

Kintsukuroi, by Jakub Kujawa

“Mistakes are the portals of discovery.”

– James Joyce

They stood near the hangars, just outside the complex. There was an odor of kerosene coming from the workshop, and it mixed with the scents of the nearby flower fields.

It was a strangely pleasant smell on a strangely pleasant, brisk night, and the sky was clear as a crystal, untainted by anything.

„The days are getting shorter,” Avel said, her voice being the only audible sound around.

“It’s spring, girl.”

“I am aware of that.”

“How are they getting shorter?”

“Don’t know how, just that they are. It is not twenty four hours anymore, and we don’t know what’s causing it.”

“Not twenty four hours? You don’t know?”

She didn’t say anything. He gave her a careful look. It was barely noticeable, but she was tensed up, head to toes, and she was doing her best to hide it.

They both stood silent for a while. He lit a cigarette, took a drag.

“How did I not notice?” he asked.

“Nobody did. We wouldn’t know either, but someone at the D.C. branch noticed different relay times on government satellites. Whilst investigating he noticed that the wavelength parameters automatically shifted into ones used in deep-space reconnaissance. That was unusual to say the least, because the override was never designed to...”

“I fix engines, Avy.”

She understood.

“Oh, Right. Sorry. Long story short, a single type of device “felt” the change, but everything else is still working as usual. It’s actually kind of amusing that right now, in order to

measure time, we need to bounce laser beams off of other stellar objects, because all our timekeeping devices are as good as nothing.”

“How ‘s that possible? What about, I don’t know, atomic clocks?”

“Operational, but their readings are wrong and thus worthless.”

“How can you be so sure, huh? You’ve got a single thing saying something different than all the other things, and that’s proof for you? Scientific proof?”

She chuckled.

“You fix engines, Al.”

He sighed, then grinned, slightly and bitterly. The night was calm. They both stared into the sky, unable to squeeze out any words. There were a lot of them to say, but none came.

She took a cigarette from him, and he lit another one.

“Suppose that explains the turmoil you’ve been having here,” Al said.

She smiled.

“Yeah, it does...”

Her mind seemed to wander off. He looked at her as she gazed upon the skies, the blue of her eyes clearly visible despite the lack of light.

“But then there’s that other thing...” she said, almost as if to herself.

“What thing?” he asked.

She blinked at the sky, smiling again. Suddenly, she turned her head and looked straight into his eyes.

“I should go,” she said, and her eyes were blank, gray hued.

She hugged him tightly, gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“Take care, old man.”

He felt her hand wander into the pocket of his jacket.

“You too, kiddo.”

They let go of each other. Avel turned around and walked towards the main assembly hall, not looking back.

He put a hand in his pocket, took out the note she left him.

It was a folded sheet of paper, two pages of small print.

It took him a while to read and understand all of it. When he finished, it was nearly dawn. He looked towards the assembly hall, towards where Avel left his sight. There were quite a few lights on in there, quite a few rooms with mad men and women that were busy with their numbers. It didn't matter whether they stayed up late or got up early.

"At least to them it's a responsibility," he thought.

He looked further, beyond the halls, onto the hill and the observatory on its peak.

The paper crumpled in his hand, and he headed towards the garage.

As he walked, he gave the sky one last look before the sunlight swarmed it. You could say his eyes were different, and they searched for different things, things that weren't there moments before, both in his head and on the firmament.

"I want you to be mistaken. I want you all to be very much mistaken."

* * *

The sirens sounded two days after that.

He remembers feeling unsatisfied.

He remembered how his parents always assured him that one day, in the distant future, all of it will come down and fall apart, but he will have no part in it, because it is so far away in time. He thought about it over and over that morning.

He remembered how his mother, whenever he felt sad, told him that in order to be happy again, all he needs is time and a single smile. He thought about how she was always right, and that this was no exception.

He remembers thinking about how she could not have foreseen that one day, somewhere in the future, it'll all come down and fall apart, and there won't be any time left to help a smile.