

# THE QUARRY

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**NIKKI**

18th April, 2014

## **Church**

I went to church on Good Friday. A man standing by the lectern preached about the importance of choice in our lives. Then, we sang a hymn. Every single believer but me sang pretty well.

The preacher said, 'Anyone interested, please come over here.' The believers flooded to the lectern. They were asked to choose either a black bean or a white bean. Some took a black bean in a transparent plastic cup. Others took a white bean in an opaque plastic cup.

After having completed the countdown of three-two-one, they swallowed their own beans hastily.

At that moment, the floor underneath the believers who swallowed white beans cracked open and they fell into a deep pit. Those who chose black beans seemed to be relieved and returned to their seats contentedly. The preacher said, 'You see? This is the importance of choice in our lives!'

Just before leaving the church, I looked into one of the deep pits by the lectern and heard a voice:

‘I should’ve chosen a black bean.’

28th April, 2014

### **No Woman No Cry**

I saw a woman weeping in the train. Her face was reddish and slightly swollen with alcohol. Then her phone rang. While she was talking she only said, ‘Why?’ Hanging up, she started sobbing again. She cried like an animal. She opened the window, and threw the phone to the outside of the train.

The phone pinged, and was run over and killed. The louder she cried, the more brilliantly her tears dropped on her light-blue dress, and shone.

Finally, her body was completely covered with her tears. They looked scaly. She had become a large fish. After flopping on the seat several times, she leaped through the window and dived into the water under the Harbour Bridge. She left behind her tears, which were as hot as melted iron.

11th May, 2014

### **Mother’s Day**

From the bus, I saw a woman in the cemetery. She was polishing a tombstone, kneeling down on the ground. She was the only one in the cemetery. The tombstone was shining like a gray gem while other graves were deserted, or broken.

I arrived at the Shopping Centre. There was a huge arch of pink balloons and flowers for Mother’s Day. There were a lot of people carrying flowers in their arms. The petals of chrysanthemums in their arms were rigid as soldiers. I bought eggs and milk, and left, wondering how cruel Australians were, since chrysanthemums are only used in funerals in Japan.

On the way home, the bus passed by the cemetery again. Nobody was there, but a fresh bunch of flowers were left in front of the shining tombstone. The flowers were swaying like a giggling child, blown in the wind. I wondered how many mothers were

lying in the cemetery. Then I remembered my own mother, Nanohana, who was named for a flower that blooms in spring, and was proud of that.

29th May, 2014

### **A Shovel**

I happened to find a shovel at a museum shop, which was heavy and reminded me of my childhood. When I was a child, I was afraid of shovels. Every spring, without any good reason, the heavy lumps of iron were given to us, and we were forced to plant sweet potato seedlings. We dug, until the teacher told us to stop. The teacher said, 'We'll harvest in the autumn,' although none of us asked when to harvest. I didn't really want to harvest, because I knew I would have plenty of food in autumn even without sweet potatoes. I would rather have washed my hands as soon as possible, and have run away from the garden named after the manga character in which I was least interested. The hole I made looked like a grave for me. I didn't like adults or children.

A museum attendant asked me if I would be interested in gardening. I smiled, looked at the shovel with a floral pattern and then asked her if I could make a grave with it. The staff was appalled and stepped back, but assured me, 'If you want.'

30th June, 2014

### **An Over-Familiar Possum**

I went to a swimming pool in the city. My goal was to be able to swim fifty metres. I managed to swim forty-five metres today. I am almost there. However, as I forgot to bring my goggles, my eyes became bloodshot and everything I saw became hazy. Even after I had left the sports centre, I couldn't see things clearly.

Later, I went to a Turkish restaurant. The restaurant was filled with smoke. Rubbing my eyes, I ordered a kebab. A waiter asked if I needed a regular salad. I couldn't read the menu but could only see his white teeth shining dimly. I left the restaurant, groping for a beacon outside.

The street lights were the strangest. I could see a dim ring around the light. It looked like a halo, and I regretted that I went to the church frequently these days despite the fact I was a Buddhist.

Walking at a snail's pace to the station, I passed through Hyde Park. There was an extraordinarily huge possum. The possum looked at me as a beggar. I remembered that I had a Tim Tam and opened my bag. However, because of haziness, I couldn't find it. The possum seemed to be really irritated. Finally, I found a Tim Tam and threw it to the possum. However, the possum rejected it and said, 'Mate, can I have a durr?' Then I finally found that it wasn't a huge possum but a homeless person. I apologised to him and scurried back to my home.

13th July, 2014

### **An Accidental Indian Dance Instructor**

As I make it a rule to write outside on a sunny day, I went to a park. When I was sitting on the bench and writing, I could see two girls dancing an Indian dance. One of them was Indian and another girl was Chinese. They seemed to be practicing for a performance. The Indian girl was teaching the Chinese girl. As they had danced for more than an hour in front of me, I realised that the Indian dance consisted of four patterns.

1. Make a loop with fingers
2. Bend knees
3. Shake hips
4. Tilt neck.

The Indian girl (I named her 'A') did two-four-three-one-three-four-four-two, while the Chinese girl (I named her 'B') did two-four-one-three-one-four-three-one. 'A' did two-four-three-one-three-four-four-two again, but 'B' did two-four-two-three-one-four-four-one. 'A' did two while 'B' did four. When 'B' did three, 'A' did four.

A: three-one-three-four-two-one-three-three-two-one-*four*.

B: three-one-three-four-two-one-three-three-two-one-*one*.

So close!

Then a strong wind blew my papers away. 'B' kindly picked them up, looked at the B4 sized papers on which numbers from one to four were scribbled and tilted her neck.

That's it!

14th August, 2014

## **Lost**

I took a wrong train. It was a night train to go to Melbourne. I had plenty of time and didn't have anything to do but sleep. My face reflected in the window was as black as a portrait drawn in Indian ink. It wasn't easy to sleep.

I looked at an obese man sitting on the other side of my seat. He had been talking to himself, while looking at his computer screen, 'Crap...Crap...Crap...' I looked into the screen and found he was watching a film. It was a film of his own life.

He was a child who was lovely, smart and vulnerable. He could get high marks in any subject, but wasn't good at playing any sports. One day, he was chosen as a rugby team member by lots. It was obvious he was the poorest in the team. He didn't practice and was absent on the day of the rugby match, because he didn't want to show his poor rugby playing. Next day, nobody blamed him, but he blamed himself. He reckoned himself a loser. He graduated from school and got a job in a construction company, but soon quit. He stayed indoors and kept on eating. He believed he was always starving despite his body swelling like a balloon.

He clicked a rewind button and started watching the film again, murmuring, 'Crap... Crap... Crap...' Then, our eyes met. He said, 'What are you looking at?'

After an awkward pause, I said, 'I'm lost.' He said, 'So am I.'

15th September, 2014

### **This Is No Longer A Bus Stop**

When I got to the bus stop, there was a sign. It said this was no longer a bus stop due to the changed road conditions. I found an aged couple sitting on the bench. I said this was no longer a bus stop. They looked at each other, laughed and said that was why they were waiting here. Again, I said this was no longer a bus stop and therefore the bus wouldn't come no matter how long you would wait. The husband studied me and then whispered something into his wife's ear. His wife slightly nodded and opened her bag. She fumbled her red enamel bag and took out a piece of a yellowish paper.

It was a timetable. However, I couldn't read it because there were so many small holes in the paper. Again, I said the bus wouldn't come, folding the paper. They burst into laughter. I was disgusted with them and started walking. After a while, however, I felt sorry for the couple. Both of them must be suffering from dementia.

After having walked for a couple of minutes, however, I heard a thundering sound. Looking back, I could see the bus stop flying across the sky, like a skyrocket. The couple in the rocket-like bus stop waved to me with big grins. Then, I realised they had been waiting for the moment the bus stop would no longer be a bus stop, literally.

16th October, 2014

### **Arsonist**

She called me and said she wouldn't be able to talk for more than ten minutes because she was now imprisoned. I was really surprised because she was my best friend and was unlikely to commit a crime. I asked what she had done. She said she set the woods on fire, which wasn't intentional. I suggested that she should have claimed that she was innocent. She said she couldn't because it was true that she had set fire to a palm tree in the woods. I asked her why she had set the fire on the palm

tree. She answered she was falling in love with the tree and couldn't forgive it for reaching its branch to another palm tree. She confessed that she was about to lose her marbles whenever the palm tree quivered its leaves in a blowing wind. When she was about to say something, the telephone was disconnected. I wondered if she had already become crazy.

Afterwards, I told this creepy story to my partner. 'It's crazy to fall in love with a palm tree, isn't it?'

My partner, a eucalyptus, didn't say anything as usual. I hugged him tightly, closed my eyes and then enjoyed his clean scent.

4th November, 2014

### **Coy Carp**

There lives a coy carp in the Shinobazu pond within Ueno Park in Tokyo. No one has seen it swimming. Hidden under waterweed, seemingly, it keeps still. It has a hobby, though.

The coy carp is into Twitter now:

#Shinobazu Pond

Water is lukewarm.

#Shinobazu Pond

Am afraid of Dengue fever.

#Shinobazu Pond

I wanna go to the beach someday.

There lives a coy carp in the Shinobazu pond within Ueno Park in Tokyo. No one has seen it swimming. Hidden under waterweed, seemingly, it keeps still. It is an ambitious carp, actually.

16th December, 2014

### **Wednesday, the Day of Loneliness**

Mr Sato our boss is now often absent on Wednesday. It's quite okay because he is just taking his paid leaves. He's within his rights.

One day, one of my colleagues, however, told me Mr Sato's secret in a cafeteria at the company.

She said in a low voice, 'A friend of mine saw Mr Sato in a park on Wednesday.'

After looking around carefully, she added, 'He was on a swing there. *Alone.*'

I didn't know if I should laugh in the moment like this. I just imagined a middle-aged man sitting on a swing by himself.

I thought it would be the ultimate loneliness.

6th January, 2015

### **Beer & Beach**

Mum would tell me when I was a child that life originated on the bottom of the ocean. Then I wondered if we would ascend into the sky like balloons when we died.

I had a friend called Jim. When I first met him, we were final-year students at the university. He was the kindest man I had ever met. We would often go to the beach on Sunday. Jim would tell me the names of birds floating in the clear sky. I would talk with him about my dream of becoming a poet. He would never laugh at my callowness. It may be just because both of us were intoxicated throughout the summer, though.



'I must be strong to be a poet,' I said.

'Poets must be vulnerable,' Jim said.

After we got drunk, we would exhaust ourselves swimming at the beach.

When the summer was over, Jim left the town in order to get a job in a city on the east coast. On the day he left, we promised to meet again. I haven't seen him since then.

Some years later, I really became a poet.

Jim became an ornithologist, I heard, and died of lung cancer at twenty-seven.

I have forgotten his gentle voice, sunburnt skin and coy smile. We didn't take any pictures in that summer. All I can remember now is the taste of bitter tides, and that we did believe we were immortal while we drank beer on the beach.