

Adele and Junishiro live thousands of miles apart, but they have one thing in common: both of them have a secret. Although Adele lives in France and Junichiro in Japan, they manage to meet. Will they be able to live their love?

SLEEP BABY SLEEP

By Odile NOEL-SHINKAWA

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SLEEP

BABY



SLEEP

Odile NOEL - SHINKAWA

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Print ISBN: 979-8-88531-169-4

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-170-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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2022

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Noel-Shinkawa, Odile

Sleep Baby Sleep by Odile Noel-Shinkawa

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022906715

Main characters

In France:

Adele: The Narrator

Elsa and Agathe: Adele's sisters

Raphael and Adrien: Adele's brothers

Adele's father and mother

Adele's grandmother

Aunt Yse and her husband, Adele's aunt and uncle

Adele's cousin, Joris

Aunt Malena

In England:

Alistair, Adele's first love

In Japan:

Junishiro, who will eventually meet and love Adele

Junishiro's parents, Otosan and Okasan

Kaoru: Junishiro's girlfriend, who later becomes a yurei

Kanoe: Junishiro's grandmother

Keiko: Kaoru's mother, and her husband, Tatsumi. Kaoru and Tatsumi are divorced.

Haruki and Koichiro: Junishiro's two best friends

Takeshi: an old yakusa, neighbor of Kanoe and Junishiro. His wife, Hanako is an evil yurei

Guest friends of Junishiro for the *hyakumonogatari* evening: Hiroki, Atsuhi, Kazuo, Masaki, Gyohei, Nanami and Yukiko.

In the land of dreams, Yumé:

The fairy Ael

The troll Gunnar

Iona, the guardian of the threshold

The Mothers of the Earth

The siren Ulfa

The salamander Ulrich

Zotz the bat

Vuall and Hagenti, the two Dragons, Masters of the Matrix

In the park:

The young man in black, the Master of the Illusions

The birds:

Adele's dove

Junishiro's pigeon: Hachiman

Junishiro and Kaoru's magic white bird: Kokoro

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Chapter V:

Summertime

During the summer holidays, our parents sent us away from home, and that was a welcome respite. We spent a couple of months in the Vosges with some cousins, in an old manor house covered with ivy, and surrounded by an enormous park. It felt good to listen to the stridulating of the cicadas. Like the song of the rain, it had some lenient and anesthetic power over me. I spent a lot of time laying in the grass, inhaling its intoxicating smell, enjoying the bite of the sun on my skin, and the light breath of the summer wind. I could then silence the pain and dismiss my sadness. But my sisters and cousins wouldn't leave me alone. They wanted to play hide-and-seek, run in the immense garden, and look for lizards and butterflies along the alleys lined with daisies and poppies. At the bottom of the park, we crossed a forbidden worm-eaten bridge and looked for tadpoles in the pond. After a while, I wandered away from the others to find some peace on top of my favorite tree, a yew which was more than a century old. From there, I was closer to the sky and could listen to the song of the birds. Then I saw the others walking to the farm to get some eggs. I slid down the trunk of the tree, skinning my hands and knees, and joined them at the henhouse. We loved playing among the hens, and enjoyed very much looking at them cackling, shaking

themselves, and clumsily trying to fly away and lash on the ground a few yards away.

At the beginning of the summer, during the haymaking, my uncle allowed us to ride the tiller. The smell of cut hay was intoxicating. Too early to our liking, the church bells started ringing the time to go home. On the way back, we ran after stray cats with slanted yellow eyes, hiding in the wild grass. My cousin Joris dragged me away to the underground cellars, where the bats were waking up and flying towards the exit, brushing our hair. Though I was scared, I loved it. I couldn't keep my eyes away from the bats' red eyes, while listening to Joris's tales about a dragon haunting the banks of the underground river. When we got home, the others had already peeled the potatoes, and were annoyed that we got away with it. They angrily asked us to lay the table.

After dinner, while wanderings around the pond, Joris and I ran into Bernard and his dogs. He was going to check his rabbit snares, and was holding his rifle over his arm, with the muzzle pointed downwards. There was something threatening about his dogs. Their sallow eyes following us as if we were preys made me uneasy. They licked their chops and gnarled, baring their sharp teeth. They had wide tufts of hairs near their ears, and looked very large. Barely greeting us, Bernard silently called them off and walked away with his hounds in his wake. Suddenly, he turned around, and looked at me as if he was casting a spell on me. In the distance, the knell was tolling. It

reminded me that my parents had not allowed me to attend my brothers' funerals. I burst into tears, and ran back to the house. The windows were lit, and fire was blazing in the chimney. The amber light was pushing the shadows away. The room felt safe and warm. After dinner, I stayed by the fire, listening to the men's night cap tales.

First, their conversations were mundane, and not much different from any drunken brawl. But after washing down a couple of bottles of homemade brandy, their gossiping was taking a different turn. In the mist of cigarettes and pipes smoke, their trivial chatter about the damages provoked by foxes in the henhouses was sliding towards old tales and legends.

When the huge log eventually split in the chimney, they opened another bottle. I heard them say that this liquor was even stronger than the brandy they had before. I was hiding behind Joris, and nobody was paying attention to me. They were now talking about a pact, and their voices lowered down until they were just a whisper... I could vaguely make out that it had to do with being able to meet again with our loved ones after their passing. In order to do so, one had to go to the Devil's Bridge, and throw an object that had belonged to the deceased in the dark waters of the pond. It had to be a souvenir which had a lot of sentimental value to both the living and the dead. Doing so would open a vortex between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The person who

wished to contact a deceased had light a black candle to invoke the Prince of Darkness. No big deal. But you also had to prick your finger until it bled, while reciting the Lucifer formula. For the second time in the evening, Bernard turned around and looked right into my eyes. I didn't lower them down. Instead, I got up and walked towards him. He muttered in a slurred voice: "This kid sure has some guts!" To my cousin's dismay, he sat on his lap, and offered me a sip of his drink. Before I could finish it, my face went red, my eyes were watery, and I had a coughing fit. But as soon as it was over, I asked for a second sip. This time, I refrained from coughing, and gulped a mouthful. Bernard cried out, "She is one of us now!"

I was putting on a brave face, not wanting anybody to find out that my head was boiling inside. It was as if neurons I had never used before had found new connections. I was becoming aware of endless alternative possibilities. Everything was spinning at the speed of light. I managed to refuse a third sip. All that I wanted was to sit down quietly and clear my head. Somebody had the wits to offer me a glass of orange juice, and that made things better.

I could then catch the rest of the conversation, the part I desperately wanted to hear. I wanted to find out about the ritual to contact your loved ones who had passed, so that I could communicate with my brothers. I hadn't felt so alive for a very long time. Bernard and my cousins went on with their

explaining. The second ingredients had me cringe a bit: I was to provide black cat's hairs.

"You are ginger haired, you must be a witch, it shouldn't be too difficult for you" said Bernard's girlfriend, Nella, who had snitched in when he took me on his lap. Everybody burst out laughing, and singing around me "Come on, wicked witch, you sure must have a few black cats in your trail."

- "Yeah, sure!" I muttered. "I suppose you are aware that they have claws and teeth!"

Nobody was bragging any more. They had stopped drinking. They had realized how foolish it had been to drag me into this. But Joris remained unabashed:

- "Don't worry, my ginger haired witch, there is a way, I won't let you down. I can trap a black cat for you."

- "Only if you release her afterwards! Promise-me Joris, please!!" Joris agreed reluctantly.

- "OK, witch, I'll set her free! Now, let's not forget that we have to take an oath to the Dark Lord! Do you feel ready to prick your finger and offer him your blood?"

There were some whispers among the remaining participants, and Bernard whispered:

- "This has to be done before reciting the ritual formula:"

Our Father Lucifer,
Who rules the Kingdom of Hell
Together with the fallen Angels your
brethren,
Grant me to meet again with...
Let them rise from the dead
Allow me to see again.
Accept these offerings,
And submit me to temptation
Midnight, the Devil time, may the Dark Lord
come in.

- "When doing so," he went on, while gazing at his empty glass,
"one has to make an offering to the Devil..."

- "An offering?"

- "Yes. Offer him somebody's soul."

I didn't have much time to ponder about that. Aunt Yse had dashed in to remind me it was time for bed. She didn't look very happy and hastily dragged me out. Although it was summer, it was chilly in the house. It was a welcome change after the suffocating heat of the hearth. I followed my aunt along the corridor. In the dark, I could hear the old house creaking. My uncle didn't allow us to turn the light on and had handed us flashlights. Their weak halo wasn't enough to light up the recesses. I could imagine the creatures of the night lurking along the walls.

I slipped between the rough sheets of my cold bed and curled up to warm it up. I was always keeping my flashlight on for a

while before going to sleep. On the old damp and moth-eaten wall tapestry, the woven characters were beginning to live their old-fashioned country life. Little shepherds were playing fife for young girls, among herds of sheep. But I knew the wolf was never very far. That evening, I didn't get scolded, but I could hear my uncle and my aunt talking until late in the night. I had trouble falling asleep. I had strange dreams... I could hear muffled cooing, the noise of scratching paws, and the ruffle of feathers.

- "It must have been pigeons," my cousin replied when I told him about it at breakfast.

- "Yes, but they were just above my head. It was as if the noise was coming from inside the wall... It sounded like they were talking to me..."

He muttered something about girls always being sissy, but I couldn't care less and shrugged my shoulders.

- "Are you sure you heard cooing?" my uncle asked me, "and not hooting?" I saw a Barn-owl in the attic last week; I think it got in through the basement window. It's broken and I haven't mended it yet." Then he added:

- "This owl was a White Lady."

Meanwhile, in southern Japan...

Keiko didn't have a large family, and most of them had turned their backs on her when she got pregnant. They didn't even wonder why Tatsumi, the child's father, hadn't been able to recognize his daughter legally. If only they had bothered asking, they would have found out that at the time of his engagement to Keiko, doctors had diagnosed him with a serious neurodegenerative disease. Not knowing that she was pregnant, he decided his bride shouldn't have to put up with his illness, and left. Later, it occurred to him he should at least have given her the opportunity to make her own decision. But he lacked the courage. He knew she had a good heart. It occurred to him that she was strong enough to meet the challenge, but he told himself it was too late. He later found out that he had a daughter, but Keiko wouldn't pick up his calls. Kaoru's death came as a shock he couldn't overcome. He bitterly regretted his cowardice. He would never get to know his daughter. It also occurred to him that he could have prevented this from happening. He was feeling so guilty... He had never been able to forget Keiko, and this self-inflicted penance had been far more devastating to him than the disease itself.

He took care of the funeral, and his help was providential for Keiko. She didn't have the strength to organize her own child's

burial. Keiko and Tatsumi had only invited Junishiro and Kanoe to the funeral vigil, the Tsuya. Keiko thought she was going to pass out when her daughter's lips had to be moistened during the *matsugo-no-mizu* ceremony, "the water of the last moment". She kept wondering where and when Kaoru would be reborn, and swore that she was going to spend the rest of her life waiting and looking for her.

All four of them were now kneeling around Kaoru's body, after Tatsumi had done the *makura kazari*^{xxi}, the "decoration of the pillow". Tatsumi was looking at her child's body, all dressed in white and looking so pale, surrounded by flowers and swirls of incense, lit only by candle lights. She still wore the white kimono she had on when she died. Keiko and Kanoe had done everything they could to clean it up and mend it. They had added an embroidered obi^{xxii} and Japanese socks to her clothing. As she was dressing her daughter, it reminded her of the time when she was a toddler. She toyed for a moment with the mad hope that she would wake up. They had concealed Kaoru's wounds and put fresh makeup on her face. The little girl looked almost alive.

In front of the altar of the ancestors, a Shinto priest was chanting songs and sutras. Junishiro put in his young bride's hands a magnificent *juzu* rosary his grandmother had given him. Then the participants laid beside her the envelopes containing the offerings to allow the young deceased to cross the *Sanzu-no-Kawa*, the "river of the three paths of death". It

separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. Junishiro realized that there now was an abyss between him and Kaoru. He felt empty, lonely and broken. His grandmother had been careful not to reproach him anything, even though she could not help thinking that she knew it would end badly.

The funeral vigil seemed completely unreal to Junishiro. Although he had not really had any rest since his friend's fatal fall, he was not feeling sleepy at all. He felt like he was in an altered state of consciousness. His mind refused to accept what had happened. He looked at the wedding ring he had put on Kaoru's finger. Junishiro couldn't stop thinking about when they had exchanged their rings and drank sake during the ceremony of the three cups. He could almost hear the bird reciting the poem sent to Narihira^{xxiii} by the High Priestess of Ise:

Did you come to me?
Or did I go to you?
I don't remember.
Was it a dream, or was it reality?
Was I asleep or awake?

and in his mind, clouded by pain and despair, that voice sounded like Kaoru's. As if in a dream, he whispered Narihira's answer:

In the Darkness
That clouded our hearts
We were wandering.

Tonight will tell us
Whether it was a dream or reality.

After the funeral, when Junishiro found himself alone in his room, his pain roamed free. It was so overwhelming that he thought he was going to lose his mind. He remained prostrated for weeks, alone in the dark, without going out of his room. Kanoe was leaving trays of food behind the door, but he barely ate. His parents came to see him several times and offered to take him home. They even said they could close the restaurant to take care of him. Junishiro realized that he was inflicting his pain to those who loved him most and agreed to open his window to let air and light in. A question was now nagging at him: why did Kokoro cause Kaoru's death? He remembered Hanako's expressionless face, and her eyes that weren't looking at anything. Somehow, he badly wanted to understand.

Kanoe's rheumatism had evolved into acute arthritis, and she couldn't get out at all. Junishiro had to feed the fish. When he first went out into the garden, after spending so much time in the darkness, he could hardly keep his eyes open. It was only when he reached the pond that he could finally look around. There were hardly any changes. The grass was a bit higher, and the pond's water a little murky, but the carps were still as eager as ever to get their food.

It was wintertime now. The wind was freezing. The bite of the cold soothed the chill in Junishiro's heart. He looked up at the

clouds. Although it was still the middle of the afternoon, the moon was already casting its ominous glow. While watching it, Junishiro wondered if he was dreaming. Was it not a white bird that emerged from the hidden face of the moon? He pondered for a while. He hadn't seen Kokoro since the tragic accident, and didn't know what had happened to the bird. He had no reason to believe he was dead. He sat for a while in the grass, and closed his eyes. He felt the touch of the wind on his face. It was as if someone was touching him lightly. The caress became a kiss. He no longer felt cold. Little by little, he started feeling a comforting presence at his side. The veil of sadness that had been shrouding him was lifting. He returned every day and sat in the same place. Sometimes, he could hear the bird chirping. At night, he was dreaming of Kaoru, and during the day, he could feel her presence, especially when he was by the pond. At first, he would keep his eyes shut in fear the illusion would go away. But it was beginning to snow. The water of the pond got covered with ice. As he was checking on the carps, he bent over the frozen mirror which was covering the surface of the water. He shrank back in shock. Beside his worn-out face, he could clearly see Kaoru's lovely face. Her skin was as white as snow, as if it were made of porcelain. Her dark eyes and jet-black hair looked as if they had been painted in Chinese ink. Her mouth looked blood-red. Her lips were slightly parted, as if she was blowing a kiss. Kaoru's presence had something eerie, but Junishiro was so taken by her beauty that he discarded his misgivings.

- "If only I had known that we would be together again by the pond... Junishiro whispered, trying not to give way to his fear.

- "Here I am, my love, I have been waiting for you. I'll wait for you until the end. We will be together again, forever..." she whispered in his ear. "I will wait for you every night by this pool. Make sure you get here, otherwise..." Junishiro shivered. This unfinished invitation, whispered in a hissing voice, sounded like a threat.

He was now feeling torn between the passion he still felt for her, and the fear that was gripping him. Part of him badly wanted to see her again and hold her in his arms. The other part was yelling at him he should run away.

- "We loved each other so much," he whispered nervously.

- "Nothing will ever part us," she murmured, "do not forget our oaths. I will never find rest in the other world without you. Never forget me. promise me you will love no one but me, or else...." Again, she did not finish her sentence, and this time Junishiro felt a trickle of icy sweat run down his back. As he was rising slowly, he could hear Kokoro's clear laughter in the dark night.

Chapter VII:

Midnight games

Maybe a week had elapsed, maybe it was a month... I had completely lost track of time. My mother was in hospital after yet another suicide attempt. This time, it was not me who found her. The thought of death kept haunting me. Every afternoon after school, we were coming back to a cold and empty home, and there was nothing to eat. The bills with the grocers were piling up, and the neighbor were tired of lending us money to get bread. Everything in the apartment had become dirty and broken, and no one was thinking of cleaning or replacing anything. My father was spending more time at the bar than with us. Whenever he would turn up, we weren't allowed to say a word, let alone ask for anything. We'd already had more than our share of smacks. Whenever we heard him stagger up the stairs, and fumble around with his key before finding the keyhole, we knew we had to wear off like shadows, and avoid at any cost being in his way. It wasn't easy, since he could hardly stand up and was staggering. We thought in the beginning it would be OK if we didn't anger him. But there was absolutely no rhyme or reason to whatever rules he had set. Anything could make him fly off the handle. As soon as he walked through the door, we would run and hide in the closet. Without even wondering if we had eaten, or if we were already

in bed, he would pour himself a drink, light a cigarette, and collapse in front of the television.

Hidden in our sanctuary, we'd switch on our flashlights. Their white light was surrounded by a halo which shone like a magic ring protecting us from the rest of the world. We could then unpack our treasures: multicolored glass beads, jacks, spinning tops, tin soldiers, kaleidoscopes, images, stamps, key rings... we would then explain how we had got them, and go into endless bartering.

I remember one evening... We couldn't hear Dad anymore. He must have been captivated by his favorite movie, a film by Duvivier, *Marianne of my youth*. It was about teenagers in a boarding school set in an old castle surrounded by ominous woods, shadow people, and the souls of the dead. There was a haunted house on the other side of a lake covered in mist. A mysterious young girl was living there. She had always been waiting for her knight in shining armor, and was dreaming of promises, of endless love. At the end of the movie, it turns out that the young guy who is in love with her is the only one who has ever seen her. My father loved the fact that it was impossible to tell if the woman was real or if she was only a figment of the boy's imagination.

The TV programs ended. The old radio started to crackle. I could hear it whispering tender message and stories about lovers that neither the oceans nor death could part. But the tales turned into threats. It reminded me of those evil spirits in

the cursed barn, on the other side of the foggy lake, in the film my father was watching. This made me think about the ring I had thrown into the pond, and the deal I had made with the devil.

- "What if we played *"What time is it Mister Wolf?"* Elsa offered, to break the silence.

- "We are only three, and there's not enough room. I have a better idea" I replied.

- "Please, tell us!" Elsa and Agatha kept asking.

- "I know a game called *"Midnight, the Devil time, may the Dark Lord come in"*

- "The devil, but what do you want from him?" Agatha had mixed feelings. She was afraid, but she was also intrigued.

- "I want him to bring Adrien and Raphael back..."

- "..."

- "Ah, and what do we have to do?" Elsa enquired.

I hesitated for a moment and I just told them about the candle and the formula. I didn't tell them anything about the drops of blood and the black cat hairs, and even less about the fact that one had to offer somebody's soul to the devil. I already knew I'd pick the schoolteacher who had accused me of cheating. I hadn't forgiven her for getting a low mark. As for the formula, we decided to keep it to *"Midnight, the Devil time, may the*

Dark Lord come in." This was going to become our favorite game. I never understood why we liked it so much. Maybe it was a catharsis to our fears. The three of us were standing in our den, surrounded by the old bedsheets we had hanged between the shelves. We were trembling in the dark, holding each other's hands. The fear was intoxicating. The game was like a rite of passage. It was calling up ancient beliefs, tales and legends, and all the creatures of the night. Afterwards, we resumed the reading of our fairy tale books.

This first time we played our *Midnight, The Devil time* game, a light breath stirred the old drapes, rustling like the wind in the leaves. The dull spark of our flashlight was shuddering, looking like the reflection of the moon on the water. The red-haired fairy in a brocade dress was whispering to me in an ancient language: "Don't be sad, I watch over them; I promise you they are happy..."

The next day was a rainy Saturday. I couldn't remember how I had got into bed and could not tell if I had slept or not. I spent hours looking for Adrian and Raphael's pictures. In the photo albums, they were some blank spaces; only the adhesive photo holders were left. Suddenly, it started raining cats and dogs. I felt very cold. A gigantic shadow was leaning over me, wrapping its malevolent wings over the scattered photo albums.

In a sugary voice, full of gravity, the White Lady explained: "I took their pictures. They have nothing to do here. You won't

see them again. The most important thing is that I am here with you. Get dressed, your Dad's tired, we're going out." She handed me a sweater knitted out of rough wool. The neckline was much too narrow. She was forcing it down to get my head through. And perhaps because of the lack of air, or having to breathe in the wool's hairs, it occurred to me she had brought her black cat with her. She finally managed to slip the sweater on me. I didn't like the color, and the sleeves were too long. Maybe I could offer her soul to the devil during the ritual...

- "No one should see these pictures," she went on about my brother's photographs, "your brothers can't have been your father's sons! He's way too intelligent! He should have married a woman like me! Their health problems can only come from your mother's side!" Her voice left a sour echo in the air. I could hardly breathe. Then she hugged me, and whispered: "You should have been my daughter you know, not your mother's."

She was erasing my mother from the picture... I was speechless. She was squeezing me so hard it hurt.

- "I have got to tell you something... The Mother Superior has decided it was time for my ordination; I will now be Sister Lamia," she explained, handing me a cup containing an odd-looking beverage. I understood that I would have to drink my cup of sorrows up to the dregs.

I reluctantly put my coat on. Elsa and Agatha were already ready and had prepared their jump ropes. I picked up my old

candy box and added some sticks of chalk in it. I wanted to play hopscotch. The prospect of hopping between heaven and hell fascinated me. In the living room, my father was listening to *The Ride of the Valkyries*, and turned the sound up when we walked past.

The weather was weird. The sky was dark, yet sunbeams were shining through the clouds. Once in the park, we ran after swirling leaves, and picked up acorns and pine cones. Then we played hide-and-seek. I could hear laughter and whispers in the groves. I followed them. The sunrays were lighting up a clearing. The tree leaves looked as if they had been embroidered with fine gold. Shadows were dancing in the light-beams. I blinked, and then the fairy was there, holding my hand. She handed me a wand. "You too are a fairy," she was humming in the wind, "Never forget it! Make good use of your wand!".

We had walked many times along these alleys, pushing my brothers' strollers. It suddenly occurred to me that the trees might have kept the memory of when they were here. I looked for them until the evening. It was like playing hide-and-seek with their shadows. However, like pictures projected by a magic lantern, it was an illusion. Their shadows soon dissolved in a gust of wind.

The clouds became darker. The sunshine faded away. I went on with my game of hide-and-seek until I could no longer feel my brothers' presence. Behind the last oak tree, Malena was

there, looking for me. I heard a sob, and the fairy vanished into the foliage.

Meanwhile, in southern Japan...

Haruki was in charge of organizing the *hyakumonogatari* event. He had told to his friends it had to take place on a full moon night. They all found it quite cool. It hadn't been easy to line up the full phase of the moon with a day when they would all be available. They picked up an evening when Junishiro was working at his parents' restaurant. There was a huge mirror over the bar, so they didn't have to worry about finding one. Haruki had explained to them that the room in which they would tell their stories had to differ from the one in which the mirror was. He clarified that the game would take place in the back room. Every time someone had finished telling his or her story, they should go into the restaurant room with their lanterns, and look at their reflection in the mirror. They should then come back with the others in the back room and blow out the lantern candle. The stories shouldn't be told in the room where the mirror was. Haruki told Junishiro he didn't have to worry about the mirror. There was no reason it should get broken.

They finally agreed on a Friday evening, because it was just before the weekend. Haruki told them he would buy the blue paper lanterns and the candles. He explained that they would have to wear blue clothes. Most of them were wearing jeans

all the time, and wearing a blue T-shirt wasn't a problem. Haruki also explained that in the 17th century, the participants were asked to leave their swords outside, and then joked that if they had Tasers or 9 Millimeters, they should kindly leave them at home. "Yukiko, if you have a self-defense spray, please don't take it with you!" he added. Not bothering to pick up the macho hint, she told him she was a judo master level 4, and certainly did not need this kind of gadget. Koichiro gave her a perplexed look, but didn't dare adding anything.

Haruki was happy to have earned the esteem of his comrades. They were all listening carefully, hardly ever interrupting. He was aware that they were only going to tell ten stories instead of a hundred, and that each tale was going to last about five minutes. He asked them if they could add nine anecdotes after their stories, to reach a hundred tales. Haruki told them that there would be a better chance for something to happen. He feared that if they were telling less than a hundred stories, the ghost wouldn't show up. He kept telling them he was not afraid, and was even willing to tell more stories to get to one hundred if necessary. The others were impressed by his determination, and decided that they'd manage to tell the requested amount of tales.

The ten friends arrived on time at the restaurant. Junishiro had previously hidden the lanterns and candles in the closet. At the end of the evening, he had told his parents that he would check the cash register to allow them to leave early. They were tired,

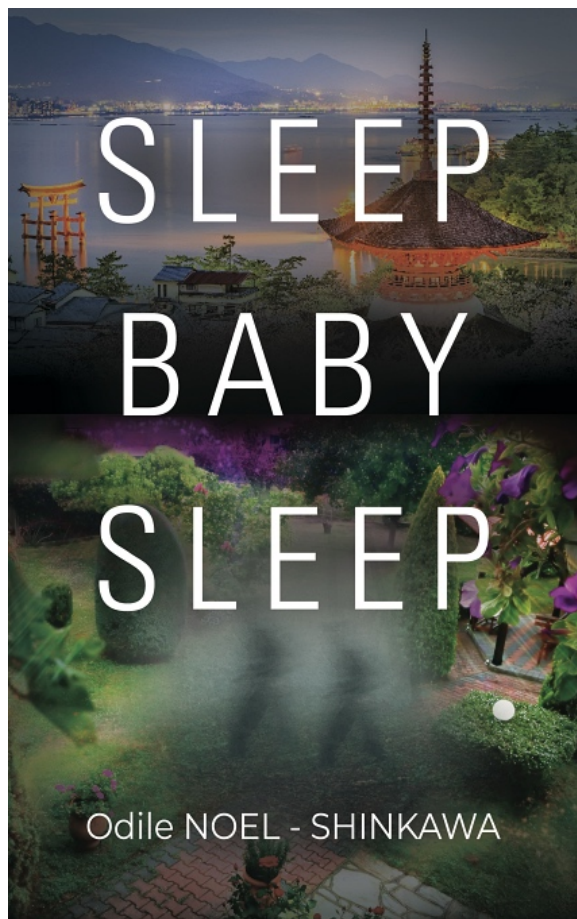
and didn't ask any questions. Junishiro then turned down the lights to notify the last customers it was time to leave.

- "We'd better not waste time. Get ready while I'm finishing work," Junishiro told Koichiro and Haruki;- "It would be cool if you started placing the lanterns and candles, but keep quiet. If I make mistakes, my parents will go berserk."

He could nevertheless hear muffled laughter and whispers in the back room, and had to check his accounts three times before getting them right. He asked Koichiro to help him clear the last tables. It was already past eleven when he could finally set the dishwasher on and join the others.

In the back room, his friends had covered the lamps with scarves to dim the light. They had hidden the crates of sake and rice under a dark cloth, and had assembled five tables. His friends had covered them with a huge embroidered tablecloth. Haruki had put the ten Washi lanterns along the table, and Koichiro had lit them on.

The participants silently took place around the table. Haruki and Junishiro sat down at each end, and the other eight split on each side of the table. Outside, the traffic had decreased. Despite the heat, none of them had opened the windows, perhaps because the full moon was looming ominously.



Adele and Junishiro live thousands of miles apart, but they have one thing in common: both of them have a secret. Although Adele lives in France and Junichiro in Japan, they manage to meet. Will they be able to live their love?

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