

WASUREMONO

noun: lost article/ something forgotten.

The train thrummed like a live wire, causing the cheap wooden seat beneath me to rattle continuously. In between the flickering of the neon strips people sat in practiced silence, doing their best to ignore the existence of other passengers, concentrating instead on delicately maintaining their balance and moving in time with the sway of the rails. What they do in the darkness when the lights fail, I don't know. Maybe they all do what I do: cover their pockets, put their back to a wall and wait for the dull purplish illuminations to return with a snap and the world to come back into focus. Maybe they think about their day; playing over the memories again and again, agonising over the details of what they said to their co-workers and imagining how they would have acted if they had just had a few minutes more to think. As if they didn't have this same journey, twice every day no less, to do just that.

A cough crept up and hacked out of me. I covered my mouth and pulled my jacket around me tighter, reaching into a pocket and fingering the patch I had there, trying to ignore the pain that had been building in my skull all day.

How long had it been? The last one had been in the reclamation yards, and that had to have been at least an hour ago, it should be okay to do it again. I turned the patch over in my fingers and waited, shivering despite the stifling humidity in the carriage. Any second now it would be time.

Flick. The lights were starting to fail again. Flick. Fli- blackout.

I quickly took the patch out of my pocket and pushed it onto the back of my neck, waited for the cold shiver, and then stashed the discarded wrapper back in my pocket, taking care to pull my hair over the liquid that would by now have stained my skin a tell tale green.

The blackness turned to blinding white, and I was on a beach. The smell of the salt hit me instantly, and the spray of the waves was cooling under the summer sun.

"They didn't have any vanilla, so I got you mint instead."

James had returned, carrying ice creams as he walked awkwardly in his flip flops. He held one out to me and I took it, the words coming out of

my mouth without my control.

“Who doesn’t have vanilla?! Thank you, love.”

No one in history has ever managed to eat an ice cream with any dignity in public, though I certainly tried. Sticky rivers ran through my fingers as I gazed at the horizon, the pristine blue sky making it almost impossible to look at the water without squinting. This was bliss for me; a perfect moment I wanted to remember forever.

Without warning I lurched forwards, falling towards the sea. I waited for the inevitable wet smack of the waves, but instead my head hit cold, hard metal.

I blinked, looking around as the other passengers came into view again. Nobody had noticed me bang my head into the window frame. Nobody notices anything here. The lingering scent of the salt and the taste of synthetic mint played on my tongue, jarring against the stale odours of sweat that seemed to be a permanent fixture on the trains. That had been a very good one, though it was a shame it had been so short... maybe if I hadn’t been in a rush and could have waited I could have enjoyed that beach for longer. Still, if I’d waited I might have had another experience all together, there was no telling with cheap memory patches like these.

“The next stop is Neo- Osaka, Food Quarter, station 3 - Outskirts”. The androgynous robotic voice of the intercom was the only sound anybody heard on this journey, besides the staccato heartbeat of the spinning wheels, the deep persistent rumble and the pneumatic swish of opening doors at each station. We slowed and the doors opened onto the platform, and the sounds of hawkers and vendors spilled into the carriage, a mix of the blaring advertisements that the shops had outside and the hubbub of Friday night revellers.

“Oolong, 5 credits each!”

“You’ve never had rice until you’ve had Old Delhi Rice! Best price in the quadrant!”

“You’ve had 12? Pah! I can eat at least 19!”

I didn’t move. This wasn’t my stop, although I could get home this way. It was better to wait for a couple of stops and get off at the first station in the food quarter, that way I’d avoid having to walk though the red zone at night. Besides, I’d taken the patch. I may as well relax and enjoy the journey. The swish of the doors signalled our departure, and we returned

to our familiar silence. The slow rumbles returned with the rhythmic swaying, and I leaned back into my seat, trying to fix myself against the window so I wouldn't hit my head again.

I became aware of how hot it had become, and the pounding of drums. Akoje was laughing as he danced, bright teeth gleaming against the firelight.

“It is time! The time has come! Time to become a man!”

Ululations and whoops of joy echoed around the circle as I felt myself being thrust forward and to my knees onto the dry dirt of the floor of the Elder's home.

“Drink! Drink!” He lifted my face back and poured the liquid into my mouth. Hot, foul and disgusting; I tried not to choke as I drank it. Was it poison? Had they poisoned me? Something was rising out of me, something noxious. I was suddenly afraid, I was not ready to die. What if I wasn't ready to become a man?! It came then, something rising up my throat that felt like the end. I doubled over and burped. The room burst into laughter and cheers, and Akoje pulled me to my feet, smiling.

Smack. The frame of the window had left another dent in my head, shocking me out again. At least that one had lasted longer, and the sense of pride and warmth that he felt at the end had not faded, and I smiled to myself. Beautiful.

I sat up and saw somebody staring at me from the far end of the carriage. A tall man, thin and impeccably dressed in an all black suit, partially hidden behind a group of elderly ladies. I felt uncomfortable instantly. His eyes were fixed on my face, and as he noticed me looking at him his head tilted to the side, considering.

At that moment the lights blinked out again, just for a moment. They came back on within a few seconds this time, but he had moved closer. He was standing in the middle of the aisle now, hanging onto the ceiling straps, and still staring at me, unblinking. My heart was racing now, and I had to get out of this enclosed carriage.

“The next stop is Neo- Osaka, Food Quarter, station 2 - Middle District”.

The doors had barely opened as I decided to jump out and run into the crowd into the red zone. The silence of the train was replaced by a cacophony of sounds, even busier than the last stop. In the middle district the streets were incredibly narrow, and packed full of people during the

night. It was the home of the street gangs and muggers, as well as the seedier drinking houses. I pushed through the crowds, and navigated the neon avenues. Vid boards called out to attract new customers, and the lights dazzled and danced in every direction. Some of the businesses had large windows in their fronts, a place to put the prettier dancing girls, another hook to entice the Friday night crowd.

I had waded through a few streets when I started to slow. My heart was pounding and it was not good to do physical exercise this close to patching, it could trigger less tranquil memories. I needed a place to rest and have a drink. Ducking into the nearest bar, I pulled up a stool in a booth and waited for a waitress to come to me. The place was dark, old fashioned and had paper menus. Incense burners were on every other table and the kitchen was open so we could all see them cook. It did not take long for the waitress to see me, and she brought me an ice cold beer.

“Food?”

“No thanks.”

“You sure? We’ve got the finest Imagawayaki on the street here.”

I reconsidered and ordered some. It came and I ate slowly, feeling better. I don’t know who that guy had been, but it had really creeped me out him staring like that.

“Three cheers for Gennaro and Maria!” Mama called out to the table, and we responded by cheering and banging our fists loudly. The sun streamed through the lemon trees and the sweet scent of flowers wafted up from underneath us. Papa was coming over from the house, and placed huge platters down on the trestle in front of us filled with ravioli.

“Come on, eat up now.”

“Oh Papa, you didn’t have to go to all this trouble!” Gennaro was smiling and hugging our father.

“Don’t be silly, it’s not every day your eldest son gets engaged. That calls for ravioli!”

Maria was talking to Mama, little red petals woven through her long blonde hair. They looked knowingly at me and laughed.

“What is it?! Why do you laugh at me?” I asked, a mouth full of pasta.

“I’ve been looking for you”. Sunlight and darkness coalesced, and I felt confused. I tried blinking, but I could not see properly. My head seared like a hot iron was branding me behind my temples. I groaned and slowly the room came back into view. He was standing in front of me. The man in the

dark suit. How had he found me? I tried jumping to my feet, but it was too close to the memory, so I fell to the floor, beer bottle smashing to the ground and liquid splashing all over my face and arm as shards of glass cut my hands.

“Who are you?”

“There is a cost for taking the past from others.” He spoke quietly, perfectly calm.

“Memories must come from somewhere. You must pay.” He reached into his suit jacket to retrieve something, but I had managed to find my feet and was already out of the door and into the night.

I did not stop running through the crowds this time, and received angry shouts and shoves as I hurtled through the night. I turned randomly left and right, not even noticing my surroundings or the time as the lights gradually died out and I found myself in an old street. Wooden houses that can't have been inhabited for many years, the sunlight in the day totally blocked out by the overpasses and the land dead from over use causing everybody to relocate to the newer quarters.

I fell to the floor, exhausted. The cough returned and I hacked my lungs for a short while. My cuts were still bleeding and I had no idea where I was. I could not stop shaking as the fear and adrenaline coursed through my veins, and I huddled against the wall in an attempt to calm myself down and give myself time to think.

The water was ice around me, freezing me as I struggled to tread the waves. I had no idea how long I'd been here, but I was losing strength fast. I panicked and gulped a lungful of sea just as a wave pushed me under. I couldn't cough it up under the waves, and I fought to get to the surface as the capillaries screamed at me. I burst through into the air and finally expelled the water. I gasped for breath and scanned the horizon desperately. There! Was that a boat? Finally the lifeguard had found me, all I had to do was w