

Yumi

The neon-soaked rain slashed against Yumi’s visor, distorting the skyline of Neo-Tokyo into a smear of light and shadow. She crouched behind a rusting shipping crate, blood from the guard she’d just slit still warm on her hands, but falling away due to the rain. Somewhere in the towering complex ahead, her son was waiting; if he was still alive.

The streets were loud, cars rushing to and from places they were supposed to be or weren’t. The city’s noise was endless, but in this moment, it was distant, muffled by the sound of her own heartbeat. It reminded her of when she was younger, alone on the streets, watching the endless stream of vehicles, never stopping. She used to wonder what the inside of a car was like. When they finally took her in, she found out that cup holders were a luxury in modern cars. It made her laugh at the time. Now, everything in this world felt like it was turning into a luxury.

She wiped her blade on the dead guard’s jacket, smearing blood across the embroidered fox-and-coin patch. The same one she’d picked off her own uniform the night she fled the syndicate. Some gifts came with too many strings.

She exhaled slowly, her hot breath fogging up her visor. The goosebumps on her arms rubbed against her jacket’s cold leather sleeves leaving a prickling sensation. She shivered once not from the cold but from the door looming ahead of her. It could be the door to her death.

The city flickered, neon and LED bleeding together in streams of color, but the light could never touch the stars. You couldn’t see them from Neo-Tokyo anymore. The light pollution and smog pushed everything out except the sun and the moon. Maybe that was the point.

Mankind’s obsession with making something more beautiful than the sun and moon had blacked out the stars entirely.

That’s what this city was supposed to be, an advanced place with technologies that no one needed to understand because they were meant to make life easier. But in the eternal conquest to keep stealing fire from the gods, they made it so no one could afford any of it anyway. In the end, they forgot about the gods and goddesses all together.

Now the government controlled the poor, and the rich controlled the government. And when blood needed to be shed behind closed doors, the fixers and the Yakuza did the dirty work. They were the knives in the dark, paid directly from the wallets of the wealthy, who bought their way out of the government’s control. A reciprocating circle of power.

Be born. Do nothing with your life. Die. That was the fate of most people out here. It had been hers too once. Until she remembered what it was like to hold Asahi in her arms. That tiny warmth against her chest. His breathing, soft and even. The only thing in her life that had ever felt real.

As Yumi made her way to the side door of the tower she was about to infiltrate, every step stretched into an eternity. With each splash of her boots against the puddles, memories flashed behind her eyes. Each more unpleasant than the last but, This was it. Her moment. Her chance to break free from the fate that clung to every average person in this world. She was going to become something. Do something. Matter.

She stopped beneath the pale, flickering light above the door. Rain dripped from her visor, trailing down her neck in thin cold streams. Her eyes darted left, then right, scanning the

empty parking lot. No cars. No footsteps. Just the rain, hissing softly against metal, glass, and stone.

Her gaze flicked to the biometric palm scanner beside the door, a dull, muted green glow illuminating the edges of the metal frame. The metal frame was worn to a darker color from years of hands pressing against it.

She tugged at the fingers of her glove, her hands trembling. The adrenaline was thick on her tongue, metallic and bitter. She clenched her right glove in her left hand, her nails biting into the damp leather. Her breathing slowed, uneven. She could feel it now the weight of the memories, tightening in her chest.

She pressed her bare palm against the scanner. The surface was cold, slick with rain. A thin white line flickered across the screen, moving quickly, scanning the ridges and unique patterns of her skin.

It was over almost before it began.

Her bare palm hit the scanner cold, slick, betraying her. The white line flickered quickly, then pulsed red.

INVALID.

Like she'd never existed..

The word pulsed on the screen in bright letters before vanishing, replaced by the same biometric green glow.

Yumi tilted her head back, staring up at the sky. Rain streaked down her helmet, distorting the neon skyline into a mixed blur of color. She blinked slowly, watching the tiny drops fall, leaving streaks which blurred the light and her sight alike. She tried to think of a way in, but all that came to her were memories. Memories of how they had treated her.

The people behind these walls were hidden away from reality, cushioned by thick security and impenetrable steel. Her pulse slowed. Her breathing steadied. The raw, shaking adrenaline changed into a low, simmering calm. She looked down at her hand, watching the rain mix with the blood on her jacket sleeve, thin red streams dripping from her fingertips onto the concrete below.

She stared at the dead man, his body already cooling in the rain. What had he been before she cut him down? A husband? A father? Just someone's son? It didn't matter now. But his hand might still be useful. She could drag him to the door, press his cold fingers to the scanner. Risky, though. Too much movement, too much time. And he looked heavy.

Her eyes drifted to her belt. Her fingers found the cool hilt of her knife comforting and familiar. She drew it slowly, watching the steel catch the white light. The rain washed over the blade, cleansing the dark smear of blood left by her last victim.

Without hesitation, she jammed the knife into the narrow gap between the metal bracket and the scanner panel. She twisted sharply, prying it loose. The plastic anchors cracked with a brittle snap, and the panel came free, dangling by a mess of tangled wires. The broken bracket hit the ground with a hollow, metallic clang.

She let out a short, breathless chuckle. So much security, so much power, and yet, this was all it took.

There were four wires: black, red, blue, and green. Power, ground, signal, bypass. She didn't have to think. Red was power. Black was ground. She pressed the blade against the green wire and sliced through it in one swift motion. Then, without pause, she severed the blue wire.

Her fingers were steady as she pressed the two exposed ends together. A spark flickered.

Beep.

Not the sharp rejection from before this one was softer. Warmer. Accepting. The scanner flashed a bright green, and with a hiss of hydraulics, the door began to slide open.

That sound of the low, mechanical sigh pulled her back.

She was twelve the first time she had walked through this door. Twelve when they had promised her a better life. Safety. Protection. A way out. She had been young enough to believe them. Believe that she could break free of the cycle, serve a purpose, and finally be worth something.

But it was a lie. Just another lie.

They had dangled freedom in front of wide-eyed children, only to take their hands and pull them into servitude. A scam to get free labor from young, stupid, innocent kids, while they took whatever else they wanted.

She arrived at the bottom of a stairwell. The air smelled musty as the stale air mixed with the fresh humid air from outside. The surroundings are painted white. The only variance of color

are the scuff marks on the wall and the black railing which seems to move infinitely upwards and the two light strips which follow the rails.

Her boots click against the hard floor. And the faint sound of water dripping from her wet leather clothes rings in her ear as she begins her ascent. She picked this entrance because she knew there were no cameras here. This is where the men did bad things. To sneak away and take or do what they wanted.

Step after step after step she climbs the staircase. It's almost calming. The air began to feel more stale as she ascended. The smell of concrete is always in her nose. But the empty simplicity of it calms her breathing and slows her heartbeat. Her brain clears for the first time in hours as she spends the next 30 minutes listening to the clicking of her boots on the floor.

After about 45 minutes her legs began to burn, every step more painful than the last. The stuffy recycled air did not help either. It stuck to her throat as she needed more and more air. But she knew she was nearing where she needed to be. So she pressed onwards.

As she stepped foot onto floor 83 she looked at the simple steel door guarded by a keypad. Which had the key to all her answers. Yumi took a couple minutes to breathe sitting down a moment before entering what could be the last door she walks through.

Yumi stands up, and reaches into her pocket as she finds a crumpled, damp piece of paper which reads 238541. A code she had memorized days prior, repeating it over and over. but she didn't trust her memory right now. Too many hours without sleep.

As she entered the numbers on the paper into the keypad it made an unpleasant chirp, and the LED on it flicked green as the door began to slide with the sound of hydraulics. As the door opened she could immediately hear voices. She knew she was in the right place.

As Yumi peeked and stepped through the door, the atmosphere completely changed. The ugly scent of alcohol hit her nose and the smell of cigarettes filled her nostrils. She looked around noticing the high quality lamps, rugs, vases, and other decorations. Her footsteps were muffled by the red carpet. She crouched down, and stood behind a wall. There were 2 men, one with a ragged voice. He sounded sick, like his nose was stuffy. The other, who sounded average. His voice was nothing recognizable. They laughed and chatted about all the things they have done, things that seem honorable in their eyes. But to Yumi, they were vile. They were sick actions that only sick people would do. And she herself has killed people.

She thinks of how she should approach this. They aren't the one she is looking for, but there is also no way out of this room except the door across the room. To get to this door, Yumi needs to go past the men. They were probably armed, but also drunk. With this she formulated a quick plan.

She readied her legs into more of a squat than a sit. She wrapped her hands around her knife, knuckles turning white as she squeezed it. She drew it quietly. Almost no sound was made, and now she was ready. She put her hand on a large vase behind her, and with her knife in one hand and the other on the vase, she toppled the vase. As it fell, time slowed. Adrenaline took over, and her heart began to run. Only as the vase hit the ground, it didn't shatter like she wanted it too. It made more of a quiet thud.

She waited a moment, but their conversation continued as normal. They were too drunk to come to their senses. She decided to take a closer look. She took off her black helmet, and set it down quietly behind her. Her boots brushed the carpet quietly. Only she could hear her footsteps as she inched towards the edge of the wall. As she peeked her eyes around, she saw the 2 men sitting smoking and drinking. The man with the hoarse voice was fat, and looked like the embodiment of greed. His black eyes were focused on something distant. She couldn't see the other man, as he was in a chair facing away from her.

She popped her head back behind the wall, and reached back for her helmet. She put it on quickly. She reapproached the edge of the wall again, knife still at the ready. In her head she counted.

Three...

Two...

One...

She slid forward, her boots soundless on the soft carpet. One heartbeat then she was behind him. Her fingers tangled in his hair, wrenching his head back. A choked gasp escaped him, but it was cut short as her tanto punched through his throat, the Damascus steel glinting once before vanishing to the hilt. She ripped it free and dropped low behind the chair. No scream came, just the wet, bubbling sigh of a slit windpipe. Crimson spilled down his collar, puddling at his feet.. She stayed crouched, listening, as the second man fumbled for his gun.

He was slow; he didn't register it till it was over. He staggered to his feet, the leather squeaking under his weight being lifted. As he saw the scene, he drew a gun from his hip. His

hands were nervous and unstable, speaking for the rest of his emotions. She could feel his fear in the air. And also his incompetence. As she saw his foot step past the chair, in an Instant she jumped up shoving her knife under his lower jaw. He immediately let out a horrifying bellow of pain. In the same instant she bashed his chest with her shoulder. She knew it hurt her, but all she could feel was adrenaline surging through her body. He fell down to the ground with a loud thud, shaking the floor. The bigger the target, the harder they fall. As he hits the ground, she kicks his hand with her boots and they crunched as his weapon went flying. She bent down over his squirming body, as she removed the knife and quickly slit his throat. She reached into his pocket. The card came free with a flick of her wrist. There it was, the fox and coin emblem, glinting under blood-smeared laminate. The sight sent a fresh wave of disgust through her. She pocketed it without wiping it clean. Let their emblem drown in its own filth.

Yumi wiped her knife clean between her arm and torso, the blade leaving a dark streak on her jacket before she sheathed it. The door hissed shut behind her as she entered a long, sterile hallway. Harsh white lights reflected off vinyl floors so polished she could see the red blinking lights of the four surveillance cameras tracking her movement.

The corridor seemed to stretch endlessly, lined with identical doors, but she didn't hesitate. She knew exactly where to go. All the cameras pointed toward one destination - her destination.

As she walked, her boots squeaked against the floor. Then she saw it: the small brass emblem above the final door. The Yakuza's fox and coin. The kitsune's delicate features were crafted to appear almost friendly, big ears perked up, eyes curved in amusement, a coin held playfully in its mouth like a pet bringing its master a gift.

Light from the overheads caught the polished metal just right, and for a fraction of a second, the fox seemed to wink at her.

Her stomach twisted. She'd seen that same deceptive smile on recruitment posters when she was twelve. The same one on the uniforms of guards who called their beatings "lessons." also the tattoo on the men who held her down while they dragged her son away.

Behind that door waited Takeshi. Her trainer. Her tormentor. The man who'd shaped her into a weapon, then used that weapon to cut away the only good thing in her life.

The memory was fresh as the day it happened. Three guards pinned her down as Takeshi carried her screaming child away. Asahi's tiny hands reached for her as the door closed.

The fox watched her approach, its coin glinting. The Yakuza always demanded payment. She'd given them years of her life. They'd taken her son.

Now it was time to collect.

Yumi reached into her pocket pulling the card out, and pressing it against the black bar on the silver door handle. A green light flashed, and the door clicked. As she entered the room, she spotted Two people. Both looking out the window discussing something. She recognized one of them. It was him. Kuro Takeshi.

Her fingers twitched against the knife hilt still strapped to her thigh. Her throat tightened, and the roar of blood in her ears dulled the sound of their conversation which was muffled by the rain and distance. She could barely make out their words. Something about a shipment. Politics. It didn't matter. Her entire world had shrunk to the man in the dark blue suit, with his broad back

turned toward her. The slight slouch of his shoulders, the familiar twitch of his right hand when he spoke. Old habits she hadn't forgotten.

He turned slightly, enough for her to see the side of his face reflected in the window. The same stoic expression, the sharp jawline and the distant, calculating eyes. The eyes she once trusted. The eyes her son had inherited. Her fingers curled into fists at the memory.

The man standing beside him, a thinner, younger man in a brown suit glanced at her as she entered.

She lowered her voice trying to make it unrecognizable and said "Make him leave".

The man didn't flinch. Didn't turn.

"Yumi." His voice was deep, calm, almost disinterested. He stared out the window at the city below. Lights flickered reflecting on the endless rows of buildings, and damp streets. The same city they once stood over together, the same city he had promised her they could build a better future for.

She clenched her jaw.

Liar.

Everything he did was a lie.

His love and care?

A lie.

His Friendships and connections?

A lie.

His good past?

A lie.

"Make him leave," Yumi said through gritted teeth.

Takeshi waved his hand and the man left promptly. Yumi took off her black helmet, letting it slip from her hands as it clacked against the ground.

"Where is my son?" Yumi says, her guard not faltering.

"Our son? He's safe" Takeshi said, dismissively.

"No, my son. You did nothing except take him away from me. You're no father."

Takeshi let out a breathy chuckle, barely louder than a sigh, as he turned to face her. His eyes were calm, too calm, the eyes of a man who had rehearsed this moment a thousand times in his mind. He took a step closer, his hands casually tucked into the pockets of his tailored slacks.

"Our son," he repeated softly, testing the words on his tongue. "Safe, well-fed, educated. Everything you couldn't have given him."

Yumi's fingers tightened into a fist, nails indenting marks into her palm. She could still feel the phantom ache in her arms, the memory of her child being torn from them. His cries still rang in her ears, small, fragile hands reaching for her as the guards dragged her back.

Her teeth clenched hard enough to ache. "Where is he?" she demanded, her voice cold and sharp.

Takeshi's eyes narrowed slightly, the faintest smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. He cocked his head, as if scolding a child. "Yumi," he said, his voice condescending, "why do you always make this so difficult?"

Yumi stepped up behind him, and pressed her cold blade against his throat.

"Stop wasting your words. They are limited," she said, trying to calm her breathing.

He pressed his neck into the knife, drawing his own blood against it.

"I wouldn't do that." Takeshi says as he grabs a file on the table. "Do you know what this is? It contains everything we fund here at the Yakuza."

He lays it open on the table. As she glances at the top sheet she sees entries on a spreadsheet.

Mio public elementary school: ¥500,000

Tanaka public soup kitchen: ¥1,000,000

Akano Homeless shelter: ¥1,000,000

The entries went on for pages. Billions of yen funneled into public services, clean water initiatives, food banks, and shelters. Private donations disguised as government grants. Funds routed through shell companies, quietly propping up hospitals, orphanages, and schools. Trying to make being homeless easier. Trying to keep the destitute breathing.

The files were a ledger of control. Free clinics but only for those who didn't ask questions. Schools but curricula that praised Yakuza patronage. Soup kitchens where the hungry learned to bow to the fox and coin emblem before they ate.

She traced a column of numbers: ¥500,000—Mio Elementary, “Community Outreach.” The same school where Takeshi had once pointed to a chalkboard and whispered, ‘See how they teach gratitude before grammar?’

Every dialysis machine, every insulin vial came with strings, no, chains that wrapped around the city's throat. The Yakuza didn't fund these places to save lives. They funded them to own them.

She kept turning pages with one hand. A children's literacy program the Yakuza paid for. Not some corporate outreach. Not some politician's platform. No, it was them. Schools built in impoverished districts, giving children a safe place to learn while their parents starved at home.

Her stomach tightened.

This can't be real.

But it was.

There were entire neighborhoods held together by their money. Soup kitchens, temporary housing, job placement services. Some masked under charity fronts. Others are simply labeled as “private investments.” It was all there in black and white. Every bribe, every laundering scheme, every dirty deal funding the lives of people who would never know where their next meal came

from. But it wasn't to help. No, it was to keep them there. To make people just happy enough to never do anything. To keep people in control. To keep the poor, poor, and let the rich get even richer.

Yumi's eyes flicked over the entries again. Her heart pounded. a steady, dull throb.

How many people would starve if this money dried up?

How many hospital wings would shut down?

How many children would be pulled from school?

She stared at the papers, the weight of it pressing down on her chest. The faces of strangers filled her mind with people she'd never met. The faces of people she had seen on the street. The old man she once saw sleeping beneath a subway grate. The young mother on the train, clutching her baby, eyes hollow with hunger.

"Why are you showing me this?" Yumi asks, her voice slightly nervous.

"Because. All this money disappears without me."

All the sound in the room came rushing back in as he finished his sentence, slamming into her like a wave of static. The rain hammered against the glass in a relentless, metallic rhythm, heavy drops streaking down in smears. It filled her ears, a low, droning roar, drowning out the hollow silence that had swallowed her moments before. The air vents whispered faintly, their synthetic hum pulsing against the walls like a mechanical heartbeat. She could feel everything now. The weight of the blade in her hand. The phantom sting of old scars on her knuckles. The faint tremor in her fingers she couldn't ignore.

It was as if she had just woken from a dream.

Memories spilled in. Neo-Tokyo. Cold. Wet. Drowning in light. She saw herself wandering those streets again. A ghost lost in the labyrinth of rain slick alleys. Neon signs burned through the downpour, their colors bleeding into the asphalt in shimmering ribbons of cyan and magenta, and anything else. Puddles mirrored the city in broken, colorful distortions, smeared reflections of holographic people, places, and advertisements. The lights from big signs reflecting promises of pleasures or good food.

She remembered the cold; it was unrelenting. The way it bit through the synthetic leather fibers of her jacket, gnawed at her skin, and clung to her bones like static. The wetness that was always there and how it soaked through her boots leaving her skin wrinkled, slicking her hair to her scalp. The damp, acrid reek of the back alleys clung to everything, a permanent film of grime and exhaust.

She could never wish her fate on another person. Except thousands live it every day. Elderly, children, and just normal people too. Just like she did. And it's not getting better, only worse. People hate the Yakuza, the corpos, the government. Would they if they knew this? She tenses up.

He was still talking, though she barely heard him. His voice was nothing more than a muffled murmur beneath the sound of the rain

She remembered the faces of the beat men, the ones with broken fingers and hollow eyes. The ones who freed themselves from worker colonies or camps to live in this beautiful city. The way they crouched around a fire built under the railing of a Magtrain. Sipping on synthetic

liquor. Voices hoarse and broken from smog and pollution. How they hated corporations every day. How they hired the Yakuza gangs to beat unionizers or kill worker leaders.

She snapped out of her memory pressing her knife a hair deeper.

"Where is my son?" She said with a more urgent whisper.

The blood was now streaming down his neck, soiling his suit. His eyes had something in them now. A hint of fear. But not enough. He reached and grabbed the file.

"He goes to one of these schools" He says as he waves it in the air.

In an instant Yumi's face is met with his fist. As she stumbles backwards he stands up.

"Who taught you how to fight? Who taught you how to live? How to serve? Hmm?" Takeshi said as he looked down on her.

"I. MADE. YOU." He takes a step back holding his wrist. "You should have stayed hidden when I let you leave. I let you go after you had my son. I let you be free. And this is how you pay me back?" He is now pacing back and forth.

As Yumi stands up, she re-grips her knife, not saying a word. He wasn't lying though. He taught her how to be a human. He let her go. But it doesn't make up for the things he has done. Yumi readied into position with only one thought in her mind. Kuro Takeshi needs to die.

"Fine. Have it your way" Takeshi squares his body towards her.

Yumi fainted forward, lunging at him. Takeshi reacted fast. His knuckles slammed into her left shoulder with near bone crunching force. Pain shot through her, but in the same instant,

she pivoted on her ankle, twisting her hips with precision. Her knife came around in a tight, vicious arc.

Metal met flesh.

The blade slashed across Takeshi's face, carving a jagged line from his cheekbone to his jaw. His blood sprayed hot against her skin, dotting her face in crimson droplets.

"Bitch," he spat through gritted teeth, eyes wild with rage.

For a brief second, his guard slipped. That was all she needed.

Yumi surged forward, driving her knife deep into his chest. She felt the resistance of muscle and bone, then the sickening give as the blade found his heart.

There was no scream. No cry of pain. Just a strangled, hollow gasp.

His eyes widened in shock, lips parting slightly. She twisted the knife, cruel and deliberate, before yanking it free. Blood gushed from the wound, painting the marble floor in thick, dark ribbons.

Takeshi's body betrayed him. His knees folded like a puppet with cut strings, sending him crashing onto the marble floor. His chest hit first - a wet slap of bloody fabric against stone - then his cheek, smearing the blood from his ruined face across the polished surface.

His fingers twitched, clawing at nothing. His lungs fought for air that wouldn't come, each wet gasp spraying flecks of crimson across his own reflection in the floor.

Yumi didn't look at him long. She turned to the table, her hands steady despite the blood still dripping from her blade. As she sheathed it, she grabbed the file and tucked it into her jacket, her fingers leaving smudges of red along the edges.

Without sparing him another glance, she made her way to her helmet. Her boots left faint, bloody prints on the marble as she crossed the room, she navigated it slowly, careful not to slip as the marble became slick with the blood under her boots. She bent down, scooped up the helmet, and slipped it on with practiced ease.

Her limbs felt heavy, sluggish. She moved through the haze, almost mechanical, as she walked to the door. She didn't even check Takeshi's body. She didn't need to.

As she stepped into the hallway, the thought hit her like a dull blade to the chest.

Did I just kill Innocents?

Innocents like I once was?

Did I just uneducate children?

Did I just starve people?

Her gut twisted. But she didn't care. All she cared about was the fact that she had a clue about her son.

She walked back through the first room, tracking her path with cold detachment. The bodies of the two men she'd killed were still there, blood pooling around them. As she stepped past them, she tracked their blood down the endless staircase with her clicking boots.

Her breath was steady. Her hands didn't shake. She was drenched in blood, but she didn't care.

When she finally stepped outside, the rain hit her. Cold and relentless, it washed over her, streaking down her visor and the crimson was washed from her jacket, her gloves, and her boots. The rain swept away the evidence, leaving only the faint bruise blossoming on her shoulder.

She paused at the edge of the building, lifting her visor. The rain struck her skin directly, cooling the feverish heat on her cheeks. She let it hit her face, uncaring about its dirtiness, just staring into the neon-lit sprawl of the city.

Her breath formed small clouds in the cold.

And without looking back, she walked away.