

First Place Winner in the 1986 D.K. Brown Fiction Contest

WHEN THE RAINS COME DOWN THE RIVER

By Stewart Shelline

Nineteen forty was the year of vanishings: Nobuyuki, his only son, into the wartime silence of Manchuria; Reiko, his wife, into the fire that swept through the munitions plant in Akashi. That was the year Taiji closed the doors of the mud-walled house the three of them had shared and made his way to Karafuto, the island of his ancestors, where he hoped to find work in the coal fields near Esutoru and consolation in the work.

Lying awake nights in the six-mat room he rented from a cabinet maker, Taiji thought often of his son, his boy who chased dragonflies among the tall grass that grew along the banks of the river near the mud-walled home they had all left behind. His Nobuyuki, who floated driftwood out on the water, who used a bamboo shoot to free his boats from among the reeds, who followed his boats some days to the ocean and let them go out upon the waves. And he thought of Reiko, the shadow of his son, ever hovering near with her box of rice paper and scissors and glue. Reiko and Nobuyuki made kites every March; the three of them would spend the afternoons then in the park or on the paths between rice fields, three figures staring up to a fragile, tugging tuft against the sky. Some days, when Nobuyuki was young, Taiji would hold the string and wonder if the kite were not holding him. Some days he had thoughts of holding Reiko and Nobuyuki tightly in his arms and letting the distant kite pull them all up with it into the sky.

Reiko had laughed when he told her this. Nobuyuki had asked if the string wouldn't break.

Nobuyuki had been seventeen when the Imperial Army conscripted him. Taiji and Reiko were not communists but they had not supported the generals. They did not look to Manchuria or the Dutch East Indies or to anything but the fields. They planted the rice paddies at the end of May as they did every year, wore their wide straw hats beneath the sun as they hunched over to press the tender rice shoots into the flooded fields. Some morn-

ings, before they went to the fields to work, they assembled with the other parents on the parade ground at the school where Nobuyuki went. They would raise their arms and shout to the framed portrait of the Emperor. Soldiers with red bands and tight visored caps stood on either side of the portrait, the actions of their automatic rifles reflecting the morning sun. Taiji remembered working hard in the fields after those mornings to rid his mouth of the bitter taste left by the soldiers. He believed the Emperor but he did not believe the generals.

Taiji and Reiko had nothing to say about Nobuyuki's conscription. They were pleased, however, that he had not volunteered: many sons of the farmers who worked the fields above Akashi had volunteered. So when the fall of nineteen thirty-nine came Nobuyuki helped his parents harvest the rice and then when the letter came he packed his things. He did not show emotion when the letter arrived, nor in the days that followed. Taiji was proud of his son for that. They went with him to the National Railway station in Akashi and saw him off there. Reiko did not weep as the train closed its doors on the figure of her son. Quiet, she followed the train's fading outline with her eyes until it disappeared, closed her eyes for a moment, then followed Taiji back to their home in the fields. They did not hear from him for weeks and then there was a letter postmarked Tokyo and then, for New Year's, a card from Mukden. Only these before winter.

In the winter Reiko rode past the munitions plant each afternoon on her way to and from the markets in town. She had a bike with a large wire basket in front that she filled with long white radishes and chinese cabbage shipped from Kyushu province. Sometimes there were eggs or chicken and she would bring these home to Taiji in the sagging mud cottage surrounded by black winter rice fields. She went with neighbor women and they chattered on their bikes for the three miles to the market in Nishi-shin Machi. The neighbor women talked about shortages of kerosene, about husbands and children, about the other women who lived among the clusters of homes scattered around the patchwork of fields that stretched back from the shore up into the foothills. If they talked about war at all it was to hear whose sons had died, whose had been wounded. Except for such times, the war was far away.

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They felt the earth tremble with the big explosion and they saw the dark plume of smoke on their way into the market. They stopped to look. The plant was large and extended away from them in one continuous angle of rusty, corrugated metal. A fence surrounded the plant and guards stood at the gate but when the explosion occurred at the far end of the complex the guards left their places at the gate. The women stopped their chattering and left their bikes near the corner of the building close to them and watched as the fire brigade rushed to and fro on the hard dirt of the compound. They watched as the black smoke pouring from the gaping hole in the wall and roof thinned and turned to bright orange flames. Other women on their way to market that afternoon also stopped but none of them knew what was happening when the men of the fire brigade dropped their hoses and ran.

One of the women said she heard a hiss and a rumble and then saw the building burst open like an orange when it is stepped on. Reiko was killed when the tall metal wall at the north end of the building billowed out and collapsed on her. A dozen workers and a fireman were killed when the fire swept through the building but Reiko was the only one of the neighbor women to die in the blaze and explosion.

That night, after he had been told of Reiko's death, Taiji knelt and placed a small bowl of rice before the god shelf and waited in the stillness of the house in the fields. After a while he lowered his head to the tatami and then rose sharply to his feet. He removed the bowl of rice from before the god shelf and walked quickly to the door and out into the fields. He scattered the rice into the darkness, then let a long, high wail from his throat.

There was no one to hear his cry and it died out somewhere in the blackness that hovered over the silent rice fields.

The next day he went to the munitions plant and found her bike beneath the rubble. The green paint had burned away and only a charred line around the rims told where the rubber tires had been. He could not find the basket. A guard chased him from the rubble. He left the bike there.

When spring came he did not go into the fields. He took what food he had and gave it to the family who lived closest to him. Nobuyuki had taken his own things when he left, so Taiji gathered Reiko's belongings—the combs and mirrors, the single, simple kimono, the box of rice paper and scissors and glue—and took them to this family and then went home and spent his last night in the home he had built for Reiko and enlarged for Nobuyuki. In the morning he arose and bathed. After he had eaten a bowl of cold rice he closed the door behind him.

By evening he was in Kobe.

By spring he was in Esutoru.

Taiji heard from his son only once in the five years on Karafuto. Nobuyuki wrote his first letter from a transport ship somewhere in the Pacific, so he could not give much detail about his regiment's plans. He still did not know about his mother because Taiji had not written him: in those five years his father had become gaunt and weak, not from the hard coal-mining work but from remembering Reiko's death: he could not console

himself. He expected to die soon and he did not know how to contact his son. And he believed Nobuyuki was near death.

As the war worsened Taiji's thoughts of death increased.

Near the end of the war he stopped eating altogether and had to be taken to the hospital in Maoka by a big Korean whom Taiji had worked alongside in the coal fields. He stayed there through the summer of 1945 and by the beginning of August he had improved enough to sip small bowls of miso soup.

He was awake when the snipers shot at the incoming Russian ships. He heard the sharp report of the rifles from his hospital room. Taiji and the others in the hospital had not been told of the Emperor's surrender nor of the Russian advance below the Fiftieth Parallel. The shots from the shoreline puzzled him but when the great guns from the warships began their bombardment he felt afraid and thought of Nobuyuki.

Taiji could smell the smoke from the fires started by the bombardment. He heard people running in the streets and shots being fired but he did not know what had happened.

He tried to rise from his bed but his legs were weak and he could only sit up. When the big Korean came into the room hours later Taiji shuddered: the Korean's eyes were wide with fear. He told Taiji about the Russian landing, about the peace envoys that had been sent to greet the invaders. With shaking shoulders he told of the murder of the envoys, how twice they had gone with white flags waving, how twice the Russians had cut the envoys down with rifle fire. The Korean said he had heard of many rapes and murders. He said he had seen the troops enter the building where the telephone equipment was kept, watched as the bodies of the seven telephone operators were pulled out and laid in the street. They were not pretty girls, he said, but the thin line of blood across each girl's throat made their white skin whiter. He had heard of other suicides, too.

The big Korean stayed with him all through that night and when the Russian troops came in the morning he was still there, asleep, slumped against the bare wall by the window.

Taiji and the big Korean were made prisoners of war and moved to Toyohara and then to Otomari. On the first of the new year 1946 they were moved across the Japan Sea from Otomari to a concentration camp in Siberia.

Weakened by his illness, his shoes taken by a guard, Taiji lost his feet in the middle of February to the harsh winter. He did not heal well after the surgery and in March was sent once again to the camp infirmary. Black sores of frostbite covered his shins and an infection from the first operation had spread almost to his groin. The doctors shook their heads when he was brought in the second time but it took only a few hours in the afternoon to remove the rest of the legs. Within a week Taiji was back with the rest of the prisoners in the compound.

The big Korean was with him all through that winter.

Some times he would carry Taiji outside and set him against the building. Tears would appear in Taiji's eyes then; often the big Korean would be afraid to move him at all. The stumps of Taiji's legs had not healed well and for weeks after the operation there were red and yellow flecks among the snow drifted softly against the walls of the wooden building where the big Korean gently set



him down.

By fall what was left of his legs had healed and he was sent with a group of other disabled prisoners to the submarine base at Maizuru. American soldiers greeted them there. They took them into a warehouse on the base and put goggles on them and sprayed them with DDT to kill the lice.

Taiji was in Akashi again before the leaves began to turn.

II

We had always wanted to talk to them but it wasn't until after the night on the bridge that we ever thought of it. We had been in the park all through the winter and never seen them and it wasn't until spring, when things began to pick up, that they started coming. They sat on a bench along the far shore where very few people walked and since we tried to stay where the people were we almost never walked over there. On our side of the lake there were more people but we were always aware of the two of them over on the other side whenever we passed the white boat dock where the couples came and rented the blue or yellow boats that took them out among the lily pads along the shore. We could see the white shirts of the two men quite well even when the cherry trees behind them kept them in the shade. The older one never moved of course but the younger one sometimes left the bench and knelt down just above the row of stones that rimmed the lake and kept the shore from washing away. He would kneel there sometimes for an hour or more, not throwing anything into the water or watching the ducks. There were orange carp and white carp in the lake but they move around quite a bit

so we decided he wasn't looking at the carp because he stayed in one place. It seemed like he wasn't looking at anything but we could not really say because we were on the other side of the lake and it was hard to see his eyes that far away. But he wouldn't move for an hour or so like that and we supposed that he was probably not looking at anything but just thinking. We used to think he was looking at us but the lake was too wide to know for certain.

We spent at least a part of every day there in the park until later after we had overworked it and began to see the same people. We became quite well known in the park after several months. We heard stories from time to time at the church about people who no longer went to the park because they were afraid of running into us but stories like that were never told to our faces so we didn't believe them. We were often at the train stations too but we never heard stories about anyone not using the stations because we were there. You hear stories about people doing this or that but you have to not think about people that way. You do your job and if they accept you, fine. And stories like we heard just didn't make sense—it was a large park and there was plenty of room for all of us. And we never forced anything down anyone's throat, either. We had a job to do and we did it the best we knew how and still we heard those stories. But the Japanese are suspicious anyways. However much you tell them differently they just go on believing what they will.

That was the year there was a very long winter and there was talk about the cherry blossoms freezing. It had not been an exceptionally cold winter although it had snowed twice. None of it stuck to the ground but it was the only snow either of us had seen since we had come to Japan. There were some mornings

when we left the apartment and saw water frozen in the sewer trenches along the road by the railroad tracks but we didn't think much of it because the winter was just long, not exceptionally cold. And by the first week of April we began to see the buds coming out on the trees in the park and we were able to leave our overcoats behind although we still wore sweaters in the mornings. We would have to take them off after we came back to the apartment for lunch and put them on again after we came home for dinner but I remember how free it felt not to have to wear the heavy overcoat and muffler and gloves.

I remember those first days of that spring because I felt free. But then in June we walked toward the other side of the lake and saw the two men come around the corner from the street and enter the park.

III

Nobuyuki came home the December after the armistice. The mud-walled house among the rice fields was still there but most of the rest of Akashi had been leveled by bombs and fires. The big Kawasaki plant west of town was destroyed; the munitions plant where his mother had died had been rebuilt and then bombed, rebuilt and bombed until it was finally abandoned late in the spring of nineteen forty-five.

Many of the farmers had left the fields the year before when the bombing became more frequent, so many of the fields had gone to weed. But the mud-walled home was still there although the bedding and paper-screen doors and even the god shelf was gone. The nearest neighbors were still there and it was from them that he learned of his mother's death and his father's journey to Karafuto.

The rains of five summers had melted the white lime layer protecting the mud of the walls. Exposed to the wind and rain and sun, the mud had dissolved and cracked in many places. There were holes near the entryway that let winter rays of sunlight onto the tatami, drying the mats. To save the tatami, Nobuyuki set out to patch these holes first. Then he patched and smoothed other weakened places in the walls and when spring came around he painted the patched places with lime.

That spring Nobuyuki heard the creak of a cart's rusty wheels and watched from the entryway of the house as the cart made its way up the narrow dirt path bordered by rice fields. He did not know the farmer but when he saw the form laid out in the back of the cart he knelt down and wept on the black hardened soil of the path. The farmer said nothing for a while, just stood on the path and held the handles of his cart. He had carried this load four days from Fukuchiyama and was tired.

Nobuyuki heard his name called from the back of the cart. He arose from the dirt and stood at the back of the cart and tried to look at the prone figure but could not.

When he heard his name called out again he knelt in the dirt once more.

"Nobu- . . ."

He could not answer. It was not his father. He had come to

think he had no father and now there was this figure in a cart. It wasn't that he had never seen legless men before. He had been in Okinawa when the invasion there began and he had seen them before, the legless, armless, handless, faceless bodies. But not of his father. . . .

"Nobu- . . ."

Nobuyuki rose from the earth and looked at the torso of his father. Taiji's borrowed khaki pants were tucked neatly up under the stubs of his legs. His eyes were steady like the surface of a still pond. As he looked at his son's bowed head, a ripple of pain spread across Taiji's face and closed his eyes.

"Carry me in."

Nobuyuki could not move but when he felt his knees bend again he straightened them and bowed his head and called out to the figure in the cart.

"Father."

The farmer held the cart level as Nobuyuki reached in and slid his hands underneath his father's arms and pulled Taiji to him. At the edge of the cart he turned his father around and reached behind him. He felt for his father's arms and lifted them up, slid his own strong arms beneath his father's and lifted the torso with his legs. Taiji's back and pelvis swung against Nobuyuki's as his body fell away from the cart. Nobuyuki remembered the long pole his mother had used to balance the buckets of water from the river on her shoulders as she carried them. He felt his father's arms, thin and weak, and remembered the time he had lifted the heavy crossbar and buckets as a boy. (His mother had laughed when he stumbled beneath the load.) There was silence as he carried the awkward weight of his father into the newly whitened mud-walled home. He propped his father against the wall on the sun-weakened tatami and then he went outside and wept to the silence of the fields.

The farmer watched Nobuyuki, then turned his cart around on the narrow path and went back toward town. It was the planting season and he had to be back in Fukuchiyama to start his rice crops.

After a while Nobuyuki entered the house and went into the kitchen and made two cups of strong green tea.

One by one over the years they sold the fields around the house. After MacArthur left, Nobuyuki took the money they had saved and built a small square room on the front of the house and bought shelves to hold the bread and packages of cookies and candy he bought from the dealer in Kobe. He hung brightly colored cloth over the doorway leading into the breadstore. He planted rice each year but only in the field next to the house; they were businessmen now. And they tried not to mind the houses going up in the fields where before they had waded in the rice with wide-brimmed straw hats, Nobuyuki, Taiji and Reiko.

The path eventually became a narrow paved lane along which uniformed-and-capped children laughed their way to and from the somber concrete elementary school. The children would stop at Nobuyuki's breadstore and buy melon-flavored bread and cream-center bread. Later years of children bought ice cream

from the red-and-white freezer Nobuyuki had purchased and set near the entrance. The children liked the ice cream bars with the sweetened condensed milk in the centers and Nobuyuki made sure the dealer from Kobe always brought plenty of them. This was long after the war, about the time they first saw the foreigners along the path.

Naiji saw them first. It was in the spring and he saw them from the chair where he smoked cigarettes and watched the children from the new houses. When the weather was good Nobuyuki would lift him by the arms, like a pack, and carry him from the house. Outside, near the sliding door that led into the breadstore, Nobuyuki had placed a chair. Here he would set his father in the morning. In the afternoons he would bring him in for cups of green tea and a rest. When his father awoke from his rest Nobuyuki would take him on his back again to the chair by the entrance and leave him there. For thirty years this had been a daily occurrence. At first Taiji had moved around in the house fairly well, pulling himself along the smooth tatami with his strong arms and hands. But age took his strength just as the winter in Siberia had taken his legs and now that he was seventy he could not move around the house. He had to be carried even to the bathroom. Nobuyuki did not like to do this but it was his father and he had no choice.

Taiji watched the foreigners as they came up the narrow lane, sentineled now on both sides by the white walls of the houses. They were walking their bicycles and the white short-sleeved shirts they wore hung limp from their shoulders.

It was in June, the monsoon season. It had not rained for more than a day but still the humidity hung in the air like smoke. Taiji's eyes did not waver. The foreigners smiled as they passed. One of the bicycles had a flat tire.

Taiji thought of the Americans at Maizuru who had sprayed him with DDT; he watched the two foreigners as they disappeared along the lane, noticed the wet dark stain of sweat on their backs. Taiji adjusted the fold of his pants beneath the stub of his right leg and wondered when it would rain again.

There were other foreigners after that, always in pairs and always in white shirts and ties. Some of them stopped and at the breadstore and bought bread or sometimes, ice cream. They were quiet, for the most part, although some spoke better Japanese than others. Taiji never spoke to them; Nobuyuki learned the names of some of them but they were never around long enough and after a while he confused names and stopped trying to learn names at all. The foreigners never bought much and often asked for the bread heels cut off the loaves before they were packaged. Nobuyuki would fill empty bread bags with the heels but he would not accept money for bread he would otherwise throw away. The foreigners came often after that to get the bread heels but still they did not talk much and Nobuyuki did not talk much to them. He knew they were Christians. All foreigners were Christians.

Taiji did not ask about them. They were foreigners, and that was all.

IV

The young one was carrying him on his back in a strange way. We talked about it once. I thought it looked like he was carrying water, the way he had his arms stretched out level from his shoulders. The older one seemed frail so I suppose he couldn't have just held the younger one around the neck although being small and without legs he was probably not heavy. So I thought it looked like the younger one was a peasant carrying water but my companion said he thought it looked like the old man was stretched out on a cross like Jesus. I told him I thought that was blasphemous but he stuck with it and I admit there was something of a resemblance to a man on a cross the way he carried the old legless man but you can't be sacrilegious with things like that. We argued about it afterwards but I don't think he understood what I was saying about keeping things sacred. He was a new missionary so I can see how he wouldn't understand something like that.

When we came around the corner we both stopped and I suppose we stared. It was a very unusual sight whether it looked like a man on a cross or a man carrying water on a pole and we were surprised. We recognized the younger one as the man who owned the breadstore out by the church across the river. The older one we presumed was his father, the old man that sat in front of the store all day and chain-smoked and never smiled. Whenever we had to go to the church we passed their store and he was always there if the weather was good enough. They were a strange pair and running into them in the park and seeing the older one sort of bouncing against the back of the younger one startled us. I was quicker than my companion and was able to smile and nod before they passed. The older one's eyes didn't even blink as he looked at us. I wondered if he had been injured in the war. Perhaps a shell had landed close to him and he had never recovered the use of his eyes and face or something. He was an old man to have fought in the war but there were a lot of people who came to the park who had lost limbs or eyes or who had big skin cysts that protruded from their faces or necks. Some of the injuries were quite comical—one man had a scar from his lip to his eye that pulled his mouth up so that he was always smiling. There were a lot of mentally ill around too, but it was hard to tell until you had got them to stop and started to talk to them. We tried to be very careful not to spend time with those kind but still we made mistakes. Several times I couldn't tell if they were crazy until I got to the end of my lesson and started asking questions. Some of them were pretty good, though: they nodded at everything we said and smiled a lot and seemed quite relaxed. But they rarely kept appointments and I think we baptized only two of them while I was there.

So we went on to our side of the lake and they went on to theirs. We left the park early that day and didn't come back for almost a week but it wasn't because of the old man. The monsoon season starts in June and we did not want to get caught in the park if the rains began. We stayed close to our apartment and the train stations and spent more time at the church. And June is a hard month to be a missionary there. People stay indoors and no

one wants to talk in the rain.

V

Sundays they came to the park and sat on the far side of the lake, away from the people. Taiji had remembered the cherry blossoms when he was in Siberia and each spring Sunday they would close the breadstore and go to the park. They would put on clean white peasant shirts and khaki pants. Nobuyuki would lift his father the way he had lifted him from the farmer's cart after the war; when they left the house he would close the door of the mud-walled home with his foot. They would walk down the dirt path to the river where Nobuyuki had chased dragonflies as a boy, where he had launched a thousand dream ships on hot summer afternoons after school and watched as they disappeared into the shimmering waves of the Inland Sea. Then they would cross the bridge and head toward the sea for a block, then follow the railroad tracks to the edge of the park. They would enter there and walk beneath the cherry trees to the side of the lake farthest from the crowds and find a bench. Nobuyuki would set his father on the bench and then go and kneel by the lake. Throughout the springs and summers and falls of three decades they made this trek, Taiji on the back of his son, arms outstretched, along the path and across the bridge and into the park. Then out of the park, across the bridge, along the path and home.

That spring they came again. They saw the foreigners, but they were used to foreigners coming into the breadstore and so they did not notice the flush of the foreigners' faces as they passed on the way to their bench on the good side of the lake. It was the good side of the lake because they could see the blossoms better from this side and because they were not directly under the trees like the people on the other side. They had the rippled surface of the lake between them and the full hill covered with blossoms and they had the reflection of the blossoms in the lake. The blossoms were closer on the other side, but seeing the water and the reflection and the blossoms together was Taiji's worship, now that he had neither incense nor altar. And it was quiet there. So quiet that Taiji could remember Reiko and the way she had followed with eyes that would not weep the train that took her son away from her. He could remember the green bicycle she rode to market and the faded orange kimono she had worn at O-Bon and the New Year and he remembered how sad he had been that he could not afford to give her a new kimono for the New Year of 1939. And he remembered he had given away the box of brightly colored rice paper and scissors and glue.

He could remember the hospital in Maoka and the strong Korean who had carried him, and he remembered the snow and the red and yellow flecks where what remained of his legs had touched the snow. And he remembered a long cart ride from Maizuru to Fukuchiyama and from Fukuchiyama home. Staring into the dark surface of the lake, beneath the reflection of the blossoms, he could also remember the anguished night before the god shelf when he had cursed his gods and cried.

Nobuyuki kneeled by the lake and remembered many things

too. He remembered the dragonfly summers and the fleeing boats and the seasons that moved too quickly through his boyhood. He remembered the bright kites his mother had made and he remembered his father's humble wish to climb the sky on the string of the kite. He remembered returning to the abandoned house, the holes in the mud walls, and he remembered walking to the deserted munitions plant and kicking through the rubble and being unable to find his mother. He had expected to find her there, something to remind him of her. But there was only the rubble and bent-over fence and he had gone home and patched another hole in the wall that day. He remembered the faces of the children who came to the store with five-yen and ten-yen and fifty-yen coins clutched tightly in their hands, coins warm against the coolness of his own hands. He remembered their brightly colored caps and their stiff leather backpacks and he yearned to have such children always in the store and in the home he shared with his father. But the children came and went like the years and still his father struggled on and still Nobuyuki could not remove the image from his mind of his father lying motionless in the back of a farmer's cart, alive and dead; he remembered the coolness of the black earth beneath his knees, the warm trail of tears that ran down his face. He remembered the seasons of cherry blossoms but no matter how hard he stared into the shivering surface of the lake he could not bring the blossoms back.

He wondered what the blossoms looked like from the end of a kite string.

VI

When the rains came in June the river filled to its banks and we watched the runoff from the bridge by the church. Except for in June, the river is quite small and there are fishermen along its banks and sometimes you can see the cardboard shanties of drifters who live among the reeds and the thin curls of smoke that rise up from their fires. We used to wonder if the drifters ever got caught when the rains came down the river but the people at the church didn't know much about the drifters. Sometimes it would rain for days and when we crossed the bridge we then could feel a rumble from the water that passed within a foot of the bottom of the bridge. The water peaked after sunset so whenever we had to cross the bridge at night we rode very fast and shouted to each other and whenever we felt a shudder we shouted louder and pedaled faster.

We didn't see the car hit them but we were riding heads down into the rain and didn't see much at all of what happened that night. Coming from the church a while after sunset we were racing and shouting as we crossed the bridge. I saw the headlights first because I was in front and had to look up from time to time to check for cars. It is a very narrow bridge with room for only two lanes of traffic although there is a pedestrian bridge farther down the river. But when the rains come down the river the pedestrian bridge is even shakier than the automobile bridge.

We did not see the two crossing on the other side. We had

seen them in the park again that day, far across on the other side of the lake, just sitting on the bench doing whatever it was they came to the park to do. We decided they had stayed late and when the rains started at sunset they had gotten caught and were trying to hurry home. We had been at the church and were going home and so we were going the other way on the opposite side of the bridge. There are no lights on the bridge so it wasn't unusual that we couldn't see them. The driver of the car said he couldn't see them either, even though they were wearing their white peasant shirts. We had lamps on our bicycles and I suppose that is what saved us. I *suppose* that was what saved us: the driver saw the lights from our bicycles and swerved to miss us and that's when he hit the two of them from behind.

We heard the thud and stopped but in the dark we couldn't tell what had happened. We saw the car stopped in the middle of the bridge with one of its headlights gone out and there was a tightening feeling in my stomach as we approached, walking our bicycles. The rain was coming down hard and the water in the river was very high and from time to time I could feel the shudder of the bridge and it was spooky in the dark.

There was no blood at all. The older one was lying face up in the middle of the traffic lane closest to the sea, his shirt wetted against his skin and his pants tucked neatly up under his legs. By the light of the headlamp we could see his eyes were open just like they were the day we ran into the two of them in the park and when the driver shone his flashlight on the face as we came up the eyes still did not blink and we knew by that he was dead. We looked for a minute for the younger one but after a while it was clear he had been knocked over the side of the bridge into the water. The bridge at that point is only a mile or so from the ocean and with the runoff moving as swiftly as it was his body was probably already to the sea by the time we started looking for it.

The rain was still coming down hard and we could see drops falling into the older one's face and into his opened eyes so I took off my coat and put it over him. The man who had hit them did not seem upset so we went back to the church to call the police. The accident happened in the middle of the bridge and for a while we were the only ones there but as we went back to the church we passed people under big umbrellas who had also heard the thud and who were coming to see what had happened.

We had to pass by the breadstore on our way to the church. There was a streetlamp across from the store and we could see the mud walls of the building. In several places the mud had fallen off and we could see the lathing in a trellis pattern underneath. The rice paddy next to the store had not been planted that year. Except for where they had built it up around the edges the paddy was completely submerged by water from the rain. There was a sign in the middle of the paddy but I could only make out the characters for the word "construction" beneath the light of the streetlamp.

We felt sorry for the two of them because they had died without hearing about Jesus but there is only so much you can do and when they never smile at you and sit on the other side of the lake they make it very hard and damn there were so many

bitter old men from the war. So many bitter old men.

When we got back from the church the police were already there. I was getting wet without my raincoat but they had taken the body of the older one away and when I asked no one could tell me what had happened to it. It was a London Fog. It had cost me more than a hundred dollars and it was the only coat I ever really liked. I hated to lose it. I hate to lose anything. But damn the bitter old men.

ADONI: I HAVE SINNED
Ether 3:4

Adoni: I have sinned;
I have sinned grievously against thee.
My legs are water, my bowels burn;
My bowels are hot stone.
Silence encloses me like iron walls;
I cannot hear thy voice.
I have sinned against thee,
And thy voice is shut out.
Reach forth thine hand to touch me;
As thou didst touch the small stones,

Reach forth to touch me.
Make me clean as burning stone.
I have loved thee in time past;
I have embraced thy fire.
Embrace me now in my uncleanness.

—COLIN B. DOUGLAS

ADONI: FORSAKE ME NOT

Adoni: Forsake me not;
Turn not away.
Sin like a girl
Comes whispering;
Like a girl with light fingers,
Whispering softly.

—COLIN B. DOUGLAS