

# Tonseisha

by

**Erik Patterson**

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# Tonseisha

## Characters:

**Akiko:** mid twenties, Japanese.

**Richard Brautigan:** 49, American, writer.

**Man/Michael:** 48, American.

**Robert:** 40s, American, poet/novelist.

**Tom:** 40s, American, journalist.

**Man:** 40s, American.

The stage should be bare, furnishings should be sparse—two chairs, a bed, a bar.

Akiko speaks directly to the audience in scenes A through F. When Richard speaks in these sections, 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).

SCENE A

*In darkness, we hear Akiko singing one verse of a nursery rhyme song:*

AKIKO

*(singing)*

When I was just a girl my eyes were deep as the blue sea,  
I could not see my dear dad when he went so far from me.  
I prayed to God, my eyes were sore, when I was just a girl,  
I did not see him go from me, my mind is still a girl.

*(Lights come up on Akiko. She is holding her father's kimono.)*

AKIKO

I'm here to tell you  
a story about my father,  
a man who haunts me.

My father used to  
tell me stories, I think, but  
that was before he—

I was young. There are  
so many words in my head,  
I can't place them all.

My father called me  
his sweet rose of May. I can  
almost hear his voice.

I was only nine.  
I can understand why she'd  
want to protect me.

She told me father—  
She said he—well, what she said  
wasn't really false.

I just didn't see  
beyond the careful choosing  
of her simple words.

She went mad, mother.  
She tore her hair out with guilt.  
She refused to speak.

Finally, I pieced  
it all together: mother,  
father, the whole mess.

I'm sorry. I told  
you a lie. See how easy  
it is? I told you.

I am not here to  
tell you a story about  
my father. I won't.

*(Richard Brautigan appears.)*

I'm here to tell you  
about Richard Brautigan,  
a man who haunts me.

He wrote love poems.  
Simple little love poems  
for many women.

Then he killed himself.  
Simple as that. There really  
isn't much to say.

He thrust a knife to  
himself. Seppuku: self  
disembowelment.

I imagine the  
blood. Then I think of how she  
cleaned up afterwards.

She must have, because  
I didn't see a thing. I  
believed what she said.

She looked in my eyes.  
They ache. Sometimes--. I'm sorry,  
what was I saying?

Sometimes the past grips  
you so tightly, you lose sight  
of where you are *now*.

I'm sorry. Goddamn  
my eyes. Where was I? Oh yes,  
Richard Brautigan.

He lay alone for  
a month before someone found  
him, then decomposed.

He left us without  
his voice. We didn't know the  
end of the story.

Maybe he lost sight  
of how words work--or ran out  
of stories to tell.

Because he used to  
tell me stories, I think, but  
that was before he--

When he killed himself,  
she tore out tufts of her hair.  
She refused to speak.

Finally, I pieced  
it all together: sorry,  
what was I saying?

I am so ashamed.  
I'm tired. I'm getting all  
my stories confused.

You ever feel like  
no matter how fast you run  
it's never enough?

Even if you close  
your eyes to escape from the  
image that haunts you,

the impression of  
that image remains on the  
back of your eyelids.

I didn't see a  
thing. Tonseisha: the man who  
abandoned the world.

Where was I? I don't...  
I *can't*...remember...myself.  
I'll begin again:

I'm here to tell you  
about a man who haunts me:  
Richard Brautigan.

*(Lights shift.)*

SCENE ONE

*TOKYO.*

*Akiko sits at a bar. A man sits a few stools away  
from her. He scoots closer to Akiko.*

MAN

Hi. Hajimemashite. Watashi wa Michael desu.

*(Akiko looks at him, smiles.)*

MAN

*(over-enunciating, miming)*

You. Want. A. Drink?

AKIKO

I speak English.

MAN

Oh. I'm sorry.

AKIKO

It's all right.

MAN

I'm an idiot.

Yes. AKIKO

You don't have to agree. MAN

No, I mean I'd like. A. Drink. AKIKO

Oh, that. Of course. MAN

Oolonghai. AKIKO

What's that? MAN

It's a drink. AKIKO

Right. Alright. We'll have two of those then. MAN

Where are you from? AKIKO

Montana. MAN

Are you him? AKIKO

What? MAN

No. I'm sorry. AKIKO

Am I who? MAN

I thought for a second— AKIKO

Thought what? MAN

Nothing. AKIKO

Oh. MAN

It's like that story. AKIKO

What story? MAN

He has a vision. AKIKO

Who does? MAN

“Pity me not, but  
lend thy serious hearing to  
what I shall unfold.” AKIKO

What are you talking about? MAN

Was he? AKIKO

Was who what? MAN

“Was your father dear to you?” AKIKO

My father? MAN

I'm sorry. AKIKO

I'm lost. MAN

I thought for a second— AKIKO

Thought what? MAN

Nothing. AKIKO

There's something. MAN

You ever read Richard Brautigan? AKIKO

Long time ago. MAN

How old are you? AKIKO

Old enough to be your father. MAN

No, really, how old are you? AKIKO

How old are you? MAN

Twenty-four. AKIKO

Forty-eight. MAN

Oh. AKIKO

And yes, I loved my father very much. MAN

Why talk about him? AKIKO

You said— MAN

I don't want to talk about him. AKIKO

Fine. MAN

You ever read Richard Brautigan? AKIKO

Yes, I said. MAN

What's your favorite book? AKIKO

The Man Within. MAN

Richard Brautigan didn't write that. AKIKO

That's not what you asked. MAN

What's your favorite Richard Brautigan book? AKIKO

I don't have one. MAN

Why not? AKIKO

I don't think he's very good. MAN

How can you say that? AKIKO

He's too simplistic. MAN

He's simple. AKIKO

You're young. MAN

There's a difference. AKIKO

Not much. MAN

What are you doing tonight? AKIKO

What do you mean? MAN

Wanna come home with me? AKIKO

I've got a daughter your age. MAN

Is that a no? AKIKO

Yes. MAN

*(Lights shift.)*