

妄想

する #2

まただ。

心臓が、あるべき場所よりも数センチ下方の敷布団と背中の間から突き上げる。えもいわれぬ恐怖心で目をさます。一筋の眠気もなく覚醒した脳に何が起こったのか探す。突然の地震に揺り起こされたのか、もしくは、悪夢を見たのか、暗闇に目を凝らした。

記憶は真っ白のまま、確かにその時に何かがあったような生々しさの余韻の中、Oは、時折睡眠時におとずれる激しい鼓動を「いつものことだ」と納得する。「自律神経失調」、そんなことが浮かんで、Oは、最近の自分に掛かっているストレスを朝食の準備をしながら列挙した。

最近、Oには大きな仕事が舞い込んだ。美術館での個展の話だった。これまでのキャリアの中でもっとも重要な機会になると思っ、気持ちは一気に高揚した。だが、同時に小さな不信が芽生えた。なぜなら、Oにこのチャンスを提案した担当学芸員UをOは知らない。Oは、Uから届いたばかりのメールの短い文面を何度も読み直す。その文頭は、「O様」という書き出しである。だがしかし、苗字のみで名の表記は無い。Oは、苗字よりも名の方が印象的なので、名と敬称で始まる文面のメールが送られてくるのが珍しくはないのだが、初めての相手からのメールで苗字と敬称のみで自分の名が記されていない事はあまり無い。だから、最初の不信は、「学芸員Uは、『O』違いの別の作家と勘違いをして、オファーをしたのではないか」というものだった。「馬鹿げた妄想」と思いつつもそのメール

鍵のかかったガラス戸の前には立っていると、ほどなくして、係の受付嬢の一人がハイヒールの音を響かせやってきた。塔の扉の鍵を開け、券売機でチケットを買うように促された。二百円のチケットを買い、受付嬢に手渡す。それをちぎって半券が手渡された。「上までは、百メートルございますので、到着まで一分ほど掛かります」と言われ見送られた。

エレベーターのカゴの四面は、ガラスでできていて、塔の螺旋構造がよく分かる。昇るにつれ、この塔内の上下百メートルの端と端に自分と受付嬢だけがいる奇妙さに微かな悪寒を感じた。塔の最上部にエレベーターが到着しても、閉塞的な鉄の壁が目の前にあるだけで眺望はない。だが、どこどころ開けられた小さな丸い穴から覗くようにして、かろうじて外を見ることでできる。Oは、何年も海底に潜み、時折水面下まで浮上して、潜望鏡から覗く救いのない風景はこんなものなのかもしれない、と思った。

塔から出ると、中空に浮かぶ巨岩が見えた。よく見るとそれは、太いワイヤーで固定されていた。広重が描いた吊るされた亀やグリューネヴァルトの磔刑図の様に見え、どちらにしても楔を打ち込まれ大地に戻れない巨岩の姿は、哀しく痛々しかった。

曇天の空の下にいても鬱々とした気持ちが続れることはなさそうだったので、美術館内に入ることにした。受付に来館の旨を告げると、受付嬢は首を傾げ、別の受付嬢に目配せをした。担当学芸員は誰か、と尋ねられ、Uの名を告げたが、受付嬢は二人とも目を伏せた。Oは、自分がこの場所から突然消えたような気がした。受付のホールの上を見上げると、巨大なパイプオルガンが覆い被さるように聳えていた。暗い光を放つパイプオルガンの胸には五芒星の護符が付けられていて、Oは、その五芒星に誘われるように二階に上がった。パイプオルガンの背後から回り込んで、Oが展示

の文面に「Oの作品」について何も触れられていなかったことも気がかりだった。

その日Oは、I県M市にある美術館でUと会い、会場の下見をすることになっていた。Oの自宅からM美術館までは、片道3時間弱かかる道程である。ある種の緊張感を持って家を出たOに、それとは別の感情が芽生えることになる。M市へと向かうバスに乗り込む直前に、Uからの電話が入った。ノイズが入り混じるなか、かろうじて聞こえたのは「待ち合わせに遅れる」という内容だった。ノイズの向こうの声の主は心当たりが無かった。

バスがM市に入る頃には、弱い雨が降り始めていた。M美術館の最寄りのバス停でバスを降りてはみたものの、喫茶店の一つも見当たらず、仕方なく待ち合わせ場所の美術館に向かって歩いた。その道すがら、建物の間からM美術館の高く聳える塔が見え隠れしていた。

Oは、M美術館の、中世ヨーロッパの城塞を思わせる、城壁に囲まれた中庭に立った。城壁の上部も下部も出入り自由の回廊になっているようだったが、Oにとっては、雨を凌げる下部しか選択肢はなかった。Uがどのくらい遅れて到着するのか、聞き忘れたことを後悔した。何もすることがないOは、塔を見上げた。その塔は、幾つもの正三角形のプレートを組み合わせた構造であり、三重の螺旋状に高度を上げている。Oは、その正三角形のプレートの数を数えたが、何度数えても確信が持てなかった。それで何となく、塔に登ってみようと思った。塔とは別の、メインビルディングの受付まで行き、希望を告げると、

「係の者が参りますので、塔の入口でお待ちください」と言われた。

をするであろう一室の前まで行った。普段なら、ここに座っているはずの監視員は不在で、だが、わずかな人の気配がイスに残されていた。「第9室」と書かれた入口から、その部屋に一歩踏み入れた直後にOが感じた違和感は、ホワイトキューブ内部の無機質な閉塞感のせいなどではなく、奥の壁に張り付いた黒い丸が原因だとすぐに分かった。よく見るとそれは、壁に張り付いているのではなく、直径四、五センチほどに開けられた穴だった。穴の方向に一歩二歩と進んだ。瞬間に全身の血の気が一斉に引いた。その穴から確かにOを監視する眼球が動いた。

「不味いコーヒー!…」

ひとりごとを言いながら、朝食のシリアルを義務的に口に運ぶ。テレビのどのチャンネルからも、いつもの午前中とほぼ同じ声のトーンが聞こえる。一瞬、グラビアアイドルの胸の谷間にウジ虫が見えた気がしたが、直ぐに画面が切り替わったので確かめる術はない。「まったく!」溜め息をひとつ。

学芸員Uは結局、M美術館に姿を現したのだろうか。胸の奥に鼓動とは別の、痛みに似た圧迫がかかる。Uがいったい誰なのか、考えれば考えるほど、なぜか冷たい哀しみの気配が心に満ちる。テレビの音は聞こえない。Oは、奥歯でカシューナッツを味わいながら昨日のことをまた、思い返す。

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クリテリオム90『美術館の幽霊』のための書き下ろしです

「妄想する #2」 二〇一五年
大久保 あり

English translation is on the other side.

D e l u s i o n s # 2

Not again.

Trapped between her back and the futon, her heart leapt several centimeters out of place.

O woke up in a fit of indescribable terror. No longer even the least bit sleepy, she tried to figure out what could have caused her brain to stir as it did. Could it have been the abrupt jolt of an earthquake? Or maybe it was just a bad dream? O strained her eyes against the darkness.

Though everything in her being told her that something must have happened, O couldn't remember a thing and assured herself that the violent throbbing in her chest was "nothing out of the ordinary." The word "dysautonomia" came to mind as O ran down a list of her stressors while preparing breakfast.

O had recently lucked into an important job. It had something to do with an exhibition at an art gallery. Though her heart leapt at the idea that this could be the biggest break of her career, an inkling of doubt stirred up in her as well. This was mainly because O knew absolutely nothing about U, the curator who had given her the opportunity in the first place. O read the short email that had just arrived from U several times over. "Ms. O," it began, without any mention of O's first name. Because O's first name was far more impressive than her last, it was not uncommon for her to receive emails that began with "Ms." and just her first name. It was, however, exceedingly rare to receive a first email from someone that mentioned "Ms." and her last name only. For that reason, O had begun to worry that curator U had mistaken her for another artist of the same last name and had meant to make the offer to that other someone instead. Try as O may to push these thoughts aside as "baseless delusions," she remained troubled by the fact that the contents of the email had completely failed to mention "O's work."

Later that day, O was scheduled to meet U at an art gallery in M, I to preview the venue. The journey from O's home to Art Gallery M took a little less than three hours. As O left her home, a new emotion began to intermingle with the nervous tension with which she'd already been wrestling. O was just about to board the bus to M when she received a call from U. She had a difficult time hearing him over the noise but was somehow able to catch that he'd be "late for the meeting." The voice on the noisy end of the line was not familiar to O in the least.

A light rain descended as the bus entered M-city. Though O had gotten off at the bus stop closest to Art Gallery M, the absence of any coffee shops left her with little choice but to head straight to the art gallery where the meeting was to be held. The tower of the art gallery came in and out of sight from among the buildings she passed along the way.

O found herself in the center of a courtyard surrounded by a rampart not at all unlike that of a mediaeval European stronghold. Both the upper and lower walls of the rampart featured corridors for easy entry, but O chose the lower corridor to help stave off the rain. O regretted not asking U how late he would be. With nothing better to do, O stared up at the art gallery's tower. It was constructed of a number of triangular plates and wrapped in three spirals that reached from top to bottom. O tried counting the triangular plates a number of times but never quite felt confident that she'd counted them all. Giving up, O decided she'd try to climb the tower instead. O went to the reception desk of the main building to ask if it would be okay to climb the tower.

"Please wait by the tower entrance," the receptionist said. "One of our staff will be along shortly."

Soon after taking her place in front of the locked, glass door, she heard the approaching echo of the receptionist's high heels. She unlocked the gate to the tower and prompted O to buy a ticket from

handed it to the receptionist, who then tore it up and handed her a ticket stub in return.

"It's a hundred meters from here to the top," explained the receptionist, as she bid O farewell.

"The whole trip should take you all of a minute."

The elevator cage was surrounded on all sides by glass, allowing her to clearly observe the make of the tower's spirals. As O ascended each of the tower's hundred meters, she felt an ominous chill as it occurred to her just how strange it was that her and the receptionists seemed to be the only people in the tower. Even as the elevator slowed to a stop at the top of the tower, the iron enclosure prevented view of anything other than that which was in her direct line of sight. But as a number of small, round openings began to appear around her, she was finally able to catch a glimpse of the outside world. Upon seeing it, O couldn't help but compare the experience to what it would be like to come up for a periscope view of the world after spending years beneath the sea—only to learn that there was no relief in sight.

O was greeted by huge, floating rock as she left the tower. A closer look revealed that it was fixed in place by a series of thick wires. To O, the megalith was reminiscent of Hiroshige's print of a suspended turtle and Grünewald's Crucifixion. Anxious but unable to return to the Earth, the megalith made for a truly sad and pathetic sight.

Sensing that the gloom under the cloudy sky was unlikely to recede any time soon, O decided to enter the gallery. When O returned to the reception desk to inform them of her arrival for the meeting, the receptionist seemed confused and motioned for another receptionist to approach. When asked which curator O was there to meet, both receptionists lowered their eyes at the mention of U's name. For a moment, O felt as if she had suddenly vanished into thin air. Glancing up at the upper floor of the reception hall, O saw a massive pipe organ that seemed to hang over everything else. It emanated a dull light and wore a pentagram talisman on its chest. Unable to resist the pentagram's pull, O made her way up to the

second floor. Swinging around from the back of the pipe organ, O came to a room that appeared to be used for her exhibition. The gallery attendant who would normally be sitting there was absent, though a lingering human presence seemed to remain on the chair. O soon understood the feeling of discomfort she felt the second she entered the room with "Room No. 9" posted over the entrance. It wasn't the cold claustrophobia of being trapped in what appeared to be a white cube that caused it, but rather, the black circle that clung to the wall on the far end of the room. A closer look revealed that it wasn't a circle at all, but a hole about four or five centimeters in diameter. O went pale as she took one, then two steps toward the hole. An eye that could only have been watching her flickered from the other side.

"What awful coffee," O muttered to herself as she went through the motions of delivering another spoonful of cereal to her mouth. The voices on the TV didn't seem any different than they had on any other morning. For the briefest of moments, O thought she had seen a maggot in the ravine of a Gravure idol's mountainous breasts, but the image on the screen changed before she had a chance to be sure of it.

"God damn it," she sighed.

She wondered if Curator U had ever showed up at Art Gallery M.

An oppressing pain in her chest accompanied her palpitating heart. The more she pondered U's identity, the more she found herself overcome with grief. She could no longer hear the TV. O thought back on the previous day again as her back teeth crunched into a handful of cashews.

This story "Delusions #2" was written by Ari Ookubo, for the exhibition 'Ghosts of the gallery', criterium 90, Art Tower Mito. 2015.

Translator: Yu Oshimura