

DENNIS KENNEDY

Underway Replenishment

Wally said there'd be plenty of girls there, even though it was late. They didn't all hook up early—some held out for more drinks and better-looking guys or just weren't interested in making a deal. We were already drunk, that goes without saying, and the bars in sailor-town were never very interesting, so we went to sake-town for better action. This was in Sasebo in 1964, about fifty miles north of Nagasaki where they dropped the second big bomb. A couple of decades before and nobody around here was likely to forget it. We were junior officers on the USS *Graffias*, which was a bastard of a banana boat that steered like an oversized radish with its top still on, skippered by a flyboy who was learning seamanship so he could command an aircraft carrier in his next life. He was a Navy captain, which is like a bird colonel in the Army, I was just an ensign, the lowest commissioned rank. He had twenty years in, I had one, but he'd been flying jets and my service was all on this ship so I knew more about steering the radish than he did. That wasn't the point. I was just serving my time, all the junior officers were, and the point was not to disturb the order of things because the regular Navy types, officers and men, already resented us college boys who had volunteered just to avoid being drafted in the Army.

Which is why we shouldn't have been in sake-town at all at two AM. It wasn't forbidden, but it wasn't recommended either, because not all the citizens of the Land of the Rising Sun were friendlies. Though the US forces were there by invitation of the Japanese government, it was the invitation you'd extend if a gun were pointed at your head. Wally was pulling me on, though, looking for willing josans, or some particular willing josan, he was cagey about it, and at least they

served a decent drink there, Jap whiskey or sake if you wanted, it gave me a shit of a headache, or fine beer modeled on the Germans, the only good thing to come out of the Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Asahi or Sapporo were good, Kirin Ichiban was ichiban, number one, the best.

The *Graffias* was home ported there in Sasebo, at the end of a beauty of a deepwater harbor like a small version of San Francisco Bay. We were a reefer, which is a refrigerated stores ship, supplying combatant ships with frozen beef and corn flakes and toilet paper, a floating supermarket. Our banana boat was about as far from a combatant as you can get and still be in the Navy. We had some old 20mm machine guns and one big five-incher and some three-inchers and we planned on using none of them. Once in a training exercise at sea we were firing three-inch shells at an air target towed slowly by an old PBY prop plane when our fire-control mechanism started reading on the tow line, the shells getting closer and closer to the aircraft until the pilot screamed over the radio and dropped the target into the water. That was our level of combat readiness.

The theory of the service force was that the ships of the Seventh Fleet operating in the west Pacific didn't have to leave the battle area for supplies, they'd be replenished at sea by the service ships, oilers and ammo ships and reefers. In war there might not be any ports to put into anyway. But since we had to put into port for perishables, the theory was a little flawed. That's why the Navy held onto Sasebo. Oilers, by the way, are named after rivers, ammo ships after volcanoes. The *Graffias* was named after a dead star.

I already had a girl. Granted she was a josan herself I met in the Paradise bar in sailor-town where she worked as what they called a hosutesu or hostess, a fancy word for bargirl. But she was young and strangely beautiful in a particular Japanese way, her skin almost transparent, a kind of luminous pale-ash color, as if lit from within. Maybe I thought of ash because of the cigarette burns up the arms she'd done on dares to herself, which should have alerted me to a potential problem in our relationship, but she was gorgeous, Kieko was, and always seemed lonely. Her upper arms, which were not burned, were like willow branches; I loved holding them when we made love, looking into her dark almond eyes. She said she was from Hiroshima and her parents were killed in the first big bomb, though I wasn't sure that was true; where was she when the thing went off? If it was true she'd have been at least 20 in 1964, though I think she was only 17 or 18. Hard to tell, she was so slender, plus she lied a lot. Though she still worked in the bar, we had taken a little apartment together—she signed the contract, I paid—and she probably was at home waiting for me, so what was I doing out with Wally looking for girls?

The truth is, though it's hard to know the truth now it was so long ago, the truth *probably* is that when I was out with Wally it wasn't girls so much as the habit of the chase. Even taking account of the usual follow-your-dick protocol of young Navy men, thinking of it as a chase wasn't very logical because the rules were already fixed in our favor. No game in that, like hunting with a Springfield rifle in a deer park. Let's be honest, no matter how you justify it with appeals to Japanese patriarchal culture and the subservience of women and the long tradition of the geisha, it still came down to paying for sex. Some of these josans were picky and some were expensive—they wouldn't go with just any old sailor, it wasn't a whorehouse. All the bar owner required was that they sell drinks and get bought expensive watered-down drinks, fizzy lemonade they called champagne; what they did after hours was their affair. If you wanted to go with a girl before closing and she was willing, you could buy out the rest of her time with the boss at an inflated price. I think josans thought of themselves as independent contractors, not prostitutes, but no one, least of all the bar owner, had any doubt about what made the seamen come. Sorry, bad pun, even for a sailor.

Actually the chase business is complicated because if you landed in bed with a girl you knew that had been your purpose for the evening, but if you didn't and made it back to your rack on the ship instead of a futon on a tatami mat, you realized you were too drunk for sex anyway and glad you didn't have a girl beside your spinning body because afterwards you'd have to wash in the icy water in her tiny kitchen with its icy stone floor and use her stinking benjo, which was a latrine or earth closet, I swear the Japanese live in the sixteenth century, and finally get to the ship somehow through the snow at five AM with a blister for a head.

It wasn't snowing that night. In fact it was near the end of July and about 95 steamy degrees in Sasebo—for a California boy Japan really had crappy weather except in spring. But it was the most beautiful place I'd ever been. I was only 23 and hadn't been many places but I thought it so remarkable I was embarrassed to be there in the Navy, as if I'd gotten into heaven under false pretences. I'd learned enough Japanese to travel on my own and went everywhere I could in the little time we had on shore. In those days they'd seen very few gaijin in the countryside so I was considered an oddity because at 6'4" I was much taller than all the natives. In the city too: once walking away from Tokyo Station at six in the evening against a huge oncoming crowd of office workers, men and women stared up in awe and parted around me like I was Moses in the Red Sea. That's when I realized what a foreigner really means: a freak.

The Japanese giggled at my language mistakes and encouraged me to make more. I bought a little Honda 50cc scooter and kept it in the dry-goods hold of the ship with the brooms for destroyers. I called it Roba, which is a kind of Japanese donkey, and it got me to the nearby villages and around the town when we put into another Japanese port. I went to Ninety Nine Islands nature reserve often, miraculous mists, flat opaque light the color of Kieko's skin, clouds charging down like war elephants. Roba was forbidden on board, but I had friends among the boatswain's mates who winched it in and out for me when the XO wasn't looking.

Nobody would call sake-town beautiful. There had been heavy bombing during the war because Sasebo was a Jap naval base long before we got there; according to scuttlebutt the harbor pilot we always engaged to navigate the treacherous entrance had commanded the Jap taskforce based there. He'd been a Kaigun Shosho in the Imperial Navy, which is a rear admiral, so I saluted him when he came onboard until the XO made me stop. "Jackson," he squeaked at me through tight jaws, as if unwilling to open his mouth, "the salute is given to serving officers only." Anyway, because of the bombing there were a lot of new houses in sake-town, badly designed and badly built. It wasn't garish like the Ginza in the sixties, just ugly. By the time we arrived that night people were mostly gone, though some streetwalkers were still working—"Hey, boy, wan do fucky-fucky? Three dolla, two dolla, two dolla, one dolla"—the price was scaled to where you did it and what you did, so I was told—but old whores were not part of the chase. Wally actually pushed one away when she got too insistent. She shouted, "I know you, Glaffiwass, benjo maru!" which means, in effect, shit ship. Not that we would have disagreed.

Sake-town was for the Japanese. It was quiet, the bars were real Jap bars, low lighting, no music, not the brassy style of sailor-town. They served a little snack with every drink because officially they were eating places. You could sit at the low bar with a cutout space for your legs, or on a floor cushion at a low table with a hosutesu if you preferred. It was easy to make fun of their English, especially when "lunch" came out "runch" on a printed menu, but my Japanese wasn't any better, pidgin on both sides, the way a defeated people have always communicated with their conquerors. Japanese are so polite it was easy to forget that's what we were, conquerors. Official American occupation had ended a dozen years before but we were living proof it was still going on under the wide flag of the Cold War.

I could decipher some of the simplified Japanese characters but this bar had a painted sign in classical Chinese characters that I couldn't read. I asked the owner and I think she said it was called Fuyu, which is winter, but remember I was drunk and probably got it wrong. In any case I never found it again. We took a table,

despite my height; I can't do it now but then I could sit crossed-legged for hours. There was a lot of confusion when Wally asked for the girl he was after, Nanami she was called, shouting by the woman and the sumo lookalike she used as a bouncer. They accused Wally of mistreating her in some way, but he denied it (through me, since he spoke benjo Japanese). That was settled when Wally gave a wad of yen to the owner, apparently for damages to the door caused when the girl was fighting him the last time he was in. He never would tell me what happened, but in any case Nanami wasn't there and wasn't coming back. He kept calling the owner "mamasan," which didn't help because it's the word all around this part of Asia for a whorehouse madam. Finally I shut him up and a different girl sat with us and fixed Suntory on the rocks and flirted the way she was supposed to.

Everything would have been fine, we would have got drunker and then found a taxi and he'd go back to the ship and I'd go to Kieko, who'd put a cold cloth on my head and pretend she didn't mind me puking in a wash basin. But just then a group of flyboys came in, making a loud entrance. We were all in civvies but you can tell Navy flyboys immediately, they have an air about them—another bad pun—that comes from thinking they're still in a fighter jet and can zipzoom wherever they want in about three seconds at Mach 2 and no one can stop them on land or sea or foam. These guys were from the *Constellation*, a large aircraft carrier that had anchored in the harbor a few days before. Sailor-town had been filled with its crew ready to make a ruckus, the Shore Patrol all over the place, which was a good enough reason for us to get out of there.

"Uh-oh," Wally said. There were three of them and they took the table next to us. They weren't accustomed to Japanese style and in arranging their legs one of them kicked our little table. It probably was accidental but the drinks spilled, mostly over the girl's kimono, and the bottle of Suntory broke on the floor. The josan stood up and tried to brush off the whiskey and cut her finger on a shard of glass. No one had shoes on, of course, you had to leave them in a little rack at the door.

The flyboys ignored her. "Sorry about that fellas," one of them said, a blond, blue-eyed type in an accent somewhere south of the Okefenokee, "Mamasan, give these gent'l'men more drinks on me."

"That's all right, guys," I said, "we were just leaving," and asked the owner for the check, Taishu-san, daikin dozo.

"You speak Jap, eh," the blond said, "that's real intr'sting. You a Jap lover?" Hoisting his colors early in the engagement.

"I'm a comm officer, it helps with communication." That was pure bullshit since we didn't do any communication in Japanese on the ship, but it slowed him down

long enough for me to stand up and pay at the bar. Wally was struggling to rise—he was a bit heavy as well as drunk—stumbled a little and stepped on the hand of one of the other flyboys, a dark-haired guy a little older, maybe a full lieutenant, leaning back on his elbows. The guy shouted, Wally stepped away and apologized, but the blond was already up and facing him down.

“You did that on purpose, you fat-ass slob,” he said. Calling attention to his fat ass always got Wally’s ire up. The girl scuttled away.

“Sit down, Chip,” the older one said, “I accept his apology.”

“Well, I do not,” Chip said. “Outside with me now, you fat fart.” Wally, bless him, smiled and sang “Up in the air, junior birdmen, up in the air upside down.” The bouncer saw trouble and grabbed Chip from behind in what should have been a death lock. Then it happened fast: Chip stomped on the bouncer’s toes, turned and kneed him in the nuts, took a swing and connected with Wally’s jaw, the third flyboy stood up and cut his foot on a piece of glass and gave a rebel yell, and Wally grabbed the broken Suntory bottle neck and jammed it into Chip’s arm, which started to bleed profusely through his short-sleeved shirt. The bouncer recovered, threw Wally to the ground, then punched Chip on the side of the head. That flattened him. The owner had called the Jap police and soon they arrived along with the SPs. I showed my officer’s ID and tried to explain but the police wanted to take Wally in for assault. The lieutenant flyboy intervened, admitting that Chip was the instigator; it turned out he spoke Japanese better than I did and convinced them to let the SPs handle it. The owner was shouting at us to get out and never come back. I left a thousand yen extra on the bar. Chip was sitting up, trying to clear his head and holding a hankie to the jagged cut. As I was leaving I heard the lieutenant say, “You see, ole Chip, I’m a Jap lover too.”

In the street I explained what had happened and the SPs, who weren’t fond of flyboys anyway, decided to let it go. They drove us back to the ship and I helped Wally on board. I never did get to see Kieko that night because the ship had been put on alert and was preparing to depart as soon as the rest of the liberty watch returned. The XO was on deck but if he noticed we’d arrived in a Shore Patrol jeep he was too distracted to question it; he just ordered us to get in uniform. He looked at the bruise on Wally’s face and said, “Did you fall down, Jacobs? Clean yourself up, aaa-sapp.” At 0630 we were casting off. The last stragglers, including Dimmick, one of my radarmen, climbed up the side on a rope ladder because the gangway had already been secured.

Entering and leaving harbor my post was on the bridge manning the UHF radio and giving commands to signalmen. The pilot wasn’t available on short notice and

without him the captain looked anxious. He glanced at me a couple of times but I was still woozy from drink and so glad he didn't give me the conn I just nodded encouragingly and said the pilot usually increased speed by five revolutions at this point to control the next turn. "Very well, Mister Jackson," he said, as if he knew it already. The channel was very narrow, though the buoy markers were well maintained and it was full light. The navigator, even more worried than the captain, had his eyes focused entirely on the radar screen, as if it held the answer to the mystery of God and the angels.

We hit open water and turned south. Sasebo is on the southernmost island of Japan, below the tip of Korea, about parallel with Shanghai. At the miserable speed our banana boat could muster it took four days and nights to reach the rendezvous point in the South China Sea called Yankee Station, about hundred nautical miles off the coast of Danang in South Vietnam. That left plenty of time to review the message traffic. In those days communication to Navy ships was on the broadcast method, which means that every ship was required to copy all incoming messages no matter who they were addressed to. They came in by radio to perpetually running teletype machines electronically encrypted, their codes changed every day. In this system the sender could be assured of delivery without the recipient having to acknowledge, which would give away a ship's location. Unclassified and Confidential messages were automatically decoded by the machines, but anything higher, Secret or Top Secret, was double encrypted, so if such a message was addressed to the *Graffias* I had to go into the crypto room, a tiny airless space, and use a typewriter rotor machine to decode the final stage.

The amount of traffic greatly increased on our way to the rendezvous. Strictly speaking we were supposed to ignore anything not directed to us, but curiosity will win that battle every time. Reading one-way traffic is like listening to one end of a phone call: you get the general drift but have to deduce the mind on the other side. A number of the messages came from the Chief of Naval Operations and would begin "Highest levels in Washington demand to know . . ." That meant the Secretary of Defense or the President, McNamara or Johnson. What they demanded to know, it seemed, were details of an engagement off the coast of North Vietnam that occurred while we were steaming south. But we'd been ordered there before that, so somebody was expecting something.

We met up with Task Force 77 in daylight. The admiral had his flag on the *Constellation*; making more than twice our speed she'd been there two days conducting flight operations, where and to what effect I didn't know. They hadn't completed resupply in Sasebo, so we were immediately doing what we were designed

to do, replenishing ships in blue water, the *Connie* and her escort destroyers, based on shopping lists they sent the day before. Underway replenishment—UNREP in Navy talk—is a tricky operation, the receiving ship and the supply ship steaming at exactly the same speed on exactly the same course about 30 yards apart with three or more high lines stretched between them. Heavy goods on wooden pallets are winched over again and again until the supply is finished. Sometimes we'd do two ships simultaneously, one on either side. It's crucial for the helm to steer precisely, which is difficult because a large vessel like a carrier creates a suction in the water between the sides of the two ships. You can read about it in *Wikipedia*.

But this was long before *Wikipedia*, in fact it was half a century ago. *Connie* came along our port side, we set up as usual and communicated over voice-powered phones, the wires stretched across with the high lines. Those phones are completely secure since they create no radio waves—really they're just like the tin can and string rig I used as a boy, except you don't have to keep the wire taut. The admiral wanted to talk to our captain, so we brought a line up to the bridge. All I could hear were phrases like “where was that?” and “a second time?” There I was, listening in again, but I had no idea what they were talking about.

The next day we UNREPed two destroyers, the *Turner Joy* and the *Maddox*. By then the President had announced on the radio that those very ships had been fired upon by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in international waters and that he had ordered bombing raids in retaliation, which had been conducted from the *Connie*. We couldn't hear Johnson's speech, of course, but the text of it came in a message addressed to Pac Fleet and the XO read it out over the bullhorn with his usual clenched-jawed diction, making the President's rolling Texan voice sound like a New Jersey bully.

But the speech *was* aggressive, that's for sure, and led to the escalation of the Vietnam conflict everybody knows about. Also we know that when it was fired upon on the second of August the *Turner Joy* was acting provocatively in the Gulf of Tonkin, gathering intelligence well inside North Vietnam's territorial waters, and that the second incident two days later didn't occur at all, the *Maddox* diligently firing on radar ghosts. Johnson had been looking for an excuse to start bombing.

Wally and I shared a stateroom aft but didn't see one another much those days. We were on full alert, I was either on the bridge or in crypto, he was on a different watch or supervising his UNREP station on deck, and we grabbed sleep when we could. It wasn't until the following Sunday, a week after the first Tonkin incident, that we had chow together in the wardroom, second sitting, usual stupid banter around the table, Guballa the Filipino steward grabbing your unfinished plate away

while you were still bringing your fork to your mouth—where did he think he was going after work?—some kind of ice-cream mess for dessert, coffee that tasted like warm seawater, and started to wonder about Chip. He must have flown in the sorties, ready to wreak death and destruction on the Viet Minh. We'd heard one pilot had been shot down; Wally hoped it was Chip.

One of the things about life on a reefer in war is that you're aware action is happening all around without it affecting you. When we were not needed for UNREP we pulled back into formation with other support ships while the carriers did their job and the destroyers did theirs. Since the North Vietnamese didn't have submarines, there wasn't much for the destroyers to do or any worry that we'd be fired on. So we steamed around a bit, out of sight of the combatants, two oilers and an ammo ship with us. The only time we came close to a fight was when we momentarily mistook a small fishing vessel for a torpedo boat. The captain imagined he was already commanding a carrier and got an itchy trigger finger like the CO of the *Maddox*. He called battle stations, we had the klaxon bonging away, but the fishing boat was identified quickly. He bore down on it anyway, and put the poor Viet fisherman in a panic—I could see his face through my binoculars as he desperately tried to avoid our hull and then our substantial wake. Teaching him a lesson, that's sure, oh boy.

We were out about four weeks before relief and on the passage back had five days R&R in Hong Kong. The British papers were full of stories about the Tonkin incident and the effect of Johnson's bombing raids on Cold War policy, but I felt strangely detached from the politics of it all. I ordered a brown three-piece suit from a Chinese tailor which was ready by the time we departed. I have it still, though it hasn't fitted me for years. Back to Sasebo in mid-September, the weather almost pleasant. I had the duty the first night, then was busy the next day with paperwork and got off the ship only after evening chow. Kieko wasn't home so I went to the Paradise and found her sitting with a fucking flyboy from the *Ticonderoga*. I drank Kirin at another table until the guy left—all the other josans would leave me alone because Kieko was my girl.

"You gone long time," she said. I didn't have to explain what we'd been doing; ship movements were supposedly secret but every josans in town knew them better than the crew.

"Gomen nasai," I said, which is sorry, "fighting a war."

"Also Hong Kong, hai?"

"Hai, also Hong Kong, Hong Kong ichiban."

"You like China girl?"

“No China girl. Only you.”

“Ha,” Kieko said, “I no believe.” I shrugged, she smiled. “You buy me one drink now then go our house, okey-dokey, big-time sailor off’cer? I come soon.” I needed exercise and walked the two miles, made tea, set out those little Japanese crackers on the low table, opened the windows, climbed the steep stairs to the bedroom. I had bought a real bed because like a lot of tall people my back hurt after a night on a futon on the floor, and was hanging up my shirt when I heard her taxi outside. She came up right away and hugged me. She felt like soft rice paper against my skin, smelled like spring rain.

“Ocha downstairs,” I said.

“No ocha, I want Jack-san.” She pulled back the bed covers quickly. A little too quickly, as it happened, because out flipped a condom in its wrapper, Trojan, available only at the Navy Exchange. I hated condoms and she said I didn’t need them—she was on the pill and my girl only. It seemed the case was otherwise.

I picked it up. “I guess this is yours,” I said, handing it to her. She clenched her jaw like our XO and wouldn’t take it. She stared at the bed for what seemed like five minutes, her eyes filling with tears.

Then she got angry. “You no give me money. What I do?”

“I gave you money.”

“Ten thousand yen. You gone most two months. No good, ten thousand.” That was worth maybe thirty dollars, more than a month’s rent. Living was cheap in Japan, and she was working.

“I didn’t know I’d be gone at all. There wasn’t anything I could do.”

“Need money, house, ’lectri, gohan, how you say?”

“Rice.” She wouldn’t attempt the word but because no matter how hard she tried it would come out “lice.” It was one of the things I loved about her. “But this, Kieko,” I said, still holding out the condom, “why with a sailor?”

“You sailor boy too, iie, Amerikajin kaiin. You give me money, I no need other sailor boy.”

It was a foolish conversation but she managed to turn it around anyway. She also managed to look achingly vulnerable and even lonelier than usual. Also let’s not forget after all those weeks at sea I was fabulously horny. So the inevitable happened: we let the ocha go cold and I held her arms in bed. We didn’t even change the sheets. It’s hard to know after so many years, but I think was I was trying to punish her with rough sex. I remember her tiny breasts and her eyes, wide open, wider than ever, her nipples almost as dark as her eyes. She moaned more than usual and kissed me hard. I fell asleep thinking of the empty sea.

Sometime around two I woke and heard the outside door bang. We'd forgotten to lock it, and I thought it was the wind. Then someone was climbing the stairs softly. Half-asleep, I roared out "Who's there?" and heard a quick scurry down the steps, a slip at the bottom, and the door slam. Kieko stayed asleep, or pretended to. Given the condom incident, I should have figured it out, but I was very tired and fell back to sleep. This time I dreamed of taking revenge on the XO.

At six in the morning I rubbed my face with cold water in the kitchen before leaving. But my shoes, which I'd left in the little entryway inside the door, were gone, and in their place were a pair of brown leather brogues of poor-quality Japanese make. Whoever it had been, in his hurry to run the man had put on mine by mistake. I wear size thirteen, his were about sevens. I couldn't return to the ship barefoot, so I used them like Jap flip-flops, pushed down the backs and tried to fit my feet far enough in to walk to the taxi stand. It was a very foolish-looking ensign who hobbled aboard the ship. Fortunately Wally was Officer of the Deck. "Cool treads, Jack," he said; "Florsheim?" Later that day all the men were smirking. I threw the shoes over the side.

Dimmick had reported some malfunction in the short-range radar so I went to CIC. He'd almost finished repairing it but was hemming and hawing about something and finally asked me if I had a girl called Kieko from the Paradise bar. "None of my business, sir," he said, "but I thought you should know that one is an enlisted man's josan, sir. She's not an officer's kind of girl." It took me a moment to realize he wasn't trying to threaten but was concerned about my welfare. To him it was simple: Kieko was used to going with the men and I should be wary of her. I wasn't sure why some girls might be reserved for officers and felt angry with him for intruding, but I said I'd take it under advisement. You have to wonder, though, what advisement was I capable of.

We were in port a couple of weeks and I had the duty only one evening in three. Wally and I went out a few times but I always got home to Kieko about midnight and she welcomed me warmly. I had managed to get beyond the condom incident until one morning I had difficulty peeing, and over the next few days a painful sore developed on my penis. Unmistakable signs of the clap. The ship's chief medical corpsman confirmed it in sickbay. I hear that penicillin won't fix gonorrhoea now but it worked then; the bigger problem for me was how to deal with Kieko. Technically the chief was required to advise the base medical officer and he'd report it to the Japanese prefecture health service who would deal with the girl. With the chief's agreement I kept it quiet and spoke to Kieko myself. Most women who have

the clap are asymptomatic and at first she pretended she didn't know what I was talking about, but in the end went to her doctor for tests and got her own shots.

She had all sorts of explanations and apologies; I won't bore you with them because even I couldn't fool myself any longer. But she had a strong hold on me, a hold I was too young and inexperienced to understand, and a few days before we sailed I was with her again. I felt like a fool, but this time I used a condom. Back in the South China Sea, in what was fast becoming Johnson's war, we were UNREPIing the *Connie* again and I thought I saw Chip standing on the receiving deck staring at us. Maybe my imagination. There were no more Tonkin incidents and the flight ops from the carriers, which were bombing and strafing raids on the North, had settled down to the kind of regular death of women and children that became the hallmark of the conflict. I knew I had to end it with Kieko, though doubted I had the strength to do it.

In the end it was taken out of my hands. Unknown to most of us, the *Graffias* had been scheduled for some time for a major refit in the US, which had been delayed by Tonkin. Now that a substitute reefer had arrived, our homeport was changed to San Francisco and we were about to steam away for good. I should have been delighted, since San Francisco was my home town, but all I felt was loss. Back in Sasebo I avoided Kieko while the ship was being unloaded of remaining supplies. I got Roba out on Sunday and rode fast southwest to Sakai, towards Mount Yaklyama, the scooter sputtering resentment all the way. The trip exhausted me but I hardly looked at the scenery.

The night before our departure I went to the Paradise. Of course Kieko had already heard we were going and berated me for staying away. Though I knew I shouldn't, I gave her some money in an envelope, a couple of month's rent, along with my key to the house. I touched her cheek, and stood up to go. "I no want you leave, Jack-san," she said, and seemed about to cry. She begged me to come home with her but I couldn't bear that. I went to sake-town instead and tried to get drunk, but was too depressed and gave up after two Kirin Ichiban.

We sailed at 0700. When the Japanese pilot climbed down the side to his little boat at the harbor mouth, I saluted him. "Domo arigato, Kaigun Shosho-san," I said. He smiled at being called admiral by one of his conquerors and returned the salute. The XO saw it but for once kept quiet.

Our radish rode badly with empty holds, rolling and pitching too high in the water, seventeen days to the Golden Gate without a stop in Hawaii. Sayonara, Butterfly, Lieutenant Pinkerton sails away again.

When I reflect on it at this distance I can't accept a simple explanation. Not the condom or the shoes or the clap, they spoke for themselves, but the other thing, the way I played the game, how I blamed her for taking advantage of my own gullibility, that was like the *Turner Joy's* report, filled with omissions and excuses, predetermined in outcome. Sorting out lies is not hard if you work at it. The trouble comes in sorting out half-lies, that's like reading one side of the message traffic: it leaves you free to make up the rest. Kieko was unfair to pretend we had a relationship based on love and respect, but I was more unfair to require her to pretend. She was using the only saleable qualities she had, her beauty and charm, to survive in a country devastated by war and depletion and occupation, her birthplace obliterated. I was the invader, after all. Sure, the Japs started the Pacific war, remember Pearl Harbor and all that, but it wasn't me or my generation who were sunk on the *Arizona* and it certainly wasn't Kieko doing the bombing. In getting angry at her I was like the *Maddox*, firing at nothing in the dark.

I was detached from *Graffias* soon after we arrived in San Francisco, spent the rest of my service on soft shore duty at Pearl where the memorial to the *Arizona* rises a few feet out of the harbor water, and left the Navy on schedule eighteen months later. I couldn't wait to get out but as a civilian I never knew what I wanted out of life. Roba was rusted out so with my Navy savings I bought an overpowered Kawasaki and crossed the country, bummed around on sailboats in the Atlantic, crewing for food and excitement, worked on boats around Baltimore and Newport News, lived in bars and strangers' beds. After too many years of this, on one long sail to the Med I met and eventually married a blue-eyed blonde from the Virginia horse country who looked a bit like Chip. We settled in Annapolis, where the Naval Academy is located, and with her money I opened a ship chandlery and boatyard, catering to weekend sailors on Chesapeake Bay, folks who enjoy the pretense of maritime danger in what are actually very expensive RVs that float. I kept a thirty-foot boat myself but always sailed in sight of shore. I wouldn't dream of another Pacific voyage and would avoid an organized cruise as I would another dose of the clap.

Nancy and I were happy for a while and might still be together, but one spring she had a desire to see Japan and wouldn't be denied. I had talked about the place often but had never gone back—I guess I didn't want to interfere with the bizarre work of memory. Nancy was an intelligent woman—she'd studied anthropology at the University of Virginia—and as soon as we arrived at Narita she could tell something was wrong. In the customs line I was hit by an astounding sense of doubleness. Japan for me had become hermetic, set aside, like a precious vase on

a shelf so tightly bound in bubble wrap it was not possible to know if it had been damaged. On the airport train, at the hotel, on the street, the smells, the food, the pachinko parlors, the comic books, the silliness, the razor-sharp beauty, made me a displaced person, lost inside myself, as if after decades away I had come home to discover it wasn't my house any longer. I had been right not to return, but once the djinn is out he won't go back in the lamp. The people were heavier and taller, I was no longer a towering freak, it was twenty years later and I saw Kieko everywhere. Walking along the street I would turn my head to follow some young girl's movements as she cast her eyes down and seemed to skate on those wood and straw sandals they call zori.

I wasn't looking for Kieko in any literal sense, and I didn't want to track her down. After all that time I couldn't remember her family name for sure—Hirata? Hirasi?—and she might have changed it. Despite that, it felt as if she were looking for me. Nancy chose to take my lingering glances at young women in a more obvious way. She said that Japan made me into a dirty old man, looking up the tartan miniskirts of schoolgirls as they rose on the escalator in Tokyo Station. She said, if I remember this correctly, I'd become a middle-aged pervert trying to recapture his youthful sexual exploits under the American Imperium. In one sense she was right, but no matter how many girls passed under my gaze it was really only one I was looking at.

Surprisingly my facility in Japanese came back, more each day. One evening after dinner I suggested we go to a hostess bar off the Ginza, claiming Nancy would be interested in the anthropology of it. She was thoroughly shamed when a josan sat next to me and struck up a conversation. The girl didn't know what to make of Nancy but Nancy, who understood not a word of Japanese, knew what to make of the girl and returned to the hotel. I followed in a half hour but it was already too late, and she flew home the next day. "Maybe you'll grow up again when you're back," she said. Those were her last words to me; everything else came through her lawyer.

I wonder now if the trouble hadn't always been there, with me running away from Japan, or running away from my other self in that other Japan. The divorce required me to sell the chandlery business to return Nancy's investment. I see my kids now and then, though they both have families of their own and don't need me. I have a job in Tokyo with an exporter of Japanese marine objects that are sold as collector's art: old brass ship's lanterns, glass fishing-net floats, compasses, charts, naval memorabilia. Not long ago we handled an officer's dress blue uniform of the Imperial Navy, circa 1945, its sleeve insignia two broad gold stripes and one narrow

stripe that loops in the center. I thought of our harbor pilot in Sasebo who held that rank, Kaigun Shosho or rear admiral. I wanted to buy the uniform but its value was greatly enhanced by a single bullet hole over the heart, provenance unknown, leaving you free to make up the rest of the story. There was heavy internet bidding between two war museums in Europe and in the end the price went higher than Fuji. I had some crazy notion of giving it to our old pilot in reparation, but of course by now he'd be dead.

Come to think of it, considering how she lived Kieko might be dead too.

I don't have much social life. Gaijin are never really accepted, no matter how long they've lived here or how well they speak the language. I often eat alone in my small apartment—I need a full-size Western table now. Sometimes I travel for business; maybe next year I'll go to Sasebo, if only to see Ninety Nine Islands again. I lead a quiet life in the midst of Tokyo's flashing neon and dark concealments. Occasionally I go to a hostess bar, but only to practice conversation.



DENNIS KENNEDY is a theatre historian, playwright, and director who has published many books on live performance. His fiction has appeared in numerous literary magazines, and he writes song lyrics for Junk Ensemble, a Dublin dance-theatre company. Born in Cincinnati and raised in California, he now lives in Dublin and France. He served in the US Navy during the Vietnam era.