

The following monologue is excerpted from:

# TONSEISHA

by

Erik Patterson

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Erik Patterson  
[Pattersone@dogear.org](mailto:Pattersone@dogear.org)

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Akiko is a young Japanese woman. She speaks directly to the audience. When Richard speaks, Akiko does not look at him. His lines are spoken as if they were part of her monologues, as if Akiko were speaking them, but instead we hear them from another's mouth, as Akiko once heard them (as she remembers them).

(NOTE: The following scene could be performed as a straight monologue, with Akiko performing Richard's lines. She should put on a "male voice," like one might do when telling a story and portraying another person in that story.)

### Scene B:

AKIKO: Have you ever heard of Seiobo's garden? Legend has it that in this garden there is a peach tree, and that peach tree blooms and bears fruit only once every three thousand years. If you're lucky enough to eat one of those peaches, the fairy queen of heaven will descend from the sky and she will tell you that

RICHARD: "though nights and days may pass, they will greet and part with numberless years, knowing no limit to your life or difference of age."

AKIKO: Then she will reclaim the fruit of the flower and rise to heaven. Legend has it that the nectar of that peach will give you eternal life. Is the story true? Or is it only a story?  
*(pause)* When I was nine, my uncle took me to a garden. He said to me:

RICHARD: "This is the garden of Seiobo. Have you ever heard of Seiobo's garden?"

AKIKO: I had not. He told me about the peach blossoms, about Seiobo descending from the sky, about the gift her fruit bears. I can still hear the inflections of his voice, the way the words sounded so new, as if he was inventing them. He recited a poem to me:

RICHARD: "Now comes round  
 The month of May so rare  
 When in the three thousandth year  
 The magic peach blooms,  
 Its petals floating in the cup."

AKIKO: He pointed to a tree. The peaches hung down from its branches like golden morning dew drops, glistening in the sun. He said,

RICHARD: "Try one."

*(pause)*

AKIKO: What my uncle didn't know, what I didn't tell him, was that I was allergic to peaches. I'd almost died once. They told me I should never--

RICHARD: "Try one,"

*(pause)*

AKIKO: he said. So I did. Excuse me. (*she eats a peach.*) It was glorious. Like God was inside my mouth. I ate it ravenously, one large bite after another, my hands wet, peach juice dripping down my chin, the skin of the fruit lodging between my teeth, my tongue taking in the taste of its beautiful nectar, until there was nothing left but the smile of its core, and I stood there spent, my hands trembling with delight. Then I remembered my allergy and expectantly awaited my expiration--right there in the garden of Seiobo. But nothing happened. Nothing. I was fine. My mouth, my throat, my skin--nothing. (*pause*) About two years ago, I took a vacation to France. I went to a friend's house for dinner one night. A wonderful meal, many delicacies. For dessert, my friend brought out a bowl of skinned peaches floating in the finest red wine. She spooned me one. I took a bite and thought of Seiobo. Nothing. I took another bite and another. Nothing. Then as I began to drink the wine from the bowl, my throat began to swell and the wine spilled out of my mouth, dripping down my chin and onto my blouse. They had to drive me to a hospital forty miles away. I almost died. (*pause*) I still have the blouse. The stain came out, but if you look real close there's one spot where it set. There's a pattern of red Botan flowers and one of the petals just doesn't look right anymore. Too red. It's one of the saddest petals I've ever seen. (*pause*) I remember another passage of the story, as my uncle used to tell it, his words seared into my mind:

RICHARD: "Now miraculously come from the sky, before our very eye, the heavenly maiden's figure in deep amazement we see. Let no doubt settle on your mind, reflecting on your sleeves the moon's clear light. Up above the clouds the royal virtue casts its glorious hues. 'What fades away is of this world the flower in the hearts of men.'"

AKIKO: What fades away is of this world the flower in the hearts of men. (*pause*) Did the goddess Seiobo visit me in her garden that afternoon when I was nine? Did I eat one of her heavenly peaches? Or did my uncle fool me so thoroughly, that, one day, my body will remember that moment, that glorious, gluttonous, god-filled moment, when my throat should have thickened but didn't, when my skin should have scarred but didn't, when my life should have left but didn't? In that moment, when my body remembers, suddenly, my throat will tense, my eyes will swell, and my heart shall stop its incessant beating.