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## Autumn Flowers

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In a corner of a neighborhood lake (literally, in a corner) kids have made a rink. They pretend they are playing a furious game of hockey in Detroit's Olympic Stadium. A large expanse of lake, small human forms. They can make a rink anywhere, but it's more pleasant to do it in a corner of a large lake. Nowadays, are you still making temporary playing fields in the corners of rice paddies? A field rink, a winter day, watching from a train window: these clearly remain in my memory.

One day I walked out on the frozen lake, dodged the skating trucks, said "Hi" and waved to the kids of the corner rink. I left the lake to visit the lakeside home of a friend (who rents someone's summer cottage for the winter). Well, that day I thought I'd enjoy a solitary walk on the lake. Wearing my heavy winter coat and my Spanish-made boots, I went out only to encounter problems. There were so many "No Trespassing" signs that there was just no place to walk along the lake. That made it difficult. I see now, in summer or winter, it's private domain. What do you think of the lakeside of the Baikal in Siberia?

I'm sending the picture I promised last month. On the desk is the rubber tree of my "domain." Do I water it too much? One by one its big leaves fall to the floor, now there are only two left. Still, dead trees are tastefully understated. White, downlike flowers bloom. I'm told it is called cat's tail. Isn't that what we call *tokusa*? I think it's somewhat like modern sculpture, in its line and in the realm of shadow. Sometimes I hear the music of Seiji Ozawa, but WJZZ is a jazz station.

#### AUTUMN FLOWERS

Did you have a chance to see what looked like an improvised "altar," that or a "flower arrangement" done by someone who had never done it before but ended up making one anyway? How did you feel, I wonder. I noticed something. The materials—are they called dry flowers?—can be left for months, even without water, and they don't change. I am told they are called cat's tail, in Japanese (according to the dictionary) *gama*, *tokusa*, *sugina*. When I went to pick those dry stalks, which are brown and shaped like *yaki-tori* skewers, they gave way lightly with a brittle snap. Since they are dry flowers, I could lean them against a wall and play around a little bit. If they had been wet flowers, it would have been a mess. Any daydreamer like myself (deluded idealist? believer in

unreality) I'm sure would end up feeling as though he were harvesting a rice paddy. (Losing the harvest to a dry wind is such a calamity.) For some reason I've grown quite fond of the looks of these "overgrown" dry flowers (dehydrated trees, dehydrated flowers).

After two or three months, suddenly a white, fuzzy flower will grow on the cat's tail. Ah, so that's why they call it "cat's tail."

All food in America is natural; it seems if they attach the word "natural" it will sell. There's a type of, well, fashionable food store where juice and eggs and vegetables are more expensive than at a regular supermarket. Although I don't like going to such affected places, they have *tofu* and *miso*. They also sell various types of seeds for growing sprouts, so to make use of the breaks in my busy schedule I've started cultivating sprouts in my kitchen. In a famous post-war Japanese poem by Yoshio Kuroda called *To Domesticate a Poisonous Insect*, somebody's mother decides to raise silk worms in a four-and-a-half *tatami*-mat room of a Tokyo-like city, and she starts chopping greens for the culture. What do you suppose brings that to mind? An itinerate, almost-a-bachelor type starts cultivating sprouts in an American kitchen. Does that make him the lone survivor of an agricultural race? I wonder.

As I push a cart through a large American supermarket, I sense a sudden chill of loneliness. I notice the absence of human voices. In the American market there is no roar of voices mingling and calling out. Well, there's no point in comparing it to the wild din of a dockside fish market in Japan. The scene of fishermen belting out a gusty song of a big catch is fine, and the scene of lone Japanese silently pushing a shopping cart through rows of groceries is fine, too. *Excuse me.*

In the kitchen, the refrigerator and oven whisper in the night. This vicinity is the source of sound. The neighbor's faucet screams. I make the landscape of dead trees in the alcove and go out. That alcove of dead trees remains in my eyes. In the picture, after all, can't you see the shadows of a rice harvest? At the bottom of the swamp is the sea. It is the end of the cycle, and time to pay for the harvest. When you pick a dry flower it goes "*snap.*"

*translated by Richard Arno and Marilyn Chin*