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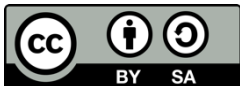
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Goldsmiths
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Bergamot and Cedar

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For art comes to you proposing frankly to give
nothing but the highest quality to your moments as
they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873)

SERAPH

The keen April light slanted past the heavy azure velvet curtains, striking into hot gold the nacre-coloured swans on Crane's wallpaper. Lysander, loosely wrapped in a teal dressing gown embroidered with gold, looked idly past Grosvenor Square, lofty and quiet in the dim roar of London. He mused at the gothic turrets of skyscrapers over Paddington, towering in the haze. He traced the lazy concourse of solitary airships, drifting to and fro between aircraft warning lights flickering, gem-like, against the lavender sky. He did not contemplate the rivers of silky black hair cascading across his bedlinen, nor the alabaster limbs stretched languidly beneath them. Would indeed be hanged if he did.

Deuced nuisance, this. What a dashed chomp he'd been. He should have gone to the Club.

'You don't mind, old boy, do you?'

The boy stretched, rolled upright, splendid and unselfconscious in his nakedness. Katsuo Saito: an intoxicating deluge of black tea and ink-stained cuffs, soft bruised skin and burnt copper, wicked smiles and the soft crackle of impending thunder. Reaching now for a green tea cigarette from the nightstand, masses of black hair tumbling around his shoulders, the glint of a single pearl earring matching the youthful avarice in his mahogany eyes.

Lysander deLeucy, Marquis of Rockingham, future Duke of Lyonesse, and first-rate fool, sighed deeply.

Thrill of the chase, and all that rot.

Walking from fire unto fire, chasing what Wilde called passionate pains and deadlier delights. He threw himself on a long chaise of turquoise brocade, watching jade-green smoke coil indulgently from Katsuo's sore lips, and thought of Verlaine, describing the collapse among the flames of races exhausted by the power of feeling, to the invading sound of enemy trumpets. Of Elagabalus, smothering his guests with rose petals.

Katsuo sat himself cross-legged on the carpet, bathed in early afternoon light, a small tattooed lotus just visible above his dark silk drawers. Still bringing faint notes of bergamot and cedar. Beautiful in his hues and shadows, his sinewy lines. Beautiful in the way of painters. He nodded at a Burne-Jones of Saint Sebastian.

'Friend of yours?' He tilted his head.

'Dashed bloody patron saint, I suppose.' Lysander smiled languidly, let smoke curl upwards from his lips. 'First time I knew what... or who I was.'

'How so?'

Lysander taxed the young man. One wondered rather about the Japanese sometimes.

'You know some frightfully clever people with extremely polished top hats have decided our nightly... activities... are simply not on?'

'Why, of course, they're deciding it all over the place, these days.' Katsuo flicked his cigarette. 'Right up into the Emperor's palace.'

Lysander nodded. 'Well, dear boy, for all their bloody laws and fears and clever books, they're dashed well not deciding what one feels when one looks at... an exquisite painting.'

'And what', asked Katsuo with what one could only call an impish glint in the eye, 'is that?'

Confound you, young hell-hound, thought Lysander, hiding a smile. He looked expressly at the Burne-Jones. 'I say, weren't you at Oxford just now?'

Katsuo yawned. 'Mhhh. Soaking up the West's eternal wisdoms and all that.'

Lysander eyed the dove-grey waistcoat that had got stuck on a bust of Apollo, with its purple lining and bronzed gold appliqué, the mauve silk tie dangling from the chandelier, the

slightly crumpled chrysanthemum buttonhole under the bed. According to Keziah, Katsuo was an engineer. He dashed well didn't look like one.

'Paterian, are you? The way you were carrying on with that Beardsley chap at dinner.'

'For my sins', said the boy, 'although I never know why you English say that.'

And I hope you never find out, thought Lysander. Out loud, he said: 'Then you'll understand that beauty cannot be coerced, nor harnessed, nor lectured. It simply is. Between you and your senses, a secret laid open.' He took a long drag from his green tea cigarette. 'That longing... that desire... It brings condemnation, but clarity, too. Peace, even.'

Right up until you remember what it will cost you.

Katsuo raked a hand across the bristles behind his ear, where his dark hair was shaven closely. 'Jolly well, as you say', he said thoughtfully, 'I understand all that. What I can't compute is this hysterical decreeing from pulpits at the first sniff of a good time. All this huffing and harrumphing from books and laws and newspapers. What's so dangerous about a little pleasure?'

Lysander gave him a long, pensive look. By Jove, the pup was a bloody powder-keg. This whole dashed business simply wasn't on. He'd better put a stop to it. Soon-ish.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, long legs crossed on the chaise's armrest. 'The English are wonderfully tolerant', he said, 'They'll forgive anything except an unbecoming truth.'

Like a note, or a photograph.

RŌNIN

It was only a short walk from Grosvenor Square to the Langham, but Katsuo was itching for the sprawling bustle of London, its rowdy sturdiness and ant-hill restlessness, its clang and clamour, its atmosphere of smoke, soot, and spice. He donned his tinted glasses and top hat, adjusted the blue iris deLeucy had given him for his buttonhole, and dove into the city's roaming multitudes; sauntering past vans and horse-drawn omnibuses, swaying with their freight of sombre shopkeepers and serious-minded women, past chugging steam-cars and teetering mono-wheels,

newspaper stands, sweetmeat vendors, flower shops, apothecaries, drapers and cobblers, sandwich men and organ players, past traders, shoppers, vagrants, rent-boys and dolly-mops, who ran past him like numbers through an Analytical Engine.

Between Oxford and Regent Street, his gaze lingered on young men and boys in subtly patched coats and soot-stained caps, idling about the book shops, telegraph offices, and street corners, scanning the crowd with piercing eyes, occasionally murmuring, winking, or sneering at passing gentlemen. One such renter caught Katsuo's eye and opted for the old mock curtsy. Katsuo vaguely inclined his head and turned towards Savile Row, with its tailors and air of quiet dignity, suddenly weary of the bellowing cacophony and incessant flashing of neon lights.

His thoughts invariably drifted back to a certain, golden-haired Apollo, with his clear blue eyes and sharp jawline, all nonchalance and wry ennui, lily-sweetness and citrus... Absently, he tucked at the stiff, Western collar which hid the soft-bruised imprints of a pearl choker on his neck – souvenirs of a whirlwind night.

Haikara – high collar – was the sobriquet given to young Japanese men who styled themselves as Western dandies. His father always spoke the word with disdain. Shimazu Noburo wanted his son educated in Western ways, to learn its technology and ruthless ambition, yet expected him to retain the sober, military discipline of his *samurai* ancestry. In typical fashion, Katsuo had got it exactly the wrong way around.

Amid Oxford's cloisters and perpetual sense of early autumn, he'd studiously avoided his assigned mentor and his stuffy chambers where algorithms came to die – to be acrimoniously charted, pinned, dissected, logged, and entombed – and had instead taken every opportunity to have his head turned by the Oxonians, those youthful men in suits and boaters, and ladies on bicycles, with their rowing teams and summer picnics, their stained-glass windows and secret societies, their Hellenism and their gem-like flames.

Beauty cannot be coerced, nor harnessed, nor lectured... A secret laid open.

A soul, reaching out for an echo.

He had wanted to build beautiful things, once. To leave his Western *savant* tutors and create something intricate, incorruptible, magnificently useless. Something animated by the spirit of old Japan, that honoured the splendour and transience of life itself, and opened only when one suspended oneself to it.

She had been transient, his porcelain geisha. A delicate contraption of bamboo wood and gold paint, animated by the daintiest clockwork, the cleverest algorithms. Dressed in his sister's embroidered kimono, white cherry blossoms on midnight blue silk, she had been animated by a wireless telegraph of his devising, doing little things like bowing low and pouring tea.

Noburo watched her in silence.

The next day, his men came to claim her, and Katsuo's geisha disappeared into the military's hidden workshops.

Fukoku kyōhei: The battle-cry of modern Japan. What it meant was 'strong army, rich country', but it also meant Western clothes, military reforms, and quiet talks of invading its neighbours. It meant trains, trams and airships, and the furtive abandonment of age-old traditions, like *irezumi* and *wakashudō*.

Lysander reminded him of those age-old warrior tales. With his herculean build and languid joviality, his softly raised eyebrows and booming laughter, and a sense of quietly brewing fury somewhere deep underneath, he seemed a sort of Hellenic incarnation of the *samurai sensei* in *nanshōku* stories. Katsuo had always cherished those tales about brave and noble comrades-in-arms, whose mentorship and brotherhood endured across battlefields and bedrooms. The Greeks, apparently, had had similar ideas that certain youngsters at Oxford were dedicated to reviving – but to those chaps love of the male form was some absolute aesthetic ideal. It had baffled him at first, this Western supposition that loving men meant some fundamental difference in one's code, like a switch turned the wrong way. In Japan, male love had been considered commonplace, completely separate from loving women, neither attraction infringing on the other. Personally, Katsuo had always found both avenues alluring – he'd always felt pleasure to be fluid, intuitive,

part of the ebb and flow of life. And then the Westerners came, and *nanshoku* was quietly, abashedly, brushed under the carpet.

Lost in thought, Katsuo wandered past the eminent Royal Geographical Society headquarters, its monuments to Livingstone, Burton, and Isabella Bird edged with soot. Strolling through Piccadilly, where the sky's dusty opalescence reflected back from shop windows and hotel dining rooms and the air smelled of confectionery, strong tea, and machine oil, he headed towards Kensington, with its museums and colleges enshrined in neo-Gothic façades, and the Babbage Institute with its friezes of binary code. This Western mania for sandstone and brick; bulky and stolid, always planting itself, investing. With the air of the debonair flâneur, Katsuo ignored the occasional rude gawk from strangers, the sporadic, but inevitable catcalls of 'chink' and 'Nanki-Poo', and idled towards Hyde Park where small leisure-cruisers under balloons of fuchsia and sun-yellow canvas drifted above the trees, and his fellow countrymen had some years ago populated a model village to promote that inordinately silly concoction, *The Mikado*.

Sunset loomed, fringing the teeming, smoking city with apricot and dusty rose, before he turned his steps back towards Soho, where the neon lights of Leicester Square hummed into gear, beckoning with their dazzling entertainment. Contemplating a particularly gaudy variety theatre advertisement – promising trapeze acts, ballet dancers, and all manners of women with enticing legs – Katsuo bought a cigarette pack from a newspaper stand. The cigarette card inside showed a guardsman, looking dapper and valiant with his scarlet uniform and twinkling blue eyes.

Bathed in flashing pink light, Katsuo smiled.

SERAPH

By the time they trotted homeward to Hyde Park barracks in a long file, cuirasses and scabbards jangling, Lysander was still thinking about dark, silky hair and pearl earrings, cocky smiles and teasing kisses, and vague impression of bergamot and cedar.

‘I say, old boy’, he rumbled thoughtfully, lighting himself a leisurely cigar, ‘how do you do it?’

‘Do what, old chap?’ Nicholas Roscoe, known throughout the Household Regiments as ‘Galahad’, steered his charger Maraschino back into line with languid ease.

‘How’s a fellow to enjoy himself with the dashed bloody DC and the papers looming at every corner?’

Nicholas’ handsome features and languid dark eyes grew sombre for an instant, but the feeling passed quickly. Galahad, dashing and penniless, a libertine, dandy, and duellist of the first order, always involved in some dalliance or other with the young, married beauties, would not have earned his place in the Horse Guards – notoriously the most exclusive and ‘fastest’ cavalry regiment – had he extended thoughts to that ghastly nuisance, the Divorce Court, that were better spent on dinner plans, button-holes, and horseflesh.

‘My dear Seraph’, he said, shrugging with charming insouciance, ‘A fellow simply can’t bother with these things. They’re only a beastly nuisance.’

Lysander gave his friend a sidelong glance. With his chestnut hair and rakish ways, Galahad sometimes looked like a *beau sabreur* escaped from an Ouida novel. But he wouldn’t have to contend with police whistles and sudden raids. His back-door escapes made for smoking-room gossip of the amusing kind.

Passing through the speckled shadows beneath the plane trees, Lysander puffed slowly at his cigar, watching the light play on their scarlet uniforms, the horses’ black coats, the young grass, the budding foxgloves and marigolds.

Komorebi. The Japanese had a word for it. Light filtering through trees.

He nudged Bérroul, his charger, to keep pace, and said nothing.

But the whole damn business of bergamot and cedar was still on his mind the next day, in the spacious, placid sanctuary of his Pall Mall Club, strewn across the lazy divans amid Turkish and meerschaum, with his compatriots carrying on about Paris escapades and summer intrigues, yachting and flirting and casino feuds, about September hunting, and the odds for the Sandown steeplechase.

On and on it coursed among the old braincells when he retreated to his other, more discreet Club, a lofty affair flanked by two strapping Atlantes in blue granite. The Ganymede was virtually undistinguishable from the Athenæum or the Traveller's, safe perhaps for his Hellenic décor – those amber marbles, cerulean velvets, ivory stucco, and walls painted with panoramas of the Aegean Sea – and the fact that some of its members preferred sitting on one another's lap at the cards table. Usually, the sight of eminent society men giving into their penchants for emerald earrings and waxed moustaches, rouge or rococo costumes, while they quietly hummed an aria at the billiards table or rifled lazily through *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* was a sight to soothe Lysander's nerves. This time, not even the prospect of those 'nymphs' or 'satyrs', the young, handsome boys thoroughly vetted and handsomely paid by a discreet concierge, could entice him.

It was no use: bergamot and cedar remained firmly fixed amid his grey cells, even as he sat, long legs crossed indolently, on one of Lulu's powder blue sofas, contemplating the Watteaus and Fragonards, pink chinoiserie, and Louis VXi furniture with which his sister outfitted her Mayfair home. With wise forethought, he had chosen a Bond Street affair of brightest azure, with mother-of-pearl embroidery, to match his surroundings.

Madame d'Esterre, floating near in a tea gown of peach and pink satins, that infernal dodo of hers waddling after her lace-lined hem, set down tea in dainty Sèvres porcelain that had once – so the rumour – belonged to Madame Pompadour.

'You must have seen that preposterous ballet dancer of hers', she was saying as she flopped down beside him, put her dainty, stockinged feet up in his lap, and popped a lemon sherbet macaroon between her rosebud lips. 'She's always carrying on with those dreadful artist types, and no husband to safeguard her reputation. I really don't know what to do with her.'

Duchess, the snow-white dodo, settled smugly on the sofa's armrest. Why the deuce one would exert scientific breakthroughs in genetics to resurrect a species that had rightfully gone extinct for sheer uselessness and then install them in every fashionable household as pets was entirely beyond Lysander.

'Pardon?', he said absently, realising a lull in chatter had occurred, and he was expected to chime in. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Keziah, of course. Do keep up.'

Ah. Lysander nodded; She was talking about Fedya, Keziah's latest – a symphony of sinew and brawn that would have haunted his dreams, had that honour not been bestowed on a certain Japanese engineer...

'You know Keziah's views on marriage', he said, turning a raspberry macaroon in his long fingers.

Lulu pouted. 'I don't see what love has to do with any of it', she said, irritably waving a rose-scented papelito. 'It's simply the smart thing to do.'

He smiled thoughtfully. Not for nothing, Lulu had earned the moniker *La Générale* at finishing school. To her, being a high society lady came with ordinance maps and battle plans with carefully painted toy soldiers.

Now, she turned her bright blue eyes on him. 'And you! You keep indulging her. Always encourage her absurdly wayward ideas.'

Lysander contemplated a bust of Marie Antoinette on the mantle. *At least one of us*, he thought, *deserves to indulge in wildly inappropriate escapades with bohemians and revolutionaries.*

'How's Trizzy, anyway?', he asked aloud, raising a lazy eyebrow.

It was plain that Viscount Trysdale, one of Lulu's many, ardent followers tasked with consoling her with incessant flirtations for the absence of her own husband – who was always incorrigibly in Indochina or some such place – had had his marching orders for elsewhere. Possibly he was securing theatre tickets or pacifying one of those imposing aunts of his. Or patiently hiding away upstairs, or simply Being Shooed Away while Lulu embarked on one of her sudden inclinations to seduce a débutante, or a house maid.

She gave him a long look down her perky nose. 'Heavens, Sandy, what's gotten into you? Tell me his name.'

Lysander sighed. 'I'm afraid I can't, old girl.'

'One of ours?'

He nodded.

'Thrill of the chase?'

He shrugged.

That was the fun of it, wasn't it, sometimes? The flirting without knowing. Throwing fate the old glove. Keziah called that 'his fatalist mood.'

Lulu angled for a sugar-powdered strawberry from the tray. 'Well, I dare say at least he won't be unpleasant about it.'

He chomped absently on the blueberry macaroon she handed him. 'Unpleasantness', in *La Générale's* world, meant anything from a scene – horrid, beastly things – to a peeress forsaking all good taste and actually running away with some long-limbed air fleet officer or some such thing. That sort of absurd romanticism only ruined the fun for everyone else.

No, thought Lysander, fiddling with his emerald cravat pin, his sister knew, at least from keen observance, that society's Olympian wrath, once incurred, was swift and merciless. Its good graces, once lost, remained so. Hence poor Arthur Somerset, fellow guardsman, still languished away at the French Riviera after that deuced revolting business on Cleveland Street, rather than risk the indignity of a trial – or worse.

Unpleasantness, indeed! One could usually handle the occasional blackmail note from enterprising renters – it practically counted as good manners to pay up, like tipping your waiter – and, to Lysander, anyone foolish enough to gamble on the rough fare one encountered in railway stations and public restrooms richly deserved their trouble. But there were professional thugs about some of the hotels on Fleet now, lying in wait with cameras behind peep-holes, and if on top of that whole dashed business, private clubs and homes weren't safe from ghastly peelers and their whistles, what was the world coming to?

There was that passage in Wilde's latest play, currently at the St. James.' He had been to see it again last night.

There are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely – or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands.

Only that was Oscar for you, with his green carnations and his bonhomie.

'Heavens, Sandy, all that brooding for a measly *affaire de cœur*.' Lulu, feeding Duchess a pistachio macaroon, frowned.

'I say, old girl, we can't all have our Trizzys and Therèses going about in plain sight.'

'Don't be absurd, of course you can.' Lulu took his hand. 'Society's a spoiled child. As long as you play its charades and give it sugars, you may do whatever you please. Just be smart about it.'

Lysander sighed and contemplated the stuccoed ceiling. Was that bergamot he smelled?

What's so dangerous about a little pleasure...?

RŌNIN

Keziah's Park Lane house had been built by Henry Cole and outfitted largely by Morris, back when the Pre-Raphaelites were considered eccentric dreamers. But then her grandfather had always sympathized with those, being one himself.

Even after many visits, Katsuo was amused to find Japanese vases, screens, and prints, and furniture of orange wood and gold lacquer liberally strewn across this unwieldy house, which

boasted, after all, no end of Tissots and Dicksees and Alma Tademas, murals by avant-garde Austrians, Burne-Jonesian Florentine knights in the dining room, and a Moroccan atrium with mosaic tiles. At least, he thought, strolling about in the cathedral-like library, she had bought the artefacts herself, from her travels in Tokyo.

No doubt she'd meant him a kindness by receiving him here, imagining he'd be intrigued to see again the dusty prototypes of the forty-seven and fifty-three Analytical Engines poised reverently under Collier's portrait of their inventor, Dame Ada, the Queen of Engines, and Keziah's grandmother. Unfortunately, algorithms were about the last thing on his mind, and he'd much preferred the velvet cosiness of one of the lesser drawing rooms, or indeed the atrium where an army of housemaids were at this moment setting up for the evening's entertainments, of which he himself was to form a considerable part.

He was politely contemplating the archived collections of her grandfather's geodes, fossils, bones, and teeth, labelled 'Galapagos', trying to evade the stares of Clarabella, the taxidermied dodo, and the Amazonian fertility icons on the wall, when she hurried in, a whirlwind of zest and amber-gold satins. A stone-faced butler brought tea in her wake.

'Darling!' She kissed his cheeks in the French manner, then threw herself on a leather sofa. 'Didn't you have the most marvellous time the other night?'

Katsuo's made his face carefully blank, searched her green eyes for impish twinkles. She was an intrepid, lissom girl sporting an air of exuberance and irony and perpetually rowdy black hair that was no doubt the bane of French maids everywhere.

'At my little salon!' she added, but he thought perhaps she was hiding a grin.

It had been that evening, lulled by hookah smoke and wine, that he had met a certain, golden-haired Marquis.

'Thoroughly enjoyed myself, all thanks to you.' He winked. 'Although no affair throwing you among the likes of Oscar Wilde and Singer Sargent can count as little, as you well know.'

Keziah beamed. She'd lately rather had her heart set on this salon business, and was tonight endeavouring to woo a gang of artistic aristocrats – who were, so the grapevine, simply dying to meet her Japanese gentleman-friend!

'Did young Beardsley talk your ear off rather frightfully?' She offered him her jasmine-scented cigarettes from a gold case and, leaning forward eagerly, plopped hers into a lacquer holder. 'Isn't he wonderfully charming? He looks quite like one of his clever drawings!'

'A striking profile if ever I've seen one.' Katsuo let the nacre smoke curl about his face. 'And such ardour for the Japanese arts!' Even to himself, he sounded half-hearted.

Keziah narrowed her eyes at him, and was no doubt about to say something annoyingly perceptive, when the butler returned with a teleprinter message on a silver tray.

'Oh dear', she said, 'I hope there hasn't been some disaster with the cucumber sandwiches. I hear they matter rather awfully.'

Katsuo gave her a long look. Keziah prided herself on being a dauntless, convivial Bohemian, who cared not one jot that her mother being one of Paris' most celebrated courtesans – a considerable embarrassment, he was told, at least to the English – put rather a spanner in the works of her social standing. Contrary to regular programming, then, these so-called 'Souls' had her all in a tizzy – and for what?

He leaned forward meaningfully. 'Keziah-san. Someone recently told me that art is an intensely personal affair. A covenant, if you will, between self and truth. That beauty doesn't bow to coercion – nor applause.'

She gazed at him across the thin teleprinter paper, something strange in her wide eyes.

Then she handed him the message without a word.

He read, and his own eyes grew wide.

Something slight but monumental shifted underneath, just as chatter downstairs announced the arrival of one Lady Desborough and one Miss Pamela Wyndham.

A sudden, insurmountable restlessness seized him, and short-circuited his heartbeat.

‘Fiddlesticks!’ Keziah, he realized, had jumped up and run to the door, beckoning him. One ear poised for the corridor, she brandished her cigarette holder at the far end of the room. ‘Behind the glass-case with the finches is a servant’s staircase’, she whispered, shooing him wildly. ‘It’ll take you all the way to the stables!’

Katsuo, top hat already in hand, hesitated. ‘Won’t that rather devastate your friends?’

‘Oh, pish-posh!’ She straightened defiantly. ‘I’ll just have to charm them myself. I can be endlessly charming, you know.’

‘I do’, he said, bending to kiss her on the cheek.

On the staircase, he unwisely broke into a run, all but careering downwards, shouting apologies when barging haphazardly through kitchen and stables, startling the housemaids and interrupting the horses, mind firmly echoing with the message in his breast-pocket, next to the cigarette card of a guardsman:

Kez old girl, would you mind terribly if I nabbed that splendid friend of yours? I don’t think I can endure another minute without him. – L.

Thoroughly out of breath, he almost slammed into the lacquered brougham waiting in the mews.

Its door opened, and out leaned a blonde Apollo with sea-green eyes.

Lysander smiled.

Katsuo bit his lip.