

★ **Fish Swimming in Dappled Sunlight****Riku Onda****Alison Watts, Translator**

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Breaking up is never easy, but when you suspect your partner of murder, it becomes a safety issue. In Riku Onda's atmospheric novel *Fish Swimming in Dappled Sunlight*, a couple spends one last night together, each determined to get the other to confess.

Hiro and Aki met in tennis club and felt an instant connection. Their conversations flowed and feelings developed, but an unfortunate discovery ruined their courtship. Resolved to pursue the relationship nonetheless, even as it teetered on a razor-sharp edge, they moved in together, took vacations together, and dated other people.

When a hiking trip ends in tragedy, Hiro and Aki's unasked and unanswered questions begin to poison them against one another. Their separation is slow. With one night left: perhaps the truth will prevail.

The mystery of the murder in the mountains proves to be immaterial in the wake of cascading revelations about who Aki and Hiro are to each other. In alternating chapters, the two dance around each other, their relationship, and their memories. Each startling twist is calculated based on which person is responsible for the disclosure.

That both narrations are direct is a disorienting, interesting device that illustrates the differences in Aki and Hiro's perceptions of the same events. Their shared memories, in particular of the fateful mountain trip, play out in reminiscences. Each remembers aspects of their relationship not just as it happened, but also as colored by their current knowledge and suspicions. In this way, the book becomes a deep character study of Hiro and Aki, their motivations, their foibles, and their triggers. Unraveling the complex connections between memory and conjecture takes the better part of the night, and with morning light comes a sense of clarity and finality.

Fish Swimming in Dappled Sunlight is an enigmatic novel about memory, perception, and time.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (July / August 2022)

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