

ON BEING ONE OF THE ONLY TWO BUDDHISTS IN TOWN

The grey-haired scholar with a ponytail and lots of silver Navajo jewelry tells me I cannot possibly be a Buddhist until I go to India and see bodies of the homeless, freshly dead on the streets every morning, and the yellow dust stirring behind the rickshaws as they carry them away to be burned. I smile at my quick anger; I have much to learn from being patronized.

The scholar tells me there are no Western languages like Sanskrit and I say pre-Socratic Greek comes close, he looks sad and tries to smile. Birgit who works at the natural foods café says he's the resident intellectual and isn't used to being challenged. I shrug and cover myself with chalk dust, marking down in purple daily prices for vegetarian lasagne, foccaccia.

Mike who also works at the café drops by my place on his way home and tells me that our local scholar read aloud the classical Greek sentence I'd thoughtfully added in the blackboard's corner: *beauty is harsh*. I snort because it's the first sentence everyone learns in Greek, I vehemently deny being attracted to the scholar, who is fifty if a day and has a grey ponytail.

My teacher Issho became a priest because he was so bad at meditating.