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I caught a ride into Maizuru with a man who worked for a furniture-shipping company. Maizuru is a confusing, schizophrenic place, with two separate downtowns divided by a peninsula. Above the city, clouds, caught on the mountain peaks, broke, rolling down the sides, heavy with rain. When a few splats of raindrops hit me, I retreated into a bookstore for a bit of *tachi-yomi* (reading while standing up), something of an art in Japan. Storeowners in Japan never yell or scowl or say things like, "This isn't a library, you know." You will see crowds of people—men, women, and schoolchildren—standing in bookstores reading for hours, reading entire magazines, cover to cover, with nary a murmur of protest. It's great.

It was while I was milling about in the language section that I came across a textbook and cassette entitled: *Porno! Learn English by Yourself!* I had heard of this, but until now had never seen it firsthand.

The Japanese fascination with studying English (I say *studying* English, not actually learning it, and certainly not using it) is virtually endless, and *Porno! English* combined two great Japanese passions: English and porn. It was inspired, even if poorly executed.

There was, of course, a language tape and lesson plan for the program, hosted by an American girl under the pseudonym Susie Bright. The content varied from archaic Victorian erotica—"presently he glided my hand lower, to that part, in which nature and pleasure keep their stores in concert"—to the crudely direct—"let's do tongue-fuck."

As far as second-language learning goes, it covered new ground: oral, anal, bondage, incest, a whole cornucopia of human perversion—all presented in standard textbook style, with grammar points, tips on pronunciation, and explanations of usage (i.e., when to use *screw* and when to use *amorous liaison*). Some of it was, well—let's just say I'm not sure what kind of response an earnest student of English would get if he ever tried to employ them.

The pickup lines, for one, were even worse than those used by Izanami and Izanagi. Here are some examples of the cool, sophisticated talk offered through the *Porno! English* language course:

*You've got a good box. Let's go to bed.*

*I'm an ass-man. Will you love me?*

And the always effective:

*You're a cheese, darlin'.*

Calling someone "a cheese," the text explains, is a sexual compliment.

A few more bon mots from the textbook:

- (a) *So, you're a horny tomato.*
- (b) *Try and trip around the world.*
- (c) *You're actually an oomph girl!*
- (d) *The diláo! So perfect for tonight.*

All are explained in grammatical detail, recited somberly on the cassettes. And you just know that out there—somewhere—some poor Japanese businessman is sidling up beside a young lady and whispering in her ear: *Say, you're really an oomph girl, aren't you?*

It as a dark, overcast day and he was wearing sunglasses. He drove a metallic gray van and his hands were huge. He had cracked, callused knuckles, and he gripped the steering wheel with oversized fists. I don't remember what he was wearing or whether he was bald, thinning, or decked out in a pompadour; all I remember are those large leather-skinned hands.

His name was Shigeki Ōishi. It meant "big stone" and it suited him. "Any relation to Ōishi the samurai?" I asked with a forced laugh.

He turned and leveled his unblinking gaze at me. My laugh turned into a weak chuckle. "I'm the twelfth generation," he said.

"Really? *The* Ōishi?"

He didn't deign to respond.

This was like meeting the twelfth son of Richard the Lionheart. The saga of Ōishi is Japan's greatest epic. It's a tale of loyalty, bloodshed, betrayal, and honor. It began in 1701 with a simple breach of protocol and led, ineluctably, to a midnight assault, a brutal murder, and a mass suicide. In short, it had all the elements that make for great literature in Japan. Even better, it