



## On the Beach

In one of the introductions to this A Story A Week series, I use the phrase "to provide pleasant light reading" when describing the stories. I have no intention of moving away from that goal at all, and never use my writing to try and 'preach' to people, or even to express strong opinions about things. After reading enough of these stories, people generally come to learn what kind of a person I am, and there is thus no need at all for me to be more overt than that. Occasionally though - very occasionally - a topic bubbles to the top of my list that is difficult to ignore ...

I spent the day at the seaside yesterday, visiting the small isolated cove that is the location for the woodblock print I am currently making. Usually when I visit that place, I take my tent and other camping supplies with me and stay overnight, but this was just a quick trip to take some photographs to help me work out the print design. It takes me just over four hours to get to the cove, using a bus, five trains, and then another bus, and over the course of the journey, I move farther and farther away from the built-up areas of Tokyo, until I arrive at the tiny fishing village from which I can walk to the isolated beach spot.

Now when you make such a journey from Tokyo out to the country, the view outside the train window changes as you go. The height of the buildings decreases, the built-up density gradually decreases, and of course, concrete is gradually replaced by greenery. But something else also changes, and the farther one gets from town, the more vivid is the change - the amount of garbage strewn around increases dramatically as you go.

In our urban areas, there is next to no garbage visible anywhere; nearly all householders carefully separate and wrap their garbage for collection, businesses have their garbage and unwanted materials taken care of, and the municipalities are very strict about maintaining the local environment. None of this seems to be happening out in the country. There is garbage everywhere one looks, and not just small papers scattered on the ground, but all manner of larger items too: broken bathtubs, old cars, bags of miscellaneous junk, and a great deal of discarded industrial material.

I know your first reaction to this will be, "That isn't garbage from country people, it's from city people who drive out there to throw it away!", but that is not true. Of course, out on isolated back roads in the country, there is indeed a great deal of that sort of junk discarded illegally, but the garbage I am talking about has been discarded by the householders and businesses themselves ... on their own property! Small factories are surrounded by mounds of discarded stuff, and those bathtubs and cars I mentioned are in peoples' yards. Nobody seems to care about keeping their own environment clean. And the fishing village (and its port) was the worst offender of all, and I felt that I had moved back in time, to an era when none of us had much of an environmental ethic, and just tossed everything aside when it was no longer needed.

And my cove? Yes, very sadly this too was an absolute mess, and I was hesitant to even walk along the sand barefoot, out of fear of cutting my feet on shards of glass or twisted metal among the heaps of tangled fishing gear and plastic packaging that litter the entire beach.

If you live in town, and have come to develop the feeling that we are doing a pretty good job of keeping our environment clean these days, it's time you took a little journey ...

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