

Happy Ending

by [T. E. Creus](#) (May 2021)



Little Dog, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 1888

To Riko

I was once criticized for never writing stories with happy endings (which isn't exactly true, by the way, but let's skip that), so I decided to write this one, about my friend Yoko, and this is a story that does have a happy ending of sorts. In fact, it even starts with a happy ending.

See, my friend Yoko was a certified massage therapist. But she came from Japan and moved to Los Angeles after finishing her studies. The culture in both countries was

very different then, well, I suppose it still is, and when she opened her small clinic, in an affordable but perhaps not the nicest place downtown, she had a few customers who were expecting, let's say, a different type of treatment. Already one of her first customers, a middle-aged man with flaccid skin and bad teeth, after the massage routine was over, showed her a twenty-dollar bill and asked her if he could have a "happy ending". When she looked puzzled, he kindly explained with a crude but very understandable gesture what he meant.

"No! No happy ending!" she screamed, immediately throwing him out. She could be quite convincing when she wanted.

After that, she was forced to put a sign on the door, "No Happy Endings," but even then she still had a fair share of annoying customers trying to flirt or asking her out.

I have to say that Yoko was not at all unattractive, and she had an air of quiet innocence that made her look even more alluring somehow.

She didn't have a boyfriend, as far as I know. She lived by herself and her only companion was her dog Samson, a black poodle that I saw every now and then walking and sniffing the earth on our small courtyard (perhaps I forgot to say that Yoko and I were neighbours in the same building, and that is how we met).

Her parents and her sister and everyone else in her family lived back in Japan. She said she didn't get along very well with them, but she didn't explain why, and I didn't ask.

Not all of her customers were awful, of course, but eventually she got tired of dealing with the occasional bad apple, and closed shop. She studied for another year or two for an associate's degree and became a financial clerk at a small accounting office. But she found the job skull-numbingly dull.

It was also at this time that she moved somewhere else, in another part of town: a little house with a little garden, for her beloved Samson to play. I suppose the dog liked it enough. But she wasn't happy. The house was in a remote neighbourhood, where only Mexicans or perhaps Puerto Ricans lived. Everybody seemed to talk only in Spanish and she, who had difficulties even with English, felt extremely alone. She called me once, telling me about her troubles. I tried to comfort her, but I really didn't know what to say. I promised I would call her later on to talk more, perhaps to meet. To my shame, I never did.

A few months, or perhaps years, later – I've learned most of this from a common friend – she could no longer deal with the boredom of being an accounting assistant, so when a former colleague offered to work together as massage therapists in a new clinic that was opening up, she accepted right away. This time, however, it was at a fancy place in Los Feliz. No dicey customers here, mostly just rich white ladies whose main inconvenience would be that they would never stop talking about their furniture, their swimming pools, their chakras, their problems with their husbands, their lovers, and so on. But it sure was better than her former experience.

However, even there things didn't go so smoothly for her.

After six months at the new job, a few minutes after she had just waved goodbye to the recently divorced Ms. Banfield, who between one massage and another had asked Yoko about how she should position her new sofa according to the rules of feng shui (and she had to explain quite tactfully that she was from Japan, that feng shui was mostly a Chinese tradition, and that she really didn't have any useful advice to give), she heard angry shouts coming from the reception. That was extremely unusual, so she decided to investigate.

Bad mistake. Turns out a pot-bellied, unkempt white

man that seemed to be in his late thirties was arguing with the receptionist in angry tones, who was trying to call security and, when the man saw Yoko, still from far away, he took out a gun from his pocket and shouted: "You stupid whore!" –and shot her. Yoko fell down and, as she told me later, "all went black."

Turns out it was a case of mistaken identity. The man had been looking for his Korean former girlfriend, who worked as a manicure in the same building and looked only slightly like Yoko—that is to say, not very much, but I guess that for some people all Asians look alike, right? In any case, from far away he could not see any difference, or perhaps he was without his glasses, or perhaps he just hadn't found his girlfriend but didn't want to leave without shooting anyone, so he shot Yoko, and later when security arrived, he shot himself.

Yoko was not completely unlucky. The bullet had just hit her shoulder, a non-lethal wound. Still, she had to stay for a couple of weeks at the hospital. But even there she could not rest properly because, by that time, the television and newspapers were blaring twenty-four-seven that this was a case of "white supremacist hate against Asians," which was then the media's *topic du jour*. Hundreds of calls and messages came requesting interviews, but she refused or ignored them all. All that she was worried about was her dog Samson—which I ended up taking care of, for a few days. A quiet, peaceful, meditative kind of dog, very much like Yoko herself.

When she left the hospital, there were still a few reporters hounding her— "What do you have to say about white supremacy in this country?" she recalled a blonde bimbo shouting—but, dizzy, she refrained from the cameras and was assisted by a hospital worker into a cab.

In the end, I think she realized that perhaps America was not the right place for someone like her. Almost as soon

as she returned home from the hospital, she packed her bags, got a travel certificate for Samson, sold everything she had, and moved back to Japan. I've heard that since then she made up with her old folks, then met someone from her local church (did I mention that she was part of the small Catholic community in Japan? Well, she was), got married, had twins and now she's a stay-at-home mum somewhere in Japan. Not Tokyo; perhaps Osaka, or Nagoya, or perhaps somewhere else—to be honest, I know very little about Japanese geography, despite my love for Ozu and Kurosawa movies, and we don't keep in touch anymore.

And I don't really know if she lived happily ever after, but at least she never had to worry about happy endings anymore.

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