

## North Country: A Suite

*For a moment he was taken with the fancy that the light must  
pass through Kamoko living in the silkworms' room, as it passed  
through the translucent silkworms.*

Kawabata, *Snow Country*

1.

The north country is wet, cold, drizzly.  
There I will ride, over the mountain-passes  
to visit, come fall.

She's tense as a fishing pole.  
But becomes radiant as a whip  
in my hands:

Elects mainly silence over her past.  
Plays neither koto nor samisen:  
No gardener's hands

callused from holding dogleashes,  
her African  
twins.

She says the skies of Provence  
—blazing, open, with a single tree—  
prepared her for me.

2.

“Marseilles is dirtpoor.  
Mostly where I stayed  
near the tracks, with *touristos*.  
The girls—used, so young. You see it in their eyes:  
a map of the low parts of town.”

While she spoke, I polished her glasses  
in the front carseat.  
Vision for the sight which lights at almond-trees—  
then slides down

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with the petalfall,  
the hushed nest.  
Burn.

3.

“Smile for your lover comes”  
was carved in the stonebridge in Central Park  
where we lived as girls.  
But the first few nights are exhausting.  
No figures of porcelain,  
not painted on silkscreen—  
we bleed at the touch of a nail.

4.

I shield my face with my arm.  
I imagine by your staring  
you’ll bring me up into clearer focus

a face from a well-bottom.  
I’d have you bury with smoked breath, like a window-mirror,  
this past:

those hundreds of hospital cots  
the children’s.

Rather you make the brass bedsteads  
blossom  
flame brighter, flowers of iron under the river.

They tremble  
flames lit  
in a drop of dew

then become  
tiny as designs in a Japanese landscape  
seen from a moonbridge an ice-mile off.

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5.

Relief.  
At the center,  
revelation: a paper-garden opening in water.

Last night I drew a steaming tub  
white  
as Lear's locks.

"I was afraid I was staring  
shameless  
with love."



"What time did you get to sleep?"  
"With the first birdcall. You?"  
"The dog's jaw was bleeding."

You rose then.  
Tying the belt round a robe.

While blood ran from the mouth of the hound—  
I scribbled poems.

I'm chaste, I whisper to myself.  
My ancestors cut themselves out of blocks of ice  
bound on deathtrains for Siberia—

just as burnt people are shipped in ice:  
hands, heart, brain to come out whole  
beating, glowing.

Where will we be, come autumn?  
If we go rafting,  
we'll sit under rafters dark with smoke of winterfires then.

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6.

Went red clear from my cheeks to the roots of my hair  
when she said  
your linen is white as the Arctic.

Why  
do I see a figure  
in teal-blue earflaps

coming  
a bird in the palms?  
Am I staring thru a frosted train-window?

Is it dream?  
I see her reading the book of the shot bird,  
my heart, in her palms.

7.

The girl who lived, her namesake  
(not the one who died, murdered  
by my childhood dream of a crown-of-thorns)  
looms  
in this door at sunset:  
Mark  
a whippet shined by oil:  
Bent over my hearts-bone  
agleam.

8.

Scales, balanced on either side  
we ate—Mr. Pumblechook smiling, bone-china, before us—  
a wrecked chicken:

Not in France on the poorest budget would we get such.

Central conservatory:  
Libran.

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Carving destiny  
with a self-accusatory smile.  
Poised; no butcher-knife, but an ivory-handle in hand,

viewing your emotions with caution  
while your intuitions  
snap, branches into light, clear & golden.

My Bonsai  
alight  
in twilight.

I'm coming  
to believe that light pours thru us, red-hot & living  
which pours thru those living in the translucent silkworms' room.

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