DEAD RECKONING

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This book is a work of fiction based on true events.
All characters, real and imagined, are long dead.
We've stayed with the truth as far as we can know it.
We've taken liberties and guesses with the rest.

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For twenty-three men

of the Delphy and the Young,

and for all who risk their lives in service at sea.

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

—W.S.

Dead Reckoning

Halfway through the ocean crossing, seven days after leaving Yokohama, the ss *President Cleveland* became in an instant a ghost ship. The news arrived via wireless. As the liner carved its straight steady route north of gray Hawaiian waters, a radio operator listened intently, jotted a few notes on a sheet of paper, and handed this paper to the ship's captain. The message, intended to warn of potentially difficult seas due to seismic activity in the western Pacific, did not spare the details of disaster. Word of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 spread from captain to crew and from crew to passengers: Tokyo and Yokohama had fallen, along with much of Chiba, Kanagawa, and Shizuoka; typhoon winds whipped firestorms through the rubble; wave after tsunami wave rose up to attack the broken land. It was too soon to count the dead, which in the end would number more than 100,000 souls.

The tragedy shocked the American businessmen and missionaries on board. In recent days they had grown fond of Japan's exotic customs and people. They gathered in the ship's lounge to recall the temples and bright pagodas, the geishas and the gardens, and wondered aloud what still stood. They reminisced about acquaintances left behind and prayed for their survival or, failing that, their salvation. For the ship's many Japanese guests, however, the news simply ripped their hearts from their chests. Beloved friends, wives, husbands, mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, sons and daughters and nephews and nieces, fates unknown and unknowable, haunted every thought, every movement, every breath. They stood at the stern and looked out past the wake, past the horizon, past the setting sun, and they cried for their loss.

Eugene Dooman heard the news while taking breakfast in the first class dining room. The buzz among the passengers had been building all morning, but he had shut it out in favor of a book given to him by a compatriot before the voyage, an account of events leading to the Great War which he found so far to be mediocre and rather an apologia for certain diplomatic missteps.

"I say, Mr. Dooman? Have you heard? It's terribly horrific."

The woman, plump and overdressed, was the wife of an industrialist. Railroad people. Weeks earlier Dooman had guided her husband through a series of embassy parties, introducing him to his Japanese counterparts, translating as needed, and wishing them success in their joint endeavors. Now she was practically

bursting with gossip, her girdle tight enough already as it was.

He thanked her politely for the information, diplomatically even, and at the next opportunity made his way forward to the ship's bridge and the radio room, where he requested a message be relayed on his behalf to the U.S. State Department:

> Please advise upon arrival San Francisco should Eugene H. Dooman, secretary at American Embassy Tokyo, return to Japan on first available ship?

Then he went to his cabin to rest. He was thirty-three years old and tired. It had been an eventful year. The decision to leave Tokyo, initially nothing but a well-earned relaxation from service, now took on the added significance of being the third time in nine months that he had narrowly escaped death.

The first occasion had been an ill-fated winter voyage to Vladivostok. Sent to assess the situation in that Russian backwater after its fall to the Communists, Dooman's ship had met an unexpected storm hours after setting out. Ice on the foredeck had accumulated so heavily that it weighed the bow down into the water, raising the stern and propellers and making navigation and forward movement impossible. It seemed all that kept them from foundering was the buoyancy of the ice itself, but there would be no guarantees if the ship turned on its side and took water. The crew spent days and nights in a losing battle of hammering and chipping and shaving at the frozen mass until at last the storm broke and they limped into port a week late, the

authorities having already given them up as lost. Several months later, on a brief hiking holiday in the Japanese Alps, Dooman had taken a misstep—upon which carelessness he preferred not to dwell—that led to a tumble down a mountainside, his fall arrested just feet from ruin by the fortunate placement of a single protruding boulder. And now this latest trouble. He pictured his Tokyo apartment destroyed and in flames, his books and bed buried and burning, and thanked God for once again sparing him by the slightest of margins.

He was not a superstitious man—he would never make the claim that these things came only in threes—but surely after all he had been through the odds should be in his favor for a while.

That afternoon he tried to mingle with his fellow passengers but found their worries dull, self-serving, and ignorant of the Japan he knew so well. Born in Osaka to missionary parents who had emigrated from the turbulence of their native Iran, Dooman's fierce and firm loyalty to the United States came weighted with a worldly experience. As a child he spoke Japanese fluently, perhaps even better than his English. He had spent plenty of time stateside at boarding school and university, but after graduation his employment with the diplomatic service sent him straight back to Tokyo—which, he could not forget, now lay in ruins.

He would be needed there. He wished he had never left.

Dooman visited the Japanese passengers but they were too broken by the news. Unlike him, they had left loved ones behind. He was unmarried, his parents long since retired and living in America, and the fate of miss-

ing co-workers carried less weight than that of missing wives and children. He checked in daily with the ship's officers and the radio room, but he received no instruction from his superiors and the ship sailed on with no sign of the feared difficult seas.

And so at the end of an otherwise uneventful fourteen-day voyage, on the morning of September 7, 1923, the *Cleveland* motored into San Francisco Bay and unloaded at Angel Island for the dual filters of customs and immigration. Dooman's status with the State Department expedited his clearance but to no great advantage. Instead of waiting in line with the others, he waited outside at the dock by the empty ferry as one by one his fellow passengers rejoined him. For the most part, among the Americans at least, their mourning for Japan had given way to excitement at reaching their destination. They were eager to get on with it and annoyed by the slow pace of processing the Japanese and Chinese arrivals, a good number of whom were pulled aside for further questioning and an extended stay in the island's detention center.

At last the ferry left the dock and headed across the bay. As many as could fit, Dooman among them, clung to the rail at the wide bow to watch the city come into focus. Consolation of sorts could be found in the bustling wharf ahead and the busy profile of buildings carpeting the hillsides. Factories, banks, hotels, residences—less than a score of years had passed since earthquake and fire had leveled this great city as well. Tokyo, like San Francisco, would rise again.

Fishing boats, freighters, and Navy warships studded the water and filled the docks ahead. Several dozen of

the latter lay at rest, identical sleek gray knives lined side by side like a trick done with mirrors, their heavy gun turrets locked forward and aft in proud repose. The ferry passed almost in the shadow of one anchored destroyer before turning for the wharf, where workers called out as they guided crates from ships to dock and from dock to ship. Nets of tired fish rose slowly from their holds, draining water in scale-glittered rainbows.

The ferry's crew tied up and the gates wheeled open. After a moment of hesitation the passengers understood they were free to depart. Dooman nearly lost his grip on his luggage amidst the bumping and pushing as everyone unloaded and dispersed in a rush. Soon it was hard to distinguish his fellow travelers from ordinary San Franciscans, except for the confused looks on those trying to orient themselves to the new city. He supposed he was one of those. He set down his bag and mentally noted the compass points, having studied a map before disembarking the liner. An electric streetcar and several jitney cabs were possibilities. Walking to his hotel would be a bit much.

He was about to take another step forward when an excitement of Navy sailors surged past, immobilizing mere civilians with their loud momentum and enthusiasm for liberty. They were young and low-ranking and boisterous, and their quest for fun or trouble or maybe both had led them here. It was ten o'clock in the morning and the height of Prohibition, but Dooman could smell the rum at five paces.

"Step right up, gentlemen, test your wits." A young man unfolded a small portable table and dropped a

satchel beneath it. "Find the lucky lady and the money is yours."

"No thanks, kid," said a passing sailor. "I know your game."

And the game was simple: three playing cards face down on the table, rapidly shuffled by expert hands, turned up to reveal two black jacks and a queen of diamonds. Dooman had seen this sport before but he admired the man's skill as two more sailors approached the table.

"I'll give it a go," said one, dropping a ten dollar bill onto a card.

"Hey diddle diddle," said the dealer, turning the card face up, "the queen's in the middle." He paid twenty dollars to the lucky sailor, who cheered and shook hands with his companion.

"All right, another round. I have three cards in my hand. Two jacks and a queen. I shuffle them up and mix their places, and if you tell me where she is, you'll have happy faces."

The second sailor borrowed money from his friend and laid it on a card. The dealer turned it over and shook his head, not very well hiding his disappointment.

"Bad luck for me, gentlemen. I do believe you hope to clean me out. But I don't cry when I lose and I won't sing when I win." He paid the second sailor then he worked his fingers a bit, shaking off the loss and readying himself to try again. He picked up his showy patter. "The red queen is the one you're after. Ten will get you twenty and twenty gets you forty. I have two chances to your one but if your eye is faster than my hand you win every time. Find the lady and triple your money."

A new man, drawn by the easy pickings, joined the game with his own ten dollars. This time, though, luck favored the dealer, whose hands pocketed the bill so quickly that the man had no chance to object.

"She's a cruel mistress. She teases and tarts. But I'm a fair host and you'll always have another chance. Remember, it's two cards to me and one to you. Follow with your eye while I shuffle the three. Here she is, and here, and here, now what do you see?"

The novice gambler hesitated, studying the backs of the cards. Where was the trick?

"This is a game for players, not watchers," said the dealer. "Who's brave enough to take a chance?"

The first sailor threw down another ten dollars. Again he had the winner.

"And that's how it's done. Nice work from the man with the sharp eye, a servant of his country no less, and surely a better man than I am. Find the honey and win the money. It's your lucky day. Jack, jack, and queen, and she's the one you want."

So this was America at last. There was nothing Dooman could do for the people of Tokyo, not now, not from here. He let himself relax for the first time in a week, realizing all at once how difficult he had been making this on himself. There was no point in dwelling on problems with no solutions, not when you were a free man in a land of opportunity. These sailors, this street gambler, they would never burden their lives with such intractable thoughts. They simply lived. They lived impulsively and well, never questioning their own worth. It seemed easy enough. Dooman thought he would join them.

He removed his wallet from a jacket pocket. It bulged with his traveling cash. From the stack he pulled a twenty dollar bill and placed it on a card.

"Why not?" he said. "Let's make this an auspicious start to my American furlough."

It came as something of a surprise, then, when the man turned the card to reveal one of the jacks and in the same smooth motion removed Dooman's money from the table. How—

"And when the dough goes down, the lady can't be found. Let me explain the game, friend. I have three cards. Two belong to me but the queen is yours. I take no bets from paupers, cripples, or orphan children, for this red lady is no kind mother. She runs, she hides, but catch her and you're in the money. Ten will get you back the twenty you lost."

Dooman tracked the man's hands as he spoke. The play was straightforward. The queen was turned face down in the middle then moved to the left, to the right, then back to the left. Dooman bet again and again he lost.

"It seems you've still got your sea legs, sir, and the salt spray stings your vision."

"I'm fourteen days by ship out of Tokyo," Dooman said. "But I'd say the difficulty lies less in my eyes than your hands. You're very skilled with those cards."

"It passes the time," the man said. "It keeps me out of trouble." He gave Dooman a wink, riffled the cards once more, and spread them face up on the table. There wasn't a jack or queen among them, just the four of clubs repeated three times like the sails of a ship. "How's that for a boat?"

Astonished, Dooman stared at the cards, playing the man's quick, short hand movements back in his mind. "How—"

But at that moment a sharp whistle sounded nearby in the crowd. A uniformed sailor blew a loud warning with two of his fingers in his mouth as two police officers closed fast on the game. The man with the cards reacted instantly, grabbing his satchel from the ground and knocking over the table. The cards scattered. The man ran.

Before Dooman had the chance to comprehend the situation, the whistling sailor was on him.

"Go, sir!" the man shouted. "Gambling is a serious crime in this city. Don't let them catch you."

The sailor grabbed Dooman by the shoulders, turned him around, and gave him a push to get him started. It seemed an overreaction. Surely the police would be inclined to ignore such a minor offense, especially from a respectable, honest man who came out on the losing end of the game. But again the sailor's hands were on him, turning him around once more, and again he spoke in a voice much louder than necessary.

"Wait, sir. Don't forget."

Dooman felt the man guiding his arm to his luggage, helping his hand grip the handle, helping him lift the heavy case, then turning him back and forcing him on his way.

"Fly, sir. Fly now. I'll misdirect the police for you."

Confused and even a bit ashamed, Dooman took a few steps into the crowd before pausing and collecting his wits. He turned back, prepared at last to speak, but the man was nowhere to be seen. The other two sailors,

though, the two who had been so good at the game, now blocked the way of the hurried policemen.

"Officers," said the first man, "I'd like to file a complaint. That thief stole my hard-earned wages."

"It was a fixed game," said the other. "Nothing fair about it."

The policemen attempted to move past the two sailors, their eyes fixed on the fleeing cardsman as he escaped the crowded walkway and crossed into the busy street beyond.

"A complaint, sir. I demand you take my statement."

"Move aside," one of the officers replied. He shoved the sailor away and continued his pursuit.

"I see him running," the second sailor said. "There he is." But the direction the sailor pointed was opposite the direction in which the gambler had run. The second officer batted the man's pointing hand before rejoining the chase.

It was then that worldly wise Eugene Dooman, secretary at the United States Embassy in Tokyo, newly arrived upon the shores of his own strange country, realized the way in which he had been fleeced.

FRIDAY

Emmett Haines adjusted the strap of his satchel. There was nothing heavy in there to slow him down, just a few essentials that might come in handy. It could have been a metaphor for his life up to this point. Two policemen followed perhaps twenty seconds behind. He ran faster