

LUKE APPLEBEE

AKUMA

‘*KURIKAESHITE KUDASAI*, PLEASE repeat after me,’ Mrs Okamoto said, standing in front of her desk, posture perfect like a powder-white Geisha doll, cradling a deck of laminated cards in her petite hands. I wish my fingernails were as long as hers.

‘When can we watch the *Karate Kid*?’ One of the boys yelled from behind. Everyone laughed—I didn’t find it funny at all.

Mrs Okamoto put a finger to her rouge lips and whispered: ‘*Shizuka*, quiet.’

Me and the other girls and boys in the front two rows sang like a choir as the teacher showed us hiragana flashcards. ‘Ka, ki, ku, ke, ko. Ma, me, mu, me, mo.’

She stopped and asked the boys along the back row: ‘Ryan-san, why you not repeat after me?’

We all turned in our seats to see Ryan carving the top of his table with a steel ruler while his entourage of unkempt idiots flicked rubber bands at each other and exchanged profanities.

‘But you told me to be quiet, Miss Okeymokey.’ Ryan grinned, bared yellow teeth, and held his ruler high. The class laughed again. Did I miss something?

She glared at him and resumed the class without the back row’s participation.

‘Sa, shi, su, se, so,’ we sang.

The boys were up to something again. You could hear their sniggers getting louder and louder.

The boy beside me, Tim, mumbled to himself and didn’t raise his eyes from the books he had opened in front of him. ‘Ow. Ow. Stop it.’ Tim jolted on his seat every time the ruler nudged him near his kidneys. He clawed his greasy brown hair and whimpered.

‘Shhh,’ I bit my lip, Tim’s BO wafted and it was as rank as blue vein cheese.

Yuck. I put on my fierce face and the ruler-armed idiot stopped, mid jab. 'I'm trying to concentrate, like, stop being so immature.'

'Give me the ruler,' Mrs Okamoto snapped.

The boy blushed and passed the ruler to someone under the desk and it disappeared. Anyone behind him could've taken it.

She sighed and retreated to her desk where she grasped a whiteboard marker and wrote some notes for this week's lesson on transitive verbs.

I wasn't sure if it was the sun hiding behind the clouds or whether the air conditioners were turned on, but the classroom felt colder. Everyone was quiet; except for the bass guitar we heard throbbing through the walls from the music room and someone—an emo guy maybe—who whined into a microphone. Mrs Okamoto seemed to be writing faster and faster, almost as though all of her bottled up emotions were about to spill onto the whiteboard.

'Shut up,' Ryan shouted. He had the ruler again and hacked the back wall with it. Flecks of paint, then chunks of plaster fell away with every thwack. 'Shut up, shut up, shut up. You're shit.'

His mates giggled while the rest of the class looked on stunned. I was speechless. And so was the teacher. She looked calm as she clicked the cap back on to her pen and gently placed it on her desk. She swept her red dyed bangs from her face and approached Ryan.

Ryan kept hammering away in the back corner. 'Shut . . . up . . . you . . . gay . . . pooftas.'

His friends sneezed as they were enveloped in a cloud of plaster-dust and they moved down a few seats, closer to the windows.

'Ryan-san.' Mrs Okamoto stood less than a metre from him. She spoke so softly, I could barely hear her over the ruler-bass-vocalist trio. She looked short with her shiny black vinyl high heels, dotted with dazzling glitter. I wondered if she brought them over from the land of Pokemon and neon.

'Yes . . . Miss . . . O . . . key . . . mo . . . key?' He didn't relent with the vandalism. 'What . . . do—'

Mrs Okamoto gripped the forty centimetres of stainless steel and wrenched it from his grip. In a heartbeat she slashed his throat. His eyes fluttered while his hands clutched the wound. Blood bubbled and seeped between his fingers.

We all watched. Mrs Okamoto held a flashcard to Ryan's bleeding face and squealed at him.

Tim vomited on his books and crawled for the door. His overwhelming odours forced me to throw up too. I wiped my mouth with my sleeve and blotted tears with a tissue.

‘What’s this one?’ Mrs Okamoto waved the flashcard. ‘Tell me, Ryan-san.’

He gargled and groped for the air between himself and the teacher. He swayed then collapsed, face-first onto the table. His foot twitched then ceased.

Everyone jumped out from their seats and bolted for the door, shouting and screaming. Tables were overturned and the frightened students trampled Tim.

One of Ryan’s mates stood his ground with a chair. I stayed to help Tim on his feet.

‘You’re crazy, miss.’ The defiant student threw the chair at Mrs Okamoto. She sidestepped the chair and sent the ruler spinning after him. He ducked as it nicked his ear and smashed the window. He dived through the shower of glass and scraped his body across asphalt. He limped away without looking back.

‘Are you alright, Tim?’ Tim was in agony. He was hunched in a ball, shivering, with his knees tucked up, covering his face.

I looked back to where Mrs Okamoto was panting, but she was gone. The bass was still throbbing next door, like nothing had happened.

‘Is she gone?’ Tim whispered.

‘I think so.’

Tim sniffled and sat up. ‘No, she’s not—’

I was pushed to the ground and watched Mrs Okamoto cram glass shards into Tim’s chest. He howled, I wailed. She was filling him with glass, as easy as pushing pins into a pin cushion.

‘Oh my god. Oh my god.’ I was shaking. Her face was crazed, her full attention was on Tim. I scabbled for the stationery left strewn around the carpet. I ripped the zip open from a tartan pencil case and found a pair of scissors. Then I found myself standing over Mrs Okamoto with the scissor blade poised to strike.

‘Do it.’ Tim moaned.

I aimed my scissor-fist for her neck but as I moved in I hesitated. I froze.

Mrs Okamoto craned her neck and saw the scissors. She dropped her last glass shard and grasped my scissor-fist with cold hands.

I could hear my pulse pounding in my ears.

She yanked the scissor-fist down with her fingers trapping mine. We caught her shoulder and punctured her neck. We shared that profound moment of horror together. Blood spurted. Again. And again. She sat there, taking the abuse. Tim stopped breathing.

‘Put that down this instant, Susie.’ The year seven coordinator peered into the room.

‘Oh, Steve-san.’ Mrs Okamoto fell to her back and feigned deliriousness. She pointed to the back corner. ‘Look what she’s done to poor Ryan-san and Tim-san.’

I dropped the scissors. ‘She’s lying, sir. She—’

The coordinator’s stern face went pale and so did mine.