

THE THOUSAND  
AUTUMNS OF JACOB  
DE ZOET

A Novel

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David Mitchell



R A N D O M   H O U S E

*Ghostwritten*

*Number9Dream*

*Cloud Atlas*

*Black Swan Green*

DAVID MITCHELL

*The Thousand Autumns of  
Jacob de Zoet*

A NOVEL



RANDOM HOUSE

NEW YORK



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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*author's note*

The port of Batavia on the island of Java was the headquarters of the Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC in Dutch, literally “United East Indian Company”) and the point of embarkation and return for VOC ships sailing the Nagasaki run. During the Japanese occupation of the Indonesian archipelago during World War II, Batavia was renamed Jakarta.

Throughout the novel, the lunar calendar is used to denote Japanese dates. The lunar calendar could be anything from three to seven weeks “behind” the Gregorian calendar depending on the year. Thus “the first day of the first month” corresponds not to January 1 but to a varying date between the back end of January and the rear middle of February. Years are referred to by their Japanese era names.

Japanese names are ordered throughout with the family name first.



***Part One***

**THE BRIDE FOR WHOM WE DANCE**

*The eleventh year of the Era of Kansei*

1799

## THE HOUSE OF KAWASEMI THE CONCUBINE, ABOVE NAGASAKI

*The ninth night of the fifth month*

“**M**ISS KAWASEMI?” ORITO KNEELS ON A STALE AND STICKY FUTON. “Can you hear me?”

In the rice paddy beyond the garden, a cacophony of frogs detonates.

Orito dabs the concubine’s sweat-drenched face with a damp cloth.

“She’s barely spoken”—the maid holds the lamp—“for hours and hours....”

“Miss Kawasemi, I’m Aibagawa. I’m a midwife. I want to help.”

Kawasemi’s eyes flicker open. She manages a frail sigh. Her eyes shut.

*She is too exhausted, Orito thinks, even to fear dying tonight.*

Dr. Maeno whispers through the muslin curtain. “I wanted to examine the child presentation myself, but ...” The elderly scholar chooses his words with care. “But this prohibited, it seems.”

“My orders are clear,” states the chamberlain. “No man may touch her.”

Orito lifts the bloodied sheet and finds, as warned, the fetus’s limp arm, up to the shoulder protruding from Kawasemi’s vagina.

“Have you ever seen such a presentation?” asks Dr. Maeno.

“Yes: in an engraving, from the Dutch text Father was translating.”

“This is what I prayed to hear! The *Observations* of William Smellie?”

“Yes: Dr. Smellie terms it,” Orito uses the Dutch, “Prolapse of the Arm.”

Orito clasps the fetus’s mucus-smearred wrist to search for a pulse.

Maeno now asks her in Dutch, “What are your opinions?”

There is no pulse. “The baby is dead,” Orito answers, in the same language, “and the mother will die soon, if the child is not delivered.” She places her fingertips on Kawasemi’s distended belly and probes the bulge around the inverted navel. “It was a boy.” She kneels between Kawasemi’s parted legs, noting the narrow pelvis, and sniffs the bulging labia: she detects the malty mixture of grumous blood and excrement, but not the stench of a rotted fetus. “He died one or two hours ago.”

Orito asks the maid, “When did the waters break?”

The maid is still mute with astonishment at hearing a foreign language.

“Yesterday morning, during the Hour of the Dragon,” says the stony-voiced housekeeper. “Our lady entered labor soon after.”

“And when was the last time that the baby kicked?”

“The last kick would have been around noon today.”

“Dr. Maeno, would you agree the infant is in”—she uses the Dutch term—“the ‘transverse’

breech position’?”

“Maybe,” the doctor answers in their code tongue, “but without an examination ...”

“The baby is twenty days late, or more. It should have been turned.”

“Baby’s resting,” the maid assures her mistress. “Isn’t that so, Dr. Maeno?”

“What you say”—the honest doctor wavers—“may well be true.”

“My father told me,” Orito says, “Dr. Uragami was overseeing the birth.”

“So he was,” grunts Maeno, “from the comfort of his consulting rooms. After the baby stopped kicking, Uragami ascertained that, for geomantic reasons discernible to men of his genius, the child’s spirit is reluctant to be born. The birth henceforth depends on the mother’s willpower.” *The rogue*, Maeno needs not add, *dares not bruise his reputation by presiding over the stillbirth of such an estimable man’s child*. “Chamberlain Tomine then persuaded the magistrate to summon me. When I saw the arm, I recalled your doctor of Scotland and requested your help.”

“My father and I are both deeply honored by your trust,” says Orito ...

... *and curse Uragami*, she thinks, *for his lethal reluctance to lose face*.

Abruptly, the frogs stop croaking and, as though a curtain of noise falls away, the sound of Nagasaki can be heard, celebrating the safe arrival of the Dutch ship.

“If the child is dead,” says Maeno in Dutch, “we must remove it now.”

“I agree.” Orito asks the housekeeper for warm water and strips of linen and uncorks a bottle of Leiden salts under the concubine’s nose to win her a few moments’ lucidity. “Miss Kawasemi, we are going to deliver your child in the next few minutes. First, may I feel inside you?”

The concubine is seized by the next contraction and loses her ability to answer.

WARM WATER IS DELIVERED in two copper pans as the agony subsides. “We should confess,” Dr. Maeno proposes to Orito in Dutch, “the baby is dead. Then amputate the arm to deliver the body.”

“First, I wish to insert my hand to learn whether the body is in a convex lie or concave lie.”

“If you can discover that without cutting the arm”—Maeno means “amputate”—“do so.”

Orito lubricates her right hand with rapeseed oil and addresses the maid: “Fold one linen strip into a thick pad ... yes, like so. Be ready to wedge it between your mistress’s teeth, otherwise she might bite off her tongue. Leave spaces at the sides, so she can breathe. Dr. Maeno, my inspection is beginning.”

“You are my eyes and ears, Miss Aibagawa,” says the doctor.

Orito works her fingers between the fetus’s biceps and its mother’s ruptured labia until her wrist is inside Kawasemi’s vagina. The concubine shivers and groans. “Sorry,” says Orito “sorry ...” Her fingers slide between warm membranes and skin and muscle still wet with amniotic fluid, and the midwife pictures an engraving from that enlightened and barbaric realm, Europe ...

*If the transverse lie is convex*, recalls Orito, *where the fetus’s spine is arched backward so acute*

that its head appears between its shins like a Chinese acrobat, she must amputate the fetus's arm, dismember its corpse with toothed forceps, and extract it, piece by grisly piece. Dr. Smellie warns that any remnant left in the womb will fester and may kill the mother. If the transverse lie is concave, however, Orito has read, where the fetus's knees are pressed against its chest, she may saw off the arm, rotate the fetus, insert crotchets into the eye sockets, and extract the whole body headfirst. The midwife's index finger locates the child's knobbly spine, traces its midline between its lowest rib and its pelvic bone, and encounters a minute ear; a nostril; a mouth; the umbilical cord; and a prawn-sized penis. "Breech is concave," Orito reports to Dr. Maeno. "but the cord is around the neck."



"Do you think the cord can be released?" Maeno forgets to speak Dutch.

"Well, I must try. Insert the cloth," Orito tells the maid, "now, please."

When the linen wad is secured between Kawasemi's teeth, Orito pushes her hand in deeper, hooks her thumb around the umbilical cord, sinks four fingers into the underside of the fetus's jaw, pushes back his head, and slides the cord over his face, forehead, and crown. Kawasemi screams, hot urine trickles down Orito's forearm, but the procedure works for the first time: the noose is released. She withdraws her hand and reports, "The cord is freed. Might the doctor have his"—there is no Japanese word—"forceps?"

"I brought them along," Maeno taps his medical box, "in case."

"We might try to deliver the child"—she switches to Dutch—"without amputating the arm. Less blood is always better. But I need your help."

Dr. Maeno addresses the chamberlain: "To help save Miss Kawasemi's life, I *must* disregard the magistrate's orders and join the midwife inside the curtain."

Chamberlain Tomine is caught in a dangerous quandary.

"Blame me," Maeno suggests, "for disobeying the magistrate."

"The choice is mine," decides the chamberlain. "Do what you must, Doctor."

The spry old man crawls under the muslin, holding his curved tongs.

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When the maid sees the foreign contraption, she exclaims in alarm.

“Forceps,” the doctor replies, with no further explanation.

The housekeeper lifts the muslin to see. “No, I don’t like the look of *that!* Foreigners make chop, slice, and call it ‘medicine,’ but it is quite unthinkable that—”

“Do *I* advise the housekeeper,” growls Maeno, “on where to buy fish?”

“Forceps,” explains Orito, “don’t cut—they turn and pull, just like a midwife’s fingers but with a stronger grip ...” She uses her Leiden salts again. “Miss Kawasemi, I’m going to use this instrument”—she holds up the forceps—“to deliver your baby. Don’t be afraid, and don’t resist. Europeans use them routinely—even for princesses and queens. We’ll pull your baby out, gently and firmly.”

“Do so ...” Kawasemi’s voice is a smothered rattle. “Do so ...”

“Thank you, and when I ask Miss Kawasemi to *push* ...”

“Push ...” She is fatigued almost beyond caring. “Push ...”

“How often,” Tomine peers in, “have you used that implement?”

Orito notices the chamberlain’s crushed nose for the first time: it is as severe a disfigurement as her own burn. “Often, and no patient ever suffered.” Only Maeno and her pupil know that these “patients” were hollowed-out melons whose babies were oiled gourd. For the final time, if all goes well, she works her hand inside Kawasemi’s womb. Her fingers find the fetus’s throat, rotate his head toward the cervix, slip, gain a surer purchase, and swivel the awkward corpse through a third turn. “Now, please, Doctor.”

Maeno slides in the forceps around the protruding arm.

The onlookers gasp; a parched shriek is wrenched from Kawasemi.

Orito feels the forceps’ curved blades in her palm: she maneuvers them around the fetus’s soft skull. “Close them.”

Gently but firmly, the doctor squeezes the forceps shut.

Orito takes the forceps’ handles in her left hand: the resistance is spongy but firm, like *konnyaku* jelly. Her right hand, still inside the uterus, cups the fetus’s skull.

Dr. Maeno’s bony fingers encase Orito’s wrist.

“What is it you’re waiting for?” asks the housekeeper.

“The next contraction,” says the doctor, “which is due any—”

Kawasemi’s breathing starts to swell with fresh pain.

“One and two,” counts Orito, “and—*push*, Kawasemi-san!”

“Push, Mistress!” exhort the maid and the housekeeper.

Dr. Maeno pulls at the forceps; with her right hand, Orito pushes the fetus’s head toward the birth canal. She tells the maid to grasp the baby’s arm and pull. Orito feels the resistance grow as the head reaches the aperture. “One and two ... now!” Squeezing the glans of the clitoris flat comes a tiny corpse’s matted crown.

“Here he is!” gasps the maid, through Kawasemi’s animal shrieks.

Here comes the baby's scalp; here his face, marbled with mucus ...

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... Here comes the rest of his slithery, clammy, lifeless body.

"Oh, but—oh," says the maid. "Oh. Oh. *Oh* ..."

Kawasemi's high-pitched sobs subside to moans, and deaden.

*She knows.* Orito discards the forceps, lifts the lifeless baby by his ankles and slaps him. She has no hope of coaxing out a miracle: she acts from discipline and training. After ten hard slaps, she stops. He has no pulse. She feels no breath on her cheek from the lips and nostrils. There is no need to announce the obvious. Splicing the cord near the navel, she cuts the gristly string with her knife, bathes the lifeless boy in a copper of water, and places him in the crib. *A crib for a coffin, she thinks, and a swaddling sheet for a shroud.*

Chamberlain Tomine gives instructions to a servant outside. "Inform His Honor that a son was stillborn. Dr. Maeno and his midwife did their best but were powerless to alter what Fate had decreed."

Orito's concern is now puerperal fever. The placenta must be extracted, *yakumosô* applied to the perineum, and blood stanching from an anal fissure.

Dr. Maeno withdraws from the curtained tent to make space.

A moth the size of a bird enters and blunders into Orito's face.

Batting it away, she knocks the forceps off one of the copper pans.

The forceps clatters onto a pan lid; the loud clang frightens a small creature that has somehow found its way into the room; it mewls and whimpers.

*A puppy?* wonders Orito, baffled. *Or a kitten?*

The mysterious animal cries again, very near: under the futon?

"Shoo that thing away!" the housekeeper tells the maid. "Shoo it!"

The creature mewls again, and Orito realizes it is coming from the crib.

*Surely not,* thinks the midwife, refusing to hope. *Surely not* ...

She snatches away the linen sheet just as the baby's mouth opens.

He inhales once, twice, three times; his crinkled face crumples ...

... and the shuddering newborn boiled-pink despot howls at Life.

CAPTAIN LACY'S CABIN ON THE *SHENANDOAH*, ANCHORED IN NAGASAKI HARBOR*Evening of July 20, 1799*

“**H**OW ELSE,” DEMANDS DANIEL SNITKER, “IS A MAN TO EARN JUST reward for the daily humiliations we suffer from those slit-eyed leeches? ‘The unpaid servant,’ say the Spanish, ‘has the right to pay himself,’ and for once, damn me, the Spanish are right. Why so certain there’ll still be company to pay us in five years’ time? Amsterdam is on its knees; our shipyards are idle; our manufactories silent; our granaries plundered; The Hague is a stage of prancing marionettes tweaked by Paris; Prussian jackals and Austrian wolves laugh at our borders: and Jesus in heaven, since the bird-shoot at Kamperduin we are left a maritime nation *with no navy*. The British seized the Cape, Coromandel, and Ceylon without so much as a kiss-my-arse, and the Java itself is their next fattened Christmas goose is plain as day! Without neutral bottoms like this”—he curls his lip at Captain Lacy—“Yankee, Batavia would *starve*. In such times Vorstenbosch, a man’s sole insurance is *salable goods in the warehouse*. Why else, for God’s sake, are *you* here?”

The old whale-oil lantern sways and hisses.

“That,” Vorstenbosch asks, “was your closing statement?”

Snitker folds his arms. “I *spit* on your drumhead trial.”

Captain Lacy issues a gargantuan belch. “’Twas the garlic, gentlemen.”

Vorstenbosch addresses his clerk: “We may record our verdict ...”

Jacob de Zoet nods and dips his quill: “... drumhead trial.”

“On this day, the twentieth of July, 1799, I, Unico Vorstenbosch, chief-elect of the trading factory of Dejima in Nagasaki, acting by the powers vested in me by His Excellency P. G. van Overstraten, governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, witnessed by Captain Anselm Lacy of the *Shenandoah*, find Daniel Snitker, acting chief of the above-mentioned factory, guilty of the following: gross dereliction of duty—”

“I fulfilled,” insists Snitker, “*every duty* of my post!”

“‘Duty?’” Vorstenbosch signals to Jacob to pause. “Our warehouses were burning to cinders whilst *you*, sir, romped with strumpets in a brothel—a fact omitted from that farrago of lies you are pleased to call your day register. And had it not been for the chance remark of a Japanese interpreter—”

“Shit-house rats who blacken my name ’cause I’m wise to their tricks!”

“Is it a ‘blackening of your name’ that the fire engine was missing from Dejima on the night of the fire?”

“Perhaps the defendant took the engine to the House of Wistaria,” remarks Captain Lacy, “to impress the ladies with the thickness of his hose.”

“The engine,” objects Snitker, “was Van Cleef’s responsibility.”

“I’ll tell your deputy how faithfully you defended him. To the next item, Mr. de Zoet—Failure to have the factory’s three senior officers sign the Octavia’s bills of lading.”

“Oh, for God’s sake. A mere administrative *oversight!*”

“An ‘oversight’ that permits crooked chiefs to cheat the company in a hundred ways, which is why Batavia insists on triple authorization. Next item: ‘Theft of company funds to pay for private cargoes.’”

“Now *that*,” Snitker spits with anger, “*that is a flat lie!*”

From a carpetbag at his feet, Vorstenbosch produces two porcelain figurines in the Orient mode. One is an executioner, ax poised to behead the second, a kneeling prisoner, hands bound and eyes on the next world.

“Why show me those”—Snitker is shameless—“gawgaws?”

“Two gross were found in your private cargo—‘twenty-four dozen Arita figurines,’ let the record state. My late wife nurtured a fondness for Japanese curiosities, so I have a little knowledge. Indulge me, Captain Lacy: estimate their value in, let us say, a Viennese auction house.”

Captain Lacy considers. “Twenty guilders a head?”

“For these slighter ones alone, thirty-five guilders; for the gold-leafed courtesans, archers and lords, fifty. What price the two gross? Let us aim low—Europe *is* at war, and markets unsettled—and call it thirty-five per head ... multiplied by two gross. De Zoet?”

Jacob’s abacus is to hand. “Ten thousand and eighty guilders, sir.”

Lacy issues an impressed “*Hee-haw!*”

“Tidy profit,” states Vorstenbosch, “for merchandise purchased at the company’s expense yet recorded in the bills of lading—unwitnessed, of course—as ‘Acting Chief’s Private Porcelain,’ in *your* hand, Snitker.”

“The former chief, God rest his soul”—Snitker changes his story—“willed them to me before the court embassy.”

“So Mr. Hemmij *foresaw* his demise on his way back from Edo?”

“Gijsbert Hemmij was an uncommon cautious man.”

“Then you will show us his uncommon cautious will.”

“The document,” Snitker wipes his mouth, “perished in the fire.”

“Who were the witnesses? Mr. van Cleef? Fischer? The monkey?”

Snitker heaves a disgusted sigh. “This is a childish waste of time. Carve off your tithe, the same—but not a sixteenth more, else by God I’ll dump the blasted things in the harbor.”

The sound of carousing washes over from Nagasaki.

Captain Lacy empties his bullish nose into a cabbage leaf.

Jacob’s nearly worn-out quill catches up; his hand aches.

“What, I wonder”—Vorstenbosch looks confused—“is this talk of a ‘tithe’? Mr. de Zoet might you shed a little light?”

“Mr. Snitker is attempting to bribe you, sir.”



The lamp has begun to sway; it smokes, sputters, and recovers.

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A seaman in the lower deck tunes his fiddle.

“You suppose,” Vorstenbosch blinks at Snitker, “that my integrity is for sale? Like some pox-maggoty harbormaster on the Scheldt extorting illegal fees from the butter barges?”

“One-ninth, then,” growls Snitker. “That’s my last offer.”

“Conclude the charge list”—Vorstenbosch snaps his fingers at his secretary—“with ‘attempted bribery of a fiscal comptroller’ and proceed to sentencing. Roll your eyeballs *that* way, Snitker: this affects you. ‘Item the first: Daniel Snitker is stripped of office herewith and all’—yes, all—‘pay backdated to 1797. Second: upon arrival in Batavia, Daniel Snitker is to be imprisoned at the old fort to account for his actions. Third: his private cargo is to be auctioned. Proceeds shall recompense the company.’ I see I have your attention.”

“You’re making”—Snitker’s defiance is crushed—“a pauper of me.”

“This trial makes an example of you to every parasitic chief fattening himself on the company’s dugs: ‘Justice found Daniel Snitker,’ this verdict warns them, ‘and justice shall find you.’ Captain Lacy, thank you for your participation in this squalid affair; Mr. Wiskerke, please find Mr. Snitker a hammock in the fo’c’sle. He shall work his passage back to Java as a landsman and be subject to common discipline. Moreover—”

Snitker upends the table and lunges at Vorstenbosch. Jacob glimpses Snitker’s fist over his patron’s head and attempts to intercept; flaming peacocks whirl across his vision; the cabin walls rotate through ninety degrees; the floor slams his ribs; and the taste of gunmetal in his mouth is surely blood. Grunts and gasps and groans are exchanged at a higher level. Jacob peers up in time to see the first mate land a pulverizing blow on Snitker’s solar plexus, causing the floored clerk to wince with involuntary sympathy. Two more marines burst in just as Snitker totters and hits the floor.

Belowdecks, the fiddler plays “My Dark-eyed Damsel of Twente.”

Captain Lacy pours himself a glass of black-currant whiskey.

Vorstenbosch whacks Snitker’s face with his silver-knobbed cane until he is too tired to continue. “Put this cockchafer in irons in your berth deck’s foulest corner.” The first mate and the two marines drag the groaning body away. Vorstenbosch kneels by Jacob and claps his shoulder. “Thank you for taking that blow for me, my boy. Your noggin, I fear, is *une belle marmelade* ...”

The pain in Jacob’s nose suggests a breakage, but the stickiness on his hands and knees is not blood. Ink, the clerk realizes, hauling himself upright.

Ink, from his cracked inkpot, indigo rivulets and dribbling deltas ...

Ink, drunk by thirsty wood, dripping between cracks ...

*Ink*, thinks Jacob, *you most fecund of liquids* ...

ON A SAMPAN MOORED ALONGSIDE THE *SHENANDOAH*, NAGASAKI HARBOR*Morning of July 26, 1799*

**H**ATLESS AND BROILING IN HIS BLUE DRESS COAT, JACOB DE ZOET is thinking of a day ten months ago, when vengeful North Sea charged the dikes at Domburg, and spindrift tumbled along Church Street past the parsonage where his uncle presented him with an oiled canvas bag. It contained a scarred Psalter bound in deerskin, and Jacob can, more or less, reconstruct his uncle's speech from memory. "Heaven knows, nephew, you have heard this book's history often enough. Your great-great-grandfather was in Venice when the plague arrived. His body erupted with buboes the size of frogs, but he prayed from this Psalter and God cured him. Fifty years ago your grandfather Tys was soldiering in the Palatine when ambushers surprised his regiment. This Psalter stopped this musket ball"—he fingers the leaden bullet, still in its crater—"from shredding his heart. It is a literal truth that I, your father, and you and Geertje owe this book our very existences. We are not Papists: we do not ascribe magical powers to bent nails and old rags; but you understand how this Sacred Book is, by our faith, bound to our bloodline. It is a gift from your ancestors and a loan from your descendants. Whatever befalls you in the years ahead, never forget: this Psalter"—he touched the canvas bag—"this is your passport home. David's Psalms are a Bible within the Bible. Pray from it, heed its teachings, and you shall not stray. Protect it with your life that it may nourish your soul. Go now, Jacob, and God go with you."

"Protect it with your life," Jacob mutters under his breath ...

... *which is, he thinks, the crux of my dilemma.*

Ten days ago, the *Shenandoah* anchored off Papenburg Rock—named for martyrs of the true faith thrown from its heights—and Captain Lacy ordered all Christian artifacts placed in a barrel to be nailed shut, surrendered to the Japanese, and returned only when the brig departed from Japan. Not even Chief-Elect Vorstenbosch and his protégé clerk were exempt. The *Shenandoah's* sailors grumbled that they'd sooner surrender their testicles than their crucifixes, but their crosses and St. Christophers did vanish into hidden nooks when the Japanese inspectors and well-armed guards carried out their search of the decks. The barrel was filled with an assortment of rosary beads and prayer books brought by Captain Lacy for this purpose; the De Zoet Psalter was not among them.

*How could I betray my uncle, Jacob frets, my Church and my God?*

It is buried amid his other books in the sea chest on which he sits.

*The risks, he assures himself, cannot be so very great ...* There is no marking or illustration by which the Psalter could be identified as a Christian text, and the interpreters' Dutch is too poor, surely, to recognize antique biblical language. *I am an officer of the Dutch East India Company, Jacob reasons. What is the worst punishment the Japanese could inflict on me?*

Jacob doesn't know, and the truth is that Jacob is afraid.

Jacob's pale and freckled skin is frying like bacon.

A flying fish scissors and skims itself over the water.

"*Tobiuo!*" one oarsman says to the other, pointing. "*Tobiuo!*"

Jacob repeats the word, and both oarsmen laugh until the boat rocks.

Their passenger doesn't mind. He watches the guard boats circling the *Shenandoah*; the fishing skips; a coast-hugging Japanese cargo ship, stocky as a Portuguese carrack but fatter bellied; an aristocratic pleasure craft, accompanied by several attendant vessels, draped with the ducal black-on-sky-blue colors; and a beak-prowed junk, similar to those of the Chinese merchants of Batavia ...

Nagasaki itself, wood gray and mud brown, looks oozed from between the verdant mountains' splayed toes. The smells of seaweed, effluence, and smoke from countless flues are carried over the water. The mountains are terraced by rice paddies nearly up to the serrated summits.

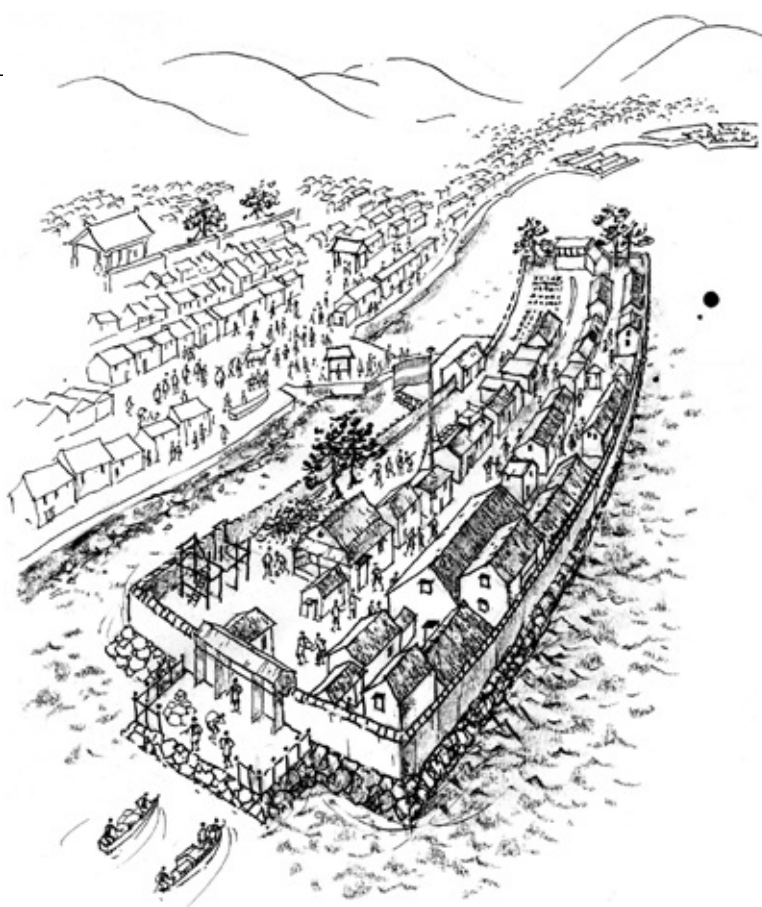
*A madman*, Jacob supposes, *might imagine himself in a half-cracked jade bowl.*

Dominating the shorefront is his home for the next year: Dejima, a high-walled, fan-shaped artificial island, some two hundred paces along its outer curve, Jacob estimates, by eight paces deep, and erected, like much of Amsterdam, on sunken piles. Sketching the trading factory from the *Shenandoah's* foremast during the week gone, he counted some twenty-five roofs: the numbered warehouses of Japanese merchants; the chief's and the captain's residences; the deputy's house, on whose roof perches the watchtower; the Guild of Interpreters; a small hospital. Of the four Dutch warehouses—the Roos, the Lelie, the Doorn, and the Eik—only the last two survived what Vorstenbosch is calling "Snitker's Fire Warehouse. Lelie is being rebuilt, but the incinerated Roos must wait until the factory's debts are in better order. The land gate connects Dejima to the shore by a single-span stone bridge over a moat of tidal mud; the sea gate, at the top of a short ramp where the companion sampans are loaded and unloaded, is opened only during the trading season. Attached is a customs house, where all Dutchmen except the chief resident and the captain are searched for prohibited items.

*A list at whose head*, Jacob thinks, *is "Christian Artifacts" ...*

He turns to his sketch and sets about shading the sea with charcoal.

Curious, the oarsmen lean over; Jacob shows them the page:



The older oarsman makes a face to say, *Not bad*.

A shout from a guard boat startles the pair: they return to their posts.

THE SAMPAN ROCKS under Vorstenbosch's weight: he is a lean man, but today his silk surtout bulges with sections of "unicorn" or narwhal horn, valued in Japan as a powdered cure-all. "It is *the* buffoonery"—the incoming chief raps his knuckles on his garment's sewn-in bumps—"that intend to eradicate. 'Why,' I demanded of that serpent Kobayashi, 'not simply have the cargo placed in a box, legitimately; rowed across, legitimately; and sold at private auction legitimately?' His reply? 'There is no precedent.' I put it to him, 'Then why not *create* precedent?' He stared at me as if I'd claimed paternity of his children."

"Sir?" the first mate calls. "Shall your slaves accompany you ashore?"

"Send them with the cow. Snitker's black shall serve me meanwhile."

"Very good, sir; and Interpreter Sekita begs a ride ashore."

"Let the mooncalf down, then, Mr. Wiskerke."

Sekita's ample rear juts over the bulwark. His scabbard catches in the ladder: his attendant earns a sharp slap for this mishap. Once the master and servant are safely seated, Vorstenbosch doffs his smart tricorne hat. "A divine morning, Mr. Sekita, is it not?"

"Ah." Sekita nods without understanding. "We Japanese, an island race ..."

"Indeed, sir. Sea in all directions; deep blue expanses of it."

Sekita recites another rote-learned sentence: "Tall pines are deep roots."

"For why must we waste our scant monies on your obese salary?"

Sekita purses his lips as if in thought. "How do you do, sir?"

---

*If he inspects my books, thinks Jacob, all my worries are for nothing.*

Vorstenbosch orders the oarsmen "Go!" and points to Dejima.

Unnecessarily and unasked, Sekita translates the order.

The oarsmen propel the sampan by "sweeping" their oars in the manner of a water snake in time to a breathy shanty.

"Might they be singing," wonders Vorstenbosch, "'Give Us Your Gold, O Stinking Dutchman?'"

"One trusts not, sir, in the presence of an interpreter."

"That's a charitable description of the man. Yet better him than Kobayashi: this may be our last chance to have a private discussion for a little while. Once ashore, my priority must be to ensure as profitable a trading season as our shoddy cargo can afford. Yours, De Zoet, is quite different: piece together the factory accounts, both for company trade and private trade since the year '94. Without knowing what the officers have bought, sold, and exported, and for how much, we cannot know the full extent of the corruption we must deal with."

"I'll do my very best, sir."

"Snitker's incarceration is my statement of intent, but should we mete out the same treatment to every smuggler on Dejima, there would be nobody left but the two of us. Rather, we must show how honest labor is rewarded with advancement, and theft punished with disgrace and jail. Thus, only thus, may we clean out this Augean stable. Ah, and here Van Cleef, come to greet us."

The acting deputy walks down the ramp from the sea gate.

"Every arrival," quotes Vorstenbosch, "is a particular death."

DEPUTY MELCHIOR VAN CLEEF, born in Utrecht forty years ago, doffs his hat. His swarthy face is bearded and piratical; a friend might describe his narrow eyes as "observant," an enemy as "Mephistophelian." "Good morning, Mr. Vorstenbosch; and welcome to Dejima, Mr. de Zoet." His handshake could crush stones. "To wish you a 'pleasant' stay is overly hopeful ..." He notices the fresh kink in Jacob's nose.

"I am obliged, Deputy van Cleef." Solid ground sways under Jacob's sea legs. Coolies are already unloading his sea chest and carrying it to the sea gate. "Sir, I should prefer to keep my luggage in sight—"

"So you should. Until recently we corrected the stevedores with blows, but the magistracy ruled that a beaten coolie is an affront to all Japan and forbade us. Now their knavery knows no bounds."

Interpreter Sekita mistimes his jump from the sampan's prow onto the ramp and dunks his leg up to the knee. Once on dry land, he smacks his servant's nose with his fan and hurries ahead of the three Dutchmen, telling them, "Go! Go! Go!"

Deputy van Cleef explains, "He means 'Come.'"

Once through the sea gate, they are ushered into the customs room. Here, Sekita asks the

foreigners' names and shouts them at an elderly registrar, who repeats them to a young assistant, who writes them in his ledger. "Vorstenbosch" is transliterated Bôrusu Tenbôsh. "Van Cleef" becomes Bankureifu, and "De Zoet" is rechristened Dazûto. Rounds of cheese and barrels of butter unloaded from the *Shenandoah* are being poked with skewers by a team of inspectors. "Those damned blackguards," Van Cleef complains, "are known to break open preserved eggs lest the chicken sneaked in a ducat or two." A burly guard approaches. "Meet the frisker," says the deputy. "The chief is exempt, but not clerks, alas."

A number of young men gather: they have the same shaven foreheads and topknots as the inspectors and interpreters who visited the *Shenandoah* this week, but their robes are less impressive. "Unranked interpreters," says Van Cleef. "They hope to earn Sekita's favor by doing his job for him."

The frisker speaks to Jacob and the chorus, "Arms rise! Open pockets!"

Sekita silences them and orders Jacob, "Arms rise. Open pockets."

Jacob obeys; the frisker pats his armpits and explores his pockets.

He finds Jacob's sketchbook, examines it briefly, and issues another order.

"Show shoes to guard, sir!" say the quickest house interpreters.

Sekita sniffs. "Show shoes now."

Jacob notices that even the stevedores stop their work to watch.

Some are pointing at the clerk, unabashed and declaring, "*Kômô, kômô.*"

"They're talking about your hair," explains Van Cleef. "'*Kômô*' is how Europeans are often dubbed: *kô* signifying 'red,' and *mô*, 'hair.' Few of us, in truth, do boast hair of your tint; a genuine 'red-haired barbarian' is worth a good gawp."

"You study the Japanese tongue, Mr. van Cleef?"

"There are rules against it, but I pick up a little from my wives."

"Should you teach me what you know, sir, I would be greatly obliged."

"I'd not be much of a teacher," Van Cleef confesses. "Dr. Marinus chats with the Malays as if he were born black, but the Japanese language is hard won, he says. Any interpreter caught teaching us could feasibly be charged with treason."

The frisker returns Jacob's shoes and issues a fresh command.

"Off clothes, sir!" say the interpreters. "Clothes off!"

"Clothes stay on!" retorts Van Cleef. "Clerks *don't* strip, Mr. de Zoet; the nasty-turkey wants us robbed of another dignity. Obey him today, and every clerk entering Japan until Doomsday would perforce follow suit."

The frisker remonstrates; the chorus rises, "Clothes off!"

Interpreter Sekita recognizes trouble and creeps away.

Vorstenbosch hits the floor with his cane until quietness reigns. "No!"

The displeased frisker decides to concede the point.

A customs guard taps Jacob's sea chest with his spear and speaks.

"Open please," says an unranked interpreter. "Open big box!"

*The box, taunts Jacob's inner whisperer, containing your Psalter.*

---

"Before we all grow old, De Zoet," says Vorstenbosch.

Sick to his core, Jacob unlocks the chest as ordered.

One of the guards speaks; the chorus translates, "Go back, sir! Step behind!"

More than twenty curious necks crane as the frisker lifts the lid and unfolds Jacob's five linen shirts; his woolen blanket; stockings; a drawstring bag of buttons and buckles; a tattered wig; a set of quills; yellowing undergarments; his boyhood compass; half a bar of Windsor soap; the two dozen letters from Anna tied with her hair ribbon; a razor blade; a Delft pipe; cracked glass; a folio of sheet music; a moth-eaten bottle-green velvet waistcoat; a pewter plate, knife, and spoon; and, stacked at the bottom, some fifty assorted books. A frisker speaks to an underling, who runs out of the customs room.

"Fetch duty interpreter, sir," says an interpreter. "Bring to see books."

"Is not"—Jacob's rib cage contracts—"Mr. Sekita to conduct the dissection?"

A brown-toothed grin appears in Van Cleef's beard. "Dissection?"

"*Inspection*, I meant, sir: the inspection of my books."

"Sekita's father purchased his son's place in the guild, but the prohibition against"—Van Cleef mouths "Christianity"—"is too important for blockheads. Books are checked by an able man: Iwase Banri, perhaps, or one of the Ogawas."

"Who are the"—Jacob chokes on his own saliva—"Ogawas?"

"Ogawa Mimasaku is one of the four interpreters of the first rank. His son, Ogawa Uzaemon, is of the third rank, and"—a young man enters—"ah! Speak of the devil and lister for his feet! A warm morning, Mr. Ogawa."

Ogawa Uzaemon, in his midtwenties, has an open, intelligent face. The unranked interpreters all bow low. He bows to Vorstenbosch, Van Cleef, and lastly the new arrival. "Welcome ashore, Mr. de Zoet." His pronunciation is excellent. He extends his hand for a European handshake just as Jacob delivers an Asian bow: Ogawa Uzaemon reciprocates with an Asian bow as Jacob offers his hand. The vignette amuses the room. "I am told," says the interpreter, "Mr. de Zoet brings many book ... and here they are"—he points to the chest—"many *many* book. A 'plethora' of book, you say?"

"A few books," says Jacob, nervous enough to vomit. "Or quite a few: yes."

"May I remove books to see?" Ogawa does so eagerly, without waiting for an answer. For Jacob, the world is narrowed to a thin tunnel between him and his Psalter, visible between the two volumes of *Sara Burgerhart*. Ogawa frowns. "Many, many books here. A little time please. When finish, I send message. It is agreeable?" He misreads Jacob's hesitancy. "Books all safe. I too"—Ogawa places his palm over his heart—"am 'bibliophile.' This is correct word? 'Bibliophile'?"

OUT IN THE WEIGHING YARD, the sun feels as hot as a branding iron.

*Any minute now, thinks the reluctant smuggler, my Psalter will be found.*

A small party of Japanese officials is waiting for Vorstenbosch.

A Malay slave bows, waiting for the chief with a bamboo parasol.

“Captain Lacy and I,” says the chief, “have a gamut of engagements in the stateroom until luncheon. You look sickly, De Zoet: have Dr. Marinus drain half a pint after Mr. van Cleef has shown you around.” He nods a parting at his deputy and walks to his residence.

The weighing yard is dominated by one of the company’s tripod scales, as high as two men. “We’re weighing the sugar today,” says Van Cleef, “for what *that* junk is worth. Batavia sends the very dregs of their warehouses.”

The small square bustles with more than a hundred merchants, interpreters, inspectors, servants, spies, lackeys, palanquin bearers, porters. *So these*, thinks Jacob, *are the Japanese*. Their hair color—black to gray—and skin tones are more uniform than those of a Dutch crowd, and their modes of dress, footwear, and hairstyles appear rigidly prescribed according to rank. Fifteen or twenty near-naked carpenters are perched on the frame of a new warehouse. “Idler than a gang of gin-soused Finns ...” mumbles Van Cleef. Watching from the roof of a customs house is a pink-faced, soot-on-snow-colored monkey, dressed in a sailcloth jerkin. “I see you’ve spotted William Pitt.”

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

“King George’s first minister, yes. He answers to no other name. A sailor bought him some six or seven seasons ago, but on the day his owner sailed, the ape vanished, only to reappear the next day, a freedman of Dejima. Speaking of brute apes, over there”—Van Cleef indicates a lantern-jawed and pig-tailed laborer engaged in opening boxes of sugar—“is Wyb Gerritszoon, one of our hands.” Gerritszoon places the precious nails in his jerkin pocket. The bags of sugar are carried past a Japanese inspector and a striking foreign youth of seventeen or eighteen: his hair is gold and cherubic, his lips have a Javanese thickness, and his eyes are of Oriental slant. “Ivo Oost: somebody’s natural son, with a generous glug of mestizo blood.”

THE BAGS OF SUGAR arrive at a trestle table by the company tripod.

The weighing is viewed by another trio of Japanese officials, an interpreter, and two Europeans in their twenties. “On the left,” Van Cleef points, “is Peter Fischer, a Prussian of Brunswick”—Fischer is nut-colored, brown-haired but balding—“and an articulated clerk—although Mr. Vorstenbosch tells me you are also qualified, giving us an embarrassment of riches. Fischer’s companion is Con Twomey, an Irishman of Cork.” Twomey has a half-moon face and a sharkish smile; his hair is cropped close and he is roughly tailored in sailcloth. “Don’t fret if you forget these names: once the *Shenandoah* departs, we’ll have a tedious eternity in which to learn all about one another.”

“Don’t the Japanese suspect some of our men aren’t Dutch?”

“We account for Twomey’s bastard accent by saying he hails from Groningen. When were there ever enough pure-blooded Dutch to man the company? Especially now”—the stressed word alludes to the sensitive matter of Daniel Snitker’s incarceration—“we must catch a catch can. Twomey’s our carpenter but doubles as inspector on weighing days, for the infernal coolies’ll spirit away a bag of sugar in a blink without they’re watched like hawks. And will the guards—and the merchants are the slyest bastards of all: yesterday one of the whoresons slipped a stone into a bag, which he then ‘discovered’ and tried to use a



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