



THE JAPANESE TOURIST A very short story by Ras Baba

I was ready. I had my camera loaded and my glasses were clean. The museum loomed large in front of me, casting a shadow over the steps as I took them two at a time. I had finally lost the fat Germans who insisted on buying me lunch, and had since felt I owed them my company all afternoon. Now I had only one hour before the museum closed for the night; more film than time, I thought to myself as I reached the ticket booth.

"One ticket?" asked the bored American as I pulled out my wallet. "No Sam, gimme nine," I thought sarcastically, but knew better than to say so. He had a large stapler.

"Thank you very much" I said and smiled sweetly. Once through the revolving doors the largeness of my mission sunk in. My stomach churned, and I regretted the German sausages and lager. I stepped up to the information booth, drawing a glare from the American woman who was offended that I dared interrupt her romance novel so late in the day.

"Excuse me," I said, "How many levels are in this museum?" She looked puzzled. "Are there three or four floors?"

"There are four floors," she replied. "But we close in an hour," she offered, looking anxiously at my camera. I knew she was prepared for trouble, but so was I.

The sausages and lager were still making themselves known. "Please, where is the bathroom please?" I asked.

"Upstairs, third floor, to the left," she said without looking up from her Harlequin romance.

Perfect, I thought. I had planned to begin at the top anyway, and work my way down. I ran up the stairs—I don't like elevators—two at a time, until I reached the third level. I leaned my shoulder against the door to open it, shielding my swinging camera with my arms. It was locked! Now I was worried. This would mean running back down the stairs and taking the elevator back up.

I ran down the stairs, two at a time, past the second floor, then decided to run back up to try the second story exit in case it was unlocked. It was. Perfect. As I walked through a large security guard, keys swinging at the hips, stopped me. He glared. He was obviously the over-eager moron who had locked the other staircase exit, knowing in his American way that nobody would take the stairs when there were elevators available, especially at this late hour.

"We close soon," he barked.

"Thank you very much," I replied, the smile frozen on my face. I spotted the elevator. It was going down. I managed to press the button just before it passed my floor. I waited. The doors opened. I couldn't believe my eyes. I was suddenly standing in front of the fat German tourists, bringing large toothless smiles to their red faces.

"Going down?" they demanded. I had been planning on going down until the elevator unloaded, then taking it back up.

"No! Sorry! Going up," I pointed, so there would be no mistake.

"They looked at each other for no more than, and I'll give them this, a split second before turning back to me and declaring, "Yal We tool!"

This called for drastic measures. Smiling, I squeezed between them. As the doors began to slide closed, I broke a great sausage and lager wind. Their faces twisted in disgust, and I managed to squeeze out just before the doors shut on their smelly, new compartment. Yes! Revenge for the awful lunch I was forced into earlier.

My lunch seemed to settle down after the elevator incident, so I changed my plans and decided to begin my mission immediately. I would begin on this floor, work my way up, then finish on the bottom floor before I left. That way I could avoid the elevator until the Germans had cleared out.

I unwrapped the first shiny new package of film. The cellophane hissed and crinkled sharply as it tore. The box opened easily under my deft fingers. I dropped the cellophane and the box into a newly-cleaned out garbage container. The box fell in with a small, satisfying thud; the cellophane floated down slowly before static electricity pasted it to the side of the plastic receptacle. I squeezed my fingernails under the plastic lid of the film container, and it opened with a quiet whoosh, as air filled the vacuum sealed compartment.

The back of my camera opened with a click, and I loaded the film in quickly and expertly. I closed the camera back up, smiling as it made the chunky closing sound I love. I wound the film to the first frame, and took a deep breath. I was ready!

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