

## **“Transience”**

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Mono no aware. It's a phrase, in Japanese, meaning the transience of things. It's the feeling of beauty, of aching sadness associated with the realization that every moment is fleeting, forever running by like an endlessly flowing river. It's a phrase I know well.

When I was younger, my grandmother's house was my home. My first memories are of playing on her infinite blue carpet, the ruffles in the fabric the waves, the expanse the ocean. Ships made journeys from one sofa to another. Empires and kingdoms rose and fell, all hidden within blunt Lego blocks. My grandmother wasn't afraid to get down on her knees and participate. Despite being perplexed by my endless peculiarities –no, that car must be over here with the stuffed cat– she joined in every time. My childhood was happy and kind, but only within the safe confines of those walls and under her watchful gaze.

Of course, it wasn't all perfect. Nothing is, and that's as it should be. There was the time I took too many donuts and had to sit in the corner for a while, or when I made mud pancakes on the walls outside right before a big party. Or when I washed my hands with her expensive new plant food.

But it was all okay. She took each childhood fumbling in stride, and laughed when I was afraid of serious retribution. Whenever I needed to escape from my house, after an argument or a bad day, I could simply walk across the field and find refuge in the little blue house that was filled with nothing but kindness.

I got older, and those days slid behind me, eventually existing nowhere but in my dim memories. But I grasped them tightly, lest they be washed away by the forever eroding waves of time, yet they receded farther from view. There was time for new memories, of course. I started attending middle school, where I was made fun of, pushed into trash cans, thrown around. I spent every day in school wanting desperately to escape, gazing out the windows at the innocent blue sky, seemingly unchanged. Finally, I would be free, riding home on the bus. My first stop would be across the field, no matter how rough the weather.

I'd find her there, my grandmother, as always. I found acceptance there. It didn't matter how I looked, what I weighed, what other peculiarities I had. Where so many people looked at life through eyes covered with a lense of discrimination, her life, lived well, had washed her of bias. She loved unconditionally. She wasn't as young as she used to be, something that escaped me for the time being. Still, we laughed together. Birds fluttered to her feeders, the sun shone even on days when it was cloudy. Nothing but kindness ever existed in that house. I read National Geographics instead of playing, and discussed current events, but the feeling was the same. Once in a while we would see the news, a story of a bombing or another tragic event would briefly cover up our sun, and we would be reminded of the dangers of this world. Those moments eventually fell behind too, as they all do. At the time I thought they would last forever; I felt that I would always be able to cross the field and visit her, and I would always be

young and happy. But of course, nothing lasts forever. Every present reality falls instantly into the past.

I began high school. Actual friends and classes began taking up my time, and I saw her every two days. However, I made sure I always went at least every other day, bringing my new dog to visit. My life outside my grandmother's pulled at me, but I refused steadfastly to accept that anything could disappear.

Time went on; she grew older. I began to notice the little things. She couldn't walk as far, couldn't quite remember whose name was whose. Every time I noticed I was reminded of the reality of life. I realized that the time I spent with her was slipping through my fingertips. I wanted to anchor myself with a ten thousand pound steel weight, holding fast in time, but I couldn't. No one can. I grew up, and she grew older. Time moved on, the rushing river of reality greedily stealing memories, moments.

She lives with us now. The little blue house sits unoccupied, its windows dark. I see her every day, but every time I'm reminded of the past. I feel the river pulling, the tides washing. I want to stop it, for even a moment. I want to somehow escape the endless robbery, but I can't. I see her, her smile, the light that seems to exude from her very existence. Her kindness, her caring toward everyone else. She tries to help us clean even when she can't walk, tries to cook when she can't lift a pot. She can't, but wants to, tries to make other's lives better and happier even when she can't do the same for herself.

I think that's what winning is, in this life. Not escaping time, not riches or possessions. It is truly, honestly living for the happiness of others, even if you yourself cannot have what they do. It's true selflessness, even in the face of time, even in the reality of the infinitesimal nature of your own personal existence. It's rebelling against the constant rushing of the river, the cruelty that exists along the way. It's being kind despite how little it might mean, despite the enormous odds you face as just one person in a vast universe.

I hope I can do the same. I hope that someday, when dim memories of me are fading away in the minds of others, those that remain are good ones. When the sun sets on me and never rises, I want to have left a fleeting echo of happiness in the world. Even if I'm only a speck in the universe, even if I won't amount to anything beyond a few seconds to the years that the Earth has existed, I want to be kind. I want to be that one person to somebody, that one person who loves them even when no one else did. I want to be the one who makes somebody else's life worth living, even if only for a moment.

Because someday, I will fade. The tides of time will wash away my footsteps, the wind will blow away my dust. Every moment I lived, every achingly beautiful second, will be gone. Sometimes that scares me. And then, I see her, my grandmother. I see her living in her twilight, but I see a beautiful one. Mono no aware is what I feel, the transience of existence itself. Because the tides may wash us away, and our echoes may fade, but what we can do right now can be eternally beautiful.