

SAYONARA TOKYO

by R.W. Schneider

Dramatis Personae (3m, 4f with doubling)

Jaq (<i>f</i>)	a playwright
Drew (<i>m</i>)	a music company executive
Fleet Girl #1, <i>IJNS Fubuki</i> (<i>f</i>)	a destroyer
Cora (<i>f</i>)	an actress
Fleet Girl #2, <i>IJNS Akagi</i> (<i>f</i>)	an aircraft carrier (can double with Cora)
Klock (<i>m</i>)	a lawyer
Yamaguchi (<i>m</i>)	an agent for Japanese video game producers
Commander Lovebed (<i>m</i>)	a naval historian (can double with Drew)
Rosa (<i>f</i>)	a literary manager for a non-profit theatre

SYNOPSIS: Playwright Jaq steers her newest project through a minefield of obstacles: the holders of underlying rights won't let her use their properties; an eager actor jumps the gun; a naval historian tests her research, and a literary manager offers too many suggestions. Some of the biggest problems are posed by people who truly want to help. At intervals, two of her characters pursue their own drama even as their creator labors over hers. When Jaq hits a wall, the characters intervene.

A slash (/) signifies when the next actor can begin speaking
Ellipses (...) signify a thought trailing off (unspoken)
An *m* dash (—) signifies an abrupt cut-off (stop)
(BEAT) signifies a thought
(PAUSE) signifies something is absorbed
(SILENCE) signifies something is understood

Ver 12

© 2023 by Robert Schneider
106 Roydon Road
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 606 7961
rschneider29@yahoo.com

DREW

Is there something I'm missing here? The song says she's got pride and self-worth. It says she's gonna survive a separation and find love. And she sings it perfectly. The song and the singer both say, "I will survive." But your characters—the characters in your play—they don't survive.

JAQ

They want to.

DREW

But they don't.

JAQ

Gloria Gaynor's rendition was purely musical, not dramatic...

DREW

I think it's very dramatic.

JAQ

I mean, it's not dramatic in the sense that it's not part of a drama; it's just there on its own. There's no story around it, so we don't know if she'll survive or not.

DREW

You mean because there's no ending?

JAQ

Right.

DREW

So you want to write a play with an ending?

JAQ

Right.

DREW

And you're saying "no," she won't survive?

JAQ

Right.

DREW

Of course, she'll survive. When Freddie Perren and Dino Fekaris wrote the song in 1978, she survived.

JAQ

But a playwright could decide that the character *doesn't* survive even if the song says she will. Being wrong about what's coming is called "pathetic fallacy." You see it in tragedies all the time.

DREW

So you're writing a tragedy?

JAQ

Right.

DREW

Like Shakespeare?

JAQ

I'm writing about events that didn't turn out as intended. And yes, I'm writing something that has an ending. By itself, the song doesn't have an ending, it just fades out.

DREW

So why use it? If it's not Shakespeare enough and doesn't have an ending, use some other song.

JAQ

I see the song as part of a larger composition. My play isn't *about* the song, but the song would add something.

DREW

What?

JAQ

Well... *irony*. The characters singing the song don't know what's in store for them; they're optimistic that they'll survive, but it's a pathetic fallacy.

(Pause)

DREW

Jacqueline...

JAQ

“Jaq”

DREW

Sorry, “*Jaq*.” There’s another thing: your characters aren’t human.

JAQ

Yes, they are.

DREW

You said they were boats.

JAQ

Ships.

DREW

What’s the difference?

JAQ

If it’s small enough to be hoisted onto a ship, it’s a boat. If not, it’s a ship.

DREW

I didn’t know that. Were you in the navy or something?

JAQ

No.

DREW

Ships aren’t people, so survival isn’t a problem for them.

JAQ

My characters are people who embody the souls of ships. Or, if you prefer, they’re ships in human form. Either way, they’re proud and determined, so “I Will Survive” is perfect for them.

DREW

But they *don’t* survive. They sink. You need a song that says “I Will Submerge.” Just don’t use our melody, okay?

JAQ

Look, in the grand scheme of things, doesn’t everybody sink? Didn’t Gloria Gaynor sink in the end?

DREW

Gloria Gaynor didn't sink. Gloria Gaynor's on television.

JAQ

Is she still alive? I thought she was dead.

DREW

She's still performing. She sings "I Will Survive" all the time.

JAQ

I didn't know that. She must be in her 80s.

DREW

She hasn't sunk.

JAQ

But ultimately, aren't we *destined* to sink? Isn't it part of our humanity, the card we're dealt at birth? The best we can hope for is to give a good account of ourselves while we're afloat and maybe sing a few good songs.

DREW

Well, I'm not gonna sink any time soon. You can sink if you want, but we won't let you take the song down with you. You're entitled to write about singing boats...

JAQ

Ships.

DREW

Ships that sing and ships that sink, but, frankly, the whole thing sounds like a downer. It's just not right for our property.

JAQ

But isn't that irony already there? When Gloria Gaynor—or any human being—sings "I Will Survive" isn't the song interesting—at least in part—because, in the end, we know she *won't*?

DREW

That's what goes through your head when you hear "I Will Survive"? A great big "no"? "No, she *won't* survive?"

JAQ

That's part of what goes through my head.

(Pause)

DREW

I think that's really sick.

Blackout. The office vanishes. A pale, nacreous light comes up. We hear a bamboo flute and a small drum. A Fleet Girl representing IJNS destroyer Fubuki enters smoothly and gracefully. She wears the short-skirted sailor suit uniform of a Japanese schoolgirl, but her bookbag comports a funnel, rangefinder and an aft turret. She has another small turret on her forearm. She circles the stage alertly, seeking the ship she's been sent to guard. Her movements are dancer-like, but also suggest a ship at sea. When she exits, the lights come up on an empty theatre. Cora, an actress, is pacing. We hear Jaq's voice coming from the back of the house.

JAQ

You're Cora Mathewson, is that right?

CORA

Yes, that's right. My agent told me you're working on a new play.

JAQ

Your agent jumped the gun a bit. I'm still working on the text. There *might* be a workshop when I finish it. I tried to explain that, but he insisted that I see you.

CORA

I love new plays, especially if there's a nautical theme.

JAQ

Then you've come to the right place.

CORA

Because I'd be playing a ship? Like, a big ship?

JAQ

Very big.

CORA

That would be a new one for me. I've never even played a kayak.

JAQ

Yeah. Uncharted waters.

CORA

Well, this morning I tried to find the physicality of the character. 'Cause that's how I work; I work from the outside in. So, I'm thinking "a really big ship isn't going to be in a walk-up apartment in Brooklyn. A really big ship needs room." So I thought of going over to Pier 57, but I didn't want to be tied to a dock, ya know?

JAQ

No, of course not.

CORA

So I went to Prospect Park and I pretended the grass was water.

JAQ

Hmm. How did that go?

CORA

It would have been fine, but there were lots of little kids playing soccer on my water! And I said "those are seagulls. They're just seagulls squawking and flying around."

JAQ

That's a very good adjustment.

CORA

And I'm this giant, floating battleship....

JAQ

Your agent said you were a *battleship*?

CORA

Yes, was that alright?

JAQ (*it's not alright*)

The Silverman agency, right?

CORA

That's right.

JAQ

Go on. You went to Prospect Park...

CORA

And I'm anchored there. And it's funny—because I don't feel heavy. It's easy to move. If there's a gust of wind, I turn into it... Cause I'm floating, see? Cause I'm a goddamn ship!

JAQ

That's very good.

CORA

Then I try and figure out what it's like to have cannons all over me, like enormous, big-ass cannons. That's a bit harder. It's not like I'm packing. It's like I AM THE GUN. I'm a whole gun store. I'm Guns.com—but I'm floating! And these guns are STICKING OUT ALL OVER ME. So I'm thinking “anybody who looks at me is looking at a gun pointed straight at them.”

JAQ

How did that make you feel?

CORA

Kinda shy. I don't want people to be afraid of me. I mean, they *better be afraid*, but I don't *want* them to be afraid. (*beat*) I go up to this guy selling hot dogs, but if I look at him to order a hot dog, he'll be scared shitless. Like, his whole cart—the hot dogs, the sauerkraut and the pretzels—it could all be blasted to pieces. And that's how everybody looks at me. And suddenly I felt really lonely. I started crying. And my first thought is “I can't order a hot dog if I'm crying. I shouldn't be crying at all. I'm a battleship; my tears will roll down inside my cannons and my cannons will rust! My cannons are gonna fuckin' rust 'cause of some guy selling hot dogs!” I mean, who needs that?” And I just lose it: KA-POW! KA-POW! KA-POW! And the whole cart turns to flames!

JAQ

Wow! Was anybody hurt?

CORA

No, the guy just looked at me funny. And I turned away. I turned to port—that's right, right?

JAQ

It's left, actually, but go on.

CORA

I turned to port and I'm hungry 'cause I *wanted* the hot dog. So I head home to eat, but it's really slow getting up speed. It takes forever to just walk across the park—and there are all these seagulls around me, screaming and flapping and nothing I can do about it 'cause they're too small to shoot at.

JAQ

You didn't have machine guns? As the war went on, the ships got more and more anti-aircraft guns. The biggest ship, *Yamato*, had over a hundred machine guns.

CORA

So many?

JAQ

Air attacks were a big problem.

CORA

That's horrible. I didn't think about machine guns. Anyway, I didn't shoot at the seagulls. Mostly, I was hungry. But I was hungry the way a big-ass battleship is hungry. A deep, resonating hunger, ya know?

JAQ

That's very good.

CORA

So... will you call me?

(Blackout. In the mid-ocean light Fubuki performs a search pattern. She's looking for Akagi. She exits in frustration. Lights come up on a law office.)

KLOCK

Copyrighted properties can be used as the basis of new and original works under certain conditions. One such condition is parody. Nearly always the original work is of a serious nature and the parody is bawdy, satirical or comedic. Your case is the opposite. You've created a serious work as a parody of something which is pretty lightweight.

JAQ

I prefer "response" to "parody." The anime series may be "lightweight," but it's also untruthful, incomplete and morally bankrupt. My work responds to that.

KLOCK

Unfortunately, the law says "parody" is fair use but not "response." You'd have to show that adding what really happened—what happened *historically*—makes it a parody. Otherwise, it's fan fiction.

JAQ

It's not fan fiction. I'm not a fan.

KLOCK

You can knock the original property as much as you like; that's *criticism*. But you've written *a play*, a play that uses the same characters and some of the same situations...

JAQ

But I use them to totally / different effect...

KLOCK

...and it's got the same name! It's still called "Fleet Girls."

JAQ

I'm gonna change the name.

KLOCK

What to?

JAQ

"Called to Serve"

(Pause)

KLOCK

Oh. Okay then. *(He consults a document)* You say the original property is an action/comedy/adventure while your play is "a tragedy." You say your work is transformative and it doesn't violate the Kadokawa and Diomedea copyrights.

JAQ

It's totally transformative.

KLOCK

Because you follow through with history? You add an ending?

JAQ

I write the ending that was already there. Historical facts are available to everybody. Kadokawa didn't invent the Second World War. They can't copyright it.

KLOCK

But the idea of representing ships from WW II as girls and young women in sexy uniforms who go to school when they're not in combat isn't history; it's *Fleet Girls*. It's

an anime series that Kadokawa and Diomedea *own*. You've gotta show that you're only borrowing their property to parody its ideology.

JAQ

Refute its ideology.

KLOCK

Refuting *Fleet Girls* is like refuting a strawberry milkshake. *Fleet Girls* isn't serious; it's just entertainment.

JAQ

But turning World War II into a strawberry milkshake is *an idea*, an idea that I'm allowed to make fun of—an idea that *deserves* to be made fun of!

(Pause)

KLOCK

Look, you've got a scene where a young destroyer, Fubuki, asks an older ship, an aircraft carrier named Akagi, what happens when you sink. Your scene is remarkably like episode eleven of *Fleet Girls*. In both works, the older ship evades the question.

JAQ

There's nothing original in the anime treatment of that scene—or the scene itself. No, the scene that's *original* in my play—original because it actually *happened*—is the scene where the Akagi is on fire and Fubuki comes to help.

KLOCK

I remember that scene. It's very affecting.

JAQ

Is it transformative?

KLOCK

It changes the tone, but it doesn't undo the resemblance between the earlier scene and episode eleven.

JAQ

I can show you versions of episode eleven in Homer! I can show you that scene in the *Mahabharata*.

KLOCK

I'll level with you, Jaq: you're not gonna be sued by Homer or whoever wrote the Mahabharata, but if you wanna use *that* scene, the scene where the destroyer asks the carrier what happens when we sink—then you gotta talk to the Japanese.

(Blackout. In the same nacreous light as before, IJNS Akagi enters. She wears a highly sexualized version of a naval uniform: a tight-fitting tunic, miniskirt and heels. She has a flight deck attached to her forearm and carries an asymmetrical Japanese bow for launching aircraft. There's a quiver of arrows representing aircraft on her back. She circles the stage thoughtfully, a ballet walk with naval flourishes. Every now and then she uses her bow to launch scout planes and watches them fly off. She exits. When the lights come up, we're in a very modern office in Tokyo. Yamaguchi and Jaq are seated on facing couches.)

JAQ

What first drew me to *Fleet Girls* was the central idea, the idea of *transformation*. This dual identity—they're ships, but they're also women. Or, if you prefer, they're young women, but they're also ships. I found that tremendously compelling. Transformation is the heart of myth—goes back at least to Ovid. But *Fleet Girls* isn't myth—it's epic poetry. And it isn't poetic in a purely literary sense, it's poetic in the *theatrical* sense—the poetry of the stage.

YAMAGUCHI

You're very kind. Ovid is very good. Are you a professor?

JAQ

I was for a short time.

YAMAGUCHI

I see.

JAQ

I understand, of course, that Kensuke Tanaka created *Fleet Girls* as a multi-player, online game. And his team did a tremendous amount of research into the ships of the period. They needed to quantify the performance of each ship for purposes of the game. Paradoxically, their research into the armor, propulsion and weapons of inanimate objects served to create highly differentiated human characters.

YAMAGUCHI

Yes, the research is very good.

JAQ

The women are different because the ships were different. It's quite ingenious. It's Ovid!

YAMAGUCHI

I appreciate your kind words.

JAQ

And it served well when Diomedea adapted the game as an anime series. (I'm skipping the arcade game and 'manga' stages of the franchise for the time being, but we can come back to them.) The anime series depicted girls and young women at school doing things that viewers—especially young viewers—would instantly recognize.

YAMAGUCHI

That was the intent, yes.

JAQ

What was omitted in the anime series, however, is what I've tried to restore in my play: the weight of history, the realization that one way or another the war is lost and the Fleet Girls are doomed. And I know this is a sensitive topic, but I mean it respectfully—the sacrifices of the Imperial Japanese Navy are humbling regardless of one's political orientation in Japan today. The courage and resolve of these sailors compel acknowledgement, if not (I understand) admiration—at least not admiration from all sides of the political spectrum. People will have differing opinions, of course.

YAMAGUCHI

Of course.

JAQ

And I understand that you've been scrupulous about not taking sides.

YAMAGUCHI

Fleet Girls was aimed at wide audience. There was no desire to cause offense to anyone.

JAQ

Which is why the Fleet Girls in the anime fight only against “the abysmal fleet,” a mysterious, supernatural force, a sort of zombie navy! That was brilliant!

YAMAGUCHI

We didn't wish to appear anti-American or anti-British.

JAQ (*she can't resist this*)

Or anti-Dutch, Australian or Chinese?

YAMAGUCHI

Of course not. These are important markets. We needed a new opposing force.

JAQ

I'm glad to hear you say that, because even though my play restores the historical outcome to "operation M-I," I don't intend it to be triumphalist for Americans or, for that matter, bitter for Japanese. For me, the story is simply tragic, tragic in the simplest and purest sense, tragic the way *Trojan Women* is tragic—not that I'm comparing myself with Euripides.

YAMAGUCHI

Euripides is very good writer with many fans in Japan. However, you are not applying for Japanese rights, only rights to English language play. So... feelings of Japanese audience are perhaps not important to our discussion today.

JAQ

I take your point.

YAMAGUCHI

I read your play. Very interesting approach. Very respectful of detail. In my view, it does not deviate from Japanese product in historical outcome as much as you say.

JAQ

In the Japanese product, the Fleet Girls are victorious.

YAMAGUCHI

Fleet Girls exists in the historical reality of June 1, 1942. Japan is winning. One week later is perhaps not the same story. Not the same outcome.

JAQ

One week later was the real "operation M-I," the Battle of Midway.

YAMAGUCHI

The "Abysmal Fleet" deviates from the actions of US Navy only in aspect.

JAQ

They're twisted, undersea monsters without souls.

YAMAGUCHI

This is not a problem. No, your play deviates from Japanese product in fan service.

JAQ

“Fan service”?

YAMAGUCHI

You have no scenes in bath house.

JAQ

Is that important? I mean, is it a question of product placement or something?

YAMAGUCHI

Not product placement: *Fleet Girls* is entertainment property. If entertainment is not present, your product is not *Fleet Girls*. We are reluctant to license product that is not entertainment property.

JAQ

I’m sorry. I don’t understand.

YAMAGUCHI

You need more nudity. *Fleet Girls* with no nudity is not *Fleet Girls*!

JAQ

More nudity.

YAMAGUCHI

Please make necessary changes. At least make visible the panties. Panties visible is a minimum. Then we can talk.

JAQ

Panties visible.

YAMAGUCHI

Exactly. Then we can talk. So... how do they say in the movies? “Good day, Mr. Bond.”

(Blackout. Lights change. Akagi enters and suddenly catches sight of Fubuki. She smiles. The destroyer hurries to Akagi, taking care not to bang into her as she comes alongside. They kiss warmly and repeatedly then exit side-by-side in a kind of pas de deux. Lights come up on a room containing a great many archival file boxes. Commander Lovebed is in uniform.)

LOVEBED

I read your draft. You've read Walter Lord, of course, and Dallas Isom (bravo for that) and you read Fuchida!

JAQ

I had to read Fuchida. Fuchida was on *Akagi* at Pearl Harbor and later at Midway.

LOVEBED

But he had appendicitis at Midway. He could barely leave his berth.

JAQ

He was lucky to survive.

LOVEBED

Did you know he was in Hiroshima in August of 1945?

JAQ

No! Really?

LOVEBED

He received orders to go to Tokyo on the fifth. It saved his life. They dropped the bomb on the sixth.

JAQ

Amazing.

LOVEBED

Anyway, you read Fuchida and the others, but you didn't read Morrison.

JAQ

No, but Walter Lord read Morrison and Isom read Lord. And I guess Isom also read Morrison. He seems to think Morrison is a bit old-fashioned. There are a few factual errors in Morrison...

LOVEBED

Morrison got to the story first. He didn't have all the pieces yet.

JAQ

That's what Dallas Isom says...

LOVEBED

But Morrison doesn't tell the same story you do.

JAQ

He doesn't?

LOVEBED

No. Morrison tells a story of brave and ingenious men confronting a cruel and fanatical enemy—and facing long odds.

JAQ

Very long odds.

LOVEBED

It seems you want to take their side.

JAQ

Whose side?

LOVEBED

The enemy's side. You want to humanize them.

JAQ

Weren't they human? To be "cruel and fanatical" don't you have to be human first?

LOVEBED

But you want to make them cute. You want to make them innocent and misled.

JAQ

Yes.

LOVEBED

I have trouble with that.

JAQ

You were never innocent? Never misled?

LOVEBED

Not by my commanders, no. My commanders always told me what to expect—to the extent that they knew, of course.

JAQ

Of course.

(Pause)

Did you serve?
LOVEBED

I'm sorry?
JAQ

Did you serve in the navy?
LOVEBED

No.
JAQ

(Pause)

LOVEBED
If you'd read Morrison, you'd know what the Japanese did to their prisoners. One of the American aviators the Japanese fished out of the water that day was tortured and beheaded. You don't mention that. Two others were tied to oil drums and thrown overboard. You don't mention that either.

JAQ
I know about both incidents. They're not part of the story I want to tell.

LOVEBED
But they're part of THE story—the story of what really happened.

JAQ
That Morrison tells.

LOVEBED
That Morrison tells, exactly.

JAQ
So, I don't need to tell it again.

(Pause)

LOVEBED

Can I ask how you got started on this?

JAQ

The anime series—it's so accurate, but it's so false. The code names of military operations are real. "Operation M-I"! The names of the ships and their grouping for deployment are real, but the outcomes are totally unreal. That's not what happened! I wanted to tell the rest of the story.

(Silence)

LOVEBED

Is there some reason why all your characters are lesbians?

JAQ

Do people have a sexual orientation for a *reason*? Is there a reason why you're straight? (I assume you're straight.)

LOVEBED

I'm straight.

(Pause)

JAQ

You're not going to ask?

LOVEBED

It's none of my business.

JAQ

"Don't ask — don't tell"?

LOVEBED

"Don't ask — don't tell" was crappy policy. I'm glad we've moved on. As I said, I'm straight, but I'm proud to serve with service members who aren't. Your orientation doesn't concern me and doesn't seem relevant to what we're talking about.

JAQ

Tell me this: if women didn't exist, could you imagine being attracted to other men?

LOVEBED

If women didn't exist at all?

JAQ

No women. Could you be attracted to men?

LOVEBED

I can imagine that... with an effort.

JAQ

Well, that's my characters' situation. There are no men, so they go to bed with other women.

(Pause)

LOVEBED

I noticed that as their displacement increases, they have bigger tits.

JAQ

Yes. It's that way in the anime series.

LOVEBED

But you're *writing a play*. You *decided* to make them lesbians—and make the battleships bustier.

JAQ

It's more intuitive than that. I can write down what my characters say and do, but I can't make them do anything they don't *want* to do. I never called a meeting and said "I'm gonna make you all lesbians."

LOVEBED

I see.

JAQ

When I started, I wanted to see if a stage version of the anime was possible. But as I got into it, what I wrote became darker and closer to *what really happened*—as you put it. But now I'm stuck. Because they'll never give me the rights for a version of *Fleet Girls* where the Fleet Girls *lose*. My only hope is to make it an out-and-out parody—and for that I need to find something the anime series doesn't touch.

LOVEBED

Something like "they tortured and beheaded American aviators"?

JAQ

That's *too* horrible. (*beat*) Look, the Japanese behaved horribly, there's no question about that. But in my story the ships are stand-ins for enlisted sailors who perish because they believe the lies of their leaders—political leaders as well as military. My ships are like raw recruits: they do what they're told—and so they die. That's the story I'm trying to tell.

LOVEBED

And you need a hand from the Naval History and Heritage Command?

JAQ

Yes.

LOVEBED

Our archives are extensive and they're open to researchers of all kinds. We don't support projects that slander the U.S. Navy or the men and women who serve in it—or who served in the past.

JAQ

You read my draft; I never even mention the U.S. Navy.

LOVEBED

And you won't mention it in subsequent drafts?

JAQ

No.

(*Silence*)

LOVEBED

After the war, the Japanese burned most of their archives but not all of them. Vice-Admiral Nagumo's report to the Supreme Council after his defeat at Midway survived and was translated by the Office of Strategic Services. The 1946 OSS edition contains a minute-by-minute log of the battle: the sightings, the signals, the launching of planes, bomb hits. Everything.

JAQ

I've got it.

LOVEBED

Good girl! Where did you find it?

JAQ

Sterling Library.

LOVEBED

At Yale? Are you a Yalie?

JAQ

I was for a short time.

(A beat)

LOVEBED

Anyway, Nagumo's report gives you your plot. That's what it's called, isn't it? "The plot"?

JAQ

Yeah, I know what happens in what sequence.

LOVEBED

Except Nagumo isn't in your play, is he? I mean, he's not a ship.

JAQ

I've got a ship that finds herself in Nagumo's situation.

LOVEBED

Nagato?

JAQ

Yeah.

LOVEBED

Tough break for *Nagato*.

JAQ

Yeah. *(a beat)* Commander, I know *what* happened. I need to know how people felt *when* it happened.

LOVEBED

That's much harder.

JAQ

And the biggest question of all: I want to know *why* it happened.

LOVEBED

Yeah... We all want to know why.

(Blackout. The archives vanish. In the now-familiar nacreous light, Fubuki enters, distraught.)

FUBUKI

Akagi-senpai, you're burning!

(Akagi enters. Fires are raging on her flight and hanger decks.)

AKAGI

Dive bombers came. It happened very quickly. There was aviation fuel everywhere. Ordinance too. Scattered everywhere.

FUBUKI

Does it hurt?

AKAGI

When bombs go off. It hurts a little. Torpedoes hurt more.

FUBUKI

I'll pump water over you.

AKAGI

No. Stay back. Don't come closer.

FUBUKI

I want to help.

AKAGI

It's too dangerous, little one. Where is Fleet Carrier Kaga?

FUBUKI

Kaga is on fire, too. It's horrible!

AKAGI

On fire everywhere?

FUBUKI

Yes, everywhere. I went by her. She saw me but didn't say anything.

AKAGI

There's something you must do. Sink me.

FUBUKI

Akagi-senpai. No. No. I can't sink you.

AKAGI

You must. I will be disgraced if the enemy finds me like this. You must do it now.

FUBUKI

Akagi.

AKAGI

Now. Quickly.

FUBUKI

How can I do it?

AKAGI

Don't play stupid! We taught you how: four torpedoes from two thousand meters, a 3-degree spread.

FUBUKI

I can't...

AKAGI

You must! What are you waiting for?

FUBUKI

No. I can't!

(Crossfade to a cramped office in a downtown theatre complex. Rosa's desk is piled high with scripts. At intervals, the office is side lit by the burning carrier in the wings.)

ROSA

You did really good research. I didn't know half the things you found out about World War II.

JAQ

Thank you.

ROSA

No, really. I respect that. Lots of playwrights don't do research; they think they know everything already.

JAQ

So you read it?

ROSA

I did.

JAQ

And?

ROSA

It's a bit long.

JAQ

It's within the page count you gave on the website.

ROSA

Yeah, but you changed the margins. We want an inch and a quarter left and right; you've got an inch all around.

JAQ

Oh.

ROSA

While we're on the subject, we prefer brass fasteners, not staples.

(Jaq surveys the piles of scripts. She picks one up at random.)

JAQ

This one's got brass fasteners. Is it better than mine?

ROSA

Let me see it.

(Rosa glances at the cover page and tosses it on another pile.)

ROSA (CONT)

No, yours is better. She wrote a play; you're writing an obsession. And please don't take "brass fasteners" the wrong way. We like to work with good writers who can follow directions.

JAQ

Who can follow orders?

ROSA

Theatre is a business—even non-profit theatre. Just like any other business, especially after COVID, we've got to rationalize operations. We've got to be practical.

JAQ

I can't imagine a business less practical than the theatre. If one theatre makes money on a play, the others all try and do the same play or the same sort of play...

ROSA

Not all...

JAQ

But the only theatre that makes money is the one that did the impractical thing first. If you're looking to be practical, I should be thankful you even read it.

ROSA

No, *we* should be thankful—we *are* thankful. Writers are the heart of our theatre. We are grateful to you for sharing your work and giving us a chance to comment on it.

JAQ

But your comment is "it's a bit long"?

ROSA

Let's start this conversation over, shall we? I shouldn't have said that. That was the wrong way to start...

JAQ

...telling me you wish there were less of it?

ROSA

Telling you that some parts retained our attention better than others. I think that's a fair observation.

JAQ

Can we start with the parts you liked?

ROSA

That retained our attention?

JAQ

Yes, the attention-retaining parts.

ROSA

Okay, for starters, we like that you've got lots of roles for young women, and yes, *attractive* young women. We're sex-positive, we're not afraid of that—and we like that the young women are boats.

JAQ

Ships.

ROSA

Right, ships. Big boats. Anyway, I was touched by their story. I was *moved*. It's a story worth telling. It's a story from history. And the idea of transformation—that's pure Ovid! It's the poetry of the stage...

JAQ

That's from my cover letter! You're quoting my cover letter back to me.

ROSA

Well, it's good, isn't it? What you wrote is good so I can say it, can't I?

JAQ

Absolutely. And I think it's great that you know who Ovid was. The agent I spoke to in Japan thought it was a boy band.

ROSA

Anyway, Ovid or no Ovid, you took the core idea of *transformation* and you ran with it. Or swam with it, ha ha! I think the scene between Akagi and Fubuki where Akagi is on fire and she orders Fubuki to sink her is heartbreaking. I had tears in my eyes. Like I say, there are parts of your play that are really damn good.

JAQ

Don't patronize me.

ROSA

I'm not allowed to say I liked it?

JAQ

Let's move on to the parts you didn't like. The parts that *didn't* retain your attention.

ROSA (*consulting notes*)

Okay. Scene two: "fleet maneuvers—unproducible stage directions." How are these women gonna launch aircraft and fire torpedoes on stage? Like, multiple torpedoes! Lay down smoke screens and stuff? How are they supposed to do that?

JAQ

Choreography.

ROSA

Choreography?

JAQ

Choreography! How does the Nutcracker fight the fuckin' Mouse King? Good God, where there's a will there's a way—especially if you've got lights and sound to help.

ROSA

I was trained as a director and I don't see it.

JAQ

Ariane Mnouchkine would see it right away.

ROSA (*Ariane who?*)

Okaaay. We'll let the director worry about that, shall we? And then there's the party scene. The battleship Yamato hosts a party and the guests—and the guests, of course, are other ships—the guests come onboard and comment on how roomy it is, and the destroyers do this floor show...

JAQ

They sing a song...

ROSA

Yeah, they sing a song. Is it gonna be "I Will Survive"?

JAQ

No, it'll be something else.

ROSA

Anyway, they sing a song and Yamato plays records.

JAQ

Right.

ROSA

So, Yamato is both a battleship and somebody hosting a party ON a battleship. In fact, she's hosting a party onboard herself.

JAQ

So?

ROSA

She's INSIDE herself!

JAQ

And that bothers you?

ROSA

It makes no sense!

JAQ

Yamato was the biggest warship ever built, 72,000 tons! If she didn't have room to host a party for three destroyers and two cruisers, there'd be something seriously wrong.

ROSA

How are we supposed to stage that? This isn't Hollywood, you know.

JAQ

Hollywood *couldn't* do that scene. You can't do it illusionistically even with a Hollywood budget. You can only create that scene in the imagination of audience members who witness it on stage.

ROSA

How?

JAQ

The magic of theatre? (*a beat*) Got anything else?

(*The carrier flares up in the wings. Rosa consults her notes.*)

ROSA

There's the question of casting. I want to say right at the top that we *can* do it. There are lots of Asian-American actors—attractive Asian-American actors—who could handle the text AND move well if you're going to have *choreography*.

JAQ

Why do the actors have to be Asian-American?

ROSA

Because your characters are *Japanese*?

JAQ

“Asian-American” isn't the same as Japanese. Lots of Asians hate the Japanese and vice-versa.

ROSA

You want them *all* to be Japanese?

JAQ

The characters are *ships*.

ROSA

So?

JAQ

Shouldn't they be played by inanimate objects? Preferably watercraft?

ROSA

Yeah, but we're committed to making roles for minority actors.

JAQ

I see. So, is this a problem or an opportunity?

ROSA

Oh it's 100% opportunity, it's just a bit tricky. Especially if they've all got to be Japanese. You could make it easier.

JAQ

How?

ROSA

Just move it up a decade: make it about American ships during the Korean War.

JAQ

Then you wouldn't need Asian actors?

ROSA

And it wouldn't be so far back in the past. It would be more relatable.

JAQ

So Vietnam would be better still?

ROSA

Vietnam kinda sucked.

JAQ

World War II kinda sucked for the Japanese. Maybe Afghanistan?

ROSA

Did they have ships in Afghanistan?

JAQ

I think Afghanistan is, like, land locked.

ROSA

Too bad. Maybe the women could be tanks! Sexy tanks. The destroyers could be smaller tanks. Or Jeeps.

JAQ

So instead of sinking, they hit landmines?

ROSA

Why do they have to sink?

JAQ

Why do people have to die?

ROSA

Look, *you're writing a play*. In *a play*, people don't have to die if you don't want them to. The Japanese don't even have to lose.

JAQ

In the anime series, they don't lose; they win victory after victory. Then they take baths.

ROSA

There you go! We could build a Japanese bath house onstage! As a sex-positive, feminist company we're not scared of nudity. We're intentional about it. We ask "does it serve the story we want to tell?" And if it does, we'll do it.

JAQ (*flat*)

I'm glad to hear that.

ROSA

I'm glad you're glad to hear that, Jaq, 'cause I'm telling you where we are with this. There are resources available. We like your play, but it's got problems and it doesn't have an ending.

JAQ

I'm working on the ending.

ROSA

I'm giving you feedback, here—*objective* feedback.

JAQ

But when / you say...

ROSA

I'm giving you feedback, but you're resisting, Jaq. You're resisting. So, do you want to work with us or not?

(Pause. The carrier flares up. Jaq is exhausted.)

JAQ

I'll work with you.

ROSA

Good. I'm glad to hear that. So... these girls are doomed. Right?

JAQ (*one more try*)

They're young, they're proud, they're sure they're gonna win. They gradually catch on, but then it's time to die.

ROSA

Tanks could do that. Tanks that take baths. But ships are better. I've always liked ships.

JAQ

Me too.

Were you in the navy?
ROSA

No.
JAQ

And it's good that the ships are gay.
ROSA

Of course, they're gray.
JAQ

No, not gray, GAY.
ROSA

Oh, right. They're gay. I suppose you'd cast real lesbians?
JAQ

Casting trans women would be better. Trans women understand transformation.
ROSA

True.
JAQ

Either way, the LGBTQ+ community—which is a good part of our audience—is gonna want to see *Fleet Girls*!
ROSA

(*a beat*)

I'm gonna change the title.
JAQ

Really? What to?
ROSA

I think it's gonna be "Called to Serve."
JAQ

I liked "Fleet Girls."
ROSA

JAQ

So did I, but there are legal problems. Can you still market the play to LGBTQ+ community if being gay isn't exactly a choice?

ROSA

Whaddia mean?

JAQ

In the world of the play, there's only one sex. Men don't exist.

ROSA

That's another plus as far as we're concerned.

JAQ

Makes it more relatable?

ROSA

People are tired of men.

JAQ

Understandably.

ROSA

Isn't it wonderful brainstorming like this? We're making real progress!

JAQ

Yeah. We are.

ROSA

So, we keep Japan and we keep the Second World War...

JAQ

It's the least we can do. I mean, to honor the dead, and all...

ROSA

And we don't need to cast real Asians because the characters are totally ships...

JAQ

Totally.

ROSA

... but we lose the bathhouse, and we bring on a choreographer. Do you still want them to sink?

(The carrier in the wings flares up.)

JAQ

Remember the scene between Akagi and Fubuki, the one that brought tears to your eyes?

ROSA

You're right. Akagi has to sink or no tears. Is there something you can do about the title?

JAQ

I don't know. How about "Task Force Cuties"?

ROSA

"Torpedo Crazy"?

JAQ

"Fleets of Fun"?

ROSA

that's no good. Forget I said that. "That Sinking Feeling"—no,

JAQ

"Destroyer Diaries"?

ROSA

Something more musical: "No, No Nagato"?

JAQ

"Yamato's Tomatoes"

ROSA

"Gray Girls Don't Cry"?

JAQ

No, No... "Sayonara Tokyo"!

ROSA

I like that.

JAQ

They never actually say that in the play, but...

ROSA

But it *sounds* good. I'd go see a play called "Sayonara Tokyo," wouldn't you? It sounds better than "Called to Serve." "Called to Serve" sounds like a tennis match.

JAQ

So, I guess it's *Sayonara Tokyo!*

ROSA

Sayonara Tokyo! Back to work! Give us an ending!

JAQ

Sayonara Tokyo!

ROSA

Sayonara Tokyo!

(They give each other a "Sayonara Tokyo" salute. Jaq exits. Rosa smiles picks up a script at random. There's a sudden flare-up from the burning carrier offstage and Jaq re-enters abruptly.)

JAQ

No.

I don't like "Sayonara Tokyo."

I don't like "Called to Serve," but don't like "Sayonara Tokyo" either.

ROSA

You suggested it.

JAQ

I suggested it because you were messing with me and messing with my play. I like "Fleet Girls." I like my play the way I wrote it. It doesn't have an ending, but I like it.

ROSA

Okay...

JAQ

I like that people die—and not just in my play. I like that people die in the world. People die. Ships sink. My play is about women and girls who go to war and die. If you can't handle that, do some other play, but don't mess with mine.

ROSA

I'm not messing...

JAQ

YOU'RE MESSING WITH IT!
AND YOU'RE MESSING WITH ME!
So stop!
Ya hear?
Just stop.

(We hear a door closing. Blackout. In the darkness we hear flames and distant shouting. The nacreous light comes up, this time with blood-red splotches. Rosa and the office are gone, but Jaq hasn't moved. She stands transfixed as Akagi drifts on, burning from end to end. Fubuki circles her in near panic.)

FUBUKI

I'll pump water over you.

AKAGI

No. Stay back. Don't come closer.

FUBUKI

I want to help.

AKAGI

It's too dangerous, little one. Where is Fleet Carrier Kaga?

FUBUKI

Kaga is on fire, too. It's horrible!

AKAGI

On fire everywhere?

FUBUKI

Yes, everywhere. I went by her. She saw me but didn't say anything.

AKAGI

There's something you must do. Sink me.

FUBUKI

Akagi-senpai. No. No. I can't sink you.

AKAGI

You must. I will be disgraced if the enemy finds me like this. You must do it now.

FUBUKI

How can I do it?

AKAGI

Don't play stupid! We taught you how: four torpedoes from two thousand meters, a 3-degree spread.

FUBUKI

I can't...

AKAGI

You must! What are you waiting for?

FUBUKI

No. I can't!

AKAGI

You can! This is the day you become a destroyer. Better make it six. Two thousand meters—don't come any closer. Do it now!

FUBUKI

AKAGI!

JAQ AND AKAGI

What?

FUBUKI

Is this the end?
Is this the ending?

JAQ AND AKAGI

Better make it six. Two thousand meters—don't come any closer. Do it now!

FUBUKI

How can I end it?

JAQ AND AKAGI

We taught you how: four torpedoes from two thousand meters, a 3-degree spread.

FUBUKI

I can't...

AKAGI

Better make it six. Two thousand meters—don't come any closer.
Do it!
Shoot!

(Pause)

FUBUKI

Line?

(Pause)

FUBUKI

Line?

JAQ

This sucks.

(Lights change. The ships break character.)

FUBUKI

You don't have a line for me?

JAQ

No. I don't have a line for anybody.

FUBUKI

Are we stopped? Is this a break?

JAQ

Yeah, this is a break.

(Frustrated, Fubuki stomps off to get water. Akagi stretches.)

AKAGI

The play doesn't suck, Jaq. It's still got headway.

JAQ

Headway going where?

AKAGI

You know where it's gotta go; you just can't write it yet.

JAQ

You Fleet Girls all have an ending. I can look it up on Wikipedia for any one of you—date and cause of sinking. Nice and tidy.

AKAGI

Tell me my ending. Tell me my whole story.

(Jaq consults the script in her hand.)

JAQ

Fleet carrier *Akagi*. Laid down at Kure Naval Arsenal in 1920 as a battle cruiser. Hull repurposed as a carrier following Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. Commissioned as a carrier 1927, rebuilt and re-configured 1934 with a single flight deck. Sank at Midway, June 5, 1942.

AKAGI *(pleased)*

Nice and tidy! Now Fubuki.

JAQ *(reading)*

Special-class destroyer. Laid down at Maizuru Naval Arsenal in 1926; commissioned, 1928; rebuilt and strengthened, 1937. Sunk in surface action off Guadalcanal, October eleventh, 1942.

AKAGI

That's sweet.

JAQ

But it's not an ending. It's what happened, but it's not an ending.

AKAGI

What's the difference?

JAQ

If you weren't made of steel, you'd know. Where's your girlfriend?

AKAGI

She'll be back.

JAQ

You guys are sucking me dry. You're completely numb about this. You have no idea what an ending is or what an ending does.

AKAGI

We're Fleet Girls. You can't expect us to have feelings.

JAQ

Don't you have feelings for each other? You feel something for Fubuki, don't you?

AKAGI

It's not love, Jaq. It's magnetism. If you were steel, you'd understand.

(Jaq starts pacing manically. Fubuki enters softly.)

FUBUKI

What's she on about now?

AKAGI

The ending.

(Jaq suddenly sobs and keeps on sobbing. There are words and phrases, but they're incomprehensible.)

FUBUKI

Why's she doing that?

AKAGI

I guess the ending is sad.

JAQ

!!!

FUBUKI

Will this take long?

AKAGI

I don't know.

JAQ

!!!

(The sobbing gradually subsides.)

AKAGI

Look, Jaq... you've been living with this play for quite a while. It's not going anywhere.

JAQ

You said it had headway.

AKAGI

I lied. It's dead in the water.

JAQ

!!!

AKAGI

This play is making you unhappy.

FUBUKI *(no compassion)*

It's affecting your relationships and stuff.

AKAGI

All those people you were talking to, if there was an ending, don't ya think they'd have found it?

JAQ

They listened. They were interested.

AKAGI

They just listened to be polite. But you went on and on about it. And it's gonna get worse. You're gonna end up on a park bench somewhere talking *Fleet Girls* to any loser that'll listen...

JAQ

I'm sorry if I'm boring.

AKAGI

You're not boring, hon.

(Jaq takes a deep breath.)

JAQ

I get lost in atmospheric.

Sometimes I see the Pacific.
Flat but not flat.
A small chop.
Nothing on the horizon, but movement everywhere.
The horizon itself—moving in and out of comprehension.
It's not a picture of an ocean;
I'm *on* the ocean—
On a ship—a certain distance above the water.

FUBUKI

Now you're boring.

JAQ

But the boring parts are the best!
The long trip there and the long trip back...
waiting for orders or spare parts,
standing watch, thinking so many things—
yet if someone asks *what* I'm thinking, I can't say.
To have air and space around me.
To see everything until the world curves and time stops.

AKAGI

Geez! You've got it bad.

JAQ

I'm writing *a play*! Of course I've got it bad.

FUBUKI

We can help you. Akagi knows what to do.

JAQ

Really?

AKAGI

Yeah, but I don't think you're there yet.

JAQ

If you know the ending, tell me.

FUBUKI

She's *there*, Akagi. She's been there awhile.

AKAGI
Really? Are you ready for the ending?

JAQ
You know I am.

AKAGI
Okay. Come over here. Face that way.

(Jaq does as she's told. Akagi moves quickly behind her and softly takes hold of her hair. With her other hand, Akagi draws a tantō sword from a scabbard at her back.)

JAQ
What are you going to do?

AKAGI
We're gonna give you an ending. Fubuki, can you help me, sweetheart?

JAQ
I'm scared.

AKAGI
Shhh. Quiet now.

JAQ
You beheaded an aviator at Midway.

FUBUKI
That wasn't us. That was *Arashi*—a hard-ass destroyer but dumb as a turd.

AKAGI
This'll be over before you know it.

(Akagi pulls Jaq's head back till she's looking at the sky. She slides the sword under Jaq's chin.)

AKAGI (CONT)
Ready?

FUBUKI
Let's do it.

AKAGI

Okay... *banzai!*

(Fubuki delivers a flying kick to Jaq's solar plexus. Reflexively, Jaq gasps and curls forward. Akagi flicks the sword away at the last moment, slashing at something in the air. Jaq falls to her knees.)

AKAGI (CONT)

Nice kick!

FUBUKI

Did ya get it?

AKAGI

I got it.

(Akagi shows Fubuki something caught the tip of her sword.)

FUBUKI

It's tiny!

AKAGI

Waddia expect? A smidge of imagination and a pinch of willpower—plays don't amount to much.

FUBUKI

That's the whole thing?

AKAGI

Yup—the whole thing.

FUBUKI

Dialog *and* stage directions?

AKAGI

It's all there. She'll be happier without it.

(Jaq groans.)

How do you feel, Jaq?

JAQ (*weakly*)

Better.

FUBUKI

She doesn't look better.

AKAGI

She's in shock—she just coughed up a play.

FUBUKI

She looks like she's gonna puke.

AKAGI

Jaqueline, listen to me, honey. There's one more thing you gotta do. Get her up, Fubuki.

(Fubuki helps Jaqueline to her feet. Akagi shows her the speck on her sword.)

JAQ

Is that my play?

AKAGI

That's it. That's what was causing all the trouble.

JAQ

It's squirming. It's alive.

AKAGI

You gotta put it out of its misery.

JAQ

No! No, I can't do that.

AKAGI

All those people you explained it to? They want you to do it.

FUBUKI

They want it to go away.

JAQ

Who?

FUBUKI

You know who.

(Rosa enters to witness the ending.)

AKAGI

That literary manager, for one. She never believed in it.

ROSA

It's a cute play, Jaq, but we can't cast it—there aren't as many Asians as we thought.

(Kluck and Yamaguchi enter.)

AKAGI

And the intellectual property lawyer...

KLOCK

What really happened could be the basis of a play, but is it reality worth litigating?

AKAGI

And Diomedea agent—he'd be relieved!

YAMAGUCHI

Even with panties visible, your play is not entertainment property.

(Drew enters.)

JAQ

I think the navy history guy liked it.

(But Comander Lovebed is already onstage with a prepared statement.)

LOVEBED

After internal deliberation and consultation with counsel, the Naval History and Heritage Command has determined that having girls and young women impersonate warships is *ipso facto* a denigration of naval practice around the world and a disincentive to naval preparedness in the United States. In consequence the NHHC declines your request for active support. You may still use the archives, but good luck finding anything.

JAQ

What do I have to do?

AKAGI

Pretend it's a bug. I'm gonna put it here, see!

(Akagi moves the tiny squirming thing to the floor.)

AKAGI (CONT)

You ready?

JAQ

I guess so.

(a beat)

FUBUKI

So do it, already.

(a beat)

AKAGI

It's the ending, Jaq. You'll feel better afterwards.

JAQ *(addressing everyone)*

But it's the ending for all of you, too.

YAMAGUCHI

Is not a problem for us.

AKAGI

They don't care.

JAQ

Okay. I'll do it.

ROSA

'Bye, everybody!

(Klock and Yamaguchi shake hands.)

LOVEBED

It's been an honor to serve with you.

(He salutes.)

FUBUKI

G'bye, my love.

AKAGI

G'bye, kid!

(With a scream, Jaq stamps hard on the speck. Instant blackout. End of play)