

## **Tokyo Rose**

by Kurt Luchs

I.

That name was never yours,  
though bestowed after the fact  
by your adoring audience: Allied troops  
in the South Pacific.  
Nor was the name even exclusive to you.  
Every woman broadcasting Japanese propaganda  
got called the same thing,  
and there were many of you, working in shifts  
around the clock to discourage our boys in uniform.  
In this task you were notably unsuccessful  
with your dance music program "The Zero Hour"  
(after the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter plane).  
Later surveys revealed that only ten percent of your listeners  
felt demoralized. Eighty-four percent  
considered your show good entertainment  
and quite a few thought you were really on their side.  
How difficult it is for lonely men to resist  
a woman with a lovely voice.  
Maybe it was something in your voice  
that told them you were lonely too.  
If they only knew!  
You were an American just like them,  
visiting a sick aunt in Japan  
when Pearl Harbor was attacked.  
Unable to return once war was declared,  
unable to stay with family in Japan  
as an American citizen,  
cut off from any aid or comfort from your parents  
back in the USA because they were soon  
imprisoned in an Arizona internment camp  
by the most popular president of all time,  
what were your choices?  
The ugly truth is that your beautiful voice  
was all you had to trade for bread.  
So you spent the war behind a microphone,  
cooing to men in submarines and destroyers,  
aircraft carriers and troop transports,  
while the latest big band hits played  
like the undertow of a long, long wave.

II.

After the war, with nuclear fallout still fresh

in the ashen craters once known as Hiroshima and Nagasaki,  
your real name became infamous  
when you tried to reenter your homeland.  
The American authorities announced that you,  
Iva Toguri D'Aquino,  
were the one and only true Tokyo Rose.  
They arrested you, tried you and convicted you  
of treason, only the seventh person  
in our history to receive that dishonor.  
You served six years in prison  
before being released in 1956.  
Two decades later you earned a full pardon  
from President Ford when certain facts came to light:  
you had refused to renounce your US citizenship  
despite intense pressure from the Japanese government,  
which declared you an enemy alien  
and denied you a war ration card.  
You lived on seven dollars a month,  
yet managed to set enough aside  
to smuggle food to friends in POW camps.  
Your radio programs were subtly subversive,  
apolitical and fun. Listeners could hear  
the finger quotes around the lame propaganda.  
Then the two main witnesses against you  
recanted their testimony and admitted  
they had been coerced.  
Some things never change.

### III.

My siblings and I knew you  
as the proprietor of J. Toguri Mercantile,  
a seller of Asian goods and novelties  
near the corner of Clark and Belmont in Chicago.  
At first we were fascinated by the exotic candies  
and the paper pellets that would bloom  
into every kind of flower when dropped in a glass of water.  
You showed us these things without ever saying  
more than "hello," "goodbye," "thank you"  
and "good day."  
Known so long only for your voice  
you now chose to have none.  
Soon my attention turned to the landscapes on your walls.  
I developed a passion for Japanese brush painting  
and determined to learn it, talent be damned.  
I began a course at the Art Institute,  
fell in love with my Japanese teacher

(I think she loved me a little too)  
and bought all of my art supplies from you.  
When I showed you my feeble paintings  
you would only nod and smile.  
Who knows what you really thought?  
You kept your own counsel to the end,  
refusing to be drawn on questions about the war.  
Thanks to my father I knew better than to ask.  
You let me draw you though,  
with my childish brush strokes  
that could no more capture you  
than a federal subpoena or an off-camera cameo  
in *Destination Tokyo* alongside Cary Grant.  
I don't know what happened to that painting.  
Like you, it has disappeared from history.  
I wish I could look on your kind, quiet, closed face  
one more time, dear Tokyo Rose.