

Tonseisha

by

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Characters:

Akiko: mid twenties, Japanese.

Richard Brautigan: 49, American, writer.

Man/Michael: 48, American.

Robert: 40s, American, poet/novelist.

Tom: 40s, American, journalist.

Man: 40s, American.

The stage should be bare, furnishings should be sparse—two chairs, a bed, a bar.

Akiko speaks directly to the audience in scenes A through F. When Richard speaks in these sections, Akiko does not look at him. His lines are spoken as if they were part of her monologues, as if Akiko were speaking them, but instead we hear them from another's mouth, as Akiko once heard them (as she remembers them).

SCENE A

In darkness, we hear Akiko singing one verse of a nursery rhyme song:

AKIKO

(singing)

When I was just a girl my eyes were deep as the blue sea,
I could not see my dear dad when he went so far from me.
I prayed to God, my eyes were sore, when I was just a girl,
I did not see him go from me, my mind is still a girl.

(Lights come up on Akiko. She is holding her father's kimono.)

AKIKO

I'm here to tell you
a story about my father,
a man who haunts me.

My father used to
tell me stories, I think, but
that was before he—

I was young. There are
so many words in my head,
I can't place them all.

My father called me
his sweet rose of May. I can
almost hear his voice.

I was only nine.
I can understand why she'd
want to protect me.

She told me father—
She said he—well, what she said
wasn't really false.

I just didn't see
beyond the careful choosing
of her simple words.

She went mad, mother.
She tore her hair out with guilt.
She refused to speak.

Finally, I pieced
it all together: mother,
father, the whole mess.

I'm sorry. I told
you a lie. See how easy
it is? I told you.

I am not here to
tell you a story about
my father. I won't.

(Richard Brautigan appears.)

I'm here to tell you
about Richard Brautigan,
a man who haunts me.

He wrote love poems.
Simple little love poems
for many women.

Then he killed himself.
Simple as that. There really
isn't much to say.

He thrust a knife to
himself. Seppuku: self
disembowelment.

I imagine the
blood. Then I think of how she
cleaned up afterwards.

She must have, because
I didn't see a thing. I
believed what she said.

She looked in my eyes.
They ache. Sometimes--. I'm sorry,
what was I saying?

Sometimes the past grips
you so tightly, you lose sight
of where you are *now*.

I'm sorry. Goddamn
my eyes. Where was I? Oh yes,
Richard Brautigan.

He lay alone for
a month before someone found
him, then decomposed.

He left us without
his voice. We didn't know the
end of the story.

Maybe he lost sight
of how words work--or ran out
of stories to tell.

Because he used to
tell me stories, I think, but
that was before he--

When he killed himself,
she tore out tufts of her hair.
She refused to speak.

Finally, I pieced
it all together: sorry,
what was I saying?

I am so ashamed.
I'm tired. I'm getting all
my stories confused.

You ever feel like
no matter how fast you run
it's never enough?

Even if you close
your eyes to escape from the
image that haunts you,

the impression of
that image remains on the
back of your eyelids.

I didn't see a
thing. Tonseisha: the man who
abandoned the world.

Where was I? I don't...
 I *can't*...remember...myself.
 I'll begin again:

I'm here to tell you
 about a man who haunts me:
 Richard Brautigan.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE ONE

TOKYO.

*Akiko sits at a bar. A man sits a few stools away
 from her. He scoots closer to Akiko.*

MAN

Hi. Hajimemashite. Watashi wa Michael desu.

(Akiko looks at him, smiles.)

MAN

(over-enunciating, miming)

You. Want. A. Drink?

AKIKO

I speak English.

MAN

Oh. I'm sorry.

AKIKO

It's all right.

MAN

I'm an idiot.

AKIKO

Yes.

MAN

You don't have to agree.

AKIKO

No, I mean I'd like. A. Drink.

Oh, that. Of course. MAN

Oolonghai. AKIKO

What's that? MAN

It's a drink. AKIKO

Right. Alright. We'll have two of those then. MAN

Where are you from? AKIKO

Montana. MAN

Are you him? AKIKO

What? MAN

No. I'm sorry. AKIKO

Am I who? MAN

I thought for a second— AKIKO

Thought what? MAN

Nothing. AKIKO

Oh. MAN

AKIKO

It's like that story.

MAN

What story?

AKIKO

He has a vision.

MAN

Who does?

AKIKO

“Pity me not, but
lend thy serious hearing to
what I shall unfold.”

MAN

What are you talking about?

AKIKO

Was he?

MAN

Was who what?

AKIKO

“Was your father dear to you?”

MAN

My father?

AKIKO

I'm sorry.

MAN

I'm lost.

AKIKO

I thought for a second—

MAN

Thought what?

AKIKO

Nothing.

MAN

There's something.

AKIKO

You ever read Richard Brautigan?

MAN

Long time ago.

AKIKO

How old are you?

MAN

Old enough to be your father.

AKIKO

No, really, how old are you?

MAN

How old are you?

AKIKO

Twenty-four.

MAN

Forty-eight.

AKIKO

Oh.

MAN

And yes, I loved my father very much.

AKIKO

Why talk about him?

MAN

You said—

AKIKO

I don't want to talk about him.

MAN

Fine.

AKIKO

You ever read Richard Brautigan?

Yes, I said. MAN

What's your favorite book? AKIKO

The Man Within. MAN

Richard Brautigan didn't write that. AKIKO

That's not what you asked. MAN

What's your favorite Richard Brautigan book? AKIKO

I don't have one. MAN

Why not? AKIKO

I don't think he's very good. MAN

How can you say that? AKIKO

He's too simplistic. MAN

He's simple. AKIKO

You're young. MAN

There's a difference. AKIKO

Not much. MAN

What are you doing tonight? AKIKO

MAN
What do you mean?

AKIKO
Wanna come home with me?

MAN
I've got a daughter your age.

AKIKO
Is that a no?

MAN
Yes.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE B

Akiko with Richard Brautigan.

AKIKO
Have you ever heard of Seiobo's garden? Legend has it that in this garden there is a peach tree, and that peach tree blooms and bears fruit only once every three thousand years. If you're lucky enough to eat one of those peaches, the fairy queen of heaven will descend from the sky and she will tell you that

RICHARD
"though nights and days may pass, they will greet and part with numberless years, knowing no limit to your life or difference of age."

AKIKO
Then she will reclaim the fruit of the flower and rise to heaven. Legend has it that the nectar of that peach will give you eternal life. Is the story true? Or is it only a story?
(pause)

When I was nine, my uncle took me to a garden. He said to me:

RICHARD
"This is the garden of Seiobo. Have you ever heard of Seiobo's garden?"

AKIKO
I had not. He told me about the peach blossoms, about Seiobo descending from the sky, about the gift her fruit bears. I can still hear the inflections of his voice, the way the words sounded so new, as if he was inventing them. He recited a poem to me:

RICHARD

“Now comes round
 The month of May so rare
 When in the three thousandth year
 The magic peach blooms,
 Its petals floating in the cup.”

AKIKO

He pointed to a tree. The peaches hung down from its branches like golden morning dew drops, glistening in the sun. He said,

RICHARD

“Try one.”

(pause)

AKIKO

What my uncle didn't know, what I didn't tell him, was that I was allergic to peaches. I'd almost died once. They told me I should never--

RICHARD

“Try one,”

(pause)

AKIKO

he said. So I did. Excuse me.

(she eats a peach.)

It was glorious. Like God was inside my mouth. I ate it ravenously, one large bite after another, my hands wet, peach juice dripping down my chin, the skin of the fruit lodging between my teeth, my tongue taking in the taste of its beautiful nectar, until there was nothing left but the smile of its core, and I stood there spent, my hands trembling with delight. Then I remembered my allergy and expectantly awaited my expiration--right there in the garden of Seiobo. But nothing happened. Nothing. I was fine. My mouth, my throat, my skin--nothing.

(pause)

About two years ago, I took a vacation to France. I went to a friend's house for dinner one night. A wonderful meal, many delicacies. For dessert, my friend brought out a bowl of skinned peaches floating in the finest red wine. She spooned me one. I took a bite and thought of Seiobo. Nothing. I took another bite and another. Nothing. Then as I began to drink the wine from the bowl, my throat began to swell and the wine spilled out of my mouth, dripping down my chin and onto my blouse. They had to drive me to a hospital forty miles away. I almost died.

(pause)

I still have the blouse. The stain came out, but if you look real close there's one spot where it set. There's a pattern of red Botan flowers and one of the petals just doesn't look right anymore. Too red. It's one of the saddest petals I've ever seen.

(pause)

I remember another passage of the story, as my uncle used to tell it, his words seared into my mind:

RICHARD

“Now miraculously come from the sky, before our very eye, the heavenly maiden’s figure in deep amazement we see. Let no doubt settle on your mind, reflecting on your sleeves the moon’s clear light. Up above the clouds the royal virtue casts its glorious hues. ‘What fades away is of this world the flower in the hearts of men.’”

AKIKO

What fades away is of this world the flower in the hearts of men.

(pause)

Did the goddess Seiobo visit me in her garden that afternoon when I was nine? Did I eat one of her heavenly peaches? Or did my uncle fool me so thoroughly, that, one day, my body will remember that moment, that glorious, gluttonous, god-filled moment, when my throat should have thickened but didn’t, when my skin should have scarred but didn’t, when my life should have left but didn’t? In that moment, when my body remembers, suddenly, my throat will tense, my eyes will swell, and my heart shall stop its incessant beating.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE TWO

TOKYO.

Akiko’s bedroom. Akiko is sitting up in bed, awake.

Groggy, Michael rolls over and sees Akiko.

MICHAEL

Morning.

AKIKO

Morning.

MICHAEL

You’re awake.

AKIKO

Yes.

MICHAEL

Love you.

You too. AKIKO

You need me? MICHAEL

What do you mean? AKIKO

I don't know. MICHAEL

Just thinking. AKIKO

It's early. Go back to sleep. MICHAEL

I can't. AKIKO

You realize what last night was, don't you? MICHAEL

No. AKIKO

I'm embarrassed. It's not something a man is supposed to take note of. MICHAEL

I'm lost. AKIKO

I figured you would say something. MICHAEL

What are you talking about? AKIKO

We met a month ago last night. Happy Anniversary. MICHAEL

I'm sorry Richard. I didn't realize. AKIKO

MICHAEL

What did you just say?

AKIKO

Happy Anniversary.

MICHAEL

No. You called me Richard.

AKIKO

What? I did.

MICHAEL

Yes.

AKIKO

I'm sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL

Who's Richard?

AKIKO

Brautigan. I was rereading *In Watermelon Sugar*.

MICHAEL

Oh.

AKIKO

So he was on my mind.

MICHAEL

I see.

AKIKO

I see him.

MICHAEL

What?

AKIKO

I see you.

(Richard Brautigan appears, visible only to Akiko.)

RICHARD

There was a darkness
upon the darkness,
and only the death

growth
 was growing. It
 grew like
 the darkness upon darkness growing.

AKIKO

I see you.

(Richard Brautigan is gone.)

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

AKIKO

It's early. I'm going back to sleep.

MICHAEL

I thought you couldn't.

AKIKO

I can.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE THREE

TOKYO.

Akiko's bedroom.

Akiko in bed, under covers with Michael, late in the morning.

AKIKO

Do you love me?

(beat)

MICHAEL

I did.

(beat)

AKIKO

But you don't?

(beat)

I do. MICHAEL

(beat)

You said 'did.' AKIKO

If I did, then I do. MICHAEL

I don't believe you. AKIKO

You don't? MICHAEL

No. AKIKO

(beat)

Do you love me? MICHAEL

(beat)

I do. AKIKO
(resisting a smile)

Do you? MICHAEL

(beat)

I did. AKIKO

Did is don't. MICHAEL

Then I can't. AKIKO

(beat)

MICHAEL
You won't.

AKIKO
Not if you don't.

MICHAEL
I don't.

AKIKO
Then we never did.

(beat)

MICHAEL
But we did.

AKIKO
Did we?

MICHAEL
Yes.

(beat)

AKIKO
Then we do.

MICHAEL
Do we?

AKIKO
No.

(beat)

MICHAEL
I forget what we're talking about.

(Richard Brautigan appears and Akiko smiles.)

RICHARD
It's so nice
to wake up in the morning
all alone

and not have to tell somebody
 you love them
 when you don't love them
 any more.

(Akiko watches Richard leave, sees Michael, then her smile fades.)

AKIKO

Hand me my kimono?

(He does. She covers herself.)

AKIKO

I won't expect you to call again.

MICHAEL

That's it?

AKIKO

That's it.

MICHAEL

I won't.

AKIKO

Good-bye Michael.

MICHAEL

Good-bye Akiko.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE C

Akiko with Richard Brautigan.

AKIKO

Have you ever read *In Watermelon Sugar* by Richard Brautigan?

RICHARD

"In watermelon sugar the deeds were done and done again as my life is done in watermelon sugar."

AKIKO

I'll tell you about it because I am here and you are there. It's a simple story. It's about this man who used to love this woman named Margaret and now he loves this woman

named Pauline. It's about that and that's about it. I'm going to read you a section of the book. It's called "Margaret's Brother":

RICHARD

"Fred pawed at the ground with his boot. He drew a kind of half-circle with his right boot on the ground, and then he erased it with his left boot. This took only a few seconds. 'What's wrong?' the farmer said. 'Yeah, what's wrong?' her brother said. 'It's Margaret,' Fred said. 'What's wrong with Margaret?' her brother said. 'Tell me.' 'She's dead,' Fred said. 'How'd it happen?' 'She hanged herself.' Margaret's brother stared straight ahead for a little while. His eyes were dim. Nobody said anything. Fred drew another circle in the dust, and then kicked it away. 'It's for the best,' Margaret's brother said, finally. 'Nobody's to blame. She had a broken heart.'"

(pause)

AKIKO

I used to think a broken heart was something tangible--like a toaster--all you had to do was take it for repairs and then your broken heart would be fixed. But that isn't how hearts work at all. A broken heart is more like a cup of china that has been shattered against a wall. After collecting the many pieces, you can glue them back together. For awhile, your heart might resemble something whole. But somewhere along the lining of your heart, a piece of china will be missing, and out that crack your ability to love will slowly be seeping. For the rest of your life, you will continue to shatter your heart against one wall after another. Your heart will become more and more fragile, and each time you glue it back together, the pieces will be fewer and fewer, the cracks more and more apparent. After awhile, you'll no longer bother. You'll realize that where once your chest held a heart, it now lays bare. I wonder if that's what it felt like to be inside Richard Brautigan's chest? Maybe it wasn't that at all. Maybe he just got tired and had to leave.

RICHARD

Or maybe: Two trees
leave many leaves to fall un-
til they are alone.

(pause)

AKIKO

I have a journal that once belonged to my father. He left when I was nine. Other than me, and my mother I suppose, he left little behind. But I have this journal. On the front page, my father has neatly printed his name in the top right corner, and underneath it, four words:

RICHARD

"lonely voice empty echoing."

AKIKO

The entry is not dated. The rest of the book is blank, hundreds of pages of unlined white paper, silent as a shadow.

(pause)

Can you hear me breathing? Sometimes at night I listen to the sound of my breath, the in and out, in and out, in and out sound of my breath, like a metronome ticking time to the beat of my heart, telling me that I'm still here. I've heard that parents do that sometimes, after their children are asleep--they listen to the in and out, in and out, in and out sound of their children's breath, just to make sure. I asked my mother once, if she ever did that. She said,

RICHARD

"But I know you're breathing. You're standing here."

AKIKO

Sometimes at night I listen to the sound of my breath because I'd feel sad for someone who never had someone listening, just to make sure.

(pause)

My father had a scar on his face, just above his right eye. It looked like a glove. I never asked him how he got it.

(beat)

I loved my father. He would play with me in the garden. Mother would watch us from the house. I'd sit on father's lap and he'd tell me stories.

(pause)

Mother came to me. She wouldn't look me in the eyes. She pawed at the ground with her toes. She drew a kind of figure-eight with her right foot on the ground, then erased it with her left foot. This took only a few seconds. "What's wrong?" I said.

RICHARD

"It's your father,"

AKIKO

she said. "What's wrong with Father?" I said. "Tell me."

RICHARD

"He's left,"

AKIKO

she said. "How'd it happen?" I said.

RICHARD

"I don't know. He just left."

AKIKO

"Will he ever come back?" I asked her. She didn't respond. I stared straight ahead for a little while. Mother's eyes were dim. Neither of us said anything. Mother drew another circle in the dust, and then kicked it away.

RICHARD
 “It’s for the best,”

AKIKO
 Mother said, finally.

RICHARD
 “Nobody’s to blame. He just had to leave.”

(pause)

AKIKO
 When I can’t sleep, I imagine myself swimming in watermelon sugar. I’ve never eaten watermelon. Isn’t that funny? I’ve never eaten watermelon, but I know how it feels to be swimming underneath its skin.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE FOUR

TOKYO evening.

A bar.

Akiko alone, drunk.

Robert approaches her.

ROBERT
 What’s a beautiful
 young girl like you doing in
 a bar this damn old?

AKIKO
 Not seeing straight.

ROBERT
 What are you looking for?

AKIKO
 Trying not to look.

ROBERT
 What’s your name?

AKIKO

I forget.

ROBERT

I don't believe you.

AKIKO

I remember.

ROBERT

What's your name?

AKIKO

I don't want to.

ROBERT

What?

AKIKO

Remember.

ROBERT

I think I love you.

AKIKO

I wish I was blind.

ROBERT

Did you hear me?

AKIKO

Yes.

ROBERT

Well?

AKIKO

That's a stupid thing to say.

ROBERT

I'm stupid then.

AKIKO

My eyes can't even focus—

ROBERT

Do you believe in love—

On your face. AKIKO

At first sight? ROBERT

I told you. AKIKO

What? ROBERT

I don't believe. AKIKO

I do. ROBERT

Even if I did, I can't see you. AKIKO

You can't? ROBERT

It's the alcohol. AKIKO

That much? ROBERT

And I'm nearsighted. AKIKO

Would it help— ROBERT

What help? AKIKO

If I came closer to you? ROBERT

You'd have to get in my face. AKIKO

(He does.)

See me now?
ROBERT

Both of you.
AKIKO

Love me at first sight?
ROBERT

I don't even know your name.
AKIKO

Robert. You?
ROBERT

No.
AKIKO

Your name?
ROBERT

I don't want to tell you.
AKIKO

Why not?
ROBERT

I don't want a name.
AKIKO

I'll write you a poem.
ROBERT

You're a poet?
AKIKO

Sometimes. I write novels.
ROBERT

Like Richard Brautigan?
AKIKO

Not really.
ROBERT

AKIKO

But you'll write me a poem?

ROBERT

What's your name?

AKIKO

I'd rather remain
nameless. That's all. You said you'd
give me a poem.

ROBERT

I'll make you a deal:
If my poem makes you smile,
may I have your name?

AKIKO

If you make me smile
I'll give you my heart, my life,
my love. Yes, my name.

ROBERT

Shall I compare thee
to a summer's day? Thou art
more lovely and more--

AKIKO

That's not your poem.
I'm drunk, not stupid, all right?
Use your words only.

ROBERT

You're right, I'm sorry.

AKIKO

All I want is your poem.

ROBERT

Alright. Well, here goes:

There once was a girl
named somethin'. She looked like a
beautiful pumpkin.

Her eyes were so great
that, famished, I ate her up
like a dumb bumpkin.

AKIKO

What's that, a bumpkin?

ROBERT
An awkward simple rustic.

AKIKO
But why “dumb” bumpkin?

ROBERT
It fit the meter.

AKIKO
If you really loved me you
wouldn't have to stretch

to fit the meter.
You'd let your thoughts go on and,
unfinished, some would

drift away from sight.
Some of them would pierce my heart.
And some of them would.

ROBERT
Would what?

AKIKO
I'm sorry.
I lost what I was saying.
You can't always stretch.

ROBERT
Are you forgetting?

AKIKO
Forgetting what?

ROBERT
You owe me
your name.

AKIKO
No, I don't.

ROBERT
I wrote a poem.

AKIKO
I didn't like that poem.

ROBERT
That wasn't the deal.

AKIKO
My name isn't a
pumpkin, nor do I want to
be eaten by you.

ROBERT

Give me one more chance?

AKIKO

Okay, I'll promise again.

ROBERT

You faked it before.

AKIKO

Just be real this time.

Tell me how you really feel.

Just open my eyes.

ROBERT

I was talking to
the most enchanting woman
I had ever met.

She wouldn't tell me
her name. The way her forehead
wrinkles makes me smile.

AKIKO

That was the poem?

ROBERT

That was the poem.

AKIKO

Why are
you lying to me?

You don't even know
me. How can you possibly
find me enchanting?

ROBERT

I'm not a liar.

AKIKO

But I can't believe in those words.
You don't know me yet.

ROBERT

Tonight's the third time
I've seen you here. I couldn't
speak to you before.

Oh, I wanted to—
but I was a coward, cowed

by your deep beauty.

Oh, don't blush. You should
know how beautiful you are—
you have something so...

something about you...
I can't put it into words,
but you have...something...

this glow, this aura—
(you radiate such sadness)
—this je ne sais quoi,

that draws me closer
and closer to you, so that
even though it seems

inconceivable,
I knew the moment I first
saw you I loved you.

I want to know more.
To know why you look so sad.
I am enchanted.

AKIKO

My name's Akiko.
Take me home with you.

ROBERT

Some of
them would pierce my heart.

AKIKO

And some of them would—

*(They both leave the bar, hand in hand on way to home, then make
blurry love.)*

(Lights shift.)

SCENE FIVE

Robert's TOKYO hotel room.

*Akiko in bed, under covers with Robert, late the next
morning.*

*(Words **in bold** are spoken by both Akiko and Robert simultaneously.)*

ROBERT: I love you. I do.
The first time I saw you I
said, "That's the girl **I'm**
AKIKO: in love with you like
rain beating down from the sky.
I see you and **I'm**
ROBERT: going to marry."
It was like you were walking
on water. **I was**
AKIKO: alive with wetness.
When you touch me I shiver
because **I was so**
ROBERT: scared such perfection
couldn't be real. I had to
touch you. **I was so**
AKIKO: alone without you.
When you are inside of me
my heart beats quick. **It**
ROBERT: lost before. I had
to touch you. I was afraid you
were a dream. **My mind**
AKIKO: reels. Slowing down. I
gasp for air. I am consumed.
You consume **my mind**
ROBERT: and my heart collide.
I wake. I wasn't dreaming.
Not if **I'm in love**
AKIKO: and I'm inside of
you. It's raining, I'm barefoot,
it doesn't matter.

(Richard Brautigan appears and Akiko smiles.)

RICHARD

If you will die for me,
I will die for you
and our graves will be like two lovers washing
their clothes together
in a laundromat.
If you will bring the soap
I will bring the bleach.

(Akiko laughs at this. Richard Brautigan disappears. Akiko sees Robert.)

AKIKO
Where are you from?

ROBERT
Montana.

AKIKO
Marry me and take me home with you.

ROBERT
Are you serious?

She kisses him. A long beat.

AKIKO: Yes.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE SIX

MONTANA day.

Living room of Robert's two-room cabin. The room is almost desolate, the furnishings spare.

ROBERT
This is Montana!

AKIKO
This is Montana?

ROBERT
Don't you like it?

AKIKO
Honestly?

ROBERT
Yes.

(beat)

AKIKO

Yes. *(smiles)*

ROBERT
You've got to see the view outside.

(beat)

AKIKO
What am I looking for?

ROBERT
Montana!

AKIKO
I see it.

ROBERT
Isn't it beautiful?

AKIKO
It's not what I expected.

ROBERT
It's beautiful.

AKIKO
I'd love a building.

ROBERT
We're in one.

AKIKO
One to see, I mean.

ROBERT
Why?

AKIKO
To let me know where I am.

(beat)

ROBERT
You're in Montana.

I know. AKIKO

(*beat*)

You really want a building? ROBERT

Yes. AKIKO

You could stand outside. ROBERT

I don't understand. AKIKO

You could look at *this* building— ROBERT

I don't think— AKIKO

If you want. ROBERT

(*beat*)

I could. AKIKO

It's home. ROBERT

I know. AKIKO

Welcome home! ROBERT

I love you, Robert. AKIKO

You too. ROBERT

AKIKO

I'm sorry.

ROBERT

About what?

AKIKO

I'm not being as—

ROBERT

What is it?

AKIKO

Enthusiastic as I should be.

ROBERT

That's all right.

AKIKO

It's just that...

ROBERT

Yeah?

AKIKO

All of a sudden, this is a lot.

ROBERT

To take in?

AKIKO

Yes.

ROBERT

It's all right.

AKIKO

This is going to work.

ROBERT

Yes.

AKIKO

This is going to work.

(beat)

So...now what?

ROBERT

I have to write.

AKIKO

Right now?

ROBERT

I've got to write 20 poems tonight.

AKIKO

Why?

ROBERT

Twenty a day.

AKIKO

What do I do?

ROBERT

You'll find something.

AKIKO

I will?

ROBERT

Take a walk.

AKIKO

All right.

ROBERT

Good.

AKIKO

Good writing then.

ROBERT

I will.

AKIKO

I'll go for a walk.

ROBERT

Enjoy.

AKIKO

I will.

(beat)

Bye.
AKIKO

Bye.
ROBERT

(Lights shift.)

SCENE SEVEN

MONTANA.

Robert and Akiko's living room. Robert sits at his desk, writing. Akiko watches him.

Silence.

Then, after a few moments:

Why did you marry me?
AKIKO

What do you mean?
ROBERT

Do you ever worry that we moved too fast?
AKIKO

To Montana?
ROBERT

To marriage.
AKIKO

And Montana.
(beat)

ROBERT
I was in love with you the moment I met you.

AKIKO
But that isn't real.

ROBERT
Of course it is.

(pause)

AKIKO

Have you figured me out yet?

ROBERT

What do you mean?

AKIKO

When we met, you told me I was a mystery. You wanted to figure out why I was so sad. Figure it out yet?

ROBERT

No.

AKIKO

Some things are unknowable.

ROBERT

I know that I love you.

AKIKO

Don't you ever get scared that we moved so fast into something we thought was love and that we might get stuck here, and then one day we'll realize that what we thought this was wasn't what we thought it was at all?

ROBERT

You think too much.

AKIKO

Last night, when you were
sleeping, I was watching your
chest fill and unfill,

fill and unfill with
every new breath. Listening
to the sounds you make.

The moon cast a blue
light against your cheeks, your lips,
your lids, your lashes.

The way your pupils
undulated under lids—
with their back and forth,

back and forth rhythmic
indentations—let me know
that you were dreaming.

I wanted you so
badly. I wanted to fall
deep into your eyes.

And as I watched you,
my eyes began to unfold,
to fall in and out,

in and out of sight,
to lose consciousness, regain
consciousness, and then,

slowly unfolding,
my eyes began to see. I
finally realized:

(beat)

AKIKO

We don't. We don't know each other at all.

ROBERT

I told you. I know that I love you.

AKIKO

It's not enough.

ROBERT

Tell me a story about yourself.

AKIKO

Can I tell you a story about my childhood?

(Robert nods.)

It involves a man, but I'll start with snow. When I was a little girl, I used to take naps in a field just beyond our house. In the winter, the snow stole my sleep. That angered me, so I chose to defy it. I put on my mother's kimono and walked out into the trees beyond our house, several lengths of red satin dragging behind me. My feet bare. The feeling of cold snow against my skin. My breath becoming irregular, then regular. I was conquering the snow and claiming it as my own. I was extraordinary. The cold was so intense that it actually grew hot. I cried and the tears froze against my face. I felt so deeply then.

(pause)

From that day on, the snow was mine and I was free to blanket myself in its solace, to close my eyes to its bitter touch.

(pause)

One day my mother found me curled up in the snow. She gasped. I heard the breath exit her mouth and then silence. She thought I had died. She went back inside to collect herself. When I returned home, my cheeks were blue. Mother looked up at me; sudden, pleading. Her face was white, like she'd seen a ghost. "Why are you wearing my kimono?" she said. "It warms my skin." "Are you ill?" she asked. "No." "Then put it back, please." She never mentioned the snow, nor my blue cheeks. From that day on, she looked at me like I was poison.

(pause)

Have you ever considered suicide?

ROBERT

No.

(pause. Richard enters.)

AKIKO

One time, a man found me napping in my snow-bed. An American man. He looked like a bird, like a heron, like no one I'd ever seen before.

RICHARD

"Are you all right?"

AKIKO

he asked. "I've been better," I said.

RICHARD

"You fall down?"

AKIKO

he asked. "No. Just napping."

RICHARD

"Funny place to nap."

AKIKO

"I don't believe in the existence of cold," I told him. He laughed.

RICHARD

"It doesn't matter whether you believe, darling. The cold believes in you. Look at your cheeks. You're freezing."

AKIKO

“I don’t feel freezing.”

RICHARD

“You’re blue.”

AKIKO

“I know.”

RICHARD

“Can I bring you someplace warm?”

AKIKO

“See through those trees? That’s where I live.”

RICHARD

“Then let me help you.”

AKIKO

He picked me up. I felt weightless in his arms. I closed my eyes. My naked feet hung in the air as he carried me home.

(pause)

When we got there, he placed me down like he might place down a Raku bowl after drinking from its lip: delicately. My feet touched the ground and the ground never felt so cold. I didn’t want him to leave. “Would you like some tea?” I asked him, “we have good Shino.” He thanked me, but said he had to go. He had to meet someone. I must have looked sad because he touched my cheek and told me,

RICHARD

“What am I thinking? I’d love a cup of tea. Tomorrow I would regret refusing such a generous offer from such a beautiful young lady.”

AKIKO

So we drank tea together.

(Richard exits.)

ROBERT

How old were you?

AKIKO

Eleven.

(pause)

After we drank our tea, he left and I never saw him again.

(She picks up a copy of Trout Fishing in America with a photo of Richard Brautigan on the cover.)

This is the man who found me in the snow.

ROBERT

Richard Brautigan?

AKIKO

I discovered this book when I was twenty. When I saw the photo, my feet felt cold. It was like the past was pleading with me, begging me to remember this man who was so kind. I tried tracking him down.

ROBERT

He's dead.

AKIKO

I never saw his body.

ROBERT

He shot himself.

AKIKO

I don't want to believe that.

ROBERT

'It doesn't matter whether you believe, darling.'

AKIKO

That's not funny.

(beat)

ROBERT

I didn't mean...

AKIKO

They say that when they found his body, it had already begun to rot. No one knew for a month. I don't understand. How he could be so alone that he could kill himself and no one would know? I've got my own theory of what happened: He was lying there on the ground in his cabin taking a nap. Some man found him on the ground. He gasped. The breath exited his mouth and then there was silence. After he had finished collecting himself, the man went and told the world that Richard Brautigan had died. But he was wrong. Richard Brautigan was napping. When he heard the news of his death, he decided to play a joke on the world. But somewhere, somewhere, Richard Brautigan is taking a nap in the snow, waiting for me to find him. And when I do, I'll say, "Are you all right?" And he'll say, "I've been better." And I'll say, "You fall down?" And he'll say, "No. Just napping." And then he'll smile because he'll recognize the girl he found in the snow, and he'll see the beauty he saw that day, and he will be alive, and I will be alive, and I will believe in the existence of cold because he will touch my skin and teach it how to feel.

(beat)

ROBERT

Do you really believe that?

AKIKO

He can't be dead. She told me he left.

ROBERT

She?

AKIKO

Yes.

ROBERT

Who's she?

AKIKO

Who's who?

(beat)

He said he had to go. But then we drank tea.

(pause)

Did you know he married a woman named Akiko?

ROBERT

No.

AKIKO

It couldn't have been too long after that day. He used to seek solace in Japan. People didn't respect him here, but in Japan they called him sensei...He married a Japanese woman.

ROBERT

Named Akiko.

AKIKO

(disappointed)

Oh, you knew.

(pause)

It didn't work out though.

ROBERT

No?

AKIKO

I read that in Rolling Stone.

ROBERT

Strange her name was Akiko.

AKIKO

A coincidence. I never told him my name.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE EIGHT

Another day in MONTANA.

Richard is at his desk, not writing. He watches Akiko.

'She has poison oak, a bad sunburn and is unhappy. She moves about the place like distant gestures of solemn glass. She opens and closes things. She turns the water on, and she turns the water off. All the sounds she makes are faraway. They could be in a different city.'

This goes on for awhile. Then:

ROBERT

What do you do?

AKIKO

What do you mean?

ROBERT

Every afternoon.

AKIKO

I walk.

ROBERT

The whole time?

AKIKO

Yes.

ROBERT

You were gone for six hours today.

You like the quiet, right? AKIKO

Yes. ROBERT

You need to write. AKIKO

(*beat*)

What do you do? ROBERT

I told you. AKIKO

I don't believe you. ROBERT

Then don't. AKIKO

I miss you. ROBERT

(*beat*)

What are you writing? AKIKO

I can't. ROBERT

Can't? AKIKO

Lately. ROBERT

Then what do *you* do? AKIKO

Nothing. ROBERT

AKIKO

Nothing?

ROBERT

Nothing.

(beat)

AKIKO

I've been looking for him.

ROBERT

Who?

AKIKO

Richard Brautigan.

ROBERT

What?

AKIKO

He used to live in Montana.

ROBERT

Where?

AKIKO

I don't know.

ROBERT

It's a big state.

AKIKO

I think he came back here.

ROBERT

I think you're crazy.

AKIKO

I have a feeling.

ROBERT

You have a feeling?

AKIKO

He's been here.

Where? ROBERT

The woods. AKIKO

Do you hear yourself? ROBERT

I'm not joking. AKIKO

No. ROBERT

I'm going to find him. AKIKO

Then what? ROBERT

What do you mean? AKIKO

I'm confused. ROBERT

He used to tell me stories. AKIKO

I thought you only met him once. ROBERT

I'm going to find him. AKIKO

What are you going to do with him? ROBERT

He'll be my writer. AKIKO

I'm your writer. ROBERT

(beat)

You're right. AKIKO

What are you doing? ROBERT

I don't know. AKIKO

You don't know. ROBERT

You're right. I'm crazy. AKIKO

You're crazy. ROBERT

I'm sorry. It's just an idea in my head. AKIKO

I'll write you something. ROBERT

That would be good. AKIKO

A poem. ROBERT

I'd like that. AKIKO

For you. ROBERT

Please. AKIKO

(Richard Brautigan appears.)

RICHARD
I want your hair
to cover me with maps
of new places,
so everywhere I go

will be as beautiful
as your hair.

(Richard Brautigan disappears.)

AKIKO

Would you write about my hair?

(Lights shift.)

SCENE NINE

MONTANA.

Akiko stands by the window, looking out.

AKIKO

Are you tired?

ROBERT

Why?

AKIKO

Your eyes look tired.

ROBERT

No.

AKIKO

Then what's wrong?

ROBERT

Nothing.

AKIKO

Oh.

(beat)

AKIKO

Do you think it's going to rain?

ROBERT

I don't know.

AKIKO

Oh.

(beat)

AKIKO
Do you want me to rub your feet?

ROBERT
Why?

AKIKO
If they're sore.

ROBERT
They're not.

AKIKO
Then I won't.

ROBERT
Good.

(beat)

AKIKO
Are we going to eat any time soon?

ROBERT
Are you hungry?

AKIKO
Yes.

ROBERT
What do you want?

AKIKO
We don't have anything.

ROBERT
I'll go shoot something.

AKIKO
Take me to the store.

ROBERT
I'll shoot something.

No you won't. AKIKO

Yes I will. ROBERT

You'll come back with nothing. AKIKO

What do you mean? ROBERT

I'm hungry. AKIKO

I know. ROBERT

I'd rather not wait. AKIKO

You have to wait either way. ROBERT

We go to the store either way. AKIKO

No we don't. ROBERT

Yes we do. AKIKO

I'll shoot something. ROBERT

A tree maybe. AKIKO

No not a tree. ROBERT

I refuse to eat another squirrel. AKIKO

ROBERT

I'll shoot a deer.

AKIKO

No you won't. You will shoot anything and everything that is inedible. I will wait. And wait. And wait. My hunger will grow. You will return home empty handed. We will have to go to the store with stomachs growling. This is the way the evening will progress. Please, spare me the agony and take me to the store now.

(beat)

ROBERT

I'm getting my gun.

AKIKO

I'll walk to the store.

ROBERT

It's ten miles.

AKIKO

I know.

ROBERT

Think you can make it?

AKIKO

I know I can.

ROBERT

Fine.

AKIKO

Fine.

ROBERT

Will you pick me up some beef jerky?

AKIKO

No.

ROBERT

Why not?

AKIKO

I'm not picking anything up for you unless you drive me to the store.

ROBERT
I would love some beef jerky.

AKIKO
You've got a gun. Go kill a cow.

ROBERT
I refuse to go to the store.

AKIKO
Then I'm not buying you anything.

ROBERT
Then I'll just eat what I kill.

AKIKO
Fine.

ROBERT
Fine.

AKIKO
I'm going.

ROBERT
Me too.

(beat)

AKIKO
You haven't left.

ROBERT
I'm waiting for you.

AKIKO
You're taking me?

ROBERT
No. I'm waiting for you to go.

AKIKO
Oh.

(beat)

This isn't working. ROBERT

No. AKIKO

You were right. ROBERT

When? AKIKO

About not knowing each other. ROBERT

That. AKIKO

I can't accept that you're unknowable. ROBERT

No? AKIKO

No. ROBERT

(beat)

I'm sorry. ROBERT

Why? AKIKO

This might sound wrong. ROBERT

Say it. AKIKO

I'd never seen you before. ROBERT

What? AKIKO

ROBERT

The first time we met, you said you didn't believe in love at first sight. I swear that's how it happened, but you wouldn't believe. So I told you that I'd seen you three times before... That was a lie. I'd never seen you before that night.

AKIKO

There was a darkness upon the darkness and only the death growth was growing. It grew like the darkness upon darkness growing.

(beat)

ROBERT

Get your jacket.

AKIKO

Why?

ROBERT

I'll take you to the store.

(Suddenly, Akiko sees Richard Brautigan, she hears nothing but him.)

RICHARD

The act of dying
is like hitch-hiking
into a strange town
late at night
where it is cold
and raining,
and you are alone
again.

(She doesn't want to cry. Richard Brautigan is gone. She sees Robert.)

AKIKO

Will you take me home?

ROBERT

After the store?

AKIKO

I mean Tokyo.

ROBERT

Oh. Yes.

(beat)

ROBERT

Do you think it's going to rain?

AKIKO

It beats me.

ROBERT

Oh.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE D

Akiko with Richard Brautigan.

AKIKO

Why is the heart-breaking autumn wind so warm when it blows? Because it is a divine wind.

(pause)

When I was fourteen years old, I became a woman. It was a moment I had eagerly anticipated. I wanted it to be like possessing the moon: so incomparable to anything I'd ever experienced that I could not contain myself, and I'd joyously cry out, "Oh, what a lovely moment this is!" But it wasn't and I didn't. It was as if the vast sky had suddenly been flooded with light and no corner had been left unlit and since the mystery of the sky had been revealed, I no longer had the desire to look for stars. It was more than my heart could bear. That was many, many moons ago. One autumn night, not too long ago, I was with Robert. We were hot, so we made a bed outside and slept there beneath the autumn sky. I went to sleep and in my dreams, I was fourteen again. I was flying through the air. The divine wind lifted me higher and higher. Then it released me and I was at the top of Mount Obasute with Richard Brautigan. He read me two poems.

RICHARD

"It's night
and a numbered beauty
lapses at the wind,
chortles with the
branches of a tree,
giggles,
plays shadow dance
with a dead kite,
cajoles affection
from falling leaves,
and knows four
other things.

One is the color
of your hair.”

AKIKO

And:

RICHARD

“My heart
Aches beyond consolation
Above Sarashina’s
Obasute-yama
The shining moon to see.”

AKIKO

I looked in his eyes. They were like two shining moons casting their blue light upon my face. I sang him a song.

“The moon we love,
With flowers we sport while on the autumn grasses
Dew drops last,
Only too soon to vanish
Why have I appeared?

The long gone autumn
Remembers now
The illusion-plagued heart,
Sad beyond consolation.”

We made love in the grass. “Oh, what a lovely moment this is!” I cried out. His two moon eyes looked into mine and he said to me,

RICHARD

“How did this intimacy grow like a dream?”

AKIKO

Like a dream. Like a dream. Like a dream. The phrase haunted me. I opened my eyes and I was at the bottom of the world--in the grass, in my outside bed with Robert, filled with an inconsolable sadness. Robert could do nothing to stop the flow of tears. I was certain that my dream had been real and Robert was a dream.

(pause)

What if we are all asleep and what we think is real is really a dream? And what we think is dreaming is really living?

(pause)

Then *this* is a dream and I am only dreaming that I have abandoned my true love, that I have left him atop Mount Obasute. Soon I will wake up, (or go to sleep, as you might say), and then, once again, I may look into my true love’s two moon eyes.

(pause)

I am ashamed that this is all I have the capacity to dream.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE TEN

Akiko at a bar in TOKYO.

She's in the middle of a conversation with Tom.

AKIKO

You're a writer?

TOM

Yeah.

AKIKO

Ever read Brautigan?

TOM

Who's he write for?

AKIKO

He's a poet.

TOM

No.

AKIKO

Ever write a poem?

TOM

In high school.

AKIKO

You're really a writer?

TOM

Yeah. Journalist.

AKIKO

You don't write poems?

TOM

No.

Buy me a drink? AKIKO

All right. TOM

Where are you from? AKIKO

Montana. TOM

I like it there. AKIKO

You've been? TOM

Yes. AKIKO

Too quiet for me. TOM

"I like the Americans because they are healthy and optimistic." AKIKO

What's that? TOM

It's a quote. AKIKO

Oh. TOM

Kafka I think. AKIKO

You read a lot. TOM

My father used to tell me stories. AKIKO

I'm a writer. TOM

AKIKO
You told me.

TOM
Right. No poetry.

AKIKO
Right.

(pause)
Wanna come home with me?

(Lights shift.)

SCENE ELEVEN

Akiko and Tom in bed together later in the evening.

AKIKO
Can I read you something?

(Tom looks at her. She reads:)

“I live in the Twentieth Century and you lie here beside me. You were unhappy when you fell asleep. There was nothing I could do about it. I felt helpless. Your face is so beautiful that I cannot stop to describe it, and there’s nothing I can do to make you happy while you sleep.”

TOM
You write that?

AKIKO
It’s Richard Brautigan. Can I tell you a story?

(He shrugs. Richard enters at some point.)

When I was nine years old, my father divorced my mother. Not officially, they never filled out any paperwork. He just left. Mother came into my room, she said: “Your father has left us.” I didn’t ask questions. Mother was humiliated. She wouldn’t look at me because she saw him in my eyes. She didn’t say a word for two weeks. Then one day, she came into my room and told me, “you’re going to live with your Uncle Jokichi.” Jokichi was there, ready to take me. Mother had packed me a bag. I didn’t see her, or hear from her, again for a year.

(pause)
Jokichi lived in Kuriyamamura, by Lake Chuzanjiko. That lake was my favorite spot in the world. Jokichi taught me how to swim and he told me I looked so much like a little fish that I’d better be careful or someone was going to accidentally eat me for their

supper. He made me laugh with my stomach. Jokichi worked during the day and so I spent long afternoons all by myself there at my lake. I'd spend them floating.

(pause)

I surrendered myself to that lake: I'd submerge and then surrender. It felt like I could go hours without coming up for air. I'd float there, my arms extended out, my face in the water, my eyes closed, suspended. I tried not to think of anything except how the water felt against my skin. That was my world.

(pause)

One afternoon, I was floating. The water was completely still. Then suddenly, I was floating without water. A man was carrying me to shore. He laid me on the ground and kissed me. At least, I thought it was a kiss. I'd never been kissed by a man before, so I assumed that opening someone's mouth and blowing was the proper course.

(pause)

He was an American. He looked like a bird, like a heron, like no one I'd ever seen before.

RICHARD

"Excuse me,"

AKIKO

he said,

RICHARD

"I thought you were a trout stream."

AKIKO

"I'm not," I replied.

RICHARD

"Then are you all right?"

AKIKO

he asked. "I was floating," I told him.

RICHARD

"Drowning's more like it."

AKIKO

"A trout stream runs," I said.

RICHARD

"You ever see one?"

AKIKO

he asked. "No, but I know I'm not one."

RICHARD

“You should see one sometime. They’re lovely.”

(Richard exits.)

AKIKO

I didn’t know what else to say to him. I was only nine, but I loved him. I wanted him to kiss me again. But he didn’t. And I didn’t. And then he was gone.

(She picks up a copy of Trout Fishing in America with a photo of Richard Brautigan on the cover.)

This is the man who found me in the water.

TOM

What were you doing?

AKIKO

Floating like an April church.

TOM

Why?

AKIKO

I told you.

TOM

That doesn’t make any sense.

AKIKO

Do you want to hear some more Brautigan?

TOM

Why’d he call you a trout stream?

AKIKO

That’s what he saw.

TOM

Who could mistake a person for a trout stream?

AKIKO

That’s not the point. I want to read you a poem.

TOM

I don’t want to hear it.

AKIKO

Just let me—

TOM

Here.

(He puts some money down on the bed.)

AKIKO

What's that?

TOM

I've got to get going.

AKIKO

You don't—

TOM

That was nice. Thank you.

AKIKO

Have to—

TOM

Next time I'm in town, you wanna do this again?

AKIKO

Do that.

(He exits. She stares at the money on the bed, ashamed.)

(Lights shift.)

SCENE E

Akiko, alone.

AKIKO

When I was just a girl, my dear dad used to call me his sweet rose of May. Akiko means “autumn,” but I was born on May first, in the spring. I'm my father's sweet rose of May. Have you ever tasted a rose? Have you ever put one of its petals between your lips and sucked? There is nothing sweet about roses. They taste like the earth, like the dirt beneath your fingernails, like rot and decay. When I hear someone say my name, I see a crinkled leaf fall from a tree, I see the wind blowing dust into children's eyes, I see the coming of winter. I can't help feeling that the one thing my parents got right was my name.

(sings)

When I was just a girl my eyes were deep as the blue sea,
I could not see my dear dad when he went so far from me.
I prayed to God to kill me quick for my poor eyes were sore,
'I've seen more than I want to see and I don't want no more.'

Did I ever tell you about Mother? When she came to get me from Uncle Jokichi's, I didn't want to see her. Uncle said, "your mother is here." I walked out the door, into the back, towards the lake. The water was green. I took a step in, then another step, until I was knee deep. I stood there and stared into the sun. Even as my eyes watered, I refused to blink. When they found me, mother said "I've come for you. You can come home now." That's when I finally took my eyes off the sun. I looked in mother's direction: she was an orange scar. All my eyes could remember to see was the sun. They'd forgotten mother completely. When I stepped out of the water, I stepped out of myself. I gave mother my hand and let her take me home.

(sings)

When I was just a girl my eyes would cry 'till they were red,
I prayed to God to help me please to let me soon be dead.
I prayed to God, my eyes were sore, when I was just a girl,
I did not see him go from me, my mind is still a girl.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE TWELVE

Akiko enters her bedroom with a strange man.

AKIKO

Richard, I'm so glad you're here.

MAN

I'm not Richard, lady.

AKIKO

Where have you been?

MAN

I think you have the wrong man.

AKIKO

I'm sorry. I couldn't see for a minute.

MAN

That's all right.

I thought you were him. AKIKO

No. MAN

It was my mistake. AKIKO

It's all right. MAN

Sometimes my eyes filter. AKIKO

No problem. MAN

It's a trouble I have. AKIKO

I see. MAN

Would you mind? AKIKO

What? MAN

No. You couldn't. AKIKO

Couldn't what? MAN

Do me a favor? AKIKO

What kind? MAN

Let me call you Richard. AKIKO

That all? MAN

Yes. AKIKO

Sure then. MAN

Really? AKIKO

I'm here, aren't I? MAN

Oh, Richard. AKIKO

What do I call you? MAN

Sweet rose of May. AKIKO

What was that? MAN

Sweet rose of May. AKIKO

If that's what you want. MAN

That's what I want. AKIKO

Not really a name. MAN

It's mine. AKIKO

All right, then. MAN

Can we begin? AKIKO

MAN
Haven't we already?

AKIKO
I want to start like none of this happened.

MAN
All right.

(beat)

AKIKO
Richard, is that you?

MAN
Why, if it isn't my Sweet rose of May! How are you?

AKIKO
Oh, Richard. Is that really you?

MAN
Of course.

AKIKO
I think it is. Oh thank god.

MAN
Is something wrong, Rose?

AKIKO
No.

MAN
What's this Richard supposed to be like?

AKIKO
You.

MAN
But I'm not really him.

AKIKO
Don't say that.

MAN

I don't know what you think this is.

AKIKO

It's mine.

MAN

What are you talking about?

AKIKO

Richard?

MAN

Fine.

AKIKO

It's your name.

MAN

All right.

AKIKO

I've missed you so much.

MAN

You too, sweet rose.

AKIKO

Will you tell me one of your poems?

MAN

What poems?

AKIKO

Any one.

MAN

I don't know any.

AKIKO

Of course you do.

MAN

Look, are we going to be doing this all night?

(He starts kissing her neck.)

AKIKO

Do you remember the story you used to tell me, before you left, about the girl who became a butterfly?

MAN

I don't know what you're talking about.

(He continues to kiss her.)

AKIKO

She was denied the bliss of Nirvana because she wanted something that she could never have.

MAN

Listen, I didn't come here for stories.

(He begins to undress her.)

AKIKO

Do you remember how it ends? I was just a little girl the last time you told it. I don't remember how it ends. Do you hear me? Do you hear me? Tell me how the story ends? Please? Oh, dear God, hear me now. I need an answer: Will the girl who became a butterfly ever get what she really wants?

(Lights shift.)

SCENE F

Akiko, alone.

AKIKO

Are you there? Sometimes
I can't remember your face.
It's been so, so long.

She told me you left.
I should have read into her
vocal inflections.

I think I see you,
but then I...my eyes open...
and you aren't you.

I can't stop trembling.
I dropped a piece of your old
china to the floor.

You and mother owned
matching cups. Now they're broken.
I'm losing myself.

When you tell the same
story too many times you
can lose yourself in it.

With a lonely voice,
I stand here on the bare stage,
empty echoing.

(Slow fade to black, end of play.)