

物の哀れ (mono-no-aware):

The Ornaments of a Life Taken Down

A fraying yellow and brown belt drooped over a copper mantelpiece, flaunting its woven daffodils and tiny embroidered Swiss flags across a field of sable. A red border spiked with white partitioned the fur from the hallowed emblems, separating the sacred from the warm.

Richard stared at the... belt? sash? placemat? At some point, it must have meant something to someone, but now it faded under the fluorescent lights of Balmain Cash Traders. *Chelsea Zum, 18 Geburtstag* was engraved on a small rusty plaque near the base. He knew enough conversational German from his days teaching in Zurich to assume it had been Chelsea's 18th birthday present and he cynically hoped this had been day of her escape from the kind of parents who would, rather than giving a car or a phone or even a dress, say, *here, my dear Chelsea, a patriotic belt!*

He was crouched under a ceiling of dangling fishing rods, surrounded by faded dusty knick-knacks: A framed black and gold photograph of the Balmain Tigers from the 80s seemed to lean forward. A silver bracelet marked with a glowing ball beckoned. To his left, a pink lily swam in a clear vase, fighting desperately to spread its sweet fragrance against the stale air that enveloped the pawn shop.

Richard slid the glass slider open, and reached towards the belt/sash/placemat, wondering whether the warmth it had once *allegedly* provided to a young Swiss girl still remained. But the hardened fur jabbed into his fingertips. Had it ever been soft? Had Chelsea ever appreciated such a baffling gift? He pulled at the belt to remove it from the copper mantelpiece and much to his surprise, a bell, hidden beneath the leather hide, reverberated through the room. He hurriedly reached under the curvature of the bell and gripped the clapper with the kind of force that would have castrated a Scotsman.

"Can I help you sir?" The pawn shop owner appeared as timidly as his question.

"Um, yes actually, this belt isn't like one I've seen before," Richard replied.

"Oh, no, a common mistake" *Was it?* "This is a cowbell - you tie it around your cow's neck so when it goes out to graze, it jingles away its location."

"So, Chelsea would be-"

"The most prized and elderly cow in Switzerland, I'm sure, with the best cowbell in Sydney!"

"Right, a cowbell." He wondered whether he had ever considered what a cowbell *actually* was before this moment.

"This beauty goes for three hundred and seventy-five dollars," the clerk added.

“Three seventy-five...” Richard raised his eyebrows and then shrugged. “Well, curiosities sell for curious amounts to curious people,” he said, unclipping his leather wallet.

Three hundred and seventy-five dollars.

For a cowbell.

Such is the price of a memory.

As the bespectacled salesman trotted towards the register, Richard continued to stroll down the aisle, edging his fingertips along each panel of glass. He wondered what it was that made people pawn off their belongings, but then he remembered his childhood toys at his family home in Wentworth Falls and the hundreds of dollars he could have made from them. Perhaps he would go back there and turn his passion for pawning into a business. He was nearing the frosted sliding doors of the shop, where *Gang of Youths* was letting each entrant down easy through a glitching speaker - it paid to keep up to date with what the kids were listening to. Tie Romantic literature to *Taylor Swift* or *Weezer*, and the LIT101 kids would eat right out of the palm of your hand. It wasn't as easy when you were teaching Japanese literature. The crossovers weren't so obvious. Richard wondered what each of the students in LIT309 would say about the objects staring at him.