

Enoshima

“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.”

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The Japanese transit officer directed him across the mass of people like an old English sheep dog in a herd. The officer’s immaculate white gloves were waving as doves, back and forth. Kuto was a lonesome chubby stutter, a clumsy shudder and the awe of awkward. His head was in the stars but his stride lacked destination. This was especially so today, in the vast Shinjuku Station where he had just arrived. Kuto, a half Japanese, half Portuguese twenty something “*big kid*” was in his third visit to the Japanese mainland. This was the only place his other half felt at home while the rest of him steered clear. His factions made him blend in while his speech made him stand out, like a foreigner wearing a traditional costume. His Japanese, learned from his mother mangled the tone of his half tongue, a burden to his Lisboan lisp.

He was running late for his date with Yui, a *twenty-plenty* as-she always answered to the dreadful question- young woman. Her job in Akihabara had introduced her to Kuto, a friend. She waited in one of the many electronic stores that plugged the district. Kuto arrived late but with snacks to appease the damsel in stress, she was not amused. Yui, in her mind had expected the rather misunderstood Kuto to understand the life beyond the arcades and the figurines. She saw in his attire, his phany pack and his arched back, he was the same of twice before. Out of politeness-the curse of the pacific-she went out with him that evening. He talked the whole encounter about his games, his comics, and pulled her from arcade to arcade. Yui, the long legged, waned figure of a working woman could not keep up nor wanted to. Her black strands hiding the rest of her contempt nodded as she listened to everything but Kuto; whose bore monologue draped the dinner table. It was time to go. They headed toward the station together among the neon light signs in this urban playground. “It was the best thing of my trip seeing you,

Yui” said Kuto with the tone of a schoolboy lover. Yui smiled and bowed politely as she got into the train. Kuto saw a flare in her eye that signal, a rescue in his deserted island. He knew then she was his salvation and he could not let her sail away. She stared in surprise at the change in Kuto’s eyes, a twinkle. She knew what it was, that light, that familiar false lighthouse that leads ships astray in uncharted waters. He leaned inside her empty train for the kiss but she railed back, politely. The train door shut in his face. He felt the rush of wind that blew his hopes away. In an attempt to keep calm he waved goodbye but her phone had all the attention now, as it always did throughout that night.

He taciturned into the corner where his hotel waited, dim. He checked into the room he excitedly reserved weeks in advance. This spacious double now turned into a cozy single with two beds. He faced the windows after the long shower and the mirror stare down by his disappointed self. The TV flickered like a broken beacon and his eyes aimlessly stared into the city skyline. A familiar tone in his phone, he received a text. It was message with a flurry of emoticons from his friend Yuu. *“How’s Tokyo da yo?!”* Kuto replied with the events of the night. He wrote about, the train ride, the arcade, the kiss to be and Yui. More faces reappeared in the screen; the friendly Yuu made him a suggestion. *“Go to Enoshima da yo! It’s fun da ne!, Maybe luck with girl!”* It was always an exclamation with Yuu. Kuto was reluctant to stray from his plans in the city but thought it might be a good trip. He decided it would be a nice break from the city pace, an intermission to his urban quest.

He wore bagged slacks and a black shirt, no backpack; he was not staying long enough to need it. The trip to Enoshima was filled with interesting sites. There were three little schoolboys, in impeccably pressed uniforms who ended every sentence with a laugh and a shriek. They smacked each other in the head, a real life whack-a-mole arcade. He saw the businessmen ready

for business. He saw suits in unison with fake laughs muted, the women in their sin tight leggings, inviting, politely. Station by station, the train emptied leaving him alone. In the last station he changed to an older train to arrive at Enoshima. He walked past the station to a smaller section where the Enoshima line was. The car was an old wooden train resembling a casket adorned but simple, yet forgotten.

Enoshima was an island with different hues of green that resembled a turtle shell half way sunk, emerging grandiose from the still waters. A white bridge connected the underground to the small island. Its entrance guarded by two dragons coiled around masts, vigilant and faithful. Kuto as he crossed the bridge admired the clustered seawalls, a titanic game of jacks left unfinished. He set foot at the island and crossed the Torii. The city grew quieter as he walked uphill until silence invaded all his senses.

He heard a faint strumming, melodic, traditional, and nautical. It grew stronger and now he heard drums. Faint drums among the hums of a song, a song of long ago. Kuto walked into the gathering crowd to see the unfolding performance. He saw a green kimono that resembled threads of jade made into silk by a divine artisan dancing in the middle of the temple gardens. As she danced gracefully a dozen kabuto helmets appeared, chasing a giant marionette that resembled a furious five headed dragon. Their swords and spears were no match to the fury of the beast. They were devoured one by one by the five headed nightmare, all to the sounds of the strums. The beat of the drums intensified the scene. The jade kimono in a trance by the music climbed onto a pedestal of stars, a *hotchiku* pressed her lips. The bamboo flute played a tune that enraged the dragon. The monster rushed for the pedestal and suddenly a light emanated from the platform. A loud bell toll rang and a rain of firecrackers cracked at the feet of the flute queen. The dragon was now at her mercy. A lonely kabuto helmet emerged from the dragon, victorious,

gleaming sword in hand, signaling toward the shore that the dragon had been slayed. The drums stopped, the flute rested and the jade kimono embraced the warrior. The audience clapped furiously at the performance. Kuto had never seen anything like it, not even in all those games he tirelessly played.

He went on exploring the islands recondite corners until he found one of the many *shirasudon* shops. The smell of raw fish and the stillborn sea creatures that swam in boiled bowls awoke his appetite. Alone on the table he sipped on green tea when across the room he saw the jade kimono and the kabuto performers sharing a meal. He turned to his plate and when he looked up he saw her sitting at his table. His speech tied his tongue at the view of such sublime beauty. “Hi” she said timidly, Kuto was now up close to this natural masterpiece. The emerald kimono was decorated with minute white leaves and it cocooned the ethereal body of the finely crafted figure. Her eyes were wide and kind. When she smiled she created light around her. Her black hair flowed uninterrupted, like the currents of a river. Her porcelain face had a calm aura about her and her lips bared no lies. “My name is Sara, what is your name?” calmly asked the kimono. “Im Kuto” he said with a knot in his stomach. “You must be visiting; we don’t get many visitors this time of the year. I saw you in the performance and I wanted to ask what you thought about it” the charming Sara now looking at the nervous Kuto. “I think it was great, but honestly I do not know what it means; I was hoping to know the meaning of it” Kuto more comfortable now at the presence of the goddess. “Well nobody knows anymore, or no one remembers at least, not even us. A lot of the stories have been forgotten; others kept secret at the bottom of the cave below the island”. Kuto was now intrigued. “When will you perform again?” Kuto asked now eager to see more. “Well now the performances are over but we are rehearsing a new performance tonight at the top of the hill if you want to come and watch, I can tell your from far

away and will not return here, come join us we can use the audience. It will temper the steel of our nerves” The jade goddess was smiling lightly. Kuto accepted the invitation and Sara returned to the table of the drunken samurai that celebrated the defeat of the dragon.

The night was calm, and the sea whispered poetry to the skies of Enoshima. Kuto waited by the bell at the top in between the ginko trees. The kabuto warriors traded their swords in for pink tassels. They stood apart in the form of a circle around the starred platform; the pink kimono held incense up in the middle. The performance would start at the first bell toll. A loud chime pierced the sky. A second, A third, by the fourth Kuto felt dazed and then a fifth carried him elsewhere in a heated pang that centered in his head. The kabuto warriors spun in place with each bell toll uncoiling their long tassels, and the kimono was tranced once more.

Kuto awoke in the company of the brave eleven, he held a sword in his hand and the bells announced the battle. He did not recognize himself in the reflection of the blade. He too wore a kabuto helmet. His face was stern and adorned with long ornamented horns, he was now the leader of the dozen. They sailed the tormented waters in a dragon boat towards the familiar island. They anchored by the cave where the dragon servants awaited in the shadows. The brave dozen slayed all of the minions in one fast and organized swoop. They lit torches and ran towards the cave by the shore. Kuto led them to force their entrance. They breached by blade onwards, to the protected temple of the five-headed serpent. Running underground in a partially lit bridge where many others had met their fate, red bridge, bloody bridge. Now they climbed upwards to find the pink parchment tied to the tree of memories, the secret exposed there would save his clan. He reached the tied parchment. He was barely touching it when suddenly he felt the slithered breath above his horns, five heads smiled at his death. His men climbed up and died for him, one after the other devoured by the monster. Kuto raised his sword but a whip of the

dragon's tail tossed him from the top of the hill. As he tumbled, he barely fell by holding on to the ledge of the dragon temple. Mustering all the courage he did not have he raised himself and engaged the dragon, no sword in hand. One of the heads hungrier than the other four engulfed him whole. Kuto closed his eyes to awake from this nightmare, perhaps induced by the strange ritual, but it was all too real, he did not wake up. In the belly of the beast he saw his older self. The clumsy comic loving, game playing misunderstood kid he was. It stood there awaiting death, sword extended, eyes with a blank stare, unafraid. He also saw Yui running toward his new self, the honed kabuto squared face warrior; brave leader of men, protector of his clan. She rushed to kiss him, but he realized this was not him.

Kuto took the sword that his former self extended and proceeded to erase his new image. As he stabbed his new self the blade pierced the dragon's womb. He was free. He walked by the dead warrior and wore his horned helmet, awkwardly walking towards the pink kimono in the middle. She held his breath. They kissed under the ginko trees while she held the parchment. They walked hand in hand and tied it together on the trees by the temple. She embraced Kuto, the true Kuto, and the one that was released from the dragon's bowels at last. He raised the sword towards the shore, the war was over, and they had slayed the dragon at last.

Kuto awoke from his daze and was back in the *shirasudon* place. Unsure of what had happened he asked the restaurant hostess about the kabuto performers and Sara, she was surely famous in such a small place but no one had even heard the name before. He went to the hill but there was no performance, even the gardens looked different. He returned to the train still in disbelief. He reached his pocket for his return ticket but instead a pink parchment rested mischievously in his hand. "*The best performance is your own- Sara*" The secret to save his clan was revealed and his eyes signaled to the shore, that the dragon was finally slayed.