

J A M E S J C R A F T

GONE GIRLY FOR GOOD

**“Big in Japan” by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Book**

**Edited, additional material and
illustrations by Joe Six-Pack**



2007 Paperback Edition

Design, illustrations & cover © 2007.

Story © 2007 James J Craft

All rights reserved.

Thanks to D.S. for guidance.

The body text is printed in New Caledonia.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part,
or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form
or by any means without written permission.

Printed in the United States of America.

joe@sixpacksite.com

www.sixpacksite.com

BIG IN JAPAN

“We’re what?” I stared at the record executive like he was a Martian, thinking his thousand-dollar suit was restricting air to his brain. The man smiled and repeated his words, “You’re big in Japan, huge in fact. Even though we aren’t renewing your contract here, our Japanese unit would be *more* then willing the sign you over there... that is, if you’re willing to go there.”

I looked at Ken, then at Murray, our manager, then back the Todd, the condescending “I know the music industry better then anyone” VP of Torsion Records, then back at Ken. He had that “maybe we should check it out” look on his face. Murray knew what we were thinking and nodded approvingly. I turned back to Todd, “so we do this and we might make another album, if we don’t then...” my voice trailed off.

Todd’s smile evaporated, “If you don’t go to Japan then you become another has-been, one-hit-wonder trying to shop their latest washed-up material around to other uninterested labels.” The words stung. He was basically summing up our entire music career in one painful sentence. We *did* have a big hit, six months ago. It *was* overplayed. Our CD sales and downloads *did* tank. The record label *was* going to drop us as fast as they could. We *could* shop our latest material around, but we’d look desperate, which we were, and they – the other labels – would know it. Pretty soon we’d have run out of money (if we hadn’t already), and we’d be back in Montana at the local feed mill, like we had started out. We knew the shelf life of a male pop duo was limited, and we also knew that if someone liked us somewhere... anywhere, we should go and be there. So if we were big in Japan, then that is were we would have to go.

Moments later we were all shaking hands, having ended our contract with both Murray and Torsion and signed a new contract with Torsion Records Japan or TRJ, without having had it looked over by our lawyer. We left the office tower and had our limo driver take us back to the hotel suite we had been calling home since last spring. Since Torsion had been footing the bill, we were essentially being evicted, which was okay, because TRJ had arranged for a first class flight to Tokyo later that night. We had just enough time to pack our stuff, call our families, instruct our lawyer to cancel the leases on our condo and the sports cars and SUV’s that we had acquired, and go out for a final night on the town.

With our suitcases already en-route to Japan, we packed some of our personal effects in a carryon bag and left in the limo, while we headed into our favorite club. The club was called *Rush* and it pretty much summed up our experience over the past year.

It all began when we auditioned for the reality show, American Superstar, and even though we only made it to the final ten, Torsion Records saw something in us that had potential. That and the girls loved us. Both Kenny and I were pretty good looking. Not in a overly macho way, but in a way that teen girls seemed to appreciate. "Boyish" is what Murray called it. We both quit our jobs at the feed mill and went to L.A., to begin recording the first single. We were to be known as the "Gnarly Boiz." Torsion had picked the name for us, and it was a stupid name, but we couldn't just go by "Mike and Ken," or so they told us. And so from there we got to here, in *Rush's* V.I.P. section buying a round of drinks for all of our "friends."



One such friend was a girl named Jo-Anne. She was originally from Montana too. We met at the DMV two weeks ago when I was getting vanity plates for my Lexus. I suggested that she come out one night for a couple of drinks. She had seen our video and loved our hit single, so it didn't take much to get her to join us in the V.I.P. section. We were with a bunch of girls that would do pretty much whatever we asked, and Jo-Anne pretty much fell in line. Needless to say, our "girls" made sure we were always

satisfied, but Jo-Anne had resisted providing sexual favors on that particular night. I was determined that I wouldn't leave for Japan without having had, at the very least, a blowjob from her.

Kenny and I were wearing our flashiest designer threads when we entered the V.I.P. suite. Our groupies were already there, and looking *fine!* I had given one of the girls a couple of C-notes to take Jo-Anne out and get her looking sexy. Now that I saw the results, I should have given her *five* C-notes instead. Not that Jo-Anne didn't look good... she did... but compared to the rest of the sluts that hung out with us, she looked positively dowdy.

She had already been drinking, and I could smell marijuana in the air. She was pretty loose, and after a couple of dances... and a few more drinks, she was all over me. Seated in a booth with two other groupies on either side, Jo-Anne moaned softly as I kissed her neck, running my hands up her black nylon covered legs, under her tartan pleated mini skirt, to touch her upper thighs. My other hand had unbuttoned her blouse and, as she had come to the club bra-less, was massaging her breast and fondling her nipple. She was putty in my hand, but she wasn't getting the point as quickly as I had hoped.

One of the other girls was also growing impatient with Jo-Anne's progress, and began to gently guide her. The naïve midwestern girl went through the motions of unbuckling my belt, unbuttoning my pants and fishing out my throbbing cock. Shyly, nervously, Jo-Anne responded to the other girl's instruction and was soon stroking my hard unit with her soft hand.

Then came my crowning achievement, as Jo-Anne fell to her knees and began to perform oral sex on me for the first time. I was in my glory. Me, the powerful music star, could turn timid women into wanton sluts at whim. She looked up at me as she brought me closer to orgasm. I smiled then turned to the girl that had guided her through her task and nodded with a smile. She knew what to do.

Seconds later the second girl had slipped out of her panties and moved Jo-Anne out of the way before lowering herself onto my lap. As she bucked and rocked, I looked down at the floor where Jo-Anne still knelt. She looked quite upset, knowing that I had had used her and then discarded her like a forgotten toy. The thought must have destroyed her, but it only made me feel more aroused.

When the slut I was fucking had finished, I buckled myself up and scanned the suite for Jo-Anne, but the ungrateful bitch had already left. *Oh well*, I thought to myself, *it was her loss. After tonight, it could be months before I was back here, and even after that, she'd be back. She needed me more than I needed her. And if she wasn't, then there would be some other girl for me to use.*

I found Kenny in another part of the suite, finishing up with a couple of chicks in a similar fashion to what I had just done. We said our goodbyes to

our posse, and headed for the airport. Soon we were seated in first class, (drunk but still drinking) flying to Japan to try and sing a few more songs and make a few more bucks before they tired of us like our American audience had.

Ken spent a sizable portion of the flight talking about how many hot Japanese chicks we were going to bang.

"I'm telling you man," he slurred after taking a sip of his bourbon, "those Japanese chicks *love* American men. We'll have to fight them off with sticks!"

It was hard to ignore the thought of screaming Asian girls in their super short skirts and super high heels clamoring over each other to see us. Maybe this wasn't going to be too bad after all. In fact... this might just be the best thing to happen to us... *ever*.



After getting through customs and immigration we were greeted by a flamboyant Japanese man that introduces himself as "Koshi," and who we would learn, was to be our guide, assistant and stylist while in Japan. It didn't take too long for both Ken and I to agree through shared glances that Koshi was as queer as a \$3 bill, as the saying goes. He spoke with massive lisp (even in Japanese you could tell) and dressed in a very androgynous pantsuit with very feminine collared shirt under it. Ken pointed out in the limo that the "dude was wearing makeup," referring to the subtle eyeliner and lip-gloss that Koshi wore. He had leaned over to whisper it to me while Koshi was gabbing away on his cell phone in Japanese, occasionally looking us over with a look of disappointment on his face. He almost looked offended. If I didn't know any better, I would have sworn he was complaining to the person on the other end how "straight" we looked.

The limo tore through the streets of Tokyo. We both couldn't help but be impressed by the sights that passed by our windows. The buildings, the neon, the people... it was just like any of the pictures or movies that we had seen. We saw plenty of good looking Japanese girls which only further boosted our over inflated egos. Kenny went so far as to roll down his window so that he could smile at a group of young women, dressed in what we would have called "Goth" clothes, back in the U.S. The girls smiled and giggled amongst each other as Ken winked at them.

"See man," he said as we continued on our way to wherever we were going, "They *love* us. We'll get laid every fucking night!"

I had to admit the thought was appealing. Very appealing. "Ken," I said to him, "this is going to *rock*."

"Hey, pull over here!" Ken yelled, opening the door and causing the limo to come to a sudden stop. He ran out up to a building and pointed at the window. It was a series of machines that looked like giant upright pinball machines. People were lined up like they were playing slots at Binion's. "Pochinno!" Ken said.

"Pachinko," I corrected. I followed him out of the car as he kept running along the sidewalk.

"They let you gamble all day long at these places, and just out in the open!" Ken yelled at me, almost drowned out by the noise of the street. "It's illegal, and the cops can't do nuthin!"

"Get back in the car, dumbass!" I yelled at him. It only caused him to continue further down the street, staggering drunkenly from side to side.

Koshi leapt out of the limo and begged us to get back in the car, waving his arms and gesturing flamboyantly. He was creating such a scene, I just decided to join Ken. We quickly ducked out and found a bar not far down the street.

We got good and sloshed in there. Some of things they served – have you ever had absynthe? – it was a wild spot. I was liking Tokyo a whole lot. "I'm never goin' home!" I told Ken.

"I'm with you all the way!" He replied.

Eventually, Koshi caught up with us, and threw us back in the limo. We were too drunk to fight it or even know what day it was. After another half-hour of driving, we finally arrived at the offices of TRJ. They gave us a few cups of coffee to try and sober us up, and we were hurried into a conference room to meet with Hurato Muriata the Executive Vice President of TRJ, the Japanese equivalent of Todd, the Torsion VP back in the States.

Hurato was the stereotypical Japanese businessman, dressed in a very average-looking navy blue suit and smiling at us and asked bullshit questions about our flight, or if we had enjoyed our limo ride from the airport. I'm sure he could tell that we were both still quite buzzed, having just drank the city dry. He even offered us some Japanese beer. We didn't want to be rude. And our buzz was starting to fade. So while we drank the cold brewskis down (and they were pretty good too) Hurato and Koshi took turns showing us data on the sales of Gnarly Boiz, and how the local media was buzzing with the anticipated arrival of the group. But then things took a very bad turn.

Hurato explained that when the single was released here, an error was made in the translation of our name. It would seem that the "Gnarly Boiz" had been inadvertently changed to... the "Girly Boys," and before anyone noticed, the single had been released to the radio stations. Ken and I looked shocked.

"What?" I nearly spat my beer out, "Did you say... girly??"



"You've got to be kidding. How the hell could you guys screw that up?" Ken chided, "I mean... Girly Boys?? What the f..."

Hurato bowed, I guess in embarrassment. "We did not think you would come to Japan. Your image wasn't as important to us as selling records."

"But Girly Boys?" I yelled. It was kind of a sore sport with us. We weren't exactly towering, hulking figures of manliness, but we were a long way from being confused with some swishy guy like... Koshi. "You gotta be joking."

Hurato was facing the ground, still bowing. "It was a simple way to market you..."

Ken's face was red with anger. "That's no excuse! How do you idiots expect us..."

Koshi cut him off, "Before you pass judgment, you may want to look at the sales statistics," he slid a sheet of paper over the table to us.

My look of anger and horror changed to one of disbelief. The numbers were amazing. We had done well with our first single in U.S., but it didn't last long. The numbers in Japan were 50% higher, plus, they had released a techno-remix that sold almost as much as the original.

"Oh my god," Ken mumbled. All I could do was stare at the paper. Hurato slid another paper over the desk. It was our contract.

"What's this for?," I asked, "I can't read this crazy-ass language." I meant legal jargon, but I think he took it to mean the Japanese language. He wasn't pleased.

Hurato's demeanor changed in a flash, from humble to hostile. "This is to remind you that you have been brought here to ensure the launch of the album is a success. We abhor failure, as I am sure you do also," Hurato said dryly, having lost almost all traces of his accent, "and I know you will agree, as you already have done in the signing of this legal document, to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the first album of the Girly Boys is a complete success."

"What do you mean... whatever it takes?" I asked.

"And why did you call us the Girly Boys... you're going to correct that, aren't you?" Ken piped up.

"In a manner of speaking," he smiled, "We do not have much of a choice but to use you. We have been told that we must use you, and so we *will* use you." He turned his back to us and examined a small framed picture on the wall. "But," He said, leaving that word to hang as a threat. "We believe that it is much too late to correct the name of the group, as the image has already been cast in the minds of the Japanese public..."



He paused as his smile grew wider, "...as we have already produced and released an animated video, starring anime female likenesses of you both, and we've used those same cartoon characters on the album cover, so its really too late to suddenly say, *Sorry, we were mistaken, the singers are actually men.* You see, here in Japan, trust is very important, and they,

your fans, trust that what the animated character look like you do. They trust TRJ. We are worthy of their trust. So in order not to betray their trust, and dishonor yourselves and this company, *your* image will have to be corrected to match the image that has been formed in the public's minds"

I looked at Ken, he looked at me, and then we both turned to Hurato and Koshi, "Huh?"

Koshi took over, explaining that the contract that we had signed (without even looking over) contained clauses that gave TRJ executives the legal right to make temporary alterations to our appearance so as to aid in the marketing of the "product," which was our group. In short, the public expected Girly Boys to be, well... Girly. And so under his direction, with a team of hairstylists, makeup artists and wardrobe people, as well as two personal trainers to help us learn the fine art of being girly... *and* Japanese, we *would* do as we were told and we *would* be made to fit the bill as the "Girly Boys."

Kenny and I sat in stunned silence as we were driven to our apartment condo to get settled in. Even as we were shown around our expansive new digs, we were in shock as to what had just transpired. Less than twelve hours previous we had been on top of the world... and now it seemed that we were back on bottom. Maybe it was just the stun of trying to understand what had just happened, or maybe it was the drinking, but that was really when we should have backed out. We didn't.



The next day began early with our new trainers – a crusty old duo called the Ishikawas (I assumed they were husband and wife) who seemed to delight in our misery. Needless to say, they were to be delighted most of that day. They started by literally pulling our hung-over asses out of bed and throwing us into the showers. While showering, we were instructed to rub smelly white lotions over one another's bodies, including each others groins. When we initially refused, they reminded us that we were obliged by law to obey, and that if we didn't do as they said, we would soon be back in the U.S. facing a lawsuit from TRJ for breach of contract. It was humiliating, to say the least. We closed our eyes and proceeded to apply the cream to each other. I silently reminded myself that I was doing it for the money. I'm pretty sure that Ken was thinking the same thing. Without a doubt, it was the *gayest* thing that we had ever done, and I just closed my eyes and got it done as fast as I could. I prayed this was the last time I'd be this humiliated.

My prayers would *not* be answered that day.

The cream stung like hell, and burned our noses. At first we weren't sure what it was for until our body hair began to fall off in clumps and swirl down the drain. We looked at each other in horror, both of our expressions saying *"what the hell have we gotten ourselves into?"*

The trainers barked more orders at us to snap us out of the numbing stupor we were slipping into. We continued to wash ourselves off and exited the showers to dry off in big fluffy pink towels. Moments later, we were each taken by one of the Ishikawas to our respective rooms, where an outfit had been laid out for us. I was to be with Mrs. Ishikawa, or Ishikawa-san as I would eventually learn to call her, and Ken with Mr. Ishikawa. She scowled at me when I asked where my luggage was, "You sirry boy," she said in a ridiculously thick accent, "you should no arg/ue. You get dless fo crass light now and no talk." Already feeling forlorn and dejected, I chose not to fight. Instead I opted to slip into the pink high-cut panties that lay on my bed.

The crusty old woman almost smiled in approval before affixing silicon pads to my buttocks to fill out my hips and ass some. When they said they wanted us to look girly, they weren't kidding. More pads, which I was told were called *breast forms*, were affixed with some kind of acrid-smelling goop to my chest. I was then helped into a pink bra. I kept my eyes low, afraid that if I looked up, I might see my reflection. "Vely good sirry boy. You keep you eyes row rike plover girl" Ishikawa-san chirped from behind me. I couldn't get over the way she talked. She watched me put on the pair of girly hip-hugger jeans that had been on the bed, followed by a snug fitting pink tee shirt. With an approving grunt, she then led to me into our spacious bathroom and sat me before a brightly-lit vanity. Ken and Mr. Ishikawa were already there. Ken was being shown how to gel his long-ish hair



into a somewhat feminine style. He looked over at me with a terrified glance. Mr. Ishikawa barked at him to focus on his task. I could see fear in Ken's eyes... fear, and thin *eyeliner* around his eyes. Not only that, but his lips looked all wet and shiny... and a little bit... *pink*?

This was just nuts. I knew that the first chance any of these jackass executives saw us in these outfits, they'd scrub the whole thing. I mean, come on! They were just doing this to try and keep fleecing us for one more hit. We knew that and they knew that. This wasn't going to get any father than the next time that VP saw us.

"Mik-oh!" Mrs. Ishikawa barked at me, "pay attention. You must appry you makeup nicery now." She pointed at the counter top where an eye-liner pencil and tube of lip gloss lay.

Miko? I thought to myself as I picked up the pencil and began to outline my eyes, *who is Miko*? I concluded, incorrectly, that Miko was a very rough Japanese translation of Mike. I drew around my eyes and then turned to my instructor. She looked very displeased. Of course she *always* looked very displeased. She mumbled something in Japanese then handed me a special moist pad and told me to remove the eyeliner I had just applied. I looked back at my reflection and could understand why she was so displeased. It was so poorly applied that it was almost comical. My second try was not much better, nor was my third. Mrs. Ishikawa gave me a few more pointers, called me a "Sirry Boy" several times, and then watched as I tried again. I *was* getting better, but it would take until my sixth or seventh try (I lost count) until it actually met her standards. Then came the lip-gloss, which was super shiny with just hint of pink color, and some blush on my cheeks. By the time I had completed *those* tasks, Kenny





had finished and left the bathroom. *He must have caught on quicker than me*, I thought to myself as I was shown how to style my hair in a girly fashion.

It took several more minutes... maybe even more... for me to figure out how to style my longish, light brown/dusty blonde hair into a somewhat feminine, funky style. Finally Ishikawa-san looked like she had simply had enough, and ordered me out. Feeling beaten, I walked out of the bathroom to meet Ken in the living room, where Mr. Ishikawa had given him new shoes. They were wedge-heeled sandals with faux-cork soles that sloped up to about two and half inches at the heel. My pair would be exactly the same when my instructor handed them to me.

So, while I was struggling with my hair and face, Ken had been practicing his walk, under Mr. Ishikawa's watchful eye. Ken's extra time in his shoes gave him an unfair advantage as we walked together down the hall to the elevator. I noted that our jeans were the same, and while my tight tee shirt was pink with some kind of Japanese character on it in white, Kenny's was black with the same character in white. I must have tripped four times in a twenty-foot hallway, then again on the way to the limo, while Ken managed to make it all the way, with only a stumble or two.

We were driven to our culture, customs and language sessions that were designed to help us to understand the mindset of the "characters" that we were playing. At least that's what the Ishikawas said. They began with basic instructions on how to speak Japanese, and if we couldn't speak Japanese, they wanted us to fake an accent. Ken and I continued to be dumbfounded, as we progressed into our instructions on walking and composing ourselves like "goo rittle Japanese girr" as the Ishikawas called it. We assumed they meant *good little Japanese girls*. Who had taught these people English? I hadn't spent much time amongst Japanese people, but the Ishikawas had the most bizarre accent I'd ever heard. It was way out there. They talked as if they were *trying* to mispronounce every word.

Anyway, all of this basically meant that we were to learn the finer points of what to do and what *not* to do in Japanese society. Our trainers called us by the names that the record label had given us (without asking for our input I might add). Ken was to be called Keiko, and I was to be known as Miko, which explained Mrs. Ishikawa's calling me by that name earlier that day. We continued to be paired with one of the two instructors throughout the week so that we might receive intensive one-on-one training in preparation of the early morning Photo Shoot that weekend. The CD release party was scheduled at the end of the following week. They were originally going to depict the anime versions of us on the album cover, but as they now had us in real life, the cover was to be changed. Of course, that meant that *we* had to be changed to resemble our cartoon selves, and quick.

It took a very long, very harsh week. Early morning starts, feminine underwear, girly jeans, wedge heeled shoes, language lessons, speaking and singing in a higher pitch, and being told to smarten up and act “ploperee” (which I assumed meant more *girly*). The Isikawas were relentless. Day after day it was the same things over and over again. So, exhausted and crushed from our training, we were finally delivered to the studio where the photo shoot was to take place the following Saturday. Ken and I were once again separated, taken by Koshi and his team to separate dressing rooms to be prepared for our first appearance as the “Girly Boys.”

After a seemingly endless morning in a salon chair, I emerged from my dressing room to see my singing partner standing before me. I almost didn't recognize him. Ken was wearing a pair of black hip hugger flared jeans, with a studded black leather belt off center, hanging on one hip. On his feet were black boots with a chunky 3” heel and 1” platform sole. A really fuzzy black short-sleeve sweater was over his new white collared shirt, the collar having been left open and spread wide over the black fuzzy backdrop. His complexion was pale but fresh and clean, with thin black eyeliner and rosy blush. His lips were outlined with a dark red and filled with a lighter, brighter and super glossy blood red color. His short hair had been extended a little with short bangs hanging over his eyebrows. They had somehow made the brows look very thin and dainty, and the hairstyle was short and very funky. He could have easily passed for one of those goth freaks we used to make fun of in high school. Trouble was, I couldn't tell if he was a guy-goth or a girl-goth... he could easily pass for both.

He blushed when he saw me, as if embarrassed. It was funny 'cuz, I was equally embarrassed, and I must have also blushed deeply. We were both wearing our padding and forms and had been cinched in the right places to create a hint of a feminine body. I wore a pair of black Capri pants over white knee high stockings, encasing my hairless ankles and calves. On my feet, pink ballet flats. My shirt was a pink, retro-style, midriff cut tee shirt, that hung over one shoulder worn over a black padded sports bra. They had affixed dangling clip on earrings to my ears. Ken's earrings were silver hoops.

My hair was also made longer with hair extensions, but was only down to my chin. It was blonde and frizzy, with long sweeping bangs combed over my left eye. Whereas the makeup artists had muted Ken's eyes and emphasized his mouth, they chose the inverse for myself. My brows had been covered with some kind of wax, hiding them from view, (I could only assume they had done the same to Ken) only to be drawn back in as thin arches, my eyes outlined with thick black liner, drawn out at the sides. The lids swept with dark, then pale pink, then white shadow, the lashes – two sets of feathery fake lashes – were coated in thick mascara. They tickled my skin when I blinked. They brushed light pink blush onto my cheeks and painted my lips in an almost white, almost clear colored pale pink,



with several coats of gloss. As I stood before Ken, I couldn't help but stare at my reflection in the full-length mirror on the wall to the left of him. I was amazed at the transformation. I felt a stirring in my groin every time I looked at my subtle curves, pretty face... and those lips! *My god*, I thought in horror. *We* look like the girls we *thought* we were going to meet here in Japan! We look *HOT*! I looked over at my musical partner. We exchanged glances for a second, and I saw a little bit of a nervous smile form at the outer corner of his mouth.

I didn't dwell on it, as we were escorted quickly and quietly to the stage where the shoot was to be done. The set was plush and pink, with thousands of fuzzy pink black and white stuffed animals strewn about. The photographer spoke virtually no English, so Koshi was in charge of translating everything for us. Several times the photographer turned to Koshi or some of the stagehands with a smile or smirk, while glancing back at us, and said something in Japanese. Both Ken and I were pretty pissed about the whole ordeal. It was pretty obvious that we were being mocked. Everybody seemed to be in on a joke except us.

He had us pose in different locations and positions around the set, sometimes smiling and laughing, sometimes looking deadly serious. Other times we were told to try and look sexy, our lips puckered, our eyes low and smoldering. It was possibly the gayest experience in my or Ken's life... even more gay than the experience in the shower. I again prayed it would be over soon.

Truth was, it was just beginning.



Less than three days after the shoot, the single was re-released with a punchier techno beat. Ken and I angrily objected, saying that the music didn't represent at all what we were about artistically, but TRJ didn't seem to care. And after watching the numbers soar to number one on the charts, it was hard to stay angry. That, and TRJ had made sure to point out that they were well within their rights to modify the sound of the group. It was another of the many clauses in the new contracts we had signed. They were so happy with the results in fact, that they took the liberty of remixing almost *all* of our remaining tracks on the album. It really was a moot point.

Kenny and I spent the time between the photo shoot and the album release in an intensive regime of dance classes and singing in our high pitched voices, followed by culture and customs and language training, followed by more dancing and singing, then more culture, then more customs and more language. It was early up each morning and late to bed each night, followed the next day by more of the same. We were told that

it was the Japanese way... learn as much as possible in as short a time as possible. "It like clam school," Mrs. Isikawa said to me. I tried to tell her that it was "cram," not pronounced "clam," but she wasn't going to hear about it. She even had me say "clam" repeatedly to prove her point. Crazy.

After a one particularly grueling day, (I don't remember which one) we were lounging around our apartment, trying to relax and not think about what we were being made to do. They had informed us that we were to appear in costume on some Japanese talk shows to promote the album and sing our debut single after the album was officially released. Of course, as far as our instructors were concerned, we were not yet ready to appear in public as our girly selves... or as they put it, "You are far too ignorant, stupid and awkward to be privileged with the gift of appearing to the public of our country. Your foolishness and clumsy mannerisms may be worthy of vile American audiences, but here in Japan, a higher level of decorum is expected."

Ouch.

"I honestly don't know what they expect from us," Ken bemoaned, absentmindedly rubbing his eyebrows, or rather the freshly bared skin from where his eyebrow hairs had been painfully ripped earlier in the day, "I mean... I am doing my best here. It's like they're freakin' perfectionists, you know?"

I nodded, trying to hide the fact that I was grinning stupidly. Ken's newly waxed brows made him look chronically surprised. I marveled at how such a small thing, like thinner eyebrows, could change the whole appearance of his face. I was sure that my face was equally changed, as I too had undergone a similar procedure under Koshi's strict supervision. According to him, the makeup staff could save themselves almost an hour's makeup application time by giving us permanently arched eyebrows. It was all about efficiency, he told us. Neither Ken nor I were thrilled with the idea, as it was going to be hard to pick up Japanese girls when you had the same eyebrows as them. Not that we were being given many chances to even go looking for girls, what with our rigorous schedule and all.

"I know what you mean," I replied, "I think it's just the culture, you know? I mean look at the way they do everything... it's like failure is not an option, or whatever. It's probably why they make such good cars and stuff."

"Whatever," Ken sneered, "I know its just driving me nuts"

We were both dressed in the jeans we had been given that first day in Japan, with the tight low-rise waists and flared legs complete with girly short cut tee-shirt and cork soled wedge heeled sandals. We had given up asking about where our "real clothes" went, as Koshi would always fly into some unintelligible rage and storm away. There was no point in trying to get the answer out of him.

As for the shirts, we had learned that the Japanese characters on the shirts were our names... Miko and Keiko. Figures.

Also, the Ishikawas had given us new workout clothes for our training sessions. Girly, snug fitting track suits with white stripes down the sides. Mine was predictably in pink, and Ken's in black.

Kenny stretched, and then got up to walk to the counter to pour a fresh mug of coffee. A glimpse of something shiny caught my eye. I watched him carefully as he stood by the counter. The flash happened again. Ken caught me looking at his flat stomach, exposed by the short tee shirt. "What!?" He whined.

I looked closer, at his belly button, but Ken quickly covered it with his hands. "Did you..." my voice trailed off as Ken blushed and looked at the floor.

"The fake one they gave me keeps falling off in dance class," he began, slowly uncovering his pierced navel and shiny diamond tipped stud, "so they um..." His voice trailed off, as I looked closer. "And um... they..." he pulled his hair extensions behind his ears, showing the tiny silver studs in each lobe, "they did these too... while they were at it, I figured... you know... might as well."

It was obvious that he was feeling rather uncomfortable with the whole ordeal.

Well, we were both in this together. "Cool," I chipped, "Maybe I'll get mine done too."

His eyes lit up, "Yeah?"

"Sure, why not?" I replied, "I mean, we're supposed to be a duo, right? If it's good enough for you, then it's good enough for me." His expression changed to slight smile. "You know we always talked about piercing our ears back in the States. Lots of guys have both ears pierced. It's no big deal."



He smiled even bigger, “Yeah... you’re right.” We both knew that I was trying to come up with ways to justify what was happening to us.

Later it dawned on me that I was essentially volunteering to get my ears pierced just to make Ken feel better. But after all, Ken was my friend – my best friend – and here in Japan... my only friend. And if getting my ears pierced would help make him feel better about things, then it was a small price to pay.

So the next morning, after much thought and before anything was done on my hair or makeup, I told Koshi that I no longer wanted to wear clip-on earrings, and that he should pierce my ears like he had done to Ken. Koshi looked like a kid on Christmas morning, and without hesitation, called one of his beauticians over to fulfill my request. No time was wasted. It was as if he believed that my offer had a short expiration date. He was probably right. I closed my eyes in anticipation of what I thought would be a quick sharp pain in each lobe. I heard the pneumatic gun fire... three times, followed by quick jolts of pain in both the lower and upper part of my left ear. Then, a few seconds later, another three shots and complimentary pain in my right ear. I opened my eyes in surprise to see the shiny silver stud in my lower ear... right beside a second one... and a third one high in the top of the ear.

“Hey!” I whined, “What are you doing??”

But Koshi had already moved on to something else and was completely ignoring me. As was the hairstylist who was adding pieces of tin foil to my hair. She was chatting in Japanese with the beautician who was doing my nails. It seemed to be taking much longer than usual for Koshi’s staff to do our hair and makeup that day. They had *just* done my hair and nails a couple of days ago... and now again? I was a little confused. But everything would become clear as she finished me and led me to rear of the studio to wait for our limo. Koshi smiled as he said that I looked very nice for the album launch.

Shoot! I thought to myself, *the launch is today?*

We had been training so hard all week on how to act in front of everyone and I still felt woefully unprepared. My instructor, Ishikawa-san, basically said I was impossibly stupid and would likely never pass the test of the general public. “But,” she said, in broken English, “If in doubt... act like proper Japanese girl and smile-oh and giggle-oh... and bow your head.”

Not exactly a glowing recommendation, but sound advice none-the-less. Ken’s instructor had basically said the same thing... *if all else fails, smile, giggle and look down shyly*. I was actually beginning to understand the way they talked.

I repeated this in my head over and over as I approached Ken standing with Koshi at the door, waiting for the limo.

Smile, giggle, look down shyly.

Ken was looking down, mumbling to himself in Japanese as I drew near. He was wearing a variation of the outfit he had worn for the photo shoot. Instead of the black jeans, he wore flared black leather pants, and instead of the boots with the 3" chunky heel, he was given boots with a four and a half inch wedge heel. His makeup was the same, but I could have sworn the padding they used to "fill us out" was much thicker, more noticeable. His hair looked just a little darker, and just a little longer, and his nails... now blood red like his lipstick... were nearly an inch long!

He stopped his mumbling and looked up with a smile when he noticed it was me.

"Hello," he spoke softly in Japanese, using a higher, sweeter tone of voice, "I am Keiko. I am honored to meet you"

We both bowed at each other and recited our mantra out loud in Japanese, "Smile, giggle, look down shyly."

We both broke into a fit of silly giggles, just as we had been trained to do. Still speaking Japanese, I complimented Ken on how nice he looked. Why not just go with the flow? He of course returned the complement. I too was dressed similarly to the photo shoot, with tight pink Capri pants instead of black, and pink platform suede mary janes instead of flats. As with Ken, I was convinced they were using more padding on me too, and I knew my hair was slightly longer and lighter and my nails were longer and pinker. The extra time spent on each of us was done to ensure that, as Koshi put it, we were "perfect."

The ride to the release party was much like our first ride into the city almost two weeks ago. We were both sitting opposite Koshi, who was once again chatting in Japanese on his cell phone. This time however, aside from looking completely different than we *had*, we were even sitting different... at least Kenny was.

I looked over at my musical partner to see him sitting very daintily, toes pointed downwards, heels lifted, knees together, hands neatly folded on lap, looking down at his legs. I stared at him in disbelief for some time before he noticed my gaze. His posture suddenly changed as he turned to me, "What?"

"Nothing," I chirped, "Well... not nothing... it's just that well..."

Kenny's expression became almost angry, "Wha-at??" he whined.

"You just seem to be taking this whole thing pretty seriously. You know? Like the whole way you're sitting and the way you talk and stuff. It's really... girly. That's all"

His angry look melted to a scoff, "Well Duh! It's *supposed* to be girly Mike. Haven't you been paying attention? We're the *Girly Boys* now Mike... the gir-rrr-lee boys. That's what we are. That's what the fans want,

it's what they expect." He turned away and gazed out the window, as if collecting his thoughts before turning back to me, "Maybe *you* aren't taking this seriously *enough* Mike. Did you consider *that*?"

I said nothing. It was really the first time Ken and I had disagreed on anything... ever. It stung a little that he thought I wasn't taking this seriously enough, though as I pondered it more it occurred to me that he *could* possibly be right. Maybe I *wasn't* taking this seriously. But then again, just how seriously *should* I be taking this all? Here I was, in Japan, dressed as a girl, on my way to release my newly remixed *techno* album. If you had told me this would happen even a few months ago, I would have laughed hysterically. The whole thing sounded ridiculous.

And yet... here I was.

The release party was pretty standard fare for a record company, and pretty much identical to what had been done for us back in the U.S. We



started on stage, lip-synching to our second single, then being introduced by the head of the record company, then were escorted by him and Koshi around the crowded hall to be introduced to dignitaries and executives. The primary difference that I could tell, was that the majority of the members of the audience were middle aged men in dark suits.

Hurato ushered us to the first group of executives. He made some sort of greeting in Japanese, and gestured to us. It was our cue. In synce, just like the Ishikawas had schooled us to say, we said, "He-ro, we are Glirly Boys."

With panic and anger in his eyes, he grabbed us both by the arms and dragged us away. "Do you have no shame!?" He growled. "Do you have *no respect!*?" Ken and I looked at each other in bewilderment. We were just doing what we had been told to do. "You disgrace your family and all of your country by talking like that! Your manner is so offensive to me and every Japanese..." And he was cut off by Koshi who quickly swept in and took Hurato aside for a moment.

They squabbled as they angrily talked, but I couldn't hear anything in the loud room. Our techno music over the speakers was drowning everything out. Ken tugged me on the arm. "What the hell?" He said. I shrugged. As I tried to figure out what the argument was all about, Koshi was pointing at a man in the crowd emphatically. He did so two or three times before Hurato could be bothered to look in the direction he was pointing, and when he did so, his expression changed. His anger was replaced by a look of pure fear.

He seemed to need to confirm whatever he had seen with Koshi, and then looked back over at us. He broke out into a sweat. I tried to see who they were pointing at, but I didn't see much. Just businessmen. And one person who was dressed a little differently. But I couldn't make it out. Hurato blocked my view, coming back over to us, dabbing his forehead with a handkerchief.

"You are speaking as your instructors have taught you?" He said to us. We nodded, unsure if it was the right answer. "That is good. Very good." He then straightened his tie and led us back into the crowd. I don't know if we ever figured out what the problem was.

By half way through the evening, both Ken and I were feeling pretty dizzy as we had been introduced to so many people, seemingly identical men in suits, and all of them had gazed upon us with the same leering smiles. "He-ro," we'd say. And then Koshi would whisper in their ears and they'd laugh hysterically. Neither Ken or myself understood, but we seemed to be going over pretty well. Still, dressed as we were, the laughing made me feel very awkward. Not to mention it was quite uncomfortable and exhausting, since we had to smile and giggle and act like we were so very lucky to make their acquaintances.

“Do they even know that we *aren’t* really girls?” I whispered to Ken while we were being hustled from one group of men to the next. He simply turned to me with a bewildered expression and shrugged, before forcing a wide grin as we were again introduced. This time, however, the man we met was not wearing a suit. In fact, he was dressed quite fashionably in a leather jacket with a high neck sweater. I must have blushed, as I was quite embarrassed to find myself thinking that he was dressed rather well, if I had been a girl, I might have even thought him handsome.



I shook my head as Kenny finished being introduced. *I am not a girl*, I said to myself as he turned to me and smiled, his hand extended, “Danny Chano” he said. His forwardness caught me off guard. I blushed even harder, fumbling to find the words.

“My... Mee... Miko,” I finally spat out, taking his hand in mine for a firm shake. His eyes were locked on my own. I quickly remembered my training, and smiled, giggled then looked down.

“Danny is the most famous talk show host in all of Japan” I heard Koshi say in the background.

“And a very big fan of your work,” Danny added, “I can’t wait to have you...”

I coughed, and looked up; his eyes were exactly where I left them.