ONE

TOM HURLEY dove into the embassy pool, slipping into the hush and cool of the water. On the other side of the world, it was day 226 of the Iran hostage crisis, but here in Tokyo, on June 17, 1980, it was placid, quiet, and, at six in the morning, already hot and a little sticky. Tom was a week into his tour to Japan as a Junior Foreign Service Officer, and for some reason he had yet to adjust to the time change, waking up at ungodly hours. Antsy and wired, he had taken to swimming laps before work.

The pool was directly behind the Grew House, the largest of the three low-rise apartment buildings on the American Embassy housing compound, all of them drab concrete-and-steel structures, designed when stripped-down industrial functionality was actually an architectural choice. Tokyo itself wasn't any prettier. Indeed, given the refinement and delicacy of the Japanese culture, the

general ugliness of the city had surprised Tom, offices and stores and houses jammed haphazardly into every available inch of space. No, what distinguished the compound, which sat on a hill near Roppongi, within walking distance of the embassy, was its size, its expanse, twelve full acres of wide, green sweeps of lawns and trees, the pool and tennis courts and parking lots, everything so *big,* an excess that the Japanese must have found typically arrogant, the way Americans always seemed to spread out and take more room than was necessary.

Yet that morning, Tom was enjoying—quite guiltlessly—the roominess of the twenty-five-meter pool, which he had all to himself, no one else there other than the college-age lifeguard. In high school, Tom had been on the swim team, and when the topic arose, he sometimes implied that he might have competed collegiately if he had attended someplace smaller than UCLA. It was quite an exaggeration, on several levels. He could be terribly vain. Thirty-one, single, in his prime, he worked hard to keep fit and trim and tan. He was tall—he told people six-foot even, although he was a bit shy of that—and he had those mixed-blooded *hapa haole* features that women liked: thick, wavy black hair, a straight nose, angular cheekbones and jaw, long, girlish eyelashes. He was half-white and half-Korean, but when asked about his ethnicity, he always said Hawaiian, a declaration of racial neutrality that, more often than not, let him avoid further inquest.

In the pool, he fell into the rhythm of his strokes, the slight roll of his body between the flutter of kicks. He focused on his technique, trying to perfect something new. As a teenager, he had been taught the standard S stroke for freestyle, keeping his palms flat and pushing back with them like paddles. Recently, however, he'd discovered that world-class swimmers were doing something minutely yet dramatically different with their hands, angling them in during the pull

and out during the finishing sweep. Instead of paddling, they were *sculling*. Their hands were acting as airfoils, producing lift, not drag. Tom had become possessed by the technique, buying books on hydrodynamics and Bernoulli's principle and trying to track down Olympic training films. This was how he was. He fixated, he obsessed, he studied and practiced, and then, in short order, he dropped it altogether. He was a dilettante, a self-aggrandizing dabbler, in almost everything he did, not able to follow through to the end with anything, in particular with women.

But it was early still, in the pool he was still infatuated with his *hands,* the way they seemed to propel him, the tiny adjustment of angles making him more efficient, faster, making him fly.

As he headed over the deep end, he heard a splash behind him. He did a flip turn, and, halfway across the pool, he saw another swimmer coming from the opposite direction. It was a woman, wearing a white bathing cap and a dark blue tank suit, cut high on the thighs. She swam well, arms stroking smoothly, long legs kicking with power. Her face was a blur as they passed, a flash of skin amid white-water turbulence. Tom reached the wall at the shallow end and flip-turned, but since he could only breathe on his right side, he lost sight of her for a lap. After he turned around, he met her at the middle of the pool again, and they kept passing each other this way for ten minutes. Two ships.

All at once, Tom noticed something. Almost imperceptible at first. Then he was sure. She was speeding up. Soon, she closed the gap altogether so they were on parallel tracks, side by side. She stayed with him for four laps, matching his position exactly, synchronizing her strokes to his, and they went along at a relaxed pace, as if on a friendly little jog together. Several times Tom had the impulse to wave to her. She edged ahead of him ever so slightly. He picked up his pace, only to have her pull forward again by half a

body length. She was toying with him, teasing him, making him chase. Every time he accelerated, she accelerated, over and over, until eventually they were at a full sprint, racing.

His technique broke down instantly. He was trying to quicken his strokes, and, just trying to keep up with her, he forgot all about his hands. This was not fair, he thought, his arms and legs leadening. He'd been swimming for a good while before she had entered the pool. She had caught him when he was tired, out of shape, unprepared.

She was two body lengths in front of him. He forced himself to swim faster, every muscle aching, lungs squeezing, dots flashing in his eyes as he flirted with blacking out. He pushed through it. He was drawing even with her, he was catching up. At the shallow end, they flip-turned at the same time. Tom felt himself cruising now, his strokes and kicks back in rhythm, going fast, unconquerable. But when he turned off the far wall, she wasn't beside him anymore.

He stopped and popped his head out of the water. The pool was empty. She was gone. She must have gotten out while he was on his blind side, breathing to his right. Treading water, Tom looked up at the lifeguard, who was dozing peacefully in his chair.

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SLEEP. KENZO OTA needed sleep. He had thought it would be so convenient for the supermarket to be next door to his new apartment, but he had not noticed the air-conditioning condenser on the market's roof, eye level with his bedroom, rattling and humming in unpredictable cycles and not allowing Kenzo a decent night's sleep since he had moved in two weeks ago.

The apartment was a ten-minute walk to Musashi-Koganei train station on the Chuo Line, which was twelve stops to Shinjuku, where he transferred to the Yamanote Line, on which he rode four stops to Ebisu, where he switched to the Hibiya subway line, on

which he rode two stops to Roppongi, where he got off and walked to Azabu Police Station, where he was a detective—an Assistant Inspector, to be more precise. The commute took an hour and a half each way, actually shorter than before, when he had lived in Fuchu.

This apartment was small: two rooms that were the equivalent of ten and a half tatami mats, plus a bathroom and a kitchen. Sort of a kitchen—a sink and one gas burner and a refrigerator cube in a single modular unit in the hallway which faced the bathroom that was adjacent to the front door. The apartment was on the third floor of a five-story ferroconcrete building, and Kenzo had paid, in advance, the first month's rent, an additional month's as a realtor fee, two months' as a security deposit, and another two months' as *reikin,* key money, which was a nonrefundable gift to the landlady in a show of gratitude for being permitted to dwell in a matchbox of an apartment next door to the sputtering din of a supermarket condenser that was making his ears ring.

He couldn't afford to move out, not with all that *reikin,* so he called the landlady, Miss Saotome, and, after sheepishly apologizing for the bother and explaining about the noise, asked if she had something else vacant in her building. Miss Saotome said no one had ever complained about the condenser before, and then was curious how he could even hear it over his own air conditioner, with the windows presumably closed, and he had to tell her that he didn't like air conditioning at night when he slept, choosing not to reveal that he had some sort of dermatitis or psoriasis, they couldn't figure out what it was, and that he was quite possibly *allergic* to air conditioning, because it made his skin feel funny—tingly and itchy—not adding further that even with the air conditioner on, he would have *still* heard the supermarket condenser, such was its volume, its tinniness, its *irregularity.*

On the telephone, Miss Saotome was silent for quite a while,

thinking—Kenzo was sure—that he was neurotic or homosexual, but finally she said yes, there was one apartment available on the fourth floor, No. 401, on the other end of the building, with the exact same layout and rent as his present apartment, but he would have to see it the next day, since she was going out of town the following evening, and, furthermore, he would have to make a decision immediately, since she knew a realty agent was bringing in several clients to look at the place that week.

Just the apartment number, 401, made Kenzo jittery, the Japanese word for four, *shi,* being unlucky, as it was associated with the word for death, but the following day at noon, he met Miss Saotome—young, painfully skinny in her chic French designer dress, with her hair died *chapatsu,* tea-color—in front of the building. They rode up the elevator together, and she let him inside the sweltering apartment, not bothering to take off her high heels at the door, plainly in a hurry, not in the greatest of moods. She slid open the window in the living/dining room and said, "*Hora. Nanimo kikoe masen.*" See? You can't hear a thing.

And other than the faint registration of cars and trucks and buses going by, an occasional siren, dogs barking, a plane overhead, bicycle bells, and the ambient hum of twenty-five million people living and working in the vast, gray, cramped megalopolis that was the Kanto Plain, Kenzo couldn't hear a thing. He looked out the windows—just rooftops, antennas, telephone poles and wires, power lines—and opened the closet door, eyed the floors. "Is it a little smaller than the other apartment?" he asked.

"It's exactly the same. Everything's exactly the same."

He could, he thought, live with this, maybe. But what if the supermarket condenser was in a rest cycle right now? What if there was something else that would rear up when they departed? A transformer buzzing, a nest of crows, wind chimes, the flush of pipes, a neighbor who played disco on the stereo late and loud into the night?

"Is it possible for me to stay here for twenty minutes? Maybe thirty?" he asked Miss Saotome.

"What?"

"I think I'll take it," he said. "I just want to make sure."

She looked at her watch, sighed. "I have to go to the post office. Knock yourself out," she told him, then, under her breath, said, "*Henjin.*" Freak.

He squatted down on the floor in the bedroom where his futon would be and closed his eyes, listening carefully for sounds from the windows. But instead of anything from that side of the building, almost immediately he heard a distinctive *ding* from the other side, the side with the outdoor walkway that led to the stairs and—he realized now, as he jumped out of the apartment—to the *elevator.* He pushed the DOWN button and waited for the tiny elevator to return. When it did—*ding*—the doors opened with a bell ringing. Why hadn't he noticed it before? He had come up the elevator with Miss Saotome, and they had exited right in front of No. 401. For a police inspector, he had very poor powers of observation, he had to admit. He took that back. They were not poor. They were sometimes heightened, electrified, excruciatingly sensitized, but, alas, *misplaced.* Had he not observed the checkered linoleum floor in the humid, stifling elevator, the squashed, dried remnant of gum near Miss Saotome's shiny black left high heel, her trim, shapely ankles and calves encased in pantyhose? Had he not noted her perfume, the smell of her shampoo, baby powder, the heat and proximity of her body next to his?

He pressed the button on the console for the third floor, stepped off the elevator, and, after letting it begin its descent, pushed the DOWN button to retrieve it. He went inside No. 401, closed the door, and waited. Soon enough, he heard it. *Ding.* He tested it again and again, listening from the hallway kitchen, the bathroom, the living/dining room, the bedroom. There were six other apart-

ments on the fourth floor, a maximum of three tenants in each, an average, say, of 1.4. That would mean a minimum of 16.8 dings coming and going on weekdays, many more on weekends. Would he get used to the noise? Which was the lesser evil, the elevator or the condenser? At least he would only have to deal with the condenser for half the year, when it was warm enough to require the windows open, whereas the elevator would continue all year long, every day and night.

And did he really want to go through the hassle of moving again? Once more, he would have to change his address at multiple ward offices, transfer the gas, electricity, water, telephone. It had been so stressful moving two weeks ago, beginning life anew in a different neighborhood. He had been in his last apartment, the one in Fuchu, for fourteen years, but the building had been sold to convert into condominiums, and he had been unable to find anything else in his price range in the area. Before then, he had lived with his wife, Yumiko, in a comfy little house for four years until she had summarily kicked him out. Up to that point, Kenzo had never been on his own. He had lived with his parents, then in one of the Metropolitan Police Department dormitories, then with Yumiko. As in most Japanese households, she had handled all the financial and domestic details. He hadn't known how to open a bank account, how to cook or clean or do laundry, how to go about buying furniture or dishware. It had been humiliating. He had worked very hard to become self-sufficient, developing routines until he was completely independent. But now, at thirty-eight years old, all that familiarity and comfort was gone, and he was comparing the relative disadvantages of dings and drones and questioning whether it would be outlandish to ask Miss Saotome, who would be back any minute now wanting his decision, if he could spend a trial night in No. 401. He couldn't make up his mind—

about anything. He wished he could take a nap, or maybe go for a long walk. Perhaps at the Inogashira zoo, to see the monkeys.

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MONKEY. LISA COUNTRYMAN heard her say it—*saru,* monkey—and she thought at first that the girl was talking about her. But no, the Japanese schoolgirl and her friend, who were sitting opposite Lisa on the subway, hands covering their mouths as they giggled, were looking down the car at an African man in a dashiki. *Saru mitai,* they whispered. He looks like a monkey.

It had been years since anyone had thought definitively that Lisa was part black. Not since junior high school, really. Before then, she had heard it all, from whites and blacks alike, neither of whom had cared for her peculiar mulatto mix: gook monkey, bamboo coon, chigga jigaboo, dim-sum casco yellowbone chinkamo slope-head nine-iron UFO ping-pang yangmo buckethead. They knew her mother was Japanese, but her father's muddied origins could only be conjectured: Creole and/or Bahamian and/or Mexican and/or German and/or Dutch.

Yet when Lisa had hit puberty, something had happened. Her skin became lighter, her hair straighter, her nose narrower. Her Negroid and Asiatic features blended together and repudiated each other, fading both ethnic distinctions, and she became nice and light, almost white, high, high yellow. People now mistook her for Italian, Israeli, Hawaiian, French, Native American, Russian, Lebanese—*some*thing, some sort of exotic dark mixture, but not really dark, not a real darkie, not—God forbid—black. When people presumed to ask, "What are you?" they discounted black, they didn't want to believe black, because black was too threatening, too uncomfortable, it wasn't a *fun* color.

Before getting off the subway car at Akasaka-Mitsuke, Lisa detoured in front of the Japanese schoolgirls and said, "*Nande*

sonna-koto iun-dayo? Shine, baka." Loosely translated: Why the hell are you talking like that? Fuck you. The girls were quite speechless.

Outside, it was near dusk, and muggy. It was past rush hour, but there was still quite a bit of pedestrian traffic as she walked toward the Hotel New Otani. She should have taken a cab, she thought. She was late and perspiring lightly in her cocktail dress when she entered the lobby of the hotel, but Mojo, who was fanatically punctual, refused to let her apologize. He wouldn't hear of it. It was *his* fault, he insisted. He should have sent his car for her. He was sweating, too, but not from the heat outside or from exertion. He was nervous. They had seen each other many times before during working hours, but this was their first *dohan,* their first outside date. Mojo blotted his brow with a folded handkerchief and ushered her to the express elevator, which whisked them straight up the forty-story tower to the Rainbow Lounge.

When the elevator doors opened with a soft, pleasant ding, they were greeted by four tuxedoed waiters and the maître d', all of whom bowed and said, "*Irasshaimase*"—Welcome. Lisa and Mojo were led to the table with the best view in the restaurant, breathtaking, the State Guest House below and the skyscrapers of Shinjuku beyond.

"Okay?" Mojo asked as they were seated.

"Wonderful," Lisa told him.

"I am sorry so not special. No time to arrangement," he said, anguished.

They always spoke in English, although Lisa could have run circles around Mojo with her conversational Japanese. Some customers liked that she knew the language, others did not. Mojo—which was a *nom de guerre,* his real name a mystery to her—claimed he wanted to practice his English, and she didn't

challenge the assertion. She had learned that it was less intimidating to older Japanese men if she played dumb.

They ordered drinks—Maker's Mark with water for Mojo and a Stoli gimlet for Lisa. It was her third drink of the evening. He wasn't the only one who was nervous. She had stopped by a bar on her way to Akasaka, wanting to loosen up, to gather courage. She owed it to Mojo to at least pretend as if she were having a good time. He was, after all, going to be dishing out several hundred dollars for this dinner, and then giving her, if she kept her nerve and went through with the plan, a $10,000 cash "gift."

But first he handed her a small *presento,* a token memento of the evening—a brooch with red gems of indeterminate origin, ostensibly arranged to look like a ladybug, but which regrettably resembled a sunburned cockroach. "*Domo,*" Lisa said. "Gosh, a little bauble."

"Bubble?" Mojo asked.

"Bauble."

"Bobble?" He juggled his hands.

"Bauble. A geegaw. Or is it gewgaw?"

Mojo stared at her, thoroughly confused.

"A pretty-pretty," Lisa said, slurring a little.

"Ah," he said, brightening, "you think pretty?"

"Yes, very pretty."

He smiled at her and mopped his forehead and then, noticing her half-emptied glass, frantically motioned to the waiter for another round.

They made a few excruciating passes at small talk, but mostly stared out the windows at the view—a convenient reprieve from conversation. When his châteaubriand and her coq au vin were served, they sliced and forked and chewed with great deliberation, as if the act of eating the meal required the utmost focus. They each had another drink, split a bottle of Merlot, then had a snifter of X.O. with their cherries jubilee.

"Good? *Oishikatta?*" Mojo asked her when the bill came.

"*Oishikatta,*" she said.

He wiped his brow, happy.

Laughing, they teetered to the elevator, stumbled across the lobby, then hung on to each other for balance at the hotel entrance, waiting for his car. When they were tucked into the black Toyota Crown, Mojo asked where he should direct his driver, the club or his *mansion.*

"*Mansion,*" Lisa giggled.

Beaming, Mojo clutched her hands in his. "Thank you, thank you," he said.

They drove onto one of the elevated expressways and shot through the city, neon blurring past the windows of the car. Lisa was drunk, terribly, terribly drunk, and also a little stoned. Before leaving the restaurant, she had gone to the bathroom and gulped down a Quaalude. She had never taken a Quaalude before. She hardly ever did drugs—well, okay, she had also ingested one Percodan that morning, but it had been purely medicinal, a salve for her hurt ribs, one of which might have been broken—and, combined with the booze, the pills were affecting her quickly.

Mojo lived in an exclusive residential neighborhood called Denen-Chofu. It was only twenty-five minutes from Akasaka, but it seemed a world apart. Ginkgo trees lined the streets, and it was quiet, as if they had been kidnapped to the country.

Mansion was a misnomer, just a name for a nicer apartment. This building, the Homat King, was one of a string of fancy abodes that catered to rich Japanese and foreigners. Still, Mojo's place was palatial: four bedrooms, a garden patio, more space than he knew what to do with. He was a widower, and his children, he said ruefully, did not visit often.

Lisa sank into the couch, head spinning. Mojo made drinks for them, but she worried suddenly that he might not be able to per-

form, which would embarrass them both and lead to all kinds of awkwardness, such as the question of whether she would still receive her gift, or if they would have to try again. She didn't care about the money. She wasn't doing this for money. But the money was important to stamp the evening as an official transaction. If she was going to be accused of being a whore, she wanted to do this right.

Mojo began dancing. He had some god-awful disco on the stereo, and he had taken off his suit jacket and rolled up his shirtsleeves and unclipped his tie. He was loose, flying, making funny gyrating movements with his hips, arms akimbo. He wasn't a bad man, he was actually quite nice, he was rather sweet. And not frightfully ugly. No, he might have been short and squat and bigbellied, face pancaked as to be featureless except for one eyelid that drooped, and he might have been unctuous, a font of secretions, sweaty, hair greased with rank-smelling ointment, skin oily and shiny and pungent with cologne, but he wasn't entirely repulsive.

Wanting her to dance with him, he tried to lift Lisa off the sofa, but he didn't leverage himself properly and fell face-first into the cushions, which broke the two of them into hysterics, until Lisa, swallowing a hiccup, farted. It wasn't a huge fart—*chisai desho*—and it wasn't long, but it was a watery fart, a short, powerful splutter, a moist punctuation of air that horrified Lisa and shocked them into momentary silence, mouths yawned open. But then Mojo began guffawing, and Lisa did, too. He had a high-pitched, keening, hyenic laugh, and Lisa's was a deeper, slower rumble, and the two of them—convulsing, shrieking, moaning—harmonized into a sound that was an ornithological abomination, a cross between a turkey buzzard and a titmouse on speed.

Flatulence was a time-honored tradition in Japan. Lisa had seen farting contests on TV, participants imitating animal noises, farting

along to popular songs, lying on a table, knees to chest, a laboratory tube stuck up their ass, attempting to blow out candles. Mojo now tried to eke out his own fart, squeezing his face tight, grunting, holding his breath, but he was having trouble. He grabbed Lisa's palm and slapped it against his sweaty forehead, pressing hard. It was a childhood game played by Japanese boys to induce farts, but to Lisa it felt evangelical, like a tent-top preacher laying hands. "*Heal,*" she said, and gripped Mojo's head harder. "I command you to receive the power of the Lord and say unto you, demons asunder, let's hear that bunghole thunder!" She pushed Mojo's head against the back of the sofa. "I anoint you and compel you to blow a gasket, give me some almond toast." She rose onto her knees on the sofa and shoved her hand down on his forehead. The movement electrified the pain in her ribs and made her throw up a little in her mouth, but she swallowed it back down. "I call on the benediction of God to empower you, toot the chute, shoot the monkey." She was floating upward, lifting. "I want spark plugs!" she shouted, hovering near the ceiling. "Ringo vapor! *Koita, koita!* Anus evacuas, fanny fumigatorio!" She was so dizzy, red and green lights popping in her eyes, the room darkening. "Fart for me, my sweet methane prince. Fart for Mama."

She wouldn't have sex with Mojo, she decided. It would prove nothing. She would be punishing no one other than herself. It was stupid to have even considered it. She resolved to leave Japan, to go back to the States. She didn't belong here.

And then she awoke in the dark. She was lying on her back in a bed. The lights were off, but the curtains weren't drawn, and the moon was seeping into the room—one of the bedrooms in Mojo's *mansion,* she gathered. She was alone. She still had her clothes and shoes on. But why did she feel so groggy and heavy?—oh, *molasses.* She couldn't move, her arms and legs were dead weight. She could barely turn her head. What had happened? Had she

fallen asleep? Passed out? Where was Mojo? She was very cold, and her face and neck felt wet. Her throat and chest hurt. Her ears were plugged, as if she were on an airplane on a steep descent. The pressure was unbearable. She tried to swallow, but the pain in her ribs and also her chest got worse, her lungs seared. Something was wrong. She wasn't breathing. Her airway was blocked. Oh, God, she wasn't breathing. She tried to cough, to get up, to grab her throat, but she could do nothing, she couldn't move, she was already losing consciousness. The cold wet on her skin—she had vomited. She had been passed out on her back, and she had vomited from all the drinks and the Percodan and the Quaalude, and she was now choking on her own vomit.

This can't be happening, she thought. I can't die like this, not like this. The pain in her chest began to ease, but she instinctively knew that this meant neither relief nor rescue, but finality. She was sinking. She was drowning. She felt embarrassed, and stupid, and terrified, and very, very alone. She had no family, no one who would really miss her. Was she really going to die like this? She wondered what would happen to her body, where she would be buried, if anyone would claim her. She was not quite twenty-five years old.