

# **BANANA DIARIES: REACHING TOKYO IS NOT EASY**

## **Part One**

### **1. BLUE SKY - DAWN**

Overlaid text over blue sky:

*Finally, to all readers who do not know me personally, who were kind enough to take the trouble to read my small effort, I know no greater happiness than that it may have cheered you, even a little. Surely we will meet someday, and until that day, I pray that you will live happily.<sup>1</sup>*

*Banana Yoshimoto*

### **2. M' S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAWN**

Quiet sounds of nature.

The window is wide open. The bed, with yellow sheets, is unmade. Around the room are open suitcases and scattered clothes, as though someone arrived late at night from a long journey.

Suddenly, the silence is broken by a repetitive sound- a phone alarm. M. enters the room holding a steaming cup. She steps over the suitcases, bags, and clothes to turn off the alarm.

She looks outside the window to a huge empty field in the countryside of Tuscany.

### **3. M' S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

On a screen, images of Costa Rica play.

Music and words repeat over and over.

M. is finishing to edit a short film.

The title reads: "*To Costa Rica and Back.*"

M. gets up and leaves the room. The space is now perfectly tidy.

### **4. COUNTRYSIDE - ELDA' S HOUSE - DAY**

M. walks to her neighbours house. She shouts: "Elda!"

Elda, an elderly woman, opens the door, greets her, and thanks her.

Lola, the dog, rushes toward M. excitedly. M. struggles to keep hold of her while putting on the leash.

The dog literally drags her down the street.

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from Kitchen (1989)

As Elda goes back inside and closes her door, a broom leaning against the fence wobbles slightly.

#### **5. COUNTRYSIDE - ROAD - DAY**

M. walks quickly, pulled by Lola's eagerness to explore. As they pass, a lone red poppy gently rocks by the air of their movement.

#### **6. ELDA'S HOUSE - DAY**

The broom slides slowly down the fence and falls to the ground.

#### **7. COUNTRYSIDE ROADS- DAY**

M. and Lola are surrounded by nature.

They cautiously climb a rocky path.

They are surrounded by silence, punctuated by the sounds of nature.

M. sits down, out of breath, on a rock that wobbles slightly. The view is breathtaking.

The silence is broken by a phone notification.

M. hesitates, then retrieves her phone and listens to a voice message. The sender's name is Japanese: *Shiro*.

Voice message:

"Hiii Mandiii!! I loved your short film, so fascinating! So cool that you are trying to make a documentary on Banana! I think you should try to write to her agent... it's the only way to get to her... Yes, I know someone who worked with her agent years ago! I'll try to ask them for advice! Speak to you lateerr!"

M. is thrilled.

She looks around: Lola is gone.

Alarmed, she begins to search for her.

#### **8. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY**

A meadow full of red poppies.

M. appears on the way back with Lola on the leash and passes by the flowers.

#### **9. ELDA'S HOUSE - DAY**

Outside the house, M. calls out: "Elda!" while holding Lola on the leash.

She hands the dog back to Elda.

Noticing the fallen broom, she picks it up and leaves.

#### **10. M'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

M. takes out all her Banana Yoshimoto books and places them on her desk.

Among the titles are: *A Journey Called Life*, *Andromeda Heights*, *Becoming an Adult*, *Moshi Moshi*.

She also finds an old VHS of the movie based on her most famous novel: *Kitchen*.

She removes the cover and pins it to the wall like a poster.

She also takes out an old book by Giorgio Amitrano: *The World of Banana Yoshimoto*.

#### **11. VILLAGE - SURROUNDINGS - SUNSET**

It's Spring.

The tiny Tuscan village consists of a few ancient houses, hidden ruins, dirt roads, small olive fields, and vineyards.

Flowers sprout from the ancient stone walls that follow the winding roads. Stray cats and dogs wander the paths, leading to open fields rich with "Terra di Siena" red earth.

Outside M's home, there's a vast field.

Wild ivy climbs up the wall and frame her bedroom window.

#### **12. M'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - DAY**

The doorbell rings.

M. opens the door to a courier and receives a small package, which seems precious in her hands.

#### **13. M'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

A notebook lies open on the kitchen counter. We read:

*Mozuku Seaweed Pasta Recipe:*

*Blanch mozuku, garlic, and nigari goya; cook pasta; add soy sauce and Parmesan. Best served hot, like udon!*<sup>2</sup>

M's eyes are sparkling, she now is ready to open the package: it contains a *nigari goya*, a bitter melon, wrapped like a small jewel. She places the melon next to the mozuku seaweed she takes out of the fridge, along with pasta, Parmesan, and garlic. She begins to cook.

#### **14. VILLAGE - SURROUNDINGS - DAY**

A stray cat walks near the house, passing by a rosemary plant.

#### **15. M'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

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<sup>2</sup>*A Journey Called Life*, p. 49.

The dish is ready: it looks both unattractive and delicious. Next to the steaming plate is the notebook.

M. begins eating and alternates between with writing on her notebook, switching between her spoon and pen, and writes:

*You were born with an older sister who acted as a second mother to you<sup>3</sup>. Now, you have only one child. What do you think about raising an only child in this world? How do you protect them from isolation?*

Between the phrases, there are small sketches of plants, cats, dogs, cactuses, and manga characters.

Mandi stops writing, she shakes her right hand, as it's aching.

#### **16. GREENHOUSE - DAY**

M. notices a small turtle hidden among big cactuses. She approaches it. The turtle withdraws into its shell, emitting a faint pink light. As she leans closer, she gets caught in a cactus' spines. Distracted for a moment, she looks back, but the turtle is gone.

#### **17. M'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SUNSET**

A cactus is now sitting near her computer, in front of the *Kitchen "poster"*. The book *A Journey Called Life* is open to the chapter titled *Me and the Turtles*, underlined, with a pencil nearby.

On the computer screen are countless images of turtles.

M. is standing by the window, staring at the moon, which slowly splits into two. She rubs her eyes and goes to the computer.

She loses all windows and types a message to Shiro:

*Hii Shiro! How are you?? How is Miko and how is work/life going for you? I recently read about Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's economic policies. I saw there have been discussions about the yen's recent depreciation and its impact on the Japanese economy..? For instance, the yen has weakened significantly.. I wonder if it's cheaper to visit Japan now? By the way, have you had a chance to catch up with your friend who knows Ms. Yoshimoto's agent?!*

*Sending lots of love from Italy!*

#### **18. MANDI'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The digital clock shows 3am, M. is awake in her bed, staring at her hands.

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<sup>3</sup> From *Cosa Significa Diventare Adulti, (Becoming an Adult)*, 2024.

On the computer screen are still the images of turtles and cactuses but now in front of them is an illustration of a human skeleton with nerves branching out to the hands and legs, resembling a tree.

M. gets up from bed and goes to the computer.

An interview with Banana Yoshimoto plays on YouTube:

*"I don't think plants are mirrors. I think we complete each other, and this is true for all living beings. If plants disappeared, we couldn't survive in this world. They are a blessing, a salvation. There's a story about plants I once heard in a documentary—I think it was about Russia. It's said that if a sick person breathes onto a plant seed and then buries it, the plant that grows from it can heal them. I'm not sure if I believe it, but it struck me. It's a kind of interaction between humans and nature that I find fascinating."*

A message from Shiro arrives. M. lowers the volume. City sounds echo faintly in the background.

Shiro's Message:

*"Hiii Mandii!! Oh my god, I'm so sorry, I completely forgot! I think he was ill, so I didn't see him at the party! But I think he's feeling better now, so I'll try to contact him soon! Sorry!! We've been shooting like crazy this past week, and you know how it is.. "*

M. is disappointed. She stops the YouTube video. Her hand keeps aching.

#### **19. RADIOLOGY WAITING ROOM - DAY**

A cartoon of Obake-no-Q-Taro plays on M.'s cell phone screen.

M. watches it with headphones on in a waiting room.

She is surrounded by elderly people. A nurse calls her name, but she doesn't hear. A woman next to her gestures for her to go.

M. enters, the older woman watching her.

#### **20. RADIOLOGY - DAY**

M. lies inside an MRI machine.

She remains still as the machine's loud sounds fill the space.

Visions of the human body with nerves resembling tree branches blend with images of Tokyo's empty streets at night.

#### **21. HOSPITAL - PARKING LOT - SUNSET**

A faint double moon is visible in the sky as M. walks toward her car to drive home.

## 22. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The wind blows.

Plants and flowers move, and the stray cat takes shelter behind a rock.

## 23. MANDI'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

A notification pops up on M.'s computer: an email from Shiro.

## 24. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A long tracking shot starts in dense woods and slowly transitions to the vast empty field in front of M.'s house.

Voiceover:

"Good evening, is this a good time?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, but the report indicates a possible demyelinating lesion in the white matter bilaterally. I recommend hospitalization for a specialist evaluation."

"What does that mean?"

"There's concern about ongoing neurodegeneration in the brain and spinal cord. We need to perform a lumbar puncture to confirm the nature of the disease causing these symptoms in your limbs and the double vision. I'll let you know as soon as a bed becomes available in the neurology ward. In any case, this is a chronic condition and has likely been present since your 2018 MRI for the herniated disc. The report mentioned it, but I was only able to access it now. I'm sorry. There's no immediate cause for alarm, but we need to plan for hospitalization soon."

The tracking shot ends with M. lying on the grass.

She breathes heavily, her hands on her chest.

On her phone, she notices a message from Shiro. She reads it:

*"Hiii!! I spoke to my friend Yoshi, and he gave me Banana's agent's email!! Please write to him ASAP; he's expecting your message! Let me know how it goes!!"*

After a brief pause, another message arrives:

*"Oh, and he said his friend mentioned that Banana values her privacy a lot... You cannot ask any personal questions about her life, especially about her family or her son! But still, I think you should try! OMG, I'm so excited for you!"*

The message includes an email address and plenty of celebratory emojis.

## 25. TRAIN - DAY

M. looks tired as she leans her head against the window. She is wearing her headphones. A friend sits beside her, keeping her company.

## **26. MANDI'S HOME - BEDROOM - SUNSET**

The unmade bed has yellow sheets.

There's no trace of Banana anywhere. The cactus is gone, as is the "poster" of *Kitchen*.

M. enters the room, finishing unpacking her suitcase as her friend changes the bed sheets from yellow to white, tidies up, and leaves, and tells her to let her know if she needs anything.

M. is alone now. She lies on the bed, staring ahead.

## **27. MANDI'S HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING**

The fridge is empty, except for a lone tupperware tucked in the back. Dirty bowls and mugs pile up in the sink.

## **28. OUTSKIRTS - MORNING**

M. stops by her neighbor's to pick up fresh eggs. The neighbor says: *"Haven't seen you around in a while. Your mom told me these past few years have been like a rollercoaster for you. Hope you'll stay for a bit now."*

Mandi leaves with fresh eggs and a small smile.

## **29. COUNTRYSIDE - CHURCH - DAY**

While holding the eggs M. visits a church, leaving a donation "to stay out of hell." She gently strokes the images of people depicted burning in hell as if to ease their pain.

## **30. ELDA'S HOUSE - EVENING**

At Elda's house a broom leans against the fence as always. On the windowsill amidst all her plants, M. sees her cactus but neither takes it nor calls for Lola.

## **31. MANDI'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

M., seated at her computer, reads Shiro's last message once again, with BY's agent's email in the bottom:

*"Oh, and he said that his friend mentioned Banana values her privacy a lot... you can't ask any personal questions about her life, especially about her family and her son! But still, I think you should try! OMG, I'm so excited for you!"*

In her notebook, M. reads the personal question she wrote about the loneliness of being an only child.

M. tries to reply to Shiro:

"Hii Shiro! It's been a long time. How are you?.. "

She deletes it, unsure of what to say, and gives up.

Browsing through Shiro's old messages, she notices the word "Costa Rica." M. pulls up the video "To Costa Rica and Back" and revisits her YouTube history, and replays the video of BY discussing her connection to nature.

BY: *"I don't think plants are mirrors. I believe we complement each other, which is true for all living beings. If plants disappeared, we couldn't survive; they're a blessing/salvation. There's a story I heard in a documentary about Russia, I think. It says that if a sick person blows on a seed before planting it, once the plant grows, it can heal them. I don't know if I believe it, but it struck me. It's a kind of interaction between humans and nature that I find intriguing."*

The electricity cuts out, and the computer shuts off.

### **32. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

M. lights a candle. She retrieves the tupperware from the fridge—inside is a piece of nigari goya, now moldy under the candlelight. Just then, the power returns. The kitchen light stays on all night. Outside the kitchen's window The moon looks double.

### **33. M'S BEDROOM - DAWN**

From M.'s bedroom window, she can be seen standing motionless in the middle of the field.

### **34. FIELD IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE - DAWN**

Close-up of M.'s feet planted firmly on the ground, then slowly upward to the rest of her body. Audio from her phone, lying on the ground:

*"To ground and connect to Earth, I sit straight up with my feet on the ground, or stand, and imagine a strong cord coming out of the base of my spine that has a hook on the end. Then I imagine it sinking down all the way to the core of the Earth, where it hooks in with its hook. I then draw energy up from the center of the Earth through the cord into the base of my spine and up to my head. Depending on the day I can see which color of energy is coming into me."*

A faint pink glow emits from M.'s hands, unnoticed by her. The glow fades as M. walks away.

### **35. COUNTRYSIDE - ELDA'S HOUSE - DAY**

M. picks Lola up at Elda's house and takes her to their usual walk.

Banana Yoshimoto's voice in voice over:

*"When we pay attention, it's surprising how quickly one can tell the well-being of dogs on a leash, stray cats near houses, and even plants. One immediately perceives whether they are receiving love or not, whether they are happy or unhappy. I will say more: even for children it is like this. A mother and her baby are walking down the street. If we observe carefully, we can tell how the child is feeling. If we start chatting, adults - and also children - put on a smiling, sociable mask. That is why, if one wants to know the truth, one must avoid talking<sup>4</sup>."*

In the forest, M. frees Lola. (BY's voiceover ends.)

M. is acutely aware of her surroundings; every sound of nature is magnified. She seems dwarfed by the vastness around her. She takes a fruit from a tree and puts it in her pocket. She calls for Lola, the dog returns, and they head home together.

### **36 ON THE ROAD TO ELDA'S HOME - DAY**

On the road a car pulls up near M and stops.

The woman behind the wheel asks her the name of the town that can be seen in the distance: Sovicille, says M.

Inside the car beside the driver M. notices an old woman holding a turtle in her arms.

M. is surprised, impressed by the encounter.

The car leaves, the dog drags M toward Elda's house.

M retrieves her cactus laid on the windowsill.

### **37. MANDI'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

M.'s cactus is back on her desk. M. resumes watching BY's video where she left off, about blowing on a seed before planting it if you're unwell.

M. pulls out all the Banana Yoshimoto books she had put away.

BY's voice in voiceover:

*"When I work, though, I work in the realm of fantasy, dramatizing my thoughts and feelings. Through communication between humans and cactuses, cats, or rocks, I can depict things in a more extreme way."*

The desk is once again cluttered with Banana Yoshimoto books, posters, and books about Japan.

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<sup>4</sup> *A Trip Called Life*, 2006, p.76

M. extracts a seed from the fruit, peeling off its outer layer. As she does, we hear her voice reading her own email, first to Shiro apologizing, then to BY's agent:

*"Dear Mr. Tanaka,*

*My name is Mandi Bricaire. Mr. Watanabe kindly gave me your contact. I am a filmmaker from Italy. I would be very grateful if you could forward my film proposal to Ms. Yoshimoto. Here is a link to my previous work."*

### **37. COUNTRYSIDE - DAWN**

M. walks toward the field with the seed in her hand.

Voiceover:

*"Dear Banana, Having the opportunity to contact you felt as though the meaning of everything suddenly rained into my hands, as if fertile, soft, and abundant soil, exposed to the sun in an open space, had taken the form of the answer I needed<sup>5</sup>."*

She reaches the field, blows on the seed, and digs it deep in the earth.

M. lingers, gazing at the planted seed, lost in thought.

*"...I have read your books since I was a teenager and have been drawn to the details of everyday life that bring a kind of lightness and give your characters hope, acting as an anchor to life, helping them feel grounded during difficult times."*

She begins walking back home.

*"For this reason, I'm interested in a poetic portrait of you focusing on the objects, faces, streets, sounds, and colors that surround you in your daily life. I understand you value your privacy. Perhaps you could choose which parts of Tokyo you wish to represent."*

*"I hope the weather is good for you now. Here in Italy, it's been a bit cold, but spring is in the air. Kind Wishes, Mandi"*

### **38. VARIOUS LOCATIONS AROUND MANDI'S HOUSE - SUNSET**

Empty countryside roads.

Images of souls burning in hell in the empty church.

Rocks on countryside slopes.

Lola sleeps outside Elda's house.

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<sup>5</sup> From Moshi Moshi.

A rosemary plant standing like a totem.

Voiceover:

*"Dear Mandarava-san, AI translated this, so I'm sorry if some sentences are incorrect. Thank you for the beautiful images of your films. I am already semi-retired and try not to reveal too much of my private life. I want to spend the rest of my life only writing novels."*

#### **39. MANDI'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The VHS of the film "Kitchen" plays on an old television in the dark room. Its credits roll. M. is deeply asleep. The film is over.

#### **40. NEIGHBORHOOD**

At night, the stray cat is awake, purring, and its eyes glow a little. The irises of its eyes now take on the shape of a banana.

#### **41. M'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The clock reads 3 a.m. M. is sleeping deeply.

We hear Banana's voice one last time:

*"...but, if the conditions and timing are right and the opportunity arises, I would be happy to do it."*

*"I can meet you one afternoon in Shimokitazawa. I am sorry I can't do more than this."*

*"With love, Banana"*

M. opens her eyes. She looks out of the window and sees an enormous tree in the middle of the vast field in front of the house.

#### **42. OUTSIDE ELDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

On Elda's house fence the broom slowly slips and falls with a bang that rumbles slightly.

## **REACHING TOKYO IS POSSIBLE**

### **Part Two**

#### **43. TOKYO - DAY**

M. picks up a broom on a street in Shimokitazawa, where Banana Yoshimoto lives and works. The streets are full of cats, dogs on leashes, and flowers in windows.

**TO FOLLOW:** The scenes related to M's real meeting with Banana Yoshimoto and the brief portrait of the writer that will follow, concluding the entire film.