation with them.

The adorable, child-like *nii-niizemi* that signals the start of summer, the *higurashi* whose transparent wings are so elegant you could weep at the sight. I even like the *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* with its friendly round eyes like an inquiring student. Most of all, I like the *aburazemi*, whose cry is said to sound like hot oil –hot like the summertime, when it is most ubiquitous – being poured.

The insect's presence in this weather is utterly ridiculous. On a day cold enough for me to be wearing my Angola turtleneck *and* have the heater running! If only I could ask it what business it had being here.

Opening the glass-pane door, I bring my face close to the outer screen door, which remained from the summer. The freezing air felt as if the winter wraith *yuki-onna* herself could be lurking in the vicinity. My eyes locked with those of the cicada who was (presumably) nearsighted like myself, silently exchanging blinks. It is unmistakably an *aburazemi*. The slim abdomen appears to have a dusting of white powder, which indicates that it is a male. It looks as if it could begin its loud, distinct cry at any moment...

With my gaze still locked on the cicada, I open the screen door ever so slightly and begin to cautiously extend my right hand. Catching the cicada in my hand sends it into a frenzy, the wings fluttering rapidly like blades of an electric fan being powered by a small motor. I gently pin down the wings with a single finger so as to not injure it, but the insect continues to twitch under my finger displaying the impressive strength of its wings.

I am ecstatic.

I feel the need to acknowledge my endeavor. Without thinking twice, I make an announcement to my father who is watching television in the living room. "This is *so* weird. I just found a cicada. Who would have thought? In the *winter*! Look."

I immediately regret the decision.

"What the hell is a woman of your age doing going around and catching bugs?" Raising my voice in indignance I reply to him, "Who cares? I like what I like!"

This is how interactions with my father generally took place.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. My father continues, "Now that you mention it, didn't they used to call you cicada girl?" I turn my back to him in a huff and head for the door.

My mother's friend Mrs. Uehara is standing there holding my mother's umbrella and a plastic bag from a nearby supermarket filled with mandarin oranges. Setting the bag just inside the doorstep she asks, "How is your mother doing? I brought these over because I happened to be in the area..."

"Thank you so much. My mother—"

Before I can reply she continues, "I thought it would be best if I returned her umbrella as soon as possible..."

The cicada in my hand is becoming agitated and seems if it may wiggle free from under my finger, so I cup my hands together to make a basket to enclose it. The legs prickle my palm as it moves around; its agitation makes me feel as if I am hiding some great secret in my hands.

"You're welcome anytime... although my mother will be in the hospital for the foreseeable future."

"Oh, is that so? How terrible."

The cicada has once again activated its small motor, the flapping wings tickling the inside of my hand. "Mrs. Uemura... Even though it's wintertime I found a cicada. Isn't it odd?"

"Is that so? Unbelievable. To tell you the truth, I'm not particularly fond of insects..." Looking warily at my clasped hands, she continued, "Well, I just wanted to stop by because I was in the area. Send your mother my regards." With that, Mrs. Uemura headed home.

I wanted to tell someone – anyone – about my cicada discovery and the curious means by which it was surviving in such a cold season. It was like seeing a sunflower bloom in the early spring.

Was it through sheer evolution? It's believed that there are more insects who can survive year-round because winters now aren't as harsh as they used to be. Maybe a mutation occurred as a result of climate change. One may even go as far to consider a twist of fate that caused its small body to be transported from the scorching summertime of some parallel universe into the wintertime of this world.

I decided I would give my old friend Awachi a call.

Whenever we drank together, he would sip his water and whisky and go on. "Oh, the *aburazemi*. What a great bug. Not bad at all. If there were ever a bug that had ambition, that would be the one." Awachi had a way with words and I liked him for that.

I carefully placed the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my cell phone. Scrolling through my contacts, I found his number was still saved. The dial tone sounded and then connected me with Awachi.

"...yes?"

"Long time no talk. Sorry to call you out of the blue," I say casually, trying to regain my composure.

"Ah, could it really be who I think it is? It *has* been a while."

I was pleased he immediately recognized my voice.

"Uh, well, as for why I'm calling... I found a cicada. In the winter. Kind of weird, don't you think?"

"A... cicada? At this time of year? You sure it's not a roach?"

I knew he was just trying to give me a hard time.

"No way, it's definitely a cicada. An *aburazemi* to be exact. It's a total mystery how it got here. What do you think? I thought if there were anyone who knew about stuff like this, it would be you."

On the other end of the line a moment of heavy, interminable silence hung in the air and then seemed to swell.

Awachi continued in almost a murmur, "There are so many mysteries..."

"Huh?"

"Inexplicable happenings like this. There are so many in this world. Including the reason for you calling me at this very moment..."

"That doesn't answer my question," I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer... that's one thing I don't have. Assuming there even was one. What I can tell you, is that these mysteries are a blessing. They are to me and probably to this world too."

The cicada peeked out from my sleeve. I need to let it go soon. If a cicada is held for too long, it will grow weak. That being said, I wasn't sure which would be worse – to keep it inside where it was warm or to release it into the snowy outdoors.

I made plans with Awachi to meet up for drinks soon and ended the call.

Leaving the front door, I headed toward the persimmon tree in the garden. It was devoid of leaves and its knobbled branches reached upwards as if grasping at the ash-colored sky. The trunk of the tree where the cicada rested was riddled with deep grooves and cracks.

Then, seemingly lost in thought, the insect started slowly up the trunk of the tree pausing periodically as if it were hesitant to continue.

The sky overhead looked as if it was snowing somewhere high up in the atmosphere. Icy snowflakes began to pelt my face with growing intensity, returning to their original liquid state, and running down in rivulets.

When I looked again, the cicada's silhouette had become imperceptible, blending into the tangle of branches at the top of the persimmon tree.

My body ached with cold, but my two hands which had held the cicada remained hot. My palms perspired as if it were the middle of summer. The thought of summer reminded me that the cicada, despite being male, didn't cry as it normally would have.

My mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still on the doorstep when I returned. The television in the living room was left on but there was no trace of my father.

I turned the television off and delivered the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as I usually did.

It was some time ago now that my father passed away. Mrs. Uehara was reported to have gone two years earlier. Awachi was also among them.

The call I had made to him remained in my phone history, but I lacked the courage to dial it again.

Snow continued to accumulate outside, and an oppressive silence swelled within the house where I remained alone. The complete absence of any other noise prompted a ringing in my ears – a sound not unlike the cry of an *aburazemi* on a bygone summer day.

The Winter Cicada

By Azuchi Moe

It was deep winter and I was curled up under the heater in an angora turtleneck sweater when a large, brown *Abura* cicada, flitting unsteadily through the snowfall outside, slapped with a start into my screen door. A feeling of warm excitement washed over me. No way, I thought. Unbelievable. I love cicadas. I love the childlike high drone buzzing cicadas that signal the coming of summer. I love the sad, elegant cicadas. I love the cicadas that come through the thick evening, still soaked in sunlight, but I love the *Abura* cicadas the most, whose call pours down like hot oil, hotter than the hottest day. I opened the sliding door and pulled my face close to the screen that had been left there for months. The frigid air touched me like a ghost.

“Little guy, how’d you even get here?”

It was a white-bellied male *Abura* cicada, ready to buzz at full volume. Our eyes met (probably) through the screen for a long moment but then I cracked the door, reached out my hand while still watching, deftly snatched him. He was frightened, wings going like a motor, pat-patting the inside of my gently curled hands. I was enthralled, immersed in pure feeling: he was my little achievement, right here, for me.

“Hey I caught a cicada in the middle of winter! Isn’t it weird?”

Dad was watching TV in the living room with his back turned. I immediately regretted telling him.

“Another cicada?” Aren’t you a little old for that?” He scoffed. It was always like this.

“Well, it’s what I like, so there’s nothing wrong with that,” I said, the words running out of my mouth. Right then, the doorbell rang. Softening his tone, he added: “That’s right, I used to call you my cicada daughter, didn’t I,” like he was recalling a distant memory. I turned and headed for the entryway. It was Mom’s friend, Uehara, who’d come to return an umbrella.

“I was just in the area, so I brought these,” she said, gesturing with a bag of fresh tangerines from the supermarket before putting them on the floor. “How is your mother doing?”

“Oh, thank you. Mom is—”

“I was thinking it would be best to return this umbrella quickly.”

Afraid, the cicada escaped from between my fingers so I captured him again with both hands and made a cage with my fingers. His legs secretly running around on the inside of my palms gave a funny pattering sensation.

“It would have been fine to drop it off whenever. Mom went into long-term care at the hospital.”

“She did. Oh dear. That must be hard for you.” The cicada fired up its wings again, flapping against the inside of my hands.

“Uehara, look at this. A cicada came in the winter. It’s weird, isn’t it?”

“Really? A cicada? You know, bugs are just not my thing.” While giving my hands a nervous look, she said: “Well, I was just in the neighborhood so I thought I’d stop by. Say hi to your mom for me.” Then she left.

I wanted to talk more with her about the cicada, how it was so strange to find it living in the middle of winter. Was it just a one-off? Was the species evolving? They said last year’s winter had been hotter and the number of insects that can live year-round had been increasing. Had this cicada come out because of the changing weather? I wondered. Or had this cicada, with summertime’s heat fastened to its back, slipped between the façade of dog-days, made it through the darkness to the far side, *this side*, of the world? I decided to talk to Kiwachi about it. A long time ago at a party, He and I had talked about cicadas: “Yeah, *Abura* cicadas. They’re the best. Such cool bugs. Defiant, and all that,” he had said, finishing his drink. He had a nice way of talking. I thought he was cute, even liked him a little. I enclosed the cicada in the armhole of my sweater and opened up my phone. Looking through my contacts, I found Kiwachi. He picked up.

“...Hello?” I relaxed when I heard his voice.

“Hi, Kiwachi, sorry for the sudden call. It’s been a while, I know,” I said.

“Is that you? I can’t believe it. How long has it been?” It seemed like Kiwachi remembered me pretty quickly.

“Hey, sorry to cut to the chase, but this cicada came, even though it’s winter. It’s weird, right?”

“A cicada? Now? Are you sure you’re not just holding a cockroach?”

Don’t mess with me like that. Stop it, Kiwachi, I thought.

“He is not a cockroach! Jeez. It’s a cicada. An *Abura* cicada. Isn’t it strange? What do you think? I was thinking you’d know more about it.”

On the other side of the line, I felt a vast, deep silence form, and begin to spread outward.

“Strange things happen all the time, you know.”

“Huh?”

“Just like you, calling me,” he said almost in a whisper.

“You didn’t really answer my question, did you, Kiwachi,” I said, poking fun at him.

“Your answer? Listen, I can’t do that. Do answers even exist—” There was a pause. “What I know is that strange things are what can save you. They could probably save the world. Even me, maybe,” he trailed off.

The cicada poked its face out of my sweater. If a cicada stays in a person’s hand too long, it gets weak. I would need to let it go soon. But I also thought, with the warm room, and having come in from the cold snow outside, which would be better? I didn’t know. I made a promise with Kiwachi to have a drink again soon, and hung up.

I went out the front door and into the garden where the persimmon trees were, the leaves completely gone and the bare branches grey like bones, cut against the sky. I let the cicada onto one of the cracks where the bark had split. It hesitated, then began to climb along the groove.

I looked up into the heavy snow, coming down from an impenetrable sky. The flakes melted and ran down my face. Before I knew it, the cicada’s stiffened silhouette had disappeared into the shroud of Persimmon branches. I was cold, but the inside of my hands where I had held him were sweaty, like they still had the heat of summer in them. It occurred to me that even though the cicada was a male, he had not sung, even once.

Mom’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines were there when I returned to the entryway. In the living room, the TV had been left on, dad nowhere to be found. Dad had left this world a while ago. Uehara must have been dead for at least two years. Kiwachi... A record of my call with him was left in my phone, but I didn’t have the strength to try him again.

I turned off the TV and put the tangerines on the kitchen table like I always do. A suffocating silence filled the room as the snow piled up outside. In the deep quiet, my ears began ringing like the call of an *Abura* cicada from a far, far off summer.

A Cicada in Winter
By Azuchi Moe

In the dead of winter, an *aburazemi*—a large brown cicada—flew through the air. It swerved this way and that through the fluttering snow, interrupting its characteristically clumsy flight pattern to land with a *tap* on my screen door.

Surprise should have been my first reaction, but instead I was filled with joy. You see, I love cicadas. I really, really love them—the *nii-nii-zemi* that announce the arrival of summer with their adorable wheedling, the poignantly elegant *higurashi* that come out in the evening, the sprightly *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* with their cheerfully droopy eyes. I love them all, but my favorite has to be the *aburazemi*, whose inescapable, feverish buzzing somehow makes the summer even hotter.

Elated as I was, it really made no sense to see a cicada in this kind of cold. I mean, I was wearing an angora turtleneck sweater, and the heater was on.

“Well, well, well. What do we have here?” I opened the sliding glass door and brought my face near the screen door, which had not been moved since the summer. The cold air pressed its way inside, refreshing and unsettling at the same time. I got close enough to get a good look at the cicada (and for it to get a good look at me, I imagine). Our eyes met briefly.

Sure enough, it was an *aburazemi*. A male, judging by the firm, narrow belly that appeared to be dusted with white powder. It looked ready to burst into song at any moment. Without breaking eye contact with the creature, I opened the screen door slightly, and slowly reached out with my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada struggled violently in my hand, its wings like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. I held it gently to avoid damaging the wings, my fingers vibrating with the insect’s fear conveyed through quivering wing joints. I was ecstatic, my hand alive with satisfaction as though I had captured the bug for some specific reason.

On impulse, I called out to my father, who was in the living room watching TV with his back to me. “Something weird is going on here. It’s winter, but I just caught a cicada. Look!” I immediately regretted opening my mouth.

“Still catching cicadas, huh?” he harrumphed. “You ought to act your age!”

“I can’t help it!” I protested angrily. “I love what I love!” It didn’t take long for us to get like that with each other.

Just then, the doorbell rang. “Come to think of it, we called you ‘Cicada-Girl’ back in the day,” my father recalled mistily. I turned away from him and huffed off to answer the door.

It was Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother’s. She was standing there with my mother’s umbrella in hand. She was also carrying mandarins in a plastic bag from the local supermarket. “How is your mother feeling? I brought something for you,” she said as she placed the mandarins inside the house. “I was in the area, so I thought I’d stop by.”

“How thoughtful of you,” I said. “My mother is—”

“I knew I should return her umbrella sooner rather than later,” she interrupted. The cicada stirred in my hand and started to break free, so I cupped both hands together to regain control. It continued to move around, its legs prickling my hands in a way I secretly found pleasing.

“Gosh, you didn’t have to rush,” I said. “My mother is still in the hospital.”

“I figured as much,” she replied. “Must be hard on you.” The cicada started its little motor and fluttered its wings, tickling my hands.

“Hey, Mrs. Uehara, it’s winter, but I caught a cicada. Weird, right?”

“What? Really? Oh, I don’t like bugs one bit,” she said, fixing a queasy gaze on my clasped hands. “Well, I didn’t mean to stay long anyway. Give your mother my best.” With that, she left.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada, about how impossible it was that a creature of summer was alive and well in the wintry cold, like a flower blooming out of season. Maybe cicadas had developed hardier constitutions. They say more insects are overwintering now with global warming and all. Maybe they’d mutated in response to the abnormal weather. Or maybe this little cicada worked so

hard to get through the hot summer that it somehow made it all the way here to the opposite side of the calendar.

I decided to share my revelation with Sawachi. I'd gone out drinking with him some time ago. "Ah yes, aburazemi," he'd said as he drained his whiskey and water. "They're good ones, you know, those aburazemi. They have ambition." I took a liking to the way he talked about aburazemi, and that's why I sort of took a liking to him.

I gently tucked the cicada inside the sleeve of my sweater so that I could open my phone. I checked the address book—Sawachi's name was still there. The ringback tone sounded. Sawachi picked up and waited a beat. "Hello?"

"It's been awhile," I said nonchalantly, making an effort to keep my composure. "Sorry to call you out of the blue like this—"

"Uh . . . is this who I think it is? Wow, yeah, it has been awhile."

Didn't seem to take him long to recognize me.

"Well, this is kind of out there, but I caught a cicada. Even though it's winter. Weird, right?"

"Huh? A cicada? At this time of year? You sure it's not a roach?"

Ew, stop grossing me out, Sawachi.

"Definitely not. It's a cicada—an aburazemi. Impossible, right? What do you make of it? I figured you of all people would be able to explain it . . ."

A profound silence followed, killing the flow of conversation and threatening to spread beyond the other side of the phone. "Impossible things happen all the time," Sawachi finally uttered in a low voice.

"Huh?"

"The impossible, it happens all the time in this life, you know. I mean, the fact that I got this phone call from you . . ."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"Answer your question? I wouldn't know where to start," he offered as if to hide his embarrassment. "I don't even know if an answer exists. But you know what? The impossible will set us free. You, me, maybe even the entire world—"

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve. I knew I had to release it sooner or later; cicadas don't last forever in captivity. But where to let it go? Inside the warm house, or outside in the fluttering snow? I didn't know which was better for the cicada.

I told Sawachi we should go out drinking again some time, and ended the call. I stepped outside and headed toward the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree was completely bare, its bony branches like talons clutching the gray sky, its trunk covered with groove-like cracks and sinews. I carefully placed the cicada on the trunk. It began to creep upward slowly, hesitating now and then as if lost in thought.

I looked up at the sky. The snow appeared to fall from interminable heights. It started to fall harder, the cold crystals striking my face and then melting, forming tracks and trickling downward. Before I realized it, the cicada had disappeared into the maze-like silhouette cast by the rigid tips of the persimmon branches.

My body was thoroughly chilled, but for some reason, my hands—the cicada's temporary cage—were hot as ever, as sweaty as though it were summer. It occurred to me then that the cicada had not called out even once, which was strange given that it was male.

I returned to the house and saw my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins in the entryway. The living room TV had been left on, but my father was already gone. I turned off the TV and put the mandarins on the kitchen table like I always do.

My father had passed away long ago by that time, and it had been two years since Mrs. Uehara died. Sawachi, too . . . I knew it all to be true. My call history showed that I'd called him. Even so, I didn't have the courage to call again.

Perhaps because the snow had started to accumulate, a suffocating stillness began to fill the empty house. In the overwhelming silence, my ears began to ring. It sounded like the call of an aburazemi from

an impossibly distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada

In the middle of winter, I was visited by a cicada. It seemed lost amidst the flurry of snow, clumsily flying this way and that before coming to a sudden halt at my screen door.

Instead of disbelief, I was delighted.

You see, I like cicadas. I really, *really* like cicadas.

They announce the arrival of summer.

There's the kind that cry *niinii* like cute infants, the elegant *higurashi*¹ and their sorrowful cadence, the nimble, cheerful, and droopy-eyed *boushi*² with their *tsukutsuku*... I like them all. But my favorite is the *aburazemi*,³ whose cries sound like hot, pouring oil, made even hotter by the summer heat.

And now, incredibly, one was here.

It was so cold, I had to wear my Angola turtleneck even *with* the heating on.

"Hey there, who are you?"

I opened the glass door and put my face near the screen door, still there from summer. Cold air pressed in like the skin of a *yuki-onna*.⁴ My shortsighted eyes met the cicada's (probably also) shortsighted eyes and for a while, we just stared at each other.

Yep, that's an aburazemi alright.

A male, judging by its tightly lined, flour-dusted belly. It seemed like it would start chirping loudly at any moment. Eyes still locked on the cicada's, I cracked open the door and slowly crept my right hand forward.

Gotcha!

The cicada struggled violently in my grip. Its wings vibrated like fan blades⁵ powered by a small motor. I held it gently so as not to injure them. They trembled against my fingers, conveying the power at their base.

I was ecstatic.

"Hey, this is strange. There's a cicada in the middle of winter, look!"

Without thinking, I called out to my father watching TV in the living room, his back to me. I instantly regretted it.

"You're still catching those damned cicadas? Grow up!"

I raised my voice, indignant. "I like what I like, I can't help it!"

It was always like this between my father and I.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

"Come to think of it, you used to call them your 'semi-daughters,'"⁶ said my father, as if he'd just now remembered.

With an angry huff, I turned my back on him and went out to the front door.

My mother's friend Uehara-san stood outside, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? Here..." She said this while putting down a bag of oranges from the nearby supermarket.

"I was just in the neighborhood."

"Oh, you shouldn't have. Mother is-"

"I've been meaning to return this umbrella for a while now."

The cicada nearly escaped from my grasp with a single thrust, so I trapped it with both hands like a cage. Its legs prickled as it moved about. My hands, which appeared to be fine, hid the secret of the painful itchiness within.

¹ Evening cicada.

² "Buddhist priest" cicada.

³ Literally "oil cicada."

⁴ A "snow woman," often depicted in Japanese folklore.

⁵ A play on words, since the kanji for "wing" is the same as "fan blade."

⁶ A play on *semi*, the Japanese word for cicada.

“Oh dear, she was always so sweet... And now she’s in long-term care at the hospital.”

“Mmm, guess so. It’s a shame.”

The cicada activated its small motor and rustled its wings, tickling the inside of my hands. “Hey, Uehara-san. There’s a cicada in winter! Weird, right?”

“Eh, is that so? Really? I’m not good with bugs, so...”

She looked at the cage of my hands, uneasy. “Well, I was just stopping by. Tell your mother I said hi,” she said and then left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how miraculous it was, alive during such a cold season. *In terms of flowers, was it an off-season bloom? Had cicadas evolved to have longer life spans?* Although it was winter, winters were warmer nowadays and the bugs that could survive them were increasing.

Maybe the unusual weather was to blame for the sudden, otherworldly occurrence. Or perhaps, for some reason or another, it had wandered into winter on *this* side of the world, carrying the other side’s sultry summer in its small frame.

I decided to try talking to my pal Sawachi-kun about it.

A long time ago at a drinking party, Sawachi-kun, draining the last of his whisky, had said, “*Aburazemi*, eh? Those’re good chaps. Real fine fellas. Got a lot of ambition in ‘em.”

I’d liked how he’d put it and, consequently, liked him a little more, too.

I gently placed the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and opened my phone. Looking through my contacts, his name was still there.

The dial tone rang, signaling we’d connected.

“... Hello...?”

I composed myself and said nonchalantly, “Long time no see. Sorry for calling out of the blue.”

“Ah... Is that you? Wow, it’s been a while.”

It seemed like he’d recognized me right away.

“Look, I’ll get right to it. There’s a cicada. In winter. Weird, right?”

“Huh...? A cicada? At this time? A ci-ca-da? Uhh, are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Ugh, seriously, Sawachi-kun, cut it out.

“It’s not! It’s a cicada, an *aburazemi*. Strange, right? Hey, what do you think? I thought you’d know all about this kind of thing.” On the other side of the phone, there was no reply followed by a deep silence. It seemed to expand.

Sawachi-kun muttered, “... There are a lot of strange things.”

“... Huh?”

“There are a lot of strange things in this world. Like the fact that you just called me...”

I tried to say something to hide my embarrassment.

“That’s not an answer.”

“An... answer? I wouldn’t know anything about that. Do those even exist? But, you know, strange things are a salvation. For me, and probably, the world...”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

I had to let it go soon. If it was stuck in my hand forever, it’d grow weak. Nonetheless, should I release it in this warm room or the flurry of snow outside? Which was best for the cicada? I really didn’t know.

I promised to go drinking with Sawachi-kun again sometime then hung up. I went out the front door and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden. Its leaves had all fallen. Bony branches clutched at the gray sky. I lightly placed the cicada on its trunk lined with furrows and cracks. It slowly began to climb, at times hesitating as though thinking of something.

Looking up, the snow seemed to drift down from an endless height. Cold crystals landed on my face with increasing intensity, melting, then flowing down in countless rivulets. Before I knew it, the cicada’s figure had disappeared in the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the treetop.

My body was completely frozen, and yet, somehow, both hands that had held the cicada were

as warm as ever, sweating like it was summer.

Come to think of it, despite being male, the cicada hadn't chirped at all...

Returning to the front door, mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges sat outside. The living room TV blared, father no longer in sight. I switched the TV off and carried the bag of oranges to its usual spot on the kitchen table.

My father had passed away a long time ago. Uehara-san was supposed to have died two years ago. And Sawachi-kun...

My phone still listed Sawachi-kun in its call log. Even so, I wasn't brave enough to try calling him again...

Snow piled up, a constricting silence filled the empty house.

In that overwhelming quiet, my ears began to ring. Like the cries of an *aburazemi* on a far-off summer's day.

A Winter Cicada

Even though it's the middle of winter, a cicada comes flying in. Fluttering awkwardly against the falling snow, he twists and turns here and there like he's lost, finally landing on the screen door. Before I can think, "Well that's odd", I become very glad to see him.

I like cicadas. I really, really liked cicadas.

Whether cute little cherub-like ones that buzz to announce the coming of summer, evening cicadas so elegant they evoke a sense of melancholy, or noisy, clever cicadas with bright droopy eyes, I like them all. But above all these, my favorite are the large brown cicadas who drip their hot-oil voices over the hot summer.

But to see a cicada at this time of year? Well *that*, that's odd.

Flying around in the freezing cold like that. So cold that here I am, wearing a turtleneck sweater with the heat on.

"Hey, you! Who do you think you are?"

I open the glass door and bring my face up to the screen, which has been untouched since the summer. The cold rushes in with a grip like the skin of the legendary Snow Woman. My near-sighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) near-sighted eyes blink at each other, staring.

Just as I thought. A large brown cicada.

A large brown male cicada with a firm, chalky white belly. Right before it looks like he's about to make a sound, I open the screen door a smidge and ease out my right hand while still looking straight into his eyes.

Got him!

The cicada wriggles in my hand. His little wings whirl like the motor of a fan. So as not to hurt him, I hold him down gently with my finger, the strength of his flailing wing joints apparent.

I am elated. The spoils of a great feat, right inside my hand.

"Hey, get this. I found a cicada, even though it's winter. Look."

I unconsciously call out to my dad, whose back is turned to me as he watches TV in the living room. However, I regret it.

"You're catching cicadas again? At that age--"

"I'll like what I like, so stay out of it!"

My voice huffs and puffs with frustration. I always end up fighting like this with my dad.

Suddenly, I hear the hallway chime.

I continue scowling as my dad says, "Now that I think of it, I used to call you my cicada-daughter," seemingly reminiscent, but turning his back on me to answer the door.

Mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, stands in the door with mom's umbrella.

"How is your mom doing? These are for her..."

As she says this, she holds up a bag of *mikan* oranges from the nearby supermarket and sets them on the doorframe.

"I just came from nearby".

"Oh, thank you. My mom—"

"I just thought I should return the umbrella as soon as possible."

My cicada gives a wriggle, about to escape. I cage him in with both of my hands. His legs flail around, giving me a tickly sensation, creating a secret pleasure just for me.

"Oh! You could've brought it over any time... My mom has been hospitalized long-term."

"Ah, well, yes. It must be hard."

My cicada revs up his little motor again, tickling my hands with his jittery wings.

"Hey Ms. Uehara, take a look at this. Even though it's winter, I found a cicada. Isn't that strange?"

"Oh, is that so? But uh, well... you know, I'm not a huge fan of bugs..."

Ms. Uehara nervously glances at my hand-cage. "I'd best be going now. Send regards to your mother!" She heads home.

I must talk to somebody about my cicada. A mysterious life that appeared in the middle of winter—!

If it were a flower, would they call it ‘off-season’? Perhaps it’s the cicada’s evolving vitality. Or, although it’s still winter, they say that it has gotten hotter than before, and that there are more and more bugs that hibernate. Maybe, due to the unusual climate, they’ve gone through some sort of mutation. Or maybe, in some sort of time slip, my cicada wandered over from *that* season to *this* season, bearing the heat of summer inside his tiny body.

I decide to try calling Mr. Sawachi.

A while ago at a get-together, Mr. Sawachi said, “Big brown cicadas? Ah, yes, those guys are real nice. Really nice little fellas, they are. They’re full of ambition.” while finishing off his cut drink. I liked his way of describing them, so it made me like Mr. Sawachi somewhat, too.

I gently tuck my cicada into my sweater sleeve and open my cell phone. When I search, Mr. Sawachi’s name is still in my address book. The dial tone sounds and I get on the line with Mr. Sawachi.

“...Hello?”

While trying to stay calm, I play it cool. “Hey, how are you? It’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue--“

“Oh... wait, is that you? Long time no speak isn’t it.”

He seems to recognize me right away.

“Hey, I know it’s random, but I found a cicada. In the middle of winter. It’s so weird, don’t you think?”

“Huh... a cicada? Now? Really? A cicada? Not a cockroach?”

No, Mr. Sawachi, stop that.

“Nooo, it’s a cicada! A big brown cicada! Don’t you think it’s strange? I thought you’d be more knowledgeable about this kind of thing, so I--”

Time passes through a deep, tangible silence that lingers at the other end of the phone, then seems to stretch on.

Mr. Sawachi makes his voice into a whisper.

“... There are a lot of strange things out there.”

“...Huh?”

“This world has got a lot of strange things going for it. Like, for example, the fact that you called me just now...”

“That’s not the answer I was looking for.”

I say something that might hide my embarrassment.

“Answer...huh. I can’t say I know the answer. I guess sometimes they come out in winter. But you know, strange things can be lifesaving. For us, and probably, for the world—”

My cicada pokes his head out from the edge of my sleeve. I have to let him go soon. If they stay inside a person’s hand for too long, cicadas can grow weak. That being said, I am unsure whether he would do better if I let him go inside the warm room, or outside where snow is falling.

I suggest that we go out together again sometime to Mr. Sawachi and then hang up the phone. I leave the entranceway and head over to our persimmon tree in the yard.

The persimmon tree has lost all of its leaves. Its thin, bony branches twist upward as if they are gripping the gray sky. I gently drop off my cicada onto the trunk, which is wrapped in trench-like fibers and covered in deep grooves. As if he were pondering something, my cicada pauses here and there as he starts to make his way up the trunk. When I look up into the sky, the snow seems like it is falling from a limitless height. Cold crystal snowflakes hit my face, gradually falling harder and melting into streaks that flow down to my chin. At some point, my cicada has disappeared into the stiff maze of the persimmon tree’s branches.

My body has absorbed a fine chill, but the two hands that held my cicada have stayed hot and sweaty like in summer. Although it was a male cicada, it didn’t make a sound... the thought suddenly comes to me.

When I return to the entranceway, my mom’s umbrella and the bag of *mikan* oranges are still there. The TV has been left on, and my dad has already disappeared. I turn off the TV and bring the *mikan* to the kitchen table, like usual.

It's been quite a while since my dad left this world, and Ms. Uehara should have already passed away two years ago. Mr. Sawachi, too...

My phone still displays the call history to Mr. Sawachi. However, I don't have the courage to try dialing again...

The empty house is filled with a pressing silence like piled up snow.

My ears start to ring in the piercing quiet. Ringing just like the cry of a big brown cicada on a summer day, years and years ago.

The Winter Cicada

It was a midwinter day like any other when a cicada came flying out of the sky.

The insect flew through a soft snowfall in its usual way—clumsily and uncertain, in one direction then the next—to finally land with a bump on the screen door.

Before I could wonder what had gotten into this poor bug, I was thrilled.

I love cicadas, you see. I just adore them.

I love all cicadas. The Kempfer cicada, so small and cute, announcing for us summer's arrival; the evening cicada, with its almost tragic elegance; the agile tsuku-tsuku cicada, with its cheerful yet drooping eyes.... But perhaps my favourite cicada of all was the one now clinging to the backyard's screen door—the large brown or “oil” cicada with a call that seems to pour a layer of smoking hot oil over an already stifling summer day.

Recovering from my excitement, I finally asked myself what this silly bug was doing here.

It was the middle of winter!

Here I was wearing an Angora sweater with the heating on inside....

“Well, hello there. And who might you be?”

I slid open the glass door and bringing my face close to the screen, left untouched since summer, went in for a closer look. The cold air flowed around me like the embrace of some winter spirit.

My nearsighted eyes met the (probably) nearsighted eyes of the insect.

Yup, it was a large brown cicada alright.

A nice male specimen with a tightly enclosed stomach as white as a spill of wheat flour. It could let out its piercing cry at any moment.

I opened the screen door a crack and, keeping my eyes fixed on the cicada, slowly reached out my hand.

Got it!

A large brown cicada struggling right here in my hand! Its wings seem powered by a tiny motor, like the blades of an electric fan. I held them down ever so gently so as not to hurt it and felt the power of its twitching wing joints transfer up through my fingers.

I was in ecstasy.

I felt fulfilled, as if I had seized some purpose I could not yet comprehend.

“Hey, check it out. I caught a cicada—now, in the middle of winter. Weird, huh?”

I said it without thinking, calling to my father's back as he watched TV in the living room. I regretted it instantly.

“Still catching bugs, eh? At your age...”

That made me angry. I raised my voice.

“It's fun, OK? I just like it. Who cares?”

This was a normal exchange between us.

The doorbell rang.

“Now that I think of it, I used to call you my little cicada girl, didn't I?”

My father said this as though lost in a reverie. I ignored him and went to the front door.

Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother's, stood outside holding my mother's umbrella.

“Oh, hello. How's your mother? Here...”

She said this as she bent down to place in the entranceway some oranges in a bag from a nearby supermarket.

“I was in the area, so...”

“Oh, thank you very much. My mother—”

“I was thinking that I should return this umbrella and...”

The cicada shifted abruptly and managed to escape my fingers, so I clasped my hands together like a cage, capturing the insect inside. Its feet pricked my hands as it circled about. The pain shot from my hands to my body like some secret thrill.

“Oh, my. Well, there was really no rush. Mom has been in the hospital for so long...”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m terribly sorry”

That little motor must have started up again because the cicada began to flutter its wing, tickling my palms.

“Hey, Mrs. Uehara, guess what? I caught a cicada—now, in the middle of winter. Weird, right?”

“Oh, Really? I’m not the biggest fan of insects, so—”

Mrs. Uehara looked warily at my clasped hands, said,

“Well, I just wanted to drop in and say, ‘hello.’ Please give my best to your mother,” and left.

I still wanted to speak to someone about my discovery, about the strangeness of this winter cicada—. Finding a spring flower would somehow have been less unbelievable. Is this some manifestation of the cicada’s evolutionary drive? Is there some new niche for winter-tolerant insects? Is it because our winters are warmer nowadays? Did some mutation occur that was selected for in our unusual climate? Or maybe something was set off in its small body, some confused desire for the summer that woke it up on the wrong side of the seasons.

I decided to call Sawachi.

He told me once at a party a long time ago,

“Large brown cicadas, eh? Yup, they’re super cool little guys. Super cool. Determined little fellas, aren’t they?”

He told me this between sips of whiskey and water. There was something about his choice of words that made me crush on him.

I gently slipped the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my cell phone, finding Sawachi’s information still listed in the address book.

I listened to the tone until I heard him pick up.

“.....Hello?.....”

I tried to calm myself before saying nonchalantly,

“Hey, Sawachi. It’s been a while, eh? Sorry to call you so suddenly like this—”

“Uh...Oh, it’s you. It has been a while, hasn’t it?”

I was happy to hear he knew it was me so quickly.

“So, um. This is going to be really random, but I found a cicada. But it’s winter. Strange, right?”

“A...cicada? Now? A cicada? Are you sure it isn’t a cockroach?”

Oh, Sawachi. He was so funny!

“No way! It’s a cicada, a large brown ‘oil’ cicada. It’s a complete mystery. Any ideas? I thought since you were so knowledgeable about this kind of thing—”

There was an unbreachable silence on the other end of the call that seemed to last forever.

Finally, Sawachi, barely whispering, said,

“...There are so many mysteries.”

“...Excuse me?”

“Mysteries—the world is full of them. I never would have imagined receiving your call now, for example...”

I tried saying something playful.

“Well, that’s no answer!”

“An.....answer? I couldn’t say. I guess these things happen sometimes. But then, there’s salvation in the strange. For us and, I think, for the world, too—”

The cicada poked its head out from the sleeve.

It was time to set it free. Cicadas weaken if they stay caught for long. Then again, which was better for it, the warm room or the softly snowing outdoors?

I promised Sawachi I would meet him sometime for a drink and hung up.

I exited the front door to head towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree stood bare, the leaves long since fallen away, with its bony branches reaching for the ashen sky.

I found a spot among the tree trunk’s many trench-like sinews and fissures to gently place down

the cicada. The insect would occasionally hesitate, as if it had just considered something important, as it leisurely found its way up the trunk.

I looked up to watch the snow fall from what seemed like an endless expanse. The ice crystals fell on my face and melted with a sting, criss-crossing my skin in a myriad of flowing streaks.

At some point the cicada disappeared into the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the tree's upper branches.

My body was chilled to the bone. Yet somehow my hands, which had just released the insect, were warm and sweaty as though stuck in midsummer. I suddenly realized that, despite being a male, the cicada had not made a sound.

Heading back to the house, I saw that my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were untouched. The television was still on, but my father was nowhere in sight.

I switched the TV off and put the bag of oranges in its usual place on the kitchen table.

My father had been dead for many years. As far as I could remember, Mrs. Uehara had passed away two years ago. Sawachi was gone too....

The call history on my phone still listed Sawachi's number at the top. I did not have the courage to call it again....

Perhaps because it was now blanketed in snow, the empty house filled with an oppressive quiet.

It was so quiet my ears rang.

The ringing sounded like a long brown cicada crying out from a summer day far, far away.

“A winter cicada”

By Azuchi Moe

Despite being already midwinter, there was a large brown cicada flying. It clumsily flew all around like it had lost its way in the flurrying snow, and at last, it suddenly stopped on the window screen.

Before I could even think how silly it looked, I was overcome with joy. I like cicadas. I really love them. I like the small and lovely Kempfer cicada that marks the arrival of summer, the elegant evening cicada with its melancholic voice, and also the Walker cicada that has lively drooping eyes. Yet, the large brown cicada with its sizzling voice that resembles frying oil in the hot summer it's my favourite. Even so, this one right now was so foolish. To be here even though it's so cold. I'm wearing a turtleneck sweater of angora wool, and I have the heater on, and yet –

“Hey, and who might you be?”

I opened the glass door and brought my face close to the window screen that was still in place from summer. The cold drew nearer like the pale skin of the Snow Queen. My short-sighted eyes and the (probably) short-sighted eyes of the cicada stared at each for some while. Like I thought, it's a large brown cicada. A male brown cicada with its thin abdomen white like if coated with powder. It seems it will soon start to cry with its high-pitched voice.

I slightly opened the window screen, and with my eyes still locked with the cicada, I slowly reached out my right hand. Caught! The cicada wiggled inside my hand. Its wings moved like an electric fan with a small motor. Its strength was tremblingly transmitted from the base of its wings to my fingers that held them down softly as not to hurt it.

“That's odd, isn't it! It's winter, but here's a cicada. Look!” I said without thinking to my father who, his back to me, was watching the tv in the living room. Then I regretted it.

“Are you still catching cicadas? You're not a child anymore!”

“I don't care what you say, I like what I like!” I said huffily, raising my voice. My father and I immediately talked in this vein.

At that moment, the entrance doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it, I used to call you my cicada-daughter,” recalled my father, but in an angry mood, I turned my back and went to the entrance. My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara was standing there holding my mother's umbrella.

“How's your mother? I brought these...” Said Mrs. Uehara while dropping a bag of tangerine from the nearby store on the inside doorstep. “Since I was passing by.”

“Oh, thank you very much. My mother –”

“The umbrella, I just thought I should return it soon.”

The cicada wrestled a little and escaped from my fingers, so I imprisoned it, cupping my hands together like a cage. The cicada's legs moved around tingling me, and such painful tingling inside my hands gave me a secretly pleasant feeling.

“Oh, there was no need to hurry... My mother is in long-term hospitalisation.”

“Oh, I see. It must be hard.”

The cicada started fluttering its wings like a small motor tickling the inside of my hands.

“Look, Mrs. Uehara. Despite being winter, there's a cicada. Isn't it strange?”

“Hm, what? Really? Well, I don't like insects, so –” Mrs. Uehara looked uneasily at my cupped hands and continued “Well then, I was just stopping by. Say hello to your mother for me” then she went away.

I wanted to talk about the cicada to someone. It's a mystery that it is alive in such a cold time of the year. Like a flower blooming out of season. Might it be that the cicada's vital energy has evolved? Despite being winter, compared to the past, it appears that recently it has become warmer, and overwinter insects are also increasing. Maybe something like a mutation happened because of the unusual weather. Or else, maybe in some sort of impetus the cicada hurt itself, its little body, during that

hot summer and lost its way into *this* adverse season.

I decided to try talking with Sawachi.

“Huh, a large brown cicada. It is a nice fellow, a very nice fellow. It has ambition.” When we were out drinking, Sawachi had said this the whole time while finishing his watered whiskey. I liked that way of talking, so I took a liking in Sawachi too.

I gently placed the cicada in the armhole of my sweater and opened the cell phone. When I searched in the address book, Sawachi’s name was still there. The phone rang and connected to Sawachi.

“Hello”

“Hello, it’s been a while. I’m sorry for calling so suddenly,” I said casually as I composed myself.

“Oh, is it you? It has really been a while!” it seemed he had immediately recognised me.

“Guess what, I know it’s sudden, but there’s a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t it strange?”

“Uh, a cicada? Right now? A cicada, not a cockroach?”

Oh no, Sawachi stop it already!

“I tell you, it’s not! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada. It’s a mystery, right? Say, what do you think? I thought that you Sawachi knew a lot about them —”

On the other side of the phone, a moment of deep irremediable silence passed and seemed to be spreading.

“There is full of strange things, you know,” said Sawachi in a muttering voice.

“... What?”

“Strange things, there is full of them in the world. Like you calling me now...”

“This is not an answer.” I tried saying something that would somehow hide my embarrassment.

“An answer... I don’t know. I wonder if there is such a thing. But you see, strange things can be a salvation. For us too, and maybe even for the world —”

The cicada put its head out of the armhole. Before long, I’ll have to set it free. If kept continuously in human hands, the cicada would get weak. Be as it may, I’m not quite sure what would be best for the cicada, to be inside the warm room or to be released in the light snow outside.

I made plans with Sawachi to go drinking again someday and ended the call.

I exited the front door into the garden and went towards the persimmon tree. The persimmon had entirely shed its leaves, and its angular branches grabbed the grey sky. I gently laid down the cicada on the tree trunk that was covered in trench-like streaks and cracks. The cicada started to slowly climb the trunk while at times hesitating like if thinking about something. Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from an endless height. Gradually and relentlessly the cold crystals touched my face, melted, and run down in many lines. Before I knew it, the figure of the cicada disappeared somewhere in the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the persimmon’s treetop. My body had become completely cold, but for some reason, my hands, that had captured the cicada, were persistently hot and sweating like it was summer. Come to think of it, despite being a male, the cicada hadn’t sung at all... I suddenly thought of it.

When I returned to the entrance, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerine were lying there. The tv in the living room was still on, but my father’s figure wasn’t there anymore. I turned off the tv and, as usual, I brought the bag of tangerine on the kitchen table.

My father passed away already a long time ago, and Mrs. Uehara too must have died two years ago. And also Sawachi... On the phone, there is still the log of calls to Sawachi. But I don’t have the courage to try calling him again...

The snow covered up the house, the empty inside was filled with an oppressive stillness. The striking silence was like a buzzing sound in my ears. It was just like the crying voice of a large brown cicada on a far, far away day of summer.

A Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

It was midwinter when the cicada arrived, sputtering from side to side through the flickering snow as if it had lost its way before landing splat in front of the screen door.

How strange, I thought, before I was overwhelmed by joy.

It's just—I love cicadas. Adore them. I love the way they call forth the summer, from the cute childishness of the *niinizemi* to the cool elegance of the *higurashi* to the pure wonder of the *tsukutsukuboushi* with its deep yet cheerful eyes. But the one I love best is the *aburazemi*, the one with a cry that is like sizzling oil poured over the heat of summer itself.

But what was one doing on my doorstep? After all, it was so cold that day. Even with the heater on in the house, I was wearing my angora sweater.

"And who are you, little guy?" I said, opening the glass door. I pressed my face close to the metal screen that had been there ever since summer. The winter air closed in on me like the ghostly touch of a *yukionna* haunting her long and icy nights.

I peered down at the cicada. The cicada peered back.

Now, I'm quite near-sighted. (Come to think of it, maybe the cicada was too.) Still, there was no mistake: it had to be an *aburazemi*. A male. The hard ridges of its abdomen were frosted with a thin white dust. Its body stiffened as if winding up for a mighty scream.

I edged the screen door open, keeping my eye on the insect, and stretched out my right hand. Got him!

He struggled, wings whirring like the blades of a fan on a tiny motor, battering against the soft grip of my fingers. It was painless but I could feel the power of his wings right down to the base of their roots.

My joy bordered on ecstasy. It was just so fulfilling to hold something in my hand that seemed to possess so much purpose.

"Would you look at that?" I blurted out. "A cicada in winter. Isn't that strange?"

My father was sitting in the living room with his back to me, watching television. Instantly, I wished I had kept my thoughts to myself.

"Still catching cicadas? At your age?"

"The heart wants what it wants."

I opened my mouth to say more, but something held me back. As always. That was just how it was with me and my father.

The doorbell rang in the entrance at the front of the house.

"You know—I used to call you my little cicada girl," said my father. I had already turned away, but his words followed me as I left to go answer the door.

It was Mrs. Uehara.

"How is your mother?" she said, stepping in through the doorway. She was carrying a bag full of *mikan* oranges which she placed on the floorboards above the entrance. "I brought you these. I just happened to be passing by."

The bag was from a nearby supermarket.

"Oh—thank you. You shouldn't have. As for mother—"

"I also thought I should return this umbrella sooner rather than later—"

The cicada fluttered wildly, nearly escaping my grasp. I clasped my hands together like a cage. His legs scrabbled around inside, giving off little pinches that were a slight but secret pleasure.

"There's really no need to hurry back with the umbrella. My mother will be in hospital a while yet."

"I see. That must be hard for you."

The little motor of the cicada started up again, blades whirring inside my hands.

"Uehara-san, look—a cicada. In winter. Strange, don't you think?"

"Ah—is that so? I'm not really one for insects—"

She glanced down uneasily at my interlocked fingers. “Well, I’m afraid I really must be going. Give my regards to your mother.”

And with that, she was gone.

I wanted to talk to someone about my cicada. How could he still be alive at a time of year when no flower would be crazy enough to bloom? Were stronger survival abilities evolving in cicadas? I had heard that winters were getting warmer and more insects were surviving right through to spring. Had unseasonal weather caused some sort of mutation? Or maybe it was just something inside that tiny body, something about bearing the brunt of the summer heat that had brought him through to the other side only to find himself lost and alone in this frigid season.

I decided to speak with my friend Sawaji. Once, some time when we had been out drinking together, he had spoken about the exact species of cicada that I now held in my hands.

“*Aburazemi*,” he had said as he opened the whiskey-and-water. “He’s a good one. Such a good one. He’s the one with hopes and dreams.”

I’d been into the way that Sawaji talked. And into Sawaji too, a little.

Gently inserting the cicada into the cuff of my sweater, I flipped open my mobile phone. Sawaji’s name was still listed in the address book. A dial tone sounded, then he picked up.

“—Hello?”

I tried to compose myself and sound casual. “I know it’s been a while. I’m sorry to call you out of the blue—”

“Is it really you?” he said. “I guess it has been a while.”

It hadn’t taken all that long for him to recognise my voice.

“So hey, get this. I just found a cicada. In winter. Weird, huh?”

“You found a cicada? Now? A ci-ca-da? You sure it wasn’t a cockroach?”

Oh, Sawaji. I could never quite tell if he was teasing.

“No, really—a cicada. An *aburazemi*. Isn’t it just so strange? What do you think, Sawaji? I’m sure you know quite a bit about things like—”

From the other end of the line, a deep irreversible silence flowed outward, filling the space between us.

“Hm...well, strange things do happen,” said Sawaji at last, his voice little more than a murmur.

“What do you mean?”

“Strange things happen all the time in this world. Like now—me getting a call from you.”

I felt my cheeks burn but tried to keep my voice steady. “That doesn’t really answer my question.”

“Answer? The answer is—I don’t know. I don’t know if there are any answers. Seems like the strangest thing is salvation. For us, maybe even for the whole world—”

My cicada poked its face out of the cuff of my sweater.

It was time to let go. If held in the human hand too long, a cicada will grow weak. Still, I wasn’t sure whether such a creature would be better off inside a house with a heater or outside in the endless falling snow.

Before hanging up, I left Sawaji with a promise that we would meet for drinks someday. Then I went out the front door and over to the persimmon tree in the garden. Its leaves had all fallen so that its bony branches clutched upward at the ash-grey sky. Its trunk was covered with streaks and wrinkles. Amongst these various grooves was where I placed the cicada. He started to climb, hesitating from time to time as if something was on his mind.

I looked upward. The snow seemed to be descending from an infinite height. One by one, the icy crystals melted as they fell onto my face, forming rivulets that trickled down my cheeks.

At some point the shape of the cicada disappeared into the tangled silhouette of the frozen upper branches of the persimmon tree. My body was cold to the core yet the hands that had held the cicada were sweating, warmed somehow by the heat of summer.

An unsettling thought struck me. The cicada was male, but he hadn’t cried out at all.

When I returned to the house, my mother's umbrella and a bag of *mikan* oranges were just inside the entrance. The television in the living room was on, but my father was not there. I switched the television off, then took the bag of *mikan* to the kitchen and put it in its proper place on the table.

My father had already left this world. Mrs. Uehara had been gone two years. And Sawaji? His name was still listed in the call history of my phone, but I couldn't find the courage to call him again.

When the snow piles up outside like this, a suffocating silence falls upon this empty house. Silent but for a ringing in my ears like the cry of an *aburazemi* on a distant summer's day.

Winter Cicada

Despite it being the dead of winter, the brown cicada flew into my life. As if lost, the cicada flew through the snow and landed suddenly on the screen door. Before I can think of the cicada as stupid landing here at this time, I am overcome with happiness. I love cicadas. I *really* love cicadas.

Cicadas mean summer has begun. From the cute Kaempfer cicada, to the sorrowful Tanna Japonensis elegantly crying out, to the cheerful Meimuna opalifera with their drooping eyes. Although, of course, brown cicadas are my favourite. Their cry is almost like hot oil being poured on a hot summer's day.

However this cicada is crazy, coming here despite it being so cold. So cold that I'm sitting here in my Angora turtleneck sweater with the heating turned on.

"Hey, who are you?" I ask opening the glass door to the cicada, a small part of summer resting on the screen door. The cold air pierces my skin, cold as the snow queen's skin. My shortsighted eyes meet what I think are the cicada's shortsighted eyes and we stare at each other. It's definitely a brown cicada. It has the tell-tale markings - white markings on its stomach - of a male brown cicada. It seems about to let out a loud cry at any moment.

I open the screen just a little and, keeping eye contact, I reach out my right hand. I've got it! It's in my hand. Its wings working like a small motor on a fan. My hand trembles as I attempt to hold it so the wings won't be damaged.

I'm ecstatic!

The cicada is in my hand, almost as if that was its purpose.

"How strange. It's winter but there's a cicada. Look!"

Without thinking I call out to my father sitting in the living room watching TV and immediately regret it.

"Are you still holding that cicada? Stop being so selfish and let it live to a ripe old age!"

"I love cicadas so I'm not being selfish!" I reply upset.

My father and I have had this relationship for a while now. The doorbell rings and in a huff I go to answer it.

"By the way, I used to have a cicada daughter", my father recalls from behind me as I head towards the door. It's my mother's friend, Mr Uehara, coming to return the umbrella he borrowed.

"How is your mother? This is for you", he says as he crosses the doorway and hands over a bag of oranges from the nearest supermarket.

"I was nearby", he says.

"Oh, thank you so much. My mother...well..."

"The umbrella. I had planned to return it earlier."

The cicada tries to break free of my grasp so I use both hands as a cage to entrap it. I secretly enjoy its legs tickling my fingers as it tries to escape.

"Oh, anytime is fine. My mother has been hospitalised for a while...", I say.

"So she has been. That's tough."

The cicada activates the small motor-like wings and it continues to tickle my hands.

"Mr Uehara, there was a cicada even in winter. Isn't that strange?"

"Really?! Was there? I'm not good with bugs...I was only stopping by. Please tell your mother I said hello", he says staring anxiously at my hands before leaving.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. That they can live even in such a cold environment. Not even flowers can do that. I wonder if they have evolved to be able to survive? I've heard that the winters are much warmer than before so there are more bugs. Were they able to mutate due to the unusual weather? Or maybe it managed to withstand the hot summer and somehow got lost, trapped in a season completely different from normal?

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

"Yeah, it's a brown cicada all right. What a beauty. What a great guy. He's got some great ambitions", Sawachi said long ago while drinking his diluted beverage. I really liked what he had said

so I became a little interested in talking more with him.

I insert the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and bring out my mobile. I look through the contacts and find his name still there. It rings before Sawachi answers.

“Hello?”

I calm myself and casually say, “it’s been a while! I’m sorry for calling at such an hour.”

“Oh! It can’t be you, can it? It really has been a while.”

It seems like he recognised my voice straight away.

“It’s a bit sudden but there was a cicada in my house. Even though it’s winter! Isn’t that strange?”

“Seriously? A cicada? At this time of year? *A cicada*? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Always with the jokes...

“No way! It’s a cicada, a brown cicada. It’s great, isn’t it! What do you think? I want to know your opinion.”

This time I’m answered with a long silence before he mutters, “there are many marvellous things.”

“What?”

“There are many marvellous things in this world. Like the fact that you called me just now...”

“I have no words...”, I respond suddenly overcome with shyness.

“Words...I don’t know either. I wonder if there is a good response. But the marvellous occurrences could be our salvation. Not just for us but for the world!”

The cicada peeks its head from my sweater cuff. I have to let it go soon. If it’s kept by humans for too long then it will become weak. But which is better for it? Letting it go inside the warm room or outside in the falling snow?

I promise to meet Sawachi again soon for drinks and hang up the phone. I leave the house and go to the persimmon tree in my garden. The leaves have all fallen from the tree so the bony, bare branches reach up to the ash-coloured sky. I place the cicada on the wrinkle-like grooves of the trunk. The cicada slowly moves up the tree, sometimes hesitating as if it is pondering something.

Looking up, the snow seems to fall from an endless height. Snowflakes hit my face and melt, leaving a mark. The cicada disappears into the shadows of the tree.

My body is frozen, with the exception of my hands, which cradled the cicada and sweat like a day in the summer heat. I suddenly think, “the cicada was male but it didn’t cry out once.”

I return to the house and bring in my mother’s umbrella and the oranges. The TV is left on in the living room but my father is not there. I turn off the TV and place the oranges on top of the table in the kitchen.

My father passed away a while ago and Mr Uehara left us a mere two years ago. Sawachi is also not around...

The call to Sawachi remains on my call history but I don’t have the courage to call it again.

Perhaps by now the snow has piled up. The inside of the house is as silent as a grave. So quiet that my ears begin to ring. Ringing like the sound of the cicadas on a distant summer day.

Oil Cicadas of Winter by: Azuchi Moe

An oil cicada of summer comes flying. As snow falls, the cicada flies clumsily, changing course here and there. In the end, it suddenly stops at the window screen. Oh, how silly, I think happily. I like Cicadas. I mean, I really love them. In the summer, I am delighted to be visited by the cute child-like Kaempfer cicada, the sad and elegant evening cicada, or even the nimble, cheerful, and droopy-eyed late-summer cicada. However, in the heat of the summer, the passionate, flowing voice of the oil cicada is my absolute favorite. Yet, at this moment, this one is really foolish. It's far too cold. I am wearing an angora sweater, even with the heat on.

“Hey. Hey. What kind of person are you?” I open the glass shutter and bring my face close to the screen, still in the window from the summer. A chill, like the breath of the ghostly Snow Woman, presses against me. My short-sighted eyes for what was perhaps a short time, stared at the cicada. It really was an oil cicada. The white powder was tight along the belly like that of a male oil cicada. Even now, in a loud voice, it cries. I opened the screen just a little, and while watching the cicada, slowly, I reached out my hand. Gotcha!

Inside my hand is the old cicada. The beating of its wings is like the motor of an electric fan. My fingers tremble with the power of its wings. I am overjoyed. Now, within my hand, I felt a sense of accomplishment. “Hey, it has to be rough to be a cicada in winter,” I called without thinking. My father sat with his back to me watching TV. I regretted it.

“You’re still catching cicadas, what an age to be----”

“I like what I like. It's not by choice!” I raised my voice. It was my father’s and my tone.

At the time, the entryway chime sounded. I angrily added, “Now that you mention it, a long time ago you said sat ‘my daughter is like a cicada.’” I remembered my father saying with his back to the entryway. There, my mother’s friend, Ms. Uehara, stood with my mother’s umbrella.

“How’s your mother’s health? Here...” Ms. Uehara said as she set down oranges from the nearby supermarket.

“Ah, thank you so much. My mother is---”

“Her umbrella, I didn’t return it very quickly but---”

The cicada tried to escape my fingers, so with both hands, I caged it. The cicada’s prickly legs moved around; the amount of itching in my hand was a secret discomfort.

“Oh, its really alright... My mother has been hospitalized for some time.”

“Oh, really? I’m sorry.”

The cicada’s little motor started, its wings tickling the inside of my hand.

“Um... Ms. Uehara. It's rough for a cicada in the winter, right?”

“Uh, is that so? Really? But I’m not good with bugs---” Ms. Uehara gave my hands an uneasy look, “so yeah, I just happened to be close-by. Well, give your mom my best.” She said, and left.

I told someone about the cicada. It was mysterious how it could live through such a cold winter like a flower blooming out of season. It must be the evolution of the cicada's will to live. Compared to the past, the winters are getting warmer, but the number of hibernating insects is increasing. It seems that this strange weather could be causing this mutation. Nevertheless, with some momentum, that small body, that little summer body will just have to bear through this season. I said as if to Sawaji.

Before at a drinking party, Sawaji had said, "yeah, it's an oil cicada, alright. He's a good one, a really good little guy. He's got ambition." He absentmindedly diluted his drink as he spoke. I was pleased with what he said, so I was pretty pleased with him. I put the cicada gently within the sleeve of my sweater and opened my phone. Looking in my address book, I still had Sawaji's name.

The dial tone rang, and Sawaji answered. "... Hello...".

Even though my heart dropped, I managed a casual tone, "It has been a while. I'm sorry to call suddenly ---"

"Oh ... it's you, huh. Uh, it has been a while, hasn't it?" It seemed he knew it was me immediately.

"Uh... yeah... so, this is sudden, but this cicada came. Even though its winter. Hey, that's weird, right?"

"What? A cicada? Now? Like a Cicada? It's not like a cockroach?" No, Sawaji, just stop.

"Come on. It's a cicada, a brown oil cicada. Isn't that strange? What do you think? Like, what do you really think---?"

I turned the phone to its side, the passing of the deep silence couldn't be undone, and it only continued to grow. Sawaji muttered, "there are so many strange things---"

"Huh...?"

"In the world, there are a lot of strange things. Like you calling me now..."

"You didn't answer my question." Why would he say such an awkward thing?

"Answer... um. I don't know. It just is, but, hey, there is a comfort in the mysterious. I think that the world is probably very---" the cicada left my sleeve.

Slowly I have to let go. To always stay in the hand of a person, the cicada would surely grow weak. Nonetheless, it's warm indoors, and if I were to release the cicada out into the lightly falling snow outside, I would have no way to know what would happen to it. Sawaji and I promised to do another drinking party and hung up the phone.

I left the entryway and went out to the garden's persimmon tree. The leaves had fallen entirely. The bony limbs reached up to grab hold of the grey sky. Along the groove like veins and cracks that covered the trunk, gently perched the cicada. The cicada seemed to be thinking of something as it hesitated while slowly climbing the trunk. While I watched, there seemed to be no end to the height of the falling snow. In turn, relentlessly, the icy crystals on my face melted and formed streaming lines. Before I had noticed it, the cicada's form vanished in the maze-like silhouette at the top of the persimmon tree.

Cold encompassed my body and yet, for some reason, my hands where I had caught the cicada were warm, like during a sweltering summer. Come to think of it, even though the cicada was male. It was not singing at all suddenly.

I returned to the entryway, where my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges still sat. The TV in the living room was still on, but my father's shape was no longer there. I switched off the TV and, like always, took the bag of oranges to the kitchen. My father had been dead for a while already, and Ms. Uehara was supposed to have died two years ago as well. And now even Sawaji was...

On my cell, Sawaji remained in my call history. But I wasn't brave enough to call him again.

As the snow piled up with no one inside the house, the silence seemed to permeate as if pushed in more tightly. In the extreme silence, a buzzing came to my ears. As though on a summer day, far far away, an oil cicada was crying.

A Cicada in Winter
by Azuchi Moe

The cicada drifted through the glittering snow, wandering this way and that in ungainly flight until it landed abruptly on my window screen. An unremarkable event, were it not the middle of winter.

A grin split my face before I could even think *impossible*. I like cicadas—scratch that, I *love* them. The playful *Platypleura kaempferi*, whose chirp heralds the coming of summer; the heartbreakingly elegant *Tanna japonensis*; the droopy-eyed *Meimuna opalifera*, always so nimble and merry. But my absolute favorite is the large brown, the species of my unexpected visitor, whose sizzling song sounds like pouring hot oil on sun-scorched sidewalk.

But this is impossible. My grin wavered. There I was, bundled up in my Angola turtleneck with the heat cranked up against the chill—no way could that be a cicada. “Then what *are* you?”

I opened the glass pane to peer at the screen, which hadn’t been removed since the previous summer. The cold caressed me with a snow queen’s touch. My nearsighted gaze met that of the presumably also nearsighted cicada, and we squinted at one another for a moment.

It *was* a cicada.

A male, judging from the markings dusted like flour along the ridges of his abdomen. He was quiet, but males never stay that way for long. I expected him to burst into his ceaseless, screaming summer song at any moment.

My eyes fixed on him and his eyes fixed on me as I inched the screen open. Slowly, slowly, I slipped my right hand through.

Gotcha!

The cicada raged inside my hand. His wings whirled like a tiny motorized fan, thrashing in all their might against the fingers I was careful to keep from crushing him.

I grew delirious with joy. It felt as if I’d captured victory itself.

“Look at this—a cicada, in *winter*. Weird, huh?” Without thinking I called out to my father, who was in the living room watching television. I immediately wished I hadn’t.

“Aren’t you a little old to be scrambling after those nasty things?”

“I *like* them. What do you even care?” I snapped, sullen. It was always like that between the two of us.

The doorbell rang. I sulked off to answer it, ignoring my father behind me. “Cicada girl,” he said. “That’s what we used to call you. Little cicada girl.”

I opened the door to see Mrs. Uehara holding the umbrella my mother had lent her. “How is your mother, dear? Here,” she said, plunking a bag full of tangerines from a nearby grocer down in the foyer. “I was in the neighborhood, and I didn’t want to come by empty-handed.”

“Oh, you shouldn’t have. Mom’s—”

“I just wanted to get this umbrella back to her. It’s been long enough.”

The cicada struggled free of my grasp, but I clamped my other hand over him to keep him from escaping. His legs skittered across my skin, a prickling secret caged between my fingers. “There’s no rush, really. Mom’s going to be in the hospital for a while anyway.”

“Is she? Poor thing.”

The tiny motor of wings revved to life, tickling my palms. “You’ll never believe it, Mrs. Uehara—I caught a cicada.”

“*Did* you? My word. Well, I’ve never really cared for bugs.” Mrs. Uehara gave the cage of my hands an uneasy glance. “Anyway, I only wanted to say hello. Give your mother my love,” she said, and left.

I had to talk to *someone* about this cicada, about the pure miracle of his existence—of his unseasonable flowering—in the coldest months of the year. Maybe cicadas were evolving, getting tougher. I’d heard that more bugs survived the winters now they were warmer than before. Maybe this one had mutated because of the changing climate. Or maybe, somehow, he’d gotten lost between the seasons, carrying the warmth of summer in his tiny body all the way to the wrong side of the year.

I decided I would talk to Sawachi.

I remembered this one time we went out for drinks, ages ago. As he killed his bourbon and branch, he'd said, "Yeah, cicadas—large browns, you know—they're pretty great. Determined little things."

Determined. I liked that. I liked him for saying it.

I slipped the cicada up into my sleeve for safe keeping and flipped open my phone. Sawachi's name was still in my address book.

He picked up after a few rings. "Yeah?"

I took a deep breath. *Be cool.* "Hey. Sorry to call you out of the blue. I know it's been a while."

"Oh, is this—? Yeah, hey, long time."

He remembers me. "So, um, the reason I called—I caught a cicada, just now. In the middle of winter. Weird, right?"

"A...cicada? You're kidding—this time of year? A *cicada*. Sure it wasn't just a good-looking roach?"

Ugh, Sawachi, you big goof. "Yes I'm sure. It's a cicada—a large brown. Kind of miraculous, right? I figured you'd know about this sort of thing, so. What do you think?"

The quiet on his end stretched for an eternity and a half before he murmured, "Miracles happen all the time."

"Huh?"

"Miracles happen. All the time. Take you calling me right now, for instance."

"That doesn't answer my question," I said, trying to keep the blush from my voice.

"Answers... Yeah. Can't say I have any, if there even *are* any. But I'll say this—people need a little bit of the miraculous to get by. You do, I do. Probably everyone does."

The cicada poked his head out from under my sleeve. It was about time to let him go; I couldn't keep him cooped up in my hands forever, or he'd just wither away. Still, it was hard to say for sure which would be in his best interest: trapping him inside the warm room, or freeing him out into the cold.

I made plans with Sawachi to go for drinks again sometime, and hung up.

I went outside to the persimmon tree in the garden. Its bald, boney boughs clawed against the ashen sky. Onto its cracked and crevassed trunk I set the cicada. He began crawling up, hesitating every now and then as if lost in thought.

I looked up and watched the snow drift down from unknowable heights. The flurry grew heavier, cold crystals striking my face and melting into rivulets. I couldn't say exactly when the cicada disappeared into the labyrinth of the persimmon tree's arthritic branches.

Every bit of me was frozen solid, except for my hands, which were somehow slick with a thin layer of summery sweat.

It was then I realized the cicada hadn't chirped a single note the entire time I'd held him.

My mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines sat untouched in the foyer. The television was still on, though no one was watching. I switched it off and put the tangerines on the kitchen table like always.

My father was gone, and had been for a long time. Mrs. Uehara had been dead for—what—two years now? And Sawachi...

I looked at my phone and saw his number in my call history. I wasn't brave enough to try calling him a second time.

The silence inside the empty house seemed to grow the more snow piled up outside. In the stillness, a ringing started in my ears. It sounded, for all the world, like the distant summer song of cicadas.

A cicada in winter

Azuchi Moe

It was the middle of winter when the abura cicada came flying over.

Moving awkwardly through the snow flurry, it flew all over the place like it was lost. With a sharp ‘tap’, it came to a sudden stop on the flyscreen.

I was so delighted I didn’t stop to think how ridiculous it was.

I love cicadas. I really, really love them.

I love the child-like kempfer cicada that lets us know summer is here. I love the evening cicada, its melancholy elegance. I even love the drooping eyes of the spritely Walker’s cicada. But there is nothing I love more than an abura cicada in the mid-summer heat, its song like the sound of hot oil.

But now? Really, how ridiculous!

Despite the cold.

Despite being cold enough for me to be wearing an angora turtleneck while the heater was on.

“Well, well! Who might you be?”

I opened the glass door and put my face close to the flyscreen, which we hadn’t taken down at the end of summer. The rush of cold air felt like the icy touch of a snow spirit.

For a moment, my short-sighted eyes met his (probably) short-sighted eyes.

Yep, it was an abura cicada, all right!

It was a male – its tummy tight and powdery-white. It looked as if it might, at any moment, start up an ear-splitting chirp.

I opened the flyscreen a little, and, with our eyes still locked, I slowly reached out with my right hand.

Got him!

The cicada struggled in my grip. His wings were like a fan powered by a tiny motor. I pressed down on them lightly so as not to damage them and, in their trembling, I felt the power of his joints.

I was ecstatic.

Perhaps he had come to me for a reason.

“Hey, you won’t believe this. I found a cicada. In winter! See!”

Without thinking, I called out to my dad, who had his back to me watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

“Again with the cicada catching. Act your age.”

“I just like them and I don’t care!” I snapped back.

It often escalates quickly like this with my dad and me.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

“That reminds me,” Dad said, as though it had just popped into his head. “We used to call you cicada girl.”

I turned my back on him in a huff and went to the entryway.

My mum’s friend, Mrs Uehara, was at the door, my mum’s umbrella in her hand.

“How is your mother? Here...” She placed a bag on the stair – mandarins from the local supermarket. “I was in the area.”

“Oh, thank you. My mother...”

“Here’s her umbrella. I thought I had better return it sooner rather than later.”

The cicada got agitated and almost escaped my grip. I made my fingers into a cage and trapped him inside. His legs pricked me as he moved around – the pleasant itch of a secret in my hands.

“Oh, there was no need to rush it back. My mother is a long-stay patient in the hospital.”

“I see. So terrible.”

The cicada started its tiny motor and the flutter of its wings tickled my hands.

“Hey, Mrs Uehara, I found a cicada even though it’s winter. Strange, right?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? I actually can’t stand bugs...”

Mrs Uehara looked uneasily at the cage I had made with my hands.

“Well, I was just dropping by. Tell your mother I said ‘hi’.”

And with that, she left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada – the mystery of it being alive in such cold weather. If it were a flower, we would say it was unseasonable. Maybe cicadas are evolving? They say that the winters are warmer now than they were in the past and there are more hibernating insects around. Maybe the changing climate caused it to mutate? Or maybe something stimulated its little body. With the hot summer weighing on it, it might have gotten lost and came across to the other side, this side and this season.

I decided I would tell Sawachi.

Ages ago at a party, Sawachi had said, “Yep, abura cicadas. They’re pretty good, all right. Not bad at all. They have ambition.”

Then he finished off his whisky and water.

His words struck a chord with me, and I took a bit of a liking to him after that.

I gently placed the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and turned on my phone. Sawachi’s name was still in the address book.

It rang and Sawachi picked up.

“Hello?”

I tried to relax and, casual as anything, I said, “Long time! Sorry for calling you out of the blue like this...”

“Oh... is that you? It’s been a while.”

He seemed to recognise me right away.

“So, let me get straight to the point. I found a cicada. In winter! Can you believe it?”

“A cicada, huh? At this time of year? A cicada? You’re sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Oh, stop it already, Sawachi!

“No! It’s a cicada, an abura cicada. Strange, right? Hey, what do you think? You know a bit about these things.”

On the other end of the line, a deep silence was spreading out.

Sawachi lowered his voice.

“... there’s plenty of strange things.”

“Huh?”

“Mysterious things. The world is full of them. You calling me now, for example...”

“That’s not an answer,” I quipped, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer? I don’t really know. Maybe it’s possible. But, well, mysterious things can be helpful for us – maybe for the world too.”

The cicada peered out from my sleeve.

I would have to release him soon; a cicada will grow weak if you keep hold of it for too long. I just didn’t know which would be better: releasing it inside a warm room or outside in the snow?

Sawachi and I promised to meet up for a drink again sometime and I hung up the phone.

I went outside to the persimmon tree.

The tree had dropped all of its leaves. Its bony branches clutched at the ashen sky.

I set the cicada down on the rough, sinewy furrows of the trunk. It started to pick its way up the tree, hesitating from time to time as though there were something on its mind.

I peered upward. The snow seemed to be falling from somewhere far, far above. It started to fall more heavily and the cold flakes melted as they touched my face, streaking my cheeks.

At some point, the cicada had disappeared into the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the treetop.

I was chilled right through. But not my hands where the cicada had been; they were hot and sweaty as if it were summer. What’s more, come to think of it, the cicada was a male but it hadn’t sung even once.

I went back inside. My mum’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still on the step. The TV had been left on in the living room but my dad was gone.

I turned it off and I took the mandarins to the kitchen table, as always.

It’s been a long time since my father passed away. And Mrs Uehara must have been dead for two

years now. And Sawachi...

The record of the call to Sawachi was still in my phone but I didn't have the courage to call him back.

The snow was starting to pile up. A crushing silence was flooding the empty house.

In the intense quiet, my ears started ringing.

It was exactly like, on a distant summer day, hearing the song of an abura cicada.

Winter Cicada by Azuchi Moe

Although it is mid-winter, the cicadas are still flying around.

As if lost, they fly awkwardly in the sparkling snowfall. Changing direction here and there until one flies unexpectedly, right into the window screen. At first, I had thought ‘Oh, what an idiot’, but then I became really happy. I like cicadas. Like, really, *really* like them. With the arrival of summer we get Kempfer Cicadas like cute little toddlers, the sad and elegant Evening Cicadas, and quick but lively droopy eyed *Cosmopsaltria opalifer*. And of course, in the heat of summer the cicadas become more active. I like the tones of their voices during that time the most.

But now, it’s so silly.

Being out even though it's cold. Like wearing a sweater in Angola, Africa even though the heat is turned on indoors.

“Come on. Who do you think you are?”

I opened the glass door and brought my face closer to the screen. Air cold like a Yuki-onna, snow woman's skin. We stare at each other for a while. I’m nearsighted and the cicada probably is too. As you would expect of a cicada. I squeeze the stomach of the damp male cicada covered in powdery snow and it starts to squeal loudly. I open the insect screen a little and the cicada and I stare at each other. I slowly extend my right hand.

Caught it!

The exposed cicada is in my hands. Small wings beating like the blades of an electric fan. Holding it softly at the base of its back with my fingers so that I do not hurt it’s wings. I’m ecstatic with the fulfilled feeling of catching it with my hands.

“Hm, weird. Here, there’s a cicada in the winter”.

I unconsciously called out to my dad who was watching T.V. in the living room with his back towards me. I regret my decision quickly.

“I haven’t caught a cicada in quite time-”

“I would like you to, no. I would *not* like it if you did that!”

My tone of speaking was roughly overshadowed. This is how my dad and I are. Then, the front door chime rang.

I went first,

“That reminds me, I was talking about a female cicada a while ago ”

As I remembered what I was about to say my dad had gone to the entrance. My mom’s friend, Ms. Uehara stood there under my mother’s umbrella.

“Mom, how are you? Oh...”

Ms. Uehara placed a grocery bag filled with mandarin orange down on the wood in the front

entrance way and spoke:

“Come a little closer”

“Oh, I'm sorry. How is mom-”

“This umbrella. I thought I should probably return it soon”

The cicada was trying to escape from between my fingers so I closed both of my hands tightly. The painful prickly legs of the cicada was secretly a pleasant feeling.

“Glad you're always doing well... My mom's been in the hospital for a while.”

“Ah, That's right. How terrible.”

The cicada's tiny motor started up, the wings tickling the inside of my hand.

“Hey, Ms. Urehara. Cicadas in the winter. Are weird right?”

“Eh, Is that so? Really? But, I'm no good with insects-” Ms. Urehara look anxiously at my tightly closed hands, “Well, I just came by for a bit. Say hello to mom for me.” She said, and went home.

I wanted to tell *someone* about the cicada. For it to exist in such a cold season is a mystery ---. What if a flower blooms out of nowhere? I wonder if this cicada will even evolve properly. Although it's winter, it's said it'll get warmer and once winter passes the insects will increase as well. In this strange weather, I wonder if there is an abnormality in the climate or something. Or maybe everywhere those small bodies --- bear the opposite, the hot summer. Maybe it got interested and that's why it came over to this side. I've decided to talk to Sawachi

Long ago at a drinking party Sawachi said,

“Hm, a Cicada huh? Those are good guys. Really, really good guys. They got ambition” ,While emptying his drink. I like that way of speaking, and because of that I also like Sawachi quite a bit. I gently placed the cicada into my sweater cuffs and opened my phone. Searched my address book to see if Sawachi's name was still there. The dial tone rang to connect me to Sawachi.

“... yes...?”

While trying to get my heart to calm down I begin, “It's been a while. Sorry for the sudden phone call”.

“Oh... could it be? Wow, it *has* been a while, huh. ” It seems that he understood immediately that it was me.

“Hey, I know it's sudden but, there was a cicada. In the winter. That's weird right? ”

“Huh, a cicada? Right now? A cicada? Hmm, not a cockroach?” No, Stop that, Sawachi.

“That's not right. A *cicada*. A large brown one. Isn't it mysterious? Well what do you think? Since its Sawachi I want your detailed thoughts-”

On the other side was a deep silence. It felt like it was spreading wider as time went on. Swachi spoke as if he was muttering to himself.

“...There are many mysterious things.”

“...What?”

“There are many mysterious things in this world. Right now, even you calling me is...”

“That’s not an answer”. Are you not embarrassed by what you are saying?

“An answer...huh? That I do not know. I wonder if one exists. But hey, isn’t the real mystery salvation? For us, and maybe, even the world-”

The cicada’s face came out from my sleeve. Eventually I have to let it go. If kept in the hands of the people forever, the cicada’s wings will become weak. Though it is warm indoors and the snow is glistening outside, wherever the cicada goes I’m not sure if it will be of any benefit to it. I agreed with Sawachi. I promised to drink with him again someday and hung up. I went out the entrance towards the persimmon tree in the garden. The persimmon tree leaves had dropped completely. I grabbed a bone bare branch in the gray sky and gently placed the cicada on the groove like streaks of the tree trunk. The cicada started climbing, occasionally stopping almost as if it was thinking in consideration. Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from endless heights, occasional cold crystals hitting my face and melting off in streaks of my face. One day, the cicada by the persimmon tree will disappear, stiffing as it’s silhouette becomes one with the maze-like texture of the trunk.

Till then.

My body was completely cold even though I was sweating like it was summer from catching a cicada with my hands. It didn’t even alarm me that the cicada was male, I had thought to myself. Returning through the front door my mother’s umbrella and the bag of oranges were left where they were. The television in the Living room was left on but dad was nowhere to be seen.

It’s been a long time since my dad passed away. Mrs.Uehara also passed away 2 years ago. That and Suwachi too...Suwachi’s call history was left on my phone. But, I didn’t have the courage to call him again. When the snow comes down like this, it’s like being squeezed by the silence of a house with nobody in it. The quietness made my ears ring. Just like the cicadas did on a distant, far off summer day.

Winter's Brown Cicada
by Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the middle of winter, the brown cicadas had begun to fly around.

The little drops of snow hitting them, the sloppy inefficient way that they fly, without going in any particular direction, and then suddenly being stopped by a screen door.

I was very unhappy, but the thought of how silly cicadas are cheered me up.

I like cicadas, in fact, you could say I love them. I like the type of cicada that announces their arrival during the summer, and live so elegantly that it's almost sad. I also like the type of cicada with nimble and cheerful, drooping eyes, but more than any other type of cicada, the one I like the most is the type with a voice that flows like oil, pouring during the hot summer. However, it's impossible for me to imagine seeing a cicada like that right now, because it's so cold. Even I'm freezing, despite wearing a sweater made of angora fur and the heat being turned on. "Ey, who are you?!" I asked. I opened the glass door and then put my face near the screen door. A cold chill passed and a figure like that of a fairy continued to approach. In my (and probably the cicadas as well) shortsightedness, we stared at each other for a short while. As I thought, it was a brown cicada. The cicada was male, and it's tight stomach looked like white power. It seemed that at any moment that big, bolstering voice it had would begin to ring. I opened the screen door a little, and while staring at the cicada, slowly extended my right hand. I managed to catch it. The cicada struggled violently in my hand. Its wings were like the small motors that move in an electric fan. I handled the cicada carefully, so as not to injure it, and could feel the fear coming from its wings in one of the fingers I was gently holding it in. I was overjoyed. This cicada in my hand, being able to catch it was like accomplishing some great goal. "Wow, this is so weird. Hey, check this out! There was a cicada hanging around even though it's winter!" I called out to my father, who was in the living room watching TV, without thinking of the consequences. I soon regretted doing so. "Are you still going around catching cicadas? Act *your age!*" My father shouted.

"I like what I like, and I'm not going to change for you!" I shouted. I got angry and sternly raised my tone. My father and I kept fighting like this for a little while. As we were fighting, the doorbell rang. I huffed, and then my father said, "come to think of it, we used to call you our 'cicada daughter'" my father stated, as if he had suddenly remembered that fact, while turning his back to head to the entrance. My mother's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing at the doorway and holding my mother's umbrella. "How is your mother feeling? I brought these for her." While setting the bag full of oranges that she got from the nearby supermarket at the doorway, Ms. Uehara said "I was in the neighborhood, so I brought these." "Ah, sorry to trouble you. My mother is..." I hesitantly replied.

"I thought I should return this umbrella as soon as I could." Ms. Uehara interjected.

The cicada struggled violently and kept trying to escape from my fingers, so I enclosed it in both my hands, like a cage. The cicada's feet were wiggling and moving around in my hand, and the painfully itchy sensation in my hands was oddly pleasurable.

"Ugh, how much longer will it be like this... mother's been in the hospital for so long." I said. "Yeah, she has, hasn't she.. it's been very difficult." Ms. Uehara replied. The cicada's tiny motor started back up, and the flickering of its feather tickled the inside of my hands again. "Hey, Ms. Uehara. There are cicadas flying around even though it's winter, isn't that weird? I told her excitedly. "Oh, really? Is that so? Although... I'm not really a big fan of bugs, so...". Ms. Uehara looked anxiously at my folded hands and said "Well, I only came to stop by, so tell your mother hello for me" and then headed back home. I wanted to talk with somebody about cicadas. Particularly about how strange it was they were alive during such a cold time of the year. If there were flowers around they must be blooming out of season. I wonder if cicadas have evolved to be strong enough to survive during the winter. Even though it's winter, it is said that it's hotter nowadays than it used to be. It's also been said that the number of bugs who live through winter is increasing. I wonder if some sort of mutation happened because of the abnormal climate. Or... perhaps, by some weird chance, the cicada's tiny little body succumbed to the harsh heat of summer and somehow got lost and ended up getting transported to this cold winter...I

wonder. I decided to try and talk with Sawachi about it. A while ago at a get-together Sawachi said “yup, brown cicada right? That’s a good bug. A very good bug. They’ve got a lot of heart!” while nonchalantly watering down his drink. I like the way he talked about things, so I grew kind of fond of Sawachi. I gently put the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and opened my mobile phone. I looked through my address book and saw that Sawachi’s name was still there. The dial tone rang and Sawachi picked up. “...yes?...” While trying to keep myself calm, I confidently replied “It’s been a while. Sorry about calling you so suddenly.” “Oh... is that you? Ahhh, it’s been a while.” Sawachi said. He seemed to quickly recognize that it was me.

“This is a little sudden, but there’s a cicada here, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that a little weird?” I said. “Huh.. a cicada? Around this time of year? ...A cicada? Are you sure it isn’t a cockroach?” asked Sawachi. “No way! Don’t joke around, Sawachi.” I responded.

“No! It’s a cicada, a brown cicada. Isn’t that so strange? What do you think about that? I thought you might find that interesting!” I excitedly stated. There was no response on the other end and then a long, deep silence for a while. The silence was so deep it was as if it was enveloping everything. Sawachi’s voice got quiet, and in a mumbling tone said

“There’s a lot of things in *this world* you could classify as *strange*. Even something like you calling me on the phone right now.” Sawachi said.

“...What?” I dumbfoundedly responded.

“That’s not really an answer, you know!” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“Answer? I don’t understand what you mean by that. I wonder if an answer to that even exists. But hey... strange things are sort of comforting. They can be a source of relief, for us, and probably for the rest of the world as well.” Sawachi replied.

The cicada poked its head out from the cuff of my sweater. It was about time I let the cicada go. The cicada had been trapped for so long that it had become very weak. Although, now that I think about it, should I release it inside of this hot room, or to the lightly falling snow outside? I had no clue which one would be better for the cicada. I promised Sawachi that we would meet again for drinks sometime and then hung up the phone. When I left the entranceway of the house, I headed in the direction of a persimmon tree in the yard. All the leaves of the persimmon tree had fallen, and the coiled branches looked like they were wrapping around the gray sky. The cicada was perched on a tree trunk which was cracked and had grooves like that of arteries. The cicada slowly began to climb the trunk of the tree and would sometimes pause, as if it were thinking about something. When I looked up, it seemed as if the snow was falling from an endless height. Gradually and violently, the freezing crystals continued to hit my face and melted, coming one after another. Before I knew it, the figure of the cicada could be seen at the top of the tree and stiffened up, then disappeared somewhere into the maze-like silhouette.

My body had become completely chilled, but despite that, for some reason both of my hands, the same ones I caught the cicada in, still felt hot. They were sweating, as if it were summer. Which reminded me, “even though the cicada was a male, it didn’t make the slightest sound” I casually thought to myself. When I arrived back at the entranceway, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of oranges were still there. The living room TV had been left on and my father wasn’t anywhere to be seen. I turned the TV off and carried the bag of oranges to the table in the kitchen, like I always did. My father had already passed a long time ago, and Ms. Uehara should have died about two years ago. Sawachi as well...

A record of my call with Sawachi was still in my phone. Even so, I didn’t have the courage to try and call him back once more. I wonder, is the snow still piling up? The empty house continued to be filled with an oppressive silence, as if someone were sternly watching over it. In the deafening silence, my ears began to ring. It was very similar to the chirping sound of a brown cicada, during a very very far away summer day.

“Winter Cicada”

Who would’ve thought a cicada would come flying by in the middle of winter?

After bumbling this way and that, looking lost in the gentle snowfall, all of a sudden, there it was, perched on the screen door—a large brown cicada.

“Huh? How on earth...?”

My bewilderment, however, quickly turned to joy.

I love cicadas. Really, truly love them. I love how they announce the arrival of summer, their cries, persistent from sunrise to sunset, as full of elegance as they are of sadness. I love the Kempfer cicada, cute as a sweetly smiling child, and I love the nimble *tsuku-tsuku-boshi* cicada,¹ with its cheerful, droopy eyes. But most of all, I love the large brown cicada, and the way that it sings with a voice like pouring hot oil, sizzling hotter than a sweltering summer’s day.

But seriously, how was this possible? On such a cold day—cold enough that I was wearing my angora turtleneck sweater, with the heat turned on.

“Just what kind of a bug *are* you?” I demanded. I opened the front door to get a better look at this peculiar creature on the opposite side of the screen door (still up from the summer months), a dreadful winter chill pressing through. Getting closer, the cicada’s probably-nearsighted eyes briefly locked with mine.

Yup, as I suspected, a large brown cicada. Male, its powdered-white abdomen pressed to the screen, ready to burst into song at any moment.

Resuming my staring contest with the cicada, I opened the door a crack, slowly reached out with my right hand and—

Yes! Caught it!

I could feel it struggling, its pair of wings—the little motor that powered this tenacious critter—whirring powerfully in my hand, trembling against my fingers keeping it pinned down as gently as possible, so as not to harm it. I felt ecstatic, overcome with a sense of fulfillment, the kind you feel after reaching a long sought-after goal. I headed toward the living room, where Dad was watching TV, calling out without thinking, “You’re not gonna believe this! There was a cicada outside—at this time of year! Look!” And I immediately regretted it.

“Aren’t you too old to be doing things like catching bugs? Grow up—”

“I *like* cicadas, enjoying something I like doesn’t make me a selfish child!” I spat back, offended. Just as things got heated, the doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it, everyone used to call you Cicada Girl, didn’t they?” I heard him reminisce, as I turned away in a huff to answer the door.

I opened the door to find Mom’s friend, Mrs. Uehara, standing there, holding Mom’s umbrella.

“How is your mother doing? Oh, here—since I was in the area...” She put down a bag of mandarin oranges from the nearby supermarket inside the doorway.

“Ah, thank you so much. Mom is, uh—”

“I figured I should return her umbrella sooner rather than later, so...”

The cicada made a sudden move and nearly escaped through my fingers, but I managed to clamp both my hands over it and lock it back up. The prickly itchy sensation of its feet moving around in there felt like a fun little secret in my possession.

“Oh, you didn’t have to do that, thank you. But, umm... Mom’s gonna be in the hospital for a while.”

“Ah, I see... I’m so sorry to hear that.”

The cicada powered its mini-motor back up, tickling my hands with its fluttering wings.

“You know, the most peculiar thing happened earlier—there was a cicada! Even though it’s the

¹

Meimuna opalifera is known as the *tsuku-tsuku-boshi* in Japan, meant to resemble the sound of their call.

middle of winter! Strange, right?”

“Oh? Really? I’m not a fan of bugs, so...” replied Mrs. Uehara, looking nervously at my clasped hands. “Well, I should get going. Give my best to your mom,” she said, before making her departure.

I wanted to talk to somebody about the cicada. About how curious it was that it could survive during such a cold time of year. Kind of like a flower blooming off-season. Was this vitality an evolutionary trait? I’d heard winters had grown warmer in recent times, and that hibernating insects were proliferating. Had previously dormant mutations awakened due to the abnormal climate? Or could it be that some type of impulse had caused the cicada to lose its way, driving it to travel to the other side, *this* side, of the planet, carrying some of that summer heat within its small body?

I decided to try to talk to Sawachi. We’d talked about large brown cicadas when we met up for drinks, what felt like forever ago.

“Hmm, large brown cicadas, huh?” he’d mused, finishing off his drink. “They’re good fellas, quite good fellas, indeed. Ambitious too, y’know.” I liked the way he talked about them, and that made me kinda like him.

I carefully placed the cicada in the opening of my sleeve and took out my cell phone. Sawachi’s name was still in the address book. After ringing for a bit, he picked up.

“Hello?”

Trying my best to keep calm, I replied casually, “Hey! It’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue.”

“Oh, hey... Yeah, it’s, uh, been a while, huh?” he said back, like he’d just realized it was me he was talking to.

“Umm, really quick—I just wanted to tell you that I found a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Weird, right?”

“Huh, a cicada? At this time of year? Hmmm a cicada... Sure it’s not a roach?”

Ew, don’t be gross, Sawachi, knock it off.

“Definitely not! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada, no less. Pretty incredible, isn’t it? What do you think? I figured, you’re just so knowledgeable about this kind of stuff, so...” I trailed off, and a dead silence followed, pouring through the phone line, stretching on and on. I didn’t know how to stop it. I didn’t know what to say.

“...There’s lots of mysterious stuff out there,” Sawachi mumbled.

“What?”

“Life’s full of mysterious things like that. For example, the fact that you called me just now.”

“You’re not answering my question,” I said back, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer...? I don’t know what the answer is. Maybe there isn’t one. But y’know, mysteries like this are a comfort—a salvation. Not just to us, but perhaps to the whole world, even.”

Seeing the cicada pop its head out from my sleeve, I knew I had to set it free. It wouldn’t survive for long confined to human hands. But whether it was better for it to be here in the warmth of indoors or released outside into the snow, I wasn’t really sure.

After promising Sawachi we would meet up again for a drink sometime, I hung up, then headed outside toward the persimmon tree in the front yard. All the leaves had fallen, leaving the jagged branches grasping at the gray sky overhead. I gently placed the cicada among the rifts and valleys that comprised the gnarled trunk. It slowly began to climb, hesitating at times, as though distractedly thinking about something.

I looked up toward the snow falling from what seemed like an unfathomable height, steadily coming down more and more heavily. Some of the flakes of frozen crystal landed on my face, melting and flowing down, leaving a patchwork of watery threads in their wake. The cicada slipped away unnoticed, stopping one last time amongst the tangle of branches before vanishing entirely into their labyrinthine silhouette.

For some reason, despite my body being chilled to the bone, my hands that had held the cicada now seemed to be permanently warm. Even now, they were sweating as though it was summertime. Strange... And, now that I thought about it, the cicada hadn’t chirped once, even though it was male.

I went back inside, greeted by Mom's umbrella and the mandarins still sitting by the door where they'd been left. The TV in the living room was still on, Dad having long since gone. I went over and shut it off, then took the bag of oranges to the kitchen and put it on the table, as usual.

It had been a long time since Dad had passed away. Mrs. Uehara, as well—it must have been two years ago now. And then, Sawachi... My cell phone still held our call history, but I just wasn't brave enough to try to contact him again.

A crushing silence filled the house where I remained, alone. Perhaps the snow was to blame. In the stillness, a ringing sound filled my ears. A sound like one from summer days of long, long ago. A sound just like the cry of a large brown cicada.

Winter Cicada Azuchi Moe

It was the middle of winter, and a cicada came flying into view.

It appeared from amidst the lightly falling snow, fluttering clumsily to-and-fro like it was lost, until it stopped suddenly on the screen door.

A cicada in winter? Before I could even stop to think about how impossible this was, a huge smile had crept across my face.

I like cicadas. I *really* like them.

I like the mottled cicadas that signal the coming of summer and remind me of cute young kids. I like the evening cicadas that always seem so sad yet elegant. I like the yellow-black cicadas with their droopy eyes that are always happily flitting about. But, without a doubt, my favorites are the big, brown cicadas that chirp on hot summer days like boiling oil being poured.

But it *couldn't be*.

A cicada in weather this cold?

While I'm here with the heater on, wearing my angora turtleneck sweater?

"Hey there little guy... What are you?"

I opened the glass door and put my face near the screen that had covered it since summer. A chill crept up on me like the touch of an icy maiden.

For a few seconds, my nearsighted eyes met with the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes.

This was definitely one of those big brown cicadas. A male, with a narrow abdomen that looked like it had been brushed with white powder.

It seemed as if any second now it would start chirping loudly.

I cracked open the screen door and, eyes locked with the cicada, slowly reached out my right hand. Got it!

The cicada thrashed in my grip. Its wings beat like two small electric fans. Careful, so as not to harm the cicada, I gently pressed a finger against the base of its trembling wings to stop it from fluttering.

I was ecstatic! As proud as if I'd achieved some great goal with my own two hands.

Without thinking, I called out to Dad as he watched television in the living room.

"Hey, this is weird. It's winter, but I found a cicada here. See?"

I immediately regretted saying anything.

"You're still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like them, that's all. What does it matter to you anyway?"

Frustration crept into my voice.

Conversations with my father often seemed to end up like this.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

"Well, I *did* used to call you 'cicada girl'..." dad said, as I angrily turned my back on him to answer the front door.

Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother's, was standing there holding mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother? Here."

She held out a bag from the local supermarket filled with oranges and put it down against the doorframe.

"I was just in the area."

"Thanks for stopping by. Mom is..."

"I thought I better return her umbrella as soon as possible."

The cicada struggled to escape between my fingers, so I made a cage with both hands to keep it in. Its legs scratched against my palms, and that itch served as a pleasant reminder of the secret I held within my hands.

"Oh, no need to rush. Mom will be in the hospital for a while."

"Is that right? I'm sorry, that must be difficult."

The cicada started up its small motor and wings fluttered against the inside of my hands, tickling

my palms.

“Mrs. Uehara, I found a cicada here even though it’s winter. Don’t you think that’s weird?”

“Oh, did you? I’m not too fond of bugs...”

Mrs. Uehara eyed my enclosed hands warily as she spoke.

“Well, I just wanted to drop by. Give your mother my best,” she said before leaving.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada; about how strange it was for it to be alive in this cold weather. It was like a flower blooming out of season. Was it some evolution of the cicada’s life-force keeping it alive? They say that winters nowadays are warmer than they used to be, so maybe there are also more insects living through the cold season. Did this irregular weather cause the cicadas to mutate? I wonder what drove this little guy, with his tiny body, to make it all the way through the hot summer, and then stray into the frigid temperatures on the other side.

I thought I’d try telling Sawachi about it.

A long time ago when we were out drinking, Sawachi had said to me “Oh, those big cicadas you get in summer? They’re good ones. Real good ones! They’re ambitious little things,” before downing his whiskey and water. I’d liked the way he’d said that, so I’d taken a bit of a liking to Sawachi.

I quietly tucked the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my phone. I looked through the address book and was glad to find I still had his number.

The dial tone rang, and Sawachi picked up.

“...Hello?”

I suppressed my excitement and replied casually.

“It’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue.”

“Oh... It’s you! Huh, it has been a while, hasn’t it?”

It sounded like he’d recognized my voice straight away.

“Oh hey, so I found a cicada here. In winter. Don’t you think that’s strange?”

“What... A cicada? In winter? A *cicada*? You’re sure it’s not a roach?”

Ew, cut it out, Sawachi!

“Of course! It’s a cicada. A big, brown one. Pretty amazing, right? Why do you think it’s here now? I thought I’d ask you since you seem to know about them.”

The voice on the other end went dead quiet and the silence seemed to stretch on.

“There are a lot of strange things...” Sawachi mumbled.

“...Huh?”

“There are a lot of strange things in the world. Like your calling me now...”

“That’s not an answer,” I said trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, hm? I don’t know if I know the answer. I don’t know if there is one. But a strangeness is a saving grace. For us, and probably for the rest of the world as well.”

The cicada peeked its head out from my sleeve.

It was about time I let it go. Cicadas get weaker the longer you hold onto them. That being said, I didn’t know whether it was better for the cicada to release it inside in the warm room, or outside in the lightly falling snow.

I promised Sawachi we’d go drinking together again sometime soon and hung up.

Stepping out the front door, I headed into the garden. The persimmon tree had lost all of its leaves, and the spindly branches clung to the gray sky. The bark covering the tree was covered with fissure-like crevices, and I placed the cicada on the trunk. It hesitantly started its slow climb up the tree, as if pondering every step.

Looking up, the snow seemed to fall from an endless height above. It gradually got heavier, and cold flakes started to land and melt on my face until thin rivulets of water started running down my cheeks.

Eventually, the cicada disappeared into the maze-like silhouette of the canopy of the persimmon tree.

My entire body felt cold, and yet somehow my hands, the same hands with which I’d caught the cicada, were incredibly hot. They were covered in sweat, as if it were the middle of summer. I suddenly

realized that, even though it had been a male cicada, it hadn't made even the slightest chirp.

I returned to the door, where mom's umbrella and the bag of oranges still sat. The television in the living room had been left on, but I couldn't see dad.

I went back to the house and put the bag of oranges on the table as I had countless times before.

Dad hadn't been with us for a long time. Likewise, Mrs. Uehara had passed away two years ago. Just like Sawachi...

My mobile still had a log of the phone call with Sawachi, but I wasn't brave enough to try calling again.

Snow piled up outside the empty house, yet a constricting silence seemed to permeate the air inside.

It was so quiet that I started to hear a ringing in my ears.

It sounded just like the chirp of a cicada on a summer day far, far away from here.

The Winter Cicada

The middle of winter is certainly not the time you'd expect to see a large brown cicada.

But here it was, looking lost as it clumsily veered left and right through lightly falling snow. At long last, it made an abrupt landing on our screen door.

Anyone else would think "Whatever is this silly klutz up to?" but my response was utter excitement.

You see, I like cicadas. Really, really like them. The adorable, fun-size Kempfer cicada that heralds summer's arrival, the evening cicada that sings so beautifully and so sadly, the nimble Walker's cicada with its lil' beady eyes—I like them all. But I must admit, my favorite is the large brown cicada, the one that adds fuel to the sweltering summer heat with its distinctive call like oil sizzling in a pan.

But, really, whatever *was* this silly klutz up to? In this weather! I was in a heated house and still had to put on my angora wool sweater.

"Hey buddy, where'd you come from?" I slid open the glass door and brought my face to the screen, the remnant of summer. The outside air, cold like the touch of the beautiful, deadly Yuki-onna, poured in.

For a brief moment, my nearsighted eyes met the eyes of the cicada, who, probably, couldn't see very far either. It was indeed a large brown cicada, and a male one at that, its rigid abdomen white like it'd been dusted with flour. Any minute, it seemed, it could break into its loud song.

I cracked the screen door open, and, holding the cicada's gaze, slowly extended my right arm.

Gotcha!

It struggled to break free, its wings propelled like the blades of a miniature fan. Careful not to cause any damage, I kept my fingers loose as the force of the cicada's fear traveled from the joints of its wings into my hand.

I was beside myself with joy. My hand felt strangely full, as if I had a physical grasp on something intangible.

"Hey, Dad, come look at this cicada," I called out, forgetting myself. "It must not know it's winter out." I instantly regretted speaking.

"Are you still wasting your time hunting cicadas? At your age—" My father was watching TV in the living room, facing away from me.

"It's not some game to me, I can't help my interests!" Indignant at the accusation, I raised my voice. The two of us were quick to butt heads like this.

I was still in a huff when the doorbell rang. "Come to think of it, we did call you 'cicada girl' back in the day," he uttered as if just remembering, but I turned my back to him and left to get the door. My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara, was standing in the entryway with my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother feeling? Here..." She placed a bag of tangerines with the logo of the nearby supermarket on the step up to the living space and added, "I was just in the neighborhood."

"Ah, thank you, you shouldn't have. She is—"

"I thought, I'd better drop off the umbrella—"

With a strong jolt, the cicada started to slip between my fingers. To thwart its escape, I locked both of my hands around it like a cage and immediately felt sharp little feet scurrying about. It hurt and made my skin itch, but I secretly enjoyed it.

"It'd be no problem if you kept it longer...she is in long-term care," I said.

"I was sorry to hear that. It must be hard for you."

The cicada started its tiny motor once again and, rustling its wings against my skin, began to tickle my palms.

"Mrs. Uehara, look at this cicada I found. At this time of year! Strange, isn't it?"

"Huh, is that so? How interesting. I have to say, I'm not a big fan of bugs—" She cast an uneasy look at the cage I made with my hands.

"Well, I thought I'd stop by. Say hello to your mother for me," she said and walked out.

I really wanted to talk to someone about my find. Its existence in this cold weather was baffling.

Was this like a plant blooming out of season? Or, perhaps, cicadas were evolving? They say temperatures have been warmer in the recent years, allowing more insects to survive winters. Was this cicada a kind of mutant, a victim of the weather anomalies? Most importantly, what had to happen that this creature—whose body, as little as it is, can shoulder the burden of sweltering summer heat—would find itself on the opposite side of the world it knows, in these winter conditions?

I decided to check with Sawachi.

A long time ago at an after-work gathering, he said, draining a glass of whiskey with water, “Oh yeah, the large brown cicada. A good fellow, that one. Good all around. An ambitious little guy.” The way he said it made me feel a certain affinity to him.

I gently placed the cicada inside the sleeve opening of my sweater and flipped open my cell phone. Sawachi’s name was still in my contacts.

“...Hello...” I heard Sawachi’s voice after a couple of beeps.

“Hello, I’m sorry to call you out of the blue—” I spoke with reserve, doing my best to contain my excitement.

“Aah...is that really you? Boy, it’s been a long time.” He seemed to recognize me right away.

“Um, listen, I’ll just skip right to it, I saw a cicada. Bizarre, isn’t it, at this time of year?”

“Wait...a cicada? You’re kidding. Now? You’re sure it wasn’t a roach?”

Come on, Sawachi, I know better than that.

“No, definitely a cicada. A large brown cicada. Crazy, isn’t it? What do you think? I thought, if anyone would have an idea, it would be you.”

A deep silence, of a kind that one can’t take back, followed on the other side of the line. It went on, expanding.

“...Life is full of mysteries,” he said at last, dropping his voice to a murmur.

“...Huh?”

“I mean, there are mysteries all around us. Like you calling me at this very moment...”

“That doesn’t answer my question,” I said, in an attempt to shake off feeling awkward.

“An answer...hmm. I don’t have one, I’m afraid. Not sure one exists. That said...one can take comfort in the unknown. You and I could, and maybe even the rest of the world...”

The cicada peeked out from underneath my sleeve. I had to let it go soon. Being held in a human palm for too long takes a toll on cicada bodies. Still, I wasn’t sure what was in the little guy’s best interest, to stay in our warm house or to be released into the snow flurry outside.

The call ended with Sawachi and me agreeing to have a drink again sometime.

I stepped outside and walked over to the persimmon tree. It stood completely bare, clutching onto the leaden sky with its bony arms. I carefully set the cicada on the chapped trunk, its bark carved with furrows. The insect began to slowly climb up, pausing every so often as if there was something on its mind.

I looked up. The snow kept falling from what seemed a bottomless sky, gradually getting worse. The cold little crystals melted as soon as they touched my face and line after line dripped down. Before I knew it, the cicada disappeared into the maze-like silhouette of the stiff persimmon branches.

My body was now chilled to the bone, and yet both of my hands, that until recently held the cicada, were somehow warm and sweaty like it was summer. Then it hit me—it was a male, but it didn’t make a peep this whole time...

When I got back, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines were still sitting on the step by the door. The TV was on in the living room, but my father was long gone. I turned it off and, as usual, brought the tangerines over to the kitchen table.

It had been a long time since my father departed this life and it must be two years ago now that Mrs. Uehara passed on. So had Sawachi...

Our conversation was still there in my call history. A mere push of a button and I could dial his number one more time, but I dared not try...

A heartrending silence now reigned within the empty house, muffled by the snowdrifts. A silence so abject, my ears began to ring.

It was the loud churring of a far-off summer day I never fail to recognize.

Cicadas in Winter
by AZUCHI Moe

It was the dead of winter, yet a large brown cicada was zipping about.

Bumbling through the flurry of snow, it darted every which way before finally landing on the screen door.

My heart filled with glee before my mind could even process the absurdity of the sight.

I love cicadas. They're my favorite things in the whole wide world.

The innocent, vernal Kempfer cicada; the wistful, elegant evening cicada; the lively, droopy-eyed Walker cicada... They all have a place in my heart. But the one I adore most is the large brown cicada—*Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*—whose signature song brings to mind hot oil sizzling on a sweltering summer's day.

But for one to show up on a day like this? Inconceivable.

It was positively freezing.

Heck, I had even thrown on a fleece turtleneck sweater and cranked up the heater.

"Whoa there. Who do you think you are?"

I slid open the glass and pressed my face against the screen door, which had been up since summer. The ghastly air sent chills through my body.

My nearsighted eyes briefly met the (presumably) nearsighted eyes of the cicada.

It really *was* a large brown cicada.

A male one to be precise, with a powdery white pattern on its tight abdomen. It looked ready to burst into song at any moment.

I cracked open the screen and carefully extended my right arm, never letting the cicada out of my sight.

Gotcha!

The cicada squirmed in my hand. Its vibrating wings fluttered like a pair of tiny motorized fans, tingling my fingers as I gently tightened my grip.

How exhilarating!

A sense of fulfillment radiated from my palm.

"Hey, you're not going to believe this, but I found a cicada in this weather," I instinctively blurted out to my father, who was watching TV in the living room. "Look."

"Aren't you a little old to still be catching bugs?"

"I'll do whatever I want!" My voice rose in defiance.

I always had a short fuse when it came to my father.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

As my temper flared, he remarked, "That reminds me, we did use to call you our little cicada..."

I turned away from him and headed for the entryway.

Mrs. Uehara, my mother's friend, was standing there with a familiar umbrella.

"How's your mom doing? Here, take this," she said, setting a bag of oranges from a nearby supermarket onto the ground. "I happened to be passing by."

"Oh, you shouldn't have... Mom's still—"

"I figured it was about time I returned her umbrella."

As the cicada desperately tried to escape my fingers, I caged it between both hands. Its flailing legs tickled my palms like a happy little secret.

"Well, we didn't need it back anytime soon... Mom won't be leaving the hospital for a while."

"I suppose you're right. Must be rough."

The cicada revved its tiny motors—its wings flicked my skin with every flutter.

"By the way, Mrs. Uehara, I found a cicada in the snow. Isn't that crazy?"

"Really? No kidding. You know, bugs aren't my cup of tea..." Mrs. Uehara stared at my clasped hands with apprehension. "Anyways, I should get going. Tell your mom I said hi."

And with that, she left.

I was itching to talk about cicadas with someone—*anyone*. About how bizarre it was to find one out in the frigid cold, like finding a flower blooming out of season. Had cicadas evolved to live longer? Come to think of it, winter wasn't the same anymore; the warming climate meant more and more insects could survive this time of year. Maybe abnormal weather conditions had triggered a sudden mutation. Or perhaps some mysterious force had transported this small creature from its familiar world of summer all the way to this foreign world of winter.

I decided to hit up my old friend Sawachi.

Once, at a party a while back, he said between drinks, "Ah, yes, large brown cicadas. They're feisty little critters. Real feisty. With ambition in their souls."

Something about his tone fascinated me, and I became slightly fascinated with him.

I brushed the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater, took out my phone, and scrolled through my contacts. Sawachi's name was still there.

A few rings later, Sawachi picked up.

"...Hello?"

I took a deep breath and replied nonchalantly, "Hey, it's been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue."

"Wait... Is this who I think it is? Dang, it's been forever."

He recognized my voice immediately.

"I'll cut to the chase—I found a cicada. In the snow. Isn't that weird?"

"Say what? A cicada? At this time of year? Sure it's not a roach?"

Come on, Sawachi. Don't play with me.

"Nope, it's definitely a cicada. A large brown cicada. Strange, don't you think? I thought you might have an explanation..."

A profound silence filled the other end of the line. It seemed to stretch on forever.

Sawachi's voice lowered to a whisper. "*Strange things happen all the time.*"

"...Huh?"

"*The world is full of things that can't be explained. For instance, how you're talking to me right now.*"

"That's not a satisfying answer."

His response came across as deliberately evasive.

"*You want a better answer? Well, I don't have one. There may not even be one in the first place. But you know what? Strange things can be a source of hope. Hope for us, and probably even for the world...*"

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

It was time to let it go; any cicada would be worn out by prolonged captivity, after all. But I wondered which environment would be more suitable: indoors in the heat or outdoors in the cold.

After promising Sawachi we'd go drinking again sometime, I hung up.

I stepped out into the yard and headed for the persimmon tree.

Its bony limbs, nary a leaf attached, reached towards the ashen skies.

I rested the cicada on the wrinkled trunk of the tree and it began its ascent, pausing every so often as if to entertain a thought.

Gazing into the sky, I saw snow falling from an unfathomable height. The icy crystals hit my face with increasing speed, leaving trails down my cheeks as they melted away.

Before I knew it, the cicada had vanished into the maze of sprawling branches.

Every part of my body felt frozen except for my hands, which were oddly warm with summertime sweat. Right where the cicada had been. That's when it hit me—even though the cicada was male, not once did it chirp.

I made my way back and was greeted at the entryway by my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges. The living room TV was on, but my father was gone.

I turned off the TV and plopped the oranges onto the kitchen table.

My father had departed this world long ago. Mrs. Uehara had passed away two years ago. Sawachi,

too, was no longer here...

His number was still logged in my call history, but I lacked the courage to press redial.

A stifling hush fell over the empty house like a layer of snow.

Amid the deafening silence, I heard a ringing in my ears.

The song of a large brown cicada from a distant summer's day.

The Winter Cicada

Azuchi Moe

It was the middle of winter, but nevertheless, along flew a large brown cicada.
Through the lightly falling snow it came, flying clumsily as though lost, weaving this way and that before settling abruptly on the mesh screen door.
My first reaction wasn't disbelief, but delight.
I like cicadas. I really, really like them.
The adorable, infant-like Kaempfer cicada that heralds the arrival of summer, the heartbreakingly elegant evening cicada, the nimble *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* with its cheerful curved eyes: I like them all, but in the end, my favourite is the large brown cicada or "oil cicada", with its voice that pours like hot oil over an already heated summer.
Then again—*now*? No, I couldn't believe it after all!
Not when it was this cold: cold enough that I was wearing my angora turtleneck sweater and had the heating on.
"Hello—what on earth *are* you?"
I opened the glass door and put my face close to the mesh screen, which had been left in place since summer. The cold closed in on me, as though a snow woman with icy skin was drawing near.
My short-sighted eyes and the cicada's (presumably) short-sighted eyes fixed on each other for a time.
Yes—definitely a large brown cicada.
A male one, with its taut abdomen that looked as though it was coated with white powder. A cicada that even now looked as though it might start making its loud cry.
I opened the screen door a little and, still meeting the cicada's gaze, slowly extended my right hand.
Caught it!
The large brown cicada thrashed about in my hand, its wings like a fan driven by a tiny motor.
I held the wings down gently so they didn't get damaged, and my fingers felt the power in the trembling wing bases.
I was ecstatic; there was a sense of fulfilment, as though I'd seized some purpose in my hand.
"Hey, this is weird—a cicada, in winter. Look."
Without thinking, I called to my father, who was sitting in the living room with his back to me watching television. Then I regretted it.
"What, you're still catching cicadas and things? At your age—"
"I like the things I like—what does it matter?" I raised my voice angrily.
It was never long before my father and I got like this.
Just then, the doorbell rang.
I went to the door in a huff, turning my back on my father as he said, "That reminds me, we used to call you cicada girl," as though he'd just remembered it.
Ms. Uehara, a friend of my mother, was standing there holding mother's umbrella.
"How's your mother getting on? Here..." Ms. Uehara was carrying tangerines in a bag from a nearby supermarket, which she put down on the inside step.
"I was just in the area."
"Oh, that's very kind of you. Mother is—"
"I just thought I'd better return the umbrella as soon as possible."
The cicada was going frantic and starting to escape my fingers, so I closed both hands around it like a cage, trapping it inside. Its legs prickled me as they moved around, the itchy pain like a secret pleasure in my hands.
"Oh no, any time would have been fine... Mother is in the hospital long-term."
"Oh, is she? I'm sorry to hear that."

The cicada started up its miniature motor and its flapping wings tickled the insides of my hands.
 “Hey, Ms. Uehara. There’s a cicada here, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that odd?”

“Oh, really? Is there? I’m afraid I’m not very good with insects...”

Ms. Uehara looked nervously at my hands, cupped together to form a cage. “Anyway, I was just dropping by. Give my best to your mother,” she said, and left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how strange it was for it to be alive at such a cold time of year. If it was a flower, it would have been blooming out of season. Had the cicada’s power of survival evolved? It may have been winter, but they did say it was warmer these days than it used to be, and that more insects now could survive the season. Maybe it was some sort of mutation, caused by abnormal weather. Or maybe, because of some impulse in its little body, it had taken the hot summer upon itself and strayed on to the opposite side, into the season on *this side*.

I decided to try talking to Sawachi.

Once, when we went out for drinks a long time ago, Sawachi had drained his watered-down drink and said, “Oh yeah, the large brown cicada. They’re great. Yeah, pretty great. They’ve got ambition.” I liked the way Sawachi put it, and so I liked him a little bit too.

I gently tucked the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater sleeve and opened my phone. Looking through the contacts list, I could see Sawachi’s name was still there.

The dial tone sounded, and I was through to Sawachi.

“...Yes?”

I forced my heart to calm down, and spoke casually.

“Hey, it’s been ages. Sorry to call you out of the blue.”

“Oh... is that you? It has been a while, hasn’t it?”

Gratifyingly, it seemed like he knew it was me straight away.

“Um, I just wanted to tell you, there’s a cicada here. Even though it’s winter. Don’t you think that’s weird?”

“Huh... a cicada? Now? A *cicada*? Are you sure it’s not a roach?”

Yuck, Sawachi, don’t.

“Yes! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada—that’s strange, isn’t it? What do you think? I thought you might know about these things.”

At the other end of the line, an irrevocable interval of deep silence flowed by, and then seemed to expand outwards.

Sawachi’s voice dropped to a murmur.

“...There are so many strange things.”

“...What?”

“There are so many strange things, in this world. I mean, you, calling me just now...”

“That’s not an answer,” I said, attempting to cover my embarrassment.

“An answer...? I can’t explain it. Are these things possible? But you know, strange things are what save us. Us, and maybe the world, too—”

The cicada stuck its head out of my sleeve.

I would have to let it go soon. Cicadas weaken if you keep them in your hands for too long. Although I didn’t really know what was better for it: a warm room indoors, or being released outside into the lightly falling snow.

Promising Sawachi we would go out for a drink again sometime, I hung up.

I went out to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree had dropped every one of its leaves, and its bony branches grasped at the ashen sky.

I gently placed the cicada on the tree trunk, which was covered in furrow-like streaks and fissures. The cicada started to make its way slowly upwards, faltering now and again as though thinking about something.

When I looked up, the snow seemed to be falling down from an endless height. It gradually began to fall harder, cold crystals landing on my face and then melting, forming dozens of flowing rivulets.

At some point, the cicada had disappeared somewhere into the rigid, maze-like silhouette of the treetop.

My body was chilled to the bone, but for some reason my two hands, which had grasped the cicada, were still hot, sweating as though it was summer. And I suddenly thought: it was a male cicada, but it never made its cry at all...

I went back in to find mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines inside the door. In the living room the television had been left on, but father was already gone.

I switched off the television and then, as always, carried the bag of tangerines to the kitchen table.

It was already a long time now since father had passed on, and Ms. Uehara was supposed to have died two years ago as well. And then there was Sawachi, too...

He was still there in my phone's call history. But I didn't have the courage to try calling again...

Maybe the snow had piled up outside, but the empty house filled with a pressing silence.

It was so still, I started to hear a ringing in my ears.

It sounded just like the cry of a large brown cicada, from a far, far-off summer's day.

Winter 'Aburazemi'
A Story by Moe Azuchi

Although a mid-winter, 'Aburazemi' (large brown cicada) came flying. Flying around here and there and turning in different directions in clumsy and confused way in the lightly falling snow; 'Aburazemi' came to a sudden stop at once on a window screen. But rather than thinking how foolish it was, I got very much delighted at first. I like 'Aburazemi'. I like it Very! Very much! Though I also like cute and young child like kaempfer cicada, looking sorrowful but elegant, evening cicada too and also smart and cheerful meimuna opalifera (cicada specie) who report arrival of the summer; it is after all 'Aburazemi' who I like the most with its sound as if adding fuel further to the summer heat. However, such a fool now! And that too in such a cold! When I was wearing an Angola sweater even when the heater was on. Hey! Who are you?

I opened the glass door and brought my face near the window screen, as it was from the summer. Cold wave, came inside closing in on like the skin of a snow woman. My eyes nearing the window and probably cicada's too would meet soon! It was none other but 'Aburazemi'. A male 'Aburazemi' looking as if hungry with a tight belly. It seemed he would start growling aloud at any moment now. I opened the window screen slightly and while staring at him, slowly extended my right hand. Caught him! Placed 'Aburazemi' inside my hand. His wings, were looking just as an electric fan moving on a small motor. He was taking jerks on the strength of wings joint in my fingers which were holding him softly so as not to hurt. I overjoyed. It was a treasure trove like attainment of the goal in my fingers. "Hey, it is strange! Although a winter, there is a cicada, you see!" I instinctively said it to my father who was watching TV in the living room from behind. And regretted it.

"You are old enough! Still care about such things like cicada?"

"I like what I like, it's my pleasure!" I turned moody and spoke in a harsh tone.

Father and myself got in that tone instantly. At that moment, the entrance chyme rang. "That reminds me, I used to call you a cicada girl in the past right?" despite what father said as he remembered, I angrily turned my back and went out to the front door.

Mother's friend, Uehara san was standing there, holding mother's umbrella. "Your mother---- how is her condition? Well, this----." Uehara san said it while unloading the nearby supermarket's bag with tangerines inside on the threshold. "Since I just came in the neighborhood."

"Oh! Thank You! My mother ----."

"Well, I was just thinking that I must return umbrella soon!" Because the cicada went wild and tried to escape from the fingers, I locked him up with two hands like a cage. Cicada's feet prickled while moving around, that painful itching was like a mysterious pleasant feeling inside the hands. "My mother who was well always----- is hospitalized for a long time."

"Oh! Is it? Must be hard!" Cicada, activates the small motor and wings flutter to tickle inside of the hand. "Look! Uehara san, although a winter, there was a cicada. Isn't it weird!"

"Huh? Is that so? For real? But then I am no good at insects-----." Uehara san said it while viewing my handmade cage uneasily, "Well then! I just stopped by. Convey my greetings to your mother." saying that, Uehara san returned back.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. And the mystery of living in such a cold season. If it's a flower, does it bloom off-season? I wondered, if it was an evolution of cicada's survival ability? Nowadays, when it is said that winter has become warmer than the past, number of insects surviving the winters is also increasing as a matter of fact. Would it be that this mutation like thing happened due to unusual weather? Or is it because of some momentum that the small body ---bearing all that summer heat, lost its way to the season of this side to that of the other side and came here? I decided to

find it out by talking with Sawachi. It was Sawachi, a very long ago, at a drinking party ----“Yup, it is ‘Aburazemi’. That guy, is a good guy! Quite a good guy! He has an ambition!” who said so while emptying the water to dilute the drink. I liked that way of saying it, so also came to like Sawachi a little. Keeping the cicada inserted in the sleeve of the sweater as it is, I opened my smart phone. When I searched the address-book, Sawachi’s name was still there.

A beep sounded and got connected to Sawachi. “-----Yes-----”. “While trying to settle my mind, said casually, “It’s been a long time. Sorry for calling you up unexpectedly.” “Oh! I wonder if you are-----Yes. It’s been a while.” It looked like he recognized me immediately. “Well! I Will be direct, ---- there was a cicada. Although a winter! Hey, isn’t it strange?” “Ah! Cicada? Around this time? Are you sure it is a cicada and not a cockroach?” “No.” Sawachi gave up. “No. you are wrong. This insect is ‘Aburazemi’. “Don’t you think it’s a miracle? Hey, what do you think?” “If it’s Sawachi, he would consider this fact in detail.” Irreversible deep silence continued for a long time on the other side of the cell phone. Sawachi said in a reproachful voice, “-----It’s miraculous!” “-----Well!” “There are many such miraculous things in this World.” “You called me now----- And I am not answering.” He said trying to hide some embarrassment. “And the answer? -----I don’t know about such things. Whether such things are there? Nevertheless, miracle is a salvation, for us also and in addition, maybe for the World too -----”

Cicada showed his face from cuff of the sleeve. It was almost a time that I should set it free. If it is kept in person’s hands as long as one likes, cicada will be weakened. However, I was not sure what is better for the cicadas, the warm room or letting him free in the flickering snow outside. I hung up with Sawachi, after promising him to have get together someday again. I left the entrance, and went to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree, having lost its leaves completely, its bony branches were trying to grab the hold of the Gray sky. I let cicada to rest on its trunk covered with groove-like stripes and cracks. The cicada began to climb up the trunk slowly, hesitating at a times, as if he was thinking about something. When looked up, it seemed as if snow was coming down from endless heights. Gradually getting violent, cold crystals hit my face too and melted, whereas many of the streaks trickled down. Before I realized, the cicada, in the view disappeared somewhere in the stiff maze-like silhouette of the persimmon treetop.

My body was completely chilled, and yet no matter what, my hands which had captured the cicada were somehow hot and sweating like summer. Speaking of which I just remembered, that though it was a male cicada, he didn’t even growl a little. When I went back to the front door, my mother’s umbrella and a bag of tangerines was placed there. TV in the living room was on and my father was no longer there. I switched off the TV and went to the kitchen taking the tangerine’s bag, to the table top as usual.

My father passed away long time back, Uehara san also must have died two years back. And Sawachi too-----What remained is a call history to Sawachi on my mobile. However, I don’t have the courage to call back there one more time. Somehow the snow has piled up and it is like a gripping silence there with nobody inside the house. In such a quietness, I heard ringing in my ears. And it was like ‘Aburazemi ’s growling sound on a summer day of the remote past.

Winter Cicada

Azuchi Moe

In the middle of winter, an unexpected visitor flew in—a large brown cicada, an *aburazemi*. Flailing about like a lost soul, fluttering clumsily here and there amid the scattering flakes of snow, at length it plunked itself down on the screen door. Rather than tut-tutting *silly thing*, I found myself overjoyed at its arrival.

You see, I *love* cicadas—really, really love them.

I love the Kaempfer cicada—the *nii-nii-zemi*—cute as a little child, that heralds the arrival of summer; the dolefully elegant evening cicada, the *higurashi*; and the agile Walker’s cicada—*tsukutsuku-bōshi*—with its gloomy, drooping eyes. But the one I adore is the *aburazemi*: its sizzling chirp—‘abura’ is Japanese for oil—is like dousing the heat of midsummer in even hotter oil.

So on second thought, it *was* a silly thing after all, turning up here in the coldest season, me in my turtleneck angora sweater, the heater on inside. “Hey you, who the heck do you think you are?”

I opened the glass front door, bringing my face up to the screen left in place since last summer. The cold air enfolded me like the pale skin of *yuki-onna*, the spectral snow-woman from the folktales.

My eyes and the cicada’s (it probably as shortsighted as me) met for a moment. It was an *aburazemi* and no mistake. Its waspish waist looked like someone had blown white powder all over it, marking it out as a male. It seemed he might burst into loud chirping at any moment....

Our eyes still locked, I pushed the screen door ajar, slowly extending my right hand. *Got him!*

The cicada struggled in my hand. His wings worked like a fan running on a tiny motor. I applied a gentle pressure, trying not to damage them; the wings’ twitchy vibrations travelled through my fingers. It made me wild with joy. I felt fulfilled, as if what I’d seized upon was some sort of *purpose*.

“Hey, isn’t this strange? Look, a cicada in the middle of winter!” I realized I had said this out loud to my father, who was in the living room, his back to me, watching television. I immediately regretted it.

“Still grabbing cicadas, at your age!” he sneered.

“I can like what I like, all right?” I snapped back, annoyed. This was the course our conversations always took.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. “Reminds me of that old wives’ tale about the ‘cicada girl’,” my father added, as if it had suddenly occurred to him. I turned my back in a huff and headed for the door.

My mother’s friend Mrs Uehara was standing there holding my mother’s umbrella. “How’s your mother? Here you are,” she said, setting down a supermarket bagful of *mikan* oranges on the threshold in front of me. “I was in the neighbourhood, you see.”

“Oh, thank you! Mother is—”

“I thought I should get this umbrella back to her as soon as possible.”

The cicada struggled again under my fingers, getting part of the way out: I made my hands into a kind of cage, trapping him again. His legs scrabbled away, prickly against my skin. The exquisite prickliness thrilled me, as if my hands held some great secret within them.

“Oh dear, you shouldn’t have gone to such trouble.... Mother will be in hospital for a long time, you see.”

“Oh, really? I’m sorry to hear that.”

The cicada restarted his mini-motor, the bat-batting of his wings tickling my skin. “Mrs Uehara—here it is, the middle of winter, and I’ve caught a cicada. Strange, don’t you think?”

“Eh, really, have you now?” she replied, eyeing my hand-cage dubiously. “I’m not one for insects. Well, I must be off. Please give my regards to your mother,” she said quickly, and left.

I really wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how miraculous it was that something was alive like that at such a cold time of the year. Like a flower blooming out of season. Perhaps the cicadas’ fight for survival had made them evolve. Then again, winters these days just weren’t as cold as they used to be, so the number of insects making it through was on the rise, I’d

heard. Maybe the unseasonable weather was causing mutations or the like. Or was it that, from the hot summer in which he had sung his heart out, some inexplicable impulse had arisen in the cicada: an impulse that had sent him bumbling blindly across to the opposite season on the calendar—*this* season?

I decided to talk to Sawachi-*kun* about it. A long time ago, when a group of us were out on the town, he'd brought up the *aburazemi*. "Yeah, it's quite the bug, you know. Quite the bug indeed. It has aspirations," he'd claimed, downing his whiskey-and-water. I'd liked the way he'd put it, and it had made me like him a little more, too.

I gently slipped the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater and flipped open my phone. Sawachi—his surname—was still in the contact list. The phone rang at his end, and he answered.

"Hello?"

Trying to keep my cool, I spoke back. "Hey there. Sorry to call you out of the blue like this."

"Ah—it's you, huh? Wow, it's been a while, hasn't it?" He seemed to have placed me right away.

"Look, I'll get right to the point—I'm calling about a cicada I found. In the middle of winter. Strange, don't you think?"

"What? A cicada? At this time of year? A *cicada*?! Sure it's not a cockroach?"

Yuck! Sawachi-kun, leave it out, okay? I thought. "No! It's a cicada, an *aburazemi*. Pretty out there, right? Any ideas? I thought you might know something...."

An irrevocable deep silence flowed for a time at the other end of the line, seeming to spread outwards from its source. Sawachi's voice was a near-whisper when he spoke at last. "A lot of things are *out there*."

"Eh?"

"This world is full of marvels. One such being the fact that you called me like this...."

"That's not an answer!" I blurted out, trying to conceal my embarrassment.

"An answer, huh.... I don't know the answer. Stuff like that just happens, I guess. But you know, it's the out-there stuff that helps us get through. Not just people like us, but probably the whole world."

The cicada poked his head out of the cuff. I realized it was about time for me to let him go. A cicada would get weak if a person kept it in their hands for too long. Having said that, I wasn't sure whether it was better to let him loose in the warmth of the room or out in the falling snow.

Sawachi-*kun* and I agreed to go out drinking again some time, and ended the call. I went outside to the garden, where the persimmon tree was. It had lost all its leaves, and its bony branches clutched at the grey sky. I gently set the cicada down on its trunk, the bark furrowed and fissured. As if lost in thought, the cicada began to inch up the trunk, at times hesitant.

The snow fell from an unfathomable height above me. It gradually gained in intensity, the cold snowflakes landing on my face and melting, running down my face in rivulets.

Before I knew it, the cicada had reached the top of the persimmon tree, vanishing into the maze of branches stiffly silhouetted against the sky. I was freezing cold now, yet somehow my hands, which had held the cicada, remained hot, sweating as if it were high summer. It struck me that, despite being a male, the cicada hadn't sung a note....

Stepping back inside, I found my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges, still there on the threshold. The television had been left on, and there was no longer any sign of my father. I switched the TV off, putting the bag of oranges on the kitchen table, as always.

Father had passed a long time ago, and it must have been two years now since Mrs Uehara followed him. And Sawachi-*kun* was gone, too....

The record of the call I'd made to him was still in the phone's memory. But I didn't have the courage to try calling him back.

I don't know whether it was because the snow was piling up around it, but the empty house seemed suffused with an all-enveloping stillness. It was so quiet it made my ears ring. Just as if, from some far-distant summer's day, came the sizzling of the *aburazemi*.

The brown cicada in winter

It was the middle of winter. Even so, a brown cicada came flying over.
Bumbling left and right seemingly lost amongst the lightly falling snow. It came to an abrupt stop, hitting into the bug screen with a light poof.
Before I could think about how impossible that was, I started to feel really happy.
I love cicadas. I really, really love cicadas.
Marking the arrival of summer, the Kaempfer cicada is as cute as a child; the mournful, elegant evening cicada and the smart, cheery drooping eyes of the walker cicada... I love them all, but with a voice like pouring oil, hotter than a summer's day, the brown cicada has to be my favourite.
But that's just ridiculous.
Even though it's this cold.
Even though I'm wearing an angora sweater and the heating is on...
"No way, what *are* you?"
I opened the glass door and pressed my face against the bug screen which had been left there since summer. The cold air felt as if the frozen skin of Yuki-Onna, the snow woman, was bearing down on me.
For a moment, my short-sighted eyes met the cicada's (probably) short-sighted eyes.
Definitely a brown cicada.
A small creak escaped its belly which was coated in white powder - a male brown cicada. Seems like it could start chirping really loudly any second...
I opened the screen door a little, locked eyes with the cicada and slowly reached out my right hand.
Gotcha!
The brown cicada wriggled violently in my hand. Its wings moving like a small motor for an electric fan. Being careful not to hurt it, I gently held it at the twitching base of its wings.
I felt ecstatic.
It was fulfilling, as if I had grabbed hold of some kind of purpose.
"Hey, this is weird. There's a cicada here even though it's winter, look." Without thinking I called out to my dad who was watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.
"You're still catching cicadas? Act your age already."
"I like what I like so mind your own business!" I retorted sullenly.
My dad and I were suddenly at odds.
Just then, the doorbell rang.
"Oh yeah I used to call you cicada girl, didn't I?" My dad reminded me, but I turned my back and headed towards the porch in a huff.
My mum's friend Ms Uehara was standing there holding my mum's umbrella.
"How's your mother doing? Here..." Ms Uehara said while placing a carrier bag full of satsumas on the step leading into the house. "I was just in the area."
"Ah, thank you so much. My mum's—"
"I thought I ought to return her umbrella as soon as possible you see."
The cicada struggled violently escaping from my fingers so I made a basket like shape, trapping it with both hands. Its legs moved around prickling my palms, the tingling sensation felt like a pleasant secret.
"Ah, anytime is good, but...my mum has been hospitalised long term."
"Oh, really? That's awful."
The cicada started flapping its wings as if starting up a small motor, tickling my hands.
"Say, Ms Uehara. I found a cicada even though it's winter. Don't you think that's weird?"
"You did? Really? Bugs aren't really my thing..." Ms Uehara looked uncertainly at my cupped hands. "Well, I just wanted to pop by, so say hi to your mum for me yeah?" she said and left.
I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how strange it was that it was alive in such a

cold season. Maybe a flower bloomed out of season. Maybe it's some kind of evolution. It's winter, but it's warmer than it used to be and the number of overwintering insects is increasing. Maybe it underwent a kind of mutation due to the unusual weather. Or maybe, by some chance, its little body survived all through summer and wound up in the opposite season, *this* season.

I decided to try give Mr Sawachi a call.

I met him ages ago at a drinking party where he rambled on about how brown cicadas were "good guys, great guys, full of ambition" while downing some watered-down drink. I was pleased with the way he talked about cicadas and took a liking to the guy.

I gently placed the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and opened my phone. Searching through my contacts, I found his name was still there.

The tone rang and Mr Sawachi picked up.

"...Yeah...?"

Trying to compose myself, I nonchalantly replied "Long time no speak. Sorry to call all of a sudden—"

"Ah, is that you? It's been a while hasn't it." It seemed like he immediately knew it was me.

"Hey um, I hate to cut to the chase but, there's a cicada here. Even though it's winter. Don't you think that's weird?"

"What? A cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? A-are you sure it's not a cockroach?"

No way, really? Knock it off Mr Sawachi. "No way. It's a cicada, a brown cicada. Weird right? Well, what do you think? I thought you of all people would know something."

A deep immutable silence flowed from the other end of the phone which seemed to spread and grow bigger.

"Mysterious things are everywhere." Mr Sawachi muttered.

"...What?"

"Strange things, the world is full of them. You even said you called me just now...."

"You didn't answer my question you know." I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer huh...? Someone like me wouldn't know. I wonder if there is such a thing. Who knows? Mysterious things are a kind of saving grace. For us and probably for the world too..."

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve.

It's about time I released it. If they're kept for too long in someone's hand, cicadas will grow weak. Still, between a warm room or releasing it into the snowy outdoors, I don't really know what's best for the cicada.

I promised Mr Sawachi that we'd go drinking again sometime and hung up. I went out the porch and headed towards the persimmon tree. It had lost all its leaves and its bony branches gripped at the grey sky.

Cracks and wrinkle like grooves covered the tree trunk where I gently let the cicada perch. Seemingly lost in thought, the cicada stopped every so often as it slowly started to climb its way up the trunk. When I looked up, the snow seemed to be falling down from somewhere endlessly high up. Gradually getting heavier, cold crystals hit my face and melted becoming streaks of water and flowing away. Unnoticed, the cicada had vanished somewhere in the stiff maze-like silhouette of the persimmon tree.

My body was frozen stiff and yet, my hands were still hot where the cicada had been; sweating as if it was a summer's day. Come to think of it, the cicada was a male, but it didn't chirp at all...

When I went back into the porch, my mum's umbrella and the bag of satsumas were placed there. The living room TV had been left on and my dad had already left. I turned the TV off and moved the bag of satsumas to its normal place on top of the kitchen table.

My dad had already passed away a good while ago, Ms Uehara must've died a couple of years ago as well. Mr Sawachi too...

The call I made to Mr Sawachi was still in my call history, but I didn't have the nerve to try ringing him again...

Perhaps because of the snow piling up outside, the empty house seemed to fill up with an

oppressive silence.

It was so quiet that my ears starting ringing.

Almost like the call of a cicada from a far, far away summer's day.

The brown Cicada in winter

by Azuchi Moe

It is the middle of winter but I saw a cicada flying around. Inside a little snowfall, I spotted a tiny thing with a confusing and clumsy way of flying around.

Out of nowhere it hits our window. I thought what a silly thing it is but actually I was quite happy.

I love cicadas. I really do.

They let you know the arrival of summer. The Kaempfer cicada — cute like a young child, the smooth and elegant evening cicada and I also love the nimble Meimuna Opalifera with his little cheerfully dropping eyes. But in the end, in the middle of a hot summer, the large brown cicada with a voice of pouring hot oil is still my favorite. But right at the moment he is so silly. Even it is so cold outside. I already have my Angolan sweater on me but I turned on the heater.

“Hey, who are you?”

I opened the window and the first time since the summer I put my face near the window screen. The cold feels like the skin of the Yuki-Onna, a snow ghost of old Japanese tales, who is approaching to me. We stared with our both shortsighted eyes at each other. Just as I thought. A brown cicada.

The tightly belly who looks like someone puts flour on it. It is actually a male brown cicada.

He should be crying any moment. I opened the window a little while watching the cicada all the time a stretched my right hand to him. Got you! He’s rumbling inside my hand with his little wings it feels like an electric fan is working inside my hand. To prevent him from hurting himself I pointed my finger on his wings. But he’s still moving with just the root of his wings. I’m so full of joy. Catching him was so a delightful moment for me, like finally reaching my personal goal.

“Hey look. It’s odd. It’s winter but I found a cicada”

Without a second thought I raised my hand to my dad who is sitting in the living room watching TV with his back showing to me. At the moment I also regret trying to talk to him.

“You’re catching those things again? How old are you actually?”

“I like it. I’m not doing it on purpose, it’s just my hobby, okay?”

I got a little aggressively tone on me.

Our conversation always ended like this. Shortly after that the doorbell was ringing.

“And also you called me the cicada girl back then!” I told him that, so he can remember that time. In huff, I went to the door and opened it. Mrs. Uehara stand in front of me. She is my mothers friend and brought her umbrella back.

“How does your mother feel? Here I brought you this”

Mrs. Uehara asked me that while she drops a bag of oranges at the door frame she got from the supermarket nearby. “I was just in the neighborhood.”

Ah, thank you very much. Mother is...”

“I thought I just have to bring her umbrella back”

The cicada rumbled inside my hand. To prevent him from escaping I shaped both of my hands like a cage. The cicadas leg was moving inside my hand. But this itchy and pain feeling was also pleasant at the same time.

“Actually she fine mostly but now she is in hospital since”

“Ah is it so? Sorry to hear that.”

The rustling wings starts to moving with a tickle inside my hand.

“Hey Mrs. Uehara. We have winter but I found a cicada isn’t it weird?”

“Really? But I’m not good with insects”

While she is looking afraid against my cage shaped hand she said: "Well, I just stopped by. I have to go. Please send your mother my regards."

And went home. I just wanted to talk with someone about the cicada. It's just a miracle that a cicada is living in this cold season.

Like an off-season blooming flower.

Maybe it's an evolution sign? But compared to the past there are a lot more insects surviving the winter because it got warmer.

Maybe it is a result of strange things happens from time to time. Or maybe his little body struggled with the hot summer and decided to try how the winter is?

I remembered the time I talked with my old friend Sawachi about this.

A long time ago we went drinking together, and he told me:

"Yeah, brown cicadas are really amazing creatures. They have ambition."

while he was putting more alcohol in our glasses.

I liked the way he talked and seeing things. Maybe that's why I started to like him.

I put my little friend in my pocket, took my phone and searched my address list. Sawachis name was still there!

My phone was ringing and Sawachi answered my call.

"Hello"

while I was trying to calm down I said: "It's been a long time. Sorry for the call out of nothing"

"Eh, wait...is it you? Wow, it's such a long time."

It seems like he knew it was me in the first place.

"Hey, I know it's all of a sudden but I found a cicada. Although its winter. Isn't it weird?"

"A...cicada? At this time? Are you sure it's not a cockroach?"

Yikes, Sawachi please stop it.

"No, it's a cicada. A brown cicada. Isn't it strange? You know more about it, so I thought I just call you about that..."

But on the other side it remained silent. After a short time Sawachi said with a muttering voice: "There are a lot strange things out there"

"What?"

"Many strange things are going on in this world. For example your call."

"That is not an answer"

He acted like he's trying to hide his own embarrassment.

"An answer... I don't have one. And I'm not sure there is one. There are a lot of things we can't explain. For us and even for the world"

The cicada reached his head out of my pocket. I think for him it's time to go. He is going to die when he stays in my hand all the time. But I am not sure what is the best for my little buddy. The heat in this room or the cold breeze outside?

Sawachi and I promised someday to go drink together again and I cut the call.

I went outside the entrance towards the Kaki tree in the garden. The tree with no more leafs on it and his branches looks like bones reaching out to the gray sky. I put my friend on a little crack in the trunk of the tree. Like he would think about what happens next he seems little hesitating while he is starts to fly. Looking upon he reached a height without getting hit by the snow. I have tried to follow him with my eyes while little snow crystals running from my face. Shortly after he aired up like being in a maze his silhouette disappeared.

Besides my whole body was freezing because of the cold my hands, with them I caught the cicada, became warm. My hands began to sweat like on a hot summer day. Speaking of it is comes in my mind that the cicada was a male but don't cried at all. As I went to our entrance I spotted Moms umbrella and the bag with oranges. The TV in the living room is on but no sign of my father. I switched the TV off and put the bag with oranges on the kitchens table

like always. It is quite a time since my father died. Also, it must have been two years since Mrs. Uehara passed away too. And then there is Sawachi....

I have still his transmission history on my phone, but I am not brave enough to call him back.

The snow piles up outside, and I am overcome with a silence in a home nobody else is. With this silence my ears began to buzz. It sounds like a cicada screaming in a summer day far far away.

The Large Brown Cicada of Winter

It was midwinter, but the large brown cicada kept flying around nevertheless.

After flying clumsily through the snow like it had lost its way, changing direction here and there, it finally landed on the mesh window.

The first thing I felt was joy, and that was before I could even consider how silly the cicada seemed.

I like cicadas. I really, really like them.

I like the adorable and childlike Kaempfer cicada, that informs us of summer's arrival; the elegantly melancholy evening cicada; and even the nimble and chirpy tsuku-tsuku-boushi with its droopy eyes - but it is the large brown cicada, whose cry in the heat of summer sounds like the spattering of even hotter oil, that I like best of all.

Now I couldn't help but think, "oh, how silly", because it was so cold outside.

Even though I was wearing a thick angora sweater and the heater was on.

"Hey there, what in the world are you?"

I opened the glass window and brought my face closer to the mesh window, which had been left that way since summer. The cold air closed in on me instantly, like the chilly skin of the legendary snow demoness.

My myopic eyes and the cicada's (probably) myopic eyes met briefly.

As I thought, it was indeed a large brown cicada.

It was a male large brown cicada with white powdery markings on its tight belly. Even right now it looked like it was going to cry out loud.

I opened the mesh window slightly, all the while maintaining eye contact with the cicada, and then slowly stretched out my right hand.

Got it!

The cicada struggled in my grasp, its wings like a fan running on a tiny motor. I could feel the strength from its wing joints beating against my fingers as I held it gently, its wings fluttering fearfully as though they were trying not to get hurt.

I was deliriously happy.

I felt fulfilled, my hands full of my prize.

"Hey, it's strange, isn't it? A cicada in the middle of winter. Look!"

I blabbed mindlessly to my father, whose back was turned towards me as he watched TV in the living room. And then I regretted it instantly.

"You caught a cicada or something again? For goodness's sake, do act your age..."

"When I like something, I like it for real! It's not just some whim!" I replied angrily.

Things escalate quickly between my father and me.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

I fretted for a bit.

“By the way, they used to call you the cicada-girl didn’t they,” recalled my father, as he turned away from me and headed towards the entranceway.

There stood Uehara-san, my mother’s friend, holding my mother’s umbrella.

“How’s your mother? This is for you,” she said, as she placed mikans in a bag bearing the logo of a nearby supermarket on the step of the entranceway.

“I got these since I happened to be nearby.”

“Ah, you didn’t have to. My mother-”

“I thought I should return the umbrella as soon as I could but-”

The cicada would have escaped with just a little more struggling, so I kept it caged with both my hands. Its legs moved around and they prickled. That tickling sensation in my hands was a wondrous pleasure.

“Oh my, you could have come anytime...my mother has been admitted to the hospital for the long term.”

“I see. That must be tough.”

The cicada started up its tiny motor once more, its fluttering wings tickling my palms.

“Say, Uehara-san. There’s a cicada here even though it’s winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“Huh, is that so? I’m not a fan of bugs though-” said Uehara-san, as she looked at my hand-cage with uncertainty.

“Well, since I’m only dropping by, I’ll be on my way. Send my regards to your mom.”

With that, she left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. How incredible that it was even alive in this cold. The flower equivalent would be blooming madly, I suppose. Could this possibly be an evolution of the cicada’s survival abilities? Winters these days are warmer than they used to be in the past, and they say that more and more insects are overwintering. Could this be an anomaly that the strange weather has brought about? Or, could it be that something had happened to that tiny body, forcing it to carry the heat of summer with it as it wandered to *our season* on the other side?

I decided to talk to Sawaji-kun about this.

I remember Sawaji-kun once saying, “Yup, it’s a large brown cicada. They’re a good sort. Really good sorts. They have ambition, those guys,” as he emptied his mixed drink at a drinking party a long

time ago. I liked the way he put it, which made me warm to him a little more.

I placed the cicada gently into the cuff of my sweater and then opened my phone. Going through my address book, I found that Sawaji-kun's name was still there.

The ringtone sounded and then I was connected to Sawaji-kun.

"...Hi..."

"It's been a while. Sorry to call you so suddenly," I said nonchalantly as I tried to calm myself down.

"Ah...could it be you? Mhmm, it's been a while indeed."

It seemed he knew right away that it was me.

"Um, to cut to the chase, there's a cicada here. Even though it's winter right now. Say, isn't that strange?"

"Huh... a cicada? Now? A cicada?!? Hey, you sure it's not a roach?"

Ugh, stop it already, Sawaji-kun.

"No way. It's a cicada, a large brown cicada. Don't you think this is amazing? Hey, what do you think about this? I thought you'd know more about these things -"

It suddenly felt like a river of silence had burst its banks on the other end of the line.

Sawaji-kun then said in a voice close to a whisper "...There are so many other mysterious things."

"...huh?"

"There are many inexplicable things in this world. The fact that you've called me is one..."

"That's not an answer."

I felt like I said that only to cover up my embarrassment.

"An...answer huh. I don't know either. Is there even such a thing? One thing though, is that these inexplicable happenings are a saving grace. For us, and for the rest of the world probably- "

The cicada poked its head out from inside my cuff.

I knew I had to release it soon. Cicadas weaken if they're held for too long. Then again, between the warmth indoors and releasing it into the snowy outdoors, I did not know which would be better for the cicada.

Sawaji-kun and I promised to drink together sometime, and then we hung up.

I stepped out of the entryway and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree had shed all its leaves completely, its bony branches clutching at the grey sky.

I placed the cicada gently on its trunk, which was covered with groove-like veins and scales. It then began climbing the trunk gradually, at times hesitating as though it were lost in thought.

Looking up, it seemed that snow was falling from an unimaginably far-off height. The snowfall gradually grew heavier, the cold crystals landing on my face before instantly melting and flowing off in multiple streams.

The crown of the persimmon tree cut a stiff, labyrinthine silhouette that the cicada disappeared into before long.

My body was chilled to the core, but somehow after holding the cicada, my hands were steadfastly warm and sweaty as though it was still summer. Speaking of which, I suddenly realized that although the cicada was male, it had not made a single sound throughout.

My mother's umbrella and the bag of mikans were still in the entryway when I returned. The TV in the living room remained on, although my father was nowhere to be seen.

I turned the TV off and placed the bag of mikans on the kitchen table as I was accustomed to doing.

It has been a long time since my father passed away, and Uehara-san too should have passed two years ago. As for Sawaji-kun...

My call log with Sawaji-kun remains on my phone. However, calling that number once more takes courage that I no longer have.

It might have been the snow piling up that filled the empty house with a constricting silence.

It was so quiet that I could hear a ringing in my ears, not unlike the cries of a large brown cicada from a far, far-off summer.

THE VISITOR
By Azuchi Moe

It is the middle of the winter, and an *Aburazemi* is flying. Snow is falling outside, and the cicada is flying in its singular, clumsy way - changing directions on a whim. And then! Without warning, it landed on the mosquito screen outside the window. Before I even begin to wonder how this is possible, I felt a happiness spreading within.

I like cicadas. I like cicadas very, very much.

I like the *Kempfer* cicada that shrills child-like with the arrival of summer, the lonely elegance of the evening cicada, the spirited nature and slanted eyes of the *Tsukutsukuboshi*, named after the sound they make. But I like the *Aburazemi*, literally “the oil cicada,” the best for his loud cry which spreads across a hot summer’s day - as oil feeds fire.

But really, how is this possible? Outside it is so cold. Wearing a turtle-neck angora sweater with the heater blasting, kind-of-cold.

“Hey there!” I call out. “What *are* you doing here!?”

I open the glass window and get my face close to the mosquito screen which was left hanging since summer. Like the icy skin of the Snow Queen, the cold air creeps in and takes hold of me.

I fix my gaze on the cicada, and the cicada (at least, I think), fixes its gaze on me, and we stare into each other for a moment. It is indeed, an *Aburazemi*. Its abdomen is tight and powdered with white; it is a male. He looks about ready to cry out in his loud ringing song at any moment.

I keep my eyes on him, quietly open the screen, and slowly reach with my right hand.

Got you!

The cicada went wild in my hands, flickering his wings like an electric fan running off a small motor. I held him softly at his wing’s base to prevent any damage and feel his wing’s strong pulse against my fingertips. I am overcome with ecstasy.

I held, within my hands, the sensation of fulfillment to a purpose I didn’t quite know.

“Look! How strange! A cicada, in the middle of winter! See?”

Without thinking, I called out to my father who was in the sitting room watching TV.

I regretted it.

“Still catching cicadas, at your age!?”

“I can’t help what I like. What’s it to you, anyways!?”

That was rude of me, but I was annoyed.

My father and I, we are always like this.

Just then the doorbell rang, and I went to answer. My back was still turned to my father when he said, “That’s right. I used to call you ‘my cicada girl’” as if he had remembered something from long ago.

It was mother’s friend, Mrs. Uehara, standing at the door and holding mother’s umbrella.

“How is your mother?” she asked. “I brought these...” she went on, indicating a bag full of oranges from the local store, and she placed it on the landing.

“I was just nearby,” she offered.

“That is very kind of you. My mother is...”

“I wanted to return your mother’s umbrella as soon as possible.”

The cicada whirls around and nearly escape from my fingers. I cage him within my hands. His legs’ movements prickle – its mild itchiness like the sweet sensation of a secret.

“There really was no need to rush. Mother will be in hospital for the long term.”

“Well... That is a shame.”

The small motor of the cicada’s wings starts up again, buzzing and tickling my hands.

“Mrs. Uehara!” I said. “I found a cicada, in the middle of the winter! Don’t you think that’s rather

odd?”

“Really?! Well...maybe? Actually, I’m not that fond of bugs...”

Mrs. Uehara cautiously eyed my hands that caged the cicada.

“Well, I was only popping in” she said, taking leave. “Give your mother my regards.”

All I wanted was to talk to someone about the cicada - the miracle of its living during the cold winter. If it were a flower, we would say it bloomed too early. Perhaps the cicada has evolved in some instinctive way. With recent record warm seasons, insects surviving through the winter are not unheard of. Could abnormal weather trigger such instantaneous change in a life cycle?

Or, just maybe, contained within the small body of the cicada is summer's heat in its entirety. And by some strange fate, the cicada wandered into the opposite season. Here: on the *other side*.

I decided to call Sawachi. I met him a while back at some get-together...

“Ahhh. The *Aburazemi*. That one, that one, is a good little bug. There is ambition in an *Aburazemi*,” he said, as he finished up his ‘on-the-rocks’. I liked how he put it like that. So, I liked Sawachi, just a little.

I tucked the cicada into my sleeve and got out my phone. His contact details were still there. I rang and got through to Sawachi.

“Hello..?” he said.

I still my heart. Act casual.

“Hi. I know it’s been a while, and I am sorry to call out of the blue...”

“Oh, hey... It’s you. Wow, yeah. Been a while.”

So, he still remembers me.

“Yes...well. I will get straight to the point – I found a cicada. Right in the middle of winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“A what? A cicada!? Really? You sure it’s not just a cockroach?”

Honestly, Sawachi. Just stop.

“No! It’s a cicada. An *Aburazemi*. It is odd isn’t it? What do you think? I thought you might be able to explain things.”

From the other end of the phone came a silence so deep, so lasting, it overflows.

Then, almost in a whisper he said, “Strange things happen all the time.”

“What?”

“Strange things happen all the time, all around the world. Like even you calling me right now...”

“That really isn’t an answer,” I said to keep cool.

“An answer...well, I don’t think I have one. I don’t think there *is* one. But I do think these ‘strange things’ are a blessing. For us. For the world too, even.”

The cicada popped his head out from under my sleeve. I needed to let him go soon. The longer a cicada is held, the weaker he gets. But, between the warm indoors and the cold and snow outside, I’m not sure which is worse for him.

I promised Sawachi we would get together soon and said goodbye.

I went out into the garden, towards the persimmon tree. The leaves have long fallen, and the bony branches seem to clutch at the grey sky. I carefully place the cicada on the persimmon’s trunk that is covered in muscular ridges and wrinkles. Directionless and with some hesitation – as if lost in thought, the cicada started to climb up the tree.

I look up at the sky; it seems the snow is falling from unimaginable heights. The snowfall is even heavier now, and icy crystals land on my face, melt into droplets, and roll down my cheeks. The cicada too, disappears amongst the weathered branches – into the maze of their silhouette. My body is chilled to the bone, yet my hands that held the cicada are hot - sweltering like summer.

Only then did I realize, that despite its male nature, the cicada did not sing.

Back inside the doorway, I notice my mother's umbrella and the bag full of oranges. The TV was still on in the living room, but my father is not there anymore. I turn off the TV and bring the bag of oranges into the kitchen and place it on the table like always.

It has already been many years since my father passed away, and I'm certain Mrs. Uehara died two years ago. Even Sawachi...

The phone's history shows I called his number. But I don't have the courage to dial again.

I don't know if it is because of the snow, but this empty house is filling up with a crushing silence. The silence is so profound that my ears start ringing.

And it rings like the call of the *Aburazemi* from a summer's day, a long, long, time ago.

Winter's Aburazemi

Though it was still in the middle of winter, an *aburazemi* cicada flew towards me.

Amidst the light fall of the snow, it had awkwardly flown near as though it were lost, but after changing its course here and there, the screen window suddenly shut it out.

I had become very giddy right before I thought: *What a silly insect!*

But I loved cicadas. I loved them very much.

They heralded the coming of summer: the pretty, childlike *kempfer* cicada, whose life grew more elegant the more it suffered, and then I was also fond of the nimble, jovial drooping eyes of the *tsuku-tsuku boshi* cicada, but of course, the one I loved the most was the *aburazemi*, whose voice, even more so in the summer heat, sounded like the pouring of hot oil.

But now, of course, it had acted very stupidly.

And in this cold.

Even though the heat was on, I had carefully put on my Angola sweater.

"Hey, what are you, exactly?" I asked.

I opened the screen door, and the screen window that had not changed once since the summer had now come towards my face. The chill air embraced me like the skin of a snow maiden.

With my nearsighted eyes, I stared at the cicada's own nearsighted eyes (I think) for a short while.

This was without a doubt an *aburazemi*.

A male *aburazemi* with a tightly wound abdomen that looked as though it were dotted with white powder.

At any time now, he would begin to chirp with his great, loud voice.

I opened the screen window a touch and locked eyes with the cicada. I slowly extended my right hand.

Caught him!

In the palm of my hand, a riotous cicada. His wings moved like the small motor of an electric fan. He had softly relayed to my suppressing fingers the root strength of his wings but did so in such a way so as not to injure them.

I was in ecstasy.

It was almost as if, inside of my hand, I had successfully caught something of purpose.

"You're a strange one, you know. Out here in winter of all times."

Without thinking, I called out to my father, who was watching TV behind me in the living room. Then I regretted it.

"Still catching cicadas? What a nice age to—"

"There's nothing selfish about loving what I love!" I shouted indignantly.

Right away, my father and I always fell into this sort of mood.

Just then, the chime of the entranceway rang.

"Come to think of it," I recalled angrily to my father, "that cicada from long ago was a young female!" But his back had turned to me and had already headed for the entranceway.

Mother's friend, Ms. Uehara, held my mother's umbrella and stood there.

"How is Mother's health?" I asked. "What...What's all this?"

Ms. Uehara let down a bag of tangerines from the supermarket onto the wooden entrance floor and said, "I came because you were nearby."

"Oh, well thank you very much. How is Mother's—"

She interjected. "I thought to myself, 'I'll have to return this umbrella as soon as I can.'"

The cicada was a little restive and escaped from my fingers, so I imprisoned it with both hands like a cage. As its prickly legs wriggled around, the itchy sensation became like a secret pleasure inside my hands.

"Ah, it seems that Mother is always hospitalized whenever something good happens."

"Yeah...that's rough, isn't it?" she said.

The cicada's small motor started up again, its flapping wings tickled the inside of my hands.

“Hey, Ms. Uehara. There are still cicadas in spite of the winter. That’s weird, isn’t it?”

Ms. Uehara uneasily peeked into the cage of my joined hands and said, “I only came for a bit, so...my best to your Mother,” before promptly departing.

I spoke to everyone about the cicada. How mysterious that it lived in so cold a winter season. If it were a flower, would it be an out-of-season bloom? Or was it because to the cicada’s evolving vitality? It is said that, although it may be winter, the days are getting warmer than before and a growing number of insects hibernate. It appears that all kinds of mutations have occurred because of the abnormal climate. Or even maybe, by some hidden impulse, the cicada carried that warm summer throughout its body and on its way towards *that season* and lost its way in the opposite one.

I had tried to speak about it earlier with Sawachi.

He had been at a drinking party the whole day, and had said to me in a drunken stupor, “Yes, that’s an *aburazemi*, isn’t it? Who’s a good boy? That’s a good boy! It has spunk, all right.” That empty-headed way of talking was a little in character, so it suited him well.

I quietly put the cicada into the cuff of my sweater sleeve and opened my flip-phone. I searched the address log. Sawachi’s name was still there.

The phone rang and we connected.

“...Yes?”

I quieted my heart and said to him nonchalantly, “It’s been a while. Sorry about calling you out of the blue.”

“Oh...is that you? Yeah, it’s been a while, hasn’t it?” He appeared to immediately understand me.

“You know, the cicada just popped up at once. But it’s still winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Eh...a cicada? At *this* time of year? Really? Uh, are you sure it’s not just a cockroach, or something?”

Quit fooling around already Sawachi. This is serious.

“No, you’re wrong. It’s a cicada, a real *aburazemi*. Mysterious, isn’t it? Come on, what do you think? I want your uniquely detailed thoughts...”

On the other side of the phone, a moment of silence, deep and unrecoverable, seemed first to flow and then to spread.

In a mumbling voice, Sawachi said, “There are a lot of mysterious things out there, you know.”

“What?”

“There are a lot of mysterious things in this world. Like you, right now, speaking with me over the phone...”

“That’s not an answer, you know,” I said, somewhat trying to hide my embarrassment.

“Not an answer, huh? I suppose I just don’t know myself then. I wonder about that. But you know, you just saved a mysterious thing. That’s how I see it, and perhaps, that’s how the whole world sees it, too.”

The cicada peeked his head out of my sleeve.

I would soon have to let it go free. Whenever a human hand held a cicada in place for too long, it became weak. Be that as it may, to be inside a warm room or to be released into the flickering snows, which was best for the cicada I honestly did not know.

I promised Sawachi that I would go out drinking again with him sometime and hung up.

I left from the entranceway and stepped out to the garden’s persimmon tree.

Its leaves had all fallen away and its skeletal branches clung tightly to the ashen skies.

I gently placed the cicada on the trunk patched with cracked skin and sinews like sewers. As if it were deep in thought, the cicada sometimes paused here and there while slowly making its way up the trunk.

I looked up to the snow that seemed to fall from the tallest height. The weather gradually became more fierce, frozen crystals struck and melted on my face, trickling down my muscles as they flowed.

The cicada’s unseen figure stiffened at the top of the persimmon tree and its labyrinthine silhouette vanished somewhere inside.

My body completely froze up, and yet, somehow, the hands that held the cicada were warm for

all eternity and gathered a summer sweat. Come to think of it, even though the cicada was male, he hardly chirped at all...or so I recall.

I returned to the entranceway and Mother's umbrella was still there alongside the bag of tangerines.

The living room TV was left on and Father's figure had already vanished.

I switched it off and carried the bag of tangerines to the top of the kitchen table, like always.

Father had already left this world a long time ago, and Ms. Uehara also should've died two years ago. And Sawachi as well...

My call log with Sawachi was still on the cellphone, but I lacked the courage to call him back again.

The snow piled up outside and a tightening silence constricted the interior of my empty home.

Within this onerous silence, a buzzing rang in my ears.

It was almost like the chirp of an *aburazemi* on a far, far off summer's day.

A Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

It's deep into winter but a cicada still came flying over.

Tumbling and turning in its confused looking flight, it fumbled through the sheets of blinking snow and suddenly planted itself on the insect screen.

How—

But before my surprise even took shape, a surge of joy has already overwhelmed me.

I like cicadas. I like them very, very much.

The cute child-like Kaempfer cicadas, who herald the coming of summer; the evening cicadas, brimming with an elegance to the point of pity; and the nimble walker cicadas, with their droopy but cheery eyes—I like them all. But my favourite would have to be the large brown cicadas, or oil cicadas, who with its cries pour into the hot summer an even hotter pot of oil.

But—

A cicada in this freezing winter? How? I'm in my Angora turtleneck sweater and even have the heater on.

"Just what are you, little one?"

I opened the glass door and approached the insect screen that's been there unchanged since summer. The wintry air flushed in and enveloped me like the skin of a yuki-onna.

My near-sighted eyes crossed with the cicada's near-sighted (I think) eyes for a while.

It really was an oil cicada.

A male cicada with a firm and compact abdomen as if it was powdered white, silent and still but about to screech any next—

I unlatched a small opening in the screen while keeping our eyes locked, and slowly but steadily, my right hand slithered towards it.

And there!

The cicada flailed around in my hand, its wings buzzing like a small motorized fan. My fingers cradled around the thorax, taking care not to hurt its wings. Its innate strength emanated through my very fingertips with its every spasm.

Bliss.

My hand was fulfilled, as if it clasped in it a very purpose.

"Dad, look how weird it is. There's a cicada in this cold winter, see." I summoned my father out of reflex. He was watching the television with his back to me. I immediately regretted calling him.

"You're still playing around with cicadas? How old again are—"

"I can't help what I like, okay? And besides, what's wrong with liking cicadas!" My tone crackled out of indignance. Our relationship has always been volatile.

It was then that the door chime rang.

"You know that reminds me, you loved bugs so much we called you a cicada kid when you were small." Father continued on from a remembrance as I angrily turned my back from him and went to answer the door.

It was my mother's friend Ms. Uehara. She was standing there with my mother's umbrella in hand.

"Hi, how's your mother? Is she feeling better? I've brought these..." She began emptying mandarins out of a plastic bag from a nearby supermarket as she spoke and went on, "I just so happened to be nearby."

"Um, thank you for the thought, my mom's—"

"You know—I've always been meaning to return her umbrella but I just keep forgetting it."

The cicada twitched and nearly escaped from my grasp, so I caged it in with both of my hands. Its many legs thrashed and wriggled inside. The prickling itch was like a secret pleasure that was all within my palms.

"Oh, it's alright...but, my mom's been hospitalized."

"Oh. I, see...I'm sorry to hear that."

The cicada lit up its engine and its fluttering wings started tickling my palms again.

"Um, hey, Ms. Uehara, there was a cicada in this cold winter. Isn't it strange?" I asked.

"Hm, oh? Really? Oh but I can't handle insects very..."

She unfurled a suspicious glance towards my hands, then quickly said, "well! I think I better get going now then. Do say hi to your mother for me, would you?"

And she left.

I still felt the urge to talk to someone about the cicada. The strangeness of it alive in this cold winter—almost like a wrong-seasoned bloom in terms of flowers. Might they be evolving? Something perhaps to do with the world being all warmer these days so more insects overwinter now than before. A sudden mutation from the abnormal weathers, maybe? Or maybe, just maybe, it had, in that small little frame of its, in a little plunge awry—found itself lost in *our* upside-down land while dragging in its body still, the entirety of that condensed and arduous summer.

I decided to call up Sawachi to talk.

In a drinking party from a distant past, Sawachi had, all the while emptying his drink, blurted that, "the oil cicada, yeah? Guy's a good one. A real nice one. Guy's got ambition, you know?"

I took to the way he phrased it, which is why I got to like him a little as well.

I lightly slipped the cicada into the cuffs of my sweater and flipped open my phone. I went through the contact list and thankfully, Sawachi's name was still in there.

The dial tone rang and Sawachi answered.

"...Yes?"

I try my best to calm myself down and, as nonchalantly as possible, started, "it's been a while. Sorry for ringing up so suddenly—"

"Oh...oh, it's you? Um. Yeah, it's been a while."

He seemed to recognize me quite quickly.

"Well, so, I'll get to the point. There's a cicada. In this cold winter. Isn't that just so, very, strange?"

"Uh...a cicada? In this period? You mean a cicada? Erm, sure it's not a roach?"

Oh please, Sawachi, stop.

"Of course no! It's a cicada, an oil cicada. Don't you just find it strange? Hey, what do you make of it? I thought you'd know a lot about cicadas and have something to—"

From beyond the phone, a long and irreparable silence suspended the pause and slowly invaded and spread over.

It was with a whisper that Sawachi broke the silence with.

"...There are a lot of strange things in the world."

"...Huh?"

"There are a lot of strange things happening all around our world. You calling me right now, for instance..."

"That's not really an explanation," I tried saying something to dispell the awkward air.

"An...explanation, huh...I don't even have one myself. I'm not even sure if there ever can be one. But, listen, okay? These strange, wondrous happenings are our little salvations. Not just for us, but, very possibly even a form of hope for the entire world—"

The cicada revealed its face from my cuffs.

It's about time I let it go. Cicadas become enfeebled if kept at our hands for too long. Although, I'm still unsure if it's best for the cicada to enclose it in the warm indoors or to release it into the flickering snows.

Sawachi and I made the airy promise of drinking together again someday somewhere in the future and hung up.

Leaving the house, I walked over to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The leaves have all fallen off. Its branches were skeletal claws clutching at the grey sky.

I rested the cicada on the gutter-like furrows and skin fissures on the bark. The cicada looked as if it was in deep thought as it tottered up the tree in its arrhythmic and indecisive climb.

I looked up, and there were the snows falling from infinite heights. It grew heavier, and even began falling and melting upon me, drawing lines on my face before flowing away.

The cicada has already disappeared into the criss-cross silhouettes of the maze-like treetop.

My body has already grown cold, but the two hands that held the cicada were somehow still feverish with sweat like in summer. A sudden realization struck me—the cicada was male, but it cried not even once.

Returning to the house, I found my mother's umbrella and a bag of mandarins lying in the entrance. The television in the living has been on for a while, and father was already nowhere to be found.

I turned the television off and moved the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as usual.

It's been a long while since father passed away, and I think even Ms. Uehara left two years ago. And, even Sawachi—

There's a record of my call to Sawachi in the call history. But I've already lost all courage to dial it again.

The snow must be piling. And a suffocating stillness started filling the vacant house.

My ears began to ring from the deafening silence.

And the silence, sounded just like cicadas from a far, far summer day.

The Winter Cicada

Azuchi Moe

One day in the middle of winter, a cicada appeared.

Snow was beginning to fall, and a large brown cicada came down towards the house in that typical clumsy flight, darting this way and that as if it was lost. Suddenly, it found its way to the screen of the window.

No way, that's impossible. But more than disbelief, I immediately felt thrilled.

I like cicadas. Very, very much.

I mean, all cicadas: those harbingers of summer, the *nī nī zemi* or the Kaempfer cicada, so tiny like lovable babies; the *higurashi*, the clear-toned cicada, with their ethereal calls that tug at your heart; and the *tsuku tsuku bōshi* or the Meimuna opalifera, nimble and lively, with droopy eyes. Most of all, though, I like the *abura zemi*, the large brown cicada. True to their name, "oil cicada," their calls sound as though they are spattering more oil onto the fiery heat of summer.

But it was just incredible to see one here, now.

In this biting cold, no less.

It was so cold that I was wrapped up in a turtleneck angora sweater, even with the heater on.

"Hey there, little guy. How did you get here?"

Sliding open the window, I lean towards the mesh screen that had been left there since the summer. The frosty air rushes in, caressing my skin like the touch of a ghostly spirit.

My short-sighted eyes meet the (supposedly) short-sighted eyes of the cicada, and we stare at each other for a little while.

It *is* a large brown cicada.

The taut stomach looks like it is covered in white powder. A male cicada. It seems as if it might start sounding its raucous call any minute—.

I nudge the screen open and, our eyes still locked, I gingerly stretch out my right hand.

Got him!

The cicada struggles against my closed palm. The wings buzz furiously, like a fan powered by a small motor. Taking care not to damage his wings, I gently pin him down. The force of the wings, their hinges firm, pulsates against my fingers.

I feel a rush of joy.

It's as if I have seized some kind of purpose, snug in my hands—a sense of fulfillment.

"Look, it's so strange. A cicada's here, even though it's winter. See?"

Without thinking, I call to my father, watching TV in the living room with his back to me. Straightaway I regret it.

"Still catching cicadas, are you? When are you going to grow out of stuff like that?"

"I like what I like. Leave me alone!"

I pout and raise my voice indignantly. Anything can set us off.

Just then, the doorbell rings.

Still prickly, I turn away from my father, who murmurs, as if a memory suddenly returned to him, "Come to think of it, I used to call you cicada girl when you were little."

A friend of my mother's, Mrs. Uehara, is standing in the doorway with my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? I brought you something...."

As she speaks, she places a bag of mandarins from the local grocery store onto the wooden ledge in the small entrance hall.

"I was just passing by, so thought I'd pop in."

"Oh, thank you so much. She's—"

"I kept thinking to myself I should return her umbrella soon, but—"

The cicada struggles fiercely for a moment and almost squeezes itself out through my fingers, so I hem it back in, cupping both hands into a cage. The cicada's legs scratch around my palms, and the

half itchy, half painful sensation is like a secret pleasure inside my hands.

“Ah, there was no rush at all.... My mother’s going to be in the hospital for a long time.”

“Oh dear, I’m sorry. It must be tough.”

The cicada revs up its mini motor—his wings flap wildly, tickling the skin of my palms.

“Look, Mrs. Uehara. A cicada came in the middle of winter. Isn’t it odd?”

“Oh, really? Is it in there? But I’m squeamish about insects, so—”

She eyes my cupped hands apprehensively and says, “Well, anyway, I just wanted to pop by. Send my best wishes to your mom.” Then off she goes.

I feel an urge to talk to someone about this cicada. The strangeness of how it’s still alive in this frosty weather. If it was a flower, you’d call it a mad flower, blooming out of season. Have cicadas evolved to survive longer? Winter is winter, but they say winters are getting warmer than they used to be, and insects that outlive the season are on the rise. Did the abnormal climate trigger some kind of mutation in this organism? Or perhaps, in some twist of fate, did it somehow shoulder the hot summer all by itself—in its tiny body—and wander over to the other side, to *this side* of time?

Sawachi comes to my mind, and I decide to talk to him.

A long time ago, when we went out for a drink with some friends, Sawachi said, “Yep, those large brown cicadas. They’re good guys. Pretty good guys. They’ve got some ambition, you know.”

That’s what he said while drinking up a glass of whiskey mixed with water. I liked the way he said it, and it made me like him a little, too.

Gently slipping the cicada under my sleeve, I flip open my phone. I look through my contacts list and find Sawachi’s name, still there.

The dial tone rings for a moment, then Sawachi picks up.

“... Hello?”

I try to act calm and say, nonchalantly, “Hi, it’s been a while. Sorry for calling you up out of the blue—”

“Oh... is it really you? Wow, it’s been a long time.”

He seemed quick to recognize my voice, to my relief.

“Well, I’ll cut to the chase—there’s a cicada here. In winter. Isn’t it odd?”

“A... a cicada? What, now? A cicada? Er, isn’t it just a roach?”

Ew—spare me, Sawachi.

“No way! It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada. Isn’t it strange? So, what do you think? I thought you’d be the one to know about this sort of thing—”

On the other side of the line, there is an unrelenting, irrevocable stretch of profound silence, which feels as if it is slowly suffusing the air around me.

Sawachi drops his voice to a murmur and says, “... There are lots of strange things out there.”

“... Eh?”

“Strange things—the world is full of them. The fact that you just gave me a call, too....”

“That’s not much of an answer,” I remark, perhaps to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer... huh. I wouldn’t know such a thing. I wonder if it even exists. But, you know, strange things can be a saving grace. For us, and probably for the world, too—”

The cicada pops out its head from under my sleeve.

It would be time to let it out soon. If a cicada is kept for too long in human hands, it would grow weak. Though it’s doubtful whether it’s better off in the warm room or the snowy cold outside.

I exchange a promise with Sawachi to go for a drink again sometime and hang up.

Stepping out of the front door, I head to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree is all bare: leaves shaken off, and boney limbs stretching out wide to grasp the grey skies.

I softly place the cicada on the bark, its surface lined with furrows and wrinkles. The cicada, as if mulling over something, begins to climb the trunk, slowly, pausing every now and then.

When I lifted my gaze, the snow was falling from what seemed to be limitless heights. It gradually thickened, and icy crystals fell on my face, too, melting as soon as they touched my skin, streaming down and leaving numerous thin streaks.

Before I knew it, the cicada's form had disappeared among the branches of the persimmon tree, lost in its silhouette of lines etched into the sky like a frozen labyrinth.

My body was chilled to the bone—but the hands that had held the cicada remained hot, sweating as if it was summer. Suddenly, it occurred to me that even though it was a male cicada, it hadn't made a sound at all....

When I went back inside, my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were sitting there by the entrance. In the living room, the TV was still on, but my father was nowhere to be seen.

I switched off the TV and carried the bag of mandarins over to the kitchen table, as I always do.

My father has been dead for a long time now, and Mrs. Uehara had passed away two years ago. And Sawachi, too....

On my phone, Sawachi's name was still in the list of recent calls. But I couldn't muster up the courage to call his number again....

Perhaps the snow had begun to stick—the empty house was gradually consumed by an almost suffocating silence.

The silence reached such a pitch that I began to hear a ringing in my ears.

It was as if, from a summer day long, long ago, there came the call of a cicada.

The Winter Cicada

Although it is mid-winter, a large brown cicada started flying in my direction. In the lightly falling snow, it clumsily flew this way and that way as though lost, changed its course in the end, and then it suddenly stopped in a flash on the screen door.

Rather than thinking this is kind of odd, I became incredibly happy. I love cicadas. In fact, I adore them. I also like the Kempfer Cicada that is like a cute baby, and the Evening Cicada that is elegantly sorrowful; as well as the nimble, cheerful, and heliophilous Walker's Cicada. All signals of summer's visit. But even so, I love the voice of the large brown cicada - that sounds like boiling oil pouring into the night during scorching summers - the most.

Either way, seeing one right now is kind of silly. Despite it being this kind of freezing. Even though I am wearing a turtleneck sweater made of rabbit fur and the heating is on!

"Hey, hey, what are you?"

I opened the glass door and drew my face near the screen door that has been left there since summer. The bitter air - like a snow woman's¹ chilly skin - begins approaching.

My (presumably) shortsighted eyes and the cicada's eyes locked for a short while. As expected, it is a large brown cicada. It is male, and it seems to have a narrow waist speckled with white. Even now, it is beginning to cry in a deafening voice.

I open the screen door a bit, our eyes still locked, and then I slowly reach out my right hand. Caughtcha! The cicada is struggling in my hand. The wings are like an electric fan that moves by small motors. The power at the base of the wings transmits tremblingly to my fingers that are holding it gently so as not to hurt its wings.

I am overjoyed. I feel such fulfillment as if I had reached some goal.

"Hey, this is so weird. Even though it's winter, there a cicada, look," I said as I thoughtlessly called out to my father's back who is watching TV in the living room. I regretted doing that.

"You're still catching things like cicadas, you're too old for that—"

"The things I like are my business!" I said in a huff.

My dad and I always ended up like this. At that moment, the doorbell rang.

"Come to think of it, a while back you were called Cicada Girl, right?" he recalls, but I angrily left for the front door with my back turned towards him. My mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing in the entryway with my mom's umbrella.

"How is your mother's condition? This ...", said Ms. Uehara while dropping off mandarins, which were inside a bag from the nearby supermarket, at the entryway.

"As I was in the neighborhood, I came over."

"Ah, thank you very much. My mom is—"

"I've been thinking I should have returned it sooner, the umbrella."

I caged the cicada in with both of my hands as it had struggled briefly and almost escaped from my fingers. Its legs are twitching, seemingly that pain and itchiness are secretly a pleasant sensation in my hands.

"Oh, it would have been okay whenever ... after all my mom is in long-term care."

"Oh, my word! You don't say, it must be difficult."

The cicada suddenly moves its miniature motors, and the fluttering of its wings tickle the inside of my hands.

"Hey, Ms. Uehara, even though it's winter there was a cicada. Isn't that weird?"

"Huh, is that so? Really? But I don't really like bugs ..."

While looking uneasily at my forced together handbasket, she said, "Well, I just wanted to stop by. Give your mother my regards," and then she simply left. I had wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. The marvelousness that is living in this kind of severe season. If it was a flower, would it be an off-season flower? Is it the evolution of cicadas' vitality? These days it's said that it is warmer than it used to be, which means insects that can make it through winter are increasing. Due to the wild weather,

¹ T/n: A spirit in Japanese folklore. Described as a beautiful woman with a body as cold as ice.

did something like a mutation happen? Or, by some chance, did its small body, filled with the scorching summer, suddenly wander into this season from the other side?

I decided to try and talk to my friend, Sawachi, about this. Long ago at a get-together, Sawachi said, “Yep, large brown cicadas. They’re nice fellows. After all, they’re fairly good bugs. They’ve got ambition,” while opening watered-down whisky. I liked the way he had said it, so I also like Sawachi a little.

I gently put the cicada in my sweater cuff, and then I opened my phone. When I looked through my contacts, Sawachi's name was still there.

The tone rings, and then Sawachi answers.

“... Yes ...”

While trying to compose myself, I nonchalantly say, “Long time no see. Sorry for the unexpected call ...”

“Ah ... it’s you? Yeah, it has been a long time hasn’t it.”

I guess he knew it was me right away.

“Well, you see, this is kinda sudden, but there's a cicada. Even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?”

“Huh ... a cicada? Around this time? Is it really a cicada? Um, isn't it a cockroach?”

Not you too!

“You're wrong. I'm sure it's a cicada, a large brown one. Isn't that strange? Hey, what do you think? I think you know a lot about this kind of stuff.”

On the other side of the line, it seemed like a moment of deep silence, which could not be undone, flowed, and continued to fill. Sawachi murmured, “... there are lots of strange things you know.”

“... huh?”

“Strange things, there are lots of them in the world. Like how today, you called me ...”

“That can't be your answer,” I said to try and hide my embarrassment.

“An answer ... I'm not sure. I wonder if there is one. But who knows, I can say mysterious things are certainly a relief—for us and, probably, for the world.”

The cicada stuck its head out from my cuff. I will have to release it before long. Whenever you keep a cicada in human hands for too long, it ends up becoming weak. Though, whether to set it free in the hot indoors or outside where the snow is lightly falling, I am not sure which is better for it.

I make a promise with Sawachi to someday to get together for drinks, and then hang up the phone. When I go out the front door, I head towards the persimmon tree in the front yard. The leaves of the tree have completely fallen, and its angular branches are grabbing hold of the ashen sky. I gently placed the cicada on the trunk that was covered with deep channels of cracks and vines. It began to slowly ascend the trunk while sometimes hesitating as though it was thinking about something.

While gazing upwards, it seemed like the snow was falling from an endless height. The frozen crystals are gradually starting to pour—even grazing my face and melting. Before I realized it, The cicada's figure ended up fading into the stiff winding silhouette of the tree trunk.

My body had become completely chilled, and yet, these hands that caught the cicada were sweating like an eternally torrid summer for some reason. *Come to think of it, although the cicada was male it didn't make a sound at all ...* I casually thought. When I went back to the front door, my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still there. The living room TV is still on, but my father is no longer there. I turned off the TV, and then I carried the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as per usual.

My father had already passed long ago, and I assumed Ms. Uehara also died two years ago. Sawachi also ...

The call history to Sawachi is still on my phone. But I am not brave enough to try and call there again ...

Perhaps the snow is continuing to pile up, while an empty house continues to fill with stifling silence. My ears started ringing in the awfully quiet silence. It is like the cry of a large brown cicada on a distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada
Azuchi Moe

An *abura* cicada came flying in the dead of winter.

Through the powder-soft snowfall, the cicada bumbled about in its lost and clumsy way. After switching directions several times, it plopped onto the screen door.

That's impossible, I thought, but rationale trailed behind joy. I was utterly delighted.

I love cicadas. I really, really do.

I love the small and cute *nīnī* cicadas—the babies of the family—whose gentle drones herald summer's arrival. I love the elegant *higurashi* cicadas, whose twilight songs make my heart ache. I love the smart *tsukutsuku-bōshi* cicadas and their intricate refrains, and I love their cheerful, downturned eyes too. But of course, I love the *abura* cicadas the most, with their voices that sound like the sizzle, snap, and pop of boiling oil being poured into the scorch of summer's heat.

Nevertheless, here and now, reason prevailed. Impossible! It was freezing outside, I was wearing an angora sweater, and the heat was on.

"Hey, hey, what are you supposed to be?" I muttered.

I slid the glass door open and leaned towards the outer screen, a relic of summer months. The draft—frosty as though it were not mere air, but the spirit of the Snow Woman of lore—drew in around me through the mesh.

My myopic eyes met the cicada's (probably) myopic eyes. It was an *abura* cicada all right. Male with white flecks powdered across its tapered abdomen, it seemed to hover just on the cusp of song. I cracked the screen door open and slipped my hand through while maintaining eye contact.

I got it!

A cicada, fighting within my hand. Its wings, whirring blades of a fan powered by a tiny motor. The strength of its wing joints, reverberating through my fingers, which were wrapped around it loosely to protect its wings.

Euphoria! I felt fulfilled as if I had caught in my hand a dream.

"How strange. It's winter, but there's a cicada here. Look!" I called without thinking towards the back of Dad's head. He was watching TV in the living room. I instantly regretted it.

"Are you still chasing cicadas? You're not a kid anymore," Dad said.

"I like what I like. I don't care what you think!" I snapped.

Dad and I were always quick to bicker.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. I turned away from the conversation and huffed to the front door. Behind me, Dad was saying, "Didn't they used to call you Cicada Girl?" like the thought had just popped into his head.

Ms. Uehara, Mom's friend, stood at the entrance holding Mom's umbrella.

"How is your mother? Here, these are for you," she said, setting down in the entrance hall a bag of mandarin oranges from the nearby market. "I was just in the area, and—"

"Thank you. Mom's—"

"—I thought I'd better return her umbrella."

The cicada wriggled and scuttled in my hand, almost managing to escape. I formed a cage with both hands and trapped it tight. Its darting legs pricked at my skin, and the stinging pain gave me a rush like the pleasure of having a juicy secret.

"Oh, there was really no hurry," I said. "Mom's in long-term care."

"I see. I didn't realize. My condolences."

The cicada revved its mini motor; its wings flapped back to life and tickled my palms.

"Say, Ms. Uehara, don't you think it's strange that there's a cicada here even though it's winter?"

"My, is there really? I don't really like bugs." Ms. Uehara stared uneasily at my caged hands. "Well, I was just stopping by. Give my love to your mother." And so, she left.

I wanted to talk with someone about the cicada, about how fantastical it was that the cicada was alive at this cold time of year. A life as miraculous as a flower blooming out of season. Did cicadas live

longer now than they had before? Maybe it wasn't cicadas but winter that had changed. Warmer than long ago, winter was now habitable for more insects; couldn't this cicada, too, be a curiosity brought about by the changing climate? Or maybe, it simply set off on an impulse one day, bringing with it the heat of summer set on its small shoulders. And just maybe, it lost its way on the flip side—on our side—of the four seasons.

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

Once, at a get together ages ago, Sawachi had been nursing a scotch and water when he said, “*Abura* cicadas, huh? Yeah, they're good folk. Just swell really, with their aspirations.” I liked the way he put it, so I suppose I liked him a bit too.

I slipped the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and flipped open my cell phone. His name was still listed in my contacts.

The line rang, and Sawachi picked up. “...Hello?” he said.

“Hey, sorry for calling out of the blue,” I said, trying to calm my racing heart.

“Oh...is this who I think it is? It's been a while.”

He still recognized me.

“I know this is sudden, but there's a cicada here. In winter. Weird, right?”

“...A cicada? Now? You said cicada, right? No way. Are you sure it's not a cockroach?”

Oh, stop it, Sawachi. You prankster.

“I'm sure! It's a cicada, an *abura* cicada. Isn't that mysterious? So, what do you think? You know about this sort of thing.”

From the other end of the line flowed a deep and irreversible quiet, which then seemed to pool and spread.

“Well,” Sawachi said at last, his voice low, “mysteries are everywhere.”

“...What?”

“Mysteries...they're everywhere in this world. For example, you calling me right now.”

“That's not an answer,” I protested, almost as if I were trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, is it? I don't have one of those. I wonder if there even is one. But if you think about it, in some ways, mysteries are a kind of salvation. For you and me, and possibly, for the world too.”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve. I had to let it go soon. It would only grow weaker if I kept it restrained. Was it better for the cicada to be kept warm indoors or to be released into the snow-covered outdoors? I didn't know.

I hung up after promising Sawachi we would get drinks again sometime.

I left through the front door and headed for the persimmon tree in the yard. The tree was bare of leaves; its skeletal branches grasped at the gray sky. Gutter-like cracks and furrows ran down the length of its trunk. There, I set the cicada down. It started to meander up the trunk, occasionally hesitating, perhaps deep in thought.

I looked up. The snow seemed to be falling from somewhere endlessly high above. As the snowfall gradually thickened, the icy crystals stung my upturned face, where they melted and slipped down in rivulets. Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared within the weave and tangle of silhouettes that made up the persimmon tree's trunk.

My body had frozen through and through, yet warmth lingered in both my hands, which had been holding onto the cicada. They were sweating like it was summer. Come to think of it, even though the cicada had been male, it hadn't made a single sound.

I returned to the entrance where Mom's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were waiting. In the living room, the TV was still on, but Dad was already gone. I turned the TV off and put the mandarins, just like always, on the kitchen table.

Dad had been gone for a long time. Ms. Uehara had also passed away two years ago. Sawachi, too, was already...Our call was recorded in my phone's history, but I didn't have the courage to try the number again.

Perhaps it was due to the now thick blanket of snow outside, but the house—in which I was alone—was filled with a suffocating silence.

In the dead quiet, a buzz crescendoed in my ears.
Somehow, it was almost like the song of an *abura* cicada from a summer day long, long ago.

Brown Cicada in Winter by Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the middle of winter, a brown cicada came flying.

Clumsily, as if lost in the air, it flew through the softly falling snow. After changing direction this way and that, it suddenly made a nimble landing on the screen door.

Joy overcame me before I even could think about how stupid it was.

I like cicadas. You could even say I love them.

I love the cute, childish Kempfer cicadas that announce the arrival of summer, the sorrowfully elegant evening cicadas, the nimble Walker's cicadas with their cheerful droopy eyes. But most of all I love brown cicadas, with their voices like flowing oil, hotter than summer itself.

But despite my feelings, I now thought, "How stupid." Especially in this cold. So cold that I was in an Angora turtleneck with the furnace on.

"Hey, who are you?"

I opened the glass door and moved my face closer to the screen, still left out from the summer. The cold air pressed into me like the skin of the yuki-onna, the snow woman of folklore.

For a short while my near-sighted eyes met the cicada's (probably) near-sighted eyes in a stare.

Definitely a brown cicada. A male, with a tight, chalky midsection. It seemed as if at any moment now it would let out a piercing cry.

I opened the screen door slightly, and holding the cicada's gaze, readied my right hand.

Got it!

The cicada squirmed in my hand. Its wings fluttered like an electric fan powered by a small motor. In my fingers, gathered gently to hold but not hurt, I could feel the power of those trembling wings.

I felt mad with glee. And fulfilled, like I had trapped some kind of purpose in my own hands.

"Get a look at this, a cicada in winter. Isn't that strange?" I called out without thinking to my father, who was watching TV in the living room.

"Still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like what I like!" I raised my voice, ticked off. My father and I had always been tense like this.

Then the doorbell rang.

I huffed as my father remembered aloud, "Come to think of it, you used to be called 'cicada girl.'" I turned my back on him and opened the door.

My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara, stood there holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? I brought these," she said and laid a bag full of mandarins from the nearby supermarket inside the door. "I just happened to be in the area."

"Oh, thank you so much. My mother is--"

"I figured I should return the umbrella soon--"

The cicada squirmed, starting to free itself from my fingers. I used both hands to cage it in. Its legs pricked me as it moved around, the painful itch like a secret pleasure.

"Gosh, anytime would have been fine. My mother's in long-term care," I said.

"Is that so? How awful."

The cicada revved its little motor, tickling my hands with its rustling wings.

"Hey, Mrs. Uehara. There was a cicada out in this cold, isn't that strange?"

"Really? Are you serious? I'm not good with insects."

Mrs. Uehara uneasily looked at my gathered hands. She said, "Well, I just wanted to stop by. Tell your mother I said hello," and left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the oddity of one being alive in such cold, like a flower blooming in the wrong season. Maybe cicadas had evolved to live longer. I heard somewhere that the warmth in recent years led to more bugs surviving the cold. Had the abnormal weather caused a mutation? Or perhaps because of some stimulus in its tiny body, it trudged through the hot summer, wandering all the way over into the opposite, into this winter.

I decided to reach out to Sawachi.

A long time ago at a drinking party, as he was emptying his drink, he said, "Yeah, brown cicadas.

Those are some good guys. They've got ambition."

I liked his choice of words, so naturally I kind of liked him too.

I hid the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and opened my phone. I searched through my contacts and found his name still there.

The phone rang, connecting me to Sawachi.

"...Hello?"

I calmed myself down and nonchalantly said, "It's been a while. Sorry for calling all of a sudden."

"Ah... is that you? Quite some time, yeah," he replied.

Seemed like he recognized me.

"I know this is out of the blue, but there's a cicada. And it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"What, a cicada? Now? You sure it's not a cockroach?"

Cut it out, Sawachi.

"No. It's definitely a brown cicada. Weird, right? What do you think? I thought you would know more."

A deep silence that we couldn't come back from poured out from the other side of the phone and filled the air.

Sawachi lowered his voice to a whisper and said, "There's plenty of wonders out there."

"...huh?"

"The world's filled with wonders, like you giving me a call just now..."

"That doesn't answer my question," I tried, as if to hide my embarrassment.

"I wouldn't know. Is there even an answer? But those wonders can be a source of comfort. Not only for me, but probably for the whole world too."

The cicada poked its face out from my sleeve.

I'd have to let it go soon. Keeping it in humans hands forever would make it weak. Even so, I didn't know whether it would be better to let it go in the warm room or out in the snow.

I promised to go drinking with Sawachi again sometime and hung up.

I went out toward the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree's leaves had all fallen and its bony branches tightly gripped the grey sky. I gently placed the cicada on the trunk covered in deep grooves. As if thinking about something, it hesitated at times as it started to slowly climb.

I looked up to find the snow falling from somewhere endlessly far up in the sky. With more force as time passed, the cold crystals repeatedly hit me and melted, turning into streams that flowed down my face.

At some point the cicada's figure disappeared into the treetop, its silhouette like a stiffened maze.

My body was frozen through but my hands stayed hot, sweating like summer. Suddenly, I realized that even though the cicada was male, it didn't cry at all.

I returned to the house to find my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins. The TV was left on but my father was gone. I turned off the TV and carried the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table as I always did.

My father had crossed over long ago. Mrs. Uehara also passed away two years ago. Sawachi too.

My phone's history showed the log for my call to Sawachi but I didn't have the courage to try calling again.

Like snow piling up, the empty house filled with a pressing stillness.

My ears rang from the quiet.

Just like the cry of a brown cicada on a far off summer's day.

The Winter Cicada
Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the middle of winter, out jumped the big brown cicada. It flew about clumsily in the lightly falling snow in a lost sort of way, veering this way and that, until it landed abruptly on the window screen. I didn't even have time to think how impossible it was before I was filled with incredible happiness. I love cicadas. I mean I really, *really* love them. I adore *niinizemi* cicadas; much like darling little children announcing summer's arrival with their songs of "*nii nii*." I love the cries of the evening *higurashi* cicadas, so elegant they break my heart, and I even love the nimble, cheerful *tsukutsukubōshi* cicadas with their droopy eyes. But, without a doubt, most of all I love *aburazemi* oil cicadas, whose voices cry out as if pouring boiling oil over the already blazingly hot summer days. But this was really unbelievable! What was it thinking, coming out in the dead of winter when here I was decked out in an angora sweater with the heater on full blast?

"Hey now, cicada, just what are you?"

I opened the window and leaned toward the screen that had been left neglected since summer. The cold air caressed my face with the icy touch of a *yuki-onna* snow woman. My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (presumably) nearsighted eyes locked for a minute.

Yep, it sure was a big brown *aburazemi*. Male, his trim abdomen appeared as if it were dusted with white powder. He looked like he might start wailing any second now. I cracked open the screen, maintaining eye contact with the cicada, and slowly stretched out my right hand. Caught him! He struggled in my grasp. His wings hummed like the little motor in an electric fan: I felt their power trembling through my fingers, which were gently pressed to the base of his wings to avoid hurting him. I was ecstatic. My hands and heart felt as full as if I had caught hold of a crawling, winged, multi-legged dream. Dad was watching TV in the living room and I said to his back, without thinking, "Hey, this is weird! There's a cicada here even though it's winter! See?"

I regretted saying anything as soon as the words were out of my mouth.

"Cicadas again? You're too old to be catching bugs."

"I like what I like!" I shot back sullenly, my tone rough. "Mind your own business!"

He and I were always quick to disagree like that. Just then the doorbell rang. Dad said, as if he had just remembered, "I used to call you Little Miss Cicada back in the day, didn't I?" as I turned my back on him all in a huff and went to the foyer.

Mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing in the foyer holding mom's umbrella.

"Is your mother doing better? I brought these..." she said, setting down a bag of *mikan* oranges from the nearby supermarket on the step going down into the foyer. "I was in the neighborhood so thought I'd drop by."

"Oh, thank you so much. Mom is—"

"I just thought I'd better hurry and return her umbrella."

The cicada squirmed, trying to slip through my fingers, so I cupped my hands around him like a cage. His little legs scrambling around tingled, the painful itchiness in my hands a pleasant secret.

"Oh, you could have brought the umbrella back any old time. Mom will be in the hospital for a while..."

"Dear me, really? I'm so sorry to hear that."

The cicada's tiny motor fired up, his wings batting against the inside of my hands, tickling them.

"By the way, Ms. Uehara, even though it's winter and all, I found a cicada. Weird, right?"

"Oh, did you? Really? I'm not too good with bugs, so..." Ms. Uehara glanced uneasily at my cupped hands. "Well, I just wanted to stop by for a second," she said. "Give my best to your mother, okay?" and then left.

I was dying to talk to *someone* about this cicada — about the total mystery of how he was even alive in the middle of this frigid winter. Maybe it's like a flower blooming out of season or something? Perhaps it's an evolution of the cicada's life force. It may be winter, but these days, which are said to be much warmer than long ago, they also say that the number of bugs hibernating through the winter are increasing. Maybe it's a mutation caused by the strange weather. Or maybe something was triggered in that tiny little body, so that the cicada took all of the hot summer onto himself and stumbled out the other side into the completely opposite season.

I decided to try giving Sawachi a call. At some drinking party about a million years ago, he had declared, "Man, *aburazemi* cicadas! They're good guys. Really fantastic," knocking back his whiskey cut with water. "They've got *ambition*, y'know." I had liked the way he said that. It made me like Sawachi a little bit, too. I slipped the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and flipped open my cell phone. I searched my address book and found Sawachi was still listed in it.

The phone rang and Sawachi picked up.

"...Yes...?"

Urging my heart to stop beating a mile a minute, I led with a nonchalant, "Been awhile. Sorry to call out of the blue like this—"

"Oh... is that you?" he replied, apparently recognizing me right away. "Wow, it really has been a long time, huh?"

"Um, well, I'll get right to the point... there's a cicada here. Even though it's winter. Weird, right?"

"What? A cicada? Now? Really, a cicada? You sure it ain't a roach?"

Oh, come on, Sawachi. Knock it off.

"Jeez! Of *course* I'm sure! It's a cicada, a big brown *aburazemi*. Mysterious, huh? So what do you think? I know you know a lot, so—"

On the other end of the line swelled an endless, fathomless silence there was no coming back from.

"...The world's full of 'em."

"Sorry, what?"

"The world's full of mysterious things. Like how I was able to receive your call just now..."

I decided to say something that sounded like I was just maybe hiding feeling embarrassed. "That's hardly an answer."

"An answer, huh? Couldn't give you one of those. I wonder if there *are* any answers out there. But, y'know, mysterious things are our salvation. They're a salvation to us and probably the whole world..."

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve. I'd have to let him go soon. If you hold a cicada in your hands too long then they get weak. Admittedly, I had no idea whether it would be better for the little guy to be let out here in the warm room or outside where the snow was falling lightly. Promising to go drinking with Sawachi again sometime, I hung up.

Exiting the foyer, I headed to the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had lost all its leaves, bony branches grappling with the ashen sky. I gently placed the cicada on the trunk of the tree that was covered in fiber-like grooves and rifts. He appeared to be absorbed in thought as he wandered his way up the trunk, hesitating occasionally. As I looked up, the snow seemed to be falling from a great height. The snow gradually fell more heavily, snowflakes striking my face and melting, leaving streaks. Before I even realized he was gone, the cicada had disappeared into the top of the persimmon tree, lost among the frozen maze of the silhouetted branches.

I was chilled to the bone but, for some reason, my hands that had held the cicada were as warm and sweaty as if it were the height of summer. Come to think of it... it suddenly occurred to me that even though the cicada was male, he hadn't made any noise at all.

I walked back to the foyer where mom's umbrella and the bag of *mikan* were still sitting. The TV had been left on in the living room, but dad was nowhere in sight. I turned it off and put the *mikan* in their usual spot on the kitchen table. Dad had passed away ages ago and Ms. Uehara was supposed to have died two years ago as well. Sawachi, too. My cell phone history still showed I'd called him. But I, for one, didn't have the guts to call him back to see if he'd pick up again...

The now empty house filled with constricting silence as the snow piled up outside. In the silence that remained, my ears began to ring. The noise was just like the shrill cries of a brown *aburazemi* cicada on a summer day long, long ago.

A Cicada in Winter

Out from amidst the piercing cold of winter, a lone cicada emerged. It flitted about awkwardly for a while in the lightly falling snow, flying this way and that, before finally landing abruptly on the screen door.

It couldn't be, I thought. Still, I could hardly contain my excitement. I've loved cicadas for as long as I can remember. I loved the evening cicada, with its tragic beauty. The *Kaempfer* cicada, which signaled the start of summer like a sweet, small child. The droopy-eyed *Meimuna opalifera*, cheery and nimble, nonetheless. I loved them all, but the large brown cicada, with its song hotter than the summer's own heat, was my favorite.

But of course, it couldn't be. If I was still cold inside here with my turtleneck sweater and the heating...

"Hey, there." I said. "Just who are you?"

I opened up the sliding glass and put my face up to the screen door, which hadn't moved since summer. As I did, the cold winter air came rushing in. For a brief moment my eyes met the cicada's, and I wondered if perhaps it was nearsighted like me. Then seeing its rigid abdomen, looking as though it were covered in white flour, I instantly recognized it as a male large brown cicada, looking as if it were ready to cry out at any moment. Opening the screen door a bit, I slowly reached out my right hand while keeping it firmly within my gaze...

Got it!

I could feel the cicada thrashing about violently within my closed hand, its wings fluttering as if they were powered by little motors. Ecstatic as I was, I made sure to grip the creature gently so that it wouldn't be harmed. Having successfully captured my target, I couldn't help but feel a bit proud of myself.

"Dad, you won't believe it! It's a cicada! In winter!" I said, rushing excitedly over to my father who was still watching TV in the living room. As soon as he responded, I realized my mistake.

"Come, now. Aren't you a bit old to be chasing after bugs?" he sighed.

"It's my choice to chase after bugs, if I'd like to!" I said, my voice rising ever so slightly in anger. Our conversations had a tendency to go this way.

Just then, the doorbell rang. As I turned to walk off in a huff, I heard my father's voice from behind me.

"I suppose you were known as 'the cicada girl,' even back when you were little."

He seemed to have fallen into a bit of a nostalgic mood, but I nevertheless continued on towards the entrance. Waiting at the door with an umbrella in hand was my mother's friend, Ms. Uehara.

"Hello, dear. How's your mother been?" she said. "I've brought a little something for the both of you." Ms. Uehara produced a bag of oranges and placed it at the entryway. "Since I was in the area!"

"Ah, thank you very much." I said. "Actually, mom's been—"

"Yes, yes." she interrupted. "I had a feeling she'd want this umbrella returned as soon as possible."

Just then, I could feel the cicada struggling to break free and had to quickly clasp my hands together to keep it from escaping. The feeling of its feet prickling against my skin was strange, although oddly pleasant in its own way.

"Any time would have been fine, really... she's going to be in the hospital for a while longer."

"Oh, is that so? I'm sorry to hear that."

When Ms. Uehara replied, the cicada activated its little internal motor and I felt its wings flutter rapidly against my hands.

"You know, the oddest thing happened today." I said, changing the subject. "I found a cicada! In wintertime!"

"You did, now? Well, I'm not so keen on insects, you know..." Ms. Uehara trailed off, glancing uneasily at my cupped hands. "Anyhow, that's all I had come here for. Give your mother my regards!" And with that, Ms. Uehara was off on her way.

I felt myself still wanting to talk to someone about the cicada. How mysterious that it could survive

in this cold weather, like a flower blooming out of season! Could it be some form of evolution? They say even the winters are warmer nowadays, so more insects are making it through to spring. Perhaps abnormalities in the climate had caused it to suddenly mutate. Or maybe, *just maybe*, by some small miracle, it kept some part of the summer tucked away within its tiny body and brought it through somehow, all the way into the winter.

I decided I would make a call to Sawachi.

I remembered talking with him at a party once long ago, when in between drinks he said, “Cicadas... they’re good guys. Real ambitious types.”

I took a liking to the way he had said that, and it led me to take a bit of a liking to Sawachi as well.

I slid the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and took out my phone to find Sawachi’s name still there in my address book. I made the call, and a soft *beep* told me I had connected to him successfully.

“...Hello?”

I took a moment to compose myself, trying to remain nonchalant.

“Hello, Sawachi. It’s been a while, so I’m sorry to call you out of the blue like this—”

“Ah... is that you? Yeah, it’s been a while.” It seemed as if he still remembered me.

“I’ll get straight to the reason I called you—I found a cicada today. But it’s winter. Don’t you think that’s strange?”

“Huh... a cicada? Are you sure? Not a cockroach or anything?”

Sawachi, please.

“It’s a cicada, I’m telling you! A large brown cicada! You can’t explain that, can you? I called you specifically since I thought you’d have something to say about it.”

On the other end of the call, I heard nothing but a resounding silence that seemed to go on for an eternity. Then at last, Sawachi murmured a response.

“There are many things we can’t explain.”

“...Huh?”

“Inexplicable things happen in this world all the time. Like right now, the fact that you’re calling me—”

“Sawachi, you’re not answering me.” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“You want an answer, huh... To be honest, I wouldn’t know. Sometimes these things just happen. But the fact that we can’t explain everything is what makes life worth living. Maybe that’s the lesson we have to take away from this.”

The cicada peeked out from inside my sleeve, and I realized it would soon be time for me to let it go free again. It wouldn’t very well do to keep it trapped with me forever. Even so, between the warmth of the indoors and the freezing cold outside, I didn’t quite know which would be better for it.

I told Sawachi I’d look forward to seeing him again, and hung up.

I stepped outside and walked towards the persimmon tree in the garden. Not a single leaf remained, its bony branches reaching up as if to grasp at the gray-colored sky. Cracks and fissures spread all throughout its trunk, and it was there that I allowed the cicada to go free. It began to climb up slowly, pausing every so often as if it were thinking of something.

Looking upwards, I saw the snow falling down from what seemed to be an infinitely high point in the sky. A single frozen crystal fell upon my face and melted in an instant, trickling down my cheek as streaks of water. Then, before I knew it, the figure of the cicada had disappeared into the labyrinthine silhouette of the persimmon tree.

I felt the winter’s cold hit me all at once, and yet my hands that had been housing the cicada were still warm, sweating profusely as if it were summertime. It occurred to me that, unusually for a male, the cicada hadn’t let out even the slightest sound.

Returning to the entrance, I saw my mother’s umbrella and the bag of oranges at the doorstep. The television in the living room was still on, but my father was no longer there. I turned it off and went to place the oranges on the kitchen counter.

It had been a long time now since the passing of my father, and two years since Ms. Uehara had gone with him. Though my talk with Sawachi still remained in my phone’s history, I hadn’t the courage

to try giving him another call.

Perhaps it was the accumulation of the snow that made the quietness of the empty house seem to tighten in around me. And yet within the overbearing silence, I could hear a sound ringing in my ears.

It was a sound not unlike that of a cicada, on a summer day long, long ago.

A Cicada in Winter
By Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the dead of winter, a cicada came flying in.
Amidst the lightly falling snow, it clumsily flew hither and thither as if lost before finally plopping down onto the screen door.

“Hang on,” I thought, “that’s impossible.”

Yet even before that thought reached my brain, I was overcome with delight.

See, I love cicadas. Absolutely adore them.

I love the Kempfer cicada, *Platypleura kaempferi*, like a cute little baby announcing the arrival of summer. I love the achingly elegant evening cicada, *Tanna japonensis*, and the sprightly *Meimuna opalifera* with its cheerful drooping eyes. But my favorite of all would have to be the large brown cicada, *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, with its cry that seems to pour more fuel onto summer’s fire.

That was the kind of cicada that was here now. Yet it couldn’t be. Not when it was this cold. Not when I had on both the heat and an angora sweater.

“Hey you, what’s your deal?”

I opened the glass door and drew my face near the screen, still there since last summer. The chill came at me like the touch of the Snow Queen. I stared at the cicada nearsightedly and it looked back at me with its own (probably) nearsighted eyes.

Sure enough, it was a large brown cicada. A male of the species, with a pointy stomach that looked like it was coated in white powder. It seemed like it would let loose a loud cry at any moment.

I cracked open the screen door and kept my eyes on the cicada as I gradually reached out my right hand.

Got ya!

The cicada went wild inside my hand. Its wings were like little motor-powered fans. My fingers vibrated while I held it in check, careful not to harm its wings.

I was ecstatic.

I felt a deep sense of satisfaction, as if I had grabbed hold of some goal.

“Man, how weird. I found a cicada right in the middle of winter. Look!”

I instinctively called out to Dad. He was over in the living room watching TV, his back towards me. I quickly regretted saying anything.

“Still catching cicadas? Grow up already!”

“Hey, I like them! I can like whatever I want!” I shouted in indignation.

It certainly didn’t take long for us to fall into our usual pattern.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it,” Dad said, as if something jogged his memory, “they did used to call you ‘cicada girl’.” But I ignored him and went out to the entryway in a huff. Mom’s friend Mrs. Uehara was standing there with Mom’s umbrella.

“How is your mother doing? Here...” She held up a bagful of oranges from the local supermarket as she stepped down from the threshold. “I just happened to be in the neighborhood.”

“Oh, thank you so much. Mom is—”

“I figured I should return her umbrella right away.”

The cicada had nearly managed to struggle out from under my fingers, so I formed my hands into a cage to shut it in. The itching pain it caused as it scuttled around in my hands filled me with secret delight.

“Gee, you didn’t have to bring it back so soon...Mom’s going to be in the hospital for a long time.”

“Oh dear, is that so? How awful.”

The cicada started up its tiny motor, and the fluttering of its wings tickled my palms.

“Mrs. Uehara, I found a cicada even though it’s still winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“Huh, you don’t say. Still, you know, I’m not very fond of bugs...” She looked uneasily at my

cupped hands. “Anyway, I’d best be going. Give my regards to your mother.” And with that, she left.

I wanted to talk to somebody about the cicada. To discuss how bizarre it was for a cicada to survive during such a cold time of year. Was it like a flower that blooms out of season? Or perhaps the cicada’s life force had undergone some new evolution. After all, I hear that winters are much warmer these days, so more insects make it through. And possibly this change in climate caused some sort of mutation. Or one might say that, by some quirk of fate, the cicada had wandered over to the opposite side of the calendar, carrying the hot summer on its tiny back.

I decided to talk to Sawachi about it.

I had met Sawachi at a get-together way back when. “Yeah, brown cicadas are neat,” he had said as he drank some watered-down whiskey, “really neat. They’ve got spunk.” I liked the way he phrased that, so I took a bit of a shine to him.

I gently placed the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and got out my phone. Looking through the address book, I found that Sawachi’s name was still there.

The phone rang and Sawachi picked up.

“...Hello...”

“Long time no see.” I said casually, trying to keep calm. “Sorry to call all of a sudden, but—”

“Oh...is that you? Yeah, it really has been a while.”

Seems there was no need to introduce myself.

“Well, to cut to the chase, I found a cicada. But it’s winter now. How strange is that?”

“Huh...a cicada? At this time of year? For real? You sure it’s not a roach?”

Yuck, cut it out Sawachi!

“N-No way, it’s definitely a cicada. A large brown cicada. Weird, huh? What do you think? I figured you’d know all about it —”

On the other end of the line, a deep, irrevocable silence seemed to flow by in an ever-expanding stream.

Sawachi practically muttered his response.

“...There’s no shortage of strange things.”

“...Huh?”

“The world is full of strange things. You calling me right now, for instance...”

“That’s not much of an answer.” I said, trying not to sound embarrassed.

“An answer? Well, I don’t know about that. Is there an answer? Still, it’s the strange things that save us. Us, and probably the world too—”

The cicada peeked its face out from my cuff.

It was about time I let it go. It was bound to grow weak if I kept it in my hand for too long. Not that I really knew whether it would be better off in my warm room or outside in the snow.

I promised Sawachi we’d meet up again sometime and hung up, then headed for the persimmon tree in the garden out front. The tree had lost all its leaves, and its boney branches grasped at the grey sky. I gently put the cicada down on the trunk, all covered in trench-like veins and cracks. It began slowly climbing up, hesitating every now and then as if it had something on its mind.

As I raised my eyes to follow it, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. Slowly but surely, the cold crystals struck my face and melted into countless strands that flowed away. Before I knew it, the cicada had vanished somewhere within the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the persimmon’s branches.

My whole body was chilled to the bone, all except for my hands that had held the cicada. For some reason, they were as warm and sweaty as on a summer day. And if that weren’t odd enough, I realized that despite being a male, the cicada had never once let out the faintest cry.

Mom’s umbrella and the bag of oranges were there in the entryway when I went back inside. In the living room, the TV was still on, but Dad was nowhere in sight. I switched off the TV and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table like normal.

Dad died ages ago, and I’m pretty sure Mrs. Uehara also passed on two years back. And Sawachi...

My call to Sawachi was still right there in my call history. Even so, I wasn't brave enough to try calling back...

Maybe it was because the snow had piled up outside, but an oppressive silence filled the empty house.

My ears started buzzing from the utter stillness.

It sounded just like the cry of a cicada on a distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada

Despite being the dead of winter, a cicada came flying over.

It bumbled awkwardly through the lightly falling snow, veering left and right like it wasn't too sure where it was. Then, suddenly, it came to an abrupt stop on the screen door.

Before I could even think to myself, "Well, that's not right," I was overcome with delight.

After all, I adore cicadas. I love them more than anything.

They're the heralds of summer. I love the tones of the Kempfer cicada, which are cute and kind of childish – but then there's the elegant yet sorrowful call of the evening cicada. I like the quick and cheerful chirp of the Walker's cicada, too, but my favorite has to be the large brown cicada. Its cries seem to fan the flames of summer's heat, making the season feel even hotter.

Still, even I have to admit that, well, that's not right.

I mean, it's so cold.

Cold enough that I've bundled up in my angora sweater and turned on the heater.

"Alright, buddy. Just what are you?"

I slide open the glass door, leaning my face in close to the screen door that's been kept closed since summer. The rush of cold air feels like a snow woman's skin brushing against mine.

Our gazes meet, as one pair of nearsighted eyes stares intently into (probably) another.

It really *is* a large brown cicada.

A male, too, with a nice dusting of white on his sharply tapered belly. He looks about ready to belt out his usual call, in a nice, loud voice.

Keeping a close eye on the cicada, I open the screen door just wide enough to slip my right hand through, and...

Gotcha!

The cicada flails about in my hand. I gently close my fingers around his thrumming wings as they beat like a tiny motor, taking care not to harm him as he panics in my grasp.

I'm over the moon.

It feels like I've caught something with *purpose*. Something to be proud of.

"Hey, check this out. A cicada in winter. Isn't that weird?"

I can see my dad sitting in the living room, watching TV, so I can't help but call out to him. And I regret it instantly.

"You're still chasing after cicadas at *your* age? Grow up."

"What's it to *you*? I'm free to like whatever I want!"

I grumble a retort, my high spirits taking a bit of a dive.

Well, my dad and I usually tend to butt heads like this.

Just then, I hear the doorbell ring.

I'm still pretty miffed, as my dad mutters...

"Hm, didn't people call you the 'cicada girl,' back in the day?"

I turn towards the entrance hall, leaving him alone with his mumbled memories.

Waiting there is my mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, with my mom's umbrella.

"How is your mother feeling? I brought these..."

She holds up a plastic bag from the nearby supermarket, full of mandarin oranges, setting it down on top of the tiered flooring that leads into the house.

"Since I was in the area."

"Oh, thank you very much. My mom, she's—"

"Well, I thought it would be best to return her umbrella as soon as—"

The struggling cicada almost manages to slip through my fingers, so I use both hands to box him in. He moves around, his feet scrabbling against my skin in a kind of secretly pleasant scratching.

"It's fine, you could have brought it over anytime. ...After all, she's going to be in the hospital for a while."

"That's quite true. Goodness, that must be tough."

The cicada starts up that miniature motor of his again, his fluttering wings tickling the palms of my hands.

“Hey, you know what I just found? A cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t that odd?”

“Hm? You what now? Really? No, no thank you. I’m no good with insects, you see...”

Giving a wary glance at my cupped hands, Ms. Uehara continues in an uneasy tone.

“Anyway, I only stopped in because I was nearby. Give my regards to your mother, would you?”

With that, Ms. Uehara takes her leave.

All I want to do is tell *someone* about this cicada. It’s just so strange for it to be alive in a season this cold and— Well, if it were a flower, it would be a freak bloom. Unless cicadas are getting to be more resilient? Come to think of it, people *have* been saying that winters aren’t as cold as they used to be, so more insects are surviving through it. He could be here because of a weather anomaly, or some kind of sudden mutation. Or maybe, by some crazy coincidence, his little body couldn’t make it through that sweltering summer, and he ended up wandering into the other side — *this* side — of the seasons.

So, I decide to try and talk to Sawachi.

This one time, at a drinking party ages ago...

“Large brown cicadas, right? Yeah, they’re cool. They’re good guys. They’re, like, *going* places.”

He said, as he drained the last of his watered-down booze. There was something about the way he phrased it that stuck with me — and made me take notice of him, too.

I gently slip the cicada into my sleeve and pull out my cell phone. I flip through my contacts, to find that Sawachi’s name is still listed there.

After a few rings, he picks up.

“...Hello...”

Steadying my nerves, I try to sound cool and composed.

“Hey, long time no see. I’m sorry for calling you up out of the blue, but—”

“...Wait, you must be... Huh, it really has been a while, hasn’t it?”

It didn’t take him long to figure out who I was.

“Okay, so, I’m just going to get straight to it. I found a cicada. In the middle of winter. That’s weird, right?”

“A...cicada? In this season? Seriously? ...You sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Oh, come on. Not you too, Sawachi.

“It’s totally not. It’s a cicada. A large brown cicada. That’s pretty unusual, yeah? Well, what do you think? I figured that you’d probably know something about it, so—”

The other end of the line lapses into a deep silence that has no discernable end. And it only starts to spread.

When he does eventually reply, it’s in a murmur.

“...There’s all kinds of strange things.”

“...Huh?”

“There’s so much weird stuff that happens in this world. Like, how you’re talking to me over the phone right now...”

“That’s not really an answer, though.”

I say, looking to hide my slight embarrassment.

“...An answer, huh? I mean, I’m not sure. Maybe things like this happen. But you know, strange things are kind of a relief. For us, and probably even the rest of the world—”

The cicada pokes his head out from beneath my sleeve.

I suppose it’s about time for me to set him free. It’s not like I can hold him forever, and I don’t want him to grow too weak. But, now that I’m thinking about it, would it be better to let him go indoors, where it’s warm, or outside in that light dusting of snow? I’m not too sure.

We make promises to meet up for another drinking party sometime, and I hang up.

I step out of the entrance hall, and head over to the persimmon tree in our garden.

The leaves have all fallen, leaving nothing but the bare bones of its charcoal colored branches.

I gently set the cicada on the deep grooves of the rugged trunk. He almost seems to be thinking of something, as he slowly and somewhat hesitantly makes his ascent.

When I glance up, the snow looks like it's drifting down from some limitless height. It starts to pick up, the cold crystals melting when they hit my face, running down in streaks.

Eventually, the cicada disappears, his figure vanishing into the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the tree branches.

I'm chilled through to the bone, but my hands — the ones that caught the cicada — are still hot, dotted with sweat like it was a warm summer's day. ...Huh. Even though that was a male cicada, he didn't make so much as a peep.

I head back inside to find my mom's umbrella and the bag of mandarins right where I left them. My dad, on the other hand, has vanished, leaving the living room television on.

I turn off the TV, then take the bag to the kitchen, setting the plastic sack full of fruit on the kitchen table, just like I always do.

My dad has long since gone to his rest, and Ms. Uehara would have passed away two years ago. And even Sawachi, he...

His number is sitting there, in my call history. But... I don't have the nerve to call him up a second time.

A deafening silence seems to bear down on the empty house, and I wonder if it's because the snow has piled up around it.

In that quiet stillness, I start to hear a ringing in my ears.

It almost sounds like the cries of a large brown cicada, on a far distant summer's day.

"The Winter Cicada" by Azuchi Moe

A cicada came flying even though it was the dead of winter.

It flew clumsily through the lightly falling snow, meandering aimlessly until it landed on my window screen all of a sudden.

I was overjoyed at the sight and let out a slight gasp. This couldn't be happening.

I love cicadas. I really do.

There's the adorable little Kaempfer cicadas that signal the coming of summer, the nostalgically elegant evening cicadas, and the spry, nimble, and droopy-eyed last-summer cicadas. I love them all, but the one I love the most has got to be the large brown cicada, with its ability to seemingly make a hot summer feel all the more hotter with its loud chirping. But right here and right now of all times?

I put on my angora turtleneck sweater and turned on the heater.

"So which one are you, little guy?" I slid open the glass door and put my face up to the window screen which had been left untouched since summer. The chilly draft brushed against my face like the icy cold touch of a ghost. I stared into its (probably) near-sighted eyes with my own near-sighted eyes for a moment. So it *was* a large brown cicada after all.

It was a male with a slender abdomen that looked like it had been dusted with white powder. It seemed as if it would burst into its signature loud chirping at any moment.

I slid the window screen open just a bit and gently reached out my right hand, eyes still fixated on it. Got it!

It squirmed within my hand, fighting to get out. I gently pressed down on the base of its buzzing wings, being careful not to hurt it. They felt like the motor of a miniature fan.

I couldn't contain my excitement!

I felt a sense of accomplishment, as if I had finally grabbed hold of something important.

"Hey, look! Don't you think it's weird? A cicada in the winter!" I blurted out to my dad who was watching TV in the living room.

"Aren't you a little too old to be excited about catching bugs?" He grumbled.

"Hey, I like what I want! Who are you to judge?" I raised my voice and snapped back.

Things had quickly escalated, but then the doorbell rang. As I was still fuming, he got up to answer the door. "Now that you mention it, didn't you used to like cicadas as a kid?" He recalled.

At the door was Ms. Uehara, a friend of my mom's. She stood there holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? Oh right, I brought these too," She said as she placed a bag of tangerines from a nearby supermarket at the doorway. "I was just in the area."

"Oh, sorry. My mom's—"

"I was thinking it's about time I returned her umbrella."

The cicada was about to wriggle its way out of my fingers, so I trapped it between both of my hands. It began to move around, its legs prickling my palms. The tingling itchiness was our little secret.

"Don't worry about it, you could have dropped by anytime. She's been in the hospital for a while."

"Oh, really? I'm sorry to hear that."

The cicada revved up its tiny motor and began to flutter its wings within my hands.

"By the way, Ms. Uehara, don't you think it's strange how there's still a cicada out here in the middle of winter?"

"A cicada? In this season? Well, I'm not too fond of bugs, though."

She glanced at my hands with unease and excused herself. "I'll be going, then. Tell your mother I said hi."

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada and how unusual it was to see one alive in the middle of a cold winter like this. Maybe it's like how flowers sometimes grow off-season. Or maybe it evolved to have a longer lifespan. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to see more insects still around given rising temperatures even in the winter. The change in climate might have even led to some sort of sudden mutation. Or maybe, just maybe, it managed to carry with itself a small piece of the hot summer and somehow wandered into here, the opposite side.

I decided to tell Sawachi about it.

A while back when we were out drinking one time, he told me, "Large brown cicadas? I like 'em. They're nice little guys. They're fearless." He finished his watered-down cocktail.

I liked the way he worded it back then and from then on kind of started to like him too.

I slipped the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and took out my phone. I went through my contacts list and saw that Sawachi's name was still there.

The call connected after ringing for a bit.

"...Hello?"

"Hey, it's been a while. Sorry for suddenly calling you out of nowhere."

"Oh, is that you? Yeah, it's been a while." It seems he recognized me instantly.

"Well, I'll get to the point. I saw a cicada. Right in the middle of winter. Isn't that weird?"

"What...? A cicada? Now? Huh? You sure it wasn't a roach?"

Oh, come on, Sawachi. Give me a break.

"No way, it was definitely a cicada. A large brown cicada. What's up with that? So what do you think? I thought you'd be an expert on this sort of thing."

The silence on the other end was agonizing and seemed like it was only going to stretch on.

"...Lots of things can't be explained."

"Huh?"

"There's a lot of things you can't explain out in this whole wide world. Like how you gave me a call just now."

"That doesn't answer my question." I somewhat tried to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer, huh? I don't think I got any. Or if there even are any in the first place. But I think it might be good that some things are unfathomable. For us, and probably for the rest of the world too."

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

It's about time I let it go. Keeping it for too long wouldn't be good for its health. But I really wasn't sure whether it belonged in the warm indoors or out in the snowy cold.

I invited Sawachi to go out drinking again sometime and ended the call.

I headed for the persimmon tree out in the garden. The leaves had already all fallen off, and the skeletal branches looked like they were clawing at the gray skies above.

I gently placed the cicada on the tree trunk covered in deeply grooved and fissured bark. It inched up the tree trunk, sometimes hesitantly as if it was absorbed in thought. I looked up at the sky and the snow seemed like it was falling from an endless expanse. The icy snowflakes kept falling on my face one after another, melting into endless streams that rolled down my cheeks.

Before I knew it, the cicada reached the top of the persimmon tree and disappeared into its rigid, maze-like silhouette.

I had been chilled to the bone, and yet, my two hands that held the cicada were still sweating as if it was a hot summer day. Hm. Strange how it never let out a single chirp even though it was a male.

When I got back to the doorway, my mom's umbrella and the bag of tangerines were still there. The TV was left on, but my dad wasn't there anymore.

I turned it off and placed the bag of tangerines on top of the kitchen table like I always did.

My dad had already been long gone, and even Ms. Uehara should have passed away two years ago. And Sawachi...

He's still listed on my call history, but I don't have the courage to try calling him again.

Maybe it was the snow piling up, but the empty house filled with a suffocating silence.

Overwhelmed by the stillness, my ears began to ring.

It sounded like the chirping of large brown cicadas from a summer day far, far away.

Winter's Large Brown Cicada

By Azuchi Moe

Although it was midwinter, the large brown cicada flew. In the flickering snow, it changed direction here and there with that clumsy way of flying, and suddenly I stopped at the screen door. Well, before I thought it was stupid, I was very happy. I like cicadas. I like them very very much. I like the cute little child-like Kempfer cicada, the droopy-eyed yet elegant *Tanna japonensis*, and the quick and cheerful *Meimuna opalifera*, but after all, the voice that pours even hotter than a hot summer. I like the brown cicada the most. But now, it's such a stupid thing. Even though it's so cold. Even though he is wearing an Angolan sweater and all cozy. "Hey, who are you?" I opened the glass door and brought my face closer to that same screen door from summer. The cold air squeezes like a snow faerie's skin. My nearsighted eyes and (probably) the nearsighted eyes of the cicada stare at each other for a while. After all it is a large brown cicada. A male large brown cicada with a tight belly that looks like it has been powdered white. It seems that it will start crying loudly at any moment. I opened the screen door a little, and while staring at the cicada, I stretched out my right hand slowly. I CAUGHT IT! The cicada flutters violently in my hand. The feather feels like an electric fan blade that runs on a small motor. The power of the base of the feather that is transmitted to my finger, which gently holds the feather so that it will not be damaged. I am ecstatic. It is fulfilling in my hands, as if I have caught some kind of purpose.

"Hey, weird. There was a cicada in the winter, you see." I instinctively called out to my father's back who was watching TV in the living room. And I regretted it. I wonder if I'm still holding it, I'm old enough. "I like what I like, so I'm not selfish!" I felt stuffy and upset. My dad and I were just like this, cold and distant.

At that time, the chime at the entrance rang. I turned my back and went out to the front door, as my dad remembered, "By the way, I used to be a cicada girl." My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara, stood with my mother's umbrella. "Hi, how are you doing? Here's this..." said Mrs. Uehara, raising the oranges in the bag of a nearby supermarket and dropping them on the stile. "I grabbed these for you because I'm a little closer."

"Oh, I'm sorry for the trouble!"

"I thought I had to return the umbrella soon too."

The cicada ran away from my fingers, so I used both hands like a basket. It got stuck. The cicada's legs flutter around, and the itching seems to be a secret pleasant feeling in the hands. "Oh, I'm glad I was always near ... My mother has been in the hospital for a long time."

"Well, that's right. It's hard."

The cicada activates a small motor, and the wings tickle in the hands. "Hey, Mrs. Uehara. There was a cicada even though it was winter. Isn't it strange?"

"Well, is that so? Really? But I'm not good at identifying insects." Mrs. Uehara looked at my basket-shaped hands with anxiety and said, "Well then, I just stopped by to say hello to your mother."

I returned inside. I wanted to tell someone about the cicadas. The wonder of living in such a cold season. If it is a flower, will it bloom out of season? Is evolution the cause of the vitality of cicadas? Even though it is winter, it is said that the number of insects that overwinter is increasing nowadays, which is said to be warmer than in the past. Did something like a mutation happen because of the unusual weather? Or does it mean that with some momentum, he took on the hot summer with his small body and lost himself in the season on the other side, this side?

I decided to talk to Sawachi. Sawachi said at a drinking party long ago, "Yeah, a brown cicada. He's a good guy. He's a pretty good guy. He has ambitions." I liked that way of saying it, so I also liked Sawachi a little. I gently inserted the cicada into the cuffs of the sweater and opened the mobile phone. When I looked up the address book, Sawachi's name was still there. A dial tone sounds and connects with Sawachi.

"... Yes ..." I calmed down and casually said, "It's been a long time. I'm sorry, I called you suddenly."

“Ah ... maybe you? Well, it has been a while.”

It seems that he immediately understood me. “Hey, it's quick, but there was a cicada. Even though it's winter. Hey, isn't it strange?”

“Eh ... cicada? Now? Cicada? Eh, it's not a cockroach?”

“No, Sawachi, stop. It's different. This cicada, a brown cicada. It's strange, isn't it? Hey, what do you think? If you're Sawachi, I think that's the details.” It seemed to go on. Sawachi said in a muttering voice.

“... There are a lot of mysterious things.”

“... Eh?”

“There are a lot of mysterious things in the world. You just called me ...”

“It's not the answer,” I said something with shyness.

“Answer ...? I don't know. I wonder if there is such a thing. But now, the mysterious thing is salvation. For us, and maybe for the world.”

The cicada came out of his cuffs. He did. It's time to let it go. If you keep it in the hands of people for too long, the cicadas will weaken. However, I'm not sure which is better for the cicadas, the basket-shaped room in your hands or the snow flickering outside. I hung up with Sawachi, promising to have another drinking party someday. When I left the entrance, I went to the persimmon tree in the garden. The persimmon tree has completely dropped its leaves, and its bony branches grab the gray sky. The cicada was gently rested on the trunk covered with groove-like streaks and wrinkles. The cicada began to slowly climb the trunk, sometimes hesitating, as if he was thinking about something.

Looking up, the snow seemed to fall from endless heights. Gradually, the cold crystals hit my face and melted, forming a streak. Eventually the cicada disappeared somewhere in the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the treetops of the persimmon tree. My body was completely cold, and yet my hands holding the cicadas were hot and sweaty like summer for some reason. By the way, although the cicada was a male, it didn't chirp at all ... I suddenly thought.

When I returned to the front door, I found my mother's umbrella and a bag of oranges. The TV in the living room is on, and my father is no longer there. I turned off the TV and took the bag of mandarins onto the kitchen table as usual. My father has passed away for a long time, and Mrs. Uehara must have died two years ago. And Sawachi ... The call history to Sawachi remained on the mobile phone. But I don't have the courage to try again ... Perhaps it's snowing, the empty house is filled with a squeezing silence. In the excessive stillness, I had a buzzing in my ears. It was like the chirping of a large brown cicada on a distant summer day.

A Brown Cicada in Winter
Azuchi Moe

It's the middle of Winter, but I spot a Brown Cicada.
Flying clumsily through a few flakes of falling snow, looking lost, changing direction back and forth, it suddenly lands on the screen door.
Before it occurs to me that this is odd, I feel a rush of joy.
I like cicadas. I really, really like them.
I like the Kaempfer Cicada, adorable like a small child. I like the Evening Cicada, so elegantly sad. I like the nimble and cheerful Walker's Cicada with its drooping eyes. But my favourite is the Brown Cicada with its call that pours hot oil on the fierce heat of Summer.
It shouldn't be around at this time of year.
It's so cold.
I'm wearing my angora turtleneck and the heating's on. It shouldn't be here.
"Hey, where have you come from?"
Opening the glass door, I bring my face close to the screen, which hasn't been touched since Summer. The cold air presses its way in like the skin of the snow woman in the folklore.
My myopic eyes and the (probably) myopic eyes of the cicada briefly meet.
It's definitely a Brown Cicada.
It's a male with its lean, tightly packed abdomen that looks as though it's coated in white powder. Even now, he looks like he's about to start making his noisy call...
I open the screen door a little, and, keeping eye contact with him, slowly reach with my right hand. Got him!
He flails in my hand. Wings like a fan working off a tiny motor. My fingers hold him gently so his wings won't get damaged. I sense fear behind the power moving those wings.
I am wildly pleased.
The satisfaction of grasping such energy in my hand.
"Look. It's so strange. A cicada in Winter."
Without thinking, I'd called out to my father, his back to me as he watches the television in the living room. I regretted it.
"Are you still catching cicadas, at your age?"
"I like what I like. Leave me alone."
My voice was rising with annoyance.
My father and I were always like this.
The doorbell rang.
As though remembering something my father said, "that's right, you used to get called cicada girl..."
Irritated, I turned my back on him and head to the door.
Mrs Uehara, my mother's friend, was standing with my mother's umbrella in her hand.
"How's you mum doing? Here..."
She lowered a supermarket bag of satsuma oranges onto the timber of the doorframe.
"I was just near your house."
"Thank you. My mother's..."
"I've been thinking I had to return the umbrella soon..."
The cicada was getting restive and almost escaped my fingers, so I trapped it with both hands. His feet moved in a pricking motion, and the tingling in my hand was a secret pleasure.
"You could have returned it any time.... My mother will be in hospital for a while."
"Oh, right. That must be hard on you."
The cicada's tiny motor started up, tickling my palms with its flapping wings.
"Mrs Uehara, I found a cicada even though it's Winter. Isn't that strange?"
"Oh, did you? Really? I'm, er, not good with insects..."

She looked uneasily at the cage I'd made with my hands, and said "well, I just called in. Say hi to your mum for me."

And left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. How incredible that it was alive despite the cold. Winters were warmer now than in the past, and more insects were managing to survive. Maybe the cicada had undergone a spontaneous mutation because of the abnormal climate. Or something had happened to its small body – carrying that hot summer inside, it had wandered, lost, into the wrong season.

I decided to call Sawachi.

At a drinking party a long time ago, Sawachi had said, "ah, the Brown Cicada. There's a good guy. A really good guy. Now that's an insect that's got ambition."

He'd said that as he drained a whiskey and water. I'd liked what he said, and it made me like Sawachi a little bit.

I moved the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater, and opened my mobile phone. Looking through the contacts, Sawachi's name was still there.

It dials, and he answers.

"...Hello...?"

I keep it casual, trying to keep my voice calm, "It's been a while. Sorry for the sudden phone call...."

"Oh... it's you, right? Yeah, it has been a while."

He seems to recognize my voice right away.

"So, anyway, I found a cicada. Even though it's Winter. Isn't that strange?"

"...A cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? Sure it's not a roach?"

"No, it's not a cockroach. It's a cicada. A Brown Cicada. Isn't it strange? What do you think? I thought you might know something about it..."

There is an uncomfortable, long, deep silence at his end. It seems to spread, slowly.

Sawachi speaks, almost muttering.

"...There are lots of strange things."

"...What?"

"There're lots of strange things in this world. That you called me, just now, that too...."

I want to hide my embarrassment, and said "that's not an answer."

"...I don't have an answer. I wonder if there is one. But, strange things save us. They save us, and, probably, they save the world..."

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve.

I need to release him soon. It's said that cicadas weaken if held by human hands for too long. Having said that, I don't know what's best for him: release into the warm indoors, or out into the snowflakes coming down?

I promised Sawachi I'd see him at another drinking party, and hung up.

Stepping out of the front door, I headed to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree had lost all its leaves a while ago, left behind were its bony branches grasping at the grey sky.

Gently, I put the cicada onto the veined and cracked bark of the tree trunk. The cicada seemed to be thinking, gradually starting to climb indecisively.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. It was getting heavier, the cold flakes landing on my face and melting into small rivulets.

At some point, the cicada disappeared into the stiff maze of the silhouetted treetop.

My body was chilled through, but my hands, where I'd trapped him stayed hot, sweating like it was Summer. And even though it was a male, it hadn't made a sound...?

Back at the front door, there was my mother's umbrella and the bag of satsumas. The living room television was left on, with my father nowhere to be seen.

I switched off the television, and put the bag of fruit on the kitchen table, as usual.

It's been many years since my father passed, and it must be two years ago that Mrs Uehara died. And Sawachi...

My mobile phone screen displayed the call I'd made to him. But.... I don't have the nerve to dial that number again.

Maybe it was the deepening snow, but it felt as though the empty house was filling with a crushing stillness.

In the silence, my ears started to ring.

Like the call of a Brown Cicada from a Summer's day a long, long time ago.

Winter visit by a brown cicada

Azuchi Moe

It is midwinter and I am surprised to see a brown cicada flying towards me. In a landscape flecked with snow, the bumbling flight of the insect takes it hither and thither as if it had lost its bearings to finally land on the fly screen on the glass door in front of me. This can't be true, and I am unable to suppress my joy. I like cicadas. I like them very, very much. I love them all. The kaempher cicada that announces the oncoming summer in cute infant-like cries, the evening cicada with its elegant, melancholic cry, the quick and cheerful shikushikuboushi with its drooping eyes, but my absolute favorite is the brown cicada with a voice that pours hot oil to make a hot summer feel even more stifling. But this cannot be possible. In this cold, I am in my angora wool sweater and the heater is on. "Hello, who on earth are you?"

I open the glass door and press my face to the fly screen that has been left in the same position since last summer. Cold air braces my face like it had touched the fair skin of yuki-onna, the snow woman of ancient Japanese legends.

My nearsighted eyes look at the cicada, which look back at me with (probably) equally nearsighted eyes. It is a brown cicada, all right. Its tight stomach speckled with white tells me it is a male brown cicada. It looks as if it is about to burst into loud song any instant....

I nudge open the fly screen and while gazing at the cicada I inch my right hand towards it. Got you! The cicada is in my hand. The wings move like a tiny electric fan powered by a small motor. To avoid damaging its wings, I gently wrap my fingers around them and I can feel the strength of their wing joints in the steady throbbing of the wings against my fingers. I am overjoyed. In my hand I feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

In spite of myself, I address my father who is watching TV in the living room and is seated with his back towards me. I immediately regret it.

"What? You are still catching cicadas at your age..."

"I like them that's why. What's wrong with that?"

I blurt out with barely concealed anger.

This is how dad and I get along.

Then the doorbell rings.

"Now I remember, you used to be known as the cicada girl"

father says. Still angry, I turn my back to dad and go to answer the door. It is Ms. Uehara, a friend of mum's who has come to return an umbrella.

"How's your mother? And thanks for this..."

Says Ms. Uehara while lowering a bag of tangerine oranges from a local supermarket onto the agarigamachi, the step up from the entrance that leads into the house.

"I just happened to be nearby"

"Ah, thanks for taking the trouble. Mum ..."

"I had intended to return the umbrella earlier..."

The cicada is now struggling hard to free itself from my fingers, so I have to use both hands to form a cage around it.

The cicada is moving around inside my hands and the pain and itch of its legs against my skin seem like the joy of a secret concealed.

"Oh, there was really no need to hurry... Mum is in for a long hospital stay"

"Really, I'm sorry to hear that"

The cicada's small motor has started and its wings are flapping against my hands.

"Ms. Uehara. It's winter and cold, but I found a cicada. Isn't that strange?"

"Really? Sorry, but I'm not overly fond of insects"

Ms. Uehara looks at my clasped hands with trepidation and says "Bye then, I was just dropping by. And, please give my regards to your mother," hastily beating a retreat.

I really wanted to talk to someone about this cicada. How strange it was for it to have come here on such a cold winter's day.

Flowers can bloom out of season. Maybe evolution has made cicadas stronger? Anyway, winters are no longer as cold as they used to be and more insects are said to be able to live through them. Or, maybe extreme weather conditions or mutations are to blame. Or, perhaps, by some strange chance of circumstance the burden of summer heat had caused this little insect to blunder into this season, the opposite season.

I decide to give Sawachi a call.

At a not so recent party Sawachi had said,

“Yes, brown cicadas. They are really great. They are truly great. They have spirit.”

while downing his whiskey and water. I liked the way he had said that and had taken a liking to him.

Opening my mobile phone, I gently insert the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater. Looking through the address book I find I still have his number.

I hear the dial tone and I am connected to Sawachi.

“... Yes...” Trying to keep calm, I say unobtrusively,

“It’s been a while. Sorry, for calling you up out of the blue...”

“Ah... Oh, is it you? Well, it has been quite some time.”

He quickly recognized my voice.

“I wanted to tell you I found a cicada. In winter and all. Isn’t that strange?”

“What... A cicada? At this time? A cicada? Are you sure it wasn’t a cockroach?”

No, Sawachi, stop.

“Of course not, It was a cicada, a brown cicada. Strange isn’t it? What do you think? I thought Sawachi, you would know about such things...”

A long, deep seemingly irretrievable silence follows at the other end and then seems to expand.

Sawachi says in a mumbling voice.

“... There are plenty of strange things”

“... What?”

“The world is full of strange things. Like you calling me at this time...”

“You aren’t answering my question”

It was like he was trying to say something to hide his embarrassment.

“An answer... ?. That’s not something I would understand. Do such things happen? But, strange things can be a boon. To us and probably also to the world.”

The cicada peers out from under the sleeve.

I will have to let it go soon. A cicada that is kept in captivity too long will become weak. But what would be best for this cicada? Should I keep it inside the warmth of the house or set it free outside in the snow-flecked landscape. I had no idea.

Before hanging up, I and Sawachi agree to meet sometime for a drink. Going outside I head for the persimmon tree.

The persimmon tree had shed all its leaves and stands out against the sky with its gray bony branches clutching at the sky.

I gently place the cicada on its cracked and furrowed trunk. The cicada start climbing up the tree occasionally hesitating as if lost in thought, but progressing slowly upwards. Looking up the snow seems to fall from somewhere unfathomably high up. The snowing gradually increases in intensity and the snowflakes that fall on my face melt and trickle down in tiny rivulets.

Before I know it, the cicada has disappeared somewhere into the stiff, maze-like silhouette at the top of the persimmon tree.

Although I had become thoroughly cold by this time, for some reason, both hands that had held the cicada are hot and moist with sweat as in summer, a sensation that shows no sign of abating. And coming to think of it, the cicada I caught was a male cicada, but it did not burst into song.

When I return to the entrance, mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerine oranges are still there. The TV in the living room is still on but father is nowhere in sight.

I turn off the TV and place the bag of tangerine oranges on the kitchen table, where we usually

place such things.

Father passed away long ago and Ms. Uehara is supposed to have died two years ago. And Sawachi...

Sawachi's number is still in Placed calls on my mobile phone. But I do not have the courage to redial...

Was it the slow accumulation of snow outside that started to make the stillness of the uninhabited house feel oppressive?

The stillness caused ringing in my ears.

This ringing sounded just like the singing of a brown cicada on a summer day long since passed.

The Winter Cicada
by Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the dead of winter, a cicada winged its way in.

It was a common large brown. Amidst the lightly falling snow, its seemingly disoriented, haphazard method of flight took it here and there, to and fro, before, at last, it came to an abrupt stop on the screen door. Before the thought: “What? That’s impossible.” crossed my mind, joy overcame me. I love cicadas. I love, love, *love* them. Heralding the advent of summer, the adorably infantile kaempfer cicada, the almost sorrowfully elegant evening cicada, and the nimble Walker’s cicada with its jovial drooping eyes — I love them all. But, in the end, the one I love the most is the large brown cicada, with its cry like a wash of searing oil, hotter than a blazing summer.

Even so, for it to be here, now? Impossible. It’s freezing. I’m wearing an Angora wool turtleneck sweater with the indoor heating on. And yet.

“Hey, you. What’s your deal?” I said.

I opened the sliding glass door and brought my face close to the screen door, untouched since summer. A wave of cold air comes closing in, brushing past like the icy skin of a ghost. For a brief moment, my shortsighted eyes lock with the cicada’s—probably—shortsighted eyes. I knew it, a large brown. A male large brown, its shapely abdomen chalked with white. It looks like it could let loose a great cry at any moment. I crack open the screen door, keeping gaze with the cicada, and slowly reach out my right hand. Got you!

The cicada, thrashing about in my hand. Its wings, like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. The strength of its wing joints, conveyed to me through twitches under my finger, pinning it gently so as to avoid damaging those wings. I could go mad with joy. Within my hand, completion, as if I’d grasped hold of some unknown purpose.

“Hey, isn’t it weird? There was a cicada, even though it’s winter, look,” I said. Unthinkingly, I called out to my father watching television in the living room. And regretted it.

“You’re still going around catching things like cicadas? Grow up and act your age.” he said.

“I like what I like, no matter what anyone else says!” I said peevishly, my tone roughening. My father and I were quick to get like this. At that moment, the doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it, I called you Cicada Girl back then, didn’t I.” he said as if to recall, even as I turned my back to him, leaving for the entryway in a huff. Standing there, holding my mother’s umbrella, was her friend Ms. Uehara.

“How’s your mother’s condition? Here, these...” she said, setting down a bag from a nearby supermarket, filled with mandarins, onto the entryway step. “Since I was in the neighbourhood.”

“Oh, thank you very much. My mother’s—”

“I just thought I’d better hurry and return her umbrella, you know.”

Since the cicada had begun to escape from my finger with its struggling, I cupped my hands around it, trapping it in. Its legs prickle as it moves around, the itching like a secret pleasure in my hands.

“Ah, any time would’ve been okay though... my mother’s been hospitalised for the long term.”

“Oh dear, is that so? That must be rough.”

The cicada starts up its tiny motor, the fluttering of its wings tickling the insides of my hands.

“Hey, Ms. Uehara. It’s winter, but there was a cicada. Weird, right?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? But I’m no good with bugs, so...” she said, eyeing my enclosed hands uneasily, “well, since I was just dropping by. Give your mother my regards, alright?”

Saying that, she left.

I’d wanted to tell someone about the cicada. Of the marvel of it being alive in this cold a season. If it were a flower, would this be an out-of-season blooming? The evolution of a cicada’s vitality? It may be winter, but they say that recent times have become warmer than they used to be, meaning the number of hibernating insects is increasing. Perhaps a mutation or some such, brought about by the abnormal climate? Or perhaps by means of some unknown impetus, bearing the blazing summer alone within that tiny body, it came, lost, to this other side; this other season?

I decided to try telling Sawachi.

A long time ago at a drinking party, Sawachi had said while polishing off a whiskey-and-water: “Hmm, the large brown. Now there’s a good one. Real good. That one’s got ambitions.”

I’d taken a liking to that manner of speech, so I came to take somewhat of a liking to Sawachi too. Gently placing the cicada in the cuff of my sweater sleeve, I flipped open my cell phone. A search through my contact list revealed that his name was still there. The dial tone rang, and I was connected through to Sawachi.

“...Hello?” he said.

“It’s been a while. Sorry for the sudden call,” I said nonchalantly, composing myself.

“Oh! ...Is that *you*? Wow, it really has been a while.”

It seems he recognised that it was me right away.

“Well, I know this is sudden, but there was a cicada here. Even though it’s winter. Weird, right?” I said.

“What? ...Cicada? At this time of year? *Cicada*? Wow, you’re sure it’s not a roach?” he said.

Ew, gross, quit it, Sawachi.

“*Definitely* not. It’s a cicada, a large brown. Mysterious, right? Hey, what do you think? I thought you’d have a better idea about this kind of thing,” I said.

A period of irrecoverable, profound silence came from the other side of the line, and it seemed like it would only extend further. Then, Sawachi spoke in a mutter: “...There’s a lot that’s mysterious here.”

“...What?” I said.

“The world’s full of mysterious things. Like right now, you calling me...” he said.

“That doesn’t answer my question you know,” I said, trying to give a reply that could hide my embarrassment.

“Answer, huh...? I don’t really know. Is there one? But you know, mysterious things are a source of salvation. As far as we’re concerned and, maybe, as far as the world is concerned—”

The cicada stuck its head out from the cuff of my sleeve.

I should let it go soon. If kept in human hands for too long, cicadas will end up weakening. That being said, I wasn’t sure whether it would be better for the cicada to be released in the warm indoors, or outside in the lightly falling snow.

Making a promise with Sawachi to have another drinking party some time, I hung up the call. Leaving the entryway, I went over to the persimmon tree in the yard. Having shed the entirety of its leaves, its bony branches clutched a tight hold on the ashen sky. I set the cicada on its trunk covered in gutter-like veins and fissures. As if preoccupied with some thought or other, it began an occasionally hesitant, leisurely ascent up the trunk. Lifting my gaze, the snow seemed as if it were falling from boundless heights. Gradually intensifying, the frigid crystals landing on my face melt, flowing into a multitude of streaks. Before I realised, the cicada had vanished somewhere into the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the top of the persimmon tree. My body was chilled to the core, and yet, for some reason, the pair of hands that had held the cicada remained indefinitely hot, sweating as if it were summer. The thought suddenly came to me that even though it was a male cicada, it didn’t let loose a single cry.

I returned to the entryway, where my mother’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins had been left. The living room television had been left on, and my father’s presence was already gone. I switched off the television and carried the bag of mandarins habitually to the kitchen tabletop.

My father’s death had already long passed, and Ms. Uehara ought to have passed away two years prior. And Sawachi, too...

His call remained in my cell phone’s call history. But, I didn’t possess the courage to call again...

Was it the accumulating snow? The inside of the empty house filled with a suffocating stillness. Due to the sheer silence, a ringing began in my ears. The sound was as if it were, belonging to a far, far summer’s day, the cry of a large brown cicada.

A Winter Cicada
Moe Azuchi

Despite it being the middle of winter, a large brown cicada came flying past.

It stopped suddenly on the screen door, after turning here and there, flying clumsily as if lost in the snow.

I felt very happy, before thinking how ridiculous.

I like cicadas. Very very much.

I like the cute little infant-like *Platypleura kaempferi* which announces the arrival of summer, the melancholically elegant *evening cicada*, and the nimble and cheerful *Meimuna opalifera* with its drooping eyes, but I like the large brown cicada the best after all, which make its loud buzzing noise as if pouring even more hot oil into the hot summer.

Nevertheless, I feel now "it's ridiculous".

Because it's so cold.

I am wearing an Angora jumper and a heater has turned on---

"Hey, who are you?"

I opened the glass door, and put my face close by the screen door which has been laid aside since summer. I feel the cold air approaching, like the skin of a snow woman.

My near-sighted eyes and the cicada's (perhaps) short-sighted eyes stare at each other for a while.

Just as I thought, it's a large brown cicada.

The male cicada with a tight stomach that looks like white powdered. It's as if it's about to start crying out loud---

I opened the screen door a little, stretching out my right hand slightly as we stare at each other.

Caught it!

The cicada is raging in my hand. Which has a fan-like blade moving with its small motor. The force of the base of its blade is transmitted to my finger, gently holding it so as not to hurt it.

I am delighted.

I fell fulfilled as if I grasp the purpose of this thing in my hand.

"Hey, it's weird. There was a cicada even though it's winter, see."

Instinctively, I called out to my father behind me, who was watching TV. I regretted it straight away.

"Are you still catching cicadas? You're a grown-up now---."

"I like what I like. It's up to me to decide."

I took offence at his words and deliberately raised my voice.

My father and I become like this easily.

Then, the doorbell rang.

I turned irritably back and went out to the entrance as father said,

"Ah, you used to be called a cicada-girl",

as if he remembered.

My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara was standing there with my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? This is..."

Mrs. Uehara put the supermarket bag with mandarin oranges in it on the step in the porch of the house and said,

"I just stopped by as I was passing through."

"Oh, thank you. My mother is---"

"I've been meaning to give the umbrella back soon, but---."

The cicada was rampaging and as it tried to escape from my fingers, I trapped it by gently closed my hands in the shape of a cage. The cicada's leg moves around tickling the inside of my hand, like a secret pleasure.

"Oh, don't worry, no rush anyway... my mother has been hospitalised for a long time."

Oh, is that so? It's a tough time."

The cicada activates its small motor, and the blade tickles inside my hands.

"Hey, Mrs. Uehara. I found a cicada even though it's winter. Strange, right?"

"Oh, ya? Really? But I don't like insects---."

Mrs. Uehara looked anxiously at my clasped cage-like hand,

"Well, I was just stopping by. Please say hello to your mother."

She said and turned to go back home

I've wanted to tell someone about the cicada. About the wonder of living in such a cold season--
-. If it was a flower, would it be called a crazy bloom? Is it the evolution of the of the cicada's life force?
Despite it being winter, which is warmer than it used to be, it is said that the number of wintering insects
has been increasing. I wonder if the abnormal climate caused mutations or something? Or did something
happen to its small body for some reason---, from the hot summer, wandering into this opposite world
on the other side of the seasons?

I decided to talk to Sawachi-kun.

Sawachi-kun was saying long time ago, at a drinking party that "Yeah, a large brown cicada. It's
a good guy. It's a pretty nice guy. It has ambitions", while drinking up whisky with water. I liked the
way he said it, so I also liked Sawachi-kun a little.

I gently put the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and opened my cell phone. When I searched the
address list, Sawachi-kun's number was still there.

The dial tone sounded and connected with Sawachi-kun.

"...yes..."

As I calmed down, I said casually,

"It's been a long time. Sorry for calling you out of the blue---."

"Ah... maybe it's you? Wow, it's been a while."

Sounded like he has recognised at once it was me.

"Well, I know this is sudden, but I found a cicada. Even though it's winter. Hey, that's weird, isn't
it? "

"Eh... cicada? now? Cicada? Really, it's not a cockroach?"

Come on, Sawachi-kun, stop it.

"Yes, it is. It's a cicada, a large brown cicada. It's strange, isn't it? Hey, how does that sound?? I
thought you are familiar with that kind of thing---."

It seems irretrievable moment of deep silence flowed on the other end of the cell phone, and it
seemed to spread.

Sawachi-kun said in a muttering voice.

"...There are a lot of strange things."

"... eh? "

"I said there are so many strange things in this world. For example, you've just called me..."

"It's not the answer."

I started speaking to cover up my embarrassment.

"The answer... I don't know the answer. I wonder if there is an answer. But now, I think this
strange thing is our salvation. For us, and perhaps also for the world ---."

The cicada stuck its face out of my cuff.

It's time to let it go. If you keep it in human hands for too long, a cicada will become weak. And
yet, I'm not sure which is better for the cicada – inside the warm room or outside in the flickering snow.

I hung up with Sawachi-kun, promising to have another drinking party someday.

I left the porch, and headed to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree has completely shed its leaves, and its scraggy branches are clutching the
grey sky.

I place the cicada gently on the tree-trunk, covered with groove-like bands and crack. The cicada
began to climb the trunk slowly and hesitantly, as if it had something to think about.

Looking up, it looked like the snow was falling from an endless height. The snow falls more
heavily, snowflakes hitting my face repeatedly and melting, flowing like rivulets.

Before I knew it, the cicada disappeared somewhere in the gnarly, maze-like shadow of the persimmon treetop.

My body was completely frozen to my bones, yet, for some reason, the two hands that caught the cicada were hot and sweating like summer. I just realised... that even though the cicada was male, it didn't sing at all.

As I returned to the porch, there were my mother's umbrella and the mandarin orange shopping bag. The TV was still on, but my father was no longer there.

I switched off the TV and took the bag to the kitchen table as usual.

My father had passed away some time back, and Mrs. Uehara was supposed to have passed away two years ago. And Sawachi-kun as well....

The call history to Sawachi-kun on my cell phone was still there. But I didn't have the courage to call it again...

It seems that the snow is piling up, and the inside of the empty house is filled with tranquil silence.

Breaking the deathly silence, I started to hear a buzzing in my ears.

It was like the buzzing of the cicada from a very far distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada

Although it was mid-winter, the cicada came flying in.

It wandered aimlessly in the glimmer of snow and stopped suddenly at the mosquito screen on our window.

I felt a great joy even before a thought crossed my mind. *What a foolish cicada!*

I love cicadas. I really really love them!

They announce the arrival of summer. Whether it was the small child like Kaemfer Cicada, or the melancholic yet elegant Tanna Japonesis Cicada or the wonderful and lively droopy eyed Meimuna Opalifera Cicada, I liked all of them. Nonetheless, my favourite cicada was the one that sounded like hot oil being poured on a plate on a warm summer day, the *Aburasemi*, the 'abura' meaning oil.

But, even so, at this moment, such an absurd cicada had appeared.

After all it was that kind of winter. A winter where I was wearing an Angolan sweater and the indoor heating was switched on.

"Hey, you? What kind of thing are you?"

I brought my face closer to the screen after opening the glass window. The cold wind approached me like the touch of a snow demon.

My narrowed eyes stared at the narrowed eyes of the cicada for a short while.

As I thought, it was a large brown cicada, the *aburasemi*.

The cicada was male, having white powder like marking around its squeaking belly. At that moment its body seemed to vibrate as if about to make a loud buzz.

I opened the mosquito screen slightly and while keeping a watch on the cicada, slowly raised my right hand.

I caught it!

The cicada struggled inside my hand, its wings buzzing like the blades of a small electric fan. Those wings had the ability to convey its anxiety even when I held it tenderly.

I felt ecstatic.

It felt like grasping onto an opportunity within the palm of my hand.

"Say, isn't it kind of weird to see a cicada in the winter? Won't you have a look?"

Without thinking, I spoke towards the living room. The television was turned on and the silhouette of my father was visible. I felt regretful.

"Are you still catching cicadas? You've already grown up."

"I like the things that I like. This is not childishness!"

I replied in a loud and sullen voice.

Lately, my father and I had been stuck in such kind of mood.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

I huffed angrily towards the door, while my father voice said in a nostalgic tone, "Speaking of them, we also had baby cicadas in the past".

At the entrance, Mr. Uehara, my mother's close friend had come to return her umbrella.

"How is your mother doing? This...", Mr Uehara said while putting down a bag full of Japanese oranges near the entrance area. They were from the nearby departmental store.

"I was in the area."

"Ah, thanks a lot Mr Uehara. Mom is..."

"The umbrella - I felt I should return it as soon as possible."

The cicada was starting to flee from my grasp, so I made a turtle like shape with my hands and cupped it inside them. Its legs flailed around in my hand, creating a stinging yet itchy feeling that was also a secret pleasure.

"Oh! Thank you for always caring about us....Mom has been hospitalised for quite some time."

"Hmm, is that so? That is a terrible situation."

The cicada started its small motor, propelling its wings to buzz around within my hands, tickling

me.

"Mr. Uehara, a cicada appeared in our house even though it is winter now. That's strange, right?"

"What? Is that so? Really? But you know I am not good with insects, so...", Mr. Uehara said while glancing uneasily at the bag of oranges.

"Anyway I was in the area. Give my regards to your mother", he said while leaving.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. To discuss this living mystery that had arrived in this kind of cold winter....If I had to compare the situation with flowers, it was as if the flowers had bloomed out of season. This might probably be due to the vitality of the evolution of the cicadas. Although it was being said that winter had become warmer than past years, it was also being said that the number of insects that were hibernating was increasing.

The sudden variations had probably occurred because of abnormal weather.

Or maybe this small cicada, had due to some impulse, given up on its own interests of a warm summer day and lost its way towards this cold weather instead.

I tried calling Sawachi.

Sawachi had always said to me, while opening alcohol bottles at drinking parties, "Oh yeah! Cicadas! You are a good person. Really really good person. A person with aspirations." I liked this kind of talking, so I also slightly liked Sawachi.

I placed the cicada softly in the sleeves of my sweater and picked up the receiver. Sawachi's name was there when I searched the phonebook.

The ringtone connected me to Sawachi.

"Hello?"

"Hey, I know it's been a long time. I am sorry for calling so suddenly."

"Oh, is that... perhaps....? It sure has been a while."

It seemed like he had quickly recognised me.

"You see, it is quite sudden but I saw a cicada. And in winter! Isn't that odd?"

"Umm... Cicadas? At this time of the year? Cicadas? Are you sure it is not a cockroach?"

"Not a chance! Sawachi, don't take this lightly."

"Cockroaches are icky. It is a cicada! An *aburasemi*! Isn't that mysterious? What do you think? I thought only you would be well informed about this."

While I was holding the receiver a deep silence that could not be undone seemed to flow and spread in the room.

Sawachi spoke in a soft whisper, "There are a lot of mysterious things in this world."

"What?..."

"If it is about mysterious things, there are a lot of things that are not usual in this world. You talking to me is also a mysterious event."

"That's not an answer."

I tried to say something that would not sound embarrassing.

"Answers? I don't know about such things. Is there such a thing? But you see, mysterious events are a sign of providence. For us and probably more so for the world."

The cicada peeked from inside of my sweater sleeves.

Eventually I must release the cicada. It couldn't always remain inside the sleeves of a sweater. After all, cicadas are weak creatures. Nevertheless, I was not sure whether the warmth of the house or the glimmer of snow outside, would be a better option for the cicada.

We ended the call with a promise to meet and drink sometime soon.

I went out of the entrance and moved towards the Cedar Tree.

The leaves of the Cedar tree had all fallen, its thin bony branches grabbing hold of the grey sky.

I released the cicada softly on the crisscross patterned trunk, the groves and sinews looking like the drainage lines of the city. The cicada began to leisurely climb the tree trunk, hesitating and stopping sometimes, as if lost in some thought.

I looked up at the sky. It seemed like the snow crystals were falling from a unfathomable height.

Those intense crystals fell, melted and trickled down my face.

Not long after, the traces of the cicada had disappeared within the topmost branches, just like being lost in a maze.

My body became chilled to the bones. But despite that my hands, which had moments ago held the cicada, for some reason became warm and sweaty as though it was summer. That said, it suddenly occurred to me that despite the cicada being male, it had not emitted its distinctive cry.

I returned to the entrance area. The umbrella and the bag containing oranges were still lying there. Inside the living room, the sound of TV could still be heard but my father's silhouette was no longer there.

I switched off the television and kept the bag on the kitchen counter as usual...

It had been a long time since my father passed away. Mr Uehara too had passed away 2 years ago. And probably Sawachi too...

There could be Sawachi's name in the call records of the phone but I did not have the courage to try and look even once.

Has the snow piled up? In my empty house, a deafening silence spread.

The leftover silence began to buzz in my ears.

It sounded like the cry of a cicada on a faraway summer day.

Winter Cicada
by Azuchi Moe

There it was. A brown cicada in the dead of winter, just flying around like it was nothing. It bumbled its way through the flecks of floating snow, changed direction, and suddenly smack landed on the screen door. More than anything, I was overjoyed—completely bypassing the absurdity of a cicada in winter. I'm a fan of cicadas. A pretty big fan of them, actually.

They announced the arrival of summer, and I love them all. The cute little kaempfer cicada, the sad and elegant evening cicada, the cheerful yet droopy-eyed Walker's cicada, I loved them all. Without a doubt, though, my favorite had to be the brown cicada with its buzz that sounded like brown oil in a bubbling fryer. Regardless, this situation was pretty absurd. What was it doing here in this frigid weather?

I was curled up in my angora sweater with the heater running, and yet...

"Come on now, what are you doing here?"

I opened the glass window and stuck my face right up to the screen door like summer never left. The chill that greeted me felt like a mythical snow woman was encroaching. My eyes met with its (most likely) nearsighted eyes for a brief moment.

No doubt about it. This was a brown cicada. A damp male brown cicada with a white powder dusted looking stomach.

Without drawing my gaze away from the cicada, I cracked the screen door open and extended my right hand out.

Caught it!

The brown cicada was now in hand. His wings revved like a fan running on a tiny motor. Careful not to injure him, I placed my finger where his wings joined together. Each small movement conveyed his fears.

I was beside myself with joy.

It was like I had taken hold of a purpose.

"Hey, you'll flip when you hear this. I found a cicada in the middle of winter. Look."

I absentmindedly called out to my father watching TV in the living room and instantly regretted it.

"You're still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like them, okay? What's so wrong about that?!"

Something about it rubbed me the wrong way and I ended up raising my voice. Conversations with my father quickly devolved into this. That's when the doorbell rang, and I stormed off.

"Thinking about it, they used to call you cicada girl, didn't they?" His words were reminiscent,

but my back was already facing him as I walked to the front door.

It was one of my mother's friends, Ms. Uehara, and she was holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother? Here, these are for you..." Ms. Uehara held up a grocery store bag filled with clementines before letting the bag drooped to her side.

"You didn't have to, but thank you. My mother is—"

"I just felt I needed to return her umbrella as soon as possible."

The cicada started to get stir crazy under my finger, so I cupped both my hands like a basket and enclosed him. His legs pricked my hands as he moved around, but that pain felt like my little secret.

"There was no hurry, really. My mother checked in for long-term hospital care."

"Oh my. Is that so? I'm so sorry."

The cicada moved like a small motor with his fluttering wings tickling the inside of my hand.

"Want to hear the strangest thing, Ms. Uehara. I found a cicada even though we're in the middle of winter."

"Really? That is quite strange. I'm not too fond of bugs, however." She looked at my cupped hands with anxiety written all over her face. "Well, I was just stopping by. Please tell your mother I said hi." With that, she left.

Wasn't there anyone who wanted to talk about cicadas as much as I did? About how strange it was that a cicada was alive and well in the middle of this freezing season. It's like a flower growing out of season. Had this cicada's longevity evolved or something? I had heard that there are a lot more bugs that are hibernating now than in the past when it was colder. Maybe there's an abrupt mutation because of the weather getting warmer. Or maybe it got lost while carrying the warmth of summer and ended up *here* in the complete opposite season.

I made up my mind to call my friend Sawaji. Awhile back when we were out drinking, he said, "Brown cicadas, yeah, those guys are great. The greatest. They're ambitious, you know?" while draining watered down alcohol. I was fond of the way he put it and, because of that, I was fond of Sawaji.

I carefully put the cicada in my sweater sleeve and opened my cellphone. After searching through my contacts, it looked like I still had his number.

The phone rang before connecting with Sawaji.

"Hello?"

I calmed myself and started off nonchalantly. "It's been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue like this."

"Wait, you're... *Wow, yeah, it has been a while.*" He realized it was me right off the bat.

"Jumping right to it, you won't believe what happened. I found a cicada in the middle of winter. Crazy, right?"

"A cicada in this season? You're sure it's not a cockroach."

Sawaji, please. Don't do this to me. "I'm telling you, it's not a cockroach. It's a cicada. A brown cicada. Strange, right? What do you think? You seemed like someone who would know about this." It felt like the other side of the line was a deep abyss with its edges bleeding out.

Sawaji's voiced turned to a mumble. *"There's lots of strange things out there."*

"Huh?"

"The world's full of strange things. You calling me now, for instance."

"That doesn't answer my question..." Hopefully, that answer sounded like it hid any confusion.

"An answer, huh? Don't know if I have one. I mean, there are things I don't know. But, hey, strange things can save you, us, and probably the world."

The cicada poked his head out from my sleeve. It was probably about time I let it go. If cicadas stay cooped up in human hands, they'll grow weak. That said, I wasn't sure what was better for the cicada—staying inside of this warm room or being released in the snow flurry outside.

Sawaji and I promised we would drink together again someday and ended the phone call.

I headed out the front door and toward the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree was completely devoid of any leaves. Its spindly branches were left to hold up the grey sky. Gently I placed the cicada on the peak of one of the tree trunk's many deep ridges. His tepid climb up the trunk made it seem like he was cautiously working through his thoughts. Looking up, it seemed like the snow was falling from an unreachable height. In time, the frozen flakes landed on my face and melted down.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared from the persimmon tree. It's as if he steeled himself and disappeared into the maze.

Regardless of how cold the rest of my body felt, my hands that held the cicada was still sweating like summer never left. *For a male cicada, he was awfully quiet*, I thought.

When I came inside, my mother's umbrella and the bag of clementines were right where I left them in the entryway. The TV in the living room was left blaring, and there was no sign of my father. I turned off the TV and placed the bag of clementines on the table in the kitchen like always.

My father was no longer in this world, and I'm certain Ms. Uehara passed away two years ago. I guess that meant Sawaji was also... Our conversation was still in my call history, but I couldn't find the courage to try redialing.

The snow piled up and the hush of a house devoid of anyone else filled its walls. In that silence I heard a buzzing in my ear—the buzzing of brown cicada on a summer day far, far away from here.

The Winter Cicada

Azuchi Moe

Midwinter. And yet, a large brown cicada came flying.

Amid the lightly falling snow it flew, clumsily as if lost, changing direction this way and that until finally, suddenly, it landed on the screen door.

Oh, no way! I thought. But before the thought had even crossed my mind, that impossible insect had made me very happy.

I love cicadas. Very, very much. I love the cute childlike Kaempfer cicadas that sing of the coming of summer. I love evening cicadas, as elegant as they are sad. I love the cheerful cicadas that sing the summer's end, nimble and droopy-eyed. But large brown cicadas, whose voices seem only to add fuel to the heat of summer's fire, I love most of all.

And yet, at that moment, I wondered how it could be. It was so cold! It was so cold I had the heating *and* my angora sweater on.

"Hullo there, what are you then?" I asked the cicada.

I opened the glass door and drew my face towards the screen door, left up since last summer. The cold air crept ever nearer like Jack Frost's greedy fingers.

My short-sighted eyes stared at the cicada's, and the cicada's (probably) short-sighted eyes stared back at mine. It really was a large brown cicada! A male, its belly covered in white specks, like a coating of fine white powder. It looked like it might burst into its loudest song at any moment.

I slid the screen door open a little and, keeping my eyes locked on the cicada's, slowly stretched out my right hand. And caught it! One squirming cicada, inside my hand. Its wings beat as if powered by a tiny motor, the kind you might find in an electric fan. My fingers held the cicada gently so as not to hurt its wings, and felt the power of them trembling. I was ecstatic.

I felt a sense of perfection, as if I had captured something worthwhile inside my hand.

"Hey, so this is weird. I found a cicada even though it's winter! Look," I spoke without thinking to the back of Dad's head, watching TV in the living room. And promptly regretted it.

"You're not off catching cicadas again... Aren't you a bit old for that?"

Annoyed, I raised my voice a little. "I like what I like, why can't you just accept that?!"

Dad and I were always like that.

Just then the doorbell rang.

Like he'd only then remembered, Dad said "Come to think of it, I used to call you my little cicada girl didn't I?". But in a huff I turned my back and went to answer the door.

Standing there, holding Mum's umbrella, was Mum's friend Mrs. Uehara. "How's your mum doing?" she asked. "Here..." she added, putting a bag of oranges from the local supermarket down inside the porch. "I was in the area, so..."

"That's really too kind. Mum is..." I trailed off.

"I thought it best to return the umbrella as soon as possible..."

The cicada squirmed and seemed on the verge of escaping from my fingers, so I formed a cage with both hands and shut it in. Its little legs prickled around the inside of my hands, secret and pleasant.

"Oh, you could have brought that back any time... I'm afraid Mum's going to be in the hospital for a while."

"Is she? I'm sorry to hear that."

The cicada started up its tiny motor and beat its wings against the inside of my hands. It tickled.

"Say, Mrs. Uehara, I found a cicada outside even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"Oh my, did you really? I'm afraid I'm not terribly good with insects myself..." Mrs. Uehara looked uneasily at my hands, clasped together in a cage. "Well I just wanted to pop by. Give my love to your mum for me." she said, and left.

I wanted to talk about the cicada with someone. About how you'd never have thought there'd be one living in this cold season. Like a snowdrop blooming in the middle of July. Perhaps it could be an evolutionary adaptation. It may have been winter, but I'd heard that winters were warmer than they used

to be, and the number of insects overwintering was increasing. That must have been it—some kind of mutation in response to the unusual weather. Or maybe something had happened, something that sent this little body, clad in the heat of summer, wandering into *our* world from its own.

I decided to try calling Sawachi.

A long time ago we were at a pub together with some friends, and I remember him draining his whisky and saying, “Yeah, so brown cicadas huh? Those are great guys. Pretty great guys. They have *ambition*, y'know?”. I liked the way he said it, so I kinda liked Sawachi too.

I popped the cicada gently inside the cuff of my sweater, and pulled out my mobile. Searching my contacts I found I still had Sawachi's number.

I heard the phone ring, and connect.

“...Hello?”

As I calmed my heart I tried to sound nonchalant, “Hey, long time no see! Sorry to call you out of the blue like this...”

“Oh, it's you isn't it? Yeah it's... been a while.” It seemed he knew right away it was me.

“So I know it's kinda sudden, but the reason I'm calling is, I found a cicada. In the middle of winter! Isn't that weird?”

“A... cicada? You mean lately? A *cicada*? You sure it wasn't a cockroach?”

Jeez, Sawachi, stop teasing.

“It is not!” I said, a little indignant. “It's a cicada, a large brown cicada. Who'd've thought it, right? But what do you think? You seemed to know a lot...” The other side of the line fell into a deep silence, which seemed to spread, and spread, like it would never break.

Eventually, almost to himself, Sawachi said “The world's full of things like that.”

“Huh?” I was surprised.

“Things that make you stop and say “who'd've thought it” – the world's full of them. Even the fact that you're calling me right now...”

“That doesn't answer my question though,” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“Answers, huh,” he said. “Well I don't know. I guess that sort of thing happens. But see, it's these little things you'd never think would happen, never think were true, that save us. Maybe even everyone.”

The cicada poked its face out the end of my sleeve. I knew I should let it go soon. If you keep hold of cicadas for too long, it weakens them. Although I couldn't have said whether it would be better for the cicada to stay in the warm indoors, or to be released into the snowy outside.

I promised Sawachi we'd grab a drink together again sometime, and hung up.

I left the porch and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had long dropped all its leaves, and the bony branches grasped at the ashen sky. On that cracked and gnarled trunk, I gently placed the cicada. Hesitating every now and then as if it had something on its mind, the cicada made its slow way up the tree.

As I looked up, it seemed the snow was falling from an endless height. Fiercer it fell, cold crystals hitting my face and melting into tiny streams flowing down.

At some point the cicada reached the top of the persimmon tree. Somewhere inside that maze of stiffened branches, it finally vanished.

My whole body was chilled to the bone, except for my hands that had held the cicada. For some reason they were still warm, even sweating like they do in summer. It hadn't occurred to me before, but I suddenly realised that even though that cicada was a male, I never once heard it give its familiar mating call.

I went back to the porch and found Mum's umbrella and the bag of oranges right where I'd left them. The TV in the living room was still blaring away to itself, but Dad was already gone. I turned off the TV and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table as per usual.

It had already been some time since Dad left this world, and I was sure it must have been two years since Mrs. Uehara passed away. And Sawachi...

My call to Sawachi was still there in my phone's log. But I didn't have the courage to try calling him back.

As the snow continued to pile up, stillness filled the empty house until it pressed against the edges. In the overwhelming silence, a buzzing started in my ears. It was almost as if I could hear the song of the large brown cicada, from a distant, distant, summer's day.

An Unexpected Visitor

A cicada came flying over that one day, a summer's day in the winter. It flew back and forth amid the fluttering snow, as if lost, then came to a sudden stop on the sliding door.

I was really happy, before I even realized how peculiar it was. That's because I like cicadas. Really, really, like them.

Whether it's the cute and childlike *ninīzemi* cicada that heralds the start of summer; the somber and refined *higurashi* cicada; the nimble and lively *tsuku tsuku bōshi* cicada with its droopy eyes; or my favorite, the *aburazemi* cicada, whose chirping brings even more heat to a summer's day.

But they're just not meant to be here now. Not when it's this cold. Not when I'm wearing an angora jumper with the heating on.

"So, what exactly are you?"

I opened the glass inner door and poked my head out from the warmth inside to the sliding door outside. The cold air came over me like a spell.

My short-sighted eyes met with the cicada's (probably) short-sighted eyes for a little while. It was an *aburazemi* after all. An *aburazemi*, with its compact brown abdomen that looks like it's been spritzed with white dust. Despite the weather, it seemed like it was about to chirp loudly.

Maintaining eye contact with the cicada, I opened the sliding door a little, and gingerly reached out with my right hand.

I caught it!

The cicada went crazy within my hand, its wings thrashing like a small electric fan. I gently pushed a restraining finger down at the base of its twitching wings, ensuring not to hurt it.

I was overjoyed. My quarry filled my hand.

"Hey, look. Even though it's winter there's a cicada. Weird right?"

Without thinking, I'd called out to my father watching TV in the living room. I soon regretted it.

"Are you still catching cicadas? Act your age already."

"I know what I like, and I'll do as I please!" I barked back defiantly.

The situation quickly turned to this with my father and I. At that moment, the doorbell chimed. While I was fuming away, my father said,

"Thinking about it, I always used to call you cicada girl," as if he'd just recalled it. However, I turned my back on him and headed to the front hallway. My mother's friend Uehara stood there with my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother? Here..."

Uehara laid a bag of mandarins from a nearby supermarket to the side of the front hallway.

"I happened to be in the neighborhood."

"Ah, thank you. My mother—"

"—and I thought to myself that I really ought to return that umbrella right away."

The cicada was really wriggling, trying to get out from under my finger, so I clasped both hands around it like a cage. The cicada's prickly legs pranced around, the itchy feeling a secret pleasure in my hands.

"You could have bought it around any time... my mother will be in the hospital for a long time."

"Oh, I didn't know. That must be hard on you."

The cicada kicked its little motor into action and tickled my palms with its papery wings.

"Hey Uehara. Even though it's winter, I found a cicada. Isn't that odd?"

"Really? That is odd. I'm not good with bugs though."

While looking nervously at my clasped hands, Uehara added,

"Well, it's about time I got going. Send my best to your mother."

With that, she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. To talk about how curious it was that it was alive in such cold weather. Like a flower blooming out of season. A newly evolved, long-living cicada. They say that the warmer winters in recent years have led to an increase of bugs that usually hibernate. Perhaps

it had mutated due to the unusual climate or something. Or maybe the lost cicada had somehow stumbled into winter, bringing the summer with it.

I decided to talk to Sawachi about it. I remember when we'd been out drinking a long time ago, Sawachi had said,

"Yeah, aburazemi cicadas. They're real good guys. Pretty cool. They've got real ambition in them," while finishing off his highball. He has a way with words. I'd found myself coming to like Sawachi a little.

I put the cicada into my jumper's sleeve and got my phone out. I scrolled through my contacts and Sawachi's name was still there.

The dial tone rang out, then I was connected to Sawachi.

"...Yes?"

I gathered myself, and nonchalantly said,

"Long time no speak. Sorry to call out of the blue."

"Ah, it's you. Yeah, it's been a while."

Seemed he knew it was me right away.

"So, to get right to it – I found a cicada. Even though it's winter. Weird, right?"

"Huh, a cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? You're sure it's not a cockroach?"

Oh come on Sawachi. give me some credit.

"Definitely not. It's a cicada, an aburazemi cicada. It's odd right? What do you think? I figured that you know a lot about cicadas."

The deep silence on the other end of the line stretched on and on, growing deeper still.

Then, in a mumbling voice, Sawachi said,

"There are plenty of odd things out there."

"...Sorry?" I responded.

"In this world. There are lots of odd things in it. Take, for example, you calling me right now."

The conversation suddenly got a bit intense, so I tried to calm it down a little.

"Hmm... so that's what you think. I don't know. I guess things like that make life interesting. For us, or perhaps everyone--"

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve. It had grown weak from being in my hands for too long, and the time had come to set it free. But honestly, I didn't know whether to release it in this warm room, or out there, in the fluttering snow.

I promised to go out drinking with Sawachi again some time and hung up.

I left the house through the front hallway, and went to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree had shed every last leaf, its ashen, bony branches clawing at the sky.

I placed the cicada upon the tree's trunk, which was scarred with gutter-like roots, cracks, and crevices. The cicada started a half-hearted ascent of the trunk, coming to a stop now and then as if something were on its mind.

Looking up, the snow seemed to fall from eternity. It gradually grew stronger, gathering upon my face then melting, flowing off in countless streams.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared into the branches of the tree, lost amongst that frigid maze.

My body had grown incredibly cold. Yet somehow, the hands in which I'd held the cicada remained ever toasty, clammy even, as if it were summer. I suddenly realized the cicada didn't chirp once, even though it was male.

Returning to the front hallway, my mother's umbrella and that bag of mandarins lay there. In the living room, the TV remained on, but my father was already gone.

I turned off the TV and took the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table just like normal.

My father had passed away a long time ago, and I think Uehara died two years ago. Sawachi was also...

My call with Sawachi remained in my phone history. But I don't have the courage to try and call him again.

The snow must have been piling up, as the empty house began to fill with a silence like it was compressed.

In this profound silence, my ears began to ring.

It was just like the chirping of an aburazemi on a summer's day long, long ago.

An Oil Cicada in Winter by Azuchi Moe

It was the middle of winter when the oil cicada appeared. It bumbled about like it was lost amidst the flurries of snow. It veered this way and that until, abruptly, it stopped on my screen door.

What? How foolish, I thought. But mostly, I was thrilled.

I liked cicadas. I loved them, in fact. All kinds of cicadas: the cute little harbingers of summer, the *niinii-zemi*; the *higurashi*, so elegant they'd bring you to tears; the *tsukutsuku-boushi*, nimble and good-natured, with droopy eyes.

But my favorite of all were the oil cicadas, the *abura-zemi*, whose buzzing cries were like sizzling oil poured into the fire of an already blazing summer.

But right now? How foolish.

It was far too cold—cold enough to be wearing an angora turtleneck and have the heat on.

“Where did you come from, huh?”

I slid open the glass doors to peer closely at the screen, which had laid undisturbed since summer. The chill swept toward me, icy as the skin of Yuki-onna, the Woman of the Snow in the old tale.

My eyes met the cicada's (probably), and we stared at each other. It really was an oil cicada. It was a male with a tightly armored underbelly dusted with powdery white flecks. Just as it seemed about to start screaming, I cracked open the screen door, our gazes still locked, and slowly stretched out my right hand.

Got you!

The cicada struggled in my hand. Its wings beat fast, thrumming like a motor-powered fan. I didn't want to hurt it, so I gently tightened my hold. Even then, I could feel the base of its wings trembling against my fingertips.

I was wild with joy. I felt like I held some kind of purpose in my hands, gratified.

“Look, it's a cicada. Even though it's the middle of winter. How odd,” I said without thinking, calling out to my father's back. He was sitting in the living room watching TV. I regretted it immediately.

“Still catching cicadas? Can't you act your age already?”

“I like what I like, okay?” I snapped.

It always ended up like this with us.

The doorbell rang then.

I was still fuming. My father said, “Remember when they used to call you my cicada girl?” He headed toward the door, not even sparing me a look.

My mother's friend Mrs. Uehara stood there holding my mother's umbrella.

“How is she doing? She forgot this,” Mrs. Uehara said, stepping inside and lowering a bag of tangerines from the nearby grocery store to rest on the floor, “and I was already in the area.”

“Thank you so much. She's...”

“I thought I'd better give this umbrella back as soon as I could.”

The cicada squirmed and nearly slipped free of my grasp. I cupped my hands together to keep it caged. Its legs prickled as it moved about, the sensation a secret rush of pleasure.

“There was no need to rush. She'll be in the hospital for a while.”

“Oh, well, that's a shame.”

The cicada started its little motor back up. I could feel the tickle of its wings fluttering. “Hey, Mrs. Uehara. I found a cicada even though it's winter. Isn't it odd?”

“Oh, really? I'm not great with bugs though.” She looked nervously at my cupped hands. “Anyway, I was just dropping by. Give her my regards.”

With that, she was gone.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada, about the marvel of its existence in this cold weather. For a flower, they'd call it an out-of-season bloom. Maybe the cicada had evolved. The winters were growing warmer lately, and more bugs were able to withstand them. Maybe this one had mutated in response to the abnormal weather. Or maybe, due to some impulse in its little frame—it had come across from the other side. It had lost its way and come *here*, to this season, bearing the hot summer in its body.

I decided to ask Sawachi. Once, at a party a long time ago, Sawachi had sipped his whiskey and said, “Those oil cicadas are good little fellas. Real good. Ambitious little guys.”

I liked how he said that, and so I started to like Sawachi a bit too.

I gently placed the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and flipped open my phone. Sawachi’s name was still in my list of contacts. I dialed the number, and after a few rings, Sawachi picked up.

After a beat, he spoke. “Hello?”

I forced myself to be calm, casual. “Hi, how are you doing? Sorry for calling out of the blue.”

“Who— Oh, it’s you. Haven’t heard from you in a while.”

I got right to it. “I found a cicada even though it’s winter. Isn’t that odd?”

“A cicada? Now? Are you sure it’s a cicada and not a cockroach?”

Stop it, Sawachi. I don’t like that.

“I’m telling you it’s a cicada, an oil cicada. Isn’t it strange? What do you think? You’re so knowledgeable about these things.”

A deep silence fell across the line, the kind you couldn’t recover from, spreading.

Sawachi started whispering. “...there are lots of strange things.”

“What?”

“Lots and lots of strange things in this world. You calling me like this...”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” I said awkwardly.

“What I mean... I don’t know either. Did I even mean anything? But anyway, there’s salvation in strange things. For us, and for the world.”

The cicada peeked out from my cuff.

I’d have to let it go soon. If it stayed in my hands for too long, it would start to weaken. But then I wasn’t sure what was worse for it: the warmth of the room, or release into the flurries of snow outside?

I promised Sawachi we’d go drinking again sometime and hung up.

I stepped out through the front door into the garden, heading toward the persimmon tree. Its bare-boned branches gripped at the gray sky. I gently placed the cicada on the grooved trunk. The cicada started to climb, pausing to think every so often.

I looked up at the snow falling from far above. The cool crystals hit with greater and greater force, melting and streaking down my face.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared somewhere up into the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the branches. My body had grown cold, but a warmth lingered where I’d touched the cicada. My hands were sweating like it was summer. I suddenly realized—it had been a male cicada, but it hadn’t cried at all.

I returned inside, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines by the door just as they’d been left. The TV was still on in the living room, but my father was nowhere to be seen.

My father had left this world long ago, and Mrs. Uehara had passed some two years earlier. And Sawachi...

My call to Sawachi was still in my phone’s history. But I didn’t have the courage to try calling back.

The snow had piled up, and the empty house filled with a suffocating stillness.

It was so quiet my ears began to ring. It sounded like, from some far-off summer’s day, the crying of an oil cicada.

A Cicada in Winter
By Azuchi Moe

There's an abura cicada flying this way. In the dead of winter. It swerved this way and that through the fluttering snow in that clumsy flight of theirs, then landed with a *pat* on the screen door.

'Huh, that can't be,' I thought, but tingled with excitement.

I love cicadas. Very, very much. I love the early summer cicadas who cry out in their high, childlike voices to let us know that summer is finally here, the evening cicadas who sing their elegant, melancholic song, the walker cicadas—those agile fliers with their round, droopy eyes. But my favourite has to be the abura cicadas, who fill the hot summer air with sounds of even hotter sizzling oil.

But it can't possibly be here now. It's too cold. I'm wearing a woollen turtleneck sweater, and the heater is on—

"Hey, now, just what are you?"

I slid the glass door wide open, how it is in the summer, and leaned my face close to the screen. Chill air blew in, brushing past my cheeks like a frigid caress from the snow queen. My short-sighted eyes met with the cicada's (probably) short-sighted eyes.

So it is an abura cicada.

It had a taut belly that looked as if it was dusted with flour—the distinct belly of a male abura cicada. It looked ready to cry out at any moment—

I slid the screen door open slightly, and with our eyes on each other, reached out my right hand. Caught it!

The cicada struggled within my hand. Its wings whirled like the motor of a tiny electric fan. My hand squeezed lightly so as not to hurt those wings, and I could feel the powerful quivering of its wing muscles against my fingers.

My heart leapt with joy. Inside my hand, I had successfully captured my target.

"Hey, that's weird. There's a cicada in winter, look,"

I called out without thinking to my father's back—he was watching the television in the living room—then regretted it.

"Are you still chasing after bugs at your age? You're not a kid anymore—"

"I'll do as I please, thank you very much!"

I angrily huffed back. My father and I were always like this. At that instant, the doorbell rang. Fuming, I turned my back on my father while he was reminiscing, "That reminds me, we used to call you the cicada girl back then, huh," and strode out to get the door.

Mrs Uehara, my mother's friend, was standing at the door holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother? Here, for you..."

She came in and bent down to set a bag of mandarins from the nearby supermarket onto the floor.

"I was in the neighbourhood, so I thought I'd stop by."

"Oh, thank you. My mother's—"

"And this umbrella. I thought I should hurry up and return it, too."

The cicada wrestled and began to break free from my fingers, so I used both my hands to trap it within a cage. Its legs prickled as it moved about, and the tingling itch gave me the thrill of knowing I had a secret within my hands.

"Oh, there was no rush... My mother will be in hospital for a while, you see."

"Dear me, really? How awful."

The cicada's tiny motor began to start up. Its wings fluttered and tickled the insides of my hands.

"Say, Mrs Uehara, there's a cicada here in winter. Isn't that strange?"

"Oh, is there? Really? Well, I'm not much of a bug person—"

Mrs Uehara stared uneasily at my clasped hands as she said, "Well, I'll be going. I was only stopping by. Say hello to your mother for me," and off she went.

I wanted to talk to someone about this cicada. About how strange it was to be alive in this cold weather. Like a flower blooming out of season. Were they adapting to the cold? Though lately, winters

were getting warmer, and insects were finding it easier to survive through the season. The strange weather might have caused a mutation. Or maybe, by some twist of fate, it had wandered over from other side, into *this* winter—bearing the heat of that summer with it.

I decided to try talking with Sawachi. Long ago, on a night out drinking, Sawachi had said, “Hm, abura cicadas. Great guys. Really great guys. Sing their hearts out, you know,” as he cleaned out his whiskey glass. I liked how he put it, so I quite liked him, too.

I softly stowed the cicada into my sweater sleeve and took out my phone. Looking through my contacts, I found that Sawachi’s name was still there.

The dial tone rang, and the call went through.

“...Hello...?”

Calming myself down, I casually said,

“Hey, it’s been a while. Sorry about the sudden call—”

“Ah... is that *you*? Gee, it has been a while, huh.”

Sounds like he recognised me right away.

“Well, I’ll cut to the chase. You see, there’s a cicada here. In winter. Say, isn’t that strange?”

“Huh... a cicada? At this time of year? A *cicada*? Hm, you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Oh, come on, Sawachi, seriously?

“I’m telling you! It’s a cicada, an abura cicada. Isn’t that strange? So, what do you make of it? I thought you might know more—”

On the other end of the line, a long deep silence drew out and then grew, seeming to swallow us up.

“...Strange things happen all the time.” Sawachi mumbled softly.

“...What?”

“Strange things, they happen all the time in this world. I mean, you’re calling me now, aren’t you...?”

“That’s not an answer.”

I said, partly to cover up my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh... I’m afraid I don’t have one. Does one exist? But, you know, strange things are a blessing. To us, and to the world, too, probably—”

The cicada poked its head through my sleeve.

I had to let it go soon. If I held onto it for too long, it would grow weak. Though it was hard to say whether it was better off being set free in the fluttering snow outside or staying in the toasty indoors.

I promised to hang out with Sawachi for drinks again sometime and hung up the phone.

Going out the front door, I tread my way over to the persimmon tree standing in the garden. The leaves had all fallen off, and its spindly branches were clutching at the grey sky. I gently set the cicada onto the trunk, which was covered with cracked and deeply furrowed bark. It crawled slowly up the tree, pausing every now and then as if it was thinking.

Gazing up at the sky, it seemed like the snow was swirling down from endless heights. It steadily grew heavier, and when the icy crystals hit my face, they melted and ran down in little streaks.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared into the frozen labyrinth of the treetop. I was completely chilled to the bone, but somehow, the hands which held the cicada stayed warm and sweaty as if it was summer. Huh, come to think of it, not once did that male cicada cry out...

When I returned to the house, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still there. The television in the living room had been left on, and my father was nowhere to be seen. I switched it off and placed the bag of mandarins on the kitchen counter as usual.

My father had already left this world long ago, and Mrs Uehara should have passed away two years ago now. And Sawachi...

There was a record of my call to Sawachi on my phone, but I didn’t have the courage to try calling him again...

Perhaps it was the snow burying us in, but a suffocating silence began to fill the empty house.

In the quiet, I could hear a ringing in my ears.

It sounded almost like the cries of an abura cicada from the echoes of a long-gone summer day.

Winter Cicada
by Azuchi Moe

It was mid-winter, and a large brown cicada flew past.
Meandering, like it was lost in the lightly falling snow. To and fro until it finally zipped to a perch on the screen door.

Before I could think, *Ugh, what is that*, happiness bloomed in my chest.

I loved cicadas. I really, really loved cicadas.

They were the very advent of summer. The cute, child-like kaempfer cicada; the evening miscanthus cicada—so elegant it's almost a shame; the nimble meimuna opalifera with droopy eyes full of vigour. But my favourite was the large brown cicada. They chirped like boiling oil poured over a hot day.

And yet, all the same, here was this little guy.

Even though it was a day as freezing as this one.

Even though I'd put on my Angora turtleneck, and switched the heating on.

"Hey there," I whispered. "What kind of cicada *are* you?"

Opening the glass door, I brought my face near the mesh screen that we still hadn't taken out from summer. The chill crept in like the ghostly skin of a snow spirit.

For a touch, my near-sighted eyes locked with the (probably) near-sighted eyes of the cicada.

It really was a large brown cicada.

A male with a tight white belly like dusted powder. That seemed like it was about to start chirping with a deafening voice at any moment—

Eyes still locked with the critter, I slowly inched the screen door open and reached my right hand out.

Got him!

Now he was a rioting cicada, raging inside the cage of my grasp. Wings like the small motor of an electric fan. The power at the base of those wings transmitting their fear to the gentle clutch of fingers careful not to hurt those wings.

I could sing with joy.

It filled my chest, as if what I'd really grabbed hold of was purpose.

"This is so weird. Look at that! A cicada in *winter*." I saw the shadow of my father's figure watching television in the living room and spoke up without thinking.

And regretted it.

"Are you still catching those things?" he scolded. "Act your age."

"There's nothing wrong with doing the things you like!" I huffed, already raising my voice. My father and I could slip into this rhythm without any difficulty.

At that moment, the door bell rang.

I was in a foul mood. "Come to think of it, I'd said back in the day that you were really the daughter of a cicada, hadn't I?" Dad sounded like he was about to get into it, so I turned my back and walked out to the front door.

My mother's friend Ms. Uehara was standing there holding our umbrella.

"Is your mother in? I brought these." She said this while putting down a plastic bag of oranges onto the upper step of the entryway. "Since I was in the area."

"I'm so sorry, my mother—"

"It's just that I thought I'd better return her umbrella quickly is all."

The cicada bleated once against my fingers, so I caged both hands around it so it couldn't escape. Its feet kept tingling against my palms as it moved around, and the needle stabs of pain were like a surprise gift in my grasp.

"Oh," I breathed out. "She'd always been doing well, but they put her in long-term hospitalisation now."

"Well that's just terrible, dear."

Starting up like a tiny motor, the cicada's fluttering wings tickled the inside of my cage.

"Hey, I've got a cicada here—even though it's winter. Isn't that strange?"

"Goodness. Really? I'm not exactly great with bugs..." Her gaze flickered down to my joined hands then quickly looked away. "Right, well, since I just thought I'd stop by. Give your mother my regards, will you?" And left.

I was dying to talk about the cicada with someone. The absolute marvel of it living in the middle of a cold season like this...

Would it be like off-season flowering, if it was a plant? Or maybe cicada lifespans have evolved. It may be winter, but it's warmer nowadays than it was in the past—there are probably more hibernating insects than ever. Maybe some of them mutated due to the strange weather. Or maybe something caused that tiny body, carrying all the weight of its hot summer home on its delicate wings, to get lost in winter on its way to the right season.

I decided to try talking to Sawachi.

It was so long ago that he'd said, while emptying his drink at a bar gathering, "Oh yeah brown cicadas. They're great guys. Totally great guys. They've got ambition, man."

I loved the way he said that, so I sort of started to like him, too.

I gently put the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and dug out my phone. I searched through my contacts, and his name was still there.

The tone rang and then I was through to Sawachi.

"...Hello?"

I had to be calm and nonchalant. "It's been a while, huh? Sorry if I surprised you."

"Oh hey, it's you! Long time no speak."

It was like he immediately knew it was me.

"Well, I'm just jumping into it, but there's a cicada here. In winter! That's super weird, right?"

"What? A cicada? At this time of year? A *cicada*? You sure it's not just a cockroach?"

Oh, stop it, Sawachi! That's gross!

"Of course it's not! It's a cicada, a brown one. Isn't that peculiar? Don't you think? I thought you'd love that."

I couldn't take back the deep silence on the other side of the phone, and it seemed to spread and spread as it lapsed by.

Sawachi's voice had dropped to a whisper. "There are all sorts of peculiar things out there."

"Pardon?"

"There's loads of peculiar things in this world. So you decided to call me for this?"

"Nope, not the answer!" I scrambled to find anything to say to hide my embarrassment.

"The answer? That's not something I would know. If there even is any. But hey, if it's so strange maybe it's a sign from above, or something. For us, or maybe even for the world."

The cicada poked its head out from my cuff. I would have to set it free soon.

Cicadas grow weak in the hands of humans.

Though I couldn't really tell which was better for the cicada—the warmth of the room, or releasing it into the light fall of snow outside.

Making a promise to Sawachi that we'd meet up again for group drinks sometime, I hung up the phone.

I walked out of the entryway to the garden, towards the persimmon tree. The leaves had completely fallen off, bony branches clinging to the ashen sky.

The cicada rested its body on the warped trunk. It clambered up the trench-like cracks and sinew tentatively, like it was absorbed in its thoughts somehow.

I looked up. The snow seemed to be falling from a boundless height. Gradually getting violent, the cold crystals struck my face and melted, forming streaks as they flowed down.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared somewhere into the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the treetop.

My body completely turned to ice. It made me realise how hot and clammy my hands were, having

grasped the cicada like I'd plucked it out of summer. It had been a male, so I couldn't help but wonder why I hadn't heard its cry even once.

Returning to the entryway, my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were still there. The television in the living room was left on, and the shadow of my father was already gone.

I turned the television off, and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table as I always have.

It had already been so long since my father's death. And probably about two years since Ms. Uehara had gone, too. And Sawachi—

My message history to Sawachi was still on my phone. But I no longer held the courage to try and call him back again.

Was the snow piling up outside? This empty house was already filled to the brim with suffocating silence.

When there is too much stillness, I get a buzzing in my ears.

It's just like the cry of a large brown cicada on a distant summer day.

The Large Brown Cicada of Winter
Azuchi Moe

Even though it's midwinter, a large brown cicada came flying. Amid the light falling snow, with that clumsy way of flying as if lost, it changed its course to all directions until suddenly stopping at the window screen. Before even thinking "Eh, no way!" I got awfully happy.

I like cicadas. I really, really like cicadas. The Kaempfer cicada, adorable as a very young child; the evening cicada, elegant to the point of being sorrowful and the *Meimuna opalifera*, with its nimble and cheerful drooping eyes. I like them all for let us knowing that summer came to pay a visit. Still, the large brown cicada with a voice that seems to add fuel to the hotness of the already hot summer is my favorite.

But something like this is impossible, after all. Even though it's this cold. Even though I'm wearing my turtleneck sweater made of Angora rabbit fur and the heater is on —

"Hey, hey, who are you?"

I opened the glass door, drawing my face close to the window screen, which was in the same state since summer. The cold came approaching as if it was the Snow Woman's skin. Then my myopic eyes and (probably) the cicada's myopic eyes stared at each other for a brief moment.

Without a doubt, it was a large brown cicada. A male one with a tightly locked abdomen looking like it had been coated in white powder. It seemed just about to start singing in a very loud voice —

I opened the window screen a little and while staring at it, slowly reached my right hand. Then I caught it!

The struggling brown cicada was now inside my hand. With its wings like a electric fan ran by a tiny motor. Wings that trembling, transmitted the force from their joint to the fingers softly holding it down, so as not to hurt them.

I was in ecstasy. It was a sense of accomplishment as if I had some sort of purpose captured in the palm of my hand.

"Look, it's strange. Even though it's winter, there is a cicada. Here."

Without thinking, I spoke to my father, who was in the living room watching tv with his back turned to me.

"Are you still catching cicadas? When will you grow up — "

"I'm free to do whatever I want with whatever I like!"

Becoming sullen, I raised my tone. Things always turned this way in an instant between my father and I.

At this moment, the chaime at the entrance ringed. Angrily, while he said "Speaking of which, you used to say that you were a cicada's daughter" as if having recalled the past, I turned my back and went to answer it.

Ms. Uehara, a friend of my mom, was standing there holding my mom's umbrella.

"How is you mother feeling? This..." she said while putting a bag of mandarins from the super-market in the doorway.

"I brought them since I was near here."

"Ah, thank you very much for the trouble. My mom is — "

"I thought it was better to return her umbrella soon — "

Since the cicada was struggling and about to escape from my fingers, I locked it down with both hands forming a cage. As its feet moved around prickling, the itching was like a secret pleasure inside them.

"Oh, you could have returned it at any time... My mom will still be hospitalized for a while."

"Oh my, is that so? It must be hard."

The cicada started the small-sized motor and the inside of my hands tickled as the wings flapped.

"Hey, Ms. Uehara. Even though it's winter, there is a cicada. Don't you think it's strange?"

"Eh, really? Is it true? But I'm not very good with insects, so — "

While she looked uneasily to my combined hands in the shape of a cage, she said "Well then, I

just dropped by a little. Send my regards to your mother,” and went back.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. About the mysteriousness of it living in the middle of a cold weather like this — If it was a flower, would it be the case of an off-season flowering? Since it’s a cicada, could it be an evolution of its vitality? Although it’s winter, it’s said to have become more warm nowadays compared to before and the numbers of insects that hibernate has also increased. Maybe a mutation happened due to a disorder in the weather. Or perhaps it was some sort of impetus that occurred in the little body — we can say that its body succumbed to that hot summer and it gave into temptation for the other side, *this season side*.

I decided to discuss it with Sawachi. A very long time ago, he said “Right, the large brown cicada. He’s a good guy. A very good guy. He has ambition,” while emptying his diluted drink in a drinking party. Because I liked his way of putting it, I also took a little interest in him.

I calmly set the cicada in the sweater’s cuff and opened my cellphone. When I searched in the contacts list, his name was still there.

The sound of the transmission rang until it connected to him.

“...Yes?...”

Trying to calm down, I said in a nonchalant way:

“It’s been a while. Sorry for calling so suddenly — ”

“Ah... By any chance, is it you? Yeah, it’s been a while.”

“You see, I’ll get straight to the point. There was a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Hey, isn’t it strange?”

“Ehh... A cicada? By now? Really a cicada? Errr, isn’t it a cockroach?”

Eew, jeez, Sawachi. Stop it.

“It isn’t. It’s a cicada. A large brown cicada. It’s strange, right? So, what you think? I thought that you of all people would be well-informed about it — ”

On the other side of the line, it felt like an irrevocable time of deep silence was flowing in continuous expansion.

Sawachi then replied with a mutter:

“... There are a lot of strange things.”

“...Eh?”

“There are many strange things in this world. You having called me as well...”

“This isn’t an answer.”

I tried saying something that would hide my embarrassment.

“The answer, huh... I don’t know. Is there even one? But see, strange things can’t be helped. Neither by us and, probably, by the world — ”

The cicada put its face out from the cuff. I had to let it free soon. If it stayed too much time detained in a person’s hand, it would weaken. Though, between to keep it in the warm indoors or to release it outside, where the snow was falling down, I wasn’t sure what was best to this insect.

Promising to go drink again with Sawachi sometime, I turned off the phone. Next, I left the entrance and went in the direction of the persimmon tree in the garden. All its leaves had fallen and its bony branches were tightly holding the gray sky. I gently placed the cicada in the trunk covered by grooved-shaped strakes and fissures. Appearing to be thinking something, it started to slowly climb the trunk, hesitating at times.

As I looked up, the snow was falling down from an endless height. Gradually becoming more intense, the cold crystals that hit even my face, melted streaming in many lines. Before I noticed, the figure of the cicada disappeared to somewhere in the frozen maze-like silhouette of the persimmon’s treetop.

My body had completely grown cold, yet for some reason, the hands that once had captured the cicada continued to be warm, sweating like it was summer. Speaking of it, the cicada was male, yet it hadn’t sung even a tiny bit... This suddenly thought crossed my mind.

When I went back, my mom’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins were lying at the entrance. In the living room, the television was left on, but my dad was no longer there. I turned the TV off and

carried the bag to the kitchen's table as always.

My dad had already passed away a long time ago and Ms. Uehara, as well, should be dead for the past two years. Even Sawachi...

His number still remained in the call history. However, I didn't have the courage to try calling it once more...

I'm not sure if it was the accumulated snow that was filling the empty house with a pressing stillness. From this excessive quietude, I got a ringing in my ears. It was just like the cry of a large brown cicada in a very distant summer day.

The Winter Cicada
Written by Azuchi Moe

It was the dead of winter, and yet, there was a large brown cicada. It flew clumsily through the drifting snow, turning every which way as if lost, before suddenly alighting on the window screen. I was filled with joy before I even realized how impossible it was.

I like cicadas. In fact, I absolutely adore them. The *platypleura kaempferi* that cries like an infant and heralds the coming of summer. The sorrowfully elegant *tanna japonensis*. The lively and nimble *meimuna opalifera* with its droopy eyes. But, in the end, the one I love the most is the *graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, the large brown cicada, whose cry is like sizzling oil poured on an already hot summer day.

Alas, seeing one now is impossible. It's so cold, after all. So cold that I'm wearing my angora turtleneck sweater and have the heater on.

"Hey, just who do you think you are?"

I opened the window and brought my face to the screen that hadn't been touched since summer. Cold air rushed in like a vengeful snow spirit.

The cicada was (probably) just as nearsighted as I am, but our eyes met for a moment. It really is a large brown cicada. It was a male, with a tight abdomen that looked like it had been dusted with white powder. Just as it was on the verge of crying out in its loud voice—

I had opened the screen slightly and my right hand was stretching slowly towards the cicada as I continued to gaze at it.

Got it!

The cicada thrashed about in my palm. Its wings like fans driven by tiny electric motors. With my thumb pressed gently against their base, I could feel their power as they twitched against my skin. I was ecstatic. I felt fulfilled like I'd just captured some new purpose in my hand.

"Hey, it's so strange. Even though it's winter, I found a cicada. Look!" I called out, without thinking, to my father watching TV in the living room. And instantly regretted it.

"How old are you? You're still catching—"

"I like what I like! I'm not just messing around!" I cried out indignantly. My father and I always end up like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang, and as I turned towards the entrance in a huff, my father as if he'd just remembered, said, "Oh, right, they used to call you 'Cicada Girl,' didn't they?"

Mrs. Uehara, my mother's friend, was standing there holding her umbrella.

"How is your mother? I brought these..." she said as she lowered a bag of satsuma oranges from the nearby supermarket onto the step. "I happened to be in the area, so..."

"Oh, hello! Thank you for coming, Mother is—"

"I just thought I should come and return her umbrella as quickly as possible—"

The struggling cicada was about to escape my fingers, so I trapped it in both hands like a cage. Its legs scuttled around, and that itchy, almost painful sensation was like a hidden pleasure.

"Oh, you could have brought it back anytime... Mother has been hospitalized long-term.

"Is that so! That must be hard."

Revving its little motor, the cicada flapped its wings and tickled my hands.

"Hey, Mrs. Uehara. Even though it's winter, I found a cicada! Isn't that strange?"

"Huh, really? Is that true? But I can't stand bugs so—" Mrs. Uehara stared uneasily at the cage formed by my hands as she left, saying, "Well, just thought I'd drop by. Give my regards to your mother."

I wanted to talk with someone about this cicada—about the strangeness of it being alive in this bitter cold. If it were a flower, you would call this blooming out of season, I suppose. Perhaps the life force of cicadas has evolved. They say that recent winters have been warmer than in the past, and because of that, the number of hibernating insects has increased. Maybe the unusual weather is causing mutations. Or, perhaps, something drove the cicada to carry the heat of *that* summer in its tiny body and it got lost in this season—in the season *on this side*.

I decided to try talking with Sawachi.

A long time ago at a drinking party, he told me as he emptied a glass of diluted alcohol, "You know those big, brown cicadas? They're good ones. Real good ones. They have ambition, you know?" I liked the way he put it, and I took a liking to Sawachi as a result.

I gently tucked the cicada into my sleeve and opened my cellphone. Sawachi's name was still in my contacts. The phone rang, and Sawachi picked up.

"... Yes... ?"

Trying to calm myself, I said casually, "Sorry for calling so suddenly. It's been a while."

"Oh... Is it really you? Wow, it has been a while!"

It seems he recognized me instantly.

"Getting straight to the point, I found this cicada and it's winter! Isn't that weird?"

"Huh... A cicada? This time of year? A cicada!? Hmm, you sure it's not a cockroach?"

Gross. Cut that out, Sawachi.

"It's not! It's a cicada! A large brown cicada! It's strange, isn't it? Come on, what do you think? I thought you might know something—"

On the other end, a period of deep, regretful silence seemed to stretch on. As if muttering to himself, Sawachi whispered, "... Strange things are all around us."

"... Huh?"

"There are strange things all over this world, you know. Like how you were able to call me just now..."

"That isn't a proper answer," I said, acting like I was embarrassed and trying to hide it.

"A proper answer, huh... I don't have anything like that. Does one even exist? But, you know, strange things are salvation. For us, and probably for the world—"

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve. I have to let it go soon. If you hold them for too long, cicadas get weak. That being said, I wasn't sure whether it would be better for the cicada to release it in the warm room or outside in the lightly falling snow.

I promised to go drinking with Sawachi again someday and hung up.

Stepping out the front door, I walked to the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree was completely barren of leaves and its spindly branches clutched at the gray sky. I set the cicada on the tree trunk covered in cracks and groove-like veins. It seemed to be deep in thought, starting and stopping as it slowly climbed upwards.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. Ceaselessly, one after the other, cold crystals landed on my face and left streaks as they melted away. The cicada had, at some point, disappeared into the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the persimmon tree's crown. My body was now completely cold, but for some reason, the hands that had been holding the cicada stayed hot and sweaty like it was summer. I suddenly realized that even though it was a male, that cicada never once cried.

My mother's umbrella and the bag of satsuma oranges were waiting at the entrance when I returned. The TV had been left on, and my father was nowhere to be seen. I turned it off and then set the bag on the kitchen table just like I always had done.

My father had passed away many years ago, and Mrs. Uehara has been dead for around two years now, I think. Sawachi, too... His name was still there in my call history, but I no longer possessed the courage to try calling him again...

The empty house filled with an oppressive silence like it had been buried in snow. In that deep silence, my ears began to ring. It was almost like the cry of the large brown cicada I once heard on a summer day long, long ago.

An Oily Cicada in Winter

Though it was in the depths of winter, an *aburazemi* – or “oily cicada” – came flying.

Amid the flitting snowflakes it flew a clumsy, meandering course, bumbling along from here to there until it finally came to a sudden halt, perched upon my window screen. Before I could think, *huh, what is this idiot doing*, my heart filled with happiness.

I love cicadas. I love them so, so much.

I love the Kaempfer cicada who cries like a cute, little child to signal the beginning of summer, and the evening cicada so elegant it brings tears to my eyes, and the nimble Walker’s cicada with its cheerful, drooping eyes, signalling the end of the summer holidays. But of them all, the oily cicada, whose cry pours like hot oil onto the already scorching summer, was my absolute favourite.

Even though it was being a truly stupid right now, appearing in a winter as cold as this, so cold that I had to wear an Angora turtleneck jumper and put on the heating.

“Oi, oi! Who might you be, then?” I said.

I opened the glass window and inched my face closer to the insect screen that had been placed in the summer and had remained there since. In crept the cold air, icy like a vampire’s skin.

For a short while, my short-sighted eyes locked with the (probably) short-sighted eyes of the cicada.

Yes, it *was* an oily cicada.

A male brown oily cicada, its cinched waist dusted with white powder. It looked like it might erupt into a loud cry at any moment.

I drew the insect screen open ever so slightly and, whilst still staring at it, I gingerly reached out my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada struggled in my clutches. Its wings were like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. I could feel the power of its wings trembling as I gently pressed at the base of them so that it would not hurt itself.

I was in ecstasy. I felt fulfilled, as if I had seized some kind of purpose in my hand.

“Look, isn’t this strange? There’s a cicada, even though it’s winter.” Without thinking, I called over to my father from behind, who was sitting and watching TV in the living room. I felt instant regret.

“You still catching cicadas and stuff? Act your age, why don’t you—”

“I just like what I like! I’m not trying to be a nuisance!” I raised my voice, speaking in an indignant tone.

My dad and I’s conversations would end up like this pretty fast.

It was then that the front door chime sounded. I huffed.

“That reminds me, you used to be called the cicada girl, didn’t you?” my dad said, looking back on old times, but I turned my back on him and went to the front door.

My mum’s friend Ms. Uehara was stood there, holding my mum’s umbrella.

“How is your mother? Here, have this...” As she spoke, Ms. Uehara took a tangerine out of a bag from the nearby supermarket and put it on the front step of the entranceway. “I wasn’t far, so I thought I’d stop by.”

“Oh, thank you for your trouble. Mum is—”

“I just thought I should return this umbrella as soon as I could.”

The cicada struggled a little in my hand and made to escape, so I closed my hands to form a prison around it. Its little legs felt prickly as it moved, and the itchy discomfort was like a delightful secret hidden in my hands.

“Oh, any time would have been fine, though... Mum will be at the hospital for a long time.”

“Ah, I see. That must be difficult.”

The cicada started up its tiny motor and its fluttering wings tickled my palms.

“By the way, Ms. Uehara, I found a cicada even though it’s the middle of winter. Isn’t that strange?”

"Oh, really? Are you sure? Well, I'm not very good with bugs, so—" Ms. Uehara watched my closed hands with trepidation as she continued, "Well, I only planned on stopping by. Tell your mother I said hello." Then she headed off.

I wanted to talk about the cicada to someone, about how strange it was that it was alive in the middle of such a chilly winter. If it were a flower, perhaps it would be a late bloomer. Perhaps cicadas were evolving to live longer. People say that winters now are warmer than it was in the olden days, and there was an increasing number of hibernating bugs. Perhaps the abnormal climate had caused a mutation in them. Or perhaps you could say that, by some impulse, it had borne alone the hot summer in its tiny body and had gotten lost, only to eventually emerge the other side, *this* side, in the middle of winter.

I decided to try talking to my friend, Sawachi. Long ago at a drinking party, while downing his whisky, he had said, "Yeah, oily cicadas. They're some good little critters. They're simply great. They've got ambition in 'em."

His way of talking intrigued me, and so I took an interest in him, too.

I carefully dropped the cicada into the sleeve of my jumper and opened my mobile phone. When I searched my list of contacts, I found that Sawachi's name was still on there.

I heard the dial tone, and then the call connected.

"... Yes..."

I composed myself, speaking in a casual manner. "Long time no see. Sorry for calling so suddenly—"

"Oh... Could that be you? Wow, it's been a while."

It seemed to be that he recognised me instantly.

"Anyway, sorry to cut straight to the point, but I found a cicada. Even though it's winter. Isn't that strange?"

"Huh... A cicada? In winter? A *cicada*? You sure it's not a cockroach?"

Ew, no, I thought. *Please don't say that, Sawachi.*

"No, it's not. It's a cicada, an oily cicada. What a mystery, right? So, what do you think? I thought you seemed to know about that sort of thing—"

On the other end of the phone, an irreversible, profound silence passed, seeming to stretch on longer and longer.

Sawachi lowered his voice to a whisper as he spoke. "... It's full of mysteries."

"... What?"

"Mysteries and stuff. The world is full of them. Like you calling me right now..."

"You're not answering me," I said, trying to hide the awkward turn this conversation was taking.

"You want an answer...? Well, I wouldn't know something like that. I wonder if there even is an answer. But you know, salvation is a mystery. For us, and probably for the world, too—"

The cicada poked its face out from my sleeve.

It was about time I freed it now. If you keep a cicada in your hand for too long, then it will grow weak. Granted, I did not really know what was best for the cicada, whether to release it into my warm house or into the snowy outdoors.

I promised to have another get-together with Sawachi some time, and then hung up the phone.

I went out the front door and approached the Japanese persimmon tree in the garden. The leaves of the tree had completely fallen away, leaving its skeletal branches clutching tightly to the ashen sky above.

I softly perched the cicada on its trunk, which was covered in groove-like cords and cracks. As if pondering something, the cicada occasionally hesitated and wavered on its leisurely ascent up the tree.

Looking up, it seemed as though snowflakes were falling towards me from an endless height. The snowfall grew gradually heavier. Freezing crystals landed on my face, melted, and ran down it in streaks.

Without my noticing, the cicada had disappeared somewhere into silhouette of the stiff, labyrinthian branches of the persimmon tree.

My body was now chilled to the bone, but despite that, my hands that had been holding the cicada

were somehow warm and sweaty, as if it were summer. I suddenly had a realisation. *Come to think of it, even though it was male, that cicada didn't let out a single cry...*

I returned to the front door and saw my mother's umbrella and tangerine sat there. The TV had been left on in the living room, but my dad was already nowhere to be seen. I turned off the TV and put the tangerine on the table in the kitchen, as always.

It had already been a quite a while since my dad had passed away, and it must have been two years since Ms. Uehara had died. And Sawachi, as well...

Sawachi's name remained on my call history on my phone. However, I did not have any courage in me to try calling him again.

Perhaps it was due to the snow piling up that this empty house was filled with an oppressive silence. It was too silent; so silent that I started to feel a buzzing in my ears. It sounded exactly like the cry of the oily cicada, coming from a summer day far, far away.

THE BROWN CICADAS OF WINTER

Azuchi Moe

Even though it was the peak of winter, brown cicadas appeared.

Through the snow that fell gently, the cicadas flitted clumsily, switching direction ever so often, and then, flew straight into the insect screen.

At first I was delighted. But soon after, I began to wonder, 'Are you that stupid?'

I love cicadas. I love them very much.

The ones that herald the arrival of summer - the adorable *nī-nī* cicadas that are like little children, the *higurashi* cicadas that are as elegant as they are sorrowful, the agile and cheerful, droopy-eyed *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* cicadas - I love them all. Even so, the big brown cicadas whose voices remind me of flowing hot oil are my favourite in the heat of summer.

Even so, they are stupid now.

It's freezing, and in spite of that!

I have an Angolan turtleneck sweater on, and even though the heater *is* on...

'Oi, oi, what exactly are you?'

I opened the glass window. I brought my face close to the insect screen that hadn't been taken down though it was winter already. The weather was turning as cold as the skin of the *yuki-onna*, a snow spirit from folklore.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes met, gazing intently.

It was indeed a brown cicada.

It was a male that appeared to have some kind of white powder spread across its belly. It looked as though it was about to scream loudly.

I opened the screen a crack, and while maintaining eye-contact, I quietly stretched my hand out...and caught it!

The cicada squirmed in my grasp. Through its wings that fluttered like the motor of an electric fan, my fingers could sense its fear.

In my hands was something I had captured. I felt accomplished.

'This is odd. Even though it's still winter, cicadas are here. Look,' I called out to my father who was watching television and immediately regretted it.

'Catching those cicadas again? Shouldn't you know better at your age?'

'I like what I like!' I was upset and my tone had turned harsh.

My father and I always immediately got to this stage. At that moment, the doorbell rang.

'Come to think of it, you were in fact called the 'cicada girl' before, weren't you?' said my father. But I turned away from him towards the door.

My mother's friend, Uehara, was at the door with my mother's umbrella.

'How is your mother? Here, these...' said Uehara, placing a bag of mandarin oranges on the step of the entranceway.

'I was just around the corner.'

'Oh, sorry for the trouble. Mother is-'

'I wanted to return the umbrella as early as I could.'

The cicada was close to freeing itself from my hold. I created a cage of sorts around it with my palms. The tingling sensation the crawling cicada caused about my palms felt pleasant.

'Ah, anytime would have been all right....Mother has been in the hospital for a long time now.'

'Is that so? A difficult time, isn't it?'

The cicada started its small motor. The flapping of its wings tickled my palms.

'Do you know, Ms. Uehara? Even though it's winter, cicadas are here! Weird, isn't it?'

'Oh, are they? But I'm not good with insects...Well, I just wanted to drop by. Do convey my regards to your mother', she said, looking at my cupped hands anxiously, and then left.

I badly wanted to discuss with somebody the strangeness of cicadas surviving in this chilly season. Do flowers bloom off-season? Have cicadas evolved as insects? It *is* winter, but it isn't as cold

as it used to be before, and the insects that hibernate are on the rise. I wonder if this abrupt climate change caused a mutation. Or could it be that a sudden change in their small bodies rendered them confused between summer and winter?

I wanted to find out what Sawachi had to say about this.

A long time ago at a drinking party, Sawachi said, sipping alcohol, 'Cicadas? They're good fellows. Quite good fellows. They have ambition in their hearts.'

I liked his way of thinking. I began to like Sawachi too.

I placed the cicada in the pocket of my sweater and opened my phone. I ran through my contacts and found Sawachi's number.

The ringing tone rang and Sawachi picked up.

'Yes?'

I tried to suppress my excitement. Forcing a calm voice, I said, 'Long time. I'm sorry for calling you all of a sudden.'

'Ah, it's you...It's been a while.'

He knew it was me immediately.

'This is random, but cicadas are here, you know. Though it's winter. It's odd, no?'

'Oh...cicadas? At this time? Are you sure they aren't cockroaches?'

Please stop, Sawachi.

'No, you've got it wrong! They are cicadas - brown cicadas! It's strange! What do you think? You're well-informed about these things, no?'

On the other side of the line, there was a deep silence that grew longer and longer.

'...there are plenty of strange things, you know.'

'...what?'

'In this world, strange events are many. Like your making a call to me...'

'That's no answer,' I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

'An answer, huh? I wouldn't know about something like that. I wonder if things like that do happen. But strange happenings are a relief... to us, and probably to the rest of the world as well.'

The cicada stuck its head out from my pocket.

I had to let it go soon. They become weak from staying in humans' hands for too long. But what would be better for the cicada - the warmth of my pocket, or the coldness of the snow outside? I wasn't sure.

Before ending the call, I made a promise with Sawachi to go drinking with him again sometime.

I left the house and made my way to the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had shed all its leaves. Its angular branches seemed to be clutching the grey sky. On its trunk riddled with cracks, I gently placed the cicada. It climbed the tree hesitantly, as though it was deep in thought.

The snow continued to fall from the endless sky. Gradually, the snowfall became harsh. It dropped on my head like cold crystals that melted and flowed down as countless streams.

I could see the silhouette of the cicada at the treetop shifting about. Slowly, it disappeared from my view.

My body was frozen from the cold. Despite that, my palms that had held the cicada were hot and sweaty, as they would be in summer.

When I returned to the entrance, I could see my mother's umbrella and the bag with the mandarin oranges. The television was still running, but my father wasn't in the living room anymore. I turned it off and carried the oranges to their usual spot on the table in the kitchen.

My father left this world a long time ago. It has been two years since Ms. Uehara passed. Sawachi too....

On my phone, Sawachi's contact remained. But I no longer had the courage to call his number.

In this house where nobody else lives anymore, pervaded a deafening silence.

In this heavy silence, I could hear buzzing in my ears.

It sounded just like the cry of brown cicadas on a summer day far, far away.

Winter Cicada

Even though it was the dead of winter, a cicada came flying out of nowhere.

After flying this way and that through the lightly falling snow in the bewildered, clumsy manner characteristic of cicadas, it finally landed with a bam on the screen. The sight of it filled me with joy rather than wonder at its stupidity.

You see, I like cicadas. I'm crazy about them.

Niiniizemi, the cute, childlike cicada that alerts you of the coming of summer. Higurashi, with cries that are so elegant that they sound mournful. The droopy-eyed, nimble tsukutsukuboshi. I like all of them. But there's no denying it: my favorite cicada of all is the aburazemi, with its cries that sound like hot oil poured on top of the already hot summer.

But would one really be so stupid as to come out now of all times? Even though it's so cold outside?

I pulled on an angora sweater despite the heater being switched on. "Hey, little guy. Who are you?" I opened the window and brought my face near the screen that we'd left in place after summer. It was so cold it felt as if the Snow Queen's own skin was pressing down on me.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes met and we stared at each other for a moment.

It really was an aburazemi.

It had a slender, cinched stomach that looked like it had been sprinkled with white powder. A male aburazemi. It looked like it was about to give a hearty cry. I cracked open the screen and, keeping my eyes locked with the cicada's, slowly reached out for it with my right hand.

I got it!

I had it in my hand. Its wings were shaped like the blades of a tiny electric fan. I pressed down lightly on the base of them to keep them from getting damaged.

I was ecstatic. It was as if I'd just reached out and taken hold of my goal.

My father was over in the living room watching TV. Without thinking, I hollered at him, "Hey, it's weird, but I found a cicada even though it's winter." Then I regretted it.

"You're still catching those dumb things? Why don't you act your age!?"

I huffed, irritated, "I like what I like. I'm not just messing around." My dad and I always put each other off like this.

Then the doorbell rang from the entryway. As I fumed and turned my back on him, heading to the entryway, he mumbled as if lost in his own thoughts, "Now that I think about it, I used to call you my 'cicada girl.'"

My mom's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing there holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mom doing? Oh, and I brought these because I was in the area," she said as she placed the bag of mikan oranges she was holding down on the step up to the hallway. The bag was from a grocery store near the house.

"Oh, thank you so much. Mother is -"

"I figured I should return the umbrella back to her as soon as possible."

The cicada was poised to flee the second a finger opened up, so I cupped my hands around it like a basket. Hiding the pain from its prickly legs sticking me as it moved around made me feel giddy as if I was keeping a secret.

"You could've brought it back anytime. Mom's going to be in the hospital for a while."

"Really? That's awful."

The cicada started up its tiny little motor and I could feel its fluttering wings tickle my hands.

"You know, Ms. Uehara, even though it's winter I found a cicada. Isn't that weird?"

"Really? A cicada? I've never really liked bugs..." she said, eyeing my cupped hands with a look of unease. "Well, anyway, I just wanted to drop by and see how your mom was doing. Tell her I said hi," she said, then left.

I wanted to talk to someone about how strange it was that this cicada was alive at such a cold time

of year. If it were a flower it'd be blooming off season. Was this an evolution in cicada life? I've heard that since it's much warmer nowadays than it was long ago, some bugs are staying active in winter. Did the abnormal weather cause them to mutate? Or maybe by some chance was it unable to stand the summer heat and, as if lost, came out during the opposite season.

I decided to try talking to Sawachi. At parties, he always said "Yeah, those aburazemi. They're nice little guys. Totally splendid fellows. They sure have ambition" as he drained his watered down drinks. I liked how he'd said it, so I was a little interested in him.

I gently put the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and opened up my cell phone. It beeped as I chose his name from the address book and he picked up.

"...Hello?"

I calmed my beating heart and said nonchalantly, "Hey, it's been a while. Sorry for calling so suddenly."

"Wait, is that you? Hold on, your name's on the tip of my tongue."

He seemed to remember me.

"So this is completely random, but I found a cicada. Even though it's winter. Isn't that odd?"

"Huh? A cicada? Now? Are you sure it isn't a roach?"

Ew, gross. Seriously, stop it, Sawachi.

"No. It's a cicada, specifically an aburazemi. Isn't it strange? What do you think? I thought you'd know about this sort of thing."

For a long time, there was a deep silence from the other side of the line. It seemed to stretch on forever. Then, as if muttering to himself, he replied, "There are a lot of strange things."

"What?"

"This world is full of strange things. For example, you calling me now."

"You're not answering the question"

He gave such an evasive reply.

"An answer? Someone like me wouldn't know about that. I guess something like that can exist. But mysterious things are a kind of salvation. For us, and probably for the world, too."

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

I was going to have to let it go soon. If you keep them in captivity too long they get weak. Speaking of, I didn't know which would be better for the cicada, releasing it in the warm room or letting it go outside in the snow.

I told Sawachi that I was looking forward to hanging out at the next party and hung up, then went out the front door to the persimmon tree in the garden. The leaves had completely fallen off, its bony, angular branches grasping up at the gray sky.

I placed the cicada on the trunk. It was so sinewy and cracked it looked like trenches were dug into it. As if it were lost in thought, the cicada started its slow, hesitant climb up the tree.

Glancing up, the snow seemed to be falling from eternity. The frozen crystals relentlessly fell down onto my face, melting, and streaming down my cheeks in rivulets. Before I knew it, the cicada had vanished, its figure disappearing into the frozen maze of the tree.

I was chilled to the bone, but for some reason the palms of my hands that had held the little cicada remained warm and sweaty as if it were summer. I suddenly remembered that it was a male, but it never let out a cry.

I went back inside to the entryway. My mom's umbrella and the bag of mikan were still there. The TV in the living room was on, though my dad wasn't around. I went and turned off the TV, then placed the mikan in their usual location on top of the kitchen table.

My father had passed a long time ago and to my knowledge, it'd been two years since Ms. Uehara's death. Sawachi was gone, too. The call history on my phone still had my call to him listed in its history, but I didn't have the courage to try calling him again.

With the snow piling up outside, the house was so full of silence that I could feel it pressing in on me.

In the heavy silence, my ears began to ring.

Ring with the cries of aburazemi on a summer day long, long ago.

An Oily Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

An oily cicada came flying up, as though it weren't the dead of winter.

After fluttering clumsily about in the lightly falling snow, as if lost, it all of sudden settled on the screen door.

My first reaction, even before shock or amazement, was one of joy. I love cicadas, the heralds of summer—really, really love them. The *kaempfer* cicadas so precious and childlike, the *tanna japonensis* in all their melancholy elegance, the *meimuna opalifera* with their drooping eyes so full of cheer and grace—I love them all. But in the end, my favorite is the *graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, the *abura-zemi* or oily cicada, whose cry sounds in the summer heat like sizzling cooking oil, *abura*, from which it takes its name in Japanese.

Still, though, to see a cicada now, of all times, as if it weren't freezing and I weren't wearing a turtleneck angora sweater with the heater turned up? So bizarre!

"Hey there mister, just who do you think you are?"

I opened the glass door and peered down at the screen door, which had been left in place since the summer. The cold air pressed in, icy and frigid as the skin of a *yuki-onna*, the snow maiden spirits of Japanese folklore said to sometimes manifest during snowstorms, often presaging death.

My near-sighted eyes and those of the (presumably) near-sighted cicada met for a moment. Definitely an oily cicada. A male specimen, with a tightly coiled abdomen looking as though it had been daubed with white powder, seemingly poised to begin singing loudly at any moment.

Cracking open the screen door while continuing to hold the cicada's stare, I gradually extended my right hand.

Got him!

The cicada lay within my hands, wings like a little motorized fan. The throbbing power at their base pulsed through my fingers, which were pressed against the wings ever so gently in order to avoid damaging them. I was in ecstasy, a sense of repletion in my hands, as if they had fulfilled their purpose.

Without thinking, I called out to my father, who sat with his back to me watching television in the living room. "Look, I found a cicada even though it's winter! That's so weird!" I immediately regretted it.

"Still catching cicadas?! Act your age!"

"I like what I like. I can't help it," I grumbled. Things always went downhill fast between my father and me.

Just then, the chime in the entrance hall sounded. As I turned in a huff and went to answer, my father added, as if he had just recalled, "Now that you mention it, didn't I use to call you Cicada Girl?"

Standing in the entrance was my mother's friend, Mrs Uehara, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing?" Mrs Uehara said as she set a bag from the local supermarket filled with tangerines down on the *agari-kamachi*, the horizontal facing-board that covers the top step from ground level to the raised floor level of a traditional Japanese house.

"These are for you. I was just in the neighborhood..."

"Ah, thanks so much. My mother—"

"and thought I should return her umbrella sooner rather than later, you know."

The cicada was peeking out from under my fingers and on the verge of escaping, so I cupped my hands into a basket and trapped him within. The cicada's feet prickled my palms as he scuttled about, the tickling sensation a secret thrill.

"Oh, there was really no rush. My mother's in the hospital indefinitely."

"I see. That must be hard."

The cicada revved his tiny motor, and the flutter of his wings tickled my palms.

"Look, Mrs Uehara, I found a cicada in winter. Weird, isn't it?"

"Eh, a cicada? Really? I'm not so good with bugs, though, so..."

Staring uneasily at the basket formed by my hands, Mrs Uehara said, "Well, I was just stopping by. Give your mother my regards," and took her leave.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. About the mystery of its being alive in such a cold season. If it were a flower, I suppose you would call it “blooming out of season.” Perhaps its survival represented an evolutionary advance in cicada biology? Winter though it may have been, they say that the number of insects that survive has increased nowadays, with it being much warmer than it used to. Perhaps as a result of climate change, a sudden mutation occurred? Or perhaps it was merely that that this cicada had somehow just kept on going, carrying the summer’s heat within himself, within his tiny body, and had gotten confused as to which season was which?

I decided to try calling Sawachi.

At a party once, a long time ago, as he downed a whiskey and water, Sawachi had said, “Oily cicadas. Yeah, they’re cool, for sure. They’ve got spirit.” I liked the way he said it, so I ended up liking him a little bit too.

I gently tucked the cicada into the cuff of my sweater and opened my cell phone. Looking through my contacts, I saw that Sawachi’s name was still there. The dial tone sounded and then I was connected to Sawachi.

“Yes...”

Composing myself, I said nonchalantly, “Sorry to call you out of the blue after all this time.”

“Oh, is that you? Yeah, it’s been a while.”

Apparently he recognized me right away.

“So guess what? I found a cicada, even though it’s winter. Weird, right?”

“A cicada? Now? A cicada?? You sure it’s not a roach?”

Come off it, Sawachi. So gross.

“It’s definitely not. It’s a cicada. An oily cicada. Strange, right? What do you think? I figured you would know all about this kind of thing.”

A moment of deep and implacable silence flowed across the phone, seeming to grow and grow.

“There are a lot of strange things,” Sawachi muttered.

“Huh?”

“There are a lot of strange things in this world. Like you calling me now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I said, trying to paper over the awkwardness.

“I don’t know. What else should I have said? Well, I guess another strange thing would be salvation. For us, and probably for the world.”

The cicada poked his head out of my sleeve.

I would have to let him go soon. If I kept him in my hands too long, he would weaken. That said, I wasn’t really sure whether it would be better for the cicada to release him inside, where it was warm, or outside amidst the falling snow.

I promised to get drinks again with Sawachi sometime and hung up.

I left the entrance hall and went over to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The tree had lost all of its leaves, its bony branches clutching at the leaden sky. I gently set the cicada down on its trunk, which was covered in grooves and cracks.

As if pondering something, the cicada began querulously climbing, hesitating now and again.

When I looked up, it seemed as if snow was falling endlessly from on high. Growing steadily fiercer, the freezing crystals struck my face and melted into countless flowing lines.

Before I knew it, the figure of the cicada had disappeared somewhere off into the unyielding, labyrinthine silhouette of the treetop.

My body was frozen stiff, yet for some reason my hands, which had held the cicada, remained warm and sweaty as the summer. Now that I thought about it, I suddenly realized that the cicada, though male, hadn’t made any noise at all.

When I came back to the entrance hall, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines were still there. The television was still on in the living room, but my father was gone.

I turned off the television and put the bag of tangerines on the kitchen table, like always.

My father was long dead, and Mrs Uehara must’ve passed away two years ago now as well.

Sawachi too...

The record of the outgoing call to Sawachi was still showing in my cell phone. But I didn't have the courage to try calling again.

The empty house filled with a strangling stillness, perhaps because of the snow that had piled up outside. In the surfeit of silence, my ears started to ring.

It sounded just like the cry of an oily cicada on a far-off summer's day.

A Cicada in Winter, by Azuchi Moe

It was in the depth of winter, when a cicada flew by.

Amongst the flickering snow, it flittered and fluttered in an awkward fashion until it eventually stopped upon the screen door.

I was first struck with delight, before I thought to myself, "How absurd."

I like cicadas. I like cicadas very much.

I like all kinds of cicadas, from the adorably childish harbinger of summer, the *nii-nii-zemi*; the somber and elegant *evening cicada*; and the speedy, energetic, and droopy-eyed *tsuku-tsuku-boshi*. However, my favorite by far is the one that chirps on hot summer days with a call like the outpouring of even hotter oil: the *brown cicada*.

But inevitably, my thought turned to, "How absurd."

It was so cold.

I was wearing an angora wool turtleneck and had the heat turned up...

"Whoa there. Who are you?"

I opened the glass window and leaned my face into the screen door that was left untouched since last summer. The chill loomed in on me like the skin of *yuki-onna*, the snow ghou.

My own nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes locked together for a brief moment.

It was, indubitably, a brown cicada.

A male brown cicada, with a tight belly that was whitened as if it was lightly powdered. It looked like it was readying to give a loud cry...

I opened the screen door slightly and kept my eyes on the cicada while I slowly extended my right arm.

And I caught it!

The cicada struggled in my hand. Its wings beat like fans powered by a tiny motor. The power of the roots of its wings could be felt zipping on my fingertips, which were carefully poised to avoid hurting its wings.

I was overwhelmed with joy.

I felt sated, as if I had grasped some objective within my hand.

"Something strange just happened. I found a cicada in the middle of winter. See?"

Without much thought, I had called out to father who was watching television in the living room. I promptly regretted doing so.

"Are you still catching bugs at your age?"

"I can like whatever I like, and it'll be none of your business!" I sharpened my tongue in retort.

Father and I were always like this.

It was then that the doorbell rang.

Still in a prickly mood, I turned my back to father and headed towards the front door while he started musing aloud like he was thinking back, "I recall you used to be called the cicada girl."

Ms. Uehara, a friend of mother's, was standing there holding mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother doing? Here..." she said as she lowered on the doorsill a bag of mandarins from the local supermarket.

"I happened to be in the neighborhood."

"Oh, thank you. Mother is—"

"I thought it was about time I returned the umbrella too."

The cicada gave a good struggle and almost escaped my fingers, so I closed both hands together like a cage and trapped it inside. The cicada's pointy feet poked about, and the tiny stinging sensation stirred a clandestine euphoria within my hands.

"Oh, there was absolutely no hurry... Mother would be in hospital for a long time."

"Oh my. That must be troubling."

The cicada switched on its tiny motors, its wings flapping about and tickling my hand.

"Ms. Uehara. I found a cicada, this late into winter. Don't you think that's odd?"

"Oh, did you? Really? I'm not fond of insects all that much, personally..."

Ms. Uehara glanced at my clasped hands worriedly and said, "Anyway, I was just dropping by. Say hello to your mother for me," before heading away.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. How miraculous it was that it was alive in this very cold season. If it was a flower, it might have been called an "offbeat bloom". Was it an evolution of the cicada's survivability? It's said that winters have been getting warmer compared to previous seasons, and more insects have been able to endure the winter spell. Did the abnormal climate cause it to mutate? Or perhaps, by chance, after bearing the burden of the blazing summer heat upon its tiny body, it somehow wandered into the opposite side, to this end of the seasons?

I decided to discuss this with Sawachi.

A long time ago, while draining a drink at a party, Sawachi said, "Yep, the brown cicada. He's a good fella. A really good one. He's got ambitions, he does."

I liked what he said then, so I had come to like Sawachi too.

I tucked the cicada into my sleeve and flipped open my phone. Looking through my contacts, I found Sawachi's name still in there.

The dial tone rang, and the call connected to Sawachi.

"...Yes?"

I calm myself and say casually, "It's been a while. Sorry for calling you out of the blue..."

"Hey... Is that you? Yeah, it's been a while."

He seemed to have recognized me immediately.

"I know it's kind of sudden, but I wanted to tell you that I found a cicada. In winter. Isn't that strange?"

"Huh... A cicada? Like, now? A cicada? Really. You sure it wasn't a roach?"

Please, Sawachi, lay off it.

"Absolutely not. It's a cicada. A brown cicada. Isn't it amazing? What do you think? I thought you might know something about this, Sawachi..."

On the other side of the phone, an undeniably deep silence passed, and then seemed to further expand.

Sawachi said in a hushed tone, "...Mysterious things occur all the time."

"...Huh?"

"There are plenty of mysteries in this world. Even the fact that you're calling me right now..."

"You're not answering me," I tried telling him, as if to hide that I was flustered.

"An answer... I really don't know. Maybe it's possible. But hey, mysteries, are a respite. For us, and maybe to the world at large too..."

The cicada popped its head out of my sleeve.

I have to let it go soon. Cicadas become weak if they're held on for too long. But between leaving it in this warm room and freeing it outside in the flickering snow, I couldn't tell which would really be better for the cicada.

I promised Sawachi that we would drink together some day and ended the call.

I went out through the front door and went towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had shed its leaves and its bony branches grasped at the grey sky.

I set the cicada down on the branch with its spiraling ridges and cracks wrapping around. The cicada paused as if in thought, and then leisurely started climbing the branch, only seeming to be wary occasionally.

When I looked up, the snow appeared to fall from an endless height. With gradually increasing intensity, solid cool crystals hit my face and melted away, flowing off me in multiple streams.

Eventually, the cicada was atop the persimmon tree, disappearing somewhere within the frigid, labyrinthine silhouette.

My body was completely chilled, but the two hands that previously held the cicada was hot as ever, and as sweaty as it would have been in summer. It occurred to me that the cicada was male, but

chirped not once the whole time...

When I returned to the front door, mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still sitting there. The television in the living room was left on, but father was nowhere to be seen.

I turned off the television and moved the bag of mandarins to the table in the kitchen as I normally would.

It had already been a long time since father had died, and it must have been about two years since Ms. Uehara passed away. As for Sawachi...

The call I made to Sawachi remained in my phone history. But I hadn't the courage to try calling him again.

As the snow started to settle, the lifeless house was filled with a suffocating silence.

It was so quiet, my ears started to ring.

And it sounded like the cry of a brown cicada, from a summer's day passed long ago.

A Cicada in Winter

A cicada came flying, though it was the dead of winter.

As if it were lost in the snow flurries, it flew around in that familiar clumsy way, then suddenly landed on my screen door.

Wait—this can't be, was not what came to my mind first. I was thrilled.

I liked cicadas. Really, really liked them.

A nii-nii zemi, an adorable toddler-like being who lets us know the summer is here; a melancholy elegant higurashi; and a nimble and cheerful, friendly-eyed tsuku-tsuku boshi. But most of all, I liked abura zemi, whose blazing call seemed to turn up the heat in scorching summer.

All the same, for now, *this can't be*.

In such cold weather.

I was wearing an angora turtleneck sweater, and the heater was on.

“Hey there, what in the world are you?”

I opened the glass door and put my face closer to the screen door which had been left untouched since summer. The cool air drew near, like the icy skin of Yuki-onna .

My near-sighted eyes and the cicada's (most likely) near-sighted eyes met.

Just as I suspected: abura zemi.

It was a male, with a powdery-white, firm abdomen. It seemed as if he would start calling loudly any minute...

I cracked open the screen door and holding the cicada's gaze, reached over gingerly with my right hand.

Got it!

The cicada fluttered around in my hand. His wings were like a fan powered by a tiny motor. Gently holding the wings so as not to damage them, my fingers could feel the pulsating beat of its flight muscles.

I was ecstatic.

I felt fulfilled as if I'd captured a purpose of some sort in my hand.

My father was watching TV in the living room.

“Look, it's strange. There's a cicada in winter. See?”

I blurted it out to my father's back. Then regretted it.

“Still catching things like cicadas, at your age—”

“I'm free to like whatever I like!”

I raised my voice, annoyed.

This often had been the way between my father and I.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it, we used to call you Cicada Girl.”

In a huff, I turned my back to my father and went to answer the door.

Uehara, a friend of my mother, was standing at the door, holding my mother's umbrella.

“How's your mother? Here...”

She placed a bag of mandarin oranges from a nearby supermarket on the raised step in the entryway.

“I was just in the neighborhood...”

“Ah, thank you. My mother is—”

“The umbrella. I'd meant to return it sooner...”

The cicada struggled and almost got away from my fingers, so I cupped my hands like a basket, trapping it inside.

The cicada's legs prodded around; the slight stinging sensation was like a secret pleasure in my hand.

“Oh, there's no rush...my mother will be in the hospital for a while...”

“Is that so? That must be hard.”

The cicada activated his flight muscles; the wings rustled, tickling my palms.

"Guess what, Uehara-san. Here's a cicada. In winter. Isn't this strange?"

"Is that so? Really? But I don't really care for bugs..."

Uehara glanced uneasily at my cupped hands.

"Well then, I was just stopping by. Say hello to your mother," she said and headed back home.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. The wonder of it being alive in such cold weather—. Was this the equivalent of flowers blossoming off-season? Was this the evolution of a cicada's survival? In recent years, even winter has become warmer, and more insects have been overwintering. Has the abnormal weather caused something like a mutation? Or, by some chance—carrying that scorching summer on his tiny back, has he wandered into this opposite season: on the *other side*?

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

Sipping whisky on the rocks at a get-together a long time ago, Sawachi had said:

"Yeah, abura zemi. They're good guys. Pretty decent. They have ambition, you know." I had liked the way he had said that, and so, I had become a little fond of Sawachi.

I tucked the cicada gently into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my flip phone. I searched my address book and found Sawachi's name still there.

After the tone, I was connected to Sawachi.

".....hello..."

I tried to remain calm and casually said,

"It's been a long time. Sorry for calling you all of a sudden..."

"Wait...is that you? Wow, it's been so long."

It sounded like he recognized me right away.

"Guess what? I'll get right to the point. I found a cicada. And in winter. Isn't that odd?"

"What...a cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? Are you sure it's not a roach?"

Oh please, Sawachi.

"No way, it *is* a cicada. An abura zemi. Isn't this mysterious? Hey, what do you think? I thought you'd have some insight into this kind of thing—"

It was as though a deep, irreparable silence fell, then grew on the other end.

Sawachi said, almost whispering:

"...there are many mysterious things..."

"...oh?"

"Mysterious things abound in this life. Like you giving me this call now..."

"That doesn't answer my question."

I said this as though to cover up my embarrassment.

"An answer...huh. I don't have an answer for that. I wonder if there even is one. But you know, mysterious things are salvation. For us, and probably for the world—"

The cicada's face poked out from my sleeve.

I should let him go soon, I thought. Cicadas could become weak if they are in human hands for too long. But in this case, I wasn't quite sure which was better for him: staying warm inside or being outside in the snow flurries.

I made a promise to have another get-together someday with Sawachi and hung up the phone.

I went out the front door and headed toward a persimmon tree in the yard.

The tree had lost all its leaves, and the bony branches were grabbing the gray sky.

I gently set the cicada to perch on the deeply wrinkled and cracked tree trunk. The cicada started to slowly climb upward, sometimes hesitating, as if he was pondering something.

Looking up, snow seemed to fall from the immeasurable high above. Gradually falling harder, icy flakes landed and melted, streaking down my face.

Eventually, the cicada disappeared into a hardened, maze-like tree top.

My body was thoroughly chilled, but somehow my hands, which had held the cicada captured, stayed warm and sweaty like it was summer. Then it occurred to me: even though it was a male cicada, he never once made his call...

When I returned to the front door, my mother's umbrella and the mandarin oranges were there. The TV in the living room was still on; my father was already gone.

I switched the TV off. Then, just like any other day, I took the bag of oranges over to the kitchen table.

It had been a long time since my father had passed away; Uehara also, had died two years ago. And Sawachi too...

The call record on my cellphone displayed Sawachi's number. But I don't have the courage to try that number again...

Perhaps the snow is accumulating now; aching stillness is filling up the empty house.

In the overwhelming quietness, my ears start ringing.

Just like the call of abura zemi in summers long gone.

An Oily Cicada in Winter

By Azuchi Moe

Even though it's the middle of winter, an oily cicada just flew over.

It darted about the swirling snow in a wavering, clumsy pattern, constantly turning this way and that, until it suddenly landed on my screen door.

Before I could register my disbelief, joy rose within me.

I like cicadas. Very much, in fact.

That includes Kempfer cicadas, which are like cute little kids that announce the arrival of summer, and evening cicadas, whose elegance is almost sorrowful, and Walker's cicadas, with their bright cheeriness and droopy eyes, but at the end of the day my favorite is the oily cicada, which floods the hot summers with a voice like even hotter oil.

But it would be ridiculous to find one at this time of year. When it's this cold. And I'm wearing an angora turtleneck sweater with the heater on—.

"Hey there, just who are you?"

I opened the glass door and brought my face to the screen door, which hadn't moved since summer. Chill pressed upon me like an embrace from Jack Frost.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes met.

It was definitely an oily cicada.

A male oily cicada, with a tapered, white-speckled abdomen. It looked like it could start noisily chirping at any moment—.

I opened the screen door a little and, without breaking eye contact, slowly reached my right hand towards the cicada.

Got it!

The cicada raged in my hand, its wings fluttering like a small motorized fan. The vibrations conveyed the cicada's power to the finger I used to softly press down on its wings' base to prevent injury.

I was ecstatic. I felt satisfied, as if I literally had a goal within my grasp.

"Hey, something weird just happened. I found a cicada, even though it's the middle of winter. Look!"

Without thinking I called to my dad, who was watching TV in the living room with his back turned. An action I immediately regretted.

"Are you still catching cicadas? At your age—"

"I can't help what I like! I'm not just being childish!"

My annoyance makes my tone rough. This is how my dad and I always got on.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

"They used to call you cicada girl when you were little, didn't they?" my dad said, as if just remembering. I turned away and stomped into the foyer.

My mom's friend, Mrs. Uehara, was standing there with my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? Here..." Mrs. Uehara lowered a bag of mandarin oranges from the local supermarket to the floor. "I just happened to be nearby, so..."

"Ah, thank you very much. Mom is—"

"I thought I'd better return her umbrella quickly, you know—"

The cicada began to struggle and almost escaped my finger, so I clamped both hands around it like a cage. I felt its legs skitter about as it moved, the tingling itchiness like a secret pleasure.

"Ah, you could have returned it any time.... Mom is going to be in the hospital for a while."

"Oh, I see. I'm sorry to hear that."

The cicada turned on its miniature motor, and the rustling of its wings tickled my hands.

"Hey, Mrs. Uehara. I found a cicada, even though it's winter. That's weird, right?"

"Huh, you did? Really? Well, I'm a bit squeamish with bugs, so—" Mrs. Uehara looked uncomfortably at my cupped hands. "Anyway, I just came to drop by, so say hi to your mom for me," she said as she left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. About the mystery of its existence during this freezing

time of year—. It was like a flower blooming in the off-season. I wondered if it was due to an evolution in the cicada's natural abilities. Even though it's winter, since the temperature is now warmer than it was in the past, I've heard that the number of bugs surviving through the year is increasing. I wondered if the unnatural climate caused something like a spontaneous evolution to occur. Or maybe, just by a fluke—the cicada managed to capture the entirety of summer in its tiny body, and somehow wandered from the other side into "this side's" season.

I decided I'd try telling Sawachi.

A while ago, when we were drinking once, Sawachi drained his glass of diluted *shochu* and said, "Oh yeah, oily cicadas are awesome. True bros. They've got wild hearts." I liked his phrasing, which made me like him a bit too.

I softly tucked the cicada into one of my sleeves and opened my cellphone. I checked my contacts, and Sawachi was still there.

After a few rings, Sawachi picked up.

"...Hello..."

"It's been a while," I said nonchalantly as I tried to keep cool. "Sorry for calling so suddenly—"

"Oh... Is that you? Huh, it's been a while, yeah."

Looks like he was able to immediately recognize me.

"Hey, I know this is sudden, but I found a cicada. Even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"Huh... A cicada? Now? A *cicada*? It's not just a roach, is it?"

Hey, come on Sawachi, don't be like that.

"No way! It's a cicada, an oily cicada. Strange, right? So, what do you think? I thought you'd know about this sort of thing—"

I felt like a deep, irreversible silence was spilling and flowing out from the other side of the receiver.

Sawachi spoke in a voice that was almost a whisper.

"...There are plenty of strange phenomena."

"...What?"

"This world is full of strange happenings. Even the mere fact that you called me just now..."

"That doesn't answer my question."

I tried to say something that sounded bashful.

"An... answer, huh. I don't have one of those. I wonder if there even is one. But these phenomena are salvation. For us, and maybe even for the world—"

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve.

I needed to let it go soon. The cicada would weaken if it spent too much time in captivity. Except I wasn't sure if it'd be better to release here in the warm room or into the swirling snow outside.

I promised Sawachi that we'd go drinking again soon and hung up.

I exited the foyer, and went to the persimmon tree in our garden.

The persimmon tree had shed all its leaves, and its bony branches grasped at the gray sky.

I softly let the cicada down on the trunk, which was covered in groove-like knots and cracks. The cicada began to leisurely climb up the tree, sometimes pausing here and there, as if deep in thought.

Looking up, it was as if the snow was falling from endlessly far away. The snow gradually grew more violent, and as the icy crystals hit my face and melted, they flowed down in streaks.

At some point the cicada had disappeared into the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the branches at the top of the tree.

My body was thoroughly chilled, yet for some reason my hands, which had been holding the cicada, remained warm and sweaty, like summertime. Come to think of it, I suddenly realized... the cicada had never chirped once, even though it was a male.

I returned to the foyer, where Mom's umbrella and the bag of oranges sat. The TV in the living room was still on, but Dad wasn't there anymore.

I turned off the TV, and put the bag of oranges in its usual place on the kitchen table.

Some time has already passed since Dad's funeral, and I think Mrs. Uehara passed away two years

ago. And Sawachi, too....

My call to Sawachi was still listed in my phone's history. But I didn't have the courage to try calling him again....

Maybe it was because the snow had piled up, but the empty house suddenly felt like it was filled with a constricting quiet.

The overwhelming silence began to buzz in my ears.

Almost like the cry of an oily cicada from a far-off summer day.

A Brown Cicada in Winter
Azuchi Moe

A brown cicada was flying toward me, even though it was the middle of winter.

It approached through the lightly falling snow, flying awkwardly as though it had lost its way, turning this way and that, before finally landing on the screen door with a plop.

What, I thought, are you kidding me? But, my first reaction was delight.

I like cicadas. I really, really like them.

I like the Kempfer cicada whose cute, child-like chirps announce the coming of summer. I like the sadly elegant song of the evening cicada. I like the bright, cheerful call of the *tsukutsuku-bōshi* cicada. But, my favorite of all is the brown cicada, whose voice crackles like the sound of sizzling oil on a hot summer's day.

Seriously, though, what was going on?

On such a cold day?

With me wrapped in an angora turtleneck sweater and the heat turned up?

"Hey," I said, "What are you doing here?"

I opened the glass door and put my face close to the screen, which had stayed shut since the end of summer. Cold air pressed in, chilly as the skin of the Snow Woman from the old stories.

Nearsighted, I squinted at the cicada. It (probably) squinted back.

Yup, a brown cicada.

A male, hunkered down tight, his stomach dusted with white. Even now, he looked like he could burst into song at any moment.

I opened the screen door a little and, keeping eye contact with the cicada, slowly reached out with my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada struggled in my hand, his wings working like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. I could feel the power in those wings, their roots twitching against my fingers as I held them tightly, but gently, so as not to damage them.

I felt a wild joy.

In my hand, the cicada settled down, as though satisfied.

My father was watching television in the living room, his back to me. Without thinking, I called to him.

"Hey, this is so weird. It's winter, but there's a cicada. Look."

I regretted it right away.

"You're still chasing after cicadas? You need to act your age."

Sullen, I retorted roughly.

"I like what I like, what's wrong with that?"

This always happened right away, with my father and me.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

"That's right, they used to call you the cicada girl."

My father sounded like he was about to start reminiscing, but I, still in a huff, turned my back on him and went to answer the door.

Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother, stood there, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How's your mother doing? Here, this is for you."

As she said this, Mrs. Uehara reached in and placed a bag of mandarins on the threshold. The bag had a nearby supermarket's logo on it.

"I just happened to be in the neighborhood."

"Thanks so much. You know, my mother..."

"I thought I'd better bring her umbrella back before it got too late."

With one sudden burst of energy, the cicada slipped free of my grip. I closed both hands around him, like a cage. I felt his legs scrabbling around, painfully itchy, a secret pleasure within my hands.

“Gosh, anytime would have been all right. My mother’s going to be in the hospital for a long time.”

“Is that right? I’m sorry to hear it.”

The cicada started up his tiny motor, his wings rustling dryly and tickling my palms.

“Listen, Mrs. Uehara. I saw a cicada, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that strange?”

“Really? Is that right? I’m not so good with bugs, you know.”

Mrs. Uehara glanced nervously at my cupped hands.

“Anyway, I just stopped by to say hello. Say hi to your mother for me, all right?”

She said her goodbyes and hurried off.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. How strange for a cicada to be here, alive in this cold, like a flower blooming out of season. Maybe cicadas had evolved into a more powerful life form. Or, maybe, winters these days had become warmer than they used to be, and the number of insects able to make it through had increased as well. Maybe the odd occurrence was the result of an abnormal climate. Or, maybe, we could even say that the cicada had somehow, by some chance, blundered in from the opposite season, carrying the heat of summer in his little body.

I decided to try giving Sawachi-kun a call.

A long time ago, when we went out drinking with friends, he had talked about cicadas while knocking back his whiskey and water.

“Yup, brown cicadas are cool. Really cool little guys. They’re wild at heart.”

I took a liking to what he had said, and to him as well, a little.

I slipped the cicada inside one of my sleeves, flipped open my phone, and looked in my address book. Sawachi-kun’s name was still there.

The phone rang, and Sawachi-kun picked up.

“Hello...?”

I forced myself to calm down and sound casual.

“Hi, it’s been a while. Sorry to call all of a sudden.”

“Hey...is that you? Wow, it’s been a while.”

It seemed like he remembered my voice right away.

“So, um, let me get to the point. I saw a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Huh? A cicada? Now? Seriously? Umm...are you sure it wasn’t a cockroach?”

Gross, stop it, Sawachi-kun.

“No way! It’s definitely a cicada. A brown cicada. Isn’t that strange? What do you think? I thought you might know about this kind of thing.”

A deep silence filled the other end of the line, as though a bottomless chasm had opened up.

Sawachi-kun answered, his voice now a low mutter.

“There are lots of strange things in this world.”

“Huh?”

“All kinds of strange things. For example, the fact that you called me just now...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I was flustered but tried to hide it.

“Mean? I don’t know. I don’t know what anything means. But, you know, strange things can be a lifeline. For us...and probably for the whole world, too.”

The cicada poked his face out from my sleeve.

I needed to start thinking about letting him go. He would lose his strength if he sat around in my hands forever. On the other hand, what would be best for the cicada? Keeping him in a warm room, or letting him go in the snow? I didn’t know.

Sawachi-kun and I promised to meet up for drinks again sometime and hung up.

I went outside and headed for the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree’s leaves were all gone, and its bony branches clawed at the grey sky.

I gently put the cicada down on the trunk, where the wood was covered over with rippling lines and grooves. He started climbing unhurriedly, hesitating here and there as though he had something on his mind.

I looked up. The snow was falling as though from an endless height. It was getting heavier, little by little, the crystals falling on my face and melting away, falling and melting away in so many rivulets.

Before I knew it, the cicada had vanished into the top of the tree. I could no longer see his stiff, wandering silhouette.

My body was chilled through, but my hands that had held the cicada were, somehow, still warm and sweaty as though from the heat of summer. Thinking about the cicada, I suddenly realized he hadn't made a single peep.

When I went back inside, my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were by the front door where I had left them. The television in the living room had been left on, but my father was nowhere to be seen.

I shut the television off and brought the oranges over to the kitchen table where I usually put them.

My father had left this world a long time ago. Mrs. Uehara had also passed away, two years ago. Sawachi-kun, too...

My phone still showed the call I had made to Sawachi-kun, but I didn't have the courage to try calling back.

Silence soaked into the empty house, filling it up. Maybe it was because the snow had started piling up outside.

It was so quiet that a ringing, buzzing sound started in my ears.

It sounded just like a brown cicada, calling from a faraway, faraway summer's day.

The Winter *Aburazemi*

Though it was the middle of winter, an *aburazemi* cicada came flying by. The large brown cicada flew as if lost in the sprinkling snow, clumsily changing course this way and that, finally coming to an abrupt halt at my screen door.

Huh? How idiotic, I thought, delighted. I love cicadas. Love ‘em so very very much. Announcing the arrival of summer are the cute, baby-like buzzing *ninizemi* and the tear-jerkingly elegant *higurashi*—the evening cicada; and finally the nimble and cheerful, doe-eyed *tsukutsu bōshi* cicada. I love all these types of cicada, but above all, I love the *aburazemi*. Its voice feels like the warmth of summer, like oil thrown on a fire.

But still, how idiotic, an *aburazemi* out here as cold as it is now. I’m wearing my Angola sweater and have the heat on for crying out loud! “Hey! What are you?” I say.

I open the glass door and put my face to the screen like it was still summer. A chill like the icy skin of a ghost comes over me. For a brief moment my myopic eyes meet the (probably) myopic eyes of the cicada. It’s a male *aburazemi*, his belly like a puff of white flour. Looks like he’s on the verge of letting out a loud buzz any second now...

I open the screen door, locking eyes with the cicada, stretching my right arm out, poised to strike. I caught him!

He struggles in my hand, his wings moving like the small motor of an electric fan. So I don’t injure his wings, I gently pinch their trembling base with my fingers.

I’m ecstatic!

Holding him in my hand I’ve accomplished some kind of goal. “Hey that’s strange. A cicada in the middle of winter? Sheesh.” Without thinking, I blurt this out to my father’s silhouette watching television in the living room, and afterwards regret it. “So you’re still catching cicadas, eh? Act your age—” he says.

“I like what I like, so lay off,” I reply sullenly. My father and I would easily get like that. Right then the doorbell rang. I got angry.

“Come to think of it, I used to say ‘my half daughter’,” my father said as if recalling a memory. I turned my back on him and went out to the foyer.

My mother’s friend Uehara-san was standing outside holding my mother’s umbrella. “How is your mother? This is...” she said as she set a supermarket bag full of mandarin oranges down on the doorframe. “I was in the area so...”

“Ah, thank you. My mother—”

“The umbrella, I thought I should return it promptly *ne*—”

The cicada starts to struggle, attempting to escape from my fingers, so I trap him with both my hands like shutting him up in a cage. His legs moved about, making my hands tingle as if that itchiness was my hands’ secret pleasure.

“Oh, my mother’s good but...she’s been in the hospital a long time” I say.

“Well, is that so? How dreadful *ne*—”

Like a scooter engine starting up, the flutter of the cicada’s wings tickles my hands. “Hey Uehara-san, even though it’s winter there was a cicada about. Isn’t that weird?”

“Eh, really? But I’m not a fan of bugs so...” Uehara-san looked uneasily at the cage of my clasped hands. “Well then, I was just stopping by. Give my regards to your mother *ne*,” she said, then left.

I wanted to talk to someone about this cicada. Tell them in this frigid season how the strangeness of it being alive is—like a flower blooming out of season. Maybe this is the evolution of the cicada’s vitality? Speaking of winter, it’s said to have become hotter nowadays than it was in the past. It’s also said that the number of hibernating insects is increasing too. Perhaps because of the abnormal weather some kind of mutation has occurred in the *aburazemi* cicada? Or, by some impulse in that small body—the hot summer absorbed in the opposite season, in *this* season you could maybe call it “losing one’s way”.

I decided to try to talk to Sawachi about it. Long ago, while we were drinking together, Sawachi said this as he downed a whiskey on the rocks: “Yeah, *aburazemi ne*. They’re good little guys. Damn good. They have *yashin*, they’re ambitious you know.” I liked the way he spoke, so I took a liking to Sawachi.

I put the cicada securely in the sleeve of my sweater and pulled out my cell phone. Sawachi’s name was still saced in my contacts. The line rings, then Sawachi picks up.

“...yes?...”

I force myself to be calm and say casually, “It’s been awhile. Sorry for calling out of the blue—”

“Ah...is that you? It’s been ages.” Seems like he instantly understood it was me on the line.

“So uh, I know this a bit out of left field, but there’s a cicada here, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Eh...a cicada? Right now? A Cicadaaaa? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Gross, Sawachi. Just stop. “It’s no cockroach. It’s a cicada, an *aburazemi* cicada. Isn’t that mysterious? *Ne*, what do you think? If I were you, I’d think the details were—”

From the other end of the line an inescapably deep silence seemed to balloon.

Sawachi’s voice became a murmur. “...Lots of mysterious things happen, you know.”

“...Huh?”

“There are many mysteries in this world. The fact that you’re calling me right now...”

“That’s no answer”

Sawachi tried to say something bashful. “An answer, huh? I don’t know. Those sorts of things happen. But anyway, mysteries are salvation, you know. Us, and probably the world are—”

The cicada poked its face out from my sleeve. I’ll have to let him go soon. If a cicada is kept in a person’s hand for too long it becomes weak. On that note, I don’t know if the warmth of this room or letting this cicada go into the falling snow outside is better for him.

I promised Sawachi that we’d go drinking together again and hung up. I went out the front door towards the persimmon tree in the courtyard. All of the leaves of the persimmon tree had fallen, its bony branches gripping the ashen sky. In a groove-like hidden crack in the trunk of the persimmon tree, I gently placed the cicada. As if pondering something, the cicada occasionally paused as he leisurely climbed the trunk.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. Gradually, the incessant and brisk snowflakes on face melted, and I found my bearings.

At some point, the shape of the cicada at the top of the persimmon tree stiffened, and the cicada disappeared like a silhouette into a maze.

I was chilled to the bone, but even so my hands that caught the cicada have been warm, even sweating like it was summer. Now that I think of it, the cicada was male, but I never heard a peep out of him...

I returned to my front door, where my mother’s umbrella and the bag of mandarin oranges lay. In the living room the television was still on, but my father’s figure was already gone. I turned off the television and carried the bag of oranges to the kitchen table like I always do.

My father passed away a long time ago, Uehara-san also died two years ago, and Sawachi too...

My call with Sawachi is still in my call history, but I didn’t have the courage to call the number again. The snow really has piled up. It’s only me in this house as silence fills the air as if under pressure.

In the silence my ears begin to ring. The ringing is as if far far away an *aburazemi* was buzzing on a summer’s day.

THE CICADA IN WINTER

AZUCHI Moe

Amid the fluttering snow outside, a cicada was in flight. A cicada... in the depths of winter. It zigzagged about in that clumsy way cicadas do—as though unsure of where it should go—before landing abruptly on the screen behind the glass door.

At first, this spectacle filled me with such delight that its absurdity didn't sink in. It so happens I adore cicadas in all their diversity: the petite *Platypleura kaempferi*, herald to the summer; *Tanna japonensis* and its mournful serenade; the exuberant but elusive *Meimuna opalifera*; and above all, *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, whose song suggests sizzling hot oil poured onto the flames of high summer.

But a cicada in winter? That's just bizarre. It was cold enough that even with the heating switched on I needed to wear my angora wool sweater.

Well, what have we here? I slid open the glass door to access the insect screen left in place since the summer. A deathly frigidity embraced me. Peering with myopic eyes, I drew my face nearer, and the cicada—perhaps myopically—returned my gaze. As I'd anticipated, it was my favourite, *G. nigrofuscata*; a male of the species in possession of a well-knit abdomen whose colouration resembled a dusting of white powder. It looked to be about ready to break into its clamorous song.

Keeping my target within sights, I shifted the screen open a little and reached around with my right hand.

Got you!

The cicada struggled in my grip. Gently, my fingers pressed down on its wings to protect them from injury, and I sensed a quivering motion stemming from their base, as if they were powered by a little motor.

I felt elated. The quarry filled out my hand.

'Take a look at this,' I blurted out to my father, who was sat watching television in the living room, his back turned to me. 'I found a cicada. A cicada in winter.' Straight away I wished I'd kept quiet.

'You're chasing around after cicadas? You need to act your age.'

'I like what I like. It's no business of yours!' I snapped back. We tended to be this way with each other, father and I.

'Come to think of it, I did used to call you *cicada girl* back in the day,' he said. But the doorbell had just rung, and in my irritated state I simply turned around and headed for the front door.

Stood outside with mother's umbrella was her friend, Mrs. Uehara. 'So, how is your mother doing? Here, take these,' she said, passing over a bag of satsumas from the local grocery store. 'I was just in the neighbourhood.'

'Ah, thank you for your concern.'

'I thought I should return her umbrella.'

The cicada had become somewhat agitated and was on the verge of slipping out of my fingers, so I cupped my hands together to form a makeshift trap. As it scurried about looking for an escape, I could feel the tingling of those tiny legs. A surreptitious pleasure contained within my hands.

'You could have returned it any time. Mum has been staying at the hospital.'

'Oh dear, has she really? Sorry to hear that.'

The cicada's tiny motor started up, the flutter of its wings producing a tickling feeling.

'Listen, although it's winter, I came across a cicada a little while ago. Don't you find that curious, Mrs. Uehara?'

'Is that a fact? To be honest, I don't get along with creepy crawlies,' Mrs. Uehara said, looking apprehensively at my clasped hands. 'Anyway, I was only dropping by for a moment. Please pass on my best wishes to your mother.' And with that she took off.

I only wanted to share my wonder at finding this living thing during such an inhospitable time of the year. Flowers are known to bloom out of season, so could there be a variation in the life-cycle of

the cicada? It may be winter, but nowadays it's warmer than it was, and apparently the populations of insects that survive through the winter are on the increase. Perhaps some sort of mutation occurred due to the abnormal climate? Or is it possible that somehow, its little body having been subjected to that hot summer, the cicada nymph lost track of the season heading into winter?

I decided to give Sawachi a call. He'd said something long ago at a party as he knocked back a tumbler of scotch, and the way he put it warmed me to him—

Cicadas, y'know; they're fine little fellows. Admirable little chaps. They're filled with that go-getting spirit, aren't they?

After nudging the cicada up the sleeve of my sweater, I reached for my mobile phone. Sawachi's name was still there in the address list. I tapped his number to initiate the call, and Sawachi's voice answered: 'Hello?'

I composed myself and tried to sound casual. 'Sorry to contact you out of the blue after so long...'

'Oh, is it you? Wow, this is a surprise.'

Evidently he hadn't forgotten me. 'Well, to get straight to the point, I found a cicada a little earlier. A cicada in winter time. How weird is that?'

'At this time of year? No, it must've been a cockroach.'

Oh don't go down that route, Sawachi. 'No, it's not a cockroach, it's a cicada; my favourite species as well. I know it's perplexing, but what do you think? I thought you may have some sort of explanation for it.'

There followed an interval of deep, irretrievable silence from the other end of the phone.

'Mysteries are part of life,' mumbled Sawachi finally.

'Sorry?'

'This world is full of mysteries, things that defy reason. Your making this call to me now, for one...'

'That's not a proper explanation,' I said, partly to cover a twinge of embarrassment.

'If it's an explanation you want, I can't give you one. I'm not sure one exists. But, mysteries and wonders redeem us, and perhaps also the world.'

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve. I needed to release it before its vitality waned, but I wasn't sure if it would last longer outside in the snow or within a warm interior. My phone call with Sawachi ended with our agreeing to meet for drinks again some time.

I stepped outside into the garden and walked towards the persimmon tree. Its scraggy branches, bereft of leaves, grasped at an ashen sky. Once I had perched the cicada on the trunk, it began a leisurely climb up the ridged and furrowed bark, taking a pause every so often as if it were weighing up the available options. My gaze drifted upwards. The snow seemed to be falling from some higher plane. With growing intensity, icy flakes landed on my face and melted into trickling rivulets. There was now no sign of the cicada. At some point it had vanished into the unyielding and labyrinthine silhouette formed by the persimmon tree's upper branches.

Although I was numb with cold, for whatever reason my hands had felt hot the whole time, and sweaty too, like they were exposed to the humidity of summer. And something else occurred to me: the cicada hadn't once produced its call, even though it was a male.

I made my way back inside. A bag of satsumas and mother's umbrella had been left in the porch. The television in the living room was still switched on and father was gone. I took the bag to the kitchen table as usual, and then went to turn the television off.

Thinking about it, Mrs. Uehara must have died a couple of years earlier; and it had been ages since my father passed away.

And then there's Sawachi...

The history of calls to Sawachi was still on my phone, but I didn't actually have the nerve to call him again.

It seemed the snow was building up outside—a suffocating sense of stillness permeated the empty house. In that profound silence I had noticed a buzzing in my ears. A noise reminiscent of a

long-distant summer's day, when the cicadas were in full cry.

The Winter Cicada

A large brown cicada flew towards me, though it was the dead of winter.

It flew about clumsily here and there in all directions as if it were lost - like they do - amidst the lightly falling snow, at long last landing suddenly upon the screen door.

But before I could ponder how preposterous this was, I became overcome with joy.

I love large brown cicadas. I really, truly love them.

I like the *Platypleura kaempferi* who resemble cute little children, and *Tanna japonensis* with its sorrowful elegance, and the quick and cheerful droopy-eyed *Meimuna opalifera* – all harbingers of summer. But the *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, or large brown cicada, with a cry that seems to pour hot oil over the scorching summer heat is my absolute favorite.

But to find one now? That's preposterous, right.

It's freezing outside.

I had carefully chosen this angora sweater, and the heater was running.

"Alright now – just who could you be?"

I opened up the glass door and leaned towards the screen, which had been untouched since summer. Frigid air encroached like the foreboding skin of a Snow Woman.

My nearsighted eyes met steadily with the cicada's. It was probably nearsighted, too.

And just as I thought - a large brown cicada!

A male large brown cicada, with a tight abdomen that looked like it had been dusted in white powder. It seemed like it could break into a loud song at any moment...

Opening the screen door slightly and keeping my eyes locked on the cicada, I reached out quickly with my right hand.

Caught it!

The cicada struggled in my hand, its wings buzzing like a low-powered mini fan. I felt the trembling power of its wing muscles against my fingers, which were clasped loosely to avoid hurting them.

It was pure ecstasy.

"Hey, isn't this strange? I found a cicada in the dead of winter – take a look."

Without really thinking about it, I called out to my father who was in the living room, watching TV with his back towards me. I immediately regretted it.

"You still catching cicadas – at your age!?"

"I like what I like – it's not by choice!"

I replied indignantly, raising my voice.

It was always like that with me and my father. But just then, the doorbell rang.

As I walked off in a huff, my father called out as if he suddenly remembered something.

"You know, long ago we used to call them cicadies."

I headed towards the front door, turning my back on him.

My mother's friend Ms. Uehara stood there, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother feeling? I brought this..."

As she spoke, she lowered a bag from a local grocer full of mandarin oranges onto the floor beside me.

"I just happened to be in the neighborhood."

"Oh, thank you for all your trouble. Mother is..."

"I just thought I should return this umbrella soon, you know."

The cicada made a sudden violent move, escaping from my fingers, so I closed both hands around it like a cage. The prickling sensation of its legs as it walked around - that painful, itchy feeling - was like holding a forbidden pleasure in my hands.

"Oh, but there was no rush... She'll be in the hospital for quite some time."

"So I hear. It's just terrible, isn't it."

The cicada fired up its little motor, fluttering its wings, which tickled the inside of my hands.

“You know what, Ms. Uehara? I found a cicada, even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“You did? Really? But I – I don’t handle insects well so...”

Ms. Uehara gazed at my clasped hands with unease.

“Well, just thought I’d pop in for a bit. Please send your mother my regards.”

And with that, she left.

I had to tell someone about this cicada – about the wonder that it was alive in this cold. If it were a flower, I guess you’d say it was blooming out of season. Are the cicadas evolving? They say that temperatures are rising recently, and that more insects are surviving the winter. I wonder if erratic weather could cause a sudden mutation? Or could there be some other impetus - causing this tiny creature who embodies the whole of summer, to wander *here*, to this season on the other side?

I decided to ask my friend Sawaji.

Once, long ago, Sawaji and I had gone out drinking.

“Ah, yes – large brown cicadas. Those are some fine fellows. Some fine fellows indeed. They have real ambition.”

He said, downing a scotch and water. I liked the way he said it, which in turn made me think of him more fondly.

Softly pulling the cicada into my sweater sleeve, I opened up my phone. Looking through the address book, I saw that Sawaji’s name was still in there.

The phone rang, and Sawaji picked up.

I spoke casually, trying to remain calm.

“Hey, it’s been a while! Sorry to call you out of the blue...”

“Uh... Oh, is that you? Yes, yes – it has been a while.”

He seemed to recognize that it was me right away.

“Well, uh, I called to tell you that I found a cicada. In the middle of winter. I mean, isn’t that weird?”

“What... A cicada? Now? A *cicada*? You’re sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Come on Sawaji, don’t do this to me.

“Absolutely not. It’s a cicada – a large brown cicada. That’s strange, right? I mean, what do you make of it? I thought you’d be the one to ask...”

On the other side of the line, time passed like a deep irreparable silence, which then seemed to spread.

Sawaji spoke softly, as if he were whispering.

“..... Lots of things are strange.”

“.....Excuse me?”

“There are lots of things in this world that are strange. Like the way you phoned me just now.....”

“That’s not really an answer.”

I tried to conceal my frustration.

“An... answer. Well, if there is one, I don’t have it. How could you answer such a thing? But I’ll tell you this, it’s the strange things that bring us solace. Not just for you and I, but probably for everyone...”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

I would have to let it go soon. You can’t keep a cicada trapped in your hand forever, or it will grow weak. But whether I should let it go indoors where it was warm, or outdoors where snow lightly fell, I had no idea.

I promised Sawaji that we’d go out drinking again sometime and said goodbye.

Stepping out the front door, I headed towards a persimmon tree in our garden. All of the leaves had fallen from the persimmon tree, its bony branches clutching the gray sky.

I set the cicada down gently on the trunk, which was covered in groove-like streaks and wrinkles. The cicada climbed the trunk slowly, hesitating from time to time as if it had something to ponder.

Looking up, the snow seemed to fall from a fathomless height. It fell hard, the cold snowflakes melting as they landed on my face, and trickling down in several wet streaks.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared somewhere into the treetop's stiff maze-like silhouette.

My body was freezing cold, but for some reason both hands that had held the cicada were still hot and sweaty as summer. And come to think of it, even though it was male, the cicada hadn't made a sound... That was unusual.

Returning to the entranceway, I saw my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarin oranges sitting there. The living room TV had been left on, but my father was nowhere to be seen.

I switched off the set, placing the bag of mandarins on the kitchen table as usual.

My father had died long ago; Ms. Uehara had passed away two years prior. And Sawaji, too...

My call to Sawaji was still in the phone's call history, but I hadn't the courage to try calling again...

Perhaps it was the snow accumulating outside, but the inside of this empty house began to fill with a clenching silence.

It was so quiet my ears began to ring.

The sound was just like the song of a large brown cicada, from a distant summer's day.

Title: Winter Cicada

Author: Azuchi Moe

Even though we are in the dead of winter, I spotted a cicada of the *aburazemi* type flying in my direction. The cicada flew in its distinct clumsy way, as though it were lost, through the spotty snowfall. After changing directions, going up, down, left, and right, the cicada made a sudden landing on the window screen.

Before even thinking, “No, that’s impossible,” I was overwhelmed with joy. I like cicadas. They let us know that summer is upon us. In fact, I adore them. I like the cute and childish *neeneezemi* cicada, the elegantly sorrowful cry of the *higurashi* cicada, and the speedy, cheerful, droopy eyed *tsukutsukuboushi* cicada. However, my favorite above all is the *aburazemi*, the cicada with its distinct cry on a hot and humid summer day, much like the crackling of hot oil over a scalding hot pan.

Yet, my current state of mind is more, “No, that’s impossible. Not in this bone chilling cold. I’m wearing an Angora sweater, and the heater is even on...” I doubtfully blurt out, “My oh my, what have we here?” I slide open the glass window and put my face near the screen, which was never taken down after the summer months. The chill creeps in like the soft, pale skin of *Yuki-onna*, the haunted woman of the snow.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicadas (most likely) nearsighted eyes, gaze upon one another. Without a doubt it’s an *aburazemi*. The male *aburazemi* have an angled torso, narrowing down to the hips, with a pattern of white speckled powder over the stomach. He is looking ready to let out a big loud cry at any moment... I crack open the window screen, gently reach out with my right arm, as our eyes remain locked onto one another.

I got it!

The cicada went wild in my hand. The rapid beating of the wings feel like a fan powered by a small motor. As I try my best to remain gentle and prevent myself from damaging the wings, I can sense the power of the rapidly beating wings from where they root into the body. I feel giddy. I feel complete, as though I am grasping a great sense of accomplishment within my hand. I instinctively call out to my dad, sitting in the den with his back turned toward me while watching TV. “Isn’t it weird? A cicada in winter. See?” I regret it immediately.

“You’re still catching cicadas? At your age?”

“I like what I like and that’s that!” I get upset and raise my voice.

Things would quickly escalate like this between my dad and me. Right then, the doorbell rang. I become sassy as I hear my dad recall a memory of the past, “That’s right huh, we used to call you cicada girl.” I turn away and go out to the front entryway.

My Mom’s friend, *Uehara-san* was standing there in the entryway holding my Mom’s umbrella. “How’s your Mother? Here’s this ...” *Uehara-san* says, placing a bag of *mikan* oranges onto the upper step of the entryway. The bag has the markings of a nearby supermarket. “I was just around the corner so...”

“Oh, thank you. Mom is...”

“I was thinking I’d better bring the umbrella back sooner than later, you know...”

The cicada went wild and almost got away. So I decided to use both hands like a cage, trapping it in place. The legs of the cicada moved and prickled my hand in a conspicuous yet sensual, itchy way.

“Oh, anytime would have been fine... Mom is hospitalized long term.”

“Oh my, that must be hard.”

The miniature motor to the wings of the cicada turn on, tickling the inside of my hand.

“Um, *Uehara-san*. Can you believe this? There was a cicada even though its winter. Strange, no?”

“What!? Really? But you know, I’m just not a bug person...” Skeptically looking at the cage I had made with my hands, *Uehara-san* said, “Just wanted to stop by for a quick visit. Say hi to your mother for me.” With that, she left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada and the mysteriousness of living through such a cold season...I guess it's as crazy as a sunflower blooming in the winter. Perhaps this is an evolution in the cicada's ability to survive. Even though it is winter, people do say things have become much warmer. I also hear there is an increase of insects living through the winter. I continue to contemplate the reality of what's going on. Perhaps some abnormal mutation has taken place as a result of the irregular changes in weather. Or perhaps, could we go as far as even saying, through some chain of events, its small body... took in the humid summer heat, to wander over to another side, this side... into the opposite season. I decide to take it up with *Sawachi-kun*.

Quite a while ago *Sawachi-kun* had said at a party gathering, "Yeah, those *aburazemi*. Now they're a good bunch. They're up there. They have ambition." All the while, downing a drink split with water. How he said it caught my attention, and naturally I became a bit fond of *Sawachi-kun*. I gently place the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and flip open my phone. Looking through my contacts, I find *Sawachi-kun*'s name and number still archived.

The phone rings and we connect. "...Yes..."

I calm myself and say nonchalantly, "Been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue."

"Oh.... Is it you? Wow, been a while." Seems like he immediately recognized my voice.

"Well. To get to the point, there was a cicada. Even though it's winter. Don't you think that's strange?"

"What... A cicada? Now? Cicada? No way, probably a roach."

"Eww. No way *Sawachi-kun*, cut it out," I think before saying, "No way. It's a cicada. An *aburazemi*. Quite mysterious isn't it? So, what do you think? I thought that of all people you would know a thing or two about them."

The feeling of deep silence continued to spread on the other side of the line, as our time together slipped away. We were on borrowed time. *Sawachi-kun*'s tone changes to a mutter. "...You know, mysterious happenings are quite common."

"...What?" I'm caught off guard.

"I'd say mysterious happenings are quite common in this world. For instance, you calling me right now..."

"That's not an answer." I say something to try and hide my embarrassment.

"Answers... huh... I wouldn't know. I wonder if answers even exist. But you know, mysteries can be a saving grace for people like us, and probably for the world..." The cicada peeks its face out from my sleeve.

I should let the cicada go about now. Cicada's become weak when held by hand for an extended period of time. Nevertheless, I can't decide what is best for the cicada, to remain in the warm indoors or to hand it over to the outside elements, spotted with snow. *Sawachi-kun* and I promised to get drinks again sometime and we hung up.

Going outside the door of our entryway, I head towards the persimmon tree in our yard. The persimmon tree has lost all of its leaves, and the bony branches clutch for the charcoal grey sky. I gently place the cicada on the trunk, covered in chapped sinewy folds. The cicada, appearing to be in deep thought, would occasionally hesitate as it began to wobble up the trunk.

While looking up, the snow seemed to fall from unfathomable heights. As the snowfall intensified, the chilly flakes hit my face and melted, forming a flow of multiple rivers. Before long, the cicada had disappeared into the treetops of the persimmon tree, somewhere within the silhouette of a hardened maze.

By now the winter chill had taken over my entire body. Yet for some reason, both hands where I held the cicada continued to remain warm. My palms were moist, like the humid summer months. Now that I think about it, the cicada was male and yet never let out a single crackling cry.

Getting back inside the entryway, Mom's umbrella and bag of *mikan* oranges sat there. The TV in the living room was left on without a trace of my dad. I turn off the TV and take the bag of *mikan* oranges to the kitchen table like I usually do.

In reality, Dad had already passed away and time had slipped away quickly. *Uehara-san* had also

passed away two years ago. In fact, even *Sawachi-kun*... Although my phone had logged the call with *Sawachi-kun*, I don't have the courage to call the number back...

Perhaps the snow outside was piling up. The stifling silence of the empty home spread to every corner. My ears began to ring as the deafening silence grew. A ringing much like the cry of the *aburazemi* of a far, far, distant summer day.

The Large Brown Cicada in Winter by Azuchi Moe

It was the dead of winter, and yet a large brown cicada was still flying about.

It zipped clumsily to and fro about amid the gently falling snow, seemingly lost, only stopping abruptly upon encountering the screen.

I was so overjoyed upon seeing it, any thoughts I had on how ridiculous seeing it in winter were pushed aside.

I love cicadas. Absolutely adore them all; the adorable, childlike kempfer cicada, whose appearance heralds the coming of summer; the elegant composure of the evening cicada; and the nimble and jovial droopy-eyed Walker's cicada. But the large brown cicada, with a cry like the crackling of oil hotter than the depths of summer, is my all-time favorite.

However, seeing one in winter was downright bizarre.

It was so cold out. I had on my angora turtleneck sweater and had the heat turned on. And yet...

"Hey, what are you doing, little guy?"

I opened the glass and brought my face to the screen that had been left in place since summer. It was so frigid, I might as well have been nuzzling up to the Snow Queen herself.

My eyes locked on (what were likely) the cicada's eyes for a short time. Definitely a large brown cicada.

He was a male, and his abdomen looked like it had been dusted with flour. It looked like he might start chirping any second.

I opened the screen a bit, my eyes on the cicada the whole time, and reached out my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada buzzed about in my hand, his wings rotating frantically like a tiny electric fan motor. I held him gently, so as not to damage his wings. He flapped his wings so fast, I could feel them prickling my finger.

I was ecstatic. I held onto my prize with a great sense of triumph.

"This is so weird. Look, I just found a cicada in the middle of winter."

In my excitement, I called out to my dad, who was watching TV with his back to me in the living room, and immediately regretted it.

"Catching cicadas and bugs again? Act your age..."

"I like what I like. There's nothing wrong with that!" I shouted with a huff.

Things always ended up like this between my father and I.

Just then, the doorbell rang. I was already seething.

"Oh yeah, we used to call you Cicada Girl growing up, didn't we?" My father reminisced aloud. I turned away and headed for the door.

My mother's friend, Ms. Uehara, was standing there, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother? I brought these..." she said, holding up satsuma oranges in a bag from our local grocery store as she stepped inside. "Since I was passing through the area."

"Oh, thank you. Mom is—"

"I wanted to return that umbrella as soon as possible—"

With a mighty push, the cicada almost broke free. I snapped my hands closed around him like a cage. The tingling from his legs kicking at my hands served as a pleasant reminder of my little secret.

"You didn't have to rush. Mom will be in the hospital for awhile."

"Oh no. That must be hard."

The cicada revved up his little motor. His legs kicking against my flesh began to tickle.

"Hey, Ms. Uehara, don't you think it's strange for a cicada to be out in the middle of winter?"

"Really? Are there cicadas out? Honestly, I don't like bugs..."

She looked at my hands caging my secret with apprehension.

"Well, I was only dropping by. Give my regards to your mother," she said and left.

I longed to tell someone about my cicada. About the mysterious nature of his existence in such a cold season. For flowers, it would be called off-season blooming, right? Was this an evolution of the

cicada's survival instincts? Some people said since the winters had been getting warmer, more bugs were failing to die off. Was this strange occurrence due to the abnormal weather? Or had it stimulated the little creature's body somehow—? Perhaps the summer had been so hot and taxing on his body, he had gotten confused and found himself awake in the wrong season?

I decided to talk it over with Sawachi. Once, a long time ago, when we were out drinking, while draining his liquor and water, Sawachi had said, "Oh, large brown cicadas? They're great. Real great. They've got a lot of spunk."

The way he talked about cicadas was enchanting. So much so that I found him a little enchanting as well.

I tucked the cicada into my sleeve and unlocked my phone. Digging through my contact list, I found Sawachi was still in there.

After the tone beeped, Sawachi picked up.

"...hello...?"

"It's been awhile. I'm sorry for calling you out of the blue like this," I said casually, trying to keep my composure.

"Oh, is that you? Yes, it has been a long time."

It sounded like he recognized me right away.

"Uhm, I'm sorry for cutting to the chase, but I've caught a cicada. In winter. Isn't that weird?"

"A...cicada? Now? Is it really a cicada? You're sure it's not a roach?"

Ew, gross! Cut it out, Sawachi!

"No way, it's definitely a cicada. A large brown cicada. Isn't that strange? What do you think? I remember you seemed to know a lot about cicadas..."

A deep, impenetrable silence pervaded the other end of the line and seemed as if it might stretch on forever.

"There are many strange things about this," he murmured.

"...what?"

"The world is full of mysteries. Like the fact that you called me just now....."

"That's not the kind of answer I was looking for," I replied, trying to mask my embarrassment.

"An answer...huh? There's no way I would know something like that. I'm not even sure there are answers to be found here. But sometimes, mysteries can be a salvation all their own. For us, and maybe, for the world as a whole."

The cicada poked his face out of my sleeve. It was time for me to let him go. If I held onto him, his body would get weaker. But I wasn't sure whether to keep him in the warmth of my room or release him to the cold outside.

I promised Sawachi we'd go drinking again someday before hanging up.

I walked out the front door and headed for the persimmon tree in our yard. It had completely shed all its leaves and its angular branches stretched against the ashen sky.

I gently set the cicada on the trunk, covered as it was in deep cracks and seams. The cicada hesitated, as if giving deep thought to his next move, before finally deciding to make a slow, meandering climb up the trunk.

As I gazed upward, the snow seemed to fall from an incomprehensible height, gradually picking up speed. The frigid crystals hit my face, quickly melting and sliding down in streaks.

At some point, the cicada reached the top of the persimmon tree and disappeared amid its stiff, labyrinthian branches.

Even though I was chilled to the bone, my hands, which had only a short time ago held the cicada, were warm and sweaty like they might be on a sweltering summer day. Suddenly it hit me. Even though the cicada had been male, he never once cried.

When I returned to the entrance, I saw the umbrella and bag of satsuma oranges were still there. The living room TV was still on, but Dad was nowhere to be found.

I shut the TV off and set the satsuma oranges on the kitchen table as if nothing were out of the ordinary.

My father passed away long ago and it's been two years since Ms. Uehara died. And Sawachi...

My call with Sawachi was still in my contact history. But I lacked the courage to even try calling him again.

Perhaps it was because of the snow accumulating outside, but an oppressive silence filled my empty house.

Amid that silence, a buzzing filled my ears.

The cry, from a distant summer's day, of a large brown cicada.

The Brown Winter Cicada
by AZUCHI Moe

It was the middle of winter, but a brown cicada came flying towards me.

Amidst the falling snow, its flight path was clumsy and wild, like it had lost its direction. It came to land abruptly on the screen door. It warmed my heart, and It wasn't until a few seconds later that my brain caught up and reminded me this wasn't normal.

I love cicadas. I love them a whole bunch. I love *platyleura kaempferi*, the cute, childlike Kempfer cicadas that tell you summer's on its way; I love *tanna japonensis*, the evening cicadas that are as elegant as they are sorrowful; and I love *meimuna opalifera*, the nimble Walker cicadas with the lidded eyes; but the *graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, the brown cicadas whose cries pour like hot oil onto already hot summers, are definitely my favorite.

Even so, this cicada was still out of its mind to be out right now. What was it thinking, in such cold weather?

I opened the inner glass door, and leaned real close to the screen. The outer door was still there from the summer. Through it, the cold brushed up against me like the skin of an ice maiden. The brown cicada and I stared at each other a while, me with my shortsighted vision, and it, too, probably unable to see very far.

It was definitely a *graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*, a brown cicada, male, with a smattering of white scattered like sugar over its tucked abdomen. It seemed like any second now it would screech out its deafening cry.

Keeping my eyes locked with its, I cracked open the screen door, and carefully stretched out my right hand.

Got it!

I clutched it now in my palm, its wings like a tiny electric fan. The power of those joints working thrummed against my fingers, which I clasped gently to avoid damaging its wings.

I was ecstatic. It felt like I had grasped a piece of victory and it was right there in my hand.

"Hey, look. Isn't this weird? There was a cicada outside, in the middle of winter!"

I couldn't help but call out to my father, who was sitting facing away from me in the living room, watching TV. I immediately regretted saying anything.

"You're still catching cicadas? Aren't you too old for that?"

"I like what I like, so I'll do what I want!" My emotions got the best of me, and I raised my voice indignantly. Dad and I were often like this. Right then, I heard the front doorbell.

I was still in a huff, so even though Dad said "That's right, I used to call you my cicada girl," like he had just remembered, I turned away and headed towards the front door. When I opened it, my mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara, was standing there holding an umbrella.

“How is your mother feeling?” She said. “I brought....”

She raised one hand, and set a bag from the local supermarket down on the front step. It was filled with oranges. “I was in the neighborhood.”

“Oh, thank you very much. My mother is....”

“I thought sure she’d like to have her umbrella back as soon as possible.”

The cicada still in my hand struggled suddenly and nearly escaped, so I cupped both hands around it like a cage. Its feet prickled as it crawled around, but that prickling felt like a pleasant secret hidden within my hands.

“Oh, dear, you didn’t have to go out of your way. She’s not likely to be out of the hospital soon.”

“Is that right.... What a tough situation.”

The cicada restarted its small motor, the flapping of its wings now tickling my palms.

“Hey, Mrs. Uehara. I saw a cicada today, even though it’s the middle of winter. Don’t you think that’s weird?”

“Oh, really? That’s something. I’m not fond of insects, myself....” She looked at my cupped hands now with hesitation, and continued, “Well, then, I’d best be going. Just meant to drop by. Give your mother my best.” And off she went.

I wanted to talk to *someone* about the cicada, about how crazy it was that it was alive, here, in the middle of winter! Maybe it was like the flowers that sometimes bloomed out of season. Or maybe cicadas were evolving, and becoming more hardy. It was winter, but nowadays everyone was saying it wasn’t getting as cold as it used to, and there were more and more bugs living all year round. Maybe the weird weather had suddenly caused a mutation or something. Or maybe there had been some point, some reversal when the heat of summer had been too much for this little body, and it lost its way and somehow ended up in this opposite season. I decided to try telling my friend Sawachi about it.

At a party I had been to, he had once said while draining his whiskey, “Oh yeah, brown cicadas. They’re good little dudes. They’ve got a lot going for them. Those little bugs have ambition.” The way he had said that appealed to me, so he kinda appealed to me, too.

I tucked the brown cicada up into one sleeve of my sweater and grabbed my phone. I checked through my contact list, and Sawachi’s name was still there. I pressed call and heard it ring, and he picked up.

“...Hello?”

Trying to calm my racing heart, I played it cool and said, “Hey, it’s been a while. Sorry for calling out of the blue like this.”

“Oh... is that you? Wow, it has been a while.” It seemed like he recognized me almost immediately.

“Hey, so the reason I called was, I found a cicada. Even though it’s the middle of winter. That’s weird, right?”

"Wow, a cicada? Now? And you're sure it's a cicada, and not just a roach?"

Come on, Sawachi, you know better!

"No, it's not! It's definitely a cicada, a *graptopsaltria nigrofuscata*. Don't you think that's strange? What do you think is up with it? I figured you knew a lot about cicadas, so you might know."

On the other end of the line, there was a long silence, so long and deep it seemed to spread out and expand, like there was no coming back from it.

Finally, Sawachi's voice returned in a whisper.

"A lot of strange things happen."

"Huh?"

"Strange things happen all the time. Like you calling me right now."

"You didn't answer my question." It was a seethrough attempt to cover the embarrassment I was starting to feel.

"You want an answer, huh. I can't say I have one for you, or if there even is one. But you know, sometimes strange things are just what you need. What I need, and maybe sometimes, what the world needs...."

The cicada poked its head out from my sleeve.

I'd have to let it go pretty soon. If I kept it in my hand forever, it would grow weak and lose its vitality. But then again, I didn't really know whether it'd be better for it if I released it inside the warm house, or back out into the falling snow.

I promised Sawachi we'd meet for drinks again sometime, and ended the call.

When I walked out the front door, I headed over towards the persimmon tree growing in the yard. It had dropped all its leaves, so its bare branches looked like bony talons grasping at the ashen sky. I placed the cicada gently on the rough, grooved bark of the trunk. It began to crawl slowly upwards, pausing occasionally, almost as if it had something on its mind.

When I looked up to the sky, it seemed like the snow was falling from some indeterminable height, far, far, above. After a while it came down more thickly, and the frozen crystals melted when they touched my face, streaming down in rivulets.

When I checked back, the cicada had disappeared into the branches. Even its silhouette was lost in the maze of the tree. By this time I was chilled more than skin deep, but for some reason the spots where the cicada had touched my palms were still hot and sweaty, like tiny reminders of summer. Suddenly I realized that, even though the cicada had been male, it hadn't made any sound at all.

When I went back inside, my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were sitting inside the entryway. The TV was still on in the living room, but my father was no longer there.

I switched off the TV, and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table like I always did.

Dad had passed a long time ago, and Mrs. Uehara must have died two years ago now. And Sawachi.... The record of my call to him was still in my phone, but I had never gotten up the courage to try calling him again.

I wasn't sure whether it was the snow piling up, or the silence of the empty house that was pressing in on me. In the overwhelming stillness, I could start to hear a buzzing in my ears.

It sounded like the cry of a brown cicada, on a far distant summer's night.

A cicada in winter
Azuchi Moe

It was the middle of winter but a cicada, an *abura-zemi*, flew in.

Zig-zagging through the whirling snow, its helter-skelter flight ended with a pat! as it landed on the door mesh. How could this be, I thought. But even before that, a thrill of joy ran through me.

I love cicadas. I really, really love cicadas. I love the *niinii-zemi*, the adorable little kaempfer cicada that announces the coming of summer. I love the exquisitely elegant *higurashi* or evening cicada. And I love the spry, slanting-eyed *tsukutsuku-boushi*. But most of all I love the *abura-zemi*, the cicada that sounds like hot oil sputtering, making hot summer days feel hotter. But for one to be here, now! It was impossible! In this bitter cold. While I was wearing an angora turtleneck and the heater was on.

“Oi oi.. what kind of creature are you?”

I slid open the glass door and drew closer to the mesh screen that had been shut since summer. Air, cold like the skin of a snow ghoul, pressed in on me. My near-sighted eye and the cicada’s (probably) near-sighted eye interlocked. It was an *abura-zemi* after all. With a tightly clenched stomach that looked dusted with a fine white powder, a male *abura-zemi*. Even now, it looked ready to burst loudly into song—

I cracked open the screen slightly, and without taking my eye off the cicada, softly reached forward with my right arm.

Caught him!

In my fist, a fretful cicada. With wings like the blades of a tiny electric fan, powered by a tiny motor. I loosened my grip, to not hurt the wings that thrummed a restive, persuasive beat against my softly cupped fingers. A mad joy swept over me. I felt a sense of fulfilment, like my fist had closed around a goal.

“Isn’t it strange? It’s winter but I have a cicada here. Look,” I said to my father, impulsively. He was watching television in the living room with his back to me. I regretted it right away.

“You’re still catching cicadas? At your age?”

“If you like something it’s alright to do it, no matter your age!” I shot back petulantly, disgruntled. We often ended up like this.

Just then, the doorbell rang. I was still bristling but he continued pensively, as if remembering something, “You were called the cicada girl, weren’t you? Once?” He turned to go get the door. It was my mother’s friend Ms Uehara, come to return my mother’s umbrella.

“How’s your mother feeling? Here,” said Ms Uehara, as she placed a bag of oranges from the neighbourhood supermarket on the raised floor by the entrance. “I went till the corner so these are just...”

“Ah. Thank you so much. She’s—”

“I thought I’d better return her umbrella as soon as possible—”

The cicada rioted in my palm, nearly escaping. I used both hands and made a basket to hold it in. My palms prickled as it moved about. The stinging and itching felt like a secret I held in my hands.

“Oh but there was no rush. She’s going to be in hospital for a while.”

“Ah, is that so? I’m sorry to hear that.”

The cicada started up its tiny motor again and its wings tickled my palms.

“Say, Ms Uehara.. Even though it’s winter there’s a cicada here. Don’t you think that’s strange?”

“Eh? A cicada? Really...? But you know, I’m not great with insects—”

Ms Uehara eyed my cupped fingers suspiciously and continued, “Well, I was just passing by. Do give your mother my regards.” And she was gone.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the strangeness of one being alive in this cold a winter. Like a flower blooming out of season. Was the cicada’s will to live making it evolve? These

days you often hear that the winters are getting warmer and that the number of insects that can survive the winter are on the increase. Had abnormal weather lead to a freak occurrence of a kind? Or did this one somehow swaddle himself in the heat of the summer it belonged to, and just wander across to this side?

I'd talk to Sawachi about it, I decided. At a drinking party a long time ago, we'd spoken about cicadas. "The *abura-zemi*? Yeah.. he's a good guy that one. A really good guy. Ambition, that's what he's got," he said as he downed his drink. I'd liked how he talked. And because of that I'd liked him too, a little bit.

Tenderly, I tucked the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater. And picked up my phone. I looked through the address book. Sawachi was still in there. A single ring and we were connected.

"...llo?"

I made myself relax and said lightly, "Its been a while. I'm sorry to call you out of the blue—"

"Is that... Is that you? Ehhh... it really *has* been a while." It sounded like he'd recognised my voice immediately.

"You see... I know this is completely out of the blue... But I have a cicada here. Even though it's winter. Don't you think that's strange?"

"Eh..? At this time of the year? No way, don't *roach* to conclusions now!"

Ah.. not funny. Stop it, Sawachi.

"It's a cicada! An *abura-zemi*. Isn't it strange? But how could it be? What do you think? I thought I'd ask you because... you know, you think about these things—"

A deep silence, like a bottomless, silent chasm opened up between us. It widened, and then it was too wide to bridge. He finally muttered, "—When it comes to strange things, aren't there a lot of those out there?"

"Eh?"

"Aren't there a lot of strange things in the world? Take this one. You, calling me, right now—"

"That's.. no answer," I said awkwardly, trying to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer... I don't think I have something like that. Is there one? But you know what? Thank god for the strange things. They rescue us. If it weren't for them... I'm thankful for them, maybe the world is too."

The cicada popped its head out of my sleeve. It was time I let it go. Holding them too long made them weak. Although I wasn't sure which would serve it better. The warm inside of the room or to be let go in the flurrying snow outside.

With a vague plan to go out again for drinks sometime, I hung up on Sawachi. I walked out of the house and to the persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had shed its leaves completely and its bony arms looked as if they were trying to grab handfuls of the ashen sky. I placed the cicada gently on a trunk patterned with countless hollows and fissures. The cicada looked as if it were pondering something and slowly, thoughtfully it started to climb up the trunk. I looked up and the snow seemed to be falling from an impossible height. The cold crystals settled on my face, melted and flowed down, the rivulets growing increasingly urgent. Before long, the cicada had vanished somewhere in the maze-like, hard-baked silhouette that was the crown of the persimmon tree. I was frozen rigid but my palms, which had been holding the cicada, still felt hot. They were sweating, like in the summer. Suddenly, it struck me. Despite it being a male, I hadn't heard the cicada sing at all.

Coming back in, my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were lying by the door. The television in the living room was on, but my father was no longer there. I switched off the television and carried the bag of oranges to the table in the kitchen.

It's been a long time since my father left this world. Ms Uehara too must have died two years ago. Sawachi too...

My phone showed a record of the call to Sawachi. But I didn't have the courage to look again, carefully. The snow piled up outside. Or perhaps it filled in the oppressive quiet of a house that had no

one in it.

In the deafening silence, my ears started to ring. The ringing sounded just like the cry of the *abura-zemi*, from a distant, distant summer's day.

A Cicada in Winter

by Azuchi Moe

Despite it being the dead of winter, a cicada has come out.

Within the flurry of snow it bumbled about as though it were lost, flitting every which-way until it connected with the screen door with an abrupt *smack*.

What, that's impossible, I thought, but my more immediate reaction was sheer happiness.

As it happens, I like cicadas. I really, *really* like cicadas.

They are the heralds of summer's arrival. There's the childlike charm of the Kempfer cicada, as well as the evening cicada whose elegance evokes sorrow, and even the energetic singsong cicada with its droopy eyes full of life. However, my favorite cicada of all cries in a voice like dripping oil, more fervent than the burning summer-- the large brown cicada.

But still, it couldn't be.

When it's this cold.

When I'm wearing my Angolan turtleneck and have the heater on.

"Hey, just what are you?"

I slid open the glass door and drew my face closer to the screen, which had been left as it was since the summer. The air brought a chill that was icy to the touch as a ghost's skin. For a moment, with our (maybe) shared shortsightedness, the cicada and I locked eyes with each other.

As I thought, it was a large brown cicada after all.

This one was male, with a sharply concave stomach that appeared to be dusted in white. It seemed on the verge of crying out in its loud voice--

I slid open the screen door just a bit more and, without breaking eye contact with the cicada, slowly outstretched my right hand...

I caught it!

I now had in my hand a furious cicada. Its wings buzzed like the motor of a miniature electric fan. Softly, as to not hurt it, I pressed my finger against its wings, and at their joints felt the power behind its trembling.

I was ecstatic- filled with a sense of completion, even, as though in my hand I had captured some kind of purpose.

"Hey, check it out- there's a cicada even in winter, isn't that weird--"

Without thinking I had called out to my father in the living room, only his back visible as he watched the TV. And I immediately regretted it.

"Are you catching cicadas again? You really should grow up--"

"I do what I like because I like to, that's not childish!" I burst out in an indignant huff.

Just like that, my father and I had gotten worked up.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

While I was fuming, my father said, "That reminds me, they used to call you 'cicada girl' back then, didn't they," as if he were remembering something. However, he then turned away and left out the front door.

Ms. Uehara, a close friend of my mother's, stood at the entrance while holding my mom's umbrella.

"How's your mother's condition? Oh, and here..." She spoke while setting down a plastic bag full of oranges from the nearby supermarket onto the raised step opposite of the entryway. "Since it was on the way."

"Ah, thanks so much. My mother is--"

"And the umbrella, I just remembered I had to return it--"

The cicada had gotten unsettled and nearly slipped through my fingers, so I took both of my

hands and shut them around it like a cage. The cicada's feet prickled me slightly as it moved around; the itchy feeling was like a pleasant sensation privy only to the inside of my hands.

"Oh, I mean, you could've returned it anytime but... right now my mother is hospitalized."

"Goodness, is that so? That's awful."

The cicada started up its little engine again and its fluttering wings tickled the inside of my hand.

"By the way, Ms. Uehara. There's cicadas out even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"Oh, really? But, I don't really like bugs, so--" She was eyeing my clasped hands uneasily. "Well, I was only here to drop by. Give my regards to your mother, alright?"

She then left just as she had come.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada. About how extraordinary it is that even in this cold season it was still living-- Was it like a flower blooming out of season? Had cicadas evolved to have more vitality? Although it's winter, they say it's warmer nowadays than it used to be and that there's more hibernating insects. Did something like a mutation happen due to the unusual shift in climate? Or is it that, by some impetus, this cicada has come bearing that hot summer upon its little body all on its own, wandering into this winter- this opposite side?

I decided to try talking to Sawaji about this.

A long time ago at a drinking party he had said, "Yeah, the large brown cicada... I like that one. It's a real good one. I feel like it's got ambition," while downing a glass of watered-down alcohol. There was something I liked about his wording at the time, and so I also took a small liking to Sawaji.

I gently placed the cicada within my sweater sleeve and flipped open my cellphone. When I searched my contacts, Sawaji's name was still there.

The dial tone beeped, and I was on the line with Sawaji.

"...Yes...?"

While trying to keep myself calm, I assumed a nonchalant tone and said, "Hey, long time no see. Sorry to call you so suddenly--"

"Oh... is that you? Wow, it's been a while, hasn't it."

It seemed like he knew it was me right away.

"Um, well, I know it's out of nowhere, but I saw a cicada. Even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"What... a cicada? Around this time of year? Cicadas... Are you sure it wasn't a cockroach?"

Ugh, no, Sawaji, cut it out.

"No, I *swear* it's a cicada. A large brown cicada. Isn't that incredible? What do you think? I figured you of all people could tell me about it--"

From the other end of the phone call, an indelibly thick period of time passed and only seemed to grow. When he spoke again, Sawaji's voice had lowered to a murmur.

"There's lots of incredible things that happen."

"...Huh?"

"I'm saying that this world is full of incredible things. After all, you were kind enough to give me a call..."

"What kind of answer is that?" I tried to say it as though somehow hiding my embarrassment.

"An answer, huh... I wouldn't know what it is, if there even is one. But, y'know, mysteries are a source of comfort. To us, and probably to the whole world too--"

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

It would soon be time to let it go. If it were to remain in human hands for too long, the cicada would just end up weakening. Even so, to keep it indoors where it was warm or to release it outside into the snowfall- which one would be better for the cicada? I couldn't be sure.

Sawaji and I promised to get drinks together again sometime, and I hung up.

I left out the front entrance and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden. Its leaves had completely fallen off, leaving behind skeletal branches that were gripping at the cold gray sky. At its

trunk covered in sinewy grooves and fissures, I gently perched the cicada. As it began its slow climb up the tree, it hesitated every now and then as though caught up in some deep thought.

Looking up, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinity away. The flurry gradually grew harsher as frozen crystals struck at my face and melted, some forming streaks of water. And then, without my noticing, somewhere in the stiff, maze-like silhouette of the persimmon tree, the figure of the cicada had completely disappeared.

Despite my entire body being frozen to the bone, for some reason my hands that had held the cicada remained warm, sweating as though stuck in summer. It occurred to me that even though the cicada was a male, it hadn't sounded its cry at all.

When I returned inside, my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were still placed in the entryway. In the living room, the television had been left on and my father was no longer there.

I turned off the television and, as usual, placed the bag of oranges on the kitchen table.

My father has been dead for a long time now. And it must have been two years since Ms. Uehara passed away. Sawaji, as well-- my phone call to him still remained in my call history, but I don't have the courage to try calling him back...

Maybe it was because of the snow piling up, but in the house a suffocating stillness seemed to fill up the space where people used to be.

With this overbearing silence, there came a ringing in my ears--

Just like the cry of a large brown cicada on that distant summer day.

A Winter Cicada

Despite it being in the middle of winter, a large brown cicada came flying. It flew in a dusting of snow in its characteristic clumsy way, making many turns in the air as if it couldn't decide which way to go, before ending up at clutching a mosquito screen abruptly. 'No way, it's nonsense,' I should have thought so, but I felt extreme happiness first. Cicadas are my favorite. I really love them. I love those adorable, infant-like small cicadas that chirp 'knee-knee' to announce the beginning of summer, those evening twilight cicadas so elegant as to a pitiful degree, and those quick and cheerful sleepy-eyed sutra-chanting cicadas, but I must admit that best of all I love *Graptopsaltria nigrofuscata* species, or large brown cicadas, that strain sizzling voices as if they were pouring heated oil over already hot summer days. However, now I should say, 'It doesn't make sense.' There is no way on such a chilly day, when I wear an Angola-rabbit yarn turtle-neck sweater with my heater turned on...

"Hey, hey, who are you?"

I slid open a glass door, and placed my face close to the screen door which had been left there since the summer. Cold air closed in on me as if it had been the snow fairy's skin. My myopic eyes and those of the (probably) shortsighted cicada's locked each other for a while. It was exactly the oil-stained color one, as I had thought. It was a male, large brown cicada, having a tight abdomen coated with chalky powder. It looked to start groaning in a loud voice at any moment. Keeping the eye contact with the dark insect, I opened the screen door slightly, and stretched my right arm very slowly. And yes, I caught it! It struggled in my hand, its wings resembling those of an electric fan powered by a small motor. Fearing that they might be hurt, I softly placed my fingers on them, and felt vivid poundings coming transmitted from the roots of the wings. I became wild with joy. I felt satisfied as if I had captured some purpose in my hand.

"Guess what, it's funny I caught a cicada in the middle of the winter, look."

Before I knew it, I talked to my father who'd been showing his back to me and watching TV in the living room. Soon I regretted my doing so.

"You, still catching cicadas and things? Aren't you aware of your age..."

"I just believe in what I've always liked. Leave me alone!"

My voice was raised with anger. He and I'd always started like that. Then, the front door chime rang. Still in a fume, I turned my back to him to answer the door, hearing him say,

"For that matter, I used to call you Cicada Girl, didn't I?" It sounded he was just recalling the old days.

Mrs. Uehara, a friend of my mother's, was standing with my mother's umbrella in her hand.

"How is your mom doing? Here, I brought something..."

She asked me, and at the same time, placed a bag of tangerines from a nearby supermarket on the floor above the stepping stone of our entrance.

"I just came across near here."

"Oh, that's very kind of you, but she is..."

"I've always reminded myself to return this umbrella, but it's taken a while..."

The cicada made a wild move attempting to escape from my fingers, and so I shut it in my hands combined like a cage. Its legs prickled as it walked around, and the itchy feeling seemed to be a secret pleasure in my hands.

"There is no rush, ...she has to stay in a hospital for a while anyway."

"Oh, is that so? I'm sorry to hear that."

The insect activated its small motor, and its flapped wings tickled me in my hands.

"Look, Mrs. Uehara, I found a cicada despite this winter season. Isn't that strange?"

"Oh my, did you? Really? But I kind of hate bugs, you know..."

She uneasily looked at my combined hands formed like a cage, and left, saying,

"Well, now I have to be going, I just stopped by. Say hi to your mom for me."

I was eager to talk with someone about this cicada. About the wonder of its being in this cold season... Could it be called a mistimed blossom for a flower? Or is it a vitality evolution of the species? They say that more insects can survive the winter period recently because of the warmer climate compared to old days. Or has something like a mutation undergone due to this unusual climate? Or, can you possibly say that this insect has strayed into the opposite side, that is, *this side* of the season by some accident, carrying those hot summer days on its tiny body? I decided to talk with a boy Sawachi. He once told me,

"Well, I know a large brown cicada. He is a good fellow, and quite a good one. He is full of ambition as far as I know," and emptied his glass of whisky and water dry at a drinking party long time ago. Because I liked the way he put it, I kind of liked him, too. I softly placed the cicada inside a sleeve opening of my sweater, and opened my cell phone. When I searched in the address book, the name Sawachi was still there. After some dial tones, I was connected to him.

"...Hello?..."

I tried to calm down, and spoke casually,

"Hi, Sawachi, it's been a while, isn't it? Sorry for the sudden call."

"Oh, hi, ... That must be you speaking, right? Yeah, long time no see." He seemed to recognize me at once.

"Well, sorry to get to the point immediately, but I just found a cicada even though it's winter, you know. Strange, isn't it?"

"What...? You found a cicada? In this season? You mean a ci-ca-da? I guess it's a cockroach, isn't it?"

No way, Sawachi, stop it.

"Definitely NOT. It's a cicada, a large brown cicada. Don't you think that's peculiar? What do you guess? I thought you had good knowledge of these kind of things."

On the other side of the phone, time had moved in an irretrievable deep silence, which seemed to be spreading. His voice now sounded like a murmur,

"... There are many mysterious things."

"... What did you say?"

"I said there were many mysterious things in this world, including your calling me at this moment..."

"That's not quite an answer, is it?" I said so in trying to hide my being flattered.

"If you want an answer... I don't have one. I wonder if there is such a thing in the first place. But, you know, mysteries are reliefs, for us and maybe for the whole world..."

The cicada showed its head out of my sleeve opening. I guessed it was about time to release this tiny insect. They would get weak if you kept them in the human hands too long. However, I wasn't sure which was better for him, to be kept in the warm room, or to be released in the snow. I promised Sawachi to have a drink again someday, and disconnected the phone.

I went out through the front door and walked toward a persimmon tree in the yard. The tree had lost all its leaves, and I saw its bony branches grabbing hold of the gray sky. I carefully let the insect perch on the trunk covered by engraved streaks and cracks. The cicada slowly started to climb on the tree trunk, hesitating from time to time, as if it had something in mind. While I looked upward, the snow seemed to be coming from an infinite height. Harder and harder, frozen crystals kept hitting me on the face, melted there, and dripped down in multiple streams. I realized that the cicada had vanished at some point into somewhere in the stiff, mazy silhouette of the persimmon treetop. My whole body had been chilled through, except for my hands that had engaged the tiny animal, which still kept their heat somehow and sweated just like they had been in the summer days. Then, it just occurred to me that the cicada hadn't sung a bit even though it was a male.

When I came back to the front door, I saw my mother's umbrella and a bag of tangerines there.

The TV in the living room was still on. My father had left no traces of being there. I switched off the TV and carried the bag of fruits to the kitchen table as usual. My father had been dead for a long time, and Mrs. Uehara, too, was said to have passed away two years ago. And ... so had Sawachi. On my mobile, a calling history to him was displayed. However, I didn't have courage to call that number again. Snow may have started to accumulate outside, and a heartrending silence had gradually filled up in the empty house. For the overwhelming quietness, my ears started ringing. They sounded exactly like the buzzing of large brown cicadas in those summer days, a long time ago.

A Cicada in Winter

It was the dead of winter, and yet along flew by a cicada. Flitting here and there, topsy-turvy through the glittering snow in that unmistakable clumsy fashion before unceremoniously landing on the mosquito net with a thump. Before I even had time to think what the hell was going on, I was overcome with excitement. I love cicadas - I really, really do. I love those cute, baby *nīnīzemi*, whose cries herald the start of summer; the doleful, yet elegant, *higurashi*; lively, nimble *tsuku-tsuku-bōshi* with their almond eyes, but my favourite of all are *aburazemi*, crying out and making an already sizzling summer's day feel that much hotter. But still, what the hell was it doing here? In this freezing weather? Cold enough for me to have the heating on *and* my angora turtleneck.

"Hey, just who do you think you are?" I thought aloud.

I opened the glass balcony door and brought my face up to the mosquito net that had been kept shut since summer ended. Absolutely freezing, like the Snow Queen's icy skin right up against me. For a second, my short-sighted self and the (presumably) short-sighted cicada were staring right into each other's eyes. An *aburazemi*, just as I thought. A male one at that, with that tight little belly that looks like it's been dusted in white powder. It looked as if it was about to start screeching its head off any second now. I opened the door just a smidge and, still staring right at him, reached out my right hand... Gotcha! An *aburazemi*, going absolutely wild, right in the palm of my hand. Wings flapping about like a tiny motor fan. Pressing my finger softly so as not to hurt him, I could feel the terrified little thing's power emanating from the joint of his wings. I was in pure ecstasy. Right there in my hands, I felt completely fulfilled, as if I'd accomplished some Herculean task. Before I had time to properly think, I called out to my dad, who was watching television in the living room with his back to me. But I immediately regretted it.

"Hey, isn't this weird, it's winter but there's a cicada here, look!"

"Are you really still catching bugs? When are you going to grow up?" he replied.

I lost my temper and shouted back, "I can like what I like and do what I want!"
Things were always like that between me and Dad.

Just then, the doorbell rang. I was feeling a little bit moody, so I added, "that reminds me, didn't you used to call me your 'little cicada girl' anyway?" as if to try and jog his memory, turned my back on him and made my way to the doorway. One of Mum's friends, Mrs. Uehara, was standing there with one of Mum's umbrellas.

"How's your mum feeling? I got her these..." she said, plonking a bag of tangerines in a bag from the local supermarket down on the doorstep, "I was just passing by, so..."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mum's—"

"I just thought I really should really bring her umbrella back soon."

The cicada started going berserk and wriggled out from under my finger, so I clasped both of my hands around it like a cage. Its legs pricking and stabbing everywhere it could, itching and scratching; the thrill of clutching a secret in the palm of my hands.

"Oh no, any time would have been fine, really... Mum's going to be in the hospital for a while."

“Oh, really? I’m so sorry to hear that.”

The cicada revved up its little motor again and its shuddering wings started tickling my hands.

“Look at this, it’s winter, but somehow there’s still a cicada hanging about. Isn’t that weird?”

“Oh, really? Is that so? I’m actually not very good with bugs, though, so...”

She looked down uneasily at my cage of clasped hands, and said,

“Anyway, I was just popping by. Give my best to your mum,” and left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada, about how strange it was for it to be here, alive, in spite of this bitter cold. Maybe it was like a flower blooming out of season, or even the next step in cicada evolution? They say that now winters are getting warmer there are more insects that can make it all the way through till spring. Perhaps it was a sudden mutation, spawned by the aid of some unnatural phenomena. Or perhaps, by mere chance, it took upon itself the vestiges of its sweltering summer and got lost on its way from beyond some unseen veil to winter on our side.

I decided I’d give Sawachi a call. A long time back when we’d gone out drinking he’d told me, “Oh yeah, *aburazemi*, they’re pretty cool. Nice little fellas. They’ve just got ambition, you know?”, and downed the rest of his highball. I thought that was a nice way of putting it, so I took a shine to him. I nestled the cicada gently in my sweater sleeve and opened up my phone to check the address book — Sawachi’s number was still there. The dial tone beeped and I got through to him.

“...Yes...”

I tried to keep my cool and said casually, “Hey, long time no speak. Sorry for the sudden call, it’s just—”

“Ah... is that you? Wow, it’s certainly been a while.”

To my relief, it seemed he knew who I was straight away.

“Right? Well, sorry, this is kind of out of nowhere, but I just found a cicada. In winter. Like, isn’t that weird?”

“Oh... a cicada? At this time of year? A cicaaada? Are you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Ew, that’s enough, Sawachi, quit it.

“No! It’s a cicada, an *aburazemi*. Isn’t that strange? Like, what do you think? I just thought since you know a lot about this sort of thing...”

Nothing came from the receiver save a deep, inexorable silence, which seemed to leech out and sprawl through the room. Sawachi replied in little more than a whisper,

“There are many, many strange things...”

“...What?”

“There are many, many strange things in this world of ours... Like you calling me right now...”

I was a little bit confused, but I tried my best not to show it.

“That doesn’t answer my question, though.”

“You want... an answer? I’m afraid I don’t know. Is there even one? But there is salvation in all these strange things. For all of us, maybe even for the world...”

The cicada popped its head out from my sleeve. It was finally time to let it go. If you keep a cicada cooped up in your hand for too long it saps it of all its strength. That being said, I wasn’t really sure whether the warmth of the room or the sheer chill of the glimmering snow would be better for him. I promised Sawachi we’d have drinks again some time and hung up, left the house and headed to a persimmon tree in the garden. The tree had long since shed all of its leaves; its gnarled, bony branches grasping at the ashen sky. Gently, I set the cicada down on the deep, cracked ridges of its trunk. Pausing every now and then as if deep in thought, it slowly started making its way towards the top. Looking up, it seemed as if the snow was gliding down from an endless expanse far above. Little by little, the freezing crystals whipped about my face and melted, running down in streaks. At some point, the outline of the cicada froze in the labyrinthine silhouette of the treetop and was swallowed up completely. My entire body was frozen stiff, but somehow, my hands that had held him were still warm and slick with sweat as if it were summer. In that moment, I realised that even though it was a male, he hadn’t once let out his telltale cry...

I went back inside to the landing where Mum’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines were waiting. The television in the living room had been left on, but Dad was nowhere to be seen. I turned it off and carried the bag of tangerines to the kitchen table, as always. Dad had passed away some time ago already and Mrs. Uehara must have died about two years ago. And Sawachi... There were some calls to him in my phone history, but I didn’t have it in me to give him another... Had the snow settled? The barren house was pervaded by a suffocating stillness. In that tremendous silence, my ears started to ring. Just like the cry of an *aburazemi* on some summer day, far, far away.

The Winter Cicada
By Azuchi Moe

Though it was the middle of winter, a cicada had come flying.

Through flurries of snow it flew as though lost, clumsily changing direction this way and that, until at last it came to a sudden stop on the screen door.

Before I could think, *wow, what an idiot*, I was already overjoyed.

I like cicadas. I really, really like cicadas.

The cute and childlike *ninizemi*, the cicada that heralds the coming of summer; the sadly elegant *higurashi* cicada; the wonderfully cheerful droopy-eyed *tsukutsukuboushi* cicada; I love them all, but of course, with its voice like dripping oil, hotter than the heat of summer, the *aburazemi* cicada is my favorite.

But even so, this idiot here.

In cold such as this.

With me wearing an angora sweater, and the heater turned on...

"Hey, hey, buddy, who do you think you are?"

I opened the glass door, and brought my face close to the screen door that hadn't been touched since summer. Cold air like the skin of a ghostly snow woman pressed against me.

My nearsighted eyes met the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes met for a moment.

Definitely an *aburazemi* cicada.

A male cicada, with a tight belly marked as if it had been sprinkled with white powder. Looking as though its loud voice might ring out at any second.

I opened the screen door just a little and, still holding my gaze with the cicada's, slowly extended my right hand.

Got it!

In my hand, the struggling cicada. Wings like an electric fan powered by a small motor. Power from their base trembling against my fingers, kept soft so as not to hurt the wings.

I am ecstatic.

Within my hand, the fulfillment of some sort of purpose is complete.

"Hey, this is really weird. It's winter, but there's a cicada here, look." I said, without thinking, to the shape of my father's back, watching television in the living room. And then I regretted it.

"Are you still catching cicadas? You're way too old for that—"

"I like the things that I like, so there's nothing wrong with it!" When I get angry, my tone gets rough.

Dad and I always immediately got into it like that.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

With me in a huff, despite Dad saying, "come to think of it, in the old days you used to be a cicada kind of girl, huh," as though he had remembered something, I turned my back and went out into the entryway.

My mother's friend Mrs. Uebara stood there, holding my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother feeling? Oh, this..." Mrs. Uebara said, dropping a bag filled with oranges from the nearby supermarket over the threshold as she spoke. "I was just in the neighborhood, so..."

"Oh, thank you so much. Mom is —"

"The umbrella, I thought I'd better return it as soon as possible, you know—"

The cicada, getting a bit restless, was about to escape from my fingers, so I made a basket of my two hands and closed them around it. The cicada walked around, the itchiness from its prickly legs tingling like a secret happiness in my hands.

"Ah, any time would have been okay... Mom is going to be in the hospital for a long time."

"Oh, is that so. Terrible, isn't it."

The cicada began to move like a small motor, its fluttering wings tickling the inside of my hands.

"Hey, Mrs. Uebara. Even though it's winter, there's a cicada here. Isn't that odd?"

“What, is that so? Really? Oh, but I’m not a big fan of insects so –” Mrs. Uebara looked uneasily at the basket made by my two clasped hands. “Well, I was just dropping by for a minute. Please give my best to your mother,” she said and quickly left.

I wanted to talk to somebody about the cicada. About the mysteriousness of its being alive in such a cold time of year. If it was a flower, it would be blooming out of season. Perhaps this marks an evolution of the vitality of cicadas. It is winter, but they say it’s warmer now than it used to be, and nowadays they say insect hibernation is increasing, too. Due to the unusual weather, spontaneous mutations and such have occurred, haven’t they? So couldn’t it be, just by chance, inside of that tiny body... that entire hot summer, carried within a creature gone astray to the other side, to *this side*, to this season, could something like that really be?

I decided to try to talk with Sawachi.

A long while back, I was with Sawachi at a drinking party.

“Yeah, *aburazemi* cicadas, right. Aw man, those are good guys. Really, really good guys. Those guys have ambition,” he said, as he emptied his whiskey and water. I had taken a liking to that way of speaking, and therefor had taken a bit of a liking to Sawachi himself as well.

I slipped the cicada softly into the sleeve of my sweater and opened my cell phone. I searched through my contacts and Sawachi’s name was still there.

The dial tone sounded and I was connected to Sawachi.

“...Yeah...”

Still my heart, I said nonchalantly:

“It’s been awhile. Sorry to call you so suddenly –”

“Ah... is that you? Hey, long time no see!”

He seemed to recognize me immediately.

“Well it’s just that... to put it bluntly, there’s a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“Huh... cicada? Right now? A cicada? Are you sure it isn’t a cockroach?”

Ugh, come on already, Sawachi, just stop.

“No, it certainly isn’t. It’s a cicada, an *aburazemi* cicada. Isn’t that strange? Hey, what do you think? Since it’s you, Sawachi, I’m sure you’ll know all about it –”

From the opposite end of the phone flowed the kind of deep silence that it’s impossible to recover from, and it seemed to spread outward.

Sawachi spoke in grumbling voice.

“There are lots of strange things.”

“Huh?”

“Strange things, right; there are a ton of them in this world. Like you, right now, calling me on the phone...”

“That isn’t an answer.” I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“Answer...? A guy like me wouldn’t know. I wonder if there even is one. But let me tell you, strange things are our salvation. For you and me, and probably, for the whole world too –”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

Soon I would have to let it go. Cicadas weaken when held too long in human hands. Although, between the warmth of indoors or release into the snow flurry outside, I didn’t really know which would be best for the cicada.

Sawachi and I made plans to meet up for a drinking party again someday and hung up.

I went out through the entryway and headed in the direction of the persimmon tree in the garden.

All the leaves had fallen from the persimmon tree, and its bony limbs grabbed hold of the empty spaces in the ash-colored sky.

Onto the tree trunk, covered with gutter-like fibers and roughened cracks, I gently perched the cicada. The cicada, looking as if to be considering something, began with occasional hesitation to slowly climb up the tree.

Looking up, snow seemed to be falling from an impossible height. Gradually it fell harder, the cold snowflakes striking my face and melting down into a few flowing streaks.

Before I knew it, the cicada's form had disappeared somewhere into the stark and labyrinthine silhouette of the persimmon tree's branches.

My body was completely chilled, but even so my hands which had held the cicada were sweaty, as though with the eternal heat of summer. And come to think of it, although the cicada was a male, it hadn't made so much as one cry, I suddenly realized.

I went back to the entryway and my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were sitting there. From the living room the TV was playing on and on, but Dad was already gone.

I turned off the TV, and put the bag of oranges on the kitchen table.

It's been a long time now since Dad passed away, and it's surely been two years since Mrs. Uebara died. And, Sawachi too...

The call to Sawachi was still in my phone's call history. But to try calling that number a second time would take the kind of courage I don't have...

The snow was starting to pile up, and a stifling silence filled the empty house.

In the perfect quiet, my ears began to ring.

It sounded like the far, far off cry of a cicada on a summer day.

Brown Cicadas in Winter by Azuchi Moe

Although it is midwinter, a brown cicada is flying about. Within the fall of light snow, it flutters about in an uneasy and clumsy fashion, changing its course of flight every which way, until finally stopping abruptly on my screen door.

Before thinking, “Huh, how could it be?” I became happy. I like the Kaempfer cicadas that resemble cute little children, informing us that summer has come; the elegant, almost sorrowful evening cicadas; the nimble, lively, droopy-eyed walker’s cicadas, but I’d have to say that my favorite is the brown cicadas in the midst of the sweltering summers, with their voices that are loud as if they were pumped up.

However, I must say that this is truly unbelievable. How could there be a brown cicada in this cold? I’m wearing an angora turtleneck sweater, and have my heater running...

“Hey, what’s the deal with you?”

As I open the glass door, I leaned my face into the screen door that I had been left as is since the summer. I feel a chill as if it were the skin of the fabled Snow Woman approaching.

My near-sighted eyes and the cicada’s (probably) near-sighted eyes locked eyes for a brief moment.

It really is a brown cicada.

It looked like a muscular, male brown cicada had coughed up white powder. As if it could start chirping with its loud, roaring voice right this instant.

I opened up the screen door a little, with my eyes still locked with the cicada, I gingerly reached out my right hand toward him.

Got him!

In my hand is a frantic cicada, with wings flapping just like a small motor moving in an electric fan. So the wings wouldn’t be hurt, I carefully felt the trembling coming from the root of the wings into my fingers pressed down on it.

I felt utter bliss.

As if I felt fulfilled from reaching a goal, right in my hand.

“Hey, it’s so weird! I found a cicada even though it’s winter. Look!”

I called out to my father with his back to me as he watched TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

“Are you still catching cicadas or whatever? You’re not that young anym-“

“I just like them! Let me do what I want!”

I become upset and raise my voice.

My father and I are always like this. Then, that was when the doorbell rang.

In my fit of anger, my father says as if he just recalled something, as he turned his back to me and went toward our foyer, “Oh yeah, you used to be called the Cicada Girl, right?”

It was my mother’s friend, Ms. Uehara, bringing my mother’s umbrella, standing in our foyer.

“How is your mother’s condition? This is for her.”

Ms. Uehara then says as she raised an orange from the bag then lowering it back in from the nearby supermarket.

“I was passing through the neighborhood.”

“Oh, thank you. My mother-“

“I thought I should return this umbrella back to her soon.”

The cicada becomes a bit rowdy, trying to break free from my fingers, so I cupped my hands together like a cage to trap him. The cicada’s legs moving around felt prickly, which made the pain and itching feel as if it were a secretly pleasant sensation in my hands.

“Oh my, you could have returned it any time, really. My mother is in a long-term hospitalization.”

“Is that so? That sounds tough.”

The cicada starts its miniature motor, flapping its wings as it tickles my hands.

“Hey, Ms. Uehara. I found a cicada even though it’s winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“What? You did? Really? Well, actually, I don’t really like bugs...”

As Ms. Uehara peered at my hands cupped together with unease, she says this and heads home.

“So, I just wanted to drop by. Say hi to your mother for me.”

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. Particularly about the anomaly that is the cicada surviving in the cold winter. If it were a flower, would this be like off-season flowering? Is this the work of evolution on its life force? Forget that it’s winter, it is said that it has been warmer recently, so hibernating bugs have increased. Perhaps because of the unusual climate, a mutation has occurred. Or perhaps, because it was in response to something, it toughed out the sweltering summer in that small body alone, and then got itself mixed up in the other side, that is, the current winter season.

I decided to talk to Sawachi. At a drinking party a long time ago, Sawachi was saying as he finished up his alcoholic drink mixed with water, “Yeah, so about brown cicadas. They’re good cicadas. Like pretty good ones. They have ambition.”

I was interested in the way he was talking, so I became more interested in Sawachi as well.

I gently put the cicada into my sweater cuff, and opened up my cell phone. When I searched in my address book, Sawachi’s contact information was still there.

The phone dials, and I got a hold of Sawachi.

“Hello?”

While I couldn’t contain myself, I nonchalantly say, “It’s been a long time. Sorry for calling out of the blue-“

“Wait, are you the one from that time? Wow, it’s really been a while.”

It seems he knew it was me immediately.

“Okay so, I’m gonna cut to the chase. I found a cicada in the winter. Isn’t that weird?”

“What? A cicada? Right now? A *cicada*? Are you sure it’s not a roach?”

Ew, gross. Don’t say that, Sawachi.

“Of course not! It’s a cicada, a brown cicada, to be specific. Isn’t it strange? So, what do you think? I thought you of all people would know-“

On the other side of the cell phone, there was a long, deep silence, as if it would keep spreading further.

Sawachi then says with his voice almost like a whisper.

“There are many strange things out there.”

“What?”

“There are many strange things out there in the whole wide world. Take for example, you calling me right now.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

I tried to say that to cover my embarrassment.

“You want an answer, huh. I don’t have one. Is there even one out there? But, you see, mystery is salvation. For us, and probably for the whole world.”

The cicada peaked its head out from my cuff.

I have to let it go soon. If it’s kept trapped in human hands like this for too long, the cicada will weaken. Nonetheless, I don’t know whether staying in the warm room or letting him out into the light snow fall would be better for the cicada.

Sawachi and I promised to have another drinking party together one day, and hung up.

As I went out my front door, I walked toward the persimmon tree in our garden. All of the leaves have already fallen off of the persimmon tree, with the angular branches grabbing hold of the gray sky. The cicada is stopped by the tree trunk which has deep lines and cracks, almost like a gap. The cicada looked as if it were concerned about something, hesitating while it slowly started to climb up the tree trunk.

When I looked up, the snow looked like it was falling from an immeasurable height. It gradually came down harder, with cold crystals landing on my face and subsequently melting just as quickly, an endless amount of lines flowing.

Before I knew it, the cicada was at the top of the persimmon tree; stiffening, like a silhouette disappearing in a labyrinth.

My body became completely chilly, however, both of my hands that had once captured the cicada for some reason continued to feel hot, as if it were sweaty from the summer. Come to think of it, the cicada was male, but it didn't chirp at all... I suddenly thought to myself.

When I got back to my foyer, my mother's umbrella and bag of oranges were lying there. The TV in my living room was still left on, and no trace of my father there.

I turned off the TV, and brought the bag of oranges to the usual spot on the kitchen table.

It's already been a long time since my father has passed away, and Ms. Uehara should've passed away two years ago. Also, Sawachi, too...

There was a call log on my cell phone with Sawachi. However, I don't have the courage to call him back again...

Perhaps it was because of the snow piling up on the ground, but the empty house felt like it was filled with a constricting silence. In this overwhelming silence, I started to hear buzzing in my ears.

It was as if I could hear the buzzing of brown cicadas on a summer's day, long, long ago.

A large brown cicada in winter

By Azuchi Moe

Although it was the middle of winter, the large brown cicada came flying.

In the lightly falling snow, it flew about clumsily as if it had lost its way, but after turning this way and that, it suddenly perched on the screen door.

Before I could even think, "that's impossible," I was overcome with happiness.

I adore cicadas. I absolutely adore them.

Signalling summer's arrival, I love the chirp of the cute, child-like Kaempfer cicada as well as the evening cicada, the more sorrowful it is, the more elegant. Then there's the tsuku-tsuku-boushi with its bright and cheerful downturned eyes. But it has to be the large brown cicada I love the most, its chirp like a hot summer with even hotter oil poured over it.

Nonetheless, it was impossible.

And it was so cold!

I was wearing my Angora turtleneck sweater even though the heater was running!

"Hey, come on, what are you?"

I opened the glass door and brought my face close to the screen door that had been left in place since summer. Cold air enveloped me like the body of a snow woman spirit.

My and (presumably) the cicada's near-sighted eyes stared at each other for a few moments.

No doubt about it, it was a large brown cicada.

A male large brown cicada with a slender stomach that seemed to have been wiped with a white powder. He looked like he was about to start chirping loudly at any moment.

I opened the screen door a little and with our eyes still locked, I slowly extended my right hand.

I caught him!

The cicada struggled in my hand. His wings were like a small motor-driven electric fan. So as not to damage those wings I gently restrained them and the strength of the wing joints pulsed fear through to my fingers.

I was ecstatic.

Fulfilled as if I had captured some kind of purpose in my hand.

"Hey, this is so weird. There's a cicada here even though it's winter. Check it out!"

Without thinking, I had called out to my father who was facing away from me and watching television in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

"Still catching cicadas and things, are you? Act your age!"

"I like what I like and if I want to catch them, I will!"

I was indignant and had raised my voice.

Things always escalated like this with me and my father.

Just then the doorbell rang.

"Come to think of it, I used to call you my Cicada Daughter," my father remembered, but I angrily turned my back on him and went to the front door.

Standing there holding my mother's umbrella was her friend, Mrs. Uehara.

"How's your mother feeling? I brought these," Mrs. Uehara said as she held up some mandarins that appeared to be from a nearby supermarket and put them down in the door frame.

"I was in the neighbourhood so stopped by."

"Oh, thank you very much. Mum is..."

"Here's her umbrella. I thought I must bring it back as soon as possible."

The cicada thrashed around and was about to escape from my fingers, so I formed a cage with both my hands and locked him inside. His feet pricked me as he moved around but the pain and itching were secretly exhilarating.

"Oh, anytime would have been fine really. Mum will be in the hospital for a while."

"I see. Things must be tough."

The cicada's small motor started up, his fluttering wings tickling the inside of my hands.

"Mrs. Uehara, even though it's winter, there's a cicada here. Isn't that weird?"

"Is that so? Really? Except bugs are really not my thing."

Mrs. Uehara looked anxiously at the cage I had formed with my hands and said, "well, I was just stopping by. Please say hello to your mother." And she left.

I really wanted to tell someone about this cicada. The marvel of finding one alive at this cold time of year. If it were a flower, wouldn't it be blooming out of season? Perhaps this is an evolution in the cicada's life force? It's said winter nowadays is warmer than it used to be and that the number of insects passing the winter is increasing. Maybe something like a mutation occurred due to the abnormal weather? I wonder if there was some kind of impetus for the cicada's small body to bear the hot summer but he lost his way from that season to this one?

I decided to speak with Sawachi.

Some time ago when we were out for drinks, Sawachi had said while downing a whisky and water, "large brown cicadas, you know? They're awesome. Really awesome. They've got ambitions."

I liked that way of speaking and for that reason I liked Sawachi a little bit too.

I gently put the cicada under the cuff of my sweater's sleeve and flipped open my mobile phone. I searched through the contact list and found Sawachi's name still there.

The phone rang and he answered.

"Hello?"

Trying to calm down, I responded casually, "it's been a while. Sorry for the sudden call."

"Hey, could it be you? Yeah, it's been ages."

He seemed to know it was me right away.

"Well, I'll get straight to the point, guess what? There's a cicada here. Even though it's winter. Isn't that weird?"

"A cicada? At this time of year? A cicada? You sure it's not a cockroach?"

Gross. Come on, stop it Sawachi.

"No way. It's a cicada. A large brown cicada. Isn't that mysterious? What do you think? I thought you would be familiar with them."

On the other side of the phone, an irretrievably deep silence flowed and then seemed to spread.

Sawachi's voice became a mutter.

"There are many mysterious things," he said.

"What?"

"There are so many mysterious things in this world. Like you calling me just now."

"That's not an answer," I said, trying to hide my embarrassment.

"An answer? That's something I don't know. I wonder if there is one. But hey, mysterious things are a source of comfort. For us, and perhaps, for the world."

The cicada's face poked out from under the cuff of my sleeve.

It was about time to set him free. If a cicada stays in a person's hands for too long, it will weaken. But I wasn't sure whether it was better to keep the cicada in the warm room or to release him outside in the lightly falling snow.

I promised Sawachi I would get a drink with him some time and hung up the phone.

I left the house and headed over to the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had dropped all its leaves and its bony branches were grabbing at the ashen sky.

I gently placed the cicada on the tree trunk, which was covered in groove-like veins and cracks. He slowly began to climb the trunk, hesitating from time-to-time as if absorbed in thought about something.

Looking up, the snow seemed to fall as if from boundless heights. It gradually became stronger, cold snowflakes striking my face and melting, several streaks forming and flowing away.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared somewhere in the stiff maze-like silhouette at the top of the persimmon tree.

My body was frozen all over, and yet somehow both my hands that had held the cicada were still

hot and sweating like it was summer. It suddenly occurred to me that though it was a male cicada, he hadn't chirped at all.

I went back to the entrance of the house where my mother's umbrella and the mandarins had been placed. The television in the living room was still on but my father was nowhere to be seen.

I switched off the television and as usual put the mandarins on the kitchen table.

My father passed away some time ago and it must be two years since Mrs. Uehara died. And then there's Sawachi.

There was still a record of my call with him on my mobile phone. However, I didn't have the courage to try and call him again.

I wondered if the snow was piling up as a tightening silence filled the empty house.

It was so quiet there was a buzzing in my ears.

Like the chirp of a large brown cicada on a distant summer's day.

A Large Brown Cicada in the Wintertime
By Azuchi Moe

In the middle of winter, a large brown cicada came flying.
Flapping along clumsily and seeming lost among the flurries of snow, it meandered this way and that before abruptly landing on the window screen.

Before even thinking, “What a stupid cicada”, I immediately felt overjoyed.

I really like cicadas. I like them a lot.

I like the cute baby-like Kempfer cicadas that announce the arrival of summer, the evening cicadas that are elegant to the point of being tragic, and the nimble tsuku-tsuku-boushi with their cheerfully droopy eyes. But my favourite is still the large brown cicada — their voices sound like the pouring of searing hot oil on an already hot summer day.

But as for this particular moment, yeah, what a stupid cicada.

And in such cold weather.

In the kind of weather where I’m having to wear an Angolan turtleneck sweater with the heater turned on.

“Well wait a minute, who are *you*?”

I opened the glass door and put my face close to the window screen, which hasn’t been opened since summer. Like the skin of yuki-onna, the snow woman, the cold air drew near.

My near-sighted eyes locked with the cicada’s near-sighted (probably) eyes for a brief moment.

A large brown cicada, just as I thought.

A male large brown cicada with a firm belly that looked like it had been dusted in white powder. It seemed as if it was about to start singing loudly at any moment.

I opened the window screen just a little and, still locking eyes with the cicada, steadily reached out my right hand.

Got it!

A cicada was struggling inside my hand. It felt like the blades of an electric fan powered by a small motor. I felt some force from the root of the wings fearfully telling the finger gently pressing down on them not to cause any harm.

I was growing ecstatic.

I felt exalted as if I had captured some kind of purpose in my hand.

“Wow, weird. Look at that, a cicada in the winter.”

I reflexively called out from behind to my father who was watching television in the living room. And then regretted it.

“You’re still catching cicadas? Grow up—”

“I do it ‘cause I like it. Just let me be!”, I said petulantly, raising my voice.

My father and I easily became this way.

At that moment, the doorbell went off.

In a huff, I went to the front door, turning my back to my father as he recalled,

“Come to think of it, you used to always call yourself ‘cicada girl’.”

My mother’s friend, Mrs Uehara, was standing there holding my mother’s umbrella.

“How’s your mother doing? Here...”

Mrs Uehara said as she placed a plastic bag of mandarins from the nearby supermarket at the step of the entrance.

“I was just in the neighbourhood, so...”

“Oh, thanks for the trouble. My mother...”

“I thought I’d better return this umbrella sooner than later.”

The cicada was making an effort to escape through my fingers so I made a cage with both my hands and locked it in. Its legs were prickling me as they moved around, giving me that pleasant itching sensation like I was holding a secret between my hands.

“Oh, anytime would’ve been fine...My mother has been hospitalised long-term.”

“Oh, I see. That must be hard.”

The cicada started its small motor and as the wings began to flap they tickled the inside of my hand.

“Say, Mrs Uehara. It’s winter and there was a cicada flying about. Isn’t that strange?”

“Oh, is that so? Really? But you know, I’m not good with insects—”

Mrs Uehara, anxiously looking at the hand cage I made, continued,

“Well, I just meant to stop by. Send your mother my regards.”

Then she headed home.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how strange it was that a cicada is surviving in such cold weather. Like flowers blossoming in the off-season. Perhaps cicadas are evolving their life force. It *is* winter, but apparently, winters have gotten warmer recently and the number of hibernating insects has also been on the rise. I wonder if rogue phenomena are occurring all of a sudden due to abnormalities in climate. Either that or perhaps through some kind of impulse, that small body — bearing the weight of the hot summer — lost its way onto the other side, onto *this side*.

I decided to try talking to Sawachi.

Before, whenever we went drinking together, Sawachi used to always say while emptying a glass of whiskey soda,

“Yes, large brown cicadas. They’re the good ones. Very good, I’ll say. They have ambition.”

I took a liking to that manner of speech, and so also took a liking to Sawachi himself.

I gently put the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater and unlocked my phone. Looking through my address book, Sawachi’s name was still there.

After the dial tone sounded, Sawachi picked up.

“...Yeah...”

Trying to calm my heart down, I said nonchalantly,

“Hey, it’s been a while. Sorry for calling so suddenly—”

“Oh...it’s you? It has been some time, hasn’t it.”

He seemed to know it was me right away.

“Well, you know, I know this is sudden, but there’s a cicada. Even though it’s winter. I mean, isn’t that strange?”

“Huh...a cicada? Right now you mean? Cicada? Uh, not a cockroach?”

No, Sawachi, cut it out.

“No, of course not. It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada. Strange, right? Hey, what do you think? I thought to myself, Sawachi would know a lot about this—”

A moment of deep silence that could not be undone elapsed from the other side, one that felt like it was neverending.

Then, Sawachi spoke in a grumbling voice,

“...There are lots of strange things.”

“...Huh?”

“Strange things. In this world, there are lots of them. And you’re calling me about it now...”

“That’s not an answer.”

I responded, trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh. I mean, I don’t know. Is there even an answer? But you know, strange things are part of salvation. For us, and probably, for the world—”

The cicada popped its head out from under my cuff.

I had to let it go soon. If cicadas are kept too long in a person’s hand, they will grow weak. Although, I’m not sure what’s better for the cicada — to be let go inside a warm room or out in the flickering snow.

After arranging another drinking party with Sawachi, I got off the phone.

I left the entrance and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had lost all of its leaves, its scrawny branches holding on tightly to the ashen sky.

I placed the cicada on the surface of the trunk, which was covered in groove-like streaks and cracks. The cicada began to climb the trunk slowly and hesitated occasionally as if it was thinking about something.

Looking up, it seemed like the snow was falling from an endless height. Gradually and relentlessly, the cold crystals landed on my face and melted, forming streaks as they flowed down.

Before I knew it, the cicada disappeared somewhere among the stiff, maze-like treetops of the persimmon tree.

My body was completely frozen, but even so, for some reason, my hands that had caught the cicada were hot and sweaty like the summer. Now that I think about it, although the cicada was a male, it did not sound out even once.

When I returned to my home entrance, my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were still sitting there. The television in the living room had been left on and the figure of my father was already gone.

I turned off the television switch and brought the bag of oranges to the kitchen table as I normally would.

It's already been a long time since my father passed away, and Mrs Uehara must have died two years ago. And Sawachi too...

My call history with Sawachi was still logged on my phone. But I didn't have the courage to try calling him again.

Perhaps its because the snow has piled up, but the empty house felt as if it was being filled with a suffocating silence.

In the extreme stillness, I began to hear a ringing in my ears.

It was just as if I was hearing the calls of the large brown cicadas from those far, far summer days.

The Winter Cicada
by Moe Azuchi

The cicada appeared on a day in the dead of winter.

It was flying in that erratic, ungraceful fashion that cicadas do, heading first in one direction and then another through a light fall of scattered snowflakes before abruptly fetching up against the screen door.

My delight at the large brown cicada's sudden, unseasonal arrival overrode any disbelief.

I've always been captivated by cicadas, completely and unconditionally.

I love the kaempfer cicada that signals the coming of summer, with its endearingly childlike appearance; and the almost heartbreakingly elegant evening cicada, *T. japonensis*; and the jaunty, quick-moving *M. opalifera*, with its eyes that tilt downward at the corners; but it was *G. nigrofuscata*, the large brown cicada, whose insistent crackling drone seemed to pour extra fuel on the summer heat with a sound like food frying in a pot of oil, that was my favorite.

None of which changed the fact that it was, of course, absurd for a cicada to be out now, despite the bitter cold, and despite me being dressed in an angora turtleneck sweater with the heating turned on.

"Hey, what kind of cicada are you?" I said to it, opening the glass sliding door and pushing my face closer to the screen that had been left up since summer. The chill air crept in on me, cold as the skin of a snow woman out of a fairytale.

For some time, the cicada and I peered back and forth at one another, its nearsighted gaze meeting mine (at least I presume the cicada was nearsighted, too).

It was definitely *G. nigrofuscata*, the large brown cicada—a male, its taut belly speckled with flecks of white. It looked ready to break out in loud song at any moment.

I inched the screen door open slightly and, with our eyes still locked on each other, reached out softly with my right hand.

I had it!

The cicada thrashed around in my hand. Its wings made a sound like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. Pinning them down gently to save them from damage, I could feel the pulsing energy at their base traveling up through my fingers.

I was ecstatic.

Bursting with satisfaction, as if what I held in my hands was some goal that I had accomplished, I called out impulsively to my father, who sat in the living room facing the other way, watching television.

"This is so strange. There's a cicada out in winter, look!"

I regretted it almost immediately.

"Aren't you getting a little old for catching cicadas?" he responded. "Of all the things..."

Annoyed, I fired back, "If I like them, I like them. It doesn't have anything to do with you!"

It was always like that with me and my father.

The doorbell rang, and, still cross, I made my way to the front door, turning my back on my father as he remarked, as if it had just occurred to him, "That reminds me, you used to get called 'cicada girl,' didn't you?"

My mother's friend Uehara was waiting at the door, an umbrella that belonged to my mother in her hand.

"How is your mother?" she asked. "I was in the neighborhood, so I brought this..." She set down a bag from a nearby supermarket; it was full of mikan oranges.

"Oh. We appreciate that. My mother, she—"

"I know I should have brought her umbrella back sooner," Uehara said.

The cicada began to struggle in my fingers, nearly escaping, and I cupped both hands over it, trapping it inside. Its legs pricked against my skin as it moved, a sharp tickle that I was conscious of as a secret, pleasant sensation in my hands.

“There was no need to rush. The truth is, my mother has to stay in the hospital for a while,” I told Uehara.

“Oh! I didn’t know. That must be hard.”

The cicada’s tiny motor sprang to life, its wings brushing drily against my palms.

“Uehara-san, look. I found a cicada out at this time of year. Isn’t that odd?”

“Did you? Really? I’m actually not very fond of insects...” She looked nervously at my cupped hands and added, “Anyway, I only wanted to stop by. Tell your mother I said hello.” With that, she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada, about how strange it was for it be alive in the depths of winter. Like those flowers that bloom out of season. Maybe cicadas were developing some kind of new survival ability. With the winters getting warmer than they used to be, more insects are supposed to be living through the colder months instead of dying off. The anomalous weather could have prompted a new mutation, I thought. Or maybe some coincidence had pushed the cicada to come wandering into its counter-season on *this* side of the year, carrying all the heat of summer within its tiny carapace.

I decided to call Sawachi.

Ages ago, when we’d all been out for drinks, I remembered him finishing off a glass of whiskey and water and saying, “Yeah, there is something special about cicadas, I mean the large brown cicada—very special. They show ambition.” I liked the way he said that, and that made me like Sawachi a little, as well.

I slipped the cicada gently inside the sleeve of my sweater and opened my phone. When I searched through the contacts, Sawachi’s name was still there.

The dial tone sounded, and then Sawachi picked up. There was a pause. “Hello?” he said.

Keeping my nerves in check, I said casually, “Long time no see. Sorry to call you out of the blue—”

“Hey...is that you? Wow, it’s been a while.”

Fortunately he seemed to recognize me immediately.

“Actually the reason I called is that I found a cicada. Right now, in winter. How strange is that?”

“A cicada? Really? At this time of year?” he said. “A cicada. You’re not talking about a cockroach?”

Sawachi, cut it out, I thought. Don’t be gross.

“It’s not a cockroach,” I told him. “It’s a cicada, a large brown cicada. Isn’t that unusual? What do you think? You seem like you’d know about stuff like this.”

At the other end of the phone, there was a profound, intractable silence that lasted for a time until I could almost feel it swelling.

Finally Sawachi muttered, “Plenty of unusual things happen.”

“What did you say?”

“Unusual things happen all the time. Like you calling me right now...”

“You haven’t answered the question,” I ventured, in what felt like an effort to cover up an awkward moment.

“An answer to the question,” he repeated. “I don’t have an answer. Maybe it’s just something that happens sometimes.” He seemed to have come to some conclusion. “But when something unusual happens, it makes all the difference, doesn’t it? To you and me, and probably to the rest of the world, too, I imagine...”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

I would need to let it go soon. It’s not good for cicadas to stay caught for too long in human hands. Still, I wasn’t sure whether it would be better for the cicada to be inside where it was warm, or set it free outside with the snow coming down.

I promised Sawachi to meet up for drinks again with everyone sometime and hung up the phone, then went out the front door and walked to the persimmon tree in the garden. It had lost all of its leaves, revealing gnarled branches that clutched at the gray sky.

I set the cicada down softly on the trunk that was covered in gully-like cracks and furrows, and it began to climb upwards in a languid fashion, pausing now and then, as if it was pondering something.

As I gazed up, the snow appeared to be falling from a limitless height. It was coming down increasingly harder, the icy flakes now landing on my face before melting away in multiple trails of liquid.

At some point the cicada had vanished into the rigid, tangled silhouette of the persimmon tree's branches.

The rest of my body was chilled to the bone, but for some reason my hands, where I had trapped the cicada for a time, remained hot, sweating slightly like they would in summer. It occurred to me that even though the cicada had been a male, it hadn't sung once.

When I got back to the front door, my mother's umbrella and the bag of mikan oranges were still there. The television was still on in the living room, but my father was nowhere to be seen.

I switched off the TV and placed the bag of oranges on the table as I had done many times before.

It had been a long time since my father died, and Uehara, I knew, had also passed away two years ago. And Sawachi... His number was still in the call history in my phone, but I wouldn't have had the courage to try calling him again now.

I wondered if the snow had begun to pile up higher. The rooms of the empty house began to fill up with an intense, gripping silence.

It was so quiet that my ears began to ring, with a sound that mimicked perfectly the song of a large brown cicada on a far-off summer day.

Brown Cicada in Winter

Despite it being the middle of winter, here flies a brown cicada.

Within a litter of snow, flying lost and clumsily, changing course here and there, finally, abruptly stopping on the sliding screen door.

“Huh, but that’s ridiculous,” or so I would have thought if I weren’t so happy.

I love cicadas. I love cicadas a lot.

Like the cute immature Kaempfer cicada, announcing that summer has arrived, the evening cicada, sad to the point of elegance, the Meimuna Opalifera, lively and nimble with drooping eyes. I love them all, and of course, in the summer with a voice like sizzling hot oil, the Large Brown Cicada, the one I love best.

But, of course, right now that’s absurd.

It’s so cold.

I’m wearing an angora sweater and the heat is turned on--.

“Hey there, what are you?”

I opened the sliding glass door and put my face close to the screen door that had been left there since summer. Cold air like the skin of a yuki-onna, a snow woman, poured in.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada’s (probably) nearsighted eyes locked, staring at each other for a brief moment.

It really was a brown cicada.

There it was, the stomach covered with white speckles, a male. Anytime now it will start making its loud cicada noise--.

I opened the screen door just a bit, continuing to stare at the cicada. I slowly stretched out my hand.

I caught it!

Inside my hand the cicada struggled. Its wings like a little motor, moving like an electric fan. In order not to injure those wings, I softly held them down, nervously putting pressure at their base with my finger.

I was overjoyed.

It was in my hand and for some reason it was as if I was meant to catch it.

“Now this is strange, it’s winter and yet here’s a cicada. Look,” I called out without thinking to the silhouette of my father’s back in the living room watching TV. And then I regretted it.

“You’re still catching cicadas, how childish---.”

“I like what I like, it’s not childish!” I said angrily, losing my temper.

That’s how my relationship with my father has always been.

And then the front doorbell rang.

I was in a huff.

“Come to think of it, I actually used to call you cicada girl,” said my father as he remembered, his back turned towards the front door.

Standing at the door was my mom’s friend Uehara-san holding mom’s umbrella.

“How’s your mother? Here...,” said Uehara-san while placing a bag of oranges from a local supermarket just inside the door.

“I was in the area, so I came over.”

“Oh, thank you for the trouble, my mom is--”

“I was just thinking that I should return your mom’s umbrella as soon as possible--”

The cicada struggled in my fingers, about to escape, so I imprisoned it by cupping my hands. As it moved around, its feet pricked my hand and the pain and itching was secretly a pleasant feeling.

“Oh, anytime would have been fine... My mom will be in the hospital long term.”

“Oh really. That must be hard.”

The cicada started acting like a tiny motor, fluttering its wings inside my hands, tickling.

“Hey, Uehara-san. Even though it’s winter I found this cicada. That’s weird, isn’t it?”

“What, really? Truly? Although I don’t really like bugs--,” said Uehara-san while looking at my cupped hands with unease.

“Well I just wanted to stop by. Give my regards to your mother,” she said as she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the strangeness of one being alive when it’s cold out--. If it were a flower it would be blooming out of season. Is this an evolution of the cicada’s vitality? Even though it’s winter, recently it has been warmer than in the past, and there has also been an increase of hibernating insects. Because of the abnormal weather, things like mutations have been occurring. Or was it due to some stimulus in that small body-- Did the hot summer do damage to it physically? It’s as if it lost track of time, coming out on this side of the seasons, the opposite side.

So I decided to see if I could talk to Sawachi-kun.

At a work party a while ago Sawachi-kun had said, “Hmmm the brown cicada, right? I like that one. I really like that one. I have a lot of enthusiasm for them,” while finishing his liquor.

I liked what he had to say, which is why I was interested in him again.

I gently put the cicada in the left sleeve of my sweater and opened my cell phone. I searched my address book and Sawachi-kun’s name was still there.

After a beep I was connected to Sawachi-kun.

“.....hello....”

While calming my heart, I said casually, “I know it’s been a while. Sorry for calling so unexpectedly.”

“Oh.... could it be? Yeah - it has been a while.”

It sounded like he quickly realized who I was.

“Um, I know this is sudden, but I found a cicada. Even though it’s winter. You think that’s weird too, right?”

“What...a cicada? Now? A cicada? Um -- you sure it’s not a cockroach?”

Ugh, no, Sawachi-kun. Stop it.

“No, it’s not. It’s a cicada, a brown cicada. That’s strange, right? So, what do you think? Because it’s you, I thought you would have an opinion--.”

On the other end of the line a profound silence stretched out, going on and on, and it couldn’t be stopped.

Sawachi-kun’s murmuring voice said, “...there are a lot of strange things.”

“....what?”

“Strange things, this world is full of them. Even you calling me now...”

“That’s not an answer,” I said, somehow hiding my embarrassment.

“An answer....oh? I don’t really know myself. I don’t know why it happened. But well, what’s strange is that it was saved. For us and probably for the world as well--.”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

Soon I would have to set it free. Being kept forever in captivity by a human would make it weak. Although I wasn’t really sure what would be better for the cicada, warm inside, or set free in the snow littered outdoors.

Sawachi-kun and I promised to make plans to go out drinking together and hung up.

I walked out through the entryway and headed to the Japanese persimmon tree in the garden.

All the leaves had completely fallen off, the angular branches looking like they were grasping at the grey sky.

I gently placed the cicada in a groove on the split tree trunk. The cicada, as if deep in thought about something, hesitated at times as it started to climb the tree.

Looking up, it seemed as if the snow fell from an unfathomable height. Gradual and relentless, the cold crystals that hit my face melted. They melted and ran down the groove of the tree as well.

Before I knew it, the form of the cicada had disappeared somewhere in the branches of the tree which had stiffened into a maze-like silhouette.

Even though my body was completely cold, why were both of my hands, which had held the cicada, even now warm, sweaty as if it was summer? Come to think of it, even though the cicada was

male it never made a bit of sound...I thought suddenly.

I went back to the entrance way to where my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges were sitting. The living room TV was still on and the shape of my father was already gone.

I turned off the TV and put the bag of oranges in its usual place on the table in the kitchen.

My father had passed away long ago, and Uehara-san had also died two years ago. And Sawachi-kun as well...

In my phone was still the call record with Sawachi-kun. However, looking at it, I had not had the courage to call him back even once...

Is the snow really still accumulating? With no one else in the house, it is filled with an oppressive silence.

In the stillness, there is a ringing in my ears.

It is just like on a far-off summer day, the sound of a brown cicada.

A Brown Cicada in Winter

Despite it being the middle of winter, a brown cicada came flying in.

Amidst the swirling snow, it flew every which way in that characteristically faltering, clumsy manner before finally landing on the screen door with a plop.

My first reaction wasn't to be shocked about the cicada's appearance, but instead, to become exceedingly ecstatic.

I loved cicadas. More than anyone can imagine.

From the kind of cicadas whose cries to announce the coming of summer sounded like adorable children, to the evening cicadas whose songs were mournfully elegant, to the walker cicadas with their upturned eyes and cheerful chirps, I loved them all. But even so, my favorite ones had to be large brown cicadas, with their trills like the sound of sizzling oil, hotter than even the heat of summer.

But really, how could there be a cicada now, of all times?

In this cold—

Cold enough that I was wearing an angora turtleneck sweater and the heater was turned on—

“Hello there, just what are you?”

I opened the glass door and put my face close to the screen door that we had left there since summer. Cold air blew at me like the touch of a snow woman.

For a while, my nearsighted eyes were locked with the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes.

It was definitely a brown cicada.

A male brown cicada, with a powder-like sprinkle of white over its slender belly. It seemed ready to let out a loud trill at any moment.

I slid the screen door slightly open, my eyes still fixed on the cicada's, and slowly stretched out my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada went wild in my hand, his wings buzzing like the tiny motor of an electric fan. I gently pressed the cicada down with my fingers to keep him from hurting his wings, and through my fingertips, I could feel the powerful quivering of his wing joints.

I was elated. It felt as if I'd accomplished some kind of goal, with the proof of it in my hands.

“Hey, isn't it weird? I found a cicada, even though it's the middle of winter. Look.”

Without thinking, I called to my father's back, from where he was sitting in the living room watching TV. And immediately regretted it.

“You're still catching cicadas at your age?”

“I can like whatever I want, whenever I want!” I snapped back at him.

My father and I had always immediately ended up like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

As I turned my back on him to head towards the front door, I heard my father mutter from behind, “That reminds me, you always called yourself a cicada girl when you were younger...”

At the entrance, my mother's friend Mrs. Uehara was standing there with my mother's umbrella in her hand.

“How's your mother doing? I brought these for you,” she said, lowering a bag of tangerines from the nearby supermarket to the flooring. “I happened to be in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd stop by...”

“Oh, thank you very much. My mother is—”

“I figured I needed to return your mother's umbrella soon, you see...”

The cicada was struggling and almost escaped from my fingers, so I caged him with both of my hands. The cicada's legs prickled as he scurried around within my palms, the tingling sensation giving me a secretive sort of thrill.

“Thank you, but there's no rush,” I replied. “My mother's been admitted to the hospital for the long-term.”

“Well, that’s true. It must be hard.”

A small motor in my hands, the cicada’s wings tickled as they whirled.

“Mrs. Uehara, it’s the middle of winter, but I found a cicada. Strange, isn’t it?”

“What, really? Are you sure? I don’t really like bugs though...” She stared uneasily at my clasped hands. “Anyway, I just wanted to drop by. Tell your mother I said hello.” With that, Mrs. Uehara took her hasty leave.

I wanted to talk to someone about this cicada. About how strange it was to find one alive in weather this cold. The closest thing I could compare it to was a flower blooming out of season. Maybe this cicada’s ability to survive had evolved. In recent years, winters were warmer, and maybe because of that, the number of insects able to live through the winter had increased. Maybe because of the abnormal weather, some kind of mutation had occurred. Or maybe, by some chance, this single little cicada, bringing with him those hot summer days from the other side, had strayed into the season of here and now.

I decided to call my friend, Sawachi.

We’d gone out drinking together before, and he’d said, while downing his alcohol, “Brown cicadas are good guys, you know. Just great. They’ve got some ambition to them.” I’d taken a liking to the way he said it, and because of that, taken a little bit of a liking to Sawachi himself.

I carefully stuck the cicada into the sleeve of my sweater and turned on my cell phone. Flicking through my address book, Sawachi’s name was still in there.

The dial tone rang, connecting me to him.

“...Hello...?”

Taking a breath to calm myself, I said casually, “It’s been a while. Sorry for calling so suddenly.”

“Wait... Is that you? Wow, it’s been a long time.”

The fact that he recognized me right away made me happy. “Listen, to get straight to the point, I found a cicada. In the middle of winter. Crazy, right?”

“Huh... A cicada? At this time of year? You sure it’s not just a roach?”

Don’t be like that, Sawachi. Don’t say that.

“I *said* it’s a cicada, a large brown one. Isn’t it a mystery? What do you think? I thought you of all people might know something about it.”

From the other end of the phone, a long stretch of silence opened like a vast, uncrossable abyss between us, and only grew wider and wider.

“...Mysterious things happen all the time.”

“Huh?”

“I said mysterious things happen in this world all the time. Like the fact that you even called me...”

“That doesn’t answer anything,” I said, letting a bit of embarrassment creep into my voice.

“An answer, huh? I don’t know any of the answers, or whether any exist. But you know, mysteries can be a source of salvation. Both to me, and probably to this world, too.”

The cicada poked his face out from my sleeve. It was about time to let him go, or else trapped in my hand, he would start to weaken. Considering that the choices were to stay in a warm room or be released outside into the swirling snow though, I couldn’t really say which would be more to the cicada’s benefit.

I made a promise with Sawachi to go drinking together again sometime, and hung up the phone.

Leaving the entrance, I headed to the persimmon tree that stood in the garden. Its leaves had fallen long ago, boney branches reaching up as if to grasp at the greyish skies. I set the cicada on the tree’s trunk, marred with streaks and wrinkles reminiscent of gutters. The cicada seemed to think for a moment before he began to crawl up the trunk, a little hesitantly at times, in a roundabout manner.

I looked upwards. It was as if the snow fell from some eternally indeterminable height, and one by one, hit my cheeks like cold crystals which melted and slid down my face.

At some point, the cicada had disappeared somewhere amongst the persimmon tree’s stark,

maze-like branches.

My body had chilled to the core. Yet for some reason, my two hands, with which I had caught the cicada, remained hot, sweaty as if with the heat of summer. I suddenly realized even though the cicada had been male, he had never made a single sound.

I returned to the house entrance, where my mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines remained. The television in the living room was left on, my father nowhere to be seen.

I turned the television off and set the bag of tangerines on the kitchen table as I always did.

My father had long since passed to the other world, and Mrs. Uehara two years ago. And even Sawachi had...

My messages to Sawachi remained in my cell phone. But I had no courage to try calling him one more time.

Maybe it was because the snow had started piling up, but the empty house was filling with an oppressive silence.

In the midst of that resounding quiet, my ears began to ring.

The sound was very much like that of a large brown cicada, from a summer day of long, long ago.

A Cicada in Winter
Azuchi Moe

It was the dead of winter and yet a cicada appeared.

Flying clumsily and bewildered, it flittered in one direction and then another before making its way through the snow flurries to plant itself right up against the window screen.

"This can't possibly be," I thought, but only after experiencing a sense of delight. I like cicadas. I mean I really, *really* like them. I like the "nii-nii zemi," the cute, child-like cicadas named for their song, which announces the coming of summer. I like the poignantly elegant "higurashi" variety, whose cry tells us the day has come to an end. I like the ones that call out "tsuku-tsuku bōshi," too, droopy-eyed yet agile and cheery. But most of all I like the plain old brown cicada, the one the Japanese call an "abura zemi" (oil cicada) because its cry sounds like the sizzle of something dropped in hot oil. A perfect complement for the heat of summer.

Be that as it may, the impossibility of it showing up now is the real issue. Now, when it is so cold outside. Now, when I'm wearing an angora turtleneck and I've got the heat on.

"Who in the world *are* you?"

I slid open the glass window and brought my face up close to the screen, still there though summer is gone. The winter air pressed in, cold as the skin of a snow fairy. I gaze into the eyes of the cicada and for a few moments it gazes right back. I'm near-sighted and I think the same is probably true for the cicada.

This brown cicada is a male, its tight, compact belly sprinkled with what looked like white powder. It seems about to release its loud cry at any second. I slide open the window screen a bit and with my our eyes still locked on each other, and I slowly reach out with my right hand.

Got it! A cicada squirming wildly in my hand. Wings beating like the blades of an electric fan. Strength pulsing into the fingers that entrap it gently so that the wings are not harmed.

I am bewitched. I feel that I have caught something I had been seeking, and I am complete.

"Dad, this is strange. It's winter, but I've got a cicada here. Look!" I blurt this out to my father in the living room where he sits with his back to me watching the television. I immediately regret having spoken.

"Don't tell me you're still catching cicadas at your age!"

"I like what I like. Leave me alone." Angry, my tone of voice is harsh. This is the way it always is with my father and me.

At that moment the doorbell rang. Remembering something, my father then said, "Come to think of it, we did used to call you the cicada girl." Irritated, I turned away and went to answer the door. Standing there with my mother's umbrella in hand was her friend, Mrs. Uehara.

"How is your mother feeling?" she asked, handing me the umbrella and placing a bag of tangerines from the local supermarket on the doorstep. "I was in the neighborhood, so . . ."

"Ah, you really shouldn't have. Mother is . . ."

"I thought I really should have returned this umbrella to her sooner."

The cicada fluttered wildly and was about to slip through my fingers, so I cupped it in both hands. The cicada's legs pricked me as it scrambled about; the itchy sting was a sort of secret pleasure in the palm of my hands.

"There really was no rush. Mother will be in the hospital for quite some time."

"Is that so? What a shame."

The cicada revved its little engine and its fluttering wings tickled my hands.

"Mrs. Uehara, I've got a cicada here, and it's winter. Isn't that odd?"

"A cicada? Really? I'm actually not very fond of bugs."

Nervously eyeing the cage I'd made by cupping my hands, she said, "Well, then. This is just a quick visit. Give my best to your mother." And she was off.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada, about how miraculous it was that it was alive in the cold of winter. It was like a flower blooming out of season. Might this be some new evolutionary step

in the life force of cicadas? They say that the winters these days are much warmer than they used to be, and that more and more insects are now able to survive the season. Maybe the changes in the weather patterns have prompted some sort of sudden mutation in them. Or could it just be that, by some twist of fate, something, or someone, has found a way into this tiny body . . . and bearing all that the hot summer has to give, it has now found its way over to the other side, *this side*, this season.

I decided to give Sawachi a call. A long time ago, at some party, he'd drained his glass of scotch and water and said, "The 'abura zemi,' that plain old brown cicada, is a fine fellow. A really fine fellow. He's got real ambition, that one." I'd loved the way he'd expressed that and it had got me thinking that Sawachi himself might be something special.

I slipped the cicada into the sleeve of my turtleneck and flipped open my cell phone. Sawachi's name was still there in my contact list.

The phone rings, and Sawachi picks up.

"Hello?," he says tentatively after a pause.

I force myself to calm down and casually say, "Long time, no see. Sorry to call you out of the blue and all . . ."

"Wait a minute, is that you? Well, well, it *has* been a long time." Luckily he seemed to immediately recognize my voice.

"I know this is kind of random, but I've got a cicada right here. Even though it's winter. Don't you think it odd?"

"Um, . . . a cicada? At this time of year? Is it really a cicada? Are you sure it's not just a cockroach?"

Yuck! Come on, Sawachi, quit fooling around.

"No way. It's a cicada, one of those plain brown ones. Kind of miraculous, don't you think? How do you explain it? You're the expert on these things."

From the other end of the line flowed a long moment of deep silence that I could do nothing about. Next, it seemed to expand.

Then Sawachi said, his voice almost a whisper: "Lots of things seem miraculous."

"What?"

"There are all sorts of miraculous things in this world. Like you talking to me on the phone right now."

"That hardly seems like an answer," I said, probably mostly to hide my confusion.

"So you want an answer, eh? I haven't got one. Would anybody? But, you know, it's the miraculous stuff that will save us. It'll save you and me, and probably the whole world, too."

The cicada poked its head out from the cuff of my turtleneck. I have to let this thing go pretty soon. If you hang onto it too long, a cicada loses its strength. That being said, I couldn't decide whether the cicada would be better off released in the warm room or outside in the flurries of snow. Promising Sawachi that we'd go out for drinks again sometime, I hung up.

I went out the front door and headed towards the persimmon tree in the garden. The persimmon tree had lost all its leaves and its boney branches clawed at the ashen sky. I gently transferred the cicada to the tree's cracked, pitted and gnarly trunk. The cicada began to slowly wind its way up the tree trunk, pausing from time to time as if lost in thought. I looked skyward and the snow seemed to be falling from some boundless height. It fell harder and harder, the cold crystals that pelted by face melting into countless rivulets that flowed over my cheeks.

At some point the cicada had vanished into the hardened labyrinth of shadows on the branches of the persimmon tree. My body itself felt chilled to the bone, but inexplicably the hands that had held the cicada remained warm, sweaty as though it were summer. It suddenly occurred to me that the cicada, though a male, had not uttered a single cry. I went back through the front door, and there I found my mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines. The television in the living room was still on, but my father was no longer there. I turned off the television and went to put the tangerines on the kitchen table, where they always go.

My father had left this world a long time ago, and it had surely been two years since Mrs. Uehara died, too. The same was true for Sawachi.

My cell phone history still showed the call to Sawachi. I wasn't brave enough, though, to dial his number again. Perhaps because the snow was piling up outside, the empty house fell into the grips of the pervasive silence that filled it. It was so quiet that I sensed a ringing in my ears. It sounded just like the cry of a brown cicada calling out from an ever so distant summer day.

Winter cicada
By Azuchi Moe

In spite that it was the middle of the winter, a large brown cicada just appeared in the air.

In the middle of glimmering snowflakes the cicada flickered this and that way like a drunk who lost its way, until it abruptly decided to land on the mosquito door. I was so happy to see a cicada, that only later did I think about how stupid its behaviour was. The reason is because I love cicadas. I love them very much.

They announce the arrival of the summer, so I like them all. The black cicada, which cries nii-nii like a sweet little child, the evening cicada, which is elegant and unapproachable, I even like the cicada whose song copies emergency alarms, with its smart and good humoured faceted eyes. But above all I like the large brown cicada, which sings during the hot summer nights, its sound always reminding me of the sizzling of hot oil.

So why did this fool turn up now, in the middle of winter, when it is so cold? People wear their angora jumpers and turn on the heaters, so why now?

‘Oh my, what were you thinking?’

I opened the glass door, and put my head closer to the mosquito net, left as it was from summer. The cold washed over my skin. My short-sighted eyes met the eye of the cicada, probably also incapable to see farther than me, and for a while we just stared at each other. It was indeed a large brown cicada. Its tight body was splattered with white dots, resembling sifted flour dust, so I know it was a male cicada. It looked like it could burst out singing any seconds.

Moving carefully, I opened the door, and while keeping an eye on the cicada, slowly extended my right hand towards it.

Yes! I caught it!

In my hand, the cicada struggled to escape, its wings drumming like a little electric fan. I held it between my fingers, taking care not to hurt the wings, and seeping in its fear which pulsed through the core of its body. I felt a crazy sense of happiness. Even though I did not know why I caught it, I was convinced that the cicada in my hand is serving some kind of purpose.

‘Isn’t it strange? A cicada in the middle of winter.’ I said without thinking towards the silhouette of my father’s back watching the TV in the living room. I regretted it immediately.

‘Don’t tell me you have caught a cicada again... and at your age!’

‘It is not my fault that I love them, it is not like I am doing it for no reason at all’, my voice got sullen and harsh. Father and I were always like this, capable of getting on each other nerves without a second hesitation.

Just at that moment, the doorbell rang. I angrily marched out to the entrance, turning my back to Father, who added in a somewhat softened mood:

‘If I think about it, that’s right. I used to call you my cicada-crazy daughter...’

A friend of my mother, Mrs. Uehara stood at the door, holding Mother’s umbrella in her hand.

‘How is your mother? Here, I brought this’, in a bag of the neighbourhood supermarket, she put a whole bunch of oranges to the ledge of the entrance. ‘It is nothing special, just from the corner.’

‘Oh, you shouldn’t have troubled yourself. Mother is...’

‘I wanted to return her umbrella much sooner; it just went out of my head.’

The cicada made a sudden burst to escape from my grip, and I had to hold on with both my hands to keep it in the cage of my fingers. Its legs turned around and around in my hand, tickling my palm. Somehow the anguish of the cicada made me feel pleased, like I was privy to a secret nobody else was.

‘Thank you, but really, there was no need to hurry. For a while, Mother needs to stay in the

hospital.'

'I am sad to hear it. It must be hard for you.'

The cicada turned on again its rustling wings, tickling tirelessly my palms.

'Tell me Mrs Uehara, isn't it strange that I found a cicada in the middle of winter?'

'What? You found one? Really? Oh dear, I hate insects' said Mrs Uehara looking uneasily at my clasped hands. 'Well, I just wanted to drop by to give you the things. Please tell your mother that I wish her a speedy recovery' and with that, she escaped.

I wanted to tell somebody about the cicada, the mystery of its persevering in such a cold season. If it would be a flower, I could just say that it is a late-bloomer. Have the cicadas evolved to be much stronger? Or it is the winter, which lately became warmer than in days of the past, so more and more insects are capable to survive it? Because of the abnormal weather lately, a sudden mutation might have occurred? Or were there some mistaken signs of spring, which reminded this little body of the summer, causing it to mistakenly swap the seasons? I decided to try to talk with Sawachi.

A long time ago, Sawachi turned to me during one of the drinking parties:

'They are good guys, those brown cicadas. Indeed, very-very good guys. They have their own dreams' and with this, he emptied his sake cup.

I liked what he said, so I developed a fondness for him as well.

After carefully hiding the cicada in the cuff of my sweater, I opened my mobile. His name was still among my contacts. After a few beeping tones, the phone was picked up.

'Hallo' I calmed myself down and tried to sound casual. 'It is a long time since we spoke. I apologize for calling you so suddenly...'

'Oh, is that you? Well, well, it has been a while, indeed!' He seemed to recognize me instantly.

'I know this is out of the blue, but imagine, I found a brown cicada! In the middle of winter. Isn't it strange?'

'A cicada, you say? At this time of the year? A large brown one? You must be joking!'

Come on, Sawachi, not you too.

'I am not joking. It is a cicada, a brown cicada. Isn't it extraordinary? What do you think of it? I thought that you might be interested...'

On the other end of the line, there was a deep silence, which seemed to stretch till eternity. Then Sawachi's voice came back, muttering to himself.

'There are many extraordinary things.'

'What?'

'This world is full of extraordinary things. That you called me, just now, for example...'

'This is not an answer – I said the first thing which came to my mind to hide my embarrassment.'

'An answer... I am afraid I do not know the answer. I am not even sure it exists. But let me tell you, extraordinary things are lifesavers. They saved me, and maybe they also save the world...'

The cicada pushed his head outside the sweater's cuff. I have to set it free sooner or later. It would grow weak if I continue keeping it in my hands. That being said, I was not sure what would have been better for the cicada: to be inside the warm room, or to be let back to the glimmering snowflakes of the winter.

After agreeing with Sawachi to meet sometime for a few drinks, I cut the line. I went out to the garden and walked to the persimmon tree. The leaves had fallen a long time ago, and the branches were bare, bony hands grabbing the grey sky. Its bark was covered with cracks and chaps, full of deep lines running down the trunk. To this trunk did I gently place the cicada.

The cicada seemed to be deep in thoughts, and took its time, as hesitantly, stopping from time to time, it started to ascend on the trunk. I looked up at the snow falling from far-far above. Gradually it started to fall in greater and greater quantity, the cold crystals hitting my face and melting instantly, flowing down like tears on my cheeks. Before I knew it, I lost sight of the cicada's body; it disappeared in the maze of persimmon tree branches.

My body grew cold, yet my hands, which held the cicada, stayed warm, even sweating like on summer days. That reminded me, that although the cicada was male, it didn't sing during the whole time. I went back to the house and saw Mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges on the ledge of the entrance. The TV was still on, but Father's silhouette was nowhere to be seen. I switched off the television and took the bag of oranges to its usual place, the kitchen table.

Father died a long time ago and I heard that Mrs Uehara passed away two years earlier. It was the same with Sawachi... I checked the call history of my phone, and my talk with him was still there. However, I did not have the courage to try to call the number again.

As the snow piled up outside, I felt trapped by the stillness of the empty house. Yet, in spite of the silence, my ears rang with a familiar noise. Around me, bringing back the memories of those faraway summer days, the air was filled with the song of the brown cicada.

A Brown Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

It's deep into the winter yet a brown cicada just flew by.

Within the fluttering snow, it was flying around in that awkward manner that always made look as if it were lost. After flying around in various directions, it finally landed on the screen door.

What? Impossible. Faster than such a thought, however, a feeling of delight welled up in me.

I love cicadas. I love them very, very much.

The cute childlike Kempfer cicadas who announce the arrival of winter, the Higurashi cicadas who look almost lonely in their elegance, and the nimble walker cicadas with their cheery-looking drooping eyes—I do love them all, but the ones I love the most are definitely the brown cicadas. It's as if their cries pour hot oil into the summer heat, making it feel even hotter.

To see one right now though, it's really just impossible.

It's so cold today too.

On top of wearing an angora wool sweater, I have the heater on as well.

"Hey there, little one. What in the world are you?"

I opened the glass door and drew my face near the screen that's been left as it was since summer. I felt the air, cold like a snow woman's skin, close in.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (probably) nearsighted eyes meet and for a brief period, we stare at each other.

It's definitely a brown cicada.

It has a slender abdomen that looks like some white powder had been sprinkled on it. This one's a male. He looks like he could cry out anytime.

I opened the screen door a little, and, while continuing to stare at the cicada's eyes, I very slowly reach out with my right hand.

Gotcha!

He was trying to resist, his wings moving like a fan run by a tiny motor. I could feel the power from his wing base as I pressed on it to keep him from injuring his wings.

I was absolutely delighted.

I felt a great satisfaction, as if I had just grabbed some kind of goal within my hand.

"Look, it's so weird. It's winter and yet I found this cicada."

I couldn't help myself from voicing my thoughts out to my father who was watching TV in the living room. I immediately regretted it.

"Aren't you a little too old to be catching cicadas?"

"I like them! People can like what they like!"

I raised my voice to show I'm upset.

My father and I were always like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

I was still angry so even as my father recalled,

"Come to think of it, they used to call you the cicada girl back then,"

I turned my back on him and went towards the front door.

It was my mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara. She had my mother's umbrella in hand.

"How's your mother doing? Here, I brought you these,"

she said as she placed a bag of oranges from the nearby supermarket on the wooden step.

"I happened to be around the area."

"Oh, thank you very much. My mother—"

"I did want to return this umbrella sooner, though."

The cicada was attempting to escape from my fingers and almost succeeded, so I cupped my hands around him like a cage. His legs kept moving, prickling my skin, the resulting painful itch feeling like a secret pleasant sensation to my palms.

"Oh, you didn't need to worry about that... My mother's going to be in the hospital for a while."

“Is that so? I’m sorry to hear that.”

The cicada started up its tiny motor and I could feel its wings flapping, tickling my palms.

“You know, Mrs. Uehara, I just found a cicada even though it’s winter right now. Weird, don’t you think?”

“A cicada? Really, now? Oh, but I’m not very fond of bugs...”

Mrs. Uehara uneasily looked at my cupped hands and, upon saying,

“Well then, I just wanted to drop by for a bit. Give my regards to your mother,”

she immediately went home.

I wanted to talk to someone about this cicada. I wanted to talk about how mysterious it is that it’s alive in this very cold season. I believe they call this blooming out of season for flowers. Could it be because of a change in the cicada’s surviving power? It may be winter right now, but apparently, winters have gotten warmer in the recent years causing more insects to overwinter. Could it be something like a mutation due to the changing climate? Or could this small creature have, by some chance, wandered from *the other side*, carrying that hot summer within its tiny body all the way towards this side of the seasons?

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

Quite some time back, during a drinking party, Sawachi said,

“Right, the brown cicada. That one’s a good guy. Definitely a good guy. That one’s got ambition,” as he emptied his drink. I really liked how he worded that, so I became quite fond of Sawachi himself.

I gently placed the cicada inside the cuff of my sweater’s sleeve and got my phone. I searched in my contacts and found that Sawachi’s name was still there.

A few rings later, Sawachi picked up.

“...Hello?”

I calmed my heart and tried to be casual.

“Hey, it’s been a while. Sorry for suddenly calling you...”

“Oh, wait, it’s you? Wow, it’s really been a while.”

It seems he recognized me immediately.

“Well, I know this is quite sudden, but I found a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Weird, right?”

“What...? A cicada? In this season? A cicada, huh. Really? You sure it isn’t a roach?”

Ew, gross, Sawachi, don’t say that!

“No way! It’s a cicada, a brown cicada. Strange, right? So, what do you think? I thought you might know something...”

On the other side of the phone, an irrevocable, deep silence flowed and seemed to stretch on.

Sawachi’s voice turned into a whisper.

“...Well, there are lots of mysterious things.”

“...Huh?”

“There are a lot of mysterious things in this world. Just like how you’re calling me right now...”

“That’s not an really answer,”

I said, somewhat trying to hide my embarrassment.

“An answer, huh... Well, I don’t have one. Is there really an answer though? But you know, mysterious things can be a kind of redemption. For us, and probably for the world too.”

The cicada peeked out from my sleeve.

I should let him go soon. Cicadas kept by humans for a long time become weak. Even so though, I’m not sure if letting him outside into the falling snow would be better than keeping him in this warm house.

Sawachi and I promised to go drinking again someday and ended the call.

I went out the front door and headed for the persimmon tree in the garden.

The persimmon tree had shed all of its leaves, its bony branches grabbing at the gray skies.

Gently, I perched the cicada on the trunk riddled with streaks and cracks running like small trenches. He started to slowly climb up the trunk, sometimes stopping here and there as if thinking about

something.

When I looked up, the snow looked like it was falling from far beyond the heavens. It gradually fell harder, the cold crystals hitting my face, melting away, flowing down in streaks.

Before I knew it, the cicada had reached the top of the persimmon tree, disappearing into the rigid, labyrinth-like silhouette.

My body then felt completely chilled in the cold. Somehow though, my hands, which were holding the cicada earlier, continued to feel hot, sweating like they would in the summer heat. It suddenly crossed my mind that even though that cicada was male, it didn't cry out at all.

When I went back inside, I saw my mother's umbrella and the bag of oranges. The TV in the living room was left on but my father was no longer around.

I turned the TV off and placed the bag of oranges on the kitchen table like I always do.

It's already been a while since my father passed away. Mrs. Uehara also passed away two years ago. Sawachi is also already...

Sawachi's name was still on my phone call history. I don't have the courage to try calling that number again though...

Perhaps the snow has piled up outside. A choking silence was filling up the empty house.

In the deafening silence, my ears started ringing.

It sounded like the cries of brown cicadas from a far, faraway summer day.

A Cicada in Winter

We were deep into winter, when a cicada flew towards me. Flying clumsily, veering this way and that in the falling snow as though lost, it finally crash-landed onto the net screen.

I beamed, before I even had chance to think about how stupid this was.

I love cicadas. I really, truly, love them. I love the cute, child-like ‘nii-nii’ cicadas who sing that summer is here, I love the wistfully elegant ‘evening cicadas’, and the nimble, joyful ‘tsuku-tsuku boushi’ variety, with their drooping eyes. But most of all I love the big, brown ‘aburazemi’ cicada, whose cry sizzles like burning oil on a hot summer’s day.

But for the fool to be here now? When it’s this cold? When I’m wearing a turtleneck jumper and have the heating turned up?

‘Who do we have here then?’

I open the window, and move my face towards the netting that has been left in place since summer. The chill creeps closer, like the skin of the fabled Snow Woman. We stare at each other for a while: my short-sighted eyes meeting its own, no doubt short-sighted ones.

Just as I thought, one of the big, brown, *aburazemi* kind. It’s a male, with a tight abdomen that looks like it’s been sprinkled with flour, and he looks ready to let out a cry at any moment.

Still staring at each other, I open the netting a little and carefully reach out my right hand.

Gotcha!

He struggles in my hand, his wings beating like one of those small, motorised fans. I press my fingers together gently, to make sure I don’t hurt him, and can feel the trembling power at the base of his wings.

I’m elated. I feel the satisfaction of grasping some kind of goal between my fingers.

‘Look what I found – a cicada, in winter! Weird, right?’

I said it without thinking, to my dad’s back as he watched TV in the living room. Then I kicked myself.

‘Still catching cicadas at your age!’

‘I don’t care what you think, I can’t help what I like!’

I raised my voice angrily. We always got like this. The doorbell rang then, and, in a huff, I turned my back on him and his reminiscing – ‘Now that I think of it, we used to call you the cicada kid’ – as I went to the door.

My mother’s friend Mrs Uehara was standing there, holding my mother’s umbrella.

‘How’s your mother doing? I brought...’

As she said it, she picked up a bag from a nearby supermarket, which was filled with mandarins. She placed it on the threshold.

‘I was in the area, and...’

‘Oh, thanks very much. Mum’s – ’

‘I thought I’d better bring her umbrella back as soon as possible.’

The cicada was struggling, and starting to make his escape from between my fingers, so I put both my hands together like a cage to keep him in. His legs prickled as they moved round and round, and the slight pain of this secret in my hands felt satisfying.

‘Oh, there was really no need to rush... Mum’s going to be in hospital for a long time yet.’

‘Well, I guess... it’s such a shame.’

The cicada started up his little motor, his flapping wings tickling my hands.

‘Guess what, Mrs Uehara. I found a cicada, right in the middle of winter! Weird, huh?’

‘Did you? Really? I’m not so good with insects, to be honest...’

Eyeing my hand-made cage uneasily, she said, ‘Well, I’d better get going. Give my love to your mother’, before leaving.

I wanted to tell someone about my cicada, and the strangeness of his being alive at this time of year. I guess if he were a flower we’d call it ‘blooming out of season’. Was this a kind of evolutionary progression? People say that winters are getting warmer these days, and I’ve heard that more and more

insects are able to live through them. Maybe the warmer weather brought on some kind of genetic mutation. Or maybe this little creature got lost and, trundling along with the hot summer on its back, came out on the other side, in the middle of winter.

I decided to ask Sawachi.

Sawachi had once said, at some drinks, ‘They’re good guys, those big brown cicadas. Really good guys. Ambitious, I think.’

He had said this while pouring some whisky. I liked the way he said it, and so I had started to like him a bit, too.

I put the cicada, gently, up my sleeve, and took out my phone. When I looked through my contacts list, his name was still there. I heard the dial tone, and then his voice:

‘... Hello...?’

I spoke nonchalantly, as I tried to slow my heartbeat.

‘It’s been a while, sorry for calling you out of the blue.’

‘Ah, you’re... Yeah, it has been a while!’

I was touched that he recognised me so quickly.

‘So what it is, I’ll just come out with it – there’s a cicada. Even though it’s winter. Weird, right?’

‘A cicada? Now? You’re sure it’s not a cockroach?’

Cut it out, Sawachi!

‘No, a cicada! One of the big, brown *aburazemi*. It’s strange, right? What do you think? I thought you’d be the guy to talk to about this.’

There was a silence on the other end of the line; a deep silence that couldn’t be undone, and which seemed to expand. Sawachi spoke in almost a murmur:

‘... The world is full of strange things.’

‘Huh?’

‘There are all kinds of strange and wonderful things in this world. Even the fact that you called me, just now...’

‘That’s not an answer.’

I blushed, and hoped these words would hide how I felt.

‘An answer, huh... I can’t give you that. I wonder if there is one, even. But you know, strange things like this are our salvation. Ours, and the whole world’s, probably...’

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

I would have to let him go soon. Cicadas lose their power if you hold them in your hand too long. Though, saying that, I wasn’t completely sure what would be in his best interests: keeping him here in the warm, or letting him back out into the snow.

I left it with Sawachi that we would arrange some drinks again sometime, and hung up.

I walked out of the porch, and towards the persimmon tree in our garden. The tree had lost all its leaves, and its bony branches grasped at the ashen sky. I placed the cicada down, gently, on its trunk, which was covered all over with nodes and fissures like little ditches. The cicada started making its way up slowly, hesitating from time to time as if thinking about something.

Looking upwards, the snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. It was gradually getting heavier, and the cold crystals hit my face and then melted, flowing downwards in streams. Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared somewhere among the stiff, labyrinthine silhouette of the treetop.

I was freezing all over, except, inexplicably, for my hands. My hands, which had held the cicada, were still dripping with sweat, as if it were the middle of summer. I realised that even though the cicada was male, he hadn’t sung at all.

When I went back to the porch, my mother’s umbrella and the bag of mandarins were waiting. The TV in the living room had been left on, but my father was already gone. I turned the TV off and took the bag of mandarins to the kitchen table, as always.

It had already been a long time, then, since my father had passed away. Mrs Uehara must have been dead for around two years now, too. And Sawachi...

My call to him was still there in my phone’s call history. But I wasn’t brave enough to dial his

number again.

Maybe it was because the snow had piled up, but the empty house filled with an oppressive silence. It was so quiet that my ears started to ring. It sounded just like the cry of the big, brown *aburazemi*,

‘The Winter Cricket’ by Azuchi Moe

Though it was the dead of winter, there was a Dark Bush Cricket crawling about.

After bumbling awkwardly this way and that amongst the lightly falling snow, it suddenly stopped on the storm shutter.

What? That’s ridiculous, I thought – but not before feeling a surge of happiness.

I love crickets. I adore them. The Italian Cricket which heralds the arrival of summer with its sweet, childlike cries. The Oak Bush Cricket, so elegant it makes me sad. The Great Green Bush Cricket, so nimble and cheerful, with its strident song. I love them all. But my favourite is the Dark Bush Cricket, with its voice which seems to deepen the blackness of the hot summer nights.

But for one to be here now was ridiculous.

It was so cold I was wearing an angora turtleneck jumper... And yet...

“Hey, who are you?”

I opened the glass door and leant in close to the storm shutter, which had stayed in the same position since the summer. The air, cold as the Snow Queen’s heart, closed in around me.

Blinking, the cricket and I regarded each other short-sightedly (well, probably).

Yep, that’s a Dark Bush Cricket.

Its rounded wings looked as if they had been sprinkled with ochre powder. *A male, then.* Looking as if it was about to start kicking up a racket any second –

Keeping my gaze locked with the cricket’s, I opened the storm shutter a little and gradually reached out my right hand.

Gotcha!

Inside my hand, the cricket struggled. Its wings whirled like an electric fan powered by a tiny motor. I felt the power at the root of its wings, which trembled against my fingers as I held it gently, so as not to hurt it.

I was over the moon.

I felt fulfilled, as if I was holding my purpose in my hand.

“Hey, isn’t this odd? Even though it’s winter, I found a cricket, look.”

Without thinking, I called out to my father, who was sitting with his back to me in the living room, watching TV.

“You’re still catching crickets? Grow up!”

“I don’t care what you think, I like what I like!” I huffed, raising my voice.

It didn’t take much for my father and me to end up like this.

The doorbell rang.

As if he was recalling the memory, my father said, “Speaking of which, I used to say you were half-girl, half-cricket.” But I was angry, so I turned my back on him and went out to the porch.

My mother’s friend, Mrs Ueno, was standing there with my mother’s umbrella. “How’s your mother doing? I brought these...” She put some tangerines in a bag from the nearest supermarket down on the porch step. “I was in the area, so I thought I’d come by.”

“Oh, thank you. Mum is – ”

“I thought I’d better bring her umbrella back quickly, you see – ”

The struggling cricket had begun to escape my fingers, so I closed both hands around it like a cage. Its legs prickled as they moved about; the prickling was like a secret pleasure within my hands.

“Honestly, you didn’t need to rush! Mum will be in hospital for a while.”

“Oh dear, I’m sorry to hear that.”

The cricket started up its little motor, and the rustling of its wings tickled the inside of my hands.

“Listen, Mrs Ueno. Even though it’s winter, I found a cricket. Isn’t that weird?”

“What? Did you really? But I don’t really like bugs – ” She looked uneasily at my joined hands. “Well, I was only dropping by. Give my best regards to your mother,” she said, and left.

I wanted to tell someone about the cricket. About the miracle of its being alive in this cold season. Was it like a flower in its second blooming? Maybe this was a new evolutionary stage in the life force of the cricket. Or perhaps, although it was winter now, it was warmer these days than it used to be in the

past, and there were more hibernating insects about. Or maybe, for some reason, its little body had succumbed to the heat of summer, and it had stumbled into the opposite season, the one we now found ourselves in.

I decided to talk to Sawachi.

A long time ago, we had gone out drinking together, and while knocking back a whisky and water Sawachi had said to me, “Yeah, Dark Bush Crickets, they’re great. Really great. They’ve got ambition.” I liked his turn of phrase so much I ended up liking him a bit, too.

Gently placing the cricket in the cuff of my jumper, I flipped open my phone. I still had Sawachi’s name in my address book.

There was a beep, and I was connected with Sawachi.

“...Hello?”

Composing myself, I said nonchalantly, “It’s been a while. Sorry to call you out of the blue.”

“Ah.... it’s you, isn’t it? Yes, it’s been a long time.”

He seemed instantly to have picked up who I was.

“Um, listen, it’s kinda urgent... I found a cricket. In winter. That’s strange, right?”

“Wait, a cricket? Now? A *cricket*? Hey, you sure it’s not a roach?”

Eurgh, enough, *Sawachi*. *Stop it*.

“Nooooooo, it’s a *cricket*, a Dark Bush Cricket. That’s incredible, right? What d’you think? I thought, since you know so much about them – ”

From the other end of the line flowed a deep silence, the kind there’s no coming back from. The silence stretched out between us.

In a voice that was little more than a whisper, Sawachi said, “There are a lot of incredible things, you know.”

“Huh?”

“In this world, I mean. There are a lot of incredible things. Even the fact that you’re calling me right now...”

Somewhat embarrassed, I tried to hide it by saying, “You didn’t give me an answer.”

“An answer, huh? I don’t know. I wonder if there really is such a thing. But, you see, incredible things are a source of comfort. For us, and probably for the world, too – ”

The cricket poked its head out of my cuff.

I would have to let it go soon. Crickets get weak if they spend too long in human hands. But I didn’t really know where I should release it – inside this warm room, or outside, where the snow was fluttering down?

I promised Sawachi that I’d go drinking with him again sometime, and hung up.

I stepped out of the porch and headed towards the apple tree in the garden.

The tree had lost all its leaves, and its bony branches had an eagle’s grip on the ashen sky.

I put the cricket down gently on the trunk. The surface was scored with veins and cracks that looked like trenches.

The cricket began to climb slowly up the trunk, hesitating from time to time as if there was something on its mind.

I looked up. The snow seemed to be falling from an infinite height. It grew gradually heavier, and cold crystals struck my face, melted, and ran down in a stream.

Before I knew it, the cricket had reached the top of the tree, and disappeared within the labyrinthine silhouette of the rigid branches.

My whole body was frozen stiff, apart from my hands which had held the cricket. They were still hot, sweating as if it was summer. It suddenly occurred to me that, although the cricket had been a male, I hadn’t heard it sing once.

I returned to the porch, where my mother’s umbrella and the bag of tangerines had been left. The TV in the living room was still on, but my father was no longer there.

I turned off the TV and carried the bag of tangerines through to the table in the kitchen, as I always did.

My father had been dead for a long time, and Mrs Ueno should have passed away two years ago. Sawachi, too...

My call to Sawachi was still in my phone's call log, but I didn't have the courage to try ringing him again.

Perhaps because of the snow piling up outside, the empty house filled with a quiet that seemed to tighten around me.

My ears rang with the terrible silence.

It was just like the cry of crickets on a far distant summer's day.

A Winter's Cicada
By Azuchi Moe

It was the dead of winter. And yet... a cicada had flown in from somewhere. More specifically, an abura-zemi. After clumsily flittering this way and that, as though lost among the gently falling snow, it finally gave up and slapped against the screen door.

Before a single suspicious thought could cross my mind I was overcome with excitement.

I've always liked cicadas. Absolutely adored them.

From the cute and childlike nii-nii-zemi that herald the coming of summer, to the melancholic elegance of the higurashi. Not to mention the nimble tsuku-tsuku-boshi and its droopy eyes so full of joy. But more than any of them, I always loved the abura-zemi the most, its cry like blistering oil that make the scorching summer days seem even hotter.

But at that moment, I had to admit. This was suspicious.

Despite the biting cold.

Despite me having to wear my angora turtleneck. And having the heater cranked up.

"Hey, you! What's your deal?"

I opened up the glass door and leaned my face in close to the screen still left attached from the previous summer. A chill as cold as the skin of a frost spirit overcame me.

My nearsighted eyes stare into its (assumedly) nearsighted eyes for a while.

No doubt about it. It was an abura-zemi.

A male abura-zemi, with a tight thorax, white as though dusted with flour. It looked like it could start to sing at any moment.

I continued my staring contest with the cicada as I opened the screen a little and slowly reached my hand out and...

Got it!

It struggled in my hands, its wings like tiny motor-powered fans. I could feel the power pushing out from the base of its wings and I carefully held it in place so as not to injure them.

An ecstatic joy washed over me.

It felt like capturing an opportunity.

"Hey, take a look at this. I found a cicada. In winter! Isn't that weird?"

I called out to my father without thinking. He was watching TELEVISION in the living room with his back to me. I immediately regretted it.

"Aren't you getting on a bit to still be catching cicadas?"

"That's none of anyone's business! I'm allowed to like what I like," I said, raising my voice.

My father and I had always been like that, pushing each other to that point.

Just then, then doorbell rang.

I rushed off in a huff.

"Now that I think about it... they used to call you 'Cicada Girl,'" he called out to me. I ignored him and made for the door.

My mother's friend, Mrs. Uehara, was standing at the entrance holding mother's umbrella.

"And how is your mother's health these days, dear? Oh, here," she said, placing a supermarket bag full of mandarins on the step leading into the house. "I was just in the neighbourhood, you see."

"Oh, you really shouldn't have. My mother is still..."

"I thought it best to bring back the umbrella the first chance I got."

The cicada was trying to struggle free, so I made a cage with my hands to keep it trapped. The scraping of its legs against my fingers was starting to sting, but it made me feel as pleased as a child hiding a secret behind their back.

"Any time would have been fine, honestly... My mother is still in the hospital."

"Oh really now? I'm so sorry to hear that."

The cicada's tiny motor was revving up, and the rustle of its wings was beginning to tickle.

"Want to hear something strange? I found a cicada. Even though it's the middle of winter."

“Ah, um, is that so? I don’t really like insects so much myself,” she said, looking down at my hand-formed cage with apprehension.

“In any case, dear, I only wanted to drop by for a moment. Give your mum my best,” she said, and quickly left.

I felt like I had to tell someone, anyone, about this strange winter cicada. If it were a flower it would be blooming out of season. Maybe this is just how cicadas have evolved to survive winters, I thought. It was winter, sure, but the days had become so much warmer than they used to be. Maybe the insects had mutated and continued to be active even throughout the winter. Or maybe some happenstance had caused that little guy’s body to absorb the heat of a summer’s day on *that* side and he got lost somewhere along the seasons, ending up here, in the middle of winter, on *this side*.

I decided to call up my old friend Sawachi.

At a drinking party a long while ago, he leaned in and told me “Y’know, those abura-zemi, they’re real good guys. Like really really good guys. I’m telling you, that is one ambitious insect,” as he polished off his drink.

There was something about that he said that. I really liked it. And that’s what made me realize I kind of liked him too.

I tucked the cicada safely into my sweater sleeve and pulled out my phone. Sawachi’s name was still in my contacts. It rang for a minute before he picked up.

“... Hello?”

I tried to calm myself down a bit and nonchalantly said “Hey! It’s uh, been a while. Sorry for calling you out of the blue.”

“Oh... it’s you. Ah, yeah. Sure has been a while.”

He seemed to recognize me right away.

“So, okay. This is a bit sudden, but I found a cicada. In the dead of winter! Crazy, right?”

“A cicada? You sure ‘bout that? Like, an actual cicada? Sure it wasn’t a roach?”

Ugh. Pleases. Don’t even go there.

“No, I’m telling you! It’s a cicada. An abura-zemi. Pretty weird right? I just called because I figured you’d know something about it. So what do you think?”

On the other side of the line, a moment went by and spread into a deep silence. The kind of deep silence that falls when there’s no turning back.

Sawachi muttered “Lotsa things are weird, y’know,” under his breath.

“... What?”

“This world is filled with weird things, y’know. Tons of ‘em. Like you. Right now. Calling me on the phone.”

“You’re not answering my question!” is all I could think of to say to hide the fact that I was getting flustered.

“An answer... huh?” he says. “You’re asking me about something I don’t have the answer to. There’s plenty of stuff like that. Besides, weird stuff like that can be a saving grace. For us, and for... everyone, probably.”

The cicada poked its head out of my sleeve.

It felt like it was almost time for me to let it go. Cicadas can’t stay attached to a person for too long, it’s not good for them. That being said, it was hard to know where leaving it in the warm room or chasing it out into the gently falling snow.

I promised Sawachi that we’d meet for drinks again sometime and then hung up.

I walked out to the persimmon tree in my front garden. The tree was bare, with not a single leaf. Its skeletal branches reached up and dug their bony fingers into the ashen grey sky.

I set the cicada down on the tree. The cracks and grooves, trench-like, its new home. It slowly climbed, hesitating here and there, as though lost in thought.

I looked up and the snow seemed to be falling from some high, boundless place, growing intense now and again. The snow crystal clung to my face before melting and running down my cheeks.

Without my noticing, the cicada disappeared somewhere among the hard labyrinthine silhouette

of the persimmon tree.

My body was chilled to the core. And yet... my hands still felt the warmth of the cicada, the humid heat of a summer's day.

I turned back towards the door. My mother's umbrella and the supermarket bag of mandarins left behind. Sounds drift in from the TELEVISION in the living room, but my father had already gone.

I switched the TELEVISION off and put the supermarket bag of mandarins on the kitchen table.

It had already been many years since my father had passed away. And two year since Mrs. Uehara died. And, as for Sawachi...

His name was still in my call history, but... I didn't feel brave enough to try and call him again.

The snow fell until it piled up, and this house with no one in was bound by the stillness that filled it.

The silence was so piercing.

As though it were the song of a cicada on a long forgotten summer's day.

A Large Brown Cicada in Winter by Moe Azuchi

Although it was the middle of winter, a Large Brown Cicada flew over.

It bumbled through the air amidst the gently falling snow, zipping to and fro as if it were lost, ultimately coming to an abrupt, silent landing on the screen door.

Before I even considered the absurdity of the situation, I was filled with immense joy.

You see, I like cicadas. I am quite fond of the creatures.

From the adorable and childlike Nii-nii, which heralds the arrival of summer, to the elegantly melancholic Higurashi, to the quick-witted Tsukutsukuboshi with its cheerful, downward-swooping eyes, I adore them all. But I have to say that the kind I love the most is the one whose droning pours piping hot oil onto the already boiling summer – the Large Brown Cicada.

But really, at this time? How absurd.

It's just too cold.

I was wearing my angora wool turtleneck sweater, and I had the heater on, for goodness' sakes.

“Hey, you – just what are you?”

I slid open the glass door and brought my face close to the mesh screen, which had gone unchanged since summer. The chilly air brushed up against me like the skin of a snow fairy.

My nearsighted eyes and the cicada's (presumably) nearsighted eyes met, and we stared at each other for a while.

It's a Large Brown Cicada, all right.

Its sleek abdomen with the white powder-speckled pattern told me it was a male. He looked like he could start his loud droning at any moment.

As the two of us stayed locked in a gaze, I slid the mesh screen ajar, and slowly reached out with my right hand.

Gotcha!

The cicada wriggled around in my hand, its wings like fans powered by tiny motors. I held down the wings gently so as not to damage them, as the powerful twitching at their base reverberated in my fingers.

I was in Heaven.

I felt satisfied, as if I had accomplished some kind of goal within my hand.

“Hey, this is weird. There's a cicada here even though it's winter. See?”

Without thinking, I called out to my father, who was in the living room with his back turned to me, watching TV.

“You're still catching those things? You're too old --”

“I can't help liking what I like; it's just the way I am!”

I raised my voice in an angry huff.

Conversations between my father and I always quickly turned sour like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

“Come to think of it, there was that old story about a cicada-loving girl,” my father said, as if he had just remembered. But I, still fuming, had already turned my back on him and was heading towards the door.

Standing there was my mother's friend, Ms. Uehara. She was holding my mother's umbrella.

“How's your mother? Here, I brought you this ...”

Ms. Uehara set down onto the front step a bag from a local supermarket filled with tangerines.

“Just because I was in the neighborhood,” she said.

“Oh, that's very kind of you. My mother is --”

“I just kept thinking about how I had to hurry up and return the umbrella.”

The cicada acted up a little and started to wriggle free from my fingers, so I used both hands like a cage to trap it. Its legs prickled me as they crawled around my skin, the itching pain turning the area inside my hands into a secret pleasure dome.

“Ah, you didn't have to rush to get it back to us. My mother is in long-term care at the hospital.”

“Oh my, really? That's terrible.”

The cicada's little motors began to whirl, causing its wings to flutter and tickle my hands.

“Hey, Ms. Uehara. There's a cicada here even though it's winter. Isn't that strange?”

“Oh, really? Is that right? Well I'm not good with insects, so --”

Ms. Uehara cautiously eyed my cage of interlocked hands.

“Anyway, I just thought I'd stop by. Say hello to your mother for me,” she said as she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About how odd it was that this creature could be alive at such a cold time of year. Maybe it's like flowers that bloom out of season. Perhaps cicadas were evolving to have a stronger ability to survive. It's been said these days that winters are getting warmer than they used to be, and that there are more insects living through the winter. Perhaps this cicada was the result of a mutation caused by the irregular climate. Or could it be said that maybe the cicada, carrying all of that hot summer in its tiny body, for some reason strayed into the season opposite of summer – the season on This Side of existence?

I decided to try calling Sawachi.

“Yep, a Large Brown Cicada. That's one of the good ones. A really good one. It's a highflier,” he would say as he downed a whiskey-and-water. I liked how Sawachi said it, so I liked him a little, too.

I gently put the cicada in the sleeve of my sweater and flipped open my cell phone. Searching the address book, I saw that Sawachi's name was still there.

The ringing on the other end gave way to Sawachi's voice.

“... Hello ...”

I responded nonchalantly, doing my best to keep my heart calm.

“It's been a while. Sorry for calling you out of the blue --”

“Oh, it's you? Wow, it has been a while.”

It seems as though he immediately knew it was me.

“So, to get straight to the point, there is a cicada here. Even though it's winter. Don't you think that's strange?”

“Huh... a cicada? At this time? Really. Are you sure it's not a roach?”

Sheesh, Sawachi, cut it out.

“No! It's a cicada, a Large Brown Cicada. Isn't it weird? Hey, what do you think? I thought you'd know a lot about these kinds of things, Sawachi --”

A period of deep, irrevocable silence flowed out of the phone and seemed to spread out over everything.

Sawachi then spoke in a hushed voice.

“... There are a lot of weird things.”

“Huh?”

“The world is full of weird things. Like the fact that you are talking to me on the phone right now.”

“That doesn't answer my question,” I replied, trying to change this awkward conversation.

“Hmm, an answer. I don't have one. I wonder if there is one. But weird things are salvation. To us, and probably to the world --”

The cicada peeked out from my sweater sleeve.

I had to let him go soon. Holding him in my hands for too long would weaken him. But I didn't really know which would be better for him, letting him go in the warm room indoors, or outside in the flurrying snow.

I promised Sawachi that we would go out drinking again someday and hung up.

I stepped outside my front door and walked towards the persimmon tree in the garden.

Having lost all of their leaves, the bony branches of the tree clawed towards the ashen sky.

Upon the tree's fissured trunk, replete with deep grooves between its fibrous sinews, I placed the cicada.

He began to clamber up the trunk, hesitating at times as if deep in thought.

Looking above, I saw that the snow was falling from a seemingly boundless height.

The snow's cascade intensified. Crystals of ice melted upon hitting my face, splitting into threads of water as they streamed down.

Before I knew it, the cicada's form had vanished somewhere at the top of the tree, within its stiff maze-like silhouette.

My body was thoroughly chilled to the bone. But even so, my hands, which had held the cicada, continued to feel hot, and were sweating as though it were summer. Just then, a thought occurred to me: although that cicada was male, he never let out even the slightest chirp.

Mother's umbrella and the bag of tangerines were waiting at the entrance when I went back inside. The TV in the living room had been left on, and father's figure was no more.

I switched off the TV and set the bag of tangerines on top of the table, like I always do.

It had already been a long time since father passed away. Ms. Uehara must have died two years ago. And also Sawachi ...

My call to Sawachi was still there in my phone's history. But I didn't have the courage to try calling him again.

Perhaps because of the blanketing snow, the silence choking me in the lonely house grew ever tighter.

The stillness of the night was so intense that my ears began to ring.

It almost sounded like the droning of a Large Brown Cicada, from some distant summer's day.

Winter's Brown Cicadas

Even though it's midwinter, the brown cicadas have flown in. In the flickering snow, after changing directions here and there with its clumsy way of flying, it suddenly landed on a window screen.

Well, before I thought it was impossible, it made me really happy. I like cicadas. I really, really like them.

Sounding the arrival of summer, I do like the cute childlike Kempfer cicadas, the sad-sounding elegant evening cicadas, and the bright and cheerful droopy eyes of the Japanese Tsuku-Tsuku-Boushi cicada. But in the end, when it's summer, I like the sound of pouring hot oil that comes from the brown cicadas the most.

But right now, there was absolutely no way. Especially if it was this cold and I'm wearing a fluffy angora sweater with the heater on. "Hold on, what are you?"

I opened the glass door, and I moved my face closer to the window screen that had been there since summer. The cold air wrapped itself around me like a snow fairy's grasp. My short-sighted eyes met its short-sighted eyes (I think it was its eyes) and we stared at each other for a short while. It was definitely a brown cicada. A male cicada with a tight white powdery belly. It seemed like it would start crying loudly at any moment.

I slightly opened the window screen and keeping my eye on the cicada, I slowly extend my right hand. Gotcha! Inside my palm was the struggling cicada. Its wings were like an electric fan powered by a small motor. I gently held the base of the wings with my finger taking care to not damage them. I was overjoyed. It was fulfilling as though I had captured some kind of purpose in the palm of my hand.

"Hey, don't you think it's weird? Even though it's winter, there are cicadas about. Look." I instinctively called out to my father's back who was watching T.V in the living room.

"You're still catching cicadas at your age?"

"I like what I like, don't judge me!" I raised my voice, offended. It was always like this between us. At that moment, the chime from the entryway rang. In a huff, "Come to think of it, didn't you used to call me the cicada girl a long time ago?" As my father remembered, I turned around and went out the front door.

Standing there with my mother's umbrella was my mother's friend, Ms Uehara. "How is your mother feeling? Here..." said Ms Uehara as she lowered a bag of mandarins from the nearby supermarkets onto the edge of the entry hall's floor. "I was just in the neighbourhood."

"Ah, you didn't have to but thank you very much. Mother is—"

"You see, I thought I should return the umbrella soon." The cicada between my fingers became spooked and tried running away, so I formed a box with my hands and trapped it. The prickly feeling of its feet walking around was like a secret pleasure in my hand.

"Oh, it would have been fine at any time... My mother is in long-term hospitalisation."

"Oh my, is that so? That must be tough." The cicada's small motors started up – its wings flapping inside of my hand, tickling me.

"Excuse me, Ms Uehara. Do you think it's strange that even though it's winter, there are cicadas around?"

"Really? Is that so? I'm not good with bugs so..." Ms Uehara looked anxiously at my cupped hands, "Well, I just wanted to stop by. Give your mum my regards, okay?" She said, turning around and heading home.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the wonder of them being able to survive in this cold season. It's like a flower blooming out of season. Is the cicadas' life span evolving? Although it is cold, it has been getting warmer compared to previous years, and there have been reports that the numbers of insects in winter have been increasing. I wonder if some sort of mutation appeared due to the abnormal climate? Perhaps, for some reason with its small body, while seeking for that hot summer, it accidentally carried itself into the opposite side, into this side of the seasons.

I decided to try and talk to Sawachi. A long time ago at a get-together he had said, "Yeah, the brown cicadas, right? They are some good bugs. They are some pretty damn good bugs. They've got

some ambitions don't they?" while finishing his drink. I was pleased with what he said, and that's why I was also like Sawachi a little too.

I softly put the cicada into my sleeve and opened my phone. When I searched up his name, his number was there. It started to ring then connected with Sawachi.

"... Yes?"

I calmed myself down before casually, "Hey, it's been a while. Sorry for calling out of nowhere."

"Ah... Is that you? Yeah, it has been a while." It seemed like he recognised me straight away.

"You know, I know it's straight to the point, but I saw a cicada. Even though it's winter. Don't you think it's weird?"

"Uh... Cicadas? At this time? Cicadas? You sure it wasn't a cockroach?" Oh, come on Sawachi, stop it.

"No, of course, I'm sure it was a cicada. The large brown ones. It's so mysterious, right? What do you think? I thought if it was you, then you would know." A long deep silence came from the other side of the call.

"There are a lot of mysteries." He muttered.

"Huh?"

"There are heaps of mysteries in this world. Like for example, you calling me."

"That's not an answer," I said, a little embarrassed.

"An answer, huh? I actually don't know. I don't know if there is such a thing. But hey, the strange thing is that it's a relief. For us, and maybe for the world."

The cicada peeked out from under the sleeve. It's about time I let it go. If I keep it for too long, then it'll start getting weak. Although, whether keeping it in the warm room or releasing it into flickering snow, I don't know which is better. I hung up on Sawachi after promising to have another get-together soon.

When I exited the front door, I turned towards the persimmon tree in the garden. All its leaves had fallen, and its grey branches grabbed at the skies. The cicada gently stuck itself onto the trunk covered in groove-like streaks and cracks. It slowly climbed the tree, sometimes hesitating as though it was thinking about something. When I looked up, it was as though it was snowing from endless heights. Slowly incessantly, the snow crystals land on my face and melt, leaving cold streaks in its wake.

Before I knew it, the cicada's figure disappeared into the silhouette of the persimmon tree's stiff, maze-like treetops. My body was chilled to the bone, and yet, my hands that have been catching cicadas were hot and sweaty just like in summer. Speaking of which, even though it was a male, it did not cry at all, I suddenly thought.

When I returned to the entryway, my mother's umbrella and the bag of mandarins were still there as I had left them. The T.V in the living room was still on, and my father was already gone. I turned off the T.V using its remote and placed the bag onto the kitchen table as usual.

My father had long passed away, and in fact, Ms Uehara should have passed away two years ago. Even Sawachi... There was a call history with him left on my phone, but I didn't have the courage to call it again. Whether if it was because of the snow piling up, a suffocating silence filled the empty house. The silence was deafening. It was like the cries of the brown cicadas on a distant summer day.

A Large Brown Cicada in Winter

Azuchi Moe

Even though it is the middle of winter, a Large Brown Cicada flew by. Through the lightly falling snow, with that wandering, unsophisticated way of flying, it changed directions, flying this way and that and without warning suddenly stopped on the screen door. Rather than disbelief, my first emotion was of great happiness. I love cicadas. I really, really do love them. I even like the cute, childlike Kempfer Cicada, who lets us know when summer has arrived. I also like the Evening Cicada, with its sad elegance and the nimble Walker Cicada too with its cheerful, droopy eyes. Though I have to say, with a voice that adds fuel to the already flaming summer, my favourite is the Large Brown Cicada.

However, what happened just now, I must say is hard to believe. I mean, it is so cold. Even with the heater on and in my angora turtleneck sweater, it is cold. "Hey, what kind of cicada exactly are you?" I opened the glass door and put my face close to the screen door that had been there since summer. The chill of the air is like the snow woman's spectral skin. My myopic eyes meet briefly with the (probably) myopic eyes of the cicada. Just as I suspected, a Large Brown Cicada. A male Large Brown Cicada, its tight thorax looking powdered with white. It looks like it might start singing loudly at any moment.

I push the screen door ajar, maintaining my gaze on the cicada, and gingerly extend my right hand. Got you! Inside my hand, the cicada goes wild. With its little motor, it beats its fan-like wings. I can feel the nervous energy in the wing root through my fingers as I gently hold it down, trying not to harm the wings. I am wild with joy. In my hands, there is fulfilment, as if I have captured some sort of objective.

"You know, this is odd. It's winter and here is a cicada, look", without thinking I call out to the back of my dad watching TV in the living room. Then immediately regret it. "Are you still catching cicadas? At your age?", he retorted. "I like what I like, so it's not up to you", I was sharp in my distaste. Dad and I were always like this. It was then the doorbell rang at the front door. As if it were a memory, he said, "Well, they did used to call you cicada girl". I turned my back on my Dad and headed for the front door. Standing in the entry was my Mom's friend Miss Uehara, holding my Mom's umbrella. "Your mother, how is she? Here..." she said as she put down a supermarket bag of mandarins on the frame of the entry step. "I was passing by see", she informed me. "Oh, you shouldn't have. Mum is-"

"I know I should have brought the umbrella back sooner", Miss Uehara said cutting me off.

The cicada made a wild shake and almost got away from my grasp so I made both my hands like a cage and closed it in. The cicada's legs prickled me as it moved around and that anguish was like a secret pleasure inside of my hands. "My, you know any time would have been fine...Mom is going to be in hospital for a while", I explained. "Oh dear, I see. It must be hard on you". The cicada started its little motor and tickled the inside of my hands with its flapping wings. "So, Miss Uehara. It's winter but I found this cicada. Don't you think it odd?", I ventured. "Oh, you did? Really? Well, I'm actually not great with insects", Miss Uehara looked at my cage of joined hands with uncertainty and said, "Well, I was just passing by. Give you mother my best wishes", and was gone.

I wanted to tell someone about the cicada. The mysteriousness of it being alive at such a cold time of year. If it were flowers, would you say it was blooming out of season? I wonder is it an evolution of the life force of the cicada? While it is winter, people say these days it has become warmer than before and more insects that hibernate. Are these sudden changes occurring due to extreme weather events? On the other hand, would you say that, for some reason or another, with that little body, they took on the hot summer by themselves and wandered over to the other side, the seasons on *our side*?

I decided to try calling Sawachi. A long time ago, over drinks, he said the following to me as he emptied his glass of watered down spirits, "Yeah, I know the Large Brown Cicada. He's a good guy. Just a really good guy. He's got ambitions too". I liked the way he said it and so I was a little fond of

Sawachi too. I gently put the cicada in the cuff of my sweater and unlocked my phone. As I looked through my contact list, Sawachi's name was still there. I heard the ringing tone then I was connected to Sawachi.

"...Hello..."

As I calmed myself, I said nonchalantly, "Been a while, hey. Sorry to call you out of the blue".

"Wait, is that you? Wow, it has been a long time", he said, knowing who it was right away.

"So anyway, why I called you is there was this cicada. But it's winter. It's odd, don't you think?"

"Wha-, a cicada? At this time of year? Cica-da? Wow, are you sure it's not a roach? Yuck. Sawachi stop it already. "No no no. It's a cicada, a Large Brown Cicada. Mysterious right? So what do you think? I thought, Sawachi of all people will know about this kind of thing".

On the other end of the line, a time of deep, irrevocable silence passed and then it seemed to expand. In a voice that was now like a murmur Sawachi began, "...There are many mysterious things"

"...Huh?"

"Mysterious things. There are many of them in life. Like that you, right now, are calling me..." For some reason I tried saying something that sounded bashful, "That's not an answer".

"The...answer. That is something that I'll never know. Is there even one? But you know, it is the mysterious things that save us. They save us and maybe even the world too". The cicada poked its head from out of the cuff of my sweater. I should be letting it go soon. If you leave a cicada in a human's hands for too long, it makes them weak. Still, I do not really know if keeping it warm inside, or freeing it outside into the flurries of snow, is what is best for the cicada. I made a promise with Sawachi to have drinks again sometime and then hung up the phone.

I stepped outside of the house and headed for the persimmon tree in the garden. The leaves of the persimmon tree had completely fallen and its bony-fingered branches clutched at the ashen sky. I gently put the cicada on the tree trunk, which was covered lines and cracks that looked like grooves. The cicada, as if it were in contemplation, would sometimes hesitate as it leisurely began climbing the trunk. When you look up to the sky, it is as if the snow is falling from an infinite height. Gradually growing in intensity, the crystals of snow hit my face and melt into lines that flow off my cheeks.

Before I knew it, the cicada had disappeared into somewhere into the silhouette of the stiff, labyrinth shaped treetop of the persimmon tree. Even though my body was chilled through, for some reason both of my hands that had caught the cicada, were continually hot, and sweaty like it was summer. Then I had an epiphany. Come to think of it, that cicada was a male and it did not sing one little bit.

When I returned to the entrance, there was the bag of mandarins and my Mom's umbrella. The TV in the living room was left on and my Dad is already gone. I turned off the TV switch and brought the bag of mandarins to its usual place on the kitchen table. It had been some time since my Dad departed this life and Miss Uehara I am certain passed away 2 years earlier. Sawachi too... My phone still had Sawachi's number in my call history. Nevertheless, I do not have the courage in me to try calling it again...

I am not sure if it is because the snow outside is piling up but the empty house is filling up with a choking stillness. It is so quiet, that it made my ears ring. Just as if I was listening to the song of the Large Brown Cicada, on a far, far away summer's day.

The *Aburazemi* Appears in Winter
by Azuchi Moe

An *aburazemi* cicada came flying though winter now.

The cicada flew in the light snow in that awkward way as if it gets lost. After it flew up and down, it perched on the window screen suddenly.

At that time, I became glad so much first. I didn't feel that what a ridiculous thing it is.

I like cicadas. I do love cicadas.

There are many kinds of cicadas besides *aburazemi*. For example, *niiniizemi* cicada which is a sign of the coming of summer and is like a cute infant; *higurashi* cicada which is so elegant that I feel miserable; *tsukutsukuboushi* cicada which is lively and has droopy eyes. I like all of them, but I like *aburazemi* best chirping as if it adds hotter oils to hot summer.

But after all, I feel like something strange is happening now.

Because it's winter now. It's so cold today.

Even though I wear an angora sweater and use a heater...

"Hello. Who are you?"

I opened the glass door and brought my face closer to the window screen which has not been replacing since this summer. The cold air creeps up on me like a ghost.

The cicada and I gaze into each other's nearsighted eyes for a little while.

It's an *aburazemi* as I expected, definitely.

A male *aburazemi* with a firm stomach and looks chalky. It is about to chirp in a loud voice.

I opened the window screen a little and reached for the cicada while gazing into it.

I've got you!

The cicada flapping wildly in my hand. The wing running like the motor of the fan. The power transmitted from the wing to my fingers which covered its wing softly in order not to be damaged.

I'm delighted.

I'm so satisfied like getting any prey in my hands.

"Hey, something is strange. Look, there is a cicada even though winter."

I said to my father unconsciously from behind watching TV in the living room. And I regretted.

"At your age do you still catch a cicada?"

"I just like cicadas. It's not your business!"

I'm annoyed and raise my voice.

My father and I often quarrel like this.

At that moment, the doorbell rang in the door.

I fumed and went to the door while ignoring my father teased me and said suddenly "I used to call you 'cicada lover'."

Ms. Uehara, who is one of my mother's friends, was standing at the door with my mother's umbrella.

"How is your mother? This is..." said Ms. Uehara while taking down a plastic bag including oranges which a trademark of a nearby supermarket is printed.

"I was in the neighborhood, so I just dropped in."

"Oh, I see. Thank you, but my mother is—"

"I've been thinking I have to return this umbrella to your mother as soon as possible—"

I trapped a cicada in both hands like a cage because it flapped suddenly and was about to fall from my fingers. The cicada moves around and its legs prick my hands. It's like a secret pleasure in my hands.

"Thank you, but you don't have to care so much... My mother is hospitalized now for the long term."

"Oh, I didn't know that. I'm so sorry."

The wing of cicada tickles the inside of my hands while flapping as the motor runs.

“Look, Ms. Uehara. There is a cicada even though winter. Can you believe that?”

“Are you sure? But I don’t like insects—”

She looked at my hands including a cicada anxiously.

“Well, I just dropped in. Please give my best regards to your mother,” said Ms. Uehara and she left.

I wanted to talk to someone about the cicada. About the mystery of the existence of the cicada in such a cold winter—If it is a flower, so to speak, blooming out of season. Is this caused by the evolution of cicada’s vitality? These days, it seems that many insects overwinter because winter is warmer than in the past. Because of extreme weather, did something like a mutation in cicadas happen? Or accidentally, did the cicada wander into the opposite world—winter—because that small body can’t stand the hot summer?

I tried to talk to Sawachi, who is one of my old friends.

A long time ago, when we were drinking, he said this. “Ah... *aburazemi*, I know. It’s a nice guy. I do think so. I think it has aspirations.” I liked his way of speaking, so I have been interested in him too.

I put the cicada in the cuff of my sweater softly and opened my cellphone. When I searched his name in my address book, his name is still left.

After the dial tone rings, finally I get through to him.

“...Hello? ...”

I started to talk while calming myself down.

“It’s been a while. I’m sorry to call you suddenly.”

“Perhaps... you? Really? It’s been a long time.”

He seems to notice me instantly.

“Listen. I know it’s too sudden, but there was a cicada even though winter. Can you believe that?”

“What? A cicada? In this season? Are you sure? I think you mistake for the cockroach.”

No no no, Sawachi.

“No way! It’s a cicada, *aburazemi*. Don’t you think it’s unbelievable? What do you think? I thought that you are familiar with such a situation.”

I felt like there is a helpless and long spell of silence between us over the cellphone and it’s spreading.

Sawachi said in a small voice like murmuring.

“...There are a lot of strange things.”

“Sorry?”

“There are a lot of strange things around us. The fact that you gave me a call today is too.”

“It doesn’t make sense.”

I somehow said so to hide my embarrassment.

“Answer is... I’m not sure. I wonder if there is an answer. But..., being strange sometimes gives relief. To you and me now. Maybe to the world—”

The cicada appeared from the cuff of my sweater.

I must release it from my cuff now. If cicada is held in human hands for a long time, it gets weak. But I’m not sure which is more comfortable places for the cicada, in the warm room or outside snowing slightly though.

We promised that we will drink together someday and hung up the cellphone.

I went out of the door and walked to the persimmon trees in the yard.

The trees have lost all their leaves and reach out the lonely branches. The branches appear to cover the gray sky.

I made the cicada perch on the trunk of the tree covered with lines and cracks like groove. The cicada started to climb up the trunk slowly while it sometimes hesitated as if it was thinking about something.

When I looked up to the sky, I felt like it snowed from the infinite sky. The snow is falling harder and harder. The cold crystals of snow repeatedly hit my face and melt. After that, it runs down my face

in many lines.

Before I knew it, the cicada has gone somewhere on the treetop of a persimmon tree whose silhouette is like a maze.

I became chilled completely. Nevertheless, my both hands which were catching the cicada were somehow hot for a while and felt sweaty as if it's summer now. Come to think of it, I thought suddenly that the cicada seldom chirped though it was a male.

When I went back to the door, there was my mother's umbrella and a plastic bag including oranges there. The TV was left on in the living room. My father has already gone.

After I turned off the TV, I took the plastic bag to the kitchen and put on the table.

It's been a long time since my father died and I'm sure Ms. Uehara also already died two years ago. Besides, Sawachi also...

A history that I called Sawachi still remains on my cellphone, but I don't dare to call again.

My house which no one is in is filled with the silence gradually as if my heart is painful because maybe the snow has piled.

Too much silence made me ring in my ears.

It was just like the chirp of *aburazemi* on really distant summer days.