

hydrophobia

Aase Berg

(2012)

The hare is also a constellation
in the listless, frigid hydrosphere
Same cosmic fatstiff freezefearflood
same cuntstiff looptrack fatflood
We like suckle animals, egg animals, whalenut animals
prefer not to give birth to live young

TRANSLATED BY JOHANNES GÖRANSSON

confessions of a mask

Yukio Mishima

(1949)

Summer vacation arrived. Although I had looked forward to it impatiently, it proved to be one of those between-acts during which one does not know what to do with himself; although I had hungered for it, it proved to be an uneasy feast for me.

Ever since I had contracted a light case of tuberculosis in infancy, the doctor had forbidden me to expose myself to strong ultraviolet rays. When at the seacoast, I was never allowed to stay out in the direct rays of the sun more than thirty minutes at a time. Any violation of this rule always brought its own punishment in a swift attack of fever. I was not even allowed to take part in swimming practice at school. Consequently I had never learned to swim. Later, this inability to swim gained new significance in connection with the persistent fascination the sea came to have

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for me, with those occasions on which it exercised such turbulent power over me.

At the time of which I speak, however, I had not yet encountered this overpowering temptation of the sea. And yet, wanting somehow to while away the boredom of a season which was completely distasteful to me, a season moreover which awakened inexplicable longings within me, I spent that summer at the beach with my mother and brother and sister. . .

Suddenly I realized that I had been left alone on the rock.

I had walked along the beach toward this rock with my brother and sister a short time before, looking for the tiny fish that flashed in the rivulets between the rocks. Our catch had not been as good as we had foreseen, and my small sister and brother had become bored. A maid had come to call us to the beach umbrella where my mother was sitting.

I had refused crossly to turn back, and the maid had taken my brother and sister back with her, leaving me alone.

The sun of the summer afternoon was beating down incessantly upon the surface of the sea, and the entire bay was a single, stupendous expanse of glare. On the horizon some summer clouds were standing mutely still, half-immersing their magnificent, mournful, prophet-like forms in the sea. The muscles of the clouds were pale as alabaster.

A few sailboats and skiffs and several fishing boats had put out from the sandy beaches and were now moving about lazily upon the open sea. Except for the tiny figures in the boats, not a human form was to be seen. A subtle hush was over everything. As though a coquette had come telling her little secrets, a light breeze blew in from the sea, bringing to my ears a tiny sound like the invisible wing-beats of some light-hearted insects. The beach near me was made up almost altogether of low, docile rocks that tilted toward the sea. There were only two or three such jutting crags as this on which I was sitting.

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From the offing the waves began and came sliding in over the surface of the sea in the form of restless green swells. Groups of low rocks extended out into the sea, where their resistance to the waves sent splashes high into the air, like white hands begging for help. The rocks were dipping themselves in the sea's sensation of deep abundance and seemed to be dreaming of buoys broken loose from their moorings. But in a flash the swell had passed them by and come sliding toward the beach with unabated speed. As it drew near the beach something awakened and rose up within its green hood. The wave grew tall and, as far as the eye could reach, revealed the razor-keen blade of the sea's enormous ax, poised and ready to strike. Suddenly the dark-blue guillotine fell, sending up a white blood-splash. The body of the wave, seething and falling, pursued its severed head, and for a moment it reflected the

pure blue of the sky, that same unearthly blue which is mirrored in the eyes of a person on the verge of death. . . . During the brief instant of the wave's attack, the groups of rocks, smooth and eroded, had concealed themselves in white froth, but now, gradually emerging from the sea, they glittered in the retreating remnants of the wave. From the top of the rock where I sat watching, I could see hermit-shells sidling crazily across the glittering rocks and crabs become motionless in the glare.

All at once my feeling of solitude became mixed with memories of Omi. It was like this: My long-felt attraction toward the loneliness that filled Omi's life—loneliness born of the fact that life had enslaved him—had first made me want to possess the same quality; and now that I was experiencing, in this feeling of emptiness before the sea's repletion, a loneliness that outwardly resembled his, I wanted to savor it completely, through his very eyes. I would enact the double role of both Omi and myself. But in order to do so I first had to discover some point of similarity with him, however slight. In that way I would be able to become a standin for Omi and consciously act exactly as though I were joyfully overflowing with that same loneliness which was probably only unconscious in him, attaining at last to a realization of that daydream in which the pleasure I felt at the sight of Omi became the pleasure Omi himself was feeling.

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Ever since becoming obsessed with the picture of St. Sebastian, I had acquired the unconscious habit of crossing my hands over my head whenever I happened to be undressed. Mine was a frail body, without so much as a pale shadow of Sebastian's abundant beauty. But now once more I spontaneously fell into the pose. As I did so my eyes went to my armpits. And a mysterious sexual desire boiled up within me. . .

Summer had come and, with it, there in my armpits, the first sprouts of black thickets, not the equal of Omi's it is true, but undoubtedly there. Here then was the point of similarity with Omi that my purposes re-

quired. There is no doubt that Omi himself was involved in my sexual desire, but neither could it be denied that this desire was directed mainly toward my own armpits. Urged on by a swarming combination of circumstances —the salt breeze that made my nostrils quiver, the strong summer sun that blazed down upon me and set my shoulders and chest to smarting, the absence of human form as far as the eye could reach—for the first time in my life I indulged in my “bad habit” out in the open, there beneath the blue sky. As its object I chose my own armpits. . .

My body was shaken with a strange grief. I was on fire with a loneliness as fiery as the sun. My swimming trunks, made of navy-blue wool, were glued unpleasantly to my stomach. I climbed down slowly off the rock, stepping into a trapped pool of water at the edge of the beach. In the water my feet looked like white, dead shells, and down through it I could plainly see the bottom, studded with shells and flickering with ripples.

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I knelt down in the water and surrendered myself to a wave that broke at this moment and came rushing toward me with a violent roar. It struck me in the chest, almost burying me in its crushing whitecap. . .

When the wave receded, my corruption had been washed away. Together with that receding wave, together with the countless living organisms it contained —microbes, seeds of marine plants, fish eggs—my myriad spermatozoa had been engulfed in the foaming sea and carried away.

