In classical flower arrangement, Masako says, three major stems occur. The shin stands thirty degrees from vertical. The so},${forty-five degrees, is just three-quarters of the shin in height. The hikae, three-quarters of the so},${ points outwards, low, at seventy-five degrees; most often this one is a flower.

What a classicist I have become, impelled by the broad hand of revelation, that is, experience. Masako's creatures fill our country house like novel theorems from the Elements; out of fixed proportion, beauty rises unlike any that I used to summon in rented rooms from floppy big bouquets.

A single sweep of branch, unflowering, another upward twist, and there's the shape of nothing caught in air, somehow the proper counterpart of one or two explosive flowers. Don't be afraid, she says, her fingers hidden inside the vase, to put more details in, as long as they don't interrupt the lines.

The heart's most elegant, extravagant designs arise, I see, from careful choice and rapid computation. In half an afternoon, Masako fills our baskets large and small, and the clear vases. Two leans from one, and three from one and two, and suddenly altogether they compose their ratios to self-sufficiency.

Even the purple brambles in the field, cut by Masako, fall in whole ellipses, and twigs repeat their angles on the branch. So may you and I and our small flower flourish in the constraints space and number pose on families; and make our tracery around the center of certain loss more beautiful, and sure.

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