

第8章

ジム登場

さていよいよジムとの出会いです。

その運命の夕方、ダイアンもテリーも不在で、私は昼間のユライア・ヒープとのやり取りを思い出して意気消沈、もう何度か行ってる、ステート・ストリートとディヴィジョン・ストリートの角のレストランにしょんぼり入り、一人テーブルにつくと、窓の外の通りからめざとく私を見つけて、ジョージ爺さんが入ってきました。テーブルの向かい側に坐り込んで、おそらく、

「そのペンドルトン事務所は辞めたほうがいいね。この前言った、ジャパニーズ弁護士事務所はどうなったんだね。もう一度電話してみたら、、、」

「ええ、でもあんまり強引に見えてもね」

などと半浮浪人とだけれど、ちゃんと話の筋道が立つ、んな会話をしていたと思います。

急にドアが開いて、非常に颯爽たるアメリカ青年が二人、風のように入ってきて、私のすぐ隣のテーブルに付き、すぐ片方が私に話し掛けてきました。この時、私に話し掛けてこなかった、私など眼中に無いという顔をしてたほうがジムです。話し掛けてきたほうは、ジムの学友クリス・ジョンソン、二人は首府ワシントンにある

Chapter 8

Enter Jim

On the day that destiny took a hand, Diane was flying, and Terry was not home. In the early evening, I was feeling quite low, mulling over my discordant dealings with Uriah Heep during the day. I was walking the now familiar streets of Oak and Rush near the YWCA, and I walked toward the restaurant called the "Golden Nugget," with which I was similarly familiar, at the corner of State and Division Streets. As I sat at a table, feeling blue, the semi-loafer George saw me through the window. He came in and sat across from me. We exchanged some dialogue, not necessarily without rhyme or reason, even though I was conversing with a semi-loafer, as follows:

"If I were you, I would quit that Pendleton law firm. Whatever happened to the Japanese law firm that you were talking about the other day? Why don't you call the Japanese lawyer you met once more?"

I responded, "Well, I don't want to look too pushy, you know."

Suddenly, the door of the restaurant opened, and two smart looking young American men briskly walked in. They sat at the table next to mine, and one of them struck up a conversation with me immediately. The other one who did not talk to me, and actually totally ignored me, was Jim. The one who was friendly was Chris Johnson. They went to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. together. Chris was in Chicago that day (it was a

ジョージタウン大学の同窓で、クリスはその日（金曜日でした）クリーブランドの勤務先から所用でシカゴを訪ねており、シカゴ出身の旧友ジムと、これからその辺のバーへ行く前に腹ごしらえだと、そのレストランに入ってきたのです。

私が前のアメリカ滞在の時、フレドニアの大学で日本語を教えたこと、フランス人の女の子たちとグレイハウンド・バスでアメリカ横断旅行をしたこと、その時ワシントンではジョージタウン大学のすぐ横手の家に泊まり、大学生たちとも喋った、なんてことを話すと、二人の青年は、断然興味を示して、質問したりジョークを飛ばしたりして、私の話を熱心に聴いてくれました。私は、快活きわまりなく、いかにも打ち解けて、磊落で、その上ハンサムな二人と喋ってることで意気高揚、ユライア・ヒープもペンドルトン弁護士事務所もいまや雲散霧消！かわいそうに、ジョージ爺さんは、もうだいぶ前に

「よっしゃ、今夜はおまえは楽しくやってけるな。これでよかった」と言って姿を消していました。

そこへ今度はやはりオフィス帰りで、これから皆で飲みに行こうといった感じの、賑々しい女性グループ5・6人が入ってきて、私たちのテーブル（クリスとジムは、さっさと私のテーブルに移ってきてた）の隣に陣取ったかと思うと、もういかにも好青年の二人に向かってガヤガヤと喋りだし、こっちもまた意気投合。結局翌土曜日に、その女性群の一番大将らしく見えた一人が、彼女のアパートでパーティをやることになっていて、それに「あなた達も、あなた達の新しいジャパニーズ・フレンドもいらっしやいよ」ということになったのです。

Friday) on business from Cleveland, and he just joined his old college chum Jim, who was a local boy. They had just decided to have a light meal before going back to a tavern to join other friends.

I told them about my earlier trip to the U.S., how I taught Japanese at Fredonia College, and how I took a cross-America trip on the Greyhound bus with my European friends. I told them that in Washington, D.C. we stayed with a family who lived next to the Georgetown campus, and that we talked to some of the Georgetown students who were invited by that family to help entertain us foreign students. They listened to my story with interest. They asked me questions; they threw in jokes quite readily. I was pretty happy to have such well-mannered, bubbly and, I might add, good-looking, young American men as my listeners. I wasn't feeling blue anymore. No more Uriah! No more Pendleton! Poor George had disappeared, saying "Well, you'll be all right tonight. Have a good time." Jim and Chris moved to my table.

While we were talking, a group of five or six noisy young women came into the restaurant, and took a table next to ours. As soon as they sat down, they started to talk to my handsome companions. They hit it off, immediately.

After a while, one of the girls, who appeared to be the leader of the group, said that she was having a party at her apartment the following day.

She said, "Why don't you all come and join us?"

私は、おそらくオギリでその招待に付け足してもらった、と確信した筈で(あの人たちはこのハンサムな二人がお目当てなんだから)、たぶん躊躇したにちがいありません。気が付くと、クリス・ジョンソンが、紙ナプキンに何かさっと殴り書きして、私に渡すのです。見ると

「明日のパーティに、僕はあなたをお誘いします。ノーというべからず。このメモ書きの意味が分からぬふりするべからず」と書いてある。

私はトタンに嬉しくなった。おとぎの国の王子様に誘われた、羊飼いの小娘よりも弾んだ気持ちになった。こんなメモ書きをそっと渡すなんて、なんて洒落てるんでしょう。しかもそのあと、

「たぶんこの二人はこの陽気な女性たちと一緒に引っっちゃうんだろうな」という我が懸念も的外れで、彼女たちは

「じゃ明日よー、間違いなく来てねー」

と、賑やかに出て行ってしまったのに、二人の王子様は腰をあげる気配はまったくなく、冗談を投げ交わし続け、外の街路が薄暗くなる頃やっと立ち上がって、数ブロック先のYWCAの玄関まで、私を送ってくれたのでした。

これが出会いです。

しかしジムは、実際はYWCAまで来てくれたわけではなく、途中の“Depot”というバーに

「じゃあ、明日ね！」

と言ってサッと入ってしまい、クリス一人が玄関

I'm sure I hesitated to accept this invitation, for I knew that this leader and the rest of the girls all wanted to invite only Jim and Chris, but they couldn't say that I was not included. I saw Chris Johnson scribble something on a paper napkin. He handed it to me and said, "Please read it." The note said, "I invite you to come with me to the party tomorrow. Don't say 'No,' and don't pretend that you don't understand."

Suddenly, I was unspeakably happy and elated. My heart was jumping higher than that of a shepherd damsel in a fairy tale, who received an invitation from the royal prince. Why, isn't this elegant and romantic to be handed a note like this? I was still apprehensive that these two handsome men would now leave with the cheerful girls, leaving me alone in the restaurant.

I was wrong. The girls left, waving their hands at us, each shouting, "Don't forget tomorrow!" or "Make sure you come!"

But, the two royal princes showed no sign of leaving. They continued to throw jokes, continually making me laugh. Only when the evening dusk started to fall on the noisy streets outside did they get up from the table and walked me back to the YWCA which was a few blocks away.

That's how I met Jim. Actually, though, it was only Chris who walked me all the way back to the YWCA because as three of us walked down the streets Jim stepped aside to go into the tavern called 'The Depot,' waving to me, "See you tomorrow!" Well, it was after all Chris Johnson who had

まで来てくれたのですが、事実上紙切れメモを私にくれて、パーティに誘ってくれたのはクリスですから、あの時は、ジムは私を送るいわれは、なかったのであります。

翌日のパーティは、アメリカに来て初めての、本当に楽しい集いでした。カナダでアランに連れられて行ったパーティなんか、それは大掛かりで豪勢だったけれど、特に楽しいとは思わなかった。結局パーティの面白さつまらなさなんて、誰と一緒に決まるのでしょうか。精彩欠くアランとじゃ、美味しいものを食べても、特に美味しくもないんだ。ジムとクリスは、見るだに活気溢れ、生き生きとした目を輝かせ、あとからあとから痛快な話を持ち出し、私は時のたつのも忘れ、YWCAの帰館制限時刻に遅れて帰り、フロント・デスクの係員から、文句を言われたのをよく覚えています。

そのパーティの時、長身で生真面目な顔のクリスが、優しく私の面倒を見てくれると、いかにも明るく軽妙な身のこなしで、ふたこと目には冗談を放つジムのほうは、女性群全部の人気の的で、こちらは、私のことは意に介しとらん、という風でした。ジムに話し掛けてもらいたいと望んだわけでもないのに、ジムが私を無視して、私の側にさえ来ない、ということ、なぜか私は意識していたと思います。

急に騒々しいレコード音楽が始まり、皆が踊り始めました。私は長いすの端に坐ってたことをよく覚えています。ジムがどこからともなく現れ、その長いすの肘にポンとお尻を乗せて、私の上にやや覆いかぶさるようにして

invited me to the party the following day, and Jim had no reason to take me home.

The next day, I went to the greatest party ever. I went to many American parties during my teaching days in Fredonia. I went to a grand party in the upscale suburbs of Toronto with Alan, but I didn't enjoy it at all. Whether you enjoy a party or not is determined by whom you are with, I believe. When you are with people such as lifeless Alan, even spectacularly laid out foods don't taste good at all. Jim and Chris were full of life. Their eyes forever sparkling, they would tell jokes back and forth. I completely forgot about the time. I was late returning to the YWCA. It was past the midnight curfew. I remember being reprimanded by the front desk personnel.

Chris Johnson was a serious type. He was very nice and attentive to me at all times during the party. Jim was easy-going and friendly to everyone. He bounced effortlessly from this group of people to the other. He was cool. He would flash a charming smile, and throw jokes with a twinkle in his eyes. All the girls liked him. He paid no attention to me. I don't think I was bothered by his not paying any attention to me, but I was aware somehow that he never came near me, much less talked to me.

All of a sudden, loud music started from the phonograph, and everyone started to dance. I remember sitting at the end of a large couch, watching the others dance. Jim appeared out of nowhere. He dropped himself lightly on the arm of the couch. He bent sideways over me, and whispered:

「僕と踊りませんか？」

と囁きました。私はダンスなんて、日本にいたときからしたことがありませんでした。第3章に出てくる、非精彩サラリーマン氏に誘われて、一度だけ渋谷あたりにあったダンスホールについてったことがありましたが、その時、氏と手を取り合って踊るのは、とても気が進まなくて、そこにズラッと並んで、客相手のプロのダンサーたちとじゃんじゃん踊ってくれと、彼氏に懇願したのです。

「恥ずかしくて、踊れません」と答えると、ジムは

「誰も居ないところでなら僕と踊れますか？」

私は、たぶん赤面していただろうと思いますが、

「イエス」と囁き返しました。

後年ジムは、あの時も私がノーと言ってたら、

「僕はリョウコに対する関心を失ってしまっただろう。イエスと囁かれたことが、いつまでも頭を離れなかった」

と言っています。

パーティが終わり帰宅する時も、ジムがまた運転手。YWCAの玄関口でジムは「サヨウラ！」と運転席から手を振っただけでしたが、クリスはドアのところまで来て、私のおでこにキスしたのだ。

そのあと、たぶん翌日に、クリス・ジョンソンはクリーブランドに帰り、私はせっかく出来た、いかにも好ましい二人のアメリカ人の友達と、これでもう会えないのかと、深く落胆して数日が

“Would you care to dance with me?”

I had never danced before in my life. The uninspiring salesman that I didn't marry (see Ch. 3) took me to a dance hall in Shibuya once, but I did not dance, leaving him to dance with the professionals who were abundant in the hall.

I responded to Jim:

“No. I'm too embarrassed to dance, for I don't know how.”

Jim then asked, “If we were alone, would you dance with me?”

I guess I blushed a little, but immediately whispered back, “Yes.”

Years later, Jim said that if I had said, “No,” or even hesitated to answer his second question, he would have lost interest in me, then and there.

On the way back to the YWCA, Jim was again the chauffeur. He waved goodbye to me from the car, but Chris walked me to the front door and then kissed me on the forehead.

I think Chris Johnson returned to Cleveland the following day. I was quite despondent, thinking that I would never see those wonderful American men again. A few days passed (or it could have been the following Saturday) when, out of the blue, Jim called:

“I'm at 'The Depot' near your YWCA with

過ぎたところへ、思いもかけぬジムからの電話、

「YWCAからすぐ近くの“Depot”に、友人たちと集まってますけど、出てきませんか？」

私は天にも上らん嬉しさ、口笛でも吹きたい気分でお洒落してジムを待ちました。

現れたジムは、ショーツに運動靴のいでたち、一旦はそのまま私を“Depot”に連れてってくれたのですが、集まってるジムの友人たちもみなショーツの気軽な服装、ドレスにハイヒールの私を気の毒がり、全員が、着替えてきたほうがいいと口々に言うので、結局私は部屋に戻って、ショート・パンツの軽装になって出直しました。

some of my friends. Would you like to come and join us?”

I felt I was in Seventh Heaven. I would have whistled if I knew how. I fixed my face and hair, put on my good clothes, and went down to the lobby. Jim showed up.

He was in shorts and sneakers. He took me to “The Depot.” All his friends were in extremely casual summer clothes, and they said, in unison, that I should go back and change clothes. Jim walked me back to the YWCA, and waited for me in the lobby while I changed into my own summer casuals. We then walked back to the tavern and rejoined his friends.

< End of Chapter 8 >