

Everyone has
some fragments of precious memories
in their heart.

My dear old green tramcar,
"Chin-den"



Shogo Kanayama

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It was awfully cold that day for November; the wind had begun to blow in the afternoon, and what was worse, it began to sprinkle. "There's no choice but to go by "Chin-den", I thought. I heard my wife's voice behind me, "You'd better take an umbrella, in case it rains," but I answered, "It's all right," and left home without an umbrella. Three minutes later, I stood at *Ayano-cho Station* on the Hankai Line waiting for a tramcar bound for *Ebisu-cho* to come, thinking it would not rain so much. Soon an old-fashioned "Chin-den" painted green came into sight.

The old car gave a shudder and ground to a halt. I had hardly seen it for a long time. That type of "Chin-den" used to be a familiar sight in the good old days, when it blended in well with the tile-roofed houses. Actually, I just can't get to like the recent models. They are quiet. But the cars which are entirely covered with gaudy advertisement are a bit too much for me. They don't match the old rows of houses, as if they were rustic workers who are made to wear heavy make-up and to play the clown. I got onto the car after an old woman and sat in a corner seat. The car with about ten passengers rattled along the narrow railroad tracks sandwiched between the old wooden houses, and soon came to the Yamato River. I used to play on the bank till twilight. I can still clearly recall the image from the bank of the river: a lonely "Chin-den" was crossing the steel bridge against the crimson sky after sunset. Though the atmosphere of my hometown has changed, I wish that picturesque scene to remain unchanged. While recalling my childhood, it entered Osaka city and soon an urban scene met my eyes. A couple sitting across from me was chatting merrily, some guys were dozing off. People of various ages got on and off at each station. A middle-aged woman who just got on the car seemed to run into her acquaintance, went up to her and made a bow while trying to keep her balance. She sat next to her, then they began to chatter away laughing. Such smile-inducing scenes made my time pass by quite pleasantly.

★what is worse その上更に悪いことには、there's no choice but～するより他に仕方がない、give a shudder and grind to a halt 車体を震わせ、きしみながら止まる、a familiar sight 見慣れた光景、blend in well うまく溶け合っている、tile-roofed 屋根瓦の、actually 本当は、just can't get to like どうも好きになれない、gaudy けばけばしい、a bit too much ちょっととひどすぎる、the old rows of houses 古い町並み、rustic workers 田舎の無骨な男達、be made to wear heavy make-up and to play clown 厚化粧させられ、道化役を演じさせられている、rattle ガタゴト走る、recall 思い起こす、the crimson sky after sunset 日没後の夕焼け空に、picyuresque 絵の様に美しい、sitting across from me 向かいに座っている、run into 思いがけなく会う、make a bow 挨拶を交わす、smile-inducing 微笑を誘う、pass by quite pleasantly ゆったりと過ぎていく

This tramline runs north from *Hamadera-kouen-mae Station* in Sakai to *Ebisu-cho Station* in Osaka. If you change to the Uemachi Line at *Sumiyoshi Station*, you can get to Tennoji in Osaka. In its time, this tramline was a convenient means of transportation for townspeople. In fact, our house is near the station, I have taken Chin-den since I was a kid. Tram drivers always sounded the bell before their departures, "Ting, ting", so the trams were called "the Chin-chin

densha" because of its sound, now the abbreviated name "Chin-den" is popular among young people. That familiar sound reminded me of my childhood. In former times, there used to be many passengers, so a conductor was needed besides the tram driver in each car. Once, in my childhood, when I was riding on a tram with my father, I saw a cool conductor wearing his cap at a jaunty angle. He managed to pass through the strap-hangers and get to the passengers who had just gotten on the tram. Then he briskly inspected and punched tickets while announcing the next station. In fascination, I kept gazing at his his motion and merry punching all through that time, hearing his lovely voice and the lilting clack of his punch. Later, I badgered my father to buy me a toy punch, and I would often make believe that I was a conductor imitating his motion and words. Somehow, the recorded voice coming from a speaker nowadays sounds insipid to me. While recalling fond memories of my childhood, our "Chin-den" got to the terminal station, *Ebisu-cho*, where I transferred to the subway Sakaisuji Line and got off at *Nagahoribashi*. "It's really convenient on a rainy day like this, it's a good thing I didn't bring an umbrella", I thought while walking along an underground shopping street, "*Crysta Nagahori*". I browsed in a bookstore to kill some time as usual. After having a smoke by a vending machine on the corner near Wisdom21, I took an elevator to the third floor. My lesson began at six.

★in its time これが活躍していた頃は、a convenient means of transportation 便利な交通手段として、abbreviate 短くする、remind me of 私に～を思い出させる、a conductor 車掌、a mere kid ほんの子供、at a jaunty angle ちょっと斜めに、strap-hangers 革に挟まっている乗客、briskly 手際よく、inspect 検札する、punch 切符に穴をあける、in fascination うっとりして、lilting clack リズミカルなカチカチという音、punch 切符に穴をあける道具、badger my father to buy 父にねだって買ってもらう、insipid 無味乾燥な、browse 立ち読みする、kill some time 時間を潰す、a vending machine 自動販売機

On my way home from Wisdom21, it was drizzling. Yet, fond memories of old days came to my mind and seduced me into stopping by *Shinsekai*, which is located near *Ebisu-cho*, on the south side to the famous "*Den-Den Town*". This area once flourished as a local entertainment district and used to be crowded with regular visitors and vacationers, since it had become famous as the home of popular entertainment: popular theaters, triple feature movies, cheap eateries and so on. The centerpiece was *Tsutenkaku*: a 103 meter-high tower modeled after the Eiffel Tower about 100 years ago. It was called "The symbol of the south of Osaka" after World War II. I still remember the day in my childhood when my parents brought me here. The streets were thronged with people and the town was full of life: signboards in every color of the rainbow, loud voices of barkers and the crowds, and the smell of "yakitori"... Curiosity tempted me to taste a sparrow yakitori, but it was all bones and too tough. I couldn't even eat a bite. "I never want to have another disappointing experience like this," I said to myself.

★come to one's mind 胸に浮かぶ、seduce me 誘われて～する、flourish 繁栄する、regular visitors 常連、vacationers 休日の行楽客、the home 本場、popular theaters 大衆演劇館、triple feature movies 三本立ての映画、eatery 食べ物屋、centerpiece 目玉、modeled after ～をモデルにして造られた、be thronged with ～でごった返す、be full of life 活気に溢れている、in every color of the rainbow 色とりどりの、barkers 呼び込み、the crowds 人だかり、curiosity tempt 好奇心に誘われて、even a bite 一切れも、say to myself 心の中で言い聞かせる

But now, this area has fallen behind the times, it remains only a shadow of its former self. Moreover, there are many jobless day laborers and homeless people wandering through the area adjacent to Shinsekai. It is a small corner in Osaka where people regarded as the losers of life have drifted into. Undoubtedly, they must have played a part of the labor force on bad terms for many years in a high growth period. Some men who had reached a dead end in their work, not knowing where to turn, vanished into the blue and drifted into this place. In those days, it was a common sight that they were waiting to be hired by a scary-looking recruiter of day laborers in front of a nearby employment office early every morning. They were called, were loaded onto the bed of a dump truck and were taken to a construction site. Their daily wages were low, in addition, they were always exploited: the truck fare and lunch fees were extremely high and were deducted from the day's wages. They only had the day's room rent and drink money on hand even on fine days, but they failed to get a job on rainy days.

★behind the times 時代に取り残されて、a shadow of its former self 昔の面影、moreover さらに、day laborers 日雇い労働者、wander through ぶらぶら歩く、adjacent to ～に隣接する、people regarded as the losers of life 人生の敗残者と見なされた人々、drift 流れつく、play a part of the labor force 労働力の一翼をになう、high growth period 高度成長期、reached a dead end 行き詰まる、not knowing where to turn 行く術を失って、vanish into the blue 突然消息を絶つ、a recruiter of day laborers 手配師、employment office 職安、be loaded onto the bed of a dump truck (荷物の様に)トラックの荷台に積み込まれ、construction site 建築現場、daily wages 日当、exploit 食べ物にする、deduct 差し引く、the day's room rent and drink money その日の部屋代と飲み代、on hand 手元に、fail to get a job 仕事にあぶれる、

Many people might be hesitant to step into this district because of its bad reputation: destitution and a hotbed of crime. There are some citizens of Osaka who are scornful of the squalid neighborhood and look down on them as the dregs of society. The TV news reports on the pitiable people who stand in a line in front of soup kitchens waiting for only one rice ball and a cup of hot miso-soup every severe winter. I have a feeling that the inhabitants are not so bad as people make them out to be. They live silently in an obscure corner of a big city. Meanwhile, outsiders, including me, look at them with mingled feelings of pity and fear. On hot summer days, I often see drunken men lying on the street. One day when I was riding on a Chin-den, looking ahead and sitting next to the driver, I happened to see a man lying on the rails of the other track by a crossing. As the tram

approached, I realized the man was dead drunk with a cup in his hand, and the upper half of his body was naked. When the tram ran past the crossing, the driver didn't do anything except sounding its horn. I wondered and asked him, "Did you see that man lying on the rails? You should notify the police." "Drunken fellows lying like that are common here," answered the young driver with a slightly annoyed look.

★reputation 評判・噂、destitution 衣食住が最低の貧困、a hotbed of crime 犯罪の温床、be scornful of さげすむ・軽蔑する、the squalid neighborhood ほったらかしで汚い近所の地域、look down on 見下す、the dregs of society 社会のクズ、pitiable 哀れな、stand in a line in front of a line of soup kitchens 炊き出しの列の前に並んで、make them out to be そうであると見なす、obscure 人目につかない、meanwhile その一方で、with mingled feelings 入り混じった気持ちで、including me 私も含めて、on the rails of the other track 反対車線の線路の上で、by a crossing 踏み切りの傍の、the upper half of his body was naked 上半身裸の、be dead drunk ベロベロに酔って、notify 通報する、with a slightly annoyed look ちょっと迷惑そうな顔で

Owing to some TV programs in the past several years, *Shinsekai* has been crowded with tourists from afar, especially in the daytime on weekends. They come here with a view to eating *Kushikatsu* or to watching an unrefined popular play performed by a touring company. But by night, the place seems to take on a slightly peculiar aspect. I occasionally walk around *Shinsekai* after Wisdom missing my memories in the old days, with no particular destination in mind. About ten years ago, Osaka city went forward with a plan of constructing an amusement facility, Festival Gate and Spa World, as part of urban renewal, then some areas of *Shinsekai* were also renovated. But these attempts failed, and ill-matched modern constructions remain now. Walking through a renewed shopping street where half of the shops are shuttered, I reached the foot of Tsutenkaku, raised my eyes toward its top; but the familiar red neon logo wasn't there any longer. It was sad for me to realize things have changed and to see that a familiar thing had disappeared. I continued down the street, which was lined with garish neon lights and showy signboards on both sides: lots of cramped cheap eateries like *kushikatsu* (the recent increase in number is unbelievable), *sushi* and *yakiniku*; untidy stand-and-drink bars, cheap but low-quality clothing stores, shady video shops, run-down movie theaters and only noisy flashy pachinko parlors. Of course I noticed some transvestites milling around. Indeed, *Shinsekai* has a complex atmosphere: indecent, signs of foul plays and who knows what mingle to create a distinct air. This area is said to be full of bizarre things and kitschy curiosities. But some enthusiasts say there still remain a somehow different flavor of vigor, and unsophisticated people with humane characters.

★owing to ~のお蔭で、from afar 遠来の、with a view to ~するつもりで、an unrefined popular play 大げさで洗練されていない大衆演劇、a touring company 旅回りの一団、take on a slightly peculiar aspect 少し奇妙な様相を呈してくる、missing my memories in the old days 良き時代の思い出が無いことを寂しく思いながら、with no particular destination in mind 特にこれ

といった目的もなく赴くままに、urban renewal 都市再開発、renovated 衣替える、attempts failed 試みは失敗する、line on both sides 両側に並んでいる、garish ギラギラゴテゴテの、showy けばけばしい、shady いかかわしい、run-down 落ちぶれた、notice some transvestites milling around 服装倒錯者が歩き回るのに気づく、indecent 猥雑で下品な感じ、foul plays 犯罪、who knows what その他もろもろ、bizarre へんてこな、kitschy 低俗な、enthusiasts 愛好者達、vigor 活力、unsophisticated 洗練されていない、humane character 人情味

No sooner had I turned a few corners than it began to rain in earnest. I dashed to an old small arcade, which people call "*Jan-Jan Yokochō*". In its day, the merrily but noisy sound of "samisen" played somewhere always drifted to entertain customers, so it is said that this street was named after the "twang" of "samisen". I stopped by a small club; where the elderly, as of old, were playing *shogi*. They were serious and all lively. Many well-known figures once lived here and led funny anecdotal lives.

★no sooner had I turned a few corners than 角を二つ三つ曲るとすぐに、rain in earnest 本降り、samisen 三味線、drifte 漂う、be named after から名付けられる、twang 弦の響く音、as of old 昔ながらに、well-known figures 有名人、lead funny anecdotal lives 逸話のある人生を送る、

To satisfy the inner man in me, I headed straight for my usual bar to have a drink: a famous *kushikatsu* bar with a long history, "*Yaekatsu*". Despite the cold rainy day, it was full; a few young men were waiting outside looking in through the window. I stood at the end of the line wiping off the drops of rain. After a while, I was able to sit at the counter, and ordered beer and *kushikatsu*: lotus root, small sweet green pepper and "*chikuwa*". A notice saying "No second dipping!" was plastered on the wall, an iron rule among the customers of this type of *Kushikatsu* bar. There were two rectangular stainless steel vessels just in front of me: one with homemade Worcester sauce and the other with pieces of cabbage. I picked up some pieces of cabbage with my fingers out of habit, drank beer and munched them while waiting for the *kushikatsu* to be deep-fried. It was served still piping hot. I had to be careful not to scald my mouth. I soaked it in the sauce fully so that I could dribble a few drops of sauce onto the cabbage in my plate. "Cabbage with spicy sauce really goes well with beer! This is just the real gourmet way of eating *kushikatsu*", I thought to myself. I can't say it's fine cuisine, but after taking the price, the taste and the air into consideration, the total count was not so bad. It's certainly a popular dish, in addition, it's cheap. I thought it's not a bad thing to enjoy this atmosphere once in a while, though they are a little hard on my stomach.

★to satisfy the inner man in me 腹の虫が鳴くので、my usual bar いつもの飲み屋、with a long history 老舗の、No second dipping! 二度漬け禁止、an iron rule 鉄則、vessel 容器、munch パリパリ食べる、piping hot 熱々、not to scald やけどしないように、soak 浸す、so that I can ~ できるように、dribble 垂らす、go well よく合う、real gourmet way 通の食べ方、I can't say it's definitely fine cuisine とても高級料理とは云えない、take ~ into consideration ~を考えたなら、not so bad

まあまあ、certainly a popular dish まさにB級料理・大衆料理、in addition おまけに、it's not a bad thing to enjoy this air once in a while たまに雰囲気を楽しむのも悪くない、a little hard on my stomach 少しもたれる

After drinking a few mugs of beer, I left the place a bit tipsy. It was still raining hard outside. While remembering what my wife said, I had no choice but to buy a plastic umbrella for 300 yen at a small variety store on the way to *Kasumicho Station*. I opened it and began to walk. "Oh, well. For starters, I did not bring an umbrella with me, and that shop girl seemed to have a cute face, I may add", I said to myself. "Even so, this umbrella is awfully small. Just as I have thought, nothing has changed just like that sparrow, all they are selling is cheap stuff." I knew it was a little late for that, but "If I had brought my own umbrella just as my wife had said, I could have eaten another two *kushikatsu*. Well, well, how stingy I am!" I walked to the station, getting both my shoulders drenched. The angry face of my wife came into my head. A shabbily dressed old man opened a street stall beneath an elevated bridge, laying out worn-out things: cassette tapes of old popular songs, dubious videotapes, an unreliable radio and used clothes. On the other side of this street and up ahead there is another town called the red-light district, where prostitution was once licensed and a certain street still retains the appearance of those days. Some say that prostitution has been an open secret there even after the Anti-prostitution Law was enforced in 1957, and that the air still suggests the illegal prostitutes' sadness. When I reached the station, an old drunken man was dancing in the crossing with an open black umbrella in his hand, just like Gene Kelly acting in "Singin' In The Rain". He might have watched that movie when he was young, just as I did in my childhood. Somehow, a feeling of tenderness came over me and I felt drawn to this atmosphere of *Shinsekai* filled with worldliness, warts and all. The next time when I happen to ride an old-fashioned green "Chin-den", I shall definitely stop by again.

★mug ジョッキ、a bit tipsy ほろ酔いで、a variety store 雑貨屋、For starters そもそも、I may add～ということも言える、nothing has changed 何も変わっていない、cheap stuff 安物、I knew it's a little late for that 今更考えても遅いけれど、If I had brought ～、I could have eaten 家内の言うとおりに傘を持ってたら食べられたのに、stingy ケチ、get～drenched～をずぶ濡れにして、shabbily dressed みすばらしい身なりの、beneath an elevated bridge 高架橋の下で、dubious あやしい、up ahead その先には、the red-light district 赤線地帯、prostitution 売春、an open secret 公然の秘密、the illegal prostitutes' sadness 非合法の売春婦の悲しみ、a feeling of tenderness came over me 優しい気持ちになり、feel drawn to ひかれる、worldliness 俗っぽさ、warts and all よい所も悪い所も取り混ぜて、

Shogo Kanayama

Postscript

I have written many letters to my friends from time to time since I was young. Those were written about the change of seasons, the scenes that left a strong impression on me, various things that happened around me and occurrences never to be forgotten. Exchanging messages is precious and valuable to me. Of course, they were written in Japanese, but my interest in English has held on to a little dream that I could write just one message in English someday.

Four years have passed since I joined Wisdom21, and within this time, I have met many teachers. They were friendly and always warm toward us. Even now, I retain vivid impressions of some of them. But above all, when I think about it now, that time was my turning point to have had an occasion to meet a certain teacher, though one has already left Wisdom21. The teacher loves Japan and has a profound knowledge of Japanese history and culture. I felt thankful to have met that teacher. We talked about many things related to our respective countries. Since then, I put my ideas into English writing and sent them on occasion. Each time I sent it, that teacher was kind enough to reply with the correction of my composition. Moreover, to my surprise, I received confidence-building praise for my wording despite the many grammatical mistakes. Hence, that gave me an urge to write in English and I decided to try writing an essay in English this February. It is no exaggeration to say that I couldn't have written this essay without the chance meeting of that teacher.

This is an essay written as letting my thoughts wander randomly over one day's small happenings last November. They were interwoven with my boyhood memories filled with nostalgia. The starting point was simple, I only wanted to describe trivial things. This very thought made me take a simple approach: if only I could express and convey these things in English; what I saw, what I thought then and how moved I was. Though English writing requires a little patience, I hope this essay will work up your enthusiasm for having a try at English writing. I'm sorry for using some difficult words, but I tried to insert as many footnotes as I could so that my story would be read easily without using dictionaries.

Thanks to the kind staff and talented teachers from Wisdom21, Ms. Genny and Ms. Lhyn, one of my dreams I've had for all these years has finally come true. They kindly offered their help and they patiently listened to my reflections that sometimes might have been wearisome. I am grateful for the teachers' kindness and do appreciate Wisdom21 for giving me good luck to have met these teachers. I'd like to express my gratitude towards these teachers who kindly shared their wisdom, knowledge and precious time with me.

May 2006 Shogo Kanayama