



Vol 1 Issue 6 | October 2024



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BE PART OF THE PEACH COBBLER

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Note from the Editor~



Greetings, peaches!

Sorry this month's newsletter is a bit late—I've been stuck in bed with a stubborn cold—looks like the season has arrived. Next month we'll be sharing some tips and tricks to help you fight it off! Now, let's get into what's in this issue.

The summer heat came and went in a flash, and now we're enjoying some cooler, more comfortable days—though it's starting to feel a bit chilly at times! This month, we've got a special story from our very own Ryan Calpito, plus our usual events lineup and puzzles.

As always, we'd like to remind you that we are always looking for contributors. Whether you have photos of unique spots you've explored, events you've attended within the prefecture, stories from your time on the JET Programme, or even book and movie recommendations, we'd love to feature you.

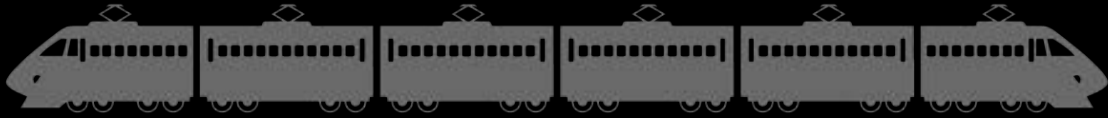
If you're interested in contributing, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at

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LAST TRAIN



Thirty-four minutes past the eleventh hour, Platform 1, the westbound track towards Kurashiki, has settled down as the final passengers of the night have shuffled aboard, filling the seats and packing the aisles, the final most travelers toeing the threshold of the train's automatic doors. The meager four-car train is packed tighter than a can of worms. The conductor checks her watch, whistle buzzer in hand, and scans the platform as she walks over to push the departure button of the platform, setting up for an on time final departure of the evening. You are late.

Admittedly, you might have pushed your luck with the clock a little too much, on a Wednesday night as well, with work and five classes coming the very next day. But you couldn't ignore the opportunity to catch a few drinks in the city with your fellow ALTs. It was Halloween afterall. You stayed a tad too long, and had a few too many to drink. The world goes by in a blur and your heart drums in your chest, sending blood rushing through your veins. You get an unrestricted boost in physical strength and endurance, feeling you could outrun Husain Bolt himself at this very moment. A senior ALT had jokingly suggested you spend the night on a *park bench*. You think, *hell would freeze over before I do that*. Afterall, you still had to create the lesson material and the slideshows for those five different classes tomorrow. You must, and absolutely, will make this train, come hell or high water.

Pushing your way past the cops, the crowds of costumed halloween celebrants, the skeletons, the ghosts, the bloodied depictions of death, the departed, and the undead, you dash up the stairs of the East Exit, ICOCA card in hand. The beep sounds and the ticket gate flings open just in time to get out of your way. The machine reads, ‘777円’, more than enough to make it Kurashiki, and a lucky number at that...so you think.

The conductor pushes the departure button points and heads back to her post at the tail of the train, just as you reach the top of the escalators leading down to platform one. You collide with a grouping of students and crash through a trio of salarymen, knocking one to the ground. You say, “*sumimasen*,” quietly but can’t stop now, the collision had already cost you precious milliseconds.

The announcement sounds. The low and slightly ominous tune いい日旅たち, *A Good Day for Departure*, plays as the automated voice calls, “*Ichiban noriba, futsuu, Fukuyama yuki ga, hassha shimasu.*” You frantically run down the stairs, tripping as you go. “*Doa ga shimarimasu. Go chuui-kudasai.*” Just another meter more, you think. The high pitched whistle pierces the air, and the doors hiss as the two leaves fly shut. You feel the doors of the old, ancient, according to you, metal box clamp down on your arm and leg, the one you used to try and get a literal foot in the door. The air brakes release. Metal creaks as the brake shoes let go of the steel wheels, the motors come to life, and the train jolts forward. You feel something in your body crack and tear. Passengers inside and on the platform scream in shock and panic, you can hear the

crowd through the crack in the door. The conductor hadn't noticed. You can't hop along on your own free leg fast enough, as the train accelerates down the platform, and fall. The line of tactile yellow blocks grinds against your back, as you're pulled along. You feel the concrete hit the back of your head over and over again as it bounces against the pavement. But you're so out of it, your only thought is, "I'm going to be stuck in Okayama tonight, aren't I?" The train lets go, and you tumble along the edge of the platform, your arm and leg freed. You see bright yellow car bodies fly past in front of you and hear the grinding of metal before blackness comes.

Your head throbs as you blink awake. Where are you? Looking around, you realize you're still at the station, still on platform one. You're seated in one of the waiting seats. Someone must have kindly carried you over and sat you there. The lights are dim and the air feels still, and oddly cold. The lights on the other nine platforms are off. Only platform one is illuminated with few and flickering lights. The alcohol is making its final way through your system, you think as your head pounds and aches. Your phone is out of battery and doesn't come to life so you groggily check your watch. **3AM.** The station staff had left you to spend the night in the station? Well, it was better than a park bench on the Nishigawa River Walk.

As you look around, you realize you aren't alone either. There are shadowy figures that stand by the platform edge, as if queuing up for a train. Men and women of different ages and from what

looked to be different occupations, though all their clothing, whatever they wore, was tattered and all were disheveled. You garner the extent of your Japanese to tell them that there was nothing coming, but none reply. None of the silent, grim, figures even acknowledge your presence. Comes with the territory, you suppose. Something feels off. But you accept what you see at face value.

The departure board was empty except for one single entry: 終電. Last train. At this point of the night, it might as well have said first train. To your surprise though, the arrival chime suddenly went off. You jump in surprise though as *A Good Day for Departure* chimes again, but it struggles through the speakers crackling irregularly, sounding all the more twisted and ominous. No automated voice comes to announce the arrival of the train and call its destination. The four car train crawls into the station. The windows were foggy and you can't see inside. It seems to glide, despite its age. And whatsmore...it's silent. No click-clack, or squealing of brakes. The train floats in and comes to a gentle silent stop at the markers. A hiss of air rushed as the doors slid open, giving you a glance inside the train. Nobody got off, even though this was Okayama! The inside was sparsely loaded, and the passengers onboard were few and far between. They sat silently and properly in their seats, unmoving, unreactive, and unflattering in their gaze as they stare ahead toward the direction of travel. No one looked at their phones. No one listened to music. No one talked. Just as silently, the shadowy figures of the waiting passengers filed into the cars, taking their seats orderly. The train cars were rusty, and were not in the greatest condition. Rusted, paint peeling, with cracks in the windows, the lights on board flickered, and the destination

board did not have any station displayed. You figure, it's heading that way, right? It should get you to Kurashiki. You might not get any proper sleep, but you'll be able to have something ready for class today.

Your eyes scan their way to the back of the train. You gasp, taken by surprise. The conductor of this service stood eerily and ominously at the tail of the train. He wasn't looking at the passengers. He didn't look at his watch, or at his schedule. He was looking, staring, at you. You can't see his eyes from under the shade of the visor of his cap, but you could tell that he was peering directly into your own eyes. No. Peering *through* you. With movements as smooth as that of a ghost, his white-gloved hand sticking out against the dim and dark, he gestured to the open cars.

“Last train.”

A chill shoots down your spine. His low but commanding voice sounded as though he spoke directly into your ear. Yet he was standing all the ways away. You nod and get up, but just as you do a final passenger came running down the stairs from the ticket gates. She wore a uniform from one of the schools in the area, but you weren't familiar with it. It was well beyond curfew, you think as you come up to the train doors. The only thing on your mind is how much your head hurts. You look forward to getting water and some food from the Lawson near Kurashiki Station. You're pulled from your thoughts as you feel the student grab onto your shirt sleeve. She rapidly shakes her head, holding you back.

“*Da-me! Noranaide! Noranaide!*” she calls over and over.
“Don’t ride,” she manages to recall from her English classes.

What was her deal? You explain that you need to go home, but she continues to insist.

「乗ったら、もう終わるんよ！お、わ、る！」

“Sorry, I don’t understand,” you groggily say.

“Don’t ride!”

Her uniform seemed disheveled too, as if she had fallen. There were dirt stains from the floor, and traces of red. Maybe she was coming from the halloween festivities too.

Suddenly you feel a menacing presence.

Behind you.

“Time to go!”

It was the train’s conductor. His face was gaunt. His features were slim, almost skeleton-like, from what little you think you can make out, but his power and authority still could not be matched.

“Schedule is important.”

He flashes his watch. The main thing you notice is that the second hand was not moving.

“*Kaerimasu,*” you say, and go to take your seat on the train. Now packed, you take a seat in the box seats among two other passengers. Both seeming equally exhausted and spectre-like. None of them

react to you or acknowledge your presence, apart from the one next to you shifting slightly to allow you in.

You look back at the conductor and the student, but are shocked at what you see.

“You too.”

The girl was forcefully shoved in as the whistle sounded. He was strong! Menacingly strong. The student nearly collided with the opposite doors, stumbling to the floor.

The doors violently slammed shut, ramming into each other without any hint of hesitation, a monster that had now gotten a grasp on its prey. The leaves of the door and their clouded windows rattled in their frame. The train jolted forward as the slack in the couplings was pulled forcefully. The motors came to life and the rusty wheels began to turn. Faster than normal, faster than the Shinkansen even, the train was now accelerating out of Okayama Station, westbound towards Kurashiki. This was an unnatural way to move, even for a machine. You get up and try to help the girl, seeing the conductor come down the aisle towards you.

You voice your anger as you reach the fallen student, berating the crewmember in English about how he treats his passengers.

“Sit.”

You blink, without blinking your eyes.

You’re seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Huh? How did that happen? You swore you were in the aisle a moment ago. You see the conductor throw the door to the next car open and cross the vestibule without once turning around and bowing. The girl's seated in the seat diagonally across from you. She's visibly scared and shaking. What's going on? You look out the left window, peering into the dark. You must be passing out of Okayama City, you hear the sounds of the train rattling over the bridges you're used to, yet you can't tell.

There are no lights.

The city, its houses and apartments, its streetlights and stop lights, are all blacked out. A fog had rolled in too. Soon you can't see farther than a few meters away from the train.

Kita Nagase. You are approaching Kita Nagase Station. You faintly make out the unmistakable outline of Okayama Dome as your train runs past the container yards to the right. There's no indication that you will stop. Sure enough, the train flies right through the station. You tear through the neighborhood tracks, and soon even Niwase quickly came and went. There were no brakes, not even as much as a slow down.

"We aren't stopping," the student says. "We shouldn't be on this train!"

The car rocks and rolls as you cross the bridge and head into the fields outside Kurashiki. Nakasho is next. Despite the abnormal operations, no one seemed to care. Looking around at the other

passengers. Everyone sits still, facing forward, and remaining motionless. Everyone had the same expressionless look of defeat.

“I’ll find the conductor. My stop is coming up,” you say, “Wait here.”

The car shakes violently. Your head throbs. You feel as though your head is being split open. You should have drank more water during the meet up. But you find your footing and start towards the front of the car. You grab the door to the next car and pull it open. The sound of rattling metal rushes into the car, coming from the space just outside the vestibule. You enter the next car. The conductor is at the first set of doors, dusting his hands off, facing outward. You note: the train door is open. What was he just doing right now? The door violently slams shut as it did upon departure.

“Hey!” You yell, “Sumimasen!”

You see the conductor’s head suddenly, unnaturally, *snap* to face you. He is not happy.

“Why are we not stoppi-”

You’re seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Again? As you come to your senses, you catch a glimpse of Nakasho Station as the train flies through. Your head hurts even more. The student looks at you, her eyes wide with shock. You now realize that you are not hallucinating. Something is not right about this train. Nothing was to begin with.

“Blood!” She manages to say, “Blood!”

Your head felt wet. It wasn't sweat. You are bleeding from your head. What was going on? You feel panic begin to set in, as the train rounded the curve towards Kurashiki.

"We need to get off," you say. You look across the car, again towards the front. You eye the emergency brake cord.

"You'll anger the conductor," The man next to you says, warning. His voice sounds as though he can barely manage the energy to say that much. *"You should just remain seated and enjoy the ride."*

But you'll hear none of it. You won't do that. Why would you? Who would? You'd better pull the emergency brake here. You were running through neighborhoods, and soon you'd be in Kurashiki City. You could get away. You could escape into the nearby streets and get help from authorities.

You look down the length of the train, peering through the windows of the doors in between the cars. The conductor is far ahead in the lead car of the train. He hasn't noticed you up out of your seat. You grab hold of the cord. This was your chance. You give it a forceful heave hoping--

You're seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Your ears ring. Your vision slowly clears. You feel as though you have been inside a washing machine for the past hour, spun into submission. You feel your gut churning and you are having a much

harder time keeping down all that Yakiniku you had ate. But you do. You're green in the face, and the violent swaying of the train car as it rattles along is not helping.

“W-Where are we?” you ask. “Kurashiki?”

You look to the student, who looks at you with a petrified look. She looks as though she's just come back to reality, and shakes her head. “Long gone,” she says. “It has already been an hour since.”

An hour? That was impossible. You were just before Kurashiki just moments ago. You shouldn't have even passed into the station yet.

You wonder why she looks even more scared than normal, as if she had seen a demon, one of hell's twisted creations. “What's wrong?” you ask. You look into the window, no chance of seeing anything in the tangible blackness that was just on the other side, the outside, of the thin panel of glass, for the dim reflection created by the low cabin lights reflecting off the pane. It's hard to see. You turn your head to different angles, trying to create a mental scan of what you look like from what little at a time you can see with each turn of your head.

What stares back is... **blood curdling.**

You take a deep, composed, but scared breath in as you pull yourself back from the window and sit up straight in your seat. You reach up and run your hands across your face, frantically confirming to yourself that your head is still properly formed. You

get a slight sigh of relief that what you feel does not match whatever mentally created specimen of nightmare fuel you saw.

The student looks at you and manages to finally say, “*Don’t get up anymore.*”

“But I need to find a way to stop this thing. To get us off,” you reply.

“You..” she struggles to find the words, “..don’t see what we see when you are *put* back.”

Her words shake you to your core, and you try to do as the old man, borderline mummy, next to you said before: *Enjoy the Ride*. You hear the train rattle and roll over bridges. The sudden change in the sound of the wheels rolling from solid ground to open and hallowed bridge decks is unmistakable. The tracks curve more too. This was the Hakubi Line, or at least that’s the only logical route you can imagine being on.

The horn blows as you round a curve and barrel straight into a tunnel, and again as you exit the otherside. The shrill whistle and horn chiming into the infinite expanse of the empty beyond.

“What’s your favorite school subject?” you ask to break the silence.

The student ponders the question for a while, leaving you to listen to the unrelenting click and clack of rolling steel on steel. “English,” she says.

“Why?” You ask to drive a conversation. You yourself begin to recall all the chats you’ve had with your own students at your many schools.

“I want to study abroad.”

“Where?”

“I want to visit Canada! Vancouver,” she says.

“What year are you?”

The student folds her hands in her lap. “San-nen,” she replies.

It was about that time of the year too. “Entrance exam study?

Many of my San-nen sei are busy with their entrance exams.”

“Yes. Too busy.” She says this with a lonesome and empty voice, as if this was all for naught.

You feel a shift happen in you, remembering the reality of your precarious situation. You don’t know how to get off this train, which meant neither would she. “Maybe, I should have listened to you in Okayama,” you say. “You shouldn’t be on this train.”

Her hands ball into fists.

“I’m here because of you!!”

You feel your gut sink at the sharp accusation.

“All I was trying to do was meet my friend at the ticket gates! And then you...”

“I what?” you ask.

The door from the next car flies open. Both of you jump in your seats at the sudden sound. It was the conductor. The tall and imposing train staff member seemed to float over to their seats, before he came to a stop right beside and turned to face you. Despite being so close you still can’t tell what exactly his face looked like under the shade of his cap visor. But you could tell that whatever he- *it* was, was not human.

*“You are bothering other passengers,” it says in a demonic voice,
“Refrain from speaking.”*

From speaking loudly? From speaking on the phone? The two of you weren't even *that* loud, you think.

The girl begins to scream in terror. You wonder for what, but before you even need to ask, you *feel* it.

Your mouth begins to seal. You feel your lips push and meld together, slowly, from the corners of your mouth inward. You try to scream in terror, but before you can make a sound, your mouth fully closes. Panicked, you breath rapidly from your nose. It wasn't over. Sharp, terrible, stabbing, and grinding pain tear at you over and over. A needle, and coarse thread, began *sewing* your mouth shut, as if being sealed wasn't enough on its own! You can only endure the pain, all the while the conductor stands over you, watching to ensure completion from a devilish red eye.

“Stay seated.”

The springs in the bench seats and pieces of the metal frame shoot through the cushions, barely missing piercing through your flesh! The metal fastens tightly across your chest and waist, restraining you from getting up. You panic and begin to hyperventilate. The metal constricting is so tight, you feel you cannot breath. You try to fight it, but to no avail. You can't yell or scream about it either.

The conductor then turns to the girl. He pauses a moment, seeming to look her over. Then he pulls out his passenger roster. He violently flipped through the pages, back and forth, and scanned them up and down, down and up. There weren't many pages in that small worn book to begin with. Then, he slammed the book shut. You see his white gloved hand, or whatever kind of appendage he had, frustratedly grip the book.

There had been a change. *Another one* on this same trip.

“Your ticket is no longer valid.”

Forcefully, suddenly, he grabbed her by the collar of her shirt and pulled the student up and along towards the door in the middle of the car. She screamed in panic and tried to fight her way out of its grasp, but it held firm. She was not getting away. You yourself thrash in your chair as well, screaming- mumbling through sealed skin.

The pair reached the door. Without *it* having to touch anything, the door sharply parted. The pneumatic air hissed as the two leaves opened to the void outside. The train bent to his will. The deafening rattle and roll of the bogeys and the wheels grinding against the rails and axles below filled the cabin. The train rounded a curve, and the whistle blew, far ahead at the head of the train. You hear the sound of a bridge, as the train began to thunder over the large hollow spaces between the rails. You vaguely hear water outside, a river.

The bindings that hold you begin to give! You gain a sense of hope and fight harder and harder to break free. You need to! As a teacher, you *need* to help this student.

Forcefully he lifts her by her shirt collar and hangs her at the end of his extended arm, dangling outside the train car with the dark and never ending black void, its infinite expanse of unknown oblivion below her.

The metal bars and springs that hold you break! And you free yourself from the bench! You quickly rise to your feet! The train passes a red signal light, a solo beacon of illumination in the supernatural darkness of what you still want to believe is actually Okayama Prefecture. The illumination provides a very brief look at things concealed in shadow, as it flew along the length of the passing train.

“I’ll see you on the next last train.”

The student screams, a gut wrenching scream of pure terror as the only witness of what the conductor, of what *it*, looked like.

The being let go. Her screams climbed in pitch as she dropped from the train into the blackness. You dive for the deck, not caring that the conductor stood right there, sliding across the floor towards the open door, reaching into the void with only hope that you weren’t too late! Your left shoulder slams into the corner of the door, but you feel your hand grip hers! You caught her!

“Hang on!” You assure her, “I got you!” All the while she is dangling dangerously out the side of a speeding train.

You strain with all your might. In the moment, you regret never getting serious about going to the gym. You remember all the times your own students beat you in an arm wrestling competition. But not this time. This time will be different! You begin to slowly pull her up! This time you will prevail!

You're seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Your head feels like it had been busted open with a hammer. Again you feel delirious and nauseous, but somehow even worse. Now your body hurts all over, as if you had been beaten with steel and concrete. Your ribcage feels like it has collapsed, and you can't feel the side of your face! You can barely breathe. Whatsmore, your heart sinks. You've failed.

"Everyone has a reason they're on this train," the mummy, dressed like a salaryman, next to you manages to say.

"You just haven't come to terms with yours yet," the other silent-until-now passenger directly across from you adds,

The outboard door closes behind you and you can hear the sound of approaching footsteps. The train rattled on, and the girl was long gone. You failed.

It comes to a stop beside your grouping of benches. You can't say anything, but you question, why are you doing this to us? What is this train?

"This is YOUR last train. You were told not to run for trains, there were many warnings, and you didn't listen. Now, here you are."

The conductor began to start his next and final walk of the train, but before leaving he paused for one final remark.

“I even told you, ‘you should spend the night on a park bench.’”

The train’s horn sounded once again, echoing into the night a final time. The train dove into another tunnel on the mountain side, not emerging from the other side.

The girl student’s eyes shot open. She had felt the shock of the ice cold water for a moment and thought she would drown in the darkness. Now the bright lights of Platform One blinded her. She was set on a stretcher being ready to be taken by paramedics to the city hospital.

“Daijoubu desu ka? Ima, atama wa dou?” Are you okay? How’s your head?

“What happened?” she asks.

There was commotion at the platform, but she managed to catch a glimpse of the clock. **11:45PM**. There were crowds of railway and emergency staff, and shocked passengers gathered around a stopped passenger train which would have been the last train to Fukuyama. A curtain covered a sizable area beside the stopped train, blocking whoever was laying there from view. But a long trail of blood

extended down the edge of the platform leading up to where the train had come to a halt.

“A passenger was caught and dragged by the departing train,” the paramedic informed. “He unfortunately collided into you on the platform, and you fell and hit your head...well, you both did. It wasn’t looking good for a while, but you are stable now. We’ll bring you to the hospital to get you properly checked by a doctor. Do you have your ID with you?”

“Yes, I have it.” The student reached for her skirt pocket to find her school ID, but paused feeling something under her and instead reached for that.

It was a white glove. The same that were worn by train conductors. “*Doa ga shimarimasu. Go chuui-kudasai.*” Just another meter more, you think. The high pitched whistle pierces the air, and the doors hiss as the two leaves fly shut. You feel the doors of the old, ancient, according to you, metal box clamp down on your arm and leg, the one you used to try and get a literal foot in the door. The air brakes release. Metal creaks as the brake shoes let go of the steel wheels, the motors come to life, and the train jolts forward. You feel something in your body crack and tear. Passengers inside and on the platform scream in shock and panic, you can hear the crowd through the crack in the door. The conductor hadn’t noticed. You can’t hop along on your own free leg fast enough, as the train accelerates down the platform, and fall. The line of tactile yellow blocks grinds against your back, as you’re pulled along. You feel the concrete hit the back of your head over and over again as it bounces against the pavement. But you’re

so out of it, your only thought is, “I’m going to be stuck in Okayama tonight, aren’t I?” The train lets go, and you tumble along the edge of the platform, your arm and leg freed. You see bright yellow car bodies fly past in front of you and hear the grinding of metal before blackness comes.

Your head throbs as you blink awake. Where are you? Looking around, you realize you're still at the station, still on platform one. You're seated in one of the waiting seats. Someone must have kindly carried you over and sat you there. The lights are dim and the air feels still, and oddly cold. The lights on the other nine platforms are off. Only platform one is illuminated with few and flickering lights. The alcohol is making its final way through your system, you think as your head pounds and aches. Your phone is out of battery and doesn't come to life so you groggily check your watch. **3AM.** The station staff had left you to spend the night in the station? Well, it was better than a park bench on the Nishigawa River Walk.

As you look around, you realize you aren't alone either. There are shadowy figures that stand by the platform edge, as if queuing up for a train. Men and women of different ages and from what looked to be different occupations, though all their clothing, whatever they wore, was tattered and all were disheveled. You garner the extent of your Japanese to tell them that there was nothing coming, but none reply. None of the silent, grim, figures even acknowledge your presence. Comes with the territory, you suppose. Something feels off. But you accept what you see at face value.

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What was her deal? You explain that you need to go home, but she continues to insist.

「乗ったら、もう終わるんよ！お、わ、る！」

“Sorry, I don't understand,” you groggily say.

“Don't ride!”

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Behind you.

“Time to go!”

It was the train’s conductor. His face was gaunt. His features were slim, almost skeleton-like, from what little you think you can make out, but his power and authority still could not be matched.

“Schedule is important.”

He flashes his watch. The main thing you notice is that the second hand was not moving.

“Kaerimasu,” you say, and go to take your seat on the train. Now packed, you take a seat in the box seats among two other passengers. Both seeming equally exhausted and spectre-like. None of them react to you or acknowledge your presence, apart from the one next to you shifting slightly to allow you in.

You look back at the conductor and the student, but are shocked at what you see.

“You too.”

The girl was forcefully shoved in as the whistle sounded. He was strong! Menacingly strong. The student nearly collided with the opposite doors, stumbling to the floor.

The doors violently slammed shut, ramming into each other without any hint of hesitation, a monster that had now gotten a grasp on its prey. The leaves of the door and their clouded windows rattled in their frame. The train jolted forward as the slack in the couplings was pulled forcefully. The motors came to life and the rusty wheels began to turn. Faster than normal, faster than the Shinkansen even, the train was now accelerating out of Okayama Station, westbound towards Kurashiki. This was an unnatural way to move, even for a

machine. You get up and try to help the girl, seeing the conductor come down the aisle towards you.

You voice your anger as you reach the fallen student, berating the crewmember in English about how he treats his passengers.

“Sit.”

You blink, without blinking your eyes.

You're seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Huh? How did that happen? You swore you were in the aisle a moment ago. You see the conductor throw the door to the next car open and cross the vestibule without once turning around and bowing. The girl's seated in the seat diagonally across from you. She's visibly scared and shaking. What's going on? You look out the left window, peering into the dark. You must be passing out of Okayama City, you hear the sounds of the train rattling over the bridges you're used to, yet you can't tell.

There are no lights.

The city, its houses and apartments, its streetlights and stop lights, are all blacked out. A fog had rolled in too. Soon you can't see farther than a few meters away from the train.

Kita Nagase. You are approaching Kita Nagase Station. You faintly make out the unmistakable outline of Okayama Dome as your train runs past the container yards to the right. There's no indication that you will stop. Sure enough, the train flies right through the station. You tear through the neighborhood tracks, and soon even Niwase quickly came and went. There were no brakes, not even as much as a slow down.

“We aren’t stopping,” the student says. “We shouldn’t be on this train!”

The car rocks and rolls as you cross the bridge and head into the fields outside Kurashiki. Nakasho is next. Despite the abnormal operations, no one seemed to care. Looking around at the other passengers. Everyone sits still, facing forward, and remaining motionless. Everyone had the same expressionless look of defeat.

“I’ll find the conductor. My stop is coming up,” you say, “Wait here.”

The car shakes violently. Your head throbs. You feel as though your head is being split open. You should have drank more water during the meet up. But you find your footing and start towards the front of the car. You grab the door to the next car and pull it open. The sound of rattling metal rushes into the car, coming from the space just outside the vestibule. You enter the next car. The conductor is at the first set of doors, dusting his hands off, facing outward. You note: the train door is open. What was he just doing right now? The door violently slams shut as it did upon departure.

“Hey!” You yell, “Sumimasen!”

You see the conductor’s head suddenly, unnaturally, *snap* to face you. He is not happy.

“Why are we not stoppi-”

You’re seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Again? As you come to your senses, you catch a glimpse of Nakasho Station as the train flies through. Your head hurts even more. The student looks at you, her eyes wide with shock. You now realize that you are not hallucinating. Something is not right about this train. Nothing was to begin with.

“Blood!” She manages to say, “Blood!”

Your head felt wet. It wasn't sweat. You are bleeding from your head. What was going on? You feel panic begin to set in, as the train rounded the curve towards Kurashiki.

"We need to get off," you say. You look across the car, again towards the front. You eye the emergency brake cord.

"You'll anger the conductor," The man next to you says, warning. His voice sounds as though he can barely manage the energy to say that much. *"You should just remain seated and enjoy the ride."*

But you'll hear none of it. You won't do that. Why would you? Who would? You'd better pull the emergency brake here. You were running through neighborhoods, and soon you'd be in Kurashiki City. You could get away. You could escape into the nearby streets and get help from authorities.

You look down the length of the train, peering through the windows of the doors in between the cars. The conductor is far ahead in the lead car of the train. He hasn't noticed you up out of your seat. You grab hold of the cord. This was your chance. You give it a forceful heave hoping--

You're seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Your ears ring. Your vision slowly clears. You feel as though you have been inside a washing machine for the past hour, spun into submission. You feel your gut churning and you are having a much harder time keeping down all that Yakiniku you had ate. But you do. You're green in the face, and the violent swaying of the train car as it rattles along is not helping.

"W-Where are we?" you ask. "Kurashiki?"

You look to the student, who looks at you with a petrified look. She looks as though she's just come back to reality, and shakes her head. "Long gone," she says. "It has already been an hour since."

An hour? That was impossible. You were just before Kurashiki just moments ago. You shouldn't have even passed into the station yet.

You wonder why she looks even more scared than normal, as if she had seen a demon, one of hell's twisted creations. "What's wrong?" you ask. You look into the window, no chance of seeing anything in the tangible blackness that was just on the other side, the outside, of the thin panel of glass, for the dim reflection created by the low cabin lights reflecting off the pane. It's hard to see. You turn your head to different angles, trying to create a mental scan of what you look like from what little at a time you can see with each turn of your head.

What stares back is... **blood curdling.**

You take a deep, composed, but scared breath in as you pull yourself back from the window and sit up straight in your seat. You reach up and run your hands across your face, frantically confirming to yourself that your head is still properly formed. You get a slight sigh of relief that what you feel does not match whatever mentally created specimen of nightmare fuel you saw.

The student looks at you and manages to finally say, "*Don't get up anymore.*"

"But I need to find a way to stop this thing. To get us off," you reply.

"You.." she struggles to find the words, "..don't see what we see when you are *put* back."

Her words shake you to your core, and you try to do as the old man, borderline mummy, next to you said before: *Enjoy the Ride*. You hear the train rattle and roll over bridges. The sudden change in the sound of the wheels rolling from solid ground to open and hallowed bridge decks is unmistakable. The tracks curve more too. This was the Hakubi Line, or at least that's the only logical route you can imagine being on.

The horn blows as you round a curve and barrel straight into a tunnel, and again as you exit the otherside. The shrill whistle and horn chiming into the infinite expanse of the empty beyond.

"What's your favorite school subject?" you ask to break the silence.

The student ponders the question for a while, leaving you to listen to the unrelenting click and clack of rolling steel on steel. "English," she says.

"Why?" You ask to drive a conversation. You yourself begin to recall all the chats you've had with your own students at your many schools.

"I want to study abroad."

"Where?"

"I want to visit Canada! Vancouver," she says.

"What year are you?"

The student folds her hands in her lap. "San-nen," she replies. It was about that time of the year too. "Entrance exam study? Many of my San-nen sei are busy with their entrance exams."

"Yes. Too busy." She says this with a lonesome and empty voice, as if this was all for naught.

You feel a shift happen in you, remembering the reality of your precarious situation. You don't know how to get off this train, which meant neither would she. "Maybe, I should have listened to you in Okayama," you say. "You shouldn't be on this train."

Her hands ball into fists.

“I’m here because of you!!”

You feel your gut sink at the sharp accusation.

“All I was trying to do was meet my friend at the ticket gates!
And then you...”

“I what?” you ask.

The door from the next car flies open. Both of you jump in your seats at the sudden sound. It was the conductor. The tall and imposing train staff member seemed to float over to their seats, before he came to a stop right beside and turned to face you. Despite being so close you still can’t tell what exactly his face looked like under the shade of his cap visor. But you could tell that whatever he- *it* was, was not human.

*“You are bothering other passengers,” it says in a demonic voice,
“Refrain from speaking.”*

From speaking loudly? From speaking on the phone? The two of you weren’t even *that* loud, you think.

The girl begins to scream in terror. You wonder for what, but before you even need to ask, you *feel* it.

Your mouth begins to seal. You feel your lips push and meld together, slowly, from the corners of your mouth inward. You try to scream in terror, but before you can make a sound, your mouth fully closes. Panicked, you breath rapidly from your nose. It wasn’t over. Sharp, terrible, stabbing, and grinding pain tear at you over and over. A needle, and coarse thread, began *sewing* your mouth shut, as if being sealed wasn’t enough on its own! You can only endure the pain, all the

while the conductor stands over you, watching to ensure completion from a devilish red eye.

“Stay seated.” _

The springs in the bench seats and pieces of the metal frame shoot through the cushions, barely missing piercing through your flesh! The metal fastens tightly across your chest and waist, restraining you from getting up. You panic and begin to hyperventilate. The metal constricting is so tight, you feel you cannot breath. You try to fight it, but to no avail. You can't yell or scream about it either.

The conductor then turns to the girl. He pauses a moment, seeming to look her over. Then he pulls out his passenger roster. He violently flipped through the pages, back and forth, and scanned them up and down, down and up. There weren't many pages in that small worn book to begin with. Then, he slammed the book shut. You see his white gloved hand, or whatever kind of appendage he had, frustratedly grip the book.

There had been a change. *Another one* on this same trip.

“Your ticket is no longer valid.”

Forcefully, suddenly, he grabbed her by the collar of her shirt and pulled the student up and along towards the door in the middle of the car. She screamed in panic and tried to fight her way out of its grasp, but it held firm. She was not getting away. You yourself thrash in your chair as well, screaming- mumbling through sealed skin.

The pair reached the door. Without *it* having to touch anything, the door sharply parted. The pneumatic air hissed as the two leaves opened to the void outside. The train bent to his will. The deafening rattle and roll of the bogeys and the wheels grinding against the rails and axles below filled the cabin. The train rounded a curve, and the

whistle blew, far ahead at the head of the train. You hear the sound of a bridge, as the train began to thunder over the large hollow spaces between the rails. You vaguely hear water outside, a river.

The bindings that hold you begin to give! You gain a sense of hope and fight harder and harder to break free. You need to! As a teacher, you *need* to help this student.

Forcefully he lifts her by her shirt collar and hangs her at the end of his extended arm, dangling outside the train car with the dark and never ending black void, its infinite expanse of unknown oblivion below her.

The metal bars and springs that hold you break! And you free yourself from the bench! You quickly rise to your feet! The train passes a red signal light, a solo beacon of illumination in the supernatural darkness of what you still want to believe is actually Okayama Prefecture. The illumination provides a very brief look at things concealed in shadow, as it flew along the length of the passing train.

“I’ll see you on the next last train.”

The student screams, a gut wrenching scream of pure terror as the only witness of what the conductor, of what *it*, looked like.

The being let go. Her screams climbed in pitch as she dropped from the train into the blackness. You dive for the deck, not caring that the conductor stood right there, sliding across the floor towards the open door, reaching into the void with only hope that you weren’t too late! Your left shoulder slams into the corner of the door, but you feel your hand grip hers! You caught her!

“Hang on!” You assure her, “I got you!” All the while she is dangling dangerously out the side of a speeding train.

You strain with all your might. In the moment, you regret never getting serious about going to the gym. You remember all the times

your own students beat you in an arm wrestling competition. But not this time. This time will be different! You begin to slowly pull her up! This time you will prevail!

You're seated in your seat, facing the front of the train.

Your head feels like it had been busted open with a hammer. Again you feel delirious and nauseous, but somehow even worse. Now your body hurts all over, as if you had been beaten with steel and concrete. Your ribcage feels like it has collapsed, and you can't feel the side of your face! You can barely breathe. Whatsmore, your heart sinks. You've failed.

"Everyone has a reason they're on this train," the mummy, dressed like a salaryman, next to you manages to say.

"You just haven't come to terms with yours yet," the other silent-until-now passenger directly across from you adds,

The outboard door closes behind you and you can hear the sound of approaching footsteps. The train rattled on, and the girl was long gone. You failed.

It comes to a stop beside your grouping of benches. You can't say anything, but you question, why are you doing this to us? What is this train?

"This is YOUR last train. You were told not to run for trains, there were many warnings, and you didn't listen. Now, here you are."

The conductor began to start his next and final walk of the train, but before leaving he paused for one final remark.

"I even told you, 'you should spend the night on a park bench.'"

The train's horn sounded once again, echoing into the night a final time. The train dove into another tunnel on the mountain side, not emerging from the other side.

The girl student's eyes shot open. She had felt the shock of the ice cold water for a moment and thought she would drown in the darkness. Now the bright lights of Platform One blinded her. She was set on a stretcher being ready to be taken by paramedics to the city hospital.

“Daijoubu desu ka? Ima, atama wa dou?” Are you okay?
How's your head?

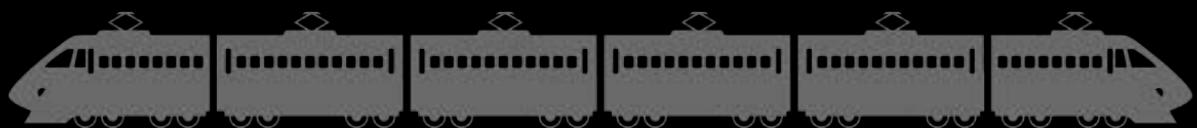
“What happened?” she asks.

There was commotion at the platform, but she managed to catch a glimpse of the clock. **11:45PM**. There were crowds of railway and emergency staff, and shocked passengers gathered around a stopped passenger train which would have been the last train to Fukuyama. A curtain covered a sizable area beside the stopped train, blocking whoever was laying there from view. But a long trail of blood extended down the edge of the platform leading up to where the train had come to a halt.

“A passenger was caught and dragged by the departing train,” the paramedic informed. “He unfortunately collided into you on the platform, and you fell and hit your head...well, you both did. It wasn't looking good for a while, but you are stable now. We'll bring you to the hospital to get you properly checked by a doctor. Do you have your ID with you?”

“Yes, I have it.” The student reached for her skirt pocket to find her school ID, but paused feeling something under her and instead reached for that.

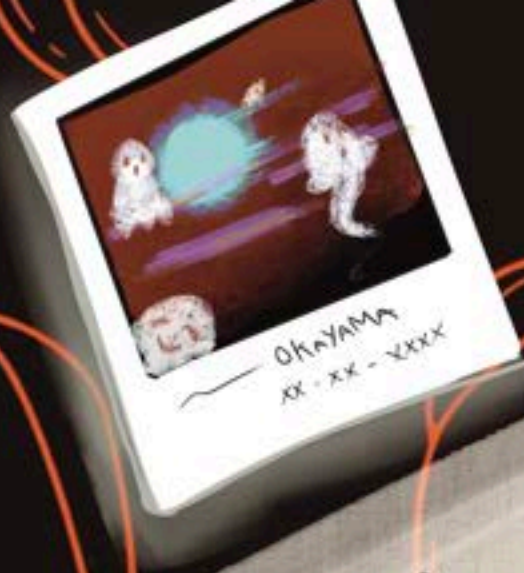
It was a white glove. The same that were worn by train conductors.



LAST TRAIN

A story by Ryan Calpito

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Want to be part of
The Peach Cobbler!?!?



If you want to
contribute photos or
stories please contact
us at
newsletter@okayama-ajet.com
OR
okayama.rose@gmail.com



more info available on www.okayama-ajet.com

UPCOMING AJET EVENTS



YOU ARE INVITED TO A

HALLOWEEN

Party

SATURDAY
OCTOBER 26, 2024



MORE INFO
COMING SOON

Events in Okayama

OCTOBER 2024

森の芸術祭 - Forest Festival of the Arts Okayama



Date: September 28th - November 24th

More Info: [日本語](#) [English](#)

Location(s): Nagi, Tsuyama, Kagimono, Maniwa and Niimi

Shuttle bus from Okayama Station → Nagi

available from Tuesday - Sunday

One-way ¥900 Roundtrip ¥3300

Time: Varies by venue

Admission: Festival Passport (1 Entry per Venue): ¥3000

Single Venue Admission: ¥700 * unless otherwise stated by facility

奈義国際フェスティバル - Nagi International Festival

Date: October 6th

More Info: [日本語](#) & [English](#)

Location: Manabi Square Niimi Large Hall

Time: 10:00 - 14:00

Admission: Free



秋のおかやま桃太郎まつり - Autumn Okayama Momotaro Festival



Date: October 12th and 13th

More Info: [日本語](#)

Location: Ishiyama Park and Okayama Castle Area

Time: 10:00 - 17:00

Admission: Free viewing

全肉祭in岡山 - Meat Festival



Date: October 12th, 13th, 14th

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Event Square in front of Okayama Dome

Time: 09:00 - 21:00

Admission: Free

Bring cash if you want to try lots of different meat

ドイツの森 ミュージック花火大会 - Musical Fireworks (German Forest)

Date: October 13th

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Okayama Forest Park

Time: 19:30 - 19:45

Admission: Park Admission; Adult - ¥1500

Kids (4-Elementary Student) - ¥1000

Dogs - ¥500



OTHER

テラウィン - ～ Otera de Halloween ～



Date: October 20th

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Saidaiji Temple

Time: 10:00 - 19:30

Admission: Free

*There is a costume contest, if you'd like to participate please sign up in advance [here](#)

International Meet Up Party 「せかつく」

Date: October 5th

More info: [Instagram](#)

Location: Matador (Bar in Okayama City)

Time: 20:00 - 22:00

Admission:

Men ~ ¥4000

All you can drink and buffet style food included

Women ~ ¥3500



More events and info available on our website

<https://okayama-ajet.com/upcoming-events>

September Answer Key



September, find words relating to the month as well as natural disasters. Stay safe out there!

Write the English translation (and/or kanji) of the words below and find them in the wordsearch above.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ① つぎみ → moon viewing 月見 | ⑥ うさぎ → rabbit |
| ② しぜんさいがい → natural disaster 自然災害 | ⑦ さく (flower) → chrysanthemum 菊 |
| ③ くがつ → September 九月 | ⑧ まんげつ → full moon 満月 |
| ④ じしん → earthquake 地震 | ⑨ ひじょうぐち → emergency exit 非常口 |
| ⑤ たいふう → typhoon 台風 | ⑩ じこしょうかい → self-introduction 自己紹介 |

ANSWER KEY

Difficulty: Medium

Monthly Sudoku

SEPTEMBER 2024

6	5	3	9	4	1	2	7	8
1	7	9	3	8	2	4	5	6
2	4	8	5	6	7	9	3	1
3	9	1	6	7	8	5	4	2
4	8	2	1	3	5	7	6	9
5	6	7	4	2	9	8	1	3
9	3	4	2	5	6	1	8	7
8	2	6	7	1	4	3	9	5
7	1	5	8	9	3	6	2	4

Fill in the puzzle so that every row across, every column down and every 9 by 9 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

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October Word Search



October, beautiful spooky season is upon us in this wordsearch focuses on all things Autumn and Halloween related. Write the English translation (and/or kanji) of the words below and find them in the wordsearch above.

① しゅうかく →

② あき →

③ まじょ →

④ くろねこ →

⑤ じゅうがつ →

⑥ こうよう →

⑦ おばけやしき →

⑧ くも →

⑨ かぼちゃ →

⑩ ほうき →

Difficulty: Hard

Monthly Sudoku

OCTOBER 2024

5					2			
			4	5	7	3		1
	7	4	3	6				9
		9		1				2
		3	6		8			
1	2			4				
4			8					
			2	7				
6			1	3	5			4

Fill in the puzzle so that every row across, every column down and every 9 by 9 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

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