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Hiroshima Bugi
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1 Ronin of Rashomon Gate

The Atomic Bomb Dome is my Rashomon.

Come closer to the stone, over here, out of the rain. You are the first person to visit me in these ruins. This is my unearthly haven in the remains of the first nuclear war. Only the dead rush their stories under this dome.

The gate of ruins.

The rain, the moody rain, a reminder of that bright and vicious light that poisoned the marrow and forever burned the heart of our memories. Rain, rain, and the ominous stories of black rain. No one can ever be sure of the rain.

The park ravens break that inscrutable silence at the wispy end of a rainstorm. Listen, the shadows of dead children arise from the stone and shout back at the ravens. They mock each other, a parade of ghosts forever teased by the rain.

Sit here, near the ropes.
Twisted reeds?
My kabuki theater.
Raven sumo.
Kabuki of the ruins.
Fierce beauty.
Shadows of the dead.
Ghostly souvenirs.
Atomu war.
Curse of black rain.
Hiroshima by chance.
Kyoto preserved.
Twice by irony.

The Rashomon Gate was in ruins too, more than eight centuries ago. Brutality so old it has turned aesthetic, the fierce cruelty of beauty. We might have been there, waiting for the rain to end just as we are today.

Akutagawa wrote our stories.

Kyoto, a grand city of shrines and willow trees, was wasted, as you know, by natural disasters, war, and wild fires, and that once-mighty gate was taken over by animals, thieves, and ghosts.

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The warior ghosts.
Kabuki scenes.
Memory is our gate.

The Atomic Bomb Dome has been registered as a World Heritage. Preserved, as you can see, for the tourists, sentimental bystanders, and, of course, for the cryptic outriders and politicians of peace.

Early in the morning, every morning since this river city was decimated, at this very site, the ruins of the hypocenter, shadows of the dead gather in a ghost parade. The children of incineration, and the white bones of an empire war, arise in a nuclear kabuki theater, and the slender shadows come to light in a ghost parade at eight fifteen, the very same moment of the explosion on August 6, 1945.

My life ended before the bomb.
My life started with the occupation.
My father sent me away.
My father was an army sergeant.
My mother was a cripple.
My mother was a bugi dancer.
My only friends are lepers.
My only friends are orphans.

Our stories are eternal, and the ravens are wise not to break the absolute silence of the ruins in the morning. Stay overnight and you may see a theater of human horseweeds and perfect memories. This is our new story.

Chrysanthemums?
My shirt of tricky shame.
Printed flowers?
Mocks the emperor.
Ruth Benedict?
Story of guilt not shame.

The government poisoned our prize chrysanthemums because of their fear of leprosy. The mere touch of a leper shamed the great beauty of the flowers.

The empire of shame.
Crown stigma.
Sovereignty of the ruins.
My theater is liberty.

Hiroshima arose out of the nuclear ruins to become a testy, prosperous city of peace and victimry. Millions of tourists treasure

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the origami cranes and forever recite the tragic stories of Sadake Sasaki.

> Discovery is the cure.
>
> Never leprosy.

> Listen to the distant thunder. The air is thick, heavy, black in the distance. A few days ago lightning struck the dome and demons sizzled down the beams. Have you ever thought about being struck by lightning?

Lightning evades me.

> The perfect death is by chance, and the thunderous, terminal turn of a conversation in the rain. The last perfect vision is a burst of bright light, and then the mighty rage of memory.

> I pray for lightning.
>
> For death?
>
> Yes, a natural liberty.
>
> Stop praying.
>
> Suddenly, bright, and true.

I was tormented by terrible dreams the first few nights alone here in the ruins. The horror was inescapable. I was caught in the same nightmare, night after night, and could not scare myself awake. The children and lonesome dead crossed over the circle in the ruins.

> My nightmare lasted sixty years.

I was surrounded by white bones and burned, puffy bodies. The river was packed with bodies that never floated out to the bay. I was dead, a heap of ancient white bones, and could only reach out for bits of passing flesh to cover my bones, to create a new memory.

> I caught a white pigeon with burned feathers. Suddenly the pigeon turned into an angry ghost and scorned me. Then my bones were mounted in a museum, with my broken, burned watch beside me, probably as punishment for my resistance and tease of time.

My body had deserted me, and my remains were displayed in a diorama of victimry to promote peace. I raged over the passive notions of peace, and then, in the last scene of the nightmare, the museum was destroyed in an earthquake. My bones were liberated by chance and my shadow was cast in a ghost parade, a nuclear kabuki theatre. I awakened in the ruins, and every morning since then there has been a ghost parade that starts abruptly at eight fifteen ante meridiem.

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My body is a nightmare.
Old war wounds?
Yes, but not military.
Samurai?
No, leprosy.
Where?
Oshima, an island of lepers.
Another ghost parade.
The rain is over.
Nasty sores on your face.

The caved nose and sores are the shame, the black rain of culture and disease on my face. No, not the ecstatic fear or perverse pleasures of stigmata. There was nothing aesthetic to bear by reason or creative poses.

My father reported the sores to save my sister from social scorn and separation. No man would have her with a leper brother at home. My face was erased by disease, and my name was erased by fear and family. The police snatched my body and confined me on an island for sixty years, even after there was a cure for leprosy. My war, you see, never ends, there is no surrender, no occupation, no reformation because my body and eroded bones are the ruins of this nasty, cruel, empire culture. My stories are separations of time and family.

Oshima, a perfect nickname.
No, no, too severe.
The samurai of leprosy.
Death in that name.
Tricky stories are liberty.
Try my leprosy.
Oshima of the ruins.

Oshima was my prison, and by torment and desperate loneliness we cared for each other to the end, a wounded and abandoned family. Many of my close friends died of loneliness. Three elders, about my age, and a younger blind woman, the philosophers on the island, died in the same week.

Death by silence.

For many years we had nurtured prize chrysanthemums on the island. Strong, beautiful flowers gave us courage in the morning. Then, reluctantly, we agreed to cut some of the chrysanthemums for sale in a nearby town, across the Inland Sea.

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Happily, the trade developed slowly, but then we were told that our prize chrysanthemums had wilted and died in a single day. My friends died too, outcasts, suicide by desolation, when we learned that the chrysanthemums had been sterilized because we were lepers. Those beautiful blooms died because of our terrible, devoted touch of leprosy.

I reach for the lightning in every storm.

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Manidoo Envoy

Ronin Ainoko Browne beat on my door at the Hotel Manidoo in Nogales, Arizona. There was no cause to answer because the sign in the lobby made it perfectly clear that the residents of the hotel were never at home to strangers or solicitors.

Ronin was persistent that morning. I watched him through the eyehole in the door. His moves were theatrical, a measured strut, and his manner cocksure. Open this door, he shouted.

Who are you?

Where is my father?

Not here.

Who are you?

Who is your father?

Sergeant Orion Browne.

Nightbreaker?

Ronin, at first sight, could have been mistaken for Toshiro Mifune. He bounded into the room as if he were on the set of the movie *Rashomon*. He looked around, gestured to the chairs and furniture. Then he turned toward me. My father lives here, he said, over an empty theatrical smile.

Ronin dressed for his father. He wore beaded moccasins, loose black trousers, a pleated shirt shrewdly decorated with puffy white chrysanthemums, and a dark blue cravat. Sadly, he was seven days too late.

Nightbreaker, my best friend, died in his wicker chair near the window. His last gesture was to the raucous ravens perched in the cottonwoods. Ravens inspire natural memories, he told me, and then continued his stories about the tricky imperial ravens in occupied Japan. Ravens create stories of survivance in our perfect memories.

Nightbreaker invited me to move into his room, one of the best in the hotel. We cared for each other as brothers and veterans. That awkward admission soon turned to humor and personal trust. Ronin told me he would stay with his father, late or not, for a few days.

Nightbreaker never mentioned a son, but he told many stories about his lover, Okichi. The name has a grievous history. Japanese authorities, more than a century ago, provided an adolescent by that

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name as a consort for Townsend Harris, the first consul of the United States. Some prostitutes now bear the same name.

Okichi was a boogie, or *bugi*, dancer. "Tokyo Bugi" was the most popular song in the early occupation. Nightbreaker said they first met at a rodeo sponsored by the military and later danced at the Ernie Pyle Canteen in Tokyo. They saw *No Regrets for Our Youth*, directed by Akira Kurosawa, one of the first Japanese films produced after the war. Okichi was not interested in heroic, political stories that were not celebrations of the emperor.

Nightbreaker told me she learned how to kiss in romantic movies and was infatuated by Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*. Her favorite song was "Sentimental Journey." Nightbreaker never knew she was pregnant. Okichi disappeared one night and never returned to their regular meeting place at the moat near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

Nightbreaker lost his war with cancer, the mortal wounds of his military service. He had been exposed several times to nuclear radiation. If only he had known about his son.

Ronin lived with me, and the memories of his father, for more than a month. The corner room on the second floor overlooked three giant cottonwood trees and the border between Mexico and the United States. He sat in silence for three days in the wicker chair and wrote notes to his father. Then he wore his father's dress uniform and signature cravat every night to dinner and imagined his moves. Ronin learned about the tender manner and sensibilities of his father from the many stories told by other native veterans at the hotel.

Nightbreaker wore the same blue cravat. Naturally, the flourish was familiar, and so was the story. Ronin told us, as his father had years earlier, that their ancestors in the fur trade wore blue to entice women, a practice learned from stories about the wise bower birds who decorate their elaborate nests with something blue. The color is an avian aphrodisiac. Fur traders sold blue cravats to natives, and the myth endures.

Handy Fairbanks founded the Hotel Manidoo some twenty years ago. He is native, a decorated veteran, and once a great hunter on the reservation. Handy lost both of his legs on a land mine, and then the last of his close relatives died in an automobile accident.

Handy created a hotel of perfect memories for wounded veterans. Nightbreaker, who earned his nickname for amorous adventures on the reservation, had lived in the hotel for the past nine years.

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Many residents thought his distinctive nickname was connected to his military service at nuclear test sites.

Five nights a week we came together for dinner and to create our perfect memories. The marvelous, elusive tease of our many stories, and variations of stories, became concerted memories. Our tricky metaphors were woven together day by day into a consciousness of moral survivance. More than the commerce of reactive survivalists, mere liturgy, ideology, or the causative leverage of a sworn witness, survivance is a creative, concerted consciousness that does not arise from separation, dominance, or concession nightmares. Our stories create perfect memories of survivance.

Natives once named the storiers of the day on trade routes in the canoe country. At night, around a fire, by the signs of natural silence, chance, menace, tricksters, and endurance, the native provenance of stories, were given to perfect memories, and so the wounded veterans of the hotel named a storier of the day.

Nightbreaker was an original native storier, and the tease of his stories became our perfect memories. He touched by totems and metaphors the imagic animals and birds of our survivance. We were always in the bright light of his eternal fires of imagination.

Ronin became a storier, and he mailed his journal to me several years later with vague instructions to provide notes, the necessary descriptive references, and background information on his father and others. The original stories were first scrawled on scraps of paper and later handwritten in seven ledger notebooks.

My personal library, a considerable collection of books about the history, literature, and theater of Japan, aroused his interest in me as a trustee, and he wanted his stories to be associated with his father and the perfect memories of our survivance at the Hotel Manidoo.

Hiroshima Bugi was read out loud at dinner by the storiers named for the day. Ronin would be pleased to hear the creative counts that became part of his tricky stories, and, of course, my commentaries.

Handy, for instance, elaborated on the scenes about romantic movies. Okichi, he said, learned how to dance and tease from *Gone with the Wind*. A copy of the movie was confiscated by soldiers in the Philippines and shown before the end of the war and occupation of Japan. Mister Nightbreaker Butler, when did those nasty soldiers burn Atlanta? Why, Scarlett Okichi, you know it was the Civil War. The Japanese lost the war to the Union.

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Handy was a marvelous storier that night, and we honored the perfect memories of Nightbreaker. Clearly, the tricky *renga*, connected scenes, ghost parades, the nuclear kabuki theater in Ronin's *Hiroshima Bugi*, and our imagic bits and riffs, are concerted stories of perfect memories at the Hotel Manidoo.

Oshima Island, or Izu Oshima, a volcanic island, was a prison for lepers near the Izu Peninsula on the Island Sea. Oshima was recently released from the island after sixty years of separation from society. The sentence and banishment for his disease was sanctioned by the Japanese Leprosy Prevention Law. Many families complied with the law and erased the names of their sons, daughters, and other relatives who were lepers. Oshima, a nickname, lost his real name, his sense of presence, cultural associations, and most of his close friends on the island.

The Atomic Bomb Dome, first protected as a historic site, with no intended irony, is now registered on the World Heritage List. The Sphinx in Egypt, the Great Wall of China, and Grand Canyon National Park, for instance, are also registered as sites of World Heritage.

The Atomic Bomb Dome, near the shore of the Motoyasu River, is the actual ruins of the Hiroshima Industrial Promotion Hall. The Dome, however, is not as real to many tourists as the simulated miniature dome constructed inside the Peace Memorial Museum.

Toyofumi Ogura described the Industrial Promotion Hall in *Letters from the End of the World*. "That old brick building, with its rather exotic dome, was well known in Hiroshima. Though the building was virtually destroyed, roof and floors both having caved in, the steel frame of the dome and the outer walls of the building are still standing. If you step over the rubble and into the remains of the building, you can look up and see the blue sky through the skeleton of the dome, making you feel as if you might be standing amid the ruins of Pompeii."

Ronin declared war on the simulations of peace when he saw, for the first time, the miniature dome over two stories of plaintive peace letters etched on metal plates. Hundreds of reduced metal letters were mounted around a pathetic peace column.

Tadatoshi Akiba, mayor of Hiroshima, for instance, wrote to President William Jefferson Clinton on December 15, 2000. "The United States should look objectively at the history of the 20th Century and realize that nuclear deterrence does not prevent war. Rather, it

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invites escalation and proliferation of nuclear weapons, thus placing the entire human race at risk of annihilation. Please listen to the international community's sincere desire to eliminate these weapons. Please immediately halt your subcritical nuclear testing, and take your proper place at the forefront of the effort to make the 21st Century free from nuclear weapons." The entire letter is etched on metal, reduced, and mounted on the column of peace. Nearby, there is a letter of protest to Jacques Chirac, president of the French Republic.

Ronin told me he summoned many spectators at the museum and read out loud to them, by shouts and roars, parts of several letters on the column. These letters do not represent peace, but the passive, pathetic apologies for the absence of nuclear weapons. Ronin said the audience rushed to the exits when he announced that the column should be incinerated at the annual peace ceremonies and the country should bear nuclear weapons.

"Peace is the order, however imperfect, that results from agreement between states, and can only be sustained by that agreement," wrote Michael Howard in *The Invention of Peace*. Peace is "not an order natural to mankind: it is artificial, intricate and highly volatile." Japan would reach a better agreement on peace if the military possessed nuclear weapons to protect the peace, said Ronin. Peace is not a column of mundane letters to heads of state. The peace museums and souvenir counters only weaken the stories of nuclear survivance.

Akutagawa Ryunosuke published the story "Rashomon" in 1915. *Rashomon* the movie was actually based on another story, "In a Grove," and directed by Akira Kurasawa. "Rashomon" the story is set in twelfth-century Kyoto.

"The Atomic Bomb Dome is my Rashomon," wrote Ronin. The allegory of the first line of his journal, the short story, and the film, starts in the rain. Akutagawa's story opens with the servant of a samurai and an old woman in the twelfth century. The servant becomes a thief and the old woman tears hair from corpses that are dumped at Rashomon Gate in Kyoto. Ronin's journal opens with an orphan and a leper in the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima.

Akutagawa and Ronin are poets of disasters. Ronin created a ceremonial circle with a rope of twisted reeds in the tradition of sumo and the kabuki theater. Misery and mischance are exorcised by enter-

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ing the circle, and, as he reveals later, by stomping on a picture of the emperor. The many corpses at the gate in the twelfth-century story are the shadows and nuclear dead of today.

That metaphor, human horseweeds, is borrowed from stories told by the *hibakusha*, the survivors, of the first flowers to bloom after the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima.

Ronin creates dialogue in a kabuki theater style, short, direct, positional words and sentences. He never discussed the style of his scenes, shifts of pronoun, transformations, or metaphorical tease, but he was strongly influenced by kabuki and sumo theater. Ronin created from perfect visual memory a theatrical, literary style. The characters, as in the scene with the leper, could be transposed in a nuclear allegory.

"Kabuki has attained its own blend of reality and unreality. It has created its own flavor which derives from hovering in its own way between the two poles. It now remains only a matter for the spectator to draw delight from the result," wrote Faubion Bowers in *Japanese Theater*. "There are moments on the stage of complete and literal representation of reality, followed by such fancy as to border on the nonsensical. Sometimes through the vast art resources available to kabuki, a perfect illusion is created, independent either of reality or of methods of creating fiction. Often this illusion is deliberately broken by the insertion of passages which of necessity force the spectator back into an awareness of himself and reminds him that what he has been seeing is merely a stage performance. For example, often actors will refer to themselves or to other actors in the course of the play by their names."

The kabuki theater is a measured transcendence of the obvious. The sound of *hyoshigi*, clacker sticks, and the curtain opens on a trace of sumo wrestlers, the circles, and narrow approach to the arena and stage. "Not only is the stylization of gestures and the marking out of ceremonial space common to both sumo and kabuki, but both performances also feature ceremonial stamping," wrote Yamaguchi Masao in "Sumo in the Popular Culture of Contemporary Japan."

Ronin posed in his black trousers and chrysanthemum shirt, sounded the *hyoshigi*, he told me, and created a nuclear kabuki theater in the registered haven of cultural shame, The Atomic Bomb Dome. His theatrical tease was nuclear, not feudal, and by his tricky

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moves the illusions of peace were converted into stories of survivance. He was a teaser, not an appeaser, of nuclear peace.

The Peace Memorial Museum created the simulations that dominate the international politics of nuclear peace, and by boosters, souvenirs, and ritual tours weaken the traditional art of war and creative nuclear survivance.

The Japanese would rather rebuild a shrine as a traditional ritual than preserve a shrine, so the preservation of nuclear ruins is an ironic gesture. The ruins are true, beyond ritual preservation. Ronin pointed this out and announced at the annual peace party that the possession of nuclear weapons is a ritual balance, a traditional renewal of peace. Japan rebuilds shrines, why not peace by nuclear weapons?

"Preserving material objects is not the only way to conserve a heritage," wrote David Lowenthal in *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. "The great Ise Shinto temple in Japan is dismantled every twenty years and replaced by a faithful replica built of similar materials exactly as before. Physical continuity signifies less to the Japanese than perpetuating the techniques and rituals of re-creation." The techniques of peace, then, are ritual power and persuasion, and an active peace is created by the possession and renewal of nuclear weapons, not by passive memorials. Ask any samurai warrior about peace, shouted Ronin.

Ronin, by his presence in the ruins, created a ritual, a nuclear kabuki theater that teased and defied the preservation of peace. The Peace Memorial Museum, at the same time, constructed a theme park miniature of the Atomic Bomb Dome.

The kabuki theater is a ritual trace of the feudal past, the rue and craze of loyalty. "Kabuki seems to me to have the perfect balance between the sensuality and ritual which are the two poles of Japanese culture," wrote Alex Kerr in *Lost Japan*. "At the same time, there is a tendency in Japan towards over-decoration, towards cheap sensuality too overt to be art. Recognizing this, the Japanese turn against the sensual. They polish, refine, slow down, trying to reduce art and life to its pure essentials. From this reaction were born the rituals of tea ceremony, Noh drama and Zen. In the history of Japanese art you can see these two tendencies warring against each other."

Ronin was at war with traditions and simulations of peace, and in a mighty theater pose he advanced the outrageous idea of more

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nuclear weapons for peace and called for a supranational soldiery to enforce a nuclear peace. He borrowed that general idea from Albert Einstein, who wrote that mankind "can only gain protection against the danger of unimaginable destruction and wanton annihilation if a supranational organization has alone the authority to produce or possess these weapons." Einstein prepared that obscure message for the Peace Congress of Intellectuals at Wroclav in 1948.

Ronin boldly declared that the Japanese must vote to amend their constitution so the government can possess nuclear weapons as a theatrical balance of crucial, reductive rituals and pleasures. The nuclear kabuki theater is a ghost parade and the aesthetic symmetry of erotic power. Ronin surely lost his audience with these comments about a nuclear-armed soldiery.

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