

Leda and the Samurai

Vol 1

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Leda and the Samurai

Vol 1

Guenevere Lee



2019

Leda and the Samurai

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Author's Note: This serial is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of my imagination or used fictitiously. All characters are fantastical, and any similarity to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Haiku

月のゆく
山に心を
くくりいれて
やみなるあとの
身をいかにせん

*Towards the moon,
to the mountains, I send
my mind and spirit.
In the dark that comes after
what becomes of my body?*

西行法師
Saigo Hoshi
(1118-1190)

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Acknowledgements

I have a lot of siblings (five altogether), which means there are some pretty big age differences between us. My oldest sister Adrienne was six years older than me, which meant we didn't play together a lot. It wasn't until high school when I really got to know her.

Adrienne is one of those amazing people who have been through a lot of difficult times, a lot of heartache. Yet she always found a way to smile. In all my memories of Adrienne we're laughing.

More than anything I think Adrienne taught me that just because life can be horrible, it doesn't mean you have to be miserable (although there's certainly nothing wrong with complaining or venting once in a while).

I take that sentiment to my writing. The journey before my characters might be harrowing, but I want them to be able to find some light in the darkness. Adrienne taught me that, so I want to thank her.

Thanks Adrienne.

Preface

What you hold is a collection of the first five chapters of *Leda and the Samurai*. As I write this, I am preparing for Fan Expo 2018, where I hope to get the word out about this story (being serialized exclusively on Chan-tillo.com), as well as my first published novel, *Orope – the White Snake*. As you can imagine, I am a mix of anxiety and excitement.

The idea for *Leda* came to me one humid August day when I wore a yukata to a tanabata festival in Sendai. While I just enjoyed the day with my friends and went home afterwards, I imagined another girl at that same festival, innocently walking into a shrine, and stepping out into Edo Era Japan. This story is about Japan, and its fantastic history and mythology. It's my love letter to the country where I lived over the span of five years.

If you're curious about the history surrounding this story, then you can also check out the podcast I co-host with Noel Sayar, *Historical Fantasy*. We are mostly focused on the Edo Era (1603-1868), when this story

takes place. In the future we hope to also talk about other time periods and places.

If you're curious about me and my writing, I hope you have the chance to visit my website, gueneverelee.com. I'm on all those pesky social media platforms as well, but the website has free sample chapters, updates about book signings, release dates, and (as the cliché goes) so much more!

-Guenevere Lee
August, 2018

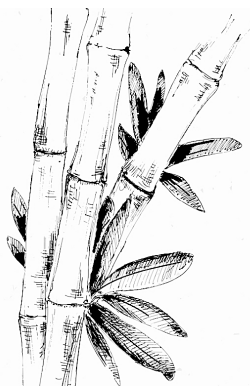
LEDA AND THE SAMURAI

七夕

Tanabata

第一章

CHAPTER ONE



You don't question why you're running through a forest of bamboo. You don't ask how you went from being in the centre of the city to an unending course of green. You don't give yourself time to think. You run. You curse your friend for convincing you to wear a stiff yukata. You rip at the flowing cotton sleeves as they snag on passing branches. You scream. You cry. You run, and run, and run.

And you hope the man chasing you with a bow and arrow doesn't kill you.

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Tanabata was the festival of the stars. It was celebrated in Japan in a manner similar to Christmas. Decorations were hung on streets. Bamboo trees instead of pines were covered in paper ornaments. Families would come together and remember their ancestors. It was celebrated in July, except for in the north-eastern city of Sendai, where it was observed during the sweltering humidity of August.

Every year for three days in August the arcade, a long shopping street covered in a glass-domed ceiling, was covered in three-metre long paper streamers called *fukinagashi*. They were cylindrical, topped with a large ball made of crushed paper. They looked like paper comets. They hung in colourful rows, and were so long and so close together that often you couldn't see the other side. You would have to part them like a curtain, only to be greeted by another wall of *fukinagashi*, and another and another. Each one was unique, a real artistic creation, and were hung for the entire three-day celebration.

The arcade was crowded that morning, mostly by visiting foreigners and people from different parts of Japan who had travelled to Sendai for the famous event. They were taking pictures and fanning themselves in a vain attempt to cool off in the exhausting heat. Many young girls wore flowery cotton yukatas, the traditional Japanese summer wear. It was an excuse to get dolled up, and while they were mostly just worn by women, every so often a young couple would walk by with a sheepish looking man wearing the darker and looser fitting male version.

Leda's Japanese friends had convinced her to wear one the week before.

One of the first things she'd noticed after moving to Japan from Canada was how much Japanese women loved dressing up foreigners in yukatas. She attended a bilingual university in Sendai, Miyagi, teaching English part-time to subsidize the scholarship she was living off of. She met most of her friends from her tutoring gig, so they were always eager to hang out and practice English for free.

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In the weeks leading up to tanabata she had received more than one invitation from her friends to go shopping for yukatas. When she had relented and gone with them to try one on they had fawned over her with compliments and even – much to her embarrassed horror – applauded and told her how beautiful she looked. She felt like a doll at the mercy of overly imaginative girls.

She didn't think she looked particularly nice in one. Yukatas were not designed with her body-type in mind. Leda was all curves. The stiff obi that tied around her waist bunched the fabric around her bust, and her hips were too wide, so the yukata was more prone to opening when she walked, making her feel like she'd suddenly gained fifty pounds.

The first time her friends had taken her to look at yukatas she had managed to avoid buying one, but the week before tanabata she had finally broken. Part of it was her friends talking about how excited they were to wear their own yukatas, and another part was that after looking through half a dozen stores they had finally found a yukata she liked. She had tried it on, looked in the

mirror and finally didn't see a frumpy *gaijin* trying to squeeze into a yukata.

It was red, with a pattern of large dark pink chrysanthemum flowers. The obi was gold with suns stitched on it, the other side dark blue dotted with stars and the moon. Instead of pushing all her bits out awkwardly, the obi gave her that cylindrical shape yukatas were supposed to have, with just a hint of her curves underneath. They braided her long sandy hair into a bun and pinned it together with a red flower ornament with dangling bells. The bells rang softly every time she moved her head, and she finally gave in.

She bought geta as well, raised wooden sandals with soft red thongs to slip her foot through. To complete the look her friends insisted she buy a bamboo bag to carry her wallet and other things in. It looked like a basket, with a cloth inset that had a flower pattern on it. None of these things were cheap, and she wasn't used to spending so much money on clothing, but she felt like she could afford to own one nice thing, and she knew she could wear to it to all the festivals she would go to in the future.

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Tanabata began on the seventh, and her friends had come over early that morning to help her put her yukata on. While not as difficult to put on as a kimono, yukatas were still notoriously hard to put on by yourself if you had no idea what you were doing. They went out into the heat together, giggling and taking selfies every few steps.

The obi was tight and she had to take small steps to keep the yukata from opening in the front and exposing her legs. She felt incredibly self-conscious. She could feel the stares towards her like angry accusations that she was doing it wrong. The tanabata decorations should have been enough to take anyone's mind off of something so trivial, but she couldn't help but concentrate on the sweat running down her back.

Along the walls of the arcade were all kinds of booths selling souvenirs, like paper fans and mini tanabata decorations. There were also kiddie pools filled with toys for children to fish out. Leda's favourite proved to be the *kaki-gouri*, crushed ice. They had 'sno-cones' back in Canada with two or three different flavours, but here there were so many at each booth that she had a hard

time deciding which one to pick (she finally settled on matcha with milk). At the end of the arcade the decorations branched north and south. They headed north. Now out on the open, the paper streamers blew in the wind as though they were dancing.

Leda had been living there since March. She had decided to go to Japan the year before. She hadn't known any Japanese cities other than Tokyo and Kyoto though. She didn't like big cities, so she started to google other options. Maybe because she had been searching during the tanabata festival, but most of the sites she had found recommended Sendai. And now, almost exactly one year later, she finally got to see tanabata with her own eyes, and not for the first time she felt relieved she had come to Japan.

She wasn't exactly sure when she knew she would have to leave Canada. She had always been desperate to leave home. She had run away a few times when she had been really young, but the fallout from those excursions were enough for her to realize she would need to bide her time. One thing she had probably always known was that if she ever wanted to truly escape *him* she

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couldn't just leave the city, or the province, she would have to get as far away as possible – and the other side of the planet was the farthest place she could think of.

She used to be convinced that her father wasn't an evil man. Maybe he was troubled, or maybe she deserved the things he said and did to her. Evil? Fathers couldn't be evil. But sometimes his outbursts would come out of nowhere. Sometimes she would be watching TV and he'd come in screaming at her about the noise she was making. Or she'd be playing with her toys and he would grab her tiny shoulders and shake her, screaming in her face to clean her room.

The closet became her safe place. Any closet would do. As a child she was small and thin enough to fold herself behind a box or pile of clothes, listening to her father's heavy footsteps as he went through the house, screaming her name. "*Somerled!!!*" She didn't like it when people called her by her full name now, it brought her back to the darkness of the closet, hearing his footsteps. *Thump, thump, thump...* And anyway, Leda was nicer to the ears.

Spending most of your childhood in a closet left you with little to do. She had to keep quiet, or else he'd find her, so she would start bringing a book and a small flashlight with her. She read everything. Fantasy, romance, horror. Kids books, adult books. New novels, classic literature. Anything she could get her hands on was good. Manga was something she discovered in junior high, but it was something that had stayed with her, something that had planted the seed. *Japan.*

When she was sixteen she finally left that house. She would bounce around from friends' couches to shelters, struggling to finish high school, all the while her father kept looking for her. Her closets had grown bigger, but she could still hear him screaming her name, still hear the heavy footfalls. *Thump... thump... thump.*

As long as she stayed in Canada she knew she would never stop fearing he'd show up at her door one day and drag her back home like when she had run away as a child. So one day she simply started looking for universities abroad. She looked through

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most countries, but always kept coming back to Japan.

In wasn't just the manga that drew her to Japan. She loved history. It became her major now that she was in university. Canada's history had always been... somewhat lacking in her mind. The country was barely one-hundred and fifty years old, and its written history only went back around five-hundred years. That was nothing compared to the rest of the world.

Her father came from a Scottish background, and her mother was French Canadian, but she had never identified with either of those, especially since they seemed to move every two or three years. The only thing she took from her parents was her name from her father, and the French language from her mother.

Japan on the other hand had all the things she had always craved. Their history spanned over three-thousand years. Their culture was full of epic stories, beautiful and romantic artwork, heartbreak, and an undeniable pride. She loved it, she wanted it, and once her mind was made up there was no looking back. She studied Japanese for the

six months leading up to her departure, all the while working as hard as she could at her part time job, saving money and getting her paperwork processed. When she said goodbye to her friends at the airport she feigned sadness, telling them she would be back soon, but it was the happiest day of her life.

She cried as the plane took off, but only because she couldn't believe she had finally made it. She had escaped.



After about two hours her friends decided they had had enough of the humidity and the crowds, and were eager to head back home, but Leda wanted to stay a little longer. There was nothing she particularly wanted to see or eat, but she had started to like wearing her yukata at the festival, had started to like the smiles she was getting from strangers she passed, had started to feel pretty and like she belonged. She just wasn't ready to go home yet.

There was a nearby shrine her friend had mentioned to her, hidden down one of the alleys of the arcade, so she decided to

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check it out. It was south of the arcade, and she walked back through the *fukinagashi*. The bells in her hair and the noise of the crowd were music to her as she waded into them.

The shrine was harder to find than she had thought it would be. She was told it was down a narrow alley, but she tried three before she finally found one that led to a red torii gate. Torii were at most shrines, and were usually painted a bright red-orange. They were simple entryways, two vertical poles on either side and then two horizontal beams connecting everything on the top. There were no actual doors to go through, and no walls connected to them, but going through one had always felt like stepping into a different room to her.

Once through the torii she still wound her way through another narrow alley, until she found a small courtyard that was filled with bamboo trees. The tall yellow-green shafts were so thick she couldn't see the other side of the lot, or the Shinto shrine in the middle, just the stone pathway at her feet. She stepped through, instantly feeling

cooler in the shade of the green leaves that tipped the top of the bamboo shoots.

The sounds of the city died away, the air seemed cleaner. She could hear the sounds of cicadas crying out, a never-ending electrical whine. Her getas clinked on the stone pathway and she thought it would be very easy to pretend in a place like this that she was in a different time, a different place, a different world altogether.

The shrine was not far from the entrance of the bamboo patch. There was a second torii, marked with kanji she didn't know how to read. On the other side of this torii was a small koi pond next to a large stone, the top concave and holding water. There were bamboo ladles next to it, and she used them to pour water over her hands and mouth to wash them as she had been taught. She did it less to purify herself and more to cool down from the humidity.

The shrine itself was a modest building, no larger than a shed. The roof was made from dried grass and mud, and hanging from the front was a large round bell with a thick rope. Underneath the bell, resting on a porch that wound around the shrine, was a

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slotted box for coins. Through the shrine doors she could see satsumas and small barrels of sake that had been left as an offering to the deity of the shrine, which appeared to be a statue of a man sitting cross-legged.

Leda took a five-yen coin from her bamboo purse. It was gold-coloured and pierced with a hole in the middle. She had been told five-yen coins were lucky, which is why they were always given as an offering at shrines. She threw the coin in, then took the thick rope in both hands, ringing the bell so it clattered above her three times, then she clapped her hands together and...

She couldn't think of a wish. She wasn't religious, or spiritual. She knew these things didn't work, but she liked doing them, liked going through the routine. It made her feel connected to Japan. Usually she just wished for happiness, but today she wanted something different. Tanabata was the time for wishes. Usually people wrote their wish on a piece of paper and hung it on a bamboo branch. What did she want? What did she truly and honestly want?

She wanted to belong. She didn't just want to be an amusing afternoon for her

friends, or a stranger in a crowd. She wanted to be needed... loved. *Love*. The thought made her laugh. She opened her eyes and shrugged.

"Happiness please," she went with her usual request, and turned around to leave, when she saw the old man.

He sat crossed-legged on the moss by the koi pond. She assumed he was a monk. He wore black and white robes and a conical straw hat. She saw monks sometimes in the arcade, ringing a bell and holding a collection box. She wasn't too sure about all the differences between Shintoism and Buddhism, but she had thought the monks were all Buddhists, and this shrine was definitely Shinto. Then again, there was a lot of overlap between the two religions in Japan. And she supposed someone had to take care of the shrine.

"*Konnichiwa.*" *Good afternoon*, she said softly, bowing her head.

The man was tiny, maybe the size of a child, though the robes certainly filled out his figure. He tilted his head up to look at her and his skin was like crinkled paper. Under large bushy white brows he strained

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his eyes to see her. She couldn't help but think he looked like a cat draped in cloth and had to hold herself back from calling him *kawaii*, cute.

"*Konnichiwa, o-jou-sama*," he bowed his head in return. *O-jou-sama* was an overly formal, and somewhat archaic, term of respect for a young woman. She smiled her thanks and started walking back through the torii, but he held up his hand. "*O-machi kudasai*." Please wait.

She stopped and looked at him, wondering where he had even come from in the first place.

"*O-jou-sama, can you speak Japanese?*" His voice was soft, and he spoke slowly, which she was grateful for, because she still had a hard time understanding people when they spoke too fast or excitedly. Half of her conversations with her friends were her smiling and nodding when she had no idea what was going on (both when they spoke Japanese to her, and English).

"Ah..." she held up her index finger and thumb, leaving a small space between them. "I speak a little. *Amari wakarimasen*." *Amari wakarimasen* was one of the first sentences

she had learned to say. It literally meant 'I don't understand much', but Japanese people sometimes took this to mean 'I understand well', since they were used to adding far too much humility to their claims.

"Ee," he smiled as his eyes seemed to get a little wider. "*Your Japanese is excellent.*" Case in point.

"Ié," no, "*it's not very good,*" she waved her hand back and forth in front of her face in protest, a habit she had picked up from her friends.

"What country do you come from?"

"Canada."

"Sou ka?" Oh really? "*You speak English?*"

"Hai," yes, "*I'm an English tutor.*"

"You speak French?"

The two questions she got asked the most when she said she was Canadian: Is it always winter there? Can you speak French?

"Hai, *it's my mother tongue.*"

"Dakara, o-mikuji wo douzo." In that case, please take this o-mikuji, he handed her a small piece of paper with a series of kanji

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written on it. An *o-mikuji* was a fortune you could buy at most shrines, usually with advice about how to be happy and healthy. She could recognize a few kanji written, but not enough to read it. She would ask one of her friends to translate it for her later.

"Domo." Thanks, she took the slip and bowed as politely as she could, then tucked the paper into her purse.

"That torii is the wrong way," he pointed to the red torii gate she had entered from, then pointed behind the shrine to a torii she hadn't noticed before. It was smaller, and made of unpainted stone. *"That torii is the right way."*

She knew he was telling her to go through the farther gate, but she wasn't sure why. She couldn't remember any other shrine having a separate entrance and exit, but there was a lot she still didn't know about Japan, and she had learned very quickly not to question and just go along with what they asked in order to be respectful.

"Wakarimashita. Arigatou gozaimasu." I understand. Thank you very much, she smiled at him and he nodded at her.

"*Ganbarimasu*," he whispered softly as she left. It meant 'do your best', though it was often used more like 'good luck'. Did he think she would need help to find her way out of there?

"Strange little monk," she thought as she stepped through the gate, turning back one last time to look at him, but he was gone.

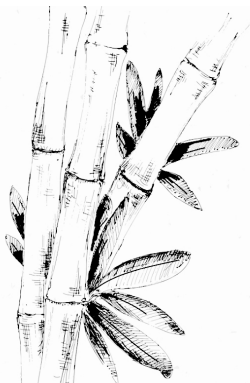
LEDA AND THE SAMURAI

鳥居を潜る

Through the Torii

第二章

CHAPTER TWO



The bamboo seemed thicker on the other side of the shrine. Everything on this side seemed different to Leda. The air smelled different, the muffled sounds of city life had been completely replaced by the whine of a thousand cicadas. She could hear a few birds twittering. The stone path was gone too. It had trailed off into dirt, and then nothing. She was just walking blindly through the woods now.

Just how big was this lot anyway? It had only taken a minute to walk into the shrine, but quite a while had passed since she had left. She was starting to wonder if she was just walking around in circles. She

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sighed, reaching into her bamboo purse for her smartphone. Worst case scenario she could just google-map her way out of there. She wasn't sure if turning back would help because she wasn't sure if she had been walking in a straight line.

"Hm," she stared at her phone's screen. "No signal."

She held it up to the sky, but knew that was as likely to help get a signal as throwing the damn thing on the ground would be. She put the phone away and started forward again. It was only a matter of time before the trees ended and the city streets would begin. Five minutes passed, then ten... then she began to worry.

"Hello? *Konnichiwa?*" she called out softly, then in a much louder voice: "*Konnichiwa!*"

She didn't feel afraid, just annoyed. She wasn't the kind of person to overact or panic in any kind of crisis, least of all getting turned around in the woods. She was half tempted to climb one of the regular, sturdier trees, to get her bearing, but that wouldn't be very pragmatic in a yukata.

When she heard the voices she smiled, relieved she wouldn't have any more wandering to do. She just wanted to go home and have a bath to wash the humidity away. It was a group of Japanese men, probably young from the rough and rowdy nature of their voices. They still sounded like they were off in the distance.

It was getting dark. The sun usually set before seven in August, so she imagined it must have been around six. Her stomach was starting to growl and she decided she would stop at a Yoshinowa on the way home and get some *gyuu-don*, fried beef on rice. Japanese junk-food, as she liked to call it.

She could just make out the figures through the trees. They were sitting around a fire, and the smell of cooking meat made her mouth start to salivate.

"Sumimasen!" *Excuse me!* she called out, and saw some of their heads turning around in confusion. They all looked to be wearing yukata, so they must have been at tanabata today. It was rare seeing so many men dressed in yukata. *"Ah, sumimasen. How do I get to Sendai Station from here?"*

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They were completely silent, staring at her with blank faces. Some looked confused or shocked or showed no expression at all. They were wearing yukata, but not the nice ones she was used to seeing. These were ratty, dirty, dark browns and washed out blue. Some wore headbands to keep the sweat out of their eyes, and a few wore geta, but most were barefoot, their feet blackened. A pot hung over the fire, soup boiling in it. A few men had small wooden bowls and were eating, though they had stopped to stare at her.

She assumed they had to be part of the festival. Period actors or something. Had they just finished for the day and were having a barbecue? Why did they look so surprised? Foreigners were a fairly common sight. Sure, she got some double-takes here and there, but they were looking at her like some mythical beast.

"Um..." she felt uneasy under their stares. Had she said the wrong thing? *"Is Sendai Station close?"*

The movement came all at once. Someone shouted something and they all suddenly came towards her. That's when

she noticed the weapons. Swords and bows and spiked clubs. They grabbed them as they advanced and she moved backwards, shouting in surprise as they grabbed her. Two men held her while another ripped her purse from her. She screamed earnestly then as they pushed her to the ground.

"What the hell are you doing?!?" They smelled like body odor and their fingers felt grimy against her skin. Some of them were laughing. She could barely concentrate, there were so many faces before her. She kicked at them as they bound her ankles and wrists in a scratchy cord. Once she was tied the men moved away from her. Some just stood around and stared, a few others were going through her bag.

"Nanda ano onna?"

"Ookina hana yo!"

A man crouched down in front of her, scratching his stubbled face with black fingernails. *"Mé ga kireina iro da."*

She was stunned into silence as they gathered around and discussed her looks. *Hana* meant nose, *mé* meant eyes. To the best of her understanding, they were debating whether she was ugly or beautiful. They

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were acting as though they had never seen a woman before. But no, the more she listened the more she realized they were discussing the things that made her distinctly foreign. What Japanese person in this day and age had never met a foreigner?

"Oi, mité," the man holding her bag pulled out her phone. *"Nanda korya?"*

He turned it over in his hands, and Leda felt just as confused as he looked. What was going on? She could believe these people were actors for tanabata. Even when it wasn't tanabata she sometimes saw men dressed like samurai or in other Edo period costumes, usually leading tours or giving out flyers. Why tie her up? Why act like she and her phone was some kind of mystery? Was this some kind of reality show?

She looked around for cameras, but all she could see were the men staring at her and her things, and the woods surrounding them. *And the woods surrounding them...* her gut felt like it was being squeezed. How could they be surrounded by woods? She had been downtown only a few minutes ago.

"Yaku ni tatanai," the man holding her phone muttered in annoyance and threw it over his shoulder.

Another man grabbed for the phone midair and when he caught it his finger pressed the home button and the screen lit up. He called out in shock and let the phone drop, the screen shattering as it hit a rock. Her senses jolted back, and her eyes went wide in anger.

"Watch it asshole!" Leda called out, unable to stop herself. "You owe me a new phone!"

A few of the men stared at her in shock. *"What is she saying? Can you understand her?"*

"Urusai yo." Shut up, another man said, nudging her gently with his dirty foot.

"Don't touch me!" she snapped, and the man grunted something under his breath. She saw the knife gripped in his hand and scolded herself. "Don't speak, don't move," she desperately ordered in her mind. Just do what the mugger says. Wasn't that the advice always given?

Most of the men had turned their attention to the phone though. No one picked it up, they let it rest on the ground, the broken

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screen face up. She could see the time, 18:04, bright on the screen, and a picture she'd taken just that day of her and her friends, the fluttering *fukinagashi* behind them. She should have gone home with them. What was she even thinking visiting that shrine? After a few seconds the light of the screen went out and they called out in surprise again.

"We should burn it. It's evil," one man whispered with wide eyes.

"Baka." Idiot, another man muttered angrily, hitting the back of his head with his fist. *"We can sell it for a lot of money."* He collected the phone, wrapped it carefully in cloth and put it in a pouch hanging from his obi (which was really just a mouldy piece of rope).

"Can we sell the woman?" Another man asked, looking at her eagerly.

"Tabun." Probably, one of them shrugged.

They had finished dumping out the contents of her purse. Her makeup was thrown away, some of it had landed in the fire. One of the men was riffling through her wallet, cards and money going flying. She

swallowed her distress, trying her best to think rationally. She had watched enough episodes of *I Survived* to know the first and most important thing she could do was not panic.

They couldn't be muggers if they weren't interested in her money. But what were they talking about? She felt too anxious, she was having a hard time following their conversation. They wanted to sell something, she had gathered that much. Who were they? They were destroying her things, so it couldn't be a TV show and they couldn't be actors...

The thought that all of this was real gnawed at her mind like a dog with a bone, but she couldn't let the thought in. It didn't make sense. This was the twenty-first century, she was in one of the biggest cities in Japan. They looked like... well, bandits. Bandits did not hang out in a lot next to a shrine in twenty-first century Japan. So... what was going on?



Night fell, and the men ate and drank and she watched feeling disconnected to the

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sight before her. She stopped asking questions about who they were, what was going on, or why this was happening. She had no doubt in her mind these men meant to do her some form of harm. The only thing that mattered now was how to get away.

With her hands bound in front of her it would have been a simple matter to untie her bonds and take off running through the forest, but there were always one or two men next to her, watching her closely, sometimes asking her a question, though she always ignored them. They drank alcohol, saké she imagined, from large orange-yellow gourds and most of them were roughhousing or singing around the fire. No man was smart while he drank, and these men didn't look too bright to begin with. She felt a strange calm settle over her. If she could escape from her father, she could escape from these fools too.

A dozen action movies flashed through her mind as she thought about how she could escape, some so ridiculous she almost found herself laughing. What did most women do when they were captured? There was the classic seduce your capturerer and

knock him out, but not only did that just seem genuinely impractical, the thought of trying to seduce someone who hadn't seen a bath in recent memory made her stomach turn.

Men's escapes were always more interesting to watch, but most of them always seemed to rely on being imprisoned with someone else. Claiming your cellmate was sick, or even missing, only to surprise attack your guard. Pick-pocketing a key, or getting some dumb animal to fetch it for you, though in her case there were no keys or locks. Sometimes they would hurl insults at the guards, goading them into a fight, but she didn't think insults would bother these guys. She certainly didn't know anything truly shocking she could say in Japanese – not to mention the fact that there was just no way she would win a fight against anyone.

She started to make a list in her mind, crossing out all the plans that had more chances of failing than succeeding. The thing that became the most abundantly clear was that if she wanted to get away, she needed to whittle down her number of guards. She could run from one or two, but

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more than that she didn't think she'd make it. She needed to wait. Short of someone wandering by and rescuing her, she was completely alone and would probably only get one chance to do this.

Watching the men was like watching a frat party get underway. With slurred speech and thick accents she couldn't understand a single word they were saying, but none of that mattered. All she was paying attention to was how much they were drinking, and how slowly, one by one, they were slumping over and passing out. After a few hours the camp was mostly still, the sounds of snoring far louder than the small group of men talking around the fire. She almost ran then, but they turned their attention towards her. They were gesturing and pointing, and although they made no move to come closer, their looks made her uneasy all the same.

Just as they were about to fall asleep, as the sky began to lighten and she started to hear the sound of birdsongs, those men who had passed out first began to wake up, groaning and holding their heads in pain. She couldn't help but smile at their obvious

hangover. A few got up, moving to the outskirts of the camp to piss against trees, smiling in relief as they did so.

They didn't go back to sleep, but instead started the fire up again and started cooking something for breakfast, looking over at her with toothy grins. One of the men came close enough that she could talk to him without yelling and bringing unwanted attention to herself.

"Sumimasen..." Her voice came out like a whisper, and she thought he hadn't heard her, until he turned his head and looked at her in annoyance.

"Nanda?" *What?* He was a short man, somewhere in his thirties, the top of his head bald, and his stomach extended into a small potbelly. His yukata was pulled open and he grabbed his penis to take a piss.

Leda did everything in her power to not wrinkle her nose in disgust and instead tried to look up at him with wide eyes, trying to look as scared and helpless as humanly possible.

"Eto..." Um... *"Toíré ni ikitain desuga..."*
I want to go to the toilet, but...

"E? What the hell is a toíré?"

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"Uh..." She was stumped for a moment. Of course he didn't know what a toilet was. What was the proper Japanese word for it again? "*O... o-téarai ni ikitai...*" *I want to go to the lavatory...*

He looked at her like she was crazy, and having finished started turning back towards the fire. She pointed with her bound hands towards where he had just peed.

"Watashi mo. Onegai." Me too. Please.

"So go," he muttered in annoyance.

"Demo..." But... She felt like an idiot as she pulled back her yukata slowly to reveal her ankles, going slightly higher than necessary. She was groaning at how ridiculous she felt, but his eyes drifted down towards her legs and his look of annoyance melted away. *"I can't walk..."*

He looked around the camp, chewing his lip. The other men's attentions were focused on the cast iron pot over the fire for the moment, then he leaned down and reached towards her ankles. His fingers lingered on her skin and she did everything in her power not to shudder at his touch. Finally he undid the ropes.

She thought he might undo her wrists, but he just grabbed her roughly by the arm and yanked her to her feet. After sitting for so long she felt slightly light-headed for a moment. The ropes had been tight enough around her ankles that now her feet felt slightly prickly as circulation came back to them. He motioned towards her to go, but she shook her head.

The sudden and visceral image of her being alone in the woods with this man was terrifying. She didn't know how to seduce and overpower someone. If she took a step forward there was a very real possibility that this man would do something unthinkable to her. Her body was shaking, and for a moment she couldn't move

"By myself... It's embarrassing..." She tried to smile, but knew it must have looked like a grimace on her face.

He looked like he was starting to get annoyed, but he complied, grabbing her arm again and pulling her into the trees. They only went a few steps. She could still see the camp through the trees, and if the men looked over they would be able to see that two people were standing there. Still...

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maybe that was enough. They were all hungover, and she would have the head start.

"Turn away," she asked, but he just looked at her and instead she turned her back to him, looking out through the woods. The foliage was thick, but not so thick that a person couldn't get through. She took a moment to just stare at the trees in the dim morning light, wondering what the best course to take was.

The man growled something in annoyance. She looked back at him. He was out of arm's reach. She crouched down. Under the yukata he couldn't see her put one leg behind the other, getting ready to sprint. Someone in the camp shouted towards them, and the man turned back and said something in return. As though that was the pistol starting her race, she took off running through the forest.

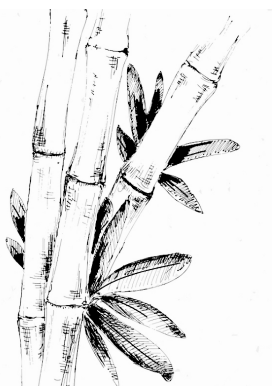
LEDA AND THE SAMURAI

広瀬川

Hirose River

第三章

CHAPTER THREE



There was a time, during her youth, when Leda's only hobby was hiding. If she wasn't squirreled away in the closet at home, she was hanging out in between the shelves of the library after school. She was often found keeping her head down and sitting in the corner of the classroom during free time, reading while everyone else was playing. If there was one thing she could do better than anyone else she knew, it was hide and go unnoticed.

It wasn't until Grade Four or Five, when her elementary school had their first track meet, that she discovered the only

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other thing she was naturally gifted at – running. She never would have gone to a track meeting, but everyone in the school was required to sign up for three events, so at a loss she just signed up for the first three on the list. The hundred-metre, four-hundred-metre, and the relay race.

Standing on that starting line, looking at the bright pink ribbon the teachers had tied to mark the finish, she suddenly decided she was going to try. Just for once, she wanted something *more* than to just disappear into the crowd. She won the hundred-metre and four-hundred-metre, and might have won the relay but one of her teammates had tripped and fallen.

Her teacher, Mrs. Sayar, asked her afterwards if she liked to run. When she meekly shook her head, Mrs. Sayar had asked how she managed to run so fast, but Leda couldn't tell her the truth. All she had to do was imagine her father standing on the starting line. Suddenly running was the easiest thing in the world.

She'd never joined the track team, or entered in any races besides those held on the school grounds. Permission slips sent

home with her would remain unsigned and crumpled in the bottom of her bag. She already knew there would be no chance of her father signing any of them, for approving her joining a sport.

Eventually Mrs. Sayar stopped encouraging her, assuming she was just another lazy student. Neither Mrs. Sayar nor her father ever knew how she would go down to the empty track on weekends and run laps, imagining herself finishing an Olympic race in first place. She would daydream that a passing talent scout would see her by chance, and be so impressed he would sponsor her career and save her. Of course it never happened.

When she finally left home, there was no time to spend pretending she was an athlete, or focusing on anything beyond getting her grades up and saving every nickel she earned at her crappy part-time job. Running, like most of the things she had loved as a child, had faded away from her life... until now.



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She heard the angry yell come a second after she took off through the woods. Her wrists were still bound. There was no time to try and untie them with her teeth. Even if they were untied though, she still wouldn't be able to run at full tilt, not with the uneven ground and having to thread through all the trees.

It was darker in the woods than she had been expecting. The sun was only just breaking over the horizon, and she stumbled through the woods blind and bound. She felt her shoulders knock against trunks she hadn't noticed and felt too many branches slap against her face and neck to count, but still she ran as fast as the terrain would allow her.

Years had passed since the last time she had really run. By the time there was enough light to finally make out all the trees and avoid running into any more of them, her breath was ragged and panting, her lungs struggled to support her efforts. She had a moment to wonder how long she must have been running for when she felt herself trip over a root and fall face first into the ground.

She lay motionless for a moment, feeling the pain wash over her body, all the stings and aches she had managed to ignore crippling her. She choked back a sob, painfully pushing herself up. She had a head start, and those men would all be groggy and hungover, but she would bet they knew these woods better than she did, and some of them might even be able to follow her tracks through the woods the brighter the day became.

Leda crawled over to some trees that were huddled thicker together. She felt it would be suicide to stay and hide anywhere in the woods. She needed to get out of them and find help, but she needed to take care of the coarse ropes around her wrists first. Her hands felt around the decaying leaves of the floor, looking for a rock or a sharp stick, conscious of the noise she was making, worried that at least one of those men might be in earshot.

Her fingers felt a rock and she brushed the leaves away. It was too big to pick up, the bulk of it buried underneath the earth like a landlocked iceberg, but some parts of it were jagged and she began to rub the

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ropes around her wrists on it furiously. For the first little while there seemed no change, but slowly the strands of the rope began to fray.

A twig snapped.

She went still, holding her breath, her eyes looking around uncertainly. She was crouched down low, in the middle of a thicket of trees. No one would see her unless they were looking very carefully – but those men would be looking carefully, wouldn't they? She couldn't see anyone, or anything for that matter. Maybe it had been an animal. Still she waited, feeling the sweat run down the sides of her face.

Finally satisfied she was alone she went back to her work. She was halfway through the rope, the forest getting ever greener around her, when she heard noises again. There was no mistaking it this time. Footsteps, and two men talking in hushed voices. One of them sounded like he was complaining, and the other one said something abrupt, angry.

Through the trees she could just make out two forms coming out of the woods to her right, walking in her general direction.

Her heart pounded against her chest, like someone was repeatedly punching her. It was a familiar sensation. It took her back to those moments when she would hide in the closet. The first few minutes were always the worst. The fear would threaten to pull her apart, feeling like any second the door would swing open and her father would be there to grab her by the hair and drag her out.

They won't see me, she squeezed her eyes shut, frightened of even crouching lower, in case they saw the movement, and prayed the light wouldn't catch her bright red yukata against the dark green forest background. If they looked in her direction, they would see her. *They won't see me*. Her heart refused to slow down. Her nails dug into the palms of her hands, her knuckles completely white. Her teeth gritted together so hard her jaw hurt. *They won't see me!*

Her mind screamed so loud she thought they must have heard, and for a moment they turned their heads. She closed her eyes, feeling like a child pulling their blanket over their head. *I can't see them they can't see me I can't see them they can't see me...*

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Their footsteps continued, getting louder and closer, and then... they went by her, and kept going. She could no longer make them out. She didn't move, didn't open her eyes. She stayed completely still, listening to the sounds of birds, feeling her muscles begin to cramp, still not convinced they were really gone. She finally moved again, not because she felt safe, but because the pain in her body was becoming too much and she needed to stretch. She opened her eyes, and was alone.

However long she had kept her eyes closed, it was long enough for the forest to come alive with colour. She could have been hiding for hours or just a handful of minutes, she honestly couldn't be sure. She went back to rubbing her bonds against the rock. Having got to the halfway point, the rest of it went relatively fast. As she put tension on the rope, pulling her wrists apart, the fibers tore and snapped and suddenly she was free.

The ropes had burrowed nasty red marks into her skin, and she rubbed the numb area to get feeling back again. She looked around the trees, warier now about

moving through the woods. Her lead was completely lost. Those men could be behind and in front of her, and she had no idea how many there were or how long they would look. She was vaguely aware of the fact that she was dehydrated and the headache she felt would only get worse if she didn't get water. When did she last take a drink of water? How long could the body last? She just wanted to stay and hide, but she knew she absolutely couldn't.

Cautiously she got to her feet, realizing her legs were shaking and took a tentative step. Nothing changed, no hidden men jumped out and grabbed her. She was alone, for now at least. She looked around, trying to figure out what direction she needed to go in, completely unable to remember which direction she had even come from. She had no idea which way was north, since she couldn't see the sun through the treetops, and none of them looked sturdy enough to climb - not even to mention the fact that if she climbed a tree and one of the men found her, she'd be trapped.

Her situation nearly overwhelmed her then. She wanted to sit down and cry over

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how insane all of this was, but a purring sound stopped her thoughts. She looked around for the source of the noise, and saw a little cat rubbing against the torn hem of her yukata. The cat, white with black cow spots highlighted with calico, looked at her and held her gaze.

The cat's face was intense. Noticing one black spot over his eye like an eyepatch, the cat's grim expression reminded her of a samurai statue she had seen in Sendai of Daté Masamuné, the warlord who founded the city nearly four hundred years ago. She couldn't help but smile down at the little thing.

"Where should I go, Daté-nyan?"

The cat nodded its head to the left. Leda thought it was just a coincidence, but then the cat did it again. Her jaw went slack and she stared in disbelief. She couldn't decide if this was more or less insane than being kidnapped by parade volunteers in a forest. The cat didn't wait for a response, he began to trot away to the left. It stopped once, and looked back at Leda, as if to ask: "Are you coming?"

Since she didn't know what way to go anyway, she began to follow the cat. At first she kept low, continuously looking around. The farther she went, the faster she started to move, feeling more and more confident. Thinking that maybe, just maybe, this cat was leading her to safety. She slowed down a little, and the cat went on ahead.

For the first time since her daring escape she started wondering again why those men were in the forest, why they had tied her up. None of it made sense. They were like a band of roving bandits straight out of the Edo period. Cosplayers gone bad. Maybe it was the stress, but the thought made her laugh. Maybe they were LARPer who had just gotten out of hand. She wondered if there had ever been a case like that before. It seemed a little too ridiculous, but no other explanation presented itself just then. She lost sight of the cat.

Leda almost started wondering where the forest had come from, but all of her thoughts suddenly came to an excruciating halt as she pushed some branches aside to walk through and was suddenly facing a young unkempt man wearing a ratty

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yukata, looking at her with wide-eyed surprise.

She only had a moment to wonder if he was one of the same group of men when she noticed the bow he was holding in his left hand, and how his right arm was suddenly reaching to the quiver slung to his back. She turned and ran, and with an angry yell the man started after her.

She didn't look back to see if she was losing him. She didn't want to turn around only to see that he was within arm's length. *Just run. Just run. Just run.* She had been running her entire life. Why should now be any different?

Something caught hold of her yukata. She was jerked backwards, and knew the man had her. She swung her arms out behind herself and felt her elbows connect with the bandit's face. He screamed, they both lost their footing, and suddenly Leda felt herself falling down a steep slope.

He lost hold of her as the two rolled down the hill. Rocks and branches mercilessly hit her as she tumbled. She felt herself slow, and bang hard into a tree. The wind was knocked out of her. She gasped and

struggled to get up. She had lost sight of the bandit, but knew he couldn't be far. She got to her feet, and continued to run.

The woods seemed to change. They were brighter, yes, because the trees here weren't as thick. There was more space to move, she didn't have to weave around as many trunks, her speed picked up. She suddenly realized she was at the edge of the woods. The light seemed thicker here, she thought she could feel it on her face. She could hear the sound of running water ahead of her.

She emerged from the woods and it felt like taking a deep breath of air. The sun was so bright she had to shield her eyes for a moment. She took a step and stumbled onto wet grass. She heard the river. As her eyes adjusted she saw the wide, familiar river bank. The white river curved along the ground like a great serpent. She could make out green hills and mountains behind her, and farmland before her. In the middle of the river were tiny hills of pebbles pierced by small trees. In an instant she knew it was the Hirose River that ran through Sendai City. But...

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Leda turned around, looking at the tall trees and bamboo, walking backwards, feeling truly afraid for the first time. It couldn't be the Hirose River, because Sendai had to be there. Where was Sendai? For a horrifying moment she felt like she couldn't breathe. Her head was swimming, and then she caught movement in the woods, a shadow coming towards her, a bandit. He yelled something at her and she turned around.

She slipped on the wet grass, falling hard on her face, but she was up again in an instant, making her way towards the river. She saw a man on the other shore. He wore a conical straw hat and a dark blue yukata. In his hands he held a fishing pole, and was so focused on the river he wasn't looking at her.

"Help! *Tasuketé!!!*" she screamed, wading into the shallow water. Her feet sank into the loose riverbed, slowing her down. "HELP!!!" She screamed again, as she felt something hit her arm. *He's thrown a rock*, she thought, stumbling again and falling into the water. She reached out to stop her fall, and saw the arrow sticking out of her

left arm. She screamed, and could hear splashing in the water behind her.

No, not behind her...

She looked up and saw the fisherman running towards her. *Run*, she thought, *run!* *He has a bow and arrows!* But she couldn't stop screaming. She wasn't screaming because she was being chased. She wasn't screaming because of the pain in her arm. She was screaming because the city was gone. She was screaming because she finally understood not where, but *when* she was.

The two men reached her almost at the same time, the fisherman getting there a second before the hungover bandit did. Leda finally managed to catch her breath and stop screaming. She managed to stand up, her legs shaking badly, and the fishermen grabbed her, shoving her behind him. She grabbed onto the sleeve of his soft cotton yukata for support.

"Get out of the way!" the bandit barked, brandishing a crooked knife.

Soft laughter came from the fisherman.

"No... I don't think I will," the fisherman lifted his head to smile at the bandit, his face confident and easy. He looked like he

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wasn't much older than Leda, and he grinned. His hand moved to rest on the hilt of the katana in his obi.

A katana... She felt dizzy.

"You'll regret picking a fight with us!" the young bandit spoke with about as much authority as a confused high-schooler. He was certainly young enough to *be* a high-schooler.

"You should look around. You're alone," he tilted his katana slightly, his knees began to bend as he took up a defensive position.

The bandit looked around, wide-eyed. If he'd had any friends with him, they had either been lost during the chase or had chosen to stay hidden within the forest. The boy was alone, and the fear that flashed in his eyes was that realization.

"I think you will turn around and run back to your motherless cowards. She'll come with me."

The boy was shaken, seeming to forget the knife in his hand. He took a step backwards, and then another. *"Mercy,"* he whimpered, then turned and ran.

Guenevere Lee

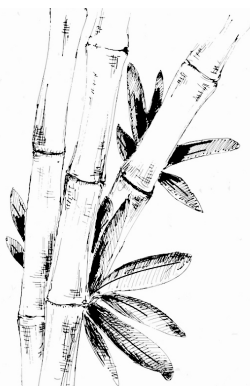
LEDA AND THE SAMURAI

仙台

Sendai

第四章

CHAPTER FOUR



She felt the cool water hit her face as the strength in her limbs gave out and she collapsed into the river. She was fully immersed for a moment, her eyes staring at the stones on the riverbed that twinkled in the sunlight. Were the stones real? If she reached out to touch one, would she feel their smoothness on her skin, or would they dissipate like smoke and leave her floating alone in nothingness?

Strong hands grabbed her shoulders, pulling her out of the water. She coughed and sputtered, able to breathe once more,

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but she had no strength left to fight whoever was holding her. The fisherman dragged her to the far side of the shore. She stared at the grass, remembering how many times she had walked along these shores by herself, or spent the day there with her friends having a barbecue. She had loved spending time by the river. Now these shores seemed alien, unfriendly.

The man said something, but she couldn't make out his words through the haze in her head. She looked up at him, his face hidden in shadow by his hat, the sun silhouetting his body. He grabbed her arm, and the pain, a moment ago forgotten, was suddenly the only thing she could feel. She called out in agony. It felt like her left arm was on fire. She struggled to pull away from him.

"Stop it! Don't touch it!" she screamed.

The man went completely still, pulled away from her, and she could just make out his sharp eyes widen in surprise. He didn't have a chance to say anything though, they both suddenly heard rumbling, and turned their attention towards the woods.

The sound was like a heavy wooden door creaking open, but it was massive and reverberated across the hills. She saw trees shaking in the distance, and when there was a great crash she realized she was hearing trees being knocked down. The shaking leaves were moving towards them. She tried to imagine the bandits all together, charging towards them, but there was no way this was being done by a group of hungover humans.

"*Shimatta,*" the fisherman muttered, and bundled her into his arms, lifting her like she was a bag of rice. He took off at a quick pace. The noise became louder as he carried her. There was no doubt. Whatever was in the woods was coming for them.

She suddenly felt her legs get swung up, landing onto something hard. She realized it was a horse's back as the animal's head reared up and snorted. The fisherman put her on its bare back, the saddle forgotten, hanging over a branch. He grabbed on and swung himself up behind her. She sat awkwardly, with her legs to one side. He put his arms tightly around her, so she wouldn't slide off completely, as he grabbed

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onto the horse's reins. With a shout and a kick of his legs, the horse was suddenly galloping.

One of his arms came off the bridle, wrapping around her waist. Her left arm hung uselessly at her side, bouncing up at down with the motion of the horse. She gritted her teeth in pain, gripping onto the man's arm with her right hand, terrified she'd fall off and he would just leave her for whatever was lurking in the trees.

The horse turned around the bend of the hill, and onto a dirt road. She felt the world go still as she saw what was behind the hill.

Hirose river curved around Sendai. Coming down from the mountains west of the city, it twisted south before heading east towards the ocean. Sendai city was nestled on that river bend. She had read how Daté Masamuné, the daimyou general who had founded this city, had picked the location for how easy it was to defend. The land northeast of the river was flat farmland all the way to the ocean. Yesterday it had been a mass of thirty-storey buildings, cars, and over one million people. Now she was

staring at a picture of a feudal era village, a white samurai castle shining on the hill overlooking the river, the village, and all the lands surrounding them.

No, not a picture. She felt her mind ache. She knew it was real, but she still couldn't form the words for what had happened. They rode over a bridge, heading towards the low buildings with slanted thatch roofs, the horse thundering past peasants wearing dark brown and blue yukatas. She caught a whiff of street merchants selling food. She could hear the calls of voices. There were other horses in the streets, carts with no wheels that men carried, and children running by the river.

They turned into the village, not slowing down, some people jumping out of the way to avoid the horse trampling over them. She let herself slump forward, closing her eyes, the horse's mane brushing against her face. She breathed the earthy scent of the horse in. It wasn't pleasant, it was strong and made her want to sneeze, but it was *real*. How and why and when all ran through her head, jumbling together and melting away,

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but she pushed them all away. It didn't matter. This was real...

The horse suddenly reared up, coming to an abrupt halt. She opened her eyes, feeling panic rise up in her again, but when she looked around she saw they had come into a small courtyard. Someone ran forward, grabbing the reins of the horse to keep it from bolting. A group of five or six people came out of the main house, rushing over to them. Leda couldn't focus on anything. The man was suddenly not on the horse, and then she was being lowered onto the ground. There was shouting.

She gasped in pain as she felt her left arm being jerked. Someone was ripping the sleeve of her yukata to get to the arrow. She opened her mouth to scream at them to stop, but as she lifted her head she caught sight of the rest of her body. Her yukata was unrecognizable in shape. It was muddied and torn and, she understood in a strange moment of clarity, completely unsalvageable.

Despite the panic of the people suddenly surrounding her, she felt a strange calmness seep through her. She wiggled her toes, realizing for the first time her geta

were gone, though she had no idea when she had lost them. With her head on the ground, she could tell the bun holding her hair up had long since fallen out and she must have looked wild and unkempt. She was certain her face and legs were just as torn as the yukata, probably bleeding here and there too.

She turned her head to see the fisherman leaning against the walls of the courtyard, taking his hat off, letting her see his face for the first time. He did look to be around twenty, his eyes were a light almond colour, his hair long and pulled back into a tight topknot. He had high cheek-bones and smooth dark skin.

A small plump woman with grey hair was at his side coddling him. His handsome face was strangely animated, his eyes widened in exaggeration as he spoke. His body language was like a stand-up comedian telling a story on stage. The calm, collected man who had made the bandit run away with one look had somehow been replaced by a clown. He had been just as scared as she had been, she realized. The thought nearly made her laugh.

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She looked over the faces of the other people gathered around her. The initial panic had worn down, but they all stared at her intensely, some muttering to themselves, two of them busily tying a tourniquet over her now bare arm. They weren't looking at her out of curiosity or concern, she knew. They were looking at her because she was unquestionably *not* Japanese.

The woman who had been talking to the fisherman turned her attention towards Leda now. She moved through the small crowd and started giving stern, though not unkind, orders and two of the men lifted her and carried her into the house. They were careful not to touch her left arm, but with every jolt of their steps pain would flare up and she ground her teeth to keep from crying out.

The main entrance led to a small garden, surrounded by a hall that wound around it, the side towards the garden open. They walked down the hall, moving into a small room with tatami mats on the floor. A futon was quickly grabbed from some unseen corner and placed on the floor. They

laid her down, going to the sliding doors on the outside of the room, opening them to let more light into the dim place.

She felt a cool cloth placed on her forehead and noticed for the first time that she was trembling. Someone was muttering and she made out the word *isha*, doctor, and a few moments later a man rushed into the room. He wore a long flowing kimono and a young boy ran in after him, holding a large lacquered box. The doctor knelt by her side, gently feeling around her wound with thin, cold fingers.

Leda gasped slightly as he touched the arrow, barely moving it, and yet it felt as though he had yanked on it. Faster than she could hope to follow, he started speaking to the young assistant, who opened the box and began to pull out a few instruments, laying them down on a white cloth next to the futon.

She thought she heard him say not to worry, and maybe also sorry, but she started to feel herself slipping away from consciousness and didn't hear properly. Then there was a pain she could not ignore and she instinctively tried to pull away, only to

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find strong hands holding her firmly so she couldn't move. The boy was holding the arrow firmly in his small hands while the doctor was sawing at it with a small tool. Leda couldn't help but whimper as shockwaves of pain went through her body.

When he had finally sawed the arrow clean through he pulled away the end. He had cut as close to the skin as he would dare go, and with a sickening lurch of her stomach Leda realized he meant to pull the arrow through, to complete the path the arrowhead had begun through her flesh. She had a vague thought that she should try to be brave, try not to scream and cry like a girl in front of these strange men, but as the doctor started to pull the arrow through the tears came easily enough.

It seemed to never end, and she soon found herself shouting: "Just pull it! Just pull it faster!" She didn't notice the strange stares her outburst received.

And then, mercifully and finally, the damn thing was out. She felt relief at first, and then dizzy. She suddenly felt very light. Her eyes wandered towards her wound, noticing the red running down her extended

arm. She had the brief realization that it was blood. A lot of blood? She didn't know, but she did notice the room start to darken and...



When Leda woke up she was first aware of her dry mouth. She felt like her tongue was swollen and rolling around in dirt. She felt the pain in her arm next. Dull and throbbing, consistent. Whereas before it had felt like liquid fire being poured on her arm, now it felt more like firm hands squeezing on her upper arm.

She opened her eyes and looked around the room. The sliding doors to her right were still open, and outside she could see the white walls surrounding the main house. Between the walls and her room was a garden of moss and small bushes with flowers of various colours. From the light she guessed it was most likely evening, but evening of the same day she couldn't tell. She tried to sit herself up, but lifting her head up she felt a sudden wave of dizziness and fell back again.

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A man was by her head, kneeling next to her with a kind look on her face. The fisherman, she realized. How long had he been waiting for her to wake up? He didn't look like a fisherman anymore though. His plain yukata had been replaced by a white kimono and a light blue hakama, a type of trousers that were functional to move around in but looked like flowing robes, and a matching kataginu which was like a vest with big shoulders and no sides, patterned with a crest she couldn't quite make out in the dusk light.

"Mizu." *Water*, she managed to croak, her voice was dust rushing from an old book slammed shut.

He crossed his legs, making himself comfortable. There was a bowl next to her head, she saw, and he gently put one hand behind her head, lifting it slightly and then tipped the bowl gently into her lips, letting the cold water slowly run down her throat. He was concentrating on his task, but she was staring at him intently. The starched, spotless kimono, the large house with pristine gardens, the matronly servant fawning over him in the courtyard. He wasn't a

fisherman. From the house, and the katana he wore even now, she assumed he must have been in the samurai class.

He put the bowl down and rested her head back against the futon. He looked at her, their eyes met. She expected him to say something, but he was completely silent, his face an unreadable smiling noh mask. She started to feel uneasy. What was she supposed to say? All of her Japanese suddenly drained from her head, save for the most basic thing she knew.

"Hajimemashité, Leda desu. Douzo yoroshiku..." she trailed off. Feeling suddenly silly, but to her surprise his face lit up. The entire room seemed to brighten.

"Douzo yoroshiku," he said. With his hands on his hips, he bowed his head ever so slightly. *"Miyamoto Bennosuké desu."*

"Miya... moto-san?" The name was meaningless to her, not giving her any clues as to who he was, or what his position was. She thought of the cold stare he had given the bandit, how scared he had suddenly been. *He's a samurai*, the thought came to her suddenly. Exactly how high ranking a

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samurai, she had no idea. "*Ano hito...*" *that person, "you could have killed him?"*

Bennosuké laughed, a soft chuckle, and he rubbed the back of his head, as though embarrassed. "*Doubtful. I've never used that katana to kill.*"

She looked at him in confusion. He had never used *that* katana, or *any* katana? Just what kind of samurai was he anyway?

"*Reda-san.*" Like most Japanese he was unable to pronounce her name except with a soft 'r' sound. "*Where did you come from?*"

What was she supposed to say? Canada is hardly a country he would know, not to mention it didn't even exist yet. She certainly couldn't say she currently lived in Sendai since she was still *in* Sendai. Would he be aware of the 'New World'? England is a place he might know, or France, but she didn't want to associate herself with countries he might consider enemies. She would rather he think she was insane than an enemy.

"*Mirai... kara...*" she whispered. *From the future.*

To her surprise he didn't look shocked or angry, instead he just put his hand on her

forehead, smoothing back her hair, his thumb tracing a line on her forehead softly. He looked at her with nothing but kindness.

"Sleep now," he told her softly, and she closed her eyes, letting herself fall back into the quiet darkness of sleep.

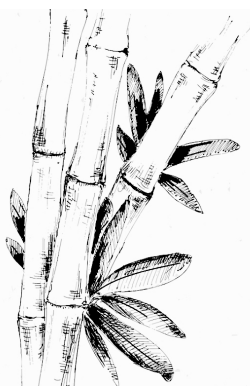
LEDA AND THE SAMURAI

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Samurai

第五章

CHAPTER FIVE



"Maybe she's one of the Ainu?" Shoko suggested with the dismissive tone of a woman who didn't really care about the answer. It was obvious from the frown on Shoko's face every time she was in the same room as Leda that she didn't approve.

Shoko was a matronly woman, though she'd never had any children of her own. She had worked for the Miyamoto family long before they had come to Sendai. She had watched over Bennosuké when he was just a boy, and when they were in private she would still sometimes call him by his childhood nickname of Ben-kun. When Ben

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had decided to follow his daimyou, Daté Masamuné, to found Sendai, there was no question of her following her master.

They sat in a small room, a tray of tea set between them on the tatami mats. The sliding doors leading outside were open, and bright sunlight streamed in. They could make out the sounds of city life, but they were mostly muffled and there was a peacefulness.

"*But look here,*" Ben held the ripped and torn yukata out. Shoko had had the garment washed at Ben's insistence, even though at best the yukata could now only be used for rags or diapers. Really Ben just wanted to find out more about who this woman was.

The yukata was of exceptional quality. The cotton was thick and the chrysanthemum pattern on it was done by a technique neither Shoko nor any of the servants in his house had ever seen. Whoever this Leda was, he assumed she must have been the daughter of a lord. The bandits who had been chasing her must have thought the same thing. *Here's some foolish rich girl we can ransom.* What had she been doing in the woods by herself?

"Nan desu ka?" What is it? Shoko asked, looking at the piece of yukata Ben held out.

Stitched into the yukata collar was a white piece of cloth (a tag, though neither knew it). Written on the top, was the name Sasaki Yukata, written 佐々木ゆかた. Although in a strange style, they could read it well enough. What was bizarre was how the writing read from left to right, when it should have been right to left. That wasn't even the strangest thing though. Underneath were the markings 'QUALITY YUKATA' and in smaller letters beneath 'Made in Japan.'

"It's Latin," he explained with a grin.

"Oho? What does it say then?" Shoko took hold of the cloth, turning it around to read it from different angles.

Ben laughed awkwardly. *"I don't know. I don't speak Latin."*

"How do you know what it is then?"

"I saw a book once..." he hesitated. He knew the next words would be dangerous to say out loud, even to someone he trusted. *"A Christian monk had it."*

"Ara? You think she's Christian?"

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He shook his head and shrugged. There was something bizarre about Leda. She didn't wear the clothes of a Christian, and when she had spoken she'd barely had an accent. He'd only met the Christian twice. While accompanying his daimyou to Kyoto, the Christians had been about. They came from a country called Portugal and talked of little beyond their religion. What Japanese they could speak was said with such a thick accent he had barely understood them. So was she foreign or not?

Behind them, a sliding door opened. A young girl kneeled on the other side of the door, bowing her head low as she spoke. *"Miyamoto-sama, Masashigé-sama has graced us with his presence. He waits for you in the garden."*

Ben stiffened. Masashigé Kusunoki only ever called on anyone for official business. He was one of Daté Masamuné's most trusted advisors, and carried out his master's will unquestioningly. It wasn't unusual for Kusunoki to make house calls, but he wouldn't be there without a reason. And there was only one reason Ben could think of.

"Keep that out of sight," he motioned towards the yukata as he got up and made his way down the wooden hall that led to the garden. The garden was in the centre of the house, in a courtyard that included a pond and several varieties of trees and flowers. The garden was Shoko's passion, though Ben did enjoy sitting on the moss-covered rocks there from time to time.

The house was as new as the village around it. There had been a village before the Daté clan had come here, but it had been small and unimpressive. They had pulled all the houses down before building anew. Daté himself had designed the streets and parcelled out the territory to those he saw fit. The samurai, like Ben, were on the west bank of the river, on the slope of the hill leading up to the castle. The craftspeople and farmers were on the east bank.

The village, as yet untouched by a major earthquake or fire, was pristine. The samurai had been given generous plots of land to build on. Although he wasn't especially rich or powerful within the Daté clan, his home felt as though it belonged to a daimyou.

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Kusunoki was not immediately visible. It took a moment for Ben to see the older man was crouching near the pond. To his amusement, Ben noticed that Kusunoki was petting a small cat who often snuck into the garden in an attempt to reach the fish in the ponds. The white cat, with black patches and calico highlights had become a bit of a mascot for his servants. Shoko had even nicknamed the cat Ninko (a play on the word *ninja*, and *neko* for cat).

"Don't let Ninko fool you, she lures her prey in by playing coy," Ben said with a smile.

Kusunoki instantly stood up, scaring Ninko away. He turned around, looking mildly embarrassed. It was no secret that although Kusunoki had proven himself to be a great warrior on the battlefield, he had a particularly soft spot for animals.

"Miyamoto-san, I'm glad to see you are well."

"Had you heard otherwise?" He jumped down from the porch to the stone path that wound through the garden.

"We heard there was some trouble with bandits," the old warrior narrowed his eyes.

Ben shrugged. *"I was fishing and one crossed my path, yes."*

"You fought him?"

"Eto..." it would do no good to said he had run. Kusunoki would not care that something far more dangerous had been in the forest with those bandits. The last thing he needed was to gain the reputation of a coward. *"The bastard was shooting arrows at me from the forest. I had to retreat."*

"And the girl?"

So he had heard. Obviously he had been seen by several people as he had ridden home with her on his horse. *"Just a farmer's girl. I sent her back to her father. Did you really come here just to ask me that?"*

"I came to ask why you didn't report this to your daimyou. Bandits so near to the village and you didn't think to report immediately to Daté-sama?"

Genuinely feeling like a fool, he bowed low. *"I apologize for my stupidity,"* he spoke sincerely. He'd gotten so caught up in the mystery of the woman that he hadn't even thought to ride to the castle and report the events. For Daté to hear it second-hand was as embarrassment.

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"Is there anything else you would like to report now, then?"

Ben kept looking at the ground, wondering if he should be honest. It was possible Kusunoki might know who Leda was, who her family was, but if he told the advisor about her, there was no doubt Kusunoki would order her moved to the castle. But he was certain she did not belong to this land. Her eyes were bluer than a clear sky. The curves of her body, even her pronounced nose and brow, did not look Japanese.

Being a foreigner was no crime in itself. Being a Christian on the other hand... He hadn't witnessed the executions himself, but he had heard what happened to those Portuguese Christians he'd met. They, and dozens of others, had been tied to crosses, spears thrust through either side of their bodies. They had died screaming in agony, because the shogun saw them as a threat. Ben knew it was only a matter of time before the shogun ordered every Christian in the land be executed.

"I only saw the one bandit, but I believe there were more. I can show you the place where I saw him, if it will help."

Kusunoki scoffed. *"It would have helped yesterday. By now the bandits are gone. Look at me, Miyamoto-san."*

Ben tentatively straightened his back and met Kusunoki's steel gaze. *"No one made you come to Sendai. You begged to serve your daimyou here. Serve him better."*

"Forgive me. I won't fail Daté-sama again," he bowed once more.

"Do not dishonour your father's name. Do not..." Kusunoki trailed off.

From his vantage point Ben could see Ninko emerge from a bush. The cat trotted over to Kusunoki's leg and began to rub its body up and down, purring loudly. Ben had to bite his cheek to keep from laughing. Kusunoki, distracted by the cat, lost the steam of his anger. It would be impossible to sound intimidating with a cat showing him such affection, and he didn't have the heart the kick the little rascal away.

"That is all," Kusunoki muttered and quickly walked away, leaving Ben alone in the garden.

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Ben waited until he knew Kusunoki was gone, then he crouched down and scratched Ninko under the chin. *"You saved me from a scolding. Arigatou gozaimashita, Ninko-chan."*



Kusunoki left the Miyamoto house feeling a disquiet in his soul. When they had received news that bandits had attacked someone on the river yesterday, men had been sent out to investigate. Most of the bandits had long since left the area, but three men were found.

From the report he had heard how the samurai had found the bandits terrified, hiding in a bamboo grove. They snuck up on them, running the first through the back. He died slowly, his lung filling with blood. He drowned on the forest floor. The other two gave a better fight.

One had his stomach opened by a well-landed strike from a katana. His guts had spilled from him like water cascading over the edge of a cliff. Kusunoki had witnessed similar moments on battlefields. For some reason the men almost always looked

confused rather than frightened. They would kneel in the mud, and with a feeble gesture try to gather their guts up and push them back in before their strength fled them and they collapsed.

Finally, the last had been brought back nearly whole. Kusunoki left his interrogation to others. Killing a man in battle, or on the orders of his daimyou, was not a problem for Kusunoki. He did not revel in others' pain though. Luckily there were more than enough men in his employ who did. Bandits were hardly known for their loyalty, and he had talked before the hour of the dog (while Kusunoki was having his evening meal) had even ended. The men worked on the bandit well through the night though, just in case he was leaving out any information.

The bandit claimed they had captured a strange-looking woman. She spoke an unknown language. However, she was dressed in expensive clothes and they assumed she was perhaps a foreign noble. Kusunoki had decided to leave the bandit's claim of an oni finding and destroying their camp. Daté would not have approved.

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Instead he focused on the girl. One man said she was a foreign noble. One man said she was a local farm-girl. One man was an outlaw, outcast and unwanted from society. One man was a samurai, who had pledged his life to serve Daté Masamuné.

One man was lying.

Appendix

This is just a quick reference guide for some of the things, people, and places mentioned in *Leda and the Samurai*. For a more in-depth look at the history and mythology surrounding Edo Era Japan, then check out the podcast *Historical Fantasy*.

Ainu アイヌ The indigenous people of Hokkaido.

Daimyou 大名 A feudal lord.

Daté Masamuné 伊達政宗 In 1600 Daté Masamuné founded the city of Sendai, and became the most influential feudal lord in Tohoku.

Edo 江戸 The Japanese time period between 1603-1868, marked by the rise of the shogun Tokugawa Iéyasu.

Fukinagashi 吹き流し

Futon 布団 A thin mattress, usually laid out on tatami mats.

Geta 下駄 Wooden sandals with cloth thongs.

Hakama 袴 A type of trousers tied around the waist and worn over a kimono.

Hirose River 広瀬川 A 45km long river that winds through Sendai.

Hokkaido 北海道 The most northern of the four largest islands of Japan (the other three being Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku).

Hour of the Dog 戌 In the Edo Era Japan worked on a twelve hour system. The hour of the dog was the first hour in the evening.

Kanji 漢字 Chinese characters adopted into Japanese writing.

Kataginu 肩衣 Sleeveless ceremonial robe. Similar to a vest.

Katakana カタカナ A phenetic writing system adopted from kanji, usually used for foreign words.

Katana 刀 A traditional curved blade around 60~75cm long.

Kimono 着物 A gown of two or three layered silk robes, tied at the waist by a thick, stiff sash called an obi.

(O)Mikuji 神籤 Fortunes, written on paper, sold at temples and shrines.

Noh (Nou) 能 Traditional Japanese theatre, where the actors wear masks.

Ninko ニンコ The name combines *nin* from *ninja* 忍者 and *ko* from *neko* 猫.

Reda レダ In the Japanese writing system our *r* and *l* sounds are interchangeable. レダ can be read Leda or Reda, but I use Reda just to show that they're pronouncing her name slightly differently.

Saké 酒 It should be noted that saké is just a general word for alcohol, and not rice wine. Rice wine is actually called nihonshu (日本酒), which literally means Japanese alcohol.

Samurai 侍 A class of nobles who serve a daimyou.

Sendai 仙台/千代 The largest city in Tohoku, founded in 1600 by Daté Masamuné.

Shinto 神道 Translated as the way of the gods, shintoism is a Japanese religion that focuses on retaining a connection with one's ancestors.

Shougun 将軍 The traditional leader of the emperor's army, and the head of state during the Edo Era.

Tanabata 七夕 A festival traditionally held on the seventh day of the seventh month, where two mythical lovers are allowed to cross the sky and be together.

Tatami 畳 Traditional mats made from weaving rice straw.

Torii 鳥居 Gates, usually painted bright red, which mark the entrance to Shinto shrines.

Tokugawa Iéyasu 徳川家康 The shougun who united Japan in 1603, bringing stability for over 200 years.

Yen (en) 円 Japanese currency.

Yoshinowa 吉野話 A chain of restaurants, known for serving gyuu-don and other inexpensive and quick meals.

Yukata 浴衣 A gown of one or two layered cotton robes, tied at the waist by a thick, stiff sash called an obi.

Notes

I've taken a few liberties in how I write out Japanese in romaji (the alphabet). Generally when Japanese is written out in romaji, what are seen as confusing or redundant vowels get cut (i.e. arigatou becomes arigato). I have never liked this, since the presence of that extra vowel at the end does in fact change the pronunciation, and sometimes even the meaning of a word. Sometimes this vowel is replaced with an h or an accent, both of which are limited because they don't indicate which vowel was taken out. I have kept all vowels intact, as it were (so words like arigatou are written as arigatou). That being said, I have kept the shortened version of proper nouns (Tokyo instead of Toukyo). This is just to avoid confusion. I included accents on some vowels to indicate that the vowel should be pronounced (for example, Daté is pronounced "DA-tay and not like the English word "date").

Within the text words spoken in *italics* are being spoken in Japanese. A sentence in italics following a Japanese quote is the English translation.

The symbol used in the scene breaks, the large circle surrounded by eight smaller circles, is one of Daté Masamune's sigils, or *mon*(紋). It is inspired by the navagraha, or nine celestial bodies. It is sometimes called the nine-planets by the people of Sendai.

References

Sadler, A. L. (1978) **Shogun: The Life of Tokugawa Ieyasu**. Singapore: Tuttle.

Glossary

Amari あまり A small amount.

Ara あら Not a proper word, but rather a sound someone makes when surprised.

Arigatou ありがとう Thank you.

Baka バカ Idiot.

Chan ちゃん See San

Da だ A very informal, and in some cases rude, way to end a sentence.

Dakara だから Therefor.

Demo でも But.

Desu(ga) です(が) The regular/formal way to end a sentence. When ga is added at the end it means but.

Domo どうも Thanks.

Don 丼 Bowl.

Douzo どうぞ Please/By all means.

E え Eh?

Ee ええ Good.

Eto えと A sound one makes when thinking, similar to *um* or *uh*.

Ga が Used to define the subject.

Gaijin 外人 A mildly insulting term for a foreigner.

Ganbarimasu 頑張ります Do your best.

Gyuu 牛 Beef.

Gozaima(su/shita) ございま(す/した) Literally means to be, but is used as a suffix to make something more polite. Gozaimashita is past tense.

Hai はい Yes.

Hajimemashité 初めまして Nice to meet you.

Hana 鼻 Nose.

Hito 人 Person.

Ié いえ No.

Ikitai(n) 行きたいん I want to go.

Iro 色 Colour.

Isha 医者 Doctor.

(O)Jou お嬢 A very respectful term when speaking to someone else's daughter.

Ka か Said at the end of a question.

Kaki-gouri カキ氷 Shaved ice/Sno-cones.

Kara から From.

Kawaii かわいい Cute.

Kirei(na) 綺麗な Pretty.

Konnichiwa こんにちは Good day.

Korya こりゃ This. (Very informal)

Kudasai ください Please.

Kun 君 See San

(O)Machi/tte 待ち/って Wait.

Mé 目 Eye.

Mirai 未来 The distant future.

Mité 見て Look.

Mizu 水 Water.

Mo も Also.

Nan(da) 何だ What?

(O)Negai お願い Please.

Neko 猫 Cat.

Ni に At/In/On/To.

Nyan ニャン A pun combining the sound a cat makes (nya) with the suffix chan.

Oi おい Hey.

Onegai おねがい Please.

Oni 鬼 Demon.

Onna 女 Woman.

Ooki(na)大きな Big.

Saké 酒 Alcohol.

Sama 様 See San

San さん(Sama/Kun/Chan)Suffixes added to
the end of a name to be more polite.
Sama is the most polite, kun is used for
young boys, and chan for young girls.

Shimatta しまった Damn.

Sou そう So/really/seeming.

Sumimasen すみません Excuse me.

Tabun 多分 Probably.

Tasuketé 助けて Help me.

(O)Téarai お手洗い The lavatory.

Toíré トイレ Katakana spelling of toilet.

Urusai うるさい Noisy.

Wakarimasen 分かりません I don't under-
stand.

Wakarimashita 分かりました Understood.

Watashi 私 I.

Wo を Indicates direct object of action.

Yaku ni tatanai 役に立たない Not useful.

Yo よ Said to add emphasis at the end of a sentence.

Yoroshiku よろしく Best regards.

