



EMMANUEL ARNAUD
KUMI SASAKI

TCHIKAN

PRÉFACE DE GHADA HATEM



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THIERRY MARCHAISSE



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PREFACE BY GHADA HATEM

ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH
BY EMMANUEL ARNAUD



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THIERRY MARCHAISSE

1.

Twelve years old, I am back in Japan after four years spent in Hong Kong with my parents and my younger brother. We were expatriated there because of the duty of my father, executive in a big Japanese firm whose branches could be found everywhere in the world.

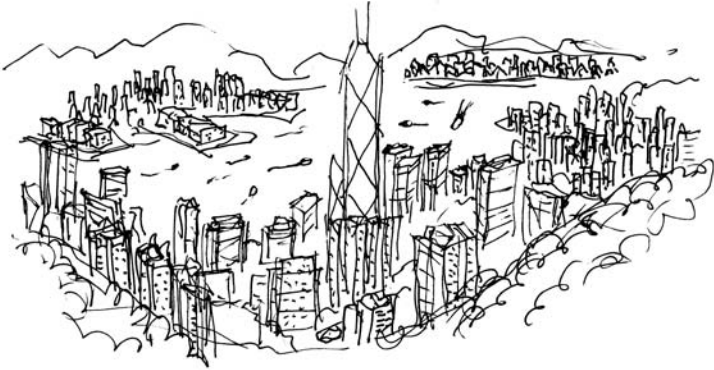
Hong Kong was fine.

Life was peaceful and secure, and yet, everything I could see around me looked exotic and singular. Compared to Japan, it was a bit chaotic of course, but I would come to like this contrast between order and jungle. I keep of it only good memories. Formally, I did not want really to live there, because my parents had told me not only that nobody spoke Japanese, but that there were many kidnapers and lawbreakers there. My brother and I had to be very careful in the streets, they said, much more than in Japan. We would have to clutch mummy's hands particularly tight as soon as we would be out of the house. At that time, I was seven years old, my brother five, and this warning had strongly impressed us.

But as soon as I entered the Japanese primary school in Hong Kong, I changed my mind. It was a school big enough to accommodate more than a thousand pupils. The schoolchildren came from almost everywhere in Japan, from abroad even, were each other very different, and naturally very open minded, much more than the little Japanese children in my Tokyo's district. Tens or so of the pupils would leave at the end of every half year, and tens or so would replace them. One would get used to this coming and going, and children would welcome the new pupils.

Our apartment was located in the nearly mountainous part of Hong Kong, fifteen minutes by car from the center of the city, not very far from the touristic sites, from which one can admire the night and sparkling views on the island sky scrapers. From our apartment, I could see an ancient Hong Kong university's building in art deco style. I liked to look at this urban and colonial landscape located inside this tropical nature, particularly the luxury hotels. I liked too the island gastronomy – I must say my parents were discerning gourmets and that we used to have dinners in very good restaurants.

In Hong Kong, my day would begin at seven o'clock precisely. Twenty minutes later, I would walk with my mother five minutes to the bus stop. The school bus would arrive at half past seven and would leave me at about eight o'clock. I would then begin my school day. The end of school was at three o'clock pm, when I would come back by the same dedicated bus till the bus stop where my mother—or another mother of our residence—would take me back home.



*“J’aimais bien la vie à Hong Kong.
C’était très animé et très exotique.
Il y avait d’innombrables gratta-ciel
au milieu d’une nature incroyable...”¹*

I tell you all this to make you understand that indeed, my day life in Hong Kong has been carefully watched over by my parents from the beginning to the end. You will see why I insist on this point: in Tokyo, when I came back from Hong Kong, I realized at once that life is very different; in Japan, every morning, little children six or seven years old walk alone in the streets till school, only in company of older children of their district. And in the beginning of afternoon, they go back home in the same way – if they would rather, they can even go back alone without any older children to go with them!

¹ “I used to like life in Hong Kong. It was very bustling and exotic. There were so many sky-scrapers amongst an incredible nature.”

Why such a difference? Because Japan is a safe country, of course! I hope you know indeed that Japan is among the countries with the lowest criminal rate in the world.

So I am back in the safest country in the world, and it is time for me to go to high school. I have very seriously prepared for the competitive examinations. Because in Japan, it is vital to enter a good high school. This governs all at once your scholar and university career, even your life. Well, I have not missed that step: I entered a good private educational establishment in Tokyo center. A high school for girls, a catholic one. My parents were very happy when they learnt it, because at that time, the reputation of public high school was very low, and they had no alternative.

I was born in March, and in Japan, school year begins in April (did you know that?). In high school, as every year since nursery school, I figured among the smallest girls in my class. This is one of the first things I realize when I go in the classroom the first day.

In Japanese high school, maybe you don't know, there is only one real exam every trimester, or even semester. The first exam, which takes place in June, is so particularly important for new school girls. It gives a bit of the fine-tuning for the rest of the year. It is also particularly stressing. Or now, here I am, at this exam, the day when I am twelve years, two months and twenty-four days old.

I feel nervous not only because it is my very first exam in high school, but also because since the beginning of March, truly, I have nearly never attended school. Only a few days

after the beginning of the school year, I caught chickenpox. And as I was ashamed with all those buttons, I was absent during one month. The result was I was lagging behind the other pupils and found myself isolated – because apart me being the youngest in the class and that it does not help to get friends, all of them had time to make acquaintance when I went back to school at the beginning of May.

On the exam day, I wake up and I see the bed room flooded with light. Outside, it is very fine! I think it is a good sign; I have noticed I am always in a better mood with this weather. I feel relaxed and that, I know from experience, is ideal to succeed in an exam. I quickly dress in my little bed room, and I still feel happy when I pull on my long sleeved shirt. In Japan, we all wear a uniform to go to school, especially in a private high school as mine. Apart from the white shirt, trimmed with a little ribbon with crimson red flounces which looks like a bow tie, I wear a long navy blue dress, which goes down to the calves and which ends to the other extreme with a round collar; I also wear a belt, navy blue too, same material made, white socks called bobby socks, with flounces, that you may know be because I have seen it is a bit fashionable in France by now, and black moccasins. At last, I tie up my hair, it helps me to better concentrate during exams; I tie my hair with a white flounced ribbon which decorates my ponytail. This ribbon is a gift from my mother, the one I most prefer. Then I put my things in my school bag, a brown old-looking school bag that I carry in hand and not on shoulders – you will see this detail is not lacking of importance for the following events. At last, do notice too, I do not wear any vest

or jacket, because the weather is very hot at this beginning of June.

This is how I look like in this morning of June!



Comme je fais moins de 1m50,
le sac que je porte pour aller au collège
me paraît toujours assez lourd. J'ai mis dedans
4 à 6 manuels scolaires des cahiers, mon bento,
et en plus ma tenue de sport pour le cours de gym.”¹

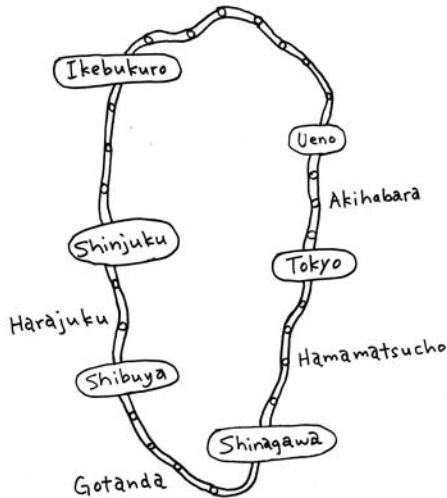
Why have I described so precisely my appearance? Because the result, even if I am still unaware of it at that time, is that it corresponds in every way to the kind of girl the *tchikan* are looking for.

¹ “As I am less than one meter and a half tall, the bag I carry to school always seems too heavy for me. In it, I put four to six school books, some notebooks, my bento, and my sport suit for the gymnastic course.”

Once I am dressed, I have breakfast, corn flakes with milk, and then I quickly go out of the house. The way to my high school lasts about fifty minutes. I must not drag on. I have to take successively two trains in which I spend every time about fifteen minutes, then I have to walk ten minutes more till my school building. This may look a long time for you, especially in the case of a twelve years old girl, but this kind of tour is indeed not extraordinary for a schoolchild in Tokyo.

The second train I travel in is the *Yamanote-sen*, the circular route which delimit the Tokyo center, a bit like your *boulevard périphérique*, but by train. I climb up in the *Yamamote-sen* at *Gotanda* station. There are four stops before I get off at *Hamamatsutcho* station, the one which follows *Shinagawa* station, a big one where many passengers get in and out – you are going to understand why I give you all those details. At *Gotanda*, at about half past seven, when I usually climb in the *Yamamote-sen* car, there are many people. People are so crammed together than they cannot move at all, nor even, for many people among them like schoolchildren as I am, hold on to anything in the car because they are too small to reach the straps fixed at ceiling available for adult people. They just succeed in keeping balance by leaning upon each other. It is called the *rush hour*.

That day, day of my first exam, because of the flow of passengers getting in at *Gotanda*, I am at once shot off to the worst place, in the middle of the car, a bit too far from the central bar to be able to hang on it. I have no chance of being able to keep my balance alone, all the more I must keep my school



La ligne Yamanote-sen (le périphérique ferroviaire de Tokyo) et ses gares principales. “Tokyo” indique la gare historique de Tokyo. La superficie de la ville de Tokyo est de 617 km². La surface à l’intérieur de la ligne Yamanote est de 63 km² soit les trois quarts de la superficie de Paris.¹

bag in hand, do remember. Around me are only adult people, especially men going to work.

In Japanese, we say *salarymen*, in French one could say “*cadre moyen*” or “*employé*” (employee). I am twelve years old, about one meter and forty centimeters tall, ten centimeters less than most of the twelve-year-old Japanese girls, and as the average

¹ The Yamanote-sen line (the ring train road around Tokyo) and its main stations. “Tokyo” shows the Tokyo historical station. The surface area of Tokyo is 617 square kilometers. The area inside the ring line is 63 square kilometers, that is to say three quarters of the size of Paris.



La Yamanote-sen pendant le rush hour¹

height of Japanese adult people is one meter and seventy centimeters, my visual horizon is limited enough. I can see the neck, hardly the chin of those men going to work.

All I can see behind me is an employee wearing a dark suit with a necktie. We are standing back to back, nearly stuck to one another, I cannot see his face.

In front of me, facing me, and considering the density of travelers in the car at that very moment, a few centimeters from me, there is another man: very tall, at least one meter and eighty centimeters tall. If I make no effort to raise my head, I can see nothing but the height of his beige pullover. This man is slim. He is not a *salaryman*, that one, because he does not wear a suit with necktie. He may be between forty

¹ The Yamanote-sen during the rush hour

and fifty years old, it seems to me he has a scarce hair, and he is holding in his hand a big briefcase the size of an iPad. Neither can I see his face.

In this situation, I think of nothing particularly, only I would like this journey to come soon to end. But I feel much shut up in here. Imagine you are on your knees and people around you come closer and closer, so near than at the end they touch you and squeeze you around, so you cannot move any longer nor even see the daylight above you. Well, it is just what I am living by now. In addition, at this very moment, the only music I can hear is the train rumble. The only sound I perceive is the automatic monotonous announcement of the car which repeats several times the name of each station in which the train will stop. Those noises drown the sound of the rare conversations around. I feel much more isolated from the rest of the world.



“Il fait exprès de me toucher celui-là ?”¹

¹ “This guy is touching me on purpose?”

The man facing me is now pressing me in such a way that the hand in which he carries his briefcase is more or less touching my chest. – In fact, I have yet no breast at my age and I do not wear any brassiere.

Suddenly, I experience something strange.

The thumb of the man's hand, the one in which he carries his briefcase pressed against my chest, begins to move and seems to start caressing me. I say "seems" because first I say to myself I must be wrong; it must be because of the roll of the train than his thumb is running over me so. But no, it does not stop and after some tens of seconds, I am compelled to admit this movement is perfectly deliberate. I do not know precisely how this man manages, but I have the impression that his thumb is rolling on my body and pushes my chest little by little. I dare not glance up at him. Apparently, no one in the car has noticed, because the only sound I can hear is still the train rolling. I do not know how to react. I get panicky. I don't know what this man is doing, nor why, I do not know yet he is a tchikan, one of those predators who prowl about the trains in Japan to assault girls. No one ever told me anything about it! Maybe have I heard once or twice of the tchikan on TV, but as far as this moment, it was some theoretical thing for me, and I would never have thought I meet one of them personally.

The tchikan is overhanging me.

As I am frightened and dare not make the slightest gesture to free myself, I feel it encourages him. Because of his tallness, I still cannot see his face, but I still feel his thumb rolling on

les doigts du tchikan
sont entrés ici!



my body. He is even getting up little by little to my neck, which is much more alarming. Two minutes later, getting advantage of the movement of some going out passengers, the tchikan presses into me more. I feel then his second hand approaching the nape of my neck, I feel the direct contact of his skin against mine, then those fingers slip under my shirt collar, in the nape of my neck, then going out surreptitiously because blocked at the level of my collar, and touch my back, this time directly on my dress, then in the same way going down to my lower back, then even to my buttocks.

I feel an impression of terror as I never felt. I am still motionless, frozen like a statue, dumb, lost amongst the passenger's crowd. I even believe I tremble.

From now on, the tchikan surrounds, nearly enlaces me, we are absolutely stuck to each other like glue whatever are the

¹ The tchikan fingers entered here

train movements, because he uses his second hand to keep me against him permanently. I cannot escape any longer. There are still so many people around us, and nobody seems to notice what is happening to me. The man standing behind me has not yet gotten off the car. He has not been moving for a past little while and still does not look towards me. I cannot manage to perceive what the other people are doing standing beside me, so tightly the tchikan squeezes me.

Seven minutes.



“Il y a beaucoup de monde autour de moi,
mais je ne connais personne et personne ne sait
que je viens d'être agressée par un tchikan.
Je tremble de peur...”¹

¹ “There are many people around me, but I don't know anyone and nobody is aware I just have been assaulted by a tchikan. I am trembling with fright ...”

The tchikan goes on touching me this way during seven minutes, untiringly, at the same time on breast and back or buttocks. Then we arrive at *Shinagawa* station, where he gets off. He loosens me, he turns over suddenly and goes away like nothing ever happened. I have still had no time to see his face.

Like magic, all of a sudden, I found myself nearly alone in the car. Most of passengers have got off at *Shinagawa*. As for me, I must get off two stations after. I still feel the print of the tchikan fingers on my clothes and on my neck. I still feel as if he were around me. It is a horrible physical sensation. I cannot manage to get rid with it. It is like a stain. I feel my clothes are crumpled by the contact with the tchikan, and that my neck keeps drops of sweat from his hand. I cannot stop trembling. When a few minutes later, I get off at last at *Hamamatsutcho* station, I am pallid. I am cold. I feel something terrible is spreading in my body.