

At the Onsen in Gifu  
by Lenhardt Stevens

*To Herman, if I may,*

Sulphur, the perforating stench, rising up through bowels  
of earth's vents, slits into the chasms where breath allows,  
horror erupts in the form of bubbled heat, magmatic scowls,

though such we can underneath mountainsides enjoy,  
hoping to our laboring kin and their ethics begin to annoy,  
what the onsen may offer, to labored legs deploy.

In naked communion, lounging with ourselves exposed,  
our worries fleeting out to our consciences' unopposed.

While I long to remember what cares we endeavored to melt away,  
have a bath, listen to what your descending waters say;  
cherry blossom in view with Nakamura-san squatting, back sway,  
he has held in his agitation this week, finding an outlet today.

Oh do not disturb the tranquility in my core while nerves shun  
the nagging human drive against incompleteness, things left undone.  
Steam rises from a shower stool, left recently while heads yet run,  
a hairless boy and his father demonstrates etiquette, learning begun.

Try to spy the artwork covered member of some seedy sect,  
while your heart pumps blood to a damp, warming frame  
where at each pore the dirt, oils of dermal activity on effort came,  
and on the brow of your head a chill and droplets begin to collect.  
Your half of humanity walking along the paths, to hide  
what they have been taught to shame when our gazes collide.  
Fear not! if our sizes are in proportion to what genes endow;  
a fortunate individual here is not what their physique allow.

Flakes descending on a ride to their dissolution below;  
this is the icy calm and boiling frenzy our earth can bestow.

Ah look up, will you, while our time here is ending,  
behold the whisper wind of night that would eviscerate  
the now languorous collection of atoms that congregate,  
while above the heavens and their contents are bending...  
You say that water is hotter still? Show me the pool!

To miss what is offered is to play an absent-minded fool

After we warmed to our last capillary, cooked our soul's chill,  
we will climb the steady ascent of the lounging room's hill,  
purchase Asahi and locate a spot next to the oak lacquered table,  
and your prostrate posture will act as your do not disturb label.

Your friend looks for you and you have neglected your *keitai*;  
who can speak this language, when there is a neat excuse to die?

MMXVI