I decided to visit Japan a final time. While there, I planned to spend the last of my money on delicacies, ryokan accommodations, and a train ticket to my family's old property, now a Western hotel. On my last night, I would slit my wrists in the garden.

The thought of dying alone didn't terrify me. I was not interested in online suicide clubs or charcoal briquettes. I wanted an old-fashioned death. No guns, nothing loud. I did not want the workers at my ryokan to have nightmares about gunshots in the night.

My vacation passed slowly. I wrapped myself in the delights of food and theatre, and spent hours watching frozen ponds and listening to snow pad across the roof. The visit to the Western hotel was unsurprising. I had seen photographs of the steel skyscraper before and it looked no better when right across the street from me. I did not go in, and had never intended to. With its glass windows glaring back the sun, it was difficult to imagine that my ancestors had ever lived here. The location of their wooden house and water mill, torn down decades ago, was unknown to me. I did not stay for more than a few minutes.

As I waited for my train home, I stared at the mirrors on the platform. The sight of my own body and clean-shaven face did not shame me. Why would such devices, which I looked into with regularity at home, prevent my suicide? Perhaps since I did not intend to toss myself in front of a bullet train, these mirrors did not apply.

That night, my last in Japan, I went to see a movie about a yûrei who haunted the man she had loved in life. The film ended when her lover, fleeing from her spirit, jumps off the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge. I left the theater bemused. I had chosen the movie at random by walking into the nearest open door. Yet, there they were, life and death spread before me again.

After the attendant had prepared my futon and left for the night, I dressed in my father's black suit and combed my hair. I shaved and then toweled off my face. My travel bag I placed upon the futon. When everything was tidy and no mess would remain for the staff to clean up in the morning, I took my lobster penknife and left the room. Once outside, I donned my shoes. The winter air sliced into my lungs as I walked in the garden, crunching through the snow. The stepping stones I had seen in the ryokan's catalogue were buried in ice somewhere nearby. The trees had shriveled some months ago and slept with their limbs now cloaked in white.

I selected a tree that stood a few feet above the ground and knelt. Its branches rested on my shoulders like bone-thin fingers. When I opened both ends of the lobster knife, I must have unsettled the branches because a thin powder of snow pattered onto my suit. I gripped the knife by its opal-and-pearl handle and dragged one of the blades down my left wrist in a vertical slash. With the other blade, I repeated the procedure more clumsily on my right. It did not hurt so much in the cold.

An admirer of beautiful things, I was taken by the pattern of red on white. I did not move my arms, but allowed the droplets to fall naturally. The privilege of seeing myself return to the earth gradually, through each plash, pleased me. Had the young men and women in their suicide pacts found the same comfort? Or the boy who had jumped in front of a train the week before? Their acts had been painful and sudden. They had had no time to reflect on their life and surroundings. They had jumped from one violence into another.

I lay down on the ground with my cheek cupped by snow. My body had begun to shiver, but I felt it only dimly, as a man lying on the shore feels the force of far-off waves through the lapping of the ocean on his toes.

It was with my eyes fixed upon a stone lantern and my thoughts on a distant beach that I saw the yûrei. She wore her burial garments, a plain white kimono and a triangular piece of cloth around her head. She did not reach for me or dangle her hands in front of her like the yûrei in theatre or art. Her black hair was unstirred by the wind and though she came toward me with the small, shuffling steps of a living woman, the hem of her kimono was not crusted with snow and, if the legends were right, she had no legs. Her eyes were looking elsewhere, at the pile of snow below my tree, perhaps, or the deadened branches that scraped against each other in the breeze. I thought her beautiful, like the red slush around my wrists.

I didn't know why she had come to watch me die. I did not recognize her, and so could not have been the one against whom she sought revenge. Nevertheless, she was here beside me and I had no interest in moving away. I possessed nothing, had done nothing, that I was so vain as to cherish. She could take my manhood and I would not care, only say, Please, it's yours, I'm not using it. In the whole of my existence, I had lived without the touch of a woman. I had tried. It was not possible. I had been driven out of brothels many times, tripping over my own waistband with laughter at my back, unable to quicken for women who did not care for me. My breath puffed out in the air and I could see my smoky life passing out through my lips, sucked away by the night's superior chill.

When I looked back to where I had first seen the yûrei, I saw thirty or forty more. All wore their burial kimono, and all of them were coming toward me. I experienced my first flush of terror, but I had by now lost too much blood to crawl away. My eyes saw their white faces through fog. Closing my eyes was useless. Still I saw them, as if my lids had become transparent.

It was only when I struggled to regain my carelessness that I realized they were doing nothing but gather around me. I also noticed that they were all very young, some of them just girls. The first yûrei looked like the oldest, and the rest seemed to respect her, keeping a small distance between their bodies and hers.

A flurry of snow rose around the yûrei and in the drifts I saw obake faces, male and young, and twisted. I thought I recognized the boy who had jumped onto the train tracks a week ago. He had been just as somber in the newspaper headshot.

All of us, alone in life and filled with a grief that we could not understand, had chosen our own ways out. The number around me grew until the dead filled the garden, overlapping trees and the stone lantern in their multitude. I imagined that if the guests inside the ryokan woke up now, they would find themselves sleeping

in a room thick with spirits.

As my body slipped away from my consciousness, the last thing I saw was the woman yûrei sliding her hand across my cheek. I did not feel it, but I pretended that I had, the touch I had wanted finally coming to me. Had I blood enough, I would have been aroused for the first time. But I did not, and I was not. Even dying virgins do not enjoy a special grace. Instead, as darkness blotted my eyes, I abandoned myself to imagination, I who had loved roughness and reality, and consumed my consciousness with the fantasy of a cold hand moving across my face, both tender and unbearable, chilling me with the death I did not yet possess, but toward which I was moving, and where I would soon arrive in seconds, a breath or two more to hover in the air, there. But not alone.

C. Asano grew up in Hawai'i on the island of Oahu . She graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a B.A . in English and is currently enrolled in the M.F.A. Fiction program at Mills College. This is her first national publication.