

Bridge of Tears (fiction story)

By Trevor Greene

He stood in the dusty road admiring the graceful curve of the bridge as he contemplated his imminent death. A turn of his head revealed the lush light green of rice fields fertile and damp stretching to low brown mountains. Toward the mouth of the Sumida River he could see the smooth red slopes of the tradesmen's shops in Edo, Japan's capital city, quaintly jumbled after the placid emerald green sweep of a marsh which slurped up to the edge of town. So soft and gentle, he murmured under his breath.

He knew few of the place names in this far-flung and despised quarter of the capital. But he knew the name of the bridge and the place where it led he knew very well. Namidabashi, the bridge of tears. Tears shed by the relatives and friends of condemned criminals they took their last steps ever over their last bridge.

There was no one to mourn his passing, however. He had left his homeland far to the north of Edo many months ago. Escaped would be a more appropriate word, he reflected grimly. The stultifying life of a tofu maker hadn't held any of the attraction for him as it so obviously had for five generations of his family before him. Also the benign oppression of small- village life, with everyone peering around rice paper walls to check up on neighbors and the *gongingumi*, or five-person family unit, dictating day-to-day life had frustrated a young man with dreams of travel and the urge to forge a different future. So one evening he had simply tied on his straw sandals after the evening meal, wrapped some rice and vegetables in a piece of cloth and left the house, heading south. His somnambulist family had barely taken notice. By now, he mused on the day he was to die, they would have banished him from the family collective conscience; effectively, the youngest son of Wakahashi the town tofu maker had done something which simply wasn't done and therefore he had never existed, couldn't be missed and wasn't expected back. This was how such things were handled. Just as well he thought, the way this grand adventure had ended up.

The trip to Edo, the capital, from his mountainous village home had taken only a few weeks. After his meager stores ran out he had taken to thieving rice from villages he skirted and eating nuts, berries and roots offered up by the familiar forest. Even so, when he arrived in Edo he was scraggly and filthy from the long walk and a month of sleeping on the ground.

He gasped when he came to the outskirts of the city, one of the largest in the world at the time. As he worked his way through the various neighbourhoods, the crowds and noise and confusion had

overwhelmed him; the vain, strutting samurai with the long killing swords shoved arrogantly in the sashes of their kimonos, the fat-bellied merchants, the bellowing fishmongers, the palanquin bearers sweating and grunting as they bore their swaying hidden human burden through the dusty streets, the slap of their bare feet strangely audible above the din.

He had headed instinctively for the waterfront, the first and last he would ever see, hurrying through the narrow streets of ramshackle houses until he could smell the fetid mingling of land and ocean drawing him nearer. Bamboo fishing weirs stood stolid in the gurgling wash of the river mouth and arrow wooden warehouses on sturdy, splintered pilings reached like bulky fingers far into the bay.

Now he saw the seamier side of the city, swept like refuse by the muddy river and deposited near the bay, far from the graceful homes of the feudal lords which were arrayed curving out like a nautilus shell around the stone-girt castle of the shogun at the centre of the city.

His disheveled, filthy clothing and bewildered, staring eyes marked him immediately as an outsider, and a target. Just hours after arriving in the city, he was accosted by three men he hadn't noticed following him down a waterfront alleyway.

"Well country boy, you look like you're lost," smirked the short fat one who appeared to be the leader of the two stone-faced brutes who had approached from behind and without warning grabbed his arms and pinned him against a warehouse wall.

He stifled a guttural curse and tried unsuccessfully to break the death-holds on his arms.

"We've got just the place for you my boy," said the little prick with a shit-eating grin. They hauled him out of the alley and down toward the river where his elbows were bound behind his back and he was led through town for what seemed like hours. After a while he realised that nobody was paying any attention to his plight, as if he and his tormentors were invisible. The bustling townsfolk he had marveled at on his arrival scant hours ago now treated him like so much dogshit, looking away as the brutes hustled him down the street. What he didn't know was that they had seen this kind of thing before many times. Still he didn't say anything, aware that his unmistakable rural drawl would brand him for good as an outsider.

They eventually came to what he was to learn was the Ishikawajima yoseba, or workhouse, set up on the mouth of the Sumida River to control the growing number of vagrants and ex-convicts roaming the streets of Edo.

The windowless, spartan one-story building was to be his only home in the big city. He and his 500-odd fellow outcasts slept on splintered, wooden floors, pissed and shat through a hole knocked into the floor in one corner and listened to the black water lap at the shore.

They were roughly awakened early each morning by their police guards and herded out into the pre-dawn chill in groups of ten under the watchful eyes of their overseers.

The men were usually put to work building pilings in the bay for a city which seemed to want to reach out across the ocean. It was hot brutal work digging foundations in the low-tide muck, sinking and securing the thick, rough pier shafts and hewing planks out of raw wood for the platforms. They were fed brown rice gruel and vegetables once a day after work and allowed to wash once a week.

He plodded on for months, hoping someday to be released, all hopes of returning home as unreal as thoughts of taking tea ruling in the shogun's palace. He had had no idea it would come to this and in his mind he bitterly cursed the gods for punishing him so severely for his bold show of independence.

At night the exhausted men had little energy for socialising, other than bragging about the whores of nearby Yoshiwara they were going to prong if they ever got out. More often they spoke in hushed tones of the bridge and the place of death it led to, Kozukahara, the execution ground. A desolate area reeking of violent death. Grassy swampland ruled by packs of wild dogs and roamed by the anguished souls of the damned. A hell of a good place to stay away from, they all agreed.

In a time when any samurai could cut down a commoner at will merely to test his blade, they spoke of the executions which took place on the orders of the rulers but at the hands of the eta caste; the untouchables, the despised handlers of dead humans and animal flesh. The wretched thousands who fell under the blade of the eta weren't destined for cremation and proper burial. They would be bound, led over the bridge and made to kneel in the grass in front of the burly, sweating executioner. Say your prayers laddie, the whistling of the sword, oblivion. Mortal remains were deposited unceremoniously in a huge lime pit which did little to mask the huge smell of death which pervaded the area. It never occurred to him that his head might someday be rolling in the swaying grass. He thought that eventually the unseen hand that had callously cast him into this brutish life would one day reach back in and pluck him out. Or maybe they'll just get sick of me and show me the door, he hoped.

The end, when it came, was swift. His work group was marched out as usual one morning but this time they were taken to a pier they had just finished building the previous day and ordered to dismantle it. No reason given.

It was too much. Despite the animal-like existence, at the very least they were accomplishing something; he could look down the waterfront and see the new piers jutting into the bay, the warehouses being loaded and unloaded.

Arbitrary and arrogant orders to tear down what he had shed sweat and blood to build were too much to take. He felt his mind go with an almost audible snap and summoned eight months of pent-up rage and frustration from deep in his guts. Shivering with rage in the humid morning air, he decked one overseer with his strong right hand and was going for the throat of another when he was hammered into the ground by the cherrywood staves of the policemen guarding his group. It took about four seconds to seal his fate.

He was dragged semi-conscious back to the workhouse. One of his escorts reported the incident to the same little pencil-neck prick of a policeman who had grabbed him and dragged him here on his fateful first day in the city.

The cop looked into his swollen, vacant eyes and pronounced judgement then and there in a scornful reedy voice. "You really fucked yourself today country boy. You're gonna walk over the bridge." The words made no sense to him at first but he knew he was going to die. Again, his elbows were bound and again he was frog marched through the unseeing, uncaring streets. They reached the bridge and waited while somebody's head was being chopped off on the other side. His thoughts were empty, but his senses were hyper-tuned to the world around him.

The incessant rasp of the cicadas swirled around his head. They will soon die like me, he thought. The frogs of the San'ya canal somewhere behind him sang a sonorous chorus sitting in their impersonal mud.

An old woman, bent and ragged in a scruffy yukata, stood to one side of the bridge, sniffing and wiping her nose on her sleeve. Her eyes were red- rimmed and glossy from mourning the death of a son or husband who had just crossed over the bridge. One of his guards gave a savage jerk on his bound elbow, snarling "It's your turn now." He took a step on to the smooth wooden planks of the bridge, worn down by doomed feet, gulped a deep breath and began towards the other side...

1961

Kazu stood at the Namidabashi intersection, a duffer bag thrown carelessly over one shoulder. His mind was ablaze with thoughts of the life that was opening up in front of him.

It was hard to believe that it had been only three months since his cousin had arrived at their Niigata Prefecture rice farm with the news.

"There's more work than you could ever imagine," he had crowed. "It's like they're building a new city and they need thousands of workers.'

Tokyo in 1961 was a frantic place of cranes, concrete and men creating an Olympic city to show the world in 1964.

'It's easy. All you have to do is go to this place called Sanya near the Sumida River. If you show up on the main drag around six in the morning, these trucks come around and pick you up and take you to the worksite. At the end of the day they pay you off, more than you make in a week up here knee-deep in the muck my son, and take you back to Sanya. You can crash out in one of the flophouses or party all night. There's guys there from all over Japan and we just get out the beer and shochu and hang out till the wee hours."

As soon as the first words were out of his cousin's mouth Kazu knew he was going.

Since graduating high school and working full-time on his father's rice farm he had been frustrated with the way his life was turning out. He didn't mind working on the farm but he knew there was something out there waiting for him and not knowing what it was sometimes drove him crazy. Then there was his girlfriend Rie. Kazu knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he wanted her as his wife but he wished he had something more to offer.

She would hold his head in her lap as they lay by the river and say that she didn't care if he was a farmer, she loved him and wanted to be his wife. Her gentle words soothed him but they also stoked his frustration.

There's gotta be some way to do it, Kazu would mutter to himself as he dozed in bed at night, long boring rows of young green rice stretching off into the infinity of his mind. One break, just one break is all I need. Then his cousin came with the exciting news and that was all he needed to hear.

"But why do you have to go all the way to Tokyo?" Rie had asked tearfully when he broke the news to her that evening. "Because that's where the work is honey," Kazu answered, desperate to make her understand. "This is the chance I've been looking for. Anyway, I'll only be down there a few months and then I'll be back with my pockets bursting with money and we'll be married."

She seemed to brighten seeing him so enthusiastic and at the prospect of finally getting married.

"Please be careful," Rie had whispered that last night as he held her in his arms. "Please come back to me. Please don't forget your home, That's all I ask."

"I'll be back," he had promised. "I'll always come back to you."

The next day he and his cousin left. Practically the whole village showed up at the train station to see them leave. Rie had begged off, saying she couldn't bear to see him leave.

As soon as they were settled down and the train began working its way back down the mountain, his cousin had pulled a milky-white bottle of sake out his jacket and proceeded to wake up his tonsils with two healthy gulps.

"You never used to drink like that," Kazu asked, his voice a mix of awe and astonishment.

"Shit man, wait until you've been in the big city a while. You'll never want to go back to that poky boring little village we just left," he boasted as he took another hefty swallow.

"Besides, now that you're going to become a Sanya boy you better learn how to drink," he said as he shoved the bottle into Kazu's hand. The liquor burned all the way down and seemed to bounce a few times in Kazu's stomach. As he blinked back the tears that sprang unbidden into his eyes, he remembered Rie's tears at their final parting and his promise to return to her, Kazu turned to the window, not seeing the familiar mountains flashing past, and made a vow to himself. That big bullshit city won't claim me as it has my cousin. My heart belongs to my village and the girl I love. I will always come back to her.

His first day worked out exactly as Kazu's cousin had said it would. They had arrived at Sanya the night before to find the place rocking. The din had assaulted Kazu's countrified ears while his brain struggled to take in what his eyes were telling it. Everywhere he could see, sitting in front of shuttered shops, sprawled on sidewalks, lounging beside buildings or spilling out of countless bars, there were groups of young men getting pissed out of their minds on everything from fiery shochu to neat whisky and beer,

and doing so at the top of their voices as if they wanted to make the world echo with their vibrant, drunken passing.

His cousin was delighted, as well as half-blind from drinking on the train, and immediately plunged straight into the middle of one of the noisier groups and vanished, leaving Kazu feeling extremely uncomfortable standing alone with his kit bag. He dug out the address of the flophouse his cousin had recommended to him and wandered away from the commotion all around him. Kazu's first flophouse was a two-story building with the traditional sloping, scalloped roof and white plaster walls. The stone-faced innkeeper perched on a stool in the small lobby hardly said a word as Kazu took his shoes off at the entrance, and as he was booking a room for three months he wondered if she was going to actually resort to sign language in order to suppress her humanity ever further when she sighed and asked him where he was from. "Up north," he answered defensively as his cousin had taught him, wary of divulging too much about himself to the wrong people. "You're just a young fella too, What would you want with the likes of these," she asked, inclining her head in the direction of the still-audible revels, going full blast a few streets away.

"Oh no I'm not here for the partying" he answered quickly. "I plan to work for a few months and make enough money to get married. Suddenly he felt like he was talking to Rie again, and the anxious need to make her understand why he had to go away swept over him again. For some reason he needed with all his heart to make this sad old woman understand that nothing would keep him from returning to his home and making a life for himself.

She turned and led the way down the concrete hallway to his room, slid open the door and stepped aside. The room smelled of mildew and wet dog. Kazu could barely see her face in the gloom but her voice was edged with emotion when she suddenly spoke again.

"You make damn sure you remember where you come from, boy. And you remember what that little girl of yours looks like because I've seen lads like you come here with their heads way up in the clouds." Her voice dropped to a hoarse croak. "And I've seen them sink into the deepest bowels of hell too. Mark well my words and you may actually go home for good someday." She abruptly turned on her heel and strode back down the hall.

The next day he was up well before dawn by long habit and out to the main intersection within minutes. Already the flat-bed trucks were lining the streets, their drivers slouched in the cabs smoking cigarettes and yawning. As he walked, trying to get used to the sights of his new neighbourhood, Kazu's feet

crunched on carpets of broken bottles, the remains of the wild partying of the previous night, but it was the bodies that amazed him. Strewn all over the street, as if a cluster bomb had exploded in their midst, were hundreds of men looking like they had dropped where they stood. Some were slumped against walls, their legs splayed out in front of them. Most were flat out on their stomach or back, hands occasionally still clutching a half-drained bottle of shochu.

After looking around at the carnage for a while, Kazu mustered up his courage and spoke to the driver of one of the trucks. Cigarette smoke streaming out of his nose, the man merely took one look at Kazu, told him the terms of the job and motioned with his head to the back of the truck. Kazu couldn't believe his luck and quickly clambered into the truck and sat on his kitbag.

Things were happening more quickly now, a buzz of conversation filling the quiet morning air as knots of men milled around the trucks discussing jobs and pay. Now and again one of the drivers would shake his head at one of the men and refuse to hire him on. Kazu could immediately see why. Almost all of those refused had been parrying the previous night and were either still legless and giving off waves of liquor-breath as they drunkenly argued their case, or so damaged from hangover that they obviously weren't good for anything other than crawling into a quiet corner somewhere and sleeping it off.

The truck eventually filled up and started north. Kazu learned from one of his companions that they were going to be digging the Olympic rowing course at Toda, Saitama-ken.

He exulted in the warm, moist breeze rushing back in the slipstream of the truck, almost gulping with excitement at the adventure he was living. They arrived all too soon and were taken out to the site, which basically consisted of a 2.5-kilometer long, 30-metre wide gash in the ground still being chewed on by power shovels crawling like gangly insects in the trench.

A burly foreman came hustling over and ordered the men into the trench. "Okay, you guys are doing the trimming," he bellowed. 'The bottom needs to be levelled out and the sides need straightening. Just start on this corner here and work your way around." The foreman then scurried off to bellow at someone else.

"You heard the man, get into the fucking trench,' snarled their driver, leaning back on the truck.

Only at the lunch break, when the men were given rice balls and cold wheat tea, did the work stop and some semblance of peace return to the site. From where he sat cross-legged under a willow tree not far

from the trench. Kazu could see a river curving off to his left. It suddenly reminded him, with a pang that almost stopped his heart, of the river near his village where he and Rie would go to make love and talk of their future together. He closed his eyes and was there in her arms, the gurgle of the river in the background, the smell of the sweet grass and Rie's perfume commingling in his nose, his face buried in her good, sweet neck...

"C'mon princess, time to get back to work."

The foreman's words rudely jerked him out of his reverie and he sheepishly hustled back to where the men were waiting to get back into the trench, almost bent double to hide the erection tenting out his work pants. They beavered away the rest of the afternoon and at sunset clustered around their driver to receive their pay. The foreman came by, his voice hoarse from yelling over the roar of the power shovels, and said he needed them every day for at least another two months.

"Fucking Olympics are just around the corner, boys," he croaked. "We better hustle."

As he climbed back into the truck, tired but elated, Kazu thought to himself that he could easily handle three months of this, especially the money part. One of the other workers, noticing his lazy smile and half-closed eyes, tapped him on the arm and asked incredulously, "You didn't really enjoy that did you?"

"Ah shit, I pulled longer days than that in my father's rice field," Kazu boasted. "I barely broke a sweat."

The two struck up a conversation and Kazu learned that Nobu was a university dropout from Hiroshima who had heard about the incredible job opportunities in Tokyo and had arrived only a few days ago.

"Listen, when we get back," Kazu's new friend said as the truck rolled back to Sanya, 'there's a cheap little pub I know right near my flophouse. We can snarf down some ales and celebrate our new jobs."

Looking over Kazu's ratty old jeans and shirt, Nobu said he also knew a good place to buy proper construction clothing as well, "so you can look the part as well," grinned Nobu.

Back in Sanya that evening, having spent half his day's pay on split-toed cloth boots, baggy balloon trousers and a crew neck shirt under a canvas vest, Kazu followed his friend into a dimly lit pub.

They ordered a bottle of beer each and, turning from the counter to survey the crowd seated at tables in the back, Kazu was amazed to find his cousin slumped alone in a chair, his eyes barely focussed,

obviously pissed to the gills. "Shit, what happened to you," Kazu asked, rushing over.

"Hey country boy," his cousin slurred back after taking a few seconds to recognize Kazu. "You really look like a Sanya boy now don't you."

Kazu soon learned that his cousin hadn't worked in over six weeks and had borrowed the money to return to their village from the yakuza gang which controlled Sanya. Heavily in debt to the wrong people, he was selling his blood to a blood bank and drinking his face off well into the night wherever he could get a free drink.

Without a thought, Kazu pulled out the rest of his day's wage and shoved it into his cousin's pocket, his cousin's bleary bloodshot eyes following every movement. He suddenly grabbed Kazu's wrist with terrible strength and, pulling Kazu's face closer, he whispered fiercely, 'You gotta get out of here kid, you gotta go back. This fucking place doesn't care who or what you are, it just chews you up, sucks you dry and spits you back out. You gotta get out kid.'

Without warning, his cousin pushed him away, lunged to his feet and tottered through the door. By the time Kazu got outside he was gone, swallowed up by the rush and rage of the night.

Kazu never saw his cousin again.

Back inside, he found Nobu and recounted the incident to him. To his surprise Nobu told a badly shaken Kazu to forget it.

"I hate to say it but your cousin is quite simply a fucked-up dude. He just did it wrong. It doesn't mean you will too. Just let him go and get on with your own thing," he said.

It took some convincing, and a couple more pints of beer, "just to steady your nerves," Nobu had said, but eventually Kazu saw the logic in Nobu's argument.

As the night wore on, Kazu's thinking actually got clearer and clearer. "I am following a damn righteous path," he stated to a barely conscious Nobu after their eighth hour of drinking. "Nobody sees my vision, not my dickhead high school teachers, not my parents, not even my girlfriend. She...hey man you still awake? Pay attention. My girl she didn't even want me to come down here, thought I would never come back, probably thinks I got no balls, probably...you know what, I bet the bitch blew me off. I'll bet you she's already got her knickers off with somebody else by that river. Well that's just bloody fine, it's a shitty little village away to hell and gone up in the fucking boonies. They can all just go fuck

themselves, I tell you..."

The light cracked through his eyelids like a white-hot knife driving straight into his brain. Until it subsided into a dull throb Kazu thought he would faint from the pain that filled his head.

When he could open his eyes, he saw he was outside the bar sprawled on the ground. People moved around and over him as if he was just so much refuse left outside to be thrown away,

He crawled slowly and painfully to his feet, using a waist-high railing for support. One look at the sun, climbing well on its way to midday, told him he had missed work, what should have been his second day. As he shuffled slowly back to his flophouse to go back to sleep, he hoped fervently he would be accepted back into the crew digging the rowing trench. His landlady's face was blank as he unhooked his boots at the door and made his way down the hallway. I don't need any shit from you today lady, he thought angrily as he slumped on top of his futon. This is just a hiccup, a one-time hitch in my vision. I'm still on track.

The next morning, he showed up on time. His driver simply hooked a thumb toward the truck bed. Kazu was so glad to get his job back that he forgot to get mad at Nobu for leaving him at the bar.

That ain't such a big deal anyway, reasoned Kazu in his mind. Nobu's gotta watch his own ass.

Rie had been so tense the past week that she couldn't eat and could barely sleep. What should have been a joyous experience was turning into an ordeal. Kazu's letters, which had been arriving every week full to bursting with news of his exciting new adventures in the big city and his thoughts on their future together, had dwindled to terse two-paragraph notes mailed almost grudgingly once a month about his goings-on with his mates out carousing in Sanya every night. The stream of presents he had been sending had slowed down then died. The biggest blow came after three months when he announced that he was extending his stay in Tokyo. He had written: "Yeah, Nobu and I got taken on for this big job finishing off the stadium in Tokyo. It's big money and a chance I just can't pass up. I will see you in the spring sometime." In the spring? Sometime? What was that supposed to mean?

But now with Kazu finally coming back, Rie was trying hard to summon the longing she had felt for him, trying to forgive him for the three months she had put her life on hold to wait for him, trying to fall in love with him again.

His parents had been none too impressed. One day back and they ragged him about his weight, "Don't you eat down there in that city, your face is absolutely gaunt." They nagged him about his drinking habits, "Back home only a couple of hours and off you go last night carousing with your friends." Worst of all they hassled him about Rie, "waiting all this while for you and you haven't even thought about seeing her."

They didn't understand. He was the MAN and he was in the middle of the ACTION. He had a duty to tell his village-bound buddies about the ACTION and about how it is done in the city. He had learned priorities while he had been away.

Long ago, thoughts of Rie and anything remotely smacking of emotion had been carefully compartmentalised and tucked away in a corner of his mind until he had time to truck them out and deal with them. Kazu had learned that was just the way it was done.

Rie's little sister came running up to her, gasping with breath, her eyes wild with excitement. "He's coming big sister, he's coming up the road!" she squealed. Rie's heart leapt into her throat. She shooed the child away and stood outside her door squinting in the April sunshine. She smoothed down her white cotton dress, ran her hands through her long silky-black hair and watched him come up the walkway.

His hair was shaggier and oddly curled. She assumed this was the current fashion in the city. His face was thin and hollowed below his cheekbones. He walked with an insolent hitch in his stride with his hands in his pockets.

Her heart pounding, she held her hands out to him and said, "welcome home."

Through the deep tan on his face Rie thought she could see him blush.

He just stood there in the hot sunshine looking down at the ground and mumbled something she didn't catch. He didn't take her hands.

In a trembling voice Rie suggested they take a stroll along the river, her mind in turmoil as she desperately sought out the gentle, caring rice farmer she once knew, seemingly buried deep in the swaggering lout who now walked silently beside her.

His first meeting with Rie after a six-month separation only proved to Kazu that he was never cut out for this lame-dick country town where everybody thought alike and nobody wanted to try anything new.

She had started with all this boring chatter, asking about work, the boys in Sanya. He could tell she wasn't interested though because he'd start telling a really good story, and he'd look over at her face and...she's holding back tears for fuck sake, looking up at him with this panicked expression on her face. He had given up at that point and just let her do all the talking. There wasn't much to say after all. They had walked to their old familiar spot and sat down on the grass. The tears had come then and she had cried on his shoulder asking what had happened to their love and other such happy horseshit. She even tried to kiss him and he had thought, not a bad idea at all.

Kazu had taken her in his arms and for some reason had wanted to be rough with her, to show her the man he had become. He had manhandled her clothes off, his face a mask, and was fumbling with his pants when he saw Rie's eyes were tightly closed, her hands clenched, her mouth compressed into a white trembling line. Kazu then looked at his rough work-blunt hands, raw against the smooth perfection of her naked skin, and just stopped. Rie was crying again. He had wanted to comfort her, to tell her he was the same guy who had left, but the words just wouldn't come. He walked away a little distance and listened to her quiet sobs as she got dressed. She came up behind him.

"I'm sorry," she had said in a small voice. They walked back to her house in silence. He declined her offer of a cup of tea and said he had to get going.

"When will I see you again," she had asked. Rie thought it only polite to ask. Polite conventions, and many tears were all she had to offer this stranger her boyfriend had become. She knew now he would never be at home in the village again. Her gentle farmer, her caring lover was gone.

"I'll write when I'm settled. Maybe you could come down to visit Tokyo some time," he had said in a flat voice.

Not in a million years, he howled in his head as he waited for the train, replaying the conversation in his head. Not in a million fucking years will a little country girl like you ever get down to see the ACTION.

The train came, he hurled his stuff into the overhead rack. There was nobody to see him off, so he didn't wave to anybody. There goes two days of work down the toilet, Kazu thought angrily as he tore the top off a bottle of sake. The liquor he threw down his throat helped calm him down a bit as the train pointed itself down the mountain and picked up speed.