

Aoyagi Natsumi: Logbook of a Sea Goddess

1. Sea Goddess...p. 2

2. Log...p. 3

3. Light...p. 4

4. Utopia...p. 5

5. Landing...p. 6

6. Salty Dog...p. 8

7. Butterfly...p. 9

English translation by Jordan A. Y. Smith

1. Sea Goddess

In China during the Song Dynasty,
The size of the ocean
Was not so easy to imagine as it is today.
No one woke up early
To contemplate
Exotic towns.
The ocean existed only as barrier zone,
A place one couldn't set foot,
One stretching somewhere far away
To where the eye could not see.
If you had a ship,
You could float across.

Ship was born in the harbor.
Much time had passed since this Sea Goddess had come to be called Mazu.
Countless legends flew round about her,
She didn't cry when she was born, she was a blessing from Heaven, a child of high royalty,
The only thing truly known was that Ship often gazed at the sea with eyes that saw far into the distance.
Even the name Ship is one used here so we can speak of it,
though not a soul knows its true name.
But Ship was indeed an individual person.

One day, while Ship was gazing at the ocean, its eyes began to twitch,
And from its right eye popped a glass marble.
The sphere held the red of ocean twilight,
If held high it showed the sky as viewed from the ocean, if held low it showed the ocean floor.
Ship placed this tiny ocean in a bag and carried it everywhere.
The marble showed was an ocean far away, so the time of day it showed was slightly ahead,
So if it revealed a turbulent red ocean, Ship would advise everyone not to put out to sea that evening.

Ship's eye again began to twitch, and from the left eye out popped another marble.
This one held the azure ocean of midday, and when Ship peered into this marble's blue,
Mary appeared, waiting far across the ocean.
Clouds crept across its sky,
And as the ashen sky stretched from morning through the day into night, the sea too grew ashen.
A tiny starlike light was seemingly gleaming,
But it was the candle Mary had lit on the far shore.
Inside the ashen marble, the flame flickered.
And in its light, Mary crafted her first tale.
The monster read books, listened to songs, learned that the first thing to float in the sky was the Moon.
Mary gazed at the body the monster had been born with.
Ship gazed at Mary and the monster through the marble.

Then Ship peered into the marbles with both eyes, seeing as though inhabiting that world beyond,
And so contemplating, Ship came to forget that its own body was in fact right here.
And on that ocean which should have been impossible to enter, Ship set its body afloat.
At which moment Ship realized:
The ocean was not a divider,
When Ship touched one edge of the ocean, it was simultaneously touching some opposite edge.
And suddenly, the marbles became teardrops, teardrops became marbles, pouring from Ship's eyes,
A crimson rain, an azure rain, flowing down into the ocean.

2. Log

It was after the storm cleared.
A whale was stranded on the beach.
The whale gasped feebly,
In evident distress,
Right away, I phoned town hall.
They called in a specialist who began to treat it,
And from the whale's mouth
Removed a massive number of tablet computers.
One by one, they switched on the power,
And each booted up smoothly.
As each wifi reception kicked in,
Before long,
A distant sea appeared with ships bobbing here and there,
And as soon as they did,
Hundreds of ships appeared
Like a wall of buildings closing in.
Everyone climbed down from the ships,
began to pick up the tablets,
Saying, Not this one, not that one either,
As they checked the desktop background images,
Each looking for their own device.
Yes, every one
Of the tablets belonged to the sailors.
The moment they powered on,
The tablets the whale had swallowed
Began to transmit location information to the sailors' radar,
And glowed like bright stars.
The ship logbooks that remained
On the tablets the sailors left behind
Told of a giant woman they had encountered at sea.
The sailors swarmed back to their ships,
This time carrying something in their palms.
Each of things had a distinct form
And was dirty and damp.
Perhaps from being stored deep in the ship's hold.
The sailors again gathered together
Around the whale and placed the tiny forms around it.
The objects
Were ship spirits,
Guardian deities perched there,
Encircling the whale.
As they did,
Slowly the whale heaved itself forth,
All onlookers' hair stood on end,
And just like that the whale walked off.
The guardian deities
Watched over the figure as it left.

3. Light

Her name is Ship.
On Ship's twenty-eighth birthday,
Ship's father built her a wooden ship.
It was large sailboat, with room for a hundred passengers,
And they named it Junk.
But Junk was far from junk,
It was echoing chuan, the Chinese word for ship,
Or on the Malaysian peninsula, jōng
From the Portuguese, junco,
So the name Junk had traversed several seas.

The father stated it might be nice to use the ship for fishing,
Or for sport on the tides, or for an adventure.
At first he outfitted the ship with an antenna for finding sea creatures
And a radar for detecting the approach of other ships.
As yet there were no other ships around,
So of course the radar registered nothing.

From then on, they gathered dogs, cats, civets
And insects who chewed away at the grasses,
And adequate land to support all these lives,
And loaded it all aboard the Junk.
Preparations took quite some time,
So as they were made, chicks hatched, larvae were born,
The elderly died and were mourned,
Goodbyes made for the creatures who naturally parted.
When the launch preparations were done,
Ship raised the sails,
And lit the fire in the lamp.

4. Utopia

Once, a war broke out.
Before the trees, grasses, flowers could be engulfed in the flames of war,
They headed out for the sea, following the tidal scents.
Sweating beads, they leapt aboard various ships,
Which made their various ways,
Belching smoke as they set out.
During the journey, potable water was preciously rare,
So the plants restrained themselves from butting forth buds.
They departed the soil where they'd been born,
Heading off to unknown lands in the rocking ships.
It was a mass exile for the plants.

When the plants arrived in port,
They were called exile plants or refugee plants.
Some plants arrived on islands where there were volcanoes,
Where a Goddess belched forth magma.
When the magma touched air, it began to take the form of humans,
Sometimes with black hair,
Sometimes with black tears.
The black tears were also plants.
The exile plants asked the black tear plants about the fire Goddess,
Recalling that Goddess
They'd see as they crossed the ocean.

Some plants arrived on other islands,
Where they were thoroughly questioned.
They were asked to talk about the moon, the lakes, the bridges, the songs,
About anything and everything
In their homeland.
The plants couldn't use language,
So they scooped up dirt and made lakes,
With little bridges over them, reflecting in the water,
Alongside the floating moon.

Once they set out to sea,
Outside the ship there was nothing around.
When the wind died down,
They would peer down over the sides of the ships,
And rather than seeing the ocean,
They'd see the ship reflected upside down.

Some plants arrived on the an island where
The plants said
That on the ocean with the calm winds
The Goddess's ship appeared.

5. Landing

Something underground had been moving around.
It could make its way anywhere under the earth,

It found its way to the ocean floor.

Everytime it arrived somewhere,
A festival would break out.

Not a festival usually held in the area,
But one that spontaneously broke out upon the arrival.

In every region, it seemed as though people
Understood what was what.

They may also have been pretending to understand.

—

When something would pop its head up above ground,
It was at that exact spot the festival would occur.

Night after night, the townspeople pondered together what to do,
Perhaps the town's own festival and the festival of the something

Could be blended, they decided.
It was a monumental decision.

Children gathered at the town hall
To learn the dances.

The dances they learned there
Took traditional festival and spontaneous festival ways

And combined them.

They flapped their hands,
Waving their feet about in time,

Moving their bodies
Like fish or whales.

From the town to the ocean, stretching out like a breakwater,
A long thin line of portable wooden shrines,

On the opposite bank along the river stood
children who wove through the shrines

To form a circle, and they danced.

—

The furthest visible land was the mountain.
Round and round the children turned,

Circling the shrines, flapping hands and feet as they moved,
Then one by one

Each plucked a single hair
And blew them away in a puff of breath.

The thing underground

Followed the above ground festival, circling,
Climbing up the mountain,

Then turned into smoke and floated up to the sky.

The smoke drifted.

With neither wind nor navigator,

Mid-sky, being proclaimed suddenly free,
It found itself at a loss as to where to go.

The strands of hair from the children
Mounted the wind and took to the sky

And formed into a single baby dragon.

Together with the smoke, the dragon walked the sky,
Then found some new patch of earth, and dove deep down inside.

6. Salty Dog

The ship set out for far off,
Far off both in terms of place
And in terms of time
Traveling to a far off time
The ship's captain,
The navigator, the engineer,
The radio operator, the dogs,
The barnacles and seaweed stuck to the hull,
And every drop of the liquor stowed away—
Everything on board would be passing the same time.

Morning, they awoke with the sun,
Went up to the bridge and gazed out to sea
One took the helm, one watched the radar,
One peered at the ocean charts,
Watching over other ships and whales
Far away enough that they should pass right by.

And watching the moon
The moon that at times pulled on the ocean,
At times pacified it
Every day, at all times of day, altering gravity
Come morning tide and evening tide
The moon's gravity pull mightily on the ocean,
When the moon's gravity cut out, waves surged,
Ship and ocean clashed, sending up sprays of salt.

The dogs on board
Were keeping watch from the bridge
When that moon's gravity cut out
The impact of the ship colliding with the wave
Sent a drop flying onto
The tip of one dog's nose
Another drop into the half-drunk bottle of gin,
Smudging the ink in the half-written logbook,
With that
The letters began to dance and swim across the page
Dragging meaning with them
One drop vanished into the glass
And once again became ocean.

When they lifted the glass,
One drop of whale
Became a stain
In the grain of the hull,
And put its curse on the ship.

7. Butterfly

Her name is Ship.
Ship also had another name.
She also went by Wutip,
Or Butterfly in the language of Macau.

The name was born after Ship was born.
Wutip was a typhoon.
It was born in 2019 in the Marshall Islands.

The *hestina assimilis* is a type of butterfly from China.
With beautiful white spots over a black base,
and remarkable red stars on the backsides of its wings.

But come springtime, the red stars disappear,
And its wings turn a white base with gorgeous black line patterns.

There was a *hestina assimilis* butterfly.
This Chinese butterfly was released in Japan,
Then more were released en masse,
Some people wanted to transform into a Japanese butterfly.

The butterflies, knowing nothing of being brought somewhere,
To this unfamiliar land,
Knowing not if were heaven or hell,
Born from eggs, then they flew to the sky,

Even if no one had prompted it,
They sought mates
And began to live together,

And before anyone had noticed,
In not more than a twenty year span,
They could be seen everywhere.

Without protective measures, the ecosystem faced collapse,
So the *hestina assimilis* was declared an invasive species,

So now even if you see them while you're out walking,
You're not allowed to catch them,
Even if they lay dying in the road,
Not allowed to save them.

Neither can you live with them,
But if you look around the town
They are hatching from eggs,
And emerging from their chrysalises, wings flapping.

Ship went by several names.
Once, back in 2019,
Wutip was born.

From that year on, as long as
Hestina assimilis was in Japan,
It was forbidden from interacting with people.

Typhoons have been named Wutip thrice before,
So the next with that name will be around 2025.

The typhoons that make the rounds of fourteen nations in Asia
Go by 140 names they cycle through each time one emerges.

That's why about every five to six years
They make the rounds until Wutip is born again.

Wutip traveled to the east of the Philippines,
Where it became a tropical cyclone.