

NO WIND BLOWS AGAINST THE PINES

A prayer vigil

By Jeffrey Moro

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Characters

MATSUKAZE
 MURASAME
 YUKIHIRA
 THE MONK
 THE FERRYMAN
 THE MOTHER

THE SISTERS' PARENTS, played by the actors who play The Monk and The Mother

THE VILLAGER, played by the actor who plays The Ferryman

THE HUT and THE BOAT are built out of the bodies of various actors.

The play was originally staged with six actors:

João Baltazar
 Gabriela Espinosa
 Matt Fernald
 Shawna Grajek
 Tiahna Harris
 Joshua Wren

and the script uses their names to refer to the actors playing particular characters.

Time and Place

At all times, we are in a clearing in the deepest woods. We have shaped this clearing into our little theater, into our church, into our sacred ground. And in this clearing, we travel to:

PROLOGUE: A clearing. Now.

ACT ONE: The coast of a great sea, at the beginning of time.

ACT TWO: The same coast, many hundred years later.

ACT THREE: The Sumida River.

EPILOGUE: Here. Now.

Notes on the script

I adapted *No Wind Blows Against the Pines* from two 15th-century Japanese Noh plays, *Pining Wind* by Motokiyo Zeami, and *The Sumida River* by his son Kanze Motomasa. The texts of these two plays weave together original material, poetic references, historical allusions, and religious allegories. I took the same approach in writing and directing this play. The script was devised and written alongside the staging and development of the original production. Part of the story comes from the Noh plays, part of the text was heavily adapted from ancient Japanese literature, part of the play arose from the actors' improvisations, and part of it is my own invention. I have long since lost track of which is which.

The play unfolds in one continuous scene.

The life of this play is the poetry of the tides: always the same, though constantly changing, building and subsiding, ebbing and flowing—and always eroding the coast, making it more and more different (and *less and less*) with each passing cycle of the moon.

Some of the Monk's lines are in Portuguese. Those lines could be in any language—besides English.

The Nembutsu—"Namu Amida Butsu" in Japanese, "Hail Amida Budda" in English—is a common devotional prayer in certain sects of Japanese Buddhism.

Citations

Matsukaze's opening monologue is adapted from the final scene of Charles Mee's *Life is a Dream*, itself adapted from Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* and interviews with Hiroshima survivors.

I extend my special thanks to Joshua Wren, whose poetry formed the basis of Yukihiro's three poems.

Prayer Offerings

This is an old song,
these are old blues,
and this is not my tune
but it's mine to use.

"Sadie," by Joanna Newsom

Your absence has gone through me
like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

"Separation," by W. S. Merwin

PROLOGUE: ALL, ALL COME, ALL ASCEND

It's March 7th, 8th, or 9th in Amherst, Massachusetts. A few minutes before 8 PM. Three doors open into the Holden Experimental Theater at Amherst College and the audience streams in. Each person passes through sheets of hanging fabric, glimpsing the shadows of trees in the center of the theater. Once there, the audience finds a clearing, and a oval of benches hewn from rough wood.

At one end of the oval, there is an enormous stump. On this stump, this altar, there are pieces of clothing, a wooden bowl full of water, and a small scroll.

In the very center of the space there is a heavy bell laying on its side with a metal striker next to it.

The audience takes a seat around the oval. We hear low, distant rumbles, almost inaudible.

Dawn of the first day.

We hear the faint, melodious moaning of six voices surrounding us in the shadows. Six actor-priests—JOÃO, GABRIELA, MATT, SHAWNA, TIAHNA, and JOSH—slowly circle in the fringes of the space. Each carries a rough birch staff. They circle the clearing, their dissonant melody growing and building with the speed of their movement. They whip a spinning wind with them as they run. They grow faster and faster, and louder and louder, until one by one they break into the playing space, still running in circles, spinning together closer.

And then: one of them reaches the center. She picks up the bell and watches as the other five swirl around her at maximum speed and volume. And then suddenly—she rings the bell.

A moment's breath, and then all the actors crash their staves to the ground and begin to beat out a savage rhythm in the dirt. It builds, grows, subsides, and builds again. Shawna picks up the bell, stands, and crosses over to the stump. The others watch her.

At the climax—she rings the bell. All fall silent, and we hear the metal ring to the sky.

ACT ONE: AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

Scene One

Shawna picks up one of the robes on the stump. She puts it on. Shawna has become MATSUKAZE.

During this speech, Matsukaze gives Gabriela, João, and Tiahna the robes that transform them into THE SISTERS' MOTHER, FATHER, and Matsukaze's sister MURASAME, respectively. She then gives each of them a sacred implement: to her Mother, the scroll; to her Father, the bell and the chime; and to her sister, the bowl of water.

MATSUKAZE

To my family,

(Matt and Josh jump up, bang their sticks on the ground once, and quickly cross to the other end of the stage.)

Of all human qualities, the greatest is sympathy—
for clouds even
or snow
meadows
the banks of ditches
wet ravines
turf bogs
rotten wood

MOTHER

Mind the waves!

MATSUKAZE

Yes, mother!

(The Mother crosses over to the far end of the clearing and finds a long piece of brown fabric—seaweed. She brings it back to her family at the far end of the clearing and rubs the salt from it.)

sympathy for seagulls
the white of an egg
an earthworm in vinegar
an earthworm in honey
dog's blood

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

the dung beetle
driftwood

FATHER

Stay close to your sister!

MATSUKAZE

Yes, father!

for a pebble right side up
the bark of an elm
the bark of a birch
the bark of a pine
an earthen cup
blue spruce
pale eyes
black pitch

MURASAME

(to Matsukaze)

Grab the seaweed and pull it in with me!

MATSUKAZE

a child eating strawberries
a labyrinth of pines
the banks of the river
the clouds passing the moon
the promises we make
and the promises we forget

To my family,

The most beautiful of all times:

In spring the dawn,
In summer the nights,
In autumn the evenings,
In winter the early mornings.
The burning firewood
piles of white ash
the ground white with frost
spring water welling up

The sunlight you see in water as you pour it from a pitcher
into a bowl. The earth itself.

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

The world goes on, and the human voice writes its story.

Love,
Your daughter.

(The world shifts. Murasame crosses over to Matsukaze at the stump to drag in more seaweed. With staves, Josh and Matt raise a hut around the parents.

We hear a sinister clicking, muttering, and pulsing. And then—

A siren.

An immense staticky roar and a blinding flash.

The bomb burns the Mother and Father away into ash. The actors slowly take their robes off and drag them into the fringes. João takes the bell with him.

The bomb fades to low, distant booming and darkness. A long silence.

And then, a rustle, and the sisters rise from the sand and drag themselves to the remains of the hut. They survey the destruction, holding each other.

In silence and alone, the sisters bring all six sticks over to the far end of the clearing. They sit in the ruins. Matt, João, and Gabriela slowly enter and raise the hut around them.

Scene Two

Many moons pass. The light picks up Josh in the fringes. He dons a robe and vest hanging from a tree. He is YUKIHIRA, war refugee and poet. Suddenly, he careens in from the woods, critically injured, and drags himself across the sand to the sisters' hut.

YUKIHIRA

O SWEET STARS!

(a gasp)

YUKIHIRA (cont.)

Hello!

Hey!

(He drags himself closer to the hut.)

HEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEY!

Is there anyone there?

Please say yes.

(He hears something inside.)

I hear stirring in there! Don't be scared, I'm not dangerous, I swear! I—

(He catches a wound on the sand.)

AAUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

(Matsukaze stands at the door. Murasame hesitates: she's skeptical.)

Please—I've been stranded in this labyrinth of pine trees for the past month; I don't know how to hunt; my clothes are in shreds; I'm wasting away; I'm pretty sure that water I drank back there was rancid and I've been eating nothing but *pinecones*!

If the universe will have me die, I accept. I'll die right here on your doorstep.

MATSUKAZE

Who are you?

(Yukihira perks up at the voice, surprised.)

YUKIHIRA

O sweet voice! My name—my name is Yukihira!

MATSUKAZE

How did you get all the way out here?

YUKIHIRA

I crawled.

MURASAME

(to Matsukaze)

What if he's a soldier?

YUKIHIRA

Who's that? I'm not a soldier, I promise. I'm—I'm a poet.
My town was demolished by bombs. I won't hurt you. I'm just hungry.

MATSUKAZE

We don't have much to give.

MURASAME

We don't have *anything* to give.

MATSUKAZE

And I'm sure our hut is too small...

YUKIHIRA

What's your name?

(Unease. Murasame sits.)

Did you build this hut yourself?

Are you still there?

MATSUKAZE

Yes.

YUKIHIRA

Yes you're still there or yes you built the hut?

(A beat.)

MATSUKAZE

Yes.

YUKIHIRA

It glows in the moonlight.

MATSUKAZE

We've lived here all our lives. My sister and I.

YUKIHIRA

(gazing at the beach)

The moon is in the tide pools.

MATSUKAZE

You're a poet?

YUKIHIRA

That's what they called me once.

MATSUKAZE

In a town destroyed by bombs.

YUKIHIRA

You never told me your name.

(A beat.)

MATSUKAZE

Tell us a poem. Then we'll know you're no kind of crow, no shadow.

YUKIHIRA

A poem?

Well—

In the Garden of my family,
 There is the Brotherly Lake,
 Curled over half the Garden's perfect circumference,
 Animating sparkling tributaries whenever there is
 conference.
 My Mother's hands are like orchards of blueberry cakes
 Streaming like veins through bloomed velour crepes.
 And my Father is the foundation,
 The soil springing the realization
 That when our bodies lie asleep in the dirt
 Their spirits live through our impressions in the earth.

(A silence.)

MATSUKAZE

And what are we?

YUKIHIRA

You?

MATSUKAZE

Your brother the lake, your mother the orchard, and your father the earth. What are we?

(He stands on top of the stump to get a better view of the hut.)

YUKIHIRA

You are the lonely wind in the pines, and your sister the autumn rain.

(Matsukaze smiles. She opens the door and Yukihiro collapses inside the hut.)

Scene Three

The hut smoothly expands the accommodate Yukihiro. We are now inside.

MATSUKAZE

Here, I...

(She helps him out of his robe.)

You're hurt. Murasame, bring water!

YUKIHIRA

(tasting the name)

Murasame.

MATSUKAZE

My sister.

(Murasame stands and gets the bowl. She brings it to Matsukaze and crosses back to the seaweed, facing away.)

(to Yukihiro)

Hold still.

(She washes his arm.)

YUKIHIRA

AUUUUUUUUUUUGHHHHHHHHHHH!

MATSUKAZE

It may sting.

YUKIHIRA

Saltwater?!

MATSUKAZE

(with a smile)

I told you we didn't have much to give. Hold still.

(He grits his teeth.)

YUKIHIRA

Even though you don't have windows, the moon still shines through the seaweed.

And the way the wind pulses the walls—it's like a great green heart.

(Matsukaze dabs again.)

Are you almost—

MATSUKAZE

Shhhhhh.

YUKIHIRA

Are you almost done?!

MATSUKAZE

Murasame, come take his robe.

(Murasame keeps her distance. Matsukaze looks back to Yukihiro, then stands and brings the robe over to her sister. Murasame grabs her arm.)

MURASAME

I don't trust him.

MATSUKAZE

Do you trust me?

YUKIHIRA

(unaware and looking at the walls)

All this seaweed...

MATSUKAZE

We draw salt from the sea.

YUKIHIRA

Show me how.

MATSUKAZE

It's not that easy—

YUKIHIRA

I bet I can do it one-handed!

MATSUKAZE

I really don't—

YUKIHIRA

You still haven't told me your name.

Murasame and...?

(A beat.)

MATSUKAZE

Matsukaze.

YUKIHIRA

Matsukaze.

Show me.

(She smiles, takes the seaweed away from Murasame, and brings it over to him.)

MATSUKAZE

The moon brings in the rising tide. Seaweed floats in from the ocean and we wade out to it and drag it in. We pull it onto the coast and wash it off in the waves so there's no sand but it's soaked in brine. And then we bring it in here and dry it off, and scrape it, like this—

(She scrapes the seaweed.)

You try.

(He takes the seaweed but doesn't have a clue what to do with it. She reaches out to him, laughing.)

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

Here—

MURASAME

(an explosion)

How did you get here?!

How did you get all the way out here?

It's safe out here. It's far away out here. I know my sister is a fool and trusts you. I'm not a fool. I've seen too many soldiers marching through that forest and I've heard too many women crying at night from near the mountains. I hear the bombs and I see the smoke. How did you get here?

(Matsukaze is mortified. Yukihiro stands.)

YUKIHIRA

O Housekeeper Murasame—inhabitant of this rather peculiar abode,

May your heart be not cousin of cold clay

Nor kin of any kind to the phylum of stone.

May your heart beat as mercifully as the million bees

Who all agreed *not* to sting me,

Even though I ripped through their garden of wildflowers and collided with their hives of honeycombs.

Through streams of fear and scream of grief

My stampede collapses and through choking breathes I grasped for penitent speech and

I said:

"Bees! I know you're angry with me and I'm a clumsy good-for-nothing

But there were bombs eating the home I was raised in! The wide jaws of war chafed by bones and whipped them running.

Through spikes of burning tears jammed red deep into my eyes

I swear I didn't see your golden castle and gentle garden.

I entreat thee, O Majestic Queen, please bestow upon a sorry refugee

Mercy, mercy, the sweetest of all nectars!"

Now, the Queen not only forgave my trespasses

But she offered me a home within her Garden.

YUKIHIRA (cont.)

The spikes of tears finally melted and my bones no longer burned.

I thanked her a million times.

She said a million sympathies refugees deserve.

I've been roaming this labyrinth of pines for the past passing moon.

May your heart beat but even a whisper of the valley drought's breeze.

MURASAME

(giggling, to Matsukaze)

You're a lunatic, bringing him in!

MATSUKAZE

Maybe—but so are you for not kicking him out!

YUKIHIRA

You'll let me stay?

MURASAME

Stay till morning.

MATSUKAZE

Stay as long as you need to.

YUKIHIRA

Then I suppose there's enough time for me to tell you how I convinced the emperor to let me rule for a day—

MURASAME

You're lying!

MATSUKAZE

Of course he is!

YUKIHIRA

I might be, but how would you know?

(The Housekeepers close the hut around them and the clearing fades into dim night. The low drums of war beat on the horizon.)

Scene Four

Ten minutes before sunrise, many years later.

Yukihira picks a walking stick out of the hut and walks out onto the beach with a strip of seaweed. The sisters are inside the hut: Murasame straining a single piece of seaweed and Matsukaze standing at the door, looking out at Yukihira.

After a moment, Matsukaze opens the door and crosses out to him. He smiles and she returns it, but there's tension.

She helps him lay out the seaweed, scrape it down on the sand, and wrap it up into a pack. While they work:

YUKIHIRA

The sun is late this morning.

(She looks to the rising sun.)

I couldn't sleep last night. I haven't been able to sleep much this past week.

MATSUKAZE

I couldn't sleep either.

YUKIHIRA

What did you dream last night?

MATSUKAZE

Last night?

(A silence. She stands.)

I saw a mother and her child walking through the market together. The mother goes up to a stand to buy something—fruit, maybe, I'm not sure—and when she turns back to the child, he's gone. And then—things went black and tilted and whirled—she wanders up and down the countryside looking for him, and she begs all those she sees, and everyone ignores her.

It ended at the banks of a great river.

Don't go.

YUKIHIRA
We decided.

MATSUKAZE
You can't go.

YUKIHIRA
The three of us—we decided—

MATSUKAZE
I've changed my mind.

YUKIHIRA
I'm coming back in a month.

MATSUKAZE
You don't know that for sure.

YUKIHIRA
How much longer could it take?

MATSUKAZE
What if you don't come back at all?

YUKIHIRA
It's just through the pines.

MATSUKAZE
Over a mountain!

YUKIHIRA
It's more of a hill.

MATSUKAZE
You don't have to.

YUKIHIRA
I want to.

MATSUKAZE
Yukihira—

YUKIHIRA
Matsukaze!

(A furious breath and then Matsukaze storms into the hut. She roots around for Yukihiro's robe, takes it, and walks outside. She goes to him and gives him the robe. She crosses back inside the hut. Murasame sees this and crosses out to Yukihiro. A beat.)

MURASAME

Yukihiro...

YUKIHIRA

I know.

MURASAME

You have everything you need?

YUKIHIRA

Matsukaze helped pack me up.

MURASAME

You have food?

YUKIHIRA

Murasame—

MURASAME

If you starve, she'll blame me.

YUKIHIRA

I'm going to be fine.

MURASAME

You'll need supplies for the way back, too. Did you think of that?

YUKIHIRA

I thought of that.

MURASAME

Oh, Yukihiro...

Yukihiro, I'm going to miss you too.

You're going to come back.

YUKIHIRA

Tell that to your sister.

MURASAME

I think you have to.

(A beat.)

I love her, Yukihiro. You love her too. We both know that. So just...just remember that, please. You've lived with us for three years. You're...you're my brother, Yukihiro.

My family. Hers too.

Remember that.

(Murasame crosses back inside. Yukihiro sits on the stump. Murasame whispers to Matsukaze and Matsukaze walks outside.)

YUKIHIRA

Look up at that moon. It's big and full and bright. Three years, and I can never get over how beautiful it is out here.

Look up at the moon. Watch it wax and wane. I'll be home before it's full. I'll come home in one month, in one piece, with supplies, and money, and food. I'll come home to you. To both of you.

(He crosses to her. And then, the true promise: he takes off his robe and puts it on her.)

The world goes on.

(She hugs him.)

He walks back to the stump and picks up his things. Murasame walks outside.)

YUKIHIRA (cont.)
(to Murasame)

Take care of her.

MURASAME

I always have.

YUKIHIRA
(to Matsukaze)

Look up at the moon!

(He leaves. The sisters watch him. Murasame takes Matsukaze's hand.)

MURASAME

The sun's rising.

(Matsukaze turns and rushes back into the hut. Murasame lingers and then turns back inside. Josh takes off Yukihiro's vest and lays down his stick. He lingers there in the shadow as the lights then crossfade to—)

Scene Five

A low pulse. Gabriela slowly sets down the staves she's holding and crosses out into the center of the clearing. She reaches into her pocket and presents the scroll to the audience. She leaves it at the sisters' doorstep, and then crosses back to her place in the hut, picks up the sticks, and knocks on the ground three times.

Morning, almost a month later.

Murasame hears the knocking and walks outside. She sees the scroll, picks it up and reads it. It drops from her hands.

Matsukaze hears her sister and walks outside. She picks up the scroll. Murasame tries to stop her, but she's too late. Matsukaze reads it and slowly collapses to the ground.

Matsukaze's breath grows sharp and wheezy. Murasame holds her.

MURASAME

Shhhhhhh.

MATSUKAZE

We have to go to him.

MURASAME

It'll be okay.

MATSUKAZE

We have to find him.

MURASAME

It's over now.

MATSUKAZE

We have to go to him.

(Murasame hums a soft lullaby. The Housekeepers join in with dissonant voices. The sound builds, and after a moment Matsukaze stands and crosses slowly toward the stump. She turns to her sister.)

MATSUKAZE

Does he live or does he die?

(The dissonance cuts out.)

MURASAME

Matsukaze—

MATSUKAZE

Come with me.

MURASAME

Does he live or does he die?

MATSUKAZE

Find out with me.

Come out here.

(Murasame leaves the scroll and crosses over to the stump.)

When they write the story of our lives, let them say that we tried.

(They step up onto the stump. They are on the cliffs at the edge of the sea.)

MURASAME

The wind off the sea stings.

MATSUKAZE

The cliff is cold under my toes.

MURASAME

I'm scared.

MATSUKAZE

I'm scared too.

MURASAME

When they write the story of our lives—

MATSUKAZE

They'll say we tried.

MURASAME

Matsukaze—

MATSUKAZE

Do you believe me?

(A beat.)

MURASAME

I believe you.

MATSUKAZE

I believe you too.

MURASAME

Matsukaze—

Does he live or does he die?

MATSUKAZE

He lives.

Yukihira!

(They take a step, unclasp hands, and throw themselves into the surf. The world decays around them; a savage rhythm strikes up; distant explosions grow closer. The Housekeepers collapse the hut, and exit to the fringes. Gabriela takes the bowl, and Matt takes the scroll. The sisters dissolve into oblivion, collapsing

and merging into the stump, wrapping themselves around it, bound and trapped to it for eternity.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO: TWO WINDSScene One

Everything clears. Matt dons a vest and enters as the VILLAGER. He crosses over to the stump. João dons an orange robe with the bell attached to a sash. He is the MONK. He enters.

MONK

Can you tell me which way to the village?

VILLAGER

Have you ever heard the story of the two sisters on the coast?

MONK

I haven't. But can you tell me which way—

VILLAGER

I love this memorial.

MONK

(it's not much of a memorial)

Memorial?

VILLAGER

"The Two Sisters on the Coast." People say it's a myth, but I've always found it magical.

(He sees the bell.)

That's a beautiful bell.

MONK

It was a gift from the monastery.

VILLAGER

You're a traveling monk.

MONK.

Yes.

(A beat.)

If I go down that road over there—

VILLAGER

Once upon a time, many hundred years ago, there were two sisters who lived alone here at the edge of the sea. They were saltmakers.

MONK

I'm—I'm not really interested—

VILLAGER

One day, a man came to their door, a refugee. The sisters took him in and nursed him back to health.

(The Monk tries to interrupt him, but the Village continues, gently insistent.)

Both had lost their families in a great way, and they cared for each other like the brother and sisters they had never had. But one day the man had to leave. The sisters begged him to stay, but he promised he would return safe and left them his robe as a token. He died on the road. When the sisters learned the news, they climbed up to the highest rocks on the cliff and threw themselves into the sea. They died, but their spirits linger on, and this memorial is in their memory.

(A beat.)

Go down that road until you come to a rock shaped like a fish and turn left. That'll get you to the village.

MONK

That's a beautiful story.

VILLAGER

Will you offer a prayer for the sisters?

(The Monk nods and crosses to the stump. He rings his bell once.)

MONK

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis. Requiescant in pace. Amen.

(He has passed the test. The Villager reaches into his pocket and hands him the scroll. The Monk opens and reads it.)

MONK (cont.)

"Prayer Written on the Occasion of My Salvation, by Ariwara no Yukihiro."

(to the Villager)

Thank you.

VILLAGER

Thank you.

(The Villager leaves, but lingers just a moment to watch the Monk before disappearing.)

MONK

(reading)

"O whimsical spirit of the Invisible Air
Ever spinning winds and skipping waves over the oceans,
Only in the silvering silence of these flickering stars
Do I tearfully beseech thee, answer me."

(It hits him in the gut.)

"O merciful Air, I beseech thee,
Cradle my cries to Lord Amida—
May mine supplications shoot past the sky
Over the halved halo of the milky moon."

(He throws down the scroll and continues his own prayer, extemporizing wildly.)

Refugee sisters, thy fates are final!
Accept thy bounds as I cross-stitch a warm home for war-
wracked bones.
Your voices soar beyond the distant stars—
Gliding piquant breaths across the curviship of antiquity—
Imultavelmente entrelaçada
Entre correntes telúicas que tempestuosamente embaçam até
mesmo o olho de Deus—

Ó Infinito Universo,
Que o ar carregue minha prece
Sob o sombrio rio da morte.
Vinde, errantes, abraçai a prima Terra!

(The Monk slams the bell to the ground and kneels, face down facing the stump, chanting the Nembutsu. The

earth shifts under our feet. Matt, Josh, and Gabriela enter and raise the hut—Gabriela replaces the bowl. The sisters rise from the memorial and float to their hut. The sisters dry and scrape seaweed in the hut, hovering from the world of the dead, as if in a trance.)

Scene Two

The Monk raises his head after the summoning is complete. Night has fallen and he is lost. The world has changed around him. He sees the hut.

MONK

Hello!

(The sisters do not respond. He senses no life from the hut.)

I'm lost!

Is there anyone there?

(Murasame stands.)

I see smoke coming from the chimney!

(She crosses to her sister and kneels down at her side.)

Anyone?

Please say yes?

MURASAME

(to Matsukaze)

He's here.

(to the Monk)

Who is it?

MONK

There's a bad storm brewing. I'm not sure how to get back to the village. Could I stay the night?

MURASAME

We're a long way from the village.

MONK

I saw the smoke from up the beach. Could I come in?

MURASAME

We don't have room.

MONK

I won't take up much space—

MURASAME

Go back up the beach. You'll find the road.

MONK

There's no light. The clouds are covering up the moon.

MURASAME

We don't have anything to give. I'm sorry.

MONK

I'm a monk. I'm *used* to less than nothing. I promise I'll be gone at morning. You'll never know I was here. And I'll leave sooner if the moon breaths through the fog. Please.

I'll even bless the house!

MURASAME

(to Matsukaze)

Matsukaze.

Matsukaze, he's a monk.

(to the Monk)

You came from up the beach?

MONK

Yes.

MURASAME

By the memorial?

MONK

Yes.

MURASAME

A monk?

MONK

Yes!

(A beat.)

MURASAME

Come in.

Scene Three

The Housekeepers open the hut and the Monk finds himself inside. The hut that once glowed green in the moonlight has grown gray.

MURASAME

I would offer something, but as I said, we don't have much to give.

MONK

Just water if you have it.

MURASAME

Matsukaze, bring water.

MONK

Matsukaze.

MURASAME

My sister.

(Matsukaze does not move. Murasame crosses to her sister and picks up the wooden bowl. Then, a shift. She turns to the Monk.)

You strayed far from the road.

MONK

I got lost in the forest. The paths in there twist and turn, and more than once I found myself back where I started.

MURASAME

And then you made your way to the coast.

MONK

I found a path that said it would lead me to Suma shore.

MURASAME

(to herself)

A monk on Suma shore...

MONK

I have to ask: is your sister—

MURASAME

—I'm sorry I didn't let you in sooner.

I would have, but my sister insisted that you might be dangerous. I think she still isn't sure.

(She crosses to him.)

You mentioned outside—you said you would bless the house.

(She places the bowl down in front of him.)

MONK

It's a small blessing.

MURASAME

Would you do it for my sister? So she knows you're safe.

(A pause. The Monk knows he is among spirits. He nods. He kneels down in front of the water and rings the bell once over it. The sound reverberates through the water and out to the walls. He stands and crosses in turn to each of the four corners of the hut.)

MONK

May the clouds of the Blessed One's spiritual powers,
his unrivaled knowledge and boundless compassion,
pour down upon your house like a monsoon rain.

May the protectors in all ten directions,
the gods in the heavens and the nagas of the earth,
ward off all dangers, misfortunes, and hazards
and ensure that you live happy here.

(He comes close to Matsukaze. He glances at her.)

MONK (cont.)

May the spirits of those lost, or longing, or clinging,
those who have bound themselves to the earth,
find solace here in this house,
that they may free themselves from their attachments
in the grace of those who here reside.

(Back to the script.)

May you dwell here like monks in the forest,
delighting in meditation—

MATSUKAZE

Wait!

*(The Monk falls silent. Matsukaze stands and slowly
turns to face the Monk. She is a porcelain wisp, faint
and broken.)*

What did you say there?

"The spirits of those lost"—what did you say?

MURASAME

Matsukaze—

MONK

I offered a prayer for those who cling to this world.

MATSUKAZE

Of course you did.

MURASAME

Matsukaze, you're scaring him.

MATSUKAZE

(to the Monk)

Tell me: did you see the memorial?

MONK

Up the coast?

MATSUKAZE

"O whimsical Spirit of the Invisible Air
Ever spinning winds and skipping waves over the oceans,
Only in the silvering silence of these flickering stars

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

Do I tearfully beseech thee, answer me."

You saw it.

Yukihira, the poet, the refugee, the fool! He stayed here in our house a while, and then was gone from us. His heart rose through the sky and was transformed into a star; his body changed to light that glimmered and then suddenly was gone—while we lingered on, while we waited, and we will keep waiting, we will keep waiting, we will wait—

(She collapses to the ground and mutters "We will wait" obsessively while Murasame comforts her.)

MURASAME

(to the Monk)

You offered prayers at sunset for two sisters, bound to the memorial and drowned in the sea. We are their phantoms.

MONK

Phantoms?

MATSUKAZE

(a fugue)

"O merciful Air, I beseech thee,
Cradle my cries to Lord Amida—
May mine supplications shoot past the sky
Over the halved halo of the milky moon."

(She rips herself away from her sister.)

You miss him too.

MURASAME

Of course I do.

MATSUKAZE

We made a promise.

MURASAME

Have I ever failed you?

MATSUKAZE

I trusted you.

MURASAME
We trusted each other.

MATSUKAZE
He made a promise.

MURASAME
It's going to be okay—

MONK
Sisters, I—

MURASAME
Please stay. Your prayers are a comfort. It would mean the world to me. Just one more prayer for my sister and me.

(The Monk hesitates, but then bows again before the bowl and begins to mutter a prayer in Portuguese. He strikes the earth with his fist in rhythm.)

MATSUKAZE
Stay with me.

MURASAME
I'm right here.

MATSUKAZE
Never go.

MURASAME
You can't go either.

MATSUKAZE
I'm so tired.

MURASAME
We can rest.

MATSUKAZE
I'm so small.

MURASAME
Shhhhhhh.

MATSUKAZE
I'm so tired.

(A pause.)

MATSUKAZE

Do you hear something?

MURASAME

The storm's growing wild.

MATSUKAZE

Something in the waves?

MURASAME

Close your eyes and rest.

MATSUKAZE

I I I I

I know I hear something out there.

(She stands. The Monk hits the final beat of the prayer.)

Murasame, I'm sure I hear someone out there.

(She runs out of the hut.)

Scene Four

Matsukaze dashes to the stump. We are on the coast. The Housekeepers collapse the hut and kneel, facing the stump, with their sticks in parallel at their sides. The storm rages.

MATSUKAZE

Yukihira!

I know you're there!

I can hear your voice!

I can hear it through the autumn rain
I can hear it through a million buzzing bees
I can hear it through the thundercracks
and I can hear it through the lonely wind in the pines.

Can you hear me?

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

Can you hear my voice?

Listen!

(She stands on the stump and looks over creation.)

I see a great river
 the River of Three Crossings
 the River Styx
 the River of the dead
 and I see you there, Yukihiro.
 I see you there in the pines.
 I see you there in the water.
 I see you there on the cliff.
 I see you there in my robe.
 I see you there in the air.
 I see you held on the wind.
 You made a promise to me
 and I remember you
 and I trust you
 and you have come back to me!

(She takes a single step off the stump but Murasame stops her.)

MURASAME

MATSUKAZE!

(All things fall silent.)

Matsukaze, it's me.

It's Murasame.

Come back, come back, wake up and come back.

It's going to be okay. Let's get you inside.

Wake up.

MATSUKAZE

Look up at the moon.

(A silence.)

MATSUKAZE (cont.)

You have forgotten his promise to us.

(Murasame looks to the moon, and then back to her sister.)

MURASAME

(small: a surprise to herself)

Yes.

Yes, I have.

But I remembered your promise to me.

(She turns, picks up the bowl, and crosses past the Housekeepers towards an exit.)

Come with me.

Come home with me.

(Matsukaze moves toward her sister, but before she can reach her, the Housekeepers jump up and make a barricade with their sticks. She cannot pass. Her sister cannot reach her. They won't see each other ever again. Murasame turns away, and then, like Orpheus in reverse, exits and disappears into mist.)

Scene Five

Matsukaze follows her sister from the interior circle. The Housekeepers collapse back to the ground. Night breaks into day. Matsukaze reaches the stump and cannot see Murasame anymore. She sits down on the stump. The Monk watches all this, and then stands, crosses to the Housekeepers, plucks one stick away from them, and then turns to face Matsukaze.

MONK

The sun is rising.

(Silence.)

Do you hear that?

MATSUKAZE

Hear what?

MONK

Rain.

(They listen.)

MATSUKAZE

Autumn rain in the pine forest.

(She turns to him.)

No wind.

(The Monk crosses to her. He lays down his stick, and as he speaks, takes Yukihiro's robe off her, picks up the scroll, and gives her the chime hanging around his neck.)

MONK

I bless you with another chance, with another life. Vá e
encontre o seu caminho.

(He turns and walks away. At the last moment—)

The world goes on.

(He exits, leaving her alone.)

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE: THE SUMIDA RIVER

Scene One

Matsukaze stands.

MATSUKAZE

Dear Murasame,

Murasame, I'm lost and I don't know where to find you. I looked under every pebble on my path, around every corner in every town, in every brush of ghosts by every dying river, and still I can't find you. I looked under my blanket at night; I looked in my tea kettle in the morning. I looked for you in the sea and I looked for you on the wind, and still I can't see you. I can't find you anywhere in the world.

Murasame, the only place I find you is behind my eyelids, inside my skull, inside my brain, buried deep in my chest.

Perhaps I'll see how the world ends. I've wandered long enough.

(João enters near the Housekeepers with two robes. Gabriela stands. Underneath Matsukaze's letter, João helps Gabriela into her robe, transforming her into the MOTHER. We are trading off stories.)

Perhaps one day, after everyone else has died of hunger, I will see what will come to pass on the earth. And maybe then I'll die too.

But until then, I am lost, and I don't know where to find you.

MOTHER

Can you hear my boy?
The wind, even the wind
coursing the skies
sings welcome tidings
to the patient pines.

MATSUKAZE

Love,
The lonely wind in the pines.

(Underneath the Mother's speech, João, Josh, and Matt create a boat from sticks. Matt puts on his robe: he is the FERRYMAN. We have transported from the coast to the banks of the Sumida River.)

MOTHER

O it is true,
A mother's hear
though not in darkness
may yet wander, lost,
for love of her child.

(Repeat ad lib. until Ferryman's line—)

Have you seen him?
Can you hear my boy?
Can you hear his voice?
Listen!

Scene Two

FERRYMAN

All aboard! All aboard! The ferry across the Sumida River
leaves now! Just a coin to cross the river! Last call! Last
call for the ferry across the Sumida River!

*(And through all of this, Matsukaze has waited,
searching, praying. She is the ghost that haunts this
place.)*

MOTHER

(to Ferryman)

Excuse me!

FERRYMAN

Yes?

MOTHER

How much to cross the river?

FERRYMAN

A coin, ma'am.

MOTHER

And if I have none to give?

FERRYMAN

Then you're not crossing the river today, ma'am. Now if you'll kindly move out of the way, there are paying customers behind you—

MOTHER

Sir, I—

FERRYMAN

Where are you from?

MOTHER

From the seas to the west, from Suma shore.

FERRYMAN

So you're from Suma, and you're mad into the bargain! Dance for us then! Dance for us and entertain us!

MOTHER

Cruel man! You're not much of a ferryman, are you? A good ferryman stands at his boat and says "All aboard!" Here you are, looking me in the face and saying "Get away!" How can I even know that you are the ferryman?

FERRYMAN

I don't have time for this—

MOTHER

I am from Suma, some hundreds of miles to the west. I have traveled a long and weary way and I'm not going to be stopped by some ferryman who thinks himself the king of all heaven!

(The Ferryman smacks the ground with his stick.)

FERRYMAN

You either pay or you get gone.

(A beat. The Mother backs away. She turns to leave, but Matsukaze catches her eye and stops her. A moment of grace between them.)

MATSUKAZE

Does he live or does he die?

MOTHER

You hear him too.

(She turns to the Ferryman.)

Does he live or does he die?

FERRYMAN

Come again?

MOTHER

Does he live or does he die?

This is the ferry across the Sumida River?

FERRYMAN

Yes, I told you—

MOTHER

Then you must know the poem about this crossing—

"Are you true to your name?
Then, Sumida birds,
I put you this question:
the one I love—
does she live or does she die?"

Well? Does he live or does he die?

FERRYMAN

I don't understand—

MOTHER

You asked for my ravings. You asked me to entertain you. I do so. I kneel down at your feet. I beg you. My son—does he live or does he die?

(A silence.)

MATSUKAZE

(something opening up inside herself)

You were walking through the market with your son.

MOTHER

(to the Ferryman)

I was walking through the market with my son.

MATSUKAZE

I remember...

MOTHER

I was walking through a market

MATSUKAZE

I remember strawberries.

MOTHER

and I stopped to look at the strawberries, because it was just summer and they were new and fresh.

MATSUKAZE

You took your eyes off him for just a moment.

MOTHER

I took my eyes off him for just a moment and when I turned back with my strawberries

MATSUKAZE

he was gone

MOTHER

he was gone.

MATSUKAZE

Things got black

MOTHER

and titled and whirled. I heard voices yelling about slave traders, about children snatched.

Ferryman, I ask you—

I asked you as I ask the Sumida birds:

the child I love,

does he live or does he die?

Again and again I question you

but you give me no reply.

Ferryman, your silence is rude.

Should I name you "Rustic Bird?"

MOTHER (cont.)

Ferryman,

MATSUKAZE & MOTHER

your boat may be full.

MOTHER

Perhaps it is small. It doesn't matter.

MATSUKAZE & MOTHER

It never has.

MOTHER

I am a mother looking for my son.

I ask for nothing else.

Make room for me.

Please.

Make room.

(A silence. The Ferryman steps aside and lets the Mother on. Matsukaze joins her.)

Scene Three

As the Ferryman rows, Josh and João expand the boat.

MOTHER

(to Matsukaze)

You are a gift, you know that?

MATSUKAZE

You're from Suma?

MOTHER

Yes.

MATSUKAZE

And what you said back there...?

MOTHER

Afterwards, I learned my son was stolen away by traders and children and spirited off east, across the mountains, to distant lands, and they were bound for the north. I

MOTHER (cont.)

followed them as best I could, but I was soon lost. But I wasn't going to stop. And I've been searching for him ever since.

MATSUKAZE

You said I heard him too.

MOTHER

You're listening. Of course you hear him.

FERRYMAN

This part of the crossing gets tricky, so hold on tight!

(Matsukaze looks over the ferry's edge.)

MATSUKAZE

Ferryman? That grave over on the far bank?

FERRYMAN

That?

Now that's a sad story.

A year ago today, on the fifteenth day of the third month, a trader in children came here from the west. He had with him a twelve-year-old boy whom he had bought, and he was bound for the mines in the far north. But the boy wasn't used to traveling. He was exhausted and had fallen ill. When he was unable to walk a single step, he collapsed here on the banks of the river. The trader abandoned him and went on his way. What heartless people there are in this world! The village took care of him as best we could, but he grew weaker and weaker, until it was certain he was dying.

On his deathbed, he said he was from the coasts to the west, from Suma shore. He said he missed the sights and the sounds of the sea, and he missed his mother so much, and wanted us to bury him on the banks of the river. His voice was so kind. He called out a prayer four or five times, and then he died.

Well, what with all my chattering, we're already here! All ashore! Everyone out!

(The Mother does not move.)

FERRYMAN (cont.)

Ma'am?

MOTHER

Ferryman, when did all this happen?

FERRYMAN

The third month of last year.

MOTHER

On exactly this day.

FERRYMAN

Yes, ma'am.

MOTHER

And the boy, he was

FERRYMAN

twelve years old.

MOTHER

And he said he was from

FERRYMAN

Suma shore.

MOTHER

And after he died, no one ever came searching for him?

FERRYMAN

No, no one.

MOTHER

No family?

FERRYMAN

No.

MOTHER

Especially not his mother. She never came, did she?

FERRYMAN

No one ever came.

MOTHER

Of course not.

Take me to him.

(He nods and strikes the ground once with his stick.)

Scene Four

The world shifts under our feet and we are now at the grave. The Boatkeepers and the Ferryman all stand by one of the exits. The tomb—the stump—glows softly.

FERRYMAN

This is the boy's tomb. Pray for him, prayer for him with all your heart!

MOTHER

My eyes...

My eyes will see him—
or so I believed, until this moment.
For this moment, I traveled a weary way
across the west, to unknown lands
only to find him gone from this world;
only to stand here before his tomb!

(She lets out a keening cry and collapses. Her walls are beginning to break down.)

O cruelty!
He is dirt!
He is earth by the side of the road, buried, with only the
new spring growth to cover his tomb!
Had he lived on,
he would have known gladness, but hope was vain
yes, vain
vain as living is to me now
To me, his mother,
for whom a while, a lovely figure in my eyes,
he glimmered and then suddenly was gone!

(Then very quiet, a murmur, growing and crescendoing—)

Come home to me.

MOTHER (cont.)

Come home to me.
Come home to me.
Come home to me.
Come home to me.

(Tremendously)

COME HOME TO ME
COME HOME TO ME COME HOME TO ME COME HOME TO ME!

(She claws at the grave.)

Come help me!
Turn the earth over!
One last time show a mother her son!
MY SON COME HOME TO ME MY SON MY SON COME HOME TO ME

(Matsukaze rushes to her, grabs her arm, and restrains her. The Mother collapses sobbing in Matsukaze's arms.)

MOTHER (cont.)

My child my child my child my

MATSUKAZE

It'll be okay.

MOTHER

I have to go to him.

MATSUKAZE

He's there.

MOTHER

I have to find him.

MATSUKAZE

Shhhhhhhhhh.

MOTHER

I have to go to him.

(A pause. Something inside Matsukaze breaks. She stands and crosses to the Ferryman, takes a stick, and presents it to the Mother.)

MATSUKAZE

Then go to him.

(The Mother looks up, and through her tears—)

MOTHER

Yes. Yes, of course.

(The Mother stands and crosses to the center to join the prayer vigil. She beats the ground once.)

MOTHER (cont.)

Namu Amida Butsu.

(She chants this over and over, striking the ground in rhythm. Soon all the others join in. The beat picks up and grows until the prayer turns to noise, then to wailing, then to screaming. It reaches a wild climax, and then—)

The Mother stops. All others fall silent. She reaches forward with an overwhelmed smile on her face.)

MOTHER (cont.)

Ah, my child: is it you?

(She embraces her son, who only she sees.)

She hugs the invisible boy and he vanishes. Her embrace falters. He reappears. He disappears. Her last goodbye.)

Scene Five

A long silence. The lonely wind.

All those present besides Matsukaze and the Mother slowly exit. The Mother, crumpled in a heap over the sump, does not move.

Then, after the air clears, she looks up at the stump.

MOTHER

My love.

(In an instant, a thousand years of sorrow flashes up in her. She sees the mother she once was, and always will be. And this was the last moment she would ever see her child again.)

MOTHER (cont.)

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

(She stands and picks up her stick. Without ever looking to Matsukaze, she turns and leaves.)

END OF ACT THREE

EPILOGUE: EVERYTHING I DO IS STITCHED WITH YOUR COLOR

We are on the coast of timelessness, the audience present like never before. The empty coast of the present moment, stripped down and stripped bare. Matsukaze alone in the center.

Then, just as in the beginning, we hear the faint, melodious moaning of four voices surrounding us in the fringes. From the corners of the world, we see the spirits of the Monk, Ferryman, Mother, and Yukihiro appear, each carrying a staff. They circle the clearing, their dissonance growing and building and the wind rushing past and through them.

Matsukaze looks at every person in the room, living and dead alike, one by one in turn.

In the pines a wind blows wild. And then, Matsukaze stops it all with—

MATSUKAZE

To my family,
to my family,
TO MY FAMILY!

The most beautiful of all times:
In spring the dawn,
In summer the nights,
In autumn the evenings,
In winter the early mornings.

I'm ready to come home now.

(Matsukaze does not at first see Murasame enter opposite her. But then an awareness builds inside and she turns to see her sister.

Murasame carries the bell.

They slowly circle each other until they meet in the center. Murasame holds out the bell and Matsukaze takes the ringer from her neck and strikes it.

The sound echoes.

They place the bell on the ground, just as it lay at the beginning.

And then they turn away from each other, never touching, never looking back, and leave. And as they leave, the other four spirits resolve into a dew and dissolve into oblivion.

The bright lights of creation blind us with their fire.

We wait.)

END OF PLAY