

Persimmon Dreams

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2016-04-27 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Redford, Steve メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.14945/00009372

Persimmon Dreams

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Introductory Note

In February, 2015, a friend and I went for a snow hike up Aozasayama. It was one of the most lovely days I've ever experienced.

And yet, though it was a calm, bright sunny day, there was a blizzard of things howling in my head. Just a few days before, for example, Kenji Goto had been beheaded. His life's work had taken him to a very dangerous place—and he had not survived.

I felt somewhat guilty enjoying the day as much as I did, with all that was going on in the world, but up on beautiful Aozasayama, I also felt—felt deeply—that I was in the exact place that I was meant to be on that day.

The sun in the sky, the sun on the snow, the blue of the sky, and the green of the bamboo grass (*aozasa*) were all brilliant. Atop the mountain, we were amazed by how soft and rosy the glistening sea was, and by how far we could see out across it—far beyond the Izu Peninsula. And the face of our dear friend Fuji-kun (Mt. Fuji, most folks say) was so clear and bright that I thought I could hear him breathing. When I looked up into the branches of the trees, I was sure I saw the winter buds quivering, sure I saw the tiny twigs reaching for spring.

I felt that *my* limbs were reaching for spring.

My mind did not become oblivious to the world elsewhere—to the “countless tribes,” to the “racist vibes,” to the “booze imbibed,” to the “alibies.” I did not suddenly forget all the “thoughts in reams” and “busted seams” and “vanquished dreams”—nor did I become deaf to all the “unheard screams,” but I did feel remarkably certain that I was feeling the flow of energy through the universe, that the energy was flowing through me, too, and that it was flowing equally through

all of us and everything—and it seemed, right then, of the greatest importance to feel that way.

When I tried to put it into words, it came out like this: *yuki ga arukiyasui!* (*It's easy to walk in the snow!*) And it was.

You might have thought that we would have been slipping and sliding the whole time, but we weren't. Our footing was good. Our boot irons remained in our backpacks. And the snow, well, it became the perfect cushion. It “gave” just enough. My knees were extraordinarily grateful.

So there I was, walking pleasantly along, marveling at how fun it was to walk in the snow . . . when I just began chanting it: *yuki ga arukiyasui, yuki ga arukiyasui, yuki ga arukiyasui.*

My friend was maybe ten or twelve strides ahead of me right then.

And I was so overwhelmed with the joy of walking in that snow that I did something that totally amazed me. I started *singing* those words. I sang them out loud and clear, so that my friend could hear me.

If I had any suggestion for a would-be poet, this would probably be it: Don't worry about being a genius. Just feel something. Feel it, believe it, feel it some more, fill your heart with it, and then take whatever few words happen to be nearby, whatever words come to mind at the moment—and then just let it rip. If your feelings are sincere, they'll come through the words, no matter how simple or time-and-place-bound the words are.

All my life, I'd been certain that I was tone deaf and without any sense of rhythm (and I'm *still* pretty sure that I am!), but when I got home, I was so lit up inside that I convinced myself that I had written *a real song*—and I got out my ukulele and strummed a few chords and worked out some more words.

That was the first song (if you're charitable enough to let me use the word *song* for the result!) that I ever wrote.

Yuki ga arukiyasui. What a thing to sing about!

And then I just kept writing songs.

In the past year, I guess I've written twelve or thirteen more. I'm not really sure how I did.

Much in the songs springs from feelings and thoughts that have come to me during my hikes up mountains here in Shizuoka prefecture.

So, as a couple of lines from two of the songs suggest, “if you have the time / to come along with me”—the time to “pump in that mountain air,” I will feel honored.

Thanks to Nan Sensei, for taking an interest in these lyrics (he just happened to come across me making some copies in the copying room), and to Yamauchi Sensei, for providing a Japanese translation of one of the songs, “I’m Just a Weed.”

Oh, yeah, no doubt. I *am* just a weed.

And now I gotta go. Got a date with *Harujion*.

* * *

All That’s Real

The lotus flower’s veined pink skin
Is lit up bright from within.
You have to stop and feel amazed--
It doesn’t burn but stays ablaze.
Eyes are ears and ears are eyes,
Helping us to empathize.
Paradise is what you feel
And what you feel is all that’s real.

I step into a temple ground.
Through a bamboo pole hear a dripping sound,
A xylophone and a string of bells
Leap right out of the bottomless well.
They say a mighty warrior’s tooth
Is buried here beneath the truth,
But under the maples I feel no fear,
The moss is green and the sky is clear.

Divide by two, what do you get?
Damaged hearts, a lot of regret.
You're still yourself in disguise—
Sometimes Solomon was pretty wise.
Paradise is what you see,
What you see is all you need,
Just your eyes can make you kneel,
'Cause what you feel is all that's real.

A cawing crow is circling high
Through a field reflecting a rosy sky.
His mate alights on a telephone pole,
The traffic below she can't control.
Listen to your eyes, loosen your mind,
Don't let them tell you that you're in a bind.
The dripping water's a magical force—
Maybe it's coming from the source.

Who's your enemy? Who's your friend?
When will this talk ever end?
For 2000 years we've wondered hard—
Now we can't play any card.
Paradise is what you see,
What you see is all you need,
Just your eyes can make you kneel,
'Cause what you feel is all that's real.

A green worm dines on a fat rosebud,
A wasp swoops down, you can hear the thud.
Stormy skies never criticize,
Thunder and lightning just lullabies.
Beginnings and endings, right here in the day,
A dandelion is blown away.

Background is foreground, forward is back,
A swallow's heaven is an empty shack.

Who's your neighbor? Who's your friend?
What's the message you want to send?
You'll never be a step ahead,
Your soul is never in the red.
Eyes are ears and ears are eyes
Helping us to empathize,
Paradise is what you feel
And what you feel is all that's real.

The End of Me

I can feel the end of me
I will never find life's key
(But) I don't want your sympathy
(She said) I can feel the end of me.

I see darkness in the sky
I have lost my will to try
(She said) I no longer can say why
(But) I see darkness in the sky.

(I said) Please come with me
See what we can see
Please come with me
Feel what we can be.

I just feel that all is vain
Sunny days look like the freezing rain

(She said) I can't bear this kind of pain
I just feel that all's in vain.

(I said) Please come with me
See what we can see
Please come with me
Feel what we can be.

Plum blossoms are bursting open now,
White-eyed birds are sucking at the source,
Cherry petals soon will paint the sky,
The *yashio* will give us reasons why,
Red-tipped leaves will glisten like the stars,
It's bound to give your closed-up heart a jar,
Open it, pump in that mountain air,
Then you'll see it's not all so unfair.
You can find so much happiness—
Just open—your heart.
You can find so much happiness—
Just light up—your heart.
You can find so much happiness—
Just live with—your heart.

雪が歩きやすい

Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo aruku
Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo walk with me.

Red coat *jizo* looking good

Welcomes us to the neighborhood
Makes us want to beat the curse
Become one with the universe.

Boots kick snow up from the land
Makes me want to take your hand
Snow blows off of Fuji-kun
Makes me want to kiss you soon.

Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo aruku
Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo walk with me.

Cedar trees and *yashio*
Tell us where we need to go
Fighting, feuding have their say
But cannot end our magic day.

High school hikers make the climb
Up step up step feel sublime
Cars keys lost who gives a damn
I know just right where I am.

Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo aruku
Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo walk with me.

Snow-capped mountains, rosy sea
They tell me what you mean to me
Winter branches reach for spring
They are saying everything

Blue sky sunshine all above
Makes me really feel my love
Diamond snow is all aglow
What else do you need to know?

Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo aruku
Yuki ga arukiyasui
Yuki wo walk with me.

Persimmon Dreams

Babies born
People scorn
Emotions worn
Hearts all torn.

Something sought
Too much bought
Bad wars fought
Nerves all fraught.

Countless tribes
Racist vibes
Booze imbibed
Alibies.

I feel the love
Coming through the blue
Uh-huh
I feel the warm

Glow of the orange
Uh-huh.

Learn by rote
Sinking boat
Too remote
Scared to vote.

What's your share?
Is it fair?
Do you care?
Do you dare?

Ideas bake
All at stake
See what's fake
Catch no break.

I feel the love
Coming through the blue
Uh-huh
I feel the warm
Glow of the orange
Uh-huh.

Hard to steer
Tough veneer
Who's sincere?
Why this fear?

Hard to hold
What's been sold?
Who was told?

Awful cold.

Thoughts in reams
Busted seams
Vanquished dreams
Unheard screams.

I feel the love
Coming through the blue
Uh-huh
I feel the warm
Glow of the orange
Uh-huh.

I ... I ... I I'm having persimmon dreams.
I ... I ... I I'm having persimmon dreams.
I ... I ... I I'm having persimmon dreams.

I'm Just a Weed

If it suits you fine
If you really don't mind
Please let me be
I'm just a weed.
Yeah, I'm just a weed.
Uh-huh, I'm just a weed
Not taking much ground
Not making much sound
My throat's getting dry—
I hope I don't die.

Oh man, don't you feel so sorry for weeds
Chased by religion, violence, and poverty
Blown by winds and driven by rain—
Sometimes you see one hopping a train.
A seed tip manages to nestle in soil
For a couple of weeks he's feeling blue royal
But then the man with the weedwhacker comes
Whacks off his head like he's one of the bums.

If it suits you fine
If you really don't mind
Please let me be
I'm just a weed.
Yeah, I'm just a weed.
Uh-huh, I'm just a weed
Not staking much ground
Not making much sound
My throat's getting dry—
I hope I don't die.

I once knew a girl named Harujion
I loved her pink color, loved that skin tone
Her heart and smile like a brilliant sun
Her shiny silk hair in the breeze such fun.
But then she broke my heart when she said
That soon at the latest all her friends would be dead
Some pulled up and stuffed in the trash
Some coldheartedly smothered with gas
Some shipped into space to fill black holes
Some blown away in a swirling dust bowl.
She said I know I'm as sweet as any flower
Got the bees and the June bugs in my power
I'm a daisy, I lied, just my hair a bit thinner

If you leave me be I'll be gone by winter.
But that man didn't mind if I thought him a sinner
He said by tomorrow I'd be burnt to a cinder.

If it suits you fine
If you really don't mind
Please let me be
I'm just a weed.
Yeah, I'm just a weed.
Uh-huh, I'm just a weed
Not staking much ground
Not making much sound
My throat's getting dry—
I hope I don't die.

My great grandfather was a dandy fellow
At peace with all, extremely mellow,
He loved the mountains and rivers and sea
And all the rest that loved to be free.
But then the fescue lawns crowded in
And his dandelion folks began to grow thin.
A single blade of grass got up in his face
Said to be honest I don't care for your race
So unless you've got affidavits and deeds
A team of lawyers, an irrefutable creed,
Or you get together a big stack of wampum
The fescue cavalry will come in and stomp you.
'Cause this land you're on is a fat loose tuna
And it's up to us to finally harpoon her.
My great grandfather didn't have much loot
So he strapped all still living into white parachutes.

If it suits you fine

If you really don't mind
Please let me be
I'm just a weed.
Yeah, I'm just a weed.
Uh-huh, I'm just a weed
Not staking much ground
Not making much sound
My throat's getting dry—
I hope I don't die.

So now that's what we do all the time
We ride air currents and we climb and climb.
We look for a bit of space that can be our castle
Where we can have quiet, and not any hassle.
And let me tell you what makes me so mad
It's the basic fact that we ain't so bad.
We dandelions are an ethical breed
There's really no need to call us a weed.
Potassium, calcium, Vitamins A, B, and C,
That's the kind of stuff that fills up me.
I make the soil around me soft and clean
So nobody needs to treat me so mean.
But it's a beautiful day in early May
And I see the root remover coming our way—
He's going to rip us out and leave us dry
And all I can ask is "Why, oh why?"
I can feel his metal squeezing my ears
And now I'm knowing the worst of my fears—
Oh, god, why did you have to do this to me?
Why, oh, why, couldn't you just let me be?!

If it suits you fine
If you really don't mind

Please let me be
I'm just a weed.
Yeah, I'm just a weed.
Uh-huh, I'm just a weed
Not staking much ground
Not making much sound
My throat's getting dry—
I hope I don't die.
I'm just a weed.
I'm just a weed.
I'm just a weed.
I'm just a weed.

All Around You

If you have the time
To come along with me
The will to climb
To where you can see
If you have the mind
To set yourself free
You might feel sublime
Know your reality . . .

. . . all around you.
Yeah, it's all around you.

Would you dare to press
Your bare feet to mine?
Did you hear the moss confess
That we too are divine?

Can you recognize
A fallen leaf's equal worth?
Can you fill your eyes
With this lovely Mother Earth?

. . . all around you
Yeah, she's all around you.

Have you surely surmised
No need to kill the moon?
Fully realized
The sun won't die so soon?
Have you learned to prize
A shadow on a leaf?
Not to be chastised
By some commander-in-chief?

. . . they're all around you
Yeah, they're all around you.

Have you heard them say
That we're dumber than the dead?
And have you heard them pray
For God to put them at the head?
And have you heard them laugh
At your unwillingness to fight?
The way they speak on your behalf
Keeps you wondering through the night.

. . . they're all around you
Yeah, they're all around you.

When we look around

Do we see non-duality?
When we walk this ground
Feel it caressing all these trees?
Scrambling up this slope
Striding toward the sky,
Do we know a tree limb's hope
Don't need to ask it why?
This infinite energy—
It's what we really are.
And oh, how amazingly,
You exploded from a star!

. . . now you are all around you.
Yeah, you are all around you.
Oh, yes, you are all around you.

* * *

俺は雑草

もしよかったら
もしほんとうに構わなかったら
どうか生かしておくれ
俺は雑草
そう、俺はただの雑草
そうとも、ただの雑草なんだ
そんなに場所もとらない
そんなにうるさくもない
のどがかわいてきたな——
死にたくないな

なあ、ずいぶん哀れだと思わないか 雑草たちのこと
宗教、暴力、貧困に追っかけられて
風に吹かれて、雨に打たれて
なかには勝手に列車に飛び乗るやつもいたりして
なんとか端っこを土に埋めた種は
数週間は上機嫌
ところが草刈り機をもった野郎がやってきて
そいつの頭をぶったぎっちゃった 乞食みたいに

もしよかったら
もしほんとうに構わなかったら
どうか生かしておくれ
俺は雑草
そう、俺はただの雑草
そうとも、ただの雑草なんだ
そんなに場所もとらない
そんなにうるさくもない
のどがかわいてきたな——
死にたくないな

ハルジオンって娘がいた
俺は好きだった あの娘のピンク色、あの肌の色が
輝く太陽みたいな心と微笑み
微風にふかれてきらめくシルクの髪の愉快だったこと
ところがその娘がこう言ったんで俺はがっかりしちまった
どうしたってすぐにあたしのともだちはみんな死んじゃうのよ
摘みとられたりゴミ箱に押しこめられたり
情け容赦なくガスで窒息させられたり
ブラックホールを埋めるために宇宙へと出荷されたり
砂嵐の渦にまきこまれたりして
そしてこう言った あたしはすてき、どんな花にも負けない
ミツバチもコガネムシもあたしのとりこ
あたしはデイジーよ、嘘ついてたの、ちょっと髪の毛が細いだけ

もしあんたがいなくなったら冬には枯れちゃうわ
でもあいつったら罪人だと思われようとお構いなし
明日までに焼いて炭にしてやるってあたしに言ったのよ

もしよかったら
もしほんとうに構わなかったら
どうか生かしておくれ
俺は雑草
そう、俺はただの雑草
そうとも、ただの雑草なんだ
そんなに場所もとらない
そんなにうるさくもない
のどがかわいてきたな——
死にたくないな

俺の曾祖父はダンディーだった
みなと仲がよく、すごく感じのいい男で
山や川や海を愛し
自由を愛する他のみんなのことを愛した
ところが芝生の連中が押しよせてきたので
曾祖父の仲間のタンポポたちはやつれだした
芝生の草の一本は曾祖父に顔を近づけるとこう言った
正直言ってきさまの仲間なんざどうだっていい
だからきさまが宣誓供述書とか証書とか
弁護士団とかケチのつけようのない綱領を用意するか
大金をかき集めでもしない限りは
芝生の騎兵隊がやってきてきさまを踏んづけるぜ
なにしろきさまがいるこの土地は太ったはなれマグロ*だし
銚でしとめるのは俺たちの勝手なんだからな
曾祖父にはろくな財産がなかったんで
まだ息のある仲間をみな白い落下傘に結わえてやった

もしよかったら

もしほんとうに構わなかったら
どうか生かしておくれ
俺は雑草
そう、俺はただの雑草
そうとも、ただの雑草なんだ
そんなに場所もとらない
そんなにうるさくもない
のどがかわいてきたな——
死にたくないな

そんなわけで今じゃ俺たちやずっとそんな暮らしを続けてる
空気のながれにのり のぼりつづけ
俺たちの城になるほんのちょっとした場所を探してる
しずかな 争いのない場所を。
それから言わせてもらおう ずいぶん頭にくるからな
そもそも俺たちやそんなに悪者じゃない
俺たちタンポポは清くただしい種族だ
雑草よばわりされる筋あいはない
カリウムにカルシウムにビタミンAとBとC
そんなものが俺のなかにつまってる
自分のまわりの土だってやわらかくきれいにする
だからだれにもつれなくされる筋あいはない
なのに五月頭の晴れた日に
草刈り機がこっちにやってくるのが見えるぞ
奴は俺たちを根こそぎにして干からびるにまかせる気だ
ところが俺が言えるのはただ「なぜ、ああ、なぜなんだ？」だけ
奴の金具が俺の耳をくすぐるのがわかる
そしていま俺は最悪の恐怖と出くわすところ
ああ、神様、なぜ私めをこのような目に？
なぜ、ああ、なぜせめて生かしてくだらないのですか?!

もしよかったら
もしほんとうに構わなかったら

どうか生かしておくれ
俺は雑草
そう、俺はただの雑草
そうとも、ただの雑草なんだ
そんなに場所もとらない
そんなにうるさくもない
のどがかわいてきたな——
死にたくないな
俺はただの雑草
俺はただの雑草
俺はただの雑草
俺はただの雑草

注

* 「はなれマグロ」(loose tuna) はハーマン・メルヴィル作『白鯨』(1851年)中の表現のもじり。詳しくは同書の第89章「しとめ鯨とはなれ鯨」(Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish)を参照。(日本語訳：山内功一郎)