

CRYSTAL BUDDHA

SAKE, DRUGS & ROCK'N'ROLL IN TOKYO

By

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*Dedicated to the good people of Japan.
You're an inspiration!*

CHAPTER 1

“Don’t worry,” said Jack Dempsey, mopping his leg with a tissue, “it wasn’t your fault.”

“I’m very sorry, young man,” said the Japanese woman sat next to him. “I couldn’t hold on to it. I’m afraid my grip isn’t what it used to be.”

She may have been old but it wasn’t her fault though. The sudden turbulence had caught all the passengers unawares so this probably wasn’t the only spillage on the plane. For Jack though, this bumpy ride would continue for longer than he realised.

“Do you need some more water?” he asked.

“Oh, yes please. I need to take my pill. The doctor said that I have to take my pill twice a day.”

“No problem.”

Jack looked up and down the aisle and spotted a stewardess approaching. The decision to use a South Korean airline had been based solely on price. However, there was something exotic and relaxing about the Asian cabin staff that they employed. They didn’t seem to match the stereotype normally associated with people in that profession. Instead, they had elegance combined with a reassuring smile that made Jack feel contented. He waved his hand. “Excuse me! Could the lady here have another cup of water please?”

“Certainly, Sir,” said the stewardess, smiling broadly. “And is there anything that I can get for you?”

“No thanks. I’m fine.”

No sooner had he rejected the offer than he started to regret it. The air-conditioning in the cabin had left his mouth dry. However, another drink would have meant another empty plastic cup to stare at on the fold-down tray whilst waiting for some way to politely offload it to the stewardess. It might also have meant another tortuous wait in the queue for the toilets. Perhaps a dry mouth wasn’t so bad.

The elderly Japanese woman put her hand on Jack’s arm. “You’re very kind,” she said.

“You’re welcome.”

“Is this your first trip to Japan?”

His experiences on buses and tube trains around London had taught

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Jack that it was best to avoid conversations with strangers but here he welcomed the distraction. He'd watched the only in-flight movie that appealed to him, a Korean film with subtitles about a martial arts wizard, and had even tried sleeping. Now, it was either conversation or staring at the screen as the little computer plane made its way over the mountains of Russia. Besides, she seemed pleasant enough, and Jack figured that she might be able to give him some vital tips about Japanese life and etiquette that might prevent him from making a total fool of himself whilst in the Land of the Rising Sun. "Yes, it's the first time I've ever really been outside of England actually."

"You've never flown before?"

"No, this is my first time."

"You're not scared of flying are you?"

"No, of course not."

Although he wasn't exactly scared of flying, a twelve-hour flight left a lot of time for his imagination to run wild so he was glad of something to take his mind off it, rather than worrying about every rattle from the overhead lockers.

"Ah," said the woman, "are you travelling by yourself?"

Jack pointed his thumb over the back of his seat. "No, the others are sat near the back."

"Oh, you couldn't sit together?"

"No, but it's okay. We'll be spending the next few weeks together, so it's nice to have my own space for a few hours."

"Ah..."

The elderly woman went quiet. Jack wondered whether perhaps she'd taken his comment as meaning that he wanted to be left alone. If this had been the Victoria Line, then he probably would have, but in this case, he genuinely enjoyed chatting with her. He was therefore relieved when she suddenly broke her silence. "Are you on a business trip? Or is it a holiday?"

"Well... It's not work as such... but it's not just a holiday. We're a band."

"Ooo, are you famous?"

Jack blushed. "Nah, we're not famous."

"Well, everybody starts somewhere. You just have to be determined."

"Definitely."

“So, what are you and your band going to do in Japan?”

“We’re going there to record an album and play a few gigs.”

“I see. It’s a long way to come.”

“Yes, but I’ve wanted to visit Japan for a few years so it seemed like a nice place to do it.”

“Oh, yes. Japan is a *very* nice place.”

The stewardess returned and handed the woman a cup of water. The woman took her pill then sat quietly for about a minute. Jack always found something slightly unnerving about other peoples’ pills and, although he was curious about what hers were for, he was too polite to ask. Besides, sometimes it’s better not to know. He hoped that it wasn’t anything too serious though. Whatever it was for, just taking it seemed to make her more content. Finally, she put her hand on Jack’s arm again. “Be careful though.”

“Be careful?”

“You and your band friends be careful in Japan.”

Jack couldn’t help but be confused by the woman’s sudden serious turn. Up until now, she’d seemed so bright and positive. Negativity certainly wasn’t what Jack wanted to hear at the start of a trip such as this. However, he reasoned that it must have been her pill taking affect so he engaged her in the most positive way that he could. “Oh, I see. Thanks. We’ll be sure to keep alert.”

“My nephew played in a band around Tokyo. Not everybody is honest.”

Jack was thrown by this revelation. The picture of Japan that had formed in his mind was of a happy society with almost no crime to speak of. Sure, he’d seen from gangster movies that the Yakuza were very active in Japan but they seemed to commit their crimes against each other. They didn’t appear to be in the habit of mugging people in the street for the fun of it. That was what Jack saw as the major difference between England and Japan, the Japanese people weren’t constantly victims of petty crime that upset the happiness of their everyday lives. That’s what Jack had believed anyway. “Hmm... Sounds like back home.”

“What part of England are you from? A big city?”

“London. There’s probably more dishonest people there than in the whole of Japan.”

“Perhaps... but still be careful. Bad things can happen.”

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“Really? But Japan looks so full of fun.”
Meanwhile, somewhere in fun-filled Tokyo...



The lead singer of the less-than-merry group looked totally at odds with most of the crowd as he strutted around the stage of Bar Denim in his pink drainpipe trousers, his bright-green Mohican swaying like radioactive riverside reeds. He was by no means alone though. The rest of the band looked equally outrageous, from the tattooed, topless keyboard player with his beer belly on display, to the drummer in the pink bowler hat and circus ringmaster's jacket. They looked like they'd turned up late at a fancy-dress shop and had to piece together outfits from whatever crap was left. Tokyo wasn't unaccustomed to flamboyant fashions and standing out from the crowd, but these guys were just trying too hard.

Bar Denim lived up to its name. It was rough around the edges and difficult to move in. For Tokyo's rock kids though, it was the place to be seen. The air was thick with sweat and attitude as the throbbing mass leapt and lunged its way through another song being blasted from the stage by the curious looking young American band. Sure, they seemed to be enjoying the music, but the regular exodus to the bar revealed that their enthusiasm, to a large degree, was coming in liquid-form.

However the crowd might have been getting their energetic enthusiasm, it was quickly dampened when the band were struck with near-silence. The guitarist strummed acoustically for a moment as the singer's unamplified voice screeched away but eventually even the drummer realised that something wasn't right and brought his sticks to a halt.

The singer flapped his arms around like an aggravated teenager and muttered to the rest of the band before turning back to the crowd and knocking over his now useless microphone and stand. “That's it! The power's gone! We don't put up with this shit. Goodnight!”

Most of the crowd, bar the first few rows, were robbed of this vital piece of information due to the lack of a working PA system and so were filled with first confusion, then anger as they watched the band

march off stage thirty minutes early. Shouts and boos bounced off the ceiling. The kids wanted to be rebels and now they had something to rebel against.

It only took a few minutes for the power to be restored and for the DJ to recapture the crowd with music, lights, and weird smelling smoke, but the band thought better of reappearing. Despite the protests of the venue staff, they'd done all they were prepared to do for the night. However, packing up their gear in front of a hungry crowd that they'd denied of music wasn't a wise move. The guitarist and bass player had sensibly taken their instruments with them when they left the stage, but there was still a lot to be done before they could clear out and go back to their hotel. For now though, the safety of their dressing room and the comfort of a few ice-cold courage-builders would have to do.

As closing time passed and the bouncers shepherded out the last of the staggering customers and locked the doors, the coast was clear for the well-oiled band to head back out onto the stage to dismantle their equipment.

"C'mon," said the keyboard player, now sporting a ragged t-shirt bearing the dubious slogan: "Women, Whiskey & Guns", "let's get our stuff, get our money, and get the hell out of this hole."

"This gig just about puts the cap on things," said the singer.

"Well, tell him then. Tell him that it's not good enough... and if he doesn't listen, then I'll tell him. Then he'll know that we mean business."

As the band were busy packing amplifiers, dismantling drums, and swigging Asahi Gold, the bar manager walked onto the stage carrying an envelope. He was a small Japanese man with round glasses, but he spoke with a forthright, all-business tone that was probably quite intimidating to the girls working behind the bar when he was telling them how they'd stacked the shelves wrong. "Here is your money," he said, handing the envelope to the singer. "I've made the necessary deductions."

The keyboard player dropped the cable that he'd been struggling to roll up and staggered up to the manager with the stench of booze leading the way. The little Japanese man looked even smaller next to the overweight American as he turned his face away to escape the beer breath that the keyboard player insisted on blasting in his direction.

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“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa there, little buddy! Wadda ya mean, deductions?”

The singer opened the envelope and frantically counted the money, first once, then again. “Hey, this ain’t the amount we agreed.”

“Of course not,” said the manager. “You didn’t play the full show so you don’t get the full money. I think that’s only fair, don’t you?”

“No, it’s not fair,” said the keyboard player. “You’d better explain yourself.”

“I’ve deducted thirty minutes worth of money, to make up for you finishing thirty minutes early.”

“That wasn’t our fault,” said the singer.

“The power tripped!” said the keyboard player.

“Technical problems are not my concern. I only care that my customers went home disappointed.”

“Your crap wiring should be your concern,” said the keyboard player.

“The other bands that played here had no problems. Perhaps your equipment is faulty.”

“There’s nothing wrong with our gear,” said the singer.

The keyboard player grabbed the manager by the collar, lifting the feeble little man off the ground. “The power tripped twice during practice too! We told ya that our amps were overloading it but ya didn’t listen! Now, give us our money!”

The manager tried his best to maintain his stern demeanour, if only for the benefit of the bar girls who were now watching their evil overlord’s plight with interest. “This sort of behaviour will not be tolerated here.”

“Well, there ain’t a lot you can do about it, little man!”

“Kuma!” shouted the manager, stretching his toes towards the floor in the hope of finding some support.

The manager may have been small and feeble but there was nothing small or feeble about the monster that appeared from the side of the stage. Out of the shadows, stepped a Japanese man so solid that his finely tailored suit struggled to conceal his huge frame. His face remained emotionless as he approached the manager.

“Shit! Let him go,” said the singer, tapping the keyboard player on the arm whilst skulking backwards.

The keyboard player looked at the daunting figure, frozen to the

spot as the little manager still dangled in front of him. Even the bar girls turned away and started washing empty glasses for fear of being caught staring.

The huge man stretched out his arm and wrapped a hand so large around the keyboard player's neck that it looked like his fingertips might touch around the other side. The manager dropped back to his feet and stepped back to safety as he watched his former attacker now struggle with his own problems.

The mighty man grabbed the keyboard player by the back of the head and, in one powerful motion, spun him round and drove his head straight into his own keyboard! The beast stepped back and smiled, pleased at his handy work, as he looked at the man lying on the stage in a mess of blood, teeth, and black and white keys.