

Paprika

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YASUTAKA TSUTSUI

TRANSLATED BY ANDREW DRIVER



ALMA BOOKS

ALMA BOOKS LTD
London House
243–253 Lower Mortlake Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 2LL
United Kingdom
www.almabooks.com

PAPURIKA (PAPRIKA) by Yasutaka Tsutsui
Copyright © 1993, 2009 by Yasutaka Tsutsui
Original Japanese edition published in 1993 by Shinchosha, Co., Ltd.
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Printed in Great Britain by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, Berkshire

ISBN: 978-1-84688-077-3

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Part One

Kosaku Tokita lumbered into the Senior Staff Room. He must have weighed at least nineteen stone. The air in the room grew hot and stuffy.

The Senior Staff Room of the Institute for Psychiatric Research had five desks but only two regular occupants – Kosaku Tokita and Atsuko Chiba. Their desks jostled for space near the window at the far end of the room. The Senior Staff Room was separated from the Junior Staff Room by a glass door, but as the door was always left open, each just felt like an extension of the other.

The sandwiches and coffee she'd brought from the Institute shop were still sitting on Atsuko Chiba's desk. She had no appetite today; it was always the same old thing for lunch. The Institute had a canteen, used by staff and patients alike, but the meals it served were like horse feed. Looking on the bright side, Atsuko's lack of appetite meant she never had to gain weight or compromise her good looks – looks that had TV stations begging for her on an almost daily basis. But then again, barring their merits when treating patients, Atsuko had no interest at all in her own good looks or her TV appearances.

“The staff are having kittens,” Tokita lisped as he lowered his bulky frame next to her. One of the therapists had gone down with paranoid delusions. “They say it's contagious schizophrenia. None of them want to touch the scanners or reflectors.”

“That is a worry,” said Atsuko. She herself often had such experiences. After all, psychiatrists had always been afraid of catching personality disorders from their patients; some even claimed that mental illness could be transmitted through the mucous membranes, like herpes. Ever since psychotherapy or “PT” devices had first

come into use – particularly the scanners and reflectors that scanned and observed the inside of the psyche – this fear had come to assume an air of reality. “It’s the ones who don’t like identifying with their patients, the ones who *pass on*, who tend to worry about that kind of thing. Pff. You’d think an experience like that would give them a chance to self-diagnose as psychotherapists.”

“Passing on” meant blaming it on the patient’s mental disorder when a therapist was unable to forge human bonds with a patient. It had been at the very root of schizophrenic diagnosis until just two decades earlier.

“Oh no! Not chopped burdock with sesame and marinated pan-fried chicken *yuan* style, AGAIN!” Tokita thrust out his thick lower lip in disgust as he opened the lid of the *bento* lunchbox prepared by his mother. Tokita lived alone with his mother in one of the Institute’s apartments. “I can’t eat that!”

Atsuko’s appetite was duly aroused when she peered into Tokita’s sizeable lunchbox. For this was surely a *nori bento* – a thin layer of rice at the bottom, topped by a single sheet of dried *nori* seaweed moistened with soy sauce, with alternating layers of rice and *nori* on top of that... A classic *nori bento* from the good old days! To Atsuko, the box was crammed full of the home-cooked delights she craved, the taste of her mother’s food. She hadn’t always been one to skimp on meals, after all. In fact, she actually felt quite hungry now.

“All right, I’ll eat it for you,” she said decisively, her hands already stretched out to receive. And with both of those hands she went to grab Tokita’s large bamboo lunchbox from the side.

Tokita’s reaction was equally swift. “No way!” he cried, pinning her hands down on top of the box.

“But you said you didn’t want it!” Atsuko protested as she tried to prise the box from his grasp. She had a certain confidence in the strength of her fingertips.

Apart from this lunchbox, there was nothing at all in the Institute that could satisfy Tokita’s appetite or suit his palate. He too was desperate. “I said no way!”

“Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.” Torataro Shima, the Institute Administrator, stood before them with a frown. “Our two top candidates for the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, fighting over a lunchbox?!” he said with a hint of sadness.

Torataro Shima had a habit of getting up from his desk in the Administrator’s Office, casually strolling around the Junior Staff Room and speaking to anyone he found there. Some of the staff would jump up in fright when he suddenly spoke to them from behind; some pointed out that it was not terribly good for the heart.

Even addressed thus with such distortion of mouth and such heavy sarcasm by the Institute Administrator, the pair refused to relinquish their grip on the lunchbox, and merely continued their struggle in silence. For a few moments, Shima simply stared at the spectacle with an expression of pity. Then he gave two or three little nods of his head in resignation – as if he’d just remembered that genius always goes hand in hand with infantile behaviour.

“Doctor Chiba. Please come to my office later,” he muttered, then clasped his hands behind his rounded back, turned and started to walk aimlessly around the Junior Staff Room as usual.

“Anyway, it can’t be good for people who are supposed to be treating patients to have the same disorders as them, can it,” Tokita continued after reluctantly sharing out half of his lunch into the lid of the box. “Tsumura misunderstood the patient’s attempt at transcendental independence as an attempt at *empirical* independence. It’s not uncommon for a patient’s family to have the same delusions as the patient. This is similar, I think.”

In that case, the danger was even greater. Because, in the eyes of the patient, it would certainly have been seen as an attempt to deceive – just as patients feel tricked by family members who express understanding of their condition. Atsuko realized she would have to analyse the therapist called Tsumura.

Atsuko only ever went to the Senior Staff Room for her lunch. Her laboratory was so full of PT devices as to resemble the cockpit of an aeroplane; she couldn't relax there, with assistants incessantly walking in and out. The same was sure to be true of Tokita's lab.

As she made her way back, Atsuko could see, through the open door of the General Treatment Room, four or five staff members clamouring loudly as they stood around Tsumura. This must have been what Tokita meant by "having kittens" – and it was a fair description of their appearance. Tsumura had his right arm raised as if in a Nazi salute, and some of the others who surrounded him in altercation also did the same. Atsuko felt sure that there would normally be nothing to make such a fuss about; something unnatural was going on.

Back in Atsuko's lab, her young assistant Nobue Kakimoto was peering at a display screen with a helmet-shaped collector attached to her head. She was monitoring the dream of a patient who slept in the adjacent examination room. Nobue's expression was vacant; she was quite unaware that Atsuko had returned.

Atsuko quickly stopped the recording, then pressed the "back-skip" button two or three times. Switching the machine off altogether could have been dangerous, as Nobue might then have been trapped inside the patient's subconscious. The picture on the screen started to flip backwards through the patient's dream.

"Oh!" Nobue came to her senses and removed the collector with some haste. Noticing Atsuko, she stood up. "You're back!"

"Do you realize how dangerous that could have been?"

"Sorry." Nobue seemed unaware that she'd strayed into the patient's dream. "I only meant to be an objective observer..."

"No. You were being counter-invaded. It's dangerous to wear the collector for long periods when monitoring dreams. I've told you that before."

"Yes, but..." Nobue looked up at Atsuko with an expression of discontent.

Atsuko laughed aloud. “You were trying to copy me, weren’t you! Going into a state of semi-sleep?!”

Nobue reluctantly returned to her seat and began to watch the reflector monitor. “Why can you do it, but not me?” she said dolefully. “Is it because I haven’t had enough training?”

The truth of the matter, quite decidedly, lay not in training but in Nobue’s lack of will-power. Some had the will-power to become therapists, for sure, but were not adept at time-sharing patients’ dreams or transferring emotions into their subconscious. If they were to attempt this, they would merely become trapped inside the patient’s subconscious, unable to return to the real world.

“Perhaps. Anyway, please be careful. Tsumura was affected by a patient’s paranoid delusions just by looking at the reflector. You must have heard.”

“Yes. I heard.”

The patient in the examination room was a man of about sixty. He was dreaming of a busy street reminiscent of central Tokyo some decades earlier. The street in the patient’s dream was vulgar, charmless, desolate. By transferring emotions to the patient using the collector, that busy street could be turned into a pleasant, desirable place, one that could be linked to the innocent erotic desires of his youth. Or the scene could take him back to a past time when he’d enjoyed a positive relationship with society, symbolizing his need to reforge bonds with the people around him.

Atsuko was about to ask Nobue to call Tsumura when young Morio Osanai walked in. Dangerously handsome, unmarried and already a Doctor of Medicine, he was the target of fervent gossip among the Institute’s female staff. But he had a poor reputation, for all that, as he tended to neglect his research in favour of politics. Nobue appeared to dislike him.

“Doctor Chiba,” he started unceremoniously. “About Tsumura. I wonder if the problem isn’t Tsumura himself, but lies rather in the reflector?”

“Of course it does. Tsumura would never have gone that way if he hadn’t messed about with the reflector.”

“Right, right. So there are some therapists who *aren’t* affected by a patient’s paranoid delusions, even if they mess about with the reflector?” Osanai answered with a smile, as if to say “*I knew you’d say that*”.

“You know that already, so don’t bother saying it,” Nobue spat out with venom. She had almost complete faith in Atsuko.

But Atsuko had no desire at all to become embroiled in such a low-level debate. “You won’t be forgetting the governing principle of our research here, will you,” she said, measuring the words out slowly and deliberately.

“To, develop, PT, devices. Why, yes. I know all about that,” Osanai said slowly and deliberately in imitation of Atsuko, completely ignoring Nobue. “What I’m talking about is the actual effect of us observing the subconscious of a schizophrenic as an image on a screen. Schizophrenics make no attempt to disguise their subconscious, as psychopaths do. On the contrary, they express their subconscious as it is, in loud and sonorous voices. They play it out as it is. And in any case, I can’t see there’s any great value in peeping into their subconscious.”

“Their subconscious is the subconscious of the schizophrenic. Surely we have to investigate the abnormal way in which they associate *signifiant* with *signifié*? As you say, these patients are expressing their subconscious as it is. Therefore, we won’t know what meanings are tied to their words unless we ‘peep into their subconscious’, will we.”

Atsuko was getting serious now. Having had his say, Osanai merely looked out of the window with a smile, pretending not to listen at all. Outside the window lay about an acre of lawns, beyond them a plantation of trees designed to hide the Institute’s perimeter fence, and beyond that, clusters of high-rise buildings in the centre of the metropolis.

“Well, that’s your theory,” said Osanai, with the implied addendum “*and I think it’s rubbish*”.

“Now wait a minute,” said Atsuko, controlling her anger. Controlling anger was part of Atsuko’s self-training as a top-grade psychotherapist. “It’s not just a theory, it’s the very foundation of our work. It’s a theory that’s been proven and certified. I don’t see why I should have to stand here and explain it all to you. That’s it. Now please bring Tsumura to me. I’ll treat him.”

Osanai straightened his face. He seemed to have remembered that no one could better Atsuko when it came to ironic repartee. “No, no. It’s not so serious that we need bother you. Hashimoto and I will cure Tsumura. We’re his friends, you see.”

Osanai hurried out of the room. Atsuko felt sure that it was he who’d spread the rumour about schizophrenia being contagious. But his intention in coming all the way to her lab and circulating it there, when he knew very well that the dangers of the reflector could be avoided, was still unclear to her.

“Curing him alone won’t do,” Atsuko muttered. “I’ll have to analyse him properly.”

“He seemed awfully scared that you would easily analyse and cure Tsumura, didn’t he,” said Nobue.

2

Rising from his desk in the Administrator’s Office, Torataro Shima invited Atsuko to sit in an armchair in the reception area. He himself sat at one end of a sofa diagonally to her right, where he reclined backwards with his body almost supine. The result was that Shima’s face became positioned diagonally next to Atsuko’s, only a little below hers. Then he merely had to lift his face to find himself gazing at the beautiful visage of Atsuko Chiba from very close quarters. Shima made no secret of his admiration for her.

“So you had a visit from young Osanai, then?”

“What? You mean he came here too?” Atsuko was decidedly unimpressed with Osanai’s sense of priorities.

“He said our researchers needn’t all subscribe to your theory and help you win the Nobel Prize,” Shima said with a chuckle.

“Just as I thought. He came about Tsumura, didn’t he. I suppose he yapped on forever with his doubts about the PT devices?”

“Yes, he opposes them. But who cares? The simple fact is that they’ve cured some patients. That’s good enough for me.” Shima furrowed his brow ever so slightly. “In fact, half of the patients have even gone as far as remission. That’s something we could never have dreamt of until now, anywhere. Isn’t that right, Doctor Chiba? So your theory must be correct, mustn’t it.”

“Well, it’s mostly down to Tokita – he’s the one who develops the devices. All I do is use them. Oh, and by the way. About two-thirds of the schizophrenics are already in the remission phase. Not half.”

“Oh yes. I remember. Well, that’s wonderful of course...” Shima pulled a sour face. “But why is it that so many patients in the remission phase identify with the head of their institution like that? Some of them mimick me most grotesquely, without a hint of emotion. Just seeing them makes my skin crawl.”

“Those are patients in the so-called malleable-vulnerable phase,” said Atsuko, laughing with abandon. “All they’re looking for is transcendental independence. Anyway, doctors and nurses are often mimicked by their patients.”

Momentarily transfixed by Atsuko’s laughing demeanour, Shima finally recovered his composure. “Osanai didn’t say anything unpleasant, did he?” he asked somewhat anxiously.

“Not particularly,” Atsuko lied, somewhat calmly.

“He was talking about the effect PT devices can have on doctors,” Shima continued. “Using a lot of technical terms, you know. So I said, wouldn’t it be better to discuss this with Doctor Chiba? Or don’t you have the balls to? And he said, all right, I’ll tell her, and walked off in a huff. So then I felt I might have done you a disservice. But I’m from the old school, you see. I can’t keep up with all these new theories. There was nothing else I could say, really.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Atsuko. She took a glance around the office. Though suitably well appointed, it was rather on the shabby side – she could have expected more from the Administrator’s Office of a research institute that was now receiving worldwide attention. The office was austere, spacious, laid out in the old-fashioned style. Bookcases lined three of its walls, their shelves stacked with classical works of psychiatry. There were original texts by Kraepelin but no recent publications at all. Surely this would create a bad impression on visitors? Atsuko wondered if it was time to replace some of the books.

“I think Osanai’s up to something. Please be careful,” she said, concerned for the position of her well-intentioned boss. “Of course, he can’t do anything by himself. Someone else is pulling the strings. They want to make my failure a *fait accompli*.”

“You mean the Vice President?” Shima shifted his body uneasily, as if he was embarrassed that Atsuko should allude to such inner-circle shenanigans. For as well as being the Institute Administrator, Shima was also President of the incorporated foundation that owned the Institute. “Now you mention it, there is a rumour that Inui has his eye on the President’s chair...”

It was no mere rumour. Even Shima must have known that Inui had met the other directors and appeared to be plotting something. But Shima seemed happy just to let it go. Tokita had thoughts for nothing but his research; Atsuko was the only one who seemed concerned about it at all. In an environment so beset with enemies, she and Tokita had much to thank Shima for. It was down to him, after all, that they could concentrate so fully on their research. More than that, though, Atsuko had immense affection for Shima’s personality and felt duty-bound to protect him.

Shima misinterpreted the look on her face. “Look, I didn’t call you here to discuss such trifling matters,” he said, hurriedly adjusting his position and straightening his back.

Atsuko lifted her face in some surprise. To her, it wasn’t a trifling matter at all. Their eyes met. Shima was lost for words. It was as if

there was something he wanted to say, but he didn't know how to say it. This was clearly going to be difficult.

In the end, Shima got up and returned to his desk. Atsuko smiled. Only when he wanted to convince someone of something did the well-meaning but weak-willed Shima hide behind the authority of the grand Administrator's desk.

"Now. Of course I'm aware that your research has entered a most critical phase. So naturally, what I'm about to ask will seem thoroughly unreasonable to you." Shima clawed the top of the desk with his bony fingertips as he spoke. "But in fact, I want you to call up Paprika."

"What?!" Atsuko all but fell off her chair. She'd been ready to accept almost any request, but this seemed a request too far. However jovially Shima tried to put it, calling up Paprika was surely out of the question at this time. "I'm sorry, but she doesn't do that work any more."

"Aha. I know. I know. What is it – five, six years since she quit? But this is a really important assignment. Can't you persuade her, just one more time? As a special favour? You see, it's not just *anyone* this time. Oh no. It's someone very important, someone with a very high standing in society. I'm not going to send him to any old clinic, am I."

"Psh. No one else seems to mind. They're all going for psycho-analysis these days."

"Yes, all very well, but this particular person is in a very delicate position, you see. Well, that's partly what triggered his neurosis in the first place. You see, a lot of people are just waiting for him to mess up and make a fool of himself. His name's Tatsuo Noda. He's the same age as me, fifty-four. We were good friends at school and university. He's still my closest friend, in fact. But now he's a senior executive in a motor company, and he's trying to produce a zero-emissions vehicle. A lot of people are against it, both inside and outside the company. So his every move is being watched, not only by rival firms but even by the government. If word got out that

he was being treated for a neurotic disorder, his enemies would try to discredit everything about the vehicle, even though he didn't design it himself. That would cause his company untold damage. Of course, being an experienced businessman, he must often find himself in this kind of position. The cause of his neurosis must therefore lie elsewhere."

"Yes, I suppose it must." This Noda was Shima's friend and contemporary. He was trying to produce a zero-emissions vehicle. Before she knew it, those snippets of information had made Atsuko rather interested in this most important of clients. "The opposition from people around him probably takes the form of harassment. But that would only cause a typical nervous breakdown, at most. Not neurosis."

"That's right. That was my diagnosis too." Noting Atsuko's interest, the good and honest Shima felt instantly buoyed. "So the proper thing would be to psychoanalyse him, and that's something I can't do. In any case, whoever did it would need to spend a lot of time with him. Get into his dreams. That's why I want Paprika to do it. She's the very best dream detective."

"But it won't be easy to treat, even for the dream detective. It'll take time." Atsuko was in two minds. She felt she'd been jockeyed into a position of compliance and no longer had a choice. But if she agreed to Shima's request there and then, her research would be interrupted at a most critical phase. Being trial research, she wasn't certain exactly how long it would last, but it should be nearing completion now. "And anyway, Paprika hasn't worked as a dream detective for six years now. She's not so young any more. PT devices may no longer be taboo, but this therapy is still very risky. I'm not sure she can do it any more."

None of this came as much of a surprise to Shima. He said nothing but merely stared at Atsuko with slightly moistened eyes, waiting for her to empty her bag of troubles.

"Look, will you promise me something first?" Atsuko said at length.

The very question brought an expression of rapture to Shima's features. He puffed up his chest in anticipation. "But of course. If you'll help with Noda's treatment, ask anything you want." Shima wasn't the kind to evade an issue with a mere "*I'll see what I can do*" – he was far too pure for that.

"All right. I want you to accept that your own position right now is just as precarious as that of your friend Mr Noda." Shima stared at Atsuko with a look of wonderment – just what would she say next?! "First of all, you should speak to all the directors individually, once each at least. You've been ignoring them, can't you see? You're so preoccupied with your work that you've lost touch with them. Second, I want you to hold a Board Meeting, as soon as possible. You can think of the reason later, but first decide a date."

Shima had been bracing himself for something much worse. "All right," he replied with some relief. "I can do that."

It was just as Atsuko had expected – he was refusing to take her advice seriously. "So, where exactly do you want Paprika to go?" she asked with a little sigh, let down by his lukewarm nature once more.

Shima wrote the details on a memo pad, using his thickest-barrelled Meisterstück pen. "In Roppongi, there's a bar called Radio Club," he said jauntily. "Only men go there. It's always quiet, and it's a favourite haunt of Noda's. I'll call him now. Can Paprika meet him tonight?"

"Does he mind if it's late?" It would take time to call up the dream detective, and besides, Atsuko had so many other things to do.

"I think he'd prefer it that way."

"How about eleven o'clock?"

"Right. Eleven it is." Shima wrote two memos and passed one to Atsuko. Then he opened the drawer in his desk and took out a file containing some documents. "These'll bring you up to speed on Tatsuo Noda. His case records are in there too."

“Oh, and Doctor Chiba?” Shima called as Atsuko was about to leave the room. He’d already picked up the telephone and was dialling the number to Noda’s office. “I’ve got to say I’m a bit jealous of Noda. Why can he have a drink with Paprika when I can’t?!”

Eight years back, when Shima had only just been appointed President and Institute Administrator, Paprika had treated him for a neurotic disorder.

3

Roppongi was a lot quieter now than it had once been. It was all thanks to a change in municipal regulations, introduced to ease the atrocious congestion around the Ginza. What they did was to license late-night opening there, with the result that fewer customers were turned out onto the streets in the early evening hours. Another reason was that exorbitant prices for food, drink and entertainment had driven the younger revellers away from Roppongi.

Radio Club was in the basement of a thirty-four-storey building, amid a cluster of high-rise blocks. The rental premiums were preposterous, but Radio Club was nearly always empty. It didn’t even have its own membership scheme. The customers were always the same, though; they were like members without a scheme.

Tatsuo Noda had arrived well before eleven and was sitting at the far end of the bar, in one of the booths lent a modicum of privacy by their high backs. The booths faced each other in pairs on one side of the room, overlooked by the counter on the other side. Noda’s booth was at the very back of the bar, forming a little private room of his own. There were no other customers in the bar. Jinnai the bartender stood behind the counter wiping glasses with a tea towel, occasionally glancing over at Noda, smiling and performing a little bow if their eyes met. The solitary waiter Kuga,

a man of considerable girth, stood motionless beside the door and appeared to be deep in thought. The professional dedication of this middle-aged double act had probably dictated the profile of their clientele. *P.S. I Love You* played over the speakers.

Noda sat drinking whisky as he waited for Paprika. But not just any old whisky – this, according to Jinnai, was highest quality, twenty-seven-year-old Usquaebach, which he'd managed to get at a discount. *Paprika*. Now that was an odd name for a psychotherapist. But, as Shima had explained, it was just a throwback from the days when using PT devices was illegal and the therapists all had to use code names. Shima had also gone on at some length about how very beautiful this Paprika was.

Noda felt no anxiety at the prospect of being treated with PT devices. He had little faith in the latest fads of modern technology, but trusted Torataro Shima implicitly as a psychiatrist. Actually, he had little choice in the matter. For who else could he trust, if not the administrator of a psychiatric research institute?

Noda was about to order another measure of Usquaebach, which was really rather good, but caught himself in time. He was already beginning to feel pleasantly tipsy, buoyed by the prospect of meeting a woman of renowned beauty. He looked forward to the time he would soon be spending with her – not working time, but time in which he could just let himself go. He didn't know whether the treatment would start right away that night, but in any case sobriety was surely the best policy. Then again, as it was Shima who'd recommended this bar for the assignation with Paprika, it would have been rude *not* to have a drink or two. Drink would loosen the inhibitions, after all. If anything, Noda was grateful to Shima for choosing this location. No one from his office, none of his competitors would ever come here. Shima must have known that.

Noda somehow sensed that he wouldn't suffer an anxiety attack while he was in the bar. Of course, he couldn't afford to be complacent. An attack could occur at any time, and the knowledge

of that merely added to the problem. Ironically, this was the only cause of his anxiety that could be identified with any certainty. That terrifying sensation of not knowing when an attack would occur was just as loathsome as the attacks themselves, events that would have brought the strongest of men to their knees.

The first occurrence had been about three months earlier, shortly after lunch one day. Noda had been sitting in a taxi on his way back to the office after a meeting. At first, he just felt dizzy. Then the back of his head began to feel heavy around the neck muscles, and his head started to spin. He'd previously suffered mild bouts of dizziness due to shoulder stiffness. Thinking it was one of those, he tried to ease his anxiety by massaging his shoulders. But then ominous words like apoplexy and stroke started popping up in his mind. A number of his contemporaries had been dying of such afflictions recently. He'd also heard that many people die of stroke after "selectively disregarding" precursor symptoms that must have been present beforehand – in other words, refusing to acknowledge the inevitability of ageing. He started to feel nauseous. It was a really terrible feeling. He imagined that he might collapse and die right there and then. The anxiety of that thought made him break into a cold sweat. His heart suddenly seemed to be beating faster. The sound of his pulse grew louder. Fear made his breathing shorter. His throat began to feel parched. To his credit, he summoned up enough will-power not to cry out to the taxi driver for help. On the contrary – he stiffened his limbs and made no sound at all, in an attempt to conceal the attack. He even surprised himself when he thought about that later. And when at last the attack had subsided, his concern shifted to when the next attack would occur. Perhaps it was a stroke of good fortune that the first one had happened in a taxi. But what if the next attack came while he was at work? The very idea sowed the seeds of a new anxiety. Something had to be done. And while he was still thinking about what that something might be, the second attack occurred while he was at work – the very thing he'd feared most of all.

Luckily, he was in his own office, which he'd earned as Director of Development. As he struggled to bear the anxiety and pain, Noda was struck by two conflicting desires – one, to cry out for help, and the other, not to be seen by anyone. The telephone didn't ring, and no one entered his office during the attack. But if it had rung, if someone had walked in, he would definitely have asked the other person for help, whoever it might have been. His fear of dying was far too great to do otherwise.

Noda knew it was considered bad for sufferers of mental disorders to read books about their condition. Even so, he bought several volumes on the subject and, while his wife and son were asleep, secretly took them out and read them. The first thing he discovered was that his symptoms resembled something called “anxiety neurosis”. But he remained in the dark as to the cause, or whether there was any chance of self-treatment.

Noda also discovered that there were drugs called anxiolytics, which were often effective in treating his condition. He knew he would need to see a doctor to get them. But he vacillated, not wanting the world to know he was seeing a psychiatrist. For some reason, he didn't hit upon Torataro Shima right away. Then he discovered, in another book, that anxiety neurosis can sometimes progress to other mental illnesses like schizophrenia, temporarily at least, owing to diminishment of personality. It was then that he finally made up his mind to see a doctor. He thought long and hard; he had to find one who would respect his privacy, a clinic he could visit without the whole world knowing. Then he suddenly remembered his old friend. They still met once or twice a year; Shima would be the perfect person to consult on such a delicate matter.

“Frankly, the notion that most people live *without* anxiety is more of a mystery to me,” Shima had declared with a laugh after hearing Noda's story. Noda reflected on his good fortune at having such a great friend, not to mention the burgeoning sense of well-being he now felt at the prospect of a cure. Shima, on

the other hand, retained a modicum of concern, feeling that he'd perhaps overestimated Noda's intellect and the strength of his ego. After all, Shima was aware that anxiety neurosis could be resolved by elevating it to an "objective experience" through the strength of the ego; he also had no doubt that Noda's illness would cure itself. What's more, Noda himself had felt, after reading a book, that the cause of his anxiety was a psychological problem peculiar to middle age. It was not the same as that crisis of awareness when a son becomes a father for the first time, or when an ordinary employee rises to middle management. It was certainly not the same as an inability to absorb new technology. Those problems were all long past; for Noda, they'd already been solved ten or twenty years earlier. Even when it came to human relationships, he'd successfully seen off numerous challenges in the past. Noda should now be quite capable of overcoming such challenges with relative ease by drawing on his own experience.

Shima had given him some tablets. After their meeting, Noda had started taking them surreptitiously, mixed with vitamin pills to disguise them. For a while, the attacks had seemed a thing of the past. But two days after the tablets ran out, Noda suffered a third, more violent attack while on his way home late one night. This time he could bear it no longer, and asked the taxi driver to take him to the nearest hospital. The symptoms had subsided before the taxi could reach the hospital, so Noda diverted the driver to Shima's residence instead. Shima seemed to understand the gravity of Noda's condition, and promised to set up a course of treatment immediately. And now, about a week later, Noda was to meet the therapist called Paprika. Her name sounded like something out of a fairy tale, but, as Shima had assured him, she was "the very best dream detective".

At five past eleven, the music changed to *Satin Doll*.

The heavy oak door opened and a girl wearing a red shirt and jeans walked in. Naturally, she looked quite out of place

in the bar. Kuga met her with a greeting that sounded more like a challenge. She whispered something to him. Kuga started to twitch nervously on realizing that she was Noda's assignation. Noda shared his surprise. Jinnai widened his eyes.

Kuga led the girl to Noda's booth, and there she stood with head tilted slightly to one side. "Hi," she said. "I'm Paprika."

Noda woke from his reverie and rose hurriedly. "Why... Hello!"

"And... You're Tatsuo Noda, right?"

"That's right. That's right." With growing surprise at the girl's helpless appearance, Noda pointed to the sofa opposite him. "Take a seat."

She was an attractive girl with a cutely shaped face and freckles around her eyes. In the dim half-light of the bar, Noda thought her skin looked quite tanned. Evidently feeling as incongruous as she looked, Paprika fidgeted restlessly for a while and cast uncertain glances around the bar.

Am I old enough to be her father? Noda wondered with some apprehension. Eventually he spoke: "Well... Miss..."

"Call me Paprika," she said coquettishly.

In fact, she was deliberately using that tone to help Noda feel more relaxed. Now the name slipped effortlessly from his lips. "All right – Paprika. What will you have to drink?"

"I'll have the same as you."

Noda nodded to Kuga, who still stood beside their table. Kuga cast a questioning look that only Noda could see – "*Surely you're not going to let her drink the very best whisky?!*" – then bowed in resignation and walked off.

Noda suddenly realized that Paprika had come empty-handed. Had Shima given her the case records? Would he have to explain his symptoms all over again?

It was as if Paprika had read Noda's thoughts. Until then she'd appeared tense, but now she suddenly smiled. "I hear you've developed a zero-emissions vehicle? That sounds cool."

She may speak plainly but at least she knows her manners, thought Noda. *She must be exceptionally clever.* Even her air of helplessness seemed designed to put him at his ease.

“Well, yes. Of course, there are already low-emission vehicles, like the LNG-powered ones.” Now feeling more relaxed, Noda started to explain the project as if he was teaching a pupil about it. That seemed to be what Paprika wanted, anyway. “But even they emit nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide in their exhaust fumes. So we’re developing a zero-pollution vehicle that won’t have any of those either. Well, I say developing. Actually, we’ve already made one.”

“So you’re actually producing them? Wow. I bet there are people who want to stop you.”

“Ah yes, but of course. And it’s not just the competitors. I even have opposition within my own company. They’re all jealous, of course,” Noda said with a laugh. “But naturally, that was no more than I’d expected,” he added more seriously, lest it be considered the cause of his illness.

“Yeah, I bet they’re just jealous,” said Paprika. She spoke casually, suggesting not only that she understood Noda’s concern but also that she wouldn’t mention anything to do with his work again. She took a sip of the whisky brought by Kuga, who again stood beside their table. “Aah! Usquaebach!” she breathed quietly.

Kuga started to twitch again. At length he bowed solemnly. “Glad you like it.”

4

From her hairstyle and dress sense, Paprika seemed a rather simple girl. But the more she spoke, the more her intelligence seemed to shine through, like the gleam in her eye.

“Um... Would you mind if I had another?” asked Noda.

“Sure. Go ahead,” Paprika said at first, then suddenly added, donning her therapist’s hat, “Wait a minute. How many have you had? This is your second, right? Well, OK. If it’s only your second. Go ahead.”

Paprika’s funny little flurry made Noda feel even more relaxed. “Mind you, I’d better not, if you’re going to start the treatment soon,” he said. “They say it’s best if you don’t drink.”

Paprika smiled precociously before looking hard at her client. “You’re a gentleman, Mr Noda. I’ll stop here too. Though I’d love to continue.”

“I’ll treat you some other time,” Noda said, then lowered his voice. “Talking of which, where do you do the treatment? Shima didn’t say...”

Paprika looked around the bar again. They were still the only customers. But even so, perhaps this wasn’t quite the place to discuss the ins and outs of psychoanalysis. She emptied her glass in one gulp, then nodded. “I’ll show you. Come on!”

P.S. I Love You was playing again as they got up to go. Paprika went straight outside, leaving Noda to settle up at the counter.

“Are you feeling all right, Mr Noda?” Jinnai asked in a tone of concern, having caught snatches of their conversation.

“Why?” asked Noda, taken aback.

“Well, the girl’s a nurse, isn’t she?”

Noda stepped outside to find Paprika sitting in a taxi by the kerbside. She must have stated her destination already, for the driver headed off towards Akasaka the moment Noda settled into his seat. The road was lined with high-rise buildings, most of which had apartments on their upper floors – investments for the filthy rich, or company housing for the top brass of large corporations.

“I’ll scan your dreams in my apartment,” said Paprika. “I’ve got all the equipment there.” Her breath smelt sweet. It was the breath of a mature woman. Startled, Noda once again wondered how old she was.

“Do you think the treatment will take time, in my case?” he asked, raising the issue that concerned him most.

Paprika donned her therapist’s hat again. “Anxiety is an integral part of being human. Heidegger saw it as a necessary evil. If you could tame your anxiety and find a way of living with it, or even make use of it, you would no longer need treatment. And then you could discover what caused your anxiety.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t got time for that.”

“Sure, understood. You’ve got your work, after all. You’ve got your family. But you need to relax. Don’t be so impatient. In principle, you’ll definitely be cured, provided we can locate the cause. In a way, your condition is like a coin falling into a pocket. Pockets have bottoms, don’t they. The coin will always be found. It’s rare for the condition to get any worse than that.”

Noda was relieved. Perhaps he could avoid going schizophrenic after all!

The taxi stopped in front of a multi-storey apartment block in Shinanomachi. It was where Shima lived, and the directors of the Institute for Psychiatric Research. The foundation owned rooms on several floors of the building. In that case, this “Paprika” must also be one the Institute’s directors. The apartments were far too expensive to be owned by ordinary individuals, that was for sure. There was so much that Noda wanted to ask. But he held himself back, and concentrated instead on following Paprika’s dance through the spacious lobby of the apartment building towards the lift. After all, Shima had strictly forbidden him to ask her true identity or her real name.

He was soon to discover her surname, though. As they reached the door to her apartment at the eastern end of the 16th floor, it was written in bold capitals on a metal nameplate fixed to the wall: Apt 1604 CHIBA.

The apartment was on a grand scale that could only have been designed for a senior executive. An eight-panelled glass door led out from a sumptuously furnished living room onto a veranda, with a panoramic night view of Shinjuku visible beyond.

“You must be some kind of VIP!” Noda exclaimed with unbridled admiration, but Paprika remained cool. Besides the kitchen and other facilities, this living room seemed to be where Paprika spent her time when not asleep. She beckoned Noda towards another room at the far end. It was dark and appeared to be a treatment room – the patient’s bed suggested as much. The room also contained other furnishings, including another bed and a wardrobe that must have been Paprika’s. Various devices lined the wall next to the crude pipe-assembled patient’s bed. Monitor screens gleamed with motionless graphics. They were the only source of light, as the room had no windows.

“You don’t suffer from claustrophobia, I hope?”

“No. Fear of heights, if anything.”

“I’ll remember that. Will you be able to sleep straight away?”

“I’m always tired. I never have any problem getting to sleep,” said Noda, feeling at a loss in such unusual surroundings. “But I wonder whether I could fall asleep under the eye of one as pretty as you?”

“Just relax. Would you get undressed now?”

Noda first took off his jacket and handed it to Paprika. She placed it on a hanger, which she hung in the wardrobe. Next came the tie, then the shirt. Paprika tidied Noda’s clothes with the dexterity and professional attention of a nurse. Reassured, Noda had no hesitation in taking off his trousers.

“What great dress sense you have. Such high quality,” Paprika said, smiling at last, as Noda lay on the bed in his underwear. “Do you always sleep like that?”

“I can’t stand pyjamas,” he replied. “They make me sweat. I usually wear as little as possible.”

“You could take your vest off as well, if you liked.”

“No, thanks. This will do fine,” Noda laughed. He put his feet under the cold, pure-white sheet at the foot of the bed. The room felt cool. The pillow was hard and smelt of starch.

As he watched Paprika busily moving about and preparing

something in the ghostly light of the monitor screens, Noda began to feel a sense of déjà vu. He could hear music. It was Rameau's *Sommeil de Dardanus*.

Paprika put what looked like a shower cap over Noda's head. It was transparent, but had an electronic circuit pattern resembling a street map printed on its surface. A single cable trailed away from the back of the cap. Noda felt rather relieved at that; he'd expected it to be more of a hard helmet-like contraption.

"Is this what you call the gorgon?"

"I can see you've done your homework. Yes, it's the gorgon, named of course after the Greek myth. But now, rather than having cables all over the place, it just has the one. Soon we won't even need the cap."

"Is it a kind of sensor?"

"You could say that. You could also see it as a combination of interfaces between a highly sensitive brainwave detector and the central processor. In the old days, they had to embed electrodes under the skull just to investigate brainwaves in the cerebral cortex. Now all you have to do is wear this. Aren't you lucky?!"

"And none of these devices have been commercialized yet?"

"No, they're still being developed. That's why it's so untidy in here..."

So who was developing them? If not Paprika herself, then whoever it was must have assembled the equipment there. In that case, since the devices were still being developed, it would have to be that scientist at the Institute for Psychiatric Research, the one who was up for the Nobel Prize or something. Would such a person really come all this way to a private residence, just to assemble the devices? Noda was beginning to feel anxious again. "So it's cutting-edge technology, you might say?" he asked with a hint of irony.

"Sure," Paprika replied as if "cutting edge" were perfectly normal. That at last put Noda's mind at ease. He allowed his head to sink back onto the pillow.

“Aaah... No electrodes embedded under my skull... I shouldn’t have any trouble falling asleep at all.”

“Good. And you’ve had a drink, so I hope you won’t be needing any hypnosis or medication.” Paprika sat on the chair next to Noda, then started talking to him in her relaxed bedside manner. “Do you often have dreams, Mr Noda?”

“Yes, strange dreams. Often.”

“It’s better to dream a lot, actually. It’s good for the brain. Interesting people have interesting dreams. Dull people only have dull ones. I’m looking forward to seeing yours.”

“And you actually appear in people’s dreams?”

“Well, I won’t tonight, as it’s the first time. I’m not familiar with your dreams, and anyway we’ve only just met. It would be too much of a shock to your system.”

“Oh well. But I must say, I never thought psychotherapy could be so enjoyable!”

“You say that because your condition is only mild. There are people who really hate seeing the dream detective. Right. I’d better not be here. You’ll fall asleep more easily on your own, won’t you.”

“Probably, but I’d far rather you stayed.” Yes, Paprika was young enough to be his own daughter, but Noda had started to feel as if he could indulge himself a little with her.

Paprika laughed and rose from her chair. “No, you should sleep now. And anyway, I’m famished. I’m going to get something from the kitchen.” It sounded like a deliberate ploy to make him sleep. Paprika left the room.

What an excellent therapist – as I expected, thought Noda. She made him feel relaxed just by talking to him. They’d never met before, but her posture and expression made her seem somehow familiar, almost as if they were related. She made him feel it was all right to talk about anything he wanted. And while she tended to speak childishly, she never said anything that made Noda feel uncomfortable – *unlike most young women these days*. Yes, she was young and beautiful, but at the same time she had a motherly