

Unbeaten by the Rain

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They're coming to take me away soon. I was a hikikomori for 40 years, but I guess that's over and done with now. I supposed it all started when I got fired. "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down", they say, and I've been sticking out my whole life. I had no friends in school, got bullied for various reasons. Sometimes it was my glasses, or my grades, sometimes it was my weight. Fatty, they called me. If only they could see me now.

Many people yearn for the days of high school, think of them as the best time of their lives, but I don't. It was hell, high school, and things didn't get any better after graduation. My parents couldn't afford college, so I went into sales. The salaryman life was just like high school, except the bullies were the ones in power. My boss would inspect our beards every morning, and if he found even one overgrown hair he would hit us. It was common in those days, and it was even worse if we didn't hit our sales targets. The company was in the red, and it was our job to keep it afloat. I don't know why I went into sales. I've never been good with people, and my salesmanship is nonexistent. After two years of failing to hit my goals, I got fired, but not before getting a dressing-down in front of everyone. You couldn't tell from their faces, but they were laughing inside. The man who consistently got bottom scores every quarter was finally getting defenestrated, how funny.

So I withdrew. That's what "hikikomori" means: withdrawing, pulling inward, confining yourself. I couldn't bear to live in that society that treated me like dirt. I moved back in with my parents, and the shame of having a son like my was so great that they let me stay cooped up, fed me, all so that their secret wouldn't be known. I became a ghost, a dead man, something heard but not seen. 40 years went by in a flash. The whole experience is a blur, every day the same as the last. I can see myself, right now, wasting away in that filthy room, with the decaying paper doors, and that horrible smell, that terrible, unbearable stench of death that will follow me to my grave.

Nothing much changed when my parents died. The house belonged to me now, but my income was gone. I wasn't old enough to get a pension, but I don't think I would've qualified anyway. 40 years of unpaid dues is too much even for the government to give you a pass. So I lived off my parents' savings. It wasn't much, just about enough to live off rice, soup, and vegetables. It reminds me of that poem by Kenji Miyazawa, "*ame ni mo makezu*", "Be not Defeated by the Rain". But I was defeated. The rain was heavy and constant. It pelted the ceiling of my house until it went through. It pelted me, when it did. Like erosion, the rain hit my body, one droplet after another, slowly destroying me until there was nothing left. I could do nothing to fix it, fix the roof, fix myself. The money was gone, and I had no one to turn to. I was defeated by the rain, alone, undiscovered, unknown to the world.

But somehow, I found salvation. I had no parents or even family left, but somehow they found me. After 40 years of isolation I finally realized that what I'd wanted all along was for someone to see me, to help me, to save me. And they have. They're coming to take me away, soon, and when they do, I can finally be free. In the end, the rain did not defeat me, it merely freed me.

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11.3
 Unbeaten by the rain
 Unbeaten by the wind
 Bested by neither snow nor summer heat
 Strong of body
 Free of desire
 Never angry
 Always smiling quietly
 Dining daily on four cups of brown rice
 Some miso and a few vegetables
 Observing all things
 Leaving myself out of account
 But remembering well
 Living in a small, thatched-roof house
 In the meadow beneath a canopy of pines
 Going east to nurse the sick child
 Going west to bear sheaves of rice for the weary mother
 Going south to tell the dying man there is no cause for fear
 Going north to tell those who fight to put aside their trifles
 Shedding tears in time of drought
 Wandering at a loss during the cold summer
 Called useless by all
 Neither praised
 Nor a bother
 Such is the person
 I wish to be

Authorities warn of “lonely deaths” amidst the destruction of typhoon Lan

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OSAKA--On a steamy, rainy day in July, special cleaners donning protective gear burned an offering of incense at the entrance to an apartment room, as the pungent smell of rot wafted out from inside.

"I can't get used to this smell, no matter how many scenes we experience," said Noriyuki Kamesawa, president of Kansai Clean Service, which is based in the city's Higashinari Ward.

The cleaners must wear their protective suits no matter how hot and sweaty they get to shield themselves from not just the smell, but all kinds of other infectious diseases due to the grim scenes they encounter.

The company takes requests from bereaved family members and landlords to sort through the personal effects of people who died in their homes and restore the items to their original condition.

The body of the as-yet-unidentified 60 year old was found under a collapsed roof. It was badly decomposed due to the hot and humid conditions during the rainy season, and his cause of death is unknown. His death appears to have gone unnoticed for about a month.

Police have ruled the death an accident, though the cause does not seem to be related to the typhoon. "It's hard to say due to the state of the body, but the cause of death is not conclusive with blunt force trauma or drowning", said the police spokesman.

"Just another lonely death," muttered an officer who declined to identify himself.

"Lonely deaths", or "*kodokushi*" are on the rise in Japan. With an aging population more and more people are dying alone at home, and their bodies are going undiscovered for long periods of time, with some being found after more than six months.

Newspapers, magazines and empty ramen cups floated around the flooded room. It seems that it had been in disrepair even before the roof collapsed. None of the neighbors were aware that the victim was living there.

According to official figures from the Osaka Prefectural Medical Examiner's Office, which defines *kodokushi* as a person who dies alone in their home and remains undiscovered for at least four days, there were 1,314 cases in Osaka in 2023--the highest number since the office began keeping records in 2017.

Authorities warn of the importance of keeping up with family members during difficult situations: "The current typhoon has caused many people to lose contact with their loved ones. Despite these trying times, we should all endeavor to keep our relatives safe— distant or not. We hope that this man's family will be found soon, and that they can be at peace."

During typhoon season, there are more cases where authorities are unable to determine the cause of death because dead bodies decompose rapidly in the heat, humidity and rain.

In May, the body of a 64-year-old man was found in an apartment complex in Nara Prefecture. Police officers made the discovery when they opened the door to respond to a complaint from neighbors about the man's two small dogs barking loudly.

It took time for the police to identify his face because he is believed to have died about three weeks before being discovered.

Two weeks after the body was found, his second-eldest daughter, 32, observed the cleaning process.

She said she had kept in contact with her father at least once a month using the Line messaging app.

"I never thought I'd see someone close to me die a solitary death. I thought I would only see such cases on TV," she said. "If I had been in contact with him a little more, I could have found him earlier."