

The Three Lives of Gaia-Louisa / First Life

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As always, I came around the corner walking home from the 100-Yen shop. I had been shopping before breakfast, nothing special, two of those Japanese cakes in plastic wrappers, some jam, margarine, sliced bread, a frugal portion of cheese, a sausage the size of my middle finger, probably made of tofu or one of these inventive Japanese meat substitutes. I also had water, maybe some fruit juice, sometimes we treated ourselves to some, and a few other bits and pieces that were to last us for the next few days.

I entered our shabby Hermes House, cheerful as usual. That was the name of the building for foreigners, backpackers passing through who got stuck there or world travellers who had decided to hang around for a while, self-proclaimed cultural ambassadors and vagabonds of the seven seas. Actually pretty cool to be one of them, I thought to myself.

So in great mood as usual, I entered our cheery little concrete block. Blinded by the bright summer morning light, I scampered into the stairwell, black as the night. The metal doors screeched. I could still hear the echo as I took the second set of steps, a total of four to reach our cosy one-roomed honeycomb cell.

I was late; yet again I had let myself get distracted and stopped at every corner to observe those busy little people going about their strange customs. To me, they were a mystery I wanted to fathom. But Kiyomi had already been waiting almost an hour.

At the top of the stairs, I smelled the fresh coffee through the door. Of course, **it wasn't anything we'd** normally imagine when we think of a door. It was more of a flimsy screen made of wooden slats and paper. **In these latitudes, you didn't need doors that** closed tightly. It was warm and humid most of the time, the inhabitants were happy to feel a bit of a breeze. We had a little steel padlock for when we went out, although it was only symbolic, just so the others knew no one was home.

Smells and sounds spread quickly between the permeable living cubicles and throughout the whole building. Hermes House was as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. This made it feel like we were all living **very close together. You knew your neighbours'** habits and they probably knew yours. As a foreigner, you had to get used to this at first, but I thought it was fine. It was fascinatingly different from what I was familiar with from my German middle-class home. Since the apartments – each resident actually only had a 9 sqm-room – since these chambers were all very close together, with their thin walls and paper doors, I felt like I was in a honeycomb cell, like a diligent little bee in a beehive.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee wafted from our little cell and I bent the top edge of **the door slightly inwards** so I could slip inside. **You couldn't open the door fully** anyway, since the bed was right behind it. Admittedly, the bed was only a standard mattress that **filled the entire width of the room. There wasn't enough space for a** proper bed. I found that exotic and exciting too and had no problem with it. Kiyomi was a small, cuddly Japanese girl, which had its advantages – very cuddly, if you know what I mean.

She was sitting under the table watching TV as she always did. She liked to do it and it saved space. The breakfast was ready on the table.

“Hi Kiyomi!” “Hi Nico, well, you took **your time!**” She cast me a forceful look with a frown. Then she raised her delicate eyebrows and smiled at me. Japanese women **didn’t bear grudges for long. At least mine didn’t and that was one of the reasons I was always so cheerful.**

She sure was a sight to behold, lounging underneath my breakfast table, I thought to myself, this petite, foreign, dark-skinned woman in her sheer yukata. I could smell her as I approached her, I longed to pull her into bed. But the smell of coffee reminded me that the breakfast was waiting on the table.

I emptied my bag onto the table and divided up the purchases I had brought. Last up was the packets of sliced bread for toast. One loaf on the table, rip it open, into the **toaster. The other... there was no more space on the table, nor on the shelf. Hmmm... what to do? I didn’t** think about it for too long and placed the soft little packet on the pillow in the bed. I liked to think up fantastical, silly situations, so I liked the sight of it. Then I tucked my little loaf of sliced bread in under our soft bedcovers, as gently as if it were a baby, and gave it a little stroke, like a loving father.

Kiyomi watched me in silence. Her antennae had pricked up almost imperceptibly. She feigned indifference and watched the scene from the corner of her almond-shaped eyes. **“What is that German idiot doing with the bread?”**

I had her hooked, I sensed it somehow. So I upped the ante and started gently murmuring to our little baby bread, as if I wanted to lull it to sleep. Kiyomi sat in her den like a female panther **hypnotised by Kaa the snake and didn’t make a peep.**

So it seemed that **my Japanese girl’s obstinately denied** maternal instincts had caused the hidden hairs on the back of her neck to stand up after all? Yes, we were a couple, but at the **same time we weren’t, considering the fact that I would soon return to Germany. It was out of the question and that was the deal we had. We weren’t thinking** about tomorrow. We had a good time, as best we could. It was cool, this exotic life with this German man, with this Japanese woman. **But we weren’t really thinking about a future together.**

This went through my head and I regretted the game with the bad little bread for a brief **moment. I didn’t** want to cause any sentimental struggles of conscience. But when I saw her sitting at the table completely normally and she began to talk about light-hearted matters and clatter the dishes, I immediately forgot my concern. I wanted to finally have breakfast.

After breakfast, the bed caught our eye again. There in the middle, sleeping contentedly **like a little angel...** was a packet of Japanese sliced bread, **“Texas Toast” brand. Really stupid name, I thought. The Japanese had Romantic ideas about the wide frontiers of America, they didn’t have anything like that.**

Kiyomi carefully pushed the Texas Toast to the side, against the wall, but not completely out of the bed. The little bundle was still under the covers like it was before, its little head peering out at the top. Then she pulled me down to her and we had sex. Oh, life showed its sunny side. **I really can’t complain, but I don’t want to boast here either.**

Afterwards, I lay there like a happy May beetle, sleepily gazing at the fake wooden panelling of our little beehive cell with a satisfied smile on my face. I was about to light myself a cigarette, when the tender embrace was released from one side and I heard the crinkly sound of a soft loaf of sliced bread being pushed between me and my Japanese lover.

Kiyomi looked at me a little recalcitrantly from the side. I **wouldn't let it get to me, not now**. I allowed it to happen and we lay there for another endless, tiny eternity together like a cosy little family.

From that day on, the loaf of sliced bread was our companion. At first a little carelessly and incidentally, as though it had been left there by accident, but then more and more unquestioningly. It demanded attention and we were less and less able to refuse it. It **just wasn't possible to take the small squishy bundle of bread out of its little bed, let alone to open it and eat it**.

In the beginning, we still pushed the packet of toast carefully to the side when we wanted to sleep. Gradually, we began to feel unconscious resistance and guilt about pushing this fragile creature away so roughly. We increasingly took great care to hold its little head when we moved it around in the bed, lifting it up from underneath with our **arms, so that its little arms and legs weren't left hanging there**. The loose slices of bread in their plastic packaging did actually behave exactly like the body of a small newborn, soft and sensitive, warm and cuddly. It **probably wouldn't have worked with a doll or a teddy bear**, but it did with a loaf of bread.

The more we fell into our roles, the more alive the little bundle became in our minds, as a full member of our exotic relationship commune. After all, we were only human too, whether we were drop-outs or squares. Our biological clocks ticked exactly as they always had for millennia.

Just like a newborn baby that has just emerged from the unconsciousness of its prenatal world in the womb, but gradually discovers the colourful shadows and alluring responses of this world in its cradle, so too our packet of sliced bread unnoticeably transformed into a living being with its own character and needs. And the more we spoke to it and playfully imagined its reactions, the more it became an independent little personality, which of course also reflected the characteristics of its mother and its father just as it would have in the real world.

The packet of bread had snuck into our world because of a silly mood, had settled in our subconscious somewhere between latent parenthood, a guilty conscience and the suppressed desire for responsibility and harmony. This little thing, our personified fetish, had managed to attain power over us, which we willingly surrendered.

We just couldn't bear the idea of withdrawing our attention, rejecting this agile little creature and sending it back to the bleak world of dead things.

When we left the house, we put our little bread to bed as though it absolutely had to **sleep and couldn't be woken up in the next few hours under any circumstances**. While we went about our business, we looked forward to returning home and could barely

wait to check if it was already awake or if it was still sleeping peacefully in its little bed in the room.

Whenever we went on longer trips, we got used to taking our baby with us in a bag, so no one would notice. We took pleasure in it like two secret accomplices when we saw it wrapped in a blanket, unnoticed by the busy passersby all around us.

At some point, we began to only go out at night. Under the cover of darkness and the general bustle of Japanese cities, **no one noticed that there wasn't a real baby in the sling we carried it in.**

We hadn't given our loaf of bread a name, we just called it "our baby girl". Probably because we secretly knew, even if we didn't admit it, that it couldn't be like this forever. If we had given our baby a name like a real child, then it probably would have broken our hearts one day. We sensed that and we suppressed the thought as best we could.

Of course you'll probably ask, justifiably: "Doesn't food have a best-before date?" Our packet of bread had one too and it had passed a long time ago.

Like two worried parents, **silently watching the progress of their child's incurable disease**, we too saw the ominous process of transformation taking place under the plastic that wrapped the slices of bread. **It didn't even help when we wrapped our little baby girl** in a second, thicker plastic bag and put on a brightly coloured babygro over it. A horrible process of decay had begun to take its irreversible effect inside our daughter. The same random chance that had given us these turbulent, wonderful few weeks, now demanded its gift be returned with silent indifference. Nature swallowed nature back up, in order to give birth to new life. Every miracle has its time and must pass. But this **eternal law of nature couldn't stop our love either.**

And so one evening, we sat down together to think about the inevitable farewell to our little daughter. Swallowing our tears, we talked about the different options. Throwing out the plastic package in a normal way was out of the question. We had to bury our baby girl somewhere. But where, where could we have the funeral? In Tokyo, in our district? At a holy shrine in Iriya? On Odaiba Island? We had often taken trips there. It was an artificial island beyond the famous Rainbow Bridge. We liked the idea. It was beyond the rainbow. Odaiba was a kind of outpost in the Bay of Tokyo. And it was the gateway to the open sea.

Kiyomi was Japanese and like all Japanese people, she had a close bond to the sea. The food they ate came from the sea. Kiyomi had grown up by the sea. Thus it made perfect sense to entrust our little baby to the mighty ocean on her final journey. We made the decision that same night.

We wept as each of us wrote a goodbye letter with our personal wishes for her great journey and with requests to the merciful gods to always watch over our little girl. We sealed the letters like messages in a bottle and found an especially strong plastic bag, which we put on under her babygro.

During our last night together, she lay between us as always. Neither of us could get a wink of sleep. Like the very first time, we felt the endless, precious, tiny eternity. And we held each other tight like a little family.

The next morning we set off. Kiyomi held the little thing tied in a sling close to her chest the whole way. Rain ran down the windows, drawing faint lines in the milky mist on the glass. Now and then, a few timid rays of sunlight broke through the skyscrapers. The people and buildings rushed by in a blur, like in a half-forgotten dream. We cried silently into the rainy world, held hands and felt the dull, **nameless pain**. **We didn't** care what the other people who passed us thought.

When we arrived in Odaiba, we wandered around aimlessly for quite a long time. There were **ships everywhere and sailors or workers from the port**. It wasn't easy to find a quiet place by the water's edge. **Shyly, we kept watch for other people out on walks**. **We didn't want any involuntary witnesses and were also a little afraid that if they saw us putting a little bundle into the sea, they would misunderstand**.

Finally, we found a suitable place behind quays. An abandoned mooring painted white with an old rowing boat and a rusty, faded sign beside it that said: "No swimming". The boat lay upside down on the beach and was tied to one of the posts, which stood in the water like a guard of honour.

It was a rainy day. No people out walking had lost their way there that day. We were completely alone. We looked at each other in silence, then I untied the old rope. It took quite a bit of effort to get the rickety old tub into the water. Luckily the oars were under the boat.

Kiyomi was already heading out into the water with our little baby, I jumped on last. I **rowed for a little while in the direction of the open sea**. **We didn't want to go out too far**. There were huge container ships all over the place. A puddle was forming at our feet, but we only noticed that later. Gradually it got dark and suddenly it stopped raining.

The evening sun was setting into the sea and cheered us up a little. We kissed our little baby girl one more time and silently, carefully placed her into the waves, which gently bathed her and then took her away with them.

I turned the boat around and we didn't look back.

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An indifferent fate ebbs away without morals or pity. All the person left behind can do is be happy about the good times and not complain about the pain.

Like a rushing current, the elements of the cosmos flow into all spaces and all times. All kinds of colourful swirls might form upon it, which the human imagination raises to incredible heights. Yet these impulses only blossom inside us.

What is “colourful”? There is no “colourful” for the universe, no “good” and no “beautiful”.

Colour and sound are human perceptions of electromagnetic vibrations. Our world exists only in our minds. The swirls that touches our hearts, we have created ourselves.

What we call “our world” are quantum effects. These quantum effects are snapshots, frozen images of our observation. They exist only for us and only when the human eye is capable of looking.

But if we don't look, even if we only look for a tiny moment, we and the universe remain that eternal, formless, simultaneous flux, which is its true nature.