

Carlos and Carole Ghosn

Together, Always

(Excerpts)

CARLOS

November 19, 2018

Often, when planes fly over the Sea of Japan which separates Asia from Japan, passengers feel turbulence, more or less severe, caused by high altitude winds. Knowing the area, they don't worry too much. As a regular passenger from Beirut to Tokyo, I am used to it. But that day, two hours before landing at Haneda airport, the plane hit an air pocket of greater intensity than I ever experienced, shaking me physically and psychologically.

Some people see this atmospheric phenomenon as a bad omen. I am not superstitious, but later, thinking back, I have to admit that it was indeed an omen... Intuitively, I had a premonition of the catastrophe awaiting me.

Nevertheless, I feel quite relaxed, even if a week of hard work lies ahead of me with, as always, a minute by minute agenda: two board meetings, one for Nissan and the other for Mitsubishi, a meeting with the Governor of Tokyo and several other important meetings concerning the Renault-Nissan Alliance. Not to mention the festivities to celebrate Franco-Japanese friendship and cooperation, but I won't attend them, or very briefly.

I am returning after four days in Beirut with my wife Carole and my friends. A long and enjoyable weekend when, for once, I was able to devote a little more time to them. But it is no longer on my mind. In general, I am someone who rarely looks back, only the future interests me. And this coming week should bring me special satisfaction: Maya, the youngest of my three daughters, is coming from San Francisco to introduce her boyfriend to me. I haven't seen her for a long time and I am delighted in anticipation of that meeting. We have planned to meet at my apartment in the evening then dine together, just the three of us. A lovely evening in view...

That is also the reason I planned my entire week in the plane. I want to free my mind for her and her friend. Since they were very young, I have always been careful to free quality time for my children. Of course, I wasn't often home when they were small, but when we were reunited, I was entirely theirs. Cell phone, emails, Internet put aside. Still today, I don't want them to feel that

I am the boss of Renault-Nissan but a father like any other, attentive to what they have to say, present at the good times and the bad.

It is almost 16h. The jet lands and slides along the tarmac at Haneda, Tokyo's international airport. After a thirteen-hour flight, no one arrives feeling fresh and smart. Although I have made this journey hundreds of times, I feel groggy. Dragging my feet, I go to join the chauffeur of the private flight firm who must be waiting for me after passport control. Usually, the employee in charge of travellers arriving from abroad gives my passport a cursory glance, stamps it and ushers me through. Today, there's a change in the ritual. He looks surprised and asks me to be kind enough to wait. I don't speak Japanese, but I understand his gestures. Then, with my passport in his hand, he stands up and disappears into an office.

This is strange. Most of the time, the employees recognise me and give me a polite nod. Today, nothing. He's probably a new recruit, I think to myself. I'm not especially worried. I only hope I won't have to wait too long.

The man comes back, pretends to restart his computer then, with a wave of his hand, invites me to follow him. I obey, a little annoyed by the waste of time. A corridor, then he opens a door. In the room, three men – one seated on a chair in front of a table – seem to be waiting for me.

"Mister Ghosn, we have a problem with your passport," he says. "I'll ask someone to explain it to you."

Just then, a small, very slim man walks towards me. He says he is Mister Seki from the Tokyo Public Prosecutor's office.

"We have a few questions to ask you..."

"Really? But... will it take long?"

"Yes, it will probably take a little time."

I haven't the slightest idea what this man wants, but I don't want to be late for Maya.

"My daughter is waiting for me, to go to dinner, I must tell her or she'll worry," I say, taking out my cell phone. But the man answers immediately,

"Oh no! From now on, you cannot use your telephone! Moreover, I will ask you to hand it over ..."

This is the first shock. What on earth is going on? What do they want from me? The man called Seki doesn't give me more time to think.

"Please come with us. Don't worry about your luggage, it will come with us."

I am immediately surrounded by three men who lead me out through a back door. Someone grabs my suitcases and follows us. We take a lift, then corridors... I am bewildered, I cannot understand what is happening to me and no one explains anything. Only Seki speaks English but he remains silent. When I ask where they are taking me, he replies dryly, "You will see"... Then his face freezes into silence once more.

At the end of a long corridor, they make me enter a sort of van with curtains blocking the windows. I am in darkness, surrounded by two people. A driver gets in the front and is joined by Seki who sits next to him. The van starts up.

A short time later, when the van stops, they make me get out. I find myself in a kind of garage, totally impersonal, there is nothing to tell me where I am. We take a lift then another succession of deserted corridors. If anyone emerges from a door, they are told to return inside. Apparently, they do not want anyone to see me. It's as though they wish to create a void around me, isolate me from everything and everyone.

Finally, they push me into an office and make me sit down. There, Seki informs me of the reason for what already seems like an arrest. A complaint has been made against me, he says, concerning the under-reporting of revenues. His exact words are: "deficient financial information".

To my surprise, and the brutal treatment I have received, is now added stupefaction. What are they talking about? I do not understand this accusation. And above all, I am worried about Maya. She must be wondering what has happened to me. She has probably tried to call me several times ...

Since I have never been involved with Japanese justice, I do not know my rights as a foreign citizen in Japan. Like any Westerner in such a situation, I ask to call my lawyer, but they don't answer, they ignore me. Moreover, all my questions remain unanswered. I have to shut up and obey.

Soon, I am led back to the same van. I don't see my suitcases, but I confess that doesn't worry me. I try to reason but the emotional shock is so great

that I cannot analyse what is happening to me. Nobody tells me where we are going, until the moment when the vehicle stops and, as I get off, I notice men in uniforms who look like prison wardens.

They take me into a room, followed by my suitcases which have reappeared and are being examined meticulously. Then, making signs, they tell me to undress. Completely. I obey. They hold out other clothes, briefs, trousers and a light green long-sleeved shirt, as well as plastic flip-flops of the same colour. They have taken my watch, my belt, my wallet. The list of my personal property is written in Japanese on a sheet of paper, a list I must sign without understanding a word. Finally, I am weighed, measured, photographed.

At that very moment, I feel a powerful sensation, almost a detonation: I have plunged from EVERYTHING to NOTHING. Even if I do not perceive in these men a specific desire to humiliate me, it seems they are keen to ensure that I do not benefit from any privileges.

On a floor above, they put me in a cell. It is tiny, 6 or 7 m<sup>2</sup>, as clean as an operating theatre with, at the back, a toilet visible to all and a little sink. On the floor, tatamis placed from wall to wall, a folded futon and a thin bedcover. Against the wall, a low wooden table.

A feeling of cold seizes me instantly. It is November and the temperature in the cell is very low, no more than 15 degrees. I will soon understand that the cold filling all the cells is not a cost-cutting measure to reduce the deficit, as the prison directors claim. It is an extremely basic, elementary method of preventing the inmates from thinking, planning their defence strategies... When you are shivering day and night, you think of nothing but keeping warm. The cold empties your mind, freezes your thoughts, dehumanises.

Then the cell door closes. I am left standing there, in the middle of the room, incapable of the slightest gesture. Here I am, a prisoner in the Kosuge detention centre. Without seeing either a doctor or a lawyer. Without informing anyone. But above all, without having the opportunity to say one word.

Night has fallen. I can see through the opening that gives onto the exterior, a window with opaque glass that makes everything hazy. At 21h, the very bright light of the cell grows dim, but it doesn't go out completely so that, as I would learn later, the warden can observe me better during his rounds.

I spend my first night in a state of numbness and extreme confusion. I do not even know if I slept or not. I cannot think. What are they accusing me of? Who ordered my arrest? These two questions turn around in my mind, over and over, without ever finding an answer.

CAROLE

19 November, 2018

“Arrived safely in Tokyo”. I smile, reassured. Carlos never fails to respect this little ritual so that each time he takes a plane, as soon as it lands, he sends an SMS to put my mind at rest. It is the end of a weekend like many others: Sunday evening, my husband takes a flight from Beirut for Japan, and me for New York where my three children live. I have planned to celebrate Thanksgiving with them.

I left Lebanon at 2am, arrived in Paris at dawn and took a plane for New York. When I am settled on the plane, I write a last message before take-off: “Love you, Carlos”. I wait a few seconds, nothing. Strange... he usually replies at once. Perhaps his chauffeur has met him and is taking him to his car, and Carlos hasn't the time to return my words of love... I remain pensive for a few minutes, watching for his message but the screen of my cell phone is silent. Too bad, I won't insist, I'll get his SMS in New York. The plane begins to run along the tarmac. I turn off my phone.

During the flight, I thought of the four days we spent in Beirut. Carlos was able to give me more time, give himself more time too, which is rare. We lunched with my mother and my stepfather, went to the market together, received friends at home, joined others in the Lebanese countryside. A joyful break, full of shared pleasures, before he has to return to the frenetic pace of his work.

Carlos travels a great deal, one day here and two days there; the morning in one country, the evening in another with an energy that has always fascinated me. In his agenda, each country has a different colour and the appointments are fixed a year in advance... Up at 5am, he sleeps little and works most of his time. But whatever his worries, his preoccupations, he is always patient with those near to him. Unlike many others, he doesn't make

those around him suffer the stress created by his huge responsibilities. He never complains about anything.

Like him, I have learned to live in several houses or apartments... I go to Japan or Brazil very rarely. I prefer to limit my travelling to the United States, France and Lebanon where my family and best friends are. When my children were younger, I always went to the States, where they grew up and went to school. Today, Daniel and Anthony work in New York. Tara, the baby of the family, is at university. Since we've been together, Carlos does his best to arrange things so that we see each other every weekend. I join him wherever he happens to be, most often Beirut or Paris.

As we fly over New York, slightly worried, I turn on my phone before the plane lands, something I never do. The ringtone fills the plane for all to hear. A little shamefaced when the other passengers stare, I answer immediately. It is Daniel, my eldest son:

"Mum, don't panic... Everything will be OK..." he says before I have the time to say a word.

"But... what? What's going on?"

"It's Carlos..."

At that moment, I imagine the worst. "Has he had an accident? Is he dead?"

"No no, Mom! He was arrested by the police when he arrived in Japan but it's clearly a misunderstanding, try not to worry..."

Daniel and Anthony are waiting at the airport. They hug me, but I don't even give them time to speak.

"Come on boys, we'll find out when the next plane for Tokyo leaves! I'm not going home, I'm leaving!"

My anxiety blinds me, makes me lose all judgement. Fortunately, my two boys have good heads on their shoulders!

"No, we're all going back to the flat, we'll find out what's going on and think about it..."

In the car, another phone call. My ex-husband, father of my children.

“Carole, is there anything I can do? Don’t worry, everything will be ok...”

Arrived home, I turn on the TV. I cannot believe my eyes: Carlos’s arrest is on every channel, without exception, first title on each news programme. They talk about nothing else! At that moment, a strange thought comes into my head, even absurd: my husband is an important man! It’s ridiculous, I realise that, but even if I know his job and his responsibilities, he is, above all, MY HUSBAND, and MY DARLING. I see him as a man and not as one of the world’s great company directors...

CARLOS

The next morning, a few muffled sounds tell me the day has begun. A dim light glows from the opaque window. It must be very early. The rattling of keys then a warden enters, explaining with gestures that it is time for the call. He shows me a number that must be mine. In Kosuge, men lose their names and become numbers. From now on, every morning, I will have to recite it in English to the first warden who enters my cell.

In the guise of a breakfast, they serve a clear soup with a bowl of rice and seaweed. Some mornings, the seaweed is replaced by little pickled vegetables. Washed down by poor quality green tea.

I splash my face with cold water to wake myself up and, instinctively, lift my head to the mirror to look at myself. My eyes meet a blank white wall. There is no mirror above the sink in the cell. Decidedly, they have thought of everything to unnerve you, like not being able to connect to your own image when you wake up after a day as crazy and nerve-wracking as the one I lived through yesterday... I’m shivering. I turn on the tap to make the hot water flow. In vain. So I drink the tepid tea, and I wait.

During the day, the prosecutor Seki has me brought to an office in the prison. Once again, I notice that the wardens who take me there do everything to avoid anyone seeing me. They even oblige those who were already in the corridor to turn their faces to the wall!

Seki doesn’t beat about the bush: “We are going to begin the interrogations. As from now, you cannot see anyone, except your lawyers,



when you have chosen them, and the ambassador of the country whose nationality you hold”.

Instantly, I say to myself that I am lucky to have Brazilian, French and Lebanese nationality. That will multiply the visits by three. Seki knows it, and I can see on his face that this particularity, which he cannot refuse to grant me, irritates him! Later, he tells me he cannot deny me the visits from three diplomats but, he insists, “You must not exaggerate, because I must have time to work”. In other words: as much time as possible to question me. “This afternoon,” he adds dryly “Laurent Pic, the French ambassador in Japan, will come to see you”.

They take me back to my cell. I don’t know the rules of the “perfect prisoner”, what I can and cannot do. Since no warden speaks English, everything is explained as we go along, by gestures that I understand, more or less. I have to wait for a translator to be present to find out that I have to go to bed at 21h, when I hear a precise signal, and get up when a bell rings at 6am; that I must fold and put away my futon every morning; that I do not have the right to walk in my cell, nor to lie down during the day except at nap time; that I must sit up straight at my little table and, at night, sleep on my back or my side, face uncovered so that the warden can see me; that I can have two showers a week lasting a quarter of an hour. And that I have to pay for my own soap and shaving foam.

From Monday to Friday, after breakfast, I’m allowed to do fifteen minutes of gym in my cell. Soon, I would force myself to do the daily exercises. For many years, my profession has obliged me keep a healthy lifestyle, I know the benefits of sport for body and mind.

On the afternoon of the second day, I am pleased to receive Laurent Pic. The ambassador is a calm man with a gentle voice and kindly eyes. We see each other in a small room, we are separated by a glass window with a hygiaphone, for a conversation that must last no longer than 15 minutes. Let’s get started, not a second to lose!

He begins right away by telling me that Carole, my wife, and my daughter Maya have been informed of the situation. I would like him to reassure them, to tell them I am fine, that it’s all a mistake, etc., but he moves on to the second point. “The absolute priority is for you to choose a lawyer or

lawyers,” he says.

Since I have never had to call upon the services of a lawyer for my personal affairs, the only one I know is the Nissan group lawyer. When I tell the ambassador to call him as soon as possible, to get me out of here, he frowns: “No no, Mister Ghosn, you will not call upon the Nissan lawyer... You don’t know this but yesterday, just after your arrest, Hiroto Saikawa, your director general, held a press conference during which he sharply criticised your lifestyle, your many apartments, the intensive use of your private jet, etc. Everything he said was against you.”

He stopped and stared at me. “This is a very serious matter, Mister Ghosn...”

I sit there, speechless for several seconds. Here am I thinking that this is some terrible misunderstanding and that Nissan would get moving to sort things out, I am flabbergasted. The enemy is in my own camp!

I also realise that I am under arrest for “financial misconduct” according to the prosecutor, whereas Saikawa is accusing me of something quite different. And that “something different” looks very like what the English call “character assassination”, ruining your reputation, a campaign to destroy a person’s image. The procedures are always the same: rumours, false accusations, manipulation of facts with a strong populist, demagogic flavour.

And it works... even on the ambassador! I can see that even if Laurent Pic has sympathy for me and he is prepared to believe me, my collaborator’s accusations disturb him and, not knowing either of us, he doesn’t know who to believe. Before leaving, he promises to come back two or three times a week to keep me informed on how things are developing. He will, if I wish, send messages to my wife, my family, Renault, the French government.

“But,” he warns me, “all messages sent or received will be controlled by the administration in Kosuge...”

I go back to my cell completely groggy. In the evening, I think about what the diplomat said, about that press conference probably scheduled ages ago, about the people I thought I could trust now accusing me of all sorts of misdemeanours. And Saikawa who even said, talking about me, that “Carlos Ghosn was not the man who resurrected Nissan in 1999, we owe that to all the employees...” He forgot to mention that before I came, Nissan had two attempted recoveries that both failed.

Suddenly, I recall one detail of his body language that had always disturbed me. I noticed that, when Saikawa came to greet me in Nissan, he held his torso back strangely, and he barely shook my hand. A cold hand, damp with no grip, an unpleasant contact. Apart from this little fault, he was correct, disciplined, faithful and presented good results. I would never have imagined...

CAROLE

All through the night, I sit on a little chair in the living room, prostrate, watching the pictures played on a loop on TV. Kosuge. I've never heard of the detention centre. To tell the truth, I don't know anything about the "dark side" of Japan, its justice and penitentiary system. I know this country through Carlos's eyes, who praised the politeness of the Japanese people, their refinement, their good education. I know their cuisine is delicious, and their culture very rich. Suddenly, it's as though a curtain is torn away in front of my eyes to reveal the hidden side of Japan. When I learned that Carlos was taken to Kosuge on that very first evening, I didn't even have the strength to look on the Internet to see what the prison looked like, and the cells. Everything is going too quickly, too violent. I don't know what's happening to us, I don't know what they want from my husband to be treating him like this. It's as though I am in shock, the biggest shock I've ever experienced in my life.

Another reason to worry: as soon as she heard the news, in spite of my warnings, Nadine, Carlos's eldest daughter, went to Japan. She went to join Maya who was already in Tokyo because on the evening of the arrest, she was planning to introduce her boyfriend to Carlos. I can understand that they want to be near their father but in the present situation, it's very dangerous. Fortunately, Laurent Pic, France's ambassador in Japan, called them telling them to leave the country right away. "Don't stay in Japan, go home at once!" he ordered. They listened to him and came to join me in New York. Because for the moment, I cannot do anything for Carlos, but at least I can try to protect his children, look after them...

CARLOS

Now I understand the timing of the arrest. It was all premeditated down to a quarter of an hour, a set up. The prosecutor's men at the airport, the pretence

of the passport problem so I wouldn't be suspicious, and I would follow orders obediently, and Nissan's press conference immediately afterwards... Later, I was to discover that the journalists, warned of my arrival, had filmed the plane being surrounded by an army of agents from the prosecutor's office. A finely laid trap that I fell into.

[...]

The questioning begins on the second day. As I said, the prosecutor Seki speaks English but for the interrogations, he is always accompanied by a translator who is mostly available in the afternoon and the evening. The sessions are interminable, they sometimes last seven hours without a break and end after 10pm. Sitting opposite me, Seki barks the same questions again and again relentlessly, demanding details about figures going back years. At the end of the questioning, when I stand up to be taken back to my cell, he always proceeds in the same manner:

"Tomorrow," he says with a sly look, "we will treat such and such a subject. You don't know yet what someone said about you. You will see, it is very severe. So..., we'll discuss that tomorrow".

Nothing like it to spoil your night! These words provoke instant stress in me. Impossible not to think about them and poison the hours of sleep to come.

Even though I know his show is remarkably well oiled and that he's an inveterate liar, in my present solitude, his insinuations make me fragile. I know from my dealings with the Japanese that they have no scruples with the truth and that they can, looking you straight in the eyes, lie shamelessly without showing the slightest sign on their faces. Poker faces! I knew this, but not to that extent! They are capable of anything to defend their own interests. Where justice is concerned, it's monstrous: the conviviality between the justice system and falsehood is terrifying.

At the same time, I have never been under the illusion that I knew Japan well. People I have worked with for a long time have always reserved a part of mystery and I have given up trying to find the keys, simply because I am not Japanese. Because of their experience and their education, their way of reasoning is very different from mine. I am a Christian and was educated by

Jesuit fathers. Since my earliest age, my vision has been marked by the fact that two worlds cohabit: the material and the spiritual. One we see and one we don't see. For the Japanese, who don't have a religion proper to speak of, rather philosophies such as Shintoism or Buddhism, only the visible world exists. What exists, is what you see. Then the fact of living on an island gives them a special mentality compared with continentals. For example, insular peoples tend to adopt a position of defence towards strangers. Whatever the islands may be, it's the island vs the rest of the world.

Several times during these months, prosecutor Seki gives me the same argument:

"Why don't you confess, Mister Ghosn, you will feel better. If you refuse to tell us everything, we'll be obliged to search everywhere, see your wife, your children and we will find it. We always do..."

Sometimes, his cruelty is more extreme. "Do you realise what you are making your family suffer? By stubbornly refusing to recognise the facts, you are making their lives impossible!"

This blackmail using my wife, my children, my sisters is constant. They have understood that my family is my weak point, Seki is trying to make me feel guilty. But he doesn't impress me. He doesn't know that from them, I draw the essence of my force.

[...]

For seventeen years, I was presented as the model director, the saviour of Nissan, for some a demigod, then suddenly, I am brutally arrested at the airport under debatable pretexts and thrown into prison like a dog! I wonder what the Japanese made of this story, when they discovered the new clothes I had been given in the press. I must say that the journalists did not pull their punches. From one day to the next, I have become "a greedy dictator", "a hard, disdainful man". Reading the press, you would think I did my "wheeling and dealing" in my little corner and that no one could oppose me. As though Nissan was a small firm, although it employs almost 260,000 people: I am accused of signing cheques, documents, of doing whatever I fancied with the

accounts whereas there were controllers for everything, auditors all around me...

Knowing nothing of the affair and with no testimony from me, the Japanese press stuck a revolting image on me. Which is not surprising when you know that in Japan the press is not free, it depends on the political and economic powers. And France, by its silence, became an accomplice in this smear campaign. If, right at the beginning, France had stood up against the Japanese prosecutors, and clearly stated that it did not accept that I should be accused without proof, everything would have been different. The French attitude of retreat was devastating for me because it threw more doubt on my guilt: "If the French won't make a move for the boss of Renault, it's because he has something to hide..." thought a part of French and Japanese public opinion.

CAROLE

December, 2018

Beginning of December, I have been allowed to write to Carlos. From this day on, and during all the times we are separated, I will write to him every evening before going to bed. I write by hand, thinking that Carlos will be happy to see my writing, then I send a scan to the French or Lebanese ambassador who must see my husband. The time difference lets them receive it before going to Kosuge. They have to submit it to the Japanese wardens before showing it to Carlos. "Show" not give, for my husband isn't allowed to hold it in his hand: the ambassador who is carrying my letter must stick it against the glass panel separating him from Carlos. That's how he reads it.

Even if his absence is killing me, I make sure I write only positive things. I hide my distress, my fear that they keep him far from me for a long time. So I give him news of the house, the children, friends... My words are carefully examined, I don't want to say anything that would anger the Japanese authorities and harm Carlos. I write that I miss him, everything will turn out fine, that I would never leave him, whatever happens, I will always be by his side: "Carlos, you give me strength and I hope I give you the strength to continue..."

Some evenings are worse than others. Sometimes, in spite of myself, my tears flow and stain the sheet of paper, but I force myself to find words of encouragement. I know they will help him to hold on. The force of our love

too. We have always been fusional; we have to live this ordeal together in thought and in action. I need him, he needs me. If one of us collapses, the other will soon follow suit. The two of us, we'll be stronger against adversity. We will fight hand in hand, he will come out of prison and we'll be together again to continue our happy life, like before. I can't imagine that things could be any different.

Towards mid-December, I find out that the Renault firm is thinking about possible successors to Carlos. Hardly a month has gone by since his arrest and they are already dropping him. If they abandon my husband, the Japanese will win the day. I am in despair.

CARLOS

December, 2018

I have had to learn how to endure being watched all the time, in the toilet and in the shower. I won't say I have become used to it but, from the moment I realised I was the victim of a plot whose aim was to break me – by intense questioning inside the prison, and by a smear campaign outside – I began to develop my resistance.

It took me almost a month to “resurface”, by that I mean for my mind and body to get over the enormous emotional shock of my arrest and the brutality of what followed. After that, my mind took over. As I said, I am not a man who looks back at the past. Rather than go on asking myself what I should have seen but did not see, I instantly ask myself how to get out of this hole.

One thing is certain: I am not prepared to lay down my arms and confess to the prosecutors something I have not done. Do they take me for a wimp? They'll see! I have no idea what they have in mind by treating me like this. I imagine they were not expecting me to resist as I am doing. Carlos Ghosn, they must have thought, is a man used to an easy life, five-star hotels, good restaurants... After two weeks of our regime, he'll be weeping like a little girl, he'll sign whatever we ask and we'll be rid of him. That's what they said to themselves. I suppose that during the interrogations, the same prosecutors have seen

strong, hardened men crack up and give them what they wanted. Perhaps they did not have the same motives as I have to hold on... As far as mental resistance is concerned, I know myself well. You cannot be the boss of a firm if you collapse at every difficult decision. From the human point of view, I have had to make some that were wise, but painful. Nor can you spend so many years without periods of fatigue, without times of doubt. But until today, I have never found myself in such a situation: mistreated, humiliated, betrayed, insulted, rejected by people who were very close to me and whose career I built!

CAROLE

February, 2019

At last, two big pieces of news – good news! The judge informs me that he will allow me half an hour in the visiting room with Carlos from Monday to Friday. And especially – I hardly dare believe it – after the umpteenth request for conditional release made by his lawyers, it is possible that he will get out on March 6.

Just a few days and we will be together! It's wonderful. In spite of all that, there's still a nagging doubt. With Japanese judges, great specialists of promises followed by cold showers, I have learned to be wary. So I took a ticket for Tokyo. Before leaving, I asked my lawyer about the risks I ran of being arrested at the airport.

“Normally, there shouldn't be any trap,” he tells me, “but you never know”.

I wave away that hypothesis with a gesture of the hand. Too bad, risk or no risk, I have to see my husband. Ambassador Pic assures me that everything will go well.

In the car taking me to Kosuge, with Caroline and Nicolas, her husband, who came from the United States to see Carlos, I see the first road signs indicating that the prison is nearby. Suddenly, there it is, in front of us, immense, grey, made up of several building in a criss-cross lay-out whose facades divided into compartments with tiny niches. Carlos is behind those walls. I shiver.

As soon as we get out of the car, guards surround us and lead us into the



prison. On my left, I recognise the little grocer where I know that Carlos buys fruit. In the corridor that leads to the waiting room, there are families with children. My eyes linger on them. The men have tattoos on their arms, their necks, and in some cases, inscriptions on their faces. In Japan, only the Yakuza, members of underworld, mark themselves in this way. As I walk alongside them, I cannot take my eyes off those of the children, who look so serious. Who are they coming to visit?

Since I walked into Kosuge, I haven't stopped shivering with the cold. The floors along the corridors shine, everything is clean and calm, but in the air I can feel death and suffering. We go up to the tenth floor, following a warden who leads me into a room separated in two by a glass window. Caroline is kind enough to leave me alone with Carlos. She will join us later.

A few seconds later, Carlos comes into the room, facing me, on the other side of the glass, with a warden on either side. He is wearing trousers and a pullover that are his own and, on his feet, those famous green flip-flops the prisoners wear. The first thing that strikes me is the colour of his face, very yellow, his hands also. His hair is longer than usual, his eyes tired, a little bloodshot. I promised myself I wouldn't burst into tears but it's such a shock to see him! He mustn't read the pain on my face. I have made the effort to do my hair, make up nicely, and I am wearing a new blouse. I want to be pretty for him, smiling, positive, but I am weeping inside to see him in such a bad way and not to be able to hug my husband tight in my arms.

[...]

I am worried about his health, his waxy complexion but he avoids my questions and tells me that the wardens are kind, he is treated well, the prison is clean... I understand that he cannot speak of his conditions of detention.

"I am so proud of you," he says suddenly, with the most tender smile. "They gave me the Paris Match article and I put your photo on the wall near my bed..."

I look at him wide eyed, so surprised that they would grant him this favour. He adds that he is allowed to put photos in his cell. So much the better, Caroline has brought a dozen. They chat together then out of the blue, Carlos pronounces a sentence that I will never forget:

“When I was brought here, I wondered, why didn’t I die on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November? Then I realised that in a certain way, I was given another chance to live, to see reality and what really counts.”

He was silent for a moment, looking at me: “We had a good life but perhaps I wasn’t sufficiently aware of it. Now, I will appreciate it more than ever ...”

CARLOS

January, 2020

Today, I think of the tens of thousands of Japanese rotting in prisons, all those anonymous victims of a system, we never hear about them. When they are foreigners, under the pressure of embassies, the press is obliged to pass on their misadventures with Japanese justice, but what about the others? Many prefer to confess to crimes they did not commit than to suffer the punishment to the end. It isn’t unusual to see prisoners declared guilty, and twenty years later, released because irrefutable proof of their innocence turns up! All of them, when you ask why they confessed, say they could no longer stand the moral and physical suffering imposed by the penitentiary life...

In my position as the boss of a firm, I had the means to pay for lawyers, but who can finance their defence for months on end, in a system that lets things drag on and on, until the situation decays? The cost of a robust defence against the Japanese judiciary system is exorbitant. If you do not have a truly exceptional salary, you are powerless. Moreover, why defend yourself? What kind of system sees 99.4 % of the accused found guilty? Not to mention that the 0.6 % who remain include those defendants who are acquitted because declared irresponsible and immediately interned in a psychiatric hospital! In 99% of the cases, the judges follow the conclusions of the public prosecutor’s office. In this country, lawyers lose almost all their cases, they only work to limit the damage...

[...]

I know who I was resisting for, and why. But I would find it difficult to define the origin of that resistance. Perhaps it is innate, and it was waiting for the most trying ordeal of my life to reveal its true dimension! Another explanation may complete my first attempt. Since I came back to Lebanon and I am obliged to stay, I visited the Holy Valley with Carole, in the north of the country, its wild beauty surrounded by rocky cliffs and giant cedar trees thousands of years old.

As early as the end of the seventh century, the Maronite Christians, founders of Lebanon, took refuge here when they were attacked by the Turks during the Ottoman period.

I saw the destitution they lived in, obliged dig in the caves in the cliffs to find shelter and to eat their food raw to avoid making fire which would have revealed their presence to their enemies. Through devotion to their faith and their community, they resisted the Muslim invasion, against all odds. Because they refused to get down on their knees and renounce their convictions.

Of course, it would be presumptuous to identify with those admirable men and women, but I can't help thinking that my parents were Maronites, that being born and brought up in those craggy mountains, they inherited the fighting spirit of their ancestors. There is a little of their blood in me, and I like to think that I have inherited their tenacity, their determination not to bend when I feel I am attacked on all sides. At difficult times, pride tells me: "They're not going to get me like that," that is one of the things that has helped me to resist.

I didn't hold out for four-months in prison and fourteen under house arrest purely by the force of reason. I needed something bigger than myself to overcome the despair when I could see no way out: infinite love of my family and the memory of my valiant ancestors.