



BEFORE THE COFFEE GETS COLD

by Toshikazu Kawaguchi

(translated from Japanese by Geoffrey Trousselot)

Summary:

What would you change if you could go back in time?

In a small back alley in Tokyo, there is a café which has been serving carefully brewed coffee for more than one hundred years. But this coffee shop offers its customers a unique experience: the chance to travel back in time.

In *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, we meet four visitors, each of whom is hoping to make use of the café's time-travelling offer, in order to: confront the man who left them, receive a letter from their husband whose memory has been taken by early onset Alzheimer's, to see their sister one last time, and to meet the daughter they never got the chance to know.

But the journey into the past does not come without risks: customers must sit in a particular seat, they cannot leave the café, and finally, they must return to the present before the coffee gets cold . . .

Toshikazu Kawaguchi's beautiful, moving story – translated from Japanese by Geoffrey Trousselot – explores the age-old question: what would you change if you could travel back in time? More importantly, who would you want to meet, maybe for one last time?

Source:

<https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/toshikazu-kawaguchi/before-the-coffee-gets-cold/9781529029581>

By Terry Hong Correspondent (11/19/2020), Christian Science Monitor

Originally debuting onstage in Japan, “Before the Coffee Gets Cold” won praise and awards for its playwright, Toshikazu Kawaguchi. Its popularity

inspired Kawaguchi to adapt the play into his first novel in 2015, producing a quirky, sigh-inducingly satisfying read that became an international bestseller. A film adaptation followed in 2018. This month, the English edition translated by Australian Geoffrey Trousselot finally arrives stateside, ready to charm American audiences.

Welcome to Funiculi Funicula, a small café in a narrow back alley in Tokyo, established in 1874. Beyond a few minor renovations, little has changed beyond the requisite addition of electricity. A married couple, Kei and Nagare, are the current owners, while Nagare's cousin, Kazu, a university student, helps out when she's not in school.

Regular customers casually wander in and out with familiar ease, with the exception of a woman in a white dress who is always seated in the same seat at the same table, most often absorbed in reading her book, "The Lovers." She is, in fact, a ghost who neglected to follow the café's most important rule – to finish drinking before the coffee gets cold.

Funiculi Funicula is no ordinary café. That certain chair at that certain table is actually a time portal. Only when its usual occupant vacates the seat to visit the restroom (yes, even ghosts need relief) can a (living) customer attempt a temporary visit. The rules are many, but the most important is tied to the coffee: Travel commences when Kazu pours a fresh cup of java; to avoid becoming a permanent specter, the traveler must conclude the short visit and drain the cup before the liquid becomes cold. While time can be defied, the present will not, cannot be, changed.

In four intertwined chapters, Kawaguchi invites readers to accompany four intrepid adventurers who desire a second chance at a crucial conversation in their lives. No-nonsense businesswoman Fumiko is desperate to be more open and vulnerable during her last meeting with her boyfriend Goro before he makes a job transfer to the

U.S. Nurse Kohtake wants one more opportunity to talk to her husband Fusagi before Alzheimer's made him forget too much – including her. Bar owner Hirai needs to talk to her younger sister Kumi, whom she's been avoiding for too many years. And then co-owner Kei, who is pregnant, wants a glimpse into the future to meet her unborn child.

As a first-time novelist, Kawaguchi's writing isn't quite comparable (yet?) to some of his globally revered compatriots – think Haruki Murakami, Yoko Tawada, Banana Yoshimoto, and Kenzaburō Ōe. His narrative is occasionally uneven and tends to meander – readers might like to know why Kazu is the only one able to pour the brew, for example, while the description of Hirai's family's historic business could have skipped a few irrelevant details. The new author is also sometimes repetitive, and his sentences aren't always exactly elegant.

And yet, where Kawaguchi excels is undoubtedly more essential: He has a surprising, unerring ability to find lasting emotional resonance. Interwoven into what initially feels like a whimsical escape are existential conundrums of love and loss, family and freedom, life and death. “[N]o matter what difficulties people face,” Kazu muses at book's end, “they will always have the strength to overcome them. It just takes heart. And if the chair can change someone's heart, it clearly has its purpose.”

Source:

<https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Book-Reviews/2020/1119/A-chance-to-redo-the-past-in-Before-the-Coffee-Gets-Cold>

REVIEWS:

"*Before the Coffee Gets Cold*... may explore similar ground to its predecessors in the genre, but it inventively limits the mechanics of its time travel to the confines of a small cafe, and is all the more resonant for it... the narrative is deeply moving." ~ **Chicago Review of Books**

"Heartwarming, quirky, and wistful." ~ **Huffpost**

"A charming novel about a mysterious Japanese coffee shop in which customers who sit in a certain chair can go back in time - but just while their coffee is cooling." ~ **Star Tribune**

"*Kawaguchi*... has a surprising, unerring ability to find lasting emotional resonance. Interwoven into what initially feels like a whimsical escape are existential conundrums of love and loss, family and freedom, life and death." ~ **The Christian Science Monitor**

"By cleverly weaving fantastic strands into what turns out to be an entertaining tale... Kawaguchi builds suspense from scene to scene, carefully selecting his narrative clues." ~ **The Arts Fuse**

"The story is gold. *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is perfect for anyone who wants to feel connected right now." ~ **BookReporter**

"*Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is able to create pathos for the characters who yearn in earnest to change the past... Check out Kawaguchi's work if you fancy a break from the inescapable reality of the pandemic." ~ **The Mancunion**

"*Toshikazu lays out a system of time travel* that is unconvoluted and beautifully simple... This charmingly magical novel is about discovering happiness despite the pasts that we desperately want to revisit." ~**The Harvard Crimson**

"*An affecting, deeply immersive journey into the desire to hold onto the past.* This wondrous tale will move readers." ~**Publishers Weekly**

"*This is a sweet, fable-like tale about a magical seat in a cafe where you can, if you wish, go back in time...* An odd read, but also a charming one." ~**The Sydney Morning Herald**

"*A story about human relationships, missed opportunities and the enduring power of love.*" ~**The Gryphon**

"*A thought-provoking and at times tear-jerking realization about what we would say if we could go back in time.*" ~**Palatinate**

"*It is full of soul, presented through clever world building and unfolding of its characters and relationships.*" ~**Books and Bao**

Source: <https://www.amazon.com/Before-Coffee-Gets-Cold-Novel/dp/1335430997>



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Toshikazu Kawaguchi was born in Osaka, Japan in 1971. He formerly produced, directed and wrote for the theatrical group Sonic Snail. As a playwright, his works include *COUPLE*, *Sunset Song*, and *Family Time*. The novel *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is adapted from a 1110 Productions play by Kawaguchi, which won the 10th Suginami Drama Festival grand prize.

Source: <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/k/toshikazu-kawaguchi/>

Toshikazu Kawaguchi is a Japanese literary fiction author born in 1971 in Osaka, Japan. He was formerly the director, producer, and writer for “Sonic Snail,” a small theatrical group. As a playwright, he wrote several critically acclaimed titles that include “Family Time,” “Sunset Song” and “Couple.” He adapted his bestselling novel “Before the Coffee Gets Cold” from the play “1110 Productions” that was the winner of the grand prize at the 10th Sugimani Drama Festival. The novel has sold more than 800,000 copies in his native Japan and has also been adapted into a movie. Kawaguchi has sold the rights to the novel in more than nine jurisdictions including Turkey, China, Hungary, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Similar to many Japanese authors such as Yukiko Motoa and Toshiki Okada, Toshikazu Kawaguchi started his career as a playwright before he became an author. “Before the Coffee Gets Cold” that was formerly a critically acclaimed play had to be adapted to a different writing style to become the best-selling novel. One of the editors at Sunmark became interested in the play and convinced Kawaguchi to convert it into a novel. It took many rewrites as he had to revise the description of character movement, extend

scenes, and pace the story differently. He also had to flesh out the story given that plays generally tend to be shorter than novels.

Source: <https://www.bookseriesinorder.com/toshikazu-kawaguchi/>



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your favorite part of the book?
2. What was your least favorite?
3. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
4. Which scene has struck with you the most?
5. What did you think of the writing? Are there any standout sentences?
6. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
7. Would you want to read another book by this author?
8. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
9. What surprised you most about the book?
10. How did your opinion of the book change as you read it?
11. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
12. How does the book's title work in relation to the book's contents?
13. Is this book overrated or underrated?
14. Did this book remind you of any other books?
15. How did it impact you? Will you remember it in a few months or years?
16. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
17. Who do you most want to read this book?
18. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
19. Did the book strike you as original?

Source: <https://www.oprahmag.com/entertainment/a31047508/book-club-questions/>