



How Many Miles to the Truth

(Original Title: Shinjitsu no 10 metoru temae)

Author: Honobu Yonezawa

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Genre: Mystery

Let me hear it—your story, what happened here.

Introduction and selling points:

Six short mysteries featuring freelance reporter Machi Tachiarai as a detective. Second place in the 2016 “Shukan bunshun 2020 misuterii besuto 10 (Weekly Bunshun 2020 Mystery Best 10)” domestic category, first place in the 2017 “Misuteri ga yomitai! (I Want to Read Mysteries!)” domestic category, and third place in the 2017 “Kono misuterii ga sugoi! (This Mystery is Amazing!)” domestic category. Nominated for the 155th Naoki Prize.

This collection of hard-hitting works with a social and contemporary feel stands out even among Yonezawa’s works. They deal with the state of the press and how to convey the truth. Together with the full-length work *O to sakasu* (The King and the Circus), also in which Machi Tachiarai plays a detective, this is an excellent collection that occupies a unique place in Yonezawa’s oeuvre.

Synopsis:

A case of the double suicide of a male and female high school student. Named after the place where they died, it was called the Renrui Joint Suicide. Tsuru, a member of the weekly magazine In-Depth's Editorial Department, joins up with freelance journalist Tachiarai and begins to cover the case, but gradually begins to feel like something is off concerning how the incident happened . . . What is Tachiarai thinking? A comical tragedy or grotesque delusion—a record of the activities of Machi Tachiarai, a journalist who faces and bears this pain herself. Nominated for the 155th Naoki Prize.

Author:

Honobu Yonezawa

Born in Gifu prefecture in 1978. In 2001, he made his debut by winning the 5th Kadokawa Gakuen Novel Award (Young Mystery & Horror Category) Encouragement Award for Hyouka (Ice Pop). Combining the appeal of teen novels and the fun of solving secrets, his style attracted attention and he established himself as a popular writer with works such as Shunki Gentei Ichigo Taruto Jiken (Spring Limited Strawberry Tart Incident). He won the 64th Mystery Writers of Japan Award for Oreta Ryukotsu (The Broken Dragonbone) in 2011, the 27th Yamamoto Shugoro Award for Mangan (Completion of the Vow) in 2014 followed by the 166th Naoki Award and 12th Yamada Futaro Award for Kokurojo (Black Prison Castle) in 2022. Mangan (Completion of the Vow) and O to sakasu (King and Circus) ranked first in the three major annual mystery rankings, and in addition, Kokurojo (Black Prison Castle) won first place in all four major annual mystery rankings and achieved the first four crowns in history. The other works include Inu ha Dokoda (Where is the Dog), Shinjitsu no 10 Metoru Temae (10 Meters before the Truth), Tsuiso Godansho (Recollection: Five Riddle Stories), Rikashiburu (Recursible), Hon to Kagi no Kisetu (A Season of Books and Keys) and Ai no Higeiki (The Tragedy of I).

Translations: Korean, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Thai

Excerpt:

1.

I was at Nagoya Station at dawn, when unusually early snow covered parts of the eastern half of Japan. About to take the 8 o'clock Shinano limited express to Shiojiri. Although several train lines' timetables were disrupted, mine was going to leave on time.

The person I was supposed to meet on the station platform wasn't around when the train pulled in. I look at my watch and pull out my cell phone. A breathless voice called out behind me when I brought up his phone number.

"Sorry I'm late."

I put away my phone and turned around.

"Glad you made it."

Yoshinari Fujisawa was out of breath. His down jacket wasn't zipped up, and his shirt buttons were in the wrong holes. His hair stood on end and was slightly greasy, and he was unshaven. His eyes were red, and dark shadows had appeared beneath them.

Fujisawa kept scratching his head.

"I'm really sorry."

"Don't worry about it. You were up late yesterday, no?"

"I mean, almost all night."

"Right. And then a trip to Yamanashi. Sorry about this."

The departure bell begins to ring. I gestured that we should hurry and headed to the Shinano's reserved seating.

"It's been a long time since I have worked with you, Tachiarai-san. Great to be together again."

As we were boarding, Fujisawa said something like that, but the loud sound of the train departing gave me an excuse not to reply.

The Shinano limited express headed down the Chuo Main Line. The reserved-seat cars were about 60% filled with young people enjoying themselves.

Fujisawa carefully lifted his camera bag onto the luggage rack. After looking around the car, he sank back into his seat and whispered.

“Surprisingly, there are a lot of passengers.”

“Yeah, there are. Even though it’s still early in the season.”

Last night, parts of Nagano, Yamanashi, and Gunma had snow, with an inch falling even downcountry. While it’s still early for winter sports and today is a weekday, the impatient university students seem to be heading for the ski slopes.

A red-eyed Fujisawa clapped his hands together and asked in a louder voice, “So, down to business. I actually don’t know, but what are we covering today?”

Fujisawa is a newcomer to the Ogaki Bureau of the Toyo Shimbun, to which I also belong. He was hired as a photographer, but at the newspaper, even photographers must gain at least one year of experience as a reporter. I am supposed to show him the ropes, but more than half a year has passed since he was assigned to me, and now he has his own job to do. These days I’m not always taking him around like I did when he started, but this time is special.

Fujisawa begins talking.

“I’ve been told that this is a FutureStair case.”

“That’s right.”

I kept looking forward and turned only my eyes toward him.

“Fujisawa-kun, do you know who Mari Hayasaka is?”

“The publicist for FutureStair. Called the ‘super-beauty PR.’ On TV a lot.”

I nodded.

Mari Hayasaka was the public relations manager for the venture company FutureStair. The younger sister of the president, Ichita Hayasaka, she was still a university student when he started the company.

With its rapid growth, she came to appear on TV and in weekly magazines like she was the company's mascot. She's charming and quick-witted. She would be all smiles on variety shows, and on news programs, she would answer commentators' mean-spirited questions with precision. However, as FutureStair's business began to deteriorate, naturally she began to appear less.

FutureStair went under four days ago. Various media outlets covered the news, but Mari Hayasaka did not appear.

"I've never met her, but what is she actually like?"

"A good kid. A really good kid."

"It's rare for you to give an honest compliment."

"I don't think so."

Suddenly, a suspicious look appears on Fujisawa's face.

"So why are you and I going to interview her?"

I looked straight at him. His cheeks turned red.

". . . I'm embarrassed to say that I was so busy yesterday and couldn't check the news. I must have said something dumb."

I didn't mean to give a look cold enough to make him ashamed. Actually, I was sorry that he had to go on a business trip after such a busy day yesterday. I shook my head.

"It's okay. It takes no time to explain. The president Ichita and his sister Mari have disappeared."

FutureStair was a three-year-old startup company. Its online delivery service brought daily necessities and medicines to older adults who struggle with everyday shopping.

President Ichita was 26 years old at its founding. Perhaps because the combination of a young president and services for the elderly was unusual, it was widely covered in business magazines, and he spoke confidently about the information revolution being a welfare revolution.

He accomplished what he set out to do. FutureStair grew rapidly and was listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's Mothers market with much fanfare. He also was developing a new business: with funds raised through membership fees, he contracted with farmers and livestock producers to deliver organic agricultural and livestock products. This business was not merely group purchasing but also had an investment aspect. Profits from selling surplus products were returned to the members.

In the end, it proved fatal to the company. Documents surfaced suggesting that while dividends had been paid as promised, new members' registration fees were used for them. It's thought that the agriculture and livestock business was a shoestring operation from early on.

The stock price began to fall after the September dividend was delayed, and, partially due to the company's inadequate explanation to shareholders, there was a series of daily variable price limits starting in mid-November. In December, FutureStair finally went out of business. Not only is Ichita being held accountable for his management, but he is also being treated by some media outlets as if he were a fraud who planned to go bankrupt.

"Ichita and Mari are from Ogaki."

"Oh really?"

Hearing this, Fujisawa still did not sound convinced at all. Not unreasonable. FutureStair's bankruptcy is big national news, and the Tokyo headquarters' society and economy desks are working on it. It is not the kind of topic that a bureau reporter would deal with.

He asks me sheepishly.

"The bureau chief knows that you are on this story, right?"

". . . I've received tacit approval, I believe."

“Wait a minute.”

He turns in his narrow seat to face me.

“So, you’re saying that we are going to fight with the head office to get comments from Mari Hayasaka?”

“‘Fight’ is a bit dramatic.”

I lowered my eyes.

“Some people might get angry.”

Fujisawa’s expression hardened slightly. I guess I should have told him up front.

“Listen, I feel bad about what I’ve done to you. You won’t get in trouble though—you’re here because I’ve forced you to come, right?—but if you’re worried, you can get off at the next station . . . I was actually going to tell you yesterday, but I couldn’t reach you.”

He then chuckled.

“No, it’s fine.”

“Fine?”

“I’m not worried. Knowing this is your runaway pet project makes it easy for me to be mentally prepared. I’m coming.”

“. . . Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. But if that’s the case, maybe I didn’t need the camera.”

An announcement is made that we will soon arrive at Tajimi. Not a single passenger in the reserved seating area stands up.

“It’d be very helpful if you came with me.”

Before we get to Tajimi, there was something I needed to tell him. I spoke quickly and continued.

“Listen to this before making a decision. I hate to say it, but Mari Hayasaka hasn’t been found yet. FutureStair has a subsidiary in Hiratsuka, and people in the industry have gathered there to find her and Ichita, but they’re nowhere to be seen.”

“Huh? Then why are we going to Kofu?”

“I have information. Hiratsuka’s not the place to be—at the very least Mari’s not there. I believe she’s in the Kofu area. Not positive though . . . With that in mind, think again about what you want to do.”

Fujisawa pursed his lips and said with apparent dissatisfaction,

“Tachiarai-san. I’m a newspaper company person myself.”

“ . . . ”

“I’m prepared to strike out.”

“Right.”

I noticed that I was beginning to smile. Thinking he was a newcomer at the company, I guess I had been too cautious.

“That was rude. I’m sorry.”

He nodded silently.

Outside the train window was the city center. The train slowed down and entered a surprisingly large station. While the train was stopped for a few dozen seconds, no one got up from their seats or boarded the train. From this point on, the railway line follows the Tosan Road into the mountains.

Fujisawa asked as I looked at the slowly moving scenery.

“One more thing I’d like to know.”

“What?”

“Why do you want to cover her so badly?”

Only a small amount of yesterday’s snow remained on the roofs of houses and in the fields.

I guessed he was asking why I would go so far as to do something that could threaten my status as a company employee. As I turned toward the window, I spoke.

“I once interviewed Mari Hayasaka when she was back to visit her parents. I was impressed by her cheerful atmosphere and unobtrusive intelligence. I talked to some of her classmates and old teachers. Everyone liked her. We’ve been getting calls at the bureau since the news broke that FutureStair is a fraudulent company. She wouldn’t do something fraudulent, and while both she and Ichita may have failed in business, they are not bad kids . . . People are interested in the Hayasaka siblings’ disappearance in the area covered by our bureau. So, it’s only right that we cover it.”

“Well . . . Perhaps that’s true.”

Fujisawa said that as if he was thinking deeply and then took a deep breath.

“. . . So, what’s this information you’ve got, then?”

The speed at which the Shinano limited express goes eastward seemed too slow for someone like me accustomed to the Shinkansen. At least there was plenty of time.