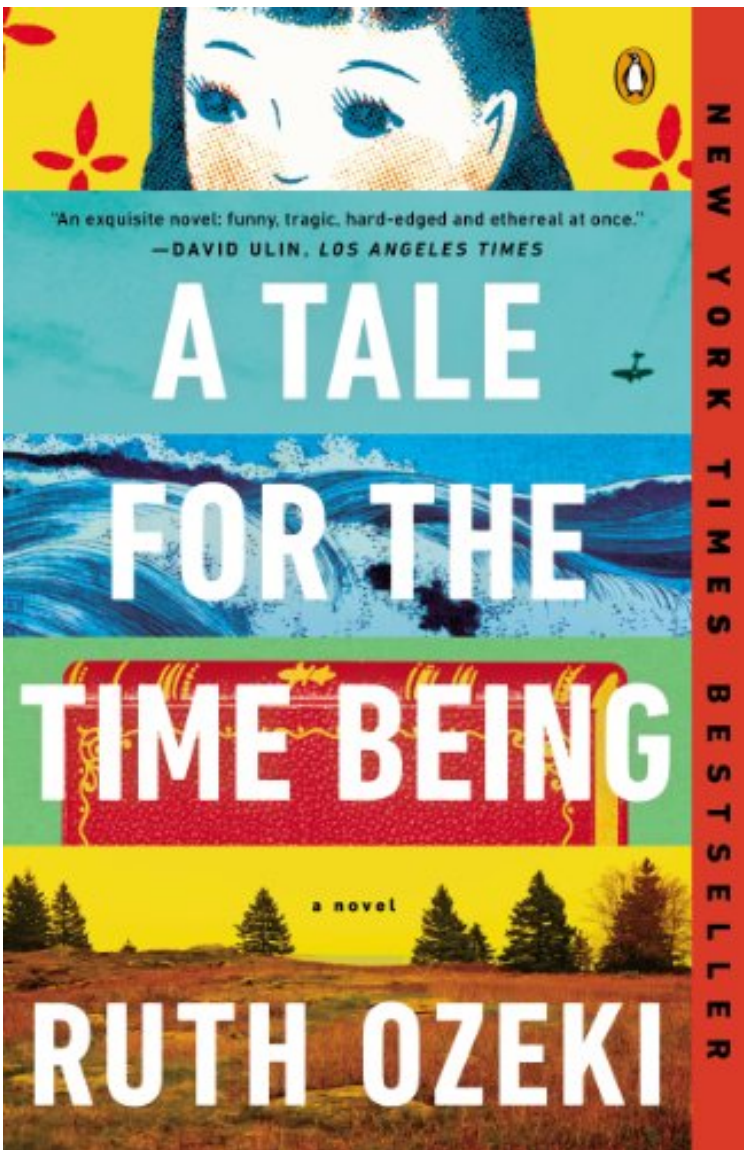


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A Tale for the Time Being: A Novel



Par Ruth Ozeki
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA brilliant, unforgettable novel from bestselling author Ruth Ozekishortlisted for the Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle AwardA time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be.In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided theres only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates bullying. But before she ends it all, Nao first plans to document the life of her great grandmother, a Buddhist nun whos lived more than a century. A diary is Naos only solaceand will touch lives in ways she can scarcely imagine. Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchboxpossibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its

contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Naos drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future. Full of Ozeki's signature humor and deeply engaged with the relationship between writer and reader, past and present, fact and fiction, quantum physics, history, and myth, *A Tale for the Time Being* is a brilliantly inventive, beguiling story of our shared humanity and the search for home. Extrait Praise for *A Tale for the Time Being* Naos lively voice, by turns breezy, petulant, funny, sad, and teenage-girl wise, reaches the reader in the pages of her diary, which, as Ruth Ozeki begins to fold and pleat her intricate parable of a novel, washes ashore, safe in a Hello Kitty lunchbox, on a small Canadian island off the coast of British Columbia.... Dualities, overlaps, time shifts, and coincidences are the currents that move *A Tale for the Time Being* along: This is a book that does not give up its multiple meanings easily, gently but insistently instructing the reader to progress slowly in order to contemplate the porous membrane that separates fact from fiction, self from circumstance, past from present. The New York Times Plunges us into a tantalizing narration that brandishes mysteries to be solved and ideas to be explored. The Washington Post A delightful yet sometimes harrowing novel... Many of the elements of Naos story schoolgirl bullying, unemployed suicidal salarymen, kamikaze pilots are among a Western readers most familiar images of Japan, but in Naos telling, refracted through Ruth's musings, they become fresh and immediate, occasionally searingly painful. Ozeki takes on big themes... all drawn into the stories of two time beings, Ruth and Nao, whose own fates are inextricably bound. The New York Times Book A terrific novel full of breakthroughs both personal and literary... Ozeki revels in Tokyo teen culture this goes far beyond Hello Kitty and explores quantum physics, military applications of computer video games, Internet bullying, and Marcel Proust, all while creating a vulnerable and unique voice for the sixteen-year-old girl at its center. The Seattle Times A fascinating multigenerational tapestry of long ago, recent past, and present... The writing resonates with an immediacy and rawness that is believable and touching. The Boston Globe A rich and engaging novel... *A Tale for the Time Being* explores many themes, biculturalism, war, manga, depression, suicide clubs, Internet bullying, the slippery qualities of time, and Zen Buddhism. When Nao learns to meditate at Jiko's temple she says, When you return your mind to zazen, it feels like coming home. Ultimately this satisfying novel is about discovering home in the moment, or now, and also home within ourselves. The Oregonian Beautifully written, intensely readable, and richly layered... Ozeki moves between Ruth's and Naos stories and their very different voices while exploring the elements of time, past, present (whatever that is, in the context of this book), and, perhaps, the future. Nao stays with her Jiko and meets the ghost of her great-uncle Haruki, a kamikaze pilot; Ruth makes a mysterious journey and has an important encounter of her own. The human relationships are deftly explored.... *A Tale for the Time Being* is compelling and memorable, one of the best books of the year. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Forget the proverbial message in a bottle: This Tale fractures clichés as it affirms the lifesaving power of words.... As Ozeki explores the ties between reader and writer, she offers a lesson in redemption that reinforces the pricelessness of the here and now. Elle A powerful yarn of fate and parallel lives. Good Housekeeping Ozeki weaves together Naos adolescent yearnings with Ruth's contemplative digressions, adding bits of Zen wisdom, as well as questions about agency, creativity, life, death, and human connections along the way. *A Tale for the Time Being* is a dreamy, spiritual investigation of how to gracefully meet the waves of time, which, in the end, come for us all. The Daily Beast As we read Naos story and the story of Ozeki's reading of it, as we go back and forth between the text and the notes, time expands for us. It opens up onto something resembling narrative eternity... page after page, slowly unfolding. And what a beautiful effect that is for a novel to create. Alan Cheuse, NPR's All Things Considered *A Tale for the Time Being* is ambitious, its multilayered, and its fantastic.... Ruth Ozeki creates multiple worlds that are alive and filled with so much sensory details and symbolism and it's difficult not to resist being completely immersed. Stock your fridge, finish the laundry, and feed the cat because you'll be busy for a few days. Hyphen A multilayered postmodern fantasia with a heart of gold. Ellis Avery, Public Books In *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth Ozeki pulls out all the stops with her new cast of beautiful, batty, and sad characters.... It's such a romp so unafraid of the disasters of life, so full of delight that it's well worth the read. Forget the easy escape route of quantum mechanics; the novel more than supplies enough old-fashioned reading magic. Shambhala Sun Ozeki is a fantastic novelist. The Sunday Times (London) A deep and illuminating piece of work. The Guardian (London) A huge, compassionate, and cleverly wrought novel... Ozeki beautifully captures Naos teenage voice, with its conflicting harmonies of bathos and intensity, stoicism and optimism.... As the novel draws to a close, with an extended riff on quantum mechanics, Schrödinger's cat, and the influence of perception on physical reality, the readers shares with Ruth a series of revelations about the human need for resolution and the impossibility

of getting it. The Times Literary Supplement (London) Links have been made between Buddhism and modern quantum physics before, but seldom can they have been intertwined with such emotive power and linguistic grace as Ruth Ozeki manages in this funny, heartbreaking, moving, and profound novel.... The warmth, compassion, wisdom, and insight with which Ozeki pieces all these stories together will have the reader linked in a similarly profound way to this fantastic novel. The Independent (London) Japanese pop culture, fiction, and nonfiction all mash up in this genius novel about hope and friendship. Chatelaine Dazzling... In its shift to a novel of ideas, through a carefully wrought yet seemingly reckless narrative explosion, the novel shines. It is not only a storytelling tour de force (and rest assured, Ozeki doesn't abandon either the richness of her characterizations nor the expanding force of the paired story lines in favor of the deeper searching; everything resolves, though not in a manner that anyone would expect), but a rich, thought-provoking, paradigm-disturbing experience of a novel. Like a Zen koan, *A Tale for the Time Being* defies simple answers or explanations even as it reveals all. You will carry it with you. The Vancouver Sun A magical narrative that dances in all worlds at once... However many paradoxes Ozeki throws into the mix, Nao and Ruth that once united and separated by time and place ultimately create their own magic, at least for the time being. Toronto Star Exudes an infectious sense of warmth and wonder... Nao is an irresistible character: inquisitive, funny, and world-weary but heartbreakingly vulnerable.... *A Tale for the Time Being* achieves an impressive balancing act. The Australian One of those exquisitely rare books in which you're still wondering what else it holds until the very last page... Ozeki's maximalist style puts her in the realms of David Foster Wallace or early David Mitchell but, unlike almost any other postmodern author for whom concepts frequently trump character, Ozeki can pluck at the heartstrings like a samisen, offering moments that bring hand to mouth in both horror and joy. The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia) Ruth Ozeki's parallel narratives stretch the reader to appreciate them fully. You are never going to get anything less than profoundly interesting.... Her real skill, though, is in blending concept and story so beautifully. The result is a novel that is clever on many levels but also immensely readable. The New Zealand Herald A quietly amazing achievement... a good read that reverberates in thought long after the final page... Many sentences or phrases had this reader stopping and rereading, savoring the beauty of Ozeki's words. The Japan Times Ruth Ozeki takes readers on a journey of laughter, sorrow, and enlightenment.... Ambitious and engrossing, Nao's narrative will grab readers' hearts as easily as Ruth's. . . . Do not miss this beautiful, intricate world or the characters who inhabit it. Shelf Awareness Wildly imaginative, ambitious, and brilliant... Ozeki expresses our universal desire to connect with others through words and stories. Her characters speak to us across time and across continents and beckon us to follow them to unknown worlds. Equal parts sobering and inspiring, the novel is wholly inventive from the first page to the last.... *A Tale for the Time Being* is destined to become a modern classic. Book Magnet An enthralling, beautiful novel about relationships, time, history, and culture. Right from the beginning it draws you in, slowly unfolding and, just when you think it can't, pulling you in ever further.... A standout book. Curled Up with a Good Book and a Cup of Tea Superb... *A Tale for the Time Being* is both disarming and likely to leave readers feeling its emotional impact for a long time to come. BookPage Magnificent... The novel's seamless web of language, metaphor, and meaning can't be disentangled from its powerful emotional impact: These are characters we care for deeply, imparting vital life lessons through the magic of storytelling. A masterpiece, pure and simple. Kirkus's (starred review) An intriguing, even beautiful narrative remarkable for its unusual but attentively structured plot.... We go from one story line to the other, back and forth across the Pacific, but the reader never loses place or interest. Booklist (starred review) Ozeki's absorbing novel is an extended meditation on writing, time, and people in time.... The characters' lives are finely drawn, from Ruth's rustic lifestyle to the Yasutani family's straitened existence after moving from Sunnyvale, California, to Tokyo. Nao's winsome voice contrasts with Ruth's intellectual ponderings to make up a lyrical disquisition on writing's power to transcend time and place. This tale from Ozeki, a Zen Buddhist priest, is sure to please anyone who values a good story broadened with intellectual vigor. Publishers Weekly An extraordinary novel about a courageous young woman, riven by loneliness, by time, and (ultimately) by tsunami. Nao is an inspired narrator and her quest to tell her great grandmother's story, to connect with her past and with the larger world is both aching and true. Ozeki is one of my favorite novelists and here she is at her absolute best: bewitching, intelligent, hilarious, and heartbreaking, often on the same page. Junot Diaz, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *This Is How You Lose Her* *A Tale for the Time Being* is a timeless story. Ruth Ozeki beautifully renders not only the devastation of the collision between man and the natural world, but also its often miraculous results. Alice Sebold, bestselling author of *The Lovely Bones* Ingenious and touching... I read it with great pleasure. Philip

me, Naoko Yasutani, which is my full name, but you can call me Nao because everyone else does. And I better tell you a little more about myself if were going to keep on meeting like this...!Actually, not much has changed. Im still sitting in this French maid caf in Akiba Electricity Town, and Edith Pilaf is singing another sad chanson, and Babette just brought me a coffee and Ive taken a sip. Babette is my maid and also my new friend, and my coffee is Blue Mountain and I drink it black, which is unusual for a teenage girl, but its definitely the way good coffee should be drunk if you have any respect for the bitter bean.I have pulled up my sock and scratched behind my knee.I have straightened my pleats so that they line up neatly on the tops of my thighs.I have tucked my shoulder-length hair behind my right ear, which is pierced with five holes, but now Im letting it fall modestly across my face again because the otaku4 salaryman whos sitting at the table next to me is staring, and its creeping me out even though I find it amusing, too. Im wearing my junior high school uniform and I can tell by the way hes looking at my body that hes got a major schoolgirl fetish, and if thats the case, then how come hes hanging out in a French maid caf? I mean, what a dope!But you can never tell. Everything changes, and anything is possible, so maybe Ill change my mind about him, too.

Maybe in the next few minutes, he will lean awkwardly in my direction and say something surprisingly beautiful to me, and I will be overcome with a fondness for him in spite of his greasy hair and bad complexion, and Ill actually condescend to converse with him a little bit, and eventually he will invite me to go shopping, and if he can convince me that hes madly in love with me, Ill go to a department store with him and let him buy me a cute cardigan sweater or a keitai5 or handbag, even though he obviously doesnt have a lot of money. Then after, maybe well go to a club and drink some cocktails, and zip into a love hotel with a big Jacuzzi, and after we bathe, just as I begin to feel comfortable with him, suddenly his true inner nature will emerge, and hell tie me up and put the plastic shopping bag from my new cardigan over my head and rape me, and hours later the police will find my lifeless naked body bent at odd angles on the floor, next to the big round zebra-skin bed.Or maybe he will just ask me to strangle him a little with my panties while he gets off on their beautiful aroma.Or maybe none of these things will happen except in my mind and yours, because, like I told you, together were making magic, at least for the time being.3.Are you still there? I just reread what I wrote about the otaku salaryman, and I want to apologize. That was nasty. That was not a nice way to start.I dont want to give you the wrong impression. Im not a stupid girl. I know Edith Pilafs name isnt really Pilaf. And Im not a nasty girl or a hentai,6 either. Im actually not a big fan of hentai, so if you are one,

then please just put this book down immediately and dont read any further, okay? You will only be disappointed and wasting your time, because this book is not going to be some kinky girls secret diary, filled with pink fantasies and nasty fetishes. Its not what you think, since my purpose for writing it before I die is to tell someone the fascinating life story of my hundred-and-four-year-old great-grandmother, who is a Zen Buddhist nun.You probably dont think nuns are all that fascinating, but my great-grandmother is, and not in a kinky way at all. I am sure there are lots of kinky nuns out there... well, maybe not so many kinky nuns, but kinky priests, for sure, kinky priests are everywhere... but my diary will not concern itself with them or their freaky behaviors.This diary will tell the real life story of my great-grandmother Yasutani Jiko. She was a nun and a novelist and New Woman7 of the Taisho era.8 She was also an anarchist and a feminist who had plenty of lovers, both males and females, but she was never kinky or nasty. And even though I may end up mentioning some of her love affairs, everything I write will be historically true and empowering to women, and not a lot of foolish geisha crap. So if kinky nasty things are your pleasure, please close this book and give it to your wife or co-worker and save yourself a lot of time and trouble.4.I think its important to have clearly defined goals in life, dont you? Especially if you dont have a lot of life left. Because if you dont have clear goals, you might run out of time, and when the day comes, youll find yourself standing on the parapet of a tall building, or sitting on your bed with a bottle of pills in your hand, thinking, Shit! I blew it. If only Id set clearer goals for myself!Im telling you this because Im actually not going to be around for long, and you might as well know this up front so you dont make assumptions. Assumptions suck. Theyre like expectations. Assumptions and expectations will kill any relationship, so lets you and me not go there, okay?The truth is that very soon Im going to graduate from time, or maybe I shouldnt say graduate because that makes it sound as if Ive actually met my goals and deserve to move on, when the fact is that I just turned sixteen and Ive accomplished nothing at all. Zilch. Nada. Do I sound pathetic? I dont mean to. I just want to be accurate. Maybe instead of graduate, I should say Im going to drop out of time. Drop out. Time out. Exit my existence. Im counting the moments.One...Two...Three...Four...Hey, I know! Lets count the moments together!9Ruth1.A tiny sparkle caught Ruths eye, a small glint of refracted sunlight angling out from beneath a massive tangle of drying bull kelp, which the sea had heaved up onto the sand at full tide. She

mistook it for the sheen of a dying jellyfish and almost walked right by it. The beaches were overrun with jellyfish these days, the monstrous red stinging kind that looked like wounds along the shoreline. But something made her stop. She leaned over and nudged the heap of kelp with the toe of her sneaker then poked it with a stick. Untangling the whiplike fronds, she dislodged enough to see that what glistened underneath was not a dying sea jelly, but something plastic, a bag. Not surprising. The ocean was full of plastic. She dug a bit more, until she could lift the bag up by its corner. It was heavier than she expected, a scarred plastic freezer bag, encrusted with barnacles that spread across its surface like a rash. It must have been in the ocean for a long time, she thought. Inside the bag, she could see a hint of something red, someones garbage, no doubt, tossed overboard or left behind after a picnic or a rave. The sea was always heaving things up and hurling them back: fishing lines, floats, beer cans, plastic toys, tampons, Nike sneakers. A few years earlier it was severed feet. People were finding them up and down Vancouver Island, washed up on the sand. One had been found on this very beach. No one could explain what had happened to the rest of the bodies. Ruth didnt want to think about what might be rotting inside the bag. She flung it farther up the beach. She would finish her walk and then pick it up on the way back, take it home, and throw it out.

2. Whats this? her husband called from the mud room. Ruth was cooking dinner, chopping carrots and concentrating. This, Oliver repeated when she didnt answer. She looked up. He was standing in the doorway of the kitchen, dangling the large scarred freezer bag in his fingers. Shed left it out on the porch, intending to deposit it in the trash, but shed gotten distracted. Oh, leave it, she said. Its garbage. Something I picked up on the beach. Please dont bring it in the house. Why did she have to explain? But theres something in it, he said. Dont you want to know whats inside? No, she said. Dinners almost ready. He brought it in anyway and laid it on the kitchen table, scattering sand. He couldnt help it. It was his nature to need to know, to take things apart and sometimes put them back together. Their freezer was filled with plastic shrouds containing the tiny carcasses of birds, shrews, and other small animals that their cat had brought in, waiting to be dissected and stuffed. Its not just one bag, he reported, carefully unzipping the first and laying it aside. Its bags within bags. The cat, attracted by all the activity, jumped up onto the table to help. He wasnt allowed on the table.

The cat had a name, Schrödinger, but they never used it. Oliver called him the Pest, which sometimes morphed into Pesto. He was always doing bad things, disemboweling squirrels in the middle of the kitchen, leaving small shiny organs, kidneys and intestines, right outside their bedroom door where Ruth would step on them with her bare feet on her way to the bathroom at night. They were a team, Oliver and the cat. When Oliver went upstairs, the cat went upstairs. When Oliver came downstairs to eat, the cat came downstairs to eat. When Oliver went outside to pee, the cat went outside to pee. Now Ruth watched the two of them as they examined the contents of the plastic bags. She winced, anticipating the stench of someones rotting picnic, or worse, that would ruin the fragrance of their meal. Lentil soup. They were having lentil soup and salad for dinner, and shed just put in the rosemary. Do you think you could dissect your garbage out on the porch? You picked it up, he said. And anyway, I dont think its garbage. Its too neatly wrapped. He continued his forensic unpeeling. Ruth sniffed, but all she could smell was sand and salt and sea. Suddenly he started laughing. Look, Pesto! he said. Its for you! Its a Hello Kitty lunchbox! Please! Ruth said, feeling desperate now. And theres something inside... Im serious! I dont want you to open it in here. Just take it out. But it was too late.

3. He had smoothed the bags flat, laid them out on top of one another in descending order of size, and then sorted the contents into three neat collections: a small stack of handwritten letters; a pudgy bound book with a faded red cover; a sturdy antique wristwatch with a matte black face and a luminous dial. Next to these sat the Hello Kitty lunchbox that had protected the contents from the corrosive effects of the sea. The cat was sniffing at the lunchbox. Ruth picked him up and dropped him on the floor, and then turned her attention to the items on the table. The letters appeared to be written in Japanese. The cover of the red book was printed in French. The watch had markings etched onto the back that were difficult to decipher, so Oliver had taken out his iPhone and was using the microscope app to examine the engraving. I think this is Japanese, too, he said. Ruth flipped through the letters, trying to make out the characters that were written in faded blue ink. The handwritings old and cursive. Beautiful, but I cant read a word of it. She put the letters down and took the watch from him. Yes, she said. Theyre Japanese numbers. Not a date, though. Yon, nana, san, hachi, nana. Four, seven, three, eight, seven. Maybe a serial number? She held the watch up to her ear and listened for the ticking, but it was broken. She put it down and picked up the bright red lunchbox. The red color showing through the scarred plastic was what had led her to mistake the freezer bag for a stinging jellyfish. How long had it been floating out there in the ocean before washing up? The lunchbox lid had a rubber gasket around the rim. She picked up the book, which was surprisingly dry; the cloth cover was soft

and worn, its corners blunt from rough handling. She put the edge to her nose and inhaled the musty scent of mildewed pages and dust. She looked at the title. *la recherche du temps perdu*, she read. Par Marcel Proust. 4. They liked books, all books, but especially old ones, and their house was overflowing with them. There were books everywhere, stacked on shelves and piled on the floor, on chairs, on the stairway treads, but neither Ruth nor Oliver minded. Ruth was a novelist, and novelists, Oliver asserted, should have cats and books. And indeed, buying books was her consolation for moving to a remote island in the middle of Desolation Sound, where the public library was one small humid room above the community hall, overrun with children. In addition to the extensive and dog-eared juvenile literature section and some popular adult titles, the library's collection seemed largely to comprise books on gardening, canning, food security, alternative energy, alternative healing, and alternative schooling. Ruth missed the abundance and diversity of urban libraries, their quiet spaciousness, and when she and Oliver moved to the small island, they agreed that she should be able to order any book she wanted, which she did. Research, she called it, although in the end she read most of them, while Oliver read only a few. She just liked having them around. Recently, however, she had started to notice that the damp sea air had swollen their pages and the silverfish had taken up residence in their spines. When she opened the covers, they smelled of mold. This made her sad. In search of lost time, she said, translating the tarnished gilt title, embossed on the red cloth spine. I've never read it. I haven't, either, said Oliver. I don't think I'll be trying it in French, though. Mm, she said, agreeing, but then she opened the cover, anyway, curious to see if she could understand just the first few lines. She was expecting to see an age-stained folio, printed in an antique font, so she was entirely unprepared for the adolescent purple handwriting that sprawled across the page. It felt like a desecration, and it shocked her so much she almost dropped the book. 5. Print is predictable and impersonal, conveying information in a mechanical transaction with the reader's eye. Handwriting, by contrast, resists the eye, reveals its meaning slowly, and is as intimate as skin. Ruth stared at the page. The purple words were mostly in English, with some Japanese characters scattered here and there, but her eye wasn't really taking in their meaning as much as a felt sense, murky and emotional, of the writer's presence. The fingers that had gripped the purple gel ink pen must have belonged to a girl, a teenager. Her handwriting, these loopy purple marks impressed onto the page, retained her moods and anxieties, and the moment Ruth laid eyes on the page, she knew without a doubt that the girl's fingertips were pink and moist, and that she had bitten her nails down to the quick. Ruth looked more closely at the letters. They were round and a little bit sloppy (as she now imagined the girl must be, too), but they stood more or less upright and marched gamely across the page at a good clip, not in a hurry, but not dawdling, either. Sometimes at the end of a line, they crowded each other a little, like people jostling to get onto an elevator or into a subway car, just as the doors were closing. Ruth's curiosity was piqued. It was clearly a diary of some kind. She examined the cover again. Should she read it? Deliberately now, she turned to the first page, feeling vaguely prurient, like an eavesdropper or a peeping tom. Novelists spend a lot of time poking their noses into other people's business. Ruth was not unfamiliar with this feeling. Hi!, she read. My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is?... 6. Flotsam, Oliver said. He was examining the barnacles that had grown onto the surface of the outer plastic bag. I can't believe it. Ruth glanced up from the page. Of course it's flotsam, she said. Or jetsam. The book felt warm in her hands, and she wanted to continue reading but heard herself asking, instead, What's the difference, anyway? Flotsam is accidental, stuff found floating at sea. Jetsams been jettisoned. It's a matter of intent. So you're right, maybe this is jetsam. He laid the bag back down onto the table. I think it's starting. What's starting? Drifters, he said. Escaping the orbit of the Pacific Gyre... His eyes were sparkling and she could tell he was excited. She rested the book in her lap. What's a gyre? There are eleven great planetary gyres, he said. Two of them flow directly toward us from Japan and diverge just off the BC coastline. The smaller one, the Aleut Gyre, goes north toward the Aleutian Islands. The larger one goes south. It's sometimes called the Turtle Gyre, because the sea turtles ride it when they migrate from Japan to Baja. He held up his hands to describe a big circle. The cat, who had fallen asleep on the table, must have sensed his excitement, because he opened a green eye to watch. Imagine the Pacific, Oliver said. The Turtle Gyre goes clockwise, and the Aleut Gyre goes counterclockwise. His hands moved in the great arcs and spirals of the ocean's flow. Isn't this the same as the Kuroshio? He'd told her about the Kuroshio already. It was also called the Black Current, and it brought warm tropical water up from Asia and over to the Pacific Northwest coast. But now he shook his head. Not quite, he said. Gyres are bigger. Like a string of currents. Imagine a ring of snakes, each biting the tail of the one ahead of it. The Kuroshio is one of four or five currents that make up the Turtle Gyre. She nodded. She closed her eyes and pictured the snakes. Each gyre orbits at its own speed, he continued. And the length of an

orbit is called a tone. Isn't that beautiful? Like the music of the spheres. The longest orbital period is thirteen years, which establishes the fundamental tone. The Turtle Gyre has a half tone of six and a half years. The Aleut Gyre, a quarter tone of three. The flotsam that rides the gyres is called drift. Drift that stays in the orbit of the gyre is considered to be part of the gyre memory. The rate of escape from the gyre determines the half-life of drift...He picked up the Hello Kitty lunchbox and turned it over in his hands. All that stuff from peoples homes in Japan that the tsunami swept out to sea? They've been tracking it and predicting it will wash up on our coastline. I think it's just happening sooner than anyone expected.

Nao1. There's so much to write. Where should I start? I texted my old Jiko this question, and she wrote back this: .10 Okay, my dear old Jiko. I'll start right here at Fifis Lovely Apron. Fifis is one of a bunch of maid cafes that popped up all over Akiba Electricity Town11 a couple of years ago, but what makes Fifis a little bit special is the French salon theme. The interior is decorated mostly in pink and red, with accents of gold and ebony and ivory. The tables are round and cozy, with marble-like tops and legs that look like carved mahogany, and the matching chairs have pink puff tapestry seats. Dark red velvet roses curl up the wallpaper, and the windows are draped in satin. The ceiling is gilded and hung with crystal chandeliers, and little naked Kewpie dolls float like clouds in the corners. There's an entryway and coatroom with a trickling fountain and a statue of a nude lady lit by a throbbing red spot. I don't know if this decor is authentic or not as I've never visited France, but I'm going to guess that probably there aren't many French maid cafes like this in Paris. It doesn't matter. The feeling at Fifis Lovely Apron is very chic and intimate, like being stuffed inside a great big claustrophobic valentine, and the maids, with their pushed-up breasts and frilly uniforms, look like cute little valentines, too. Unfortunately, it's pretty empty in here right now, except for some otaku12 types at the corner table, and two bug-eyed American tourists. The maids are standing in a sulky line, picking at the lace on their petticoats and looking bored and disappointed with us, like they're hoping for some new and better customers to come in and liven things up. There was a little bit of excitement a while ago when one otaku ordered omurice13 with a big red Hello Kitty face painted in ketchup on top. A maid whose name tag says she's Mimi knelt down before him to feed him, blowing on each bite before spooning it into his mouth. The Americans got a real kick out of that, which was hilarious. I wish you could have seen it. But then he finished, and Mimi took his dirty plate away, and now it's boring again. The Americans are just drinking coffees. The husband is trying to get his wife to let him order a Hello Kitty omurice, too, but she's way too uptight. I heard her whispering that the omurice is too expensive, and she's got a point. The food here is a total rip-off, but I get my coffee for free because Babette is my friend. I'll let you know if the wife loosens up and changes her mind. It didn't used to be this way. Back when maid cafes were ninki #1!14 Babette told me that the customers used to line up and wait for hours just to get a table, and the maids were all the prettiest girls in Tokyo, and you could hear them over the noise of Electricity Town calling out, Okaerinasaimase, dannasama!,15 which makes men feel rich and important. But now the fad is over and maids are no longer it, and the only customers are tourists from abroad, and otaku16 from the countryside, or sad hentai with out-of-date fetishes for maids. And the maids, too, are not so pretty or cute anymore, since you can make a lot more money being a nurse at a medical cafe or a fuzzy plushy in Bedtown.17 French maids are downward trending for sure, and everyone knows this, so nobody's bothering to try very hard. You could say it's a depressing ambience, but personally, I find it relaxing exactly because nobody's trying too hard. What's depressing is when everyone is trying too hard, and the most depressing thing of all is when they're trying too hard and actually thinking that they're making it. I'm sure that's what it used to be like around here, with all the cheerful jangle of bells and laughing, and lines of customers around the block, and cute little maids sucking up to the cafe owners, who slouched around in their designer sunglasses and vintage Levis like dark princes or game-empire moguls. Those dudes had a long, long way to fall. So I don't mind this at all. I kind of like it because I know I can always get a table here at Fifis Lovely Apron, and the music is okay, and the maids know me now and usually leave me alone. Maybe it should be called Fifis Lonely Apron. Hey, that's good! I like that!2. My old Jiko really likes it when I tell her lots of details about modern life. She doesn't get out very much anymore because she lives in a temple in the mountains in the middle of nowhere and has renounced the world, and also there's the fact of her being a hundred and four years old. I keep saying that's her age, but actually I'm just guessing. We don't really know for sure how old she is, and she claims she doesn't remember, either. When you ask her, she says, *Zuibun nagaku ikasarete itadaite orimasu ne.*18 Which is not an answer, so you ask her again, and she says, *Soo desu ne.*19 I haven't counted for so long... So then you ask her when her birthday is, and she says, *Hmm, I don't really remember being born...* And if you pester her some more and ask her how long she's been alive, she says, *I've always been here as far as I remember.* Well, duh, Granny! All

we know for sure is that theres nobody older than her who remembers, and the family register at the ward office got burned up in a firebombing during World War II, so basically we have to take her word for it. A couple of years ago, she kind of got fixated on a hundred and four, and thats what its been ever since. And as

I was saying, my old Jiko really likes detail, and she likes it when I tell her about all the little sounds and smells and colors and lights and advertising and people and fashions and newspaper headlines that make up the noisy ocean of Tokyo, which is why Ive trained myself to notice and remember. I tell her everything, about cultural trends and news items I read about high school girls who get raped and suffocated with plastic bags in love hotels. You can tell Granny all that kind of stuff and she doesnt mind. I dont mean it makes her happy. Shes not a hentai. But she understands that shit happens, and she just sits there and listens and nods

her head and counts the beads on her juzu,²⁰ saying blessings for those poor high school girls and the perverts and all the beings who are suffering in the world. Shes a nun, so thats her job. I swear, sometimes I think the main reason shes still alive is because of all the stuff I give her to pray about. I asked her once why she liked to hear stories like this, and she explained to me that when she got ordained, she shaved her head and took some vows to be a bosatsu.²¹ One of her vows was to save all beings, which basically means that she agreed not to become enlightened until all the other beings in this world get enlightened first. Its kind of like letting everybody else get into the elevator ahead of you. When you calculate all the beings on this earth at any time, and then add in the ones that are getting born every second and the ones that have already died and not just human beings, either, but all the animals and other life-forms like amoebas and viruses and maybe even plants that have ever lived or ever will live, as well as all the extinct species well, you can see that enlightenment will take a very long time. And what if the elevator gets full and the doors slam shut and youre still standing outside? When I asked Granny about this, she rubbed her shiny bald head and said, Soo

desu ne. It is a very big elevator... But Granny, its going to take forever! Well, we must try even harder, then. We?! Of course, dear Nao. You must help me. No way! I told Granny. Forget it! Im no fucking bosatsu... But she just smacked her lips and clicked her juzu beads, and the way she looked at me through those thick black-framed glasses of hers, I think maybe she was saying a blessing for me just then, too. I didnt mind. It made me feel safe, like I knew no matter what happened, Granny was going to make sure I got onto that elevator. You know what? Just this second, as I was writing this, I realized something. I never asked her where that elevator is going. Im going to text her now and ask. Ill let you know what she says.³ Okay, so

now I really am going to tell you about the fascinating life of Yasutani Jiko, the famous anarchist-feminist-novelist-turned-Buddhist-nun of the Taisho era, but first I need to explain about this book youre holding.²² Youve probably noticed that it doesnt look like an ordinary schoolgirls pure diary with puffy marshmallow animals on a shiny pink cover, and a heart-shaped lock, and a little golden key. And when you first picked it up, you probably didnt think, Oh, heres a nice pure diary written by an interesting Japanese schoolgirl. Gee, I think Ill read that! because when you picked it up, you thought it was a philosophical masterpiece called *la recherche du temps perdu* by the famous French author named Marcel Proust, and not an insignificant diary by a nobody named Nao Yasutani. So it just goes to show that its true what they say: You cant tell a book by its cover!²³ I hope youre not too disappointed. What happened is that Marcel Prousts book got hacked, only I didnt do it. I bought it this way, pre-hacked, at a little handicraft boutique over in Harajuku²⁴ where they sell one-of-a-kind DIY goods like crochet scarves and keitai pouches and beaded cuffs and other cool stuff.

Handicraft is a superbig fad in Japan, and everyone is knitting and beading and crocheting and making pepakura,²⁵ but Im quite clumsy so I have to buy my DIY goods if I want to keep up with the trend. The girl who makes these diaries is a superfamous crafter, who buys containerloads of old books from all over the world, and then neatly cuts out all the printed pages and puts in blank paper instead. She does it so authentically you dont even notice the hack, and you almost think that the letters just slipped off the pages and fell to the floor like a pile of dead ants. Recently some nasty stuff has been happening in my life, and the day I bought the diary, I was skipping school and feeling especially blue, so I decided to go shopping in Harajuku to cheer myself up. When I saw these old books on the shelf, I thought they were a shop display so I didnt pay any attention to them, but when the salesgirl pointed out the hack to me, of course I had to have one immediately. And they werent cheap, either, but I loved the worn feeling of the cover, and I could tell it would feel so good to write inside, like a real published book. But best of all, I knew it would be an excellent security feature. I dont know if youve ever had this problem of people beating you up and stealing things from you and using them against you, but if you have, then youll understand that this book was total genius, in case one of my stupid classmates decided to casually pick up my diary and read it and post it to the Internet or something. But who would pick up an old book called *la recherche du temps perdu*, right? My

stupid classmates would just think it was homework for juku.²⁶ They wouldnt even know what it meant. Actually, I didnt know what it meant either, since my ability to speak French is nonexistent. There were a bunch of books with different titles for sale. Some of them were in English, like *Great Expectations* and *Gullivers Travels*, which were okay, but I thought it would be better to buy a title I couldnt read, since knowing the meaning might possibly interfere with my own creative expression. There were others in different languages, too, like German and Russian and even Chinese, but I ended up choosing *la recherche du temps perdu* because I figured it was probably French, and French is cool and has a sophisticated feeling, and besides, this book is exactly the right size to fit into my handbag.⁴ The minute I bought the book, of course, I wanted to start writing in it, so I went to a nearby kissa²⁷ and ordered a Blue Mountain, then I took out my favorite purple gel ink pen and opened the book to the first creamy page. I took a bitter sip and waited for the words to come. I waited and waited, and sipped some more coffee, and waited some more. Nothing. Im pretty chatty, as you can probably tell, and usually I dont have any trouble coming up with stuff to say. But this time, even though I had a lot on my mind, the words didnt come. It was weird, but I figured I was just feeling intimidated by the new-old book and would eventually get over it. So I drank the rest of my coffee and read a couple of manga, and when it was time for school to let out, I went home. But the next day I tried again, and the same thing happened. And after that, every time I took out the book, Id stare at the title and start to wonder. I mean, Marcel Proust must be pretty important if even someone like me had heard of him, even if I didnt know who he was at first and thought he was a celebrity chef or a French fashion designer. What if his ghost was still clinging to the inside of the covers and was pissed off at the hack the crafty girl had done, cutting out his words and pages? And what if now the ghost was preventing me from using his famous book to write about typical dumb schoolgirl stuff, like my crushes on boys (not that I have any), or new fashions I want (my desires are endless), or my fat thighs (actually my thighs are fine, its my knees I hate). You really cant blame old Marcells ghost for getting righteously pissed off, thinking I might be dumb enough to write this kind of stupid crap inside his important book. And even if his ghost didnt mind, I still wouldnt want to use his book for such trivial stuff, even if these werent my last days on earth. But since these are my last days on earth, I want to write something important, too. Well, maybe not important, because I dont know anything important, but something worthwhile. I want to leave something real behind. But what can I write about thats real? Sure, I can write about all the bad shit thats happened to me, and my feelings about my dad and my mom and my so-called friends, but I dont particularly want to. Whenever I think about my stupid empty life, I come to the conclusion that Im just wasting my time, and Im not the only one. Everybody I know is the same, except for old Jiko. Just wasting time, killing time, feeling crappy. And what does it mean to waste time anyway? If you waste time is it lost forever? And if time is lost forever, what does that mean? Its not like you get to die any sooner, right? I mean, if you want to die sooner, you have to take matters into your own hands.⁵ So anyway, these distracting thoughts about ghosts and time kept drifting through my mind every time I tried to write in old Marcells book, until finally I decided that I had to know what the title meant. I asked Babette, but she couldnt help me because of course shes not a real French maid, just a high school dropout from Chiba prefecture, and the only French she knows is a couple of sexy phrases she picked up from this farty old French professor she was dating for a while. So when I got home that night, I googled Marcel Proust and learned that *la recherche du temps perdu* means *In search of lost time*. Weird, right? I mean, there I was, sitting in a French maid caf in Akiba, thinking about lost time, and old Marcel Proust was sitting in France a hundred years ago, writing a whole book about the exact same subject. So maybe his ghost was lingering between the covers and hacking into my mind, or maybe it was just a crazy coincidence, but either way, how cool is that? I think coincidences are cool, even if they dont mean anything, and who knows? Maybe they do! Im not saying everything happens for a reason. It was more just that it felt as if me and old Marcel were on the same wavelength. The next day I went back to Fifis and ordered a small pot of lapsang souchong, which I drink sometimes as a break from Blue Mountain, and as I sat there, sipping the smoky tea and nibbling a French pastry, waiting for Babette to set me up on a date, I started to wonder. How do you search for lost time, anyway? Its an interesting question, so I texted it to old Jiko, which is what I always do when I have a philosophical dilemma. And then I had to wait for a really, really long time, but finally my keitai gave a little ping that tells me shes texted me back. And what she wrote was this:²⁸ which means something like this: *For the time being, Words scatter... Are they fallen leaves?* Im not very good at poetry, but when I read old Jikos poem, I saw an image in my mind of this big old ginkgo tree on the grounds of her temple.²⁹ The leaves are shaped like little green fans, and in the autumn they turn bright yellow and fall off and cover the ground, painting everything pure golden. And it

occurred to me that the big old tree is a time being, and Jiko is a time being, too, and I could imagine myself searching for lost time under the tree, sifting through the fallen leaves that are her scattered golden words. The idea of the time being comes from a book called *Shbgenz* that an ancient Zen master named Dgen Zenji wrote about eight hundred years ago, which makes him even older than old Jiko or even Marcel Proust. Dgen Zenji is one of Jikos favorite authors, and hes lucky because his books are important and still kicking around. Unfortunately, everything Jiko wrote is out of print so Ive actually never read her words, but shes told me lots of stories, and I started to think about how words and stories are time beings, too, and thats when the idea popped into my mind of using Marcel Prousts important book to write down my old Jikos life. Its not just because Jiko is the most important person I know, although thats part of it. And its not just because she is incredibly old and was alive back when Marcel Proust was writing his book about time. Maybe she was, but thats not why, either. The reason I decided to write about her in *la recherche du temps perdu* is because she is the only person I know who really understands time. Old Jiko is supercareful with her time. She does everything really really slowly, even when shes just sitting on the veranda, looking out at the dragonflies spinning lazily around the garden pond. She says that she does everything really really slowly in order to spread time out so that shell have more of it and live longer, and then she laughs so you know she is telling you a joke. I mean, she understands perfectly well that time isnt something you can spread out like butter or jam, and death isnt going to hang around and wait for you to finish whatever you happen to be doing before it zaps you. Thats the joke, and she laughs because she knows it. But actually, I dont think its very funny. Even though I dont know old Jikos exact age, I do know for sure that pretty soon shell be dead even if she hasnt finished sweeping out the temple kitchen or weeding the daikon patch or arranging fresh flowers on the altar, and once shes dead, that will be the end of her, timewise. This doesnt bother her at all, but it bothers me a lot. These are old Jikos last days on earth, and theres nothing I can do about that, and theres nothing I can do to stop time from passing or even to slow it down, and every second of the day is another second lost. She probably wouldnt agree with me, but thats how I see it. I dont mind thinking of the world without me because Im unexceptional, but I hate the idea of the world without old Jiko. Shes totally unique and special, like the last Galapagos tortoise or some other ancient animal hobbling around on the scorched earth, who is the only one left of its kind. But please dont get me going on the topic of species extinction because its totally depressing, and Ill have to commit suicide right this second.⁶ Okay, Nao. Why are you doing this? Like, whats the point? This is a problem. The only reason I can think of for writing Jikos life story in this book is because I love her and want to remember her, but Im not planning on sticking around for long, and I cant remember her stories if Im dead, right? And apart from me, who else would care? I mean, if I thought the world would want to know about old Jiko, Id post her stories on a blog, but actually I stopped doing that a while ago. It made me sad when I caught myself pretending that everybody out there in cyberspace cared about what I thought, when really nobody gives a shit.³⁰ And when I multiplied that sad feeling by all the millions of people in their lonely little rooms, furiously writing and posting to their lonely little pages that nobody has time to read because theyre all so busy writing and posting,³¹ it kind of broke my heart. The fact is, I dont have much of a social network these days, and the people I hang out with arent the kind who care about a hundred-and-four-year-old Buddhist nun, even if she is a bosatsu who can use email and texting, and thats only because I made her buy a computer so she could stay in touch with me when Im in Tokyo and shes at her falling-down old temple on a mountain in the middle of nowhere. Shes not crazy about new technology, but she does pretty well for a time being with cataracts and arthritis in both her thumbs. Old Jiko and Marcel Proust come from a prewired world, which is a time thats totally lost these days. So here I am, at Fifis Lonely Apron, staring at all these blank pages and asking myself why Im bothering, when suddenly an amazing idea knocks me over. Ready? Here it is: I will write down everything I know about Jikos life in Marcells book, and when Im done, Ill just leave it somewhere, and you will find it! How cool is that? It feels like Im reaching forward through time to touch you, and now that youve found it, youre reaching back to touch me! If you ask me, its fantastically cool and beautiful. Its like a message in a bottle, cast out onto the ocean of time and space. Totally personal, and real, too, right out of old Jikos and Marcells prewired world. Its the opposite of a blog. Its an antiblog, because its meant for only one special person, and that person is you. And if youve read this far, you probably understand what I mean. Do you understand? Do you feel special yet? Ill just wait here for a while to see if you answer...⁷ Just kidding. I know you cant answer, and now I feel stupid, because what if you dont feel special? Im making an assumption, right? What if you just think Im a jerk and toss me into the garbage, like all those young girls I tell old Jiko about, who get killed by perverts and chopped up and thrown into dumpsters, just because

theyve made the mistake of dating the wrong guy? That would be really sad and scary.Or, heres another scary thought, what if youre not reading this at all? What if you never even found this book, because somebody chucked it in the trash or recycled it before it got to you? Then old Jikos stories truly will be lost forever, and Im just sitting here wasting time talking to the inside of a dumpster.Hey, answer me! Am I stuck inside of a garbage can, or not?Just kidding. Again. Okay, heres what Ive decided. I dont mind the risk, because the risk makes it more interesting. And I dont think old Jiko will mind, either, because being a Buddhist, she really understands impermanence and that everything changes and nothing lasts forever. Old Jiko really isnt going to care if her life stories get written or lost, and maybe Ive picked up a little of that laissez-faire attitude from her. When the time comes, I can just let it all go.Or not. I dont know. Maybe by the time Ive written the last page, Ill be too embarrassed or ashamed to leave it lying around, and Ill wimp out and destroy it instead.Hey, if youre not reading this, youll know Im a wimp! Ha-ha.And as for that business about old Marcells ghost being pissed off, Ive decided not to worry about it. When I was googling Marcel Proust, I happened to look up his sales ranking on , and I couldnt believe it but his books are all still in print, and depending on which edition of *la recherche du temps perdu* youre talking about, his ranking is somewhere between 13,695 and 79,324, which is no best seller, but its not so bad for a dead guy. Just so you know. You dont have to feel too sorry for old Marcel.I dont know how long this whole project is going to take me. Probably months. There are lots of blank pages, and Jikos got lots of stories, and I write pretty slow, but Im going to work really hard, and probably by the time Im done filling in the last page, old Jiko will be dead, and it will be my time, too.And I know I cant possibly write down every detail about Jikos life, so if you want to learn more, youll have to read her books, if you can find them. Like I said before, her stuff is all out of print, and its possible that some crafty girl has already hacked her pages and tossed all her golden words into the recycling bin next to Prousts. That would be really sad, because its not like old Jiko has any ranking on at all. I know because I checked and she isnt even there. Hmm. Im going to have to rethink this hacking concept. Maybe its not so cool after all.Ruth1.The cat had climbed up onto Ruths desk and was preparing to make a strategic incursion onto her lap. Shed been reading the diary when he approached from the side, placing his forepaws on her knees and nudging his nose underneath the spine of the book, pushing it up and out of his way. Once that was done, he settled himself on her lap and started kneading, butting his head into her hand. He was so annoying. Always looking for attention.She closed the diary and placed it on the desk as she stroked the cats forehead, but even after putting the book aside, she was aware of an odd and lingering sense of urgency to... what? To help the girl? To save her?

Ridiculous.Her first impulse when shed started the diary was to read quickly to the end, but the girls handwriting was often hard to decipher, and her sentences were peppered with slang and intriguing colloquialisms. It had been years since Ruth had lived in Japan, and while she still had a reasonable command of the spoken language, her vocabulary was out of date. In university, Ruth had studied the Japanese classicsThe Tale of Genji, Noh drama, The Pillow Bookliterature going back hundreds and even thousands of years, but she was only vaguely familiar with Japanese pop culture. Sometimes the girl made an effort to explain, but often she didnt bother, so Ruth found herself logging on to the Internet to investigate and verify the girls references, and before long, she had dragged out her old kanji dictionary, and was translating and annotating and scribbling notes about Akiba and maid cafs, otaku and hentai. And then there was the anarchist feminist Zen Buddhist novelist nun.She leaned forward and did an search for Jiko Yasutani but, as Nao had warned, found nothing. She googled Nao Yasutani and again came up with nothing. The cat, irked by her restlessness and inattention, abandoned her lap. He didnt like it when she went on the computer and used her fingers to type and scroll instead of to scratch his head. It was a waste of two perfectly good hands as far as he was concerned, and so he went in search of Oliver.She had better luck with Dgen, whose masterwork, *Shbgenz*, or the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, did have a ranking, albeit nowhere near Prousts. Of course, hed lived in the early thirteenth century, so he was older than Proust by almost seven hundred years. When she searched for time being, she learned that the phrase was used in the English title of Chapter 11 of the *Shbgenz*, and she was able to locate several translations, along with commentaries, online.

The ancient Zen master had a nuanced and complex notion of time that she found poetic but somewhat opaque. Time itself is being, he wrote, and all being is time... In essence, everything in the entire universe is intimately linked with each other as moments in time, continuous and separate.Ruth took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. She took a sip of tea, her head so full of questions she barely noticed the tea had long grown cold. Who was this Nao Yasutani, and where was she now? While the girl hadnt come right out and said she was going to commit suicide, shed certainly implied as much. Was she sitting on the edge of a

mattress somewhere, fingering a bottle of pills and a tall glass of water? Or had that hentai gotten to her first? Or perhaps she had decided not to kill herself, only to fall victim to the earthquake and tsunami instead, although that didnt make a lot of sense. The tsunami was in Tohoku, in northern Japan. Nao was writing in a maid caf in Tokyo. What was she doing at that maid caf in the first place? Fifis? It sounded like a brothel. She sat back in her chair and gazed out the window at the tiny stretch of horizon that she could see through a gap in the tall trees. A pine tree is time, Dgen had written, and bamboo is time. Mountains are time. Oceans are time... Dark clouds hung low in the sky, forming an almost indiscernible line where they met the still, dull sheen of the ocean. Gunmetal grey. On the far side of the Pacific lay the battered Japanese coastline. Entire towns had been crushed and dragged out to sea. If time is annihilated, mountains and oceans are annihilated. Was the girl out there somewhere in all that water, her body decomposed by now, redistributed by the waves? Ruth looked at the sturdy red book with its tarnished gilt title embossed on the cover. It was lying on top of a tall messy stack of notes and manuscript pages, bristling with Post-its and wound with cramped marginalia, which represented the memoir that shed been working on for close to a decade. *la recherche du temps perdu*, indeed. Unable to complete another novel, she had decided instead to write about the years she had spent taking care of her mother, whod suffered from Alzheimers. Now, looking at the pile of pages, she felt a quickening flush of panic at the thought of all her own lost time, the confused mess shed made of this draft, and the work that still needed to be done to sort it all out. What was she doing wasting precious hours on someone elses story? She picked up the diary and, using the side of her thumb, started riffling through the pages. She wasnt reading, in fact she was trying not to. She only wanted to ascertain whether the handwriting continued all the way to the end, or if it petered out partway through. How many diaries and journals had she herself started and then abandoned? How many aborted novels languished in folders on her hard drive? But to her surprise, although the color of the ink occasionally bled from purple to pink to black to blue and back to purple again, the writing itself never faltered, growing smaller and if anything even denser, straight through to the very last, tightly packed page. The girl had run out of paper before she ran out of words. And then? Ruth snapped the book shut and closed her eyes for good measure to keep herself from cheating and reading the final sentence, but the question lingered, floating like a retinal burn in the darkness of her mind: What happens in the end?

2. Muriel examined the barnacle growth on the outer freezer bag through the reading glasses she kept perched on her nose. If I were you, Id get Callie to take a look. Maybe she can figure out how old these critters are, and from that you can calculate how long the bags been in the water. Oliver thinks its the leading edge of drift from the tsunami, Ruth said. Muriel frowned. I suppose its possible. Seems too quick, though. Theyre starting to see the lighter stuff washing up in Alaska and Tofino, but were tucked back pretty far inland here. Where did you say you found it? At the south end of the beach, below Jap Ranch. No one on the island called it by that name anymore, but Muriel was an old-timer and knew the reference. The old homestead, one of the most beautiful places on the island, had once belonged to a Japanese family, who were forced to sell when they were interned during the war. The property had changed hands several times since then, and now was owned by elderly Germans. Once Ruth heard the nickname, she stubbornly persisted in using it. As a person of Japanese ancestry, she said, she had the right, and it was important not to let New Age correctness erase the history of the island. Fine for you, Oliver said. His family had emigrated from Germany. Not so fine if I use it. Its hardly fair. Exactly, Ruth said. It wasnt fair. My moms family were interned, too. Maybe I could lodge a land claim on behalf of my people. That property was stolen from them. I could just go there and sit in their driveway and refuse to leave. Repossess the land and kick out the Germans. What do you have against my people? Oliver asked. Their marriage was like this, an axial alliance her people interned, his firebombed in Stuttgart a small accidental consequence of a war fought before either of them was born. Were by-products of the mid-twentieth century, Oliver said. Who isnt? I doubt its from the tsunami, Muriel said, placing the freezer bag back down on the table and turning her attention to the Hello Kitty lunchbox. More likely from a cruise ship, going up the Inside Passage, or maybe Japanese tourists. Pesto, who had been twining himself around Muriels legs, now jumped up onto her lap and took a swat at her thick grey braid, which hung over her shoulder like a snake. The end of the braid was secured with a colorful beaded elastic, which Pesto found irresistible. He also liked her dangling earrings. I like the tsunami narrative, Ruth said, frowning at the cat. Muriel flicked the braid behind her back, out of the cats reach, and then rubbed the white patch between his ears to distract him. She peered at Ruth over the top of her glasses. Bad idea. Shouldnt let your narrative preferences interfere with your forensic work. Muriel was a retired anthropologist, who studied middens. She knew a lot about garbage. She was also an avid beachcomber and was the person whod found the severed

foot. She prided herself on her finds: bone fish hooks and lures, flint spearheads and arrowheads, and an assortment of stone tools for pounding and cutting. Most were First Nations artifacts, but she also had a collection of old Japanese fishing floats that had detached from nets across the Pacific and washed up on the islands shore. The floats were the size of large beach balls, murky globes blown from thick tinted glass. They were beautiful, like escaped worlds. Im a novelist, Ruth said. I cant help it. My narrative preferences are all Ive got. Fair enough, Muriel said. But facts are facts, and establishing the provenance is important. She scooped up the cat and dropped him onto the floor, then rested her fingers on the latches on the sides of the lunchbox. Her fingers were decorated with heavy silver and turquoise rings, which looked incongruous next to Hello Kitty. May I? she asked. Be my guest. On the phone, Muriel had asked to inspect the find, so Ruth had repacked the box as best she could. Now she felt a kind of tension in the air, but she wasnt sure where it was coming from. Something in the formality of Muriels request. The solemnity of her attitude as she removed the lid. The way she paused, almost ceremonially, before lifting the watch from the box, turning it over and holding it to her ear. Its broken, Ruth said. Muriel picked up the diary. She inspected the spine and then the cover. Heres where youll find your clues, she said, opening it to a section somewhere in the middle. Have you started reading it? Watching Muriel handle the book, Ruth felt her uneasiness grow. Well, yes. Only the first couple of pages. Its not that interesting. She took the letters from the box and held them out. These seem more promising. Theyre older and may be more historically important, dont you think? Muriel laid down the diary and took the letters from Ruths hand. Unfortunately, I cant read them, Ruth added. The handwriting looks beautiful, Muriel said, turning over the pages. Have you shown them to Ayako? Ayako was the young Japanese wife of an oyster farmer who lived on the island. Yes, Ruth said, slipping the diary below the table and out of sight. But she said the handwritings hard even for her to read, and besides her English isnt so good. She did decipher the dates, though. She said they were written in 1944 and 45, and I should try to find someone older, who was alive during the war. Good luck, Muriel said. Has the language really changed that much? Not the language. The people. Ayako said young people cant read complex characters or write by hand anymore. Theyve grown up with computers. Under the table, she fingered the blunt edges of the diary. One corner was broken, and the cloth-encased cardboard wiggled like a loose tooth. Had Nao worried this corner between her fingertips, too? Muriel shook her head. Right, she said. Its the same everywhere. Kids have terrible handwriting these days. Theyre not even teaching it in schools anymore. She placed the letters next to the watch and the freezer bags on the table and looked over the collection. If she noticed the missing diary, she didnt mention it. Well, thanks for showing me, she said. She heaved herself to her feet, brushed the cat hair from her lap, and then limped off toward the mud room. Shed gained some weight since her hip replacement and still found it hard to get up and down. She was wearing an old Cowichan sweater and a long skirt, made out of some rough peasant fabric that covered the tops of her gum boots when she put them back on. She stomped her feet in the boots and then looked up at Ruth, who had come to the door to see her off. I still say this should have been my find, she said, pulling a rain parka on over the sweater. But maybe its better you got it, since at least you can read some of the Japanese. Good luck. Dont let yourself get too distracted now... Ruth braced herself.... Hows the new book coming, anyway? Muriel asked.

3. At night, in bed, Ruth would often read to Oliver. It used to be that when shed had a good writing day, she would read aloud what shed just written, finding that if she fell asleep thinking about the scene she was working on, she would often wake with a sense of where to go next. It had been a long while, however, since shed had a day like that or shared anything new. That night, she read the first few entries of Naos diary. When she came to the passage about perverts and panties and the zebra-skin bed, she felt a sudden flush of discomfort. It wasnt embarrassment. She was never shy about this kind of thing, herself. Rather, her discomfort was more on behalf of the girl. She was feeling protective. But she neednt have worried. The nun sounds interesting, Oliver said, as he fiddled with the broken watch. Yes, she said, relieved. The Taish Democracy was an interesting time for Japanese women. Do you think shes still alive? The nun? I doubt it. She was a hundred and four I meant the girl. I dont know, Ruth said. Its crazy, but Im kind of worried about her. I guess Ill have to keep on reading to find out.

4. Do you feel special yet? The girls question lingered. Its an interesting thought, Oliver said, still tinkering with the watch. Do you? Do I what? She says shes writing it for you. So do you feel special? Thats ridiculous, Ruth said. What if you just think Im a jerk and toss me into the garbage? Speaking about garbage, Oliver said. Ive been thinking about the Great Garbage Patches recently... The what? The Great Eastern and Great Western Garbage Patches? Enormous masses of garbage and debris floating in the oceans? You must have heard about them... Yes, she said. No. I mean, sort of. It didnt matter, since he clearly wanted to tell her about them. She put down the

diary, letting it rest on the white bedcovers. She took off her glasses and laid them on top of the book. The glasses were retro, with thick black frames that looked nice against the worn red cloth cover. There are at least eight of them in the worlds oceans, he said. According to this book Ive been reading, two of them, the Great Eastern Patch and Great Western Patch, are in the Turtle Gyre, and converge at the southern tip of Hawaii. The Great Eastern Patch is the size of Texas. The Great Western is even larger, half the size of the continental USA. Whats in them? Plastic mostly. Like your freezer bag. Soda bottles, styrofoam, take-out food containers, disposable razors, industrial waste. Anything we throw away that floats. Thats horrible. Why are you telling me this? He shook the watch and held it up to his ear. No reason. Just that theyre there, and anything that doesnt sink or escape from the gyre gets sucked up into the middle of a garbage patch. Thats what would have happened to your freezer bag if it hadnt escaped. Sucked up and becalmed, slowly eddying around. The plastic ground into particles for the fish and zooplankton to eat. The diary and letters disintegrating, unread. But instead it got washed up on the beach below Jap Ranch, where you could find it... What are you saying? Ruth asked. Nothing. Just that its amazing, is all. As in the-universe-provides kind of amazing? Maybe. He looked up with an astonished expression on his face. Hey, look! he said, holding out the watch. Its working! The second hand was making its way around the large luminescent numbers on the face. She took it from him and slipped it on her wrist. It was a mans watch, but it fit her. What did you do? I dont know, he said, shrugging. I guess I wound it. 5. She listened to the watch ticking softly in the dark, and the sound of Olivers mechanical breathing. She reached over to the bedside table and felt for the diary. Running her fingertips across the soft cloth cover, she noted the faint impression of the tarnished letters. They still retained the shape of *la recherche du temps perdu*, but they had evolved, no, that word implied a gradual unfolding, and this was sudden, a mutation or a rift, pages ripped from their cover by some Tokyo crafter whod retooled Proust into something altogether new. In her minds eye, she could see the purple ink scripting sinuous lines into solid blocks of colored paragraphs. She couldnt help but notice and admire the uninhibited flow of the girls language. Rarely had she succumbed to second thoughts. Rarely did she doubt a word, or pause to consider or replace it with another. There were only a few crossed-out lines and phrases, and this, too, filled Ruth with something like awe. It had been years since shed approached the page with such certainty. I am reaching through time to touch you. The diary once again felt warm in her hands, which she knew had less to do with any spooky quality in the book and everything to do with the climate changes in her own body. She was growing accustomed to sudden temperature shifts. The steering wheel of the car that grew sticky and hot in her grip. The smoldering pillow, which she often woke to find on the floor beside the bed where shed flung it in her sleep, along with the covers, as though to punish them all for making her hot. The watch, by contrast, felt cool against her wrist. Im reaching forward through time to touch you... youre reaching back to touch me. *Revue de presse* An exquisite novel: funny, tragic, hard-edged and ethereal at once. David Ulin, Los Angeles Times As contemporary as a Japanese teenagers slang but as ageless as a Zen koan, Ruth Ozekis new novel combines great storytelling with a probing investigation into the purpose of existence. . . . She plunges us into a tantalizing narration that brandishes mysteries to be solved and ideas to be explored. . . . Ozekis profound affection for her characters makes *A Tale for the Time Being* as emotionally engaging as it is intellectually provocative. The Washington Post A delightful yet sometimes harrowing novel . . . Many of the elements of Naos story—schoolgirl bullying, unemployed suicidal salarymen, kamikaze pilots—are among a Western readers most familiar images of Japan, but in Naos telling, refracted through Ruths musings, they become fresh and immediate, occasionally searingly painful. Ozeki takes on big themes . . . all drawn into the stories of two time beings, Ruth and Nao, whose own fates are inextricably bound. The New York Times Book Sixteen-year-old schoolgirl Nao Yasutani is the heart and soul of this very satisfying book. . . . The contemporary Japanese style and use of magical realism are reminiscent of author Haruki Murakami. USA Today A terrific novel full of breakthroughs both personal and literary. . . . Ozeki revels in Tokyo teen culture—this goes far beyond Hello Kitty—and explores quantum physics, military applications of computer video games, Internet bullying, and Marcel Proust, all while creating a vulnerable and unique voice for the sixteen-year-old girl at its center. . . . Ozeki has produced a dazzling and humorous work of literary origami. . . . Naos voice—funny, profane and deep—is stirring and unforgettable as she ponders the meaning of her life. The Seattle Times Beautifully written, intensely readable and richly layered . . . one of the best books of the year so far. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Masterfully woven . . . Entwining Japanese language with WWII history, pop culture with Proust, Zen with quantum mechanics, Ozeki alternates between the voices of two women to produce a spellbinding tale. O, The Oprah Magazine Forget the proverbial message in a bottle: This Tale fractures clichés as it affirms the lifesaving power of words. . . . As

Ozeki explores the ties between reader and writer, she offers a lesson in redemption that reinforces the priceless here and now. Elle A powerful yarn of fate and parallel lives. Good Housekeeping Ozeki weaves together Naos adolescent yearnings with Ruths contemplative digressions, adding bits of Zen wisdom, as well as questions about agency, creativity, life, death, and human connections along the way. A Tale for the Time Being is a dreamy, spiritual investigation of how to gracefully meet the waves of time, which, in the end, come for us all. The Daily Beast As we read Naos story and the story of Ozekis reading of it, as we go back and forth between the text and the notes, time expands for us. It opens up onto something resembling narrative eternity . . . page after page, slowly unfolding. And what a beautiful effect that is for a novel to create. Alan Cheuse, NPRs All Things Considered Superb . . . her best and most adventurous novel to date . . . likely to leave readers feeling its emotional impact for a long time to come. BookPage Magnificent . . . brings together a Japanese girls diary and a transplanted American novelist to meditate on everything from bullying to the nature of conscience and the meaning of life. . . . The novels seamless web of language, metaphor, and meaning cant be disentangled from its powerful emotional impact: These are characters we care for deeply, imparting vital life lessons through the magic of storytelling. A masterpiece, pure and simple. Kirkus s (starred review) An intriguing, even beautiful narrative remarkable for its unusual but attentively structured plot. . . . We go from one story line to the other, back and forth across the Pacific, but the reader never loses place or interest. Booklist (starred review) Ozekis absorbing novel is an extended meditation on writing, time, and people in time. . . . The characters lives are finely drawn, from Ruths rustic lifestyle to the Yasutani familys straitened existence after moving from Sunnyvale, California, to Tokyo.

Naos winsome voice contrasts with Ruths intellectual ponderings to make up a lyrical disquisition on writings power to transcend time and place. This tale from Ozeki, a Zen Buddhist priest, is sure to please anyone who values a good story broadened with intellectual vigor. Publishers Weekly An extraordinary novel about a courageous young woman, riven by loneliness, by time, and (ultimately) by tsunami. Nao is an inspired narrator and her quest to tell her great grandmothers story, to connect with her past and with the larger world is both aching and true. Ozeki is one of my favorite novelists and here she is at her absolute bestbewitching, intelligent, hilarious, and heartbreaking, often on the same page. Junot Diaz, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of This Is How You Lose Her A beautifully interwoven novel about magic and loss and the incomprehensible threads that connect our lives. I loved it. Elizabeth Gilbert, bestselling author of Eat, Pray, Love A Tale for the Time Being is a timeless story. Ruth Ozeki beautifully renders not only the devastation of the collision between man and the natural world, but also its often miraculous results. Alice Sebold, bestselling author of The Lovely Bones Ingenious and touching. . . . I read it with great pleasure. Philip Pullman, award-winning author of The Golden Compass One of the most deeply moving and thought-provoking novels I have read in a long time. In precise and luminous prose, Ozeki captures both the sweep and detail of our shared humanity. The result is gripping, fearless, inspiring and true. Madeline Miller, author of the Orange Prize winner The Song of Achilles A Tale for the Time Being is equal parts mystery and meditation. The mystery is a compulsive, gritty page-turner. The meditation on time and memory, on the oceanic movement of history, on impermanence and uncertainty, but also resilience and bravery is deep and gorgeous and wise. A completely satisfying, continually surprising, wholly remarkable achievement. Karen Joy Fowler, bestselling author of The Jane Austen Book Club A great achievement, and the work of a writer at the height of her powers. Ruth Ozeki has not only reinvigorated the novel itself, the form, but shes given us the tried and true, deep and essential pleasure of characters we love and who matter. Jane Hamilton, bestselling author of A Map of the World Profoundly original, with authentic, touching characters and grand, encompassing themes, Ruth Ozekis novel proves that truly great stories like this one can both deepen our understanding of self and remind us of our shared humanity. Deborah Harkness, bestselling author of A Discovery of Witches and Shadow of Night Ive long been an admirer of Ruth Ozekis work, and her exquisite, richly textured novel, A Tale for the Time Being, marks the stunning return of a writer at the height of her powers. Seamlessly weaving together tales of the past and present that are equally magical and heartbreaking, she transports us to the worlds of Nao and Jiko, in Japan, and Ruth, on a remote island in British Columbia, where their worlds collide as they reach across time to find the meaning of life and home. . . . A wise and wonderfully inventive story that will resonate through time. Gail Tsukiyama, bestselling author of The Samurais Garden