

to get hopelessly stuck in my mouth This has happened to me before, this desperate, cornered feeling When could it have been now, let me see

And searching for the answer, Toshio woke from his dream pressed flat against the wall by the buttocks of his wife, Kyoko, curled up, shrimp-like, beside him. A mean push sent her back to her side of the bed and knocked something to the floor.

Aha, the English conversation book Kyoko was mumbling over before they fell asleep. That explained to Toshio where his weird dream had come from.

An old American couple that Toshio had never met were coming tonight to stay with them. A month ago Kyoko, all excited and waving a red-white-and-blue-bordered air-mail envelope, had said to him, "Papa, the Higginses are coming to Japan! Let's have them stay here." She had met Mr. and Mrs. Higgins that spring in Hawaii.

It was a small operation, true enough, but Toshio ran a studio that produced TV commercials, and hoping to make up for the irregular hours he kept, meeting sponsors and overseeing film sessions, he had sent Kyoko and their three-year-old son, Keiichi, to Hawaii—not without a twinge of conscience at this unwonted luxury, but he had been able to get a break on the tickets through a connection with an airline and had hit on the small businessman's happy expedient of charging it to the company. Kyoko, who might well have been nervous about traveling alone with a child (What good will my junior-college English do me now?), if anything, took advantage of being a woman and boldly spread her wings, making many friends over there, Higgins among them. Retired from the State Department and living on a pension, he had married off his three daughters and—whatever his former rank might have been—he and his wife were now pursuing the enviable task of traveling around the world on a second honeymoon.

"Americans are so cold-blooded. Once the children get married, their parents are as good as strangers," said Kyoko, conveniently forgetting the way she treated her own parents. "It wouldn't hurt to be nice to them, I decided, and I did them a few little favors. You wouldn't believe how happy it made them. They said they liked me better than their very own daughters." And they treated her to meals in fancy hotels that she could never have afforded on her \$500 budget, took her island-hopping in a chartered plane, and sent chocolates for Keiichi's birthday that July, in return for which she mailed them a mat of woven straw. Then letters went flying back and forth across the Pacific at least once a week, culminating in the announcement that the Higginses were coming to Japan.

"They're really lovely people. You'll be going to America someday, too, Papa. Think of the confidence it will give you to have someone there that you know. And Mr. Higgins says he's going to get Keiichi into an American college."

A good bit of Kyoko's interest in the Higginses sounded like self-interest, he was tempted to say. Supposing three-year-old Keiichi went to college at all, it would be fifteen years from now. What made her think a retired official could

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❖ American Hijiki

(Amerika hijiki, 1967)

A white spot out of nowhere in the burning sky—and look!—it puffs out round and in the middle of the round a kernel swinging slightly like a pendulum aimed straight at me. It has to be a parachute, but in the sky no sight no sound no nothing of a plane and before there's time to think how weird this is the chute glides down into the yard's crazy glut of loquat, birch, persimmon, beech, myrtle, hydrangea, never catching on a branch, never tearing off a leaf. "Hello, how are you?" grins this skinny foreigner—wait a minute, he looks just like General Percival. The white chute falls around his shoulders like a cape, slips down and covers the yard in a blanket of snow. All right, the man said hello, you've got to answer him. "I am very glad to see you?" No, that would be funny for an unexpected guest—if that's what this foreigner is. "Who are you?" would sound like I was grilling him. "Look, you son of a bitch, who are you? Who are you? Who are you?" Three times and if he doesn't answer, bang! let him have it. Wait, don't get carried away, first you've got to talk to him. "How how how" comes crawling up from my belly

last that long? But Kyoko's calculations, after all, were merely a way to justify all the money they would have to spend if they were going to entertain Mr. and Mrs. Higgins. And she was carried away with the honor of having an American houseguest.

"They always said they wanted to see where I live. And they want to meet you." She had assumed his consent before Toshio could say a word. "Grandma and Grandpa Higgins are coming to see us, Keiichi. You remember them, don't you? Grandpa always used to say 'Hello' to you, and you'd wave to him and answer, 'Ba-ha-hye,'" she twittered.

So now it's Hello-Ba-ha-hye Japan-American amity, is it? Twenty-two years ago it was Q-Q Japan-American amity.

"America is a country of gentlemen. They all respect ladies. 'Ladies first' is the motto. And they're all polite. Well, you fellows won't have to think about 'Ladies first' for a while, but politeness is another thing. What worries me is you're going to be rude and make the Americans think Japan is full of barbarians." All of a sudden the War was over and after four years of persistent, ratlike picking on the students to console himself for having to teach an enemy language, the English teacher (he was such a coward he used to sit quivering in the air-raid shelter chanting sutras) walked into his first class and started in on us like this. Then he wrote "THANK YOU" and "EXCUSE ME" across the blackboard, surveyed us all with a look of contempt, and said "Anyone know how to pronounce these? No, of course not. This one is 'San-Q,' and this one is 'Eksu:Q:zu-mee.' Got that? The accent is on the Q." He underlined the Q with a forceful stroke that snapped the chalk and sent it flying. Grim smiles filled the classroom. ("Here we go again.") Until two months ago, the Chinese classics teacher had stopped teaching and spent all his time lecturing on the War. "In the final battle for Japan, Heaven shall be with us." And whenever he'd write the characters for "American and English Devil-Brutes" on the board, he would be so overcome with loathing that the chalk would always screech and crack in two.)

"All you have to do is smile and say 'Q' and America-san will understand. Got that?"

The class ended with this "Q-Q" and we went out to fill in the bomb shelter that had been dug around the edge of the schoolyard. If you hit someone with a rock, it was "Q." When you asked someone to take the other end of a beam, it was "Q." Soon we were using it for everything.

It's no wonder we don't know English. After three years of middle school, the only words I could spell were "Black" and "Love." About the only thing I learned to say that seemed like real English was "Umbrella." And nobody understood the difference between "I," "my," and "me." The first thing I learned when I got into middle school in 1943 was how to read Japanese written in Roman letters. At home I found a butter container that said "Hokkaido Kono Koshi" and I realized it was the name of the dairy. That was the first time I had ever deciphered the "horizontal

took the place of English classes, and all we got from the English teacher on rainy days were hymns to the glory of college boys who went to the front.

"American college students do nothing but enjoy themselves, going to dance parties on weekends, that kind of thing. Compared to them, Japanese college students . . . etc., etc." "The only English you kids have to know is 'Yes or no'." When we took Singapore, General Yamashita said to the enemy general, Percival—"and here he pounded on the desk, his cheek distorted in a nervous spasm, his eyeballs bulging—" 'Yes or no'! What valor!"

We had an exam, all right, but on the translation problem you could get full credit for "She's house."

The great villain was Percival. "The foreign dogs may be tall," shouted the judo instructor, "but they're weak from the waist down. This comes from sitting in chairs. Squatting on floor mats gives us Japanese strong legs and hips." A plaque reading "Reflect on That Which Lies Under Foot" hung above him. He stood there with the Union Jack and a white flag of surrender bearing down heavily on one shoulder, his skinny shanks protruding from his short pants. "So all you've got to do with a foreigner is get your leg around to his rear end and slip him over backwards. Trip him from the inside, trip him from the outside, just work on his legs and he'll go down easy. Right? Now, everybody up!" During the free-for-all, everyone would imagine he was fighting Percival, throw the poor old guy down, jump on his back, and get him in a headlock. "Yes or no! Yes or no!"

In the second year of middle school, we went out to the farming villages to do labor service. After the fall of Saipan, this meant what they called "decongestion of dwellings." The floor mats, the sliding doors and windows, the storm shutters of a house would all be loaded into a big wagon and taken to the nearest wartime "people's" elementary school. When the house was just a shell, the firemen would throw a rope around the central pillar and yank it down. You could see signs of how the people had rushed to get out: the bathtub full of water, old diapers hanging under the toilet eaves, a Hotei scroll, a three-pronged spear from feudal times, an empty coin bank (this was "booty" we hid in the hedge and took home afterwards), and a big, thick book filled with nothing but English. "Maybe they were spies." "It could be some kind of code." We flipped through it as if in a treasure hunt, everyone straining to find a word he knew. Finally, the head of the class found "silk hat" and said, "It means a hat made of silk." In that instant, the bare floorboards, the old calendar, the pillar with the mark of a torn-off amulet all disappeared to be replaced by the scene of a ball and men in silk hats. We had always known the words shiruku hatto, but the class-head's translation came as a revelation. "That's amazing," said one boy, "I never knew 'shiruku hatto' meant 'silk hat.'" And even now, when I hear the words shiruku hatto, as a matter of reflex I think, "A hat made of silk."

When he saw the first letter from Higgins displayed conspicuously on the dinner table like a flower straight from Kyoko's heart, the air-mail envelope's garish border caused an unpleasant commotion in Toshio's chest. Not that he was

worried about looking bad if Kyoko asked him to read it to her: it was the simple shock of getting a letter from an American. But Kyoko, overjoyed, had managed to read it and told him what Higgins had to say

"I'll have to answer him. Can somebody at the company translate a letter for me?"

"Well, sure, I suppose so."

"Here, I've got it all written."

Toshio found the letter a schoolgirlish string of pretty clichés. For the moment, he was willing to give it to one of the young men at the office who were hard at work on English in the unshakable belief that a trip to America had been ordained for the future. But on careful rereading, the sentence, "My husband joins me in expressing our sincerest gratitude for your many kindnesses," didn't set well with him and he tore this part out before submitting it to the translator. Higgins' second letter, however, came hard on the heels of the first with the assurance that Kyoko could send her "delightful" letters in Japanese because Higgins had a Japanese neighbor to read them to him. Moved by this show of consideration, Kyoko wrote a long letter on the fancy stationery that Toshio had brought her from Kyoto. Toshio did not ask what was in the letter, but she had apparently sent an open-hearted—and somewhat ostentatious—account of just about everything concerning the family.

"Mr. Higgins says making TV films is the most promising profession in America, too. He says you must be very busy, so be careful not to overtax yourself. Papa, are you listening? This is for you."

Some TV film companies were the kind that Hollywood studios bought, and then there were those like Toshio's that produced a lot of five- or at best fifteen-second commercials at low profit. True, if you looked in the phone book, they would both be under the same heading, but Toshio was not in the mood to start explaining the difference between them to Kyoko, who was becoming annoyed at his inattention.

"Papa, you ought to go to America, too. It would enhance your image."

"No, it's too late for me. Anyhow, the way everybody and his brother is going overseas these days, people who've never gone once may have a certain scarcity value. We're the only ones uncontaminated by superficial exposure to foreign countries."

"That's just sour grapes. And as far as the language goes, you manage one way or another when you get there."

Once it had been decided that Kyoko would be going to Hawaii, she had bought some English conversation records and practiced phrases she would need for going through customs, words for shopping and such, as a result of which she discovered that "They don't say 'Papa' and 'Mama' in America, it says. They use 'Daddy' and 'Mommie.' A 'Mama' is supposed to be a vulgar woman." She proceeded to teach the new words to Keiichi. Toshio had allowed himself to be called "Papa" now that "Otochan" was too old-fashioned, but "Daddy" was

more than he could stomach, and after a spirited argument, he maintained with a finality rare for him, "I don't care what you do in Hawaii, but in Japan I am to be called 'Papa'."

Until we lost the War, any English we managed to learn was written English. Afterwards, it was spoken English, as symbolized by new lyrics like "Comu, comu, eburybody" for traditional children's songs. The English-Speaking Society got started when I was in my fourth year of middle school, attracting the student elite "Oowat-tsumara-izyoo?" one of them, an older boy, said to me in the sunny place outside the wrestling (formerly judo) gym I thought, maybe "tsumara" means "tomorrow" and he's asking me what I plan to do. Before I could make sense of it, though, he jeered at me and said: "They won't understand you if you say it the old way, 'Howatto izu matah ooizu yoo?' You've got to say, 'Oowat-tsumara-izyoo.' Anyhow, habagoot-taimu." He went off laughing with his friends.

I quit school after the fourth year. My father was killed in the War, my mother was an invalid, and my little sister (in her second year at girls' school) ran the house. To feed the three of us I went from a stocking factory to a battery factory to being an ad-taker for the Kyoto-Osaka Daily.

I don't know if it was my appearance that won her confidence—steady-looking for that time, with the bottom two of my seven-button cadet jacket smashed, and for pants, cotton jodhpurs narrow at the shanks—but one day when I had cut work and was walking around Naka-no-shima Park, a girl came over to me and said: "Are you a schoolboy? If you are, there's something I want you to do." She wanted to get to know an American soldier and asked me to introduce her. Sure enough, where she was looking there stood a soldier staring idly at the boats on the river. "I'll pay you. Just meet me here tomorrow."

I knew well enough that "How ah you" was the right thing to say, but I had never tried using it on one of them. The soldier, maybe sensing what was going on, came over to us. "Sukueezu," I thought he said, holding out a thick hand to me. For a second, I didn't understand, then remembered the English teacher, who doubled as manager of the baseball team, explaining to a dumbfounded player: "Sukueezu means wring, press, tighten—squeeze. Don't you remember? You learned if you sukueezu snow, you get a snowball."

When I timidly grasped the soldier's hand, he looked at me as if to say "Is that the best you can do?" and squeezed me back as easily as crumpling up a scrap of paper. I almost jumped with the pain. Maybe he just wanted to look good in front of the girl, but she started laughing when she saw me wince, and the soldier immediately started talking to her. She panicked and looked to me for help, but while I could catch a few fragments—"name," "friend"—I had no idea what he was saying.

Real classwork had only started for me in the fourth year, but there were not enough English teachers and I had this old guy who worked part-time and specialized in onomatopoeic words. "In Japan, we say that streetcar bells ring 'chin-chin,' but in America they say 'ding-dong.'" Nyan was "meow," kokekok-ko

was "cockadoodle-doo." Some kids, deadly serious, would make vocabulary cards that said "chun-chun" on the front and "ding-dong" on the back. The next thing you knew, the teacher would come up with a sentence like "He cannot be cornered" that you felt couldn't possibly be real English even if you didn't know what it meant. After learning English from guys like this, what the soldier said to me could have been a Chinaman talking in his sleep.

I knew I had to say something, started pointing back and forth between the soldier and the girl, when this totally unexpected shout of "Daburu, daburu" came out of me. "OK, OK," he said, looking satisfied and putting his arm around the girl. "Taxi," he ordered. True, there were these humped-over-looking cabs running past now and then, but the problem for me was getting one to stop. When he saw me looking baffled, the soldier ripped out a sheet of paper and wrote "TAXI" in great big letters with a ball-point pen, then shoved it under my nose, whining and urging me to get a cab. Probably realizing it was hopeless, the girl signaled for him to follow and started walking. I looked at the word "TAXI" written in genuine English, then put it in my breast pocket, handling it as carefully as if it had been a movie star's autograph, and murmuring the word to myself in imitation of the soldier's pronunciation. The next day, expecting nothing, I went back to the same place and there she was, holding a half-pound can of MJB coffee and a can of Hershey's cocoa. She looked almost proud of herself. "Know somebody that'll buy this stuff?" I told her about a coffeehouse in Naka-no-shima Park, a hangout for GI whores, where this Korean handled the coffee, chocolate, cheese, and cigarettes that the soldiers used for money. "You take care of it," she pleaded. "I'll give you a cut." When I went to the coffeehouse (they had junky pastries for ten yen, coffee for five), the Korean was out, but the minute she saw what I had, this fat lady who also looked like a dealer said, "I'll take them off your hands." She pulled a roll of bills out of a big, black purse like the ones the bus conductors use and gave me four hundred yen without batting an eyelash. "You got cigarettes? Twelve hundred yen a carton." Another woman in the place, obviously a GI whore, was singing "Only five minutes more, give me five minutes more" in a surprisingly pretty voice.

When it came to songs in English, I knew my share. It seems as though debates, strikes, band, and baseball were the whole of our middle-school education. The biggest loudmouth would represent the class in the debates. "Student Uniforms Pro and Con" was one, but of the pros and cons both, not half could afford the luxury of a uniform. The girls, though, all had nice sailor dresses. I guess it was around December the year after the War ended, I stood staring open-mouthed at five or six Otemae girls who came almost dancing out of nowhere, pleated skirts fluttering before my eyes, along the moat of bombed-out Osaka Castle. Of course, my little sister was still wearing wartime farm trousers then. In the new middle schools (the ones upgraded from higher elementary schools) it was normal for all the students, girls included, to dress as they had during the War. Band was something that the rich kids with uniforms had asked for, and for their first recital they played without sheet music but with a decent collection of instruments—

"You Are My Sunshine," "There's a Lamp Shinin' Bright in a Cabin," "Moonlight on the River Colorado," and the big showpiece, "La Comparsita." A fifth-year student (a local landowner's son who, it was rumored, had already bought women in the Hashimoto red-light district) was master of ceremonies, and when he announced the tango as "Rodriguez's 'La Comparsita,'" the weighty ring of that "Rodriguez's" just bowled us over. Even the Crown Prince used to sing "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," according to the newspapers.

The souvenir photographer in Naka-no-shima was a part-time student at the Foreign Language School and good at spoken English, so I used to go to his place when he was free and get English lessons in exchange for cigarette butts. I needed English for my pimping—if you can call getting one or two women a day for soldiers pimping. The girls were all pale, bony-shouldered aspiring whores who had gotten word that they could meet America-san and get chocolate if they came here, the soldiers all sad-faced boys who stood watching what was then the swift, clear flow of the Dojima River, maybe thinking of home, but not over here in Naka-no-shima because it was supposed to be girl-hunting territory. Amateurs, the girls had no idea how to turn their nicely bagged spoils into cash. My daily cut from selling the stuff to the Korean came to a hundred yen anyhow, which was a lot more profitable than the door-to-door selling of photo magazines and newspaper delivery boxes I did when not taking ads. I gave this job everything I had and started entertaining the soldiers with "I hohpu you hahbu a good-doh taimu" or, leering, "Watto kind ob pojishon do you rike?"—whether or not I understood exactly what I was saying. Kyoko is right, I managed the language one way or another. I guess one school friend who happened by was less shocked at my miserable clothing than the sight of me trading English with the soldiers, because word got around that I was an interpreter ("You should hear that guy's English!") and a lot of the kids I hadn't seen since I quit school started showing up to watch me work.

Once it was certain that Higgins would be coming to Japan, Kyoko got excited about English conversation again, even teaching some to Keiichi. "Goom-mohneen. When you wake up, you say, 'Goom-mohneen.' Go ahead, try it." And: "How about you, Papa? You ought to practice a little. You'll have to show them around—to Kabuki, Tokyo Tower. They were so nice to me in Hawaii."

"It's out of the question. I'm much too busy."

"I'm sure you can manage two or three days. Husband and wife are a single unit in America. People in Hawaii used to ask me where you were. I covered up by saying you'd be coming later."

What the hell are you talking about? The only reason you got to go to Hawaii was because I stayed home and worked! But what really gets me down is the thought of having to show them around Tokyo. The building on the right is the tallest in Japan. Rooku atto za righto beeruingu, zatto izu za highesto. Why should I have to start playing the Naka-no-shima pimp all over again? It amazes me to see anybody grinning and talking to Americans without the slightest hesitation. Walking along the Ginza, I see these young guys happily chattering away

to Americans, the really bald-faced ones strolling down the avenue arm-in-arm with American girls like it was the most normal thing in the world. Sure, there were some in our day who talked to them, too, I remember. Once, on a crowded streetcar, a tense college student got up the nerve to ask some soldiers: "Ho-what-toh do you sheenku ob Japahn?" One of them shrugged, the other fixed him with a stare and said: "Half good, half bad." The student nodded gravely as though he had just had some profound philosophy explained to him. He took the stick of gum held out to him by the one who shrugged, rolled it like a cigarette, and popped it into his mouth, much to the envy of the other passengers. Why was it?—a soldier just had to look at you in those days and he was ready to give you chewing gum, cigarettes. Were they frightened to be in a place that had only just ceased being enemy soil? Did our hunger make them pity us?

But you can't get full on chewing gum. In the summer of 1946 we were living in Omiyamachi on the outskirts of Osaka, near a farm—which may have been why our food rations were often late or never came at all. More or less appointing herself to the duty, my sister would go several times a day to look at the blackboard outside the rice store and come back crushed when she found nothing posted. Once, we turned the house upside-down but found only rock salt and baking powder. We were so desperate we dissolved them in water and drank it, but this tastes bad, no matter how hungry you are. Just then the barber's wife, her big, bovine breasts hanging out, came to tell us, "There's been a delivery. Seven days' rations!" This was it! I grabbed the bean-paste strainer and started out. The strainer wasn't going to be big enough for seven days' worth, though. We'd need the sack. The strainer had become a habit because we had only been getting two or three days' provisions at a time, just a fistful for a household of three, which made a big sack embarrassing. We ran out to the rice store, where a couple of housewives were standing near the stacks of olive-drab U.S. Army cartons. "My old man hasn't been able to do it to me since he got back from Manchuria." "Ain't you the lucky one! Mine comes at me every time I've had a bath and finally got cooled off. Then I'm hot and sweaty all over again." And they laughed obscenely while they waited for their share. I understood what they were talking about and told my sister to go wait for me at home. Her navel always stuck out a little and once a sharp-eyed housewife who used to be a nurse saw her walking around without a top because she had nothing to wear. "Oh, what a cute little outie! But it's going to be kind of embarrassing when you get undressed for your husband," she said right to her face.

What would it be this time? Cheese? Apricots? I was used to these olive-drab cartons and knew we weren't getting rice but American provisions. The sugar-cured apricots had nothing to them, but you felt you were getting some nourishment from the cheese, which tasted pretty good in bean-paste soup. We all watched as the rice man split open a carton with a big kitchen knife and came out with these little packets wrapped in dazzling red-and-green paper. As if to keep our curiosity in check, he said "A substitute rice ration—a seven-day supply of chewing gum.

That's what these cartons are." He pulled out something like a jewel case. This was a three-days' supply.

I carried off nine of these little boxes, each containing fifty five-stick packs, a week's rations for the three of us. It was a good, heavy load that had the feel of luxury. "What is it? What is it?" My sister came flying at me and screeching for joy when she heard it was gum. My mother placed a box on the crude, little altar of plain wood. The local carpenter had made it in exchange for the fancy kimono my mother had taken with her when we evacuated the city. She dedicated the gum to my father's spirit with a ding of the prayer bell, and our joyful little evening repast was under way, each of us peeling his gum wrappers and chewing in silence. At twenty-five sticks each per meal, it would have been exhausting to chew them one at a time. We would throw in a new stick whenever the sweetness began to fade. Anyone who saw our mouths working would swear they were stuffed with doughy pastry. Then my sister, holding a brown lump of chewed gum in her fingertips, said, "I guess we have to spit this out when we're through." The second I answered "Sure," I realized we had to live for seven days on this gum, this stuff that made not the slightest dent in our hunger. Anything is better than nothing, they say, but this anything was our own saliva, and when the hunger pangs attacked again, my eyes filled with tears of anger and self-pity. In the end, I sold it on the black market—which was on the verge of being closed down—and bought some corn flour to keep us from starving. So I have no reason to be bitter. One thing is sure, though: you can't get full on chewing gum.

Gibu me shigaretto, chocoreto, san-Q. No one who's had the experience of begging from a soldier could carry on a free-and-easy conversation with an American, I know it. Look at those guys with their monkey faces, and the Americans with their high-bridged noses and deep-set eyes. And now all of a sudden you hear people saying the Japanese have interesting faces, beautiful skin—can they be serious? Often in a beer hall I'll see a sailor at a nearby table, or some foreigner who seems shabby if you just look at his clothes, but his face is all civilization and I catch myself staring at his three-dimensional features. Compared to the Japanese all around him, he's a shining star. Look at those muscular arms, the massive chest. How can you not feel ashamed next to him?

"Mr. Higgins' ancestors come from England, he says. He has a white beard, just like some famous stage actor." Yes, Toshio knew well enough what Higgins looked like from those color snapshots of him in a bathing suit against Black Sand Beach or Diamond Head, the chest muscles sagging, of course, but the belly good and firm, and Mrs. Higgins standing by in a bikinilike thing despite her age. "He's so white he gets sunburned immediately. And he's hairy, but the texture of the hair is different from ours—soft, with a golden glow, very handsome." Probably it was the food, and for a while after they got back, she fed Keiichi nothing but meat. That hadn't lasted long, of course, but she had started in again recently. "Americans are very fond of steak, you know. Japanese beef is so good, I'm sure

I can make something they'll like." For practice, she started keeping big, American-style chunks of beef in the refrigerator, making steaks every night and serving them with lectures on "rare" and "medium" like some overzealous hotel waiter.

Kyoko put a pink terrycloth cover on the toilet seat, no doubt thinking it a point of etiquette because she saw it done in Hawaii. Their Japanese-style bath worried her—could the Higginsses manage to wash and rinse before they got in to soak? She took special pains in killing cockroaches. She bought a mattress for herself and Toshio, deciding that the Higginsses would sleep in their bedroom. Vinyl flowers in the living room were bad enough, but she enlarged and framed their wedding photo and a snapshot of herself and Keiichi in Hawaii—this, he was pretty sure, was something she had gotten from an American TV show. He complained at first, but it was easier to let Kyoko handle everything her own way. He decided to be above it all and observe the progress of the changing cheap décor from the sidelines.

Once, while I was an imitation pimp in Naka-no-shima, one of my old classmates, a Shinsaibashi butcher's son, asked me to bring an American to their house for dinner. What for? I asked him. The way he told it, his old man had made so much money selling beef it scared him to have the cash around. He had built a new house with doors that opened and closed electrically, but he still didn't know what to do with his money. He liked to have a good time and gave a lot of parties and now he wanted to have an America-san over "to thank him for the trouble we've caused him, making him take a special trip all the way to Japan." I agreed to find somebody, figuring there might be a good chunk of beef in it for me, and brought along a twenty-one year-old Texan soldier named Kenneth after doing my best to explain to him what this was all about. They sat him crosslegged on a tiger skin before the ceremonial alcove of their luxurious villa and put two miniature lacquered tables in front of him, serving one tiny dish after another of the purest Japanese-style catered cuisine. Kenneth didn't know what to do with his long legs, there was no hope of his liking the carp boiled in bean soup or the raw slices of sea bream, and all he did was drink glass after glass of beer. Finally, the kids started to do this terrible dancing and miming of a Japanese folk song. I was climbing the walls with embarrassment, but the butcher looked enormously satisfied with all this, kept puffing on his long, skinny pipe and repeating the only English he knew, "Japahn pye-pu, Japahn pye-pu."

They could never have a repeat performance of that fiasco, but if Higgins made a face and refused Kyoko's cooking, and if Kyoko encouraged Keiichi, who had been happily imitating those awful singers on TV, "Sing for Grandpa Higgins now, Keiichi, retsu shingu" . . . Just imagining the scene, Toshio felt the blood rush to his head.

"Do you think this will fit him?" Kyoko tore off the department-store wrapping and showed him a maroon bathrobe. "I bought the largest size they had. Here, try it on, Papa." She had him into it before Toshio could say a word. His five-foot-nine-inch frame was big for a Japanese and the robe fit him perfectly.

"Let's see, he must be about this much taller than you." She stretched out a hand to indicate the difference between Higgins and himself. "I suppose we'll have to ask him to make do with this. Mrs. Higgins can wear a yukata."

"Look at the Americans. Their average height is five feet, ten inches. For us, it's only five feet three. This difference of seven inches figures in everything, and I believe that's why we lost the War. A basic difference in physical strength is invariably manifested in national strength," said the social studies (formerly just "history") teacher. This fellow might be talking off the top of his head or spouting sheer nonsense, but he was so good at it, you never knew how seriously to take him. Maybe this was just his way of covering up the embarrassment he felt at suddenly having to preach Democratic Japan after Holy Japan from textbooks filled with the censors' black blottings, but at the time of America's first postwar atomic bomb test on Eniwetok Atoll, he scared us with prophetic pronouncements like "If the chain reaction is infinite, the earth will be blown to bits," and "Do you know why the Americans are making us hand over the lead pipes that are found in the burnt-out ruins? So they can send them home as material to block radiation! The Third World War is at hand. America and Russia are bound to fight it out." But he didn't have to tell me about a difference in physical strength making for a difference in national strength. I knew it all too well from experience.

September 25, 1945, was a fantastically clear day. It seems as if there was never a cloud in the burning sky from summer into autumn that year—which is not true, of course. I have heart-withering memories as well of an early typhoon and the rice plants in the paddies falling in swirls, the very footprints of the wind. This tied in perfectly with expectations of a bad crop. But on September 25, in any case (as had been true of August 15, the day the War ended), we had what would have been a "Japanese beauty" of a day if it had not been the day everyone said the American Army was finally coming. We were let out of school—not that we had any classes to speak of, since most of our time was spent cleaning up the fire-bombed ruins. For no very good reason, I had always thought the Americans would be coming in planes or boats, but when I walked toward the ocean from the shelter we were living in there in the ruins of Kobe's Shinzaike, a motorcycle with a sidecar came roaring along the highway carrying a tense-looking policeman who wore a hat with a chin-strap, and following a hundred yards or so behind him was a winding column of jeeps and canvas-hooded troop trucks that I later realized had raced past my eyes in what, compared with the motorcycle, could only have been called a majestic silence.

Six years earlier, I had watched the same sort of truck detachment going down the highway, except then it had been at night and the soldiers were Japanese. The troops had put up with families near Kobe Harbor, waiting nearly three full weeks for their ship to come. Two men stayed at our house, which was great fun for me. When their orders came all of a sudden, it was close to nine at night. I went with my mother to see the soldiers piling silently into truck after truck on the highway, heard orders ringing like the cries of some strange bird, but we looked in vain for

the two men who had stayed with us, swallowed up now in the darkness. It seems to me that eventually a victory song welled up, but this must be a trick of the memory. I do remember that the tears were pouring out of me. The trucks moved off down the highway, heading west, and searchlights sent two unwavering beams aloft, picking clouds out of the night sky.

The Americans also went from east to west down the highway. At first I chased them with my eyes like counting cars in a freight train, but there was no end to them. "Look, they brought along fishing poles," shouted a boy with an egg-shaped head. He was one of the few bare-headed people in the crowd that quickly formed along the road, most still wearing gaiters and army caps. He was right: all the jeeps had long, flexible things like fishing poles that swayed with each bump. "The Chinks went to war with umbrellas, the Americans take fishing rods. They are different," said an old man. I don't know what was supposed to be so "different," but it did seem odd to think of American soldiers fishing just like us for the same fish from the same beaches. But then a young fellow who looked like an already-demobilized soldier answered: "That's an antenna, a radio antenna." In all innocence, I had to admire them: so the Americans took radios along when they went to war!

All at once, without an order or a shout of any kind, the column came to a halt and the soldiers, who until then had looked like part of the machinery with their uniforms the same color as the trucks, sprang out—almost as if they had been shot out—holding rifles. Once on the ground, they leaned casually against the vehicles, looking at us, their cheeks as red as devils'. "Who says they're white? They're red devils!" said one frightened boy of my age as if my thoughts had been his own. A couple of hundred yards east down the wall of people, a cry arose that could have been a cheer or a scream. I looked over to see two American soldiers who stood a head—no, a head and shoulders—above the crowd that surrounded them. As I was about to step into the road to see what was happening, three big men came up before I knew it and, standing six feet from me, their mouths working constantly, started opening packs of gum and throwing the sticks in our direction. They were so offhand about it, we were all too startled to move. The soldiers started gesturing for us to pick up the gum, and I suspect the first one to take a stick did so less out of a willingness to accept charity than a fear of being punished if he refused. This was a man in a crepe undershirt and knee-length drawers, brown shoes, and garters to hold up his socks, who timidly stretched out his hand and showed not the least pleasure at having received a stick of chewing gum. The rest were like pigeons flocking for beans.

I had never thought much about it until then, but the second I saw the American soldiers I remembered the judo teacher's spirited lecture on how easy it would be to knock down the hairy beasts if you got them below the waist, where they were weak. Half seriously, I looked them over—and my illusions died on the spot. Maybe General Percival was an exception, because the soldiers I was looking at now had arms like roof beams and hips like millstones, and underneath pants

that glowed with a sheen our civilian uniforms never had, you could see their big, powerful buttocks. I had been granted beginner's status in the Martial Arts Society and I knew how to trip up the biggest lugs in school, but I could never do a thing to these American soldiers. What magnificent builds! No wonder Japan lost the War. Why were we fighting these giants to begin with? If you went after these guys with the wooden rifles we used in bayonet drill, they'd snap in two. Feeding us like pigeons began to bore them after a while, I suppose, and the soldiers climbed back into their trucks. A few people ran after them, as though sorry to see them go, but a soldier grabbed up his rifle and scared the daylight out of them. The soldier laughed, and jeering laughter rose in the crowd as well.

Next day, there was labor service at the customs house. We had to throw all the papers in the building out of the windows. Everything was to be burned, supposedly as part of a "major clean-up," but whatever they didn't want the Occupation Army to find had certainly been taken care of long ago. This was sheer madness inspired by an overdose of fear, because the most these papers had on them was lines. If they're going to burn these, I might as well take them, I decided, because all I had for notepaper then was the backs of old cash memos from the stationer's. I stuffed some in my shirt, but this was not the customs house for nothing. My smuggling was uncovered in no time and the papers burned to ashes.

Just three months earlier, we had gathered in front of the customs house and walked to the beach at Onohama, weaving in and out of the Mitsui and Mitsubishi warehouses crammed into the area, to build a protective wall for Japan's latest piece of weaponry, a 125-mm. anti-aircraft gun they said could pierce steel plating at an altitude of 50,000 feet. "Equipped with radar and gearing, this gun is capable of firing at planes that are approaching, overhead, and going—all three," explained the platoon leader. Kobe was thus protected by a veritable wall of iron, he said, but there were only six of these guns. He also let us look through his binoculars. You could see Jupiter perfectly even though it was broad daylight.

The B-29s that made a straight line across Osaka Bay and attacked the city on June 1 met with a savage barrage of fire from these 125-mm. guns that failed to down a single plane. I tried to be encouraging. "What fantastic guns! They really spit fire!" But the soldiers, unfazed, answered matter-of-factly: "That is why they're called spitfires."

Then, I had been helping the Army shoot back at the Americans. Three months later, I was cleaning up to receive them as guests. The only difference was that work on the gun emplacement got me a loaf of bread, while for labor service after we lost I always got money—one yen fifty sen a day. Once, during the lunch break at the customs house, I went down to the beach. Both the anti-aircraft gun and the radar antenna (it looked like a fish grill) had disappeared without a trace. The only things on the beach were a few dozen concrete pipes, and in the water a line of small warships, American minesweepers cleaning up the mines the Americans themselves had planted.

"How old is Mr. Higgins?" it suddenly occurred to Toshio to ask.

"I'm not sure. Sixty-two? Sixty-three? Why?"

"Did he ever say he fought in the War?"

"No, of course not. Who'd go to Hawaii for a vacation and talk about such awful things?" Then Kyoko added, "Except you." She hurriedly went on: "Please don't start talking about the War, even if he did fight in it. It won't make him feel very good to hear that your father was killed."

Whenever Toshio brought a friend his own age home for a drink, the liquor at its height would call forth war songs, stories of experiences in the war effort, and Kyoko, feeling left out, would grumble, "It's so stupid, the same old stories over and over," which was probably why she had included this warning in Higgins's case. She need not have feared, however: Toshio did not know enough English to share war stories with an American.

"You just have to forget these terrible things. Every summer they come out with new war stories, more memoirs—well, I just hate it. I mean, I remember my mother carrying me piggyback into the air-raid shelter, I ate those starchy wartime foods, but I hate the way they dig up the War and bring back memories of August 15 year after year after year. It's as though they're proud of having suffered so much."

In the face of Kyoko's increasingly earnest appeal, Toshio could only remain silent. At the company, whenever he would let slip a remark or two on the air raids or the black market, the younger men would smile faintly as if to say "Here we go again." The fear would suddenly overtake him that the others were seeing through a tale that grew more exaggerated with each telling, and he would cut himself short with a pang of emotion. This coming August 15 would be the twenty-second anniversary, after all. Why shouldn't his stories be taken as an old man's senile prattling?

On August 15, I had my mother and sister with me in our shelter in the Shinzaike ruins. It might sound funny to say that they were with me, a fourteen-year-old boy, but fourteen-year-olds were the only ones left in Japan by then who could be called upon to do a man's work. I was the only one who could bail out the shelter when it rained or go to the well when the pipes failed. My mother was practically an invalid with her asthma and neuralgia. I can't be sure now whether it was the day before or that morning, but the word was passed that some important news was coming. I probably heard it from one of our neighbors. (We had lots of neighbors living in shacks of galvanized sheeting put up where a wall had been left standing, or in air-raid shelters with three-foot-high roofs.) I went to join the group of thirty or so in the neighborhood council who had to gather in front of the still intact Young Men's Association because the neighborhood council building had been destroyed. "I'm telling you, they're going to declare martial law." "Maybe His Majesty himself is going to take command of the Army?" There had been a major air raid on Osaka on the fourteenth, and Kobe itself had been strafed by carrier planes; none of us had the slightest idea that the War would end the next day. We heard the strangely disembodied voice saying "... and thus am torn

asunder ... to bear the unbearable, endure the unendurable ..." but we were more mystified than anything else. The announcer solemnly reread the Emperor's proclamation, and the broadcast was over. Everyone probably realized in a vague sort of way that the War had ended, but nobody wanted to risk being the first to let it slip out. "Harmony has been restored, that's what it means," said the head of the neighborhood council, the white hairs conspicuous on his long-unshaven head. His choice of words brought to mind the "restoration of harmony" between Ieyasu and Hideyori after the Summer Siege (or was it the Winter Siege?) of Osaka Castle over three hundred years ago, but it conveyed no immediate sense of our having lost the War. I suppose I was in a state of excitement, because for a while I didn't notice the streams of sweat that had come from standing under the burning sky, but then I walked straight back to the shelter. "It looks like there's no more war, Mama." My little sister, combing the lice from her hair, was the first to answer. "You mean Father's coming home?" My mother went on silently rubbing her skinny knees with talcum powder, and after a while said only, "We'll have to be careful."

"Look! The B-29s are dropping something," my sister shouted. At the time, I was trying to get what little coolness was available in the hot, steamy shelter by blowing into my shirt. "Get back in here, stupid!" They might have been more bombs. "It's all right, they're just parachutes." When I timidly stuck my head out, the sun was on its way down, casting its red glow on Mt. Rokko, and the three-plane formation of B-29s had already flown so far that they were beginning to blend into the contrasting deep blue of the sky above the ocean. In a long band that started directly overhead, countless numbers of billowing, overlapping parachutes were streaming westward at a slight incline, almost as if they had a will of their own. My sister clung to me, afraid, and I held her close, ducking down again just in case. "What could they have dropped?" My voice quavered. The new bomb they dropped on Hiroshima was an atomic bomb, and that was supposed to have had a parachute, but certainly they would never drop so many—and not here, where there was nothing but burnt-out ruins as far as you could see. The parachutes fell more slowly as they neared the ground, then glided in and collapsed sideways when they hit. It was the hour of the evening calm and absolutely windless. The parachutes never moved.

An old man holding his shovel like a rifle and an old woman wearing a scarf on her head in spite of the sweltering heat kept going in and out of their shack and pointing at the parachutes. Amid the strange silence, the first one to start running was a shirtless boy of about first-year middle-school age. I started walking, too, frightened and fascinated to see what the things could be. The first one I came to in a tennis-court-turned-potato-field. The white cloth of the chute was draped over its cargo—a bomb or something—but nobody wanted to go near it. "Stay away! Move! Get away!" a policeman shouted through a megaphone, walking over with his bicycle. I climbed a tree that had escaped burning, to get a better view. All along the highway to the west were white clumps that looked just like

the puddles that formed in bomb craters. "Waah! There's hundreds of them!" I immediately announced my discovery. Some of the white clumps were surrounded by crowds, while others between the highway and the ocean had still not been noticed. An old woman appeared, looking for help. "One of them fell right next to my shelter." "Did you see what it was?" Everyone had watched the parachutes sailing down to the ground, but nobody had gotten a clear look at what they carried. "I don't know, I think it's some kind of big barrel. I have some eggs in my shelter—do you think it's safe to go get them?" The fear of duds and time-bombs was too deeply ingrained. No one was willing to offer his assurances. We just stood there looking fearfully at the white ghost that would suddenly come alive now and then when the almost imperceptible breeze filled the chute.

Their boots crunching on the earth, some soldiers came running in our direction. At last! The dud squad! But no, there were only ten shirtless, unarmed men. They set to work on the chute without order or hesitation. The crowd pressed forward, tightening the circle. When the chute was stripped off, an olive-drab metal drum emerged. I had seen plenty of old, scorched gasoline drums, but this one had the gloss of newness, and there were small English script and numbers on it. Three soldiers pushed it over and started rolling it, oblivious of the thick growth of potato leaves in their furrows. "What is it?" someone finally dared to ask. "Isn't it a bomb?" "They dropped stuff for the prisoners. The Americans take good care of their men."

There was a prisoner-of-war camp at Wakihama, and the prisoners often used to carry freight on the pier, but could these things really be for them? "Well, we're the prisoners as of today," one man said good-humoredly and produced a pack of cigarettes. "These are good smokes, from Roosevelt—no, Truman." He gave one to a civil corpsman. "They've got everything in these barrels!" When they finally got the barrel to the roadside, they kicked it along, then rolled it up into a wagon. As soon as they went rattling off with it, the crowd dispersed in all directions. I ran for those white clumps I had seen on the beach side of the highway. Hell, if they were going to give these treasure cans that had "everything" in them to the POWs, I'd take one for myself. I thought, driven more by hunger than hatred for the enemy. The sun was down, the burnt-out ruins on the verge of darkness. Just as I had run around looking for a shelter in the June 5 air raid, the black smoke enveloping me and turning the afternoon into evening, I made for the white chutes, now searching for what had fallen from the sky instead of fleeing from it, as we had until yesterday.

Every one of the drums was an anthill crawling with grown-ups in a sweat to get the things open with hammers and crowbars. I got yelled at for just looking at them from a distance. On the way back to the shelter, I heard the voice of the old woman who had been worrying about her eggs, now screeching through the darkness: "No! No! This thing fell on our land, so it's ours! I don't care what you say, I'm not giving it up! Get out of here! Get out!"

The Army took charge of the situation. There was too much stuff to give it

all to the POWs, so each neighborhood council would take the responsibility of dividing it up evenly—and quickly, because there was no telling when the American Army might show up. If there were something in a drum besides food, this had to be reported immediately, and if someone were found to have taken possession of any such thing, he might be immediately executed. Sending along sufficient threats, they allotted two drums to each block, though of course anyone who had taken anything from the drums got to keep it. The contents of the drums were ready to be parceled out next afternoon in front of the Young Men's Association, but everything was wrapped in green and it was impossible to tell what was what. "Can anybody here read English?" the head of the neighborhood council asked, trying to smile, but intellectuals like that had been smart enough to evacuate long ago. It was the people who belonged to the place that stayed behind—the tinsmith, the carpenter, the tailor, the tobacconist, the grocer, the Golden Light priest, the grade-school teacher. I was an air-raid drillmaster and plenty used to looking smart in front of grown-ups, but not when it came to English. "How about opening all the packages so everything gets distributed fairly?" Each barrel had contained a single item—nothing but shoes, say, or all cigarettes, and these the neighborhood councils had divided up evenly. Now the first thing we opened were some long, narrow boxes. They were packed full like a kid's lunch box with cheese, canned beans, green toilet paper, three cigarettes, chewing gum, chocolate candy, a hard biscuit, soap, matches, jam, marmalade, and three white pills. These were distributed two boxes per household. Then we opened some round cans that were stuffed full of cheese or bacon, ham, beans, sugar. I felt like taking everything for myself, even if it meant killing everybody there, and I suppose everybody else felt the same. Sighs went up when the sugar can was spilled into a cardboard carton. "Luxury Is the Enemy." "We Desire Nothing—Until Victory Is Won." Whenever I had seen these slogans, it had seemed to me they were talking about sugar. Luxury is sugar; when victory is won, we can eat as much as we like. So on the day we lost, what came falling out of the sky but sugar, along with a bunch of other treasures, including some wrinkled, black stuff like little pieces of thread. This was distributed loose, each family getting what could be scooped up in both hands. It was the only thing we didn't recognize, but nobody had time to worry about that. Anything that came out of the green cartons, even if it had been sand, you would have carefully stowed away, checking your share against what everyone else got. There was even some absorbent cotton, and when a middle-aged lady in glasses asked that it be distributed to the women, the civil corpsman turned her down flat. "No favors for anybody!" he shouted, red with anger. I had a vague idea what the women wanted cotton for. A little after we were burned out, my mother went to the drugstore for advice. "My period is awfully late this time." "So's mine," said another customer about her age. The pharmacist joined in and an embarrassing conversation ensued, ending with: "Still, it's a lot less trouble this way as long as you can't get cotton." Apparently a lot of women stopped having their periods after the bombing started.

"We don't know when the Americans are going to come here. This is a special ration we stole from the prisoners, so get rid of it as soon as you can. Let's not take any chances," the head of the neighborhood council warned us, and the first thing I did when I got back to the shelter was repeat this emphatically. We had gotten into the habit of stretching everything to the limit, so if my mother had said to me, "Let's just have the beans today," I would have looked long and hard at our portion and then cried like a little kid watching his mother put away his favorite cookies "for later." The only reason I hadn't started eating the sugar on the way was my excitement: all I wanted to do was hurry back and show off the food as if I had gotten it through some daring exploit.

My mother did as I said and offered a biscuit and cigarettes before my father's picture in a corner of our shelter. It only occurred to me after I had sampled most of this special ration from America, but if my father's spirit was alive somewhere, what would he have thought of all this? It was so strange—helping yourself to something that belonged to the "American and English Devil-Brutes" who had killed your father and then offering it up before his spirit!

"What is this?" I asked, once the initial excitement had ended. The stringy, black stuff was the only thing that seemed to need cooking, but neither the taste nor the smell helped us to figure out what it was. "I'll go ask somebody," I said, aware of nothing but an overwhelming desire to eat. I ran out and asked the laundry woman. "I don't know," she said, as puzzled as the rest of us, "I guess you have to soak it for a while until it's soft, then boil it. It looks a lot like hijiki." Could that be it? Hijiki was supposedly something they used to cook together with fried bean curd. I had heard that the dish was a favorite of the Osaka merchants' apprentices. Our cracked earthenware brazier was held together by wire, but I immediately got a fire going and set a pot on it that we had saved from the bombing. When I started boiling the stuff as the laundry woman had suggested, the water turned an increasingly dark, rusty brown color. "Is hijiki supposed to be like this?" I asked my mother. She came over to look, dragging her bad leg. "The bitterness is coming out. American hijiki has a lot of bitter stuff, doesn't it!" I tried draining it and changing the water, but still couldn't get rid of the rusty brown. The fourth change of water stayed clear, so I flavored it with rock salt and took a taste after it had boiled down. It turned out to be this sticky, absolutely tasteless stuff like the black ersatz noodles they made from seaweed—only worse. Chewing did no good. It just seemed to stick to the inside of my mouth. And swallowing it was an impossibility. "That's funny, maybe I boiled it too long." My mother and sister both made faces when they tried it. "The Americans eat some pretty awful things, too," my mother grumbled, but we certainly couldn't throw it out. Having been boiled, it would probably keep for a while. We left it in the pot and refreshed our mouths with chewing gum. Nobody ever did figure out how to cook this American hijiki. The head of the neighborhood council asked a soldier about it three days later and told us: "He says it was something called 'burakku teh,' the

tea leaves they use in America." But by then, there was not a speck of it left in any of the shelters.

The narrow streets between the burnt-out houses were filled with discarded silver chewing-gum wrappers. One of the first men to grab a drum for himself had found it filled with chewing gum. No matter how much he chewed, of course, he was unable to get rid of it all. It would be dangerous for him if the Americans showed up and, besides, his jaw was getting tired, so he handed it all out to the kids, who chewed it like cinnamon and threw it away as soon as the flavor was gone. At first, everybody smoothed the wrinkles out of the silver papers and saved them for origami, but there were so many they ceased to have any value and soon the streets were covered with silver paper snow, glittering in the summer sun. This was like hiding your head and leaving your tail exposed. If the Americans saw it, they would realize immediately that the drums had been stolen. But nobody worried about that. The special ration was gone soon enough, except the sugar, which we kept nibbling at, but even after we had gone back to the old boiled miscellanies and starchy soups, the silver chewing-gum wrappers, like the colorful trash spread around a shrine after a festival, kept the special ration of dreams from America alive in the yellow-brown landscape.

"America" for Toshio meant American hijiki, summer snow in the burnt-out ruins, big hips under glossy gabardine, a thick hand held out for him to sukuezu, seven days' rice rations of chewing gum, habagoot-taimu, MacArthur with the Emperor just up to his shoulders, Q-Q and Japan-American amity, half-pound cans of MJB coffee, DDT doused on him in the station by a black soldier, a lone bulldozer smoothing over the burnt-out ruins, jeeps with fishing poles, and a Christmas tree in an American civilian's house, its only decorations electric lights blinking silently on and off.

In response to Kyoko's entreaties, Toshio agreed to have the company car take them to meet the Higginses at Haneda Airport. "You'll be coming, too, won't you, Papa?" she pressed, in answer to which a busy schedule would have been too obvious an excuse. But worse, he hated the thought of being seen through ("What are you afraid of?") if he refused. And so, on to the chaos of the airport and Kyoko flaunting her one-time experience of foreign travel, gliding into International Arrivals with "Oh, look, Keiichi, remember we got on the plane over there? And customs is way over there."

"I'll be in the bar."

There was still time until the plane arrived. Toshio took the escalator upstairs. "Straight whiskey, double." He gulped it down like an alcoholic. "I will not speak to him in English" had been his first firm resolve on waking this morning, not that he could have done so had he wanted to, but the fragments of conversation he had used back then in Naka-no-shima might suddenly come to life again and start pouring out under pressure to use English. "No, right from the start I'll give him the old standard 'Yaa, irasshai' or 'Konnichi wa,' and if

he doesn't understand me, to hell with him. You come to Japan, speak Japanese. I won't even say 'goon-nighto' to him." As he drank, the fluttering in the chest that had been with him since lunch gradually subsided and he began to sense the thrill of striking back at the enemy.

The crowd came pouring through the gate: a bearded American student wearing cotton pants and rubber thong sandals and looking as though he was on a trip to the nearest town, a horrifyingly tall couple, a middle-aged man who walked with the quick, high-strung steps of the successful businessman in familiar territory, beaming Japanese travelers who really did have slanted eyes and muddy-looking skin when you saw them like this mixed in with foreigners, Hawaiian Nisei all round-faced with thick heads of hair. "Hi, Higgins-san!" screeched Kyoko, and there he was in blue blazer, gray pants, leather necktie, and the white beard that Toshio knew so well, and with him a little old lady wearing bright red lipstick and looking smaller than she had in the snapshots. Shaking his head "Yes, yes," Higgins walked over to them, hugged Kyoko, and patted Keiichi on the head. Even Kyoko seemed at a loss to produce English right away, flapping after "How ah you" and trying to overcome her awkwardness by gesturing towards Toshio with "My husband." Toshio threw out his chest, extended his hand, and said, "Yaa, *irasshai*" somewhat hoarsely, to which Higgins responded in faltering but correct Japanese, "*Konnichi wa, hajimemashite.*" So utterly unprepared for this was Toshio that whatever composure he had mustered up gave way to a hurried scraping together of vocabulary fragments that would enable him to answer in English, which he felt he must by all means do. "Werucome, berry good-do." Higgins received these disconnected bits with a smile and said in his shaky Japanese: "We could come Japan, I am very glad." Toshio could think of nothing for this but a few polite groans. Meanwhile, Kyoko and Mrs. Higgins were managing to communicate with English and sign language. To Toshio, Mrs. Higgins said the usual "How are you," and he answered by echoing the phrase, his firm resolve by now having disappeared somewhere.

Using "Ladies first" as an excuse, Toshio got Kyoko into the back seat with Mr. and Mrs. Higgins and sat next to the driver with Keiichi.

"You're just terrible, Mr. Higgins. You didn't tell me in Hawaii that you knew Japanese."

"Yes, then I was without confidence. But when we decided to come Japan, I tried hard to remember." During the War, he said, he had studied conversational Japanese at the University of Michigan's Japanese language school and then come to Japan for six months in 1946 with the Occupation forces. Toshio recalled the rumor going around back then that there were Americans walking the streets pretending not to know Japanese, and when they heard someone criticizing America they would send him off to Okinawa to do hard labor. Higgins said he had been doing newspaper work in Japan. If it was 1946, everything had still been a pile of rubble. Speeding along the expressway from the airport, Toshio

thought several times of asking with pride: "Japan has changed quite a lot, don't you think?" Higgins should have been the one to show surprise, but he kept silent while his wife chimed in with "Wonderful, wonderful" each time Kyoko pointed out Tokyo Tower strung with lights or the panorama of high-rise buildings.

"Do you like to drink, Mr. Higgins?"

"Yes, I do," he nodded happily and handed a cigar to Toshio, who had turned to face him.

"San-Q," said Toshio, no longer hesitant about speaking English. But the cigar was another matter: weren't you supposed to snip one end off before you smoked it? American officers used to bite the end off and spit it out. All right, then . . . but it was more than he could manage. When he looked up, Higgins was carefully running his big tongue all over his cigar, which seemed to be absorbing his full attention. He looked like some kind of animal. When he started feeling for a match, Toshio quickly proffered his lighter.

They left the expressway, heading for home in Yotsuya, and as they approached the famous Ginza Yonchome intersection, Toshio, unable to resist the role of guide any longer, said: "This is the Ginza." Higgins would have to be surprised at the glut of neon here. It was supposed to be more spectacular than that of New York or Hollywood.

"The Ginza, I know. The PX was here."

They passed the building where the PX had been, before there was time to point it out.

"If you like, we can have dinner here instead of going straight home," Toshio suggested. Kyoko had made preparations for dinner, but she went along with him, and Higgins, apparently willing to leave everything up to Toshio, stepped gleefully from the car.

Toshio could not decide whether to take them to a restaurant with a foreign chef, or to one serving *sukiyaki* and *tempura*. But Higgins asked: "Is sushi here?"

"You eat sushi, Mr. Higgins? It has raw fish, you know."

"Yes, there are sushi restaurants in America. *Kame-zushi*, *Kiyo-zushi*, very good."

Mrs. Higgins, apparently startled at the tidal wave of people, kept pressing her husband for information.

"My lovely wife is asking me this a festival?" he said to Toshio, smiling.

Toshio wanted to follow Higgins' reasonably workable Japanese with something clever in English, but the best he could do was, "Oar-ways rush-shu, *ne*," an explanation for Mrs. Higgins in strict GI-whore style. It seemed to have gotten through to her, though, because she nodded and started yammering at him in incomprehensible English. He nodded back and gave her the famous Japanese *sumairu*.

Holding their chopsticks in what should have been an unusable position, Mr. and Mrs. Higgins deftly picked up the bits of raw fish and vinegared rice balls

popped before them by the sushi chef. "In America, too, the different kinds of sushi they call *toro*, *kohada*, *kappa-maki*," said Higgins, drinking green tea and looking as if he and his wife had been in Japan for years.

"Mr. Higgins and I are going to have a drink together, Kyoko, so you take Mrs. Higgins home. —Right, Mr. Higgins?"

"Fi-ne," Higgins nodded, smiling.

"But they must be so tired," Kyoko objected. "And it's not very nice for Mrs. Higgins."

But Mrs. Higgins seemed satisfied with her husband's explanation, to which Toshio added the wholly unnecessary "Stag-gu pahtee."

"Well, all right, maybe we can do a little shopping," Kyoko said, then awkwardly repeated this in English for Mrs. Higgins.

"Don't come home too late," she reminded Toshio as usual, and started off with Mrs. Higgins and Keichi.

"Your son is up until late. Is it all right?" Higgins volunteered a sort of admonition.

True, the children usually stayed home when the husband and wife went out in America, Toshio recalled with some embarrassment. He was pretty sure he had seen that in "Blondie."

They went to a nightclub where Toshio often entertained important sponsors.

"What's this? Are you doing business with foreigners now?"

"No, no," Toshio hurried to explain. "He's been to Japan before and his Japanese is *very good*." He was taking no chances on Higgins' catching some rude remark. But the manager had his wits about him and quickly got two English-speaking bar hostesses for Toshio and his foreign guest. Toshio felt a little awkward with the unfamiliar girls, but Higgins seemed relieved at having been liberated from Japanese and started chattering away, turning to Toshio now and then with a bit of flattery. "Young ladies speak wonderful English." Soon he was hugging them and holding hands.

Aha, this old dog likes the girls, I see, thought Toshio, convinced that he would be providing inadequate service if he failed to find Higgins a woman. Perhaps a call girl tomorrow night? He thought of an agent in that particular line of goods with whom he had had some dealings in connection with work.

"Mr. Higgins, do you have anything planned for tomorrow?"

Higgins produced a memo book, which he showed to Toshio. "Three o'clock, Press Club. Five o'clock, I see a friend at CBS, have dinner. Why?"

Toshio, almost annoyed that Higgins should have so many acquaintances in Japan, said: "That's all right, the evening will be just as good. I was thinking of introducing you to a nice *gahru*."

"Thank you." Higgins did not seem especially pleased.

"How about after you have dinner with your CBS friend?"

"What time?"

"Eight o'clock should be all right."

"OK."

Toshio left the table abruptly with the look of a man who had important business to carry forward. He telephoned the call girl agent.

"He's a foreigner, now, an old guy. I think he'd probably like a really young girl." It would be fifty percent extra for foreigners, the agent said, but the girl would be absolutely stacked. Toshio ordered a girl for himself and they arranged to meet in a hotel in Sugamo.

Higgins was having the girls fill old-fashioned glasses half full of straight whiskey for him and drinking them down in a single gulp. He was not the least bit drunk, however, and from the one bag he refused to part with when the company car took the luggage home, he produced a cardboard-lined envelope. "Nude photos, I took them," he said, and displayed a series of explicit spread-leg standing poses among the hors d'oeuvres and fruit on the table, obviously enjoying the commotion raised by the shrieking hostesses. "My camera work, pretty good, isn't it? I took lots the time I in Japan, too."

For a second, Toshio was ready to pick a fight—I suppose you gave young girls chewing gum, chocolate, stockings, and forced them to get undressed for your camera?—but the feeling quickly passed as he began to get interested in the near-obscene photographs of blonde girls. Suddenly a little blob of something went shooting past him and he looked up to find Higgins pulling a narrow rubber band through the spaces between his teeth. He was flicking whatever food was lodged there in any direction it happened to fly, along with trailing bits of stuff that could have been saliva or tartar but was in any case disturbing to the hostesses, who wiped themselves but did not object openly to Higgins' bad manners.

They went to two more places after that, Higgins totally unaffected by the alcohol he kept gulping down, the two of them harmonizing on "You Are My Sunshine" in the cab and arriving home at three a.m. Toshio showed Higgins upstairs, then crawled in next to Kyoko and Keichi, who were sleeping amidst a jumble of what must have been presents from the Higginses—chewing gum, cookies, perfume, brandy, and the kind of cheap muumuu the Hawaiian natives wear.

He woke with a terrible hangover, called to say he would be late for work, and was still munching pain-killers when he said good morning to the Higginses, who had been up for some time. Higgins, showing not the slightest trace of last night's drunk, stood looking out at the lawn and said: "It needs a little mowing." Kyoko had done a thorough job on the inside of the house but had not gotten to the yard and, yes, it was an overgrown jungle, punctuated here and there with a touch of dried dog shit. Toshio thought it rather considerate of them to serve Higgins iced coffee, but this he curtly refused, asking instead for green tea. He ate only a single slice of bread, never touching the salad or the fried eggs, then asked: "Do they sell English-language newspapers around here?" They ought to

have them at the local distributor's, Toshio answered, still in too deep a fog to go out and buy one for his guest.

"I'm taking Mrs. Higgins to the Kabuki theater today," said Kyoko. "She says her husband is going to be busy. We'll be eating out, so what will you do?"

Toshio could hardly say he was going to buy a couple of women with Higgins, and Higgins, who could certainly overhear this conversation, was busy licking another cigar and never said a word. "That's all right, I'll find something to do," said Toshio.

Mrs. Higgins had gotten hold of Keichi and was trying to make him learn English pronunciation. "Good morning, how are you?" He kept responding with sheer nonsense, obviously wanting to be left alone, but she would not give up.

"Why don't you leave Keichi with your mother?" Toshio suggested quietly in the kitchen.

"She's not feeling well. Why?"

"You're sure to be coming home late tonight, and spending all that time with grown-ups will just tire him out. Besides, he'll get into the habit of staying up late."

"Don't worry, he gets along beautifully with Mrs. Higgins, and he can learn a little English from her, too." Kyoko may have thought Toshio was finding fault with her for leaving the house like that with Mrs. Higgins, and she added sulkily: "Here's a better idea. Why don't you come home early and baby-sit? I don't see why you're so worried about him developing new habits. He never goes to bed until you get home, no matter how late. He says he's 'waiting up for Papa.'" With this unfavorable shift in wind direction, Toshio left the kitchen. Keichi's happy twittering attracted his attention to the yard, where Higgins, cigar in mouth, was slowly pushing the lawnmower they had bought when the lawn was first planted and left thereafter in the storage shed. His form was a perfect replica of the advertising posters.

"Oh, please, Mr. Higgins," shouted Kyoko, "please don't do that." And to Toshio: "I asked you to mow the lawn, didn't I? That thing is too heavy for me. I'm so embarrassed."

The ladies were going to the beauty parlor and then on to Kabuki, they said, departing with Keichi after lunch. Toshio's hangover had passed, but he could not leave Higgins at home alone and, for something to do, suggested a beer after Higgins had finished mowing and had rinsed himself off in the bath. "Have you got whiskey?" Toshio found himself keeping Higgins company in an authentic drinking bout with the sun still on high and pouring himself whiskey-and-water even after Higgins had left for his three o'clock appointment, when it was too late to go to work. Having nothing better to do, he peeked into the second-floor bedroom and found it littered with Mrs. Higgins' clothing. Inspection of a suitcase revealed a dozen or more gaudily colored panties that he could not conceive of as belonging to that little old lady.

Toshio was good and drunk by the time they met at Hotel N at eight o'clock

"What do you say?" he started in playfully on Higgins, "You can take both girls and I'll keep out of your way. You've got a numbah one gahru tonight, old boy Caviar. You noh? Caviar inside." Higgins did not understand. "In a word, cunt. You noh? Eets rike caviar inside." Higgins, it appeared, had fooled around quite a bit in his day, because he recognized this and laughed aloud when he heard "octopus trap." "I know 'string purse,'" he volunteered.

They found the agent alone in the Sugamo hotel, his attitude wholly changed from what it had been last night when he was so quick to make promises. "There's just a limited number of girls who are willing to take foreigners. And you didn't give me enough time. I did manage something, but she's not so young. I absolutely guarantee her technique, though." She was thirty-two, he said, and used to work the American base at Tachikawa.

"How about mine?"

"For you, I've got a real nice one. Practically untouched."

"Look, wouldn't she take him if I doubled her fee? This guy is an important customer." What if Higgins decided he didn't like the thirty-two-year-old? Toshio couldn't give him inferior goods after his promise of a numbah one. He was getting frantic.

"I'm afraid I can't force the girl," the agent said almost loftily, "but I will talk to her and see."

"Please try. Money is no object."

He went to the room where Higgins was waiting. He was sitting in the ceremonial alcove to avoid the bedding spread all over the matted floor, and fiddling with his camera.

"Is it all right to take pictures, the young lady?" he asked.

Face shots would be no problem, but if they were going to be obscene photos like last night's, Toshio could not be sure. "OK, I'll try negotiating," he said, now the compleat pimp.

Twenty minutes later the two girls arrived. The agent motioned Toshio aside. "I got it all worked out. It looks OK for a double fee."

"How about photos?"

"By which you mean . . . ?"

"Nudes. There's nothing to worry about. He's going straight back to America."

"Well, the girl will have to decide that for herself. You'd better talk to her," he said, as if he expected her to refuse.

The young one was a slender beauty who could pass for a fashion model, the graduate GI whore—sitting slouchy and sullen—was a tough-looking woman with a square jaw. The two seemed not to know each other. Higgins stayed quiet in his alcove seat. This called for a little pumping.

"What's your name, honey?"

"Miyuki," said the younger one.

"Meet mistah Higgins-san," he said, figuring there was no need to use a

pseudonym. "Your room is over here." He showed them the way, letting Higgins into the room first and explaining to the girl, "This American likes cameras and he wants to take your picture. He'll be going straight home, and you'll just be in his album to represent Japanese womanhood. Of course there'll be some money—"

"Not me, mister. No deal." She glared at him as if he had been the one with the camera.

Dragging himself back to his room, he found the graduate in a black slip, and though his heart wasn't in it, he gave himself up to his drunkenness and took his clothes off. He had no idea what it was supposed to mean, but the minute he lay down she purred "Baby, I'm a widow," and stretched out on top of him, whining. Her famous "technique" was strictly for her own satisfaction. Maybe this was what she had learned to do for foreigners. She started kissing him all over and digging her nails in, while Toshio struggled like mad to keep the brand of infidelity from being impressed on his skin. His only stimulus the exact opposite kind of scene that he vividly imagined must be taking place in the next room between Higgins and Miyuki, who could justly be called a beautiful little girl, Toshio eventually climaxed and went to take a bath, there to discover himself splattered with sickening red hickeys on the side, the upper arm, close to a nipple—and suddenly he was sober.

He sent the graduate away and started drinking beer from the refrigerator, but still there was no sign of Higgins. Lying down, he dozed off for a while and woke with a start just as the two of them were coming into the room, Miyuki clinging to Higgins without a trace of her former venom.

"Oh, Higgins-san, your Japanese is so good!" Now she was paying him compliments.

"Thank you very much," said Higgins, rewinding the film in his camera. So he had managed to get his pictures, too.

The agent called to ask how everything had gone. "All right," said Toshio.

"What I'm really calling about is this first-class *shiro-kuro* couple I'm handling. How do you think your foreign friend would like them? I doubt if you can see a show like this anywhere else." It would be thirty thousand yen, complete with a blue film, he said. The man had been a big hit in the Asakusa entertainment district, had stopped performing for a while, and now was making a comeback. His thing was truly magnificent and well worth a look.

"Higgins-san, yoo noh what they call *shiro-kuro*?"

"No, I don't."

"Eh, obsheen show, *ne*. Fahcking show."

"I understand," he grinned.

"Fine," he said to the agent, "make it tomorrow, six o'clock." And to Higgins: "They'll do it here, toomohrow, Japahnese numbah one penis."

Higgins nodded.

Again they went from one *ginza* bar to another. Higgins' job was to

about being treated. Of course, if he *had* taken out his wallet, Toshio would have indignantly stopped him. Kyoko was still up when they got home after one last stop in Roppongi for sushi.

"I wish you had told me you were going to be with Mr. Higgins," she said resentfully. "I started worrying when you were so late. Mrs. Higgins told me you were out together drinking again. I was awfully embarrassed." Was it all right for him to stay out every night? Didn't he have to go to work? There had been several calls from the company, she said pointedly.

"What's the difference whether it's all right or not? He's *your* guest, isn't he? I'm providing all this service, so what are you complaining about?"

"Service doesn't have to mean drinking every night until three and four in the morning. He can't take that kind of pace. He's an old man."

Who's an old man? he wanted to say, but that was out of the question.

"And that old lady could learn some manners, too, the way she goes poking into everything. She was inspecting the refrigerator!" Was the mother-in-law impulse something they had in America, too? she wondered. Unable to pick a fight with Toshio over the guests she had inflicted on herself, Kyoko snuggled up to him. But if this was going to lead to love-making, Toshio had the evening's event to worry about. It would be too strange for him to stay in his underwear in this hot weather, but if he got undressed, she'd see the hickeys.

"I'll take a bath." He pressed her back nonchalantly.

"You can't," she snapped. "Mrs. Higgins washed herself *inside* the tub and drained the dirty water." It would have been so much trouble to clean the tub, fill it again, and wait for the water to heat up that she and Keiichi had gone without bathing. "And you can stand it, too!" She turned angrily away, and he lay down again, relieved.

Aware of the fatigue that follows a binge, that sensation of being dragged into darkness, Toshio was still wide awake in another part of his mind.

What is it that makes me perform such service for this old man? When I'm around him, what makes me feel that I have to give everything I've got to make him happy? He comes from the country that killed my father, but I don't resent him at all. Far from it, I feel nostalgically close to him. What am I doing when I buy him drinks and women? Trying to cancel out a fourteen-year-old's terror at the sight of those huge Occupation soldiers? Paying him back for the food they sent when we were so hungry we couldn't stand it—the parachuted special rations, the allotments of soy-bean residue that was nothing but animal feed to the Americans? Maybe it's true they were just getting rid of their agricultural surplus on us, but how many thousands and thousands of people would have starved to death if the Americans hadn't sent corn when they did? Still, this doesn't explain why I feel so close to Higgins. Maybe he feels that same nostalgia, recalling the days when he was here with the Occupation. Considering his age, the time he spent in Japan might have been the fullest period of his life, something he had been missing: never being the one he comes back here. That might explain his

almost insulting behavior, his serene willingness to let me go on buying him drinks. That's not hard to understand. But the question is, why should I go along with it? Why should I be so happy to play the pimp the way the grown-ups did back then? Nothing holy rubs off on me for drinking booze with some lousy Yankee. Could it be that I'm feeling nostalgic for those days, too? No, that shouldn't be. Those were miserable times, when you were so hungry you learned to chew your cud like a cow, bringing the food back for a second, a third taste. Swimming out from the beach at Koroen and being chased by an American boat and almost drowning, getting beaten up in Naka-no-shima by an angry American soldier whose girl had run out on him: no, any way you looked at it, there were no happy memories. It was the bombing, after all, that ruined my mother's health and finally killed her; it was America, you could say, that put my sister's life in my hands and caused us so much suffering. Why, then, should the sight of Higgins make me want to do such service? Is this like the virgin who can never forget the repulsive man who raped her?

The new day brought back Kyoko's good spirits. They were be taking a bus tour of Tokyo, something Mrs. Higgins wanted very much to do. "If it weren't for an opportunity like this, I'd never take Keiichi to see the Sengakuji Temple," she said, Kyoko herself far from lacking in enthusiasm. "What are you going to do today? With Mr. Higgins again?"

"Um."

"Come home early tonight. I'm making dinner for them."

Higgins had gotten up early and gone out for a stroll, undaunted by his ignorance of the neighborhood. "There is a nice church," he said with satisfaction, drinking a whiskey. Toshio, usually confident of his capacity, was unable to join him. He could not ignore work completely, and he invited Higgins to leave with him. But Higgins answered simply, "I will relax a little more. Feel free." There was nothing Toshio could do but hand over the key and ask him to lock the door when he went out. Higgins assented as easily as if he had been sponging on them for years.

When Toshio explained to his staff somewhat apologetically that he had a guest from America, the total absence of any hint from him heretofore of contact with foreigners made their unanimous surprise that much greater. "Are we going to move in on the U.S. market? Japanese animation techniques have a good reputation over there." Toshio did not feel like explaining how far off the mark that was. "If you need an interpreter, I'd be glad to offer my services," said another young man, his eyes sparkling.

"No, he's just a rich American here for a visit."

"Wow, that's terrific. An old friend of yours?"

"Uh-huh, from the Occupation." This almost had the feel of truth for Toshio himself. To him, all Americans were Occupation soldiers, and an American child was just a small Occupation soldier. This was something his young staff

could never understand. For them, America was a place you had to visit once, like a famous temple, a place where something holy rubbed off on you, a place that enhanced your image, a traveler's paradise where you could get by for next to nothing if you used your connections cleverly.

They went to the Sugamo hotel again as arranged, Toshio asking on the way how things had gone yesterday. Higgins winked. "She had a very lovely body. But my models in America are more stacked," he said, boasting of the obvious. All right, brother, hold your hat, now you're going to see the *shiro kuro* show and numbah one penis, the pride of Japan. Let not their magnificence astound you. Toshio was eager to get started. Soon the agent appeared with the couple, the man on the small side, about Toshio's age, the woman in her mid-twenties. They bowed with exaggerated formality and withdrew to change their clothes.

"This is his first performance for a Foreigner-san, he tells me. Anyhow, he's got an amazing thing there. I get a complex just looking at it, it's so huge," the agent expressed his earlier opinion. Eventually, the couple appeared in light robes and lay on the floor mattress. Unable to get a good view, Higgins pointed towards the head of the mattress and signaled that he would like to change his seat. "Please, by all means, get as close as you like. Take a good look at Japan's Forty-Eight Holds."

"Fohty-eight pojishon," Toshio explained, eliciting a nod from Higgins.

The man started by plastering the girl with passionate kisses on the lips, the neck, down to the breasts, and then she was panting, her robe opening bit by bit, revealing more and more flesh, when suddenly there was a loud "Thump!" and Toshio saw that Higgins, engrossed in the spectacle, had fallen over sideways from his low pile of floor cushions near the couple's pillow. He reseated himself calmly, without embarrassment. That'll teach you, thought Toshio, and suddenly he realized:

The reason I'm doing all this service for Higgins is that somehow, one way or another, I want to bring him to his knees. I don't care if it's by drinking him unconscious or driving him crazy over a woman, I want to turn this grinning, maddeningly self-possessed son of a bitch on to something—anything—Japanese and make him knuckle under. That's what I'm after!

Soon the woman was completely naked and obviously no longer acting in response to the seemingly endless foreplay. She was truly dying for the man, who now spread her legs and, poised before her on his knees, opened the front of his robe. Indeed, his was equipment worthy of a veteran, for even now it had yet to attain its full heroic stature but rose, ever dark and coiling, in defiance of the coming storm. The man spat into his palm and began to massage himself slowly. Higgins stretched his neck forward, staring intently. The woman by now was frantic, wrapping her legs around the man and pulling him closer. He continued with his prayerlike manipulation, which did result in some additional upthrust, but he was far from ready to come to grips with anything. He went on like this

with his right hand, caressing the woman's body with his left, and after he had taken several steps that were familiar to Toshio from occasions when performance failed to match desire after heavy drinking, he simply lay on top of her. The woman moaned, but clearly union had not taken place. Was this part of the act? But no, the man wore a look of exasperation. He returned to his knees and started massaging himself again, having shrunk in the meantime to something far short of numbah one. Aware at last of what was happening, the woman got on top and used her mouth, but there was no sign of recovery.

Toshio glanced at the agent, who wore a twisted smile and looked very puzzled. The man now had his face down near Higgins' feet and, bathed in sweat, he knit his brows and closed his eyes as if in intense meditation. Every now and then he would spread his legs wide like a woman and stretch them out, while the woman ran her fingers over his chest, his thighs, the desperate valor of her efforts clear to all. Before he knew it, Toshio was straining as if he himself had been struck impotent.

What the hell are you doing? You're numbah one, aren't you? Come on, show this American. That huge thing of yours is the pride of Japan. Knock him out with it! Scare the shit out of him!

It was a matter of pecker nationalism, his thing *had* to stand, or it would mean dishonor to the race. Toshio almost wanted to take the man's place, his own thing now taut and ready. Noticing this, he glanced at Higgins' crotch, but nothing was happening there.

"Yot-chan, what's wrong?" the agent cried out, unable to contain himself after nearly half an hour's struggle.

Lying on his back, too exhausted even to sit up, the man answered hoarsely: "I'm sorry, this has never happened before. I don't know what to say."

The woman, too, was at a loss. "Maybe he's tired. This never happens."

"Well, take a break, have a beer," said Toshio, less discomfited before Higgins than sorry for this man who had drained all his energy trying to achieve erection.

Refusing the beer, the man said with extreme formality: "This has been terribly embarrassing. I will return your money, and I hope to have an opportunity to perform for you as a complimentary service."

"No, not at all, don't let it worry you. This happens to men all the time. Come on, have a drink," Toshio tried to comfort him, but the man fled from the room. Higgins was silently licking another cigar.

"This was a totally unheard-of occurrence. To think that Yot-chan could have failed!" said the agent, recounting tales of the prowess of that magnificent organ. "I'm sure this didn't happen just because a Foreigner-san was here!" he concluded, turning to Higgins with a laugh.

This man they call Yot-chan must be in his mid-thirties, and if so, Higgins might well have been the cause of his sudden impotence. If Yot-chan had the same

sort of experience that I did in the Occupation—and he must have, whatever the differences between Tokyo and Osaka-Kobe—if he has memories of "Gibu me chewingamu," if he can recall being frightened by the soldiers' huge builds, then it's no wonder he shriveled up like that Yot-chan might have been in a state of perfect professional detachment, but when Higgins sat down over him like a ton of bricks, inside his head the jeeps started rolling, the strains of "Comu, comu, eburybody" began to echo again, and he recalled, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the hopeless feeling when there was no more fleet, no more Zero fighters, recalled the emptiness of the blinding, burning sky above the burnt-out ruins, and in that instant the impotence overtook him. Higgins could never understand that. No Japanese can understand it, probably, if he's not my age. No Japanese who can have an ordinary conversation with an American, who can go to America and have Americans all around him without going crazy, who can see an American enter his field of vision and feel no need to brace himself, who can speak English without embarrassment, who condemns Americans, who applauds Americans, no Japanese like this can understand the America inside Yot-chan—inside me.

Exhausted, Toshio said to Higgins, "We ought to go home now. Kyoko's making a sukiyaki party."

"I must excuse myself. Am going to see a friend at the Embassy." And after a "Thank you very much!" to the agent that sounded like pure sarcasm, he walked away with a brisk at-homeness unthinkable after a twenty-year absence from the country.

Toshio found Kyoko in a rage: "The nerve of the woman! She knew I was making dinner for them. All of a sudden she says she's going to stay with friends in Yokohama tonight!" On the table stood a large platter of the finest Matsuzaka beef and enormous quantities of all the other sukiyaki ingredients in anticipation of large American appetites. "Anyhow, the three of us will eat it. And you'd better have a lot!" Then Kyoko started in on Mrs. Higgins. "I couldn't do enough for that old lady, but she never noticed. I was explaining everything on the tour bus, but she just kept reading her English guidebook. And she's so stingy! I saw the things she picked out when we went shopping—all cheap. The toys she bought for Keiichi are like what the sidewalk vendors sell. That doesn't stop her from opening her big mouth, though. I can be standing right there when she gets mad at Keiichi and she'll scold him without a nod to me, his mother. I've never seen such rudeness. They come in here and expect us to do everything for them. All right, they were nice to me in Hawaii, so to show my appreciation I invited them to stay with us, but how long do they think they're going to stay? Toshio? Toshio, are you listening to me? How long do they think they can stay here?"

"Who knows? A month?"

"Never! I won't have it! I'll tell them outright they have to leave!"

Higgins will go back sooner or later, I suppose. But it won't make any difference. As long as I live, there will be an American sitting inside me like a ton

of bricks, and every now and then this American inside me, my American, will drag me around by the nose and make me scream "Gibu me chewingamu, Q-Q," because what I have is an incurable disease, the Great American Allergy.

"Toshio, what are you going to do tomorrow? Just let them take care of themselves."

I suppose I'll get him a geisha next time, for variety. Japahnese geisha gahru, courtesy of Toshio the pimp.

And from a mound that never diminished, however quickly he moved his chopsticks, Toshio went on stuffing his already full stomach with the prized cuts of beef, eating and eating in joyless abandonment as if it had been American *hijiki*.

TRANSLATED BY JAY RUBIN