

**Inunaki Mura**  
**The Abandoned Howling Village of Rural Japan**

Second Entry

The sky was a blanket of gloom and greyness, so dark and angry it looked as if billows of acrid smoke rolled, roiled and raged amongst one another. There were very few sporadic patches of silver where the white-morning sun burst through, but whether they were faint hints, promising a clear sky later, it was too early to tell. But my focus was before me, taking in the tunnel of Inunaki Mura.

The night before, I didn't sleep too well due to the roaring wind. One thing I didn't expect when I moved here was the weather and its intensity. Of course, in the UK people comment on the weather, regardless of compliment or complaint. But over here, you could spend the day in scorching sunlight, sweating the last drip of moisture from within you, only to lay shuddering in bed, cocooned by duvet, heater on, as gale force winds buffeted the neighbourhood causing an orchestral clangour as it took to rattling all fittings and fixtures, and howling through the streets like a rabid pack of spectral wolves.

The summer storms were immense. I mean *immense*. Cataclysmic. Biblical. I still remember the first time I stood, awed, staring from my patio and watching that forked lightning flash, sudden and divine, over the mountainous horizons. Bruisingly humbled as for a fraction of a second the very shroud of night was stunned senseless by a blinding blink of brilliant illumination – highlighting the slashing rain that wept uncontrollably, hammering the town – only for it to plunge in to darkness once more, followed by a furious, deafening crack of ground-shaking thunder that felt as if it could fell those mountains and raze the town to dust.

Of course, the weather in spring is much calmer than that, but it was still subject to bitter bouts of rage – just like the night before. I thought of it as nature's mourning; the cherry blossoms were dying.

I watched over the last three weeks as the trees that had been bare, abandoned and crooked all year round suddenly popped proud and pretty as a peacock's plumage, and, already, as I cycled past them, each petal plummeted and peppered to the ground after a too-short life, the tears of transience.

I woke when it was still dark, of course, as was the routine for our hiking trips, and got myself ready in a half-lucid state. I was exhausted, but I usually didn't wake up properly for at least an hour or two after I left my bed, I'm only human after all. A coffee was the antidote.

The town, like myself, had not awoken by the time I left the house, showered and brushed. The stars were blocked by those same clouds I would witness the tunnel under, though, a swirling deep purple at this point. Darkness lulled the open rice fields and secluded vineyards, keeping them quiet and secret.

The wind, much calmer now, crept and taunted as I made my way to the station where we always met. As I saw the light of the convenience store glowing and inviting like a middle-aged tavern – open twenty-four hours a day, thankfully – I stopped in to pick up the coffee I needed from equally tired and yawning staff, then continued on my way.

I was surprised however, when I got to the station, to see Nishimoto-san standing hunched and alone at the entrance without backpack or supplies. We nodded in acknowledgement to one another, until I was close enough that we could speak at a normal volume, and offered the usual good morning in the other's language. He seemed to pick up on my confusion, perhaps painted on my sleepy face in the pale light emanating from within.

"No train," he said quietly, shaking his head.

“Today car.”

“Oh?” is all I could manage at that point. We’d never gone by car before, but I suppose it made sense. From what I’d read about Inunaki Mura, it was sequestered, far off the beaten path. Perhaps the train would leave us too far off. And to be honest, I’d found a lot of my experience here was just being pushed from place to place, it was usually best to just follow where I was pointed seeing as my Japanese was too poor to understand any explanation. “Okay!”

He led the way to his car, bade me to put my bag in the back where I saw his had been tucked in to the seatbelt. I did the same, and then made my way around as he opened the front passenger door with a polite, croaked, “please.”

Then, we were off. As we drove, I could feel the coffee licking life in to me; thoughts and excitement starting to flame as the sky glimmered from that dark purple to the grey I mentioned. Even in the car, we were mostly silent, but that was always fine with us. I stared out, watching the scenery of Japan pass by me, which, even under the miserable sky was beautiful.

As always, the distance was guarded jealously by bulking mountains, but everything from there to the window, which my forehead was clumsily pressed against, was just beautiful. One moment, we were rumbling quietly through the outskirts of the town, in which the houses, clambering hither and thither, high and low, different sizes, varying layouts, ever changing rooves began to delicately trickle their rainbow of colours in to the world, defying the sobering mood above. Their gardens, an array of everything from carefully pruned rich green bushes, zen and peaceful, to blooming bouquets which harboured all the soothing tones of spring in one place. Then, the scenery gave way to more vast farming fields of I don’t even know what. Lined and neat, with no fence but trust to block them off from the outside world.

We would be driving through level, plain land for a while, until suddenly there would be a restaurant propped up proud and elusive in the middle of it all. Structurally stunning for what it was, with hip-and-gable rooves tumbling down one another on three or four different levels, like a wooden waterfall. On the front, fanciful kanji stroked across in sharp black and red designs (which I couldn’t read), and smaller signs dotted about written in hiragana or katakana (which I could read... kinda).

Then, out of nowhere, vast depths of trees would pour out to the side of us, rushing down a drooping landscape. I leaned up in my seat to get a better look, to see a wild descent in to a thick, overgrown forest of which the canopy was so interwoven it seemed like a mossy, glistening emerald ocean.

Either we had gradually driven on to higher ground, or the land stooped without warning. I shuddered to myself, as my thoughts plunged me in to being thrust somewhere like there at night; lost, cold, and vulnerable to the whims of a wild woods.

I snapped my mind back to itself, knowing that my actual trip was going to be eerie enough, I didn’t need to prologue that with imagined worries.

Luckily, the bosky depths arose and levelled out once more, and we drove through other towns. Above the roads, the tangled mess of electrical wires clung from post to post, shooting off down every street, and bundling around larger posts before veering off in to the distant pylons. Here and there, I saw a few lights flourishing near and far within the houses, and checked my watch to see that it was eight-seventeen. Normal people were starting to wake now, but the town was still very much empty of footfall.

The overall drive took just over an hour, thought it felt as if we’d journeyed through a multitude of biomes in that time, as if every five minutes was a portal in to a new world. After a while, I saw a mountain just ahead, clawing upward, as if wanting to break through that doleful sky to the sunlight above. And then suddenly, the vision was stolen from me as we whipped through

a tunnel. When I realised we were driving through that very mountain, I couldn't help but shake my head in wonder.

Lights zipped past us, offering swift processions of vision, and there were even another two cars coming the opposite way which, as far as I could remember, were the only other people I'd seen so far. It dawned on me, that I knew this tunnel. From the research I'd done, the pictures and videos I'd seen. This was the new Inunaki Tunnel that was built – ignoring the village completely.

Legend has it, that even in this modern one, lone cars will breakdown without reason, and all the lights inside the tunnel – including the cars – will flicker off. There will be a sound of scuttling footsteps outside, echoing and reverberating about the tunnel so as to mask the true reflection, until the car would be met with a gentle but harrowing brushing and scrabbling sound. If this happens, you must ensure all doors are locked immediately. After a while, the lights in the tunnel will flicker on, the car will work once more, and, to those who have experienced this horror, they will find tiny finger prints - marks and swipes - on their door, near the handle.

I could feel myself shaking, staring around anxiously and thanking our fortune we saw those other two cars. Then, a sudden burst of natural light, and relief, flitted in the vehicle once more as we emerged from the other side. Out this way, in the distance, I saw the dam; mighty and imperial. I realised then, we were almost there! A sense of foreboding began to seep within me. My stomach began squirming.

I'd seen this dam once or twice before, prior to the knowledge of Inunaki Mura! Initially, I perceived it as a magnificent feat of engineering, as all dams were, but now with the knowledge that this was the very injection of one of the stories – that the dam backed up the water to such a level that it made the town unsafe, unstable, treacherous and moistened the earth so as to slip and grip many people in to the risen depths until they drowned - I shuddered. (Some reports claim the damn completely submerged the town, but it's unclear.)

The cement was so imposing, and stretched such a lengthy curve that it would take a solid ten-to-fifteen minutes, if not more, to walk across. In the centre, white rapid water spewed out. All this, for that. If this was indeed a cause for many of the deaths, it was haunting to see it still flowing so freely. Behind it, more forested mountains melded in to one another, with a lone pylon erected in the midst.

Though my thoughts were focusing on whether this was a good idea or not, the car continued onward, and I could see Nishimoto ducking and peering through the windscreen, clearly trying to spot something.

After slowing down for a the last few minutes of the journey, he took a turn down a beaten path, not quite a road but still clearly travelled enough to be distinct. It felt as if we were driving through the scrambling forest I saw earlier, but this time below the canopy. The trunks marched, as varied as the houses, thick, thin, old, young, tall and proud, withered and gnarled. They loomed above the car, and I tried to take them in, impressive as they were.

Here, the darkness of the sky above was suffocated further, and Nishimoto flicked the headlights on full beam out of necessity, allowing concentrated brightness to lance before us, and give brief, unsettling insight in to the depths. Though, there was nothing of note but more trees, more moss, more forest.

The caffeine seemed to have found my reserves of anxiety, and had swept them from where they lay dormant, washing my entire body with a nervous tension. And then, just like that, the car stopped in a small alcove, where a copse of haggard old witchlike trees had tangled their

branches around one another, in a foul conspiracy, and the heavy leaves drooped over to form a feathered arch.

We left the car, met with a chorus of birdsong, and grabbed our bags. There was a subtle chill here, even with the trees blocking out the wind which shuffled the green ceiling above, letting it undulate calmly – a sensation I didn't share. I looked up to see the flickers and slithers of the dullness above filter in, and then glanced over to my companion who caught my eye, and chuckled as I gave a dramatic grimace... though, it wasn't entirely a joke.

"Let's go," he said simply, and before I even gave an answer, he began walking.

Now, being within here was creepy enough for me. If he decided to be done with the journey and turn back, I wouldn't have been angry. I loved the hiking, but this already had a completely different taste to it. I was never this nervous, this anxious, this on edge – even at the foot of the tallest mountain. This was already kindling major regret.

I followed in his footsteps, each one leaving a muffled wet thud in to the dew-doused carpet of snapped twigs, creeping roots and sodden soil. I kept seeing silhouetted hands reaching from below, but as I gave them a wide berth and focused on them, I could see they were just a tangled mass of warped and contorted branches. Still, I made sure to avoid every single one I saw.

In this vigilance, I also brought my attention above, trying to spot the source of the nearby trill and tweet that pierced above all others, or peer through that tightly-packed leaning and bending trunks to ensure there was no-one else nearby. Every now and then, there would be a snapping of a branch or a leaf would clip off from its spindly limb, and fall nearby causing me to jump.

We had taken to following a series of pink markers that were tied around trees. Every so often, an old battered sign had been hammered in to the ground, muddied and draped with wet, clinging foliage. I noticed the kanji for mountain, and assumed this was just a roundabout way to get to the village. Though, for the first time, I didn't want to enjoy hiking. I wanted to get there, and leave. Just to say I've done it.

"Is it far?" I asked, and he turned to me, puzzled.

"Far? Is it far?" I pointed to the ground and then with my other hand, tapped it and spread my arms wide, then back together, then wide again to indicate distance.

"Maybe," he shrugged. "Don't know!"

Well, that didn't quite instil me with confidence. We carried on this unsteady walk, wreathed by wild nature and the trees only seemed to grow older and taller with each step; entering the maw of some wild hell. Where the canopy knitted thick and dense, casting a pool of shadow beneath, I kept imagining I could see heads peeking out at me. Little pale faces stealing a quick glance before flashing back behind the trunks of which they were hiding.

But, whenever I stared, focused, challenged – there was nothing. It was only in my peripherals, so I knew it was just my tired mind, my anxiety, my excitement, all mingling to stage a horror show in my head. Still, that foreboding sense I felt earlier seemed to be galvanising within, vibrating and blurring my thoughts, booming with each heartbeat.

We were clearly going against gravity, and, I noticed that in the remote distance, I could hear the trickling of water. I really doubted it was the dam, but, I couldn't help but staple the vision in to my mind's eye.

With the floor being wet, and each footstep having to be pressed hard so as not to slip, it was everything I could do to not picture the horror of traipsing through a familiar environment, my home for so many years, only for one day have it betray me, slip out beneath me, pull me down and have me tumble with a terrible splash in to my demise. Flailing in futility, icy and freezing, trying my utmost to swim to the surface and gasp at precious oxygen.

Maybe even if they did, the ones who allegedly met this fate, the sudden drop would be so steep that they couldn't manage to climb out. Just pull themselves across, desperate for some purchase in which they could throw themselves on land only to slip back in, wide-eyed terror beneath the suffocating stillness, the black water gushing in to their lungs, and in the distance... a shadow.

I shook my head, trying to shed that horror of the depths from within, but after a few blinks, I was still there. And then, I saw the face of a woman hurtling toward me. She looked furious, her blank white eyes rabid and raging. Her wet, oily black hair ragged and scraped behind her at the sheer velocity, as she darted through the water with ease, swiftly approaching closer and closer.

I gasped for air, trying to scream at the same time, and the sound of my roar brought me back to the forest. It bound in to the distance, fading fainter and fainter with each second, until soon, it fizzled in to an embarrassing memory, and hidden within the soundscape of chirping, snapping, swishing.

Nishimoto had jumped, and turned to face me alert and panicked. I laughed, sweating and shaking. He looked incredibly concerned, but I just apologised, and told him in Japanese I was really tired, mostly because I didn't know how to say 'exhausted'. Which I was. I should have opted for a second coffee.

I focused on the path ahead now, trying to spot the pink marker before him. Half to ensure I didn't over-excite myself again, and half because I really didn't want to slip – there was no water around, but that image was enough to force caution.

We delved further in to trees and shadows – as if we had found the source of night itself - though looking up I could see leaves of orange mottling the greenery like burning embers. And, just like that, I felt soothed by the beauty of nature – an outside tonic to ease the inner overthinking.

After about thirty minutes of walking, and him anxiously checking back to see if I was okay (making me feel substantially embarrassed enough to keep laughing at myself from the cringe), we reached a strangely clear opening. Here a larger sign was erected, which I knew from sight rather than understanding – the summit! It was a very modest summit, and I wondered why we had traversed here if he wanted to go the village.

He tottered over to one of the trees in front of this sign, on which two smaller signs were attached to it. One pointed the way we had just come from, and the other, well, the opposite way. Nishimoto tapped the other sign, "Inunaki Mura." And then, as easy as that, we began to descend.

Going down was a much easier feat than going up, naturally, and much less frightening in the realms of panic-induced visions, thankfully. About ten minutes in, he stopped suddenly, giving me a start, and placed a hand out for me to do the same. He pointed in to the distance, and I could see a natural break in the canopy before us. Framed within these flaming reds, soothing oranges and comfortable greens, was a huge blue bridge that extended across an enormous gaping space between two mountains. Behind it more and more mountains – ubiquitous as they were - solid shoulders of pure dark green clambering over one another. Far below it a tangled ravine of swaying trees, unbroken and sweeping across the surface like an adumbral plague.

In Japanese, he told me it was Inunaki bridge. Which I understood. Then, gravely, followed with, "Jisatsu."

"Jisatsu?" I repeated, feeling like a child as I always did when I didn't understand.

"Jisatsu," he repeated, and then placed his hand in front of him flat, palm down. It was trembling ever so slightly from the effort, and I noted that we should eat something soon. Then,

he pointed at the bridge with his other hand, brought two fingers above the first, and walked them like little legs, indicating a person, to the edge. With a bending of the fingers, and a push, he replicated someone jumping off. Then pointed back at the bridge. "Jisatsu."

The meaning struck me hard then. I shuddered involuntarily. But still, I was fascinated. I asked him to wait as I checked. He was right. That bridge was an infamous spot for suicides. Just like the dam, it bore bright and searing in my mind. The bridge itself was amazing, so colossal and impressive; a vivid, vibrant blue with a huge arch beneath to support it.

The land it overlooked was so boundless and prodigious, that to drop in to that – to plummet – like one of those beautiful, heartbreakingly brief cherry blossoms was just, in a term, hauntingly tragic. How many people had taken that last step? What were their last thoughts? Could they even be found in such an incomprehensible expanse?

I started to feel incredibly hot. It seemed that it wasn't just the village that was cursed, but the entire landscape around it. As if whatever energy had harboured and tainted within there one day, had poured out freely like the water in the damn, and spread its malevolence all around, allowing it to fester and rot. And here we stood, overlooking it from within.

Nishimoto asked if I wanted to take a picture, but it felt like a foul slight, a massive sign of disrespect to the countless souls that had looked upon that same view before they plunged and snuffed their last breath, dashing their future in to the wilderness below. I politely refused, wanting to let them keep that bittersweet beauty to themselves.

Further down we traipsed, carefully; the birdsong grew louder yet and thicker still here. The rustling of the leaves above was a mere muffled backdrop now, and I could barely hear myself think. It was strange, but I felt as if the birds, the trees, something was aware of us. The hairs on my arms, the back of my neck, everywhere began to stand on end. I suppose I had this feeling as soon as we got out the car, but now it was settling heavy and demanding precedence. But those fleeting faces in my peripherals? I tried to expunge it- it was just silliness. I just had to stop being ridiculous, focus on the path ahead. The pink markers slunk ahead bravely before us, stark bright against the mulchy, brown, mossy surroundings, and then-

A *thundering* drumbeat *boomed* near us! *Snapping* twigs and *breaking* branches echoed in its wake, and they began to grow rapidly louder as the entity approached. I panicked, I couldn't even bring myself to scramble backward or locate where it heralded from, but within a second I saw something burst out from a thicket slightly ahead. Brown and elegant, bouncing in a swift beauty... a *deer*.

I began laughing in sheer shame. A deer! I didn't even realise I had fallen to the floor, but there I was shaking and red faced, looking up at Nishimoto, who now, was brandishing a small knife. In the meagre dearth of light, I saw his fingers striped red and white in the tightness of his grip. I glared at it, feeling a silly anxiety bubbling within, but he looked down at it and then explained, "Inoshishi." He stared at my blank face for a moment, and then hazarded in English, "Many boar."

Well, that was almost enough for me to refuse the trip. Cancel it there and then. A deer was one thing, but a an angry boar with razor tusks? Yet, we would have to walk that whole way back. If we at least saw the tunnel, I'd be satisfied. That would be enough for me. That's all it needed to be, even though every sense of logic was screaming at me to turn back, that it wasn't worth it.

I wish I listened.

He helped me up, and we made our way further down for almost another ten minutes, until thankfully, we saw a cement path snaking through. The side of the path was littered with rappers and rubbish which, through was more present in Japan than I initially was led to

believe, before me was more than I had ever seen. That indicated that this was a well-travelled path, by others as stupid as us, but one that isn't maintained by any authority or governing body.

Regardless, to feel the solid, smooth cement was a blessing. I never thought I'd be so relieved for level land in my life. I peered back up through the pink-guided trail we'd fought through, and already from outside it seemed to meld in with the rest so seamlessly, that I imagined it'd be very easy to miss should you wish to go back that way. But I shrugged the anxiety away, as that feeling of being watched lessened the second we crossed the perimeter.

The birdsong still tweeted ahead, and that undertone of swaying leaves and trickling water could be heard, but now there was an addition of far off engines moaning as they sped by – another strange relief I never even reckoned I'd ever be thankful for.

However, we didn't have to walk for much longer before we saw it. Blocked and stacked by four pillars of concrete slabs, with some more placed on top and more still placed in front – someone did not want us to enter. They were covered in weeds, weaving in and out of every crevice, accompanied by furry moss like a rash; all wreathed by a nimbus of wild and scrawled graffiti.

But, I'm afraid I can't finish writing about this right now. Because even allowing that image to revisit my head is reminding me of what we found in the village and I'm trembling, alone in my apartment, because I get the impending sense that there is something aware of what I wish to disclose, and it's close.

I'm going to go for a walk – it's daytime here. Maybe I'll write about the tunnel, entering it, and the village in another update if I can shake this feeling later. I think I just need to be outside for a little while. To be around the town whilst it's awake. Perhaps take the last of those cherry blossoms in. They really are ambivalently beautiful.

You know... I've never been one for entertaining superstition – the 'spiritual world' has always fascinated me more than horrified me, but, right now, after that, I don't want to challenge this feeling, not with this sense of eerie proximity.