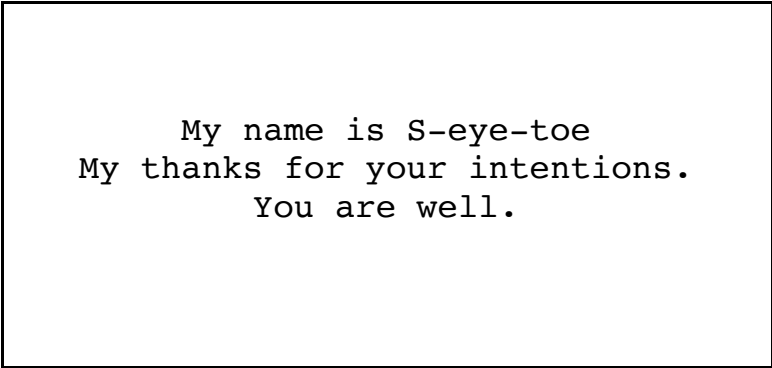


STORY

SAITO AND THE ICORIGIBLE HARU'S RIDICULOUS TOUR

Not speaking much English, and certainly having difficulty with pronunciation, Saito had decided it pragmatic to create a series of phrase cards. Before leaving Tokyo, he had played out the long weekend trip several times in his mind and tried to think of critical phrases and questions. When he thought of a good one, he'd work it out on Google Translate and the pronunciation in Katakana (so he could at least give saying it a shot) and then if all else failed, he could hand over the card for the other person to read. He took care in his writing, and each card was quite intricate in its calligraphy as well as made of a very nice card stock Saito had particularly sought out for the task.



My name is S-eye-toe
My thanks for your intentions.
You are well.

Before long, his bag packed, his newly wrought cards safely tucked away in the pocket of his most comfortable business suit jacket, he left the Hotel, headed for the airport, and from there he'd catch a flight to Portland, USA. In the cab and at moments of pause in the airport, Saito would stare at her contact picture, thumb hovering over the dial button, not at all sure if he could call her to tell her he was leaving to get his head together. She'd been so angry with him. He'd no idea that staying a few nights at the hotel would be anything other than that, but the sprint in his belly had grown into a desire to run a marathon. He saw no sense, at the moment, in not stopping his momentum away from anything and everything.

Choosing to go to Portland hardly had any bearing on the matter. He'd heard things from friends. He'd seen things on TV. It was there, it was not here, and interesting things seemed to lay that way. He might as well have thrown a dart at a map. Although, again, in the cab and in the airport, when he wasn't looking at his phone, there was an undeniable anticipation growing. Whatever happened in the next few days was just going to be different—wildly so—and it would be for him and him alone. He had even had half a mind to not take photos and only journal the trip, but he decided against it. What he might do is take pictures but not post them on any social web sites. At any rate, since he hadn't told Shoka that he was leaving, he couldn't have her seeing them—if she was even looking—which he suspected she was not.

The flight didn't disappoint. While nominal for most of the time, with little disturbance and lots of digital distractions, the bright blue sky met only by a bright blue ocean until the last hour. Clouds appeared then, in the end, in small enough numbers at first, to accompany the plane, fluffy

and white and bright. But after a bit, they had surrounded the miniature jet and neither ocean nor sky was to be seen. Then the escorts turned gray. Then they took turns shaking the little toy, poking and prodding it to watch it's tiny cargo panic. Like Gashadokuro himself, the weather seemed to guard some sacred place, and only after a period of testing, was the plane allowed to pass. After that, the clouds turned to rain and the sky grew calm. It felt like a port was near. Saito smiles. *Portland.*



Saito's arrival had only just happened: getting off the plane, making his way through customs, dodging through crowds, stopping to look at a craft beer display, and leaving the airport, when he is intercepted by Hal Goesch. The encounter is so sudden: Hal approaching Saito with hand outstretched, speaking so much English all at once, and then taking Saito's suitcase while seemingly waving off any protest or payment. Slowly corralled by Hal, Saito, like a sheep away from the herd by a wolf, steps over to a very strange looking automobile. Hal tells him, "Yes sir, it was clear right away from your garb and your poise that I must put myself in your service. I am a premiere tour guide of Portland—top notch—one of the best." Hal shoved a card at Saito, who could not read it, but did take it as a sign of credibility. "A better time cannot be had in our fine City of Bridges—why, some of us call this Rip City—and that's just fine by me, I say. Yes, indeed

if Rip City means enjoying your pants off, well then who am I to say different, sir?" For the briefest of moments, Hal looks to his newfound patron and sees that most of what he has said has not at all registered at all.

But the corral has all four sides now and Saito sees that his new compatriot and he have arrived at a strange red truck? Hal puts Saito's suitcase in the rear door (which complains loudly) and then guides Saito by the elbow to the passenger door, opened with a deferential bow. This, Saito understands and he bows somewhat less back and then gets in "the truck". Once secure in the driver's seat, Hal indicates that Saito should put his seatbelt on. Saito does so and Hal starts "the truck" — which grinds to life with more complaint as Hal shoves the shift stick into first. "Now, good sir, where shall we be going first?"

Saito smiles.

Hal contemplates alternative words. "Destination?"

Saito smiles.

"Address?"

Saito gasps gladly and reaches into his suit jacket to retrieve a stack of index cards. He shuffles through them and then hands one to Hal.

Address: 1336 SE Pine St.



"I see, sir. That's not too far off at all. We'll be there in no time," and Hal manages to simultaneously let the clutch out and tip his Trilby off his head toward Saito, arching his eyebrows in a manner that clearly says, *We are off*.

Once they are on the highway, Hal leans over to Saito conspiratorially and says, "The truth is, Portland abounds with true wonders. Yes, luck is with you this trip, good friend, because Old Hal knows *all* the secrets. My family lineage goes all the way back. Yes sir, *all* the way back. Why my family helped to start this town; founded it." Hal checks with his companion who nods, at least on the surface excited. "Yes, you can trace my lineage all the way back to George Portland himself—founder of this luscious place—an impressive figure of a man taming the Wild West."

At this, Saito hears something familiar and he makes his hands into guns and fires them off. Hal bellows. "That's right! You've got it: the 1800s, the gold days, back when this was all just some wooden buildings carved out of the woods—some of the most beautiful trees ever seen in these United States. Now, as I am sure that you know, trees in Japan are very small." Hal takes his hands off the wheel to gesture and clarify.

Saito smiles.

"But trees here are larger than anywhere." Again Hal gestures, his arms out to hug something enormous. Saito makes a look of awe. "Of course, tomorrow, when we go to see the sites, we are

likely to run into a few Trolls—maybe magic folk too—if you catch my drift. But you've nothing at all to worry about, I've dealt with those ilk before and you are well-protected with Hal." With this, Hal winks at Saito who bows in return.



The sun is just setting as the pair are crossing (entirely unnecessarily) over the Morrison bridge. Hal is talking. Saito rests his head in his hand and stares out the passenger window. He had been in town for maybe thirty minutes and already he's spied two dozen things that caught his eye. The architecture, the citizens with strange hair and dress, the bridges! He contemplates getting Haru to stop the truck? But Haru is still speaking, no doubt telling Saito great American facts about American history and the conquering of the so-called "West" or maybe some information about public transportation or good restaurants.

Saito wishes for a moment that he could record everything Haru is saying to have it translated for later. But then he decides it doesn't matter. Saito doesn't care. He is here to escape the turmoil at home, and as the bridge pass underneath them, and the water appears lit by sparkles from a low sun—the clouds and rain from before, vanished—he truly feels the first sense of relief in a long, long time. Japan is far, far away, and none of this new place makes sense to him, except that, now that he is here, he relishes it. Just something—anything—other than the mundane and

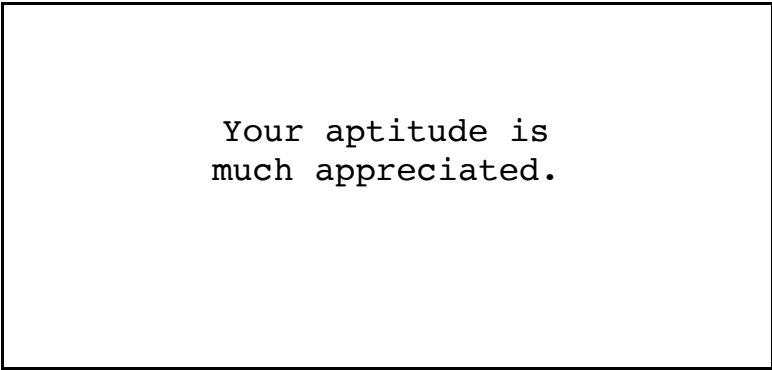
profane he had become so numb to. He has now days in Portland with no intention of missing a second. But for tonight, he just needs to soak in the novelty, and get some well-deserved rest.

As the sun disappears to the West, Saito thinks about how the Sun had been up for hours already then in Tokyo, as if Tokyo were merely on the other side of the horizon, as if just over a hill and not across an ocean that swallowed horizons. He knew that Shoka would be busy. Would she have yet wondered where he was? Was she sad? Without him there to witness it, a wry sense of relief stretched a smile across his face. For whatever reason, what mattered to him most at the moment, was that he couldn't know and didn't have to care.

Maybe she'd figured it out. Maybe she thought he was a coward for running away (he knew there was some cowardice in it) but also his heart was buckling from confusion and his mind was underneath—drowning in—even, some kind of pressure. For a moment, he looks at Haru who has a look of anticipation on his face, like he had just finished a joke, so Saito laughs and nods, understanding nothing.

The rumbling hull of "the truck" was good and warm. With no one to speak to, with no one able to speak to him, Saito would have true isolation; a laboratory in which to experiment with the loneliness that he felt when there was everyone around talking and talking and talking. Haru was talking of course, but to Saito—he smiles to himself at the thought—listening to Haru is no different than listening to a rare bird's song. And a rare bird Haru is, Saito thinks. He'd certainly seen nothing like Haru on American television. He was dressed in a suit yes, with suspenders and a dapper hat, but it all looked to be second-hand. Haru's tie was comically large. Saito liked that

though. Perhaps Haru would help him procure an outfit just like it. He could suddenly see himself as a kind of guide to places away from depression and gangrene. Let me tip my hat and take you to a wonderland. Let me take you away. What are you afraid of that is so regular and awful? I'll take you elsewhere. Just then, Saito remembers his cards and removes one for Haru.



Your aptitude is
much appreciated.

"Oh well. Uh, Thank you! Never thought of myself as a man of appetite"

Without further ado, "the truck" groans up to an old house in front of a small traffic circle.

Saito can see the address numbers on the door, so at least he knows that he had arrived; not that he cared. He reaches into his suit jacket and removes a very large wad of cash. Haru immediately enacts some kind of fit. He seems upset. Was he insulted somehow? Haru takes the cash roll from him and divides it up into smaller rolls and gestures at Saito's leg and then his shoes? Saito can't follow and slowly shakes his head at Haru, who, clearly disappointed, hands all the money back. Saito thinks it must be a kind of negotiation. He removes three crisp 20 dollar bills and holds them out to Haru. Haru huffs, takes the twenties, removes one, thinks on the matter, removes a second,

and then hands the last one back to Saito. Saito puts the money back in his jacket and folds his hands and bows and says, "Domo arigato, Haru dese."



Hal slept in "the truck" as he was wont to do. And comfortably. Bright and early the next morning, Hal knocks on the door to the house. The innkeep arrives and says, "Good morning."

With his trilby hat in both hands and held to his chest, Hal says, "If you would please, please let Mr.—uh—" and Hal has a moment to realize his error. He did not remember his patron's name. "There's a Japanese man staying with you?"

"Oh. Yes?"

"Please indicate to him that his driver is waiting. You needn't hurry him; I'll wait as long as he needs."

"Sure. Are you with Lyft or Über?"

"What's that now?"

The innkeep looks at Hal with mild puzzlement, and then smiles and says to Hal, "I'll let him know." However, just as the innkeep is about to turn away, Saito arrives on the scene, equipped for the day with a large backpack. "Haru!" he shouts.

Hal looks to the innkeep and the innkeep looks back. "Do you know what that means?" but

the innkeep shrugs and says, "I don't speak Japanese." Hal turns to see Saito getting into "the truck"—he turns to the innkeep again to say, "But then, how did he—" and he sees Saito put on his seatbelt and so waves goodbye to the innkeep and shouts, "I'll have him back by ten!" He wanted his fellow businessmen to know that he was on the up and up and responsible and all of that.

The innkeep stands in the door for a moment, watching them go and puzzled, says, "I don't care."



"Now what I would really like to show you first is the Weather Machine that we have here in Portland, but the truth is, sir, it's just not terribly exciting until around noon." Feeling that Saito is on board with the tour, Hal checks in less to see if his fare is following him to the letter. The fact that Saito had hopped in the truck made Hal feel like they had a good spiritual connection, and Hal was confident that—uh—he really needed to figure out the guy's name—but confident that his patron got the gist. Before he could speak again, Saito handed him a card.



Weather can be bad.
May I purchase a rain jacket?

"Yes. Yes! There is a place right on the way to our first destination. Now, I have a wonderful place to begin our tour. It is one of the only government sanctioned Leprechaun parks anywhere in the world. I suppose there are likely to be a few over yonder in Ireland, sure, but this park is the most westward located if you get my meaning. You, of course, are from further Westward, but so much, I suppose that it just becomes East again."

"But then who would be shocked that the little people never got over the Pacific? I feel terrible thinking about their journey across the Atlantic as it was—they being so small and having to stowaway among who knows what kind of garbage. I mean, they're *small*, right? And then, and *then* they make their way across this whole country Oregon-Trail-style?" This gave Hal pause. He wasn't just there to gab, it was only fair that his companion learn a thing or two, so he turned to Saito and said very slowly, "Or-a-gone," and then he pointed at the floor of "the truck" for emphasis. Saito considered the floor of "the truck" and then looked up at Hal and said, "O-ru-gonu." Hal gave him a thumbs up and Saito gave him thumbs up in immediate return. And Hal felt good.

"It's a helluva thing to think about not just having to hide from injuns but then to also have to worry about foxes and hawks and such. I shudder to think. It's a wonder that they made it here at

all. But such is the fortitude of the Leprachaun. They are made of tough stuff, I think. Maybe it's that they're Irish, maybe it's that when you're so small you acclimate to the need to be made of something sturdy. I've never met one, mind you. They keep to themselves—who could blame them? But I sure would like to get my hands on one of those wishes."

"They say that—um—George Miller?—did that himself after coming back from World War II. He grabbed himself a leprechaun and wished for them to have a park. You know World War II? We fought then you know."

Saito smiles.

"Well, I think it's quite all right when a man gains a wish and all he does is wish for something for someone else. I think that's just about the nicest thing one man could do for another."



Saito, surprised to see Haru at the door—briefly questions their financial arrangement—but clearly Haru was there for him. Glad to have rested very well; he'd awakened early (pleasantly unaffected by jetlag) and packed any tool he thought might be useful, re-combining his belongings from his rolling suitcase into a backpack that he had brought to make it easier to hike about. All morning, he felt an urgent need to get out and lose himself in novelty. Then, to his

surprise, there is Haru, and so Saito shouts his name, like a high five on a game show.

Once in "the truck" Saito gets out his index cards with pre-determined locations carefully translated. But when Haru gets in "the truck" Saito realizes that what he truly wants is to just see *life* in this place; probably nothing that he could find in all his Wikipedia searches; things he wouldn't have known to search for. Haru is talking and Saito can't understand him, starting "the truck" and Haru doesn't ask for an 'address', so Saito goes to put the cards away and lets Haru do the driving, but at the last minute he remembers one last bit of clothing he was advised to have. He hands Haru the note, who seems to understand perfectly, and Saito is very glad to be in Haru's hands. In fact, he thinks that would make a nice slogan: "Let Haru do the Driving." In fact, he thinks 春は運転をやらせます.

And Saito so is tickled with the idea that he can see a whole ad campaign for Haru appear before his mind's eye. It involves multiple, multiple copies of Haru's and "trucks" driving in lines around an inexplicably sunny Portland, caravanning to the airport. An announcer shouts, "See Portland the Haru way!" All the Harus and "trucks" drive up to the airport entrance in an orderly line, get out of the trucks and jump in the air and shout, "Arigato Haru dese!" Freeze frame.



Saito admires his new bright, yellow, Columbia windbreaker, while Haru is talking in his

very confident American manner, and Saito assumes that Haru is discussing the rich history of this town called Portland. Saito had done at least some homework before abandoning his lovely home in the Asakusa district for a dark hotel room. He knew that Portland had once been considered one of the most dangerous ports in the United States in the late 1700s, back when it was little more than a fur-trader haven.

While Japan was settling arguments with swords there were men in Portland with guns who settled argument in equally deadly but different ways. And neither likely even knew of the others' existence.

Saito feels like Portland must have been like Mos Eisley, with all manner of scum and villainy, just beyond the steady gaze of a young United States government; protectorate not yet instituted. For the moment though, the largest difference Saito could see between Portland and Asakusa was how many large old trees there were. Haru was clearly traversing along back-routes to their destination and the houses were massive mansions, structurally unusual, with so many colors, all and hugged by trees. They come to Naito Parkway and stop.

Hal leads Saito across the parkway, his hand gingerly placed on Saito's forearm. Hal whispers like a nature guide, "Now, we're early, yes, but to my knowledge, the Leprechauns only come out right at dawn or at twilight, so I wouldn't expect to see one of the—" Hal pauses, looks Saito in the eyes, and slows his speech—"little people." Saito nods vigorously.

Once across the street, in the middle of a nominal parkway, the pair stands in an island where a three foot diameter concrete circle sits; Mill Ends Park—the smallest government sanctioned

park in the United States. Hal squats and Saito follows suit. Glancing about the park, Hal says, "Yeah, they clean up after themselves real well. Too bad. I don't see too much evidence here. I mean, you got that tiny soda can over there."

"I just truly admire the fortitude required for someone of such small stature—heck, their small family too—to hitch up their wagon and make their way across the Oregon Trail. I mean, it was hard enough for the American pioneers. There was a great amount of death and disease on the trail for the pioneers. But imagine, for a moment, if you will, what kind of horrors even a coyote pup could reek on a wagon train that was only 10 inches high! Hawks!"

Saito nods slowly in understanding.

Hal remove his hat and wipes his brow. "Why the carnage must have been just the stuff of nightmares. I admire any of those individuals who made it this far out. A superlittlehuman feat to be sure."

Saito holds out his smart phone, imploring Hal to photograph him, both thumbs up in his bright yellow coat. Hal is a little put off by Saito's possible morbidity, but he shrugs it off. After Hal takes the picture, and as Saito is still scanning the tiny park, he says to no one in particular, "Why, I wonder if there are Japanese leprechauns?"



It isn't long before Haru pulls "the truck" over to the side of a boulevard. It seems odd to get out of "the truck" where they are, but then again, Saito trusts Haru's excitement. Haru is on about something—something clearly exciting. Right at Southwest Naito Parkway and Southwest Taylor Street, right in the middle of a major thoroughfare, Haru starts talking about a concrete hole in the ground, with great aplomb. There are gorgeous plants to be sure, but nothing of significance that Saito can see. It is a very small garden; in the middle of a parkway.

Haru is gesticulating wildly and reaches down into the garden and picks up some object from it, and shakes it, right in front of Saito's face. Still, Saito can see that Haru is very invested in the description of this small place—it was important to Haru—maybe others? What Saito did was, he took out his camera and took a picture of the hole in the ground, and also a magnificent picture of Haru lecturing in the early morning light.

This microcosm is a metaphor for the city, Saito thinks. If Haru understood Japanese custom, then he would understand the importance of attention to detail in even the smallest of endeavors. So here was this hodgepodge of flora, carefully cordoned off from the surrounding traffic—which Saito also noticed consisted mostly of bicycles at the moment—and Haru telling him—well, Saito couldn't be sure, of course, but he *felt* what Haru was telling him: in Portland, even such a minute element of the landscape is given great attention.

Like the trees in the neighborhoods, like the eclectic architecture of the houses, like the bicycles passing them by even now, this was a place where people concerned themselves with their effect on the world and the world's affect on them. Haru seemed quite passionate about it,

removing his hat and wiping his brow with a certain glumness; it must bother him greatly that more urban areas in the US do have this culture where attention to the environment is simply a given.

Saito was not jaded by any stretch of the imagination, but he had become complacent to all the news about the dangers of humanity's impact on the world. To Saito, it seemed inevitable. There was no turning back the clock. There was no such thing as a zero-anything footprint. Humans changed the world the moment they arrived. They cultivated some plants and not others; they wiped out some species and not others, simply for food. Of course there was an impact on the ecology, even the atmosphere. What humans *could* do was plan the impact a little better. The solution to any problem began with the recognition of the presence of the problem. So Saito was not jaded, he just felt that people who wanted to reverse the impact of humanity were wishful thinkers. The thought reminded him that there was also the cultivation of his relationship with Shoka; necessary, yes, but, a garden? Perhaps not. Was it too late to reverse-engineer the damage? He loved Shoka. He did. And deeply. But was she the garden he wanted to tend?

Haru, forcing him to pay attention to this minor detail of the city seemed to be communicating exactly that. And Saito was grateful. It was something that had gone missing with Shoka. She had become—not obsessed—Saito was not sure of the exact word—*overtly* concerned with status. Saito had concerns about quality of life and Shoka had developed concerns about what the neighbors thought, what her colleagues thought. Saito's work, their home, their shared time together, the money he made; it all had become, for her, he thought, a means to an end, and

not a reason d'être. She had less and less time for his laziness and peccadilloes. It was more important to be at the latest fashion or art show.

In that moment, Haru had stopped talking and the two of them, squatting in the middle of the Parkway, had a moment of silence and meditation.

Saito knew then that because he understood the problem with he and Shoka, that the relationship could be salvaged. It could be negotiated. He would have to tell her why he had been so sullen the last few months. She might listen. He knew she loved him deeply and maybe this preoccupation with presentation would be something she would see through if he told her how unhappy it made him. She might not, of course.

Once, she had not been concerned with those sorts of things. Maybe she would again. Saito, in the midst of that thought, felt connected with Haru, felt thanks for Haru giving him something he could relate to, something he would not have known to seek out, and he pat Haru on the back, as they squatted together in the middle of the Parkway and said, "Arigato, Haru dese." Then, Saito holds the camera out to implore Haru to take a photo of him in the moment, excited by the slight lift of his melancholy.



The odd pair now walk into a ramshackle vacuum cleaner store. Hal is saying, "It's ten-thirty,

so it's still too early to visit the Weather Machine, but I believe I have something that will satisfy anyone's curiosity for a time. For you see, I have once or twice been privy to show around a tourist of a different sort than you. You, sir, are from a different country, but these individuals were from a different *time*." Hal takes pause to look at his compatriot and the impact of the statement doesn't seem to have taken effect. "They were *time travelers*," and with this Hall makes a grand gesture. Saito smiles and the Shopkeep, behind a massive counter covered in papers, a register, and various vacuum cleaner parts, raises his eyebrow.

Hal and Saito make their way to the back wall of the shop where sits a massive wall of shelves and many, many vacuum cleaners, from the modern to the classic, to downright unique examples of the first vacuum cleaners ever—machines simply made of smoothed wood and engravings. Some of them are barely more than a metal enclosure attached to a broom handle with a loose electrical wire. Hal waves Saito close to him and down a little. He looks around the shop before he whispers, "What I was made privy to, by these travelers I mentioned, was that the machinery that eventually tries to enslave humanity, well, a key piece of that machine lies here. Now, of course, they would not share with me what particular part or element, if you will, was the very unique thing that they were seeking. Allowing me to have that information would likely change the timeline, I think—I don't pretend to understand these matters—maybe our actions might cause them to never be born or some such weirdness, I suppose. But, I can tell you this: that critical piece of machinery lies here in this humble store. Now, isn't that something?"

Saito nods and smiles.

"I have to say, you take news of the eventual enslavement of humanity with quite a good attitude. Then again... I suppose your people are somewhat used to the concept of empire and emperor, so perhaps it's for the best while this terrible thing has not yet come to pass. No, we should merely reflect upon it." Hal reflects on the wall that is the demonstration of the brief history of vacuum cleaners. "I suppose I could burn the whole place down—" at this Hal realizes the volume of his voice and glances toward the shopkeep, who stopped paying any attention. Relieved, Hal returns to his thought. "If I did the deed, who's to say that any good would come of it? Perhaps I do and it's the fire that transmutes the metal into the key piece! Is there any way to know?"

Saito is closely examining a tank vacuum cleaner, a reflective and sparkly blue cylinder on loose black plastic wheels. Hal observes and adds, "Could be that one. Could be."

After shuffling through his cards, Saito hands one to Hal.

All go to the same place;
all come from dust,
and to dust all return.

Hal read it and furrowed his brow. Then, he chuckled merrily at the pun. His ward seemed to

understand more than he let on.



This place, insofar as Haru showing him the cultivated details of this unusual city, seemed a particular misstep. Why would Haru bring him now to a vacuum store? Haru had not done him wrong thus far, so trust was necessary. And Saito was rewarded for his trust as they passed by all the latest in cleaning machinery to the back wall of the store where a hallway appeared, lined with nothing but historical examples of vacuums. Saito figured that the demonstration of this sad display of malfunctioning machines must have some value he was missing. He examined the machines closely. Haru was talking at a clip, so surely there was something for him to gain. Then, all at once it hit him. These machines, the most basic of consumer items, or perhaps even the highlight of a human workforce attempting to use machines to make life more comfortable—certainly less dirty—this was somehow the base of the loss of humanity in the kind of class warfare, the replacement of quality for quantity, that even Shoka had become mesmerized by. Was this the origin of "keeping up with the Joneses"? Prior to the existence of appliances, would any neighbor care that their neighbor had a plow or a gin? Here were all the machines that once upon a time were expensive and now were little more than garbage, put in a single place to remind us that the engagement of consumerism is a cycle that never ends. There are always newer machines

to replace the machines that did an adequate job in the first place. These were mere samples; all of their brethren lay in junkyards and landfills or had long since turned back into dust.

This march of consumer technology, all an attempt to make life easier, all the while consuming the patrons because there is always a better machine to be bought through dedication and work. There is a reason to work harder and that reason is to gain access to the next machine, whatever it may be. The next machine reduces work in some sense, yes, but then new work appears. For instance, the work of sweeping drifts away because there is a new machine that just sucks the dirt away. The new work becomes the act of emptying the machine. The autonomous robot vacuum still needs to be emptied and the new work is the mastery of the settings and now and then re-booting. Saito thought, a truly good vacuum would empty itself. *Who in the world should ever have to reboot a vacuum?* The concept was absurd. Saito stoops down close to a large machine, a tank vacuum cleaner, weirdly decorated with gold flecks on a royal blue backdrop.

It catches Saito's attention because as a machine it seems easy to anthropomorphize. Its obvious face is like a friend he would have wanted to create. While staring at the machine he was waiting for it to bleep or bloop to life. Saito's entranced by the little blue sparkly machine and in the meantime he is aware that Haru is talking fast about something to do with this wall of machines, and considering the theory of cultivation that Haru had put forth earlier, this must be some demonstration of what had gone wrong with that cultivation. It wasn't long-term. Industrialization not only sped up our lives, it shortened our sights, reduced our depth of field. This is something that Saito had given a great deal of thought to, given his work with his

company. Always there was a concern about new product, new features, new options, none of which Saito felt was necessary. He was unique among his colleagues for saying "No." Always they wanted to deliver the next reason for you to buy anything. Anything at all. Saito was always concerned with effect. He was concerned with function, affordance, and he believed that form followed function. "They," —at least Shoka—had decided that the social contract had to do with status, and nothing to do with creation or preservation. Saito waited for Haru to finish his treatise. Seeing Haru's theme of their tour coming into form, Saito felt the need to contribute to the conversation. He took a moment to shuffle through his cards and then handed one to Haru that read:

All go to the same place;
all come from dust,
and to dust all return.

Saito waved Haru over and took a selfie of the pair, with Haru staring at the blue tank vacuum with a puzzled look and Saito cartoonishly shrugging.





Hal leads Saito to a large brick-laid square in the heart of downtown—Pioneer Square.

“Now. This is going to be one of the main attractions, Mr. uh—” —Hal really had to get a name somehow—”sir. It’s been said, by all manner of folks, really since the city's founding, that it just rains too much in Portland. The thing that folks just don’t realize is that the weather machine here in town is broken. And what I mean to say, is that it is not simply engaged in controlling the weather—that much is obvious, I think. It’s just that the weather machine here has made up its own mind about the weather. Its displays are wildly incoherent when compared to the actual weather conditions. I don't know when, but at some point, the machine clearly began to ignore its thermometers and barometers. But, I ask you, is that so bad? Can you really have sun all the time? I mean, just look at people from California. I don’t think so. No sir, I think one needs a good melancholy now and then, and rain and haze help afford the opportunity.”

"Of course, you’re from Japan—I imagine that all your weather machines are just quite fancy—I suppose, digital, maybe. *Portland's* is mechanical, you see. It’s a bit queer. It certainly doesn’t do what it’s supposed to do—hence, all the rain. Mind you, I’ve become quite acclimated to the weather. You have too, when you consider that dapper raincoat." Hal took the liberty of pinching the material of Saito's jacket and pointed and said, "Dapper."

Saito nods, holds up a finger for pause while he shuffles through his cards. Then,

Luck is probability
taken personally.

Hal stares at the card for a while. He takes it in, but then moments pass and his original point returns to him. "Yes sir, throw me a sunny day, and I don't know what to do. What in the world is that burning orb in the sky that's baking my skin? You know?"

Saito smiles.

After not too long a spell, after Saito has circled the weather machine and photographed it from numerous angles, the machine elicits the sound of trumpets blaring the way they would upon the entrance of an archduke to some royal affair. The machine wirrs to life and finally, the metal icon of a sun slowly ascends from the top of the machine and locks into place. Hal and Saito look around and sees that it is very cloudy. They both nod with some kind of understanding.



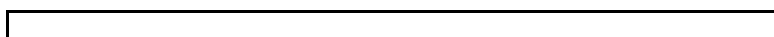
The weather machine, when Haru shows it to Saito, looks like a gigantic, complicated

lamppost. It's metal, largely consisting of a base and a tall pole, with a large head at the top. The "head" has numerous moving parts in the shape of arms that seem to measure the world about it. Barometers and thermometers are all inset into it. Saito watches as it makes its slow weather dance. While at once it is elegant, it is also gangly. It is clockwork. It's meters shift, and—without warning—it makes music.

It sounds out a lyrical, trumpeted fanfare in order to announce what it thinks the weather might be. Icons rise up from its mechanical structure; representations of a sun for clear and sunny weather, a blue heron for drizzle and transitional weather, or a dragon and mist for rainy or stormy weather. Today, Saito watches it release a dragon in the form of a bronze plate, and the machine does so with unbelievable fanfare, so Saito immediately hands the camera to Haru and stands in front of the machine for his photograph with the contraption.



Speaking of machines...



Come with me.