

DAY 1

TRIADS

CHAPTER 1

TOKYO, 2:36 P.M.

EIGHT people had already died by the time Akira Miura showed up at our door fearing for his life.

When the commotion broke out I'd been on a long-distance call to London trying to track down an original ink painting by Sengai, the renowned Japanese painter-monk of *Circle, Triangle, and Square* fame. The rumor had come out of the United Kingdom, so I was plying channels to nail down the potential gem for a client in San Francisco who would kill to get it, and kill *me* if I didn't.

People killed for a lot less. I learned this anew with each day spent at Brodie Security, the detective agency and personal protection firm established by my father in the Japanese capital more than forty years ago.

Had I been sitting in my antiques shop in San Francisco instead of behind my father's battered pine desk in Tokyo, I wouldn't have given the shouting match in the front office a second thought, but in Japan a loud altercation constituted a serious breach of decorum.

If not more.

Mari Kawasaki tapped on my door. "Brodie-san, I think you should get out here."

All of twenty-three but looking more like sixteen, Mari was the office tech whiz. When I came to town, she lent me a hand. We were a small operation and people wore multiple hats.

“Could I call you back later today?” I asked my London connection. “Something urgent has come up.”

He said certainly and I jotted down his schedule, bid a polite goodbye, and stepped out onto the main floor.

Mari pointed across the room to where three hardened Brodie Security ops had herded a fourth man against a wall. The man cast indignant glares at them, and when my people didn't wither and fall back, he pelted the trio with the exasperated sighs middle-management salarymen usually fling at underlings.

That didn't work either.

Mari rolled her eyes. “He charged in here demanding to speak with you and refused to explain himself or wait at reception.”

When the unexpected reared up at Brodie Security, containment came before all else. Our work brought us into contact with every manner of fringe character. Old-timers still talk about the right-wing lunatic who sprang from the elevator with short sword drawn and put two of the staff in the hospital.

“Calm down,” one of the three men cooed. “If you would just return to the reception area . . .”

The salaryman was irate. “But it's urgent. My father is a sick man. Can't you see that?” He saw me and yelled across the expanse in Japanese, “Are you Jim Brodie?”

Since I was the only Caucasian in a sea of Asian faces, it wasn't a brilliant deduction. Our unannounced guest was handsome in the unassuming way Japanese men can be. He was in his fifties and sheathed in the requisite business suit—dark blue in his case—with a white dress shirt and a perfectly knotted red silk tie. The tie had set him back some. What looked like platinum cuff links sparkled at his wrists. His attire was flawless, and under normal circumstances he'd be considered nonthreatening. But his expression was frayed, as if he were unraveling from the inside.

“That's me,” I said in his native language.

He drew himself up. His eyes grew watery. “Kindly allow my father to intrude. He is not well.”

All eyes shifted toward the paternal figure waiting patiently at Reception. He had a full crown of silver-gray hair and the same unassum-

ing good looks: sculpted cheekbones, a firm chin, and the deep brown eyes women habitually swoon over.

He waved a wooden walking staff in salute, then began a tremulous foray around the unmanned half-counter that passed for Reception in our no-frills office. With singular determination he shuffled forward. His hands trembled. The cane shook. He wheezed with each step. And yet, there was something noble in the effort.

He had dressed for the trip into town. A brown hand-tailored suit that had gone out of style maybe three decades ago. As he drew closer the smell of mothballs suggested his attire had been plucked from a dusty clothes rack expressly for this visit.

Three feet away, he stopped. He squinted up at me with unflinching brown eyes. “Are you the *gaijin* the papers said caught the Japantown killers in San Francisco?”

Gaijin means “foreigner,” literally “outside person.”

“Guilty as charged.”

“And tackled the Japanese mafia before that?”

“Guilty again.”

For better or worse, the overseas murders and my run-in with the Tokyo thugs had made headlines in Japan.

“Then you’re my man. Got notches on your belt.”

I smiled and his son, who had sidled up on the other side, whispered in my ear. “That’s his meds talking. Makes him emotional. Sometimes delusional. I only mentioned coming here to calm him. I never thought he’d actually do it.”

His father frowned. He hadn’t heard what was said, but he was astute enough to guess the content. “My son thinks I’ve toppled off the train because I’ve put on a few years. Well, I’m ninety-three, and until last December I could walk three miles a day without a damn stick.”

“A few years? You’re ninety-*six*, Dad. You shouldn’t be charging around town like this.”

The old man waved the cane under his son’s nose. “You call this charging? There are tombstones in Aoyama Cemetery that move faster than I do, but upstairs my train’s still running on straight tracks. Besides, when a man my age no longer wants to shave off a couple years to impress the ladies, *then* he’s done for.”

I was going to like this guy.

I said, “Why don’t we step into my office? It’s quiet there. Mari, would you show these gentlemen the way? I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Follow me, please,” she said.

Once Mari had shut them in, I turned to a pale-faced detective nearest the entrance. “Anything else besides their showing up without an appointment?”

“Only the last name. Miura.”

“Okay, thanks. Do you know where Noda is?”

Kunio Noda was our head detective and the main reason I came away from the Japantown case in one piece.

“He’s out on the kidnapping case in Asakusa but supposed to be back shortly.”

“Send him in as soon as he arrives, okay?”

“Will do.”

I headed back to my office, where I exchanged cards and the customary bows with the new arrivals. The father’s name was Akira Miura and he’d once been senior vice president of a major Japanese trading company.

The son with the pricey tie was a *fuku bucho*, or assistant section chief, at Kobo Electronics. His company was equally impressive but his position was not, especially for a Japanese salaryman in his fifties. You didn’t start making good money until you hit *bucho*, the next step up for Yoji Miura, so either he was spending beyond his means or there was money trickling in from another source.

Taking my seat I said, “So, gentlemen, how can I help?”

Before they could respond, Mari knocked and entered. On a tray she carried green tea in decorated porcelain cups with lids. Guest china-ware. In Japan, courtesy rules.

“I was in the war, Mr. Brodie,” Akira Miura said after Mari departed.

When a Japanese mentions *the war*, he or she means World War II. And only the youngest soldiers—now the oldest surviving veterans—were around today. Japan fought no further battles after the big Double Two.

“I see,” I said.

Miura Senior’s eyes zeroed in on me. “How much do you know about Japanese history, Mr. Brodie?”

“Quite a bit, actually.”

My endeavors in the field of Japanese art made knowledge of the country’s history, culture, and traditions mandatory.

“Did you know that in the old Japanese army you followed orders without question, or your commanding officer put a bullet in your head?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Then you probably also know that my country conquered part of Manchuria and set up a puppet state.”

I did, and he seemed pleased.

Japan had entered China aggressively in the early 1900s, then cemented its grasp by laying railroads, bringing in settlers, and setting up branches of its large conglomerates. In 1932 it famously resurrected the rule of China’s twelfth and final Qing Dynasty ruler, Pu Yi, canonized in popular culture as the Last Emperor.

Miura said, “I was sent to the Manchurian front in 1940 as an officer. My men and I fought many battles. Then new orders shifted us to a frontier outpost called Anli-dong. Our assignment was to stabilize the region, and I became the de facto mayor of Anli and the surrounding area.

“We were outnumbered two hundred to one, but by that time the Japanese military had a reputation so fierce we retained control without incident. Although I preached nonviolence and it held, my predecessor had been ruthless. Any Chinese male offender faced a firing squad or worse, and his women became the spoils of war. Which is why I need you.”

“For something that happened more than seventy years ago?”

“You’ve heard about the recent home invasions in Tokyo?”

“Sure. Two families slaughtered within six days of each other. Eight people were killed.”

“You saw the police suspect Triads?”

“Of course.”

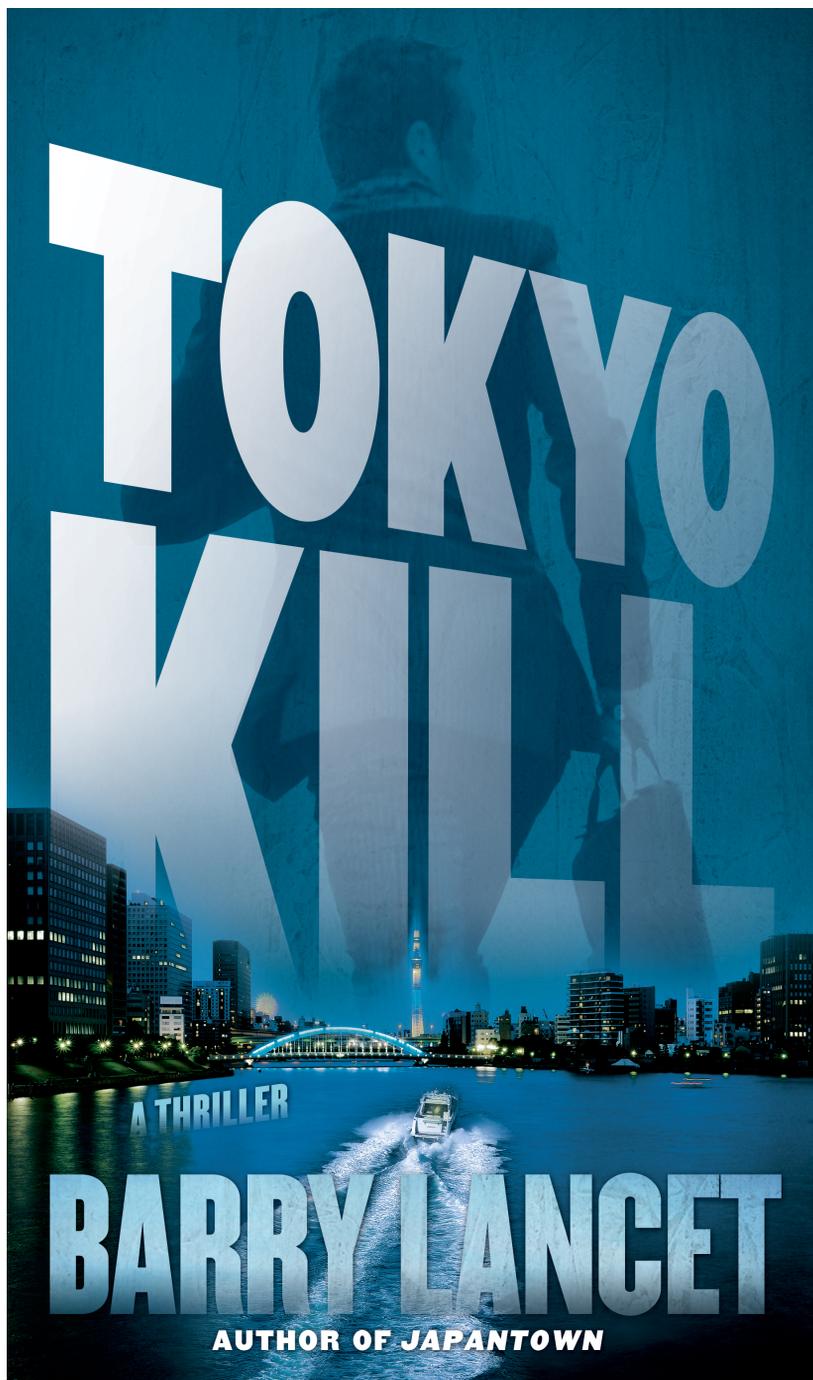
“They’re right.”

Inwardly I cringed at the mention of the blade-wielding Chinese gangs. I’d run into them in San Francisco once when I lived out in the Mission. It hadn’t ended well.

“How can you be so sure?”

Miura’s handsome brown eyes flooded with fear. “In Anli-dong they told me they would come after us. Now they have.”

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