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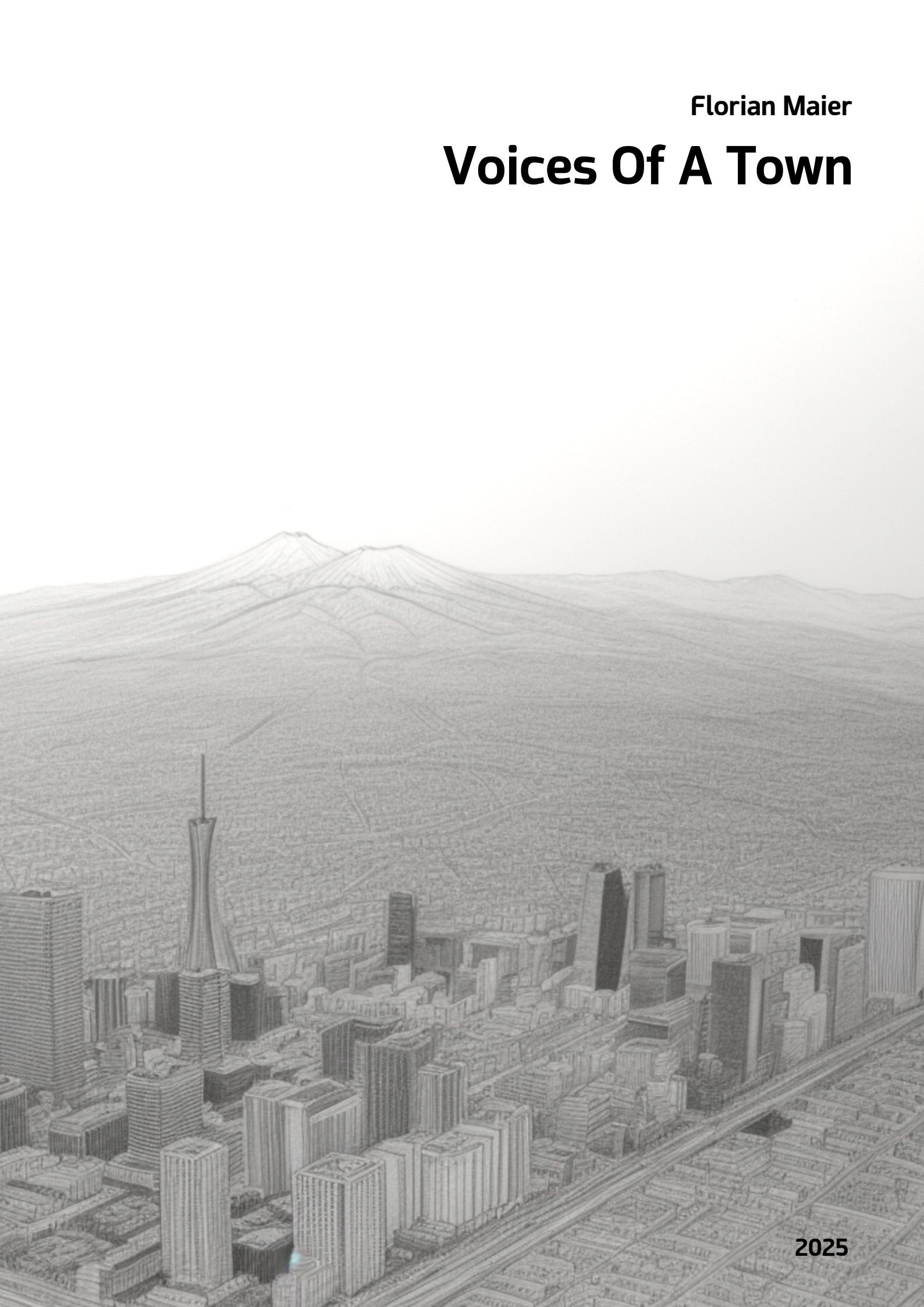
Voices Of A Town



2025

Lines

1

Kaito Mochizuki wasn't the kind of boy who stood out just by being there. In class, he usually sat in the third row, off to the side, where the light from the window fell gently on the floor but never directly on him.
When asked a question, he answered politely—but briefly.
He rarely raised his hand.
Not out of shyness, but because his thoughts were often a step ahead of the topic in the room.

Sapporo Municipal Maeda Kita Junior High School was big enough to feel a little anonymous, at least if you were a student.
Between class blocks and the bell for recess, life moved through the hallways like a never-ending river of voices and shoes on linoleum.
Kaito was part of that current, but he had learned to move through it quietly, mostly unnoticed.

This Wednesday, tucked between school notebooks and a worn pencil case, was a sheet of paper in his backpack.
He'd been carrying it for several days—not to show it,
but simply to have it with him.

The drawing showed a young woman in a clearing at Maeda Forest Park,
her gaze gently lowered, a sheet of music in her hand.
She had been singing there,
and Kaito, who had been sitting nearby, daydreaming,
had heard her—
and drawn her.

He didn't quite know why he had done it.
It had just happened—like a reflex,
like trying to hold on to an echo before it fades.

The lines weren't perfect,
but they were true.
He had captured her posture,
the quiet around her,
the way she had sung not for someone,
but from within herself.

Now he carried the picture with him.
To class,
into break time,

on the way home.
He didn't show it to anyone.
It felt too personal.
Too raw.

Until today.

Because that morning, it was the art teacher, Mrs. Yamaguchi,
who saw the drawing as he pulled out his notebooks at the beginning of class,
and the picture slipped out onto the desk.

Kaito tried to slide it back quickly,
but she gently stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"Mochizuki-kun," she said, her eyes on the drawing,
"did you make this?"

Kaito hesitated, then slowly nodded.
She was kind, but observant—
one of those teachers who noticed things before they were spoken.
Because of that, most students treated her with a kind of automatic reverence.

"May I take a closer look?" she asked.
Not with pressure or authority—
just genuine interest.

And after a moment that felt far longer than it needed to,
Kaito handed her the drawing—hesitantly.

She took it gently in both hands and studied it for a long time.

Finally, she said,
"This is something special.
Would you let me display it in the hallway?
I think it could reach someone."

Kaito didn't know what to say.
But he nodded shyly,
because something inside him said:
Yes.

And so something began—
quietly,
unremarkably,
but undeniably.

2

By the next morning, Kaito's drawing was on public display—
in the long main hallway beyond the school's front entrance on the ground floor.

Mrs. Yamaguchi hadn't placed it first in the row,
but its presence stood out clearly between a charcoal drawing by an eighth-grader and a minimalist landscape.
It was where the drawing hung that gave it weight—
because the other works, while technically sound, lacked any real voice.

To Kaito, both of them felt empty.
They were fine, yes—flawlessly executed, even—
but they had no soul.
No depth.

What bothered him more than that, though,
was the fact that his teacher had written his name
on a small adhesive label just below the picture.

Not long after she had pinned it to the wall,
he began to notice reactions—
people stopping to look, or at least pausing.

Most students and teachers passed by with their heads down between classes, lost in thought, unreachable.
But some did stop and study the drawings.
And that, in turn, led to more and more students recognizing him—
and asking about the picture.

"Is it true? You really drew that?"
"I love the scene with the woman—it's beautiful."
"How did you do it?"

Over the next few days, he was peppered with these kinds of questions.
And he had to admit:
they both irritated and pleased him.

He didn't like being in the spotlight—
but the attention that came with the drawing
felt strangely good.
And right.

Even Daiki Sugimoto, the class's math genius and notorious show-off,
openly admitted his admiration.

“Gotta hand it to you—that’s pretty impressive.”

Kaito was quietly surprised at the kinds of responses his drawing had stirred.
The image had spoken to him after he finished it,
but he had never imagined that it might reach anyone else.

As an introverted person,
he had long since learned to keep things to himself—
especially anything like emotion.

But what surprised him most of all
was the way some of the teachers reacted, too.
Mr. Ando, the upper-grade chemistry teacher, praised the raw depth of the scene.
Ms. Takahashi admired his sense for detail.
And even old Mr. Inoue, the gruff school janitor, pulled him aside during break and gave him a long, appraising look.

The janitor was known for being a bit of a curmudgeon,
so Kaito wasn’t sure what to expect.

“You’re the boy who drew the singing woman, right?”
the old man asked, stern-eyed.

“Yes, Inoue-san,” Kaito replied quickly,
avoiding direct eye contact.

“Come with me.”

They walked through the hallway toward the main entrance,
to the spot where Kaito’s drawing hung.

The janitor looked at it and said nothing.
He just breathed in and out a few times—
loudly, like a walrus, Kaito thought.

“Your name’s Kaito, isn’t it?” the man finally said after about a minute.
“Mrs. Yamaguchi told me.”

Kaito nodded awkwardly.

“Well, Kaito,” the old man began,
gesturing toward the drawing,
“what you made here is truly something.”

He traced parts of the picture in the air with his finger as he spoke.

“These aren’t just lines.
You captured her soul.

That's a gift, boy."

Kaito didn't know what to say,
so he simply mumbled a quiet thank you.

"Maybe you think,
'He's just the janitor.'"
Kaito shook his head emphatically,
but the man only grinned.

"I was young once too, you know.
I would've thought that, if I were you."

He gave a rough, rasping laugh.

"I may just be the janitor, and I'll admit I don't know much about art,
but *this*—"
he raised his hand again toward the drawing,
"this is something special."

He turned away from Kaito,
studied the image for a long moment,
and murmured almost to himself:

"You can feel this.
That's a gift.
Don't lose it."

Without another glance at Kaito,
he walked slowly down the hallway.

"These aren't just lines, young man," he called over his shoulder.
"They're something much more."

3

The janitor's words stayed with Kaito for a long time.
The reactions from those who had seen the drawing continued to surprise him
—
but they also gave him confidence.

He began to question whether his quiet way of being was really the right one.
What if the others were right?
What if he really *was* talented—
and his drawings could reach people?

Kaito had drawn so much already—
but he had never thought of showing his sketches to anyone.
Until now.

The next day, he brought a portfolio to school.
He didn't quite know why—
but something had encouraged him to take some of his drawings out of the closet and carry them in a protective folder to school.

At the end of the school day, he went to see his art teacher.
He knocked on the door of the art room on the first floor and stepped in carefully.

"Mrs. Yamaguchi?"

The teacher was in the adjacent supply room, putting away a few materials, and looked up as he entered.
She smiled warmly.

"Mochizuki-kun! What a nice surprise. What can I do for you?"

"Well..." Kaito hesitated.
"The drawing you hung up in the hallway the other day... it's been getting reactions."

She placed the last box on a shelf and turned to him, giving him her full attention.
Her expression was curious, open.

"What kind of reactions?"

"They were... good ones.
Encouragement.
Support."

Her face lit up.
"That's wonderful, Kaito! I told you it would touch someone."

Kaito held out his portfolio like a shield.
"I was wondering... if you'd maybe take a look at a few more of my drawings.
I don't know if they're any good."

For a moment, he felt foolish for even asking—
but within a second, she replied:

"I'd be honored."

She sat down at her desk, and Kaito handed her the folder.

She carefully looked through some of his sketches—
an old man reading a book,
a family spending time together at a playground in the park,
a boy cheering at a baseball game—
and similar scenes, all capturing people in moments of quiet emotion.

Then she turned to him.

“These are very special, Mochizuki-kun.
You have a gift for capturing feeling in images.”

Kaito felt his cheeks and ears grow warm.

“Do you really think so?”

“I do.
You should absolutely keep pursuing this ability.
And I’d love to support you.
If you’d like, you’re welcome to stay after school and work on your drawings with the materials here.”

4

Kaito felt like he was walking on air.
The conversation with his art teacher—
and all the encouragement from the past few days—
had stirred something in him he had never noticed before:
a new curiosity about what his drawings could evoke in others.

It was a feeling he had never confronted.
He had simply never imagined that anyone would care about what he created.

But now, having seen how people reacted to his work,
he felt seen.
And understood.

On his way out of the school building,
he walked down the hallway that led to the exit—
past the art display, past his drawing.

But this time, he wasn’t alone.

Standing in front of the picture was a man Kaito rarely saw outside official school events:
Principal Takeshi Naruse.

He stood motionless,
hands clasped behind his back,
his gaze fixed on the drawing.

As Kaito approached, he hesitated.
Naruse seemed different than usual—
quieter.
More vulnerable.

Kaito only knew him as a reserved, almost distant man,
someone who rarely smiled and always kept a careful distance.

“Good evening, Principal,” Kaito said politely.
No response.
Naruse didn’t move.

Only when Kaito was about to pass him did he catch sight of the man’s face—
and he saw the tears.
They ran silently down his cheeks,
reflected in the lenses of his glasses,
which had fogged slightly.

Kaito stopped instinctively,
wanting to say something—
but no words came.

He didn’t know what touched him more:
the fact that his drawing could move someone this deeply—
or that someone like Naruse could be moved at all.

He considered asking something.
Maybe staying.
Maybe offering an explanation.

But something held him back—
perhaps respect,
perhaps shyness,
or maybe just the quiet knowledge
that this moment belonged to the man alone.
He walked quickly toward the exit,
stepped into the pale afternoon light,
and pulled his jacket tighter around him.

But something inside him had changed.
He had learned that his lines didn’t just create images—
they could touch hearts.