

THE GIRL WHO LEAPT
THROUGH TIME

YASUTAKA TSUTSUI

Translated by David Karashima



Contents

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THE GIRL WHO LEAPT THROUGH TIME 7

THE STUFF THAT NIGHTMARES ARE MADE OF 107

THE GIRL WHO LEAPT
THROUGH TIME

THE DARK SHADOW IN THE SCIENCE LAB

It had been hours since most of the students had left the school building. Its halls and classrooms were now cold, and everywhere was quiet, except for the distant sound of someone playing Chopin's 'Polonaise' on the piano in the auditorium.

Kazuko Yoshiyama was in her last year of junior high school, and she'd just about finished cleaning up the science lab with her classmates, Kazuo Fukamachi and Goro Asakura.

"That's good enough. I'll take out the trash," she said. "You boys can go wash your hands."

As the tall and lanky Kazuo left the room with the short and stocky Goro, Kazuko had to stop herself from letting out a chuckle at the contrast between her two friends. They were very different in other ways, too. Both of them were very clever, that was for sure. But while Goro worked hard and could be very impulsive, Kazuo was a bit of a dreamer. In fact, he often seemed

to be in a world of his own, and Kazuko could never be sure of what he was thinking.

While washing their hands in the bathroom sink, Goro looked over at Kazuo.

“Kazuko’s cute, and she’s nice, too. But she can be a little overbearing at times, can’t she?”

Goro liked to pepper his sentences with big words from time to time.

“Oh yeah?” said Kazuo, who had been miles away again. “What makes you say that?”

“Don’t you think she can be overbearing?” said Goro, puffing up his chest to match his face, which was always rather red and puffy. “She treats us like we’re kids. Come on. *You boys can go and wash your hands*, she says.”

“I hadn’t really thought about it,” replied Kazuo, who already appeared to be setting off on another excursion in his mind.

Kazuko took the trash out to the back of the building and came back to the small science lab to put away some brooms they’d been using. But as she placed her hand on the doorknob, she thought she heard a sound coming from inside.

“That’s odd,” thought Kazuko.

Although it was called the small science lab, the room was generally used as a storage space and was filled with lots of interesting things like jars of biological samples, skeletons, stuffed animals and all kinds of chemicals. For most of the girls in the school, the room was a creepy place best avoided. But Kazuko wasn’t the sort of person to mind.

“Nobody should be in here,” said Kazuko to herself. “I wonder if it could be Mr Fukushima?”

But then, she’d seen her teacher leave earlier through another door, so it surely couldn’t be him making the noise. So who could it be? Kazuko started to feel a little scared. But nevertheless, she managed to summon up the courage to open the door. But as soon as she did, there was a great smash, and the sound of breaking glass echoed around the walls of the room.

“Who’s there?” Said Kazuko, her voice wavering as she struggled to see in the dark.

She could just about see that there were some test tubes lined up along a desk in the middle of the room, and it seemed that one of those had simply rolled off onto the floor, leaving a pool of liquid to spread across the tiles. Someone must have been doing an experiment in here, she thought. But who? And where on earth did they go?

Kazuko walked over to the desk to read the labels on the bottles of chemicals lined up next to the test tubes. But before she could, a dark shadow jumped out from behind the chemicals cabinet and scuttled behind a partition next to the door. Kazuko froze. Could it be a burglar?

“Who’s there?” she called out. “Stop scaring me like that, and show yourself!”

The door leading to the hallway rattled.

“It’s no use trying to escape to the hall!” Yelled Kazuko, trying hard to stop her fear from overwhelming her. “That door is locked!”

When Kazuko’s voice had echoed away, the room fell back into silence. With no more rattling of the door and not a sound from behind the partition.

“I know who you are!” Said Kazuko, feeling a little more brave. “Come out Kazuo! Or Goro! I know it’s one of you two trying to scare me!”

Kazuko waited for a response, but none came. So instead, she gulped down her fear and tiptoed over to the partition. Then she stopped, took a quiet breath, and slowly peered around the edge. But incredibly, there was nobody there.

THE SCENT OF LAVENDER

“What just happened?” gasped Kazuko, incredulously.

Was that someone’s shadow she’d seen? She was sure of it. There was no way it could have been an illusion. No, she was sure she’d seen somebody move behind the partition.

Kazuko reached for the door that led to the hallway and tried pulling it. But, just as she thought, it was locked. So whoever had been here clearly hadn’t left through there. So where had they gone? They couldn’t have just vanished. That would be ridiculous. But what other explanation was there? This was all just too strange to be true.

Completely confused, Kazuko slowly returned to the desk where the test tubes were lined up. There was a slight hint of a sweet scent in the air, and Kazuko assumed it must be coming from the contents of the broken test tube. And though she wasn’t quite sure what the scent was, she did notice that it was quite

pleasant. In fact she could remember smelling this before somewhere. It was something sweet and nostalgic. Something she'd definitely smelled somewhere before. But what was it?

She reached for one of the bottles of chemicals on the desk and tried to read the label. But it was too dark for her to see properly. She tried squinting to see if that helped, but as she did, she started to feel lightheaded. That sweet smell was growing stronger by the second until – all of a sudden – it overpowered her, sending her crumbling to the floor and into unconsciousness.

A few minutes later, Kazuo and Goro returned to the science lab.

"Come on, Kazuko. Let's go!" called out Kazuo.

"We've got your bag here!" Goro added in a loud voice as he pushed open the door to the empty main lab.

"I guess she hasn't got back from taking out the trash yet. Probably ran into someone and is still out there chatting away. Girls just love to talk!"

"I doubt it," said Kazuo, in his usual relaxed way, as he pointed to the door of the smaller lab. "She's probably in there putting away the brooms."

Goro walked off towards the small science lab, swinging his bag and Kazuko's as he went.

"Nope. She's not here." He called out before suddenly letting out a high-pitched scream.

"What's up?" called Kazuo, running in after to find Goro standing by the side of Kazuko, who was lying still on the floor.

"What's happened?" asked Goro, trembling. "She's not... dead... is she?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" said Kazuo, taking her wrist in his hand and checking her pulse. "She seems fine. Can you grab her legs?"

"What for?"

"So we can carry her to see the nurse, of course! I think she's fainted."

When the three of them reached the nurse's room, there was no one there. So Kazuo and Goro lay Kazuko down on the bed.

"I'll go look for a teacher," said Kazuo. "You open that window and find a way to cool her forehead."

Goro was clearly frightened, and he nodded without a word. Then, after Kazuo had left, he composed himself for a moment, opened the window and dabbed his handkerchief in water before placing it on Kazuko's head.

"It's probably exhaustion," Goro mumbled to himself

sheepishly. "It's ridiculous for them to ask the three of us to clean a room that big!"

"Come on Kazuko! Wake up!" said Goro with tearful eyes as he dabbed the handkerchief in water again and placed it back on her forehead.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Kazuo returned with Mr Fukushima, who'd been the last person left in the staff room.

"Yes, I think she's just fainted," he said after giving her a quick examination.

Together, they waited in silence for several minutes. Then finally it looked as if Kazuko was starting to wake up.

"Oh my. What happened?" she said.

"You fainted in the laboratory," replied Kazuo.

Immediately Kazuko's memory came flooding back, and after taking just a moment to regain her composure, she began to tell the others all about her encounter with the shadowy figure.

"Wow, that's really something," said Kazuo. "But when we found you on the floor, there weren't any test tubes or bottles of chemicals around. And there wasn't anything on the floor either."

"And we didn't smell anything," added Goro.

"Really?" said Kazuko sitting up on the bed, clearly surprised. "That's so strange. I'm sure I... I want to check the room again. Come with me."

Mr Fukushima raised his hand.

"Hey now, not so fast. You should take it easy after fainting like that. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Well, if you're sure, then I will come with you."

Together, they returned to the science lab. But when they got there, sure enough, there was nothing to be seen. Nothing on the table. And not even a shard of glass where the broken test tube had been earlier.

"But that's so odd," said Kazuko in bewilderment.

"That smell you mentioned," asked Mr Fukushima, "could you tell what it was?"

"Well, it was a sweet smell. But how can I describe it..."

Then the answer suddenly dawned on her. "That's it! It was lavender!"

"Lavender?"

"Yes! I remember when I was in elementary school, and my mother used to let me smell her lavender perfume. It was the same smell!"

But Kazuko knew there was something else about the smell. Something she couldn't quite remember. But something that was somehow very important.

RUMBLING AND SHAKING

Kazuko didn't feel her normal self for several days after the incident in the science lab. She wouldn't go so far as to say that she was feeling ill or anything. It was just that her body seemed to have an odd lightness to it, like a sort of floating sensation that left her feeling ungrounded. Like she might suddenly do something crazy. But this strange feeling was more mental than physical, and Kazuko couldn't help but wonder if it might have been caused by the lavender-scented chemical in the laboratory. In fact, she was almost sure of it.

On the third night after the incident, Kazuko finished her homework and climbed into bed at eleven. She'd been playing basketball in the afternoon, and her body was exhausted, but her mind was still sharp and wide-awake, so she was having trouble getting to sleep. And as she lay there in bed, staring at the ceiling and thinking of the incident in the lab, there came a great rumbling noise, and Kazuko's bed began jolting up and down.

“Earthquake!” said Kazuko to herself. Within moments the room began shaking sideways and letting out disturbing creaking sounds. This was no minor tremor. This was a big one.

Kazuko had always hated earthquakes. So she jumped out of bed, ran out of her room without changing out of her nightgown and scurried along the hallway, with its windows that were now creaking, too. But the very moment when she opened the front door, the creaking and rumbling came to an abrupt end. Hearing steps behind her, she turned around to see her mother and younger sisters standing in the doorways of their rooms, looking pale and surprised.

“We’d better go in the garden,” said Kazuko, “in case there’s an aftershock.”

And within moments they were all standing shivering in the breeze in the garden. Sure enough several aftershocks came along within minutes, but they weren’t too big. So once they’d decided it was safe again, they all returned to the house and went back to bed. But again, Kazuko found it difficult to sleep. After all, her heart was now racing from all that drama. But after lying there for several minutes more, she felt her eyelids starting to become heavy.

Suddenly, just as she was finally drifting off, there came a loud and piercing scream from the road in front of their house.

“Fire!” came a single voice. Then came the voices of many: “Fire! Fire!”

What were the chances of so many incidents in one night! Kazuko was getting sick of it by now, and felt like crying in frustration. She jumped out of bed again and went over to the window, pushing open the lace curtains that hung there.

Outside, about two blocks away, she could see the chimney of a bathhouse enveloped in smoke. *Oh my goodness!* she thought to herself. *Goro’s family store is right next to that bathhouse!*

As two fire engines passed Kazuko’s house, their sirens blaring through the night, she hastily pulled a light overcoat on over her nightgown and left her room to investigate.

“Where do you think you’re going?” asked her mother from behind the door to her room.

“There’s a fire near Goro’s house!” she replied. “I’m going to see what’s going on.”

“Don’t be daft! It’s too dangerous!”

But Kazuko pretended not to hear her mother's warning. Instead she quickly pulled on her wooden sandals and ran out into the night to where a bunch of onlookers had already gathered. It seemed as if the fire had started near the back door of the bathhouse, so it hadn't spread to the Asakura General Store yet.

"Please, everyone, stay back!" shouted the police at the growing mass of sleepy spectators. "You're getting in the way of the firefighters!"

"I felt an earthquake earlier," said a man standing next to Kazuko to one of his friends. "It must have toppled the gas burner over and started the fire."

"Hey you!" said someone, tapping Kazuko on the shoulder from behind. Kazuko turned to see Kazuo standing there in his pajamas.

"Oh, Kazuo! I was worried about Goro's shop."

"Me too. But I think everything is fine. I hear it's just a small fire. They said it'll be extinguished in no time," said Kazuo in his characteristically laid-back fashion.

Not too long after, when the last of the flames had been snuffed out by the firefighters, Kazuko and Kazuo walked over to Goro's house. Together they jumped for joy at Goro's lucky escape from the oncoming fire. Then they all went back to their homes.

Kazuko glanced at her clock as she got back into bed yet again. It was already three in the morning. She was absolutely exhausted, and fell asleep within minutes, but she kept having strange dreams all through the night. At first she saw a shadowy figure that jumped out from behind the fire and then flew away. Then she found herself in the lab again, which also started to rumble and shake violently. When she finally woke up, she found herself covered in sweat. But at least it was morning.

She looked over to where the sun's rays were coming in through the window, casting lacy shadows on the floor. *What time is it?* she thought to herself, turning to glance at the clock. *Oh my goodness! I'm late!*

Skipping breakfast, she ran out of the house, with a sleepy, aching head and tired, unsteady legs. Fortunately, she caught sight of Goro waiting at the traffic light.

"Hey Goro!" she called out. "Are you running late, too?"

Goro turned around and smiled, happy that he wasn't the only one running behind today.

"Yeah," said Goro. "It took me so long to fall back to sleep after the fire that I ended up sleeping through my alarm."

When the light turned green, they both dashed across the zebra crossing, but as they reached the middle, an unfamiliar voice startled them.

“Watch out!”

Then came a deafening horn.

Kazuko and Goro turned to see a large truck coming straight towards them. It looked as if it had just run a red light, and now it was heading directly for the intersection where they stood.

Kazuko whipped around and ran straight into Goro, who was standing right behind her – and they both tumbled to the ground. She looked up, and the truck was closer. Then closer still. Until its massive tires were just meters from her face and Kazuko could do nothing but close her eyes.

BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY

Kazuko’s mind was racing with different scenes and different thoughts. Too many for her to deal with.

I’m going to die! she thought to herself. *Run over by a huge, heavy truck! If only I’d stayed in bed a bit longer. Then I wouldn’t be so tired and slow!*

Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion, and she prayed for the safety of her warm and cozy bed back home. But she knew there was nothing she could do. Nothing except keeping her eyes closed as tightly as she could. And so she did. About a second passed. But nothing happened. Then another. But still nothing happened. Kazuko began to wonder what on earth was going on. But right at that moment, she felt herself slipping into unconsciousness. She felt a sense of warmth begin to engulf her. Like the warmth and coziness of her bed that she’d been praying for.

When Kazuko opened her eyes, she found herself back in her room. She was wearing her nightgown and