

Butterfly's Child

A Tragedy in One Act

◆ by Ralph Protsik ◆

rsp@bsgtv.com
617-266-4633

This script is copyright protected and may not be reproduced, distributed, or disseminated without the prior written permission of the author.

BUTTERFLY'S CHILD (5.0)

Cast of characters:

BENJAMIN PINKERTON, a Lieutenant in the US Navy

KATE PINKERTON, Pinkerton's wife

MATTHEW PINKERTON, aka **SORROW**, aka **VICE CONSUL KANASHIMI**

OKUDA, Pinkerton's son by Madame Butterfly

SHARPLESS, US Consul in Nagasaki and friend of Pinkerton

SHINA, a young Japanese woman

GORO, a Japanese tough

SUZUKI, Butterfly's maid

YOSHIKAWA, a Japanese spy in Hawaii

Actor requirements:

One male actor can play Sharpless, Goro, and Yoshikawa.

One female actor can play Suzuki and Shina.

Aide (one line) can be played by Pinkerton or stage manager.

Butterfly's voice is heard off-stage in Scene 6 and can be read by Kate.

Total actors required = 2 females and 3 males.

(At sea in the Pacific. The year is 1907. The Pinkertons (**KATE** and Benjamin) are aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on a honeymoon voyage from San Francisco to Nagasaki, Japan, where **PINKERTON**, a lieutenant in the US Navy, has been stationed.)

(Lights on)

KATE

(taking Pinkerton's hand)

Thank you.

PINKERTON

Thank you? For what?

KATE

For everything. Marrying me. This voyage. Opening my eyes to a new world. For being you.

PINKERTON

Purely selfish, my dear. It's all about me, you know.

KATE

You're such a poor liar. (pausing) Now tell me about Japan! Tell me everything!

PINKERTON

(laughing)

Everything? But our voyage only lasts a week!

KATE

Then take a week if you must. Tell me what you remember about Nagasaki. What did you do? Who did you see? What is the city like? Oh, darling, I want to experience it all through your eyes!

PINKERTON

It was...strange...beautiful. Everything was so...unfamiliar.

KATE

Like Chinatown in San Francisco?

PINKERTON

Yes, but much more so. The language and dress—both were unlike anything I’d heard or seen before. Oh, I bungled through the language barrier. It’s amazing how much can be said with a wave of a hand or nod of the head. And understanding their English can be challenging—and often amusing. Why, I was talking to an official one day, and he asked me if we have many “erections” in America! I was flabbergasted! Then I realized he was talking about politics and not sex!

KATE

Oh, dear!

PINKERTON

And their clothes are so simple, yet so charming and functional. Especially the clothes women wear. Their “kimonos” are like our bathrobes, with a hem that falls to the ankle and with attached collars and long, wide sleeves. They wrap them around the body, always with the left side over the right and are tied at the back by a sash.

(He shows her, using his robe.)

KATE

(trying it herself)

I could never get this right!

(She continues to fumble with the sash until she finally gives up.)

PINKERTON

Nor could I. I only wore mine for wakes and weddings.

KATE

Then I can wear my robe to the market?

PINKERTON

Ha! I suppose you could try. You’d cause a scandal, I’m afraid. Your beauty alone would cause all to stare and the men to gasp with desire!

KATE

(taking his hand)

You’re so sweet...and so incredibly corny.

PINKERTON

It's more than just language or dress though. It was the customs that I found most surprising and...unsettling.

KATE

Unsettling?

PINKERTON

We take so much for granted about our lives in America. How we greet each other. How we eat. How we show our emotions. Even how we court and marry.

KATE

What could be different about marriage? A woman and man pledge their love and live happily ever after! Like us!

PINKERTON

Ah, but we're talking about Japan, my dear, not America. To the Japanese the idea of "marriage" can be like ours, yes, but it can also be less...formal.

KATE

I don't understand.

PINKERTON

There are marriages of convenience, as we have in America, but there are also marriages that are not intended to last. They can be arranged and carried out with both parties fully aware that the marriage is...conditional. And possibly impermanent.

KATE

But why would a woman agree to such an arrangement? What's to come of her if the marriage ends? What about children? This sounds so...stupid! So...impractical!

PINKERTON

I know. This Japanese view of marriage can place the woman at a disadvantage. She may have more to lose. She may be left with children and little property or money. But this isn't always the case. Women may have as much to gain as men.

KATE

I'm not doubting you, Benjamin. But, still, what's to keep a man from marrying a woman for pleasure? Surely there were pretty young things in kimonos that you could "buy" without marrying them?

PINKERTON
(uncomfortably)

Yes...there were.

KATE

And? Were you not tempted?

PINKERTON

Of course. We all were. We were in a strange country without women who looked and spoke like us. Many of my fellow officers took solace in the arms of yujos, the women of pleasure. There were many of them. Some were very lovely, most were plain but...very skillful.

KATE

And did you?

PINKERTON

I did, a few times. But...I don't know how to say this, my darling, without you thinking ill of me...I met a young woman who was not a yujo. She was very pretty. And kind. Oh, I knew from the beginning that I would eventually hurt her—and possibly you. But I'm not without imperfections or...desires. It seemed so...convenient. A single lover, none of the risks of the yujos, a small house on a hill...Someone I could be with until I returned home to you. To be honest I never gave thought to consequences.

KATE

And you...married her?

PINKERTON

Under Japanese law. I could end the marriage at any time, as I intended to do. In Japan a marriage contract is valid for 999 years but can be annulled at the end of each month.

KATE

But she thought the marriage to be permanent?

PINKERTON

I don't know. I suppose so.

KATE

What was her name?

PINKERTON

They called her Butterfly. It fit her perfectly—so delicate and wistful, and fragile.

KATE

And she is waiting for you?

PINKERTON

I don't know. Perhaps, perhaps not. It's been almost four years. She may not even remember me. We had a few months together before I returned to America. I can't imagine she's not had other suitors. By now she may be married again.

KATE

How old was she?

PINKERTON

Fifteen.

KATE

Oh, god. You seduced a child. How could you?

PINKERTON

She knew the terms of our agreement. She entered it willingly. And she was paid. To me it was all about business.

KATE

You paid for her?

PINKERTON

For her and for her house. A hundred yen. (defensively) Japanese custom, it's very different from ours. These marriages were common. I wasn't the only officer...

KATE

(after some time)

I don't know what to say. You bought this child's virtue for, what, a hundred yen? What is that? A dollar?

PINKERTON

Fifty.

KATE

(wryly and not without bite)

Not much of a house, was it? (long pause) Did you...do you love her?

PINKERTON

As one loves the sunrise. Not like our love.

KATE

(angrily)

Oh? And am I not the sunrise?

PINKERTON

Yes, of course. But...

KATE

(sarcastically)

But what, dear? (pause) This marriage, the ceremony, it was just the two of you?

PINKERTON

It was formal, her family was there. And my friend Sharpless, the Consul.

KATE

Sharpless was part of this charade?

PINKERTON

He warned me...but I was not listening.

KATE

And her family? They must have seen you as quite the catch.

PINKERTON

Her uncle, the Bonze they called him, he caused a stir when he found out that Butterfly was adopting my religion. He denounced her in front of the entire family. Then he stomped out. I'm afraid that all her relatives have also renounced her. (pause) I'm so ashamed.

KATE

Of what, dear? I had no claim on you at the time.

PINKERTON

But...

KATE

But what if I had an affair while you were away? Would you be so forgiving?

PINKERTON

Of course not! Men have passions! We all fall from grace on occasion.

KATE

And women do not?

PINKERTON

You don't understand. I was very lonely.

KATE

And I? (handing paper and pen to Benjamin) Here. I want you to start writing. Tell your darling Butterfly that you didn't intend the marriage to be permanent, and that you can't resume your arrangement. You needn't tell her about me. And you will never see her again. Is that understood? You will never see her again. (pause) Then let's speak no more about it. It's all behind us.

PINKERTON

Of course, my darling. You're all that matters. I'll have Sharpless deliver it as soon as we arrive. You needn't worry. Butterfly will understand.

KATE

Then she is more understanding than I.

BLACKOUT

(Nagasaki Harbor, one week later. The **PINKERTONS** are in their quarters.)

(Lights on)

KATE

A child? A bastard? How could you, Benjamin?

PINKERTON

Kate...

KATE

(with spite)

You're as much a bastard as he is. A thoughtless, willful bastard.

PINKERTON

Please, let me explain...

KATE

Explain what. I'm barely twenty-nine. Separated by an ocean from my family. Thrown into a strange culture, in a new marriage...to a man I thought I knew and obviously did not. And now being asked to adopt his...(sarcastically)...love child?

PINKERTON

We don't have to, Kate. His mother can care for him.

KATE

And what? Let him starve? Or do we support her and her bastard son and go on as if nothing has happened? (pausing, ruefully) Oh, I wish we could just make this go away. Sweep it under a rug.

PINKERTON

You know we can't do that, darling. I have my career to consider. If this were known to my superiors...(pausing) I'm the youngest lieutenant in this part of the Pacific. I have a spotless record. In five years I may have my own ship. We can't have my child and his mother hanging around Nagasaki. No, the only solution is for you to take the child to San Francisco. I can find a way to get transferred back.

KATE

You must be kidding, Benjamin. Just show up with a kid in tow? A half breed?

PINKERTON

Think, Kate. Sharpless tells us the child has his mother's features but with some of mine as well. He would not be alone—there are other mixed Japanese children in the city. You could tell your family and our friends that we adopted him because his mother had died. As Christians, it was our duty.

KATE

Oh, Benjamin, how cruel.

PINKERTON

To whom, Kate? His mother or the boy?

KATE

To me, Benjamin. To me. (pausing) What makes you think Butterfly would give up her son?

PINKERTON

She'll do whatever I ask. I'm sure of it.

KATE

You sound so confident. Or arrogant.

PINKERTON

Why would she not? I'm sure she wants what's best for her child. She knows we can give him a good home...and she cannot. She also will do whatever I want. From what Sharpless said, she has been waiting for me every day since I left four years ago. She loves me. I'm the boy's father. She will understand that if she cannot have me for herself, at least her son can. (pausing) I'm not worried about Butterfly. I'm worried about you. About us.

KATE

About my ability to bear children? We only know what one doctor has told us. I'm not willing to give up hope.

PINKERTON

We don't have to. We can keep trying. If it does not happen, at least we have our Japanese son.

KATE

You've really thought this through, haven't you?

PINKERTON

I think it's our best way out of this bad situation. And I know you will be a wonderful mother.

KATE

And you a dutiful father?

PINKERTON

Yes, I a dutiful father. (after a moment) Tomorrow we can visit Butterfly, along with Sharpless. He tells me that Butterfly's maid, Suzuki, can help us convince Butterfly, if any convincing is needed. Meantime we can sleep on it. We're doing the right thing. (pausing) But we must act as a couple, Kate, if this is to succeed. Can I count on you?

KATE

Give me the night, Benjamin. That's all I ask.

BLACKOUT

(The Pinkerton's home in San Francisco, ten years later. **KATE** is busy cleaning. Her son **MATTHEW** enters.)

(Lights on)

MATTHEW

Mother.

KATE

Hello, dear. How was school?

MATTHEW

Better than usual...actually. We talked about Japan in our history class. Such a strange place it was in the 19th century. Miss McHugh had us act out a Japanese play, something she called kabuki. I got to be a samurai warrior, with a real kimono...but only a fake sword!

KATE

Good thing!

MATTHEW

Hah! Sure wish I'd had a real sword. Boy, would I put it to use. (acting out a samurai wielding his sword) Take that Jimmy Caswell! Take that Tommy Hood! Off with your heads!

KATE

You shouldn't say that, dear.

MATTHEW

Why not? I'm tired of them calling me a Jap and pulling the corner of the eyes to make them slanted like mine. I hate them. I hate most of my classmates.

KATE

Of course you don't hate your classmates, Matthew. You know that. Boys of your age can be bullies—they do this to everybody. You shouldn't take it personally. You have many friends. (after a moment) I haven't seen Henry lately. You two seemed so close.

MATTHEW

Yeah, we've both been busy. Exams and all.

KATE

Of course. (pause) Will you be going to the church dance on Saturday?

MATTHEW

I haven't decided. I may have to study for my math final.

KATE

There'll be plenty of girls there.

MATTHEW

Girls think I'm odd, mother. (pause) I am odd.

KATE

Not odd, dear...exotic. You're just different from your classmates.

MATTHEW

I don't want to be different. I want to be accepted. (after a moment) Ever since first grade I've felt like an outcast. My English was different. My looks were different. And the names they called me...

KATE

But that's all better now, isn't it?

MATTHEW

A little, I guess. I still feel like an outsider. Not American, not Japanese. Like I'm from another planet. A total fraud.

(as if singing, with musical background)

Different skin, different hair
 Out of place, everywhere
 Eyes too slanted, voice too rare
 Not like them, a burnished face
 Instead of fair

MATTHEW (continued)

Just for once I'd like to be
 No different from the rest
 Not exotic, not peculiar
 Not the smartest, not the best

Not the kid their folks condemn
 Not a flower but a stem
 Why can't I be just like them?

Am I asking for the moon
 To blend into the crowd
 Not too distant, not too proud
 Just an ordinary face
 Inside a cloud

Not the kid their folks condemn
 Not a flower but a stem
 Oh, why can't I be just like them?

KATE

Oh, darling.

MATTHEW

(after a moment)

The class today, on Japan—it got me thinking about my Japanese mother. How I wish I had known her. Or at least knew more about her. Maybe someday I can look for her home...and her family. (pausing, troubled) Lately...I've had flashes of memory of what might be Japan. I don't know if these memories are real—or tricks my mind is playing, connecting imaginary dots to produce imaginary events. I just don't know. I don't know. But they keep coming back.

KATE

(warily)

Memories?

MATTHEW

Faint images. Being held tightly by a woman. Another woman with her, possibly a maid or friend. A house full of flower petals—white, pink, red...everywhere. Being torn from her. Death...sadness...remorse. For what I don't know. I wish I could erase these images, whether they're real or a figment of my mind. (after a moment) You know, mother, you've never told me much about how you and dad came to adopt me. You've said that my mother was poor and could not support a young child. But that's about it. I know nothing about her background, or who my father was, or how it was that you and dad discovered her...and me, or even what her name was.

KATE

(choosing her words carefully)

I can't recall her name. I do remember that she had a "pet name"—a term of endearment that everyone called her. Possibly your father remembers. She was very young...and pretty, but terribly frail. Your father's good friend Sharpless, the US Consul in Nagasaki—do you remember him? we've had him to dinner a few times—brought the woman to us shortly after we arrived. It was clear she loved you very much. (pause) A few months after we took you in, she died. As for your father, nothing. We never learned his identity.

MATTHEW

Why did you and father decide to adopt me? You were just married, you had your whole lives in front of you. You must have known what a disruption I might be.

KATE

Well, it certainly wasn't something we planned. Our first thought when we learned of Butterfly's death and faced the decision of what to do next was, "That's crazy." Adopt a three-year old? Take him back to America? A child who was half Japanese? What would our family think? And our friends? And could this child possibly be happy in a culture that viewed him as...different?

MATTHEW

As it does.

KATE

Your father and I spent a sleepless night, back and forth, anguishing about what this would mean to our marriage...and our lives. Then just before dawn we made up our minds. Adopting you wasn't just something we wanted to do...it was something we had to do. We've never regretted that decision. (pauses, reflects)

KATE (continued)

I still remember the first time we saw you. You were so shy...and skinny...and very sad. Your mother told us little about her background. All we knew was that she trusted us to love you, and protect you...as she herself would have protected you.

MATTHEW

As you have.

KATE

It took a while before you began to accept us. You always viewed us with suspicion, or so it seemed. There was something dark and enigmatic about you. There still is, I think. My mysterious son!

MATTHEW

Maybe it's why I still don't trust people. It's always been hard for me to make friends. My classmates...they all see me as distant. I guess I am...But you know that.

KATE

Try to put these troubled thoughts behind you, darling. You know how much we love you. We just want you to happy.

(PINKERTON enters)

PINKERTON

Well, what have you two been conspiring about? Not dinner, I hope. You know how I feel about turnips!

KATE

Hello, dear! You're an amazing mind reader. I was just telling Matthew about a new recipe I found for baked turnips. With liver and onions.

PINKERTON

Ah, my favorite.

MATTHEW

Hello, father.

PINKERTON

Son.

KATE

Actually, Matthew and I were talking about Nagasaki...and his adoption. His history class covered Japan today.

(She casts Pinkerton a cautioning eye.)

I told him about his mother...what we knew about her.

PINKERTON

Poor, lovely soul.

MATTHEW

I asked mother what people called her. She said you might remember. It was a “pet name,” she thinks.

PINKERTON

It was. They called her Butterfly. It fit her perfectly—so fragile...and vulnerable. (to Matthew) What got you thinking about her?

MATTHEW

Oh, just some dreams I’ve been having. Strange dreams. About a woman who might be my Japanese mother. A house. Flower petals. An American flag. You and mother show up in these dreams. It’s all so confusing.

PINKERTON

You mustn’t think about these dreams. There was sadness when she handed you to us, of course. But there was also gratitude in her eyes to know you would be loved and cared for in a way she could not offer. She died, you know, within months of our departure. Who’s to say what would have happened to you had we not found you. Butterfly had called you Sorrow—but the last words she said to us were, “To me, now, he will always be not Sorrow but Joy.” And you have been our joy from that moment on.

(MATTHEW exits)

KATE

I’ve started to believe this fiction.

PINKERTON

I too.

KATE

It's not all false.

PINKERTON

Not all. Only the important parts.

KATE

Do you suppose he knows more than we've admitted?

PINKERTON

I don't know. But he may know more than he realizes. It's in his dreams, in his actions, in how his friends see him and treat him. Oh, he seems so...normal, on the surface. He's trying so hard to be normal. But beneath the surface...that calm surface...

KATE

Turmoil?

PINKERTON

Waiting to erupt?

KATE

How long can we protect him?

PINKERTON

As we have protected ourselves.

KATE

(after a moment)

You still think of her, don't you?

PINKERTON

How can I not? But you...? (pausing) I still see it in your eyes. You can't let go. I have, but you have not...

KATE

I have.

PINKERTON

Then why do you punish me?

KATE

Punish you? I love you, Benjamin. You must know that.

PINKERTON

Yes...maybe. I'd like to. Still...part of me believes that you are punishing me.

KATE

For bringing Matthew into our lives?

PINKERTON

Perhaps...No.

KATE

How could you? Our Joy.

PINKERTON

And our Sorrow.

KATE

If only we could protect him forever.

PINKERTON

If only we could remove all his fears...his loneliness...

KATE

All we can do is embrace him as best we can. We cannot protect him forever.

PINKERTON

Not forever. But at least for now.

BLACKOUT

(A street in San Francisco, eight years later.)

(Lights on)

MATTHEW

Sharpless! Is that you?

SHARPLESS

Matthew? My heavens, how long has it been? How are your parents? And what are you up to these days? You look splendid!

MATTHEW

(shaking his hand)

Sharpless, how good to see you! Father was just talking about you last week. I've finished up at college and plan to look for work here. I guess my heart is in this city. And you? Still with the State Department?

SHARPLESS

Ah, and I shall probably die there, at my desk. But they treat me well. A few more years and I'll be able to sail away to a distant port, free and clear. You know, you should give a thought to government work. It's not as dull as you may think. (pause) Well, perhaps it is, perhaps it is, no matter. If you want excitement, there's always your father's profession. You would make a splendid naval officer! As did he! And he would be thrilled to see you in a US Naval uniform!

MATTHEW

I'm sure he would. But I'm thinking more about law, possibly international. Something that allows me to travel abroad. See the world. I would love to visit Japan. Go to Nagasaki. Possibly try to find my mother's home and even try to track down some of her family.

SHARPLESS

(alarmed)

Your mother? How much have your parents told you about her?

MATTHEW

Quite a bit. That she was poor, and desperate, and that her name was Butterfly. And that she was abandoned by my father. Is there more to say? How well did you know her?

SHARPLESS

(now very alarmed)

Then you know how it was that you came to be adopted?

MATTHEW

I think so. And the role you played. Very sad, tragic. It must have been hard for you as well. To have me taken away from my birth mother. Then to have her die.

SHARPLESS

(misreading Matthew's words)

I had no idea that he and Butterfly had conceived a child. I tried my best to tell him how unwise it was get involved with a Japanese woman. A child, really. Fifteen years old! He wouldn't listen to me. All he knew was that he desired her—and had no expectation of staying with her. He gave no thought of the possible consequences.

MATTHEW

He? Him? Who are you talking about? I thought you didn't know my real father?

SHARPLESS

(now confused)

Not know him? Of course I knew him. (realizing his error) I mean...

MATTHEW

You mean what, Sharpless? My parents told me they never learned the identity of my father. Either they lied to me...or you lied to them. Which is it?

SHARPLESS

Well, I....

MATTHEW

Tell me, which is it? Why would you lie to them, unless...(pausing) ...unless you were my father. Is that it? You're my father?

SHARPLESS

Don't be silly Of course not.

MATTHEW

Then why would you lie to them? Or are all of you deceiving me? Unless...

SHARPLESS

I...I...

MATTHEW

...unless...my American and Japanese father are one in the same. Is that it, Sharpless? It was my American father who deserted Butterfly? He who is my real father?

SHARPLESS

I...I...thought he had told you all of this. Oh, heavens, I've been a fool! A witless fool!

MATTHEW

(angrily)

A fool indeed...but not for your honesty. Now tell me the real story. Leave nothing out. I want to know who I am...and how I came to be a Pinkerton.

SHARPLESS

(trying his best to stay under control)

Your father is the man who abandoned Butterfly. He met her four years before, through a marriage broker. They were wed under Japanese law, with all her relatives in attendance and with no intention on his part to remain with her. He was already engaged to your mother and planned to marry her upon his return to the States. What he did not intend—or even consider—was that Butterfly would regard their marriage as permanent. That she would regard him as her husband for life. And certainly not that they might conceive a child. It was foolish...and heartless.

MATTHEW

(furious)

Did he even love her?

SHARPLESS

I cannot say. I do know that he thought she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever known. A delicate creature—"fair as a garland of fragrant flowers, brighter than a star in the heavens."

MATTHEW

Ah!

SHARPLESS

I remember to this day the toast your father made just before Butterfly and the guests arrived at the wedding: “To the day on which I’ll wed in real marriage a real wife, a wife from America!” Imagine. He knew he was deceiving her, the pitiable soul. And for the price of a hundred yen!

MATTHEW

He paid for her?

SHARPLESS

For her and for her house—for 999 years, with the option to cancel the contract at the end of any month.

MATTHEW

Then he left. And I was born. And he returned.

SHARPLESS

Yes, he returned, but after first confessing to your mother that he had a Japanese wife. He vowed never to see Butterfly again. And it might have ended that way except for you. He wrote a letter to Butterfly which I was to deliver. It was hard for me, for I had grown very fond of Butterfly. I might have even been in love with her myself.

MATTHEW

(to Sharpless)

Can this be true?

SHARPLESS

All this, and more. The next morning I returned with your father and mother. They were determined to ask Butterfly to relinquish you, the child she called Sorrow, for them to raise in America. They thought only of your well-being...and with little thought of Butterfly’s. Butterfly had decorated the house with petals in preparation for your return. She and her maid Suzuki had stayed up all night in waiting. She knew your father was coming back—they had seen his ship coming into the harbor. When we arrived at the house, she immediately noticed the strange woman next to your father. She knew at once who the woman was, and that they had come to take you from her. In her grief she stabbed herself.

MATTHEW

(more to himself than to Sharpless)

Can this be so? My father a seducer? My mother a common thief? The two of them murderers? And my whole life a fraud, built on a bed of lies? How could they have deceived me so? How could they have treated my mother as if she were chattel? (to Sharpless) Why am I to believe you?

SHARPLESS

I've retained the letter your father wrote. Your parents can confirm all that I've said. You must ask them.

MATTHEW

And so I will, Sharpless! So I will. (He flees.)

BLACKOUT

(The Pinkerton home later that day. **KATE** and **PINKERTON** are seated as **MATTHEW** enters.)

(Lights on)

KATE

Matthew! What a surprise! We thought you were out for the evening. Come in, dear, we were just about to have tea. Can I get you some?

MATTHEW

No thank you, mother. I can only stay for a few minutes. (He turns to his father.)
Father.

PINKERTON

Son. To what do we owe this pleasure?

(Matthew hesitates, clearly troubled.)

KATE

What is it, darling? What's wrong?

MATTHEW

(at last)

I ran into Sharpless today.

KATE

Oh, and how is he? We've been meaning to have him over. He must be thinking about life after the State Department.

MATTHEW

He's fine. He sends his regards. (pausing) We got to talking about Nagasaki. About my mother. (pausing again) Did you know he loved her?

PINKERTON

(clearly surprised)

You must be mistaken. He barely knew her.

MATTHEW

Actually, he knew her well. Much better than you admitted to me. He told me he was at her wedding to my father. He thought she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever known. “A delicate creature—fair as a garland of fragrant flowers, brighter than a star in the heavens.”

PINKERTON

(stunned)

I had no idea. We only saw them together the day we took custody of you. Perhaps he had seen her after you were born. At her home or at the consulate.

MATTHEW

He also remembers the toast my father made just before Butterfly and the guests arrived at the wedding: “To the day on which I'll wed in real marriage a real wife, a wife from America!”

(Pinkerton looks at Kate with alarm.)

Imagine. He knew he was deceiving her, the pitiable soul. And for the price of a hundred yen! (pausing, with emphasis) He bought her house—and her—for 999 years, with the option to cancel the contract at the end of any month. For that she gave up her religion and her family. (vehemently) Sold her soul to the white devil!

PINKERTON

(defensively)

Japanese custom, it's very different from ours. Their agreements are every flexible. These marriages were common. Your father was no different from many others who sailed into port.

MATTHEW

Even so, cruel and heartless. To ruin an innocent girl. (pausing then turning to his parents accusatively) And then to steal her child!

PINKERTON

The child was given to us willingly! Butterfly had no choice if he was to live a happy life!

MATTHEW

(angrily)

At the cost of her own life?

PINKERTON

What are you talking about?

MATTHEW

Sharpless told me all. Butterfly's vigil. The petals. Your arrival. Mother's request. Her suicide. (to his mother) Do you remember my telling you about the images that were haunting my dreams, from when I was a young boy in Nagasaki? Those dreams were real. Every one of them. I knew in my heart that I had another mother, a mother who loved me to the bottom of her soul. A true mother. A Japanese mother.

PINKERTON

None of this is true, you must believe me. Sharpless is confused. You said yourself that he was in love with her. He was merely defending her. It's all a lie.

MATTHEW

And the letter you wrote to Butterfly? Is that also a lie? They say that if a butterfly is caught by man, he'll pierce its heart with a needle and then leave it to perish! As you have done.

KATE

Oh, Matthew! We were only trying to spare you! Please believe me.

MATTHEW

What I believe, mother, is that when you tore me from Butterfly, you tore away my soul. You banished me to another country, another culture. You stole my true identity, my true mother. I am Japanese, not American! This country you have made me adopt is poison to my being. The love you have given me is stolen love. I despise what you have turned me into, and what you have taken from me!

KATE

Matthew!

MATTHEW

Not Matthew...Sorrow! From this day forward I shall be known by her name for me, Sorrow. My birth name. Japan, my birth country. Its religion, mine. I cannot forget all you have given me—I don't for a moment doubt your love. But I cannot forget your treachery. Both of your treachery, but...(turning to his father)...especially yours, father. Do not mourn for me, mourn for Butterfly. She came of a people accustomed to little. And you treated her as you would a vagrant. How can you bear to live with such shame?

PINKERTON

(remorsefully)

I meant no harm. I was young and impetuous, a boy really. When I saw Butterfly, my heart soared. Her charm was so alluring, her body so delicate. I gave no thought to consequences. I...I...was weak.

KATE

(to Pinkerton, with spite)

You were weak. Had I known how callously you treated her as a bride, I would have shown her more pity. You not only deceived Butterfly and Matthew, you deceived me. And I became your accomplice. How often I have thought of that day when we took advantage of that poor girl and left her to die, without hope, without her child. The joy that Matthew has brought us can never repay the shame of our actions.

MATTHEW

(with scorn)

I can't bear to live with you any longer. Put me out of your thoughts, as I will put you out of my life. Good bye, dear parents. You shall see me no more!

BLACKOUT

(Tokyo, two years later. **MATTHEW** is sitting at a bar when **SHINA**, a young Japanese woman, approaches him.)

(Lights on)

SHINA

Mind if I have a seat?

MATTHEW

Sure, help yourself.

SHINA

(after a moment, looking at him with interest)

We don't see many ainokos [NB: eye-NO-kos] in here.

MATTHEW

So? I have as much right to be here as anyone.

SHINA

Of course, but it's a pretty tough crowd. They can be hard on half-breeds.

MATTHEW

I can handle myself.

(after a minute)

SHINA

So, let me guess. Your mother was probably a geisha, and your father was an American sailor, probably a drunk American sailor. That would explain why you look more American than Japanese. Am I right?

MATTHEW

Why would you think that?

SHINA

I'm right then? You're a Navy love child? There are many like you in Tokyo.

MATTHEW

(angrily)

I'm not American! My father was a German officer. He met my mother at the embassy. She was a secretary. (pause) We hate Americans as much as you do!

SHINA

(drolly)

Sure, sailor boy, whatever you say. Just be on your toes. My friends don't ask a lot of questions.

(**GORO**, a friend of Shina, approaches.)

Better yet, you might be better off leaving now.

GORO

(sneering)

Who's your ainoko boyfriend, Shina?

SHINA

Leave him alone. He was just leaving.

GORO

(continuing to sneer)

Hey, white boy, you coming on to Shina? Why don't you get your kuronbo ass out of here before we turn it into yakitori? (Matthew ignores him) What's the matter, kuronbo? Your sailor dad took your balls with him when he left port? Let me guess, you pimp for your whore mother because your dick is as limp as a soba noodle?

(Matthew lunges at him. They begin to scuffle. Shina finally throws herself between them.)

SHINA

Lay off him, Goro. He did nothing to you.

GORO

The prick walked into this bar. That's enough for me. He doesn't belong here.

(Goro continues to throw punches around Shina.)

GORO (continued)

How's that feel, kuronbo?

SHINA

Stop it!

(Goro finally stops.)

GORO

Had enough? Now get the hell out of here. I don't want to see your face in here again.

(Goro stalks away.)

(Matthew moves back to his seat at the bar.)

MATTHEW

Asshole.

SHINA

I'm sorry. But I warned you.

(They sit silently for a few minutes. Then Matthew turns to Shina.)

MATTHEW

Why did you protect me? Don't you hate me like the others?

SHINA

Look at me. What do you see?

MATTHEW

I see an attractive Japanese woman.

SHINA

What else do you see?

MATTHEW

(confused)

Kindness. Intelligence. Is there more?

SHINA

What is it that you do not see? (pausing) Another ainoko?

MATTHEW

You?

SHINA

Yes, me.

MATTHEW

But you, you...

SHINA

Yes, me. I do not look like you. My mother was Japanese, my father Korean. I was raised Japanese, but I too am a half-breed. Very few people know. Goro would kill me if he suspected.

MATTHEW

So you have not experienced what I did tonight?

SHINA

I have not. But I've seen it. Often. (after a moment) Now tell me the truth about your parents. You are not half German, are you?

MATTHEW

(sheepishly)

My father was an American naval officer. My mother was a geisha, as you suspected. When she died, my father took me back to America, to San Francisco, where I was raised. I never set foot in Japan until last year.

SHINA

Which explains why your Japanese is so deplorable.

MATTHEW

Is it that bad?

SHINA

(laughing)

Truly.

MATTHEW

It was my first language, the language of my mother in Nagasaki.

SHINA

How old were you when she died?

MATTHEW

Three. She killed herself, committed seppuku, when she found out that my father had married an American woman.

SHINA

I am so sorry.

(she takes his hand)

MATTHEW

I only found out the truth of my mother's death a few years ago. Since then I've been running away from everything they taught me. But I've found that it is far easier to run away from what you hate than to find what it is you love—and to be loved in return.

SHINA

Living as half Japanese in Japan is not an easy path.

MATTHEW

So I have found.

(pausing)

Why do the natives hate us so?

SHINA

Not all of them hate those of us who are not pure Japanese. Only those who fear losing the purity of Japanese blood. They are frightened of change, and of anything different.

MATTHEW

As were my classmates in America. To them I was Japanese, to the Japanese I am American. The worst of both worlds.

SHINA

Did they treat you like Goro?

MATTHEW

Picked fights, yes, but mostly they called me names. Jap. Nip. Slant-eyes. My poor English the first few years didn't help.

SHINA

So, from deplorable English to deplorable Japanese?

MATTHEW

The story of my life...(pauses) That word Goro used, kuronbo. What does it mean?

SHINA

(awkwardly)

It is what some Americans might call a...a...black person.

MATTHEW

Ah, I see.

SHINA

(after a moment)

How do you support yourself?

MATTHEW

I translate. I wait tables. I wash dishes. I do a little of a lot.

SHINA

(gently)

Can I help?

MATTHEW

You?

SHINA

I have a sister who works for the government, in intelligence. She tells me that they have a hard time finding recruits who speak fluent American English, and who know the country and its culture. Let me put you in touch with her.

MATTHEW

You would do that?

SHINA

I would do that. But under one condition...

MATTHEW

What is that?

SHINA

You must first tell me your name.

MATTHEW

(laughing)

I was called Matthew in America. But the name my Japanese mother gave me is Kanashimi, Sorrow.

SHINA

Kanashimi. Kanashimi. I like that. (pausing) Please call me Shina.

MATTHEW

Shina it is. A pleasure to meet you, ainoko Shina.

SHINA

(looking around)

Quietly, please. Quietly.

BLACKOUT

(The bed in **SHINA**'s apartment, six months later.)

(Lights on)

SHINA

Hey.

KANASHIMI

Hey.

SHINA

Thought I'd lost you there.

KANASHIMI

I was beat.

SHINA

Yeah, I could tell. You barely talked last night. (pause) Work?

KANASHIMI

Yeah.

SHINA

They're still on you?

KANASHIMI

Yeah.

SHINA

You said it was getting easier.

KANASHIMI

The work is.

SHINA

But not the people?

KANASHIMI

Not the people.

SHINA

You knew it wouldn't be easy.

KANASHIMI

Yeah. But not like this. (pause) I've tried everything. I keep quiet. Show respect. Do my job well. I've even tried telling jokes. Today we had a meeting of the department. Everyone gave a report. Mine was last, as always. No one said a word afterwards. Just frozen silence. Then everyone got up and left. When I tried to talk to one of my colleagues, he just ignored me. (pausing again) It's wearing me down.

SHINA

I can imagine. It shows on your face. (pausing) And on us. On our relationship.

KANASHIMI

You too? You have to bring that up?

SHINA

I'm sorry.

KANASHIMI

As if I'm the only one to blame. (pause) Every night at home. Just the two of us. (pause) What are you afraid of?

SHINA

You know what I'm afraid of.

KANASHIMI

Afraid? Or ashamed? Of me. Or both? Afraid of being exposed for what you are? Ashamed to be seen with a man who is like you?

SHINA

That's ridiculous.

KANASHIMI

Is it? What's ridiculous is how you keep lying about it.

SHINA

You know my situation. I could lose everything—my job, my friends.

KANASHIMI

Which obviously mean more to you than I do.

SHINA

Don't say that. You know I love you.

KANASHIMI

Love me? You mean "love me until it gets uncomfortable"? "Love me as long as it's convenient?" How you lie, Shina. How you lie. To me. To everyone in your life. Why don't you just go back to your thug friend Goro and his crowd? Stop suffering because of me. (angrily) Don't drag me into your lie. I can live without you.

SHINA

(spitefully)

And I can live without you.

BLACKOUT

(Nagasaki, six years later. **KANASHIMI** is on a street in the Murayama section.)

(Lights on)

KANASHIMI

Excuse me, I am looking for a woman by the name of Suzuki.

SUZUKI

(looking at him strangely)

I am Madame Suzuki. What can I do for you?

KANASHIMI

(tenderly)

Madame Suzuki, you do not know me, though once you did. My name is...or was...Matthew Pinkerton. I believe you knew my mother, the woman they called Madame Butterfly. The name she gave me was Sorrow, Kanashimi.

(As Suzuki starts to collapse, Sorrow catches and steadies her.)

SUZUKI

Kanashimi? Is it truly you? My dear lady's only son? Oh, oh! It cannot be! I thought I would never see you again in this life. Kanashimi!

(She begins to sob uncontrollably.)

KANASHIMI

Dear madame, I cannot tell you what joy it brings me to find you. Please dry your eyes.

SUZUKI

Kanashimi, Kanashimi, let me look at you. You are so tall and strong! Oh, but I see your mother in your face! It is as if Butterfly has returned! The gods have smiled today.
(pause) But how did you find me?

KANASHIMI

It was Sharpless who told me about the Bonze, Butterfly's uncle.

SUZUKI

Sharpless! The white devil's disciple.

KANASHIMI

Indeed. But my disciple as well as it turns out. He always seemed to be a kindly man and the voice of reason to my father, but he was also weak. In any event, he led me to Nagasaki. When I arrived, I sought out the Bonze.

SUZUKI

And he welcomed you?

KANASHIMI

Not at first. He hates those who are not pure Japanese, and he was deeply suspicious of me when we met. But after I told him what I knew of Butterfly's death and my abduction, about the lies my parents told me about how I came to be adopted, about how I renounced them and their country, about my current position in Japanese intelligence...he changed. It turns out, to my surprise, that Butterfly honored them by ending her life as she did. The entire family—aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins—hold Butterfly in high regard. We talked for hours. At the end, he rose, and with tears in his eyes, he embraced me.

SUZUKI

(wryly)

The Bonze did that? Truly the gods are smiling.

KANASHIMI

He asked me to return the next day. When I did, I found that he had assembled the entire family for a celebration. It was the most moving day of my life. We shared stories, we laughed, we embraced. To them I was not only part Japanese, I was family!

SUZUKI

But what of Butterfly? After she died I took her remains to Sakamoto Cemetery. But a few years later they disappeared.

KANASHIMI

Her cousin, Hoshi, told me the story. With the Bonze's connections they were able to move Butterfly's ashes to Okunoin, where the family has its graves. Today they are in the family site—a stone monument with a place for flowers, a place for incense, water in front of the monument, and a chamber underneath for her ashes. The front of the stone pillar lists the names of the family members. Underneath Butterfly's name, in her honor, is carved a single butterfly.

SUZUKI

We must go there at once.

KANASHIMI

(taking her hand)

We will, dear Suzuki. We will. (reflecting) My mother. What can you tell me about her? You knew her best.

SUZUKI

She was a child. She loved your father deeply, and she loved you even more. There is nothing else to say.

KANASHIMI

You say she loved my father. I don't doubt that. But did she really expect him to return? Did she think she would be his wife forever? Or was she living in a fantasy?

SUZUKI

I cannot say, Kanashimi. I could only see so far into her heart.

KANASHIMI

What was she like to be with? Will you not share more?

SUZUKI

(after thinking)

She was witty, and loyal, and she loved all things in nature. But most of all that heavenly, meek, pretty, little voice never uttered a note of sadness. She used to say laughter is fruit and flower. (pausing) This was her favorite poem.

"A smile breaks through a web of trouble.

It opens the shell for the pearl,

To man it opens the gates of Paradise.

Perfume of the gods...fountain of life...

The wise Ogunama has said:

A smile breaks through a web of troubles."

That was Butterfly. It is how I always remember her. It is how you should think of her.

KANASHIMI

But how could she give me up so willingly?

SUZUKI

Willingly? It broke her heart. But she could not say no to your father. Her love was too strong...for both him and for you. She wanted most of all to see you happy and cared for. And to obey him.

KANASHIMI

Ah, I see. I see.

(It is the following day. KANASHIMI and SUZUKI are at Butterfly's grave site in Okunoin Cemetery.)

KANASHIMI

It is as Hoshi described. A single butterfly. Delicate and fragile as blown glass.

SUZUKI

(wistfully)

“Like a butterfly she fluttered and settled with such quiet grace.”

(Kanashimi and Suzuki kneel, bow their heads, and take each other's hands.)

(In the background the [Humming Chorus](#) from Madame Butterfly softly plays.)

KANASHIMI

(waiting a minute for chorus to play)

I have been searching for you my whole life, dear mother. Now I have found you. Now I have come home to you. Now I know who you are. Now my children will know who you are.

BUTTERFLY

(from off stage)

Beloved Idol,
Adored being,
Fairest flower of beauty.
Though you may never know it
It is for you, my love, for you that I have died
That you may go away

BUTTERFLY (continued)

Beyond the ocean,
Never to feel the torment when you are older,
That your mother forsook you!

My son, sent to me from Heaven,
Straight from the throne of glory,
Take one last and careful look
At your poor mother's face!
That its memory may linger,
One last look!
Farewell, beloved! Farewell, my dearest heart!

(Humming Chorus plays to the end.)

BLACKOUT

(Honolulu, 1941. **KANASHIMI** Okuda, the new Vice Consul in Hawaii in charge of espionage, is meeting for the first time with his key agent, **YOSHIKAWA**. They are seated in the Shuncho ro, a Japanese-style teahouse in the Alewa Heights section of the city.)

(Lights on)

KANASHIMI

(looking around)

So, this is where you spend your time?

YOSHIKAWA

Yes, Vice Consul. Most days I spend at least an hour here at the Shuncho ro.

KANASHIMI

How long have we been working together, Yoshi? Three months? More? And all during that time I never asked you where and how you were gathering your information. Only what it was.

YOSHIKAWA

My job, sir, is to serve you and my country.

(after a moment)

KANASHIMI

(looking out)

A perfect view of the harbor.

YOSHIKAWA

Consul General Kita introduced me to it. It is strategically situated—it even has a telescope I can use in privacy. The restaurant is run by a woman from my own Shikoku Island. She staffs it with geishas. They help me gather information from the US seamen who come here. (points out) From these front windows I can see Ford Island in the center of Pearl Harbor.

KANASHIMI

Ah, yes. The center of operations for the U.S. Navy. (pausing) You have done well. We are well prepared. Now we await the message that will tell us that an attack on Pearl Harbor is imminent.

YOSHIKAWA

(with steel in his voice)

“East wind, rain.”

KANASHIMI

“East wind, rain.” (after a long moment) I’m curious, Yoshi. Why is it you left Japan to come here to Hawaii? You were well-positioned in Tokyo.

YOSHIKAWA

It was the right time, sir. I no longer had deep ties to my homeland. My wife had just died, and we had no children. I was ready to begin a new life.

KANASHIMI

I’m so sorry about your wife. It must have been painful.

YOSHIKAWA

More than you can imagine. (pausing) A few years ago I became ill. All during the time I was suffering, my wife was seeing another man. When I found out, I was devastated. I left her, moved to a nearby town. She asked to come back, but I was too proud, even though I still loved her. But she never gave up. Finally I relented. Although she died within the year, during that one year we were closer than we ever had been. It was as if my willingness to forgive—and hers to ask forgiveness—allowed us to rediscover the love of our youth. So much I would have lost...had I not let pride go!

KANASHIMI

You are a lucky man, Yoshi. I envy you.

YOSHIKAWA

(after a pause, with caution)

If I may ask, sir, how is it that you have become our Vice Consul? To meet you on the street here in Oahu, one might assume by your appearance that you worked for the American and not the Japanese consulate. Yet your Japanese is flawless. And your record speaks to your loyalty to the Crown.

KANASHIMI

My father was a US Naval officer, my mother a geisha living in Nagasaki, a young woman they called Butterfly. When she died, my father and his American wife took me to San Francisco. She had indicated to my parents that they could adopt me. She had little

choice. She knew she could not support me, and she loved my father. When they came to claim me, they found that she had killed herself, committed ritual suicide.

YOSHIKAWA

Ah, I have heard this story before.

KANASHIMI

Only years later did I find out the truth. They deceived me into thinking they had adopted me after my mother died of natural causes. Father's best friend and US Consul in Nagasaki, a man named Sharpless, helped in this deception.

YOSHIKAWA

Did you not suspect your parents were deceiving you? No memories of your mother, of Nagasaki?

KANASHIMI

A few. And a photograph I once found of my father standing next to a young Japanese woman. It didn't occur to me until later that the woman might have been my mother.

YOSHIKAWA

What happened to you after you left your parents?

KANASHIMI

I moved to Japan. I thought I'd be welcomed there with open arms. Instead I was shunned. They called me an ainoko, a half-breed. No one would befriend me; no one would hire me. Were it not for my fluent English and knowledge of America, I'm sure the diplomatic corps would never have offered me a job. Even now I'm viewed with suspicion. So I've learned to distrust the motives of those who are kind to me, including women. It should come as no surprise to you that I have never married.

YOSHIKAWA

You have no wife?

KANASHIMI

(shaking his head)

The American women here in Hawaii, the half-Japanese like me, I despise, while the Japanese women in Japan want nothing to do with me. Only those few Japanese women

who are ainokos give me any comfort. One of them, a woman I met in Tokyo, was the one woman I loved.

YOSHIKAWA

What happened with her?

KANASHIMI

Toward the end she could not accept my American parentage. The social pressures on her were too great—she too was only half Japanese, but Korean instead of American. She was deathly afraid of being exposed.

YOSHIKAWA

Japan can be hard on outcasts, sir. It is easier to live there as a foreigner than as a half-breed. The former are distrusted...and looked down on—but at least they are left alone. An ainoko is seen as a traitor.

KANASHIMI

That is how I feel, Yoshi, like a traitor. I did not choose to be American—and yet I was one, and in many ways I still am one. I have my relatives in Nagasaki—they see me as family—but outside of them I live as an alien. One foot in two worlds, at home in neither.

YOSHIKAWA

(moved)

Yet here you are, fully Japanese, serving our government, with nobility.

KANASHIMI

Fully Japanese? What does that mean? I was raised in America, by American parents. To this day I dream in English. I knew nothing about Japan until my early twenties. You, on the other hand, you were Japanese from the day you were born. It's in your blood. So how can I think and feel about Japan as you do? (angrily) At times I wish I could take a knife and carve out all that is American inside me. Do you have any idea what that is like—to love your country but not really feel part of it? To feel like a stranger in your own land? Neither fish nor fowl? The best I can do is to act more Japanese than most Japanese, by devoting my life to attacking its enemies. But the struggle within me never ceases, no matter how hard I try to hate America and my parents. I live as a fraud.

YOSHIKAWA

(after a pause)

You found out the truth many years ago. And since then you have not spoken to your parents?

KANASHIMI

Not a word.

YOSHIKAWA

And never will?

KANASHIMI

(sadly)

I do not know. I do think of them often. At times I long to see them again. I know they loved me as their own, and that they feel remorse for what they did to Butterfly. At times I wonder if there may be a limit to my desire to punish them. I still feel a hole in my heart that once they filled. My youth with them was wrapped in pleasant memories. Even now my dreams are filled with these images.

YOSHIKAWA

They live in America?

KANASHIMI

In San Francisco. My father is now retired. They have reached out to me many times, asking to see me in San Francisco or Hawaii. At first I didn't bother to respond; lately I've begun sending them brief notes, asking them not to write again. Still they persist. They continue to call me by my American name, Matthew.

YOSHIKAWA

Brothers and sisters?

KANASHIMI

None.

(They sit in silence.)

YOSHIKAWA

Have you asked yourself, Okuda-san, why your parents were so willing to adopt you? They must have known how difficult it would be for you to grow up I in America. And how hard it would be for them to raise you.

KANASHIMI

I have, many times. Perhaps if I had looked less American and more Japanese they might not have wanted me. As it was, I must have been a dagger in my American mother's side, though she never would have admitted it.

YOSHIKAWA

How hard that must have been for her. To see Butterfly each time she looked into your eyes.

KANASHIMI

I know she blamed my father for his callowness. What transpired between them when they actually saw me for the first time—when they had to decide to take me or leave me behind in my mother's blood—that I do not know. What I do know is that they had made that decision even before my mother Butterfly sacrificed herself. (sadly) We think the option to forgive is never ending. But people die. Options close. Pride wins out.

YOSHIKAWA

People die. Options close...

KANASHIMI

...pride wins out. And bitterness. They are all that remains.

(They sit silently.)

Butterfly called me Kanashimi, Sorrow. She told people that she would change my name to Joy when my father returned from America. I still wait for that day when Sorrow turns to Joy.

BLACKOUT

(The home of the **PINKERTONS**, later that year. The Pinkertons are awaiting **KANASHIMI**'s arrival.)

(Lights on)

PINKERTON

Did he say anything?

KATE

Nothing, other than that he was in San Francisco, and could he stop by.

PINKERTON

After all this time...

KATE

Oh, Benjamin, is it too much to hope?

PINKERTON

Best not to, I suppose.

KATE

But why now? What could he want if not...

PINKERTON

We have no reason to believe he wants us back in his life. He's made that clear. He despises everything about us...He despises our country.

KATE

(as much to herself as to Pinkerton)

I do hope he's all right. He was always so fragile...

PINKERTON

Perhaps he means to warn us. We may be at war with Japan before the year is out.

KATE

Surely not. Why do you think so?

PINKERTON

I don't—but it's possible. When I visited Hawaii last month, I couldn't help but notice how ill-prepared our Navy is for an attack on Pearl Harbor. When I asked Admiral Kimmel about it, he pooh-poohed the idea. All three of our Pacific Fleet's aircraft carriers are at sea. It makes a lot more sense for the Japanese to use their carriers and planes to protect their conquests in the Philippines and British Malaya.

KATE

I still worry about our trip next month. Did you tell him about our plan to travel to Nagasaki?

PINKERTON

Not yet. I will today.

KATE

I can't imagine that he would tell us any more than he can. His reaching out may have nothing to do with politics...or war.

(The doorbell rings. PINKERTON goes to the door.)

KANASHIMI

(bowing to his father)

Father.

PINKERTON

Son. Please come in.

(They make a clumsy attempt to embrace.)

KANASHIMI

(bowing to his mother)

Mother.

KATE

Hello, dear.

(They all stand awkwardly. Finally, KANASHIMI walks over to the sofa and sits down.)

KATE

You look well. (laughing) Handsome as ever.

(They both sit opposite Kanashimi.)

KANASHIMI

Thank you. You also look well. Both of you.

PINKERTON

What brings you to San Francisco?

KANASHIMI

Official business, I'm afraid. My new job has me traveling a lot.

PINKERTON

You're with the consulate now?

KANASHIMI

Yes, in Oahu. Vice Consul.

PINKERTON

(after a moment)

You heard that Sharpless died last year?

KANASHIMI

Ah, I had not. I am so sorry to hear. He was always kind to me.

PINKERTON

(after a moment)

Before he died he told me things about your mother that I had not known. Or had forgotten.

KANASHIMI

You still think of her?

PINKERTON

Often. (pausing) And you, have you been back to Nagasaki?

KANASHIMI

I try to visit her grave every year. I've grown quite close to her cousins. They accept me as theirs.

PINKERTON

You are theirs. As much as we are yours.

KANASHIMI

(with a flash of anger)

No, father! Do not for a minute think that I can hold you as dearly as I hold Butterfly. You can never replace her.

PINKERTON

Of course, I understand. We would never ask you to replace her.

KATE

Matthew...

KANASHIMI

(interrupting her)

Kanashimi! My Japanese name. Please do not call me Matthew.

KATE

(wounded and embarrassed)

Of course...Kanashimi. (after a moment, looking for something to say) How much do you remember about your mother?

KANASHIMI

Only fleeting images from when I was a child. And what her cousins have told me. (to Pinkerton) What more can you tell me?

PINKERTON

(reflectively)

How aptly her name was chosen. A gossamer creation. I remember what Sharpless said to me on the day I married her: "I have never seen fairer nor sweeter maiden than this little Butterfly." If only I had listened to his warning. But her innocent charm entranced me. I only gave thought to what I wanted at that moment.

KANASHIMI

(looking at Kate)

And you? How could you have accepted what father did?

KATE

I only knew your father as an American naval officer. We met in a different world. Anything from his past he either withheld or dismissed as unimportant. When he finally told me of his folly, I accepted it as just that, youthful folly, and he promised to never see Butterfly again. So it would have been...had they not conceived this beautiful child.

KANASHIMI

(after a moment, to Pinkerton)

Did you love my mother?

PINKERTON

I can't say. I certainly thought I did, as one might love a child. But...did I love her as I love my wife? (looking at Kate) No. She and I have shared a lifetime of joys and tribulations. (He takes her hand.) We cannot ask you to forgive us, only to understand how much we love you and how deeply sorry we are for how we treated your mother. (He puts his head in his hands.) We couldn't have known...

KANASHIMI

You should have known.

PINKERTON

I should have known. (pause) When were you last at her gravesite?

KANASHIMI

I go each year, in June, the month she died.

PINKERTON

To Sakamoto Cemetery?

KANASHIMI

Sakamoto is for foreigners. She now lies elsewhere. After I left you, I traveled to Nagasaki, to the Maruyama District where she lived. I knew from Sharpless that Butterfly's maid, Suzuki, was the one person who loved Butterfly as much as Butterfly loved you. It took time to find her—she was living in the poorest section of the city—but once I did, it took no time for us to share our tears.

PINKERTON

Ah, Suzuki. I remember her well. What did you learn from her?

KANASHIMI

She told me a great many things about Butterfly. About her love of nature. Her loyalty. Her wit and humor. Most of all her love for you. The questions I most wanted to ask were ones she couldn't answer. Was Butterfly delusional...was she mad? Or was her love for you so deep that she truly believed that you would return? Either might explain why she spent hours every day scanning the harbor for your ship. To the end she expected to be Mrs. Pinkerton for life. It is why she took her life.

PINKERTON

Questions I was too blind to consider.

KANASHIMI

Before seeking out Suzuki I went to see her uncle, the Bonze—you must remember him? He was well along in age...as ornery as Sharpless had warned.

PINKERTON

(sighing)

After all this time. I hated that man.

KANASHIMI

At first he didn't believe I was Butterfly's son. Then he was suspicious of me for being her son. Finally he embraced me because I was her son. Not immediately, but over time. It was you and not I whom he despised.

PINKERTON

And for good reason.

KANASHIMI

He introduced me to Butterfly's cousins, most of whom never stopped loving her. We grew so close they even began calling me Yorokobi! Joy! The name my mother had promised to use when my father returned. (pause) The Bonze had arranged years before to bring her ashes to Okunoin. Today they are in a family grave.

PINKERTON

(sadly)

I would love to see it. (after a moment) How would you feel if your mother and I went to Nagasaki? (pause) To see her gravesite. We might try to talk to her family—if you think it wise. Perhaps you could even join us?

KANASHIMI

(angrily)

Haven't you done enough harm already? What more can you take from me? You say how sorry you are, and yet you continue to think that a few "I'm sorries" and a trip to her gravesite will make up for everything you've done to my mother, to me...even to your wife.

PINKERTON

I only want to honor that memory. To ask forgiveness.

KANASHIMI

(with resignation)

I cannot stop you, only discourage you. I should warn you, however, the situation in Japan is very unsettled. Our government blames America for cutting off its resources. War is possible.

PINKERTON

I understand the risk.

KATE

Tell me...my son. You asked that I call you Kanashimi, Sorrow. Not Yorokobi, Joy. Must the rest of your life be spent as Sorrow...in sorrow? Have you stopped looking for joy? Or even hoping for it?

KANASHIMI

(haltingly)

I don't know, mother, I don't know. All I know is that...sadness hangs over me...like a shroud. I can't get it off me. I had a dream the other night. In the dream I was at a birthday party with the two of you, my mother Butterfly, and Sharpless. You all exchanged gifts...but gave me nothing. Funny thing was, I was neither sad nor disappointed. I kept telling myself that I got what I deserved.

KATE

Oh, Matthew...(correcting herself) Kanashimi.

KANASHIMI

I've lost one mother. Now I've rejected another. But I am not ready to accept you back into my life. Is it you? Is it America? Or is it the anger I feel at myself for not letting go?

PINKERTON

Then find a place inside you where there is joy, and maybe the joy will burn out the pain.

KANASHIMI

(moved)

Thank you, father. I will try. (to them both) I must go. (as he leaves) Do not grieve for me. Grieve for Butterfly.

BLACKOUT

(Honolulu, two months later. The **PINKERTONS** are aboard a battleship in Pearl Harbor as guests of the Admiral.)

(Lights on.)

KATE

What do you suppose Matthew meant in his letter? He knows about our trip. Should we be worried?

PINKERTON

I don't know. I keep asking myself if he was sending us a warning. He knows we're going to Nagasaki, but I'm not sure he knows we're in Oahu. All he said in the letter was that the situation in the Pacific was very unstable.

KATE

Surely there's no threat to Oahu? The Japanese would never attack America. You've said so yourself.

PINKERTON

I know the reasons they wouldn't. I also know the reasons they might. It would destroy our fleet and allow Japan to conquer Southeast Asia without interference. It would buy time for Japan to consolidate its position and increase its naval strength. It would deliver a body blow to our forces in the Pacific, especially if battleships are the main targets. They are our prestige ships. It could undermine our morale. The government might even seek a compromise peace with Japan.

KATE

But still...attack Pearl Harbor? That seems crazy.

PINKERTON

Possibly. But two weeks ago our codebreakers intercepted a message from Tokyo to diplomatic posts in DC and West Coast cities. They were told to destroy all codes, coding machines, papers, if they heard the words "East Wind, Rain" in the daily weather forecast. Just Thursday our people intercepted this "winds message." Even Marshall is concerned.

KATE

Why aren't we acting then? With this flood of intelligence, why hasn't the military taken steps to defend Pearl Harbor?

PINKERTON

It may be too much of a good thing—too many intercepted and decoded messages. Very few of them specifically mention Pearl Harbor. These bits of unconnected intelligence are arriving on Roosevelt's desk on a daily basis...and no one is in charge of "connecting the dots." I fear we're missing the grain amongst the chaff.

KATE

You got this from Kimmel?

PINKERTON

Kimmel is as much in the dark as anyone. This is mostly from Stafford and Kirk. They've been trying to get Turner to take the threat seriously.

KATE

Old "Terrible Turner" himself?

PINKERTON

Ha! Our self-appointed intelligence expert! He thinks that an advance against Thailand seems the most probable action the Japanese will take. If the Japanese do surprise us, Turner will be in the nearest latrine ducking for cover!

KATE

I do wish we had postponed our trip. If something does happen, we may be in the latrine with Turner!

PINKERTON

I know, darling, but the DNI wanted me to brief them on the Japanese naval command. They seem to think I have some kind of insight from spending so much time in the Pacific studying the Japanese. And they're paying for this grand escapade!

KATE

Do you think you have special insight?

PINKERTON

As much as the next guy. Almost 40 years amongst the Japanese, and I don't really understand them. The chrysanthemum and sword. Pretty much sums them up. Aggressive and unaggressive, militaristic and aesthetic, insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. Enigmas.

KATE

(after a moment)

How does it feel to be back on this old ship?

PINKERTON

A lot of memories. It's how I met James Cagney when they were filming *Here Comes the Navy*.

KATE

You old snake. You had a thing for Gloria Stuart, didn't you?

PINKERTON

(snickering)

Gloria who? (pausing) Remember the Long Beach earthquake in 1934? I still get notes from survivors we helped. Provided food, treated the injured, provided security from looters. Mostly I remember all the training exercises we held on this grand old ship. Just the smell of it makes me feel like a young officer again.

KATE

The sailors still remember you. You were a hero to them then. You're a hero to them now. (poking fun) If only they knew the real you...

PINKERTON

As you do?

KATE

(after a while)

Did Matthew say where he was when he wrote his letter?

PINKERTON

No. He might be here, or he might be in Japan. I was hoping he would ask us to drop by, wherever he was. I'll write him again in case he's in Tokyo when we pass through.

KATE

He would never put us in harm's way, don't you think?

PINKERTON

Not intentionally, no. But he has no way of knowing we're in Oahu. Or even when we planned to arrive in Nagasaki. He may think we're still in San Francisco.

KATE

(after a long pause)

It's been a good life, hasn't it, Benjamin? After we lost Matthew, I wondered if our marriage could withstand the shame. And the anger I felt toward you. I know you wanted a child of our own. I just couldn't bring myself to forgive you. But you and I, together, we gave voice to our remorse. Had it stayed hidden, it would have broken our hearts. We didn't let that happen. Perhaps sorrow is how we learned to love.

PINKERTON

Perhaps it was. I wish it were for Matthew. They say that sorrow's purse is free. I'm afraid Matthew will never stop carrying that purse. Some are blinded by their tears of anguish...and see no joy. That may be our son. He has torn down the house that happiness once built.

KATE

The house, yes. But the foundation? I cannot believe that he doesn't love us...and that someday we'll be reunited.

(In the distance the sound of approaching aircraft)

KATE

(rising)

Benjamin?

(The first bomb hits.)

PINKERTON

(rising)

No!! Please, no!!!

(They hold each other.)

(after a moment)

(The second and third bombs hit. The Pinkertons continue to hold each other while the fourth, and lethal, bomb explodes, destroying the Arizona. The stage grows dark.)

BLACKOUT

(Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, December 7, 1941. **KANASHIMI**'s office the morning of the attack.)

(Lights on)

[OPTIONAL: Projected on a back screen are clips from the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor—attacking planes, exploding ships, etc.]

YOSHIKAWA
(enters and bows)

Vice Consul.

KANASHIMI

Come in, Yoshikawa. Please sit.

YOSHIKAWA

Thank you, sir. (after a pause, smiling) We have succeeded! The US naval fleet is destroyed!

KANASHIMI

Not destroyed, but seriously damaged. Eight battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, an anti-aircraft ship. Either totally destroyed or badly damaged. More than a hundred aircraft. Very light losses on our side. It was indeed a success. You have much to be proud of, Yoshikawa. Your reports were instrumental.

YOSHIKAWA

Thank you, sir. (after a pause) If I may ask, Vice Consul, our planes were nearly invincible. Our stealth was complete. Why then did we not destroy the enemy's other targets in the harbor—the navy yard, oil tank farms, submarine base, barracks?

KANASHIMI

Our leadership believes the enemy will surrender within a few weeks. They have been so weakened by the loss of their navy. We had no need to bomb these other targets.

YOSHIKAWA

I hope they are right.

KANASHIMI

You will be detained by the US, of course. They will round up all Japanese here on the island.

YOSHIKAWA

This I have known from the day I arrived. If our forces attacked Pearl Harbor, we all would be under suspicion. It is why everything I have done was legal and proper. They may detain me—but they will let me go. I hope to continue my work until the war is over, whether that is one week or 10 years. (pausing) And what of you, Vice Consul? Your diplomatic immunity will protect you?

KANASHIMI

It will. My main concern is with my parents. They are currently in Nagasaki, I believe, and they may need my help if they are to return to the US.

YOSHIKAWA

You care about their well-being? I thought you hated them?

KANASHIMI

I did, Yoshikawa. Now my hatred has passed. It is as if the bombs that destroyed the US Navy have also destroyed any contempt that remained for my parents. I have been vindicated. My country has triumphed. I hate America no less than before, nor do I love my mother Butterfly any less, but out of today's devastation has emerged a new love for the parents who raised me.

YOSHIKAWA

Why would they travel to Nagasaki?

KANASHIMI

They plan to pay respect to Butterfly at her gravesite. And possibly to her relatives as well. They seek their forgiveness.

YOSHIKAWA

And you, Vice Consul, do you seek their forgiveness?

KANASHIMI

It may happen, Yoshikawa. I do not know. I do know that I love them.

(He gets up and bows to Yoshikawa, who in turn bows to him, then walks him to the door.)

KANASHIMI (continued)

Good bye, Yoshikawa.

YOSHIKAWA

Good bye, sir.

(As Yoshikawa leaves, an AIDE walks into Kanashimi's office.)

AIDE

Sir, you asked me to report if we heard any news about your parents. This note just arrived.

(Kanashimi takes the note and sits down at his desk. After reading it, he takes his head in his hands. The room begins to darken.)

KANASHIMI

What have I done!? Oh, what have I done?

[(OPTIONAL: Playing of [final minute of Act 3 of Madame Butterfly](#))]

(End of play. BLACKOUT.)
