

## **The Story of a Bear-Lady in a Sand Cave\***

I keep getting indigestion.

Could it be that I'm eating too little?

Eating the same food for every meal has never bothered me, so living on only garlic and mugwort is really not very difficult for me.

The only thing is that for someone who used to gorge all the time how much I eat has been greatly reduced these days.

I actually enjoy it—it's cozy to eat a small bit at a time.

I don't sleep well.

I can't tell whether I'm waking up too early in the morning or if I'm having trouble falling asleep until too late at night.

The cave is full of shadows only, because there is no light in here.

People outside call these shadows, the type that is unchained to light, 'darkness.'

Among these shadows, where hardly anything is visible to naked eyes, my eyes are also very much free.

So free that it may be difficult for me to sleep with my eyes closed.

Just as my eyes are free, my movement is also free.

What I do in this cave, where I enjoy this kind of freedom, is to shovel

sand out of  
the cave.

The sand must be bailed out; otherwise the cave would collapse, they say.

Of course, that is not why I am digging sand.

I've never seen it, but there is a tiger who lives with me in this cave.

Of course I don't know for sure since I can't see, but the tiger has the same living arrangements as I do.

The tiger is also digging sand.

The tiger's gait is probably quite full of grace, and his style of sand-digging full of beauty.

Otherwise we would have already had an opportunity to run into each other.

The tiger was originally a teacher from Tokyo.

That is to say, he is a city person.

He probably knows much about the world that an ignorant woman like me, who has been bailing out sand all her life, does not know.

I don't know for sure, but I don't think the tiger originally came looking for a sand cave.

The tiger in my dream drifted in here while looking for an insect.

I think he was an amateur insect collector.

In any case, it seems that the tiger decided to stay.

Tiger is my companion, and Heaven is our lover.

Sand has swallowed words, and thus Tiger and I are silent.

But we both live amidst soundless tongue-wagging.

The wagging goes something like this:

“Are we digging sand to live, or living to dig sand?”

I was much moved by Tiger’s thoughts on the cave, although I have never heard them.

The sand cave promised us a willingness to accept life.

People outside think we took to this cave to become humans.

I don’t know for sure, but I think we were humans before we came here.

In the end, we will become humans the moment we step out of here, and it will look as if we have finally become humans in the eyes of the people outside.

In truth, we put our stakes in the cave, rather than in Heaven.

In this cave, where words have been swallowed and forms submerged, I miss Tiger very much.

The sand moves mysteriously and yet dangerously.

On the surface of the enticing and enchanting sand wave the image of Tiger is superimposed.

It’s a man.

I think I see a tiger, but a wave of sand flows and erases it; once the sand takes all my wits out of me, up emerges the tiger again on top of what has been erased.

The tiger’s face is drenched in sweat and covered with wet hair.

His entire body is covered with salty sand.

I see myself, too.

I am getting thirsty.

I am getting so hot I feel dizzy.

Can't tell if I am dreaming or awake.

Tiger, to me, is like me, a bear.

He is male, but he is also of the same gender as I am.

So it's true, my feelings about Tiger are private.

At times I even feel as if Heaven and the tiger are the same.

But, isn't it in fact true that Heaven is far away while the tiger is keeping me company?

Actually, the tiger and Heaven both mean an onerous choice for me at times.

There is no doubt that I am being trained in this sand cave.

It is probably not a matter of simple perseverance.

This training is absolute; it has no direction and no duration.

Sand comes through endlessly in waves, like the waves of perseverance.

So one does not ask from where and why they come.

What is certain is that they come from outside.

People outside are busy fighting about the sand we bail out, despite the fact that the very sand comes from where they are; outside.

People outside call this sand "rights and interests."

The constantly in-coming sand is sent back out all day long.

Sand moves through, like water, inside and outside.

This movement is my responsibility.

It is a responsibility unique to me that is unrecognized by the people outside who are buying and selling the sand.

I and Tiger take much care to create a look that is as beautiful as waves

of water.

It is not because that is what people outside would like, but we still try to make it beautiful.

At times, a wave is formed that is not any different from the ecstasy of sand I have seen in dreams.

It has to be slower than the flow of water and as dangerous as volcanic lava to look seductive.

When a sand wave excites ecstasy, Tiger and I become one.

We become a man and a woman.

The two bodies become one.

They take on their rightful look.

A wave flows, and a valley deepens.

We heat the sand and light the cave.

We start a war.

In the wars outside there are lessons to be learned; in our battles only destruction comes forth.

Everything must fall apart.

I know the kinds of fighting around the sand that are going on outside.

Sand is used in construction.

Sand will then fatten those who live under bright lights outside.

Sand will then draw blood outside.

This is the war of the people outside.

They think that Tiger and I are ignorant and naïve, that we don't know the whole story and are suffering a hard life in here.

So we try loading the truth on a sand wave.

Those who are privy to the beauty of the wave sometimes speak ill of us, saying that we have it easy.

They do not know the loneliness hidden behind what looks easy.

We keep silence.

The silence is not for the sake of the outside world.

This silence is a vibration.

It is a vibration that is decisive for making a sand wave.

I trim the waves so that the people outside can recognize the vibration.

Water and sand are similar.

If one finds what is similar to water on the ground, that is sand.

Apart from their characteristic of moving in waves, sand and water are also similar in covering and filling up cavities.

Imagining suffocation under sand, people outside have avoided this cave.

Even if it were not this sand cave, it seems that they don't really know how to do things on their own.

It seems that they guess as much outside, that unless one takes on water and sand voluntarily they could be dangerous.

Although it hasn't been very long,

Tiger and I have both aged much since we met.

Like the sound buried in sand, we have become living corpses together.

Somebody said that being a living corpse is the same as being a mother without giving birth to a child.

What a relief.

Despite all these brilliant secret plots of mine, I am still desperately yearning for something.

I miss Heaven, and I miss Tiger.

Of course, I miss the shadows very much too.

I think I would hate them if I did not love them, so I keep them all as my lovers.

And the sand?

I made it my First Wife.

Relax your body through imagination?!

I stop shoveling the sand and try splashing it on my body.

It is cold, like my body temperature.

I have tamed the sand, somewhere along the way.

The Tiger's body temperature is probably the same too.

Perhaps the two of us became one through body temperature in this cave.

This is a story that people outside, who rub their bodies when it's cold, do not know.

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\* In an e-mail correspondence Haegue Yang has referred me to two other stories. The first is the story of Dangun, the Korean foundation myth. According to the legend, a tiger and a bear were instructed to eat only garlic and mugwort and remain out of sunlight for 100 days in a cave. The tiger gave up after about twenty days and left the cave. The bear remained and was transformed into a woman, later marrying the son of the lord of heaven and giving birth to Dangun, the forefather of Koreans. The second story is *Woman in the Dunes*, a novel by Kobo Abe that was made into a film by the same name by Hiroshi Teshigahara – translator.