

- **Yoko** (part of Inochi Abandonment?)

He was an American, working as an English TV Presenter at a major television company.

She was an art student, recently having graduated from Tokyo University.

They fell in love.

That was how things used to happen.

Yoko painted the lipstick across her face, bringing a deep redness to her otherwise pale and thin lips. She applied a little rouge to detract from her white complexion and topped it all off with a few, short blasts of Christian Dior; the American whore's favourite. She had smelt it on his skin enough times after another long shift at the station. She was his co-presenter, the predictability of it all almost crushing in its blandness. She had never caught them, not even heard rumours off any of his friends, but she knew nevertheless. He was American, young and brash and could barely conceal his excitement at receiving so much female attention. She cooked his lunches, took his clothes to the cleaners, ran their tiny flat in the heart of Shinjuku, away from her family so that he could be within walking distance of the station; all so that he wouldn't have to go through the hassle of getting a Japanese driving license.

She played the part well; the typical Japanese housewife with her painting hobby to keep her occupied after the chores were done and before her man came back home. Her work was good, original even, but it was not selling well. She needed to go to Europe, that was her reasoning. She was sure that it would do well there and if nothing else, the cobbled streets of Rome and the creative energy of Paris would at least help to inspire her. What could these four walls offer in way of inspiration? Even the city was a smoke stack, a collection of high buildings and cold colours. Even Shibuya would have been better than here, at least that district held a little colour. Shinjuku was good for nothing other than money and office buildings. But Grant was the man, the foreigner still, his Japanese good but his attitude still undiluted American. But his bosses loved him. he was cute, for a westerner and good with the bored to tears kids that they recruited for his show.

Sandy. That was her name, as if she had been lifted straight out of 1950s Americana. She was the American Pie girl, the kind you saw working in coffee shops while they pursued their dream of becoming an actress. Sandy was blonde and her chest had gotten her the job. Usually, Yoko did not like to harbour such thoughts, demeaning others and their achievements, but the woman was sleeping with her husband, a man who made no attempt to hide his marriage ring, so that made the woman a whore, a dirty slut. The Japanese men at the studio loved her and who knew how many she was fucking. But this did not seem to bother Grant. In the last week alone, he had come home late, stinking of her cheap scent. He wore it like it was some trophy, evidence of his conquest, eager to show off his allurements even to his doting wife.

Bastard.

Yoko stood up and examined herself in the vanity mirror. She wore nothing but her underwear and could see nothing wrong with what she saw reflected in the glass. She was twenty four, slim and curvy for a Japanese. She had even tried to gain a little weight because she knew that westerners liked their girls to look feminine and voluptuous. And for what? So some scheming little blonde whore could still him away from her.

Yoko turned side on in the mirror, staring at her breasts. They weren't big, but then that was how it was here. Was that what had tempted Grant away from her? A pair of tits?

She spun away from the dresser and picked up her clothes from off the bed. She slipped into the skimpy red top and pulled on the tight, black mini-skirt. This was obviously how he liked his women to look.

She smiled at herself on the way out of the bedroom, a wicked grin that made her stomach churn. She thought that she had never looked worse but then, what did she know? She snatched her purse off the side and left the house.

The slow walk over to the television studio did little to calm her nerves, nor did the chill wind that wound its way through the latticework of alleyways, signalling the onset of autumn.

Yoko marched along the street, her high heels clip clopping on the pavement, reminding her of the sound of a horse in full stride. She ignored the lingering looks that she attracted as she passed the suited Japanese men on their way home. They looked now, but she would soon be forgotten as soon as a pretty foreign girl came walking past. That was the way it was. Foreign girls seemed to win on both fronts when it came to men.

She crossed over the intersection and could now see the high, neon glow of the TV station's sign, glittering in the distance atop a twenty story building. Yoko grit her teeth in determination and carried on, eager to confront him now, to make him choose between her and his whore. Her family had objected enough to their marriage in the first place, there was no way that she was going to give them the satisfaction of a juicy divorce. Tonight he would leave him whore for the last time and then they would go home and try to rebuild what he had so senselessly shattered.

More men looked, some even stopping to whistle in her direction; American sailors on shore leave. The attention from these foreigners caused a warm glow to pass up through Yoko and she suppressed a smile. That warmth quickly chilled however, as she remembered how she was dressed. So maybe it was a universal thing with American men then? That they all liked their women to look like sluts, to suck their long, white cocks and cook them Japanese meals. She resisted the urge to turn around and spit at them, quickening her pace instead, eager to get inside and get this over with, impatient to wipe the heavy shit off her face and get into some warmer clothes.

"Hey there sexy lady."

Yoko shuddered as she heard the words cast in her direction, a flutter of nervousness turning over in her stomach. She did not even look in the man's direction, pleading ignorant to the English he spoke.

"Hey there, wait up a sec."

She could hear footsteps tracing behind her and fought the urge to run. She could scream if he grabbed her, but then who would come to her aid? She was a slut, being accosted by a foreigner. It was not Japanese business, just more brash, ugly foreigners and the girls stupid enough to go with them.

"You understand me girl? You speak English? Come on, wait up."

The man suddenly appeared in front of her and Yoko had to stop before she bounced off his chest. He was big and barrel chested, his thick arms barely constrained

by a tight, blue tee shirt. He was a good six inches taller than she was and she tentatively lifted her head to meet his dark eyes.

“Where you off to in such a hurry, huh? You not hear me back there, I just wanna talk to you.”

“My English, not good,” Yoko faltered and tried to look past the large black man. The street behind him looked so inviting. It was the path that she had to follow and she was running out of time. Grant was due to finish filming at eight and it had already been a quarter to by the time she had finally left the house.

“Yeah right lady, I know your type. You girls learn quick, gets you more yen in your little purse there,” he mocked, pointing down at the slim handbag that hung off Yoko’s shoulder. She had picked it especially to go with her garish outfit, the bag a glittering gold colour with a fine strap and an easy to lift buckle.

“What do you want?” She asked, her impatience flaring up like a tiny bomb. The cold crawled up her bare legs and made her shiver.

“Maybe I got some business for you,” the American replied, thrusting forward one of the fliers he had been holding behind his back. “It’s good pay, better than most places around here.”

Yoko looked down at the flier that had been put in her hand and instantly threw it the ground.

“I’m not what you think I am,” she replied, her small eyes hard. She found it odd that she felt no fear in staring straight into the eyes of a man so large and obviously strong. Perhaps because she had been living with Grant so long; she had gotten used to foreign men and was not so timid around them as most Japanese girls.

“I didn’t say what I thought you were, I’m just making you an offer. Think what you like about it.”

“I’m not a prostitute.”

“And I ain’t no pimp. My boss runs a social club, that’s all. Pretty girls, expensive drinks. We get good clients, nice men. Big wallets. You know what I’m saying.”

Yoko shook her head, unable to believe her harsh luck.

“I’m sorry, I have to get going.”

She pushed past the black man, who gracefully stepped aside.

“Whatever he’s paying you, you can earn three times as much and still keep your panties on.”

Yoko spun round, anger bubbling away within her. She was sick of this; of all this dirty looks and presumptions. This wasn’t her, couldn’t they see that? This was all just an act, a way to get revenge on a piece of shit man. What was their problem?

“I thought I already told you, I’m not some whore. Go bother some other girl.”

The big man smiled, his teeth shining in the reflection of a lantern that hung outside of the restaurant next to the hostess bar.

“And I already said that I didn’t say anything about you being a whore. You’re pretty lady, that’s all I mean. And pretty girls can make themselves some big money in there. You’re fiesty, you’ll go down well with the clients.”

Yoko laughed.

“Clients? You mean perverts? No thanks.”

It was the black man’s turn to laugh this time.

“Yeah, you’re probably right. But what do you care? it’s not like you’ll be getting to know any of them, if you see what I’m saying. Why don’t you just come inside, let’s talk for a while.”

Yoko was about to turn to go when something popped inside of her, like a soap bubble coming to the surface of the water to burst. What was her rush? Really. Did she really care that much about some asshole who had been fucking some other girl for the last three months? The sad thing was, even in her mindsight of revenge, she was still running around after him, living her life according to his schedule. That was what tonight was all about, wasn’t it? Change. There wasn’t a more drastic change that Yoko could think of right now.

“Okay, let’s talk then,” the replied, taking a step back towards the man. “You’ve got five minutes and then I’m out of there. I really have somewhere to be.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” he replied. “Come on in. I’ll show you around.”

Yoko didn’t know what she had been expecting before she stepped in through the half curtains into the entranceway of the club, but what greeted her on the otherside was certainly not it.

The place was tasteful for a start. It was done out in dark, mahongeny, the same for the bar and each table. There were pieces of art on the walls, good pieces, a few that Yoko even recognised from well know local painters. She had perhaps been expecting tits and ass, pornography on the walls, not tasteful cherry blossom tree portraits or old prints of sumo wrestlers. She guessed it was because the place was aimed mainly at tourists, wanting to give them the authentic Japanese experience and not to scare off some of the more bashful tourist who might wander in here because of what his guidebook told him.

The black American led her across the to the bar, where a young Japanese man in a full suit stood waiting by the till.

“Good evening,” he said in perfectly annuciated English, adding a slight bow in Yoko’s direction.

“Drink?” The American asked and ordered two shots of Cutty Shark, telling the barman to leave the bottle.

Yoko picked up her drink and sniffed it. She had never been a big whiskey drinker, but Grant always had this stuff stocking up the fridge. The ice clanked as she lifted the glass up to her lips and she took in a lungful of air as the hot liquid warmed its way down her throat.

“You like?” The man asked, watching her with some amusement. “Imagine, this would be part of your job, sipping drinks with men who have money to spare. All free, on your tab. What do you think?”

Yoko took another sip and then giggled, feeling suddenly light headed. It was warm in here, cosy even and at the moment a little on the empty side. She imagined business would pick up later in the evening, but, for now, the place had a nice feel to it. Comfortable.

“I’m no one’s whore,” she said in between sips. “I know what men expect when they come to a place like this. They’re not interested in just having a drink with a girl.”

The American finished his drink and smiled at her through his grimace.

“You see any stairs in this place?” He asked, motioning with his arm. “There’s a backroom and a cellar to keep the beer. No bedrooms, no upstairs brothel. So you tell me, woman, where is all this fucking happening that you keep going on about?”

Yoko followed his arm around the room. There was a door at the back of the door and another set which led to the toilets but she could see no stairs. That didn’t mean that there wasn’t an entrance somewhere, but somehow, she didn’t think so.

Yoko shrugged, finishing her own drink and finding that she quite fancied another.

“That doesn’t prove anything she said,” resisting the urge to reach out for the whiskey bottle. “It just means that they have some other place to go.”

“You know,” the American said, pouring himself another drink and also, to her secret delight, refilling Yoko’s. “You’re starting to make me think I’m wasting my time. Maybe you want to speak to the manager, make all these accusations at him. I don’t think he’d like it much.”

Suddenly Yoko was on the back foot and trying to maintain her balance in the conversation.

“I didn’t mean to be disrespectful,” she said, her smile sweet. “I just have a certain idea about these kinds of places.”

The American nodded as if he could see right into her mind, accessing all her well kept thoughts.

“I know a lot of places are like that. But here, it’s respectful, you know. A lot of our clients are just foreign men looking to meet Japanese women. It’s new to them, you know? They don’t have the guts to go pick up some woman in a bar, so they come here. To talk.”

He nodded as he watched Yoko take another drink.

“You won’t find any foreign girls working here. It’s strictly Japanese only. Like I said, we look to foreigners for our business. Having western girls here just harms our reputation.”

Yoko listened to his words and let a warm smile envelop her face. It was if he were programmed to say exactly the right thing. No western girls, huh? That sounded good to her. Maybe she had been wrong about this place.

“So how does this work then?” She asked, feeling giggly, her glass empty once again. “I mean, what do I have to do?”

The American smiled, flexing his broad shoulders, his tee shirt straining as if ready to rip at any moment.

“You do just what you’re doing with me. You talk. Man comes in, sits down, orders a drink, you go over see if he wants some company of a little extra money. Most times they say yes.”

“And if they say no?”

“Don’t take it personal. Move on to someone else. There’s always someone else.”

Yoko thought about it for a moment. It was weird, how the night’s events had taken such a sudden and drastic turn. But then, maybe that was how it was supposed to be. Maybe tonight hadn’t been about revenge after all, or, perhaps it had, but revenge of a different sort. If Grant wanted his secret life with his western whore, then why shouldn’t she entertain the same idea? It was time to cast off the shackles of being just

another Japanese housewife, to embrace the lust and excitement that she had held for life whilst she had been at university.

“What’s your name?” She asked.

“Marcus.”

“Hi, Marcus, I’m Yoko.”

He suggested that she start straight away, a sort of trial run as he put it. Yoko agreed, but hesitantly. Now that she had decided to do this, a fistful of fear had hit her, throwing up all kinds of doubt and unforeseen problems.

Now, as she sat at the bar, sipping on her fourth glass of whiskey, promising herself that she would move to coke after this one; she felt that ball of fear start to dissipate, falling away, piece by piece. She adjusted her skirt, conscious that it had started to pull up at the hem and glanced around the room taking in the new faces who had come in during the last hour. Marcus hadn’t been lying about the clientele this place attracted. So far, she had seen only businessmen and well dressed foreigners come in through the curtain. Marcus himself had gone back outside to hustle up some more customers, but had promised to check back in on her every our or so. As new as all this was, strangely, she didn’t feel out of place, not needing the large American’s protective watch. Indeed, as the minutes wore on, Yoko found that she was even enjoying herself slightly. No one had approached her as yet, but the place was fun for people watching and it was interesting to see how the other girls here interacted with the men.

She had been expecting tarty women plastered with make-up and with their breasts almost on show, to parade around the room, throwing themselves at any man they might pass. But the opposite was true. The women were classy and graceful, engaging the men in deep conversation, only stopping occasionally to make sure that their drink got topped up. Hell, they had to make their money, didn’t they?

Yoko relaxed in the warmth of the ceiling lights and closed her eyes, letting the whiskey fog up her thoughts. Grant and his sordid affair seemed like a lifetime away, like something she had read in some gossip magazine. She leaned back into the hard wood of the bar and had to stop herself from falling asleep. It was so peaceful in here, a notion that would have seemed ridiculous to her, had she not been experiencing it for herself.

“Excuse me, miss,” a voice said from out of the darkness, stirring Yoko from the boundaries of sleep. She opened up her eyes, one at a time, to see a small, squat, Japanese man standing by her side, his black eyes fixed intently upon her. “Is anyone sitting here?” He asked, pointing to the vacant barstool beside her.

Taken aback, at first Yoko failed to find a reply, instead simply nodding her head.

The man bowed and seated his round behind on the stool, resting his pudgy hands on the bar. Yoko looked down to see the gold wedding band that encircled the third finger on his left hand and smiled inwardly. Some presumptions she had about this place had seemed to be true.

“May I ask your name?” The man enquired, his face forward, towards the bar, trying in vain to attract the young bartender’s attention.

Yoko snapped her fingers and the young man turned, smiling as he walked towards them.

“My name’s Yoko,” she replied, spinning on the stool towards the older man, her painted lips parted in a sly smile. “Care to buy me a drink?”

The older man nodded and ordered two whiskies. Yoko shrugged; she could hardly ask her first client of the night to get her a coke.

The drinks arrived only seconds later and the man raised his in toast to Yoko, his thin lips smiling beneath the pencil moustache that he wore.

They both smacked their lips in unison and Yoko set about trying to think up some conversation to pass the time. She wasn't exactly sure how the issue of payment was going to be resolved, Marcus had failed to cover that particular point, but she was willing just to let it go for now and see where the evening took her.

"Are you a new girl here?" The man asked, staring down into his drink, as if trying to melt the ice cubes with his eyes.

"Yes, it's my first time. You could say, I'm kind of a virgin."

Yoko's smug satisfaction at being alluring, quickly evaporated as she saw the small man wince at her words, his brow furrowing. He sipped his drink.

"What I mean to say," she corrected, "is that I've never really done anything like this before. In a place like this."

This brought the man back round and he looked up to stare at Yoko through his glasses.

"I don't come here that often either," he said. "But I've been a bit lonely of late. Things at home haven't been that great and my wife refuses to listen to me anymore."

"Listen to you about what?" Yoko asked, sipping her drink and sinking into her role.

"About anything," the man said, looking melancholy. "She just sits in front of the TV and refuses to acknowledge me when I come in through the door at night. So I come here instead, just for the company."

Yoko nodded, though she wasn't sure how much she really wanted to get into the intricacies of this man's private life. If anything, she had started off the night needing someone to talk to about *her* problems.

"It's sad," she said, "when wives stop paying attention to their husbands like that. Or vice versa."

"What do you mean?" The man asked, his drink forgotten as he focused his attention on the young woman.

"Well," Yoko stuttered, surprised that her words held such resonance. "I just mean that it works both ways. Husbands can be just the same."

"Oh, I see," the man nodded. "I guess I just never thought that a woman so young would know about such things. You don't seem long out of high school."

Yoko laughed and meant it. It wasn't the flattery of the remark, so much as the irony. It was true, she guessed it hadn't been a lifetime ago since she had graduated but it certainly felt like it.

"That's sweet of you to say, but I'm older than I look."

The man smiled and returned to his drink, signalling the bartender for another as he noticed that Yoko's glass was nearly empty.

"I've never seen a woman drink whiskey so quickly," he observed, nodding down at the floating ice cubes.

Yoko shrugged.

"Not a problem, is it?"

“Not at all,” the man replied. “I know how much the drinks in here are marked up, but money is no problem for me. It never has been. But now, I think even my wife is bored of it. She barely spends a penny anymore, another thing that has gotten me worried.”

“Now that is something that I never thought I would hear a man say,” Yoko laughed. “All the guys I know are always worrying how much their wives are costing them. You’re definitely a different kind of cat.”

The older man slumped his shoulders, exposing the balding patch that was spreading around the crown of his skull, the soft lighting bouncing off the hairless skin.

“Know many men, do you?” He asked, not raising his eyes from the bar.

Yoko stopped for a moment, thrown by the man’s question. There was something about the tone of his voice that didn’t sit quite right with her. It harboured something beneath the surface, something that she wasn’t so sure she would like to see come to the surface.

“You know, you never did tell me your name?” She asked, hoping to change the subject.

“Akira,” the man replied. “Yoshimoto. I’m from Chiba originally, been living in the city for close to twenty years, working for the Hibashi Corporation. I work in the accountancy department. Any other personal details you would like to know? My height, weight in college? The size of my shoe collection?”

He laughed then, a grunting sound that sounded more like a throaty cough. Yoko turned up her nose at the sound. The man sounded like a pig when he laughed like that. A dirty pig, caught in the throes of orgasm.

“I was only asking your name,” she said, her voice sounding hurt, scorned like a child.

The man shook his head, his nose hovering just above his drink.

“I’m sorry,” he said, his words muffled by his chest. “I’m very sorry Miss Yoko. I didn’t mean to go off the handle like that. It’s just been a long day, you see. Very long. I guess I need to relieve a little tension.”

Yoko’s face softened but her eyes remained hard, untrusting.

“Okay. I guess I understand that, but there are other ways to unwind, you know? You always go off on girls like that?”

Akira shook his head solemnly and for a moment, Yoko thought that the man was going to break down into tears. A part of her wanted to offer out a comforting arm, to pull the troubled man into her and let him take comfort in her warmth. Yet another part wanted to push him away and run, to get as far away from the man and his long list of problems as she could.

“I know, I’m a bastard,” he said and lifted up his glass, sucking greedily at the liquid inside, his mouth slurping as he drank. He placed the glass gently down on the side and motioned the bartender for another.

“You’re not a bastard,” Yoko said, leaning in towards the man, letting her strong perfume wash over him, watching as his nose ticked at the scent. “You just need to know how to talk to people, that’s all. It’s not fair to take your problems out on other people, okay? Especially pretty girls in a place like this, yeah?”

She giggled and hoped he would do the same. She felt drunk, the whiskey working its dark magic. There was something so sad about this man, it was like seeing a

puppy in one of those pet shops, trapped in a plastic case, its eyes all big and sad, looking for love. That was exactly how she was seeing this man; just a giant, human puppy. She giggled again and felt a little sick at the exertion.

“I know,” Akira was saying, his lips moving but the words seemed to be a step behind, like in a badly dubbed movie. “I know that I should keep my problems to myself. But I get so lonely sometimes. You can understand that, can’t you? Even someone as young as you. What it’s like to be lonely?”

Yoko found herself nodding, her vision slightly blurry. The soft lights now seemed harsh above her and their brightness was hurting her eyes. She felt giddy and wobbled on the stool, the legs threatening to give out beneath her.

“Hey, you okay?” Akira asked, his small, pale face looking up into hers. Yoko remembered the heavy make-up she was wearing and felt suddenly ashamed, so much so that she thought she would burst out into tears. What the hell had she been thinking tonight? Some plan.

“I just, I just feel a bit...weird,” she slurred, shaking her head to try and clear her vision but only succeeding in rattling up a dull headache.

Akira looked at her seriously, his hands drumming out a tuneless beat on the wooden top of the bar.

“You look like you could do with some coffee,” he said, his words still coming to Yoko in parts, disjointed, following each other in a delayed sequence. “Would you like to go get some coffee? There’s a Starbucks in the arcade that should still be open.”

Yoko felt her eyes close and then jolt back open, the shock sending a shivering wave through her stomach, her light dinner suddenly on the verge of spilling forward.

She didn’t think she had given an answer, but she felt the man’s hand grasping hers, pulling her forward towards the door, her legs lagging behind, struggling to keep up with one another.

Yoko passed out of the cosy, warmth of the bar and into the bitter cold of the night. The alcohol warded off the main sting of the cold, but she could still feel the chill of the thin wind wrap around her bare legs as the man pulled her down the street, heading off in search of coffee. She thought that she heard someone call her name behind her, but her head was spinning too much to let her turn around to see.

Akira marched ahead, striding down the street, oblivious to the other people they passed. The heat was in him and he had his woman in tow. He knew exactly where he was going and it wasn’t far. It would all be over soon.

Yoko tried to call out, to ask him to slow down a little. She felt like she was going to be sick but he showed no signs of stopping so she swallowed down the bile, her face twisting as the acid burned down her throat. It was getting darker, the streetlights and the neon glow of the main stretch were fading behind them now as they entered the backstreets. Yoko tried to wade through the sludge that was her brain and recall what was down here. The man was supposed to be taking her for coffee, to help sober her off, but was there a coffee shop down here? She didn’t think so.

Something rose in her then, a red warning of panic and she tried to pull her arm free, fear suddenly injected into her veins like a shot of pure china white. But the man was too strong and Yoko’s body felt too weak. Could she really be this drunk already? How much had she had? Four whiskies? Five? Either way, that shouldn’t have been enough.

She tripped on something and felt her heels slip beneath her. With a yelp, she crashed to the ground, a dull ache of pain echoing in her legs as her knees snapped against the floor.

Akira stopped, turning to look down on the fallen woman.

Yoko looked back up at him, only able to make out his outline, the features blurred by her distorted vision.

“Help me,” she whimpered, tears flowing now as a sense of abandonment and loss fell upon her. The tears swam through her thick make-up, streaking it down her face; a sad clown.

Akira stepped forward, his eyes focused on the mess beneath him. Inside, he burnt with contempt. He didn’t understand this, any of it, but it pleased him to know that the woman at his feet felt lower than he did, more pathetic. He knew that he was a loser, an insignificant speck, but at least he wasn’t grovelling on the floor, rubbing himself in the dirt.

He smiled as he stood over the woman, his eyes black but shining in the dim moonlight.

Slowly, savouring the moment, he started to undue the fly on his trousers, pushing aside his tie and tucking it into his waistband, out of the way.

He pulled his cock free of his underwear and sucked in a breathful of air at the sudden burst of cold.

“Thank you, Yoko,” he said, the woman still whimpering beneath him, her eyes looking up at him, unfocused, barely registering what was happening to her. “Thank you for listening.”

With that, he relaxed, leaning back on his heels as the first hot drips of urine began to flow.

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