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近圏、遠景 Near Place, Faraway Landscape



七月の終わりに、鹿児島島にいた。前回初めて鹿児島を訪れたのが震災の直後だったから、だいたい三年ぶりということになる。さして縁があるわけでもないこの南の街に、まさかこんなに早く再び訪れようとは思わなかった。済まさない用事にはさっさと片を付けて、あとは気兼ねなく、記憶を辿りながら街をぶらぶらと流す。行き交う人を眺め、街をぶらつくのにも飽きた夕暮れ前には、目に付いた店の暖簾をくぐって、串をつまみに焼酎のお湯わりをひっかけける。時間が早いせいか他に客も見当たらず、閑そうな店の主とひとしきり他愛もないお喋りをして時間を潰す。腹も満ち、話すこともなくなった頃合いで勘定を済ませ店を出て、時計を見ればまだ八時をまわったばかりだった。宿へ戻るにはまだ早すぎる。かといって、もうなにも食べたくはない。どうするかと思案するうちに、この辺りにも銭湯があるとさつき店の主が言っていたことを思い出す。そうだ、風呂に入ろう。風呂に入って、また飲み直そう。そう決めて、携帯で地図をみながら暗くなった街を歩きたす。鹿児島市内にある銭湯は、すべて天然温泉なのだという。水の豊富な街。火山の街。アーケードを抜けて信号を左折、公園をこえて大きな通りを渡り、もうすぐ左手にそれらしき建物が見えるはず、と画面から顔を上げると、ふと、既視感に包まれた。この景色を見たことがある。以前にもここを通ったことがある。まさか、と簡単に打ち消して見つけた銭湯の暖簾をくぐり、脱衣場へと足を踏み入れたところで、目に飛び込んできた鍵のかからない脱衣かご、花柄の浴槽タイル、動かないマッサージチェア。やはり確かに、以前にもここを訪れたことがあるのだった。汗まみれの服を脱ぎ捨てて、舐めるとちよつとしゃばい温泉に浸かりながら、いったいいつこの場所に来たのだろうと考えてみる。鹿児島を訪れたのは前回が初めてなのだから、三年前のことに違いない。それが夜だったのか昼だったのか。なにをした後だったのか。誰と一緒にだったのか。湯舟に顔を埋めても、なにも思いつかない。ただ一つだけ、その時泊まっていたホテルはこの銭湯のわりと近所だった気がしたのだけれど、しかしなんて名前のホテルだったのか、どんな部屋だったか、それすらもやはり思い出せないのだった。いや、そもそも鹿児島に来たのは、本当に前回が初めてだったのだろうか。

記憶の中の浴場といま見ているこの浴場の景色だけがくつきりと重なり合い、他は全てばやけてなにも像を結ばない。まるでこの風呂場だけが切り離されて、真つ暗な空間を漂っているようだ。ホテルからすぐの歩道脇に、たしか銅像が二体置かれていた。あれは、鹿児島のホテルではなかったか。あるいはそれは、松山で泊まったホテルの話だったか。仙台、沖縄、草津、京都、過去に訪れた様々な場所の景色が混ざり溶け合って、自分が今どこに居るのかさえも定かでは無くなりそう、考えるのを諦めて風呂から上がり、体を拭いて汗まみれの服を再び身に纏う。濡れた手ぬぐいを肩にひっかけ靴を履き、入口の扉に手をかけると番台で閑そうにテレビを眺めていたおばちゃんから「毎度」と声をかけられて、そのとき僕の混乱は、極みに達したのだった。

It was the end of July, and I was in Kagoshima. It had been three years since my first and only visit - right after the earthquake. I'd never thought I would go back so soon, I had no real affinity to the city. Having taken care of my errands, I wandered the vaguely familiar streets for the rest of the day. I soon got tired of walking around and watching the locals pass by, and even though sun had not yet set, I entered a bar that looked decent enough and had some kushiyaki skewers and hot shochu. Since there were no other customers, I spent some time talking to the bored-looking owner behind the counter. Before long I was full and without much left to talk about, I asked for the check a little after 8pm and headed off. I thought to myself, "It's too early to return to the hotel", yet I was feeling full and couldn't eat anymore. As I pondered what to do, I remembered that the pub owner had told me that there were several bathhouses in the area. A good bath and a few more drinks sounded like a good option, and so navigating with my iPhone I walked the dark streets. He had told me that all the bathhouses in Kagoshima City used water from natural hot springs as it was a city with a rich supply of water from an active volcano nearby. I walked past the arcade, turned left at the traffic lights, walked through the park, across the big street and I was almost there. Looking up from my iPhone, I was suddenly filled with a sense of déjà vu. I had been there before. I had walked that exact street. But I knew that was impossible... Somewhat bewildered, I entered the bathhouse. In the changing room I saw lockers with their locks broken, flower patterned tiles and a busted massage chair; by then I was sure that I had been there before.

Taking off my sweaty shirt, I soaked myself in the bath. The water tasted salty, and I tried to remember the last time I had been there. I had could to Kagoshima for the first time three years ago, so that must have been it. Had I come at night or in the afternoon? What was I doing before that? Who was I with? I submerged myself in the water, yet still nothing came to my mind. I thought that maybe the bathhouse was near the hotel I stayed at last time, but I couldn't remember the name of the hotel or how it looked. I started to doubt whether last time had really been the first time I visited Kagoshima.

In front of me, the bathhouse interior matched perfectly with the one in my memory, but everything else was hazy and had no clear outlines, as if the bathhouse was a separate memory, floating in a dark space. I remembered that in the alley near the hotel where I stayed, two sculptures had been installed. Or was it the hotel in Matsuyama where the two sculptures were? Or Sendai, Okinawa, Kusatsu, Kyoto...? Memories of the places I had visited started to merge together, and I became confused as to where I actually was. I gave up on remembering, got out of the water, dried my body and put my sweaty shirt back on. I put the wet towel on my shoulder and slipped on my shoes. As I opened the door, the lady at the counter, who had been watching TV idly, said, "Thanks for visited again". My confusion reached its peak.



