

32. Elvis

(Extract from to-be-published 'Tokyo Daze')

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The hypnotic buzz of the bullet train would have lulled me to sleep if I hadn't been so jacked up on diet pills. At high speed I headed out of the throbbing metropolis of Tokyo, rain splattering across the train's window as I strained my neck for one last glimpse of this electric place I had called home for the past four months.

Strangely, I longed to be out there, caught in the middle of the swarming pedestrians, rushing across the Shinjuku crosswalk, under their blanket of psychedelic umbrellas, their collective urban sigh awakening to the excitement of another Friday night and the weekend that lay ahead. I imagined running among them, dodging the sharp spikes of the umbrellas, peculiarly level with my gaze. I felt the acid rain kissing my cheeks as I made my way to the nightclub called Tokios, my home away from home, the international models' playschool. I could see myself feasting on free food, alcoholic beverages and exotic handsome men, while gyrating carelessly to the pounding disco thud.

The tea girl's cart clattered by, her petite delicate hands protected beneath spotless white gloves, as she slowly served steaming hot green tea. As the train darted and swayed, she stumbled slightly, unable to stop the hot tea from splashing and stinging my arm, which jolted me out of my daydream. She nodded and bowed embarrassed apologies, the neon signs through the window were blurred beyond her deep, sorrowful arch, as we lunged forward into the belly of the Japanese countryside, heading for Osaka.

I eyed the tuna fish and cheese sandwiches cut perfectly into finger-length strips as the tea girl passed in her crisp white uniform. Her eyes darted away from mine in her embarrassment at her tea assault; she masked her

shyness with a tight, sweet smile. The chocolate dots, the exotic *mochi* bean cakes, unusually sweet coffee drinks - all seemed luscious as they tempted my loud growling stomach. Carefully the tea girl placed a steaming teacup on my tray; I lit up a Mild Seven cigarette, slowly eliminating the tea girl's sweet, rose perfume and my sharp pangs of hunger.

"Darling, there is no such thing as a fat model!" The voice of my Tokyo modelling agent bellowed in my head as we zoomed through another black tunnel. Slowly chewing on a toffee-covered chocolate amid the phone-ringing chaos of her modelling agency, she levelled her fierce brown eyes on mine and licked her sticky fingers as I anxiously awaited the needle coming to land on the almighty scale beneath me. Seventeen and desperate to get out of Industrial England, I had found my Japan niche through a Northern modelling agent who frequently sent leggy, teenage 'fresh faces' to Doreen, the rotund British modelling maven in Japan's booming 1980s' fashion market.

Now wearing only underwear, poised nervously centre-stage among the chattering Japanese bookers, I watched the needle on the scales wavering below me as I shifted my weight, trying to ease the outcome.

"One hundred and thirteen pounds" she declared triumphantly! "You're fat darling, I can't sell you like that!"

The agency hum quickly subsided as the audience took their seats.

"That's a ten-pound gain!" she pronounced.

"But Doreen," I whispered in a nervous whimper, "I'm on my period."

"Your period, your period? Hah!" she spat, "Darling you don't put on that amount of weight with a period!"

Revisiting her chocolate box, she scanned its contents; her pudgy index finger lingered on a caramel, then continued abruptly along to the left side of the box before settling on a dark, oval shaped, almond cluster. I watched the chocolate slosh inside her mouth, whipping and turning like an angry cement mixer as she raised her hand to continue.

"Maki!" Her shrill scream snapped the silence as her jumpy, top Japanese booking agent appeared gasping for breath by her side. "Book Sarah a