Memoirs of a Geisha

By Robin Swicord
Tanaka-san!
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A story like mine should never be told. For my world is as forbidden as it is fragile. Without its mysteries, it cannot survive. I certainly wasn't born to the life of a geisha. Like so much in my strange life... ...I was carried there by the current. The first time I knew my mother was sick... ...was when my father threw the fish back into the sea. That night we went hungry. "To understand emptiness," he told us. Mother always said my sister Satsu was like wood. As rooted to the earth as a sakura tree. But she told me I was like water. Water can carve its way, even through stone. And when trapped, water makes a new path. Stop here. These are the girls from Tanaka? Sisters, yes, from Yoroido. This one, maybe. The other one, no. - No, no, Chiyo! Chiyo! Chiyo! - Satsu! Satsu! - Chiyo! - Satsu! Show your respect for Mother. You must not speak. I will answer for you. Kneel. And head down. Never look her in the face. - How old are you?
- She is Year of the Rooster.
Only 9.
Where is my sister?
Let me see those eyes.
Look at me.
Too much water.
But, Okasan, a little water
is good to guard against fire.
You won't have to worry
about the okiya burning...
...losing all your kimono.
These country girls.
Too late to send her back now.
Go.
Pumpkin. Keep her quiet.
Mother is downstairs.
Let me go!
Let me go! Let me go!
Let me go!
- Stop that.
- Let me go!
Mother will hear you.
She's got a bamboo stick.
I want my sister! Satsu!
I cried too at first.
You know, it is easier
if you just forget everything...
...that happened before
you came to the okiya.
If you impress Mother
and do exactly as she says...
...she will send you to school
to be a geisha.
A what?
A geisha. Like Hatsumomo.
You will get to drink sake
and sleep until noon.
Where is my sister?
Probably in another okiya
in the hanamachi.
Your family sold you to this house.
You live here now.
Outside, you wear these.
Inside, these.
We don't display our naked feet
like monkeys.
It's not flesh we're selling here.
This is a geisha house.
Remember to always honor
this okiya.
You listen, you learn.
Now get to work.
Be quiet. Hatsumomo is sleeping.
Pumpkin, when can I go outside?
Outside the okiya?
You can't. It's not allowed.
How will I find Satsu?
You can't just walk up to every house
in the hanamachi.
Do you know how many there are?
Look.
Tighter!
Chiyo. Chiyo-chan.
Come. Two nights ago, Hatsumomo
had to stay at the teahouse until dawn.
That's what she told Mother. But she
was really here with a man the whole...
Why can't you be quiet?
So this is the new arrival.
A pity she still stinks of fish.
Stay out of my room.
Your fingers smell.
I can't have you touching my things.
Only reason Mother tolerates
Hatsumomo...
...is because she brings in
good money.
Never forget.
It is Hatsumomo
who pays for your supper...
...the clothes on your back.
By the time she was 20...
...she had already earned back
her purchase price.
Unheard of.
She has been the talk
of the hanamachi ever since.
These are all hers?
Certainly not.
They belong to the okiya.
A kimono like this,
made of Tatsumura silk...
...it would take a lifetime to earn.
A geisha needs
an elegant wardrobe...
...just like an artist needs ink.
If she's not properly dressed,
then she is not a true geisha.
Nobody told me what a geisha is.
You will find out soon enough.
I have news for you, child.
Mother has determined
it is off to school with you.
You are to become geisha.
Chiyo! Pumpkin!
Quick, quick! Don't be late!
You will be late.
Go. Go.
This way!
Pumpkin! Pumpkin!
Pumpkin! I'm going to run.
I'm going to find Satsu.
No, Chiyo-chan, don't!
You will ruin your own chances.
And mine too.
Please, stay with me.
Squid. Come on!
Look for your sister's name later.
You are late!
Chiyo! Where is Granny's food?
Where have you been?
It's freezing cold!
Close the window!
- With millions of people unemployed,
on the brink of starvation.
Banking institutions have continued
to suffer in Germany...
...due to rapid inflation.
Another cause of Germany's suffering
is the constant struggle...
...to pay the heavy burden
of war reparations it's still...
Chiyo! Chiyo, come quickly!
Hatsumomo is at the bathhouse.
Tidy up.
- But she told me to stay out...
- Hatsumomo does not run this okiya.
The Japanese emperor has agreed to send army instructors to Manchuria.
Why, look who's in my room.
Did you touch this?
I can just hear the General now.
"Why, Hatsumomo,
you used to smell of jasmine.
What's this new perfume?
Blowfish?"
I told you never to touch my things.
Can't you understand why?
Because your General will say,
"Hatsumomo, you stink."
At least you don't smell as bad as your sister.
You know, she was here.
She came by looking for you.
What?
Was I wrong to ask her to leave?
Please, tell me where she is.
Only if you swear yourself to me first.
Yes?
Now, get out.
Hatsumomo.
You'll wake the entire house.
Your big sister is thirsty. So am I.
Go get us some beer.
I'm not in the mood for beer.
I know what you're in the mood for,
and his name is Koichi.
What did you say, Korin?
I'm sorry. I forgot.
You're just jealous
someone cares for me.
Guess who this belongs to.
A geisha as desired as she is...
...ought to keep a close eye
on her clothes.
- It's Mameha's?
- Yes.
- How did you get it?
- Bribed her maid.
- There.
- I can't.
Give it to her.
- Little Chiyo, come. Come.
- Chiyo.
Now, then, little Chiyo,
it's time to practice your calligraphy.
There.
Remember, you swore yourself
to me.
Yes.
Don't let anybody see you.
Go, go!
This will teach the great Mameha.
Come, come.
Thieving rat!
That kimono was worth more
than you!
Careful! You will hurt yourself
more than her!
Let me.
Kneel!
What have you done
to Hatsumomo?
I haven't done anything.
I promise you.
Her little trick with that kimono
will cost you.
Whatever you have done to anger her,
you'd be wise to stop now.
Lie facedown!
I will beat you hard...
...so Mother does not
beat you harder.
I told you not to let anybody see you.
I have kept my promise.
So tell me, where is she?
She's in the next hanamachi
in the house called Tatsuyo.
In the pleasure district.
Trust me, little Chiyo,
you will find her.
Tatsuyo?
Satsu! Satsu!
Satsu!
Satsu from Yoroido! Satsu! Satsu!
No! Satsu! No! Satsu! Satsu!
Sat...
Satsu! Satsu!
Chiyo-chan!
- What took you so long?
- But, Satsu, I tried!
I went to your okiya weeks ago.
They laughed and turned me away.
Please, I did not know!
I've missed you so much!
Let's leave. Tonight.
But we need money, Chiyo. I know
I can steal some first thing tomorrow.
- No, please! Tonight!
- No, tomorrow!
Meet me at the Sasame Bridge
as soon as it's dark.
Now I have to go. Quickly,
before someone catches us.
What if I cannot get away?
Be there, Chiyo.
It's our one chance.
Once I've left, I can't go back.
I've waited as long as I can.
Now go!
What is she doing here?
She's seen us.
Stupid girl.
Why have you come back?
Your perfect chance to escape!
Get in!
- Koichi, please.
- Look at us.
Sneaking around like criminals.
- Koichi, don't...
- It's degrading.
What's going on?
Koichi.
Who's there?
Go! Now! Go!
Show your face.
Look, Okasan! I caught her stealing!
She was running away
with her sister, the whore!
You little thief!
No! She is lying!
- After all we have done for her!
- I saw her with a man! Right there!
His name is Koichi!
Shut up!
We should kick her out!
Take her arms.
You are never to see him again.
What do you think?
A geisha is free to love?
Never.
Bolt the gate!
No one is leaving this okiya.
Dr. Moro is very expensive.
You seem to be racking up
quite a debt.
Kimono destroyed...
...geisha school...
...rice and pickles, train ticket,
Mr. Bekku.
All this on top of the money
I paid Mr. Tanaka.
And for what?
And now I hear that your sister
has run away.
She didn't wait for you.
And now she can never come back.
You must forget
you ever had a sister.
We are your only family now.
"Dear Satsu and little Chiyo:
As one who was once
an orphan child myself...
...this humble person
is sorry to inform you...
...that six weeks after you left
for your new life in Miyako...
...the suffering of your
honored mother came to its end.
And only a few weeks afterward...
...your honored father
departed this world as well.
This humble person feels confident
both your honored parents...
...have found their places
in paradise. But happily... "
At the temple...
...there is a poem called "Loss"
carved into the stone.
It has three words.
But the poet
has scratched them out.
You cannot read "Loss."
Only feel it.
My father and mother
had left this life.
My sister, I never heard of again.
I had dishonored the okiya,
so Mother had other plans for me.
I would pay back my debt...
...year after year after year.
Not as a geisha.
As her slave.
It is too pretty a day
to be so unhappy.
Did you fall down?
Why so shy?
Nothing to be ashamed of.
We all stumble from time to time.
You see that enchanting lady
in green?
Once, when she was just a maiko,
she fell clean off her wooden shoes.
It's true, I did.
And now look at her. So elegant.
Mr. Chairman, shouldn't we hurry?
We will miss the beginning.
We see the Spring Dances every year.
We can spare a moment.
What's your name?
Don't be afraid to look at me.
Do you like sweet plum or cherry?
You mean, to eat?
I like sweet plum myself.
Come.
None of us find as much kindness
in this life as we should.
Hi. Both kinds, please.
My children wait for these
every spring.
Now I'm a geisha too.
And so you are.
How did you come by
such surprising eyes?
My mother gave them to me.
Generous of her, wasn't it?
As you have been to me.
Smile for me, won't you?
There, now. That is your gift to me.
This will buy your supper.
Now, promise me one thing:
Next time you take a tumble,
no frowns.
That's better.
In that moment...
...I changed from a girl
facing nothing but emptiness...
...to someone with purpose.
I saw that to be a geisha...
...could be a stepping stone
to something else:
A place in his world.
The money the Chairman
had given me...
...could have bought fish and rice
for a month.
But I gave it back in prayer...
...keeping only his handkerchief.
I asked one day
to become a geisha.
And then, somehow,
to meet him again.
The Imperial War Ministry

announces news:
A great victory for our friend
Adolf Hitler.
Today, Hitler demanded
self-determination...
...for Germans living in Austria.
Hitler's quest for lebensraum,
"living space"...
Chiyo-chan, I can't find my comb!
Did you find it yet?
Pumpkin, it's time to go.
- I found it.
- Arigato, Chiyo.
Oh, I couldn't sleep last night,
I was so worried about my stupid hair.
Am I lopsided?
You look beautiful.
With your hair like that...
...you look more like a pumpkin
than ever.
Don't poke your neck forward
like a tortoise.
She's not ready? We will be late.
Poor Pumpkin. Her debut,
and everyone will be staring at you.
- Hurry up, huh?
- This time...
...tune your shamisen
before you play.
When you make a fool of yourself,
your big sister gets the blame.
Stop crying, your face will run.
Pumpkin!
Pumpkin!
The winter I turned 15,
I saw the Chairman again.
But that wasn't the only surprise
fate brought me that season.
Along with the snow
came a most unexpected visitor.
Why is she here?
Chiyo! Chiyo!
Open the gate!
Now that your beloved
Granny is gone...
...you'll have no need for a maid.
I would never question
the great Mameha...
...but you could choose anyone
in the hanamachi.
You flatter me, truly.
I'd give you my Pumpkin if she were
not already tied to Hatsumomo.
Please. I would never dream
of asking.
Besides, I could always sell Chiyo
to Mrs. Tatsuyo.
With your eye for beauty
and nose for talent...
...surely you can see
what a terrible waste that would be.
If you were not the kind-hearted
geisha I know you to be...
...then I might think you were
scheming against Hatsumomo.
Then I'm grateful, Mrs. Nitta, that
you don't have a suspicious mind.
Perhaps you can pique
my interest with...
Yes?
...your offer.
I will cover Chiyo's schooling,
all her expenses...
...till after her debut.
Now I am confident you are teasing.
I could not be more sincere.
If Chiyo hasn't repaid her debt
within six months after her debut...
Impossible! Too little time.
Then I will pay you twice over.
What?
No geisha could ever...
I am certain you will not object
to one trivial condition.
Yes?
If Chiyo erases her debt
in the time allowed...
...you will have no part
in her future earnings.
It's too good to be true.
Mameha is up to something.
She isn't in it for the money.
That much is for certain.
Rumor has it, ever since the prime
minister bought her mizuage...
...she's been rich.
That so? Absurd to think
she noticed Chiyo.
It's that kimono.
She remembers
how you destroyed it.
- Now she wants to get even.
- An odd picture, isn't it?
Hatsumomo sweeping into teahouse
after teahouse with our little Pumpkin.
And Mameha with our maid.
I'm so far behind.
I will never catch up to you.
Don't worry, Chiyo-chan.
I will help you.
Pumpkin!
You are never to speak to her again.
Now you are rivals.
Pumpkin.
Pumpkin.
This is how it was,
this tiny world of women.
Friend turned against friend.
And now the two greatest geisha
in Miyako at war over me.
Hatsumomo at my back.
Mameha calling,
offering me the chance...
...to become one of those elegant
women I'd seen on the bridge...
...floating in a silk kimono,
the Chairman at my side.
Chiyo is my new protégé.
As lovely as her big sister.
And with eyes the color of rain.
The Baron is a very special man
to me. My danna.
Someday, if you are fortunate,
you will have a patron too.
Don't kneel. You are not
a servant girl anymore.
Step into the light.
I see water in you.
Does that displease you?
Water is powerful.
It can wash away earth,
put out fire and even destroy iron.
But you have not drawn
on those strengths, have you?
About your kimono...
You may apologize if you wish.
Why, that is a perfect bow...
...for a pig farmer.
Don't drop your head.
Fingertips together.
Elbows in. No weight on the hands.
Yes.
As for the kimono,
I'm no fool, Chiyo.
Hatsumomo cannot
tolerate competition.
She is jealous of you?
Not me, I'm afraid.
Someone closer to home.
Rise.
Not like a horse.
Slide your foot forward.
That's it. Now walk.
You are a magnificent geisha.
Tell me, Chiyo, does Mrs. Nitta
ever speak of the future?
Not to me.
Well, someday soon,
she will have to name an heir.
One of her own geisha
to succeed her.
Strange, isn't it,
she has not adopted Hatsumomo.
That would be like releasing
the tiger from its cage.
You have a gift for expression.
And if Mrs. Nitta adopts Pumpkin...
...that is hardly a threat.
But a young girl
with eyes like rain...
But Mrs. Nitta would never
choose me.
On the contrary, that is our goal.
- It is?
- Of course.
If you do not inherit the okiya,
then we will all be at the tiger's mercy.
Water's always in such a hurry.
Perhaps it is just as well.
We have no time to lose.
We must transform you.
And what takes years,
you must learn in months.
Say I'm entertaining the Baron.
Like so many clients, he's trapped
in an arranged marriage.
So in the teahouse, when he's
seeking my company instead...
...I reward him like this:
With a glimpse of my wrist.
Seeing this demure little trace
of naked skin...
Well, it gives him pleasure.
Or when you're sitting down...
...for the briefest moment,
press your leg against his.
Always by accident, of course.
Mameha, when does a geisha
choose her danna?
I'm afraid it's the other way around.
Focus on your studies, Chiyo.
Music, the art of conversation.
That's the surest way
to attract a danna.
On your feet, not off them.
Remember, Chiyo,
geisha are not courtesans.
And we are not wives.
We sell our skills,
not our bodies.
We create another secret world.
A place only of beauty.
The very word "geisha"
means "artist."
And to be a geisha is to be judged
as a moving work of art.
Agony and beauty, for us,
live side by side.
Your feet will suffer,
your fingers will bleed.
Even sitting and sleeping
will be painful.
You cannot call yourself
a true geisha...
...until you can stop a man
in his tracks with a single look.
No one can do that.
Choose someone for me.
The grey hat.
Choose someone for me, Onei-san.
The boy on the bike, with one look.
You are ready.
Hurry up!
You are not making money
standing there gawking at yourself.
For luck!
This binds us together forever
as sisters.
Today you leave your childhood
and cast away your name.
From this day forward,
you will be known as:
"Sayuri."
When Mameha granted me
my new name...
...I felt little Chiyo disappear
behind a white mask with red lips.
I was a maiko now.
An apprentice geisha.
From that moment, I told myself:
"When I make tea,
when I pour sake...
...when I dance,
when I tie my obi...
...it will be for the Chairman.
Until he finds me.
Until I am his. "

Ready?
Thank you.

Friends...
...we have the pleasure to witness
the debut of a new maiko.
I remember those eyes.
What was her name?
Sayuri.
Determined, isn't she?
If there'd been a drop of tea in that pot,
Sayuri would have gotten it out.
Don't tease, Baron,
it is her very first time.
What a beautiful dance,
yes, Pumpkin?
Her fans are so hypnotic...
...that you never notice her feet.
- What's her name?
- Her name is Sayuri.
Sayuri? A name as sweet
as she is.
I'm afraid these days...
...even a common chambermaid
can call herself a geisha.
So it's nice to see such
a sincere young maiko. Isn't it?
Why, yes.
Surely you would like
to thank Hatsumomo...
...for her gracious compliments.
There is so much I would like
to say to Hatsumomo.
Sometimes the smartest remark
is silence.
What better advice to follow
than your own?
Sayuri.
- I was a maiko myself once.
- Of course.
But it's been such a very long...
...long, long, long time.
I shall destroy you.
She can destroy you.
She will spread rumors...
...stalk you from teahouse
to teahouse, then steal your clients.
All in the hope that Mrs. Nitta
adopts Pumpkin instead of you.
- What can we do?
- We've got to outwit her.
To find a place somewhere
beyond her reach...
...where you can practice your skills
without any interference.
- Your first sumo match.
- What?
Today you will meet
Iwamura Ken.
He is head of the Iwamura Electric
Company in Osaka.
My client for years.
We will entertain him
and his partner, Nobu.
We may find Nobu
quite a challenge.
He does not like geisha.
Be attentive. I will do the rest.
Chairman Iwamura. President Nobu.
This is my new younger sister, Sayuri.
Nobu-san.
Nobu-san.
Injured in Manchuria. War hero.
Sayuri, is this your first sumo match?
Nobu-san will have to educate you.
I cannot tell one wrestler from the next.
That is the Chairman's diplomatic way
of saying he hates sumo.
Did you notice our contribution?
We are harnessing
the power of water...
...to bring electricity
to some of the smaller villages.
- It was in the newspapers, wasn't it?
- With the Chairman's picture.
You compensate for all
my shortcomings, don't you?
May I ask, how does someone harness the power of water?
You should never ask an engineer to explain a thing, because he will...
Let the girl watch sumo.
Hatsumomo, that snake.
Quick, turn your attention to Nobu.
But, Mameha-neisan...
Hatsumomo finds him repulsive.
She'd never steal him away.
Mislead her. Go.
Perhaps Nobu-san will be kind enough to explain the rules of the match.
Three things matter in life:
Sumo, business and war.
Understand one, you know them all.
But why should a geisha care?
You spend your time plucking strings and dancing.
I humbly beg to differ.
What is sumo but a dance between giants?
What is business but a dance between companies?
I'd like to know about every kind of dance.
They are throwing salt to purify the ring.
That man is Miyagiyama, the greatest fighter in Japan.
But he's so tiny.
Only compared to his opponent.
Miyagiyama may use hataki komi.
Are you listening?
Yes.
Hataki komi is a movement the smaller combatant uses...
...to throw the larger man off balance.
Victory does not always belong to the powerful.
Look. There.
In his eyes.
I'm afraid our time has come to a close.
- Going so soon?
- Not yet. I want her to see. Now that is hataki komi!
I see now why you like sumo. You can never judge a man's power by his appearance alone.
Mameha.
You may bring her again.
I scoured the newspaper for the Chairman's photograph. Anything to preserve our moment together. A moment stolen...
...when I was forced to turn my attention to Nobu. In that instant, I felt the world shift. But not my own determination.
I made a secret promise: Along with his picture, I would lock away my heart...
...and save it for him.
Come in. Tonight we will deliver a quick blow to Hatsumomo.
- How?
- We will meet Nobu-san...
...at the Tsunashima restaurant. But first, a visit to Dr. Crab.
- Dr. Crab?
- It's a little nickname...
...he's earned over the years. Hold still.
I have something in mind. A plan. Now cut your leg where I've marked it.
- What?
- Or I will do it for you...
Have you gone mad? Do you trust me or don't you? Well?
Go ahead, do it. Careless with the sewing scissors,
were you?
Right through your beautiful kimono.
Such a pity.
It won't leave a scar, will it?
Sayuri is a special girl
at a very special time in her life.
Yes.
With those eyes,
you must be quite a commodity.
Clean cut.
Won't leave a mark, I promise.
But I had best prescribe
a bit of antiseptic.
Your honorable sister says,
"Cut your leg," you cut your leg.
She says, "Follow me,"
you follow her.
My life had turned into a game...
...and only she knew the rules.
Ekubo. At the right moment,
slip it to Nobu discreetly.
He will know what it means.
– You have kept us waiting.
– Please, forgive us, Nobu-san.
The Chairman thinks I should
take more pleasure in life.
Music and the theatre.
What is your impression?
It is useless
to push a cart sideways.
One could not wish Nobu-san
to be anyone but Nobu-san.
I could not agree more.
I owe this man everything.
He gives me too much credit,
as usual.
Probably.
It is a trinket.
I found it a few days ago.
Nobu-san. I had no idea
you were so sentimental.
Call it my new leaf.
My mother...
My mother, she used to wear
something similar.
You do not like it?
Forgive me. I've never received
a present before.
What a beautiful comb.
Such a joyous moment, Sayuri.
You are finally getting
what you deserve.
How lovely.
And now, will you excuse us,
please?
We have another engagement.
Many, in fact.
Pumpkin.
You are most kind.
Now, give this one to Dr. Crab.
- Mameha, please.
- You're upset?
I want to trust you, I do. But you
have to tell me what's going on.
I am ensuring your future.
But tell me how. I beg you.
I'm trying to orchestrate
a bidding war.
- What for?
- Your most precious attribute.
- And what is that?
- Your mizuage.
Did Mother ever tell you
about the eel in the cave?
Well, every once in a while...
...a man's eel likes to visit
a woman's cave.
- Yes, I know.
- You do?
I live with Hatsumomo.
Your cave is untouched.
Men like that.
We call this mizuage.
And to become a full geisha,
you must sell it to the highest bidder.
Did you sell yours?
The largest sum ever paid.
Ten thousand yen.
I freed myself from debt.
And so will you.
When you slip the rice cake
to Dr. Crab...
...it is a sign that says
your mizuage is ripe for sale.
The doctor has no desire
to see you tonight.
Or any night.
Pumpkin. Hatsumomo
went to see Dr. Crab, yes?
I have to go, Chiyo-chan.
- Didn't she?
- I do not know.
Of course you know.
You shadow her every step.
You expect me to betray
my big sister?
Has she made you cruel as well?
- No.
- My Pumpkin always told the truth.
But...
The truth.
Tonight we went to the teahouse
to see Dr. Crab.
I sat outside, but I could still hear
through the screen.
And Hatsumomo then said to him:
"I live in the same okiya as Sayuri.
Did you know that she brings men
back to her room?"
"No," he said.
"Common sailors
and fishermen too."
The doctor looked queasy,
like he didn't want to hear any more.
But she kept going.
And Hatsumomo said to him,
"What's the matter?
Have I told you more
than you wanted to know?"
I'm so sorry.
I wanted to say something...
...but how could I,
Chiyo-chan? How?
Am I really like her? Am I?
Of course not.
Is Mameha-san cruel to you too?
No. She's so kind to me.
But sometimes I worry she's taking me
further from the things I want.
That man Nobu.
Do you really like him?
- No.
- That's what I thought.
Do you like somebody else?
Don't worry about me,
Chiyo-chan, I'll be fine.
Better than fine.
Mother plans to adopt me...
...so my dream of having someplace
to live out my life may come true.
I have to go.
We could still win, Sayuri.
How? Hatsumomo has poisoned
Dr. Crab against me.
Forget about him. There are plenty
of other fish in the sea.
- The Chairman has been kind...
- Sayuri.
Nobu and the Chairman
are business partners.
They would never bid
against one another.
It is time we cast a wider net.
Suppose there was a night in Miyako,
hundreds of men, all in one place...
- ... eager to bid for you.
- What do you mean?
Where you are the object
of all their fantasies.
The most famous geisha
in the hanamachi.
- But I'm not.
- You will be.
Who is responsible for this?
Ask Mameha.
I'm asking you, Okasan.
How come Sayuri gets to be the lead?
It's your own fault.
You should practice more.
What did Mameha do?
Speak to the director in private?
Not every geisha uses that kind of currency.
I'm looking forward to your performance.
You know how I adore watching you dance, Chiyo.
They've all come.
The Baron, Nobu-san...
...our beloved Hatsumomo and that dapper General of hers.
Anybody else?
And even your old friend, Dr. Crab.
What if I dance poorly?
What if I disgrace myself and no one takes interest...?
You will be glorious.
Now it's time.
Sayuri, you remember the doctor.
I hope my performance pleased you, doctor.
Oh, you dance with such profound feeling.
I most humbly thank you.
It seems you've once again caught the doctor's interest.
And I am most grateful.
- If you have heard any gossip...
- Yes?
...then I hope you will follow your own advice.
And what would that be, pray tell? Seek a second opinion.
Chairman.
Sayuri gave such a passionate performance, don't you think?
Indeed.
Mameha, did you invite the Chairman to my estate this weekend?
It's my annual blossom-viewing party.
Baron, I told you I can't go.
I have an urgent appointment.
Taking care of a little nuisance?
Or was that a naughty secret?
Baron, wouldn't Sayuri
look stunning...
...among the flowers
on your estate?
Yes, very pretty.
Be sure to send her along.
With a chaperone, of course.
I'm certain Mr. Bekku will oblige.
That's a fine idea, Baron.
But Sayuri is required at the theatre.
Mameha, I expect her there.
Nobu. Coming Saturday?
All that way to see a cherry tree?
I will leave that to the Chairman.
Wonderful tonight.
Excuse me.
If you would rather not go...
I'd like to go very much.
Then be on your guard,
every moment.
There is a reason Hatsumomo
wants you there.
Trust me, I know my Baron, Sayuri.
He has a weakness
for beautiful women.
And now you are the most
celebrated geisha in all Miyako.
The most desired as well.
Pardon. Pardon me.
Pardon me. Sayuri.
Today, even the cherry blossoms
are envious of her.
There's something I've been wanting
to say to you for some time now.
I'd like to...
To thank you for your attention
to Nobu-san.
Nobu can be a difficult man.
So severe.
Hates parties, sake
only in moderation.
And he disdains geisha.
But he...
He's fond of you.
Because you admire him,
I respect him more.
He will never tell you himself.
He's far too modest.
We were fighting
in Manchuria together.
There was an explosion.
He protected me
from the worst of it.
As you might imagine,
I owe him quite a debt.
Nobu has taught me a great deal.
Patience, for one thing.
I, in turn, have tried to teach him...
...you have to savor life
while you can.
The lesson of the cherry blossom.
That is why Nobu likes you.
We must not expect
happiness, Sayuri.
It is not something we deserve.
When life goes well,
it's a sudden gift.
It cannot last forever.
Sayuri.
There you are.
I have a present for you.
Mameha asked me to show you
my kimono collection.
It's quite venerated.
My grandfather and father
collected kimono before me.
I've given a number
of valuable kimono to Mameha.
I like to give present
to beautiful girls.
It's for you.
Come. Have a closer look.
Isn't it lovely?
Try it on.
The Baron is too kind.
I will happily try it on with Mameha
when the Baron returns to Miyako.
Who knows when that will be?
Put it on now. Don't be shy.
Don't worry.
I am experienced in knotting obis.
And untying them as well.
Please. Mr. Bekku is waiting.
Bekku is waiting for no one.
Please!
Stop!
Please!
Stop now!
Sayuri...
...I only want to have a look.
No harm in that.
Any man would do the same.
I heard a message on the wind.
So careless.
- You have ruined all our plans.
- I did nothing.
Please, Sayuri, do not insult me.
I know the Baron better than that.
He gave me a kimono.
- You sold yourself for a kimono.
- I did not sell myself!
Today is the day I accept bids
for your mizuage.
What kind of price
can I hope to demand...
...with a finger pointed at your back?
He looked at me,
that's all, Onei-san.
You will be examined
at the mizuage ceremony.
If you are found to be worthless...
I am not worthless!
I am not worthless.
How much longer is this bidding
going to take?
Besides, who wants a plum when
someone has already had a bite?
What is it?
Twenty yen? Thirty?
This can't be the right amount.
I trust you agree.
I have won the wager.
Sayuri's made history.
No mizuage has ever been sold
for more. Not even mine.
Fifteen thousand yen.
Unbelievable.
Of course, none of it will go
to Sayuri.
Or to you, Mameha.
It goes to this okiya.
All 15,000 yen to this estate.
I do not understand.
That Sayuri will inherit
as my adopted daughter.
- What?
- You wouldn't dare.
I'm entitled to do as I choose.
But you promised
the okiya to Pumpkin!
Look at her. Still a virgin maiko.
- Pumpkin!
- Can't you adopt us both?
Quiet, Sayuri. I'm no fool.
Pumpkin would only be
Hatsumomo's puppet.
How long will it take before
you kick us out onto the street?
I have given you my life.
Yes.
Your impudence.
Your foul temper.
Who paid for the silk on your back?
The rice in your bowl?
The tobacco in that pipe of yours?
Who?
Don't exaggerate!
You have never even had a danna.
- Don't say it. Don't say...
- You chose that no-good Koichi.
- Stop it.
- Sneaking through your window...
- ... at all hours of the night.
- Quiet!
Not like a geisha.
Like a common prostitute.
Enough!
Besides, you are getting old.
But Sayuri?
Sayuri is destined
to become a legend.
My dear Okasan.
We will see...
...won't we?
Sayuri, your room is too small.
Take Hatsumomo's.
From now on,
your name is Nitta Sayuri.
May I congratulate you both.
You too.
Everything we wanted,
you made happen. Thank you.
May I ask who?
Dr. Crab.
Was Nobu disappointed?
Nobu did not bid.
It was against his mighty principles.
Dr. Crab was opposed by the Baron.
My Baron.
Do you want to know
the truth, Sayuri?
He was the highest bidder.
Forgive me.
But I let it go to Dr. Crab.
I think you understand why.
I swear to you, I am innocent.
Of course you are.
No man would ever bid so much
for a thing he had already taken.
It was my own fault.
I did not protect you.
Celebrate this moment, Sayuri.
Tonight, the lights in the hanamachi
all burn for you.
My daughter.
You are full geisha now.
What are you doing in my room?
I came to congratulate you.
Please get out.
Why, little Chiyo.
Look what I found.
His initials, how elegant.
You've been hiding your love
for a long time.
The sacrifice every geisha
must make.
Don't!
Isn't this where you keep it?
Next to your heart?
Give it back!
Give it back!
No!
Mother!
Pumpkin! Mother!
Kimono!
Kimono, Sayuri!
Kimono! Pumpkin!
I could be her.
Now I am geisha to this house.
I could be her.
Were we so different?
She loved once.
She hoped once.
I might be looking
into my own future.
Until the real future
came falling from the air.
Stop.
Oh, Korin. Have you seen Sayuri?
No. I don't know.
Chairman!
They are sending us away,
but they won't say where.
Osaka. But you must not go.
The city is a prime target.
Get your things, quickly.
Nobu and I are trying
to find safe havens...
...for as many of you
as we can. Come.
Here.
Work certificate. Nurse's aide.
Friend of mine is chief surgeon
in Kameoka.
What about Sayuri?
Can't we go together?
Don't worry.
She will be taken care of.
Here you are. Here we go!
Sayuri.
Sayuri! Come.
This is Arima.
He will take you into the hills.
Nobu has got a friend there.
A kimono-maker.
Anyone stops you, show them this.
- Do I have to go?
- It's remote. You will be safe.
What about you?
You said Osaka was dangerous.
Our factory is there.
I have no choice.
Go!
I will express your gratitude
to Nobu-san.
A year without news...
...except news
of death, defeat, shame.
Rumors of cities evaporating
into clouds of smoke.
Then another year...
...and then another...
...until the old life is a dream life.
Was I ever geisha?
Did I ever dance...
...holding a fan?
Who would hold a fan now...
...or paint their lips?
And then another year.
Nothing.
Rice.
Work.
Rice.
Work.
Nothing.
Sayuri!
Sayuri! A man from Osaka
has come to see you.
Nobu-san.
General Tottori was captured
and tried as a war criminal.
The Baron lost his fortune
and committed suicide.
What about the okiya?
Mr. Bekku is gone, but the others...
Auntie and Mother?
Indestructible, as always.
And the Chairman?
As well as can be expected.
This is all that remains
of our factories.
I'm so sorry, Nobu-san.
Sayuri...
We want to rebuild, but to do that
we will need your help.
What can I do?
Somewhere, under those rags...
...are you still the greatest geisha
in Miyako?
If a tree has no leaves or branches,
can you still call it a tree?
With nothing but rubble at my feet,
can I still call myself a businessman?
I should have taken
better care of you.
Please, you saved my life.
I owe you so much in return.
The Chairman and I
need American financing.
There is a man,
a certain Colonel Derricks...
...who has the power
to grant us a contract.
I showed him your picture.
He asked to meet you.
I am not a persuasive man, Sayuri.
But if you and a few geisha...
...would once again put on your kimono and join us...
...we could show the Americans how hospitable our country can be. How I wish, Nobu-san.
But that was a long time ago. I have no doubt, Sayuri... ...that you could still melt the heart of any man.
No matter how resistant.
I am not accustomed to begging...
...but please know that if you consent... ...the Chairman and I would be most grateful.
One dollar. One dollar.
- What?
- One dollar.
The Chairman needed me.
But I was a far cry from the geisha I had once been.
Hey, mama-san, let's step inside.
The secrets of our hidden world were postcards now for girls back home.
Any streetwalker with a painted face and silk kimono...
...could call herself a geisha.
I looked for the one person who might help:
Mameha.
The war was written on her face.
Everything about her, not just her home, was less than before.
Sayuri, when my poor Baron filled his pockets with stones...
...I was desperate.
What could I do?
I sold my kimono,
I traded my jade combs for rations.
It was painful at first, but I have made my peace.
Now, I make a small but tidy living renting rooms.
I am not about to go chasing the past.
It might do you good.
- How?
- To remind you that, once...
...with a single glance, you could bring a man like the Baron to his knees.
Well...
...I did keep one kimono.
The Baron gave it to me when he became my danna.
Thank you, Onei-san.
So tell me. What do we know about entertaining Americans?
- Was she worth it?
- Hell, yeah.
- Come on.
- All right.
Chiyo-chan! Is that you?
I have no right to ask favors of you, Pumpkin, I know that.
Guess what. I only smoke Chesterfields now.
I have wanted to apologize to you for so long about the okiya.
These soldiers, you know who they've got me singing?
- It should have gone to you.
- Frank Sinatra and Dinah Shore.
If it is in your heart to forgive me...
Sayuri, don't.
The honest truth?
I'd rather chew sand than go back to all that.
Then you are not angry with me?
Don't worry about me, chickadee.
I've got more clients than I can handle.
You seem so at home with these Americans.
They're bastards.
So who's this colonel?
Sounds like top brass.
He has the power to approve
American funding...  
...for Nobu and the Chairman.  
So is he willing to pay us  
American dollars?  
Cash?  
Don't waste my time.  
You think I'm a sucker?  
I want 60 cases Lucky Strike...  
...or I'm taking my business  
to Sergeant MacPhee.  
I had to become a geisha  
once more.  
Mother had reopened the okiya,  
but my powder box was empty.  
My charcoal had turned to dust.  
And yet, it was my one chance  
to see the Chairman again.  
Would he notice  
my weathered hands?  
The threadbare silk?  
See? You are yourself again.  
The world had changed completely.  
Had he?  
And would I finally find the strength  
to tell him all that I felt?  
Just look at you, Sayuri.  
It's as if the war did not happen.  
I am so glad to see that  
the Chairman is safe.  
Accept my apologies  
asking this of you...  
No.  
There is nothing I can do  
to return your kindness.  
- I've wanted to tell you that...  
- Sayuri!  
May I present Colonel Derricks.  
My God, you're more stunning  
in person.  
This is my associate,  
Lieutenant Hutchins.  
It's an honor, ma'am.  
Sayuri is one of the mysteries  
of the Orient I told you about.
A mystery that perhaps you can solve.
- Yes, of course. Colonel.
Okay, sure.
Good.
All right, hold it. Beautiful.
Hey, who likes whiskey?
Look at this. We got a live one, sir.
Chairman, please don't tell me you started the party without me.
May I present Pumpkin.
- Hello!
- Pumpkin! Over here.
One sec.
Okay! Gentlemen! Please.
- Oh, it's been a long time.
- Good to see you.
You haven't changed.
You look like a little boy.
This is a... My!
It's huge! Like an elephant.
Please, have a seat. Buckle up.
I'm excited, but I'm scared.
You're not going anywhere! Okay?
Good for him, not so good for us.
May we join you, gentlemen?
- Yes, please.
- Wow, I could get used to this.
Back home, a bath is nothing more than a quick shower on cold tile...
...with a bar of lye soap, right?
But here, you make everything a ritual, don't you?
That is the art of turning habit into pleasure, colonel.
Spoken like a true geisha.
If we are in business together, then perhaps we will visit you someday.
I'd like to see the United States.
I know a little game we can play.
It's called Truth and Lies.
I know this game.
Back home we call it "marriage."
No, I'm serious. Now, listen closely.
Sayuri know the rules.
I never met a woman who didn't.
Each person says two things.
One is true, the other is not.
If you guess right,
the liar pays the price.
So it pays to lose.
There you go.
Okay, I'll go first. Let's see.
One day in Sapporo,
where I was born...
...a fisherman caught
a talking fish.
The other story is the true one.
And I haven't even heard it yet.
How would you know?
No, no. You drink. You drink.
If I drown, it's all your fault.
Nobu-san, your turn. Please.
I'm no match for these geisha.
They are experts in the art of deceit.
I'm an expert in one thing
and one thing only:
Sake.
Sayuri, the truest story you know.
Once, when I was a little girl...
...on the banks of the Sunagawa...
...a handsome stranger
was kind enough...
...to buy me a cup of sweet ice...
I think we have to stop the game.
If Pumpkin drinks any more sake,
she will pass out.
That is a true story.
I'm sorry.
Okay.
So...
...what is the protocol?
Excuse me?
Suppose I wanted to see you
in private.
I beg your pardon, colonel,
that is not a geisha's custom.
Don't be coy. I mean,
if it's a question of price, I'm sure...
If there were a price,
you could never afford it.
I saw the two of you whispering.
You have arranged some kind
of tryst, haven't you?
- What did you promise him?
- Your company. Nothing more.
He seemed to expect a great deal!
If I had wanted a common whore,
I could have hired one.
What are you trying to say?
Just the idea of you with him,
with any man...
...you'd be dead to me!
Can't you see that I want you
for myself?
You have ruined me.
Before we met,
I was a disciplined man.
I should not have asked you
to come.
The Chairman was against it.
I should have listened to him.
I must beg your forgiveness,
Nobu-san.
I was foolish to think
you would barter me away.
Then you made no arrangement
with the colonel?
Please don't insult me again.
If he ratifies our contract...
...then I will be
a man of means again.
There is nothing
I want more, Sayuri...
...than to become your danna.
I already owe you far too much.
- I will not be refused.
- Please.
We are tied to each other.
I know you feel it too.
I never meant to mislead you.
Sayuri...
I do not like things
held up before me...
...that I cannot have.
When you first introduced me
to Nobu...
...I was such a fool to give him
my attention.
- You cannot refuse him. You must not.
- But, Mameha...
What is he to think?
He safeguarded your life.
- So he owns it?
- Sayuri.
I know what it is like to try
and scrape by without a danna.
I will do something, anything else.
Renting rooms?
Scrounging for every meal?
Is this the life that you want?
I want a life that is mine!
Nobu has never treated you
with anything but kindness.
- I don't want mere kindness.
- What?
What more can we expect,
we geisha?
You had feelings for the Baron,
didn't you?
I never allowed myself that.
Don't lie to me.
In time, you learn.
- I don't want to learn!
- Sayuri!
We don't become geisha
to pursue our own destinies.
We become geisha
because we have no choice.
Pumpkin.
What is it? What's wrong?
Nothing. I have a favor to ask,
that's all.
Ask.
At 9:
on the far side of the garden.
Not a minute before,
not a minute after. Yes?
And, please, do not tell Nobu
that I will be there waiting.
It's a surprise?
Yes, it's a surprise.
Whoa, in here?
What..? No, no, no. Hang on.
Hey, hey, hey. No, whoa.
I think we have done it.
Let's make sure he signs.
Wait!
Are we doing this or not?
Yes?
Chairman.
Chairman!
How could you?
You don't know
what you have done!
But I do.
I do not understand.
Why did you have to bring
the Chairman?
Because I know how you feel
about him.
A long time ago,
you took something from me.
The only thing I'd ever truly wanted.
Well...
...now you know how it feels.
The heart dies a slow death.
Shedding each hope like leaves.
Until one day there are none.
No hopes.
Nothing remains.
She paints her face
to hide her face.
Her eyes are deep water.
It is not for geisha to want.
It is not for geisha to feel.
Geisha is an artist
of the floating world.
She dances.
She sings.
She entertains you.
Whatever you want.
The rest is shadows.
The rest is secret.
Sayuri, quickly.
The teahouse just called.
You are to meet
a very important client tonight.
Who?
It must be Nobu. Yes.
He is going to be
one of the richest men in Osaka.
He wants to honor his promise:
To become your danna at last.
Give me.
It's about time.
Finally, a return on my investment.
Keiko, maybe one day
you will be as lucky.
No geisha can ever hope for more.
Let me see it.
Chairman.
Where is Nobu-san?
He won't be coming.
Is something wrong?
He knows what happened.
It is not in his nature to forgive.
Chairman, what happened
on the island...
Please, you do not have to explain.
But I have shamed myself so deeply,
past all forgiveness.
No. I'm the one
who must be forgiven.
I do not understand.
Perhaps...
...if you had only known the truth...
The truth?
Some years ago...
...I was on my way to the theatre.
I saw a little girl weeping
by the Sunagawa.
I stopped to buy her
a cup of sweet ice.
You knew I was that little girl?
Didn't you ever wonder why
Mameha took you under her wing?
Mameha came to me
because of you.
I wish you could have told me
long ago.
What could I do?
I owe Nobu my life.
And so...
...when I saw he had a chance
at happiness with you, I stood silent.
But...
But I cannot any longer.
I hope...
...it is not too late.
Don't be afraid to look at me, Chiyo.
Can't you see?
Every step I have taken...
...since I was that child
on the bridge...
...has been to bring myself
closer to you.
You cannot say to the sun,
"More sun."
Or to the rain, "Less rain."
To a man, geisha can
only be half a wife.
We are the wives of nightfall.
And yet, to learn of kindness...
...after so much unkindness...
...to understand that a little girl
with more courage than she knew...
...would find her prayers
were answered...
...can that not be called happiness?
After all...
...these are not the memoirs
of an empress, nor of a queen.
These are memoirs
of another kind.