

Ilya Pushkin

# Let's Not Talk about it with Anybody



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Let's Not Talk about it with Anybody  
(New Japanese tales)

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## To Get the Blue Bird

When you reach your fifties, your kind fairy has to hurry to grant your wishes, because at this age all available wishes have become fewer and fewer, and to fulfill them becomes more and more difficult.

But I achieved my most important wish: to get to Japan. I really had two reasons for going there: to publish my book of poems in Japanese and to end my loneliness, to have a last chance at romance with a pretty Japanese woman. (After a prolonged correspondence on the Internet we felt that we could be happy together).

There was a third reason: I loved Japan, even without ever seeing it. I was convinced that I could be happy only there. Everyone has his own paradise and I felt that my paradise was to be found in Japan.

At that time I lived in Israel, in Jerusalem, and worked as a doctor. This was very far from my dream. My teacher of Japanese was Sadako-san – a small, old Japanese lady, who lived in my neighborhood. Once, some years ago, I had helped her carry her heavy bags from the market and she had invited me to a “tea ceremony” at her apartment. We began to visit each other and, gradually, we became good friends. Our meetings eventually turned into Japanese lessons and that was how my love for Japan began.

When Sadako-san heard that I intended to go to Japan, she said to me: “May I ask you to do something for me?

There are many little old shops in Asakusa – an old district of Tokyo. Could you please buy me a fan from there with a picture of a blue bird from the Edo period? Of course, I will pay for it...” Her request interested me, and I agreed.

I arrived in Tokyo and stayed at the hotel “Smile of Tokyo” in Asakusa. When I breathed in the air of Japan, my lungs were filled with happiness. I think that the air in Japan must surely contain molecules of happiness...

After a short rest in the hotel I decided to try and carry out Sadako-san’s wish. I left the hotel and started walking down the narrow streets of Asakusa. I visited many little old souvenir shops, one after the other, but didn’t find a fan with a picture of a blue bird. As I passed near one small insignificant shop, I saw a “maneki-neko” in the window – the beckoning cat with a raised paw – the traditional lucky charm so often displayed in the older traditional small shops in Japan. But this “maneki-neko” looked at me with very strange eyes which seemed to compel me to enter the shop. I couldn’t resist it and I went inside. It was a regular shop with an old saleswoman but nothing of any interest. I quickly looked around and left.

The next day I continued to look for the fan in Asakusa, but didn’t find it and once more I found myself near the same little shop, with the same strange stare from the “maneki-neko”, which dragged me inside the shop again. I found neither the fan, nor anything interesting. And the old saleswoman followed me with her fixed and rigid gaze.

On the third day I passed by that shop again by chance. Of course the “maneki-neko” drew me inside once more. This time the old saleswoman was absent. In her place there was a teenage girl. She greeted me with the

usual “Irrasshaimase!” I decided to examine the shop thoroughly. Since I had already come there three times, I felt there must be some reason for it. Maybe there was something important for me in this shop. Perhaps, the fan was waiting for me on one of the shelves. For a long time I searched all the corners and then, on the farthest and highest shelf, I saw a little figurine of a fox-cub made of porcelain. An old Chinese piece of work, I thought.

The fox-cub looked alive, and I couldn’t take my eyes off it. At last I decided to buy the figurine. “How much?” I asked the salesgirl.

“Actually, I don’t know, but I think, that my granny won’t scold me, if I sell it for “ichiman yen,” she answered.

I was surprised. “Ichiman yen” is one hundred dollars. I hadn’t planned on buying such an expensive toy. But the fox-cub was so sweet that I couldn’t let go of it. I felt that I absolutely had to buy this cute baby-fox. So I bought it.

As I was returning to my hotel, I noticed that a young Japanese woman was following me. It was strange, because at my age young women don’t usually follow me. Perhaps I was mistaken and she was going about her own affairs or following somebody else...

The next day I walked along the streets of Ueno – in downtown Tokyo. I took many pictures of “Ameyouko” - the biggest market in Ueno. I ate some very tasty Japanese food in a restaurant there. Afterwards I visited some museums in beautiful Ueno park.

I was tired after such an interesting and intense day. In the lobby of the hotel, I saw the old saleswoman from

the shop where I had bought the figurine of the fox-cub. She approached me, greeted me with a light bow and said: "Excuse me, please, but yesterday my granddaughter sold you something which wasn't for sale. Take this hundred dollars and give me back the statuette, please."

She tried to give me the money.

I didn't want to return my fox-cub to her, of course.

"I am sorry, I like this porcelain figure very much and I don't intend to return it."

She took out a second band of hundred dollar bills from her bag:

"Please, take two hundred dollars. That figurine isn't for sale. Give it back to me, please."

"I don't make a living selling fox-cubs," I answered. "This is mine. I won't return it to you."

She took out more bills from her bag.

"Here is a thousand dollars. Take it, please. You can get wonderfully entertained with this money in Kabuki-chou..."

I began to feel angry.

"Our conversation is over, lady. Goodbye." I turned to the elevator, but heard behind me:

"Sometimes, Tokyo can be a dangerous city for foreigners. Take care..."

It was a threat, but I wasn't frightened by threats. I entered the elevator without glancing back and went up to my floor.

When I opened the door of my room, a real live fox jumped out and escaped down a corridor and around the corner!

Of course, I was very surprised by this. Nothing had been disturbed in my room. Everything was in its place.

I hurried to check my figurine. The fox-cub was in its place in a cupboard. But something had changed in the expression on the cub's sweet muzzle. It was smiling.

The next morning I had two important things to do: to meet with my pen pal (her name was Izumi) and to visit a publisher, "The Early Star", which intended to publish my book. When I left my room, I put the fox-cub into my breast pocket. I had an appointment to meet with Izumi in the middle of Ueno station in front of the information office "Midori." I bought a beautiful bouquet of roses and waited for her at our appointed meeting place, filled with happy hopes and anticipation.

When she arrived, I didn't recognize her. She was much more beautiful than in her picture on the Internet. This is the usual situation with Japanese women. I kissed her lightly and we went to the Hard Rock Cafe – a special place for dates and first meetings. She looked beautiful, but my happy dreams were soon shattered.

"Do you intend to marry a Japanese woman?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, this is my goal. That is why I have come here. I very much want to have a Japanese wife."

"But how will you support a family? Where will you work?"

"It's not so important for me. I will try to find some job to earn more money..."

"Some job? You don't know what you are saying. You don't have a license to work here as a doctor, and in any other

work you won't earn enough to support a family. Do you intend to live on my salary and in my apartment?"

I didn't have an answer.

She stood up and put my flowers and some money (perhaps, for her coffee) on the table in front of me.

"Good bye, mister clever gaijin! Look for some other stupid Japanese woman, who will agree to keep you. I have not worked hard all my life for this."

She left the café without glancing back. I was absolutely crushed. Why did I come to Japan? But I didn't have time to be sad and think about it: I had to hurry to the publisher. I left the café and entered the train station. The publisher was in Shinjuku, far from Ueno, and I had to travel there by train.

When I entered the streets of Shinjuku, I noticed a strange blue bird on the road in front of me. I had never seen a bird like this in my life. Its behavior was most peculiar: the bird flew from place to place in front of me and then looked back at me. It seemed as if it was showing me the way and was calling me to follow it. Without hesitation I followed it. The bird led me to a simple, single storey wooden house and flew through the partially open door. I entered after the bird.

I was very surprised and couldn't believe my eyes: in the middle of a spacious room my Japanese teacher Sadokosan was kneeling down and performing the tea ceremony! Without looking at me and without interrupting the tea ceremony, she said:

“I know, you don’t understand what’s going on and you have many questions, but now I have time to answer only one of them. What do you want to ask me most of all?” I remembered how a fox had jumped out from my room in the hotel.

“What was a fox doing in my room in the hotel?” I asked.  
“Your question is a good one.” Sadako-san answered. “The fox was nursing her baby in your room.”

“Was nursing her baby....!” I didn’t understand anything. The situation was becoming more and more complicated. Sadoko-san put a cup of tea on the wooden desk in front of her, stood up and turned to me.

“If you want to publish your book, you have to hurry to the publisher. The editor has to go away now.”

She gave me a little violet-colored sack:

“Take this “o-mamori,” please. If the situation at the publisher gets difficult, press it in your hand.”

I knew that “o-mamori” is an amulet that would protect me. I thanked her and hurried to the publisher.

The editor was a small bald man with an unpleasant face. He was sitting in front of a big table, and when I entered his office, he didn’t even greet me. He said:

“I have read your poems. I’ve never read such terrible writing in my life. These are absolutely not poems. You don’t know what poems are. You don’t know Japanese either. It’s best for you to return to Israel immediately and not write again, not poems and not in Japanese. Where did I put them?” He began to look for my poems on the table. “I can’t find them. I threw them in the garbage, I think. I am sorry, but I am very busy now. Don’t disturb me please. Return to Israel.” he repeated, and I left his office.

If after meeting with Izumi I was depressed, now I was absolutely destroyed. I decided to go to the Sumida-River and jump in..., but suddenly I remembered about “o-mamori” of Sadako-san. Really, I don’t believe in amulets, but all the same I touched it my pocket. Suddenly the bald editor ran out of his office:

“Oh, excuse me, “shitsurei shimashita!” I simply confused you with another poet. Your poems are really great. We have decided to publish them next month. You are a genius. I have never read such wonderful poems! I have never seen a “gaijin”, who knows Japanese so well. I congratulate you! I think every Japanese person will be happy to read your poems!”

After these words I left the publisher, dancing on air. I was absolutely ecstatic! In this mood I felt I wanted to visit Meiji-Jingu – a very significant place in Tokyo. Meiji-Jingu is a beautiful temple with a wonderful park surrounding it. It was built at the beginning of the last century and was devoted to the Japanese Emperor Meiji. I thought I would like to take a walk there being in such a happy mood. I boarded a train and went to Harajuku-Station.

When I reached Harajuku, I felt something moving in my breast pocket. I put my hand into my pocket and found a live fox-cub there! It was warm and moved about in my pocket! I was very surprised and didn’t know what to do, but I left the station with the crowd of passengers. In front of the station I suddenly saw that young woman, who followed me when I bought the fox-cub. She approached me with an imploring face, and said with a bow:

“I earnestly ask you to allow me to feed my baby. He

hasn't eaten anything since this morning and he is very hungry now."

I didn't understand her, but suddenly the fox-cub in my pocket moved again, climbed out and jumped into the woman's arms. It became a human baby and began to cry! I didn't have time to be surprised. The woman turned around and, seeing a small café on the other side of the road, we went there. As soon as we entered, she went to sit down on a chair in the farthest corner, turned to face the wall and began to breastfeed the baby, not paying attention to anyone in the café.

While the woman was nursing her baby, I tried to make some sense of the situation, but I didn't have enough facts. I was finding myself in a very strange and maybe dangerous adventure with Japanese foxes, magic and transformations. I liked this woman very much, but who was she? Who was the father of this baby? Who was this baby? ...or fox-cub?

I didn't have the answers to all these questions.

After the woman had finished nursing, she and her baby looked very happy and satisfied. I would be happy to have such a family, I thought.

We left our temporary refuge and walked in the direction of Shibuya. She walked very fast, almost running. I kept up with her. I decided that now she had to explain the situation. I could stand it no longer and I had too many questions. "Who are you?" I asked. For the first time I looked at her very closely. Really, she was the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen in my life.

“I am Aiko. I know that you have many questions, but now we have to hurry. Wait a little please, you will eventually know everything. If you hadn’t bought the fox-cub figurine, you wouldn’t have found yourself in this strange situation. I am sorry, but now you can’t get out of it.”

“I like this situation, Aiko-san. It has given me the chance to meet you.”

She smiled at me. At that moment I felt that I was ready to die for only her smile.

We were passing near some high buildings with a crowd of young girls at the entrance. The girls were laughing and speaking loudly. Suddenly, two big black cars stopped near us, and some strange and suspicious looking men jumped out of them.

“Let’s run!” Aiko cried, and we forced ourselves through the girls into the building. Somebody told us: “Buy tickets, please!”, but we had already run down the corridors. This was a television building, I realized. There were many windows in the corridors and we could see television programs and films being made. All of a sudden one of the doors opened, and a young man with red hair and earrings said:

“Where were you? We can’t begin without you. Change your clothes quickly!”

We entered a room. It was a studio filled with samurais in traditional costumes with swords. We were led inside to different rooms. Some people helped me dress in the old traditional costumes of the thirteenth century. When I came back to the studio I almost didn’t recognize Aiko. She looked very beautiful in a kimono with a traditional Japanese hair-style. Her baby was wonderful. Aiko held

him gracefully and carefully. Our red-haired director approached us once more:

“This drama is very specific. We want to show how a gaijin saved the heir of the Emperor for the first time in the history of Japan. Concentrate, please.”

Suddenly, some of the dangerous looking boys from the black cars appeared at the entrance to the studio. In spite of our costumes, they recognized us. One of them shouted: “There they are! Catch them quick!”

I had to do something very quickly.

I pressed my “o-mamori” in my pocket once more and cried: “Samurais, save the son of the Emperor!”

The samurais drew their swords and sat upon our enemies. A terrible fight began! We took advantage of the melee to escape. We ran out of the building and continued to run to Shibuya. Our appearance was very strange: we looked like a samurai family from the thirteenth century. All the passers-by stopped and stared at us. Even the cars stopped. Everybody took pictures of such an unusual sight.

Suddenly, a big van stopped in front of us, and a man with a camera and a pretty girl with a microphone got out.

The girl approached us with a smile:

“We are reporting live. Why have you come from the Kamakura period? What are you doing here?”

“We came to your time to see and enjoy Meiji-Jingu.” I answered.

“Who is this beautiful young woman with the sweet baby?”

I turned to Aiko. At that moment I felt a hot wave of love fill my heart.

“This is my wife and my baby.”

“Who are you?” the reporter asked.

“I am an Israeli poet. I write poems in Japanese. A book of my poems will soon be published in “The Early Star”.

“Oh! This is interesting. Say one of your poems, please.”

I began to recite:

Today you made a mistake  
when, instead of rice,  
you laid your kisses  
in my sandwich box.

Because of your charming mistake  
my heart overflows with your love,  
but my stomach is empty.

“That’s great! With such interesting poems and such a beautiful wife you will do very well in Japan, I am sure. There will not be anyone in Japan, who will not buy your book.”

After the reporters had let us go, Aiko said:

“Because you declared that we are your family, all our problems are solved and we can be happy.”

She looked at me with a grateful smile.

“Aiko, I don’t know anything about you and your baby, but I love you very much and I am asking you to become my wife.”

Aiko shone. Japanese don't kiss, especially on the street, but Aiko kissed me very passionately. Everyone observing this scene around us began to applaud.

Suddenly, from somewhere, Izumi appeared. She looked at me and at Aiko with big surprised eyes. After she had recovered from the shock, she said to Aiko:

"Don't believe him. He is a liar. Only this morning he proposed to me ..."

Aiko answered her with a steely smile:

"This is none of your business. Now he is mine. I'll decide what to do," and Izumi disappeared from my life forever.

Near Shibuya-Station Aiko said to me:

"Now please go to Gojou-Temple in Ueno-park. Everything will be explained to you there. Afterwards we'll meet in your hotel."

In front of the entrance to Gojou-Temple in Ueno-park I saw a young monk in white clothes. He was a tall strong man with wide shoulders and a severe but handsome face.

He looked at me and I felt that his stare penetrated directly to my heart. He said:

"Now you have the right to know everything. A girl-fox seduced me and gave birth to my son. In order to hide my sin, I turned him into a figurine, a fox-cub. When you bought it, I understood that you would all have to be killed: the fox, the baby and you. But, when you announced on television, that they were your wife and baby, the problem was solved. Now you may be free and happy with your beautiful family. I bless you! And this is a reward for all your trials." He handed me a box. It was a fan with a picture of the blue bird!

“Return it to the mother of your future wife.” The monk said.

“The mother of my future wife?!”

“Yes, your teacher of Japanese, Sadako-san. She sent you to save her daughter and grandson, and you have completed your mission extremely well.”

With these words the monk turned and entered the temple.

Our wedding in Jerusalem wasn’t a regular one. Not just because the bride was with a baby, but because of the heavy rain that suddenly poured down from a sunny blue sky. The Japanese guests understood that it was due to the occurrence of a portentous event, the marriage of a “kitsune” – a girl-fox.

## The “Tokyo Law”

Of all the students at the university in Jerusalem, I am the only one studying both Physics and Japanese.

I am studying Physics for my future profession, and Japanese – for the enjoyment of my heart.

Actually nobody, myself included, really knows why I am studying Japanese.

My best friend at university was Akira – a boy from Tokyo. He was studying Judaism and loved Israel and Hebrew like I loved Japan and Japanese. So it was no surprise that we became best friends. One day Akira and I were sitting in front of the television and watching beautiful Japanese girls riding their bicycles on the streets of Tokyo. I said:

“You know, I would marry any one of them, if only it were possible.”

Suddenly, Akira said with a smile:

“You can do it more easily than you think.

“???”

“Do you know the “Tokyo Law”? According to this law if a Japanese girl bumps into a man with her bicycle she has to marry him.”

“In that case I’m going to Tokyo immediately.” I said.

I knew exactly what I had to do.

The next morning I was having breakfast with my parents in the kitchen. Not wanting to waste any time I decided to tell them about my new plans. My father

worked as an advocate and I was sure that he was aware of the “Tokyo Law”.

“I want to marry a Japanese girl. I’m going to Tokyo.” I said.

My parents looked at me in surprise. My mother said:

“Don’t you have enough problems with Israeli girls? Why do you need more difficulties? What do you want to find in Tokyo?”

“I like the beauty of Japanese women. They are very elegant and graceful. Japanese babies are very sweet...”

My mother said to my father:

“Don’t sit there quietly. You see that your son is going mad. Say something.”

My father said:

“Why do you think that Japanese girls will jump at you just when you come to Tokyo? How can you be so sure that somebody from there will want to marry you?”

“Because of the “Tokyo Law”!” I answered.

“Tokyo Law”? What’s that?”

“Don’t you know?” I told him what I heard from Akira.

My parents exchanged glances and began to laugh loudly. I didn’t understand what was so funny. After a few minutes, when they had calmed down a little, my father said through his tears:

“Yes you are right. There is such a law”. Go there with my blessing and marry a Japanese girl according to this law.”

Some time later I was walking on the streets of Tokyo and admiring the beauty of the city of my dreams.

And, of course, hundreds of Japanese girls passed by me on their bicycles. But my plans turned out to be more

difficult to put into practice than I had expected. Japanese girls rode their bicycles very skillfully, and to come under their wheels was not so simple.

I was struck by the miracle of Japan and was walking about rather absent mindedly, sometimes not paying attention to where I was going. I was deep in thought, when suddenly I felt a blow to my hip. I heard a girl shouting, and the sound of a bicycle falling. The girl had bumped into me and had fallen off her bicycle!

I grabbed her and asked:

“Are you OK?”

She was a very pretty Japanese girl with a pony tail. She seemed frightened. I helped her to get up and picked up her bicycle. Except for a few abrasions on her right knee, she seemed unharmed.

“I’m sorry. Please forgive me!” I said. “The accident happened because of my carelessness.”

“No. I am the one who has to apologize...”

She was very sweet. Of course, I fell in love immediately. We happened to be standing in front of a Starbucks café.

“May I invite you for a cup of coffee?” I asked.

While we were sitting at the table, drinking our coffee, and looking at each other, I felt that I loved her very much already and wanted to bring her to Israel as soon as possible. I said:

“If you don’t like me, you shouldn’t marry me.”

She didn’t understand of course.

“I shouldn’t marry you? What are you saying?”

“I know about the “Tokyo Law” and I would certainly be

very happy to marry you, but if you don't like me..."

She smiled.

"Are you proposing to me? What is the "Tokyo Law"?"

I explained what Akira had told me.

She stared at me and began laughing.

Then she said:

"Yes, this law exists, but not everybody knows about it. I agree. Do you want me to introduce you to my parents this evening?"

"Of course!" I was very happy.

She said: "Let's meet in Shibuya-Station "Hachiko-mae" at seven."

I knew that a statue of a dog named Hachiko was near the Shibuya-Station. Young people often meet in front of this statue and it's named "To meet Hachiko-mae".

At seven it seemed that all the youth of Tokyo were gathered in front of the statue of the dog – "Hachiko-mae". But I immediately recognized my Yumi.

She was in formal dress and looked very beautiful.

We walked along Shibuya-street for about twenty minutes and entered a Japanese style restaurant. The restaurant was expensive I thought. We were directed to a table, where two elderly couples and a young man were sitting. They were all dressed very formally. The women were in kimonos and the men wore black suits and ties. I felt a little uncomfortable in my jeans and simple black shirt with an open collar.

When we approached, Yumi took my hand and greeted all the people sitting at the table with a bow and a smile.

Then one of the couples and the young man stood up and left. The other couple leaped up and followed them with bows of apology. It looked like an unsuccessful betrothal. As if nothing had happened, Yumi sat down at the table and said to me:

“Look, how many delicious things are here! Let’s start eating.”

She was already enjoying the food.

But before I had time to sit down her parents came back.

The old man, perhaps Yumi’s father, said:

“Yumi, you always disgrace us in front of respectable people! Shame on you! Why don’t you like the boy who was here?”

Then he looked at me and asked:

“Who is he?”

“He is my fiancé.” Yumi answered.

“Your fiancé? This gaijin is your fiancé? Is this a joke?”

“Do-ozo yoroshiku o-negai shimasu!” I said bowing, the most polite Japanese greeting. “We have to marry according to the “Tokyo Law”...”

“The “Tokyo Law”? What is this?” The father was very angry.

I explained what the “Tokyo Law” meant.

“I have never heard such bullshit!” He shouted.

Then the father of the young man entered the restaurant with some tall strong men, all looking very aggressive. They approached us. The father of the unsuccessful fiancé had a red face. He said to Yumi’s father:

“Do you think that you can offend people in this way?

Now I'll teach you to respect people!" His friends came closer looking threatening. The young man's father looked at me and said:

"You may leave. This is not your business."

"It is my business." I said. "I am the fiancé of this girl, and I am almost a member of this family."

"You are her fiancé?! In that case you will get what's coming to you."

"Don't hurry." I said. "I am Israeli. I served in the Israeli army in the commandos. Haven't you heard that Israeli commandos don't take captives? Be careful. If you attack us, nobody will remain alive."

I saw that my words had made a strong impression on them.

They were very angry, but decided to go away.

"We'll meet again!" The father of the young man said to Yumi's father before they left the restaurant.

"You really served in the Israeli commandos?" Yumi's father asked me.

"I didn't serve in the army at all." I answered.

"You'll marry this gaijin!" he told Yumi.

My parents were very happy that I married beautiful Yumi. And now my mother is very happy to babysit our sweet little Fumiko-chan.

And what about Akira?

When he saw the results of the "Tokyo law", he went to Tokyo and now he is throwing himself under the wheels of the bicycles of beautiful Japanese girls...

In one of the programs on Japanese television, an announcer said:

“Recently a very strange phenomenon has been noticed on the streets of Tokyo. Young foreign boys are throwing themselves under the bicycle wheels of Japanese girls.

When we asked an American boy why they do it, he answered: “The same reason that I do it. I came to Japan to find a beautiful Japanese wife. This is the easiest way.”

“How?”

“According to the “Tokyo Law”...”

## From Japan with Love

“Don’t worry so much,” a salesgirl at the pharmacy said reassuringly. “A baby girl is born? That happens occasionally. Now we’ll get her everything she needs.”

I shuddered at the mere thought of what had happened. It was not as the salesgirl imagined. That fateful morning I had found a crying Japanese baby behind my entrance door.

Who had brought the baby to me?

Only later did I remember Tokiko, who had lived nearby and had moved about six months previously. Tokiko was a charming petite Japanese girl. She led a rather frivolous life and had once woken up in my bed.

Was I the baby’s father? I couldn’t tell. Maybe, maybe not. Anyway, now it was unimportant: the Japanese baby girl, pretty and as white as snow, was cradled in my arms.

I immediately chose a name for her: Yuki, which is “snow” in Japanese. (When I lived in Russia, I studied Japanese at the university following my army service and then worked as a Japanese interpreter.)

Of course, I had no intention of rushing to the police and handing over this sweet girl to a stranger. Unhesitatingly, I accepted her as my own child.

But what could I do with her? Without thinking twice, I rang at the door of the neighboring flat occupied by a middle-aged Russian woman named Elena Sergeevna. I didn’t have the slightest notion as to why she had settled in Israel. She was slim, almost transparent, but looked firm and resolute and spoke in a commanding tone.

Elena Sergeevna was neither confused nor puzzled. She

confidently took the baby into her arms and dispatched me to the pharmacy to buy “all the necessities.”

“Don’t forget the baby food and a baby bottle with a dummy,” she said simply and casually. “By the way, do you have enough money?”

When my current girlfriend heard that I had acquired a Japanese daughter, she screamed indignantly in my face: “Ah, so you’ve slept with a Japanese strumpet!” and then she disappeared forever from my life.

After crashing through all the walls of the Israeli bureaucracy, I finally managed to officially adopt Yuki. Elena Sergeevna, not being such a busy person, helped me raise the girl. I worked hard and when I got home in the evening I would spend all my time with the child.

Gradually, Elena Sergeevna became an integral member of my family. Alas, at that time I had no other family. That’s how we lived.

One day, Elena Sergeevna told me: “The child needs a mother. You should marry, Sasha. The girl is already three years old!”

Of course she was right. I realized this and started to look for a good match. But whenever a prospective candidate would learn about Yuki, she would immediately disappear. Nobody wanted to raise a Japanese girl in Israel.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that Yuki’s mother should be of Japanese origin.

There were no suitable Japanese women in Jerusalem. At the university, one could find some female students from Japan, but they were obsessed with sex and dreamed of a rich American husband. They were not to be taken seriously and neither could any of the Japanese women married to Israelis. It was clear that a mother for Yuki could only be found in Japan.

So I started to search for a candidate through the Internet using Japanese websites and match-making chat rooms.

Of course, I didn't mention the daughter in the correspondence, only described myself as a dashing guy. For a long time, my search brought no results, but finally Emiko emerged...

Ichiro Takeda did not work in the Ministry of Agriculture as his neighbors thought. For the last ten years, he headed the operational department of the Japanese Intelligence Service.

Neither did Hiroko Morimoto earn her living at an advertising company as she had told her mother. Hiroko was a well-trained agent for Japanese intelligence and performed the most important and dangerous tasks.

For one such mission, she was summoned to the Main Office.

Entering the colonel's room, she bowed: "Shitsurey itashimas."

"O-o, hisashiburi," responded the colonel. "Genki kai?" Only after these greetings did he raise his eyes from the stacked documents on his desk and gaze at the girl.

Every time he looked at her fragile, elegant figure, he recalled his wife Yumi, who had died long before during the catastrophic Kobe earthquake.

"Hiroko-chan," he always treated her in a tender personal manner. "Tonight you will fly to Israel."

The girl could not hide her emotion. Takeda knew very well that several years before she had had a wild and unhappy love affair with an Israeli living in Japan. Unfortunately, it had all finished very simply and

predictably: the Israeli suddenly returned to his country leaving Hiroko to suffer. The wound in her heart was still bleeding and sometimes, the girl would weep at night.

“One week from now, a group of Chinese physicists will travel to Israel. This man will be among them,” the colonel said, showing a photo to Hiroko. “He is not a physicist nor even a Chinese. This is a North Korean spy and assassin. He is expected to bring the Palestinians a contract for the atom bomb. This isn’t our business, but we have to settle our own accounts with him. He caused us a lot of trouble in Seoul last year.”

Hiroko knew what he meant. A year before, several Japanese agents had lost their lives in Seoul.

We don’t have much chance of reaching him in China and even less in Korea, so we’ll have to do it in Israel. Your task is to annihilate him and return home. This operation will last a week.

Suddenly, the colonel grinned:

“You are being assigned a very unusual cover.” He pressed a phone button. “Tanaka-kun, come in!”

A very young officer entered the room. As he uttered the usual greetings he looked at Hiroko and turned red.

“Please report, lieutenant,” Takeda ordered.

Tanaka cleared his throat and said: “About six months ago an Israeli man with a perfect command of Japanese showed up in one of our online chats. He was very actively searching for a young Japanese woman. My superior ordered me to get in touch with this guy under a female name – Emiko.” He cast a quick glance at Hiroko and blushed again.

“This is our correspondence and the fellow’s photo,” the officer bowed and handed a file to the colonel.

“You may go, lieutenant.” When Tanaka closed the door, Colonel Takeda removed the photo from the file and gave it to the girl with a smile:

“Look at this guy. You are going to meet him there, Emiko-chan. And you’re leaving tonight. He’ll find you at the airport in Tel Aviv. He doesn’t know what you look like and has never heard your voice. Judging by his last e-mails, he has fallen in love without ever seeing you and he’s looking forward to your arrival.”

Hiroko studied the picture carefully.

“Obviously, after the operation is completed you’ll have to remove him, too.” The colonel nodded – the instructing session was over. Hiroko bowed and left.

\*

Japanese intelligence first noticed Alex when he boasted in one of the Japanese chat rooms that he had served in Chechnya as a sniper.

At first, they had wanted to enlist him. But events developed with such speed that there was no time left, and it was decided to use him in the forthcoming operation simply as a “blind agent.”

That day, a young stranger with Asian features joined the routine five-minute morning meeting at one of the departments of the Israeli security service.

Nissim presented the newcomer: “This is Yigal, our friend from the Mossad.” All those present smiled. Usually “friends from the Mossad” had no personal names. “He wants to tell us something interesting. Please Yigal, go ahead.”

Yigal began to speak in Hebrew with a slight accent: “Tomorrow, a group of Chinese physicists will arrive in

Israel at the invitation of the Technion in Haifa. A certain Van Li will be among them. Our friends have informed us that Van Li is neither a physicist nor Chinese by nationality. He is an agent for North Korean intelligence and his real name is Pack Chen. He is expected to bring the Palestinians a weapons contract. This probably concerns middle-range missiles or an atomic bomb. The Palestinians are ready to pay any price for the atomic bomb, and they have enough money. The North Koreans, on their part, are starving and need the money urgently..."

After a short pause Nissim added:

"We'll have to follow this Pack Chen closely. We can't remove him, because he is a 'Chinese physicist,' and we already have enough problems with China. But his Palestinian colleague is within our reach. Now let's decide who's going to deal with this task and then we'll continue on to further matters." Nissim looked at Yigal: "Do you want to add anything?"

"Yes, with your permission. We received information from our friends that the Japanese secret service is after Pack Chen for some unknown reason. The Japanese have already made two attempts to eliminate him, but both times failed. It's not ruled out that they will try again here in Israel."

"That's hardly possible. Anyway, we will not defend him and will not grieve if...something happens to him."

As soon as Yigal left the room, Nissim began to distribute everyone's roles in the upcoming operation.

The plane landed at Ben Gurion airport. Hiroko quickly passed through passport control and headed for the exit. The task seemed quite simple to her, although the man in the photo appealed to her and she did not want to kill him.

\*

Sasha thought about how to meet Emiko and how to present his little daughter to her. Maybe he was too quick to invite a woman without even seeing a picture of her. He was certainly eager to know how she looked. Though Emiko wrote to him that she was “hosoi” (slim) and “kavaiy” (pretty), it was not clear what that really meant. Almost all Japanese women are “hosoi” and “kavaiy”... What if she is uncomely? Or maybe he would simply find her unappealing?

“Don’t worry, Sasha,” Elena Sergeevna tried to calm him. “If the worst comes to worst, the girl will spend some time with us and return to Japan.”

So it was decided to take Yuki to the airport to meet Emiko.

“The situation will be clarified at once,” said Sasha, and Elena Sergeevna agreed with him. But how should he present the newcomer to the child? Besides, Yuki had never really seen many adult Japanese women and had never spoken with them. What will be her reaction to Emiko?

Elena Sergeevna did not hesitate. She went straight to the point.

“A very good lady is coming to visit us,” she told Yuki. “You will go with daddy to meet her. If you like the lady she will be your mother.”

Having digested this straightforward statement, Sasha translated it as usual into Japanese for the girl. He wanted Yuki to know the Japanese language as well as Russian, and he explained everything to her in both languages.

\*

Hiroko was the only Japanese woman among the passengers on that flight, and Sasha immediately realized that she was Emiko. His heart beat with happiness – the girl was exceptionally beautiful.

Yuki was sitting in his lap peeping out from behind a huge bunch of flowers. The moment she saw Hiroko she realized that it was “the good lady” and jumped down from her father’s lap...

Hiroko stopped, perplexed. Of course she recognized Sasha at once, but she didn’t expect to see a pretty Japanese girl with him. As an experienced and well-trained agent, she could take instant decisions even in the most complicated situations, but this time she felt lost and did not know what to do.

The next minute Yuki rushed to her screaming: “Okaasan! Okaasan!” (Mother! Mother!)

The confused Hiroko-agent immediately turned into Hiroko-woman who knew very well how to behave. She grasped the pretty little girl, picked her up and tenderly pressed her to her bosom.

She whispered: “Kavaiy onnanoko” (My pretty girl).

A strange new sensation prevented her from speaking and stuck like a lump in her throat. Suddenly tears streamed down her cheeks. Hiroko cried.

The four of us sat in a small Italian café in the Nahalat Shiva neighborhood. Yuki licked an ice cream as she settled comfortably in Emiko’s lap. Her face shone with happiness. Emiko patted the girl tenderly and whispered something in her ear.

Elena Sergeevna and I gazed at them lovingly, unable to take our eyes off of them. Only four days had passed since Emiko's arrival, but it seemed as if we had lived together for many years: we all enjoyed the family idyll...

"Mummy has to leave you for an hour, my sweetie," said Emiko.

"For an hour?" echoed Yuki. "Where are you going?"

"I must meet a friend of mine. I'll be back very soon. You won't even have time to miss me, will you?"

Elena Sergeevna glanced at the window:

"Look, Sasha, so many Chinese workers have gathered here. I wonder what they're doing."

I followed her glance. Several Chinese men in working outfits were standing at the café entrance. Too many Chinese workers had arrived in Israel in the last few years. I translated Elena Sergeevna's words to Emiko.

Emiko cast a glance at the window... and shuddered. She changed instantly, bracing herself. Her expression grew tense, her face turned to stone. She slowly passed the girl over to Elena Sergeevna. Yuki could sense that something serious was happening and looked in bewilderment at Mummy.

"Tell Elena Sergeevna to take Yuki home immediately," Emiko spoke in a calm flat voice.

"What has happened?" I asked.

"They are not Chinese," responded Emiko. "They are North Korean agents and they're after me."

"What do you mean!? What is it all about?"

"It's very dangerous to remain here. Tell Elena Sergeevna to take the girl away as soon as possible."

Elena Sergeevna listened with apprehension to the

Japanese speech, switching her puzzled glance from me to Emiko. She could understand that something serious had happened.

“Elena Sergeevna,” I explained to her. “Emiko has said that these guys behind the window are North Korean agents. She says that they have come for her and that we all are in danger. Please take Yuki and return home... I don’t understand what is happening...”

“Everything seems clear to me,” Elena Sergeevna exploded suddenly. “Your Emiko here is a Japanese spy, and these Koreans want to kill her. She simply used you as a shield and put us all into danger.” Elena Sergeevna glanced angrily at Emiko. “She could have at least spared the child.”

“What is she saying?” Emiko asked briskly. I translated. “So-o des ne,” Emiko said. “Everything that she says is correct.”

“What???” I groped for the right words. “Emiko is a spy???”

Elena Sergeevna snatched the unusually quiet Yuki: “Be careful, Sasha, and don’t trust her... I will take care of the girl, don’t worry. I can defend her.” Without looking at Emiko, she left the café with the child.

When they passed the Chinese workers (or Korean spies), one of them separated from the group and quietly followed the woman and the girl...

\*

“Emiko, please tell me what’s happening”.

“I am not Emiko, Sasha. I work in the Japanese intelligence service. My name is Hiroko.” She looked straight into my eyes and I realized that she was speaking the truth.

“When I received this mission, I didn’t know that I would fall in love with you,” she continued. “And I knew nothing about Yuki...”

She took my hand: “Honto- o ni kimi o ai shite iru wa... - I really love you very much. Please believe me! If we both survive I’ll prove it to you...” Hiroko paused. She could hardly hold back the tears.

I looked at the Koreans standing outside. They were all staring intently at us.

“What’s your mission in Israel? Why did they send you here? Why are Koreans after you?”

“They sent me here to eliminate a Korean agent who had come to Israel. He assassinated some of our people, and I was entrusted with the job of avenging their deaths.”

“But what is he doing in Israel?”

“He has brought a contract to the Palestinians for the Korean atom bomb.”

What!? The Palestinians want to obtain an atom bomb?  
Yes, Hiroko is right: that man has to be eliminated.

“I’ll help you,” I said. “Do-o shitara iyi no? – What can I do?”

Hiroko smiled and squeezed my hand.

“I can’t get out of here,” she nodded in the direction of the window. “Please hurry to Zion Gate. Our man is waiting there. Tell him you were sent by Hiroko, and he’ll tell you what to do next.”

“How shall I recognize him?”

“He’s Japanese”.

“And what about you?”

“Don’t worry. The Koreans won’t get me.”

“Ai shite iru yo. – I love you so much. Gambatte kudasay – Watch out, Hiroko, my darling.”

I got up and hurried through the kitchen to the back door.

Elena Sergeevna walked slowly home holding Yuki by the hand and entertaining her with a simple story. The girl listened attentively and occasionally asked questions. The “Chinese worker” followed them at a short distance. The agent Chon Khi had a simple mission: assassinate the woman and the girl, escape any possible shadowing and then meet other group members at the appointed place. With his right hand, he squeezed the shaft of the dagger hidden up his sleeve.

As his prospective victims reached a seemingly deserted alley, Chon quickened his pace and the distance between them diminished. When only two meters separated them, Chon prepared for the assault.

At that moment the woman turned around abruptly, stepped towards Chon and with lightning speed struck him in the throat with the finger tips of her right hand. Chon fell flat before he could wave his arms or even cry out... That was her favorite punch. Captain Elena Sergeevna Belova mastered it as a senior instructor at the KGB training school.

Then she turned quickly to Yuki and blocked the fallen man with her body. As if nothing had happened, she spoke to the girl with a sweet smile: “Come, my dear. I’ve got something delicious for you at home.”

It was empty at Zion Gate except for a small white Toyota parked by the road. I went up to the car and saw the driver: a young Japanese guy was sitting in the front in a

strange reclining posture. He was pale and his eyes were closed. I noticed blood stains on his clothes.

“Ikiteh imaska? – Are you alive?” I asked him. He opened his eyes,

stared at me for several moments and suddenly gave me a warm smile.

“Alex,” he whispered. How did he know my name? But I had no time for questions or deliberations.

“Hiroko has sent me,” I said quickly in Japanese. “She cannot come. I’ll do everything.”

He studied me intently, then shut his eyes and briefly instructed:

“A chapel opposite the Church of the Holy Sepulchre... second floor... at exactly 11:00 he will leave the church...” I looked at my watch. It was ten minutes to eleven. I had to hurry.

“You know,” the guy whispered suddenly as he opened his eyes and gazed at me with a strange grin. “It was I who sent you e-mails... Boku wa Emiko – I am Emiko...”

He dropped his head sideways and lost consciousness. I felt confused but there was no time to analyze or even think.

I ran as fast as I could in order to get there on time.

In front of the church there is a very old, dilapidated chapel. I ran up the stairs to the second floor in one breath – and found nothing there.

Oh, I had forgotten that they called the second floor what, to us, was the third floor. I quickly climbed two more flights and found a sniper’s rifle in a niche with a telescopic sight.

The tower clock started to strike eleven!

I snatched the rifle, pulled the lock and aimed at the church door.

My hands trembled a little after the rush, but I had no choice and could not miss the target. Now, the main thing is to breathe, even and deep breaths...

Suddenly the high church door opened and five completely identical Chinese men came out. They had similar faces, similar short haircuts; they were dressed in similar grey suits and white shirts with ties...

Which of them was the Korean spy?

No time to think. If the Palestinians get the atomic bomb... No, this must be averted at any cost! Shoot down all these Chinese-Koreans!!! To hell with them!!! I pointed the rifle at them...

At the last moment, two Arabs approached one of the Chinese visitors. They exchanged friendly smiles, shook hands and patted each other on the shoulder...

“Bravo, Japanese!” Nissim looked very pleased. “They’ve got this bunch at last.”

“It was not the Japanese,” lieutenant Gabi corrected him.

“What???”

“The fingerprints on the rifle belong to one of our guys. Look here,” Gabi passed several papers over to Nissim. Alex’s fingerprints are stored in the card index of Israel’s security service, as are all the details of those who serve in the Israeli army.

“Shall we arrest him?” Gabi inquired.

“Arrest? Why? Because he saved Israel from the atom bomb?”

“But he was working for Japanese intelligence...”

Nissim smiled:

“Why do you dislike Japan so much, lieutenant? You know what? Let’s go to ‘Sakura’ tonight. Have you ever tasted sushi? As for this guy, I would like to meet him personally.”

\*

“I would like to meet your husband, Hiroko-chan,” Colonel Takeda squinted his eyes cunningly. “By the way, what does he intend to do in Japan?”

“He wants to study Japanese philology at Tokyo University.”

“Japanese philology? So-o ka... And how is your daughter? If I am not mistaken, her name is Yuki?”

“Yuki is fine, Mr. Colonel. She is waiting for a little brother.”

Takeda stared at Hiroko. His eyes lit up.

When Hiroko left the room, the colonel made a telephone call: “Hiroko is out of the game for the time being. Yamada will fly to Paris.” This was his order.

Half an hour later, Yamada came to the colonel for instructions.

When Ichiro Takeda returned home, Elena Sergeevna was already waiting for him with the colonel’s favorite dish – suki-yaki.

Of course, she didn’t make a real Japanese housewife, but she gave her husband what only a real Russian woman could give.

So every night, Samurai Takeda stormed Port Arthur smiling with contentment into his moustache.

# It's Difficult to Understand my Poems

On waking up one morning, I fell in love with a girl in the newspaper. I immediately started learning Japanese and the next thing I knew, I had written a book of Japanese love poems.

And so, the book was written, but what would I do with it? After pondering for a while, I approached the Department of Culture in the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs, located in Jerusalem.

The Foreign Ministry clerk specializing in cultural communications was Shai Gelbert. With his bright eyes and sparkling white teeth, he held my book in his hands, toyed with it, and then said with an understanding smile, “I assume you’ll agree that these poems don’t belong to Israeli culture.”

“So where do they belong?” I wondered.

“Maybe in Russian culture? After all, you’re a Russian immigrant. Or maybe they belong to Japanese culture? They are written in Japanese!”

I felt too awkward to ask if he spoke Japanese or if he had read my poems.

“Nihonogo ga dekimasaka?” – “Do you speak Japanese?” I asked him.

“Be tzura mesuyemet” – “Somewhat,” he answered in Hebrew.

In other words, Shai probably didn’t speak Japanese and, therefore, he hadn’t read my book.

On the other hand, the Japanese cultural delegate in

Israel, Yumi-san, actually told me that she was amazed by my poems and that she read them each night before going to bed (“neru mae ni”).

“Sugo-oi des ne!” she said, as her eyes almost popped out of their sockets (“It’s marvelous!”), “But you have to agree that your poems are not what one calls ‘Japanese poems’. They don’t actually belong in Japanese culture. After all, you’re an Israeli, and you’re an immigrant from Russia. You must meet Shai-san from the Department of Cultural Communications...”

And so, the cycle was closed. It appeared to me that no culture suits my poems. My only comfort was that somebody was reading my poems, nightly (Someone other than Yumi-san, I assume...)

Well then, now’s the time when one must think clearly about what one can do. A few rather nice coffee shops exist for this purpose.

I walked into “Max”, my favorite café, and I ordered my usual: a double espresso with some hot milk on the side – a strong, aromatic coffee with a tiny hot milk jug.

“How was your day?” Itzik asked me. Itzik, a retired general (if I’m not mistaken), was my regular table companion at “Max”.

I told him about my current situation.

“Shai Gelbert?” he asked, bursting into laughter.

“Do you know this guy?” I replied.

“Don’t be cross with Shai,” Itzik continued with a smile, “He doesn’t know anything about Japan or about poetry. He has much more important things to do and, trust me, he knows his job.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Forget it. You’d better give me your book when you have a chance. I have a friend who could possibly help...”

Itzik apparently knew what he was talking about. Shai Gelbert was indeed not a Japanese poetry expert. Working in the Department of Culture was merely a cover for his real job: a Mossad agent responsible for the Israeli Intelligence’s operations in France.

Lately, he had been too busy to read poetry: an unexplained plague of failed missions had hit the Parisian department. Some of his best agents had disappeared or had been killed and it was Shai’s job to figure out what was happening and how to repair the damage as fast as possible.

In reality, Itzik Elkayam was not a retired general, but a chief commander in the Mossad and directly in charge of Shai.

Sitting in his office, he talked to Shai about the situation in Paris:

“After analyzing recent failures, we have come to the conclusion that we have a ‘mole’ and that there is probably a double agent in our ‘company’ in Paris. We started to fail somewhere in January this year just when two new agents started working there at the same time. For starters, we must investigate them. They are at the root of all of this. If we work carefully, we’ll find the spy.”

“How do you want us to do it?”

“I have an idea. Do you remember the other day when a strange fellow showed up at your office with a book of Japanese poetry?”

I received Shai Gelbert's surprising phone call a few days later.

"We may be able to help you find a publisher for your poems," he said very persuasively, "But you'll have to fly to Paris for about a week. Would that be possible for you?"

"Paris??" my head was spinning, "Wonderful! Sure it would be possible! I'm totally available now. I would just have a slight problem with the cost..."

Actually, I had been unemployed for six months, and all my savings were spent on translating my writings from Russian to English and Hebrew.

"Don't worry. We'll pay for your trip. After all, your poetry can raise our country's reputation abroad. You'll visit two... publishers... who are our friends. They'll help you get published. One of our employees will join you, a woman. No. Not a Japanese woman. Come to my office within an hour. Your visitor's pass is waiting for you at the lobby."

\*

As I walked in, the "one of our employees" was already waiting at Gelbert's office. She was a young woman of medium height, with colorless eyes and a thin line for a mouth. I couldn't see how this kind of girl could be interested in Japanese poetry. The fantasy of flying to Paris with an astonishing beauty quickly faded. This young woman brought on a sharp feeling of discomfort.

"I'm Ora," she said and reached out to shake my hand.

\*

As soon as the poet walked out of the room, Gelbert said quietly to Ora: "This guy is one of Itzik's men. He's poses a great danger for us."

“Don’t worry, boss,” she answered quietly. “He won’t live to see Paris.”

The Russian Intelligence vice-president, Colonel Ivan Chekhov, received some strange information from his Israeli agent. It said that a rather important Israeli agent was flying to Paris with a book of Japanese-themed poetry. No one knew exactly what this book meant, but it was clear that the Israelis were watching the person and his book very closely and that this whole mission was top secret.

Something in this book could probably be used to decipher codes and it may include the plans for some Jewish conspiracy to conquer the world (something similar to the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’).

Without a doubt, it was clear that they needed to get their hands on this book. And when something is “needed”, a certain regular team always comes to help Chekhov: his top agent, the beautiful Dasha Limonova, and the not-so-young, but well-built, Uncle Nikholai, who is able to solve any argument.

Chekhov concluded his instructions: “The Israeli Intelligence has been very helpful and reliable lately. Therefore, the Israeli agent must not be harmed. On the contrary, if you have the chance, you can even help him.”

I didn’t quite see her immediately when I entered my apartment. She stood by the window and resembled a shadow; when my eyes got used to the dark, I saw her clearly: a thin Japanese girl in a colorful kimono, her hair made up in traditional Japanese fashion.

I wasn’t scared for some reason, although I hadn’t

expected anyone like this. She greeted me warmly and bowed slightly in my direction.

“Konnichi wa!”

“Konnichi wa!” I replied mechanically, “who are you?”

“I’m Hitomi,” the girl answered, “I was sent here by ojii-san.”

“Your... Grandfather?” I asked hesitantly.

“Yes, ojii-san, my grandfather. Matsuo Basho.”

I have to admit that I could not understand her answer. Matsuo Basho, the great Japanese poet, lived about 300 years ago. Grandfather, you say...

Suddenly I noticed that the girl had no legs. She was hanging freely in the air!

That actually made it clearer for me: yu-urei are the legless Japanese ghosts. This means that “Grandpa” Basho could have sent her to me. Could have? Oh, nonsense! But Hitomi carried on: “My grandfather sent me here to save you. You’re in danger. You can’t go to Paris.”

It was all too much.

“But I can’t cancel this trip! It will change my whole life!”

“It sure will. It will change everything. You won’t return from it.”

She spoke with such assurance in her voice that I became even more puzzled.

“But why would Matsuo Basho want to save me?”

“Grandpa likes your poems,” said the Japanese girl and bowed again.

Ora boarded the plane as close to departure time as she could, in order to sit as far as she could from the “Japanese

poet". She felt a strong loathing toward the poet and she was looking forward to fulfilling the mission that Gelbert had given her.

The plane started to take off. A voice from the loudspeaker announced that the passengers could unfasten their seatbelts and that light drinks would be served by the staff.

A good-looking Japanese flight attendant approached Ora and politely offered her some orange juice.

"How did a Japanese flight attendant get on an Israeli plane?" thought Ora, but she was very thirsty and quickly drank the tasty and refreshing drink.

All at once her eyes closed, her head dropped down and she sank into a deep sleep.

When I took the bus from the Paris airport to the center of the city, Hitomi appeared in the seat next to me.

She said, without any preamble: "You'll meet a Japanese girl in the hotel. She has been sent there to kill you. Be careful."

"Why would a Japanese girl want to kill me?" I asked, but Hitomi was already gone.

When I got to my room I heard the phone ringing: "A lady is waiting for you in the lobby. Could you come down?"

A beautiful Japanese girl, wearing a yellow top and a red miniskirt, was sitting on a couch with her legs crossed.

She smiled and stood up as she saw me. I couldn't take my eyes off of her legs.

"Konnichi wa!" said the girl and bowed, "I'm Kayo."

"Konnichi wa!"

She handed me a large, white envelope.

“Shai asked me to give it to you. Here you’ll find the addresses of the publishers and some recommendations.”

She looked like she was about to leave.

“Kayo-san, can I buy you a cup of coffee?”

“I’m a bit tired... maybe we can go up to your room?”

“That’s great!” I couldn’t believe my luck.

While we stood in the elevator she looked down modestly, just like a Japanese girl would do.

When we walked into my room, I circled her waist with my arms, gently moved closer to her and we kissed. Suddenly, I felt that we were not alone in the room. A woman was lying on my bed. It was Hitomi.

Kayo blushed and ran out of the room.

“Wait! Wait! It’s not what you think!” I tried to stop her, but obviously I failed.

This time Hitomi broke every limit.

“How dare you get involved in my business? This girl has fallen in love with me and suggested that we come up to my room! You’ve ruined everything!”

“Don’t be stupid!” Hitomi answered sharply. “That girl is a professional killer. There’s a pen-like cyanide syringe in her bag. She was sent here to kill you, can’t you see?”

“You’re just jealous!” Of course, I did not believe a word she said.

“Tomorrow you’ll meet a Russian girl. She’s on your side. You can trust her.” Hitomi continued, not paying attention to what I’d said.

“But be careful not to fall in love with her. She is a Russian beauty,” Hitomi added. She blushed slightly and suddenly waned.

Too many beauties had appeared in my life recently. But the most beautiful of all was Hitomi. Maybe I was in love with her already.

When a person goes to Paris, it is worth remembering that “a continental breakfast” means just a cup of coffee and a croissant.

It was morning and I was sitting in the modest hotel restaurant. I was drinking the local espresso and eating a croissant with butter and jam. A girl walked into the restaurant and turned in my direction. She was blond, slim and had long fluffy bangs. She walked quickly with her long legs, like a runway model. This must be that Russian girl that Hitomi was talking about. She looked at me and smiled in a friendly fashion.

“Hi, I’m Dasha and I’ve just arrived from Moscow. I hope I’m not bothering you.” She sat down, not waiting for an answer. Girls like her never take “no” for an answer.

“I’ve spent all night in an airplane and I really feel like drinking coffee, but the coffee in Parisian hotels tastes like crap,” the girl said, smiling. The bad coffee probably wasn’t a good enough reason to ruin her mood.

“I’m a tourist,” she said, “I came to see Paris. What about you? If it’s not confidential, of course...” Dasha laughed meaningfully.

“No, it’s not a secret. I wrote a book of Japanese poems and I’m here to publish it.”

“You speak Japanese? That’s amazing! So how do you intend to publish your book? Your poems?”

“I have two addresses of publishers. Maybe they will be able to help me. I was just about to go and look for them.”

“I’m free today. Let’s go together! I’ve never met a real publisher!”

I happily accepted her offer. A girl like her would probably bring me luck.

“Ok, let’s go then,” she said cheerfully. “Will you show me your book?”

“I’ll even give it to you as a present!” I said.

We left the hotel in a good mood.

The first publisher was located in the Saint Michel area. We quickly found the beautiful 18th century stone house and went up to the second floor.

A dark-haired man opened the door. He had a rather unpleasant face.

When he heard the words “Japanese poetry book” he became furious: “Do you think I’m stupid? That I don’t know why you came here? I’ll show you ‘Japanese poems’! I’ll show you and your slut!” He reached for something in his pocket, but at the same moment he was knocked down by Dasha. So that’s why mini skirts go along with long legs.

“Please don’t hit him,” I turned to Dasha. “He just doesn’t like Japanese poems. That’s not a reason to hit a person.”

Dasha smiled without replying. She bent down to the publisher, took a gun out of his pocket and said in a hoarse voice: “Don’t you mess with the Russians, son of a bitch! You won’t walk out of it alive.”

“Why would she be interested in Japanese poems?” I suddenly thought.

As we went down the street, Dasha seemed troubled.

“I have a feeling that this publisher is not interested in

your poetry. Maybe we'll have better luck with the other one."

Her phone rang. After a short conversation she turned to me: "There are many visitors waiting for us at the other publisher's residence. I have to call Uncle Nikholai."

I didn't understand what Dasha was saying, but as we went to meet the second publisher, a huge, red-faced and unshaven bully was waiting for us at the building entrance. One couldn't tell his age by his appearance. He had a black package under his right arm.

"Uncle Nikholai! I'm so happy to see you!" Dasha kissed him noisily. We went inside the stairway and headed upstairs.

Ora opened the door. Shai Gelbert, Kayo and another man with dark sunglasses were inside.

"Your trip ends here, my friend," said Shai sweetly, "I'm terribly sorry that your 'genius' poems will never be published." He took a gun out of his pocket.

"Dicktyarov" thinks differently," said Uncle Nikholai.

"Who is Dicktyarov?" asked Shai.

"Here he is. Pleased to meet you." Uncle Nikholai was holding a rather worn-out looking machine gun. The room was suddenly filled with noise and smoke.

\*

As I said goodbye to Dasha, I gave her my book and wrote a personal message on the inside cover. I think that she was very pleased.

Dasha was a beautiful woman, but she wasn't my type.

I was sitting at “Max” alone, deep in thought. My poems weren’t published after all. Nobody wants them.

Hitomi, after fulfilling her mission was gone forever, like a nice Japanese ghost should be. She was probably on her way to see her grandpa as I stayed alone, like poets often do.

All of a sudden, the glass door opened and Hitomi came in. She walked in confidently. She had legs! Her face was beaming. Thrilled and amazed, I ran to her.

“Grandpa managed to release me. He’s sure that I’ll be happy with you. Oh! It’s so wonderful to be a real woman! Flesh and blood!”

She bent down and smoothed the hem of her skirt. As she stared at her legs, she smiled modestly and asked: “Don’t you think my legs are prettier than Kayo-san’s?”

I gently kissed her for an answer. My heart was racing with joy.

“Can we go to see grandfather’s tomb?” she asked.

I had to kiss her again.

A few days later, I received a phone call from Itzik, my friend from “Max”.

“Listen, there’s a chance for you to get your book published,” he said mysteriously. “Will you be able to fly to Moscow for a few days?”

“Sorry. Tomorrow I’m flying to O-otsu.”

“O-otsu? Where is it? Why are you going there?”

“O-otsu is a small town in Japan, near the Biva Lake. I will go to the tomb of the Japanese Poet Basho. I must pray at his grave rather urgently.”

Itzik didn't know what to reply.

On Basho's tomb, among fresh flowers and "senko"  
incense sticks, lies a book by an unknown Israeli poet. The  
wind had blow the book open to the second page and one  
could read:

An unwritten poem  
Like an unborn child,  
One of these days  
It will be back  
Shaped as a beautiful flower.

# A Japanese Girl on a Bridge

The Mossad didn't accept me! They'll definitely be sorry for that, but then it will be too late for them. Mind you, the loss will be theirs. After all, I'm not a leech, or a beggar, either. Let's make this clear: I was born to be a spy. I'm a genius at espionage, a talented secret agent. I'm so classified, I can't even tell you my real name. So let's make this an anonymous conversation; after all, I don't know your name, either.

Without a doubt, I'm a spy. Maybe I wasn't accepted by the Mossad, but I couldn't see myself working for any other intelligence service. I've never been a traitor. What could I do, then? What was left for me to do was to start my own operation, to take on my own responsibilities. That's how I created "A Private Israeli Intelligence Service" (APIIS). And I started with an operation against the enemy of Israel: the Arab terrorists.

After some contemplation, I came to the conclusion that the center of the Arab terror organizations was located in Paris, France. Therefore, my first operation would take place there. I also speak a bit of French, so that couldn't hurt.

There's something else you should know about me. I have another special quality, or should I say, a sort of a crazy passion: I adore and admire anything that is part of Japan and its culture, and I've even learned how to speak Japanese. I can't remember what the source for this love is or how it all started.

Every morning, reports were placed on the desk of Lieutenant Colonel "N", head of one of the Mossad units. Today, the captain who handled the reports took his time

near the colonel's desk and, with a rather strange grin on his face, gave him a sheet of paper:

"Here. Read this. It arrived 30 minutes ago by e-mail."

The colonel read: "I'm flying to Paris tonight. I will probably need your help and back-up. 'APIIS'."

"What is this rubbish?! Who wrote this?"

The captain read through a file and replied: "This guy came to us through the recruitment ad that was published in the newspapers six months ago. This e-mail was sent to the address published in that ad. In his interview, he was found incapable of working for us since he had recently visited his "ill mother" in Moscow - we can't really confirm that information. Besides, he made a bit of a... umm... nutty impression..." The captain pointed to his temple.

"How did you get this impression?"

"He is totally obsessed with anything Japanese. He learned Japanese, wrote Japanese poetry, and asked us to send him to work there..."

"So? Not everyone who studies Japanese is crazy. Find out what he's planning to do in Paris, where he's housed and what his stupid nickname means."

An hour later, the colonel was informed that "APIIS" had ordered a plane ticket to Paris and a room in the Mattle Hotel through "D" travel agency. He would indeed leave Israel that night on a French charter flight. The purpose of his journey and the meaning of his strange nickname remained unknown.

"Make sure that some of our people keep an eye on him there." The colonel often worked on intuition.

"Look, I'm sorry, but he's quite insane... perhaps he can manage without our assistance? After all, we don't have that many agents in Paris, it's a shame to waste them on

Japan-freaks..."

"Please, report to me every day about his activities in Paris."

The conversation ended.

After that, it was discovered that the Mattle Hotel was located near the synagogues and kosher restaurants in the Montmartre area, where many Israelis stayed; as a matter of fact, one of the Mossad agents was present there. The agent was quickly contacted.

When I went down to get some breakfast, it was already eight o'clock and all the tables were taken. I looked around, and noticed a woman sitting at a table in the far corner. She seemed pleasant and nice, had short hair, and looked like a typical Israeli. She looked back at me and waved. I walked to her table.

"Hi!" she said. "How nice it is to meet one of us abroad."

"Do I look that Israeli?" I said.

"Much more than you would like to think. By the way, I'm Laura."

We had coffee together. The woman was very kind to me and smiled much too warmly for a first meeting.

"It's my first time here and I don't know the place well at all," she said. "Let's hang around together."

I politely refused her offer. I had to examine the field and consider my next move. We arranged to meet in the evening, but I had a feeling it wouldn't happen.

I wandered through Paris that day. I had no actual plan, no practical idea. Actually, I hadn't any idea whatsoever, besides my confidence in doing the right thing in the right place. I decided to postpone the hunt for the enemies of

Israel until the next day, and in the meantime, wandered around the city, in order to adapt to its climate, to rest and to “reset” myself, as the system administrators say.

Toward the evening, I found myself on one of Paris’s many bridges. Darkness was falling fast. I suddenly saw a disturbance through the fading light, and quickly approached the place. Four short Asian men were attacking a young woman. She was desperately trying to defend herself, but the attackers were stronger and she was outnumbered, so they quickly managed to capture her. Before even thinking about what I was doing, and without any delay, I came to her rescue with a loud shout. The attackers quickly scattered and the young woman fell to the ground.

As I bent towards her, she opened her eyes.

She was Japanese! A sudden heat wave washed over my entire being. I fell in love immediately. I simply had no other choice, you see. I felt that this was the moment I’d been waiting for my entire life.

“Kowagaranaide! – Don’t be afraid! – Watashi wa kimi no yuzhin da – I’m a friend.” The girl was so surprised to hear my Japanese that she looked as if she was about to lose consciousness again, this time from amazement. “Shimpai shinaide. Taskete age yo! – Don’t worry. I’ll help you!”

“Anata wa dare? – Who are you?” the girl asked, smiling.

She smiled at me!

A small public garden located behind the cathedral of Notre Dame is a favorite spot for Japanese tourists. The benches are always taken by groups of cheerful, excited Japanese, who are often equipped with the newest and the most up-to-date cameras available. Here, they excitedly exchange their new impressions of the city.

An elderly Japanese tourist sat on one of the benches, with a must-have accessory, a Nikon camera, hanging from his chest. He was admiring the picturesque Saint Louis Island and quietly chatting to a cute young Japanese woman, possibly his daughter or granddaughter. Their conversation, however, was unusual and did not concern family matters.

“If it wasn’t for that Israeli, the Koreans would have killed you, Yumiko-chan,” said the elderly man. “He saved your life. He must be repaid in kind. What about giving him information about our Arab friend?”

“Hai,” the girl politely nodded. She knew the subject of the discussion was Jabar: a bloodthirsty uncaught murderer, a freedom fighter for the “Palestinian nation.”

Finally, my knowledge of the Japanese language turned out to be useful! Useful indeed! Yumiko told me she worked as a journalist and that she was in town on a secret journalism mission. But I could never imagine that she was also interested in Arab terrorists until I saw on her desk in her room a few papers, thickly written in Japanese.

“I’ll be back in ten minutes,” Yumiko said and left the room. I unintentionally picked up a page from her desk and glanced at it...

!!!

Now I really knew all that I needed: the name of the terrorist was Jabar, and his shelter was in Montmartre. I was so lucky! Now all I needed to do was to find the bastard and kill him. I thought I should let the Mossad know, after I’d dealt with the matter by myself, of course. Meanwhile, Yumiko came back, and I had no intention of discussing terrorists with her. We were too busy, you see. It’s been ages since I walked around this two-storey house

in green Montmartre! I've walked around it so many times, I've sat for hours and hours on the surrounding benches while "reading the paper"...

I knew everything about this house. I knew that early in the morning, every day at the same time, a dark Mercedes with tinted windows would be parked outside, and two thugs would leave the house wearing new and expensive suits, starched white shirts and ties. They would be followed by a fat, sloppy and unshaven man. This was Jabar himself, the unbeatable and uncaught bastard, whom I intended to kill...

To kill. But how? The more I thought about it, the more I convinced myself that my mission was undoubtedly difficult. Still, could it be done?

I had no weapon; my budget was running low... What was I doing? What had I been thinking in the first place? And there was another worry: I'd noticed that I was being followed. Laura, the woman I'd met at the hotel and who aggressively offered me friendship, was now constantly following me, or as spies say, she was tailing me. She would tend to appear in different places, without even bothering to hide; she was openly following me, and it definitely wasn't easy to evade her... Did she understand my mission? Did she know who the brute was that I was after? I hoped not.

It was obvious that Laura was a spy, but for whom did she work? Was it for the Arabs? Or for the Mossad? Maybe the French intelligence service? Regardless, her presence was dangerous for me, and I had to think of various ways to mislead and frighten her. I hoped that eventually I would succeed. I hoped so, because otherwise...

The Mossad couldn't find answers either.

“Didn’t you tell me he’s a bit crazy? If that were so, how did he manage to find Jabar?” the colonel asked in a controlled, quiet tone. The captain preferred to remain silent. Indeed, this issue appeared to be most peculiar. How could this weird Japan-freak have located the dangerous and hidden terrorist so fast? It was a fact, though: the mysterious APIIS had somehow managed to track down Jabar.

The Mossad had found out about Jabar’s existence a while before, and it hadn’t yet been decided what action should be taken. Obviously, killing Jabar in Paris would be too risky and could cause an international scandal. Moreover, planting an agent in Jabar’s gang would be a far riskier thing to do...

Wandering through the streets of Montmartre, I became more and more convinced that I would not be able to put my plans into action. No, I wasn’t afraid; I was even ready to die, just like the Samurai warriors did hundreds of years ago when they found their efforts failed. I was willing to take Jabar with a knife, with an axe, with iron or with brick, and to get myself killed by the bullets of those vicious people. No matter what, I would never give up...

My heroic thoughts were interrupted by a sudden grating sound. The dark Mercedes had stopped right in front of me. Three thugs jumped out and quickly scattered, without even closing the doors of the car. I was so amazed that I could not think of a possible reason for what was happening! Without further hesitation, I jumped into the Mercedes, grabbed a yellow leather bag sitting on the back seat, and from the glove compartment pulled out a pistol and a bundle of dollars tied together by a rubber band. Then, I leapt out of the car and started to run as fast as I could towards a nearby alley. Before I arrived at the corner,

a huge blast came from behind me. From the intensity of the blast, one could surely assume that the Mercedes no longer existed...

I had not been chased, but I still walked for a few hours through the streets of Paris in order to see if I was being followed.

And what would I have done if I'd known the Mercedes was about to explode? I really don't know.

I returned to my hotel room and immediately opened the yellow bag. It contained documents and sketches in Arabic. I don't speak Arabic. It all needed to be urgently delivered to the Mossad (I mean, I only needed to bring the papers to the Israeli embassy in Paris). But first things first: I had to finish my plan for Jabar!

I carefully hid the bag and the money, and examined the pistol. It was an Austrian "Glok". It was loaded and looked perfectly fine.

It was time for action.

Feeling confident, I left my room.

After Laura saw that no one was in the room, she quietly slipped in. She immediately found the "carefully hidden" yellow bag, and glanced at the documents. She was taken aback. Unlike the "self-employed spy", Laura spoke Arabic fluently; she was amazed by the contents of the bag...

When the captain read Laura's message, he became more amazed than her. He could not believe his eyes, and after a minute he excitedly reported to the colonel, his voice choking: "I don't know from where, but our APIIS has managed to get detailed information about the structure of Jabar's organization in France and in Belgium!"

Moments later, the European department of the

institution called an alert. Urgent commands were given. They needed to “pay a visit” to Jabar’s people before they managed to spread out and hide, since they must have known about the missing bag.

In the rush, the colonel managed to find a few seconds to give the captain a meaningful look.

And again I went to Jabar’s house. It was better to sit somewhere and to think about the operation rationally. I sat on the bench nearby, but not a single thought came to mind. For instance, if I tried to break into the house, I probably would have only managed to shoot the guard on the doorstep and not even get up stairs: they would immediately rain fire on me with their Kalashnikovs.

My sad thoughts were again stopped by Jabar’s three gorillas, who surprisingly appeared out of nowhere. They came closer to me and pointed their pistols, which had been hidden in their pockets. I looked back. Behind the bench stood another thug, with an evil grin spreading on his face.

“Come, habibi,” the fat one said in Hebrew with a heavy Arabic accent. “The boss wants to speak with you.”

This time Laura didn’t use a code and the secret phone numbers. The matter seemed too urgent, so she called the captain’s number straight away.

“APIIS is caught. Permission to act is needed.”

“Not approved,” the captain said and set down the receiver.

I sat in the middle of the room, my hands tied behind my back. Jabar, visibly comfortable, spread his limbs on the couch in front of me. He had a constant depraved grin. Jabar’s assistants, who had sibling-like similarities, were sitting on the sofa next to him with two Kalashnikovs

lying on their knees.

Jabar spoke slowly: “Of course, my people could have nailed you long ago, but I like to kill Israeli agents myself, and now I have the opportunity...”

Bang! Bang! Bang! It all happened so fast! The windowpane was shattered, and Yumiko burst into the room like a tornado. Her guns didn’t stop shooting while the criminals collapsed on the floor one by one, with a precise and tiny hole pierced into each of their foreheads. Two more armed men came from the stairs that led to the lower entrance hall and they, too, both rolled back, each with a bullet in the middle of his forehead.

Yumiko pounced at me, and with just one quick movement, she freed my hands.

“Hayaku! Tobi orimasho – Quick! Let’s jump down!” she whispered and pulled me toward the window.

I had never jumped from such a height. Second floor, high ceilings. But we both came through. A minute after that, we were already downstairs, running towards Place Pigalle. Three minutes later, we had already walked into the first brothel we saw.

“What is it that you don’t approve?” the colonel asked as he entered the room. He had overheard the captain’s talk with Laura.

“Our APIIS has been caught by Jabar, and I didn’t approve Laura’s request to take action for his release.”

“???”

“We can’t jeopardize the lives of our best agents for the sake of some adventurer.”

The colonel came closer: “Haven’t you figured it out yet?” he said, quietly but clearly. “He is our best agent. And we’ll

free him at any cost.”

Ten minutes later, the ambulance parked at the Champs Elysees had suddenly pounced, turned on its siren, and completely disregarding the traffic lights, drove fast in the direction of Montmartre. In different parts all over Paris, other cars had suddenly changed their course and speed; they all began to drive in the same direction.

The best Mossad agents in Paris had received the command. It wasn’t in Jabar’s best interest, but now it wouldn’t matter to him anyway...

Laura was the first to burst in, and three minutes later, the operation to free APISIS was canceled. The young Israeli woman took just one look around and understood the sequence of events. She quickly left the house of corpses and vanished into the crowd.

When the colonel and the captain received Laura’s message, they stared at each other in amazement.

Whatever had happened in the Montmartre house was beyond their understanding... but it was reality. A nutty Japan-freak, who had been mocked and disbelieved by the Mossad, had single handedly killed a gang of dangerous murderers and supplied the Israeli intelligence services with very significant information.

In the brothel, Yumiko was completely calm: without any hesitation, and in a very serene and confident way, she ordered a strip show. As for me, I found it hard to calm myself down, since it was my first time ever in such a place.

A young woman named Janette approached us. The manner of her undressing was graceful as well as playful. After that, she began to dance, while swaying her buttocks. If it had occurred at another time, I may have

been more interested, but the circumstances now were different. Sirens howled outside, helicopters rattled in the Montmartre sky, and the young girl gave us some confidence. However, when she started to react to the alarming noise outdoors, Yumiko's eyes signaled her to look down at my trousers. Surprisingly enough, the girl blushed: "That's not my job," she said. "I'm not paid for that."

"Well, in that case, I'll do it myself," said the young Japanese woman. "For free." She bent towards me, and I almost lost consciousness, what with all the recent events. Meanwhile, Janette observed us with a kind of professional expression...

When I finally exited, on weak legs, out of this hospitable institution, not even one policeman in the street suspected us in any way. Even our cab driver smiled at us with understanding.

We spoke Japanese in the cab.

"Where are we going?" Yumiko asked.

"Back to my hotel," I answered.

"No," she said.

"Yes," I said.

"It's too dangerous. You are expected there."

"Maybe, but I've hidden some extremely important documents there that I have to deliver to our men. Besides, all my money is in the room."

"Silly! There's nothing there anymore. They've probably taken everything already, no matter if they're friends or enemies. You can't go back. They're probably waiting for you."

"I must."

“I can’t back you up or rescue you, if you need it.”

“I must go back.”

“Baka! Baka! – Fool!” She suddenly burst into tears, and that’s when I realized how much I cared for this young woman. I hugged her: “Yumiko, ay shte iru yo! – I love you! – Kavaiy onnanoko, – My sweet girl, – nakanayde kudasay – please, don’t cry. – I love you. This is the last time. After I return, we’ll never be separated again. Anata to isshonee itsumade mo imas! – We’ll be together forever!”

I wasn’t surprised to see strangers in my room, and their pointed guns were no surprise either. Laura was there, too. The yellow bag was on the table.

“We’ve been expecting you,” said a thin, gray-haired Israeli who was probably their commander. Suddenly, they dropped all their weapons as if they were ordered to do so. I quickly went to the closet and checked the hiding place: the dollars were still there.

The gray-haired man handed me a package: “Here you’ll find a plane ticket, money and documents. Your plane will be leaving in three hours. Laura will accompany you.”

“I’m not going back to Israel. I have completely different plans.”

The man tried to remain calm. “You’ll be accepted with a formal ceremony. You’ll also receive a government citation and a large grant. After a short rest, we’ll start your training.”

I nodded: “Look, my plans have changed. I have... a girlfriend now.” Suddenly I remembered Yumiko. I checked the time and realized that I had three minutes to leave, before everyone in the room would be killed. I grabbed my suitcase, which I had packed beforehand, and turned to

the door.

“Excuse me, but I must leave now, otherwise...”

“We can’t let you go like this,” said the gray-haired man, and another man came and blocked the exit.

Suddenly Laura, no doubt seeing something intimidating in my eyes, shouted: “Don’t stop him! Let him go!” She had probably been in the house before and had seen Yumiko’s work. Obviously, she didn’t want to get a bullet in her forehead! And Laura was right. I would never have managed to stop the Japanese girl from coming. She worked too fast.

The man moved aside from the door.

We sat on a huge plane, filled with Japanese schoolgirls who were flying back from a trip to Paris. Yumiko laid her head on my shoulder and I felt tremendous bliss. The woman of my dreams was sitting next to me: the sweet, gentle Yumiko-chan, my beloved.

The plane turned towards Tokyo.

## Let's Not Talk About It with Anybody

If you happen to have returned from Tokyo nine months ago, don't be surprised at receiving congratulations from there on the birth of your baby. I wasn't surprised.

Nine months ago I rented a room in Asakusa, one of the old and picturesque districts of Tokyo. I found the room on the Internet. A Japanese woman advertises her own apartment from which she rents out rooms to foreigners. I took the smallest and darkest room, one that didn't even have windows.

Apart from myself, all the five lodgers in this guest house were young women. They came from different countries and were of diverse nationalities, but what all of them had in common was their love of Japan and their desire to live there. These women's figures resembled one another, and when one of them entered my dark room at night and got under my blanket, I didn't know which one of them she was. The next morning, when everyone had breakfast together in the kitchen, all the girls smiled at me knowingly while exchanging significant glances with each other... I only smiled stupidly.

Our landlady was a Japanese woman of uncertain age. Sometimes I caught her meaningful glances at me... Her name was Mitsue and she worked as a teacher of the tea ceremony. Every evening we went to her lessons at a small wooden house not far from her guest house. For various

reasons, many Japanese women learn how to perform the tea ceremony. Young girls learn it before their weddings, and also Japanese women of all ages, who start to feel attracted to the old traditions. Usually women carry out the ritual automatically, like some type of sport. I didn't really understand the significance of the custom: for western people it's more natural to drink tea with one's family in the kitchen.

But one evening, I noticed a woman who performed the ceremony with particular devotion and concentration. All her graceful movements seemed to be filled with some secret spiritual meaning. She appeared to be a very profound and refined person. I admired her and asked Mitsue: "Who is that woman?"

"She is my friend. Her name is Kumiko." Mitsue answered. It seems she didn't approve of my interest in Kumiko, and that evening Mitsue neither talked to me nor even looked in my direction...

I couldn't forget Kumiko and in my dreams we were together...Two days later Mitsue said to me:

"Kumiko-san and her husband invited us to dinner today." I regretted that Kumiko was married, but I was happy to see her once more. On the way to their home we bought a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a cake.

"Why did they invite us?" I asked, but Mitsue didn't answer. She said:

"They are a very happy couple, but they don't have children. I think the problem is with him."

Kumiko's family lived near Sumida-River in a nice place. They received us very formally. At first Kumiko looked serious and worried. She hardly paid any attention to me at all. Her husband's smile was strained. "Why did they invite us?" I thought, but didn't find an answer. The dinner was very good. Kumiko soon tried to be cheerful and talkative, but both she and her husband seemed to be rather stressed. Suddenly Kumiko's husband and Mitsue stood up. "I am sorry, we have to leave you for ten minutes," Kumiko's husband said. Kumiko continued to sit with downcast eyes. I stood up, but didn't know what to do.

After they left the apartment, Kumiko got up and came over to me. Without making eye contact, she took my hand and led me to another room. It was a bedroom. Kumiko stood near me, looking at me with her eyes wide open. Suddenly she embraced me and then pushed me down onto the bed. I didn't have time to be surprised. She began to undress me, fumbling with my clothes. A strong desire seized me. I hugged her and we turned over... She kissed me very unskillfully. It seemed like it was her first attempt at sex in her life. The minute it was over, she forcefully pushed me away.

"Go away!" She cried, covering her breasts with a sheet. She looked at me with loathing. She quickly put on a yukata – a kimono made of cotton which is worn indoors, and threw my clothes at me. "Go away" she cried once more and began pushing me out of the flat. I didn't have time to finish dressing before I was out of the door.

When I returned to my room, Mitsue came to me and stretched out her hand: "Give me back the key to my

apartment, please,” she said. That evening I moved to a nearby hotel.

Sometimes I would pass near Kumiko’s house, but I felt too embarrassed to visit her. I didn’t have her telephone number. When I called Mitsue, she hung up on me and didn’t answer my emails either.

I sat in my hotel room, watching TV, drinking ocha – a green Japanese tea – and thinking about Kumiko. I was like a wild beast in that situation: the possibility of sex with a stranger’s wife excited me very much. As far as Kumiko was concerned, she had gone through with it like a robot, without any emotion. I think it had disgusted her. But a Japanese woman can endure anything if it’s necessary...What kind of child could be born from such intercourse?

But no! This way of thinking was not right! I really felt I loved Kumiko very much and that I couldn’t live without her. I thought about her constantly and remembered her smile, her movements, her body...And our sex wasn’t “the intercourse of a beast” – it was an act of real love. Suddenly I heard a quiet knock on my door. I opened it quickly. It was Kumiko! Without saying a word I took her into my arms and she responded passionately...

I have never felt such wild, mad happiness, as I did that night. Kumiko changed from the quiet modest Japanese housewife to a wounded panther. Her body wriggled in my embrace as she pressed herself against me, trying to penetrate into me and become one whole with me. Her

hips jumped like mad gazelles... I will surely never forget that night!

When I woke up the next morning, she had already left my room. I felt that she had entered deep into my heart, and from now on we'd be together for ever. At last I had found my ideal woman!

But beside the lamp on the table I found a short note:  
“Sayonara! – Good bye! If you love me, don’t try to meet with me, please.” I was devastated by these words. It meant finding happiness and instantly losing it. I found it unbearable but I couldn’t refuse to do as she wished...

I didn’t see Kumiko again before I left Japan. But I couldn’t forget her even for a minute. When I returned to Israel, I tried to get in touch with Mitsue many times, but she didn’t answer my phone calls or my messages. And now, nine months ago...

But who has sent me these greetings about the birth of a child? I telephoned Mitsue.

“Congratulations!” she said. “Your daughter is a healthy and very sweet girl.”

“How is Kumiko-san?” I answered.

“Kumiko-san is OK too. She is very happy to have such a nice baby.”

“And her husband..?” I had to ask this question.

“She doesn’t have a husband. She is divorced and is now living with her mother in inaka (in the village).”

“She’s divorced?! Why did she get divorced? Why didn’t she let me know?” I was astounded.

“When Kumiko found out that she was pregnant, she felt that she was very much in love with you and couldn’t live with anyone else.”

“But why didn’t she tell me?” I repeated my question.

“She is a Japanese woman.” Mitsue answered.

I asked and wrote down Kumiko’s new address.

I had no doubts about what I had to do. First of all I went to my boss and asked him for a raise and also to allow me to take a holiday immediately. He was very surprised.

“I have become a father and now I must support my family.” I explained.

“But you are single. You don’t have a wife. How did you become a father?” he asked.

“Nine months ago I was in Tokyo...” I said, blushing a bit.  
“And now I have to bring my wife and my daughter back from Japan.”

My boss was so astonished that he agreed to everything.

There were no buses from Chiba station to Kumiko’s house in the village so I took a taxi. When I arrived at the door of Kumiko’s house, I heard a baby crying from behind the door. I rang, and an elderly Japanese woman opened the door. We looked at each other without saying anything.

“Okaasan, who is it?” Kumiko’s voice called from inside the house. The woman and I continued to stand looking at each other without speaking. Kumiko came out to us holding the baby in her arms. The three of us were silent. Even the baby stopped crying.

“What did you name our daughter?” I asked.

“Hitomi,” Kumiko answered, and began to cry...

Now our happy little family is living in Jerusalem. Kumiko teaches the tea ceremony at the Center for Japanese Culture in Jerusalem. Little Hitomi and I often go to her wonderful lessons so we can admire Kumiko’s artistry. We are very happy.

Perhaps our relationship began rather strangely, but let’s not talk about this with anyone...

# How to publish a book in Japan

It is hardly necessary to say how much any author would want to get his work published. And obviously an author who writes in Japanese, would want to see his book published in Japan.

But how can I do it, if I live in Israel?

Japanese publishers usually delete the work of an unknown author as a matter of course.

And whenever I try to make an appointment with Japanese publishers, they are suddenly always too busy to see me, particularly when they hear that I live in Israel.

At last I realized that there is only one possibility left for me to “push” my works – to go to Japan and to turn up in front of a publisher and to try to convince him to publish my book...

As soon as I had made this decision, I took two weeks’ leave of absence from my work and, at the first opportunity, I flew out to Tokyo.

I had made a list of the better publishers in Tokyo, and began the rounds of all of them.

But I was immediately confronted by a problem, which is typical for Tokyo: the streets don’t have names, and the house numbers are not consistent at all. For example house number 10 may be next to house number 5. This makes it very difficult to find an address.

But can a small problem like this stop an author who wishes to publish his work?

I quickly learned to find addresses with the help of maps, asking policemen or passersby.

All the publishers I met received me very cordially and entertained me with Japanese green tea – ocha and Japanese special cakes and asked me about Israel. Of course an Israeli, writing in Japanese caused some surprise and even delight, by the fact that I had managed to find them.

Sometimes, the publishers were very busy and really could only spare me a few minutes, but despite this they were very friendly.

There was just one unpleasant exception when a girl at the prestigious T.-L. literature agency was wearing a necklace of ornamental Arab letters. When she heard that I am from Israel, she didn't want to speak with me...

Of course, nobody would give me a definite promise and everybody talked about the difficulty of the publishing business in Japan. There was one special objection: everybody was afraid to publish the work of an unknown author and thereby risk losing their money.

The day before returning I decided to visit a publisher named Watanabe, which was in Yanaka – in the old one-floor area of Tokyo.

Usually when I visit Tokyo, I always stay in the hotel near Ueno-station. And Yanaka is near Nippori – the next station on the Yamanote-sen – circular line in Tokyo.

There is a big cemetery in the middle of Yanaka. And you hardly notice that you have gone from the city to the cemetery: you are walking along the narrow streets of the city, and all of a sudden you are walking between the grave stones.

I saw again the address of Watanabe publisher: a block 7, a house 30 (but for some reason it wasn't marked on the map), and I cheerfully began to search.

I easily found block 7. It was difficult to find house number 20. However to find house number 30 was impossible and nobody knew where it was.

At last somebody said: “Go that way between those buildings”.

I went there and... suddenly there was the cemetery, and directly in front of me – a grave of Watanabe (line 7, grave 30). On the gravestone was written: Watanabe Kioshi 渡辺清.

I was paralyzed from this unexpected discovery. It gave me the creeps.

Suddenly an old Japanese man, wearing a dilapidated kimono came to me.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

I was glad to see him: maybe he could help me to understand this situation. He must be familiar with this place.

“I am looking for the publisher Watanabe in block 7, house number 30, but instead I find the grave of Watanabe Kioshi on line 7 and grave number 30... I don’t know what to think...”

“This is not a mistake. Watanabe-sensei was a well known publisher for many years,” said the old man.

According to the dates on the grave the publisher had died the previous century.

“But for a long time he... hasn’t published anything...” I said.

“What do you want from him?” The old man asked.

I took out the manuscript of my book from my bag.

“Here. I want to publish my book.”

“Then, you came to the correct address. Put your notebooks here, burn some incense at the grave and your book will be published for sure.”

Did he really say that? Did I hear correctly?

“I am a Jew, and Jews don’t burn incense on graves.”

“But Watanabe-sensei wasn’t a Jew. So you can burn incense on his grave,” The old man said, turned around and walked away between the graves...

“Am I delusional?” I thought, but anyway I went to a Buddist temple to buy incense.

What could I do in such a situation?

I bought some incense, burned it on the grave of Watanabe-sensei and then continued on to Nippori-station with a feeling of having fulfilled an important task.

So, my meeting with the publisher in Yanaka had some meaning...

Some days after returning home I received a message from the publishing house N. from Tokyo. I read with excitement that it was decided to publish my book by Watanabe’s publisher.

It will be published this year.

By Watanabe’s publisher???

But the contract seemed to be quite “earthly”.

I quickly signed it and sent back.

From the conditions of the contract it was clear that I wasn’t going to become a rich man.

What could it mean for me?

I had fulfilled my dream. At last my book will be published in Japan!

## Where is Toshiko?

I have always been very interested in Japan. I have taken courses in Japanese and endeavored never to miss any lectures being given on Japanese culture at the university in Jerusalem. This was not so difficult because I was living in French Hill near the university.

When I planned my first trip to Japan, I began to correspond with girls on Japanese dating sites. It's better, of course, to travel in Japan with a nice Japanese girl.

But, unfortunately, Japanese girls didn't exactly rush to volunteer to guide me around their wonderful country. Maybe, my few extra kilograms and my several months' Japanese didn't make much of an impression on them. I managed to find just one girl who agreed to meet with me in Tokyo and to show me Japan. She sent me her telephone number, but I couldn't make out her photo on the dating site because it was somewhat blurred, so I didn't really know what she looked like. I tried to arrange to meet her as soon as I'd arrive in Tokyo, but she answered: "Don't worry, my dear, call me and I'll find you by myself."

On my flight to Japan there was a pretty Japanese girl sitting next to me in the plane. She smiled at me in a friendly way. Really, she was a perfect Japanese lady. I was very surprised and glad to meet her.

"What is your name?" I asked her.

"I am Toshiko," she answered.

"Is it you?!" I was a bit overwhelmed and also happy. "It's wonderful you found me so quickly!"

She smiled, but didn't answer.

I did my best to make the flight pleasant for her and to entertain her. We talked about all manner of things during the flight, and before landing in Tokyo, I felt we had become very close.

Naturally, I invited her to a room in a hotel in Ueno, which I booked for us, and of course she agreed...

Next morning, when I woke up, she was getting dressed.

I admired her perfect and sexy body.

I felt complete happiness.

“Good morning, Toshiko-chan! I am so happy that we found each other in such an amazing way...”

She looked at me and said:

“You have made a mistake. I am not the Toshiko, you were looking for. And you aren't right for me at all! You are too old and fat, my dear. I hate your miserable clothes. I hate this nasty hotel....” She finished dressing. “I am used to the expensive clubs of Roppongi, and to fashionable restaurants and I usually travel in big European cars. How could you expect that I would fancy a man like you? I hope you find your Toshiko, and she will suit you better and not run away.”

She turned with a toss of her head and left.

I didn't feel so good after this experience, of course, but I decided that I should continue my trip and try to find my Toshiko. After drinking my morning cup of coffee at Starbucks, I went to call Toshiko, and to start from the beginning.

“Hello, Toshiko! I arrived in Tokyo yesterday. When can we meet?”

“Hello, my dear! What about ten o’clock this morning? Wonderful! I’ll wait for you in front of the Hachiko-exit at Shibuya-station near the police box.”

At ten o’clock I was standing near the police box at Shibuya-station. I smiled at the policemen and began to look out for my Toshiko.

There were many beautiful girls standing around and waiting for someone. One of them looked a little like Toshiko’s photo. She seemed a very nice girl.

I went up to her.

“Hi, Toshiko! I am so happy to see you.”

She smiled sweetly:

“I am happy to meet you too.”

“Let’s go and sit in some café and get to know each other better...”

“Of course.” she answered. Really, she was very beautiful. We found an Italian restaurant and while eating pasta and pizza with shrimps, we examined each other closely. Our conversation was amusing and inconsequential. When we got to the dessert, I said:

“I am staying in a hotel in Ueno. Let’s go to my room, I have brought you a wonderful present from Israel.”

She looked perplexed.

“I am sorry, but I can’t go to a hotel with a man. I am a married woman.”

“You are...what?” I couldn’t believe my ears.

“But you wrote me and told me on the phone...”

“I never wrote you anything and never spoke to you on the phone. I think, you have mixed me up with somebody else.”

“But you are Toshiko...”

“There are many women named Toshiko in Japan.”

She stood up, waved goodbye and with a sweet smile left the restaurant.

I understood that I had made a terrible mistake again.

But where was my Toshiko?

I called her immediately.

“Toshiko, please excuse me, I have made a mistake again. Really, I am sorry... Perhaps we can try to make another appointment?”

She laughed.

“Don’t worry, my dear. We can meet this evening at eight o’clock at the entrance to Ueno-park near Keisei-Ueno-station.”

“Of course, I’ll come.”

That evening, at eight o’clock I duly arrived at Ueno-park near Keisei-Ueno-station. It was already getting dark.

By the lights there I could see a young woman, sitting on a bench at the entrance to the park. I thought she looked like the photo of Toshiko (though in the darkness I couldn’t see her face clearly). There were no other girls there. I sat down near her.

“Good evening, Toshiko! I am very glad, that we have met at last.”

“Good evening, my dear,” she answered.

“Shall we go and sit in a café and get to know each other better?”

“Of course. It will cost five thousand yen for two hours.”

I didn’t understand.

“Toshiko, do you need money?”

“What did you think?” She smiled with sarcasm. “I work here.”

Oh! I realized that I had made a mistake yet again.

I leaped up from the bench.

She stood up too and said:

“I will agree to four thousand.”

But I was already making my escape...

After a few minutes I telephoned Toshiko.

“Tomorrow at ten in the morning in front of the information booth at Ueno-station,” she said.

Next morning at ten I was in front of the information place at Ueno-station.

Many women were standing there waiting to meet somebody. One of them looked like Toshiko’s photo. I approached her and asked:

“Excuse me, are you Toshiko?”

“No,” she answered. “I am Takako.”

Suddenly I heard a woman’s voice behind me:

“I am Toshiko.”

I turned around and almost fell down in shock. I saw a very old little woman in front of me.

I quickly ran away...

“Toshiko, let’s make an appointment one last time. If we can’t meet this time, I won’t be able to meet you at all, I think.”

“OK. This evening, please come to the “Blue Bird-chan Pub” in Roppongi at nine.”

I knew that Roppongi is the modern and fashionable area

of Tokyo.

Of course, I was in “Blue bird-chan” at nine.

In the darkness of the pub I could see many girls and boys in weird clothes with strangely coloured faces. Rock-music was playing very loudly .

Suddenly, a boy with heavily made-up eyes and bright red lips approached me, swaying his hips.

“What are you looking for here, my dear?” he asked.

“I am looking for a girl named Toshiko.” I answered.

“Toshiko is me!” he said happily.

I flew out of that pub and for a long time couldn’t recover from the shock.

After this I continued my trip in Japan without trying to find Toshiko.

Japan is really a wonderful country. I enjoyed discovering this magic world, filled with unexpected surprises and delicate beauty.

Sometimes, of course, I remembered with sadness my unsuccessful search for my Toshiko...

On my return flight to Israel there was a Japanese girl sitting next to me in the plane. She smiled me warmly and sweetly.

“Are you Israeli?” she asked.

“Yes.” I answered.

“That’s wonderful!” she said. I am going to Israel for the first time, and I have many questions. May I ask you?”

“Of course. What do you intend to do in Israel?”

“I was invited to the university in Jerusalem to lecture on Japanese culture.”

“Really? I am interested in everything Japanese, and I go to many lectures on Japanese culture at the university in Jerusalem. I will be glad to answer all your questions about Israel and to help you!”

“Thank you very much! That’s wonderful. I will be staying at a small hotel in French Hill... Do you know where that is?”

“I live there. Don’t worry, I will be happy to show you where it is.”

I felt that I could fall in love with this girl. It was my good fortune. She looked at me with interest and sympathy and it filled my heart with hope and happiness. Suddenly, I realized that we still hadn’t really introduced ourselves and I didn’t know her name.

“What is your name?” I asked her.

“My name is Toshiko.” she answered.

# The Girl from Nagasaki

Yumi didn't sleep well last night. She had strange dreams, kept waking up and wasn't quite sure if she had actually slept at all.

In the morning, when she had woken up completely she realized that she was ill. She felt extremely weak, perhaps because she had a high fever.

She couldn't stand up. It was difficult for her even to move her hand.

Yumi knew that there was a flu epidemic around in Israel. Maybe she had the flu. Because Yumi lived alone in a foreign country, she always made sure that she was careful with her health. She ate only natural food and ran every morning for an hour in a park near her house.

Yumi would usually treat any illness she had by drinking Japanese green tea, which her mother sent her from Nagasaki. But now she didn't have the strength to stand up and to boil water in the teapot.

Her mouth was so dry. Her thoughts were confused and she couldn't concentrate.

Suddenly she remembered that today Alex was going to come. She should warn him that she was ill, but she couldn't. She wasn't allowed to phone him because of his jealous wife. And Yumi couldn't even get to the computer. It was a great mistake to fall in love with a married man, but now it was too late for regrets – it had already happened.

Yumi had come to Israel six years ago to study Judaism at the Hebrew University, and after finishing her studies she had stayed on living in Israel. She earned her living by giving private lessons in Japanese and translating. She tried to develop relations with Israeli boys, but

they weren't serious from the beginning. Strong Jewish mothers hope their sons will marry Jewish girls from good families. Of course, boys can have a good time with a Japanese girl, but to marry her would be considered unacceptable. Alex was sensitive and refined. Yumi had met him at a party for the Japanese community in the university and had just fallen in love with him. And after that there was a wonderful trip to Eilat...

When she found out that he was married she was very unhappy, but what could she do?

Now she would meet him twice a week, and today he was supposed to come to her.

Yumi dozed off and didn't hear the door opening and Alex coming in.

Alex was a doctor. When he saw Yumi lying on her bed, she was unconscious. Her pulse was very rapid and weak. Obviously she had the flu.

Alex knew that because of the flu epidemic the Emergency departments of the hospitals in Jerusalem were filled with sick people and Yumi would only have to wait a long time until someone could attend to her.

Alex decided to take her to his home. He lifted her almost weightless body and carried her to his car.

Like all doctors, Alex had at home a variety of medicaments and sets of infusions. He knew that Yumi was dehydrated and needed an infusion immediately.

He brought Yumi to his flat, put her on a sofa and administered the infusion.

His wife Elka was due to arrive home. She was also a doctor and she usually returned from night work at this time. Of course, Elka would be very angry to see Yumi in her apartment, but Alex didn't have any choice: he had to

save his beloved.

Alex put his palm on Yumi's forehead; she had a high fever. He opened more fluid into the infusion.

The door opened and Elka came in. Alex heard her changing her shoes.

"How are you, my dear? – She called out.

Alex didn't have time to answer: Elka had already entered the living room.

"What is this?" She pointed to Yumi on the sofa.

"This is my Japanese friend... She has suddenly become very ill and I have had to bring her here, because she needs treatment urgently."

"Your Japanese friend? Do you think I am a fool?"

"Elka, her situation is very dangerous. She can die."

Elka went up to Yumi, took her hand and checked her pulse. Elka's face became serious.

"I want to check her lungs," she said. "I am afraid that it may be pneumonia."

She took a stethoscope and said to Alex:

"Help me."

Alex sat Yumi up on the sofa and raised her shirt. Elka quickly and professionally checked the girl's lungs and heart.

"There is wheezing in the lower lobe of the right lung. She needs antibiotics."

"We have PAN-CEFTRIAXONE in the refrigerator. I'll add it to the infusion."

Hiromi was still unconscious.

Elka looked at her carefully.

"She is very beautiful... And you are revolting!" Elka

turned to Alex. “How could you do it?”

Alex couldn’t answer.

Suddenly, Yumi opened her eyes and looked at both Alex and Elka somewhat fearfully.

Elka smiled and said softly:

“Don’t worry, my dear. We are doctors and we are treating you. Soon you will feel better.”

She turned to Alex.

“Bring her hot tea with honey.

Alex immediately went out.

Yumi looked at Elka entreatingly and whispered:

“Excuse my...” Her eyes filled with tears.

“You are not guilty,” Elka answered with a smile. “We know that men are like animals.”

She took Yumi’s hand. Yumi smiled weakly.

Alex entered with tea.

Elka helped Yumi to sit up and she began to drink.

She was like a sick child.

Elka looked at her tenderly.

Yumi’s clothes were wet with sweat. Elka brought her pajamas and motioned to Alex to go out. Elka then helped Yumi into the pajamas.

That night Alex and Elka took it in turns to sit near Yumi, check her fever, and bring her hot tea. Next morning Yumi felt better.

When Elka entered the room, Alex was holding Yumi’s hand and looking at her lovingly. He didn’t let go of her hand. Elka smiled and didn’t say anything...

Yumi wanted to return home, but Elka said to her:

“Don’t hurry, my dear. You will go, when you are well enough. Don’t worry, it’s not difficult for us at all.”

Some days passed. Yumi quickly regained her health, but Elka didn’t let her return home. Yumi stayed with the couple and gradually became a member of the family.

Elka and Alex grew used to the pristine cleanliness of their apartment and the tasty Japanese food.

Their relationship became more and more harmonies.

Now who sleeps on the sofa in the living room?

Alex, of course.

# Fantasy in the Moonlight

I remember the warm spring of 2010.

Junko and I were admiring the sakura blossom in Ueno Park.

We were worrying about the young Japanese figure skater Kanako Murakami in the world championship.

We also couldn't tear our selves away from watching the Japanese astronaut on TV, the beautiful lady Hanako Okazaki 's space trip.

It was a year before the terrible tsunami would crush Japanese cities and wake up Fukushima.

Japan was still a paradise, and the Japanese were still sweet and careless angels.

And Junko and I loved each other like Adam and Eve – the first people in Heaven – and we couldn't get enough of our happiness and love...

But I want to tell all the story from the beginning.

What was I doing in Japan?

How did Junko enter my life?

I was born in Russia and lived in Israel (because I am a Jew), but ever since my childhood I had always dreamed about Japan.

I am a man of quick decisions, and the distance between the Japanese legends and my job as a manager in a German consulting firm in Tokyo is not so far.

My workday would begin at six o'clock when, dressed in a new suit with a modern tie and shining black shoes, I would get on the train. My work day ended at eleven in the evening at some pub in Shibuya with the corporative party of our company. Like everybody in Japan I worked hard in

order to earn money and to progress in my career.

One morning a very young girl, dressed rather unusually, approached me in the train. She was obviously still dressed from the previous evening in her red super mini, high heeled shoes and torn tights. The train was shaking and she cuddled up to me and held on to my sleeve.

“Hi!” she said with a smile. I noticed the smell of alcohol.  
“Why don’t we meet tonight after your work?”

We must have made a rather strange couple hurrying to work, the well-dressed manager and the school girl, returning from the night club.

“I don’t meet with schoolgirls,” I answered.

“I am 23.”

Maybe. Sometimes Japanese women do look very young.

“Aren’t we people from two different worlds?

“So what? Are you afraid of a girl from another world?”

She was Junko. We met that evening, and didn’t separate after that...

Junko turned out to be a wonderful housewife. She cooked well, and our apartment was always clean. We lived together very happily.

But there was something missing in our relationship: I knew nothing about her past, her family or friends. She never spoke about them.

I loved Junko very much and sometimes I would talk with her about getting married, and every time she would change the subject.

But the corporative parties every evening were our most serious problems. Naturally, I wanted to be with my beautiful young lover all the time, and I would get upset having to leave her and to spend time with my drunken

work colleagues...

But Japanese traditions are very strong, any objections are not accepted, and to refuse is impossible...

But let's get back to our story.

Every evening in the pub we watched the astronaut Hanako Okazaki, dressed in traditional Japanese kimono with a fan in her hand, turning somersaults in the weightlessness of space on the big television set.

And we watched the sweet figure skater Kanoko Murakami win the junior world championship that year.

One evening on TV it was announced that because of technical problems the spaceship had to return to earth immediately. The report wasn't clear, and we all were very worried. There was so much speculation.

Suddenly, an old man came to me with his mug of beer and sat down next to me. I would see this man here every evening, but didn't know his name and never talked with him. He was drunk as usual.

"Today is a full moon," he said. "Some serious and incredible things may happen on this day. Aren't you worried about your young wife?"

His question troubled me.

I called Junko immediately, but nobody answered!

This was something I wasn't expecting.

I ran home as quickly as I could, full of foreboding.

But Junko wasn't at home!

I ran around our house, searching for her near the station, went around all the pubs in the neighbourhood, but couldn't find her.

I went to the police and told them that my lover had disappeared. But the police only laughed.

“A young lady is able to walk out sometimes somewhere,” they said. “Don’t worry, she will return.”

“Or she will not return,” added his colleague with an annoying smile. “You are not a married couple, and you are not Japanese. It’s difficult to know. But don’t worry: if she doesn’t return, you will find another girlfriend, don’t worry!”

But I worried: I knew that Junko didn’t intend to leave me and I didn’t intend to look for another girl...

I remembered that the old man in the pub knew that Junko had disappeared.

I ran to the pub. But he hadn’t been there since yesterday. I asked a barman, what the man’s name was.

The barman answered:

“He has a very strange name - Taketori. Like in the tale.”

“In what tale?” I didn’t understand.

“Oh, you don’t know? The tale about Princess Kaguya - the princess of the moon.”

I found and read the story about Kaguya - the princess of the moon (“Taketori - monogatari”).

It interested me that my Junko was a bit like Kaguya.

From the beginning she was for me a woman “from another world”. I didn’t know anything about her, perhaps nothing connected her to this world... And like Kaguya-hime she wasn’t in a hurry to get married...

Weeks passed, but Junko didn’t come back.

Taketori, the old man from that pub has also disappeared,

and nobody had seen any more of him.  
Perhaps, he is continuing to drink in some other pub as  
he has been doing for ten centuries, after his adopted  
daughter Kaguya had left him and returned to the Moon...

The spaceship landed. All the astronauts were safe. The  
beautiful girl astronaut Hanako Okazaki smiled at us from  
the TV every day and told us about her interesting trip  
into space...

One day some woman called me.  
“Hi!” she said. “I am Hanako Okazaki. I’d like to meet with  
you as soon as possible for a very serious conversation.”  
I couldn’t believe my ears!  
“Astronaut Hanako Okazaki?”  
“Yes. Can we meet this evening?  
We decided to meet in the Starbucks café at Roppongi  
station at seven.  
I just couldn’t think why she wanted to see me.  
What could be “a serious conversation” between us?  
I recognized her at once, as did almost everybody in the  
café who greeted her and photographed her with their  
cell-phones.

At last she noticed me and came to my table with her mug  
of coffee.

After greeting me she said:  
“I am sure you were very surprised at my call, but an affair  
is really unusual.”

She drank a little coffee and continued her story staring  
ahead.

“A terrible event occurred in space, something other than what you heard on TV. Suddenly the generator of our spaceship failed and we had no oxygen. Soon I felt the shortage of oxygen: I began to suffer from vertigo and weakness... We understood than all of us were going to die, and there was no way we were going to be saved.

In this situation everyone behaved according to his character: some wept silently, some cried hysterically, some just froze in fear... But the Japanese know how to die honorably, it has been instilled in them since they were born.”

Hanako fell silent and looked down. She lived again through those terrible moments...

After a minute she continued:

“Suddenly my module was infused with a white light. I saw in front of me a very beautiful girl wearing something bright. I understood that it was Princess Kaguya just as she is always portrayed in the tale. It wasn’t a delusion, I saw her like I see you now. She said to me: “You will not die this time, you’ll return to earth and will have a child.”

Hanako covered her eyes with her hand and was silent for some minutes. After this she continued, looking straight at me:

“Kaguya-hime asked me to tell you that Junko will never return... and that she had no other choice.”

After meeting with Hanako Okazaki I realized that Junko wouldn’t return, but how could I explain this to my heart? I thought about Junko all the time which prevented me from working in my consulting firm.

I read many variations of the tale about Kaguya-hime in

Japanese and I found I had many questions. My friend from Tokyo University told me that the best specialist in old Japanese literature is Professor Yamada from Waseda University. Right away I made an appointment with him.

“There are many unclear points with in this tale,” Yamada-sensei said. “It was written in the tenth century. At that time only political and religion texts were being written. But you know in this tale all high-ranking people and even Emperors were humiliated, and the tale’s conception of “the Moon Lady” doesn’t correspond to the Japanese religions of Shinto and Buddhism.”

All this was very interesting, and I quickly returned from management back to the legends of Japan.

I very soon began to study for a doctorate in Japanese literature of the tenth century at Waseda University, under the supervision of Yamada-sensei.

And so my life was filled with meaning and enjoyment.

To investigate old texts and to lecture students is more interesting than to lie to clients in the consulting firm.

But Japanese students are very shy and usually don’t ask questions during lectures. Japanese tradition does not encourage drawing attention to oneself. But sometimes after lectures I received notes with

interesting questions. I tried to answer them as best I could, of course.

One day I noticed that a new girl began to attend my lectures. I noticed her because she somewhat resembled my Junko. But I couldn’t really see her because she always

came wearing a mask (usually Japanese cover their faces with a mask when they are ill) and she always sat in the last row in the lecture hall.

Once when I gave a lecture about Kaguya-hime, I said that if Kaguya-hime had married one of her candidates, it would not have ended well, because Kaguya-hime came from another world.

After this lecture I received a note: “I know you are afraid of a girl from another world.”

Quickly I looked at the masked girl. She took off her mask and laughed.

It was Junko.

# The Marriage of the White Fox

## (Grab your happiness tightly by the tail!)

Even on the plane flying to Japan I couldn't stop thinking about my forthcoming marriage.

But let's see how this marriage came about and how I am finding myself on this plane flying to Japan.

Irena had been my friend from childhood and our parents were friends, but I had never thought of her as my girlfriend, and certainly not as my future bride.

However she started to become much more interested in me. She began to telephone me a lot and also became very close to my parents.

Suddenly everyone around me started to talk about our getting married soon as if it were already understood. I felt I couldn't get out of it, because to refuse would disappoint my parents and would make people think that I had gone back on my word.

And then to my surprise I was told that the hall for our wedding had been booked, and Irena was making her wedding dress.

Irena was a good girl, but I had never loved her. Maybe, just being very good friends is enough for a happy married life...

A close friend understood my feelings very well and advised me to take some time off to go traveling awhile before the wedding.

It would help me to come to terms with the inevitable changes in my life.

After reflecting on this I decided to go to Japan. This amazing country with its unique culture would surely

disperse my doubts and would lighten my mood.

After leafing through a guide-book I decided to begin my acquaintance with Japan from Ueno – the old part of Tokyo.

In my opinion, the most interesting place in Ueno is its wonderful park, Park Ueno. It is full of museums, temples and shrines. There is also Tokyo Zoo and a picturesque pond with water lilies and swans.

While walking slowly through the park, I looked with interest at the visitors and also the homeless people who were living on the benches.

Suddenly amongst the homeless ones I noticed an old woman with a beautiful, spiritual face. She was very thin and she had the regal bearing of a queen.

I felt that this was not the place for such a woman. The woman looked straight into my eyes, and I felt that her glance burned my heart.

I thought about her for a long time afterwards and couldn't forget her eyes.

I read on the Internet about the homeless people of Japan. They don't receive any social help, they don't have medical insurance and they don't have any money to buy food. She was very thin...

When I went into a restaurant to eat lunch I suddenly felt that I couldn't eat while that woman goes hungry.

I bought a large sandwich with beef and vegetables and some fruit juice, and took it to the woman. I was afraid that she might refuse it, but she accepted it graciously with a smile. I felt that her smile filled my heart with joy!

I continued to bring her food every day, and I always tried to buy something good.

Our meetings became very important and made my trip more meaningful...

One day, as I was walking in Ueno Park as usual, I saw many people in beautiful festive clothes near a shrine.

“What is happening here?” I asked somebody.

“This is a wedding,” he answered and nodded at the side of the shrine. “The young couple and their guests will soon come out of the shrine, and you will be able to take as many photographs as you want. So get your camera ready now.”

There were many shoes in front of the door of the shrine. Perhaps all the people who went inside, had removed their shoes as I knew that the Japanese did when they entered a house.

I was happy, because I had never seen a Japanese wedding. I prepared my camera to photograph the wedding guests, when they came out of the shrine.

Suddenly a door opened and a young girl in a beautiful peach colored kimono came out. She looked around at all the people and her glance stopped at me.

“Hi, gaikokujin!” she said. “Are you married?”

“No,” I answered.

“Do you want to take part in a Japanese wedding?”

“Of course!” I was amazed.

This was my chance!

“Please, come here,” she said.

She took me to a small wooden building near the shrine and gave me a beautiful black kimono.

“Please, put it on. You have to look festive,” she said and

went out to wait for me.

I changed my clothes, left the building and we both entered the shrine.

There were many beautifully dressed people in the shrine. Amongst them there was a girl in a white dress. Perhaps she was the bride.

I noticed there was a tall serious looking man dressed in red and white – a Japanese Shinto priest - kannushi.

The “peach girl” took me to the bride and I stood near her. Much to my surprise, I saw that the bride’s face was covered with a mask! (Usually Japanese wear masks to protect them from disease, but a bride?!!).

The priest - kannushi came to us and held a glass goblet of sake for me to drink (sake is a rice wine). After this he held the goblet for the bride to drink.

She turned, took off her mask and also drank a little. The kannushi said something in Japanese and everyone around us cried: “Omedeto-o gozaimasu!”

They looked at me and at the bride with smiles and applauded.

I understood that my part in this Japanese wedding was as the groom!

It was unbelievable!

That time the “peach girl” took my hand and led me out. When we went out, all the people standing outside clapped their hands and cried “Omedeto-o gozaimasu!”

The girl took me to the little building near the shrine again.

“Please, change your clothes,” she said, and I went in.

I quickly changed my clothes and came out again.

But there were no guests there.  
All of them had disappeared!  
The bride (or my wife?) and the kannushi had disappeared too.  
There were no shoes outside the door.  
Had I been hallucinating?  
Had this wedding been a dream?

I walked around, but couldn't find any of those guests at all. There were only the usual visitors to the park near the shrine.

I asked somebody:  
“Where is the wedding?”

“What wedding?” he answered. “There wasn’t any wedding here today.”

I knocked at the door of the shrine.”

The kannushi opened it after a few minutes.

“Where is the wedding?” I asked.  
“There is no wedding here. You are not allowed to enter here. Please, go away!” and he closed the door.

I had a very strange feeling: I didn’t understand, what had happened to me: did I get married or not?

I walked around for a long time and looked for some signs of the wedding, but couldn’t find anything.

When I brought food to my “homeless lady”, she smiled me strangely and said:

“Omedetou gozaimasu! How does it feel to be a married man? Don’t worry, everything will work out well, I’ll help you.”

I blushed. How on earth, did she know this?

What does she mean by “well”? How does she intend to help me?

But, when I brought her food the next day she wasn’t in her place and I didn’t see her anymore until I left Japan... Anyway I had to continue my trip.

On further trips to Ueno Park, I discovered a flea market. I fell in love with this wonderful place. There was such a variety of different old things, parts of unknown old things, old coins and badges, old photos and pictures. You could find everything there. A flea market tells you about the history of the place and reveals the secrets of the city and the country.

And everything is cheap.

I bought as many interesting artefacts as I could afford. Included in my purchases was a little round black lacquered box. The seller said that it is used in the Japanese Tea Ceremony and is called a natsume.

It was so beautiful and smooth, that I often took it out to admire and stroke it.

I left Japan with mixed feelings. That place made me ask too many questions and left me feeling very uncertain. But Japan had entered deep into my heart, and when I left Japan, I was sure that I would go back there.

Anyway, I returned to Israel. Irena and my happy parents informed me that the wedding was to take place in a few days.

I said to my parents:

“I can’t get married, I already got married in Japan.”

“How stupid of you! How could you get married? Were you

drunk?”

“No... I can’t explain it, but I am married and can’t get married again.”

Of course, my parents didn’t believe me and didn’t take me seriously.

I felt like a convict before his execution.

But I bought a gold ring for Irena and an expensive suit for the ceremony, and at the appointed time I stood under the huppa with Irena and my parents at my wedding (Jews get married under a canopy called a huppa).

The rabbi came to us and held a glass of wine for me to drink. He said the blessing, drank a little, and offered me the glass...

Suddenly, he snatched the glass away from me.

“You can’t drink this wine!” he said. “You have already drunk at your wedding. You are already married!”

Everybody around us was shocked, and they all started to shout.

There was a great scandal. Relatives and friends of Irena cried in anger, my poor parents wept with surprise and disappointment...

But it was clear that the wedding had now been ruined and would not continue.

Of course, after that fiasco Irena disappeared, and my parents didn’t want to talk to me or see me.

My friends didn’t understand what had happened either.

Suddenly I felt very lonely...

I often remembered my amazing trip. I read about Japan every day and liked to look at all the souvenirs that I had

bought there.

One day, while I was holding the black lacquered natsume , I opened the lid...

Suddenly I began to hear some voices in my head! Some people were talking with each other in an unknown language.

I decided to write down some words from their conversation and to look for their meaning in Google. I wrote down “nagoya” and “jishin”.

I quickly found that “nagoya” is a city in Japan, and “jishin” is earthquake in Japanese.

They spoke in my head in Japanese!

I closed the box, and the voices in my head stopped.

I knew that “voices in the head” is a sign of schizophrenia, but my schizophrenia was very unusual wasn’t it?

Next morning I was sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee before going to work and listening to the news on the radio.

Suddenly I heard: “This morning there was a very strong earthquake in Nagoya, Japan. There are many casualties.”

Oh! Those voices in my head knew yesterday what would happen today!

I began to learn Japanese and every day I opened the black lacquered box and listened to the “voices”.

Little by little I began to understand the voices better and better. Usually they talked about events and current affairs that happen or happened in Japan. Sometimes they talked about events were going to happen in Japan in the future.

I began to feel that maybe they are Japanese demons.

I started to study Japanese culture and the history. I

quickly studied the Japanese language too.  
Of course I couldn't forget my wedding and what happened to me in Japan and often thought about it. Also I often thought about my wife. I didn't know her at all. She was a very slim girl with a perfect figure, but I never saw her face at all...

Anyway I thought about her as if she were my wife and I felt I wanted to live with her. I tried to be alone. It was very strange to have a nice wife somewhere and to suffer from loneliness.

One day one of the voices said:

“You know, Inari-sama is very angry, because the White Fox got married, but doesn't live with her husband.”

“Why, has she got married?” asked the other voice.

“She had to get married in order to continue her sansara. She had to marry quickly with whoever she could find. It turned out to be a gaijin, not a Japanese. He returned to his country and now she doesn't know where he is and she can't find him.”

I realized that this strange conversation was about me!  
At first I found on the Internet that “Inari-sama” is a powerful Japanese deity, the protector of the magic foxes - kitsune, who sometimes turn into beautiful girls.

So, my wife was a kitsune!

My life was becoming more and more interesting.  
Anyway, I had to go to Japan to find my wife!

I went to Japan again and again wandered down the paths of Ueno Park.

I found the shrine, where I got married. Nobody was there. And then the girl in the peach kimono, came out from a door.

She came to me, greeted me with a smile and took me to a small wooden building near the shrine.

She gave me a beautiful black kimono and went out as she had done before. I put on the kimono and left that place too.

Outside I saw many people in festive clothes exactly like on the day of my wedding. Everybody applauded and cried “Omedetou gozaimasu!”.

My wife was there too. This time she was without the mask, and I was struck by her extraordinary beauty: I fell in love with her immediately, at first sight!

She came to me and took my hand with a happy smile:  
“Now I am yours, my dear,” she said tenderly.

It was the White Fox, I understood.

Suddenly, everybody was silent and they all bowed low.  
I saw that my “homeless lady” had arrived!

This time she was dressed in a beautiful blue kimono with a red belt. Everybody was bowing to her showing her great respect.

She approached me with a smile and said to me:  
“You see, all finished well. I think, the White Fox will be a very good wife for you... But sometimes, so that she won’t escape, you will have to hold her tightly by the tail.”

It started to rain heavily, although the sky was clear. I had studied Japanese culture and knew that this happens only during the wedding of a kitsune.

Suddenly I saw that all the wedding guests were disappearing, as if they were dissolving in the stream of the downpour.

I was holding my wife's hand, but she was beginning to change. She was turning into a white fox!

I remembered the words of my "homeless lady" and quickly caught hold of the fox's tail and held it tightly...

Now I live with my wonderful wife and we are very happy together but sometimes, so that she will not escape from me, I have to catch hold of her tail...

And sometimes too, in order to be happy, you have to grab your happiness tightly by the tail!

## The Arrival of the Last Gaijin

I went from Tel-Aviv to Tashkent on the Uzbekistan Airway Company's flight. From Tashkent to Tokyo I flew on the Japanese Company's flight. It was the very last flight to Japan, and I was the only passenger on the plane. The flight attendants looked at me in surprise. They didn't dare ask me, but the question was written on their faces: "Why are you flying to Japan now, what is going to happen the day after tomorrow..?" The girls couldn't spoil me enough. They offered to let me stay in first class and every few minutes brought me drinks, offered me food and asked me what else I wanted. They smiled at me, but not with the professional smiles of flight attendants. I almost felt the warmth and softness of a mother and a sister in their smiles...

At some time during the flight, one of the girls came to me and said with a bow: "The captain of the plane wants to talk with you." A few minutes later, a dignified looking gray haired man of a somewhat rugged appearance approached me. I stood up to meet him. Although this wasn't in accordance with Japanese tradition, he shook my hand and said:

"I don't know why you are going to Japan, but I respect your decision. I think you will be the only gaijin there."

"I am not a hero." I answered. "I simply can't believe that something bad will happen to your wonderful country."

"And what about the prognosis for the day after tomorrow?"

"I am Jewish. When our God decided to destroy two cities (Sodom and Gomorrah), He said that He wouldn't do it, if

there were ten righteous men there. There are millions of excellent people in Japan. I am sure God won't ever destroy a country like that."

The captain smiled and returned to his cabin without saying anything.

However, it was common knowledge that a big comet would fall on the Earth in Japan in two days time. Because of this, all the people who were able to were leaving Japan. To start with, tourists, diplomats, foreign workers and foreign husbands of Japanese women went. Finally, only Japanese were left in Japan. Of course, some Japanese tried to escape too, but only a few. Not everybody was ready to abandon their old ill parents and relatives or the graves of their forefathers. Not everybody could imagine their lives without their beloved motherland...

All the flights bringing people out of Japan were full. And the last plane which flew to Japan was mine...

When my travel agent Sasha sold me the ticket he said, without looking at me:

"I can't sell you a ticket to come back: all flights after tomorrow have been canceled."

When I arrived in Narita, the customs officials asked me:

"What is in your baggage?"

"Clothes for two weeks." I answered.

They exchanged glances in silence.

It was the beginning of April, the time when all the Japanese hanami wo suru – go outside to admire the blossoming of the sakura – cherry trees, whether a comet

was going to fall on the Earth or not. This ritual, steeped in tradition, was firmly entrenched in the genes of the Japanese. I think it has now become even stronger than the instinct of survival. I love hanami too. I like to admire sakura's blossoming and the Japanese, who admire sakura's blossoming.

For this reason I wasted no time in going to Ueno-Park as soon as I reached Tokyo. There were many people walking around there. Some of them had spread a green plastic "carpet" on the grass and were sitting on it under the blossoming cherry trees. They were with their families, relatives, friends and colleagues. They had laid out many delectable looking dishes and drinks on the green carpet and were enjoying wonderful picnics. Their shoes had been placed along the edges of the green carpets.

From all sides I heard invitations to join in their celebrations: "Hey, gaijin-san, come here! Let's drink something together. Kampai!" And they raised their glasses of sake or beer. I smiled and waved in answer. Suddenly I saw many sararimans - "white collars" - sitting on a green carpet under a big spreading cherry tree. An old man with thick glasses was sitting in the midst of them and it was obvious that he was their boss. Just then the old man called a young sarariman over to him and said something to him in his ear while pointing at me. The young man made some rapid bows, stood up and then quickly came to me with a bow and polite smile: "My boss wants to talk to you. Please, come with me. This is very important."

I felt he was afraid that I would refuse. He seemed to

be imploring me. Of course, I went to the old man (not forgetting to remove my shoes before I stepped on the carpet). The boss gestured for me to sit near him and I sat down. Somebody immediately filled a glass of beer for me (if this had been Russia I would have been entertained with vodka). He said:

“What is a gaijin-san doing here at this time?”

“I admire the sakura’s blossoming as everybody does.” I answered.

“Don’t you know what is being predicted for the day after tomorrow?”

“I don’t believe in any bad prognosis. The Flood has already happened and it won’t happen again. You can confidently enjoy the beauty of sakura’s wonderful flowers.”

“Do you know who I am?” the old man asked. And without waiting for an answer he continued:

“I am Tanaka Seiichi, the director of “The First Imperial Bank”.

I said: “If I were in your place, I would sell all the stock of every Japanese company and after two days I would become the richest man in Japan, or even in the world.”

He looked at me for two or three minutes in silence. All the sararimans around us kept silent too. After this he said something in the ear of one of his young workers.

The young man responded with a bow: “Hi, sou desu!” and quickly ran off. The old man said to me with a smile:

“Please, write down your name and how to find you. If this works out, you will also share in the rewards.”

I understood that my future prosperity was already secured...

Ikuko was a teacher of sado (The Japanese tea ceremony). She taught her students in an old one-storey wooden building near Sensoji-shrine in Asakusa. I knew that now I would find Ikuko while she was in the middle of teaching the tea ceremony. It doesn't matter whether after tomorrow the comet will drop on the Earth or it won't, the most graceful Japanese custom must be taught and must be carried out.

When I arrived, the lesson was in full swing. In order not to disturb anyone I stood behind a slightly opened door and looked inside. There was absolute silence in the classroom. Ikuko was wearing a yellow kimono and looked very beautiful. She was kneeling, motionless, in front of a kettle with a scoop in her hand. Some Japanese women of various ages and wearing kimonos, were sitting around their teacher and watching her attentively. There was the feeling that something important and significant was taking place. I couldn't take my eyes from it all and held my breath...

When the lesson was over, I went to Ikuko. She was very surprised. "Why have you come here?"

"I want to propose to you. Let's get married immediately."

"What nonsense. The day after tomorrow... The comet..."

"Ikuko, no comet could destroy our happiness. We have loved each other for a long time and we must be together! We shouldn't suffer and torture each other any longer. Let's marry right now!"

Two days later, Ikuko and I were lying on the grass in Shinjuku-Gyoen-park, holding hands and looking up at the sky. The sky was blue with some small white clouds. I

felt such happiness. Everything around us was wrapped in the cherry trees' blossoms.

Suddenly the sky appeared to burst into flames which were then instantly extinguished. We didn't even have time to be afraid. We felt the smell of ozone in the air.  
The comet had by-passed the Earth!!

\*

This story is absolutely true, of course. If you don't believe it, please tell me how it is that I have such a large and luxurious house in the center of Tokyo and such a beautiful wife?

## The Love of the Fox

For a time I was studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was a handsome man, young and stupid as perhaps you too were at this age.

One day, an Asian girl I had never met came to me in the lobby of the university:

“My friend asked me to pass you this letter.” She gave me an envelope and then quickly merged with the crowd in the lobby.

The letter was written in English:

“My beloved, I can’t live without you anymore, but I am very afraid to reveal my love. I am sure that if you reject me, I won’t be able to continue living...”

The letter distressed me very much. At the time I didn’t have a girlfriend and, as young men usually do, I was constantly looking for a suitable girl with whom to fall in love. There so were many slim and beautiful girls at the university, that sometimes I thought I could fall in love with every one of them...

But this letter had changed everything. This letter shocked me – no one had ever before loved me so strongly and selflessly.

I felt that I had to discover the writer’s identity. I started to watch attentively all the Asian girls at the university, but my searches were in vain. Certainly, I couldn’t guess who she was, and I prayed only that she wouldn’t be ugly.

A few days later, I saw “the messenger” again.

“Who is she?” I asked a friend of mine.

“She’s some Japanese girl. I saw her at the Japanese community meeting,” he said.

I decided to follow “the messenger” in order to discover her friend, the one who loved me so strongly. The lectures and seminars had finished, and the students left the campus and went to their cars and buses. My Japanese messenger left too, but she didn’t go to the parking lot or to the bus. She made her way towards a small valley in the area around the university. There was an old deserted Arab village and a grove of olive trees in this valley. The girl quickly walked down into the valley and into the deserted village. I ran after her, but not in time to see where she had disappeared. I looked for her among the ruins of old houses, but found only lizards. Upon leaving, I met an elderly Arab man.

“Who lives here?” I asked.

“Nobody lives here except some foxes,” he answered.

Once, when I returned home in the evening, I saw a figure of a thin girl near the entrance of my house. This was her, I thought.

There was a cold rain falling, but the girl was without a raincoat or umbrella. When I approached her, I saw that she was Asian. She was trembling from the cold and her long wet hair clung to her face. She was crying and raindrops and tears were running down her cheeks.

“Please come in,” I said, and we entered my flat. I was very agitated: I don’t find Japanese girls on my doorstep every cold evening!

I threw a warm blanket over her shoulders, boiled some water for tea and ran a hot bath for her. I knew that to the Japanese, there is nothing more important than a hot bath in the evening. I tried to talk with her and ask her questions, but she didn’t say a word.

When I woke up the next morning, she had already disappeared. Perhaps it was only dream? A light trace of fragrance was the sole evidence of the reality of her visit... But, I thought, she behaved very strangely for a girl in love. During our meeting she didn't say a word. She didn't answer my questions and she never quite looked into my eyes.

I was sure that she didn't love me completely. I asked myself, "Why did she write that she loved me so much?"

The next day started as usual and I went to the university. My "messenger" was already waiting for me in the lobby, and she silently passed me a new letter and again disappeared.

The following was written in the letter:

"My beloved, I heard that my older sister spent the night with you. I was very angry with her and almost went mad with jealousy, but she told me that she feared for me and because of this she wanted to test you. She loves me very much. She worried about me and was only with you in order to be sure that you would not be dangerous for me. She wanted to see that you don't intend to do me any harm. Forgive us, please! We are only young and stupid girls who love each other very much. Please wait a little longer. The time of our meeting will come."

Again, another day went by as usual, but in the evening someone called me.

"Hello, my name is Tanuki. I have something important to tell you. May I invite you to the Japanese restaurant 'Sakura' in town?"

"Yes, of course!" I answered without any hesitation. I was sure that this invitation was connected to my last Japanese adventure.

We arranged to meet at seven that evening.

Mr. Tanuki was a Japanese gentleman with a cunning smile, a thin face and restless eyes. To me, he seemed unpleasant and even dangerous.

When we had sat down at the table and ordered our meals, he told me:

“I came here to give you some brilliant advice: Forget her immediately and don’t meet her again,” Mr. Tanuki said.

“Who are you talking about?” I asked, not understanding him. Was he talking about my “lover in letters” or her older sister? Perhaps he was referring to the “messenger”?

He stopped smiling and began talking sharply and roughly:

“You understand me very well. Every day you receive her letters and yesterday you met with her. But you really don’t understand that you are in danger. She is not a girl,” he said ominously, “She is a fox-werewolf. If you truly fall in love with her, she will kill you.”

I suddenly remembered the old Arab man in the abandoned village. He had said to me: “Nobody lives here except some foxes.” Could it be that Mr. Tanuki was right? But he looked at me spitefully and I felt that he did not wish me well.

“Why have you told me this?” I asked.

“I want to save you,” he answered.

“Why do you want to save me, Mr. Tanuki? Until today, I had never heard of you. Why do you want me to leave this girl?”

He seemed very angry, but held himself in check.

“You don’t believe me? Soon you shall see that what I

have told you is true. But then it will be too late.” He then abruptly stood up and left.

The waiter brought our order. I like Japanese food very much and was hungry, but nevertheless a meal for two was too much for me.

All of a sudden, I saw the older sister of my “lover in letters”. She approached my table. She was beautiful and elegant in an evening dress, and this time she looked at me and smiled. She smiled at me! I forgot my “lover in letters” and immediately fell desperately in love with this girl.

I stood up and said, “I am really pleased at your unexpected arrival. But I confess that I love you and not your sister. I’m sorry. Ever since that night you visited me, I have only been able to think about you and now I am staggered by your beauty!”

She laughed, “Thank you, my dear! My ‘sister’ and I are the same person. You may love us simultaneously.”

I held her hands and lightly kissed her. We sat down and, while laughing, began to eat the sashimi and sukiyaki and drink the sake that Tanuki and I had ordered.

“Why didn’t you speak to me that night, or even look at me?” I asked.

“I was very shy,” she said. “It was our first meeting... I had come because I could no longer be without you.”

I marveled at her. Her every movement was graceful. She was truly the most beautiful woman I had ever set eyes on.

“I know you met with Tanuki.” she then said. “What did he tell you? Did you talk to him about anything specific?”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I didn’t tell him anything. I don’t believe him, he is a very unpleasant person. Who is he?”

“Tanuki means ‘raccoon dog’ in Japanese. He is not a man, he is a spiteful and insidious werewolf. Some time ago I refused to marry him and because of this he is chasing me.”

I decided not to tell what Tanuki had said about foxes.  
“He is really a terrible creature! But how did you know that we would meet here?” I asked.

“He told me and I wanted to come with him, but I was late,” she said.

We were very happy together. We started to chat about silly things and laughed very much.

After the meal, we returned to my apartment, kissing the whole way home. I will never tell anyone about that night, I have never felt anything like it...

The next morning, she woke up in my bed. She looked very happy, and as I was admiring her loving smile, I composed a poem:

The dream was already over,  
but the girl, who came from the dream,  
remained with me.

The girl, who came from the dream  
back to the dream, forgot to return.

That day we didn’t go to the university. We had more important things to do...

So my life began to be filled with love and became constantly and blissfully happy!

But then a few days later, she disappeared. I tried to find

“the messenger”, but she had disappeared as well. They had vanished completely and no one knew where they were.

I asked the Japanese students about them and looked for them in all the corners of the university, but without success.

At last, I decided to go to the deserted Arab village in the valley.

I walked for a long time before seeing two foxes tied to the thick trunk of an olive tree. They lay there looking exhausted. It seemed as though they had been tied up for a long time without food or water. I thought that they looked at me with eyes full of tears. I quickly untied them and gave them a drink from a bottle of water I had with me. They looked up at me with gratitude. I then ran back to the campus to bring them some bottles of water and sandwiches, but when I returned, they had already disappeared. I looked for the foxes among the ruins, but found nothing.

A long time has passed since these events, but I never saw any more of my love nor “the messenger”. They had vanished completely. Without her I suffered so much and often fell into despair. I looked for her everywhere, but could not find her. Some days, I would walk to the ruined village, but found only lizards there. I contacted the Japanese embassy, but all my efforts were in vain. I did not find her.

Finally, I concluded that my Japanese adventure had finished and I stopped searching for her. But, of course, I never forgot the only love of my life. She remained in my heart forever. But the suffering and pain of her disappearance, like sharp needles, also remained in my heart.

A few weeks ago, I happened to read in the newspaper that a young biologist caught a raccoon dog in the area of the Hebrew University. It was given as a present to the Jerusalem Zoo.

Some day I'll visit you, Mr. Tanuki!

# The Romantic Trip to Hawaii

## (Konnichi wa, O'Henry-san!)

Some years ago, when I began studying Japanese, I started corresponding with some beautiful Japanese girls over the Internet. They seemed very glad to receive my messages, but as soon as they realized that I lived in Israel, they would disappear. This upset me very much, so I started introducing myself as Gerald, from Hawaii. With this simple change, many girls talked to me frequently and asked to visit me immediately or even marry me.

I wrote only in Japanese, since I knew no English. My Japanese was poor and primitive, and I made many mistakes, but my pretty correspondents patiently corrected me and were very indulgent toward me. They thought I was from the highest race of gods and lived in paradise.

At the time, I really hated Americans. I felt they were my invincible rivals. Israel could never be as desirable for Japanese women as America, and neither Hebrew nor Russian would be as important to them as English.

I wrote warm, gentle messages. Other than the topics of Hawaii or my English, I was very sincere and honest, but our relations could never progress without having meetings or telephone conversations. My utter defeat was obvious. No Japanese girl would ever accept Israel instead of America or me instead of a real American cowboy.

One day a Japanese girl wrote to me, saying she was very ill, without any hope of recovery. Before she died, she wished to meet me and visit Hawaii. But she said she understood it was impossible, since she was a poor girl and didn't have enough money to travel to Hawaii. I stared

at her photo and reread her messages over and over. I thought about her all the time. She had a very delicate and beautiful face and her figure was very slim. Her messages were clever, deep and sincere. I felt that I had fallen in love with her.

I decided to order a hotel room in Hawaii and send her money to travel. I didn't have enough money for this adventure, but without hesitation I sold my car and some other things. Love moves mountains!

There may not have remained much time for her to live, but that was no reason to deny her a little happiness. Love is very important and a rare thing in life, it would be a shame to miss it.

But there was one serious problem: Yumiko expected to meet an American. I learned English quickly and well, but I couldn't become American. I feared telling her the truth...

Yumiko Sato was very young when her mother died. She was raised by her grandmother in the country near Kamakura-City in Japan. Yumiko grew up to be a beautiful and sensitive girl. Her father was always very busy and seldom saw her. He was a businessman who worked hard, and eventually became a very rich man.

When Yumiko was 18, she moved to Tokyo where she began to live with her father and his new wife. She wanted to study at university, but her level of education was too low, so she continued to be taught by private teachers. Because Yumiko was so rich and beautiful, many boys tried to capture her romantic and delicate heart. After some painful disappointments, she became very careful and untrusting. She preferred men who didn't know how

rich she was. Frequently, she wrote messages on the Internet and said that she was only a simple, poor girl from Kamakura.

One day, Yumiko received a very nice message from someone named Gerald who lived in Hawaii. He was a very unusual and interesting person and she enjoyed talking with him. Yumiko knew, though, that almost everyone corresponding online uses fake names and usually lies about personal details.

Yumiko turned to a private detective agency in order to find out everything about him. They quickly discovered that he wasn't American, but that he lived in Israel, didn't speak English and had no money. But Yumiko had already gotten used to his funny jokes, sincere messages, and kind smile in his photo.

Perhaps Yumiko had fallen in love too.

But she decided to test him...

I arrived to Hawaii a few days before her and found a little bungalow on the beach. I then thoroughly investigated the area. Life in Hawaii was expensive, but not unreasonable. Beautiful nature was everywhere, I very much enjoyed walking on the beach and swimming in the ocean. I was surrounded by happy tanned people in colourful swimming gear. Hawaii really resembled paradise.

On the day of her arrival, I bought some beautiful flowers and went to the airport. I was nervous because of numerous possible problems. For one, what if I couldn't recognize her in a crowd of Japanese people? Many Japanese girls arrived on every plane and I had only seen her in a photo. Perhaps she was not as beautiful as in the picture? But I had no reason to fear...

I recognized her at once among the crowd. She was even more beautiful than in the photo. She smiled, and my heart melted with happiness.

I approached her, gave her the flowers and took her bags. We kissed lightly and quickly made for the exit.

I spoke to her in Japanese during our drive in the rental car:

“We’ll live in a bungalow on the beach.” (I didn’t tell her that I had rented the bungalow and the car for two weeks only. After that, all my money would be finished).

“Thank you for everything! I’m so pleased!” she smiled and stroked my hand. “I am really happy!”

I was happy, too. I was sitting near my lover girl and she truly loved me.

What else could I want?

As I spoke in Japanese, she surely understood that I was not American because of my accent, but she didn’t ask me about it. She looked quite healthy and didn’t talk about her illness and I didn’t mention it. Though we had some unanswered questions, they didn’t spoil our happiness.

Have you ever lived in paradise? I have. We enjoyed our love uninterrupted and quite forgot that our happiness would be short-lived.

Every night, we slept entwined in each other’s arms and every morning, we woke up with kisses and caresses. Our love in Hawaii delighted us. We swam in the warm waves of the kind ocean every day and at night we often went to pubs or cafés to drink cocktails, to listen to music and to dance. We had a blissful time and felt that nothing could interfere with our happiness.

Sadly, the two weeks passed, and we were forced to part.

On the final day before her flight, we cried together. I was very upset. I thought I would never see her again. It was the end of our sudden happiness, and when she flew away, I thought that the best part of my life was finished.

When I returned home, I discovered that all my things in my apartment had been stolen. Nothing remained. My computer also disappeared, leaving me unable to contact my beloved.

In addition, I found an official letter in my postbox discharging me from work. I also found a notice from my landlord warning that if I did not pay my rent immediately, I would be forced to leave my apartment.

I felt as though my life had disintegrated. I had lost my job, my apartment and all my possessions. I had no money, or even a car. I had nothing except the light reminiscences of my love in Hawaii, which resembled a far away dream...

I went to the police to report the burglary. But upon checking my passport, the policeman said I was under arrest.

This, of course, was the logical end to the day.

“You are suspected of having robbed a bank three days ago,” the policeman said.

“Three days ago I was abroad,” I protested. “That’s when I was in Hawaii.”

But he smiled and continued: “You are wanted on suspicion of committing a bank robbery. You may call your lawyer.”

“Thank you, but I don’t have a lawyer.”

I didn’t have a lawyer or even the money for one. I

remained in the police station. Every day, detectives interrogated me for hours on end. They insisted again and again:

“We have absolute evidence that you took part in a bank robbery last week.”

Again and again I answered:

“Last week I was abroad. I have a plane ticket. The border police stamped my passport. Test this, please!”

But they told me:

“Someone else must have gone to Hawaii on your passport. We are positive you robbed the bank.”

And all the questions began again...

It was clear that without a lawyer, I would be sent to prison for years.

I thought about my week of happiness in Hawaii and about my lover girl. I remembered her tears before our parting. She was truly miserable! My situation may have been bad, but hers was worse. I would get out of prison eventually, but she was to die soon.

The trial was set for three weeks after my arrest. I was expecting to receive a harsh punishment and had no hope. When I was brought to court and was waiting for the trial to begin, I saw a very eminent looking man in an advocate's gown. He smiled and waved to me.

“Who is that?” I asked the policeman escorting me.

“He's your lawyer, Ben Richter, one of Israel's most famous and expensive lawyers,” he said.

“But I didn't hire him.” I understood nothing.

“Stand up please! The trial has begun,” a uniformed man said loudly.

Ben Richter really was a brilliant lawyer. It was quickly clear to the judge and to all those in the courtroom that I was totally innocent. I was dismissed directly from the court. I was free again!

When I left the courthouse, I suddenly remembered that I had no home to which to return... I had no idea what to do.

Just then, a big black car stopped near me. A well dressed Japanese man stepped out of the car, opened the back door and said to me: "Take a seat please, sir!"

Without hesitating I climbed into the car. There sat my Yumiko!

She smiled happily and said:

"Excuse me for lying, dear Gerald, but I am not the poor, sick girl from Kamakura."

"Excuse me too, but I am not..." I began to say, but she silenced me with a hot kiss.

"I know everything!" she said.

## Some Day We'll Get You, Mister Hacker!

It was only my own stupidity that caused me to be locked up in Ma'asiyahu prison. While working freelance in various computer companies, I used to study Japanese, and at the same time, I delved into the art of electronic information theft. I was probably the best hacker in all of Israel. So, just to prove it to myself and the entire world, I broke into the database of the Japanese Ministry of Defence. A short time later, I found myself in Ma'asiyahu; the Japanese government demanded my extradition.

I was rather afraid of being transferred to a Japanese prison. I'd heard stories about the inhuman cruelty of the prison guards toward foreign convicts. I understood that in this case, my knowledge of the Japanese language wouldn't save me.

\*

One day, I was told to leave my cell and to come and face the prison manager. The manager himself was absent and two guards, in civilian clothing, sat behind the desk.

They had a friendly expression on their faces.

"Please sit down," said one of them, "We're from Israeli intelligence. We came across a certain problem, and we might need your help."

"What's it about?" I asked.

They gave each other a look and then one of them answered:

"We've recently received information that a Japanese terror organization, called 'The Red Brigades' is preparing a biological attack on Israel."

“And you’re probably the only Israeli hacker who speaks Japanese,” added the second man.

“You’ll find their database and break into it...” said the first one.

“And you’ll be released from prison,” the second one concluded, “and we obviously won’t hand you over to the Japanese.”

It sounded great! Obviously, I immediately agreed.

“I have one request, though,” I said, causing the two men to look worried. “I will only work on my personal computer.”

“Oh! Sure!” the first man promised.

“You have nothing to worry about!” the other one added.

“It’s just that my computer is already filled with material for this kind of game,” I explained. They nodded understandingly.

I found the organization’s database without a problem; I broke into it and once again became a free man.

For some reason, the minute I got sent to prison all my friends disappeared. I phoned my girlfriend, a Japanese student in Israel, and she didn’t even want to speak to me.

“Back home in Japan, criminals are kept locked away!” she said and hung up the phone.

While serving time, I ached, suffering from loneliness. But when I was released, none of these feelings emerged again. After all, I had my computer. And computer hackers don’t really have the time for melancholy.

After my release, I came back to my only loyal friend and spent all my days and nights in front of the screen.

One day, a sudden door-bell ring interrupted my thoughts in front of the screen. I came to the door, trying to guess who it could be. But I could never have guessed: A beautiful Japanese girl stood on my doorstep. She had a big traveling bag hanging on her shoulder and a large suitcase in front of her. She smiled at me with affection and nodded: “Konichi va! I’m Sachiko. You invited me here, and here I am!”

Utterly confused, I looked at the girl with amazement, but still I managed to whisper: “Yoku yiraseshaymashta! Welcome! Please, come in!”

I brought her suitcase into the apartment, a gesture which gained me her kiss. Wow! How did I get into all this?

As if she managed to hear my question, the girl said: “We chatted online a few months ago, and you invited me to stay with you here, in Jerusalem. So here I am!”

I guess that was it. I corresponded with dozens of girls throughout Japan and I wrote to every single one of them that “I would love to host [them] in Jerusalem!”

I was merely being polite. I never intended to actually invite any of them. After all, who would actually come to a distant country, just to see a guy she had never met in her life? But this girl actually came. Well, I deserved that, I guess. But the girl was very cute and in fact, I wasn’t really sorry that she came. Obviously, we immediately fell in love with each other.

Apparently, it wasn’t Sachiko’s first visit to Israel and she could even read and speak some Hebrew. We really had a lot in common, and we were probably made for each other.

\*

She only came for two months which, unfortunately, flew by fast. When there were only a couple of days left

until the date of her departure, we felt that under no circumstances could we actually separate. I didn't wish to leave Israel, but Sachiko couldn't find herself getting used to life in a foreign country. She had no trouble convincing me that I would have no problems in going to Japan.

"The Japanese Ministry of Defence has more important missions than going after a silly hacker!" she claimed with confidence.

\*

So, we bought the plane tickets, we packed all our belongings, and on the following night we were to fly to the place of our happiness.

The night before our flight, I sat, as always, in front of my computer, while Sachiko read through some newspapers. Just then, the phone rang.

"Moshi-moshi!" it was the soft voice of a girl: "Ichi-mankyu-happyaku-rokudju-hachi." When I heard the number sequence I was filled with horror: it was one of the codes in the database of the terror organization! They must have found me and now were planning their revenge.

The girl on the other side of the line laughed: "Konichi wa! Mister Hacker! I will be waiting for you tomorrow at the 'Dan Panorama' hotel lobby. Five o'clock. You'd better get there on time." She continued to laugh until she hung up.

I stood frozen, still holding the phone close to my ear, even though it now only made a busy signal. I probably looked frantic, as Sachiko worriedly asked me, "What's wrong?"

I slowly hung up the phone and said: "They found me, the terror organization."

She knew what it was about. I'd managed to tell her all about my imprisonment and the terms of my release.

"Tomorrow I'm supposed to be at the 'Dan Panorama'. A Japanese girl called... She was probably sent here to kill me. There's no point in escaping. If they found me here they'll find me anywhere."

We stared at each other for a few agonizingly long moments, understanding how serious the situation was.

Suddenly, Sachiko smiled. She lifted the newspaper from the desk, opened it to a certain page and handed it to me with a victorious smile. I was puzzled: she pointed at the page where the Tel Aviv brothels were advertised.

"What's this?" I asked, "Why are you showing me this dirt?"

"Listen to this!" Sachiko quickly dialed one of the numbers in the ads. She waited for a few moments and then started to speak in flirtatious, obsequious English: "Hi! I just came here from Japan and I want to make some money! Yes, I'm Japanese... 18 years old... Maybe we should meet tomorrow and talk... I'm staying at the 'Dan Panorama'. I'll wait for you at five o'clock in the lobby... You'll be able to recognize me, I'm Japanese... Well, yes, of course. I can prove my skills up in my hotel room," Sachiko giggled.

When she hung up the phone, we immediately hugged each other tightly. What a wonderful idea! I showered her with kisses and whispered: "Sugoi. Well done. Great job. Ai shitee yiru yo. I love you."

Kayo Shinoda, aside from being an extremely beautiful Japanese girl, was also the most efficient murderer in all of her group, the terror organization "The Red Brigades".

Because of her extraordinary cruelty and apathy, her colleagues called her “kori no kokoro”- Heart of Ice. Even her own boss would recoil a bit from the pleasant and fragile Kayo-Chan, the restrained, merciless murderer. Well, she was the chosen one for this mission: to find out what she could about the Israeli hacker.

At five o'clock sharp, she was sitting on a rather comfortable leather couch in the luxurious “Dan Panorama” lobby. She was reading through a women’s magazine and, from time to time, would look up at the glazed entrance door. Two men walked in fifteen minutes later. They were dark-featured; all dressed in tasteless, outlandish attire and wearing multiple layers of heavy, golden chains. They were smoking and talking quite loudly with each other and seemed very out of place in the splendor of the lobby. The hotel guards decided not to delay by searching them. Instead, they reported to their supervisors about the unwanted guests. These were two well-known pimps, with a reputation in the Tel Aviv crime scene. They looked around the lobby and turned to the Japanese girl. When she saw them, she left the magazine on the table and slowly stood up.

“Well, aren’t you a doll!” one of them said. He lowered his lips, stuck them out and presented his repulsive gesture along with a wink. He tried to pinch her cheek, but she managed to evade it.

“You’re just perfect for us!” the other man gave her a lecherous smile.

The pimps seemed very glad. A beautiful girl like her would instantly bring them a lot of money. Besides, they were waiting in anticipation for all the pleasures they would experience in the hotel room.

“You know, we have to examine your professional level, your skills,” said the first man, and again, winked lasciviously at her. “You’ll show us, babe, what you can do?”

“So that we’ll know for sure that you’re fine,” the second man added, and smiled insidiously. “Let’s go upstairs, baby.”

Suddenly, the girl smiled too. “Yes, of course. Let’s go to the room and I’ll show you exactly what I can do.” And they all turned toward the elevators, each of them thrilled for different reasons.

\*

Half an hour later, Kayo made a short phone call to Japan from her “keitai denva”: “I’m done. I’m coming back”.

She still had a few hours until her flight, so she decided to use the time she had left for a drink in a trendy bar and a short walk on the Tel Aviv promenade.

\*

In the next day’s newspapers, the main headline was: “Two known pimps murdered last night at the ‘Dan Panorama’. This could be a violent turning point in a new battle between the crime lords of the city.”

During our flight, Sachiko seemed peaceful. As for me, I was still a bit worried. Where would I find a job? How could I integrate?

“Do you think that I will find a job?” I asked Sachiko nervously.

“Don’t worry about a thing. You’ll work for the same company where I work.” she calmly replied.

“And what’s that?”

“Oh! That’s a secret!” Sachiko laughed happily. “But you, I can tell. I work for the Japanese Ministry of Defence.”

\*

Kayo Shinoda was on the same plane as us. She immediately noticed the odd couple: a good-looking Israeli guy and a tall, doll-like Japanese girl. The couple was staring softly into each other’s eyes and laughed together from time to time. Kayo heard their laughter, saw their happiness and suddenly felt very tired.

# A Japanese Wife for an Israeli Doctor

Israeli men have many reasons to marry Japanese women, but Japanese women have many reasons not to want to marry Israeli men. Why?

This isn't the theme of our story.

I admired Japanese women and wanted to marry one but, so far, all my efforts had failed: they always managed to escape from me before I could get anyone to consent.

Why wasn't I born an American? If that had been the case I never would have made my usual get-away before a Japanese girl would even start to think of marrying me...I suffered from loneliness, but wasn't prepared to give up my Japanese obsession.

At that time I was working as a doctor in a clinic in a small town in the middle of Israel. Doctors at our clinic also served the urgent medical needs of people in the area as a whole. We often went out in ambulances to assist at road accidents and at various cases requiring resuscitation.

One day I received a telephone call to go immediately to someone apparently needing resuscitating. Our ambulance set out in the direction of the local cemetery. There were many people in the cemetery that day: one of the neighboring settlements had just buried one of their residents. After arriving, we left the ambulance, and were led to a building belonging to the "Hevra Kadisha", where a corpse had been laid out. The "Hevra Kadisha" is a special team of people who bury the dead according

to Jewish religious law. The paramedic and I entered the building.

“Who needs our help?” I asked. People around us pointed to the corpse which was covered with a white sheet.

“I don’t have time for jokes.” I said.

“This isn’t a joke. One of his relatives saw him moving.”

I took off the sheet and examined the body. After a few minutes of thorough examination I was sure that he was absolutely dead.

“He is dead. You may bury him. We’re leaving,” I said.

But when we were a short distance away, we were called back again: “He is moving!”

I checked the body a second time but didn’t find any signs of life, and, after leaving again, they called us back once more...I told them:

“You can’t bury a moving body. Keep him in the building until tomorrow and tomorrow you will decide what to do.”

Everybody agreed and at last we left the cemetery.

Next morning the mayor of that settlement telephoned me:

“You know, the body disappeared from the building last night...”

I didn’t know what to think.

Some days after this event, I had a strange dream. The corpse came to me and said:

“You didn’t bury me alive. For this I’ll grant your dearest wish.”

I have had many stupid dreams such as these in my life and don’t pay any attention to them.

Some time passed and one night I was woken up by the telephone ringing.

“We are calling you from the Intensive Therapy department of Hadassa Hospital. A few minutes ago we resuscitated someone and brought him back to life. After he regained consciousness, he asked us to call you and to tell you that your wife will arrive tonight at three.”

“You woke me up for this stupid joke? Just to mock me?

“No. He said this very seriously and emphatically and demanded that we call you. He said that it was very important for you to know this.”

I looked at the clock. It was two in the morning. My sleep was irretrievably lost, so I decided to go to the airport in Tel-Aviv.

On the way there I telephoned the Information Office at the airport and asked:

“What flights will arrive tonight at three?”

“Only one flight will be arriving then. From Tokyo.”

Suddenly, somehow, I believed the strange story.

At the airport I bought a bouquet of red roses and waited in front of the arriving passengers’ exit. I decided to look over the heads of the people, because I didn’t know what my wife looked like. She would have to recognize me, I thought.

However, all the Japanese passengers walked passed, and nobody came to me. I felt very disappointed and depressed. I threw the flowers into the nearest trash can, sat down on a bench and put my hands on my head.

When will I grow up and stop believing these silly jokes!

Suddenly I heard someone close to me weeping quietly.

On the bench a Japanese girl was sitting and crying.

“Why are you crying?” I asked.

“My husband didn’t come to meet me...” she answered.

When Yoshiko came into my life, my happiness began. She was a very graceful and tender woman. She always took excellent care of me: she cooked delicious food (especially my favorite dishes). She cleaned our small apartment until it sparkled. My shirts and pants were always perfectly ironed. All my bravest and unexpected wishes were realized immediately ... Every day I brought some present to Yoshiko or surprised her with something. We made each other happy and this was the essence of our lives. And we didn’t need anything else...

One day I returned from work earlier than usual and opened the door quietly. I had brought Yoshiko something interesting and also intended to invite her out to a special place which I was sure she would like. She didn’t hear me come in. Suddenly I heard the voice of another woman coming from the living room. The voice was gruff and unpleasant. The woman said:

“Why haven’t you killed him yet? You know that you have to kill at least once in order to become a real woman. Do it quickly or the chance will be lost forever.”

Yoshiko answered:

“I can’t do anything to hurt him. My fate is not important to me. I love him very much...”

And then the door slammed shut and the voices faded.

Yoshiko ran out to me. Of course, I pretended I hadn’t heard anything.

The next day the manager of the clinic where I worked, called me out to his office.

“I have a special mission for you. A Japanese diplomat lives in our town. Today his wife felt unwell and called for a doctor. I want you to go there. Be careful. Such patients often complain.”

If a Japanese woman had sent for me as a doctor before I was married, I would have been very anxious about the visit. But now it was of no special interest to me.

When I came to her place, she opened the door wearing a colorful loose kimono. She greeted me with a smile. She was a very beautiful woman and didn’t look sick at all.

“What is the problem?” I asked.

“I feel a pain here.” She pointed to her breast. Smiling at me with embarrassment she opened her gown.

I was amazed. It was too much.

“Stop this ridiculous behaviour! I have come here to treat a patient and not for any other reason.”

“Don’t you like Japanese girls? I have some more information.” She grinned knowingly.

“I have a much loved wife and am not interested in amusing myself with other women.”

I turned around and left her flat.

My manager’s advice to be careful was in vain.

Of course I didn’t tell Yoshiko about this episode.

Three days later an old Japanese woman entered my office in the clinic. Without any preamble she started:

“You have to kick your wife out immediately. She is a danger to you.”

“Stop it. I have to kick you out. I don’t want to hear any gossip about my beloved wife.”

“You don’t know anything about her. She isn’t a woman. She is a “kitsune” – a fox-girl, a werewolf. She came to you intending to kill you.”

I got up and opened the door:

“Get out!”

She looked at me with a strange evil grin and left my office.

Suddenly I felt absolutely weak and exhausted.

I reached home with difficulty. Yoshiko helped me to take off my clothes and put me to bed. I had a high fever, I thought. What has happened to me? Where did I get this disease? I was lying contemplating taking some medicine, but my thoughts were becoming confused and I didn’t know what I was doing. Yoshiko brought me a glass containing a cloudy liquid:

“Drink it, please. It will cure you.”

I looked at the glass and thought that this liquid might kill me. But, if I die, Yoshiko will become a real woman and her longed for wish will come true. At that moment I no longer cared what happened to me. I quickly drank it up and passed out.

Next morning I woke up feeling perfectly healthy.

I heard Yoshiko cooking breakfast in the kitchen.

She heard me moving too and called out:

“Sweetheart, breakfast is ready!”

We were sitting at the table and having breakfast.

“I know everything.” I said.

“I know that you know.” Yoshiko answered.  
“I just want to live happily with you. How can I make it happen?”  
“We must leave this place. We have to move to my homeland, to Kamakura.”

In Kamakura Yoshiko prayed at the shrine of Inari-sama, Lord of kitsune, and I waited for her in front of the temple. When she had finished praying, she came to me.

“I am pregnant,” she said.

Both of us understood what this meant: Yoshiko had become a woman.

Inari-sama never forgets his kitsune.

## Nobody Returned from the Japanese Lessons

“Avi, I can’t continue in this job anymore!” – The conversation with my commander began with these words. My commander, Avi Buzaglo, was a captain in the police force. I had come to Israel with all the necessary qualifications. I specialized in the language and culture of Japan. When I understood that this would not help me to find a suitable job, I applied to the police department and I have now been working as a traffic policeman for three months. I soon realized that this job wasn’t for me, and that even for all the money in the world, I didn’t want to continue doing it. I had requested an urgent meeting with my commander Avi Buzaglo, and now I am sitting in front of him in his office and am saying these words: “I can’t anymore!” Avi looked at me thoughtfully and then said:

“I heard you know Japanese?”

“Yes, that’s my speciality,” I answered and thought to myself: What would he need my Japanese for in the traffic police? Avi pressed the button on the intercom and said: “Ilana, call Pavlik immediately.” And then he turned to me: “We have an unusual problem at the moment, and I think we’ll need your Japanese. If you cope well with this task I’ll see that you are transferred to the Judiciary Department.”

Just then Pavlik entered – a big boy from the Judiciary Department. I had already made his acquaintance at the gym. Avi nodded at me and said to Pavlik:

“This young man will be your assistant. He knows Japanese. He is at your service. Decide how you would like to use him.” Pavlik and I smiled at each other and shook hands.

“Why do they need my Japanese?”

We went to Pavlik’s office and made ourselves two cups of Turkish coffee. Pavlik told me a very strange story.

“In the last six months, five students from the Japanese Department of the university in Jerusalem have gone missing: three boys and two girls. These young people didn’t stay in the same place all the time of course: they would meet with their friends, go to parties and maybe go away on trips. And so quite a lot of time passed before it was noticed that they just weren’t around any more. Their relatives and friends looked for them all over Israel, but in vain: they seem to have disappeared without a trace. An interesting fact has come to light: all the missing students were studying with the same private Japanese teacher.”

Pavlik handed me an advertisement: “Private Japanese lessons...” with a telephone number and the name of a teacher: Chieko.

He continued:

“We tried to talk with her, but we were unsuccessful: she is a very strange girl, she looks like a sleepwalker. It’s impossible to find out anything from someone like her. By the way, she is studying at the Jerusalem University too. We decided to send an undercover agent to join her lessons “to study Japanese,” and just now you appear! We couldn’t have wished for anything better. You are our only chance. But please be careful, this is a very strange story, most peculiar.” Pavlik gave me pictures of the missing students. They looked nice and well dressed.

My mission seemed very interesting. Not wasting any time, I immediately telephoned Chieko and arranged the date for our first lesson. Of course I told her that I didn't know Japanese at all.

A young Japanese woman, dressed in a peachy colored kimono and with a Japanese type hair style, opened the door for me. She had the special charm of Japanese women, which always fascinates me. She smiled at me with a little bow and the typical Japanese welcome: "Douzo, o-hairi kudasai – please, come in." I wanted to answer in Japanese, but remembered that I wasn't supposed to know the language.  
"Shalom!" I responded in Hebrew.

The woman said:

"I am Chieko. Go over there, please." She pointed to the open door of the living room. It was a room in Japanese style with tatami – a straw mat on the floor. There were preparations for a Japanese tea ceremony in the middle of the room.

"Usually I begin my courses with the chanoyu – the tea ceremony. Students can start learning about Japanese culture more naturally this way, I think. Sit down over there, please." She pointed to a small chair. Chieko concentrated very hard on performing the tea ceremony and took her time. Every movement was so graceful and beautiful. I have seen this ceremony many times, but only this time did I begin to understand the spiritual essence of it.

Finally she gave me a cup of tea with a bow: “Douzo.” The cup looked very old and cracked, but it had some element of charm. I forgot that I didn’t know Japanese and, on receiving the cup, I answered: “Doumo arigatou gozaimasu – Thank you very much”.

I took a sip of tea, and suddenly Chieko’s room disappeared and I found myself on a crowded street in some unknown city. There were many inscriptions in Japanese on the tall beautiful buildings. I read one of them: “Shinjuku”. I was in Tokyo! There were Japanese people all around me rushing somewhere and looking very busy. Suddenly somebody called me. I looked back and saw the five missing students on that Tokyo street!

“What are you doing here? All Israel is looking for you. Your relatives and friends are very worried and don’t know what to think...”

“Come with us,” one of them said to me.

I wanted to go with them, but suddenly... found myself in Chieko’s room again.

“Let’s begin our lessons,” Chieko said and raised a pencil.  
“Kore wa empitsu desu – this is a pencil.”

My first Japanese lesson began with these same words a long time ago. Why do Japanese teachers like pencils so much? The lesson passed uneventfully and after it finished Chieko said:

“You are making good progress. If you keep on like this, you will master Japanese very quickly.”

As I was leaving the room, I noticed a chest of drawers

with five netsuke – small figurines made from bone (the netsuke – an element of traditional Japanese folk-art). The faces of these netsuke seemed very familiar. Suddenly I realized that they were the faces of the missing students!

When I told Pavlik about my Tokyo adventure at my first Japanese lesson, he said: “You were hallucinating. She must have drugged your tea. Did you enjoy it at least?” he added with a smile. I took something out of my pocket and put it on the table in front of Pavlik and he stopped smiling. It was an empty box of cigarettes “Mairudo Sebun,” which I had picked up on the streets of Tokyo.

This affair had become more and more complex. The landlord, who rented the flat to Chieko, also disappeared. We managed to find out that he had worked as an Israeli diplomat in Japan about five years ago. Every month Chieko put money into his bank account for the rent, but nobody ever withdrew the money. The landlord of Chieko’s flat didn’t have any relatives and nobody had noticed that he had disappeared.

During my Japanese lesson I noticed that there were three rooms in Chieko’s apartment: a living room, a bedroom and one other room to which the door was never open. Pavlik decided to investigate the apartment the next afternoon, when Chieko would be attending lectures at the university. “That’s against the law,” I said: “It’s forbidden to search a property when the tenant is absent.”

“But if we only go according to the rules, we won’t find

anybody. We don't have time. Maybe they are suffering."

The lost students in Tokyo didn't look like they were suffering but I didn't want to argue with Pavlik – he was my commander. Next day Pavlik went to Chieko's apartment. I waited for him until evening, but he didn't come back. I telephoned him many times, but he didn't answer. He didn't return home. Pavlik had gone missing too.

When I arrived for my Japanese lesson the next evening, Chieko met me dressed in a white blouse and red mini skirt. From the very first moment I couldn't think about anything except her legs. Really they were very beautiful. I felt that I was absolutely bewitched by them. But suddenly I saw something that forced me to take my mind off them: there were six netsuke on the chest of drawers. And the sixth netsuke had the very surprised face of Pavlik! I turned to Chieko and asked:

"Chieko-san, who made this? Where are they? Where is Pavlik?"

Chieko looked at me in silence. Her demeanour and whole appearance struck me as being the embodiment of innocence. Of course she couldn't possibly have any connection to the missing people. She was standing very close to me, and I felt overwhelmingly attracted to her... This woman personified the most appealing feminine attributes of all the women in the world and strongly excited me. It was her I had embraced in my dreams, just her I had desired every night of my life. I completely lost control of myself and passionately embraced her...At that

moment everything around me began to whirl in front of my eyes and I passed out.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in Chieko's living room. But I wasn't alone. The five missing students were there too, as well as Pavlik and a monk of Shinto, who was dressed in traditional red and white ritual clothes. There was also an ikebana, made from red and white chrysanthemums in a tokonoma (a traditional Japanese niche in the room).

The monk said: "In order to attain real spiritual progress you need purity and maximum mental concentration. If you don't achieve this now, you will not be able to complete your mission..." Just then I passed out again.

The sound of Chieko's voice woke me: "Prepare this material for the next lesson please, and try to be more attentive next time." When I opened my eyes, I saw that Chieko was wearing a modest jacket and a long black skirt. I said good-bye and quickly left her flat.

When I find myself in a difficult situation, I turn to my friend for help and advice. Professor Shimoni isn't only my friend, he is my teacher and also directs my study projects and investigations into Japanese culture. Professor Shimoni is the foremost authority on Japanese culture in Israel. He looks like a wise old owl. But he always speaks to me as if I too am an authority on Japanese culture. To the other teachers in the Japanese Department I am just a policeman.

When I entered his apartment, I was very surprised to see the same Shinto monk whom I had seen in my dream during my last Japanese lesson. Professor Shimoni introduced him: "This is Yamaguchi-sensei, a monk from Amanawashin meijinja shrine in Kamakura."

I told the professor everything that had happened concerning this strange affair, and he pondered it at length. At last he said: "Some years ago, a holy mirror was stolen from the Amanawashin meijinja shrine. The holy mirror is one of the three most important objects in Shinto. Its loss has been kept secret until now. The monk says that the mirror is in Israel and he came here in order to return it to the shrine. I think the landlord of Chieko's flat brought this mirror to Israel, and now it is in that closed room in her apartment."

"But why were the students missing?" I asked.

"Perhaps, they looked in the mirror. The mirror has enormous magic power. Nobody knows what happens if somebody looks in it... we have to return the mirror to the monks as quickly as possible in order to prevent something bad from happening. I think that only you can get this done. But do be careful."

"Who is Chieko?" I asked.

"Somebody has to guard such a valuable thing," the Professor answered. Suddenly he smiled: "Don't forget to invite me to your kekkon shiki."

I blushed. "Kekkon shiki" is 'wedding' in Japanese. Does he know something....? As I was leaving his flat, he said:

“Be sure to take some roasted beans with you when you go to Chieko’s.”

I didn’t understand what the connection with roasted beans was but I didn’t even think to question it. Professor Shimoni always knows what he is talking about.

The next day I went to Chieko for my third lesson. I took with me a clean white piece of chamois for the mirror and put a packet of roasted beans in my pocket.

This time Chieko was dressed in a white kimono with a red obi – a belt for the kimono. She said sternly: “You know Japanese well and don’t need any lessons. What are you playing at? What is it that you want from me?”

“I am a policeman,” I said. “I am looking for the missing students from the university. They all took private lessons with you. Tell me where they are now. Where is Pavlik? Who are you?” Chieko went as white as her kimono. She lowered her head.

“I am a kitsune (fox-girl in Japanese legends). I would have killed you or turned you into a netsuke. But I have fallen in love with you and now I can’t hurt you. I don’t care what may happen to me for helping you.”

She loves me! A wave of happiness flowed over me.

“Dear Chieko, I love you too. But I must find and save those missing people. I have to go into the closed room. I have no choice. Give me the key.”

There was fear in Chieko’s wide eyes. “It is very dangerous. You can’t imagine what awaits you there...”

All of a sudden she put her arms around me and I held her

close. I felt her shoulders shaking from her sobs.

“You mean so much to me,” she said. “I can’t lose you...”

“Chieko, I love you very much, but I must see this through and then we’ll be together for ever.” She gently released herself from my embrace and pressed something into my hand. “This is the key to the room. I’ll pray for you.” I kissed her lips and approached the room. Strange and fearful sounds could be heard coming from behind the door. Some smoke began to come out from the keyhole and from under the door. It was clear that there was something terrible and dangerous going on in there. I took out a handful of roasted beans from my pocket and opened the door to the room...

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Some days later, Pavlik and I sat in a pub drinking beer and talking about what had happened. Pavlik said:

“I still can’t believe in this sorcery or demonology.”

“If I’d been in your place I’d believe in it,” I responded.

“How did the world look from the chest of drawers?”

“What was behind the door in that closed room?” Pavlik asked.

“I don’t remember. Maybe because it wasn’t anything important or interesting.” Pavlik looked at me doubtfully, but didn’t say anything.

Avi Buzaglo couldn’t persuade me to remain in the police: I didn’t want to become a detective or to have a career as a police officer. I entered the university in Jerusalem to start some research under the supervision of Professor Shimony. Do you want to know the subject of my research? “The effect of roasted beans on Japanese devils.”

Chieko and I soon got married and became a very happy young family. Needless to say, the heavy rain that suddenly poured down on our wedding from out of a sunny blue sky signified, as it usually did, that it was the marriage of a kitsune – a girl-fox.

## Dangerous Love in Paris

After my second divorce, I was both very upset and bored, so I asked my chief to send me abroad to work.

I was one of the most successful secret agents in the Mossad, and received an order to go to Paris immediately. There was a traitor among our secret agents in Paris and my mission was to kill him.

A secret agent has many advantages: to kill bad guys, to kiss beautiful girls, to travel around the world with a big gun, and to feel invincible and irresistible.

I like Paris, but seldom visit. Usually, I stay at some little unremarkable hotel in the area of Montmartre.

Do you like to stay in the cold winter's rain at night and to wait for somebody for a long time? I do. This is my job. I like my profession. Every job has some down side, doesn't it?

I had walked for an hour already near the Mazarin Palace in a hard winter's rain, but the messenger had still not arrived. Suddenly, from around a corner, a thin Japanese girl appeared. She wore a yellow raincoat and held a red umbrella. She approached me and said:

"If you are looking for your dog, it is in my garden".

This was our code. She was my messenger! Where did the Mossad find her?

Girls as nice and slim as this Japanese girl always fascinate me and awake desire in my heart...

She looked very alarmed and said:

"I am Yoko. Someone is chasing me, quick, let's run!"

But it was too late. From around the corner came three Arabs. I saw guns in their hands. We had no time to think,

I just jumped ahead and knocked down the first one. My fist flew into the second's face, and the third fell down without my help. Something glimmered in the girl's hand. We ran for a long time. Suddenly the girl said: "Come in here!" and we entered a building.

Her flat was very comfortable but very small. After two double shots of whisky, we stared at each other wordlessly. The effort was too strong and we both needed the release.

In the mist of the cold winter morning, I could see nothing but the outline of large buildings. I slowly walked beside the Seine with Jules Rober, leader of our organization in Paris.

"This is his photo and his address. We didn't have enough time to get more information."

"It's okay, don't worry."

"Afterwards I'll ask you something..."

False eyebrows and a moustache changed my face completely.

"Rue Vaugirar 6/2" – I went up in the elevator to the second floor and knocked on the door with the number "2". Someone looked at me through the peep-hole and after a few seconds the door opened. A nice young woman looked at me smiling expectantly.

"Bonjour, madame. May I see Monsieur Jan?"

"He has not yet returned. I have been waiting for him for two hours. Do you have something to give him?"

"No. Thank you, I'll come later." I smiled at her, too. I was glad: I didn't want to kill her.

I went down in the elevator. He was waiting for me right outside. We looked directly into each other's eyes. Before he entered, I had time to shoot him three times, the last time in his head. My mission was accomplished.

I walked on the boulevards of Paris and thought about my sweet messenger.

Many times I had thought that I had already found the woman of my dreams, but afterwards something would always happen and... I would wake up alone again. But this girl had really penetrated my heart. I got up and went to her.

She had been waiting for me and immediately opened the door. When I embraced her, I felt some tenseness in her body. Something prevented her from surrendering herself wholly to love. I continued to kiss her, but all the while tried to understand what had happened.

There was only one answer – treason! Perhaps somebody had ordered her to kill me.

Jules Rober? It may be possible. What must I have done then? Surely I couldn't kill her.

I whispered in her ear: "I am sorry, my dear. I have to..." I gently released myself from her embraces and moved in the direction of the bathroom. At that moment, I actually felt danger – she may have already had a gun in her hand. Without warning, I jumped to the right, to the open entrance of the room... and heard a nearly silent shot fired behind me. Without hesitation, I jumped out of the window. The ground floor was high up, but it wasn't too difficult for me. I quickly turned the corner and merged into the crowd.

I tried numerous times to connect with my chief in Tel-Aviv, but my password was always “incorrect” and access was denied (of course, I couldn’t call him directly – this was absolutely prohibited).

Do you have your own secret agents? If you do not, you can do nothing.

I have one in Paris. My old friend J.G. has already saved me many times.

Nearly ten years ago, we joined the Mossad together and from that time on we had always helped each other. Usually, we meet in a little café near the Moulin Rouge at Place Pigalle.

He’s never late and when I arrived at the café, he was already waiting for me.

I briefly told him my problem.

“I don’t know who wants to kill me or why,” I said at the end of my story.

He looked at me very sadly.

“Your situation is very serious and dangerous. I don’t know why, but the Mossad has begun to hunt you. I don’t know what happened, but I have also received the order to kill you.”

Once again, I went to visit my dangerous and lovely Japanese girl.

She undoubtedly loved me, but had received an order and was ready to kill me. Nothing can ever prevent the Japanese from carrying out an order.

At the entrance to her house, I saw two suspicious looking Arabs, and I understood that she had some unexpected visitors. I turned the corner and quickly climbed a fire-

escape. I saw the terrible scene through her window. Two Arabs held the girl's hands and a third was punching her in the face. I broke the glass of the window with a kick and jumped into the room.

I fired my gun without interruption and the Arab terrorists were killed within seconds. The Japanese girl looked at me in wide-eyed astonishment. I freed her quickly.

"Why did you do this?" she asked. Instead of answering, I kissed her gently. Suddenly she passionately embraced and kissed me too... But there were dead terrorists around us, and there were still two killers below. We had to escape quickly. We went out to the roof by the fire-escape and ran away.

Taking care not to be seen, we entered my room in the hotel. I quickly, but carefully, treated her wounds. Afterward, I made her a strong coffee with rum.

I felt that I needed to have time to think, so I left Yoko to walk the boulevards of Paris.

To me, the situation was clear. Jules Rober was a traitor. He had sent me to kill the innocent Jan and then reported to Tel-Aviv that I was a traitor.

What could I do? I called my friend J.G.

"Three o'clock," he said and hung up.

At three o'clock exactly, I entered our little café in Montmartre.

There I saw J.G., Yoko and... my chief from Tel-Aviv! They were sitting at the table and drinking coffee.

"You did good work!" the chief smiled. "Don't worry, we know everything. Jules Rober was a traitor and we have already caught him. You helped us to expose him. All has

been accomplished. Yoko-chan will explain your next mission to you.”

“On Rober’s order, I killed the innocent Jan...I am very sorry...” I started to say.

“Jan wasn’t innocent. He was also a traitor, they had worked together. Rober gave the order to kill Jan in order to get rid of a witness to his treachery.”

The chief stood up, said “Good bye!” and left the café with J.G.

Only Yoko and I remained in the café. We sat looking at each other and smiling. I felt that I loved her very much and could not live without her. I said:

“I don’t know what you want to tell me, but my next mission will be our marriage.”

“I won’t refuse,” she answered.

It’s permitted to kiss in the cafes of Paris.

# Don't Try to Escape from Your Love!

I don't know the reasons for your trip, but I'll share with you a reason for mine. I simply tried to escape from my ex-girlfriend.

When I fell in love with a charming Japanese girl, I didn't immediately understand that I had fallen into a trap.

We loved each other very much, but her wild jealousy constantly tormented me and my situation became unbearable. I understood that I would never be able to find such a beautiful girl again, but I had no choice: she simply didn't let me breathe.

Where could I escape from my love? Of course, to Paris. I made reservations for a single room in a little hotel in Montmartre with the romantic name "Rose Blanche".

I booked an aisle seat on the nearest flight from Tel-Aviv to Paris. I always reserve the aisle, because if I sit near the window, I would struggle with the desire to jump out.

My neighbor on the plane was a nice French girl. She was sitting quietly near the window and didn't show any sign of wanting to jump. When I approached my seat, she smiled at me and we introduced ourselves.

"My name is Geraldine Marcie," she said and smiled very sweetly.

She spoke a little English and we had a nice time during the flight. She was really pretty and flirted with me, but... suddenly I discovered that I could only think about my Sachiko. I missed her very much and our separation took a real toll on me. But Geraldine really was very nice, her French accent was enchanting and by the time we reached De Gaulle Airport, we had already become close friends.

Of course, we left the airport together.

“Let’s go to my place!” she said, and it felt natural to continue our relationship. I thought about Sachiko, but if I really intended “to escape” from my “ex-lover”, this was an excellent opportunity.

When we were in the taxi to Paris, Geraldine called somebody on her phone. She spoke in French, so I didn’t understand anything.

We drove for a long time and I was tired after the trip. Eventually, we reached an old grey building with two floors in a far-too-neglected neighborhood. Geraldine constantly laughed, told jokes and flirted with me, not letting me take notice of the direction we were taking. The place was inhabited by African immigrants and I didn’t see anybody there except Arabs and blacks. I began to seriously worry, but an old door had already opened and we entered the dirty and disgusting apartment. The door then instantly slammed behind me and I saw three Arab men with guns aimed at me.

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I sat in the middle of a room with my hands tied behind me. The biggest and fattest of the Arabs, probably their boss, sat smiling on a sofa in front of me. Geraldine sat next to him. She smoked, spoke in French with the Arabs and sometimes laughed. She looked at me contemptuously and didn’t hide her disgust for me.

“It was very easy!” she said. Everybody laughed.

The boss said to me:

“Don’t be afraid! We don’t intend to kill you, we have only one little request from you. Take this package and put it

into your baggage. You will take it to our friend in Israel. If you do this, we won't kill you."

I didn't have a choice, so I agreed to do it. I thought it could be a bomb and surely didn't intend to take the package on a plane. But how would I be able to deceive them and survive?

Sachiko read in a letter from her boyfriend that he had to go to Paris and didn't know when he would return. Of course, she understood that he intended to leave her, but how could she continue to live without him?

Her love wasn't a love of silent tears. Mad passion stormed in her breast!

Without further delay, Sachiko rushed off to Ben-Gurion Airport and after just a few hours, she had landed at De Gaulle. Sachiko understood that she would probably not be able to find him in Paris, but she couldn't remain without her only lover and she wasn't ready to suffer and to do nothing!

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Sachiko collected her luggage and went to exit the airport, but suddenly she saw him. He was with a beautiful girl!

Sachiko decided to kill them immediately – First, his prostitute, and then him. She didn't think about how she would do it or what would happen afterwards: that wasn't important.

But something in the situation was odd. Her ex-lover looked very upset and anxious. His girl had very angry eyes and looked at him with loathing. And... Sachiko noticed that some Arab men in black leather coats with

serious faces and hands in their pockets were near the couple. She understood everything, but what could she do? She knew!!

Sachiko ran to the El-Al terminal and there appealed to one of the security guards in broken Hebrew:

"I have very important and urgent information," she said.  
"But be quiet, please, and don't show that anything has happened. Arab terrorists have caught my boyfriend and have forced him to bring something dangerous to the plane. Now they're here and they're getting near. I'm sure they're armed. Please be careful: they can start shooting and can kill him."

The security guard quietly and quickly began to talk on his Motorola, and Sachiko saw that all the other officers began to approach the Arab terrorists, surrounding them very slowly and carefully. From all sides in the distance, soldiers appeared in the black uniform of the French Gendarmerie.

The terrorists were very close to Sachiko with their captive. Suddenly, he saw her! Sachiko smiled at him, with her eyes full of tears.

The French girl noticed something was going wrong. She pulled out a gun and turned it on the captive. Sachiko immediately threw herself between the French girl and her lover. A shot rang out. Shooting had begun. The terrorists were killed instantly.

Sachiko lay on the floor with blood seeping out of her right shoulder. The man knelt near her, crying in despair: "Sachiko, I love you! Don't die! I'll never leave you again!"

Paramedics approached with a stretcher...

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I married Sachiko, and we now live together happily and peacefully.

I don't give her any cause to be jealous of me. How do I do this? I can't tell you. It is my secret.

# The Unexpected Trip to Japan

I am an author.

My life is passing between two stories: the first story has already been written, the second story – is just now being written.

And my life between them – accidental, absurd, impossible – a ridiculous sigh between the last sigh of a character in my last story and the first sigh of a character in my future story.

Stories like waves roll over my head: the first one covers me, and the next one is just about to cover me...

If you see a nice girl on the street, don't even dare dream of her: she is from my story. She is mine. "Hey, Miss, what story are you from?"

Where are you hurrying to? According to the subject of this story, you have to be late anyway.

Didn't you notice that you have already become a character in my story?

If I am writing a story about war, I duck the shots, although my blood drops onto the pages of my story, and one of the bullets pierces what I have just written...

If my story is about love...

The characters of my unfinished stories suffer.

For example, a girl from my story undressed and began to take a cold shower. I put this story aside, but the poor girl is still standing under a stream of cold water with goose bumps. Two professional killers were waiting for a victim at the entrance of his house. I decided not to finish this

story either. The unfortunate victim has already died in his old age, but his killers are still waiting for him at the same place...A couple of young characters kissed. Again I didn't finish this story and, until now, they haven't progressed with their relationship. If all the characters of my unfinished stories were to assemble together, it would be really bad for me!

But I live in Israel, and Israel's poor authors can't let themselves live absolutely inside their own stories: constant connection with reality is a matter of survival here. If one evening you "fly into space", you will find your head on the bedside table by the next morning.

In my new story a young girl lives in the apartment above me. Every evening, when I hear the sound of her heels on the stairs, I imagine her slim legs barely covered by her mini skirt. I am sure that one day she will stop on my floor, and will knock on my door. If it doesn't happen, there is no use in my writing this story...

But actually an old, sick woman lives above me. Every day I hear her shuffles and laboured breathing on the stairs and one day she really did stop in front of my door and knocked! After she had entered my flat, sat down on a chair and recovered her breath, she said: "Of course, you are surprised at my visit. Now I'll explain. My son went to Japan three years ago and has gone missing there. I know you are a very good young man. You have often helped me to carry heavy bags to my floor and are always very affable and courteous. I heard that you lived in Japan for a long time and you know Japanese and their customs well. I'd

like to ask you to go to Japan to find my son. Of course, I'll pay you well and I'll give you money for expenses. What do you say?"

It was so unexpected but exactly what I wanted that I almost kissed my wonderful neighbor! Why did my heart suddenly begin to beat so quickly? My Michiko lives in Japan. It has been so long since I've seen her... I'd been waiting for the chance to go to Japan for ages, but urgent affairs and constant problems with money always proved to be insurmountable obstacles. But it's unacceptable to display any show of emotion in business.

I said:

"It's possible, I think. I worked very hard on my last book and now it's the right time for a change of scene."

She put a picture, an envelope with money, and an old Japanese postcard on the table.

"My son's name is David Gross," she said. "Here are his pictures, his last address in Tokyo and money for your mission." After she left my flat, I started to think. I had been waiting and looking for a chance to go to Japan and I had sensed the time for this trip was fast approaching. Because of this, it hardly came as a surprise when my neighbor came to me with her request. Anyway I had to go to Japan, because Michiko lives there...

All the other women in my life were like ghosts: they came and went, leaving no trace. When one came, I wasn't happy, when she left, I wasn't sad. I didn't feel that they were real women. And I felt that our relationships

weren't real. Their images glittered as if through a kaleidoscope... Michiko was the only real woman in my life. My heart filled with happiness when she appeared and I felt insufferable sadness when she disappeared. For me she was a woman made of flesh and blood: I desired her constantly, I needed her, I wanted to feel the sensation of the skin of her body...

Michiko always appeared unexpectedly and unexpectedly disappeared. I don't understand how she always managed to know where I was. And it was useless trying to look for her when she disappeared... Our meetings depended on her only. She was, possibly, the most important (and the most imperceptible) part of my life. Without the hope of seeing her I would have no reason to take on this mission.

While thinking about this I suddenly became aware of the smell of smoke in my room. Somebody coughed behind me. When I turned around, I almost shouted in alarm: there was a heavy man with a moustache sitting in my armchair, smoking his pipe and letting out the smoke from his nostrils. He smiled. "Who are you?" I cried.

"Who do you want to find without me? I am John Smith, the private detective from your story, "The Strange Death of Mister Samuel." Do you remember me?" he asked, smiling. I wrote that story three years ago. But how did he...? It was impossible. But the clouds of smoke in my room, his slight cough and his hoarse sarcastic voice seemed only too real...In front of me, in my own room, there was a character from my story sitting and talking to me...

Just then my telephone rang. I heard:

“Hi! This is Sergey. I know you’re going to Japan. Please find my daughter Natasha there and tell her that I miss her very much and that I am waiting for her. The last time somebody saw her she was in the section for Russian books in the “Kinokuniya” bookshop in Shinjuku.”

I couldn’t believe my ears: Sergey and Natasha were characters from my story entitled “A Trip to Nowhere.”

In this story, beautiful blond Natasha escapes to Japan and her luckless father searches for her everywhere but doesn’t find her...I barely had time to put the receiver down, when the telephone rang once more. “Don’t try to escape from me: I’ll find you everywhere! I’ll catch you in Japan too!” said a terrible rough male voice.

I put the receiver down and disconnected the telephone wire from the socket, but at that very moment the telephone rang again! The voice of a weeping, desperate woman said: “You promised to marry me and now you’re going to your lover in Tokyo? Shame on you! You’re leaving me pregnant... Will I have to raise the baby alone? What will I say to him when he becomes an adult?” It was the woman from my story “Don’t Trust Your Love.”

I felt like a character from somebody’s story, like a doll in somebody’s hands. It was too much for me. But then the telephone rang yet again! I realized that I had to get out of there immediately. I ran to the door and opened it wide... There were three dangerous looking men of unpleasant appearance standing in front of me. They were similar to the killers from my story “Nobody Remained Alive.” From the terrifying expressions on their horrible faces, I

understood that I was in trouble. Everything became dark in front of my eyes. I lost consciousness...

When I eventually got on the flight to Tokyo, a reputable looking person sat next to me on the plane. From the beginning of the flight, however, he started smiling at me. “Are we acquainted?” I asked him.

“More than you’d want,” he answered. “I am your boss and the owner of your life.”

It’s wonderful to have a crazy neighbor on the long flight to Tokyo, isn’t it?

“Be quiet or go and change your seat immediately. I am not ready to listen to this madness all the way to Tokyo,” I said harshly. His response was his disgusting grin.

“I thought that you wouldn’t believe me. But now I’ll show you who really is the boss here. Your plane doesn’t have to reach Tokyo. For example, it could crash.”

At that moment our plane went down in an air pocket. The passengers screamed. The captain of the plane announced over the radio: “Attention! Everyone fasten your seat belts immediately! We are encountering turbulence in this area.” My neighbor continued: “Or the plane could be hijacked.” As soon as he’d uttered these words a group of young men, dressed in black leather jackets with long hair and crazy eyes, ran along the aisle in the direction of the pilots’ cabin. They were holding long packages in their hands. My ‘boss’ continued with his vile grin: “Or a flight attendant could poison you.” On cue, a beautiful flight attendant approached me with a glass of orange juice on a tray.

“Please, drink some juice,” she said with a smile. There was a smell of almonds coming from the juice! I knew that the quicker I got out of this situation the better.

“You are one of the characters in my new story. And I am planning adventures in Tokyo for you, so that you won’t be bored,” my ‘boss’ said.

“I need to smoke and to think over this situation,” I told him. My ‘boss’ smiled again:

“You don’t smoke in my story.”

“But I smoke in other stories,” I answered, and got up out of my seat.

“I’ll smoke with you,” he said, and stood up too.

We went in the direction of the toilet at the back of the plane. As we passed near the emergency exit, I grabbed hold of the partition and kicked the handle of the door. The door opened and my ‘boss’, followed by the three hijackers and the dangerous flight attendant with her beautiful smile, were instantly sucked out of the plane, and the door slammed shut. All the passengers were safely in their seats held by their seat belts...

I thought that without a boss on my trip, it would be quiet and safe, but actually my adventures had only just started...

The last place, from where David Gross had sent a postcard to his mother three years ago, was the hotel “Pink Snow of Asakusa.” I decided to stay at this hotel too. (What is “the pink snow of Asakusa”? Every spring pink

petals of sakura fall down and cover the earth of Asakusa like pink snow...)

In the lobby of the hotel, there was an elderly woman behind the desk, and a young woman cleaning the floor. After I had filled out the registration form, and paid for the hotel room, I showed David Gross's picture to the elderly woman and asked her: "Do you remember this man? He stayed at this hotel about three years ago. His name is David Gross." As I said the name, a young woman jumped at me, snatched David's picture out of my hands and tore it into small pieces. Her face had reddened and was full of hate.

"He is a scoundrel, she said. "He deceived me..."

She covered her face with her hands and went out of the lobby. It was useless to pursue her: the picture was irrevocably destroyed.

When I opened the door of my hotel room, a cloud of smoke and a hoarse cough met me. "Hello!" John Smith said. He was sitting in an armchair with a pipe between his teeth and smiled through his moustaches. How did he find my room and get inside? I created him as a character in my story, but suddenly both of us turned out to be characters in another story, a strange, crazy story...

It was incomprehensible! John Smith cleared his throat and said: "There is one girl who knows where David Gross is. Her name is Nanako Suzuki. She works in the pub "The Golden Scorpion" in Kabuki-chou in Shinjuku. Go there now, you must hurry. I've learned that

somebody wants to stop us.” He stood up and without saying ‘good bye’, he left.

I was tired after the long flight from Tel-Aviv to Tokyo, but business comes first and I didn’t have time to rest.

I opened the door intending to go out...Unfortunately a little surprise was waiting for me on the other side of the door: I received a strong blow on my chin and, without knowing from where it came, I fell back onto the floor. The light in my brain went out and I sank into darkness...

When I regained consciousness, I saw two disgusting ugly faces bending over me. One of them was a terrible gorilla look-alike and the second one was a very short man. “This is enough for the first time,” the short man said. “Next time you won’t get rid of me so easily. You’d better stop looking for David Gross right away if you don’t want any trouble, my friend.” Having said that, they left.

I had a splitting headache and my chin hurt. It wasn’t going to be so easy this time. Now for sure I had to find David Gross. My interest in this mission had increased.

Staggering a bit, I left my room and went to Shinjuku.

Kabuki-chou seemed dangerous in the evening. I saw several unsavoury looking characters on the streets and I felt myself to be like hunted game under the glare of hunters. At last I found “The Golden Scorpion.” In front of the entrance I saw a beautiful smiling girl wearing a red Chinese dress, with a picture of a scorpion on her chest and her hair styled to look like horns on her head. The

pub was very large inside with a desk, many tables and stairs going up. Girls, in red colored Chinese dresses and as if with horns on their heads, were sitting alongside the bar. I made my way to a far table in the corner. Suddenly I noticed Michiko among the girls near the bar! She was also wearing a red colored dress and had the same idiotic hair style. I waved to her. She waved back and came to my table, swinging her hips.

“Michiko, what are you doing here?” I asked.

“I am not Michiko. My name is Aiko,” she said, and sat down at the table. “Entertain me, Mike. Order a drink for me.” I understood that this evening I was to be Mike and she was Aiko. But why? I was sure that she was Michiko. She was behaving as if she were a prostitute but I knew that she was my Michiko. Then a waitress came, and I ordered two beers. OK, I decided, if this is what she wants, I will play her stupid game. I put a one thousand yen note (about ten dollars) on the table and said:

“I am looking for Nanako Suzuki. Where can I find her?”

“Why do you want her? I am better.” Michiko smiled seductively. I put another thousand yen on the table.

“I have to ask her something,” I told her.

Michiko took the money, stood up and indicated that I should follow her. As we were going up the stairs, everybody in the pub looked at us. They knew what we were going to do now...On the first floor there was a dark corridor and two rows of doors. From behind the doors we could hear laughing, screaming and moaning. One of the doors was open a little. Michiko pointed: “She is there.” I looked inside and immediately closed the door. It was clear that Nanako Suzuki would not be able to help me – she was dead. She was lying on the bed with a knife in her

breast, and blood still dripping from her wound...

Of course Michiko didn't need to see this.

Suddenly sirens were heard coming from the street below. Somebody shouted: "It's a raid!" Semi-naked men and women emerged from the rooms and rushed about the corridor in panic. Michiko took my hand and pulled me after her through a nearby door. It led to the stairs. We ran out to the street into the rain and managed to escape from the police. We walked along the streets of Shinjuku for a long time and, at last, Michiko opened the door of a house. We entered a dark little hall, took off our shoes, and Michiko ushered me into a light and spacious living room.

An elderly Japanese lady was there. She said to Michiko:

"You've brought a man with you again. You have absolutely no consideration for your daughter at all."

"It's not what you think."

"So what is it?"

"He is the father of Fumiko," Michiko answered.

I couldn't believe my ears! But Michiko didn't give me any time to be surprised. "There is your room," she said, opening a door. "You also have a shower and a toilet."

She pointed out other essential items, gave me a towel and left the flat quickly. I had many questions, of course, but I didn't have time to ask them...

When I woke up the next morning, I saw a little girl standing near my bed. She was about five years old and was wearing a pink dress and a pink bow in her hair.

“Are you awake already?” she asked. “Please get up! Mama said that you’ll take me to the Zoo today.”

“Who are you?” I was very surprised, of course.

“I am Fumiko.” She answered. “Please hurry. Mama left breakfast for you on the table.”

“Where is your Mama?” I asked.

“She already went to work,” Fumiko said, and went out. She was sweet. I stood up and quickly got dressed.

The breakfast was very tasty. Fumiko watched me eat and sometimes she laughed. I think the way I used hashi – chopsticks - amused her. At last I finished my breakfast and we left the flat. Fumiko and I made a strange pair on the Tokyo streets: a foreign white man with a little Japanese girl, and people stared at us in surprise.

Tokyo Zoo is in Ueno. It’s far from Shinjuku and we needed to get there by train. On the way to Shinjuku station two policemen stopped us. I gave them my passport, but didn’t know how to explain the situation. I looked suspicious: maybe I had kidnapped a little Japanese girl? But Fumiko said, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened:

“He is my father. He is taking me to the Zoo.” She took out a piece of paper from her little bag and gave it to the policemen. They looked at my passport and at Fumiko’s paper and saluted me with a smile.

We continued on our way, but in front of the station a big black car stopped near us. My familiar short man and the gorilla look-alike got out of the car. “I warned you that our next meeting would not end well for you,” the short man said, with his repulsive smile. “Catch him and put him into

the car,” he instructed the gorilla.

I didn’t have time to get afraid. Fumiko said: “My uncle Shinoda Yasuo will not like this. He’ll find you wherever you are. Go away!”

The short man shouted at the gorilla:

“Don’t listen to this little fool. Do what I tell you. Now!”

But the gorilla stopped.

“Isn’t your life worth anything? If you want to die, catch him yourself. I don’t want to get involved with Shinoda.”

Arguing and quarrelling a while longer, they finally got into the car and left.

I like animals and I like people who like animals. Ueno Zoo is one of my favorite places in Tokyo. Fumiko liked animals too. We stood in front of all the cages for a long time. When we came to the place with the polar bears, Fumiko said: “I like polar bears most of all.” Suddenly, she climbed over the fence and went down into the polar bears’ enclosure. I didn’t have time to grab her. Everybody around us screamed. The biggest polar bear went towards her...Without thinking I climbed down after her, grabbed her and climbed out as quickly as I could. The bear had time to tear my trousers slightly...

The crowd came to us, looking relieved.

“Why did you do that?” I asked Fumiko.

“I wanted to make certain that you really are my father,” she said. If I really were your father, I would smack you properly, I thought.

We had got soaked in the bears’ pond and needed to dry off. It was a hot day so I wasn’t worried that Fumiko would

catch a cold. We sat in an open café near the Zoo's lake with its swans. I ordered a cola for her (she only wanted a cola) and asked her:

"What is your mother's name?" I needed to know who she was, Michiko or Aiko.

"Are you crazy?" Fumiko said. "Don't you know my Mama's name?" My attempt at clearing that up failed.

But how could I make friends with my daughter?

"Please teach me to sing your favorite song," I asked her.

"OK, repeat after me," she said, and began to sing:

"Pop-pop-po, hato poppo mame ga hoshi ka?..."

I repeated the song and we began to sing together. After singing the song three times we became close friends.

Fumiko was very happy.

Suddenly I heard a hoarse cough behind me and turned around. John Smith was sitting at the neighboring table, smoking his pipe and smiling.

"You have to go quickly to the bookshop Kinokuniya in Shinjuku," he said. "You can find Natasha, Sergey's daughter, in the Russian literature section. She knows where David Gross is."

And so I said to Fumiko: "Let's go, dear. We have to return to Shinjuku."

There are many big and wonderful bookshops in Tokyo, but Kinokuniya in Shinjuku is the biggest and the most wonderful of them. I knew that Kinokuniya was near the eastern exit of Shinjuku station and found it quickly.

I promised Fumiko that we would look for books for children, but first we went up to the seventh floor to the section for Russian literature. I saw a beautiful blond

there. She was Natasha, of course. I hadn't yet lost my surprise at seeing characters from my stories everywhere.

I went to Natasha and started to say: "David Gross..." But Natasha interrupted me saying in a loud voice:

"Yes, we have the book by Tolstoy that you need." And she handed me "War and Peace." The book opened in my hands. There was a piece of paper between its pages! I read: "The girl is in danger! Please take good care of her." I turned around but couldn't see Fumiko. She had disappeared! I threw the book onto the desk and ran down to block the exit of the shop. I jumped down three stairs as people quickly moved out of my way. I reached the ground floor in just one minute, but it was no use! There were exits from the shop on other floors and I couldn't block all of them! I tried to look for the girl in front of the shop, I ran to the station, I ran to the opposite side, I looked for her in the narrow streets of Shinjuku, but couldn't find her anywhere. Suddenly I collided with John Smith. He said to me, without taking his pipe from his mouth: "In order to find something or somebody in Tokyo the information office can be useful. I use this one." And he gave me a slip of paper with an address on it. Then he disappeared into the crowd...

John Smith's 'information office' was in Sanya – the poorest area of Tokyo. There were many old, run-down houses there and cramped, shabby shops and also many homeless people on the streets of Sanya. I walked around there for a long time until I found the 'office' which was a dilapidated old hovel with a partially open little door. When I went inside, I saw a ragged old woman sitting in the middle of an empty room on a dirty tatami (the mat

which is made from rice straw). Her eyes, like two small pieces of burning coal, pierced through me.

“Sit down here,” she said, pointing to a place in front of her. I sat down. She said:

“I know why you’ve come. It costs gojuu man yen.” (about five thousand dollars).

“But this is all the money I have.” I answered. “It too high a price for me. I can’t pay it.” How could I give all my money to the first old woman I meet?!

“Isn’t your daughter worth gojuu man yen?” The woman asked. “If you want to save her, you must pay.”

What else could I do? I had no choice. I gave her the money and she quickly hid it in her rags. Incense sticks appeared in her hands from somewhere. She lit them and strange smelling colored smoke filled the room.

Suddenly everything around me disappeared in clouds of pink smoke. Through the smoke I began to distinguish a strange picture on the floor: a black cobra and a golden scorpion in fighting positions. They were actually fighting. The scorpion tried to strike the cobra with its tail, and the cobra, while trying to dodge the scorpion’s tail, was also striving to grab hold of it. It continued for some time, but neither of them won.

Gradually the picture of the battle became unclear and then vanished. I came to and found myself in the empty room again. The old woman had gone away (with my money!). The door was open a little...I had given that old swindler all my money. For what? For the stupid dream? How will it help me to find my daughter? At last, I felt

that she really was my daughter. I was now ready to do anything for her! But I didn't have time to waste thinking about it.

I remembered that Natasha knew something or someone was threatening Fumiko. Now I had to ask Natasha some questions. I left the 'information office' and walked along the streets of Sanya, trying to find a metro-station. Suddenly, I saw Natasha! She was walking towards me. I went up to her and asked: "Natasha, where is Fumiko? What did your warning mean?" She looked around, took my hand and led me to a kissaten – a Japanese style café. We ordered coffee and sat down at a table in the corner. She asked me:

"Where have you been? What have you been doing until now?"

I decided to tell her everything.

"I met an old witch and she cheated me out of all my money... She put me to sleep and I had a strange and stupid dream."

"What dream?" Natasha asked. She looked very serious. I told her about the battle of the black cobra and the golden scorpion. Natasha moved closer to me and said in a whisper: "Listen carefully. 'The Black Cobra' is a Chinese gangster band. They are cruel beasts. If Fumiko is in their hands, she is in terrible danger. We can't help her."

And then I recalled something important.

"Fumiko has an uncle. His name is... Shinoda Yasuo. He is one of leaders of yakuza, I think. Have you heard this name?"

"Everybody in Tokyo knows this name." Natasha

answered.

“Where can I find him?”

“In the pub ‘The Golden Scorpion’ of course,” she said.

Why didn’t I realize that myself?!

“I must go, I told her.” I got up and left the kissaten quickly... I had to hurry, my daughter was in danger!

The second time I found ‘The Golden Scorpion’ easily. I went in and... met Nanako Suzuki! She came towards me with a smile. But I had seen her lying in a puddle of blood with a knife in her chest! She said to me with a bow: “Welcome! Mister Shinoda is waiting for you.”

Again, the girls were sitting around the bar like last time, but I didn’t see Michiko among them. Nanako led me through an entrance that was situated behind the bar. We went along a corridor and came out downstairs. Two aggressive looking powerfully built young men blocked the doorway by holding a picture of a big golden scorpion in front of it.

Nanako said something to them and one of them disappeared behind the door. After two minutes he returned and opened the door for us with a bow. We entered a spacious room with red-gold walls. A respectable looking Japanese gentleman was sitting at the massive wooden table. He was one of the bosses of the yakuza of Tokyo, Shinoda Yasuo. Some men, of a most suspicious looking appearance, were standing near him.

He looked at me and asked:

“Where is Fumiko?”

“She is being held by the Chinese gang ‘The Black Cobra,’ I told him.

Shinoda stood up abruptly. His expression had hardened. “I am sick and tired of these Chinese bastards. It’s high time to finish them off once and for all. Takeshi, get all of our boys together. We’ll go now.” He turned to me: “Will you come with us?”

“Of course!” I answered.

In a few minutes we were on our way in four big black cars. We reached an industrial area of Tokyo and stopped in front of a storehouse. Everybody got out of the cars quickly and noiselessly. Without saying anything we approached the entrance to the building. There seemed to be absolute silence inside. I thought nobody could be there. A huge man from the yakuza reached the door and broke it off its hinges with a strong blow from his shoulder. And then we quickly entered the building. About thirty Chinese men, all ready to fight, were waiting for us inside. We came to blows with them right away. It was a really cruel fight!

I kicked somebody’s head, received a fist in my ear and fell down on the floor. Around me the fight became intense. I saw a flight of stairs going up and thought that perhaps Fumiko was there. I stood up and tried to reach the stairs, but was knocked down once more. At the third attempt I managed to get to the stairs and went up them quickly. On the first floor there was a long corridor with a row of doors on either side. Where was Fumiko? I didn’t have time to open every door: I could hear footsteps on the stairs. I began to sing quietly the song that Fumiko taught me in the Zoo:

“Pop-pop-po, hato poppo mame ga hoshi ka?...”

Suddenly from behind one of the door Fumiko’s thin voice

answered me:

“Sora yaru zo. Minna de naka yoku tabe ni koi.”

I opened the door. Fumiko was sitting in the middle of the room. An evil wretch had tied the girl to a chair. When I untied her, Fumiko cuddled up to me and wept silently.

Just then I heard people’s voices in the corridor. I grabbed the girl, opened a window and jumped out. We landed without any mishap and I began to run as fast as my legs would carry me...

I was walking with Fumiko in my arms for some hours until I became exhausted and couldn’t go on any more. I put the child down and leaned against the wall of a building. There was a sobaya (a restaurant, where o-soba – buckwheat noodles - are served) on the opposite side of the street. This type of restaurant in Japan is always open, even at night. We went in. An elderly woman with a kind, smiling face greeted us with the usual “Irrasshaimase – Welcome!” She cooked a hot o-soba for us, but we were too tired to eat it. Fumiko had fallen asleep in my arms as soon as I sat down...

When Fumiko woke up, she yawned luxuriously and stretched herself sweetly. Instead of the kind elderly matron a cheerful boy was working in the sobaya in the morning. Fumiko and I ate o-soba and drank soba-yu (o-soba – hot water).

“Do you know where your mother might be?” I asked Fumiko.

“She is waiting for us in Kamakura of course,” Fumiko answered.

I was surprised. Why “in Kamakura”? Why “of course?” My daughter really was a very special and outstanding girl!

We took the train to Kamakura at Shinagawa-station.

There were seats facing each other on the train. An old man entered and sat down on the seat in front of us.

When the train started moving, Fumiko said:

“Do you think we’ll be quiet all the way to Kamakura? Won’t you tell me a story?”

I was exhausted after the sleepless night and the memories of last night’s events prevented me from being able concentrate.

“Fumiko, wait please. I’ll tell you a wonderful tale later. Now I have to rest a little...”

Suddenly, the old man sitting in front of us said: “I have a story for you. But it isn’t just a tale, it’s a true story. Do you want to listen? Fumiko became interested. I looked at him gratefully.

### The Old Man’s True Story

When I was seven years old I lived in a village. I liked playing with samurais as did all the other boys in the village. We ran around the village swinging wooden swords and looking for a way to fight like real samurais.

There was a funny little puppy in our village. It liked me, because I often played with it and sometimes fed it. One day, the ‘village samurais’ decided to tie up the puppy and beat it. Sometimes boys of that age can be cruel. They

brought the unsuspecting puppy to an empty place behind some sheds and put a cord around its neck. I couldn't bear seeing my friends teasing the puppy like this and screamed at them: "Don't touch it!" After a minute all the boys started to fight me with their wooden swords. I received a strong blow on my head, fell down and passed out...

When I opened my eyes, an old man was bending over me. The boys had run away. The old man smiled at me and said:

"You fought well and weren't afraid. You'll be a brave samurai. I want to reward you."

With these words he gave me a silver whistle.

"Use it only if you find yourself in serious danger," he said. I returned home, threw the whistle into a box of toys and forgot about it. Some time after this the war began. My father went to fight in the war and we moved to live with our relatives in Tokyo. The situation on the front lines got worse and American B-29 planes began to burn Tokyo.

One day my mother, my little sisters and I were sitting on the floor and praying. Fires were raging around us. Flames were everywhere and we were sure that we wouldn't get out alive from there. All of a sudden I remembered the silver whistle. I didn't have much hope that it could help us, but I found it and whistled..... Suddenly, huge silver samurais emerged from out of the walls of our room. They seized hold of all of us and transported us to a clearing in the forest. We breathed in the smell of pine needles and heard the birds chirping. The war was over for us.

“What a wonderful tale! Thank you very much!” I said. I liked his ‘true story’ very much.

“But where is your whistle now?” Fumiko asked.

I expected the old man to answer with some joke, but he took out a silver whistle from his jacket pocket!

“Take it, please,” he said, giving the whistle to Fumiko. I don’t need it any more, but I think you will find it useful.

“Use the whistle only in situations when you are in great danger,” he added.

Just then the train reached Kamakura. We said goodbye to the old man and got out onto the station platform. There we saw Michiko.

“O-kaasan!” Fumiko screamed and jumped into her mother’s embrace. It was touching to see their meeting. I felt happy that this was my family...Suddenly I heard a hoarse cough behind me and turned around. It was John Smith, of course! He was smoking a pipe and smiling, as usual.

“The monk from the Hasedera-temple knows where David Gross is,” he said. “Go there quickly. We don’t have much time.” After saying this he disappeared in an instant, as usual.

We bought bento – breakfast in a box - and hurried to the bus to Hasedera. Near the Hasedera-temple we saw many tourists but didn’t see any monks.

Michiko went to a statue of Buddha – the protector of children - clasped her hands together in front of her and closed her eyes for a few minutes. Afterwards Fumiko asked her:

“O-kaasan, what did you do?”

“I prayed for you and our family,” Michiko answered.

“What is ‘prayed’?”

“I asked Buddha to protect us,” Michiko explained.

Fumiko also went up to the statue of Buddha, put her hands together in front of her chest and closed her eyes.

After a minute an old monk came out of the temple towards us and asked:

“Who is this girl?”

“She is our daughter.” I answered. “Why are you asking?”

“When she started to pray, Buddha smiled,” the monk said. “She must be a very special girl.”

Michiko and I exchanged glances. I remembered John Smith’s words.

“May I ask you something?” I asked. I wanted to find out where David Gross was.

“I know what you want to ask. It’s impossible to find somebody who doesn’t exist,” the monk said, and went back to the temple.

Fumiko was hungry so we decided to eat our bento. There was a very picturesque place with tables and benches under tall pines near the temple. Some tourists were eating their bento there. We could see Kamakura’s roofs, the sea and the surrounding mountains from there. A sign carried the warning: “Be careful! Eagles steal food.” There were some large eagles in the sky above us. Everybody looked up at them cautiously, covering their bento with their hands. I moved closer to Fumiko and put my hand on her head to protect her – the birds were rather large and could steal not only bento...

After the meal we felt very tired and went looking for a hotel. Michiko said that she knew some ryokan (Japanese style hotels) near this place and she led us along a path deep into the forest. I asked her what kind of hotel could be in the forest, but Michiko only smiled. It was then that I noticed some strange men following us on the path. But perhaps they were intent on their own business?

We continued walking for a long time and at last came to a wooden building. A young woman wearing a kimono met us at the entrance with a bow and proceeded to direct us to our room. It was a typical ryokan. I was somewhat surprised because I couldn't remember any hotel being in this area. We were so exhausted that we took a bath and went straight to bed. As I fell asleep, I heard others entering the ryokan too (maybe they were the suspicious looking men who were following us?)

I experienced a strange dream. Two devils were talking with each other. One of them said:

“Why didn’t you eat those guests?”

The second devil answered:

“I can’t get to them. The girl possesses some super power. I can’t do anything. She’s preventing me from entering their room.”

“And what about the men that came later?”

“I have already eaten them.”

When I woke I could hardly believe my eyes: I was lying on the earth in a clearing under the pine trees. A fox and a little fox-cub were sleeping rolled up into a ball near

me. There were some white gnawed bones under the trees in the distance. I stood up noiselessly. Suddenly I saw Natasha standing among the trees. What was she doing here?

She indicated that I be silent and beckoned me to come to her. She looked very worried and whispered:

“You must return to Israel immediately. It’s very dangerous for you to be staying here. Behind these trees John Smith is waiting for you with a car. He’ll take you to the airport.”

“But I don’t want to return.” I answered. “I have found my family here and I am absolutely happy with that.”

“Are those animals your family?” Natasha said scornfully, pointing to the foxes. “Listen. There is a young beautiful girl waiting for you in Israel. She’ll be your real wife, your real family. Now, you mustn’t delay any longer. You must hurry, go quickly.”

“I won’t return,” I said decisively.

Natasha smiled:

“But you don’t have any choice...” She passed her hand in front of my eyes and suddenly my head began to swim and I fainted...

When I recovered, I found myself sitting on a seat in a plane. There was an announcement over the radio saying: “Fasten your seatbelts.”

How did I get here?!

I don’t want to fly to anywhere!

Suddenly a huge silver samurai materialized out of the wall of the plane. He caught hold of me with his large

hands and I lost consciousness once more...

When I came to again, I was in Michiko's living room. Michiko, my daughter and I were sitting on a sofa and John Smith and Natasha were sitting on armchairs in front of us. John Smith was smoking his pipe, of course. Michiko said:

"He is my husband and the father of my daughter. He's not going anywhere and he'll stay with us forever."

Natasha jumped up. Malice was distorting her features. She shouted:

"Hush! Keep silent! Do you think you exist at all? You are a secondary insignificant character in our story. You are nothing! If you won't be quiet, we'll rub you out of the story and you'll disappear."

Suddenly Fumiko said:

"It seems to me that somebody wants to steal my father from me..." At this moment silver samurais with swords in their hands appeared out of the walls.

John Smith said, smiling saccharinely:

"We need to find a compromise here. Nobody wants to make trouble for you, my sweet girl."

The samurais vanished into the walls again.

I said:

"Apart from anything else I have to find David Gross. I promised his mother ..."

"His mother? Who is his mother?" Natasha asked with a mocking smile.

“The old woman who lives above my flat...” I answered.  
“But there is a young beautiful girl living above your flat,  
and every evening you could hear the sound of her heels  
tapping on the stairs...” Natasha said.

Suddenly a man entered the room. His face looked  
familiar. I had seen his picture, of course. It was David  
Gross!

Natasha said to him:

“Nobody has found you yet. Get out!” And the man  
vanished.

Suddenly I understood everything. It all became clear.  
“From the beginning of my trip John Smith and you,  
Natasha, have been telling me what to do. All this time I  
have been like a doll in your hands. You knew everything  
I was doing from the beginning until now. You were  
directing all my actions. I became a character in your  
story!”

All of a sudden, somebody else appeared in the room.  
The old monk from the Hasedera temple said to me:  
“You are right, but this story about you will remain  
unfinished. And as a character in an unfinished story,  
you’ll continue to live at the moment where the story has  
stopped. So, you’ll live in happiness with your beloved  
wife and daughter. And if you don’t want to become  
somebody else’s character, then please stop writing. When  
a story is being created, well described characters become  
alive and begin to live their own lives. Everything gets  
mixed up and the poor author may become one of his own  
characters...”

\*

I think the monk was right.

I stopped writing.

Now I am living with my lovely family in Shinjuku in perfect happiness and I don't think about anybody who may, or may not, be living above my flat. I am happy to become a character for my wife and my daughter only...

Sometimes on Sundays we go to the Zoo in Ueno in order to see the polar bears again. And the bears are happy to see us too, I feel.

