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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **Writing the Robinsonade Novel in Context of Globalism and Self-Enlightenment: E Pluribus Unum**

Dinsmore, Chester

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Writing the Robinsonade Novel in Context of Globalism and Self-Enlightenment:

*E Pluribus Unum*

by

Chester Dinsmore

THESIS

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Robinsonade is a genre born out of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe* where the core thematic element is a protagonist separated from society by a life-altering event and forced to survive with the resources available to him or her or them. The solitary Robinsonade protagonist marooned in nature leads to a path of self-enlightenment offered as model of the general eco-solitude experience. During the process of writing a Robinsonade, narrative and historical considerations include the author's personal background that helps to shape the perceptions and values on display. Over the span of nearly four centuries, the genre produced versions of essentially the same story that are reliant in context of when, where, and who it is written by. Authorial perspective thereby informs the intended and unintended social commentary for which *Robinson Crusoe* has set the precedent with Defoe's engagement on the topics of colonialism and capitalism in his novel. This reality of the Robinsonade, grounded in my influences and personal experience, situates my novel with postcolonial discourse on globalism, multiculturalism, hybridity, and economics. From this context, a perception of fluid existence of the physical and spiritual self, aided by the cross-cultural experience, takes form in the novel and articulated more critically in the commentary.

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## PART I: *FINDING KAIYO* – A ROBINSONADE NOVEL

## CHAPTER ONE – FEBRUARY 1945

### Refuge

I scurry, grasping my rifle tight as it shimmies from my grip with each step. Tips of outreaching foliage slap against me as I break through the thinned, brittle branches. I swim through the sludge of warm air, with smoke and dust irritating my eyes and nostrils. My mind races faster than my heart or feet, calculating all outcomes for each decision down to the smallest movement. I stop to listen and survey the sea of browning jungle as if a tide of trees flowed in over the reef of mountain tops to cover the valley, then evaluate whether I'm circling back toward the pursuing soldiers or away from them.

There beyond the dried thinned foliage is that peak, the one that caught my attention when I first chose to flee. *Ah yes*. I think, an unmistakable marker. The summit is topped with a towering rock, the sun glaring off its surface, shored up by the soft flowing slopes leading to it. My thoughts of which direction no longer waver, condensing into the sole objective of reaching my target.

My arms sting, now sensitive from the compounding scratches of the foliage, and with each step the mucus squished from my blisters lubricates the tight confines of my boots. The peak is not lost in the nag of my discomfort. The beacon glares, and at times, I sense it hidden behind the treetops. For much of my scurry, I let these instincts direct me, glancing behind me more often than I glance up at the peak.

I've run long and hard. *There's no way they could have kept up*. I slow down and dodge the foliage, my movement now quieter than my heavy breathing. I lean over, placing my hands above my knees to keep my chest and head high while my lungs catch up to supply my body with oxygen. The last time I ran this hard and

long, I did so with my best friend Shiro when we ran from Mr Nakajima after setting his lawn ablaze during our summer break. It was a one-mile sprint to Miyazawa Elementary where we had completed third grade the year before. We knew the grounds of the school well, having spent many days there in the treeline that separated it from the adjacent neighbourhood. This arrowhead of trees was the entry point to the pathway that led up the Mt Takaosan, which we would venture further and further up each summer as we grew older.

“Don’t climb the mountain,” Shiro’s parents would always remind us, up until the age of ten, “you’ll get lost there.”

My father wasn’t concerned. Only my mother’s eyes would follow us each time we left with sharpened sticks made from fallen, misshapen tree branches for spears. We referred to this treed area, starting at the school grounds and leading all the way up the mountain, as ‘Shima Territory’. It pales in comparison to where I find myself now. Shima Territory is where we chased, hid, and played war using sticks as spears or rifles and rocks as grenades. Not until Shiro struck me above my right eye with his spear, did we realise the danger of tossing these objects at one another. Shiro hung his head at the sight of the deep gash on my face. I explained to my mother that I ran into a branch protruding into the trail’s path while she cleaned my wound with warm water and soap, her hiss of angst coming in place of any words. I didn’t know if her disappointment was over seeing me injured or because she had to take time out of her day to tend to my injury. After that day, it seemed Shiro would often glance at that scar showing as a bare spot within the hair of my eyebrow. He took it much more seriously than I did, but I suppose I would feel the same if I caused injury to him. But on the day we ran from Mr Nakajima and arrived at Shima Territory, we both leaned over placing our hands on our knees, gulping air like I do now. Each breath slakes me as water would my thirst.

A gunshot. The bullet close enough that I hear it slap and crack through the leaves and branches behind me. *This is real*, I say to myself, bringing me out from reverie of sticks for spears and guns and back to the threat of my pursuers. I pause my breathing and pop up to stand with the tip of my boot already angled and planted into the ground, ready to push off in a sprint. The jungle is quiet. I breathe, lift the tip of my boot out of the soil, and take a soft step forward.

"Over there," a man shouts in an American accent.



My small indecisive steps turn into a jog away from the voices.

"This way," the American shouts.

*They're close.* I sprint away, gaining enough speed to glide through the jungle with little worry over the crunching-thud of my steps, leaping over rocks, balancing myself along the uneven ground before me, the branches slashing at me and insects bouncing off my face. A dragonfly gets caught in the trap of my opened mouth. I bring it closer to my lips with the tip of my tongue before ejecting it with a deep huff of breath and regaining the rhythm of my breathing. *Just keep running*, having lost the direction of the peak and directing myself away from the voices and the swoosh of branches. The men fanned out behind are like a wave ready to crash over me in a thalassic-like effect. Among the blur of my surroundings, which zip past, the canopy of trees opens. A new peak is revealed. I run towards it.

In the act of running away, I ponder, *Honour or find safety, country or self. Should I make one last stand? I'm worthy, I'm strong. A chance to prove myself before death.* The Bushido code sears into my consciousness. Guilt builds with each stride. I'm prepared to turn towards the enemy and shout "Banzai," as the word builds momentum within my gut. I'm encouraged further by the thought of dying a quick death by bullets and not at the hands of vengeful Filipinos. *Tamiko. Maeko. Shiro.* The idea of a swift and honourable death is dashed away by the desire to see them once again —whether or not they wish to see me.

*Tamiko was allowed a day off from working at her family's livestock feed store, and Shiro, being the good friend he was, made an excuse that he had to help his father that day. I took her to the small lake where Shiro and I found our new clubhouse weeks ago. It was an old unused hut. Tamiko and I fished at the nearby lake, talked about our likes, dislikes, what we wanted to do with our lives, and just about every other thing kids our age would talk about. We made improvements to the clubhouse. On her suggestion, we built a laboratory, at least that's what she called it, in the corner of the hut, made from recycled bamboo and wood, to store plants and insects. We already had a supply of makeshift tools, including a pipe as a hammer and nails we pulled from used wood. We placed the different plants and insects we collected into the cage; that's what I'd call it. We returned throughout the day, checking on our collection. To no surprise, the insects didn't hang around long, crawling over the edge*

*of the box or through the gaps of our patch-worked cage. Her father demanded she return by dusk, but as she prepared to leave, she pointed to the green light of the fireflies along the river that flows into the lake.*

*"Look," she said, after we had already returned all the plants and insects into the wild and tidied up the hut for our departure.*

*The mating fireflies topped off our day and made her late for her curfew. Perfect timing, I thought. We sat in the very spot where we'd stopped upon seeing the fireflies and watched their dancing lights. I looked over to Tamiko, her eyes jumping from firefly to firefly and a broad grin lighting up her face. While she stared at the fireflies, I looked at her until she looked over to me. I was summoning the courage to lean in and kiss her lips or cheek, depending on what was easier to reach. I didn't know if she would get another day off anytime soon.*

*"Thank you for inviting me, friend" she said, as if sensing what was on my mind.*

*It felt like the disappointment on my face was obvious in the darkness. I turned away, back towards the fireflies. I didn't say much on the walk home, wondering what I could have done differently. She didn't say much either, worried about her father's reaction to her tardiness. Although he didn't allow her a day off again that summer, he allowed me to visit their home for a few hours once a week after the store closed. During that time, our friendship grew. I knew that when the time was right, I'd try for a kiss again. Her presence was enough. Idle moments next to Tamiko gave me a sense of belonging. Her attention softened my hardened edges and brought out a sensitivity I never knew I had.*

*It wasn't until a much-delayed moment, three summers later, that her father, who I referred to as Mr Yoshida, allowed her to spend the day with me away from their property. It was that summer, after years of courting other women, when I had the choice between asking her what she thought about me or bypassing all of that and going for the kiss. We sat along the riverbank at the back of her property when a similar moment to our first date presented itself when we were surrounded by the glow of fireflies again. I took it as a sign and looked over to her. She smiled; eyes fixated on the fireflies. The upcurve of her lips levelled off and she turned to look into my eyes. Sensing no words on the tip of her tongue, I leaned in. She leaned towards me, giving me confidence to lean further and kiss her on the lips. The kiss lasted*

*about two seconds. I leaned back to my original position, reeling from the adrenaline of her reciprocating the kiss, and having no doubts about how she felt. We turned back to gaze at the fireflies, and she leaned into me with our arms and shoulders touching. We did not feel the need to speak much while I walked her home. Our silence had nothing to do with other matters and everything to do with our comfort in that moment. My head was clear, nerves calm, with only the euphoria of the present radiating from my centre.*

*The next time I saw her, she told me, "My father asked me to invite you for dinner tomorrow."*

*"Umm..."*

*"It'll be ok, Kaiyo," she said, squeezing my wrist with both hands as if wringing out a wet rag.*

*Despite my parents never saying or doing anything to stall Tamiko and my relationship up to this point, the gravity of the sense of obligation to them was a disruption as long as I lived in their home. Year after year, they stacked more duties on to me. They depended on me when I couldn't depend on them.*

*I escaped the grip of my parents by joining the army before I turned eighteen, in preparation for starting a new life with Tamiko, though most men waited in fear of a forced enlistment. The night before proposing to her, I visited Mr and Mrs Yoshida after Tamiko's bedtime. I waved to Mr Yoshida through the window to get his attention, not wanting to wake Tamiko by knocking on the door. He opened the door but did not greet me with a smile. When I looked over to Mrs Yoshida standing behind him, she did greet me with her normal smile.*

*"I heard you joined the army?" he said, after opening the door.*

*"Yes, sir," I answered.*

*"It's been hard on Tamiko? She's been in her room all day after hearing the news."*

*"I'm sorry, sir."*

*"When do you leave for training?"*

*"Two weeks from today."*

*Mr Yoshida was wise as to why I was there late that night because, as I began my next sentence with "Sir", he invited me in.*

*I sat down with Mr and Mrs Yoshida to get their blessing to have Tamiko's hand*

*in marriage.*

*Mrs Yoshida responded with, "But you'll be away, Kaiyo. Are you sure this is the best decision?" her hands remaining on her lap and a slight tilt of her head sideways.*

*"I have no doubts I want to be with Tamiko. I love her. If you don't think she wants to be with me or should be with me, then I understand."*

*"She would never forgive us if we didn't allow this," Mrs Yoshida said, her head straightening, looking over to Mr Yoshida as if the affirmation of my love for her daughter reminded her of their own love story.*

*The next day I met Tamiko at the lake near our clubhouse, where we once sat looking at the fireflies on what I considered our first date. I didn't have time to wait for this year's fireflies and we sat under a moonlit sky. Mr and Mrs Yoshida had convinced her to meet me there.*

*As soon as she arrived, she was upset and asked, "Why didn't you tell me?" unable to look at me.*

*"I'm sorry, Tamiko. I should have told you," I said.*

*"You're leaving me," she said, "And Shiro?" She turned to me with a deflated face. "Shiro isn't happy either."*

*"This wasn't easy for me?" I told her.*

*Tamiko looked down and sobbed. I reached out to grab her arm and she pulled it away from me. I reached out again, grabbing her arm, then hand.*

*"Be my wife?" I said.*

*She looked up to me, stopped crying, and stared at me.*

*"Will you be my wife?" I asked again.*

*She placed her hand over her mouth, looked away, and was silent.*

*"Tamiko? I love you." I said, while pulling on her arm, urging her to face me.*

*She whipped around in my direction. "Yes!" she said, nodding and removing her hand from her mouth, "Yes!" she said again, leaning into me and resting her head on my chest.*

*We married 19 December 1940 in a small wedding at the temple.*

*Tamiko and I moved into a home, provided by her parents, on the other side of Hiroshima and closer to the army base where I was stationed. I did not think my time away from her would extend beyond my training. The recruiter promised I would be*

*stationed in Japan afterwards. I was stationed at the base for six more months while living with her, then sent off to fight in Manchuria.*

*One of the last conversations Tamiko and I had before I left for basic training less than three weeks later, was about children. We never spoke about the particulars of having children, but there were many times I made comments during our time together as friends and partners that painted a picture for her of my position.*

*"If you can't love the child fully and provide for them, then it's better not to have them," I told her, jaded from my own experience.*

*I believe she thought I never wanted children, which was true until the day I decided to propose to her and saw bearing a child as the pinnacle of consummating my love for her.*

*"Maybe we can have a child when you get back," she said, not looking up at me while helping me pack.*

*"If you promise to give me a boy," I replied, as a joke.*

*She looked up and smiled in the biggest smile I ever saw from her, glowing. I laughed.*

*"I'll do what I can," she said, laughing.*

*And although I said it as a joke, I preferred a boy because of watching my father treat my mother harshly all those years. I didn't want a man's wrath ever directed towards my daughter. Regardless, she treated my father and me with respect minus the affection one would expect from a wife and mother. I believe Tamiko knew she was pregnant with Maeko at the time.*

*My goodbye to Shiro was succinct and direct.*

*"I may be right behind you," he said, in parting.*

*"Don't join," I told him. "Don't join because I joined."*

*"I don't think I'll have much choice," he said.*

*Shiro joined the army soon after I left.*

*Following my reverie, thoughts of sacrificing for bushido are a distant past. My feet slide to a stop. My instincts returning, I'm drawn to my right, up a slight incline, and away from the new peak. I run with more sense of comfort in the direction of what I don't see than in the direction of the peak I do see. I run as the wave of pursuers channels through the contour of the lower valley and past me. The*

landscape blurs past as I scan around for a dark hole to crawl into, with shame poking at me. The gradual incline of an increasing slope slows my pace as I look down at my feet to guide each earned step. My adrenaline spent and legs near collapse under my body's weight, I stop, reach down to place my hand on my shaking knees until I catch my breath. *Where the hell am I?* I look up above the trees to find that sought-after peak, guided to her only by instinct. My energy boosted, I climb and dodge the hanging branches as if I'm avoiding the swinging arms of the enemy. The cooler, moister climate of this higher elevation brings forth the lush greenness of the jungle. I ascend above the smog, of air scorched from weeks of intense gunfire and explosions. In the cool air that reaches my skin, I breathe in the sweetness of flowering plants diluted by peat.

The last time I smelled or noticed the smell of flowers was when Maeko picked one for me. She too young to speak at the time and me too numb to speak, she raised the light-pink, ruffled carnation to my nose. I sniffed. Maeko smiled at me while the sweet, spicy fragrance reached deep into my nostrils. I could not smile back as much as I wanted to. She brought the flower to her nose, sniffed, and smiled either from the fragrance or amused to mimic her father. The last time I smelled the peatiness of the earth this distinctly was days before fleeing while hunkered down in retreat within a freshly dug trench as the passing bullets whizzed above me. My nose was pressed hard against the soil amid the prospect of an imminent death. The ordinary smell of peat today is as sweet as Maeko's carnation then.

I reach a rock wall twice my height, never turning back to face the downward slope as the thick vegetation on both sides funnels me up the wall. I toss my rifle and knapsack onto the ridge above, before reaching out to the rock-wall until I find the proper contours to grip. My fingers latched, I do the same to find a place for the tips of my leather boots before hoisting myself over the ledge, my arms compensating for my weak legs, the grunt in the effort giving away my location - if anyone is nearby. I roll onto my back, exhausted. Pointed rocks press into my flesh as if they dig for my kidneys. It is the sharp point pressing into the bone of my shoulder blade that keeps me from lying comfortably. *Let me rest*, I beg. The shouting and gunshots echo in the valley below in fading and resurging commotion all afternoon. A separate pursuing group has come into range.

"This way," someone shouts.

I stay still. The voices fade into mumbles. I take a deep breath before turning to my side, expecting the challenge of another steep climb to show itself before my exhausted body. A barrier of thick trees and bushes crowd my sight, so closely bunched they don't provide any gaps to see beyond. I lift my sights above the barrier, expecting another towering slope or cliff, but see only blue sky. An unproductive ponder enters my mind for the first time since the battle began. An orchard, a lake, and reunion with comrades play to my optimism over what may be on the other side. *How about Tetsu, Hansuke? Are they alive?* I remind myself that even if any of them survived, their fingers would be tense on their triggers. If I traversed the barrier I'd be riddled with gunshots, long before they could know it was me.

I'm exposed on the ledge. The sharp edge of the rock continues to prod my shoulder-bone as when my mother nudges me awake on a much too early morning to fetch my father tobacco for his kiseru. And just as I couldn't ignore the demands of my father without being ridiculed by him for being lazy, I couldn't ignore the rock nudging me to get up and conceal myself from the enemy. I jump to my feet, pick up my rifle, and dive into the wall of vegetation while closing my eyes and holding my breath to avoid inhaling any of the thick foliage brushing against my face. The incline is slight, and the vegetation thins after a few yards of fighting through the snagging tentacles of the bushes. I exhale as I break through to the other side and brush the bits of dry leaves and branches off my face before opening my eyes. The sun gleams off the sandy soil, obscuring sight of whatever lies ahead as a breeze blows the baking sand onto me. My eyes adjust to the brightness to reveal, like the curtain dropping in kabuki theatre on a paradisiacal setting, the nook. It is carved out of the side of the mountain in a near-perfect wedge. Birds dance around me, swooping through the air and singing as though excited by my presence. The small light-brown yellowish ones with white bellies are most abundant, intermingling with the smaller bright yellow canary-like ones. Their two colours weave a flash of a threaded, yellow-brown trail as they streak from tree to tree. The sharper pitch of the small ones rises above all the other sounds piercing my ears in contrast to the booms and pops that I have mistaken for normality. *Oasis. How do I find myself here?* I hold my hand in front of my face, play with my fingers. *Am I dreaming?*

Gunshots from the valley remind me I'm not. I sense the distance between me and war widen. I do not feel safe from those who hunt me, but safe from the exploding battlefield. I'm in a dangerous game of hide-and-seek where there's a severe consequence in being found, unlike the childhood games in Shima Territory.

The barrier lines the edge of the nook, enclosing me in a half-circle, and the cliff-wall, which trickles with water, blocks-off the rear. The trees and bushes fight for space along the outer edges of the nook, where the soil is most fertile and not choked by sand from the weathered rock of the rear-cliff-wall. I'm isolated, camouflaged by the barrier of trees and bushes. The unique placement hides the nook within the side of the mountain. I stand in open view in its centre, where there are few trees providing cover. The nook is otherwise spread with trees and plants, unlike the frenzied growth of the barrier, peppered with scattered boulders and dotted with grassy plots.

Insects buzz around me, masking the drone of planes which swoop into the valley. The moths, beetles, mosquitos; each trail a different sound that can be mistaken for an approaching plane. I'm faced with a new set of challenges as the initial grandeur of the nook provides a short break for my eyes and ears after being soaked heavily in war. My face flushes out any sense of peace when the harsh reality hits me. This nook is a dead-end unless I climb that steep rear-cliff-wall further up the mountain or return to the valley below. The enemy hunts for me in the valley and from the skies. The dead in dead-end looms large. *I must wait it out. Wait them out.*

Walking toward the rear-cliff-wall, searching for cover, I'm greeted by an old tree standing out in size, girth, dark, rustic bark, and the complex intertwining of its thick branches. It shields a dark hole which looks like a cave, at the rear-cliff-wall. *A tunnel that goes straight through the centre of the mountain*, I think, as my imagination inflates my flickering hope for escape. I walk past the old tree to see that the hole is no cave but made up of two slabs of rock leaning against each another like sumo wrestlers in a standing draw. The rear-cliff-wall behind is dark grey, smooth solid rock with faded-green moss brushed over the surface like waterpaint that has soaked into the paper it was painted on.

I stick my head through the opening to inspect it. Light from a cleft above and light seeping through at the rear, where the slabs meet the rear-cliff-wall, illuminate



the arrangement inside. The den is cool, quiet, pristine, as though prepared for my arrival. The floor is smooth sand with wavy patterns of mud at the back created by water trickling into the den. I'm uneasy on entry, like an animal lured into a trap. *Too good to be true.* I lean in, poke every corner of the den. The echoes from the valley and the continued buzz in the air nudge me to waste no more time concealing myself. I crawl into the den through the three-by-three-foot triangle entrance, coughing on the cloud of dust caused by disturbing the dry soil. I hold my breath and wait for the dust cloud to clear and notice the tremble of my hands, the slouch of my posture, tightness of my jaw, and my vice-like clutch on the rifle. I set the rifle down and peel my warm, sweaty hands from the metal. The air cleared, I breathe deep before clasping my hands together and squeezing hard. The trembling shoots up both arms as though the other arm has joined the oshi of a bonshō.

"Come on," I say, as I clasp harder. "Stop."

*Weak. Coward.* I look up to the cleft to gauge the time of day by the sun's position. The large body of a yellow-black spider blocks my view, its web strung out over the opening. Any danger from it is masked by its familiarity.

*Shiro approached them with caution. I, on the other hand, would hold them in my hand whenever possible.*

*"Can you carry me?" I asked Shiro, with a smirk on my face and a spider crawling on my rotating hand.*

*"Don't get bitten," is all he would say.*

*Holding up a spider in Shiro's face, similar to the one which shares my den, I said, "Look, no fangs," while streaking my finger across its large, glossed-ceramic-like body as if I were petting it.*

*My curiosity guided my adventurous escapes. If I stayed around the farm after finishing my duties, my father would call out barking orders before long. "That lazy boy," he would say if I spent my time exploring around the farm or remained in an otiose state of daydream. Autonomy on the farm and exhausting a daydream was a luxury.*

Picking up the rifle, I position myself to guard the entrance to the den, peering back into the jungle as if doing so is a courageous act. Those valley echoes fade to silence as dusk settles in, with my legs and arms aching from holding the same

tense position all day. I'm slow and intentional in my movement, coming out of my crouch with the circulation not yet returning to my limbs. Then I stretch out flat on my back. Feeling vulnerable in my idleness, I continue to clench the rifle with chafed hands. My thoughts race with all the different ways I will be found or killed when I fall asleep.

A coolness comes from the slabs of rock. The dripping down the rear-cliff-wall into the mud triggers my thoughts of water. My thirst surges with a new awareness of my aching, dry throat. I pop open the canteen and suck with of the indelicacy of cotton-ball-like, chapped lips. Unable to stop myself, I drink until the canteen's empty. I crawl over to catch the dripping water in the cup of my cheek, before swallowing what little collects. I do this for several minutes before placing the canteen under the drip and lying back down. The drops alternate between plopping into and slapping against the outside of the canteen, from two separate drip paths.

I've put trust in this nook and the den's cold slabs to conceal me for the time being, but it's trust by default, with few other options. My breathing calms in-sync with the gradual change of the jungle shadows and the cooling air. Night-time arrives, the drip-drop of water acting as metronome to the crickets and frogs. With the rifle resting across my chest, I stare into the vast mystery of the jungle. Stoked by fear and mental fatigue, my imagination takes over. Man, beast, spirits all take turns leaping from the darkness. The moonlight saves me from my imagination, outlining the canopy of trees and gleaming onto my face through the cleft. The veil of darkness dims my paranoia of being spotted. The crepuscular serves as a dramatic nocturne. The impenetrable rock slabs serve as bodyguards. Only then do I rid myself of the spider dangling over my body, by knocking it to the ground with my rifle. It is the size of a mouse and much like a yellow-spotted beetle with long spider legs. I toss it far out from the den by flipping it with the tip of my boot.

"Don't come back," I tell it.

*The den is mine.*

*My bedroom at the farm was the only other time I had my own space. I was twelve when I charged out of my room one evening and demanded they, "knock before entering, and don't go into my room unless I say you can. Look at what you did," as I held up the haiku which I had spent the week writing, deliberate and thoughtful, on*

*the cleanest piece of white paper I could find. It now had a muddy footprint across it.*

*I braced myself for one of them to counter with criticism of my harsh tone but walked away as soon as I realised that if I stood there long enough someone would respond.*

In the lull of night, I twitch to each rustle and snap. I shiver from a steady breeze and with it a wary peace from the night's own natural rhythm and the distant commotion of war. Although an abyss of mystery, there's chaotic order within this setting. Frogs croak, crickets chirp, bats flap against the moonlit sky, trees sway as if caught in the ebb and flow of a tide, varmints dig through the dry leaves on the ground, mosquitos hover near my head, and a constant hiss fills the air. The unnatural addition of my breathing raises my consciousness of it, bringing my first sense of proprioception and autonomous control since the start of the war. I am alone, the first time I felt this in a while.

*The potholed face of Captain Mori flashing back as though he watches over me, spoiling this feeling of independence.*

*"You're the property of Japan. That means, as your superior, I own you," he said.*

*Prior to this, our officers would tell us, "You are protecting Japan's and your families' honour. You are protecting our great emperor."*

*Captain Mori's approach was less inspiring, but more honest. He earned my respect for saying this in his introduction to our company. His relentless insults and barking of orders threw many of my comrades off-kilter. Unable to handle the pressure, they began questioning the effectiveness of his approach. I processed his orders without panic. All those years of bossiness and harsh criticism from my father prepared me for Captain Mori.*

*I stood looking over at a group of soldiers digging a fox hole in the line-of-fire of another group's foxhole, and prepared to inform the soldiers of their failure, when Captain Mori stepped up next to me.*

*"Do you think you can lead these idiots someday?" he asked me, as we stood watching.*

*"Yes sir," I responded, as a matter of routine, taking the question as a rhetorical*

one.

*He jetted away from our conversation and charged towards the guilty group, "Are you trying to win the war for the Americans?"*

*At the time, I was a Superior Private. Three weeks later, I found myself Lance Corporal and leading a platoon after their former leader Masao vanished when he was hit directly by a mortar. I suppose it made it easier for his, now my, platoon that Masao's maimed, lifeless body didn't lie there reminding them of the horror we found ourselves in.*

My mind races, jumping between past, present, and future. War haunts me, changing the rhythm of my breathing. The sharp pitch of my memories drowns out any noise from the jungle, wrestling and pinning me down to the reality of the past. It pokes and stabs at me--the shouting, the screaming, the booms, the pops--all filling my mind's ear. The stench of unsanitary living and rotting bodies infects the walls of my nostrils, and the blood-stained ground, with its mangled bodies, has scorched the mucus of my eyeballs. The unforgiving truths snap at the heels of the fickle hope brought on by this new refuge. I readjust my body, each nagging thought triggering a deep breath in attempted relief, then mumble in the weariness of near sleep. The moon shifts each time I look up through the cleft, as a restless night endures. Thoughts of life back in Japan find their way to me in flashes, as childhood memories fight for recognition, trying to quell my mind's turmoil of war. I tug these pleasant memories to the surface.

*My childhood home, was a small solitary bamboo farmhouse on the outskirts of Hiroshima, surrounded by the clean lines of rice fields. Takaosan peak in the background and waves of smaller mountains crashed up against it. Memories of my mother carrying me up the driveway at a very young age vivid. I believe this memory marked my first arrival to the farm after birth; but common sense tells me otherwise. Asking mother is much too sentimental, even during our closest moments. I often relive the gentle bounce of her footsteps while wrapped warm between the soft cloths that lie across my forehead. The loose ends of hanging thread tickling my face as her warmth seeps through the cloth comforted me then and in reminiscence today. Ominous shapes of mountains stand tall beyond the fog of an early morning arrival as*

*the mist collects like tiny fish eggs on her jet-black hair and the cloth that covers me. A manufactured reality perhaps.*

Ah yes, softening my face as my mind bathes in childhood memories before memories of war roar back for attention and drown any pleasant thoughts I've salvaged. The haunting precedes the fears of my present situation. Then, the weight of my eyelids dulls my sense of worry. The heaviness brings me to surrender to the night. Failing to conjure the bushido spirit and hold on to those rational concerns of survival, I find myself between consciousness and sleep. The irrationality of my emerging oneiric subconscious moves in like a dense cloud as my mind catches pace with an exhausted body. I fall deep into sleep. Buried thoughts resurface in a morphed dream state, only to recycle recent horrors into a wicked unified narrative. Nightmares where my family appear next to me in battle, and dead soldiers that I never got a chance to know visit me on the childhood farm on which I grew up. They all show up trying to help me find a way out. A consortium of desultory thoughts in the mind's effort to reconcile who I am, was, and will become.

## CHAPTER TWO – NEW WORLD

### Day 1 - Light

*The battlefield roars with darting action as I huddle deep within a trench and bullets whizz overhead. The silhouette of a man stands over me, the sun's glare filling the background. The man leaps into the trench and grabs a handful of my uniform. He yanks me to my feet. It's my father. He looks down at me, and then his face disappears when his shifting stance blocks the sun and recreates the silhouette of his large frame. I cover my eyes, anticipating the sun splashing into my vision on his next shift in stance, but when I peek between my fingers my father's silhouette is transferred to the rice paper walls of my childhood home. His silhouette grows as I hear my mother play the koto. The sweet and soothing sounds warm me to a ticklish shiver. My father slides open the door in the room next to me, where my mother plays. Their blended shadows are individually defined near the flickering light of a candle. My mother pauses, and the tip of her nose points up towards my father. His voice rumbles, harsh and direct as usual. My father walks away, leaving the door open. My mother continues playing. The music reverberates through the house and joins the chirp of the crickets outside. The glare of the candle intensifies, fading out my mother's silhouette. I feel the candle's heat strike my face, the burn of heat now coming from a flamethrower as I'm brought back to the battlefield. The soldier next to me throttles the trigger while aiming at a nipa hut. Familiar screams come from within and intrude my thoughts where the voices and faces of everyone I know jumble together. The heat pulls me away from the friends, family, and comrades in my convoluted dream.*

The burn jerks me out of sleep. I squint to the sun shining through the cleft and across my face, wiping all those familiar voices and faces from thought. I shield my face with one arm, my trembling hand inches from my eye, while the other arm hugs the rifle. I recall those trembling hands during my first action in battle, only now realising that the trembling has been with me ever since. Only a coward has trembling hands. If I were back home in Japan staring at the outlines of the mountains and orange-purple clouds at sunset, which always brought me peace, I think these trembling hands would still curse me, in punishment of the things I've done. I have no memory of gazing at the sunset here, but I'm sure it's like Japan.

"Banzai!" I say, jolting myself out from unproductive thoughts. I must survive this day.

My eyes canvas the den before a plop of the water summons me to check on the canteen. I crawl over to it, sip on it until it's empty, then place it back down to collect more water. The small amount of water does little to remedy my sandpaper-like tongue and dry throat. As I start to feel the muddling effects of dehydration, which makes complex thoughts difficult, my inner voice becomes simple, concise, and decisive. *Survive. Water.*

Having slept the entire night in my uniform, I remove my boots and peel off my blood-stained socks, worn thin at the heels.

"Hai," I say, as the cool air meets my hot, throbbing feet.

The relief is so immense it dulls all the other pains of my body, like receiving the shot of heroin after a bullet cleanly passed through my torso during my deployment to China at the Battle of South Guangxi. A breeze blows onto where my skin is pinkish and exposed from burst blisters. The sting of my arms and legs from all the scratches and cuts returns. I inspect my body, looking for any deep wounds that could bring infection. I'm ok. I massage the cramps in my feet, careful around the two remaining blisters. *Should I pop them?* I squeeze out the yellow puss of a small one but leave the big one alone seeing the pinkish-red mixture of blood and puss inside.

The triangle-shaped entrance frames the sea of trees. The adjacent mountain range on the other side of the valley and their own rocky peaks stand prominent above the treetops of the nook's barrier of trees. I scan the mountains for any man-made shapes. If I cannot see at that distance with my good eyesight, then anyone over there cannot see me unless they scan with a telescope. The distance reinforces my sense of safety in seclusion, but fire or smoke would tip someone off. *I will need fire soon.*

*The first time Shiro and I reached Takaosan Peak, I peered in the direction of the farm searching for the rectangles of our rice paddies or the windmill my father built for polishing rice.*

*"Do you see it?" I asked Shiro.*

*Shiro peered alongside me. Our eyes canvassed the landscape, eager to be the*

*first to spot my family's farm.*

*"There," Shiro's finger shot out. "The windmill. You were looking too far north."*

*"Ah ok, I see," I told him, even though I hadn't yet located the windmill.*

*As we gazed over the landscape and ate dried cuddle fish Shiro's mother had packed for him, I located the windmill and the rectangular plots of rice paddies with the late morning sun reflecting off its shallow water.*

*"Do you think they can see us?" asked Shiro.*

*"Of course not."*

*"Maybe if we send smoke signals, they will know it's us."*

*"Your parents might notice. Not mine."*

*Water, I say to myself, refocusing on the top priority.*

*I stand the rifle next to the entrance of the den, remove the cloth knapsack slung across my shoulder, and subitize the items inside the knapsack. There are 20 bullets, one grenade, and an apple. I set the apple on top of the knapsack as my mouth waters and stomach growls. I must resist and save for later. My eyes peruse for familiar round, oval, or oblong shapes among the treetops, as finding my next meal would give me permission to eat the apple.*

*The snaps, cracks, and persistent snake-like hiss pin me within the den. I question whether the sounds are real or imprinted in my mind. Action is needed if I am to survive. My mind, coming in and out of the muddle, struggles to decide. I resolve to cower in this dark hole instead. Details missed in yesterday's scurry are revealed to my busy eyes: the diversity of trees and bushes in this stand-alone jungle of the nook, small stair-like niches on the rear-cliff-wall packed with more bushes and small trees. The den is far below the mountain's distinctive sharp peak. Along the middle of the gradual slope from the den down to the front edge of the nook is a rut, with all the connecting dried-out, mini-tributaries coming from the rear-cliff wall fanning out from it. The rut runs at twelve o'clock and serves as a natural out-trail which will save me the trouble of penetrating the thick barrier each time I exit or enter. The old tree stands in front of the den's entrance like a guardian, its branches filtering out the sun for most of the day. A large, flat-surfaced elongated rock slab, which looks like a table, sits to the left side of the tree, the den, tree, and rock-table an equal distance apart from each other. I can't help to*



think how convenient the table will be if I find food to make use of it and am somewhat amused by the thought that I may never find food. *It's not funny. Water, I remind myself. I'm losing my mind.*

I drink the collected water from the canteen in one gulp, hoping to lubricate my mind and delay insanity. It's been a week since I had a proper drink, surviving on the rationing of my canteen during the final battle. That last day before fleeing, there was no chance to drink or to even think about drinking. What little water was taken-in over the last day went back out twofold in perspiration, and that's without any labour. *I am samurai.* A thought I used as a child to boost my confidence. A product of reading *The Book of Five Rings* at the age of nine after falling in love with reading at six years old. When not out exploring, I was in the local library. The artwork of a samurai on the cover caught my attention. I figured it was fiction when I pulled the book off the shelf, but it's a teaching on leadership and sword technique in combat. The aggressive stance of the warrior on the cover, which I later learned represents author Miyamoto Musashi, is seared into my mind as masculine, confident, heroic. I recite, "I am samurai," digging deep for the rumble in my voice and reverting to my childhood source for inspiration. It's as if memories of my life flash before me in bits and pieces, while a slow, immanent death approaches. It's Freud who spoke of the unconscious and memories. *I wish I read more of his books.* I'd be better equipped to prevent my insanity. *Can't change the past. Can't change the past.* Forward-thinking eludes me. *No. No. It's dehydration. I need water. That's all. Water.*

"Kaiyo," I call to myself, rattling my head from side to side as though it will clear my mind and bring me an increased sense of urgency. I stop. I'm dizzy.

"What did you study at university," Captain Mori asked me on the day he awarded me my Lance Corporal insignia.

"University, sir?"

"Didn't you attend university?"

"I did but never finished."

"But you're more educated than anyone in the company. You know the history of the Philippines. You showed how the Spanish once conquered this land when you were comparing Spanish words and names with Tagalog words and names for your

*comrades.”*

*“I like to read, sir.”*

*“Ha,” he responds. “I went to one of the best universities and am no more educated than you.” He grins at me. “We never learned of the Spanish conquering this part of the world.”*

*I was eager to tell him more about this land we found ourselves in.*

*“Open your hand.”*

*I opened my hand, and he slapped the two wing-like stripes into my open hand.*

*“Make me proud,” he told me, and walked away.*

I sit all day scanning the trees, watching, listening in a passive use of my senses, at times fantasising about food as I once did about women. Those small-yellow canaries swoop and jump from branch to branch in herky-jerky, toy-like movement. I’m convinced they were built by someone. My fecund thoughts expand to the trees, then the mountains, and that odd bright orb in the sky, all peculiar in artificialness. *Water*. The exertion of yesterday’s scurry, where I sweated out most of my body’s water, has caught up with me in full force today. *Before long, I’ll hallucinate*. The drip-drop of water rises above all else. I wait. I count. *I’ll drink at twenty. One*. I wait. A buzz. I wait. A chirp. I wait. *Is Maeko eating well?* I wait. The jungle hisses. A snap. *Is she safe? Two*.

A maringouin buzzes above me after entering through the cleft. I’m on high alert, with capture by my enemies paramount in my thoughts again. Out of all the noises, the mosquito’s buzz is closest to the drone of a plane. *Survive, Water*, I remind myself. I suck the small amount of collected water from the canteen after counting nine drops. My tongue soaks it all and none reaches my throat. I lie back down.

The angle of the evening light outlines the rounded, dark shape of a coconut buried deep within the line of trees. Sight of this jostles my growing atrophy. I stick my head out of the den to get a better look, while attributing a steady bombinate to my psychosis. I shake my head and clear each ear with my finger before concentrating on the sound as it gets louder. A plane veers around the side of the mountain. I pull my head back into the den and peek out of the cleft to see the blur of its rigid, dark-green metal as the plane flies over me. The plane, with the big

white star on its side flashing in the momentary glare of sunlight, dips into the valley. Any thought of leaving the den, climbing up the tree, and retrieving that coconut, evaporates. I perceive a noose of soldiers tightening around the mountain, the plane's flyover as the last attempt at intel before the assault.

"Banzai," I say, summoning energy in preparation for a final stand.

By the time afternoon arrives and the threat of an assault is less likely, my posture slouches and eyes gloss over as the heaviness of heat and lost hope weighs on me. I lie down and fixate on the drip-drop of the water falling into my canteen, my head and eyes rocking to my left and right, scanning the ground for stray insects. *Food. Do what I got to do. Survive. As my* cheek presses against the soil and towards the canteen, a beetle intersects my depth-of-field in giant-like grandeur. I focus on it and lift my head an inch off the ground, grains of sand clinging to the side of my face. The beetle walks, slow, clumsy, top-heavy, over the imprints of my hands and knees, as the loose granules provide unstable footing for it. I reach over and pluck the beetle up by pinching the girth of its body with my fingertips. Its feet continue to walk through the air. *Here goes*, I think, convincing myself to stick the head of the beetle in my mouth. The beetle's long legs reach out and fight against my lips. I extend my teeth from the cover of my lips, and bite down. The beetle's legs freeze on the crunch. I open wide, reposition my mouth, and tilt my head back, sticking the beetle between my molars. The mucilaginous inside explodes in my mouth as I bite down. I gag, then chew with impatience to swallow and get whatever nutrition it contains into my system. The mangled pieces make it through the canal of my throat with my gag reflexes holding steady. My face sours as if I sucked on a lemon. It is, however, more an instinctive reaction than anything else, as the complex textures and flavours are unfamiliar, and challenge my palette. I'm not eager to repeat the experiment. *Where's all the real food? Fruit. Meat.*

My hebetude tames the tremble in my hands as the evening breeze rattles the leaves. The sun leaves a swath of light at the entrance, like a doormat, and the smell of hot stone flows through the den with the cooling breeze.

*It was a Sunday morning, and before the relationship between my father and mother became distant, when I woke to a quiet morning all to myself. My parents departed early, while I slept, to attend the wedding of the daughter of my father's friend. That*

*morning, despite an opportunity to sleep in, I woke at my usual time with the routine to do so ingrained in me. My duties on the farm waited for me. I lay there, with the breeze blowing through the cherry blossom tree near my window and the sun painting a triangle at the foot of my bed. The smell of sakura, mud, and grass made it to me as I lay in bed; always hidden by the scent of tea, which would greet my nostrils every morning. I worked harder than I ever did that day, and finished my duties early, simply to return to my bed and lie there late in the afternoon, daydreaming about scenarios where my parents stayed away longer than that one day.*

I lie with rifle resting across my chest, barrel pointed towards the entrance and bayonet readied to thrust into any marauding face which might peek in as nighttime arrives. I stare into the darkness of the jungle, the dim light of the moon giving a menacing presence to the old tree, an auroral glow in the background, the peculiar sounds of the night unsettling as the jungle encroaches on my comfort in a new sense of nyctophobia. The old tree creaks in the breeze as if to warn the jungle from intruding our space. I try reaching slumber before my mind dives into the turmoil of a haunted subconscious. The fear of facing society eases my anxiety over the jungle's dominant presence. Jaws tight, eyelids heavy, I find my way to sleep amid the ebb and flow of my mind.

## Day 2 - Rain

*Leeches cover me under my soaking-wet uniform. Their sanguivorous suckle squeezes against the surface of my skin. The trench next to us splatters with movement. Through the mumbling voices, the word "snake!". Those voices and the intermittent popping of distant gunshots interfere with the hush of night. The soldier next to me, his face hidden in the dark, drowns me with words by reciting his life story as an anxious new recruit.*

*"Did I tell you I lived on a farm?" he asks, repeating the question every so often. The story is familiar, a version of my life. The sky lights up with a bursting flare. I look over at the young soldier in the flutter of orange light from the falling flare. The confusing shadows create the illusion that his face is deformed. Looking closer, he is a younger version of me I suppose. An odd sensation to look at a self which is me and not me. He holds a frown, as if disappointed that I see him. The sleeve of his*

*uniform extends over one hand. The other hand carries a stick for a rifle.*

*"Father?" He looks to me, lost, asking for guidance.*

*A raindrop splashes on his cheek, and when more raindrops fall, the frown turns to a smile with the gloss of his skin reflecting the moonlit background. The boy jumps out of the hole. I follow. We run into the jungle splashing each other as we stomp through the puddles and race towards a clearing ahead at jungle's edge. It opens into a rice field and on the other side of the paddy is my childhood home. The boy runs through the flooded fields, waving me on to follow.*

*"Come on," he says.*

*I jump into the flooded field, and the tension of the water slows me. My smile levels-off when the water is up to my waist. The boy disappears into the house, but I'm no closer to it. The water rises to my neck, then my mouth. I'm paralysed, swallow water, choke.*

I wake with water dripping into my mouth from the cleft above. A soot-like cloud passes over, in view through the opening. There's a distant rumble and leaves rattle to a gust of wind.

*Water!* I exit the den and look up towards the sky. Another cloud among many scattered clouds filters the sun, and the spray of shattered droplets whirl in the wind. I wait with hands drawn towards the sky as though I'm caught in a moment of spiritual ascension. Mouth open and eyes closed, I wait. Opening one eye, I peek at the grey sky. The first succulent drop thuds onto my face. I close my eyes. Rain splashes on my face and slaps onto the leaves around me. The rhythm it creates is lost in the slosh of it. My face sleek-wet and mouth filling with water, I gulp, then open wide again. The rain is warmer than the water dripping down the wall into the den, but not granular. I collect and swallow three more times, with an aftertaste from the filth on the skin around my lips leaving a growing bitterness on my tongue with each gulp. The rain stops. The cloud passes. I'm drenched. The trailing mist cools the air as the sun shines bright again, creating a rainbow in the distance.

My skin is first to dry. I'm energized, my worried frown momentarily gone. The jungle hisses much like when water cools the hot stones of a sauna. Water trickles off the trees and rocks, reminding me of the time I visited Hojo Garden with Shiro and his parents.

*I read more than I ever have in one day, sitting next to a pond reflecting the blue sky among the bamboo chimes, the trickle of water flowing into the pond from the staggered boulders within the well-manicured garden, which is complete with its granite lantern at one end.*

The freshness of a rinsed jungle provides a short break from the overload of scents. The birds re-emerge, chirping and hitting their notes. Wet surfaces evaporate before my eyes as if time has sped up. Streams of water, delayed from their meandering journey down the mountain, cascade down the rear-cliff-wall. I stand under one stream of flowing water outside the den with my mouth wide-open.

"Water," I gasp, "Water."

While gasping again to catch my breath, I fill my canteen. *I've been watered. A few more days of life.* With nowhere else to store water, I binge until nauseous. Moving into the stream of falling water, I rub my scalp to loosen the filth of dirt, twigs, and bugs held within the thick net of my tangled hair, which smells of smoke and gunpowder. The water runs down my body, leaving a hint of red within the brownish puddle at my feet, from all my scratches and nicks. I remove my tattered clothing, tossing my shirt and pants, with their thin thousand-stitch waistband, onto the slant of the den wall. A thousand-stitch waistband is stitched one stitch at a time by family and friends and given to all departing soldiers. They were given to me by Tamiko.

*"Even your parents sewed a stitch," she told me.*

Liberated by nudity, I scrub hard, at times peeling off layers of dirt with my fingernails as if shedding the skin of a snake.

"Hai," I say, refreshed from the rainfall.

I wash my clothes by rubbing together the fabric under the weakening stream of water. The friction releases excess dirt. I stop rubbing when the water dripping from the shirt turns clear, which is about the same time the stream of water turns to a trickle. I lay my clothes over bushes to dry, as the branches spread the fabric out as does the bamboo frame of a rice-paper lantern.

*My mother dried our clothes on her azalea bushes next to a cherry blossom tree, feet*

*from our house. The petals of the cherry blossom blew into my bedroom in the mornings during that time of year when I dreaded the start of school, and I found the peace and inspiration to wake in the soft-pink hue greeting me. It wasn't that I despised learning or my classmates, but it felt like I was missing out on something outside the four man-made walls of our schoolhouse. Many days I stared out of the classroom window towards the mountains, imagining what adventures awaited me.*

My mind lubricated, I gather my thoughts before the hot sludge of moist air weighs on me. *Dry clothes, coconut*; accounting for my two immediate priorities. I walk over to the coconut tree and look up. I hop onto the base of the tree and the rough tree bark scratches against my nude body. I jump off and wipe off the dusty, tree-bark residue. *I need my clothes.*

I return to my drying clothes, flip them over, and spread them out wider than the tips of the branches nearly poke through the fabric. *Hurry. Dry.* Looking up to the sky for planes. I shield myself from sight and from the bright sun in the den, my resolve boosted, and mind sharpened from the earlier rain. *Get that coconut.* The camouflaged garments dry under the loose canopy of the nook.

My solicitude is stretched to its limit, and I collect my clothes from the bushes. The clothes cling to my skin from the remaining moisture when I put them on. I roll up my sleeves and pant legs a few inches, to cinch-in the loose fabric, and walk back over to the coconut tree. Listening carefully, I sift out a drone from the constant bombinate in the air, before hopping onto the tree. I shuffle myself up the tree but make little progress, sliding down as much as I move up. I hug the tree, waiting for my next move. In the silence, and as I look up to the sole coconut, my attention turns to a hum. *A plane, a bug, my paranoia?* Waiting for the answer, my clutch on the tree weakens. The bombinate gets louder. *Plane!* I hop off and sprint towards the den, its entrance the finish line. I jump over rocks and bushes, closing in on the triangle opening, and I glimpse the tip of the plane's wing coming from around the mountain ridge. I leap into the den, clipping my back on the entrance. The collision knocks most of the breath out of me. I grit my teeth as the plane passes overhead.

"Damnit," I say with my remaining breath.

I roll over in pain from the collision, grunting, and turning myself around to

mark the position of the sunlight coming through the cleft with a twig to mark the time of day. The pain ebbs and my lungs refill with oxygen. Turning on my side again, I reach around with one arm to rub and press on my aching shoulder blade. There's the roughness of damaged skin but no blood on my fingers. A nasty bruise I'm sure and annoying soreness for days to come. *I'm lucky*, I think, managing to avoid an open cut during my time in the jungle. *Lucky?* I reprimand myself, reminded of my marooned state. The closest thing to an open wound is the exposed pinkish flesh of the popped blisters on my heel. I fear the large blister with pink-red mucus popping on me. *Drain it?*

Mosquitos pester me in a swarming frenzy, brought to life by the splash of rain. Then quicker than they appeared, they disappear as another gust of wind blows through. Clouds gather above. A light mist swirls with the wind. Those heavy raindrops remain pent up in the clouds above the nook as rain drapes the adjacent mountain range. *It's their turn*. I watch without envy and pour a small amount of water from the canteen over my feet. I immediately regret wasting it, but when I prop up my feet on top of the knapsack to dry them, the breeze soothes them, nearly putting me to sleep. Burning stomach pangs snap me out of the indulgence.

I confine myself to the den to remain hidden from passing planes with delayed hope of retrieving that coconut. Instead, I pick at large black ants which pass through my den at regular intervals. Their smaller bodies and exploding guts are easier to tolerate than those of the beetles, and there's pride in eating without gagging.

The moonlight replaces twilight, and the flutter of bats replace the swoosh of birds. The nighttime coolness from a cloud of serene blows through the den, emboldening my lethargy, my limbs giving further to gravity and resting firm on the ground. Aside from reverie and dreams, my less-welcomed nightmares also take me away from the reality of my present. *Tamiko. Maeko. Shiro*. The brief moments of seeing the faces of those important to me are worth the haunting that pollutes these pleasant images—at least on some nights. Faces among mangled bodies of Filipinos along the roadside swoop in and out of my mind's eye. *Who are you?* I wonder, with each unknown face. It's the empty void of the pupils surrounded by the off-white of decay that sears at me. *Who were you?* My eyes weigh heavy. Dreading what's to come in sleep, I'm saved by the memory of my mother playing the koto.



*I watched her play except in her shadow through rice paper walls. I imagined her cradling the koto with eyes fixated on it while I revelled in the sweetness of her chords.*

I beg, *let me be*, as war's brutal truth readies to intrude on my mind again in a persistent battle between pleasant and haunting memories. The goal of the Japanese Empire was to achieve the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere under the philosophy that Asia should be ruled by Asians. The location of my final battle was the last line of defence against the Americans in retaking the Philippines. Part of me knew it was coming when our commanders circulated the news that General MacArthur said, "I came through and I shall return". Sharing this news was a way in which our superiors used the information to keep us alert to an oncoming onslaught we knew nothing about until we heard the artillery hitting our defences closer to the shores. No general would make such a promise without meaning it. Less than two months after MacArthur announcing "I have returned" with confidence over the airwaves when the Americans gained strategic advantage in re-securing the island, my company and I retreated further into the jungle where we held our positions through the rainy season. The Americans and Filipinos found us, overran us. I fled, and now find myself here. There is no evidence of a rising Japanese tide here. None of our planes with the *Hi no maru* on its sides and wings has flown over this valley.

### Day 3 - Soil

*Rain pours. I dig. Water and mud avalanche back into the large trench with faceless bodies piled next to it. Other soldiers join and we pair-up to toss the bodies into their shared grave, each one splashing in the large pool of muddy water. The last body splashes in. We fill the trench with mud. The mound of mud washes flat and an inch of water covers the trench, which makes the imprint of the gravesite look like a pond.*

*An arm rises.*

*"Kaiyo," a voice calls.*

*I stare at the arm that reaches towards me.*

*"Come on. Jump in," the voice continues, triggering my taphephobia.*

*Shiro emerges from the pond. My fear is rinsed away. We jump in the pond with childlike joy, racing to the vine-filled bottom. Glancing at each other through the murky water, we race back to the top. I watch Shiro rise to the surface, but despite my attempt to swim up, I remain at the bottom with vines wrapped around my legs. My mother and father swim among the vines, and my wife Tamiko's blurred image looks down into the pond from the shore, waving for me to come up. I fight to free myself, panic, and hear the creaking of the old tree. The tree's shadow reaches me at the bottom of the pond. I reach for the shadow, and although I remain submerged, I no longer panic. The tree creaks louder in oneiric ambiguity.*

I wake to wind gusting, leaves rattling, tree creaking in the dim glow of early morning, and to shadows of the old tree's branches swaying over me.

Water plunks into the canteen. I release my clasp off a handful of soil, heart still racing, and skin hot. Far beyond a safe distance to stray from the cover of the den, a large gathering of birds swoop and perch in a small group of trees and bushes. I'm drawn to inspect what lures the birds. *Food.* My mind, though it has a simple goal, is yet to work out a strategy. *Do they pick at a carcass? Feed on fallen fruit? Perhaps it's just a swarm of insects they feast on.* I gauge the risk. The morning shade of an un-crested sun provides some cover in the unlikelihood of a plane's early flyover. The birds scatter upon my approach. I clear through a circle of bushes and greet the reflective rolling water of a pond. *Maybe it's an oasis after all.*

I think of those innocent Filipinos caught in the crossfire as I kneel at the side of the pond and see my reflection. *Ha. Who am I fooling? Murder. It's cold-blooded murder, that's what it was. Murderer.* The elation of finding water is diluted as I am unable to elude my reflection unless I leave the pond. Debris from the surrounding trees and bushes float on top of the pond. I reach down to scoop up water with one hand, examine it by holding it up to the available light, then smell it. I'm tempted to slurp it out of my hand. Instead, I lick a single droplet running off my finger. Stagnant water surrounded by animals around is a bad sign. Though I gained little from our rushed survival training, my instincts take over, and I toss the water aside. Yesterday's rain satisfying my thirst makes it easier to do so. The sun crests.

*Fire. Water,* I think, keeping focus on the simplified goal of survival. I must boil the water. If I don't build a fire or find another source of water soon, then I will

be forced to drink the pond water the way it is and take my chances.

I lie looking out the den for the first half of the day, with my ear resting on my hand and the coolness of shaded, moist ground providing a mild comfort. My eyes run up the trunk of the old tree, to the tangled branches which look like petrified snakes stacked one on the other. Stomach pangs press against my ribs, from a stomach demanding to be served. If it could leap from my body in an independent search for food, it would. *Go for it. Find some food because I can't. You are more determined and courageous than me.* Fear and hunger are pitted against each other with the prospect of death attached to each.

I entertain the idea that surrender or capture would satisfy my hunger, since they are bound to feed me. I've forgotten the taste of normal food. It isn't the shame of defeat or even death that I fear most anymore, it's the fear of facing cruel justice at the hands of vengeful Filipinos. The thought of facing my accusers, the people I wronged, fills me, this murderer, with terror. There's a similar terror in facing Tamiko and Maeko again. *Am I dead to them?* I wonder. With my predicament reframed, it doesn't seem too bad to be stuck here alone, nor to die from thirst or starvation.

I turn to the twig marker I placed in the ground yesterday and wait until the edge of the sun-streak is far past it, and I can be confident a plane will not pass today. I put on my boots without socks, before trekking across the mound, struggling to maintain balance on the sandy soil with my weakening legs of deteriorating muscles. *Protein is what I need. Water and protein. Water and protein.* My boots sink into the soil, the blazing heat sapping more strength and the dust of burning sand clogging my nostrils. I reach the coconut tree, look up, and abandon the notion of retrieving the coconut because of the amount of strength it would take to climb the tree. *Is there protein in coconut? I doubt it.* I kick the tree with the side of my foot in frustration, and with the small hope a coconut will drop. The tree, planted firmly in the soil, does not rattle. The act only adds to the soreness of my already scabbed, blistered feet.

"I'll get you," I say, looking up to the coconut.

I look around the jungle floor surrounding the tree, seeing plenty of coconut fronds. There's a buzz. *Mosquito*, I think, my eyes catching the source of the sound. I continue to search the ground for coconuts. Another buzz. I follow the sound but

cannot find the mosquito. I run back to the den, wait, then return. This paranoia continues, and I waste a good chunk of my energy and my day in the back and forth between the den and the coconut tree.

Later in the afternoon, another buzz. The buzz gets louder. I stop, listen. A *plane*. On hearing the rumble of a choking motor, much like the changing gears of a motorcycle, I plant one foot preparing to sprint off. A *coconut!* I marvel, spotting one under the low-lying branches of a bush. Paranoid that I somehow would lose the coconut by not claiming it at this moment, I snag it off the ground before rushing away, leaving behind the sway of branches that tried to hide it from me and juggling it between two hands to prevent myself from dropping it as I run. My pathway to the den is more precise this time, and I make it back before the plane passes overhead, despite my rubbery legs. *That was reckless*, I think, knocking myself on my left temple with the heel of my hand. What I thought would happen to that coconut, I couldn't say, except that I refused to lose it after getting so close. I stick another twig into the ground, marking the time of day by the position of the sunlight coming through the cleft.

I hold the coconut up before me and examine the fray of the dry husk. I look closely as though I'm bound to find out it's not really a coconut. *Maybe it's empty, hollow*. I jam my bayonet knife into the husk, and begin prying away at the fibrous membrane, thinking *what could I use the husk for? Sponge? String? Can I eat it? Tinder!* I yank the rest of the husk off with my hands, to reveal the round coconut shell, and toss the husk out in the open atop the hot sandy soil, to dry it further. The coconut shell is small, round like the candlepin bowling ball I encountered marching through the city of Balanga.

*We lined the streets, marching in unison, while small bands of Japanese soldiers from another company maraud the villagers' belongings.*

*"What is this?" a ransacking soldier asked the unsuspecting Filipino business owner.*

*"A candlepin bowling bowl," the man answered.*

*The soldier tossed the ball towards the street ahead of me as we marched, and it rolled into the roadside drainage canal.*

*"It can be used as a weapon," he told the owner as other soldiers tossed out the*

*remaining balls from the old community hall turned bowling alley.*

*Men ahead of me picked up the balls and placed it in their knapsacks. I picked up the last one as I walked by, but couldn't make sense of what I would use it for, or what the other soldiers planned to do with it. We kept marching and I handed it over my shoulder to the soldier behind me. Later, that same soldier used the ball as a weapon against an innocent Filipino man standing too close to the marching column, and it was as if he knew exactly what he'd be using it for when he took it from me. I admit, as guilty as I feel about it, I was content to see this soldier die in battle weeks later.*

I set the coconut aside and drag in a large stone from outside the den, which I can also use as a table or chair. Cupping each end of the coconut with my hands, I raise it above my head, and strike the shell against the stone in one long downward motion. Coconut water squirts out the cracks. *Not a bowling ball.* I turn the coconut upright and pull apart the two halves. *Not hollow*, after seeing the white flesh, then drink the coconut water collected in the bottom half. Using my knife to carve out chunks of clean, white coconut meat, I eat one large piece at a time as the pieces separate easily from the coconut shell as if they were pieces of white chocolate, melted then cooled to solidify in a ceramic bowl. I absorb the remaining bits with the tips of my wet fingers. The thought of eating the shell crosses my mind. *I would hate shitting that thing out.* The half-shell replaces the canteen under the dripping water. The wider radius of the shell catches more water from the array of imprecise drips as they plop onto the inside curvature, roll down, and collect in the middle. Although never climbing to retrieve the hanging coconut, I'm left with a sense of accomplishment. *Baby-step forward.*

The leaves rattle and branches sway in the afternoon breeze, breaking the monotony of watching and waiting. The insects I pick at provide little to make up for the long absence of proper food. I swear my stomach is trying to speak to me through its growls.

"Calm down," I tell it.

Perhaps it's the shock of sustenance from the coconut or it's my sanity continuing to waver.

"Grrrrr," it tells me, as though moaning in disappointment.

*Is it in pleasure or pain?*

In less than half an hour, it's clear the coconut has loosened my bowels and whatever liquid remains within me looks to escape. I step outside the den, walk over to a bush, and use my knife to dig a small hole into which I have no choice but allow my body to flush out much of my remaining liquids. *A big step backwards.* My stomach settles as the evening progresses.

"Be at peace," I tell it.

However, my energy and mental acuteness take a dive, hurling me into delusion by the time night arrives. Tamiko and Maeko watching me from the darkness is the prelude to sleep. It's hard to remember when their eyes last set on me after returning from Manchuria, or if I ever gave a proper look towards them. What I do remember is that they have the same eyes, as if drawn on by the talented hands of a calligrapher in two separate soft curves for the top and bottom, leaving behind the dark edges of ink surrounding the airbrushed brown of their pupils. With the whites of the pupils appearing and disappearing with each blink in the darkness, I'm overcome with shame.

*I returned from basic training and exited the train in uniform. Shiro was there waiting. We embraced with big smiles on each of our faces. Shiro pushed me away with a smirk on his face.*

*"Looking important," he said, then laughed.*

*"When do you do your training?" I asked.*

*"I leave at the end of the month," he told me.*

*"Enjoy your freedom while it lasts," I said, looking him directly in the eye.*

*Shiro reached to help me with my knapsack. I jerked it away from him.*

*"Just drive."*

*We hopped onto the motorcycle and Shiro zipped off, rushing to get me home to see Tamiko.*

*"You're going to kill me before I get to see Tamiko," I shouted into Shiro's ear, as the loud roar of the engine and wind dominated.*

*Shiro, skirting corners, turned back to me.*

*"She's been waiting long enough," he said.*

*Once on the long straight dirt road leading to Tamiko's family's home, I saw a*

single figure in the distance, standing in front of the house. It was moments before recognised Tamiko and the large, pregnant belly filling her dress. As we pulled up, her smile exposed the whites of her teeth, and then I could see the sparkle in her eyes.

"Welcome back, my love," she told me, as she kissed me on the cheek.

"Come here, my beautiful wife," I said, as I grabbed her by the waist, reeled her in for a hug, and kissed her.

"Calm down, mister," said Shiro, "save all the kissing for after I leave."

I knelt on one knee and put my ear on to Tamiko's belly, then turned and rested my hand on it.

"Daddy's home," I spoke into her belly as if it was a large microphone.

Tamiko flinched to a movement in her belly and pulled my hand away as if I had just touched a hot stove. We looked at each other with eyes wide.

"She heard you," Tamiko told me.

I turned to Shiro, "She responded to my voice."

We shared wide-eyed glances between us before placing my hand on Tamiko's belly again.

"Can you hear me, my child?"

That night, my ear rested on Tamiko's belly. I sang the Japanese national anthem to the baby.

"Seven days is not very long," said a wide-awake Tamiko after finding out was off to Manchuria soon.

My dreary eyes reopened, and I groaned in acknowledgement.

"How do they expect soldiers to have a family if they're always away?"

"It's our duty, Tamiko," I responded.

She paused, then raised her voice in frustration, "For what?"

We remained silent.

"I've heard awful things about the Sino-Japanese war," she continued.

"Like what?"

"Bad things, violent things."

"It's war, Tamiko."

"People die," she said, sniffing.

I removed my hand from Tamiko's belly and rubbed her leg.

"I'll be OK," I told her, before returning my hand to her belly.

*Her sniffles stopped at that empty promise and gesture.*

*On the morning of my departure, I hugged Tamiko long and tight, the rumble of Shiro's motorcycle in the background as he waited.*

*"It'll be ok," I whispered to her.*

*"Come back for your daughter," she whispered back.*

*I hopped on to the motorcycle, giving Tamiko one last glance and smile, as Shiro drove off.*

*The convoy from Shanghai to Nanking was a long journey over crude roads which rattled every part of the soldier's body. The canvas walls of the lorry hid the death that plagued the roadsides from our eyes. Only through the flapping canvas, which would open and close between the loose ties hooked to the truck, could I glimpse the blood-stained ground. Some soldiers vomited from a combination of the uneasy ride and putrid smells. Not until arriving at Nanking and smelling the unfiltered, overwhelming stench of death, and seeing the battered corpses littering the city, did the rest of us heave up the rations we'd put into our bodies hours before.*

*I was one of the new soldiers deployed to Nanking to defend the city alongside many battle-hardened soldiers. Large groups were sent off to join the advancing Japanese front to be replenished by more new, virgin soldiers. I was assigned to a guard post within the heart of the city. It was at the intersection of diverging roads suffocated by small buildings, horseless carts, and abandoned bamboo roadside markets stripped bare by my earlier comrades. Blasted fragments of brick, rock, bamboo, and wood debris, from the initial assault on the city, littered the streets. Chinese civilians who chose not to flee became target practice when one occasionally sprinted from one building to another. Pop! And the Chinese civilian dropped fast to the ground as if their legs were swiped from under them. Until finally, on order of our superiors, innocent civilians walking the streets were no longer targets, contradicting the "Three Alls Policy" of kill all, loot all, burn all. As each day passed, more Chinese walked the streets and the daily lives of us Japanese soldiers normalised as if we were fellow citizens. The roadside-bamboo markets restocked and reopened. We paid with money and with items stolen from the houses and buildings of that same city. Some vendors received items stolen from them weeks earlier as payment.*

*"Restore order and a functioning society," our superiors told us. "This is your home for now."*



*But it was never peaceful. The execution of civilians, including children, suspected of conspiring against the Japanese was commonplace in the streets, and they were often filed out and shot in the open. I learned we were expecting a girl the same week I witnessed the first group of executions. Doubt over bringing a child into this world stood forefront in my mind. Would she one day be a victim like these executed kids should Japan lose the war? Would I be there to protect her?*

*In the week before we were to vacate Nanking, the Three Alls Policy came back into effect.*

*“Leave behind nothing,” we were told, “not even a rat burrowed deep in its hole.”*

*The honour of appeasing the Empire of Japan, so they thought, allowed for the rationale of such acts. I started by avoiding eye contact when aiming, only to find out it made things worse if I missed killing the person the first time, then needed to approach closer to shoot them again as he or she moaned.*

*The nightmares began that night after committing my first murders. I did everything I could to avoid killing another soul. It’s nothing like the movies. A soldier in my unit had lost his mind from the guilt and eventually killed himself. The thought doing the same crossed my mind but being there for my soon-to-come daughter kept me from doing so. The commanding officers seemed pleased that the soldier killed himself, seeing him as a liability during his mental decline.*

*Our regiment was sent back to Japan after three years, while other freshly trained soldiers replaced us. All the while, I worried Tamiko and Maeko’s safety, only able to send out one letter and never hearing back from them. Most likely, their letter just never reached me on the battlefield. Without much resistance in Manchuria, deployment there was a training ground for the real battles of the future which would have more powerful adversaries. I killed, was shot, but had yet to fight in a real battle. Killing someone that aims to kill me is a sign of a true soldier. Killing unarmed, innocent, civilians is cowardly, murder. The faces of murdered women and children that I thought forgotten, return.*

*It got worse for me when back to a life of civility in Japan. My mind occupied by the horrors and emotions locked in an iron case to which no one holds the key. I returned to Tamiko and baby Maeko without the capacity to connect with them.*

*I was there for Maeko’s first day of preschool soon after returning from duty in*

*Manchuria. Tamiko and I walked up the stairs to the entrance of Hiroto Elementary. Tamiko reached out to help Maeko up the stairs, but instead, Maeko reached out to grab my hand at my side. It was the first sign of affection towards me, a stranger, an absent father, but the warmth of the moment couldn't penetrate my hardened exterior.*

#### Day 4 - Sky

*Smoke floats over the dead bodies strewn across the field, separating the two entrenched factions. The bodies lie all day in the sun, rotting in their faded uniforms. The stench lingers in the nighttime coolness as moonlight reflects off blades of grass and the liquefying skin of the dead soldiers. Dark figures wait on the other side as if they're a reflection of my comrades and me, below the sparkling stars. I reach forward, poke my finger towards the stars, and swirl my hand. The stars follow my swirling finger. The sky splashes and stars ripple along with a blurry reflection of myself. Shiro, as a teenager, stands behind me with a big smile.*

*"We should go home, Kaiyo. It's late."*

*I gaze up at the stars and point.*

*"But look at the stars, Shiro They're so bright out here."*

*We both gaze up in silence together, before walking into the nighttime jungle.*

*"You go first," Shiro stops and looks towards me to lead the way.*

*I walk ahead of him. "This way," I say without looking back.*

*Shiro doesn't respond, and when I turn around, he's gone.*

*"Shiro?"*

*I retrace my steps. A soldier's dead body lies there on the path. As I get close, I recognise the face.*

*"Shiro!" I cry, kneeling next to his gunshot ridden, sagging, bloodied body.*

*I fixate on Shiro's eyes, feeling guilty that I led him to his death. The thought of looking at him through my eyes and he unable to see me through his dark, lifeless ones, jolts me.*

*I wake in the middle of the night, alert, and feeling empty, as if Shiro and our brotherly bond is forever severed. The tail of a glowing cloud of stardust is framed in the hexagonal shape of the cleft. I reset my sleeping position by crawling over to the den's entrance, sticking my head out, and lying down on my back, looking up to the*

full body of stardust floating among the blackness, which is like an evaporating cloud which has ascended well beyond earth's atmosphere. Using what little I know about astronomy; I locate the Big Dipper and Little Dipper and point to a star.

"North," I whisper.

I carve an arrow with my knife onto the surface above the entrance, pointing the arrow towards what I think is Japan. *Maeko. Tamiko. Shiro. I hope you believe I'm still alive.* I watch the stars sparkle long enough to follow their movement along the night sky. This lulls me back to sleep.

Feeling like I just closed my eyes, I wake to the blue glow of early dawn. My body lies halfway out of the den, exposed from tossing and turning during sleep. I pop up and survey the area for any peering eyes, before crawling back under full cover of the den.

The expectation of a passing plane keeps me in the den as the punishing heat of the sun bakes the jungle. The plane passes overhead. I mark the position of the sunlight, placing another twig between the two other twigs, before firming up the others in the sandy soil. I peek out of the entrance to watch the plane dive into the valley, with sun glaring off the glossy paint of the white star. The drone fades. *Now's the time. Find food.* I exit, paying little mind to the lingering hum in the air. As I walk over to inspect the first group of trees and bushes, the drone returns. I walk back towards the den, then run when I realise the plane is coming around the ridge again. The den is too far. My mind scrambles through the options as my eyes scan for safety. *In the bushes? Rush to bury myself in the leaves? Hold branches over my head? Idle up close against a tree? Decide!* I take five long, leaping strides towards the pond and dive in headfirst at an angle, keeping my arms and legs tight against my body to limit the splash. Having never checked the depth of the pond, I prepare myself for impact. The water slows my momentum and I drift along the concave base of the pond dragging my finger on the bottom. I look up through the undulating water to flip-flopping sunlight and treetops. The pond is shielded by a circle of trees and bushes, with a clearing directly above. I hide in a dark corner of the pond, shadowed by tall grass, keeping myself at the bottom by slowly releasing air from my lungs. The rippling waves have calmed to a sway. The blurred shape of the plane passes overhead.

*One. Two. Three.* I push off the bottom of the pond with my legs and shoot to

the surface. I emerge, sucking in air as soon as I feel the water roll off my lips. *Close call. The universe is working against me*, I think, after catching my breath. I run back to the den and search for any clues that may have alerted the pilot to make that second pass. The gunshots escalate in the valley. *Have they found me? Should I abandon the nook?* The battle carries on with the skirmish concentrated in one location. Relinquishing this spot would likely mean my demise at the hands of the jungle if not by the enemy. I'll make my last stand here. *Is it courage when I have no choice but to face the enemy?*

*I didn't get to see Maeko's face when I fled from my family but imagined tears on her face as she hid in her room. Tears of hurt and not tears because her father was leaving. Looking at Maeko's face as I walked out of the door, I saw disappointment. These last thoughts released any remaining hope of ever redeeming myself. That did, however, bring back an emotional aptitude lost in Manchuria. A profound sadness only for a moment. I didn't notice back then the many glances Maeko gave me as if to say, "Who is this man in our home?" As distant as we were from each other, it comforts me to think that just maybe she wished to tell her papa something, as little girls often do.*

The sun retreats behind the ridge, the distant mountain range blocking that unforgiving fireball. The close-call of the fly-over, and the gunfire below, has me on high alert. With dusk settled in, I exit the den, rake up dry leaves with my hands, and drop them in a line along the edge on this side of the barrier, expecting that the crunching of leaves might alert me of any approaching threats. I kneel at the triangle opening, rifle in hand, eyes peering through the foliage, ears perked, and nose sifting the air for the soldiers' musk. *You will not take me alive.* I fall asleep on my knees, leaning against one side of the entrance, jolting myself awake to look around throughout the night, then going back to sleep. Although this on-guard mindset is something I'm accustomed to, survival for the sake of family and self, rather than duty and empire, means much more to me. All I've come to love is at stake. A war-mongering empire is not one of them.

*Dogs tear shreds of meat hanging from a caribou carcass on the side of the road. They growl and snap at each other as we march into the village. Vultures peer down from their perches on surrounding trees. One dog turns and barks at us, displaying his fangs and oblivious to what little power he has over us. I march past the dog, staying in sync with the other soldiers and keeping my head facing forward, even though I feel the dog's instinct to bite the back of my leg. He barks and growls at the soldiers behind me. Pop! A Squeal. Silence.*

*We step aside for a rumbling caravan of jeeps and lorries coming from behind. They were abandoned by the Americans and are now driven by my comrades. They pass. Then the lead vehicle stops at the front of our marching line. After exchanging a few words, Captain Mori jumps into the jeep and waves us on. We all hop onto the nearest vehicle, with some soldiers hanging on the sides. I find a seat on the opened gate at the rear of a lorry. We rumble and squeak through the potholes. Looking down at my dangling feet, the potholes turn into carcasses of caribou and dogs that smell of fish. My body slides side to side, slamming against the cold steel of the lorry before the ride sways over shallow puddles. Shiro and I sit at the rear of my father's caribou wagon. Our feet dangle. My father steers with a rope hooked to the caribou's nose. He tugs on the rope and the caribou raises his nose in the air as if irritated, before following my father's command and veering left around a large pothole. The heron, catching a free ride on the caribou's back, flaps its wings to keep balance then returns to picking insects off the caribou's skin. Our feet are splashed with the muddy water of the puddles. Shiro taps my shoulder and points. I look down at my legs and feet caked with layers of mud. We giggle.*

*'Hey!' my father shouts.*

*I become aware of my dream state. My eyes crack open, but I continue to play out a version of my childhood and soon am back in my dream state. Shiro and I are careful to mute our giggles and cover our smiles. Another splash and our smiles return with pent-up giggles. The smell of fish reeks in the heat from the day's travel back from the coast. I look toward a malodour and see a wagon full of dead Filipinos. I am haunted by the face of a young Filipino girl buried in the pile, who resurfaces in my dreams.*

*"Daddy," she calls out.*

I wake to the flutter, swoosh, and chirps of birds, and the smell of fish. I sniff the air and follow the scent to the pond. Lying there is a dead fish at the water's edge, swarmed by ants and with strings of white flesh hanging from its bones. I panic. *Who put the fish there?* I wonder, then look at the pond.

I remove my clothes, jump in, and search within the murky water. I locate a group of tilapias.

"Fish," I say in excitement under the water, choking as it sneaks into my throat.

I try pinning them against the shore as they pass, but they skirt past me. I exit the pond and make a spear from a long stick by shaving one end into a point, like Shiro and I did as children at the lake next to our clubhouse, then jump into the water and stab at the fish. The water too deep and fish too fast. *A net or basket may work. I have neither. My grenade?* This would assure me a catch of not just one, but all the fish and anything else that lives in the pond. I fight to keep a measured approach. I move the fish carcass out into the open, closer to the den. *Bring me some food,* I implore inwardly, hoping the strong smell attracts those mysterious varmints rustling through the leaves.

Today, the passing plane's thin and distorted shadow skims over the ground and trees, like a preying hawk. I firm up the outer two markers and remove the twigs in the middle, relying on the earliest and latest as a cautious timeframe.

The dry leaves rustle around me. Those ghost-like varmints, perhaps keen for my trap, refuse to venture out to nibble on the fish carcass. *Slithering snakes?* Little do they know; I have no method of catching them in the act of nibbling at the bait except to rely on my speed at chasing them down and stomping on them. *Meat,* I think each time I hear them. The meat is lost if I shoot the small things, not to mention the waste of a bullet for such little reward. *Come on, you damn things! Show yourselves!*

I turn my attention to the less mysterious, and follow the movement of those swooping birds, trying to track the location of their nests. But when evening arrives, I lose sight of them in the dimmed light of dusk, never seeing where they retire to for the night. I think back to the Tilapia. *Fish. Yeah, fish sounds perfect.* I sigh as the curtains close on today's performance of elusive fish, swooping birds, slithering snakes, and scurrying varmints. *Where are the monkeys?* Although we didn't often

see monkeys close-up, the constant, far-off cackles that signalled their presence. Whether they've fled further from last week's fierce battle much as I did, or whether the location of the nook obscures them, their cackles did not contribute to the day's cacophony of sounds. I'm surrounded by food but cannot eat while the piercing pain of my stomach persists. I spend more time considering my failures than devising a way to catch something. *The apple*. If I don't find food tomorrow, I'll eat it.

#### Day 6 - Man, Woman

*Villagers are lined up on the road in front of their homes. Two soldiers and I team up to inspect a hut because nobody stands in front to claim it. The window flaps and door are shut. I guard the front while the other two soldiers enter the hut with bayoneted rifles leading their way. The soldiers jam their bayonets into the wall of a small room at the rear before entering it. They rummage through the hut, pocketing a ring, gold necklace with crucifix, pair of reading glasses, and small bottle of gin.*

*Swivelling my head back and forth between guarding the entrance and watching the ransacking soldiers, I hear the rake of soil and bend down to peer into the dark underbelly of the hut. Between the log columns that lift the hut off the ground; I see a man, woman, and a young girl huddled together. They stare at me wide-eyed, frozen, and holding their breath. I begin the motion to notify the soldiers above. I pause, then shoosh them by holding a finger to my lips while forcing myself to smile to ease their fear. A rush of light shoots down on the family when the soldiers inside lift a hatch hidden under the rug. And in that flash of light, I find myself huddled with Tamiko and Maeko looking up at the soldiers. The thrust of bayonets come down on Tamiko and Maeko, but my arms are locked to my sides within the confined space. I'm helpless to protect them with the slice of the blades plunging into their flesh. Their screams sear my ears; the helplessness boils my blood. The soldiers grin at me before their sharp blades plunge into my chest.*

My eyes shoot open. I grab my chest, with my heart thumping against my sternum and my body covered by a thin layer of sweat. *I failed them*. This nook is my refuge.

*After my first deployment in Manchuria, and soon after an incident at the market in*

*Aki District when I nearly fought a man for no reason, I used saké to numb my senses to cope with a high degree of sensitivity to my surroundings. During the two weeks I was sober after returning, when Maeko was three years old, I didn't speak a single word to her. At the time, I justified it because she was shy around this stranger of a father, who had suddenly appeared in her life after three years. What little I knew about being a father was useless when the nurturing compassion of fatherhood was stripped away by war.*

Turning to the coconut cup one-third full of water, I prioritise my goals as I drink. *Water. Food. Fire.* I focus and return to my earlier plan of boiling water. *Fire.* I collect wood and pull from the coconut husk laid out in the sun for the past three days. I place the dried-coconut-husk tinder in a hand-pressed concave within the sandy soil inside the den and pick the two driest sticks from the pile of collected wood. I rub the two sticks together. *Something like this, I think,* recalling my training. After about an hour, I stop from exhaustion and lie flat on my back regretting the expended energy. The action yields nothing except a weaker, thirstier, and more hopeless self. It has compounded my woes of a degrading mental state. If I can't think myself through this roadblock, any action will be futile. Once I build a fire, my water dilemma will be answered. It will lubricate my mind so I can devise how I will get food. *Fire. Water. Food.* I continue to remind myself while I lie there regaining my strength.

The tender overlay of the morning jungle eases my angst. Rat-a-tat-tat! The thunderous vibration of not-too-distant machine gun fire launches birds, hidden within the trees, from their perch and into the open air. I pop up, grab my rifle, and stand guard. Pop! Boom! Rat-a-tat-tat! The drone of planes joins the commotion. I study their sound. The scent of gunpowder reaches me. *This is it. They are coming for me. Full assault.* My mind sharpened from the adrenaline; I visualise a group of men breaking through the barrier. *I will take out the leader.* I plan. I plot. *No! They will not come charging through. They will hide in the cover of the barrier and shoot at me from there. I'll be trapped inside the den.* I exit and position myself at the edge of the nook, at the front-cliff wall, overlooking any oncoming enemy. *The high ground. Maintain advantage of high ground.* Our battle training much more thorough than our survival training. If any of them make it up the wall, I've lost my dominant



position and will retreat to the den. *Fallback position.* The two slabs will protect me from gunfire coming from the sides. *How about gunfire coming from the front directly through the entrance? The rock I cracked the coconut on is still there. I'll use that for cover. It's big enough. I'll make my last stand there, in the den. Bushido! Regain my honour.* I am a soldier again. My hand trembles.

I lie on my belly behind the rock with my rifle-end resting on top, aimed at the barrier of trees. The booms stop, the planes fly away, then the rat-a-tat stops. Pops linger and gain distance before stopping. I listen for the snapping branches and watch for the movement of swaying branches. *You won't catch me off-guard.* I look over the deep curves of the valley. *Beautiful,* I think, yet corrupted by violent echoes and with that unapologetic grit of soldiers forced upon it. We soldiers accept it as normal, our nature, entitlement for the sake of duty. The ebb and flow of loyalty a constant battle.

I return to the den at dusk, relieved from the fear of an impending assault. My energy spent from high-alert, a hint of who I was before the war returns to me in the lullaby of the nighttime stir. No plane has flown directly overhead today, helping to snuff out my defiant comrades. *All dead.* Perhaps I should have made my last stand with them. A more honourable death. *Honour? Bushido?* The doctrine losing its appeal as war distances itself from me. Our superiors put forth much effort to instill the Bushido Code in us. The idea is now fickle, with my newfound independence. *I must survive.*

I lie daydreaming of home. *Tamiko, her touch. Maeko, her laughter. Shiro, our brotherhood. Water from the creek on the backside of our farm. Food. Yakisoba topped with charred beef strips and the glaze of syrup-like teriyaki sauce poured over.* Yes, food is what I think of now. This is what I really want. In fact, anything cooked. *Fire, Fire, Fire. I'll cook tilapia.*

I drift off, nearly falling asleep. *A slither?* I shiver. *Snake!* I jump up and snag my rifle with bayonet. I aim the blade before lifting the knapsack off the ground. *Nothing.* "Don't lose it, must hold on to my sanity," I tell myself, my tongue and throat aching with dryness. *Water. Fire. Food. Water.* Confused about what's most important. The apple bobs around in my knapsack and I lie the knapsack back down, clutching the rifle with the other hand. I don't remember if I planned to wait this long or just forgot it was there. *How can I forget? I must have planned this. Wait*

*a little longer. Discipline!* Trying to sort it out, my eyes shutter open and close as thoughts of the apple fight with fatigue. I open my eyes, rise to my knees, stand the rifle next to the entrance and remove the apple from the knapsack with eyes fixated on it. *Discipline? I need to eat.* My skin tears along the deepest wrinkle of my chapped, bottom lip as I open wide to bite. The blood colours the apple flesh. I suck up the apple's juice, which escapes down the side of my mouth, then chew and swallow fast finishing the apple in two more large bites. I hold the stem, gnaw on it until soft, then swallow it before sucking the juices tucked away in the corners of my mouth. *My last meal?*

A flickering thought of reuniting with Tamiko and Maeko goes dark. *I'm dead to them anyway.* The camouflage of the jungle seduces me to die here. My free-will has no will, dried up in the drought of the most basics necessities. An empty shell of a man tossing and turning with thoughts of my failures. It is as though returning will only put me on stage, with bright lights glaring at me, whoever I face.

"You," Maeko would say, scolding me, her little finger pointing. "Mean man. You're not my daddy."

I welcome dying in solitude. I lie on my side curled up, looking into the jungle, which possesses everything I need. I find myself unable or unwilling to take that next step.

"Goodnight," I say, with little desire to wake the next morning. *Damn war ruined me.*

#### Day 7 - Rest

*I stand guard, flinching to the gunshots, dark figures appearing in the jungle, moving closer, then disappearing. I lie against the trench wall and am soon surrounded by Filipino villagers.*

*"Japanese! Damn Jap!" they shout, pointing down at me.*

*A catholic priest in his white robe and purple sash parts the crowd and stands at the edge of the trench looking over me.*

*"Water?" he asks.*

*I nod. A villager gives the priest a bucket of water while the other villagers continue to shout.*

*"Kill the Jap!"*

*"Don't help him."*

*"Murderer!"*

*I lick my lips. The priest tosses the water onto me, and I am unable to catch any with my opened mouth as it splashes on my forehead. The villagers stop shouting.*

*I look up, my eyes begging, before my words, "more water please?"*

*"You're not ready," the priest replies.*

*The crowd is silent.*

*"You're free. You're free to go," he says before walking away.*

*The villagers follow the priest.*

*The stir cleared, an old woman wandering the jungle calls out, "Water!"*

*I stick my head out of the trench, licking my dry lips.*

*"Where's my water?" begging for someone to help her.*

*I see a bucket left behind by the priest a few feet away and crawl out on my belly, grab the bucket, and pull it into the trench under cover of darkness.*

*"Water!" the woman calls out again, walking past the trench. I press against the soil wall and hold my breath. Her calls for water fade as she walks away. When I no longer hear her voice, I lift the bucket over my head and tilt it towards me to drink. The moonlight illuminates the inside of the bucket. It is full of snakes. Before I can stop the momentum, the snakes slide onto my face.*

I wake with both arms across my face, breathing heavily, and sapped of spirit. I have no desire to turn my head and look out of the entrance. My world has shrunk to the den. A guilty awareness of my failures as a father, husband, soldier builds. *Let my misery end here. I haven't the strength, the wits, to carry on.* If I survive, there will be no one to welcome me back. *Tamiko? No. Maeko? No.* Only Shiro if he survived the war. I've accepted my demise through the forces of man or the forces of nature though I had originally believed it would be through age. The long-held vision of me dying peacefully on my family farm, lying in the same childhood bed, with the pink cherry blossoms floating onto the bedroom floor, and their sweet scent putting me into a forever sleep, feels as unrealistic as inserting myself into a scene from one of Kajirō Yamamoto's films. Crossroads now limited to these two dire yet simplistic outcomes as my body and mind fail to spur any action.

There's a coolness in the air as fog rolls through the valley easing the

relentless heat. I close my eyes and sleep until the fog burns off, turning to my side when the heat begins to nag. Now facing the entrance, eyes half-closed, I see the blur of a green jungle in the background with my dry, tired eyes. I close my eyes and pay no attention to whether a plane flies by today, resting until the evening coolness arrives. After the grand task of sitting up, I cross my legs and close my eyes to meditate.

“Oooooommm,” I hum from deep within my diaphragm grasping for inspiration and my sanity.

I open my eyes looking and listening as if answers await me. I close my eyes again and take a deep breath.

“Oooooommm,” I hum on my exhale and reminisce.

*Cherry blossoms, soft in colour and touch, floating to the ground like a silk cloth. Mount Fuji, dominating with symmetrical, gradual slopes and vanilla ice-cream-like snow-cap.* The jungle goes into a lull, earlier than usual, while thoughts of my mother playing the koto in conjunction with nocturne rhythms comfort me as a prelude to sleep.

“Play. Play for me mother,” I say softly, my eyes looking over the landscape through the triangle exit of the den. *Kami.*

Not until my eyes flutter to a close do I realise the tight screws of my jaws loosened. *Hai.*

## CHAPTER THREE – YEAR 1

### Day 8

I struggle to open my eyes. *How long have I been asleep?* I lie, foetal and rejuvenated, without any lingering thoughts of my dreams. The last time I remember feeling this refreshed after a good night's sleep was when my parents went out of town for the weekend and I slept in until almost 10am. Prior to this, I never woke later than 8am. Either the high-pitched voice of my mother woke me, or my father would slide off the door open with commands of what he needed done that day.

*Shiro came over early Saturday morning, minutes after my parents left for the weekend to my mother's sister's house in Sapporo because my Aunt Cho had fallen ill. I suspected that since the city was home to Japan's foremost brewery, it was extra incentive for my father to join my mother, and he flirted more with Aunt Cho than he did with my mother.*

*"What should we do today?" I asked Shiro. "The farm is ours for the day."*

*Shiro looked over to my father's Murata rifle mounted on the wall. "Target practice."*

*After a few seconds of me not replying, he looked to the white ceramic bottle of Bimbo Tokkuri sake.*

*"I'm not going to abuse my freedom. I have limits." I interjected. "They may never leave me alone at the house again."*

*Instead, Shiro and I invited over everyone we knew. The nine of us played a 4 vs 4 makeshift game of war using every corner of the property as hiding places with the odd person out the scorekeeper.*

*That first night ever sleeping alone, I wondered whether I should have shot tin cans off the tree stump at the edge of the property or tasted sake for the first time. As my mind seesawed between regret and honour, gazing at the moonlight, from the comfort of my bed, as it accentuated the dark lines of the distant mountain range, my solitude draws me into sleep.*

I'm comfortable in the warmth of the den but clueless as to my next move when I open my eyes wide. Hearing the familiar sounds and looking out to the

familiar landscapes, I'm comforted in my lassitude. *This is where I belong.*

I observe my wiry, near-emaciated frame. My hair hangs over the top of my ears, my beard thickening but not yet thick enough to cover that scar across my cheek from that fateful day that destroyed my family. I run my finger over the smooth surface of the scar where hair never grows. If someone didn't know me before the war, they would think I was in a sword fight with the enemy. And if that someone should ever ask, I would tell them something of the sort.

"What would you do if an enemy soldier charged at you ready to plunge his bayonet into your heart? You either take it in the heart or block the thrusting rifle into another part of your body."

A young boy would have the most interest in such a thing, and this boy follows up with, "you were in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy?" wide-eyed with intrigue, just as I was prone to be as a boy.

But whatever the follow up question, I would jump in before he could ask it.

"Young man," in a scolding tone as the boy readies to roll the next word off his tongue, "stay away from war, any violence," perhaps pointing my finger in his face. "It's not like what you read in books or see in movies."

Although sincere in my convictions about war, there is less shame in misleading someone than confessing it was self-inflicted after that night of my drunken rampage aimed at Tamiko and Maeko.

Mountains dominate the valley, all of them rigid compared to the soft slopes of my mountain. I look up to the peak. *Imagine what I can see from there. The enemy, a river, a village. I would command this area from there. The day will come.* Yet, I find myself confined to the den without food or enough clean water. *Fire. How?* I spend the morning thinking of just that and if I should even try. *How? How? How? And the smoke? It could give away my position.*

I spend the day curled up knowing that the Filipinos hunt for me and any of my comrades with seething anger. *What next?* Capture would mean a brutal death. *Is it true that time heals?* Anger is bound to soften with each passing day. I'll hide in this nook for as long as I can sustain myself or for as long as I can remain hidden.

"I need time," I say to myself while looking out to the jungle.

*Maybe if I wait long enough, Tamiko and Maeko will forget the past too and give me another chance.*

I trust what has become familiar while in the confines of my den, watched over by the old tree in this small haven lush with plants and lively with creatures. Everything else beyond the front-wall of the nook entrapping me here on this small plot of land where I will drown in my regrets. The adjoining standing monuments of rock slabs making up the den give me flashes of a place where my body decays as my final resting place. These pillars of stone are sepulchral-like, signifying my vast failures in life. *Rightly* so, I think.

"I need water!" digging deep into my soul and using the faint hope of reuniting with Tamiko and Maeko as motivation.

"Think, concentrate," pressing my palms against my temples as though I can squeeze out an idea for my next move.

Pop! Pop! Pop! My paranoia takes precedence over my goal for water. The plague of war persists.

At dusk, the scout plane passes. To keep track of the time is useless. A pilot is a soldier of the sky after all and making his flights unpredictable gives him the advantage.

Each tree, bush, insect, snake, bird conspire to suffocate and prevent me from intruding on their way of life in this unspoiled hermitage. I'm a weed to them and out-of-sync with this environment: my uniform and what it stands for, the cold hard steel of my rifle, even my movements and rugged ways are in vulgar contrast.

I build a small fire pit in the centre of the den with a ring of stones, then add to my stockpile of twigs, dry grass, leaves, and wood. *A lot of work if I don't ever start a fire*, I think, while resting on my knee and wiping the sweat off my forehead. I take a larger piece of wood and carve out a divot in the centre, find a stick to fit into the divot and spend the day waiting for the plane to pass. The plane passes over when the sun is at its highest point. I place the tip of the carved stick into the divot and roll the top half between my opened hands, using the sunlight coming through the cleft to further heat the point of friction. I rub until my hands are bright red and near drawing blood as I drip in sweat, far from producing enough heat to create a spark. I lie down and rest.

If this should be my final resting place as an isolato, my foggy mind is ready to surrender to it, but there's a sense of incompleteness that draws me back from the fog of doubt and into the light. Images of Tamiko and Maeko flash into my blank

stare. The rhythm of the jungle plays in the background; a chirp here, a buzz there, and the breeze rattling the leaves--all within their own metered pace. This sparks my lost passion for music which breathes life into me. Rentarō Taki, Nobu Kōda, were my favourites. My perspective is recalibrated from proving my worth to others to self-worth.

At nightfall, my eyes draw heavy, jaws loosen, and heartbeat slows. I crawl over to drink from the coconut cup by pouring it into the pocket of my lower lip, the most assured way to avoid ripping my chapped lips. Using my finger to collect the oily sheath from the side of my nose, I rub it onto my lips to soothe the dryness. I pick at ants that crawl around me without much thought until the squish in my chew reminds me of their mucus-like insides. *I must find some real meat.*

## Day 9

My eyes shoot open.

"I am samurai," I say, popping up to my knees with the day's goal clear.

I must find water today or take my chances and drink from the pond. I look to the sky, "water, please," I plead to it.

I venture further out to the edge of the nook and stand near the cliff-edge that drops into the valley. A foulness of rotting flesh reaches me in the push of air coming up from the valley. Walking along the edge of the cliff while sniffing the air, I follow the scent to the decomposing body of an American soldier. His body is propped up against the front-cliff-wall behind a group of bushes as though the soldier found a final resting spot months before I arrived. The wall, a last obstacle he could not overcome before reaching the safety of the nook. *Not tough enough*, is my initial thought, as I pull my sleeve down to hide the subtle tremble in my right hand.

I climb down and cover my nose from an odour one never gets used to. I inspect the man while breathing in air through my mouth. He has no shoes, no shirt, and makeshift shorts from an old uniform held up by the fraying bamboo string he wears for a belt. Maggots, beetles, and ants are busy in and around his body. On his chest, close to his heart, rests a Bible with both hands draped over it, and spectacles are hooked onto his stiffened fingers. Propped up against a rock is a bolo knife with USAFFE carved onto the grip. I examine it by flipping it to both sides



and running my finger along the blade, gauging the sharpness before sliding it between my thousand-stitch waistband. I look around in case someone watches while checking his pockets, finding they are worn through with holes. I pry his hands away from the Bible. Moisture from his rotting flesh has seeped into the leather cover, staining the first few pages. The Bible opens to a creased page where the man's soiled fingers left behind streaks. I mutter the words "peace" and "earth" before closing the Bible.

"The essence of the Bible is forgiveness and love," my Japanese-American friend Thomas told me.

*I met Thomas a few years before joining the military and he swayed my opinion of Americans because he was more like me than I imagined. He was well-educated and talked about politics, science, literature, psychology, history with me. There were many times I did not understand him; sometimes because he spoke too fast for me and other times because of my ignorance on the topic. He was a Christian and I learned a lot about his religion. He was born in San Francisco, as were his parents, and their parents too; he was more American than a lot of White-Americans. He was twenty-one and lived in Japan for two years after graduating with a degree in literature and minor in psychology from Berkeley. My intellect took a leap following Thomas' influence on me and I viewed the world from a more analytical and academic perspective because of him. He influenced me to go to college. I started at the University of Hiroshima but could not afford to finish. My education was reading more than I ever would in college mostly Japanese books but to expand my English vocabulary I resorted to the Oxford English Dictionary.*

*"Trying to get understand where I came from," he said.*

*He spoke a lot about white people and race with a sense of frustration I couldn't understand. When in Japan you were either a Japanese or a foreigner and didn't exert much energy in pointing out differences beyond caste.*

*He was learning Japanese while in Japan, but we went back and forth between English and Japanese when talking. He already knew some Japanese and I knew some English. I spoke in English, trying to improve my language skills; and he spoke in Japanese, trying to improve his. We helped one another, but it became a back-and-forth game of who's improving more.*

*"Life in America is good," he told me, "If you have a good job."*

*His family owned a supermarket. They were well-off. He said non-whites have more trouble finding a good job.*

*Before leaving for America, he said he'll be in touch. I never received the letter he promised, so I sent a letter to him a year later. I figured he joined the military since he spoke of doing so during our time together to prove his loyalty to America. If he did, he would be what they call a Nisei. Odd to think if he did join the army, how we could have fought in the same place against each other without ever knowing it. Same in every aspect except for our allegiance.*

I place the Bible and spectacles aside, freeing my hands to toss leaves and branches on top of the soldier. The American's failure is to my benefit. If I had found him alive when I first emerged through the barrier into the nook we would have been in a standoff. My rifle versus his bolo. Perhaps a duel of bayonet versus bolo because a gunshot would have tipped-off my pursuers. His failure to climb that wall could mean my survival through all of this. The morning is bright. I hurry back to the den with bolo, spectacles, and Bible.

I test the grip of the bolo by chopping through the air, striking across my body once from the right, then switching hands and striking once from the left. I put on the spectacles after wiping the lenses clean, growing dizzy with my altered vision. I snap them off to avoid falling from a lost equilibrium. I sway and my eyes shutter to regain my balance. Caressing the lines of the engraved writing on the Bible's leather cover, my fingers run along the H, the O, the L, the Y, then drop down reversing direction along the E, the L, the B, the I, the B. *A nice piece of craftsmanship.* I place the Bible next to the bolo, spectacles, and my knapsack.

Half the day passes with my mind jumping from thought to thought in my idleness. I pull out a bullet from the knapsack, pop off the rear of the bullet casing using the edge of my knife, dump out half of the gunpowder into the divot, and place a small pile of the dried threads of coconut husk over it. I then pop out one of the lenses from the spectacles, place it in sunlight coming through the cleft, and angle the magnified light onto the pile of dry grass and gunpowder. I keep the white dot of the magnified sunlight steady. *Do I even need the gunpowder?* A string of smoke rises and seconds later the gunpowder pops and sparks in a bombastic opening act

to the flame. I place dry leaves on the flame. The flame grows and the popping gunpowder projects away some of the dry leaves like a grenade does soldiers. I add more leaves, twigs, and branches. The fire grows large. I top the pile off with a log that releases pieces of burning grass swirling into the air. A cloud of smoke filling the top half of the den seeps out of the cleft. *Am I giving away my position?* The smoke disperses in the air enough by the time it rises above the canopy to curb my concerns, in addition to me accepting the risk for access to clean water. I lie under the cloud of smoke and pop out a thin metal piece on the bottom of my canteen to remove a photo of my Tamiko and Maeko. I place the photo into the creased pages of the Bible.

“You’ll be safe there,” I say, before placing the Bible on the small rock.

I crawl out of the den, fill my canteen with pond water accompanied by the debris on the surface, return to the den, and place the canteen on the crackling fire. When the water boils over and steam blows out of the top like the smokestack of a locomotive, I use my socks as gloves, remove the canteen from the fire, and drop it on one side of the firepit with the heat reaching my hands through the worn-thin socks.

Once cooled, I wrap my mouth around the canteen's opening and drink, pausing to spit out a piece of wood and catch my breath. I sip, spitting out slivers of wood each time, then return to the pond once the canteen is empty. I place the cloth of my shirt over the canteen's opening as I submerge it into the pond to refill. *Learn from my mistakes*, I tell myself. The fabric filters the debris floating on the pond's surface. I boil the water, drink it, then do it all over again to save a batch for later, before extinguishing the fire. I set the canteen aside for the night, snuff out the fire, leaving only a pile of red, hot embers. I scoop up the embers and enclose them in the coconut shells which have dried over the fire, set it at the edge of the fire pit, and further insulate it by covering it with the warm soil and ashes from the firepit.

The transition from afternoon to dusk yields a temporary pause in nature's stir, with the chirp of an eager cricket the sole instrument. Darkness falls, masking my plight as I lose clear sight of what surrounds me until the mysterious nocturnal sounds and popping gunfire remind me where I am. I lie down with the fog of my dehydrated mind clearer, even though my stomach still begs, and my body is lethargic. Thoughts of the dead American lying there cause me to toss and turn.

*Who is this man? Does he have a family that still waits for him?*

## Day 10

*"I am not the enemy,"* a voice says.

I wake. It's morning. I put on my boots and return to the dead American soldier. *American Joe is what I'll call him. Joe*, I think, on approach.

"Hi there, Joe," I say. The white of his eyes is showing through a gap in the layer of debris.

I clear the branches and leaves from his body, then dig a pit about two feet deep, two feet wide, and six feet tall, using the coconut shell and my hands on the soft-soiled downward slope a few metres away from the front-cliff-wall. I roll his body onto the layer of removed branches and drag Joe's body to the hole, leaving behind a trail of maggots. I roll his body into the pit, the flail of his limbs swaying to one side as if reaching towards me.

"Rest well, Joe," I say, before covering him with soil.

I place three large stones on top, masking the churned soil. Standing up stiff and straight, I salute.

"My enemy you may be, but I respect you," I say, relaxing my stance.

Walking back up the slope, I avoid the trail of squirming maggots. *Perfect fish bait*. As hungry as I am, I do not give it any further thought and return to the den knowing they've feasted on human flesh.

*Fish? Coconut? Insects?* I cycle through the option with a clearer mind from rehydration. *Insects*, surprised where my logic leads me. The amount of energy it takes to climb the tree for one coconut, illogical. The amount of energy devising a fishing method, implementing it, and waiting without guarantee that I will catch anything, illogical. It takes less energy to collect the many insects which fly past my face and crawl at my feet. And now having the fire to cook them makes it more tolerable. I focus on beetles. I use a thin stick as a kushi and skewer the beetles over the fire like it was yakitori. The guts that didn't seep out during cooking squirt in my mouth, tasting much like nuts and shrimp. *For the sake of survival*, I tell myself as I eat.

## Day 16

I start a fire in the mornings with the embers I stored within the coconut shell during the night and boil captured beetles. The smoke is unpredictable, with some kinds of wood creating more smoke than others. *What's the difference in the wood? Moisture? Type of tree?* I've used up two more bullets because the embers don't always keep through the night, usually when the sun is blocked by clouds and the air is cooler and moister. At this rate, I'll use all my bullets without taking a single shot. *What a waste.*

I return to the coconut tree, searching for more fallen coconuts. *Where are the rest of the coconuts?* It's unlikely the tree only produced two; the one I picked up off the ground and the one that still hangs. I target the hanging coconut with small rocks, striking it with two consecutive throws. My baseball coach Mr Suzuki is to be thanked for that.

*I played centre field. Although I experimented with every position like most of us during the first month, centre field was perfect for me. Far away from the action and room to roam.*

*"Have confidence. Follow through," he told us during our first week of practice.*

*"Teamwork. All about teamwork. Trust the guy next to you," Mr Suzuki repeated during each practice, which prepared me for the army.*

*Comparatively, Captain Mori would say, "the guy next to you can mean the difference between life and death. Just do your job. Don't forget your training."*

*Shin played left field, Nobu played right. Shiro didn't play because it conflicted with his Judo classes. I would join him in Judo when it wasn't baseball season and encouraged by my ability to submit Shiro when sparring despite he completing more training. We each had our strengths—his, quickness and endurance; mine, balance, and strength. I'd tell him I was also smarter, and he'd respond telling me he's better looking. This one-upmanship was a regular part of our banter.*

*I hope you're ok, my brother.*

The coconut hangs firm. Using a rock the size of a baseball, I cock my arm and throw it up towards the coconut, following through on my release as fingers shoot forward, pointing right at the coconut. The rock, much heavier than a baseball, falls short. I hop onto the tree, hug it, and shimmy my way a metre up

before hopping back off. My arms and legs are red, much like a sunburn topped with the white, flaking skin of scratches. Looking up to the coconut and calculating my options, I pick up the longest stick I can find and throw it up at the coconut as if it is a spear. The stick, too long and lanky, bounces off the side of the tree and reverberates all the way down to the ground, then vibrates as if a toy with batteries was left on. *Useless*, discouraged that a single tree remains a puzzle when there are so many more puzzles to solve if I am to survive. Looking down at my feet, *how about these coconut tree leaves?* I collect them and spread them out on the den floor to keep the sandy soil from finding its way into my body's crevasses during the night, and to act as a buffer from the ground's coldness.

### Weeks

Flies harass me, landing on my face and crawling over my emerging beard. Grabbing my collar, I sniff on it. My odour has lured flies away from my toilet along the rear-cliff-wall near the den. I bathe at the pond and brush my teeth with the residue of charred wood using my finger before washing my clothes and stringing them over the ends of branches inserted into the sandy soil. Spreading a fresh set of coconut fronds for my mattress, I languish moist and naked on their wax-like surface in the coolness.

I wait until soon before dusk to start a fire, with the fading light helping to hide the smoke but not so dark as to give away the glow of flames. Water boiled, I exit the den, plunge my fingers into the decomposing leaves under the large tree, and flip-over the tightly compact layer as if it were a stack of damp washi paper. Beetles, black ants, and centipedes flee for cover. Worms wriggle on the surface with the veins of their exposed burrow-tubes like a piece of abstract art made in the soil. I drop to one knee to collect beetles and place them in the clench of my other hand. I roast them on a kushi, waiting until their insides finish sizzling and oozing out. They cool. I eat. They're crunchier than last time and the nutty shrimp flavour is milder.

"Hai," I say to the improvement.

It's nearly dusk when the crackling of the fire is interrupted by an approaching plane. *The fire!* I reach for the canteen near the fire to douse the flames.

“Shit,” I say, dropping the still-hot canteen.

I toss the sandy soil of the den on top of the fire, then place coconut fronds over that. Smoke still rises. *My clothes!* I reach out, grabbing my exposed hanging clothes; but instead of tossing them aside, I look to the smoking firepit. *Will they burn?* Before throwing my moist shirt and pants on top of the coconut fronds permeating smoke. The wet clothes filter the remaining smoke to a thin fog that rises to the top of the trees just as the plane flies over. *So close*, freezing with my ear turned towards the sky, fixed on the drone until it is silent.

“Don’t come back, don’t come back,” I whisper to myself. Knowing that if the plane were to circle again, it would mean I’d been spotted, mean the end of me. If my mind weren’t sharpened from the boiled water, I would have fumbled around too long in hiding the smoke. *They didn’t see the smoke.* I assure myself with logic after I no longer hear the drone of the plane.

I fill the coconut shell with the few remaining red-hot embers from the smouldering firepit. I take my fingers, blackened from the charred wood, and rub them along the flat surface of the den’s rock-slab wall. Using my smoke-tainted wet shirt, I wipe off the finger markings and pick up a half-burnt stick from the firepit. Pressing and twisting the pointed end against the wall, I mark the wall with a black dot. After six dots, I draw a line through the dots and repeat three times. *23?* I finish by adding two more dots. *What good will it do me?* I write 23 on the wall, looking forward to the morning when I erase it and write 24. This is the first time I notice the stark contrast between humanity and nature—writing, knowledge, ability to think, learn, documenting and sharing our knowledge. That deliberate shape of the ‘2’ and ‘3’ foreign to these surroundings, let alone the understanding behind them.

I revert to my childhood adventures, searching within that encyclopaedia of experiences for solutions. Each new experience I considered an adventure, no matter how big or small. The downside, knowledge is not finite and yet the capacity of my brain is. New knowledge replaced old knowledge, where many things are forgotten. I do remember words from the Oxford English Dictionary given to me by Thomas, which I read over and over again. That, along with my friendship with him, refined my English. Thoughts of my neighbour, Mr Nakajima, surface while sifting through my memories for useful information.

*It was a crisp, cool, sunny day. A blue-sky background showing between the gaps in the branches, I looked up. Shiro and I watched Mr Nakajima pick cherries with a long pole of bamboo sticks tied together, a rake the size of my hand on one end to yank the cherries off their stem, and a basket of equal proportion underneath the rake. I waited for Mr Nakajima to hand one of us the cherry-picker as we awed when a group of cherries popped off their stem and fell into the basket.*

*"Can we try?" I asked when he finally glanced over our way.*

*He handed the cherry picker to Shiro.*

*I should have asked, "Can I try,"*

*Shiro plucked one bunch, then handed the cherry picker to me. I stood close with arms extended and hands open, set to get to plucking all the cherries I could before Mr Nakajima reclaimed the cherry-picker. I counted around thirty-three cherries before the outreach of his arm summoned the return of the cherry-picker to him.*

*It could work, replacing the imagery of cherries with the coconut hanging from the tree. But no bamboo. I peel thin strips of bark from a tree and use them to tie together a series of branches to make a pole long enough to reach the coconut, with the thickest branch at the bottom, and thinnest, lightest branch at the top. The pole is heavy and is lopsided from the uneven curves and unbalanced weight. The contraption reaches the coconut, and I use the pronged ends of two young, sprouting branches to rake over the stem of the coconut. I yank. The prongs snap, and the sudden jolt loosens the linked junctures before the pole collapses.*

*No clear evidence of my workmanship remains from the sprawled-out, broken pieces and with the strips of bark used as ties blending into the ground's debris onto which they've fallen. Not a complete failure, as the coconut dangles looser. I toss a rock at it and miss. I flip another rock in my hand like I'm warming up for a pitch. The coconut sways as if the passing rock has blown air onto it. I cock my arm. Before I can throw, the coconut snaps off and thuds when it hits the ground, locking into its own imprint in the sandy soil.*

*I look to the sky. "Thank you," I say, with my arms outstretched, when I mean to say "finally."*

*Feasting on half the coconut like I did with the first one, I savour every bit of one half and save the second half for later in the day. By spacing consumption of*



the two halves, the natural laxative loosens my bowels but doesn't flush me out like before. *I'm learning*, I think, with a sense of pride.

#

Early morning, I wait until there's enough light to search for food but it's still dark enough to conceal me. I scavenge, stopping to the familiarity of a green, leafy, weed-like plant. I pull on the roots until they're tight, then dig the topsoil off with the other hand and labour to pull out the roots. I dig. I pull. A group of sweet potatoes emerge from the compacted weight of the soil. The purplish hue of their leaves and the dangling, rattan-like roots now visible.

"Ah yes, kamotes." As the Filipinos call them.

This word stands out among the other words in Tagalog.

*A young man approached.*

*"Kamote, po?" he said, holding it out in offering as the Filipinos tended to do despite our hostile presence.*

*I stared at him, making an effort to understand the words even though I understood his action.*

*I thought about the word after hearing it for the first time. Coyote? I asked myself. Maybe bait used to catch coyotes, I thought.*

It sounds ridiculous now that my mind went there.

*"Kamotes, po?" he asked again, raising the sweet potato closer to my face.*

*My attention turned to the cloth underneath the kamote. That, combined with the fact the man's face wasn't familiar to me, made me suspicious it might have been poisoned, the cloth protecting the man from poisoning himself with the synthetic urethane it was dipped in. If I knew he was from the village and not a man coming from outside posing as a regular villager, I would take it because he would have friends and family here that would pay for his treachery. One of the more social kids approached us.*

*"Kuya?" he asked the man, sensing our impasse.*

*The man spoke to the boy in Tagalog. I picked up the word "kamain", which means eat, and "mainit", for which I didn't know the translation.*

*"You eat while it's still hot," the boy said to me in English. The language is part of the regular curriculum in all the schools here. "It's a sweet potato," he told me.*

*“Masarap.”*

*I took the kamote, nodded to the man, and eyed the boy watching me in envy, as I took the kamote back to my comrades. We sliced the kamote in half. Steam rose from the centre, and we shared by scooping out the soft flesh with our fingers. When I looked back up, the boy wasn't in the spot where he handed me the kamote, but I knew he watched from somewhere. It was sweeter and softer than what we call the yamaimo in Japan.*

I lie on my back, hands still gripping the kamotes, which lie across my belly as they rise and fall with my deep breathing. My body runs on fumes, and the starchiness of the potatoes will complement the diet of ants and beetles. If it wasn't rice, my mother would feed me yamaimo. To this day, I cannot understand why we were ever out of rice when we lived on a rice paddy. It happened several times. I do know my father wasn't very good with money and rice was our currency. I guess I do know why, or probably why. But I'll give my father the benefit of the doubt and say it was those seasons of bad harvests that was the culprit.

After catching my breath and when the sunlight leaks over the horizon into the valley, I wash the soiled kamotes in the pond, exposing the purple tint of their skin. The kamotes, hanging as I grip their roots, drip water onto my legs and feet as I walk back to the den. I place a kamote on the rock-table, slice it in half with my knife, then slice it in quarters. The hard flesh crunches at my bite like an apple and the fibrous texture of raw kamote is bland, though milkier than cooked kamote. I eat up one kamote piece by piece throughout the day. It satisfies my taste buds and fills my shrunken belly. It does not suppress my deep craving for meat. *Fish.*

“Right there,” I say, and point over to the pond as though scolding myself for not yet catching any Tilapia. My eyes shift within my head. *Fishing rod? Net? Drain the pond?*

#

For the first time since burying Joe, I climb down the front-cliff-wall and walk towards the valley. There's a pile of mangoes that wasn't there before, which may be left behind by “Fifth Column” spies, Filipinos working with us Japanese. I put my rifle strap over my shoulder, gather as many mangoes as possible, holding them against my body, and walk back up the slope. Rat-a-tat! I drop to the ground letting

go of the mangoes in the process. They roll away. I remove the rifle from my shoulder and look towards the gunshots while on my belly. *Not again*, minutes from securing the sweetness of mangoes. Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat-tat, tat-tat, the vibrations rattling the trees and bushes as if they shiver from the threat. I clench the rifle.

“Shoot him,” says a man with a Filipino accent.

A group of men rampage through the jungle perpendicular to me.

“Shoot the Jap,” an American says.

*Should I run? No. Stay still.*

I take a deep breath, hold, and exhale as if blowing gently on Tamiko’s neck. They seem close enough to hear any slight raking of soil or heavy breath. It is a rag-tag group of Filipino and American men. The men, still wearing their makeshift uniforms as though they are a badge of honour, are USAFFE. *Your friends Joe?* The United States Armed Forces Far East are part of the resistance movement of American soldiers who escaped to the jungle after Japanese occupation. A bitter and efficient group I must avoid, but a welcome alternative to the Huks, who are Filipino communists that joined the fight against the Japanese and are known for their swaying loyalties and extreme brutality. I sink behind the bushes.

*Stay.*

The men pass as I’m ready to release a load of air too large for my lungs.

*Stay.*

The men stop, turn back towards me.

*Stay.*

“This way,” a man says.

My eyes shift with an expectation they’ll spot me at any moment.

*Hold it. Hold.*

The crunch of their footsteps and their voices gain distance.

I exhale.

I jump to my knees and scoop up two of the dropped mangoes before running away. Stumbling, I drop another and keep running. I cut left, then cut right, veering away from the voices now coming from different directions. If there’s a group of idle soldiers, then I may find myself bowling right over them. I sprint through the jungle avoiding entanglement within the bushes and vines as I twist, turn, and slide through the gaps. A body dangles ahead.

*Comrade*, I think, once I'm close enough to see the red patches on his uniform.

He's riddled with gunshots in a cruel game of target practice. It's a scene I wish to avoid but keeping my direction, I run towards him. He is tall. *It's not Tetsu*. I look away, fearing my reaction to the lifeless face of Hansuke. I force myself to look up with my heart dropping into my stomach as I pass in the moment of *this could be Hansuke*. I decipher the blood-smeared, pale face. *It's not Hansuke*. If Tetsu or Hansuke were killed, I hope their deaths were quick. I wouldn't wish hanging and torture on anyone—even my worst enemy. I feel the soldier's eyes follow me as I run past. This sends a chill through my body. *He's dead*, I tell myself and hustle towards my peak, which shows itself high in the distance.

Continuing my sprint and not stopping to catch my breath, I arrive at Joe's grave. Using the stones I placed on top as cover, I aim my rifle into the valley and watch for any of those fanned-out soldiers trailing behind the lead group. The firing machine-gun gives me a gauge on their changing locations and direction of travel. The soldiers circle back this way.

"Banzai!" a fellow Japanese soldier screams.

Pop, pop, rat-a-tat-tat, pop. Silencing my comrade's scream.

*What if that was Tetsu, Hansuke?*

I clench my rifle tight. *Bushido!* Looking to the grave.

*I will die with my friends, with honour.*

I rise to one knee, heart beating fast while I look at my path to charge into the valley to join my comrade.

*I'm not the enemy*, remembering that voice.

*Bushido?*

Honour and doubt pitted against each other create enough idleness to blunt my percolating and ingrained sense of duty. I lie back down on my belly, rifle aimed at the valley.

*What can I do? I'm safe right here.* Climbing the wall back up to the nook will leave me exposed. The soldiers below trample through the valley, hidden under the cover of trees. *I'll wait it out.*

"It's just you and I," I whisper to Joe.

It's near dusk when the swoosh and snapping of branches stop. I climb up the

wall onto the nook, crawl over the jagged rocks into the cover of the barrier. Once inside the den, I drop face-first onto the coconut frond floor. *Safe*, laying on my left cheek and looking at the grey slab in front of me. My breathing calms.

I hunker down within the den, haunted by the face of the dead comrade and the scream of a charging comrade. *It wasn't Tetsu or Hansuke*, I tell myself, to ease any guilt of not joining my comrade in sacrifice. I won't start a fire to boil water for at least three days. The enemy still looks to weed out every last one of us. *We are prey*, concerned a scout finds the dropped mangoes and tracks me back to the nook. It's night when I hear the crunching footsteps of a scout wandering in the valley. Every one of my cautious movements with trembling hands is with the well-trained Filipino scout in mind. Broken branches and footprints are telegraphs to the scout, but with the tread of my boots worn and his comrades trampling nearby, my hope is that my footprints can't be singled out as those of the enemy.

#

My attention turns to the scarcity of food and nature's conspiracy to weed me out after weeks without gunfire or passing planes. The jungle deceives in my expectation for it to provide, doubting whether I can trust or depend on it any more than what lies for me beyond. In the obscuring grey darkness of dusk, the distinct recognition of environment is replaced by outlines and silhouettes yet to register to my memory. These dark, mysterious, ominous shapes remind me of my past.

*I returned to the farm earlier than usual and sat under our tree on the tall-grass island in the centre of the rice field, where the connected raised pathways dividing sections of the rice paddies meet. The tree shadowed me in the remaining light of dusk, and the gaslamp light of our house flickered inside. Shadows stretched and shrunk with movement from within. Hard-edged silhouettes appeared through the thin rice paper doors, but my father was out drinking with his friends at this time. The shadows danced within the house, drawing close, then apart. I heard my mother's voice but not her words, joined by the deep rumble of a man's voice. The two shadows crisscrossed several times. The door slid open as the man prepared to leave. A few soft words were exchanged before he exited. I squinted, thinking it would somehow give me a better vision through the darkness, but didn't recognise the man's tall, slender frame. The man walked away across the field at the rear of the house and I*

*watched him disappear into the darkness, the direction of his departure giving no additional clues. I stayed there under the tree, waiting for my father's return to detract attention from my own. I was afraid I couldn't hide the suspicion on my face from my mother.*

*My father's motorcycle rumbled down the pathway otherwise used for walking. When I entered the house, a flowery scent was in the air casting suspicion on to them both. If I were able to assess the origin of the perfume, it would direct me to the unfaithful one. They each attempted to interact through the awkwardness of the perfume's scent.*

*"Katsu," my mother said, while sliding a bowl over to my father.*

*My father groaned as his way of saying yes, and my mother handed him chopsticks.*

*I slipped into my room, waited, and listened, hoping to catch clues as to who was guilty by their tone and chosen words. In typical fashion, that was the extent of their evening conversation. I avoided returning to the house unexpectedly thereafter when my father was away, and never saw the strange man around again.*

I adapted to the new idea of three separate parts of a distant but once singular family. As I got older, these parts grew more remote and disconnected. Yet, my workload didn't change. Rumours of my father in the company of geishas lingered for years.

*My parents took me to the Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples as a young boy.*

*I wandered, touched what I wasn't supposed to, and talked when I shouldn't. At the shrine, my parents washed their hands and mouth with water from the temizuya before making an offering of money, ringing the bell, praying, and then clapping twice before bowing as we departed. At the temple, they would chant. I saw the shrine as a playground and the temple as a museum, the meaning of them not reaching me until my parents stopped worship, at around the same time as rumours spread of my father's involvement with geishas.*

The man in the house that evening told another side to the story, or at least I thought so. What was consistent was my wavering faith in each of them. I tended to

side with my mother from afar because she took good care of my father while he never provided her the same attention and respect, and she tended to my needs in a sense of motherly duty, minus the affection.

### Months

Failing to catch the tilapia with my hands several times over the months, I stand above the pond with one end of a long stick carved into a spear. I drive the spear into the water at the sight of their dark shapes blurred by the murky water. I wait, locate, thrust the spear again and again. The pond is too deep, too murky, and the fish too quick, so that it becomes like a child's game of stick-torpedo. *Maybe if I enter their world, I'll have a chance.* I jump into the pond, follow the tilapia, and try spearing them while underwater. I chase and stab at them, ducking, diving, shooting through the water. Lazier with each attempt, I go through the motions and my focus is pulled towards other solutions. *A multi-pronged spear? A net? Drain the pond?* I give myself one final push and thrust the spear at the tilapia in frustration. The spear snaps. I leap out of the water.

"Damn fish!" I say, tossing the broken spear aside, the water dripping off me as I stand inglorious and defeated.

*Give me some damn protein.* My jaws clenched, I walk fast back to the den like a pouting child and grab the grenade. Straddling the edge of the pond, eyes peering into the murky water as if the tilapias' intention was to make it personal, I pull the pin from the grenade, toss it in, and run to shield myself behind a tree. The muffled explosion fills the air. Water and debris rain down. I come out from behind the tree to find the pond near emptied of water and two dead tilapias floating in what remains. After collecting and slicing them, I toss their guts into the open out of convenience. *Bait.* Bringing the fish back to the den, I take a savage-like bite of the exposed, raw white meat. The bones and stringy meat are unpleasant. My frustrations under control, I start a fire earlier in the day than usual, spread open the fish by slicing down their middle, hang them on multi-pronged branches over the fire, toss decomposing leaves onto it, and smoke them under the canopy of a layer of coconut fronds stacked in a lean over the entire firepit, making a structure much like those tepees seen in American Western movies. *If I could only remember how my father made Katsuobushi. Fermentation, boiling, a basket,* with no clue how

those play into the process. *Ferment or boil first? What kind of wood? Oak? Does it matter that much?* I boil then smoke the fish through the night, drying much of the moisture from them. This should preserve the fish a bit longer, but without salt to rub on or soak them in, I cannot smoke them properly to preserve the fish long-term. I supplement my meal with the starchiness from half a kamote to dilute some of the protein. *Finally. Proper food. Meat.* My energy boosted but stomach unsettled, I resist eating more fish for at least four hours to avoid a protein-induced, rancid stomach.

*Our farm was a half day's trip to the coast near Kaita Bay, where my father was a weekend fisherman. He took advantage of his friendship with a fisherman named Ichiro. Ichiro lent my father his boat and would sometimes accompany him if I wasn't there. In exchange, my father brought him about five kilos of rice. I rather enjoyed going with him mainly because of the geisha houses that line the streets at Horikawamachi.*

*At the age of five, and after our first day out on the boat together, my father and I walked from the dock to our wagon with our two pail of fish. The thin bamboo string of the wood pail cut into my hand as I stumbled trying to keep the bucket from dragging on the ground and proud to show anyone who might be impressed with our day's catch.*

*"Very good," an old man said, looking down into the pale, then smiling at me as if he should help. I continued lugging the pail down the street, trailing far behind my father.*

*A woman, face painted white and wearing a black kimono, walked out onto the first-floor balcony. The kimono was designed with gold-coloured crashing waves on the bottom half. I saw her before she saw me. Although I didn't understand the role of a geisha until years later, I knew the woman was a real-life representation of the gold-leaf artwork that hung in the sitting room of Shiro's home. She looked at me and smiled. I smiled back, lifting the bucket higher.*

*A year later, carrying the pail and walking close to my father, the same geisha smiled at him. It didn't bother me at first, but when her eyes stayed locked on him, I became jealous. Other geishas looked my way but never smiled at me like she did. That was the last year I saw the geisha. It wasn't until I was ten years old when I*



*learned that the primary motivation behind a geisha's smile was to make money. Each year between the first smile and realising this, I looked up to that first-floor balcony every time I walked down that street.*

*It seemed so easy to fish back then, with those large nets we cast overboard.*

Between meals, I peek out to the other side of the barrier into the valley, concerned about the grenade blast attracting attention. I listen, watch, and monitor the valley. *It wasn't that loud*, trying to calm myself with a rationale that the water muffled the explosion well enough. I gambled. An example of me losing my wits out of desperation. *Was it worth it?* Only if it doesn't give away my location or I don't need the grenade later; a continuing balancing act of risk and reward. I search all day for the other fish or evidence of what was once the fish. I do not account for them all. *Elusive things. Even in death.*

I lie flat on my back in the den with continued solicitude. *Decimated*, I think of the remaining fish and stare at blue sky through the cleft. A white-headed eagle, much like the American Bald Eagle, flies across my view. *Is it a prop from the Americans to warn me? A pet? A trained spy?* Appearing and disappearing as it circles in the sky, I notice its difference from the American Bald Eagle, which has a curved beak that looks more like a parrot's. I stick my head out the entrance to follow the eagle's full flight path. It dives. Reaching the treetops around the pond, the eagle flaps its large wings, slowing itself enough to snag a tilapia hanging from the end of a branch. I rush to grab my rifle while the switching momentum of the eagle from descending to ascending leaves it hanging idle in the air. *A clear shot.* I aim.

*"Isseki ni chou,"* I say, as the saying goes, or one bird and a fish.

But the target is small, and I risk wasting a bullet. The eagle flies away. I climb a tree next to the pond and scan over the treetops for any more fish. There were at least five in the pond. If not destroyed in the blast, they're around here somewhere. I go from tree to tree, climbing each one to get a closer look for any hanging fish.

"Where are you?" I say, puzzled and now convinced their carcasses are somewhere around me.

I search for a floating fish hidden by the layer of debris on the surface of the

remaining water. I'm at a loss after sifting through the debris. *What if?* My determination for answers supersedes my survival objectives. The energy gained from the smoked fish giving me a boost. I enter the remaining water of the pond feeling along with my hands and feet. "Hai," as I feel a fish brush against my foot.

I track the tilapia in the murky, shallow water, grab it, then place this fish back in the pond. I will feast on this one another time in a special sayonara meal to ever eating fish again. I search for another. *Maybe the last fish hides within murky water or has dug itself into the soil. If so, maybe they'll reproduce,* I think, in a spurt of elusive optimism.

6 August 1945

I wake to monkeys calling in the distance. Stepping out of the den, I stretch and look to an unusual orange glow in the sky to the distant north. The glow is concentrated, taking up a small piece of the horizon's otherwise grey and white spectrum with the blue revealed in the sparse gaps of a cloud-filled sky. The clouds press against the atmospheric limits among the contrasting orange glow. It is like a child's artwork of cotton and orange and yellow paint. The raucous monkeys allow me to gauge their location at an adjoining mountain north of me. Playful or frantic, they abandon any discretion to their location. *Monkey meat. I hear it's delectable.* If I am to hunt them down, now is a good time. As I watch the orange glow fade, I work hard to decipher this phenomenon attributing it to a rare shifting cloud within the morning sunlight. The horizon now a uniform spectrum of dull grey and white. The monkeys calm, and I lose them in their silence. *No monkey meat today.*

9 August 1945

The frantic monkeys wake me again. I look north to see a similar bright orange glow. This time the glow is more prominent and further east. *Monkey meat!* I grab my rifle and track the monkeys' location, but as the glow fades out, they calm. Unable to track them, I imitate their cackles. No response. I try again and imagine their heads tilting to this unusual noise. Like humans, they communicate with distinct voices. My voice is equivalent to an American trying to speak in made-up Japanese words.

"What on earth is that?" the monkeys would say, if they could talk.

My calls somehow persuade them to migrate to this mountain. I walk towards them. I stop and call again. They respond, and I smile for the first time. But as I get closer and continue to call out, they migrate further into the jungle, moving away from my calls as if the slight change in tone from excitement altered the meaning of my cackles from “hello” to “monkey meat”. I try again, stretching out my neck and holding the cackles in my throat, as if I gargle salted water to cure a sore throat, before straining to call out loud to them. No response. I climb up the side of the mountain and locate the swaying treetops as they gain distance in a seamless transition from tree to tree. *No monkey meat today.*

### The Rain

After months of torrential rain, I wake to the lull in a break of rainfall with the dense, dark clouds filtering much of the light from the rising sun. The sun lights up the background like it was a lightbulb and the clouds a lampshade. Coconut fronds lay outside the entrance to reduce the amount of mud I track into the den.

The need to stretch my legs and arms swells over me, and I endure the sting of returned rain that blows hard against my skin by the roaring wind. There’s more water than I know what to do with when it was scarce not long ago.

“Yes!” with arms stretched to my sides and face looking upwards. “Come get me,” with the roar muffling my shouts at the sky.

The rain strikes my skin creating a similar sensation to a person’s touch. I stand there, wind gusting, rain slapping against me until the sting covers me in a mild numbness.

“Hai,” releasing my repressed voice to the sensation.

In preparation for the rainy season, I stocked layers of wood along the triangle compartment on each side between the two angled-slabs and the ground. I’m left with little room to manoeuvre except to sit on my rear-end attending to the fire, laying to sleep, and shimmying myself to collect water flowing off the rear-cliff-wall. I dodge the uneven ends of the stacked wood, careful not gouge an eye or poke my sore lower back. Each time my back throbs, I think, *my poor kidneys*. I assume the worse with little margin for error. *Drink more water.* The firepit is between me and the exit. The small-rock-table, which is one-fourth the height and half the width of the entrance, sits in front as a buffer to the wind and rain. The fire flickers in the

wind that blows rain over the rock buffer and through the entrance. I stick the end of coconut fronds into the sandy soil in front of the entrance to shield the firepit. The implanted leaves hold steady and angle over the firepit with the rock edges of the pit holding their hanging ends browning and wilting away inches from the flames, but the fire is protected from the weather.

There's more stacked wood outside the den which I calculated to last through rainy season. I cover them with coconut fronds to keep them dry and leafed branches on top of that to better camouflage the woodpiles from passing planes. The soggiess reaches inside the den, leaving my skin chilled and moist. The fire helps keep me and den somewhat dry, but the amount of moisture overwhelms the effects of the fire. I pace my use of wood, careful that I'm not too frugal the fire dies out on me. I check and recheck, then check again, careful not to be caught off-guard by fickle flames. The flow of water at the rear of the den cascades and collects in a growing puddle. I use the coconut cups to dig a wider opening at the bottom where each slab meets the hard soil of the cliff-wall. The water drains out, reducing the water level collected in the dip scoured out by the previous rainy seasons and the reason why I've chosen to leave the firepit at the front near the entrance even though more exposed to the wind and rain.

### Months of Rain

*It never stops*, I think, as I lie within the chilly, dampness of the den and amid the splash of a million raindrops. There's a saying that one can die from a thousand cuts. I wonder what millions of raindrops will do to me. It is as though I drink from a bottomless cup of water at first quenching my thirst with refreshing, clean water on a hot day then suffocating from the flow that never gives me a chance to catch my breath. As for food, it has found me. The rain brings out prey, whether a soaked bird grounded from its perch by the bombs of raindrops, the stray rat drowned out of its hole, or the snake in its element gliding across the flooded ground. I watch the puddles and flowing water outside the den while waiting for a break in the storm to venture further out. Each season, I'm reminded how persistent the pounding of rain and wind is during rainy season. I wait for the sun now and wait for the rain in summer—epitomising the forces of nature I'm pitted against, powerful and unforgiving for which I have no power over. The never yielding sound of rain and

wind are numbing my eardrums like the constant roar of the sea. *Oh, how I miss that scorching sun.*

#

A python slithers along the wet gloss atop the sandy soil like a sea serpent. I rush out of the den, and the rain pushed by the strong wind feels like the prick of pins. I jump in front of the snake. The python turns to avoid me as I expected. I chase and catch up to step on its tail. The snake swings around attempting to bite me, which I also expected, but the thick-bodied python is not agile enough to reach me in defence while trying to flee. If he were to face me in a dedicated challenge, I would stand-down because this is when the otherwise docile python is dangerous. The snake, too big and strong to hold in place with my foot on his tail, escapes. While he gains momentum to glide away along the flooded ground, I rush back to the den to grab the bolo propped against the entrance and catch up to the snake at the edge of the nook. I cock my arm back. *I am samurai*, as I strike down, cutting into his body. He hisses and attempts swinging around to strike me with his fangs. I jump on the opposite side while pulling the blade out and re-cocking my arm. I aim for the wound from the previous strike.

“Banzai!” I say, fueling my strength as I chop down and cut through his thick, muscular body.

“Hai,” I say, pleased from the proper kill of game, my racing heart replaces my trembling hands.

*This will be a feast. One less snake in the jungle.*

My vision obscured by the rain running down my face, I cut a slit down along its body on the rock-slab table, then grab the two sides of the slits of hanging skin and pull off the skin by yanking on it like if I were pulling off a wet sock. The rain washes the blood off the table. I do the same with the other half. After skinning the two halves, I string the meat along branches stuck in the ground to the side of the fire and leaning over the flames. The snake cooks much like my clothes dry in the sun.

I breathe in the aroma of roasting snake as if it were necessary to satisfy my waiting taste buds. I cut off chunks of meat as it cooks to test its readiness. It’s a cross between fish and chicken, and a big step up from the tilapia. *How can something so vulgar taste so good?* It makes the beetles taste like origami paper. The

python is a gift from nature that should last me a few days, maybe more if I can keep it from spoiling by cooking it over and over to prevent bacteria from overtaking the meat. *I think that will work.* Snake meat should not spoil as easy as the fish.

My theory is anything coming out of the water spoils quick because of the rush of oxygen reaching it, which is in small supply underwater. To be a scientist was one of my many ambitions as reading gave me an appetite to do and learn everything. My third-grade teacher Ms Suzuki told me, "*ni usagi wo ou mono wa ichi usagi wo mo ezu,*" when I said I wanted to be a baseball player after claiming I would be a sumo wrestler and teacher earlier in the school year. I didn't understand the depth of her statement at the time but looking back on my life, it is clear. I agree with her sentiment that trying to do two things at once will make you fail in both. For me, it was many more than just two things or goals. I didn't take steps to focus on one goal until I joined the military. It's the one thing that I gave a singular focus to and why I flourish as a soldier. At the time of fleeing, I achieved the rank of Lance-Corporal. It was my profound comfort in a mind corralled of its many useless ambitions which consolidated my energy.

#

The rain and wind call it quits after giving the jungle a good wash and filling the pond back up with water. *Thank God.* The sun-setting sky returns, and the faint cackles of monkeys are first to awaken the jungle. Mosquitos emerge from the damp soil and create a cloud around me, staying there for the rest of the day. After squeezing every last minute of daylight in my gaze, I scoot myself into position at the centre of the den and cross my legs. A small pile of wood remains. *Success.* Eager to bid farewell to the rain, I step out.

"Welcome back," I say, forgetting the soon-to-become adversarial relentlessness of the sun dipping behind the mountain range.

I slap the mosquitos away throughout the night. Enduring the mosquitos for one night pales in comparison to the torment of the wind and rain I endured for the past four months. Tonight, they're welcomed into my solitary life as the memories of family and friends lose their lustre in-sync with my lost hope in ever seeing any of them again. *Tamiko would hate the rain here.* She always brought an umbrella with her for the smallest chance of rain. My mind clears watching shadows paint the surface of my chamber among the red-orange glow of the smouldering firepit.

A self-devouring stomach pang reminds me that no more time is to be wasted. My cravings move from meat to fruit and nuts that were stripped away from their plants and ruined by wind and rain. I convince myself that danger of a passing plane no longer exists with echoes of war vacating this part of the jungle. I creep out beyond the large tree and towards the edge of the nook, examining each bush and tree along the way. My face crossed as I struggle to remember any of those plants I've passively learned in the years of my childhood adventures. *This looks familiar, that looks familiar*, I think one after another. Youthful curiosity attempts to resurface among a murky memory from a time of reckless experimenting with mysterious textures and tastes in nature.

*Soon after starting primary school and with more freedom, Shiro and I walked to and from the schoolhouse. We bypassed a weed-like plant lured by the appeal of red berries. We tried the berries. If we weren't so repulsed by the taste, we would have eaten more. That saved us. But we did get very sick, so sick we spent time in the hospital where we were forced to throw-up to empty our stomachs. Those appealing doku utsugi berries were not ok to eat and the weed-like hikagehego was ok to eat. Lesson learned.*

I sniff, rub, suckle for any clues in my survey. *Be careful*, as I always tell myself in my encounters with plant life since. My caution with plants outweighs my caution with animals in contrast to the average person. *Does Shiro share my caution after having the same experience of getting sick? I would think so, and I should know.* I sift through my memories for evidence, not caring if I find the answer once I'm lost in the reverie of my childhood.

Standing at the edge of the nook with the front-cliff-wall dropping to the valley, I gaze into the distance seeking clues of a lake or river. The thickness of the jungle hides many of the tell-tale signs. I climb down.

"Are you ok, Joe?" I ask, making sure that the topsoil hasn't washed away in the rain and exposed the body.

I walk down the steep decline into the valley while choosing landmarks along the way to direct me back, only to forget them minutes later. Malnutrition is taking

a toll on my mind and my teeth are loosening.

*My physical decline started while hunkered down with my fellow soldiers with limited supplies.*

*“Supplies will be here soon,” our captain kept telling us, “Have faith.”*

*Faith! If we relied on faith, we’d all be dead. We made great efforts to scavenge for our own food and had more faith in the Filipinos feeding us than we did in our superiors. Here we treated them like animals, yet they kept us alive. It’s easier to say they feared what would happen to them if they let us starve, but I think kindness and generosity is in their nature. I like to think the average Japanese citizen would do the same. I’m forever jarred by the acts of cruelty of my comrades. This is not the Japanese way, I often told myself.*

*We stopped to rest in the city of San Fernando during our long march to the prisoner camp at Capas Train Station, more than sixty miles away in heat that dwarfs what I’ve experienced before and since. The direct assail of the sun magnified by dehydration and the prodding of prisoners to march on. It was a test of everyone’s endurance with no mercy for the prisoners and little mercy given to us soldiers by our superiors. Many prisoners collapsed from exhaustion and were often killed instead of giving them a chance to rise. Seeing such disregard for life again and again numbed my sense of compassion.*

*As we rested in the main street leading into San Fernando from Bataan on the outskirts of the city, we soon realised we were in the heart of the Filipinos version of Geisha Row where all prostitutes lived and provided services for both Filipino men and Japanese soldiers. In Tokyo, Geisha Row was a street where most of the geisha houses were located on the south side of the city. Unlike the bright paint and well-constructed homes and buildings of Geisha Row, the buildings here were one-level wood-shacks lining the street. They combined living quarters for the women at the rear with an open-air restaurant at the front.*

*Although exhausted, my comrades vanished into these building for five to ten minutes one by one. When our battalion commander Major Ueno found some of his soldiers missing, he ordered everyone out of the buildings. My comrades emerged side by side with the women, about fifty in total. All my comrades carried their rifles, but many of them were half-clothed.*



*"Get back in there and get dressed," he demanded of the soldiers not fully dressed.*

*When they returned fully clothed, he ordered the guilty men to step forward.*

*"Turn around and face your woman," he said.*

*The men turn, looking eye to eye with the women there were just in company with.*

*"Raise your rifle."*

*The men raise their rifle, many aiming the nose of the rifle downward towards the ground.*

*"Place the tip of your rifle between the eyes of the women."*

*The men are slow to do so. The cries of the women cascade over the silence as everyone there is frozen in the moment, watching.*

*"Do not take your eyes off these women," he demanded. "What do you see? A frightened woman? Can you feel their fear?"*

*One soldier turns away, trying to look back to Major Ueno.*

*"Don't look away!"*

*The man is quick to set his sight back on the woman before him.*

*"Now pull the fucking trigger," he commands.*

*As if their recent cruelty was a lifetime ago, the men holdback when confronted by the screams of the pleading women before them.*

*"Shoot dammit!"*

*My eyes focused on one woman, tears glistening along the curves of her nose. Her face deformed with what I'm guessing were birth defects of a missing lower jaw and ears made up of holes on the side of her head minus earlobes. I thought of how her life of enduring ridicule has led her to that moment. In these brothels, she'd found the attention of men that was missing most of her life.*

*And before I finished my thought, Bang! Her life snuffed out.*

*"Never neglect your duties," Major Ueno said before walking away.*

*In that moment, 'this is not the Japanese way' resonated strongest.*

I look back to the mountain peak through the spacing of the trees behind me, careful not to lose my bearings. When reaching the dense collection of trees in the lower valley, I lunge forward into the jungle thickness which buries me among the

trees and bushes. My arms and rifle are held high to protect my face from the sharp points of branches. In a relative clearing, vines hang from a tree and collect on the ground around it like a clump of tangled string. *Rope*, should I need some. Plucking a leaf for quick examination, I rely on my instinct and toss it aside. Not at all academic. But there's knowledge buried somewhere in my mind that I hope steers my instincts.

I see a dark image behind the bushes. It breathes like an old, overweight man climbing stairs. I squint. Through the foliage, there's the silvery black hair of a wild pig as it snorts and sniffs the ground. My eyes are wide and my mouth waters as I imagine the golden-crisp skin and clumps of roasted meat clinging to it, all seasoned with the oils of its melted fat. I remove the rifle from my shoulder with bayonet already attached. The pig's heavy breathing is accompanied by snorts as though he gets pleasure from breathing the fresh air; his way of saying, "I found something to nibble on." I approach with a bush shielding me from sight, inching my way closer, watching my steps and careful not to signal the pig with the crunch of leaves or snap of a twig. I reach the bush. The pig sniffs, snorts on the other side. I take my hand off the trigger and wrap the rifle's strap around my wrist, preparing to plunge the bayonet into the pig through a gap within the thinned-leafed branches of the bush. As soon as I see the pig's head emerge in view through the gap, I thrust the blade towards its neck. The rifle snags on the branches and the pig runs off squealing without my blade ever reaching him. I aim at the running pigs. The weight of the bayonet sways my aim at the shrinking figure. Pop! The gunshot echoing as if it is the only sound in the jungle. The pig disappears into the thickets. It's quiet. *Maybe I got him.*

When I break through the thicket wall he ran into, the pig is gone and there's no trace of blood. *Another failure.* My concern turns to the sound of the gunshot. I scan the valley in all directions before turning my attention to where the pig was snorting the ground. A common grass grows near the base of the bushes. *If the pig can eat it, I can.* I nibble on the bland, moist grass before returning to the den. *New food*, I think. It is something I never thought to turn to, believing it lacked any nutritional value. The nook is full of this grass right there at my feet.

#

Today, I walk further into the jungle. Ahead is a large, open clearing with the

sunlight brightening that part of the jungle floor. The charm of birds sparse as I continue to walk towards the clearing. I slow my stride on sight of the first clean-lined structure of a hut. The other huts of the village camouflaged by the overgrowth of foliage with each plot like their own little island in an archipelago of islands as if the once-oppressed trees and bushes planted and cultivated on their land expressing their freedom upon the absence of civilisation and swallowing up the man-made structures. I creep up to some cover at the clearing's edge looking down into the village and listen. No people or animals roam the streets, no chickens cackle, a select number of trees within the clearing are heavy with coconuts and other fruits, and window shutters creak in the breeze. *Where did everyone go?* Shivering to the eeriness. *Wiped out*, I think. I go from hut to hut, trying to salvage what I can, bracing myself to see mutilated bodies. The village is already stripped of anything with value. I find an opened, rusty tin can with its sharp-edged lid bent back but still attached. *Trash to others, useful for me. I will use it to store the embers.* The tin is much like the cold, industrial steel of my rifle—not belonging and in contrast to the jungle. These weathered bamboo huts an intermediary, their material created by the hands of mother nature but constructed by the hands of man.

*On some days, Shiro and I came back from the jungle with burlap sacks of cans and bottles. Albeit it was to make a little money to buy candy or play at the arcade. There was a store down the street from us that all the neighbourhood kids frequented because they imported candy bars from America. My favourite was the thin chocolate bars attached together in four sections with wafer inside. Oh, what I would give for one right now. A hand perhaps. Really! I have two. At the front of the store were arcade games which often took most of our money as we easily lost track of the money we spent. We put coins in the machine to begin and wouldn't think twice before putting more coins in to start the next game. We played until we ran out of money, which was the reason why we bought our candy first and played the arcade games with our remaining money, so we didn't leave the place without satisfying our insatiable adolescent sweet tooth. Pachinko was my favourite game as I watched the small metal balls drop one by one to realise their fate as each zig-zagged over the dark-blue background with artwork of a beady-eyed samurai and exploding*

*fireworks. Recycling cans and bottles was one way we funded all of this.*

In this instance, marooned in the middle of the jungle, the tin could mean my survival. The heat of the firepit will warm the inside of the tin long after the fire is out, and I'll punch holes through the tin so not to extinguish the embers from a lack of oxygen.

*Animal*, seeing movement out of the corner of my eye. A dog, half the size of the pig, runs into the street. It reminds me of Hachikō, an Akita Inu I had in Japan except for two sharp-pointed ears instead of one pointed and one flopped-over ear like Hachikō.

"Come here," I call, clicking with my tongue.

I move closer, slouching over and rubbing the tips of my fingers as if there was something to give. The dog stares at my hand and tilts his heads. His tail wags. I creep my hand back towards my bolo, catching the dog's attention away from my rubbing fingers. He lowers his head and growls. *Friend of food?* My mind jostles between the two before my next move. I draw and swing my bolo in one efficient motion. He leaps backwards, and much like the pig, the dog squeals as I swipe at him. He runs off. *But I love dogs*, I tell myself, bewildered by my action. *Survival*. I convince myself, out from the guilt.

"Come here," I call out, looking for him as though he can sense my apologetic tone.

The dog is nowhere to be seen.

In the centre of the village, along the main street, is a water pump for an old well. The lever is light and loose as I first start pumping, but as I continue, the tension increases. Water trickles out, then brown water flows. I pump until the water clears, and drink, rinse out the tin, then wash my hands and face. As the water runs off my face and blurs my vision, a small man stands at the end of the main street. I rush to wipe the water from my face while snatching up my rifle. When I look back down the road, the man is gone. I pick up the tin and trek back to my den, careful not to lose my bearings, thinking what is to come of the man spotting me. The discomfort of the mosquitos nagging me all day pales in comparison to my worry.

A chilly discomfort wakes me in the middle of the night. I fall back to sleep, then wake again, coughing over the nocturnal sounds, with a throbbing head and a sheen of sweat over my entire body. Falling in and out of sleep with my body weak, my arms and legs sprawl over the sandy soil and my eyes flutter in a struggle to sleep through my discomfort. The nighttime coolness brings me relative comfort. By morning, my canteen is half empty. The prospect of death hits me as I do not possess the strength or wherewithal to boil water. Recognising the dire need for water is the extent of my progress toward ever obtaining some.

I fall in and out of consciousness, unable to suppress my cough from echoing. With much effort, I sip from my canteen at regular intervals until it is empty. The day's heat magnifies the fever to where my sweating body is like a wet rag squeezed of its water. Sickness rots me from the inside out. Slow and steady, it feels like a vice squeezes my body. My vision blurs. The sunlight and colours of the jungle become a piece of smudged artwork within my mind's conscious and unconscious states as if I'd taken a hallucinogenic. *Am I dreaming? Am I awake?*

Magnified with the heightened sensitivity of my hearing, the chirp of a bird is like a whistle in my ear, the leaves rattling in the breeze are like bells tolling, and the buzzing of insects is like the roar of a jet plane. Ghost-like images dance by me or charge at me from all angles. People from my past are there with me. The den walls become the bamboo walls of my childhood home. I've lost all sense of where and when. My wife Tamiko is here with me, preparing a cup of tea and kneeling next to me. She cuddles the teacup against my lips. I sip, feeling her gentle hand guide my head towards the cup. The blur of my eyesight clears for a moment and the vision of Tamiko is replaced by a woman holding my head up and a man standing behind her.

"Mama. Papa," I mumble, with an elated sense of nurturing.

I drink from the coconut cup. The woman smiles at me, a small, dark-skinned man standing behind her near the entrance wearing a loincloth and holding a spear as though it's an extension of his arm. They speak an unrecognisable language, with the man's short-stature evident by his ability to stand inside the den without crouching over.

I'm tickled by breath on my neck and shift my eyes in that direction. *Hachikō?*, brought back to my convoluted reality. *But Hachikō is dead.* Then, once

again grounded in the present by that thought, I recognize the dog as the same dog I saw in the deserted village the other day. He sniffs at me.

Forgiving or forgetful, he licks my face. *Good dog*, I think, wishing I could reciprocate the affection. If it weren't for the presence of the man and woman, maybe he'd bite a chunk off the side of my face.

"You were willing to take a bite out of me," he would say.

Unable to hold my eyes open any longer, I fall asleep.

I wake early, nauseous, feverous, and with a dose of strength. The fire crackles with a collection of small flames at its heart of charred and glowing red logs despite me not tending to it. A cup full of shaved pieces of tree bark sits on the small-rock-table at my feet. *It wasn't a dream*. I'm quick to swivel my head to scan around me, then muster the strength to get up. I sit on my rear-end, grab my rifle, and stay there guarding the entrance. *Someone knows I'm here*, I think, my hands trembling. Scanning for any movement in the nook, my finger holds the trigger so firm that if I had cleaned the rifle of all the dirt and grime, the trigger would collapse from the tension in my hands and a shot would ring out.

After about ten minutes with that spurt of adrenaline gone, my body collapses and I have no qualms about resting in the twisted position where I lie. Extreme weakness has resolved my concern, or at least any action to address it. My heart races, then eases, races, then eases. The spurts of panic unsustainable within a weary body and mind.

I wake at night to the clogged breathing of my own heavy snoring. No fever, head no longer throbbing, chill gone, but my muscles ache in a state of spirit-sucking fatigue. *How long was I asleep?* I remember at least two different moons. The dark faces of the man and woman, the woman's gentle touch, and the man's earthy musk dominate my Delphic consciousness. *People*. I am warmed by the thought. *Kind, gentle people*.

I fall back to sleep and wake with the sun prominent in the sky, the heat mild and the breeze cooling me within the shade of the den. The soreness in my muscles and a dry mouth persist. My strength and spirit return at the slow speed of an uncoiling cherry blossom in March. I reach for my canteen to find it full of water. I drink, and as my lips catch the flowing water, my eyes lock on to a bamboo culm about eight inches long, standing tall on its end, and a banana leaf stuffed into the

other end. "Thank you," I say as if they are there in the den with me. I put down the canteen and pick up the warm bamboo culm, darkened brown from the fire, tilt it sideways, and pull on the edge of the banana leaf. Two banana-leaf bundles slide out. Each is filled with a serving of rice and chicken—a restaurant-like luxury well beyond any imaginable expectation in my situation. I insert one banana leaf-wrap back into the bamboo culm for later but waste no time eating the first. I must have broken a record eating that first wrap, if records were kept on such a trivial thing. *Trivial! Nothing trivial about that much needed and appreciated meal.* As I wash down the last bits of chicken and rice with water from the canteen, I freeze at the sight of a hen passing the entrance of the den; casual, cackling, while picking at the ground with her beak. I squeeze my eyes closed, and rattle my head, before reopening my eyes to confirm I'm not hallucinating.

"Would you look at that," I say.

I glance over to my rifle. It's out of reach. I look back to the hen. Leaning forward on my knees, I prepare to leap and grab it as it clucks in and out of sight outside the entrance. The hen turns to look at me and then continues to cluck and peck at the ground. "Cockle-doodle-do", adds a rooster from the other side of the den wall. *More chickens!* I relax from my planned pounce and exit the den to find a rooster, two hens, and a covered bamboo basket full of chicken feed comprised of a mixture of grains that I would try eating if there weren't a full burlap bag of rice placed along the outer den wall. *I must thank them,* I think, in the guilt of knowing how valuable all of this is. Considering the amount of food left behind, they have no intention of returning.

"Thank you," I say to them, looking towards the village where I believe they live.

I also find the bark and remaining leaves of the dita tree, used for the tea that healed me on the large-rock-slab table. The chickens keep their distance but do not flee. Like most domesticated animals, they stay where there's food. Reflecting back to the man and woman's dark skin and short stature, it dawns on me, *they are Aetas.*

*I was assigned to lead a group to collect more coconuts, "What's out that way?" I asked a villager while pointing towards a dense part of the jungle.*

*"The jungle, po," he told me.*

*"Coconuts?"*

*"Probably coconuts and Aetas, po," he told me.*

*"Aetas?" I asked, assuming he would describe a fruit.*

*"The natives," he said, and pointed to his ten-year-old son, "short as him," refusing to use his son's name in fear of us knowing the boy better, "and black, po," rubbing his finger along the skin of his arm and face.*

*At that point, I recalled what we've been told by our superiors about the Aetas, who they referred to as the "black natives".*

*"They are, for the most part, neutral. Stewards of the jungle, masters of the jungle, blending into the jungle. Use their help when you can," warrant officer Ito said, while giving us an overview of the Philippines before our assault on the island.*

#### Days Later

My first order of business this morning is to wrangle a chicken or two. *Yakitori*. This time with chicken as it's supposed to be. I suspect returning to beetle yakitori will not be so easy after chicken yakitori. The thought is nearly as tantalising as the crisp, roasted pig that never came to be. I focus on the hen most oblivious to my movement, as I approach the group. Even as the other chickens flap away, the hen is slow to react, focused on plucking chicken feed tossed on to the sandy soil. *Is this one stupid?* Despite what looks like an easy catch, my attention turns to the rooster for the reward of a bigger meal.

"You're dinner today," I say, as I move towards the rooster, "come here, mister."

I lick my lips and gulp at the thought as much like the exaggerated reaction of a kyōgen actor. I chase the rooster into the corner against the rear-cliff-wall and den wall. Sensing a fight now that he's trapped, I crouch down with arms extended to keep him from escaping.

"Gotcha," I tell him.

We're face to face. The rooster turns from a mild-mannered domesticated bird into a fierce, defiant one and squawks at me, prepared to gouge my eyes out with his beak. I take a small step back. *It's just a chicken*, stepping forward. I look him dead in the eyes.



"Banzai!" I cry, lunging forward.

The rooster hops high into the air, trying to fly over me. I take a big step back, keeping him between me and the walls. I lunge at him again. Flapping his wings, he attempts to fly over the slanted wall of the den and to the other side. Nearly over the top at the apex of adjoining slabs of rocks, I reach out, grab a leg, and yank him back down. Both his legs secured and wings flapping in attempt to escape my grip, I bring the rooster over to the stone table now serving as an altar for sacrifice. I slit his throat which ends his struggle. *I will not waste anything.* I turn away until I hear his blood drain to a trickle into a halved coconut shell, then to a plop. *It's just a chicken.* But the sight of blood always gets to me. I can stare at a maimed body with a detective's mind of how it got there but become light-headed if that same body drips blood. I hid this weakness from my comrades. "Just like a little girl," they would say.

I remove the rooster's head, pluck the feathers, and gut it. First, I roast the liver and kidneys on a stick before roasting the chicken by inserting a stick down the middle of the carcass and placing it over the fire out of the reach of the flames, turning it a few inches about every fifteen minutes. I stuff a handful of rice into the bamboo culm sealed by a node at one end, add water, seal the open end by stuffing a wet banana leaf into it. *Bananas*, I realise after using the leaf. *Where can I find these bananas?* I place the culm in the firepit, standing it up on one end like I found it a few days ago. Steam seeps through the banana leaf.

"Done," I say, slapping my hands together.

After finishing three-fourths of the chicken and rice, I lie down and stretch with my arms overhead in satisfaction. The stupid hen enters the den feeding on the ants crawling around me. Proper sustenance and the conquest over the rooster casts away self-doubt in my ability to survive for the time being. Catching and feeding a domesticated animal that was provided to me is not a great feat, but the smallest accomplishments bode well for my spirit.

My stomach sinks when I realise my error and slap the heel of my palm against my forehead. I have two hens remaining with no male. *Stupid me*, when I was so quick to judge the hen now feeding and clucking on the ground around my head.

I carve a wooden figurine of Buddha and place it on the rock-slab-table, on top of the banana leaf used to wrap the chicken and rice. *A token of appreciation.* I don't believe the Aetas are religious people besides their profound appreciation for the jungle and perhaps possessing a spiritual or metaphysical component to nature. *It should not offend,* thinking in the absence of any organised religion that may lead them to think so. They'll see a happy fat man, that's all. When the day comes, I meet the couple, I'll explain his greatness. I will tell them about Kami too. It is said Kami is everywhere and in everything. It is probably closest to what they believe. I'm not a religious man, but religion doesn't frighten me away. Truth is what I seek, and there's only one truth. I will decide that myself under guidance of the universe or God and not let another flawed man or women dictate what is true and what is not. I can also learn from the Aetas about what they believe to broaden my horizons.

#

I expect to see the Aeta couple lurking in the bushes or to wake to a fresh supply of goods. *Where are those bananas attached to those banana leaves? Roasted bananas, banana chips,* daydreaming to the sweetness. *Where are my new friends?*

One month passes. Aetas consider themselves a part of the jungle and not the civilisation with ancestors here long before names like Bataan or Philippines were assigned to their land. I do not fear them or question their intentions, only that word will spread with a single careless mention of my presence. I'm relying on their discretion. My life depends on it. *Why wouldn't they return to check on me?* The figurine remains in the same spot, starting to weather and crack from the sun. *Trouble,* my instinct tells me. I gather my gear and climb onto a small open ridge that looks down into the nook and spend most nights there, only returning to the nook when I need to boil more water, feed on grass and insects found around the ridge, and take along any kamotes I find.

The tin has kept the embers well, carrying it with me and blowing on it a few times a day to get the dying embers to glow bright. I expect the Aetas to emerge through the barrier of trees and will defer to that possibility rather than the emergence of a Filipino scout unless I spot a rifle in hand. *Spear or rifle?* I repeat this in my head all day, every day for three weeks of heightened caution before returning to live in the den, driven more by reaching the limit of eating uncooked insects than by any decline in paranoia. *Someone will emerge,* ready to accept either

fate.

#

A thin smoky fog spreads through the lowest part of the valley. The smoke and the desire to see my friends prompt me to venture out beyond the barrier and seek the couple out. I venture during the day and return at night for three consecutive days focusing on the area around the abandoned village where I first saw the Aeta man and his dog. I'm tempted to give them all names. *Who am I to name them?* I'm also afraid that I will get so used to those names I wouldn't call them by their real ones if I met them. *When*, prying for optimism. *When I do meet them.*

On the third day, I walk well beyond the village, where I find a charred plot of land with the remains of a smouldering hut. I am searching for anything I can salvage when I'm overcome with an intense chill upon finding two charred bodies covered by debris. *Is it them?* My heart feels like it stops as I await the answer. I clear the debris off the bodies. Although the bodies are burnt beyond recognition, I find the iron tip of the Aeta man's spear next to the bodies. My legs give way and I drop to my knees, *the HUKS did this*, I think, while clenching the spearhead and holding it over my heart.

"Arigatou," I say, bowing my head.

I create one burial for the couple and stack three large rocks in a triangle for a headstone. I carve the word "Tenshi" on the top rock before returning to the den and hammering the spearhead into the large, old tree to serve as a cenotaph.

I toss and turn all night, staying perched on the ridge above the den. *Damn Huks*. The neutrality of the Aetas will be tested after the murder of two of their own. I hope these masters of the jungle seek revenge. I do.

"I will find justice for you, my friends," I say looking to the trees around me, anger building like the steam within my canteen placed over the fire.

### A Week Later

*Uncorrupted hearts*, thinking about the Aetas and how war jaded the rest of us. My anger now turns to hate, outgrowing my fear of the HUKS. If they should find me, capture will not be an option and bushido will be in full practice. Not for my country but for my friends. I seethe for revenge.

“Enough innocent lives!” I say, flushing out my inhibitions.

A disdain for war grows. I finish my supply of rice without trying to grow more before turning to the remaining chicken feed. I’m ready for a confrontation to defend the honour of the Aetas, the jungle. *Let the HUKS find me.*

#

A rainbow streaks across the valley from the mist of a passing cloud. I study the colours, matching the different hues within the landscape with many unique colours within the scope of my sight. In this brief time of viewing the rainbow, I’m enlightened to the beauty of light in the prismatic display and dwell on the importance of water in the coolness of mist. I find the timing impeccable, as it appears to be coordinated to help me find some solace in my grief, with the koto playing in my head for the remainder of the day but stopping when worries return to my thoughts. With contentment, I set fresh ears and eyes on the jungle--the howling and cackles of monkeys wild at play in the distance, the exotic birds with their own unusual song and dance, the sweetness replacing all rankness in the air, and the warm sandy soil between my toes. *Kami*, sensing it here and now as though guiding me to the truth. The idea of dying here alone a more peaceful prospect than the idea of dying at the hands of others.

I stand on the ledge above Joe.

"Hi, my friend," I say, looking down at the gravesite, contemplating the same possible fate.

The jungle is an adversary I choose to face instead of civilisation. It is a more familiar foe thanks to an adventurous childhood. I sought solace in nature then, and I do so now, as my mind migrates further from war and memories of loved ones. *My past is my past. It does not help me. I must learn to provide for myself.* I think to the future. The young, mysterious Filipino girl revisits me in my dreams.

## CHAPTER FOUR – YEARS 2 AND 3

I lie flat on my back with a beard. The bars of my ribs press well-defined against the skin and rise above the concave of my belly. My thin skin fails to conceal the underlying bone of my forearm. *I need more protein.* According to my markings on the wall, it's over two years in the nook. I survive on mostly insects, the occasional kamote, grass, new batches of coconuts growing on the tree every few months and then eventually falling to the ground or rotting up there in the tree. One of my best finds so far is a cashew tree. I pluck a handful of the yellow cashew apple, return to the den, remove the cashew shell from the apple, burn the shell over the fire, then crack open the shell removing the cashew nut. I eat the roasted cashews then suck the juice from the mango-like flesh of the fruit, which tastes like a combination of cashew and mango. But it is the protein from the nuts that's most beneficial to me. I enjoy two cashew apples and save the rest for the next few days. All this is provided within a small range, foraging in a radius from the base of the nook. My area of free-range expands from the safety of the nook, but I remain on heightened guard since finding the Aetas' charred bodies almost a year ago—my unsettled nerves urging me towards revenge despite the passing of time softening my anger. Little do the HUKS know that this lone soldier they seek as if I were a wounded wild animal is ready for them; to fight for the honour of my friends. *Justice.* Their assumption that I will flee gives me the advantage when I charge at them, but I will not give up my haven to find them.

“Come find me,” I say, slapping my fist against my chest.

I lie. My heart beats fast. Chirping crickets draw my attention. The cool night's breeze blows over me. *I'm safe here.* My heartbeat slows.

*“Kaiyo,” the Aeta woman calls out.*

*I swing the bolo, slicing through a corn stalk, then look her way. She stands at the entrance of their hut.*

*“Come eat. We're waiting for you?”*

*I throw the stalk in my left hand onto the ground and spear the bolo in my right into the soil before walking over. When I enter, the couple are not there.*

*“Hello?” I call out to them.*

*An unwrapped banana leaf of streaming rice and chicken rests on a small table.*

*"Hello?" I call out again, before kneeling next to the table.*

*I eat, finishing the rice and swallowing the chicken meat and bones.*

*"Thank you," I call out.*

*I wait, and listen for someone to respond or enter the hut. The movement of shadows prepares me for the Aetas to enter, and I turn to face the entrance while remaining on my knees.*

*A man enters with a red bandana around his forehead.*

*"Let's talk," he says, waving me to follow him outside.*

*I rise from my knees and exit the hut. The man stands next to the gravesites of the Aetas.*

*"This is your fault," he tells me.*

*Angered, I yell, "You killed them."*

*"If you took good care of yourself, they'd still be alive."*

*I run over to the bolo sticking out of the ground and charge at the man. He stands there, waits for me, and I swing the bolo, chopping him down like he was another corn stalk.*

*The man, covered in blood, looks up to me, "Are you happy? Do you feel better?"*

*I drop the bolo onto the ground.*

*"Is that justice for you?"*

*I stare at my bloody hands.*

*I wake, lie still, then raise my dirt-brown, calloused hands before my face.*

*I need more food. My body evidence of the incremental decline while I exert more energy in my daily labours than I take in. Where are the mangoes? Where are the bananas? Where is the meat? Any meat. That's what I crave, that's what I need. Meat! The rustle of bushes in the breeze brings a flash of hope that it's another wild pig that sniffs and snorts behind them. If anything, it's the occasional snake or small rodent I find in trees or burrowed in the ground that provides a reward.*

*Of all the insects, it's the crickets that I'm fond of. Cooked with a squirt of calamansi juice. They are not plentiful, but I collect them from a patch of drying grass here in the nook. I'm always on the lookout for a larger parcel of grass in the*

jungle. The occasional small patch here and there makes them a delicacy. I continue to eat beetles and ants for sustenance with the calamansi not doing much to persuade me to accept them as a welcome part of my diet. *At least they're cooked.* Calamansi with salt would explode my taste buds. And if I had salt, I could smoke or cure meat should I finally catch something of significance. I must consume meat within a few days if I do nothing to preserve it. I roast any rodent whole after skinning and cleaning out their insides, the meat only enough for a single sitting. The cobra lasts two days at the most after roasting. I roast one-third of the python meat before boiling the rest as a stew, which extends its life by another day or two up to a total of five days. In two years, it's been six mice, two rats, three cobras, and another python. I could ration an adult python for months if I were able to preserve it with salt. *Am I in Bataan? It rests on the shores of the Philippines Sea after all.* With no sight of sea-blue west or south, I will have to steal some if I get the chance. *No. Borrow some.* I use what I collect; eating the fruit of the cashew and reusing the shells of the coconuts, cutting from all the rising blades of edible grass within the nook but leaving enough for them to quickly grow back, and eating the calamansi whole after squeezing the juice over my crickets. I also eat the skin, leaves, and roots of the kamote. The jungle holds all one needs, but I have yet to find and exploit the full scope of its resources.

I find another patch of dry grass. Crickets hop around in a frenzy as if I were looking down on the streets of Tokyo. I place the canteen in the centre of the plot of grass with a small amount of water left inside. Returning the next day, the canteen is full of crickets who crawled in for a drink but couldn't find their way back out. A childhood trick Shiro and I used with clear glass bottles.

*We thought we were geniuses and could make millions selling a cricket trap to the world.*

*"Mr Kenji, the glassmaker. He can make custom bottles for us," Shiro proposed.*

*"Why don't we just recycle old bottles?"*

*"Then people will just copy us. We don't want to let people know that a regular bottle works. We want them to think that only our bottle works. That our bottle is special, magic."*

*"Put a label on it. Magic Cricket Bottle. That's what we'll call it," I responded as*

*if I was responsible for the whole idea.*

*"We'll travel the world. New York first. Then Hollywood," Shiro said.*

I boil crickets within the enclosure of an empty coconut shell before frying them on a thin, flat stone set on top of the fire. The rock drops further and further into the fire as the wood burns and collapses underneath. If I didn't boil them first, they'd just crawl away and drop off the side of the stone into the fire, unless I twist their heads off one by one. The downside is they become less crunchy after soaking up additional moisture during the boil. Using a decaying, frequently reused banana leaf as a glove, I lift the hot stone, set it on the ground, and squeeze calamansi juice over the crickets as they sizzle. I'm quick to drop the hot stone on the soil outside the firepit as the heat reaches my hands. *Where's that banana tree? Bananas, banana leaves. I will even eat the skin. Why not?* Unlike the coconut fronds, banana leaves have no gaps in their leaf. It's like coconut fronds are stitched fabric and banana leaves are leather. They make a good wrap for food, my hands, and the Bible. I turn my attention back to the crunchy tartness of the crickets, picking out every little piece of cricket caught between my teeth with my tongue and finger then sucking on the pieces collected by my tongue.

The light of a full moon seeps through the cleft. I lie there as my stomach gurgles and moans with the taste of crickets and calamansi remaining on my tongue. Mosquitos disturb my evening languish of a digesting meal which delays my sleep. I swat at them, hoping to crush the pests between my hand and face, slapping an empty hand against my face more often than catching one of them. *I look foolish. Good thing no one is watching. They would think I'm delusional. That I've lost my mind, swatting the empty air.* I slap away.

#

I cling to the reverie of family and friends which threatens to slip from my grip. *The laughter of Maeko in the next room as her mother reads to her, Tamiko stroking my stubbled chin as she comforts me in bed the first night after returning from Manchuria, the jab of Shiro to my shoulder after first finding out Tamiko liked me back.* These memories are like momentary gasps for hope, like fighting to the surface for a breath of air before I'm dragged down again by memories of those souls lost in war or forever corrupted by it. I will die here, alone, my impending death



inconsequential to others beyond the sense of justice for my part in all of it. I was dead to Tamiko and Maeko long before this. But my past does fuel me. Regrets nag. *What should I have done differently with my life? Will Maeko ever forgive me?* Whether or not I see her again. But it's war that plagues me most right now. *How can I put that behind me and move on? Pop! Bang! Boom! Pop! Pop! Pop!* The routine and familiarity with my surroundings taking some of the load off the haunting sounds and images. When my tasks come to an end, the screams of innocent victims provoke my guilt. *I stood by. I did nothing.* I try to stop myself from reliving the details to cope. *Tamiko. Maeko. Tamiko. Maeko.* But I cannot deny my mind revisiting those screams and terrified faces in war. I'm distant from it but no longer numb to it. It is like the bastion of solitude has awoken a dormant part of my soul that war put to sleep. The prospect of death forces a more honest examination of self. *What has my life become? What have I become?* War will end if it hasn't already, but the accountability of my actions or inactions will never end. *Is that the real me?* My place in the world as a soldier, a son, a father is in question. I cast away all these titles as self-doubt rots my mind like malaria did my body.

My uniform ripped, worn thin, hanging from my body like drying moss hanging from the tips of branches, and my boots falling apart with the leather detaching from the uneven wear of the rubber soles. I toss the boots aside. After taking off my clothes, I cut the fabric into long swathes of cloth, save the military patch, tie the cloth together into one long piece, and wrap it around my torso as a loincloth just like the Aeta man wore. My feet hardened with blisters that have turned into calluses. My bare feet more comfortable than the unstable footing the tattered boots provided, I walk the trails with ease, yet to figure out the full extent of what is to be earned from it in this newfound kinship. *I am Aeta*, able to cast away all other titles.

#

The monkeys cackle. *Monkey meat.* I climb down the cliff, make my way in the direction of the monkeys and using their cackles to guide me until I see blotches of their brown and black fur among the treetops. When I'm close enough to see the grey of their fur on the macaques' underbelly, they quieten and look over to me. I stop and swing the rifle-strap over my shoulder, so the rifle is hidden behind me. They carry on. I near a young macaque who has strayed far from the group and

moves along the branches naïve to me watching her. I click my tongue. She flinches and looks over to me, then carries on crawling along the branch. The other macaques' cackle loud. I stop my approach. This does nothing to ease the tension. It's as though I crossed a territorial line a few steps earlier. *This may be my chance.* I remove the rifle from my shoulder. Their cackles intensify to screams. *Shoot now?* But I take steps backwards until they calm, removing myself from taking a clear shot, and sit at the edge of their playground. The young macaques are drawn away from their fixation on me. They play again, swinging from and climbing on paths along the branches. *Have fun.* I watch the pod of macaques interact and play all day without the thought of raising my rifle. *What games does Maeko like? I should know.*

*Does she like art?*

*After returning from Manchuria, Tamiko and Maeko waited for me outside the base. They smiled as I approached. With thoughts of Manchuria dominant on my mind, it was hard for me to smile back until Maeko handed me a piece of paper that read "Welcome Home." Tamiko had written the words surrounded by the streaks of colour from crayons drawn by Maeko.*

*Pushing hard for the words to come out, I asked, "did you draw that?" as I point to the artwork.*

*She nods.*

*Later that day, Maeko played a small wooden flute that came as part of the same toy kit the crayons came from. I laid in bed listening to the unique harmony of each note until I fell asleep. I dreamt of a large, dark room with her music echoing over mumbling voices.*

*Does she like music?*

### Months Later

The playful sounds of macaques in the nook wake me. Exiting the den, they're jolted by my approach as they all look over to me, preparing to flee. I kneel, observe. The little ones jump onto and slide off the wide base of the tree in failed attempts to climb it. The alpha climbs by hugging the tree, hanging from his hands, and leveraging his feet while leaning back. *So that's how it's done.*

*"You make it look so easy," I say, talking softly to myself.*

Reaching the batch of coconuts, he pulls one off its stem.

The male climbs to the very top, sits there in a nest-like perch, and yanks at the thick fibrous outer layer of the coconut using his jaws and hands. *Should I scare them away? These are my coconuts.*

"Go," I say, clapping my hands to startle them.

The pod scatters, leaving the large male atop the tree alone. I lead them away from the nook. When they stop to look back at me, I clap my hands again to urge them along as if they are a heard of goats. Stopping at the site where they were yesterday, I'm careful not to infringe on what I concede is their territory. An adult female corrals the younger ones while the older males sit along the outer edges of the pod. They all play, groom one another, observe me, and turn towards any rustle, snap, or buzz which gets their attention. The alpha rejoins the pod after finishing the coconut in privacy. *You're welcome*, looking at his smug face. I stay in their company until late afternoon and create little distraction with my departure when I sneak back to the den before sunset, finding the cleaned-out coconut shell near the base of the tree.

Before I lie down for the night, I hop onto the tree, grab onto it with my calloused hands wrapped around the back, lean back for leverage, and with the flats of my feet gripping each side of the tree, I shuffle myself up it just like the macaque did. Unable to bear my weight with my arms any longer, I hop off. *The rattan vines.* Eager to try and with enough sunlight remaining, I make the trek to collect from those hanging rattan vines found over a year ago. I choose a vine thick enough to hold my body weight but not so thick as to make it difficult to bend. I cut a three feet long piece that is wrapped around a tree.

When I return to the coconut tree, dusk has set in. *I waited long enough to conquer this tree.* Wrapping the vine around my torso and the tree using a single loop and leaning back onto the vine which replaces my arms to carry most of my weight, I climb by balance with my feet and pressing with my legs, then shimmying the vine up the tree little by little. After reaching the top, breathless and leg muscles burning, I chop the coconuts off their stem, and they thud onto the ground in a single bunch. The darkness mutes my excitement without clear sight of the coconuts that await me on the ground. *Finally.* I store my harvest inside the den and will ration them out over the coming weeks. It is not until morning that I look

closely at their green shells which look like the skin of an apple but are hard as a piece of wood. They will provide plenty of milk but less of the tasty white flesh. I will wait until they are brown for the next harvest to feast on the copra.

#

A rustle among the fallen leaves wakes me. My eyes shoot open, and pupils adjust as though I've emerged from water. I wait for my vision to clear. My view is onto the smooth surface of the slanted-rock-slab-wall in front of me, with sand embedded into its dark grey composite, sparkling in the warm, mild morning light which is seeping in. I listen. My senses tuned sharp and with a slight tilt of my head, I position my ear toward the exit.

I gauge the proximity of the sound, calibrating the planned angle of sight, before shooting my head sideways to peer out. My eyes fixate on a blurred overview of the jungle and adjust to the new depth-of-field. Within this perceptual canvas, the rustling sound draws my attention to the centre of a bed of leaves collected on the ground. A bayawak pops its head out above the dry-fluffed leaves like the scope of a submarine. I inch my way to one knee, then two, while at the same time reaching for my rifle. I open the chamber of the rifle to confirm it's loaded, close it, then raise the rifle aiming it towards movement under the leaves where the lizard has buried his head again. The pop of unlocking the safety on the rifle causes him to shoot out from the bed of leaves to reveal his stout front legs slightly turned in towards each other as though pigeon-toed. With head held high in alertness and tongue licking the air, the bayawak's shimmies left, then right, then left again. It scurries to a nearby tree, its claws crackling against the bark as it climbs.

The lizard now sits perched on a low branch, head darting left to right, sensing my presence with his tongue. I keep my eyes set on him as I reach down to my knapsack and glance at the remaining bullets before peering back up and locking eyes onto the bayawak. I set the rifle on the ground and remove the bolo dangling under my left armpit from a holder I made of leather from my tattered boots and a rattan vine strap. I crawl out of the den on all fours. The lizard shoots a few inches further up the branch before pausing again. I lift myself up to one knee then slowly rise to my feet and tiptoe towards him. The bayawak scurriess along the branch another few feet. I pause, he pauses.

I sneak across the dry soil in long gentle strides, avoiding the crunch of

scattered leaves. Recognising that the lizard's only escape route is to come back down the way he went up, I sprint across the crunching leaves to the base of the tree. His escape route is sealed and my intent no longer a mystery. The bayawak jets to the end of the branch. I'm drawn that way by instinct as it's become a face-off of wits, but this move brings me a few steps further away from the base of the tree. He zips back down the branch and then down the tree. I jump toward him and take a swipe at the lizard with the bolo as he runs down the tree. He avoids the strike by leaping off. The blade chops into the tree. The bayawak glides along the ground with a stiff upper body, legs churning under the layer of leaves, giving the illusion he's floating. He runs down the slight slope of the nook into a maze of rocks which are part of the front-cliff-wall. *Outwitted!* I grunt and throw the bolo at the nearest tree in a fit. The bolo clangs and bounces off the tree, falling and burying itself in the leaves.

"So close," I say, clinching each hand before me and looking at them disappointed that they're empty. *Meat.* I leave my bolo behind, pouting my way back to the den. *Damn reptile.*

*I was nearly four years old when I went frog fishing for the first time. It was only the night before I decided to do it, after hearing them croak louder than ever.*

*"It's a good time to catch frogs," I said to myself, while lying in bed.*

*I woke in the morning darkness as the frogs still croaked. I took out a fishing line, hook, and bright pink lure shaped like a tadpole from my father's tackle box. The fallen cherry blossom leaves glowed in the moonlight directing me to the edge of the raised pathway where the tree stood. Near the pathway was an irrigation canal with stagnant water yet to be released into the rice paddies. I focused on a stretch of water glistening in the moonlight. After rigging up the fishing line, I dropped the lure into the canal and sat against the cherry blossom tree while I waited. It wasn't more than ten seconds after sitting down that I felt a tug on the line, which would have pulled it away from my grip and made it disappear into the darkness if I hadn't wrapped it around one of my fingers as my father taught me to do when fishing for mackerel. I drew in the line, much like pulling a small boat by its rope onto shore. As I hoisted the frog out of the water and over the embankment his legs flailed as if climbing air while he swayed side to side on the line. When close enough, I grabbed the frog around his*

*belly to unhook him and place him in a burlap sack. Each time I cast the line back in, a frog took the bait as quickly as the first time. I stopped at nine and brought home the burlap sack full of frogs.*

*"A gift for you, mama," I said, holding up the sack of jostling frogs.*

*My mother took a step back and said, "Is that a snake?"*

*"Frogs, mama."*

*She smiled and took a step closer to me to grab the bag. Whether it was the sense of providing for the family or my mother's smile, I did the same in the years that followed until I met Tamiko.*

Nature isn't that kind to me here.

#

Mosquitos are more active this season. Maybe they multiplied over the years, drawn by my established presence. They nag and poke at every surface of my exposed skin, and hover around my face. Their buzzes echo in my ear like the drone of tiny airplanes with my earlobe the canyon over which they fly. I slap, blow, shake my way through the constant haze of these pestering insects swarming in a sheath around me. I use a coconut frond to swat them away, cutting through the haze before the mosquitos regather and once again swarm. Swatting harder with the frond, it folds-over from the air's resistance. The pests adjust, jockey with each move I make. I stir the flames in the firepit, scoop up dry leaves with both hands, and drop the leaves on top of the fire. The smoke thin, the mosquitoes still pester. I scoop up moist leaves weighing heavy against the ground and add them to the fire. The haze of mosquitoes thins and is replaced by the thick haze of the smoke. I cover my face as the smoke vents out the den and up above the treetops, making my presence in the jungle less discreet. The smoke permeates into my dwelling, masking the smell of my sweat and breath. I cough, tolerating the smoke until there's no more streaking specs or buzzing around me. I wait, breathing in the air lower to the ground and hoping they forget about me before smothering the flames with sand. Only a small group of mosquitos pester me late at night when I'm deep in sleep. Although smoking out the mosquitoes is not a permanent solution, this provides relief but leaves my throat scratchy as if I inhaled from an unfiltered cigarette. *There must be a better solution. Surrender?*

*Aside from her father, mosquitos kept Tamiko cooped up in her home.*

*"Is it my blood type?" she asked.*

*"What is your blood type?"*

*"How would I know?"*

*"I think it's more odour than blood type. Maybe it's the perfume you wear."*

*"You mean my Soir de Paris that I rarely wear? I thought you liked it."*

*"I do but maybe the mosquitos do too."*

*She stopped using the perfume for three months to no avail.*

*"Maybe it is your blood type," I said to annoy her.*

#

Collecting more coconut fronds to use in and around the den, I find a beetle among them. It's the largest beetle I've seen here, adorned with a rhinoceros-like snout and reddish-brown hair on her back. I bring the beetle and fronds to the den. I tie a string, made from the thread of my fraying clothes, to the centre of the beetle's body to keep her from escaping. She waddles around the den spreading her wings as if contemplating flying away then pulls them in. I watch her explore the confines of the den with the end of the string wrapped around my finger.

"Come on, let me see you fly, my friend," wishing to see the spectacle of her large, clunky body float in the air.

I poke, urging her to fly. She regains her balance, crawls over the coconut-tree-frond-covered floor of the den, then rests between the layers. I tug the string, pulling her closer to the edge of the frond she hides under. She crawls deeper into the pile of stacked fronds. I lie and wait, hoping she will emerge on her own. She is idle under the cover as though taking an afternoon nap. I close my eyes, string still wrapped around my finger, and let my mind wander, curious about what else hides among these fronds. My skin itches while I imagine something else crawling or squirming onto me. Turning towards her without opening my eyes, I take a short nap while I wait for her.

When I wake, she remains hidden. I pull on her, one small tug after another, until she is out from under the fronds. Finding herself in the open, she begins moving again as if I woke her from a deep sleep. She crawls towards me. I pull her up off the ground with the string.

"Fly," I say, bouncing her up and down in the air like a yoyo.

She dangles, feet still moving as though she's forgotten how to fly.

"Are you OK?" I ask, picking the beetle up to examine her for injuries.

I toss her up in the air while holding the end of the string. She flies. The string extends, and the tension tightens as she pulls away then hovers when there is no more give in the string. I pull it like the reins of a horse and lead her as she flies in circles around me. After a few minutes, entertained by it all, I reign her in closer with each circle and snatch her out of the air. I tie the end of the string to a small rock as though she were a household pet. She crawls back into the pile of fronds with the slack given to her.

"Make yourself comfortable," I tell her.

She re-emerges crawling along the sandy soil towards the den's entrance until reaching the end of her line. Her feet dig as she tries to walk further against the tension of the string. Her legs stop churning and she stays there in the open with the triangle of the entrance in front of her. On the other side is the stir of midday. The constant gaze of the jungle is upon her just as it is upon me. What eyes have or will set sight on her worries me.

*What devours beetles?* She may be prey for some animal or other insect lurking nearby. *You're just like sitting bait on this string.* I tug on the string. She turns and crawls back towards me after. I untie her and she crawls up and around my arm, then crawls up my neck and reaches the tenderness of my earlobes. I block her path with my hand, preventing her from walking over the cavern of my ear and poking my eardrum with those twig-like legs. She crawls onto my hand. I hold the beetle up to my face, examine her eyes, her rhinoceros-like horn, and her armour-like shell. Then I set her down and let her roam free.

It's late afternoon, the air outside the den hot, but I relax in the warm coolness of the shaded shelter. The beetle explores the landscape of my body while I lie down, comforted by the ticklish touch of her walking over my skin. Her adventure takes her to the rounded cliff of my shoulder, back to the smooth valley of my neck, over the cavern of my ear again, and to the forest of my hair—seduced by the sensation. She falls off my head and slaps onto the coconut-tree-frond-covered floor. I hear the rev of her wings and look over to her fluttering between the ground near my ear. She flies to the light of the exit and out into the open.

"Be free," I tell her.



*Remember me, I think, a frown on my face returning.*

#

Within my regular radius of forage, I chop at an old rotting tree with what looks like termite holes spread throughout. *I haven't tried termite yet.* The wood brittle and shattering off in chunks reveal worms that live in these holes. Repulsed by the sight of it, I step away. Worms, centipedes, caterpillars, snakes are on my avoid or kill list. Not unusual for the average person, I suspect. But I've seen worms from trees eaten before by my comrades and came near to trying one myself.

*"Try it," my comrade Hansuke said, while he held one in front of my face.*

*I cringed.*

*"Come on, it's not as bad as it looks," he tried to convince me.*

*With the look on my face holding, he turned to Tetsu, "you?"*

*"I'll try," Tetsu said, grabbing it from Hansuke's hand.*

*Tetsu tilted his head back and dangled the worm over his mouth before lowering it down onto his tongue and chewing.*

*Delaying his judgement while swallowing the bits of mangled worm, Tetsu turned to me, "he's right, it's not that bad."*

I step back to the tree and continue chopping until enough of the worm is exposed so that I can pinch one end of it. I pull out the long stringy specimen embedded within the hole. It is indeed the same one that Hansuke offered me; flatter and slimier than earthworms with one side like the whitish, secreting underbelly of a slug. I smell it and close my eyes. *It's not that bad*, thinking of Hansuke's and Tetsu's words to make the task easier. My experience with the doku utsugi berries and hikagehego taught me not to judge nature by appearance, as that creates a level of botanophobia. Tilting my head back and dangling it over my mouth, I peek at it before lowering the worm and draping it over the surface of my tongue like Tetsu did. I close my mouth and chew, expecting my gag reflexes to kick-in from the sliminess or a foul taste. The texture and taste are much like an oyster. I grind the worm down into small bits with my molars before swallowing. Chopping at the tree, I collect more. *Yeah, I always did like oysters*, as I pull them out of their holes. I try to reconcile my perception by rationalizing that a worm is not all that

different from an oyster. I'm not convinced by the rationale, but the taste, *it's not that bad*.

#

My insect diet includes crickets in limited supply, woodworms in rare instances, ants, which are numerous but tedious to collect outside their mound, and beetles, which are easier to spot and collect but are not in abundance. If eating mosquitos was feasible, I would eat so many of them that I'd be sick just to reduce their numbers and stop the nagging. *Nag? I could torture the enemy with those little things.*

I see my emaciated face in the reflection of the pond, protruding rib bones, loosening teeth; I have yet to find enough meat to sustain my muscle mass. I wait for the macaques to return. I've caught three snakes in two years, five small lizards, eaten what was indeed the last tilapia, found a nest of tiny bird eggs, and chased another bayawak which again escaped the blade of my bolo. My desire for meat is visceral and my plant diet remains the same after taking one gamble that didn't pay off. Ingesting a beautiful, bright purple flower which spread throughout the nook led to vomiting and diarrhoea for twenty-four hours and reminded me that appearances are deceiving. Grass continues to supplement my diet. Air salad is what I call it because the grass is so light and tasteless that it barely registers as food when I eat it.

My attention turns to those canaries, as I call them. I have yet to figure out how to capture one. They are quick and unpredictable. In my lack of skill in catching any of them, I shift to their intrigue. *Unambitious or pragmatic?* It's the quick flaps of their tiny wings, the sharp whistle of their chirps, the white around their eyes, and their nebulated markings that catch my attention. They are small and delicate. The meat would do little to satisfy with all the precision it would take to catch one. *Pragmatism.* I listen to them sing and admire their tropical-flower-like colours, as ornaments among the trees. I cannot pluck these birds from a tree like flowers, I cannot smell the scent they give off, and I no longer crave to eat one. They are drawn to the large-old-tree. I don't know why because it bears no fruit, and I don't see them plucking insects from it. If there were fruit, the tree would yield an abundant crop because of its size. It nevertheless provides shade for a large part of the day, reduces the wind blowing towards the den during rainy season, and

provides a resting place for the canaries in close view of the den.

#

I trek further up the mountain, climbing around the steep rear-cliff-wall and up along the soiled slope. I reach a rock suited for a chair overlooking the valley, stand on the rock, and scan the landscape. *Hai. A grand sight.* Mountains on the opposite side of the valley stretch far northwards and southwards. *Overlook Point.* I name this viewpoint. With the trees' faded-green, thinning summer leaves, I locate the meandering line of a stream or rut along the side of a mountain.

The endless pursuit for survival pulls me away and I walk north towards that line. *More fresh water. Fish?* After a half-day's walk north, I arrive at a dried-up stream bed. Not surprised considering the time of year, I follow it up the mountainside until the steepness and disappearing rut halts my progress. *No lake,* I conclude, looking up to the jagged peak. I turn around and follow the line down the mountainside, closer to the abandoned village in the lower valley. Snap. I stop. I walk. Swoosh. I stop. I walk. *Who's there?* I kneel, looking towards the dark shape of a rotting tree trunk nearly my height. I prepare to catch the movement of another person. *Would I run? Should I say hi? Kumusta ka? Are they still looking for me?* The thought of seeing someone excites me even though it may mean my demise.

At the base of the mountain is a dirt-road with an overgrowth of grass and weeds hiding the potholes. Following the sounds of water trickling, I walk along the drainage gully along the side of the road and over to a small stream coming from a separate meandering line. The flow of water fans out across a washed-out section of the road. Much of the topsoil is washed away, revealing the hodgepodge of rocks beneath the clear, rippling water. Standing in the gully, I look left, gazing as far down the road as I can see. The road is suffocated by the encroaching jungle where both sides nearly join at the middle with the tips of their reaching branches. I step back and reach down to fill my canteen in a small pool of collected water swirling in the gully before flowing across the road. I drink unabashed as water runs down the sides of my face then reach down to refill the canteen. I stand and look across the road at the continuing jungle leading to the adjacent mountain range. Then I look right, towards the village where the road ends while other direction remains a mystery. *Is that my way out?* as I look left. I hold my gaze, then turn my head back to the right. *Maybe the village is safe for me.* I return to the nook, knowing I've

pushed the boundaries far enough for one day.

*The village is bustling like the Higashi neighbourhood of Hiroshima. As I walk down the road out in the open and towards the village, the people wave to me.*

*"Come on, Kaiyo," they shout out to me.*

*I wave back, elated to the forgotten sense of community.*

*"OK. Thank you," I say, smiling as I enter the boundaries of the village.*

*Each villager smiles at me, "Welcome home, Kaiyo," they say as I walk past.*

*"That way," pointing to the village centre.*

*I arrive at the village centre. A hut sits in the middle of the open square.*

*"Your home," a man tells me.*

*"Thank you," I say, bowing to him.*

*"Go ahead. Make yourself at home," he tells me.*

*The villagers gather around.*

*"It's all yours, Kaiyo," someone shouts.*

*"Welcome home, Kaiyo," someone else shouts.*

*A little girl approaches with hair tied back and a white dress with coconut patterned print.*

*She points to the hut.*

*"Sleep well. Eat well," she tells me in clear English as if she's older than she looks.*

*I enter the hut and the villagers cheer me. A large bed with soft mattress and table covered with plates of food await me. I run towards the window to look out and thank everyone, but bars on the window block me from sticking my head out. When I look at the villagers, they no longer smile. I run over to the door, but more bars block my exit.*

*The man that led me to the house, now wearing a military uniform, stands on the other side.*

*"Make yourself comfortable," he tells me,*

*I wake, jump up, and exit the confines of the den.*

#

I return to the Overlook Point, noting where the village is hidden and recognising that vague line through the thinned summer trees at the bottom of the

valley as the old dirt road. *What is to become of me?* I look north. *My escape? A Japanese Base? Tetsu, Hansuke?* I sit on the rock with the warmth from the stone reaching me among the orange-purple glow of the evening sky. The instinct to decipher the landscape or plot my next destination lost in this moment. The colour of the sky changes to an orange-grey as the evening light fades. Silhouetted geese fly across the sky. Darkness covers the valley and details of the landscape around me are lost. I shiver. Moonlight reflects from the surfaces of peaks and trees as if the mountain range was the glistening tail of a dragon.

*Kami*, I think of Shintoism's philosophy that all elements of nature possess a spirit. The thought calms me as the silhouette of the mountains lines the horizon.

"Kami," I mumble, looking at the rock I sit on.

"Kami," I say, looking at the peak.

"Kami," I shout, looking to the stars.

Loneliness reaches me, as these thoughts and fears are marooned in a singular mind. *Is this my destiny? Why do I exist?* It feels as if I'm the only one asking such questions. Perhaps another soldier, from a different country, hiding in a different jungle is asking the same thing. It does not matter because I cannot share with this other soldier if there is one, no matter how bonded we are by identical circumstances. I believe I will not see Shiro again or be reunited with Tamiko to ever share these thoughts. My mind dies with me here when my body does. *Does it?* Maybe the world will change. Or maybe I will change what I can; me.

I unwrap the banana leaf I used to protect the Bible with the photo of Tamiko and Maeko between the pages. Their faces in the photo are the same faces imprinted in my mind. I worry one day I will forget.

"I hope you are well."

Ties severed as a husband and father. *But maybe not all's lost?* The approaching, hope-sopping rainy season threatens to extinguish what remains of that flickering flame. Holding the photo close to my chest, I fall asleep.

#

I watch and listen, the rain filling the air in a fog of blurring precipitation coming from the sky and splashing onto the water-soaked ground as if it was the rolling surface of a lake. It's repetitive and drenches my thoughts as the countdown begins until the sun will reinvigorate the jungle and my mind. As children, we

enjoyed the rain.

*Shiro and I were two years old when we first met, according to our mothers. I don't remember these early days, but I do know he's been in my memories since I began creating them. He's my brother--different mother, different father--but my brother. Shiro and I played in the rain; splashing through the sheath of water on the road with our bicycles, stomping through the puddles, catching frogs, and sometimes standing there idle, as water ran down our faces and our clothed bodies.*

"Shiro, what happened to you, brother? Are you OK?" I say, looking north.

#

After months of rain, my joints as strained as my mind in huddled idleness, the rays of sun bloom life into the irrigated jungle. Using the momentum of nature's renewal, optimism sprouts within the soggy soil of my mind. The mosquitos pester and nag. I use smoke from the fire to ward them off. They leave, return, pester. I rub a handful of mud onto my skin, collected where the mini-tributaries coming off the cliff-wall meet at the centre of the nook. Mosquitoes hover, searching and finding those spots of exposed skin unprotected by the mud. They prod at me. I leap into the muddy ditch for relief and roll around, caking on layers of mud to cover myself. I snort like a pig, in playful relief, still reeling from the frustration while slogging through the ditch and completely covering myself with mud. The mosquitos hover near like a squadron of planes waiting for clearance to land.

#

The moisture sucked from the ground and into the air creates a hot sludge which makes it feel like bags of rice tied to my limbs when moving. This drains strength from both body and mind. Short and long-term plans are loose. *Why live another day?* Any proposition for a future is squashed with doubt. *Meat? I will not find any. Escape? All options end with death. Rescue? I am forgotten.*

Nature stirs all around me. *Kami.* I must believe in something, anything if I am to survive. *Why am I here?* I will sink below the surface never to re-emerge, without motivation to stay afloat. My mind is soggy again, but without the rain. I struggle for action, ashamed that I cannot prevail with a lack of resolve, and in failure as a man. *Useless!* My titles stripped-clean with no duty to others and only myself; knowing I may never face Tamiko, Maeko, Shiro, Mother, Father, or my

country again. Castaway thoughts nag at me and I fear what duty to self may reveal. It is my own truth that evades me and there lies part of the struggle. *Truth*, I tell myself. *Only one truth*.

*As a child, I questioned life and death out of curiosity instead of fear. It was far beyond what a child should think of. I attribute it to the amount of alone time I had, roaming and observing nature as my way to escape labour on our farm above and beyond my long list of daily duties.*

*"It's odd to think we will die one day," I said to Shiro.*

*To no surprise, with young boys our age never thinking about the topic, he was quiet, probably giving it deep thought for the first time.*

*Years later, I brought up the same topic. Shiro had a response.*

*"Yeah," he said, "but isn't it odder that we are living now?"*

*"What do you mean?" I asked.*

*"If we die one day, why do we live today?"*

*I could not answer him, and he did not expect an answer. But I thought about Shiro's question then and still think about it today. Why do we live only to die? And even if life was eternal, why do we exist at all?*

*Shiro and his family are Buddhist, Mahayana Buddhist to be precise. Shiro would often talk to me about truth and reality.*

*"The Four Noble Truths," he said in our early teen years, "are about facing the reality of suffering in the world."*

*"What does that mean?" I asked.*

*"First, you must learn about dukkha," he told me.*

*I never did. But the idea of truth stuck with me.*

Buddhists often speak of enlightenment. Maybe that's what they mean—the ability to know the truth of our *raison d'être*. Fear didn't reach me then, but it reaches me now. The many unresolved, nagging issues with love; my actions in war; and contemplating the reason for our existence.

I visit Joe.

"Hi Joe, enlighten me," I say, as if we're sitting at a bar and drinking saké. "Where are you? Are you really under these stones and dirt?"

I wait for a sign; a bird falling from the sky, a sudden change in weather, Joe's face within the clouds, or his hand reaching out from the grave waving to me.

"No, I'm just here rotting away," he might say, if he could talk.

*Joe was born April 1915 on a corn farm in Nebraska to a large family of three brothers and three sisters. He was the middle child, along with his sister Margaret. Lost in the shuffle of a large family, Joe joined the army to get noticed. He was sent to the Philippines as part of the regiment tasked with protecting the country from us Japanese and looked forward to travelling to the tropics when told of the beautiful Filipinas. He visited all the blue-water beaches of the country and meet a young Filipina. They talked of marriage.*

*"You will love America," he told her.*

*"But I love my country. My family's here," she told Joe.*

*"If you want to stay, we'll stay," he said.*

*While they were planning their marriage at the local municipal church, we attacked this otherwise peaceful country. Joe fled the village to ensure he wouldn't jeopardise the safety of his future wife and her family should we find out about their relationship; and joined the USAFFE to support the resistance hoping to defeat us and reunite with his fiancé. He was separated from his fellow USAFFE soldiers in battle and fled further into the jungle to find safety. After weeks of little food and water, he rested at the front-cliff-wall of this nook thinking it was a dead end. As his final act, Joe held the Bible close to his heart with belief it would magnify the power of his prayer for the safety of his fiancé and her family.*

This is how I envision Joe's story.

#

My charcoal-sketched calendar reaches the den wall, its edges now obsolete, days lost from sickness of body and mind and fading markings turned to blotches due to the wind, moisture, or my body brushing against the wall. *I must find my way to safety.* I splash water onto the wall and wipe it clean with a coconut husk. When the walls are dry, I draw a map with the blackened tip of a stick from the fire; mark an x for the nook, draw a house for the village, write "Tenshi" for the location of the Aetas' property and burial site, draw a straight line for the road, draw two jagged lines on the two edges of the map to show both mountain ranges lining the



valley, and write "Overlook Point" above the x marking. *I need more names, more locations. Explore.*

*Should I return to the Aetas' property to look for food?* I didn't notice it when there, but like most people, they would have fruit or vegetables growing on the property. *Risky.* No explosions, planes, and only occasional gunshot over the past year which very well could just be hunters. But the Aetas' property may be occupied by another family, or claimed by the HUKS, or under surveillance. *Too soon. The village?* The same thoughts. *Dangerous. Risky.* I look to the black line on the wall drawn for the road heading north. which comes to an abrupt stop with nothing else ahead of it. *I'll explore that way. Tomorrow? Prudence, patience,* I tell myself. *After the next rainy season is best.* Early spring is cooler, there's more water available to draw from, and the thicker foliage will camouflage me better.

*There in the crowd of familiar faces, the young Filipino girl from my dreams—short black hair, big eyes, and one earlobe smaller than the other. It's a gathering at my childhood home on the farm. Food is served, among it, roasted pig. Shiro and Tamiko are in conversation at one corner of the room. Tetsu and Hansuke speak with my father as my father stands within the frame of the front door, leaning his back against it. Shiro's parents and Tamiko's parents in the kitchen, my mother in conversation with Maeko and the Filipina girl for whom I don't have a name. She is part of this large group of family and friends, belonging there as a stranger.*

Perturbed by this, I wake. The girl lingers in my mind for a few seconds then disappears as I adjust to reality.

#

I stack all the coconut shells I collected, pondering different ways to use them beyond the purpose of bowls, cups, and storage containers. *Chungcajon! How did they do it?* A trial-and-error process of adding and taking away shells and rocks before I'm able to figure out the game Filipino kids played. The coconut shells are lined up in two rows of seven with a single shell at each end centred between the two rows, to make a total of sixteen shells. Each shell contains seven rocks, making a total of ninety-eight rocks. I choose a random cup, pick up the rocks, and drop one into each of the following cups, stopping only when the shell of the next cup is

empty and there are no more rocks to pick up to continue the game.

The game entertains for part of the day, but I lose interest without another player. *Maybe the monkeys can learn.* It becomes a repetitive and mundane act of counting rocks and hearing them knock against the shell when they fall in; nothing more. Loneliness and boredom closely linked; I must find something else to entertain me. More importantly, keep my mind from sulking in doubt. Creating games is not the answer when there's so much around me. *Explore.*

The remaining light paints the sky orange and purple in atmospheric hue which illuminates the splatter of clouds in the foreground. I have yet to appreciate this common sight even though I stare directly at it. I continue to stare until my mind catches up with what my eyes have already seen.

I accept that there is no way to avoid or defeat the mosquitos. My only concern is malaria. Even though I have more of the dita tree bark and leaves should I get ill, battling malaria is debilitating, draining, and could kill me if my already-weak body gives up on me before the tea can heal me.

## CHAPTER FIVE - YEARS 3 TO 5

It's the third spring after arriving at the nook. The trees are bigger and pathways of tightly packed soil and grass worn thin stem from the den and nook. Wearing only my loincloth; I carry my rifle, knife, bolo, knapsack, and canteen with me for my first exploration along the road leading north away from the village. I walk on the roadside within the cover of the jungle in fear of being spotted in the long open view ahead and behind me on this straight road. If someone should approach in front, who sees who first will determine my fate. And if someone approached from behind, they would have the chance to take cover and follow me without my knowledge; or worse yet, to notify someone of my presence. *But would they know I'm Japanese from afar?* People around here must know that a Japanese soldier is still hiding, and any stranger or lone soul with a hint of Japaneseness would be suspect.

"I found the Japanese enemy," eager to tell the American soldiers.

I continue north for about two miles and reach a sign that reads "Clark Air Base" with an arrow pointing. I go no further. I'm bound to run into Americans and Filipinos the closer I get during that long walk to the province of Pampanga. The road that brought me hope is a dead end. Literally, death awaits me there. Shoulders drooping, I walk back south along the road and drink from the collected water in one of many roadside gullies which are sourced from brooks coming down the mountains. The pools of water overflow to the other side at washed-out points of the road. *There must be a river or lake on the other side. The water must go somewhere.* I'm keen to return to the nook after finding out this road has direct access to the airbase. Despite the overgrowth of grass and weeds on the road, I expect a military convoy to rumble past any minute, breaking through the young branches, flattening the grass and weeds; with one of their dogs barking at my presence as I try to hide among the trees.

"A Jap!" someone would shout, the soldiers then saturating the hillside with gunshots. *That's the easy way out*, considering the alternative of torture. *Yeah, quick death by gunshot*, weighing my options as if I really do have a choice over the method of my demise. After waiting for so long in curiosity, the revelation of where the road leads drags me down, when previously it was a rare source of hope.

Back at the den, I draw one long line and write "Clark Air Base" at the end of

it, then "Death End" in big letters, covering most of the blank space on the map. I fall onto my back and sprawl out as if I just surrendered to those American soldiers at the airbase, knowing only the Aeta's property and the village remain as alternatives to the nook. Food and safety are at odds. The village or Aeta's property could yield the fruits or vegetables of the old gardens or the trees that used to sustain them. But it's the HUKS territory as I've come to understand why the village was abandoned. *HUKS or the Americans?* The airbase not seeming all that bad in contrast. *Should I continue to wander and hope for the best? A gamble, risky, inefficient. What signs do I look for in finding fruit in this vast landscape? Type of soil, foliage, elevation, position to the sun?* These are details I did not pay mind to in viridity, astute as I tried to be as a young boy.

When I first arrived in the Philippines, it reminded me of the jungle back home, but with each day since, I find there are more differences than similarities. Japan has monkeys, palm leaves, coconut, heat, a rainy season like here; but also has snow unlike anywhere on the Philippine Islands. My perception of this nation as wild and unforgiving is shaped by war and now reinforced by living among a new adversary. The jungle is demanding and never lets up, wearing down my resolve to continue as if I'm a man being tested as I am reminded of the basics of human needs. *If I learn to coexist will a market serve me any better?* Here I pay for my coconut with labour rather than a symbol of labour of endless wants often under the guise of need.

*What am I supposed to do now?* Trapped once again with risky options. My hands tremble, each possible action a gamble on my life. I spend all day sulking rather than pondering, with no plan or intention for action. I've surrendered my day, perhaps more, to my failure. If someone should rattle the bushes of the barrier or if I heard the click of a rifle, I wouldn't put up a fight.

#

Spring's numbered days of spirited growth begin. *If they could see me now,* thinking of Tamiko and Maeko for motivation out from my idleness. *Time to grow something.* There's no consistency in what food I collect, which is not reliable and sustainable long-term. I'm thinner and weaker than I've ever been. It is not so much energy I lack; it is the lack of strength from depleted muscle mass to carry out my duties. Climbing and lifting are most taxing. My body feeds on any fat and muscle

for energy, and three teeth have fallen out as though they were temporary fixtures. Even as a child, my teeth didn't come out so easily. There was a time as a child when one of my front teeth waggled in all directions for weeks before falling out. Here, my teeth fall out before I know they are loose.

I concentrate on what I believe is easiest to grow – and not because I desire it most—the kamote. I harvest one-third of the kamotes, leaving the rest behind for when needed. Cutting off the green leafy parts from the top of them, I plant them with the same approach as planting rice. *If I only had rice instead.* I cultivate the soil by using the backside of the bolo to dig up the soil, softening and churning it as though ploughing. I choose a plot where the soil is similar to the sandy soil of the den. I group the bunches and stick the bottom ends of the cut stems into the line of ploughed soil. Their tops of green and purple leaves exposed to the sun; I space the bunches enough so not to inhibit the growth of the neighbouring bunch. Soil, water, and sun are vital to growing rice and every other crop I know. For the dug-up kamotes themselves, I put aside three to last the week, then slice the rest into small, thin pieces and lay them out on the large-rock-slab-table to dry in the sun.

I gauge the sunlight coming through the canopy of trees, then climb up a tree, and begin chopping down branches to provide sunlight to the newly planted kamotes. The thumping carries far into the jungle in contrast to the soft morning sounds of nature. The pod of monkeys responds by squawking in the distance. I pause. The squawking stops. I begin chopping again and the squawking starts as if they are playing the role of guardians to the trees to which they have a close link. For every branch I hack away at, there is one less option for them to play, escape, explore, and access food. It must be as if someone were to chop down my tree of coconuts. I would squawk too.

I once helped my father cut down a forty-foot-tall, old white birch tree split in half by a typhoon that hit our area when I was seven years old.

*After the tree split into two opposite leaning halves, Shiro and I climbed to the top.*

*“I am king,” I shouted.*

*“I am a ninja,” Shiro shouted before swinging down on the branches one by one until he was close enough to the ground to jump off.*

*The tree was one of the few sources of entertainment on the farm for the year*

*before my father decided to cut it down. Although I was disappointed to cut it down, it was the first time I used a real axe and not a makeshift one made from scrap metal. I grunted at each swing, focused on the base of the tree.*

*"What's going on?" my mother shouted from the house, which was her way of saying she didn't approve of my father letting me use the axe at my age.*

*My father took over after my twelfth swing, as I counted to see how many would bring down the tree. One of his swings cut into it as much as my twelve swings did and I stopped counting. The two halves fell to the ground with the tree's branches holding it up, just as the branches of a tumbleweed allow it to roll along the desert sand. We chopped the tree up, section by section, starting from the top of each half, using the axe and a gyokucho. By the end of it, I was as proficient with the axe and gyokucho as an eight-year-old could be.*

*"Next time you can do it all by yourself," my father told me.*

*The chopped wood lasted us three winters.*

#

*My first crop! I harvest the kamotes and cut off the kamote tops to replant them. The system works when I find the right sandy-soil and space them properly. These vegetables are resilient and survive with little water or sun. They keep multiplying and soon I'll have more than I know what to do with. I'm already tired of the starchy thing. *I'd rather have rice.* I sun-dry, roast, mash the kamotes, or whatever technique I can come up with. Although I eat plenty of kamote, I wonder if it's doing more bad than good. My mother told me, "Too much of anything is not good," when I begged for more of the chocolate her boss at the clinic gave her. *Too much chocolate!* I can count on one hand the number of times I'd had chocolate at that age.*

*I continue to collect coconut and cashew nuts at a sustainable pace. As for other farming options, I don't know how to produce more grass and would not be interested in doing so if I did, and there's no way for me to produce more crickets or any other insect. I take insects as they come, some days more abundantly than other days. The kamotes are keeping me alive, that I'll admit, but they're doing little to build muscle mass. *Meat. Pig. Deer. Rat! I'll take a rat. Anything! And it's about time for another python. A cobra would do.**

#

*Time to test my hunting skills.* I prop up a large flat stone with a stick, a short string attached to the bottom of the stick. A dead beetle is tied to the other end of the string and I surround the outer edges of the trap with twigs to funnel any game to the bait. A tug on the beetle will pull on the string and should cause the stone to collapse on top of the prey. I've seen this type of trap as a kid on the way up to Takaosan Peak using *ninjin* as bait.

*On the way down late that evening, the nub-like tail and sprawled hind legs of a hare stuck out from under the collapsed stone. I thought about taking the catch home and telling my parents, "Look what I caught," thinking it would bring praise my way. I'm not a thief. In fact, seeing the hare smashed under the rock was an unnerving sight for me. I once wanted a bunny as a pet.*

I wait, crouch on top of a boulder about ten metres away, the trap within my sight. I'm not a hunter but figure any small animal can hear or feel the vibrations of my movement if I waited on the soil. I move from crouching to sitting on the boulder with legs raised inches off the ground. *Would a real hunter hang around like this waiting for his game?* I watch as though it might help my chances of success. If hunting were only a matter of desire and not skill, then I'd be quite successful at it. And if I'd honed my skills as a child, I'd do well here. I'm quite fond of animals due to my parents' loose affiliation with Buddhism. Killing animals never appealed and there was no logical reason for me to do so. Sure, I eat meat, but it's easier to do so when I distance myself from all that preceded the serving of teriyaki beef or the pork katsu in my bowl. No eyes of fright or pain to look into.

*What else lives among me? That rustling in the leaves.* Using a cricket and chunk of coconut meat, I tie them on two separate strings to increase the odds of luring game with two tempting choices. I'll be satisfied with a collapsed trap and missing bait as proof that something does scurry around here. Nothing the first day, but I return the second day to watch a line of ants haul bits of the coconut over their heads like little men hauling marble stones out of a quarry.

I rebait the line with even more choices this time—beetles, kamote slices, crickets, and coconut meat. After about two weeks, I wake to find a gecko caught in the trap. The stone pins the lizard's tail under the rock. Motionless, he stares at me,

then blinks as I get closer. It is as though he struggled all night long before realising he could do nothing to escape. Setting traps down from the nook is my best bet, but risks someone spotting the traps. *A hare? Rabbit meat must be delicious.*

#

Although I abandoned my attempts with the collapsing-rock trap, I chose to waste a bullet and shoot a bayawak on first sight. The momentum gained comes to an abrupt halt when the rainy season returns. Rain and wind beat me into another season of remission, reminding me of nature's might. It's as if nature punishes me each year for my intrusion, scolding me for the trampled land, for taking from it as an unwelcomed guest, washing my stench from it. I stay within the den stored with food and wood. Succulent raindrops pound like drumbeats and the tree-bending wind rumbles around me like a passing train. I wait for the weather to let-up before stepping out and taking what I can before being forced back into my den. I forage in short spurts at night and scurry back into hiding when the rain returns, much like a cockroach does when a light switches on. *How many more seasons of this until it breaks me?*

#

I wake to the slither of a snake. When I open my eyes and turn my head to the ground next to me, I'm eye to eye with a cobra. The snake, coaxed into the den by the flooded ground outside, pauses at my movement with his head rising in the air, evaluating whether I'm a threat with its eyes and sifting tongue. I stay still. The cobra's head drops, slithering towards the back of the den as if I invited him in as a guest. I inch towards my bolo propped up near the entrance, my eyes locked on the snake. When it reaches the back of the den, I leap for the bolo. I'm quick to turn to face him while crouching within the den and keeping my back to the exit. *Snake meat is delectable.* The cobra bobs its head to my challenge, weaving it towards me through the air as its bottom half coils on the ground. There is no other escape route beside the bright exit of the den unless he's able to squeeze out of the back-corner holes where the water runs out between the rock-slabs and cliff-wall.

"Banzai!" mustering up courage.

I stick the bolo out toward the snake to prod him for a reaction. The cobra lunges towards my arm and his fangs clink against the metal blade, inches from my hand. I jerk my arm away. *Close call*, my heart racing. The near-miss of his bite



injects me with adrenaline which overtakes a more pragmatic approach.

"Come on," I call out.

I hold my ground and keep the bolo raised in front of me as a target should he strike again. *Cornered. No escape. Will he charge at me?* I kick up sandy soil towards the cobra trying to confuse him, while giving myself time to plan my next move.

"Banzai!" I say again, as my emotion piques in a mixture of anger and fear.

I bait the cobra with the blade again, not extending as far towards the snake as before. This time it strikes with head and teeth clanking harder against the metal blade. The collision against the blade disorients the cobra. I swing and strike it, cutting into its flesh below its head. The force of the dull blade knocks the cobra off balance which would have cut right through him if I had sharpened the blade as if it were a samurai sword. The cobra lowers its head onto the ground and tries to slither past me, pressed tight against the bottom edge of the den wall. *I've won.* I step aside, stay still, and let the snake pass; my patience returned during his retreat. Once it has slithered out of the den, I grab my knapsack, chase after it, and toss the knapsack at it. The knapsack lands on its head and I step on the knapsack trapping the cobra underneath. *Got him,* confident in my position of dominance. While standing on him, I insert the blade tip just below the head, grinding it into the soil to completely remove the cobra's head and flinging it away with the tip of the bolo. I hold the snake's body up towards the sky.

"Ahhh!" I shout, in exhalation.

*Snakes beware.*

"For you, Maeko," I scream out, "see what your papa can do."

*One of the few times I spent with Maeko alone was at the local cherry blossom festival after coming back from Manchuria. Maeko took a liking to a hand-crafted rag doll made from the fabric of old worn-out clothing. Grabbing the doll from the table it was displayed on, she ran up to me.*

*"Papa?" she says, her pupils reaching the top of her eyelids as she looked up to me and the gleaming sunlight rolling within the blackness with each slight movement of her head.*

*"How much?" I asked the woman selling them although I knew I didn't have enough money on me.*

*"15 yen," the woman said.*

*"Papa?" Maeko continued to look up at me.*

*I reached in my pocket and pulled out 5 yen.*

*"Sorry, Maeko," I told her.*

*Her face soured.*

*"Take it. Pay me later," the woman says, after seeing Maeko's disappointment.*

*Although I appreciated the woman's kindness, I refused, grabbed the doll from Maeko's hand, placed it back on the table, and braced myself for Maeko's crying as we walked away. She did not cry but did not speak to me for the rest of the day. At the time, my guilt was muted by my numbed emotions. My pride overrode what was left of my compassion. The guilt prods me today.*

#

Coming down from the nook to forage, the afternoon breeze whistles and rattles the leaves, blowing a smell of manure in my direction. I squint, sniff, and following the scent to a pile of droppings. *It's not a pig*, holding my hand close to feel its warmth. My eyes widen and my ears sift the noises. Following what I think are animal footprints, I look up and around hoping to notice the animal before it notices me. Turning to the swoosh of a bush being plucked of leaves, I spot the animal's dark-brown fur in the distance. I sneak closer. A deer, with rows of white spots on his back and sides and antlers, tugs at and chews on the leaves. It is much like the Sika Deer of Japan.

*I saw a Sika Deer while travelling by caravan to visit my mother's childhood friend in Okayama. It ran along the hillside hopping over rocks and bushes as if its legs were made of springs.*

*"Can I ride it?" I asked my mother.*

*"If you can catch one," my mother replied.*

*The year after that, I'd peer out my bedroom window toward Mt Gosasou whenever snow fell, hoping to catch sight of their brown fur against the white background.*

*It wasn't until a few years later, and after I realised the humour in my mother's statement, that I saw another one. A group of deer wandered down from the mountain one morning, grazing on the grass fields of my school as Shiro and I walked to class.*

*Not mentioning the conversation with my mother years earlier, I asked, "Do you think we can ride one?"*

*"How would you catch one?" he replied.*

*"But if we did. If we caught one. Do you think we could ride it like a horse?"*

*"Why not? The big ones are strong enough. Maybe even the small ones," Shiro said.*

*I stood there staring at the herd, thinking how nice it would be to befriend one and ride it up to Takaosan Peak like a cowboy riding his horse. Parting ways with him or her once at the peak to be reunited at a later time for another adventure.*

I catch myself staring at the deer in disbelief of what's there before me. *What a beautiful animal*, mesmerised by the patterns of his fur as if blotched with a white paintbrush. *Focus*. I shimmy the lever on the rifle to break apart dirt and grime built up around the chamber. *Patience*. I raise the rifle, aim, and adjust the rifle's position in my hands, bracing it against my shoulder. *Got you*. Boom! He stumbles to his knees then falls over as the blast echoes. The deer kicks its legs trying to pop back up. I run towards the deer while grabbing another bullet struggling to load it from the shake of the run. With the rifle loaded as I approach the stumbling deer, I calm myself knowing the deer does not have the strength to get up and flee with his front two legs buckling each time she tries to get up.

He gives up by lying there on his side, breathing heavy in pain, gasping, eyes stretched wide open, and the soft filtered light of the sun reflecting off the deer's black pupils. I place the end of the rifle barrel on his temple above his right eye. *Save the bullet*, lowering my rifle. The deer bleats and I struggle to attach the bayonet in my rush to end the deer's suffering, using the more efficient long pointed blade of the knife instead of the bolo. Once attached, I plunge the blade into the deer's neck and angled up towards his brain. The deer convulses with his head and legs raised off the ground in the final moments of pain. My eyes water. I look away and push with all my strength leaning my weight on the rifle until the convulsions stop. When I pull the bayonet out of the deer's neck, I'm light-headed in a combination from the energy expended and my uneasiness from the kill despite my time in war, my childhood sympathy for nature growing back day to day. One of my early memories is of an injured dove on the road in front of our farm.

*Peeking out the window as I frequently did, I saw the bird. I must have been less than five years old because I struggled to get my eyes over the windowsill after climbing on top of the stool which stood against the wall under the window. I ran out of the house into the road, careless to oncoming traffic even though Shiro's parents seared into my mind to look both ways. I picked up the dove which couldn't run away from me fast enough while flapping one wing with the other wing staying close to his body. I knew it was a dove when I picked him up because they were once used at the kabuki theatre when a princess wore little white doves for feet.*

*"They are doves," I heard a mom explain to her son in the row in front of me when the boy asked.*

*It was an odd sight, birds for feet.*

*"Are they real birds?" the boy continued.*

*The mother paused. "Well, yes," she said.*

*"Then why don't they fly away?"*

*I too wondered that while listening, believing the information was intended for all the curious kids that could hear her.*

*All the mother could think to say was; "Because they can't fly anymore."*

*I waited for the boy to continue his questioning, but he was satisfied with his mother's answer. It was a special performance for mother and son that day, the room full. I was there with Shiro and his mother. Later, I learned the doves were taxidermies.*

*"Dead and stuffed," my father said.*

*The dove I rescued is similar to a pigeon but smaller, longer tail, and white just like the princess's feet; except alive. And I didn't want anyone to kill and stuff him. What I wanted to do was fix his broken wing.*

*When I brought the bird into the house and told my father I wanted to help it, he said, "broken wing! That's it for the bird. It's just as well dead."*

*I examined the bird held firm in my hands.*

*My father watching me, said, "He won't ever fly again so you'll have to take care of him."*

*And with his blessing, I took care of him for three years. I appropriately named the dove Yuki since I really didn't know if it was a male or female. I hid my crying*

*from my parents when he died. He was my only ever pet. There was our family dog Hachikō, which looked much like the Aetas' dog. Hachikō sometimes accompanied me on adventures, but most of his time was spent around the farm with my father. He knew his primary duty was to watch over the property.*

I'm torn on whether to eat the deer. *I'm sorry Maeko*, she shares the same compassion for animals as me when I was a child. *She cried when I stomped on a spider. "Why?" is all she could say at 2 years old.* Already taking the deer's life and not using the meat for sustenance feels like an injustice of equal proportion. I turned the cut-off head to face away while I prepped the deer. I'll think twice before killing another animal. Except for snakes. *Pure evil they are.*

I pay homage to the deer by putting my hands together and closing my eyes much like in prayer. *Thank you for your sacrifice.*

"Itadakimasu," I say before eating.

I cut the leftover meat into small strips, boil it, and then lay the strips out in the sun until they are dried of their moisture. I store them wrapped in large plant leaves collected from the valley, the leaves so big they look like ferns from the time of dinosaurs. I just hope these leaves don't taint the meat.

#

Drought has brought a scorched-brown to the jungle. Smoke is in the air. *Another house burns.* I think back to the smoke in the air from the Aetas' house burning. I follow in the opposite direction to the wind, walking towards the source. Coming through the thicket of the barrier and into an opening overlooking the valley, I see flames burning through an open dry grass field with a few dry, splitting, lifeless trees. I rush down to the field, its centre blackened and flames lining the edges of the smouldering charred grass. The flames swallow the splitting trees and move outward towards the line of exposed, brown trees connected to the main jungle tree line and clinging to life. *I must protect the jungle.* I run to the burning field with bolo in hand and begin chopping at the ground as if to till the soil of an abandoned garden. This cuts the flames off from the fuel of dry grass and creates a clearing between the progressing flames and trees. Dripping sweat, I continue by hacking away in a circle around the flames, so the fire burns itself out. Exhausted, I crouch over with hands on knees to catch my breath. I look around knowing I don't have

the time or energy to complete a circled clearing wide enough to prevent the flames from jumping, and so I can't save the parched jungle from fire. There's a lush green thicket within the main treeline further ahead, with a shaded oasis-like grouping of trees much like the one in the nook. *Pond?* I run over and burst through the thicket. *Water!* It is a shallow, muddy pond. I break off leaves and branches from the surrounding foliage, dip them in the pond collecting both water and mud, and carry the branches over to smother the flames. I sweep over a section of flames, leaving a trail of mud and water before returning to the pond to repeat the process. The field smoulders and I sit in the shade, relieved but exhausted. My dire thirst gives me the will to fight through the exhaustion, get up, and make my way to back to the den to claim my canteen as if it were a trophy. *See what your papa can do, Maeko.*

*It was summer, Shiro and I were around seven. There was a grass trail wide enough for a horse-pulled wagon at the back of the farm. We spent time there pulling each other on a cart once used for hauling rice with metal wheels that we salvaged from an abandoned lot. Along that trail was Mr Nakajima's property. He was an old man, a farmer who lived alone after his wife died, which was before I was born. We rested from pulling each other on the wagon in the shade of an old garage-like structure on Mr Nakajima's property. Underneath the structure was thinning dry grass revealing the soil underneath. Shiro pulled out a small red box of matches from his pocket.*

*"Where did you get those?" I asked, excited to see them.*

*He grinned.*

*"Let me see," I asked, and held out my hand in demand.*

*He placed them in my hand. On the top of the box was a samurai fighting a tiger. I opened the box full of matches and pulled one out.*

*"What first?" I asked, and looked to Shiro.*

*I lit the match, walked past Shiro to the dry grass, and dropped the match onto the grass. The blades of grass were spaced far enough that it didn't catch fire until the match burned to its end. Ready to burn out, a single blade of dry grass touching the match caught fire. I watched closely, urging the flame on with my eyes because I didn't want to waste another, thinking about insects, plants, and wood we could throw on top. The flames travelled along the blade of grass as if it was a wick. The flame hopped to the other blades of grass nearby, exponentially growing. The fire fed*

*easily on the parched grass, soon building enough momentum to consume the entire edge of dry grass like the boundary lines of an encroaching forest fire. Shiro and I knew things were out of control and the grins of our amusement turned to the dumbfounded looks of what-do-we-do-now, when out of nowhere, Mr Nakajima popped onto the scene in panic, stomping on the fire with grunts of urgent effort. Unable to stop the flames from spreading, he ran over to grab an old rotting piece of plywood which lay on the ground next to the shed, with moisture trapped between it and the ground. He threw the damp plywood on top, which controlled the fire from spreading, before stomping out the remaining flames. Shiro and I ran away while Mr Nakajima smothered the red glow in the grass with the tip of his tatami sandals. When Shiro and I returned the next day, embarrassed of not only starting the fire, but also of failing to act to prevent things from getting out of control. Our parents never acknowledged our mischievousness, and the kindness Mr Nakajima continued to show us after the event served as the perfect punishment, as it turned our embarrassment to shame.*

The scorched earth of the field before me reminds me of that day, except that the shame is replaced by pride. The smoke clearing from the air, a circle of rocks from a recent campfire sits in the centre of the field. I look all around my head much like the shifting head of the bayawak, then back my way into the jungle scanning to make sure no eyes are on me to follow my direction back to the nook. Taking an alternate route, I spot the symmetrical lines of a bamboo thicket among the garnish of the trees and bushes. *Finally! Building material, spear, food, that mesh for drying food.* I cycle through the things I could do with bamboo. I brush away the dry leaves at the foot of fully-grown bamboo stalks. Young sprouting bamboo culms grow underneath the leaves. One sticks out about 6 inches from the ground. I dig the soil around it with my hands before yanking the culm out of the ground. I dig up more of these bamboo culms and bring them back to the nook, peel off the layer much like a corn husk until I get to the softer, fleshier yellow-greenish centre. I cut off the two ends, rinse any remaining dirt from the flesh, slice into smaller pieces, and eat. *Masarap.*

#

Midday and while out on forage, I hear the screams of macaques. I run to the

screams and as I approach, the long, thick, blackish body of a python stands out in the garnish of leaves and branches. It slithers downward, closing-in on a confused young macaque who looks in every direction but behind as the other monkeys screech to warn her. The python snatches the young, unsuspecting monkey in his jaws. The girth of the snake's body coils around her. She screeches in a desperate call for help as his coil tightens. The elder monkeys try to distract the snake from its victim by shooting in and reaching out as though to strike the snake. One monkey reaches far enough to slap the snake to no effect as the snake is already fully occupied by its catch.

*Meat.* I aim at the python without a clear shot and the risk of killing the young macaque. *Why kill a macaque when I don't have to?* The captured monkey screeches and I must shoot now to save her or put her out of misery. I aim at the snake's wide body with the macaque hidden in the coil of the snake. The python's head crests above the coil. I adjust my aim. Bang! The snake's grip releases, and the monkey's body flails to the ground. *She's dead,* I think at first. The python drapes over the branch in balance of his two halves before sliding off and onto the ground next to the macaque. The macaque coughs in a gasp for air, hops to her feet as if awoken from a short nap, and shivers frozen in place by the sight of the python next to her.

I step back to allow the other monkeys to help the young victim, but they continue to squawk as they fixate on the dead python that lay there inches from the frightened young monkey. I walk up to and grab the tail of the python, dragging it away from her. She runs up a tree to her mother that waits. The squawking begins again, different in tone. A mango drops from the tree. I take it as a thank you from the macaques. Gathering the snake and mango to bring back to the den, I look to the young monkey in her mother's arms. A sense of purpose warms me. The Filipino girl in my dreams surfaces alongside thoughts of Maeko. *Will you ever forgive your father?*

#

Lying on my back and among the glimmer of stars through the cleft above. A tidal wave of dark, thick, towering clouds approaches followed by a clash of thunder which sounds like the strike of a daiko right above my head. The large tree stares at me with eyes from two old scars of chopped branches from when I first planted my kamote garden. The wind blows, swaying the creaking tree. The birds' high pitch



chirps another warning of the oncoming thunderstorm. I motion my arms like a symphony conductor to the creak of the tree and chirp of birds. And with each creak or chirp, I point in the direction of the noise. I raise both arms to the daiko-like thunder as if a crescendo, acknowledging the chiming leaves from a gust of wind. Then with a final bang of the daiko, my performance would come to a close in the fading reverberation. I bow with the rattle of leaves clapping for me. A mishmash of music cords from the koto play in my head. These thoughts help calm my active mind and give hope in solmisation. *Da da daaaa, de da, de da.*

#

I wake to the young Filipino girl's face, but do not remember much of the dream itself which she was part of. There were people around her, family perhaps. In the lingering image of her, she's smiling. It is as if that was the lasting image she left behind in real life. I never met a Filipino before the war, but she is not a stranger to me. *How would I know her smile so well?*

At least three rainy seasons have passed since seeing or hearing anyone else. The long arms of the old tree extending beyond the den. I trek down to the now travelled road where the weeds and grass are flattened or worn away. Further down the road are fresh scars of chopped down trees. *Who do these people think they are?* I am angered by a sense of intrusion. *This place is ours.* The longstanding potholes and trenches along the road which lead towards the airbase stand as further violations of our land. The once pestering mosquitos return in small numbers never again pestering like they once did and the anguish of solitude is less burdensome. Looking at the potholes, I hear the booms of yesterday's war. My past pits itself against my present.

#

*That girl in my dreams?* Faces of many haunt me. Hers doesn't. It's a welcome vision. *A survivor perhaps?*

*There was that village on the route to the prisoner camp in Capas along a major intersection with one road leading to Bataan and the other to the naval base at Subic Bay. There were kids, plenty of kids in the background. Their faces held a stoic naivety about what was going on. To look back on the sound of gunshots was to show concern toward the villagers.*

I did not look back then but look back now searching for this girl's familiar face. In war, it does not matter much what or how it happened, it only matters that it did. In the moment, my indirect participation or inaction seemed justified. *Nothing I could do*, was the common response. A stain on my soul as if God would never let me forget my wrongs of action and inaction. Although I struggle for repentance, I am comforted that the souls of the innocent may exist in peace for not taking but sacrificing their lives. But those faces, of the children dead or alive, are vivid. I search for that girl somewhere there in the crowd that day. She is not there, while every moment spent with Maeko is easy to recall.

#

I've learned to cope with rainy season, after enduring five of them, by venturing out more often. The punishment of the harsh rain and wind is a better alternative to the mind-corroding idleness. I wake to sunlight sparkling off a drenched jungle in regained momentum towards spring. A small, lone tree, unable to endure the punishing rain and wind, leans over with stretched roots clinging to the soil and its full array of branches holding its small, light frame above the ground. *Poor thing*. I hoist the tree back up and the thin tip, a few feet above me, vibrates from the jostle. I let go and the tree falls over again with the roots adapting from the months of leaning in that position. I push the tree back up and prop it up with two bamboo culms. The tree still tilted, I lodge another bamboo culm in equal distance to the other two to force it further upright and set it in near-original position.

"There you go," I tell it, "You will be OK."

I've made my spear, mesh for drying food, and drainage within the den using bamboo. *Why did you take so long to reveal yourself? You make my life much easier*. By clearing the nodes of a culm, I made a pipe flowing out of the two sides at the rear edges between the rock-slab-walls and rear-cliff-wall. It is useful during the rainy season. When the rainy season passes, I seal the two ends of the drainage with smaller culms to collect from the water trickling down the rear-cliff-wall. Also, by rubbing the split edges of two bamboo culms against one another, I can create enough friction to start a fire. It's much easier during dry season. In the rainy season, I use the remaining gunpowder because just about every exposed surface is

moist even within the shelter of the den, including the bamboo.

#

The firepit now outside the den, I fry crickets with coconut oil on a flat stone placed in the centre of the pit. The pod of macaques plays near but out of sight. The young macaque I saved last year approaches on the overreaching branch of the large tree.

I focus on cooking. The young macaque lets out a short cackle. *Never knew macaques liked crickets.* I grab one cricket, blow on it to cool, walk underneath the branch, and reach up towards her. The monkey swings down with both legs hanging from the branch, stretches out to snatch the cricket from my hand, holds it in her lips, swings back up to grab the branch, and hoists herself up to a crouch. She looks closely at the cricket, smells it, nibbles on it before placing the cricket in her mouth and chewing. Still chewing, her bulging eyes move back and forth between me and the frying crickets. I grab another cricket and hold it short of her reach.

"You need a name."

She stares at my mouth and tilts her head to the side from hearing my words, any words, for the first time.

"How about Kuriketto?" I ask, extending my hand closer to her.

She grabs the cricket from my hand.

"Kuri?"

She chews.

"Ketto?"

Her head tilts the other way.

"OK, Ketto it is."

The cackles of the monkey-pod get louder and closer. Ketto jets away with a sheepish squeak as if scolded by elders for getting too close to me.

#

I retrieve the wrapped-up banana-leaf, lodged above between a gap where the two slabs of rock meet, and unveil the dormant Bible within. Damage from moisture marks the leather cover and the edges of most pages. I open the centre pages where the damp, enlarged sponginess of the photo of Tamiko and Maeko sits and glance at it to ensure the image is intact. *I'm doing OK*, as if Tamiko and Maeko can hear me. I place the photo back into the pages, wrap the Bible back in the banana leaf, and set

it on the small-rock-table in the den. Looking to the wrapped Bible, my thoughts turn to Thomas talking to me about Christianity. He explained how God is everywhere and I told him it was like the Kami. Thomas often spoke of forgiveness, compassion, and love as essential to Christians, trying to persuade me to attend Bible study with him. I was worried about what people would think if I did or if it was even allowed in Japan.

I couldn't understand the value he placed on the Bible and said to him, "It's just a book."

"It's much more than a book," he said, "it's the word of God."

I didn't understand how that could be possible because what kind of God writes books. Still curious what the answer would be to that question, I step out and the sun punishes me for forgetting its power. Using a palm leaf to shield myself from the sun's rays, I visit Joe.

"Hi Joe," I say, as I tend to his gravesite by pulling the weeds that grow on top. I sit.

"Things are getting better."

*There's so much we could learn from each other.*

I imagine Joe's Sunday.

*"Good morning, Joe," the pastor says, shaking hands as Joe walks into church with his Filipina wife and two; no, three kids. Two girls and a boy.*

*They sit in the front pew, Bibles open while the rest of the congregation find their seats.*

*"Christ is our saviour," the pastor repeats each story of sin and forgiveness of everyday life, linking it to the day's Bible teaching. The congregation focuses on the relevant verse in the Bible as if studying for an exam.*

*Following the sermon, the congregation gathers at the foyer. Coffee, tea, cookies, and what Americans call cupcakes are served.*

*"I enjoyed the sermon," Joe would say to the pastor and rehash some of the verses referenced and bring up related verses while flipping through his Bible.*

*Joe's wife in the background, speaking to another woman. The kids sitting on wooden chairs lining the walls of the foyer, their feet dangling while each munch on a cookie and they watch the adults walk past their field of view. The boy hops on and*

*off the chair in impatience, his cookie crumbs falling onto the chair and rug.*

A rush of sadness fills me when realising that such a Sunday is not an option for Joe. That should Joe really have a wife and kids, their Sundays are absent of their father. The thought of that void in their life reminds me I still have a chance to fill the void in Tamiko and Maeko's life should they want me to.

## CHAPTER SIX – YEARS 6 TO 20

I unwrap the Bible from the banana leaf and flip through the pages. The first paragraph reads, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."

I read more each day, skipping through chapters and stopping on stories that catch my interest. Some of the stories remind me of *The Tale of Genji*, with kings replacing emperors. Thomas' words of forgiveness, compassion and love resonate in my quest to gain a spiritual understanding. I read on, turning away from the pure entertainment of some stories, and often referring back to already read or skipped pages. *Ah yes*, I think, as it dawns on me that Thomas never said God wrote the book. He said it was the word of God. As I gain a better understanding of the stories, I make sense of the sections titled with different names. *This Christian God is working or speaking through these people*, I think in revelation. I read; I study. The world seems bigger, much like it did in college. Thomas' wise words on matters from science to religion did not fall on deaf ears. I merge the knowledge from the Bible with my abstract and altruistic spiritual perspective on existence taken from experiences with Gods, nature, the spirit of all things learned from Shintoism, and philosophies of Buddha. I understand the concept of God's Will in the Bible, which sparks my sense of purpose. Which God I attribute to this enlightenment, I have yet to determine. *There is something more significant, more important than I*. I rewrap the Bible in the banana leaf and tie the browning leaf with bamboo string.

#

It is a dry summer after an unusually mild rainy season. The pod of monkeys encroaches on my den, playful and eager as if Ketto told them about those fried crickets—a consequence of befriending them. I refuse to feed them, recognising the dilemma I'm in. They remedy my loneliness but are on the verge of dependency and abandoning their fear of man as they start poking around the nook. While I'm out watching the pod play around me in the nook, an adult macaque steals a coconut shell full of cashews from the den. *This is bad*. I chase him. He spills half the

cashews avoiding my kicking leg and swinging arms.

"Shoo!" I shout, as I chase him away.

The other macaques swoop in and pick from the trail of nuts behind me. I chase them away.

"Ahhhh!" I scream.

As I become more aggressive, they do as well. The adults, at different positions around me, having already forgotten how I saved Ketto, taunt in their deep, brutish calls. I grab my rifle with bayonet attached and point it at the monkeys. They flinch, then continue their taunts and rummage through my encampment.

"Leave!" I tell them. "Go!" as I run around chasing them away, swatting air with my open hand as I do with mosquitos.

When I chase the macaques away on one side, other macaques move in on the other side and tamper with my things in and around the den. The surrounding circle of macaques closes in. The adult males take turns shooting in at me. My heart races. Fumbling to raise my rifle, I shoot into the air. The monkeys scatter back into the jungle.

Days later, I walk over to the monkeys' territory. *Just don't feed them*, I tell myself. The monkeys scatter and screech when they first see me. *Should I be doing this?* I sit on the ground with legs crossed. Their panic calms. After a few minutes, they ignore my presence. The young ones chase each other among the treetops and tussle on the ground. The males guard the perimeter with the females grooming them. Young monkeys approach me.

"Shoo," I say, careful not to shout and raise tensions.

They are skittish but not paranoid to my presence which leaves that invisible boundary long held between human and wild animal intact. I shoo and throw pebbles to keep them at a distance without creating panic.

After observing for weeks, I arrive this morning with the peering eyes of the alpha monkey on me. Before I'm able to set my things down, he climbs down then leaps from the tree and charges at me. I hold my ground. He struts back towards the tree then turns around and charges again.

"Hey, I don't want to replace you," I say with genuine belief that he understands my sentiment, as I step back, slouch, and raise my empty palms to him.

He charges at me as though my voice is a further agitation to him. *I have overstayed my welcome.* As I pack up my things ready to abandon the companionship of the monkeys, he charges at me again. He interprets me relinquishing my ground as weakness, and with new confidence he's set on seeing to it that I don't return. He charges and I feel the inertia of his closeness. I keep him away with my bayonet, striking the air in front of him so I can back out and escape. This is his territory, the nook mine. The alpha passes the sharp point of the bayonet, keen on taking a chunk out of my flesh, with a crazed, rabid look. He stretches his mouth wide open, screeching and flexing those sharp fangs while strings of saliva swing from his teeth. He is between me and the blade. With one hand gripping the barrel and the other gripping the butt of the rifle, I swing the butt forward just like I was trained. It strikes the alpha on the side of his head with a force that would crack a man's skull. He's stunned by the hit. *Attack,* I think, realising this may be my only opportunity to make it out unscathed. Stepping back and flipping the rifle with blade pointed at him, I thrust the bayonet through the monkey's right eye and into the back of his head. His body is quick to go limp, as I pin his head to the ground while he convulses to his death. The pod of monkeys flees, screaming like villagers under siege of a massacre.

"Why?" I say, looking at the dead alpha, "I was your friend."

I am, however, relieved that the monkeys did flee. I wouldn't know how to resolve the dilemma if they saw me as their new alpha, short of killing more to keep them away. The thought that I forever severed the relationship catches up with me. My relief turns to guilt as I blame myself for the alpha's death. *He was a father too.* I bury his body among the base of the mango trees. *I miss you, Maeko.*

*Soon after returning from Manchuria; Tamiko, Maeko and I were at the market in Aki District searching for a Happi coat for Maeko. Much of the time, I walked behind them focused on every movement and sound of the market. Not until I heard the piercing laughter of young children next to me did I pull my focus back from the busy market to the boy squeezing his younger sister with a hug. Their grins meant nothing to me as I watched to see whether he squeezed her too tight, looking at them, then to their mother standing behind a produce table of daikon, kabocha, satsumaimo which she was selling. Tamiko reached over to the lady to purchase a handful of satsumaimo*



*when a young man, working at the next stand over, handed a bill over to the lady asking for change. Tamiko pulled her hand back and waits. Maeko, next to Tamiko's side, stepped back out of the way to distance herself from the man's reaching arm. He looked at Maeko but did not smile. The young girl played with her brother next to me. She squealed. I flinched, catching the kids' attention. They looked up at me and I relaxed my jaw in an attempt to smile. I turned back towards Maeko, expecting the man to acknowledge her or Maeko.*

*"Wait your turn," I told him, grimacing while looking dead into his eyes.*

*"Excuse me, sir?"*

*"My wife was next," I say, pointing to Tamiko.*

*"I'm sorry, sir. I'm just getting change," he said, expressionless and not looking to Tamiko.*

*"And you scared my daughter," I say, pointing to Maeko and raising my voice. He said nothing.*

*"Are you going to apologise?" I ask, taking a step closer to him.*

*He faces me and stands tall, saying nothing. And as I lift my left foot to take another step towards him, Tamiko grabs my arm.*

*"Kaiyo," she says, squeezing my arm and looking up to me, "It's ok."*

*Tamiko turns to the man, "He just came back from Manchuria," she tells him.*

*I break eye contact with the man, surprised by her statement. She knew before I did how much the war had changed me. As numb as I was, my instinct to protect my family was innate.*

#

About six years in and the den more a permanent home than a hideout, the years lose their relevance. The trees, old and new, are my audience as much as I am to them. A kinship, more so now that I keep my distance from the macaques. These patient, idle creatures dominate in both size and numbers, working together, but each unique. The trees' pace of life is somewhere between the birds zipping around and the unmovable mountains existing for millennia. My pace adjusted as so. They wait, and although I can uproot and move, I feel less capable than them when doubt resurfaces. It is as though they are the true guardians of nature; not the grandiose mountains; and not the sun or moon with their birdseye view of earth. The mountains tower above the valley but do not see me. The sun covers earth's surface,

energizing life into these trees but does not see me. The moon oversees the night, pulling and pushing the shorelines of our vast oceans but does not see me. The trees see me, feel the vibrations of my steps, hear the rumble of my voice, and feed on the air of my breath. The melodies of my mother's koto play in my head.

I'm keen to climb the old tree now, previously deterred by its maze of tangled branches. I run and leap onto the base, grabbing the lowest branch to pull myself up. I crouch on the branch, with its bulk providing steady support. Looking upwards, I plot my path through the maze. Twisting and turning, I climb. The branches poke into my rib cage and claw at my neck while I shimmy my way up. I make it through the layer of twisted branches before facing another layer. Willing myself closer to the blue sky, I break through to the top. The stinging scratches on my skin are relieved by the cool open-air reaching me. I'm held up on the padded fullness of the jungle canopy as I look over the tops and indulge. I see the nook in its entirety and through the barrier to the front-cliff-wall, giving me the same view as the birds and trees. The cliff rises behind and the slope dips beyond the front-cliff-wall ahead. And from this angle, I recognise how the old tree hugs my den below as if it were my guardian.

*There would be the occasional glance my way by my father and my mother who worked, undeterred by weather or illness, somewhere within sight but always at a distance on our respectable plot of land. As I grew older and stronger to help with chores, I received more attention from them. I was more their labourer than their son, and observations of other children with their parents convinced me of this. I was just another mouth to feed until I could work, contribute. A smile or look of affection towards them didn't reach my father's hardened heart or break through my mother's bubble of anxiety.*

*My curiosity projected outdoors and at night, after putting myself to bed, I was drawn to the details of our home. Sunday nights, and during my parents only downtime, I lay staring at a candle's glow through the rice paper walls, watching the silhouettes. My father wrote his calligraphy while sitting on his tatami in the centre of our lounge, inspiring me to write in the air with my finger. My mother, with her normally inhibited and deliberate movements, played in the next room as if she danced kneeling next to the koto, swaying forward and back and side to side. I*

*mimicked her notes with the hum of my voice. These were lullabies that eventually put me to sleep.*

*As soon as I heard my mother tune the koto, I would stop what I was doing and find a resting spot. If I was outside at the time, which I often was, I remained close so I could hear the calls of her tuning her instrument. The distinctive sounds of the chords off-tune were like the gong of a bell at the temple. I'd wait for the melodies to fill the air among the chirping crickets. Her elusive emotions came out in the music. I hoped that we as a family were somewhere in those melodies. I led myself to believe it was so, and that is why the melodies, which I often recite in my mind, mean so much to me.*

*When my eyes drew away from the silhouettes and intricate veins of the rice-paper walls to listen to the scratching of my father's pen and the boing of the koto's strings, I looked up to the weave of our bamboo roof. There among the dark crevasses between the bamboo threads and wood beams, my eyes scanned for creatures that had found temporary refuge in the warm, dry comfort of our home; A spider hanging in its web vibrating from the draft of air coming through the gaps between our roof and house frame, or a lone moth bouncing off the ceiling among the flickering candlelight. The streaking geckos often looked my way.*

#

Today, year seven or eight, I return to the village. The land of one house in the village is cleared and ploughed. Staring down at the farm from the gradual slope and across the fields of tall grass between me and the village, I wait for movement in the hut connected to that particular plot. The hut is the only home with no shrubbery encroaching it and is fitted with the tan colour of new window shutters, contrasting with the dirty brown-black of the old bamboo and wood material making up the rest of the hut. The road coming into the village from the south splits it into two halves; each side equally balanced with six homes of bamboo huts and small wood houses intermixed. The bamboo hut I watch is at this end of the village closest to me.

There's a figure moving about in the hut. A young man exits, pumps water from his well, filling up a bucket, and pours the water over the lines of ploughed soil. *Eggplant, bok choy, sili*, flipping through images in my head of those things I desire. *If it's rice he grows, he's doing it all wrong.* He paints all the lines of soil with water then stands there looking over his garden. Scanning the garden from right to

left, he then looks up scanning from left to right over the grass fields as though in ambition of farming all the available land. *Perfect for planting rice*, joining in on his ambitions. Realising his slow-moving gaze will soon set in my direction, I sink deeper into the cover of the jungle. His head swivels back in the other direction away from me. I trek back to the den, my heart racing from a combination of paranoia and excitement that someone shares this part of the jungle with me.

#

The curtain of night closes on the jungle with sparkling specks emerging from the sky's black canvas. The sidereal glow adds life to the otherwise dark void, each with its own story. They streak across the sky at intervals equivalent to my attention span. When my thought wanders away from awe at the night sky to introspection, another one streaks as though to say, "remember us?" It streaks then crashes to its death like a kamikaze. *I salute you*. Such sacrifice is more than any honour I still hold. His fire burns out. Nothing and no one can endure forever. *God? Love?* A day will come when these mountains around me, or the stars above me, will be no longer. A unique melody plays in my head.

Tonight, the melody is further fuelled by what gazing at the stars provokes. I believe answers to that one-truth dwell somewhere in or beyond the black canvas. It is the same sky by day, but with different meaning. By day, I do not see the same endless void. Not trained in music, I wonder if the melody is simply the reproduction of a song my mother played.

The soothing sounds of my mother's koto are more vivid than many other childhood memories. I remember each melody without ever learning the names or stories behind the songs. All those years, my mother never knew I was in the other room fixated on her performance. She never knew the impact it had on me. I lay and listened to her melodies as if the love coming from them was directed at me. If given a second chance, I will tell her how much it meant to me to contrast it with my father's wrath and frequent criticism towards her. This melody plays in my head with the volume and frequency increasing the longer I'm marooned here.

The moon is like a lantern hanging from a dark ceiling. Within the full roundness of the moon are the traumatic scars telling its story. Whether hanging low, high, half, full, or behind the clouds; it does not waver in duty. It owns the night sky much like the sun owns the day. My eyelids close over my eyes as night

does day.

#

I return to the village months later. Corn stalks stand tall over the garden, chickens cluck around the hut, and a fire smoulders not far from the well at the side of the home. I move-in closer to pluck corn from the stalk. *He'll never notice.* As I walk across the field of waist-high grass, there's movement in the house. I drop to one knee with the tall grass hiding me. The man exits, loads a basket onto a rack on the rear of the scooter, and whistles. A dog emerges from the hut and jumps on top of the scooter's basket. The man hops on and drives off. The dog balances himself on the basket amid the sway and rattle of the ride. The man drives through the village, heading south on the road that veers right and up the mountain. Scanning over the village once again, I make sure no one is concealed by the huts and houses before running up to the man's garden. I peel back the green husk and silk to peek at the gleaming bright-yellow cob inside, then pluck the ear of corn from the stalk and place it in my knapsack. Perusing through the other stalks, I pick two more ears. I'm careful not to leave a noticeable gap, scanning the village and fields around me for any witness to my thievery. *But I'm not a thief.* I walk closer to the hut, tempted to grab a chicken. *I'm not a thief,* nor do I wish to kill the chicken. I rush back into the treeline and watch for movement in the village. *Did anyone see me?*

The man returns less than an hour later untying and offloading a now heavier basket. He scoops rice out of the basket and into a pot, adds water, the cast iron lid clanging as he puts it on the pot, and places a log into the firepit. The man carries the basket of rice into the house. *If I can get some of those rice kernels, I'll plant my own rice,* daydreaming more than plotting. Although I didn't bring extra water or food to last another day, I spend the night on the rounded surface of a large rock within the treeline, using the branches of a fern as padding and blanket. The glow of a lantern flickers inside the hut for a bit after sunset. Then darkness. We sleep.

It's morning when the man and dog emerge from the hut. It's not often dogs spend time indoors here, but I suspect it's for companionship. If I had my own dog, I would let him curl up next to me during the night. The man sweeps the dirt around his home into clean lines, pumps from the well, and waters his garden. I ready myself for him to jump up and say, "someone took my corn!" He carries on tending to his property all day. *He's all alone.* Hungry and out of water and food, I do the

approximately two-hour walk back to the nook before replenishing my body with corn and water.

Lying down for the night, I think of how to get some of the man's rice. *Go further up the road where I may find the rice field of another family? Wait for him to leave again then sneak into his home? But if it's rice he leaves for, then he'll take the already empty basket of rice with him. Sneak in his home when he's asleep? But with a dog, I cannot go unnoticed.* It's vital to grow rice as a staple in my diet. I toss and turn, plotting before falling asleep.

I'm quick to wake. *Why don't I approach him and trade my kamotes for some rice? Or cashew, or coconut, or mangoes, or insects? OK, maybe not insects. Why must I plot, sneak, deceive?* A bag of kamotes is worth less to me than a handful of cashews, a coconut, or a couple of mangoes. *But I can't trade face to face. He will recognise my accent as Japanese. I can write a note.*

I return to village-edge after two weeks predicting when he will run out of rice. I bring food, water, rifle, bolo, knapsack full of kamotes, and my deerskin blanket. After waiting two days, the man leaves with his basket. I walk up to his property and hang the knapsack of kamotes on a balete tree near the property's well—the note inside written with a charred piece of wood on a blank page from the Bible. If I used anything but a piece of paper, it might cause suspicion because after all, who doesn't have access to paper these days. I have only one chance to do it right and sacrificing one page of the Bible will be worth it if it works. Though I admit, I do feel guilty ripping out a page from Joe's Bible. The note, written in Tagalog, reads, "Kamotes for 1-kilo rice. Please hang here. Pick up tomorrow at noon." I have no intention of picking it up noon tomorrow because I suspect he'll wait around for me wishing to meet his mysterious neighbour. I will wait, spy on him, and retrieve the rice after he has fallen asleep. Since he keeps his dog inside the hut at night, I should be able to retrieve the bag unnoticed. I question my spelling because although I have learned Tagalog from the years interacting with the Filipinos before fleeing, I have read few words and never written the language before. I do know that the use of K in place of the C is common.

I trek back to the den, anxious at the prospect of my effort for rice backfiring. This act could tip people off that some stranger lurks. "It's that Japanese soldier we never caught," someone would interject, and a mob would come looking for me.

These thoughts nag as I lie down for the night.

*I sneak up to the balete tree to pick up my rice. As I pull the knapsack off the tree, a box-like wooden cage drops down over me. I try squeezing through the six-inch gaps in the wood frame, try lifting it, and try chopping through with my bolo. I'm stuck, helpless. Villagers exit their homes and surround me.*

*"We caught one," a woman says.*

*"What should we do?" says another voice.*

*"Kill him!" a man shouts.*

*A boy steps forward, points at me, "eat him!" he says.*

I wake.

At night, I wait until about an hour after the flickering light of the lantern turns off. My knapsack hangs. As I grab the knapsack from the nob of an old cut branch, the man's dog barks from inside the hut. The latch of the door clicks, and I turn around prepared to sling the rifle off my shoulder.

"Po?" he says.

*Respond, stay silent, walk away, run, flipping through my options.*

I walk, point to the knapsack, and say "salamat" as casually as I can, knowing that running is the act of a guilty man and will ruin my chances to trade with him in the future.

"Po," he shouts, now jogging towards me.

I stop and turn to face him with the full moon lighting us, and a smile grows from the sensation of being face to face with another person despite the dangers.

"Salamat," I say again, pointing to the bag and preparing to walk away.

"Thank you for the Kamotes," he says.

I struggle to find words from the many years void of conversation, as though that dormant part of my brain needs warming up - much like an old engine. As he has not latched the door behind him, it swings open. I flinch at the dog running out towards me.

"Don't worry, he's a good dog," the man says.

My eyes fixate on the dog as he runs up to me and nuzzles his nose into my hand. My stomach sinks. *It's the Aetas' dog.* My heart races, a cold sweat covers my

body, and a willingness to break my oath to never kill again sprouts.

"He likes you," the man says.

*Charge at him now. Choke the life out of him. Would that be justice?* I gather myself, breathe, kneel to pet the dog, and know that my rifle is slung over my shoulder should I need it. The adrenaline lights a fire under my chilled brain lacking the much-needed stimulation from the years void of human contact. It's kickstarted to draw from a fragmented memory of social norms and by the time words reach my mouth, they are a select choice.

"Where did you get the dog?" I ask with a smile, playing detective and not worrying about my accent, which he may or may not detect.

"A friend gave him to me," he says.

I continue to pet and look closely at the dog. *Maybe this man had nothing to do with the Aetas death.*

"My friend had a dog just like him," I say, looking up to see if it prompts a response.

His smile disappears. *Guilty.* He takes a step back looking at my rifle. The revenge boiling in my blood reduces to a simmer when I see the fear in his face. And it makes sense why he's here alone, to escape the past much like me.

"It's ok, my friend," I tell him.

I keep a slight smile on my face, in comfort at our shared experience despite once being enemies, which helps to keep him calm. I give the dog one last pat on the head and stand up. *Does the man know I'm the Japanese soldier or just friends of the murdered couple?* Either way, he knows I know his past.

"Thank you," I say, raising the knapsack full of rice. He reaches out to shake my hand. We shake and I squeeze hard, holding a few seconds too long.

Looking into his eyes smiling the best I can, I ask, "How about chickens next time?" gauging whether I can trust him.

"OK, Po," he says, nodding his head, his tight jaw releasing as he forces a smile.

I walk away towards the treeline and sense that the man continues to stare at me. I turn around. We make eye contact. He panics and runs towards the front of the property where his scooter is parked on the main road. Kick-starting it, he revs and drives off south down the road. This leaves him open, without cover of the hut



and houses, unlike if he had gone north. I run across the field trying to catch up to him, unslinging the rifle, and aim. The dog runs after the man as though confused over why he's been left behind. The man is in my sights. *Clean shot.* I lower the rifle. *It's either him or me.* Sucking in air, I raise the rifle with those few seconds creating more distance between us. I shoot. The man drops off the scooter as if he was a large burlap sack of rice. The scooter rolls ahead a few metres before tipping over and creating a dust cloud as it slides to a stop along the dirt road, the wheel still spinning. The dog runs up to his master, barking and whining. Seeing the man move, I run over to him, the dog confused whether he should bark at me, lick the face of the owner, or run away. He does a little of all three, turning in a triangle of confusion. I think if the dog didn't remember me, he would attack. As the man bleeds on the ground, I give him a drink from my canteen to win the dog over, before pulling up the man's limp body and carrying him to the hut. The man lies in his bed with laboured breathing. His eyelids are heavy, but his pupils peer directly at me as I kneel next to him.

"Why did you run?" I ask the man. "Things would have been fine."

His fear-glossed eyes pan over to me, and his lips separate as though he wishes to speak. The dog sits next to me. I tend to the man's wound, first pulling out the bullet from his back near his lung, sterilising the wound with a bottle of gin from one of the many bottles on his table, then cutting strips of cloth from a bedsheet and wrapping it tight around him.

"Stay with me, my friend," I tell him, so his mind doesn't give up before his body.

I remain by his side, and once he falls asleep, I sleep.

At first light, a motorcycle passing on the road in front of the house wakes me. I glance over to look at the man's chest to confirm it rises and falls, and the passing motorcycle stops further down the road. *The scooter!* I have forgotten to move the scooter from the road in my effort to save the man's life. I peek out of the window. A pudgy, middle-aged man stands there looking around for the driver of the scooter then glances back at the village. He gets on his motorcycle, turns around, and heads back to the village. I grab my knapsack of rice and rifle before running out the back door. The dog follows me partway then returns to the hut and barks at the approaching man.

"Po?" he shouts, "are you ok?"

The man watches as I sprint across the grass field and into the jungle. When I glance one last time through the obscuring sight of the trees, I see the man approach the house I fled from. I keep a brisk pace all the way back to the nook.

The deep, dark, fear-filled pupils of the injured Huk haunt me. Despite his fear, it was as if he wanted to say sorry; sorry for killing the Aetas, sorry for killing the Japanese during the war, or sorry for running away and forcing me to shoot. *I just shot a man.*

I look at my rifle, hold it above me.

"If I didn't have this, I would never kill," I yell at the sky. "I'm a monster!"

I toss my rifle into the pond and the splash shatters my reflection.

"Honour?" I scoff.

"For what?" I ask, looking to the sky for an answer.

"Look at me!" I say, pointing to myself and to the jungle around me.

"I'm in the middle of nowhere. No one cares. Where's the empire now?" I ask, collapsing to my knees, skin dry and cracking, body thin, hair and beard tangled.

"Damn the empire!"

Tears run down my face, snot out of my nose as I fall to the ground and curl up. I lie there until I run dry of tears before falling asleep out in the open in the sunlight filtered by the large tree.

My guilt, accumulated in war, is magnified with the thought that I may have killed the Huk. It does not pass, sticking with me for days and joined by the guilt of the part I played as a soldier and in the abandonment of Tamiko and Maeko. *I cannot use war as an excuse this time.* I fight these feelings and thoughts by numbing my emotions, which brings about lethargy. Starving my mind brings the same weakness as when my body was starved. I have no desire to eat or drink.

I reach over to grab the wrapped Bible on the small-rock-table. My arm flails to the ground in a failed attempt. While staring over to the banana-leaf wrap, my eyes close in an urge to sleep, then pop open. This book is a distraction, or medicinal for my unresolvable anguish. I push myself up with one arm and reach with the other, grabbing the edge of the banana-leaf wrap and tugging it off the table. The bundled Bible slaps to the ground and particles from the dried-out banana leaves shoot up and float around it. I tug on the single-strand-bamboo-

string worn thin by time. The string snaps and a leaf folds open, revealing the Bible, like an oyster exposing its pearl. The pearl's lustre fades when my eyes weigh heavy. I fall to sleep with my face turned toward the Bible.

*I'm in a foreign place, nothing familiar. Or is it fog I'm surrounded by? Not dark, not light. Shapes in the Greyness. Am I looking inward or outward? I pray. Lost with how to do so, I say, "Lord, God, Heavenly Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit." repeating it over and over while moving closer to a brightness.*

I wake in the morning, mumbling these words. The melodic chirp of a bird reminds me of where I am. I'm familiar with many of the stories of the Bible in my accumulated reading to the point I no longer read to learn but read for comfort. I recite in my head a memorised paragraph, *"But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."*

This view of nature is a similar philosophy to all religions I know. *Is the truth in front of me, around me?* My mind labours to find that path to redemption while looking outward towards the jungle for its role in a greater truth. *My dear Maeko, look to those animals you love so much. They will speak to you in my absence.*

I take the photo of Tamiko and Maeko from the Bible and place it within the splitting leather soles of what used to be my boot.

"You'll be safe here," I tell them.

#

Although my plan was to grow rice in the opened field that burned years ago, I delay that plan until I'm convinced my encounter with the Huk hasn't triggered a new search for me. *How could it not?* Whether the Huk survived or died. I listen, watch closely, and sniff the air for clues. Anything beyond my need for survival is an indulgence. Only focusing on food and shelter has weaned me off the old habits of society. Now that the nook is my home and I am establishing a steady diet, there's a dangerous sense of contentment. I yearn for nothing except companionship and to grow rice when the time is right. Thoughts of Tamiko and Shiro are strong but do

not grow stronger by the day like thoughts of Maeko do. I know Tamiko and Shiro well and memories of them are clear. But it is as if I'm getting to know Maeko and creating memories of her with my imagination, accompanied by that melody. *Does she think of me? Does she forgive me?* I think, while my fingertips caress the scar on my face as though wondering if it's still there. That day at the hospital vivid.

*The smell of saké reached me first as if the alcohol drooled onto my face. I opened my eyes and Tamiko was framed within my vision like a well-composed camera shot from one of Kajirō Yamamoto's films. She stared expressionless and left me confused about my predicament. I panned down to see Maeko's head sticking above the edge of the bed and noticed the white sheets and metal frame. I looked around the room before reaching up to touch the stitched tightness on my cheek. I looked back to Tamiko, then Maeko. Their stoic stares magnified my shame. I did not drink again after that day, but it didn't matter much because the damage was done, and our relationship forever changed.*

#

The 10-plus years of heavy rains reshaping the contours of the valley exposes the flesh of hillsides, builds new hills of transferred earth, and carves new paths. The mound of Joe's grave is flat. Only using the bolo when necessary, I follow a natural trail and glide through the jungle in ease of stride, no longer creating a ruckus in my once clumsy movements. My goal is to reach the peak on the other side of the valley. To keep from walking in circles when the sight of the peaks on both sides are hidden among the trees, I focus on a tree or large rock as a marker to move in a straight line across the valley. My sense of where the nook lies is never lost while my direction forward is never clear. And I often look behind to confirm, catching quick sight of the peak above the nook when it is not hidden by the trees behind me.

I cross the road then cross the river, ending up on the other side of the valley. As I keep walking, the valley begins sloping up toward this new peak ahead of me. I look up to see the obscured shape of the mountain through the canopy of trees. Standing there at the mountain's base, I plan my route. I climb along a natural rut created by a dried-up stream. The slope is gradual, and the flat surface of unencumbering foliage within the stream bed makes for an easy climb until the

slope steepens. My footing doesn't catch on the dry, loose soil of the rut, so I shift my path to within the softer, moister soil where trees and foliage grow. Once seen as obstacles to my climb, I now use the trees' firm base and the established roots of the foliage to hoist myself further up the slope while my feet sink into the softer soil to provide more footing. With legs pressing hard against the rich jungle soil and arms pulling me, I progress up the slope, using the bolo to clear pathways within the web-like foliage.

I reach the end of the first soft-soil incline where it meets with steep, rocky terrain. My neck stretches out the bulge of my Adam's apple while I look up to search for the peak. I catch sight of the peak above the towering rocky terrain leading up to it. My stance sways and knees weaken to vertigo. My fear of heights works in both directions, creating the sensation of free-falling upward towards the openness of sky as if top is now bottom. Convincing myself of the reliability of gravity in preventing me from floating upward, I take a big breath and climb. Each step plunges into the young soil collected beneath the weathered rock, pressing forward until I reach the rocky terrain which precedes the peak. Legs anchored, I thrust upward while my hands serve as the pulley on the jagged rocks. I progress up section by section in a near-vertical climb. Muscles burning, I will my way towards the peak. *I've come too far to turn around.* I press, I pull, I grunt my way up, then heave myself to the flat surface of the mountain's highest point on a protruding rock where the peak hangs over the conquered rocky terrain. Rising to my feet in exhausted glory, crouched over, with hands on knees, I pant and gather my strength. I push off my knees and stand tall to gaze at the view surrounding me. *It's grand.*

When my breathing calms, I look over the ledge and down the rocky terrain to where my sunken footprints leave a vague line in the young, soft soil below. *I did it. Conquered.* While looking straight down with my feet gripping carelessly, I sway in a playful taunt—the fear of falling down or floating up gone. *Look at your father now, Maeko.* Give me a parachute and I jump, give me a hot-air balloon and I'm happy to float higher. *Has anyone been in this exact spot before? Probably not,* as though it were a noble feat. From here, the rear-cliff-wall marks the nook with a smudge of grey among the lush, green mountainside. *Home.*

*"Get back home soon," Tamiko told me as we lay in bed the night before leaving for basic training.*

*"That will be my home for the next three months," I told her.*

*"Home is wherever your heart is."*

*"What does that mean?"*

*"You may live in the army barracks, but your heart stays here with me."*

*I did not respond while I thought about that concept.*

*She slapped my arm, "I hope so."*

*"Of course," I told her. "I'm just thinking what's it going to be like. Will they let me think about you?"*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"Their goal is to make me a soldier first and everything else secondary."*

*"See! Why did you have to join?" she said and sniffled next to me.*

*"I'll be back before you know it. And if they try to take me away from you, I'll walk out on them," I said, knowing it wouldn't be possible.*

*"You will?" she asks, rolling to her side and placing her hand on my heart.*

*"I promise," I say, looking over to her.*

It was war, not the training for war that stole my heart and mind from her, from me.

## CHAPTER SEVEN – YEARS 20 to 40

A new generation of bushes and small trees has joined our community, replacing the ones withered away or destroyed by the shifting landscape. I'm here, marooned, a soldier fleeing the enemy, a soldier derelict in his duties; or a soldier holding out against the enemy in perseverance and loyalty to the emperor who's willing to fight to the end. I am a failed father and resentful son. The who and why of me is a mystery much like the jungle when I first arrived. The comfort I have found in the jungle leads to thoughts of growing old in the den. Duty to myself and nature has replaced duty to my family with answers to my questions likely found here in this carefully crafted environment. "Is this what happened to you, Joe?" looking over to his grave. "Did you give in, give up?" *I will always love you, Tamiko, Maeko*, as though to say goodbye forever.

My pace, attitude, and appearance are more in tune as I walk in rhythm to the swaying branches. My skin is darkened, loincloth faded, blending into the colours of the trees. My breathing is gentle like the constant breeze that rescues me from the heat. A place that should only be my temporary home, a permanent home. All complexities of where, what, and how simplified. *My home*. I no longer curse at the pounding rain, or the nagging mosquitos, or the slithering snakes as they are no longer enemies to my well-being. I still feed on snakes but do not despise them anymore. The urge to shield myself from the rain, smack the mosquito against my skin, or chop the head off a snake; no more. My annoyance turning to mindfulness of nature's interdependencies for survival which I am now part of. The blood and guts of animals are on a near-equal plane to the blood and guts of woman, man, and child. My harmony of existence with nature finds its rhythm, and so does the melody in my head. A single melody with crescendo and all. The sound is clear and growing louder. I feel safe. *Are you playing for me in Japan, mother? Because you miss me?*

#

*I need rice*. The field that once contained that out-of-control fire is where I will plant my rice as the rice kernels I traded for years ago soak in water, with more than half sprouting. In the years since that fire, it has filled with dry grass and small bushes. I set the field on fire to clear the new growth. It burns throughout the

day with a thick cloud of smoke rising high. *Would anyone suspect a Japanese?* Late afternoon, the blackened field leaves tiny plumes of smoke among the scorched earth like the aftermath of an epic battle.

The next day, I arrive at the rice field in early morning, just as the cresting sun provides enough light for inspection. In the black layer of ash are the well-defined footprints of trespassers walking straight through the centre of the field, their feet small but heavier than a child, barefoot, a man, a woman. I visualise the size of the man and woman by comparing the depth of the imprint to my own footprints. These people are smaller and lighter than I, or the average Filipino. *They could be the Aeta couple, the healers that saved me. Maybe those bodies I buried were not them.* My heart warms for a moment until my rationality takes hold. Except for hunters, it would be Aetas that walk this part of the jungle. A flash of optimism for a reunion has come and gone. I'm keen to meet them even if they are only half as kind as the Aeta couple who saved me. And should they be the Aeta couple who saved me, then they are indeed angels. The Bible says there are, "Angels around us, angels beside us, angels within us, angels within us. Angels are watching over you when times are good or stressed. Their wings wrap gently around you, whispering you are loved." *Could these birds around me be angels? They do have wings. They do watch me. I'm lonely but do not feel alone.* I plough the soil.

I shore up the edges of the field with soil and divert water to the field from a stream using bamboo pipes, using the experience of making my drainage within the den. When the field floods with water, I block the flow by shoving leaves into the pipe and plugging it with a bamboo culm segment of smaller diameter. I plant each sprouted kernel by pushing them into the soil one by one and spacing them evenly throughout the field with space to spare in the gaps.

#

Three months later, I cut all the fully-grown rice stalks and let them dry in the sun before shaking out all the rice onto tightly woven bamboo mats, spread the rice out evenly, and let the sun dry them. I put aside one-fourth of the rice kernels for replanting, store the remaining rice for consumption over the next year, and discard any floating rice into the compost pit created on one side of the nook.

A month later, I tend to the rice field preparing for the next crop. I plough the field using a log that's shaped like a large ball-pin hammer, shove rocks into gaps in



the splitting, weathered wood, tie a large bamboo rope to it, and drag the log behind me. It is more strenuous than climbing that peak across the valley, with my legs and upper body working at maximum capacity. *I shall eat and sleep well this week.*

I store the rice in a series of long bamboo culms. I plant enough rice to last for the year in two separate harvests, and by not making the rice crop too big, I save myself labour of ploughing, planting, and harvesting beyond what is needed. After all, as is the case with kamotes, there's only so much rice a man can eat. To reduce labour, I avoid stripping and polishing the rice down to the white. The brown rice seems to have improved my bone strength, recovery from a hard day's work, regulated my bowels, and made it easier to maintain my muscle mass.

I check on the rice crop each morning, sleep twice a day from midnight until 4am and noon to 4pm, and collect wood in the evening for the next day. The rest of my time is spent collecting mangoes, coconuts, kamote, and cashew apples. I find snakes at a pace of one a month.

The act of observing my environment from here in the nook or at Overlook Point brings me the most peace. However, I stay within boundaries I've set for myself where I know there are no villages, roads, or well-travelled trails. At night, I recite the melody in my head to ease my solitude. *See mother, see father, I can grow rice all by myself*, boasting to myself.

"Thank you for teaching me," I say, once humility replaces my instinct for bitterness towards them.

#

The village, double in size since my last visit, is surrounded by the pattern of rice paddies. A new row of homes along a pathway perpendicular to the street encroaches on my viewpoint at the treeline. The gardens behind each home are patchworks of mostly green vegetables with some yellow squash, purple of eggplant, and differing shades of red tomatoes. Kids playing in the street part like water as a motorcycle drives through. Two men work in the rice fields and roadside produce-stands made from salvaged wood line the streets, serving vehicles passing to and from the mountains.

The stir slows as the villagers filter into a white, concrete church with blue trimming, in the spot where the community water pump once was. Only the two men working the rice field remain with their backs facing me. I walk further out and

sit perched on a rock halfway between the village and treeline, listening to the sounds coming from within the church, with no commotion out on the streets except for the occasional passing vehicle.

"Oh Lord, Oh Lord, forgive me," I say, as the congregation sings in English.

The singing and smoke of burning sugarcane provide a sweet incentive to relax. I place my knapsack with a bamboo culm full of rice and cashew apple on the rock where I sit. I'm in-between the two worlds of jungle and civilisation, looking back and forth between the two. The voices draw me closer with my dark skin, nappy hair, loincloth, and bolo on waist.

An American military jeep drives north on the road coming down from the mountain and through the village. It's hidden behind the homes as it passes through the heart of the village then emerges out into the open beyond the houses at the end of the village with no homes and only rice fields on this side of the road. I wear nothing that signals my Japanese allegiance and I'm far enough from the jeep where they're unable to engage me in conversation. I sense the eyes of the soldiers on me as the jeep drives by.

"Stop!" says a deep voice coming from the jeep.

The jeep stops. The passenger pulls out a pair of binoculars and peers at me through them. I walk towards the village as though I'm walking home, hiding my panic while my heart beats fast. *Am I an obvious outsider?* But walking is the reaction that seems least suspicious. There's mumbling, then the soldiers laugh.

"Yup, it's a negrito alright," he says, before gesturing for the driver to drive on.

As the jeep drives off, I look down at myself and touch my hair aware how much I look like an Aeta. I scan around to see if anyone notices me approaching before crawling into the cogon grass on the slope leading down to the encroaching row of houses and near the garden of the first house. The tall grass gives me cover before I gather the courage to stand, hoping to blend in as a local or Aeta, anything but Japanese. I keep a casual stride with shifting eyes as I approach the crops of the first house. Activity is focused at the heart of the village near the church. I enter the boundaries of the garden with long lines of eggplant, okra. I look around, then reach down to pull okra off its stem.

"Po?" a young girl asks, hidden somewhere in the garden. Startled, I stand up straight and search for the girl with scanning eyes up, down, side to side.

"Can I help you, po?" she asks, and I follow her voice.

She stands tall enough that the top of her head, cut off at the eyes, sticks out above the other side of a row of vegetables. I make my hand into a mouth as if I had a sock puppet, point to my own mouth, and shake my head to convince the girl I cannot speak.

"Ta," she calls to her father.

I breathe deep to keep calm with my hand staying close to the handle of my bolo.

The father arrives.

"Can I help you, po?" he asks.

I turn to the girl urging her to answer for me.

"He cannot speak," the girl tells her father in Tagalog.

"You mean he's deaf?" the father asks his daughter while looking to see if I understand. I give the father a blank stare and raise my hands, pointing to my ears, then mouth, to convey both I can't hear or can't speak. The father looks over my thin frame.

"You want?" the father asks, pointing to the okra in my hand.

I nod and the father looks to the girl. The girl runs over to grab a bag weaved of thin strips of bamboo. The father and girl pick okra and eggplant then place the vegetables in the bag.

"Go ahead," the father says as the girl hands the filled bag to me.

I bow my head thanking them, then look up to notice other villagers filing out the church staring at me. *Did I just tip them off by bowing?*

In a panic to quickly break off from the interaction with the father and daughter, I say, "salamat," immediately regretting it.

"You can talk," the father says.

I shake my head, pointing to my ears as though I can't hear, and the handle of the bamboo bag looped around the wrist of my other hand.

"I speak Ambala," the father says, which reduces my panic.

I shake my head again after he too has mistaken me for an Aeta. The father scans me from head to toe while the loud squeaking brakes of a passenger tricycle stopping on the road causes me to flinch toward my bolo. The father backs away.

"Go get help," the father tells the girl.

The girl runs off. I back away.

"Help!" the girl shouting in Tagalog as she runs into the heart of the village where most of the villagers gather, "my father needs help."

The girl's shout echoes through the village. Other voices join in as the chatter of the village picks up. The father's and my eyes lock as I back away, then I move my hand away from the bolo after glancing to see that the man has no weapons. *I'm sorry, I'll go now.* Reciting this in my head as an option to calm the tension. *But my accent! As of now, he thinks I'm Aeta.* The village commotion nears a fever pitch as the girl's and other women's voices are replaced by the rumbling of men's voices.

"Where is he?" an angry voice says.

I glance towards the village centre and back at the father before running off. In the frantic getaway, I sprint back into the jungle without locating my knapsack. I look back towards the village to see a group of men approach the father. They talk, but knowing that they still don't know I'm a Japanese soldier, I must retrieve my gear which will tip them off if they find it and trigger a manhunt. I run back in the direction of the village and emerge from the jungle in plain sight to grab my knapsack from the rock.

"There," someone shouts.

I dive into the jungle with the rumbling of men's deliberating voices behind me.

Back at the nook, I'm in comfort in isolation as men's voices of judgement circle in my head. I've come to prefer the unpredictability of nature over the unpredictability of man. Like I do regularly to keep a hint of faith in the society, I view the photo of Tamiko and Maeko. *How I wish to see or speak to them again. How many years has it been now? What year is it?*

"Papa," I would like to hear Maeko say.

*My father was a soldier and a drinker.*

*One night, after putting Maeko to bed, Tamiko climbed into bed with me.*

*Smelling the alcohol on my breath, she turned to me and said, "When are you going to stop your drinking and get to know your daughter?"*

*"Drinking?" I answered. "I can't have a drink?"*

*Tamiko rose from the bed, opened the sock drawer, and reached into the back*

*of the drawer to pull out a sock with my saké hidden inside. She pulled the saké out of the sock and held it in front of me.*

*"Why are you hiding this?"*

*I scoff with a dismissive wave of the hand.*

*"You try to hide your drinking more than you try to get to know your family. How about your daughter?"*

*"She's no good to me," I said while reaching for the saké. "Where's the son you promised me?"*

*I stopped my words there to the hiccup-like cries of Maeko in the next room.*

*Tamiko got out of bed.*

*"You've changed Kaiyo. What happened to you over there?" she said, while walking out the room.*

*I knew war changed me but didn't understand how. My emotional energy was locked in my own head, and I couldn't connect with Tamiko and Maeko beyond superficial interactions. It was like I was going through the motions of being a husband and father minus the emotion.*

*"Daddy loves you, dear," Tamiko consoled Maeko in the next room.*

*"He doesn't love me," Maeko responded in her high-pitched voice of hurt.*

*The guilt reached me in my isolation, and a moment of rare emotion surfaced as my eyes watered trying to understand where that sentiment came from and why I couldn't withhold those words. I lay in bed and drank from the saké bottle that I took back from Tamiko. I continued to drink until Tamiko returned to the room after Maeko had cried herself to sleep.*

*"You broke her heart," said Tamiko.*

*"I'm her father. Fathers don't care about crying," I said, slurring my speech.*

*"Did you drink more?" she asked, walking around the bed to find the empty saké bottle underneath. She picked up the bottle, "what's this," then dropped the bottle on the bed next to me.*

*The bottle rolled down the concave of the mattress into me and I jumped out of bed.*

*"Don't throw bottles at me," I said.*

*"I didn't throw the bottle at you, Kaiyo," she said with a calm-guardedness as I took a clumsy but aggressive stance next to her.*

*Tamiko grabbed her pillow from the bed and walked away.*

*"I'll sleep in Maeko's room," she said without looking at me.*

*"I'm sorry," I said, grabbing her arm.*

*Tamiko pushed my arm away.*

*"You're staying here," I demanded, grabbing her arm tighter.*

*"Let go," she tried pushing my arm away as I held tight. "You're hurting me."*

*She yanked her arm from my grip, ran to Maeko's room, and locked the door. I stumbled my way out the room and into the hallway then fell against the door. My face rested against the door and my hand on the doorknob held me up.*

*"I'm sorry, Tamiko," my voice loud against the wood door of the house her parents bought for us. "Tamiko?" I called out.*

*"Mommy," I heard Maeko say.*

*"Tamiko, please open the door," I said with a tired, slurred voice.*

*"What does he want?" Maeko asked.*

*"It's OK, Maeko. Your father is not well."*

*I tapped on the door.*

*"Tamiko?"*

*I knocked on the door.*

*"Tamiko, I'm sorry. Open the door."*

*I pounded on the door.*

*"Tamiko!"*

*"Mommy, make him stop," said Maeko as her cries start again.*

*"Go to bed, Kaiyo. You're scaring your daughter."*

*"Open the damn door!" pounding harder on the door.*

*Maeko screamed above her cries.*

*"Stop it," she begged.*

*I went back to the bedroom, picked up the empty bottle from the bed, and returned to the door.*

*"Here's the damn bottle. Right back at you," as I threw and shattered the bottle against the door.*

*I fell to my knees then laid my face and body on the ground next to the door.*

*"I'll just wait here for you," I said, tired and eyes shuttering to a close as I fell asleep.*

*In the morning, I woke to the screams of Maeko. Tamiko stood over me.*

*"Go back in your room Maeko," Tamiko pushed Maeko into her room and closed the door.*

*"Kaiyo," Tamiko said, kneeling next to me and touching my face.*

*I pushed myself up, Maeko crying loud on the other side of the door.*

*"Papa," Maeko called out. It warmed me to hear her call me that for the first time.*

*"Stay there, Kaiyo," Tamiko said before running downstairs.*

*When I looked around me, I was lying in a pool of blood. Soon after I lost consciousness. I came to again in the hospital, with Tamiko and Maeko by my side and the tightness of stitches across my cheek. None of us found the right words to speak in the hospital room and on the taxi ride home. When we arrived back at the house, Tamiko went straight to the kitchen and Maeko ran to her room. I packed my things.*

*Tamiko met me at the front door.*

*"Where are you going to stay?" she asked.*

*"The barracks."*

*"How long?" she asks, expressionless.*

*"A few days."*

*"OK," she said.*

*I look up the staircase and lean over to shout, "bye Maeko," with guilt softening my tone.*

*"It was too much for her. Give her time," Tamiko told me.*

*After two days, I delayed my return a week, then another week trying to sort my thoughts and overcome my shame. During this time, America declared war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. I chose not to face Tamiko and Maeko again before going off to war. Even with all I experienced in war, it is the lowest point in my life and I never drank again.*

*I wish to hear Maeko say papa again, one last time before I die. The scar across my cheek reminds me of that shameful night.*

*#*

*I spend much of my time exploring the ridges and mountains, staying away*

from the growing population in the valley. The blackness of a cave's entrance behind the summer-thinned foliage catches my attention as I walk by. Cutting through the brush from the many years of undisturbed overgrowth, I find myself there at the black-void entrance, which is around the same height as me and the width of my extended arms. In the darkness, a glimmer of metal reflecting from the daylight prompts me to step through the entrance and into the darkness. I walk towards the glimmer, hearing the flutter of a bat diving deeper into the cave without clear sight of the ground before me. I reach out to the glimmer. The light touch of a sharp metal object slices through my palm. I snap my hand away. Blood trickles down my hand and onto my arm. Holding my hand high, I rush out, grab a leaf, press the leaf against the cut, then tie the leaf over the wound with a bamboo string from my knapsack.

Re-entering the cave, I use the bolo to tap at the metal in front of me in the darkness until I find the sword's handle. I pull the sword out of the ground, exit the cave, and get a closer look in the full light of day. It's a samurai sword with dust reducing the glimmer of its shine. I wipe the dust off the blade by sliding it along a patch of grass. Holding it up, the signature "Yamashita" is etched in small print on the blade near the handle. Yamashita is the name of our Japanese commander in the region and rumours swirled that all the treasure looted throughout Asia was brought to and secretly buried in booby-trapped caves throughout the Philippines. I do not re-enter the cave in fear of the booby-traps. I note the surrounding landmarks should I return another day. *Treasure is no good to me.*

Back at the den, I remove the leaves from my wound and pour water over to clean it. I rub sugar into the wound to keep it dry before rewrapping it with a piece of clean cloth from what used to be my uniform. I will remove the bandage, boil the cloth, gently wash the wound, rub sugar onto it, and rewrap every four to six hours. Once I heal, I will practice the sword. I always wanted to be a samurai warrior ever since reading about the great swordsman Miyamoto Musashi in *The Book of Five Rings*. It's an activity I can add to my morning exercise, looking over at the sword resting against the wall at the den's exit as if I were a child waiting to play with a new toy.

#

It's been years since visiting the village. Keeping track of time has become



more difficult each year. *How old am I now?* I keep a greater distance when I do return to the village and observe from a high ridge. The village has again doubled in size with more passenger tricycles on the roads but no sight of any military vehicles. I hear the singing voice of a woman below. I step out from behind the tree and proceed down the ridge where a small waterfall flows into a pond. I climb down the slope hiding behind the trees as I descend until I'm close enough to get a good look at her. I expose myself further. She glances my way.

"Hey!" she says.

I straighten my stance.

"Po?" she asks, without scolding me for gawking at her.

In effort to hide my accent, I say, "salamat."

*Wrong choice of word.*

I hear the voices of more women approaching, break off our stare, and run away. When I loop around the village back down to the valley, I'm met by a group of men. I hold up my hands, *they finally captured me.*

"That's him," the woman steps up from behind the group.

"Are you the pervert?" he waits for my answer.

Any other man would fear such wrath from a husband, but I'm relieved they do not know I'm Japanese.

"Sorry," I say, while my eyes shift to the other men.

"Don't worry they won't touch you unless I say so," the husband says while turning to look at the men.

"Sorry," I say again.

A man warming his fist in the palm of his other hand steps forward. I grab the bolo from my waist and toss it on the ground, not wanting to make this worse than it needs to be.

I'm beaten, thinking of only Maeko, until my face is bloodied, and ribs are sore. I wish no ill will on these men despite the harm they are inflicting on me. If she was watching me, I hope she would see strength and not weakness for denouncing violence. These are not bad men. I deserve it. I welcome it, despite the pain in my jaw and my swollen eye socket. Notions of violence have vacated my soul. I would only hurt or kill for the sake of loved ones whether or not they love me back. Even then, it would deepen my anguish. I came close to fighting for Tamiko once before

we were married and before the incident at the market in Aki District. In that case, my anger was warranted.

*I often let Tamiko drive my father's motorcycle while I rode in the passenger carriage my father welded to the frame. On the side of the road we drove down frequently, a man emerged from his home waving for us to stop. Tamiko pulls over.*

*"A woman shouldn't be driving," the man said, as though it was his duty to enforce what he thought a social injustice.*

*I knew her response would come before mine and would be better than what I could come up with.*

*"Why?" she asked, trying to lead the man to dig himself deeper into the hole of ignorance when I just wanted to punch the guy in the face.*

*"You should let your boyfriend drive," the man said, pointing to me.*

*"No thank you, I'd rather drive," she responded.*

*"Women don't drive," the man repeated.*

*I shuffled in the carriage and positioned myself to exit. It's about time I punched this guy in the face, I thought.*

*Tamiko revved the engine on the motorcycle and said, "This woman does," before speeding off and throwing me back in my seat.*

*Tamiko accelerated so fast that we nearly lost control and veered off the side of the road. I couldn't help to think, don't crash, please don't crash. Not that I was worried about injury to her or me, but that it would only prove the man's point. When I looked over to her, I saw the focus in her eyes on the road ahead and her firm grip on the handlebars. I knew we would be OK.*

#

*I gaze at the twinkling stars. Is life a test? A test of humankind perhaps? And why does God remain obscure, an idea rather than something I can see, touch, hear? My questions echo among many others in the world, but in this setting, there's pure and unadulterated clarity in seeking truth. With another twinkle of a star, the notion of freewill enters my mind.*

*"Ah, I see," mumbling to myself with eyes still gazing upwards.*

*Choice in a world I cannot control. Oh, how this makes sense to me. Choice, one of the few things I can control. A sense of control of not how I can change the past*

but how I choose to move forward. A light has been turned on in the dark corners of my mind, an uneasy sense of peace. Newfound hope sprouts from the despair of once only seeing dead ends to seeing a path in setting my life right. *The freewill of choice. A gift.* I pray for answers. I pray for Tamiko's, Maeko's, Shiro's well-being.

*But God?* I continue to struggle with the idea of a god. *Which God? What constitutes God?* But I acknowledge the miracles around me and accept that such complexity cannot be possible from random chance. I look at and through the jungle around me that I've become so accustomed to, and reframe my perception. What I pray to in the sky, around me, or within myself, are one and the same.

#

I no longer feel strangers' eyes peering into this hidden nook. The boundaries of familiarity expand out to the limits of my sight from Overlook Point. I'm the overseer and not the overseen. I watch over in encouragement for nature to flourish, to grow strong, fulfilling its roles within the jungle and its own raw truth of survival. I often venture to those ridges, looking into a new set of unfamiliar landscapes without crossing the boundary of familiarity, at risk of coming face to face with the unexpected. I know not what or who lurks, relegating my eyes as the explorer and my body as a tree among trees. I'm proud among them.

I look far into the horizon and think of Japan, the beauty of the mountains and sea. I think of sushi, katsu, udon, miso. I miss the comfort of a kimono's silk against my skin. Most of all, I miss Maeko, Tamiko, Shiro, and even my parents. The resentment I have for Japan dilutes these positive thoughts as I'm now able to separate wartime Japan from peacetime Japan. I see the similarities in us all and recognise that the Japanese, American, Filipino soldiers are all pawns used for others' greed. I burn the military patch saved from my ragged uniform and check to ensure the photo of Tamiko and Maeko is keeping well in its leather case.

Musical notes play louder in my head. The call of fatherhood beckons me like a faint radio signal. The prospect of returning to civilisation and facing my family less frightening. My contentment in a solitary livelihood is losing its appeal because there's only so much good I can do here. The trees, animals, mountains speak to me, but there's no conversation; I can embrace them, but they cannot embrace me back; I am in good company, but lonely. I yearn to feel and share the love of another person. It's time I served my purpose.

“You and I have much in common,” I tell Joe sitting next to his gravesite.  
“Soldiers, alone in the jungle, away from loved ones. Can you hear me?”  
I turn to the cawing crow flying overhead and retrieve my rifle from the pond.

## CHAPTER EIGHT – YEARS 40+

I sit on the slope looking down onto the now paved road that leads to the village in the south and Clark Air Base in the north. Civilisation encroaching, power lines hang from their poles along the roadside with huts and concrete-block houses popping up within the jungle as if part of the spring growth. The sun glares off the tin roofs of those houses and spoils the landscape. In contrast, the nipa huts blend in with their palm leaf roofs except for their bright, glossy surface of new tan-coloured bamboo stacked tightly together. Joe's grave blends into the landscape as if the soil was never disturbed.

It is before midday when the first sounds of an approaching motorcycle get me to stand. Approaching from the north and not yet in sight, the driver honks. A young man drives with a small boy riding on the back. They pass with the boy's arms hugging tight around the man to keep from falling and one side of the boy's face pressed against the man's back to shield himself from the turbulence of wind and dust. Soon after, a rhythmic squeaking of whatever prompted the driver to honk his horn approaches from the same direction. I wait. My view is broken by the trees lining the road in the foreground of my sight. An elderly, shirtless man riding a bike comes in and out of view between the gaps of the trees.

In open view in front of me, he stops at a stream coming down the slope. Holding the bike with one hand, he reaches down to collect from the cascading water and drinks from his cupped hand several times. Mounted on his bike is a rifle, a bolo, a basket of rambutan, and two dead jungle fowls or darags hanging from a metal rack of misaligned welds mounted above the rear tire. My eyes fixate on the rambutan. I salivate to the mild sweetness and silky texture of their flesh. The old man props his bicycle against a tree and stands on the opposite side of the road facing away, to urinate. I glance back at the rambutan and the darags. If the man offers me a darag, I will accept it since they are already dead. The temptation grows to procure his supplies, knowing the old man will concede his goods easily if I ambush him.

My plotting stops when I notice the long, deep scars of bamboo lashes on his back, shaming me. I do not turn back to look at the rambutan, and as the old man finishes relieving himself and turns around, I avoid looking at his face. But when he

faces me preparing to mount the bike, I hope he will look up, see me, and nod at me. The old man is slow to mount his bike. I wait for him to either look at me or ride off. He looks up my way. I expect to lock eyes with him. He stares in my direction as the roar of a passenger plane grows then shatters nature's serenity as it flies directly overhead. I have never seen such a large plane before. *And where are its propellers?* The old man's eyes follow the low flying passenger jet. I look up with eyes fixated on the blue globe on the tail of the plane as it passes. The jetliner leaves behind a soft vibrating hum as the old man hops on his bike and rides off. The squeaking reengages my ears, now sharper after the low roar and rumble of the plane, its rhythm returning to the same pace as if the man is incapable of pedalling any faster or any slower.

Back in the den, I draw the globe from the jetliner and draw the Hi no maru side by side on the wall of my den.

"Shori," I mutter to myself.

I continue to stare at the two drawings.

"Shori!" I say out loud, jumping up and hitting my head on the angled stone ceiling.

I exit the den, rub my head, extend my hands towards the sky, and shout from the top of my lungs.

"Shooooori!"

As the sun sets, I'm frantic to gather all my belongings and pile them outside the exit before going to sleep. The excitement keeps me up late, but I wake well-rested. My recent dreams replaced by thoughts of the day to come. *Hansuke? Tetsu? Maybe they wait for me at Clark Air Base or Subic Naval Base. It's difficult for me to imagine what victory means for Japan. A Japanese governor appointed to rule the Philippines perhaps.*

I bid farewell to the den the next morning with a nod to the large, old tree before walking to the village. During my trek and my excitement tempered by both time and an aged body, I assess the evidence. *Why haven't I seen any Japanese soldiers, people, or vehicles? The globes? Are they the same?* Comparing the two images in my mind, one blue, one red; they look less alike the more I think about it. My logic wins me back and I return to the nook. *Is this really my destiny?*

I wake to the crying yelps of a dog. Grabbing my rifle, I make my way out of the den with the rush of fear clearing the grogginess from my head. I follow the yelps down the front-rock-wall to a medium-sized, golden-brown mutt stuck in a mud pit created by the recent rains. He looks up to me, tail-wagging, crying, *I can't leave him there. He will draw someone to me with his barking.* I look around for the dog's owner before reaching over to the dog with a branch. The dog clamps his jaws onto the branch, and I pull him onto the surface of the mud. When he tries to walk, his legs plunge back into the mud. I tug on the branch with his jaws gripping on it and drag him along the surface of the mud as he lays on his belly in abandoned effort to walk or stand again. He now sits at my feet looking up to me with a wagging tail.

"Smart, aren't you?"

The dog made more excited by my voice, stands up.

"Sit," I tell him.

He sits back down. I reach over to pet him, and he lies down to expose his side. Then as I rub along his rib cage, he turns onto his back, exposing his belly and brushing the dusty surface of the soil with his wagging tail. I rub his belly. He stretches his body by extending all four legs and closes his eyes in pleasure. When I stop petting him and stand up straight, he jumps to his feet then sits back down, begging for more affection as he looks up to me and wags his tail. When I kneel to pet him again, he licks my face with his sandpaper tongue. *My mouth is probably filthier than his.* I pull back, stand, then wipe my face.

"Go home now," pointing in the direction of the village.

He glances that way but remains seated, stares back at me, and wags his tail.

I lower my arm to reset and point again, "Go!"

He shifts, glances that way with his rear lifting off the ground for a second before looking back at me and sitting back down.

"Come on," as I lead him towards the village.

He follows.

We're on the outskirts of the village at the same place I used to visit when watching the Huk that I shot many years ago. The dog sits at my feet wagging his tail and glances towards the village as though he expects me to walk all the way. Homes fan out on both sides of the trails and roads like the growing branches of a tree.

"Go," commanding him again, uneasy with my closeness to the stir in these homes.

The dog sits at my feet wagging his tail.

"Go!" commanding him this time.

The dog runs out from the cover of trees then turns towards me with tail stiff and waits. He looks to the village and runs in circles urging me to follow, but I stay hidden behind the treeline. He barks. I step back into the jungle. He barks longer and louder in excitement, running in bigger circles in the open grass field. I back into the jungle.

"Isko," a girl shouts.

I drop to my knees and into the darkness of the shaded jungle. The girl, about six years old, runs out from her home about fifty metres away and into the grass field where the dog circles and barks. She looks up in my direction and I sink lower behind the bushes.

"Isko, come here," she calls out.

Isko runs over to the girl, and she greets him. He licks her face.

"Why are you so muddy?" the girl asks Isko. "I've been looking for you."

A little boy, about two years old, runs out to join them.

"Kuya, Isko is back," the girl says to her little brother.

Isko licks the boy's face. The boy turns away cringing as he wipes off the saliva. The girl laughs and then runs back towards the home, which is a newer multi-room bamboo home on stilts, isolated at the end of a trail away from the main road. It is the closest home to my viewpoint. The little boy chases after his sister and Isko, stumbling as his short, uncoordinated legs catch on the grass in the middle of the field. Left alone, he hoists himself up and continues the chase.

"Nay," she calls.

The mother pops her head out of the window.

"Look! Isko!" says the girl.

"Where was he?" asks the mother.

"I don't know, but he's muddy," the girl answers.

"Don't play with him until you wash him."

The girl runs away from Isko as he jumps on her in excitement at their reunion.



"Sit," she commands.

Isko sits.

"Tala, did you hear me?"

"Yes, nay."

Tala pumps water from the well at the back of the home filling up a bucket halfway. Isko sniffs the grass around Tala.

"Come here, Isko," she calls to him while lifting the bucket.

Isko approaches unsuspecting with his eyes and nose focused on finding a snack in the dirt surrounding the house. Tala dumps the water over Isko, sending him running away under their home where he shakes out the water from his fur. The boy laughs and claps.

The boy points, "aso," he says, then laughs again.

"Jovin! Call him Isko, not aso," the girl annoyed, tells her brother.

Jovin points, "aso," he says again.

Tala and Jovin run around with Isko chasing them. The girl looks up towards me as if she knows I'm there. I stand still hoping to blend well enough into the jungle. *Does she see me?* She returns to play. I sneak off.

#

I return to the village about once a month over the next year to observe the family—the trek wearing on my joints on my less resilient, middle-aged body. Today, I see the Jovin but not Tala. I wait, scanning the area for her. Then I hear panting. Isko stands on the other side of a fallen tree near to me, staring, tongue drooping out, breathing heavy, and tail wagging.

"Nice to see you again," I tell him while I climb over the fallen tree.

I jump off the tree onto the ground and reach down to greet him by scratching him between his jaw and neck. Isko greets me by licking my outreaching hand. Branches snap. I whip my head up and Tala stands at a distance watching. We lock eyes before she darts away out of the jungle. Isko abandons me to follow her into the open field and to the house.

A man at the property grabs her by the arm as she runs by, jolting her to a stop.

"Why so fast?" the man asks.

I rise to my feet, preparing myself to run back to the nook.

"Nothing papa," she replies to her father.

The girl glances in my direction and I lean back to hide behind a tree. The father turns his head towards me.

"Did you see a ghost?" the father asks as he turns back to Tala.

The girl pauses then turns towards her father and answers with a firm "No papa. Nothing."

The father lets go of Tala and she runs into the house straight to the window that faces me and peeks out with her forehead and eyes showing above the windowsill. She finds me among the camouflage of trees. Cautious and shy, she waves to me. I smile for the first time since finding the nook and give her half a wave.

When I arrive back at the den, I erase "Village" from the map on the den wall and write "Tala and Jovin's Home."

#

Nearly a year later after frequent visits overlooking the village, I venture further from the safety of the treeline, closer to the village. Tala and Jovin play in the grass-field between the village and jungle. She occasionally glances over at me, her brother unsuspecting of my presence while the mother prepares dinner and the father is nowhere to be seen.

"Kick the ball," says Jovin.

Tala kicks the ball hard and it flies over Jovin's head.

"Wow! What a kick!" he says, running to recover the ball.

Tala turns back towards me. I give her a thumbs-up and a smile. Tala grins from ear to ear, runs over to Jovin to grab the ball from his hands, runs back to her position, and kicks the ball again with that smile locked on her face, but not looking back up at me.

"Your turn Jovin."

She places the ball on the ground in front of Jovin.

"Kick it."

Jovin kicks the ball, and it shoots sideways off his foot.

"Try again," she says, placing the ball in front of him.

Over and over, she encourages Jovin until he finally kicks the ball over her head.

"Great job Jovin!"

"Let me try again," he says with a grin.

I watch the kids for most of the day, turning to observe the house where the Huk once lived. A family appears. I don't know whether he lived or died all those years ago, but the family living there now is not a good sign that the man survived the gunshot wound. These properties are often passed down from generation to generation or passed-on to others within the family.

#

A group of men gathered on the Tala's property work around a large wood pole laid at the front of the house. I creep closer in concern over these strangers until the men raise the pole with wires attached at the top. The hoisted wires sway from the pole connecting to another, larger pole along the main road about 20 metres away. The men stabilise the wood pole in a pre-dug hole off the trail in front of Tala's home. One man approaches with a wheelbarrow, pours cement into the hole, and I cringe at metal scraping against metal as a second man cleans out the cement clinging to the bed of the wheelbarrow with a flathead shovel. The two men prop up the pole with recycled wood on four sides, adjusting their position before nailing them into the pole for support while the cement dries.

When the pole is solid, vertical, and the wires stop swaying, a man shouts out, "OK."

Another man flips the switch box attached to the house and a hanging light bulb within the home turns on, doing little to illuminate the daylight interior.

"Electric!" Tala says in English, excited.

"Electric," Jovin joins in the excitement.

Their bobbing heads pop up above the windowsill while they dance in a circle around the light bulb as if doing a tribal dance around a bonfire.

"Electric, electric," they chant.

They continue to chant, and in clear view through the large window, the mother enters the room and pushes the black button at the base where the lightbulb screws in to turn off the light.

"Awwww," they say in disappointment, now standing on the far side of the light bulb where I can see them.

The mother gives Tala a playful slap on her rear-end as she walks away.

"It's Electricity," she says to them in parting.

Tala and Jovin look at each other, "Electricity, electricity," continuing their chant and dancing around the lightbulb without light.

#

Months later, voices come from the house. *Americans!* It sounds like they speak through a microphone. *Communications radio?* I flinch to the distorted sound of gunshots coming from the speakers. *Radio?* I move in closer, hiding within the cogon grass to enjoy the entertainment. With clear view of most of the room through the window is the moving images of a small black and white television screen as the slope down to the house is like a seat at a cinema with the family's actions framed by the window. The television sits on a small bamboo table in the corner of the room. The father, mother, Jovin, and Tala sit together on a bamboo long-chair with eyes fixed on the television screen. I move in closer, further down the slope, adjusting my angle to get a better view and staying later than usual as dusk brightens the screen and masks my presence. I come out from the cover of the cogon and lie on a grass slope nearer to the house with an unobstructed view of the screen and other rooms in the house. A tired-faced cowboy with deep, throaty voice fills the tv screen. I never enjoyed the front row seats in the cinema because the screen made me dizzy when I was so close to it. The light flickers in the house like a cinema and I wish I could get even closer. The credits roll, ending the first movie.

"Bedtime," the mother says.

"Awww, tay," they pout in unison.

I stay to watch another movie with the same tired-faced cowboy. His deep, throaty voice becoming a soothing tone. The movie ends late at night. The mother and father turn off the television and go to bed. I cut and spread the tall cogon grass over me to keep warm. I'll wake just before first light and return to the den.

#

Months later and consistent with my visits, I wait all day only to see Jovin and the mother enter and exit the house with water. I do not see Tala. On the sixth day of waiting, a man wearing a Barong-Tagalog visits the home. Despite the full light of day, I move in close. The doctor pulls out his stethoscope, sits Tala up into view with her head drooping forward, inserts the earpieces of the stethoscope into his ears, then presses the chestpiece against her chest.

"Breathe," he tells her.

He listens.

The doctor presses the chestpiece against her back.

"Breathe," turning his head sideways to concentrate on listening and looking out the window.

He looks at me. I freeze. He turns his head back towards Tala and places the chest-piece at a different position against her back.

"Deep breath," he tells her.

After the examination, the doctor steps out onto the front porch with the mother. He speaks to her, which sounds like whispers from my distance. The mother covers her mouth, holding back tears while Jovin kicks and pokes around the house long-faced and disinterested in the things he kicks and pokes at.

#

I continue to observe the family every day during the week, bringing enough food to last and refilling my canteen with water at a stream coming down the slope. I wake this morning to chatter and find a group of people around the house, some crying. A large group is gathered in front of the house. The mother is consoled by other women. The crowd quiets and turn towards the house. The father exits with Tala's limp body draped over his arms.

"Tala!" the mother cries out while resting her hand on Tala's chest. My heart sinks into my stomach. Like a man is supposed to do, I hold my tears. The father carries Tala, with other men clearing the way through the crowd, each person reaching out to touch her forehead as he takes her body to the church. Once her body is brought into the church and is no longer visible, I flee into the jungle with the bushes whipping at me from the speed of my run. When I'm back in the nook, I stand on the open, sandy soil in front of the den and look up to the sky.

"She's just a little girl," I say, unable to hold back my tears.

I hop onto the large-stone-table.

"What did she ever do?" screaming out.

I lie flat on the rock as if to sacrifice my body to ancient gods on a stone altar. It is long and wide enough to support my body except for my feet dangling at one end and my hands dangling to each side from my outstretched arms.

"I don't understand," I say in a soft voice to myself, "she never got the chance

to live her life."

Raising my voice, "And me! I'm still here, alive, with all the terrible things I've done. Why!"

My grieving carries on late into the night until I fall asleep.

#

*"Bye, papa," Maeko says to me with Tala's face.*

"Maeko," I cry out half asleep.

It's morning. I fill my knapsack with all the collected cashews and three mangoes, loop the strap over me; then pick up the rifle, canteen, bolo, and spectacles, and leather sole of my boot holding the photo of Tamiko. Yamashita's samurai sword glistens. I leave it behind. I turn back to look at the den one last time and over the familiar surroundings of the nook.

"Thank you," I say, looking up to the old tree and mountain peak.

I climb down the front-rock-wall to Joe's grave and place the bolo and spectacle on top of his grave.

"Thank you, Joe. You helped to save me."

I salute.

Walking down the slope, wearing only my loincloth, I reach the road. Motorcycles and automobiles pass me with drivers and passengers giving me a quick glance. I reach the village and walk up the slope to that large rock out in the open close to the family's house where they hold Tala's wake. I watch the people enter and exit the house to pay their respects, with very few people noticing my presence. I camp there for three days until Tala's body, in a white coffin, is taken from the house. It is carried by a group of men towards the cemetery located at the far end of the village along the road heading south. Leaving all my gear next to the large rock, I follow, lagging far behind. I keep my distance at the cemetery but stay close enough to hear the priest speak. After he says a few words about Tala and acknowledging Jovin as a "good brother", Jovin's eyes fill with tears. The priest reads from the Bible.

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the

Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the LORD has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth'."

The words give comfort, which brings me closer to the cemetery. People file past the open casket for their final goodbyes. The line grows and extends near to where I stand. One by one people say their goodbyes and the line gets shorter. While there's no one else to join the back of the line, I feel the moment slipping away from me and get in line. People glance at me in my loincloth but carry on. When I arrive at the casket, I stare at Tala's face and the one earlobe smaller than the other. *This is her!* Nearly falling over by this revelation and my ageing body weak, I lean into the casket. A woman behind me grabs my arm, pulls me back up, and holds me steady.

"Are you ok, po?" she asks.

"Yes, I'm ok. Salamat," doing my best to turn my head around to look at her in gratitude while staring at Tala.

*Tala is the girl in my dreams! How is this?*

As the villagers clear out from the cemetery, I see Tala's family. The revelation solidifies my belief that something greater is at work. Nothing else matters except to do what's right. Leaving behind any concerns of recognition as a Japanese soldier, I approach Jovin and his parents. Jovin uses his forearm to rub dry his red, moist eyes. His mother holds his other hand. Jovin looks up to me with the mother and father trying to match my face to memory. They wait for me to speak.

"I'm sorry," I say to Jovin in English, with no effort to mask my accent.

He doesn't look at me, preoccupied with the loss of his sister. He rubs his eyes with the back of his hand. Feeling my words inadequate, I reach out trying to console him. Jovin steps away. His father steps between us. A mixture of murmurs and questions come from the crowd.

"Who is he?" a lady says.

"Do we know you po?" the father asks.

"Capitan," a young boy calls out while running towards the scattered crowd

walking back down the road to their homes.

"I'm sorry," I say to the father. "Tala," putting my hand over my heart, "I'm sorry."

The barangay captain approaches with two other men by his side. The crowd steps aside to let them through.

The barangay captain walks up to the father.

"Do you know him?" he asks the father in Tagalog and turning to the mother as well.

"No, I don't think so," the father says.

The barangay captain turns to me.

"English," someone interjects with a gentle whisper.

"How do you know the family po?" he asks in English.

"I know Tala," I tell him.

"How do you know Tala?"

I look to Jovin and smile.

The barangay captain looks to the man next to him.

"He speaks Ambala," pointing to him. "Would that be better?"

"What's your name?" someone shouts.

"Do you know the family?" someone else shouts.

"Where do you live?"

Overwhelmed and in panic, I try explaining in Japanese.

"He's Japanese," a boy shouts.

I turn to the boy, "I am Japanese," standing up straight and slapping my fingers against my chest with no more trembling in my hands.

#

I'm brought to city hall and provided a translator by a city official named Manny, who's in his thirties, with combed-flat-sleek-black hair, and wearing a white button-up shirt with collar and black slacks. The nicest dressed man in the city. He gestures to me to sit while he prepares to sit at his desk. I sit, he sits.

"How long have you been in the Philippines?" he asks, glancing over to the translator.

The translator's lips part, prepared to repeat the question in Japanese.

"I don't know," bypassing the translator and answering in English. My eyes



wide in curiosity to find out, "since MacArthur returned," I tell him.

Manny directs the translator to sit down and talks directly to me.

"MacArthur!" he shouts out with a smile. "You mean, since World War Two?" he asks in disbelief. "The war is over," he says, "did you know that po?"

The other employees of the building enter the office.

"Po, please stay seated," a woman tells me.

She runs out of the office and comes back with a device and checks my blood pressure. Then checks my pulse and flashes a small light onto my pupil while a man sets a cup of water in front of me.

Turning to Manny, she says, "he's ok, po."

As she and others exit Manny's office, Manny says, "thank you, doctor."

I glance back at the woman as she walks out the door. *Woman doctor?* I can't help thinking.

"Japan surrendered when the Americans retook control of the Philippines soon after MacArthur returned," Manny is quick to continue our discussion.

I stare at him, waiting for more information. He stares back in hesitation as if worried the steady stream of revelations will overwhelm me.

"It's 1985," he says, lowering his tone with eyes squinting as if sorry he has to break the news.

I gasp wide-eyed.

"1985," looking at Manny and smiling.

*It's a dream, that's what this is.*

Manny smiles once, recognising my amusement. The room is silent as I soak in the reality, and Manny and the translator give me time to do so. *When will I wake up?*

"We'll contact the Japanese embassy and see if we can find your family," breaking the long stretch of silence.

I nod, still gathering my senses to the shock.

"Wife?"

I nod.

"Children?"

I nod, "daughter," I say with my mind, struggling to comprehend the time warp I find myself in, catching up with the question.

I provide Manny with my personal information.

"I have to go back," I demand, pointing back up to the large rock and all my gear.

"You're OK here, po; you can't go back to the jungle right now," he says.

"I have to go back," I say again.

Trying to clarify, I walk up to the window in his office and point to the rock on the outskirts of the village.

"My things are there," speaking to the translator in Japanese.

Manny looks over and listens to the translator explain before calling his assistant into the office.

"He will get your things. OK?" looking at me with kindness.

When the man brings my things back, I pull out the photo of Tamiko and Maeko.

"That's my daughter," pointing to Maeko in the photo and smiling at Manny and the translator.

I try handing Manny the photo.

"You can find her?" I ask.

"We'll try," he tells me, "But you keep the photo for now. OK?"

I pull the photo back towards me.

"Thank you, sir," I tell him, bowing and nodding in gratitude.

We shake hands, and as the translator accompanies me out of the office, Manny says, "Tala's family has agreed to host you. Jovin explained everything to his parents."

I look at Manny, surprised.

"Apparently, Tala talked to Jovin about you."

"Too soon," I say, feeling I was intruding so soon after her death.

"They insist," he says, "The mother thinks it will help Jovin. And you saved their dog, didn't you?"

Amusement that Tala and Jovin knew much more than I realised eases my worry of intruding on the family. And when I exit Manny's office, the mother and father greet me outside with Jovin hanging on to his mother's leg.

"Hi Kaiyo po, I'm Erwin," The father says, reaching out his hand.

If I wasn't so fatigued and shocked by the new circumstance I find myself in, I

would have flinched to Erwin's hand shooting out towards me. We shake hands and within his firm grip, I feel a sense of comfort that I will be taken good care of, which releases me from my inhibitions over assimilating back into society; let alone the society of my once-enemies.

Erwin points to the mother, "This is my wife, Maricel. And you know Jovin," looking down to Jovin.

Jovin squirms in shyness, then smiles.

When I arrive at their house, the scent of vinegar and soy sauce of newly cooked food fills the space. I step into the living room with a small kitchen to one side and a table next to it. A television with a long bamboo chair in front of it is on the opposite side. Curtains drape the entrance of three bedrooms, and a dark-brown-wood-carved caribou standing out among an assortment of other figurines is displayed on the shelf against one wall. In the centre of the room hangs that lightbulb that Tala and Jovin once danced around. Above the television is a green, yellow, orange, and black painting of a hut next to a lake at sunset with a silhouette of a man pushing a banca with a long stick—the green lakeside grass and treetops, yellow setting sun, orange sky, and black silhouette. Although I've never seen the painting before, it's nostalgic. After I'm done perusing my new surroundings, Maricel leads me to a room by brushing aside the curtain.

"This is Tala's old room. I hope that's OK for you?" Maricel says.

"Yes," shaking my head to approve even though the unease of taking over Tala's room as a result of her death churns my stomach.

The small bed which Tala used has been replaced with a large bamboo bed and the room has been cleared of all her personal belongings. *Too much.* My sense of imposition on the household peaks. For them to wipe away her presence from the room on my behalf places pressure on me not to disappoint in my company or their expectations of me. There's a folded stack of used clothes on the bed. *Too much.* Resting on top of the stack of clothes is a soap bar, towel, razor, toothbrush, toothpaste, and black plastic comb. I set my knapsack and canteen on the floor next to the bed and old leather sole of my boot with photo inside on a small side table. Manny has kept my rifle with him at the municipal building.

"You won't need it anymore," he told me.

I agreed.

I must clean up first and put on some proper clothes despite my hunger and fatigue. Picking up the soap bar and towel, I exit the room. Erwin, Maricel, and Jovin turn to look in unison as if anticipating my every move.

"Eat first," Maricel tells me as she carries a pot from the kitchen counter-top and places it on the already set table. "Eat now," she tells me again.

*Is it ruder for me to refuse or ruder for me to sit unbathed and in my loincloth?  
I'm starving!*

"If he wants to bathe first, then let him Maricel," Erwin tells her.

This relieves the pressure of my sense of obligation to sit.

"I will bathe," showing the soap, towel, and razor. "Please eat," I tell them, "Don't wait for me."

After I exit the house, I hear Maricel say, "He must be starving though."

*If only you knew my level of starvation, Maricel.*

I pump water from the well into the bathing bucket, dump water over my head and body using a small plastic cup and lather myself with soap. The luring scent of vinegar and soy sauce speeding up the process. I rinse off and wrap the towel around my waist before removing my loincloth to finish cleaning myself. Washing the loincloth, I hang it on the clothesline nearby although I have no use for it anymore. I use rusted scissors hanging by a wire on the well-pump and cut my hair before shaving my face as the last step of cleaning up. I put on a pair of jeans, white t-shirt, socks, and pair of what they call sneakers which are light, soft, and well-padded shoes. I re-enter the home with the family sitting at the table waiting for me.

"A new man," Erwin says with the whole family, smiling in pleasure at my new appearance which reduces my embarrassment that they all waited for me.

"Please sit," Erwin tells me, gesturing to the chair across the table.

I sit and Maricel stands to serve me from the pot of reheated pork adobo in front of me.

"Eat," she insists, "don't be shy."

*Shy! I just don't want to be rude by following my desire to stuff food in my mouth.*

It's not so much the pork that satisfies me, it is the salty, tangy flavour of vinegar and soy sauce that explode my taste buds. I could drink the juice from the adobo. Instead, I pour much of it over my rice.

"Masarap," I tell Maricel.

"Thank you," she responds.

I continue to eat, conscious to keep myself somewhere between an appearance of patience and sloppiness. But I'm closer to sloppy while slurping up the adobo juice and the soaked rice with soft strands of sliced onions mixed into it.

"No, thank you," I say, glancing up to her insisting there's no need to thank me for anything. "Salamat," I reiterate, looking down to my plate and scooping more of the rice into my mouth.

Jovin giggles. I look up to see everyone smiling.

"You eat like Isko," says Jovin.

"Jovin!" Maricel scolds him.

"We understand, Kaiyo po," says Erwin, putting me at ease.

Not forcing me into conversation, Erwin talks about Tala and the rest of his family. Erwin's time away from the family is because he's in the military, causing me to shift in my seat when I hear this.

"A good girl," he keeps saying.

I withhold my words, careful not to say the wrong thing with the recent loss of their daughter and in my uneasiness at infringing on their space at such a time. Tala and Jovin are the closest thing to family here and by default Erwin and Maricel are too.

"I'm sorry about Tala," I finally say, interjecting with sincerity.

The room silent, and as emotion builds for everyone, I look to Erwin.

"You're a good father," I tell him.

Then I look to Maricel, "you're a good mother."

Maricel's eyes water up, but she withholds any tears as she looks over to Jovin. I smile at Jovin. He smiles back.

"She was a good girl," I say, spirited to try to bring closure to our emotional frailness.

We finish dinner, speak in light conversation about Tala, the family, the village, and I speak a little about the nook where I lived all those years.

"Where did you sleep?" Jovin asks.

"In a cave," I tell him, to excite his imagination.

I thank them again before going back to my room while Maricel smiles from

the other side of the room, still hiding her sadness from Jovin. But later that night when Jovin is fast asleep, I hear the sniffles of her crying. I want to tell them about the visions of Tala in my dreams and to let them know she is my angel to show how special their daughter was, is. *Is it reckless to tell them so? Far-fetched for them to believe what I know to be true.* Tala reminds me of those important things which still exist that I thought were impossible to obtain again—love, friendship, genuine human connections.

I fall asleep with pleasant thoughts of Maricel, Erwin, Jovin, Manny, the translator, the doctor at Manny's office.

#

With my strength regaining from a healthy diet, a good bed to sleep on, and the inspiration of forming relationships with Tala's family; I remain isolated from the other villagers. *Do they hate me? Do some of them seek revenge?* I'm called back to the municipal building for another meeting with Manny. Erwin accompanies me, although I doubt he understands my outdated fears due to the war. Erwin waits outside Manny's office.

"We could not find your family members po," Manny says.

I pull out the photo of Tamiko and Maeko, which I always carry with me in a leather wallet given to me by Erwin, and hand it to Manny.

"You take this now, it may help," I say.

Manny looks at the photo.

"Your daughter is much older now, po," pointing out a reality I never really considered.

"My wife, she still the same, maybe grey hair," I explain.

He takes a deep breath.

"Hiroshima, that's where you're from, right?"

"Yes," I answer.

He explains how the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, describing it as "the biggest bomb ever used in war."

"Only one bomb," I say, not conceiving the magnitude of it, "maybe it missed them."

"It was a big bomb Kaiyo, very big bomb," he explains.

I lean forward and hide my face in my hands remaining silent for about a

minute. *They are gone forever.*

"Good news," he finally says, trying to cheer me up, "the embassy has found your enlistment records and confirms your citizenship. They are willing to fly you back to Japan."

I don't respond, my face still hidden behind my hands.

"You do want to go back, don't you?"

Removing the hands from my face, I look at him hoping there's no need to explain what I'm feeling. The years of hoping to one day reunite with Tamiko and Maeko extinguished in one moment like the lives of my wife and daughter. *If Tamiko and Maeko are gone, why would I leave my new and only family?*

I look out the window in his office in the direction of my new home.

"Do you want to stay here? We can arrange that if you want."

I nod at Manny.

"OK, we'll sort that out for you, but we'll continue to seek out your family. Everyone needs family," he says to me.

#

That evening after Maricel and Jovin are asleep, Erwin and I sit, talk under a mangosteen tree. Clouds are like silhouettes behind a rice paper wall as they float among the background of the moon and stars. He drinks a small bottle of gin with a label on it of a yellow-winged angel, wearing a red outfit, and holding a sword over his head ready to strike a fallen angel. The artwork reminds me of a Michelangelo painting.

"Do you know much about the bomb?" I ask Erwin, he a ranking member of the Philippine Army.

"The atomic bomb?" confirming with me before continuing with, "it was the biggest bomb ever used. Killed hundreds of thousands of people."

"Why so many?"

"Science," before turning to me to say, "sorry about your wife and daughter po. Apparently, the Americans thought that an invasion would be too costly for them."

"So many innocent people though," in my first display of anger since emerging from the jungle. "Maybe an American invasion would have resulted in more innocent lives lost," regaining my rationality. "What do you think?"

"I think it sets a bad precedent," he tells me. "Anyone, any nation can find justification, any excuse for using the bomb. And now that all the powerful nations have the bomb, there will be no winners. We all lose. You're a soldier too, what do you think about it, po?" he asks me.

"War becomes all about winning. Rules of engagement, morality, humanity are all lost in war." I look Erwin in the eyes, "I hope you never see war Erwin," I tell him in the docile nature of my fragile, elderly state.

A recurring nightmare of Tamiko standing and vanishing in the street visits me again and again, each time her scream making me nauseous, helpless, frightened, and jolting me awake in a cold sweat.

#

My guardedness towards the other villagers evaporates when the community pitches in to build my very own hut on a vacant lot next to Tala's family. *How can they forgive me?* I wonder and volunteer to help manage the rice fields separating the village from the jungle's treeline where I once stood observing Tala and Jovin at play. At times, I retreat to my hut when overwhelmed by the social interaction of the villagers. *It will take time.* It is at night, among the sounds of crickets and sight of bats flying across the moonlit sky, that the marooned soldier in me returns on occasions when I cannot assign something to what I hear, see, or smell. I do not sleep until I do.

Late morning, a woman approaches as I plant rice in the paddies. She is at least ten years younger than I. She walks along the raised trail separating the rice fields.

"Kaiyo?" she calls out when I refocus on my work.

I look up.

"Are you Kaiyo?" she asks in Japanese.

My mind takes a minute to catch up after spending years of speaking English, and more recently, focused on improving my Tagalog.

I assent by raising my eyelids and nodding. She bows to me, I bow back.

"I'm Atsuko from Japan International Newspaper," she tells me.

I find myself staring at her smile and snap myself back to continue the motion of planting rice while I listen.

Atsuko goes on to explain she's enthralled by my story.



"Over fifty years!" she exclaims.

I'm guarded, worried she may wish to pry too deep into my life.

"I will help you find your family," convincing me in her optimism.

"You think?" questioning her rationale.

"Do you have any other family not living in Hiroshima at the time that may still be alive?" she asks.

"No," I'm quick to say, "My wife, my daughter, my parents all lived in Hiroshima."

"OK, I'll focus on your wife and daughter."

"Shiro!" I call out.

"Your brother?" she tries, clarifying.

"My best friend Shiro," I say.

"Did he live in Hiroshima?"

"Right there, the house behind me," I tell her.

"OK," she says, looking down at her feet, "Give me his full name and I'll look for him too."

She knows, like I do, that Shiro was either in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing or off fighting in the war. Both ominous outcomes, but by the apocalyptic nature of the atomic bomb, it seems that the prospect of Shiro surviving is greater if he was not in Hiroshima at the time and away in battle. Atsuko makes the promise again of finding them or finding out what happened to them before she leaves, making sure I understood that it's likely they didn't survive.

"I want to know what happened to them," I tell her to show that I accept the grim outlook.

We exchange bows.

"Why do you wish to help?" questioning her motives before she walks away, "is it because you want to write my story?"

"I'm not doing this as a reporter," she assures me, "but I think I can help." I trust her.

#

"Maganda umaga, Lolo," Jovin and the neighbour kids would say each morning.

Walis Ting Ting is the name of the broom made of midribs of palm leaves and

my Tagalog has improved as I'm accepted as a respected part of the community of San Fernando. This once village is now a town with a population of over one thousand. Some of the elders who were alive during the war are not so open to accepting me. Manny, the former local official, is now mayor of San Fernando. The town thrives because it's the main access point to the mountain range where there's a military training base, logging, mining, outdoorsmen, and tourists. The town is also a place the Aetas come down from the mountains and access the health clinic and school. I've asked about the Aeta man and woman who saved me, but no one knows about them or the incident almost forty-years ago. I did find out the man I shot survived only to die years later from tuberculosis. I stop in place and stare in awe at each passing jetliner. *Someday.*

#

Apo Paling is Manny's mother and the most respected elder in town. She sits on the porch of Manny's white-brick house.

"Kumusta ka, po," I say as I approach, intimidated by her cold stare. Her eyes follow me to the gate of the property as she looks down on me from the high perch of the porch along the recently paved street.

"Kumusta ka," I say again, standing at the edge of the porch and bowing in return to my Japanese traditions.

She raises her chin in acknowledgement, refusing to exchange pleasantries. Her stare chilling, I continue to speak in Tagalog.

"Can we talk?" I ask.

She waves me up to the porch. I open a black metal gate customised with a fanciness of curves and whirls fitted on top, enter the empty carport, walk up the driveway. She turns her head towards me once I enter the enclave of a porch made up of palace-like white marble and white tiles. She gestures at me to come closer. I grab her hand and touch the back of her hand to my forehead in blessing, as is the custom here with elders even though she's not too far beyond my years of 75, before sitting next to her. We both face the street while she flaps a bamboo-woven fan over her face with the other hand.

"Your husband fought in the war?" I am direct in the question, as she does not have the patience for small talk with me.

"Yes."

Silence.

"He died in the war," she continues.

"I'm sure he died bravely," I say.

She scoffs, "That doesn't matter. Never able to raise his kids. Over there, an empty grave," pointing to the town's graveyard at the end of the village.

Although her response is confrontational, I couldn't agree more, but stick to my agenda and avoid dissecting the topic. I don't think she would take my perspective as a Japanese soldier all that seriously.

"Your son, he's done well for himself, the family."

"My son? I'm sure he would rather have his father." Her persistent hostility places doubt on whether I should continue.

*Should I even bother with this?*

With no intent to challenge that logic, I say, "I'm sorry," then look to her for a reaction.

Her face and posture do not change, as she continues to fan herself and not look directly at me.

"Only when I started reading the Bible did my guilt begin to go away," I tell her.

Head tilted down and eyes looking up at me like a schoolteacher gazing up at unruly students from her classroom desk, she puts her finger in my face and says, "Christ," then returns to that same cold look.

I wait for more, never taking my eyes off her. She turns her head away, making a quick glance and nod back towards me.

"OK," she says.

I take that as her blessing. Although the Bible has helped with my spiritual journey, she believes I've become a Christian which I am not. And it's not that the Bible hasn't convinced me of the sacrifice of the man Jesus, it is that I cannot release myself from all the bits and pieces picked up over my lifetime from Shintoism, Buddhism, and my own spiritual interpretations and philosophies. They all create the patchwork of my spiritual self, which still seeks that one truth. The Bible fed my spirit, loved ones fuelled my hope, and nature was accompanied by that recurring melody.

Erwin, now with higher rank, visits the American military base on Subic Bay near Olongapo City every three months for what they call friendship meetings between American and Filipino soldiers. It is about a three-hour drive from San Fernando, the official name given to our growing town. Although I cannot attend the meeting, I'm allowed into the civilian corridor of shops, bars, restaurants, and the beach within the official boundaries of the base. I'm amazed by all the advancements in technology witnessed best here on base; the Japanese automobile, military jets and commercial airlines frequently flying overhead, and most of all, the computers found in wide use at banks and business offices.

*"You know the calculator?" Jovin asked when trying to explain the computer to me.*

*"Do you mean a mathematician?"*

*Jovin smirked and took a deep breath, his eyes churning in his head.*

*"Ok, po. Do you know what an abacus is?"*

*"Of course. It's known as a soroban in Japan. The ancient way of calculating."*

*"But instead of moving beads up and down, imagine someone doing it for you and all you have to do is type it out on a typewriter."*

*"That's a calculator?"*

*"That's a calculator and computer. The difference is a calculator is only numbers. A computer is numbers and letters."*

*"But you don't need to calculate letters and words," I responded.*

*"In this case you do. The computer uses numbers and calculations to produce words. It's one big, very complex abacus."*

*"But how does it produce words with numbers?"*

*"I couldn't tell you exactly how, just that it does," said Jovin, ending the conversation.*

*I pondered the thought and reached the conclusion a combination of numbers represents a letter in the alphabet much like devising a secret code or number key to communicate military secrets to avoid enemy detection.*

My Japaneseness is long forgotten by this new generation of soldiers. In fact, Japan is a close ally with the Americans now. *Who would have thought!* I accompany Erwin on the bumpy ride in his custom-made silver-sheet-metal jeep. As usual, we

part ways after he parks with a 3pm meeting time back at the jeep.

I'm always keen to strike up conversation with Americans, preferably with the civilians because it is hard to completely relieve myself of the ingrained guardedness to people in military uniform. I find the Americans friendly and a way to improve my English because much of the conversations with the Filipinos now default to Tagalog. Today, it's an American man who sits on a bench facing the palm-tree, sandy, resort-like beach. He eats lunch out of his green-coloured metal lunchbox with polished-silver latch, his black dog next to him. I sit next to them. He tells me he's a welder who builds and repairs military ships at the shipyard, and the Labrador's name is Rocky. I reach down to pet Rocky who sits between us at the American's feet. Rocky wags his tail but stays seated next to his master.

"I had a dog growing up," I say, attentive to Rocky.

"You want him?" the American says, splitting concentration between me and his ham and sauerkraut sandwich, with mustard and mayo seeping out from the edges of white bread.

"Excuse me?" looking to the American with suspicion.

"I'm leaving for the States in a few weeks. If you want him, you can have him."

Surprised by the American's nonchalant attitude towards the dog and impromptu offer to a stranger, it takes me time to find a response.

"He looks like a good dog. Don't you want to take him with you?" I ask.

"Yeah, he's a good rascal, but my wife and I are having our first child soon. So, if you want him, he's yours."

"Now?"

"How about you come back two weeks from now, same time, and if you're here then he's yours. If not, I'll find someone else who'll take him. It'll give you some time to decide."

I ponder the thought on the ride home to San Fernando and the two weeks after. It would be another commitment further rooting me to the Philippines when I still have hope that either Tamiko, Maeko, or Shiro will draw me back to my homeland. Maricel, Erwin, Jovin are like family; but the reality is they're not. The love we have for each other doesn't have a limit, but the bond of belonging does. And since moving into my own hut, I try to keep a healthy distance, careful not to further infringe on their lives.

Two weeks later, I see the American snapping the latch on his lunchbox with Rocky at his feet as I walk up towards them.

"Ah, there he goes," the American says as he stands.

He unhooks Rocky's leash from the bench, eager to get back to work.

"He's a great dog but I just couldn't convince my wife he would be ok around the baby."

The American kneels on one knee and gives Rocky a firm rub under his neck with both hands.

"You take care of...," the American looks up to me.

"Kaiyo," I say.

"You take care of Kaiyo."

The American stands then grabs his lunchbox from the bench. "He's officially yours," handing me the leash.

"Thank you," I say, as the American takes one last look at Rocky.

"A girl or boy?" I ask.

The American looks to Rocky, then back at me. "Ah the baby," the American's face brightens, "It's a girl," he answers, "we've named her Lydia."

"Good," I say, "very good."

"Do you have kids?" he asks.

"A daughter. Maeko," I say, forcing a smile despite the fact I may never see her again.

#

Three years of sparse communication with the newspaper reporter, Atsuko, and she continues to hold hope for me to find the answers about the fate of Tamiko, Maeko, or Shiro, while I've given up all hope. She writes:

Dear Mr Fushimoto,

I hope you are well. I continue to search all public records for your family but did not find any information on your wife or daughter. As you know, you have very few close relatives since both your mother and father did not have any siblings. I located records of distant relatives far removed from your family tree and will pursue this lead further if you wish for me to do so.

Please let me know what you decide.

Also, I did find the military records of Shiro. He joined the army less than three months after you joined, but I regret to inform you he was stationed at Iwo Jima during the February 1945 American offensive which was soon after General MacArthur retook the Philippines. I do hope this bad news doesn't discourage you from finding out the true fate of Tamiko and Maeko.

I will take some time off from work with the recent passing of my mother. I will tend to the funeral and her affairs before returning to the office. However, since I'll be in Hiroshima prefecture, I will visit the main archival building for the area when there. Apologies for any delays in receiving my next letter.

Sincerely,

Atsuko

#

Dear Atsuko,

My condolences to you and your family for the loss of your mother. You do not need to apologise for any delays. It is very kind of you to visit the archival building while you grieve your mother's death. Please take all the time you need. Thank you very much and for all you have done already. I did not know you are from Hiroshima prefecture, maybe we are related.

Hearing Shiro died at the battle for Iwo Jima leaves another void in my heart. Rumours about the battle on that island trouble me and I hope he did not suffer much. He was like a brother to me. I will visit the church to honour him since there are no temples here. As for these distant relatives, Tamiko's and Shiro's families are more family than these strangers who carry some of the same blood as me. Please do not waste your time and energy seeking them out. Be well.

Sincerely,

Kaiyo

#

Dear Mr Fushimoto,

Sorry for my late reply, grieving and tending to my mother's affairs took a larger toll on me than I thought and have decided to resign from my position at the newspaper. I now reside in my mother's old apartment in Hiroshima. I continue my commitment to finding out what happened to your wife and daughter and now have more time to do so. I found records of Tamiko's and Maeko's last place of residence before the devastation of Hiroshima. However, when I visited the house, it had been rebuilt into an apartment complex. I'm not sure if it was destroyed in the war or as a result of urban growth.

I doubled my efforts to find Tamiko's and Shiro's families after your last letter when you said they are more like family than your distant relative. I can confirm that Tamiko's parents survived the war but died of natural causes later in life. Unfortunately, much like your parents, Shiro's parents were victims of the bomb. My next move is to follow the lead using the last known address of Tamiko and Maeko.

In regard to being related, aren't we all.

Sincerely,

Atsuko

#

While at the local market I look for music CDs of the koto or other Japanese music. Lasers is how Jovin described them.

"It shoots lasers, Lolo," he said to me.

He sees me as his real Lolo. I just wonder if he understands we are not related. He's twelve years old now. As for shooting lasers, I thought it was his imagination at work but come to find out he's not that far off. With a few CDs of Japanese music in my hand, I find a CD with a Japanese woman holding a Shakuhachi. *A woman playing the Shakuhachi?* I buy the CD because her eyes look like Tamiko's along with two other CDs with Japanese singers of modern, westernised music. Pop music is what they call it. I will judge after I listen. Borrowing a radio with built-in CD player from Erwin, I listen to all my new music



in my hut. The two pop singers entertain me. I'm moved by the music of the Shakuhachi musician listening to the entire CD again and again.

#

Dear Atsuko,

I'm sorry to hear of your troubles and please don't worry yourself with my affairs. I will rely on the Japanese Embassy to locate Tamiko and Maeko if they are still alive. Please take it easy and I will follow up to see how you are doing. Thank you for all you have done.

Sincerely,

Kaiyo

#

Dear Mr Fushimoto,

Please allow me to finish what I've started. I made a promise to you and intend to keep it. You will get no more help from the embassy unless the information falls on their lap. Although yours is an exceptional case, consider the number of people they deal with daily. Besides, I have nothing else to do with my time right now except this and my writing. I have no plans of working again anytime soon.

Getting back on track, the lead of your family's last place of residence came up empty. I will return to Hiroshima archives to see if their names come up in any other documents dated after the war which will help determine if they survived the bombing even if it doesn't tell us where they live.

Sincerely,

Atsuko

#

Dear Atsuko,

I can't express my gratitude enough for your dedication to finding my family. The only thing I can think to offer is a meal. I can make you my

favourite dish if I ever return to Japan.

The CD I included contains some music you may appreciate that might help soothe your soul. It caught my eye because the performer reminds me of my wife. How times have changed, a woman playing the Shakuhachi.

Sincerely,

Kaiyo

#

Years later, Erwin is promoted and stationed at the Manila military headquarters. Maricel and Jovin will move there with him. Jovin is the one who tells me.

"Lolo," he says with the brashness of an emerging teenager, "we're moving to Manila," failing to look at me with bottled up emotions. "Tay is moving up in the world," he goes on.

"Aren't you excited?" I ask him, in an attempt to provide some optimism, "big city, girls, lots of girls." If anything would get a fifteen-year-old excited, it should be girls. *Or is he still too young for that?*

"But all my friends are here," he says with a frown.

*I hope he's sad about leaving me as much as I am to see him go.*

"And you, Lolo, what are you going to do here alone?" finally looking over to me.

I smile at his words, and he's right.

He checks on me almost every day.

*"Lolo?" he always asks, sticking his head through the window or doorway, "Are you OK?" with a more admirable sense of concern over my wellbeing than he has for my privacy.*

But in this moment, he downplays his concern by shrugging it off as if he's not dependent on me as much as I am on him. Half the time he checks on my wellbeing and the other half of the visits are him seeking advice or support in his parents' absence. Erwin is always away with work and Maricel works part-time and volunteers at the health clinic for most of her remaining time. I believe they welcome such a busy lifestyle, as they will forever mourn the loss of Tala. I will as well. There are few things to keep me busy in my old age except my mind dwelling on the

memories of Maeko, Tamiko, Shiro, and Tala. Jovin receives my affection in entirety.

"It will be ok, Jovin," I tell him, "I will visit you often."

His frown levels off. I know this is not true and I think he does too, but my words seem to put him at ease.

#

A new family rents the old house of Erwin, Maricel, and Jovin. It is a young family; wife, husband, and their three young kids—my hut far enough away in isolation. Besides the pleasantries of frequently crossing paths, the man and I had only one real conversation. He introduced himself as Arnel and works as a tricycle driver. That is the extent I know them, as they seem comfortable keeping it that way. I do not think less of them for it.

No longer willing to accept any favours, I rent the hut from Erwin and Maricel after they move to Manila, using the money made from selling fruit and vegetables on the side of the road. I'm too old and weak to work in the rice paddies anymore. The years marooned in the jungle have sped up my ageing process as I turn eighty-two this year and my body is in decline. The doctor tells me it's my kidneys that suffered most.

"Malaria, diet, the water could have done it," he said.

"Can you fix it?" I ask, thinking with all the advancement since World War Two that this long-time health issue of repairing bad kidneys is resolved.

"Avoid stress," he tells me.

I am disappointed that he doesn't propose anything else.

I'm earning my own way by paying rent and providing myself with food, but the stress of this pales in comparison with my first years in the jungle. Here I know I won't starve or become homeless when surrounded by the kindness of Filipinos. It pleases me to know that since coming out from the jungle, any stress rolls off me like a raindrop, as I now understand what I value most. *I am at peace here*. Only the deaths of loved ones and regrets of never sharing the love I have for Maeko weighs on me while everything and everyone else lifts me—from the stranger on the street, to a mosquito, and even the pouring rain which was once the source of my unhappiness.

#

It's been nearly a year since I heard from Atsuko, and I believe she's finally

given up despite her promise. It doesn't bother me because I never expected any good news, or for her to keep at it this long often telling myself *no news is better than bad news*. I exit the hut early Sunday morning, clean-shaven and wearing donated church clothes comprising of black slacks and Barong Tagalog. I gaze at the morning landscape while I wait for Sunday mass, the soft light of the rising sun showing the lifting fog over the rice paddies. I've grown closer to this Christian God and adapting to their Catholic ways as a matter of routine more than faith. Attending church is the norm around here, and it's just as much social as it is spiritual for me. Just as when I turned to the Bible when marooned, I approach the sermons with a curious mind.

I stroll out to the paved road like I often do on a quiet Sunday morning. A woman stands on the road. She stares at me. I stare at her. Then I notice the glistening of tears on her cheeks in the dim morning light. I walk out onto the road with the balance of my thin, frail legs tested among the rocks that line the edges of the road. I step into the centre of the road and regain my balance on the sturdiness of the smooth pavement. I move towards the woman, my eyes moist with the familiarity of the woman's face without yet sorting who she is. *I know her*, is all I think. Someone from my past. A tricycle comes down the road, then honks lightly at the woman before him. She does not move. The driver slows to a stop and the passenger steps out.

"Po?" the passenger asks the woman who's dressed in a long, black, business-like skirt and white, button-up shirt.

"Are you OK?" the driver joins in.

The familiar woman's attention is locked on me.

The stir on the normally quiet Sunday morning street catches the attention of my neighbours. One by one, they emerge from their homes, seeing the woman and I standing in the centre of the road.

"Kaiyo po?" the young neighbour girl Ruby asks in concern.

I reach out to the woman and pick up my pace in the long walk towards her. *I know her*.

"Papa?" reading the mumble of her lips.

"Maeko?" my voice trembles from old age and emotion.

"Papa?" she calls out louder.

The dull look on her face now a sour frown of pent-up, painful emotion.

"My daughter!" I say, turning to the villagers along the way. Villagers idle up to road's edge with smiles, their hands extended in support with gentle brushes from the tips of fingers as I pass. Maeko walks towards me faster than I can towards her. Staring at the familiarity of her eyes as we get closer, then coming face to face, we both look deep into each other's eyes in final confirmation that the other person is who we think they are. It is easier for me to remember her eyes, the eyes of her mother. *How does she know? She was so young when I left her.* But my eyes are the only part of me she could draw on which remains the same from her childhood, all else a dramatic transformation since then. My appearance old and worn, my soul loving and free. *The scar. I hope she does not look at the scar and remember the old me.* She stays fixed on my eyes. We embrace. I squeeze tight.

"My Maeko," the tremble of my voice clearing.

I hold tight, not wanting to let go and feel redeemed when she squeezes me tight.

"I'm taking you home, Papa," she says with her voice rasping as if she's been crying for days and a warm tear drops off her cheek onto my neck, providing a sensation greater than any raindrop.

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After the swell of our emotions settles, Maeko explains. "Atsuko called and said she found you. I told her you died in the war. But when Atsuko finally confirmed the address of our farm, I realised it was real."

"I never heard from Atsuko," I tell Maeko.

"She offered to fly to the Philippines to get you, but I told her I would go. I think she's quite fond of you, papa," looking for my reaction.

In the comment, I know that Tamiko is gone.

Afraid to hear the answer, I ask, "And mama? What happened to your mother?" bracing my emotions.

Maeko grabs my wrist.

"I'm sorry, Papa," she says, looking at me.

And just like that, as simple as it could be, I let go of the remaining hope for reuniting with the only love of my life. As if God has given me permission, I think of Atsuko's smile, without guilt, on that day we met in the rice field. Maeko tells me

that she survived the atomic blasts only because she moved to Hatsukaichi for her education at Nippon Preparatory Academy for the Arts, while Tamiko was commissioned into labour by the government to work in a factory manufacturing munitions. I look deep into her eyes to read how heavy the burden was that she did not have her mother or me all those years.

“Tell me more,” I ask her.

We sit and she describes a good life with the support of Tamiko’s parents.

“But there was always a void in my heart,” she tells me, “My music kept my hopes up.”

“Hope that we would be reunited?” I ask.

“Hope that I would find out what happened to you,” she tells me, “I never imagined you’d still be alive.” She grabs my hand tight, “It’s a blessing, Father.”

*I’m sorry*, is what I wish to say. *I’m sorry for leaving*, as I squeeze her hand and stare into her eyes. Instead, I ask, “Your music? The Shakuhachi?”

Maeko’s smile grows.

“Oh, Papa. I’m so happy I’ll get to play for you. It’s my life, my passion, and I’m fortunate it’s my career.”

When Manny finds a Shakuhachi for us later that day, we sit together on the steps of my porch with about ten of the neighbours gathered around. She adjusts her lips onto the instrument and raises her arms to play. I prepare to slide away to give her space, but releasing one of her hands from the Shakuhachi, she grabs my arm.

“Stay,” she says.

There’s a lull of silence when she closes her eyes as if to transfer herself from one reality to another in preparation. She starts in a soft tone, much like the chirps of evening crickets, and when she reaches a crescendo of melody, my eyes well-up, recognising the melody as the same melody that stayed with me during my time marooned in the jungle. She finishes the song and looks over to me to see the gloss in my eyes. She smiles. But little does she know it’s much more profound than a father hearing a daughter play for the first time.

“Beautiful,” I tell her, “The most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard.”

I’ve seen the worst and seen the best humankind has to offer. I’ve seen the worst and best I have to offer. Those years marooned were a necessary path for my

life, with all the scars now healed. I chose to forgive others and choose to forgive myself with no remaining doubt over the greater force at work. *Be at peace Tamiko.* I'm reeling from the emotion of the performance. Maeko says, "Let's go home now, Papa." It warms me that she calls me, Papa, with home an abstract thought and Maeko choosing not to see that scar on my face.

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## PART II: CRITICAL COMMENTARY



## INTRODUCTION

The two most influential experiences that made the novel *Finding Kaiyo (FK)* possible are my frequent travels to the Philippines as a child of a Filipina mother and my exposure to Japanese culture through one of my childhood friends. I spent much time in the once battle-ridden province of Bataan where the story is set. During these visits, I was exposed to people, places, customs, and history. I immersed myself in the culture because of close family ties and my fluid racial and national identity. My background helped me to easily cross cultural boundaries with little external resistance and no personal inhibitions to blending in. I was accepted into the culture on these main factors; physical traits that deemed me of at least partially of Filipino blood, my known personal history for those in the general locale, the xenial Filipino culture, the Americanisation of the culture, including a large English-speaking population, and most importantly, my sense of global citizenship which allowed for a natural sense of belonging or commonality no matter the cross-cultural experience.

My Japanese-American friend from childhood inspired the character Shiro. He was my gateway to understanding Japanese culture and my bridge for cross-cultural exchange. Because of our friendship and his traditionally Japanese parents, who immigrated to the USA not long before he was born, I had a heightened awareness of anything Japanese and I was exposed to their language, mannerisms, values, artefacts, customs, and food. I wouldn't have had the deep level of interest in telling the story, the ability to provide detail in the setting of the Philippines, and the knowledge to authentically portray the two cultures without frequently travelling to the Philippines and early exposure to and a heightened awareness of Japanese culture. These cross-cultural, immersive experiences provided me with the grounding in the essence of places and cultures represented in the novel.

When using the word essence, I refer to spirit over physical or material, or alternatively, the 'nature' of something. This approach elevates an ontological view over a phenomenological view where 'ontology's interest in the nature or essence of

the text (Damrosch 6; Moretti 67)' and phenomenology 'is concerned with the description and classification of its phenomena, rather than causal or theoretical explanation'.<sup>1</sup> Essentialism is the core perspective through which I view the world and foundational to the conception, vision, and practice of writing the narrative. Essence of time, place, culture, people, or what I call contextual-essence, and the desire for cross-cultural exchange are the most important guiding forces or inspiration behind *FK*. Essence behind theme (thematic-essence) or allegory of rapprochement was secondary, as a result of the developing plot and in recognising intent behind the creative process. The creative process of storytelling, artistic expression, is more an emotional experience for me than it is a scholarly one. It is instinctual, and abstract more than deliberate. Technique and narrative details were used to keep with intended contextual-essence from which sprang the clarity in plot that formed thematic-essence.

After conceiving and in the process of writing *FK*, I became aware of its close link to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). My own story centres around a World War Two Japanese soldier who survives in the Philippines jungle for over forty years in an isolated nook where its enclosure within surrounding cliff walls resembles the perimeter of shores around Crusoe's island. The protagonist, Kaiyo, faces many of the same experiences of survival and solitude that Crusoe does: establishing shelter, coping with loneliness, the paranoia of the unknown, criticism of societal roles and expectations, quest for self-mastery in solitude, autobiographical-like reflection, individualism and autonomy, resourcefulness and self-economics, reliance on the natural environment, and his spiritual journey as a path to redemption. The similarities are uncanny, especially considering that I had never read *Robinson Crusoe* until after writing the first few drafts of *FK* and suggestive of the ongoing influence of Defoe's novel's influence on Western literatures and on my writing.

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, first published in 1719, 'stands out as one of the few works in which we can see a major new genre being born.'<sup>2</sup> It was key in shaping a whole new genre called the Robinsonade, first coined by German writer Johann Gottfried Schnabel in the Preface of his 1731 work *Die Insel Felsenburg* (*The*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Essence, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/64494>> [accessed 30 July 2022]; Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 40.3 (2007), 216–39, (p. 217) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267701>> [accessed 29 June 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Quentin G. Kraft, 'Robinson Crusoe and the Story of the Novel', *College English*, 41.5 (1980), 535–48 (p.535) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/375722>>.

*Island Stronghold*), where the dominant themes ‘derive their basic structure from the existential struggle of characters stranded in the wilderness and forced to battle for survival’.<sup>3</sup> The novel was also vital in establishing a new fictional portrait of realism and individualism that was taking shape in the eighteenth-century.<sup>4</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*’s popularity rested largely on it meeting readers’ expectations and their familiarity with a range of literary genres concerned with travel and exploration, which appeared in printed ‘books, pamphlets, *vade mecums*, ballads, [and] guides’.<sup>5</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* appealed to readers’ curiosity for ‘far-off places, especially Africa and the Americas [...] because (more practically) they hinted at potential future markets, possibilities for expanding trade, or religious, cultural, and commercial evangelism’.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Defoe wrote and published *Robinson Crusoe*, ‘he had mastered many genres that come together in his novel from a writing life that included travel narratives, pirate tales, journalism, political pamphlets, and other contemporary forms.’<sup>7</sup> Maximillian Novak speaks of Defoe’s motivation to address ‘Questions involving exile, isolation, religious disputes, economic experiments, politics, considerations about European history, thoughts about the nature of reality and how humans experience it’ and his ability to merge the influences from multiple textual traditions into his own writing.<sup>8</sup> It seems these textual traditions and personal experiences helped Defoe form his fictional narrative, which was presented under the illusion it was based on a true story.

In my case however, in addition to *Robinson Crusoe*, is the cinematic influences as a once and still aspiring screenwriter. The giant on which my cinematic vision stands on the shoulders of is Akira Kurosawa. Kurosawa’s influence is responsible for the persisting vision of the story initially conceived for

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<sup>3</sup> Yves Winter, ‘Debating Violence on the Desert Island: Engels, Duhring and Robinson Crusoe’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 13.4 (2014), 318–38 (p. 318) <<https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2013.28>>.

<sup>4</sup> John Mullan, ‘The Rise of the Novel’, *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-rise-of-the-novel>> [accessed 22 June 2020].

<sup>5</sup> J. Paul Hunter, ‘Genre, Nature, *Robinson Crusoe*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Robinson Crusoe’*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 3–15 (p. 6) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.002>>.

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Fisher, ‘Innovation and Imitation in the Eighteenth-Century Robinsonade’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Robinson Crusoe’*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 99–111 (p. 99) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.008>>.

<sup>8</sup> Maximillian E. Novak, ‘*Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe’s Career as a Writer’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Robinson Crusoe’*, ed. by John Richetti, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 32–48 (p. 46) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.004>>.

the screen. Although Defoe and Kurosawa's influences guided me subconsciously from the story's conception to completion, they are both foundational in shaping the novel on preconceptions of genre, theme, and visualisation. But make no mistake, what made the novel possible, is the immersion into the represented cultures from which an informed essence of place and culture emerged, creating the backbone for the story to exist and thrive. With this essence as the backbone, the narrative model drew largely from *Robinson Crusoe*, Kurosawa's films, and World War Two historical knowledge for it to be told coherently and hopefully convincingly.

This commentary will explain in more detail the novel's genesis and evolution, influences and personal experiences, and some of my intentions which are grounded in the overview of my background and accompanying essentialist perspective. I will further detail the significance of Kurosawa's influence on *FK* and a likeness of experience and perspective to author Kazuo Ishiguro. Both Japanese-born storytellers help to introduce the topic of hybridity, fluidity, and cross-cultural exchange that leads into postcolonial discourse. It is important to acknowledge the impact colonialism and capitalism had on *Robinson Crusoe* when examining allegorical connections within *FK* in relation to postcolonialism and prevailing present-day thoughts on race, gender, nature, and economics. This includes discussing the colonial mentality of dominion or mastery over nature and people, examining some of the postcolonial ideologies influencing *FK* around the changing social (e.g., multiculturalism), environmental, and economic dynamics of globalisation. I place living alone in nature, or what I call eco-solitude, in distinction to the superficial impurities of social life. Not to say society itself is inherently flawed, but to point to some of the sources for corruption of the self by society (e.g., war and other artificially created sources for contention). The novel doesn't claim that society is in itself corrupt, rather that society is corruptible like the self is, and corrupted society propagates the corruption of the mind and spirit with the aforementioned skewed value-system and moral ambiguity. The underlying philosophical thread weaving these topics together is our fluidity of existence and the artifice of boundaries from an egalitarian and essentialist's point of view.

## SOLITUDE

The Robinsonade is much aligned with the idea of a utopia or seductive alternative. Jason Pearl describes this as an 'idyllic inversion of metropolitan excess'.<sup>9</sup> The island Crusoe finds himself marooned on is a 'solitary utopia'.<sup>10</sup> The term solitude takes precedence over my use of isolation in regard to the premise examined because isolation or isolated does not inherently preclude others while solitude is defined as 'the state of being or living alone'.<sup>11</sup> Stephen Beck describes the Robinsonade's appeal as 'a unique joy to being [sic] alone on a beach, far from the reach of civilized concerns, contemplating how he might take full and lone command of his affairs' and although it is not always a 'beach' where the character or characters find themselves as depicted in *FK* or *The Martian*, the sense of 'falling away from the world' is a significant aspect of the Robinsonade.<sup>12</sup> Although the common perception of them and their popular appeal comes through their depiction of a 'solitary utopia' (Pearl) and a 'falling away from the world' (Beck), the Robinsonade is also much about struggling with nature.

It is important to recognise this struggle for survival because it would otherwise be Edenic or an Arcadian vision, derived from Greek mythology, of a congenial and abundant nature where the character(s) are content to live a simple, unchallenged lifestyle in harmony with nature.<sup>13</sup> Kaiyo isolates himself physically when choosing to flee into the jungle, and mentally, in coping with his trauma. Kaiyo relives his social engagement through memory in the hybridity of past and present. Kaiyo lives in solitude but never alone. He is in company of nature, self, God-like spirit, and others via memories. Childhood memories help him recall the self lost because 'trauma can be defined as that which breaks the frame, rebuilding a frame to contain it is as fraught with difficulty as it is necessary'.<sup>14</sup> Kaiyo's memory

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<sup>9</sup> Jason H. Pearl, 'Desert Islands and Urban Solitudes in the Crusoe Trilogy', *Studies in the Novel*, 44.2 (2012), 125–43, (p. 125) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2012.0023>>.

<sup>10</sup> Pearl, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> 'Solitude, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184314>> [accessed 23 March 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Beck, 'Getting Away from It All', *New Criterion*, 34.2 (2015), 30–35 <<http://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&issn=07340222&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA431532761&sid=googleScholar&linkaccess=abs>> [accessed 17 November 2022].

<sup>13</sup> Winter, p. 320.

<sup>14</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 31–32.

anchors him to both that traumatic past and anchors him to a non-traumatic, comforting past— symbolic of his divided self. Thoreau and Auster construe solitude as ‘a means of connecting with the world through multiple, metamorphic selves’.<sup>15</sup> Thoreau argues that by ‘losing ourselves [...] we realize “the infinite extent of our relations” (*Walden*, 171)’.<sup>16</sup> Kaiyo, through his solitude, experiences a palingenesis and evolution of self where reflection/memory plays a large part.

## MEMORY

Memory itself, even under the best of circumstances or intent, is morphed by the one remembering. A matter of perspective is just as individualised as the individual him/herself when no two people view the same thing identically. When considering shared experiences, we find ourselves in an exercise of negotiating perspectives. Kaiyo considers his first perceived memory as a child and admits it's unlikely to be true and only exists in his mind as a source of comfort:

*Memories of my mother carrying me up the driveway at a very young age vivid. I believe this memory marked my first arrival to the farm after birth; but common sense tells me otherwise. Asking mother is much too sentimental, even during our closest moments. I often relive the gentle bounce of her footsteps while wrapped warm between the soft cloths that lie across my forehead. The loose ends of hanging thread tickling my face as her warmth seeps through the cloth comforted me then and in reminiscence today.*<sup>17</sup>

The story doesn't offer the mother's memory of the same experience, but it would inevitably be different if portrayed with awareness of the pliability or plasticity of memory; applicable in discussion on historical truths. Aside from that example, the novel does little to create doubt in Kaiyo's childhood memories. His memories provide a fluid sense of self, between the self lost, the self he wishes to distance himself from, and the self he is trying to become. Kaiyo uses memories as a source of connection to his many selves as well as in connection to others, because ‘the

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Ford, ‘Inventions of Solitude: Thoreau and Auster’, *Journal of American Studies*, 33.2 (1999), 201–19 (p. 205) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875898005969>>.

<sup>16</sup> Ford, p. 205.

<sup>17</sup> Chester Dinsmore, ‘Writing the Robinsonade Novel’ (doctoral thesis, Bangor University, 2022), p. 12.

notion of personal memories isolated from their social context is an abstraction. [...] [T]he individual does not cease to be “enclosed within some group” just because he or she is physically alone while recalling an event. And the social can be identified in every individual memory (Halbwachs).<sup>18</sup> If one considers the past is active in the present, the future dictated by choices of past, and the present never independent from the past and future; corporeal life can be viewed as fluid.

Not only do we travel in physical time; we also experience mental time travel. We visit the past through our memories and then journey into the future by imagining what tomorrow or next year might bring. When we do so, we think of ourselves as we are now, remember who we once were and imagine how we will be as the article helps to explain our sense of self as a culmination of reference points.<sup>19</sup>

Kaiyo is constantly engaged with his past, coming in the form of memories and dreams, and consistently engaged in his future with hope. Our past is part of our experiential process which helps to shape us but not change us from our core-self or what I’ll also refer to as essence-of-being. We are prone to distance ourselves from our past because ‘our past selves seem foreign to ourselves, as if they were another individual’ in order ‘to construct a positive self-image in the present [...] because we may recognize flaws in our past self’s behavior, we tend to distance ourselves from the person we once were’.<sup>20</sup> The past is not only something buried far and deep in one’s memory; it encompasses everything of experience and includes the split-second prior to reading this word. Therefore, all behaviour and actions are of the past, happening in the momentary present, from which we find flaws of self informed by externally created values and expectations pitted against the repressed innate values of our essential self. Our experience can either divert us away from or lead us to the guiding light within our essence-of-being. It is often an ebb and flow of the divided-self as portrayed in *FK* with external vs internal and past vs present and corrupt-self vs core-self and physical vs spiritual.

My approach to writing *FK* was grounded by the cross-cultural experience and

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<sup>18</sup> Michael R. Molino, ‘Traumatic Memory and Narrative Isolation in Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 53.4 (2012), 322–36 (p. 324) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2010.494258>>.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Martone, ‘How Our Brain Preserves Our Sense of Self’, *Scientific American* <<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-our-brain-preserves-our-sense-of-self/>> [accessed 22 April 2022].

<sup>20</sup> Martone.

the fundamental understanding of historical context that when combined, informed contextual-essence. This allowed me to inhabit the character in what I believe to be an authentic representation of the protagonist navigating his real world, my fictional world. First-person POV allowed me (and hopefully the reader) to inhabit the character and for me to become a reliable narrator as Kaiyo. First-person POV was more natural than the third-person POV because I didn't have to manage what the character would and would not know, see, experience; which I struggled with when I first began writing *FK* in third-person. There was no sense of inhabiting the protagonist in third-person POV, and therefore, I wasn't able to engross myself in essence (the emotions tied to context as I knew and understood it), thereby making essence inauthentic without the ability to internalise and place myself then and there. Telling the story in first-person POV and present tense was natural and uncomplicated for me, using a perspective similar to how I experience everyday life when inhabiting the character complete with surfacing memories as adjunct. Authentic contextual-essence preceded the details meant to support it because 'If [the author] grasps the context, [the author's] guess is valid.'<sup>21</sup>

## ANACHRONISMS

By seeing the world through the eyes of the protagonist, I incorporated my existing knowledge, supplemented by new research, to authentically portray contextual-essence. This approach created a blurred line between author and narrator. As a result, the language was sometimes anachronistic because at times, I spoke in the voice of my own cultural and historical context. Although anachronisms appeared in the narration, it also came out in dialogue when striving for believability in the relationship between Kaiyo and Tamiko, with the contemporary reader in mind. Upon further review however, I took time to edit out clear anachronisms, leaving what I considered to be contextually plausible or dialogue that supports verisimilitude. For example, 'couldn't care less' was changed to 'wasn't concerned' because the former was determined implausible, but 'being the good friend he was', despite sounding somewhat anachronistic, was not altered because it was

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<sup>21</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'BBC Radio 4 - The Reith Lectures, Hilary Mantel, Can These Bones Live?', *BBC* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08wp3g3>> [accessed 10 October 2022] [transcript].



determined plausible.<sup>22</sup>

I think if you use stilted language, your characters can seem quaint and I wanted the reader to feel that this could be happening now. People in the past weren't quaint, they were outspoken and fierce and competitive. I don't know how they spoke, I know how they wrote but not how they spoke, and that gives me the freedom to translate their thoughts into modern-day language.<sup>23</sup>

My dialogue is a hybridisation of assumed historical language and current-day language. Dialogue was therefore 'inaccurate but plausible' and a 'more accessible representation of speech' or 'bygonese'.<sup>24</sup> I amended anachronistic language in dialogue, concluding that some language draws the reader too far out of the novel's contextual-essence. Authenticity of dialogue is speculation, because as Stocker notes, 'The acknowledgement by historians such as Southgate and Collinson of the lack of evidence for historical speech provides an opportunity for historical novelists to let go of immersion, where impractical, in favour of developing and articulating more workable approaches to dialogue, such as hybridisation and reader guidance' and 'by acknowledging the futility of reconstructing true "authenticity" in language for the majority of historical periods, writers can focus on producing dialogue that meets the needs of the story and the reader'.<sup>25</sup> Authenticity of dialogue and historical figures are a perceptive and ethical judgement reflective of the cultural and historical context of the author and their contextually shaped values.

## HISTORICAL FIGURE

As a child, I may have heard from a family member about the story of a Japanese soldier emerging from the Philippines jungle decades after the end of World War Two. The idea of a Japanese soldier living in the Philippines' jungle resurfaced as an

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<sup>22</sup> Dinsmore, pp. 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Suzannah Dunn, 'Book Reviews: Tapestry of Tales', *The Scotsman (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 16 December 2006, p. 20, Gale OneFile: News <<https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bangor.ac.uk/apps/doc/A155948169/STND?u=bangor&sid=bookmark-STND&xid=9b95d16d>> [accessed 28 November 2022].

<sup>24</sup> Stocker, p. 313; David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (National Geographic Books, 2004), pp. 20-21.

<sup>25</sup> Stocker, p. 316.

adult when coming up with screenwriting ideas whilst pursuing my undergraduate degree in Film & Television Studies. The goal was to visit the Philippines soon after completing my undergraduate degree to cultivate a cinematic vision for the story by reacquainting myself with the Philippines. My new experiences in the Philippines provided inspiration and a more complete understanding of setting and social dynamics. However, the reality set in of the improbability of ever seeing the *FK* project through to completion, where the end-product was a film, since the project required financial investment and group labour. I therefore turned to the novel form as a largely solitary, creative space in which I could tell this story. The story's premise was likely inspired by the historical figure, Hiroo Onoda (19 March 1922-16 January 2014). Not until I read a 17 January 2014 BBC article telling of Hiroo Onoda's death did I realise he existed and was not a figment of my childhood imagination.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, I learned of his autobiography, *No Surrender* (1999), but didn't read the book until soon before submitting my thesis for it was never my intent to tell Onoda's story and concerned the distinguishing details of his story would subconsciously make it into my story.

Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was a Japanese soldier who lived for nearly 29 years in the Jungle of the Philippines after World War Two concluded. Onoda survived in the jungle with three of his comrades, with one surrendering to Filipino forces in 1950, another killed by gunfire in 1954, and his last comrade killed by local police in 1972. During their time in the jungle, Onoda and his comrades carried out sabotage operations they thought hindered the Filipino and American soldiers. They believed any information that reached them about the war ending was a trick by the Americans to lure them out. Their persistent sabotage efforts made for a contentious and fraught relationship with the Filipinos when the Filipinos would not otherwise hold any ill-will towards them after decades removed from the war. In the years before emerging from the jungle, news of Onoda's existence reached Japanese mainstream media, creating a frenzy where he was viewed as a hero for his resolve and loyalty to Japan. Family and friends attempted to call out to him and lure him out, but Onoda also viewed those calls as clever attempts by the Americans to get him to surrender. A university dropout by the name of Suzuki and Onoda's

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<sup>26</sup> 'Japan WW2 Holdout Soldier Dies', *BBC News*, 17 January 2014, section Asia <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25772192>> [accessed 24 March 2018].

commanding officer Major Yoshimi Taniguchi were key to persuading Onoda to come out of hiding after each meeting with Onoda separately in 1974. Taniguchi issued orders for Onoda to ‘cease military activities and operations immediately.’<sup>27</sup> Onoda surrendered in March 1974.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The most influential non-fiction informing jungle survival was *From the Jungles of World War Two Bataan, The Epic Story of a Soldier, a Flag, and a Promise Kept* (2012) by Bob Welch, which tells the true story of an American soldier hiding from the Japanese in the Philippines’ jungle. The story is a real-life Robinsonade. This is the point where my thoughts began to shift away from a cinematic vision and more toward a literary one because the book provided clarity of what Kaiyo’s circumstance would look like and how it could play out in reality through detailed language. I hesitated to read a book from an American perspective, but the similarities of circumstances were hard to ignore. Details from Welch’s book that added to authenticity include cogon grass, pestering mosquitos, bouts of malaria, the use of Dita herb to cure malaria, information about Fifth Column Spies (pro-communist group), United States Armed Forces Far East (USAFFE), People's Anti-Japanese Army or Hukbalahap (HUKS), the training of Filipino scouts, the use of banana leaf as plate or wrap, and the use of coconut shells as cups.<sup>28</sup> Most importantly, whilst I was familiar with the Aetas, indigenous to the Philippines, I didn’t consider adding them to the story to the extent I did until reminded how much they were and still are an integral part of the jungle. Other war-related sources that reinforced my pre-existing World War Two contextual understanding were the documentaries *The Pacific War: Despair on the Battlefield* (2013), *Pacific Land War in Bataan* (2013), *The Most Extraordinary Jungle Survival Story of World War 2* (n.d.), *World War Two in Colour* (2009) and *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945). Details related to the appearance of uniforms, soldier equipment, musical instruments, names and their meanings, historical events, plants, animals, and

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<sup>27</sup> Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. by Charles S. Terry (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Bob Welch, *Resolve: From the Jungles of WW II Bataan, The Epic Story of a Soldier, a Flag, and a Promise Kept*, Reprint Edition (Boston: Dutton Caliber, 2013).

terminology were found online.

Although I was able to immerse myself in place, people, and culture through first-hand experiences which translated into my novel, portraying the historical period was reliant on my long-held interest in and knowledge gained on World War Two history. Stocker refers to readers at least being ‘in touch’ with history where ‘it may not be altogether familiar, but neither is it altogether strange.’<sup>29</sup>

The historian’s processes are more hidden. He’s not a simple chronicler, piling event on event. He seeks out the meaning of the story he tells. But like the novelist, he is the product of his own biography. He brings his personality to his work.<sup>30</sup>

Stocker elaborates, ‘Despite the rigors of their discipline, historians themselves cannot produce a coherent narrative [...] without resorting to literary devices.’<sup>31</sup> Beverley Southgate confesses, ‘we can, in short, never represent that past (as history) in any way of which it makes sense to talk of “truth” or “certainty”, or in any way that is finally and irrefutably distinct from fiction’ except there is an expectation of truth with non-fiction where historical fiction lives in verisimilitude.<sup>32</sup> The appearance of truth or authenticity ‘is not simply presenting the past factually. Authenticity is a negotiation between the evidence available to the writer, the reader’s existing understanding of the period and the imaginative power of the author, which combined, can only present the spirit of an era rather than its actuality.’<sup>33</sup> Stocker’s reference to ‘spirit of an era’ is in line with my term contextual-essence from which authenticity of historical fiction lives.<sup>34</sup>

## CINEMATIC INFLUENCE

Although *FK* was influenced by, and I had an affinity for, a wide-array Robinsonade films, including *Cast Away* (2000), *Lord of the Flies* (1990), *Blue Lagoon* (1980),

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<sup>29</sup> Stocker, p. 312.

<sup>30</sup> Hilary Mantel, ‘BBC Radio 4 - The Reith Lectures, Hilary Mantel, The Iron Maiden’, *BBC* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08v08m5>> [accessed 8 July 2022] [transcript].

<sup>31</sup> Stocker, p. 310.

<sup>32</sup> Beverly Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (Routledge, 2019), p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> Stocker, p. 310.

<sup>34</sup> Stocker, p. 310.

*Enemy Mine* (1985), and *The Martian* (2015), my cinematic vision for story was largely, and for the most part unknowingly, influenced by Akira Kurosawa which came to light when reflecting on the writing process. The Japanese director ‘trained as a painter’ and went to ‘great lengths to establish the authenticity of scenes, arranging rooms and battlefields alike as a painter would organise a canvas.’<sup>35</sup> Kurosawa ‘conceives of cinematic structure in terms of explosion and strife, and he orders his visual materials to produce a maximum of dialectical shock [...] in terms of clash, contradiction, reversal’.<sup>36</sup> Kurosawa’s style evolved from camera movement to static frame later in his career but the influence of his aesthetics of static dramatism, smooth continuity of cinematic grandeur, and the juxtaposition in montages of thoughts as a source for action were key to my visualisation of the story.<sup>37</sup> *FK*’s use of dreams, thoughts, and quick actions were inserted similarly to Kurosawa’s ‘kinetic qualities’ of quick edits and montages.<sup>38</sup> Kaiyo’s struggle for survival ebbed and flowed in mimicking Kurosawa’s ‘explosion and strife’ with a steady dose of ‘clashes, contradictions, and reversals.’<sup>39</sup>

A lone man sitting on the ground facing a large tree as if the tree and man were engaged in conversation, all perfectly balanced and framed, is the consistent visual that stayed with me early in the story’s conception and writing process. This framed virtual image was my static camera shot of painter-like mindset inherited from Kurosawa’s influence. And echoing the way in which Kurosawa uses the camera, I used my mind’s eye to visualise scenes of drama because for Kurosawa, ‘these elements are not simply aesthetic; they contribute to the story and add emotional depth.’<sup>40</sup> Visualisations began with the intention to include little dialogue aligning with ‘Kurosawa’s fondness for the silent cinema’ and ‘reliance on imagery’.<sup>41</sup> Eventually, this static visual of a lone man sitting next to a tree was replaced by other visuals as the story evolved and the fictional world of *FK* expanded. I intended

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Prince, *The Warrior’s Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Kindle Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.32; Chris Gosling, ‘Akira Kurosawa: Master of Cinema by Peter Cowie – Senses of Cinema’ <<https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/book-reviews/akira-kurosawa-master-of-cinema-by-peter-cowie/>> [accessed 6 July 2022].

<sup>36</sup> Prince, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Prince, p. 242.

<sup>38</sup> Prince, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Prince, pp. 38,45,.

<sup>40</sup> Brett Davies, ‘Kurosawa to Kasdan: Storytelling Influences’, *Journal of Screenwriting*, 10.2 (2019), 213–28 (p. 222) <[https://doi.org/10.1386/josc.10.2.213\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/josc.10.2.213_1)>.

<sup>41</sup> Prince, p.32.

for the process of writing to be similar to Kurosawa's style of storytelling, with a '...“directness [and] economy” (Richie 1998: 15) achieved by way of short, [and] apparently simple dialogue', which preceded the influence of Emily St. John Mandel's efficient writing style in *Last Night in Montreal* (2009).<sup>42</sup> *Last Night in Montreal* was the ideal example of the type of writing I appreciate. Mandel constructed her sentences with no wasted words and her novel was well-balanced in both tone and structure which further influenced me to strive for clean, efficient writing.

There was an explicit intention for nature to play an important role in *FK* earliest conception, aligning with 'a culture like Japan's, where traditions of nature veneration are very old.'<sup>43</sup> In the spirit of Kurosawa's ebb and flow, nature played both the antagonist and ally. I attempted to make elements of nature human or character-like from which either conflict or cooperation arose. Kurosawa's idea of retreating to nature for solitude (eco-solitude) is in line with Buddhist ideals where 'there is the sharpest antagonism between the world of men and the world of nature [where one can] escape the contaminations and sufferings of human troubles'.<sup>44</sup> Much like I did in *FK*, Kurosawa uses 'torrential rain to dramatic effect' and his 'passion for incorporating nature as an element of the drama [...] wherein the cycle of the seasons, climate, and weather conditions are active participants in the drama'.<sup>45</sup>

Each season, I'm reminded how persistent the pounding of rain and wind is during rainy season. I wait for the sun now and wait for the rain in summer—epitomising the forces of nature I'm pitted against, powerful and unforgiving for which I have no power over. The never yielding sound of rain and wind are numbing my eardrums like the constant roar of the sea. *Oh, how I miss that scorching sun.*<sup>46</sup>

Kaiyo's experience with rain and wind provides an antagonistic,

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<sup>42</sup> Davies, p. 218; Emily St John Mandel, *Last Night in Montreal*, Reprint Edition (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Prince, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Robert N. Bellah and others, 'Ienaga Saburō and the Search for Meaning in Modern Japan', in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. by Marius B. Jansen (Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 369–424 (p. 392).

<sup>45</sup> Davies, p. 222; Prince, pp. 261–262.

<sup>46</sup> Dinsmore, p. 60.

dramatic effect by wearing him down as if punishing him or testing his resolve as, like Kurosawa's protagonist, he's 'thrust into a hostile universe and to survive must struggle' and shows 'the essential conditions and dilemmas of human existence'.<sup>47</sup> I depict struggle as prompting or forcing Kaiyo to question selfhood, his role in the world, or 'dilemmas of human existence' and after stripping away the distractions, superficialities of social life he is able to claim or reclaim his core-self, a fully-realised, enlightened self. This concept of self-mastery and the accompanying benefit of transcendental thinking aligns with Buddhist perspective which 'acknowledges the transience and illusory nature of material existence'.<sup>48</sup> In this line of thinking, essence-of-being outweighs all things superficial and 'enlightenment is truly the natural way of things [...] achieved by penetrating beyond the veils of illusion that attach to corporeal bodies and the material world. Worldly desires must be transcended to achieve enlightenment, but paradoxically, real-world consequences flow from this wisdom as it is applied to ameliorate human life'.<sup>49</sup>

## SELF-CONCEPT

Dave D. White and John C. Hendee introduce us to the Primal Hypotheses, which asserts that solitude in nature has a positive impact on the personal development in the wilderness experience, which produces an outcome of enlightenment and enhanced self-conception (e.g., personal growth and the advent of spiritual development).<sup>50</sup> This stronger sense of self provides for a deeper connection to nature, and thereby acknowledging the external connection of environment to self. The solitude does allow for a simplification of life and time to ponder the 'essential facts of life' by transporting an individual away from the distractions of society.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Prince, p. 355.

<sup>48</sup> Prince, p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> Prince, p. 120.

<sup>50</sup> Dave D. White and John C. Hendee, 'Primal Hypotheses: The Relationship between Naturalness, Solitude, and the Wilderness Experience Benefits of Development of Self, Development of Community, and Spiritual Development', in *Wilderness Science in a Time of Change Conference* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, 2000), III, 223–27.

<sup>51</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Kindle Edition (1854: Pandora's Box Classics), p. 1261.

It is inherently human to question self and reason for existence. We look for meaning behind what we do, and who we are, where ‘a subjectively meaningful existence often boils down to three factors: the feeling that one’s life is coherent and “makes sense,” the possession of clear and satisfying long-term goals and the belief that one’s life matters in the grand scheme of things.’<sup>52</sup> *FK* shows a character trying to make sense of his life, better understand his purpose, and find his truth about/of self. The catalyst for Kaiyo’s evolution-of-self is in combination with nature and solitude, which aligns with Thoreau’s idea of ‘poverty’ (190) in *Walden* (*W*) where he is committed to using ‘nature as a barometer and stimulus to [...] spiritual development’.<sup>53</sup> It is in the combination of staying out of reach from the corrupt influences of society and the inspirational qualities of a transcendent nature that Kaiyo finds enlightenment where he’s able to find or reclaim his core-self. At the heart of Kaiyo’s redemption or reclamation is the idea of eco-solitude as the catalyst for clarity and achieving a higher-level of consciousness aligned with Thoreauvian thinking of ‘Explore thyself’ [sic] which Ford describes as the ‘spiritual internalization of the pioneer spirit’.<sup>54</sup>

## TRAUMA & ANXIETIES

Thoreau’s experience, as depicted in *Walden*, is ‘consciously acting out the central American myth that stipulates one can only achieve selfhood by immersion in the wilderness’.<sup>55</sup> ‘Simplify, simplify’ aligns with Kaiyo’s rearranging/recalibration of his value-system in attempt to shed his role in and expectations from society.<sup>56</sup> *Walden* ‘strikes to the heart of capitalist economics by asserting that less is more and that it is not material objects but spiritual development that we should seek. One travels through life best by simplifying bodily needs to leave more time and energy for

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<sup>52</sup> Frank Martela and Joshua Hicks, ‘A New Dimension to a Meaningful Life’, *Scientific American* <<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-new-dimension-to-a-meaningful-life1/>> [accessed 22 April 2022].

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Buell, ‘Thoreau and the Natural Environment’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 171–93 (p. 176) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521440378.013>>.

<sup>54</sup> Thoreau, pp. 4364; Ford, p. 211.

<sup>55</sup> Ford, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> Thoreau, p. 1274.



pursuing transcendental reality'.<sup>57</sup> Kaiyo escapes capture or death in the hands of the enemy but allegorically flees from society and by doing so 'simplifies' (W). In Kaiyo's simplification or life of 'poverty' (W), a shift is made from an externally defined sense of self to an inward journey. Simplification is the general premise of Kaiyo's journey. His evolution from fear to appreciation in/of nature is part of the journey to self-conception. The eco-solitude experience includes an appreciation in the small details of and connection with nature when doing what Joshua Hicks and Frank Martela call 'element experiential appreciation' where such moments of nature appreciation 'may enhance how [people] view their life'.<sup>58</sup> It is in Kaiyo's recognition of the small details that his appreciation of nature is revealed, and the essence of nature emerges.

...like the curtain dropping in kabuki theatre on a paradisiacal setting, the nook. [...] Birds dance around me, swooping through the air and singing as though excited by my presence. The small light-brown yellowish ones with white bellies are most abundant, intermingling with the smaller bright yellow canary-like ones. Their two colours weave a flash of a threaded, yellow-brown trail as they streak from tree to tree.<sup>59</sup>

Kaiyo's struggle against and eventual harmony with nature grounds him in a remedial way. He simplifies his life, which has otherwise been complicated by society or, more specifically, corrupted/traumatised by war. Considering his traumatised-self only complicates life above and beyond the normal pressures of society. Kaiyo's state of mind becomes a hindrance to self-improvement at the expense of the relationship with his wife and daughter. His mental and emotional leads him to stay among nature for a more inwardly examination. Kaiyo's social anxieties and compromised mental well-being from trauma materialise in his yearning of and regrets with loved ones; fears of the unknown; and in the overall ebb and flow of Kaiyo's emotions in 'self-division' or a divided-self (solitary vs societal, traumatised vs non-traumatised).<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Thoreau is obsessively

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<sup>57</sup> Richard J. Schneider, 'Walden', in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 92–106 (p. 98) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521440378.008>>.

<sup>58</sup> Martela and Hicks.

<sup>59</sup> Dinsmore, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Ford, p. 204.

concerned with the powers of solitude to convert the socially induced anxieties of 'self-division' (Ford) into the creative forces of self-awareness 'attribut[ing] all enthusiasm for reform to "some obscure, and perhaps unrecognized private grievance"(RP 184)'.<sup>61</sup> *FK* portrays a less obscure or ambiguous motivation. Kaiyo's trauma stems clearly from war and the trauma's causation of his fractured relationship with his wife and daughter.

I equate Kaiyo's trauma as his source of socially-induced anxiety. He is forced to address his anxiety by acknowledging his mental state and linking his past failures with family to war. This trauma has marooned or isolated his emotional self in his inability to connect with others, similar to his physical state of solitude. In reference to *Robinson Crusoe*, Engelberg describes the process as, 'what had once functioned as a retreat from the tumult of the worldly eventually develops into a tense face-off where the self confronts itself and its inevitable aloneness.'<sup>62</sup> *FK* adheres to the philosophy that for positive change and to reach a fully-realised self, one must face truth. This may appear a contradiction since truth behind memory and history is a subjective process and based on interpretation, perception. However, facing-the-truth is not about recalling memories or revisiting history. It is not about the past. It is about the present. It is about what is in front of you materially, emotionally, spiritually. What do you see when you look rather than recall. The dialectical approach to eco-solitude is therefore linked to a catalyst for change towards self-conception and enlightenment, framing the Robinsonade protagonist with this understanding.

Kaiyo's marooned state symbolises a withdrawal from society. Unlike Crusoe, Kaiyo chooses his solitude although it may seem he didn't have a choice. He could have surrendered in defeat or anytime during his time in the jungle. The intent was to portray him running from life (or simplifying life) while healing from trauma during a process of self-conception or enlightenment more than running from the enemy. He uses his hybrid of realities from dreams, flashbacks, memories, and of the present-self to cope with the trauma alone. Molino explains this behaviour as 'experiences remain bound up in an individual psychological process of working through trauma [and] a traumatic experience can remain buried in silent blind

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<sup>61</sup> Ford, p. 214.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Engelberg, *Solitude and Its Ambiguities in Modernist Fiction*, 2001 Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 2.

spots of memory, relived at unanticipated moments, and experienced with distortions and displacements'.<sup>63</sup> Kaiyo is marooned of mind more than body.

## TRANSCENDENCE

In these exploration-of-self narratives, eco-solitude is key to bring about a higher level of consciousness. Nature serves as a source of inspiration, spiritual guide, transcendent mediator between society and self in *FK*. Thoreau describes eco-solitude as if to stand at a distance from self and observe that other self, to be critical of self and evaluate or 'taking note'.<sup>64</sup> This spiritual-like perception, this 'doubleness', was expressed in *FK* and is relatable to my personal concept: belief the self is made up of the corporeal and spirit.<sup>65</sup> Thoreauvians ascribe to the wilderness experience where eco-solitude is a catalyst to self-conception and transcendence; and society a hindrance. Thoreau acknowledges our present physical state and reality but goes on to insist we 'must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny' and reject the status quo of expectations or artificial boundaries for the sake of a greater purpose.<sup>66</sup> This is very much in line with my personal philosophy that shows itself in *FK* in more subtle ways. All the different facets of Kaiyo's journey (overcoming trauma, reclamation of self, redemption, yearning for loved ones) lead to removing boundaries on self; to exist in the world as spirit/essence with a greater sense of purpose beyond the boundaries of common understanding into the arcane.

The transcendence unfolds more concretely when Kaiyo recognises Tala, after her death, as the girl in his dreams even before ever setting his physical eyes closely on her but suggests that another set of eyes of truth and reality exists. It is a dramatic example of the many things that happen in our lives we cannot explain with the logic of existing knowledge or boundaries. And although the scenario is created for the fictional world, this is the intent behind it. We've all experience hard-to-explain real-life scenarios that each of us interpret differently. I believe the term

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<sup>63</sup> Molino, p. 325.

<sup>64</sup> Thoreau, p. 1857.

<sup>65</sup> Thoreau, p. 1856.

<sup>66</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance & Other Essays*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Kindle Edition (Sanage Publishing House, 2020), p. 398.

‘coincidence’ is often used as an easy way to explain the unexplainable in bias against what may exist beyond the boundaries of our existing knowledge. There’s more we don’t know than we do know about why we exist, feel, and connect in the ways we do.

On the one hand, the goal of Thoreau's pilgrimage - and presumably the reader's - is spiritual progress, to explore beyond the restricted boundaries of our materialistic lives to find new truths and thus to become a new person.<sup>67</sup>

As Schneider explains, ‘Both the wilderness and the pond's “bottomlessness” are symbols of human potential, reminders of truths yet to be discovered. The crux of *Walden* is perhaps to be found in Thoreau's recognition of this dual goal of humanity:<sup>68</sup> Viewing boundaries and human limitations as short-sided and biased is an extension of my essentialist view of the world. We are condition to think in a way which I attribute to a skewed value-system of the material world’s checks and balances. *Walden* insists ‘on a continuous and paradoxical tension between what can and cannot be known’.<sup>69</sup> Thoreau writes, ‘At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable.’<sup>70</sup>

Kaiyo refers to nature as ‘an abyss of mystery’, although he also acknowledges that ‘there's chaotic order within this setting’, suggesting that there’s something bigger at play, and references Kami based on the Shinto ‘philosophy that all elements of nature possess a spirit’.<sup>71</sup> ‘God works through nature, as it were, allowing nature to give and to take [from] man according to his just deserts’ writes Gómez on Defoe’s Puritan perspective.<sup>72</sup> Engelberg describes *Robinson Crusoe*’s narrative as ‘the tale of a single man on an island in “peril and solitude...is enough to arouse in us the expectation” of sublime vision of nature, of metaphysical

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<sup>67</sup> Schneider, p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> Schneider, p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> Ford, p. 203.

<sup>70</sup> Thoreau, p. 4303.

<sup>71</sup> Dinsmore, pp. 11, 87.

<sup>72</sup> Alfredo Sandoval Gómez, ‘ROBINSON CRUSOE : LITERATURE AND RELIGION’, *Journal of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Praxis.6* (2010), 7–14 (p. 9) <<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bangor.ac.uk/docview/1835811576/8DB31B1921234A91PQ/2?accountid=14874>> [accessed 5 September 2017].

ponderings about the nature of humankind and God' while quoting Virginia Woolf.<sup>73</sup> *FK* depicts essence in and through nature. This done so by both experiencing nature and 'retreating into the mind' while in eco-solitude—a 'dualistic debate between the Transcendentalist and the naturalist' of double meaning in Thoreauvian thinking.<sup>74</sup> The Robinsonades' engagement with eco-solitude provides a better understanding of the psychology and essence in introspection when 'retreating into the mind' (Schneider) and/or through a transcendent nature.

## TEXTUAL HYBRIDITY AND FLUIDITY

Above and beyond the hybrid nature of my writing style made up of a mixture of screenwriting/cinema and fiction/literature, are the elements of form and structure within the novel that are hybrid and the narrative elements fluid. While fluidity is a more seamless integration, hybridity is the joining of two distinct parts. The most relevant textual elements include the use of italics and interpolating languages. Italics was used to juxtaposition the core narrative of Kaiyo's present to his past, marooned state of his conscious outer-self to his subconscious and/or inner-thoughts. By creating the textual hybrid in form, I hoped to assist the reader in distinguishing the transition away from the core, Robinsonade narrative. Through the intertwining of italics with non-italics the textual hybridity is appropriately applied, though imperfect, to tie together this incongruous element. Narratively, it creates a perception of the fluidity of time, where the past is lived in the present by Kaiyo and the reader, fluidity between internal and external, and the hybrid of conscious and subconscious. Time is fluid with a linear timeline of the present contracting and expanding according to meet the narrative needs and inserted flashbacks allowing Kaiyo to seamlessly 'time travel' (Martone) to his past often with relevant context to or triggered by an event or symbols in his present.

Language is representative of cultural fluidity where Kaiyo speaks Japanese, English, and Tagalog with the transition between languages more seamless or fluid. Kaiyo's multilingualism show's up in the story at opportune moments where key terms seemed most appropriate in their original language where English was the

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<sup>73</sup> Engelberg. p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Schneider, p. 100.

default narrator language. By intermixing or interpolating English with Japanese and Tagalog, this code-switching helped to create the intended multicultural tone and believability of context in accompaniment of cultural items and symbols termed in English. This intermixing of language accompanied by the blurred national boundaries between the Philippines and Japan contributed to the intent of fluidity.

## HYBRIDITY AND FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY

“Japaneseness” lies in the fact that the concept relies on the contrast between the native and the foreign, so that Japaneseness is created by the foreignness it eschews [and] There can be no true recuperation of traditional values once a revolutionary hybridizing change has occurred.<sup>75</sup>

Post-war Japan has shifted cultural norms where Japaneseness has become a hybrid between traditional Japanese and Western culture. I see this as part of the evolution of society despite Japan’s contentious history with this change. Kaiyo infers a change in what it means to be Japanese in a more global, cross-cultural society near the end of novel with, ‘My Japaneseness is long forgotten by this new generation of soldiers.’<sup>76</sup> Kurosawa’s film rework of *King Lear* with *Ran* ‘exemplifies the kind of hybridity that allows Japan to benefit from a western perspective without effacing a sense of its own identity and cultural heritage’.<sup>77</sup> Kurosawa remained grounded in Japan and his Japaneseness. This established a less permeable perception of identity but his cross-cultural exposure to Western-ways allowed for hybridity in culture and artistic expression. His boundaries as an artist were expanded and blurred because of his version of the cross-cultural experience. ‘Kurosawa was a man of all genres and all periods, bridging the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, the East and the West.’<sup>78</sup> This hybridity is a prime example of how blurred boundaries in cross-cultural exchange does not inherently mean a negative outcome when using ‘newer western influences to think critically

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<sup>75</sup> Jessica Chiba, ‘Lost and Found in Translation: Hybridity in Kurosawa’s’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 36.4 (2018), 599–633 (p. 612) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2018.0059>>.

<sup>76</sup> Dinsmore, p. 155.

<sup>77</sup> Chiba, p. 619.

<sup>78</sup> *Akira Kurosawa: Interviews*, ed. by Bert Cardullo (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), INTRODUCTION.

and constructively about [Japan's] past and its future'.<sup>79</sup> I argue there's strength in humanity when the negotiation between tradition and evolution takes place to form a constantly adapting cultural and individualised identity.

Another Japanese-born storyteller who has a similar perspective to Kurosawa but a more similar cross-cultural experience to mine is novelist Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro's cross-cultural experience and dual sense of nationalism shaped his identity, perception, and imagination not clearly rooted in a single place despite entrenchment in British culture: 'Ishiguro's body of work blurs the boundaries of culture, nation, and politics.'<sup>80</sup> His stories recreated a Japan, a 'floating world' (Ishiguro and Faber), partly from memories but that largely existed in his imagination after moving to England at the age of five and never returning to Japan.<sup>81</sup> This 'floating world' is his perception and self-interpretation of Japan but based on a solid contextual understanding that allows him to successfully capture essence. Ishiguro's novels 'are often praised by world literature critics interested in cosmopolitanism for their staging of universal ethical conundrums that can be abstracted from specificities of nation, history, or race'.<sup>82</sup> And Ishiguro's 'works are often read as exemplifying a certain brand of cosmopolitanism, seemingly unyoked from the particularities of nation, language, race, and history, even as his narratives are hitched to these issues'.<sup>83</sup> Ishiguro and my cross-cultural experiences produce works with characters and narratives of cross-cultural experiences and blurred boundaries. While some see the world of clear boundaries and differences, I see a world of blurred, fluid boundaries. As *FK* infers a universal nature in the essence-of-being, it posits the externally-created values of experience (violence and nationalism) with the internally-innate values (love and equity) to be reclaimed.

Kaiyo's cross-cultural experience does promote cooperation, acceptance, and the larger essence of humanity's existence. He exists in Japan, Philippines, the jungle/nature, pre-war, post-war, simple-rural life, modern-global society, in

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<sup>79</sup> Chiba, p. 619.

<sup>80</sup> Jerrine Tan, 'Screening Japan: Kazuo Ishiguro's Early Japan Novels and the Way We Read World Literature', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 67.1 (2021), 89–122 (p. 89)

<<http://www.proquest.com/docview/2507716088/abstract/14920CCD4DA477BPQ/1>> [accessed 29 June 2022].

<sup>81</sup> Peter Sloane, 'Literatures of Resistance under U.S. "Cultural Siege": Kazuo Ishiguro's Narratives of Occupation', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 59.2 (2018), 154–67 (p. 156)

<<https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2017.1375456>>.

<sup>82</sup> Tan, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> Tan, p. 90.

community, in solitude as essentially of same spirit where the struggle for identity is portrayed as a more externally produced anxiety about self. The novel's theme rests on the belief that self is established when we enter the world and constant where our experiences, relationships are less to do with creating or shaping the self and more a tool for finding or recognising the self that already exists. But identity is malleable and fluid according to the individual and to be accepted and respected by others. Kaiyo spends much more time finding common ground, practicing compassion than he does finding faults or judging others much like how 'Ishiguro's works in fact bring the tension between issues of cultural specificity and universalism into sharp relief'.<sup>84</sup> In the discourse on cultural specificity and universalism arise the questions of homogeneity and threats to culture.

### FLUIDITY OVER HOMOGENEITY

It is often assumed that texts are being translated into English and that the process of translation leads to cultural as well as political homogenization. Translation leads to cultural homogenization, the argument goes, because readers will learn fewer languages, and because texts written for translation will tend to avoid vernacular references and linguistic complexity. (Owen 31; Spivak 18-19; Apter "On Translation" 12). [...] The concern is this: translation is bad for what it does to books (presents them apart from their original language and context); but it is worse for what it does to authors (encourages them to ignore that language and context).<sup>85</sup>

Walkowitz describes a dire view of what's lost in translation with little consideration of the positives of shared experiences in cross-cultural exchange. I argue that reaching across cultures benefits more than it detracts by providing glimpses into other perspectives alienated or out of reach to any particular demographic. The original remains intact, and the translation is meant to reach an audience that would have otherwise never been reached. The strength is in the spirit/essence of the story by way of the author's intent rather than the details, as I

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<sup>84</sup> Tan, p. 90.

<sup>85</sup> Walkowitz, p. 216.



argue more generally and holds true for translation. The alternative is therefore to translate with effort to maintain original context at the expense of shrinking the demographics if not adapted for a specific audience; or not to translate the original work at all. I don't believe homogeneity inevitably means the 'death of culture'.<sup>86</sup> I do believe it's inevitable that continued and increased cross-cultural exchange will create a new hybrid of national cultures already taking shape in American culture in addition to a global culture currently dominated by pros (ideals of equality and freedom, and the normalisation of new hybrid/fluid identities) and cons (caste and modern-capitalism) of Americanism. This evolution of humanity will allow for blurred boundaries to bring us closer and make our differences more fluid in a new, everchanging, and individualised identity while the culture-holders and originators of cultural content remain the gatekeepers to their own culture.

As a product of the hybridisation of cross-cultural exchange, I view such cross-cultural exchanges as creating bridges between cultures rather than a rebranding of culture. Ultimately, the motivation for a Japanese writer, for example, to cater to the American clientele or US culture consumer, is usually their decision alone stemming from values of capitalism and personal gain. It is the duty of the citizens of the culture themselves to guard against 'death of culture' (Kenzaburo) if they have the power to do so. Despite Japan's tumultuous history with America and the influence Americanism has on the world, Japan and its people are in the position to shape their future, which is ironically a product of influence of American economic, political, and social values that makes it possible by giving power to the individual.<sup>87</sup> Japan has evolved 'from an isolated imperialist military nation to a pacifist, democratic, capitalist one (Finn, 139)'.<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, as an American, it is welcoming and convenient for me to support Americanisation on a global scale; but I don't believe the world is at a loss for adopting the core values equality and freedom from American culture. What threatens society are skewed values towards the material in those societies adopting capitalism in large part or in whole. The same materialism that Kurosawa, Ishiguro, Thoreau, and I proclaim as a barrier to self-conception, enlightenment, truth, or mastery of self are the biggest threats to

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<sup>86</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro and Oe Kenzaburo, 'The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation', *Boundary 2*, 18.3 (1991), 109–22 (p. 118) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/303205>>.

<sup>87</sup> Ishiguro and Kenzaburo.

<sup>88</sup> Sloane, p. 157.

culture because it corrupts our value-system where profit from selling a book may be more desirable than being a responsible gatekeeper to culture.

It is not inherent that the circulation of English literature results in homogenisation, or homogenisation results in ‘death of culture’ (Kenzaburo). We can never fully absorb another person’s nuances, perspective, or individuality even if communicated in the same language. This is true with any piece of art where the viewer/reader can never fully understand the cultural context if not part or privy to that culture. Even within a culture, there will be differences in perception. More is learned than not learned in the sharing. Boundaries create limits; it doesn’t promote venturing beyond when viewed as a barrier rather than an opportunity. Categorisation, as we see with literature and people, can be viewed as fluid or rigid. It provides a useful structure in scholarship and we are conditioned to see the world as more rigid than fluid. Rigid categorisation creates these boundaries while fluid categorisation is open-ended, adaptable.

Simon Gikandi considers the dilemma of categorisation on the global stage, stating, ‘What are we going to do with those older categories—nation, culture, and English—which function as the absent structure that shapes and yet haunts global culture and the idea of literature itself?’<sup>89</sup> Walkowitz addresses this issue as it relates to Ishiguro and blurring of boundaries and proposes that Ishiguro’s work ‘invokes absent structures over and over again [...and] forces categories such as “nation, culture, and English” to operate comparatively. He challenges us to see that a new conception of “global culture,” if it is to be something other than an enlargement of national culture, will require a new “idea of literature itself”...’ but does not propose a resolution in a possible remedy.<sup>90</sup> I have and will continue to suggest a fluid view of categories, existence as the new way of thinking. This updated world view of fluidity where we are different but equally malleable in all directions (like fluid) and not one-directional, including the concept that we are more of essence than we are defined within the confines, boundaries, categories of the material world.

This fluidity or malleability from the cross-cultural experience is applicable to American Globalism where, ‘Anthony Appiah makes a related point when he remarks in his book on cosmopolitanism that the expansion of U.S. products into

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<sup>89</sup> Simon Gikandi, ‘Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100.3 (2001), 627–58 (p. 633) <<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/30720>> [accessed 3 August 2022].

<sup>90</sup> Walkowitz, p. 219.

world markets can have a variety of dynamic effects, including reverse assimilation, such that U.S. products have to accommodate the desires and preferences of a variety of world consumers (109-13).<sup>91</sup> As an American, I am a beneficiary of globalisation with American culture dominating the world scene since the end of World War Two. Therefore, a sense of or fear of loss doesn't resonate with me as strongly. Sloane writes of Ishiguro 'Anti-American sentiment' and fear of 'dissociating people from their cultural roots' as a result of American-led 'cultural colonialism'.<sup>92</sup> It seems to me that if we are to choose a model for a global culture, the American system strongly rooted in the principles of freedom and equality is the one to take the lead. The US is a prime example of the cross-cultural experience but with continued growing pains of achieving the best version of a hybrid and more fluid society—the most diverse nation once led by a man who is a product of the cross-cultural hybridisation.

Referring back to Kurosawa's cultural hybridity, there is also his hybrid of time between past and present, pre-war Japan and post-war Japan. 'The Sengoku period has been characterized as an age of change [...] as the boundaries of class or vassalage became unstuck [...] Kurosawa is attracted by these fluid class boundaries and the new potentials for human realisation they offer, as well as to the social and economic changes characterizing the era' as if the humanist in him recognised the potential and envisioned a better future with fluid boundaries, lack of hierarchy in our social structure for which finds profound relevance in postcolonial thinking.<sup>93</sup> The character of Kikichiyo moves from farmer to the more respected role of warrior in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) and 'is symptomatic of the fluid class boundaries of that period, a fluidity that fascinated Kurosawa'.<sup>94</sup> The fluid cultural perspective shows itself in *FK* with the Kaiyo's ability to assimilate, adapt, morph his identity according to the community around him, blurring the boundaries of differences that can be used to define us from a negative purview. He is the fluid, cosmopolitan, autonomous individual meant to represent our evolving society.

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<sup>91</sup> Walkowitz, p. 234.

<sup>92</sup> Sloane, pp. 155-156; James Petras, 'Cultural Imperialism in Late 20th Century', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29.32 (1994), 2070-73 (p. 2070) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4401590>> [accessed 1 December 2022].

<sup>93</sup> Prince, p. 204.

<sup>94</sup> Prince, pp. 351-352.

## INDIVIDUALISM AND AUTONOMY

The individual is the invisible peak of humanity's evolutionary advance – invisible because the psychological evolution of human consciousness is entirely a subtle, subjective process, visible only to the inward vision and manifest only in its most outward results.<sup>95</sup>

*FK* and *Robinson Crusoe* provoke questions around personal freedom and power of the individual to act independently in the world, which can be split into two major categories of individualism when viewing through a modern lens: the inner-self and the external-self. Individualism describes a way of thinking towards self-interest and self-centred *modus operandi*: 'to act freely and independently in economic and social matters.'<sup>96</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* includes the inner-self relating to issues of the mental and spiritual mastery or conquering; and the mastery or conquering of external or physical of self-economics in survival management. Kaiyo and Crusoe survive in a state of self-economics. These protagonists symbolise the power of the individual when no longer reliant on capitalistic society though conditioned with that value-system. *FK* aims to depict detachment from society and the global economy more than *Robinson Crusoe*. Kaiyo's engagement with capitalism is minimal, inferring superficialities associated with capitalism while promoting the story's essence of purity and rapprochement in detachment from capitalism and society.

*Robinson Crusoe*'s corrupted view of individualism is closely related to the capitalistic ambitions of self-interest within the colonial disposition of control and mastery. Crusoe, like other well-known characters, including Faust, Don Juan, and Don Quixote, 'exhibit[s] a single-minded pursuit by the protagonist of one of the characteristic aspirations of Western man.'<sup>97</sup> Ian Watt's *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* explains that 'all four of characters'—or what Watt refers to as myths—'were widely recognized as having a universal importance, partly at least because they presented individualism as the

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<sup>95</sup> Ashok Natarajan, 'Evolution of Individuality', *Eruditio* <<http://www.eruditio.worldacademy.org/article/evolution-individuality>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

<sup>96</sup> 'Individualism, n'. *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/94635>> [accessed 17 February 2021].

<sup>97</sup> Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*, Canto Original Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. xiii <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511549236>>.

most desirable human quality.<sup>98</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* became the arrowhead in portraying the new perspective of economic, religious, and social individualism in literature germinated by colonial and capitalistic ideals.

This portrayal of personal freedom contributed to the novel's success when a new fictional perspective of realism and individualism took shape during the eighteenth-century.<sup>99</sup> The novel is in line with the inherent ideological perspective of self-interest in a skewed value-system born from capitalism during a period when 'colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe'.<sup>100</sup> Individualism is apparent in the overall premise of *Robinson Crusoe*, the mobile male, choosing to sail out to sea the first time and in subsequent voyages against the wishes, pressures, and expectations of his father's patriarchal objection and other hierarchical inherencies of his 'station of life'.<sup>101</sup> He escapes those societal expectations only to duplicate them as the autonomous individual whose value-system remains entrenched in capitalism with minor alterations of self from his cross-cultural experiences (primarily with Friday) as Defoe fought against a stronger current of Othering where many variations of differences were positioned, more concretely, as separate and unequal during his time. Kaiyo escapes society seeking autonomy and peace without holding the same view of differences in replication of my personal view.

## COLONIALISM-BASED SYSTEM

Artificial boundaries of differences used for the purpose of power and control of others or those Othered by simply not meeting the ever-changing criteria of acceptance to the dominating group is a societal-induced artifice. This artifice or form of corruption is posited against the corporeal and transcendent self in more detail within the context of colonialism and globalism. The hierarchy in question was created to benefit white, male, Western, coloniser and is a power structure that

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<sup>98</sup> Watt, p. 172.

<sup>99</sup> Mullan.

<sup>100</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Kindle Edition (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. by David Price, Kindle Edition (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1919), p. 4.

remains prevalent today as it's proven difficult for those holding power to relinquish that power. Speaking to these artificial boundaries, Isabel Wilkerson states 'Color is a fact. Race is a social construct' in her book *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*.<sup>102</sup> As the title suggests, Wilkerson's book has shifted focus from traditional scholarship on race and Othering to describe the existing power dynamic of differences with term 'caste'. She describes it as so; 'In America, race is the primary tool and the visible decoy, the front man, for caste. Race does the heavy lifting for a caste system that demands a means of human division.'<sup>103</sup> The term caste acknowledges the structure, the system, and the accompanying behaviours behind these artificially created boundaries of difference. It is 'the infrastructure of our divisions. It is the architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining' inherent in American culture and applicable to colonial traditions 'encoded' into our expectations.<sup>104</sup> *FK* is an attempt to decode or recode our existing perceptions behind the artifice of differences in an effort to recalibrate our value-system and create an alternative, individualised value-system and expression of self within the premise of a fluid existence.

America's scarred colonial history includes Indigenous displacement key to laying claim to land, cheap labour from the African slave-trade as an important economic component, the domesticated female considered as property of their male counterparts, non-white immigrants seen as threats to personal wealth, and nature for the exploits of man. Patriarchal ideologies of dominance and control structured the logics of hierarchy and oppression in European colonies, informing, too, the way in which non-white, non-European identities and cultures were Othered and positioned as inferior, which Plumwood labels as the 'master model' (master-model) in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.<sup>105</sup> There is, at times, a sense Kaiyo conquers his environment as displayed with him standing at Overlook Point using a visual straight out of *Cast Away*:

I trek further up the mountain, climbing around the steep rear-cliff-wall and up along the soiled slope. I reach a rock suited for a chair overlooking the valley, stand

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<sup>102</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste (Oprah's Book Club): The Origins of Our Discontents*, Kindle Edition (New York, NY, US: Random House, 2020), p. 66.

<sup>103</sup> Wilkerson, p. 18.

<sup>104</sup> Wilkerson, pp. 17-18.

<sup>105</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 23.

on the rock, and scan the landscape. Hai. A grand sight. Mountains on the opposite side of the valley stretch far northwards and southwards. Overlook Point. I name this viewpoint.<sup>106</sup>

*FK*'s association with colonialism is inescapable in the context of a Robinsonade when *Robinson Crusoe* is so entrenched in the mastery of land and people. Kaiyo indulging in a commanding view of the valley and assigning the name Overlook Point to land that is not his creates an unintentional colonial-like act of conquered land and a sense of entitlement over discovery. Likewise, Crusoe 'travelled for discovery up to the top of that hill, where, after [...] great labour and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate, to my great affliction [...] that I was in an island environed every way with the sea'.<sup>107</sup> In Crusoe's commanding view, the stage is set for dominance, control, mastery of his new land, where 'two common tropes in the literature of colonialism, the surveying of territory from a high vantage point and the firing of the gun, tropes which signify the colonist's assessing, taking possession of, and asserting mastery over the land'.<sup>108</sup> Crusoe soon gains dominance over the island when he discovers and exploits its natural resources and 'becomes the master of all he surveys' as if the first and only to do so, when in fact, the inference is that he is the first and only civilised person to do so.<sup>109</sup> The island becomes Crusoe's dominion, ready to be exploited to meet his self-interest with little regard for anyone or anything else. The colonial attitude of entitlement over nature prevails when he takes from his personal market (nature), often using his firearm, whenever he chooses at no real cost or consequence and 'comes briefly quite close to the primitive capitalist, able to take advantage of human contrivances to exploit the bounty of nature'.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, Kaiyo never gains dominance over any form of Othered and his only drive for mastery is over himself.

By the time Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*, European colonialism and its

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<sup>106</sup> Dinsmore, p. 85.

<sup>107</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. by David Price, Kindle Edition (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1919), p. 34.

<sup>108</sup> Dennis Todd, 'Robinson Crusoe and Colonialism', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'*, ed. by John Richetti, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 142–56 (p. 142–143) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.011>>.

<sup>109</sup> Rivka Swenson, 'Robinson Crusoe and the Form of the New Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 16–31 (p. 24) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.003>>.

<sup>110</sup> Pat Rogers, 'Robinson Crusoe: Good Housekeeping, Gentility, and Property', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 49–66 (p. 58) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107338586.005>>.

closely associated counterpart, imperialism, was well-established. The ideologies of colonialism influenced Defoe's representation of travel, discovery, nature, Indigenous people, as well as economics. Serving as a backdrop to, and influence upon, Defoe's novel was the promise that 'new' and undiscovered lands in America and beyond, were 'literally up for grabs' for white European men.<sup>111</sup>

I knew not what, or where; neither what Latitude, what Country, what Nations, or what River: I neither saw, or desir'd to see any People; the principal thing I wanted was fresh Water. We came into this Creek in the Evening, resolving to swim on shoar as soon as it was dark, and discover the Country.<sup>112</sup>

The idealistic notion that unoccupied territories were out there to be discovered, claimed, and exploited for economic gain, yielded the expansion of Western colonial influence on the world at large, and created what Ania Loomba describes as 'the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history'.<sup>113</sup> Wilkerson refers to these 'relationships' as caste without applying nature into her discussion but applicable to those willing to recognise nature as Othered as seen in ecofeminism. Ecofeminism brings together issues of race, gender, and environmental activism. These hierarchical dynamics of suppression and exploitation have been explored within interdisciplinary frameworks, linking, for example, postcolonial, Marxist, feminist, ecocritical approaches to highlight the ideological connections between 'race, class, gender and nature' in colonial contexts where only God outranks man.<sup>114</sup>

The patriarchy under which Crusoe and his mother live is symbolic of the wider colonial perspective of the Western, white, male atop the social structure wielding power and influence over society which informs our contextual understanding of *Robinson Crusoe* when this was a dominant perspective in practice during the eighteenth-century. Although Crusoe, as a male, is afforded the right to explore while his mother is confined to the household in an immobile, domesticated role. This model speaks to the wider implications in capitalistic expectations of

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<sup>111</sup> Loomba, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. by Michael Shinagel, Second Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

<sup>113</sup> Loomba, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> Plumwood, p. 1.



economics and colonial-based oppression. In order to reflect the patriarchal reality in proper context, I depict Kaiyo's father as domineering, Tala's father as a ranking military official, and Manny as the leading town official who eventually becomes mayor. Dominating patriarchal elements with Tamiko and Kaiyo's fathers are more suited for the time and culture as portrayed with, *'If I stayed around the farm after finishing my duties, my father would call out barking orders before long'*, *'The man leaps into the trench and grabs a handful of my uniform. He yanks me to my feet. It's my father'*, *'Her father demanded she return by dusk'*, *'Although he didn't allow her a day off again that summer'*, *'Aside from her father, mosquitos kept Tamiko cooped up in her home.'*<sup>115</sup>

I attempted to make a statement in the later chapters against subscribed gender roles by including Maeko playing a traditionally male instrument to show the changing times when Kaiyo's mother played a traditionally female instrument during Kaiyo's childhood. Portraying women, nature, and any variation of Othering from a more empathetic, respectful tone of equal value and capability takes shape to support what is sometimes called 'feminist utopias'.<sup>116</sup> This utopia is viewed as 'a land where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another and for nature, where the earth and the forest retain their mystery, power and wholeness, where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth, or at least that part of it controlled by women'.<sup>117</sup>

The master-model associated with colonialism is far-reaching in the history of exploitation, control, and oppression of people and nature as two separate, unequal parts. This power relationship in dualities of Western thought is a mode of thinking where contrasting elements of dominance / subservience or valued / undervalued counterparts are linked to consistently place the white, European male in the position of dominance and value from which everything and everyone else is compared and subalternised, oppressed, or Othered. In further clarification Rickel states, 'the subaltern cannot speak [...] based on the premise that the subaltern are those who are denied dialogue within the hegemonic discourse (Spivak)'.<sup>118</sup> In *Foe*,

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<sup>115</sup> Dinsmore, pp. 3, 10, 14, 82.

<sup>116</sup> Plumwood, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Plumwood, p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Jennifer Rickel, 'Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 43.2 (2013), 160–85 (p. 166), <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2013.0018>>.

Friday does not speak because, symbolic of his subalternity, 'They cut out his tongue.'<sup>119</sup> This master-model duality is apparent in *Robinson Crusoe* where 'Crusoe and Friday are, after all, totemic figures in literature as models of an encounter between the perceived anthropological extremes of human experience: civilization and savagery, enlightened and unenlightened' which gains relevance in postcolonial/globalisation studies.<sup>120</sup>

## GLOBALISM

Postcolonial study is 'widely proclaimed as a dying field, replaced by less inescapably political fields of globalization studies', since the world is becoming more asymmetrical on both a global scale and within nation-states.<sup>121</sup> I reinforce this sentiment that globalisation has ushered in, and begun to erode, some of these manufactured boundaries of difference towards a more asymmetrical, homogenised, fluid society. As an American, the embodiment of the 'US constitutional project' led by core principles of equality and freedom is a major influence.<sup>122</sup> The American constitutional promise has not been fully realised or embraced by all and the 'Post' in Postcolonial doesn't necessarily mean we're in a completely new, detached state of enlightenment, or that we have mended the ruptures from colonial oppression.

A multi-ethnic, multi-racial, cross-cultural, and 'intellectual and political cross-fertilisation' experience is the norm today, creating a cultural and intellectual hybridity or fluidity shaped by the global economic system.<sup>123</sup> My hybridity enabled a less biased understanding of the relationship between dominant and marginalised perspectives using tools learned from both cultures and forming a fluid identity. But rather than viewing myself lost in the in-betweenness of not belonging, I view it as providing more autonomy and independence of the self that rigid categorisation and expectations can inhibit. This experience of mine (and as it becomes less of an outlier experience) allows for empathy with both the dominant and the Othered. Or respectively, the American coloniser and the Filipino colonised, considering the

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<sup>119</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Kindle Edition (New York, NY, US: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Radhika Jones, 'Father-Born: Mediating the Classics in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*', p. 46.

<sup>121</sup> Loomba, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> Loomba, p.10.

<sup>123</sup> Loomba, p. 173.

complex colonial history of the Philippines, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it fell under Spanish rule. My non-fixed position helps me to think outside a 'system thrives on dissension and inequality, envy and false rivalries, that build up in a world of perceived scarcity'.<sup>124</sup> Inequality is and is not particular to my identity, I've internalised no clear rivalries exist aside from right and wrong, and I understand that perception is individualised on how we choose to see things.

The idea of hybridity and multiculturalism makes it into the narrative after Kaiyo emerges from the jungle and becomes part of the Filipino community, to which I can relate as an American spending time in the Philippines. Kaiyo's integration into Filipino society happens gradually with fear and hesitation that he will ever be accepted based primarily on his past role as a Japanese soldier. Sense of community, self, and home are fluid without ever erasing a sublime sense of self in his core-self tied to his past.

My guardedness towards the other villagers evaporates when the community pitches in to build my very own hut on a vacant lot next to Tala's family. *How can they forgive me?* I wonder and volunteer to help manage the rice fields separating the village from the jungle's treeline where I once stood observing Tala and Jovin at play. [...] It is at night, among the sounds of crickets and sight of bats flying across the moonlit sky, that the marooned soldier in me returns on occasions when I cannot assign something to what I hear, see, or smell. I do not sleep until I do.<sup>125</sup>

### *THE FEMALE AMERICAN*

A Robinsonade novel more engaged on the topic of hybridity is *The Female American* (1767), which was written by Unca Eliza Winkfield. Her novel is, much like *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a story about a protagonist marooned on an island during a Transatlantic voyage, who is forced to survive in a mostly solitary state, encount-

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<sup>124</sup> Wilkerson, p. 239.

<sup>125</sup> Dinsmore, pp. 151-152.

ering both indigenous and European peoples, and it is presented as a true story.<sup>126</sup> Unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Female American* tells the story from a female, biracial, cross-cultural perspective and advocates for equity and mutual respect between the colonised and coloniser. Henceforth, I will refer to the author of *The Female American* as Winkfield and the protagonist of the story as Unca to minimise confusion since they bear the same name; noting that Unca Eliza Winkfield is a pseudonym for an unidentified author.

*The Female American* represents ‘one of the earliest novelistic efforts to articulate an American identity’ (Burnham) from a specifically female perspective.<sup>127</sup> Unca is a product of a Native-American princess mother and English settler father, making her the ideal proxy between the two cultures, and equipping her with the fluidity to empathise with both and an understanding of culturally-specific perspectives, which echoes my own experience. Unca was accepted by her uncle but she ‘was little less caressed by the neighbours’ as an anecdote of the non-normative hybrid citizen during that period.<sup>128</sup> Keely Susan Kuhlman describes *The Female American* as straddling ‘cultures, communities, traditions, religions, and ethnicities’, and that ‘the transatlantic setting and crosscultural identity of the heroine allows Unca to form a new culture [or ‘new voice’ (Han)] that blends aspects of Native American traditions, Christian ideals, and European rationalism’.<sup>129</sup> Unca acknowledges this hybridity with, ‘My tawny complexion, and the oddity of my dress attracted every one’s attention, for my mother used to dress me in a kind of mixed habit, neither perfectly in the Indian, nor yet in the European taste.’<sup>130</sup>

This same type of ‘straddling’ or fluidity is found in *FK*’s narrative and authorial perspective of Western-Eastern spirituality, American-Filipino-Japanese ideals and traditions, and nature-human relationship. Kaiyo uses his hybrid spirituality to conquer self which materialises when finding his truth and sense of peace clearly stated by him with, ‘I merge the knowledge from the Bible with my abstract and altruistic spiritual perspective on existence taken from experiences

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<sup>126</sup> Unca Eliza Winkfield, *The Female American or, The Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield*, ed. by Michelle Burnham, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2000).

<sup>127</sup> Winkfield, back cover.

<sup>128</sup> Winkfield, p. 49.

<sup>129</sup> Keely Susan Kuhlman, ‘Transatlantic Travel and Cultural Exchange in the Early Colonial Era the Hybrid American Female and Her New World Colony’ (doctoral thesis/dissertation, Washington State University, 2006) <<http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Dissertations/Spring2006/k/%5Fkuhlman%5F033106.pdf>> [accessed 6 March 2021].

<sup>130</sup> Winkfield, p. 49.

with Gods, nature, the spirit of all things learned from Shintoism, and philosophies of Buddha.<sup>131</sup> Winkfield's portrayal of spirituality includes a hybridity of Christian teachings and Indigenous idolatry used for persuasion over the Indigenous population in Unca's 'attempt to teach the knowledge of the true God'.<sup>132</sup>

Unca attempts to play the role of neutral party between Indigenous population and Europeans, and thereby challenges the traditional representations of women as immobile and domestic. Unca recognises the disparity of male mobility and female domestic roles describing her adventures as much like her male counterparts:

The lives of women being commonly domestick, the occurrences of them are generally pretty nearly of the same kind; whilst those of men, frequently more vagrant, subject them often to experience greater vicissitudes, many times wonderful and strange. Though a woman, it has been my lot to have experienced much of the latter; for so wonderful, strange, and uncommon have been the events of my life...<sup>133</sup>

Unca's powerful role does not differ from Crusoe's role on his island, except Unca's feminist utopia does so with a goal of negotiating an effective co-existence between the two at-play cultures, much like Kaiyo's co-existence between Filipino and Japanese cultures. In partnership with her cousin, Unca explains, 'We now had divine service every Lord's day, which my cousin performed in English, and I was interpreter, till he had learned the Indian language, which he did much sooner than could have been well expected, and at last preached in the Indian tongue.'<sup>134</sup>

Although this reinforces the trope of Indigenous people's religious conversion tied to colonialism, it is done with a purity of intent and not to justify exploitation or with the same sense of superiority. Albeit Unca and her cousin see their religious beliefs as the truth, *The Female American*, as the example shows, is a negotiation of different values, traditions, and beliefs in a more equitable manner where Unca's cousin learns their language under pure intentions rather than force upon the 'Indians' language or religion. Unca, her cousin, and other Europeans are not so much the colonisers as they are conduits for cross-cultural exchange. At most, Unca

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<sup>131</sup> Dinsmore, p. 109.

<sup>132</sup> Winkfield, p. 84.

<sup>133</sup> Winkfield, p. 35.

<sup>134</sup> Winkfield, p. 140.

and her cousin are missionaries on a religious conquest, but even that is a stretch.

Unca is a symbol of the American experience, the immigrant rather than the coloniser. The Indigenous are not viewed as savage, dangerous, or uncivilised and in fact, perceived as ‘uncorrupted’, ‘honest’, and of ‘purity’.<sup>135</sup> This contrasts with *Robinson Crusoe*’s more contentious, binary version of boundaries between civilized and savage, coloniser and colonised, master and slave, as Crusoe sometimes finds himself on the flip side of his role as master, civilised, and coloniser. For example, Crusoe becomes a slave when captured by the Turks, the savage as the wanderer living and roaming in nature, and is the colonised after laying claim to the island when savages and mutineers arrive to lay their own claim on the island.

If the blurring of the civilized–savage binary implies that savages like Friday have the capacity to become civilized, then it also suggests that putatively civilized people like Crusoe can be savage. True, Crusoe eventually builds permanent dwellings, plants crops, and domesticates animals, but these are things he achieves only after struggling against his own savage energies.<sup>136</sup>

Although the roles between civilised and savage are interchangeable, it is one or another and not the merging of the two roles or parts as seen in hybridity or fluidity. Therefore, it is less that the boundaries are blurred and more that the boundaries are firm but reversible in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe’s ability to reverse his roles is solely at his discretion and he is not at the mercy of others—he remains autonomous. Crusoe wields power over Friday and Friday’s culture is not equally valued. Acceptance only comes after Friday has assimilated important Western knowledge and values of language and religion to become more ‘civilised’. As Crusoe explains, ‘I became more intimately acquainted, and that he could understand almost all I said to him, and speak fluently’ where affection and respect for Friday are in direct relation to becoming more like Crusoe, his master.<sup>137</sup> Note the difference, that Crusoe expects Friday to learn English whereas Unca’s cousin learns the Indigenous people’s language. Crusoe’s early impulses were fear and violence towards the savages, but ‘in the end, his desire is to civilize and Christianize Friday’.<sup>138</sup> Although Crusoe never places Friday on equal plane, even

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<sup>135</sup> Winkfield, pp. 135, 141.

<sup>136</sup> Todd, p. 150.

<sup>137</sup> Defoe, p. 160.

<sup>138</sup> Todd, p. 146.

after developing a strong affection for him, he does move the needle, so to speak. Friday is judged by standards of European rationalism and never sheds the stigma of the child-like primitive capable of grasping command of reason over emotion or instinct over reflection.

Crusoe does demonstrate a hint of cultural understanding towards Friday and a slightly diverging viewpoint of the prevailing thought of that time. For example, Friday is shown to be a cannibal during a time when cannibalism 'indicated the threat that these savages could turn against and devour Europeans', but Crusoe nevertheless learns to trust him and accept the differences in culture.<sup>139</sup> Crusoe 'reconsiders what cannibals are and how he should respond to them' by viewing from the Others point of view that cannibals don't see it as a crime in their own eyes.<sup>140</sup> This reassessment of Friday's cannibalism allows for the reader to reconsider or deconstruct the negative connotations of cross-cultural interaction by addressing variations of values as explainable rather than prescribed under the colonial perception of savagery and Others in the New World.<sup>141</sup> Coetzee's retelling of *Robinson Crusoe* with *Foe* takes literary humanitarianism further by 'negat[ing] and subvert[ing] the conventions and presuppositions of Euro-centrism by rewriting *Robinson Crusoe*, so Cruso in *Foe* became the antithesis of Robinson Crusoe [and] was depicted as old, impotent, foolish, superstitious, stubborn, uncertain and passive' despite maintaining authority over Susan and Friday simply because of where he inherently falls in the hierarchy.<sup>142</sup> By 'deconstruct[ing] "Englishness" and Euro-centrism [Coetzee] aroused the national imagination of the Africans by rewriting it [...] and encourage[d] the Africans to eliminate cultural inferiority and discrimination by creating [a] new voice'.<sup>143</sup> Likewise, Winkfield and I form a 'new voice' in our work based on our individualised context.

While the cross-cultural experience is normalised today, Winkfield's imagined island society would pre-empt the fluid nature of identity in a global society against the prevailing trade-wind of 'imperial intercultural dynamics' of the time, which were built on a system that 'gives us false comfort, makes us feel that the world is in

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<sup>139</sup> Loomba, p. 85.

<sup>140</sup> Todd, p. 146.

<sup>141</sup> Todd, p. 145.

<sup>142</sup> Han, p. 1144.

<sup>143</sup> Han, *Abstract*.

order, that we automatically know the good guys from the bad guys'.<sup>144</sup> Like the prevailing multicultural view of modern society, Unca takes elements she deems most beneficial to her new society while still recognising and valuing differences equitably. The boundaries of difference are blurred in *The Female American* with even the most significant issue in religious beliefs where the Indigenous religion is at times described as 'having nothing in contrary to [the Christian] religion'.<sup>145</sup> To further demonstrate this cultural equity, when Unca finally accepts her cousin in marriage, they 'first married [...] according to church rites, the high-priest acting as father [and] also married according to the custom of the Indians'.<sup>146</sup> Winkfield avoids the colonial method of Othering the Indigenous; a philosophy symbolised in her marriage to a British man where 'Amerindian religious and cultural customs are observed with as much solemnity as British ones', and where 'fault and virtue are recognized in both Amerindian and European characters and in the actions they take'.<sup>147</sup> *FK* also does little to Other the people or place and Kaiyo emerges from the jungle to a more modern, fluid, global society.

[We visit] the American military base [...] for what they call friendship meetings between American and Filipino soldiers. [...] I'm allowed into the civilian corridor of shops, bars, restaurants, and the beach within the official boundaries of the base. I'm amazed by all the advancements in technology witnessed best here on base; the Japanese automobile, military jets and commercial airlines frequently flying overhead, and most of all, the computers found in wide use at banks and business offices.<sup>148</sup>

Kaiyo represents a bridge between two once-at-odds nations, just as 'Unca Eliza emerges as a multinational woman who diffuses imperialism and functions as a force for balance and reconciliation in cross-cultural engagement'.<sup>149</sup> Kaiyo comes to learn that place or nation doesn't define him with 'home an abstract thought' and his relationships do, culminating in him saying it 'warms me that she calls me papa'

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<sup>144</sup> Wilkerson, p. 196.

<sup>145</sup> Winkfield, p. 141.

<sup>146</sup> Winkfield, p. 141.

<sup>147</sup> Denise Mary MacNeil, 'Empire and the Pan-Atlantic Self in *The Female American; or, The Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield*', in *Women's Narratives of the Early Americas and the Formation of Empire*, ed. by Mary McAleer Balkun and Susan C. Imbarrato (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), pp. 109–22 (p. 110), <[https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137543233\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137543233_8)>.

<sup>148</sup> Dinsmore, p. 155.

<sup>149</sup> MacNeil, p. 111.



at the novel's closure.<sup>150</sup> The one person able to define him, when he is otherwise autonomous and independent, is his daughter because love is not a superficial expectation and nationalism is. Unca's motives are not superficial. She promotes a sense of strength and empowerment from her fluidity in recognising weaknesses and embracing the strengths. Unca 'emphasize[s] her androgynous cultural fluidity. She moves with complete ease between multiple European and American languages and their accompanying thought systems' and 'highlights femininity and uses it to promote gender and cultural heterogeneity'.<sup>151</sup> The mere fact that Winkfield's gender, racial, and national identity is in flux contributes to the novel's portrayal of hybridity and fluidity in Americanness. I attempt to construct a 'new voice' of equity and fluidity of differences— esemplastic, rapprochement, and amendatory in nature despite current-day social dynamics with a divide arising along the lines of economics

## ECONOMICS

Much like *Robinson Crusoe*, there exists the idea of self-economics where Kaiyo plays the role of hunter, gatherer, builder, farmer, and domesticated man (*Homo domesticus*), which is a departure from the worker's specialised skillset in capitalistic society. *Robinson Crusoe* brought to light Crusoe's hardships of separation or severed-ties from capitalistic society, which mimicked 'the typical conditions immigrants faced in the colonies. Many colonists lived lives as primitive as Crusoe did. [...] [T]hey labored at heavy and tedious work in the field. [...] [G]oods and conveniences we so scarce in the New World that colonists were compelled, like Crusoe, to develop their ingenuity and become self-reliant jacks-of-all-trades'.<sup>152</sup> The idea of domestication naturally arises in Crusoe's solitude, where he is forced into a life of tending to the economics of household affairs to survive and thrive as *Homo domesticus* and tending to affairs of the middle-class.<sup>153</sup> New roles on the island put Crusoe in a state of hard manual labour of the middle-class and involves a power-

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<sup>150</sup> Dinsmore, p. 164.

<sup>151</sup> MacNeil, p. 111.

<sup>152</sup> Todd, p. 152.

<sup>153</sup> Rogers, p. 62.

shift in humility when ‘most household management fell to the lot of women’.<sup>154</sup>

Watt sees the moral premise of *Robinson Crusoe* as the ‘rational ecological and economic labor and development’ where the bare bones of essential living evolve into a new livelihood, which mimics the evolution of early-human behaviour and society.<sup>155</sup> The evolution of Crusoe’s living space from cave to house, and the evolution from hunting to agriculture, are consistent with that of early humans’ drive of *Homo economicus* (self-economics) and for him to improve his living condition and odds of surviving when learning from his failures and successes within the eighteenth-century colonial context of dominance. Although detached from society, Crusoe is an agent of capitalistic society by creating an island economy in his many roles as farmer, artisan, baker, ‘mechanick’, *Homo domesticus* and in his ‘regrets [in] the lack of conventional props of civilization’ coming from commerce.<sup>156</sup> This embodiment is a well-entrenched colonial ideology that leads Crusoe to create a small-scale island society that mimics the different roles in Britain’s eighteenth-century capitalistic society; complete with servant/slave (Friday).

Kaiyo’s domestication and self-economics mimic hunter-gatherer of early-human and the yeomen farmer without the same attempt as Crusoe to replicate capitalistic society. Progressive thoughts of multiculturalism have intersected with a re-emergence in colonial strategies of oppression in threat to the existing power dynamic creating new sources for contention. As example, we see the rise of populism where the ‘forces of globalization and automation that had hollowed out the working class over decades. Growing inequality sparked anger toward the elites leaving others behind [and] felt most strongly among white males’.<sup>157</sup> Wilkerson explains that those in power ‘often align themselves not with those whose plight they may share, but with those whose power and privilege intersect with a trait of their own. People with overlapping self-interests will often gravitate toward the personal characteristic that accords them the most status’.<sup>158</sup>

What is emerging, however, as the blurring of boundaries based on physical

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<sup>154</sup> Rogers, p. 56.

<sup>155</sup> Watt, p. 151.

<sup>156</sup> Rogers, p. 57.

<sup>157</sup> Brendan O’Shaughnessy, ‘The Rise of Populism’, *University of Notre Dame* <<https://www.nd.edu/stories/the-rise-of-populism/>> [accessed 17 October 2022].

<sup>158</sup> Wilkerson, pp. 326-327.

traits in a more culturally fluid society becomes a new reality, economics or wealth gains relevance on an individual basis and national basis where some nations' power and influence is highly dependent on strength of economy or potential strength of economy. Corporations largely unfettered by geography and boundaries are a result of cooperation from and influence over nations states and policy.<sup>159</sup> Though this may be the case, the common citizen does have easier access to information and a new online marketplace because *'it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, globalisation has been credited with a wide range of powers and effects. Its proponents claim that it is both "natural" and an inevitable outcome of technological progress, and creates positive economic and political convergences'*.<sup>160</sup>

Globalism 'is a complex of competing narratives and sometimes opposing views [in] a new paradigm of social media based on values of sharing and collaboration'.<sup>161</sup> The equalising or empowering effect of the Internet on race and gender supports the neoliberal argument this new form of globalism 'dissolves earlier hierarchies and inequities, democratises nations and the relations between nations, and creates new opportunities which percolate down in some form or another to every section of society'.<sup>162</sup> The opposing argument is 'that globalisation is hegemonic, antagonistic to the poor and vulnerable, and is debilitating local and national economies, communities, and the environment' and we see signs of this in the growing economic disparity.<sup>163</sup> *FK* is a hybrid of the two arguments with the collaboration between American, Filipino, and Japanese nations and peoples in the dissolution of boundaries under American hegemony. The clearest example of economic disparity in *FK* includes the contrast between Kaiyo's family and Tamiko's family. Kaiyo's family are farmers (working- or lower-middle-class) and Tamiko's family are business owners (upper-middle to upper-class). As a result, the story plays out to portray Tamiko's family with a nicer home and overall healthier environment, while Kaiyo's family's life is simpler and more dysfunctional. I attribute this portrayal to my perception of economics tied directly to education and

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<sup>159</sup> Shalmali Guttal, 'Globalisation', *Development in Practice*, 17.4–5 (2007), pp. 523–31 (p. 527) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520701469492>>.

<sup>160</sup> Guttal, p. 523).

<sup>161</sup> Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley, 'Globalism and the Experiment of Openness', *Knowledge Cultures*, 5.1 (2017), 50–67 (p. 52), <<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.bangor.ac.uk/10.22381/KC5120175>>.

<sup>162</sup> Loomba, pp. 10–11.

<sup>163</sup> Guttal, p. 524.

education tied to economics.

‘Class is an altogether separate measure of one’s standing in a society, marked by level of education, income, and occupation, as well as the attendant characteristics, such as accent, taste, and manners, that flow from socioeconomic status’ and ‘If you can act your way out of it, then it is class, not caste’.<sup>164</sup> Class is not a new concept but twenty-first-century class distinctions are gravitating more towards a nuanced economic, class-like social stratification where society is layered into three main categories of upper-economics, middle-economics, and lower or poverty-class. Modern globalism is spurred-on by technology accelerating communication, trade, and overall commerce, creating a new level of consumerism for which is the engine of what I like to call hyper-capitalism which is the global twenty-first-century, ethically autonomous, profit-by-any-means, consumption-driven economy from American-styled capitalism and dominant social value-system. Much like on the issues of race and gender, ‘the term “postcolonial” does not apply to those at the bottom end of this hierarchy, who are still “at the far economic margins of the nation-state” so that nothing is “post” about their colonisation.’<sup>165</sup>

The lines of racial and gender differences are blurring with a global, multicultural, borderless society interconnected by technology, economy, and the ability to easily travel to nearly any place in the world. These realities of today are ‘often seen as an inevitable historical process and is also often seen as associated strongly if not with neoliberalism, then certainly with American-styled capitalism’.<sup>166</sup> As a result and in conjunction with the 2007-2009 recession (aka Great Recession), rose the Occupy Wallstreet movement in a stance against economic inequity under the premise mammonism was the cause of the economy’s collapse. The DC Policy Center describes this economic inequity as ‘economic polarization’, noting that segregation by income is replacing segregation by race.<sup>167</sup> As progress is made in overcoming social inequalities, a new era of disparity arises in economic oppression.

In 1980, [a] report found, 85 percent of census tracts in America were either predominantly middle-class or mixed-income. [...] As of 2010, that figure

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<sup>164</sup> Wilkerson, p. 106.

<sup>165</sup> Loomba, p. 30.

<sup>166</sup> Peters and Besley, p. 52.

<sup>167</sup> David Rusk, ‘Economic Segregation Is Replacing Racial Segregation in Large U.S. Metro Areas’, *D.C. Policy Center*, 2017 <<https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/economic-polarization/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

had fallen to 76 percent. Today, considerably more upper-income Americans live in neighborhoods where the majority of their neighbors are upper-income, too (18 percent, up from 8 percent in 1980). And lower-income households are increasingly clustered in the same neighborhoods, as well (28 percent, up from 23 percent in 1980).<sup>168</sup>

This is the trending result of mammonism more than it is globalism where hyper-capitalism has eroded most if not all ethical values of human and environmental consequences for short-term, material gain. In the blowback from this trend is a reassessment of values due to a growing economic disparity and in questioning the interconnectedness and interdependencies of globalism towards the appeal of self-sufficiency from which I'm personally influenced as evidenced in an uninterested, self-sufficient capitalist in Kaiyo.

### THE MARTIAN

*The Martian* (2015) by Andy Weir posits modernity of globalism by putting into question individualistic and communal values in context of the Great Recession (2007-2009). In true Robinsonade fashion, *The Martian* portrays a solitary protagonist marooned under the premise of discovering a new world—literally so in this case—and must find ways to survive his environment. The justification of this modern-day conquest is 'Mankind reaching out to Mars to send people to another planet for the very first time and expand the horizons of humanity', which echoes the justification of communal gain during European colonialism.<sup>169</sup> Once Watney finds himself marooned in solitude on Mars, the most prominent component of this narrative includes the topic of individualism related to self-economics shaped by Weir's exposure to the Great Recession. Watney's hardship forces him to convert to a 'natural world system' where he once 'laughed' at 'hippies' and their 'pathetic attempts to simulate a complex global system in their backyard' to find himself 'doing exactly that'.<sup>170</sup> It's hard not to draw parallels or influence of the economic struggles of the time because 'Weir began to write *The Martian* in 2009, months after

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<sup>168</sup> Emily Badger, 'The Rise of Economic Segregation', *Bloomberg.com*, 2012  
<<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-08-02/the-rise-of-economic-segregation>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

<sup>169</sup> Andy Weir, *The Martian*, Classroom Edition, Kindle Edition (New York: Random House, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>170</sup> Weir, p. 13.

the puncturing of the housing/mortgage bubble in the United States brought about the near-collapse of financial markets worldwide'.<sup>171</sup> We can only then infer, like most living through this period, that his views on individual and communal economics were somehow affected by this socio-economic experience in accompaniment to the trend of social detachment and specialised skillsets due to technology.

In modern-day American society, where hyper-capitalism reigns, the value of skillsets has overcome some barriers of racial, gender, religious differences. If we use the example of specialisation for many technologically advanced products, we'll find it is a global effort to produce wherein the manufacturing process consists of many non-localised components and personifies the philosophy behind interconnectedness and interdependencies from globalisation. This fundamental, structural change in our global, social perspective fundamentally repositions individual's social and economic value. *The Martian* places the protagonist, Mark Watney, in a detached social state on Mars to exercise a wide array of already learned or newly established specialisations. He states, 'I'm a botanist and mechanical engineer; basically, the mission's fix-it man who played with plants' and upon finding himself marooned must expand those skills to support the domesticated male and yeoman farmer.<sup>172</sup>

Watney's severed link to society allows for autonomy and individual expression (much like an individual choosing to live off-grid), but still serves a purpose within the capitalistic agency of American and global society because, in reality, it's difficult if not impossible to completely detach ourselves from the global economy. Whether it's Watney surviving with assistance of all the technology and goods at his disposal or the reality of his rescue dependent upon NASA's budget where 'The cost for [Watney's] survival must have been hundreds of millions of dollars. All to save one dorky botanist,' the mission is inseparable from capitalism.<sup>173</sup> Likewise, Crusoe and Kaiyo never fully detach themselves from the global economy. Crusoe is continually linked to his father's expectation of 'middle station' and maintains ownership of his plantation while marooned all those years.<sup>174</sup> Kaiyo is

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<sup>171</sup> Thomas Strychacz, 'The Political Economy of Potato Farming in Andy Weir's *The Martian*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 44.1 (2017), 1–20 (p. 9) <<https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.44.1.0001>>.

<sup>172</sup> Weir, p. 10.

<sup>173</sup> Weir, p. 368.

<sup>174</sup> Defoe, p. 3.

linked to imperialism in his loyalty to nation and role as a soldier even while marooned. The inability to detach any novel to capitalism is in itself evidence of the far-reaching impact of globalism.

A parallel exists between Kaiyo's sense of duty to nation as a soldier and Watney's undertaking of space travel as an astronaut for NASA, a government agency. Kaiyo's predicament is brought on by imperialistic ambitions of conquering land, the Philippines; Watney, colonisation of Mars. Watney notes, 'They say once you grow crops somewhere, you have officially "colonized" it. So technically, I colonized Mars.'<sup>175</sup> Weir's novel is without the same implications of race and gender, but sparks debate on the exploitation of environment. Much like a soldier or coloniser, Watney has a duty to NASA and US government with a 'mission [...] to see how plants grow, in various combinations of Earth and Mars soil and atmosphere' which carries with it a sense of conquering or mastering land.<sup>176</sup> *The Martian* is an investment of risk-reward just like any other governmental or private investment for discovery, which harkens back to the era of colonialism. Colonialism's impacts on environment stem from the drive for economic gain, and in Watney's case, it is (or becomes after finding himself marooned) for his personal gain in self-economics of survival. The circumstance prompts him to begin farming potatoes 'in order to profit (or derive maximal utility) from his limited resources' no matter the impact on the wider Martian landscape.<sup>177</sup> In fact, Watney uses the choice term of 'infect' to describe the process of using human waste to make the Martian soil 'ready for plants' much like the European-coloniser laying the groundwork for other soon-to-arrive colonisers.<sup>178</sup> Mars appears as a desert-like, desolate environment, and it seems as if the use of a relatively small amount *Martian* soil will do little harm to the environment but human impact on Martian ecology is unknown and 'microbial contamination [by humans and their vehicles] could pose a significant risk'.<sup>179</sup> Kaiyo, on the other hand, is conscious about the impact he's making on environment and takes from but doesn't exploit.

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<sup>175</sup> Weir, p. 147.

<sup>176</sup> Weir, p. 12.

<sup>177</sup> Strychacz, p. 7.

<sup>178</sup> Weir, p. 14.

<sup>179</sup> Andrew C Schuerger and others, 'Survival of Endospores of *Bacillus Subtilis* on Spacecraft Surfaces under Simulated Martian Environments: Implications for the Forward Contamination of Mars', *Icarus*, 165.2 (2003), 253–76 (p. 253) <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-1035\(03\)00200-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-1035(03)00200-8)>.

The role of farmer, albeit science-driven, is in juxtaposition with Watney's role as scientist, utilising humankind's latest technologies and prompts criticism of Weir's outlook on whether he advocates for 'a return to the old Jeffersonian dream of a nation of yeomen farmers'.<sup>180</sup> Watney plays the many roles of his isolated society, consistent among the Robinsonade protagonist, as farmer and the wide array of scientific roles including the overarching duty to nation as an astronaut. As a farmer, Watney harkens back to the days of the American pioneer's ingenuity to overcome harsh environments and create a 'potato farm in the wide open space of the Hab' along with the sense of pride when touting his crop as 'All natural, organic, Martian-grown potatoes'.<sup>181</sup> Likewise, Kaiyo produces his own crop of kamotes. As a scientist, Watney uses his specialised skills to 'Find a way to communicate with Earth' and assist in his rescue.<sup>182</sup> *FK* engages in the more insular practice of farming one's own land and becoming more independent from the communal economic structure. This is partly in response to the impact of wider economic fallout seen in the Great Recession in contemplation as a viable alternative to globalism and shielding oneself from the effects of the market economy and ancillary effects of social inequity and environmental exploitation.

## ECOLOGY

The past 60 years, also referred to as the Great Acceleration because of the rapid growth in globalism fuelled by technology, has impacted the environment on an unprecedented scale of heightened carbon dioxide emissions, climate change, ocean acidification, habitat destruction, extinction of wildlife, and wide-scale natural resource extraction.<sup>183</sup> Anthropocene is defined as 'the epoch of geological time during which human activity is considered to be the dominant influence on the environment, climate, and ecology of the earth, a formal chrono-stratigraphic unit with a base which has been tentatively defined as the mid-twentieth century'.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Strychacz, p.1.

<sup>181</sup> Weir, pp. 96, 150.

<sup>182</sup> Weir, p. 11.

<sup>183</sup> Katie Pavid, 'What Is the Anthropocene?' <<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-is-the-anthropocene.html>> [accessed 15 February 2021].

<sup>184</sup> 'Anthropocene, n. and Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/398463>> [accessed 19 February 2021].



Although there's no consensus on when the Anthropocene period began, I support the stance 'when nuclear weapons cast radioactive elements across the globe. The radioactive debris from nuclear bombs made its way into rocks, trees and the atmosphere'.<sup>185</sup> In addition to the measurable and dramatic impact on environment caused by nuclear weapons, it is the point when science rivalled the most powerful aspects of nature and demonstrated the extent humans are able and willing to go in achieving gains for national or self-interest.

Coincidentally, the narrative of *FK* finds itself at the beginning of the Anthropocene era, complete with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the distance resulting in an 'unusual orange glow in the sky to the distant north'.<sup>186</sup> I'm a product of anthropocentric societal influences, conscious of environmentalism, and self-conscious about recycling, my carbon-footprint, an organic diet, and electric vehicles. Signalling his environmental awareness, Kaiyo says, 'It's as if nature punishes me each year for my intrusion, scolding me for the trampled land, for taking from it as an unwelcomed guest, and to wash away my stench from it.'<sup>187</sup> But there is also an underlying spiritual aspect to my viewpoint on environment materialising as more dominant within *FK* in a transcendent nature.

It was appropriate to view the environment through an ecofeminism lens when discussing dualities and instrumentalisation in the context of *Robinson Crusoe*, but Deep Ecology is more appropriate when discussing *FK* because it closely aligns with my intent in the representation of environment when writing the novel. Deep Ecology is defined as 'a radical environmental philosophy and movement which regards human life as merely one of many equal components of the global ecosystem, and seeks to counter anthropocentric attitudes and policies' in deconstruction of the colonial habits or encoding of a new normal.<sup>188</sup> However, we see some ill-effects of this new social and economic environment with the earlier prefaced economic disparity. In this quickening pace of global change, 'Fears of an erosion of social and environmental standards, high poverty rates in less developed countries and ever higher frequencies of financial crisis' but 'most economists

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<sup>185</sup> Pavid.

<sup>186</sup> Dinsmore, p. 58.

<sup>187</sup> Dinsmore, p. 97.

<sup>188</sup> 'Deep Ecology, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/48625>> [accessed 9 December 2020].

strongly believe the net effect of globalization to be positive.<sup>189</sup> Concerns are valid but it is difficult to defend the idea that the cons outweigh the pros when it comes to human advancement despite new problems and concerns arising from the change.

A social conscience in my writing transferred over to nature representation in *FK*. I've given nature both feminine and masculine qualities and the issue then becomes how stereotypical these attributes are. Although I've associated nurturing to femininity and violence with masculinity within the novel, I don't personally hold the view that stereotypical masculinity qualities always equate to a male subject and stereotypical femininity necessarily always equates to a female subject when stereotypes emerge on the insistence that these attributes are gender specific. When gender attributes are introduced explicitly in the use of pronouns 'he' and 'she', criticism of supporting stereotypes in the novel come into question, but again, even in these cases, attributes are not consistently applied to one gender. The following excerpt gives an example of this labelling and supports a patriarchal model during a scene that highlights Kaiyo's loneliness in solitude and unintentionally supports a colonial trope of the immobile female when tying a Rhinoceros Beetle to a string is (or was) a common playtime activity for Filipino children. Otherwise, gender remains fluid, for the most part, in the sense that men are no more or less nurturing or empathetic than women, and nature is just as feminine as it is masculine.

I watch her explore the confines of the den with the end of the string wrapped around my finger.

"Come on, let me see you fly my friend," wishing to see the spectacle of her large, clunky body float in the air.

I poke, urging her to fly. She regains her balance, crawls over the coconut-tree-frond-covered floor of the den, then rests between the layers. I tug the string, pulling her closer to the edge of the frond she hides under.<sup>190</sup>

*FK* depicts a largely non-hierarchical human-nature hybrid world where nature possesses equal or near-equal power and influence to that of humanity. Kaiyo eventually forms a changing preference for the consumption of meat saying,

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<sup>189</sup> Axel Dreher, 'Does Globalization Affect Growth? Evidence from a New Index of Globalization', *Applied Economics*, 38.10 (2006), 1091–1110 (p. 1091), <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00036840500392078>>.

<sup>190</sup> Dinsmore, p. 82.

‘My cravings move from meat to fruit and nuts’ to portray an evolving reverence for nature or ‘sense of moral accountability toward nonhuman creatures’ much like Thoreau does in *Walden*.<sup>191</sup> ‘Not until the later chapter on “Higher Laws” does Thoreau restate his philosophy of abstemiousness as anything like an environmental ethic, questioning the killing and eating of animals and fish. This slow expansion of the sense of moral accountability toward nonhuman creatures is symptomatic.’<sup>192</sup>

Kaiyo is challenged by the natural environment—primarily from the ignorance of it. As a functioning member of society, he became, like we all are, adept at survival in a state of existence where we’re afforded the conveniences of a capitalistic society. However, as Kaiyo overcomes his ignorance of nature, so does he overcome the ominous, mysterious perception of it. And instead of being a constant obstacle to achieving success, it becomes a source of inspiration and a partner for survival. Much like I’ve touted the benefits of cross-cultural exchange, the novel depicts the benefits of cross-species exchange which we can circle back to earlier discourse on the benefits of eco-solitude. The intent was to show an evolution in perception by portraying nature as a source of conflict into a source of harmony, from antagonist to partner. *FK* includes the continuity of humans and nature as a linked relationship (or oneness) found in Deep Ecology, as well as an acknowledgement that ‘the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self’.<sup>193</sup> My nuanced perspective links back to fluidity of existence in cross-species exposure where the boundaries between nature and man are manufactured, artificial in the practise of Othering nature when we are immersed among nature every day as an evolving, bi-directional adaptation persists.

To effectively engage with modern ecological discourse, it’s important to find resonance in both continuity and difference because ‘an adequate account of the ecological self must be able to recognise both the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self. In ecological selfhood the thriving of nature and of earth others is treated as not instrumentally but essentially related to our own thriving’.<sup>194</sup> Otherwise, it shows a lack of intrinsic value in others’ individuality and vice

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<sup>191</sup> Dinsmore, p. 62; Buell, p. 175.

<sup>192</sup> Buell, p. 175.

<sup>193</sup> Plumwood, p. 6.

<sup>194</sup> Plumwood, p.160.

versa. *FK* represents empathy and continuity on a macro-scale and connections of valued differences on a micro-scale because solitude alone, without relationships, is not a catalyst for growth. Through society or the public sphere ‘respecting the needs of the other involves acknowledging the differences as well as the connection between our needs. We need to recognise not only our human continuity with the natural world but also its distinctness and independence from us and the distinctness of the needs of things in nature from ours’.<sup>195</sup> As seen both in *FK* and *Robinson Crusoe*, ‘ecological selfhood’ is not ‘purely private practice’ and always linked to the inescapable social life from which the protagonists came.<sup>196</sup> My emphasis in the novel is on personal transformation inspired by nature and vanquishes the presupposition of the existence of a social hierarchy found in *Robinson Crusoe*. This hierarchy is replaced by a horizontal and linear relational social structure of individual differences rooted in essence-of-being rather than group differences, as seen with Othering nature, race, and gender as generalisations from rigid categorisations that help to breathe life into our coded biases. *FK*’s attempt at recoding depicts nature as more intertwined and fluid with humanity informed by a hybridity from a transcendent-nature line-of-thought and modern-day environmentalism.

## RECODING THE JAPANESE SOLDIER

The historical context in which *FK* was written helped to create characters, not caricatures, by humanising the Japanese soldier and refraining from stereotyping Asians when considering the racial elements in my story. Efforts to avoid ‘orientalism’ when depicting the Japanese and Filipino culture played a factor in my portrayal, and this involved consciously refraining from exoticising people and places.<sup>197</sup> It’s important to humanise the Japanese soldier since ‘representations of the Japanese in [art] have often been based on wartime caricatures of them as

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<sup>195</sup> Plumwood, p. 178.

<sup>196</sup> Plumwood, p. 186.

<sup>197</sup> ‘Orientalism, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132531>> [accessed 13 April 2021].

barbaric and subhuman'.<sup>198</sup> An updated Western narrative was to introduce depth to the Japanese soldier and portray the American soldier as more of a caricature with little depth in antithesis of the Western perspective norm with the same sort of recoding to Coetzee's antithesis of Crusoe with Cruso. My portrayal was meant to humanise the Japanese soldier, yet I did not want to absolve the Japanese soldier from being party to wartime atrocities. I was not inclined to research historical details on Japanese World War Two atrocities and held in higher regard capturing essence of pain, death, cruelty, guilt based on my existing, informed perception of history. Kaiyo's guilt and trauma as a soldier are revealed in the narrative through recalling atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers in Kaiyo's reflections and flashbacks, and in the overall emotional weight of his war experiences on his mind. The following completely fictional scene portrays cruelty by and humanises the Japanese soldier.

*"Place the tip of your rifle between the eyes of the women."*

[...]

*"Don't look away!"*

[...]

*"Now pull the fucking trigger," he commands.*

*As if their recent cruelty was a lifetime ago, the men holdback when confronted by the screams of the pleading women before them.*

*"Shoot dammit!"*

*My eyes focused on one woman, tears glistening along the curves of her nose. Her face deformed with what I'm guessing were birth defects of a missing lower jaw and ears made up of holes on the side of her head minus earlobes. I thought of how her life of enduring ridicule has led her to that moment. In these brothels, she'd found the attention of men that was missing most of her life.*

*And before I finished my thought, Bang! Her life snuffed out.*

*"Never neglect your duties," Major Ueno said before walking away.*

*In that moment, 'this is not the Japanese way' resonated strongest.<sup>199</sup>*

I find much greater value in feeling the moment in fiction than to retell facts of an event. This emotional provocation is achieved from the internalisation of

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<sup>198</sup> Akil Awan, 'Opinion: Midway's Treatment of the Japanese Enemy Highlights the Power and Limits of Empathy', *HistoryExtra* <<https://www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/midway-movie-japanese-american-representation-how-treated-ww2/>> [accessed 7 October 2020].

<sup>199</sup> Dinsmore, p. 64.

contextual-essence fuelled partly by a good foundational understanding of historical context. The acknowledgement of Japanese atrocities also includes more factually based interjections to support the novel's contextual verisimilitude but fails to portray the same emotions. For example, *'Pop! And the Chinese civilian dropped fast to the ground as if their legs were swiped from under them. Until finally, on order of our superiors, innocent civilians walking the streets were no longer targets, contradicting the "Three Alls Policy" of kill all, loot all, burn all.'*<sup>200</sup> In addition to acknowledging Japanese atrocities in the Philippines during World War II, Kaiyo is a caring, feeling, regretful, family-oriented Japanese soldier. Even the dead American soldier, Joe, is treated with respect by Kaiyo instead of being viewed as simply the enemy. He provides Joe with a proper gravesite and forges a symbolic friendship with him. By having Kaiyo treat Joe in this manner, I wanted to add more depth to Kaiyo and further humanise the Japanese soldier—to recode the Americanised perception.

## CONCLUSION

The commentary on my background and experiences has provided a description of process and influences that shaped *FK*, serving as an example of how the spark in imagination came to take form into a concrete substantive piece of creative work. In sharing contributing factors that led to this endpoint, much like a protagonist within any story, a better understanding of my backstory helps to inform the motivations behind my actions, my story. Inspiration rested largely with childhood experiences gestated over the years with the passion for storytelling, sense of purpose in telling this story, and desire to share essence of land, people, and culture. The essence and cinematic vision were consistent inspirations throughout the process and aided by an imagined soundtrack to further provoke emotions. My mind's eye adjusted to reflect a strong literary perspective where words became the paintbrush for which to tell a story rather than a camera. A heightened appreciation for the more precise, thoughtful use of words has supplanted an earlier reliance on the abstractness of visuals meant to be shared in cinematic form.

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<sup>200</sup> Dinsmore, p. 29.

My biracial background and cross-cultural exposure attributed largely to the quintessential American experience allowing me to play a part in creating a 'new voice' of what it is to exist in a society built on a colonial history of categorisations for the purpose of control and limits. *FK* is a novel written by an American with a cosmopolitan view of the world, born from ideals of freedom and equality for all. In embracing autonomy of the self and fluidity of existence, artificial boundaries from classifications hold little relevance to my established identity. The inability to clearly classify me as Other within the colonial framework has allowed my identity as a cross-cultural, fluid, autonomous individual to evolve beyond the boundaries of an American citizen or product of Filipino and European heritage not beholden by the particulars of identity or location. In relieving the self from a superficial and burdensome thinking, essence of the self is not tethered to intramundane expectations. This line of transcendental thinking does resemble or overlap with Buddhist teaching and the Thoreauvian perspective, both of which I had little knowledge of prior to writing the novel. I do believe there exists similarities, a degree of universalism in uncorrupted self-truths and enlightenment as seen in Buddhist, Thoreauvian, and my thinking. In all three lines of thought, the commonality is the ability to set aside the material/superficial to reach similar conclusions in self-enlightenment where the unenlightened self is only but a fraction of what we can be.

I view solitude as remedial to the superficialities of society (which include inherited biases), holding in high-regard introspection as a source of enlightenment best achieved in a state of eco-solitude. Freedom or autonomy not bound by superficialities, expectation, anxieties, and empty gratification of a skewed system of values tied to capitalism transfers into the *FK* narrative of an agonist seeking ataraxia in eco-solitude. Kaiyo adapts and finds peace in eco-solitude, to the point of contentment and does so explicitly when he states, 'My harmony of existence with nature finds its rhythm, and so does the melody in my head.'<sup>201</sup> Kaiyo is persistently tested by nature and himself in eco-solitude and the path to reach a level of self-enlightenment. He finds or reclaims his core-self or essence-of-being in an exercise of unadulterated autonomy and independence or 'higher form of individualism.'<sup>202</sup> In finding power in his individualism, boundaries of existence are dissolved or blurred,

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<sup>201</sup> Dinsmore, p. 123.

<sup>202</sup> Prince, p. 137.

or what I describe as the fluid essence-of-being that exists in both the intra-mundane and transcendent world.

One of the core intents of *FK* is to promote a sense of communal and individual rapprochement, piggybacking on the harmony with nature theme. Once Kaiyo evolves or heals to a point of reclaiming his core-self, he exists in a world of no boundaries where the only thing he must come to terms with is internal and not external. His emotions, specifically guilt, is the last boundary he must dissolve to become his purest, uncorrupted version of self; and the only source of tension, incompleteness. The story ends with him reuniting with his daughter and finding a greater sense of peace (or ataraxia) that she has forgiven him or forgotten his errors of past to release the only true weight on his soul all these years where everything else is peripheral. The very last sentence of *FK* is: 'It warms me that she calls me papa, with home an abstract thought, and Maeko choosing not to see that scar on my face.'<sup>203</sup> The external were only tools, experiences to help guide him to that point, to the only thing that matters—love.

*FK* promotes a moray in the positive attributes of cosmopolitanism and egalitarian goals stemming from this inherent goodwill in our essence-of-being. Kaiyo is Japanese living in the Philippines, exposed to Americanism, multilingual, spiritual mix of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity, part of society, not part of society or part of nature. He is a soldier, son, husband, father, friend and isn't those things depending on where he's at in his personal journey. He becomes part of Tala's family but yearns for his own family. Ultimately, his sense of self is fluid, his existence is spiritually based, a simple motivating and innate force of or value in love where boundaries of existence are blurred. I recall once being asked what is true freedom and I responded that it is the ability to love everybody and everything. It seems this goal of true freedom in real life has made its way into *FK*. In Kaiyo's autonomy, appreciation for his environment, love for the people of his past and present, forgiveness of self, he has achieved that freedom. There are no boundaries in form and spirit. His existence is fluid.

I am an American writer and a writer, I am mix of cultures within national boundaries and which predates national boundaries, I'm much like you and you like me, and I am more than the person in the mirror. We are already homogenised,

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<sup>203</sup> Dinsmore, p. 164.



hybridised, and fluid if we choose to accept it as so. I believe in the power of the individual and meliorism; that wider change comes about through a more enlightened self or collection of enlightened selves. A stronger self-conception would provide a grounding of self and possibly transcendent thinking; or at the very least, reconsideration of what is truth according to self, absent expectations of others. 'For Emerson a crisis ought to result not in a dispersal of the self, but a rediscovery of one's origins' and 'Thoreau remains convinced of the primacy of the individual in bringing about any real improvement in society.'<sup>204</sup>

*FK* positions society as largely influenced by a skewed value-system of colonialism and capitalism and the artifice of differences that places us at odds with taking a Kaiyo-like journey of self when our differences are of essence and experience and less so physical and cultural. *FK* attempts to provide a sense of harmony and cooperation from an egalitarian mindset and intrinsic value in all living things, variations of Other. Kaiyo achieves harmony within a philosophy that in the fluid identity of race and gender and ecological selfhood we are not pigeon-holed by generalisations of colonial-era Othered in defining self and can be a far more esemplastic society. I rest my faith that perceiving human existence as fluid melts away the boundaries that help create the framework used to categorise the Othered and gravitates us towards a more self-prescribed, cross-cultural social identity of individualised differences framed within my overarching view that we have more similarities than we have differences. I believe we are at a point in history and societal evolution where monumental change is possible in rapprochement. It is not only a reality of our current social dynamics but also a remedy for some of our divisions. A 'new voice' or new normal emerges for those who are part and accepting of this cross-cultural, cosmopolitan experience in experiential and essential uniqueness. My intent is less deconstructing or decoding as it is constructing or encoding a new, more sublime, vision of our existence in transcendental thinking. I do believe American society is at the stage where effort is better applied towards encoding a new generational voice, vision of an esemplastic world with an expectation of meliorism from the enlightened self for which eco-solitude, solitude, or deep reflection can be useful.

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<sup>204</sup> Ford, p. 202; Len Gougeon, 'Thoreau and Reform', in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 194–214 (p. 203) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521440378.014>>.

It [is] up to each of us to accept or challenge the role we were cast into, to determine for ourselves and to make the world see that what is inside of us—our beliefs and dreams, how we love and express that love, the things that we can actually control—is more important than the outward traits we had no say in. That we are not what we look like but what we do with what we have, what we make of what we are given, how we treat others and our planet.<sup>205</sup>

In regard to being related, aren't we all.<sup>206</sup>

*E Pluribus Unum*

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<sup>205</sup> Wilkerson, p. 387.

<sup>206</sup> Dinsmore, p. 158.

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## DECLARATION

'Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deul cymeradwy.'

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith gyda chytundeb fy Ngrichwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)'

'I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.'

I confirm that I am submitting the work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s)'