



Red Sky, Red Dragonfly

John Galligan

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In the hours before his sayonara party, a handsome young American vanishes from the Japanese village where he has been the first-ever foreign English teacher. The first result is a throng of disappointed women. But when Stuart Norton fails to show up back home in Utah, or anywhere else, his disappearance quickly becomes more ominous. Something bad has happened to the town's first and only foreign teacher.

The town is Kitayama, a beleaguered old castle town in the northern snow country. Stuart's disappearance threatens the Kitayama International Business Plan, and loyal town fathers scramble to squelch the mystery and preserve their tenuous grasp on modernization. Thus Stuart's problems in Kitayama are effectively hidden, leaving it to the next teacher, grizzled Tommy Morrison, to grope his way to the truth.

A refugee from a shattered inter-racial marriage and a fizzled pro hockey career, Tommy MacArthur can feel the young man's torment. He is also rebellious enough to defy town fathers and explore the fate of his countryman. As his own teenage son becomes a runaway in the United States, Tommy latches on to Stuart's case and sees it through to its heartbreaking conclusion.

Tommy makes three Japanese friends along the way, and their viewpoints inform the story. Wealthy old Yoichi Ono believes in a ghost named Kappa, and he may have reason. Noriko Yamaguchi, Tommy's miserably married "handler," shows him the love hotel. And a vast ex-sumo wrestler, Yohei Wada, placidly steers them all toward the heart of things. Together, they assemble the pieces of Stuart's tortured final days. Then they climb the local mountain, and within the gloom and isolation of an ancient shrine, they find the young man's body, hanged.

But Tommy has made enemies along the way, too. And as the truth about Stuart's anguish and suicide is at last revealed, Kitayama officials quietly arrange for Tommy's deportation. The parting is bittersweet. Kitayama has grown and changed, and now a true debate over modernization can begin. And Tommy has grown and changed as well. Understanding now his place in the world as a white man, as a father, and – hoping against hope – as a husband, he boards his airplane for home.

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