

Insect Country (B)

Sawako Nakayasu



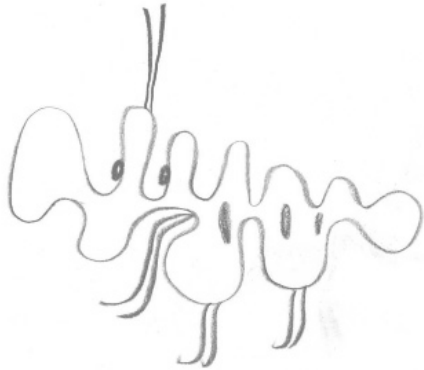
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Love

A butterfly grows up on the other side of the bullet train tracks, lulled to sleep each evening by the intermittent swish of a train sliding by. As an adolescent butterfly he is often praised by his P.E. teachers and finds himself on the track and field team, which is where he develops his own, specialized flying technique. His is a no-flutter,

even-flapping technique with a highly developed sense of microcurrents, and soon he is recognized all over the world as a high-speed champion. “He’s going to the Butterfly Olympics,” the neighbors say to each other as they hear him swish by.

One day, he takes some time off from practice to be with his girlfriend, and they spend the day playing in the wake of the passing bullet trains. One way that this story continues is that a beautiful bouquet of

flowers lures the girlfriend butterfly inside an open train door, at which point the door quickly closes and the train takes off, girlfriend trapped inside.

The other way that the story continues is that the girlfriend, having grown sick of her boyfriend's arrogant ways, has already decided that she has had enough of his butter and has decided to start a new life for herself, wherever the train may take her. In either case, off she goes inside the train,

traveling the bullet train at bullet train speed.

The boy butterfly chases after the bullet train with his specially-developed high-speed flying technique, as only he could do. Any other butterfly would have given up before even starting, but this butterfly has confidence. And more than that, he has love, his true and undying love for his one and only sweetheart. He chases after the train and gives it everything he's got.

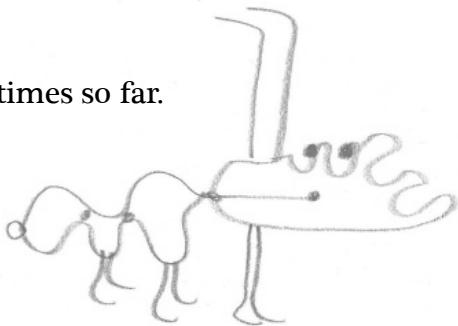
And then some.

Unfortunately the train does not stop for a long long time. If it is the case that the girlfriend intended to leave him, we are probably slightly relieved to know that he will never know the truth, as he continues his chase after the train, flying faster than any butterfly has ever flown before. If only the Olympic judges could time him now.

As a testament to his true and undying love, the butterfly flies after the train for as far as he can, for as long as he can. The definition of this is that by the time he finally stops, he is on the very very brink of butterfly death. He can no longer fly, and fades to the ground, landing beside a delicate flower, which he does not see through the tears in his eyes. He shakes his tightly clenched butterfly fists at the sky before drawing his last breath.

On the other side of the train tracks, a man is being interviewed:

- So, what are your hobbies.
- I like to give blood.
- You don't say!
- Yes, I've done it 106 times so far.



Billboard

for Rim ElJundi

Everyone keeps asking why I stare so intently at that billboard over there. It is true that in the time it took for me to come all the way to this side of the street, a fair distance from the billboard itself, the circumstances have probably changed, but last time I was over there I noticed an ant running up and down and all around the surface of the billboard.

Due to social upheaval in his home and native land, this ant has been uprooted from home, torn away from his wife and children, tossed into a random urban environment such as New York City, and has spent the last many moons fending for himself in this harsh and foreign metropolis.

The reason I keep staring is because the entire surface of this particular billboard is covered with the giant picture of another ant. The ant of whom I speak has recognized

this enormous picture as his long-lost wife, and has made a special leap into the second dimension, overcoming the scales of distance and time by frantically running across her body, touching her here, there, again and more over there, sending his love through the paper and ink and over the years through this frantic and contained marathon, covering vast distances across the surface of the billboard, such that he sees and feels nothing but his wife, his wife, his lovely and billboarded wife.

Hitchhiking

I was never very good at double dutch, which I am growing keenly aware of as everyone else has already found a ride. We are trying to cross the intersection, but since we're not fast enough to get across while the cars are stopped, we need to get up on a shoe and hitch a ride on someone's foot. A moving foot is tricky, though – you

have to jump on at just the right moment, and then quickly get up to a lace or a zipper or a buckle or something, anything to hold onto – the ride can be rough, depending on how fast the human is traveling, and on what kind of shoes. You better not fall off, is all I know. And so anyway, all the other ants have already gone and I am about to be left behind, no I already have been left behind, unless I get on that shoe, no that one, this one, this next one, or that one, oh.

Progress

One year ago today, a video camera was released upon the public market – a camera that is the result of years and years of development by a pair of French engineers, having been fine-tuned to such a degree that it can capture the kissing of a pair of ants – mandible to mandible, from a great enough distance so as not to disturb them.

All issues of privacy aside, the true test of academic excellence in our children now rests entirely on their ability to measure the heat transfer in an ant kiss – which will be exhibited at this year's International Junior Insect Olympics, which is something akin to a science fair for the young minds of the world.

Who will go home with the gold medal this year? Which Asian country is showing the greatest promise in its youth? A controversy

breaks out when a group of Americans from somewhere with a low literacy, high bravado rate pulls up to the event with their own version of the Ant Kiss Project, involving genetically mutated ants, ants as big as your average American SUV. Oh you ain't leaving our children behind just yet, insist their parents. Just you wait an' see.

Decay

from Jorge Boehringer, and a Gayageum performance

The great desire is to get inside of it – the poem, the painting, the music, the woman –

An ant, perceiving itself to have failed to get in anywhere, takes one brave leap off a cliff, thereby making its last and final attempt to get into something, anything, anyhow.

On its way down, or perhaps at the moment it lands, (neither of us are quite sure which), it makes an undeniable percussive sound as its body breaks, pops, and for the entire duration of the decay of this sound, it is as inside as it can get, there, inside that sound, however short-lived, who cares if it is witnessed or not.

These poems have been published in the following publications:

“Love”: Denver Quarterly, 2007

“Billboard”: Meena, 2007

“Hitchhiking”: 6x6, 2007

“Progress”: Unpleasant Event Schedule, 2007

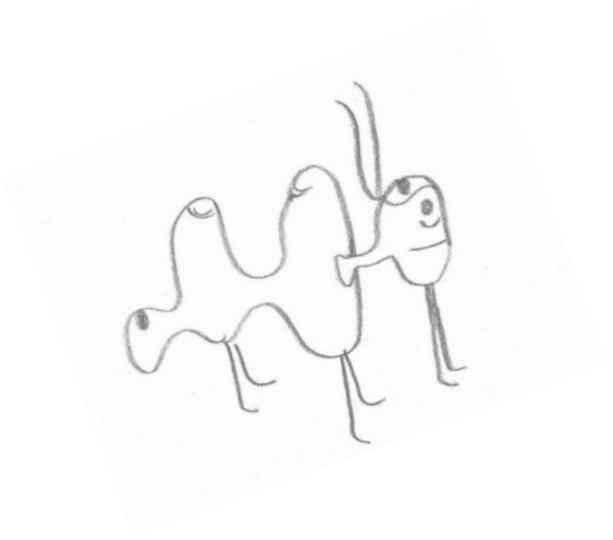
“Decay”: Ars Interpres, 2006

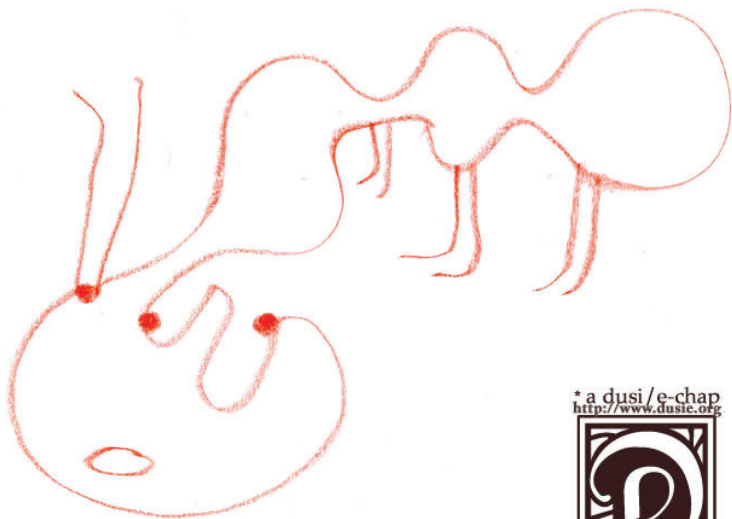
This book is dedicated to Sally.

Insect illustrations: Kenjiro Okazaki

This book is number ____ of 200.







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