

THE BREAKING

It was Tokyo 1950, before the end of the American Occupation. In the parents' bedroom closet stood a Russian submachine gun, in the father's dresser lay an unfirable German Luger, trigger melded into housing. Five hundred miles away raged the Korean War, the source, through multiple hands, of the Soviet weapon.

The boy had seen Russians once or twice from afar in the hotel across the street from his father's office building. They were always men, and though in coats and ties and overcoats—even "western" hotel lobbies were cold—they seemed rougher, gruffer than other grownups: Americans of commerce and finance; French and Germans and British of many years' experience in Eastern trade; wiseacre tieless young journalists just arrived from the States or Singapore or London; self-effacing Japanese in brisk, herring bone double breasted suits who worked with—for—his father. "They are Russians," someone would say. Their faces, with their heavy eyebrows, looked vaguely Asiatic, like his father's.

Sometimes after school the boy would play by himself at home, ten miles from Tokyo's hotel and business center, in the shadowy sideyard bordering their white stucco French colonial house. There, crepe myrtle trees and acuba bushes abounded, making for his small frame a forest to stalk in. With his toy rifle he'd hunt enemy soldiers—the enemies being American—through the bushes and trees, and around the small tool shed adjoining them at one end. The Russians were not involved, but it excited him to imagine himself a Chinese Communist, calves wrapped in layer upon layer of cloth leggings as he'd seen in photographs.

At the same time, he'd draw pictures of American war heroes, celebrating their exploits and the numbers of Chinese and North Koreans they'd killed in a single encounter. He'd get this information daily on Armed Forces Radio. "Why don't you draw something constructive?" his older brother, serious with horn-rimmed glasses, asked as he looked at the boy's drawings.

The boy didn't know the meaning of "constructive" nor of the shadows of branches he'd see on his pale wall at night, but the patterns frightened him. He was even more frightened one evening when he heard loud voices from his mother and father's room, where Luger and machine gun were stored. He didn't know if the machine gun had bullets but it was so heavy he couldn't imagine anyone using such a thing—yet he knew they did every day in Korea.

"I'd rather be strangled than kept here," he heard his mother wail at his father one evening. "I want to go back to Marietta!" Their door was open, but he was afraid to draw close. It was dark and the only light was broken by bony configurations of branches on the wall.

The next day two friends of his parents, Major Grimes and Mrs. Grimes, came to visit. She was carrot-haired and he had big ears that stuck out from the sides of his head, reminding the boy of Sad Sack in the stateside funnies they'd be able to get every once in a while.

Major Grimes and his wife lived in the U.S. Army compound at Pershing Heights. They brought him a gift for his birthday, a khaki U.S. Army overseas cap and various gold and blue and white insignia.

"Where are you from, young man?" the Major asked.

"The world," the boy responded.

"What do you like to eat?"

"Food," he answered.

He behaved like that for several minutes before leaving the room, then after the guests were gone he overheard mother and father talking there, in the space between the white mantle and the large brown metallic gas stove from whose dusty white porcelain teeth blue flames flared. It was near the very spot where he'd lain on the carpet some evenings, staring at the pictures in a strange, large, heavy and musty book by a man named Hogarth. He'd taken it from the glass bookcase, and as he looked he'd wondered if

those people with their intestines falling out were real. "I think he needs a spanking," he heard his mother say.

The next day was Saturday and there was no school. The squat little tool shed that bordered the shadowy place with the acuba bushes and crepe myrtles had a sliding door with windows of translucent glass about a foot square. Inside were various old tools and contraptions he'd rummaged through before; this morning he slid open the door and took one of them, a small short-handled dusty axe with a dented blade. Then he slid the door closed and broke every window on it, and every window to its left and to its right. "I know this is wrong," he said to himself, with every stroke.

ROSE YAMASHITA

1

The gold that rimmed two upper front teeth flashed when she spoke; she limped a little as she walked. This afternoon at four, as Rose Yamashita prepared to leave the American School cafeteria, even removing her apron was an effort.

Today was really no different from usual, she thought to herself, opening the drawer to her wooden desk and reinserting the black net that held her yellow hair, then hanging up her apron, oiled from cooking and black from stovetops. She'd begun at 8:00; Eki-san the short cheery accountant had entered just after, and they'd had a bit of conversation: this year on Buddha's birthday Miss Eki's brother would return from Hokkaido for the first time in two years; her mother had at last gotten over the flu that had laid her so low.

By 9:00, Watanabe-san and all the others who cooked were there, and before 10:00, the kitchen steamed and once-shiny windows were opaque with white beads of heat. Today it was Chop Suey, ready by 11:00 when first and second graders arrived for lunch—only the Morinaga milk man was late again and Rose had gone to that nearly abandoned refrigerator behind the kitchen, the one she refused to let them remove, for the four dozen small orange juice cans a friend had gotten from the PX, and so, for her youngest kids, saved the day.

There was the familiar shoving and pushing in line and two trays of food were dropped, but she got them and their remains up fast. In spite of messes the children were sweet and she wished she had time to pat them all on the head, take them into her wearied arms. Soon third and fourth graders came, then fifth and sixth, and finally by 11:50 she saw juniors and seniors standing in the hot room's long line overlooking the crowded, noisy formica table tops and wooden benches. Rose's stomach was not good and she went back to the office, checked the directions in *kanji* and *hiragana* which Dr. Hara had written, and emptied white powder into a glass of water.

As she put the last lid on the last vat from today's lunch she remembered she'd not taken her own, and went for her bowl of rice and hardboiled egg. Usually she ate with Kimura-san or any of her regular crew, but today she was tired and could tell they wanted to go on to the next chore—getting everything in place for the Shepherd's Pie tomorrow—and be out.

And so by 4:00 after she'd helped them complete their labor she was ready to leave at last, stripped of her spoiled white in plain blouse and dark blue skirt. Slipping on her wool overcoat, she thought to check all the dials on the stoves, all the locks on the doors—even though she knew—she thought—she'd done that a quarter hour earlier. She made her way through the now empty corridor, down the curved stone main walk that led from the elegant, ivied two-story stucco main building past the ellipse of green grass bordered by sundial and trees. Then, grasping iron railing, she made her way step by step down two flights of stone stairs and through the black entrance gate onto the street clogged with huffing three-wheelers, squeaking bicycles, coughing trucks.

Sixteen years since the Occupation had re-opened the school in 1946, she mused, reaching for her

pass in front of the turnstile at Naka-Meguro station. Sixteen years of Shepherd's Pies, Chow Mein, Chop Suey, Pigs in a Blanket, Red Spaghetti, Beef Stew, and the occasional fried or baked fish. Lucky she had such good children, she thought, such good staff.

Where was her dance career, she asked herself boarding the first of two crowded trains. Until just a few years ago—she was losing an inch or two from the onset of osteoporosis, Dr. Hara said—she was a head taller than half the Japanese men around her; many of the women barely reached her shoulders. Now, of course, the western-fed younger generation pushed towards her chin and above. This evening as usual both men and women stared at this still-large creature with curled yellow hair and sallow English complexion, and as usual she let it be. She'd known the staring ever since her parents—her father was with the British Embassy—had brought her here when she was eight. It had lost its newness long ago, as she'd grown accustomed to being public Stranger, Other, *Gaijin*. It was hot now in her heavy, high-collared coat, but there was simply no room to shed outer garments. A dozen musty, overheated bodies pressed against hers. More than half the seats—if one could see to count—were filled with men, implacable-faced, reading newspapers or periodicals or violent *manga* comics, or dozing.

Her dance career, she answered herself, lived in her mind thirty-three years ago, when her mother and father tried to talk her out of going to London for ballet and in running from them she'd run straight into the arms of Tatsuo.

He rode by the house one day on a blue motorcycle—in the days when motorcycles, like cars, were few, and bikes were many—just as she was coming out to walk a letter to the shiny little red silo of a post box at the corner; and he had the effrontery—extraordinary for a Japanese—to turn around and come back and speak to her. He was extremely handsome though he had one floating eye, and was taller than most Japanese even though shorter than she and it was not that day but the next when she joined him on his 150-cc, 1928 Kawasaki. In a month they were married, with blessings from neither family. His falling-out with his own father had been so great that he ended up settling for a concentration in engineering rather than architecture at the university, a difference that would prove fatal.

They were happy—oh how so! she recalled as she pressed through the second turnstile at Shibuya, displaying her laminated pass for the dark blue uniformed attendant, then climbed stone stairs to await her second train. They were happy, with the birth of their daughter, his building projects near Tsukiji and on other sites along the bay, and that comfortable western home in the High City, in Chiyoda-ku, until the government called—forced—him to Manchuria. His role was of course logistical and not at all military, but that was no matter to saboteurs of the bridge he was building and what there was of his remains was shipped home nine weeks after he'd left.

She didn't have the money to return to England and her parents. Her father had retired there from the foreign service, but wouldn't send her any, and so, with her daughter now four, she began doing as she could. Tatsuo's friends welcomed her, but as their government began controlling more of everyone's lives and promoting xenophobia, her contacts diminished—no matter that she knew the language, the culture, the people. As for herself, she wanted none of her friends to get in trouble.

She gave private English lessons, until she met Fredrick Blumenthal, an American teaching art at Waseda University. They had no romance, but he helped her get a part-time job in the cafeteria at the American School until it was closed in 1941; in the meantime her daughter enrolled in a neighborhood school where she continued until she was officially no longer welcome.

A cold rain had begun the last few minutes of her long walk up the hill from the station, but except for her hair her heavy coat kept her dry. Once inside her small apartment with the gas back on, it was only minutes before Rose was warm again. She'd bought her box lunch dinner yesterday at the shop nearby

and kept it in the little fridge. Now she ate, wearily, with her lacquered sticks. Her stomach was better after eating and she eased herself down in the chair in her tiny western sitting room, paper and pen in hand, to write a letter. She knew it would be an early evening and that her small Seiko bedside alarm would, as usual, call her to ready for the morning trains sooner than she'd like.

When the war had come, she still had enough contact with Tatsuo's friends to seclude herself far in the country, beyond Kamakura, taking with her a few books for her daughter's disrupted education. For two months they'd even stayed in one of the prototypical temple-caves in the area, where they were tended daily by two Buddhist priests, one of whom made his way to them on crutches. After the Surrender, Rose—nearly penniless—was again helped by both Tatsuo's friends and Fredrick Blumenthal, with one part-time position and another, until returning to the cafeteria in the fall of 1946.

Now an hour later, letter written, she readied for bed, unrolling the *futon* she'd neatly rolled up in the morning in her three-mat room. She laid her letter in the alcove next to the photo of Tatsuo in his student's black cloth jacket with gold buttons, to take to the post box in the morning. As she lay there, covered with a quilt Tatsuo's sister had made, she realized all that she hadn't done today, all that needed doing tomorrow. She must tell Mr. Watanabe to replace the stainless steel bins with the copper-lined ones that Akiyama carries now; she must express her great grief to Kimura-san over the loss of her son on the overcrowded ferry; she must tell the headmaster without holding back any longer there'd be no school lunches in the spring without that additional allotment she'd requested. Then her daughter and grandchild came to mind and the image of the small woman with much smaller infant was replaced by one of several children, Rose among them, playing in golden light near green trees beside a heath in Ryeburn, England fifty-six years ago.

Meantime, on the rain-slick street outside a taxi honked and a late streetcar slowly clanged its way uphill. Rose was asleep, her long length at rest on her short *futon*. Her worn wool coat hung from the hat rack inside the small entranceway, where two umbrellas rested against the wall: one of blue plastic and aluminum; another of persimmon-colored oilpaper and bamboo, too delicate for the train. Tomorrow, it was said, more rain was expected.