



## The Museum of Modern Happiness

### Back to the Big City

In the smallest building of a number in the compound of what once was an open air museum with reconstructed Minka, vernacular farmhouses, barns and stables, Kuras with walls thick as rock castles' and windows in style with war bunkers, two 2<sup>nd</sup> generation squatters sat silently smoking shag, a mix of local produce. From the full moon hidden behind a thin cloud deck a blanket of ghostly greyish orange light covered the yard, and the 'Gassho' house with its steep thatched straw roof looking like two hands pressed together in prayer, with sliding wooden lattice windows, skeletal structure of timber frames, it all contrasted even more among the shades of neon-green trees.

Pleasant this early evening in late summer, the cicadas gave their last daily concert in decrescendo, and unlike previous past point pleasant dusks, peace prevailed, or so it felt for a moment at least.

"Looking back from the long promised happy future yet to come, back on the happiness before the commoners lost it to the beast of capitalism, I think of starting to collect memorabilia of those happy days. Exhibit them in a museum of some sort." said Wilbur to Kibo a lost and found old friend of his.

"You mean a virtual compilation of modern happiness on line or a physical one?" questioned Kibo in his oriental simplicity.

"Could be both, the physical smart phone and above a 3D holographic clip of two teen age girls el-cycling, one in saddle and the other while standing on the extension shafts mounted on the cogset of the rear wheel, tittering, holding her rider's shoulder with one hand, talking to each other on their mobiles." Wilbur responded with ease in one breath.

"Listen, something is going on outside," remarked Kibo.

"Yeah, unusual, the cicadas stopped their concert," Wilbur added.

"Screams! It's a fight, I bet."

"A fight?" ....no one's ever come here to fight..."

"Come on, listen!" Kibo repeated.

"Right, what the heck... who cares?"

"Come on, let's check it out!" Kibo insisted.

Wilbur, never in the mood to argue with Kibo, conceded. Kibo was after all someone to hold onto, not to lose in throwaway arguing, an uncomplicated friend in a complicated world.

They stumbled up, legs a bit numb from squatting all this time, left their abominable abode for the worst; getting involved, something Wilbur being ex-pat Gibraltarian hated. The sound of tumult escalating echoed from the barn, the shriek screaming voice definitely was a woman's. From under their hoods eyes crossed question marks. Should they hurry, lay low or take a cautious tactical approach?

"Hurry!" Kibo pronounced.

"Just a sec..." hissed Wilbur consecutively.

They turned the corner of the Kura storehouse, parallel to the farmhouse, and encroached on the barn. A beam of suppressed light escaped from the gap in the gate.

The disturbing sounds had subsided. Eerily emboldened Kibo peeked in. Two figures snaking behind a lantern at the far end on the stamped clay floor, one atop of the other moaning.

"Mutual death rattle," whispered Wilbur over Kibo's shoulder, prompting him to shout: "Hey you there...!"

"Leave us fucking alone" a man's raw voice reacted.

"Is that what you're doing?" Wilbur jumped in.

"Yeah" followed without further ado.

"All right then dude, come and have a drink and a drag afterwards," invited Kibo in an insisting pitch.

As no answer came Wilbur slammed the gate door close as to say we're gone and stay out of trouble when two snakes are making out. He switched his headband flashlight on.

"Something for the museum? Modern happiness, no?" Kibo smiled as they walked towards a vintage Norton, undoubtedly the couple's.

"Don't be silly," Wilbur said, head hanging, the vision of the two shoeless legs swaying up in the air lingering on, "there're tons of more exciting soft-demand porn out there."

"No, no Wilbur, the Norton!" and stopped.

"I'll be damned, didn't see it; look the bike has a horse saddle."

"A modified Norton Commando from 1969, I reckon," Kibo completed and absolving Wilbur with: "We came from the other side."

As they approached, from behind the man came charging, above the rattle of a whole hardware store his hoarse voice shouting: "Piss off, don't even think about it!"

Both turned, Kibo gestured as a Jizo, his right hand in what could be interpreted as hold it - his left as giving way. Wilbur's hands Christ-like, exclaimed: "Peace mate, we're the nice guys, remember? I'm Wilbur, come and join us for a smoke or a drink!" was more a defense repeat of Kibo's earlier invitation than meant.

"Yeah, yeah, I've heard that before, and then..."

Kibo cut short: "Right dude, that was me, Kibo is the name." looking at Wilbur for confirmation.

"You think you're funny, Chink?"

Wilbur diverted: "We've got Mazar-e-Sharif too, dude" and went to his pocket.

"Freeze!!!" came as instant as the SOG blade from his chain adorned belt.

"Ho, ho, we're not insisting bro, we'll be on our way," and Kibo slung his arm around Wilbur's shoulders turning him and himself away from the Bōsōzoku bike rider and away from the Norton. Three, four steps, nothing happened. The two thirty something year olds were well on the way and the clatter of the hardware store kept sounding. A chill ran up the spine, more trouble in the air?

The kick starter of the Norton, the powerful sound of the Bōsōzoku fashion of accelerating with louder unbaffled strait exhaust pipes and shortly after the engine stopped again. They didn't dare to look back, turned the corner of the Kura storehouse, parallel to their Minka farmhouse.

Then Kibo loosened his grip on Wilbur's shoulder and said: "He's picking up his chick of course."

Wilbur corrected: "Bitch you mean. Chicks became extinct after roadies got them pregnant and bands were no longer touring."

"Gotcha," Kibo went on, all ear to the Norton engine starting again, slowly throttling, "Did modern happiness only start with the Yuppies then? I think of fat pay, wining and dining, business class flights, exotic holidays, yachting, golf and luxury hotels with women flocking around, as easy to take as a yellow cab..."

Wilbur cut in: "Sounds like you missed it."

"In a way yes, I wasn't born at that time yet," and with a slideshow of vision Kibo went on unabated: "You could set the start point on the timeline of modern happiness in the 50s with winged Impala convertibles, family, fame and glamour on TV, showcase the decades of Rock & Roll following..."

They entered their barely habitable Doma, stepped on the raised floor of compacted earth; the place Wilbur had sought refuge in when green ideals of squatters in the Big Apple became tainted and after losing out on investments in Californian alternative lifestyles years ago. Was life as a loner preferable to the sense of belonging as a means to reach one's full potential, he often questioned.

Though he had replaced some of the broken window panes, taped the torn shoji paper screens, adjusted frames of sliding doors out of angle after frequent earthquake tremors and mended the built-in hearth, called irori he had learned, there was so much more on his mind with the museum that the idea of the workload to realize it stifled him. So he had kept to working out, chopping wood for the upcoming winter.

Kibo not deprived from reveries of his own in his otherwise disciplined life, sensibly suggested to keep working out the business model and seek funds on kickstart.com

"Can't work on an empty stomach, Kibo." Wilbur repeated and went off to the pantry feeling paltry in the soot blackened doma room. Some Daikon radish, Lotus root, Gobo burdock, Kabocha pumpkin, dried gourd ribbons and fresh green leafy Mizuna and Negi white scallion from the vegetable garden would make a reasonable poor man's Nabe fast; even without tofu that he had no patience for making himself every now and then, forget fish or meat this time, there was a spoon of Miso to add instead.

With yesterday's rice in it, it would be a decent and filling meal for sure, a beggar's banquet.

In the cast iron pot hanging from a chain around a bar between two ceiling joists of the thatch, the water was about boiling. Kibo had not sat idle, put on more charcoal and fanning the black red glow till the sparks spiraled.

"Where did you get the water from?" asked Wilbur, coming in with a full bamboo sieve of ingredients and a Santoku bōchō knife to cut the vegetables up on top.

"From the large jug there," Kibo was quick to answer laconically.

"It's more than three days old..." was out before Wilbur could retract it, but added "probably all right."

"Let's get started," ignored Kibo, thinking -are the vegetables washed? - but saying: "here's the cutting board."

"Need a pot and restrainer for washing the some of the veggies," and thinking aloud, "you start cutting the other stuff." Kibo obliged and Wilbur stumbled off. "Got it, we'll be eating in no time."

"Hello" said a western woman in ragged jeans set, without belongings but with a foreign accent.

"Hi" the resounding response, silence echoing in the lapse of time equally hollow.

"I smelled food, burned," followed apologetically. Kibo absented on the burned.

Wilbur connecting the dots dreaded inquiring: "Are you, err,... dumped, err... from the barn?"

"Yeah, happens to me all the time," she said relieved and approached as if nothing ever had kept them apart.

Even in the dim light from the fireplace aided by the small oil lamp in the corner she looked pretty beaten up, literally. Kibo stepped in: "You got a black eye, you're bruised all over, you need something to clean with, ointment and such."

"Got some?" she looked at Wilbur who stirred the Nabe rice porridge with long bamboo cooking chopsticks but didn't answer. Ever since he'd seen the legs in the air there, she'd been on his mind and even now the sound of her, the standing she-male could not replace the image of the fe-male panting.

Kibo, momentarily a bit at a loss, frantically searched his memories for when and where he had last seen a first aid kit or the like, cotton, disinfecting alcohol, soothing gauze. Nothing turned up, except alcohol...

"I'm hungry" she butted in.

"Food's ready in a minute." Wilbur promptly posted preemptively.

"Your lip is swollen and cut, eating's not gonna be much of a pleasure...," reasoned Kibo.

"Can I have something to drink?" she redirected Wilbur more pliable.

Kibo light-heartedly remembering the Sochu bottle on the alcove Tokonoma of his room and its double usage here prompted: "Come with me, you'll be better off."

Relieved and simultaneously surprised at seeing him dragging her off, memories of schoolboy Wilbur flashed not before his eyes but in his nose. He always smelled memories, the tangy smell of the Mediterranean on summer holidays, the smell of rancid butter in Tibetan girls' hair that made him feel he was born in the Himalayas and the tacky shoebox odor in the Genkan entry of the last Japanese style apartment in San Francisco he lived in, always coinciding with: keep calm and carry on.

Smells had left deep impressions on his boys-only boarding school mind. The rock, I am the rock, Gibraltarian. How was that connected to Simon and Garfunkel again? Giggling girls, bad boys, stern but achievers, all the more so when it comes to girls. He was not the achiever kind of guy, his girl-friends got laid but not by him. The *déjà vû* rolled round and round.

Kibo meanwhile had broken the ice in the adjacent common room, his room. Her real name was Boel. Pronounced Bole, Bo for all non-Scandinavians. Bo being a boy's name as well. And yes she was dark haired nevertheless. After a hasty face wash barely touching her lip cut, again he dipped the piece of ripped off clean cloth with the 35° Sochu to treat the other bruises while she had a sip from the bottle to treat them from inside too as she said.

"Can you get some music out of the speakers from that iPod?"

"Batteries are dead, it's for the museum of modern happiness." the stuff of thought he had to thank Wilbur for.

It must have stung or burned he guessed from the sudden uncontrolled pull-away, but she didn't even ouch, was she habitually jaw clenching?

Avoiding eye contact he asked that routine question: "And what brought you to Japan?"

- only focusing on her arm bruises and well, if there was anything to treat below the visible bosom line of her dirty V-shaped jumper.

"That's a long story..." Bo sighed and Kibo didn't insist.

Instead he recounted bumping into Wilbur in Hong Kong 10 years after losing contact with him in California where he worked on a 'Weed Farm' - imagine HK, on Lantau Island totally in the middle of nowhere if you can call the hiking trail to Po Ling Monastery nowhere land, you know what I mean?

Terra incognita, as many hidden recesses of mind as there are concessions filled with conceptual riff-raff, made no impression or time for thought.

"I always wanted to go to California," ignored Bo, though she could combine the two Latin terms with dreamy eyes gleaning a distant past, "but that changed after I became a nurse for HIV patients, there are so many of them there in California."

A nurse being nursed, now that's funny Kibo thought and looked up. At once he was caught up in her dreary eyes, so full of sorrow foreshadowing a future he did not want to be part or parcel of.

He stood up, said: "Let's join Wilbur," and did not even look back if she followed, but she did, behind him, the lighter creaking of the varnished floorboards under her featherweight barefoot paces gave her away.

In the Doma room Wilbur had waited with the Nabe for them, three empty bowls on an empty stomach, three eternities.

He served, with Chinese plastic spoons and reused disposable chopsticks, on the shabby tatami mats.

Bo opened: "Yosh!"

"You picked up some Bōsōzoku lingo," remarked Wilbur dryly. Bo pulled her shoulders. Kibo slurped away, Wilbur followed up. Bending closely over their bowls both absorbed in their own world of Nabe.

"How far is Tokyo from here?" she broke the noisy slurps.

"About 60 km or more, one hour and a half by commuter train," Kibo reckoned.

"Think of leaving after?" Wilbur was quick to add.

"Depends," Bo replied hesitantly, "but... yeah, yeah, always that but, even when nothing comes out after, always but, but. I'm against everything, simply put." Her face flared up as if she had coined the word for expressing the world's discontent. She spoke her mind Wilbur appreciated.

"More a question of staying the night, then?" Wilbur negotiated the bumpy road ahead if the Bōsōzoku were to return for his stolen property....

Kibo sensed the dilemma between the badge of honor changing diapers and throwing the baby out with the bathwater. "What about seeing you off at the station?" he said, and immediately asked "D'you have any cash?"

"My shoulder bag, in the barn, not much," she stammered.

"Eat up, and we'll go and fetch it, and you need some footwear too."

"But I can stay?"

In canon chorus "No!" sounded. "Not a good idea," and contrapuntal "It's not safe for a woman alone" trailed.

"But, with you two guys..." came out in a stealthy way from her cut lip.

"No butts...I mean our butts are on the line when you err...your dude's coming back for you." Wilbur frowned.

There, it was out. Easier to stand up to a woman than to a hardware store and possibly a whole chain of them.

"No dishes to be done, no tardy thinking it over again, not even a second scenario to be explored," I like that remarked Kibo, and being dual Japanese-Chinese pragmatically added: "Could be I have sneakers that'll fit you, on the long run, ha ha."

"But mine are in the barn, and I don't know anyone in Tokyo." Bo voiced in a last-ditch effort of defiance, foreign accent even more pronounced by the swollen lip.

"Will you stop bickering and get on with it? We can make it to the station by 9:45 and this late there won't be any commuter trains, so we'd be lucky to reach Tokyo by midnight." urged Wilbur.

The shortcut passage through the woods downhill to the station was fairly easy in daylight and although the flashlight on Wilbur's headband was shining on the trail from behind Bo brushed her boobies several times by Kibo's arm in an attempt to clutch him or indiscriminately fall on all four. Kibo didn't mind, though it left him pensive about the softness of the feeling. No one talked, not a whisper between the pine trees that had invaded the majestic cedar trees' homeland. Two had been spared from being cut down during two world wars. A twined and twisted rice straw rope tied the twins together in an infinite 8, graced with white gohei paper streamers as a ward against evil spirits. Should one only breathe when traversing centuries and hope for the best?

They reached the suspension bridge over the mountain stream. The two spotlights at either end had long ceased brightening the flight path to and from the iron artery of the hitherto energy pumping bubble. The planked footway of the bridge wide enough for two to walk along side swayed stiffly under their out of sync steps. Below the rush of water curling by carved rocks, in tune the sussurus of the autumn crickets.

Bo for the first time asked: "Is it still far?"

"You see that little light there? That marks the first tunnel and then there is another one, shorter, and then we're almost there." Kibo replied cheerfully, "no need to drop breadcrumbs or even better, pebbles."

It had been quite a while since he last journeyed the distance to Hachiko, the faithful dog in Shibuya. Rusty treads of a steep stair with two flights on the other side of the stream bank led them onto a neglected paved road, cracks foreboding a landslide with the next heavy downpour.

"Stop, quiet," warned Wilbur, extending his ear shells with both hands for optimal listening.

No potato-potato-potato sound of any piston or crankshaft below the decibels of chirping crickets.

They headed for the tunnel.

"Look," exclaimed Kibo in delight, "Dokudami, heartleaf, the perfect herb for treating inflammation."

"Right Kibo, but young spring leaves are more potent."

"D'ya hear Bo? Better get beaten up in spring here."

"Not funny, I'm thirsty." Bo sulked.

"Let's get moving," rebuffed Wilbur, "the sooner we get to the station the better."

No one objected. The tunnel swallowed further conversation, spitting undigested remnants out into the next tract. The beam of Wilbur's headlight weakened, trouble in the tunnel, bigger drops of water dripping from the ceiling, puddles of water to bypass, Bo grew thirstier.

"The station," bellowed Bo, "a vending machine? Cola?"

"Water at best!" Wilbur posted, "vending machines have long stopped talking here."

"As did computer generated announcements." completed Kibo.

Bo rushed off to the poorly lit restrooms. From behind the wild life shed you could hear the station generator engine running. Wilbur and Kibo walked off to the timetable, having no eyes for the 20<sup>th</sup> century nostalgia that the Okutama Station building called forth: the key route to hot spring spas and romantic hideaways for Tokyoites on weekend outings in its heydays. Small lights dotted the Okutama hamlet on the mountain flank, signs it was not entirely deserted, but even in day time most shops on the station street were shuttered. Some stray dogs ran barking in the moon lit dark. The museum of modern happiness was furthest from their mind when they were closest.

"The next local train at 21:52, what do you say Kibo?"

"It's already 21:55 on my watch"

"Yours runs 5 minutes early, doesn't it?"

"Lucky us, and if not we catch a commuter train at the transfer station after an hour, then maybe catch one half way to the city, these days getting stuck, you'd never know where." Kibo dithered between English and Japanese syntax in front of the time table.

Bo showed up, they heard the train pulling in, the replica antediluvian station clock showed 21:50".

"Come on, no time to waste. I'll put out the fares, we can settle later." urged Wilbur.

"Later?" questioned Bo.

"When you look better." Kibo alternated thinking she could earn a good buck on AV productions.

In the desolate station the ticket vending machines deprived of EI-power had been replaced by human manually operated printing devices which the only station staff on duty mechanically used. Three to Tokyo, 1210 each that made 3620 on the Soroban or Japanese Abacus, and the change on 5000 was equally quick fingered with the beads to 1480. "Arigato!" thanked Kibo on their behalf.

The JR Line officer, well beyond retirement age, habitually responded with the full lengthy version: domo arigato gozai masu, elongating the last vowel out in descending inflection.

"The train will depart with 5 min. delay," followed in a staccato that reminded of religious chants.

Our party of three had the whole four carriages for themselves. The diesel locomotive geared up, the breaks released hissing and they were on their way below the power lines no longer in use.

Bo placed herself between the two guys on the rusty red upholstered seats. The longitudinal seating could sit 7 persons and they had accepted her in the middle, not so much out of gallantry, but rather because she had after all taken the central stage, and she was well aware of it. There was a long stretch ahead, time to feel each other out a bit more. She wouldn't let them drop her off just like that, or would she?

No one to answer burning questions during the first dark long passage with overhead protection for avalanches, and not now in the first dark tunnel either. The endless click-clack of the wheels on the joints in the rail took the steam out of their kindred spirits. The train stopped and left Shiromaru station, Hatonosu station, no one got on, no one talked. Then after Kori station a sharp bend, the squeal of steel wheel on steel rail signaled the first indication they were well on the way out of the mountains. The Bandai interior, dreams and creation, entertained no longer bored minds with the latest gadget marketing, with advertisements of grand firework shows or colorful Matsuri festivals, scenic sightseeing and souvenir shopping sprees, career making pathways or sexy dolls in Japanese Playboy. Most advertising was outdated or just seen a thousand times.

You'd wonder whether reducing single-tube fluorescent lighting on the ceiling to half had remained in vogue since the big 2011 Tōhoku earthquake or re-introduced under duress after El-grid collapses here and there. Still, why were there some empty fixtures and some with tubes not giving any light?

Wilbur pulled a P.E.T. bottle without label out of his treasured North Face backpack, and took a sip.

Kibo jumped on the bandwagon, but came up with the Sochu bottle still half full or half empty if you will.

"Wanna sip, Wilbur?" "Yeah, but watered down in this pet bottle"

"I'll have it straight first," Bo didn't hesitate.

"Wasn't asking you..."

Whereupon Bo hysterically tried to snatch the bottle, screaming GIVE IT TO ME at the top of her hurting head. No sooner she had a hold the two jumped her, grabbing her in places that would be indecent unless in a fight like this. Tumbling on the floor, reminiscent of the barn, her shoulder bag spilled its contents all over.

"Whiskey!" roared Wilbur. "Mine!!!" yelled Bo.

Kibo loosened his grip. Bo snaked, clutched the bottle of Whiskey as if her life depended on it, which it presumably did. If it doesn't heal you it'll kill you.

"Relax, no one is going to take it away from you!" Kibo, now sitting cross legged on the linoleum floor, said somewhat forced.

"Right," joined Wilbur in, caressing his elbow hurt from the tumble, "what's wrong with you?"

"Everything," Bo adjusted her out of place brazier, "happens to me all the time."

"Right, that explains everything," Wilbur mocked.

Kibo burst out in laughter, the kind of valve Orientals open to relieve themselves when everything seems to have gone down the drains.

"Now what?" said Bo, unashamed to screw the bottle cap open and take a first strengthening sip of the 200 cl Nikka Black, the callowest whiskey known to man.

"Chotto, sodan shitai-n desu ga -Can I have a word with you?" asked Wilbur gingerly in Japanese and made moves to turn away from the status quo.

"Secret language, hey?" slurred Bo with a thick tongue, taking another sip.

They retreated to the holding bars at the door of the 3 priority seats under the watchful but blurred sight of Bo's eyes. Hooded and in nondescript alfresco outfit they could have passed for anyone but foreign to locals.

"She is playing us Kibo, she's gonna throw herself at one of us. You first, I guess, if she can't make it with you she's gonna turn on me to split us up."

"Take it easy mate, I may be a bit younger than you, but we're smart enough to play with her together, you know, bounce her a bit forth and back."

"I don't feel much like playing Kibo, I'd rather get off next station."

"Won't work, for none of us."

"What do you suggest?"

"Go along, see where the wind comes from and sail with its strength."

"That's philosophy, not a solution."

"You can't tie her up, tape her mouth and knock her out, doesn't look good on us with such a travel companion."

"That's it Kibo, make sure she knocks herself out with booze."

"Not enough booze I'm afraid, but with a little help from my friend here, Lendormin, it'll work..."

"Sleeping pills!" lightning struck, Wilbur almost thundered, "BRILL!"

Looking at the blister pack with few remaining pills that Kibo had taken out of his wallet Wilbur noticed the date stamp, 6 months beyond expiry. While Kibo assured him two pills would still put a chronic insomniac to sleep for 12 hours straight, they worked out a plan to dissolve just one in a bit of water and administer her earlier better than later.

When the train pulled in at a station again they turned away from the door and Kibo said, pronounced as planned: "Hi Boel, we wanna make friends again, share a drink with you." and he reached for the Sochu bottle. Wilbur even offered three disposable cups from his backpack to 'kampai' with.

A hunchback with conical straw hat resting on his shoulders got on; saw them foreign birds from the corners of his baggy blood-shed eyes. Irrational Bo pretended not noticing but saw the double chin cassock working his way with his woven-fabric wrapped load through the flexible gangway to the next carriage behind them anyway.

"Kampai" our kindred minds toasted.

"Skol" came from remote Vikingland.

"Bottoms up!" in tandem.

A mouthfull ejected at full force showered the two unpleasantly.

"What from hell are you giving me, arsenic laced piss?" growled Bo.

"Piss has the color of your booze, this is pure and clear Sochu lady, straight!"

"Straight lady, my ass," screwing her foul language up a notch.

Wilbur approached her carefully, "Can I make up for it?" sounding out: "a hit of black afghan, perhaps?"

Kibo tried harder: "Meth? Great high! I've got three pills!"

Wilbur, astounded at the deceiving clarity of Kibo's proposition, wanted to make it even more male competitive.

In vain, Bo jumped at it right away.

"Why are you playing these mind games? I'm just for fun while it lasts..."

"Right on, so are we," continued Kibo his contention, "here we are on the way to Tokyo and nothing can stop us from having a good time, right?"

"That's my boy," Bo gleamed again.

She has that destructive drive to cheer; I'd give her that observed Wilbur.

"No sooner said than done, Bo!" and Kibo pulled it off to seduce her with barbiturates: "Come on, babe, here is yours." and to make it comprehensible complete he put a Lendormin pill in Wilbur's palm as well, in the hope he would keep it under his tongue while pretending to swallow it. Wilbur complied.

"And now the afghan black," Bo swore by the name of "shit"

"But you have to wash it down with your piss, before you can blow us," pranked Kibo.

It worked; a gulp of the Nikka Black, another and one more did it. Drunk, doped Bo passed out slowly but securely.

"Whew!" Wilbur regenerated, "that was a close shave!"

"You bet," Kibo rejoiced, "now let's lend her a shoulder to lean on."

"This time on the outside, not in between us." Wilbur recommended, "we can take turns when nobody looks on..."

Kibo maneuvered her willowy three sizes in place for the first round and for a moment struggled with the desire to have a peek at her nipples, were they pink with a wide nyurin? That's where he got stuck, what was that in English again? Milk ring, made some sense, but ...

While Bo was unwillingly dreaming up sex with Wilbur, the man she was on top of, in an orgasmic pulsating alley, Kibo asked Wilbur who added to 'areola of nipple' behave yourself, people are getting on and we'll soon have to change trains. That was uncalculated in their scheme of knocking her out sooner better than later.

The old traditional Japanese way then, Wilbur the more muscular one gave her a piggyback ride up the stairs but hesitated seeing the hazards down the stairs, her limp arms not holding him over his shoulders. Kibo maneuvered her arms around his neck, tied her wrists up with the sleeves of his jacked and covered it up with flipping the back over the knot. Caringly he hold them in balance from the side hardly attracting any attention of the remaining few that could afford returning to the commuter suburban townships after a late evening out. Wife at the cooking pots and raising a kid or two, for fun you had the hostess bars. Old habits die hard...

Once on the semi express train into the big city our 3P, two old-timers and one greenhorn to them, made themselves comfortable on the priority seats at the rear of the carriage. Three seats cut out for them. The sign said for disabled, elderly, pregnant women and mothers with babies, Bo could certainly be categorized as falling under the 'Fujiyutai' -literary translated: not-able-to-freely-move-bodies, and besides who would care on this almost empty train? The pin-up girl sitting there? She looked too occupied with finding the right foundation in her vanity case, and that to start with. Applying all plastering and primers, glues to fold the eyelid flaunting bigger eyes, eyelashes too bigger and longer, as glue-on nails, then doing a whole lipliner, lip color, the shine coat and not to forget the gloss thing, no one hour was not too much.

Or the gigolo in black and white there, endlessly adjusting the mesh of his messy hairstyle on or behind the thick rimmed eyeglasses without lenses, over and over again turning his smart phone with mirror app to different angles, the mesh just had to be perfect. Minutes later he checked and started all over again. Can't say they're empty egg heads now can you? They were on their way moonlightening after all, earn a couple of 10 thousand Yen.

Looking out of the window, contours of another residential sleeping town passed by against the bleak backdrop of high rises, nothing to do, even the moon was sleeping behind a curtain of gloomy grey. Kibo felt like following suit, dose off for the rest of the way. Let his head rest on hers that was steadily planted on his left shoulder. Schmooze from within cyber space.

Wilbur sitting to the right unzipped his North Face backpack again and pulled a book out.

Kibo immediately recognized it. "Wilbur! The Zen book from Suzuki, are you carrying it wherever you go?"

"No, no mate, I only read it once, 10 years ago, right after you gave it to me as your farewell gift, but nothing sticks in my mind, so I thought of reading it again."

"It's an awesome mouthful, takes time to digest; y'know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, could be I haven't chewed enough, doesn't sink, strikes a chord every now and then, but once the book's back on the shelf it silences, without leaving any echo..." lamented Wilbur

"That's the spirit of Zen!"

An empty silence overcame them both. Wilbur opened the book at a random page, like he did with the I-Ching in the old days, but may not have liked what he read as he closed it shortly after again. The mildew smell, the underlying mustiness of the book actually set it off. Under the tyranny of circumstances are idle reveries or endlessly chewing the cud, the only pastime to escape the fact that life is work and work is made to religion, in other words: a day of not working is a day of no life?

Kibo himself reflected on what had just come out of his mouth, spontaneous as it was, the meaning however deep, who was he to point out the spirit of Zen? Three times he had moved from one country to the next, every time epicurean journeys, only to fail falling in with the lay of the land at the end of the three year cycle. Was this going to be the same now that he had returned here to the better part of his youth?

What was to be expected of the age of youth and as his late father had stated that the youth of age only starts when passing the 40?

Bo's head was again rolling off Kibo's shoulder. "Your turn Wilbur!"

They managed to change places, holding her head with the barbed wire feeling of her hair, holding her waist with a wistful feeling of tenderness. For both of them avoiding a pleasurable sensation and a painful emotional disturbance at the same time was this time not something simple to escape from.

"Where in Tokyo are we actually heading for?" Kibo asked.

"Was thinking about Shimo-Kitazawa, Gu, I know the owner, he'll help us out, might know a place to crash. What have you in mind?"

"Shibuya or Mejiro. I used to frequent Shibuya more, know a Russian Ukrainian living above the Russian Restaurant. He plays the poor refugee with wife and two kids whom he remits alimony to, back in Russia, every month 60% of his salary of wedding jewelry designer - if the zero counts. Always finds a girl for compassionate sex in his bed, but they can't stay the night. Don't know why or how he pulls it off, but I stayed over one time. Then there is Mejiro, rich residential, home to many embassy and university folks. I know an American millionaire there, he also owns an apartment in Paris and one in Hawaii. Runs a indigenous music instrument shop here, but I think it's just a cover for legitimizing his residence here. He is always changing his Japanese girlfriends, he meets them abroad and they last a good year tops. With some luck he's not having one living in."

"Come to think of another guy in Shimo Kitazawa," Kibo inserted, "Dutchman, gone local, but has extra rooms above his pub for well, you know, waitresses without work permit and so. I'm sure he's done quite a few up there."

"Flip a coin, Kibo, or stone paper scissors on which place first? Yours or mine?"

"I think I still have a lucky coin somewhere, with two heads," said Kibo offhandedly, his sense of pedantry. Paper wrapped stone and Shibuya came first. Waking Bo up in good time before changing trains in Shinjuku station, not an easy feat given their history with her, started with calling her name and then shaking her, but ended with Wilbur being entangled with her full weight of flesh and bones.

When Bo had breathed out Kibo held her nostrils and mouth closed, her body shuddered, her eyes opened wide, and Kibo didn't leave it a fraction of a moment to chance, he said: "We're almost there."

"Where?"

"There!" he pointed out of the window.

"Manhattan! Look, the dome above, beautiful like a soap bell..."

Wilbur and Kibo looked at each other equally excited, but not for the same reason...

"Thank you for waking me up! Wouldn't have wanted to miss is for a million."

"They are actually the skyscrapers of Shinjuku, Tokyo." Wilbur hesitantly remarked holding back comments on the dome above. Kibo feared the worst.

"Whatever, it's beautiful."

Our quick-witted buddies tried again to make out what beauty there was for her to see in the luminosity of the night sky surrounding the megacity. It certainly was not a vision of a polluted sky nor the dome that once was planned to protect the city hub from radiation of the second nuclear disaster after Fukushima. That lofty dome never got off the ground. Instead 6000 sq.ft biosphere domes in clusters of 8 interconnected dome houses were swiftly snatched up by the rich and famous, a place to see and be seen. Not in her case. Wackily on her feet she stumbled to the window and got a closer look. "How much longer till we get off?"

"Maybe 10 more minutes..."

"Enough to get upright with a drink, that is." and she filled up.

Looking on, Kibo helplessly looked at Wilbur who had managed her so well so far.

"Right," said Wilbur in his Gibraltarian way, "and we'll change trains to get to a place to bunker."

"All together? You're not going to drop me off in some S&M dungeon?"

"No," Kibo jumped in, "we're the regular guys, remember, getting along?"

No response, no nothing, no buts. The train pulled in Shinjuku station, dimly lit but with functionality intact to process passengers through a maze of corridors to the desired destination, even the ones like our trio, more so in fact at this late hour. No fear to be rush-hour pushed onto a train you don't want to take.

Unstable on her feet Bo held onto Wilbur's arm while Kibo went in front on impulse, a change in squadron at the spur-of-the-moment.

JR Yamanote line had long run as clock work with intervals of three minutes between trains but irregular delays had to be reckoned with these days, no suicidal jumpers though, they preferred day time, a stable figure of 30.000 a year, including the double splashes of couples with a hopelessly unacceptable bearing jumping from at least the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. On this circular line train, a fair amount of men oozing of booze, crack head night ravens side by side the cheerleader girls after a late evening sports event.

"Shut up, you noisy daughters, you disturb other passengers!" a man shouted.

Everybody fell quiet and looked his direction, just long enough to see his nondescript old authoritarian figure that spoke for all of them, the passengers, in the conventional language these old men use when addressing young women with daughter. Here and there dosing off sat game programmers on nightshift to the Bit Valley Shibuya, imprisoned in a pun IT culture without escape, burned out, on the way to Karoshi or death by overwork; and with the kind of fake lace blinds pulled down over the train windows more like a rehearsal on a hearse. These were hard times; even the porn industry claimed the urging need for a bail out.

Exiting Shibuya station, that's what it looked like. The multi-pattern neon-transparent clad gals still with folklore bleached hairstyles and faces shining as from Mahoney brown shoe polish, the batman black bad boys 'Center guys' with a language apart. This Harajuku locale displaced mutant Ganguro 90s race with white eye shadows and ditto lipstick were difficult to distinguish when you saw the Manba and Yamanba of the 20-10s in their TrancePara dance style of pre-mating in flocks of mostly 6 or 9. On two giant screens fixed to the Q-Front Building pulsed random clips of everything from lustful healthy wealth to explosive red war wrath, from plastic facial gems, pearl powder and platform shoes added to incongruous accessories, promoting enjo shokai or compensated dating and happiness from devoted conspicuous consumption in the wake.

Grotesque, came to Wilbur's mind.

Every direction of the five-way scramble crossing turned green and a wave of pedestrians blackened the first white zebras - none of them concerned that passing by the Hachiko dog statue without an acknowledgement of its dying divine status could well throw them to the dogs of a less likable god realm...

Like most staying mainstream into nightlife, our V formation, one lead vic and two wingmen, of which one was a woman all right, squared the distance to the other side amidst the current of the outbound on both flanks. Once in the smallest of the five access roads to the station, Bo repositioned her in between them, they didn't demur to walking with her arm in arm.

She stood tall as a wall in the citadel of topsy-turvy-dom and having long passed the stage of a generic conversation, she elicited: "So how does it go from here?"

"We're on the way to Slav. He lives above Roskovski, a Russian Ukrainian restaurant. If we're lucky we can bunk there for the night or get to know where to crash."

"I love Russians, they wake you up with Vodka and lard on sour bread."

"He's Ukrainian," Kibo replied wryly.

"Who cares?" provoked Bo.

"He probably does," Kibo turned the angle.

Wilbur suspected a tempest brewing in a teapot, but when one does not know what to say it is time to be silent, goes without saying he added to his stream of thought.

Kibo halted, the road split. This was not the slightly left bending slope with 'kind of European redbrick mix with glass wall house designs.

"I'll be damned," he thought aloud, only seeing the red light district.

"Let's go there, looks more like fun," Bo loosened her arm, but Wilbur didn't let go.

"No money, no fun and in your shape, no way," he claimed.

"You don't know a shit," Bo argued lightheartedly, "I've been around the block."

"You bet your bibbies," assured Kibo her, "still, you'll be better off with us, unless you're heading for another blue eye, broken ribs or worse."

"You too, chicken shit?" Bo, secretly thirsty for the leftover of Black Nikka more than anything else, went along, wherever the stronger wind blew from.

"I'll go wherever you go, and you with me, deal?" And while preoccupied with where to get that Nikka sip to keep going Kibo remarked: "Sounds like a wife-to-be when proposed."

"For the first part," Wilbur observed, "but we're not bound for traipsing from bar to bar."

"Tell me a story to suit yourselves," audacious Bo challenged.

"You got it!" Wilbur took the lead, "We're off to Shimo Kitazawa."

"And Mejiro?" Kibo asked

Yeah, what about it Wilbur?" Bo was quick to escalate.

"You have the Tel Nr?" Wilbur ignored Bo.

"Flat battery, can't access my address book. You of all should know."

"That's right, everything's flat, iPod, iPhone, iWallet, iBalls too Kibo?" Bo teased.

"Shut up, Bo," said Wilbur, realizing she may have hinted at other than eyeballs, worst of all she had started using their names and he had joined in.

"I'm going to the world of free speech, and that's right there, see yah!" and off she went, only having Nikka and privacy in mind.

"What now, Wilbur?"

"Sounds like you're blaming me. I told you she was bad news. She's playing us, setting us up against each other, is that what you want?"

"You're imagining things, even if I were to go after her and... "

"See Kibo, she's trapped you already and..."

"Hear me out Wilbur, you go to Gu in Shimo Kitazawa, secure us a place for the night. I'll be joining you, say in one and a half hour from now, with or without her."

"Can't believe this! What responsibility is it you so desperately need to take?"

"It's not that, we've come so far and I want to give it a fair chance to bring it to a good end."

"Kibo, the good end is now. We brought her to Tokyo and she decided to go her own way, as simple as that." "I guess you're right, let's head for Gu," Kibo gave in at the thought of finding old squatters, the resigned bunch not even jealous of the stamina of bionic people with telescopic zoom lens eyes, brain implants and bionic replacements enhancing just about any performance and beyond the imaginable, achievers far above the capabilities of the hoi polloi or dropouts like him.

Just as they were to turn their back on the nightlife district, back to the station, they heard the yelling voice of Bo further up the road.

Wilbur for once did not give in to contemplating the situation, think about the right thing to do, speculate about possible outcomes of either going or staying, he just left saying: "You know where to find me, Kibo." waiving his hand high above in a farewell, with his head down as if he were walking the green mile.

Kibo stood perplexed, torn between a bad choice and a worse choice, all courage sank down into his shoes heavy as lead. Standing tall as a lighthouse in distress, beaming SOS as he watched how Wilbur merged with the shadows of choppy seas, his bowels urged for a toilet where he could shit like there was no tomorrow.

Wilbur, not having eyes for anything, not for the passersby in love hotel mood, not for the mishmash of entertainment businesses on either side of the road, it occurred to him that he just walked like a container devoid of a miserable mission accomplished contents. Living in an enclosure called space and it smelled damned good, flower fragrances and scents of fresh moist green, nothing was further away than his thoughts could bridge in an instant and the station wasn't that far, only his legs did not run as fast as his thoughts did. Robotic his movements felt, programmed to destination, but who was the programmer, and what was the destination?

There the 5 way Shibuya station crossing, the soundless giant screens already behind him. In a sec he was going to be on the train, the secure feeling of moving forward tame and lame. The train, a place where commoners delighted in happiness gained from material welfare and comfort, game consoles transporting the mind into cyberspace where the real world is reproduced, where you have all the controls at your fingertips and can caress your vanity or give your standing a boost just as in the real world of solitude. How would he put all of that in the museum of modern happiness?

