

September 18, 2003

Post American Conservatory Theatre production.

A Full-length One Act Play - Running time - Approximately 80 minutes.

Copyright Philip Kan Gotanda 1998

Author's Thanks: Danny Glover, Tim Dang, East West Players, Carey Perloff, Paul Walsh, Johanna Pfaelzer, Ben Guillory, Anne Bowen, Robey Theater, American Conservatory Theatre, Steven Anthony Jones, Dian Kobayashi, Joy Carlin, Tony Taccone, Richard Seyd, Chay Yew, Timothy Douglas, Berkeley Repertory Theater, Mr. & Mrs. Twine, Carolyn McDonald, Hiroshi Seto, Seret Scott, Midori Nohara, August Wilson, Charles Fuller, Carl Mulert & the Joyce Ketay Agency. And, always, Diane Emiko Takei.

YOHEN was written as a companion play to THE WASH.

For Nobu McCarthy

YOHEN*

... "accident in the kiln firing that results in
transformation of the pot" ...

- Seto Hiroshi -

Copyright. Gotanda. 2002

CHARACTERS

SUMI WASHINGTON - Japanese woman in her mid-60's. Born in Japan and raised in Manchuria, later moving back to Japan. Has lived in the United States since the early 50's. Married to James.

JAMES WASHINGTON - African American man in his early 60's. Former amateur boxer of some promise. Retired military person. Married to Sumi. No children.

SET

Living room with a kitchen attached. Typical middle-class American furnishings - with Japanese flourishes thrown in here and there. A flower arrangement, several nice ceramic pots of Japanese flavor. A couch with a low coffee table. A few magazines are nicely laid out on the table. Nothing too modern - no VCR, etc. Neat, understated, but wanting to be more in some unspoken fashion. Yet, decidedly locked into its middle-class station.

TIME & PLACE

1986. Gardena, Los Angeles. Fall into winter

Early November

Opening music - Bill Evans Alone; On a Clear Day You Can See Forever

SCENE ONE

TIME - Before dinner

(Knock at door. SUMI, an attractive woman in her mid-60's, answers it. JAMES, a large man in his early 60's, stands there. They acknowledge each other awkwardly.)

SUMI: Hello, James.

JAMES: (Nodding) Sumi.

(Pause)

SUMI: You look handsome.

JAMES: Thank you.

(Pause)

It's good to see you.

(James bends down to kiss her. Sumi pulls away)

SUMI: No.

JAMES: It's been two weeks, Jesus.

SUMI: That's not the way I want to do it.

JAMES: I don't know what you look like anymore.

SUMI: I want to start at the beginning.

JAMES: Jesus. This is stupid, Sumi. Stupid.

SUMI: I want to start at the beginning.

JAMES: Okay, okay, okay...

(James notices Sumi looking at him)

What?

SUMI: Don't you have anything?

(James doesn't understand)

For me? Flowers, candy, something?

JAMES: (Muttering to himself)
Jesus fucking Christ...

SUMI: Are you going to behave yourself?

JAMES: Yeah, sure.

SUMI: If you're not going to behave yourself, I want you to leave.

JAMES: Okay, okay...

SUMI: On a first date a man behaves.

JAMES: Jeez.

(Awkward pause)

SUMI: Let me take your coat.

(As Sumi hangs up his coat, James seats himself in his favorite chair. Notices the TV angle)

JAMES: (contorting) Hey, I can't see now.

(Sumi touches his shoulder as James gets up to move it)

SUMI: I rearranged things a bit.

(James stops)

I like it this way.

(Sumi notices his tie and starts to re-do it)

JAMES: Leo tied it. It was his idea to wear it.

SUMI: How is he?

JAMES: Leo? He snores. He snored when he was a kid. Now he snores like a man.

SUMI: I mean with Rachel and the kids at the house and he's over there by himself.

JAMES: He'll live. The apartment's not bad, only temporary. Rachel'll take him back, she always does.

(James, looking down at Sumi's head, begins to laugh)

SUMI: What?

JAMES: Your roots are showing. Looks funny. Two-tone hair job, white and black. Like those kids on TV. You know, with the Mohawk haircuts. I should get one. Like my Grandpa Cherokee Chief. Eee-aahh!

(Sumi doesn't laugh)

SUMI: He wasn't an Indian Chief.

JAMES: Great Grandpa? Yeah, he was. That's what my Mama said - And he married Great Grandma who was the daughter of a French trader, Joaquim Bouchet and a slave woman, Grandma Dorothea.

(Sumi, irritated, gives up on the tie and exits to the kitchen)

SUMI: (leaving) And you told me you were 1/8 Seminole, not Cherokee.

JAMES: Seminole, Cherokee—I don't know. He was a chief. That's what Mama said.

(Silence. Tension)

JAMES: Smells good. What you cooking?

SUMI: Just rice. I didn't have time. I got take-out at Maruyama's. I told you the traffice. After work, going back to Little Tokyo to buy food. I still have a ton of work.

JAMES: That's okay. Anything's good. I'm hungry. I'm starving. I could eat a whole cow.

SUMI: (from Kitchen) Let me get this into the microwave.

(Sumi starts to put food into the microwave)

JAMES: Jesus, Leo's cooking. It's a wonder we're not dead. He can't cook worth beans. No, I take that back. That's all he can cook. And guess who washes the dishes? No, really. Hell, the stuff was piled up a mile high. And it was growing this green stuff on it. Leo, Jesus. Without Rachel, he's a mess.

(Sumi brings in Japanese appetizers on a nice ceramic plate carried on a lacquer serving tray)

SUMI: Here. Your favorite. *Sembe* ((seasoned Japanese crackers)). I went to Little Tokyo to get it. It's got the *nori* ((seaweed)) on it you like.

JAMES: It's like we're kids again. Leo and me. I sell the fish and he just sits there in the cart, enjoying the ride, waving at everybody while I do all the work. Next thing you know I'll be cooking.

(Eating. Awkward silence)

SUMI: (Noticing) What happened to your arm?

JAMES: What?

SUMI: There. It's black and blue.

JAMES: Nothing. I must've bumped it.

SUMI: You been drinking again?

JAMES: No. (Beat) I wasn't.

(Pause)

I was at this park and I ran into a bunch of kids. It's near Leo's, the park...

SUMI: James...

JAMES: No, nothing like that. They were all standing around and we started talking—one thing led to another—

SUMI: (Interrupts) You started fighting?

JAMES: They just wanted to test me.

SUMI: Be more careful around those kids.

JAMES: This one kid's pretty good. He suckered me with a head fake but I blocked the punch.

(Feeling arm)

He can hit.

SUMI: He'll pull a knife and stab somebody.

JAMES: They're only 13, 14 years old, Sumi.

SUMI: Look what happened last time. We let that kid stay in the house and look what happens. (beat) And you still want to go over there and fight with them.

(Silence)

Why don't you do something better with your time. You're retired, you could do anything you want. You should be trying to better yourself, learn about new things—

JAMES: (Interrupts) I don't want to get into this again. Not right now.

SUMI: Instead, what do you do? First thing when you get up, turn on the TV. What's that channel you watch - ESPN, that's the channel - sports, sports, day and night, nothing else.

JAMES: I go down to the Club and work out with kids.

SUMI: And that's not what I mean, boxing. Why don't you take classes like I do? The new semester hasn't started yet, you could take -

JAMES: (Interrupts) What do I need to go to school for, I got a nice pension.

SUMI: That's not what I mean, James.

JAMES: Thirty-seven years of the Army, that's enough!

SUMI: Don't raise your voice to me.

(Pause)

JAMES: Black folks got PhD's running all around - what they doing?

SUMI: That's not true anymore, James.

JAMES: They're sweeping floors. Black man always be down, even when he's up, he's down. And he always ends up cleaning everybody else's mess.

SUMI: Maybe before but not now.

JAMES: Oh, yeah? I don't know, I don't know...

(Beat)

SUMI: I don't think so.

JAMES: I do.

SUMI: I don't think so.

JAMES: I do.

(Silence. They sip tea and munch on sembe)

SUMI: I don't think so.

(James is silent)

JAMES: I need a beer.

(Sumi doesn't move)

What the hell is going on? Even on a first date the woman is supposed to be nice. Or is that old hat, now? Now, you're supposed to be mean?

(Starts to get up)

I'll get it myself.

SUMI: I threw it out. The beer.

JAMES: All of it?

(Sumi nods. James can't believe it. Goes to check the fridge)

JAMES: (in the Kitchen) There were two whole 6-packs in here. Heineken!

(James returns from the kitchen)

SUMI: I have Pellegrino.

JAMES: Pelle-what? What?

SUMI: Pellegrino. It's Italian. Italian bottled water. You know, club soda.

(Sumi getting up to get it)

JAMES: (Muttering to himself) Bottled water. Bottled "Italian" water. Jesus-fucking-christ...

(James gets up from the couch and seats himself in his favorite chair. Takes the remote control and is about to switch the TV on when he remembers the TV angle is off. In frustration, he puts down the remote. Sumi returns with a tray of drinks)

(James stares at the glasses with ice. Bottles are unopened)

JAMES: On the rocks? So what happens when the ice cubes melt? You got cold Italian tap water.

(Sumi tries to remove the top with a opener and is having trouble. James takes the bottle and does it for her. She pours it out, James tastes it)

JAMES: (Reading label) Pel-le-gri-no. This must be what Gerald and the boys drink down at the office.

SUMI: I read about it in the Los Angeles Magazine. I just thought we'd try it.

(Sumi picks up the magazine and shows it to James)

JAMES: What a bunch of pussys. Even in the old neighborhood, pussys don't seem like pussys next to Gerald.

(Notices Sumi's irritated look)

JAMES: So how's work? Down there, things okay?

SUMI: Fine, fine, the usual.

(Pause. James sips the bottled water)

JAMES: (Muttering) Bunch of pussys...

SUMI: I won't drag you to anymore of the office parties, okay? You don't have to go anymore.

JAMES: What? I'm not talking about that. That's not what I'm talking about, Sumi.

SUMI: So you don't like them - okay, okay. But I have to work with them so can you please be a little more understanding of the situation.

JAMES: What? I know they're looking down their noses at me. 'Who's this nigger, what's he doing here? He doesn't talk good English, didn't go to college.' They..(cont.)

SUMI: (overlapping, muttering) Don't use that work...

JAMES: (cont.) ...look down their noses at us. We don't need that kind of crap.

SUMI: Sherry Lawson's the newest junior partner. And Jason Chang's been there since the—

JAMES: Oh, give me a break. That girl? And don't go saying, "How come she's not sweeping the floors?" That's something totally different. This girl's one of those new "bourgey middle-class Negroes." At least, Gerald talks to me. She - what's her name, Harrison what?

SUMI: Lawson, Sherry Lawson.

JAMES: Okay, Lawson, whatever - she ignores me the whole time. Ignores me.

SUMI: Why would she do that?

JAMES: And she won't look at me. Come on, give me a fucking break.

SUMI: James, it's all inside your head. She talks to me all the—

JAMES (Interrupts) I make her nervous, that's why. She doesn't like being reminded about what she really is.

SUMI: She worked on Mayor Bradley's campaign last year—

JAMES: (Interrupts) I offered her some of those small sandwiches you guys always have at those office parties, and know what? She says, "No, thanks."

SUMI: (Sumi doesn't understand) No, thanks?...

JAMES: It's the way she said it. The "way" she said it to me. She didn't say, "No, thank you." It was "No, thanks." One colored to another knows. We understand. She didn't say, "No, thank you." It was "No, thanks."

SUMI: So tell her. Did you tell her?

JAMES: Why? What the hell for?

SUMI: If you feel that way, tell her. Let her know.

JAMES: What the hell for? What? You want me to embarrass you in front of all your white friends? Besides, she'd probably lose her job. Gerald knows that I know about these things. He listens to me. If I said something about her, he'd fire her.

SUMI: James, James, I'm only the secretary.

JAMES: I'm not talking about that. Me. I'm talking about me. So you're the secretary, so what? These things, what I'm talking about, these things are different. Gerald knows. He knows that I know. Maybe not other stuff, but things like that? Hell, yes. She'd find her black ass out in the street. You been there what, 20 years, Sumi?

SUMI: (correcting) 18 ½ years.

JAMES: 18 ½ okay - 18 ½ goddamn years, when he was still over on Vermont in that small office, just the two of you, him selling insurance and going to law school at night. We talk, we talk. He'd listen to me. I don't need that kind of crap, Sumi. I don't need it.

(Sumi is upset, crying. James notices)

What's wrong? Sumi? Did I do something? What?

SUMI: This isn't working. This just isn't working. I wanted us to have this nice meal...

JAMES: (Trying to console her) I told you it was crazy, didn't I, I told you. All this crazy stuff. I don't know what's gotten into you lately.

(Sumi gently pushes him away)

SUMI: I'm trying to do something. I'm trying to do something about our life.

JAMES: What? What you trying to do?

SUMI: I don't know, I'm not sure---

JAMES: See, you don't even know what you're trying to do.

SUMI: That's what I'm trying to do, figure this all out, that's...(cont.)

JAMES: (overlapping) Yeah, but what, what?

SUMI: (cont.)...what I'm trying to do.

JAMES: (mimicking Sumi) 'I want you to move out, James.' Did I do something wrong? 'No.' Is there somebody else? 'No.' Are you sick? 'No. I just want you to move out. Then come back and date me.' Date you? We're not 17 anymore. I'm 61 and you're 66.

SUMI: (Correcting)
65

(Pause. James stares at Sumi)

JAMES: This some kind of woman's thing, I don't know about? Comes after Menopause? Like a stage two kind of thing? I was talking about it to Leo.

SUMI: What?

JAMES: 'Cause I don't know, the first time round I almost didn't survive. Crying and yelling, crying and yelling - you were all mixed up.

SUMI: Since you retired and you're around the house 24 hours a day, and all you do is sit and watch TV. That's the problem.

JAMES: Okay, if that's the problem, I'll just go back to Leo's and watch TV there. Get out of your way.

(James grabs his coat and moves to the door)

Alright. Okay. Good. Then, I'm going.

(Sumi is silent)

Sumi? I'm going. Okay, I'm going.

(No response. Opens the door)

Alright, okay...

(Sumi does not move. James realizes she's not going to stop him. He exits and stands on the porch, looking back. Confused and frustrated)

(Dim to darkness)

(End of scene music - Thelonius Monk - Ask Me Now)

SCENE TWO - TWO WEEKS LATER (ABOUT 9:00 P.M.)

(Sumi dressed in a bathrobe, holding the door open. James stands there with a BROWN PAPER BAG in one arm, and a BOUQUET in the other. He's dressed up, made a real effort. Pots on the table with books open)

SUMI: James.

JAMES: I know.

SUMI: I'm studying. I have an important exam tomorrow.

JAMES: Can I come in? Just for a bit, that's all.

SUMI: I ate already.

JAMES: I'm not hungry.

SUMI: I could heat something up.

JAMES: No, no, that's okay.

(Pause)

JAMES: Coffee. Coffee would be good, though. Do you mind? Making the coffee?

SUMI: I'll make a fresh pot.

JAMES: (Trying hard) You look nice. I like your hair. It looks good on you.

(beat)

JAMES: You sure this isn't some kind of woman thing? Leo says it never goes away, it just goes into hibernation. Then, one day, for no reason at all, boom!

(Sumi, gives him a hard stare, then exits with flowers)

JAMES: (calling) I worked out with some new kids down there. Boy, I'm outta shape - coffee would hit the spot, get the old engine going—

SUMI: (Interrupts) (enters with flowers in vase)

You went down to the gym? You'll only get into trouble again. They don't want you down there at the club---

JAMES: They got themselves a new director. Old Man Harmon's gone, okay? He's gone.

SUMI: You shouldn't have hit him.

JAMES: I didn't hit him. How many times I got to say that? He was an asshole to the kids. Telling them they could grow up to be the Head of Coca Cola and tellin' me that I was "underestimating their potential." Those kids wanted to box.

SUMI: (As she exits) You shouldn't have hit him.

JAMES: Remember that boy I met at the park near Leo's? The one who bruised my arm? The doorbell rings. I open the door, he's standing there, don't say nothing, just stands there. I recognize him right off. I say, "What? You come here to kick my butt." He says, "Teach me." "What? Teach you what, boy?" Then he goes like this—

(Punches his right fist)

"Teach me." I got him to come in and work out. Loves to spar. Once he gets going, doesn't want to stop.

(James notices a pot)

JAMES: This is an...*Oribe*. Right? The greenish color and everything, the one you like. Right? *Oribe*? And this is the one that's supposed to be such a big deal...*Bizen-yaki*. The red markings come from the salted straw they wrap around the pots. See, I know this stuff.

SUMI: Yeah, but it's not a real one. We just used salted string in class and you get the same effect.

(Grabbing a book)

I got this new book. His name is *Rosanjin Kitaoji*. His pots are...You have to look.

(Thumbing through the book)

The Japanese, they're aesthetic sense is so far ahead of the West. We don't try to fight nature...

(Finds a particular photo and shows it to James excitedly.)

JAMES: (Intimidated. Feigning comprehension)
Whew! These Japanese artists, huh.

SUMI: He's supposed to have bawled out Picasso once for being late to a meeting with him. Rosanjin. Can you imagine somebody doing that to Picasso? And he was a gourmet cook, Rosanjin. He ran his own restaurant and served all the food on his own plates.

JAMES: (staring at the photo) This one's crooked.

SUMI: You use a hand wheel, it's not going to come out straight like some machine.

JAMES: I don't know, it looks crooked to me.

SUMI: You don't know how to look at it - that's part of the Japanese aesthetic.

JAMES: Yeah, but that half is sagging there, like it had a stroke. You make better pots than that, Sumi. You do.

SUMI: James, you don't understand it.

JAMES: Look at it. Look at it. You—(continue)

SUMI: (overlapping) James...

JAMES: (Cont.)--make better stuff than—

SUMI: (Interrupts) No, no, I don't. I don't. This is a pot by Rosanjin Kitaoji. He's considered one of Japan's finest potters.

(Silence)

JAMES: I wouldn't buy this crap.

SUMI: They're priceless.

(pause)

JAMES: Okay. I've been thinking. About what happened last time? What you were saying? Okay, okay, maybe you are on to something, okay? Something, right? You know it's something? You may not know what that something is. But now, I know it's something. Okay.

(Pause. Sumi picks up one of her own pots)

SUMI: It's called *yohen**.

JAMES: Yo-what?

SUMI: Yohen. The type it is. I don't know the *kanji* ((Chinese characters)). *Hen* I think is the character for change - (she writes in the air). But *Yo*, could be fire (writing in air) or appearance (writing)... My teacher told me about it. It's an accident in the kiln firing that changes the pot. It gets too much heat and warps, or a piece of ash falls on it causing it to be discolored. Most times it doesn't turn out good, *kizumono*. Break it up and use it to pave the dirt road. But once in a while, the accident turns out right. Then you keep it. It's hard to tell. It's a matter of taste, *yohen*. To some, it looks ugly. To others, beautiful. You think it's ugly?

JAMES: I don't know.

SUMI: Some are prized by tea masters. They give them names.

JAMES: The pots?

SUMI: Yes, they name them. Silly, huh.

(Pause. James looks at the Pot)

JAMES: So what are we going to name this one?

SUMI: What?

JAMES: This yohan, or whatever - what did you call it?

SUMI: "Yohen."

JAMES: Yeah, let's give it a name. Like the old tea masters did. What kind of names did they give them?

SUMI: I don't know - there's a famous *Iga* water container called, *Habukuro*.

JAMES: What does it mean?

SUMI Torn pouch.

(James holds up the pot, studying it)

JAMES: Something that sums this baby up. Speaks to its shape.

(It comes to him)

"Sumi's Ass."

SUMI: (trying to hide it but amused) James...

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, "Sumi's Ass."

(Both laughing)

How does that go in Japanese, "Sumi's Ass?" Come on, come on, how do you say that in *nihongo* ((Japanese))?

SUMI: I don't know, James.

JAMES: Ass is *oshiri*, right? So it's *Sumi no oshiri*!

(Both laugh)

We could have a tea ceremony. Like your mama liked to do. All of us sitting around on the *tatami* being all proper.

The air is so still. The night so beautiful. Listen to the cicada singing. *Zzzz*. And this. Surely a thing of this beauty must have a name. Yes? What? Sumi's ass!

SUMI: (Laughing) Careful, careful. Be more careful, James. You wouldn't drink from this anyway - it's not a *chawan*. It would be a water container. You don't like Japanese things anyway.

JAMES: I do, too.

(Sumi taking Pot from James)

SUMI: (mimicking James) 'Why can't you act more American?'

JAMES: That was a long time ago. And that was just the food...

SUMI: No, no - 'Wear this kind of American dress, cut your hair like this style'... You wanted me to change overnight, you didn't like me the way I was - just like your father.

JAMES: Come on, I don't do that anymore.

SUMI: Not like your mother. She knew me. What I was going through.

(Pause)

JAMES Sumi? It's not like Earl didn't want me to marry you.

SUMI Every time I came into a room, your father'd leave.

JAMES: He knew what we'd have to go through. 'She's gonna have troubles with her people, and you're gonna have troubles with your people. But the baby's gonna have both your troubles and then some 'cause of what he is all on his own.'

SUMI: He never spoke to me once. Not once the whole time I was there.

JAMES: He didn't know how.

SUMI: He didn't like Japanese.

JAMES Nah, nah...

SUMI: He didn't like Japanese.

JAMES: Okay, he didn't like Japanese.

SUMI: He was prejudiced.

JAMES: He wasn't prejudiced. Hell, to him Japan was another planet.

SUMI: Okay, then he was ignorant.

JAMES: He wasn't ignorant, Sumi. He may not have had a lot of schooling like your Pa, but he was a smart man. Not like book learning smart, but common sense smart.

SUMI: (sarcastically) 'Smart,' huh?

JAMES: Yeah, like when there wasn't work in North Carolina, and he came to Jersey and got himself job cleaning bluefish and tuna on the docks in Belford near Sandy Hook. Right off he noticed they were throwing away all the fish from the catches they couldn't sell - goosefish, fluke, whiting. Pa gets an idea. He asks the foreman if he can have them - the foreman laughs at him and says, "Yeah, sure --"

SUMI: -- (interrupts. Sumi's heard this before) -- but he still makes your father pay...

JAMES: Yeah, but Pa knew how to play this guy - "Colored folks always got to eat what the white man throw away. What? Now he got to pay for it, too?" The foreman didn't like being sassed, but Pa had a way of saying things so you couldn't quite tell if he was making fun of you or just making talk.

SUMI: Your father was a big man, James.

JAMES: That wasn't it. Peckerwood just kinda do like this - "Hmm, sure yeah, Earl. You and your boy can have these here."

SUMI: You still had to pay, though.

JAMES: Yeah, but not much and Pa knew he could sell them on his own and still make some small profit. He bought that wagon and Leo and me was set up in business. We'd pack it with ice and fish and go house to house to all the neighbor folks. Hell, fish real cheap and real fresh - who the hell cares if it's ugly - as long as it tastes good and don't kill you.

(Pause)

SUMI: Okay, he wasn't ignorant.

JAMES: He was common sense smart.

SUMI: He didn't talk much, your Papa.

JAMES: He didn't know what to say.

SUMI The two of us sitting there in your living room. Alone. He didn't speak Japanese and I didn't speak English too well. So all we did was...

(Sumi bows)

JAMES Oh, that's right... Then he'd do like this...

(James bows)

SUMI: Then I'd...(bows)

JAMES: Then he'd (bows)]

(Sumi bows, then James bows)

SUMI: And on and on it went.

JAMES: Cause he's old school Sumi, a Southern Gentleman - it's impolite to not return a lady's bow...

SUMI: Yeah, but in Japan, I have to bow last or I'm not showing respect for my father-in-law. So it went on and on and on...

(James and Sumi bowing to each other, laughing)

(James reaches over for the paper bag he brought with him. He pulls out a 6-pack of beer. James notices Sumi's look)

JAMES: If I don't drink it here, I'll just drink it back at Leo's afterwards.

(Sumi puts the beer by the front door then goes into the kitchen)

You should see this kid, Sumi. The one from the park. Jesse. He can hit. Jesus, he can hit. Like when Sugar Ray Robinson hit me. During that exhibition match. Like a train.

SUMI: (Calling from the kitchen) Yes, but you beat everyone in your weight division in the Army...

JAMES: I was a cinch for the Olympics.

SUMI: Everybody said that, the Olympics.

(James wanders over and grabs a beer and begins drinking it during his speech)

JAMES: But Sugar, he was a born champion. He had destiny written all over him. You don't mind being put away by destiny. See, you can make a boxer out of a hitter. But you can't make a hitter out of a boxer. Hitters are born, not made. Something about how all the equipment works together. They can be scrawny looking like an Arguello or like that new kid Tyson, built like a caboose. The timing, the leverage, limb size, and some instinctive thing that makes you pick and choose a particular time to hit. Boom. Like Ali and Liston. The Bear goes down. No one even saw the punch. It's a gift. And this kid? Jesse? Shi-it...

(Sumi enters with the coffees. Sees James drinking the beer. Sets the coffees down)

SUMI: I'm full time now. At the college. I enrolled as a full time student.

JAMES: Full time?

SUMI: I can take more courses. I've been wanting to do this for a while.

JAMES: Yeah, but what about work? What did Gerald say?

SUMI: I quit.

JAMES: What?

SUMI: I quit my job.

JAMES: Why?

SUMI: I didn't like it. You know that.

JAMES: Yeah, but you had that job for what - twenty, nineteen --

SUMI: (correcting) Eighteen and a half years.

JAMES: Okay, eighteen and a half years now?

SUMI: It didn't pay that well. And you're the one who kept saying you don't like them.

JAMES: Yeah, but work's work. You think I liked saying, "Yes sir, no sir," to those sons-a-bitches all those years?

SUMI: Look, it's over and done with. I quit. I don't want to type another brief as long as I live.

JAMES: I mean, I'm not worried. But the money's always helped, Sumi. All I have is the pension and it's good, but it's not a helluva of a lot of money.

SUMI: The house is paid off and as long as the Pontiac holds up you're fine.

(Pause)

I have a little money saved. Some money of my own.

(Silence)

I have a right to my own money, don't I?

JAMES: Yeah, but –

SUMI: (Interrupts, upset) Okay.

JAMES: You been planning this for a while? Sumi?

(No response)

You have own account? That's where you keep it, right, in a bank? How long?

SUMI: Not long.

JAMES: I just want to know.

SUMI: It's my money, James. It took me a long time. I always covered the household expenses and gave you the rest. Just a little that I saved by cutting corners here and there. It's my money. I earned it.

JAMES: I'm not saying it's not.

SUMI: I'm sick and tired. All you talk about is boxing, boxing, boxing. We need to do more. See more things. Do more things. I keep telling you that. I want to go to school full time. And now I can do it.

JAMES: You could do it while I was here.

(No response)

You could. I wouldn't stop you, Sumi? You know that. I wouldn't—

SUMI: (Interrupts) I know. But I always end up spending all my time on you. 'Get this Sumi, do that, Sumi. When is dinner ready, Sumi?' Even when you're not asking me to do things, I feel like I'm doing things for you. – (continue)

JAMES: (overlapping) Okay, okay, I didn't know...

SUMI: -- I have no privacy, even in my own mind.

JAMES: All right, I'm sorry.

SUMI: I feel different when I'm at school. I feel different. At least there, I can hear myself think. And I know it's me thinking.

JAMES: All right!

(Silence)

I thought if I understood this "something," whatever the hell it is, then, you know... I just thought you wanted me to move out for a while. Not something like this. I mean, Leo's already back at the house with Rachel and the kids... You still taking pottery, then?

SUMI: No. Yes, but after next semester, I won't be making it. I'll be studying it. It's hard to explain, you wouldn't understand.

JAMES: Jesus, what? Am I an idiot now?

SUMI: It's a general art major... (continue)

JAMES: (overlapping) Too dumb for you...

SUMI: ...with my main area being Japanese Art, with a specific emphasis on ceramics, okay?

JAMES: I don't waste my time reading books! I'm sweeping up fish guts and hosing down floors by the time I'm eleven. And by thirteen, I got my own fish business going.

SUMI: They have high school courses for adults.

JAMES: You want me to sit in a class with a bunch of punk drop-outs? I spent 37 years busting my ass in the Army, Sumi. What the hell do I have in common with them? Jesus. I'm a grown man, Sumi.

SUMI: Just something, then. Anything. But do it with some - I don't know - do it like you mean it. Like it means something to you Not just once a week, go down to the club and tell them old war stories. Grow up, James. When are you going to grow up and deal with the real world. I don't want a kid for a husband. I want an adult.

JAMES: I'm not a kid - don't call me a kid.

(Pause)

I'm just the way I'm always. I thought you liked me this way? I thought you liked it?

SUMI: You're boring. Okay? I find you boring. I don't know why. I still love you, but everything you do bugs the hell out of me.

(Silence)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, James. I didn't mean it. It's just - I'm hungry, James. I'm hungry for, I don't know - new things, new ways of thinking, new experiences...

(Sumi realizes she's gone too far. James doesn't know how to respond)

(James and Sumi stare at each other. Semi-freeze. Lights dim to half. James and Sumi lit in pools of light. They're in their own worlds)

(Music - Miles Davis - Nuits Sur des Champs-Elysees)

(James turns out towards the audience. He's in a state of turmoil. Unable to get a handle on what's happening. Takes off his shirt. James begins to jab, punch. He's trying to beat-down an invisible foe who's much too elusive.

Sumi appears. Unsure whether to phone or not. She makes the phone call. James hears his phone ringing and pauses for a moment. Thinking. Then returns to jabbing and punching with a renewed fervor. The phone continues to ring. James flails away at the night)

(Music - Bill Evans - Here Comes That Rainy Day)

As James' light dims, Sumi continues to hold in hopes James will pick up. James slowly winds down. Grabs his shirt and moves upstage.

As James crosses upstage, there is a moment in this half-light world where he passes by Sumi as she holds the phone, waiting for him to answer.

He moves past her and exits.

Sumi hangs up. She watches his exiting figure. Her light dims to half)

(Dim to darkness)

SCENE THREE - THREE WEEKS LATER

(James stands, looking out the window. He's dressed casually but looks more together. He appears more natural than the last scene. More the real James. James checks his watch. Sumi enters with a tray of *sembe* and tea. She has worked on her appearance. James appears distracted)

SUMI: I'm glad you came.

JAMES: I can't stay late. I got an early meeting in the morning.

SUMI: Thank you for the flowers. The candy, too.

JAMES: "SEES" Candy.

(Silence)

SUMI: You're hard to get a hold of. I've been calling all week.

JAMES: (James shrugs) You got me. Here I am.

SUMI: Semester's almost over. I'm getting ready for finals.

JAMES: Leo's back at the apartment. Rachel kicked him out again.

SUMI: How is she?

JAMES: I think it's for good this time.

(Pause)

Look, if you've got to study or something...

SUMI: No, no, it's all right. Please. I have all day tomorrow.

(offering)

Peas? Cooked peas, you like?

JAMES: (checking his watch) Can I have a Pellegrino?

SUMI: I have club soda. Calistoga

JAMES: That's those covered wagons, right?

SUMI: No, that's Conestoga—

JAMES: (Interrupts) Joke. A little joke, Sumi.

(Awkward pause)

SUMI: Would you like another beer?

JAMES: (surprised) Yeah, okay...

(Sumi goes to the kitchen to get it)

(James is looking at the pot. Sumi reenters with a beer and a glass)

SUMI: My last pot.

JAMES: I like it. It's good.

(James looks up)

SUMI: End of semester, that's it.

JAMES: Yeah, but you're still making them?

SUMI: I'm changing my area of emphasis. Remember I told you?

JAMES: If you're gonna know about 'em, you gotta keep making 'em. That's the problem. Everybody always talking – yak, yak, yak, like they know but they don't know.

SUMI: I'd have to carry extra studio units, it's too much.

JAMES: That's okay, that doesn't matter. You lose touch. You forget. I been going down to the Club pretty regular. It's all coming back now. You gotta get hit a few times. Then you know, you remember.

(Silence. Sumi takes a pea and tosses it into the air trying to catch it in her mouth. It bounces off her face. She looks at James. She tries another, it sails over her head)

JAMES: (shaking his head) No, no. Watch.

(He tosses a pea up in the air and catches it in his mouth)

JAMES: Now go ahead.

(Sumi tries it and it bounces off her forehead. James shakes his head. He's trying to hide it, but he's amused)

No, no...

(James moves closer with his hand on her arm)

JAMES: It's all in the hand. You got to throw the pea straight up. Don't use your wrist, keep it straight, use all arm. Ready...Here it comes...

(James helps her toss a pea up and she tries to catch it)

(They both laugh at the result)

SUMI: You make me laugh.

(Sumi gets up and starts cleaning up. James is feeling good, gets up to tell his stories)

JAMES: You remember? That park near your home in Nagoya? I swear. I tell you a joke and what do you do? You get mad. Yeah, you don't laugh, you get mad. I say, "What?" Is this damn crazy or what?"

SUMI: I wasn't sure what you were saying to me.

JAMES: You spoke American good enough. Everyone laughs at my jokes. That's why I got the easiest work detail.

SUMI: I was scared. Your face was so big, James. You scared me.

(Sumi pushes her face in close to James')

JAMES: You looked pissed to me.

SUMI: I'd never seen an American GI so close up.

JAMES: Right in the middle of my joke. Not a word. Nose stuck up in the air. You walk away.

(Sumi begins to move towards the kitchen)

SUMI: I ran away. And you started chasing after me.

(James starts to follow her playfully)

JAMES: I was following you.

(Sumi enjoys his playfulness)

SUMI: I was running as fast as I could.

JAMES: You were walking.

SUMI: 'What's your name! Mama-san! What's your name!' "Mama-san"? Really. It was so embarrassing. *Hazukashii!* Embarrassing. All the neighbors poking their heads out and staring.

JAMES: You were walking.

SUMI: I was running! You can't run fast in kimono.

JAMES: You were walking!

SUMI: *Uso!* (No)) I was running as fast as I could in kimono.

(Sumi demonstrates with small steps as she exits to kitchen. Sumi continues talking from the kitchen)

SUMI: (Calling) Mama was so shocked the first time I brought you over.

JAMES: (Eating another pea) Whoa, I remember...

(Sumi reenters with a Bowl and a Bag of Snow Peas)

SUMI: She'd given up on me. She was so ashamed. Now, everybody divorces, even in Japan. But then, Mama was so proud... And after the War and everything, nothing made sense anymore...

(Sumi sets the bag and bowl down)

JAMES: You had a nice house in Manchuria...

(They set about tearing the hard ends of the snow peas off and throwing them into the bowl. They make little piles of the ends in front of them. They both move into this without speaking. They've done this many times before)

SUMI: I've missed you.

(Pause)

JAMES: You were right. About that something. Me doing something. I feel better. I do. I wasn't feeling bad before, but now... I understand why you like school. Going out, new ideas, people...

(Pause)

SUMI: Our home was so beautiful. My Papa helped so many people, everybody loved him. The biggest Japanese lumber mill in Manchuria. If the Chinese workers needed medical help, or needed extra money to help out with some emergency, my Papa was famous in Manchuria for his kindness to the Chinese people. But then the War and business going bad... And by the time we got back to Nagoya, and then my divorce... I didn't think she'd be so upset about you coming over.

JAMES: Whew! The look she gave me. She couldn't talk any American but I could tell. But she loved the steaks I brought over, huh.

SUMI: She kept trying to get me to go back with my first husband's family.

JAMES: Yeah?

SUMI: He was such a mama's boy. And I was his wife living in his family's house. It was like being his mother's maid.

JAMES: I thought she liked me. You know, after a while.

SUMI: I waited until my husband had fallen asleep and sneaked out. It took all night because my husband's family lived way out in the *inaka* ((sticks)). It was so dark, I couldn't see anything. And then I see these big eyes looking at me. Then more eyes, all staring at me. *Obake* ((ogres)) coming to get me for doing this bad thing. I screamed.

JAMES: Ghost.

SUMI: Cows. All these cows. I scared them away.

(Pause)

When I showed up back at our family house in the middle of the night - that look on Mama's face. Like she'd seen *Obake*.

She wouldn't go out of the house, she was so ashamed. They were all talking about me. I didn't care, though. Sometimes Japanese are so two-faced. But it hurt Mama.

JAMES: Don't you think she liked me towards the end? Your Mama? Yeah. She liked me. Your Mama liked me.

SUMI: She didn't like you, James.

JAMES: But when the boat left, at the docks, she hugged me.

SUMI: You hugged her and she screamed.

JAMES: Come on, she did not, she had a big grin.

SUMI: You should have warned her.

JAMES: Your Mama - you just touch her, up she goes.

SUMI: She was embarrassed, everyone staring at this big *gaijin* ((foreigner)) holding her up in the air.

JAMES: She was so tiny.

SUMI: She told me you had a big heart. She used to say that all the time.

(Pause)

She just worried about me. You know, my hips. She worried I wasn't big enough.

(Pause)

You know how Mama was. You're so much bigger than me and Mama knew your baby might kill me.

(Silence. James looks at the Pot)

JAMES: It's stupid but the more you look at it the better it gets. Like it's all off. Like my Pa when he got old. An old man just doesn't stand up straight. They shrink, get all bent up. But that's what makes it special, too, 'cause it tells the story.

I mean a new born baby's fun to look at. But it's not a real person yet. It's like a car right off the lot. It's got no character, no personality. It's got to log a few miles of blood and sweat.

You feed a baby some carrot food here...

(Motions to his mouth)

...and it comes out the other end, what? Carrot food. No change. Why? No character yet. My Old Man? You couldn't go in that bathroom for hours. My Ma would evacuate the house. It takes a whole life of ups and downs, winning and losing to make that baby food go in here a carrot and come out totally different.

(Quiet. Sumi watches James intently)

JAMES: What?

(Sumi smiles and shakes her head)

JAMES: What's the matter?

SUMI: You just...I don't know...You are who you are.

JAMES: You know this pot. You showed it to me last time and I said I liked it? You wanna know the truth? I thought it looked like shit. What'd you call it? Yohen?

SUMI: Uh-huh.

JAMES: But now, now I see it. I can see it.

(Looking at the pot)

You're good. You are, Sumi. Even when I first met you, you could do things so careful. Me? With my big clumsy hands. But you - pouring tea, the way you lay the food out. Jesus, I couldn't believe it - so perfect. Everything like a picture out of - I don't know - some cookbook...

SUMI: (Embarrassed) James...

(Sumi picks up the bowl of snow peas and the bowl of fried salted peas and exits to the kitchen)

JAMES: You know the kid I been working with? Jesse? I'm thinking about having him say over. Him and a couple of other kids for the weekend. I've got a whole new plan for the program. I have a meeting with the director tomorrow morning. I want to break it down into age and weight which is standard. But see, I want to add a special category based on talent - some of the younger ones like Jesse can fight with the older kids to really improve their ---

SUMI: (Interrupts) You sure that's safe?

JAMES: What? They all wear head gear. They'll be in the same weight class and I watch them pretty closely so I can tell --

SUMI: (Interrupts) I mean about the kids staying over. You don't know a thing about them, right?

JAMES: Jesus, Sumi - they're good kids. Nothing's going to happen.

SUMI: What's this kid's last name?

JAMES: Jesse? It's Rollins.

SUMI: Rollins? What's that? Irish? German...

JAMES: I don't know - he's colored, is that what you mean?

(No response)

The two others - one's Mexican, Lupe. And Bobby's white, I think, I can't tell. Why?

SUMI: What does Leo think? I mean having kids over for a day, that's one thing - but having them spend the night, a couple of nights.

JAMES: Leo doesn't care. He likes them over. We're going to take them down to the Olympic to see some boxing. Look, I'm not drinking anymore. And this kid is different than the other one -

SUMI: (Interrupts) Not the Olympic Auditorium, James. It's *abunai* ((dangerous)) - all those riff-raff throwing bottles and firecrackers.

JAMES: They frisk everyone before you go in now.

SUMI: Oh, wonderful. This is great for these kids.

JAMES Sumi, what the hell's wrong. I'm just having some kids over for the weekend. That's all. Sumi?

(No response)

I don't know why you're bitching so much.

SUMI: I don't like that kind of thing. That's all. I'm not used to it. Strange people in the house.

JAMES: I'm not bringing the kids here to the house anyway. It's Leo's place. Jesus, come over here expecting a nice, quiet meal...

(Silence)

Okay, I'll say it again, about that kid I brought home last time. Sumi, I am sorry. I was drunk, I couldn't handle the boy. It will never happen again. Sumi? What else do you want me to say?

SUMI: How come you don't call me?

JAMES: I do.

SUMI: In the beginning you did, but for the last few weeks...

JAMES: I'm busy with things.

SUMI: I don't like not knowing where you are. It makes me worry. People take advantage of you, James. You're too trusting.

(James notices Sumi feeling her shoulder)

JAMES: Here...sit...

(James motions for her to sit down in the couch)

SUMI: It's bending over the wheel...

JAMES: Come on, sit, sit....

(Sumi reluctantly sits and James moves around behind and begins to massage her shoulders. James works in silence and Sumi begins to relax and enjoy it)

(James leans in and nuzzles Sumi's neck. She likes this.)

SUMI: Remember that first meal we had at your parent's house. What was it? (trying to remember) Fried chicken. Fried chicken, string beans, corn bread...

JAMES: You still remember?

SUMI: Corn on the cob... And for dessert that butter pound cake.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, ummm Mama could cook. My Ma's fried chicken, ummm...umm...

SUMI: Remember how they served the meal? Remember?

(Pause. James thinking)

JAMES: (Remembering and starting to laugh) Oh, yeah...Oh, yeah... In one of my letters, I said everybody in Japan sits on the floor.

SUMI: It was so cute.

(Sumi goes to the kitchen)

JAMES: (acting it out) "Mama? Wanda? Leo? What the hell you all doing on the floor?"

SUMI: Not your Papa though.

(Sumi returns holding a six-pack and offers a beer to James)

SUMI: The beer you left last time.

(He takes it without thinking and begins to drink. She sets the rest on the floor next to him)

JAMES: Everybody trying to sit on the dining room floor. They cleared out everything. And that old red picnic blanket spread out. Wanda -- (cont.)

(Sumi goes to record player)

-- and even little Nyla's bony ole legs sticking up like this. Their dresses almost on top of their heads they so tangled up. They just wanted you to feel at home.

(Sumi starts an old favorite tune of theirs. Moves to James)

(Music - Billie Holiday; East of the Sun)

JAMES: Sumi?

SUMI: Just want to make you feel at home.

(They begin to slow dance. James isn't sure what's going on but he likes it)

JAMES: I got a meeting early?...

(Sumi ignores his comment and they continue to dance. She takes his hand and leads James back to the bedroom. James stops and hesitates as Sumi continues off. Then, James turns and follows Sumi off)

(Dim to darkness)

SCENE FOUR - TWO WEEKS LATER

(Sumi stares at a new POT. It's very distorted looking and she's trying to decide whether it works for her)

(James bursts in without knocking. He's carrying a brown paper bag. Towel wrapped around his neck. He looks better - nicer clothes, hair is neat - he just seems to have more life in him)

JAMES: Sorry, I didn't call first. I was down at the gym all day.

(Pulls out a 6-pack of Pellegrino from the bag)

Tadah! I'm in training with the boys. Pellegrino! No "Heini" beer for me. Just "Wop Water!" You know where times flies the fastest? In Italy, 'cause every time you turn around a "da-go's" by!

(laughing heartily at his own joke)

Trying to set an example for the boys. The Junior Golden Gloves' trials are in two weeks and I think we're gonna kick some butt. Yessiree. My boys are gonna be kicking some butt. And my kid, Jesse? Damn, damn, the kid's dangerous. He's half my size -comes up to here - but he's a banger.

(Notices the pot)

Is this a new one? When'd you start making pots again?

SUMI: They know me at the studio. I can go anytime I want to. As long as it's not crowded. So, I've been going in. Well?

JAMES: I don't know. Boy, this one is really - how you say - "yohen"?

SUMI: Mr. Duke, my instructor, thought it was stupid to keep, too. But the more I look at it...Sometimes it looks ugly, sometimes I like it. I haven't figured out which. I don't know. Stupid, huh. Ugly?

JAMES: No, no. I just can't tell, that's all. I'm leaning towards ugly, though.

SUMI: Maybe I'll throw it away, later.

(Sumi and James look at the Pot)

SUMI: I got it. James? My T.A-ship. They approved it. My advisor phoned me.

(James comes over and hugs her)

JAMES: Good. Congratulations!

SUMI: I don't know...It's just...

JAMES: What? What? It's what you wanted, isn't it?

SUMI: Yeah, but my English is not good. Especially my writing.

JAMES: Your English is great, you'll do fine.

SUMI: I've been here a long time, but I still don't feel American sometimes...

JAMES: You're an American, now. One hundred percent, red, white and blue.

SUMI: What about my English?

JAMES: You'll do good, real good.

SUMI: James?

JAMES: Un-huh?

(Silence)

Sumi?

(pause)

SUMI: Can you spend the weekend.

JAMES: I don't know...

SUMI: You know, here, at home. With me.

JAMES: Sumi, this is a bad time. This whole thing with the Golden Gloves and everything. I got to be there for them. This weekend is make or break with the kids. Jesse was in trouble at the home, and I had to go in and talk to him. I'm the only person he'll listen to...

Look, they're depending on me. The kids. The director's excited about our chances in the tournament. Daryl's inviting people from the L.A. Boxing Committee for the Olympics. They still don't have an assistant coach for the local team...

SUMI: The lawn looks so bad, James. It's getting embarrassing. The neighbors, the Bookers, and Mr. Martinez in back there – their gardens are so neat.

JAMES: I know, I know.

SUMI: I can hire a gardener if you want me to, but that's going to cost extra.

JAMES: No, that's okay.

SUMI: I don't want a Mexican gardener either, they're too messy. I want a Japanese gardener even if we have to pay –

JAMES: (Interrupts) No, I'll do it. (beat) Sumi, Sumi. Isn't this what you wanted? Me, off my butt, out of the house, doing something other than watching TV?

SUMI: (Interrupts) And the toilet's making that running sound again.

JAMES: Okay, okay... It's not hard to fix, Sumi, you just lift the lid off...(beat) I'll fix it. I'll fix it, don't worry...

(Silence)

SUMI: You need a beer?

JAMES: What?

SUMI: I went and bought some last week.

(Sumi exits to the Kitchen)

SUMI: Heineken, okay? I got it just for you.

(beat)

JAMES: Jesse? You know, Jesse? I'm going to keep him over the summer. Sumi? It's been working out real good when he comes on the weekends. And last week, he had those problems at the Center - nothing serious, but he needs more room. (beat) Sumi? I don't want the beer. I changed my mind. Hear me? I don't want any beer.

(Sumi enters with an opened beer and glass)

SUMI: You're going to keep him for the summer?

(Sumi begins pouring the beer)

JAMES: Yeah, I'm thinking about that. Jesus, nothing's set.

SUMI: (pouring) Why don't you do something other than boxing. Why does it always have to be boxing. You'll never change. You'll always be the same --

JAMES: I said, I didn't want any beer!

(Uncomfortable silence)

SUMI: Why did you sleep with me?

(Pause)

JAMES: Well...

SUMI: You didn't spend the night.

JAMES: I had that early meeting.

SUMI: Do you know how that made me feel?

JAMES: Sumi...

(awkward silence)

JAMES: You know when this whole thing started? You kicking me out? Wanting me to come back and date you? To change? Before that, anything gets in my way, I can always...(punches hard) But this...(punches, then slowly stops) What is this thing? How do you change yourself?

And then I start to see something inside my head. This picture of these two men going at it in the ring. Black men, bodies shining from the sweat, they look like black gods. Then I see that one of them is me, yeah, it's me - in my prime, young, strapping, full of piss 'n vinegar - I'm beautiful. And the other guy, the other guy is Sugar Ray Robinson. And I'm holding my own. Yeah. I'm a mauler like Graziano, and I'm on the inside getting off some good body shots. And he's backing up. I'm doing alright -And then, boom, out of nowhere - I'm on my butt. No one's ever put me down. I'm okay, I get right up. The bell rings, and I go back to the corner. The whole time, my corner's talking to me but I don't hear them, I'm looking at Sugar Ray and thinking. Is he a boxer or a banger? Or is he both? I start to get worried, I think maybe I have to change something, try something different, maybe go southpaw for a bit, see if that throws him...

(beat)

Now after I saw all this inside my head? That's when I started going down to the club serious like. When I started taking Jesse over there and really working out. I know, I know, you're thinking, "but that's not the kind of change I'm talking about, James." I'm getting there, okay? I'm getting there.

SUMI: That's not what I want for you.

JAMES: Hold on, hold on. Now, I had only one style in the ring - a bulldog - go in and maul the other guy, keep moving in, crowding him, you get hit but you hit more and where it hurts - the kidneys, below the rib cage, the liver - hang all over him, wear him down, then boom... But I didn't do that. I changed my style...

Some people they get hit? Right off, they think they got to change. Like I did, throw everything out and try to be something totally different. They're easy to beat 'cause deep down they don't know who they are.

Other folks, they get hit? They just dig deeper. Go down, just find more of the same shit that made them who they are in the first place. And then just come back the same, only more of the same - bigger, badder, meaner. (beat) I didn't do that. I'm not saying I woulda beat Sugar. Like I said, he was special, he had destiny written on him.

But changing? Being you, but just being more you than you was before? That's changing, too.

I'm a bulldog. All I can do is be more of a bulldog. Boxing? It's what I do. James does boxing and he does it damn good, and he keeps reaching down deep inside and bring up more of the same shit, so James can be a bigger, badder...better, James.

I can't change like you. You're going to school, becoming this professor - you gotta change like you change. And me? I gotta change like I change. (beat) Jesse's staying for the summer.

(silence)

I like kids. You know that Sumi. I like having a ton of kids around making noise and running around. It makes me feel good.

SUMI: I know.

(Pause)

JAMES: He can be sorta like having a kid around the house. Jesse.

SUMI: Don't say that.

JAMES: What?

SUMI: You know what I mean.

JAMES: All right, so it's not like having our own kid - (continue)

SUMI: (overlapping) He's not our kid.

JAMES: -- But it feels good. Okay, it's not the same. Okay? I know.

SUMI: You don't know a thing about this boy.

JAMES: He's a good kid, Sumi.

SUMI: I don't know. I've never met him.

JAMES: He's not like the other one. This kid wants help.

SUMI: So did the other one, only you were too drunk, and I had to break up the fight.

JAMES: Jesse's a good kid. He's different. And so am I now.

(beat)

JAMES: He wants to meet you. How 'bout when I come? Just for dinner? I'll bring him.

SUMI: For a whole summer? What about his own parents? I thought you said he has parents.

JAMES: It's okay. She said it was okay. He stays at the shelter full time now, anyway. He can't stay with his mother - he gets into trouble.

(Pause)

He's not Japanese, right? Sumi? Isn't that it?

SUMI: You don't know a damn thing about - (continue)

JAMES: (overlapping) Gotta be Japanese, Japanese, Japanese...

SUMI: -- this kid - No, that's not it. What are you - it's not that at all. Does Jesse come from a good family?

JAMES: (Interrupts) Sumi, Sumi - what the hell is this 'good family' crap? Jesse doesn't have a real family. If you don't want me to keep him for the summer just say so, okay? Just say so.

(Pause)

Sumi? I wanted kids. You know that. I wanted my own kids. Lotts a them.

SUMI: I was sick.

JAMES: You could have tried after we got back here if you wanted to.

SUMI: I had high-blood pressure.

JAMES: If you didn't want kids, why didn't you just tell me in the beginning.

SUMI: Did you want me to get sick?

JAMES: Then it would have been different, Sumi. Then - (continue)

SUMI: (Overlapping) Did you want me to have a stroke?

JAMES: -- I would have known. I could live with that!

(long silence)

SUMI: I've always loved you. (beat) With you, I could breathe again. I laughed again. I did things I couldn't do before. Say anything I wanted to - things that would shock a Japanese man. But with you, it was okay. And I could tell you liked me. Even though I was divorced. You liked me.

JAMES: What, what are you talking about?

SUMI: But when we came to the States, I saw how people looked at us.

JAMES: Sumi, why are we talking about this now? What does this have to do with Jesse?

SUMI: They told me how it was when you marry someone who isn't white. If you're married to a white G.I., you get treated different.

JAMES: Ah, shit.

SUMI: I didn't believe it. But I saw. I saw how people looked at us.

JAMES: You ever notice how black women look at me, Sumi? Because I'm with you? Whoa. 'This nigger think cause he got him this oriental thing, his shit don't stink.' So we both get looked at funny, that's the way it is, so what's the big fucking deal? And what's this got to do with anything - we were talking about Jesse and me wanting kids.

SUMI: I come from a very proud family. My father was Samurai.

JAMES: Oh, your family, your family again. A good, Japanese Samurai family – Bullshit! You hardly even lived in Japan. You lived in Manchuria, for god's sake.

SUMI: We came from a Samurai line that dates back to the Takeda Clan.

JAMES: Your father ran a fucking lumber mill in Manchuria, and he was ripping off the Chinese people left and right. They hated him. Why shouldn't they hate you? It's their country and the Japs come and make them work for your father like slaves. It's their goddamn country.

(pause)

SUMI: Okay - yes, they spit on us. When my father led us to the train, the Chinese villagers all lined up and spit on us. But, my father...still proud...still strong...

JAMES: (repeating what he's heard many times) 'My father built something. I came from a Samurai family. We had the biggest home in Manchuria...'

SUMI: I'm not talking about that – I'm talking about what's inside. What Papa felt inside. What I feel inside. What I want a baby to feel inside.

JAMES: Nah, it's about something else.

SUMI: It's not James.

JAMES: You not wanting a baby - it's about something totally different.

SUMI: It's not, James.

JAMES: Then what? What is it?

SUMI: I can live with how people look at you. But what I can't accept is how you look at yourself. You believe it. Accept it. I want my baby to feel pride. My pride...

JAMES: What? Accept it? What the – Jesus, fucking Christ. What the hell do you know about my pride? Huh? You don't know shit. You don't know shit about what you're talking. Grow up in some rich Japanese family –

SUMI: (Interrupts) You were different. You were different.

JAMES: How?

SUMI: You were. I could see. That's the man I loved. The one I looked up to – that man. You were proud. So proud. Just like Papa. (Continue)

JAMES: (overlapping) That was in Japan...

SUMI: -- When we got back, I could see the difference. I could. And then, I understood.

(silence)

JAMES: You shit.

SUMI: What?

JAMES: You shit. All these years. All these years. If you didn't like being married to a nigger, why – (continue)

SUMI: (overlapping) No, James, that's not it - you don't understand...

JAMES: -- didn't you just say so? Leave. Get out.

You know sometimes I didn't like being stuck with a fucking Japanese princess. So polite and so proper in Japan. But once we get State-side, boom! 'I don't like cleaning, I don't like cooking' – complain, complain, complain. And everything has to be Japanese. Goddamn everything. I'm up to eyeballs in Japanese.

And I can't help it if you don't like what I am. I'm not going to apologize for it. Jesus, this is what I fucking am. This is America. I'm a black man. And this is where I live. It ain't always pretty, but it's home. And what you see here in front of you is all there is, baby. Not what you saw – thought you saw – 37 years ago in Nagoya.

(Pause)

What I went through, what I was feeling – I don't know... Walking down the street, I just felt strong. Like I could say anything, do anything and it was okay –nobody was going to jump all over my butt. Like this huge weight on me was lifted off. And just something like walking... Walking – swinging my arms, kicking my legs up – it felt so good. So good. "I" was walking. I wasn't walking and watching to see how other people were reacting to me walking – Nah, nah, I was just walking, me, swinging "my" arms, kicking "my" legs, strutting "my" stuff...

(Pause)

He doesn't exist anymore. It wasn't real.

SUMI: Then what am I doing here? Who have I been married to for all years, James?

JAMES: Fucking princess looking down her nose at me...

SUMI: (Interrupts) After 37 years married to you, and putting up with your crap...and your crap has nothing to do with your color, believe me.

(Pause)

I wanted to leave. In the beginning... And the other Japanese wives on the base - (a disgusted expression) I was from Manchuria... I was so lonely. Sometimes I would just pull all the shades and cry all day, waiting for you to come home. (hint of accusation) And sometimes you didn't come home, James.

(Silence)

When we moved to L.A., I felt good. Finally, I could feel at home. But they looked down their noses at me, the Nisei. I married a G. I. And on top of that he's *kurochan* ((Black)). I was so lonely. I wanted to go home. I wanted to go home so bad.

(Pause)

JAMES: Sumi?

SUMI: Yes?

(Pause)

JAMES: Is that why you didn't want the baby? Because you didn't want to have my baby? A—(continue)

SUMI: (overlapping) Don't say things like that.

JAMES: -- black baby?

SUMI: You didn't hear me - it's about pride, pride, not color.

JAMES: I think you're getting it mixed up.

SUMI: I didn't even know what this color thing was. Black, white – you were the Americans, you were the victors.

JAMES: Your pride changed into something else.

SUMI: I was sick, the doctor said so. (beat) James, what are you -- I don't know, I don't know, I'm mixed up – Did you want me to die for your baby? Is that what you wanted?

JAMES: You wouldn't have died.

SUMI: IS THAT WHAT YOU WANTED!

(Long silence)

(Silence. Notices the pot. Looks at it)

I can't tell if it's good or...

(Sumi, sits down and begins to cry)

I don't know what's happened to us...

JAMES: Sumi, please. Stop it. Sumi.

SUMI: (crying) I can't help it.

JAMES: Goddamn it. Stop!

(Silence. Sumi gradually gains control of herself)

SUMI: James. I know in my heart. I wanted your baby.

(Pause)

JAMES: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Sumi.

SUMI: About what?

JAMES: I don't know. I'm just sorry.

(Pause)

SUMI: James?

JAMES: Yes?

SUMI: Maybe we can adopt. We talked about it.

JAMES: Jesus, Sumi. Look at us. We could be grandparents.

SUMI: I know. But from Japan. I have family there still in Nagoya. My cousin, the one who's in the government? It can be arranged. People do it all the time.

JAMES: Sumi, we're old. Old people don't adopt. Besides, I don't want a Japanese baby.

(Awkward silence)

SUMI: Are you staying tonight?

(No response)

Why don't you stay over? This is your home.

(No response)

Please. Please stay, James.

JAMES: I can't.

SUMI: Just tonight.

JAMES: No.

SUMI: I want you back. James, I want you back here. This is our home.

(Sum reaches out to the Pot)

SUMI: It's ugly.

(James is about to leave. Sumi begins to, very slowly, push the pot towards the edge of the table. James stops, watches, trying to figure out what she's doing)

JAMES: Sumi? Sumi, don't. Stop it.

(Sumi keeps pushing. Almost to the edge. James starts to move towards her)

SUMI: No.

(James stops. She begins to push...)

JAMES: Jesus, fucking Christ, Sumi...

(Sumi pushes the Pot closer and closer to the edge. Teetering at the edge – she stops)

SUMI: Please. James?

JAMES: I'm sorry.

SUMI: Do you love me?

(Pause)

JAMES: Yes. Yes, I do.

(James watches her for a beat, then exits. Sumi stares at the door for a moment. Then down at the Pot balanced on the table's edge. A long beat. Then, slowly, she reaches down and places her hand on the Pot. She feels its texture, almost as if her hands were trying to discover something in their feel. She lifts it and begins to examine it)

(Music - Thelonius Monk; I'm Getting Sentimental Over You)

(Fade to black)

END OF PLAY.

* The Title - YOHEN is a term my pottery teacher once used to describe a piece we had pulled from the kiln. We worked with the traditional *noborigama* or climbing kiln, using wood and oil to fire it. Upon opening the

kiln, there are always a number of works damaged during the course of firing. They were *kizumono*. Oddly colored, peculiar flashing, warped - all products of a process that invites the unpredictable forces of nature to participate. I was in charge of breaking them up and scattering them on the dirt road for fill. These throwaways tended to be in higher number with Seto-san. There was a loose style to his work that lent itself to this result more than if he been compulsively diligent. This was his character and choice. He liked to tempt those unknown hands of fate to more readily instruct, even if it meant a larger percentage of unusable pots.

While unloading the kiln, there would be a piece damaged in the firing we would put aside to be discarded later. However, the more Seto-san looked at it, the more he could see it held an aesthetic essence - derived from the very fact of it being the result of an *accident* - that made it artfully compelling. The hands of conscious artist design, and, unseen forces creating in concert. This piece was referred to by Seto Hiroshi as *yohen*.

As I learned in time, *yohen* is traditionally used in specific reference to the *coloring* of pots and that my teacher's usage to include physical misshapeness, was a broader interpretation, perhaps again, to suit his own particular approach - expansive, allowing greater spaces between the logic of his aesthetic rationalism. Hiroshi Seto was a character.

Interestingly, the idea that *yohen* pertains to *coloring*, is in fact, more appropriate to this American play where we live in a highly racialized world. And where the tradition, is to focus on color.

Program notes for American Conservatory Theatre Sept '03 Production of
YOHEN

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES --

The original draft of YOHEN was written quite a few years ago. It was inspired by research I was doing at the time on the topic of Japanese War Brides, and, the desire to write a theatrical response to my play THE WASH which turned on the wife's final decision, as opposed to the husband's, at the end. With the initial writing of YOHEN, I was enthused about the possibilities for the piece. Issues of cultural intersection expanded the world of my usual themes. However, after submitting the draft to the commissioning theater I received only a form letter stating they had no interest. Though never stated, I had the impression it was because of the nature of the material - a Black and Japanese interracial marriage. Perhaps it was the time, when the racial dialogue was still exclusively Black and White and didn't include an African American-Japanese American story in this company's vision of theater.

I put the piece away and began to work on other things. And yet YOHEN, in an always unexpected manner, would surface. I had a director acquaintance who had shown the piece to the local actor, Danny Glover, who became intrigued by the interracial take on family. My friend, the late actress Nobu McCarthy, was in town so we arranged an informal reading at the house with Danny and Nobu. It went well and there was excitement about what we might do with the piece. Avenues didn't open readily and people became otherwise engaged. YOHEN fell to the way side. It surfaced next as a reading at American Conservatory Theatre(ACT) in San Francisco during Joy Carlin's tenure as Artistic Director, with Nobu and Steven Anthony Jones reading this time. We discussed its future, Steven being particularly enthusiastic, then it once again was set aside. A few years later, we workshopped it at Berkeley Repertory - two times I believe - and it was even announced as part of their upcoming season. Because of my reservations about the piece not being quite right yet, Tony Taccone honored my wishes and withdrew it from the season. Then a year or so later Danny Glover returned to the picture. I got a call from him that he wanted to develop it into a half hour show for a series he was producing for one of the big cable stations. That ultimately fell through but it re-ignited both our interests in doing it on stage. We called around, chased down leads. Danny, Nobu and I even schlepped ourselves to NY to read it there. Leads eluded us. Then, after much planning, un-planning, and planning again, it was produced on stage at East West Players in co-production with the Robey Theatre Company in Los Angeles. Of course, starring Nobu and Danny, directed by Ann Bowen. I thank Danny who was so instrumental in supporting the production. During its rehearsals, I was on the road continuously, hurrying to finish my film for Sundance and opening an involved work in another City. I flew in for the opening.

That was pretty much the extent of my involvement. There were good people stewarding the production and I had faith they would do right by it. My faith was not misplaced. It had a very successful run. An interesting side-note for the two theaters was the mix of Asian and Black faces for each night's performance. For Los Angeles, in particular, given its history of African American-Asian relations, this was encouraging.

Time passed and I longed to do it again, this time with more of my involvement. In the interim, Danny and I were approached by the *other* big cable station to develop YOHEN into a movie. Drafts were written and rewritten, written and rewritten... Then on another front, after a series of discussions with Artistic Director of American Conservatory Theatre, Carey Perloff, and Dramaturge, Paul Walsh, we decided to arrange an in-house reading. It was to be with Steven Anthony Jones and Dian Kobayashi before staff and conservatory students. With this new cast and simple setting, we were taken by the potential for a new interpretation to the material. I was particularly excited about the prospect of being able to revisit this piece, a straight forward tale examining the complexities of

long-term love. Now I've been given the opportunity with this new cast, director Seret Scott and the support of ACT.

A final note. Nobu McCarthy passed away last year while shooting a film in Brazil. She was a very special friend to my wife, Diane Takei, and myself. Nobu will be dearly missed by us as both an intimate and as a gifted and favorite working associate. As she was so much a part of the development of this play, I dedicate this production to the memory of her, Nobu McCarthy.

COPYRIGHT PHILIP KAN GOTANDA 1997