

Blessed Duality

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*The eternal quest of the individual human being is to  
shatter his loneliness*

NORMAN COUSINS

Thomas Monroe

## Prologue

It's painful, it's always painful, let us be honest. It drags on and on and on. You just sit there, by yourself and it all simply happens. Life goes on. You close your eyes, life goes on. I could walk up to someone, say hello and it wouldn't change anything. Life would still go on as it always had. It is merciless. It is strange, though, you see these other people, they talk, they laugh, they're happy. They change, they do their strange things. People almost seem to be in flux. I don't really understand it, but that's life, I guess. But sometimes I wonder if it is all real, if they are all real, at least in the way I see them. I would love to experience it, them. I want to be amongst them, laugh and talk with them. But ... it feels impossible. Each and every time I try to

enter that world, I would simply bounce off, almost as if they were protected by a force field. This is of course figuratively speaking, but that is what it feels like. I could go all metaphysical and question my own sense of reality and the truth of what I see around me. But I will refrain, my story is not of such a nature. In the end all I know is that life is a strange creature and more often than not, a tiresome struggle.

# Chapter One

## *Sunshine and Roses*

**K**itō Himeko, that's my name. Fourteen years old and not even tall enough to reach a meter fifty. I'm an unimportant, invisible little twerp. God, I hope I will still grow a bit taller, but I doubt it. As they say, just my luck.

"Himeko! Wake up, right now!" Mom yelled, there were hints of anger in her voice.

As usual I let out a moan and simply turned around in my bed. I love the feeling of the sheets on my skin as I slowly wake up, I'm a sucker for it. It calms me, it makes me forget about the day

that is to come. There is something special about slipping out of that sleepy twilight into the real world. In that semi-groggy state, the world still seems hopeful. This of course meant that I would consistently oversleep. As was the case that day.

"Himeko, get out of bed right now or I'm gonna get angry."

With a loud moan I rolled myself out of bed. My small feet hit the wooden floor with a pound. I sat on the side of the bed for a little bit. I wanted to topple over and lay down again in those soft sheets, but I knew mom was watching me, if I did, she would blow up. So instead, I lifted myself to my feet and shuffled in the direction of the bathroom to take a shower.

"Hold it Hime." Mom pulled my shoulder abruptly.

I felt dizzy for a moment as I spun 180 degrees.

"Hmm ... what?"

"No shower, you don't have the time."

"What? I can't go to school without showering!"

"You should have thought of that before sleeping in. It's past eight. If you don't get dressed immediately and leave, you'll be late for school."

"It's past eight? Damn it!"

"Told you." Mom shrugged and left my room.

I had no choice; I had to get dressed and leave immediately. I didn't have time for a shower or even breakfast. So, I grabbed my school uniform, put it on messily, threw my bag over my shoulder and left my room.

"Dad, can you drop me off at school?"

"Nope"

"Dad, please!"

"I'm sorry Hime, but I won't. If I start doing that, you'll just wake up later and later."

He was probably right, not that I would admit it, but he probably was.

"Please daddy! Just this once."

"Nope."

"Hime, just go!" Mom entered the kitchen and gave me a push in the back.

"You could go by bicycle," dad said as he grabbed his suitcase. "Bye darling."

He gave mom a kiss.

"Bye Hime, make sure you're not late for school."

He gave me a quick kiss on the forehead.

"Bye dad, have a nice day at work." I waved him goodbye.

Dad was right, there was my bicycle, but I couldn't use it, or rather I wouldn't. I never liked riding my bike, I was always afraid of being hit by a car, especially when going down one of the many hills. I once missed a corner and flew straight into a rice field. That was the last time I used it. So ever since then, I always walked to school. It takes a bit longer, but I manage.

That day was no different, with a quick pace I left home and was on my way to school. The path to school is a beautiful one. Smooth hills covered with nothing but forests, freshly planted rice fields, countless trees in full bloom. The fact it was spring made the road to school even more breathtaking. Yeah, as you've probably already realized, I didn't exactly live in a massive metropolis. My town had about thirty thousand inhabitants. Decent size, but I guess you could call it "the country side." It had its ups and downs to be honest. Living so

close to nature was something I love, it calms me. It gives me serenity. But any time I wanted to buy something which couldn't be found in a grocery store or a medium sized supermarket, I had to go to the nearest city. In my case it just so happened to be the capital. With its thirty million people, it is the biggest city in the world. You could literally find anything there. Anything.

I arrived at school with only two minutes to spare. Several sweat drops were running down my face. I hadn't exactly been running, but it had been a brisk pace. I really didn't want to be late; it would put too much attention on me, and I have a feeling that wouldn't exactly be nice. So instead, I walked at a brisk pace.

Upon entering the school grounds, the school bell rang, I knew I had to hurry. So, my quick pace changed into a running speed. To my fortune, I entered the classroom right at the same time as the teacher. He didn't say anything, he only threw me a quick glance. I gave him a quick little nod before running to my desk in the back corner of the classroom. The teacher had been the only one to react to my arrival, none of my thirty classmates gave me even the simplest of acknowledgements to my arrival. I was simply there ... an ignored spec in the corner of everyone's eyes. I don't wanna be ignored, I never wanna be ignored, but what could I do? Should I yell "Hello!" loudly as I enter? Don't start with that, I can't, I literally can't. I think I'm physically incapable of calling out to someone. But then ... who would I direct the "hello" to? There isn't a single person I've had any meaningful social contact with, neither the boys nor the girls. Not even after all this time in middle school with the same

classmates. Third year of middle-school ... not a single friend had been made. And let's not talk of boys, I don't think I ever talked to a boy my age. Guess I could be dramatic and say, "Fourteen and never been kissed." But I'm not the type for teenage drama. What I will say however is that I looked forward to it, the love of a nice boy. I guess it'll ... just happen. At least that was my running theory. Everyone else was forming friendships and love connections, so why not me? Yeah, a nice girl would just waltz into my life and be my friend, a nice boy would suddenly kiss me and profess his love for me. I'm a realist ... but a girl could dream, right?

That day was boring. I didn't learn anything new, not to mention I had to take two tests that went badly. And I got back one test ... I had a bad grade, let's just keep it at that. At noon, I had to buy something from the small shop at school since I hadn't brought any lunch from home. Yeah, no time, it was my own fault, I get that. Still cost me some money, though, I had better things to spend it on. Considering this, I went for the bare minimum. A can of soda and one melon-pan. More than enough to get me through the remainder of the day. I'm not exactly a big girl, you know. The remaining classes went by as one would expect, me half asleep in the back of the class while the teacher droned on about some stupid math problems. I think I even fell asleep at one point and let out a snore. But I'm not quite sure about that. But it didn't matter, when the school bell rang, I was out of there. Sure, there were still club activities, but I hadn't joined any. I once tried joining the music club, but all I got from the members was a faint hello and the cold shoulder after that. They simply continued with their project, and I sat for a full

hour in the corner of the classroom waiting for someone to take notice of me, ask me to do something or what I could do. Not for a moment did they show interest in my abilities or what my interests were. Knowing this was how I was treated in a club I wanted to be part of, I had not the slightest bit of interest in joining any other, definitely not any of the sports clubs. My legs can barely carry me walking at a brisk pace, let alone running. So no club activities for me. Not sure whether I felt happy or sad about it. I guess ... if all club activities were like that one time, I guess I wouldn't want to be part of it. The pain of just sitting there, by myself, no one saying a word to me, I don't even know how to describe it. Just thinking about it makes my heart beat a little faster and a little heavier. I can feel my arms tremble, my hands become unsteady. Hell, I even have trouble breathing in moments like that. When these kinds of things really get me going, I could be out of commission, so to speak, for several days.

So, from the moment the school bell rang, I bolted. No clubs, no people to talk to and I sure as hell didn't want to be addressed by any of the teachers. I'm not sure I realized it at the time, but I was back home in half the time it took me to get to school. But I didn't stay home for long. No, I had plans. I had nothing to worry about anyways, it was the weekend, no homework, no early bedtime, no worries.

Arriving back home, there was no one there. Dad was still at work and mom ... I had no idea. She was always busy with something. No matter, they knew I had plans and in the worst-case scenario, they could contact me on my cellphone. With an

honest smile on my face, I ran into my bedroom and grabbed my sweetheart.

My sweetheart, what else could it be, my lovely guitar. Alder body, rosewood fretboard and a maple neck. Nice oiling to bring out the natural beauty of the wood, a humbucker at the bridge and a lipstick pickup at the neck. Two large letters were burned in the head of the guitar. K and J. This thing was hands down the most important thing I owned. Not that I owned much, but it was, nonetheless. I scooped up my guitar and shoved it in its bag. Honestly, in the rush of the moment, I completely forgot to change out of my school uniform. A grin still decorating my face, I danced out of the house. Although in my enthusiasm I did trip over something. Good thing I have some reflexes and was able to prevent my guitar from banging into the ground. I did scrape my knees somewhat, however. I was about to start yelling and cursing, when I saw it was a cat. Ooh, what am I saying, it wasn't a cat. It was our Moses. A jet-black male cat, covered with scars. Not the brightest bulb in the closet thanks to an incident when he was still a small kitten. But he had been my cat for ten years now, my little warrior.

"Hey there buddy, I'm so sorry."

Moses meowed loudly.

"I know I know, but you stood in my way!"

He meowed again.

"Thank you, I love you too, sweetie." I petted him. "I'll give you a treat, some nice cookies, tonight when I return, okay?"

Moses meowed and started to rub against my ankles and delicately licked the scrapes on my knees.

"Bye buddy, see you tonight."

He meowed and disappeared into the bushes. I got to my feet with a smile, dusted off my knees and got on my way. Once again that same path. Yeah, the station was right next to my school. Sure, I could have brought my guitar to school and saved myself thirty or forty minutes. But that would mean having to bring my guitar to school, which I am allowed to do by both the school and my parents, but that would result in attracting some attention to me. What if someone were to ask me to play something. I would draw a blank and people would think I'm pathetic or a poser ... or both. No, I don't want to risk it. I'll just waste about forty minutes to avoid any of those problems.

Some things never change. The looks. It took me a while to realize this, but people tend to look when they see a small girl walk with a big guitar. But it's probably more because I looked like a guitar with legs than actually me. But once I hit the capital, the looks generally end. More than enough strange things happen there after all.

The train to the capital was rather calm, I had a double seat all to myself. The scenery was whizzing by quickly past the window. In no time at all we were in between my hometown and the capital, among peaceful nature. But this didn't last very long. We live close to the capital after all. Not to mention there were no stops between the two. The train stopped at seven stations in the capital itself before arriving at the one I wanted. Giddily I ran out of the station. The streets were filled with people, the weekend had truly arrived. Everyone was out for a good night. Guess I was too, just not in the same way as most other people. Seeing all these people run around, it was once again clear to me. There were so many young people in school

uniforms like me and many others carrying large things ... like I was. But ... there was something else. Everyone was with someone else. All the people of my age were in groups, going to arcades and karaoke and cafés and ... what did people of my age do? I couldn't really think of anything. What do normal young people do? Shoot me, I had no clue. No matter, I was there for one simple reason. I knew where to go. A great guitar shop, yeah, what else would I be going to with a frigging guitar? I couldn't think of another thing to do with a guitar in the capital, at least nothing else I had the guts to do.

"Uhm hi, I'm Kitō Himeko," I said in a quiet voice.

"What can I do for you?"

"I placed an order ..."

"Let me check."

The man behind the counter was silent for a while as he was looking up the information.

"Aah yes, I see. A humbucker. One moment please."

The man left and returned five minutes later with a transparent case with a black humbucker pickup with little pink skulls on it.

"Here you go."

"Thank you" I smiled and took a closer look at the pickup.

I had saved money for quite a while to buy this, I really hoped it was worth it.

"So, do you want it installed or will you do it yourself?"

"If it's not too much trouble. I know how to do it, but ... this guitar is my baby. I don't want to do anything wrong."

"Let's see what we have to work with." He smiled and reached for the guitar on my back.

I had to admit, I was slightly scared. As mentioned before, this guitar was my sweetheart. There was so much connected to it. So much personal history. I instinctually feared messing with it myself or having someone else mess with it. But I had to stop worrying too much, these were professionals. So, I placed my guitar bag on the counter. The man bowed slightly and zipped it open.

"Well, this is ... different. This is a beautiful guitar. Clearly made by a craftsman, but ... I don't recognize the brand. K.J.? But it's definitely gorgeous."

"Thank you."

"Don't worry, we'll treat it with respect."

"How long will it take?"

"If you want it back right away, two hours. Otherwise, you can come pick it up tomorrow."

I thought about it for a moment.

"I'll come back for it in two hours, if that's okay with you."

"Of course, we'll get to it right away."

I nodded awkwardly and shuffled away quietly without my guitar. So, I had two hours to kill. Dear lord, how the hell would I do that? How to kill time ... in the capital? To be honest I never really took my time to explore this part of the city ... any part. I guess I had two hours to give it a whack. So, I did as such ... went to an arcade ... and a clothes shop ... that was what I was supposed to do, right? The arcade ... it was rather boring, maybe it was more fun with others. I tried a few of the claw machines too, wasted too much money on that crap and got nothing in return. And the clothes shops, yeah, I don't get fashion.

The sky was slowly getting darker, the night was descending upon the capital. The people became happier and louder. The groups became tighter, closer. Everyone seemed more distant, I felt more isolated than before. Occasionally I would try standing a bit closer to one of these groups, see if I could ... spontaneously integrate into it. Yeah, I was like air to them all. How do people make friends? I always wondered about that. How do you get started? And ... who do I ask? There is no way in hell I could ask my parents, they would think I'm weird, probably see me as ... damaged. No, I can't bear to talk to them about any of this. I guess ... I'll just figure it out by myself. I was window-shopping at a little boutique selling small figurines. There were several cute ones, but I didn't have the money. Everything went into my main hobby, guitars. This didn't leave me much monetary breathing room to do other things. But that didn't matter much to me.

A sudden faint shriek came from the other side of the street. I glanced over and noticed a young girl had face-planted on the concrete. She was a pathetic looking thing. Her hair draped around her face; her glasses crooked on her nose. The pale blue sweater hung loosely around her thin body, it had hints of dirt and frayed edges. The skirt she was wearing reached her ankles, it wasn't exactly flattering. The girl pushed herself to her knees, there was a little tear. It was tiny and frail, but I somehow noticed it from afar. Her papers lay spread out over the concrete. Her small, scraped hands trembled as she started to gather all her papers. But ... it was strange, no one stopped to help her. No, it was more, no one even glanced over. Why? An adorable young girl, close to my age I would say, and they didn't even notice her.

That was literally it, there was no malintent, just the absence of realization she was even there.

Someone bumped into her, once again she spilled her papers over the sidewalk. The girl who bumped into her quickly glanced over and threw her a quick apology before walking away. I guess I had no choice, someone had to help her. I ran across the street as fast as the passing cars would allow me. Standing two meters away, I froze. I looked down at her for a while. This little girl looked lost, even more so than me. I felt for her. I couldn't speak though, I was too afraid, too scared of it. But what I could do was help her. I knelt down and started to gather her papers. But from the moment I did so, the girl jolted backwards. She glanced at me as she pushed a strand of hair behind her ear. There was something about this girl, she exuded this air of ... I don't know. Whatever it was, I felt for her.

"Hey, are you okay?" I pointed at the scrapes on her face and hands.

She didn't answer, I think, she might have given me a slight nod.

"I'm Himeko, Kitō Himeko." I forced a smile on my awkward face.

She whispered something, but I couldn't understand. Instead of putting her too much on the spot, I quickly gathered her papers and sat down on my knees next to her. She pulled away slightly.

"I'm so sorry, I couldn't understand you earlier because of the noise, what's your name?"

"Megumi, I'm Tamaki Megumi."

"Pleasure"