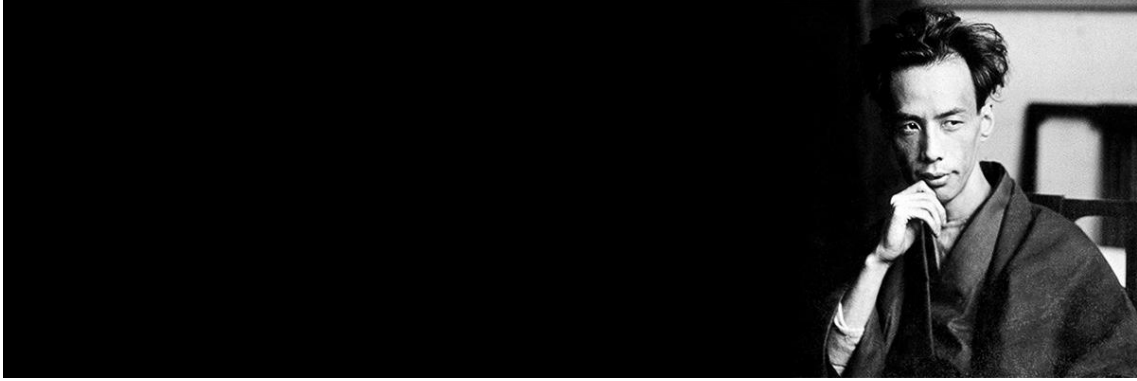


A WOMAN'S BODY

Ryunosuke Akutagawa



One summer night a Chinese man named Yang was suddenly awakened by the oppressive heat. Lying on his stomach, his head in his hands, he had been engaged in feverish fantasies when he noticed a flea crawling along the edge of the bed. In the gloom of the room, he saw it dragging its tiny back glittering like silver dust towards the shoulder of his wife sleeping beside him. Naked, she lay deeply asleep, and he heard her breathing softly, her head and body turned to his side.

Watching the flea's indolent progress, Yang reflected on the reality of these creatures. It takes a flea an hour to reach a place that is two or three steps away from us, apart from the fact that its entire space is reduced to a bed. "Very tedious would my life be if I had been born a flea..."

Dominated by these thoughts, his consciousness slowly began to darken and without realizing it, he ended up sinking into the deep abyss of a strange trance that was neither dream nor reality. Imperceptibly, just when he felt awake, he saw, astonished, that his soul had been penetrated by the body of the flea that all that time had been advancing unhurriedly across the bed, guided by a pungent smell of sweat. That, however, was not the only thing that confused him, although it was such a mysterious situation that he could not get out of his astonishment.

In the path stood a towering mountain whose more or less rounded shape appeared suspended from its summit like a stalactite, rising beyond sight and descending toward the bed where he lay. The half-round base of the mountain, contiguous to the bed, had the appearance of a pomegranate, so lit that it gave the impression of containing fire stored in its bosom. Except for this base, the rest of the harmonious mountain was whitish, composed of the snowy mass of a fat, tender, polished substance. The vast surface of the mountain bathed in light

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gave off a faintly amber luster that curved skyward like an arch of exquisite beauty, while its dark slope glistened like bluish snow in the moonlight.

Eyes wide open, Yang gazed in awe at that mountain of unusual beauty. But what would be his surprise when he realized that the mountain was one of his wife's breasts. Putting love, hate and carnal desire aside, Yang contemplated that enormous breast that looked like a mountain of ivory. In the height of admiration, he remained petrified and stunned for a long time before that irresistible image, completely oblivious to the acrid smell of sweat. He had not noticed, until he became a flea, the apparent beauty of his wife. Nor can a man of artistic temperament limit himself to the apparent beauty of a woman and gaze at her in amazement as the flea did.