

The Harvest Festival of Jelly Beans

[ジェリービーンズの収穫祭]

(a short story inspired by words and photos sent from From Chiang Mai to Nakanojo)

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- This short story is part of “*Cross-Words*”, a multi-media installation by Wuttin Chansataboot •
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When I first started going to middle school, I once asked my mother, who was washing dishes in the kitchen, what marriage was all about, out of a curiosity that I was beginning to feel about the opposite sex. It was out of an insipid curiosity about the opposite sex that I began to have an awareness of the opposite sex. My mother stopped washing dishes and was silent for a while, then she moved her hand again and murmured, "It's like diving into the deep sea in a submarine. I mumbled to myself. I regretted asking the question, even though I couldn't see my mother's expression. I regretted asking the question, and we never talked about it again.

A few years later, my father fell ill. He was in a critical condition for a while, but managed to survive, but when he regained consciousness, he had lost all memory. He is still recuperating in a government-designated hospital without knowing who he is. My mother, who I see regularly, tells me about my father's condition, but her tone of voice has a cheerful bounce to it, as if she enjoys visiting him. Maybe my mother is living a happier married life than ever before.

I was reminded of this as I lay back in my car seat and watched the sky at sunset. The traffic lights here always make me wait. I have no choice but to lose myself in the memories that come rushing back.

Last year, my grandmother died. She passed away quickly from an epidemic. The funeral was limited and simple. I heard that she wanted to study literature when she was young but chose to become a teacher because of her difficult life. Even as a child, my grandmother did not like me very much, and compared to my cousins, I think she kept me at a distance. So I had never visited my grandmother's apartment before she died, but the first time I entered her room to sort through her

and her mother's belongings, I was overwhelmed by the number of books that were neatly lined up. While I was browsing for a while, I found an album that was disproportionate to the bookshelf. I picked it up and casually flipped through the pages. For some reason, it was carefully preserved, from the empty corridors of the school building to the blurred images that were almost impossible to make out. One photo caught my eye. It was probably taken at a school festival when my grandmother was a novice teacher. The young grandmother was standing in front of the blackboard surrounded by her students, looking at me with a slightly stiff smile. As I stared at it, a strange sensation caught my attention. Am I now playing a role in the extension of time in this photo? Something felt different. The time here and now is completely disconnected from the time in this photo. Or rather, it felt like they were out of sync or overlapping. I can't remember why I did it, but I gently pulled the photo out of the album and put it in my pocket. I still carry it around in my cell phone holder.

A letter carrier's motorcycle rattled by. It's a postal system dedicated to the lovers of paper-based mail. The car begins to move forward in response to a green light that had changed before I knew it. Although automated driving has become a permanent feature and traffic accidents have been dramatically reduced, traffic light congestion remains unresolved. Technology advances with imperfections.

We drove out of the seasonless town and into the suburbs. I don't have any particular destination, but I heard that it's the right time of year that the Aurora Borealis has been observed twice on the border of N and G counties in the past five years, so I decided to go for a spin.

According to scholars, the earth is on the threshold of another ice age. Could this be the reason why the Arctic and the Antarctic are aligned like twins, expanding their ice ranges? Indeed, the end of summer seems to have come earlier in the past few years.

After an hour of driving, the traffic lights and buildings disappear behind me, and in their place, the shadows of the distant mountains begin to spread out in my field of vision. The border between day and night, just before the outside lights are turned on, and driving in the dusk is not a bad way to immerse yourself in a good sense of solitude.

I switched from automatic to manual driving, shutting off the GPS and steering the car as I wished. Every curve makes a chattering sound. A bunch of keys left on the dashboard had been making noise as they rubbed together for some time. I've long since forgotten which key it was, but I've left it there as a good luck charm.

I parked the car on the side of the road and went outside to take a break. When I breathed in deeply, the smell of damp and fragrant earth escaped my nose. A few dead leaves fluttered under my feet. I pulled out my map book from my bag on the back seat and flipped through the pages in the dim light. There are still publishers who create dictionaries, but they don't make maps anymore. The quickest way to get one is to bid on it at the auctions that enthusiasts sometimes put up. I found this one on a whim on the Internet some time ago and bought it on a whim. However, when I tried to find out where I was, I realized that I had no ability to read a map. How am I supposed to read this when there is no right or left, up or down on the ground? There must be some special way to learn. But as I look at it, I am amazed at how the earth can be filled with symbols. I wondered where I was. Normally, navigation and automatic driving would take me to my destination on its own. I imagined myself standing alone on the map. I'm alone. No one knows that I am here now. Hmmm...it's hilarious. An electric light comes on dimly. It seems to have cooled off a bit. I returned to the car and started the engine and drove down the road I had come from.

A few days ago, a TV news report said that a lab at the U of T had succeeded in analyzing the world's first image that proved the existence of a white hole. There, they said, an infinitely compressed chunk of atoms is being ejected as it expands toward this universe. If this is true, then this universe will eventually become a highly concentrated mass of gravity. If that is the case, the universe itself will become a single hole, and what in the world will be sucked into that hole? Before that happens, the gravity of each other will crush it.

It was getting dark, and the number of headlights of oncoming cars hurrying home was increasing. If we continue on this road, we should be able to reach the border of the prefecture at some point. The five-ring symbol was always displayed in the corner of the billboard that rose and fell in the darkness, and it remained in the back of my eyes as an afterimage.

The year I was born, the T Olympics were postponed and the following year it was officially decided to cancel. The country was left with a sense of loss and its prospects for the future were shut down. Subsequently, all scheduled Olympics were discontinued, and for a long time, Olympic bidding activities were overshadowed. No country had the luxury of doing so.

Thunberg, formerly of Sweden, was re-elected as the first world president of the United Nations, with the exception of a few countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, and he began his second term in office. This led to the first Olympic Games in the African continent to be held in four years.

With the fear of the disease that took the lives of a tenth of the population still ruling the world, the people needed a stage for their dreams to be dispelled. In addition to mainstream e-sports and drone competitions, chess and other major board games from various countries have been adopted as competitions. Of course, remotely controlled robots will sit in front of the gaming table instead of the players.

After the global pandemic, people are finally trying to regain their original order, and in the process, some nations have been dismantled, separated, and disappeared. Each time, new conflicts and outflows of migrants have occurred incessantly. People were exhausted and lost their ability to face their fears. So the government introduced a revolutionary system to manage and control people's emotions. It seemed as if there was a return to normalcy in people's lives. Order was something that was given in the first place.

An astronomer proposed a new theory and predicted that time is a substance. According to him, time is made up of much smaller particles than elementary particles, and although it is matter, it has a paradoxical mass of zero. The universe is filled with these particles, flooding the space between atoms and generating time in a radial fashion. Time can be rewritten on the fly. There is no fixed past, and the past is reconfigured to fit the time that occurs each time. In other words, time travel is whatever you want it to be.

Suddenly, I wondered when I had last eaten and slid into a roadside restaurant. Freshwater fish courses as well as various insect dishes adorned the menu. I ordered a plate of fried fish. Since the country's waters have become increasingly poorly fished due to rapid changes in sea temperatures, and the livestock industry has been decisively affected by human-to-farm disease, insects and freshwater fish farming, which had been neglected until now, have come to dominate the country's diet. Large freshwater fish from South America and Southeast Asia in particular are resistant to environmental changes and grow quickly, making them ideal for low-cost, rational fish farming. Whether this dish was good or not, I took it to my mouth and repeatedly chewed and swallowed it down. I don't know much about appetite, but the act of eating evokes a sense of being alive, so I do it as a daily habit. The payment was made at the GoldenEye, as usual. The machine identifies the iris and pays automatically.

When I left the store, I was given a receipt. This is rare nowadays. It's interesting to encounter unexpected events like this when you go to the suburbs. My old habit of wondering if there is a law of physics hidden in the list of numbers on the receipt made me toss my head in the air. A college

professor once told me that there are no coincidences in this world and that everything is expressed in mathematical formulas. At the time, I was obsessed with that professor, and I immersed myself in solving riddles to find the inevitability behind everything. One day, on my way home from college, I found an old red ribbon hanging down from the wall, which I assumed was a suggestion that only I could understand, and pondered over it day after day, but in the end I never found a logical way out. I was disappointed that I was still not connected to the world. The conclusion I came to was that all events are outside of my thoughts. I crumpled the receipt and twisted it in my pocket.

Now, what to do. It's almost time to deviate from the county line, the restricted area set aside for me, but a memory whispers to me, "Go!"

The United Nations called on countries to stop the production of high heels as an extremely slutty piece of footwear that leads to sexual derision. They quickly disappeared from the streets, aided by the public mood as the boundaries between the sexes diminished. When I was a child, I secretly borrowed my mother's shoes and tried them on, but they were really difficult to walk in, and I had a hard time understanding why people wore these things. One day, however, I was shocked to find a scene from an old movie on a video site that was banned by the Ethics Committee on the grounds of being unsound. It was a scene of a drunken woman slumped face down on a bed, taking off her high heels and throwing them away. That's all there was to it, but I felt that this scene clearly expressed the sentiments of women in this era. In this era where gender is no longer an issue, there is no need to wear such things and there is no need to fall down drunk. However, I couldn't help but be envious of the woman in this video as she looked to me like she was fighting something and trying to establish herself. This world where people are lined up and given equal human rights and no longer discriminated against in any way may not be an unhappy place, but at the same time, there are things we have lost. There is a wall that people overcome, and that's why they try to break through it themselves. There was a time when one could still feel joy in this world.

I stepped on the gas pedal at the end of the road. I knew the outcome, but I felt like I had the freedom to wear high heels.

I was approaching N County when my car was suddenly blocked by a blinding light. I slammed on the brakes and looked forward through the gap between my clasped hands to see an object floating on the road, blocking my car's path. A loud warning sound could be heard. I knew it, I had expected it, but I was mildly disappointed. There was a glimmer of hope, though. Hope, what on earth

is it now? The large object floating in front of me is a neighborhood patrol drone summoned by the personal identification chip implanted in me.

I'm pregnant now. Of course, I haven't been told what he looks like or who he is. I carried a genuine human child through state-recommended artificial insemination. The institution of marriage is still around, but after what happened, it's a rare choice for people to choose it. On the other hand, a new policy of having children raised by state institutions has been launched. If you become a surrogate, the government will guarantee you a house and living expenses. The unborn child will be raised in a family that has been screened by the government. My name on the family register is Naomi T., but I have another name that is registered with the government. It is serial number covoid-42n.J2020.F303 type C.

I signaled to the drone, then took a slow breath and pulled out a picture of my grandmother. I wondered if the 'T' Olympics had taken place in the flow of time in my grandmother's photo. Unlike digital photos, papers of analogue photos themselves are in time. My grandmother's smile seemed to waver.

I followed the drone's guidance to make a U-turn and return to the road I came from, then switched to automatic driving. "I see, it's a submarine...". My mother might have been talking about a destiny that she couldn't resist at that moment.

I turned around and looked at the distant night sky. Beyond the drone flying away, there was only darkness. It was apparently not the right season to see the Aurora Borealis in this country.

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