

Waking up in the morning is always interesting. It reminds me of when we're playing hide-and-seek—I'm hidden crouching in the pitch-dark closet and suddenly Deko throws open the sliding door, sunlight pouring in as she shouts, "Found you!"—that dazzling glare followed by an awkward pause, and then, my heart pounding as I adjust the front of my kimono and emerge from the closet, I'm slightly self-conscious and then suddenly irritated and annoyed—it feels similar, but no, not quite like that, somehow even more unbearable. Sort of like opening a box, only to find another box inside, so you open that smaller box and again there's another box inside, and you open it, and one after another there are smaller boxes inside each other, so you keep opening them, seven or eight of them, until finally what's left is a tiny box the size of a small die, so you gently pry it open to find... nothing, it's empty—more like

that feeling. Anyway, it's a lie when they say your eyes just blink awake. Bleary and cloudy, then as the starch gradually settles to the bottom and the skim rises to the top, at last my eyes wearily open. Mornings seem forced to me. So much sadness rises up, I can't bear it. I hate it, I really do. I'm an awful sight in the morning. My legs feel so exhausted that, already, I don't want to do a thing. I wonder if it's because I don't sleep well. It's a lie when they say you feel healthy in the morning. Mornings are grey. Always the same. Absolutely empty. Lying in bed each morning, I'm always so pessimistic. It's awful, really. All kinds of terrible regrets converge at once in my mind, and my heart stops up as I writhe in agony.

Mornings are torture.

"Father," I tried calling out softly. Feeling strangely embarrassed and happy, I got up and hastily folded up

my bedding. As I hoisted it, I was startled to hear myself exclaim, Alley-oop! I have never thought that I was the kind of girl who would utter such an unrefined expression as “Alley-oop.” It seems like the kind of thing an old lady would shout—“Alley-oop!” It’s disgusting. Why would I have said such a thing? It’s as if there were an old lady somewhere inside of me, and it makes me sick. I’ll have to be careful from now on. I became deeply depressed then, like the time I was repelled by a stranger’s uncouth gait only to realize I was walking in exactly the same manner.

I never have any confidence in the mornings.

I sat in front of the dressing mirror in my night-clothes. Peering at myself in the mirror without my glasses, my face looked sort of blurry and moist. My glasses are the thing I hate most about my face, but there are certain good things about glasses that other people might not un-

derstand. I like to take my glasses off and look out into the distance. Everything goes hazy, as in a dream, or like a zoetrope—it's wonderful. I can't see anything that's dirty. Only big things—vivid intense colors and light are all that enters my vision. I also like to take my glasses off and look at people. The faces around me, all of them, seem kind and pretty and smiling. What's more, when my glasses are off, I don't ever think about arguing with anyone at all, nor do I feel the need to make snide remarks. All I do is just blankly stare in silence. During those moments, thinking that I must look like a nice young miss to everyone else, I don't worry about the gawking, I just want to bask in their attention, and I feel really and truly mellow.

But actually glasses are the worst. Any sense of your face disappears when you put them on. Glasses obstruct whatever emotions that might appear on your face—

passion, grace, fury, weakness, innocence, sorrow. And it's curious how it becomes impossible to try to communicate with your eyes.

Glasses are like a ghost.

The reason I hate glasses so much is because I think the beauty of your eyes is the best thing about people. Even if they can't see your nose or if your mouth is hidden, I think that all you need are eyes—the kind of eyes that will inspire others, when they are looking into them, to live more beautifully. My eyes are just big saucers, nothing more to them. When I look closely at them in the mirror, it's disappointing. Even my mother says I have unremarkable eyes. You might say that there is no light in them. They're like lumps of charcoal—it's that unfortunate. See what I mean? It's dreadful. When I see them in the mirror—every time—I think to myself, I wish I had

nice eyes that sparkled softly. Eyes like a deep blue lake, or eyes that look as if they reflect the big sky that you might look up at while lying in a lush green meadow, with clouds floating by every so often. You might even see the shadow of birds in them. I hope I meet lots of people with lovely eyes.

Today is May, I reminded myself, and my mood seemed to lighten a bit. In fact, I felt happy. Soon it would be summer. As I went out into the garden I noticed strawberry flowers. The reality of Father's death felt strange to me. That he had died—passed away—seemed impossible to understand. I couldn't wrap my head around it. I missed my older sister, or people I used to be friends with, or people I hadn't seen in a long time. I cannot stand mornings because it seems I am always bleakly reminded of long-gone times, and people I used to know, and their presences

feel eerily close, like the scent of pickled radish that you just can't get rid of.

The two dogs Jappy and Poo (we call him Poo because he is such a poor little thing) came running over. I had them both sit in front of me, but I only petted Jappy. Jappy's pale fur gleamed. Poo was dirty. As I was petting Jappy, I was perfectly aware of Poo next to him, who looked like he was about to start whining. I was also aware that Poo was crippled. I hate how sad Poo is. I can't stand how poor and pathetic he is, and because of that I am cruel to him. Poo looks like a stray dog, so there is no telling when he might get nabbed and killed. With his leg like that, he would be too slow to run away. Hurry, Poo, go on up into the mountains! No one's going to take care of you, so you may as well die. I'm the kind of girl who will say or do unspeakable things, not just to Poo, but to anyone. I annoy

and provoke people. I really am a horrid girl. Sitting down on the veranda while I rubbed Jappy's head, I gazed at the eye-drenching green of the leaves and had a pathetic urge to sit directly on the ground.

I felt like trying to cry. I held my breath for a good while, in order to make my eyes bloodshot, and I thought I might be able to squeeze out a tear, but it was no good. Maybe I've turned into an impassive girl.

I gave up and started cleaning the house. While I cleaned, I happened to be singing a song from the movie, "Tojin Okichi." I felt like I ought to look around. How amusing that I, who normally was wild about Mozart and Bach, would unconsciously break out into a song from "Tojin Okichi." If I go on saying "Alley-oop" when I hoist the bedding or singing "Tojin Okichi" as I'm cleaning, there'll be no hope left for me. At this rate, I fear what



crude things I might utter in my sleep. Still, there was something odd about it, and I rested the broom in my hand and smiled to myself.

I changed into the underclothes I had finished sewing yesterday. I had embroidered little white roses on the bodice. You couldn't see this embroidery when I put on the rest of my clothes. No one knew it was there. How brilliant.

Mother, who was very busy arranging someone's marriage, had gone out early this morning. Ever since I was little, Mother had devoted herself to other people, so I was used to it by now, but it really was amazing how she was constantly in motion. She impressed me. Father had done nothing but study, so it fell to Mother to take up his part. Father was far removed from things like social interactions, but Mother really knew how to surround herself

with lovely people. The two of them seemed an unlikely pairing, but there had been a mutual respect between them. People must have often said about them, What a handsome and untroubled couple, without any unattractive qualities. Oh, I'm so cheeky.

While the miso soup was warming up, I sat in the doorway of the kitchen and stared idly at the copse of trees out front. At that moment, I had the odd sensation that I had been staring like this for a very long time, and would be staring from now on, just like this, sitting here in the doorway to the kitchen, in the same pose, thinking the same thing, looking at the trees out front. It felt as if the past, the present, and the future had collapsed into one single instant. Such things happen to me from time to time. I'd be sitting there, talking to someone. My gaze would wander to a corner of the table and affix itself there,

unmoving. Only my mouth would move. At times like these, a strange hallucination always occurs. I would feel absolutely certain that, at some point before, under these very conditions, I've had the same conversation while, in fact, staring at the corner of the table and that what was happening now would continue to go on indefinitely, in exactly the same manner. Whenever I walk along a country path, no matter how remote it is, I always feel that I have undoubtedly been on the same path before. Whenever I walk along and pluck soybean leaves at the path's edge, I always think that I have surely been on this same path and plucked these leaves before. And I believe that, from then on, over and over again, I will walk along this path, and pull soybean leaves from the exact same spots. Again, these kinds of things happen to me. Sometimes, I'd be soaking in the bath and suddenly glimpse my hand. Then,

I would become convinced that however many years from now, while soaking in the bath, I will be transported to this moment when a random glance at my hand turned into a stare, and I will remember how it made me feel. These thoughts always make me rather gloomy. And once when I was putting rice into an ohitsu serving bowl, I was struck by—well, it would be an exaggeration to call it inspiration but I felt something charging within my body—zipping through me like, how shall I say, I would almost call it a philosophical glimpse—and I gave myself over to it, then my head and my chest became transparent all the way through as a sense of my own existence floated down and settled over me and, silently, without making a sound, as pliant as tokoroten before you make them into noodles, I felt at the mercy of these waves, a light and beautiful feeling that I would be able to live on this way. Now, this

wasn't a philosophical commotion. But it was frightening, rather, this premonition of living like a kleptomaniac cat, stealthily and quietly, and couldn't lead to any good. To go on like that for any length of time, it seems, you would end up like you're possessed. Like Jesus Christ. But the idea of a female Jesus Christ seems appalling.

Ultimately though—since I'm just idle most of the time, and I really don't have any troubles to worry about—I wonder if I am just desensitized to the hundreds if not thousands of things I see and hear everyday, and in my bewilderment, those things end up assailing me like floating ghosts, one after another.

I sat down to eat breakfast by myself in the dining room. I had cucumbers for the first time this year. Summer seems to come from a cucumber's greenness. The green of a May cucumber has a sadness like an empty

heart, an aching, ticklish sadness. When I'm eating alone in the dining room, I get this wild urge to travel. I want to get on a train. I opened the newspaper. There was a photo of that actor Jushiro Konoe. I wondered if he was a good guy. I decided I didn't like his face. Something about his forehead. My favorite things in the newspaper are the advertisements for books. It must cost one or two hundred yen for each character on each line, so whoever writes them are all trying their best. Each character, each phrase must generate the most possible impact, so these wonderfully wrought sentences groan with pain. Such expensive words must be pretty rare in the world. There's something I like about this. It's thrilling.

I finished eating, locked up the house, and headed for school. All right, there's no rain, I thought to myself, but anyway I wanted to walk along with the nice umbrella