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BLACK BANANA

Archaic custom to which all
citizens who have lost their teeth
must submit

On a certain morning, entomologist Endo Hiroshi decided to stop eating anything and everything that might appear healthy to other people. He made this decision after the sleepless night – which was perhaps brought about by the memory of the house’s ancient cook leaving for the Convoy of Toothless Beings⁽¹⁾ – that followed his parent’s wedding banquet. During that night he had felt, between waking and sleeping, the disappearance of his arms and legs provoked by the uncontrollable voracity of his own stomach. The organ displayed such aggression that by daybreak Endo Hiroshi already felt like a member of the gang of those who only eat to ruin it.

Of those who aim to transform it into almost useless appendage. Endo Hiroshi was very familiar with stories of youngsters who died displaying extreme thinness because they suddenly refused to eat even a grain of rice. Some said that many cases of those lacking appetite were caused by some disappointment in love, and others that it was incited by strictly following the impositions of fashion that came from the West. On the other hand, he knew of men and women who stuffed themselves, showing in their burly figures the impossibility of abstracting themselves from the reckless desire to represent within themselves the whole universe.⁽²⁾ In his family, in more than one occasion, these two opposite situations came to pass. There was even the case of his twin cousins, in which the sister was consumed by anorexia and the brother became a renowned Sumo⁽³⁾ wrestler.

Endo Hiroshi also recalled some stories from the time of war, that he heard as a boy, in which they would reference such scarcity that it would force many to kill for a ration of rice or a piece of fish⁽⁴⁾. Likewise he had heard tales of the existence of rodent-meat wrapped in delicate sushis, and of young men who devoted themselves to catching flies to consume them as mijo⁽⁵⁾. It seems like the impact of these stories motivated the acquisition of a spirit that somehow combined a kind of aversion and a kind of reverence toward food by entomologist Endo Hiroshi from a young age. For that reason he never gave the impression that he agreed with that foreign expres-

sion, which claimed that the food of his nation seemed to be made for visual appreciation rather than consumption⁽⁶⁾. In his grandparent's house, where he spent part of his childhood because his parents were prohibited from living together while the cook was still alive, it was not a custom to waste any food. Often – based chiefly on the book of teachings by the Prophet Magetsu, of whom the entire family was a devout follower – there was a peculiar way of preparing food that consisted of burying the ingredients for several hours in a pile of rocks heated by lit wood or coal. The Prophet Magetsu, a monk who is said to have died not one but many deaths, conceived of the creation of the universe as a gift from mother earth to the constituent elements of the cosmos, among which, of course, were human beings.

During a trip he made to Africa, invited by a society of entomologists of which he was a member, Endo Hiroshi had to consume packaged foods the whole time, which he purchased near his home by recommendation of the members of the association of which he was a part. He took the trip carrying pots and glasses that contained variations of dehydrated food. Endo Hiroshi only had to add boiling water to the receptacles to achieve a certain variety of food that, in some way, slightly resembled the foods consumed in the country. This excursion was dubbed by the entomologist Endo Hiroshi himself “The long voyage of boiling water”, as it was fundamental to his voyage that there

be teapots and portable hot-plates that allowed him not only to feed himself adequately but also to drink tea in the traditional manner. Endo Hiroshi could have done without food for a few days, but as long as he was awake it was practically impossible for him to go without tea for more than three or four hours. Some entomologists counseled him to take advantage of the opportunity to taste one of the many edible insects that were consumed in the regions they all visited. From common ants, which were served bathed in honey inside paper cones, to the pulp of certain blue-footed tarantulas that only inhabit the tops of certain trees⁽⁷⁾. As they ate these specimens, it was common for members of the expedition to talk about the nutritional properties of insects. Some years back certain experts, especially the scientist Olaf Zumfelde from the University of Heidelberg, had built a table where the amount of protein contained in invertebrates that is immediately absorbed by the human body was detailed⁽⁸⁾. However, Endo Hiroshi did not taste anything but the packaged foods that he had purchased back home. He continued on his travels, always carrying his packaged foods, tea, teapots and the small battery-operated hot plate. With only a few days left of this trip, during which he worked with his habitual diligence, he found a strange specimen that was believed to be extinct. He found an unknown specimen. The only other species of which there was a record was the Newton Camelus Eleopitirus, which was a different color. He was able to store it in the best

2 Popular belief among Assyrians mainly, that in human body contained the totality of celestial spheres. It is believed, thanks to recent psychological studies around the world, that there are remnants of this conviction as a sign of social superiority in men.

3 Type of wrestling that aims to celebrate times of harvest and abundance. It is practiced mainly in areas ruled by a sun-calendar.

4 The type of fish for which the most killings were committed was Sole.

5 To this day there are sometimes news of cases of merchants who sell roasted flies in place of edible seeds.

6 See Newsweek #234, pp. 56

7 These were phosphorescent *Larpiacus tarantulas*, which only exist in western Namibia.

8 Consult the Zumfelde Table, available at the Society of Nutriologists of Berlin.



9 According to the traditions of the Prophet Magetsu, which are incomprehensible to the western world, the masters of a house could not maintain a marital life until the oldest of their female servants lost all their teeth. This fact did not deny them the right to have children.

10 Stewarson glasses were used, which were imported by the Tenkei-Maru House.

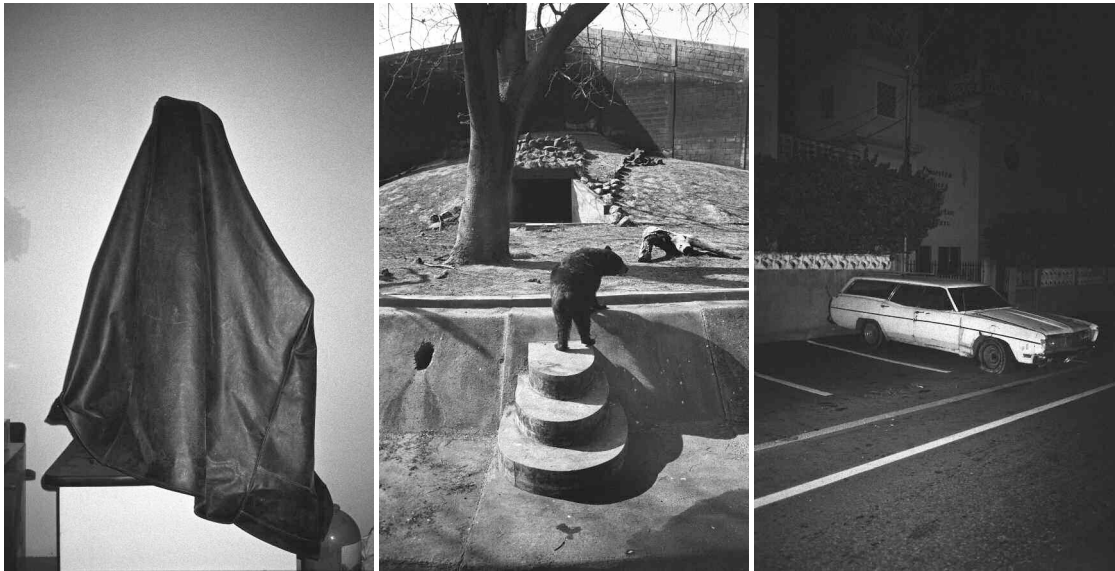
possible conditions, and without mentioning it to the rest of the expedition members, he took it with him on the trip back home.

Once he landed, he headed directly to the laboratory he had assembled in the back of what would later become his parent's house⁽⁹⁾. Then, his parents were still single and lived separately. In spite of this situation, the members of the family met every night in that house, where Hiroshi lived from infancy, to recite the prayers of Magetsu the monk. Endo Hiroshi knew that the discovery of the insect was fundamental to his career as an entomologist. His name, Hiroshi, was going to be used from then onward and forever to name the species he found. To the best of his, and many other investigators', knowledge, the known insect was blue and not red like the one that Hiroshi had found. Hiroshi *Camelus Eleoptirus* would be the name of this new species. But to his surprise, when he opened his plastic box he found only a tiny black

ball in place of his insect. The ball was so minuscule that it was curious that Hiroshi would notice its presence. The box had been designed especially to transport specimens of this nature – that is to say, small to medium sized insects. They were made especially for members of the society of entomologists to which he belonged. They were made in such a way that trapped insects could live for a long time in its interior. It was unthinkable that the eleoptera he caught last week had escaped. Endo Hiroshi had seen it in the Nairobi airport before boarding the plane back home. In the plane, he had taken a peek and upon his arrival, at home, he had been contemplating it for a long time under special entomology glasses⁽¹⁰⁾. On that opportunity he had been comparing it not only with the *Newton Camelus Eleoptirus*, which appeared in an illustration in the book of insects he always carried around, but with a series of specialized treaties that filled his library. Such was the im-

pression caused by this absence that he did not notice the arrival of his parents to the house who, given the safe return of their son, were preparing to resume prayers in the living room of the house. During the weeks that he had traveled to Africa, they had no choice but to pray in the temple of the Prophet, which rose from the skirts of the main mountain. To get there they had to complete exhausting ascents. Things could not be done any other way. Such was the prohibition before the cook's death, that the parents were not just impeded from living together before they were married but they were forbidden to remain together in the house for even a minute without the physical presence of their son.

Hiroshi heard them calling, surely they wanted to greet him but the most important thing was that religious rites could not start in his absence. Shikibu, the old servant, was almost done making the big pot of white rice that would be of-



ferred after the ceremony. From the time he was fifteen years old, the bowl of white rice served after prayers was the only food Endo Hiroshi consumed during the day. Rice and, he pointed out, several liters of tea. Anyone would have predicted that diet would leave him thin and weak. However, his vigor proved the contrary. Like old monks, even like the Prophet Magetsu himself, a bowl of rice a day was enough to go on through an entire lifetime. Referring to this idea, it is said that one of Prophet Magetsu's deaths, apparently his definitive death, occurred when the Prophet decided to allow his body to be its own food⁽¹⁴⁾. To leave record of the process, in which his flesh disappeared gradually to become a trace of his own flesh, he relied on his disciple Oshiro, who wrote the words that his master dictated throughout the process on a great rice-paper parchment, available to anyone who wished to consult it. The master limited himself to uttering one word each day.

Curiously, the last word could be translated as peace. It seems strange that a being at a spiritual level as high as the Prophet Magetsu, at the end of a death process as complex as the one he carried out would pronounce a word whose meaning is more than obvious to so many.

Before commencing the ritual adoration to the Prophet, Endo Hiroshi and his parents have got to proceed to examining the ancient cook's teeth. The parents were always the most interested in this inspection, for they could only marry and enjoy their status as masters of the house when that woman lost all her teeth. The day that she could not continue to eat, the cook would die of hunger during the solitary voyage – an endless road she had to start on one of the many roads that surround the main mountain that she would have to begin the same night of her masters' wedding. It was enough for this inspection to de-

tect the absence of every tooth to immediately begin preparations for the celebration. Generally, two days later everything would be consummated. The masters would be husband and wife. During those days the old lady could not taste even a morsel of the nuptial banquet, a state that would be fundamental so that in her road towards death, events would precipitate as quickly as possible.

A few minutes later, after the obligatory greetings and paying respects to the image of the Prophet Magetsu, they proceeded to the inspection of the cook's mouth. It was not yet time to begin prayers, it was important to know, in order to intone them correctly, whether they were praying in full knowledge of whether the cook had any molars. On that occasion, even though he performed them perfectly, Endo Hiroshi gave no importance to the rites he was directing. He was concerned with the disappear-

See the Sacred Catechism books of the Hiro-Sensei sect.

¹² It is said that some neighbors were unable to sleep that night.

¹³ Masters of this technique are usually found in the southern coast of the country.

ance of the insect. But, being a devotee, he pretended as best he could. He was wearing his traditional tunic and, after greeting his parents like any son returning from a long journey should, he began to splash, at their spread out bodies, the corresponding water, which he got from a small wooden bowl. After the greetings, the parents had laid out on the floor face-down. When that part of the ritual ended, they noticed the absence of the cook. The parents immediately intuited the truth. They went to the kitchen where they found the old lady hiding behind the firewood. As they presumed, upon opening her mouth, they discovered that the last molar, which had tortured them for the last few years, had disappeared.

While the old servant begged and refused to open her mouth again, Endo Hiroshi, who had followed his parents to the kitchen, seemed to understand then what had happened to his insect. He understood that the minuscule ball he found in place of his exotic specimen was a kind of insect-stomach. Really it seemed nothing more than the insect, which had eaten itself. A theory like this one could not be strange to him. Not in vain had he spent almost his entire life, every single moment away from his life as an entomologist, directing the rituals of the monk Magetsu. The process that the monk had gone through before his definite death seemed to have repeated itself in his entomologist's box. That ball had to be a formless mass formed

by the elements that had constituted the small bug. The old lady's screams were bloodcurdling⁽¹²⁾. The parents were inflexible. Finally the old lady was quiet –she suddenly showed a quietness that seemed to be an absolute acceptance of her destiny. The parents could then, calmly, discuss preparations for the wedding. They mainly talked about the banquet. There would be no modern touches, save for the sea-breams offered to the newlyweds before the ceremony. One had to think of a cook skilled enough to prepare the Phantom sea bream⁽¹³⁾. The recipe consisted of cutting the fish into pieces until there it is meatless but alive, to then put it in a fishbowl which would be placed at the center of the newlywed's table. The newlyweds would eat the meat while the animal continues to swim, moribund, showing its internal organs to anyone who wants to look. As a sign of good luck for the couple, the meal must last exactly as long as it takes the fish to die.

The entomologist Endo Hiroshi confirmed his suspicions that evening. After they sentenced Shikibu and completed, more intensely than usual, the rites for the prophet, back in his room with the help of a microscope he saw that, effectively, the insect seemed to have consumed itself. Without apparent reason, he experienced a wave of nausea. He vomited. In the meantime, downstairs, his parents continued with their planning. From that moment on, the mother

could, in addition to arranging the house to her liking, paint her teeth black. The father, apart from beginning to give order towards the functioning of the house, now had the right to go to the dentist and extract, once and for all, his front teeth. Those characteristics, black teeth and a lack of front teeth, were symbols of being in possession of a full life. Reflecting on the transformation that the insect had suffered, the insect that could have been named Hiroshi Camelus Eleoptirus, a name that would have immediately thrust him to international fame, he decided that after his parent's wedding the end of his life would consist in attenuating, to the minimum, the normal functioning of his stomach. He would seek to neutralize it in a similar manner to the renal atrophy experience by some geese, obsessively fed by their owners, or cats in certain countries, that are raised in minuscule cages and fed chemically aromatized corn.

When the sun came in through the window the following day, illuminating the plastic box containing the supposed insect-stomach, Endo Hiroshi decided not only to eat the black ball but also a series of weevils and other bugs he would collect in the morning. In his closet he stored, almost intact, the suit for the caterpillar hunt that was held on leap years. The last time he participated in one of these events he did it in the company of his cousin, that extremely thin girl who died as a consequence of her thinness, and of her brother, the obese Sumo wrestler.