

★ **Lion Cross Point**

Masatsugu Ono

Angus Turvill, Translator

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Masatsugu Ono's *Lion Cross Point* is an atmospheric, melancholy tale about memory and absence.

Ten-year-old Takeru arrives at his mother's childhood village by the sea. Under the care of a relative, Mitsuko, he settles into a languid summer. The intervention of neighbors, a new friendship with the second-grader next door, and sightings of a ghost are entwined with memories of the disorderly apartment where he witnessed scenes of domestic violence.

The spare and sometimes ambiguous narrative circles through past and present, dreams and reality. Tragedy is left implied; subtle grief folds into everyday encounters. As Takeru recalls his mother's brutal lover, he also revisits acts of kindness. From a Haitian man who notices Takeru and his brother's frequent abandonment to others who offer drinks and food, the book hints that survival is intricately bound with larger forces.

One man in particular—once a friend of Takeru's mother—takes it upon himself to lighten Takeru's days through a promised trip to an aquarium. It's the drive there that provides the map on which fragments of memory are skillfully pinned. Grace comes in unbidden waves that offer reprieves amid the mental isolation Takeru endures.

Meticulous natural details enhance many scenes. Whether noting the sound of cicadas or dreaming of ants, Takeru is an attentive observer who forms deep impressions. At turns a psychological journey, a panoply of self-reflections, and a moving portrait of a mother whose longing to leave her village is painfully clear, the book masterfully splices memories with the present. Dark as the material is, the burden of remembering never drowns Takeru.

In Turvill's translation, dialect in the seaside village is represented through dropped consonants and vowels, and on occasion, entire syllables. The effect is a rural, guileless voice that is nearly collective.

This eloquent, haunting work captures the heart of a boy at a crossroads.

KAREN RIGBY (March/April 2018)

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