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EMMANUEL ARNAUD  
KUMI SASAKI

# TCHIKAN

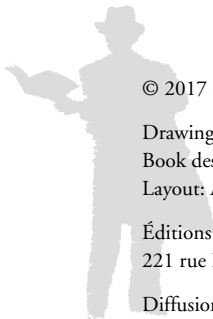
PRÉFACE DE GHADA HATEM



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THIERRY MARCHAISSE



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Drawings: Kumi Sasaki

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EMMANUEL ARNAUD  
KUMI SASAKI

# TCHIKAN

PREFACE BY GHADA HATEM

ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH  
BY MICHAEL EDWARDS



*éditions*

THIERRY MARCHAISSE

痴漢 (*chikan*), *n.* 1. An act of public molestation.  
2. The perpetrator of such an act.

I wake up and I see my bedroom flooded with light. Outside, it's a beautiful day! I think it's a good sign; I'm always in a better mood when the weather is like this. I feel relaxed and I know from experience that this is perfect for doing well on an exam. In my little room I dress quickly, feeling happy as I pull on my long-sleeve shirt. In Japan, we all wear a school uniform, especially at a private school like mine. Over my white shirt, trimmed with a ruffled crimson ribbon that looks like a bow tie, I wear a calf-length navy dress with a round collar and a matching belt. On my feet are bobby socks, also with ruffles, and black loafers. Finally, I put my hair in a ponytail with a frilly white ribbon; it helps me concentrate during exams. The ribbon is my favorite, a gift from my mother. Next I put my things in my school bag, an old-fashioned brown satchel that I carry by hand and not on my shoulders. This detail is of some importance in what follows, as is the fact that I am not wearing a cardigan or jacket, because the weather is hot for early summer.

Here is how I look on this fine June morning!



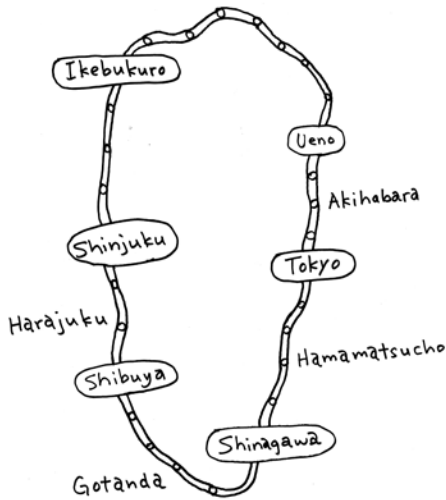
“As I am under five feet,  
the bag I carry to school always seems  
too heavy for me. In it I put perhaps half a dozen  
textbooks, my bento box, and my gym uniform.”

Why have I described my appearance so carefully? Because, even if I was still unaware of it at that time, the particulars of my appearance corresponded perfectly to the kind of girl that the *chikan* look for.

Once dressed, I have cornflakes for breakfast before dashing out of the house. It takes me about fifty minutes to get to school. I can't dally. I have to take two trains and then walk another ten minutes. This may seem to you like a long journey, especially for a girl of twelve, but really it's nothing out of the ordinary for a middle schooler in Tokyo.

At about half past seven, which is when I normally get on the Yamanote line at Gotanda station, there is a large crowd.

People are so packed in that they can't budge and many, including schoolchildren like me, who are too short to reach the ceiling straps only manage to keep their balance by leaning against others. In Japan we call it "rush hour," just like in your country.



*The Yamanote line and its principal stations, with the historic central station labeled "Tokyo." The Yamanote line makes a loop around the center of the city encompassing an area slightly larger than Manhattan.*

On this particular day, the surge of passengers getting on at Gotanda immediately sweeps me to the worst spot, near the middle of the car but too far from the central pole to grab ahold of it. I have no chance of keeping my balance on my own, especially since, if you recall, I have to hold onto my satchel. Around me there are only grown-ups, mostly men on their way to the office.

In Japanese, the standard expression for these white-collar workers is also borrowed from English, “salaryman.” I am twelve years of age, about four feet seven, four inches shorter than most twelve-year-old Japanese girls, and as the average Japanese adult is five feet seven, my field of vision is pretty limited. I can see the necks, at most the chins, of these men headed in to work.

Behind me, all I can see is a salaryman wearing a dark suit and tie. We are standing back to back, almost stuck to one another; I can’t see his face.



*The Yamanote line during rush hour.*

In front, facing me, just inches away because of how densely packed the traincar is, there is another man: slim and very tall, close to six feet. Unless I make an effort to lift my head, I can see nothing but his beige pullover. This man can’t be a salaryman, because he’s not wearing a suit and tie. He must be



in his forties – I think I saw thinning hair – and he is holding in his hand a man’s purse the size of an iPad. I can’t see his face.

In this situation, I think of nothing in particular, only how I would like this journey to be over soon. I feel trapped in here. Imagine you are on your knees and people around you are getting closer and closer, so near that finally they touch you and press around you, so you can no longer move or even see daylight above. Well, that’s what it’s like. What’s more, at this moment, the only music I can hear is the rumbling of the train. The only sound I perceive is the monotonous recorded announcement repeating the name of the next stop. These noises drown out the sound of the few conversations taking place around me. I feel completely isolated from the rest of the world.

The man facing me is now pressed against me in such a way that the back of his hand holding the purse is more or less touching my chest. — I don’t have breasts yet and, what’s more, I don’t wear a bra.

Suddenly, I feel something strange.

The thumb of the hand holding the man’s purse against his chest begins to move and seems to start stroking me. I say “seems” because initially I tell myself I must be mistaken; it must be the swaying of the train that is making his thumb move like that. But no, it doesn’t stop and after twenty or thirty seconds, I am forced to admit this movement is perfectly intentional. I don’t know exactly what this man is doing, but I have the impression that his thumb is roving across my



“Is this guy touching me on purpose?”

body and little by little pushing my chest. I dare not glance up at him. Apparently, no one in the car has noticed because all I can hear about me is just the sound of the train rolling along. I don't know how to react. I feel panicky. I don't know what this man is doing, nor why. I don't know yet that he is a *chikan*, one of those predators who prowl the trains in Japan looking to molest girls. No one ever told me a thing about this phenomenon! Maybe I had heard once or twice about the *chikan* on TV, but till this moment they were just an abstraction. I never thought I would encounter one in person.

The *chikan* towers over me.

As I am afraid and dare not make the slightest move to free myself, I feel it encourages him. Because of his height, I can't see his face, but I still feel his thumb creeping across my body. Little by little he is approaching my neck, which is much more frightening. Two minutes later, taking advantage of the movement of some exiting passengers, the *chikan* presses

The *chikan*'s fingers  
entered here.



against me more. Then I feel his other hand approaching the nape of my neck, I feel the direct contact of his skin against mine, then his fingers slip under my shirt collar at the back of my neck, before slipping back out, because my collar is in the way. Next he starts touching my back through my dress, then in the same manner slides down my lower back to my buttocks.

I feel a sensation of terror that I have never felt before. I remain motionless, frozen like a statue, unable to speak, lost in the crowd of passengers. I think I'm shaking.

Now the *chikan* wraps himself around me, virtually hugging me; we are stuck to each other like glue no matter how the train moves, because he is using his second hand to hold me fast against him. I cannot escape. There are so many people around us, yet nobody seems to notice what is happening to me. The man standing behind me is still there. He hasn't moved for a little while and is still not looking in my direction. I can't make out what the people standing beside me are doing because the *chikan* is squeezing me so tight.

Seven minutes.

The *chikan* goes on touching me this way for seven minutes, unremittingly, on my chest and back or on my buttocks. Then we arrive at Shinagawa station, where he gets off. He lets go of me, abruptly turns round, and goes off as if nothing ever happened. I still haven't had a moment to see his face.

Like magic, all of a sudden I find myself almost alone in the traincar. Most of the passengers have gotten off at Shinagawa while I have two stops to go. I still feel the imprint of the *chikan's* fingers on my clothes and my neck. I still feel his presence around me. It's a horrible physical sensation. I can't get rid of it. It's like a stain. I have the feeling that my clothes have been mussed by the *chikan's* touch, that drops of sweat from his hand remain on my neck. I can't stop shaking. When,



“There are many people around me,  
but I don't know anyone and nobody is aware  
that I have just been molested by a *chikan*.  
I am shaking with fright...”

a few minutes later, I get off at last at Hamamatsutchō station, I am white. I am cold. It feels like some terrifying thing is spreading through my body.

