

**RAIN FALL**  
a thriller by Barry Eisler

*In the changing of the times, they were like autumn lightning, a thing out of season, an empty promise of rain that would fall unheeded on fields already bare.*

– Shosaburo Abe, master swordsman, on the Meiji era *samurai*

## **PART I**

*Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
When I count, there are only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman  
– But who is that on the other side of you?*

– T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

## Chapter 1

Harry moved through the morning rush hour crowd like a shark fin cutting through water. I was following from twenty meters back on the opposite side of the street, sweating with everyone else in the unseasonable October Tokyo heat, and I couldn't help admiring how well the kid had learned what I'd taught him. He was like liquid the way he slipped through a space just before it closed, or drifted to the left to avoid an emerging bottleneck. The changes in Harry's cadence were accomplished so smoothly that no one would recognize he had altered his pace to narrow the gap on our target, who was now moving almost conspicuously quickly down Dogenzaka toward Shibuya Station.

The target's name was Yasuhiro Kawamura. He was a career bureaucrat connected with the Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, the political coalition that has been running Japan almost without a break since the war. His current position was Vice Minister of Land and Infrastructure at the *Kokudokotsusho*, the successor to the old Construction Ministry and Transport Ministry, where he had obviously done something to seriously offend someone because serious offense is the only reason I ever get a call from a client.

I heard Harry's voice in my ear: "He's going into the Higashimura fruit store. I'll set up ahead." We were each sporting a Danish-made, microprocessor controlled receiver small enough to nestle in the ear canal, where you'd need a flashlight to find it. A voice transmitter about the same size goes under the jacket lapel. The transmissions are burst UHF, which makes them very hard to pick up if you don't know exactly what you're looking for, and they're scrambled in case you do. The equipment freed us from having to maintain constant visual contact,

and allowed us to keep moving for awhile if the target stopped or changed direction. So even though I was too far back to see it, I knew where Kawamura had exited, and I could continue walking for some time before having to stop to keep my position behind him. Solo surveillance is difficult, and I was glad I had Harry with me.

About twenty meters from the Higashimura, I turned off into a drugstore, one of the dozens of open-façade structures that line Dogenzaka, catering to the Japanese obsession with health nostrums and germ fighting. Shibuya is home to many different *buzoku*, or tribes, and members of several were represented here this morning, united by a common need for one of the popular bottled energy tonics in which the drugstores specialize – tonics claiming to be bolstered with ginseng and other exotic ingredients but delivering instead with a more prosaic jolt of ordinary caffeine. Waiting in front of the register were a few gray suited *sarariman* – “salary man” corporate rank and file – their faces set, cheap briefcases dangling from tired hands, fortifying themselves for another interchangeable day in the maw of the corporate machine. Behind them, two empty-faced teenage girls, their hair reduced to steel wool brittleness by the dyes they used to turn it orange, noses pierced with oversized rings, their costumes meant to proclaim rejection of the traditional route chosen by the *sarariman* in front of them but offering no understanding of what they had chosen instead; a gray-haired retiree, his skin sagging but his face oddly bright, probably in Shibuya to avail himself of one of the area’s well-known sexual services, which he would pay for out of a pension account that he kept hidden from his wife, not realizing that she knew what he was up to and simply didn’t care.

I wanted to give Kawamura about three minutes to get his fruit before I came out, so I examined a selection of bandages that gave me a view of the street. The way he had ducked into the store looked like a move calculated to flush surveillance, and I didn't like it. If we hadn't been hooked up the way we were, Harry would have had to stop abruptly to maintain his position behind the target. He might have had to do something ridiculous, like tie his shoe or stop to read a street sign, and Kawamura, probably peering out of the entranceway of the store, could have made him. Instead, I knew Harry would continue past the fruit store; he would stop about twenty meters ahead, give me his location, and fall in behind when I told him the parade was moving again.

The fruit store was a good spot to turn off, all right – too good for someone who knew the route to have chosen it by accident. But Harry and I weren't going to be flushed out by amateur moves out of some government antiterrorist primer. I've had that training, so I know how useful it is.

I left the drugstore and continued down Dogenzaka, more slowly than before because I had to give Kawamura time to come out of the store. Shorthand thoughts shot through my mind: Are there enough people between us to obscure his vision if he turns when he comes out? What shops am I passing if I need to duck off suddenly? Is anyone looking up the street at the people heading toward the station, maybe helping Kawamura spot surveillance? If I had already drawn any countersurveillance attention they might notice me now, because before I was hurrying to keep up with the target and now I was taking my time, and people on their way to work don't change their pace that way. But Harry had been the one walking point, the more conspicuous position, and I hadn't done anything to

arouse attention before stopping in the drugstore.

I heard Harry again: “I’m at 109.” Meaning he had turned into the landmark 109 Department Store, famous for its collection of one hundred and nine restaurants and trendy boutiques.

“No good,” I told him. “The first floor is lingerie. You going to blend with fifty teenage girls in blue sailor school uniforms picking out padded bras?”

“I was planning to wait outside,” he replied, and I could imagine him blushing.

The front of 109 is a popular meeting place, typically crowded with a polyglot collection of pedestrians. “Sorry, I thought you were going for the lingerie,” I said, suppressing the urge to smile. “Just hang back and wait for my signal as we go past.”

“Right.”

The fruit store was only ten meters ahead, and still no sign of Kawamura. I was going to have to slow down. I was on the opposite side of the street, outside Kawamura’s probable range of concern, so I could take a chance on just stopping, maybe to fiddle with a cell phone. Still, if he looked, he would spot me standing there, even though, with my father’s Japanese features, I don’t have a problem blending into the crowds. Harry – a pet name for Haruyoshi – being born of two Japanese parents, has never had to worry about sticking out.

When I returned to Tokyo in the early eighties, my brown hair, a legacy from my mother, worked for me the way a fluorescent vest does for a hunter, and I had to dye it black to develop the anonymity that protects me now. But in the last few years the country has gone mad for *chappatsu*, or tea-color dyed hair, and

I don't have to be so vigilant about the dye anymore. I like to tell Harry he's going to have to go *chappatsu* if he wants to fit in, but Harry's too much of an *otaku*, a geek, to give much thought to issues like personal appearance. I guess he doesn't have that much to work with, anyway: an awkward smile that always looks like it's offered in anticipation of a blow, a tendency to blink rapidly when he's excited, a face that's never lost its baby fat, its pudginess accentuated by a shock of thick black hair that on bad days seems almost to float above it. But the same qualities that keep him off magazine covers confer the unobtrusiveness that makes for effective surveillance.

I had reached the point where I was sure I was going to have to stop when Kawamura popped out of the fruit store and reentered the flow. I hung back as much as possible to increase the space between us, watching his head bobbing as he moved down the street. He was tall for a Japanese and that helped, but he was wearing a dark suit like ninety percent of the other people in this crowd – including Harry and me, naturally – so I couldn't drop back too far.

Just as I'd redeveloped the right distance, he stopped and turned to light a cigarette. I continued moving slowly behind and to the right of the group of people that separated us, knowing he wouldn't be able to make me moving with the crowd. I kept my attention focused on the backs of the suits in front of me, just a bored morning commuter. After a moment he turned and started moving again.

I allowed myself the trace of a satisfied smile. Japanese don't stop to light cigarettes; if they did, they'd lose weeks over the course of their adult lives. Nor was there any reason, such as a strong headwind threatening to blow out a match,

for him to turn and face the crowd behind him. Kawamura's obvious attempt at countersurveillance simply confirmed his guilt.

Guilt of what I don't know, and in fact I never ask. I insist on only a few questions. Is the target a man? I don't work against women or children. Have you retained anyone else to solve this problem? I don't want my operation getting tripped up by someone's idea of a B-team, and if you retain me, it's an exclusive. Is the target a principal? I solve problems directly, like the soldier I once was, not by sending messages through uninvolved third parties like a terrorist. The concerns behind the last question are why I like to see independent evidence of guilt: it confirms that the target is indeed the principal and not a clueless innocent.

Twice in eighteen years the absence of that evidence has stayed my hand. Once I was sent against the brother of a newspaper editor who was publishing stories on corruption in a certain politician's home district. The other time it was against the father of a bank reformer who showed excessive zeal in investigating the size and nature of his institution's bad debts. I would have been willing to act directly against the editor and the reformer, had I been retained to do so, but apparently the clients in question had reason to pursue a more circuitous route that involved misleading me. They are no longer clients, of course. Not at all.

I'm not a mercenary, although I was nothing more than that once upon a time. And although I do in a sense live a life of service, I am no longer *samurai*, either. The essence of *samurai* is not just service, but loyalty to his master, to a cause greater than himself. There was a time when I burned with loyalty, a time when, suffused with the *samurai* ethic I had absorbed from escapist novels and

comics as a boy in Japan, I was prepared to die in the service of my adopted liege lord, the United States. But loves as uncritical and unrequited as that one can never last, and usually come to a dramatic end, as mine did. I am a realist now.

As I came to the 109 building I said “Passing.” Not into my lapel or anything stupid like that – the transmitters are sensitive enough so that you don’t need to make any subtle movements that are like billboards for a trained countersurveillance team. Not that one was out there, but you always assume the worst. Harry would know I was passing his position and would fall in after a moment.

Actually, the popularity of cell phones with earpieces makes this kind of work easier than it once was. It used to be that someone walking alone and talking under his breath was either demented or an intelligence or security agent. Today you see this sort of behavior all the time among Japan’s *keitai*, or cell phone, generation.

The light at the bottom of Dogenzaka was red, and the crowd congealed as we approached the five street intersection in front of the train station. Garish neon signs and massive video monitors flashed frantically on the buildings around us. A diesel-powered truck ground its gears as it slogged through the intersection, laborious as a barge in a muddy river, its bullhorns blaring distorted right-wing patriotic songs that momentarily drowned out the bells commuters on bicycles were ringing to warn pedestrians out of the way. A street hawker angled a pushcart through the crowds, rivulets of sweat running down the sides of his face, the smell of steamed fish and rice following in his zigzagging wake. An ageless homeless man, probably a former *sarariman* who had lost his job and his

moorings when the bubble burst in the late eighties, slept propped against the base of a streetlight, inured by alcohol or despair to the tempest around him.

The Dogenzaka intersection is like this night and day, and at rush hour, when the light turns green, over three hundred people step off the curb at the same instant, with another 25,000 waiting in the crush. From here on, it was going to be shoulder to shoulder, chest to back. I would keep close to Kawamura now, no more than five meters, which would put about two hundred people between us. I knew he had a commuter pass and wouldn't need to go to the ticket machine. Harry and I had purchased our tickets in advance so we would be able to follow him right through the wickets. Not that the attendant would notice one way or the other. At rush hour, they're practically numbed by the hordes; you could flash anything, a baseball card, probably, and in you'd go.

The light changed and the crowds swept into one another like a battle scene from some medieval epic. An invisible radar that I'm convinced is possessed only by Tokyoites prevented a mass of collisions in the middle of the street. I watched Kawamura as he cut diagonally across to the station, and maneuvered in behind him as he passed. There were five people between us as we surged past the attendant's booth. I had to stay close now. It would be chaos when the train pulled in: 5000 people pouring out, 5000 people stacked fifteen deep waiting to get on, everyone jockeying for position. Foreigners who think of Japan as a polite society have never ridden the Yamanote at rush hour.

The river of people flowed up the stairs and onto the platform, and the sounds and smells of the station seemed to arouse an extra sense of urgency in the crowd. We were swimming upstream against the people who had just gotten off

the train, and as we reached the platform the doors were already closing on handbags and the odd protruding elbow. By the time we had passed the kiosk midway down the platform, the last car had passed us and a moment later it was gone. The next train would arrive in two minutes.

Kawamura shuffled down to the middle of the platform. I stayed behind him but hung back from the tracks, avoiding his wake. He was looking up and down the platform, but even if he had spotted Harry or me earlier, seeing us waiting for the train wasn't going to unnerve him. Half the people waiting had just walked down Dogenzaka.

I felt the rumble of the next train as Harry walked past me like a fighter jet buzzing a carrier control tower, the slightest nod of his head indicating that the rest was with me. I had told him I only needed his help until Kawamura was on the train, which is where he had always gone during our previous surveillance. Harry had done his usual good work in helping me get close to the target, and, per our script, he was now exiting the scene. I would contact him later, when I was done with the solo aspects of the job.

Harry thinks I'm a private investigator and that all I do is follow these people around collecting information. To avoid the suspicious appearance of a too-high mortality rate for the subjects we track, I often have him follow people in whom I have no interest, who of course then provide some measure of cover by continuing to live their happy and oblivious lives. Also, where possible, I avoid sharing the subject's name with Harry to minimize the chances that he'll come across too many coincidental obituaries. Still, some of our subjects do have a habit of dying at the end of surveillance, and I know Harry has a curious mind.

So far he hasn't asked, which is good. I like Harry as an asset and wouldn't want him to become a liability.

I moved up close behind Kawamura, just another commuter trying to get a good position for boarding the train. This was the most delicate part of the operation. If I flubbed it, he would make me and it would be difficult to get sufficiently close to him for a second try.

My right hand dipped into my pants pocket and touched a microprocessor-controlled magnet, about the size and weight of a quarter. On one side the magnet was covered with blue worsted cloth, like that of the suit Kawamura was wearing. Had it been necessary, I could have stripped away the blue to expose a layer of gray, which was the other color Kawamura favored. On the opposite side of the magnet was an adhesive backing.

I withdrew the magnet from my pocket and protected it from view by cupping it in my hands. I would have to wait for the right moment, when Kawamura's attention was distracted. Mildly distracted would be enough. Maybe as we were boarding the train. I peeled off the wax paper covering the adhesive and crumbled it into my left pants pocket.

The train emerged at the end of the platform and hurtled toward us. Kawamura pulled a cell phone out of his breast pocket. Started to input a number.

*Okay, do it now.* I brushed past him, placing the magnet on his suit jacket just below the left shoulder blade, and moved several paces down the platform.

Kawamura spoke into the phone for only a few seconds, not loudly enough for me to hear over the screeching brakes of the train slowing to a halt in front of us, and then slipped the phone back in his left breast pocket. I wondered

whom he had called. It didn't matter. Two stations ahead, three at the most, and it would be done.

The train stopped and its doors opened, releasing a gush of human effluent. When the outflow slowed to a trickle, the lines waiting on either side of the doors collapsed inward and poured inside, as though someone had hit the reverse switch on a giant vacuum. People kept jamming themselves in despite the warnings that "The doors are closing!" and the mass of commuters grew more swollen until we were all held firmly in place, with no need to grip the overhead handles because there was nowhere to fall. The doors shut, the car lurched forward, and we moved off.

I exhaled slowly and rotated my head from side to side, hearing the joints crack in my neck, feeling the last remnants of nervousness drain away as we reached the final moments. It has always been this way for me. When I was a teenager, I lived for awhile near a town that had a network of gorges cutting through it, and at some of them you could jump from the cliffs into deep swimming holes. You could see the older kids doing it all the time – it didn't look so far up. The first time I climbed to the top and looked down, though, I couldn't believe how high I was, and I froze. But the other kids were watching. And right then, I knew that no matter how afraid I was, no matter what might happen, I was going to jump, and some instinctive part of me shut down my awareness of everything except the simple, muscular action of running forward. I had no other perceptions, no awareness of any future beyond the taking of those brisk steps. I remember thinking that it didn't even matter if I died.

Kawamura was standing in front of the door at one end of the car, about a

meter from where I was positioned, his right hand holding one of the overhead bars. I needed to stay close now.

The word I had gotten was that this had to look natural: my specialty, and the reason my services are always in demand. Harry had obtained Kawamura's medical records from Jikei University Hospital, which showed that he had a condition called complete heart block and owed his continuing existence to a pacemaker installed five years earlier. Turn off the pacemaker, and you turn off Kawamura.

I twisted so that my back was to the doors – a slight breach of Tokyo's minimal train etiquette, but I didn't want anyone who might speak English to see the kinds of prompts that were going to appear on the screen of the PDA computer I was carrying. I had downloaded a cardiac interrogation program into it, the kind a doctor uses to adjust a patient's pacemaker. And I had rigged it so that the PDA fed infrared commands to the control magnet. The only difference between my setup and a cardiologist's was that mine was miniaturized and wireless. That, and I hadn't taken the Hippocratic oath.

The PDA was already turned on and in sleep mode, so it powered up instantly. I glanced down at the screen. It was flashing "pacing parameters." I hit the enter key and the screen changed, giving me an option of "threshold testing" and "sensing testing." I selected the former and was offered a range of parameters: rate, pulse width, amplitude. I chose rate and quickly set the pacemaker at its lowest rate limit of forty beats per minute, then returned to the previous screen and selected pulse width. The screen indicated that the pacemaker was set to deliver current at durations of .48 milliseconds. I decreased

the pulse width as far as it would go, then changed to amplitude. The unit was preset at 8.5 volts, and I started dropping it a half-volt at a time. When I had taken it down two full volts, the screen flashed, “You have now decreased unit amplitude by two volts. Are you sure you want to continue to decrease unit amplitude?” I entered “Yes” and went on, repeating the sequence every time I took it down two volts.

When the train pulled into Yoyogi Station, Kawamura stepped off. Was he getting off here? That would be a problem: the unit’s infrared had limited range, and it would be a challenge to operate it and follow him closely at the same time. *Damn, just a few more seconds*, I thought, bracing to follow him out. But he was only allowing the people behind him to leave the train, and stopped outside the doors. When the Yoyogi passengers had exited he got back on, followed closely by several people who had been waiting on the platform. The doors closed and we moved off again.

At two volts, the screen warned me that I was nearing minimum output values and it would be dangerous to further decrease output. I overrode the warning and took the unit down another half volt, glancing up at Kawamura as I did so. He hadn’t changed his position.

When I reached a single volt and tried to go further, the screen flashed, “Your command will set the unit at minimum output values. Are you certain that you wish to enter this command?” I entered “Yes.” It prompted me one more time anyway: “You have programmed the unit to minimum output values. Please confirm.” Again I entered “yes.” There was a one second delay, then the screen started flashing bold-faced letters: **“Unacceptable output values. Unacceptable**

**output values.”**

I closed the cover, but left the PDA on. It would reset automatically. There was always the chance that the sequence hadn't worked the first time around, and I wanted to be able to try again if I had to.

There wasn't any need. As the train pulled into Shinjuku Station and jerked to a stop, Kawamura stumbled against the woman next to him. The doors opened and the other passengers flowed out, but Kawamura remained, gripping one of the upright bars next to the door with his right hand and clutching his package of fruit with his left, commuters shoving past him. I watched him rotate counterclockwise until his back hit the wall next to the door. His mouth was open; he looked slightly surprised. Then slowly, almost gently, he slid to the floor. I saw one of the passengers who had gotten on at Yoyogi stoop down to assist him. The man, a mid-forties Westerner, tall and thin enough to make me think of a javelin, somehow aristocratic in his wireless glasses, shook Kawamura's shoulders, but Kawamura was past noticing the stranger's efforts at succor.

*“Daijoubu desu ka?”* I asked, my left hand moving to support Kawamura's back, feeling for the magnet. Is he all right? I used Japanese because it was likely that the Westerner wouldn't understand it and our interaction would be kept to a minimum.

*“Wakaranai,”* the stranger muttered. I don't know. He patted Kawamura's increasingly bluish cheeks and shook him again – a bit roughly, I thought. So he did speak some Japanese. It didn't matter. I pinched the edge of the magnet and pulled it free. Kawamura was done.

I stepped past them onto the platform and the in-flow immediately began surging onto the train behind me. Glancing through the window nearest the door as I walked past, I was stunned to see the stranger going through Kawamura's pockets. My first thought was that Kawamura was being robbed. I moved closer to the window for a better look, but the growing crush of passengers obscured my view.

I had an urge to get back on, but operationally that would have been stupid, and anyway it was too late. The doors were already sliding shut. I saw them close and catch on something, maybe a handbag or a foot. They opened slightly and closed again. It was an apple, falling to the tracks as the train pulled away.