

Radio Silence (excerpt)



by

Doyle Avant

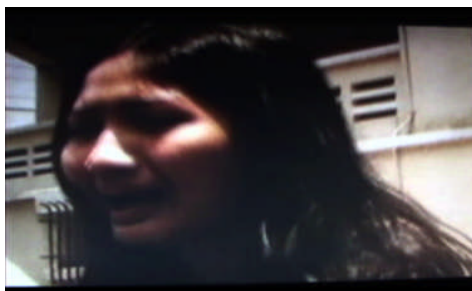
Thirty five years after his father vanished during the Fall of Saigon, Frank Kenner goes to Vietnam to find him but ends up seeing something unexpected in the mirror.

Radio Silence was first presented as part of Jump-Start Performance Company's WIP Crème production in May 2010, performed by the author.

Radio Silence was performed as part of a trilogy of solos at Mansion in Beirut, May 2013.

*(Darkness. Haunting ethereal music up.
Nightmarish video montage of the Fall of Saigon.)*





Video fades out

*Lights up on man sitting at a table. Two-way radio set, candles, scotch, cigarette.
Music fades a bit – but continues subliminally throughout.)*

MAN:

The swirling black blades of time slash the memory filled air and leave the world trembling.

My name is Frank Kenner the third. I was born 38 years ago, exactly seven minutes after my father disappeared forever: 3:11 p.m. April 29th, 1975. Saigon time.

The truth is – the Frank Kenners of my line don't tend to end up too well, and it would appear that I'm doing the very best I can to carry on this fine tradition.

My grandfather – Frank Sr. – was a dedicated and highly accomplished scotch drinker. Other than that he managed to fail spectacularly at just about everything he ever tried his hand at.

The army. Business. Marriage.
Even shooting himself in the head.

He pulled the trigger sitting on the front porch sometime around cocktail hour and then lingered on until late the following morning. I've got a box somewhere with all the hospital receipts. There's an itemized bill from the anesthesiologist for \$21.21. I guess that back in 1959, you got a whole lot more bang for your buck.

As for *my* father – Frank Jr. – he basically went down the same road but without actually having to *pull the trigger*. Yeah, he let *history* do that for him.



Flying a helicopter during the Fall of Saigon. Plucking the terrified from the roof of the American Embassy, running them out to the USS Arizona in the South China Sea and then back to town for another round. Six runs without incident.



And then sometime when he was flying back into Saigon on run number seven... that's when he went off the radar.

This was followed by twenty-one days of radio silence during which time nobody knew for sure what had happened or where he was. Which – as far as my mother was concerned – was pretty much *business as usual*.

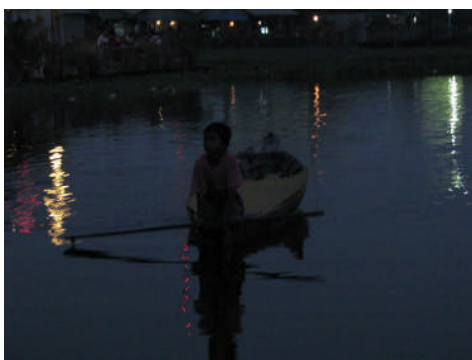
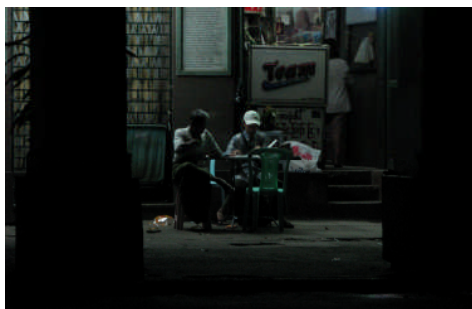
After a week, when two men from *the company* came to the house to inform my mother that her husband was missing, she said: "Oh really? I've got an idea. How about you tell me something *I don't already know*."

And then thirty eight years pass.
Just...like.....that.

When I finally make my way to Southeast Asia, I don't go to Saigon.
Not right away.

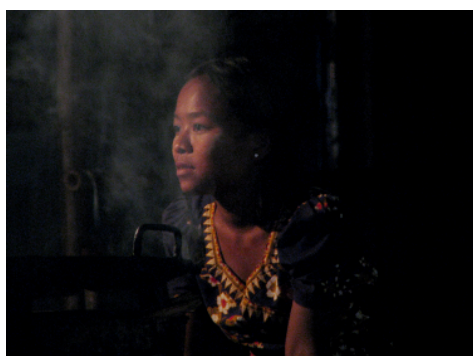


I circled around it.
Like a vulture hovering over the scattered remains of memory.
Or a helicopter searching for the perfect rooftop.



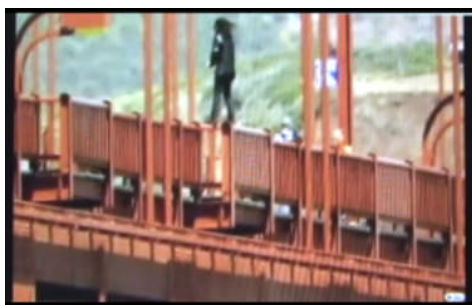


I drift through crumbling Rangoon teahouses, candlelit stalls along the Mekong,
and the smoke-filled back alleys of old Bangkok. Slowly circling the underbelly of the continent.



And I must have some kind of malfunctioning homing beacon in my head because no matter where I go, all the whacked-out whiteboys seem to find me. The falling men.

Like that Golden Gate Bridge jumper who'd somehow managed to land just soft enough to tell the story.



Or the Lehman Brothers trader – who was just about to take a leap out his World Trade Center window.....



but then decided to try the stairs first.

And the sky diver at that lakeside bar in Phnom Penh who tells me something he's never even told his wife and now it's way too late.

How every time he jumps – somewhere between *here* and *there* – he slips into a state of pure and absolute peace and for a few seconds he's tempted to *not pull the rip cord* and just stay with the fall.



A fleeting moment when he betrays the woman in the ground... and makes love to the air.

