

★ **The Thorn Puller****Hiromi Ito****Jeffrey Angles, Translator**

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In Hiromi Ito's novel *The Thorn Puller*, a woman cares for her aging relatives across two continents while trying to maintain a life of her own.

In Japan, Ito's parents rely on her to provide them care as their health fails. Meanwhile, back in California, her relationship with her husband faces pressures, including his own health problems. There is little humor in her struggles, but she manages to find some anyway, plucking wry observations from even the most tragic circumstances. All the while, she draws strength from family stories, folk tales, and religious rituals. She especially relies on Lord Jizo, a deity with the power to take away pain.

With ruthless honesty and wicked humor, Ito exposes the frustration and inconvenience of being a caregiver, juxtaposing it with the sorrow of watching a loved one deteriorate. She focuses as much on life's beauty as on its ugliness, describing road trip landscapes and her parents' incontinence with the same sharp eye.

In the midst of all, Ito has her own personal crises, from health scares to the death of a pet. Yet her duty to her family is always foremost in her mind: if something happens to her, no one else will care for her daughters, her husband, or her parents. Despite resenting her many responsibilities—from accompanying her parents to endless doctors' appointments to keeping her youngest daughter's Tamagotchi alive—she fulfills them, often with only Jizo for support. Her observations on life, death, and the in-between make for a fearless look at what every adult in every country must face: growing older as their loved ones do too.

The Thorn Puller is a darkly humorous semiautobiographical novel in which a woman attempts to remain strong in the face of immense responsibilities and inevitable losses.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2023)

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