

IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT
A TRAVELER



If on a winter's night a traveler

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For
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Chapter 1

Into a magnifying sphere
through a bumpy lava tunnel

As has been said from ancient times, the sum of energy residing us remains constant at all times – all matter can convert back to energy and the energy manifests in different ways creating objects, people, thoughts, and events. It's all about shifting energy from one to another. Like Michael Jackson pulled so many people in and created his era and phenomenon, then the energy shifted from him and will cause another pull of events somewhere else. Like the water was stopped, thus the energy was clogged in the building, and then it caused a flood. It was stopped, shifted, amplified its magnitude, and it perhaps came out as a tsunami along the coast of Japan.

I wish I could be contained in a glass jar with a Marimo and stay there as long as I wanted. The place is cool, shaded, and complete. I see things a little obscured through the layers of water and the glass. I hear people and talk to them through the vibration of the layers. There is a little time delay and frequent misunderstandings occur, but that's nice. The irresistible activity in our life is to imagine, to create events in our mind, and to relive other people's experiences through imagination. It's being here and being somewhere else. It's how much distance one can slip. And this action is not a leisure nor a luxury, it is actually the only option left for us. Our experiences are solo acts, our feelings are private, and even languages, which are supposedly there to connect and communicate between us, are private. Then we at least need to imagine we go through events together – getting drunk and dancing under the same music – sharing similar feelings – being fulfilled momentarily. Or instead we fall asleep spooning, smelling the sent of the nape of his neck where hair and skin meet. Icelandic people say when they smell a sweet floral sent in the air that the elves are around.

There is an insanely long underground tunnel connecting Lake Akan in Hokkaido and Lake Myvatn in north Iceland. Volcanoes exploded and lava flooded. The explosions left craters where water streamed in and created the two lakes. The lava hardened underground and formed the bumpy colorful tunnel. Marimos, elves, and trolls use the tunnel, go through the bubbling hot and freezing cold spots and the dark and narrow parts, and finally reach Lake Akan or Lake Myvatn. When they arrive at the other lake, it is a place unknown to them but somehow familiar. It feels a bit like visiting a remote relative's house for the first time. You've never met them but the familiar decorations and the smell of the house – the one on Saturday after lunch – hit your memory so strongly that you feel a bit dizzy, get sucked into a vortex. You feel strangely at home in the foreign place, which makes you feel uncomfortable because it shouldn't be comfortable. So Marimos, elves, and trolls recognize many familiar elements of their home – volcanic energy, hot springs, freezing water, the long winter and its quietness and darkness – but they also realize that people call them different names and that their faces are different.

Another familiar thing for Marimos is weak salt water. Marimo mothers give it to their children as a remedy when they are sick. They tell a story that their home used to be a part of the ocean a very long time ago and they remember the sense of it without consciously remembering it. Marimos no longer know whether that is the reason or because it has been a habit from their childhood, but they still soak themselves in weak salt water when they feel homesick.

I find Marimos compelling and beautiful. The existence of Marimos is non-logical and out of order from nature. It attests that non-logical, stubborn, persistent, and excessive are the qualities from which beauty emerges. Marimos only exist in a few places in the world thus aren't in any way popular or common. They live off of photosynthesis, yet like dark and cool places away from the sun. Photosynthesis plants are usually flat or linear to maximize their intake of the sun, and only green on the surface – white inside – to minimize their energy consumption. However Marimos are spherical and thus half is always in shadow, and they are green all the way to the core. An analogy would be a loser husband who spends more money on gambling than he earns and doesn't even make much money to begin with . . . Marimos don't have roots and thus drift and are rotated by water waves. This keeps Marimos in their spherical shape, it is not by their effort but as a byproduct of other forces. Marimos may seem extremely lazy up till now, but they are also amazingly patient – they spend a few hundred years growing to a sphere one to two meters in diameter – and greatly stubborn not to change their attitude. This trait gives Marimos a sense of dignity, even makes them heroic and beautiful. Also, Marimos behave like a time capsule absorbing and distilling time inside themselves. They take out small portions each time and give it to us when we look at the Marimos, and thus we gain a portion of time, making us feel relaxed and grounded.





Chapter 2

Sliding down the gorge of crystal protuberances



While sugar refinement was being invented in Arabia, the crystal landscape was starting to be formed in a hot steamy cave in Mexico. The Portuguese ship in the middle of the Indian Ocean went through many storms and wild waves while sailing towards the east. Men in all times seem to attempt to conquer unknowns – people, land, sea, and themselves – which have created many histories as well as tragic stories. I don't fully get the men's romance and I don't like ships because of my terrible sea sickness. I rather end up wondering how many times the Portuguese sailors puked into the sea from the edge of the ship.

The Kamishibai drama 'The Portuguese Trick or Treat' is about to take place here. Portugal among other European countries was going through the Age of Discovery and they were sailing toward the east to colonize new lands and to spread Christianity. While aiming to reach China a storm hit the Portuguese ship and the Portuguese missionaries landed at Nagasaki in 1543. They brought Kompeito as well as other Portuguese sweets, which Japanese people referred as 'southern barbaric sweets.' Nonetheless Japanese people had never seen sugar in such a shape as Kompeito and thus they highly praised it. The missionaries gave Kompeito to General Nobunaga as a gift to ask for a permission to spread Christianity. Kompeito's charm worked on Nobunaga till his successor decided to ban Christianity and limit foreign entrance into Japan. The making of Kompeito had initially been all a mystery but by this time the Japanese craftsmen had appropriated the skill. They further developed and perfected its shape and quality. Meanwhile Kompeito was commonly spread and adopted as a 'traditional' Japanese sweet.

My mother was too hung over the next morning from the exquisite French dinner and the bottle of Saxony red wine of the night before to visit the Green Vault, so I went there alone to see the treasures of August der Starke. It is insane what enormous wealth sometimes manifests into – such an extraordinary obscure dreamland both inward and outward. The cherry pits have 360 or so minute faces sculpted on them. I imagine putting the pit into my mouth, rotating it slowly, and examining the facial expressions on the pit with my tongue. It never melts so I have to spit it out some point. Yuck! . . . They're not faces, but Kompeito have twenty-four protuberances over their surface. Kompeito made in the same atelier always have the identical shape with same numbers of protuberances. They are hand made by craftsmen and the skill is passed down among them orally just like how the ancient cult of beekeeping was kept secret in Egypt, Greece, and Rome. They say it takes at least twenty years to master the skill and almost twenty days to make one kind of Kompeito. The Kompeito craftsmen seem to possess the same kind of pride and men's romance as the sailors.

Resting in its glass base, a Kompeito asked me 'Do I belong to art or nature?' I wanted to avoid such a heavy-handed question and just wanted to assure that it is art because I say so. Yet it demanded more of me and left me in a gloomy, blurry field with an Oscar Wilde flashlight as a navigation tool. The Oscar Wilde flashlight was probably not meant to illuminate Kompeito to begin with and I didn't know how to use it either. Ahh! . . . I switched it on and it shed a light: 'Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.' Kompeito was created by human imagination, hands, and lucky accidents, not owing to ideas from nature. But when it reaches its most perfected form the complexity is highly organic and it seems to belong to nature again. The queer shape of Kompeito even became a heated subject in science in the 1980s. Fractal and Chaos Theories explain that while the sugar is getting crystallized, unevenness of distribution occurs. This noise created by uneven waves gets exaggerated through the process. This creates the unique shape of Kompeito, yet they can't explain why it always has uniform protuberances. Science usually takes its subject from nature, thus suggesting that Kompeito is nature, but it fails in the total explanation, which automatically leaves Kompeito in art.

Being a companion of Pesto Verde,
Mont Blanc, and a block of meat

The water fountain at the station plaza in a new suburban district of Osaka, the water was shut off a long time ago and it became an anti-climax monument. The water in the oasis in the Taklamakan Dessert disappeared and the town became a ruin. A new water source was found in Orezza and the spring was brought back to life again.

In Haruki Murakami’s Wind-Up Bird Chronicle Malta Kano has a spiritual psychic power which she gained through contact with a very pure water sprang in the deep mountains of Malta Island. That’s how she chose Malta as her business name. On our long night walk in Malta we saw rows of Arabic bay windows and an old water distillery built in 1881. Malta was supposedly among the first nations to distill fresh water from sea water. Malta’s sister is called Crete Kano and she wears a thick make-up resembling that of the 1960s. She could easily be a character in George Lucas’s American Graffiti popped out in the Japanese reality. She helps Malta as her medium. She can go through people like water goes through their bodies and becomes a part of them. Or it’s as if she was a very good silky greenish olive oil, which can be mixed and become the delicious smooth consistency of Pesto Verde. Crete gives a birth to a baby – of unknown sex – and calls it Corsica. A filthy dog with dirty teeth shouts and barks: ‘No man is an island!’

A volcano exploded in the Rapaggio region of Corsica and a gigantic cake appeared, baked by the heat of the explosion. It is a vast, fertile land formation called Mont Blanc, covered with contour layers of marron creams on top, brandy flavor fresh cream inside, and a moist sponge cake at the bottom. The monument of Marron Glace stands at the peak of the land covered with mesh sugar. From one place between the crusts of the marron cream layers an Orezza geyser shoots up in the air. It creates clouds of mist, which end up creating the mesh sugar on the marron monument. The geyser water streams into the low land creating a fresh sparkling spring. People enjoy bathing, spa treatments, snorkeling to explore under water, and peddling a white swan boat. It was once a popular utopian wellness destination for the mainlanders from the late 1800s till World War II. It was forgotten, but it is now a hidden spot for the local people in Corsica.

In the shadows, away from the violent sun of North Africa, French soldiers cured their thirst and exhaustion with Orezza water during the combats of World War II. A small group of Japanese soldiers were caught by Russian and Mongolian soldiers in the wintry desert of Mongolia close to Manshu in Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. The Mongolian soldiers kill their prisoners in a very brutal manner. They don’t shoot them nor kill them immediately, instead they peel their skin slowly, leaving human bodies like blocks of meat. The prisoners die eventually by the loss of blood. The last person left was Officer Mamiya. Instead of peeling his skin the Mongolian soldiers forced him to jump into a deep dry well in the desert and left him there. Officer Mamiya spent the next few days at the bottom of the well in the darkest darkness and insane fear. But for a few minutes a day when the sun came directly into the well he experienced the immense existence of light veiling him, taking him to the highest of one’s sensation and rapture. When he was rescued he realized that he lost all senses and felt numb to everything in his life. While we aim to reach this state to experience the highest moment, this place is where one should never reach perhaps. The place is empty in reality, and we cannot bear it.

An old German lady sits in her kitchen, drinking a bottle of Orezza water. Actually she is not German, she is an Austrian from Kärnten. She lives in a renowned Baden town of Germany, but she hasn’t visited the springs for a long time. Actually she no longer goes out of her house. She sips prickly chilled Orezza water and remembers different events from her life. The time she and her girlfriends climbed the mountains in the summer in Kärnten. The time she moved to Germany after her marriage and found the houses very peculiar. The time she and her husband were separately put into English war prisons after the war. The time she gave birth to her daughter and the time her daughter gave birth to her grandson. The time she and her husband celebrated their silver anniversary. She has many memories to re-experience while sitting at home, and no longer needs nor desires to go out. She is utterly beautiful and serene. I wonder if she also experienced the immense rapturing sensation in her life and continues living while bearing the emptiness of life as well.



Shooting up the circuses
above the Atmosphere of Venus

While sitting in my back room at the Oranienplatz apartment, looking straight at the ivy wall outside the window and hearing the kids playing in the playground, I concentrate my thoughts on how one can tell multiple stories simultaneously without having any sequential order. Why am I thinking about such a concrete matter on such a brilliant sunny day? I should call Laura, walk to Engelbecken, and lay on the grass beside the water. But...stories by their nature have linear durations and thus they take up time. And since they take up time they have to be told in sequence...I remember a painting by Jan Van Eyke – the one with two people in the ceremony of a marriage or some unification. The painting is like a field with many landmarks, each of the landmarks pointing to a suspended frozen story. These frozen stories don't seem to converge at one point but rather stay co-existing and interrelating like looking a section view of underground mole nests. Painting might be a good vehicle for me, I hurry myself to cycle to the Gemäldegalerie at Potsdamer Platz. I pass by Mies's glass box, saying hello to it in my mind, I walk into the Kulturforum, and go directly to the deserted long corridors of the painting gallery. It's completely still and cool despite the warmth and life outside in the city. I walk toward a painting – not too big, looking Flemish or Dutch, a figure seemingly in her domestic interior. I try to look at it closely and carefully.

The surface of the painting, glazing, and overall presence of air and humidity in the painting: *On a muggy summer evening's stroll along the river bank a young man saw the most beautiful, elegant woman standing alone, wearing a brilliant red peony patterned kimono with an exquisite pearl hairpin above her ear. He was struck by her stunning allure, he approached her nervously and asked her name. 'Oyoshi,' she answered with her plum voice. She invited him and entertained him with different stories of foreign places. He felt as if he was sucked into a daze, completely loosing his sense of time and place. As the morning star appeared above the horizon Oyoshi told the young man 'I must leave now.'* With these words she turned into a female fox, bowed to him deeply, and jumped away into the bushes.

The painting hanging on the wall at the left back side of the painting: *With the new discovered alchemy of transforming clay powder into white gold, Meissen menagerie was set up in the Zwinger Palace. Exotic animals such as elephant, lion, tiger, monkey, rhino, fox, parrot, flamingo, and many more pose elegantly on the pedestals, all glazed pure white and completely still, reflecting the glare of the chandeliers on the palace ceilings. August der Starke and his family would meander through the safari with their ornate long dresses sweeping the floor.*

The antique figure on the desk at the right front side of the painting: *The sisters of the Lomonosov foxes escaped discreetly from the abandoned, much destroyed Oranienbaum Palace in St. Petersburg and made their way to Germany. They are tinted, unlike the Meissen white fox. They were raised in the Russian royal court and they have been a part of countless glamorous balls and parties in the palace. They have learned the skill of disguise as well.*

The telescope also on the desk at the right front side of the painting: *One of the many accomplishments Mikhail Lomonosov made in science and art was the discovery of the atmosphere of Venus. Venus appears the brightest in the sky after the Sun and the Moon thus it is also called 'Lucifer' – light bearer, or simply 'Golden Star.' It is also the only planet referred to femininely in the solar system. The very dense, high-pressure, and high-temperature atmosphere of Venus could be the strong aura of a brilliant bewitching woman, with its substances being exceptional talent, sensitivity, intelligence, charisma, and magnanimity, which add up to compelling beauty. A vigorous presence pulling people in, folding them into her atmosphere.*

The figure in the middle of the painting: *On her wedding day Miss Margherita made a commitment to herself and to the nation that she would become the first queen of Italy. The white embroidered wedding garment, a pair of long silk gloves, and the intricate patterned lace veiling her face and shoulders transformed her into an elegant bride. But mostly the magnificent diamond, ruby, and pearl jewels she wore – partially as presents from her soon-to-be father-in-law, Victor Emmanuel II, and partially from her mother, Princess Elizabeth of Saxony - gave her a sublime weight as the future queen. She stood with her husband, Umberto I, on the balcony of the Palazzo Reale, waving to the citizens who came to celebrate their wedding, she took her roll closer. She sat next to Umberto I in the horse carriage, going through*



the wedding march in Turin, she took her roll even closer. Her transformation as the queen was symbolized by her obsession with pearls. Italian people called her the 'Queen of Pearls' with admiration. This appellation was not merely because she wore many chains of pearl necklaces and big drop earrings but because of her delightful presence, which made her people adore her, long for her, and fall in love with her. Her lustrous presence helped the young country, Italy, to be brought as one and united.

The shadow of a figure suggesting the presence of the painter at the left front side of the painting: *In his petite atelier in Paris with disco music and pornographic images pinned on the wall, Mr. Pearl continues to make corsets for special people and special occasions. The corsets he creates are said to be a permanent embrace on the body, which makes the body more palpably present through its presence.*

The presence of the outside viewer for whom the painting exists: *Margo sits in her sky garden with Romulus on her lap. The last bit of sun casts the long shadows of her succulents and the evening star rises. She is a pearl and a child of light.*



Bouncing through the lattice
Calvino has set up

Frau Lipp lives in a stone house. The walls are very thick, shutting out the city noise and preventing iciness seeping into the house, making it difficult for anything from outside to invite itself into the house.

She has a punctual daily schedule reading the newspaper, doing a crossword puzzle, and watching the symphony play on television. And she has another routine practice, that of observing the objects that surround her through a monocular. This is her way of working towards her desire to be set free one day. Until then, she restricts herself from going outside of the house, even to the balcony or to the different floors of the house. This limitation indeed brings her closer to the state she wishes to reach.

She is responsible, always trying to be self-sufficient, even considering the things people will have to take care of after she disappears. She doesn't wish to cause grief to her loved ones, she has experienced it, she knows what suffering it can be. She is careful to maintain a distance from her surroundings, not to be too close with them carelessly, although she desires to have some sort of tie, to have some company with her. She decides to get a canary, but she doesn't want the canary to feel lonely or left alone when she goes away so she buys a pair of canaries. The pair of yellow canaries in the cage – whether sisters, a couple, or complete strangers – fly along, sing together, and sleep side by side. She gains company, yet the pair of canaries accentuates the missing partner that would complete a pair with her. She looks at the feathers of the canaries through her monocular, and she slips into her upstairs bathroom, in her memory lemon-yellow tiles cover the floor and walls. The bathroom physically above her head but separated by the ceiling is as remote as anything in the universe, it exists out of the boundary she has established. At the same time, it is there instantly, like all the things imagined in her mind.

Mr. Palomar appears. He is a considerate person who also keeps his distance from people, preferring to spend time alone, reflecting on matters and himself. He has been thinking for a long time without communicating his thoughts. He believes that matters exist though they might not take any shape or be able to be received or perceived some day.

When two similar characters encounter each other, it is natural and instant that they begin spending time together and sharing things, enjoying their companionship while appreciating the appropriate distance to keep. They plan a trip together and call it a silver moon. 'How perfect it is to embark on a silver moon and thankfully not a honey moon! The distilled time and accumulated memories residing in us make our moon lighter and more romantic. Will you go on the moon with me, Frau Lipp?' asks Mr. Palomar gentlemanly. 'Delightedly, Mr. Palomar. Two conditions I wish to ask you though. One, we ought to use my monocular as our vehicle through the moon. I cannot abandon my practice in the middle of the way. Two, we ought to be tasteful of our decisions and things we surround ourselves.' Mr. Palomar replies 'Did you call upon me knowing me as the remarkable telescope of the last century? I am grateful for being older, to acquire some taste and roundness around myself.'

They set out on their moon with carefully packed suitcases. In Frau Lipp's white leather suitcase: a white pleated dress, a pair of white lace gloves, a sun-shade umbrella, a black-and-white patterned shawl, a wrist watch, a handbag, a little compact with powder, cream, a soap box, a toothbrush case, a shoehorn made of cast enamel, and an alarm clock. In Mr. Palomar's dark brown leather suitcase: a light grey suit with a white handkerchief in the pocket, two neckties, white pressed shirts, a straw hat, a camera, a radio, a timetable, and two brands of cigarettes (Hope and Camel).

Frau Lipp: 'Wouldn't you like to go to the beach to observe the stars? It is said to be famous for its clear air, good view, and quietness.'

Mr. Palomar: 'No, I don't need to go out to the beach to look at the stars. I look at the stained glass ceiling of our bedroom and see the

intricate patterns and lines intersecting with the transparent colors on the sky as the background. I see the fragmented sky, I sleep, I dream about the devoted astronomers on Mount Palomar, sitting in the sack of the 200-inch telescope, trying to see the unseen edge of the universe, in the freezing coldness with their hands feeling numb. I trust them and leave all the new discoveries in their hands. I wake up and see the row of pigeons on the mountain rim, from which Mount Palomar got its name. I don't have to be there myself any longer for it to be Palomar.'

Frau Lipp doesn't sleep much. While she lays in bed in the middle of the night the moon appears in the stained glass ceiling, shining into the glass, making it a prism. This transforms their bedroom into the Blue Mosque, with its gorgeous geometric patterns, flooding blue whiteness, and solemn air. The moon passes beyond the frame after ten minutes, their room turns back into a dark bedroom. A large white flower on the chest still holds a dim whiteness. Is it the moon or is it the smooth skin of woman, are the veins on the petal the veins on her hand?

In the steamy glass dome of the greenhouse Frau Lipp and Mr. Palomar stop at a placard:

This tropical garden, known as the Banana Alligator Garden, is heated entirely by geo-energy from the surrounding hot springs. Visitors may think the location and existence of this facility odd, with its wide variety of different tropical species of fruits and plants and the largest numbers of alligators and lesser pandas in the world – all in a seaside town in Japan. Yet this peninsula was once an island on the north tip of the Philippine tectonic plate, until the plate shifts pushed it north and connected it with the mainland. This explains the distinct ecological system of this peninsula. Though the historically renowned sea explosions caused by the underground hot springs which gave this area the name 'hot sea' have calmed down, there are countless hot springs in the area, which make it possible to sustain our micro tropical climate.

They also feel thankful to the hot springs for enabling them to wear the summery outfits they carefully selected for their moon despite the layers of snow outside.

Standing by the side of a large tropical water lily pond, Frau Lipp confesses that she wanted to be a botanist. In her daily practice she slowly follows her flower-patterned sofa cover with the monocular and she slips into the forest of Kärnten, or she focuses on the blackness of Mohnkuchen and is transported to an orange poppy field. Mr. Palomar says that he refused to be a botanist. His parents were respected botanists and their profession brought his family to Bahamas in his childhood. The greenhouse makes him think of his Bahamian house with the many green plantain chandeliers hanging from the trees, and all the name plates with Latin names make him think of his father, who always referred plants first by the Latin name and then by the common one.

They walk side by side yet slip into completely different planes: Kärnten, the Bahamas, San Giovanni.

They come to face an albino alligator in a steamy, foggy glass room. He lays there, completely still. He doesn't possess the ferociousness that Frau Lipp associates with alligators. She sees him and sees a Japanese specialty of steamed eel before teriyaki sauce is applied, served on a bowl of rice. Mr. Palomar bends his knees to look the alligator in the eyes and thinks of the albino gorilla he visited in the Barcelona Zoo. He tells both white animals that they are not alone, or that, though they are still alone, they are not the only one who is alone. They proceed to the tropical parlor for refreshments.

A large poster of a beautifully drawn woman is taped onto an electric pole at the edge of the neon-lit arcade. It captures the essence of woman more than a real woman would, and more moisture than the actual air can hold before making water drops. A petite European young lady dressed nicely with a pink felt hat passes by. She walks zigzag, carrying a sushi box in a plastic sack, walks off into the darkness. Frau Lipp is content to be European as well.

The arcade is lit with neon though it's completely deserted. This seaside town is past its time and decaying slowly. Mr. Palomar mixes the decaying town with himself and feels desolated that he is no longer the biggest, the most bright, pushing the boundary. 'It still doesn't change the fact that you are a sensible, refined, reflective, and tasteful person,' Frau Lipp crosses her arm with Mr. Palomar's.



