

To assign words to the mountains in Nikko—the staircase through the tall grass, the cloud cover always moving closer—is to keep a wild dog in a Tokyo apartment, never letting it roam. But I'll try: Duck soba at midday to calm our stomachs. We've hiked several miles already, we've been awake since before dawn. We haven't yet noticed the blood coloring our pant legs from leech bites. The words 'duck soba at midday,' the experience of climbing up the fog, blood leaking onto the steps, or running back down to catch the last train to Asakusa. That morning, my life was leaking water from both ends; that evening, the word 'nothingness' was falling away like a leech meeting fire. At an onsen in the night, bloodstains become clearer—my own anxieties opening up. At an onsen in Shin-Okubo, my tattoos out in the open. English instructions pasted to the door of the apartment, Euro-American ideas in translation. I put the Japanese words in a certain order, reintegrate myself back into my world, settle back into my life. I wash the blood away and buy some new pants, unstained.