

"The Homecoming" (Aru Kikyō) by Hoshi Shinichi
Translated by Michael Ignatov

He was born in a village deep in the mountains¹.

When he was fifteen, his father fell ill and died at the age of forty. And sometime before that his mother, in a terrible accident, fell off a cliff to her death. Being an only child this left him a total orphan.² Now, as a rule orphans are poor and tend to give off a pitiful impression, but in this boy's case things were different.

He did not plummet into poverty. On the contrary, the boy was from a very wealthy family. A family that owned a vast mountain forest and established a comfortable life for itself just by felling and selling timber and planting rice, while the storehouse³ of the vast mansion housed countless⁴ works of art, priceless swords⁵, gold coins⁶, the many ancestral valuables that were passed down from generation to generation.⁷

At fifteen, he hadn't started to manage his wealth. After all, he was still a boy. Everything was in the hands of a guardian, the village elder, a reliable⁸ man of character.

¹ Though, lit. "that man was born..." I think the simpler opening is more natural here.

² In the original he "became" an orphan, but I thought this was understood in English. I initially translated this as: "What more, he was an only child; in other words—a total orphan." But that was unsatisfying upon further review. "What more," sounds wrong in this context.

³ This reads 蔵(*kura*) in the original, which seems to be a number of things along the lines of a cellar, warehouse, or depository.

⁴ Lit. "it would take many days just to count." (line 13)

⁵ Or, "famous/excellent swords." I think that both of those sound strange in English, while "priceless" seems to be a reasonable alternative, since it is the monetary value of the items which is being emphasized.

⁶ The original reads 小判 (*koban*), the old Japanese oval gold coins. I thought that the English-speaking audience might not be familiar with the term, so it is rendered as "gold coins." Originally, I assumed that this story wasn't set around the time that the *koban* were in circulation, and had rendered the term "ancient coins." However, in order to sidestep the issue altogether, and further emphasize the monetary value of these coins (which is probably the point), I used the above translation.

⁷ I combine the original sentences into one because having the existence of the items and the list of these items in separate sentences sounds choppy in English prose.

⁸ Or, "trustworthy" (信用できる人)

It was a good idea to leave everything in his hands. And since the boy was wealthy, he had the means to hire some neighbors to take care of the meals and cleaning.

Everything was going smoothly.⁹

However, he started to notice something strange about the situation. Something was funny. But he couldn't quite put his finger on what the oddity was. There was, for example, the way that others looked at him, with furtive glances.¹⁰ Of course, it was natural for people who were blessed with such a life to incur the jealousy of others, and there wasn't much to be done about that.¹¹ But something was different here.¹²

But what was it? It seems the villagers would gossip about him. One minute they would be carrying on in hushed tones, and when he suddenly appeared, quickly change the subject in a nervous flutter. One would start talking about the weather while the other would complain about a relative.¹³ People close to him would look at the boy with expressions full of sympathy. One might imagine this was because the boy had lost his family, but that wasn't all, it seems. It was difficult to understand such a strange phenomenon. But there had to be a reason, and he was dying to know what it was.¹⁴

The truth cannot be kept secret forever. Besides, the boy was going to great lengths to discover it. And so, one day, he finally did. Eavesdropping on a conversation

⁹ Although I usually like to combine some of Hoshi's short paragraphs into one, I kept this one as is because it marks a turning point in the story, and acts as a set-up to the character's eventual downfall.

¹⁰ I had originally rendered this as "with a trace of special treatment in their glances," but that sounded very awkward, if literal. I think "furtive" is appropriate here, because the villagers obviously know something he doesn't and avoid talking about it in front of him.

¹¹ Originally rendered, "people who were blessed with such a life couldn't do anything about the jealousy of others."

¹² Or, "But for some reason he got a different impression," more literally.

¹³ I was tempted to render this as "non sequitur conversations," but wasn't sure if it would fit here. Originally I translated this as: "...when he suddenly appeared, they would quickly change the subject, starting a mismatched conversation in a nervous flutter." This sounded fine at first, but in retrospect is awfully worded. So I added an example that was not in the original in the hopes of getting the point across.

¹⁴ This is a fairly conservative translation of "知りたくてならなかった" but in English lends itself nicely to an ironic pun.

he learned some shocking news. It turned out to be perfectly natural for the villagers to shy away from him¹⁵. He had probably been better off not knowing. But it was too late. He was destined to live for precisely forty years, and there was nothing he could do about it. So, he visited the elder to confirm these rumors.

“Is it true? I’ll only live until forty?” he asked.

“Well, I tried to keep this a secret, but if it’s come to this, there’s no way around it. It’s a fact. You can check your family tree. The heads of your family have been dying exactly at forty for generations without exception.”¹⁶

“Father died at forty, too. I wonder what was going through his head. I mean how could he go through life like that?”¹⁷

“Well, I think he had his eyes open.¹⁸ He knew that he couldn’t get away from his fate and resigned himself to it.¹⁹ And, so, he met death peacefully.²⁰”

“But, why on earth did something like this happen? Is it a spell? A curse?”

“Sure, there was some talk like that. Although, according to my research, it goes like this. It seems that around the time of the Warring-States Period your ancestor prayed to the spirit of the mountain. He asked the spirit to preserve him and his descendants for generations until the age of 40. And his wish was granted.”²¹

¹⁵ Originally rendered as “...villagers not to want to talk to him,” but I thought this was clunky, if closer to original wording.

¹⁶ Literally, “even if you check your family tree, you’ll find no exceptions.”

¹⁷ At first rendered as: “...kind of frame of mind he was in,” but, again, this was a little clunky. I added the last sentence for clarification as well.

¹⁸ The Japanese “悟る” can mean anything from “to see, to understand” to “to gain enlightenment” in the Buddhist sense. Thus, I initially thought this to be something like an “enlightened” state of mind, but I now question the plausibility of any real religious connotation.

¹⁹ Literally, “resigned himself to his inescapable fate,” but I think this doesn’t sound like speech.

²⁰ Literally, “He was on such a tranquil verge of death.” But that sounds unnatural in English.

²¹ At first I followed the original, in which the ancestor’s utterance is in 1st person. It read: “preserve my descendants...starting from me.” The shift in perspective seemed a better alternative to keep consistency with the elder’s point of view.

"Why ask for something like 40..."²²

"It was the Warring-States Period! You would get dragged into a war, or attacked by bandits, many people died young. After that it was the Edo Period, but it didn't make much of a difference. There were many famines. No real medicine to speak of.²³ Kids were dying within a year of being born. If a cut would fester, if you got appendicitis, if there was an epidemic, that would be the end."

"Here today and gone tomorrow, huh?"

"That's why a 40-year guarantee was such a great blessing. Actually, from then on, your ancestors haven't died at a young age. So, their fortune increased as well. The spirit's divine protection was altogether wonderful, everyone used to be so jealous."

"But in this day and age..."

"Well, I can only say that it is very unfortunate. Naturally you, too, aren't going to die of sickness until you're 40, probably won't be getting into any accidents either..."
The village elder tried to comfort the boy, but he hung his head.

"Is that supposed to make me feel better? Aah, what is this! Science should be able to do something about it."

"Your deceased father said the same thing, went to all the big hospitals. However, in the end it²⁴ was all useless. Scientifically speaking, genetic elements probably factor into one's lifespan. There are flowers that bloom for a long time, and there are those that scatter in but a few days."

"Well, it looks like there's nothing I can do."

²² Although the original doesn't omit the "years," it does omit the verb; the omission was made due to the sov-svo difference between the languages.

²³ Originally rendered as "There generally wasn't any serious medicine." This sounded very stilted to me.

²⁴ "In the end" is my addition, to make the sentence smoother in English.

“Do what you like, lead a comfortable life. What with your inheritance you could go to the city. Just write a letter and I’ll send you as much money as you need.”

“I guess that’s what I’ll do then.”

He went to the city and lived as he pleased. For all that he had a great time in his twenties, and forty was still far ahead. There were many people in the world worse off than he, people that would die young. Besides, in his case, even neglecting his health wouldn’t kill him. Since he had money every day was spent in idleness. He had no need to work. Improving his position in the world wouldn’t do him any good either.

However, as he entered into his 30s anxiety began to mount. Now less than ten years were left. He drank more, his womanizing intensified²⁵, and his life fell further and further into chaos,²⁶ but no matter what, it wouldn’t bring him the least bit of pleasure. He even considered undertaking ascetic training and obtaining enlightenment, but that didn’t suit him, so he returned to his careless life. Thirty-five years old and five years to go. It was getting to be unbearable. *I’ll just do whatever the hell I want*, he thought, and made his way back home.²⁷

“Sell off all of my property,” he said to the village elder upon returning home.

“Even if I get married and have kids, I’d only cause them to suffer. I want to do what I like and end my family line.”

²⁵ Although, in English, “womanizing” carries a distinctly sexual flavor, I think the Japanese “女遊び” is a little more vague, and could refer to frequenting geisha houses as readily as to frequenting brothels. But I thought that “womanizing,” though it does not encompass the breadth of the Japanese meaning, is not altogether inaccurate, but is much easier to understand for an English reader.

²⁶ It seems that “一方” here is used in a progressive sense, something that I’ve never seen before but is apparently not an infrequent use of the term, as in: “病人は悪くなる一方です” – “the patient keeps getting worse.”

²⁷ This is awkward to translate, since “やるぞ” sounds more like something the character would think, rather than the author. So I put these words in the character’s mouth.

"I will not stop you," said the elder and diligently sold off all the man's fortune and gave him the money. The man gave a small sum to the elder, and left his hometown once again. He traveled the world, gambled, and even dabbled in drugs. All to divert his mind from his anxiety. Of course, it was all very useless, but he had as much fun as he could. Much of his money disappeared in a flash.

Turning thirty-eight, he borrowed money from all his acquaintances. With only two years left, he wasn't planning on paying it back anyway. And when he couldn't borrow any more, he got it through a swindle, and again spent it like water. His creditors and victims pursued him, and trying everything to avoid them, he joined a criminal syndicate.²⁸

"Just say the word and I'll kill anyone you want," he offered.

"What a great guy to have around!" thought the bosses.

The man achieved a certain status in the syndicate.²⁹ A murder is no laughing matter, if it ever came to that. But, since he did say he would do it...

In fact, he took this upon himself to kill about three members of an opposing gang. It was as easy as aiming the rifle and pulling the trigger³⁰.

Yet, the flow of time is heartless. Little by little, he approached his fortieth birthday. The police cast a dragnet out for him and the rival gang was dogging him. His

²⁸ Organization works just as well, but I think "syndicate" has more of an organized crime connotation. (犯罪組織) in the original.

²⁹ "一応" is very tricky to translate. The meaning is ambiguous, meaning something like "after a fashion, roughly, or tentatively," and even "just in case." I think the feeling here is that, although he was accepted into the syndicate, the job they gave him (killer) isn't altogether satisfactory. Something that, in English, would probably be expressed in a hesitant tone of voice.

³⁰ This passage initially caused a great deal of confusion, since I assumed that "ひけばよかった" was meant as "it would've been good if he pulled the trigger," in which case the preceding line about him killing three men would make little sense. So, I reasoned that perhaps "引け受け" in that context meant simply "taking responsibility for their murder" as this is not an uncommon practice. However this still wouldn't explain why later the opposing gang would be after him. It makes much more sense, then, if we assume that the "ひけばよかった" line is supposed to be "ひけばよかっただけだ."

presence was troublesome for the syndicate, so they gave him a little money and turned him loose.

He continued with the booze and drugs, and became hopelessly addicted³¹. But somehow he held on to a piece of sanity, and with what little sense he had left returned home. If it was all the same, he wanted to die where he was born. And when he reached the other world, he would give his ancestors hell!³²

Although he retired from his post, the former village elder was in good health and came out to greet him.

"You've led quite an unruly life by the looks of it."³³

"Obviously. A hard life. Only a few days left now."

"Oh yes, that's right,³⁴ I was putting your things in order [getting rid of? Liquidating?] when I came across your [dear?] mother's will. I wonder when she wrote it. I was going to send it to you, but I wasn't really clear on the address... [wasn't sure about the address...]"

"Well I don't really care[it doesn't really matter?] one way or the other but..."

said the man, taking the will. He broke the seal [opened the envelope?] and read:

³¹ "中毒" can mean either "poisoning" or "addiction" in case of drugs. Since we are to assume this man cannot die, and taken in the context, it seemed "addiction" would be the better choice.

³² This rendering leads to a somewhat unfortunate pun that, although not found in the original, is nevertheless not inappropriate I think. ~てやる is a strong way of expression the determination to do something, with the understanding that this action will cause someone some difficulty. Therefore, "give them hell," is fairly close to a strong complaining. "Give a piece of his mind" might also work, but I think that's slightly antiquated.

³³ "荒れた生活" literally means something like a wild or unruly life. The kanji "荒" is also used to express an ill-kempt state (as in a dilapidated house) and when speaking about a rough storm. So "wild," "unruly," or "stormy" could work equally well here, I think. The difficult part of this sentence is the honorific tone indicated by the word "なさる." Perhaps the Hoshi was trying to express "old-man" speech.

³⁴ "そうそう" is a little ambiguous here. It could mean "yes, that is so" or something like "oh, that reminds me." I think "that's right" comes close to covering both aspects of the expression. Another way to render this may be simply, "oh yes." I put the two together because I think it sounds closer to the way the old man would have said "そうそう."

“Knowing this family’s fate, I had a chilling though.³⁵ And so, knowing it was wrong all the while, I went behind your father’s back and had an affair with a man who comes from a long-lived family. The child that was born is you. Cheating is not very good, is it? But, when I thought about the life of my soon-to-be-born child, I had to do what I did³⁶. My family is filled with long-lived people, too. So you see³⁷, you don’t have a thing to worry about [have nothing to worry about?]. You are probably so glad about this and you must be grateful...”³⁸ [You will probably be so glad about this and surely grateful ...]

³⁵ “心の冷える思い” Literally means a “thought that chilled my heart,” but I think simply “chilling thought,” would work better. Originally I wanted to use “made my blood run cold” in order to simulate a more written style that is used in the letter. Also I thought this phrasing would echo the original, considering how the Japanese expression uses the kanji for heart/mind. Then I realized that, in written Japanese, the です/ます form (used in this letter) is actually very informal, as opposed to the more formal written だ/である style.

³⁶ Literally, it means something like, “I couldn’t go on without doing that.”

³⁷ My attempt at rendering the explanatory character of the Japanese のです/んです construction.

³⁸ The last line is a little awkward to translate; because of the Japanese SOV sentence structure the verb is left out. So the actual action is unknown. I thought it would be safe to just translate it as is. The other problem lies in that I was unsure as to the tense of this utterance. That is, it could be directed towards the son at the time she meant for him to read the letter (i.e., present tense: “you must be so happy”), or it could be written while looking forward to his reaction in the future (i.e., “you will be so happy”).

“Ikka Shinchu” – Hoshi Shinichi
Translated by Michael Ignatov
“Family Suicide”

“That’s it!” said a short, skinny¹ * man from his room. “I’m really stuck here. A complete dead end...”

“Is there nothing you can do?” asked his wife, frowning.

“It’s hopeless.² I’ve considered everything imaginable, and it’s impossible. There’s absolutely no way to go back to the way things were,” said the man in a level [lucid] tone,³ his rational manner lending more credence to the possibility of bad things to come, then lapsed into a brief moment of silence that was over before it began.⁴ “With the way things turned out, I can’t just go on living. I’m going to kill myself. You’ve got to die with me, too. Then, the kids, too...”

His wife grew pale, but didn’t lose her cool. She knew well her husband’s character, and always expected him to say something like this at some point.⁵ She also knew that there was no defying him.

“Well, you always mean what you say, don’t you, dear.”⁶

“That’s right. You know⁷ I’ve never asked anything unreasonable of my family.”⁸

“Yes, you’ve been a good husband to me, and a good father to our baby girls.”

¹ The Japanese, “小柄” is literally “short build.” Interestingly enough, the other reading for the kanji compound is: “こづか,” which were small daggers that the samurai wore on their scabbards.

² In the original, the “hopeless” came in the middle of the utterance. I’ve simply switched it’s placement with “だめ,” which I didn’t properly translate, instead substituting the “impossible” from the next sentence. The second part of the utterance is literally, “it is impossible to do anything that would cause the recovery of the previous situation.”

³ In the original this is “理性な口調” which is more like “rational tone.”

⁴ I had originally rendered this as “After a moment passed like an invisible creature running through the room,” because this was close to the original, and I thought the quirky metaphor amusing. But it didn’t stress the immediacy of the action, I think the instant of silence is supposed to be understood as being over very quickly.

⁵ This clause appears as a separate sentence that is preceded by the following English sentence in the original. I thought this ordering was more fluid in English and made the paragraph less choppy.

⁶ Literally, “If that’s what you say, dear, then that’s what you plan to do.”

⁷ My addition, it’s a simple declarative sentence in the original. However, in English it seemed unusual to state this without some phrase addressed to the wife that would elicit a response.

⁸ In the original this is more like “said anything absurd in the home.” But, in the context, asking makes more sense in English.

“⁹Then for the first and last time allow me just this one selfish request. I know it’s way too unfair, but you’ve got to go along with it.”

“I’m ready, it’s just...”

“What? Something wrong?¹⁰”

“No, no. Hearing you explain things, I’ve made up my mind to die. Even if there’s no other choice, I would still want to...”

“What are the girls doing¹¹?” asked the man, his face contorting slightly into a pained look.¹²

“They’re all sleeping in the next room.”

“I see...” Said the man, and at that the conversation about their daughters came to a halt. Even if they explained the situation, they could never get their young daughters to understand. It would be better if, while their girls slept, they painlessly took them along to the next world.

“Is this all because you worked in publicity?” Asked the wife, picking up the earlier conversation.

“That’s right, I loved my job. I put my heart and soul¹³ into it, it was my life.¹⁴”

“You have to take this kind of responsibility just because you did promotions?”

“I think so.”

⁹ The Japanese has “そのおれ” here, which is challenging to translate. Essentially it means “me,” but actually refers to the things the wife said about him, I think. So “the me (who was a good husband to you, etc).”

¹⁰ Literally, “you have any complaints/are you displeased?” I thought this sort of question wouldn’t appear in an English conversation.

¹¹ I originally rendered this as “what are the girls up to?” But later thought it was a little too jovial in light of the situation.

¹² “Into a pained look” is my addition, made to further clarify the contortion of the face. The Japanese is “顔がゆがむ,” and is related to the expression “ゆがんだ顔,” meaning “tortured face.”

¹³ The original “ずいぶん熱心に” literally means extremely passionately. I thought that this was not only stiff, though, but also decidedly lacking in passion.

¹⁴ Literally, “what I lived for/ the purpose of living,” “生きがい.”

“There are people in the world who are hurt every day by the side-effects of drugs and by dangerous household goods. But the people promoting these things, for them to take such responsibility...”

“Maybe that excuse would work. And maybe I would even be forgiven. But, you know, I truly believed in¹⁵ our product. If it was just some half-assed contract job to make a quick buck, I’d be cooking up excuses myself. But I got in too deep. When I decided to promote a truly first-rate product with everything I had, I threw myself into my work without regard for any bottom line.”

“You were always a workaholic, weren’t you, dear. Men get like that...”

“Well, I don’t know how it is with all men. But I, at any rate, devoted myself entirely to my work. It was fun, and gave me such a sense of satisfaction,” said the man nostalgically.¹⁶

“And because everyone knew my name.”¹⁷

“Oh, I remember that, too. It was marvelous. Newspapers, posters, radio,¹⁸ pamphlets, music, parades, meetings, parties, exhibitions, logos. Popular among all ages, from young boys and girls to the elderly. Everything bustled with such excitement then.”

“In those days, anything I touched turned to gold.”¹⁹ Said the man and, with a touch of nostalgia, hummed a jingle he once wrote²⁰. In the current situation the only cheerful thing was that melody. Realizing this, he flashed an ironic smile and fell silent.

¹⁵ The Japanese “ほれこんでしまう” literally means “enamored” or “enchanted.” Maybe an alternative would be “crazy about.”

¹⁶ The original does not have this word. But the man uses the sentence-final particle “な” which I read as giving the utterance a slightly nostalgic tone of reminiscence.

¹⁷ The original uses a curious expression, which means literally, “that name was pushed into everyone’s head.” After reading the story all the way through, I thought that perhaps this shouldn’t be “my name,” but rather the name of the “product.” Maybe “the name” would have worked better.

¹⁸ The original uses the word “電波” which is literally a radio or electromagnetic wave. This word can be used as readily towards a radio wave as it is to a microwave. It also has a broader connotation of “broadcast,” so it could possibly also refer to television. I think in this context it is referring to the radio, for a few reasons. First, it has to be a media outlet of some sort, to work together with newspapers and posters. Second, it is probably radio, because if it were a TV, Hoshi would probably have said just as much.

“Ah, if things could’ve only gone on like that...” said the wife.

“Unfortunately it doesn’t seem to work like that in the real world. If there ever was such a thing as a flawless product it’s money, that’s about it. If you [get around?] money and simply and safely make a profit, that’s the sort of thing that lasts. But unfortunately I’m of a different breed.²¹ I became completely mesmerized by a very particular product, and because of that, I ran smack into a brick wall. But still, I didn’t think I would hit this wall so soon. Maybe I should’ve been thinking of the worst-case scenario and gotten my hands on a different kind of product as a sort of insurance, but...”

“You just weren’t the type.”

“You’re right. That’s why I don’t really have any regrets. I thought I was working for the good of all. But the results were pretty disappointing, which was a problem. Because people only see the results.”

“I know you may think this is nonsense, but we could just skip town. It’s not like we don’t have the money...”

“I know that. There were guys like that in the past, and there will be guys like that in the future. But I’m not one of them. From my position—no—from my heart, I know that I must not run.”

“But in the case that some harmful effects did happen, who on earth will be held accountable? The product itself²²? The promoter?”

¹⁹ 何をやっても、面白いように効果があがった。This is very difficult to translate literally, so I thought an idiomatic expression would work best.

²⁰ I originally had “...for an advertisement.” I took it out because, in the context of the story this was misleading, and I think jingle implies the purpose for which a melody is written.

²¹ The original has “different from that race.” そういう人種と違っていた。

²² Literally “the product side.” But the product itself can hardly be held accountable. In the end this becomes clearer.

“That doesn’t matter.²³ I could dispute my culpability until the cows come home and it would get us nowhere. Or else, in the eyes of the public the responsibility might finally fall on the product. But I shouldn’t even be saying this. I promoted the product, and I must make amends.”

“Be that as it may, must we drag our kids into this? They are innocent as far as I’m concerned. I just want to let them live whatever life they can.”

“I thought about that, too. But then I think about how many families lost their children because of the defective product I promoted...”²⁴

“You’re feelings of responsibility are so strong...”

“Maybe, what’s really strong is my egoism. There are guys who would blame it all on that, too. But I’ve said too much. Let’s put an end to it.”²⁵

“Let’s.”

The man pressed a buzzer to call the doctor.

“Sorry, doc, but would you go ahead and give my sleeping kids the injection? The stuff that’ll let them die painlessly,” said the man when the doctor arrived.²⁶

“As you wish.”²⁷

²³ それはわからん is literally, “that I don’t know.” However it seems to have a much stronger connotation of “I don’t know and I don’t care,” or as I rendered it “it doesn’t matter.”

²⁴ In Japanese this sentiment is divided into a few short sentences, and the impact comes across stronger in the original in my reading.

²⁵ The original uses 幕にする, which is a variation of 幕になる “come to and end,” as in a story that comes to an end. Here it is literally, “make it end.” The kanji 幕 means “curtain,” so etymologically, this expression might be something like “pull the curtain down” as at the end of a play. There is a strong link to the theatre I think, because it is the same kanji that is used in act/scene notation (e.g. 第2幕第2場 “Act 2, Scene 2). Moreover it is used in the more popular expression 幕を下ろす “draw/lower the curtain.”

²⁶ As often happens, in the original there’s little explicit description of speech. I’ve inserted “when the doctor arrived,” since in the original it simply said that the man “called the doctor and spoke.”

²⁷ The doctor’s reply in the original is simply “はい.” At first I wanted to keep the single-word utterance and rendered this as “understood.” However, I thought this is a little too close to another common Japanese response “分かりました.” So I opted for a longer phrase, but one that perhaps captures the original sentiment in a natural way.

“Before that,” pleaded the wife delaying the doctor, “couldn’t you please give me the same injection?”

“As you wish, ma’am.”

“If we could relive this life, I wish you would’ve promoted something else,” spoke the wife while receiving the injection, “anything but Hitler.”

Confirming that his wife had indeed drawn her last breath, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda²⁸ Goebbels²⁹ turned his pistol on himself and pulled the trigger.³⁰

²⁸ The full impact of this is challenging to translate, since the Japanese 宣伝 means both “advertisement” and “propaganda,” and also, more generally “publicity.” Thus the Japanese essentially uses this term exclusively, whereas I had to use the above several translations.

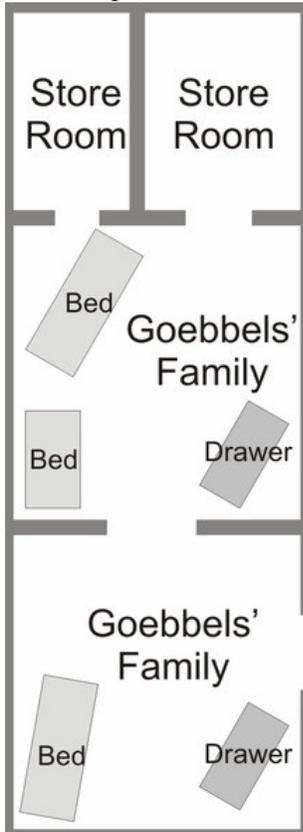
²⁹ The full title in English is Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

³⁰ I believe some historical notes would be helpful here as there are a few discrepancies with the historical record. The Goebbels did indeed have a slew of young daughters, but they did have one son, Helmut, who is either ignored or lumped in with the daughters. If we look at Soviet photographs of the aftermath, Helmut’s body is actually lying next to his mother’s. Another point of contention is the way in which the killings were carried out. Hoshi suggests that before her children were killed Magda Goebbels begged to be injected with the same drug. However the children’s deaths seemed to have been achieved in a two-part process: first, they were drugged with morphine, then when they lost consciousness, cyanide capsules were crushed in their mouths. James O’Donnell, an American soldier who gained access to the bunker on July 4, 1945 and author of *The Berlin Bunker*, posits that it was probably Magda herself who crushed the cyanide capsules into her children’s mouths. The most striking aspect of this story, and maybe this is reading too deep into what is supposed to be light entertainment, is the portrayal of the Goebbels as basically ordinary people. This is perhaps very true on some level. But all historical evidence seems to point to Goebbels as someone who not simply bought into Hitler’s ideas, but one of the people who pioneered the ideas themselves.

* Image courtesy of <http://blog.goo.ne.jp/nobunaga1567/m/200604>.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
The Floorplan of the Fuhrerbunker



“Iya na warai” by Hoshi Shinichi
 “That awful laugh” Translated by Michael Ignatov

One night, a happily drunken man was stumbling along the sidewalk when suddenly he lunged into the road. A huge truck rumbled along from the opposite direction. The driver had no time to swerve or slam on the brakes, and just like that,¹ crushed the drunken man.²

But the man didn’t die, thanks to a certain apparatus he of his own invention: the time machine. This machine gave him the ability to return one year into the past. He was perfectly satisfied with this, and so turned his full attention to the improvement of miniaturization technology,³ and made some great strides in the field.⁴ At last he shrunk the time machine and implanted it in his body, programming the mechanism to activate at the moment of his death.⁵

That is to say, the very instant he died the time machine went into effect, transporting his body against the flow of time one year into the past. And one year ago, the man was a picture of health, without a care in the world.⁶

“Man, what a reckless goddamn driver [who let that reckless sonavabitch behind a wheel!?!],”⁷ mumbled the man, ignoring [blind to] his own carelessness, “I remembered the

¹ “ひとたまりもなく” means something like “in one fell swoop” or “without any resistance.” I think “just like that” is more natural, and captures the essence of the phrase in this context.

² The original has this in the passive voice, “the man was crushed.” I think this needed to be reworked into the active voice in English, since English prefers the active voice in simple sentences like these, and in this particular case the active voice sounds better in my opinion. “Drunken” was also my addition, to avoid the repetition of just “the man.”

³ The Japanese says something like “exclusively strove to improve miniaturization.” I think that “full attention” captures this without the need to say “exclusively/solely,” and thereby avoids redundancy. “Technology” is also my addition. I think this is implied, but in English, felt that in needed to be stated.

⁴ This is also my paraphrase of the following Japanese sentence. The original literally says that he got pretty good, or very good, at making things small. I thought that this idea could be more easily conveyed in a paraphrased clause added to the previous sentence.

⁵ The phrase “...するようなしかけにした” gave me a lot of problems. Because it is written all in hiragana, it took me a long time to parse out the constituents of the sentence.

⁶ The Japanese is “異状なし” and literally means that there were no problems. In an interesting aside, it is the “all quiet” in the novel and movie *All Quiet On the Western Front* (“西部戦線異状なし”), which is itself a translation from the German *Im Westen nichts Neues* (literally: “Nothing New in the West”).

license plates before I got hit though. Next time we meet, he won't be getting away so lightly!" But those were just empty threats. After all, the accident wouldn't happen for another year, and even if he spotted the truck, he couldn't really [honestly] get upset. Besides, in a year the man himself would make a point of avoiding the place of the accident, so getting done in⁸ by the same truck again was altogether unlikely.

While time traveling only his body returned whole. That doesn't mean he came back stark naked, but rather wearing the same clothes he had a year ago. Yet, after moving back in time, the only remaining memory was of his death, everything else was a blank.⁹ Which was a shame; had he remembered the market fluctuations and business trends, he would have easily made a good bit of money. But that was one thing he never regretted. What was money compared to the assurance that he would never die?

A little after inventing his time machine, the man got into the business of investigating the effects of toxic drugs [pharmaceuticals?]. All he had to do was take the drugs and see what happened, and if he died he just needed to report back on the mode of death.

"Anyone who regularly takes this [continually/ continues to takes this], will waste away and die in ten months," he would report.

"Listen, who on earth did you get to drink this stuff?"

"I'm sorry, that would be a trade secret. Rest assured, however, that there will be no forthcoming lawsuits from the family of the deceased."

⁷ In Japanese this is: "トラックめ," so he is speaking of the truck. But I thought it's very odd to assign blame and thereby personify the truck, so I shifted the blame to the driver in the translation. The particle "め" expresses anger or frustration with the addressee. The English equivalent might be cursing.

⁸ "Getting done in" is my attempt to render "やられる," which sounds faintly humorous to my ear. Although, literally the Japanese says "killed in an accident."

⁹ I have reordered the Japanese sentence order to make a smoother transition into the next sentence, which in the original was a separate paragraph, but had a strong connection to the preceding one.

“You really got some guy to drink it?”¹⁰

“Of that you can be absolutely certain.”

“I just don’t get it./ Makes no sense.”

The man didn’t receive much payment, so you couldn’t exactly call this a profitable business [line of work]. Plus, running across a particularly fast-acting poison was a major annoyance, because he’d have to kill a lot of time¹¹ before he’d come across the same poison and, beginning to take it, suddenly remember the effects. And so, he gave up the pharmaceutical testing. Having no worries of death the man could do as he pleased. If only he had a job that paid in advance. Like the transportation of dangerous explosives [munitions?], for example.¹² That way he could wait until the very last minute playing around on his advance pay. If everything went smoothly, so much the better. And if by chance something were to happen during the course of the mission, that would be fine, too.

Yet, the man was always careful to avoid any sort of criminal activity, since that could quickly get him in serious trouble. Say he murdered someone and got the death penalty. This wouldn’t be so bad if it were carried out quickly so he could return to a point before he committed the crime. But if it weren’t, or if the trial dragged on, he’d be up a creek!¹³ [in a tight spot, hot water, real trouble] Even if he were finally executed at that point he would have to go back to trial. And if he had to serve time [was locked up] in one of those suicide-watch cells [cells under tight surveillance], he would be stuck forever [doomed to repeat the same thing over

¹⁰ In Japanese it says: “Did you really experiment?” But this is much too awkward, and the colloquial style of the original required a freer translation. The implication is clearly, “did you actually test this on another human being?”

¹¹ Literally, “idly wait for the passage of time.”

¹² Literally this is: “powerful and dangerous explosives,” but I thought that was redundant, since the danger of an explosive is defined entirely in terms of its potency.

¹³ This is a rather free translation of the sentiment expressed in the paragraph. The Japanese uses “どうにもならぬ” which is similar to “使用がない/仕方がない” literally meaning “nothing to be done.” But in this context it is referring to the man’s being caught in an endless cycle of trial and jail time, which is a messy situation, and I wanted to emphasize that.

and over]. Of course he could try to go on a hunger strike and starve himself to death, but whenever he considered the suffering he'd have to endure until death would take him, the man quickly lost all nerve [couldn't work up any motivation], no matter how many resurrections he had to look forward to [was guaranteed].

The man took full advantage of his special abilities and played around with women on his own terms. No matter how deeply he got involved he always had a way out.¹⁴ If he got sick of some woman, he could just die, and she wouldn't have anything to weep over [feel sorrow/sad for]. He'd remember he died because of a certain woman and would avoid her the next time around. That way he would never break her heart in the first place.

He ate like a hog and drank like a fish and led an utterly unhealthy life. But so what? He could die and return to a healthy body just like that. And it would be nice if he took better care of his new body, but even if he didn't it would be no big deal.¹⁵ Somewhere along the line he began to mumble words of praise to himself, probably because he had cheated death one too many times. "Man, I'm so great ..." [awesome, a champ, incredible] He'd mutter. Having forgotten most of what he had done, he was nevertheless filled with feelings of omnipotence [grandeur?].¹⁶ In the man's own opinion the world revolved around him [he was the center of the world.] Whenever he thought this, the man would explode¹⁷ with unrestrainable laughter. "I'm so great,

¹⁴ Literally, "he had no worries of his partner not granting him a break-up." I think the reason for the edit is self-evident. Although I think that the carefree connotation is lost in the translation, in which the man comes across as having a "couldn't be bothered" attitude. Whereas a "way out" seems like a last resort.

¹⁵ Hoshi has the first instance of "I'm great" here. I moved it after the explanation to make the reading smoother. I also moved the second instance for the same reason.

¹⁶ Literally "being able to do anything feeling." What Hoshi seems to say here is that the man, though having forgotten many of the things that he had done, has been left with feelings of being able to do anything. I imagine that although he didn't remember the specifics, since he lost all memories excepting those related to his death, he was still left with a feeling akin to accomplishment.

¹⁷ The Japanese word is "込み上げる" which is used both for welling up of emotions, or for nauseous retching. I used "explode" to approximate the expulsive property.

AHAHA!” he’d mutter and then burst out laughing [roar with laughter]. Before he knew it, the man started to lose his mind, only he failed to notice.

More than a year passed since the laughing business began before someone finally brought him to a hospital. However all the treatment proved to be of no avail and the man literally laughed himself to death. And that wasn’t the end of it. He returned right to the same old “I’m-so-great” self. Then his laughing got louder and louder until someone brought him to a hospital. However all the treatment proved to be of no avail and the man literally...

If the man was looking for a permanent death he should have taken the time machine out of his body. But, in his disordered state of mind, he did not realize this much. Or else he could keep killing himself without stopping until he returned to the time he invented the time machine and stop himself from embedding it in his body. But that, too, didn’t cross his mind. At the same time, completely ignorant of the device implanted in the man’s body, any hospital he was dragged to would simply administer the most standard [garden-variety] treatments. And so, before long, the man would laugh himself to death [die laughing/ die a laughing death?].

“I’m so great, AHAHA!” Roared the man louder and louder yet again, disturbing the other patients at the hospital. But for all the trouble the man caused, this was a hospital where euthanasia was judged too cruel, not that it would make any difference to him. Due to this judgment they put the man into a state hibernation and shipped him off [transferred] him to a certain island, thinking that they could find a cure [method of treatment] later. About two years passed before they pulled him out of hibernation¹⁸ and again the man broke into laughter.

“I’m so great, AHAHA!”

¹⁸ The Japanese “もとこ” carries a sense of origin, of being based on something. So it seems like the doctors are “returning him out” of hibernation. I chose “pulling” for the sake of the active voice.

Whatever treatment the doctors tried had absolutely no effect. So they threw up their hands [abandoned it as hopeless/threw in the towel], left the man a little food, and scurried back. The man remained on the island for a year and a half and died laughing. [The man remained on the island for a year, laughing all the while, until he died.] But in the same instant he returned to the island and convulsed with laughter again and again. Every time he repeated this cycle his laughter grew more and more violent.¹⁹ So, for all we know, we might eventually hear that awful laugh coming as if out of thin air.

¹⁹ In the original this is followed by a sentence which reads, “his voice would never grow fainter than before,” I cut it due to awkwardness and redundancy in English.

“Konna Jidai Ga” By Hoshi Shinichi
 Translated by Michael Ignatov
 “These Days we are Living in”

“And now time for the news. First, in international news. No sign of conflict can be seen in any county.¹ Next, the national news. The number of crimes for yesterday remains at zero...” Announced the voice from the large television screen hanging on the wall, the screen filling with beautiful mountain and sea scenery. A lone man lounged in front of the television.

“There’s nothing new under the sun, huh,” he mumbled, lazily eyeing the screen.² The room was kept at a comfortable temperature, and pure, nice-smelling air circulated throughout. In the next room, a robot was sweeping up. The program changed to enchanting music, accompanied by fantastic colors shimmering³ on the screen. The man enjoyed this mood for a while, but eventually pressed some buttons on the remote and switched the screen to a TV phone. The dial tone broke off and the figure of his friend appeared on the screen.

“Well now, how is it?⁴ Anything new?⁵” The man began.

“Ha, like hell!⁶ As you can see...” Replied his friend, puffing on a cigarette, while a robot was giving him a massage.

¹ Literally: “tense situations cannot be seen”

² My addition, in an attempt to put across the leisurely connotation of “寝そべる.” The original says something like: “the lone man sprawled out, and mumbled while watching (the TV)”

³ The Japanese “揺れ動く” has the connotation of flickering like a candle. Perhaps, “dancing on the screen” could also be appropriate. “Flickering” didn’t seem to contribute to the pleasant atmosphere the author was trying to build.

⁴ Sentence final particle *かいのだい* in this context gives a mood of a lightly doubtful question to the sentence. According to the *広辞苑* dictionary.

⁵ “変わったもの” can be both something new, and something out of the ordinary. I found it difficult to portray both nuances, and decided to stick with “new.” Since it is a more natural greeting and is keeping in line with the man’s earlier “there’s nothing new under the sun” lament.

⁶ The only other alternative I could think of to “あるものか” was “as if,” but that sounded more like a Valley Girl and less like a grown man.

“You’ve gotten even slimmer, I see.”

“Have to be, don’t I? [And if we’re talking about slim, aren’t you the one to talk...]” said the friend smiling contagiously.

“So, all’s well, is it? That’s awful nice⁷, isn’t it?” said the man, returning the smile. “A happy day.”

“Awful nice, without a doubt. A happy day.” But it wasn’t New Year’s. In fact, it was no holiday at all, just an ordinary day.

“Time goes on and we’re stuck in the middle of this uneventful loop,” the man said, “if only something, one exciting [sudden] thing would happen...”

“You mean something major? [a major incident? Something big?]”

“Well, sure, something like that.”

“Hey, those are dangerous [risky] ideas right there!⁸ Of course, there’s probably a fair number of people who think like this. But the fact of the matter is, there are none who would take it upon themselves to make anything happen [none who would take action to make anything happen]. So, no matter how much you hope, it’s no use,” lectured the friend. “Well, maybe I shouldn’t say dangerous, more like outdated ideas. Isn’t that obvious?”

“Oh, I got that much,” retorted the man, “just said it to say it, you know.”

⁷ This is “おめでたいこと” in the original, which has a kind of double meaning. It can mean a “happy event,” which is a fairly standard meaning. However, an implication of being blind to the truth, “happily in the dark,” can also be read into this expression. Consider for example “全くおめでたいやつ” or a “hopeless moron.” Whether the author intended this or not is unclear to me, but either way it serves as a clever foreshadowing, accidental or otherwise. Therefore, I was initially tempted to translate this as “almost too good to be true,” but I thought that would be a little more revealing than necessary. Moreover, I was able to convey a more conversational tone, as one finds in the original, and a play on the word “awful” with my final choice.

⁸ Sentence final particles such as “ぜ” are always difficult to translate. This one is supposed to be a very emphatic one, similar to “ぞ.”

“These days we’re living in, [our ancestors] people didn’t even dream of in the old days, probably.” / “In the old days (past) people probably didn’t even dream of the times we’re living in now.”

“Let’s not talk nonsense, now. If we start up with the talk about the old days (past) we’ll never see the end of it,” answered the man. “Well, take care.”

“Tell me about it. Thanks to medical progress they’ve cured most diseases, so we’re not going to be catching anything anytime soon. I guess we’ll have to live out long, healthy lives whether we like it or not!”⁹

“Well I was just talking [just putting in my 2 cents]. Later,” said the man, cutting the line, and his friend disappeared from the screen.

“You must be bored, sir¹⁰,” said the robot, entering the room.¹¹ “Shall we play some piano? Perhaps, read some books?”

“Nah, it’s alright.”

“Shall we play a game? Would you prefer to tour [sightsee] the outskirts (suburbs?) on your electric automobile, sir?” Pressed the robot. It was an all-purpose [multi-purpose] model, exquisitely made. Playing a game, he would graciously loose at the appropriate time, and even if forced to drive an automobile, he would never have an accident. This faithful [devoted? Dedicated? Diligent?] robot posed not the least bit of threat to humans [totally harmless? was by no means a danger to humans?] Never

⁹ I moved a little away from the original in this dialogue to try to capture a more natural English conversational style. The exclamation point is my attempt at putting the effect of “よ” sentence-final particle.

¹⁰ I chose to use “sir” in order to simulate the robot’s high politeness level.

¹¹ There’s nothing in the original about the robot’s moving into the room, but since he was in a different room when the man was watching TV, and then suddenly started speaking, I thought it necessary to clarify.

sleeping even at night, he also functioned as a crime deterrent [fulfilled the role of crime-prevention?]. Then again, this was a world without the likes of criminals.¹²

A doorbell rang, and while the man was still lounging about, the robot went to answer the door. There stood a delivery robot.

“I have come to deliver this week’s food ration.”

“Thank you very much [thank you for your work?]”

Without any need to make a payment, the robot accepted the provisions [rations] and began cooking. The unused portion he placed in the refrigerator and locked it. Seeing this, the man let out a sigh [groan].

This is what the world had come to. [This is what these days have come to/ This was what this era/age has come to.] Everyone was equal, living in their comfortable rooms with their all-purpose [multipurpose] robots, without need for anything like physical labor. No complaints thus far. Only there was a food shortage. A fair allotment [distribution] was assigned according to precise computer calculations.¹³ A meager amount, on which one could barely survive.

“I do not comprehend this feeling of hunger,” said the robot. “So, I am afraid, there is no way for me to sympathize with you, sir.”

“Damn it,” thought the man, “where the hell should I go to steal some food?” But that’s all that was, only thoughts. He did not have such a surplus of strength to actually

¹² It seems “尤も” has two implications. The first being, “naturally” or “justifiably.” So this sentence could read “Naturally, this was a world without the likes of criminals.” However, this would imply that it is as a result of such diligent robots that the criminal element has been suppressed. The second meaning seems to me more logical, and carries the implication of “it must however be said.” This meaning I think is closer to the author’s intention, as it again emphasizes the Utopian aspect that he has been stressed thus far.

¹³ The Japanese word “きわまる” has a meaning of the upper limit or bound. So, I think this is literally means something like “A fair allotment was assigned according to a computer’s precise calculation of a limit.” This seems to make sense in the original, as the following sentence goes on to clarify that the limit is the lowest amount of food needed for survival. I thought it would work better if the word is dropped, because it is slightly redundant, since the idea of the lower limit is present in the next sentence.

act on them [didn't have any strength to spare...any extra strength]. He wasn't even sure that he could walk 50 yards.¹⁴ No, lying down was best. Of course, this was a peaceful world. If something unthinkable¹⁵ like a war were to occur there wasn't a single person to fight in it. There were no criminals to be found,¹⁶ let alone [much less/ not to mention] soldiers.¹⁷

¹⁴ This is actually 50 meters. Or roughly 164 feet. Or 54 yards. I think either could work, but 50 yards is fairly easy to imagine (being half a football field) and is very close to the meter measurement.

¹⁵ The dictionary definition of “大それた” is “outrageous, appalling, monstrous.” However, I think “unthinkable” works better here since it captures both the outrageous aspect of war, and the slim possibility of it ever breaking out in this world.

¹⁶ Literally: “no things like criminals.” The “出る” in this case, though literally meaning “go out,” seems to mean something closer to “be found” when rendered into English. Of course, it is cleverer in the Japanese because any would-be criminals physically couldn't leave their houses.

¹⁷ I felt the need to rearrange the entire final sentence/paragraph. I added the “of course it was a peaceful world” for a few reasons. The first was to make the connection to the news broadcast at the beginning of the story stronger. Secondly, this allowed me to combine the criminals and soldiers (not actually spelled out in the original but inferred) into one sentence so that I could link them with an English equivalent of “まして.” In Japanese, Hoshi is perfectly natural in putting that word in the beginning of a sentence, but in the English “much less/let alone” usually connects two clauses.

“Kuroi Fuku no Otoko” by Shinichi Hoshi
 Translated by Michael Ignatov
 “Men in Black”

A well put-together gentleman appeared in a neurological hospital. With a pale, frightened expression, he faced the hospital director and spoke in a trembling voice.

“Doctor, please do something to help me. I’m uneasy and scared¹. If this keeps up, I won’t be able to sit still². Whatever the cost, I’ll gladly pay it.”

“I understand. But, why don’t you calm down and explain the situation. Tell me everything.³”

“Well, day and night, I’m secretly tailed by suspicious-looking men in black. I am constantly under their surveillance, you see. When I told my friends, they told me I was just imagining things, and didn’t take me seriously. When I complained to the police about black-clad groups and such, they wanted nothing to do⁴ with such a childish story. They said, why don’t you go to that hospital first, and see...” said the gentleman in a voice that got progressively louder and tinged with seriousness.

“I see,” said the director, trying to suppress a laugh.⁵ “This is a common delusion. There are many people out there, who scheme to drag others down by discovering people’s secrets, and

¹ In English, “I’m uneasy and scared,” sounds slightly rigid. I think it would probably be more natural to say, something like “I’m uneasy and, well, scared/afraid/terrified/frightened.” However, I decided to remain a little more faithful to the original, as I wasn’t entirely sure how many liberties should be taken with the text.

² The expression “居ても立ってもいられない” means something like “cannot sit still,” if I am not mistaken. However the tense here seems to create some problems in English. I am somewhat unclear as to whether he says “the way it’s been going, I cannot sit still,” or the way I translated it.

³ This reads “なにごとです” in the original, which here probably means “everything.” I was a little unsure about how this should be rendered in English. I could simply say, “...situation, without leaving anything out,” or something to that effect. I kept it closer to the original because I thought that this way it sounds somewhat ominous in English, foreshadowing the eventual revelation of the doctor’s relationship with the men in black.

⁴ Another possible translation that occurred to me was, “they weren’t even going to humor such a childish story,” or “they didn’t even humor.” The reason I went with “wanted nothing to do,” is because that seems to be closer to the original (since つきあう is literally something like “socialize”), but at the same time not as stiff as the literal “couldn’t have anything to do.” Although, that is also a valid option, perhaps.

⁵ Lit. “a laugh/smile-suppressing tone,” presumably a serious or official tone. But, I couldn’t get it to sound right in English. Perhaps a possibility is, “...in an official/serious tone to suppress his laughter.”

causing their eventual downfall. This is probably the source of your delusion.⁶ But, with a little medical treatment, you can make a full recovery.”⁷

“But, doctor, this is no delusion. The men in black really are following me...”

“It is precisely because it all seems so real, that this is a delusion. If you still have the same impression after the treatment, *then* it’s genuine. In which case, I’ll go with you to the police and confirm that this is no delusion.”

The director’s seemingly confidant explanation relieved the gentleman a little, and after a two-week hospitalization, the director checked up on his patient.

“How are you felling? Still feel that the black-clad group is following you?”

“No, they completely disappeared. I can finally get some peace of mind. And it’s all thanks to you, doctor...”

The gentleman paid his bill, and went home happily. At the same time, a man in black came out from the back.⁸

“Good work,” said that director, handing him some money. “This plan was a great success from the beginning. The numbers of patients have greatly increased. Since we do some background research, and only target CEOs, politicians, popular singers, and wealthy people, both our success and profit rates are high. We’ve even sent some materials detailing the symptoms along with the reference data to every police station. On the whole, we are doing well. Recently, thanks to you, our hospital has been continuously well in the black...”⁹

⁶ Another possibility: “Something like this is the cause.” But, I thought that, although closer to the original, it wasn’t particularly clear.”

⁷ I’ve also considered “...you can get back to normal,” but though it a little colloquial.

⁸ I am not sure whether it is only one man, perhaps a leader of the group, or all of them.

⁹ I had a little trouble translating the punch-line. Specifically with “つづき,” because it seems that he is saying that it will continue being in the black as well as having been in the black ever-since the scheme was first carried out. Also, this story seems to be very ellipsis-heavy, and being unsure about whether to leave them in or take them out, I kept them.

Version II (Less Literal)

“Kuroi Fuku no Otoko” by Shinichi Hoshi
Translated by Michael Ignatov
“Men in Black”

A well-dressed gentleman appeared at a neurological hospital. His face, drained of color, was wrought with a terrified expression.

“Doctor, I’m at my wit’s end. If this keeps up, I don’t know what I’ll do. Please do something to help me. Whatever the cost, money is not an issue,” he addressed the hospital director in a trembling voice.

“I see, but please calm yourself. Why don’t you explain the situation from the beginning?”

“Well...I am secretly tailed by suspicious-looking men in black. Day and night, I am constantly under their surveillance. I told my friends, but they said it was all in my head. I went to the police, but they wanted nothing to do with childish stories about black-clothed groups and the like. ‘Why don’t you go to that hospital, first,’ they said...” As he spoke, the gentleman’s voice, tinged with seriousness, grew progressively louder.

“I see,” said the director, suppressing a smile. “This is a common delusion. You see, there are many people out there, who scheme to drag others down by discovering their secrets, thereby causing their eventual downfall. Your condition most likely grew out of something like this. Luckily, with a little medical treatment, you can make a full recovery in no time.”

“But, doctor, this is no delusion. The men in black really are following me—”

“It is precisely because it all seems so real, that this is a delusion. If you still have the same impression after the treatment, *then* it’s the real deal. In which case, I’ll gladly go to the police myself and confirm that this is no delusion.”

The director's confident explanation relieved the gentleman a little, and after a two-week hospitalization, the director checked up on his patient.

“And how are we doing now? Still feel that the black-clothed organization is shadowing you?”

“No, they've completely disappeared. I can finally get some peace of mind. And it's all thanks to you, doctor...”

The gentleman paid his bill, and went home happily. At the same time, a man in black came out from the back.

“Good work,” said that director, handing him some money. “This plan was a great success from the beginning. The numbers of patients have sky-rocketed, as have our success and profit rates. With a little background research we can target CEOs, politicians, popular singers, and wealthy people, exclusively. We've even sent some materials detailing the symptoms along with the reference data to every police station. On the whole, business is good. And, thanks to you, our hospital will always be in the black...”

"Yume noyouna hoshi" – by Hoshi Shinichi
Translated by Michael Ignatov

"Dream Planet"

One day, a meaningful radio signal reached the Earth from some corner of the universe [cosmos]. And I'm¹ not just saying so, no, it really was a tremendously important communication [communiqué?]. This gradually became very clear.

When the people of Earth sent a signal of their own in the same direction [the direction from which the first signal came] they received a response.² While this procedure was being repeated it became possible to exchange ideas³ and, in no time at all, the other side learned the Earth language. [and began communicating in it.] By this time, these exchanges had already become the focus [topic] of conversation of the entire world.⁴ Everywhere you looked, on all the TV and radio channels, they broadcasted the same thing. Everyone became completely engrossed and listened without fail. [everyone was glued to their tv/radio sets].

"Your civilization must be rather advanced," went the message from Earth.

"You bet.⁵ For starters we were the ones who contacted you, and it was us who learned your language. It would probably take you decades to figure out [lit. decipher] our language. Going by your Earth hours."

¹ There is no mention of a first-person narrator in the original, but I felt the English needed to have some sort of pronoun here.

² "応答" means "reply, answer, response." I went with the last meaning, because it becomes clear that the aliens don't speak the earth language just yet, and both "reply" and "answer" would imply a comprehensive response. Whereas a response can easily be just a sign of contact.

³ At first I thought that this "意見の交換" was a council that the people of Earth held to deal with the situation while the signal was being sent out. But I think, it is more plausible from the context, if this was an exchange of ideas with the 'aliens,' during which they were able to pick up the Earth language.

⁴ "全世界の話題の焦点" is still somewhat confusing for me. I think that "focus/topic of conversation" gets the meaning across. But that is only if I understand the meaning correctly.

⁵ "そりゃあ" is a contraction of "それは" so I thought it best to go with a very casual affirmation. Throughout the exchange, the Earth communications tend to be rather formal, whereas the responses are casual.

Since these [communication, correspondence] messages had to travel across the vast universe, there were quite a few days between a call and a response. But on the day of the reply everyone would wait for the {tv or radio} broadcast, their hearts racing with anticipation. The people of Earth had a mountain of questions to ask of such an advanced civilization.⁶

"What about the standard of living? It must be very high."⁷

"Ah, well. We'll leave that to your imagination."

But how could the people of earth even begin to image?

"Is there any indication of a population explosion?⁸ That is to say, are there any signs of population growth getting out of control? [or just "overpopulation"?]" *In so advanced a civilization, wouldn't the population be as high as the standard of living,* thought the people of Earth.

"Not at all, not at all."

Upon hearing that, the people of Earth heaved a collective sigh of relief. *At least they didn't come here to conquer us to solve their overpopulation problems,* they thought and everybody's fears were laid to rest.

"What of environmental problems? Is there any air or water pollution?"

"Nope. Some pristine nature we got here."

"Have you any concerns about using up all of your planet's natural resources?"

"We've never had to worry about stuff like that."

⁶ The advanced civilization part is in addition. The original just says they had many questions to ask. But I thought, in the English this felt incomplete, the asking needed an object.

⁷ The original just says "living." But I thought that "standard of living" is more natural for this sort of question in English. Also the original supposes their life is "pleasant/agreeable," but since I've decided on "standard of living," in order to keep consistency I went with "high."

⁸ At first I thought that "population explosion" was a somewhat awkward term, but then I thought this might be a reference to Paul Ehrlich's 1968 [The Population Bomb](#), in which Ehrlich predicted that multitudes of people would starve in the 1970s and 1980s due to overpopulation.

Hearing this, the people of earth grew [wholeheartedly] truly⁹ jealous.

“Do you not have any traffic [transportation] problems? Congestion, accidents, anything like that?”

“Never had to worry about anything like that, either. Everything is going great!”

“But there must be a criminal element. If there are intelligent people around [where there’s a will there’s a way?], someone is bound to be plotting some sort of a crime. What about juvenile delinquency? What measures do you have for dealing with that?”

“Criminal...criminal...Ahh! Is that like doing bad things?¹⁰ [you mean bad/evil deeds?] Jeez, you had me all confused, using archaic [obsolete] words like that. Of course we don’t have that sort of thing, not even a single case. You could leave your door wide open and not a thing would happen! So, the fact of the matter is, we don’t need any ‘measures.’ Completely unnecessary, you see.”

“Well, this certainly sounds idyllic.¹¹ However, in our understanding [by our estimation / going by what we know/our experience], there would probably be those dissatisfied by such an ideal place. Wouldn’t they, as unreasonable as it may be [useless?], try to upset the order [rebel]?”

“What the hell are you talking about? Why would there be anyone like that? You’ve got a bunch of them running around or something?”¹²

“It’s a little embarrassing to admit, but...” said the people of Earth, greatly embarrassed. Red-faced, they reflected on their own actions. “...well, if it came to that,” they asked timidly, “wouldn’t you be faced with the risk¹³ of war?”

⁹ Literally, “from the heart.”

¹⁰ I initially had this as “wrong deeds,” but I thought that it is more natural to turn “deeds” into a verb.

¹¹ Literally, “tremendously tranquil.”

¹² At first I translated “ばかばかしい” as “nonsense.” However, that sounds too formal here. Therefore, I’ve reworked the entire sentence to fit the colloquial style of the speaker.

“‘War’ meaning a mass of people killing each other? There’s just no way that would happen. We don’t have a thing that could be used a weapon, for starters.”

“Incredible. We have to say that we greatly admire your planet and hold you in the highest esteem.¹⁴ But, we must ask, how in the world do you spend your days?”

“We pass every day by doing what we like when we like.”

“We’re so jealous!”¹⁵ Exclaimed the people of Earth with a sigh. “How did you ever develop such a spectacular societal structure? Please tell us how, we beg you!”

“Look at you asking everyone else [strangers? others?] for advice. Such an easygoing attitude is no good! Why don’t you think for yourselves for a change? Maybe then you’ll get to the point we’re at.”

No matter how many times the Earth pleaded, the other planet would not budge. The people of Earth grew increasingly agitated. They knew it was possible to construct an ideal society, but they didn’t have the slightest clue as to how to proceed. Some even went mad [became a little touched in the head].

“Isn’t there anything you are troubled by [worried about]?”

“Well, there is just this one thing. Only I can’t tell you what it is. Don’t even want to talk about it.” Saying this, the inhabitant of the distant planet looked around and smiled a wry, joyless smile.¹⁶ There was some trouble [worry], certainly. Just one thing. And the thing was that there were no other inhabitants on this planet besides him.

¹³ I think “機器” literally means “crisis.” However, here it seems to function more like “risk” or “danger” would in English.

¹⁴ I realize this sounds slightly redundant, but I thought this would get the hyper-polite language across better.

¹⁵ I think the original says “we are, in a word, jealous.” However, in English that sounds much too formal for the exasperation expressed with the “もう” preceding this sentence.

¹⁶ The Japanese “虚無的” literally means “nihilistic.” But I could not picture what would constitute a nihilistic smile. Instead, I took it to mean that this smile was not really a smile, that is, he was smiling but not because he was happy.

Once [there was a time when], this planet had the same problems as any other.¹⁷ Then one day they received a strange signal from outer space. From then on, everyone went mad and, as a result, the population dropped until finally only a sole survivor remained. With no one but himself to talk to he began to search out other worlds, and talking his head off when he found them. And so, tormenting other planets with the possibility of the perfect world became his favorite¹⁸ amusement.¹⁹

¹⁷ The next part of the sentence says "it was just one of many ordinary planets." I thought this would sound a little redundant and decided to cut it.

¹⁸ Literally, "peerless" or "ultimate." "Favorite" seemed a more natural way to describe an "ultimate amusement."

¹⁹ The original doesn't spell this out. It simply says "and that was the reason/origin for his tantalizing (思わせぶり) phase/complaint." "思わせぶり" was a little difficult to translate because the English word "suggestive" has salacious overtones which are not appropriate in this context. I thought that it referred to the tricks the lone survivor played with other planets, and paraphrased instead. Although, it might well refer to the complaint of his that there is just one thing that worries him. Even if this is so though, I think that repeating this sentiment here is redundant, because that point has been driven home in the previous paragraph.