

A #MeToo Story

by E. Q. Manson

I

I had no business being in the Navy.

I didn't fit in with the wannabe warriors in candidate training, any more than with the bonafide salts on board ship. People who knew me in college couldn't imagine me in the service, and certainly not as an officer. When I finished active duty five long years, seven long months and twenty-seven long days later, I had to agree.

It was September 1985 in the Philippine Islands, where it's never anything but very hot, except in monsoon season when the tropical mugginess is punctuated by periodic torrential rain. The Subic Bay Ship Repair Facility, which isn't there anymore (the United States abandoned it after the area was destroyed by Mount Pinatubo), was pretty expansive. Its piers and wharves could handle a dozen medium-sized ships. Industrial operations staffed by ridiculously inexpensive local yardbirds covered most of two square miles. But

civilization extended only so far in this largely undeveloped island nation. The jungle was thick outside the fence, even in certain areas within the base. When jogging, I had to watch out for unusual animals. Nothing dangerous as snakes or hyenas, but monkeys had been known to scratch people and transmit rabies.

We docked here for a week before steaming on to exercises in the Indian Ocean and port calls in Australia, Malaysia and Hong Kong. This was my first taste of the P.I. I found a couple of places I felt comfortable. Learned the ins and outs of changing money, transportation by jeepney, counting to three (*isa dalawa tatlo*), and saying yes and no (*o-o / hindi*). Became accustomed to, nay, blasé about uniformed Philippine nationals walking around toting automatic weapons. And found out how to avoid being robbed. Which happened once, but that's another story.

I was an officer all right, but stood apart from the rest of the wardroom. All (excepting the doctor and my boss, Lieutenant Moon) were men in the surface warfare community; I was a mere supply officer. That wasn't all, though. I felt more camaraderie with the enlisteds, the deck plate sailors. They went in for my

vulgar language, my vocal disdain for the dumber rules (ironic, coming from an officer). They seemed to appreciate the way I championed them, kept their backs.

Furthermore, I simply had no interest in the nights-on-the-town the other officers preferred. Being an (as yet) undiagnosed manic depressive, six years from my first taste of lithium, I struggled to moderate the drinking I did to cope with its symptoms. I had no intention of cheating on my stateside spouse. I just wanted a relaxed time on those nights I wasn't pulling duty. The other officers acted for the most part like they had something to prove. They were out to push the envelope on infidelity, on intoxication, and on demonstrating their American colonialist superiority.

Having little in common with the officers, and it being frowned upon to fraternize with enlisted, I struck out on my own when liberty call went down. Not once did I go ashore with a group. It was reasonably safe to head off base alone, as long as one limited one's range to a half mile stretch of Magsaysay Drive, always staying in well-lit or sedate establishments. After changing some dollars for pesos just outside the main gate, I customarily headed straight to a basement club called the

Cork Room Lounge, down stone steps from a stand that sold pizza rumored to be made with goat cheese.

The Lounge was small and intimate, poorly lit yet unthreatening. And the air was naturally cool. A singer, playing acoustic guitar with no sound system, could be easily heard. His impression of James Taylor was as remarkable as was his inability to comprehend the words he sang. He let customers perform on his guitar – a kind of low-tech open mic event.

I went by the street alias Phillip (a tip from one of my sailors). After a couple of visits the James Taylor sound-alike would announce me by that name to whatever audience had assembled, before handing me his guitar. That's why I kept going back – one of the joys of my life is playing music in public. Primarily a piano player, I knew about thirty guitar songs ranging from Aerosmith's "Seasons of Wither" to Zeppelin's "Thank You", having spent months of ocean steaming time working up the list.

The very first time I went to the Cork Room I ran into Ensign Kelly Tyler, a woman with whom I had spent almost a year at schools, first at officer training in Rhode Island, then supply officer school in Georgia.

She sat beneath a sign that read "Unescorted Women Not Allowed", eating a pizza. A chance meeting in the Philippines; the Navy is a small world indeed.

"Kelly Tyler?" I said. She recognized me and we proceeded to have a short chat. Turns out she was assigned to the Cubi Point Air Station adjacent to the naval base. We caught up on gossip, mostly regarding who else in our class we had managed to run into in the fleet during the year or so since we left supply school. Just to be cute, I pointed out the sign she was sitting under.

"That means Filipino women, not white women."

"I knew that," I lied.

The distinction would become obvious with further exposure to nightlife, and the "hostesses" standing by everywhere you looked, eager to act as guide to any American. "*You cherry boy what ship you on Joe how long you gone be here?*"

Look no further for evidence of the sense of security the Cork Room Lounge offered. Here, this well-proportioned, alabaster-skinned blond beauty felt safe enough from unwanted gentlemanly attentions to dine alone. About fifteen minutes after sitting down with Kelly I

was on the stage, playing and singing Sister Golden Hair by America.

Kelly was the only other officer I ever saw in the Cork Room. Budding troubadours tended to be enlisted. I spread the word, and in no time the Lounge was frequented by our sailors.

After spending time at the Cork Room I would wander up the strip, dropping in any place that took my fancy. Stayed away from the air-conditioned clubs where rock musicians blared deafening but spot-on impersonations of American classic radio headliners. Ignored the souvenir shops and pushcart hawkers of live chicks in their shells or meats unavailable at any American food court. Steered very clear of back rooms where barkers talked up a sideshow, touting the talents of girls who could pick up a stack of coins with a part of their anatomy normally used for a different purpose.

Everywhere you went on the strip you found abundant San Miguel beer in squat brown returnable bottles. It was practically the only beer available, produced by a state-sanctioned manufacturer. Lieutenant Moon advised me that the bottle caps might have rust under

them; a signal of street smarts was to open a bottle and immediately wipe the mouth to clean off the rust.

My nightly wanderings generally landed me at one particular spacious open-air drinking establishment. The brightly lit Brown Fox featured picnic tables instead of standard bar furniture. It held no pretensions, exhibited no forced elegance, and as such was a place no officer would be caught dead. But that's where most of *my* sailors retreated for its relative calm, its comparatively innocent merriment. Unlike the deck apes and engineering snipes – your typical pirates – supply and electronic operations sailors didn't push any envelope or act like they had something to prove. They drank prodigious amounts, but in the sweltering heat it seemed alcohol could be eliminated directly through sweat, so the Slurpee-like concoctions Mojo and Bullfrog didn't pack the punch you would expect of drinks consisting primarily of whiskey, vodka, and San Miguel.

Everyone woke up hungover in the morning, briefly envious of our shipmates who had to stay aboard for duty the previous evening. *Everyone* busted ass in the relentless sun and heat, oxidizing those pesky toxins for

fuel. *Everyone* began feeling alive again by 1400 hours, and was ready for more by sundown.

After six days of this carousel, it ended as suddenly as it began. Having been joined by four other ships, we and the rest of the squadron pulled anchor, let go the lines, and made way in stately formation towards the equator.

II

Seven weeks later, the five vessels of Amphibious Squadron Four returned to Subic for three full weeks of engine overhauls, yard work that would deplete our collective budgets four times as much if obtained back in the states. Twenty-one days. Four section duty worked out to five nights restricted to the ship, and 16 nights potentially spent ashore. This was our final stop on deployment before crossing nine time zones east to California and home.

The story begins one Wednesday, two weeks into the three week stay. That night I remained aboard for duty. It was my turn to stand the hated midwatch. I showed up at 2345 hours (11:45 pm), catching two sailors from our crew tromping down to their pier sentry stations.

One, a friendly second-class signalman¹, greeted me familiarly by rank and name. He carried a coffee mug in his left hand, saluted the off-going Officer of the Deck with his right, and said “Have a good watch” to all.

I surveyed the brow, which ramped down to the grimy concrete pier, advertising USS DURHAM LKA-114 on white waterproof canvas lashed to both sides. Inspected the watch shack where the Petty Officer of the Watch kept the ship’s log and stood by for any calls on the ship’s phone. Upon finding all was copacetic I gave my white polyester twill uniform shirt and belt buckle one last quick tidying, then saluted the off-going chief petty officer. “I hereby relieve you.” “I stand relieved.” I was now Officer of the Deck.

None of the whirring, clanking industrial noise which emanated from the shipyard facilities during the day could be heard anymore. Stark electric lights illuminated the long pier. The berth across from us was unoccupied, revealing black water that shimmered with incandescent reflections against darkest midnight. Not ten minutes had passed when our Commanding Officer

¹ He eventually would make the Navy a career, retiring after 24 years.

strode up the brow. I rendered the usual gestures of respect.

Captain Blackmer was in a foul mood. His wife was in country, having flown over from San Diego with a few other officer's wives. She was staying in government civilian guest quarters. He, obviously, was not spending the night with *her*. The last thing Captain Blackmer wanted in the Philippines was a wife checking up on him.

"One of your pier sentries is holding a coffee cup," he said. A veiled threat. I scrambled to put together a response, babbling out something like, "Really? I'll take care of it right away—"

"I find a man on your watch with a cup of coffee again, you're relieved." With that he took his sullen self inside the skin of the ship.

I found myself dwelling upon a half dozen uncomfortable – no, make that distressing – thoughts and feelings from his dressing down.

But I wasn't even in charge when he went off the ship!

That's not a real rule! Is it? No one ever told ME.

Relieving me will only punish the other watchstanders who have to cover for me.

Would you rather he fell asleep at 3:00 am?

The first lieutenant already has it in for me – he might just restrict me for this, and I need my alcohol or I'll NEVER sleep.

I tortured myself with every conceivable thought except: *Don't let it bother you. The Old Man'll probably forget it by morning.* Which as far as I can tell is what actually happened.

The knot in my gut lasted the remainder of the watch: four hours of abject boredom, punctuated by a trickle of shipmates returning from their personal debaucheries. When at last relieved at 0345 hours, I returned to my compact stateroom, moving quietly so as not to arouse my roommate. (That meant quarter to four. The 24-hour clock never did become my default way of thinking time.) I stowed my good uniform and lay down on my top bunk, even more unable to sleep than usual. Reveille was at 0600 hours. All I could do for 2 hours was stew in my own discomfort, anticipating the One-M.C.

loudspeaker that would boom "All hands heave out and trice up!" any second now.

Man, did I ever have no business being in the Navy.

III

Thursday morning. The anticipated/awaited/dreaded reveille announcement sounded. In minutes I was up and once again in uniform; insomnia or no, I had energy by the bucket. My head throbbed, almost as bad as a hangover even though it had been 30 hours since my last drink. I was eating breakfast shortly, and sitting at my desk by 0630 alongside my workaholic first class leading petty officer. Ninety minutes till morning colors, the official start of the work day.

I put in a drowsy full day's work. Paperwork in the office. Making rounds to other division spaces. Attending meetings (the captain had all sixteen wardroom officers slog through hours of daily repair updates, 90% of which pertained to only three of us). Like every other day, I occupied myself crossing off all the tasks that never did quite seem finished to Lieutenant Moon's liking.

Sometime in the afternoon he himself called me to his stateroom/office, a compartment he shared with no other officer. *Rank Has Its Privileges*. The executive officer (my bossman related) had expressed concern about me spending zero time ashore with other officers, frequently instead being seen around enlisted men. Big Brother, it seems, was watching. He recommended I join the crowd at a place in town called El Torito.

The sun was down by the time (1900 hours) I finally closed my pocket notebook, changed into civilian clothes, and headed out to the squalid third world entertainment strip that is Magsaysay Drive, Olongapo City, Subic Bay. Having had at most six hours sleep spread out over the last 72 hours, I was feeling a little sick. Healthy or not, one never misses an opportunity to sample the nightlife in a port town. It may be your last opportunity for a long, long time.

Mindful of the XO's admonition against fraternization I skipped the Cork Room, instead making my way down the bustling, cacophonous street to Rizal Avenue, where the half-mile strip ended at a traffic circle around a statue of a stylized globe. On the far side of the circle stood a two-story lime green drinking establishment. El

Torito it was. Our ship's officers had staked claim to the second-floor balcony, with its commanding view of Magsaysay Drive action.

Up a rickety flight of stairs and there they were. Sal Quezada, our taciturn engineering warrant officer. Mike Hunter, black, former enlisted, cheerfully vulgar – everyone called him Bos'un. Bill Canton, arrogant as an aviator but imprisoned on our rust bucket. Roger Kittredge, the rangy, fastidious operations assistant who looked like a youth fallen in among thieves. And others, each one draped by whichever boisterous dark-skinned hostess latched onto them for the evening.

They greeted me as I made myself at home on our shared turf. I wasn't here for anything but an appearance.

Immediately I was approached (claimed may be a better word) by my own private hostess. She called herself Vicky. I suspected that was as much an alias as the Phillip I introduced myself as (to the knowing grins of my fellow officers). It was well known these girls came into town on the Victory Liner, a bus that made multiple trips to and from the provinces. Victory => Vicky.

Short, angular, her lips smelling of tobacco soot, her uncut black hair somewhat stringy, and sporting a practically pre-pubescent body shape, Vicky was not what I'd call attractive. But she was, nonetheless, the opposite sex. She brought me a San Miguel I didn't ask for, and went on to show the kind of all-consuming feminine interest a cruelly ordinary-looking straight guy such as yours truly could never achieve so effortlessly back in the states.

Goodbye, time-to-myself.

Still, it was useful to have Vicky beside me. It deflected further attention from me, a solitary tourist. And it absolved me from any obligation to carouse with the other officers. You remember: the ones out to prove how much sin you could pack into the hours between knock-off and turn-to.

Right off the bat I presented my banded ring finger and spoke the only complete sentence I had learned in Tagalog: "*Casal na aco.*" It means "I love my wife." Since I'd gone to the trouble of learning how to say the phrase, I figured it would be taken at face value.

"Bool sheet!" she answered. But in a lighthearted way. I suppose.

I had specifically asked some of the older sailors whether it was generally accepted among locals that not everybody who walked down the strip was looking to get laid. They assured me that *was* the case. For the most part, the townsfolk only wanted our money.

And you know something? Despite Vicky's poor English, coarse choice of words she *did* know, annoying habit of suspending our conversation to engage with interlopers, and a gold tooth further marring that chapped half smile... in my sleep-deprived state the closeness of someone who answered the basic description appropriate to my heterosexuality began having a visible effect. I don't mean arousal. I mean relaxation replacing tension. Alertness supplanted. Lowered guard.

Vicky got up to fetch a fresh bottle; in this heat a cold twelve ounces didn't last long. Bear-sized Sal craned his head toward me, saying, "Feel like you're weakening?" My folded-up lips were all the answer he needed. He and his hostess enjoyed a hearty laugh.

Vicky ably detected the company of my fellow officers was not my reason for being there, and suggested we take a walk. Before that could happen there was

business to attend. Leaving a place with a hostess required paying a “bar fine”. The two beers became *gratis*, a pittance beside the “only ten dollars” unconverted American cash price Vicky quoted. That's why this whole strip existed, to transfer money from sailors and officers to the Philippine economy. I gave two fives to the *mama-san*, her “employer” – an older woman, most likely a former hostess herself – and off we were.

I had by then swallowed two drinks. Goal most evenings was to quit at four; my tolerance was pretty damned low for a problem drinker. Those two hit me harder than usual.

I really can't say exactly what happened for the next half hour. Not because of a blackout or memory repression, nothing like that. The sequence of events was simply not all that memorable. One evening spent walking up and down a brash, teeming, hot, smelly, overpoweringly colorful and loud port city nighttown district is hard to distinguish from the next.

I do remember buying Vicky a pack of cigarettes, absent-mindedly lighting one before handing it to her. In the process I accidentally inhaled just enough smoke to

reestablish the addiction I had broken five years earlier.²

"Don't you smoke?" Vicky said.

"No. I quit in 1980."

"Bool sheet!" That was beginning to annoy me.

I offered some food which Vicky passed up, and led the way to the Brown Fox. I sort of wanted to be seen with a "date" by the sailors who knew me. One mustn't appear too much of a priss. Some of my sailors did see me, gestured mild approval, and returned to whatever matter was previously at hand. My appearance was no *cause célèbre*. Mission accomplished: I fit in.

I had at least one more beer while meandering in and out of various nightspots, before indicating to Vicky that I definitely needed sleep. I could have just said goodbye and begun the mile walk back to the ship. Instead, against my better judgment, I agreed when Vicky suggested taking a jeepney.

Here things get ambiguous. Not my *memory*; that remains unusually clear, thirty-five years later. No, what became ambiguous were the messages passing between

² Epilogue: I didn't end up smoking cigarettes again, but nicotine withdrawal fits did bother me for a whole month afterward.

myself and Vicky. When you're ambling about a raucous public area (think Times Square or Bourbon Street) accompanied by a stranger with an extremely limited vocabulary, communication of necessity becomes nonverbal. Actions drown out words.

Vicky lived close by, or so she said. It was maybe 2200 hours - eight hours before reveille. I had no inkling that Vicky – diminutive, childish, aiming to please – was a dangerous companion. There had been no talk of sex, other than me repeating "*casal na aco.*"

"I just want to sleep," I emphasized, "nothing else."

"Okay," Vicky assented. "I have a place you can sleep."

Did I take this as an opportunity to bolt? Of course not. What can I say? You spend several weeks in a foreign land, it becomes less forbidding. You brush up on advice from previous visitors. Perhaps you experience a couple scary encounters with the locals. You learn what mistakes not to make, and begin to trust yourself. When Vicky volunteered to put me up, it struck me as a gesture of hospitality.

Any number of my shipmates had described the locals as welcoming and generous with what little they

had; providing, of course, we furnished the pesos. Spend the night. Homecooked meal. Get your laundry done. Shave and a haircut. All the comforts of home and family could be had, I'd been told. As long as you're willing to put up with roaches the size of a Milky Way bar and the intermittent intrusion of jabbering housemates.

As we stood on the corner awaiting the next irregularly scheduled jeepney, I imagined the place she would soon be taking me. No doubt the apartment, or shack, or whatever Vicky called home, was nothing to brag about. But if I could be under a blanket behind a closed door, half an hour quicker than it would take to get all the way back to my stateroom ... in my current completely exhausted state I was hopeful I could fall asleep in no time flat.

"I have to be back on base by 7:30," I told Vicky. Or shouted is more like it, to be heard over a few score conversations between passersby, the clamor of motorbikes, the street vendors, and the amplified music coming out a dozen different doors and windows.

"Okay." As long as Vicky refrained from saying "bool sheet" I figured we understood each other.

Vicky signaled a passing jeepney – an overgrown golf cart painted robin’s egg blue, stickered with gaudy prints of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, draped in beaded lavender lace, honking clown horns and belching cumulous diesel. On we hopped. Off it jolted.

There were other passengers on board; tiny rail-thin Filipinos with unsmiling faces, carrying things like live chickens. I had learned never to get on an empty jeepney, and until I trusted Vicky more she didn’t count. A driver could take off and deposit you who-knows-where, leaving you in the fell clutches of rogues of the night lying in wait. Really.

The ride was deceptively short, as if Vicky and I could easily have walked to where we stepped off hand in hand. Though we went barely a mile, the cowpath route was circuitous enough to throw my orientation completely off. The jeepney took us to the edge of a beaten path. On foot we went off an even less beaten path. *Way* off. To where trees were not even cleared for the decreasingly paved road. Past where houses were made of solid materials like concrete and stone, to where structures seemed no more permanent than campsites.

Vicky's "neighborhood" was lit well enough by streetlights under a canopy of tropical branches. For some reason, these apartments were not on the ground, but rose up on high stilts. Possibly it had something to do with the monsoon rains which would rot out wood set down on ground. Pouring a concrete slab was too high-end for this side of town. I followed Vicky up some stairs to this (for want of a better term) tree house, and inside.

I don't remember the door requiring a key.

"You sleep."

I took off pants and shirt, leaving on my briefs. Lying on my back on the white-sheeted single mattress, I took in the stark appearance of the room. A single bulb light hung on its own wire. Beside something that might have been a stove there stood a deep sink with a few white towels hanging close by. The ceiling was corrugated steel, sealed enough to keep out mosquitoes.

I was struck by the complete lack of ornamentation. Most everything in the P.I. that can be decorated IS decorated -- and with garish color. Not just jeepneys but shops, yards, balconies, people's t-shirts... anywhere a knickknack or necklace, flower or pattern or image of a

saint can possibly be attached, it was. If there was space for one adornment, there would be four. Here, on the other hand, the walls were brown, bare and barren.

"I put your clothes over here."

I began thinking perhaps I had been led to believe something false. Maybe there was writing between lines I totally missed reading. Suffice it to say (I realized a bit too late) that when I left El Torito with Vicky, between us we had already established an implied contract. It was reinforced by nonverbal messages, which take precedence over unfamiliar words in disparate languages. The terms were: (1) Payment in advance; (2) Vicky was to render the service.

I didn't realize it till decades later, but this was not Vicky's house. This was nobody's house. If it was anybody's house, it would've had more people living in it. Unbidden, wordlessly, Vicky pulled the rest of my clothes off.

She was now in control.

I may as well take a moment to explain a couple things I've surmised about Filipino sex worker culture. That ten dollars I handed over to remove Vicky from El Torito could buy quite a lot for an employer. This was

a society where a bus ride costs five cents. Ten dollars would buy 200 bus rides. What would 200 bus ride equivalents buy in a typical American city? A month's rent on a small apartment. Groceries for a family of four. Both Vicky and the operation running out of El Torito would go to great lengths, pleasant or un-, to ensure those tens kept rolling in. A repeat customer translated to weeks of luxury.

Sex would bind me to Vicky. It would cement the business relationship. It would make it harder to back out.

Saying “no” at the point where Vicky took control would be seen as robbing the operation of a hard-fought-for income stream. It would have meant at best an argument, ending with an awkward exit from this wilderness I had been dragged to. At worst, it would have meant calling in enforcers to “persuade” me to make good on the “promise” I unwittingly made. *“How much you got, Joe? Thirty dollars we call it even.”*

Till that moment the worst thing I anticipated happening was more insomnia – that no matter how tired I was I would not benefit from saving the half hour it supposedly would've taken to walk back to my ship.

That time was already lost. Call me foolish, naive or unsuspecting. I had allowed myself to get into a situation where I was utterly unaware of my location, clueless even as to how I had arrived. I was completely reliant on another person – a person I barely trusted – to get me back where I belonged.

I pretty much froze, unable to resist even the slightest bit. I knew what was going to happen, what Vicky was going to do next, and there wasn't a damn thing I could do to stop it.

"I only want to sleep," I anemically protested. "You don't have to... " ... *do whatever you're planning on.* No answer. I suspect the very concept was unfamiliar to her.

God DAMN this! I should have stayed away from El Torito. Never set foot anywhere near Sal, Mike, Bob, Roger...

No, Joe, this is nobody's house. This is just an available room.

Vicky pulled the light chain, leaving us in the murk trickling from the streetlights through uncurtained window panes. Soon I felt knees moving up along my legs. Skin on skin. Proximity engaged the instincts. If fingers

are correctly placed, the human body responds whether the brain goes along with it or not.

There was hardly any natural lubrication. To make bad matters worse, (and I hadn't exactly had a *parade* of partners as a young man, so had little with which to compare, but any way you looked at it) Vicky's repertoire of motion was anything but masterful. Her moves were like painting against the grain. Uncomfortable. Just plain wrong. Not a trace of pleasure for either person.

But nevertheless effective. Thankfully, the whole thing seemed to last no more than fifteen seconds – I'm pretty sure it was the fastest I ever finished, before or since. Vicky, apparently satisfied the agreed-upon good time had been provided, leapt up and did some rudimentary cleansing. I'd heard something about health

code compliance that somehow made this all legal.³

"I want to go back to base."

"Okay." *Those* words Vicky could understand.

Shortly thereafter, I was in another jeepney. Vicky rode with me all the way back, reinforcing our implied business relationship. The trip back was much shorter than the trip out; obviously the way out of this jungle completed a circle we had started on the way out. I mumbled a thank you and headed across the short foot-bridge over "Shit River", the drainage canal which separates Olongapo City from the base. At about midnight I showed my green photo ID to the gate sentry. He noted the O-1 rank and rendered a hand salute. I was back where respect was due and safety could be presumed. Possessing a bit less faith in humanity than 5 hours earlier.

³A couple years earlier in my first apartment I had been awakened by my girlfriend in this same position. The encounter (by the time it was over) *was* consensual, but that first-hand experience taught me something. Given the proper sensory stimuli, erectile response occurs involuntarily. You have to hand it to the human organism: its vital functions don't require taking thought. A man *can* complete the sex act against his will. No premeditation or intent necessary on the part of the man – provided the woman knows what she's doing.

So utterly relieved was I to be in these gray, metallic, yet familiar surroundings, I actually slept some that night.

IV

Now imagine for one second that I treated this as what it was: rape. You, reading this, don't have to tell me that it could have been much worse. I fully realize there were no weapons, no physical overpowering, no violence or overt threats, and no penetration of my person. I'm not saying my experience ranks with the nightmarish violations experienced by others who have been raped. In comparison it almost seems petty to raise the issue. I mean, I was once mugged; three nondescript black kids in Alexandria Virginia roughed 13-year-old me up and took all the money I had: less than two bucks, but it included my bus fare home. Which is almost nothing compared to someone who has the living crap beat out of him while being relieved of jewelry, wallet, credit cards and various articles of clothing. But this isn't a contest. It's recognizing something for what it is.

Imagine for one more second that I had *told* people, calling it what it was. What do you think the other officers on the ship would say if I told them some Filipino girl took advantage of and sexually assaulted me? When the laughing subsided, when they realized I was being serious, they would begin arguing dismissively. My account and my motivation would be angrily called into question.

Didn't you go through all of the motions as though that was your intention in the first place?

Why were you even with the girl if sex was not the objective?

Why didn't you leave before the first jeepney ride? Or before getting to the room?

Why didn't you say no, or make it more clear?

How can a woman even rape a man (other than some form of pegging)?

Admit it. You're just changing your mind after making a big mistake: deliberately cheating on your wife then wishing you hadn't.

And what exactly do you expect us to do next? Go to the Filipino authorities and have the girl arrested? Are you nuts?

With that, at least, I would agree: nothing could really be done about it. Just like that time those punks stole my bus fare. It's not like the police would be able to track them down and bring them to justice. No, this had to be chalked up to experience. Lucky for me it wasn't a life-ruining event.

V

But I *didn't* tell anyone. I was too ashamed, convinced that *I* was the one who did wrong. I had cheated on my wife in a tawdry way. I had exposed myself to danger, inviting a predicament frankly unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, and quite possibly caught the clap. I had succumbed to peer pressure; in a foolhardy effort to live up to the image of a tough American military man I'd gone and done the dirty deed with a foulmouthed, gold-toothed, cigarette chomping whore who, come to think of it, could well be jailbait, judging by her lack of hips and bosom.

There was no other way to interpret it. I must have voluntarily played my role in this script, I thought.

It is surprisingly easy for a victim to pretend nothing bad happened. In fact, I could prove I was really the one in control by the simple act of going back for more.

So, the next night, against all logic, I returned to El Torito, paid 10 more dollars, and accompanied Vicky down the strip once more.⁴ She found us a room much closer to the action: the upstairs apartment above a loud rock and roll club. This time, I managed to make it abundantly clear sex was out of the question. She didn't care; her expenses were covered either way, and besides, I was already "hooked".

Again, what I really wanted was sleep, and didn't mind giving off the appearance of having a girl on the side. But the booming music from below made sleep impossible. In half an hour I gave up and went back to the ship.

The following day, despite intense ambivalence, I felt I had achieved sufficient command of my new-

⁴ Did this retroactively make the sex consensual? No. I can't justify this with psychology, but the interested reader might find investigating abusive codependency a good place to start.

found double life. I casually mentioned to Lieutenant Moon that I'd be taking some laundry into town for my girlfriend to do for me. His reaction was not at all what I expected: extreme dismay. I don't know if he deemed it appalling because what I was doing was an enlisted (not officer) sort of thing to do, or because he'd met my wife (stateside and pregnant at the time), or because I was putting myself in danger of being snared into some underworld activity. The sight of his face and the tone of his one-word response – “*What?!*” – made me realize I was fooling nobody but myself.

That evening I marched into El Torito, located Vicky's *mama-san*, and told her it was off. She shouted “Why?” I didn't answer, but just turned and left. No more \$10.00 bills from “Phillip”.

After that I didn't show my face on the street for days, lest I be spotted by one of the enforcers I'd heard tell about. I confined my liberty time to the officer's club for the most part. We had four days remaining in Subic Bay before the squadron would depart for San Diego. I was scheduled for duty the day before we got underway. My last chance ashore I made one final excursion into town. Straight to The Cork Room then

straight back. It was filled to capacity. “James Taylor” basked in the appreciation of so many listeners that he never gave up his instrument, to me or anyone else. So, my last night in the P.I. was a disappointment.

On a sweltering hot Friday afternoon, the sky and the Pacific a clear blue in all directions, with the decks of the ship gently rolling and the Philippine Islands disappearing from sight behind the stern's churning wake, I waited for the queue of sailors at the corpsman's compartment to attrite away. When no one was looking, I stepped in and requested a shot. Some say laughter is the best medicine. No, tetracycline is.

You know what else, Lieutenant Moon, wherever you are? Out of the close to 75 bottles of San Miguel beer I consumed in the P.I., not one had rust under the cap.

Lakewood Ohio

October, 2020