

Reasons

It was a wintry night; the moon shone pale white high above in the firmament. Below the starry sky, a man was making his way through a desolated street of the recently renamed city of Tokyo. He was heavily dressed, wearing a dark blue *haori* – a long sleeved coat – over a brownish *hakama* – a traditional two piece item of clothing –, and a *kasa* – a conical straw hat – upon his head. In clear defiance of the new law that prohibited to carry swords, this man openly displayed his *katana* and *wakizashi* –traditional swords used by the samurai- thrust through his belt. The man's pace was steady, neither fast nor slow, and he seemed to have no intention of stopping; at least not until he saw someone running towards him. By instinct, he reached for his sword, but let go of it when he realised that the person in front of him wasn't but a young woman. It wasn't just any woman, though; it was one of a very particular kind, and the man would have been more surprised hadn't the presence of westerners become more common. However, he did wonder what such a person could be doing outside at such a late hour; and running, to top it off. His doubts were cleared the moment he saw the young woman was being pursued by two men. As soon as the young lady had run past him, he positioned himself in between her and her pursuers with the clear intent to protect her. The two men, who seemed to be quite drunk, tried to run past him as well, but, as the trained warrior he was, he managed to reduce them without effort. The pursuers, seeing they stood no chance against their opponent, finally decided to run away.

Reflecting on how pointless his way of acting had been, and assuming the young woman had disappeared from the scene by the time that little brawl had ended, the man was ready to resume his journey. He hadn't even taken a step when he was stopped by the sound of a soft, gentle voice. "Thank you," said the voice in perfect Japanese. Surprised as he was, he turned around to see that young lady standing in front of him. A faint smile drew on his face. Not many westerners spoke Japanese that well. For a moment he just stood there watching her, studying her. He had never thought foreign women to be attractive, but this woman was different. She had silky blond hair, and a skin as white as the stainless snow on Mount Fuji. Her eyes were of a vivid green, and she had well defined features that made her look even more beautiful. She was attired in a long green dress, which had been ruined by all the running. "Thank you for saving me," said she, gratefully. He took a moment to answer, for her Japanese still amazed him. "There is no need to thank me," said he in a very polite manner. For a while they just stared at each other. Finally, the young woman requested his help to find her way home. The man, at the prospect of spending a little more time with her, agreed.

Along the way, both of them began to talk, learning about each other. His name was Mochizuki Jiro, a *ronin*, a masterless warrior. He had served a Lord in the region of Satsuma until a couple of years before. His Lord had supported the *Isshin Shishi*, who strived to open Japan to the rest of the world, until that fateful night. He was going back to his domains when an ambush took place. Jiro, who was there, wasn't able to protect his master, losing his lord and his honour at the same time. He hadn't finished his story when the young lady suddenly asked why he still carried his swords in spite of the prohibition, to which he solemnly answered, "Because I have nothing else left." The woman then proceeded to tell her story.

Alice Eve was her name, and she was the daughter of an American businessman. Her mother had passed away a long time ago. Her father had come here as soon as he realised the profitable deals he could make in this new country, dragging his daughter along with him. By the time she had finished talking, a sad expression showed on her face. Jiro, seeing that, asked why it was she had stayed. "Because all I have is here," she replied. As soon as they finished telling each other their stories, they arrived at Alice's house.

It was a big place located in the centre of Tokyo, where most of the foreigners had settled. Realising that Jiro had nowhere to go, Alice offered to put him up. He was hesitant to accept but he was also extremely tired of travelling, so he decided that it would be a good idea to stay. The moment they entered the house, Jiro took off his *kasa* revealing his long black hair, combed back in a ponytail. Alice was a bit surprised to see him like that for the first time, but she liked it. After that, she gave him a little tour of the house and, after supper, she showed him to his room. He slept soundly that night, something he hadn't done in a long time. Her father wasn't very sure about having that man in his house at first, but after hearing what had happened the previous night, he felt very grateful towards him. What is more, he saw a great opportunity in that man. He figured that, as long as there was still some animosity towards foreigners, his daughter wouldn't be safe whenever she was on her own. He himself spent most of his time working, so he couldn't be there to protect Alice all the time. This man would be the solution to that; he could hire him as a bodyguard. Jiro was reluctant at first, but was soon persuaded by Alice's words. From that moment on, they spent most of their time together, growing closer and closer to each other until they finally fell in love. Breaking the news to Alice's father wasn't an easy task. However, to their surprise, he didn't object to their relationship at all. Why would he? His daughter had finally found happiness, and he wasn't going to get in the way of that.

A few months passed since they had met. Jiro had stopped carrying his swords and Alice was becoming used to her new home in that new country. Unfortunately, their newfound happiness was about to be shattered to pieces. Unbeknownst to them, Alice's father had been dealing with some dangerous people. There was a new moon that fateful night. Alice and Jiro had been out late, for a festival was taking place and, by the time they got home, it was already too late. The whole place had been torn apart; no piece of furniture had been left intact. The first thing they did was to look for Alice's father. They found him in one of the rooms at the back of the house, talking to three men. They were Japanese, but they were wearing black western suits. Two of them were carrying swords, and the moment the couple entered the room, one of them stabbed the girl's father in the chest, killing him instantly. Speechless, Alice fell to her knees. A tear ran down her cheek, followed by a sorrowful scream. Upon hearing that, the three men turned around to find the couple there. Jiro, knowing what was going to happen, grabbed the grief-stricken Alice and ran to their room. Once again he would have to wield his sword to protect a beloved person, but this time he wasn't going to fail.

In no more than a few seconds, they had reached their room and, filled with memories of the past, Jiro unsheathed his blade, ready to face his opponents. The moment the two attackers showed at the door, with lightning-like speed, Jiro cut them down, getting rid of them. With no one to prevent the couple from escaping, they started heading towards the exit when, all of a sudden, a loud sound broke the silence behind them. It was the explosion caused by

those modern firearms the foreigners had brought along with them. Jiro was once again readying himself to fight. He had only turned around when he felt something warm gushing out of his stomach. He touched the wound and fell to the floor, feeling weaker and weaker. Alice, petrified at the gruesome scene, had already given up any hope she might have had. The man in black walked towards her until he was a couple of inches away from her. He was raising his pistol. Before he could pull the trigger, however, Jiro, drenched in his own blood and making use of the last of his strength, stood up behind him and pierced him in the back. The man in black fell to the lifeless ground; Jiro, with his own life fading away, fell beside him. Alice, in despair, knelt by his side and held his hand until Life had left his eyes. At that moment, she thought life was very unfair after everything they had gone through. She had lost everything. There was nothing left in this world for her. For some minutes she just stayed there, still. She, then, stretched her arms reaching for her lover's sword. It was heavier than it looked. She contemplated the idea of taking her own life. She held the sword tightly in her hands. She was ready...