

## Chapter 6

# The Taste of a Bullet

“Hi, Manabu-san. How’s it going? You should drop by once in a while. Anyway, I’m calling to ask a little favor.”

It was a few days into 1986, the year after I was first suspected of being the Fox-Eyed Man. The call to my home in Tokyo was from Iwamaru Yukio, the head of Iwamaru-gumi, an arm of Teramura-gumi affiliated with the Aizu-kotetsu syndicate. A *kobun* of Maruoka Tetsutaro, who had succeeded my father as the head of Teramura-gumi, Iwamura was also the *wakagashira* (No. 2 man) in Teramura-gumi. We had known each other quite a long time, but just as two people who happened to be in the same business of construction. Our relationship extended no further, except for the fact that a relative of mine was working for Iwamaru-gumi. Iwamaru was a fine-looking man with plenty of money who lived the good life.

“It’s about one of my company’s projects,” he said. “We’ve been buying up some forest land in Iwakura to develop it into a residential area. Everything was going fine. We got hold of the land and it was designated an urbanization area. We raised some ¥2.3 billion in finance. Then, just

when we were about to get started, the Communists got involved and started a campaign against us.”

“The Communists? Why?”

“They’re talking about the possibility of landslides. You don’t think I’d let something dumb like that happen, do you? I’m really serious about the project.” His voice betrayed his pent-up frustration. “They won’t listen! There’s nothing we can do about the Communists—they’re too much for us yakuza. That’s why I called you, Manabu-san.”

Used to dealing with yakuza and hard-nosed businessmen, Iwamaru was at a loss about how to handle the Communist intellectuals at the heart of the protest campaign, who included some professors at Kyoto’s Ritsumeikan University. Feeling somewhat obligated because he was looking after my relative, but also rather excited at the prospect of a confrontation with members of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), I accepted his request, even though I was quite busy in Tokyo.

“I understand. I’ll be down soon.”

Never did I dream that this nonchalant reply would result in two men being shot dead right before my eyes, and me taking a bullet as well. Only the gods knew that.

Not long afterward, I went down to Kyoto to see Iwamaru and get more details. He was developing a residential area called Iwakura Green Town on a hillside in Iwakura, Sakyo Ward. The 21,500 *tsubo* plot had been purchased by Kosei Construction, a company run by Iwamura, and it was being jointly developed with Nara Real Estate of Yokohama.

Following a revision to zoning policy, restrictions on developing about 9,000 *tsubo* of this land had been lifted and it was designated for urbanization. With permission to develop the land already obtained from the municipality of Kyoto, Iwamaru made preparations to begin work. At a briefing for the local neighborhood council association and area residents, however, the neighborhood council had raised objections.

The plan called for cutting into a hillside and transferring the excavated soil to an adjacent hill. People living at the foot of the other hill opposed the plan, which they said would likely cause a landslide, and launched a campaign against the development. Backed by JCP activists and Ritsumeikan University professors, the movement brought the

development plans shuddering to a halt. What Iwamaru wanted me to do was negotiate with the residents on his behalf and settle the matter.

Over the next six months I had as many as fifteen meetings with the locals. There is normally nothing you can do in negotiations like this but to stick at it and try to bring the other party around to your point of view. This takes so long, though, that when I was meeting with just the JCP activists it was frequently necessary to engage them in heated debate in an effort to defeat their arguments. I often found myself involved in angry exchanges, but the negotiations themselves proceeded in a civil-enough fashion.

It was a pretty tough being on my own all the time, but finally in June an agreement was worked out and signed between the local inhabitants and the developers. To solve the landslide problem, some 1,000 *tsubo* of adjacent forest would be purchased where the excavated soil could be buried. In the end, it was a successful negotiation.

Actually, it wasn't only the JCP and area residents that had opposed the development. They were joined by pseudo-antidiscrimination campaigners and quasi-yakuza types who were in it for the money. In striking contrast to the tactics I employed with the Communists and the local residents, my approach with these people was to use intimidation.

This is the only way to deal with such types. Nothing is more likely to get you into trouble than equivocal answers that confuse things unnecessarily. Anyway, there was no obligation to pay them a penny.

"Looking for trouble?" I asked. "You know it's my job to take care of things. You want to get badly hurt? Or are you going to support the plan? Which is it?"

"We'll support the plan!"

"Then sign!"

So that was the protest campaign settled.

But just I was about to return to Tokyo, a guy called Fukuda who worked at Iwamaru's office came to see me.

"The land we bought includes 11,000 *tsubo* that haven't been designated for urbanization," he told me. "There's no point holding onto something we can't use. Can you sort it out?"

To prevent unbridled land development and the resulting environmental degradation, suburban areas are subject to zoning regulations by

the relevant local authority. There are two categories: urbanization areas and urbanization control areas. The 11,000 *tsubo* plot came under the latter. Development was not permitted.

For the land to be developed into a housing lot, the municipality of Kyoto would have to be prodded into reviewing its zoning policy and re-designating the land an urbanization area. But it is unheard of for civil servants to review zoning policy of their own free will. There was only one way to get them to do it, which was to apply pressure. Fukuda asked me if I knew a negotiator tough enough for the task.

“If you know somebody who’ll do a good job, put him in touch,” Fukuda said. “We’ll pay big.”

I didn’t know why, but the name that popped into my head was Kitamoto Tetsuya. He had been three years below me at junior high school and idolized Kobata Yuichi, who I have talked about elsewhere. Tetsu’s father was a day laborer and an uncontrollable drunkard who went about in an alcohol-fueled rage from morning to night. Unable to stand his behavior, his wife walked out on him; soon after, Tetsu’s father followed her out of the house and disappeared. This happened when Tetsu was at primary school.

Left alone with his elder sister, and with nobody offering to adopt or take care of the two children, Tetsu had to find a way to provide for both of them. But what could a little kid do? At lunch time, he would sneak out of the classroom and huddle in a corner of the school grounds hugging his knees. The plan he came up with was to scare other school kids into handing over their money.

He began by targeting primary school children, snatching ¥5 or ¥10 at a time. He was acting out of desperation, since without money he wouldn’t be able to eat. But most primary school kids didn’t have allowances back then, so it didn’t prove very effective.

Eventually he switched his attention to junior high students. With the little money he had he bought himself a switchblade, and things began to look up. On the downside, there was more risk involved, as these kids were older. Quite often he ended up on the wrong end of a beating. Unfazed, he preyed on those who looked weak, bullying them into handing over everything. It was the only way for a kid like him to stay alive.

I first got to know him around the time he was entering junior high. By then, he had the face of a full-fledged juvenile outlaw, which was hardly surprising given that he spent his time intimidating people to support himself and his sister. His eyes had a dark, forbidding look. His was the archetypal childhood of a future yakuza.

Subsequently, he followed a well-trodden path: being sent to reform school and juvenile prison before eventually ending up a yakuza. For a while, he was with a gangster organization based in Kanto, followed by a total of ten years in prison. He was then taken on as a young lieutenant by the head of M-gumi, which was part of a larger yakuza organization, Kamoda-gumi, affiliated with the Yamaguchi-gumi.

The head of Kamoda-gumi, Kamoda Shigemasa, was among the most prominent bosses of organizations with ties to the Yamaguchi-gumi. This was thanks to his lineage—his family had links with the Yamaguchi-gumi on his father's side—and his big-heartedness. Kamoda-gumi was also known for its militancy and had nearly 3,000 members at its peak. Kamoda himself was once rumored to be in line to succeed Taoka Kazuo, the third godfather of the Yamaguchi-gumi. Kamoda-gumi was headquartered in Nagata Ward, Kobe, the district hit hardest by the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake.

Tetsu was a Kyoto branch manager for M-gumi. Although it was only a small operation and he had no more than ten people under him, he was under the umbrella of one of the top Yamaguchi-gumi affiliates and felt he had a good future ahead of him. Tetsu was then thirty-seven, in the prime of life.

But his prospects took a sudden turn for the worse when major hostilities broke out between Yamaguchi-gumi and Ichiwa-kai. That was one year before Iwamaru approached me for help. By then, Kamoda Shigemasa had broken away from the Yamaguchi-gumi to assume the No. 2 position at Ichiwa-kai. This meant that Tetsu now came under it, too. But Ichiwa-kai was driven to the wall by wave after wave of attacks by the Yamaguchi-gumi. Tetsu himself was twice targeted by Yamaguchi-gumi hit men.

In 1986, when I was negotiating with the local residents of Iwakura, the Yama-Ichi War was at its fiercest. Tetsu's office had been shot at and he was unable to move about freely, which deprived him of any means

of making money. I heard yakuza in Kyoto say that he was really hard up. Maybe that's why his name popped into my mind. Had I turned down Fukuda's plea and left for Tokyo, or had I not thought of Tetsu, he wouldn't have died the way he did. In a sense, it was me that killed him.

"Let me take the job," Tetsu said over the phone right after I finished outlining Fukuda's request. "I know just the guy. I won't let you down."

There was a note of urgency in his voice. He must have been desperate.

We arranged to meet at a secluded restaurant. He showed up accompanied by several bodyguards—he was a target, after all. Standing about 1.85 meters tall, Tetsu had a look of Clint Eastwood about him that drove women crazy. As he walked down Kawaramachi or Gion in Kyoto with a trench coat slung over his slim body, women who passed him in the street would invariably stop and turn around. When I met him, however, he had lost a lot of weight—probably worn out by the effects of the ongoing Yama-Ichi war—and his sunken cheeks gave him a grim expression.

The bodyguards looked equally menacing. They all had bloodshot eyes. I could see from their bulging chests and stomachs that they were carrying guns. As Tetsu and I sat down and faced each other across the table, the bodyguards parked themselves on nearby chairs to surround us. Their sharp eyes scanned the restaurant and the exits.

"I get the picture," Tetsu said. "We've got a man by the name of Yajima. He's the president of Yajima Trading and also chairman of an antidiscrimination association. He's really good at this kind of thing."

"OK. If that's your recommendation, let's give him the job. How much do you and Yajima want?"

"The price for this kind of work is normally about ¥5,000 to ¥10,000 per *tsubo*."

"All right, I'll negotiate for ¥10,000 per *tsubo*. You'll get ¥110 million. Not bad, huh?"

"How much do you want, Manabu?"

"Up to you. As long as I get something."

We left it like that. A few days later, Fukuda asked Tetsu and Yajima to start work on getting the local authorities to designate the land as an urbanization area. He gave me ¥10 million as down payment, which I handed directly to Tetsu. The remaining ¥100 million would be paid

when the relevant officials of Kyoto municipality pledged before representatives of Kosei Construction and Nara Real Estate that they would review the zoning policy and designate the land an urbanization area.

Right away, Tetsu, Yajima, and Takita, a deputy chairman of Yajima's antidiscrimination association, launched a fierce offensive to put pressure on the local authority. The association was actually their own private organization and had nothing to do with the Buraku Liberation League that led Japan's antidiscrimination movement. In fact, Takita was an ex-yakuza and it was a pseudo-antidiscrimination association.

Takita did most of the negotiating. He frequently visited the relevant local government sections, including those of landscape management and urban planning.

"We're thinking of developing the land in Iwakura to provide cheaper housing for people who suffer from discrimination," he told them. "I want you to work more positively to have it designated an urbanization area."

Sitting across the negotiating table from Takita were usually the three section chiefs involved. Invariably very uptight when dealing with him, for fear of making any commitment they would later regret, they would only repeat that it was impossible to give him what he asked. Takita pointed out that 9,000 *tsubo* of forest land in the area had already been designated an urbanization area. He called for the person who took the decision to sit at the negotiating table as well.

"Why approve that development and not ours?" Takita asked him. "Just explain that! Was it a mistake? A special exception?"

Actually, it was an exception. But because the authorities were supposed to behave with impartiality, they could not admit this. Otherwise, the official responsible would have to be punished. The section chiefs, stuck for a reply, would go quiet as Takita, using logic, pressed them for a satisfactory answer.

In any negotiation, nothing is more overwhelming than the power of reasoning used by a composed man. Roaring and raging are for lowlifes; a smart man doesn't resort to such foolishness. Well, actually, sometimes you do have to look the other party hard in the eye and ask in a stony voice if he is taking you for a mug. Being an ex-yakuza, Takita knew what to do in a negotiation: how to read his opponents and respond accord-

ingly. Little by little, alternating between aggression and conciliation, he backed the section chiefs into a corner.

Finally, in September, after about three or four months, one of the section chiefs, under intense pressure from Takita and the others, inadvertently blurted out, “The forest conservation area is out of the question, but we’ll consider rezoning the rest of the land the next time we review the current zoning policy.”

With this pledge, Tetsu and Takita got down to the final step of obtaining a witnessed statement to this effect from the three section chiefs. Takita asked them if they were certain. Yes, came the reply, the land in Iwakura would be designated an urbanization area at the next policy review. Tetsu, elated, thanked them for offering such a good way to resolve the issue.

Needless to say, pseudo-antidiscrimination organizations don’t have a monopoly on pressuring local government to get what they want. It’s something that politicians, political organizations, and other groups do almost on a daily basis. Takita seems to have cited specific examples to put pressure on the local authority. One of these was three hectares of forest in Fushimi’s Daigo district that the local authority had been forced to designate an urbanization area by a notorious individual called Ozaki Seiko. Better known as the “Emperor” of the pseudo-antidiscrimination movement, Ozaki stands out as one of the leading scoundrels of the half-century following the war. Let me digress for a moment and talk about Ozaki. After all, he had a lot to do with the pseudo-antidiscrimination phenomenon.

Born on the island of Shikoku, Ozaki behaved recklessly from his youth, getting arrested seventeen times for bullying and assault, among other reasons. After a job he was asked to do around 1970—recovering close to ¥500 million in drafts impetuously issued by Lower House member Saigo Kichinosuke—he began to move in on the political world, setting up a pseudo-antidiscrimination organization, the Nippon Dowa Seiko-kai. From then on, masquerading as an antidiscrimination movement leader, he relentlessly intimidated and extorted money from high-ranking local government officials. Bureaucrats and civil servants feared and hated him like a snake.

I came across Ozaki on a number of occasions in various entertainment quarters, including Gion, and can attest that he was one tough operator. His powerful frame emitted an animal vitality, as if he were some ferocious beast. Plus, he was a snappy dresser. With a diamond-studded watch worth ¥120 million on one wrist and a ¥80 million bracelet on the other, Ozaki wore the finest quality suits and shoes (all made to order, of course). He owned two limousines—one black, one white—each worth ¥30 million. In the media, he was referred to disdainfully as a “walking ¥300 million.”

The office of the Nippon Dowa Seiko-kai in Tokyo's Nagatacho district, I am told, was stunningly extravagant. Occupying one entire floor of a luxury condominium block called Palais Royal—where the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's ex-kingmaker Kanemaru Shin had his office—it boasted an opulent Japanese garden in the middle of the premises. Not only did the office have the most expensive pieces of furniture, it was also staffed by secretaries as gorgeous as any on-screen beauty. There were stories of visiting local prefectural assembly members so dazzled by what they saw that they were overwhelmed.

What was so extraordinary about Ozaki was that he targeted only high-ranking bureaucrats and officials, such as bureau directors, prefectural governors, and ministers. He completely ignored section chiefs and the like. Without an appointment or going through any official channel, he would storm into the private room of a bureau director of a ministry in Kasumigaseki,\* overturning desks and chairs.

“What's happening about such and such? I've heard nothing!” he would holler. “Take me for a fool?” This was the way he went about his work.

One time, he went down to Shikoku to negotiate on behalf of someone he owed a favor. Right after arriving in Tokushima in his limousine and being briefed, he rang the prefectural office to find out where the governor was. On discovering he was at a Shikoku governors' conference or something, Ozaki made off to the hotel where the meeting was under way. Shoving the security guards aside, he burst in.

\*Kasumigaseki, where government ministries are concentrated, is close to the Diet building in Nagatacho.

“Which one of you is the Tokushima governor?” he yelled, looking the room up and down.

There was nobody to stop him doing anything he wanted. Finally, to restore a semblance of order, someone—a general affairs bureau manager, perhaps—inched his way up to Ozaki. “We’ll do whatever you want,” he said, his face etched with tension. “Just please leave us alone here.”

With no exposure to violence, and too worried about saving face, elite bureaucrats were vulnerable to Ozaki’s methods. They just dithered about and in many cases ended up doing what he wanted. It wasn’t as if they had to submit to his roughhouse tactics. If it were only a question of being threatened with violence, they weren’t completely helpless. They could have used the power of the state to protect them had they been so inclined. What made Ozaki so outrageously effective was that he struck at these intellectual types where they were weakest. Bound by the ideals of postwar democracy, they were equally susceptible to arguments couched in terms of human rights. Ozaki took full advantage of this, even as he threatened violence.

Ozaki was also aware that they would easily capitulate when presented with a logical argument based on facts. What made him the “Emperor” was that he was so good at deploying reason at the negotiating table. Indeed, he would conduct extensive research to unearth specific facts he could use against the bureaucrats he was to confront.

Surrounded by proficient people he headhunted from government agencies or local government, Ozaki also had good access to classified information leaked from political figures and businessmen. Plus, he himself was a stickler when it came to gathering information. Whenever he heard from a politician about an upcoming sale of state-owned land to the private sector, or a large public-works project, he would collect all the related land registration certificates and official drawings. Shut away in his study, he checked these thoroughly for any flaws or discrepancies. The process often took him to the actual location, which he would survey personally.

For example, if Japan National Railways (JNR)\* decided to develop a tract of land used for train sidings and the land happened to be in

\*Renamed Japan Railways (JR) after privatization in 1987.

a Buraku district, Ozaki would check carefully to see if there were any discrepancies between the official drawings and the measurements on the ground. Official drawings are not as precise as you might think. Quite often, the actual dimensions differ from those officially registered. These accidental differences are known as loosened or shrunken rope. Such disparities can mean that there are still unregistered pieces of land remaining.

When Ozaki spotted such an opportunity, he would quickly register the land in his name and then wait. No matter how long it took—years, in some cases—he bided his time until the development project got under way. Then he would charge into the office of the highest-ranking official at JNR or the relevant government agency and lash out, intimidating him with threats:

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, going ahead with your fucking development without talking to me first? This is discrimination! Don’t take me seriously? You’re not getting away with this!”

He would start to throw chairs across the room, but a moment later his demeanor would change completely as he switched to the calculating businessman using reason as his weapon of negotiation. In the end, JNR would be forced to pay Ozaki an exorbitant amount of money for his piece of land.

Ozaki was a born bullyboy. In fact, he was a genius when it came to bullying. It seemed to me that this was what he enjoyed more than anything else. Even so, I was impressed when I heard the story of how he coerced a golf course.

There are various regulations that govern the building and maintenance of golf courses. Among them is one banning trees taller than three meters from being planted within special designated areas. After finding this out, Ozaki had a tree about two meters tall planted in one such area. Then he waited patiently until the tree was over three meters. After confirming that the regulation was being violated, Ozaki rushed over to the golf course and really tightened the screws on the owner until a huge amount of money changed hands. Nobody would come up with such an idea, and then show the patience to wait for the tree to grow, unless he were doing it for fun.

Ozaki's specialty was getting the authorities to sell off state-owned land or to change the status of land from urbanization control area to urbanization area. He did this all over the country. That meant there were high-ranking officials across the nation who were intimidated and abused by Ozaki. He was the genuine article. Nobody was more hated by Japan's upper echelons. In a country where people are helpless before an all-powerful bureaucracy, I can't think of anyone else who has put himself in direct confrontation with those in power as fiercely and fearlessly and who brought them to their knees so successfully. In that sense, Ozaki deserves respect.

The way his life ended really befitted the person he was. On the night of January 30, 1984, at about ten o'clock, laid up in a private room in a Tokyo hospital, he was attacked by a trio of assassins in caps and white masks. For some reason, the three bodyguards hired by Ozaki were not around. Entering the room, the killers shot him in the back and the head with silenced pistols. To finish him off, they stabbed him deep in the spine. They then calmly fled the scene, having taken no more than thirty seconds to get the job done. Undoubtedly, it was the work of professionals. Ozaki was forty-eight.

The killers had stormed into the room as Ozaki was counting money, about ¥5 million. When they had finished their work, there was blood everywhere and Ozaki lay dead in the middle of a pile of bloodstained banknotes. It was a fitting demise.

Pseudo-antidiscrimination organizations such as Ozaki's Nippon Dowa Seiko-kai began to emerge and made their presence felt around the late seventies. This was also about the time that the political rivalry between the Left and the Right began to heat up, with progressives being elected to office as local governors or mayors. The driving forces behind this reformist movement were the JCP and the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), especially the latter. In particular, the JSP drew its strength from the Buraku districts that formed the core of the Buraku Liberation League. Residents not only acted as a close-knit action group for the JSP but also provided it with a lot of votes. Since these districts posed a threat, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) set out to undermine them in an operation spearheaded by Tanaka Kakuei.

I have known quite a few Buraku Liberation League activists since my childhood. Both as individuals and as an organized group they are a dogged bunch. The LDP could have found nobody more capable of breaking them than Tanaka. He passed a temporary antidiscrimination law and, as authorized under it, allocated hefty sums of money to the Buraku districts. The roads got paved, modern-looking condos went up, and residents were granted special privileges. This led to an increase in the number of LDP supporters among the inhabitants, dividing the once monolithic alliance down the middle. Tanaka's realpolitik achieved a certain degree of success.

But it soon became apparent that the government had to pay an enormous price for using political maneuvering and money politics to settle issues such as discrimination or human rights problems. So-called reverse discrimination was one consequence; the emergence of pseudo-antidiscrimination organizations was another. The relationship between these groups and the bureaucrats and government agencies they dealt with represented nothing more than a clash of venal interests with no higher cause involved. Neither government nor public agencies were in a position to repudiate the existence of these organizations. In that sense, the pseudo-antidiscrimination movement was not merely an unwanted evil born of fifty years of postwar democracy but a very symbol of it; for even as the nation has paid lip service to living by democratic principles, it has adhered to the idea that money is everything.

At any rate, the government stressed the use of money to solve the discrimination problem, rather than helping to change the thinking behind it. It was a policy rooted in a desire to build an effective majority. This was based on the principle of majority rule, which was the essence of postwar democracy. But such attempts to win a majority by playing political games or using money poisoned its sweetness.

Teeming with naked ambition and violence, the world of pseudo-antidiscrimination was a truly venomous one in which dark individuals, akin to medieval bandits, swarmed around the sweet poison of postwar democracy. It was a world that laid bare the miserable nature of the human condition in a way not seen in daily life. Actually, ordinary citizens shared the same nature. The only difference was that the cloak of democracy they wore was just thick enough to conceal this. In that sense,

pseudo-antidiscrimination may be the true heir of postwar democracy's greed-based society.

Now, let's go back to what happened to Tetsu and Takita after they succeeded in getting the land designated an urbanization area.

The next day, September 17 or 18 if I remember correctly, I asked Fukuda, who was the president of Kosei Construction, for the remaining ¥100 million they owed us for getting the job done. Fukuda said they didn't have that kind of cash just then and promised to talk to Iwamaru about it. I passed this on to Tetsu and the others. A few days later, Yajima negotiated directly with Iwamaru, who told him the money would certainly be paid but asked that they wait a little while. Deferring payment is not unusual in the yakuza world.

But things took a sharp turn for worse on the evening of September 24 or thereabouts, when Tetsu, losing patience, stormed into the office of Kosei Construction, accompanied by his men and Takita. Earlier in the day, at about three in the afternoon, Tetsu had called me to say he was going over to Kosei to "sort things out" with Iwamaru.

"Don't even try!" I said, alarmed.

I had no idea what Tetsu was thinking or how he was feeling. Clearly, though, barging with his men into someone's office was asking for trouble. In the yakuza world, nothing is more important than maintaining face, and the headquarters is a sacred place. Bursting into the office or the company run by the boss and seeking to negotiate directly with him would be regarded as an act of provocation. Such a move would very likely lead to hostilities between the yakuza organizations involved.

"Confront Iwamura? You know better than that! You've been around long enough!"

"I don't care. I'll look bad unless I talk this out with him."

"Tetsu, hold on! Where are you now? I'm on my way. Stay there, OK?"

I met him at a coffee shop near Kosei. Hurrying inside, I found Tetsu looking resentful, sitting with his feet up on a table, surrounded by four or five of his men, as well as Takita. I tried hard to talk Tetsu out of his plan. His only response was that it didn't matter what I said because he

was still going to do it. It was just a rerun of our earlier phone conversation.

“All right, do as you like,” I said finally. “But I’m coming with you.”

I could put myself between Tetsu and Iwamaru, I thought, if the two of them looked like they were about to come to blows.

But when we arrived at the Kosei Construction office, only Fukuda and a few members of Iwamaru-gumi were there. Iwamaru himself was vacationing in Yamashiro spa up in Hokuriku. Clearly disappointed, Tetsu rounded on Fukuda and began berating him. Looking on, the Iwamura-gumi people appeared ready to pounce at any moment. Fukuda did his best to try to explain the situation, but he failed to placate Tetsu and succeeded only in annoying the Iwamura people, who felt he should be standing up for their side even though he was not a member of the gang. As Fukuda talked on, both sides glared angrily at him. In due course, they began transferring their attentions to each other. The tension began to mount.

Fortunately, the worst-case scenario was avoided. Both parties agreed to another meeting in the same office at ten the next morning. But at my and Fukuda’s suggestion, this would take place without Tetsu and his men, since there was a good chance their presence would trigger a battle.

Even so, I felt that if Iwamaru remained at the spa without realizing the gravity of the situation, there were going to be problems. I sped up to see him there and told him what had happened. He agreed to return to Kyoto. On the drive back I told him it was his responsibility to work things out.

“Manabu-san, I’m really sorry that my being away has caused you all this trouble,” Iwamaru replied. “I’ll pay everything I have to.”

Looking back, I believe that Iwamaru was being straight with me and he personally had no hidden intentions.

We arrived back in Kyoto the following morning, September 25, at about four o’clock. About half past five, just as I was going to bed to snatch some sleep, the phone rang. It was Fukuda calling to change the arrangements. He now wanted to meet Yajima, Takita, and the others at Restaurant Fushimi at noon and he also asked that Tetsu be present.

Having talked with Iwamaru, I jumped to the optimistic conclusion that they were now willing to work out the problem with Tetsu.

“Got it,” I replied. “I’ll let everyone know.”

I got back under the covers but couldn’t sleep. I felt vaguely apprehensive. Even though I wanted to nod off, my body wouldn’t let me. Deep inside, some part of me remained awake and refused to rest. Turning over in bed, I recalled the hard time I had trying to catch some sleep on Waseda University campus on the eve of the expected mobilization of the riot police to put an end to our struggle against the tuition hikes and the rest. In the end, I was up at seven, having had no sleep at all. I think all human beings are endowed with foresight to some extent. It is the fact that we have no control over what we can see coming that makes life so interesting.

At noon sharp, I arrived at Restaurant Fushimi, as did Fukuda and another guy from Kosei. We went upstairs and were seated at a large booth at the back. Looking around the room, I counted around twenty tables and maybe a couple of dozen people having lunch. About twenty minutes later, Tetsu, Yajima, and Takita showed up, accompanied by two men from Yajima’s company.

Fukuda and I sat next to each other across the long narrow table from Yajima and Takita, who had their backs against the wall. Tetsu sat at one end, like a judge. Behind him, hidden by a curtain, was a corridor leading to the rest room.

It was well after half past twelve by the time everybody was settled and we were able to resume the previous day’s discussions. In the meantime, I had twice spotted the familiar face of one of the Iwamaru men inside the restaurant. On both occasions, he had been at the top of the entrance staircase, looking this way and that, as if searching for someone. When he saw me looking at him, he simply glanced the other way. Whether he didn’t notice me, or was pretending not to, I didn’t know.

“What’s that son of a bitch doing here?” I wondered to myself. “Meeting a woman or something?” I let it go at that.

But the guy turned out to be the lookout for the other members of the hit squad. Loitering at the top of the stairs, he was signaling our positions to the shooters, especially where Tetsu was sitting and whether he was

in his seat. With my back to the other patrons, I didn't notice that two hit men, guided by the lookout, had been given a table about ten meters away from us.

It happened suddenly. The crack of three gunshots rang out. As each bullet hit Tetsu his torso reared up like a wave. The curtain behind him flew open. Holding a gun, a young man in dark blue combat gear\* appeared. His eyes were wide open, staring.

Now I knew what was going on. It was Kuniba Koichi, a member of Iwamaru-gumi. He was then twenty-seven, but I had known him since his apprentice days. He hadn't long arrived from Okinawa, a real hick, when I first met him. Single-minded, he was a typical southerner.

Most hit men involved in yakuza battles in Kansai were from Okinawa, making their way by offering their bodies as shooting targets. Kuniba was one of them. It was the only way for outsiders like him to get ahead, given the way the Kansai yakuza world is dominated by locals. Kuniba had just been released from jail two months earlier, after serving a five-year term.

It's funny the way people behave and think. Even at such a critical moment, they are still capable of carefree thoughts. I remember what crossed my mind as I looked at Kuniba: "Poor Okinawan yakuza! Back to jail!"

I snapped out of it when I felt someone moving behind me. Turning around, I saw another young man rushing toward me in the same blue combat clothes, clasping a gun in front of him with both hands. It was Murakami Akihiro, a member of Iwamaru-gumi. He hailed from Fukuoka, Kyushu, and was another *teppodama* (bullet).

Acting on reflex I got to my feet and roared, "Stop, you bastard!"

The next moment, I saw fire and smoke spew from the gun. Something far hotter than I had ever known seared through my right side.

Getting shot felt like being shredded apart. An intense pain tore into me as a burning sensation rushed through my body. It was as if a red-hot Chinese kitchen knife had been shoved into my gut. I couldn't breathe for the pain and heat. Instinctively, I put both my hands over the spot. My

\*Such clothing was fashionable among members of biker gangs, etc.

feet gave way and I collapsed on the seat, blood spurting from between my fingers.

The blood didn't bother me. What flickered through my mind was, "So this is what it's like to get shot. Guess I'm a goner now."

Perhaps, when our time comes, we are indifferent to our fate.

The entire restaurant reverberated with the crack of another shot. I looked in the direction it had come from to see Murakami closing in on Tetsu, now only two meters away from him. The gun was thrust out, ready to be fired. He stopped, his eyes open so wide it seemed they would burst. Another gunshot rang out.

I was fixated on the muzzle of his gun when this happened. I watched something black shoot from the barrel along with the fire and smoke. This may only be what I thought I saw, rather than what I actually witnessed, but I really seemed to view it clearly. Murakami drew closer to Tetsu and blasted another shot into his body. Hurling backward by the bullet, Tetsu landed face up on the booth seat.

Seeing this, Takita, who had been sitting across from me, leapt to his feet with an incomprehensible roar and tried to run away from Murakami. That sealed his fate. Instinctively, Murakami spun around and shot Takita in the gut. The dry crack of two gunshots could be heard, one after the other. Takita, stopped in his tracks, toppled backward.

After checking their work, the two hit men rushed off toward the staircase. I heard them shouting at the terrified diners milling about in panic to get out of the way. Just then, Takita suddenly rose to his feet with a livid expression on his face and made after Kuniba and Murakami with a battle cry that seemed to have been wrung from the very core of his being. It must have been some animal instinct for revenge. He staggered after them, but dropped to the floor near the top of the stairs.

On September 26, the *Kyoto Shimbun* reported the incident on its general news page under the headline, "Shootout At Fushimi Restaurant Panics Twenty Diners: Police On Alert For More Violence." In detail, it reported that Tetsu and Takita had been shot by two men who had been at another table and that some twenty diners had fled the scene in terror. The two hit men were described as being in their early twenties and clad in blue combat fatigues. The pair had come into the restaurant with another man before noon, but then left again. It was when we had begun

our talks that they returned and sat down at a table some ten meters away from us. Right after giving their order to the waiter, they suddenly got up, walked up to our table, and shot at us from a distance of some 1.5 meters. The paper's version of events was followed by some comments from the restaurant manager, whose name was Hirata:

"I was between the second floor dining area and the kitchen when I heard a couple of bangs that sounded like balloons bursting, so I headed for the dining room. On the way, two men came rushing toward me waving pistols and yelling at me to 'get the hell out of the way.' They were followed by a man with blood all over his stomach, who slumped to the floor. The diners all stood up to see what was going on. I yelled, 'It's all right; please stay seated,' but it was no good. They all ran out of the restaurant. A thing like this, in broad daylight—it's awful. I hate to think what might have happened to the group of eight ladies who were seated closeby. I mean, they could have been hit by stray bullets. . . . Those responsible mustn't be allowed to get away with it!"

It was as if everything had taken place in slow motion, like in a movie. There was nothing real about it. I had been shot, but it seemed as if it had happened to someone else. Suddenly, however, the acute pain in my stomach brought me back to my senses. I looked at Tetsu, who was having convulsions as he laid sprawled half on and half off the booth seat.

Because his body was almost entirely covered in tattoos, Tetsu wore long-sleeved clothing even on the hottest summer days. That day he had been wearing a long-sleeved cotton sweater and a pair of dark pants. The sweater was now glistening wet, stained blackish-red. At his feet, on the floor, was a pool of blood.

"Tetsu, come on!" I cried. "Tetsu! You can't die like this!"

He didn't respond to my voice. Probably he couldn't hear any more. His convulsions continued. It was obvious that he was dying.

I looked around at Fukuda, Yajima, and the others. They were either hiding under the table, pressing their bodies against the seating, or standing upright in terror, their faces pale and contorted. On seeing their expressions, I knew I had to get us all out of there right away, before the police arrived.

“Get up!” I told Fukuda and the others, grabbing them and driving them toward the stairs.

My wound ached excruciatingly with every step. Some of the others were still in a stupor, unable to come to terms with what had happened. The rest, realizing the gravity of what had taken place, fled downstairs. Takita, lying near the stairs, showed no signs of life as I rushed past him.

After shoving Fukuda and the others into the car I had parked in the restaurant lot, I gunned the engine. I dropped them off near Kosei Construction and then headed for Tokyo. Leaving Kyoto as soon as possible was all I could think to do. I got on the Meishin Expressway at the Kyoto South Interchange and stayed in the fast lane. Before I knew it, I was doing well over 150 kilometers an hour and the car was shuddering violently. Still confused, I tried to go over in my mind what had happened. Had I been struck by a stray bullet or did the hit man simply botch the job? I couldn't imagine Iwamaru-gumi trying to kill me. “But can I rule it out?” I kept wondering, my foot hard on the accelerator.

As I approached Tokyo, the wound in my gut began to hurt so badly that I had to pull over. The bullet had gouged a hole through the side of my abdomen as it passed through me. Actually, it wasn't that much of a wound, but it hurt like hell. Getting stabbed or slashed with a knife, as I had been in the past, was nothing compared with this. I shuddered to think what damage the bullet might have done had it hit me more centrally. I was also bleeding profusely. I made a bandage from the clean shirt I kept in the car and tied it tight around the wound. It did nothing to stem the flow of blood. The pain worsened as I got closer to Tokyo. Greasy sweat broke out on my face and back. My mind began to drift.

In an effort to distract myself from the pain, I switched on the radio. Before long, the news came on, leading with a report on the shooting at Restaurant Fushimi. I learned that Takita had died in hospital. The incident was reported as a Yamaguchi-gumi attack on Ichiwa-kai as part of their ongoing war. Hearing this version of events, I couldn't help but smile, almost forgetting the pain. Journalists these days are always too lazy to do their own legwork and rely instead on information supplied by the police. And what is worse, they never call this practice into question.

“Not the Yamaguchi-gumi!” I hollered at the radio. “Iwamaru from Kyoto!”

Probably because of the pain, I was starting to grow faint and my mind began to get hazy. I asked myself how many times I had been to Tokyo. One of the first had been the spring I was nineteen, when I set out to foment revolution carrying a Boston bag stuffed with ¥5 million in today’s money. Then there was the time when my company had gone bust and I had only ¥20,000 in my pocket. Now here I was, fleeing there with a bullet wound.

“What am I doing?” I wondered, reflecting on things in a way that I rarely did.

As I became increasingly light-headed, I was filled with thoughts of Tetsu. Looking back, he was a sad man, in a quest for cash since he was a kid. His thirty-seven years had been one long battle over money, and it had ended up killing him. But thinking about it another way, money was the currency of Tetsu’s existence. His life embodied the principles and results of capitalism.

“Hardship, grief, and pleasure—Tetsu, you knew them all far better than ordinary mortals do in this capitalist world of money. Lived enough to get yourself killed, didn’t you? Why not start again in the next world? Battle your way through for money, just like you did in this one . . .”

As I thought about Tetsu, images of him, all as a child, drifted in and out of my mind.

I drove on toward Tokyo until I could go no further and checked into a hotel in Yokohama. It was already late at night. I called a friend, someone I had known at Waseda. He was younger than me, an extremely busy man who traveled the world on business. But he rushed to my hotel, followed by others from different walks of life that he contacted. They put aside what they were doing to come to my aid.

Because I had a gunshot wound, it wasn’t possible to see a doctor. In any case, I didn’t think the injury was serious enough to merit professional attention. Nevertheless, my friends went out to knock on the door of a pharmacy that had already closed for the day and they bought me medicines. Moved by their kindness, it was all I could do to act cool and say I just needed some ointment.

Four days after the incident, Kuniba Koichi and Murakami Akihiro surrendered themselves to Fushimi Police Station with the .38 caliber revolvers they had used and confessed that they had killed Tetsu and Takita. Right through the police investigation and the trial, they doggedly insisted that the shooting hadn't been planned and had nothing at all to do with Iwamaru-gumi. The judge was said to have had some sympathy for them, but they were each sentenced to twenty years in prison. They are still there. Kill or be killed—it's truly sad being a yakuza.

Around the time they turned themselves in, I had a call from a detective in Kyoto Prefectural Police, telling me to come to Kyoto as they had some questions to ask me.

"Restaurant Fushimi? What happened?" I said, pretending to know nothing. Of course, I didn't expect him just to give up.

"Come clean! We know you were there from the testimonies of those involved."

"Yeah, I was there, but so what? I had nothing to do with it. I was a victim. Look, I'm busy right now. If you need to see me, come up here."

Kyoto Prefectural Police sent two detectives to Tokyo to meet me at the Keio Plaza Hotel. Having had no hand in the attack, I told them almost everything I knew about the incident.

After that, I wasn't called to help with the investigation again.

The death of Kitamoto Tetsuya didn't lead to a conflict between M-gumi and Iwamaru-gumi. The matter was settled once and for all at summit talks between the Aizu-kotetsu syndicate and Kamoda-gumi, with condolence money sent from Iwamaru-gumi to the individual victims' families and the organizations involved. Everything was resolved within days.

There is one thing I want to add. I don't know why, but Tetsu had taken out a ¥300 million life insurance policy. Probably he wasn't serious about it, and it could have been something his girlfriend or someone had asked him to do. There it was, though. Chasing after cash from when he was little, Tetsu finally came into big money, but it cost him his life.

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