

REBECCA RUKEYSER

The Engineers

THE DAY BEFORE Belinda left for Korea, Ray Tino had sent a one-line e-mail: “Don’t get lost in the chingity-chong out there.” The e-mail had been offensive for many reasons, not the least of which was the choice of the word ‘out.’ It was true that she was traveling west, but she was going to the East, which was always going ‘back.’

Tino had seen no reason for Belinda to leave California, but after losing his job and hearing her talk about her free furnished apartment and two-and-a-half-million-won salary, Tino had followed her to teach in Ulsan. Now, after six months of teaching, he knew more about Korea than Belinda did.

“You don’t really want to date an engineer,” said Ray Tino, sipping his beer. “Trust me on this one.”

This was another offensive statement. Tino knew more about Korea-Korea but Belinda felt she knew more about their Korea, the English teacher’s Korea. She’d learned it by rote. There were three accepted ways: celibacy, dating a Korean, or dating another English teacher. But it was hard to meet a nice Korean man, everyone said so. Meeting other English teachers was easy. There was an expected trajectory: to flirt about a bit first and then find a man to keep you through the duration of the year, but it was November and no one new had arrived in Ulsan for months. Belinda knew them all: the sodden Irish rugby-playing teachers, and the American teachers from Colorado who wore ponchos and the brittle, mocking Englishmen. The rugby player had invited her back to his apartment and then fallen asleep before even kissing her, a lit cigarette between the fingers of one hand and the empty tuna can that he used as an ashtray in the other. The Coloradan, who liked to go on temple stays and considered himself a Buddhist, called her a whore when he was on top of her in a way that made her actually afraid. English teachers didn’t sound like a good idea anymore. What sounded like a good idea were the tall northern men: Swedes and Danes and Scots, who apparently populated the engineers’ compound out in the coastal village of Bangeojin. Dating an engineer was not one of the accepted ways.

“They aren’t bad, there’s just something *off* about them,” said Tino. Belinda knew that he was talking about Engineer Dale, who had become

that part that represented the whole.

Engineer Dale had opted not to live out in the engineers' compound and instead drove his company Hyundai out to the petrochemical plants each morning and returned each night. He lived in the same neighborhood as the English teachers, but in an apartment outfitted with a separate shower and an oven and other expensive Western conveniences. This apartment was in a cluster of high-rises painted lavender and an egg-blue. The pastel colors spoke of serenity. Belinda's building was unpainted.

Her apartment was in a converted love motel, which struck her as comical sometimes, or the saddest thing in the world. The door that separated her mudroom from bedroom was frosted glass, with the words "Havana House" written in English cursive and Korean. She kept this door open, the words covered with her bath towel. The apartment was typically Korean, with heated floors and a tile-lined bathroom with a showerhead attached to the wall and a drain in the middle of the floor. She often sat on her padded toilet seat when she was washing her hair. Across the street from Havana House was a grimy Hof-Soju, issuing forth the smell of fish paste and a parade of drunken men, who looked at her blond hair and fading summer tan and asked "Ruski?" "Natasha?" Now that it was autumn, she wore her hair bundled under a knit cap. Belinda imagined the engineers as a population of blonds and light brunettes, sitting around eating filet mignon and watching pirated DVDs and missing home.

Diane was blond. Belinda met Diane in October, when Diane's engineer husband was away on a project in Vietnam and Diane had grown bored with Bangeojin and had taken the forty-dollar cab ride into Ulsan to go to Café's Beer Pub, the English teacher bar. Diane had been an English teacher in Spain when she met her husband. She was twenty-eight and had been married for three years and looked back on her life before marriage with an indulgent nostalgia. When she was thinking of a word, Diane had a habit of cycling her hands. This showed off her French manicure, and made the stone of her engagement ring glitter. Belinda found it impossible to look away.

"You need to learn some more Korean," said Ray Tino. "It's a beautiful language," he said. "The honorifics are fun. You can say anything and then elevate it and it's like you're talking to a queen. You can say 'Suck my dick,' and add 'hasimnida,' and it's really polite, like saying 'Pretty please with sugar on top.'"

When she had arrived, Belinda had enrolled in a language class but after learning the alphabet she understood that a lot was in fact English translation—the restaurant Korean at least was strewn with borrowed words: *banana*, *original*, *large*—and stopped attending. Her class had been full of male English teachers, who all confessed over drinks that they wanted a Korean girlfriend.

“Sometimes Korean girls get part of their leg muscles removed, to be pretty. You can get your hand half around their calves,” said one. His hands were small.

A lot of the men in Ulsan had a slightness that connoted sensitivity. Tino told her that the Korean girls were wary of foreign men, especially English teachers, and it was an asset to any foreign man to be petite. The engineers had no apparent luck with Korean girls. The engineers were rumored to be unusually muscular for expatriates; there was a private fitness center in the Bangeojin engineers’ compound.

Engineer Dale was midwestern and solid, with a receding hairline that signaled high testosterone and feet so big he had to go up to near the U.S. Air Force base in Seoul to find shoes. Belinda thought he looked a bit like a Viking. He had lived in Venezuela, Spain, Turkey, China, the U.A.E., Indonesia, and Vietnam since he had started working as an engineer, and had lived in Ulsan for the last year and a half. This was widely regarded as the root of the problem with Engineer Dale. He had been gone from home too long, and had traveled too widely.

“He’s gone sincere,” said Tino, as if he was saying, “He’s gone soft.”

Engineer Dale didn’t know when to hold back. He’d talk about eating plates of sardines on a beach in Gibraltar, or of seeing an ancient monastery in eastern Turkey. He talked about his honest love of foreign things: the stray dogs of Marrakesh, the summer skies of St. Petersburg. All he owned could fit in a backpack. His prized possession was his camera. No one in his stories got hurt and he had no ear for mishaps in translation. He had never told an old woman that he would enjoy impregnating her when he meant he would enjoy tasting what she had cooked. Most of his stories took place, pompously, in locations that no one else had traveled to.

The English teachers knew how important it was to talk light, to tell jokes and travel stories that everyone could relate to and that were at least one person’s expense. People who told stories that didn’t end in mishaps were boring. People who told stories about locations that others hadn’t visited were self-congratulatory. The teachers liked to repeat that Japan was full of teachers who wanted to be samurai and masturbated to

anime, that China was full of itinerant sorts who wanted to save the world, and that Korea was full of misfits and masochists. The punch line was derogatory but elating: teachers in Korea were teachers in Korea because of ingrained traits; they traveled without pretension. None of Engineer Dale's stories started, "One time when I was drunk and bored in Chiang Mai." Engineers, the other teachers had decided, were mechanical: wealthy and dull and sincere. New Zealand Jacky said that they were colonialists, but New Zealand Jacky was worried about the new retinal scans in place at Japanese customs and wanted to build a sod house on the South Island, so no one paid any attention to her.

Engineers' wives were also regarded with suspicion.

On the night they met, Diane said, "I didn't realize that so many of the English teachers here were practically co-eds."

Belinda was twenty-two. Diane ordered herself another gin and cranberry and recrossed her legs. Belinda sat next to her and ordered the same. She was aware of the attention she was attracting, of the sidelong gaze of the bartender as he drew a pint. Diane turned on her stool and appraised the men in the room. "English teachers don't really change from one country to the next," she said.

"I know exactly what you mean," said Belinda, sucking her drink through the hollow stir-stick.

Belinda ran into Diane the next weekend walking into a coffee shop. They drank lattes with decorative fern leaves in the foam, and Diane invited Belinda to get a manicure.

"I'm on a spousal visa—it's impossible for me to work in Korea, except teaching on the side to private students," Diane said. She turned toward her manicurist, who was trying to sell her on acrylics using a series of hand gestures.

"*Anyo!*" said Diane, crossing her forearms sternly to emphasize the negative. "My Korean is terrible, but I know that much. There's a language tutor out in Bangeojin, but I hardly ever go see her. She's your typical *ajumma*, poor old thing, born during the war, and whenever I went tanning this summer she would cluck at me for ruining my complexion." Diane leaned her head back against the headrest. "I'm being whiny. I'm having an I-hate-Korea day."

Belinda had thought that the expression "an I-hate-Korea day" circulated only among the teachers, to be used when their students mocked

them, or they craved sausage rolls and were served pizza with corn on it. It was hard to imagine what the engineers and their wives could hate. She had heard that there was a real pub in Bangeojin that served fish and chips and nachos.

"I've been having an I-hate-Korea day for the last month," Belinda said.

"You need a mini-vacation. Come out to Bangeojin! You can stay with me, and we can go out with some of my girlfriends," said Diane. The manicurist rang them up, and Diane turned to Belinda.

"How much did she say it was?"

"Thirty thousand won," said Belinda, and then, embarrassed, "I know that because it said so on the register."

Diane's billfold was creamy yellow leather and her hair was held carelessly back with a silk scarf. Both the billfold and the scarf looked duty-free. Diane waved off Belinda's offer to pay for the manicure, and she waved off Belinda's offer to pay for the cab ride out to Bangeojin.

Diane's apartment had boiler heat and central air, and the bathroom was tiled, with a separate, Western-style shower. Diane let Belinda use her makeup, and lent her a scarf to tie up her hair. The scarf was patterned a wormy batik, and Diane told her it had come from Kuala Lumpur. Belinda thought of Diane filling her carry-on luggage with scarves from an expensive souvenir shop in the Hong Kong, or Taipei, or Kuala Lumpur airport to give to the girls back in the engineers' compound.

They sat with a group of other wives at the pub: the women were taut from the fitness center and dressed in the Korean couture that, this season, included short boxy jackets in colors like mustard. They were already planning their Christmas trips to Laos, Cambodia, India.

"You should come with us to Thailand for Christmas!" said Diane to Belinda.

"Are you going to Phuket?" a woman asked.

"Phuket is just German tourists," said Diane. "We're going Koh Chang, I think. Maybe? We also really want to go into the mountains, too."

"Northern Thailand is supposed to be the best," someone agreed.

"Don't you want to get a tan, though?" another woman asked.

At the end of the evening Belinda tried to pay for her dinner, but Diane had already done it on the sly. Diane's apartment had blackout curtains and Belinda slept for longer than she had in months. The next day they got a massage at the Bangeojin Sauna.

The next Saturday Diane spent the night at Belinda's. Belinda thought of expensive products as composed of clean lines and few colors, but what Diane unpacked was a jumble. She had gauzy metallic tops and shoes with wooden heels and a dove-colored woolen skirt. She had a pack of new nylons with gold thread shot through the material, she had a pale pink tube of designer lipstick, she had a leather armband. It was all wrong. Diane spread her clothing on Belinda's bed and looked at it thoughtfully. What was laid out on the bed was what had been in style in Spain, in Turkey, in Malaysia: the kinds of things that had appeared in second-tier fashion magazines. But when she had dressed, she looked chic and youthful, even with her hair pulled back in what should have been a matronly bun.

Belinda felt some creeping amalgamation of nausea and wistfulness from within the pit of her pelvis. She needed to start looking for a husband. Her youth—the boardwalk paths to the beach, the seed pods pattering on the wooden handrails, the medicine smell of the eucalyptus—was finished. The neon crosses from the church across the street flickered on red, and from down below she heard a couple of old men singing the first bars of a song “Eh-eh-eh, eh-eh-eh, eh-eh-eh.” She made two cups of ginger tea and poured half a bottle of soju in each. She could be an engineer's wife, she decided, and she toasted her future with her teacup.

At Café's Beer Pub Belinda forcefully introduced Diane to everyone. Diane's buoyancy was infectious, and everyone seemed to like her: New Zealand Jacky and Tino and all of them. Diane spoke endearingly about layovers and when the guard at the Syrian border thought she was a prostitute or a drug smuggler because she had bought three leather jackets from a fur shop in Antalya. When the conversation turned to others' experience, when the rugby players launched into their story about the ladyboys in Chiang Mai they had a night with over the Chuseok holiday in September, Diane kept her face a dependable mask of interest, torn with a wide appreciative grin. Her hands gestured with twisting grace, sparkling her rings at every flourish. Belinda kept watching the door for Engineer Dale.

Later, Diane and Belinda talked alone at the bar.

“I liked teaching English: it's fun, it's exciting, and it's easy,” Diane said. “But I liked traveling the best. I liked, I liked the sound of the names. I had a map when I was young and I remember the names best, like Kowloon.” Kowloon, thought Belinda, was a dog howling.

“It was the decision that was the scariest, when you’re applying for a job and looking at the map and seeing where you are and where you will be, and then suddenly you’re there and you have to deal with all those stages of culture shock, and then when you leave you have to say your goodbyes. I like my husband’s schedule, and I like that we go where he’s needed and we don’t have the weight of decision on us. And the nice thing is that where you end up is where you end up, and it’s always nice, even with the I-hate-Korea days.”

Belinda told Diane that she had decided her future, that she knew what she wanted and what she wanted very much was to be an engineer’s wife. Looking at Diane, in her gilded tights and mussed bun, Belinda felt as though she were talking to herself in five years’ time. The world had opened up, and there was a panorama of meetings and locations ahead. Kowloon! They were all lonely people, she told Diane, everyone in the world. But they were *good* people. It was her duty to see it all, all the beauty and sadness and splendor. She had decided.

“You sound like you’ve decided to become a nun,” Diane said. No, that’s not what she meant at all, Belinda said. It was a calling like painting was a calling, or charity.

The next day Belinda woke up past noon—strips of light making their way through the seal of the venetian blinds. Diane was asleep on a mat beside the bed. Belinda sprung to her feet and prepared cups of instant coffee for them both. She ran down to the convenience store and bought milk and eggs and some white rolls. She hummed.

“Do you remember that nonsense you were talking about marriage last night?” Diane asked as they ate their French toast.

“It wasn’t nonsense. I didn’t think it was nonsense.”

“Oh!” said Diane. “You were serious about all that?” Belinda looked down at her plate of French toast. The rolls, she realized, had a gluey consistency and probably were made with rice flour. Diane hadn’t eaten much.

Diane laughed and rubbed the knit cap covering Belinda’s head. “You’re such an odd one!” said Diane.

Belinda walked her down to the cabstand. Before Diane entered her cab, she turned back to Belinda.

“You’ll come out to the St. Andrew’s Day Ball out in Bangeojin this Saturday, right? It’ll be like Cinderella. My husband comes home on Thursday—come over early Friday evening and we’ll pamper and we’ll

get all dolled up, and we'll find you a nice bloke to marry." Belinda could hear Diane's laughter even after she shut the cab door.

"That sounds godawful," Tino said, when Belinda met him at Café's Beer Pub after work. "They'll be soused on scotch and acting like real William Wallaces, but they'll still be talking about turbines and that time they went whale-watching in Patagonia and how it just changed their lives." Belinda saw Engineer Dale in the corner, poised with a pool cue. "You go and enjoy yourself."

Back in her apartment Belinda curled in bed listening to the singing of the men coming from the Hof-Soju and watching the swoop of the motor scooter lights up and down the bedroom wall. Things you found sad alone would be humorous with a husband, or at least poignant. They could get married in Fiji, she thought. Or in Bali. She thought of herself all the way at thirty, waiting for her husband in a hotel lobby full of potted palms.

The Bangeojin Conference Hall was decorated for the St. Andrew's Day Ball with crepe-paper tablecloths that turned romantic, black-tie, as soon as the lights were dimmed. Belinda liked the thickness and capability of the engineers and the comfortable way they met and lent truth to the stereotypes expected of them: the Scotsmen were red-cheeked and the Norwegians were tall and sandy, and the Danes looked sharp and melancholy. "Tonight everyone is Scottish," said the emcee, "even the Koreans. We're very alike, as a people. For example, the weather! Korea has four distinct seasons, and in Scotland you experience all four seasons every day!"

A rare bottle was put up for auction, which was met with a roar of approval. The auctioneer talked in a clipped efficient manner and the rowdy men up front jumped up and down to raise the bid. They acted younger than Belinda had thought they would. They didn't seem like the assured, urbane men she had expected.

The older engineers—not assured, just sedate—raised their hands quietly from their seat at the tables. Only Engineer Dale, at one of the back tables, kept his arm raised the entire time. He got the bottle, in the end, and strolled to claim it while the rest of the bidders jeered. He took it from the judge, and stood for a moment with the bottle raised in his hand, as if he was about to make a speech. A man ran up to the stage and lifted his kilt and the audience forgot that they were clapping for the scotch bidder and clapped twice as hard for the pale buttocks dusted with hair.

Engineer Dale didn't seem to mind the ruckus. He made his way down the back of the stage. As he passed Belinda's table she smiled in a way she hoped was commiserating.

"Dale!" said Diane. "Come sit down. Do you know Belinda? You must know Belinda." Dale stopped and introduced himself, even though they had met before at Café's Beer Pub. His hand was dry and Belinda felt the rasp of a callus on his palm. Diane persuaded Dale to sit down, and to sit down next to Belinda. He offered his scotch to the table.

Belinda could smell his cologne, which had a metallic sweetness. She complimented him, and he told her it was duty-free, bought on the hydrofoil that ran between Busan and Japan. She had taken the same hydrofoil, in order to get her teaching visa from the Korean consulate in Fukuoka.

"Did you like Fukuoka?" he asked.

"I loved it," she said, and he looked down at his scotch. He was swirling it like it was brandy.

"The dump trucks were immaculate, very shiny. The whole city was." He looked at her, tired. "How long have you been in Korea?"

"Eight months."

"Do you hate Korea? Are you one of those people that have I-hate-Korea days?"

"Everyone has those days after a while," she said. She was pleased by the worldliness of her statement and the warmth of the scotch.

"Do you long for clean?" he asked. "You wish we had dump trucks that clean?"

"I think that it seemed friendly. It's hard to make friends in Korea, Korean friends."

"It's hard to make friends. You probably just don't like the culture shock of it, and you'll go home," he said.

"Look," he said kindly. "Look. You came out here eight months ago. You'll get tired. You'll get run down. Someone will hock and spit and you'll hate them for it, and some child will try to stick their fingers up your asshole at the bathhouse, and someone will tell you that Korea has four distinct seasons and you'll want to hit them. I swear to you this will happen. And at the end you'll hate it and go home, or you'll love it and stay."

"I like teaching English," she said, "but what I really want to do is travel." Dale set down his drink and looked at her. He started to speak and as he did so his gaze drifted from her face to over her shoulder and

his eyes fixed on a cluster of streamers. He wasn't actually seeing the streamers, Belinda thought, he was watching his memories.

"When I finished college and I joined the Peace Corps, and they sent me to Kyrgyzstan, I thought blond leggy women and nesting dolls, and I was sent to a town in the northwestern corner of the country in the mountains, which was wild and craggy and then when the snow started falling the road to Bishkek was closed, the road to the rest of the country was closed. In the whole town I was the only foreigner. I got terribly sick that winter; I couldn't keep anything in, couldn't retain any of the calories I ingested. My neighbors took me in—the generosity of this family—they nursed me back to health. We would stay up late together, drinking fermented mare's milk: the women would weave felt rugs, using wool right off the backs of their own sheep, and the men would play the *komuz*—kind of like their mandolin—which has this high, haunting sound. They would take me out into the mountains, and we'd sit around the fire and look at the brightest, sharpest, coldest stars. And it was a beautiful winter after all. And I stayed there, in that little village, for two years."

As he continued talking about his time in Kyrgyzstan, Engineer Dale's eyes refocused on hers, and Belinda saw the scope of their lives together: the Nile, Cyprus, Helsinki, Kowloon, the vision of each destination as boldly colored and outlined as travel stickers on a steamer trunk.

Engineer Dale was a meticulous lover, with an engineer's precision. He moved her legs up around his back just so. He cupped her jaw. He kept one arm behind her back with his hands spread, the fanned fingers cradling the back of her head, and when he wanted to kiss her throat he pulled his hand down and her neck arched for him.

She stayed awake longer than he did, watching the outline of his chest as he breathed. The room was dully lit with the red glow of the neon crosses from a church outside, and when she woke up she woke to the tin clang of recorded church bells.

Engineer Dale was standing at the stove, his back moving with the effort of shaking the omelet pan. They ate their eggs in silence. Outside his kitchen window the bare branches were moving in the steep rays of the sun. As she left he grasped her coat lapels, and with a shake similar to that he had given to the omelet, bundled the material closer around her neck for protection. She walked lightly home, feeling carbonated. She dribbled an empty can along the flagstones for a full block. A stall was selling the last of the season's apples, and she bought a kilo, pressing an extra five thousand won into the palm of the street vendor.

Belinda and Diane's lattes arrived with hearts etched in the foam.

"How appropriate for you!" said Diane. "Tell me everything about your conquest. No, but I'm jealous. It's been so long since I had a tryst that I feel like a real old married."

"He's great," said Belinda. "He's different from the teachers. He's not a boy. I don't know if it's a tryst or what. I don't know!" The carbonated feeling overwhelmed her again. "Do you know him at all?"

"Sweetie, I'm so glad you had a good time! What do I know about Dale? He works at the petrochemical plant, and he was dating a girl who taught at the university for a while—nothing serious. I know he was a Peace Corps volunteer, very noble, in Kazakhstan."

"Kyrgyzstan."

"Kyrgyzstan. But he had to go home early because he got sick. He was in the hospital with some kind of intestinal parasite and only spent about three weeks total there, and then was sent back to America on medical leave."

Belinda told Diane that she had a hangover, went home, and slept for the remainder of the afternoon. As she showered, she sat on the squishy foam toilet seat until the hot water ran out. She heard herself saying, in a voice thick with scotch, *I like teaching English but what I really want to do is travel*. The most embarrassing thing, the thing that made her the most pathetic, was that he hadn't even tried to come up with a good lie, a special lie only for her. His story was easily exposed, which meant she had been disposable, single-use even before he had gotten her home.

After her shower she made herself a cup of ginger tea and knocked the newly poured cup over her hand. She held her hand up, observing the twitching and the red and white blotchiness of it: like the granular, pulsing stars she saw when she closed her eyes against a bright light. Instead of making more ginger tea she drank her *soju* straight, and the raw ethanol taste of it felt purifying.

In the bathhouse Belinda was leaning over and washing her hair, sluicing water from a plastic bowl, when a little girl jammed her two forefingers between Belinda's buttocks. When Belinda jerked upright, the little girl squealed merrily and padded away on her chubby feet, squealing *ddong ch'im! ddong ch'im!* An older Western woman looked over from her own wash station and said grimly, "She's saying *shit-needle*. My students love doing that to me, right in the middle of class."

That night, as she walked past the Hof-Soju a man stopped next to her. "Natasha?" he asked. "You are Russian?" His breath, clouding in the

cold, had the yogurt smell of rice wine. He grabbed his crotch, massaged it, and then crouched down and calmly vomited next to her boots. When she was cooking dinner she was distracted by the yogurt-and-vinegar smell coming off of her boots, so she placed them outside. When she went to retrieve them, they were gone.

The holidays arrived in Ulsan without much fanfare. There was a tangle of lights hanging from the awning of the barbecue restaurant across the street from Café's Beer Pub. Some of the bulbs were green and red, some of them were silver, and a giant smiling LED Santa was tethered precariously to the roof.

Every holiday season there was a gala at the engineers' compound. The invitation that Belinda received promised that the event would contain, among other things, a Yule log and hot spiced wine. Diane had written on the bottom of the e-mail, by way of personalization, *Please come! I missed your pretty face all the time we were in Thailand! We rode elephants!*

Belinda replied that she didn't think that she could make it. Café's Beer Pub was having its own holiday party, with a special menu of Christmas-themed shots. Belinda was looking forward to the Café's Beer Pub party because she knew Engineer Dale would probably be out with the other engineers. She had told Tino about her night with Dale, and Tino had been kind and bought her a drink. He told everyone that Engineer Dale was a dog, and people took to calling him Engineer Dog. For several weeks Dale couldn't find anyone willing to play pool with him. But then New Zealand Jacky got deported for marijuana possession and Engineer Dog went back to being plain Engineer Dale. At no point had he seemed ruffled or melancholy. He had been abroad long enough to know the brief half-life of English teacher gossip.

Belinda sat at the window, drinking a peppermint cocktail. Through the steamed windows of the restaurant across the street she could see a couple frying pork. They were seated on bright plastic stools so low that the man had to raise his elbow to work the tongs. She was refilling their beer glasses. The boy poured a ladleful of sauce on the grill, making it flare, and even from across the street Belinda could hear the girl's laughing mock-reprimand. The diodes in the Santa brightened and dimmed in a repeating sequence. It was so lovely, thought Belinda.

Tino ran at Belinda with his index fingers held together, yelling *ddong ch'im! ddong ch'im!* Everyone laughed, except for a girl who hadn't heard

the story. Belinda set down her shot glass with a theatrical clack and began to speak, “Once I was hungover and sad in the bathhouse . . .” When she concluded with the part about the stolen boots, the girl nodded appreciatively.

“An I-hate-Korea day.”

“Exactly, an I-hate-Korea day.”

As Belinda had memorized the anecdote its delivery became cadenced. She was afraid it sounded stale, but people listening seemed to enjoy it more as they got used to hearing it repeated. It wasn’t pretentious, and it wasn’t sincere. It was a good story, and people liked it. This wasn’t China; no one sat in bars talking about organic farming initiatives. This wasn’t a bar in Japan full of skinny kids reading manga. This wasn’t a bar full of engineers.