

Butterfly on a Breeze
A play in six scenes

Characters

- Yoshiyuki - an old man
- Miyoko - his granddaughter, about 18
- Michihiro)
Kiwako) - a young couple, male and female
- Kenichiro - a volunteer warden, could be played by a man or woman
(if a woman, she would need a new name – Yukei)

Scene: The collapsed ruins of a wooden house, modest in size and design, by the sea in a town which has suffered an earthquake and tsunami less than a month before.

Time: The present

Butterfly on a Breeze

The scene is set some weeks after a major earthquake and tsunami. I have used Japanese names but the feel of the piece does not have to be Japanese. The time of year is late Spring in a climate where summers get hot and winters are cold. As the play opens Yoshiyuki is quietly searching through the debris. He is on top of the “pile”. He works slowly and meticulously. When Miyoko comes in she is more anxious and worried about her grandfather than she realises. The scene is the collapsed house of Yoshiyuki, an old man. It forms a more or less conical shape in the middle of the stage. The debris could be real, symbolic, or imaginary but you need the shape – the conical mound with a flattish top – a mini -volcano shape.

Miyoko What are you doing, you stupid old man?

(He appears not to hear)

I've been looking for you everywhere, but I needn't have bothered. I should have known that you would wander back here.

(He continues his slow, meticulous searching)

Mummy said that you'd gone to find a battery for your hearing aid. You obviously failed in that simple task!

Yoshiyuki There's nothing wrong with the battery – they last for months.

Miyoko But they must run out sometime. If it's not the battery, what was it? Mummy said you were as deaf as a post this morning.

Yoshiyuki There is such a thing as elective deafness, as leaving a small piece of equipment in your pocket, or not turning it on.

Miyoko I've been everywhere. I was sure you were lost.

Yoshiyuki I was not lost. I came back to look for something.

Miyoko You came here yesterday and the day before. There's no point. It's all smashed to bits. It's all ruined. Mummy told you to give up looking. What is it that's so important, anyway? Hidden treasure, your savings in a secret box under the floor?

Yoshiyuki Do you ever say your prayers now you've become so grown-up? Night-time and morning, before sleep and after, I used to say your prayers with you.

Miyoko No, not me, no-one would listen to me. My head's too busy to stop and say my prayers.

Yoshiyuki Praying is for children and old men, eh? When the earthquake began, did you not ask for help? And the flood? You were afraid? You called out?

Miyoko I screamed. Yes, I screamed. But screaming isn't praying.

Yoshiyuki Did you ask to be saved, to stay alive?

Miyoko No, there was no time. I screamed. I panicked for a moment and then I remembered the drill. I was sensible. I did not pray.

Yoshiyuki If you were going to say a prayer now, what would it be? What would you want to ask for? Who would you be speaking to?

Miyoko Grandad, I don't understand you. You're not making sense. Come down, and let's go home.

Yoshiyuki When I say a prayer, here, on top of my broken home, I wonder where do the words go, how does it spread, what I want to say? On the wind, in the flowing of water, in the flame of the candle. It leaves me and is gone but is not lost. Who knows?

Miyoko When you blew out the candle I would watch the coils of smoke rise and twist and disappear.

Yoshiyuki No smoke if you pinch the wick between your fingers – just a small, expected pain.

Miyoko There is one rock in our garden that has the face of a bear. He protects me. He has a snout and the impression of ears and two small eyes and a grin – sometimes it is kind, sometimes malicious. Then I have to watch out.

Yoshiyuki You must show me. I don't know that stone. I see faces in the clouds. They, too, can change; they always are changing.

Miyoko Is that what you do all day – your head in the clouds. Mummy is right about you.

Yoshiyuki This last week I have slept out under the stars, sometimes in your garden, sometimes here. I have not done that for years. It is so wonderful to lie on your back looking up at the stars. They move but do not change.

Miyoko Yes, I would like that. The stars, the dark.

Yoshiyuki Even better with someone special lying beside you – to be in love under the stars. That is heaven, lying in each other's arms.

Miyoko I don't need you to tell me about that. That is none of your business.

Yoshiyuki I'm sorry, Miyoko, I was not prying. It's not for me to talk about love. No, looking up at the stars, now, after so many have died, so many drowned, then I feel close to them. The stars move slowly across the sky and I feel that this is where I can reach them, they are close, these are there in the night between me lying on the cold ground and the bright fires of the stars. I do not know if they need my help.

Miyoko Stop! You're talking nonsense. You're making me afraid. All this superstition. Lying outside will give you rheumatism or whatever, when you've got a good warm bed to go to, which is more than thousands have right now. Go and look at the camps for the homeless, some without much more than a tent and a blanket.

Yoshiyuki You're sounding awfully like your mother. It can't be helped, that's the way things go, one generation following another, but watch out for your own voice, you're the one with possibilities.

Miyoko Possibilities?

Yoshiyuki You're a clever girl. You've had a good education. You've got the whole world at your fingertips. You can speak to someone in San Francisco right now and be there tomorrow – or not even bother. You have the whole world. There are two kinds of people in this world – those with education, and those without. Think for yourself!

Miyoko One minute you're on about education and getting on, and the next you're telling me all this mystical stuff about people who have died and stars, and praying. You might be getting just a little confused??

Yoshiyuki Quite possibly. More than a little. I was a teacher for nearly forty years, a humble village teacher seeing the sons and daughters coming to my classroom of those I had taught twenty, thirty years before. Now it's not like that. You have skills to take you anywhere, to let you be who you want.

Miyoko It's not like that, granddad. It's not. It's all too difficult, too complicated. There's no point in wanting anything. It's all been spoilt. Look at this, this mess!

Yoshiyuki This is just an earthquake, Miyoko. This is just waiting for us to get on with the job of clearing up. You know things, you will do things, that I can't even imagine.

Miyoko Perhaps we won't get the chance. It's all too damaged. All we do is chatter.

Yoshiyuki I was a long distance runner when I was young. Yes, yes, you've seen the photos and the trophies. Just before my biggest race, I got injured, overdoing it probably, had to pull out of race. I was devastated, heartbroken, but in time I became sort of friends with that injury. I can still feel it now, a weakness here in this tendon. It reminds me of my disappointment and there's a kind of comfort.

Miyoko I can do without your lectures, granddad. I'm not one of your adoring eleven year olds. Is that what you're looking for – your precious trophies and photos. Your sad old photos and funny trophies.

Yoshiyuki Yes – they were nothing, but this weak tendon is an old friend. I limp when I'm tired and today I'm tired.

Miyoko Come down, granddad. I'm sorry. I don't know why I say such nasty things. I've never won a medal for anything. I do have an old friend Hiroko – my doll with the lilac dress and the parasol. When I came home after the earthquake and found our house safe and sound, I went straight away to find Hiroko in my cupboard. I tidied her up and put her by my bed, looking out of the window, keeping an eye on any danger, keeping me safe.

Yoshiyuki I expect she's still there, still on the lookout.

Miyoko Yes, she is, she's on guard. She was dusty, but I washed her dress. It has tiny ribbons and a sash.

Yoshiyuki Yesterday when I was..... when I was here, I turned over a broken panel and several butterflies stirred into life and then flew away, one by one, into the sunlight. They were blue, pale violet blue, some had orange at the edge of their wings, some not, some with darker veins. Each one different. Slowly they woke and then opened their wings, and flew, flying strong in the breeze on their fragile wings.. They came to life because I disturbed them.

Miyoko Are there more today?

Yoshiyuki No more today. I have found nothing today.

Miyoko Perhaps the ones with orange on their wings are the females.

Yoshiyuki Why not the males! Must the females always be the special ones!

Miyoko Isn't it usually the males who do all the showing off.

Yoshiyuki While the women slave away in the kitchen and look after the children, and the garden, and the..... your mother is a good woman, a hard-working, life is not easy

Miyoko But, unfortunately, as you would say, without education, without a mind, not worthy of your precious son.

Yoshiyuki I say unkind things and I do not have the excuse of youth. I was born with a good mind but that was nothing, nothing, till I learnt to be kind and it was your grandmother who taught me to be kind. She was a worker, always on the go, but that energy of hers had a kind of wisdom in it that was a mystery to me, the female mystery, the wisdom of life. On its own, mind is nothing.

Miyoko She never stops, and now the earthquake has only made it worse, her keeping busy, exhausting herself, not complaining.

Yoshiyuki There was a man down at the crossroads yesterday with a cart-load of water melon. I am just imagining the delicious freshness of a mouthful of water melon. Would you go down and see if he's there today.

Miyoko You'll have to come down to give me the money.

Yoshiyuki No, I won't. I'll throw you down my purse.

Miyoko I might not catch it. I'm a girl, you know.

Yoshiyuki You're a good catcher. I made sure of that. Here, catch! Hurrah!

(he comes down and faces her)

Miyoko I'll be back in a few minutes. See how fast I can run.

Yoshiyuki I don't know where they have come from. It's very early in the year for water melon. Make sure you get a ripe one. No point in buying one that's bitter and pale.

Miyoko I know what I'm doing.

Yoshiyuki I've spent a lifetime watching my good advice go flying out the window. Here, at last, there are no windows so maybe people will start listening.

Miyoko I don't expect you minded really. What teachers love most is the sound of their own voice. (She goes)

Yoshiyuki The sound of my own voice when the butterflies opened their wings there was a tiny creaking noise like old window-shutters opening in the Spring, for the first time, when winter's over.

He has made a move to come down to say goodbye but she has gone in a flash. There is a moment of total stillness and then he returns to his searching.

- Kenichiro Oi, Granddad! Can't you read! You're not allowed here without special permission.
- Yoshiyuki Special permission to be in my own home!
- Kenichiro This is an unsafe area. It's my duty to keep you out of here. You never know what might happen. Out of here, right now!
- Yoshiyuki (Climbing down to talk to him) What is all the fuss about? This pile can't collapse any further. The worst I might suffer is a splinter in my finger. I've got one now, as a matter of fact.
(He holds up his finger and Kenichiro starts examining it)
- Yoshiyuki I was just wondering whether my grand-daughter has a boyfriend. I was too shy to ask in case she hasn't and she minded. I don't think she has. I think she would have told me.
- Kenichiro That's it out! I've got tweezers in my first-aid kit, but that's down at the station; but I managed to get it with my thumb and finger. Now, just go, will you. One good turn deserves another.
- Yoshiyuki You have a rather inadequate uniform – a hat and an armband. I like that. I have a bad reaction to uniforms.
- Kenichiro Keep away from the centre, then, and the harbour. The place is crawling with police and military. I'm just a humble auxiliary, a volunteer.
- Yoshiyuki I was a prisoner-of-war – a long time ago of course but I've never forgotten the feel of a uniform. My uniform. That's what I detest. I didn't like being pushed around, at the mercy of the guards, but wearing those same badly fitting clothes for three years nearly did for me. A laughing-stock, trousers too short and shirt too long, or the other way round – humiliation!
- Kenichiro And then one day it was over, the gates opened and you were free to go wherever you wanted.
- Yoshiyuki Were you one too? Of course not, much too young.

- Kenichiro Not me – wireless operator, coastal watch, never stirred from home, hardly – National Service.
- Yoshiyuki Since the earthquake there haven't been any doors to go through. It makes a difference. You go through a door, you can get away. Somebody comes through a door and, you never know, something unexpected might happen. Doors opening bring surprises, doors closing, endings.
- Kenichiro Is it fences too, as well as uniforms. I was at the zoo the other week with my grandson and the baboons, you know, they really were rattling their cages. Shaking the wire like crazy – mad, angry creatures gripping the thick wires and shaking in a frenzy.
- Yoshiyuki No. It goes without saying. I don't like to be inside a cage, behind a fence. I've always wondered who invented barbed wire.
- Kenichiro Perhaps it was an accident, something that happened by accident, without anyone really thinking about it. And there it was.
- Yoshiyuki At the end of the war we were taken out of the camp and marched for days on end – by the enemy – through the mountains. Men falling like flies, with the fatigue and weakness, and the altitude. One day, quite late on, we came up through a long pass and arrived at the top where the landscape opened out and the track began to descend; the top of the pass, and the sun setting. We'd been climbing for days, or hours, and all the men ahead had just stopped, with the power of it, and the guards did nothing to push us on. No rifle butts in your kidneys! We all just stood there, hypnotised.
- Kenichiro Look mate, that's just what I haven't got the time to do – stand here chatting. I must politely ask you to leave this area and return to your, well, where are you staying now?
- Yoshiyuki With my son and his wife – in the house I grew up in. Not like this one. I built this, well most of it, myself – a simple house for my retirement, my retreat from the world. Now – the family house was built by my father and his four brothers, built of stone, with a beautiful tiled roof, and a good deep well. It survived the earthquake and was too high for the flood. Unlucky me. I built too near the sea, and so – this.....! They knew how to build so that things could shift, could take the stresses and strains. There was room to move. But the house was simple – not a skyscraper.

Kenichiro I've been patient up to now, old fellow, but my patience is running out. I don't want to fetch the police up here but if you won't go of your own accord I shall be forced to call in the militia and they don't take too kindly to awkward old men.

Yoshiyuki They took my neighbour, Takaheshi, yesterday – looking for his blasted cat. That cat was the bane of my life, scratching at my seedlings, hunting birds. He couldn't have cared less but I had the better of that cat. It didn't dare poke its nose into my garden.

Kenichiro Putting himself at risk for the sake of a cat – did he find it?

Yoshiyuki No, not that I know. I had a look round myself, after he was taken away. They nearly had to put handcuffs on him. That was a clever cat but I had my ways, my plans. He wasn't going to spoil my garden, again.

Kenichiro So, friendly neighbours, eh! You enjoy a battle, a man who likes an argument.

Yoshiyuki What are neighbours for if you can't have a healthy disagreement !

Kenichiro And what did this neighbour of yours find to fight about with you – apart from the cat.

Yoshiyuki With me? He said I would never give in, that I always thought I was right – and the trouble is – I am always right and he couldn't accept it.

Kenichiro There's no two ways about it. Either you shift yourself now or I call the police. Who called them out to your neighbour? It wasn't me. I haven't been over this way all week.

Yoshiyuki Who knows? Some busy-body or other who can't leave a man in peace. I used to watch that cat stalking my little birds through that long grass. I'd have a stone in my hand and wait till it had got to the edge of that bare patch, there, then, wham!..... but my aim's not what it was.

Kenichiro Pretty flimsy, this house. Not much more than a shed.

Yoshiyuki I moved in with my son for the winter months. A house either floats down from above, like a bird, or you build it up out of the rocks of the earth. This was my tree house only it wasn't in a tree. When I was younger I wanted something solid, weighty. Now I don't need it. I'm ready to float away.

Kenichiro Exactly. Time to float away with me. By the way, what is it you're looking for? Doesn't look to me as if there could be much left worth finding.

Yoshiyuki I am looking for the gold watch, with a gold chain, which belonged to my grandfather and which he gave to me when I first left home over fifty years ago.

Kenichiro A watch! Sentimental value? If you did find it, more than likely it would be smashed.

Yoshiyuki It's here somewhere and it is unbroken, I am convinced of that. It will not be ticking because I have not wound it up but it is waiting for me to find it. I will find it.

Kenichiro It's no good. It's too much for you and there's more important things to do. The bulldozers will be up here, eventually. It's just a pile of firewood, now. It's hopeless.

Yoshiyuki I was on a plane once, flying to the South, and we came into land in fog. Twice the pilot gave up the attempt to land but then tried a third time. We came down out of the fog, off the runway, too fast, too low, the plane veered, the wing touched the ground and we were over in a moment, me hanging upside down, it was dark. I was sure I was going to die, to drown, or be burnt alive. Everything was on top of me, seats, people, glass, metal. I survived. The watch survived. It was ticking in my pocket. My grandfather's Swiss watch with its gold chain of seventeen links. I like to feel my way along them, counting with my fingers. The watch is here. I will find it.

Kenichiro Not today, old son. I'm not giving up. I've got a job to do and I'm not giving in.

Yoshiyuki Have you been dealing with the dead, with the bodies? Eleven died on that plane, five others survived – and me. I was upside down but the watch stayed with me – because of the chain. It went through my button-

hole. Not a dent or a scratch Have you beenworking.....with the dead.

Kenichiro Yes. The flood was everywhere. We find them everywhere. As you know. Not now. The work is over, for the most part. People take care of the bodies. There is great respect. It was a terrible flood. So sudden. We make the bodies as.....peaceful, as we can.

Yoshiyuki Do you talk to them? What do you say to them?

Kenichiro I am silent but under my breath I do try to console them. I do try to speak, to give each one something. We take the time to find out names, of course, to return them to where they belong, if we can, if we can. I want to tell them that the flood is over, the grass is growing, flowers, quiet again, summer is coming.

Yoshiyuki What was that? Moving there, in the undergrowth. I think it was his cat. Come on, let's check it out.

Kenichiro What's the cat's name. It might help if we call out. Some cats respond to their names.

Yoshiyuki I give it a number of not very polite names, which may not be very helpful in attracting it out into the open. You take the lead!

Kenichiro If you find it, what then?

Yoshiyuki I'll look after him till Takaheshi gets back. His place isn't as badly damaged as mine. He'll be rebuilding.

Kenichiro I thought you hated the cat and wanted to be rid of it.

Yoshiyuki No point in spoiling a good quarrel. Anyway, I want to practice my aim. You go through that way and I'll go round the other side of the cherry tree. Puss, puss, you little devil, come, come.

Kenichiro Puss, come to Kenichiro, come to Kenichiro
(they leave the stage in search of the cat)

There is a moment of total stillness and silence before Miyoko returns.

- Miyoko Come in, it's safe here. You can rest. Are you tired? You look tired. You'll be safe here. It's my grandfather's garden. And his house, what's left of it. He's here, doing somethingGrandad? Where are you? Grandad..... He's not here. He must have gone for a drink or something. It's getting hot. Are you thirsty? His name is Yoshiyuki Kumagai.
- Michihiro We have water, thank you.
- Miyoko There are no chairs but the grass is clean. He has tidied up. Sit down. He'll be back soon.
- Kiwako You said that he knew everything, knew everyone.
- Miyoko He has lived in this town all his life. He was a teacher. He had made a beautiful garden here. It was beautiful till the flood came. Isn't it strange! It was winter then and now it is almost summer.
- Kiwako Wherever we walk we tread in the blossom that has fallen.
- Miyoko It was worse with the snow. Have you lost your house?
- Michihiro We have not lost our house. You do not need to go searching for a house. A house cannot be carried far.
- Miyoko Some people get sad in the winter, many people. It's a disease, a condition. You can use special light bulbs that make you think it is day. But it is dark inside.
- Kiwako We walked in the snow and the snow became blossom that floated down.
- Miyoko When summer comes and the trees are heavy and the days are so humid, then I don't know what to do with myselfwatch tv.....I end up doing nothing.
- Michihiro It was silent after the flood no engines, no traffic and the snow muffles the noise, even in the town.

Miyoko This morning the cuckoo was calling. When I was young I always listened out for the cuckoo. I had forgotten, but today I heard it, first on one side, then on the other. I woke early. Where did you sleep last night?

Kiwako In our home, of course. We must be there.

Miyoko I don't know where he has gone. He will be here soon. He's always here. He's cleaned up... the road outside is still a mess. Where do all the lumps of concrete come from, lumps of broken concrete.

Michihiro From the harbour walls.

Miyoko And you see cars that have crashed with bits squashed and broken, but some of them, there's nothing left! it looks so angry.

Michihiro They are lightweight. That's the right design. It makes them fast and efficient. You wouldn't want to be driving a tank, would you? That wouldn't make you safe – and if it's light and well-designed you use much less fuel.

Kiwako Did you bring us here because your grandfather can help us? Can tell us something? We can't hang about. Our son, Kyohei, needs us.

Miyoko Where is he? With your family while youwhile you are busy.... has something happened? Is he in the hospital?....the hospital is so busy. I've been there myself, with a friend, there are beds in the corridors. I expect it is the same in the children's ward. How old is he?

Michihiro His first birthday is coming soon.

Kiwako He is not in the hospital. He is missing. He has not been found since the flood. He was in the Nursery. Twenty one children. Seventeen are known to have died, their bodies have been found. Three survived and are alive.

Michihiro They were the lucky ones. One was asleep inside a plastic barrel, a yellow plastic barrel, one was found buried under plastic balls, small ones, alive, hundreds of plastic balls, all colours.

Kiwako And one is missing and that is our son and we keep on looking. We are not stupid.

Miyoko But it's.....many days.....a long time.

Michihiro We do not expect a miracle.....a child surviving on nothing.....but we keep on looking.

Miyoko But.....what can you.....do you hope.

Kiwako We cannot find his body but we keep looking and if we purify our eyes we may be allowed to see something.

Michihiro There is always more to see. We hope we do not miss anything.

Miyoko What will you see? His spirit. Is he still here?

Michihiro We think he is still here. We will not let him go. There is always something undetected.

Miyoko So your son, who is nearly one, was taken by the flood and you have been looking for him ever since. I saw you on the street and you seemed to be in another world. I thought that I must know you, that perhaps I did know your faces, but that you were strangers now. Tell me what has happened to you. I want to know.

Kiwako We have lost our child.

Miyoko You're not much older than me and yet now you seem as distant as.....grandad. I have seen what has happened – the earthquake, the flood, the many dead, the destruction and I haven't felt a thing, not till I passed you on the street just now and we looked at each other for a moment. I want to know what you know.

Kiwako We cannot tell you anything. If your grandfather is not here, we must be going.

Miyoko On and on, wandering and sad. When will you stop!

Michihiro This is what we have to do.

Miyoko Tell me something, please, each of you. Tell me when you grew up, when you stopped being a child. Was it when you met, when you fell in love, when you first felt the baby in your womb, when was it?

- Kiwako When I was eighteen I went away to the city to begin my training as a nurse. I had a backpack, and a suitcase, my laptop and a plastic box with my picnic in it which my mother had made. Salad and hard-boiled eggs and apricots. I sat on the train with strangers and I was alone. I peeled the shell from the eggs, bit by bit. There was a little twist of paper with salt in it. I dipped the egg in the salt. I took the stones from the hollow centre of the apricots. I crunched carrots and radishes. When I had finished my picnic, I shut the lid on the empty plastic box and I was not the same Kiwako who had boarded the train. I was no longer a child.
- Miyoko Kiwako, Kiwako, now I know your name. And what is your name? Will you tell me?
- Michihiro I am Michihiro. My name is Michihiro.
- Miyoko When did you grow up, Michihiro? I want to know what happens.
- Michihiro When I first had a motorbike I was out with my friends, we weren't wild, we were driving carefully, he was ahead of me and a car pulled out in front of him, he had no chance of stopping or swerving. It was instantaneous. He went right into the side of the car, the driver's side, an old man with a bald head. And he was dead. No question about it. Dead in the road.
- Miyoko Was that it? Seeing your friend die, right there, with nothing to be done?
- Michihiro No, not then. I went with the police to tell his parents. I didn't have to. They didn't want me to go but I decided. I knocked on the door. She opened it. I didn't actually have to tell her. She knew. She knew by my face, I suppose. She guessed. No, she knew. Then I told her the facts. That was easy, easier than the knocking on the door. The door was open, but I knocked.
- Kiwako The boy needs me to find him and if I cannot find him I will keep looking until.....he wants me to let go. We forgot to bring a sunhat. The sun is getting strong and today he would need a sunhat. You can easily get too much sun, at his age. I like to be prepared. I am not mad.
- Miyoko What have you got in your bag? Do you carry lots of his things with you. Clothes and toys. Do you have his photo with you?

Kiwako No, we do not! It is not your business to know what I carry. We do not need a photo. He is not a missing person, someone who has left home, or wandered off. We bring with us what is necessary.

Miyoko When I was little I thought there was another world. You couldn't see it. Once upon a time it had been here, people had lived in it, and were solid but gradually it had faded and become invisible, but it was still there, still everywhere. When I walked through the woods I was also walking through this world which had disappeared. But it was real, it was looking after me. It was like water.

Michihiro We are still searching in this world, this hard world.

Miyoko Then, I could not tell anyone. If I had said a word then the other world – it was like air – it would have flown away, forever. Now I have told you, because I think you know about that world.

Kiwako Yes we do know. It is a lonely world, there are many orphans, many widows. We pass them. We do not talk.

Miyoko I never had fairies in my garden. I had dolls. I had three dolls in all. One was beautiful, one was fierce and one was dirty and sad and had a torn dress. And I always had to have a clean cloth to wipe her face. They played games together. They lived together.

Michihiro We keep walking because we love one another. You can get stuck when someone dies. We are not stuck.

Kiwako He needs me to speak to him, to tell him about the Spring, about the things he would have done.

Miyoko We passed each other in the street. In a moment we would have gone on, and never met again.

Kiwako The sun is getting strong. Where is your grandfather?

Miyoko I want to show you my doll. Just one, just the beautiful one. The others have gone, I think. Don't go. She will help you. I will bring her back and on the way I will tell her what has happened and then she will help, she will listen to your sorrow, she will. And then she will go with you. Take her.

Stay here. I'll be back. Grandad will come. Rest in the shade. There's no rubbish here. I'll be back.

She runs off with the intensity and abandon of a child. Again there is a moment of intense stillness and silence before Yoshiyuki returns having failed to find the cat.

- Yoshiyuki I see you! Think you can fool me. Think you can hide from me. Looters will not find much worth having here. There's nothing left for you to scavenge. Be off with you or I'll call the police. Looting will be severely dealt with.
- Michihiro We are not hiding. We are waiting.
- Kiwako Your granddaughter brought us here. I don't know her name. I forget.
- Michihiro She did not tell us her name. She has three dolls. She has gone to fetch one.
- Yoshiyuki She is called Miyoko. She is eighteen. She is my only granddaughter. I live here alone.
- Kiwako We are alone. We had a child. His first birthday is soon. He was lost in the flood. He was not with us. We were at work.
- Yoshiyuki The town centre is secure and the port, the warehouses. Now they are warning us about looters trawling through the residential areas. I can tell you: I have found nothing and neither will you.
- Michihiro We are not looters. Your granddaughter told us to wait. We did not know where to go next. We have lost our little boy.
- Yoshiyuki Yes, I see. So many mix-ups, chaos, confusion. People taken all over the place, some running, some glued to the spot, unable to move a muscle. It will go on for years, trying to sort it all out.
- Kiwako We have been through all the searches.
- Michihiro We have been to every place, followed all the leads, looked at many pictures.
- Yoshiyuki So you believe him to be dead.
- Michihiro We do not know.

Kiwako We search. We go on. Your granddaughter thought that you could help us.

Yoshiyuki One summer I went on a pilgrimage. My wife had passed away. It is a long time ago. I went in a party. We had fun in the evenings – music, poetry, very traditional, but in the day we each walked alone. It becomes like a dream, one foot after the other, you walk and she was close. I could talk to her. Up and up we went. Friends for a fortnight. On the way down it all seemed a bit ridiculous. Are the two of you in a dream?

Kiwako Who can tell me?

Yoshiyuki Yesterday I had toothache. No hope of finding a dentist today. I hate dentists, scare me stiff. Today it had gone or else I had got used to it. Then I get frightened when I find you here in my garden and the toothache is back again, throbbing like hell. I'll try to forget it. She thought that I would be able to help you, did she, dear little Miyoko?

Michihiro We have lost each other – for now. We, Kiwako and I, we only meet in another world that is not our own. We do not have our own thoughts, our own feelings, our own bodies anymore. We cannot find our feet.

Yoshiyuki There was a time when I spoke to my wife, after she died, and then a time when I spoke about here, when I could say her name again. Tell me the boy's name, your son's name.

Michihiro Kyohei

Kiwako Yes, Kyohei.

Yoshiyuki Now, tell me more, Your child was in the nursery.

Kiwako He had taken his first steps. He was about to move from the first room to the second.

Michihiro It would not have made any difference. It was the same for all the children. Three of the youngest survived, and the ones who were not there, some at least.

Yoshiyuki And you were both at work.

Michihiro I am the manager of a motorcycle franchise – sales, service and parts. We are back in business. Our showroom was destroyed but we have

found a warehouse. Things are getting going. I go to work. It helps. It does not interfere. The hours pass. Old customers wish us well.

- Kiwako I am a nurse. Everyone was needed. But to start with there were not many who needed treatment. To start with there were the dead, many, and then slowly people came. It took a long time. And in between we searched.
- Yoshiyuki When this happened, and I found that I was safe, and my family, my son and his wife, and Miyoki, I did not know what to do. I wandered about, pretending to help. I wanted to get up and away, high up. I walked up to the top of the mountain. I tried to pay attention to what I could see and hear, the sea far away, the birds, a heavy crow lumbering into flight with giant hops, a thistle at my feet. Each thing, each glint or shadow was a part of me, scattered, and as I sat they gathered themselves together, shaped themselves, into me. Me! I found myself on the mountain. But you have each other. You have your love, you can hold each other. You can touch and kiss. You are young. Another child will come.
- Kiwako That does not seem possible
(She takes out her sewing or painting stuff)
- Yoshiyuki When I was your age I had an Enfield Bullet. Made in India, I believe. It will mean nothing to you. "Made like a gun, goes like a bullet". Except it didn't. 350cc, single cylinder ohv. There was a larger model too but that was even less reliable. The electrics – but beautiful suspension. They went on making them for years and years. The hours I spent on my back, my hands covered in oil and blood from my scraped knuckles. Grime and blood. The spanner slips again. I acquired it after the war. I don't remember how or where.
- Michihiro The modern machine is clean, efficient and reliable. But there is still style and power and magic. I think they are beautiful
- Yoshiyuki Too noisy for me, I fear, too fast. I want something slow and peaceful. I would show you my fishing rods and reels but they are splinters at the bottom of that pile.
- Michihiro My father was a fisherman.
- Yoshiyuki So was mine! I remember baiting the lines, long lines, hook after hook. Now that was skilled work, the setting of the lines. I went out as a boy – that's sixty years ago. You pull the line from the water and hook by hook

you brought the shining fish into the bottom of the boat I could do it now.
Some things you just don't forget.

Michihiro My father fishes with nets, drift nets.

Yoshiyuki Not those factory ships scraping the sea bed, taking everything there is, turning the sea into a wasteland! In thirty years or less a world of plenty that would last forever has been destroyed. Not a fish left, to speak of. But I loved my rods, and reelsI suppose I could start again..... I am getting old, never mind what you say, you get slower, you can't learn new tricks. I know my limits.

Michihiro My dad's boat was smashed to bits. I haven't the patience to sit with a rod. I liked the boat when I was a boy, the sound of the engine, the instruments, everything in its place, everyone with a job. I think he will go back to it. He still made a good living, but the catches were down. There was talk of the breaker's yard.

Kiwako It is not enough for us to sit and wait. That is why I sew. I make patterns. That is why I draw. I make pictures. I must make something and not just be scattered.

Yoshiyuki Can I see what you are doing?

Kiwako No. It is nothing. It is just to keep me busy.

Yoshiyuki No, I can see it is more than that. But it is not enough. I have not been any help. I am not wise, but I have been to the top of that mountain, through the pine forest, follow the stream, you will hear the waterfall. Go there, now. This has gone on long enough. Go to the mountain and see if you can start to think for yourself, not just see and move, going through the motions. You have become part of a story that is not your own. Go, one foot in front of the other, up to the top of the mountain. It will not float away.

Kiwako Miyoko has gone to fetch her doll. Her doll is going to take away our sorrow.

Yoshiyuki That is nonsense. That is ignorance. You must think for yourself and not let yourself be figures in a story. It is hot and sticky but it will be cooler under the pines. If there is mist, keep going. Hold onto each, cling to each other. Go, that is the best advice I can give.

(He bundles them off, helps them on their way. They feel the urgency though they do not understand it)

Kiwako Careful with my embroidery, my paints. There are things I must finish.

Michihiro What will we find there? What are we to look for?

Yoshiyuki No more questions. You will find something that is not you and you will make it your own. That is my riddle for you to solve

Kiwako Tell Miyoko that we had to go, that you sent us on our way. Tell her that we cannot give our sorrow away. We are not pure. It is all mixed up, tangled.

(They have gone)

Yoshiyuki No, we are not pure, not pure.

(He starts practising casting his line with an imaginary rod)

Again, there is a moment of total stillness and silence before Miyoko returns. She is carrying her dolls, and also has a simple flute or whistle in her hands.

- Miyoko Where are they? Michihiro and Kiwako and their little boy, except that he's not here. I brought them all of my dolls, all three, they're all here. See – one, two, three.
- Yoshiyuki I sent them on their way. It was time for them to go.
- Miyoko No time for my silly games! (she throws her dolls to the ground). Oh no, I'm sorry, no, I didn't mean it (she picks them up again, distressed). I got you here and now I must look after you. I passed a little bird on the ground, hardly big enough to fly – I don't know – I was going to pick it up but my hands were full. It was a crow, I think, almost black, a big beak. My hands were full.
- Yoshiyuki Fledgling time already! Better to leave him, you can't be his mother. Out of the nest into the big wide world....
- Miyoko Survival of the fittest – that's what they call it, isn't it.
- Yoshiyuki That's what they call it.
- Miyoko The cuckoo was calling all the way home and back again. Did you hear her?
- Yoshiyuki No chance – remember about the batteries. No, but anyway, bird song has gone for me – no chance out there is just silence, but I can watch them.
- Miyoko I've never seen the cuckoo. I hear her loud and clear but she never appears, somehow.
- Yoshiyuki She is a secret bird except for her voice! His voice I should say! And what we don't know for certain, we make up. For a long time people believed that a cuckoo would lay her egg on the ground, then swallow it, and then

quickly spit it out into the nest of the little bird in which it would then be hatched and raised. When someone managed to film the cuckoo laying her egg directly in the nest, it all happened so quickly that the viewers would not accept that it wasn't some kind of conjuring trick, some kind of illusion. All done in a second – remove the egg already in the other bird's nest and lay hers in a flash. People would not believe their eyes.

- Miyoko Can I not go back and find the baby crow? We could feed it, granddad! You know what you're doing. We could mash stuff up. Do you use a squeezer of some kind? I want to try.
- Yoshiyuki I am glad you have a kind heart, Miyoko, that you are the little mother bird, but
- Miyoko Wouldn't it work, Isn't it possible?
- Yoshiyuki It is, it can be done, but now, I don't have the energy, I'm sorry.
- Miyoko Now is just the time to do it! I want something alive to look after, not these stupid dolls, with their stupid faces.
- Yoshiyuki There are better things for you to care for than one crow who's fallen from his nest.
- Miyoko I haven't got anything else unless you want me sifting through this rubbish and massaging your back or bringing you tea.
- Yoshiyuki No, I've got my own business and I'll get on with it, sore back or not.
- Miyoko And I want that little bird to be my business.
- Yoshiyuki And if you go back now, you'll almost certainly not be able to find it. It will have gone; it will be alright, or it will be dead. That's the end of the matter.
- Miyoko The end of the matter! Grandfather has spoken!
- Yoshiyuki Why not put the dolls down. We could find them a comfortable place. What's that you've got in your hand?
- Miyoko It's a flute. I wanted to give Michihiro and Kiwako something for their little boy, something to keep. I thought of giving them one of my dolls, but I couldn't bear to part with them – and so I brought the whistle. They could

play it. It's just a simple whistle. At the end of the day, when they're sad. In the morning, when they set off, play a tune.

Yoshiyuki You could play it now – for them, for the little boy....for the dolls. We will have a doll's concert. I will sing and you will play. Let's find good seats for the audience and get ready to perform.

(The concert takes place – Yoshiyuki sings, and then Miyoko plays, to the audience of the dolls. It is a happy interlude, but seriously done. Here create your own dialogue and action, perhaps using one or more of the dolls as characters in the song. I think the song should be a light-hearted folk song or ballad about love and misunderstanding or trickery, ending with their laughter and closeness, then a shift)

Yoshiyuki They have gone up to the top of the mountain.

Miyoko I used to image a giant living in the mountain. He was the mountain. And if you were brave you could find your way inside, crawl inside the giant and would never know, he would stay asleep. There are caves in the mountain.

Yoshiyuki Holes to find a way into the giant. They have been searching for bodies under the sea. With robots which can tell a body from an object. There is so much debris, so much wreckage. Robots exploring the dark waters, but that time is past; no bodies left to find.

Miyoko And farmers had to abandon thousands of animals on their farms, when they were evacuated. Cows and pigs and chickens – calling out in a landscape with people; the cries of the living, on and on, and no-one to hear.

Yoshiyuki My father was a slow reader. He would have a weekly newspaper, once a week. He would read each story of war or trouble, of conflict or tragedy, and he would be distressed or puzzled – the reading was an effort for him – and having finished it, he would read it again, shaking his head, muttering something like 'Can that be true? I will see what it says'. He would read it again hoping that the ending will have changed, that it will have a happy ending. He was a kind, simple man.

Miyoko That's just ignorance! People do that to me all the time. You do it, granddad, tell me stories, tell me lies, tell me everything will be alright, not to worry. Why do you all tell me not to worry!

Yoshiyuki Once upon a time there was a king who condemned a man to death, a foreign prisoner who spoke a different tongue. And the prisoner cursed the king, because he had given up all hope. The king did not understand the prisoner's words and asked his councillors who were there. One stepped forward and, lying, said that the man was praising God for his love of those who control their anger and forgive. The king was struck by these words, looked into his own heart, and there and then forgave the prisoner and set him free. Another councillor, outraged, called out to the king telling him the prisoner was insulting him with every foul word he could find. The king thought a moment, then said; "I prefer his lie to your truth because his lie came from a kind heart and your truth from a better one. The one who lied looked to do good".

Miyoko Does that satisfy you, the lie that comes from kind intentions? That's rubbish!

Yoshiyuki I like the story. I can see the king with his finely trimmed beard, and the prisoner in his chains. In that moment I feel the heart of the one eager to save the condemned man. You are angry at all the lies you are surrounded by. The world is full of stories that are trying to trick you, and to change you. What do you have to hold onto? Out there people are still gathering the unrecognisable parts of the bodies of the dead. That couple wander with their grief....

Miyoko Michihiro and Kiwako – that's who you mean. People have names, you know!

Yoshiyuki Yes, Michihiro and Kiwako, climbing the mountain.....climbing.....
. Stories do not make all that go away, but I cannot live with how brutal life is without something that gives me a moment of strength. I see the two faces of the councillors, the one touched by mercy, the one hard with the certainty of justice. Stories can't do much, but they need not be make-believe, need not be fake. It's up to you.

Miyoko I want the truth. I want to understand what is wrong with the world and I want to put it right, to make it better. I feel that all I hear are lies and false dreams. I want reality. I want something harder than your stories. I want something hard.

Yoshiyuki Dear Miyoko, you don't know what I'm talking about. It's impossible for me to teach you what I'm trying to say.

Miyoko Typical – you know it all. You've got all the answers.

Yoshiyuki That's what I'm saying – there are no answers. I'm sorry. I want you to have your ideals, but life is one day after the other.

Miyoko That just sounds rubbish to me; clever twisted logic, trying to be a wise old man. No wonder they had enough of you and chucked you out – and now you can get on with it here, sifting through the debris, wasting your time till you die.

Yoshiyuki I did find something yesterday – this little vase with the brightly coloured enamel dragon. Do you remember it. It was by my bed. The blue background has been chipped but the dragon is intact. I like the pot more now. I like the way the dragon is bursting out of the vase, breaking the perfect surface.

Miyoko Underneath the smooth colours the pot is rough, plain and rough to the touch.

Yoshiyuki I want you to take it. Perhaps it will make more sense to you than my sermons – finding, here and now, the energy to go on, making sense moment by moment.

Miyoko Yes, granddad. I will take it now; it is beautiful, but it also makes me sad. My dolls will help me look after it. It belongs with them, the fiery dragon.

Yoshiyuki And I would have you know that your mother did not throw me out. I needed some peace and she, you, needed the space. This is a much more convenient arrangement.

Miyoko More convenient – and she threw you out.

Yoshiyuki That is an oversimplification. There is always more to any situation than appears on the surface. As the head of the family....

Miyoko You were told you had to go. And now what will happen to you?

Yoshiyuki There are aspects of every situation that have not been explored. By the way, what happened to the water melon?

Miyoko The water melon? I was on my way and then I passed Kiwako and Michihiro, I passed them and then I turned round, and she turned round and our eyes met.... and then....I never got to the water melon stall. I was with them.

Yoshiyuki How about we take a walk down there now. We can leave the dolls here to keep an eye on things.

Miyoko And the dragon – they can see the dragon. He’s breathing fire but he will not harm them.

Yoshiyuki For now he’s held in check but you forget him at your peril, at your peril.....

He rushes at her, making a game of being the dragon. She is startled, then relaxes into laughter. They laugh together, but there is unease. They arrange the dolls and the vase and then leave, hand in hand. There is a moment of total stillness and silence before Kenichiro returns. He comes in quite shyly as though entering a holy place.

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Kenichiro So, nobody here. And no sign of that cat, or his neighbour, as far as I know. He’ll be back. Not one to take much notice of regulations. And why should he? He’s a free man. My old dad used to talk to himself and when I hear my own voice it reminds me of him. It could be him. He always did it. It wasn’t something that got more pronounced as he grew older. A family habit. I hear his voice when I hear myself talking. I think that’s partly why I do it. Heh, old fellow, you here? Given up looking for today – his grandfather’s watch. It can’t still be ticking. I can cope with the bodies. I hope I do my job with respect for the dead, but I cannot abide the rats. They send a shiver down my spine. You should see the teeth on them, take your finger off, and clever?! Clever’s not the word for it. They know exactly what’s going on and if a rat wants to get somewhere, it will. I can’t abide the rats. Never saw a rat before, certainly not in the town hall. I clung onto the fence, strong wire. I clung on and the others didn’t or couldn’t. Seventy dead. Sometimes I wish I had been swept away as well. I mean, it’s just a thought. Then we would all have been in it together – in the same boat. Well, no, not in a boat. Washed out to sea, swept away. I clung on, I clung on to the wire, that was all I could do. But ever since I think what it would be like to let go, not to hang on any longer. Seventy dead from the town hall. The fence was strong, the pillars were reinforced concrete. A rat can bite through concrete, you know. My shift’s nearly done – here, that is. I’ll go up to the evacuation

centre afterwards, help out a bit. So, he's not come back. A watch, if it's got a good case, can survive a lot of knocks. Swiss watch, he said – the best. You'd see the glint of the case, wouldn't you. You'd see the gold. I expect my eyesight's a bit better than his. Might be lucky. I'll give it a few minutes, try my luck. You never know, I might just strike lucky. There's gold in that mountain. You can pan for it in the streams, swirl the gravel, look out for the grains of gold, heavier than the rest. That's the secret, I believe. There's the real gold and there's fool's gold. Now let's have a good butcher's while the light's still good.....

He carefully ascends the pile and begins searching. He continues until the lights go down or the marking of the ending in some other way.

THE END