



## Skirts In the Boardroom? But This is Tokyo!

*Ms Rei Kimura*

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Three young women arrived in Tokyo from the small towns of rural Japan with nothing but a burning ambition and the vague knowledge that somehow, their lives would be different. With so many odds stacked against them, what were the chances that their ambitions would eventually be realized? And at what cost? The fourth woman, Emi is from an affluent family in Tokyo but her privileged life did nothing to lessen the odds stacked even higher against her. This is the tense, smoldering story of four young Japanese professional women from diverse backgrounds and a big score to settle with their female unfriendly society, whose lives converged in Tokyo where they met by chance and started the “four pillars.” Well educated, vibrant and ambitious, the four women, Suzue, Sachi, Tomoko and Emi are bonded by their common struggle to break out of the system which traditionally placed Japanese women as the coffee and tea serving ladies of the corporate world. Emi, from the snobbish upper crust of Japanese society whose family still has the samurai mindset, a well connected marriage is planned for her, Sachi, from a middle class surbaban town in Kyushu and Tomoko from a traditional small town family buried deep in the interiors of Japan, short stints of mindless employment ending in the inevitable “stable” marriages with provincial “salary” men is their fate and the most controversial of them all, the sultry and defiant Suzue, illegitimate love child of a Japanese mother and a half black American father she never knew, if the Japanese society had its way, most doors should be closing in her face in fiercely homogenous Japan. This gripping story is set against the backdrop of vibrant, contradictory and pulsating Tokyo, the capital and heartbeat of Japan and the way life is really led in a country where traditions and extreme modernity co exist in perplexing harmony. But it’s not all gloom and doom, the four pillars’ dissection of the men they “cannot live without and yet cannot live with” are told in an entertaining way with great wit and a satirical sense of humor. So is the wicked fun they consistently make of Japanese society’s outdated and failing visions of women either as the nation’s reproductive receptacles and baby sitters or corporate “tea ladies” trained only to bow at the right angles. Suzue.... The room would be full of traditional male suits and she could imagine the look on their faces when they realized that the two women at the head of the long shining conference table were not the agency’s “tea” ladies but powerful executives who would be spear heading the pitch. Sachi..... Maybe she was a little under the weather or that scatterbrained receptionist had passed her cold on but Sachi suddenly felt a little down and alone. She had to admit to her sophisticated face in the mirror that deep down, she still believed that men and women did belong together and should compliment each other or even try to grow old together, it was just so hard to find the right fit among the millions of busy scurrying people in Tokyo especially for independent, successful women who intimidated the men looking for pliant women with simple needs to warm their beds, home and hearth. Together and yet apart, each woman has her own secret yearnings and dreams and having forced their way into the boardrooms of Japan, what lies ahead for them? Will and can the parallel lines of their ambitions and personal lives finally converge or travel forever, open ended and unresolved?

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