

STAFF PICK

THE STATIONMASTER

NOVEL BY JIRO ASADA

The Stationmaster by Jiro Asada is a collection of eight short stories with an overarching theme of how small miracles may touch people's hearts. Despite this common theme, each story ends up giving a very different kind of feeling, aided further by Jiro Asada's masterful prose and Terry Gallagher's excellent translation, which allow the individual story to carry a different tone of voice.

The stories are quite short in length (around 30 pages each), and Asada does not take the time to overindulge readers to fully digest them as they read. Rather, I found myself wanting to put the book down each time I finished a story to quietly reflect on my thoughts and feelings for 10 minutes.

The title story, "The Stationmaster," is about a soon-to-retire stationmaster Otomatsu who is dedicated to his role even as his decrepit rural station is

due to be closed down. Asada's beautiful imagery of the snowy countryside and empty railway line echoes the character's own reflection of the quiet tragedies of his life. In the end, Otomatsu finds closure and redemption through an encounter with a small miracle.

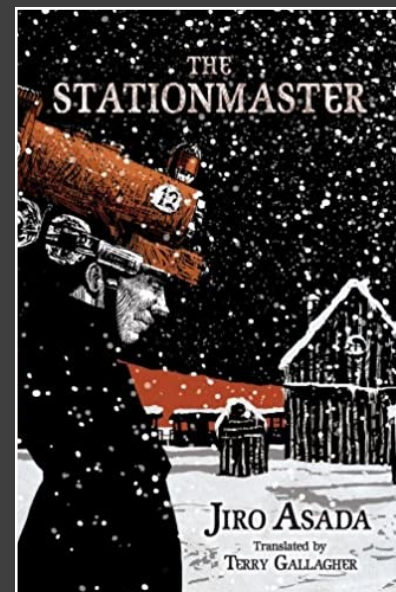
In addition, I personally—and unexpectedly—enjoyed the story "Love Letter" about a petty criminal who travels to Chiba because of the death of a Chinese sex worker, whom he registered as his wife for money. In one scene, he ends up weeping for this woman whom he has never met. While sad, this scene also made me feel warm. It felt good to be reminded of the basic goodness in human nature, and that people, whether they or others think of them as "flawed," are able to feel sympathy for complete strangers—especially during the current difficult times.

— Haram, Library Assistant
February, 2021

ABOUT AUTHOR

Jiro Asada (浅田 次郎) was born in Tokyo in 1951 and has become one of the most representative authors of contemporary fiction in Japan. In 1997 *Poppoya* (*The Stationmaster*) won the Naoki Award for popular fiction and went on to become a best seller. Many of his works, including several stories from his book, have been made into popular films.

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Title: The Stationmaster

Author: Jiro Asada

Publisher: Viz Media
Year: 2009

Pages: 237

Translated by Terry Gallagher

Call no. 895.635 A82 S72 2009
Item no. 00019227

Original Japanese:
Poppoya
鉄道員 (ぽっぽや)
Shueisha, 2000