

BOUNDLESS HORIZONS

邊界 那麼寬

A quest to discover her roots in the family's hometown on the Pacific Coast opens the eyes of a Taiwanese-Japanese woman not only to the divide between urban and rural but also to that between older and younger generations. She watches forlornly as both life's familiar comforts and her family's ancestral lands slip away.

Ryoko, born to an indigenous Amis mother and Japanese father on Taiwan's Pacific Coast, spends her teenage years in Japan. However, increasingly alienated from the ideals and expectations of Japanese society, she dreams of moving to her mother's home village in Taiwan. Ryoko finally makes the move but finds, although surrounded by childhood friends, she is not yet ready to settle down. She slips away without warning to the city and reboots her life again with a new boyfriend.

Several years later, she again abandons urban bustle to return to her mother's home village. But this time, her growing reputation as an internationally acclaimed artist and vocal activism against construction of a seaside resort hotel complex nearby leave many in the community wondering sanguinely whether she is now finally ready to settle down...and whether the romance with her former hometown boyfriend will ignite once more.

Author Kuei Chun Miya's beautifully lithe prose masterfully weaves into this work the vitality of indigenous tales and traditions. The narrative sheds light onto how the area's different ethnic communities and cultures have increasingly abandoned longstanding mutual distrust and enmity in favor of mutual concern and assistance and of standing together against injustice. As the priorities and exigencies of modern "civil society" chip away at this once-remote backwater, the individual compromises made by characters across successive generations end up, in hindsight, helping seal a lamentable fate for the overarching struggle to preserve traditional ways and values. While



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progress brings good as well as bad, the author invests her passion and sorrows into this work, shedding new light on life at the bleeding edge between traditional society and modernity.

Kuei Chun Miya 桂春·米雅

Kuei Chun Miya, an indigenous Amis from Taitung County in southeastern Taiwan, currently lives and works in Yunlin. She engages regularly with topics related to indigenous cultural traditions and serves as an indigenous culture lab researcher. Kuei Chun Miya's works span various genres and include the illustrated work *Lokot: The Fish that Lived in a Tree*, which has already been published in translation in English, German, and Slovakian.

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By Kuei Chun Miya

Translated by Mary King Bradley

Prologue

Somay ina picked up a white chalcedony and put it in her basket. The coral trees were in bloom, so it was time for another of these white stones to go into the bamboo basket. Each stone represented the start of a new year. She had been a Sikawasay (a shaman) for many years, and had lost count of the exact number of stones now in the basket.

She gazed at the distant sea, which looked especially calm today. Shafts of light shone through the clouds, revealing the sky's message on the rippled surface of the water. Figuring the time, Somay ina estimated another hour before the black clouds at sky's edge would cast their shadow over the bay. Now that her equipment was packed, she should be up and on her way; it was still some distance to Fohang. There was a child there who inexplicably liked to eat earth. Most likely they had found no other way to cure the ailment, and so they had come to her for help. If it weren't for incurable illnesses, who in this day and age would still have faith in animist traditions? She stood on the very tips of her toes and reached up into the eaves with one hand, groping for a ritual implement: the mandible of a specific kind of animal. She found the bone and put it in her bag, then opened a small window into a beehive by the corner of the house. Several bees came zooming out. While the bees were absent, she broke off a piece of honeycomb and put that into her bag as well, then tied an ancient bronze bell to her waist. Coming out the door that overlooked the path into the valley below, she saw a group of tourists walking towards the terraced fields. She knocked on the wooden box beneath the eaves, and two diminutive birds poked out their heads.

"Malingad to," she said to them in Pangcah, the language of the Amis. *Time to go.*

The sea reflected the soft light of morning. Driftwood laid on the sandy beach made it easier to pull ashore the flat-bottomed boats, heavy with fish. The weeds to either side of the path were still wet with dew. Somay ina had entered the forest when she saw Ryoko, with her little brother Kolas behind her, the two children following their mother at a discreet distance. Far out at sea, the early dawn light had washed the waves in a violet mist. The people walking down by the bay resembled tiny ants moving on the sand. Fanu the cat walked silently alongside the sister and brother, as usual.

Sudden movement in the forest made Ryoko straighten up instantly, eyes watchful, looking around her. There were many wild animals here, invisible among the trees. Afraid it might be a fafoy, a wild boar, she tugged at Kolas, ready to run for home. Somay ina called the children's names from the dense understory, calming Ryoko's anxiety for the moment. She stepped into view, saw

the children's fright. Taking Ryoko's and Kolas's hands, she walked with them towards the village.

"Somay ina o mana ko mialaen iso?" (Somay ina, what's that in your hand?)

Kolas, a curious child, always had lots of questions.

Answering him, Somay ina waved the banana leaf.

"Mi' iyof to falì ato kawatan." (I use it to summon the spirits.)

"Mimaan korira?" (Why?)

"Makesem adada ko faloco' ato tiring no tao'. (Because a person's soul is wounded.)

"Nima a kawatan?" (Which spirit can do that?)

Kolas and Ryoko stared at Somay ina with big eyes, waiting for her to answer.

"iso." (The whale.)

Somay ina pointed at the sea, where the shafts of light fell from the sky onto the sea's surface. A sea wind blew, its gusts rippling the rice seedlings planted on the flat terraces.

For a long time, this bay had been like an empty bottle with its mouth sealed: legitimate fear had been exploited; the truth of what had happened had been concealed; and passers-through eager to make off with smuggled souls had nonetheless recalled with longing the gray blue of its sky. Somay ina rested the banana leaf on her shoulder, gazing in the direction the two diminutive white-eyes had flown. She believed the spirits opened windows even for those who had lost their faith in nature, and thus usher in a liberating cosmic wind.

The Cape

The sudden cloudburst forced Haruko to break off what she was doing and duck for cover inside the orchard's thatched house. As usual, she was humming a song she didn't know the name of, its melody turned into an almost tuneless drone.

There were lots of kids in their bayside village, but most of them were being raised by grandparents. Haruko herself was no exception. During the week, she worked in the kindergarten, the children in the yard like a flock of noisy sparrows. The only way to make them settle down was usually the pump organ and a song. Every time Haruko sat down at the school organ, the kids would come rushing pell-mell to surround the instrument the moment she lifted the keyboard lid. They brought to mind small coal tits swooping in from the millet fields. This method of making them quiet down had proven very useful.

On her days off, Haruko mostly kept busy in the orchard. Other than the short period when she had left the village to attend high school, the seemingly endless years of her youth had all played out in this village by the bay. One reason for this had been to keep her maternal grandmother, Alo, company.

For a time, agencies had visited the village, recruiting men to work in Arab countries or go to sea as sailors. They also made arrangements for even the young women to work abroad. In the period that followed, almost no one except the elderly and children was left in the village. Haruko's mother had also gone abroad to work. Less than two years later, the bad news arrived. Her mother's body had been cremated overseas, and her ashes were not sent back to the village.

During the first three years her father was in Arabia, he had sent them money for living expenses, but then all news of him stopped. Every time Haruko's grandmother called the agency, the other party usually said they couldn't get in touch with him, or that the Arabian desert made communication difficult. This was how Haruko had lost her parents. Her only option was to follow in her grandmother's footsteps, selling shellfish from the bay and fruit grown on the mountainside.

In remote villages like theirs, many of the kids left school at fifteen to make a living. Some went to the city to work in factories. A few stayed in the village and became fishers. Haruko had tried everything she could think of to continue going to school. She had sought help from the church, and had scrimped and saved for a basic radio so she could listen to news from the outside world. In the early days, even if someone on Taiwan's eastern coast had a television, they had nothing to watch because of poor reception. Radio had been the only conduit for news from the outside world.

It never rains in Southern California. The song on the radio faded in and out. Haruko gave the dial a gentle twist to change the frequency, but even with static, the song enchanted her. Haruko wished she could tell people in other places about the often brutal sun, the fickle moods of the sea breeze, and the heavy rains in her remote village on Taiwan's eastern coast. Could she, too, get on a bus and go far, far away from the village? Drop everything, and end up in another city where she would miss this barren village forgotten by the world?

But girl, don't they warn ya.

It pours, man, it pours!

Listening to the song, Haruko found herself wondering what to do about the future. She took a deep breath, her eyes drawn to the far side of the ocean. The waves sparkled in the sunlight, and she could see a small black dot in a shaft of light. Haruko remembered that Somay ina would be going out to sea today, to perform a ceremony.

The clouds stretched over the sea to the south like wings, half the sky obscured by a thick blanket of gray. Haruko put away her tools in the orchard and hurried down the mountain. The weather, which had seemed so mild that morning, had undergone an unexpected change come afternoon. On her way home, she picked some wild greens growing between the fields. A snail wouldn't get very far even if it could run, so she might as well fill a bag to take home. The bitter melon leaves were almost gone, the vines plucked nearly bare. Haruko remembered there had been bitter melon leaves on the table for almost every meal and decided not to pick any today. A blue magpie had pecked the red patch on the bottom of a green papaya and made a big hole in it. Haruko looked all around. Once she was sure the magpies weren't nearby, she quickly snapped the papaya from its stem and made her getaway. Although she had planted the tree, its fruit had become the property of the blue magpies from the moment the birds noticed it. The magpies were too fierce for Haruko to do anything other than pick the papayas on the sly. She just thought of it as sharing, since there was plenty for all, anyway.

Haruko needn't have worried about the blue magpies. At that very moment, the tribe was having some fun chasing a civet. Suddenly, a man she had never seen before appeared out of nowhere and disrupted their game. The human in the hat became the magpies' new target. After

the birds had chased him for a while, the stranger evaded them by ducking into the woods. He, too, appeared to find the civet fascinating.

The rain poured down in torrents. Haruko was soaked before she could get inside. Natural gas was a luxury in the remote mountain districts, so her home's water heater was wood fueled. Haruko quickly lit a fire to heat some water; a hot bath would help to warm her up and ward off a cold. The falling rain clattered on the iron roof. She looked at the places where rainwater was dripping through it and sighed, wondering when she would have time to deal with the leaks. The salt carried on the sea breeze in this bayside area corroded the metal roofs quickly, and even finding someone to make the repairs was difficult.

Soaked to the skin, Haruko warmed herself in front of the fire and thought about the nice, long soak she could have once the water was hot. She was shivering.

She heard a dull thudding sound as rain continued to pummel the roof; probably fruit, falling from the tree beside the house. Because the roof was already leaking and Haruko didn't want the damage to get any worse, she braced herself against the cold rain and went outside to take a look. The noise turned out to be several monkeys using her roof as a throughway. She watched them in something of a daze.

“Koko de ame kara mi o kakusu koto wa dekimasu ka?” (May I hide from the rain here?)

A thin man in khaki with a large pack on his back and a bamboo hat on his head addressed Haruko in Japanese. He stood, a rather pathetic-looking figure, under the eaves to one side of the house.

Haruko stared, wondering if the man had just rolled down the mountain. Why did he look like a fugitive on the run?

“Anata wa chūgokugo o hanashimasu ka?” (Can you speak Chinese?)

“Can speak, very little.... Iikata ga wakaranai.” (Not very well.)

“I know only a little bit of Japanese.”

Haruko shivered, realized they were both standing in the rain, and ushered the man into the warmth of her kitchen.

Conversation was somewhat awkward. Haruko had learned Japanese from the village's older generation – mostly simple forms of address, and how to talk about meals or the weather – which made chatting a bit difficult. Her guest spoke in somewhat broken Chinese, but it was far better than Haruko's Japanese. The two of them did their best to understand each other, and mostly just smiled.

“My name Matsumoto. Working in literature and history.”

Matsumoto took a notebook out of his pack and looked a bit upset when he saw it was wet. Haruko saw that even his pack was covered in dirt. He must really have rolled down the mountain. When she saw the troubled look on Matsumoto's face, Haruko picked up an empty aluminum kettle and filled it roughly half full of some charcoal she dug out of the stove. She then spread open the wet notebook, placed a dry kitchen towel over it, and used the warm kettle to iron the wet pages. After several passes, the notebook pages were not only dry but flat. Haruko noticed that

Matsumoto had used pencil for all of his notes and sketches. Pencil was less likely to blur in the rain, so Matsumoto must have been taking precautions against this very situation.

“Tapowaray...Dajulai, wakimizu ga arimasu, kono basho.” (There is a spring, this place.)

Haruko pointed at the place in the notebook where Matsumoto had drawn a question mark next to the place name Dajulai. She wanted to explain that it was called Tapowaray in Pangcah and what the name meant, but her Japanese wasn't good enough.

“Kono basho ni wa wakimizu ga arimasu ka?” (This place has a spring?)

“Kon'na kanji janai (Not like that). 'Dajulai' means 'place where the spring comes gushing out.' It's a place name.”

Haruko gestured broadly as her words came tumbling out faster and faster. She told herself she didn't need to say so much. Her Japanese wasn't that good, and now she was feeling a bit embarrassed.

“Chimei no imi (place name's meaning)! You mean, place name, it's meaning?”

“Yes! I'm so sorry, I don't know how to explain.”

“Sō ka.” (I see.)

At this point, her grandmother Alo returned from gathering sea snails on the beach. Haruko heard Alo speak before she saw her, and listened as her grandmother gave a detailed account of everything she'd heard at the beach that day. She was talking about the daughter of a family who had married incredibly well in Hualien City a while back, who always drove a luxury car when she returned to the village and *looked* as though she was living a good life, yet every time she came, brought just a few bags of rice and some seafood for her family. Alo's tone was full of skepticism, her words aimed at Haruko and clearly meant to imply that marriage to a Payrang (Han Chinese) was not as good as a person might imagine. Still talking, Alo came into the kitchen, caught sight of the strange man, and was duly astonished. Brows puckered, she gave Haruko a look that chastised her for not exercising proper caution. She looked Matsumoto up and down, observed his polite, intellectual demeanor, and thawed slightly.

Alo listened as Matsumoto explained his note-taking field trip to the canal and his unceremonious intrusion after he had lost his way on the forest trail and sought shelter from the rain. His nervousness apparent, Matsumoto stood up, ready to leave, but Alo invited him to stay and have some hot tea.

Alo told Matsumoto that many place names had changed since the Japanese government's withdrawal from Taiwan. The indigenous peoples had names in their own languages for villages and places, which she guessed would make Matsumoto's fieldwork more difficult. He was wet through, and Alo was distressed by the thought he might catch a cold. So she told Matsumoto he would most likely miss the last bus and invited him to stay overnight in the shed out back. Haruko had just filled the tub with cold dispelling herb-infused water, and her grandmother insisted Matsumoto take a bath. Matsumoto hadn't had a warm bath for so long that he came very close to kowtowing in gratitude.

Haruko prepared some simple glutinous rice and hot tea for their guest. Matsumoto then spread open his notebook, and the three of them examined his sketches and diagrams under the

light from the lamp. Looking at the sketches in the notebook, Haruko and Alo felt each of them was a place they recognized. Alo pointed to a few of the drawings and told Matsumoto they were incomplete. Large chunks had been omitted. From her grandmother's comments and the information recorded in the notebook, it was abundantly clear that Matsumoto was creating a map of the torii ruins and canals the Japanese had built during their occupation of Taiwan.

"My name, Haruko, my grandmother gave it to me." The name fell like a familiar friend on Matsumoto's ears. Although he knew the Japanese had colonized Taiwan, that had been many years ago, and yet the indigenous tribes still used Japanese names. It gave him a sensation akin to *déjà vu*.

The grandmother kept a watchful eye on the two of them. Alo was not overly suspicious by nature, but she did fear losing someone she loved yet again. Her daughter had gone overseas to work and been cremated there, not even the urn holding her ashes sent back. As for her son-in-law in the Arabian Peninsula, there was no news at all. Most of the village's children in Haruko's age group had married early. Alo had already lost her daughter and son-in-law; she was determined not to let her granddaughter Haruko leave. But more importantly, the village had no suitable marriage partner for her.

Under her grandmother's watchful eye, Haruko was unsure what to do – the steady sound of rain on the roof indicated the downpour would not end anytime soon. But Matsumoto, embarrassed and without any plan to stay the night, stood, bowed his thanks to Alo and left, braving the rain.

Alo sat by the stove glaring at Haruko and condemning her granddaughter's inappropriate behavior like a dog gnawing a bone. She accused her of wanting to run away with a foreigner as if he were the first man she'd ever seen. The words came spewing out, and her tears started again as she insisted that Haruko must be planning to leave her there in the village alone. The more she talked, the angrier she got, until she was shouting at Haruko for her shamelessness.

This was not the first time Alo's emotions had run riot. In the past, Haruko had always promised to take care of Alo in her old age, but her patience had slowly eroded, replaced by a wordless impotence. Today in particular, Haruko had felt a familiar warmth as she looked at Matsumoto. But Alo's glare of displeasure, plain for all to see, had made Haruko very uncomfortable. She was overcome by a sudden urge to shout, just as her grandmother was, but she couldn't do it.

While Alo was scolding Haruko, Matsumoto walked along the coastal highway, conscious of the fact that he had missed the last bus. Looking around him, he saw that the sea was relatively calm. No lights had been turned on yet to illuminate the village's wet streets, and the rain drummed softly. Up ahead, at the extreme limits of his vision, Matsumoto saw a person running towards him in the rain.

"Darekaga shūbasu ni noriokuremashita ka?" (Did someone else miss the last bus too?)

Watching the person run through the rain, Matsumoto experienced a sense of fellow feeling

with this person who shared his misfortune.

“Wait a moment! Nōto! (Your notebook!)”

Matsumoto had left in a hurry. Haruko, listening to Alo’s relentless tongue lashing, had felt her patience snap. She had the sudden impulse to go spend the night in her mountainside taro’an (a small hut for rest, shelter from the rain, or overnight stay). If she hid there, she would have some peace and quiet. When she turned, she saw Matsumoto’s notebook on the table. Without much thought, she grabbed a raincoat to wrap around the notebook and headed for the bus stop at a run. Worried that she hadn’t yet caught up with Matsumoto and unsure if she could, Haruko had fretted as she chased after him in the rain.

“Dōmo arigatōgozaimashita, kono memo wa watashi ni totte hijō ni jūyōdesu.” (Thank you so very much! This notebook is of tremendous importance to me.)

Haruko wheezed as she handed the notebook to Matsumoto. Without giving him time to say another word, she turned and ran back the way she had come. The rain continued to fall.

“Dōmo arigatō!” (Thank you so much!)

Matsumoto shouted his thanks, his eyes following Haruko’s retreating figure until it was swallowed by the rain. Not another soul was to be seen anywhere on the road.