

A trailing plume of smoke splashed through the screen, patting it down in matte grey. I held my breath as Ichigo fell on the ground, his saffron hair billowing in the gust of fate.

[これはきっと...終わり]  
[This must be...it]

The silence of his death devoured my limbs. Just then, a movement—his blood-threaded fingers trembled, clawed, then thrust his limbs into motion. He stood up, covered in blood, a ghoul of vengeful spirit.

*Ding*

‘What the-’

Like a kettle aflame, I felt a sharp jet of frustration piercing through my body. Quickly, I slipped my mouse towards the blue rectangular box in the corner of my screen.

[Welcome back to Tokyo International school...]

Time stopped. The peripheries of my face tensed up, like the feathers of a fledgling prey.

[...We are looking forward to meeting you again in person.]

In person. That’s right. I’ll have to see them again.

My mouse helplessly hovered, lost and drowning in bleak memories. Not wanting to let the feeling sink me further, I stood up and cowardly turned away from a fate that must be lived someday, like a feeble warrior realising the impossible might of his foe.

Stumbling out of the room, a familiar voice tangled up my foot. Ichigo.

[いいえ...復讐は、苦しみから逃れるため]  
[No...Revenge is just the path you took to escape your own suffering.]

I slammed the door.

“Mum, I’ll go outside for a walk.” Tying my shoelaces, I shouted to my mum, busy frying the chicken wings in the kitchen.

Closing the front door, I pulled myself up towards the translucent light of summertime Tokyo. There was a blissful tint of green to everything—electric poles, stray cats, even the shadows of leaves hanging on invisible lines through the pavement. Somewhere in the distance, little

children wearing mottled clothes giggled and chased each other, like colours assorting and mixing on a painter's palette.

Then, a flash: [Welcome back to Tokyo International school...]

'God damn it.' I frowned, a grey splotch smothered on the corner of a perfect Tokyo afternoon.

'Noise. I need noise.' I quickened my steps to Shibuya Crossing. It was the only place where deafening noise was guaranteed. With each step, a chaotic storm of old spite and bitter memories continued to roar. I could still draw out each ugly line of their faces—dogs hankering for a victim to bite, gnarl and toy with.

*"Is that all you get for your pocket money?"*

*"Do you even have a brain?"*

My eyes burned with rage. Just then, out of nowhere, Ichigo's voice echoed from a black, blurred distance; *"No...Revenge is just the path you took to escape your own suffering."*

Sighing, my foot kicked into a corner, unfolding a world of exploding activity. Shibuya.

Like falling sand castles, the pedestrians crossed the cross-shaped junction from all four directions, their granular steps shattering down and spreading over the infinite pavement. Watching, my mind splintered, each thread tied to the million footsteps; anger, regret, sweet revenge, the minister's sermon to "forgive our enemies", friends shouting "karma!"...Their steps entwined and tangled around my body like knotted thread.

Just then, something caught my eye. Among the endless sea of black and brown, a face framed by brushes of neon-yellow strolled into my vision. It was a man fashioning a cropped sailor moon costume. He stood out like a sore thumb, like an accidental pixel of colour punched into a screen of black and white TV. I was bewitched. I loved his moonstick keyring, his hair...but above all, I loved the way he walked past the hushed whispers and stares as if they were antique frames hanging on the wall, obsolete and invisible. He was recklessly, fearlessly, himself.

Watching his silhouette slither through the crowd and fade away from sight, a sudden realisation illuminated through the suffocating fog of my mind. I finally understood what had been missing—what mattered in my search for healing: an impenetrable belief in myself. Who I am.

The road began to clear, making way for cars to race towards their destination.

Reaching into my pocket, I faced the message I had been avoiding. I pressed 'Reply'.

[ Dear Mrs. Suzuki,

Thanks for your message.

I can't wait to be back.

Sincerely, Lucy.]

The road light turned green. The crossing was finally over. I looked up at the sky and the vibrant sunlight poured down, sizzling my skin.

Turning around, I pulled myself up towards the translucent light of summertime Tokyo, my hair billowing in its gust of fate.

**Jimin Jeon, 14**