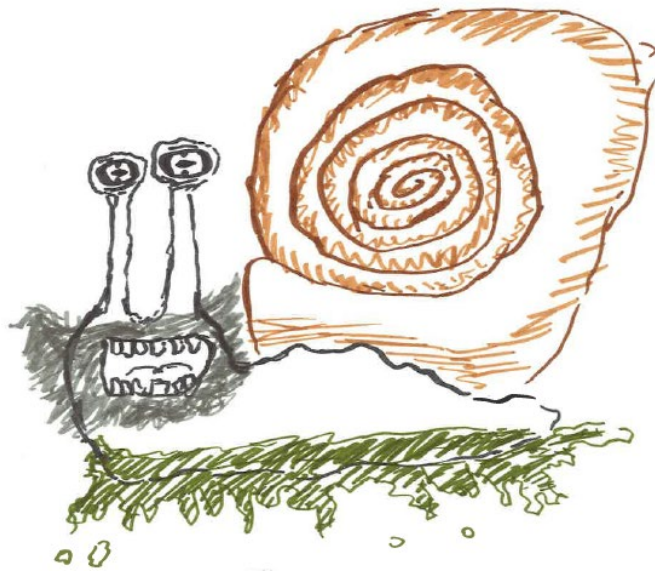


(An Audio Guide for)
Unsung Snails and Heroes
Julia Izumi



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Contact:

Sam Barickman and Kate Pines
ICM Partners
65 E 55th St., New York, NY 10022
212-556-5743 // 212-556-6805
sbarickman@icmpartners.com // kpines@icmpartners.com

(artwork by Kai Chen)

Characters

ATSUKO (篤子), Japanese, 16, second sister of the Tazawa family, student
Pronounced AH-tsu-ko

YASUKO (康子), Japanese, 19, eldest sister of the Tazawa family, farmer
Pronounced YA-su-ko

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL (ご先祖様のカタツムリさん), a deliverer of dead words, he's also
blind, but so are most snails
Pronounced MIS-ter-AN-ces-tor-SNAIL

XUE (雪), Chinese, 19, female, farmer
Pronounced SHOO-eh

AUDIO GUIDE, Japanese-American, female, your guide for this journey

GOSSIP LADY 1 (CHIE) & GOSSIP LADY 2 (RIIKO), townswomen
FURUHATA, black market merchant
OFFICER CARL/MR. CARL/PROFESSOR CARL, a Naval officer? An English teacher? An East
Asian Studies Professor? (May be a pre-recorded voice.)

Places

Azumino, a town in the Nagano prefecture of Japan

Manchukuo, a Japanese puppet state on Chinese & Mongolian land in the Manchurian region*
Everywhere in Between & Beyond...

(*The script will use “Manchuria” to reference the state as Japanese civilians would have
referenced the land by its region name.)

Note 1: Yasuko's Japanese should NOT be translated for the audience. Thus translations here
are in the footnotes.

Note 2: Names should be pronounced as close to the Japanese pronunciation as possible.
Vowels at the ends of words are generally short. The impulse for English-speakers is to
emphasize the second syllable in three-syllable names (like re-BEH-cca), but in Japanese, the
emphasis goes on the first syllable (like JU-li-a). So “Tazawa” is pronounced “TAH-zah-wah”
with short “ahs.”

Note 3: **Big red text** is when the ghosts echo.

レイコおばちゃんとおばあちゃんへ
ジュリちゃんより

prologue

A square box made of plain and simple unfinished wood sits on a table. A thin strip of paper with Japanese writing on it hangs off the front.

Perhaps the box is on display for an exhibit.

Perhaps the box is on display for a funeral.

AUDIO GUIDE sits in one front corner on a zabuton behind a microphone and a book stand. Next to her is a mokugyo, and a small singing bowl.

A YOUNG WOMAN stands on stage in contemporary clothing. She wears headphones attached to a portable audio device. She presses a button on her device.

AUDIO GUIDE hits the mokugyo several on a steady rhythm.

AUDIO GUIDE strikes the singing bowl, hitherto referred to as "Chime."

AUDIO GUIDE

Before you is a bone box from 1945, or Year 20 of the Showa Era.

The bones of the dead are usually placed in ornate funerary urns and boxes.

However

You'll notice this box is plain.

It is made of simple unfinished wood.

This particular box was sent from the Japanese government.

They shipped many boxes such as these during this period of war

To the families of those who died overseas.

The writing on the paper reads:

"Tazawa Hirofumi, Father and Farmer, died in Manchuria."

Manchuria was declared a new Japanese State in 1932.

This box travelled all the way

From Manchuria, which is now Northeast China,

To a small farming town called Azumino,

In the Nagano prefecture in central Japan.

Here, in the middle of the mountains,

Is where the family of Tazawa Hirofumi lives.

This box has survived quite a long journey.

You, too, could survive a long journey.

This bone box arrived in July of 1945.

Its arrival was the first and only notification that

"Tazawa Hirofumi, Father and Farmer" died.

Perhaps this bone box was his ending.

Perhaps this bone box is your beginning.

Chime-chime.

Perhaps the world is full of many bone boxes.

part one

AUDIO GUIDE

Press here to listen to a radio announcement from this era.

YOUNG WOMAN presses a button on her device.

AUDIO GUIDE

Radios alerted citizens of air raid or bomb warnings.
So neighbors would stop by and gather around the nearest one.

*Perhaps we see shadows of two figures by a radio.
A lo-fi muffled Japanese ad for Manchuria begins playing.*

AUDIO GUIDE

This radio notice played on the radio from 1932-1945.
It tells you to become the first settlers of the new Manchurian villages.
“You, too, can purchase new Manchurian farmland for a low, low price!”
“You, too, could be the start of the new Japanese Empire!”

But few Japanese families were willing to move so far away.
So handsome, charming men, like Tazawa Hirofumi,
Were hired to convince as many local farmers to move as possible.
Handsome, charming men, like Tazawa Hirofumi,
Moved to Manchuria without their families.
They had to focus on their duties as village leaders in the new settlements.
What do you think happened to handsome, charming men, like Tazawa Hirofumi,
So far from his family all the way in Manchuria?

The radio shadows talk.

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! You think the Chinese would kill a handsome, charming man like Tazawa Hirofumi?

GOSSIP LADY 2

How else could he have died? He was so strong and healthy.

GOSSIP LADY 1

But doesn't the radio say Manchuria is a peaceful place where all Asians live in harmony?

GOSSIP LADY 2

With all those Chinese running around, how peaceful can it be?

GOSSIP LADY 1

I just can't believe the government sent his bone box home without any explanation of how he died. This is not for me to say, but perhaps...the Tazawa family *was* told how he died, but it was such a shameful way that they refuse to tell anyone.

GOSSIP LADY 2

Like how, Chie?

GOSSIP LADY 1

Perhaps he took on a lover and she killed him! Or perhaps he killed himself...

GOSSIP LADY 2

I can't imagine Yasuko, the Angel of Azumino, lying about such a thing. She's such an honest, respectable girl, that eldest daughter of his.

GOSSIP LADY 1

With their mother having died and the eldest brother off to war, she has to take care of the farm and her younger siblings all by herself. It must be so hard on her.

GOSSIP LADY 2

We all have it hard, Chie. I haven't tasted a good piece of fish in months.

GOSSIP LADY 1

My kids keep complaining, saying, "rice porridge again?" and I tell them to shut up and be grateful we have anything to eat at all. But every time I get the daily ration I look at it and say to myself, "Rice porridge again?!!!"

GOSSIP LADY 2

I know, Chie, I know. Thankfully, Mr. Tazawa was paid a fortune to be the Manchurian village leader, so the family can probably afford to bury his bones.

A MAN begins to enter the stage.

He walks so slowly that you might not be able to tell he is moving at all.

He will continue to cross the stage throughout the following.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Was he paid that much?!

GOSSIP LADY 2

Why else would that responsible man leave his family behind and convince half this town to move with him?

GOSSIP LADY 1

I mean with that face, Mr. Tazawa could convince me to do anything. I heard his wife died of heartbreak because he was so far away from her.

GOSSIP LADY 2

This is not for me to say but...I heard Mr. Tazawa took the job to save up money for his daughter.

GOSSIP LADY 1

For Yasuko? The Angel of Azumino?

GOSSIP LADY 2

No the other one.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Sumiko? Or the little Yoshiko?

GOSSIP LADY 2

No, the *other* one.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Oh...the *unfortunate* one...but what does Atsuko need money for?

GOSSIP LADY 2

Well if you're trying to look out for that girl's future...

GOSSIP LADY 1

Oh that's so true...Men will marry anyone for money these days.

The radio shadows laugh and disappear.

Chime-chime.

The MAN is still walking.

A mannequin wearing men's clothing appears, holding a stack of old books.

YOUNG WOMAN presses a button on her device.

AUDIO GUIDE

By 1945 buildings were being rationed off.

Their structures would be torn down for military supplies.

Many business-owners, like former bookstore owner Mr. Furuhashi, lost their jobs.

So business-owners, like Mr. Furuhashi, resorted to trading in the black market.

Trading is fun.

You and your partner have to agree on what an item is worth beyond money.

Mr. Furuhashi could offer to trade banned books,

Such as those written by Westerners or communists.

Mr. Furuhashi could also offer to trade English lessons,

As learning the language of the enemy was illegal.

Imagine you would like to obtain both of what he offers.

What would you give Mr. Furuhashi in exchange?

Or, what would you *do* for him in exchange?

YOUNG WOMAN presses a button on the device, as if to move on.

AUDIO GUIDE

Have you decided what you would like to trade?

Is her audio device talking to her? YOUNG WOMAN cautiously shakes her head no.

AUDIO GUIDE

Perhaps it would help to understand what books and English lessons mean to you.
Perhaps you are a smart and curious young woman
Like Atsuko.
Perhaps you are the 16-year-old second daughter of the Tazawa family,
Like Atsuko. The unfortunate one.
Perhaps you live in a world, a time, a society, that undervalues smart and curious young women,
Like Atsuko.
But perhaps...your father didn't undervalue you.
Most children have been pulled out of school to work.
But perhaps Father made sure you stayed in school in 1945.
Even though he's far, far away in Manchuria.
Perhaps...
You are Atsuko.

YOUNG WOMAN takes a breath. She is ATSUKO.

AUDIO GUIDE

What would you do for banned books and English lessons, Atsuko?
Perhaps you would give him dresses that your older sister, Yasuko, made for you.
Perhaps Mr. Furuhata wears the dresses.

The mannequin's male clothing falls away to reveal a pink dress.

AUDIO GUIDE

Perhaps he asks you to wear his clothing.

ATSUKO looks at the fallen clothing. She puts on the oversized jacket.

AUDIO GUIDE

Perhaps he says clothing is enough for the books but not for the English lessons.
Perhaps he asks you to watch something.
Press here to watch something in exchange for English lessons.

*ATSUKO pushes a button on her device.
Perhaps the mannequin starts moving a little.
Perhaps the mannequin starts moving a lot.
Perhaps the mannequin is jerking off.
Chime, as he finishes.
ATSUKO talks to the mannequin like he's FURUHATA.*

FURUHATA

I'm so sorry, I might have made a tear.

ATSUKO

Sis can fix it in a second. And, it was too pretty for me to wear anyway.

FURUHATA

You know the saying, "with the right clothes, even the mule driver can look handsome?"

ATSUKO

The girls in my class say, "Maybe the mule driver can but not the mule."

FURUHATA

To you?

ATSUKO

They're just teasing. You look...pretty.

FURUHATA

Thank you. So do you. Men's clothes suit you. Do I look prettier than Yasuko, the Angel of Azumino?

ATSUKO

No one in this world is more beautiful than Sis. And as far as men go, no one could top Father.

FURUHATA

I'm very sorry to hear of his passing. When is the funeral?

ATSUKO

We'd have to pay extra for an individual funeral so we have to wait for the next mass funeral, whenever that might be...I just wish we knew how he died.

FURUHATA

Maybe the bones will tell you. Have you looked inside the bone box?

ATSUKO

Sis says we shouldn't open it because it would anger the ancestors or something. I hope she gets married soon so she can stop telling us what to do.

FURUHATA

Is it true she gets a different suitor every day?

ATSUKO

No. Just once a week or so.

FURUHATA

How are you liking that book from last week?

ATSUKO

It's okay so far, but Agatha Christie's beginnings are always a slow tease.

FURUHATA

Like your sister.

ATSUKO

Sis is not a slow tease! She just has her eye on a particular person.

FURUHATA

Oh does she? Who?

ATSUKO

No one! I didn't say that!

FURUHATA

I think being a slow tease means you're clever. The more you make people wait for something, the more it seems worth the wait, and the more they'll want to keep waiting.

ATSUKO

Like winning the war?

FURUHATA

Is that what your teachers tell you?

ATSUKO

Our teachers tell us nothing. We just repeat the Emperor's Virtues over and over again, which is so boring—oh, but I'm not saying the Emperor's boring!

FURUHATA

The Emperor *is* boring...

ATSUKO

Mr. Furuhata! ...Are you a...a (*whispers.*) communist.

FURUHATA

(*laughs.*) You don't even know what that means.

ATSUKO

Everyone talks about communists like they're evil, but it seems like communists just don't want the military to control the country...which I don't think is an evil thing to believe in.

FURUHATA

...Where did you learn that?

ATSUKO

One of the books you gave me a couple of weeks ago...the cover said it was *Kokoro*, but the pages were actually some speeches and translations of Soviet essays by someone named Sakai.

FURUHATA

He's blacklisted so we—uh, *people* used to send around his writing by disguising them as other books. ...Atsuko, are you going to go to college?

ATSUKO

We can't afford it. But I probably wouldn't get in anyway.

FURUHATA

Of course you would, you're the smartest person in Azumino. Marry someone rich and apply to a regular university, not an all-female one—your brain deserves more than home economics lessons.

ATSUKO

I don't think...anyone would want to marry me...

FURUHATA

There are a lot of strange kinds of men out there, Atsuko...I'm sure one of them will take a unique liking to your face. Oh, here's the book for today—I found one all in English. I thought we could use it to learn pronunciation.

ATSUKO

Wow! I hope someday I can read a whole book in English. I can't always trust a translation to tell me the real story. (*ATSUKO picks up a book.*) Cute! There's a bunny on the cover.

FURUHATA

The book is about a bunny who leads a girl on a big journey to a foreign land.

ATSUKO

How do you say "bunny" in English?

FURUHATA

Bah-nee.

ATSUKO

Bo-ney.

FURUHATA

It's more of an "ah" sound. Like Atsuko. *Bah-nee.*

ATSUKO

Bah-nee...(giggles.) English is weird. ...Mr. Furuhata...are we...losing the war?

FURUHATA

...I hear Germany and Italy have already surrendered.

ATSUKO

I thought all the whites were our enemy?

MR. FURUHATA

No, those countries were our allies...

ATSUKO

I thought we were saving Asia by ourselves?

FURUHATA

Atsuko...Have you ever read a book about a group of pigs who take over a farm?

ATSUKO

No, but that sounds funny.

FURUHATA

I'm gonna see if I can trade around for a copy and bring it to you next time.

ATSUKO

You don't have to go through all that trouble for me. My hiding spot is getting full anyway.

FURUHATA

It'll be worth the trouble. Now: let's review the alphabet, shall we?

ATSUKO

(sings, the familiar tune.) Eh, bee, she, dee, ee, efu, jee...

Perhaps ATSUKO starts flipping through her new book.

(still singing.) ...How I wonder what you're at...

Chime-chime. AUDIO GUIDE maybe makes a look like, "that was a little weird."

YASUKO appears, as if she is a mannequin on display.

She wears monpe trousers and appears to be in the middle of sewing a furoshiki.

AUDIO GUIDE

Most working class people had no time or resources for fashion.

Eldest daughters, like Yasuko, would sew all of their family's clothing out of old kimonos.

Eldest daughters, like Yasuko, would be very good at sewing.

Eldest daughters, like Yasuko, often had no choice on who they could marry.

So perhaps eldest daughters, like Yasuko, secretly made many dresses.

Perhaps she sold those dresses to make a little money for herself.

Perhaps she made a little money so she could secretly run off with someone she wants to marry.

Perhaps YASUKO breaks her stillness for a second to go, "shh!"

AUDIO GUIDE

Eldest daughters in farming families, like Yasuko, would wear these *monpe* trousers every day.

Trousers allowed women to move quickly and take up little space in bomb shelters.

So Yasuko wore these pants constantly for protection. Just in case.

You, too, could wear pants for protection. Just in case.

Chime.

YASUKO starts to sew. She sews. She sews. She sews.

AUDIO GUIDE hits the mokugyo like it's a knocking on the door.

YASUKO finally looks up.

YASUKO

はい？ あっ いまい 今行きます

(calling off.)アツコー！遺骨箱^{いこつばこ} とってきて！
タツー！スミコ！シズさん！葬儀^{そうぎ}の用意^{ようい}ができたって
キチとヨシコはお留守番^{るすばん}お願いね！
ダメ！この頃^{ごろ}泥棒^{どろぼう}がふえてるって話^{はなし}だから
今夜^{こんや}の夕飯^{ゆうはん}おかわりあげるから キチロー^{ねが}お願い
スミコ何^{なん}で泣^ないてるの？ は？葬儀^{そうぎ}にお化^ばけなんか出^でないはよ
タツなんでバカなことスミに言^いうの？
はいはい泣^なかない泣^なかない キチとお留守番^{るすばん}する？
行きたいの？行きたくないの？どっちかにしてちょうだい
(calling off.)アツコー！聞^きこえた？¹

ATSUKO

I'M COMING! I'm just being careful that I don't drop his box!

AUDIO GUIDE

The mass funeral is ready.

Press here to hear the traditional funeral recitations.

Chime.

AUDIO GUIDE hits the mokugyo on a beat that continues.

Perhaps the MAN, who is still walking, sings a funeral monk chat.

YASUKO and ATSUKO kneel on the floor where they are, far away from each other, and put their hands together in prayer.

ATSUKO's head has dropped and starts to snore.

In this scene, YASUKO and ATSUKO talk as if they are next to each other.

But they are not. They speak in whispers.

YASUKO

篤子^{あつこ}？…篤子^{あつこ}？…あっちゃん!²

ATSUKO wakes with a start, and yelps in pain.

ATSUKO

My feet fell asleep!

¹ Yes? Oh, we'll come now. / Atsuko! Go grab the bone box. / Tatsu! Sumiko! Miss Shizu! The funeral is ready. / Kichi and Yoshiko, please stay home and watch the house! / No you can't, because there's talk of burglars recently. / I'll give you another serving of dinner tonight so Kichiro, please? / Sumiko, why are you crying? Huh? Ghosts do not come out at funerals. / Tatsu, why'd you say something stupid to Sumi? / Okay, okay, don't cry, don't cry, do you want to stay home with Kichi? / You wanna go or not go? Please decide. / Atsuko! Did you hear me?

² Atsuko? ...Atsuko? ...Acchan!

YASUKO

あんたがしびれたんでしょ³

ATSUKO

I know this service is for a lot of people but it is so long! Did the monk see I was sleeping?

YASUKO

きっと自分の声以外何にも気にしてないんじゃない⁴

ATSUKO

Sis, you can't say that about a monk.

YASUKO

あのお坊さん金目当てのどスケベじいさんだと思⁵う

ATSUKO

You definitely can't say *that* about a monk!

Chime. If there was chanting, it stops. They speak in their regular voices.

ATSUKO

Finally! I'm glad you ended up making everyone else stay home. Tatsu would have gotten bored and poked at me the whole time, and Sumiko would've kept crying—

YASUKO

あっちゃん。今のうちとっても大事な話があるの...⁶

ATSUKO

What? What is it?

YASUKO

誰のためにピンクのドレスを着⁷たの?

ATSUKO

I told you I was just, taking the dress out of the dresser and I ripped it by accident!

YASUKO

³ You fell asleep.

⁴ He was probably distracted by the sound of his own voice.

⁵ I think that monk is just a greedy old perv.

⁶ Acchan. I have to discuss a very important matter with you while I have the chance...

⁷ Who did you wear the dress for?

あの破りかた絶対着たからでしょ！誰のために着たの？みんなには内緒にするから⁸

ATSUKO

Fine, I just tried it on for fun okay, I didn't wear it for anyone!

YASUKO

「今日アツコお姉ちゃんが帰ってきたらなんかすごく変なふうに笑ってた」
ってすみこが言ってたよ⁹

ATSUKO

Well Sumiko's a fat-mouthed liar!

YASUKO

誰の心を掴みたいの？先生？市場の男の子？もしかして同級生？¹⁰

ATSUKO

Ew I'm not trying to "capture anyone's heart"—definitely not a classmate's! They're all girls!

YASUKO

ホーじゃあ…あっちゃんが好きじゃなくなって好かれてる側ね！誰に誘われたの？¹¹

ATSUKO

No one, anywhere would fall in love with me.

YASUKO

人は外見だけで恋に落ちないわよ。¹²

ATSUKO

But didn't you fall in love with Shinjiro because he's so handsome?

YASUKO

シー！あっちゃん！¹³

ATSUKO

Sis, everyone knows you two are in love. Father was the only one stopping you from marrying him so now is your chance!

⁸ That tear is definitely from wearing it! Who did you wear it for? I won't tell the others!

⁹ Sumiko said when you came home from school you were laughing weirdly.

¹⁰ Who are you trying to capture the heart? A teacher? One of the market boys? A classmate??

¹¹ Ohhh, I see, you don't like them but they like you! Who asked you out?

¹² People don't just fall in love with looks.

¹³ Shh! Acchan!

YASUKO

そんなに簡単^{かんたん}じゃないの。あんた^{たち}達の事^{こと}も考^{かんが}えないといけないし村^{むら}の事^{こと}もあるし¹⁴

ATSUKO

Who cares what the town will say!

YASUKO

村^{むら}の全^{ぜん}員^{いん}が気^きにします！¹⁵

ATSUKO

In America, people can marry whoever they want! Even if you're the oldest.

YASUKO

篤^{あつこ}子^こ…まだそういう本^{ほん}読^よんでるの？¹⁶

ATSUKO

...No, not since the book ban...promise. Only school textbooks.

YASUKO

気^きを付^つけて、あ^あっ^つちゃん^{ちゃん}¹⁷

ATSUKO

I'm being careful.

YASUKO

頭^{あたま}いい人^{ひと}が^{いちばん}一番^めひどい^あ目に^め会^あうんだから¹⁸

ATSUKO

No one cares about smart people with ugly faces.

YASUKO "pokes" ATSUKO's cheeks,

YASUKO

こんなかわいいほっぺに誰^{だれ}も^ほが^ほ惚^ほれちゃうよ！¹⁹

ATSUKO

Stop! You're just copying what Father used to say...Sis...Don't you wonder how he...

¹⁴ It's more complicated than that. I have to think of you guys, and the town.

¹⁵ The whole town will!

¹⁶ Atsuko...Are you still reading those books?

¹⁷ Be careful, Acchan.

¹⁸ Smart people are always the ones who get in the worst trouble.

¹⁹ Anyone would fall for these cute cheeks!

YASUKO

何? ²⁰

ATSUKO

...Never mind. I'll go get the bone box.

Chime.

AUDIO GUIDE

Addendum: Recently it has been discovered that bone boxes sent by the government rarely contained bones when they arrived to the families.

ATSUKO looks around furtively. Then she peers her head to the side as if peeking.

The beats stop and the lid on the bone box of the altar is lifted.

ATSUKO gasps.

The box tips over.

Out pours a rock. And dirt.

Chime.

Radio shadows appear again.

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! A rock? Just one rock?

GOSSIP LADY 2

And some dirt. To a lot of the families who had relatives in Manchuria.

GOSSIP LADY 1

The Satos by the river?

GOSSIP LADY 2

Yes!

GOSSIP LADY 1

The Satos by the lake?

GOSSIP LADY 2

Yes! One bone-less bone box filled with dirt and a rock for every relative who died.

GOSSIP LADY 1

I thought they only did that for soldiers who were lost at sea! What happened in Manchuria that killed them all?

GOSSIP LADY 2

²⁰ What?

No one knows, but it's awfully suspicious that the government isn't telling anyone. This isn't for me to say but perhaps Manchuria was actually a very dangerous place. And as I was telling this to Mrs. Sato—

GOSSIP LADY 1

By the river or the lake?

GOSSIP LADY 2

No, in the town square—I said to her, “Perhaps Mr. Tazawa, as their village leader, knew Manchuria was dangerous when he convinced people to move over there.” And she told Mr. Sato and Mr. Sato told Mr. Sato and they told some of the other families who got empty bone boxes. And they all went to Yasuko and they claimed that Mr. Tazawa knowingly lead all those people to their deaths and they demanded that the Tazawa family take responsibility for his lies and pay for their burials. And that's why there was a mob outside their house last night.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Ohhh, I was telling people it was because Yasuko was probably doing work in her underwear because of the heat and everyone wanted to see.

GOSSIP LADY 2

Chie, you really have to be careful of what you tell people!

GOSSIP LADY 1

But can you really properly bury someone without their bones? I think I remember my grandmother saying once that if you don't bury people's bones, their souls will not rest?

GOSSIP LADY 2

I think it's that if you don't cremate the body, the soul can't join the ancestors?

GOSSIP LADY 1

Oh, you know, I think someone actually told me that if you don't cremate the bones, the soul can't be released from the body and if you don't bury the bones, they become a **ghost that haunts this realm forever.**

A moment for ghosts.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Is that right?

GOSSIP LADY 2

I don't know, I never listened to that monk, he talks for too long.

GOSSIP LADY 1

And he's a greedy, old perv.

GOSSIP LADY 2

Chie, you can't say that about a monk!

GOSSIP LADY 1

At least I'm not saying it about the Emperor. Well I hope they saved that large sum of money Mr. Tazawa supposedly left for Atsuko to pay for all those burials...

The radio shadows disappear.

YASUKO and ATSUKO still talk as if they are right next to each other, but they are not.

ATSUKO

He left it...for me? And I'm the only one who can withdraw the money?

YASUKO

そうよ²¹

ATSUKO

So...if he went to Manchuria for me...then he died because of me—

YASUKO

そういうふうにかんがえちゃダメ²²

ATSUKO

Why did he leave it to me? Was it because...he thought we'd have to bribe someone to marry me?

YASUKO

そういうことじゃないわよ...ほら、篤子^{あつこ}って危^{あぶ}なっかしいから—²³

ATSUKO

Stop trying to protect me from the truth like you did with the bone box. You knew it had no bones inside and you tried to hide that from us didn't you?

YASUKO

あれはスミコ^{たち}達^{こんらん}を混乱させないために言^いわなかったの²⁴

ATSUKO

Fine, you didn't have to tell Sumiko or the others but you could have at least told me!

YASUKO

今^{いま}は父^{とう}さんの責任^{せきにん}をとることを考えてちょうだい²⁵

²¹ That's right.

²² You can't think that way.

²³ It wasn't like that...it's just you can be so reckless so—

²⁴ I didn't say anything about that because I didn't want to confuse Sumiko and the others.

²⁵ Could you think about taking responsibility for Father right now?

ATSUKO

I will go and take out the money, but we are not going to use it to pay Mr. Sato and the other families. Sis, with that kind of money we could eat meat and good fish for a month!

YASUKO

どこでお肉をかうき？²⁶

ATSUKO

There's some on the black market—

YASUKO

やみいち い
闇市に行ったの？！²⁷

ATSUKO

No, I promise I've never been, I just heard—

YASUKO

わたし
私もこういうふうにあつこのおかねし
に 篤子のお金使いたくないけどしょうがないでしょ²⁸

ATSUKO

Don't I get to decide how it's used?

YASUKO

わがまま 言わないの²⁹

ATSUKO

But we don't actually know how anybody died. It might have had nothing to do with Manchuria! Maybe there was a random disease or a fire or maybe a big bear attacked the village and Father died trying to save them all! We can't just believe what they say, we need...proof! We don't even have proof that anyone's dead.

YASUKO

とう し
父さんは死んだの³⁰

ATSUKO

How do we know for sure? Why should we believe the government? Do we have any evidence that they're always telling us the truth? ...Sis, if Father really is dead...we have to think about using the money in a way that would best honor him...make him happy...don't you think?

YASUKO

²⁶ And where would we buy meat?

²⁷ You went to the black market?!

²⁸ I don't want to use your money this way either, but what can we do.

²⁹ Don't be selfish.

³⁰ Father is dead.

…どこに隠^{かく}してるの？³¹

ATSUKO

…Hiding what?

YASUKO

もうああいう本^{ほん}を^よ読^よまないって^{やくそく}約束^{やくそく}したでしょ³²

ATSUKO

I am not reading those books!

YASUKO

ウソつき。ああいう本^{ほん}を^よまだ読^よんでるからそんななこと^い言^いうんでしょ³³

ATSUKO

It's not crazy of me to question the government, it's common sense—

YASUKO

どんなに^{あぶ}危^{あぶ}ない^{こと}事^{こと}をしてるか^わ分^わか^わってるの？^{かぞくぜんいん}家族^{かぞくぜんいん}全^{ぜん}員^{いん}を^{きけん}危^{きけん}険^{けん}にあ^あわ^わせる^せる^るつ^つも^もり^り？³⁴

ATSUKO

Books are not dangerous, they're just words—

YASUKO

どこにあるの？³⁵

ATSUKO

I told you I'm not—

YASUKO

^こ小^や屋^や？^{だいどころ}台^{だいどころ}所^{ふたかい}？^{ふたかい}二^{ふたかい}階^{ふたかい}？³⁶

ATSUKO

…

…In the attic…behind the big trunk…But, Sis, please let me keep the book with the bunny on the cover—I can't even read it—

Chime.

³¹ …Where are you hiding them?

³² You promised me you would stop reading those kinds of books.

³³ Liar. You wouldn't say such a thing like that if you weren't reading those books.

³⁴ Do you realize how dangerous it is? You wanna put this entire family in danger?

³⁵ Where are they?

³⁶ In the shed? In the kitchen? Upstairs?

YASUKO runs out.

AUDIO GUIDE

Press here to cremate books.

Sound of flames burning.

AUDIO GUIDE

Cremation is a process to detach our souls from our bodies.

Before, during, and after cremation, monks would chant funeral rites.

Their chants would be accompanied by beats on a small round wooden drum, carved like a fish or a bell, called a *mokugyo*,

And the striking of a singing bowl.

The beats of the *mokugyo* calm and focus the soul.

AUDIO GUIDE hits the mokugyo to demonstrate.

The chime of the singing bowl helps send souls to the Pure Land.

Chime.

The chime is a sacred sound, so only strike a singing bowl in a moment of concentrated prayer.

Do not strike a singing bowl excessively.

Do not use for sound effects or ambiance.

...Oh...

AUDIO GUIDE looks at her bowl and quietly apologizes. She dashes off stage.

The sound of flames grows and grows.

The MAN, who has still been slowly walking until now, starts to move at a more regular pace. Now his movements become longer and more elegant. As if he is coming alive. Or perhaps out of a shell.

He moves closer and closer to ATSUKO. He bumps into her and the sounds stop.

He is MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL.

ATSUKO & MR. ANCESOR SNAIL talk directly to each other.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Ow.

ATSUKO

Oh, sorry, Mr. Snail.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Yea, watch where you're going.

ATSUKO

Actually you bumped into me.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL.

Well you're in my way.

ATSUKO

Well maybe you should have gone around me.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Well maybe I couldn't see you.

ATSUKO
Well maybe you should look where you're going.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Well maybe I can't look.

ATSUKO
Well maybe you should learn how to look.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Well maybe I'm blind.

ATSUKO
Oh. I'm so sorry.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Most snails are blind, you know.

ATSUKO
I didn't. Thank you for telling me.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
You're welcome. Good day!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL turns in another direction.

ATSUKO
That wasn't the direction you were going in.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
I know where I'm going, okay?

ATSUKO
Where?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
To the Ancestors.

ATSUKO
Which way are the Ancestors?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
The way that I am going.

ATSUKO

How do you know if you can't see?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I am an Ancestor Snail, and I deliver things to the Ancestors. That means I will always get to the Ancestors, wherever I go, however long it takes.

ATSUKO

What do you deliver?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

You ask a lot of questions.

ATSUKO

People call me "curious."

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I'm not people so I'm calling you Nosy. Words.

ATSUKO

Huh?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I deliver dead words that are cremated and buried.

ATSUKO

Words that are cremated...? (*gasps*) My books?! They were burned recently. Do you have them??

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I don't know what words I have, I just deliver them.

ATSUKO

Would you be able to...read me a little of your delivery? Those words used to belong to me—and I never got to finish the new Christie mystery!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Fine, but only so you'll stop bugging me.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL maybe takes a pose of presentation.

Ahem. "The Orient Express arrived at Belgrade a quarter to nine that evening. It was not—"

ATSUKO

No I read that page already. Try page...45? I think?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Fine! Ahem. "Alice riverbed next to older sister was sitting, nothing to do so was very bored. Once, twice, older sister's book—"

ATSUKO

No, I asked you for page 45 in the Agatha Christie book.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Listen, Nosy, these are the words in the order that their remains come to me. Linear organization is an exclusively living human thing. Do you want me to read this page or not?

ATSUKO

I guess...although I have no idea what book that is...it's like the words are out of order ...

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Ahem. "Once, twice, older sister's book she tried to look but there was no picture or dialogue. 'Picture of dialogue none book, no purpose it has,' Alice thought. There suddenly, pink eyes white bunny close came running. If only that, terribly peculiar not. For Alice, that bunny 'What to do! What to do! Late I will be!' spoke, she heard."

ATSUKO

Is this...is this the book about the bunny?? But you're reading it in Japanese—wait, Mr. Ancestor Snail, can you translate English?!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

What's English?

ATSUKO

A language?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

What's a language?

ATSUKO

Um...the kind of words we speak?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

What's a translation?

ATSUKO

It's turning one language into another. Which is what you were doing with the Bunny Book—will you read me more?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I have a job, you know. Don't you have a job, Nosy?

ATSUKO

I'm not Nosy, I'm Atsuko.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

You can be both.

ATSUKO

Just give me one more page, please!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Ahem. “June 8th, 1945. Dear Yasuko. Words cannot express my happiness here in the village of Heiho. This is nothing I could have imagined. They call Manchuria paradise because it is a place the other villagers and I will never leave. It pains me to be so far from you and my other children in these violent times but knowing you are safe keeps my mind at peace. More soon. Father.”

ATSUKO

But Sis said letters weren't being delivered because Manchuria doesn't have a postal system...was she getting letters this whole time?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I don't know. Good day!

ATSUKO

Wait, this is proof! He said everyone was happy in Manchuria! So he didn't trick people into going to a dangerous place! Why did Sis burn this letter? Are there others? What else did they say? What didn't Sis want anyone to know? ...Why did she lie to me again?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

What's a Sis?

ATSUKO

I need to know if you have any other letters. Please just...read a few more pages and I'll see if there's another letter and then I promise I'll let you go.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Fine! Ahem. “But Tom Sawyer, he hunted me up and said—“

ATSUKO

Next page, please.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Ahem. “April 24th, 1939. Dearest Yasuko. I left money in Atsuko's name at the bank. That money is specifically to be used for her college education so make sure she doesn't use it for anything else. Do everything you can to protect that brilliant brain of hers. More soon, Father.”

ATSUKO

...That letter was right after he left...That money was for me to...go to college? Why didn't Sis...

MR. ACENSTOR

Oh, that was a letter. Then I can be on my way. Good day!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL walks off, albeit insanely slowly.

ATSUKO takes a moment to think for herself. Then she takes a deep breath.

ATSUKO

Wait, Mr. Ancestor Snail! Wait! I...

*ATSUKO realizes the snail has not gone very far.
She places herself in front of him and he crashes into her again.*

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Ow.

ATSUKO

Mr. Ancestor Snail, would you come with me? To Manchuria?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Where??

ATSUKO

It's where I'm gonna find my father and the truth about what happened to him. You have to come with me and read me all his letters so I can find as many clues as I can. I'm assuming that might take a while considering it's mixed with my books and...something about linearity—but I don't have much time! So read me everything you got while we go to Manchuria—including the books (which is just a nice bonus)—and then I DOUBLE promise you can go back to the Ancestors.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Manchuria sounds very out of my way...

ATSUKO

Please, Mr. Ancestor Snail? My Father...my Father, he's...he's my hero. He deserves to die a hero in the eyes of my town and my family. He deserves to be properly buried—he might not even be cremated wherever he is. He went to Manchuria for me, so I have to go to Manchuria for him.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Well if he's not cremated, his soul can't be released from his body and if his bones aren't buried then he'll be a **ghost that haunts this realm forever.**

A moment for ghosts.

ATSUKO

...What?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

If he's not cremated and buried...maybe I could deliver his soul to the ancestors. I've never delivered a human soul before. Then maybe I could get a promotion. I could become...a Very Special Ancestor Snail...All right. I can come with you. Although if I'm gonna spend so much time with a human, I wish she wasn't such an ugly one.

ATSUKO

I thought you were blind.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I can still tell if someone is ugly.

ATSUKO

I guess...I guess I'm going to Manchuria! ...And we won't have to pay the townsfolk the money...and I'll—

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Do you wanna sing about it?

ATSUKO

Huh?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL brings out a handheld mic.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Do you want to sing about it? It's always better when you sing it.

ATSUKO slowly and cautiously takes the mic.

I'll give you a note, ready?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL sings a note.

Sing it back to me.

ATSKO sings the note back.

Great. You're ready.

ATSUKO

(sings. She starts out very hesitant.)

I will ride...across the mountains

I will sail...across the sea

I'll be a sleuth

I'll find the truth

And I'll bring Dad back to family

She inspects the mic like a new toy.

Then she runs to the bone box.

She inspects the rock and puts it in her pocket.

She dumps the rest of the dirt out of the box and puts the mic in it.

She proceeds to pack the box like a suitcase.

AUDIO GUIDE returns to her station with a Japanese(ish?) bell.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL notices she's back, takes a furoshiki that YASUKO was sewing before, holds it up and stands behind it. A little like he's hiding. It works. (!)

AUDIO GUIDE rings her bell.

AUDIO GUIDE

This is a *furoshiki*.

Furoshiki can be used for packing lunches, clothes, or bone boxes.

Perhaps you would tie the *furoshiki* and hold it like a suitcase.

Furoshiki has other capabilities, such as wrapping a gift or keeping a bottle warm.

Or covering yourself while you masturbate.

Perhaps the mannequin comes back out in the pink dress.

FURUHATA

You can't go by yourself. One of your younger brother should go with you.

ATSUKO

Kichi is too young and Tatsu is too annoying.

FURUHATA

It's dangerous to go alone.

ATSUKO

Machuria isn't dangerous—my father said so in his letters.

FURUHATA

Horrible things can happen to a young woman travelling alone.

ATSUKO

Like what?

FURUHATA

...It's best if you don't know.

ATSUKO

You sound like my sister...

FURUHATA

(sighs.) If you're going to go alone, at least pretend to be a boy. Go in those clothes of mine that you're wearing now.

ATSUKO

I don't want to pretend to be a boy and be loud and dirty and talk about boobs all day.

FURUHATA

You don't have to act like one—just stay dressed as one. I don't want you to get hurt.

ATSUKO

...Okay.

FURUHATA

Those pants are too long on you. Give them to me, I'll fix it.

ATSUKO

You know how to sew? I've never met a man who sews

FURUHATA

I don't tell many people. Not even my wife knows.

ATSUKO

I'm very bad at sewing. I prick my fingers every time.

FURUHATA

Well you live with the best seamstress in town so you don't have to be good at it.

ATSUKO

...Sis found the books you gave me and burned them.

FURUHATA

Oh no... I'll get you another copy of each one. They'll be something to look forward to when you get back.

ATSUKO

You don't have to do that for me, Mr. Furuhata.

FURUHATA

I want to. I'll also give you this bottle of shochu to take with you. Liquor is very valuable – it can always come in handy.

ATSUKO

I'll be okay money-wise.

FURUHATA

Alcohol can be much more valuable than money.

ATSUKO

...Thank you...thank you so much, Mr. Furuhata...I should...I should pay you for the shochu.

FURUHATA

Don't worry about that. You should save your money.

ATSUKO

Well...if you'd like...I can pay you with my body...?

FURUHATA

...That's...that's all right, Atsuko. I'm. I'm fine with our arrangement as is.

ATSUKO

...Right, sorry...I guess anything I could do...it wouldn't be of much value coming from me.

FURUHATA

No, Atsuko, that's not—

ATSUKO

Sorry. Forget I said anything.

FURUHATA

...

...Here, that should do it.

Period-appropriate, properly sized men's clothing and a hat drops into ATSUKO's hands.

Good luck, Atsuko. Be careful.

ATSUKO starts putting on the men's clothing.

AUDIO GUIDE

(as if replaying clips from before.)

You, too, could survive a long journey.

"You, too, could be the start of the new Japanese Empire!"

You, too, could wear pants for protection. Just in case.

Perhaps you are very smart and curious.

What would you do for books?

What would you do for...truth?

When ATSUKO is dressed, MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL gives her the furoshiki. She wraps the bone box in it and holds it like a suitcase.

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell.

AUDIO GUIDE

Are you ready for your journey?

ATSUKO

Are you ready to leave home, Mr. Ancestor Snail?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(gestures to his back.) I'm always home.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL climbs on ATSUKO's back.

AUDIO GUIDE hits the mokugyo like a knock at the door.

YASUKO enters with a tray of food.

ATSUKO

"August 1st, 1945.

Dear Sis."

YASUKO

あつこ
篤子？まだ起きてる？³⁷

ATSUKO

"I took out all the money in my name."

³⁷ Are you still awake?

YASUKO

きょう ぜんぜん み てないけど…だいじょうぶ ?³⁸

ATSUKO

“I’m taking half of it with me.”

YASUKO

なか お腹 すいてるでしょ ?³⁹

ATSUKO

“I’m going to Manchuria. To Father’s village, Heiho.”

YASUKO

ゆうはん もってきたよ⁴⁰

ATSUKO

“I’m finding out the truth about what happened to him.”

YASUKO

あんまり たい 大したもんじゃないけど⁴¹

ATSUKO

“We shouldn’t pay for anything he’s not responsible for.”

YASUKO

きのう は…ごめんね。⁴²

ATSUKO

“And I’m bringing back his bones. He deserves a proper burial.”

YASUKO

わたしい 私言 いすぎちゃった⁴³

ATSUKO

“I gave the other half of the money to Tatsu and told him to get lots of food. You should be eating real meals. Don’t pay the Sato family. Stall or lie until I get home. I know you know how to do that.”

³⁸ I haven’t seen you all day...are you okay?

³⁹ Aren’t you hungry?

⁴⁰ I brought you dinner.

⁴¹ It’s not much.

⁴² I’m sorry...about yesterday.

⁴³ I spoke too harshly.

YASUKO

お^{かね}金のこと^{わす}忘れて。私^{わたし}なんとかするから⁴⁴

ATSUKO

“Tell Sumiko and Yoshiko and Tatsu and Kichi and Miss Shizu and big brother when he gets back from the war—tell everyone that I will be back soon.”

YASUKO

実^{じつ}はあのお^{かね}金…^{あつこ}篤子^{だいがく}が^い大学^{かね}に行くためのお^{かね}金^なの。だから^{つか}そう使^おおう⁴⁵

ATSUKO

“Sincerely, Acchan.”

YASUKO

あ^{あつこ}っちゃん？あ^{あつこ}っちゃん^き聞^ねいてる？寝^ねてるのかな…⁴⁶

Sound of a door opening. YASUKO gasps.

あ^{あつこ}っこ
篤^{あつこ}子^{あつこ}？！⁴⁷

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell several times.

The world starts to shift to an in-between place.

Maybe a path is built out of the bone boxes and dirt.

⁴⁴ Forget about the money. I’m gonna figure it out.

⁴⁵ That money is actually...for you to go to college. So you should use it like that.

⁴⁶ Acchan? Acchan, are you listening? Maybe she’s asleep...

⁴⁷ Atsuko?!

part two

ATSUKO, carrying MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL on her back, is in an in-between place.

AUDIO GUIDE

You are now moving from central Japan to Manchuria.

First, you will take a bus from the town of Azumino to the capital of Nagano.

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell but it sounds like a car horn honk.

Today we take for granted how many ways there are to pass the time.

But it is 1945 and you are very comfortable sitting in silence.

ATSUKO is tapping her feet of impatience on a rhythm. She sighs of boredom.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL starts humming to the rhythm of ATSUKO's tapping feet.

ATSUKO starts to hum along.

ATSUKO

(sings.) You know what I want?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(sings.) What do you want?

ATSUKO

(sings.) A nice pair of boots

Boots are good for travel

They're tough and they protect your calves

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I'm always afraid my calves are in danger

ATSUKO

(sings.) Boots are meant for men

And I'm supposed to be a man

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(Boy)

ATSUKO

(sings.) So I should really have a pair of boots right now.

ATSUKO starts walking in place to the rhythm.

AUDIO GUIDE

From the capital of Nagano, you will take a train to a town in Niigata, a neighboring prefecture.

AUDIO GUIDE rings a bell but it sounds like a train whistle.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(sings.) You know what I want?

ATSUKO

(*sings.*) What do you want?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(*sings.*) A nice pair of feet

Feet are good for travel

They get you anywhere real fast

ATSUKO

Well anything is faster than you.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(*sings.*) Feet are meant for humans

And I don't want to be a human

But I'd like to have a pair of feet and put some boots on.

ATSUKO

Yeah!

AUDIO GUIDE

Excuse me, I misspoke: from the capital of Nagano, you will take a train to a town in Toyama, a different neighboring prefecture, and then take another train to...um...

ATSUKO starts stomping on the rhythm.

ATSUKO & MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(*sing.*) You know what we want?

What do we want?

A nice pair of boots/feet

Boots/feet are good for travel

AUDIO GUIDE

Or actually you take another bus to...to...

ATSUKO & MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(*sing.*) Boots/feet are meant for people/snails

Who are going on a journey

So we should really get a pair of boots/feet right now

AUDIO GUIDE

Actually, maybe it's a walkable distance?

ATSUKO & MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(*speak-sings.*) You know what's good for big long walk?

It's a strong, nice pair of boots/feet!

ATSUKO starts jumping on the rhythm.

AUDIO GUIDE pulls out a map of Japan.

She traces potential routes from Nagano to Manchuria.

She mutters inaudibly, but maybe every so often we can make out a musing, like “but there’s no train station here.”

ATSUKO is still jumping and it is starting to become strenuous. (She is carrying a snail man on her back after all.)

She starts to run out of breath.

AUDIO GUIDE makes a decision. She puts away the map.

AUDIO GUIDE

Ahem! In order to get from the center of Japan to Manchuria during this period, one must take a bus from Azumino to the capital of Nagano, and then a train from Nagano to the middle of Toyama and then *ride a horse* north to the naval port in Toyama.

Riding horses is a conveniently independent mode of travel people did back then.

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell but it sounds like horses neighing.

ATSUKO stops jumping and just bounces. She might be too out of breath to sing.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

I’ll sing for the horse.

(sings.) You know what I want?

ATSUKO

(shouts?) What, Mr. Horse?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

(sings.) A nice pair of shoes

Shoes are meant for horses

Who are raised to run around

But they won’t give me shoes because I’m raised for slaughter...

(speaks.) People eat horses? Would they eat snails too?

ATSUKO

Never!

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell but it sound like seagulls.

AUDIO GUIDE

You have arrived at the naval port in Toyama.

ATSUKO

Excuse me—

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Deeper!

ATSUKO

(Deeper voice.) Excuse me, sir, when is the next boat to Manchuria?

Perhaps CARL is MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL throwing his voice. Or perhaps he is pre-recorded.

OFFICER CARL
Immigration papers?

ATSUKO
Imi...imi-what?

OFFICER CARL
You can't travel international waters without immigration papers.

ATSUKO
Oh no, I'm going to the newest Japanese state. My father lived in Heiho, Manchuria.

OFFICER CARL
You're still travelling international waters. How old are you, boy?

ATSUKO
16?

OFFICER CARL
You look younger than 16. You have government-issued identification?

ATSUKO
No?

OFFICER CARL
Where are you from?

ATSUKO
Japan? Nagano? A town called Azumino?

OFFICER CARL
You're not sure?

ATSUKO
Um, would you like a swig of the best shochu from Nagano?

OFFICER CARL
Uh. Okay. (*Glug, glug.*) Did you say Nagano?

ATSUKO
Yes?

OFFICER CARL
I love Nagano. The mountains there are really beautiful.

ATSUKO

They are.

OFFICER CARL

I went to a hot spring in Nagano once and it was the most beautiful experience I've ever had.

ATSUKO

Our hot springs are really the best.

OFFICER CARL

So listen, you can't get on the passenger boats without immigration papers. But this card is going to certify you as a deckhand on a cargo ship that leaves in 2 hours. If anyone asks, just say you're an apprentice. Okay?

ATSUKO

Okay!

OFFICER CARL

Stay out of trouble—what's your name?

ATSUKO

Atsu...shi. My name is. Atsushi. What's yours?

OFFICER CARL

Carl.

ATSUKO

...Carl?

OFFICER CARL

Yes, Carl.

ATSUKO

But you...you look...um, or you *don't* look like a...um, how do you write "Carl"?

OFFICER CARL

She, ehy, ahru, elu. The last two letters are tricky.

ATSUKO

Right. Of course. Right...

OFFICER CARL

Take care, Atsushi.

ATSUKO

Take care...Carl.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

He smelled fishy.

ATSUKO

We are by the ocean.

*AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell and it sounds like a ship wailing.
ATSUKO puts MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL on the ground.*

AUDIO GUIDE

You are on a boat to Manchuria.

You are travelling the Sea of Japan, or the East Sea.

(See Wikipedia for full naming discrepancy.)

You smell the ocean air and feel the salty breeze and let the sound of waves soothe you...

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell and it sounds like calming ocean waves.

Perhaps AUDIO GUIDE takes a moment to feel calmed.

Another bell, a doorbell, rings far off stage.

AUDIO GUIDE grunts, like how dare someone interrupt my calming moment.

(calling off.) Coming!

AUDIO GUIDE exits.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

“And—splash! Chin up to salt water Alice was in. First she thought, somehow sea in fell or.”

That’s the end of that page.

ATSUKO

(sighs.) This is even worse of a slow tease than a mystery book. Next page, please.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

“Caterpillar mouth from water pipe took and bored sleepy voice spoke in. ‘You, who are? Caterpillar says. Alice a little shyly answers, ‘Ah, ah, um, not really I know right now—at least this morning when I woke, I who I was knew, but then I many times changed—’”

ATSUKO

What does that mean?!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Woah, how did you know that was the next set of words?

ATSUKO unties her furoshiki, opens her bone box, and takes out the mic.

ATSUKO

(sings.) Someday...

I’ll read this book in order

And it’ll all make so much sense

I mean, where does it even take place?

There are queens and disappearing cats

And hat-makers who don’t make any hats?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Maybe Manchuria?

ATSUKO
(*sings.*) Manchuria!
Yes I'm going to Manchuria!
According to my father's letters
It's a peaceful land of pretty purple flowers
And funny Chinese hunting dogs all around!
(*speaks.*) Next page, please.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
"June 8th, 1945. Dear Yasuko. Words cannot express my struggles here in the village of Heiho. This is nothing I could have imagined. They call Manchuria paradise because it is a place the other villagers and I will never leave—"

ATSUKO
Wait, this is the letter you first read to me...but back then you said, he said, "Words cannot express my *happiness* here."

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Did I? "Words cannot express my *struggles* here..." Oh I must have misread it last time. How strange, the word for "happiness" and "struggle" are so similar.

ATSUKO
Mr. Ancestor Snail...that changes everything.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
It's only one word.

ATSUKO
If Manchuria is actually a dangerous place then maybe Father did mislead everyone...but, Carl wouldn't put me on a ship to somewhere dangerous, would he?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
I told you he smelled fishy. Want me to keep reading?

ATSUKO
No, I...I should sleep.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
Want me to sing you a lullaby?

ATSUKO
That would be nice. ...Father used to sing to us at night...

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Okay. Let's see.
(*sings.*) Oh, I wish I were a cricket
Yes it's true
I wish I were a cricket
Then the music of my body
Would play for you
And someday you'll sing my elegy~
(*speaks.*) How's that?

ATSUKO is asleep.

Wow, I'm really good at this. If I can't get a promotion as a Very Special Ancestor Snail, I should become a professional lullaby singer.

...

Hmm. Strange.
Something...burns?
Oh.
You know what it is?
It's the salty air.
On my snail skin.
Hmm.
It burns.
It burns.
It burns.

It burns.

Ghosts awaken.

A nightmare.

The world shakes.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL claws away at his skin, screaming in pain.

We may hear her voices wailing out but ATSUKO's body is not producing words. She is trying to escape the nightmare.

Ghosts are building Manchuria.

ATSUKO's hands go to the headphones. She is about to take them off when AUDIO GUIDE returns with a delivered package and rings the bell and it sounds like a boat honking.

AUDIO GUIDE

Welcome to Manchuria.

You have arrived.

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell and it sounds like a bell.

The bell resounds for much longer than usual.

part three

*ATSUKO opens her eyes slowly. She looks around.
This is Manchuria.
She turns to MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL.*

ATSUKO

Mr. Ancestor Snail, how do you think we get to Heiho—

But MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL has become a JAPANESE OFFICER.

AUDIO GUIDE

When you arrive in Manchuria, an officer welcomes you.

JAPANESE OFFICER

Who are you?

ATSUKO

...!

AUDIO GUIDE

He asks your purpose here.

JAPANESE OFFICER

I asked you a question.

ATSUKO

...

AUDIO GUIDE

He asks you where you are headed.

JAPANESE OFFICER

You just get here?

ATSUKO

...

AUDIO GUIDE

He instructs you to participate in the Manchurian Orientation.

JAPANESE OFFICER

Come with me, boy.

AUDIO GUIDE

He walks you to the Orientation Building.

JAPANESE OFFICER

I said, move it.

JAPANESE OFFICER stands behind ATSUKO and puts his hands on her shoulders. He starts marching in place. Then he kicks the back of ATSUKO's knees and she starts marching in place.

AUDIO GUIDE

On your walk, perhaps you notice the Manchurian architecture.

They reflect a blend of Chinese, Japanese and Soviet cultures and styles.

You are mostly walking by Japanese officers.

Perhaps you also run into Chinese laborers and farmers, who live in the neighborhood.

A vegetable cart appears.

Most Chinese farmland was under control of the Japanese.

They would give over their hard-earned produce for the Japanese military.

Imagine this vegetable cart full of corn and cabbages, which were abundant in this region.

Also in this cart would be poppies, used to produce opium.

The Japanese to extract opium in order to—

XUE appears out of the vegetable cart.

XUE

Okada! You're looking dashing today. New haircut?

JAPANESE OFFICER

Xue! On your way for deliveries?

XUE

Who's this sweet little thing? You have a son you didn't tell me about? You keeping secrets from me, Okada?

JAPANESE OFFICER

No, never. I found him on the docks—new arrival.

XUE

Welcome to Manchuria! What's your name, little one?

ATSUKO

...I...

XUE

Hm?

ATSUKO

...I'm 16.

XUE

You're kidding! Well, I like men of all sizes, so you're in luck.

XUE winks at ATSUKO.

JAPANESE OFFICER

He's a little young for you, isn't he Xue?

XUE

Oh, what a dirty mind you have, Okada, I'm just trying to make our little friend feel welcome here.

JAPANESE OFFICER

When are you gonna welcome me to your home and show me that, um, recipe you promised?

XUE

Next time! I promise—when I'm not so busy. This August heat has been hard on our crops so my parents and I are planting double. Speaking of—you'll tell the boys upstairs that their delivery might not be for another week, won't you?

JAPANESE OFFICER

Of course.

XUE

Perfect, this is why you're my favorite. But that's between you and me, all right?

JAPANESE OFFICER chuckles.

See you next time! And have fun, *young man*—what's your name?

ATSUKO

...Atsushi. Like the character for passion, or fever.

XUE

Mine's Xue. Like the character for snow. Together we melt. Hope to see you around, Fever Boy!

XUE exits but when JAPANESE OFFICER isn't looking XUE spits in his direction, which ATSUKO sees.

JAPANESE OFFICER

Here's the Orientation Building.

JAPANESE OFFICER shoves ATSUKO forward.

AUDIO GUIDE

This is an original Manchurian Orientation Manual. Page 1:

JAPANESE OFFICER

"You are an important part of creating the new Japanese Empire.

Accordingly, you must prepare yourself for everything if you are to survive here.

First we will go over the map of the terrain.

Next, we will introduce you to the rules and regulations.

Then, we will train you to face the threats you may encounter."

JAPANESE OFFICER presents a rifle to ATSUKO. ATSUKO stares at it.

AUDIO GUIDE

Page 13:

JAPANESE OFFICER

“How to shoot a rifle.

Step one. Inspect the gun.

Step two. Prepare your target.

Step three. Load the gun.

Step four. Hold the handgrip in your trigger hand and balance the stock in your supporting hand.

Step five. Aim.

Step six. Shoot.

ATSUKO is still staring.

Step six. Shoot.

JAPANESE OFFICER pushes the gun closer to ATSUKO.

Step six. Sing.”

It’s always better when you sing it.

ATSUKO looks at JAPANESE OFFICER. Is he MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL?

ATSUKO slowly takes the gun in her hand. She runs her hand along it.

She turns it into a microphone.

She looks to MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL. He gives her a note. She sings the note back.

ATSUKO

(*Sings.*) I rode across the mountains.

I sailed across the sea.

But now I’m here...

There’s an ever-looming fear...

That it’s not the place I thought it would be.

AUDIO GUIDE rings the bell and it sounds like a gunshot.

ATSUKO drops the gun in shock and falls to the floor.

AUDIO GUIDE also seems shocked.

ATSUKO takes off the headphones and throws the audio device on the floor.

AUDIO GUIDE

(*to herself.*) Woah, wait...

ATSUKO opens her bone box. She hides herself inside. She closes the lid behind her.

AUDIO GUIDE looks at the box where ATSUKO disappeared. She thinks.

She looks at JAPANESE OFFICER who is still standing, as if awaiting command.

AUDIO GUIDE

Next page, please.

JAPANESE OFFICER

“Page 14: —How to use a knife. Step 1. Wrap your hand around the hilt and point the sharp edge towards your aggressor—“

AUDIO GUIDE

Next page, please.

JAPANESE OFFICER

“Page 4: —in the North, there lies the cities of Harbin, Heiho, and—”

AUDIO GUIDE

Crap, I put them out of order...umm...what about...

AUDIO GUIDE opens her package that was delivered and takes out some old documents. She starts flipping through them.

JAPANESE OFFICER

“Diary Pages of Okada Fumio, Japanese officer stationed in Manchuria. January 20, 1942—”

AUDIO GUIDE flips the page.

“December 8, 1943—“ (*flip*) “April 15, 1945—“ (*flip*) “August 6, 1945. Received word that American bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Trained some new arrivals at orientation. Used Chinese [(*static*.)] as target practice. A small act of retaliation.”

AUDIO GUIDE

...

...

Obaachan? Obaachan? Are you still up?

YASUKO appears but this time much, much older and in clothing more akin to now. She is sitting in a chair sewing.

YASUKO

(*doesn't look up*.) ...Mm?

AUDIO GUIDE

Do you know what...? (*gets lost in reading something*.)

YASUKO

(*still not looking up*.) Hmm?

AUDIO GUIDE

...Sorry... (*sees watch*.) Oh my god. It's 2am. Wait, what are you doing up so late?

YASUKO

What are *you* doing up so late?

AUDIO GUIDE

I asked you first.

YASUKO

I'm your grandma.

AUDIO GUIDE

I lost track of time going through some of these old documents I just got—do you know what this word is?

AUDIO GUIDE shows YASUKO a piece of paper.

YASUKO

Souku. It means “hunting dog.”

AUDIO GUIDE

They shot dogs in Manchuria?!

YASUKO

It’s also a not nice thing to call a person. Like a stupid person or a, a—what is the word? Gremlin? Someone who does everything for you.

AUDIO GUIDE

A...henchman?

YASUKO

Yes, yes. What are you reading?

AUDIO GUIDE

I’m trying to do more research on Atsuko’s story.

YASUKO

What story?

AUDIO GUIDE

You know...

YASUKO

I don’t know.

AUDIO GUIDE

How she went to get great-grandpa’s bones from Manchuria? All by herself?

YASUKO

Oh yeah.

AUDIO GUIDE

...Are you sure she didn’t mention anything else about getting to Manchuria? Because if she went the normal way at the time you’re saying then she might have had to shoot some Chinese...”hunting dogs.”

YASUKO

I don’t know.

AUDIO GUIDE

You don't know if she said anything else or you don't know if she shot someone?

YASUKO

(*shrugs.*) It was such a long time ago.

AUDIO GUIDE

That seems like a big enough deal that you'd remember.

YASUKO

That war was only a portion of my life.

AUDIO GUIDE

But don't you think it was...a very important one? Like it's really crucial for me and future generations to know what my Japanese ancestors suffered through.

YASUKO

You know, the other day I realized I've spent more years in America than I've lived in Japan.

AUDIO GUIDE

But your formative years were in Japan.

YASUKO

What kind of years?

AUDIO GUIDE

The years that made you know who you are.

YASUKO

Oh. I don't think so. "I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." You know what that's from?

AUDIO GUIDE

Yes, you quote it all the time—but, okay, do you remember anything about how Atsuko got to Heiho?

YASUKO

What's Heiho?

AUDIO GUIDE

That's the village great-grandpa led in Manchuria.

YASUKO

Wasn't it called something else? Like...Manho?

AUDIO GUIDE

You told me it was Heiho—was it Manho?

YASUKO

Oh no, that's the Chinese restaurant I ate at last week. It was very good. Very authentic.

AUDIO GUIDE

Are you sure? Because the village name makes a big difference.

YAUSKO

It's still Manchuria either way.

YASUKO

Yeah but—Heiho is a village in the far north which means Atsuko would have had to get there by train. But see—this is the part I'm still figuring out—the Soviets invaded Manchuria on the day of the Hiroshima bombing, which should be around the day Atsuko got to Manchuria. When the Soviets invaded, the Japanese military fled south, so the trains were all shut down. So to get to Heiho, Atsuko either got on the last train north ever or, I dunno...rode a horse? I'm just having a hard time figuring out how she found his bones with the information you gave me.

YASUKO

Maybe she didn't find them.

AUDIO GUIDE

What?!

YASUKO

Maybe she made it up.

AUDIO GUIDE

But she brought back bones, right?

YASUKO

I don't know whose bones.

AUDIO GUIDE

You're just casually suggesting you might have buried some stranger's bones in your family's grave?!

YASUKO

Or maybe I remembered the dates wrong.

AUDIO GUIDE

Obaachan!

YASUKO

We didn't have electronic devices to keep track of our lives back then.

AUDIO GUIDE

I know but...didn't you ask her details over and over again so you could sear it into your memory?

YASUKO

She didn't want to say any more. So I figured I knew everything I needed.

AUDIO GUIDE

Did you ever ask her why she didn't want to talk about it?

YASUKO

Why do you think?

AUDIO GUIDE

Because...because she was raised to be a "humble Japanese woman."

YASUKO

(*laughs.*) My sister was not always confident but she was not humble.

AUDIO GUIDE

Then why do you think she didn't want to talk about it?

YASUKO

...

Imagine you were her. Imagine going through what she did at the time. ...I don't think shooting someone would be the hardest thing she had to experience.

AUDIO GUIDE

You said she came back unharmed...

YASUKO

Physically...

AUDIO GUIDE

...

...I'm gonna figure it all out and prove to you she did what she said.

YASUKO

Okay.

AUDIO GUIDE

...Why are you up?

YASUKO

Jet lag.

AUDIO GUIDE

You came back from Japan weeks ago.

YASUKO

As you get older, it gets harder and harder for your body to process a change in time.

AUDIO GUIDE

Good luck on getting some sleep. *Oyasuminasai*, Obaachan.

YASUKO

Oyasumi, Acchan.

AUDIO GUIDE exits.

YASUKO finishes the last stitch. She holds up what she was sewing. It is a pink dress, good as new. She pats it, remembering who it was for.

She looks on the floor. She notices the audio device dropped by ATSUKO.

She takes her aged body and walks over to pick it up.

She puts on the headphones.

She examines the device and presses a button

The radio shadows appear again.

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! Atsuko and Mr. Furuhata? Were they really?

GOSSIP LADY 2

I hear that's why Atsuko skipped town.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Do you think that's why his wife killed herself?

GOSSIP LADY 2

I thought Mr. Furuhata's wife killed herself because he was...you know...another way..

GOSSIP LADY 1

But how could he be another way if he and Atsuko—

YASUKO presses a button.

The shadows grow bigger and they talk faster.

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! Yasuko? And the clockmaker's youngest son?

GOSSIP LADY 2

Yes! They were going to elope!

GOSSIP LADY 1

Well he's very handsome and charming, but he is definitely beneath her. He's a third son!

GOSSIP LADY 2

Well it doesn't matter because now she's marrying the eldest son of the Sato family! This way they'll drop the demands to pay for the burials.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Oh, she really is an angel isn't she? That man is definitely beneath her. Those gap teeth?

*YASUKO is trying to change the channel, but she's old and doesn't know what to press.
The shadows are growing bigger and they talk faster.*

GOSSIP LADY 2

I heard Yasuko was originally going to elope with the money Mr. Tazawa was paid for going to Manchuria.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Well I heard Yasuko was secretly taking money from all her suitors, tricking them into thinking she was going to marry them.

GOSSIP LADY 2

Well I heard Yasuko was secretly posing as a nude model.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Well I heard she was secretly making dresses to sell to the rich girls in the neighboring town.

GOSSIP LADY 2

Well I heard now she's using the money she secretly stashed to pay for Atsuko's college tuition.

GOSSIP LADY 1

Oh she really is an angel. That mule face who ran away is not worth a single—

*YASUKO manages to push a button.
The shadows grow larger and talk faster.*

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! The eldest brother of the Tazawa family died? In battle?

*YASUKO pushes a different button.
The shadows grow larger.*

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! The little baby Yoshiko of the Tazawa family died? Of malnutrition?

*YASUKO pushes a different button.
The shadows start bursting at the seams, becoming ghosts.*

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! The Tazawa family is losing their house?

YASUKO pushes a different button.

GOSSIP LADY 1

No! The Tazawa family is not losing their house?

GOSSIP LADY 2

Yasuko figured out a way to save the house. She's an angel. She's a miracle-worker. She's perfect. **She's beautiful. She's—**

*YASUKO presses a button and the ghosts are abruptly quieted.
She is able to change it to an old Japanese tune.
Like “Suzhou Night” by Shirley Yamaguchi.
She bops her head to it. She starts to sway. She starts to dance.
Perhaps as she dances she is younger again.
Her younger self stops dancing and looks around to see if anyone is looking.
Then she opens ATSUKO's bone box which is still on stage and takes out a book.
It is Alice in Wonderland, a little burnt around the edges, with perhaps some pages torn out. She touches it gently. Then she opens the book and starts flipping through the pages.
The old Japanese tune finishes. We hear MR. CARL.*

MR. CARL

りこうらん そしゅう よる
李香蘭で「蘇州の夜」でした⁴⁸

それでは今夜もミスターカールと英会話の時間です⁴⁹

It's time for “English Lessons with Mr. Carl.”

ミスターカールです

I'm Mr. Carl.

ものがたり つづ
物語を続けましょう

Let us continue our story.

YASUKO lands on a page and reads, as if she's following along with MR. CARL.

MR. CARL

さいご らんぼう
最後のひとはいきなり乱暴すぎて、アリスはとびあがってしまいました
“The last word was so suddenly violent that Alice quite jumped.”

するとアリスは大きなねこを見かけました

“Then, Alice saw a large cat.”

ねこは、みみ みみ 耳から耳までとニヤニヤしています

“The cat was grinning from ear to ear.”

YASUKO begins to read aloud and starts to walk over to the zabuton.

YASUKO

「教えていただけませんか？」
とアリスはききました。
「なぜこちらのねこは、あんなふうにならうんでしょうか？」

MR. CARL

“‘Please, would you tell me,’
Asked Alice,
‘Why does your cat grin like that?’

⁴⁸ That was Li Xianglan (Shirley Yamaguchi) with “Suzhou Night.”

⁴⁹ The remaining Japanese in this scene is directly translated by Mr. Carl.

「チェシャねこだから」と公爵夫人^{こうしゃくふじん}が。
「そのせいだよ」
「チェシャねこがいつもニヤニヤわらう
とは知らなかったです。」

‘It’s a Cheshire cat,’ said the Duchess,
‘And that’s why.’

‘I didn’t know that Cheshire cats always
grinned.’”

YASUKO has sat down at the zabuton.

MR. CARL

“In fact, I didn’t know that cats *could* grin.”

YASUKO

“You don’t know much,”

MR. CARL

“Said the Duchess.”

YASUKO

“And that’s a fact.”

MR. CARL

そしたら公爵夫人は赤ちゃんを見て子も
り歌みたいなものをうたいだしまし
た。。。。

YASUKO

“And with that the Duchess looked to her
child again, singing a sort of lullaby as she did
so...”

XUE enters, rocking a baby in her arms.

She is singing an old Chinese jazz tune, like Bai Guang’s “Waiting for You.”

ATSUKO’s bone box opens.

Out pops AUDIO GUIDE in ATSUKO’s men’s clothing.

She watches XUE. When XUE finishes singing, AUDIO GUIDE as ATSUKO claps lightly.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

You’re a really good singer.

XUE

I know. Thank you. My parents gave me a cheesy name like “Snow” so I would be a trendy girl who could go to the city and have a future. I really grew up believing I could be a singer in a city night club. But then...you know.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I don’t know.

XUE

Well...the Japanese came...and...I couldn’t leave.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

You mean...Japan saved the land from the Soviets.

XUE

(*laughs.*) If by save you mean steal our land and burn our homes and kill and torture and enslave our people.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Oh...I didn't...know that...

XUE

You don't know much. And that's a fact.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...I'm sorry for...I'm sorry if we...did some horrible—

XUE

Fever Boy, are you part of the Japanese military?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

No...but they're my...they represent—

XUE

Don't feel responsible for anybody's actions but your own. You can't survive that way.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

So...do we...I mean, do the Japanese own this farm? It's very big.

XUE

My parents were able to keep this farm.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

So the Japanese didn't steal your land.

XUE

We might own the land but we don't control what we farm.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

What does the army want you to farm?

XUE

(*winks.*) Wouldn't you like to know?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

(*Laughs uncomfortably.*) ...You're very good at...talking...like that...being...charming?

XUE

I'll choose to take that as a compliment. But just for the record, this is not a house where men come and go regularly. This is my parents' house and I treat them with the respect they deserve.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Oh I wasn't trying to say... I just...was wondering...how you're able to...be so charming?

XUE

Is there someone in particular you want to charm?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

No...I just...I'm not very good at being...like that. On account of my face.

XUE

What's wrong with your face?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...You know...

XUE

I don't know. I don't see anything wrong with your face other than that awful bruise around your eye. It's looking much better than when I found you on the street, though. You feeling better?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Yes...Thank you for helping me.

XUE

I've seen those officers beat up Chinese boys all the time but never a Japanese one. You must've done something pretty bad.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I shot a...Japanese officer...

XUE

Woah!

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

By accident! During the gun training, they um...they lined up these men with bags over their heads...and I couldn't see their faces but you could tell...they were yelling, screaming, begging for their life in broken Japanese...and I closed my eyes, even though that wasn't gonna help with the sound and I guess an officer went over to try to shut one of them up but I couldn't see that and someone pushed me and I thought that meant I had to shoot so I shot with my eyes closed and I...I...shot the officer...

XUE

Did you kill him?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

No! I only shot his...rear end.

XUE

YOU SHOT HIM IN THE ASS?!

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Yeah?

XUE bursts out laughing.

XUE

Fever Boy you are full of surprises—do you remember which one you shot? Wait—no! Don't tell me. Next time I go into town I'm gonna see for myself who has a bandage on his ASS!

Baby starts crying.

Dammit. (to baby.) Shh, shh...

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I could try to rock him to sleep?

XUE

No I'm gonna bring him to my mom—and tell her what you did!

XUE walks off with the baby.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO) takes a moment to look around. Is this Manchuria?

She inspects what she's wearing. Is this approximately what she wore?

Then her pocket starts moving. She is startled. Perhaps there's a small muffled cry of, "Let me out, let me out!" She slowly and carefully tries to move her hand to her pocket when XUE enters, laughing again.

XUE

My mom says you're her hero.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I only shot him by accident!

XUE

Who cares! She's gonna forever remember you by what you did, not by what you thought.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Ahaha...that is so not what I'd like to be remembered for...

XUE

So you know how to rock a baby to sleep. Is that what they teach boys in Japan?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Um, they do when you're in a big family. I'm the third of seven.

XUE

That must be nice. I'm terrible at raising a baby. I mostly leave it to my mother.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

What about your husband?

XUE

I don't have a husband.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Then how do you have a baby? Oh! Do you have a lover? My sister doesn't have a baby but she has a lover.

XUE

I don't ever want a lover. I hate men. They are useless, greedy, selfish pigs. Every single one. Japanese men especially. (*points to AUDIO GUIDE.*) Don't grow into a man.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I can promise I won't.

XUE

Good. ...Let me tell you a trick for being "charming." It's called a slow tease. You suggest you might offer something, and then you say, "Next time." And then next time...and next time...They more you keep them waiting for something, the more—

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

The more it seems worth waiting for. And then the more they'll keep waiting.

XUE

Looks like you do know a thing or two. ...That trick can't protect you forever, as you saw...

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

What do you mean?

XUE

...Man, 16 must be young in Japan. I wish I could live somewhere where 16 was young...Where did say your Father lived?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Heiho.

XUE

You mean, Heihe?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Right, yes, Chinese pronunciation. It's very far north so I should be getting to the train. ...There are trains running...right?

XUE

Well...I just heard the trains have been shut down because of some Soviet attacks.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

(*quietly.*) Damn.

XUE

But...you could take my horse.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

(a little stiff.) A horse. How convenient. That's so kind of you. Thank you. I should get going. On that horse.

XUE

I'll come with you.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Oh no, you don't have to do that.

XUE

Do you know how to get to Heihe? There are no signs on the roads in the countryside.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

(a little to self.) Ugh, that's such a good point...But what if you give me a map and I—

XUE

You know how to follow a Chinese map in a country you've never been?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...Probably not...?

XUE

Why don't you want me to come?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I just can't think of a reason why you would risk so much for me, a Japanese stranger—

XUE

I'm not risking anything.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

But—but...it's really important that I do this...alone...that's what...that's what makes it—

XUE

You haven't been alone.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Yes I have?

XUE

What about your Ancestor Snail?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...My what?

XUE

Mr. Ancestor Snail? Your friend who you said has come along with you for your journey?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...I...what?

More rustling in AUDIO GUIDE's pocket.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL's VOICE

(*muffled.*) Hey! Hey, Nosy! Let me out!

AUDIO GUIDE pulls out the ROCK that was originally in the bone box from her pocket.

ROCK (as MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL)

Phew. It smells awful in there by the way.

AUDIO GUIDE

You're...Mr. Ancestor Snail...? And you've...been here this whole time?

ROCK (as MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL)

Yeah! I had to go home for a bit to heal my skin from the salty sea winds. But my home is here, remember, Nosy? So I've always been with you.

AUDIO GUIDE

Oh...okay. A "friend." I can...maybe get behind this. Okay.

ROCK (as MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL)

Who's your new friend? I like her already, she's pretty.

XUE

Your snail has good eyes.

ROCK (as MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL)

Actually, I'm blind.

XUE and AUDIO GUIDE move as if they are on a horse to Heihe. We hear MR. CARL.

MR. CARL

"...And the Duchess and Alice hurried out." And that concludes tonight's session of "English Classics with Mr. Carl."

YASUKO closes her book and continues listening to her headphones.

MR. CARL

I'm signing off this evening with a rare find: A *shidaiqu*, which was a kind of jazz music that had traditional Chinese influences. Very popular in the 1930s and 40s. These songs sometimes contained messages of rebellion against all the outside foreign influences on China.

A shidaiqu starts to play.

As it does, XUE and AUDIO GUIDE's movements start to become in synch with the song.

Their movements start to turn into a dance.

They have a little fun as they dance.

YASUKO turns at looks at XUE and AUDIO GUIDE.

She watches them dance and then she hits a button on the device.

The music shuts off and she watches as XUE and AUDIO GUIDE dance without music.

A female and male figure dancing.

They dance.

They dance.

They dance.

They dance non-stop, getting more and more vigorous.

AUDIO GUIDE is visibly getting exhausted.

But she keeps going.

They dance faster and faster.

Until maybe they cannot dance anymore.

YASUKO presses a button on the device.

It turns on to the song's final chords.

XUE and AUDIO GUIDE stop dancing but are clearly out of breath.

XUE is singing along with the final chords. AUDIO GUIDE cheers and claps.

XUE tries to bow but stumbles a little.

XUE

That Japanese liquor is very strong.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

You really have an amazing voice. You should go to Shanghai—you'd become a famous singer in a second.

XUE

Yes, just ride my horse back south, past my house, all the way to Shanghai!

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Yea!

XUE

With what money, Fever Boy?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Oh! (*She fishes in her pockets and takes out some money.*) With this! This is what was left to me by my father. But you should have it!

XUE

This is the alcohol talking. You need to hold on to that.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I don't need it—we'll reach Heihe tomorrow, I'll get what I need, and then I'll take a boat from the Northern Port back home.

XUE

Didn't your father leave that for you to go to college?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Yea but I'm...I'm not gonna go to college. ...I don't want to be taught lies by the Japanese government. Come on. Take it.

XUE

...I don't want your money.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

But it's—

XUE

Don't. Put that away and don't mention it again.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

...Okay...

XUE

...Once Mr. Ancestor Snail wakes up, you should sleep next. I'll take the next shift.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

No...you should sleep next. I...I don't think I'll sleep tonight.

XUE

...Nightmares?

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

(laughs, embarrassed.) We've passed by so many dead bodies in the fields...I've seen all these horrible open wounds...mutilations...of Japanese and Chinese folks alike...I don't know what is happening...

XUE

The Soviet invasion has gotten everyone confused...everyone's killing each other in fear...

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

It's all disturbing but...what keeps me up at night are the screams of the man begging for his life in the gun training...Sorry. You've probably heard much worse. I shouldn't be complaining...

XUE

It's never easy...Hey, let's get out of here for a while. Maybe that will help you sleep.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

How? Where?

XUE

I'll show you around my farm.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Right...right now?

XUE gestures around AUDIO GUIDE.

XUE

You are standing right outside my back door.

Before you, to your right, is corn.

Rows and rows and rows of sunshine yellow corn, wrapped in their leafy cocoons.

If you walk a little to your left, there's a small patch of eggplants and tomatoes

And a row of cucumbers so green you can taste them just by looking

Don't step there!

Right at your feet

Cabbages, of all shades of red and purple and green and white...

Oh—don't turn that corner.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

What's there?

XUE

...Purple flowers called—

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Poppies! Yes I read about them in a—in my father's letters! The Japanese military force Chinese farmers to grow poppies so they can extract the opium to get the Chinese civilians addicted and...oh...

XUE

That's right...I am responsible for the deaths of hundreds of my people...but in exchange the Japanese officers protect me and my family.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

No. You're only responsible for your own actions. And you are doing what you can to survive.

XUE

That sounds familiar...

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

A very clever future singing star told me that.

My turn...let's see...

AUDIO GUIDE starts gesturing around XUE.

...This is a nightclub

In...London!

London has very nice nightclubs

Although a lot of murders happen in them according to Agatha Christie.

But we'll make sure this one doesn't have any

XUE

Take me somewhere you've actually been.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

I've been to a London night club through books.

XUE

It's more fun if there are more real details. Show me your home.

AUDIO GUIDE (as ATSUKO)

Okay...um...

You are standing in the entrance of my...home.

And then on the right there's a set of stairs going up...I think...

On the left, there's a hallway...

You walk down the hallway...

And the first room is...the kitchen?

No! The main room—where we eat...

And then...

And then—

YASUKO speaks into the mic.

YASUKO

And then there's another room—

It's full of dressers.

The boys sleep in here.

The girls all sleep in the room upstairs.

And walk all the way down to the end of the hallway.

Turn right and you'll see the bathroom

But turn left...and smell.

AUDIO GUIDE and XUE and YASUKO all smell the air. Perhaps YASUKO is older again.

YASUKO

Soy sauce and sugar

Lightly burnt mochi

Boiled miso and scallions

Pickled daikon and rice freshly steamed...

The kitchen's at the end of the hall.

If you walk past the kitchen

And open the door...

There's our farm.

We were a potato farm.

So it was not very exciting to look at.

Just rows and rows of potato greens.

But we have a little colorful garden for ourselves to the right.

The lid of the bone box pops open again. And ATSUKO pops up halfway.

She rests her arm on the edge of the bone box and listens to the story.

Sumiko loved picking the cherry tomatoes.

One time Atsuko was mad at her—

I don't remember why, they were always mad at each other—

So Atsuko picked all of the cherry tomatoes.

And Sumiko cried and cried and cried...

So Atsuko stayed up all night and took my needle and thread

And sewed every single cherry tomato back on the vines

So Sumiko could pick them the next morning...

It didn't really work and Atsuko made her fingers bleed.

So she couldn't do any useful work on the farm for days—

Which I sometimes think was her plan all along

Because it meant she could read all day...

..

As the war went on I watched that garden grow smaller...

And smaller...

Until it was nothing but another patch of dirt...

It never grew back again.

By the end of this XUE has faded away and AUDIO GUIDE has come back to herself.

She has sat next to YASUKO to listen.

ATSUKO hops back into the box.

AUDIO GUIDE

I wish I could have seen it. The house you grew up in.

YASUKO

It wasn't anything special. And it wouldn't tell you much more about Atsuko's little Manchurian escapade.

AUDIO GUIDE

That's okay...I researched more...and I did what you said, I really imagined what she must have...and you're right. She must have been through such a difficult and...traumatic experience. She probably didn't want to relive it by telling people...

YASUKO

...But...?

AUDIO GUIDE

No buts!

YASUKO

I hear it. I hear the "but *obaachan*..." in your voice.

AUDIO GUIDE

...But...if you know how hard it must have been for her...why aren't you proud of what she did? Maybe she didn't want to talk about it but *you* could've. You barely even told me.

YASUKO

Peh. Americans overuse pride. You say you're proud of everyone which sets the bar very low—

AUDIO GUIDE

But if you loved her, then wouldn't you still want people to—

YASUKO

Americans also overuse love. They tell everyone I love you, but what does that really mean. Atsuko and I were *kazoku*. That is a connection beyond love.

AUDIO GUIDE

I obviously understand what it means to be family—that's why I'm trying to piece this story together! To give you proof that your sister did this heroic thing, so we can all tell everyone the full story about—

YASUKO

I don't need proof.

AUDIO GUID

...You said, "Maybe she didn't find them," which suggests to me you do.

YASUKO

She came back with Father's bones. Maybe she didn't come back with Father's bones. But she came back with Father's bones.

AUDIO GUIDE

...What? Say it in Japanese.

YASUKO

アツコは父^{とう}さんのお骨^{こつ}を持って帰^もってきた。^{かえ}
アツコは父さんのお骨を持って帰ってこなかったかもしれないけど
アツコは父さんのお骨を持って帰ってきた。⁵⁰

AUDIO GUIDE

...Yeah that really didn't help. Are you saying that...even if she might not have done what she said she did...you still think it's truth? Because that's...literally not the definition of truth. Our society and culture is crumbling because so many lies have been posed as truths, so we can't just say—

YASUKO

You don't believe her?

⁵⁰ Atsuko came back with Father's bones. Maybe she didn't come back with Father's bones. But she came back with Father's bones.

AUDIO GUIDE

Of course I believe her, I believe she did a thing which seems near impossible, so I'm gonna find *how* she did the near impossible so I can tell the world—

YASUKO

She didn't want to tell the world.

AUDIO GUIDE

Because you didn't let her!

YASUKO

Me?

AUDIO GUIDE

If you or anyone in our family had recognized the hero she was, she wouldn't have gone *unsung* and underappreciated in her lifetime and I wouldn't have to dig this deep for this family history!

YASUKO

...

AUDIO GUIDE

Sorry I didn't mean to... I'm not blaming you for anything, I'm blaming a system that lets women believe their stories are not worth telling. Because if she were a man she would probably be gathering people around a table every holiday and telling the story of how she...rode a flying horse to Heihe and grabbed her father's body...even though, as I just found out, the Soviets had taken over Heihe by the time she got there so there is no way anyone would have kept tabs on any of the villagers who had died a month earlier, much less great-grandpa's bones...

YASUKO

And...if she told you that, would you tell others she rode a flying horse or would you say, "she's a liar"?

AUDIO GUIDE

...I mean...obviously she wouldn't say she rode a flying horse...

YASUKO

Have you ever read this?

YASUKO points to her copy of Alice in Wonderland.

AUDIO GUIDE

Why do you love that book so much? Nothing happens in it—it's about a girl who doesn't go anywhere except on a psychedelic drug-induced dream—which, by the way is not fair because every time a girl goes on an adventure, it's all in her head!

YASUKO

But it's a very cute psychedelic drug-induced dream...

AUDIO GUIDE

I feel like you've quoted me the entire book at this point so I don't need to read it.

YASUKO

You should still read it. Especially the end.

YASUKO hands AUDIO GUIDE her copy of Alice in Wonderland.

Then YASUKO exits humming.

AUDIO GUIDE looks at the book. She then shakes her head and returns to her station.

She looks at Atsuko's bone box.

AUDIO GUIDE

I'm still gonna figure it out. Don't worry.

No response. AUDIO GUIDE looks at the book. Then she slowly opens it and starts to read.

AUDIO GUIDE

"Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end? 'I must be getting somewhere near the center of the earth.' Alice said aloud. 'I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth! How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards...'"

As AUDIO GUIDE reads the above, ATSUKO starts floating down onto the stage.

AUDIO GUIDE

"Down, down, down. She felt that she was dozing off, and had just begun to dream that she was walking hand in hand with Dinah, when suddenly, thump! Thump! Down she came upon a heap of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over."

ATSUKO crash lands onto the stage.

AUDIO GUIDE

"Alice was not a bit hurt, and she jumped up on to her feet in a moment."

ATSUKO gets up and dusts herself off.

"She found herself in a long, low hall. There were doors all around, but they were all locked..."

ATSUKO stares out as if staring at a long hall. Or perhaps, rather, the village of Heihe, surrounded by Soviet soldiers. XUE enters.

ATSUKO

What did the local Chinese farmers say?

XUE

They said there isn't really a way to sneak around Heihe without being noticed by a Soviet soldier. But if you can convince them to let you in, all the dead have been put in the building that used to be the hospital. They implied...there's probably quite a lot of bodies there though...maybe hundreds...

ATSUKO

And did they know how the Heihe village leader died a month ago?

XUE

They didn't want to tell me... They said, "Who cares what happened to those filthy Japanese!" I didn't prod because I didn't want them to think I was a Japanese sympathizer. ...This is as far as I can take you. I'm sorry. I have to survive this war too.

ATSUKO

...I understand. ...But how do you think I can get them to let me in?

XUE

By telling them, "Next time."

XUE takes ATSUKO's hat off and lets her hair down.

ATSUKO

You...you knew?

XUE laughs a little and adjusts ATSUKO's hair so that it falls nicely.

ATSUKO

I...I really don't think I can...they won't even...

XUE

You learned from the best slow tease around.

ATSUKO

My sister.

XUE

Me!

ATSUKO

Oh, right, yeah, and you!

XUE

Don't worry, you'll be back with her soon in Japan and forget all about me.

ATSUKO

I would never, Xue. You've done so much for me. How could I ever...oh!

ATSUKO opens her bone box. She takes out the mic. She hands it to XUE.

ATSUKO

This is a truly small token of my gratitude. It's always better when you sing it, especially if it's with your voice.

XUE

Thank you, this is...sweet. Now... you must make it to the Northern Manchurian Port by sunrise tomorrow. That is when the next ship to Japan will leave. Rumor has it, it might be the last ship out forever. You have to make it on that ship or there will actually be a “next time” with those soldiers. And you don’t want that.

ATSUKO

Got it. (*pats her pocket.*) Mr. Ancestor Snail? Say bye to Xue.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL’S VOICE

Bye, Pretty Lady.

ATSUKO

(*to XUE.*) Goodbye...

*ATSUKO starts to exit but then XUE gives her a hug.
ATSUKO is startled. But then she lets the hug sink in.*

XUE

And Fever Girl...you should know...it’s not your face that makes you ugly.

*ATSUKO exits.
XUE waves goodbye and then looks at her mic.
Then she sings into it.*

XUE

(*sings.*) I will ride straight past my family...
I will ride a horse with wings...
I may be undone
That I won’t know my son
But then every night I get to sing.

XUE flies away.

part four

ATSUKO enters a hospital room full of dead bodies and searches among the dead bodies for her father.

Except perhaps...we do not see her searching through dead bodies.

Perhaps we see her do an action that is repetitive and taxing.

Perhaps she lifts and drags on giant sacks of potatoes.

Perhaps she is in a sea of sand or rice and is looking for one particular grain.

Perhaps the world is filled with hundreds of bone boxes and she is sifting through every single one.

She does this, alone, in silence for a long while.

AUDIO GUIDIE

“Suddenly she came upon a tiny golden key, and Alice’s first idea was that this might belong to one of the doors of the hall; but alas! Either the locks were too large, or the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them.”

Perhaps a book falls out of what she is searching through. ATSUKO picks it up.

AUDIO GUIDE

Then Alice sees a peculiar bottle...Tied on the bottle is a label that says, “Drink Me!”

“I am the diary of a Japanese Heihe villager!”

“Drink me and know the truth of what happened to your Father!”

ATSUKO starts to flip through the pages.

AUDIO GUIDE

Alice takes a sip of the bottle and—

We hear PROFESSOR CARL, who is perhaps a pre-recorded voice.

PROFESSOR CARL

Yes, I’m Professor Carl and I am a specialist in Heihe history.

Heihe had a tumultuous relationship with the local Chinese farmers.

See, the closest Japanese military center to Heihe was the capital of Manchuria, Harbin.

Harbin is notorious for being the location of Unit 731

Unit 731 was the Japanese military’s covert chemical warfare laboratory, known to perform lethal human experimentation on prisoners of war.

Several of the Japanese settler villages sent any Chinese they imprisoned to Unit 731.

Heihe was one of those Japanese villages.

And the original village leader of Heihe—

ATSUKO shuts the book. She tosses it across the room. She continues her task.

AUDIO GUIDE

But then Alice spits out the drink.

“Before anything, I must find a way to open a door.

I must get to the other side,” Alice thought to herself.

...

She tried the key on all the doors again.

“On the second time round, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before...”

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL, as performed by a man, enters.

AUDIO GUIDE

“And behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high...”

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Atsuko...

ATSUKO

I'm still looking.

AUDIO GUIDE

“She tried the little golden key in the lock...”

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Atsuko...

ATSUKO

I'm gonna find him, just wait.

AUDIO GUIDE

“And to her great delight it fitted!”

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

It's time to go home.

ATSUKO

I can't, Mr. Ancestor Snail. I haven't found him yet.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

It's almost dawn. You have to go. You need to get on the last boat and go home.

ATSUKO

I don't need to go home, I need to find my father's bones—

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Your sister is waiting for you. You have to go back to her.

ATSUKO

...I don't want to go back to her...she's a liar...and...and she doesn't even care about Father...and if she doesn't care about Father then I don't care about her...

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

...

“May 4th, 1945. Dear Yasuko. I believed I was a good man. But seeing the person I am here, I no longer know. I have the blood of many people on my hands. This is why I did not want to be a soldier, this is why I came to Manchuria—so I could avoid the draft. But it seems a man cannot escape his country’s war. This shame so haunts me that I would rather die here than ever face my family again. Tell the others I think of them often. Sincerely, Father.”

...

She may not care about Father...but she cares about you...and how you care about Father.

ATSUKO keeps sifting.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Atsuko...please?

ATSUKO looks and speaks directly at MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL.

ATSUKO

I’ll go when you tell me where you are.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

...

ATSUKO

Tell me where you are.

MR. ANCESSTOR SNAIL

...

ATSUKO

TELL ME WHERE YOUR BONES ARE.

MR. ANCESSTOR SNAIL

(*gently.*) I don’t have any bones. I’m a snail.

ATSUKO swallows hard.

ATSUKO

...Fine. Then I’ll leave you here to rot. I’ll leave you here. Just like you left us. You won’t be cremated. You won’t be buried. You’ll be a GHOST THAT HAUNTS THIS REALM FOREVER. I’ll turn you into a ghost. I’LL TURN YOU INTO A GHOST! (*she speaks to all the bodies.*) I’LL TURN YOU ALL INTO GHOSTS!

ATSUKO starts to break and falls down to her knees.

ATSUKO

No...no...

ATSIKO wipes her tears away. She pulls herself up.

I cannot let you haunt me forever...I have to survive...Mr. Ancestor Snail...how many souls can you carry on your back?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
As many as you need.

ATSUKO takes the shochu and pours the remainder on the bodies.

ATSUKO
I thought I saw...yes!

*ATSUKO picks up a gun from among the bodies.
ATSUKO points the gun at all the bodies. She shoots.*

*One. Two. **Three.***

The bodies go up in flames.

The ghosts all awaken. An army of ghosts start to emerge.

ATSUKO
Alcohol is more valuable than money...I'll take a few random bones from all around the room...And perhaps Father will be one of them...Oh...I should...I should perform the rites. Um, uh...

She takes out her bone box.

This can be a mokugyo. And...and where am I gonna find a singing bowl.

AUDIO GUIDE tosses her one.

Oh! Look at that. Curiouser, and curiouser...Um...Mr. Ancestor Snail, do you know a funeral chant?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
We can sing something we used to sing?

ATSUKO
About boots?

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
No. The one we used to sing together. Start the beat and give me a note.

*She hits the bone box like a mokugyo on a rhythm.
She strikes the singing bowl. Chime.*

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL
(*sings.*) Come with me
On this journey
I will roam
'Til we make it to your home
(*speaks.*) Come on, Acchan, sing along. Don't you remember our song?

ATSUKO
...I remember...

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL + (ATSUKO)
How we'll go (How we'll go)

I don't know (I don't know)
And though I don't have any bones
I'm a snail as strong as stones
And I'll leave a trail for anyone who wanders to follow (To follow)
To follow (To follow)

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL looks down. He has grown feet.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Look at what I got! Real feet! I think I'm on my way to the promotion! All the souls you're cremating are hopping on my back. Well, I gotta go make my delivery to the Ancestors now. Goodbye!

ATSUKO

...Wait...wait! Please I can't—Father, please don't—!

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL

Keep singing, Nosy. It'll make it better!

ATSUKO keeps on hitting her bone box and singing along through tears.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL starts marching. The army of ghosts march behind him.

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL (+ GHOSTS)

(*sings.*) Follow me (Follow me)
On this journey (On this journey)
Lots in store (Lots in store)
When you're marching off to war (When you're marching off to war)

Here we go (Here we go)
To and fro (To and fro)
And though we don't know who'll survive
Or why we all gave up our lives
We'll fight until our weary bones are laid to rest below (Below)
Below (Below)
Below~

MR. ANCESTOR SNAIL marches off with his ghosts.

ATSUKO collects a few random bones and puts them in her bone box.

She has completed her task.

part five

Perhaps there is a transportation bench.

ATSUKO sits down on it with her bone box. She stares out the window.

AUDIO GUIDE

“It was a curious dream, dear, certainly:

But now run in to your tea; it’s getting late,’ said her sister.

So Alice got up and ran off.

But...her sister sat still ...

Thinking of little Alice and all her wonderful Adventures,

Till she too began dreaming after a fashion...

So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland...”

AUDIO GUIDE closes the book and sets it down.

She rings the bell but it sounds like...

Waves crashing and gulls chirping...

A ship bellowing...

A horse neighing and trotting...

A train whistle...

A train pulling out...

ATSUKO is on a train.

AUDIO GUIDE gets up and walks over to the bench.

AUDIO GUIDE

...May I?

ATSUKO moves over a bit so AUDIO GUIDE can sit.

For a moment, ATSUKO and AUDIO GUIDE ride this train together in silence.

AUDIO GUIDE

I met you. Just once.

I was twelve and it was my first time in Japan.

There was this awful screeching

And it turned out to be you on your bicycle

As you hurled around the corner

And came racing towards me.

I thought you were going to crash into me.

But then you jumped off your bike

And you looked at me

And you shouted,

“You look just like your grandma!”

I had heard that my grandma was the town beauty.

So I thought that must be a joke.

I was the ugly one in my family.

Kind of like...

But then you said,

“You know your grandma was so beautiful,

They put her in a magazine

I'll show you, hold on."
And then you took out your giant purse.
And you sifted through it.
It was stuffed with so many things—
I have this image of you pulling out a fish?
Maybe I made that up.
Or maybe I didn't...
Then *obaachan* said from behind me,
"No one needs to see that."
And then you saw her.
And your face just widened.
And then...you...hugged her.
My *obaachan* doesn't hug people.
So, out of respect, I've never hugged her.
I know this is a cultural thing.
And also a generational thing.
But it is also a little bit a...her thing.
Sometimes I'm afraid my grandma is an artifact to me.
She is an embodiment of a time and a place
That she can tell me about and I can learn about...
But there is always a part of her that I can't be close to.
But you...you put your arms right around her without even hesitating...

You did find the photo from the magazine in your bag.
It was in a little plastic sheath for protection.
She was...so beautiful...
And I saw...just a little bit...of how I looked like her.
And I saw...a lot...how you looked like her too.

I didn't learn about what you did
Until after you died, years later.
You got hit by a car while riding your bike to some volunteer gastropod research—
Which kind of makes you an even more fascinating person...
I dove straight into your story...
Because I thought knowing exactly how you did what you did
Would get me close to you.
And you seemed like someone I could more easily be close to.
But I think I also thought...if I got close to you,
I could get closer to my *obaachan*...

It's good that I couldn't uncover all the truths about your journey.
I realized hiding the truth to control and oppress a population
Is different from having an individual or emotional truth
To help you survive.
To help your family survive.
To stay...close.
I used to think that because your sister wasn't interested in your detailed truths
Or in telling people about your journey

That meant she didn't care.
But she cares. So, so much...
Her care is sometimes invisible to me...
Because I'm too American or too of this generation...
But it's there.

Knowing that...
Still makes me feel like there are gaps...
Between me and you and her.
But I'm trying to understand...
That having gaps with someone doesn't mean you aren't close.
Because even if you did tell your story,
By the time it would have reached me
It would still be beyond layers and layers of translation...

You're still my hero, though. Whatever you did.

*ATSUKO finally looks at AUDIO GUIDE.
She hands her a set of headphones and a listening device.
AUDIO GUIDE is like, "For me?" ATSUKO still doesn't respond.
AUDIO GUDIE puts on the headphones.
She presses the listening device.
ATSUKO hands her the bone box.
The train whistles. ATSUKO disappears.
ATSUKO reappears on the zabuton.*

ATSUKO
Welcome back to Japan.
You have returned in time for the Obon Festival.
A Festival to honor the spirits of your ancestors.
August 15th, 1945.
The day your journey ends.
The day the war ends.
This is the historic speech of surrender.

We hear the Japanese Emperor's speech of surrender.

The Japanese Emperor spoke in a way that most people listening could not understand him.
Perhaps he is saying...
You may feel defeated.
You may feel like you...didn't get result you wanted.
And yet...
You, too, are a hero. Still.

YASUKO appears sewing, as the age she was when we first met her.

ATSUKO
You arrive at the station.
You are greeted by Mr. Furuhata.
He tells you all that has happened in Azumino while you have been away.

And he also tells you...
Sis has given him permission to marry you.
He asks you if you would accept his proposal.
You tell him, "...Next time."

*ATSUKO's voice continues seamlessly but ATSUKO's body gets up and moves.
She moves so slowly you can barely tell she's moving.
She moves closer and closer towards YASUKO who is still sewing, not looking up.*

ATSUKO'S VOICE

You arrive home.
Your younger brothers and sisters run out to greet you.
Welcome home, they say.
But where is Sis?
You run to the kitchen.
There she is.
Working.
As usual.
As if you'd never left.
You tell her your home.
She barely responds.
You ask her why she didn't marry who she wanted.
She says that may not be how it's done in America but it's what we do in Japan.
You ask her why she thought she could marry you off without asking.
She says Mr. Furuhata will send you to college.
And you have to go to college, isn't that what you wanted?
And you yell.
..What do you yell about?
You don't remember...
Something about...war...
Something about the Japanese government...
Something about lying...
Why the lies...
Why the lies, Sis...
Something about how you went to Manchuria to find the truth, to save Father, to save the family...
She slaps you.
Very hard.
She's never slapped you before...

You look at her.
She looks so...
...
Tired...
Has she always looked...this tired?
Does she seem thinner, to you?
Is that a bruise on her neck?
Have her eyes always been this red?

...

And then she yells.
But you can't hear her.
She yells.
But you can't see her mouth move.
Because all you can see
Is that she went on a journey
Without you. Because you left.
A journey you will never know.
Because you weren't here.
She stayed right in the same place
But she, too, went on a journey.
She, too, is a...

*ATSUKO suddenly runs and hugs YASUKO. YASUKO is bewildered.
For a moment it seems as if they are frozen.
Then ATSUKO starts to sob. YASUKO holds her.*

ATSUKO

ごめんなさい...ごめんなさい...
(Gomen-nasai...gomen-nasai...)
[I'm sorry...I'm sorry...]

*YASUKO holds ATSUKO tightly and starts to hum.
A familiar tune maybe...
"I will ride...across the mountains..."
Perhaps YASUKO cries a little, too.*

*The bone box AUDIO GUIDE holds starts to rattle.
AUDIO GUIDE opens the lid.
She looks inside.
She sees something and gasps.
Chime.*

*The End.
The curtain call should be a jig. And when I say "jig" I do not mean a mid-18th Century European dance. I mean a contemporary lightly choreographed dance set to fun music.*