

Record of a Tryst In Tokyo

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Translated from Japanese by Marissa Skeels

Lying on our bed, her florid, parted lips telling of an everyman's scent, alluring Chimiko takes in my usual romantic techniques amid the erotic green mist clouding the room.

Compared to her predecessor, who sees foreigners, Chimiko sadly lacks the sort of delicate touch one sees in classic, Eastern picture scrolls, but as her male partner, to whom she leaves the incursion, the tattooing, blooms as far as the temperature climbs during the world's oldest trade, I glimpse within her exotic, tactile map, beneath a wave of empty emotion, a new template for love. And so her affectionate words ride crimson ripples of silk, "It just happens? Mm."

I glance up. The hands on a ghostly wristwatch show 10:30pm. "Yeah."

"You cheat?"

Her little finger rests in pinched folds, and the clandestine prints in my heart are already gone; her face is bright, teasing, *How's that?*

"Yeah, I've cheated on you!"

At that, she blossoms like a lotus flower, laughing at the disguises in my soul. That ominous laugh also enchants, ensnaring me.

I get up, step out into the corridor in this middling hotel where the city becomes suburbs, and take the telephone off the hook while, at this moment, Tokyo station grows crowded before the 10:55 Kobe express leaves.



As evenings... wear on... the smell of coal tar oil follows the shallow gutters, filling my nose. That night I was in Tsukiji, on the floor of the dance hall by the river. A girl in a high-necked dress and an elegantly slim man were making heartfelt love in a bucking dance beneath a chandelier ringed by screwed-in neon signs, while new outfits bobbed around them like lanterns on water. The jazz grew fiercer in the colored spotlight's rays, as if sobbing or adrift on rough beats, spitting tapes of lust as white as seed.

It was there, among the brilliant dancers and the unceasing, rich melody, that she caught my eye. A beguiling, svelte, lady of the night in a red crepe dress and a sumptuous, chinchilla wrap met my eyes in the humid hall, in a tryst in a vanity mirror through which she smiled. I felt that she was winking at me through its reflection, and her spirit of intimacy aroused my foreboding, alone on the floor, cupped under women's perfume.

The band began a blues number as neons rolled like unmoored ships. Couples rose at its telling of a love found once a millennium... as did I, to tug the velvety hem of a dancer I knew. "Hey, do you know the girl in the chinchilla wrap?"

She huffed an amused snort. "You noticed her?"

"Yeah." I nodded, leering over her head as we danced.

She murmured into my back, in the code of a fellow sensualist, "Want me to fix you up?"

"Yes, please."

"What'll you give me?"

"My wages from the clothes store this month."

Having made bait of the woman in the chinchilla, she agreed. "Okay, I'll introduce you to her the next time a waltz comes on. But that's all."

I fell in love again, in the pink maze of the hall, with the jazz singer's husky love song. One half-Italian dancer came here from Shanghai to make her riches, and the peal of a saxophone echoed off her expansive, mighty chest as she went on, as always, with her honeymoon tour of the hall.

Everything spun slowly. Dancers emerged from the girls' room in clothes changed for the nth time that evening, lipstick-stained clutches firmly in the crooks of their arms. They can make it through nights out in the elements, from Naniwa to Shanghai or in any red-light district, content as long as they have their clutches. With bows in their bangs they are filled with dancer spirit; their short skirts, high heels, and of-the-minute fashion bewitch.

waltz

We melted into the seamless mass of bodies in the dissolution of the hall. I gazed into the flower garden of the face of the woman in chinchilla fur as we whirled around the floor like a red butterfly. "I'm not sure what to make of you."

"Whatever you will."

Lost in the melody of the miraculous woman's voice, I said, "Then, should we get out of here?"

"Yes, I'd like to go with you."

"Where to?"

"I'm wholly in your hands."

"...It's just..."

"Yes?"

I caressed the faces of countless chinchilla faces on her wrap as we stood at the taxi rank, an anchor of lust sunk in this suspect seduction. "I might make love to you."

"I don't care for that sort of thing."

"No, for me, anything else is boring."

"Oh, why? Does it stir you up that much?"

Lustrous lights from the upper floors of buildings on the main street dappled the taxi window as we passed through slums.

"I'm going to kiss you," I said.

"No," she said a beat later, her earlobe the shell of a moon snail, worthy of sonnets...



I confined my love to one room of a hotel in a dead-end street downtown.

Then gazed at her, as is my habit when drunk, a john in his final moments of coquetry with a woman from the dance hall. But this was met with a hostility that crossed her pale face where she leaned against a bedpost.

"What would you like to do?"

"I want to date you," I took off my coat, "as you are, a prostitute," and tossed it on the sofa, brandishing my blue checkbook. "How much?"

She said nothing.

"I wouldn't mind losing everything, for you."

Her reserve of endured sorrow and lonely pride only broke, suddenly, surging forth flowery passion on the jade-green linoleum. My immoralities were swept away in her flood of tears. I stood silent, and touched something cold, filling up with sensation a hollow of guilt. An exquisitely sensual sound arose.

“Come back,” I said eventually, soothing.

“Okay.” When her gulping sobs subsided, she touched up her makeup in a compact mirror. “I’m from Kobe, rather, I’ll return tomorrow night on the 10:55 train.”

“Bye, then,” I said with finality.

After a pause, she replied. “Bye.”



The shock of the sound of the phone I took off the hook sets both our hearts pounding. The bubbles of our fleeting love vanish in a blink, and beneath a wave of emotion, I see that my fleeting affair has gifted Chimiko a template for a kind of new love.

