

# SKIN MEMORY

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HADA NO KIOKU

PINKY VIOLENCE  
BOOK 1

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*AT THE SHORE'S EDGE,  
NO WIND, NO WAVE—ONLY TIME  
LAPS AT MY FEET.*

*—From the Man'yōshū*



## 1 THE SHORE'S EDGE

SEPTEMBER SUN STROBED through the windows with the rhythm of the passing poles, the train humming along the Yokosuka Line, late afternoon on a Thursday. Ian Doyle sat near the end of the car, on a long bench that ran the length of the wall, swaying as it shuttled him from Narita Airport in Tokyo to his home in Kamakura.

A man in workwear snoozed upright across the aisle, hard hat in his lap; he'd joined the train at Totsuka. Two high school girls in matching uniforms shared earbuds and goggled over something on a phone screen. Down near the end of the opposing bench, a little girl, about seven or eight years old, clutched a spiral-bound sketchbook in her lap, feet dangling above the floor. The girl's mother sat beside her, holding the little girl's pink hat, dozing, chin

tilted to her chest, two fingers on the other hand hooking the straps of a plastic shopping bag from a department store in Shinagawa.

The outskirts of the city flicked past—concrete block housing, lines of parked bicycles, the occasional temple gate half-hidden behind wisteria. The rush of Shinjuku and Shinagawa had blurred past, now replaced by quieter suburbs: rooftops stacked in verdant hills like multicolored origami, sentinel vending machines posed in alleyways, strings of laundry fluttering from apartment balconies. Life, unbothered.

Three full days of around-the-clock travel exhausted him. Rendered him bone tired. And homesick in a way that was new to him. He'd slept on the bush plane to Bangui, slept on the flight from Bangui to Addis Ababa, slept in a cracked Bole International chair in the noisy lounge, Al Jazeera blaring from the overhead televisions. Slept on the flight to Dubai and the flight home to Tokyo. But it was shit sleep. Pressurized cabin sleep. And sleep plagued by nightmares.

His head was cotton, eyesight unfocused, thoughts casting without direction. The African assignment weighed on him—a job he should've declined, but didn't. He rubbed his jaw and let his head tip back, eyes half-lidded, until he felt it: the weight of a gaze. Not hostile. Curious.

He glanced across the aisle and to his right.

The little girl's pencil worked in quick, furtive flicks, eyes darting to him, then back to the page. When she detected his glance, she froze like he'd caught her shoplifting. Her pencil's movement ceased, and she looked straight ahead, mouth shrunk, eyes staring at nothing. Ian looked out the windows again, monitoring the girl in his periphery. He was pretty sure she was drawing him. He smiled, admiring the little girl's persevering look of innocent reverie.

Rice fields flashed between buildings now, stubborn green patches clinging to the edges of modernity. Elderly cyclists pedaled through narrow lanes, baskets packed with groceries. A woman stood outside a shuttered shopfront, watering a line of potted azaleas, hem apron damp. The girl's eyes flicked his direction now and then—shy, steady, inquisitive. Her pencil moved in small, cautious strokes, the book angled to shield it from view. Ian shrank his smile, resuming his stoic pose, letting her decide if she still wanted to draw the *gaijin* with the tired face.

That smile might have been the first smile stretching his cheeks in a week or more, so it was a shame to hide it. Africa had been chaos and horror, and here he was, home again, hiding out in Kamakura where order reigned.

The scenery softened—green hills rising, tiled shrines tucked into the trees. Kamakura wasn't far

now. After a few minutes, when he was sure the little girl had resumed drawing, he head-turned her way fast and pulled a ridiculous face: one eye squeezed shut, mouth twisted in a lopsided grin, tongue jabbed out.

The little girl squeaked, then hid behind the sketchpad. She lowered it, eyes fixed straight ahead. Her smooth cheeks went pink, and the sight of her like that warmed his heart in an unexpected way. Ian straightened, reclining again in the boneless pose he'd held before, and went back to staring out at the passing trees—serene, as if nothing had happened.

His tin-cloth duffel bag was wedged between his boots, still dusty, fraying. His camera satchel crossed his body and sat in the space next to him. The encrypted storage was full, but he hadn't looked at any of the photos since Bangassou. He didn't want to.

He closed his eyes, drifted. But the flicker of sunlight through the train windows became the flicker of flames. A church. Grievous wailing and despair. And then the phantom stink of oil smoke, the coppery blood and scorched metal rose up again. He saw that little boy in Beloko-Ngai. They would be the same age. Would have been. The boy whose face came away like a Halloween mask. He and the precious little thing with her sketchbook would be the same age. *Would have been.*

The headline in *Vue monde*, the bellwether of

Paris elite, would read something like “The Cross in the Crosshairs: Religious Cleansing in Central Africa” or whatever the French equivalent might be. “Cross in the Crosshairs” might not be as catchy *en Français*. However the editor titled the article, Ian Doyle’s accompanying photos would represent only a small fraction of what he’d seen there. The most palatable.

The train sighed to a halt, and the doors hissed open. He hefted his duffel from the floor and shouldered it. The high school girls were getting off in Kamakura, too, and he let them go ahead. He leaned aside toward the little girl with the sketchbook, and the little girl grinned so wide her eyes went narrow. She held that sketch close to her so he couldn’t see it. He winked, smiling again, helpless to the girl’s charm. She smiled enough he could see her teeth, then shied away—a funny and bashful connection between artist and her subject.

He stepped off the train into Kamakura Station, disappointed he’d never know how the girl saw him.

KAMAKURA STATION WAS quaint by Tokyo standards. A sunlit platform, twin corrugated rooflines sheltering the commuters from the harshest rays, the dividers papered with a colorful mosaic of advertising signs—rehabilitation clinics and pharmacies, snack ads, local services. A vibrant celebration

of Kamakura's rhythm: aging, healing, drinking, cleaning, commuting, mental health. The wooden benches along the platform had sun-bleached slats and old iron armrests, worn smooth by decades of waiting. A student with a bento box sat cross-legged on one; an old woman in a straw hat was folding up a newspaper with slow, precise movements. Foot traffic flowed in and out of the train. Orderly bustle.

Beyond the platform, low hills pressed the edges of town, and the rooftops staggered downhill toward the coast. Somewhere out there, past the trees and temples, was the ocean. He smelled salt in the breeze—the same one that rustled the sleeves of his jacket and made him feel like he'd come ashore from somewhere far away.

He'd grown up seaside; the wee town of Portrush, Northern Ireland. Portrush was frigid and harsh. A place of kelp and diesel and suffering. A place he learned not to cry. He would cry for Kamakura. Cry for its beauty and peace and all the things it wasn't.

He trudged from the station, camera bag across his body, heavy duffel over a shoulder. Kamakura was a summer hang, a place with lots of ex-pats; late summer now, past the peak season and going into his favorite time of year in Kamakura, where the weather was kindest. A taxi would have made the trip quicker—or he could have called Saeko to pick him up—but that would ruin the surprise. And, as

homesick as he was, now that he'd set foot in Kamakura, a whole different dread stalled his arrival home.

From the station, he headed into the hills, away from the town and the coast, up near the 4-chōme ridge where the houses clung to the green hills like barnacles. The Ima Kōji wandered upward from the station, rising into hills veined with temple paths and mossy staircases.

The road narrowed as he climbed. Potted plants lined the corners—hydrangea, fern, a cluster of bonsai with curling roots. A cat watched him from atop a garden wall, tail flicking. The roads near his home were wide enough for only one car at a time.

He passed a small wooden house with the door open to the breeze elevated above the lane at the last curve before his own home. A low stone wall and dark metal slat fencing gave the property privacy without feeling unwelcoming. The front garden stood thick and plentiful with flowers and pruned trees and shrubs, and topiary-style evergreens. A short flight of steps led up to the front door. Their elderly neighbor stood under the shade of a generous eave, watering a row of potted plants. Nakano-san, neighborhood icon, a former train engineer.

Nakano-san looked up. "Ah," he said, eyes narrowing with good-natured curiosity. "Okaeri."

Ian stopped, blinked, sometimes a few beats behind on spoken Japanese, especially today after a

travel marathon from the heart of darkest Africa all the way here.

“Welcome home,” Nakano-san clarified, in halting English, smiling now, bowing his head. Then he raised a finger. “*Wait.*”

Nakano-san shuffled back into the house, disappearing behind a noren curtain. Ian waited, still catching his breath, back aching, a rash of heat and sweat cooling on his back now and beginning to itch. Cicadas buzzed.

The man returned a moment later, cradling a large jar wrapped in kitchen cloth. He stepped down to the lane and offered it with both hands, nodding once, and when Ian received it with both hands, Nakano-san parted the cloth—pickled daikon, sharp and yellow in the glass.

Ian bowed. “Thank you,” he said, surprised by the gesture’s warmth.

The man grinned, nodding in quick jabs, then added with thick accent: “My wife say too sour. You strong, maybe like.” He batted near Ian’s arm but didn’t touch him.

They both stood smiling, happy but awkward. Ian’s brain had let all his Japanese small talk leak from his reservoir, and Nakano-san spoke little English. But they liked each other, and that was probably enough. And there was a lot unsaid in that moment. Topics left untouched by choice. More nods, big smiles. Ian thanked him again. Their smiles

grew more somber, and Nakano-san's happy expression changed to one of compassion.

Once they'd both reconciled what was being communicated without words, Ian bowed again and Nakano-san bowed too.

Nakano-san said, "Okusan ni yoroshiku otsutae kudasai."

*Say hello to your wife for me.*

Saeko.

The weight of the tragedy in his home grew heavier, but he scratched up some useful Japanese and managed, "Okusama ni, uh, mo yoroshiku . . . o-otsutae, kudasai." A very respectful return of the wifely greeting.

The older man grunted and nodded, smiling still, and watched as Ian stepped back and turned, heading further up the street, the wrapped jar of pickles held to his chest, the sky's blue deepening behind the trees.

Around the corner, he saw his own abode. Home at last. A journey of around 13,000 kilometers coming to an end.

Their home—Saeko's family home—was an old-fashioned kaminko constructed during the second world war. Set back and hidden from the street by greenery and a high stone wall and a gate. It was a small bungalow, built with wooden beams and sliding shoji doors, the roof in curved black tiles. Sometime in the late 90s, Mr. Takashiro modernized

some of the old home's interior; the bathroom and the kitchen and the bedroom.

He went up the steps and into the garden, crossed the tiled grass to the concrete-floor doma. Saeko's bicycle leaned in its usual spot. Here he sat on a bench for a moment and pried off his hiking boots. He stored them away and stood.

The pickles sat on the bench, blameless but portent.

A gift from Nakano-san. Right away his return to Saeko would be tainted by the carried gift from the neighbor that acknowledged the hard time he and Saeko were going through. If Saeko saw Ian with the jar, she wouldn't think of his return, she would think of her father. He left the pickles on the bench, dragged his duffel and satchel inside the foyer and left them there. Then he stalked through the hall, going to the washitsu, the Japanese room, the huge space at the home's center.

Saeko was near; he sensed her presence. Thursday afternoons, she taught calligraphy at a classroom in the Buddhist temple; she would be home now and relaxing. The long space of the washitsu had been divided in two during the pandemic, and one half had been used as her father's bedroom. The shoji divider still stood.

But he didn't want to think of that now, crossing the tatami mat out to the backyard veranda that led to their kitchen. And that's where he found Saeko.

The veranda—an *engawa*, a path of flooring outside the house, separated from the outdoor garden by sliding doors—was kitchen-warm and smelled of dashi and fresh-cut vegetables. He could see into the kitchen at the end of the long hall.

The sight of his wife cooking, seen from behind, her head down, hands working at something, brought a thunderous roar to his heartbeat and stopped him in his path. A long, long journey to come home to this.

Saeko wore black slacks and a cream-colored top; a plain apron protected her her outfit—the one she wore to her class this afternoon. Steam billowed from a pot. Her long black hair shone in the kitchen’s high lighting.

That smile brought out earlier by the little girl with the sketchbook returned again. Relief flooded his system, coursed through his pathways and synapses and a flux of abundant happiness rose from his feet and up his legs, up his back and touched the nape of his neck. He shivered.

And, like Saeko felt the same rush, she paused her chopping and her head turned a degree in his direction.

He heard her mutter, “Tadaima...?”

Unsure. Wishing.

He moved into the kitchen doorway.

Saeko turned.

For a heartbeat, she didn’t move. Her eyes

widened, and a wooziness took hold of her. She stood stunned with a kitchen knife in her grip. She set the knife on the counter behind her then covered her mouth. The appreciation he felt in that moment astounded him.

She gripped fistfuls of the apron's cotton, drying her hands before whipping the apron away and trotting to him, her eyes gone wet. She rushed into him and he took her head-on, grabbing her, hoisting her feet off the ground and crushing her in his embrace. She sobbed and laughed into his collar.

He laughed, and felt the racking threat of the laugh's shaky balance on the edge of grief or heartache. Africa had been too far. Too dark. He shouldn't have gone.

When he set her down on the floor, she wiped at her eyes, then clutched his jacket arms, looking him over as if she couldn't believe he was here. "You're supposed to be home tomorrow," she said, the word tripping slightly off her tongue, sounding like *tomodo*. Her voice sounded somewhere between surprise and scolding. She blinked hard, trying to catch up with what her heart had already accepted.

"I missed a connection," he said. "Ethiopia. It was good luck. It's how I caught an earlier flight."

"I thought maybe I was hearing things," she whispered. "I thought . . . it couldn't be."

He opened his arms.

"It is."

Her happy and forlorn expression calmed to a different pose now. Her eyes wandered his face, settling on his mouth. She went to her toes and kissed him and he took her arms and held her still.

“I’m so happy,” she whispered, her brows bowing, eyes gone pinky.

She kissed his mouth again, lighter this time. A devotion to him. Proving something to him. The pandemic was over.

Her hands went to his cheeks and held his jaw.

The state of his face embarrassed him and he held her hands to stop them from moving. He wouldn’t normally come home in this state, not after Saeko’s fears during the pandemic. He cleared her soft fingers from his stubbled face and touched his forehead to hers.

SAEKO SCRUBBED his back with a sudsy loofah, movements slow and ceremonial, cleaning him with kindness. Up and down his back from his shoulders and neck, down to his tailbone. Bare ass on a low wooden stool, he sat in their shower room, knees up, arms resting on thighs.

The shower room had been renovated in the nineties, all concrete floors and walls, super modern in such a traditional home; a tall window in the corner looked out to a secret corner of the garden, and, once showered, one descended stone steps into

the tiled tub set deep below the floor level like a grave.

Hot water splashed on his head, on his crown, and he bowed further forward, letting Saeko do her work. She shampooed his hair, washed his ears, used liquid soap in the palm of her hand, rubbing in circles until it turned to thick foam. Then she slid her small fingers around the back of his neck to his throat, coming up his chin and running her short nails in his three-day-old scruff. There was something reverent in it. Like she was rendering him clean again—not just the body grime of airports and Africa, but something solemn and devotional.

Saeko had changed into an ivory samue top—soft cotton, loose in the shoulders, the sleeves rolled halfway up her forearms. Nothing below. Her legs were bare, the hem brushing the tops of her thighs when she moved. This wasn't seduction—it was a tender ritual. She crouched beside him with the wash basin, dipping the cloth in warm water, and he watched the fabric cling and darken with each motion, the outline of her collarbone visible where the neckline slipped.

When she came around to his front side, rinsing off her hands, then using the wand to spray water directly on his neck and down his back to clean him of the soap, he saw her naked form through the wet top. The ivory cotton had become transparent and clung to her body. Her brown nipples were erect and

enlarged, pushing out the fabric. He held his breath at the sight's beauty.

She told him to turn, putting the wand back in its cradle and showing him to sit facing toward the tub a little. He complied, mesmerized by the sight.

This was worth all the time in the air, all the time in the airports and in bush planes and bouncing in Toyota pickups. To have someone who cared for you, someone who loved you, and someone who tended...? It was a perfect moment.

She straddled his thighs now, sitting in his lap and facing him. She raked his hair back from his face with her fingers. Her long hair was wet as well, and the water splashed on both of them, getting them from the shoulders to their thighs. The way she sat ballooned out the front of her top, treating him to a peek at the swell of a breast.

He'd grown aroused while she scrubbed, just the feeling of his wife's hands on him. But now his arousal began to tick further upright between them.

She studied his face, and he regarded her porcelain perfection, the sculpted chin, the jaw, the straight and delicate nose, and pouting lips, those dark, dark eyes, a face full of mystery; until it bloomed a smile. And it always bloomed a smile.

As he held her hands at bay again like he'd done in the veranda, taking her thin wrists, he said, "I should have shaved. I just didn't have a chance."

Saeko said, "I'll shave you. And I don't mind."

She kissed his mouth. Then, as if to prove her point, she pulled her kiss away, took her soft, pouted lips, and rubbed them back and forth on his stubbled chin, producing a wet, scratchy sound that had them both laughing. But she stopped quickly, making sounds of comical complaint and rubbing her own mouth and showing him a chastising look. He pulled her close and held her for a long moment.

She climbed off, returned with his razor and a squeeze-tube of shave gel, and sat in his lap again, guiding him to look up, her expression quite serious now. She had a task at hand. She lathered his face, scrubbing in the soap, going down his neck, up to his ears, getting around his mouth. Her touch was exquisite.

He said he should probably use an electric razor first, the thick shave lather sticking to his lips, and Saeko dismissed it, saying, “New blade,” and popped off the protective cap.

She was slow and careful, didn’t nick him once, moved the blade down his skin, through the soap and the wet, shearing off the rough hairs that bothered her smooth skin. On his cheeks, along his jaw, turning the razor upside down, going from his collar up to his Adam’s apple. It took her a long while, but she wanted it done right.

While she worked, the end of his erection rested on her thigh, sometimes touched her mound, though

the samue folds fell between her legs. Saeko pretended not to notice.

When at last she was done, she used her hands to angle shower spray on his face and neck and cleared him. She kissed his bared chin now, kissed his hairless jaw and kissed his mouth.

But she wasn't done before they would get in bed.

Her soapy hands went down his chest, her right hand slipping between them for that final washing: the monument to desire he sported. He trembled at her touch as her hand went around it, stroking down to the base then cupping his scrotum. She looked deep in his eyes, showing him nothing as she worked a lather that had his heart pounding with immeasurable need. She slipped from his lap, samue soaked and clinging to her flesh, and knelt between his open legs, cleaning and worshipping what he had. He groaned and rocked and fought every urge he had to take her down to the concrete floor, spread her legs and get himself all the way inside her. Saeko cleaned every bit of his manhood, every crease, every wrinkle unfolded, every ridge on the engorged corpulent bulb. He would jolt and rock and hold her hand to pause her as he neared impromptu eruption.

Then it was time, and she stepped back once more, brought the shower wand between his legs and rinsed him. The razzing sting of the shower spray got him jerking and flinching on the stool. It was funny,

but both of them were beyond laughing, both swollen with sweet need.

This time when Saeko returned the shower-head wand to the cradle, he rose and followed. She replaced the wand, turned, and elbowed off the water lever. The room was quiet except for the dripping from their bodies, and she put her back against the concrete wall, raising her chin to him. He opened the lapels of her drenched samue, peeled it down her smooth shoulders and bared her shaking breasts. Her nipples stood at aching attention, and her body writhed with need. The samue dropped to the floor with a wet slap.

He pinned her then with a kiss, her head against the wall, his hands going down her arms to her wrists, intertwining their fingers, drawing her hands up like angel wings above her head. He pushed his hardness into her stomach, and his wife mewled into his mouth.

He lowered, scooped an arm around the back of her thighs, and lifted, hefted her light weight. Seiko wrapped her thighs around him and locked her ankles. Their mouths didn't come apart. He walked with her like that, two people alone in their own house now. The tragic event that left them without Takeshi forgotten for the moment. Naked, walking through this old house in Kamakura, down the hall, near the front door, turning into the bedroom.

The bed was a queen size with a dove gray duvet,

the bed sitting on a pedestal a foot off the floor's regular height and taking up most of the room. He stepped up and laid Saeko's back on the dove gray. She sunk into the bedding.

He regarded her for a moment, laying on her back and looking up at him, totally naked, her hair wet and darkening the duvet. Her hips rolled with anticipation, the little pink mouth between her thighs fattened by lust, the wispy tangle of her pelt twisted in wet curls.

He let saliva flow from his tongue into the pads of his fingers, then prepared the end of his manhood. Seiko was very tight, and even when she was wet, sometimes they had difficulty at first. He entered her with ease, holding steady and guiding himself inside her in slow increments. Saeko squeaked and held her breath. After a moment, she exhaled as he sunk deeper.

She pulled him close and held him. He pushed deeper and pulled out, rolling his pelvis and doing it slow, letting her get accustomed. It didn't take long until she was meeting his thrusts, wanting him, haunting him deep inside her.

"I missed you so much," he said.

She said, "I love you."

He told her he did, too. He held her black hair while they made love. She kissed his neck and his chin.

But he'd been gone for so long and missed her so

much that within minutes, he was ready to release. Saeko sensed it and was not disappointed or deterred. She said to him, "Follow," and guided him higher on the bed.

She got him onto his back and straddled his waist and angled his steely hardness, sitting back on it, in control. Her fingertips raked his chest while she sat with him buried inside her. She rocked slow and gentle and nodded to him, encouraging him, wanting him to come inside her.

They were young and they were married, but they weren't *that* young. The time for a child was now. The matter had been off the table during the pandemic, but since it was over, Saeko made him understand if it happened, it would happen. So when they were together, he would come inside her.

He put his arms up over his head on the pillows. And she lay almost flat against him, humping him, wanting him to ejaculate. This was Saeko's sacred secret. His wife was smart, intelligent, worldly. She was kind and polite. She dressed demurely, spoke cleverly, but in bed, she was the horniest feline he'd *ever* been with.

As he neared climax, she bit his neck, stroked his throat, and squeezed his earlobes. She kissed him. She humped faster and harder. And when it was time, she put both hands in the center of his chest like she was doing CPR and uprighted herself. At this outrageous angle, her tightness was extreme. Her

grip, strong. He exploded inside of her. Weeks worth of pent-up lust, desire, and love for the woman he married. Even Saeko cried out, getting further upright, back bowing, squeezing her own nipples and squalling in ecstasy as he jetted inside her again and again.

