



Fred Sasaki

AND IF I KISS YOU  
IN THE GARDEN  
IN THE MOONLIGHT  
WILL YOU PARDON ME?

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a friendly Casper, nor am I one of your Slimers from *Ghostbusters* or *Ghostbusters II*. I am a man of little substance, of 10-percent body fat and medium frame, a half-digested panini and Pellegrino; and I might even be said to possess half a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because there isn't much to me. Like the disappointing ghouls you see in your car as you end a ride of Disney World's Haunted Mansion, it is as though I accompany you in some fleeting glass reflection. When you turn to me, you see only my surroundings. Looking at my reflection as you lurch toward me, you feel only butt-worn vinyl upholstery. I am a crack in that upholstery—filled with bits of gravel—where you mindlessly set your fingers. I'm a fissure in existence—indeed, standing right beside you, by your side waiting for the same elevator, my arms casually crossed, no memory of me will linger except for a vague sense of my warmth and Old Spice.

I walk silently into the office building in which we both work. Back from lunch under the John Hancock. I am wearing a black polo shirt, two buttons undone, slightly worn Levis 501, and Adidas sneakers. It is the most banal outfit in Chicago. My haircut is a smudge. My complexion is beige. I speak with no discernable accent. I am 40 Regular straight off the shelf. You see



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Fred Sasaki is a Chicago boy.



On the “L” you don’t notice me. Maybe I look a little too long at you. I take up maybe too much space on the seat beside you. Maybe my knee or thigh is unusually warm. Once you thought I was following you back into our office building, something about the pace of my gait. Your alarm vanished, however, as we turned in the revolving doors and you became anxious to catch the just-opened elevator doors.

You haven’t seen me elsewhere. We have shared the very elevator we wait for numerous times before. Once, my elbow grazed your elbow. You mumbled something less indistinguishable than I did, but neither of us recognized the speech as anything other than obligatory social groans. You haven’t seen me exit two floors beneath yours and weren’t at all curious.

The effort to consider it weren’t there. In fact I could be fiction, but it isn’t worth even be said to irritate you, however much you’d prefer I could be humming along. I am so peripheral that I can’t see the up arrow of the elevator button. I am the Muzak. I am the dimly lit fluorescent orange ring around the doors and both glare at an un-illuminated light above the doors and both glare at a full turn, and I’m grateful. We together stare at the elevator doors. The glimpse of me vaguely, approach the elevator. The glimpse of me you catch in the buffed steel of the elevator doors doesn’t warrant a full turn, and I’m grateful. We together stare at an un-illuminated light above the doors and both glare from it to the dimly lit fluorescent orange ring around the up arrow of the elevator button. I am the Muzak. I can’t see the up arrow of the elevator button. I am so peripheral that I can’t even be said to irritate you, however much you’d prefer I weren’t there. In fact I could be fiction, but it isn’t worth the effort to consider it.

But now we are posed, motionless, in front of those doors—you more awkwardly than me. Your right arm is bent in an L as if you are holding a coffee. Your head is slightly askew, eyes directed above the threshold of the elevator. You look a little like the little boy in the Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pop commercial who has just handed the owl his lollipop with the hope of determining how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pop. My legs are crossed. My neck and head seem burdened by my body. Maybe I am the turtle from the Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pop commercial.

The doors open and I start slowly forward, making a display of allowing you in first. You act grateful but resent the pretense. I extend my arm to direct you inside while motioning as if I’m bracing open the doors even though I am several feet from the sensors. You thank me and walk to the menu. You push the button for your floor and glance back as if to ask me mine, for which I wait, but then I lunge forward to press it myself, thanking you. I almost stumble. The doors close. We find our positions and sigh, yours louder than mine. Your shoulders are slumped and I have the distinct impression that you are now entirely relieved of any pressure to perform. You wipe your nose and I notice that your right foot is rolled over on its side. I hold my breath.

to say something about Otrpheus and realize that nothing happened, that nothing has ever happened, and I finally flash into myself—like the cartoon soul who stands up from his recently zonked body to look pitifully on himself, maybe not recognizing himself or acknowledging himself or still in shock from being dead or just figuring out that he was never really a part of himself in life or death. Like the ghost who walks around to find that life is impossible without a body that ties him to the world, and finally returns to his un-bruised-by-anvil body to live again and resume a life that wasn’t as bad as death. I see you leaving me and I start to walk in after you and the doors close on me as you feign pressing open.

mouse I wouldn’t eat you or chase you around. We’d talk like the late eighties *Tom and Jerry* and talk and cook and eat together and play and have picnics. That would be nice I say, but I always liked the episode when they went into outer space. That was a good one, you say, but then there is always the burning descent back down. That’s true, I say, but I wouldn’t mind you chasing me around a little. When I was a boy and the little girls would want to kiss me I’d run away and make them chase me, screaming. And when they caught you? you asked. They never did, I say, and then they lost interest and wouldn’t chase me any more. We grow up quickly, you say.

You lean in to me and close your eyes. Your lips part and my lips part and I lean in toward you, too. Our lips meet like two prunes, sweet and a little sticky, and you smell like Apple Jacks. Vines and tulips bend back from the elevator walls and willow branches wave in from the ceiling door. Something like a harp plays and then I think our garden sounds like a shrill vibrato and the sound of a singing horse fills the elevator and the elevator drops and starts to climb. We are embracing as the doors open. Sunlight floods our lift and I dip you.

The call bell sounds and we are standing in front of the elevator doors on the ground floor, covered in fluorescence. You walk in without looking back. I want

And our intrigue begins, remarkably. For the first time you look at me. I seem smart and partly sexy. There is a ukulele in my bag. You notice my fashion sneakers and begin a compliment, to your surprise.

The elevator jumps then halts abruptly. You sigh again and say Oh my. I don't need this today. This is just what I needed. This is the last thing I needed. You glance at your watch, still not ever looking at me, and flip open your cellular telephone. Your service is blocked. Finally you turn to me and say This is horrible. I say Yes this is horrible. You say This is just great. Great. This couldn't be any worse. This is perfect, just perfect. We look at the empty phone box, ceiling door, and each other. I say nothing, then I stutter after gathering the courage to confess and say, I've always wanted to get stuck in an elevator. You scrunch your forehead and say Really? I say Yes, I've always kind of hoped to be given a chance to step back and let chance take me out of my life for an indeterminate time with me not being able to do anything about it. I say It's kind of like a vacation. Like I am helpless in a void, trapped between floors both literally and figuratively. You say Oh. You are slightly terrified by me but getting somewhat comfortable with the idea of a stay together in the elevator. A vacation seems nice in theory but, you think, I'm not at all

convincing. You think maybe it'd be more interesting if I were more handsome. You flip open your phone again but find no service. I ask you Have you ever seen the movie *Elevator to the Gallows*? No, you say. I say The British title is *Lift to the Scaffold* and the original French title is *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*. It's a Louis Malle film. You say Oh. I say The main character spends nearly the entire film trapped in an elevator. I pause and say It's a love story but you never see the two lovers together for a single frame, except for in a photograph at the end of the movie. We both realize that we could never be lovers. Miles Davis did the original score for the movie, I say. It's the one and only film he scored his entire career. He spent a week in a hotel room with a mini grand composing the music. The score was performed by musicians that had never met before, and the music was improvised as they watched a loop of the film. You ask Elevator music? Not exactly, I say. A lot of other things happen. You ask Does your cell phone work? I say Yes, but it's busy. Should we press the alarm button? you ask. I say Maybe that's a good idea. OK, you say, Will you press it? I say OK. I press it. The alarm rings, less loudly than we both remember alarm calls sounding and we wait, listening. I press it off saying I think someone heard it and will contact maintenance.

when we would hold our breaths underwater and we thought that we could hold forever until it was on the news that kids started dying underwater, holding on to the poolside ladders. You say And we'd still play. I say Like when I thought that I would be the first one to live forever just because I wanted to. You say Everything seemed like forever.

You keep strumming and start singing like Tiny Tim *...Knee deep in flowers well stay. We'll keep the showers away. And if I kiss you...and a string breaks. I say If you were a cat and had whiskers I'd pull one off and resting the ukulele. You wouldn't get upset until the third or fourth string broke and then you wouldn't look much like a cat anymore. Do you think I look like a cat? you ask. I wouldn't normally answer that I say. Besides, I pause, no whisker would be long enough to even string a ukulele. And no cat could play the ukulele you say. I smile. I say But I did see a cat play the guitar on WGN morning news. You continue playing with the remaining strings and I say Django Reinhardt played the guitar with only two fingers. You say Look, you don't have to try so hard.*

And here we both stop dead, the lights are cut black as we stand in the motionless elevator. You reach toward me and stroke my face and say If I were a cat and you were a

You again look at me. You ask Do you play the ukulele? I say I thought you did. You say I do, that's strange. I say Lots of people play the ukulele. But how did you know? you ask. I say What do you mean? Ukuleles are very common. I pull it from my bag and hand it to you. You say OK. You strum it and giggle. When I was a child, you say, I thought I could just pick up a ukulele and play it like in the cartoons with the hula girls in grass skirts. I say So did I. I say And when the savages forced the explorer into a boiling cauldron after fooling him that it is a bath with rubber ducks I always thought that being boiled alive was just a state of mind and that if you just ignored the death aspect of it all that you could finish your bath and never be killed. Cartoons will do that, you say. I say And I always thought that if I were caught in an avalanche that I could huddle over my teddy bear and the rocks and boulders would bounce off me. You say We are invincible when we're young. I say And I thought that whatever disease I picked up, there would be a cure by the time I got it, and that if I lost any limbs that they could be regrown, or that I could just grow new ones just by trying. And if I ever got stuck in an elevator I thought I could jump up through the elevator's ceiling door and scurry up the cables to pry open a floor. Kind of like when I thought I could fly in my Underoos. Like