

3/11: Temporary Shelter
(3.11 Rinji hinanjo) (2011)
Written by Takuya TANAKA (b. 1971)

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Afterword

By Takuya TANAKA

I was already past my mid-thirties when I started living in a house of my own. At the edge of the woods near it, clear water gushes up to form a little stream that flows into Lake Senba. At the small mouth of that stream lie the remains of a shell mound. I heard that as late as the 1950s, earthenware shards were often uncovered in the neighboring fields. From my house, I can clearly see the sun rising through the trees in the woods and the moon beaming brightly in the night sky. When I dug up the yard and tried to create a kitchen garden, vegetables grew in abundance. I had tomatoes, eggplants, cucumbers, edamame, kidney beans, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and on and on. After I started harvesting them and setting them out on the kitchen table, I began to feel, intimately, the changes of the seasons. All kinds of insects and small animals also visit the garden. Mantises, swallowtail butterflies, *tanuki*, pheasants, wagtails, sparrows, azure-winged magpies, brown-eared bulbuls...With all these assorted creatures who have made my garden their home, I find myself surrounded by a multitude of “lives” so numerous I cannot even count them. Living this way day by day among them, it seems something inside me has quietly begun changing.

Ten years have passed since the publication of my first collection of poems, *Natsubiki*, and six years since the second, *Hitachimichi*. In this current volume, I have included 387 poems selected from those written since my second collection, some previously appearing in *Kokoro no hana* and other journals, magazines, and newspapers. *Kumotori*, the title of this collection, means “birds flying between clouds.” It also refers to the pillow word *kumotori no*, a classical poetic epithet (*makurakotoba*) associated with the word “*aya*,” which means “woven design” or “patterned weaving.” *Unchô*, a collection whose title is written with the same characters differently pronounced, was published by the poet Ôta Mizuho in 1922, so I decided on the reading *Kumotori* for my collection.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me in compiling this volume.

Here, the afterword was to end. It was dated February 3, 2011. Nagarami Publications had sent me the galleys, and I was to make corrections in red ink. The volume would be published in April. But everything changed because of the Great East

Japan Earthquake of March 11. I was in the middle school where I teach, in my 8th grade class, explaining a *Manyôshû* poem by Yamanoue no Okura. Because of the onset of the earthquake, I was unable to finish that explication. In middle and high school Japanese classes, we sometimes have the opportunity to teach the medieval concept of impermanence (*mujô*). Whenever we take up classic works like *Tsurezuregusa* [Essays in Idleness], *Hôjôki* [Record of a Ten Foot Square Hut], and *Heike monogatari* [The Tale of the Heike], we always talk about impermanence. “All things are always changing...” When I look back now on my own earlier attempts to explain it, I feel keenly the powerlessness of my words. Although I understood in my head the term *mujô*, deep in my heart, I think I always trusted that “tomorrow will come as a continuation of today.” Throughout the night following the earthquake, the two characters that make up the word *mujô* weighed heavily on my heart.¹ The earthquake revealed the enormous power that nature possesses. And yet, at the same time, there remains deep within my heart, as though emblazoned on my mind’s eye, the beauty of the starry sky I looked up at the night of the earthquake, and how moving it was at dawn when I felt the morning sun. Nature is terrifying. And yet, it is magnificent. Since the earthquake, I have come to feel that the workings of nature are more beautiful to my eyes than they ever were before.

So for this volume, I reorganized the manuscript and added another fifty poems, making a total of 437 in all. This has created extra work for my publisher, Mr. Oikawa at Nagarami Publications, and I am deeply grateful to him. I would like to express my thanks again to all those who were so helpful to me in completing this collection.

¹ *mujô* is written with the character *mu* (無), which means “nothing,” or “not,” and *jô* (常), which means “always.” Literally the term means “nothing [remains unchanged] forever.”