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Scissors Cut Paper

The geisha called ‘Trembling Leaf’, on her knees beside James Bond, leant forward from the waist and kissed him chastely on the right cheek.

‘That’s a cheat,’ said Bond severely. ‘You agreed that if I won it would be a real kiss on the mouth. At the very least,’ he added.

‘Grey Pearl’, the Madame, who had black lacquered teeth, a bizarre affectation, and was so thickly made up that she looked like a character out of a Noh play, translated. There was much giggling and cries of encouragement. Trembling Leaf covered her face with her pretty hands as if she were being required to perform some ultimate obscenity. But then the fingers divided and the pert brown eyes examined Bond’s mouth, as if taking aim, and her body lanced forward. This time the kiss was full on the lips and it lingered fractionally. In invitation? In promise? Bond remembered that he had been promised a ‘pillow geisha’. Technically, this would be a geisha of low caste. She would not be proficient in the traditional arts of her calling – she would not be able to tell humorous stories, sing, paint or compose verses about

her patron. But, unlike her cultured sisters, she might agree to perform more robust services – discreetly, of course, in conditions of the utmost privacy and at a high price. But, to the boorish, brutalised tastes of a *gaijin*, a foreigner, this made more sense than having a *tanka* of thirty-one syllables, which in any case he couldn't understand, equate, in exquisite ideograms, his charms with budding chrysanthemums on the slopes of Mount Fuji.

The applause which greeted this unbridled exhibition of lasciviousness died quickly and respectfully. The powerful, chunky man in the black *yukata*, sitting directly across the low red lacquer table from Bond, had taken the Dunhill filter holder from between his golden teeth and had laid it beside his ashtray. 'Bondo-san,' said Tiger Tanaka, Head of the Japanese Secret Service, 'I will now challenge you to this ridiculous game, and I promise you in advance that you will not win.' The big, creased brown face that Bond had come to know so well in the past month split expansively. The wide smile closed the almond eyes to slits – slits that glittered. Bond knew that smile. It wasn't a smile. It was a mask with a golden hole in it.

Bond laughed. 'All right, Tiger. But first, more *saké*! And not in these ridiculous thimbles. I've drunk five flasks of the stuff and its effect is about the same as one double martini. I shall need another double martini if I am to go on demonstrating the superiority of Western instinct over the wiles of the Orient. Is there such a thing as a lowly glass tumbler discarded in some corner behind the cabinets of Ming?'

‘Bondo-san. Ming is Chinese. Your knowledge of porcelain is as meagre as your drinking habits are gross. Moreover, it is unwise to underestimate *saké*. We have a saying, “It is the man who drinks the first flask of *saké*; then the second flask drinks the first; then it is the *saké* that drinks the man.”’ Tiger Tanaka turned to Grey Pearl and there followed a laughing conversation which Bond interpreted as jokes at the expense of this uncouth Westerner and his monstrous appetites. At a word from the Madame, Trembling Leaf bowed low and scurried out of the room. Tiger turned to Bond. ‘You have gained much face, Bondo-san. It is only the *sumo* wrestlers who drink *saké* in these quantities without showing it. She says you are undoubtedly an eight-flask man.’ Tiger’s face became sly. ‘But she also suggests that you will not make much of a companion for Trembling Leaf at the end of the evening.’

‘Tell her that I am more interested in her own more mature charms. She will certainly possess talents in the art of love-making which will overcome any temporary lassitude on my part.’

This leaden gallantry got what it deserved. There came a spirited crackle of Japanese from Grey Pearl. Tiger translated. ‘Bondo-san, this is a woman of some wit. She has made a joke. She says she is already respectably married to one *bonsan* and there is no room on her *futon* for another. *Bonsan* means a priest, a grey-beard. *Futon*, as you know, is a bed. She has made a joke on your name.’

The geisha party had been going on for two hours,

and Bond's jaws were aching with the unending smiles and polite repartee. Far from being entertained by the geisha, or bewitched by the inscrutable discords issuing from the catskin-covered box of the three-stringed *samisen*, Bond had found himself having to try desperately to make the party go. He also knew that Tiger Tanaka had been observing his effort with a sadistic pleasure. Dikko Henderson had warned him that geisha parties were more or less the equivalent, for a foreigner, of trying to entertain a lot of unknown children in a nursery with a strict governess, the Madame, looking on. But Dikko had also warned him that he was being done a great honour by Tiger Tanaka, that the party would cost Tiger a small fortune, whether from secret funds or from his own pocket, and that Bond had better put a good face on the whole thing since this looked like being a breakthrough in Bond's mission. But it could equally well be a disaster.

So now Bond smiled and clapped his hands in admiration. He said to Tiger, 'Tell the old bitch she's a clever old bitch,' accepted the brimming tumbler of hot *saké* from the apparently adoring hands of Trembling Leaf, and downed it in two tremendous gulps. He repeated the performance so that more *saké* had to be fetched from the kitchen, then he placed his fist decisively on the red lacquer table and said with mock belligerence, 'All right, Tiger! Go to it!'

It was the old game of Scissors cut Paper, Paper wraps Stone, Stone blunts Scissors, that is played by children all over the world. The fist is the Stone, two outstretched

fingers are the Scissors, and a flat hand is the Paper. The closed fist is hammered twice in the air simultaneously by the two opponents and, at the third downward stroke, the chosen emblem is revealed. The game consists of guessing which emblem the opponent will choose, and of you yourself choosing one that will defeat him. Best of three goes or more. It is a game of bluff.

Tiger Tanaka rested his fist on the table opposite Bond. The two men looked carefully into each other's eyes. There was dead silence in the box-like little lath-and-paper room, and the soft gurgling of the tiny brook in the ornamental square of garden outside the opened partition could be heard clearly for the first time that evening. Perhaps it was this silence, after all the talk and giggling, or perhaps it was the deep seriousness and purpose that were suddenly evident in Tiger Tanaka's formidable, cruel, *samurai* face, but Bond's skin momentarily crawled. For some reason this had become more than a children's game. Tiger had promised he would beat Bond. To fail would be to lose much face. How much? Enough to breach a friendship that had become oddly real between the two of them over the past weeks? This was one of the most powerful men in Japan. To be defeated by a miserable *gaijin* in front of the two women might be a matter of great moment to this man. The defeat might leak out through the women. In the West, such a trifle would be farcically insignificant, like a Cabinet Minister losing a game of backgammon at Blades. But in the East? In a very short while, Dikko Henderson had taught Bond total respect for Oriental

conventions, however old-fashioned or seemingly trivial, but Bond was still at sea in their gradations. This was a case in point. Should Bond try and win at this baby game of bluff and double-bluff, or should he try to lose? But to try and lose involved the same cleverness at correctly guessing the other man's symbols in advance. It was just as difficult to lose on purpose as to win. And anyway did it really matter? Unfortunately, on the curious assignment in which James Bond was involved, he had a nasty feeling that even this idiotic little gambit had significance towards success or failure.

As if with second sight, Tiger Tanaka spelt the problem out. He gave a harsh, taut laugh that was more of a shout than an expression of humour or pleasure. 'Bondo-san, with us, and certainly at a party at which I am the host and you are the honoured guest, it would be good manners for me to let you win this game that we are to play together. It would be more. It would be required behaviour. So I must ask your forgiveness in advance for defeating you.'

Bond smiled cheerfully. 'My dear Tiger, there is no point in playing a game unless you try to win. It would be a very great insult to me if you endeavoured to play to lose. But if I may say so, your remarks are highly provocative. They are like the taunts of the *sumo* wrestlers before the bout. If I was not myself so certain of winning, I would point out that you spoke in English. Please tell our dainty and distinguished audience that I propose to rub your honourable nose in the dirt at this despicable game and thus display not only the

superiority of Great Britain, and particularly Scotland, over Japan, but also the superiority of our Queen over your Emperor.' Bond, encouraged perhaps by the crafty ambush of the *saké*, had committed himself. This kind of joking about their different cultures had become a habit between himself and Tiger, who, with a first in PPE at Trinity before the war, prided himself in the *demokorasu* of his outlook and the liberality and breadth of his understanding of the West. But Bond, having spoken, caught the sudden glitter in the dark eyes, and he thought of Dikko Henderson's cautionary, 'Now listen, you stupid Limey bastard. You're doing all right. But don't press your luck. T.T.'s a civilised kind of a chap – as Japs go, that is. But don't overdo it. Take a look at that mug. There's Manchu there, and Tartar. And don't forget the so-an-so was a Black Belt at judo before he ever went up to your bloody Oxford. And don't forget he was spying for Japan when he called himself assistant naval attaché in their London Embassy before the war and you stupid bastards thought he was okay because he'd got a degree at Oxford. And don't forget his war record. Don't forget he ended up as personal aide to Admiral Ohnishi and was training as a *kami-kaze* when the Americans made loud noises over Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the Rising Sun suddenly took a backward somersault into the sea. And, if you forget all that, just ask yourself why it's T.T. rather than any other of the ninety million Japanese who happens to hold down the job as head of the *Kōan-Chōsa-Kyōku*. Okay, James? Got the photo?'

Since Bond had arrived in Japan he had assiduously practised sitting in the lotus position. Dikko Henderson had advised it. 'If you make the grade with these people,' he had said, 'or even if you don't, you'll be spending a lot of time sitting on your ass on the ground. There's only one way to do it without cracking your joints; that's in the Indian position, squatting with your legs crossed and the sides of your feet hurting like hell on the floor. It takes a bit of practice, but it won't kill you and you'll end up gaining plenty of face.' Bond had more or less mastered the art, but now, after two hours, his knee-joints were on fire and he felt that if he didn't alter his posture he would end up bandy-legged for life. He said to Tiger, 'Playing against a master such as yourself, I must first adopt a relaxed position so that my brain may be totally concentrated.' He got painfully to his feet, stretched and sat down again – this time with one leg extended under the low table and his left elbow resting on the bent knee of the other. It was a blessed relief. He lifted his tumbler and, obediently, Trembling Leaf filled it from a fresh flagon. Bond downed the *saké*, handed the tumbler to the girl and suddenly crashed his right fist down on the lacquer table so that the little boxes of sweetmeats rattled and the porcelain tinkled. He looked belligerently across at Tiger Tanaka. 'Right!'

Tiger bowed. Bond bowed back. The girl leant forward expectantly.

Tiger's eyes bored into Bond's, trying to read his plan. Bond had decided to have no plan, display no pattern. He would play completely at random, showing

the symbol that his fist decided to make at the psychological moment after the two hammer-blows.

Tiger said, 'Three games of three?'

'Right.'

The two fists rose slowly from the table-top, quickly hammered twice in unison and shot forward. Tiger had kept his fist balled in the Stone. Bond's palm was open in the Paper that wrapped the Stone. One up to Bond. Again the ritual and the moment of truth. Tiger had kept to the Stone. Bond's first and second fingers were open in the Scissors, blunted by Tiger's Stone. One all.

Tiger paused and placed his fist against his forehead. He closed his eyes in thought. He said, 'Yes. I've got you, Bondo-san. You can't escape.'

'Good show,' said Bond, trying to clear his mind of the suspicion that Tiger would keep to the Stone, or alternatively, that Tiger would expect him to play it that way, expect Bond to play the Paper and himself riposte with the Scissors to cut the paper. And so on and so forth. The three emblems whirled round in Bond's mind like the symbols on a fruit machine.

The two fists were raised – one, two, forward!

Tiger had kept to his Stone. Bond had wrapped it up with the Paper. First game to Bond.

The second game lasted longer. They both kept on showing the same symbol, which meant a replay. It was as if the two players were getting the measure of each other's psychology. But that could not be so, since Bond had no psychological intent. He continued to play at random. It was just luck. Tiger won the game. One all.

Last game! The two contestants looked at each other. Bond's smile was bland, rather mocking. A glint of red shone in the depths of Tiger's dark eyes. Bond saw it and said to himself, 'I would be wise to lose. Or would I?' He won the game in two straight goes, blunting Tiger's Scissors with his Stone, wrapping Tiger's Stone with his Paper.

Tiger bowed low. Bond bowed even lower. He sought for a throwaway remark. He said, 'I must get this game adopted in time for your Olympics. I would certainly be chosen to play for my country.'

Tiger Tanaka laughed with controlled politeness. 'You play with much insight. What was the secret of your method?'

Bond had had no method. He quickly invented the one that would be most polite to Tiger. 'You are a man of rock and steel, Tiger. I guessed that the paper symbol would be the one you would use the least. I played accordingly.'

This bit of mumbo-jumbo got by. Tiger bowed. Bond bowed and drank more *saké*, toasting Tiger. Released from the tension, the geisha applauded and the Madame instructed Trembling Leaf to give Bond another kiss. She did so. How soft the skins of Japanese women were! And their touch was almost weightless! James Bond was plotting the rest of his night when Tiger said, 'Bondo-san, I have matters to discuss with you. Will you do me the honour of coming to my house for a nightcap?'

Bond immediately put away his lascivious thoughts.

According to Dikko, to be invited to a Japanese private house was a most unusual sign of favour. So, for some reason, he had done right to win this childish game. This might mean great things. Bond bowed. 'Nothing would give me more pleasure, Tiger.'

An hour later they were sitting in blessed chairs with a drink-tray between them. The lights of Yokohama glowed a deep orange along the horizon, and a slight smell of the harbour and the sea came in through the wide-open partition leading on to the garden. Tiger's house was designed, enchantingly, as is even the meanest Japanese salary-man's house, to establish the thinnest possible dividing line between the inhabitant and nature. The three other partitions in the square room were also fully slid back, revealing a bedroom, a small study and a passage.

Tiger had opened the partitions when they entered the room. He had commented, 'In the West, when you have secrets to discuss, you shut all the doors and windows. In Japan, we throw everything open to make sure that no one can listen at the thin walls. And what I have now to discuss with you is a matter of the very highest secrecy. The *saké* is warm enough? You have the cigarettes you prefer? Then listen to what I have to say to you and swear on your honour to divulge it to no one.' Tiger Tanaka gave his great golden shout of mirthless laughter. 'If you were to break your promise, I would have no alternative but to remove you from the earth.'