

1

Lavender

*The child must stand in the place of the one
whom she so resembled.*

—Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*

The caustic smell of electricity crept through her white surgical mask. The other women all said they didn't smell it any more. Emiko did, even though she'd been working in the factory almost two years, ever since she graduated from Kitayama High School. Her mother, in the back winding wires into coils, said she'd never smelled it.

Emiko picked up *Item A* with gloved fingers and placed it between *Tabs 1, 2, 3, and 4* on the circuit board. She eyed the higher pile of completed boards in front of the gray-haired woman next to her. "Did you ever wonder what these things are for?"

Jun-oba gave her a sideways glance. "No." She touched Emiko's hand. "By the way, a woman in the back said your mom went home early. Wasn't feeling well."

"Something serious?"

Jun-oba scoffed. "Come on. You know it's the only way we can get time off now and then."

The buzzer signaled the end of the shift. Emiko tossed her white kerchief, gown, and shoe covers into the bin, let down her long hair, and walked out into a town walled in by mountains on all sides. Snow Country. The mountain peaks glowed pink in the late summer sun. Tourists were awed by the scene. Soon the town itself would be wrapped in snow, and Emiko

knew the low cover of clouds blocking the sky would give her the feeling of being trapped in a white cocoon.

Up ahead, standing under the red and white banner of the newly-renamed “Moon Landing” ramen shop, was a familiar scraggly-haired man in tattered clothes. She watched a by-passer stop, face him, and yell, “Attention!” The mind-shattered old war veteran snapped to attention as his tormentor grinned and walked on. The shopkeeper came out to shoo him away, but Emiko paused. She slipped a thin brown pay envelope from her jeans and gave the vagrant enough for a bowl of ramen. “Let him eat,” she told the shopkeeper. “He can pay.”

For all Emiko knew, her father could be standing hungry in the streets of some other city. The war had shattered his leg but not his mind. For over twenty years he’d supported their family as a watchman at the factory. But now and then he took brief trips to cities where protests for peace were being held. He’d never returned from his last trip even though he said he’d be back in a couple of days. Emiko’s mother had a letter from him dated January 1969, when he arrived in Tokyo. And now it was the end of August. The police said men went missing all the time in Japan. *Jōhatsu*, they called them. Evaporated people.

As soon as she slid open her house door and stepped into the little *genkan* entryway, she knew something was wrong. Her mother’s pink flowered handbag had been dropped on the edge of the step-up to the *tatami* mat area. “Mom!” she called. No answer. Emiko rushed into the bedroom and found her mother curled on the floor, sweat covering her forehead.

“Mom, is it your heart again? The doctor said you should cut back to part-time.”

Her mother was gasping. “I will when your dad returns. Something must have happened to him. He’s never been gone more than a few days.”

Emiko wiped her mother’s face with the sleeve of her pur-

ple blouse.

“He raised you to be strong, Emiko. If I die—”

“Mom. You’re not going to die. I’m going out right now to call an ambulance.” Emiko put a cushion under her mother’s head and slid a coin for the phone from the dresser. But it was too late. When she looked again, her mother had stopped breathing.

Emiko threw herself on the tatami, sobbing. She pulled her mother’s hand to her lips. It was gripping her father’s guard whistle.

Fingers trembling, using long metal sticks Emiko lifted a thin, chalky bone from the tray of her mother’s cremated remains and dropped it into the urn. She glanced at the funeral director through tears, and he stepped forward. “No need to go on, Miss. We’ll finish the ritual. We’re so sorry for your loss.” After nearly two years of suffering with a weak heart, her mother was gone. She was only forty-three years old.

There were just a few mourners, friends from the factory and a few former high school classmates of Emiko who hadn’t gone away to college or moved away to work in another town. They’d come to her house offering comfort, and they stood by her at the funeral. But now they had to go back to their own lives. Jun-oba stayed to walk home with her.

Emiko felt a strong hand grip her shoulder. The man wore an elegant black suit and tie, his hair graying slightly at the temples. “Emiko? I’m Genji Sato. A friend of your mother’s.” He slipped the funeral director a thick envelope.

Jun-oba’s face paled. She turned and hurried away.

Emiko had heard Genji’s name before. Her mother had told her all the men in Kitayama had returned from the war or been reported dead except her husband. Twenty-two years old and childless, she had met a handsome younger man, the son of the factory owner, who had come back to Kitayama

after graduating from high school in Germany, where he'd avoided the draft. "Jun-oba and others disapproved," her mother had told her. "But my life felt so hopeless."

A few months after her mother began seeing Genji, her husband suddenly returned, finally released from a Russian prison camp in Manchuria. She immediately broke off with Genji, and Genji's father hushed the scandal by sending his son off to the university in Tokyo. The older brother took over management of the factory, and Genji stayed in Tokyo. That was twenty years ago. They said he'd started an import-export business of his own. Some said his father had disowned him. In any case, as far as Emiko knew, he'd never come back to Kitayama until now.

"Let me drive you home," Genji said.

Emiko waved her hand *no*, but her knees felt weak from the stress of the funeral. She wavered, and Genji took her arm. He gave a signal, and a black Mercedes pulled up. The driver held open the door with a white-gloved hand, and when Emiko refused to get in, Genji lifted her onto the seat.

"Stop. What are you doing? Let me out."

"Still living in Shiroyuki-cho?"

"Let me out. I want to walk."

The large sedan barely squeezed between the houses crowding the narrow lane. As they got out, Genji said something to his driver, who backed the car out to the main road. He took Emiko's arm again. "I'll help you inside."

"No." But her knees were still wobbly. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, ashamed of her weakness.

He sat cross-legged across from her at the low table. "Is there tea in the carafe, Emiko-chan? Let me pour you some."

She drank some and, in fact, felt her strength starting to return. Looking at the photo of her parents on the dresser encouraged her. She'd moved it to a place of reverence on the tiny *kamidana* altar her father had built to honor their

ancestors.

“Your mother was beautiful,” Genji sighed. “I feel like I’m looking at her now.”

Emiko tried to hide her embarrassment “It seems you paid for the funeral. I’d understood Kitayama Industries was going to pay.”

He ignored that. “Your eyes,” he said. “They’re your mother’s eyes.”

Emiko had heard this often from her classmates and more recently her colleagues at the factory—from girls and women, mainly. But it disturbed her to be hearing it from a man who must be forty years old. Not to mention a man who’d had some previous relationship with her mother.

Genji looked around the room. Piles of clothes covered the floor in one corner. An ironing board was folded against the wall. Stacks of newspapers and books leaned unsteadily beside the sliding *shoji* door. He sucked in air through his teeth. “You deserve better than this.”

“I’m all right.”

“I wonder. You’re alone now. Are you going to get by? The rent for these Shiroyuki houses can’t be much, but with only you working now—”

“I’ll work overtime.”

“Still, I’d like to help you.” He reached across the table and put his hand on hers. “So soft. So beautiful. Come sit next to me.”

Emiko jerked her hand away. But she didn’t get up. She’d been flattered, jokingly cajoled by boys before, but this was somehow more ... real. Her heart was pounding.

“Your mother was twenty-two when I came back from high school in Germany. About your age, I guess.”

“I’m twenty. I don’t understand what you—”

“Let me be plain, Emiko. I have a wife in Tokyo whom I respect. And a good business. But as soon as I saw you, I also

wanted to take care of you. I want to buy you a nice place here in the new Mountain Luxe Apartments. You won't have to work. You can read your books, draw, paint, ski. I'll visit you as often as I can. Believe me, I'll be in agony when I'm away."

Now Emiko stood up. "You want to make me your second wife?"

Genji rose, brought her hand to his lips. "If you refuse me, I"

Emiko had never been touched by a man as handsome as this. She was insulted but at the same time there was an undeniable thrill. She stood silent, staring at her feet.

"I know I'm older than you. But I'm still—"

"That's enough, Mr. Sato. I think you should leave."

His eyes looked genuinely sad. "I know this was sudden. It took me by surprise, too." He slipped a business card from his breast pocket and when she didn't reach to take it, dropped it on the table. Would you promise me to think it over? Just that?"

Emiko said nothing.

When he was gone, she collapsed on the cool tatami floor. It felt like all the energy had been drained from her, and she fell into a deep sleep until the next morning.

"*Gomen kudasai!*" It was Jun-oba announcing herself and sliding open the front door. With bowed head she handed Emiko a white envelope tied with black ribbon. "From the ladies at the factory. Our *okoden* funeral offering." She looked up, obviously waiting to be invited in.

Emiko knew she was expected to hold the envelope to her forehead and say something like "This is too much" or "I don't deserve your kindness," but she couldn't make herself do it. Empty courtesies, meaningless traditions left her cold. Her mother always said, "You're just like your father."

Emiko took it as a compliment.

“Jun-oba, would you like to—”

“I’ll just stay a minute.” The old woman knelt at the table. “Emiko-chan, I hope you won’t mind a bit of advice. Purple shoes at the funeral yesterday? I know I’m not the only one who noticed.”

It was starting again. And her father wasn’t here to say, “I guess she can wear any color she wants,” and her mother wasn’t here to change the subject and offer the old woman tea.

“I expect you’ll be more careful now to obey the factory rules. You couldn’t afford to lose your job.” Jun-oba pointed to a glass bead necklace hanging on a knob of the tiny dresser in the corner of the room. “For example, as you know, jewelry isn’t allowed in the sanitary room where we work.”

Emiko poured her a cup of tea.

“You have to make more of an effort to fit in, Emiko. I loved your mother, but I wish she’d made sure you knew the way things are done.”

“Yes, Jun-oba.” Emiko wondered if the woman would object to her becoming Mr. Sato’s mistress as much as she did to her sneaking books into the factory to read at lunchtime. Probably not. Becoming a rich man’s mistress was rare, but it wasn’t one of those things that “aren’t done.”

Jun-oba swallowed a bite of rice cracker and narrowed her eyes. “I came to bring the funeral offering, Emiko. But there’s something else. The ladies and some of the men were talking. You probably don’t know who that well-dressed stranger was, but some of us recognized him. He’s the younger son of the factory owner, and he left this town in disgrace when he was eighteen. He’s not somebody you should be talking to.”

“He paid for Mom’s funeral.”

“I suppose you did have to thank him for that.” Jun-oba said this with puckered lips as if she’d bitten into a crabapple.

“He seems nice.”

“That’s enough. We won’t talk about him any more. My friend at the hotel says he’s returned to Tokyo, where he belongs.”

Emiko was feeling mischievous. “He wants me to become his second wife, and I—”

Jun-oba choked on her tea. “No! That can’t be. You absolutely can’t do that.”

“Anyway, I’m definitely not going back to the factory.”

“Oh? Well, not right away, of course. You’ll want to take some time to mourn before going back to work. We’d all understand, Emiko-chan.” The woman rolled her eyes around the room. “You probably can’t afford to stay here. You can stay with me. In my sewing room.”

The thought of doing that made Emiko cringe. “I don’t deserve this kindness,” she intoned. “I couldn’t possibly put you to so much trouble.”

Clearly taking this as polite acceptance of her offer, Jun-oba left with a satisfied smile.

Emiko sat cross-legged on the floor. Jun-oba was right. She likely couldn’t earn enough even with overtime to stay in this house. And even if she could, being here would remind her constantly of her mother and father.

Her mother had died with her father’s whistle clutched in her hand. Every day, he hung it around his neck as he limped off to the factory stockyard. One day he came home smiling. “There’s been an incident,” he announced. “Day after day nothing. But today something happened. A thief dug under the fence and I saw him filling up a bag from the charcoal pile.”

“Did you blow your whistle, Dad? Get him arrested?” Emiko was excited. “Nah,” he’d told her. “The guy was poor. I just let him take it. The whistle’s still standing by for action.”

Emiko and her mother knew the watchman job was bor-

ing. They didn't blame her father for occupying his mind with other things, which meant mostly politics. The war and his imprisonment afterwards had turned him into a fervid opponent of what he called imperialism. Japanese imperialism was basically defunct except for what he said was the economic variety. But he also opposed American imperialism, which he said had been played out in the Korean war and was ongoing in Vietnam.

Emiko read all the newspaper articles he showed her and all the books. In high school, she had learned that nothing but poor grades and scorn resulted from questioning the Education Ministry's version of history. It seemed that the only person she could speak her mind to was her father. Where was he?

She picked up the letter he'd sent from Tokyo. The police in that postal district told her mother they had no information on Hiroji Ozeki. It wasn't surprising since her father seldom used his real name on his visits with protest organizations.

Emiko took a deep breath. She had to find him. She put the letter into her backpack, added a couple bundles of clean clothes, and counted the funeral offering money—plenty for a trip to Tokyo and at least a short stay there. For insurance, she slipped in Genji's business card.

2

Uncertain luck

“... the Abbot has ordered that women are not to be allowed inside the temple courtyard Take care you obey his orders.”

—Kanze Kojiro Nobumitsu, *Dōjōji*

Light snow was already dusting the town when Emiko bicycled to the station. The direct train to Tokyo wasn't until the following morning, but she wanted to leave now. She'd take the local to Nakakuni, and catch the Tokyo train there the next day.

She set the kickstand and stood her bike unlocked in the mass of others left there every day. She didn't know when or if she'd be back, but she was sure her lavender bike would still be there if she returned.

She'd only been out of Kitayama a few times. Once on a school trip to Kyoto, another time to Nikko with her parents, and once to Tokyo with her father. The swarms of vacationing high school students in jeans jackets and cowboy hats had already gone back to school, so the station was practically empty. She easily found a seat by the window.

The train rattled through the valley, snaking left and right as if probing for some unseen gap between the mountains. At the edge of town it made a curve so sharp Emiko could see the end of the train she was on. It seemed almost to be coming towards her. And then the train bored through a dripping tunnel. The only way out, Emiko thought.

The train emerged into a different world—bright sun,

clear skies, and warmer, humid air condensing on her still-cold window. She saw women in baggy *mompei* pants and wide straw hats harvesting rice in yellowed fields marked off by glimmering irrigation channels. In other fields men were digging up long *daikon* radishes, piling them onto a hand-drawn cart. These were the hard-working people Emiko's father had taught her to admire.

At Nakakuni station she got off and noticed a gaudy poster stapled to the wall advertising a guest house within walking distance. It wasn't expensive, but Emiko didn't want to spend that much. She walked along the gravel road through the town and looked around. Across a little river, up on a green hill, a huge red sun was setting behind the roofed *rōmon* gateway of a temple.

She crossed the river on a log bridge and followed a packed dirt path up the hill. Heavy stones were placed in the steeper parts as steps. By the time she reached the level ground at the top, the sun had set. She looked through the entryway at the temple. Its dark, aged wood and single curving roof unadorned with paint or gilding suggested indifference to attracting visitors. In fact, none of the posters in the station had even mentioned the temple.

She walked through the open door, slipped off her shoes, and padded warily up to the altar. Here there was some glitter. Gilded candlesticks with electric bulbs for flames, gold-trimmed hanging lanterns, and a painted statue of Buddha. She didn't know whether to bow to the statue, clap her hands, or what. To tell the truth, she thought anything like that was silly and was glad nobody was there.

On a gate in front of the altar was a wooden coin box with a tray of *omikuji* fortune papers beside it. Emiko dropped a coin into the box and took one. In the dark of the temple, she had to hold it close to read. *General prediction: uncertain luck. For starting a trip: uncertain luck.* Emiko shoved the

paper into her backpack. “Thanks for nothing.”

A shuffling sound behind her made her jump. She turned around to see a lanky teenage boy in an open brown robe over black pants, who also stiffened, obviously not expecting to find anyone in the temple. He had a rag in one hand and what smelled like wax in the other. Since he seemed to be frozen in the doorway, Emiko approached him. “Are you—”

“Hello,” he said. It was more like a squeak. He bowed, presenting her with a view of his glossy shaved head. He was tall, with dark eyebrows and a pale, just-hatched look. Emiko finished, “—in charge here?”

“The abbot is away now, so”

“I see. I’m traveling and I wonder if I could stay here for the night.”

The acolyte or whatever blinked and said nothing.

“I don’t need anything. Just a place to lie down until morning.”

He began mumbling what Emiko assumed was some kind of Sanskrit prayer. She waited. He cleared his throat and said, “We do have a tradition of accommodating travelers. I wish the abbot was here. I mean, it’s usually men.”

“I could just sleep right here. I guess that front door closes?”

“I’ll be saying vespers.”

“It won’t bother me.”

He was loosening up just a bit. “I can bring a futon, I guess.”

The vespers seemed to be forgotten. Tōshin—his dharma name, he told her—not only brought a futon but offered her a bowl of rice and *miso* soup. She told him to call her Sachiko. “It’s my traveling name.”

They sat on the futon, Tōshin uttered some kind of prayer, and they ate side by side. “Where do you sleep?” she asked. “Just curious.”

“There’s another room through that door. That’s where travelers can sleep, too, but”

“I understand. Here is fine.”

When they finished eating, Tōshin took the dishes away, came back, and sat cross-legged at the altar to say some prayers. Emiko took a walk outside while he did. The stars flashed brilliantly in the moonless sky. Below, she could see a few lights of the town but there was no sound. The only thing she heard was the droning of prayers inside the temple. When she noticed that had stopped, she went back in. Tōshin was turning out the lights.

“Can you leave a couple on? It’s pretty dark in here.”

He nodded. “Not supposed to, but I guess it’s all right. Well, I usually go to bed early.” He bowed and went into his own room.

He’d laid out a blanket and a stiff buckwheat hull pillow on the futon for her. Emiko crawled under the blanket and fell asleep almost immediately. But it must not have been long before she woke up with no idea where she was. The wind had picked up, and swaying lanterns were casting flickering patterns on the high ceiling. Behind the dimly lit altar, the whites of the Buddha’s eyes flashed out. The sliding doors rattled in their tracks.

When it came back to her where she was, she had to admit sleeping here was unexpectedly scary. As the rays from the lanterns flashed on the far wall, she saw the door to Tōshin’s room. Trembling, she dragged everything towards it, then quietly slid open the shoji. Tōshin was asleep on his own futon. When she plopped her futon down next to his, he opened his eyes and gasped as if seeing a ghost. He sat up and started intoning what Emiko supposed from her reading of Noh plays was an incantation against demons.

“It’s all right, Tōshin. It’s just me, Emi- uh Sachiko.”

Eyes closed, he intensified the chant. She rested her hand

on his shoulder to assure him, and he sucked in a lungful of air as if it would be his last. When he opened his eyes, he didn't seem to trust what he saw.

"I was scared, Tōshin. That's why I came in. I can't sleep alone out there."

He rubbed his hairless head, beginning to comprehend.

"So, I mean, can I just sleep in here?"

"You're not—"

"I'm not a demon. No. I'm just a girl trying to find her father."

He reached out with a shaky finger to touch her arm. "I'm not usually frightened like that."

"Let's just lie here and talk a bit." When she stretched out next to him, he cautiously leaned down on an elbow, then gradually put his head on his pillow. "You say you're trying to find your father?"

They talked until they fell asleep. When she told him her mother had recently died, he recited a Buddhist mantra and warned her to use only her mother's spirit name until her spirit had time to completely detach itself from the world. Using her real name would call her back to earth. Emiko's eyes always glazed over when she heard this kind of talk about the ghosts of dead people returning, unable to let go of something in their life.

The next morning Tōshin fixed breakfast for her—the same rice and soup, but with a raw egg added, and tea. When she left, he said, "I'll pray you find your father."

Passengers lined up on the platform long before the train for Tokyo was due to arrive—women with babies on their backs in *ombuhimo* carriers or toting bulky *furoshiki* wrapping-cloths filled with clothes or *omiyage* gifts for family or friends, a few children running and shouting but never straying far from their parents, men smoking cigarettes and read-

ing newspapers, some giving Emiko covert glances. She saw no one her age. They were probably away at college or working.

Hating to stand in line, she went to a snack shop by the station and bought a *bento* boxed lunch to take on the train. She pulled a copy of the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper from the trash can and sat on a bench. September 2, 1969—yesterday’s paper. *Ho Chi Minh Dies of Heart Failure at 79*. She tried to read the article, but her eyes were clouding over. Her mother had been only forty-three.

As soon as the train door opened, the orderly lines of passengers on each side of the door broke into a single-minded shoving match to get a seat. Emiko was the last one to get on the train. She’d resigned herself to standing for the whole two-hour trip to Tokyo but saw an empty seat bypassed by everyone. Nobody seemed to want to sit beside a googly-eyed youth with a tangled crop of bleached orange hair sprouting atop his head and sparse black hairs springing from his chin. Two women who preferred to stand gave Emiko a disgusted glance as she nodded to the young man and sat down.

“Interesting shirt,” Emiko said. It was a white T-shirt featuring a crude drawing of a girl putting a flower into a rifle. Below it was written *Give Peas a Chance*. “Are you a vegetarian?” she asked.

His onyx eyes registered surprise that she was talking to him. He probably hadn’t heard correctly. “Satoru,” he introduced himself.

The train lurched forward, slipping the newspaper from Emiko’s lap. Satoru picked it up. He blinked on seeing the headline, stroking the hairs on his chin.

“Keep it,” Emiko said.

“Pardon?” He was scanning the Ho Chi Minh article with glazed eyes. When he finished reading, she said, “I take it from your shirt you’re opposed to the war in Vietnam?”

He nodded, handed the paper back to her.

“So. You going to Tokyo to find a job? To join some protest movement? Just to have a look around?”

“Mm.” He seemed to mean all of that. “I’m going to enroll in a computer training school.” His pursed lips might indicate he meant this as a joke. Emiko couldn’t tell. She asked which school.

“Haven’t found one yet.”

“Here.” She opened the back section of the paper. “Some ads for training programs. I think I saw one for computers. Right. Here.”

Satoru tilted his head back and forth doubtfully as he glanced at the ad.

“You don’t seem very interested.”

He shrugged. “I’ll see when I get there.”

“You just graduated from high school this spring?”

“Mm.”

He didn’t seem to want to talk, so Emiko turned through every page of the paper hoping to find some description of a Peace-in-Vietnam activity her father might be involved in—anything that might be a clue how to find him. Of course, she’d been doing that every day with her mom for almost eight months. Never anything. The biggest protests had been back in mid January, the time her father had sent his last letter. He’d probably taken part in them. But why didn’t he come back?

“Can I see the Help Wanted ads again?” Satoru finally spoke. He ran his finger down the *Part-time Male Help Wanted* column. “I couldn’t get any of these.”

“No?”

“No driver’s license. No trade license. I didn’t do well in school. I guess you did?”

“Me? Not bad. English was my favorite subject. I’m not planning to stay long enough to get a job.”

“I have a place to stay. The Sanya House. Not luxurious but it’s cheap.” He looked at her.

“I’m staying with my father.”

The train stopped at another local station, and Emiko noticed Satoru look away as several passengers passed money through the train windows to buy snacks from vendors. She wasn’t hungry yet, but when the train started off again, she took out her bento and shared it with him.

Satoru shook himself awake. “Ah. The transfer announcement. I get off here and take the train to Minami-senju.” He pulled a small green furoshiki bundle from under the seat. Emiko expected him to take a backpack or something else from the rack above, but the little bundle—that was it.

She followed him onto the platform.

“What? Your father lives here?”

Emiko walked alongside of him, realizing she’d have to admit something. “Truthfully, my father’s missing. I have no idea where I’m staying. You said the Sanya House is cheap, so”

Satoru looked doubtful. “They do have a women’s wing, my friend told me. I don’t know if you’d like it there, though.”

“We’ll see.”

Welcome to Tokyo

*After all, Tokyo was a vast boarding house for
all sorts of people from all parts of the country.
Hardly anyone thought of it as home*

—Osaragi Jirō, *Homecoming*

Satoru's friend had said the Sanya House was off the main street. They had to ask a few people for directions, and every time they got strange looks. They found it on a narrow street covered by a maze of electric wires and lined with bicycles in front of two- and three-story stucco buildings crammed against one another, all with slightly different designs and colors, grays and creams predominating. The buildings were so narrow and close they advertised with vertical signs jutting over the sidewalk. Emiko wasn't feeling the broadening of her possibilities she'd hoped for when she left Kitayama.

They stepped over a bearded man sleeping on the sidewalk. If Satoru's outfit clashed with what was expected on the train, Emiko stood out here in her hip-hugger jeans. "People are staring at me," she said.

"Of course. Because you're so pretty."

The sign was in Roman letters, which looked painted on by hand. The door was open, and a pale-faced, gray-haired man sat on a wooden chair bent over a tiny table in the narrow hallway. "Three hundred fifty yen per night, payable in advance." It was about the cost of a large bowl of ramen. "Guests must leave by 8 a.m. each day and cannot return until 8 p.m. No exceptions. *Sabisu* tea in the morning."

“Free tea,” Emiko smiled. “How wonderful.”

The hotel man narrowed his eyes to slits at her sarcasm. The clock on the table said 10 a.m. “Pay now. Find your room, then come back after 8 p.m. Women that way, men that way.” He tilted his head left, then right.

Emiko walked through an open door into a narrow room—lobby?—with a black and white tile floor and another little table set with two chairs and a teapot. A woman in a long gray apron shuffled towards her with a tiny towel, looking her over carefully. She pointed to an open doorway. “Bed number nine.”

On either side of a corridor only wide enough for a single person rose bare wooden structures with futons on platforms, three-high. Emiko calculated that eighteen women could sleep here, although only one could get into bed at a time. Bed number nine was on the top. She climbed a ladder and crawled in, bumping her head on the ceiling when she tried to sit up. There was only enough room to lie down.

When she'd come to Tokyo with her father, they'd both slept the night on vinyl couches in the makeshift office of Beheiren, the Citizen's League for Peace in Vietnam in the Hongō district, not far from Tokyo University, where she'd watched her father urging on a crowd of anti-Vietnam war students. She was in high school then, and watching him stand on those stairs and shout through a bullhorn to a roaring crowd gave her a feeling of pride. She'd helped make some of the placards and handed them out to masked protestors, who carried them into the street, forming a single-file line and weaving snake-like back and forth to take up the whole street. On the train ride back, her father explained terms like *complicity*, *escalation*, and *agent orange*. After that, she read the newspaper constantly and talked with him during dinner about things like the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces agreement, the security treaty, and the continued occupation of Okinawa until her

mother clapped down her chopsticks and moaned.

Unable to sit up in the bed, Emiko turned on her side and took out her father's last letter and a subway map. The letter had been sent from the Hongō Post Office. She saw it was near the little Beheiren office where he'd taken her five years ago. She'd go there first. The police had already told her mother it was almost impossible to find somebody in Tokyo. But it was like when somebody tells you they've already looked everywhere in the room for your lost pen or something, yet you're not satisfied until you go look for yourself.

She counted her funeral offering money. At three hundred fifty yen per night, and if she ate mostly ramen, which she loved, she'd be able to stay in Tokyo a week or so. It would have been nice to lie in the bunk a little longer, thinking, but she heard the apron woman shuffling towards the room. "All right in there? Guests can't stay here during the day."

She crammed her backpack into a wooden box at the foot of the bed, turned its tiny key, and climbed down the ladder.

"Is there a phone?" she asked the man out in the hallway. She wanted to call Jun-oba, tell her she'd come to Tokyo so she wouldn't wonder what happened.

He looked annoyed, as if tired of being asked this question. "Not in here. There's one down at the corner in front of the bar."

Emiko stood on the sidewalk looking at her subway and train map. She felt someone bump her, then tap her behind. A greasy-haired man with a gold tooth and snake tattoos on both arms stopped and looked her over. "Pardon me, Sister. This sidewalk's narrow, isn't it?" He grinned, and she saw a second gold tooth. Emiko backed up to the Sanya House wall and kept studying the map, ignoring him.

"Here, here, that's not polite, Miss. I was talking to you." He rolled his Rs *yakuza* gangster style.

Emiko in high school had amused her friends talking like

a yakuza. “*Damarre bakarro*,” she shot back at the man. Shut up, fool. Although she said it with a smile just to be safe.

The man stood gaping at her, his grin gradually widening. “Just the type,” he said. “You’ll be perfect. Those long legs. That butt. And that sassy mouth. Throw that map away, Sister. I’ve got a job for you that’ll change your life.” He handed her a business card. *Hi Crass Bar*.

“Sorry,” Emiko said. “I don’t do *crass*.” She rolled the R on the English word, too.

The tattoo man laughed and flicked the card she still held. “*Kashikoi*. Smarty. Call me when you’re hungry.” He set off down the street with an exaggerated swagger.

Satoru came out of the hotel still holding his green bundle and stopped beside her as if he’d expected her to be waiting for him. He ran his fingers through his bleached hair. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing.” —Except was she ever going to come across a normal guy on this trip? But maybe that wasn’t fair. None of the “normal” guys she knew from high school interested her, to tell the truth.

Satoru looked down at the sidewalk. “My friend says there’s a place in Shinjuku where I ought to hang out.” He shifted on his feet, seemed a little scared. “You could come, too.”

“Thanks. But I need to make a phone call and take care of a few things. We’ll probably meet up again here tonight—at Sanya House bedtime.”

Satoru stood looking up and down the packed street, then shrugged. “Sure. Eight o’clock, right?”

“Maybe you should call your parents, tell them you got here all right.”

“Can’t. I need to get the name of some computer school first. I had to promise I’d enroll. Did you throw that newspaper away?”

“Yeah, but you can find them in the trash cans everywhere.” This is what it must be like to have a younger brother, Emiko thought. She kind of liked it, but at the same time it was annoying. Finally, Satoru said “Bye” and walked towards the station.

She found the red pay phone on the corner. Not knowing how much it would cost to call, she put in all her change, a whole handful, and called the Kitayama factory.

“*Moshi moshi*. Hello. Emiko Ozeki here. I need to speak to—”

“Emiko! Just a minute. I’ll get Jun-oba right away. She’s so worried.”

It turned out *angry* might have been a better word. “Emiko, what do you mean going missing like this? Where are you? They saw your bicycle at the station. You can’t just—”

“I’m fine, Jun-oba. Just listen. I came to Tokyo to find my father. With Mom gone, Dad’s all I have left. You have to understand. He’s here somewhere. I have to find him.”

Jun-oba sniffed. She might have been crying. “Emiko-chan,” she said. “I hope you find him. I really do. But, Emiko, he’s not your father.”

“What? Jun-oba, what do you mean?” Was she saying a man who suddenly disappears like that is no father to you?

The phone clicked off. The time had run out. Emiko had no more change. Oh, forget it. One advantage of coming to Tokyo was that she didn’t have to deal with Jun-oba any more.

Potential witness

*The others go home.
With the fireworks over,
how dark it's become.*

—Masaoka Shiki, *haiku*

The red flash burst up behind the ridge before they heard the explosion. Juan dropped flat onto the prickly grass, the ground vibrating beneath him. His ears were ringing. He lifted his head to look through the cloud of dust and smoke. All the men were lying flat, face down, gripping their rifles. He saw a few heads pop up like his, but not all of them. The ridge was supposed to have been abandoned. Somebody had made a mistake.

Another flash, then the boom, and dirt shot up behind him. Some of the men were slithering back down towards the trees at the base of the hill. Juan fired some shots at the top of the ridge and started backing down, too.

“Take out that mortar.” It was Lieutenant Joss. “Spread out. Up the hill, ladies. Up to grenade range.” Hunched over, Joss started zig-zagging towards the ridge of the hill, grenade in one hand and waving his men on with the other.

In Puerto Rico, Juan was a high school center fielder. Now in his early twenties, he could still throw farther, more accurately than anyone in the platoon. He stood up, ran, cocked, and threw. A blaze of white blinded him. It was the last thing he remembered.

He awoke strapped into a sitting position in a hospital

bed. His chest throbbed with pain. He noticed a wide bandage there and broke into a cold sweat wondering what it was covering.

“You’re going to be all right, soldier.” A young medic with a clipboard peered at him through thick glasses. “Three broken ribs. Some lacerations. Give a shout if you need any pain medication.”

“Lacerations?”

“No big deal.”

“I want to see.”

The medic looked at his clipboard. “Almost time to change the bandage anyway.” He peeled it off. “You’ll have a few scars when it heals. That’s all.”

“Where am I?”

“U.S. Army Field Hospital, Camp Oji, Tokyo. You’ve been here two days. Little break from Vietnam.”

Juan remembered trying to take the ridge, knock out the mortar. Nothing after that. “The rest of the platoon?” he asked.

“Don’t know. CID guys were here to question you. You’ve been unconscious till just now.”

“Criminal Investigation Division?” Juan couldn’t imagine what he’d done.

“They’ll be back.”

As the pain killers kicked in, Juan felt better. He realized the pain in his chest was the broken ribs, not the lacerations. They told him there was nothing to do for the ribs except wait it out. He started to eat the mushy food they gave him. A nurse came to give him a bedpan to pee in. She was heavysset and kind of butch. But she was a woman, and he was aroused at her touch—until she gave him a quick smack. Anyway, that was good. He was still functioning down there.

Later, the nurse brought a walker. This was humiliating.

He eased out of bed, keeping his upper body straight, and held onto the handles, light-headed, making his first sortie to the toilet. He felt stronger the next day and was soon walking step by step on his own.

“Feel up to going downstairs?” the nurse asked. “There are some people who want to talk to you.”

She led him into a bare office that smelled like Clorox. Two men in army haircuts and tan suits showed him their CID badges. The first stage of their interview seemed to be glaring at him as he maneuvered himself, flinching, onto a metal chair. Were they waiting for him to fall on his knees and confess to something? Juan raked through whatever memory he had left of the battle. Still nothing after the flash. He hadn’t even been able to find out if the ridge had been taken or not.

The two tan-suits sat close in front of him flipping notes. “Tell us about the Bighorn Ridge battle,” the one with a uni-brow said.

“You mean”

“You don’t know what we’re talking about?” the one with a twisted ear said.

“We were taking a ridge. Mortar on top. I guess I got hit. I remember that much.”

“A ridge your lieutenant told you was held by a single enemy soldier. Is that correct?”

Juan nodded.

“Would you say *yes* for the record. This is being recorded.”

“Yes. That’s what our lieutenant thought.”

The one with the ear said, “To be clear, that’s what he told you?”

Juan nodded, then said, “Yes.” He couldn’t imagine where this was going. Had he done something wrong he didn’t remember?

“And did Lieutenant Joss brief the platoon on how he

knew there was only one man on the ridge—and that the ridge needed to be taken? Neither of which was correct.”

“No, Sir.” Juan recalled that Joss had gotten key details wrong previous to this. He didn’t say anything about that but asked, “Was anybody else hurt?”

The unbrow guy chipped in, “Two men killed. You really don’t know that?”

“I remember a white flash. Then I woke up here in the hospital.”

The investigators eyed each other, flipped through pages in their notebooks. One read out, “traumatic amnesia.”

“OK,” the other said. “Let’s turn to the months before the battle. Have you ever witnessed behavior by Lieutenant Joss that unnecessarily put his men’s lives in danger?”

The answer Juan hesitated to give was yes. Joss often ignored parts of his orders simply because he loved a fight. And of course there was the Vietnamese farmer Joss shot in the face. He’d said he thought the guy was armed. “Um, I couldn’t say” was what Juan came up with.

Both investigators started to speak at once. They told him others in the platoon had accused Joss of being criminally reckless but were starting to walk back their testimony. “They’re still under his command,” one said. “We have to assume they’re afraid of repercussions.”

“But you’re safely out of his hands here,” the other explained. “So you’ll need to tell us everything you know about this man.”

Juan shifted in the chair, which sent a sharp pain through his rib cage. He flinched, emitting a little cry.

The unbrow frowned. “You’re hurt. There’s time. We don’t need to do it today.” He flipped back a page in his notes. “Broken ribs. You could be sent home for six to eight weeks, but we need you to recuperate here in Tokyo so we can talk to you again. We’ll extend your time here as a poten-

tial witness as long as necessary.”

That was OK with Juan. He didn't have much reason to go back to Puerto Rico. His mother and father were divorced and remarried to people he hardly knew. Both parents had turned a cold shoulder to him when he insisted on enlisting. He had no brothers or sisters.

“Get some rest for now,” the unbrow said. He clicked off the tape recorder, and Juan was dismissed.

Two MPs were escorting a soldier down the corridor. Juan turned to look. It was Lieutenant Joss. Joss stopped, the aggressive red flush that Juan knew quite well coloring his face. “Gomez. You. I should have known why they brought me in.”

“Come along, Sir,” ordered an MP big enough to be a bouncer. He took Joss's arm. “You're not to talk to any witnesses.”

Through his teeth Joss grunted, “Witness all you want, Gomez. Just remember. I'll see you back in Nam.”