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This book is dedicated to the children of Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate Prefectures.

May they grow up to be healthy and strong.

and

The Japanese youth.

You have the greatest opportunity with your advanced technology to lead the world with new, clean alternative energy.

World catastrophe waiting to happen

In July 2012, TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) announced that the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was still emitting 10,000,000 becquerels (Bq) of radiation per hour. The Number Four reactor building is leaning precariously to one side and could collapse if there is another earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5. If this happens, the spent fuel pool in the Number Four reactor building will run dry and catch fire, releasing around 50 times more radiation than Chernobyl. This will be a world catastrophe and will affect the lives of every person on this planet. The Japanese government, despite knowing these facts and contrary to strong public opposition, had the audacity to restart two nuclear reactors at the Oi plant two months prior to this announcement. Fukushima is not just a Japanese problem but a world problem and should be dealt with by the international community, not by a company and a government that continuously hides the truth from the public. In August 2013, TEPCO announced that 300 tonnes of radioactive water was escaping into the Pacific Ocean every day.

In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

~ George Orwell

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.

~Martin Luther King

Earthquakes and tsunamis have the power to damage a nation.

Nuclear energy has the power to destroy a whole country.

~ Vindal Vandakoff

Reality is usually ridiculed and illusion easily accepted.

~ Unknown

On March 11, 2011, at 2:46 p.m. a catastrophic event took place, changing the lives of millions of Japanese.

This set the cogs in motion that would forever change the world.

A word from the author

I was sitting in my study in Japan on March 11, 2011, at 2:46 p.m. preparing another book campaign for my recent book *Zeron: The Awakening*, which had just reached eighteenth on Amazon's Science Fiction Best Sellers list. I live in Hitachiota, Ibaraki Prefecture, which is located about one hundred kilometers north of Tokyo and about 120 kilometers south of the Fukushima nuclear plant. My wife, her mother, and my twenty-year-old daughter, who was on leave from university, were at home.

"Daddy, earthquake!" shouted my daughter from downstairs.

"What?" I called back.

"An earthquake's going to hit in thirty seconds," she shouted back. She didn't seem to be too concerned, and neither was I, as earthquakes are a common part of life in Japan.

But then the rumble started, and the ground began to shake.

"Sounds like it'll be a big one!" I called back casually.

And then the mountains thundered, and the house shook violently.

"Get outside!" I yelled, bolting from my study and racing down the stairs. I had been in enough earthquakes to know this was going to be a huge one.

The next wave of seismic energy hit like a sledgehammer, and the whole house lifted off its foundations.

My wife and daughter were trying to help my mother-in-law out of the house. I grabbed her and carried her outside. The air boomed and the ground shook as if it was going to tear apart. We clung to the side of the house to stay on our feet. I looked at waves crashing out of the swimming pool. The cedar trees swayed precariously as if they were about to snap in half.

"Get into the yard!" I shouted, carrying my terrified mother-in-law.

Shock wave after shock wave tore through the ground, and we were barely able to stay on our feet. Another wave of energy hit, and we all stumbled backward. I lost my grip on my mother-in-law, and she crashed to ground. The earth jolted again, and we were sent sprawling across the lawn. Then it was gone, and an eerie silence befell us.

The Great Eastern Earthquake registered a magnitude of 9.1, and it was the first of the thousands of earthquakes that would jolt Japan over the next year. We had seventy earthquakes above 4.5 from 2:46 p.m. to midnight, many of them registering magnitudes of 6 to 7.9, and that's not counting the countless smaller ones below 4.5. The next day we had one hundred and seventy—about one every four minutes.

Electricity was out, so I went to my car and turned on the radio. What I heard made the blood drain from my face and an icy chill run up my spine. Tsunami warning after tsunami warning was being broadcasted—twenty meters high for Iwate Prefecture,

time of impact twenty-five minutes; fifteen meters high for Miyagi Prefecture, time of impact twenty minutes; fifteen meters high for Fukushima Prefecture, time of impact thirty minutes; six meters high for Ibaraki, impact thirty-five minutes.

“Jesus Christ!” I exclaimed.

“They’re saying to evacuate from lowland and rivers,” my daughter shouted.

“Minakawa lives next to the river,” I said at once. I took out my mobile phone and punched in the number; amazingly I got through.

“The tsunami is going to come up the river. You need to get out,” I said in Japanese as calmly as I could.

Mrs. Minakawa wasn’t talking coherently, and I could hear her daughter and grandchild’s cries in the background.

“You need to get out,” I repeated. But I only got a confused answer that I could make no sense of.

I jumped in my four-wheel drive and sped down the dirt track and then swung right onto the sealed road. The more I descended the more damage I saw; stone walls around most houses had fallen over, old farmhouses had collapsed, and tiles littered the road. The most severe damage was on the low farmland where the soil was soft. I had to cross a river to get to Minakawa’s house, and I calculated I still had at least twenty minutes. I slowed and checked the way was clear and then sped across the bridge and turned left onto a side street. In front a barn had toppled over onto the road. I managed to squeeze my car around it, but there was house collapsed across the road blocking my way. I reversed back up and swung into a narrow lane, put my car in four-wheel drive, and drove across some farmland and back out onto the road.

Mrs. Minakawa was standing outside her house with some bedding and clothes; most of the stone walls around her house had fallen onto the road, and the barn had collapsed onto her car. “Where’s your daughter?” I asked.

“She’s at the evacuation area,” she replied.

“Get in! I’ll take you there,” I said, throwing her bedding into the back.

We drove through several narrow lanes and came to the evacuation area. Her daughter was in her car, nursing her baby, her face ashen, expressing disbelief.

“Come up to my house and stay tonight,” I offered.

Mrs. Minakawa nodded, switched the bedding to her daughter’s car, and got in.

We headed to the main road, but there was a traffic jam, so we turned around. I told them I was going to get some firewood from my friend and would see them up at my house; they agreed.

Just before I got to the river, my mobile phone rang. “*Hai, moshi moshi*,” I said.

“Daddy! Are you OK?” came the panicked voice of my younger daughter in Australia.

“We’re all fine,” I replied.

“Where are you?” she asked.

“I’m just coming back from Minakawa’s. She needed some help.”

“They’re showing footage of the tsunami on TV now; it looks like the wave out of the book *The Perfect Storm*, and it’s going up the rivers.”

I swallowed hard and sped across the bridge.

“Stay away from the rivers,” she said.

“That’s exactly where I am,” I answered, regretting the words as soon as they left my mouth.

“Get out of there!” she screamed. “It’s going up the rivers and destroying everything.”

“I’ll call you back,” I said and hung up.

I continued to my friends Mr. and Mrs. Fujii’s house. When I arrived I saw that Mr. Fujii’s mother was sitting in the car with a blanket around her. I asked him what she was doing, and he told me she was too scared to go back into the house. His mother spent the next few nights, like so many other people, in the car. The Fujiis made me some coffee, and we sat and talked for a while as the tremors rattled the house every few minutes. He then generously gave me some firewood, and I headed back down the hill. I stopped near the bottom and scanned the farmland for any sign of the approaching tsunami; there was none, and I quickly drove down and then back up into the safety of the hills.

That night we sat around the wood burner while my wife played the guitar; we had no idea what destruction the tsunami had caused, nor that the Fukushima nuclear plant had lost all power and the six reactors were on the brink of meltdown.

The next morning my American friend Mike came around to get some water, as I was not connected to town water but instead piped it down from a creek 500 meters up the hill. That’s when I found out that the reactor in Fukushima had gone critical. I was worried but not alarmed as I knew, or, more to the point, was led to believe, the Japanese nuclear industry had the best safety record in the world.

Later that day I drove down to Tokai village, about twenty minutes away, to check on my office. It had half collapsed, so I salvaged the computer and some important documents and went back home.

I heard nothing about the explosion at the Fukushima plant until the next day; we immediately fled to Tokyo and then to the island of Shikoku about 900 kilometers south. As we headed south the next two reactors blew up, and to my absolute bafflement the Japanese government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) who owned and ran the reactors, kept insisting there was nothing to worry about and that everything was OK. Things are definitely not OK when three nuclear reactors blow up.

I decided to ring an old friend who had been a manager of a nuclear plant in Japan. His response was absolutely bizarre. He told me that everything was fine and that there was nothing to worry about and that he himself was out on his roof replacing some broken tiles. He then went on to lecture me that fleeing such a long distance increased my risk of having a serious accident and that I would be much safer if I had stayed at home in Ibaraki. I hung up the phone and said, “Yeah right.” I have never again talked to him, nor intend to talk to him.

I then rang a friend in America who works in the nuclear industry. His response was quite different; he said to get as far south as I could or leave the country. He told me not to even think of returning home until the radiation level had dropped. Even then I

should only make a quick visit because if one of the reactors ‘burps,’ as he put it, I wouldn’t want to be downwind, as there would be some pretty lethal particles flying around.

Ironically, my first job when I came to Japan twenty-seven years ago was as an English teacher at a nuclear power plant. What is even more ironical is that it was at Japan’s very first nuclear plant in Tokai village (Tokaimura). That reactor has now been decommissioned, but the Number Two reactor is still operating. The Number Two reactor only just survived the same fate as the reactors in Fukushima: three of the four emergency generators were flooded by the tsunami—the remaining one just enough to save the day by keeping the reactor cool. They had just recently raised the height of part of the tsunami wall and were in the process of relocating the backup generators to high ground.

When I said Tokai village, some of you may have thought you’ve heard that name. Yes, you’re right. It was home to the JCO (Japan Nuclear Fuel Conversion Company) nuclear accident in 1999. In 1999, workers at a uranium reprocessing plant operated by JCO were filling a precipitation tank with uranium enriched to 18 percent with a radioisotope known as U-235. The workers who lacked proper training accidentally added sixteen kilograms instead of the permitted 2.4 kilograms, and this initiated a criticality. It continued for twenty hours before it could be stopped. Two workers died shortly after being exposed to massive amounts of radiation.

I remember the day well. I was about to go to my office in Tokaimura at about three in the afternoon when my wife called out that there was a leak.

“I thought the plumber had fixed it,” I said, thinking she was talking about the upstairs shower.

“No, not the shower. Some nuclear facility in Tokai,” she replied.

I switched the TV on and watched reporters with Geiger counters measuring the radiation. “Ring the village office and find out what is happening,” I told my wife.

She rang and they said everything was OK—nothing to worry about. They even said it was safe for children to play outside.

I immediately assumed they were lying, as TV news reporters in Tokai were registering high levels of radiation on their Geiger counters. I rang my office and told the staff to go home. I told them to take a route in the opposite direction the wind was blowing. I then evacuated my family to an area fifty kilometers to the west. That night the government established a ten-kilometer, *no-go zone*.

The next day I decided to go north to a friend’s house—and this is where it gets really bizarre. We went north to Fukushima Prefecture to a town called Tomioka. Take a wild guess what lies a few kilometers down the road on the coast? That’s correct, the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini nuclear power plants. Actually, my friend Mr. Yamada, who I believe now lives in the southern island of Kyushu, made a joke the first night. He said, laughing, that we had evacuated to his town, but imagine if the power station nearby blew up while we were there. We had a good laugh at the time.

So, I have been caught up in two nuclear accidents, and what do I find so similar about the two? The cover-ups, the lies, and the irresponsible handling of the accidents by both the government and the companies involved. According to independent and private

sources, this blatant mismanagement has led to millions of people unnecessarily exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.

It seems the Japanese government, NISA (Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency), and TEPCO can act entirely by themselves—above the law.

Conservative estimates predict about one million people will die in the next twenty to thirty years owing to radiation exposure from Fukushima.

What I find interesting is that no one has been arrested for negligence. Actually, the blame has not been pinned on any individuals. I wouldn't point the finger of blame at the plant workers but at the TEPCO officials who knew that this type of accident could occur and did nothing to prepare for it.

On the contrary, I would glorify the men known as the Fukushima Fifty for preventing a much larger crisis from occurring—a crisis that would have affected the whole world with much more dire consequences.

Although I have written this book as a fiction title, what went on in Japan during the day of the earthquake and days after is based on facts and interviews with the survivors. My wife and I took supplies to the town of Otsuchi four weeks after the tsunami, and what we witnessed is beyond words. We have been back several times since and truly admire the strength of the Japanese peoples' spirit. The book unveils what the Japanese people went through and are still going through as well as what happened at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. I point out that the nuclear industry worldwide is driven by profit and has deliberately covered up safety issues.

A recently released independent report, which condemns the gross mishandling of the nuclear accident, cites TEPCO's refusal to allow any of its workers to be interviewed. I wonder why?

And tell me why the supermarkets are stocked with imported vegetables, meat, and seafood and people are buying bottled mineral water by the box? *Everything is OK; there is nothing to worry about.* Seems the public do not believe as the government would like them to.

Please enjoy!

Vindal Vandakoff

Japanese Beyond Tragedy

Prologue

They flew low across the city, and Captain Mackeller stared down at the chaos below.

“What’s happening?” asked his copilot, his voice full of anxiety.

“They are trying to escape,” the Captain said, staring down at the mass panic. The streets were gridlocked, the sidewalks jammed with people carrying what few belongings they could hold.

“Where are they going?”

The Captain adjusted his microphone. “To the coast. There are ships waiting to take them to China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Russia.”

“Why?” the copilot asked.

The Captain didn’t answer but instead banked the helicopter left and flew north along the coast. The copilot watched the mass exodus all along the coast. Drove of people headed toward the sea. He looked out over the ocean at the armada of fishing boats, freighters, tankers, and yachts sailing away from the coast. Although the masses were heading to the coast, there were no ships bound to land, and he knew the people were being abandoned.

Moments later the Captain slowed the helicopter as they flew over Yokohama. The scene below was horrifying. The streets were jammed with abandoned cars, and the hordes of people moved like a wave toward the harbor. The docks were crammed, and the boats overflowed with the fleeing. He watched one ship, a mound of bodies and limbs, heel to the side and turn over, throwing the people into the water. “What’s happening?” the copilot insisted, his eyes remaining pinned on the horror.

The Captain turned to the copilot. “It has happened,” he said acidly. “They were warned and did nothing to prevent it. The international community knew but did nothing. People protested, but the Japanese government hid it with a media blackout. Money and greed took priority over the well-being of the people. The leadership has failed the people.”

“What has happened?”

The Captain didn’t answer him and they continued across the bay to Tokyo. What they saw in Tokyo sent an icy chill up both their spines. Millions of people were swarming like ants to the harbor side, but the ships had left and were heading out to sea; the people were trapped and there was no escape. The copilot noticed some movement in the water and narrowed his eyes. At first, he didn’t believe it, but then the raw reality hit him; people were swimming out to sea—thousands upon thousands of people trying to swim away from the looming peril.

“What are they fleeing from?” the copilot asked.

The Captain ignored her question and pushed down on the controls. As they flew north along the coast, the scene deteriorated quickly. At Oarai harbor, mayhem had

broken out, and thousands of people were fighting to board the few remaining boats. They watched as the crowd surged forward, pushing the people at the front into the water. Some people were trying to clamber up the sides of the boats. They watched a man slip and get crushed between the dock and a boat. A mother holding her two daughters was hurled over the side as the crowd surged forward again. The crew of one ship clubbed people who were climbing over the side with iron bars, sending them plunging into the sea.

“What is happening? Why is everyone trying to escape?”

The Captain was silent. He just pointed a finger to the north.

As they flew over Hitachi city, they noticed people staggering along the roads as if they were drunk. They watched as one lady collapsed to her knees, her hands clasped tightly around her head. The lady began to cough, and blood sprayed the sidewalk, and then she crumpled onto her side. The copilot stared out the window paralyzed by what he had witnessed.

“We will reach the destination in a few minutes,” the Captain said flatly.

Where? The copilot was about to ask, but now he knew where they were headed. He looked down as they flew over Iwaki city. The streets were littered with the dead; no one had survived. Tears came to his eyes, but he fought them back, replacing them with thoughts of anger. *They have killed them. Those few men at the top. Those irresponsible money junkies.*

The craft slowed and hovered. “There!” said the Captain, pointing to the Daiichi nuclear power plant.

What the copilot saw made his blood run cold. The Number Four reactor building had collapsed into a pile of rubble, and black smoke billowed from the debris. “The fuel pool with the spent fuel rods,” he said.

The Captain nodded. “There was a 6.5 quake early this morning and the structure collapsed.”

“Didn’t they know it could collapse?”

“Of course they did,” he replied.

“So why didn’t they do anything about it?”

“Greed,” the Captain said simply. “They knew if they told the public the real story they wouldn’t be able to get the first two reactors restarted in Oi. They needed to get them started as quickly as possible.”

“Why did they need to restart them so quickly?”

“A gateway,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“All fifty-four reactors were shut down after the nuclear accident. So if they could restart the reactors, it would lead to more reactors being restarted. It would save the nuclear industry.”

The copilot stared at the billowing smoke as anger welled within him. “I can’t believe they let this happen. Japan has been destroyed.”

“Not just Japan,” the Captain said, staring down at the crippled plant. “The other five reactors have rods in the spent fuel pools, but now the radiation level is so high that

no one can survive in the plant for more than a few minutes.” He paused letting his words hang in the air for a moment. “The cooling systems for these pools will soon fail, and the pools will boil dry, and then the rods will catch on fire.”

The copilot’s eyes went wide. “How far will it spread?”

“It will contaminate most of the Northern Hemisphere, making many countries uninhabitable.”

The copilot sat there speechless.

Captain Mackeller’s eyes flickered open and it took him a few moments to realize his surroundings. He sat up on his bunk and shook his head. He was on the USS Ronald Reagan, a US aircraft carrier stationed in Tokyo, Japan. “Damn,” he cursed to himself. “That’s the third time I’ve had that dream.”

“Are you OK?” asked his copilot from the bunk below.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just another bad dream.”

“Same one about the nuclear accident?”

“Yeah, same one,” he said, jumping off the bunk.

“You think it will happen?” asked the copilot sitting up.

Mackeller shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know, but I hope not.”

“Well...you were right about terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and the death of your copilot in Iraq two years ago.”

Mackeller ignored the comment and went to the washbasin. He looked at himself in the mirror; dark blue eyes, eyes that were void of emotion—emotion that had been drain from him like the blood that had been drained from the hundreds or even thousands, he wasn’t sure any more, of Iraqi and Afghanistan civilians he had killed with his rockets. His square hard face was scarred on the right side by shrapnel—the same shrapnel that had killed his copilot in Afghanistan.

“Do I survive in this dream?” asked the copilot.

Mackeller nodded.

Chapter One

March 11, 2011

Her eyes snapped open in the darkness; she could hear the deep distant rumble and knew exactly what it was. She flung her futon cover off and jumped up and made for the next room. It hit like thunder, her house shaking violently, books and ornaments tossed from the shelves. She clung to a wooden beam as a wave of energy jolted the house, threatening to tear it from its foundations. The Buddhist altar crashed to the floor. The thunderous noise grew, and another wave tore through the house, sending her sprawling across the floor. The wall clock smashed to the floor. The structure trembled and she could hear the roof tiles shattering on the road outside. And then it was gone, and an eerie silence fell over the town. She read the time on her watch: 1:55 a.m. She slid open the door to the next room and saw her bedridden husband staring out of the darkness. "It's all right. I won't leave you," she said softly. She moved next to him and held his trembling hand and began to stroke his hair.

**

"I'm so cold! Help me! Mommy...Momm...y—please Mommy!" She lay trembling, her freezing hands barely able to cling to pile of wooden wreckage. The first snowflakes melted on her wet skin, but her body was too numb to feel their icy touch. Night shrouded the last of the daylight and darkness swiftly cloaked her.

"Mommy!" she managed to scream one last time before she disappeared into the bitter darkness.

**

It was just getting light when Sachie slipped out of the futon and dressed quietly.

"*Mo iku no?* Are you going so soon?" Her boyfriend asked, stirring under the quilt.

She knelt down next to him and stroked his black hair. "The tournament is next month. I have to practice."

He sighed. "You always put practice before me."

She smiled and looked into his brown eyes and then put her hand on his cheek. "I must win this tournament."

He brushed her hand away and sat up; a dim light seeped through the window revealing his muscular body and sharp facial features. "Have you told your parents yet? Or at least your mother and grandfather?"

Sachie giggled. "You mean that you asked me to marry you?"

"Well—" He paused. The splay of twilight accentuated her soft face and long dark hair—she was so beautiful. "Yes. You did agree to marry me, didn't you?"

Sachie didn't answer; just let the question hang in the air like a taut string about

to snap.

“You said *yes*...remember?” His voice was tinged with concern.

At last she laughed. “Of course I will marry you.”

He let out a shallow sigh of relief. “Stop teasing me.”

“I wasn’t,” she said with a smirk.

He took her hand and lay back, gently luring her onto him. “You were,” he said. “You know I’m a sucker for you.”

She grinned and then kissed him softly on the lips.

He felt her warmth flow through him and pulled her tighter, kissing her more deeply—she didn’t resist and he rolled her onto her back. “I love you,” he whispered.

“*Watashi mo*. Me too,” she said softly.

He could feel her hard breasts on his bare chest; feel himself growing. He kissed her again and she kissed back. He unbuckled her jeans and slipped them down.

A few minutes later, she lay panting in his arms. He gently kissed her on the forehead and then closed his eyes and let sleep take him.

Sachie slid from the futon, took a shower and dressed. She looked down at him and smiled. “Tomo,” she said, whispering his name. “I can’t—” He let out a soft laugh. The thought of him coming to her house and traditionally asking for her hand in marriage made her almost burst out with laughter. He would have to don a black suit and tie—neither he owned, nor had probably ever worn in his life. As tradition required, he had to kneel before his parents, head to the floor and ask his father for the right to marry her. Suddenly, the memory of the night of her father’s accident surfaced and a tear ran down her cheek. “I’m sorry father.” She turned and left his apartment.

**

“Heave!” shouted the old fisherman to his grandson. “Heave or they’ll get away.”

His grandson pulled on the net, heaving the fish closer to the boat.

“That’s it! Just a little closer,” the old man encouraged, moving to the starboard side. He hauled the net and up and over the gunwales and fish spilled onto the deck.

“Well done!” the old man said, slapping his grandson on the back.

The young man stood on the deck, fish flapping around his rubber rain boots. “Thanks for the lesson,” he replied.

“You’ll make a great fisherman.” A broad smile creased his dark, leathery face, revealing a mouth with a few remaining tobacco-stained teeth—the daily bottle of sake aiding the decay.

His grandson was about to say he didn’t want to become a fisherman. He didn’t want to learn the trade, didn’t want go home stinking of fish every day, but he held back knowing it would break the old man’s heart. He didn’t know when he would tell him that he had been accepted into Tokyo University’s Department of Law. His goal—young and ignorant as he was—was to become a rich lawyer and siphon as much money as he could out of the hapless public. His parents had kept his acceptance into university under the rug. Instead he asked, “Do you always get such a good catch?”

“Only when I have such a good hand to help me.” He grinned, lifting the net so the fish slid into a plastic box.

“Is that so?” his grandson replied, scooping up the remaining fish in a bucket. “I think you’re having me on.”

“Look!” said the grandfather, pointing toward the land.

The grandson gazed in the direction he was pointing. The sky was awash with streaks of red, orange, and pink. The morning sun was just peeping over the crests of the snow-capped mountains, splaying a golden light across the silver sea.

“It’s so beautiful,” said the grandson. But he knew he couldn’t stay in this town. He knew his destiny lay in the big city. Like the young all over Japan, he too wanted to flee the countryside for the money and excitement of the big cities of Tokyo, Osaka, and Yokohama. He would join the ranks of deserters and leave the aging population to make its last stand throughout the rural areas of Japan.

“Yes, so beautiful,” his grandfather said. “Let’s get these fish packed up and go home and have a sake to warm us.”

His grandson nodded his agreement.

The grandfather went into the wheelhouse and turned the ignition. There was a loud crack followed by smoke.

“What happened? Are you OK?” yelled the grandson.

“Damn electric system blew,” coughed the grandfather, stumbling from the wheelhouse.

“Can you fix it?” asked the grandson anxiously.

“No and the radio is down as well. We’ll have to drift until someone sees us. They’ll eventually work out something is wrong and come looking for us.”

“I can ring the harbor on my mobile phone.” He took out his phone and pressed the start button. “Damn!” he cursed.

“What’s wrong?”

“I forgot to charge it last night—no power.”

“That’s OK,” said his grandfather matter-of-factly. “I’ll put up the aft sail so when the wind comes up we can steer towards shore. (Many Japanese fishing boats hoist a small aft sail to save on fuel when they have a tailwind.)

“Do you think a wind will come up today?”

“At about ten o’clock,” he replied.

**

“Tono, the village of Folk Law,” Yukino called excitedly from the backseat.

“That’s right. Everything strange and weird comes from here,” Yuta said, grinning and putting his foot down on the accelerator and running another red light.

“What do you mean ‘weird’?” she asked.

“UFOs,” he replied.

“You’re the one who’s weird,” she said.

He took it as a compliment and said, “Not just me; many people have seen

strange lights in the sky over the last couple of weeks.”

She ignored him and looked out the window as the sun crested the mountains and night faded away to morning.

“I love *Kapa*. He’s my favorite folk character,” Yukino said, sliding the van’s window open to let the fragrances of Tono blow against her face.

“Well, I guess you can see him since you’re still a child.” Yuta grinned through the rearview mirror.

Japanese folk law says that only children can see the mystical characters called *Kapas*. The creatures are believed to live in rivers and ponds. They are about the size of a child. Their scaly, reptilian skin ranges in color from green to yellow or blue, with webbed feet and hands. They are naughty creatures that like to play pranks, such as loudly passing gas or looking up women’s skirts or kimonos or, to the more malevolent, drowning people and animals, kidnapping children, and raping women. On top of their head they have a lily pad-like bowl, which is believed to be their power source, and it must be kept full of water or their power will drain away, leaving them rendered helpless.

Yukino glared back at his reflection. “Well, that’s one advantage we have over you adults.”

His grin stretched further across his face, and she regretted what she had said, playing straight into his hands. She had announced, as if on a loud speaker, that she was not old enough for him—not that he was that much older. But, when you are sixteen, four years’ difference seems like an eternity apart.

He looked at her through the mirror again. “Do you know how to escape from a *Kapa* if you encounter one?”

She turned her head and stared out the window, ignoring his question.

“They are really obsessed with being polite.” He paused and looked at her reflection staring out the window. “There is only one way to escape. I know because I encountered one when I was your age.”

She quickly turned and stared back at him through the mirror. “Where?” she asked.

“At the *Kapa* temple just over there,” he said, pointing out the window.

“How did you escape?”

“I knew that they are obsessed with politeness, so I bowed deeply and the *Kapa* returned the bow. The water spilled out of the bowl on his head, rendering him powerless until the bowl was refilled.” He looked back and saw her eyes wide with astonishment.

“Did you refill the bowl?” she asked, her voice full of curiosity.

“Uh...”

“If you refill his bowl, he must serve you for the rest of your life and—”

“Well I di—”

“You can show him to me, can’t you? He has to do whatever you say?”

Yuta knew he had gone too far. “Look! I didn’t refill his bowl. I ran for my life.”

“What! You didn’t put water back into the bowl,” she said disappointedly.

“I just wanted to get as far away as possible—as quickly as possible,” he replied. He evaded her eyes in the mirror.

“You’re a fool,” she said, looking back out of the window.

“I am not,” he said defensively.

“Coward,” she murmured, paying no attention to him.

**

Mr. Suzuki drove his Toyota hybrid through the rice fields of Futaba town in the direction of Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. He thought driving a hybrid car was a little contradictory considering he was the manager of a nuclear power station. His company TEPCO didn’t want people to reduce their energy usage—on the contrary, they wanted them to use as much as they could. TEPCO and the other Japanese power companies wanted everyone to use electric cars so they could build more and more nuclear power stations all over Japan. Forget about solar and renewable energy; nuclear was clearly the future.

He turned left and in the distance, set against the backdrop of a clear spring sky, towered the six reactor buildings of Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Unfortunately, his mood didn’t reciprocate the lovely spring morning. Last night he had come home a little too late from a hostess bar and a little too drunk with lipstick lips on his cheek. His wife was unimpressed by his incoherent excuses, and he had an uncomfortable sleep on the bare *tatami* floor. (Tatami floor is a straw mat forming a traditional Japanese floor covering.) When he had woken in the morning, he had found a note on the table saying she had gone to stay with their daughter. “Damn Risa!” he cursed out loud, remembering the cute young girl who had sat and poured him drinks the night before and kept him company listening and talking to him. She’d even sounded interested when he’d voiced his opposition to the construction of a new tsunami wall that had suddenly come under consideration to ward off a *killer-tsunami*. He let out a long sigh at the absurd idea. This so-called *killer-tsunami* was the concoction of a group of seismologists and was scaring the crap out of some Tokyo politicians. A report had been submitted two days previously that predicted a tsunami of more than ten meters could hit the Fukushima plant. He put these types of seismologists in the same category as the sensationalist news reporters—idiots who had no inkling of how much trouble and damage they did to world economies and the everyday person by spreading information devoid of facts and, in some cases, spreading downright lies. He shook his head in disgust and imagined the next pandemic would probably be dog or cat flu, and everyone would have to kill their precious pets—sure, it would make great news.

“Bastards!” he yelled out the window. He had only two years to go before retirement, but if the construction of the new tsunami wall was given the go-ahead, his retirement would be put on hold for another few years. His plan to retire to Hawaii would come to nothing.

“Bastards!” he yelled out the window again. He let his thoughts wander back to the night before, and Risa’s sweet face floated into his mind. She was new at the bar, and she’d genuinely seemed impressed that he was the boss of the plant. He guessed the *Mama-san* had sent her to his table because all the other girls were bored of hearing the

same old stories about his work. He let out another long sigh. He had worked for TEPCO for thirty-five years, and, except for the occasional company golf game, he had no other interest outside of his job. His daughter was married to a *salary man* in Osaka and only came home once a year at New Year; although last year she had made up some excuse why she couldn't return. His son, the one they had placed so much hope in, had dropped out of university in the first year. He had taken up surfing and now lived in Okinawa, working part-time in convenience stores and pubs. He hadn't seen him for three years, except for the rare telephone call when he needed money to support his fruitless lifestyle. He was a damn beggar he had told his wife on more than one occasion, and she had nodded her agreement, and then, without telling him, she would transfer money into his bank account the next day.

He looked in the rearview mirror, his head shaved bald—the modern man's answer to rejuvenation once the receding hairline turned to a shiny patch. He had more wrinkles than the last time he had looked. He wasn't aged by any means; he still looked way below his age. And if he compared himself to his American counterparts in GE (General Electric), who visited the Daiichi plant on occasions, he looked half their age. He smiled and touched his cheek, remembering Risa's soft kiss, the kiss that had stained his skin and made his wife over the moon to see him—so over the moon that he had spent the night on a bare tatami floor. Then he remembered she had whispered into his ear. He pulled over to the side of the road and searched his coat pocket. He took out the paper chopstick cover and read what she had written. He looked out the window, his thoughts swaying back to his wife, and he touched his wedding band. "Yes, I still love you," he said out loud. How many times had he repeated this sentence; it seemed almost a daily ritual recently, as if he was trying to convince himself. His wife hadn't kept herself in shape and was twice the weight she should have been. Of course, she was a loyal, dutiful Japanese wife who always greeted him whatever time he came home. Always, she would pour him a cold beer and listen attentively to what had happened at the power plant that day, and then she would serve him dinner and prepare his bath. While he soaked in the bath, she would wash the dishes and then leave the evening newspaper on the table with a cup of sake and go to bed. He couldn't remember the last time they had made love.

He looked down at the paper chopstick holder.

Meet me tomorrow for lunch?

Two o'clock at the Mellow Yellow Café in Tomioka.

09023476383

Risa

There were lipstick lips on the chopstick holder.

He brought the paper to his nose and inhaled her scent. He pulled back onto the road and drove flat-out toward the Daiichi plant, a big grin plastered across his face; he felt young again, and he began to sing a hit from his university days.

**

Mr. Saito watched the car pull back onto the road and speed off toward the Daiichi plant.

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