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ALONSOVILLE VOICE

The Holiday Issue



Photo by John Dean

Cindy Moss: Bat Woman

By David Bolton



Her interest in nature sprouted in Rockville, MD, back when there were still woods to explore. Forget the mall. Cindy liked nothing better than traipsing around the forest, looking for frogs and toads. It was no accident she would become a scientist. Her father worked at NIH as a developmental psychologist who researched the interaction between mother and infant. “We had something similar in our personalities,” she said recently. Cindy also had an independent streak. On the first day in chemistry class, the teacher separated the girls from the boys under the auspices that girls could not handle the complexities of chemistry. She left the class and signed up for physics and biology.

Cindy disliked the car culture in Rockville, too suburban, too boring. Then her father, on sabbatical from NIH, took the family to Florence, Italy. “Going to Italy opened up the world for me. Florence was spectacular.” Cindy attended a small, international school and made lasting friendships. Unlike Rockville, there was public transportation; she had the run of the ancient city with her friends. The year passed all too quickly.

Returning to Rockville, she experienced “reverse culture shock.” For a time, she did not socialize... spent a lot of time in her room. Eventually she did hang out with some Latino kids at school, giving her the chance to speak Italian and Spanish. During her junior year in high school, Cindy applied to be an exchange student, going through American Field Service. She was given two choices, northern hemisphere or southern hemisphere. She chose

northern; when asked where she'd like to go, she said Greece. They sent the student to Sweden for her last year of high school. Why Sweden? Evidently, they considered the girl "too independent" for the Greek culture. Better for her to be in an environment where women are more equal.

Aside from bonding with her host family, she described the experience as "a hard year." People were "shy and reserved," making it difficult to make friends. She liked history, arts and foreign languages and was placed in the "humanities line." She was disappointed to find students talking about "candy, diets and clothes." She made the best of the situation by doing "practical work," volunteering at the school of the deaf and homes for the autistic.

Against her mother's wishes, Cindy chose Hampshire College (Amherst, MA) because she could build her own curriculum. "From the day I enrolled at Hampshire, Mom wanted me to transfer. There were students who did nothing, but others were more like me, who worked all the time." She'd show Mom what she could accomplish.



Hanging out with friends in Florence, 1972

As part of her curriculum, she planned to research "sensory systems." Having worked with autistic people, she understood that there were differences in the ways they processed sensory information. "I looked at the sensory environment of children with special needs and considered how it affected brain development." This led her to volunteer at Belchertown State School, a state institution for the developmentally disabled in western Massachusetts. She also took courses, participated in research in classrooms for children with special needs, and did a lot of reading on her own. After a year and half at Hampshire College, she might have graduated had she stayed another semester. But Cindy realized she was not getting a liberal arts education. She had narrowed her focus far too early... needed to step back. After three semesters, she left Hampshire and landed a full-time job at Belchertown State School, working as an assistant therapist.

Every morning Cindy hitchhiked to work at Belchertown in the bitter cold of New England winter. She had been assigned one resident, a small, wiry woman in her late 30s who had spent her entire life in this institution. She was considered a threat to herself and others. If one person in a ward couldn't eat solid food, everyone ate pureed food. When they showered, the entire unit was run through the showers. The patients were not treated like human beings. The horrors of Belchertown State School were featured on 60 Minutes in the 1970s. Eventually, it was closed.

“Pat Walker threw her breakfast tray at me.”

Pat Walker lived in a room off the main hallway. “Following the instructions of the therapist, I would take her out and try to enrich her life: getting fresh air, walking around, taking the bus into town and seeing the world outside the institution,” a challenge because Pat was both psychotic and developmentally disabled. Should she become upset or violent, Cindy was instructed to hold her from behind and talk her down.

On one particular morning, “Pat Walker threw her breakfast tray at me.” Following “the plan,” Cindy grabbed Pat; the woman writhed in her arms, scratching and kicking. Cindy locked her in the room and called out for help, but no one came. The staff working there viewed her as “a naïve young person.” She didn't really belong. At 19, she felt “burnt out” after the funding to help Pat Walker ran out. She moved back to Rockville and worked as a waitress in Georgetown. “It was like a vacation.” She needed to time off to chart a new direction... maybe medical school.

The Path to Bats

At the University of Massachusetts, she found herself again focusing on sensory systems, working in labs that studied children's attention when watching Sesame Street. She also worked in a lab studying changes in human visual sensitivity during eye movements and taste/feeding in the blowfly, the subject for her undergraduate thesis. Along the way she met Don Berger, a budding poet. They married right after college and moved to Seattle, where she took classes, worked in labs and applied to graduate school. There she realized the depth of her passion for science and abandoned the plan to apply to medical school.

In one lab at the University of Washington, she studied infant visual development. She was leading a project, and her boss offered to send her to an international conference, where she met a Swedish ophthalmologist who wanted to duplicate the methods her lab used at UW; he invited her to



Cindy with a big brown bat in Germany

build/transport a duplicate apparatus for infant vision testing to Linköping, Sweden, bringing her back to the same family she had bonded with as a high school senior. She's considered part of the family. Perhaps you've noticed the Swedish flag sometimes hanging off her front porch on Wingate.

“Think of a strobe light in a dark room. The faster the strobe, the closer the bat is to its prey.”

Over the next decade, Cindy Moss earned a PHD at Brown University in experimental psychology and did postdoctoral work in biology at the University of Tübingen in Germany and postdoctoral work in neuroscience at Brown. In graduate school, she shifted to studying hearing in frogs, the subject of her dissertation. From there she moved onto “bat echolocation,” spending two years in German labs and another two years at Brown. A job at Harvard brought her growing family to Cambridge. For the first time, she had her own lab, funded by grants and private foundations. After six years, she brought her expertise to the University of Maryland. A large group was studying the “Comparative and Evolutionary Biology of Hearing,” from insects to humans; they needed somebody to study hearing in bats. Cindy would stay for 19 years.



Egyptian Fruit Bats



To see these amazing creatures in action, go to the Bat Lab at JHU, click on “Movie” at the top, and see eight short videos of brown bats, one of 1400 species.



Cindy with her family in Takoma Park

Seven years ago, she and Don bought an Alonsoville house. Perhaps you have seen her walking with purpose down Wingate, on her way to the Bat Lab at Johns Hopkins, or with her dog, Floyd, featured in the previous Voice as “the lion of Alonsoville.” The best thing about Alonsoville? “The people.”

Her research, supported by federal and private foundation grants, has expanded. “We started with how bats use echoes to measure distance of objects. They produce sounds to ‘interrogate’ the environment. We record and analyze the sounds to make inferences on what’s going on in the mind, studying a range of things: attention, memory, perception, target tracking, prediction and decision making.”

By making calls and adjusting features of those calls, bats reveal what they are thinking. Think of a strobe light in a dark room. The faster the strobe, the closer the bat is to its prey. “Bats and humans have the same basic brain structure. Their brains are powerful for processing sound to create perception. We are looking to see if some of the same processes apply to humans and other animals.”

It would be a challenge to chronicle Cindy Moss’s contributions to science: her positions, scientific appointments, and honors. She is most proud of her “long and successful history in training predoctoral and postgraduate fellows.” Many would go on and make their mark in science. She is also dedicated to launching careers in the Center of Hearing and Balance.

Cindy speaks four foreign languages, Italian, French, German and Swedish. She travels the globe, sharing the Bat Lab discoveries. She’s the co-author of two books and 150 referred articles and scientific reviews. Maybe one day she will slow down, but not now. There’s too much to discover.



The Spirit of Christmas

WWI, Christmas Eve, 1914. Along the Western and Eastern fronts Germans placed candles on trenches and Christmas trees. They sang Christmas carols and the Brits responded in kind, climbing out of the trenches. A soccer game broke out. Both sides were able to bury the dead. The soldiers, some as young as 16, continued to shout Christmas greetings to one another until the powers-that-be ordered an end to the truce. The war would not end until November 11, 1918.



New Additions to the Neighborhood

Quote of the Day

“When we moved here, there were lots of old people. Now there are lots of kids.”

~ A boy at the Pumpkin Carving



Joan "Joanie"
Frances Irwin
November 25, 2022
Emmy, Amos and Joanie



Aila Astraea McCanon
October 31, 2022
With big sister Echtra

Yanko Kranov: The Perpetual Fixer Upper

He saw the Alonsoville listing at 9:30pm and called his agent. Ten minutes later the Loyola engineering professor had an appointment. The next day he walked into the rundown grey house on 413 Wingate and came in at 25k above the listing price of \$199,000. The sellers had intended to flip the house, but the amount of work “scared” them. His offer of “buying it as is” closed the deal.

The house was in a sad state. It needed to be gutted. Yanko was up to the task. In Bulgaria, he had built a house with his father. A machinist and tool-maker by trade, he said recently he had been “doing this all his life,” beginning in high school, where the communist government required students to learn a trade skill.

He began by cleaning and painting two rooms so his children, Alex and Sophia, would have a place to sleep. He also removed the cabinets and the “terrible” shelving. They moved in at the end of November 2017. From the damp basement to the leaking roof, he assessed the “bad stuff” and what needed to be done. Just about everything had to be replaced. “Little by little,” he upgraded the wiring, heating and plumbing and added a gas line for the kitchen as well as three radiators on the first floor. “I do everything up to code.” Collecting and recycling hardwood flooring from old houses, he replaced the “bad wood” in the kitchen, “damaged by rain and a leaking faucet in the kitchen sink.” For a mud room off the kitchen, he added walls and enclosed it.

There were challenges along the way. The second winter, thieves broke into the garage where he had his workshop and stole all his tools. He built a fence in response. Then a neighbor’s tree fell on top of the garage. He constructed “two giant beams to reinforce the roof.” Recently, his water bills rose to “500... 600 dollars a month.” There was no apparent leak, so he did a test by turning off the water.

Outside the water meter was still running, indicating a leak in the line between the house and the meter. He and his son dug a 40’ trench for the new water line; then they added 20’ to capture the rainwater coming from the hill. “It’s like a river. I can’t stand water in the basement.” There he does metal engraving as a hobby. He also collects “watchmaker lathes. I like time machines. The basement needs to be dry.”



413 Wingate in 2017



Citing the “beautiful gardens and houses,” Yanko calls Alonsoville “the Shire” (*Lord of the Rings*). He estimates he has five more years to finish the restoration. He has no intention of replacing the original windows. “Plastic siding and PVC windows may be cheap and efficient, but they make the whole thing odd.” Instead, he plans to glaze the windows and polish the brass pieces. He also wants to replace the floors in the attic and transform the backyard into a Japanese garden. Remarkable.



Here's some photos from the past and the present:



NEWS & NOTES

Thanks to Larry Grubb, the New Year's Eve Crab Drop has been revived. See you at the circle at 11:45.

Johns Hopkins University has revived plans for its private police force, even though campus crime that prompted the original plan has receded.

In case you missed Raphael Filippi's masterpiece on the pumpkin carving party:
[HTTPS://youtu.be/gFF9RTiHRT8](https://youtu.be/gFF9RTiHRT8)

Featured Dog in the Neighborhood

ENZO

A TRUE FASHIONISTA

Italian Greyhound

2 years old



Photo by his human, Sara Fidler

ONCE UPON A TIME

“In the 400 block of Cold Spring, the Drop Stitch Studio, which sold children's clothes, had a donkey who lived for years in the back of the store.”

~ Daphne Mohr, 409 Wingate Road, Keswick's History Notebook

One More Word

I lived in Japan from '84 to '86, working as a copywriter for Universal Advertising in Tokyo. During that time, I wrote this Christmas story. It was published in *The Plaza*, a Japanese/English journal that I helped found. In '87, I entered the story in the Baltimore Sun short story contest. It garnered honorable mention. Merry Christmas!

Nativity in Balsa, 1985

Sometimes one doesn't know the value of something until it is lost.

The ringing shattered his vision of snow, plump flakes melting into tears on his cheeks. Yawning, Douglas reached across the futon for the black rotary phone and picked up the receiver. Dawn's early light filtered through the sliding glass doors.

"How's the oyster stuffing?" he asked, watching a trio of cardinals eating seeds from the feeder on the patio. "Did you make oyster stuffing?"

Mom's cigarette-laced voice faded in and out. ". . . 'course, dear, I made oyster stuffin' . Wouldn't be Christmas eve without oyster stuffin' ." The static lessened and he heard in the background Dad croaking "O Come all ye faithful . . ." Dad was always a happy drunk on Christmas Eve; other times, not so much.

Oh to be back in that house in the Hampden neighborhood, among the familiar smells, sights and sounds of the season, the 34th streetlights, the decorations on the Avenue, arm in arm with those who cared about him... at times he felt lost in this sea of 20 million souls. Hadn't that been his intention? To lose himself? He had come in July on a whim, on the heels of a failed romance. Got on a plane at Dulles and flew to Narita on a tourist visa. *Nothing too big you can't run away from...*

"Did everybody come?" Douglas asked.

"The entire... you... we... you."

He raised his voice, hoping to cut through the crackling void: "Sorry! Didn't get that!"

"... miss you. You gettin' enough to eat?"

His mouth watered at the thought of her mashed potatoes swimming in gravy, fluffy rolls warm on the tongue, spoon bread and spinach souffle, pumpkin pies lathered in whipped cream, and, best of all, a huge steaming turkey. "I'm fine, Mom; I eat fish every day."

"Watch out for the sushi."

"You eat raw oysters out of the Chesapeake. What's the diff—"

"And don't eat the blowfish. I read in the National Geographic—"

"Mom, I won't eat the blowfish."

“Promise?”

“You worry too much.”

Her voice faded. “...love you.”

“I love you too. Give my love to the brood.”

“Merry Christmas, sweetie...”

He rose from the tatami mat, rolled up the futon and stuffed it in the closet. Who else today would wish him Merry Christmas? He could have asked for the day off, but he wasn't quite sure how to fill up the time, other than haunting the museums or going to the movies. Couldn't very well stuff a turkey in the microwave. He had tried that at Thanksgiving. What a disaster.

Douglas switched on the radio in search of Christmas carols, a few lyrics of *Silent Night* would be perfect while he dressed, anything to soften the mood of this overcast morn. The dial crossed several talk shows, a commercial for Jack Daniels, some commentary in Russian, and countless stations playing teeny-bop tunes. Too squeaky for his taste. Even Armed Forces radio... no *Silent Night*, but Michael Jackson, *Thriller*. Nah.

After one last adjustment of the green bow tie in the mirror, he stepped from his flat into the walkway and greeted his kimono-clad landlord with an awkward wave. If only he knew more Japanese, he could have a real conversation, not just these polite nods. A small, round woman of uncertain age, Mrs. Mayazaki was clipping a *bonsai*, one of three dozen that lined the rows on the metal stand. The trees looked ancient. “Douglas-san,” she said with a bow. “*Ohayo Gozaimas.*”

“*Ohayo Gozaimas,*” he replied.

At *Sakura* Boulevard he fell in with a sea of blue suits and bobbing heads, all heading for the subway, a gelatinous entity seeping into a vast underground complex. Another workday in Tokyo Station. Passing through the hive, he had grown used to the competing announcements, the deafening echoes of commerce, the flash of neon and the sheer numbers on the move east, west, north and south. Douglas also had adopted the stoicism of the natives to endure the crowd at the platform, the mad crush when train doors separated, elbows jabbing ribs; white-gloved university students, big as houses, pushing the mass into the train till people were splayed against windows. How could they fit another person into this space? Like toothpaste squeezed from a tube, he felt he could rise toward the ceiling. Yet those sumos in suits added not just one, but a few more bodies. There was always room for more, just had to shove those exposed limbs a wee bit so the doors could close.

At last the train pulled away from Tokyo Station. His lanky, 6'2" frame towered over the swaying mass as he looked over the shoulder of a man who was engrossed in a *manga*, a highly stylized comic book. The story appeared inane, about a big-eyed girl chased by a Dracula-like figure before the caped boy saved the day. The elegant strokes of black splashed across the page were pleasing to look at... style over substance... or maybe style *was* substance?

At work, he initialed the big black book and frowned at the red mark next to his name. *Damn*, late again. He swept past the desks lined across the fluorescent-lit room, nearly as big as a football field. A blue cloud hung beneath the lights... *nice day, nice smoke*. Douglas fished out of his corduroy pocket what was left of a Pall Mall. He had bummed the cigarette from a salaryman the night before in a sake joint. *And, they are mild...* Funny how slogans stuck in the mind... like chewing gum on a banister.

Flicking open the Zippo lighter, he lit the stub, more in defense than in actually wanting a cigarette before 9am. At least he was making use of his degree in English. Wasn't that one of the reasons he chose Japan for his escape? Beat being a substitute teacher in Baltimore City.

Douglas removed his jacket (the room already felt stuffy) and settled into his seat. At the desk stood a pile of customer letters, usually letters of complaint about a Seiko watch that needed fixing under the 10-year guarantee. Another pile were the responses, often requiring heavy editing and proofreading. Too much "Japlish," words of English altered to fit the Japanese mind. He had never thought of "sex" as a verb until he came across a headline for underwear: "Let's sex." Huh?

At 10:30 sharp, he heard the rattle of the approaching cart. "Dozo," said the moon-faced young woman in a blue uniform. The "tea girl," as she was called, placed a steaming cup of green tea on his desk.

"*Domo arigatou,*" he replied. "And Merry Christmas to you."

"*Sumimasen,*" the girl squeaked, retreating. Had he said something wrong? Sighing, he returned to his editing.

As the morning passed, he found himself glancing at the clock, calculating the time in Baltimore. Now they would be gathering around the fireplace, having a whiskey or two in preparation for midnight mass at Thomas Aquinas on Roland Avenue. Uncle Pete might recall spending Christmas in the South Pacific, praying to baby Jesus for protection from the submarines. Or Dad in the thick forests of east Belgium, hoping to survive the Panzers in the Battle of the Bulge. Douglas had heard these stories since he was a little boy; being away from familiar shores gave them greater meaning.

Lunchtime. He welcomed taking a stroll in the crisp air along the boulevard to his favorite place for lunch, a narrow restaurant off the lobby of the Mitsubishi building, an art-deco structure destroyed during the war and rebuilt to its exact dimensions. The sushi makers chimed their welcome, "*Tras-shai-ma-se!*" He was in luck, one vacant stool by the door. Usually he had to line up along the wall. He lifted a passing plate of salmon sushi from the conveyor belt. While he ate, he watched the men in white make the sushi, so efficient with their razor-sharp knives. He had *unagi*, freshwater eel next, then white fish, another plate of salmon, but no blowfish.

No one wished him Merry Christmas.

The afternoon passed in trickles. He tried not to dwell on the holiday as the pile of letters dwindled; at times, his attention strayed across the big, fluorescent-lit room, scanning the metal desks for a holly twig, a bit of mistletoe, even a shiny green or red ribbon would do.

At five thirty, he slipped on his jacket and whipped a silken white scarf around his neck, a gift from his girlfriend the previous Christmas. He bade goodbye to his co-workers, a pair of middle-aged men with sallow complexions. Douglas wondered if either ever resented his early departures. He doubted it. The *gaijin*, the foreigner, was expected to leave on time; they in turn would man their posts often till seven, sometimes eight; it was an honor to be the last to leave.

Douglas took the subway to the Shinjuku high-rises and wandered among the gently jostling throngs. He entered the Seibu department store to see what the natives called "Xmas-style" decorations. Had it been just a year since he presented Lucille that diamond ring? Wonder what old buddy Kev gave her this Christmas? Maybe they were at midnight mass, a few pews away from his folks. Poor Dougie Platt... snaked by his best friend. *Stop it!* Let the flame burn to ashes. If only he could...

Loudspeakers assaulted his ears; a neon ho hoing Santa, three stories of blinking plastic, made him want to cover his ears and shut out the noise, inside and out. On a side street slick with drizzle, Douglas sought refuge in a place marked by a sole black note on the door. Down the stairs, he entered a smoke-filled cavern. At a corner table in the shadows, he nursed a scotch and stared at the baby grand, anticipating the show. Maybe he would hear some jazz or, better yet, some blues, something that would rip his heart open. *Let it bleed.*

The club was half full when the curtains closed across the stage. She was introduced in two languages, “*Sakura . . . Cherry Blossom, for your pleasure.*” The curtains parted, revealing before the piano a long young woman in a sparkling black gown. India-ink hair sheened down her bare back. She was stunning in silk. Bowing to the all-male audience, she slid onto the seat and launched into “Summertime,” sounding as if she had stepped out of *Porgy and Bess*. At his fingertips, Douglas’s drink lay untouched, the ice melting during her husky litany of woes and lovers; she moved with ease from Gershwin to Billie Holiday.

He had to talk to Sakura, to tell Cherry Blossom how much her music meant to him on this Christmas night. At the break, 45 minutes into the show, she rose from her seat and bowed to the standing audience. She left the stage and glided near his candlelit table. He stepped toward her declaring that he loved her voice

“*Hai,*” she said with a shy smile. “No English.”

“Your English is fine, Sakura-san. My name is Douglas.”

Sakura lowered her eyes. “No English.”

“Would you like to celebrate Christmas with me after the show? We could—”

“No English! No English!” Her face flushed with embarrassment. “*Sumimasen.*”

“Oh...” The lyrics had been memorized, word for word, devoid of all meaning. Watching her swift departure, he felt slightly duped. Wasn’t her fault. He did not stay for the second half.

Through the tangle of narrow streets, he walked slightly hunched, hands thrust in pockets. Paper lanterns swayed in the icy breeze. The crowds had thinned at Shinjuku Station, exposing grizzled men on cardboard mats; most wore soft, two-toed boots, laced over the ankles, perfect for climbing bamboo scaffolding. During the day they were a common sight on the sides of buildings. They reminded him of leprechauns. He had heard that many of these men had been exiled from their rural villages because of some disgrace they had brought to their family. One might have married the wrong girl, chosen a career beneath the family’s station, or stolen gold from the Shinto temple. Honor was complicated in this ancient society.

Normally Douglas, inured to the streets of Baltimore, would have passed these men as though they were invisible. But a small Nativity scene, no larger than his hand, caught his eye. Beside the carved balsa reclined a fellow with close-cropped white hair; his head rested on a burlap sack. He was looking at his creation. Must be rough sleeping on that cold stone....

Douglas raced from the station, hoping to reach the Seibu department store before it closed. He was in luck. Big Santa was still ho hoing. He found what he wanted in the “Live Life” section at the top of the escalator on the third floor. He paid with a pair of 10-thousand-yen notes and hurried with his load down the escalator. Red-faced salarymen gave the tall *gaijin* wide berth to maneuver across the

plaza and into the tunnels of Shinjuku station. Most of the grizzled men had fallen asleep; empty bottles of sake and *sochu*, a poor man's vodka, were scattered along the wall. He draped a blanket over each figure, whispering Merry Christmas as he ambled along the tunnel. Several acknowledged the greeting with a bow.

Last, he came to the old man with the carving. His eyes were closed. "Merry Christmas," Douglas whispered, tucking the blanket around the old man's shoulders.

He headed for the ticket machine, hoping it would not be a long wait for the train. It could be an adventure on these later trains, usually filled to the brim with drunk salaried men. Recently he saw a man lose his dinner on the shoulder of the man in front. The victim turned, wiped the residue off his suit with a handkerchief and returned to his magna, no big deal. Could only imagine what would occur, had that violation been in New York.

Douglas took his ticket from the machine. He felt the rumble of an approaching train. A hoarse voice gave him pause: "Merry Kreestmas!" Wrapped in the blanket, the old man was sitting up, leaning against the wall. Douglas asked if he spoke English. "Jesuits," the old man said with a toothless smile. Gesturing for Douglas to sit, he pulled from his sack a bottle sloshing with sake, along with a pair of porcelain cups.

"*Matte*," Douglas said, holding up a finger. He took the stairs three at a time and found a noodle cart outside the station. He returned with chopsticks and two steaming bowls of *ramen*. "*Dozo*," Douglas said, placing the bowl at the old man's knees.

The old man poured the sake into Douglas's cup; Douglas took the bottle and filled the other. They clicked their cups. The sake went down easily; a warmth spread from his stomach, shielding him from the chill. The noodles and salty broth tasted as good as turkey from his mother's silver platter. Amidst the curious glances of passersby, they exchanged names. Douglas learned of Masanori's plight; he had been banished from his family. Douglas did not ask for the reason. Grateful for his own loving family, Douglas thanked the old man for sharing Christmas with him.

"Presento," Masanori said. He placed in Douglas's palm his carving. The shepherds, the animals, the holy family and angels were fragile as eggshells and connected through a series of slits on the wood.

"I'm truly honored, Masanori, but I can't take this. It gives you comfort. I saw it in your eyes."

"Presento, a shrine for your living space," Masanori insisted. "I make another."

"Okay, but only if you accept my present." Douglas pulled from his pocket the diamond ring and placed it in Masanori's calloused palm.

"Why give me this?" asked Masanori, inspecting the stone. "Can't accept."

"Please... let me explain. Once this meant a great deal to me. Now I no longer have use for it. Sell it, do whatever you want. The diamond is real. You should be able to get a grand for it."

"Why not you sell it?"

"It would be better if I gave it away. Here, take this scarf too. Now I'm free."

The old man seemed more pleased with the scarf. "Okay," he said, wrapping it around his neck.

“Thank you, Masanori-san.”

“Maybe I go back to my village. I would like to die there.”

“Maybe you go back to your village. Send me a postcard.”

The two men laughed and clinked cups in a final toast. “Merry Kreestmas!”

“Merry Christmas, my friend....”

On the train Douglas cradled the balsa while he nodded off, resting his head against the window. He nearly missed the *Yotsuya* stop and scrambled off the train just before the doors closed. Emerging into the mist, he covered the Nativity with his jacket and walked through the glistening streets and past the *koban*, where a pair of young policemen stood watch with their kendo sticks. He let himself into the flat. He had forgotten to lock the door that morning. Not that it mattered. On the table, next to a photo of his family, he placed the balsa.

In the early morning hours, he dreamed of an eagle, flying high in the sky.

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