



## Kishibe no tabi [Riverbank Journey]

By Yumoto Kazumi

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### 岸辺の旅 湯本 香樹実

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One day, the first-person narrator of the story is in the kitchen making *shiratama* dumplings. Suddenly, there in the semidarkness behind the serving table is her husband, Yūsuke—he has come back. He has been missing ever since he disappeared three years previously but has returned to eat her dumplings, which he loved. Yet Yūsuke says he has been eaten by crabs at the bottom of the sea. And now he is preparing to go somewhere again.

“Come on, hurry up. It will soon be daybreak.”

The two pack their things and set out. The husband is no longer living but cannot die without closure. There is something he has to tell his wife, and their journey retraces the path he has taken to do so. The couple visits a newspaper delivery shop and a maker of *gyōza* meat dumplings; they then help out with the work in a tobacco field in the hills. They are interacting with people who know the husband, but it is hard to tell whether they are living or dead. However, as the couple drift along, the people they meet accept them completely naturally. While going back and forth between this world and the next, the narrator fills in the blanks of her husband’s three-year absence.

“I wanted to apologize properly,” says Yūsuke, gazing out to sea. As the two sit together on the shore, a Jacob’s ladder to heaven finally appears. The narrator tells Yūsuke’s soul that it is time to part, and, carrying both of their bags, once more starts to walk. This beautifully peaceful tale tells of a present-day descent into the realm of the dead. (SH)

## Yumoto Kazumi

Born in Tokyo in 1959. Her first novel, *Natsu no niwa: The Friends* [trans. *The Friends*], won newcomer’s prizes from the Japanese Association of Writers for Children and the Japan Juvenile Writers Association. *Natsu no niwa* has been made into a film and stage play, has been published in translation in over 10 countries, and has won the Mildred L. Batchelder Award and the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award.



### 湯本 香樹実

1959年東京都生まれ。デビュー作『夏の庭—The Friends』で日本児童文学者協会新人賞、児童文芸新人賞を受賞。同書は映画化・舞台化されるとともに世界10カ国以上で翻訳され、米・ミルドレッド・バachelダ一賞、ボストン・グローブ＝ホーン・ブック賞などを受賞した。

ある日、「私」が台所でしらたまを作っていると、配膳台の奥の薄暗がりには夫の優介がふいに現れた。優介は3年前に姿を消して行方知れずだったが、好物のしらたまを食べるために戻ってきたのだ。ただし優介は、自分は水底で蟹に食われたと言う。そしてまたどこかへ行こうとしている。

<さあいそいで。夜が明けきってしまう>

二人は荷造りをして旅に出る。それはすでに死者となったが死にきれずにいる優介が妻にある一言を伝えるために歩いた道のりをさかのぼる旅だった。新聞配達店、餃子屋……二人は夫を知る人を訪ね歩き、山のタバコ畑では農作業も手伝った。彼らは生者とも死者ともつかない。だが、あてもなくさまよう夫婦をごく自然に受け入れていた。彼岸と此岸しがんを行きつ戻りつする中で、「私」は夫の3年間の不在を埋めていく。

<ちゃんとあやまりたかった>。優介は沖のほうを見ながら妻に言った。海辺でたまたむ二人の前にやがて天につながるヤコブの梯子はししが現れる。優介の魂に別れを告げた「私」は、二人分の荷物を持って再び歩き出す。現代の「冥界下り」を描く、美しく静かな物語だ。(SH)

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