

Bone Meat (1969)

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Translated from the Japanese by Lucy Lower



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It was last fall, but the woman could not seem to take it into her head to dispose of the belongings the man had left behind when he deserted her.

A day or two before, it had been raining. Four or five days later she noticed his umbrella and her own lying by the window. She had no recollection of putting the umbrellas there, so perhaps the man had done it. In her panic over being deserted, however, perhaps she had forgotten what she herself had done. She opened them, and found they had

dried completely. The woman carefully adjusted the folds of each, wound around the strap, and hooked the metal ring over the button. But after standing her own umbrella in the umbrella rack inside the shoe cupboard, she wrapped the man's umbrella in paper, along with another of his she had found there, tied them up with a string, and put them away in the closet.

It was, perhaps, around the same time that she threw away the man's toothbrush. One morning, as she was about to pick up her own toothbrush, her eyes fell on his lying beside it. The bristles at the end of the transparent, light-blue handle were bent outward from hard use. Once, he had come home with an assortment of six toothbrushes for the two of them which he had bought on sale. She also recalled having bought them toothbrushes two or three times. Whether the toothbrush that remained was one of the six the man had bought, she didn't know. But as she picked it up she remembered his purchase and, seeking an excuse for discarding it in the painfully worn-out bristles, dropped it in the wastebasket. Next, she threw in three or four old blades from his safety razor. She also removed the blade still clamped in the razor, on which were hardened bits of soap mixed with the man's whiskers, and discarded it. But the razor she wrapped in his dry towel, together with several small boxes of unused blades, and put them away in his underwear drawer.

That drawer was the top one in the woman's wardrobe. Previously, the man's clothes had hung inside together with hers, but before leaving he had collected them quickly. However, the woman later noticed a faded gray lizard-skin belt which he no longer wore, and that too she put in his underwear drawer.

There were other things of his that ought to have been put away. Two or three of his shirts were probably at the laundry, and she intended to go pick them up and put them in the drawer too, though she hadn't done it yet. She couldn't imagine he had gone to get them.... Atop the wardrobe lay his four clothing boxes, a couple of which seemed full; she put them in the closet in place of her own.



A Japanese futon consists of two parts: a padded mattress and a top quilt. Both are folded and stored away during the daytime. Unlike the Western variant (inspired by the Japanese original), there is no configurable, wooden frame.

The man's pillow stayed where it was for quite some time. Each night when the woman laid out the quilts, she first took the man's pillow out of the bedding closet, holding it by the opening of its oversized pillowcase, and put it back when she had finished taking out the quilts. And in the morning when she put the quilts away, she took it

out once again. This continued for several weeks before it occurred to her to pack it away. She washed the case and set the pillow in the winter sun, choosing as bright a day as possible; then, replacing it in its cover and putting it into a nylon bag, she laid it on top of the man's clothing boxes in the closet.

The woman knew perfectly well that the man would not be back. How many times had she been unable to refrain from saying things like "I'd be better off without you!" and meaning them. And one day when she had again been unable to restrain herself, the man had replied "So it seems, doesn't it?" and left. The remorse she felt afterward had been painful. She acutely regretted having become accustomed to speaking in that way, and having said those words once again the day the man took her up on them. But what made it so

painful, in retrospect, was that she had no right to regret, considering the man's attitude for some time past as well as his adroitness in taking advantage of her words. And the pain bereft her of the energy to pursue him.

The woman no longer wanted even to ask the man to come pick up his things. His reply was certain to be: "Do whatever you like with them." And, in fact, perhaps what he had left there he cared nothing about. As their relationship had begun to deepen and he stayed at her place for long intervals, he had little by little brought over personal things he needed. But even



Tokyo apartment complex (ca. 1960s)

after he was virtually living with her, he didn't move out of his own lodgings, where he must have still had a dresser and desk, several boxes of clothing, ski equipment, and bedding. He had taken away the everyday clothing he had kept for convenience in her wardrobe; furthermore, it seemed that he was rising to a higher position at work. Surely he felt no attachment to the worn-out things he had left behind.

The woman, however, was at a complete loss as to how to dispose of them. Aside from putting them away, she simply could not decide what to do with the objects the man had left lying about. If she called him to come for them, it would be equally disagreeable whether he told her to throw them out or said: "Are they still there? Well, just send them over." Even if someone else would see to it, getting in touch with the man like that was itself distasteful. Yet it was also disagreeable to take it upon oneself to throw away someone else's belongings-- still quite useful things-- or to have them carted off by a junk dealer. Besides, she couldn't give these things, which the man had abandoned along with herself, to someone else.

She regretted she had not had him take all of his belongings when he left. She regretted it with all her heart.

The first hints that the man was beginning to think of a life in which she had no part appeared even before his work took a turn for the better. His decision to abandon her had been reflected in both his private and public aspects; even the clothing he wore was all newly made. She felt the sympathy of a fellow-sufferer for the old clothes that he took no more notice of, and yet felt scorned by the very things she tried to pity. And thus the woman found even more unbearable these troublesome leftover belongings.

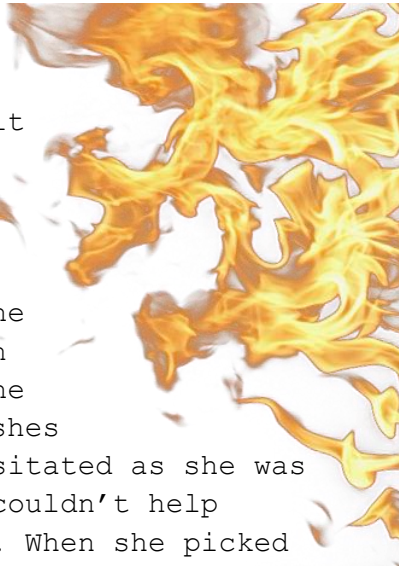
She had several times considered taking the man's underwear, which filled the top drawer of the wardrobe, and his woolen clothes that lay mixed with her own in the tea chest on the lower shelf in the closet, and making a single bundle of them, but the mere thought of it made her feel weary and feverish. If one were to open them and look, there might also be just enough room to put the man's underwear and woolen clothing in his suitcase which was on the tea chest, or in the four clothing boxes that she had put in place of her own on top of her suitcase on the upper shelf. The man's rucksack and canvas shoes, also on the upper shelf, might well fit into one of these too. But she didn't feel like opening any of them. She always felt that the things the man had left weighed upon her.

She was terribly envious when she thought of the man's delight as he abandoned her and his belongings with the single comment "So it seems." She had decided that the best method of dealing with the perplexing problem of the man's belongings was herself to abandon them entirely, along with her own, and move to a new place. But she didn't have the money to move to a new place or to buy all the necessary things for it. Although the woman would have liked to abandon it all, she could not, and even her own belongings and the place itself became repugnant to her.

The woman could only trust that circumstances would arise in which her lack of money presented no obstacle. She felt she would like to burn it all-- the man's things, and her own, and the place. If she too were to burn up with them, she thought, so much the better. But she merely hoped for it, and made no plans. Strangely, for a woman who wanted even herself to be destroyed in the conflagration, she was inclined to be wary of fire. She always recalled one late winter night in her childhood, when there was a fire close by and she saw an old man from the burning building, with a padded jacket slipped on over his flannel nightshirt,¹ being swept along in the crowd, barefoot on the asphalt where water streamed from the fire hoses.

¹ rather than central heat, space heating (through small kerosene heaters or the more traditional *kotatsu*) is the norm in Japanese homes (even to this day); as such, people tend to wear warmer clothes indoors in the winter than they do in the West (especially true since much Japanese housing is not insulated)

Now she was even more careful. She was tortured by the fear that if she were to start a fire accidentally it would seem like arson. When she went out, especially, she felt she had to check for fire hazards two or three times, all the more so if she was in a hurry. Once, after she had locked the door and taken a few steps, she suddenly became uneasy. Unlocking the door and reentering, she checked the outlets and gas jets. She held an already wetted ashtray under the faucet in the kitchen and ran more water in it until the ashes floated. Reassured, she went out, but she hesitated as she was about to drop the key into her handbag. She couldn't help recalling an impression she had had just now. When she picked up the ashtray she had been reminded of how she had smoked half a pack of cigarettes the man had left behind. Ordinarily, the woman smoked only her own brand. When she ran out, even if the man had some, she found it unsatisfying to make do with a brand not her own, and she would take the trouble to go and buy some. However, the day the man left, or perhaps the next day, when her cigarettes ran out, she was so distressed that she did not want to go. Her eyes fell on the half-empty pack the man had left, and in her agitation she thought, Oh good-- any brand, as long as there are cigarettes. All that the woman had disposed of among the things the man had left behind was the discarded toothbrush, the old razor blades, and the cigarettes. A moment before, when she had held the ashtray in her hands, she had the dreamlike feeling that everything would, happily, burn to ashes like the cigarettes. She felt then, suddenly, that when she had first locked the door she had already taken care of all possible fire hazards. Having gone out a second time, she found herself worrying that she might now have unthinkingly contributed to an outbreak of fire. And again she had to use her key.



Winter was almost over, and from time to time a springlike sun shone. The woman recalled how, last year about the same time on just such an afternoon, she and the man had gone out together. Where they had gone and with what purpose, she had forgotten, but she retained a vivid impression of the window of a shop where they had stopped to buy bread on the way home, and of various sorts of bread in steam-clouded cellophane wrappers.

As she waited for her bread, the woman looked again at the loaves heaped in the window and noticed a glass case next to them. In it were a number of whole chickens glowing in an electric

rotisserie, roasting as they revolved. She took the bread and, glancing around at the man, moved toward them.

"Are you going to buy some?" the man said.

"I thought I might," she replied.

"Are the ones here good?"

"Hmm, I've never bought any from here before..."

Inside the glass case each row of four chickens,² richly glazed, rose, turned, and sank back down. As they rose again, with hardly a trace of the severed necks, they seemed to be lifting their wings high. The row of plump breasts rose, then began dropping out of sight, and the bones that peeped out from the fat legs as they rose made the chickens



appear to be falling prostrate, palms up, withdrawing in shame.

The woman stood waiting for the man to speak and watched the movement of the chickens. The man, too, seemed to be watching them and said, finally: "Would you mind not buying any? Lately they're fattening chickens with female hormones. It seems a man shouldn't eat too much of it."

The woman wondered if he weren't thinking of American chickens. She had been present when one of his friends, home from the United States, had spoken about cooking for himself there. He said that he had often bought small fried shrimp that were sold cheaply at the market, and salted and ate them. He had often bought halves of roast chicken cheaply too. "They weren't so tasty, though. They're fattened with hormone injections," he had said, pantomiming an injection. The woman didn't remember for certain

² Regular meat eating (excluding seafood) was not a part of the typical daily Japanese diet even through the 1950s. This began to change in the 1960s (the greatest period of Japan's post-war economic growth), as domestic meat output doubled between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s with a concurrent rise in imports. Chicken, in particular, accounted for only 15 percent of all Japanese meat consumption in 1960, but by 1980 it comprised over a third. The consumption of meat as a convenience food (the first Japanese supermarket opening in 1957), in other words, is a marker of the increased prosperity of Japan's middle class during this time period. Smil, Vaclav and Kazuhiko Kobayashi. *Japan's Dietary Transition and Its Impacts*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012. (p. 51)

whether he had said simply "hormones" or "female hormones," nor did she know whether Japanese chickens were so treated or not, but she wondered if the man weren't misremembering that comment. She didn't say anything, though. She realized she could hardly claim they didn't often have roast chicken.

"I see. Well, shall we have oysters? On the half-shell?" Although that too they certainly had often enough.

"Yeah, that would be better," the man agreed this time.

They went into a department store. What with the heat from the steam that clouded the inside of the bread's cellophane wrapper, and the store's intemperate heating system, the woman breathed a sigh of relief when she stood before the cool abalone³-filled glass water tank of the shellfish stall in the basement. Pointing to the oysters in the glass case next to it, where frost had crystallized on the horizontal bars, she asked for ten of them. The clerk picked out ten of the larger ones and put them in a short, wide oilpaper sack, and then on a rear table wrapped it up in two sheets of paper. As she took the parcel, the woman could feel the same bulk and weight as always.

She had become skilled at opening the oyster shells. In the beginning the man had opened them, and she had enjoyed watching him do it. But he relied on strength alone to break open the shells, always leaving their contents in a sorry state, so the woman learned from someone else and undertook the task herself. With the rounded side down and the hinge toward her, she held one firmly on the cutting board, tilted at an angle away from her. The brownish color and rippled surface merged so that it was hard to tell the seam from the shell.



Searching for the point near the middle of the edge where the inside of the shell peeked through, or, if she couldn't find it, somewhere in that area, she inserted the knife forcefully, blade turned outward, taking care not to damage the oyster, then turned the blade sideways, slipped another small knife between the shells, and with the tip of that blade scraped downward, cutting the hinge. Then the top shell would loosen abruptly and she would catch a whiff of the seashore. But if the top shell had not been cut loose completely she once again turned the blade in the opposite direction and sawed upward. That usually did the trick.

³ an edible mollusk that has a shallow ear-shaped shell lined with mother-of-pearl

That evening, too, the woman opened the oyster shells in this way and laid them on a plate of ice cubes. She added lemon wedges and carried it to the table.

"Go ahead and have some," the man said, taking one from the center of the large plate, dropping it with a clatter on the small plate before him, and trickling lemon juice over it.

"Mm," she replied, but did not reach for one.

"No, really," the man continued, lifting the edge of the oyster he was about to eat with his fruit fork.

"Mm," she again replied, but took pleasure in not reaching for one.

She watched the man's hand, clenched so tightly around the fruit fork that it appeared even more delicate, as he maneuvered it right and left, trying to cut loose the hinge muscle. He seemed to have done it neatly. As he lifted the oyster to his mouth, seaweed still clinging to its shell, he worked it slightly with his fork and the sound carried the smell, taste, and freshness of the seashore.

"Is it good?" the woman asked. The man nodded, laid aside the shell, and with the same hand took another from atop the ice on the large plate. He placed it on his small plate and the woman squeezed lemon juice over it.

When he had progressed to his third and laid the shell on the table, the woman transferred one of the shells he had discarded to her own plate.

"Have some of these," said the man, indicating the large plate.



At this, she took even greater pleasure in not doing so, and instead scraped with her fork at the bit of muscle left by the man. At last she got a tiny piece of white meat on the tip of her fork, and rubbed it against her lips. She liked to hold the morsel of meat pressed firmly to her lips and feel

her tongue become instantly aroused with the desire to have its turn. The hinge muscle lay in a slight hollow of the shell, and she had still not taken quite all of the meat the man had left there. She again moved her fork toward it, urged on by lips and tongue that had already finished off the first piece. As her hand holding the fork responded violently to the impatience of the urging, she found herself struggling with the bit of meat. This made it that

much more difficult to get loose; once loosened, more difficult to get hold of; and when at last she lifted it to her lips, her hand trembled. Holding both her fork and the empty shell aloft in her hands, she savored the eager rivalry of her lips and tongue for the meat.

The woman did not yet lay aside the shell. All that was left of the oyster was a brownish arc in low relief, where some flesh was still attached. She sliced at it with her fork and, bringing the shell to her mouth, tipped it up. The woman felt that all the parts of her mouth were contending for the taste, the smell, the



freshness of the seashore. So it seemed, from the intensity of the rivalry in there. But it also felt to her as if all of these many parts stirred simultaneously with the pleasure of gratification. Before her, she could see nothing but the glistening inside of the shell, with its

matchless white, pale purple and blue, and yellow. All the parts of her mouth reverberated at once with pleasure when she put that last brownish ridge of meat to her lips, because it seemed that this fresh glistening flowed in, too, with a rush.

"Ah, that's good," the woman sighed, at last putting down the shell.

"That's because you're only eating the best part," the man said.

"True...." Nodding emphatically, she took the next shell that lay beside the man's plate.

"Shall I give you one?" the man suggested after a few minutes, speaking of the oysters on the bed of ice. "Or maybe I'd better not."

"Let me have just one," the woman said, holding her fork in one hand and a shell with a bit of meat attached in the other.

"For you, that'll be plenty." He pointed to the shell in her hand.

"Don't say that-- please give me one," she said.

The man quickly picked one off the ice and laid it with a clack on the small plate in front of her.

"Try it and see," he said. The woman, with this departure from the usual order of things, felt somewhat at a loss. He went on: "They don't seem to be as good as usual. I was hungry, so at first I didn't realize it."

The woman put down the shell she was holding and, cutting loose the oyster the man had laid on her plate, she sucked it from its shell. In an instant the entire cold, slippery thing slid through her mouth that had leapt so at just the tiny morsel of meat.

"How is it?" the man asked.

"Well, I can't really tell," she replied. What she could tell was that it was not nearly so good as the taste of the hinge muscle scraped from the empty shell or the other bit of meat that had given her such ecstasy. And it seemed distinctly inferior to the flavor, the smell, the freshness of the seashore called up in her mind by the voluptuous sound the man made when he raised the shell to his lips and sucked out the oyster. Even the flavor evoked by that sound amounted to little more than imagining a long-past and much-faded sensation. For the woman, the whole raw oyster always tasted the same. She could by no means tell by tasting one whether tonight's oysters were as good as usual.

"They don't seem quite so good to me," the man said.

The woman noticed that it was unusually bright and sunny for a winter's day. "Are they diseased, I wonder?"⁴

"No, you could tell right away. The taste is completely different."

The man took another from the large plate. He loosened the oyster, but did not squeeze lemon over it; picking it up in its shell, he raised it to his mouth with an air of examination.

"Maybe it's just me. They look all right, don't they?" he said. He laid one from the large plate onto the woman's plate and one on his own. There remained one more on the large plate. When she had finished hers, the woman ate that one too.

She gathered the empty shells on the large plate of melting ice and carried it to the drainboard. She washed the knife she had used in the preparation, put it in the dish drain, and picked up the cutting board from where she had left it. As she was rubbing it clean under running water at the faucet, something broad and sharp pricked her palm. She shut off the water and felt the board to see what it was, then took the board to the man.

⁴ Since oysters filter ocean water to feed and breathe, warmer than usual weather allows for higher bacteria levels in the water that can (in turn) contaminate the mollusk, especially if consumed raw. This is why health officials generally warn against eating raw oysters outside winter months.

"Look here." She took his wrist and placed the palm of his hand on the board. He withdrew it immediately.

"What happened? It's so rough," he said, touching it again lightly with his fingertips.

"This is where I opened the oysters. When I stick the knife in hard, the edges on the bottom are crushed and cut into it. It always happens." The woman spoke as though in a dream. It did happen every time, but for once, instead of smoothing it with pumice as usual,⁵ she couldn't resist bringing it to show him, because she felt dissatisfied that the scene they always played when they ate oysters on the half-shell had not been followed. The man took her hand and stroked it. She wished she might feel that on another part of her body.

"Do you think it's all right?" she asked.

"It's a cutting board. So it can't help getting bloody sometimes."

That evening, however, which ended without the usual fulfillment of the scene she associated with the taste, was the last time they ate oysters together. Before too many more days passed, spring was upon them and the raw-oyster season was over. The summer passed and autumn came, and by the time the air again began to turn cold, the man had already left.

This year as the days turned more and more springlike, the woman had grown very thin. The man's belongings, as always, remained with her. To him they were invisible, but they weighed upon her whenever she was at home. These troublesome belongings of his, and her own which for lack of money she could not abandon, and the place, became all the more unbearable to her, and she frequently saw herself being swept along the crowded late-night street flooded by the fire hoses, barefoot, with something thrown quickly over her nightgown.

It was about this time that the man's stored belongings, which weighed so on her conscious mind, gradually began to obtrude on her



⁵ Japanese cutting boards (and most east Asian cutting boards, for that matter) tend to be made of much softer woods (preserving the edge of the knife) compared to American cutting boards (usually made of hardwood for hygienic reasons-- since they do not absorb blood from raw meat or promote bacteria growth from the pits and grooves caused by cutting on them). A softwood board needs to be scraped clean after use (as depicted in the story).

vision. It was as though the top drawer in the wardrobe had changed into some semitransparent material, so that the man's underwear within it shone white and what seemed to be his socks shone black. Little gauze-covered windows appeared here and there in the thick paper sliding doors of the closet, and the bulky shapes of his suitcase, the umbrella package, his clothing boxes, his rucksack, and his pillow showed through. From within one of the drawers he had used in the desk, too, a plastic box began to be visible.

The woman herself thought that she must be terribly weak. At meals, she must try to eat as much as possible. She must gain some weight. She must get stronger. If she didn't, perhaps the wardrobe drawer, the closet door, and the drawer in the desk would turn to glass. Perhaps too the man's suitcase and clothing boxes would become glass cases, and his rucksack and canvas shoes would become like the nylon pillow cover, or a cellophane bag. At this rate, she might very well find herself being swept along barefoot in the night in the crowded street flooded by water from the fire hoses, with only something slipped on over her nightgown. It might happen she thought, if she didn't eat a lot at mealtimes and recover from this weakness.

But when she tried to carry out her resolution, the woman realized that she ate even less. It had always been a peculiarity of hers that when she was excited-- pleasantly or unpleasantly-- she would become strangely hungry. She seemed to give way to the excitement and gorge herself whenever she had been aggravated into saying "I'd be better off without you!" and meaning it, and especially during her agitation after the man left her. But she had by now lost the energy and the momentum of the excitement, and her appetite no longer asserted itself even in that form. No matter what was set before her, after one or two bites she could not proceed.

Since girlhood, the woman had hardly been what could be described as plump. However, from about the time the man began gradually bringing in his personal belongings, she had started to gain a little weight.

Their tastes concurred, and they both liked dishes with bones or with shells. The woman was poor, and the man's prospects, up until about the time he abandoned her, had not looked good, so in order to serve such dishes often, they had to economize on their other meals. Even so, it was mostly the bones or shells which went to the woman. But although she seldom ate richly, she began to gain weight.

The woman recalled this odd phenomenon as not odd in the least. The man would attack a boiled tuna tail avidly and set the plates rattling, and although the woman called what little was left a "bone-tail," the flavor that could be drawn from each hollow in

it made her want to exclaim: "Are there such flavors in this world!" Likewise the sight of the scarlet-wrapped slender morsel of flesh bursting from the single lobster claw granted her made her want to sigh. All those varied bone and shell dishes began to give her the feeling that a sense of taste had been awakened throughout her body; that all her senses had become so concentrated in her sense of taste that it was difficult for her even to move. And when she awoke the next morning, she felt her body brimming with a new vitality. It would have been odd had she not gained weight.



Even after she had noticed a change in the man's behavior and had become critical of him (though not yet to the point of being unable to refrain from saying "I'd be better off without you!"), the two of them continued to enjoy these dishes with bones or shells. Whether because of that or because their relationship had not yet deteriorated too badly, she continued to gain weight.

The day the man had said that males probably shouldn't eat too much chicken, she had deferred to him, although afterward he still brought home roast chicken any number of times. In the intervals between roast chickens, the woman sometimes fixed boiled tuna tail as before, or bought the head of a coastal sea bream and boiled it. Because of the season, that night was the last time they had oysters on the half-shell, but during the summer they often ate abalone. The man liked the whole abalone, and seemed to enjoy begrudging the woman the least morsel. For her part, she took intense pleasure in savoring the meager flavors of the big shell itself.

The woman had never been critical of him when they had dishes with bones or shells, because at those times he never made her anxious or brought her troubles to mind. He coveted meat even more fiercely than before, and she even more wholeheartedly savored the tiny bits of bone meat. They were a single organism, a union of objectively different parts, immersed in a dream. Sometimes both would sigh simultaneously from the excess of flavor, and then laugh so much that they had to put down the food they were holding.

The woman, now grown thin, realized that she longed only for the taste of those dishes. It was not only herself and his belongings that the man had deserted, but that taste as well. However, her sense of taste did not yet seem to understand that it had been abandoned. When she ordered one of the old dishes with bones or shells and something else was brought out, she rejected it at once, saying "No, not that!" The woman began to wonder if this

weren't how a mother, abandoned with a young child by her husband, must feel. And like the mother, she now took pity on the young child's unreasonableness, now scolded it, at times hugged the still uncomprehending child and cried; she even thought of killing the child and then committing suicide. Once, at her wit's end with the unreasonableness of her own sense of taste, she raptly imagined the man to be standing just beyond the grillwork partition devouring a chicken thigh, then tearing the stripped bones apart at the joint and throwing the pieces in to her, so that suddenly she felt she heard the sound as it hit the floor. If she could be sure that she would be able to share it, she thought, she wouldn't mind being swept along the crowded asphalt street barefoot where water streamed from the fire hoses, with only something slipped over her nightgown. Then, becoming aware of the semitransparent top drawer of the wardrobe, she stared at it, trembling. She lacked the courage to look around at the desk drawer, which of course must have become transparent, or at the little gauze-covered windows that must have appeared here and there in the thick paper doors.

"You going to burn this?" The voice seemed to belong to one of the children in front of the large cooperative trash incinerator.

"Yes, I am."

"Give it to me!"

"I can't do that. I have to burn it. Throw it in, please. I'll buy you an even fatter red pencil. That's right-- that's the way."

"Are you going to burn the clothing box?"

"The box? Yes, I am."

"Shall we help you?"

"Well, thank you. But you mustn't open it. I don't want the contents to get scattered around. Just burn it that way."

"OK. Everything in here can burn, huh?"

"Yes. Can you burn these up for me? I have a lot to bring over here."

"Bring all you want."

"That's great."

"Shall we help you carry it over?"

"Would you mind?"

"Of course not."

The words echoed pleasantly in her ears. It was an exhilarating feeling. Tomorrow when she awoke, she would no longer be troubled by anxiety over the semitransparent drawer or all the little gauze-covered windows in the thick paper doors, or whether they might be getting even worse. It was months since the woman had felt calm, and so exhilarated; the thought put her completely at ease.

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

"Aren't you the one who used the incinerator today?"

The woman realized that she hadn't checked on how the schoolchildren who had helped her had left things, but she knew it was part of the dream, so it was all right. Trying to keep from awakening and interrupting her dream, she kept her eyes shut, the quilt pulled up around her head, as she rose and went to the door.

"Won't the people who use it later have a hard time? Leaving a mountain of bones that way. We're supposed to clear out what's left unburned. Why, there are oyster shells alone to fill a bucket."

To fill a bucket-- what fraction of the oysters they had eaten together would that be? But there weren't very many from that last time, so when might these shells be from?

The siren of a fire engine wailed somewhere continuously. But what caused her dream to recede was less the siren than the words she had just heard in her dream. From the ashes of the man's belongings, that there should be so many bones and shells! "Is that so? Is that so?" she said nodding, and the siren, to which was added a furiously ringing bell, filled her ears. Was what she had been told in the dream perhaps prophetic? The bell stopped, and just then the siren arrived blaring under her window. But the woman, her eyes closed, nodding "Is that so? Is that so?" simply snuggled deeper into the quilt as it seemed to begin to smolder.

