

Chapter 19

"FROM JAPAN WITH LOVE"

< Letters Written by Walnut in 1972 to Jim in Chicago >



As I said in Chapter 18, I returned to my parents' home in Tokyo in March, 1972, for the first time since I met Jim in Chicago in 1969. Jim followed me in April. He stayed at my parents' house for about 2 weeks, and returned to the U.S. at the end of April.

My father was gravely ill, and I stayed with my family for several months until the end of August. Between Jim's departure for Chicago in April and my father's death at age 72 in mid-August that year, I wrote to Jim frequently.

It was not my intention, initially, to include those ancient love letters in this Walnut's "life in America" story. However, as I have completed 18 chapters of my narrative, it occurred to me, somewhat belatedly, that they might not be irrelevant. Accordingly, here's Chapter 19 - "From Japan with Love," with no Japanese translations.



April 25, 1972

Dear Jim:

Remember the iris garden where we strolled? This is how it would look in June. (*Walnut's note: This was written on a postcard, showing the iris in full bloom in the well-known garden in Tokyo*) So happy to hear your voice yesterday. How's everything? And work? I'm glad to know that you are back to all the comforts you are used to. Slow down and rest as much as possible. I've been sick with a slight cold. Should be O.K. soon. Received your card from S.F. I miss you, too!

Love always,
Ryoko

April 27, 1972

Dear Jim:

After you left, the weather continued to be bad, little or no sunshine every day, and I continue to have my cold. I know that if I stay in bed a whole day, I'll be all right, but

somehow or other, I read books, review my French, and then go about doing the chores. I become weak again. I should have written you sooner. I'm mad at myself to think that at this writing, you haven't yet received my postcard. I hope it will reach you by Saturday, at the latest.

The day you left, when my brother and I returned from the airport, my father showed surprise to see me back. He thought I had gone with you. Since then, he asks me every now and then, "What time is your flight?" We all had decided not to tell him anything. I'm sorry and ashamed that you saw my father like that. Forgive me, Jim, for mentioning my father here. I won't do this again.

Last night, I dreamed. We were again on a tour bus with many people. I was late again and ran to the bus that was already starting. From the entrance of the bus, I looked inside, looking for you. There were so many people and I couldn't see you. They assured me that you were inside, but I couldn't see you....

I think of Chicago. I liked Chicago in all seasons, but if I were to choose the best season, that's the spring through early summer. The tender green of the leaves of the trees and lilacs and all, alongside the beautiful South Shore Drive, to and from your Mother's. The grounds are covered with more green every day, and remember those millions of tiny, fluffy dandelions we saw from the IC train? And, of course, the ever magnificent Lake Michigan! How I miss all those things, and above all, you!

I forgot to write down your Mother's new address. Please send it to me.

As ever,
Ryoko

May 3, 1972

Dear Jim:

I received a letter from your Mother. She says the way we shopped in Tokyo was wise. It was nice of her to write to me, but at the end of her letter, she wrote: "We all enjoyed meeting and knowing you," and I felt a sudden hole in my stomach. Good heavens, doesn't it sound as if she does not expect to see me again!? If I sound ridiculous, just disregard my remarks. Being thousands of miles away from you, however, my heart fluctuates constantly between hopes and uncertainty. When I'm uncertain, I get weak, and I tell myself that Jim-san does not like me weak. So, I try to become strong, again.

My mother has just called from downstairs telling me that the bath is ready. Oh, she was so sorry for you about that wooden-bucket bathtub!

I'm back at my desk. I think of you all the time. I'm often tempted to get on an airplane, and arrive in Chicago one sunny afternoon and call you from O'Hare Airport.

My cold is all gone. Are you all right now? Indeed, we both seem to get sick mutually sympathetically. (Isn't this a nice expression?) Take good care of yourself, Jim-san. Be out in the sun whenever you can. Oh, how I wish I could walk with you to our Lincoln Park Zoo! Let me at least dream about it tonight.

Good night.

< *I continue to write the following morning, as follows:* >

Such a bright and cheerful card from you! It sure does make me feel so good, and wow! The winning pitcher and also three hits out of four!! I'm so proud.

It's so nice to be remembered by your friends, too. Please say hello to them all: Turk, Ron, Bob, Crowley, Johnnie, and Murph, and also to Patsy, Maureen, Rebecca, and Judy.

Today, I'm going to Shibuya to buy some pretty cards to be sent to your Mother, Lois, and Mary Jo.

Lots of love,
Ryoko

May 6, 1972

Dear Jim,

Received your another 'Kuma' card today. (*Walnut's note: 'kuma' is 'teddy bear' in Japanese.*) Thank you so much. I have also received the statement for the past two months from the Chicago-Tokyo Bank. Thank you again for your trouble.

Incidentally, I owe your Mother some money for the couch. What do you think I should do? Maybe you could send me my check and let me know the amount I owe her. I'll write the check and send it to her. Please let me know the best way. (Actually, though, I'd rather go to Chicago sooner, and hand her my check.)

I was tempted to have pictures made myself and send them to you, but you underlined "immediately," so I'm enclosing the two slides in this. I am also mailing a letter to your Mother today.

Have a nice weekend!

Love and xxxxxx,
Ryoko

May 22, 1972

Dear Jim:

My brother came upstairs this morning to wake me up with your 'squirrel' card. Your 'lion' card came the day before yesterday. Thank you very much for all those photos, too. My mother, sister, and brother all enjoyed looking at them.

Cousin Sato-chan and I processed, in his father's darkroom, the pictures he had taken on our trip. Remember the photo lab, sort of, in their house? I sent them to you yesterday, together with two slides that you had sent me. Sato-chan had some pictures of us in color, but none of them looked good; in fact they were awful, so I didn't ask him to give them to me.

My job is O.K. As I explained to you, when it comes to working as a steno-secretary, it's much easier and more comfortable for me to work here in Japan, for I get a great appreciation from whatever English-speaking people I work for. The lawyer I worked for last week was here to take depositions of some Japanese witnesses in a certain lawsuit, and he and the company people, whom he represented, took me to lunch every day. If I worked for Mr. W for ten years, he wouldn't do that, would he? (*Walnut's note: Mr. W is the lawyer in Chicago for whom I worked.*) Well, I don't mean that being taken to lunch is important. I mean, to feel that my work is being appreciated makes me feel good. Also, I get paid as well as in the U.S. I made 33,600 Yen for 24 hours last week.

But, my dearest Jim-san, I don't care. I don't care whether I feel comfortable or not. I don't care whether I make five times more money than in the U.S. I want to be with you and be in America, even if I am uncomfortable at work. Tokyo has its own exciting side as you have had a glimpse of it. Besides, living in my parents' house, I don't have to worry about anything. But, I much prefer to have small worries and inevitable lonely feelings now and then of the life abroad.

My father is fast approaching the final day. My mother, sister, and brother all think he will not live through the rainy season. I don't know. Sometimes, I wish that he dies soon. Oh, it's beyond my comprehension that my father became like that.

Shiba-chan assured me again that I don't have to bother about those boxes. So, if you really don't want to go, don't. Besides, you won't be able to recognize my boxes among hers. *(Walnut's note: Upon leaving Chicago to come home, I terminated my apartment lease, and I left my belongings with a Japanese friend of mine, Shiba-chan. I must have written her from Tokyo, saying that she could transfer the boxes containing my belongings to Jim's apartment.)*

I like all the pictures you sent me, too. So does my family. They think you are so cute. My friends to whom I showed them, all think you are cute, too.

Yesterday, I watched a football game on TV between Americans and a Japanese college team, and Japan won 22-0!! There are many, many sport events every day now. Baseball, 'sumo,' volley ball, golf, tennis, soccer, horse races, track and field, basketball, and ping pong. I wonder why there weren't any good sport events in April while you were here?

Will write you soon, again.

Lots of xxxx from Kuma and me, to Jim-san and his Kuma,

Ryoko

June 2, 1972

Dear Jim:

How are you doing?

Hope everything is all right and you are just busy.... I mean, I don't mean I hope you are busy, but I mean I hope the reason for your silence is that you are busy.... How was Indianapolis?

This week, I've been transcribing all those depositions which I attended as a quasi-court reporter. Well, those lawyers from California had all the proceedings taped and my transcribing is being done depending entirely on the tapes. Unfortunately, they used an open-reel tape-recorder, so Manpower had to have the whole tape dubbed into many cassettes to be fit into the Dictaphone from which I transcribed. When the two lawyers argue between the interrogations, they talk so fast that I had to go back on the tape every

ten words to catch every little word. It's going to be a voluminous transcript and I have a backache, arm-ache, shoulder-ache, etc.

My father has not been eating for many days. He is no more than skin and bone. Just after you left, we, at least I, thought he suddenly took leave of his senses. When you said you thought he sang a filthy song to you, I was in doubt at that time. But now, looking back, we all think that that was when he was just beginning to transform into a different person. I hated him for a while, for having become so weak in mind. He was no longer the father that I used to adore. I couldn't make myself nice and kind to him when I saw him crawl helplessly on the floor. When I heard him yell and scream for a little attention, I thought I could not forgive him for being like that. I could not accept that he was ill, mentally. But today, only after a few weeks, he is a very wreck of body and soul and oh, dear Jim, who but a demon could not have a deep pity at such a sight? We are all in anguish. For a while, we thought that maybe I shouldn't be here, because it seemed that my presence was tormenting him. You know, Jim, my family says that he was bound to become like that whether I came back or not. But, I have a feeling, and so does my family, to a certain extent, that my coming back prompted his mental deterioration. Yes, I could have spared him that, at least another two or three years, by not coming back this time.... So, as I said, my family, particularly, my onii-san (my brother), suggested that I go back to Chicago to you in order to put my father's mind at ease. Today, his illness has advanced to such an extent that he does not comprehend anything. My being here does not have any meaning to him. But now, I can't leave him like that. I have to see him to the end. I have to see his poor soul put in peace, finally. That may not be too far away.

Much love,
Ryoko

P.S.: Just as I was going out to mail this letter, I got your 'EXPRESS' letter. I showed off your chicken scratches to my sister. She thinks they are unusually beautifully written. I do, too.

I love you, too.

July 6, 1972

Dear Jim:

On the way to the Manpower office this morning, in the little window of a tobacconist's shop, I saw a pair of wooden Kuma sitting on their butts, and they were so tiny (about an inch and half high) and so much looked like "Jim Kuma" and "Ryoko Kuma" in your card, and they

were so absolutely cute that I went back at lunch time to buy them. Alas! They were not for sale. The shop woman told me that they came from Hokkaido. Rather hard to find in Tokyo. Oh, I couldn't stand it! All morning, I was thinking I'd send you the smaller one, "Ryoko Kuma," and I'd keep the larger one, "Jim Kuma!" Wouldn't that be fun? Now that I couldn't get them, I'm more anxious to receive another of your Kuma cards. Gosho, gosho.

I am now working in an American-Japanese joint-venture company whose American parent company is located at 135 South La Salle Street, Chicago, and Mr. Rex Coleman, lawyer from Baker and McKenzie for whom Ai Caine (*Walnut's note: Ai was my Japanese colleague at Baker & McKenzie*) worked, drafted the joint venture agreement, and his name appears among the directors of this newly-started company. Isn't this a funny coincidence? The name of the company in Chicago is 'Liquid Carbonic Corporation,' and the Japanese counterpart's name is Mitsui Tōatsu.

I am so sleepy now. Please write to me soon. My grey Kuma really wants to see you. Maybe it's a good idea to write to you when I'm sleepy like this, 'cause I cannot think how I should whine.

Bye for now, dearest Jim. I love you so much.

Ryoko

July 18, 1972

Dear Jim:

All day Sunday, I thought about you and at night I waited for your telephone call, while watching a movie with my brother. I watched that movie because Richard Harris co-starred with Charlton Heston in it, and my brother told me Richard Harris (one of his favorite American actors) is a very good actor who resembles Jim-san. I agreed that he was a good actor and liked him too, but I declared that Jim-san has warmer eyes and is much better looking, and Onii-san laughed (as usual, whenever I brag about you), but he agreed with me. Then he said, as usual, "Just pick up the phone and call him, penny-pinching Ryoko!"

I waited for your phone-call and finally went to bed after midnight. Then, you were in my dreams all night through, and when I woke up, I felt so dispirited that I was moping in bed. And, then, I heard my brother call me, "It's Jim, Ryoko. Hayaku!" Oh, Jim-san, how you always cheer me up so! How silly I was to have felt so dispirited! Then, I went to work and found your cute, cute 'panda' card there. Yes, yes, all those pandae are so warmly received by me as those cute Kumae from you in the past (aren't they all relatives?).

Please don't work so hard. I'm worried. How I wish to be with you and see you slow down now and then, and eat a lot of food.

My brother (how he loves you!) wants to buy you something nice. Please send my love to Lois, Mary Jo, and their families.

My greatest love to Jim-san, always,

Ryoko

July 27, 1972

Dear Jim:

Yesterday and the day before yesterday, I worked for a Far-East Regional Manager of Montgomery Ward of Chicago! He's flying back to Chicago today, so that was a very short assignment. He said he'd like to have my services again when he comes back to Japan. I'm off today.

I worked for that man at Liquid Carbonic for two weeks altogether, and then I asked Manpower to send a replacement. I think I told you that he was from Chicago, but that wasn't correct. He was at their office in Lima, Peru for many years, and just before being transferred to Tokyo, he was sent to Chicago for two to three weeks, attending an intensive Japanese language class at Berlitz. He was actually an Englishman, but strangely, he had no English accent.

Jim, I know you don't like me to speak ill of others, but that man was the worst kind I've ever met. Attorney. W was amiable compared with him. He was contemptuous of all his Japanese staff, just because they did not speak proper English, but he shamelessly appropriated the company money for his own use. The brazen-faced slyness was unbearable. The Mitsui-Tōatsu people and I all went out of our way in helping him and doing services of a personal nature, and none of us ever heard him say "thank you." That he was discontent with his assignment in Japan was apparent. He wrote to a Chicago executive, saying "... this certainly ages me more quickly...", venting his spite on all Japanese staff. (I should know this for I took his dictation and typed that letter!) He said he'd like to recommend me to Liquid Carbonic, Chicago. He wanted me to remain in his service until Mr. Winchell, Executive Vice President of the Chicago operation, comes here in late August. But, Jim, I could not wait till then, being face to face every day with that spite and unreasonable contempt toward

Japanese and his dishonest conduct. Please don't think that I am throwing away a good chance of employment back in Chicago because of my usual immaturity.

In the meantime, Mr. Ogata, Executive Managing Director of Mitsui-Tōatsu and a very respectable man, who is higher in rank than this Englishman, told me to call him before going back to Chicago if I should need any reference. He said he would like to refer me to an American professor in Boston (who is well-versed in Japanese literature), so that he (the professor) might refer me to someone in Chicago who is in a cultural or literary field. I'm not sure about this, though. If it's not a direct reference, it must be less effective, and besides, I don't want to be in a cultural or literary field.

Mr. Ogata also would recommend me to Liquid Carbonic of Chicago, if I want to be employed by it. But I know that Liquid Carbonic Chicago has no direct business with Japan, and it has no particular interest in, or need for, a Japanese-speaking secretary. Besides, I must avoid accepting Mr. Ogata's recommendation, work there for a while, then get disillusioned and quit. Oh, I also worked for a man from Chicago. Mr. Salisbury of Victor Comptometer was here in connection with certain managerial dispute in its Japanese counterpart company, and I worked for him as his interpreter. He told me to be sure to call him in Chicago so that he might help me relocate. What I've just said about accepting Mr. Ogata's recommendation applies here, also. Oh, Jim-san, this job matter is really a problem of my living in Chicago. I know I cannot afford to work on a temporary basis in Chicago.

In the distant future, maybe I'll translate various Japanese writings into English, and make money that way. There are millions of classic and modern novels; romance, adventure, science fiction, detective stories, historical novels, essays, children's stories, and what not, in Japanese. Practically none of them has been translated into English and other European languages. I often thought it was a shame that such good writings remain unknown to other people of the world. We have hundreds of translators from English and other languages into Japanese, but not vice versa. I really want to do this in the future, staying at home (I'll have to buy a typewriter of my own), keeping the house nice, and cooking oishii dinner for Jim-san.

I am going to Shibuya now to mail this from the bigger post office (much faster), and then buy little things I want to bring to Chicago. From tomorrow on, I am assigned to Time-Life. I hope you are not keeping yourself too busy. I can't wait to see you.

Yours as ever,
Ryoko

August 8, 1972

Dear Jim:

I've just got an air ticket. I spent too much time shopping yesterday, and I was unable to buy the ticket. I couldn't write to you, either. I am at a very crowded Chinese restaurant on Ginza Street. So, this is a very quick note. Here's my flight schedule:

< August 19, 1972 >

Lv. Tokyo 16:00
Ar. S.F. 09:10 JAL #002

Lv. S.F. 11:00
Ar. Chicago 16:35 AA #182

I wonder if they are the same flights as the ones you took.

I will mail this right away. I wanted to be the first one to mail a letter to your new address.

Take care. We'll see each other oh, so soon! I send you thousands of kisses and hugs.

P.S.: Still cannot decide whether I should buy a nice pair of glasses here. Maybe I will.

Much love,
Ryoko

August 15, 1972

Dearest Jim:

My father passed away this afternoon. I was home and I held his poor head till the last moment. He now looks so peaceful and kind and good-looking, just as I, as a young girl, used to think him to be. I wish I had been nicer to him while you were here and just after you left. This thought will torment me the rest of my life.

I don't think I can fly on Saturday. I will stay with my mother at least a week. I miss you very much. I miss you just so very much. I will write you again. Take care of yourself.

Love,
Ryoko

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