



## Hidemi's Rambling No.231

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I'm poor at recognizing people's faces. Sometimes they're all the same – sometimes I can't remember my acquaintance's face. To me, Richard in 'LOST' and Mark in 'Flash Forward' is the same person. Even after I was told they were different actors, I still can't see the difference between the two of them. When I lived in California, I had rented a room in a hotel where a long-term lease was available. The rent included breakfast and supper and I had eaten with other tenants or guests. One day, I went into the lounge where the supper was served as usual, after coming back from a vacation in Florida for a couple of weeks. A woman came up to me and asked, 'How was Florida?' I was frozen with terror. How could a total stranger like her ever possibly know I was in Florida? Is she a CIA or FBI or whatsoever agent? Why is the US intelligence after me who am the least important human being in the world? What did I do? What kind of threat is she posing to me? What does she want? With all those thoughts, the tongs in my hand were trembling while holding my favorite Chaw Main. I managed to squeeze my voice out of fear and asked her how she knew I was in Florida. She stared at me with a look of surprise and said, 'You told me so yourself.' She was my acquaintance. Although we had had a meal together for several times, I didn't remember her face...

## Hideki's Rambling No.232

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Many municipalities in Japan hold a fireworks display during summer. The one for where I live took place yesterday. It's an annual event of 90-minute fireworks. When I first moved here, the fireworks were visible from the window of my apartment. But soon a house was built right in front of it and blocked the view. I had been out to see them since then and had found a perfect spot near my apartment. But then, Seven Eleven was built right in front of my spot and blocked the view. So, this year, the event started with spot hunting. Soon after the fireworks began, my partner found the spot. It was beside a fence that surrounded a construction site for a condominium that had been abandoned due to the recession. The fence stood on a five-foot-high mound. I needed to stand on the 15-inch-wide edge after climbing the steep mound. While my partner easily reached the spot, I was fighting with my fear of slopes. As I was about to give up, my partner declared that the spot had the most splendid view for the fireworks around here. With his help, I managed to get to the top of the mound in every conceivably clumsy way. There, I made a discovery. In addition to almost all kinds of phobia, I also had a fear of heights. For 90 minutes, I clung to the fence with all my strength that would be unnecessary for people except for me. But, the view was indeed magnificent, the best spot ever for this fireworks display. On top of that, thanks to the height, I got to see the fireworks of Tokyo Disneyland, which I had heard the sound every night but never been able to see from my neighborhood. And today, every muscle in my body is screaming from the climbing and clinging. Nothing ventured, nothing gained...

## Hidemi's Rambling No.233

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I often see people living in the States shoot hoops in their yard. In Japan, it's almost impossible as the houses are crammed densely back-to-back with a very small yard or mostly none at all. Despite these circumstances, there appeared a daunting family who launched an outrage. They put up a net on the side of their house, which was facing the street directly, so that their kids could bounce a basketball on the street and shoot to the house's outer wall. The street that is busy with people, bicycles and cars has now turned into their yard. Unfortunately, that crazy family lives so close to my apartment. The noise of a basketball hitting asphalt is very loud, resonating through walls of crammed houses. Since they started this assault, I've thought about complaining, but haven't because I don't want to get involved with this insane family, who willingly let their kids play on the public street and are fine with it. Yesterday, my sleep was disturbed by their noise two days in a row, as I slept in the daytime and worked at night. To the thin walls of my apartment, their dribble sounded like a continuous snare drum. The kids have expanded their street yard, closing in on me. That does it. It's time for an action...

## Hidemi's Rambling No.234

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There is no formal casino in Japan. Instead, there are innumerable pachinko parlors all over Japan. A pachinko is a very popular Japanese gambling game that is partly like pinball and partly like slot. They buy small silver balls to play with, and the machine brings out the balls if they win. They exchange the balls for money or items like cigarettes and chocolates. For some reason, it's not allowed to exchange directly for money. They get a certain strange item with their balls once, and exchange it for money at a small dark hut behind the building. A pachinko parlor is sort of a mix of a casino and a game arcade. It has a large number of pachinko machines side by side in aisles and exists around almost everywhere people live. Sadly, it doesn't make people a millionaire. By playing all day, they win a few hundred dollars at most. As for me, I've never played a pachinko in my life. My life itself is awfully like gambling and I'm bogged down with it completely...

## Hidemi's Rambling No.235

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In the TV series 'LOST', 'candidates' had met Jacob at one point of their lives, mostly at a young age and possibly at the miserable time. Thinking of a mysterious encounter, I may have met Jacob myself. When I was six or seven years old, my grandfather took me to my aunt's house. They weren't so well-off then, living in a small house with a lot of cats and dogs and eating from the aluminum plates. Across their house was a pachinko parlor. It was a really shabby place. My grandfather took me there and made me wait while he was playing. The place was small, filled with pachinko machines, cigarette smoke and down-and-outers. Since there was no waiting place for a kid, I was just strolling through the narrow aisles between the noisy machines and worn-out people. Suddenly, someone called me and I turned around. A man with sunglasses was standing behind me. He held two buckets of silver balls, which meant he had won a rare amount. The buckets were too full to hold the all balls and some of them were spilling. He pushed the buckets to me and said, 'Take these. Go exchange for your chocolates.' Because he pressed them forcibly, I had no choice but to receive. And he disappeared. My grandfather was astounded when he saw me with the buckets and told me to return them to the man, but we couldn't find him. I had never hold that much chocolate in my arms. The brand of the chocolate still remains my favorite but am I still a candidate? Or have I been blotted out long before...?

## Hidemi's Rambling No.236

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Way back in an episode of 'LOST', Charlie made a list of the best things that happened in his life. One of his best things happened to me, too. When I lived in California, I would often visit Disneyland Hotel, as it was only a few blocks away from the place I lived. One day I had a meal there and went into the rest room. There was a cleaning lady working at the washbowl. I have the habit of thanking and nodding to them and I did so to her at the time as usual. Our eyes met and she gazed at me. I was about to wash my hands but her gaze stopped me. I was puzzled and watched her. She said, 'You're number one.' It was one of the most perplexing experiences of my life. That has mystified me ever since. In Charlie's case, it was obvious. But in mine, it was ambiguous through and through. I'm number one of what? When? I haven't seen any sign of number one concerning me...

## Hidemi's Rambling No.237

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Since I decided to move out, I've realized the power of the Internet again. Without going anywhere physically, I've been able to look for a place to live at home, gathering a lot of information on prices, floor plans and the neighborhood. People's blogs are useful, too. For the past eight months, I've been looking around the Internet, collecting and comparing the details, and have narrowed down the choice to three apartments. They are all located in the same area, which is surrounded by mountains, cold and snowy in winter. The area has a small population with a constant decline. That has led to a remarkably low price for an apartment there. I chose the area because the prices were low enough to fit my tight budget. But its small population was the main appeal to me, who feel uncomfortable to be with people. All three places I've picked for my new home are more than 20 years old and one of them is on the fourth floor. So far, that one is my first choice. There seem no particular flaws in the room, but the building's available rooms are mostly on the fourth floor. Is it just a coincidence, or is there anything wrong? Even the mighty Internet doesn't tell about it. I wonder what's the secret of the fourth floor...



## Hidemi's Rambling No.238

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My apartment hunting has come to a climax. Last weekend, I went to see the places of my choice in the countryside where I had never visited before. I had found a budget travel package online that paying only for train tickets made a hotel stay, dinner and breakfast all free. It was a 90-minute bullet train ride and to take the bullet train, I got to the downtown train terminal. I hadn't been downtown for years and was shocked by its filthiness. Years ago, my English friend once said that she was amazed at how clean it was when she first came to Japan. Now, time has changed that and litter was everywhere on the streets. But once the train left the terminal, I was supposed to enjoy a beautiful countryside view from the train window after a while. Since it was a super discount travel package, the trains and the seats were specified beforehand. The bullet train was a double-decker. My seat was on the first floor from which I could only see people's feet on the platform from the train window. Although I expected the countryside would come into view after departure, low soundproof walls standing along the railroad track blocked scenery all the way...

## Hideki's Rambling No.239

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I transferred the bullet train to the local train to the area where all three apartments of my choice were located. There were no passengers but me on the train although it was a weekday morning. The station was an unmanned small shack. I walked along shabby houses, used-to-be shops and rice fields and found one of the apartments among them. My first impression was that a photograph showed things much better than they actually were. The building had looked a lot more gorgeous in the photos on a website. I walked on and soon found the other two apartments. One was under refurbishment and I couldn't see it from the outside. The other stood nearby and I saw a half-naked old man sitting idly on a balcony, who was a kind of person I didn't like to have as one of my neighbors. I took a rest on a bench, wondering if this trip had already become a fool's errand...

## Hidemi's Rambling No.240

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After I saw the outside of the buildings, I met a real estate agent who showed me the available room in each apartment. For a room in the apartment which was under refurbishment, she offered a 20 percent discount because the carpet and the wallpaper in the room was damaged. As the room had been my first choice anyway before I came here and I have a weakness for a discount, my mind was almost set on that place. The thing was, as I wrote here once, the available rooms of that building were concentrated on the fourth floor in the east side and this room was among them. Even after I saw the building and the room with my own eyes, I couldn't find out what was wrong with the fourth floor. I checked in a hotel and went to have dinner at a restaurant in the hotel as the stay included dinner. Since it was a budget travel package, I didn't expect the food at all. But the dinner was probably the most gorgeous feast I had ever had. It included all-you-can-eat crabs, tempura, steak and shrimps. Ironically, fatigue and tension for decision making spoiled my appetite and I could eat only little. At night, I couldn't sleep either from a sense of claustrophobia because the mountains and the woods closed down the area. I asked myself if I could really move in this area, let alone on the enigmatic fourth floor...