

CHAPTER 1

JOURNAL OF BLEACHED
BONES IN A FIELD
NOZARASHI KIKŌ

I set out on a journey of a thousand leagues, packing no provisions. I leaned on the staff of an ancient who, it is said, entered into nothingness under the midnight moon. It was the first year of Jōkyō, autumn, the eighth moon. As I left my ramshackle hut by the river, the sound of the wind was strangely cold.

bleached bones
on my mind, the wind pierces
my body to the heart
nozarashi o / kokoro ni kaze no / shimu mi kana

autumn, ten years:
now I point to Edo
as the old home
aki totose / kaette edo o / sasu kokyō

On the day I crossed the Barrier, it was raining and all the mountains were cloud-hidden.

misty rain,
a day with Mount Fuji unseen:
so enchanting
kirishigure / fuji o minu hi zo / omoshiroki

A man named Chiri was my companion and aide, and he put himself completely into caring for me. Our hearts are as one, and in friendship he is ever faithful.

Fukagawa—
 leaving the *bashō* tree
 to Mount Fuji's care¹
fukagawa ya / bashō o fuji ni / azukeyuku (Chiri)²

I was walking along the Fuji River when I saw an abandoned child, barely two, weeping pitifully. Had his parents been unable to endure this floating world which is as wave-tossed as these rapids, and so left him here to wait out a life brief as dew? He seemed like a bush clover in autumn's wind that might scatter in the evening or wither in the morning. I tossed him some food from my sleeve and said in passing,

those who listen for the monkeys:
 what of this child
 in the autumn wind?
saru o kiku hito / sutego ni aki no / kaze ika ni

Why did this happen? Were you hated by your father or neglected by your mother? Your father did not hate you, your mother did not neglect you. This simply is from heaven, and you can only grieve over your fate.

The day we were to cross the Ōi River, rains kept falling morning till night.

a day of autumn rain:
 in Edo they're counting their fingers
 about the Ōi River³
aki no hi no ame / edo ni yubi oran / ōigawa (Chiri)

A poem on horseback

roadside rose
 of sharon: devoured
 by my horse
michinobe no / mukuge wa uma ni / kuwarekeri

The waning moon shown pale in the sky, the base of the hills was still dark. With my whip dangling from my horse, we crossed many miles before any sound of cockcrow. I rode in a lingering dream as in Du Mu's "Dawn Departure,"⁴ then as I arrived at Sayo-no-nakayama I was startled awake.

dozing on my horse,
 with dream lingering and moon distant:
 smoke from a tea fire
uma ni nete / zanmu tsuki tōshi / cha no keburī

I visited Mutusbaya Fūbaku in Ise, resting my feet for about ten days. As night came on, I worshipped at the Outer Shrine. With shadows draped across the First Torii and sacred lanterns lit here and there, the "pine wind from the high peak"⁵ pierced my flesh and struck deep into my heart.

month's end, no moon:
 a thousand year cedar
 embraced by a windstorm
misoka tsuki nashi / chitose no sugi o / daku arashi

I wear no sword on my hips but dangle an alms wallet from my neck and hold a rosary of eighteen beads in my hand. I resemble a priest, but the dust of the world is on me; I resemble a lay person, but my head is shaven. Although I am no priest, here those with shaven heads are considered to be Buddhist friars, and I was not allowed to go before the shrine.

There's a stream in the lower end of Saigyō Valley. As I gazed at women washing potatoes,

potato-washing women:
 were Saigyō here,
 he'd compose a waka
imo arau onna / saigyō naraba / uta yoman

When I stopped at a teashop, a woman named Butterfly asked for a poem referring to her name. She brought me some white silk, and on it I wrote:

an orchid's scent—
 its incense perfuming
 a butterfly's wings
ran no ka ya / chō no tsubasa ni / takimono su

Visiting the thatched hut of a recluse living in tranquillity
 planted ivy
 and five or six stalks of bamboo
 in the windstorm
tsuta uete / take shigo hon no / arashi kana

I returned home at the beginning of Ninth Month. The Forgetting Grass by my mother's room had withered with frost, and no trace of it remained. Everything from the past had changed. The temples of my brothers and sisters were white, wrinkles around their eyes. "We're still alive!"—it was all we could say. My older brother opened a relic case and said, "Pay your respects to Mother's white hair. Like Urashima with his jewelled box, your eyebrows have aged."⁶ Then, for a time, we all wept.

 should I take it in my hand
 it would melt in these hot tears:
 autumn frost
te ni toraba kien / namida zo atsuki / aki no shimo

We continued our pilgrimage into Yamato Province to a place called Take-no-uchi in Katsuge District. This was Chiri's hometown, so we rested our feet for a few days.

cotton-beating bow—
 as consoling as a lute
 deep in the bamboos⁷
wata yumi ya / biwa ni nagusamu / take no oku

Visiting the Taima Temple on Mount Futagami, we saw a pine in the courtyard that must have been a thousand years old, "big enough to hide oxen." Though nonsentient, its connection to the Buddha preserved it from the woodsman's axe.⁸ How fortunate, how awesome!

monks, morning glories:
 how many died, and reborn;
 pine of the dharma
sō asagao / iku shinikaeru / nori no matsu

I wandered alone into the heart of Yoshino. The mountains were so deep. White clouds lay piled on the peaks, and misty rain filled the valley. The woodsmens' tiny huts were scattered all around, and the sound of wood cut to the west echoed on the east. Temple bells struck to the base of my heart. From of old many who abandoned the world and entered these mountains fled into Chinese poetry, took refuge in Japanese verse. Surely one can call this Mount Lu, like the mountain in Cathay.

At a certain temple lodging, I put up for the night.

beat the fulling block,
 make me hear it—
 temple wife⁹
kinuta uchite / ware ni kakiseyo ya / bō ga tsuma

The remains of Saigyō's thatched hut is off to the right of the Inner Temple, reached by pushing a few hundred yards along a faint woodcutter's path. It faces a steep valley—a stunning view. The “clear trickling water” seems unchanged from of old, and even now the drops trickle down.

dew trickles down:
 in it I would try to wash away
 the dust of the floating world¹⁰
tsuyu tokutoku / kokoromi ni ukiyo / susugabaya

From Yamato I passed through Yamashiro, taking the Ōmi Road into Mino. Beyond Imasu and Yamanaka lay the grave of Lady Tokiwa. Moritake of Ise once wrote, “autumn's wind resembling Lord Yoshitomo,” and I had wondered what the similarity was. Now I too wrote:

Yoshitomo's heart
 it does resemble:
 autumn wind¹¹
yoshitomo no / kokoro ni nitari / aki no kaze

At Fuwa Barrier

autumn wind—
 just thickets and fields
 at Fuwa Barrier
akikaze ya / yabu mo hatake mo / fuwa no seki

The next night I spent in Ōgaki, the guest of Bokuin. When I set off on my journey from Musashi Plain, I had bleached bones by the roadside on my mind, but now:

not dead yet
 at journey's end—
 autumn evening
shini mo senu / tabine no hate yo / aki no kure

At Hontō Temple in Kuwana

winter peonies
 and plovers, like
 cuckoo in snow
fuyu botan / chidori yo yuki no / hototogisu

Weary of sleeping on grass pillow, I went out to the beach in the predawn darkness.

daybreak—
 a whitefish, whiteness
 one inch
akebono ya / shirauo shiroki / koto issun

I went to Atsuta to worship. The grounds of the shrine were utterly in ruins, the earthen wall collapsed and covered with clumps of weeds. In one place a rope marked the remains of a smaller shrine, in another was a stone with the name of a god now unworshipped. All around, mugwort and longing fern grew wild. Somehow the place drew my heart, more than if it had been splendidly maintained.

even the fern of longing
 is withered; buying rice-cakes
 at an inn¹²
shinobu sae / karete mochi kau / yadori kana

On the road to Nagoya, I chanted verse.

a wild poem:
 in winter's winds
 don't I look
 just like Chikusai¹³
kyōku / kogarashi no / mi wa chikusai ni / nitaru kana
 grass for my pillow:
 is a dog too being rained on?
 night's voices
kusa makura / inu mo shigururu ka / yoru no koe

Walking out to view the snow

market townsfolk!
 I'll sell you this hat,
 a snow umbrella
ichibito yo / kono kasa urō / yuki no kasa

Seeing a traveler

even a horse:
 gazing on it on a
 morning of snow
uma o sae / nagamuru yuki no / ashita kana

Spending a day at the seashore

the sea darkening,
 a wild duck's call
 faintly white
umi kurete / kamo no koe / honoka ni shiroshi

Removing my straw sandals in one place, setting down my staff in another, I kept spending nights on the road as the year drew to a close.

the year ended,
 still wearing my bamboo hat
 and straw sandals
toshi kurenu / kasa kite waraji / hakinagara

Chanting such verse, I spent New Year's at a mountain hut
back home.

Whose son-in-law?
bearing fern fronds and rice-cakes
this year of the Ox
ta ga muko zo / shida ni mochi ou / ushi no toshi

On the road to Nara

yes, it's spring—
through nameless hills,
a faint haze
haru nare ya / na mo naki yama no / usugasumi

Secluded in Second Month Hall

the water drawing—
in the frozen night, the sound
of the monks' clogs
mizutori ya / kōri no sō no / kutsu no oto

I went to the capital, visiting Mitsui Shūfū's mountain villa
at Narutaki.

Plum Grove

the plums so white:
yesterday did someone steal
the cranes?
ume shiroshi / kinō ya tsuru o / nusumareshi

Meeting Priest Ninkō at Saiganji Temple in Fushimi

onto my robe
sprinkle dewdrops from
Fushimi's peach blossoms
waga kinu ni / fushimi no momo no / shizuku se yo

Crossing the mountains on the road to Ōtsu

on a mountain path,
 somehow so moving:
 wild violets
yamaji kite / naniyara yukashi / sumiregusa

A view of the lake

pine of Karasaki:
 more vague even
 than the blossoms¹⁴
karasaki no / matsu wa hana yori / oboro nite

Sitting down for lunch at a traveler's shop

azaleas all arranged:
 in their shade, a woman
 tearing dried cod
tsutsuji ikete / sono kage ni hidara / saku onna

Poem on a journey

in a field of mustard,
 with flower-viewing faces:
 sparrows
nabatake ni / hanamigao naru / suzume kana

At Minakuchi I met a friend I had not seen for twenty years.

our two lives:
 between them has lived
 this blossoming cherry
inochi futatsu no / naka ni ikitaru / sakura kana

A monk from Hiru-ga-kojima in Izu Province, on pilgrimage since last autumn, heard of me and came to Owari to join my journey.

well now, together
 let's eat ears of barley:
 a grass pillow
iza tomo ni / homugi kurawan / kusa makura

The Abbot of Engakuji, Daiten, had passed away early in First Month. Shaken, I felt as if I was in a dream, and from the road I sent word to Kikaku:

yearning for the plum,
 bowing before the deutzia:
 eyes of tears
ume koite / unohana ogamu / namida kana

Given to Tokoku

for the white poppy
 it tears off its wing:
 the butterfly's memento
shirageshi ni / hane mogu chō no / katami kana

Once again I stayed with Tōyō, and as I left for the Eastern Provinces,

from deep in the
 peony's pistils, the bee's
 reluctant parting
botan shibe fukaku / wakeizuru hachi no / nagori kana

At the end of Fourth Month, I returned to my hut, and as I rested from the weariness of the journey,

summer robes:
 still some lice
 I've yet to pick
natsugoromo / imada shirami o / toritsukusazu