



The silkworm's skin

A I O Z A K I



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31 July

Hands and arms are in sight more than the face, but it is difficult to notice the changes. The moles on my palm that I had when I was child have disappeared, and the moles on the back of my hand have increased. I did not notice this happen. About to turn 30, I thought that I want to be able to love the changes that happen in my body. But I kind of didn't like the sudden change, so I wanted to start being careful about my body.

The government's declaration of a state of emergency was finished, the first long trip was to the sea. I was into playing and when I came to my senses, both my arms were tingling and red. My skin had been thoroughly burned by the sun, and it hurt so much that I had to wrap them in a wet towel all day. The skin of my arms twitched and wrinkled just by bending it a little. Only my arms seemed to have aged in an instant. The tingling pain lasted for several days, and after only the heat remained.

When the remaining heat disappeared, itching began. When I looked closely, my skin colour was dull. After scratching, white lines remained on my skin and traced it with my finger. The sensations in the fingers are delicate. I felt a thin gap between my skin and my finger. It's like I am touching something that is not me. My sense of finger reminds me of a silkworm larva.

When I was in elementary school, I often went to a friend's house in the neighbourhood to see silkworms. I remember the rain-like sound of silkworm larvae eating mulberry leaves in the dark room and the smell of fresh green. I gently pick them up and place them on my hand and arm, then slide my finger along the back of the silkworm larva. As I enjoyed their soft, elastic, cool and smooth skin, they moved as if searching for mulberry leaves. I felt sorry for them and put them back where they were. Once I remembered in detail the texture of them and the feel of their legs sucking on my arm, I wanted to touch them again. While researching silkworms on my laptop, I carefully peel off my skin. There was a new skin under that, shiny and slightly darker than before.

16 August

During the hottest part of the afternoon, the silkworm larvae were delivered to my apartment. They were in the kind of plastic container used for yakisoba noodles from street stalls. The larvae as small as 3cm, raise their heads and move around. They are as thin as a twig. In my memory, the silkworm larva was about the size of my finger, and it was plump, so it felt like I was looking at another kind of larva. I moved 22 larvae to a cardboard box, very carefully to avoid crushing them. While reading a booklet on how to raise them, I reached out for the artificial feed that was delivered with them. When I opened the package, which looked like a chunk of thick sausage, it smelled like cheese. It seems that vitamins and minerals are added to powdered mulberry leaves and steamed. I really wanted to try growing them with mulberry leaves, but I knew from research they were hard to come by, and I gave up because once they ate mulberry leaves, they would stop eating artificial feed. I watched the larvae eat the clay-like artificial feed until my neck hurt.

19 August

It can be confirmed that larvae are getting bigger every few hours rather than every day. I have known that they grow fast, but they eat a lot more than I expected and it feels refreshing to watch. I could stare at silkworm larvae for hours as they silently and intensely ate food. Their shape became closer to my memory. Their eating moves are very fascinating, but also the defecating moves. Artificial food that looked like a sausage, entered the silkworm larva and was digested, when the buttocks with a tail-like thing called tail horns were lifted slightly and the anus was opened, regular cylindrical masses with flower-like patterns smoothly came out of the buttocks. The excrement of silkworm larvae that eat mulberry leaves contains a large amount of high-quality chlorophyll, which is extracted and used to colour food and is also used as a herbal medicine. Is it possible to use the faeces of them that eat artificial food that way also? Why does the faeces of a creature that only eats one thing feel so clean?

21 August

There are 5 levels of developmental stages called 'instars', and each stage advances with each moulting. The 4th-instar larvae have started moulting into 5th-instar larvae. They eat a lot of food and plump up, when the wrinkles on the body are enough to disappear, they stop eating. Larvae are spitting threads, supporting the body and stopping moving around. The head held high and the front legs putting together, as if praying. We call this term '眠 (sleep)'. Occasionally they are squeezing and shaking their body.

Is it the same as the feeling of our body shaking when we do a big stretch to relax a stiff body? The moulting is closer when the body, which is plump, shrivels up a little and a new face begins to appear at the base of the face,

under the skin. The old skin takes off from the split, most plump section near the head. The silkworm larva which had just finished moulting, looked shiny and glossy.

23 August

The appetite of larvae in the 5th-instar is great. They eat 90% of their lifetime food at this time. They eat more and more, excrete more and more, and grow bigger and bigger. It is pleasant to see them eat a lot. They also produce as much faeces as they eat. The larva that moulted the slowest did not eat much and its movements were awkward. It would be a pity if it was stamped on by other larvae twice their size, so I moved to a different container to keep an eye on it.

27 August

One by one, they stop eating and start to move their heads in a figure of ∞ and continue to spin their threads. The larvae, which had only moved around food, roam outside of the cardboard box looking for a place to be a cocoon. So I built a shelf called 'Mabushi', which is made of corrugated cardboard assembled in a grid pattern. When they find a space that fits them they cocoon in it. The faeces that came out after they stopped eating gradually became watery and finally became clear pee. A thin membrane made up of overlapping threads, is pushed outwards by the whole body to form a round shape. The sound of the threads rubbing against each other is soothing. The body shrivels, the skin becomes translucent, and continuing to spit threads, becomes more and more invisible. I was saddened by the feeling of death rather than the spectacular image of transformation.

The larva that had been moved to another container earlier a few days ago, hardly grew at all. There was another larva that was acting strangely.

It was shaking in small trembling movements when it squeezed its body tightly. The dorsal side of its body has a part like the sand vein of a shrimp from the head to the buttocks. In healthy silkworm larvae, the body fluid is pumped out at a constant rhythm, like the pulse of a human being. The abnormal larva had a slower rhythm and were more feeble. They also spin their thread in a faltering manner. After a while, I found that the body knot around the head became black. It might be sick. The larva was shivering painfully with its body cramped in the mabushi. When I gently pinched it to move it, its body had lost its elasticity like clay. The black colour spread from its head to its buttocks. The blackened head was no longer moving and the still white buttocks moved slightly. The body fluids were barely pulsating, but only the hindmost leg was firmly gripping the ground.

1 September

I breathed on the larva. The hind legs, which had been moving slightly in waves, were no longer moving. I buried the larva in a thyme plant on the balcony.

Apart from those two larvae, 20 of them seem to have finished making their cocoons. I can no longer see what is going on inside, but when I stare at them they sometimes shake, so they may still be spinning threads.

2 September

The larva, which had remained small, died after vomiting liquid. All the water in its body seemed to have been expelled, the larva became only skin. I gently picked it up and buried it in a lavender pot on the balcony.

4 September

The silkworms have been selective breeding by humans so that they can harvest a lot of silk thread. Due to this, the cocoons are sometimes too

strong for the moths to come out on their own. When a week has passed since cocooning, the cocoon has stabilised as a pupa. I remove it from the Mabushi, and make holes in the cocoon at both ends with a knife. I move my hand carefully so as not to damage the pupa inside. The cocoon was harder and lighter than I had imagined, The threads became denser towards the inside and were as smooth as the surface of hard paper. When I see such magnificent cocoons, I worry that some of the larvae are running out of strength inside, as they keep spinning out their threads without eating anything. I peeked in fearfully, I saw that they had all completely formed pupae, and the skin from the last instar larva they had shed was neatly attached to the side, as if folded up. I rolled the cocoons a little on my hand, they swung their hips round and round. The cocoons were removed from the Mabushi, so the cocoons trembled when the pupae moved. It must be close to hatching.

9 September

When I woke up in the morning, I found a hatchling moth clinging to its cocoon and stretching its wings. It is probably the first larva who made a cocoon. The figure, covered in fluffy, ecru-coloured fur, looked so fragile that I felt like it should not be touched. It was half the size when it was a larva and the way its appearance changed was like that of a completely different creature. But I could see that same rhythm of bodily fluids flowing languidly through the knots in its abdomen. From its buttocks, brown pee vigorously flew out. It reached the outside of the box and smelled nothing.

10 September

The silkworm moths hatched in the order in which they made cocoons. The males hatch before the females. The hatched moths are docile and

hardly move, so the females are probably not yet ready.

The first female moth hatched at dawn. Her belly is twice the size of the male's and she looks plump and hard to move. A translucent yellow membrane protrudes from the gaps between the knots in the abdomen, probably due to the presence of eggs. After she had been out of the cocoon completely and her wings fully extended for a while, the males, who had been clinging to the cocoon and barely moving, began to flap their wings and move in unison. They bend their bellies and turn in circles to look for the female. During this time, the female barely moves. She has an organ similar to the pistil of a flower on her bottom, from which she emits pheromones. She inflates and deflates that organ and flaps her wings slightly to release pheromones. This movement is called the matching dance. When the male reached the female, turning around, touching her body with his genital at the end of his bottom. When the genitals were squeezed together, they both shook their wings in a steady rhythm, just like the pulsation of bodily fluids. After a few hours of mating, the tightly attached genitalia are removed by human hands in a twisting motion. This is done in order to leave the body strength for spawning, and is said to be called “割愛 katsu-ai (the characters means ‘separate’ and ‘love’)”. It means unavoidably omitting something that you really don't want to omit. Carefully take hold of the mating moths, imagining how their genitals are attached, and carefully separate them so as not to damage their bodies. It was too difficult and exactly 割愛. And I realised too late that it was something I didn't have to do, because I am not a sericulturist. I left one pair mating and watched them, and after a few hours they separated on their own.

I started keeping the males and the females in separate boxes. Males will continue to move around in circles looking for females while their sense of touch detects the female's pheromones. Even if their bottom fur

is frayed, even after they have mated and split, they keep circling around, bumping into each other and checking with their bottoms to see if it's a female. They dance in unison, flapping their wings and dragging their bellies, causing scales and fur to fly up.

12 September

After the mating, a female began to spawn. She seems to be looking for a good place to lay eggs by finely and dexterously moving the egg tube surrounded by pheromones at the tip of her bottom. Cream-coloured flat eggs, like liver oil candy, are laid in targeted areas. The eggs that had just come out were shiny, wet and briefly gorgeous. When this wetness dries, it acts as a glue and sticks together stiffly. Some moths lay rows of eggs, while others lay irregularly. How do they decide? The silkworm moths show more individuality than when they were larvae.

16 September

The moth which had curled wings died. When they are living, they have elasticity. The legs of the dead moth are easily detached and its body collapses, even though they had such a tight grip on my skin.

The moth wandered awkwardly with a gesture as if looking for a place to lay eggs, and appeared to go behind the paper laid down for egg-laying. I thought it might be a place of calm, so I left it there until it stopped moving completely. The female moths may tend to move around a lot before they die. After laying eggs, their bellies lost their fullness and they became the same size as the male. The moth flew for a moment just before it died. Not in a fluffy way, but flapping wings, slipping on the ground, suddenly launching up around 30 cm and falling straight down. I could only watch over it.

2 October

The last of the moth has stopped moving. And larvae started to hatch from the eggs. They are so small that they could be easily crushed without noticing.

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2 August

When I had finished peeling the skin after getting a bad sunburn and thinking about silkworms, I put on sunscreen well and went to the sea again. Because a friend wanted to see the sea, my partner planned to go there and send videos to the friend. So I joined him.

We left our place past noon and arrived at the sea past 4 pm, the sun was still high, and the sand accumulated heat from the sun and baked us from below as well. The beach was sparsely populated and few people were swimming in such hot weather. The waves were calm and there were a few people standing on surfboards and sliding on the surface of the water. The sky was blue and almost cloudless, but the sea looked somewhat dull and dreary as I approached. I like the sea, but when did I stop wanting to go into the sea? When I was a child, in the car on the drive home, I liked to lick my lips that soaked in the sea a lot, to see how the taste of the sea faded. The vague colours of the sea recall Munch's Dance of Life. In this painting, people are dancing with the sea behind them. As I gaze into this picture, I find myself quietly uneasy. It is supposed to depict a cycle of birth, reproduction and death. It overlaps with various images of the sea, ancient, modern, all over the world. Stones colliding with each other in the sea waves and shaving little by little reminds me of the bird's digestion. Birds have no teeth. Some of them grind the swallowed food with sand and pebbles in a digestive organ called a gizzard. Indigestible pebbles help digest food. Then the sea began to seem like a huge digestive organ. I was walking along the surf to see if anything good had washed up, a group of

young people were shouting and running into the sea. They went further and further away and only their heads were floating in the sea.

On the train home, my eyes are drawn to people wearing a thin fabric mask for summer. Every time they breathe in, the mask sucked in their face and the movement of their breathing is clearly visible. They all seem to be gill breathing. Licking my lips, they're slightly tidal, probably from the sea breeze. I felt a little bit like I was into the sea.

3 October

A road leading straight south from Tsujido Station leads to the sea. Enoshima Island is seen on the left. The coast I usually go to has Enoshima on the right, so it was refreshing. If I have to say then, the beach here seems wider and the waves rougher. Some parts of rough waves were splashing and the horizon looked hazy. Lukewarm breezes and cold breezes from the sea, separately reached me, along with the smell of the sea. The temperature was just right for wearing light long sleeves. The surfers floating like a flock of seabirds far away, waiting for the waves. Will they come here even when it gets cold? The fast and furious tip of the foaming wave looks like a caterpillar crawling with great speed. I kept watching the mass of black, muddy waves as the sand rolled up, stretched out and sucked into the ground. Suddenly a shiny black object was left behind after the wave. I was curious and went to have a look, but it was a cheap pair of sunglasses. The sea in Fujisawa was still dull and dreary today.

30 October

From Fujisawa, take the Odakyu Enoshima Line train to Sagami-Ohno and walk from Chogo Station to Nanatsugi Shrine, which is also said to have a 'shrine for protecting silkworms'. As it heads a little inland, I

thought it would be more hilly, but it is not at all, and the landscape is flat. The area was popular for silkworm farming, so it could not have been that undulating. There is only a convenience store and a pachinko parlour in front of Chogo station, it felt like a local place. Straight from the station to the south-east, it reaches the Nanatsugi Shrine. After passing through a residential area where each house has a large property, and crossing Machida Kaido street, the road becomes suddenly narrower, and surrounded by trees. Quaint old buildings stand in regular rows, with short trees spreading their branches like roofs. Not so long ago, this place could have smelled sweetly of grapes. At the end of the path, when I saw rice fields that had been harvested in front, the Nanatsugi Shrine was on the left side.

The area around the entrance gate looked very desolate, with bird cages, magazines and other waste in several places. I heard crackling noises here and there, which made me uneasy. I observed the situation, acorns were falling from above by the light wind and bouncing against the ground. Go through the entrance gate and look for the small shrine for silkworms. It was located by the guardians (called komainu) at the top of the stairs. “護蠶祠 (protect silkworm shrine)” was carved on the front. On the side, it says that the Shimotakakura Silkworm Farming Association built it on 3 April 1923 to memorialise the 10th anniversary of its foundation, The names of those involved were carved around the bottom part. Silkworm farming in Fujisawa was said to have peaked at this time. A white fox ornament was placed at this small shrine. This may be because in the Shinto, the bountiful harvest and the fox are connected.

Two visitors came to pray while I observed. I was surprised to see visitors. I thought almost no people would come because the main shrine building was shuttered and with graffiti, there was a lot of waste. Shrines dedicated to Minamoto no Yoritomo are scattered around the Sakai River,

which flows through Fujisawa City, and these are collectively called ‘鯖 /SABA (mackerel) SHRINES’. Yoritomo is called the deity of the 左馬 /SAMA or SABA (symbol of good fortune), which is said to be one of the origin of the name. In the past, when an epidemic broke out, people would visit Saba shrines to pray to ward off the disease. Visitors may have come because of the Corona epidemic. When I saw the character 馬 (horse), I thought it would be suitable for silkworms, which have a pattern on their bodies that looks like a horse’s hoof. As I watched people taking their time to pray slowly, I was suddenly reminded of silkworm larvae’s period of ‘眠 (sleep)’, which looks like praying. We say ‘a well-slept child is a well-grown child’. I think that ‘眠 (sleep)’ included this kind of wish. What do silkworms pray for?

Before leaving, I took a few more photos of the small shrine, and while doing so, I found on it, in a chipped hollow, a small empty cocoon. It was shaped like a slightly crushed bird’s egg, with the top neatly cut in a circular manner. This shape seems like a cocoon of the *Monema flavescens*. A quail-egg-like cocoon with a distinct stylish dark brown pattern that is often found in illustrated books, but no pattern, so it is probably a different species. In contrast to the silkworm, which has tail horns but no poison, the *Monema flavescens* has several strong poisonous stingers all over its body. It is somewhat interesting that its cocoon is attached to a shrine built to protect the silkworm. Larvae of the *Monema flavescens* are brightly coloured, have horn-like spines and look much like nudibranchs. The silkworm-like creature in the sea is a ナマコ (sea cucumber). The word ‘コ’ mean is the same as カイコ (silkworm larva), long ago, caterpillar-like creatures were all called ‘ko’. When attacked, the sea cucumbers spit out guts and white thread-like toxic material from their mouths and bodies. This is also part of their organs. Sea cucumbers can regenerate these parts, allowing them to escape while predators eat or

are poisoned by these expelled parts. What a strong and flexible creature.

Two weeks later, unable to explore the area around the shrine, I went to Nanatsugi Shrine again. Rice and salt were offered at the silkworm shrine. The rice could be from the rice fields nearby. All the waste that had been thrown around was gone.

27 November

I had not seen sea cucumbers and nudibranchs for a while. I decided to go to the Enoshima Aquarium. It is located along the coast, and there are some notices on the wall inside of the aquarium that show how many metres above sea level I am. Every time I notice it in the narrow corridors, I feel a little breathless. Two hours passed quickly when I took my time looking at the various marine creatures, and I came around the exit without finding a sea cucumber and a nudibranch. I asked the receptionist, she told me where the nudibranch tanks were and that sea cucumbers were everywhere in tanks, although they were not introduced because they were just there as tank cleaners. On display was a *Glaucus atlanticus*. It was neither a larva nor a slug-like form of the *Monema flavescens*, and had fins that looked like limbs. Because of this appearance, they are called Sea Swallow, Blue Angel or Blue Dragon. Its small body, about one centimetre long, reflects light in many different colours, as if it were covered with polarised pearls. They are so beautiful that people might just touch them, but they have strong poison, as they eat the Portuguese Man O’ War which has strong poison.

Sea cucumbers were hard to find. After three rounds inside the aquarium, I finally found one sunk in the depths of a dimly lit tank. Once one was found, some sea cucumbers were found in various places in the tanks more easily that had not been visible before. They are all completely motionless, and those in the sand can be seen feeding with their mouths

submerged in the sand with transparent tentacles. They can survive on little nutrition by not moving. Before the Corona pandemic, people could touch sea cucumbers in the touch pool section. I want to touch a live sea cucumber one day.

In the souvenir area before the exit, there was a large machine filled with a lot of bouncy balls. A clear blue ball with various sea creatures inside. They look like eggs. I put money in to try it out and turned the wheel, and a bouncy ball came out with a shark in it. On the way home, I tried bouncing it on the ground and putting it in the sea, but something was different. I realised I was attracted to the way the machine was packed full of balls.

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26 September - 11 December

While I was at a loss about what to do with the eggs laid by the silkworm moths, it was the morning of the second week, when they were supposed to hatch. When I went to check the eggs, I found a few millimetre-long larvae on its shell of eggs, black and hairy all over, swaying in a raised-head like prayer pose. Even as newborns, they were already exactly silkworms. It was not possible to get silk from the cocoons from which the moths hatched, so I decided to raise them, until they became cocoons. Observe how the young, which had a black and glossy head, come out of the egg, then gently scratch them with a soft brush and move them to another place. Eight of the moths were females, so if 500~700 eggs were laid per female, there would be about 4,000~5,600 if they all hatched. There were about half of the dormant eggs that would not hatch in the cycle, which soon turned black. Still, 2000 eggs. That's around 100 times the number I raised last time. There must be 100 or more hatched now. It is about to hatch from the eggs even as I think about it. I impulsively decided to boil the rest of the eggs. I put the eggs into the boiling water. During

boiling, eggs were leaving the paper, and dancing in the hot water. The steam rising above the pot smelled like nothing I had ever smelled before.

The small silkworm larvae quickly grew again and finally began to spin thread. Collect silkworms in one place every cleaning. Their entanglement attracts me every time. There were so many silkworm larvae, so I started to prepare Mabushi before they moved everywhere in the room for making cocoons. After a week, most of the larvae became cocoons and I removed them from the Mabushi. Shake the cocoon lightly in the ear, and if it makes a dry sound, it has completely become pupa. As I did not have time to take the threads off, I stored them in the freezer. When I was clearing away the emptied Mabushi, I noticed a few silkworms making cocoons behind desks and on shelves. It was already December and the time for hatching had long passed. So I put them all together on a plate, but was surprised to find that one of them had hatched on its own. Sometimes it moved a little. I put it on my hand to see if it was cold but suddenly it started to lay eggs. Vaguely I thought that moths lay eggs after mating, so I thought they would not lay eggs without mating, but chickens also lay eggs without mating and my body also ovulates every month. The moth moved to my fingertips and laid its eggs in a rhythmical manner. I watched her lay eggs for a while.

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7 January

Boil the cocoons. Take out the cocoons stored in the freezer and prepare to take the silk from the cocoons on the balcony. I had heard that the smell of boiling cocoons was awful, so I decided to work outside, even though it was cold. The smell of incense is flowing as the graveyard is just across the hedge. At first 50 cocoons are placed in a pot with water, as they cannot all fit. The temperature was so low today that the steam was rising even before it boiled. When I boiled the eggs of silkworms I had never smelled

anything like it, and I felt like I was doing something terrifying. But this smell of steam is like something else. It's not a bad smell either, it smells like when cooking. It is like when vegetables with a strong flavour are cooked with a simple seasoning, but also I feel a slight raw fish smell. The pupa that comes out after the silk has been removed is sometimes selected in good condition and cooked in tsukudani (food boiled in soy sauce and sugar). But this time, it's been a long time since the harvest, so I didn't cook them. I felt that I had wasted them again. Change the fire to low heat, touch the cocoon and take the silk from where it starts to unravel. I pulled silk from about 20 cocoons, spinned it into a single thread and wrapped it around a wooden board. Although each strand is very thin, when spinning them together they are stronger than expected. The still watery threads, when put together, were as shiny as wet hair. The silkworm is said to spin out 1,500 m of thread over three days. When cocoons have become so thin that the pupa inside can be seen clearly, the hot water turns brown, about the colour of soy sauce, and my fingers soaked in silkworm broth had gotten wrinkled and pruney. I smelled my hand and remembered that I already knew this smell. It is the smell of enoki mushrooms when they are dried, and then roasted in a pan for long term preservation. This way, for some reason, it tastes like squid. The used pupae were wrapped in kitchen paper rather than buried in the pots on the balcony, and were placed in the trash bin along with a sense of gratitude and other food waste. It felt natural to do so.

It is very cold today but the sun is shining and the air is dry. I remembered I had some enoki mushrooms in the fridge. I loosen them, put them on a cutting board and put them in the sun on the balcony. The day before yesterday I turned 30.

Gratitude

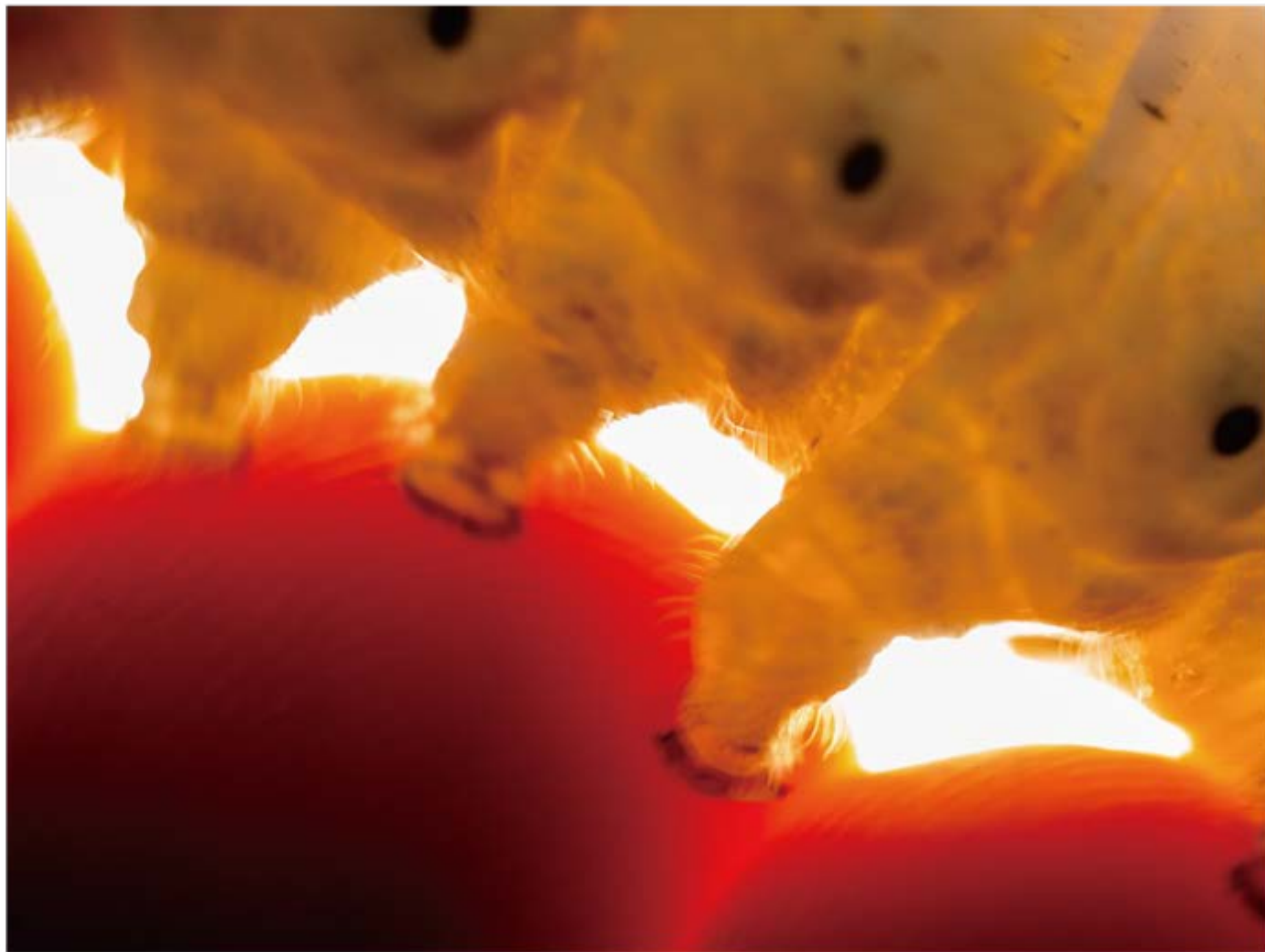
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ついた。一二月になり羽化のタイミングはだいぶ過ぎていたので、まとめてお皿の上に置いていたら、いつの間にか一頭だけ自力で羽化していたようで驚いた。ほとんど動かさず、寒くないだろうかと手に乗せると卵を産み始めた。交尾しないと卵は産まないのかと思っていたが、交尾しなくても鶏も卵を産むし、私の体も毎月排卵している。指先へ移動した蚕はリズムよく卵を生みつけていく。しばらくの間蚕の産卵を見守った。

一月七日

繭を茹でる。冷凍庫に保存してあった繭を取り出してベランダで糸取りの準備をする。繭を茹でる匂いはくさいと聞いていたので、寒いけど外で作業することにした。生垣をはさんだ向こうがすぐ墓地なので線香の香りが流れてくる。全部は入りきらないのでひとまず50個の繭を水が入った鍋に入れる。気温が低いので沸騰する前からもくもくと湯気があがった。蚕の卵を茹でた時は嗅いだことのない匂いがして、いっそう恐ろしいことをしている気持ちになったけど、この湯気の匂いは何かに似ている。どちらかといえば臭くなくて、料理をしている時のような匂いだ。旨味の濃い野菜を煮ている時のような、でもどこか少し生臭さも感じる。糸を取り終えて出てきたサナギは状態の良いものを選んで佃煮にして食べることもあるそうだが、収穫してからだいぶ時間が経つのでやめておく。もつたいないことをしてしまった。火を弱めて繭を掻き、ほぐれたところから糸を取り始める。20個ほどの繭から糸をひっぱり、一つにまとめて手頃な木の板に巻きつけてみた。一本一本は細いのに、よ

り合わせると思った以上に丈夫な糸だ。まだ水を含んだ糸は、まとまると濡れた髪みたいで艶やかだった。蚕は三日かけて1500メートルの糸を吐くという。中のサナギがはつきり見えるまで糸を取る頃、お湯は醤油を入れたくらいに茶色くなり、蚕の出汁にたっぷり浸かった指はシワシワにふやけていた。手の匂いを嗅いで何に似ているのか思い出した。エノキを保存するためにカラカラになるまで干してからフライパンで炒った時の匂いだ。こうするとなぜだかスルメイカのような味になる。すっかり出し殻になった蛹たちはベランダの鉢に埋めるより自然とキッチンペーパーに包んで、感謝の気持ちと他の生ゴミと一緒にゴミ箱の中へいれてしまった。

今日はとても寒いけど日差しがあって空気は乾燥している。冷蔵庫の中にエノキがあるのを思い出した。ほぐして、まな板の上のせてベランダで日に当てる。一昨日私は三〇歳になった。

展示されていたのはアオミノウミウシだった。見たかったイラガの幼虫でも、昔よく見たナメクジのような形でもなく、手足のように見える鱗がついていて別の生き物に見える。この見た目から、Sea Swallow や Blue Angel、Blue Dragon などと呼ばれているそう。1センチほどの小さい体は偏光パールをまぶしたみたいで、いろんな色に輝いて見えた。海で見かけたらしい触れてしまえば美しいさだが、猛毒の刺胞を持つカツオノエボシなどを食べるため、彼らも毒を持っている。

ナマコはなかなか見つからなかった。館内を三回往復したところでようやく薄暗い水槽の奥に沈んでいる一匹を見つけることができた。一匹見つけたら二匹、三匹と今まで見えていなかったナマコが水槽のいろんなところにいるのがわかった。みんな全く動かず、砂地にいるものは口から透明な触手を砂の中に潜らせて食事をしている様子がみえる。動かない彼らは、ほんの少しの栄養で生きることができるといえる。コロナ前までならタッチプールのコーナーでナマコに触れたそう。いつか生きてるナマコに触りたい。

出口手前のお土産コーナーには大きなスーパーボールが詰まった機械があった。青く透き通った球の中にいろんな海の生き物が入っている。卵みたいだ。試しにひとつ、お金を入れて回してみたらサメの入ったものが出てきた。帰り道、地面に弾ませてみたり、海に入れてみたりしたけれど、手に取るとどうにもときめきが薄い。たくさん詰まっている様に惹かれたのだとわかった。

九月二六日 ― 十二月二日

蚕たちが産んだ卵をすぐにどうにかすることができなかった。悩んでいるうちに、きっかり二週間目の朝、様子を見に行くと卵の上にはわらわらと、全身に毛が生えた黒い2〜3ミリほどの幼虫が、頭を上げたお祈りのポーズで揺れていた。生まれたばかりでも立派な蚕だった。成虫が羽化した繭からは糸を取ることができなかつたので、彼らを繭になるまで育てることにした。黒くつやりとした頭だけ出ていた子が卵から出て来る様子を観察してから、柔らかい筆でそと搔いて別の場所に移す。成虫になったうちの八匹がメスだったので、一頭あたり500〜700個の卵を産むと全部孵れば4000〜5600頭くらいになる。産卵後少し経つと黒く変色するその年には孵らない休眠卵が半分ほどはあったが、それでも2000。前に育てた数の百倍だ。今孵つたのは百頭かそれ以上だろうか。考えている間にも蚕たちは卵から孵ろうとしている。私は衝動的に残りの卵を茹でることにした。強火でポコポコと沸騰する湯の中に卵を入れていく。紙の上に産みつけられた卵は茹でているうちに紙から離れて湯の中で踊りだす。鍋の上ののぼる湯気は嗅いだことのない匂いがした。

小さかった蚕はまたあつという間に大きくなり、ついに糸を吐くまでになった。掃除の度に一つのところにまとめた蚕が絡み合う姿には毎回惹きつけられてしまう。たくさん蚕が営繭のために部屋中を徘徊し始める前にまぶしの準備に取り掛かる。一週間経つとほとんどが繭になり、まぶしから繭を外した。耳元で繭を軽く振ってカラカラと乾いた音がすれば蛹になったとわかる。糸を取る時間になかつたので、冷凍庫に入れて保存した。

蚕たちがいなくなつたまぶしを片付けていたら何頭か、机の裏や棚の上に繭を作っているのに気が

てくると左手に七ツ木神社があった。鳥居の周りには鳥籠や雑誌などのゴミがいくつか置かれていて、とても寂れた印象だった。そこかしこでパチパチと音がして不安な気持ちになり様子をうかがうと、少し風が吹くだけで上からどんぐりが降っては地面にぶつかり跳ねていた。鳥居をくぐって祠を探すと、階段を登ったところにある狛犬のそばに祠があった。「護蠶祠」と正面には彫られていて、側面に下高倉養蚕組合が創立一〇周年を記念して大正一二年（一九二三年）四月三日に建てたこと、下の方にほぐると囲むように関係者の名前が記されていた。藤沢の養蚕はこの頃がピークだったそうだが、祠には白い狐の置物が置かれていた。五穀豊穰と狐が関係しているからだろうか。祠を見ている間に参拝者がふたり来た。本殿のような建物には落書きがされたシャツターが下りていて、ゴミも多いし、ほとんど人は来ないと思っていたので驚いた。藤沢市内に流れる境川の周辺には源義朝を祀った神社が点在していて、これらを総称して「サバ神社」と呼ぶそう。サバは鯖と書くが、義朝は左馬（サマ・サバ）の神と呼ばれるので、それが由来なのではないかと言われている。疫病が流行すると七つの鯖神社を巡り厄除け、疫病払いをする民族信仰があり、それを七鯖参りといったらしい。コロナの流行もあって参拝者がいるのかもしれない。左馬という字を見て、馬の蹄のような模様がある蚕にぴたりだと思った。時間をかけてゆっくりお祈りをする人を見て、ふと、脱皮直前の祈るような「眠」の蚕の姿を思い出した。眠という呼び方には、寝る子は育つという願いも込められていたのだろうか。あの蚕たちは何を祈るのだろうか。

帰る前に、もう一度祠の写真を残しておこうと何枚か撮影をしていたら、欠けた窪みに空になった小さな繭がくっついて見つけた。すこし潰れた卵のような形で、上が綺麗に丸く切り取られている。これはイラガの繭だ。焦げ茶色のはっきりとした模様が、おしゃれなウズラの卵みみたいな繭

がよく凶鑑には載っているが、模様は褪せて消えてしまったようだ。尾角はあるが毒を持たない蚕とは対照的に、強い毒針をいくつも持つイラガの繭が、蚕を守るために建てられた祠にくっついているのはなんだか面白い。鮮やかな色でツノのような棘を持つイラガの幼虫はウミウシにもよく似ている。海にいる蚕のようなものはナマコだろうか。ナマコのコは蚕が由来らしい。ナマコは攻撃されると口から（場合によっては体を溶かして）内臓や毒のある白い糸状の腸の一部を吐き出す。これらは再生することができるので、捕食者がそれを食べたり毒にやられたりしている間に逃げるといふ。なんと強くしなやかな生き物だろう。

神社の周辺を散策できなかったので二週間後、もう一度七ツ次神社へ行った。蚕の祠にはお米と塩がお供えされていた。この辺りの田んぼでとれたお米だろうか。周りに投げ捨てられていたゴミは全てなくなっていた。

一月二七日

ナマコとウミウシはしばらく見ていなかったの、実際に見られそうな江ノ島水族館へいく。海岸沿いにある江ノ島水族館はふとしたところに海抜何メートルかを示すプレートが貼ってあった。頻繁に自分が海抜何メートルのところにいるか意識すると少しだけ息が詰まりそうになる。じっくり見ていたらあつという間に二時間が経っていて、どちらも見つけられないまま出口の方まで来てしまった。受付の人に尋ねると、ウミウシの水槽の場所と、ナマコについては紹介されていないけど清掃要員としていろんな水槽に入っていると教えてくれた。

昼過ぎに家を出たら着いたのは4時すぎだったけど、まだまだ日は高く遮るものがない砂浜は、充分に熱されて下からも熱が登ってくる。浜はまばらに人がいて、こんなに暑いのに泳いでいる人は少ない。波が穏やかだからサーフボードの上に立って海面を滑る人がちらほらいた。雲はほとんどなく空は青いのに、近づいて行くと海はどこかどんよりして見える。海に入るのは好きだったのに、いつから入らなくなったのだろう。家に帰るまでの車の中、海水に浸かってふやけきった唇に染み込んだ潮の味を、舐めては少しづつ薄れていくのを確かめるのが好きだった。ぼんやりとした海の曖昧な色を見てみると、ムンクの「生命のダンス」を思い出す。この海のような曖昧な色をした海を背景にダンスをする人々が描かれていて、絵の細部を見ていくと静かに不安な気持ちになる。誕生と繁殖、死が織りなす循環が描かれているそう。古今東西、海に抱く様々なイメージと重なり合う。海辺の、寄せては返す水の流れの中で石同士ぶつかり合い、少しづつ削れて行く様子は鳥の消化を思い起こす。いくつかの種類の子は、砂や小石を食べ物と一緒に飲み込み、砂嚢と呼ばれる消化器官ですり碎く。消化できない小石が食べ物の消化を助けるのだ。そうするとだんだん海は大きな消化器官にも思えてくる。何かいいものが流されてないか波打ち際を歩いていたら若い人たちが声を上げ、走りながら海に入っていく。ぐんぐん沖のほうに出て、頭だけぶかぶか浮いていた。

帰りの電車、夏向けの薄い生地マスクをつけている人に目がゆく。息を吸うたびに顔に生地が吸いついて呼吸の動きがよく見える。みんな鰓呼吸になったみたいだ。唇を舐めると潮風に当たったからか、ほんのり潮っぽい。少しだけ海に入った気分になった。

一〇月三日

辻堂駅からまっすぐ南に伸びた道を行くと海に出る。江ノ島が左手に見えた。いつも行く海岸は右手に江の島があったので新鮮だ。どちらかといえばこちらの方が浜が広く波が荒い気がする。波の荒いところで飛沫が舞って水平線が霞んで見えた。海から来る生暖かい潮の匂いがする風と、ひんやりとした空気が混ざり切らないうちに体に届く。薄手の長袖がちょうど良い気温だ。遠くで海鳥の群れみために浮かんで波を待つサーファーたちは、寒くなってもいるのだろうか。泡立つ波の先が猛スピードで芋虫が這っているように見える。砂が巻き上げられて黒く濁った波が、ざあっと伸びて地面に吸われる様子を飽きずに眺めていたら、黒く光るものが波が去ったあとに取り残された。気になって見に行くと安っぽいサングラスだった。藤沢の海はやっぱり今日もどんよりしていた。

一〇月三日

藤沢から小田急江ノ島線相模大野行きに乗り、長後駅から歩いて「蚕を守る祠」があるという七ツ木神社に向かう。少し内陸に向かうので、坂が多くなるかと思ったら全然そんなことはなく、平らな景色が続く。養蚕が盛んだった土地なので水捌けは良いのだろう。長後は駅前にコンビニとパチンコ店が目立つくらいでローカルな印象だった。南東に向けて伸びる道をまっすぐ歩いていけば七ツ木神社に着くようだ。一軒一軒の敷地が広い住宅街を通して、町田街道を突っ切ると樹木に囲まれ道幅は途端に狭くなった。古い趣のある建物が並び、背の低い樹が屋根のように枝を広げて規則正しく並んでいる。少し前ならぶどうの甘い匂いがしたのだろうか。突き当たりに稲刈りを終えた田んぼが見え

私は、これがやらなくてもいいことだとようやく気がつく。ひと組だけ交尾したままにして様子を見ていたら数時間後には離れていた。

オスとメスを別々の箱に離す。オスはメスのフェロモンを触覚で感知する間はメスを探してぐるぐると動き続けてしまう。お尻の毛が擦り切れていても、交尾が終わって割愛した後でもぐるぐる回って、お互いの体がぶつかる度にお尻を当ててメスカどうか確認し続ける。一斉に羽ばたきながらお腹を引きずって踊り出すので、鱗粉と毛が舞い上がった。

九月一二日

交尾を終えたメスが産卵を始めた。お尻の先のフェロモンに囲まれた卵管を細かく器用に動かして、良さそうな場所を探しているようだ。肝油ドロップみたいなきりム色の平べったい卵が、狙った場所に生み落とされていく。出てきたばかりの卵は艶々と濡れていた。卵を覆うこの水分が乾くと糊の役割をしてガッチリと産み落とされた場所にくっつく。自分のいるところを中心に円を描くように並べて産卵する蚕と、どんどん移動し産卵する蚕がいて、どんなふうに決めているのだろう。羽化した蚕は、幼虫だった時よりも個性が見える。

九月一六日

羽がカールした蚕が死んでしまった。生きているものには弾力がある。あんなにぎゅっと肌を掴んでいたのに、死んでしまった蚕の足は簡単にとれてしまう。産卵場所を探すような仕草でぎこちなく徘徊し、産卵用に敷いた紙の裏に入っていく様子があった。落ち着く場所なのかもしれないと思ったので完全に動かなくなるまでそのままにしておいた。メスは死ぬ前によく動く傾向があるのかもしれない。卵を産み終えてお腹のふくらみが無くなり、オスと変わらぬ大きい大きさになった。産卵をじっくり観察したメスは、死んでしまう少し前に一瞬だけ飛んだ。ふわりとではなく、羽ばたきながら地面を滑り、30センチほどまっすぐ打ち上がってそのまま落ちる。私はその様子を見守ることしかできなかった。

一〇月二日

成虫になった最後の一匹が動かなくなった。卵から孵った幼虫は気づかないうちに潰してしまいうまくない小さい。

*

八月二日

ひどい日焼けをして蚕のことを考えながら皮を剥き終わったころ、しっかりと日焼け止めを塗ってもう一度海に行った。一緒に暮らしている人が、海が見たいと言った友人に藤沢の海の映像を送ると聞いて、私も海が見たくなったのだ。

たくさんの絹糸を収穫できるように品種改良されてきた蚕は、繭が丈夫になりすぎて自力で出られないことがあるそうだ。営繭から一週間が経ち、蛹になって安定する頃にまぶしから繭を外し、両端をナイフで切って穴を開ける。中の蛹を傷つけないように慎重に手を動かす。繭は想像していたものより硬く軽やかで、内側に向かうにつれて糸の密度が増し、すべすべの紙くらいになめらかだった。これだけ立派な繭を見て、何も食わずに糸を吐き続けて中で力尽いてしまっている蚕がいるのではないかと心配になる。恐る恐る覗き込むと、みんなしつかり蛹になって、そばには脱ぎ終わった幼虫の時の皮が置まれるようにきれいにくっついていていた。手の上で繭をすこし転がすとお尻をぐるぐる振り回す。周りの固定していた糸がなくなっただので、蛹が動くどぶるぶると繭が震えた。そろそろ羽化が近いのだろう。

九月九日

朝起きると羽化した蚕が繭にしがみついで羽を伸ばしていた。一番初めに繭を作った子だろう。生成色のふわふわとした毛に覆われた姿はとても脆そうで、触れてはいけない気がした。幼虫だった時の半分くらいの大きさと変わりように全く別の生き物に思えたけど、お腹の節の隙間から体液がぐんぐんと流れるあのリズムが見えた。お尻から茶色いおしっこがぴゅーっと飛ぶ。箱の外まで飛んだそれは何の匂いもしなかった。

九月一〇日

蚕は繭を作った順に羽化する。オスがメスより先に孵化すると言われているが、孵化した蚕はおとなしくほとんど動かないので、メスはまだなのだろう。

九月一日

明け方に最初のメスが羽化した。お腹がオスの倍はあって、ぽってりと動きにくそうにしている。お腹の節の隙間から半透明の黄色い膜がはみ出ているのは、卵があるからだろうか。繭から完全に出て羽が伸びきるまでしばらく経つと、ほとんど動かなかったオスたちが一斉に羽ばたきながら動き出した。お腹を曲げてぐるぐると旋回してメスを探す。この間メスはほとんど動かず、お尻から雌蕊のような形をした器官を出して、ふくらませたり、萎ませたり、わずかに羽ばたいたりしてフェロモンを飛ばす。これが「婚礼ダンス matching dance」と呼ばれているそうだ。メスにたどり着いたオスは、お尻の先にある生殖器でメスの体を確認しながら回る。お互いの生殖器が出会ったところでぎゅっつくつき、体液のリズムのように一定の間隔で羽を震わせた。交尾が終わって数時間経過したらくつきき合った生殖器を人の手で捻るようにはずす。産卵のための体力を残すために行うのだが、これを「割愛」と言うそうだ。惜しいと思うものを思い切って捨てたり手放したりすることや、愛着の気持ちを断ち切るという言葉があるが、がっちり交じり合う蚕を、少しでも体へのダメージが小さくなるように、そっと両手で掴んで生殖器がどんなふうにくつききあっているのか、想像しながらはずすのはまさに割愛だった。心をすり減らしながら何ペアも割愛した後で、養蚕業をしたいわけではない

もりもり食べて、ぐんぐん大きくなっていく。食べる様子は見ていて気持ちよい。食べたのと同じくらい、たくさん糞も出した。

脱皮が一番遅かった蚕はあまり餌を食べず、動きがぎこちない。倍ほど体の大きいほかの蚕にふまれてはかわいそうなので、別の容器に移して様子を見る。

八月二七日

一頭、また一頭と食べなくなって、∞の字に頭を動かし糸を吐き続ける。ごはんの上しか移動しなかった蚕が、繭になる場所を探して縦横無尽に徘徊する。「まぶし」と呼ばれる蚕の営繭のための柵をダンボールを格子状に組んで作り、動きまわる蚕を移動した。食べなくなってから出てくる糞はだんだんと水っぽくなって、最後には透明なおしっこになった。糸が重なり薄い膜状になると、全体でぐーっと押し広げて丸い形を作っていく。プチプチと糸が擦れる音が心地良い。体が縮んで、透きとおって、繭を作ってどんどん姿が見えなくなる。変身のどこか華々しいイメージよりも死を感じて悲しくなった。

早めに別の場所に移した蚕はほとんど大きくなりません、もう一頭様子がおかしい蚕がいた。ぎゅっと体に力を入れては小刻みに震える。背中側の頭からお尻にかけてエビの背腸のような箇所がある。元気な蚕は人間の脈みたいに体液が一定のリズムで、ぐんぐんと送り出されていく動きが見取れる。様子がおかしい蚕はこのリズムが遅く、弱々しかった。糸を吐くのもたどたどしい。しばらくすると頭の模様のそばの体の節にある隙間から、じわっと黒くなってきているのが見えた。病気が打っていなかったけど一番後ろの足だけがしつかり地面を掴んでいた。

九月一日

息を吹きかけると波打つようにわずかに動いた部分も、今日はもう動かなくなっていたので、ベランダにあるタイムの鉢植えの中に埋めた。小さい蚕と黒くなって死んでしまった一匹を除いて二〇匹は繭を作り終えたようだ。中の様子はもう見えないが、じっと見ていると繭が揺れる時があるのでまだ糸を吐いているのかもしれない。

九月二日

小さいままだった蚕が水を吐いて死んだ。体中の水分が吐き出されて、お尻の方は脱皮した後の皮みたいになっていた。そとつままで、ベランダのラベンダーの鉢の中に埋めた。

九月四日

八月一六日

蚕が届いたのは午後が一番暑さが厳しい時間帯だった。

段ボールには4センチおきくらいに穴がいくつも開けられていて、蚕の幼虫は屋台の焼きそばが入っているようなプラスチックの容器に入っていた。3センチほどの小さい幼虫は頭を上げてゆらゆらと動いている。記憶の中の蚕は小指か人差し指ほどある、むっちりとしたものだったので、小枝のように細いそれは別の幼虫を見ている気持ちになった。潰さないようにつまむか、指に乗るように誘導して二二頭を段ボールの飼育ケースへ移動する。飼いが書かれたA4サイズの冊子を読みながら、一緒に届いた人工飼料に手を伸ばす。太いソーセージの塊のような包みを割くとチーズのような匂いがした。桑の葉の粉末にビタミンやミネラルを加え、蒸したものだそう。本当は桑の葉で育ててみがかったけど手に入れるのが大変なものと、一度桑の葉を食べると人工飼料は食べなくなってしまおうと諦めた。今日は飼育ケースの中に置いた粘土みたいな人工飼料を一生懸命に食べる幼虫を、首が痛くなるまで眺めていた。

2

八月一九日

日ごとというより数時間単位で大きくなっているのが確認できる。成長が早いとは聞いていたけど、気持ち良いほどによく食べて大きくなる。一生懸命に食べる姿は何時間も見入ってしまう。だんだんと記憶の中の蚕に近づいてきた。食べる姿も良いが排泄の動きも魅力的だ。ソーセージの塊みたいだった人工飼料が体の中に入り、尾角と呼ばれる尻尾のようなものがあったお尻を少し上げて肛門が開く。

すると規則性のある円柱の塊がずりりと出てくる。桑の葉を食べる蚕の糞には良質な葉緑素がたくさん含まれており、抽出して食品の着色や、蚕沙と呼ばれて漢方としても使われるそう。人工飼料を食べた蚕の糞も使えるのだろうか。一つのものしか食べない生き物のうんこは、なんでこんなにきれいな感じがするのだろうか。

八月二一日

幼虫の成長段階は脱皮ごととに区切られる。4齢から5齢（終齢）になる脱皮が始まった。たくさん食べてパンパンにふくらんで、皺がなくなつたものから順々に食べるのをやめると、吐いた糸で足場を作り、体を支えて動き回らなくなる。この状態を「眠」と呼ぶ。頭を高く挙げて前の足を合わせる様子はお祈りをしているみたいだ。時折ギョツと体に力を入れてぶるぶると揺れる。こわばつた体をほぐすように大きく伸びをした時に、体が震える感じと同じだろうか。パンパンだった体が少し萎んで、顔の根元の皮膚の下に新しい顔が見え始めたら脱皮は近い。顔のそばの一番ふくらんだ節の皮膚が裂け、そこから古い皮膚を脱いでゆく。包まれていたからか、脱皮が終わったばかりの蚕はつやつやと光を受けて見えた。

3

八月二三日

5令になった蚕の食欲はすごい。この時期に生涯の90%の飼料を食べるらしい。

七月三一日

手や腕は顔よりもよく視界に入るのに小さな変化には気がつきにくい。小さい頃にあった手のひらの黒子はいつの間にか消えていて、手の甲には黒子が増えた。もうすぐ三〇歳になる自分の皮膚を、変化も愛せるように、でも急激な変化は少し辛い気もして必要以上日焼けしないように気をつけようと思った矢先、つい日焼け止めを塗らずに過ごしてしまった。

久しぶりの遠出は海だった。遊ぶのに夢中で、気がついた時には両腕はひりひりと熱を持ち、真っ赤になっていた。じっくり日差しに焼かれた両腕は濡れタオルを巻かねばいられないほどに痛い。ひきつる肌は少し曲げただけでしわが刻まれる。腕だけ一瞬で年をとったようだ。ひりひりした痛みは数日続き、気がついたら熱だけが残っていた。

ほてりも消えた頃、痒みが出てきた。よく見ると肌の色はくすんでいる。搔いた後が白く残り指で皮膚をなぞる。指の感覚はすごい。わずかに薄い隔たりを感じて、自分じゃないものに触っている気持ちになる。指先が思い出すこれは蚕の幼虫だ。小学生の時、近所の友達の家で蚕を見せてもらいに行った。薄暗い部屋の中、桑の葉を食む雨が降っているみたいな音と、青い匂いを思い出す。そつとつまんで手に乗せ、蚕の背に指を滑らせる。柔らかで弾力があり、ひんやりすべすべした肌を楽しんでいると、桑の葉を探しているように動くので可哀想になって元いた場所へ戻す。手をつかんだ吸盤のような足がぶつぶつと離れていくのを思い出したら、もう一度蚕を触りたくなっていった。蚕についてパソコンで調べながら浮き上がった皮を慎重に剥いていく。剥いたら白くなると思ったけど前より暗くなった肌がキラキラと覗いた。



A : O Z A K I



空の肌

A I O Z A K I