

Night wanderer

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It had been raining for two days. Although it had reduced the temperature outside to a bearable level, the humidity had not let up at all. The eternal film of sweat that covered the surface of my body like a second skin made the few pieces of clothing I was wearing stick to me. Where my trousers were tight, my skin was turning red. Movement caused friction, it was better to reduce everyday movement to the minimum required.

Thinking causes friction too, but in the head. My weary flow of thoughts through the nerve pathways of the convolutions of my brain rubbed against the molecular conductors. The muggy humidity prevented the regular dissipation of heat outwards. I felt the blockage of the heat.

The warm damp in my head mashed my nerve pathways and synapses into one sticky lump. The transfer of information for my higher functions collapsed and my autopilot switched the system down one level, to the vegetative conducting level.

With a quiet hum, the machinery in the upper levels of my consciousness was powered down. Sharp outlines of things became blurry, images rearranged themselves. The basic functions, however, **continued to fulfil their duties**. I **didn't** need to worry, this was a process that had been tried and tested over millions of years, verified crisis management.

Higher developed primates would never have been able to survive as long without the solid foundation of a much older organisational form.

Were the almost two and a half million years not merely something like a test run, measured by the length of time life usually needs to develop, to release a new, competitive model onto the market?

Our human intelligence was just the prototype for a whole series with new features. Our intelligence was still in its baby shoes. It was not yet capable of meeting all the demands.

My instinct once again took control of managing the processes. The ship that was my body lay in the opaque water, sure **on its course**. I **couldn't think clearly no matter** how hard I tried.

You can safely leave thinking up to the crickets, someone once said to me. Their chirping came from all sides, from all corners and the underground tunnels. It was a kind of primal background noise.

The crickets have always been here! Now who was it who said that to me?

The atmosphere stretched out to the edges. I moved my eyeball in different directions. There were bright impressions on my retina. The view from the inside grew distorted when I looked into the corners.

Yet the room seemed empty. Could I recognise little black spots through the haze?

The high frequency hum of the crickets seemed to never cease. Or was it the rain again? The crickets were everywhere, I recalled vaguely. I tried to quickly catch a glimpse of these winged arthropods. **It wasn't that easy**.

We have described them, taken them apart, dissected them, analysed them. We have given them names, a label, an address and a house number: arthropod/insect/flying insect/hemiptera/cicada.

Taxonomy like this was something for obsessive aesthetes. They identified the subtle differences and laid it all out clearly on the table.

What differentiates us from the common, what characterises our hierarchy from the lower levels to the higher?

The pharmacist's cupboard, his drawers were full of plausible explanations. But I couldn't find a single one of them.

I calculated roughly: in ten to twenty million years, they will probably only smile condescendingly about the things that played out in my consciousness.

Born a few million years too early. **It's just like it was with power cuts**, which our grandparents regularly had to endure. And now I wanted to catch a cricket. Did I really want to? Who asked me to?

The remaining currents in my outer brain had played a trick on me. I dug down deep inside, where the currents and juices still flowed freely.

What was I here for? Who was here before me? And what the hell was my purpose here?

At the end of the day, I had to do something meaningful. The same way, every day and every week, I ended the day feeling satisfied that my life had a meaningful justification when I had completed my tasks for the day and lay down in my bed. And it was good that way.

The days had been passing quickly recently, their hours were suspiciously fluid, as if someone had turned on the tap. I faintly remembered how one hour could be so thick you could cut through it, a healthy thing you could touch, like a loaf of bread.

But now everything was in flux, as if hanging from a single thread. That made me nervous.

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I had spent the last few weeks, well with what? Yet there was also a feeling of necessity there.

It must somehow be right that I spent day after day in this city with endless underground train journeys, marching here and there on foot, ceaselessly moving from one place to another.

I felt the need to find my way into every nook. I did have to deal with people.

Communication was a tough business.

Most of the time, however, I observed them. I swam in their society without belonging to it. A tiny little amoeba in the sea.

I absorbed and excreted materials and information.

All the other individuals around me organised themselves into colonies, built themselves little shell houses, which gave them a close connection. They submitted to their state structures with aims and functions that I did not understand.

In actual fact, I was the only individual far and wide. I lacked the ability to attach. I had no sockets free to connect to. My outer shells were all full of the stuff I carried around with me, memories, habits, judgements, arguments.

Couldn't I let go of some of them to make space for a connection?

Whenever I did, I felt like I was being absorbed by the system. So I would just remain single in my lonely amoeba life.

Maybe I didn't need to keep asking myself the same question anymore: what am I here for?

I would be given an answer. I would be given a task and a function within the community and then I would participate in that community, in their ideals and their collective comfort.

No one would ask that other unnerving question. Who was here before me? Kiyomi . . . ?

Perhaps I should have sucked **that mother's** milk with deep, animalistic satisfaction, like a member of a litter, lying cosily **back to belly with the others**. Then perhaps I wouldn't have known this restlessness that forces me to travel miles and sea miles in hollow underground tunnels.

Suddenly I saw them, they stared at me with their wide compound eyes. They were everywhere, **why couldn't have seen** them sooner? They clung to the walls, hid in cracks between the walls. Wherever objects cast a shadow, they were hiding.

I could only vaguely make their outline out against the pattern of the wallpaper. They could also barely be differentiated from tree bark.

Yet now I saw them more clearly than ever. There were so many of them, they rustled their wings, watching me.

Had they only been waiting for my innate need to rationally interpret things to finally subside, so I could finally look beyond the surface of things?

Apparently still, however, they incessantly broadcast their unique mating call made by the sound membranes on the sides of their abdomen.

Were these alluring calls, which **I couldn't stop thinking about**, meant for me? I would have liked to have asked someone beside me if he heard the crickets too. But there was no one there I could ask.

Some cicadas have 13- and 17-year life cycles. But they only spend a single month of their lives above ground.

I read that once in an encyclopaedia. For some strange reason, it suddenly occurred to me now. And there it was again, the unnerving question. Who was here before me? This time it pointed unmistakably to the answer. The crickets have always been here.

Somebody had just said that to me a few minutes before, I had almost forgotten. Who had spoken to me?

I tried to concentrate; it took a lot of strength to remember. Kiyomi?

A strange question that filled me with fear, **indeed a question I hadn't even consciously asked, and an answer I didn't understand.**

I couldn't grasp whatever was being played out, shadowlike, behind the sweltering curtain of humidity outside my head, in clear images or words.

The external areas of my mental apparatus were switched off. Only reactive currents and single discharges escaped over the brain casing. **This wasn't going to get me anywhere!**

I felt the sweat running down my body, wrapped around me like a damp cloth. I felt exhausted. The endless rain had worn me out.

Did I really have to investigate everything? And if somebody invisible was already speaking to **me...** and then these insects too, staring at me as if I were one of them.

I felt a strong urge to drink from the collective milk, shake everything off, my tormenting questions, to insert myself into the system and switch off just like everyone else. If it had been possible, I would now have given up my amoeba existence and willingly handed over everything, so that I could lie back to belly with the others and suck at those large, refreshing breasts.

A delicate hand reached in through the misty veil, demanding me to act. It grabbed the sleeves of my shirt and pulled me towards it.

The doors of the carriage hissed loudly as it closed behind me. The train rushed away and disappeared into the depths of the underground tunnels with a roar.

Had I been dreaming? I was still standing dazed behind the safety line on the train platform. I carefully felt under my shirt. The sweat was still running down my body, nothing had changed about that.

A petite woman belonged to the delicate hand that had pulled me out of the carriage. I looked at her like she was an alien.

She was standing in front of me dancing on the spot. A little impatiently, she ordered me to finally follow her. Why not?

It seemed we had come together and also had a shared goal. The woman then grabbed me by the arm and pulled me off.

I decided not to ask any confusing questions for now. She spoke English, but she was Japanese. **I didn't speak Japanese**, so it had to be English. **It wasn't my native language** though.

I heard myself answering casually, **answers that wouldn't have** occurred to me in my sleep.

I searched inside myself for scraps of memory. Then I recalled her name: Kiyomi?

I said it softly to myself. The woman peered at me from the side as she walked and **answered with a: "Yes?"**

"Oh nothing!" I replied and gave her a kiss on the cheek out of habit. I was no longer wondering why.