

THE LONG SIDE OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN



THE LONG SIDE

*of the*

MIDNIGHT SUN

*Warren Decker*

ISOBAR  
P R E S S

First published in 2020 by

Isobar Press  
Sakura 2-21-23-202, Setagaya-ku,  
Tokyo 156-0053, Japan



14 Isokon Flats, Lawn Road,  
London NW3 2XD, United Kingdom

<https://isobarpress.com>

ISBN 978-4-907359-31-7

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	7
The Letter from Nathaniel C. Finterlee	8

### **The Unabridged Text of *The Long Side of the Midnight Sun***

Primary Characters	10
Other Characters	11
Prologue	13
1. Ink	24
2. Ink Ibex	30
3. Ink Ibex Igloo	39
4. Ink Ventriloquist	53
5. Ventriloquist	59
6. Ventriloquist Ink	66
7. Ventriloquist Ink Ibex	72
8. Ventriloquist Ink Ibex Igloo	78
9. Ink Xylophagous	83
10. Xylophagous	98
11. Xylophagous Ink	103
12. Xylophagous Ink Ibex	112
13. Xylophagous Ink Ibex Igloo	117
14. Xylophagous Ink Ventriloquist	125
15. Xylophagous Ventriloquist	131
16. Xylophagous Ventriloquist Ink	139
17. Xylophagous Ventriloquist Ink Ibex	151
18. Xylophagous Ventriloquist Ink Ibex Igloo	159



## Introduction

Peter T. E. Pappeteener  
Editor, *Unfettered Letters Literary Review*  
New York City  
December 23, 2019

The following poem was transcribed from the hand-written contents of a mysterious fleece-bound notebook which found its way to my desk in Manhattan in a large official-looking manila envelope with a Washington D.C. return address with no name. The sender turned out to be Nathaniel C. Finterlee, an adolescent acquaintance that I had not heard from since we attended school together in Salisbury, Maryland. I have included his letter here, following these introductory notes.

As readers will soon observe, the author occasionally uses Japanese within the poem. During the transcription process I learned that there are five primary vowel sounds in Japanese which are generally pronounced as follows:

a	/ä/	b <b>Al</b> my, <b>A</b> Ardvark, <b>A</b> rmor
i	/ē/	est <b>EE</b> med, <b>E</b> go, tur <b>EE</b> n
u	/ü/	untr <b>U</b> thful, pantal <b>OO</b> ns, sch <b>OO</b> ner
e	/e/	in <b>Ex</b> plicable, <b>E</b> ggshell, <b>E</b> difice
o	/ō/	claustroph <b>O</b> bic, g <b>O</b> At, anecd <b>O</b> te

At the time of this writing, this poem's author remains unknown.

December 25, 2018

To Peter T. E. Pappeteener,  
(Editor of Unfettered Letters Literary Review):

Forgive me for contacting you so abruptly after having been completely out of touch since our school days in Salisbury. Congratulations on all of your great literary success.

I trust that your time is precious as a literary editor and thus I will get directly to the point. The enclosed fleece-bound notebook--along with 30 kilograms of cocaine, over 56,000,000 Thai Baht, and hundreds of illegal animal products--was seized by my team of agents during a raid on the Ocean City "beach-house" of Philip Ringsley, the notorious drug-trafficker known to the world as Long Side Phil.

The Honorable Judge Judith T. Tonabelle deemed this notebook to be inadmissible as evidence in our case against Mr. Ringsley but unfortunately considered it to be of "literary merit". Thus, after Mr. Ringsley's distinctly untimely aneurysm during his trial, instead of surreptitiously placing it in our incinerator--an act which I will confess to having anticipated with no small degree of excitement--I found myself assigned with the task of returning this notebook to the family of the late Philip Ringsley.

Since--after considerable efforts--my team and I were unable to make contact with any living relatives of Mr. Ringsley, nor find any designated legal heir for his considerable financial resources, my supervisor advised me to send this notebook to a reputable literary editor, and--naturally--your name came immediately to mind.



Thus, if you--like the Honorable Judge Judith T. Tonabelle--deem the enclosed fleece-bound notebook to be of "literary merit", then please feel free to publish its contents in any form of your choosing. If you--like me--do not, then please dispose of it by whatever means are most convenient and/or enjoyable for you and your associates.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathaniel C. Finterlee'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'N' and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Nathaniel C. Finterlee  
Washington DC Domestic Field Division  
United States Drug Enforcement Administration

## PRIMARY CHARACTERS

CRAIG	The hero of our story
INNER CRAIG	The inner hero of our story
STORYTELLER	The teller of our story
KANA	The wife of our hero
KEN	The son of our hero and Kana
MOM	The mother of our hero (Jade)
DAD	The father of our hero (Corey)
SAMANTHA	The older sister of our hero
MARKLE	The nephew of our hero (Samantha's son)
WIZARD	The wizard

**OTHER CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

CRAPPY TEXTBOOK  
FLO  
LOU REED  
RAPPER  
CLERK  
ORANGE VEST  
TUXEDOED GROOM  
NEWSCASTER  
CAPTIVE LISTENER  
BONG  
THOM THE THIRD  
REPORTER  
TV GUEST 1 (JOE)  
ANTI-CHRISTMASERS  
TV GUEST 2 (JIM)  
TV GUEST 3 (WES)  
INGRID BERGMAN  
HOLOGRAM MACHINE  
HUMPHREY BOGART  
DR. FITZPER  
CROW  
FAMILY MURMURER 1  
FAMILY MURMURER 2  
DEEDEE N. SINGH  
RADIO  
PSYCHIATRIST  
DONKEY CLOCK  
ALASKAN LOCALS  
SOCRATES  
ATHENIAN JURY  
先生  
OCEAN  
SOME



**PROLOGUE**  
**Osaka, Christmas Day 2014 –**  
**Maryland, The Day Before Christmas 2015**  
**(With a Number of Memorable Detours)**

**STORYTELLER**

For his forty-first Christmas, Craig's two-item gift-list consisted of an iPhone 6 and one kiss with Kana. He shifted closer in his frayed-wrist plaid pajamas on the leather couch (a gift from her boyfriend as a teen). She slouched in black jeans and a fluffy white fleece. Craig stiffly leaned a little closer. He kept his hands in his lap. Ken napped in the back room. Craig's lips were chapped. But he finished his <sup>Asahi</sup>アサヒ, put his hand on her knee, and auspiciously, she didn't glare at him suspiciously, pull her leg away, or smack his hand viciously. Reaching towards her thigh, he surreptitiously glanced up at her eyes.

**KANA**

Still so fucking shy.

**STORYTELLER**

But she smiled and leaned closer and then Ken began to cry. Craig sighed. Kana groaned, then left him on the couch alone, and went to check on Ken. Craig thumb-punched his iPhone 5.

**MOM**

| Craige, Samantha, Merry Christmas.

---

**Asahi** – brand name of Japanese beer

| Miss us? I had just one Christmas wish, which was  
| A VISIT WITH MY OFFSPRINGS' OFFSPRING! with no scoffing  
| at my 'Christmas at the Isthmus' plan. We were offering  
| to spring for your airfare. We'd found a Kra resort  
| with hot-springs and tennis courts. Listen, LIFE IS SHORT!  
| So no short vague retorts. I NEED TO SEE MY GRANDSONS!!!!  
| Ken in those corduroys, looking so handsome,  
| still overjoyed by presents, still writing Santa Claus  
| and asking for a pony. Markle with his 'Satan's Claws'  
| punk-rock songs, and those rings in his lips,  
| his wild purple hair, all his tales of his trips.  
| It's really such a bummer that this Christmas was a bust.  
| Oh well. Let's try for summer! The logistics might be tough,  
| with Dad and I in Singapore, Samantha in Toronto,  
| Craige in Osaka, but we have the chance, we ought to  
| go Arctic! Fjords! Somewhere none of us have been.  
| I'm leaning towards Norway, and I'm leaning towards when  
| the earth is leaning towards the sun. Maybe Mjøsa Lake?  
| Torsvåg for the solstice? I understand your plates  
| are pretty full with jobs and kids (I remember, believe me!)  
| and I hate to pull and prod, but please, it will relieve me  
| just to see the baby-steps of 'maybe' plans taking shape!  
| So reunion in June? Sooner's better than too late!

#### STORYTELLER

Craig stopped reading. The rest he just skimmed, imagining his mom with her trunk-sized limbs and her Nordic blond hair, the crease between her eyes that he'd noticed as a kid when she helped him tie his ties for his uncle's eight weddings, California state debates.

INNER CRAIG

*O abominable fate, are we just a bunch of flakes  
of snow that won't accumulate and yet the crushing burden  
falls on Mom to make a snowman?*

CRAIG

|| not really certain ...  
|| Ken has summer school? maybe summer pool?  
|| 2015 Christmas? maybe??? would that be cool?

STORYTELLER

He replied and sighed, then remembered Santa Barbara. Once he'd tried to see Santa with Samantha; it was hard to keep his eyes open. Orange-magenta sunrise, his dinosaur pajamas, cold fake marble tiles in the kitchen, switching Mr. Coffee's switch as Samantha made toast. His tiny fingers itched to tear the silver wrapping-paper off his single gift. Dad appeared with a smile as he reached out to lift the carafe to pour his coffee. He blew into the steam, pursed his lips and took a sip.

DAD

I had a funny dream:

Craig, you built a snowman (sticks for ears that grew into thick gnarled trees [painted eyes {runny blue}, red carrot teeth]), who came to life and caught you, and stuffed you in a cave. Let's see what Santa brought you.

STORYTELLER

Now with Kana in Umeda, they had no fireplace.

No chimney. No stockings. KFC and Christmas cake,  
and Craig on the couch with his unfulfilled wish.  
He remembered when they met, at HAPPY HAPPY ENGLISH.  
She was new in admin, he was working as a teacher.  
She'd friended him on Facebook and said that he could reach  
her  
in case of an 'emergency' with air-quotes and a wink.  
Craig fiddled with a paper clip, gulped and then blinked.  
At the HAPPY monthly meeting, Craig half-napped,  
until Kana told <sup>Kacho</sup>課長:

KANA    This HAPPY book is crap.

CRAPPY TEXTBOOK

I humbly beg your pardon?

KANA    Please <sup>Kacho</sup>課長, no one talks that way.

STORYTELLER

<sup>Kacho</sup>  
課長 frowned and looked away. The next HAPPY day,  
Kana wasn't there, but later she had texted:

KANA

Date on Xmas eve?

STORYTELLER

<sup>Hoteru</sup>  
in ホテル Mist Chief.

KANA

No shit? You're still a virgin?

---

**Kacho** – Section Chief

**Hoteru** – hotel



STORYTELLER

She laughed into the pillow, but then gently urged him:

KANA

Relax. Have some fun! Come on, it's Christmas eve!

STORYTELLER

Their second time was better, so much better they conceived their unexpected Ken (who just started first grade at <sup>Ogimachi Shogakko</sup> 荻町小学校). Kana had laid herself on the floor when she found out she was pregnant.

KANA

I'm getting an abortion.

CRAIG

*No* Kana let's get

married!

KANA

You are joke?

CRAIG

No, I'm serious!

STORYTELLER

Glazed eyes raised, Kana nodded, Craig delirious with happiness. Quiet <sup>dekichatta-kon</sup> 出来ちゃった婚.

Samantha couldn't make it, but Mom and Dad had flown from Changi to Itami, long Narita layover.

Mom wore a muumuu.

---

Ogimachi Shogakko – Ogimachi Elementary School

dekichatta-kon – a marriage arranged because of an unexpected pregnancy

MOM    Japan's way colder  
than Singapore!

STORYTELLER                          Dad two decades older  
than <sup>Otousan</sup> お父さん. Mom was nervous, Craig told her:

CRAIG  
I'm in love Mom. She's the one for me.

MOM  
Well that's all well and good, I just hope that you can be  
truly happy Craigeys, in the many years to come.

DAD  
Marriage takesswork son, workssss never done.

STORYTELLER  
Dad had softly slurred.

DAD    Delissssious sa-ki.

CRAIG <sup>sake</sup>  
It's 酒 Dad.

DAD    Some timessssswill be rocky ...

INNER CRAIG  
*Dumb expression.*

---

Otousan – Father  
sake – rice wine, pronounced 'sah-kay'

**STORYTELLER** But with post-partum depression,  
eight months later, they started weekly sessions,  
as patients of <sup>Azumi-San</sup>安海さん, bilingual marriage counselor,  
patient as Craig shouted:

**CRAIG** She lies on the couch for  
days! Then gets up ... you know why?  
To fuck her high school boyfriend!

**STORYTELLER** Then he'd start to cry  
and wish he was a kid with his mom tying his tie.

**CRAIG**  
I really think she wishes that I'd go away and die.

**KANA**  
Do you always have to cry?

**STORYTELLER** Was <sup>Azumi-San</sup>安海さん laughing  
when their time ran out? Craig imagined her graphing  
spreadsheet details of how their marriage failed.  
Kana packed her duffel-bag, but somehow he prevailed  
and convinced her to stay, instead of taking Ken  
and moving to her parents' house. In 2010  
he got a job at Sandai.

**CRAIG** Associate professor!

STORYTELLER

Genuine American and sort-of snappy dresser,  
compared to other applicants with their advanced degrees,  
who'd take their jobs too seriously, giving students Cs,  
when Craig would give Ss.

CRAIG

I pine for your caresses!

STORYTELLER

He laughed and crooned to Kana, but deep in his chest  
he did pine. Now they slept in different rooms,  
Ken and Kana in the back, Craig alone with the moon  
blue on his <sup>tatami</sup>畳.

SAMANTHA

||| xmas works 4 us  
||| let's meet somewhere balmy.

MOM

||| OK, well so much  
||| for the midnight sun in Norway, but you know what  
might be fun?  
||| A beach-house in December, your Uncle Phil has one.  
||| Ocean City, Maryland! I know it sounds tacky,  
||| famous for its boardwalk and its saltwater taffy,  
||| Ferris wheels, mini-golf, funnel cakes and rides.  
||| Phil's house is on the water and he christened it  
'The Long Side.'  
||| So Christmas '15 at The Long Side! It's decided!

---

**tatami** – traditional woven mats used for floors

STORYTELLER

At the airport one year later, Craig still elided the details of the flight: two transfers, thirty hours.

KANA

There won't be any bathtubs right? Only showers?  
Ken <sup>kawaisou</sup>かわいそう. Whatever, <sup>shouganai</sup>しょうがない.

STORYTELLER

Best deal on Orbitz: Xiamen Airlines had them fly first to Singapore (he didn't tell his parents), Vancouver, then to Baltimore. It was apparent to Craig, when they arrived in The States:

INNER CRAIG

*My marriage is fucked.*

STORYTELLER

Kana was irate

at the Budget Rental counter, watching Craig get pushed around by a kid (nametag Flo), who punched some keys and frowned.

FLO

So here's your reservation: 'compact or midsize.'  
We only have a compact so ...

STORYTELLER

He rolled his eyes

and handed them the keys to a two-seater KIA.  
Ken in Kana's lap.

---

Ken **kawaisou**. – Poor Ken.  
**shouganai** – nothing can be done

KANA                            Fuck, it's gonna be a  
long three hours, to get to Ocean <sup>Shitti</sup>シティー.

CRAIG  
Still can't say 'city,' or just trying to be witty?

STORYTELLER  
Craig buckled up, and they started driving east,  
towards a blue-bruised dawn.

KANA                            Hey at least  
I can speak. Not like your shitty Japanese.

CRAIG  
But now we're in America, so could you please  
shut up?

INNER CRAIG  
*O sun! Why don't you rise?*

STORYTELLER  
Bridge over the Chesapeake, tears in Craig's eyes,  
and fields of dead corn.

KEN                                Papa nakanai  
パパ <sup>泣</sup>泣かない!

KANA                            <sup>shouganai</sup>                            <sup>Papa</sup>  
Ken <sup>しょうが</sup>しょうがない. Your <sup>パパ</sup>パパ loves to cry.

---

Shitti – imported word for 'city,' pronounced 'shitty'

Papa nakanai! – Don't cry, Dad!

shouganai – nothing can be done

**STORYTELLER**

Snow began to fall.

**KANA**

Can't feel my fucking thighs.

Craig stop at this McDonald's, I need coffee and some fries.