

May 2023



Before the coffee gets cold: Tales from the Café is the second in a series of short novels by playwright, producer and author Toshikazu Kawaguchi. The first book, *Before the coffee gets cold*, was adapted from Kawaguchi's play of the same name.

In a small dark alley somewhere in Tokyo is a café where patrons can go backwards or forwards in time. There is one particular chair in this establishment occupied by a woman who is also a ghost. Once each day she leaves her table to visit the toilet and while she has gone, a patron may take the opportunity to sit in her chair and travel in time, but only until their coffee gets cold.

In this book we, the reader, are offered stories from characters who are, in turn, looking for absolution

or a chance to assuage their grief or guilt or both. While these four stories are set some six years after the first novel and the characters visiting the café have changed, the basic formula remains the same.

For 22 years Gohtaro has lied to his daughter about her birth family. Now she is about to marry and he knows that the truth about his deception will be revealed. Haruka is in fact the daughter of Gohtaro's best friend and his wife who were tragically killed when the child was only a year old. After honouring his promise to take care of the child, he is now wracked with guilt about his deception and worried about his daughter's reaction to the truth. His quest is to seek absolution through contact with his friend Shuichi and to return with a message from him for their daughter.

Since the death of her mother, Kazu the waitress at the café, had been nurtured by an art teacher who has recently passed away. Kinuyo's son Yukio, a potter, had not been aware of his mother's illness and was unable to attend her funeral. He is an angry man who is not only grieving the loss of his mother but is also greatly distressed about the way his own life has evolved. He wants to revisit his mother before her death.

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The third story involves a trip to the future. Kurata has come from the past to connect with his love Asami. He knows he is dying and he wants to make sure that Asami, after his death, realises that her happiness is important to him and that she continues her life in a way that will fulfill this wish for her.

The last visitor to the chair is Kiyoshi, a customer who earlier in the book asked for help to find a suitable birthday present for his wife. Unbeknown to all, Kiyoshi's wife, Kimiko, had been killed some 30 years earlier. On the night Kimiko died she was to meet Kiyoshi at the café but he was delayed at work and, as she walked home, she was killed by a mugger. After her death Kiyoshi had felt the burden of not just grief at her passing but also the guilt that he was to blame.

In this reviewer's opinion the writing is clunky and the frequent regurgitation of information about characters and rules often unnecessary. Although there were some beautiful prose and sentiments expressed, it was just a little too much for this reader and while not sorry to have read the book overall, there is no compunction to read either the first or third book in the series.

Ratings: Maggie 2.5, Pauline 2, Nicola 2, Jo 2.5, Sophie 3, Janet 3, Viv 2.5, Diane 3, Kim 2.5, Sandy 2.5, Cheryl 2.5, Lynda 3.5..

We look forward to seeing you again at our next meeting 6:30pm on Tuesday 13th of June at *QCWA Mermaid Beach Centre located in 43 Ventura Rd, Mermaid Beach*, when we'll talk about *Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell. Hope to see you there and Happy Reading!

The 2023 Reading List can be found in the sidebar, or below if you're on your mobile device.

Other Books We Read

May 2023

The Promise by Damon Galgut, 3.5

The Mother Wound by Amani Haydar, 3.5

The Homecoming by Kate Morton, 3.5

The Ministurist by Jessie Burton, 3.5

The House of Fortune by Jessie Burton, 3.5

The Last Painting of Sara de Vos by Dominic Smith, 3.5

King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild, 5

One Hundred Days by Alice Pung, 4

How to Raise an Elephant by Alexander McCall Smith, 3

Bad art mother by Edwina Preston, 3.5

The undertaking by Audrey Magee, 3.5

Victory city by Salman Rushdie, 4

The seven skins of Esther wilding by Holly Ringland, 3

Everyone in my family has killed someone by Benjamin Stevenson, 2

Before Your Memory Fades by Toshikazu Kawaguchi, 3.5

Indelible Ink by Fiona McGregor, 3

The Good Doctor by Damon Galgut, 3.5