

GLOBAL HOBO



The author of this piece, Olly, did a writing workshop with Global Hobo in Japan. Olly is a 21 year old autistic female. Her article was written to subtly demonstrate the parallels between the life of someone who is neurodiverse to that of a foreigner.

ALIENATION

It's strange.

You arrive to a new land, there are people to greet you.

At first you don't understand; in fact, you don't understand for quite a while.

But speaking your mother tongue never did you any good anyway. Communication was always hard for you.

They say things with their hidden contexts and words you haven't learnt. They pause for a moment and repeat themselves. Slowly, and with purpose. Rotating words until something sticks and the meanings meet the sounds. You're relieved that you understand, you feel like you have a bit more control. You worry that the process to reach where you are is too tedious for your companions.

But it's okay.

You're not one of them.

They understand.

Their world is a lot. Bright lights and busy sounds and it *smells*. Not necessarily bad, just... different. It's not what you're used to.

Constantly moving, constantly seeing, constantly hearing, smelling, learning.

There's always something else, something new, that demands your attention whether there's anything to give or not.

There's a way to do things here. Your mind never gets a chance to *rest*. You must keep up, lest you be seen as rude.

You are constantly aware that you're existing somewhere *different* by the gentle fingertips of surrounding stimuli.

It never feels like home. They ask you if you're okay. Do you need to rest? It might be too much for one day.

But it's okay.

You're not one of them.

They understand.

You're offered foods and drinks; local delicacies, they say. Try it!

So, you do.

Some are good. Some... don't quite agree with you. It's not necessarily bad, just... different. It's almost by instinct that your body rejects it. "This isn't for *us*," your insides say. They laugh at your expression.

But it's okay.

You're not one of them.

They understand.

There's still the odd glance between them. Unnecessary questions and assumptions. You know that you're different and you know it's apparent.

But you've been here a while now.

What was unspoken was learnt through mimicry. You do your best to communicate and even sometimes succeed. Every moment without failure is a moment rejoiced.

You've worked hard. This much must have been hard, right? You've done so well!

You feel loved. You return to your home with a warmth in your heart, kindling the fire in your eyes as you prepare to face the map once more.

It's strange.

You arrive to a familiar land. A known land. To home.

However, it doesn't feel like it. You are just as foreign here as you were before. No cheap tourist t-shirts can announce your difference here. It's something much deeper. Interwoven into your being since you were born.

There's no one to greet you. Why would you need it?

Still, there are things you don't understand. They say things with contexts hidden in friendly alphabets. You receive confusion in response to inquisition. This is your home, isn't it? How could you not get it? The words might be repeated (more often not), but here, the tone is disdainful. You must be stupid.

It's not okay.

You're supposed to be one of them.

Why don't you understand?

Your home is a lot. Bright lights and busy sounds. At least the smell is familiar.

There's always something else that demands your attention whether there's anything to give or not.

There are things to do here. Your mind never gets a chance to *rest*. You must keep up, lest you be seen as lazy.

You are constantly aware that you're existing by the grasping fingertips of surrounding stimuli.

It never feels like home. It should. You can't escape.

It's not okay.

You're supposed to be one of them.

Why don't you understand?

You're offered food and drinks; your mother made them, they say, take it.

So, you do.

Some are good. Some... don't quite agree with you. It's not necessarily bad, just... different. It's almost by instinct that your body rejects it. "This isn't for *us*," your insides say.

They scowl at your expression. How rude of you. Your mother slaved away in the kitchen to feed you; don't you know? You're not allowed to finish until you're done.

It's not okay.

You're supposed to be one of them.

Why don't you understand?

In your home country, what makes you different isn't as blatant as a change in skin tone or accent.

There is no visible sign, no excuse for your behaviour, no ignorance to fall back on.

Across the ocean you're fine.

There it's just because you're foreign.

There's still those who will try to take advantage of you or deliberately berate you for things that were never taught to you. But a majority will tell at a glance: you're not from here. It's not your fault; how could you have known?

Those secrets, those unspoken laws that are built upon generations, blooming into an elaborate and beautiful culture.

Back home you should just know these things.

Back home there is no foreign help desk. Not for your kind of foreign.

Maybe this isn't your home. You look to the stars and strain for recognition.

If you're going to feel this way, you might as well do it somewhere where the reason is something physical like your nationality instead of something like neurology.

Neither you can control, so why is one more acceptable than the other?