

▲ Act Two, Scene Fourteen

Scene Fourteen

The

Wash

Darkness. Two days later. Onstage, the TV light comes on. NOBU's face lit by the screen's light. Lights come up and NOBU is now lit in a pool of light, seated at sofa watching TV. No kite on the coffee table. The rest of the place is in darkness. MASI is lit in a pool of light. She stands, staring pensively downstage into space. In her arms she is holding the brown paper bag of newly washed clothes. She turns and moves towards NOBU's place.

As she enters the lights come up full on the house.

NOBU is still sitting on the sofa watching TV. MASI goes over to the kitchen table and takes out the newly washed clothes, stacking them in neat piles on the table. She then proceeds to pick up the clothes scattered on the floor and to put them in the bag. She is ready to leave. MASI takes the bag of dirty clothes and moves towards the door, then stops. She makes up her mind about something she has been struggling with for a while. Masi returns to the kitchen and leaves the bag of NOBU's dirty clothes on the table. As she opens the door to leave, MASI looks back at NOBU and watches him for a brief moment.

During this whole time, NOBU has never turned around to look at MASI though he is very aware of what is going on. MASI sadly turns and exits through the door. Lights dim with NOBU silently watching TV. Briefly, NOBU's face is lit by the dancing light of the television screen. At the same instant, the brown paper bag of wash on the table is illuminated by a shaft of light. His phone begins to ring. NOBU turns to look at it. Blackout on NOBU. The wash fades into darkness. The phone continues to ring for a few moments. Then, silence.

[END OF PLAY]

A Song For A Nisei Fisherman had a workshop production at Stanford University in 1980 by the Asian American Theatre Project.

DIRECTOR. David Henry Hwang

ITSUTA MATSUMOTO played by David Pating

Characters

ITSUTA MATSUMOTO (Matsuzaki), the fisherman's grandson
JEFFREY (Narasaki), his lawyer
TOCHAN, the fisherman
KACHAN, her mother
MOSAN, her father
ROBERT, her brother
MILITARY PERSON, the fisherman's neighbor
SINGER, the fisherman's neighbor
TAXI DANCERS, the fisherman's neighbors
MUSICIAN, the fisherman's neighbor

The play was first produced at the Asian American Theater Company in 1981.

DIRECTOR. David Henry Hwang

PRODUCER. Wilbur Obata

LIGHTING DESIGN. Linda Obata

COSTUME DESIGN. Lydia Tanji

SOUND DESIGN. Christopher Moore

STAGE MANAGER. Stan Wong

Cast

ITSUTA MATSUMOTO. Marc Hayashi

MICHIKO MATSUMOTO. Judi Nihei

TOCHAN. James Hirabayashi

KACHAN. Suzi Okazaki

MOSAN. Lane Nishikawa

ROBERT. Kent Horii

JEFFREY. Ken Narasaki

KATS. John Nishio

TAXI DANCERS. Taylor Gilbert and Peggy Ford

MILITARY PERSON. William Ellis Hammond

SINGER. Mitzi Abe

MUSICIAN. Lane Hirabayashi

The second production was with the Mark Taper Forum as part of the New Theatre for Now Festival in 1982. Gordon Davidson was artistic director.

DIRECTORS. Mako and Shizuko Hoshi

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGN. Fred Chuang

COSTUME DESIGN. Terence Tam Soon

MUSIC COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE. Kazu Matsui and Jeffrey Takiguchi

STAGE MANAGER. Dianne Lewis Hall

Cast

ITSUTA MATSUMOTO. Mako

MICHIKO MATSUMOTO. Dian Kobayashi

TOCHAN. Ernest Harada

KACHAN. Josie Pepito

MOSAN. Keone Young

ROBERT. Leigh Kim

JEFFREY. Nelson Mashita

KATS. Jim Ishida

TAXI DANCERS. Diane Civita and Sarah Ballantine

MILITARY PERSON. Charles Tachovsky

SHAKUHACHI. Kazu Matsui

BASS. Jeffrey Takiguchi

Author's thanks to David Hwang, Mako, and Eric Hayashi

Characters

ITSUTA "ICHAN" MATSUMOTO, the Nisei (second generation Japanese American) **FISHERMAN**

MICHIKO, Wife. Nisei woman

TOCHAN, FISHERMAN's father. Émigré from Hiroshima, Japan, living in the Hawaiian Islands

KACHAN, FISHERMAN's mother

MOSAN, FISHERMAN's older brother. In his twenties

ROBERT, FISHERMAN's older son. Doctor. Late twenties

JEFFREY,* FISHERMAN's younger son. Law school dropout. Late twenties

KATS, Nisei. FISHERMAN's longtime fishing buddy from Stockton, California. Produce man

JOSEPHINE, taxi dancer. Caucasian female, around thirty

CORA, taxi dancer. Caucasian female, around thirty

MILITARY PERSON/RACETRACK ANNOUNCER, Caucasian male, around thirty-five

MUSICIANS, a *shakuhachi* (Japanese flute) and an acoustic double bass

*If the songs are used in the production, then JEFFREY is also the SINGER.

Place

Stockton, California.

Time

1981.

Settings

Scene 1. Catching fish.

Scene 2. Cleaning fish.

Scene 3. Cooking fish.

Scene 4. Eating fish.

Scene 5. Catching fish.

Rough Timetable

ITSUTA MATSUMOTO: Born around 1913 in the Hawaiian Islands.

TOCHAN scene (eleven years old): 1924 in Kauai.

KACHAN scene (seventeen years old): 1930 in Kauai.

UCLA (eighteen to twenty-one years old): 1931–35 in Los Angeles.

University of Arkansas (twenty-one to twenty-five years old): 1935–39 in Arkansas.

Taxi dance hall scene: 1938 in San Francisco.

Buddhist Church bazaar scene with MICHIKO: 1940 in Stockton, California.

Internment camp scene: 1942 in Rohwer, Arkansas.

Swan and the baby scene: 1947 in Stockton.

KATS and the boat scene: 1970 in Stockton.

FISHERMAN, MICHIKO, and ROBERT scene: 1973 in Stockton.

MICHIKO's diary scene: 1974 in Stockton.

FISHERMAN and JEFFREY scene: 1976 in Stockton.

MICHIKO passes away: 1978.

FISHERMAN dies: 1981 (sixty-eight years old).

Notes

SET. The set should be as simple as possible. Several low risers accommodate the needs of various scenes. Along the upstage area there is a riser with a scrim in front of it. It should be a large enough area to hold the bass player, the *shakuhachi* player, and the SINGER.

PROPS. All props, such as fishing pole, creel, or frying pan, are to be mimed except where otherwise noted.

MUSIC. A *shakuhachi* (Japanese flute) player who, ideally, can play other percussive instruments such as *taiko* (Japanese drum). An acoustic double bass player. If songs are used, then these instruments provide accompaniment. Otherwise, musicians should attend rehearsals and compose music.

Preset

A pool of light center stage.

Darkness. Musicians lit behind scrim on upstage riser.

SINGER:

Shadows wash the room, linger in the air,
Fall upon the man, sleeping in the chair.

It's a photograph in black and white
The characters are grey.

Caught precisely in a tragic pose
Of strange decay.

Your rich embroidered memories . . .

The feast after the hunt;

Those fine college days;

The wife, the home, the children;

Your song it plays and plays.

The rich American dream is here to stay, is here to
stay . . .

(MUSICIANS dim to darkness.)

Scene One

Catching Fish

Lights up onstage. A tree motif gobo is lit against the upstage backdrop. The FISHERMAN enters looking for a spot to fish. He moves quite easily, though appearing to be in his mid-sixties. The FISHERMAN wears baggy khaki pants with a faded red flannel shirt. On his feet, a pair of dark brown work shoes and on his head, a hat. Over his shirt he wears a worn tan fishing vest. He mimes carrying a spool and creel.

FISHERMAN: Now that looks like a good spot. It's deep but with a bit of swirl on the top so that you know there's some current there, not stagnant. And see all those overhanging cypresses? They provide a little cool shade. Not too much, but just enough so the fish can rest and hide away for a while. And you know what's in all those leaves and branches? Mushi,* bugs. Lots and lots of bugs. And when they fall in the water, oh, the fish gobble them up. *(Sees a fish jump)* Ara!** *(Lowering voice)* See the big one jump. Right near the swirl. What'd I tell you. *(Setting down the creel and preparing to fish)* Now me, I use about a two- to four-pound-test line. Usually I prefer four pound 'cause if you catch a big one they'll snap your line. And around a size eight hook. I don't like the pretied ones. Like to tie my own.

(Ties hook onto line while talking. Cuts excess line off with his teeth, spitting it out. Pulls hook while gripping line to make sure it holds.)

And two or three small BB shots for weight.

(Clamps lead weights onto line with his teeth again instead of using pliers)

*Mushi, "insects."

**Ara, "oh."



*Mako in A Song For A Nisei Fisherman,
Aquarius Theatre, Hollywood*

Photo by Craig Schwartz,
courtesy Nancy Hereford/MTF Press

Scene One



Now the bait. Oh, first I get out a small marshmallow. That's right. Now don't laugh. This old Buddhahead's not crazy. *(Playfully, looks around secretively)* That's my secret. Now watch. I get the marshmallow. Okii no wa dame.* Gotta be small size. Push the marshmallow through the hook and slide it all the way up the line to where the BB shots are. Then put some salmon eggs, oh, two or three, on the hook. Gotta be Pautzke's Balls O'Fire salmon eggs. Only problem is, this stuff is so damn expensive. *(Holds bottle up)* Two dollars and twenty-five cents, and that's on sale. Stuff's like caviar. And the bottle's half the size it used to be. Hell, I ought to put this stuff on rice, eat it like sushi. Now I want to put the line right near the swirl where the fish jumped. *(As he casts forward, he tangles his line in some overhanging branches. Embarrassed.)* Must have grown down since I was here last. *(Casts the line)* Yosh! ** *(Admiring cast. Sets pole down.)* Now, as the BB shots sink the line, the bait comes to rest on the bottom. And a lotta times there's moss and snags down there, especially in a cool shady spot like this, so the eggs are hidden away in all that and the fish can't see it. But, the marshmallow floats. And because it floats, as it melts, the marshmallow slides up the line from the BB shots toward the bait, causing the bait to slowly rise. It's no longer hidden in the moss or snags. Instead, the salmon eggs are proudly floating there, looking so tasty.

A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman

(Reaches into his creel and furtively pulls something out, looking around to see if anyone's watching. Then he quickly starts throwing stuff in the water, all the while looking around to see if he's being watched.)

What am I doing? Shhh! I'm chumming. Is it illegal? *(Innocently)* I don't know. *(Back to normal self)* Besides, it attracts the fish. Hell, they love cottage cheese. Oh, you can

*Big ones are no good.

**Got it!

Scene One

▲
A Song use lots of stuff to chum. Corn, they love corn, except that
For A it always attracts the carp. Carp, they eat anything. Once I
Nisei even tried some old nuka, the stinky paste Michiko puts
Fisherman the vegetables in to make pickles. Whew! Kusai yo!*
 Could smell the stuff for miles. Had the whole place to
 myself. Just me . . . and the carp. And if the carp are big
 enough they snap your line. And if they're just small fry
 and you catch 'em, you can't even eat the damn carp. Meat
 tastes funny, chotto kusai.** But back in the islands—
 Kauai, that's where I grew up—it was different. We had
 fish just like the carp, a trash fish, and we used to feed 'em
 to our hunting dogs. Fillet 'em real quick and just toss 'em
 to the dogs raw.

(Reflecting. Reaches down to check his line.)

You know, there was one dog, what was his name . . .
 Tengu. Yeah, that's what I called him, Tengu. He was my
 dog. Well, he wasn't really mine. One of the family's hunt-
 ing dogs, but I sort of unofficially adopted him. It was a
 secret just between me and Tengu. That was a long time
 ago, I was a kid, but I can still remember him. Boy, was
 Tengu a tough son of a bitch. Wasn't that big, almost on the
 small size, but tough, a real scrapper. Wouldn't take any
 crap from any of the other dogs . . . and wouldn't let
 anybody touch him. It's like he wanted to get petted but
 there was always something inside that just wouldn't let
 go, and he'd end up growling and barking at you.

Anyway, in Kauai, we lived in the inaka, out in the
 sticks, and we used Tengu and the other dogs for boar
 hunting. One day Mosan—he's one of my brothers, boy,
 he's a crazy one—he and I decided to go hunt boar, so we
 packed everything and headed out with the dogs.

(Turns and transforms into a young man. Acts out the following.)

*Stinky!

**Slightly smelly.

Scene One

▲
 Right off Tengu and the dogs caught the scent of some-
 thing and took off running after it. When we caught up the
 pigs were already cornered. A female and two small pig-
 lets, backed against some rocks. Mosan and I were just
 bringing our guns up when suddenly something jumped
 right past us. It was a huge male boar. One of the biggest
 I'd ever seen. It was an ugly, mean sucker with two big
 tusks. Slammed right into Tengu's side and then all hell
 broke loose. Pigs squealing, dogs barking, Mosan cursing,
 "Goddamn son of a bitch, you goddamn son of a bitch!"
 He was kicking and punching, trying to clear out the dogs
 so he could get a clear shot. And then, suddenly . . . it was
 all quiet. Everybody was gone. Taken off running every
 which way, except for Tengu. He was lying on the ground.
 His side had been ripped open and he was making these
 funny gurgling sounds in his throat.

I knelt down beside him and examined the wound.
 About a five-inch tear with part of the intestine bulging
 out. Using some old rags, I wrapped them around his body
 so the wound was at least covered. It didn't look too hope-
 ful, but it was the best I could do. I poured some water into
 my cupped hand and offered it to Tengu but at first he
 wouldn't drink. "Drink, Tengu, just a little. Come on, boy.
 That's good. That will make you feel better." *(Getting up
 to leave)* "Take care, Tengu. I'll be back in a little while."
*(Stops, turning back to Tengu. Puts hands together in Bud-
 dhist prayer.)* "Namu Amida Butsu."

I turned and left to catch up with Mosan and the dogs.
 Later, when we returned, Tengu's body was gone. Except
 for the blood spilled where he had fallen, nothing. We
 returned home. Days passed and the incident was slowly
 forgotten.

About three weeks later, the family was sitting down to
 dinner when the dogs began barking wildly. We all ran out-
 side to see what it was. I couldn't believe my eyes. There,

▲
A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman

Scene One

▲
 A Song limping slowly into the yard, was Tengu. He looked horrible, all skin and bone. But he was alive. (*Runs up and puts arm around the imaginary dog, hugging and petting him*)
 For A "Tengu! Hey, he's still alive! Tengu! Tengu! Hey, he's letting me pet him." (*Tengu starts to growl at the others and has to be restrained.*) "Watch out, stay back! Only me." (*For a moment he quietly pets Tengu. Then slowly rises, becoming the old fisherman.*)
 Nisei
 Fisherman

Well, Tengu lived for about six months after that. He wasn't too good for anything. He would just lie on the porch, napping in the sun. He'd yawn occasionally, growl now and then at the world to let it know Tengu was still there. And as the sun moved across the porch, he'd get up from the shadows, move into the sunlight, and plop down again, yawn and fall asleep. But one day Tengu wouldn't eat. He'd never done this before and he seemed restless. That night I woke up. (*Sound cue of a dog barking*) I could hear Tengu barking like hell. As if something was out there. None of the other dogs were barking, only Tengu. And it was an unusually loud bark for Tengu, like his old bark when he was healthy. But it was a short burst and then it was quiet, so I went back to sleep.

The next morning when I got up, Tengu was gone. I kept wondering if maybe he caught the scent of some big boar and was off chasing it down. And that one day he'd come limping back home just like last time, good old Tengu. But this time, this time Tengu didn't come home . . .

(*Composing himself, he notices a nibble. Carefully picks up the pole, waiting, waiting . . . snags for a moment, thinks he has it. Then, realizes he's missed it. Reels up slack line, slightly embarrassed. Sits down on the edge of the riser as if it were a shoreline holding the fishing pole.*)

I remember once—this is back in Kauai—oh, I was 'bout eleven years old, Tochan* and I had taken a load of

*Papa.

Scene One

▲
 fish in the wagon to sell in town. Usually Kachan* and I took the fish to town to sell but Kachan was very pregnant . . . again. Anyway, it was the end of the day. We'd sold everything and we were starting to return home. Tochan let me hold the reins to Taro, that was our one and only horse. Boy, that bugger was old . . .
 A Song
 For A
 Nisei

TRANSITION. *Fishing pole that is still being held in FISHERMAN's hands gradually becomes the reins to the wagon. FISHERMAN is now eleven years old. TOCHAN enters counting money he has made from the day's fish sale. Sits down beside FISHERMAN and motions for him to get the wagon moving. FISHERMAN speaks with a slight Hawaiian pidgin nuance.*
 Fisherman

FISHERMAN (*holding reins*): Come on, Taro. Come on, boy. Let's go . . .

TOCHAN (*interrupts. Sees his drinking buddy, Isamu*): Itsu, matte, matte. ** OI! ISAMU! YO! ISAMU!

(*TOCHAN listens to Isamu's response. Isamu is unseen and unheard by audience. ITSUTA doesn't like this man.*)

TOCHAN: Ore? Sold all our sakana. Business been going real good. Making good money, lotsa money. Nomu? Drink? Yosh!†

FISHERMAN: Tochan, mo' better we go home . . .

TOCHAN (*interrupts*): One drink, Itsu, one drink, that's all.

FISHERMAN: We told Kachan we be home early, she's going to be plenty angry yo. 'Member what happen last time?

TOCHAN: Ano nah, Itsu. I haven't seen Isamu in a long time.

We talk business. Right, Isamu? We going talk business.

FISHERMAN: But getting dark and we told Kachan we be . . .

*Mama.

**Itsu, "wait, wait."

†Ore, "me"; sakana, "fish"; yosh, "alright."

Scene One

▲

A Song TOCHAN (*interrupts*): Yakamashi! (*Giving FISHERMAN some money*) Here's the money. Go pake,* Chinaman's store and pick up Kachan's medicine. Come right back with the leftover money. I'll meet you here by the wagon.

For A Read your book. Yosh, Isamu.

Nisei (*TOCHAN walks over to the riser stage right with Isamu. They enter a small cafe/bar. At the same time, the FISHERMAN goes stage left to complete the transaction at the store. He returns and seats himself in the wagon reading his book.*)

Fisherman TOCHAN (*bowing and greeting other people*): Dōka, dōka.** The mango? No worry, no worry. The new mango I going make going to be the biggest, tastiest—no spots, too. I get your money back. You get two times your money back. Oh, Isamu, don't pour so much. (*Gulps down the sake. Holds out his glass while Isamu pours.*)

You already know why I put my family out in inaka. How many times I gotta tell you? 'Cause of the big fish pond. Like one private fish stock. Got all we need to live on. What we don't need, sell to people in town. Extra money, Isamu. Even you buy the fish. And the kids work on old man Knapper plantation. Bumbye with the Matsumoto Mango, the fish, kids working, going come rich, Isamu. Oh, domo, domo. †

(*Accepting drink. FISHERMAN has become impatient waiting for TOCHAN at the wagon. Enters tavern, bows to people shyly, and tugs at TOCHAN's sleeve.*)

FISHERMAN: Tochan. We go home.

TOCHAN (*notices son*): Eh? How come you're in here? Tochan told you to wait outside. Go. Study your book. (FISHERMAN exits tavern but waits right outside door.)

*Yakamashi, "quiet"; go pake, Hawaiian for "Chinese."

**How are you?

†Inaka, "the sticks"; bumbye, pidgin for "by-and-by"; domo, "thanks."

Scene One

▲

TOCHAN: He's a good student, yeah. Can read American like haole.* Best student in class. Not like Mosan. (*Feeling his sake. Starts to clap hands, singing a lively Japanese drinking song. Gets up and drunkenly begins to dance around. Stops, laughing loudly and wiping perspiration from his brow. Accepting another drink from Isamu. FISHERMAN enters.*)

TOCHAN: Domo. Easy, if you use atama** like me. Good business sense. Gonna be big important man, Isamu. When I go back Japan they going meet me at the train station like one boss man. (*Standing*) BANZAI! BANZAI! BANZAI MATSUMOTO-SENSEI!

(*Unnoticed by TOCHAN, FISHERMAN is watching. TOCHAN notices Isamu and others laughing at his boasts. TOCHAN is upset.*)

TOCHAN: Yeah, that's it. Go ahead and laugh. All the time laugh at Matsumoto, neh. Big joke, nah. Horafuki, † nah. You wait and see. My new mango going make me rich.

FISHERMAN: Tochan, let's go. Kachan's gonna worry yo. And you drink too much already.

TOCHAN (*irritated by son's admonition*): Too much drink? Itsu, men never drink too much. Never. Men can always drink more sake. Maybe cannot talk haole good. Maybe cannot read those books of yours. But men can always drink. Oi! Arakawa-san! More sake for me and Isamu. (*As TOCHAN is bringing a cup to his mouth to drink, FISHERMAN reaches in and tugs on his sleeve.*)

FISHERMAN: Tochan, come on. We go home. (*Sake spills all over.*)

TOCHAN: Ah kuso! ‡

FISHERMAN: They're poking fun at you.

*Caucasian.

**Head.

†Big liar.

‡Shit!

▲

A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman

Scene One

▲

A Song TOCHAN (*angered by his comment*): Nanda? Gaki!* (*Slaps FISHERMAN on the back of his head. Realizes what he's done. Composes himself.*) Itsu, we're talking business. Nah,

For A Isamu. And men drink when they talk business. (*Offers money to FISHERMAN*) Buy some candy or something.

Nisei FISHERMAN (*refusing to take money*): Store went closed already.

Fisherman TOCHAN: Go. Tochan finish soon.
(FISHERMAN turns to leave.)

TOCHAN: Itsu.
(FISHERMAN turns to look at TOCHAN. TOCHAN seems on the verge of saying something but changes his mind. Motions for his son to leave. As the FISHERMAN returns to the wagon, TOCHAN begins to drink again while singing a sad melody. Slowly falls asleep.)

FISHERMAN, who has fallen in the wagon, is suddenly awakened by Isamu.)

FISHERMAN: Tochan pilikia? ** Again? (FISHERMAN goes into the tavern and helps his father back to the wagon.)

Tochan, we go home.

TOCHAN (*drunkenly*): Banzai, banzai Matsumoto-sensei . . .
(FISHERMAN helps TOCHAN sit in the back of the wagon. He grabs the reins, glances back at TOCHAN, then forward again.)

FISHERMAN: Come on, Taro. Come on, boy . . .
(Continues.)

TRANSITION. *Holding reins to handling a fishing pole, as TOCHAN exits from the scene.*

FISHERMAN (*continuing*): . . . Come on. Come on, fish. Just a little nibble. Ah, that's it. A little bit more. (*Snags and hooks fish*) Gotcha! (*Talks while playing fish*) It's a shoreline so don't need my net . . . (*Points to net strapped around his*

*What? Brat!
**Hawaiian for "in trouble."

Scene One

▲

A Song *shoulder* . . . to land the fish. In the islands we used throw nets to catch fish. Illegal here, though. Can't catch 'em with a net. Big fine.

For A (*Just as he pulls it up on the shore, the fish wiggles off the hook. Gets on knees and scrambles around after the flapping fish but it's slippery. It falls into the water and he lunges in, cornering it against the shoreline. Pulls out his net looking around to see if anyone is watching.*)

Nisei FISHERMAN (*to the audience*): Shhh! (*Scoops up fish triumphantly*) Yosh!

Fisherman (*Blackout on FISHERMAN. MUSICIANS lit behind scrim.*)

Scene Two

Cleaning Fish

Lights come up on FISHERMAN cleaning fish.

FISHERMAN: See the kinda brownish color on this trout?

That's because it's newly planted. The native ones don't have that. Like this one over here. See, no brown color, just beautiful rainbow. It doesn't affect the meat, still good eating, just doesn't look good.

Trout you really don't have to scale much. Not like striped bass. They got lotta scales. Good eating though, good sashimi if it's fresh. Not as soft as maguro, tuna, but I think it has more taste. Besides, I like my sashimi kinda chewy. Maguro just melts in your mouth, too soft.

See, now you grab the fish from the back with your thumb and middle finger in the gills, get a good grip that way. And the belly facing up towards you. And you cut from the gills to the anal opening. Then you just reach in and grab from the gills and pull out and down. See the gills come out with all the intestines attached.

(Stands and walks towards audience to give them a better view.)

Let's see what we have here. This is the peritoneum, the smooth membrane covering, and this is like the main aortic vessel in the human body. And that's . . .

TRANSITION. KACHAN enters carrying a load of fish for FISHERMAN to clean. Notices he isn't cleaning. FISHERMAN is around seventeen years old.

KACHAN (*irritated*): Ichán. Nan shitoru?*

*What are you doing?

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Scene Two

FISHERMAN: Kachan, more fish?

KACHAN: What look like? Now clean, clean. Plenty more to go yet. A Song

FISHERMAN: Kachan, I've been working since I got back from school. I still got plenty of homework to do . . . For A

KACHAN: Hayo, clean. Tochan get mad, yo. * He wants these all salt-packed for later on. You know who catches hell if it's no done when he gets back. Work first, then school. Nisei

Chichan, abunai yo! yo! Get down from that tree. Yachiyó, you suppose to watch your sister. Fisherman

(KACHAN dumps a load of fish while FISHERMAN sits down behind table and starts to clean. She takes the fish cleaned by FISHERMAN, places it in a barrel, and sprinkles it with salt.)

FISHERMAN (*cleaning*): Kachan, are we samurai?

KACHAN: Samurai? Who told you that?

FISHERMAN: Mosan. That's what he telling people at school. He's telling them that we come from a great line of samurai. And that it's their duty as good Japanese to show him their homework, or they get one broken head. *(imitates biting someone with a sword.)*

KACHAN: Aho! Idiot! That brother of yours. My back, Ichán. That comes from working the rice fields. Farmers from Hiroshima. That's what we are. Plenty of families around here big talk being samurai. All liars, Ichán. Anyone who left Japan had nothing but big dreams and empty pocket. Work, work. *(Under breath)* Wait till Tochan hears about that brother of yours . . . Samurai . . .

(Both working.)

FISHERMAN: Know what else happened at school?

KACHAN: Mata fight? ** Mosan get you into . . .

FISHERMAN: No, no.

KACHAN: Mosan flunk class?

*Hurry, Tochan will get mad.

**Fighting again?

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▲ Scene Two

FISHERMAN (*interrupts*): No, no Kachan, nothing like that.
(KACHAN notices FISHERMAN has stopped cleaning.)

A Song
KACHAN: Holo, holo then.*

For A
FISHERMAN: I went transferred to a new class. I'm taking
homemaking, a homemaking class.

Nisei
KACHAN: Homemaking? What for? That's just for girls.
Your sister maybe, but you one boy.

Fisher man
FISHERMAN: Mr. Marshall, the principal . . . remember
Mr. Marshall? Mr. Marshall and Mrs. Thompson, the
teacher, said can.

KACHAN: You're gonna shame Tochan. Between you and
Mosan . . .

FISHERMAN: I went talk to them and they both said it was
all right. Told them I like learn how to cook.

KACHAN: You no like my cooking?

FISHERMAN: No, I mean . . . it's just we no more money so
I figured that . . .

KACHAN (*interrupts*): I know that, Ichhan, but we always get
plenty to eat. You like people think we no more shame or
what? I always think you liked Kachan's cooking.

FISHERMAN: I do, I do. But I like go to college. Like
Knapper-san's kids. I like study to be . . .

KACHAN (*interrupts*): College? Sure, sure, Ichhan. That's nice
but no can; something like that takes . . .

FISHERMAN (*interrupts*): I want to be a doctor.

KACHAN: Doctor? Ichhan, Ichhan. Sure we get enough to eat.
And enough for clothes, maybe. But no extra. You know
that. College, doctor's school, where we going to get the
money? All that's for rich white people. Ah, nani guzzu,
guzzu shitoru no! ** Hayo, clean. Ichhan, what's that got to
do with homemaking? You giving Kachan a headache.

FISHERMAN: That's why I'm taking the class. See, that's my

*Hawaiian for "Hurry, hurry."
**Oh, why are you so slow?

▲ Scene Two

plan. If I can cook, I figure I can work my way through
school. Here, I like show you something.

(Pulls KACHAN away from her work so he can show her
the college catalogue)

KACHAN: What you doing? (*Notices Yachiyō*) Yachiyō, you
supposed to watch your sister.

FISHERMAN: I already discussed it with Mr. Marshall and
he says he can get me a job as a cook at his friend's house
on the mainland side.

KACHAN: Mainland?

FISHERMAN: He's a professor at the University of Califor-
nia. Here, try look the pictures . . .

KACHAN (*uncomfortable*): No can, no can. It cost so much,
too far. What you gonna do over there? And you know
what Tochan think about spending so . . .

FISHERMAN (*interrupts. Getting excited about the classes*):
Try look. These are all the classes they offer there. I can
take physics and organic chemistry . . . (*Continues*)

KACHAN (*overlapping*): You go? What about all this work?

FISHERMAN (*continuing*): . . . that is if my grades are good
enough to get me in there, and Mr. Marshall says no
problem.

KACHAN: Yeah, but Ichhan . . .

FISHERMAN: What do you think?

(*Awkward pause. FISHERMAN anxiously awaits*

KACHAN's reply.)

KACHAN: Go, go if you like, go. Go drown in the ocean!
(*Moving back to work*) Hayo! * Clean, clean. No more
waste time thinking. So many things to do before Tochan
gets home. Holo, holo. Way behind. (*Notices that the FISHERMAN is disappointed*) Itsu.

(*No response*) Ichhan. (*Pause*) Why you wanna go so far
away, Ichhan?

*Hurry up.

▲ Scene Two

(FISHERMAN doesn't respond. Goes back to work cleaning fish. KACHAN starts to leave to get another load of fish. Stops.)

A Song

For A

KACHAN: When Tochan come back we talk to him, yah? I no promise nothing, but we see. Now finish clean the fish.

Nisei

(KACHAN exits. FISHERMAN excitedly begins cleaning fish again.)

Fisherman

TRANSITION. Back to present. FISHERMAN cuts finger.

FISHERMAN: Ouch! . . . Gotta watch out for spines while you're cleaning. Trout usually aren't so bad at all. Usually, anyway. Catfish are the worst. Really spiny and they stay alive out of water a long time. So at the end of the day when you reach down to clean them, they jerk around and you end up with a spine right through your finger. They're a son of a bitch to clean. *(Notices something and picks it up)* Dime. Eat anything. Once found a cigarette butt in the stomach. I've even found marshmallows in there. *(Washes dime off and looks at it. Remembering.)* Fifty dollars is all I had. *(Pockets the dime)* Fifty dollars and a one-way boat ticket to California, and I threw up the whole way. Actually I was headed for Los Angeles. Didn't know anybody there. Just fifty dollars, the ticket, oh, and a letter of introduction to a professor at UCLA, where I was to go for the next four years.

I worked my butt off. Get up at five o'clock in the morning, study for an hour, cook breakfast for Professor and Mrs. Jameson. Nice people, both grey-haired ojitchan and obaachan* type. Then go to classes till four o'clock, come home, prepare and cook dinner. That took until seven-thirty with dishes. Then back to the books till twelve o'clock. Sleep, get up at five o'clock and start again.

*Grandfather and grandmother.

Scene Two

So for the next four years I worked, I studied and studied. At the end of my third year, I sent off my applications to med school. I applied to four. I had to get a full scholarship or I wouldn't be able to go.

A Song

For A

TRANSITION. During college; FISHERMAN is about twenty-one years old.

Nisei

Fisherman

FISHERMAN *(standing. Mimes reaching out and receives a letter)*: The first letter came back. *(Opening and reading it)* "We are happy to inform you that you have been accepted . . . However, you were not selected as a scholarship recipient . . . We hope this does not inconvenience you . . . look forward to seeing you in the coming year." Well, at least I'm getting accepted.

(Reaches out and receives letter) Second letter. *(Opens it quickly)* "We regret to inform you that we do not have space for you in our first-year class . . ."

(Reaches out and receives letter) Third letter.

(Opens more apprehensively) "We regret to inform you . . ." *(Reaches out and receives letter. Stares at it, looks at audience.)* My only out-of-state school. University of Arkansas. Home of the Razorbacks. Only one that offered a full scholarship to out-of-state residents. *(Slowly opens it up)* "We are happy to inform you that you have been accepted . . . and that you have been awarded a full scholarship!" Hey, I got in! Professor Jameson . . .

TRANSITION. From excitement over being accepted to satisfaction about passing first-year medical school exams and talking to his roommate. Runs onstage shouting to Professor Jameson that he got in, and then turns and moves downstage talking to Sam, his roommate. FISHERMAN is around twenty-two years old.

Scene Two

▲
FISHERMAN: I passed my exams! My first-year exams! Even got an A in Anatomy and Biochem. Come on, Sam, this calls for a celebration. We both passed first-year exams and we deserve a drink. Let's go down to the Razorback Inn. Come on, let's . . . What? *(Listening)* Sam, how many times do I have to tell you? They aren't looking at us funny. You're imagining it, they like us here. Some of the other guys from the class will be there, James and . . . *(Listening and becoming upset)* Jap and the Jew, Jap and the Jew, you're always talking about that. Look, I . . . *(Listening)* Who knows why they put us together? We get along as roommates, don't we? Maybe they figured the only Japanese and Jew in the class would have something in common. And we do. We both work harder than anybody else here, and we get the best grades—well, most of the time.

Sam, I don't notice any prejudice. I don't have to use the colored facilities. In fact, when I first got here I used them and got hawled out by some coloreds. They said to use the white ones. I've been treated real good. Most don't even know what I am. They've never even seen a Japanese before. They think I'm an Eskimo. If you're so goddam sensitive about what you are, tell 'em you're an Eskimo. They'll treat you real good. I think you're just too sensitive. Wanna go or not, 'cause I'm going.

TRANSITION. *From talking to Sam into a dancing sequence in a taxi-dance hall in San Francisco. Sound cue of a late thirties dance. MOSAN and taxi dancer, CORA, enter dancing. The other taxi dancer, JOSEPHINE, approaches FISHERMAN.*

JOSEPHINE: Where your tickets?

(FISHERMAN holds them out and she takes all of them.)

CORA *(while dancing with MOSAN, hollers to JOSEPHINE)*: I don't care what he says, I'm not going back. Hell no, not this time.

Scene Two

▲
JOSEPHINE *(ignoring CORA)*: First time taxi dancing, huh? You can hold but no touching. Got that? No touching. CORA *(shouting to JOSEPHINE)*: He lays a hand on my kid again, I'll kill him.

JOSEPHINE *(to CORA)*: You can stay at my place. And the kid, too.

CORA: I swear it this time, Josephine, I swear it.

MOSAN *(to CORA)*: Hey, darling, you dancing with me or what?

JOSEPHINE: Where are you from anyway? What you do?

FISHERMAN: Arkansas. Going to medical school out there.

JOSEPHINE *(incredulous)*: A Chinaman doctor from Arkansas?

(FISHERMAN ignores her response, keeps dancing.)

(She realizes he's not kidding.)

JOSEPHINE *(sarcastically)*: God, America—that's what I love 'bout this country. Opportunity. One minute you're in some rice paddy in China, and the next you're a Chinaman doctor in Arkansas.

(Dance for a moment in silence. FISHERMAN feeling very uncomfortable.)

JOSEPHINE: So why you come out here to San Francisco, doctor?

FISHERMAN: I came out here to see about some . . .

JOSEPHINE *(interrupts. Stops dancing)*: Is that all you have?

FISHERMAN: What?

JOSEPHINE: Tickets, tickets. Come on, doctor from Arkansas, you can afford it.

FISHERMAN: How many did I give you? *(Checking pockets)*

I gave you the whole bunch when we . . .

JOSEPHINE *(interrupts)*: One ticket, that's all you gave me.

One ticket. You musta . . . *(Continues.)*

(MOSAN notices FISHERMAN'S dilemma and comes to his rescue.)

▲

Scene Two

JOSEPHINE: . . . dropped 'em on the floor. You have to get some more if you wanna dance.

A Song

MOSAN: Don't be so nervous, Itsu. Here, take some of mine.
(As he hands the tickets to the FISHERMAN, JOSEPHINE reaches in and takes them.)

For A

MOSAN (to FISHERMAN): Got lots more so don't be shy. (To JOSEPHINE) Take good care of my brother.

Nisei

Fisher man

(MOSAN playfully slaps the FISHERMAN on the back and returns to CORA. At this point, the FISHERMAN and JOSEPHINE dance out of the way up right while MOSAN and CORA move down center and do about a twenty-second choreographed dance routine. MOSAN loves to show off his dancing moves and CORA has to hang on to keep up with his enthusiasm. At the end of their dance routine, FISHERMAN and JOSEPHINE start up conversation and the focus shifts back to them.)

JOSEPHINE: Don't see too many of you in here. Lotta sailors. Lotta them Filipinos from the valley—they stink like whores with all their perfume. Not too many Chinamen, though.

(This is too much for the FISHERMAN. Stops dancing.)

FISHERMAN: Excuse me. (Hurries over to MOSAN) Mosan. MOSAN (dancing): Nothing like this in the islands, huh. Place is crazy, huh.

FISHERMAN (trying to pull MOSAN off to side): Mosan, come over here. I want to talk to you. Come on.

MOSAN (to CORA): Little brother like to talk to me. (To a sailor) Hey, Mac, I'm dancing with her. (To CORA) Don't go away. I'll be right back.
(They move downstage while JOSEPHINE and CORA chat upstage.)

MOSAN: What's up, anyway? Huh?

FISHERMAN: Mosan, let's get outta here. I like go.

MOSAN: What? We just got here. You must be joking.

Scene Two

FISHERMAN: Place's dirty, it stinks. Smells like shiko.*
Come on, let's go someplace else.

A Song

MOSAN: This place is good for you. You got too much book learning.

For A

FISHERMAN: I don't like it here. Let's go bowling.
MOSAN: Bowling? Is that what they teach you in Arkansas? Jesus! (Continues.)

Nisei

(JOSEPHINE starts to walk over to them.)

Fisher man

MOSAN: . . . Tonight big brother is giving you one real education. (Sees JOSEPHINE approaching) Oh-oh, here comes your sensei. **

(MOSAN pushes FISHERMAN into JOSEPHINE'S arms. They start dancing once again.)

CORA (to JOSEPHINE): What if he tries to call?

JOSEPHINE (to CORA): Don't worry, I'll handle him.

MOSAN (grabbing CORA): You dancing with her or me?

JOSEPHINE: You can hold but . . . (Continues.)

FISHERMAN (overlapping): "No touching." I remember.

JOSEPHINE (continuing): . . . no touching.

(They dance. The FISHERMAN is stiff as a board.)

JOSEPHINE: Come on, loosen up. This is supposed to be fun. Ya know fun?

FISHERMAN: Yeah, I'm having a good time.

JOSEPHINE: So why you here? In San Francisco?

FISHERMAN: I might move to Stockton.

JOSEPHINE: That's where all them Flips come from.

FISHERMAN: A lot of Japanese there, too. All the farming.

JOSEPHINE (studying him): You a Jap boy, huh?

FISHERMAN: Might set up my practice there.

JOSEPHINE: Come on, loosen up. You're stepping all over me.

FISHERMAN: Too many Japanese doctors in Los Angeles. San Francisco's the same.

*Urine.

**Teacher.

▲ Scene Two

A Song

(FISHERMAN keeps stepping on JOSEPHINE's feet. She's getting disgusted with his dancing.)

JOSEPHINE: How come you're in here?

For A FISHERMAN (nodding towards MOSAN): Brother brought me.

Nisei JOSEPHINE: Thought he was one of those horny little Fill-

pimos.

(MOSAN and CORA have stopped dancing and are involved in an argument. Focus shifts to them.)

Fisherman

CORA: Who gives a damn?

MOSAN: But you already took the tickets.

CORA: My feet are tired, my back hurts. I want to go to the toilet.

(CORA turns to leave. MOSAN grabs her.)

MOSAN: All right, all right. You dance with me when you get back.

(CORA shakes his hand off.)

CORA: Buzz off.

(As she starts to leave, MOSAN grabs her again.)

MOSAN: You dance with me when you get back. I already gave you the tickets.

CORA (trying to knock his hand loose): Who cares 'bout your damn tickets.

MOSAN: Then give me back my tickets! You not gonna steal my . . .

(FISHERMAN has come over in an attempt to calm

MOSAN down.)

FISHERMAN (interrupts): Mosan, take it easy.

MOSAN: Just want my tickets back.

CORA: Let go, let go of my arm, you bastard!

JOSEPHINE (to FISHERMAN): Calm your brother down or get him out of . . .

FISHERMAN (interrupts): Mosan, Mosan. Take it easy. Mosan.

Scene Two

MOSAN (struggling with CORA): I want my tickets. She stole . . .

(CORA pulls out a knife and shoves it threateningly in MOSAN's face. He immediately lets go.)

CORA: You want a cut-up face, is that what you want? Is that . . . (Continues.)

JOSEPHINE (overlapping): Put it away, Cora! Put it away!

(Calling for the bouncer) Jimmy! Jimmy, get over here!

CORA (continuing): . . . what you want? Huh? You want me to cut you? Is that what you want?

MOSAN: You're not gonna make one fool outta me!

FISHERMAN (holding MOSAN back): Mosan! Mosan!

MOSAN: Give me my goddamn tickets! You give me my tickets!

JOSEPHINE: Get your brother outta here! Get him out!

FISHERMAN: Mosan! Come on . . .

(FISHERMAN pulls MOSAN out of the dance hall.)

JOSEPHINE and CORA exit. Nighttime. Outside of the dance hall.)

FISHERMAN (upset): Mosan, you almost got us killed in there! What's gotten into you? Ever since you come to the mainland. Drinking, gambling, fooling around with haole wahini.*

MOSAN: What about you? You been acting like one stupid kotonk.**

FISHERMAN: What are you trying to do? Huh? What are you trying to do?

MOSAN: Nothing already.

FISHERMAN: What do you mean "nothing"?

MOSAN (getting angry): I said nothing.

FISHERMAN: You nearly got us killed just . . .

MOSAN (interrupts): You don't know nothing about nothing, Itsu!

*White women.
**Mainland-born Japanese American.

▲ Scene Two

FISHERMAN: Spend good money buying a damn race horse, and the damn horse can't even . . .

A Song
 MOSAN (*interrupts*): You shut up! As long as me and the family giving you money for go to school, you keep your mouth shut about how I spend my money. Besides, the horse can run.

Nisei
 FISHERMAN: If it is your money.

Fisherman
 MOSAN: Where I get my money is none of your goddamn business.

FISHERMAN: What, you went stole the money?

(*MOSAN shoves the FISHERMAN.*)

MOSAN: You shut up, asshole!

FISHERMAN (*pushing MOSAN back*): You the asshole!

(*They rush towards each other as if to fight. Standing face to face, they both raise their right hands as if to trade blows. Freeze. Lights come up. The next day. Instead of swinging at each other, they both bring their hands down in a lively game of jan ken po [Japanese hand game]. They're at the racetrack.*)

FISHERMAN, MOSAN (*together*): Jan ken po! Ai kanna shoi!

FISHERMAN (*laughing*): You lose, Mosan! You go place the bets.

MOSAN (*moving towards the betting window*): All right, all right.

FISHERMAN (*watching MOSAN placing the bet*): Win?

MOSAN: Hell yes, everything on win.

FISHERMAN: That much money?

MOSAN (*leading FISHERMAN to the viewing stands*): My horse no can lose. I feel it in my bones. No worry, no worry. Sit, sit.

(*They seat themselves on one of the risers to watch the race. As the race is called their faces move in unison as they watch the horses circle the track, all the while hollering encouragement. RACE TRACK ANNOUNCER appears holding an old-fashioned microphone. Sound cue of a bell ringing.*)

Scene Two

RACE TRACK ANNOUNCER: And they're off! As they go away from the gate, it's Lady Luck moving out ahead, followed by Baby's Dream, Velvet Girl, Mr. Dancer, and bringing up the rear of the pack . . . Buddha Buggy. Into the far turn, it's Lady Luck opening up a lead of two lengths, followed by Velvet Girl moving into second, and . . .

For A
 . . . Oh-oh, here comes Buddha Buggy, challenges Mr. Dancer and moves ahead into fourth . . . Passing Baby's Dream into third . . . Passing Lady Luck into second . . . Down the home stretch now it's Velvet Girl and Buddha Buggy neck to neck. It's Buddha Buggy . . . It's . . . BUD-DHA BUGGY!

(*FISHERMAN and MOSAN jump around excitedly.*)

Fisherman
 MOSAN: What'd I tell you! Buddha Buggy's number one!

Number one!

FISHERMAN: Hey, that's my brother's horse! Buddha Buggy's number one!

(*They calm down as they move across stage. Lighting change. Later that day. MOSAN is singing a Hawaiian tune and doing the hula. Both have been celebrating all day.*)

FISHERMAN: Mosan?

MOSAN: Yeah?

FISHERMAN: Sorry about some of the things I said last night.

MOSAN: Sorry? Hey, I'm the one that hit you.

FISHERMAN: Yeah, but I knocked you down.

MOSAN: You a damn good fighter, that's why. Hey, who taught you everything you know?

FISHERMAN: She's a good horse, she really is. Buddha Buggy's number one horse.

MOSAN: Hey, forget it. Pau* already. (*MOSAN pulls out a wad of money from the race track earnings.*) Here.

*Hawaiian for "okay," "all right."



Scene Two

FISHERMAN: No, no. Cannot, cannot.

A Song MOSAN (*putting money in FISHERMAN'S pocket*): Here.

(FISHERMAN finally accepts the money.)

For A MOSAN: No shame, no enryo. Enough for tuition, books, and maybe even some taxi dancing.

Nisei FISHERMAN (*laughing*): Next time we go bowling! (*Calmng down*) We go to Chinatown, have some noodles?

Fisherman

MOSAN: No, I gotta go now. Some people like talk to me.

FISHERMAN: You're not in trouble again?

MOSAN: No, nothing like that.

FISHERMAN: You sure.

MOSAN: Yeah, yeah. I gotta go. (*MOSAN turns to leave. Stops.*)

Hey, Itsu?

FISHERMAN: Yeah?

MOSAN: Good luck.

(*MOSAN turns and leaves.*)

FISHERMAN (*watching him leave*): Hope your luck holds out, Mosan. I'll pay you back every penny. I promise . . .

TRANSITION. *He turns and faces audience and begins to recite the Hippocratic Oath. Medical school graduation. Slow fade as he recites.*

FISHERMAN: . . . by Apollo, the physician, and Aesculapius . . . and all the gods and goddesses, that according to my ability and judgement, I will keep this oath . . . according to the law of medicine.

(FISHERMAN dims to darkness. MUSICIANS lit.)

[END OF SCENE]

Scene Three

Cooking Fish

FISHERMAN: Trout you just flour like this and fry till golden brown. Gotta be careful on a warm day 'cause the fish get kusateru, rotten. If you catch them early in the day, keep them covered with leaves in the creel, otherwise they go bad. You can tell if the meat is spoiled by looking on the inside of the fish, the rib bones start to peel away from the flesh. See, these are fresh trout—good color, firm meat, the bones still attached to the meat, see.

Now, like frying fish but my favorite is kasuzuke. Most of you non-Nihonjin* don't know what that is, huh. "Kasu" are the dregs, the leftover stuff when making sake. What you do is get the fish—oh, I use striped bass—cut it in chunks and put it into the kasu and let it set for a couple of days. Then take it out, wash it off, and fry it. Ummm, oishii yo!***

TRANSITION. *To Buddhist church bazaar in Stockton.*

MICHIKO *appears as a young woman of twenty-five.*

FISHERMAN and KATS *are around thirty in this scene. We hear loud laughter. Lights up on MICHIKO and KATS. KATS is teasing with suggestive jokes.*

MICHIKO (*calling for help while laughing*): ICHANI! (*To KATS*) Yarashii!†

KATS: You wanna see a one-eared elephant?

(*KATS pulls one of his pockets inside out so it sticks out like a white elephant ear. Then, with MICHIKO watching*

*Non-Japanese.

**Tasty.

†Nasty.

▲ Scene Three

A Song
cirtonously, KATS mischievously reaches for the buttons on his fly and starts to undo them. MICHIKO catches on to the joke and screams in shocked amusement.)

For A
MICHIKO (laughing): You're awful, Kats!

(The FISHERMAN enters the scene and observes them.)

Nisei
MICHIKO: Hi, Ichan.

KATS (uncomfortable): Hi, Doc.

Fisherman

FISHERMAN: Hi, Kats.

(Awkward moment between KATS and FISHERMAN.)

FISHERMAN notices KATS's pocket sticking out.)

FISHERMAN: What's wrong with your pocket?

KATS (embarrassed. Hurriedly pushes pocket back in while he exits): See you at the poker game.

(MICHIKO is working inside one of the food booths. As KATS exits, FISHERMAN reaches down to sample some of the food. He's about to put it into his mouth when MICHIKO notices and snatches it away.)

FISHERMAN: Hey, what are you doing?

MICHIKO: Ichan, if you want to eat, you have to pay. See the sign?

FISHERMAN: Yeah, but I helped you make all this last night, Michiko.

MICHIKO: That was last night. Tonight is the church bazaar and everyone has to pay. And that includes you. Come on, come on. You can afford it.

(While FISHERMAN reaches into his pocket for change, MICHIKO grabs the piece of food out of his hand, and pops it into her mouth.)

FISHERMAN: Hey!

MICHIKO (taking the money out of his hand): It's all right, I work here.

FISHERMAN: Michiko, you've been here all day. Why don't we go for a walk?

MICHIKO: Who's going to watch the booth?

FISHERMAN: Someone else will take care of it. Come on, it's too noisy here.

▲ Scene Three

MICHIKO: But I like church bazaars. All the food and dancing . . . oh, look, there's Sumiko. She looks good in kimono, neh? She's nice and light. Mama always says my complexion's too dark. She's always telling me to stay out of the sun.

FISHERMAN: You are kind of dark.

MICHIKO: She's pretty fast, ya know.

FISHERMAN: Who? Sumiko? With her daikon* legs? Who'd go out with her?

KATS'S VOICE (off): Hey, Sumiko! Wanna see a one-eared elephant?

MICHIKO: Kats said so.

FISHERMAN: He did? What'd he say?

MICHIKO: Said she go out on a date the first time you ask her. She's just asking for it.

FISHERMAN: First time you ask her, huh? How many times did I have to ask you? Once?

MICHIKO (quickly): Twice.

FISHERMAN: Twice? Whoo, this girl is loose.

MICHIKO (defensive): I am not. Papa introduced us so it was all right. Only had to refuse you once. Besides, Mama likes doctors and she was afraid you might give up.

FISHERMAN: Mama likes me, huh?

MICHIKO: No. Likes doctors, that's all. *(Sees someone and bows)* Konbanwa. Ikaga desu ka?*

FISHERMAN (bowing): Konbanwa. Yes, Tuesday, two-thirty. *(Repeats loudly as the person is hard of hearing)* Tuesday, 2:30. Come on, Michiko, let's go for a walk.

MICHIKO: Where do you want to go?

FISHERMAN: Where there aren't so many people. We never get to be alone.

MICHIKO: What kind of Buddhist are you, anyway? We're

*Japanese horseshoesh.
 **Good evening. How are you?

▲ Scene Three

▲ supposed to like people. (Teasing) Neh, Ichan. What do you have in mind?

A Song FISHERMAN: Come on and find out.

For A MICHIKO (calling to KATS): Kats! Can you watch the booth? KATS (off): All right! Sumiko, you busy . . .

Nisei (They stroll across the stage. FISHERMAN dusts off a spot and offers her a seat. He seats himself beside her on the riser.)

Fisherman FISHERMAN: How old are you?

MICHIKO: You know.

FISHERMAN: I want you to tell me.

MICHIKO: What for?

FISHERMAN: Come on, how old are you?

MICHIKO (slightly uncomfortable, lowers voice): Twenty-five.

FISHERMAN (acting surprised): Twenty-five? You're twenty-five?

MICHIKO (irritated): You know that.

FISHERMAN (voice getting louder): Twenty-five? You're practically an old lady, an obaachan.*

MICHIKO: I am not.

FISHERMAN (loudly, as if announcing to the world): Twenty-five! She's twenty-five years old and not even married yet! . . .

MICHIKO (interrupting, trying to quiet him down): Shhh!

Ichan, shhh! People are looking.

FISHERMAN (same loud voice): . . . And she thinks she's young!

MICHIKO (embarrassed): Shhh! Not so loud.

FISHERMAN (calms down. Back to normal voice): Your body's already past the prime age for childbearing.

MICHIKO: My body's none of your business, buster.

FISHERMAN: Take it easy. I'm a doctor. Bodies are my business.

*Grandmother.

Scene Three

MICHIKO: You sound just like Mama. And I'm still young. I'm only twenty-five years old.

FISHERMAN: That's a quarter of a century. And you still think you can make healthy babies, huh?

MICHIKO: Stop talking nasty. (Lowers voice so no one can hear) And I can too make babies.

FISHERMAN: Sure, little funny ones like Tanaka-san's little kid . . .

MICHIKO (interrupts, irritated): I can make babies, healthy ones too.

(FISHERMAN notices, then MICHIKO notices, that the imaginary Reverend Taniguchi has walked up and is listening.)

FISHERMAN (bowing): Konbanwa, Reverend Taniguchi.

MICHIKO (surprised, bowing nervously): Oh, konbanwa, Sensei.

(Both FISHERMAN and MICHIKO laugh nervously, worried that Reverend Taniguchi may have overheard some of their conversation.)

FISHERMAN: We were just talking about . . . about Buddha . . .

MICHIKO: When he was a baby . . . Sumimasen, Sensei.*

FISHERMAN (bowing, then breaking into laughter after he's gone): Boy, gonna hear about this in church. He's such a stuffed shirt anyway.

(They calm down.)

MICHIKO: You know Mrs. Kanemoto? The old woman who works at Papa's drugstore? She couldn't have any children.

FISHERMAN: Sometimes that happens. Can't be helped.

MICHIKO: I'd hate to be like Mrs. Kanemoto.

FISHERMAN: I got a big mouth, Michiko. I was just teasing.

MICHIKO: What if I can't have children?

FISHERMAN: Don't worry, Michiko. You're healthy as a horse.

*Sorry to have troubled you, Reverend.

▲ Scene Three

MICHIKO: Just forget it.

A Song FISHERMAN: Well, what do you recommend we do to find out? (*Mischievously*) We could practice. (*Both laugh.*) Well, practice does make perfect.

For A MICHIKO: Perfect babies?

Nisei FISHERMAN: No, a perfect marriage.

(*They embrace. Transition into marriage ceremony.*)

Fisherman FISHERMAN and MICHIKO turn so they both face upstage. MOSAN enters stage right, and KATS stage left, as if part of the wedding ceremony. As they position themselves, FISHERMAN and MICHIKO march up the aisle. They turn and face each other.)

MILITARY PERSON (*as Reverend's voice, off*): I now pronounce you . . . (*MILITARY PERSON walks in.*) . . . Next!

TRANSITION. MILITARY PERSON carries a folder and makes the voice of the Reverend change to that of the MILITARY PERSON. Transition from wedding ceremony to relocation camp loyalty oath scene. FISHERMAN and MICHIKO hug and she joins MOSAN stage right on platform. KATS is on stage left platform.

MILITARY PERSON (*checking his watch and looking at schedule. Obviously impatient: it's been a long day*): Could you please hurry it up with the questionnaire, Mr. Matsumoto, we're running behind schedule here.

FISHERMAN: I want to ask about questions 27 and 28. There's been a lot of talk in the camps about why we have to . . .

MILITARY PERSON (*interrupts*): Look, everyone in all the relocation camps seventeen and older has to fill them out, okay? I just administer the thing. That's all I do.

FISHERMAN: Questions 27 and 28, though. I don't understand why we have to . . .

MILITARY PERSON (*interrupts*): You're having trouble with that, too. Here, let me read it to you. Question 27: "Are

Scene Three

you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?" Okay? Question 28: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States from any attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power, or organization?" Now, I haven't got all day. How are we going to sign? Yes, yes, or no, no?

(*In the following sequence, MOSAN, KATS, and*

MICHIKO are figments in FISHERMAN's mind, and are

not acknowledged in the physical by FISHERMAN or

MILITARY PERSON. MOSAN's initial "No, no" overlaps with MILITARY PERSON's "No, no.")

MOSAN: No, no. You gotta sign that thing no, no, Iitsu. Look what they doing to the Isei. Michiko's parents. They sign that thing, they lose their Japanese citizenship. They can never go home. That would kill 'em. You know that, Iitsu. No, no.

KATS (*this initial "No" overlaps with MOSAN's "No, no"*): No. They think we're not loyal American citizens, Iitsu. That's why they put us here in the first place. We gotta prove to the rest of the country that we are loyal citizens. And if that means joining up and fighting . . .

MOSAN (*interrupts*): And dying?

KATS: And dying, then we gotta do it. (*To FISHERMAN*) Yes, yes.

MOSAN (*to FISHERMAN*): For what? We shouldn't have to prove nothing to nobody. They take away all our land. We're sitting behind barbed wire. They ask us to be loyal after they put us in here. For what? No, no, Iitsu.

MICHIKO (*her initial "Iitsu" overlaps with MOSAN's "Iitsu"*): Iitsu. I don't like what's happening but I'm not Japanese. Ichan, I'm an American. We're Americans. This is our home. I hear rumors the no-no boys may go to prison.



A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman



Scene Three

A Song

There's even rumors they might get sent back to Japan. Yes, yes.

For A

MILITARY PERSON: Come on, come on. We're running behind. Now how we gonna sign?

Nisei

(MICHIKO, MOSAN, and KATS begin to chant "Yes, yes" and "No, no" respective to their positions. They start softly and crescendo until FISHERMAN cuts them off. Each says his or her chant differently, either in tempo or style of pronunciation. The FISHERMAN can't make up his mind.)

Fisherman

MILITARY PERSON: Listen, we don't have all day.

(The chanting gets louder. The FISHERMAN is still undecided.)

MILITARY PERSON: I'll read the question again. Question

27 . . .

(He starts to read questions 27 and 28. The chanting gets louder and louder.)

FISHERMAN: All right!

(Silence.)

MILITARY PERSON: Next . . .

(MILITARY PERSON, MICHIKO, MOSAN, and KATS exit.)

TRANSITION. FISHERMAN returns to cooking his fish.

FISHERMAN: The camps weren't so bad. I don't think about it too much, happened all so long ago . . .

(Pause. He starts to remember the pleasant stuff, then slowly the unpleasant stuff. Catches himself just as he starts to remember the unpleasant things.)

FISHERMAN: Good fishing, though. In Arkansas they have good perch fishing, blue gills. Really tasty. (Laughs to himself) I go to Arkansas to study to be a doctor and all the time I want to be fishing. Then when I get out and want to be a doctor, they send me back to Arkansas and make me fish.

Scene Three

I don't think about the camps much. They're getting a lot of attention now. The redress hearings. The Nisei are finally starting to speak out like the young people.

(The following speech gradually builds up in intensity of feeling, passion, and anger, but it is always controlled.)

For A

FISHERMAN: I mean it wasn't fair what they did. Shogana

Nisei

nah, * but it wasn't right. I mean most of us were American citizens. Why didn't they pick on the Italians or the Germans? That's what really pisses me off. No, they just pick

on us. And they were just waiting to move right in and take over our businesses. Not just hakujiin yo, Shin-sans** too.

Oh, they were the worst. Wore signs saying they were Chinese. Can you believe that? So just like we're supposed to get up and move. What am I supposed to do with the house, my practice? Michiko's mother's too sick to be moved. Put tags on us, gave us numbers, made us live in horse stalls and then we get shipped all the way to Arkansas . . . (Tempo winds down as he regains composure) . . .

Rohwer, Arkansas . . . (Reflective pause) Boots. You had to wear thick boots, otherwise it wasn't safe. 'Cause to get to the lake you had to walk through thick grass, and there were a lot of poisonous snakes. But the fishing was good, lotta perch. Played some baseball in the camps, too. I was

the camp doctor. It wasn't so bad. I haven't thought about it for years, so I don't remember too much about it. Fishing was good, but no hunting of course. Wouldn't let us have any guns . . .

(Transition into hunting sequence. He holds an imaginary shotgun, watching the skies for a bird. Gradually makes out something in the distance coming towards him.)

FISHERMAN (talking to himself): That bird is huge. Talk about beginner's luck. That is the biggest, whitest snow goose I have ever seen . . . (FISHERMAN'S body follows the

*It could not be helped.

**Hakujiin, "Caucasians"; Shin-sans, "Chinese."

▲ Scene Three

goose's flight movements as it circles in closer. He raises gun and shoots.) Got it! Got it!

A Song *(Runs upstage and exits and immediately runs back downstage left. Winded, stands over the fallen goose. Sets down gun and looks at bird.)*

Nisei **FISHERMAN:** Wait till I show this bird to Kats. *(Mimicking his friend KATS.)* I can hear him: "Shoot a goose? You don't even know what Canadian snow goose look like."
(He picks up bird and slings it over his shoulder. Then looks up and notices a local game warden.)

FISHERMAN: Oh, hello. Look at the size of this thing. I just shot it. What? My hunting license? Sure, just a second. *(Puts down bird, gets wallet out, and shows warden the license.)* Big bird, huh. My driver's license? *(Getting it out.)* I'm from Hawaii originally, but I have a California license. Isn't this snow goose huge? *(Listening.)* It's not a goose? *(Listening in disbelief.)* It's a swan?

TRANSITION. **MICHIKO** enters up right carrying their newly born first child.

MICHIKO: Not a swan, a son. Ichan, look. Your son.
(FISHERMAN looks across upstage. Dim to darkness. Lights up on MUSICIANS.)

Scene Four

Eating Fish

FISHERMAN: Two ways to eat this kind of fish. Michiko likes to pick the meat off the fish bone. She gradually works, or eats her way, till one half is bare, just bone. Pick, pick, pick. Then she turns it over and starts the whole damn thing over again. Now me, I like to make an incision along the dorsal spine, like this. All the way from the head to the tail. You poke fairly deep. Then slowly, by pulling on the head, all the fish meat in one chunk pulls away from the fish bone. There, then the job's easy. Just flip it over, pull the bone away from the other half. See how easy and cleanly you can do it. Then you can just concentrate on eating the fish. Big hunks. Not little pieces like Michiko's way, that's frustrating. You can take big bites of fish and not worry about any bones. A little shoyu . . . *(Eats contentedly.)* Then finds a fish bone and pulls it out. *(Embarrassed.)* Now, if you eat sashimi, don't have to worry about this stuff. You fillet the fish, so no bones. Hmm, love sashimi, but gotta be fresh. Some people like to let the meat sit for one day to age it, say it tastes better. I say, baloney. The fresher the better. In fact, one time I went striped bass fishing with my friend Kats out on his boat . . .

TRANSITION. *Into boat-fishing sequence with KATS. They are fishing in a boat with their profiles to the audience and their backs to each other. They sit for a while just holding poles and fishing. KATS is whistling.*

FISHERMAN: Hey, Sinatra. Shut up. Scare all the fish away.
(Teasing) Carch any carp?

▲ Scene Four

A Song
KATS: Shoots any swans lately? (*Notices something in the distance*) Doc, look.

For A
FISHERMAN: Damn skiers. Scare all the fish away.
(*Back to fishing*)

Nisei
KATS (*notices*): Hey, they're getting close . . .

FISHERMAN: Don't worry.
KATS: No, look.

Fisherman
FISHERMAN (*notices that the water skiers are cutting close to their lines. Yells at them*): Hey! Watch out for the lines!
You're too close!

KATS (*yelling at skiers*): Get outta here! We're fishing!
(*The boat passes by.*)

FISHERMAN: Damn yogore. * Scare all the fish away.
(*They start to settle back to fishing when suddenly the boat begins to rock as the waves caused by the skiers' boat hit. FISHERMAN and KATS rock back and forth.*)

FISHERMAN: Why don't you get a bigger boat instead of this goddamn dinghy? Every time a boat passes, we nearly tip over.

KATS: Why don't you buy a boat, you cheap bastard? You're a doctor.

FISHERMAN: All those doctors with their Cadillacs—got their noses up in the air.

(*Boat settles down. FISHERMAN gets a bite, snags, and hooks into fish.*)

KATS: Another one?

FISHERMAN: My day, Kats. Get the net.

KATS: Do it yourself. Too small. (*Back to his pole*)

FISHERMAN: Let's measure it.

(*The fish flops around in his hand.*)

KATS: You're wasting your time, Doc. Too small.

(*FISHERMAN measures the fish with his hand span. Legal size for striped bass is sixteen inches or about two of FISHERMAN's hand spans.*)

*Punks.

Scene Four

FISHERMAN: Just by an inch, though.

A Song
KATS: Mottai nai, nah? * Small striped bass like that make good sashimi.

For A
FISHERMAN: Make good sashimi, nah.
(*They both laugh.*)

KATS: Can't get much fresher.

FISHERMAN: Right, can't get much fresher.

(*The fish flops in his hand. Laughing dies down as the two start to take the idea more seriously.*)

Fisherman
FISHERMAN: Good eating . . .

KATS: Good eating . . .

FISHERMAN: Got rice balls and shoyu . . .

KATS: And hot tea in the thermos . . .

(*Both look at each other, then look around to see if anyone is watching. Slowly a sly grin appears on both of their faces.*)

FISHERMAN: Yoshi! Fresh sashimi! Give me the knife!
(*Hits the fish to kill it.*)

TRANSITION. KATS withdraws. Back to eating.

FISHERMAN: And so right then and there we gutted it, filleted it, and ate it. Even had some wasabi in the boat, that's the hot mustard. Oh, it was good. The best way to eat it. The meat still quivers on your tongue. Oishikata. **

TRANSITION. FISHERMAN settles left. MICHIKO enters.

ROBERT, his eldest son, enters.

MICHIKO: Robert is here.

ROBERT: Did I get any mail?

MICHIKO: Just a couple of things. I'll give them to you when you leave.

*Waste, isn't it?

**Tasty.

▲ Scene Four

FISHERMAN: Sit down, Robert.

A Song (ROBERT and MICHIKO seat themselves. FISHERMAN nods for MICHIKO to go ahead and speak.)

For A MICHIKO: Robert, we called you last night.

Nisei ROBERT: I'm at the hospital most of the time. You have to call pretty late at night or you just can't get ahold of me.

FISHERMAN: We did call late.

Fisher man

ROBERT: Well, I get tied up down there a lot with late-night rounds and everything. Sorry no one answered the phone.

FISHERMAN: Someone did. (Pause) A girl, Robert.

MICHIKO (awkward pause): Robert, are you seeing somebody?

(ROBERT, about to answer, hesitates.)

FISHERMAN: Are you living with a girl?

ROBERT: No.

FISHERMAN (sternly): Robert.

ROBERT: Not exactly.

(FISHERMAN is upset.)

ROBERT: Don't worry, Dad. It doesn't interfere with my studies or anything. I'm not going to flunk out of medical school or anything like that.

FISHERMAN: You better not. After all the money Mom and I put into your education.

MICHIKO: Robert, does she come from a good family?

ROBERT: Of course, Mom.

MICHIKO: Well, what's her name?

ROBERT: Marilyn.

FISHERMAN: Marilyn what?

ROBERT (incomprehensible): Marilyn Wong.

FISHERMAN: A Chinese? My son's going around with a damn Shin-san! Jesus Christ, Robert, you know better than that! Going around with Shin-san!

MICHIKO: Ichhan. Take it easy. (To ROBERT) You know how Dad gets upset if you don't go out with a Japanese girl.

ROBERT: Look, we're just good friends, nothing serious.

Scene Four

FISHERMAN: You call shacking up with somebody "nothing serious"? What kind of sons have I raised? You talk to him, A Song

Michiko. (Gets up and turns on TV down center)

MICHIKO (aside to ROBERT): If you have to, just don't tell For A him.

ROBERT: Mom, he asked me what her name was. What was Nisei

I supposed to say . . . Marilyn Wongamoto?

FISHERMAN (reseatng himself): Don't get smart with your Fisher man mother!

ROBERT: I'm not getting smart.

FISHERMAN: And I don't want any of my sons marrying a Shin-san.

ROBERT: Who said anything about marriage?

MICHIKO: You know how Dad is.

ROBERT: What's he talking about anyway? He had a Chinese girl friend himself.

FISHERMAN (to MICHIKO): I did not.

MICHIKO (to ROBERT): He did not.

ROBERT (to MICHIKO): Yes, he did.

FISHERMAN (to MICHIKO): I did not.

MICHIKO (to ROBERT): He did not.

ROBERT: That's what he told me. During college. Mabel Chang.

(Pause. MICHIKO looks at FISHERMAN.)

FISHERMAN: She was just a friend.

MICHIKO: Who's Mabel Chang?

FISHERMAN (flustered): There were a couple of us orientals in premed. We used to do things together.

ROBERT: Look, Mom, Marilyn and I are just friends. Okay? No big deal.

MICHIKO (to FISHERMAN): You told me you studied all the time in college. Study, study, study.

FISHERMAN: Well, I had a little time here and there.

MICHIKO (to ROBERT): What else did he say?

▲ Scene Four

ROBERT: What time is it? I gotta be going back to the hospital. I'm late already.

A Song

MICHIKO: Robert, why don't you bring her over for dinner?

For A

ROBERT (*nodding towards FISHERMAN*): What about . . . ?

Nisei

MICHIKO: Be good for him. Bring back some old exciting memories of Mabel Chang.

FISHERMAN: Michiko, I don't want any Shin-san in this house.

Fisherman

ROBERT: It's okay, Mom. Really, it's no big deal. . . .

MICHIKO: And we'll have Dad's favorite—steamed bass in black bean sauce . . . Chinese style.

ROBERT: Okay, Mom. Just tell Dad he doesn't have anything to worry about.

(*MICHIKO helps Robert with his coat.*)

FISHERMAN: You damn right I don't have to worry about nothing. We'll talk about this later, Michiko.

(*ROBERT and MICHIKO exit.*)

FISHERMAN (*calling after her*): Michiko? Michiko? . . .

TRANSITION. FISHERMAN finds MICHIKO's diary. He opens it and begins to read aloud from it. At first we just hear FISHERMAN's voice. Then gradually we hear MICHIKO's voice overlapping the FISHERMAN's as she is brought up in a pool of light. FISHERMAN's voice fades out and MICHIKO continues alone.

FISHERMAN (*reading MICHIKO's diary*): Ichap. I've been your wife for twenty-eight years. (*Continues.*)

MICHIKO (*enters, gradually overlapping*): Sometimes I'm amazed I even stuck it out. (*Continues.*)

FISHERMAN (*fading out*): Sometimes I'm amazed I even stuck it out.

MICHIKO: And don't think I wasn't tempted to leave at times. Remember when we first got married and how you used to stumble in from Mosan's poker games three, four

Scene Four

o'clock in the morning and pass out dead drunk on the living room floor. I know, I know, "It's Mosan's fault, it's Mosan's fault." Who cares whose fault it was? I was the one who had to take off your clothes and somehow haul you into the bed.

And I was the one who had to clean up all the vomit when you threw up. Ahh, the romantic years. Some of those times I just wanted to pack up and go back to Mama and Papa, but I knew how much it would hurt them. Oh, things weren't always that bad and I admit I wasn't always the best wife. Remember the time I got so mad at you, 'cause you were always going fishing and leaving me with the kids and never helping out around the house, that I broke your best fishing pole . . . I'm sorry. You know that's the only time you ever came close to hitting me.

(*Pause.*)

Twenty-eight years. I've been your wife for twenty-eight years. Cooked your meals, washed your clothes, bore your children. Right there by your side through all the rough times. You had things you wanted to do with your life, you had dreams. You cried when they seemed too far away and I comforted you. You yelled when you felt cheated from them and I took it all. And when you finally reached your dreams, I was so happy for you, though you never really thanked me.

I gave you two sons. They have things they want to do with their lives. Mommy do this, Mother do that. They have dreams. But what about my dreams, Isu? What if, what if I could have anything I want? What if I could do anything I want? What would I want just for me?

TRANSITION. Younger son enters scene. MICHIKO turns her attention to JEFFREY and FISHERMAN.

Scene Four

JEFFREY: Mom, let Dad tell me himself what's bothering him.

A Song

FISHERMAN (*standing up*): Sit down, Jeffrey.

For A
JEFFREY: Why don't you sit down, you're the one with arthritis.

Nisei
FISHERMAN: I don't want to sit down. Besides, I'm doing the talking.

Fisher man

JEFFREY: I don't want to.

FISHERMAN (*upset*): Then stand for God's sake, stand there like an idiot, I don't care.

(FISHERMAN sits down in a huff.)

JEFFREY (*sitting down disgustedly*): Why can't we for once just have a civil . . .

FISHERMAN (*interrupts, standing up*): That's what I mean.

That's what I mean. Every time I tell you to do something you always do the opposite. Now stay put.

JEFFREY (*standing up*): I do not.

FISHERMAN: Oh, sit down, will you.

JEFFREY: I don't want to. You sit down.

MICHIKO (*can't take any more*): Why don't you both sit down!

(*Both are rather shocked at her outburst. They both slowly seat themselves. MICHIKO exits.*)

FISHERMAN: How come you quit?

JEFFREY: Dad.

FISHERMAN: Jeffrey, when you gonna grow up? Huh? You're thirty years old.

JEFFREY: I'm twenty-nine.

FISHERMAN: Twenty-nine, thirty, what's the difference? You're a grown man. What you gonna do with your life? You're no kid anymore. Mom and I aren't going to be around much longer to support you.

JEFFREY: I'm not asking for support.

FISHERMAN (*mimicking son sarcastically*): "Mom, please send me some money, I ran out." I know you're broke half

Scene Four

the time. She tries to hide it from me, but I know. Go back to law school. Finish it off. Get your law degree and start practicing like your older brother—he's a doctor. Then you can do whatever you want in your spare time.

A Song

For A

JEFFREY: Dad, I'm not Robert and I don't like law.

Nisei

FISHERMAN: Who cares whether you like it or not? That's not the way life is. That's your problem. Any time anything gets a little too hard you quit, no guts. No gaman.* (*Mimicking son*) "I don't like it. It's not right for me." Well, what the hell do you want to do?

Fisher man

JEFFREY: Write. I want to write.

FISHERMAN: Write? Before, it was playing music—you can't even feed your face, keep a steady job, support yourself. How . . . (*Continues.*)

JEFFREY (*overlapping*): Forget it, just forget it . . .

FISHERMAN (*continuing*): . . . you gonna write? What you even gonna write about?

JEFFREY: You, it's a piece about you. (*Decides it's no use*) Forget it, Dad. . . . (*Tries again*) It's just some of the stories you told me as a kid, remember when I was little? Like that hunting dog of yours that got gored and lived . . . Tengu. And how Uncle Mosan used to race that horse of his. Remember when you told me about the time the two of you got in a fight and . . .

FISHERMAN (*interrupts*): Who cares about that stuff? Huh? How you gonna live, support yourself? How about when you get married, have a baby? What you gonna do then? JEFFREY: That's not the point, Dad. You're missing the whole . . .

FISHERMAN (*interrupts*): That is the point! I know, I know, you know how to express yourself. You're good with words. You're like hakujin.

JEFFREY: Dad, come on.

*Perseverance.

▲ Scene Four

A Song
FISHERMAN: But what you gonna do? Feed your wife and baby words? You shame me. And how do you think it looks to other people for me to have a grown son who's a regular bum!

For A
JEFFREY (*pause. Quietly*): Okay, I'm a bum. All right? That make you feel better, Dad? I'm a bum.

(JEFFREY exits.)

Fisherman
FISHERMAN: Jeffrey, come back here! Jeffrey!

TRANSITION. MICHIKO is lit in a pool of light upstage.
FISHERMAN seats himself and watches TV. FISHERMAN is recalling her death.

MICHIKO: Please not so loud, Itsu. I'm not feeling too well, so don't shout around the house. I've been getting these headaches lately. Feels like it's right here, on the left side of my head.

(*Pause. Musical punctuation. Lights dim.*)

Don't you think I should go see a specialist, Ichán? It's been hurting a long time. Neh? I'm calling your friend, Dr. Scott, okay? Ichán?

(*Pause. Musical punctuation. Lights dim. More discomfort.*)

He took x-rays, Ichán. They found a tumor. I'm worried. Should I see another doctor? Ichán?

(*Pause. Musical punctuation. Lights dim. Now she appears very ill but no longer worried, almost tranquil.*)

Do you remember the day you asked me to marry you? It was a church bazaar. You had on brown baggy pants and a shirt that was full of bright yellow flowers. You looked so funny in it I had to keep myself from laughing at you. The things you remember.

(*Pause. Musical punctuation. Lights dim. Gravely ill, no longer tranquil.*)

Scene Four

Itsu? Hold my hand. I'm feeling nauseous again. I feel so sick. Itsu?

(*Pause. MICHIKO is barely visible in the shadows. She becomes young again. She calls his name affectionately and laughs.*)

Ichán?
(*Dim to darkness. Musicians are lit. FISHERMAN exits.*)

[END OF SCENE]



A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman

Scene Five

Catching Fish

FISHERMAN enters as he did in Scene I, looking for a spot to fish. He moves slowly. Though in age he appears the same as he did in Scene I, one senses he feels much older. He seats himself rather gingerly, as his back is bothering him just a little bit more than usual, and prepares his pole and line to fish. He does exactly what he did in Scene I except that all his movements take on a ritualistic quality. All movements are distilled in action and compressed in time so that the whole process is done in far less time than it took previously. He pulls things out of the air as if magically—his hook, the salmon eggs, etc. He casts out and immediately hooks and reels up a fish. He pulls it off, sets it aside. He casts out again and in the same motion falls asleep.

TRANSITION. Visited by ghosts. TOCHAN appears upstage right. MUSICIANS underscore the appearances. FISHERMAN awakens and peers downstage.

FISHERMAN: Tochan? Tochan?

TOCHAN (*looking at him from upstage*): Yah, it's me, Itsu. It's been a long, long time, nah. How you been?

FISHERMAN: I've been all right, Tochan. How about you?

TOCHAN: Good, good. (*Pause*) You know I been meaning to talk to you.

FISHERMAN: There's something I wanted to ask you, too.

TOCHAN: Itsu, I know I wasn't best papa. But I was busy, eleven kids and everything. But I did my best. I like drink sake too much. And when I drink sake, I like to make speech. My friends, they like when I make speech. They give me a drink, they say, "Oi, Matsumoto-Sensei. Let's hear your plan to make big money." (*Acts out as if in front*

Scene Five

of friends) Yosh, I work hard, make lots of money. (*Takes a drink*) When I go back Japan, they meet me at train station.

Banzai! Banzai! . . .

(*Abruptly stops in mid-cheer, slowly bringing his arms down. He looks sadly at FISHERMAN, who is looking away uncomfortably.*)

Itsu. Itsu. I know they were laughing at me. Tochan's not stupid. Just like sake a little too much. But you, good boy. You one doctor. Make Tochan and Kachan so proud. Nah,

Kachan.

(KACHAN appears upstage right, wiping her hands on her apron.)

KACHAN (*kidding*): More fish to clean?

FISHERMAN (*smiling, holds up the trout he caught*): Just one small lake trout.

KACHAN: No can feed eleven kids with just one small fish, Ichan. Need plenty more so we can dry 'em and salt-pack 'em for later. And if got time we make kasuzuke. You like that, huh, Ichan.

FISHERMAN: Kachan?

KACHAN: Yes, Ichan.

FISHERMAN: I'm worried.

KACHAN: About what?

FISHERMAN: I'm old. It's dying. I tried to ask Tochan about it but you know how he is.

KACHAN: Yeah, he's always busy, neh. Working and drinking—and you know Tochan and his sake. Me, I'm not smart like Tochan, but I no drink sake either. I work, work, like a horse. I can always work.

FISHERMAN: Yes, but what about . . .

KACHAN (*interrupts*): What about what?

FISHERMAN: What about dying, Kachan?

KACHAN: What about living, Ichan? You're still alive.

FISHERMAN: I know, but it worries me. I can't stop thinking

A Song

For A

Nisei

Fisherman

▲ Scene Five

A Song about it. I want you to tell me about . . . about what it's like.

For A **KACHAN:** Ichhan, I no can tell you nothing. Remember, I'm dead, yo.

Nisei (**FISHERMAN** notices **MICHIKO**, who has appeared *upstage left*. **MICHIKO** never speaks. Only quietly observes him.)

Fisherman

FISHERMAN: Michiko? Michiko? Can we talk some? It's not always easy to say what I'm feeling inside. Things just don't come out that easy, you know that. I haven't been able to sleep too well lately. No, it's not the coffee or anything like that. It's just I've been thinking about things lately. You know, just things. (*Pause*) Where'd they go? Mosan, Kats. What happened to them? Mosan was only thirty-eight when he had the accident. Kats was older but it's still difficult. . . Michiko, I meant to tell you before but never got the chance.

(*Lights on Michiko begin to dim.*)

There were so many people at the hospital and you looked so different lying there. Michiko . . . I love . . . (**FISHERMAN** looks up and sees that **MICHIKO** is gone. He's unable to complete his confession.) Michiko? Michiko?

(*Exhausted, he lowers his head and falls asleep. All three ghosts remain on stage lit at half. They silently observe him.*)

TRANSITION: **ROBERT** enters. Present time. **ROBERT** sees his father and smiles. He gently touches his father's shoulder to waken him.

FISHERMAN (*waking*): Michiko?

ROBERT: No, Dad. Mom passed away three years ago, remember? It's Robert.

FISHERMAN (*waking up*): Oh. Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT: Just dropped by to check on you. You okay?

Scene Five

FISHERMAN: Fine, fine. Heard from Jeffrey?

ROBERT: I'm sure he's doing okay over there.

FISHERMAN: Still in Tokyo?

ROBERT: Hiroshima. He wanted to see where Grandma and

A Song

For A

Grandpa came from.

FISHERMAN: Still at it, huh? Wish he'd come home.

Nisei

ROBERT: How's the fishing?

FISHERMAN (*showing the fish*): Small, neh. Not like the old

Fisherman

times. (*They sit for a moment quietly looking out at the water.*)

FISHERMAN: Robert?

ROBERT: Yes, Dad?

FISHERMAN: Why don't we go fishing sometime? Together.

Just you and me. Like old times when you and Jeffrey were kids. We can go to Lake Berryessa, like we used to. Rent a boat . . .

ROBERT (*interrupts. Sincere*): Sure, Dad, but right now Kathryn and the kids are waiting in the car. We're going on a short vacation. When I get back we'll get together, I promise. I'll call you about it, okay? I have to go now. You take care, Dad.

(**ROBERT** exits. **FISHERMAN** watches him leave. Reels up line to check bait. He casts out again. As he settles back, holding his pole, he quietly smiles to himself. Gradually he falls asleep. Sound cue of a dog barking. **FISHERMAN** awakens with a start and stares out into the darkness.)

FISHERMAN: Who's there? Who's out there?

(*The three ghosts silently observe him. No response so the FISHERMAN settles back down to his fishing. Slowly falls asleep. MUSICIANS are lit and the SINGER sings the final song. At this point, the FISHERMAN is seated in a pool of light with the three ghosts watching him quietly. As the song is performed, the lights begin a very slow fade on the FISHERMAN.*)

MUSICIANS:

Walks into the room, shadows rise and fall;

▲ Ticking of the clock, echoes down the hall.

A Song Standing at his favorite spot,

He casts into the wind.

For A Silently he reels up

And casts out once again.

Nisei Your rich embroidered memories . . .

The feast after the hunt;

Those fine college days;

The wife, the home, the children;

Your song it plays and plays.

The rich American dream is here to stay, is here to stay . . .

(By the time the song has ended, the stage is dark and the light appears center stage. Silence.)

[END OF PLAY]

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