

I Called Him Necktie

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New Vessel Press (Sep 9, 2014)

Softcover \$15.99 (140pp)

978-1-939931-14-6

This minimalist narrative exquisitely conveys themes of connections within the Japanese culture.

I Called Him Necktie is an elegant and moving story about two very different people who, by keeping secrets, begin to disconnect from others. In this touching story, a friendship develops between a twenty-year-old shut-in and a businessman as they sit opposite one another in the park.

Takei Hiro is a *hikikomori*, a Japanese youth who lives with his parents but spends most of his time shut in his room, keeping contact with others to a minimum. One day, when Hiro is in the park, sitting on the bench he has taken to occupying daily, he observes Ohara Tetsu, a man in his fifties, sitting on the bench opposite him. He inspects Tetsu's tie—its colors and pattern, the way Tetsu loosens it and throws it over his shoulder to eat his lunch. Hiro decides to call Tetsu "Necktie." Eventually, after this routine of sitting opposite one another daily in the park, the two make eye contact and begin to talk. Their conversation reveals stories of their past and present, the secrets, traumas, guilt, and shame that led to them sitting on the bench.

As Hiro and Tetsu begin to share the secrets, they become allies, and Hiro slowly begins to reconnect with the world around him. This exposition of two people going through a life crisis deftly reveals the Japanese culture's importance of appearance of decorum and saving face; for example, Tetsu keeps a secret from his wife, continuing to accept the lunches she makes and keeping up the appearance of going to work daily.

Japanese culture permeates the story, not only through the measured use of words and phrases (which are explained in the glossary at the back of the book), the description of Hiro's interaction with his parents, or Tetsu's food, but also in the style of the narrative itself. The minimalist style and calm pacing of the narrative reveal a depth of emotion behind the controlled exterior. An example of the simplicity of the wording and evocative imagery appears in the description of Hiro's friend, Yukiko, a young girl and victim of bullying, whose name has been written under a picture of a pig: "She wiped it off, stroke by stroke. Yukiko became Yuki. Yuki became nothing."

Clean, crisp images further offer a simple beauty and elegance that lends a hypnotic, meditative quality to the reading experience. Short sentences, with their rich choice of words, such as "Silence has a body. It is alive," lend a contemplative quality to the engaging story.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (Fall 2014)

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