



The Ants

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for Eugene

The Ants

We the Heathens

We go to have Chinese for dinner and my friend who is visiting from another planet is horrified (and perhaps a little excited also), until I explain to her that we are having Chinese food, not Chinese people. We go to a place that serves not dumpling soup, which I love, but soup dumpling, with which I am unfamiliar. The soup is actually inside of each dumpling, and everyone develops their own system of eating it. As we poke our chopsticks voraciously into the folds of the Crispy Fried Whole Exploded Fish, which is delicious, it becomes clear to me that we would have no right to be shocked or mortified or outraged or even surprised or upset, should some creature from another planet descend upon the earth, pluck our people off the ground and fry us up, tearing away at our flesh with relish.

My friend Morton, a sweet and gentle man, is sitting quietly beside me with his uneaten hamburger. I don't know how he managed to get himself a hamburger in a Chinese restaurant, but there he sits, and there sits his hamburger, with the top bun off. Morton says he wants live ants on his burger but does not want to go hunting for ants himself, so he is waiting for the ants to come to the burger, at which point he will replace the top bun and eat. I tell him that he will probably have better luck with that outside, and he says that's a good idea, thanks, and goes outside with his hamburger, and that's the last I ever see of him.

*An Ant in the Mouth of Madonna
Behind Locked Doors*

Is there, is there, is there but can't prove it to anyone, is small, is glistening and black, is determined, is hanging on, is at a loss for a good perch, is wet, is blown by the wind when she takes a breath, is happy, is uncertainly happy, is ardent, is devoted, warm and plenty, full of courage, is going to write a Moby Dick-length book about this upon returning, is unsure, is still looking to perch, is unable to see its own feet, is developing a relationship, its first adult relationship, is in a wet place or a hard place, is not strong enough to hang on, not even to the backs of her teeth, is hardly noticed, is tentative, is shy, is timid, is sweet, oh if only it could prove it, is waiting for its chance, is waiting for a big break, is going to show those folks back home, is feeling the slightest bit homesick, is determined to make it, is determined to go down in history, is determined to beat the odds, is casually hoping to make it into the Guinness Book of World Records for the Longest Time Spent in Madonna's Mouth, is an optimist at heart, is fearful in the moment when her breathing gets rough, is shaking, is shaking, is shaken, is having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, is, after all, an ant with a fairly short lifespan, is gay, is not gay, is female, is black, is uncertain, is nothing compared to the giant scale of all the people who surround her, is everything relative to the other organisms inside her mouth, is big-hearted, is open-minded, is sweet, really, all it ever wants is for her to, for her to, oh, and then she comes, and the ant is, and isn't, and is.

Ladybug

I am looking for my friend who promised to meet me on this street at a time that's right about now, except we failed to specify exactly at which part of the block we would meet, and even then it should not be a problem because I know exactly what my friend looks like and yet I am not seeing her at all anywhere on the block. I ask around, to the local shopkeepers, but they haven't seen her either and I look around some more and I still don't see her but fortunately right then she calls and says to look behind me, and I do and I still don't see her, and she says look down, and I do and I still can't find her, and she says she is under that pile of swarming ladybugs right there and I am horrified but she says she is having a good time and that I should come and join her and I walk away and that was the sad end of our friendship.

Girl Talk

We are sitting around the table eating and drinking and exchanging stories about flashers, gropers, underwear thieves, your general assortment of urban perverts. When I tell the story about the man who came up to me and opened up his bag and offered me one of a teeming million wiggling ants in his bag, the whole table goes silent and I am reminded all over again how hard it is to get along with the women in this country.

Battery

We get lost in the desert, lost very lost, and although we aren't going to tell anyone that we can't possibly be any more than two miles from civilization, the fact remains that we are lost very lost in the desert very desert, and the car very car is having a hard very hard very hard time getting started up again, and so we kick it very kick it in its ass very ass and the car is still having a hard very hard time and we are feeling lost all the more lost very lost in this desert very desert, and there is no one around us no no one very around us at all very all and there are birds very birds of which there are many very many, but the birds very birds don't know don't know how to help us and us and us help start the car very car and we are more lost more lost and we need help need very very help need very very help help and there is no no no one around us except if you count count count those ants in the ant hill that is all we have all we have are the ants very ants and then we wire them up yes wire them up yes I said wire wire wire and with the force of all the ants all wired all wired up and then on the count of three we all yell "CHARGE!"

Ant Farm

When I was a small child I wanted an ant farm very much, but never had it, never got my ant farm. I tried to make my own, filling dirt in a jar and gathering all the neighborhood ants and throwing them in there and covering it with plastic wrap and punching holes on top, but somehow it never quite turned into that ant farm I always did want.

Also when I was a small child I was told that the watermelon seed I just swallowed would sprout in my stomach and I would grow a watermelon right inside my body. And that if I didn't get that splinter out of my finger, it would pop out later through my eyeballs. What did happen, however, is that a couple of ants managed to find their way inside, set up their nest, like the ant farm I always wanted, right inside my very own arteries and veins, going up and down the corridors of my circulatory system, riding the blood current, those freeloaders. The ant farm I always wanted.

Now I am disappointed—and isn't this the way it goes—I finally get my ant farm and don't even get to observe it. Not only do I not get much enjoyment out of this, but I also find, or feel, rather, that I am reaching maximum capacity, which is not good. There is not enough room, and yet there is no way for the ants to exit.

What they need is a wound. And so it is that I am forced to call up my friend who owns a gun to come over and shoot me, somewhere harmless like my leg, where it won't kill me, just make a big gushing wound large enough so the ants can get out, and he does, and they do, and now do I miss them.

Colors

I leave the house for a couple of months, and upon my return find that a gang of ants and a gang of cockroaches have been having turf wars in my home. I don't actually see any ants or cockroaches, but I can tell by those little tiny colorful bandanas they have left behind.

Slackers

Back to the ant farm circulating in my body. So we said that we were approaching maximum capacity and that I was going to have my friend shoot me so that all the ants can gush right out of the gaping wound, but not every ant is as simple as all that. They've heard the stories from their older siblings, that once you gush out from an open wound there's no telling what might happen—and so it is, of course, that the smart thing to do is to hang out by the heart, loiter just below the inferior vena cava, hold on to each other in a tight chain so as to resist getting pushed out into the cold harsh world. There are some ants that hold on like this for ages, for all time, burrowed into little nooks, even—hiding out in my heart where they know there is always a home, safe, pounding and ever so warm.

Apple Speed

We have our light years, and they. Their longest unit of time is based on nothing else but. The lifespan of one of their own and. Different colonies may use different varieties of apple, but. The time it takes for a single ant to eat an entire. Apple. The fact of the matter is, working alone makes the task excruciatingly. Slow. Working alone, a single ant is unable to eat the entire. Thus a new replacement ant must. Take over for the old ant at exactly the right. Which means that a number of ant eggs are readied and placed nearby so that when death arrives for the first ant, the most recently born ant can immediately take over the job of the former. In this way, a series of single ants is required in order to consume an entire. And so it goes that an apple speed is the sum of a number of ant-lifetimes, the total amount of time required for the consumption of an entire apple by one hypothetical, long-living ant, and so then the question might go, how many apple speeds does it take to dig this hole, from right here under my feet, straight through the underground and popping back up again over there where you.

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Sawako Nakayasu writes and translates poetry, and also occasionally creates performances and short films. Her most recent books are *The Ants* (Les Figues, 2014) and a translation of *The Collected Poems of Sagawa Chika* (Canarium Books, 2014). Other books include *Texture Notes* (Letter Machine Editions, 2010), *Hurry Home Honey* (Burning Deck, 2009), and *Mouth: Eats Color – Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-translations, & Originals*, which is a multilingual work of both original and translated poetry. She has received fellowships from the NEA and PEN, and her own work has been translated into Japanese, Norwegian, Swedish, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese. More information can be found here: <http://sawakonakayasu.net>.