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Losing Sight of Home:

A Translation of Pham Van Ky's *Perdre La Demeure*

By

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for Honors in the department of Modern Languages and Literatures

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Union College

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Abstract

Born in Binh Định province of central Vietnam in 1910, Pham Van Ky was a bilingual Vietnamese-Francophone writer who published an array of poems and stories in his home country of Vietnam but also flourished as a novelist when he moved to Paris for studies at the Sorbonne (cut short by World War II). From a family of twelve other siblings, he was sent to study at a French school in Hanoi at the young age of thirteen. During this time, many placed their hopes in young intellectuals like Pham Van Ky to one day lead Vietnam to independence and bring about a new era of prosperity. At this school, he quickly developed a mastery of the French language in which he later wrote numerous works of literature and poetry. His first large-scale recognition was at the age of twenty when he won first place at the Indochina Floral Games for his French poem “Investiture.” By his mid 20’s, he was already the editor in chief of two prominent literary magazines, one in Saigon and the other in Huê.

In 1938, Ky left Vietnam to live in Paris where he attended the Université de la Sorbonne to study literature and he even pursued a thesis in religious studies at a Chinese university in Paris before ultimately halting this due to the onset of the war and the death of his advisor. He had to become a private French teacher to make ends meet all the while continuing to compose novels and poems which were sometimes published in local media outlets. His works were not only confined to novels and poetry though, as a few years after leaving Vietnam, he began writing works for theater as well.

His only return to Vietnam was in 1970, over thirty years after he left, and this trip home resulted in him writing an essay in Paris upon his return where he emphasized concerns about the structures of the socialist society he had seen in Vietnam and how things had drastically changed since he left. From this point onwards, he no longer published many of his works which had

since shifted focus to cultural and political ideology. His inability to publish after this date was likely in part due to this change of focus and the uneasiness that the Parisian press felt regarding the new subjects presented in his writing. He would continue writing smaller pieces and essays from this point until his death in the Paris suburbs in 1992.

Sadly, Pham Van Ky is not largely recognized in the French literary world or even in his home country and is certainly not a household name among anglophone readers. This is partly due to his strong opinions and critiques towards the communist governing style in Vietnam but also due to his non-conforming style in an age of French literature where perception was everything, not to mention the heavy strains of colonial and post-colonial relations within France. In 1993, a Vietnamese literary committee compiled the works of many of the country's great authors and while Pham Van Ky's works were included, his name was never mentioned.

Overall, his works capture the notion of duality and the schism between "oriental" and "occidental" cultures. This is understandable given his own duality as both Vietnamese and French. One of the goals of his work was to show European readers that despite surface level differences in cultures and practices, humans are confronted with many of the same problems. His works also emphasize nostalgia for the homeland and call into question the concept and repercussions of colonialism.

These ideas are especially prevalent in *Perdre La Demeure* (published in 1961) where the main character, Captain Watakashi Hizen, might be interpreted as expressing Pham Van Ky's own experiences with colonialism. The reserved yet potent style of his writing is what makes this story so powerful and insightful but this style, along with the multiple colonial histories intersecting in this novel, are what make this work so challenging to translate. For this project, I

translated the opening two chapters of *Perdre La Demeure* or, as I have chosen to title it, *Losing Sight of Home*, in the pages to follow.

Set in 1870's Japan during an era of intense industrialization, Captain Hizen (a former samurai) leads a group of soldiers guarding the railway being built and also oversees the workforce itself. Western engineers lead the railway design but the workforce largely comprises Japanese, Korean, and the native Aino people. Throughout the story, Captain Hizen is faced with a disgruntled workforce, frequent attacks from remaining samurai groups, and scathing and demeaning comments made by the western leaders that accompany him in overseeing the rail project. As the story progresses, Captain Hizen himself becomes disheartened and begins to doubt the virtues of this newly extolled modernisation. This realization comes after he tries to make peace with a samurai who is constantly attacking the workforce, but the samurai refuses to abandon the old ways and watch his country modernize before him. Despondent and now questioning his own ideas, Hizen is relieved of his duty and sent away in disgrace while the rail line continues to be overseen by someone else. By following Captain Hizen in this story, the reader is able to gain insight into Ky's own mind and the moral conundrums he faces in confronting western powers in a land neither theirs or his own.

Part 1

Chapter 1

I didn't realize that it takes time to mature the eye and secure the finger which pulls the trigger. My men weren't on target. How could they have been? These were just their first shooting lessons. With my eyes, I consulted Captain de Neufville. I didn't have to do that. It was a mistake the Frenchman did not deign to exploit.

At any rate, the incident had broken the monotony of the work. The eighty recruits of my section, the five hundred workers, diggers, laborers, and apprentices employed for the construction of the railway, the fifty telegraph laborers, foremen and supervisors, the European staff of civil engineers, the administrative body, the supplies team, healthcare, engineering, in short, all this revolutionary personnel created by the West, at its own risk and peril, watched, with hypnotic fixity, the three Japanese men who took off at a gallop, flattened on the backs of the stolen horses, hair against mane, jumping over the stones arranged along the embankment bordering thickets streaked with light of the setting sun.

In the panic caused by the shooting, I was grateful to Neufville for not trying to interfere with my duties. He was only an instructor named, let us say solicited, hired and paid by the emperor on the same basis as other foreigners. Any order from him would have compromised my prestige. I alone was qualified to make the decision to either pursue the deserters or notify the police in Hakodate, the closest port, by plugging the device offered by Commodore Perry into the telegraph line.

I didn't hesitate for long. Designating six of my infantrymen armed with chassepot rifles, I called to them to mount the Algerian horses, a gift from Marshal Neil to our court, and to return to me the three wretches dead or alive.

James Hart was smiling. As much as I appreciated Neufville's discretion, I was mortified by the British irony, it was the *white weapon*- or shall I say the Whites' weapon- that I feared the most. I felt powerless against it, not having been brought up for this sort of silent combat where the superiority, justified or not, of my opponent seeks to assert itself, not in our ritual of challenge, but by a slight opening of the lips. And what lips! Fine, honed, cutting.

Hart sounded like he was saying "Poor shooters! But it's inscribed in their blood, in their race: indelible, unfixable."

Instinctively, my hand went between my shoulderblades, where not long ago, before my conversion to western science, my two samurai swords crossed. As for the revolver that replaced them, I was reluctant to use it. To the shame I felt for the inexperience of my soldiers and the indiscipline of the three diggers, I refrained from adding another. Besides, the targets were already too far away.

But as James Hart was still smiling, I ran to my tent where I found my wife busy with our two children, heating the water for the pre-dinner bath. Unhooking my crossbow and quiver, I went back out and slowly took aim. The arrow whistled. A mare bows and slumps, dragging down the rider, one of six pursuers who had just set off on the wild trail. I wasn't proud of my achievement or rather - why not admit it?- of my clumsiness, because in my soul and conscience, it was the man I aimed at and not the horse. What did I care about an individual's life when the honor of my country was at stake? However, I noticed with painful surprise that my bow had lost its spirit.

The mare writhed, miserably, puffing and panting to get back on her legs but could not.

Second Lieutenant Baudouvin- in reality a simple guides corporal as I read in his secret file- took a chassepot rifle then, shouldering it and aiming for a point from which nothing

masked the convulsive head, pulled and reached between the two eyes, what Neufville called a moving target, and in Hart's words, at about forty yards.

Full of himself, he blew on the barrel of the rifle and approached the kill above which a cloud of crows were already cheerfully cawing. After removing the bayonet, he plunged it several times into the still quivering thigh, marking a geometric figure on its skin. Then, at the tip of the blade, he brandished a slice of bloody meat: -

“To improve the ordinary would you like this steak captain?”

Neufville accepted it with joy. Under his tent, a kneeling Maro welcomed him, bowing deeply then arching backward: a double curtsy which affirmed, without confusing them, the servant and the mistress.

Outside, the crows kept circling over the cadaver. The workers had returned, some to their huts, others, less favored, to the wagons converted into common dormitories.

While Baodouvin was cooking his steak under the disapproving eye of his orderly, I asked myself why our people shunned meat? Did Buddhism prohibit it? But after the Restoration, exactly two years ago in 1868 on your calendar, the emperor had advised the monks to abandon the vegetarian diet, to marry and to procreate.

Suddenly convinced that whites owe their strength and stature to a meaty diet, I hurried to Hart's tent, the chief engineer. He was fifty-something with red hair and sideburns.

"I was looking for you, Captain Hizen ..."

Under that "captain," an accent of mockery pierced through that irritated me.

“... to tell you that I'm responsible for the escape of the three diggers. Yes! Yes! We are always responsible for those we employ.”

He put out his fist, intensifying, in my already heightened awareness, the feeling of a duty, not neglected until then, but becoming more and more compelling. Before this foreigner who claimed as a king the faults of his subjects, I was sure that he was treating us as a conquered country. But one thing at a time! I told him what I had come for, explaining the project, which I had just come up with at the moment, for cutting off the workers so they would have to feast on the dead mare and would eat meat from then on. He raised a few objections before admitting that on a rational diet he would get a much better return out of the labor force.

“Obviously, Mr. Chief Engineer, I will be overseeing this initiative under the authorities of Hokkaido.”

Had I clashed with him when I mentioned “overseeing?” Baulking, he invoked powers he claimed to be invested with - what gall! - and that I was usurping.

“Let's say, Mr. Chief Engineer, that we will both be in charge of this.”

It wasn't enough yet. So I gave up bargaining any more, despite my government's instructions that I should not give in under any circumstances: “Let's say, Mr. Chief Engineer, that you will be the only one in charge.”

He relaxed and asked me to pass a note to Supplies Management.

Outside, I found the crows still cawing cheerfully over the remains. Their cries are comforting. Not as sinister as the Europeans in the encampment claimed, they encourage us in the exercise of dying for which our lives are designed. They fit harmoniously into the background noise of our daily routine *tran-tran*, mixed with the *zzz* of the fly from Himeji. I'll tell you the story - of what haunts the silence of our attic: a frantic race of white, black, red-brown mice fleeing from a snake, the strangled squealing of the victim snatched by the reptile....

On the big island, Nippon, I was so used to that racket that I did not pay attention. It imposes itself on me by its absence now that I live in a tent, exiled from the noises that precede our rising: those of the skylights that are opened in the kitchen, shutters folded down and closed on the outside our houses - "toys to give to children", joked Baudouvin - springy veranda planks that give under the servant's weight as slightly as the reed a hummingbird has landed on, the purring of the fire - a fiery cat - in the *chibachi*, the creaking of the well pulley, the particular rustle of the paper stretched over the sliding doors which we dust with a kind of swift motion ... The house then gives way to the fresh air, to the chirping of sparrows, to the song composed of twelve stanzas of our incomparable nightingale.

And what do I get to hear now? The patrol's drum, the whistle of the blind masseur at nightfall and, during the day, the one-two, one-two, chanted by Baudouvin, the buzzing of the telegraph poles which bears lick greedily- determined to get the honey of the nesting bees.

The five infantrymen, launched in pursuit of the runaways, were slow to return.

In front of Tchiyo, my wife, already undressed - our two children were staying in an adjacent tent - I took off my French infantry officer's uniform: the large shako, the crescent-shaped copper gorget, the dark blue tunic with yellow epaulets, the red pants, the heavy boots that bruised my feet. Then, to give honor where honor was due, I was the first to sink into the barrel of hot water.

Bath taken, dinner swallowed, I inspected my section in their rooms, and the workers in their huts. Deprived of rice and fish, all were grumbling about what they considered collective punishment after the escape of the three diggers, but no one prowled around the dead mare. As for me? I offered myself up as an example the next day, ostensibly, on the lunch break, without

being able to overcome an overwhelming nausea. Of course, I had tasted roe deer before, but the horse meat was off putting with its sweet flavor.

I chalked it up as a complete loss. Although carnivores, the Aino, savages that we had driven back here in Hokkaido for centuries, refused this food.

That night, with the crows having got to it, I was obliged to post soldiers around the corpse. But, fearing that this guard posting may be misinterpreted, I dismissed them and put myself on lookout.

Towards nine o'clock, I saw the blind masseur come out of his shelter. With his long cane he felt the ground and, with the other hand, he brought to his lips a whistle from which he made high and prolonged sounds: a precaution observed by those of his guild when crossing a dense crowd, which was not the case. But habits! He was going to do his chores at Neufville's quarters. Avoiding the bait too, he soon disappeared into the darkness pierced by the flickering lights of the lanterns.

Then I noticed a staggering colossus: Shojo, the head of my private police. He was secretly in charge of the menial workers that I had imposed on the whites of the construction sites: maids, grooms, orderlies, wheelmen or escorts. He was nicknamed Shojo because he drank heavily.

Late that night, footsteps woke me from a slight doze. A stealthy figure behind a pile of felled pines, sitting Western-style on a stone. I held my breath. A match struck. A vegetable wax candle grew clearer, a firefly flame grew, spread out, lighting up the round and studious face of Katsu, the young performer. Son of a samurai and therefore samurai by hereditary transmission, he belonged to a lower class than mine. But, like I, he had become Europeanized from top to bottom: Parisian ankle boots on his feet and the back of his head shorn of the little pony tail that

once hung there. Brave Katsu who was hungry! Would he succumb to the red meat? I had to lower my expectations. He took out some blades, but from a case, and they were scalpels. His cherished microscope hung around his neck. He was about to dissect. No, not yet. Pointing his index finger at different parts of the animal, he carefully articulated: “Skirt, ribeye, brisket, fillet, loin, sirloin, rumpsteak, round steak, culotte blade, thick rib, topside, stifle, back, loin, point, shoulder, quasi, chest, rouelle, leg, square, slanche, pestle, boat, rump ...”

It was never among his ambitions to become a butcher, but having consumed the contents of many books of Dutch and French medicine, he was simply revisiting his knowledge of anatomy. Without a glitch, he became a surgeon. He was the image of Japan, hastily converted, from Kagoshima to Sapporo, to the civilization of the West. He sliced the flesh, he opened the belly. The bluish innards glistened in a crack of yellow fat. He examined the pattern to compare it to an illustration reproduced in one of his textbooks.

Once his thirst for knowledge had been quenched, would he be able to appease his cravings? With his fingers sticky with blood, he snuffed the candle and left, muttering: "Uterus, alvin and celiac, pelvic, hypochondria, loins, peritoneum, epigastrium, hypogastrium ..."

I shuddered in the dawn which whitens the uneven horizon, cutting as with a bayonet the sharp, snow-capped mountains, dark evergreen forests, and straying from the path cleared by James Hart, between sugi trees that had survived six generations of humans.

Work resumed. We were running out of energy here to build a temporary bridge with wooden planks, to rawly slice into a low hillock, further on to lay ties, rails and, on the telegraph side, to erect fir poles at the top of which we fixed brown insulators.

The five infantrymen still did not report to the call.

On the training ground, my section was preparing to execute orders at the command and gesture of Baudouvin who served as guide, twelve paces ahead, on the brief signals of Neufville. But, like every morning, I had to read the Imperial Rescript first. Giving in to automatism, in one stroke, I gave the five pages of this true moral treatise which, after a short introduction, develops and extols the five virtues of the soldier: "Honor, politeness, courage, loyalty and frug. ..." Under penalty of being accused of treason, I had to finish the sentence: "... and frugality." Frugality! And I was determined to turn them into meat eaters.

"And frugality," I repeated, to give myself time to reconcile this immemorial injunction and my initiative of the last few days.

Suddenly, with the mental promptness of the adherents of jiu-jitsu, I bypassed the obstacle by attaching this fifth virtue to the meager pay we were receiving rather than to the consumption of raw vegetables:

"I do not believe that our services are those which are paid for in money. *Tenno heika banzai!*" And the seventy-five recruits echoed out, "Long live the Emperor!"

I had done my job. I was still going, since I would have failed due to the frugality of our very people. But I noticed that they did not have the pale fasting complexion. What had happened that I missed? Summoned, Shojo tells me that they had fed on cooked roots, nuts and torch-caught fish from a nearby river. I took to preventing any night outings. They retaliated by looting the food train, emboldened by the leniency of the new laws because, two years earlier, any individual committing theft of a value greater than ten *rio* (fifty francs at the time) was liable to capital punishment.

Weary of war, I buried the stinking mare, and the Supplies Team redistributed the food.

Chapter 2

It was the third Sunday since construction began. As in the previous two, and on my orders which contradicted those of James Hart, the workforce was not idle. Having learned the basics of English from a pastor, I was well aware of the significance of the Lord's Day. The Europeans rested on this feather pillow at the end of the week. However, they did not celebrate mass: I was always afraid that a priest would sneak in amongst them. But, in the luggage of their masters, my spies had not reported any mass ornaments, sacrament boxes or priestly attire. However, I did not relax my surveillance because, after the Restoration, our government had not proclaimed religious freedom and, in public places, along the paths, here as throughout the empire, posters recalled the outlaw of Christianity and the bonuses promised to informants.

James Hart had never sought to quarrel with me about it. Perhaps he figured that by unearthing a history dating back three centuries he would compromise his mission. His mission? Whatever he claimed, it only consisted, and again on a title basis, of building - at the same time as the Tokyo-Yokohama section was being built on the big island - a piece of railway line from Etu-screp to ... to which region of the interior? To Sapporo, the English railway company had proposed. But the emperor doubted that one could pierce through the mountain, creep through the impenetrable thickets, Hokkaido constituting one of the only and immense forests as vast, Neufville told me, as a third of France.

Ultimately, the two sides had come to an agreement on some kind of wager. The railroad - the coolies called it the "burning road" - would go as far as it was possible to go, followed compliantly by the telegraph network. As for the section, while learning about the art of the French military, it was responsible for policing and the protection of workers. As far back as he could remember, Neufville told me, at least since the invention of this mode of locomotion, no

route had been so abandoned to the discretion of the engineers, particularly without adjudication or competition.

Where were we with our work? James Hart had made a six hundred yard curve radius over a length of two thousand yards. He was in the process of straightening it by a counter-curve to take the general direction of Sapporo, by means of three inflections intended to avoid hills that were too challenging. He wasn't attacking what he called the works of art yet. But the metal aprons, among other things, were at work, stored in shelters. We had received notification of the imperial desire to apply, in all domains, the last word of Western science: hence the chassepot rifles for my infantrymen, the tubular boiler locomotives ordered and, for the telegraphs, the conductors to American fluid: networks of twelve or fifteen double rows of wires superimposed at the top of the posts.

Neufville devoted that Sunday to having the young shoots of cherry trees planted, by his order, which had been sent to us by the model farms of Sapporo, and which had themselves come from Europe. He wanted to show us that these trees bear fruit while ours are content to flower. "Sunday work!" he called out to me as he walked through the exercise yard where, to kill this Lord's Day, I couldn't think of anything better than inspecting the section.

I feigned that I hadn't heard him. He stopped, then in a loud voice: "You jump with both feet from Louis XI to Robespierre, from pedestrian tracks to paths of iron and you quibble over Sunday!"

Landed in Yokohama in 1863 with Admiral Jaurès, bombarding Simonoseki on July 20, he had been the proud master of the sidewalk of this latter city, after the destruction of forts and stores by the Franco-Anglo-Dutch squadron.

To give myself some composure, I congratulated my soldiers on their very regular alignments: they were pretty much the same size, which facilitates the presentation on the line. But, incapable of replacing Neufville, or even Baudouvin, I limited myself to strict movements of the honors to be rendered.

“Present arms!”

Some imperious *hai hai*'s - station, station! - suddenly resounded along the track where James Hart was prancing on Trafalgar, his white horse prancing in red. Twenty servants made up his regular escort outside the ordeley. Every three minutes, in rotation, one of them detached himself from the column to march in front, where the danger was, for the samurai only attacked head-on, which still spread terror in the area.

“Rest arms! Present arms!” I yelled, swaying in this alternate, metronome or shuttle on the loom.

The previous two Sundays, I had at least been busy fighting against the implantation of this trait of manners. The day before, the same, but in a contrary sense: I had fought to impose January 16 as a public holiday. With July 18, this date is dedicated to ancestral worship. I would have to act similarly to the flowering of the cherry trees around April-May and especially to the birthdays of which, above all, that of the first emperor in our history. Until then, no respite.

Do not think that our people remain bent in toil throughout the year, for their life is summed up in these words: absence of need. Neither misery nor envy in the most disadvantaged classes. We derive from work what is sufficient for our subsistence and we care only about dying well.

At a trot, James Hart joined me: “For the time being, Captain Hizen ...” With his fist forward - it was his tick - he emphasized this limitation. “... For the time being, I don't care

about your zeal. Moreover, these overtime hours will not figure in my accounts. But I don't mean to sabotage what I have struggled to build.”

He led me to the place of sabotage. Simple negligence. Apprentices had laid English Kinder-type rails on the earthen platform and had undertaken the first layer of ballasting, when interest dictated it only after the second.

But why did James Hart no longer invoke his own responsibility, he who had held himself responsible for the flight of the three diggers? I asked and fully expected him to respond like an enraged turkey- the bird had just been introduced to our shores. But he smiled, seemingly disarmed: “So you recognize, Captain Hizen, that I am the master?”

He had scored a point. He called Antell and told him to connect the device offered by Commodore Perry, the man who, on his black ships, forced the opening of our ports.

Antell complied with Hart's orders, assisted by Derbeck, his second, much older than he. By riggings (the nature and excellence of which completely escaped me) they attempted to link us to Hakodate. Trials had proved successful in Nippon over thousands of yards and, thanks to this, the emperor was able to triumph over the shogun and his henchmen. Since then, we have striven to extend the benefits of this Whites' weapon between Tokyo and Yokohama, Soda and Goba.

“What are you going to wire to Hakodate, Chief Engineer? I asked.

“That I'm the only master.” Was he looking to take advantage of me by conniving with Antell and Derbeck, and how would I know his dispatch would actually be transmitted and received?

"Contact established," Antell announced.

"Contact broken," Derbeck said immediately.

The two men rummaged through a complex of coils, conductors, insulators, cylinders and levers.

“Someone cut the line,” Antell shouted. “No! Contact restored.”

He suddenly jumped and, on a piece of paper, transcribed the crackle of obscure language: - A lost message! A message for no one, since our line is not ready and there are no more coming from Hakodate. At central command, someone will have had fun learning the needle apparatus of Bréguet, who recently arrived from London.

“Always read,” Hart said. And Antell added to the riddle by delivering the contents of this message to the birds of the sky:

"Eighty steps a minute." That's all. Hart nodded, intrigued. I couldn't help but think of my poor infantrymen. "Eighty steps a minute." Already, at fifty, they were running out of breath. Not that they lack the training or the stamina. But, accustomed to straw sandals or wooden geta, they bled quickly in the heavy boots that they sometimes removed in secret to hang from their necks or from their belts. Hence the considerable lengthening of the columns after two hours of marching, although the French pace seemed to have been adjusted in proportion to our height, alas very small, compared to that of Hart for example.

Thinking of my soldiers thus, I remembered that since my last command they had frozen in stillness:

“Rest arms!”

What else did I have to teach them? And Neufville himself, what more had he taught them? The suspicion sometimes came to me that he was hiding the essence of his art from us, better still: the genius of Napoleon for whose intelligence we had asked his descendant, the Emperor of the French, a military mission now dispersed, but not long ago stationed at the

Utamura camp facing the 20th British Infantry Regiment, he, the occupational body. Certainly, according to one of our writers who recounted the Napoleonic epic, this great warlord is similar to our 16th century Hideyoshi, the latter having also shaken the strategy of his time. But are they the same notions of space, time, masses, communications?

“Contact cut!” Antell said again.

What if Antell only builds the telegraph network in preparation for an upcoming invasion of coalition forces from the West?

“Sabotage?” Hart interrupted.

And what if Hart used his railway to the same end?

“Contact restored. Contact broken.”

Annoyed, Hart ordered the line to be repaired at once.

“Present arms! Rest arms!”

Behind my back, Baudouvin hummed an arrogant refrain:

Enough power to earn one's bread.

To sweeten it, a few jams

When our adventures will come to end,

Enough to pay for four pine boards.

He was showing off his gala uniform which did not resemble mine copied from that of Neufville's. And my recruits, still dressed in Japanese style, coveted the green frock coat with a scarlet collar and facing, the blood-colored waistcoat "à la hussarde", the collarback with aurora cord, red flame and celadon plume, the pelisse bordered with black fur, the rifle and officer's satchel. But, like Neufville, he sported an imperial beard, a pointed tuft of hair under his lower lip.

While waiting for the line to be restored, Hart came after me again, always on the subject of Sunday, a word that did not exist in our vocabulary. In response, I begged him to reread the contract where no mention was made of a weekly pause. He held back a gesture of surprise: Sunday rest was taken for granted, he hadn't thought of it.

“I estimate a workman's output,” he said, “by the weight of material he can carry. However, those who are unemployed on Sundays are better off on Mondays.”

Monday arrived and the workers could not carry anything: an icy downpour soaked the bones and the skin. In Tokyo itself, as soon as it rains, passers-by take shelter, the streets are deserted and most shops are closed. Regardless of whether there are serious issues to be debated or large interests at stake, vessels that need to be loaded in the harbor or that are anxious to set sail. We just see a coolie, his large latanier hat on his head and the oil paper coat on his shoulders, dragging in his vehicle completely covered with the same waterproof material, a customer who suffocates there. And suppliers delay deliveries, officials do not return to their posts, appointments are canceled automatically.

Here, on the three worksites, the workers had given up everything. In my tent, I did not react, pinned in place by a force of inertia older than the sugi plants that bordered the railroad tracks. We too, had forgotten to stipulate, in the contracts, that rainy days would not count.

Because, the rainy day, was our Sunday.

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