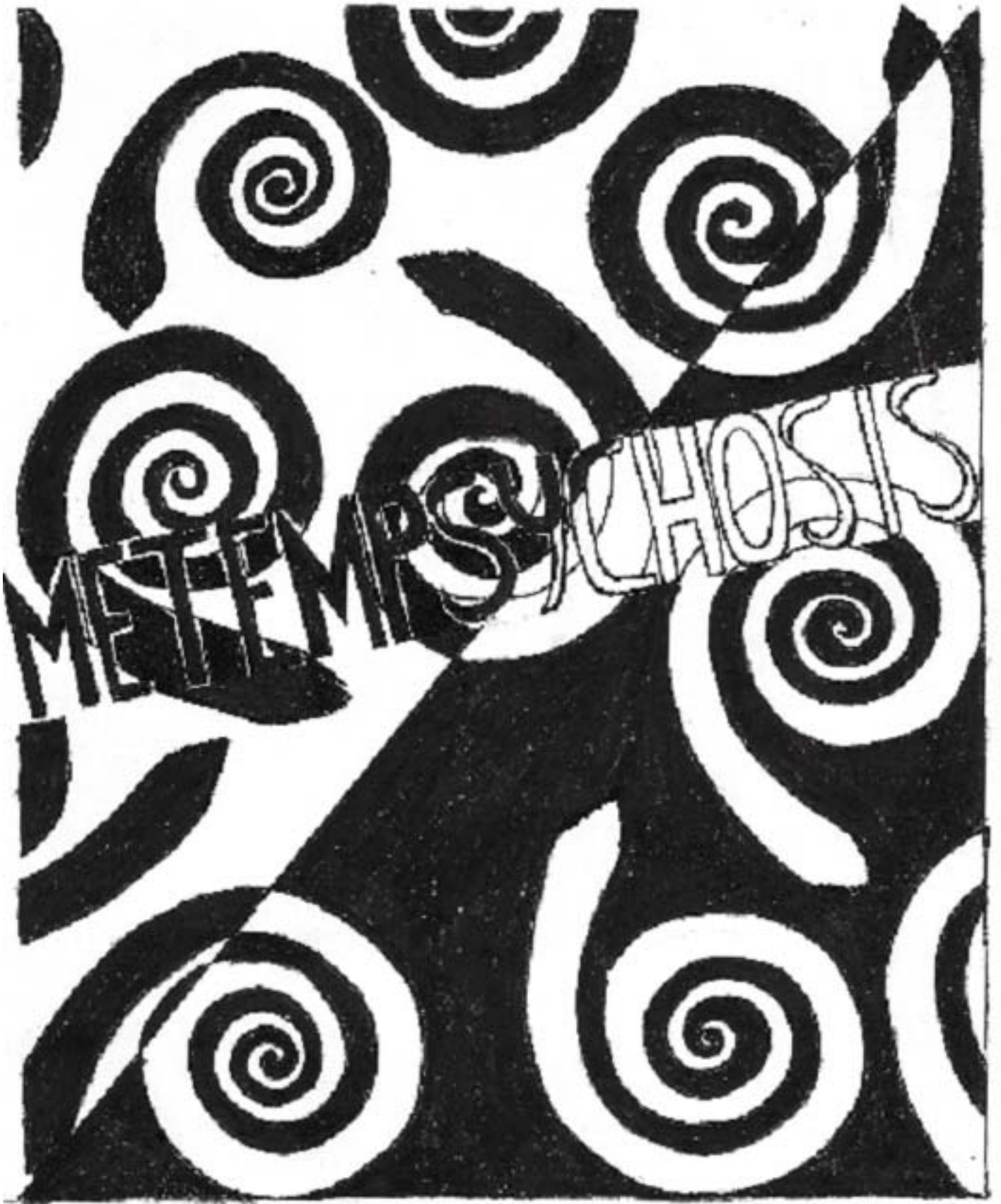


Brian Wizard's



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Even in the sunset years of their lives, Mieko and Hiroshi were dedicated farmers. They lent their green thumbs not only to food production but also to the grace and beauty of traditional Japanese gardens. Garden masterpieces embellished their homes in the country outskirts of Hiroshima.

In conventional Japanese culture, separate male and female roles dictate certain horticultural tasks. Mieko and Hiroshi did not conform to that legacy as they felt their individual selves were each one-half of a whole entity. As one, they shared all the chores and responsibilities, joys and gratifications of their unique alliance with the kingdom of plants.

Of all their shared garden projects, the art of bonsai was their favorite. This ancient art form produces miniature-potted trees. With proper care, such trees live in an environment conducive to longevity. For Mieko and Hiroshi this longevity was symbolic of the never-ending love they held for each other.

It was on August 4th, 1945 that the two bonsai masters traveled to Hiroshima to present a public viewing of their prize-bonsai collection. With the horror of World War II shadowing their daily lives, the couple could still find peace and tranquility in the midst of their miniature forest. It made them happy to be able to share such rare commodities.

Two days later, while attending to their exhibit, they felt an eerie sense of panic. Mieko looked across a plant covered display table to watch Hiroshi work. She held only one thought as she watched her other-half gleam with pride as he added one more touch of his artistic genius to the display. Hiroshi felt her stare, looked to her and nodded. Without a word, they walked toward each other for a loving embrace.

“Our life together has been our greatest creation,” Hiroshi told his wife.

“The trees are excited,” Mieko whispered. Her head rested on her husband's chest. Her right arm stretched out as she ran an open palm across the crown of the nearest tree. “Can we be together forever?” she asked her soul mate.

“We will remain linked as one throughout time,” he told her.

In a bright, soundless flash of light, they evaporated into the future.

Mill Valley, California
August 6, 1948

"No! I don't think we should," Marianne Morris complained to her boyfriend, Danny Osborne, as he attempted to force his way between her legs in the front seat of his daddy's car. It wasn't unusual for Danny to make sexual advances, but this time the advances had become demands.

"We must," he insisted. "My patience has run out. Everyone is doing it but you and me. If you love me, you'll..."

"No! I won't," Marianne said, accompanied by a very hard push against Danny's head.

Embarrassed by his own rudeness, Danny pulled away from his girlfriend. His stare shot through the windshield, far off into space. "I'm sorry," he apologized.

"There will be plenty of time for us to make babies."

"I don't want to make babies, Marianne. I want to make love. Look at me!" Danny unzipped his fly, reached into his pants and withdrew more than a handful of swollen manhood. "I'm about to explode!"

Marianne was amazed at her own hormonal surge and physical response to the sight and aroma of Danny's erection. She felt herself slip out of control. Her pelvic muscles tightened. Her breath became deep, making her breasts heave. She felt like she too was going to burst. In what appeared to be one continuous flow of motion, Marianne slipped one leg out of her panties, raised her dress, and straddled a very surprised Danny Osborne.

Seven weeks later, Marianne was worried. Her period was very overdue and she feared the worst.

"Danny, I'm pregnant," she told the father, as he pumped fuel into a customer's car at the local gas station.

"What? How could you be?"

"By doing you know what!" She sounded hoarse as she strained not to raise her voice. "How are you going to support me, us? You can't even afford a car of your own, never mind a wife and baby."

"Wife and baby? You have got the *wrong* guy, girl. I've got plans and none of them include a wife and child," Danny responded harshly.

“Well! What are you going to do?” the shocked mother-to-be asked, placing her hands on her hips in disgust. “Run away?” Her head wagged as she shouted the question into Danny's red with embarrassment face, while he collected money from the driver of the fueled automobile.

“You can consider me gone,” he snapped in response. Within two days, Danny was gone, forever.

Marianne could feel the life growing inside her. At night, her dreams had become strange and exotic. She often saw two Asian people surrounded by many plants. Awake, she could feel the presence of someone else, as if she had visitors. None of this bothered her. She enjoyed the warm sense of shared love generated within her.

Nevertheless, worry and confusion overwhelmed her. She didn't know what to do. She dared not to tell her parents, but how could she keep her predicament from becoming obvious? Her options were few. She could run away. She could kill herself. Oh, if only Danny wasn't such an irresponsible coward, marriage would have been an option.

“Go to one of those doctors that can fix you,” her friend Amanda suggested.

“Kill it?” The thought did not set right with Marianne.

“Be serious, Marianne. You can't have it,” Amanda insisted. “I can help you.” Amanda had the underground connections to make the suggestion become a reality.

The doctor, a non-English speaking man of questionable character, put his patient under sedation. It did not take long for the removal of the life that was no longer to be born.

With Amanda's help, Marianne returned home that same day. Her parents were not yet home from work. She left a note on the kitchen table saying that she was not feeling well and had gone to bed. The note was true. Physically, she felt terrible for the next three days. Emotionally, she felt sinful.

Her mother came to her room when she returned home and read the note. She immediately suggested a visit to the family doctor. Marianne declined, brushing off her illness as the flu.

In her dreams, Marianne's emotional torment was the worst. The sense of a strong mutual love within her disappeared, only to be replaced the grief-stricken cries of two broken hearts. In her subconscious ran a constant dialogue murmured in an indiscernible language. She began to do things to keep herself from sleeping. Quietly through the night, she would read, sew, or re-clean her already spotless bedroom. After a week of diminished sleep, she was a wreck. To her mother she looked like death-gone cold.

"You are going to see the doctor today, young lady," her mother asserted with authority.

Marianne knew that she could no longer live this way. She broke into tears as she collapsed into a kitchen chair. Her mother hurried to her side.

"I've done something wrong, Mom," she began to confess.

"You can do no wrong in my eyes," her mother comforted her. 'Now, what's the problem? Boy trouble?'"

Marianne told her story about having sex with Danny, getting pregnant and aborting the child. Her mother was silently surprised at the extent of the "boy trouble." Nevertheless, she never let her emotions override her first concern, which was, her daughter's health.

Later that day, the doctor comforted Marianne and her mother with the diagnosis that there was no permanent damage done by the illegal operation, and surprised them both with the news that Marianne was still very much pregnant. If she had not had the operation, she would have had twins.

At the supper table that night, Marianne's father countered the two women's relief that all is well with a furious rant of anger. "You're what! By whom?"

"You remember Danny Osborne?"

"That pimple faced hoodlum that works at the gas station? I know his parents. I know where they live!" He continued to rave as he angrily pushed himself away from the table and headed for the front door.

"But Daddy. . ." Marianne called out in a futile attempt to explain that Danny was no longer in town, as her father stormed out of the house.

* * *

Marianne gave birth to a healthy boy and named him Dannyo, much to her father's dismay. Throughout the boy's childhood, he was a quiet lad and kept pretty much to himself. His mother knew that for some strange reason her son was happiest when he was alone and pretending he was a farmer. Frequently she would watch him till imaginary soil, plant his pretend seeds, tend his make-believe garden, and enjoy a bountiful harvest. Dannyo would come up to his mother acting the part of a merchant, offering her his produce. She would offer him a fair imaginary price, but in the end, he would don his cutest smile, bow a funny little bow, and offer his wares to her free.

In the spring of the year that Dannyo was to turn seven years old, opportunity arose for Marianne and her son to move north to the apple-growing town of Sebastopol. As they drove along the Redwood Highway, Dannyo couldn't stop talking about how happy he was to be moving into a farming community. "I can pretend that I am planting a garden in a real field, instead of my bedroom."

Marianne couldn't help wondering where he picked up his profound interest in farming. Neither she nor anyone else in her family had ever cared much for digging in the dirt. Moreover, to whom was it that Dannyo would mumble to as he worked so hard on his imaginary crops?

"Son, why do you play that same farming game over and over?"

"I'm practicing. We want to be a great farmer when I grow up."

"What do you mean, 'We want to be a great farmer?'"

Dannyo suddenly flushed and lowered his head. You see, as far back as he could remember he had always felt the presence of an inner friend. He wants to keep his friend a secret because he is sure no one will understand how alive this person inside him really is. Thinking in his seat, he snaps his head up, and says emphatically, "Oh, you know, Mom. It's just me and my pretend friend."

"Oh, yes. Of course. Are you lonely? I can call Mrs. Rogers and have young Sid over for the weekend."

"That would be fun."

Dannyo sighed with relief when his mother dropped the subject. How could she understand that there is a real person living in his mind? A

person he could see in his dreams. One who spoke a foreign language and called herself Me-ay-ko.

Marianne wondered what she could do to make Dannyo's seventh birthday his best ever. What if she bought him everything needed to create a real garden?

On June 24th, Dannyo's eyes opened wide when he followed his mother's instructions to look out the back door, where he found his birthday presents.

"Real gardening tools!" Dannyo ran out of the house as if it was on fire to delve into the neat stack of tools.

"That's just the beginning," Marianne said to her excited son. "Later today we'll go to Bennett's Nursery and you can go on a shopping spree for seeds, fertilizer, and anything else you think you might need for a real garden."

"Where can I put it?"

"Over there by the shed?" his mother suggested.

"No. That will never do. There's not enough sun," Dannyo informed her. His eyes searched the backyard for just the right spot. "Over here!" He ran to the far corner of the yard and paced off a five-meter square patch of sun-drenched ground.

"That ground is really hard," Marianne warned.

"I'll wet it first. You just wait and see. I will be putting fresh vegetable on our table in no time at all. These are the best birthday presents ever," he tells his mom with a hug. "Thanks, Mom. I was worried you were going to get me something dumb like a baseball glove."

Dylano Bennett founded Bennett's Nursery when he was in his early twenties. Mr. Bennett was no longer active in running the business, but was always on hand to give advice to other gardening enthusiasts. Dannyo's eagerness to become a farmer captivated the elderly Mr. Bennett's interest. "I've never seen such excitement over digging in the dirt as your lad has," the retired farmer told Marianne.

"Dannyo has been playing farmer for years. It's his birthday today, so I thought this was a perfect opportunity to turn a fantasy into a reality," she explained.

“Dannyo, this is Mr. Bennett. Mr. Bennett, my son, Dannyo,” Marianne introduced the two when Dannyo walked up to them with both his hands full of seed packets.

“Farming is a lot of hard work, lad. Are you up to it?” Mr. Bennett asked the small boy. He did not expect much more than a yes or no, but to his delight, he heard words that reflected his own gardening philosophy.

“It's also a source for much love, given and taken,” Dannyo seriously told the tall master gardener. The boy bowed a subtle bow of respects, and then turned away to do more shopping.

“Your son is very interesting, Mrs. Morris.”

“Oh. He's a little weird, if that's, what you mean. But there's no harm in him.” Marianne said, defensively aware of her son's eccentric behavior.

Mr. Bennett excused himself from Marianne's company and went over to Dannyo, whose face expressed confusion. “I'm too old to do any more sweat-worthy tilling of the soil,” the old man explained to Dannyo. “But I'm not too old to pass along some gardening secrets. So, if you ever have any questions, feel free to ask me.”

Dannyo took an instant liking to Mr. Bennett. Without hesitation, he asked some very serious questions. His first was, “I don't understand these fertilizers.”

The old master quickly explained how all sorts of new chemicals were now on the market. Many touted as “wonder drugs” for the soil. “Frankly, nothing beats good old animal manure.”

From that day on, the two gardeners were best of friends. Marianne worried her son was taking up too much of Mr. Bennett's time with a constant barrage of gardening questions. She relaxed when Mr. Bennett boasted to her how Dannyo had the greenest thumb in the land. This she knew, as she could see the results of her son's magnificent gift of farming at adorning her dining table daily. She could also see Mr. Bennett's joy in being with Dannyo. They were like grand-father and grand-son.

Mr. Bennett was always willing to share with Dannyo his deepest agronomic secrets. He was also humble enough to listen to the boy's innate understanding of plants, especially when he introduced the budding horticulturist to his own favorite hobby: the art of bonsai. Dannyo took to

the ancient Japanese tradition like a bird to the sky. Soon, Mr. Bennett felt as much a student as he did a teacher.

When he was eighty-four years old, Mr. Bennett caught a deadly flu. The now nineteen-year-old Dannyo brought a large vine ripened tomato to his friend as a get-well gift.

“Here you go fresh fruit.”

As the old man sucked on the juicy tomato, Dannyo spoke to all the tiny trees that Mr. Bennett had brought from the greenhouse to his bedroom. “Why have you surrounded yourself with a bonsai tree forest?” Dannyo questioned.

“I thought that for my last act,” the old man paused to cough, “instead of riding off into the sunset, I'd simply fade away into the forest.”

“Mr. Bennett, you'll be up puttering in your garden again in no time at all,” Dannyo encouraged his friend.

However, it was not to be like that. Mr. Bennett did fade away into the forest, his forest of bonsai trees. Before doing so, he made it clear to everyone that Dannyo was to receive control of all his bonsai tree collection. “Lad, rest assure that I pass away in comfort knowing that my prize collection of bonsai trees will be in the hands of a master,” he told his young gardening cohort before he died.

All during the deep friendship Dannyo had with Mr. Bennett, he never revealed his secret source of knowledge about gardening and the art of bonsai. This source, of course, was his dream friend known to him as Me-ay-ko.

Practically every night, Dannyo met his mysterious dream companion as she worked in her immaculate garden. She would invite him to help her work the soil, prune the branches, and trim the roots of her prize bonsai trees. Dannyo never understood much of what she said, although he realized that she always referred to him as Hiroshi. Whenever she would do that, Dannyo would feel like a bystander. The only part of the dreams he didn't like were their endings. Most of the time, the dreams would end with a surge of fear, followed by a bright, soundless flash of light.

Marianne noticed a change in her son's activities after Mr. Bennett's death. He no longer tended to his vegetable gardens. He hired farmhands to take care of them. All his energy went into the art of bonsai cultivation.

Within a few years, Dannyo had developed a reputation for his techniques in the creation of prize-winning miniature trees. He became the Northern California source of advice to other bonsai enthusiasts.

One day, while he was attending a bonsai convention in San Francisco, Dannyo walked past a fortuneteller's place of business. He was carrying a small potted tree that was over 100 years old. He had some time to spare and an odd thought struck him. *Why not enlist the services of the clairvoyant to help him contact his dream friend?*

The sign on the door read, *Walk In*, as he did, a bell jingled. Incense burned in a vessel set upon an intricately carved table. It sent a stream of smoke curling into the air. The smoke tickled his nose and made him sneeze. He perused the posters on the walls that displayed images of god-like beings. One was a dancer with many arms. Another was of a winged unicorn with a lithe female rider soaring among the clouds. One wall displayed posters of celestial charts, the solar system, astrological charts, a schematic of the chakras within the human body, and unnamed photographs of odd-looking people from foreign lands. Curiously, he scanned the trinket-laden shelves that held vases with dried flowers and feathers, colorful candles, crystal specimens and figurines made of glass, metal, wood, and stone. The item that attracted his greatest admiration was a carved soapstone rendition of the moon sitting on a cloud.

A middle-aged woman entered the room through a beaded curtain strung in the doorway. Dannyo could not help staring at her. She wore a full-length, sequin-studded, red dress. She adorned her pierced ears with multiple earrings. Even her nose had a gold ring through one nostril. Dannyo could not, not stare at the dark red dot in the center of her forehead that matched the color of the woman's lips and dress. Her eye makeup made her face appear mystical, expressing a deep knowledge of all things metaphysical.

"May I be of assistance, Sir?" the woman asked.

Dannyo was embarrassed at his staring and inhibited about asking for her professional help. "I hope so."

"Come now," the confident woman advised her prospective client, while leading him by the arm to an ornate sofa set against one of the walls.

"Don't be shy. I am Reverend Dora. I am a psychic, a mediator between dimensions. I sense that you are here in search of a friend that has passed on to the other side."

"Not really," Dannyo admitted. "I have contact with a 'friend', but only in my dreams."

The woman tilted her head to one side. The movement reminded Dannyo of the way dogs sometime act when they show a sign of curiosity. "Have you ever been able to make contact, or identify, with a dream entity?" he asked frankly.

"I have a gift," the Reverend modestly replied. "We could step into my private chambers. Perhaps I can communicate with this dream-friend of yours."

Dannyo agreed to this and followed her into a small backroom. They sat across from each other on folding wooden chairs with nothing between them. More incense filled the air. Dannyo sneezed again.

"Hold your hands apart. Place them on your legs, palm up," she instructed. "Take a deep breath and relax."

Dannyo sat in that position for an hour. He answered his interrogator's questions and allegations as she used her' psychic powers to search for details of his dream woman's character.

"Are you able to touch her?"

"No. We never touch."

"Do you converse?"

"Sort of. She speaks a language I don't understand. Japanese I think. Mostly, I read her body language."

"What do you talk about?"

"Gardening. It is amazing how I have learned genuine gardening techniques from this dream woman. The strangest part is I never feel like she is really speaking to me. I feel like...

"A bystander?" Reverend Dora finishes.

“Exactly. Is that significant?”

“Perhaps. The mental image I am receiving is of two souls with a deep spiritual love for each other. Both are within you, but one is out of place. She resides into your heart chakra. I would like to trace your past lives to see if I can find any clues there. This will take time. I charge thirty-five dollars an hour. Or, you can buy ten hours for two-hundred dollars, in advance.”

“What will I get for my two hundred dollars?” Dannyo’s respect for the soothsayer dropped like a rock at the terms of her fee options. He should have seen that coming.

“We will work on communicating with your friend through séances.”

“Have you ever really done that?” Dannyo asked, his disbelief showing through.

“All we can do is try. I will not be able to guarantee any successful communication, and if you do not have faith in my gift, then it will be that much harder. “

“Do you ever trade for services?”

“What do you have to trade?”

“I have this tree. It is a fine specimen of the Japanese art of bonsai. It's over a century old.”

Reverend Dora took a hold of the potted tree and inspected it. “Your dream guide teaches you how to create these tiny trees?”

“Yes, she does.”

“I’m very interested in your case, Mr. Morris. We can trade. I feel confident that we will make contact. I might be able to use this tree to get a feel for ... do you have a name for your dream girl?”

“She calls herself Me-ay-ko.”

“Mieko. And what does she call you?”

“Hiroshi.”

“Yes. Definitely Japanese. Do you want to start tonight?”

“This all sounds like hocus-pocus to me. If you really think you can contact her, though, and you’ll trade, I guess we can try.”

That night they began the series of séances. They sat across from each other, fingers inter-locked, and one palm up, the other down. Before

putting them into a deep trance, Reverend Dora pushed the RECORD/PLAY button of her tape recorder to catch every word of the séance. When the spirit of Mieko was able to speak, Dannyo became the channel. His voice rose to a falsetto as she spoke in melodic Japanese. This surprised Reverend Dora.

When it was over, she and Dannyo listened to the tape recording of his foreign voice. It made him both excited and disappointed. "This is great. Amazing to say the least," he acknowledged with enthusiasm. "But what good does a tape recording of gibberish really do for us?" he complained.

"I have a friend," Reverend Dora told him. "A Japanese man named Hayato. He works as a translator. I'll call him right now."

Hayato agreed to do the translation for them at his house, after eight o'clock that night. At eight-fifteen, the three sat comfortably in the sanctuary of the translator's den. He offered them warm sake to sip as he listened to the tape.

"You may have a career in opera with such a lovely soprano voice as this, my friend," Hayato teased.

They consumed an entire bottle of sake before the translation was finished.

"It's a very sad story," Hayato announced. He had first transcribed the tape into Japanese, then into English. He offered to read his work for his guests.

The story was a tale of great love, anguish, and fear. It first told of the love between Mieko and Hiroshi. It then spoke of their special union with the plant kingdom. It relived the last few moments of their lives during the public display of their prize bonsai trees in Hiroshima.

"Then, there was a bright, soundless flash of light," Hayato read.

"Yes!" Dannyo spoke up. "I've seen that flash of light many times. It always ends my dreams."

Hayato's translation continued to describe through the process of metempsychosis, Mieko and Hiroshi could sense that they were still together, sharing the *same womb* of a new mother. For a short while, they were content, until once again an incomprehensible act of man altered their happiness. Mieko increased her will to cling to her soul mate. They held

tight to each other's spiritual being as her new physical being was mercilessly ripped from its garden like a noxious weed.

Since then, the unbridgeable gap of life separates their spirits. The only way Mieko could communicate with her soul mate was in Hiroshi's reincarnated body through dreams.

"I was once a Japanese farmer called Hiroshi?" Dannyo blurted out. With that information, he understood where some of his idiosyncrasies came from, like his habit of bowing to show respect.

Dannyo stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. He sat on Hayato's front porch for ten minutes mulling over the psychic revelations.

"How are you feeling?" Reverend Dora asked, as she joined him.

"I feel sad. They have done so much to fill my life with happiness that I want to do something special for them."

"Like what?"

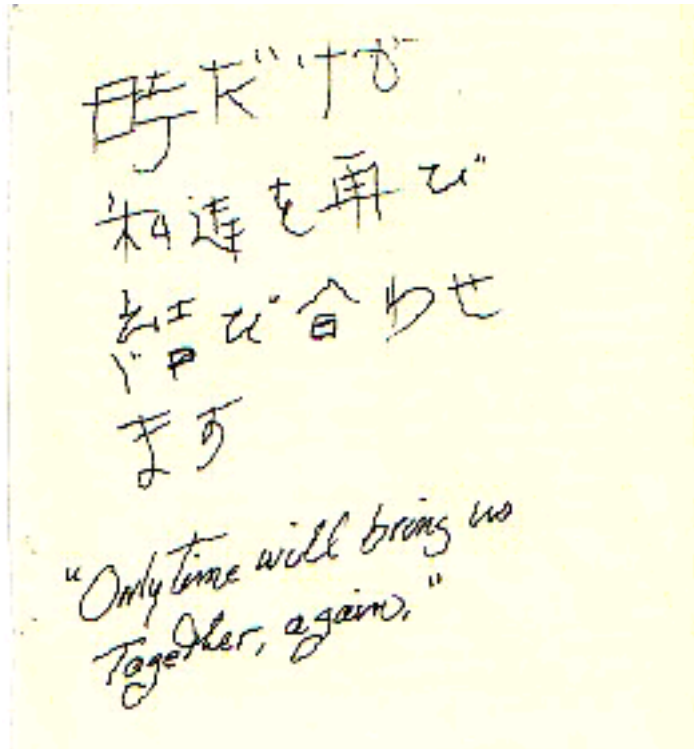
Dannyo's spirit picked up when he thought of getting back in touch with Mieko and asking her what she would like him to do. "Do you think Hayato could teach us enough Japanese to communicate with Mieko?" he asked Reverend Dora. She only raised her eyebrows before they hurried in to ask.

"I think you're both making this whole thing up," Hayato told them. "Or you're both crazy."

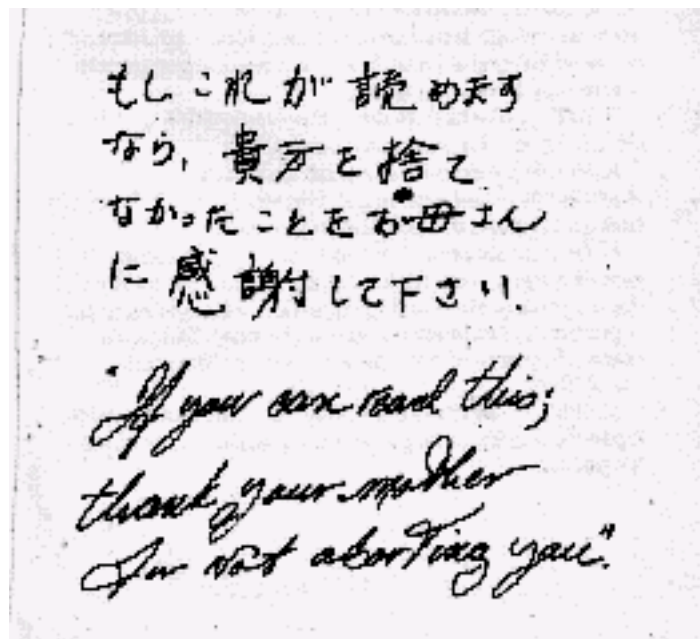
After a few moments of banter about who in this world is crazy and who is not, Hayato did teach them enough Japanese to ask Dannyo's question.

In the next séance, Reverend Dora and Dannyo regained contact with Mieko. Dannyo found her in the dream garden. He asked his question. The tape recorder captured her channeled response through Dannyo's falsetto voice. They immediately took the tape to Hayato for translation.

Mieko's answer was brief. Hayato wrote it out in both Japanese and English, passing the piece of paper to his guests.



There is one more sentence to Mieko's message," Hayato announced. "It would make a great bumper sticker." He wrote the last sentence out as he did the last. He passed the piece of paper to Reverend Dora. It read:



EPILOGUE

Marianne noticed a change in her son's attitude after his last trip to the city. His mood had become very solemn. Dannyo could not rid his mind of Mieko's answer. Did she mean that time would heal all wounds? He still asked himself, "What can I do for them?"

Within a week, the answer came to him as he drove to Santa Rosa to do some errands. Instead of stopping to do errands, he drove his truck north on Highway 101 until he came to a large forest of redwood trees. He walked deep into a majestic grove of towering sequoias, and laughed when he realized that he was a bonsai person among these giant plants. He collected ample *Galerina* mushrooms as he walked along, revealing a spiritual intent to reunite his two inner spirits. He stopped at a place that made him feel at home, resting on a fallen redwood log. There he ingested a lethal quantity of toxic mushrooms. His mind spun with hallucinations. His body retched and trembled. In the last few moments of his life, when his body no longer moved and his consciousness was fading, in his subconscious eye saw the dream-scene that he had hoped he would.

Mieko was in her garden. She was staring at him with a look of concern. Her expression turned to surprise, and then joy, as the physical likeness of Hiroshi walked away from Dannyo. The two Japanese farmers embraced each other. The process of metempsychosis had begun. Hiroshi and Mieko's images began to fade. He knew his life as Dannyo was lost. It had been a good life.

Suddenly, a fear of being alone seized his soul. It was then that Hiroshi and Mieko broke their embrace with a gesture for him to join them. He could feel his spirit unite with theirs as death's dark cloud engulfed them.

* * *

TRIPLETS BORN TO QUEENSLAND COUPLE

Darling Downs residents Sheila and Vern Dulley became the proud parents of three new sets of farm hands yesterday.

When Vern was asked what he thought life would be like down on the farm with three added mouths to feed, he answered, "We'll have to budget our money for years to come, mate, but it'll sure pay off when they grow old enough to help work the land."

Brian W. Lipard