

Letters from Japan

Gary Young

Not yet morning, but no longer night, the sky peach-hued at the horizon, cicadas began their electric chorus, and two crows called out as they flew beneath a half-moon stranded in the wakening sky.

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Bamboo, heavy with summer rain, bends to reveal a stand of pine trees at the crest of a hill, and just beyond, a single trawler sliding over the bay.

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14,000 years ago, in the mountains above Nara, a ravine was filled with boulders to match the constellations overhead, to conjure the Milky Way, and to mirror a river of stars with a river of stones. When I knelt there, I could hear the faint murmur of water far below, the same low hum we hear at night, when we look up at the stars.

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The farmhouse with its tiled roof is a sun-struck island. A crane hunts frogs in the flooded field.

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We climbed the mountain, looking for the mountain, unsure of what we'd find. Cicadas hummed in the moist air, and two ravens called out as they circled overhead. Sunset lit the far side of the summit. A stand of bamboo swayed above us, making the mountain appear to breathe, and we kept walking, the mountain alive beneath our feet.