

THE HAIKU MURDER

CHAPTER ONE

‘There they are,’ said Ken. ‘Over by the group check-in sign.’

Josie craned her neck to see over the heads of the queue of passengers at the economy class check-in desk and spotted an alert young woman with red lipstick and a professional smile, clipboard at the ready. She wore a smart blue suit with a jaunty yellow scarf at the neck and the little group of people behind her had labels in the same zinging shade of yellow tied to their luggage.

‘Yes, that’s them,’ Josie said. ‘I can see Mr Kimura standing behind the tour guide. What’s her name?’

‘Hina. She’s nice, you’ll like her.’

Josie took a yellow scarf like the one Hina was wearing out of her bag and tied it around her neck so the blue logo and the words *Haiku Country Tours* were visible. She hoped it looked natural and casual, though she suspected it actually just made her look sallow and western. Ken didn’t have a scarf, but he was wearing his Haiku Country Tours tie, which was blue with a very small logo in yellow. Josie wished she could have had a tie too instead of her all-too-noticeable scarf.

They made their way across the departure hall towards the waiting group, dodging through the ever-moving mass of families, business people and tourists trying, like them, to get from the top of the escalator from the monorail to the right check-in counter with their luggage and their sanity intact. A group of uniformed school children sitting cross-legged on the floor blocked their way, but the teacher obligingly opened up a pathway through, like Moses parting the waves. His eyes rested briefly on Josie and flicked back to his charges. Haneda airport on a Monday morning was not a place where people took much notice of how you looked, even if you were, like Josie, a tall skinny foreigner with untidy hair and an unflattering scarf.

As they reached the other side Josie’s boss, Mr Kimura, detached himself from the yellow-labeled group and came to meet them. His Haiku Country Tours tie hung limply around his thin neck and his long face looked even more lugubrious than usual, as though he’d rather be safely at his desk than about to set off on a haiku adventure.

‘Mr Ueda,’ he said to Ken. ‘Thank you for picking Miss Clark up and ensuring she got here on time.’ He glanced severely at Josie. ‘I know she does struggle with timekeeping sometimes.’

Josie bristled but restrained herself from replying. She’d had to set her alarm for four thirty in order to meet Ken at Tokyo station by half past six. Why couldn’t they have got a flight at a more sensible time? It was only an hour and a half to Matsuyama – not exactly a trek to the Arctic.

‘Think nothing of it,’ said Ken. ‘We’re both really looking forward to the trip. And the haiku, of course.’

‘Fortunately you’re not the last to arrive,’ said Mr Kimura, mollified by Ken’s show of enthusiasm. ‘Mr Ando has just texted to say he and his wife will arrive just before take-off. But the rest of the Ando Investments party are here. You know Hina, of course.’ He turned to the woman with the clipboard who had been hovering behind him.

‘Yes,’ said Ken. ‘We’ve been liaising over the tour arrangements.’

‘This is Josie Clark,’ said Mr Kimura to Hina. ‘She works in Corporate Support with me and this is her first experience of haiku writing. But I’m sure she will turn out to be very talented, despite not being Japanese.’

Hina turned to Ken with a worried expression.

‘Don’t worry, Josie speaks Japanese,’ he said.

Looking relieved, Hina bowed, smiled and handed Josie a large pack of papers in a folder with a picture of Matsuyama castle on the front.

‘This is your tour pack. It has a full itinerary, a list of the hotels we’ll be staying in, a participants

list and a short guide to each of the places we'll be visiting. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to ask. I'll be travelling with you the whole way and I'll be only too happy to help with any problems.'

If only she could write my haiku for me, Josie thought. That would help with my biggest problem.

'Today and tomorrow we're in Matsuyama,' Hina went on. 'The bus takes us to Kochi on Wednesday. We have Thursday in Kochi and fly back to Tokyo in the evening. It's all in the pack. Please relax and enjoy the tour.'

'Thank you,' said Josie, trying to sound wide awake and interested. 'Have we got time to get a coffee before we board? I really need some caffeine.'

Hina checked her watch.

'We can't board until Mr and Mrs Ando get here,' she said, 'so I don't see why not.'

'How about you?' Josie said to Ken.

'I'd love a coffee, but let's just say hello to Eriko and Mr Mori first.'

'They're the Ando Investments people, right?'

'Yes. The woman standing next to the baggage counter is Eriko Ono. She's Mr Ando's assistant. The man is Mr Mori – I don't know him. I think he works in finance or something.'

Josie looked curiously at the pair, a young woman with a pile of papers and a distracted air, and an older man about a head shorter than her. Though they both worked for the same company and were about to go on the same tour, they seemed curiously unconnected, like two strangers who just happened to find themselves in the same check-in queue. They stood a little apart from each other; Eriko had an open folder in her hand and was ticking off some sort of list, while Mr Mori twitched and fiddled with his luggage tag as his eyes darted around, taking in everything that was going on.

Eriko looked up as though surprised when Ken approached, though Josie was sure she had been covertly studying them out of the corner of her eye. She smiled and bowed to Josie when Ken introduced them, but the smile quickly vanished. Josie got the impression she was worried about something. Maybe she didn't want to go on a haiku-writing tour any more than Josie did and had been dragooned into it by her boss just as Josie had by hers. Eriko didn't seem like the poetry-writing type, though Josie wasn't actually sure what the poetry-writing type looked like – thin and ascetic maybe, whereas Eriko looked like she enjoyed her food.

Mr Mori didn't look the poetic type either. He was thin alright, but his restlessness was unsettling and his eagerness to be introduced was faintly repellent. He hung back with exaggerated humility at first, but when Eriko's eyes returned to her papers he stepped forward, bowed, and bared his teeth in an ingratiating smile.

'Pleased to meet you, Miss Clark,' he said, in the kind of old hissing Tokyo accent that was used in thirties movies by sinister oriental villains. You didn't hear it much nowadays, though the woman who ran Josie's local noodle restaurant had it too, making her hard for Josie to understand. 'It's a great privilege for me to be permitted to take part in this tour with such interesting people. I hope that you will be able to spare a little of your valuable time for me and permit me to ask you about English life.'

'Of course,' said Josie, deciding to give Mr Mori a wide berth.

'We're just going to grab a coffee before check-in,' said Ken. 'Do you want to join us?'

'I'd love a coffee,' Eriko said. 'But I need to wait for Mr Ando. You go ahead.'

'Please, go and have your coffee. I wouldn't presume to intrude,' said Mr Mori, twisting his body in a parody of humbleness.

'Thank goodness they didn't come with us,' said Josie as she and Ken settled in the far corner of Starbucks with a couple of caramel macchiatos. 'I don't think I could have coped with being sociable at this hour. Why on earth do you think they've come on the tour? Neither of them looks like a haiku fan to me.'

'It's not supposed to be for haiku fans,' said Ken. 'The idea is that, as Ando Investments are new clients, we should have a little getting-to-know-you trip. And as I've been transferred to Client Relations, I got stuck with organising it.'

‘So was it your bright idea to have a haiku tour?’

‘Of course not. Actually, it was Mr Ando’s idea.’

‘Mr Ando? It doesn’t fit with my image of him at all.’

‘You’ve never met him, have you?’ said Ken. ‘You wait. You’re in for a surprise.’

Josie drank her coffee, grateful for the warmth and the energising blast of caffeine hitting her veins. She felt blurry, as though she had jet lag, and she knew the dulling effect of lack of sleep would last all day. She hoped she wouldn’t have to talk to the Ando Investments people on the trip down. She fancied just curling up and sleeping her way to Matsuyama.

‘So why am I here?’ she said. ‘On the tour I mean. Was that Mr Ando’s idea too?’

‘As a matter of fact, it was. He heard we had an English girl on the staff and suggested to Mr Kimura that he bring you. I think his curiosity was piqued.’

‘I’ve never heard of a haiku tour before,’ said Josie. ‘What exactly are we going to do? I won’t really have to write haiku, will I?’

‘Of course you will. That’s the whole point. We all write haiku and then read them out to each other. Look at the itinerary.’

Josie opened the pack Hina had given her.

‘You’re right,’ she said. ‘There’s a haiku reading slot scheduled every evening after dinner.’

‘Exactly,’ said Ken. ‘I’m looking forward to it. I won a prize for haiku at school.’

‘It’s alright for you,’ said Josie. ‘I didn’t write any haiku at school. I wasn’t even any good at poetry – they called me the Catford McGonagall – and Japanese poetry is a closed book as far as I’m concerned.’

‘Catford McGonagall?’ said Ken, making McGonagall sound as though it had twice as many syllables. ‘What’s that?’

‘McGonagall was the worst poet in the world,’ said Josie. ‘Except for me. And Catford is in south London and is not exactly known as a hotbed of poetry. Couldn’t you write a few extra haiku and let me read them out as though I’d written them?’

‘You’ll be fine,’ said Ken.

‘No really, I can’t even remember whether it’s five-seven-five or five-five-seven.’

‘It’s seventeen syllables in three lines split five-seven-five,’ said Ken. ‘And it’s got to be about nature. That’s why we’re going on this trip, to get out into the countryside and commune with nature. Plus Matsuyama is the home of haiku.’

‘What does Noriko think about your going off on this trip?’ said Josie. Noriko was Ken’s fiancée.

‘She’s fine with it,’ said Ken. ‘She and her mother spend all their time planning the wedding, so I think she’ll be glad to have me out of the way so they can go and look at wedding dresses. And I’m quite glad to be out of it all too. All this fuss – I wish we could just go and sign the papers and get it over with.’

Josie looked at Ken thoughtfully. It could have been me, she thought. I went out with him before Noriko did. But then Dave turned up again, and Ken met Noriko. Otherwise... But things are better the way they are, even though Ken’s got cheekbones like Keanu Reeves. Cheekbones aren’t everything.

Back at the check-in counter they found Hina with some new arrivals, an older couple and a girl in her twenties, who seemed to be waiting for tickets. Then Mr Kimura hurriedly joined them and Josie realised this must be the Andos.

She’d had an image of Mr Ando firmly in her mind; one of those short, grim-faced businessmen who talk in gruff voices and ignore anyone of lower status to them. After all, he was head of a successful investment company with rocketing profits and a head office in fashionable Aoyama. But the real Mr Ando was nothing like that. He was average height, slim and stylish in a bespoke suit, with a mane of grey hair tumbling over his collar. Expressions chased each other across his face like clouds scudding across the sky and he moved like quicksilver, darting across to shake hands with Mr Kimura (who had been on the verge of bowing and seemed quite disconcerted) and giving Ken a friendly wave and nod. Then his eyes fell on Josie and a huge grin split his face.

‘This must be your English assistant, Miss Clack,’ he said, reaching out to grab Josie’s hand and

pump it up and down.

‘Clark,’ said Josie. ‘Not Clack. Josie Clark.’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Mr Ando. ‘I’m so glad you could come on this trip. I want to hear what you think of Matsuyama. Is this your first visit to Shikoku? I’m sure your haiku will be a revelation to us. That Western sensibility! Do you like T.S. Eliot? I so admire *The Waste Land*. Measured out my life with tea spoons, eh! Wonderful!’

‘Coffee spoons,’ said Josie. ‘He measured out his life with coffee spoons. And it was *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*.’

‘Exactly! I can see you and I will have plenty to talk about. You must tell me all about English poetry on the plane.’

He turned to the woman with him, who Josie guessed must be his wife, though she seemed an unlikely partner for quicksilver Mr Ando. She was solidly built and stood firmly planted on two legs as though it would take an earthquake to shift her. Her hair had been fashionably cut and styled in a failed attempt to lighten her square, sensible face. She bowed to Josie, a deep bow that suggested she thought Josie was higher status than she was, which was odd given their true relative positions. Once again Josie was reminded of the woman who ran the local noodle restaurant, who always bowed in just that way even if you’d only had a bowl of plain noodles.

‘Are the tickets sorted out?’ said Mr Ando, twisting round to see where Hina was.

‘Hina’s doing it now,’ said Mrs Ando. ‘Not to worry – I’m sure she’ll fix it.’ Her voice was low and comfortable, as though nothing could worry her.

Hina came hurrying over from the ticket counter.

‘No problem,’ she said. ‘I’ve arranged everything. I’ve got an extra plane ticket for your daughter and I’ve phoned ahead and warned the hotel to reserve an extra room.’

The girl with them held out her hand for the ticket. She had a spoiled, sulky face and didn’t thank Hina for her efforts. She was expensively dressed in the latest *Comme des Garçons* jeans and a Chanel jacket, and carried a Prada bag over her arm, which she held so the logo was visible. She stood in a posed way with her hips thrust forward, which she obviously thought made her look like a catwalk model.

‘Good,’ she said. ‘I’ll see you on the plane. I’ve got some shopping to do.’

She flounced off, leaving Josie open mouthed. Mr Ando caught her expression.

‘My daughter, Yuko,’ he said. ‘She decided to join us at the last minute. And why not eh? The more the merrier.’ He gave an uneasy laugh which turned into a cough as he seized his bag and strode off, only to be waylaid by Eriko who immediately produced her folder of papers and started asking him questions about them, checking things off with a biro as she went, while Mr Ando fidgeted. Mrs Ando stood watching them, until Mr Mori sidled up to her and began to talk to her about autumn in Matsuyama in an unctuous voice and forced her to turn away.

How odd, thought Josie. I wonder why Mrs Ando is here when it’s supposed to be a business trip. And what on earth prompted Yuko to turn up out of the blue like this?

She didn’t have time to speculate any more as Hina gently herded them towards their departure gate, looking anxiously over her shoulder for Yuko, who appeared at the very last moment carrying a bag with the Haneda Airport logo, with the same sulky expression on her face that she’d had when she arrived.

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Much to Josie’s embarrassment, Mr Ando insisted that she sit next to him on the plane and proceeded to interrogate her about her life in Catford and what she was doing working for AZT Insurance in Tokyo instead of marrying a nice English boy and settling down. Josie explained as best she could about working as a teaching assistant in Sapporo, learning Japanese and deciding to stay on when her teaching contract ended, but drew the line at telling Mr Ando about Dave, her English boyfriend, who now worked in Australia. She could feel Eriko, sitting in the row behind them, poised to waylay Mr Ando with another pile of papers, biro at the ready.

In Matsuyama, where they were met by a shiny blue and yellow minibus with *Haiku Country Tours Matsuyama* written on the side, it looked like she'd got her chance. Mr Ando got on the bus first and sat in the front seat. Eriko hurried on behind him and tried to claim the seat next to him, but Mrs Ando elbowed her out of the way and Eriko went and sat at the back, looking daggers at Mr Mori when he seemed inclined to join her. She waved to Josie when she got on and patted the seat next to her invitingly, forcing Mr Mori to look elsewhere, which was presumably the idea.

'Is this your first trip to Matsuyama?' Eriko said, and when Josie nodded said, 'Me too. I'm really looking forward to it. They say the yuzu ice cream is fantastic. Only I need to be careful how much I eat – I've only got to look at ice cream and I pile on the pounds.'

Eriko didn't look like she had much of a weight problem – her body was firm and her arms well-muscled. She saw Josie looking and laughed.

'I'm a real gym-bunny,' she said. 'But if I stop for a moment, I'm in trouble. I like to eat, that's my problem. You're nice and slim, though. How do you do it?'

'Genetics,' said Josie. 'All my family are tall and thin.'

'Oh, I thought you must be a runner.'

'No way,' said Josie. 'Though I do a fair bit of walking.'

'There'll be plenty of walking in Matsuyama. We've timed it just right for the autumn leaves. Look.'

Josie looked out the window. They were driving along a winding country road through the mountains and the woods on either side were filled with maple trees, whose leaves ranged in colour from pale lemon yellow through gold and bronze to deep crimson. Although it was November, the weather was still as warm as an English summer and the sun glinted through the trees and turned the colours to fire. Josie didn't have much experience of the Japanese countryside – she was a big city girl, happy to exchange the crowds of London for the crowds of Tokyo – but now she began to wonder why she didn't get out of Tokyo more often. The occasional trip up to Hakone to visit the hot springs hardly counted.

The view outside the window gradually changed to a vista of ugly grey buildings, just like every other Japanese town Josie had ever seen. But then they turned a corner, slowed as the bus climbed a hill, and Ken, who was sitting in the seat in front, turned round and gestured out the window.

'Look,' he said. 'It's the Dogo hot spring.'

Josie looked where he was pointing to see a magical old building of dark wood with curved slate roofs piled on top of each other like turtles mating. At the corners were fantastical carved creatures and the apex of each roof was crowned with a heraldic carving. On either side of the entrance stood two ancient stone lanterns.

'It's amazing,' she said. 'But why do I have the feeling I've seen it before?'

'The film, of course,' said Ken. 'It was the model for the bath house of the gods in Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away*.'

Something clicked in Josie's head and she looked at the building again. Now she saw it overlaid with the scenes from the film, as the little girl, Sen, raced around the complexities of the bath house's stairs and corridors trying to rescue her parents from a future as a pair of pigs.

There was a crowd of tourists standing in front of the building pointing and taking photos, then lining up to buy entry tickets from a little wooden hatch in the door.

'Can we go in?' she said to Ken.

'Of course. We'll go down after dinner and bathe in the hot spring. We've got some free time then.'

At the top of the hill the coach turned into the forecourt of a white-walled building with a glass portico swooping across the front. Above the portico were big silver letters spelling out *Dogo Resort Hotel*. Everyone stretched and lined up to get off the bus while uniformed porters unloaded their bags.

The hotel foyer was cool and quiet, with a mural of a traditional Japanese scene of court ladies and gentlemen on a bridge over a flowing stream painted on the one wall. In the centre of the room a little fountain tinkled pleasantly. There was an air of peace and calm, quite unlike the hustle and

bustle of Tokyo.

'Please register at the desk,' said Hina, handing out registration cards. 'When you've checked in and found your rooms please assemble back here for our trip to the Ishite temple, which I hope will give you plenty of inspiration for our first day's haiku.'

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Josie found the trip to the Ishite temple something of a trial. Partly because Hina insisted on telling them all about its history and status as an important cultural property and a stop on the pilgrimage road, but mainly because it was her turn to fall victim to Mr Mori's insatiable questions. Once again she found herself going through the Catford-Sapporo-Tokyo story until she was paralysed with boredom. She tried to turn the tables but Mr Mori was reluctant to talk about himself; she learned only that he was a Tokyo native, which she'd already guessed from his accent, and that he'd joined the haiku tour at the last minute as a substitute for the Chief Accountant who was ill.

'It's a privilege for me to be here,' he said. 'I would be grateful for your goodwill.' He bowed low as he spoke and for a odd moment Josie felt sorry for him. He really did seem to feel that he was too humble to be in such an august group. She wondered what he did at Ando Investments and how well he knew Mr Ando. Mr Ando had greeted him with a hearty handshake at the airport, but then Mr Ando seemed to get along with everybody.

But she had had enough of Mr Mori for one day, so when Hina said there was a wonderful view from further up the hill, she took the opportunity to hurry on ahead and leave him behind. As she climbed she saw a thrilling sight – a hawk soared high overhead, hunting its prey on long lazy wings. The whole party stopped to watch it until it flew out of sight.

As they started the climb, Yuko put a hand to her head as if in pain and turned Hina.

'I've got such a headache,' she said. 'I can't bear to walk around in the sun any longer. I'm going back to the hotel. Don't worry about me – I'll pick up a taxi back.'

She hurried away before Hina had a chance to say anything. The rest of the party were admiring the view and didn't notice, but Josie saw Eriko looking at Yuko's retreating back with dislike. Ooh, Josie thought. No love lost there. I wonder what Eriko's got against Yuko. And if the feeling is mutual.

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When the group assembled after dinner for the haiku reading Josie could feel the butterflies in her stomach. The room was plain, just a wooden table surrounded by chairs and a side table with a green tea dispenser on it. The rest of the group were already assembled so Josie quickly helped herself to green tea to calm her nerves and sat down.

'Welcome to the first haiku-reading session of our tour,' said Hina. 'I'm sure we're all keen to hear what people have to share with us. Can I suggest that Mr Ando, as the moving force behind the tour, read the first haiku?'

Mr Ando looked pleased. He shuffled some papers in front of him, clearly deciding which of the many haiku he'd produced was worthy to launch the proceedings. Josie felt intimidated – it was all she could do to write one.

Mr Ando cleared his throat.

'*In the autumn haze, A starling's dry call startles, The distant pilgrims,*' he said. There was an appreciative pause and then a round of light clapping. He turned to Mr Kimura.

'Perhaps you would like to follow,' he said.

'I hesitate to follow such a masterly work,' said Mr Kimura, 'but if you insist.'

He opened the notebook that lay on the table in front of him and read, '*Temple bells ring out, Scent of incense fills the air, Golden autumn day.*'

Another polite patter of applause. Who would be next? Josie tried to shrink away out of sight, but since she was sitting next to Mr Mori, who was a good head shorter than she was, that was

difficult.

‘How about you, Eriko?’ said Mr Kimura.

Eriko opened her notebook and, looking straight at Mr Ando, read, ‘*Hawk high in the sky, But when clear skies turn to storms, Harried by the wind.*’

Mr Ando’s reaction to this struck Josie as extraordinary. He shifted in his seat, almost rising as if to leave, but then thought better of it and sank back down again. He smiled weakly and stared down at the bare table.

‘Shall I go next?’ said Ken, who had also noted Mr Ando’s discomfiture.

‘*Gold and russet leaves, Rustled by the passing breeze, Whispering of autumn,*’ he read, and once again a polite smatter of applause went up.

Hina turned to Mrs Ando with an encouraging smile. Mrs Ando looked straight at Eriko and said, ‘*Hawk high in the sky, Soaring in the evening breeze, Fears no changing wind.*’

It sounded like a response, a rebuke even, to Eriko. Josie looked curiously from one to the other, but both were impassive. Only Mr Ando reacted, getting out his handkerchief and mopping his brow, though the room was on the chilly side. He looked down the table at Mr Mori, with something approaching pleading in his eyes. Mr Mori looked back at him and said softly: ‘*Hawk high in the sky, Fleeing doves see hidden clouds, Fear the coming storm.*’

Mr Ando got up and abruptly strode from the room.

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