

Pointless Homecoming

Chieko, who so hankered to come home,
Is home at last; is dead.

How deep this deep
Hush of October night in which I sweep
The corner of the studio and comb
My tousled hair before, with infinite
Pointless precision, quandaries of care,
I lay the body of Chieko there
And, by the utter singleness of it,
Its total stillness, stand in the glare of loss.

People set screens, correctly upside-down.
People burn candles, start the bluish-brown
Wavers of incense. People lean across
Chieko's patient form to paint her face.

So, somehow, things get done. The day arrives,
Then one night more. Bright flowers, friends, their wives,
Such colored gaiety so fills the place
It could be for some stranger's funeral-rite:
And then, before I know what must be known,
Chieko's gone, gone quietly away.

In the deserted studio, alone,
Dark in its dark I stand. Outside, a bright
Full moon informs the sky. Or so they say.

Takamura Kotaro (1883-1956)
(translated by Graeme Wilson)