

# **The Realm of Whispering Ghosts: If Truman Met Einstein**

(working title)

Sixth Draft  
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By K.C. Brown  
Based upon an idea by Mike King

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[claire@zaslove.com](mailto:claire@zaslove.com)

## **Characters:**

**Frank**, formerly an American soldier

**Tomiko**, a young Japanese woman

**Albert Einstein**

**President Harry S. Truman**

**Colonel Henry Stimson**, Secretary of War

**James Byrnes**, later Secretary of State

**General George Marshall**

**Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki**

**Marquis Koichi Kido**

**General Korechika Anami**

In addition, Tomiko plays the role of Dr. Leo Szilard and Foreign Minister Togo

Frank plays Admiral William Leahy

The premiere production of the play in August 2013, directed by Arne Zaslove, featured a chorus of three Asian women who played masked characters in Bardo, the Japanese leaders in Act Two, and served as 'kuroko' (black-clad figures who facilitated transitions between scenes). This made for a cast of 10.

It is also possible for the three actors who play Stimson, Byrnes and Marshall to double as the Japanese leaders. This gives a very different flavor to the doubling – but yields a cast size of 7.

Of course, it is possible to add chorus members and eliminate doubling, for a larger cast size.

## **Setting**

The play is set in Bardo, a place inhabited by visions (some of them very personal to the person making the transition through this state after death). This allows for wide latitude in the design and production choices.

In my original vision, Tomiko is discovered alone onstage, in a wasteland in which the only recognizable feature is a torii gate, such as the one seen in the photos of Nagasaki after the bomb. She is surrounded by a set of masks, one of which she dons to embody the Angry Ghost.

In the premiere production, all the sets for the play were present onstage, but up-ended as if they had been tossed around in a conflagration. Tomiko was joined in Bardo by several figures wearing Noh masks, the stage design showed strong Japanese influence, and the chorus served as *kuroko*.

In another production, Bardo might feature characters trapped in columns of light – or some other indication that we are not in this world. Frank and Tomiko visit a number of locations in the “real world” but it should always be clear that these are “islands” – or that Bardo and the real world intermingle or jostle against each other. Projections and voice-overs can be very supportive, and settings should be indicative rather than realistic.

### **Act One**

- Sc. 1 Bardo  
(Tomiko, Frank)
- Sc. 2 White House  
(Truman, Stimson, Byrnes)
- Sc. 3 Einstein’s summer cabin  
(Einstein, Tomiko/Szilard)
- Sc. 4 James Byrnes’s home in South Carolina  
(Byrnes, Tomiko/Szilard)
- Sc. 5 White House  
(Truman, Marshall, Frank/Leahy)
- Sc. 6 Einstein’s home  
(Einstein, Tomiko/Szilard)

### **Act Two**

- Sc. 1 White House  
(Truman, Byrnes, Einstein)
- Sc. 2 Bardo  
(Tomiko, Frank)
- Sc. 3 Council of Six Meeting – Japan  
(Suzuki, Kido, Anami, Tomiko/Togo)
- Sc. 4 Potsdam – The Little White House  
(Truman, Byrnes, Stimson, Frank/Leahy, Marshall)
- Sc. 5 Council of Six – Japan  
(Suzuki, Kido, Anami, Tomiko/Togo)
- Sc. 6 Potsdam – Little White House  
(Truman, Byrnes)
- Epilogue (Truman, Einstein, Tomiko, Frank, various voices)

## ACT I

### Scene 1

(We are in darkness. Suddenly a blinding flash of light, unbearable at first, then lingering as it fades. Gradually stage lights come up. We see a desolate landscape, as of a ruined city but very little left of what was. Perhaps in the background we see part of a *torii*, or Shinto gate. A masked figure or figures are discernible in the uneven light, and we hear the faint sound of whispering.

We become aware of a new figure entering. It is an older man, shuffling, in a bathrobe. He is disoriented, and looks around as if trying to determine where he is. At first he does not see the maskfigures.)

MAN

(calling out)

Alice! Alice – ?

(More tentatively)

Alice? I saw a light in the hallway, and then... Suddenly it got so bright. Alice... Are you there? I still can't see...

(Without realizing it, the MAN has gotten close to a figure. It stands like a gatekeeper, wearing or holding a Noh demon mask. Suddenly the FIGURE lets out a terrifying cry. )

MAN

My God... What are you - ?

ANGRY GHOST

(same sound, maybe like a snake)

Hsssttt.....

MAN

(looking back where he came)

Please God, I.... Alice! How did you get so far away? Alice, help me, you - Don't cry... What's the matter? It's alright, I'm here... Just let me get closer to you...

(Behind him, the ANGRY GHOST is silent, watching – as the MAN gazes a little way into the distance.)

MAN

Why... that's – Alice.... That's me there... I –  
 (At a hiss, he turns back to look at the Angry Ghost.)  
 What is this place?

(The ANGRY GHOST turns sharply to look at him, but does not answer.)

MAN

Is this hell?

(Stamping its feet, the ANGRY GHOST gives way. The MAN looks around, taking in more of the scene. He sees an OLD MAN and OLD WOMAN, wearing Noh masks. They are grieving.)

MAN

I knew I would find myself here. Some day. Tell me – is this hell?

(The two new GHOSTS make the sign of weeping, but do not respond.)

MAN

All the years I spent trying to live a good life... It still comes back.  
 (He spots a new figure, wearing the ambiguous mask of a YOUNG WOMAN.)  
 It had to be here. And you...  
 (He approaches the YOUNG WOMAN. She draws back.)  
 Could it be - ? No, don't be afraid. Just let me –

(He gently reaches up to remove the mask. Perhaps one of the other ghosts removes it, like a Noh performer's assistant. She is revealed to be TOMIKO. The MAN steps back, speechless for a moment. She watches him. They are both frightened and confused, still wary.)

MAN

It is you.

TOMIKO

Who am I then?

MAN

Tomiko. I thought I would never see you again.

TOMIKO

I've never seen you before. I don't know you.

MAN

It's - ... How... ? We were... We meant - I'm Frank.

No, you're not. You're old

TOMIKO

I...grew old

FRANK

I didn't.

TOMIKO

I know. At least, I - That's what I thought.

FRANK

(Seeing her still puzzled and afraid, the MAN touches his own face and realizes he too is wearing a mask. Gingerly, he reaches up to take it off. Then he slips the bathrobe off, and steps forth, looking as he would have done decades earlier, when he first met her. She gasps.)

It's you!

TOMIKO

FRANK  
(looking down at himself, quite pleased)

Yes. I guess the rules don't apply here.

How did you get here?

TOMIKO

I saw the light. I – it was unbearably bright.

FRANK

I see it often.

TOMIKO

FRANK  
(quietly)

I must have - Does this mean that I – we're - ?

TOMIKO  
(not listening)

That woman you were calling to... Who is she?

Alice? She's my –

FRANK

(He turns toward where she was, but she is gone.)

TOMIKO

You married?!

FRANK

Tomiko, you – you were gone.

TOMIKO

Where did I go?

FRANK

You don't know?

TOMIKO

I can't make any sense of it. I -- I was on my way to Honkawa School, to help Yoahio's teachers. I had just come from my grandmother's house. And suddenly there was this blinding flash in the sky. And all the air... the *air* turned completely still, and then a rush of hot wind, so hot I felt like I was melting. And then I was –

(pause)

Here. At first I saw – terrible things.

(She shakes her head, as if to shake the images out of it.)

I had to cover my eyes and ears. I couldn't bear it. And then finally it got quiet. And I was still here.

(She looks long and hard at FRANK.)

I waited and waited for you.

FRANK

I dreamt about –

TOMIKO

I dream and dream. I can't find a way to wake up. But always demons, and terrible things. I hoped you would -- Our souls are linked. I knew you would come.

(Beat. A step.)

FRANK

I missed you. I thought of you.

TOMIKO

We're together now. At last. Now I want to wake up – with you.

FRANK

I don't know if we will.

TOMIKO

You know, don't you? You know what happened. How long have I been here?  
How did you get so old?

FRANK

It's been fifty-five years.

TOMIKO

Since what?

FRANK

Since - My country dropped a bomb. On your city.

TOMIKO

A *bomb*? The sky rained with bombs.

FRANK

No, this was a... a special bomb. Unlike any other bomb before.

TOMIKO

Are you telling me that I... that I died?

(He is silent.)

I don't remember leaving my body. They say you can look back and see –

FRANK

(too quickly)

You may - You may not have had any body to look back at.

TOMIKO

(not understanding)

What?

FRANK

Nothing like it had ever happened before.

TOMIKO

And my grandmother?

(FRANK turns away.)

TOMIKO

My parents?

FRANK

If they were anywhere near you –

TOMIKO

But they would have been one kilometer away. Maybe they -- ?

FRANK

Believe me, it's better if they didn't.

TOMIKO

(after a long pause)

And so this... this is -

FRANK

The place in between. Bardo.

TOMIKO

(almost laughing)

How do you know that word? Of all the things I taught you, all the things we shared... I don't remember ever talking about that.

FRANK

I read. I don't sleep – that is, I never slept well. For years. I would read at night. History. Philosophy.

TOMIKO

And dream of ... ?

FRANK

Yes. Always.

TOMIKO

Can we be together forever, now?

FRANK

I think it – changes.

TOMIKO

Don't you want to?

FRANK

Of course I do.

TOMIKO

Then here we are. At last.

FRANK

I don't know if we get to stay like this. We see visions, we are faced with our choices, and then - It changes.

TOMIKO

It hasn't changed for me. I've waited all this time...

FRANK

(gently)

Maybe... you were stuck. You didn't realize where you were. I may just be a vision for you – to help you move on. You may just be a vision for me.

TOMIKO

(touching and holding him)

No! I'm here. You're here. I don't want to "move on"...

FRANK

I know. But Tomiko, we can't change the past, what already happened.

TOMIKO

You got old. That already happened. And now you're *young* again.

FRANK

You're right. And you're the same. You've spent all this time here, but you never got older.

TOMIKO

Maybe time is different here. Maybe it doesn't only move in one direction. What? What are you thinking?

FRANK

It's just strange. There was a famous scientist. He talked about time slowing down... when you start to move really fast.

(In low light, we see EINSTEIN enter in a corner of the stage.)

TOMIKO

Once again, you make no sense. But somehow here... nothing makes sense. And now you look strange.

FRANK

No. It's just - I think I can see him.

TOMIKO

Where?

FRANK

Look there. What do you see?

TOMIKO

Rubble.

FRANK  
That's all?

TOMIKO  
This is where I live!

(They are both silent for a moment.)

TOMIKO  
This is where I've been.

FRANK  
I'm sorry. I wish you could see him.

TOMIKO  
Why so important?

FRANK  
It's odd that I should see him now. His work was – His work was part of what made that bomb possible.

TOMIKO  
That bomb. That bomb that killed my family. And destroyed - ? My city?  
(FRANK nods.)  
This thing that had never happened before - Did it ever happen again?

FRANK  
Once.

TOMIKO  
Where?

FRANK  
On another city –

TOMIKO  
In my country?  
(FRANK nods again.)  
Did you try to stop it?

FRANK  
Tomiko, what could I do? I was still a prisoner. It was only days later...

TOMIKO  
(taking this in)  
Days later? What city?

FRANK  
Nagasaki.  
(She is silent.)  
I'm so... I've been sorry every day of my life.

TOMIKO  
Then that's why you're here.

FRANK  
I think so.

TOMIKO  
And that's why I waited for you. You couldn't stop it there, but perhaps we can stop it here.

FRANK  
What?

TOMIKO  
Why not? The rules don't apply here. You can be young again. Didn't you say we face our choices? So why not go back? And face them?

FRANK  
But it wasn't my choice!

TOMIKO  
Do you wish you could change it?

FRANK  
Yes, of course!

TOMIKO  
Then let's change it.

FRANK  
I don't know how.

TOMIKO  
You mean you don't want to try?

FRANK  
Of course I do!

TOMIKO  
Then how do we try? Think! It wasn't your choice, but whose choice was it?

FRANK

Well, the President. The President at the time.

(In low light, in another part of the stage, enter TRUMAN.)

TOMIKO

Then we'll go to him.

FRANK

Tomiko, he's dead.

TOMIKO

Well, if you are right about where we are, we are all dead here.

FRANK

(laughing)

That is why I always loved your spirit!

(Long pause. FRANK spots TRUMAN and can hardly believe his eyes.)  
Tomiko, do you see what I see?

TOMIKO

I don't know. Why?

FRANK

I want to know. I want to know if we are dreaming together. Or if I'm dreaming alone.

TOMIKO

Well, what are you dreaming now?

FRANK

The President. Harry S. Truman. Look. There. Do you see?

TOMIKO

I see - A man. A man alone.

FRANK

That's it! You see his desk? The office?

TOMIKO

No. Just his loneliness.

FRANK

Well, you may be right. You may be right.

TOMIKO

I know what that feels like. Maybe... Maybe we can go to him.

FRANK

Go to him?

TOMIKO

Maybe I can talk to him.

FRANK

Tomiko, you can't just – go and talk to a President.

TOMIKO

In your great country? Didn't you tell me it's a place where all people are equal?  
What do you call it, a - ?

FRANK

A democracy.

TOMIKO

Yes. You told me it was a place where ordinary people could be heard.

FRANK

Well, yes. I guess I did say that.

TOMIKO

You said that's why you were fighting for your country, why it was all worth it for you.

FRANK

I suppose I believed so, then.

TOMIKO

Don't you believe it any more?

(Pause.)

FRANK

I was young then.

TOMIKO

So your – democracy. Is it only for the young?

FRANK

No. But fighting for it – that's a young man's game.

TOMIKO

But you are young again. Look at you.

(FRANK glances down at his young, strong body. Caught! He cannot escape the power of her logic.)

FRANK

Presidents are still surrounded. By advisers, by people –

TOMIKO

But he's a man, isn't he? Not a god, like our Emperor.

FRANK

Yes. He's a man. And we are – ghosts.

TOMIKO

We can whisper to him, he will hear our urging – and we can change things! We can have our life together after all.

(The lights on TRUMAN brighten. COLONEL HENRY STIMSON enters, as FRANK and TOMIKO watch.)

TRUMAN

Secretary Stimson. Please, take a seat.

STIMSON

Thank you, Mr. President.

TRUMAN

It's going to take me a while to get used to being called that.

STIMSON

I know, sir. It's a great shock.

TRUMAN

It is. And some giant shoes to fill.

STIMSON

President Roosevelt had confidence in you, sir. That's why you're here.

TRUMAN

Thank you, Colonel Stimson. Although God knows, if ever a man felt unprepared to take up the yoke of this great office... I wish he'd had enough confidence to let me in on a few things.

STIMSON

Well, sir. That's actually why I wanted to speak to you.

TRUMAN

Mm-hm. You mentioned an urgent matter.

STIMSON

I did, sir.

TRUMAN

Well, Colonel...

STIMSON

Do you remember the name Richland, sir?

TRUMAN

Can't say I do. Have I met him?

STIMSON

No, it's a place, sir. Out in Washington state. Maybe the name Hanford – ?

TRUMAN

Oh, yes! That place you warned me off of, when my committee started asking questions. You know your boys over at the War Office always had my full support, always will. But it was my job. To keep an eye on the spending, make sure there wasn't any waste. Lot of money going to that site out at Hanford.

STIMSON

Yes, sir, there was. There is.

TRUMAN

Well, I stopped nosing around when you asked me to. I suppose you're going to tell me now what all that money is going toward?

STIMSON

It's a top secret operation. I – I'm sorry that I didn't have President Roosevelt's permission to brief you on it.

(Beat.)

TRUMAN

Well, it's not the only thing he left me in the dark about.

STIMSON

No, sir. But quite possibly the most important thing. It's called the Manhattan Project.

TRUMAN  
(pause)

I'm all ears.

STIMSON  
President Roosevelt received a letter as the war in Europe was beginning. 1939. It suggested the very real danger that Germany might be developing a weapon of unimaginable power. And advised the President to invest urgently in beating Herr Hitler to the punch.

TRUMAN  
Well, I don't know what you're working on out there, but I do know it's cost the American taxpayer \$2 billion to date. That's a hefty sum. Must have been quite some letter.

STIMSON  
The President considered the source worth listening to.

TRUMAN  
And who did this letter come from?

STIMSON  
Albert Einstein, sir.

TRUMAN  
Ahh.

STIMSON  
You know of him, then?

TRUMAN  
Colonel Stimson, I may be an old farmer from Independence, Missouri, but I do know my Nobel laureates.

STIMSON  
I beg your pardon, sir. Of course you do.

TRUMAN  
And so I take it President Roosevelt put some stock in what Professor Einstein had to say and –

STIMSON  
And initiated the Manhattan Project. Yes, sir. Which is tasked with the development of a – well, we call it the “gadget.” It's a weapon that derives its force from nuclear reactions. We believe it will have the equivalent impact of 20,000 tons of TNT.

TRUMAN

(silent for a moment, and then:)

That's... a lot of impact.

STIMSON

Yes, sir.

TRUMAN

In one... "gadget"?

STIMSON

Yes, sir.

TRUMAN

Well. How far along are we?

STIMSON

Dr. Oppenheimer is in charge of the project. He believes we may be ready to test it as early as this summer.

TRUMAN

Colonel, if I'm hearing you correctly this "gadget"... could completely change the way we prosecute this war.

STIMSON

It could, sir. It could indeed.

(Beat.)

TRUMAN

This is a lot to digest, Colonel.

(He presses a buzzer on his desk, or signals an aide through the door.)

I've asked Jimmy Byrnes to come in and talk over a few things.

STIMSON

Well, I'll excuse myself, sir.

TRUMAN

I'll expect a full briefing, soonest.

(BYRNES enters.)

Colonel Stimson, I believe you know Jim Byrnes.

STIMSON

Of course. Mr. Byrnes.

BYRNES

Colonel.

(STIMSON excuses himself, and exits. BYRNES and TRUMAN look at other.)

BYRNES

Well. Mr. President.

TRUMAN

Jimmy, I'm in a pickle.

BYRNES

Well, I think we all had a notion this day might come, the President's health being what it was.

TRUMAN

That may be, but *he* seems to have thought he was going to live forever. I'm just getting a glimpse of what he didn't tell me. And it's not just these piles of papers right here. He's left me with the damnedest decision any President –

TOMIKO

Wait! Stop.

(TRUMAN and BYRNES freeze in place, as the focus shifts to TOMIKO and FRANK.)

TOMIKO

Who is this man, now? With the new President?

FRANK

James Byrnes. Very experienced politician.

TOMIKO

The President Truman seems to trust him.

FRANK

He must have. He named him Secretary of State a while after this.

TOMIKO

Maybe he can help us. The new President is upset. This man could guide him. Is there any way we can reach him?

FRANK

What do you mean?

TOMIKO

Talk to him. Say something – quietly.

(FRANK moves into the scene, where the two men remain frozen. He approaches BYRNES, uncertain, as if he actually intends to try to whisper in his ear. Then he feels foolish, as well as disoriented. He moves on, unable to resist his curiosity, and gets closer to TRUMAN. He looks at the piles of papers on the desk – maybe a childhood dream, to actually see the President’s desk! Then one envelope catches his eye. He reaches for it and, to his surprise, is able to pick it up. He looks closely at it and then, wide-eyed, lifts it and waves it at TOMIKO, but uncertain whether speaking would, at that moment, break the spell. He places the letter, gingerly, on the desk directly in front of TRUMAN, and then slips back into place next to TOMIKO, as if afraid of discovery.)

TOMIKO

What was it? What did you find?

FRANK

A letter to President Roosevelt. From Albert Einstein! It hadn’t been opened.

TOMIKO

(having trouble with the name)

From Al – bert - ?

FRANK

Einstein. The scientist I told you about, the one I saw. The one who started this whole thing, with the bomb.

TOMIKO

But maybe this letter will be bad too! You must go back – and take it. Take it away from there!

FRANK

I don’t think I can actually – take it...

(Too late anyway. TRUMAN and BYRNES are unfrozen now, and continue their conversation as if there had been no interruption.)

BYRNES

If this is a decision I can – help you with in any way...

TRUMAN

I do know, Jimmy. That's why I called on you – and I want you to know I'm going to be calling on you a great deal. There's no one whose advice and experience I feel I can rely on in the same way, and –

BYRNES  
(flattered)

Well, you know I'll be pleased to - What is it?

TRUMAN

Isn't that the damndest thing! Right here in front of me, and I never noticed it. A letter to FDR from Albert Einstein. You know, the scientist.

BYRNES

I know.

TRUMAN  
(opening the letter)

Obviously the President never saw this. But it must be about that very decision I was telling you about...

(starts to read aloud)

“March 25, 1945. The Honorable Franklin Delano Roosevelt... Sir: I am writing to introduce to you Dr. L. Szilard.... one of the discoverers of the *neutron emission of uranium*... importance of uranium... national defense... You responded to my letter of August 2, 1939... started the Government's activity in this field... The terms of secrecy under which Dr. Szilard is working do not permit him to give me information... greatly concerned about the lack of contact between scientists who are doing this work and those members of your Cabinet who are responsible for formulating policy...”

And he wanted FDR to take the time to meet with this Dr. -

BYRNES  
(gently taking letter)

Szilard. Another foreign scientist. One more of Herr Hitler's gifts to us.

TRUMAN

Well, all right, Jimmy. But good Lord – neutrons, uranium...

BYRNES

Harry, I know this is an overwhelming time for you. It'll take you a little while to find your feet. How about I meet with this Dr. Szilard, and see what he has to say?

TRUMAN

Would you do that for me, Jimmy? I'd be much obliged.

BYRNES

My pleasure. (Beat.) You look good in that chair, Harry.

(BYRNES exits. Our focus shifts back to TOMIKO and FRANK, as lights fade out on the Oval Office.)

FRANK

Did you see that? Did you? I was actually able to move the paper on his desk!

TOMIKO

Yes, yes, I saw but –

FRANK

But what? I changed something!

TOMIKO

Yes, but –

FRANK

But what? Maybe something different is going to happen now!

TOMIKO

Yes, something is! That man is going to meet with the scientist!

FRANK

Isn't that good?

TOMIKO

No! The letter said he should meet with the President!

FRANK

Well... I told you. It's not easy to get to see a President.

TOMIKO

But is it all right for this man to meet him instead?

FRANK

I don't know... We'll just have to wait and see.

TOMIKO

It's too important to just wait.

FRANK

What else can we do?

TOMIKO

Maybe the President would meet with the other one? The one who wrote the letter?

FRANK

Einstein. Well, he *is* the most famous scientist in the world -

TOMIKO

And the President listens to his letters. *They* must meet!

FRANK

But Einstein didn't ask for a meeting. He asked the President to meet with Leo Szilard.

TOMIKO

Then he *will* ask.

FRANK

How can you be sure?

TOMIKO

(after thinking for a moment)

Szilard will make him ask.

FRANK

What are you saying?

TOMIKO

You were in the President's office. You moved something on his desk – that really happened. Maybe I could go to visit the scientist.

FRANK

Einstein? And what - ? Rearrange the papers on his desk?

TOMIKO

Talk to him. Maybe I could go as –

FRANK

Leo Szilard?

TOMIKO

How did you – how did you see the President? When you saw him?

FRANK

I was just thinking about him very strongly, and...

TOMIKO

And there he was. You found him. By thinking. By focusing. Tell me about Leo Szilard...

FRANK

He was from Hungary. Jewish. Escaped from Europe and came to work in America. Very strong in his work... strong in his opinions...

(TOMIKO is focusing, and undergoing a transition as he speaks. Perhaps she puts on a jacket – or perhaps it is an internal transition. She feels her way into the role of a pugnacious middle European, middle aged male scientist.)

FRANK

I'm not sure what else to tell you –

TOMIKO

No, it's - It's strange, but I'm feeling him. I'm feeling even things you haven't told me. Almost as if I could enter his skin and...

(In a pool of light, somewhere on the stage, we see ALBERT EINSTEIN at a desk, reading a letter. He murmurs, reading it softly aloud to himself, but we cannot hear him yet.)

TOMIKO

Who is it?

FRANK

That's him. Einstein.

TOMIKO

He's reading a letter. Maybe it's the letter we need –

FRANK

Listen.

EINSTEIN  
(reading)

"...In the course of the last four months it has been made probable – through the work of Joliot in France as well as Fermi and Szilard in America – that it may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium...

This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs, and it is conceivable – that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed...”

(EINSTEIN continues to read. FRANK turns to TOMIKO.)

FRANK

No. That isn't the letter we need! That's the one he sent to the President before the war even began. The one that urged him to start work on creating the..."gadget."

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Well, then I must go.

FRANK

I'll be - I'll be watching.

(FRANK is silent for a moment, not knowing what to say. TOMIKO/SZILARD moves toward EINSTEIN, simply appearing in his office. EINSTEIN does not see SZILARD, who has appeared as quietly as a ghost.)

EINSTEIN  
(reading)

"... to speed up the experimental work... by providing funds, if such funds be required..."

(He lowers the letter to the desk.)

What have I done?

TOMIKO/SZILARD  
(clears throat)

Good afternoon, Professor.

EINSTEIN

What's that? Who is it? Why, Leo! This is a pleasant - Did I know you were coming?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No, this is an unexpected visit. I'm sorry to intrude.

EINSTEIN

Please, we don't stand on ceremony, Leo. Sit, sit. Make yourself comfortable.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Thank you. Albert.

EINSTEIN

I was just looking over this letter to President Roosevelt. The one that started this whole terrible affair.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Ahh. Yes. You have a copy still. May I see it?

EINSTEIN

Suit yourself, Leo. After all, you wrote it.

TOMIKO/SZILARD  
(slightly uncertain)

I... did.

EINSTEIN

One of the greatest regrets of my life. Letting you talk me into signing that thing. But I have good hopes for our latest letter, don't you?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I do not.

EINSTEIN

Nonsense, Leo. You have only to get in the same room with President Roosevelt, and you will soon have him seeing things our way.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Albert, where have you been since yesterday evening?

EINSTEIN  
(shrugging)

A little sailing, a long walk on the beach.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Have you not heard the news?

EINSTEIN

Leo, this place is my refuge from the news.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

President Roosevelt is dead.

EINSTEIN

Ahhh, no!

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Yes, Albert. It's a catastrophe!

EINSTEIN

How is Mrs. Roosevelt taking the news? A fine woman.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Mrs. Roosevelt! How should I know? My friend, this deals a heavy blow to our chances of meeting with the President.

EINSTEIN

(unable to resist some amusement)

Well, it does, Leo. In the circumstances, he might not be very... receptive to scientific argument. But there is, surely, a new President in place already. I believe that is how they do it here?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Yes, of course. A True-man – his Vice President has taken over.

EINSTEIN

Well, if he has been President Roosevelt's – what do they call it? – right hand man, he must be completely informed as well.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No!

EINSTEIN

What do you mean?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I mean, no! He is not informed at all. And he won't meet with me.

EINSTEIN

How do you know?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

(caught)

I... I believe he won't. I believe he will palm me off on some underling.

EINSTEIN

Congratulations, Leo. You are learning to have about as much faith in politicians as I do.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Exactly. I have no faith. That is why it is urgent for you to write another letter!

EINSTEIN

*Another* letter?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Yes. Write to the new President. Explain to him how important it is to meet directly with him. That you want to meet him personally –

EINSTEIN

Let me stop you there, Leo. Two letters already. You and your letters to Presidents have brought me no joy.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

You were the only one who could reach him! Your reputation got us Roosevelt's ear –

EINSTEIN

Yes, when we thought the Nazis were going to be the first to yoke nuclear discoveries with weapons. Yes, it seemed like the right thing to do. But now look where we are! We find that they had no chance of developing an atomic weapon, but *we* are doing it! We are the ones to unleash this dragon in the world. We cannot tame it, Leo – you know we can't! And it is *we* who have done it.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

It isn't done yet, Albert. There is still time to stop it!

EINSTEIN

By talking to politicians? Leo, their eyes go crossed when you mention mathematics. How do you hope to explain the principles underlying this research?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Roosevelt grasped the...the implications of what we brought to him.

EINSTEIN

Franklin Roosevelt, alav ha-shalom, was an exception. And what he grasped best, my friend, was that he must win the war.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

By any means necessary. But the war can be won without using this weapon.

EINSTEIN

So you go to instruct them in science, Leo? Or to try to tell them their business?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Both!

EINSTEIN

Good luck, my friend. You haven't learned from history.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I have! I have learned that sometimes a President will listen to you! The great Albert Einstein, the Nobel Prize winner, the sage of peace, the greatest scientist of our time –

EINSTEIN

Ach, ach. You know me better than to flatter –

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I'm not *flattering* you – I'm reminding you of your responsibility! You must speak out!

EINSTEIN

I do speak out! But I will not waste my time with politics, Leo. I know too well what a waste of time that is. You go. If you think you can make a difference, you go.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I tell you, he won't see me.

EINSTEIN

We shall see. Now, Leo, that's enough of this. Some tea?

TOMIKO/SZILARD  
(turning to go)

No. Thank you.

(Returning to FRANK, TOMIKO removes the SZILARD jacket.  
She is visibly frustrated and disappointed.)

TOMIKO

I thought if I could just talk to him - !

FRANK

And you did. You actually talked to him!

TOMIKO

Stubborn, stubborn man...

FRANK

You talked with Albert Einstein...

TOMIKO  
(shaking this off)

Just because one old scientist is immovable – that does not mean nothing can change. This politician, the one who took the letter. He will listen. Don't politicians change all the time?

FRANK

That's what they say.

TOMIKO

I will visit *him*. He will tell the President to stop the weapon – it will never be made.

FRANK

You actually talked with Albert Einstein...

TOMIKO

Frank.

FRANK

Yes?

TOMIKO

Pay attention. I am going to try again.

FRANK

Good. Good, that's good. Wait. How will you try?

TOMIKO

I am going to think hard about that man who met with the new President...

(Lights come up on another part of the stage, to reveal JAMES BYRNES, at home.)

FRANK

And you will go as Leo Szilard again?

TOMIKO

It's a strange feeling... being someone else.

FRANK

And someone so different from you.

TOMIKO

But I think I like it... I feel as though it has been a long time since we saw that man with the President.

FRANK

It's only been a few minutes.

TOMIKO

No, a long time there. In their world. Maybe weeks.

FRANK

You're starting to feel the world? And time?

TOMIKO

Yes. I must go.

(TOMIKO/SZILARD enters the Byrnes household. BYRNES is apparently expecting SZILARD.)

BYRNES

Ahh, Dr. Szilard. So good of you to make the trip. I trust you had a pleasant journey.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

(all business)

Yes. Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Byrnes.

BYRNES

Please take a seat. May I offer you some refreshment?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No. Yes, some water. Please. It's very warm.

(TOMIKO/SZILARD loosens his tie, and opens the top button of his shirt, creating a disheveled appearance. BYRNES, ever the Southern gentleman, remains formally dressed. He delivers a glass of water.)

BYRNES

Our Southern climate takes some getting used to, Doctor. You're originally from Europe, I think?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Hungary. I didn't come here to talk about the weather – or geography. Dr. Einstein requested a meeting for me with the President.

BYRNES

Yes, well. Sadly, President Roosevelt never had the opportunity to read Dr. Einstein's letter.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

But the new President – Truman – he must have seen it? I mean, here we are. Many, *many* weeks after the meeting was requested.

BYRNES

The new President, as I'm sure you can understand, has had many pressing matters before him. Bringing the war against Germany to a successful conclusion, for example. I hope you don't mind 'making do' with me.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

And as I'm sure you can understand, I must speak with the President himself. The matter I wish to discuss is highly confidential, and extremely urgent.

BYRNES

(steelier)

The President *asked* me to meet with you, Doctor. You've made the trip all the way down to Charleston. Now, I suggest you make the most of this opportunity, and tell me what's on your mind.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

(huffs momentarily, before acceding)

Very well. Your government is financing a very secret, very high level team of scientists and engineers...

BYRNES

I'm listening.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Called the Manhattan Project. The goal is to develop a powerful weapon, the magnitude of which has never been seen before on earth.

BYRNES

When you say a weapon - ?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I mean a bomb. An atomic bomb.

BYRNES

And, forgive me, Doctor – what makes this bomb *atomic*?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Nuclear chain reaction is the key breakthrough. We learned that German scientists had succeeded in splitting atoms of uranium in 1938. I feared for what might come of this knowledge. So we set to work here, in Chicago. My colleague, Enrico Fermi, and I succeeded in creating a controlled nuclear chain reaction.

BYRNES

Congratulations, sir. So if I understand you correctly –

TOMIKO/SZILARD

You don't understand me. You can't. You don't have the math, much less the physics, to understand this. This is the result of very advanced research.

BYRNES

(as politely as he can manage)

Indeed. Apparently this team of scientists on the Manhattan Project understands fairly well how this works.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Of course. But they have no communication with the members of the government who are deciding how to use this weapon.

BYRNES

(wryly)

Imagine that.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

It may please you to be sarcastic with me. But it is impossible to explain to a layman the complexity of this project. Or the danger. We were listened to when we thought in 1939 that the Germans were developing the bomb.

BYRNES

And who listened to you then?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

President Roosevelt himself!

BYRNES

Hence the Manhattan Project. I'm beginning to see now how this all came about. What I don't see, I'm afraid, Dr. Szilard, is any basis for your complaint that the government doesn't listen to you. Big team of scientists on the project, facilities, materials, all that secrecy... Must be expensive.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Very expensive.

BYRNES

How's the project coming along?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

We're very close. Very close.

BYRNES

Close to having the bomb ready?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Close to being able to *test* one. This technology has never been employed before, never been seen before. We don't even know how well it might work.

BYRNES

(flattering)

Scientists of your caliber must have projections, though. An expected outcome.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Of course, of course!

BYRNES

What are you thinking? Like – say – twenty conventional bombs all in one? A hundred?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No, no, no! More than 2,000! You see the impossibility of explaining these things to a layman. We are talking about the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT. We are talking about a single bomb that can annihilate an entire city.

(A pause, while Byrnes takes this in.)

BYRNES

Really. Impressive.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

That is why we must stop the work on this project!

BYRNES

I'm sorry, Dr. Szilard. Now I'm not understanding you at all. Didn't you say it was you who urged our government to start this "project"?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Yes, of course. But Germany is defeated. They stand in ruins. And we find, now, that they had no chance of developing an atomic bomb – not even close.

BYRNES

Germany may be defeated, Doctor, but the war is not yet over.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

That's just it! At last you understand me. Some of us on the project are deeply concerned that the government will still attempt to use the bomb. On Japan. This would be a disaster!

BYRNES

Do all your scientists think so?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No, no. There is much disagreement.

BYRNES

Over whether it would be effective?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Over whether it should be done! My God, man – did you not hear me? I told you this thing can wipe out an entire city!

BYRNES

(playing his cards very carefully)

Please excuse me, Dr. Szilard. I thought you were referring to disagreement over whether this thing will work.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Trust me, it will work. I am *confident*.

BYRNES

(wryly)

“Confident” is one word for it. Then the disagreement is over - ?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Whether it is necessary, whether it is *moral* to employ such a weapon.

BYRNES

Dr. Szilard, you're right. It is hard sometimes for us lay people to understand your thinking. Did you think it was moral when you first proposed to President Roosevelt that he fund your research?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

(frustrated)

It was not a matter of *funding our research*, Mr. Byrnes, but of making sure this weapon was not developed first in Nazi Germany.

BYRNES

Yes, I see that, but how do you know it isn't being developed somewhere else?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Impossible.

BYRNES

Really? Many of the scientists you are working with are European, I imagine?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Yes, that is where the discoveries were first made that led to this work.

BYRNES

You're not concerned about Russian Soviet scientists being at work on this as well?

TOMIKO/SZILARD  
(this has given him pause)

No.

BYRNES

Why not?

TOMIKO/SZILARD  
(shaking the idea off)

It takes enormous resources. And the work we have accomplished has been done in utmost secrecy.

BYRNES

You're pretty sure about the security around this Manhattan Project?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Completely. No one has any motivation to violate the secrecy.

BYRNES

Even when you scientists are arguing amongst yourselves?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

We argue about morality, not politics.

BYRNES

Dr. Szilard, has this country been good to you?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

What is that supposed to mean?

BYRNES

Well, you came here under... duress. The United States took you in.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

So you are questioning my loyalty to this country because I am an immigrant? Or tell me, Mr. Byrnes, do you simply believe that I must be untrustworthy because I am a Jew?

BYRNES

Now, Dr. Szilard, you know I have only the greatest respect for your learning and your work –

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Mr. Byrnes, I am all too well aware of the prejudices that lie underneath the “respect” your kind of people holds for the clever Jew.

BYRNES

“My kind of people”? Really, Dr. Szilard, where does the prejudice really lie here?

(After an uncomfortable moment, TOMIKO/SZILARD moves to leave.)

TOMIKO/SZILARD

My colleagues told me I was foolish to come here. But I thought it needed to be done all the same. You seemed to be a man of intelligence –

BYRNES

(dryly)

Thank you.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

But men like you should not be entrusted with the fruits of powerful knowledge.

BYRNES

Men like me, Dr. Szilard, have decisions to make every day in the real world. The very real world, where the bad guys don't always go down to defeat. We have lives in our hands, lives of American soldiers, like the ones who saved your Europe from a terrible fate.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

You cannot imagine how terrible the fate of the entire world may be, if you unleash the destructive power of this bomb.

BYRNES

How about we come to an understanding, Dr. Szilard? A gentleman's understanding. You keep doing what you do best, splitting those atoms and seeing what happens next. And I'll keep doing what I do best, advising the President about how to win a war.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Ahhh...

BYRNES

Thank you for your time, Dr. Szilard. It's been most instructive.

(Our focus shifts back to the area where FRANK has been watching.)

TOMIKO returns, most disheartened.)

FRANK

(not sure what to say)

You were very - Very strong there. I'm impressed.

TOMIKO

But what have I done? He will go to the President and urge him to use it. *You* must stop him!

FRANK

James Byrnes is one of his closest advisers! One of the most powerful politicians in the country. He almost became President himself!

TOMIKO

How can that be?

FRANK

He thought he was going to be Vice President, and then he would have been sitting in that chair making the decision! But the people in his party chose Truman instead.

TOMIKO

(thinking this might help)

Why?

FRANK

Well, Byrnes is from the southern part of the country. Some of the more liberal members of the party didn't quite trust him.

TOMIKO

Well, I don't trust him either! We must stop him!

FRANK

Stop James Byrnes, the unstoppable force... What an idea.

TOMIKO

You must talk to the President before he does.

FRANK

Me? Who am I?

TOMIKO

You're a military man! He must listen to his military men.

FRANK

I'm sure he does. But I'm just...

TOMIKO

When I first saw you, I could tell you were a soldier. It was the way you held yourself. Even though you were dressed in those awful rags.

FRANK

You knew we were soldiers.

TOMIKO

We knew you were foreigners, yes. Come to labor at our school. But, trust me, many of your fellows just looked like poor devils...

FRANK

Let's just say the rations weren't too generous. And a lot of them were sick.

TOMIKO

And they worked you so hard! Out in the sun, with no rest... A lot of the girls felt sorry for you.

FRANK

Is that why they were giggling behind their hands? We thought you were laughing at us.

TOMIKO

Of course not! We just... wanted to get a closer look at you. But we are taught to be modest. We can't just stare straight at a man – especially a foreign man.

FRANK

Just as well. *We were* a pretty sorry sight.

TOMIKO

You... weren't like the others.

FRANK  
(tenderly)

Tomiko... let's not torment ourselves.

TOMIKO  
(carefully)

You are right. Going back to that time reminds me of... what is to come. What we must prevent. You must go to the President.

FRANK

How?

TOMIKO

As I did. As one of his advisers.

(Perhaps she summons a military jacket for him – or perhaps FRANK prepares himself without a costume change.)

FRANK

But how will I know how to act, what to say?

TOMIKO

It's strange, but somehow you just... know. Once you're there, you'll find what to say.

(They prepare FRANK to, somewhat reluctantly, enter a room where we see TRUMAN on the phone, and GENERAL GEORGE MARSHALL, Army Chief of Staff, waiting for him to get off the phone. FRANK enters the scene as ADMIRAL WILLIAM LEAHY, Truman's National Security Adviser. The two men wait as the President finishes his phone call.)

TRUMAN

(on phone)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, I want a memorandum on that, on my desk tomorrow morning. Yep. Well, you tell those boys they can bounce it around their committee all they like, but when they're done, I'm not going to authorize that. No, we've got to move forward on this, and I'm ready to make a decision. I don't need another endless set of recommendations to do something that I don't think is the right thing to do. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm...

MARSHALL

(aside to Leahy)

Remarkable, isn't it? ... Admiral? Admiral Leahy?

FRANK/LEAHY

(realizing he is the only one there)

I beg your pardon? Sorry, General.

MARSHALL

I was just saying – it's remarkable. This President gets more decisions made in a day than FDR would in a month.

FRANK/LEAHY

Well. President Roosevelt maybe took a – thoughtful approach.

MARSHALL

Thoughtful. Well, if anyone *knew* what he was thinking. Always seemed to me he was holding a few cards up his sleeve. Keeping his options open.

FRANK/LEAHY  
(not sure how he should react)

Mmm.

MARSHALL  
This President is a straight shooter. Plain dealer. Not afraid to take action.

TRUMAN  
(on phone)  
Well I'll be expecting some results on that. You report to me as soon as you've got them. All right. Bye-bye.

(to Marshall and Leahy)  
Sorry, gentlemen. Couldn't let that little matter wait any longer.

MARSHALL  
(nodding approvingly)  
Of course, Mr. President.

TRUMAN  
Admiral Leahy. General Marshall. How about that briefing earlier? I asked the two of you to stay behind just so I can be sure I have the benefit of your most candid perspectives. Now, General Marshall, you're telling me that with Operation Downfall we're looking at a two-stage invasion of Japan.

MARSHALL  
That's right, Mr. President. We begin in November by seizing the southern half of the Home Island of Kyushu. And once successful there we proceed to invade the Island of Honshu next March.

TRUMAN  
And you're expecting we would face about 45,000 in American casualties. Is that for the whole operation?

MARSHALL  
No, sir. That would be in the first 30 days of operations.

TRUMAN  
Steep price, General... Admiral Leahy, I think you took exception to those figures? Thought they were conservative.

FRANK/LEAHY  
(starting out uncertainly)  
With all due respect, Mr. President... What our boys are facing in Okinawa right now should give us a taste of what we could expect.

MARSHALL  
We're on the verge of a successful completion there –

FRANK/LEAHY

With 65,000 casualties to date –

MARSHALL

In over two and a half months of hard fighting –

FRANK/LEAHY

And tens of thousands of civilian casualties –

MARSHALL

Regrettable though that is, we've got to focus on the casualties we inflicted on the enemy combatants, over 95,000 killed, another 10,000 captured –

FRANK/LEAHY

But my point about the civilians, sir, if I may... The casualties were so high because they took up arms against us too. Middle school boys on the front lines. Farmers and housewives with spears. We've had the kamikaze pilots raining sheer terror on us out of the skies – and the locals on the ground every bit as bound and determined to get themselves killed, fighting us off. Half the time we couldn't tell civilians from soldiers – they were all ferocious. And that's just Okinawa, sir.

TRUMAN

How do you mean, Admiral?

FRANK/LEAHY

Well, Mr. President, the Home Islands of Japan have never suffered invasion. Never. I think we could expect civilian resistance there that would amplify whatever the Japanese army could throw at us.

MARSHALL

That's why we've set the figures pretty high, Mr. President, at 45,000 in that first 30 days.

FRANK/LEAHY

I believe we could see it still higher.

(Beat.)

TRUMAN

Well, gentlemen, I had a little visit a few weeks ago with former President Hoover. I invited him to come to the White House for a chat.

MARSHALL

President Hoover!

TRUMAN

I know, I know, but before you say anything – President Hoover has certainly done his turn as a political punching bag. But he's also done some extraordinary feats of organization – and he's a man whose opinion I respect. I asked him to prepare some memoranda for me, outline his thoughts.

MARSHALL

On the prosecution of the war, Mr. President?

TRUMAN

Well, mainly on how to clean up the mess we've got now in Europe, General. But I did ask his views on the war with Japan. He's inclined to think that if we try to defeat Japan on the battlefield, we'll be looking at American casualties on the order of 500,000 to a million. What do you make of that, gentlemen?

(A pause, as they consider.)

MARSHALL

Too high, Mr. President. I think that figure is too high.

FRANK/LEAHY

Mr. President, does that represent the initial invasion, or the entire campaign, right to conclusion?

TRUMAN

I think it's got to be the latter, Admiral.

FRANK/LEAHY

(carefully)

Well, then, I think President Hoover might be right.

MARSHALL

Mr. President, if I may ask... Did you inform President Hoover about the new weapon that we have at our disposal?

TRUMAN

I did not. Your thoughts, General?

MARSHALL

Just wondering, sir, if perhaps President Hoover might have exaggerated his figures, in order to make a case for using it.

TRUMAN

No, General. I had a frank and open discussion with President Hoover, man to man. But I did not share any classified war information with him. The existence of our... new option was not a factor.

FRANK/LEAHY

With all due respect, Mr. President, I'm glad to hear it. A weapon of that power has never been unleashed on the world and, sir, I just don't see the justification for it. The Japanese are weakened, they're on their knees. If we just continue our air raids, and isolate the Home Islands completely with a naval blockade, it's only a matter of time before they surrender.

MARSHALL

The Japanese are hardly on their knees, Admiral Leahy.

FRANK/LEAHY

The continual bombing of their cities is having an effect on their morale. I know. Not to mention their infrastructure.

TRUMAN

General, how long do you think they can hold on, if we just keep up the air raids?

MARSHALL

Before they surrender, Mr. President?

TRUMAN

Not just surrender, General Marshall. It's an unconditional surrender we're looking for. Got to have it.

MARSHALL

In that case, sir, they'll never give up.

FRANK/LEAHY

They'll have no choice, General. We won't need to land troops on the Home Islands, that's just asking for another hell like Okinawa –

MARSHALL

Admiral, I care about these boys as if they were my own sons. The ones who made it through roughest kind of fighting in Europe, they've only had just over a month to celebrate their victory there – and they're facing the prospect of having to serve again, in an endless, drawn-out blockade of Japan, fighting hand to hand on tiny outlying islands where the ground is a sea of mud and stinking corpses. These men are exhausted –

TRUMAN

The country is exhausted, gentlemen.

MARSHALL

That is true, sir. That is why I believe we must press to a conclusion, and prepare for a decisive victory on Japanese soil. I believe Colonel Stimson, the Secretary of War, is in agreement.

TRUMAN

That Interim Committee he's been chairing seems pretty intent on having our "gadget" be part of the mix. Jimmy Byrnes has been reporting to me.

MARSHALL

Will it be ready?

TRUMAN

Never been tested, General. We don't know yet what we've got. Jimmy's pretty keen on it, though.

FRANK/LEAHY

And I submit, Mr. President, that we need to let a naval blockade and continued air raids do their work. We do not need any new horror weapon unleashed on the world.

MARSHALL

Well, sir, I propose to keep moving forward with our plans for invasion, and hope that this new weapon will be ready in time to make a difference.

FRANK/LEAHY

Have we considered the possibility that such a weapon could be used against *us*, in the future? Like poison gas –

MARSHALL

The Germans got it first –

FRANK/LEAHY

That didn't protect them! They couldn't keep it secret – and they wound up losing thousands to gas attacks –

TRUMAN

(cutting off the discussion)

Well, a lot to think about here, gentlemen. Thank you for your perspectives. Maybe you'll excuse me. I've got this damned conference in Potsdam to get ready for, but I'll be in touch.

(The General and Admiral excuse themselves, with FRANK/LEAHY returning to the pool of light from which TOMIKO is watching.)

TOMIKO

Why did he cut you off?

FRANK

(shaking his head)

I can see you have to think fast, and talk fast, to keep a politician's attention.

TOMIKO

The President is listening to this Byrnes man! Why will he not listen to his generals?

FRANK

Well, he seems to be hearing different things from his military leaders.

TOMIKO

Yes, like your Admiral –

FRANK

Leahy –

TOMIKO

Urging him to continue bombing my country.

FRANK

Tomiko, I was urging him to continue with the little bombs, rather than use the big bomb.

TOMIKO

Little bombs? What makes them little? Half of Tokyo on fire – my cousin was there. He couldn't speak about it, it was so terrible.

FRANK

I know. Tomiko, I know.

TOMIKO

Thousands of people burned in one night –

FRANK  
(quietly)

Over a hundred thousand –

TOMIKO

He saw bodies – *charred* like firewood...

FRANK

Tomiko. This big bomb they speak of...

(She waits for him to speak.)

It's worse.

(Both are silent. Then TOMIKO stands, with a new resolve.)

FRANK

What are you planning?

TOMIKO  
The other scientist must go. The famous one.

FRANK  
Einstein?

TOMIKO  
Perhaps the President will listen to him.

FRANK  
Tomiko, that never happened.

TOMIKO  
What do you mean?

FRANK  
Albert Einstein. President Truman. They never met.

TOMIKO  
And so they must meet now.

FRANK  
But – what if we can't change history?

TOMIKO  
I thought we agreed.

FRANK  
What?

TOMIKO  
I thought we agreed to try. People talk to each other. Then they make decisions.

FRANK  
And the decisions are real. They have real consequences.

TOMIKO  
We can get the people to talk to each other. When you became that Admiral, did you say what he actually said – what he said on that day to the President? Or did you say something different?

FRANK  
How can I know?

TOMIKO

Exactly. How can we know? We only know we must try. The scientist seems to have more time to think than the President does. I am going to the scientist again.

(She turns and stands, again, at the entrance to Einstein's study. Einstein does not immediately notice her presence. Finally...)

EINSTEIN

Leo. I did not hear you come in.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

I'm sorry, Albert – to come unannounced.

EINSTEIN

No, no. Please. Sit, sit, ait, sit. How did it go with James Byrnes?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Badly.

EINSTEIN

I'm sorry to hear it, Leo.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

The man is a fool.

EINSTEIN

He is a politician, Leo. I did warn you.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

And stubborn. And arrogant.

EINSTEIN

Well. As I said...

TOMIKO/SZILARD

He *will* not listen, he *can* not understand, and he *must* not be the only voice the President hears on this matter.

EINSTEIN

What do you think he will say to President Truman, now that you have talked?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

What will he say? I think he will say, "I did not realize this weapon would be so powerful! Isn't it wonderful that we have it and the Russians don't?"

EINSTEIN

Wonderful? Leo, how could the man think any such thing, after all you must have told him?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

It's not like science, Albert. We seek to find out what's really true, what can be proven or demonstrated, based on the evidence. He seeks to find evidence to prove what he already believes.

EINSTEIN

So what does the evidence tell you, Leo, in this situation? It is as I have said to you. No good can come of trying to influence the sphere of politics – it has its own laws. Better to work for peace directly with people of good will. Especially young people. Here. Let me show you what I was working on when you walked in. I have a letter from some schoolchildren in Japan. So long isolated, and now reaching out to an old scientist in another country. *This* is what gives me hope. I am writing back to them.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Albert, this is wartime. There is no postal service to Japan. These children will never receive your letter.

EINSTEIN

Never? The war will not last forever. I will send this when it is over. Listen. Here is what I wrote to them:

“In sending this greeting to you Japanese schoolchildren, I can lay claim to a special right to do so. For I have myself visited your beautiful country, seen its cities and houses, its mountains and woods...

“Ours is the first age in history to bring about friendly and understanding intercourse between people of different countries... With this in mind I, an old man, greet you Japanese schoolchildren from afar and hope that your generation may some day put mine to shame.”

(For a moment, EINSTEIN looks over his letter with satisfaction, then notices that TOMIKO/SZILARD is silent and downcast.)

EINSTEIN

What is the matter, Leo? You are not yourself today.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

No. I am not.

(After a pause.)

I wish your schoolchildren could some day read your letter.

EINSTEIN

Of course they will.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

They will drop the atomic bomb on Japan, Albert. I am sure of it.

EINSTEIN

How can that be?

TOMIKO/SZILARD

The United States is still at war with Japan.

EINSTEIN

Not with their children!

TOMIKO/SZILARD

So wise, and so naïve. My grandmother had an expression for men like you.

EINSTEIN

Spare me your bubbie's folk idioms. We have to stop this.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

We? *I* have tried, Albert. I have failed. What are you prepared to do?

(EINSTEIN thinks for a moment, clearly aware that his hand is being forced.)

EINSTEIN

I will write to President Truman. I will ask him to see me.

(TOMIKO/SZILARD, seemingly unsure what to say, just nods – then stands up as if to go.)

EINSTEIN

I don't know what more to do, Leo.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

People talk. Then they make decisions. I think only you, though, can get him to talk.

EINSTEIN  
(pause)

And maybe to listen.

TOMIKO/SZILARD

Let us hope so, Albert. Good luck.

(TOMIKO, jubilant, returns to the area where FRANK waits.)

TOMIKO

I think we have done something. I think he is really considering.

(Pause.)

Don't you think so? Frank. We may really change history! I think he will go to the President and make him listen.

(Pause.)

Frank. What is the matter? What are you thinking?

FRANK

(suddenly sober)

Tomiko... If we succeed, if we really change history... it's possible that my children will never be born.

TOMIKO

If we do not change history... it is certain that *my* children will never be born.

(Lights fade out. End of Act One.)

## ACT TWO

(Again we are in the waste land. TOMIKO wanders, singing a Japanese childhood song. FRANK looks into the middle distance, as if he sees something not visible to us. Finally, TOMIKO stops and looks long and warily at FRANK.)

TOMIKO

What is it?

FRANK  
(still distracted)

What do you mean?

TOMIKO

What are you seeing?

FRANK

I'm not... seeing what I hoped to see.

TOMIKO

Then what are you looking for?

FRANK  
(hesitant to tell her)

My daughter. She was expecting a baby when I - When I came here. I'm trying to see her, find out if everything is all right.

TOMIKO

We haven't been able to see the present from here. Or the future. Only your past.

FRANK

Does that mean that I will never get to know? Never get to see -

TOMIKO

Your grandchild? What month was it when you died?

FRANK

The last thing I remember was in... June.

TOMIKO

You only have to wait until August, then. For Obon. Your daughter can dance the *bon odori* for you, and bring your spirit back to see your descendants.

FRANK

(recognizing her attempt at kindness)

Well. Perhaps she will think of that.

TOMIKO

Or even if she just cleans your grave, and places flowers there. It may be enough.

FRANK

Is it – a long visit? When the spirit is invited back by the family?

TOMIKO

I don't know how long it would feel, to us. I have no one to welcome me back.

FRANK

(mortified)

Of course. I –

TOMIKO

We are *Urabanna*. Caught in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts.

FRANK

(uncomfortable)

What were you looking for – just now?

TOMIKO

I keep thinking I smell cherry blossoms. But then the scent is gone.

FRANK

Beautiful and fleeting.

TOMIKO

I was away with my family viewing the blossoms, *ohanami*. When we came back for the beginning of school, you were gone. You and all the other prisoners.

FRANK

It was March, when they started evacuating the city. We were moved out into the countryside, to work on schools and buildings there – they were overflowing. I had no way to let you know. I hoped... that your family would be evacuated too.

TOMIKO

I was too old. A new graduate. And my little brother was too young. They needed me to help his teachers at his school.

FRANK

Honkawa School. I know. You told me that's what you would be doing.

TOMIKO

You said you would come and find me. When the war was over.

FRANK

I did.

TOMIKO

You did? How? How did you look for me?

FRANK

I found Honkawa School. That's where I started.

TOMIKO

And what did you find there? Who was there? Did you find Yoshio?

FRANK

(not sure how to start)

Tomiko, the school is a – a memorial now. Many people come to visit it. It was the closest school to the epicenter.

TOMIKO

What does that mean?

FRANK

All the students who were there that day... all the teachers...

(Silence. In another part of the stage, our attention is drawn as lights come up on Truman's office. TRUMAN is there, working on some papers, and JAMES BYRNES is with him. TOMIKO and FRANK turn to see them.)

TOMIKO

That man! Why does he have to be there? Why does he meddle with things he doesn't understand?

(TOMIKO and FRANK watch, as we shift our focus to the conversation between TRUMAN and BYRNES.)

TRUMAN

So you think the Russians will come in with us, on the invasion of Japan?

BYRNES

I'm confident they will. Not that I trust Josef Stalin as far as I could throw him.

TRUMAN

Well, when we get to Potsdam I can look him in the eye. Best way to get the measure of a man.

BYRNES

What I can't wait to see is the look on his face when you tell him about the atomic bomb.

TRUMAN

We're not planning to *say* -

BYRNES

No, no, of course. "A weapon of exceptional destructive power," or words to that effect. Still, when we actually drop it, things will become clear enough to Comrade Stalin. He'll know whom he's dealing with, in this new state of play.

TRUMAN

You're saying "when" we drop the bomb, I notice. Not "if."

BYRNES

Harry, we both know we've got to use it.

TRUMAN

That's not a decision I've made yet.

BYRNES

But it would be crazy not to, Harry -

TRUMAN  
(flaring)

You mean "Mr. President."

(Pause.)

Look, Jimmy, we go back a long way. You know I always relied on your guidance when I was a young senator. And I turned to you when I first found myself sitting in this chair. But I'm getting the idea you think it should be you sitting here. And maybe it should have been. But I was put here through the due process of law and the workings of this great democracy, and there's got to be some respect for that democracy and for this office. I'm not sitting here just as plain Harry S. Truman from Independence, Missouri - but as the representative of all the aspirations and desires, and *responsibilities* of this entire great nation. And I take that seriously.

BYRNES  
(carefully)

Well... Mr. President. The decision is, of course, yours to make. I had just thought that after all the information I've been reporting to you - the deliberations of the Interim Committee and all... well, it just seemed that the right course of action is pretty self-evident. If we want to get that unconditional surrender that our country wants, that our people are clamoring for...

TRUMAN

That's as may be, but -

(The phone rings, or Truman's assistant appears at the door to murmur some news.)

TRUMAN

What, here right now? I thought we weren't expecting him until - Well, never mind, no. I'm not going to make the man cool his heels. I'll just - Secretary Byrnes, I have a caller. Professor Einstein.

BYRNES

*Albert Einstein?*

TRUMAN

(distracted and a bit off balance)

I believe that's his Christian name, yes.

BYRNES

What's he doing here?

TRUMAN

He dropped me a line, and asked if he could have a word or two, so he's here at my invitation. Although, I wasn't expecting him so -

BYRNES

Now - with all due respect, Mr. President - what kind of perspective does a long-haired scientist have to offer on matters of the highest level of national security? I met with one of his colleagues a few weeks ago and reported to you.

TRUMAN

You did indeed, and I appreciate that. But according to Professor Einstein's letter, there was something missing from your report. I guess you didn't think it important to mention that the scientists on the Manhattan Project aren't all in accord about the nature and purpose of the work.

BYRNES

No, I did not think that important to mention. Their job to develop the weapons, ours to decide how best to use them. Sir, I urge you not to waste your time

conversing with Professor Einstein. We still have important preparations to make for Potsdam -

TRUMAN

We do, at that. But I'd hate to waste the Professor's time by calling him all the way to Washington, and then not seeing him.

BYRNES

Mr. President. These fellows in their white coats don't have to stare down Josef Stalin.

TRUMAN

Well, there are some who think they've had to stare down far worse.

BYRNES

Did they? Or did they turn tail and escape to America? Where we've given them safety, freedom, damn good budgets for their research -

TRUMAN

Europe's loss and our gain. Where are you going with this?

(EINSTEIN enters, clearly somewhat ill at ease. He looks around as though he is surprised to find himself here. He drinks in the alien scene.)

TRUMAN

Professor Einstein, please come in.

BYRNES

Well. If I'm no longer needed...

TRUMAN

Secretary Byrnes, you will always be needed. By your country, and by me. And you are very welcome to stay and meet with Professor Einstein.

BYRNES

Thank you, but I've already had my physics lesson with Dr. Szilard.

TRUMAN

Professor Einstein, may I introduce you to our Secretary of State, James Byrnes.

EINSTEIN

(to both, more or less)

How do you do, sir?

BYRNES

Professor. Y'all have a pleasant visit to the White House.

(BYRNES takes his leave abruptly, clearly still put out. TRUMAN indicates that EINSTEIN should get comfortable.)

TRUMAN

Thank you so much for coming to see me, Professor Einstein.

EINSTEIN

No, Mr. President, it is I who thank you. For taking the time to see me.

TRUMAN

Well, when a man of your renown asks for a few words, one is apt to listen.

EINSTEIN

That's what I am told.

(TRUMAN looks a bit puzzled at this remark.)

This Secretary Byrnes... he is the man who met with my colleague, Leo Szilard, a few weeks back?

TRUMAN

He is.

EINSTEIN

Mmm.

TRUMAN

What did Professor Szilard tell you about the meeting?

EINSTEIN

Well, Mr. President, you could say he was not well satisfied with the outcome. That is why I am here.

TRUMAN

I see. You know, Secretary Byrnes is of the opinion that it's the province of scientists to develop weapons, and our province to decide how to use them.

EINSTEIN

Then I must concur with my colleague's opinion of Secretary Byrnes. Which I will spare you.

TRUMAN

Perhaps that would be for the best.

EINSTEIN

Is that really what Secretary Byrnes thinks – that we are talking only about scientists developing weapons?

TRUMAN

I shouldn't speak for him, Professor. I want to hear what you think.

EINSTEIN

Thank you. Professor Szilard, Professor Oppenheimer and the others - they are not mere weapons technicians. Their research is opening the door to a world that we can hardly imagine...

TRUMAN

Surely you know what they are doing, Professor.

EINSTEIN

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

TRUMAN

Still, your discoveries gave rise to the work they are embarked on...

EINSTEIN

Not directly, no. The key thing is the discovery of the nuclear chain reaction – almost by accident, it was discovered.

TRUMAN

And – and - that's what makes this –

TRUMAN/EINSTEIN  
(together)

*A nuclear* bomb.

EINSTEIN

Yes, just so. But the elements released in the process, they can be very volatile.

TRUMAN

Elements?

EINSTEIN

Particles. Radioactive. Yes.

TRUMAN

And...

EINSTEIN

...and to release them in the atmosphere this way – it has never been done before. It concerns me greatly.

TRUMAN

These particles. Are they like – say, X-rays, Professor?

EINSTEIN

Yes. Just so. But in such magnitude! With the scale of this weapon... We have never seen the like. We cannot predict –

(He shakes his head.)

TRUMAN

Well, that seems... very clearly explained, Professor.

EINSTEIN

You sound surprised.

TRUMAN

I am. I'm aware of your – extraordinary genius, sir. I hadn't expected to understand you, man to man.

EINSTEIN

Well, I feel if one can't explain something simply, it is because one doesn't understand it well enough.

TRUMAN

I should mention that to my Cabinet.

EINSTEIN

You are pleased to humor me, perhaps, knowing my feelings about politics.

TRUMAN

No, Professor, I'm also a believer in plain dealing – and plain talk.

EINSTEIN

Then perhaps we have a chance to understand each other, after all.

TRUMAN

I hope so.

(A beat, and then Einstein seizes his chance.)

EINSTEIN

I trust you will not mind, then, if I tell you that it is not only the release of radioactive particles that I fear, although the results of that could be terrible.

TRUMAN

What is it you fear *more*, Professor?

EINSTEIN

It is man. It is the lust for power that the nations will feel, when they see what destruction this bomb can produce. That is a Pandora's box we must not open.

TRUMAN

Well, Professor, now you are starting to stray into my area of expertise. Men and power? That's been my study, all my life.

EINSTEIN

Yes, yes, but on a small scale. Men in shirttails, bickering over this vote, or that amendment. I am talking about something very real here.

TRUMAN

(nettled)

Professor Einstein, when I served as a captain in the United States Army in the Great War – on the western front – that's what I'm talking about, when I say I've studied men and power. Some men, some officers, had the power to keep their men straight, with their eye on the job. Some others lost the discipline and focus their men badly needed, and you know what happened to those divisions? They got shot to hell, Professor. My battery didn't lose a single man. Real power is about protecting the people you're responsible for, at whatever cost to the enemy that is attacking them.

EINSTEIN

And that enemy, Mr. President, is also fighting to protect the people, the families, for whom they are responsible.

TRUMAN

Are they, Professor? That is a point on which I wish we could agree. The civilians on Saipan leapt off the cliffs into the ocean – with their children. Committing suicide rather than let us win an island. That just doesn't square with how I see family, how most of us here in America protect our families. That kind of thing is just – foreign to me, Professor.

But isn't the question, who brings the conflict? My boys were just American kids who'd never been out in the world, didn't know anything much beyond their own home towns. They didn't suddenly up and attack Germany in 1917. We went to the defense of people who had been attacked *by* Germany – and we went willingly, because we felt it was right.

EINSTEIN

Maybe it was right, Mr. President. Nobody came out of that war unscathed –

TRUMAN

You're right, nobody did. And here we are again, taking up the unfinished battles. And trying to set the world to rights.

EINSTEIN

You cannot set the world to rights with violence. What we need is a world government, that can bring the nations to order and make them sit down in peace.

TRUMAN

That sounds just fine, Professor Einstein. You know we just created a body called the United Nations –

EINSTEIN

Yes, a body of talkers. But only one of you has an atomic bomb. Until that bomb is in the hands of a world government, not just a single nation –

TRUMAN

Wait, sir. Surely you're not telling me that in this time of turmoil, with Europe in collapse and Asia pressing in on us, we should share this bomb with the world - ?

EINSTEIN

It is too powerful to be in the hands of one nation. And it is too dangerous to be used.

TRUMAN

I'm sorry, Professor, but wasn't it *you* who wrote to President Roosevelt urging him to start work developing this weapon?

EINSTEIN

We had every reason to fear that the Nazis would develop the weapon before we could. But they did not!

TRUMAN

But now that we have it, who else are we to trust? The Soviets?

EINSTEIN

You must trust no one with this bomb! You must stop production, and bury the information forever.

TRUMAN

Professor Einstein, you're just not making sense. We have gone to all the trouble and effort of developing a weapon that has the potential to bring this long and bloody war to an end. Men's lives are at stake!

EINSTEIN

And still, you must not use it. The lives of women and children in the nation of Japan are also at stake.

TRUMAN

Professor, I feel that weight on my shoulders more heavily than you can imagine. But many of their lives are forfeit, with or without this bomb, because of the naked aggression their leaders have pursued.

EINSTEIN

So you must meet aggression with greater aggression?

TRUMAN

If that's what it takes to protect my soldiers, and bring this enemy to its knees. We didn't start this war, Professor. And I may not know much about physics, but I do know what's right and what's wrong.

EINSTEIN

Really. You know right from wrong. Then you are privy to knowledge that the greatest of philosophers have never claimed.

(Pause.)

TRUMAN

Look, Professor, I'm a believer in the equality of all people. And I truly have no desire to harm the ordinary people of Japan. But their leaders are holding them hostage in a war they refuse to lose. And we can't have them win.

EINSTEIN

I understand the equation, Mr. President. And you are a man who knows right from wrong. That is why you are fighting in this war.

TRUMAN

That is right, sir.

EINSTEIN

That is right. And will you feel right when you order the use of a bomb that will melt the flesh from young children? For that is what I believe this bomb will do.

(TRUMAN is silent, as he lets this sink in. EINSTEIN is silent, as he watches the President. The focus shifts back to TOMIKO and FRANK, each of whom are also quietly chastened at this question. After some time...)

TOMIKO

We have changed the path of history...

FRANK

We don't know that we have.

TOMIKO

We must have. I believe your President listened. He will change his mind.

FRANK

I think you are right. He really is considering it.

(They share a moment of triumph, perhaps an embrace.)

TOMIKO

What happens now? Everything will be different...

FRANK

(a sobering realization)

Even if he does change his mind... Tomiko, your country will have to surrender.

TOMIKO

Or win.

FRANK

You can't win!

TOMIKO

How can you say that?

FRANK

You have no idea... Your country is devastated. I saw, in the countryside, in the cities... You have no more resources to fight a war.

TOMIKO

We have the will of the people.

FRANK

That's just it! Your people are starving, but they continue to fight. As long as your people cling to that spirit -

TOMIKO

You want to break my people's spirit?

FRANK

No, not the people. But your leaders – what if they give my government no choice?

TOMIKO

Of course they will. They are wise, and strong.

FRANK

Strong, maybe. But wise – Tomiko, I don't know...

TOMIKO

What are you saying?

FRANK

We have changed something in my world. Our whispers were heard! But I'm still afraid –

TOMIKO

Afraid for what?

FRANK

Your people. What about your leaders?

TOMIKO

Then you must talk to them as well. Visit them.

(FRANK hesitates. TOMIKO regards him carefully.)

FRANK

Me?

TOMIKO

You're a military man!

FRANK

I know, but –

TOMIKO

Do you like it better when there is nothing you can do? Nothing but wait to see whether your children will bring flowers to your grave?

FRANK

No. It's just that –

TOMIKO

What?

FRANK

President Truman. Albert Einstein. At least I –

TOMIKO

What? Understood them?

FRANK

No, I would hardly say that! But they were... I don't know. They were *real* to me.

TOMIKO

And the leaders of my country...

FRANK

I just can't imagine them.

TOMIKO

Did they have an impact on your life?

FRANK

(looking hard at her)

All right. I see what you're saying.

TOMIKO

Whether you can imagine them or not, they are also real.

FRANK

(conceding)

Who do we go to?

TOMIKO

The Council of Six. They advise His Highness, the Emperor. They are the ones we must influence. And Marquis Kido, the Emperor's Privy Seal – I think I have heard that he has the Emperor's ear.

FRANK

Who are they, this Council of Six?

TOMIKO

The Prime Minister. The Foreign Minister. Two from the Army, two from the Navy.

FRANK

Only two civilians? Advising the Emperor?

TOMIKO

You have your ways, and we have ours.

(beat)

You are right. You will not understand them. I will go.

(She may select another jacket, this time of an Asian man. She becomes SHIGENORI TOGO, Foreign Minister of Japan. She and FRANK watch as we see a small group gather after a meeting of The Council of Six. TOMIKO/TOGO hovers near the group, then enters the scene at an appropriate moment. PRIME MINISTER SUZUKI has taken MARQUIS KIDO aside, as GENERAL ANAMI stands nearby.)

SUZUKI

Marquis Kido, are you going directly to the Emperor to report on this meeting?

KIDO

Not directly, Prime Minister. I am expected at the Palace later this evening.

SUZUKI

Good. Then perhaps we have time to make one more inquiry of our envoy in Moscow.

KIDO

Still no answer from the Soviets?

SUZUKI

I think not. But Minister Togo still believes they are our best hope to act as honest brokers with the West. Minister Togo, if you would be so kind.

(TOMIKO/TOGO joins them. GENERAL ANAMI watches.)

SUZUKI

Still no word from Ambassador Sato in Moscow?

TOMIKO/TOGO

The Soviets are evasive – that is the report we are receiving.

SUZUKI

It would be good, then, to send a cable – encoded in the usual way. Let Ambassador Sato know of the urgency of receiving some commitment from the Soviets.

KIDO

Do you intend to let him know of the dire condition we face here – no resources for the army, and civilians starving?

TOMIKO/TOGO

I assure you the communication is safe, Marquis Kido. Our code is unbreakable.

(GENERAL ANAMI has drifted closer to the conversation.)

ANAMI

The only code that is unbreakable is the warrior's code of honor.

SUZUKI

General Anami. The entire nation is profoundly indebted to the Imperial forces, and the sacrifices they are making to preserve the homeland.

ANAMI

Preserve the homeland? Have your ambitions shrunk so small? We have secured a mighty empire for His Highness, over which the rising sun will shine undimmed.

SUZUKI

General, we face the prospect of the enemy bringing the war to our very shores.

KIDO

That is unthinkable.

ANAMI  
(bristling)

With 700,000 men stationed along the beaches of Kyushu, the foreign wretches will barely set their feet on dry land. The shores will be drenched with their blood. And you ask my men to give their lives for victory, when behind their backs you sue to the enemy for peace?

KIDO

General Anami, His Highness feels deeply the pain and suffering of his people.

ANAMI

His Highness knows that we need one great, decisive victory before that suffering can cease. We must stand on firm ground when we talk with the enemy. How many years now have we seen our envoys return home with their faces red and their eyes downcast?

TOGO

The General is pleased to refer to events long ago, which no longer –

ANAMI

No longer shame us? Yes, I am speaking of Versailles. We knew then that there was only one way for us to hold our heads high in this world: through the power of our army and the great reach of our empire. And now we have these arrogant nations on their knees –

KIDO

General, I speak with the greatest respect. It has come to the Emperor's notice that perhaps it is we who are on our knees.

(Silence.)

ANAMI

I will give His Highness the victory we need. If we fight to the very last drop of our soldiers' blood, we will call forth the whole nation to die with honor. No foreign army can vanquish one hundred million of our countrymen, willing to give their lives for the Emperor, and the land we love.

(ANAMI lets this sink in, then turns on his heel and stalks out of the room. The others look at each other carefully.)

SUZUKI

Marquis Kido, when you report to the Emperor, it might be valuable for His Highness to know of the... determination of his Army leadership. That is one aspect of our condition which is – immovable.

KIDO

But their loyalty to His Highness is, surely –

SUZUKI

Is unquestionable. But I have a feeling here (*he indicates a point on his side*) that tells me their loyalty sometimes leads them to take action that we might regret. Minister Togo, you will draft a cable to Moscow? I will be pleased to review it before it is sent.

(TOMIKO/TOGO bows in assent. SUZUKI excuses himself. TOMIKO/TOGO looks for a moment at KIDO, puzzled.)

TOMIKO/TOGO

Marquis Kido, the pain in the Prime Minister's side...

KIDO

Do you not remember, Minister Togo? That is where one of the bullets struck him, when the Army tried to kill him.

TOMIKO/TOGO  
(digesting this)

Of course. Forgive me.

KIDO

He was one of the few fortunate enough – or strong enough - to survive. It was not a good time to be a politician.

TOMIKO/TOGO

Prime Minister Suzuki perhaps – fears it could happen again?

KIDO

The Army rising up and taking control? I think we should all fear that. But, Minister, your lapse in memory concerns me for another reason. When the Emperor appointed the Prime Minister in April he felt - we believed the Allied powers would understand that we were signaling a desire to discuss peace. Kantaro Suzuki, a man so opposed to militarism that he was shot four times and left for dead by the young fanatics in the army. How could it be more clear? And yet we received no communication from the west, no offer to negotiate. It was... surprising. Do you think it is possible that the west did not understand the signal?

TOMIKO/TOGO  
(after a hesitation)

I cannot say, Marquis.

KIDO  
(as he turns to go)

Their leaders... they are very hard to understand.

(KIDO goes, and TOMIKO/TOGO returns to FRANK. She is upset at what she has learned, and spoiling for a fight.)

TOMIKO

Is it true?

FRANK

Is what true?

TOMIKO

That my country was signaling for peace, and your leaders ignored it?

FRANK

Tomiko, I'm no politician –

TOMIKO

But appointing a new prime minister – that is not a small gesture!

FRANK

We had our own change of leader that April. President Roosevelt died unexpectedly. Truman was suddenly President, Roosevelt had told him nothing. He didn't know any of the secret understandings the old President had entered into...

TOMIKO

And I'm saying there is nothing secret about the appointment of a new prime minister!

FRANK  
(flaring)

Well, maybe we missed some of the “signals for peace” in amongst the kamikaze pilots flying their airplanes into our ships.

TOMIKO

Soldiers do what they must do –

FRANK

Or American prisoners, like me, being starved and beaten within an inch of our lives. Or the ones who never made it back alive.

TOMIKO

But you were prisoners.

FRANK

That means we should have made it through the war.

TOMIKO

Why?

FRANK

If we had been treated humanely, given medicine when we needed it, given more than seven spoonfuls of rice a day, more of my friends would have survived.

TOMIKO

But you were *prisoners*.

FRANK

What are you saying?

TOMIKO

You were defeated. Shamed. Why would you expect to be treated well?

FRANK

(caught up short)

It's no shame to be captured.

(TOMIKO is silent.)

FRANK

Really? Is that how you saw us too? Lower than dogs, because we didn't fight to the death? Is that how you saw me?

TOMIKO

Not you. You were different.

Why?  
FRANK

TOMIKO  
You know what I felt for you.  
(shaking that off)

Anyway, our soldiers would fight to the death because they know how they would be treated if they were captured. It's just the way.

FRANK  
No, we don't do things that way. We have – protocols we subscribe to. The Geneva Convention.

TOMIKO  
So you thought our men should surrender, because you would treat them well?

FRANK  
(after a silence)  
Well, no. Not really. Some of our guys were pretty upset about the way we'd been attacked. I guess they... they kind of chose to kill your soldiers, rather than capture them.

TOMIKO  
Then we understand each other.

FRANK  
Do we?

(Again, silence.)

TOMIKO  
We must – still – find out what your leaders are planning. We cannot forget what we are trying to do...

FRANK  
You are right. Of course.

TOMIKO  
Let us see if your President has changed... You must go again.

FRANK  
As Admiral Leahy?

TOMIKO  
(gently teasing)  
Now that you have realized that's who you are...

(FRANK, reaching for a better humor, finds his ADMIRAL LEAHY jacket and/or demeanor. We see a scene coming into focus elsewhere on the stage. A group of men are pouring bourbon and unwinding after a long day.

It is PRESIDENT TRUMAN, Secretary of War HENRY STIMSON, and Secretary of State JAMES BYRNES. We are at the “Little White House” in Potsdam, the evening of July 25, 1945. FRANK/LEAHY tries to slip in unnoticed, but he is spotted.)

TRUMAN

Admiral Leahy – there you are! Pull up a glass. Quite the day, wouldn’t you say?

FRANK/LEAHY

Yes indeed, Mr. President.

TRUMAN

We were just trying to make sense of Joe Stalin’s response, when I took him aside and told him about the atom bomb.

BYRNES

You mean his *lack* of response. You’d swear, from across the room, you’d just told him we were planning a bingo game on Sunday.

STIMSON

Mr. President, you didn’t actually use the phrase “atomic bomb.”

TRUMAN

No, no, Henry, I promise you – I was the soul of discretion. I said we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force. Still, it was the darnedest thing. He didn’t seem to take much of an interest.

STIMSON

He’s a cool customer. I doubt that we can read very much into his reaction, either way.

BYRNES

Oh, I don’t know, Henry. I don’t think he’s a man who deals in understatement. As seven million Ukrainian farmers would testify. If they could.

STIMSON

Indeed.

BYRNES

No, I think he just didn’t understand the significance of what we’ve got.

TRUMAN

He said he hoped we could make good use of this new weapon against the Japanese.

BYRNES

And we're still counting on the Soviets to declare war on Japan?

STIMSON

That is their undertaking. Within three months of the defeat of Germany, that's what Stalin promised at Yalta. So that puts them at war with Japan by the first week of August.

BYRNES

If Comrade Stalin is as good as his word.

STIMSON

Self-interest. I believe they want some of those territories for themselves – warm water ports, and all.

TRUMAN

Colonel, can it really be that the Japanese don't know what the Soviets are planning? How do you account for that?

STIMSON

Wishful thinking, Mr. President. They're still making overtures to the Soviets to extend their Neutrality Pact. And the Soviets aren't coming out and saying no, so...

TRUMAN

Wishful thinking. Now there's a luxury a leader can't afford. God knows, I wish this thing was already over, and our boys safe at home. Right, gentlemen?

(A chorus of "Hear, hear" as the men lift their glasses and drink. GENERAL MARSHALL arrives, his urgent energy in contrast to the more settled rhythms in the room.)

TRUMAN

Why, General Marshall – glad you could join us.

MARSHALL

Thank you, Mr. President. Some urgent communiqués - sorry I had to slip away from the meeting.

TRUMAN

Not at all, not at all. Let's pour you a drink. You look like you've seen a ghost.

MARSHALL

Maybe a considerable number of ghosts, sir.

TRUMAN

What's the matter? What's the news?

MARSHALL

We've intercepted some coded intelligence from the Japanese. It appears they've discerned exactly where we are planning to launch Operation Downfall. They're sending divisions down to the south shore of the island of Kyushu, to fortify their defenses there –

STIMSON

What does this mean, General?

MARSHALL

They've got three times the number of troops in place than we anticipated. Upwards of 700,000 fighting men. It means the casualty estimates we gave the President back in June are out the window.

(Silence in the room.)

TRUMAN

Well, Admiral Leahy. It looks as though you were right. Our casualty estimates might have been a little low.

FRANK/LEAHY

Believe me, Mr. President, it gives me no pleasure to be proven right.

TRUMAN

What are we looking at, General Marshall?

MARSHALL

Well, as Admiral Leahy has pointed out, there's never been an invasion of the Home Islands. We can expect them to hit us with everything they've got, and then some. Could be – hundreds of thousands.

TRUMAN

American casualties!?! Holy hellfire! General, that can't be!

MARSHALL

I know, Mr. President, and that's why I have to ask. This new weapon, it's tested out all right - ?

BYRNES

Like a charm, General. Just over a week ago – you lifted a glass with us!

MARSHALL

I know. But, Secretary Stimson, how is production going? How many of these – atom bombs do we have ready to go?

STIMSON

Two now, maybe a third will be ready within a few weeks. It's... not an easy job to make one.

MARSHALL

I need twelve.

TRUMAN

How's that, General?

MARSHALL

There are twelve beaches we'll be landing on in Kyushu. One to clear each beach. That's the only way I can see safely landing American troops. Drop a bomb on the beach, then send the boys in. The Japanese troops will be in disarray – and maybe a lot of the job will be already done.

BYRNES

With all due respect, General, I believe Secretary Stimson has some strategic targets already identified. Niigata, Nagasaki, Kokura, Hiroshima, Kyoto –

STIMSON

Not Kyoto.

BYRNES

Secretary?

STIMSON

I've been very clear with Lieutenant General Groves about this. Not Kyoto.

BYRNES

The Target Committee placed a high value on the psychological impact that could come from hitting Kyoto.

STIMSON

Precisely. I know the city well. I honeymooned there.

(A beat.)

BYRNES

Secretary Stimson, I'm sure your memories are exquisite. But industries are being moved there, as other cities are destroyed. And it's an intellectual center,

so the Committee feels the people there would understand the implications of what happened, sooner than in other centers.

STIMSON

An intellectual center, yes, Secretary Byrnes – and a city of beautiful, irreplaceable old wooden palaces and temples. We are talking about the spiritual heart of an ancient land, gentlemen. If we wish to embolden the Japanese people, and ensure that every last civilian, - man, woman and child - will be trying to bayonet our soldiers with a carved bamboo stick, then we can do no better than to destroy Kyoto.

BYRNES

Your point is well taken, Henry. Well. Not Kyoto, then.

FRANK/LEAHY

(seeing his moment)

This assumes, gentlemen, that we plan to make use of the atomic bomb at all.

BYRNES

Don't be absurd, Admiral. The thing works! Of course we'll use it.

FRANK/LEAHY

You know my position on the horror we would be unleashing if we proceed. I was not taught to make wars by destroying women and children. And I've yet to hear the President authorize its use.

(Silence, as all eyes turn to TRUMAN. He takes in the focus of the room, but takes his time to respond.)

TRUMAN

Gentlemen, I am considering every option.

MARSHALL

If it's a matter of what time, and which place, sir –

TRUMAN

(pointedly)

*Considering* being the operative word here. I will not rush to judgment.

(Silence again, as the men, severally, consider whether it is advisable to push their agendas at that moment. We may see TOMIKO, outside the scene, almost collapsing with relief.)

TRUMAN

Now, gentlemen, I suggest we turn our attention to the draft of this declaration we're about to issue to Japan. All of this talk of invasion, casualties, atomic

weapons... Could be all moot, if we can get peace now, on the terms we need. What have we got?

STIMSON

I have the draft here, sir.

TRUMAN

And this goes out from us, the British and the Chinese – am I correct, Secretary Byrnes?

BYRNES

Exactly. The Soviets can't be seen to be violating their Neutrality Pact with Japan, but they won't raise any objection to the declaration.

TRUMAN

(reading)

"...the elimination for all time of the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest." Good. "Japanese military forces... completely disarmed... stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals..." Good. Japanese influence confined to the Home Islands... Well, gentlemen, this is what we've got to have them agree to. "We call upon the Japanese government to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces... The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction."

FRANK/LEAHY

Mr. President, if I could express one concern...

TRUMAN

Admiral.

FRANK/LEAHY

Unconditional surrender. There's no mention of the position of the Emperor. We know that is of huge concern to the Japanese. How can they be sure that we won't prosecute *him* for war crimes?

TRUMAN

Oh, I know, Admiral. We've gone around and around on this unconditional surrender business. But the fact is, President Roosevelt was committed to it, and so is our country. I wasn't elected to this office, but he was. I've got to carry on the policies he stood for, because he represented the will of our people.

FRANK/LEAHY

But, Mr. President, with all due respect, sir - conditions have changed since President Roosevelt's death.

TRUMAN

Have they, Admiral? Have the Japanese proved themselves any less fanatical – or cruel?

STIMSON

Or determined. If I may interject, I believe the difficulty with clarifying the Emperor's position – is that it may cause the enemy to believe our will is weakening, and that they must fight harder in hopes of gaining better terms.

TRUMAN

Well said, Colonel. Oh, I don't have any objection to them keeping their Emperor. But we just can't come out and say so. We've intercepted communications to their ambassador in Moscow, saying it's "in the Emperor's heart" to end the war. Maybe he'll come down off his – what is it?

STIMSON

Chrysanthemum Throne, sir.

TRUMAN

Exactly. And prove an ally to us. Well, at least a partner in peace.

BYRNES

I'd like to see that day.

FRANK/LEAHY

But, sir, when we threaten "prompt and utter destruction"... It sounds as though we are threatening the use of the atomic bomb.

TRUMAN

I told you, Admiral, that decision has not yet been made.

FRANK/LEAHY

Is this all the warning we would offer, Mr. President? If that decision were to be made.

TRUMAN

It's already more warning than we got before Pearl Harbor.

FRANK/LEAHY

I understand, sir, I'm sorry.

STIMSON

Bear in mind also, Admiral, that if we give the Japanese any advance warning of our intention to use the atomic bomb, they'll simply move all our prisoners of war to the site we've chosen.

FRANK/LEAHY

I see.

TRUMAN

Listen, Admiral, this new Prime Minister – Suzuki. He was a Navy man, wasn't he? What do you know about him? Does he strike you as reasonable?

FRANK/LEAHY

Not a great deal, sir. Except that a bunch of junior Army hotheads tried to assassinate him in '36, so maybe they found him too reasonable.

MARSHALL

*Reasonable.* Let's hope so. But if that kind of insubordination has been allowed once in an army, it can happen again. Prime Minister Suzuki may need to watch his back.

TRUMAN

Gentlemen, the plain fact is that none of us will sleep easy in our beds, anywhere in this world, until we have an affirmative answer from Japan on these terms.

(General assent, as the men go back to reviewing the document, sipping their bourbon, debriefing the day. FRANK/LEAHY slips away from the group unobserved, and returns to the area where TOMIKO waits. He removes any Leahy jacket or mask.

As he does so, BYRNES goes over to the bar/table to pour himself another drink. MARSHALL sidles over to BYRNES, and initiates a conversation *sotto voce*. FRANK and TOMIKO watch this private moment.)

MARSHALL

Secretary Byrnes.

BYRNES

General.

MARSHALL

What the hell's going on here?

BYRNES

(looking at him carefully)

I'm not sure, General. What are you seeing?

MARSHALL

I'm seeing a President who finally, for once, is a take-charge kind of guy, ready to make decisions and act on them – and suddenly he's *considering* every option. We've got a war to win here. And we've got the weapon to do it.

BYRNES

I know exactly what you're saying, General. Never seen him get quiet like he did when we got word that the bomb had tested all right. Not like him.

MARSHALL

What's happened to the man? This is our chance, here at Potsdam. With all the key players. Are we going to come in strong, and show them what we've got?

BYRNES

I have a notion...

MARSHALL

Yes?

BYRNES

It looked like things were unfolding one way, but now everything's different somehow. I'm wondering if it's something that scientist said, that Einstein...

MARSHALL

Well, I'm telling you, Mr. Byrnes – if he doesn't want to use the atomic bomb to end this war, I'm going to need twelve of them to clear those beaches. Twelve.

BYRNES

I think I'll have a word with him, General, when I can catch him in private.

MARSHALL

I believe we'd all be much obliged.

(MARSHALL returns to the group, leaving BYRNES thoughtful. Our focus shifts back to TOMIKO and FRANK, as they digest this new wrinkle.)

TOMIKO

Twelve bombs?

FRANK

Yes. I heard.

TOMIKO

But your President listened to Professor Einstein! We really did change something.

FRANK

And maybe now we've made it worse.

TOMIKO

But he listened to the scientist!

FRANK

Yes, but he listens to his advisors too.

TOMIKO

Why does he not bring them all together?

FRANK

How do you mean?

TOMIKO

These powerful men in the room, the generals and politicians. Why doesn't the President bring them together with the scientists? So they can talk together about what they are doing?

FRANK

Tomiko, a meeting like that never happened.

TOMIKO

Neither did the meeting with the scientist and the President. But then it did! We changed it, there was a different choice...

FRANK

But there's so little time now! If we can get your country's leaders to make peace, we won't have to worry about any bombs. They have to think carefully too -

TOMIKO

They are! Didn't you see? They are trying to get the Russians to help bring peace. It is in the Emperor's heart.

FRANK

Weren't you listening just now? Your leaders think they can trust the Soviets - but they can't.

TOMIKO

That is not the most important thing! It is all those soldiers, preparing for one last great victory. Then we can negotiate a peace with your people.

FRANK

They won't get that last victory. They will have to accept this Potsdam Declaration.

TOMIKO

The one that calls for complete surrender?

FRANK

*Unconditional* surrender. Yes.

TOMIKO

It's impossible!

FRANK

Now you sound like your leaders.

TOMIKO

No. I sound like any citizen of our great Empire.

FRANK

Tomiko, what you want, your family, your friends – and what your Army wants... Those are very different things.

TOMIKO

No, they are the same! The Army is us too. It is nothing more than our finest young men.

FRANK

(getting frustrated)

Who fly their airplanes into the ground, just to kill as many of *us* as possible.

TOMIKO

Because they are brave and young. They paint cherry blossoms on the sides of their airplanes because their lives, too, are brief and glorious.

FRANK

And sometimes barbaric and terrifying.

TOMIKO

(pained)

How can you hate them so much? They are no different from soldiers you know.

FRANK

Sometimes they are. Do you not know - ? Have you never heard of Nanking?

TOMIKO

The Battle of Nanking. In 1937. We were victorious.

FRANK

In America we call it “The Rape of Nanking.”

TOMIKO

Why?

FRANK

Because of the *way* your Army was victorious, the terrible things they did to the people there. Did they not teach you this in school?

TOMIKO

Of course not. What are you saying?

FRANK

Tomiko, I can't even speak of the horrors your... your young soldiers inflicted on that city...

TOMIKO

Why are we even speaking of it? They were *gaijin*, foreigners – what does it matter how our soldiers treated them?

FRANK

Tomiko.

TOMIKO

What?

(Silence.)

FRANK

I am *gaijin*.

(Silence.)

TOMIKO

I know. But that's not what I see when I look at you. I just see you.

(They are silent, barely able to look at each other. Then a strange thing happens. We hear, distantly at first, sounds of a seashore – waves and seagulls. A figure is strolling, as if on the shore. He strolls right between FRANK and TOMIKO, not seeing them. It is EINSTEIN.)

TOMIKO

(quietly, to Frank)

Do you see - ?

FRANK  
(quietly)

Yes. But I don't think he can see us.

(EINSTEIN stops for a moment, and savors the sea breeze on his face.)

TOMIKO

What is he doing here?

FRANK

Is he here? Or are we - ?

TOMIKO

Bardo is the place in between.

FRANK

The place outside time and space. Maybe he visits.

(We hear the sound of the seagull, louder now. EINSTEIN looks up, as if gazing at it.)

EINSTEIN

I hear you, my friend. Look at you, hovering on the wind. Motionless, or so it seems. And yet you are moving all the time. And the wind is moving under you. Invisible. A miracle. When I was younger, I would look at you and think of time. Velocity. Mass. Energy. What would you look like if I were actually traveling on the wind? Hmm. Now I look at you and think, what will become of you if these leaders have their way? This Potsdam Declaration they put forth...

(He shakes his head.)

I thought I had him! I thought he heard me, really listened. But now they threaten "prompt and utter destruction." That can only mean one thing. No one understands what it means, no one knows yet what they are saying. But I do.

(Looking up at the bird)

You, my friend. What will become of you, if they unleash this genie? And when the world sees it, every little tinpot dictator will want one too. Every nation will clamor for that power. Man will challenge God for the right to destroy.

(Pause.)

But only God can create a mystery like you.

(He pulls a notebook out of his pocket, as if something has just occurred to him. He writes.)

"A human being... experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest ... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from

this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

(Pause. He puts away the notebook, and looks back up at the bird.)  
You look like you are flying somewhere, my friend, but you stay in the same place. I know how you feel.

(EINSTEIN walks on. FRANK and TOMIKO watch him go, in silence. The sounds of the beach gradually fade.)

FRANK

He is right. No one really knows what they are saying in that Potsdam Declaration. No one can imagine it. Tomiko, your leaders don't know what is really being said.

TOMIKO

(gathering herself)

I will go, and try to help them think.

(She starts to don the TOGO jacket.)

FRANK

There's not much time. And your Army men are determined. They will push back hard against you.

TOMIKO

I know. But they will be loyal to the Emperor. And it is "in the Emperor's heart" to seek peace. You heard.

FRANK

Can you... do you think you can get the Emperor to intervene?

TOMIKO

I don't know.

(She turns to enter a scene, where PRIME MINISTER SUZUKI and MARQUIS KIDO are already present, reading a document. TOMIKO/TOGO takes a place with the men. GENERAL ANAMI joins them shortly after.)

SUZUKI

(reading)

"We, the President of the United States, the President of the National Government of the Republic of China, and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, representing the hundreds of millions of our countrymen, have conferred and agree that Japan shall be given an opportunity to end this war..."

KIDO

Perhaps it is not necessary to read again their boasts about their strength, and the insults to our leaders. Proceed with the rest.

SUZUKI

“... Following are our terms. We will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay.”

ANAMI

The terms are unacceptable. “The Japanese military forces, being completely disarmed...”? If the Emperor orders the Army to stand down, we will be in control of executing his order. No foreign power will ever give orders to the Imperial forces.

KIDO

I understand, General.

ANAMI

But the Emperor has not given any such order. Nor will His Highness need to. We will deliver him one decisive victory, and then *we* will write the terms.

KIDO

General Anami, your vow to deliver His Highness one great victory is met with deep respect – but it has not escaped His Highness’s notice that such promises have been made before. And also that the war has developed... not necessarily to Japan’s advantage.

ANAMI

Hundreds of thousands of His Highness’s loyal soldiers have given their lives, and hundreds of thousands more stand ready to die for him. That is all I can say. If they hear the terms of this ignominious document, they will rise up against anyone who would dare entertain such thoughts.

SUZUKI

No one will hear the terms of this document, General. We will consider our response and deliver it secretly through the proper channels.

ANAMI

Wake up, man. The nation already knows it exists. The Allies are broadcasting it on the radio, they are dropping leaflets explaining it.

SUZUKI

It is against the law for anyone to read enemy leaflets!

ANAMI

Against the law, too, to steal food rations – yet your civilians do it, all the same.

KIDO

Prime Minister Suzuki, we must contain this situation. The public cannot be debating matters that belong to us.

SUZUKI

Of course, Marquis, I understand that we must not allow discussion and speculation on the streets.

ANAMI

The only course of action is a swift, public rejection of this... document.

TOMIKO/TOGO

We cannot reject it out of hand, General. We need time for the diplomatic channels to work. We are waiting for word from our envoy –

ANAMI

What evidence have you that the Soviets will represent us as we wish them to?

TOMIKO/TOGO

(not knowing what to say)

No... evidence, General.

ANAMI

It is as I thought.

TOMIKO/TOGO

But there is evidence in this declaration that the western powers will negotiate fairly with us.

(Taking up his/her own copy of the document)

Listen. “We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation – “

(GENERAL ANAMI virtually spits, in contempt and disbelief.)

No, wait. “Japan shall be permitted to maintain such industries as will sustain her economy – “

SUZUKI

(bitterly)

“Shall be permitted – “

ANAMI

(contemptuously)

Nothing but words.

TOMIKO/TOGO  
(almost desperate)

“Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights, shall be established.”

KIDO  
(shaking his head)

They go too far.

ANAMI  
(brandishing his copy)

I tell you, my men will not kneel down before this.

TOMIKO/TOGO

But they offer us a way to stand up again, when this is over.

ANAMI

And you believe their words? They are *gaijin*!

TOMIKO/TOGO  
(not knowing what to say)

I... I know. But our fates are linked. What about this threat they make? “Prompt and utter destruction.” Should that not worry us?

ANAMI

More of their boasts. We have seen the worst of what they can visit upon us, and we remain standing.

TOMIKO/TOGO

What if we cannot imagine - ?

(She stops, knowing this tack is unlikely to work)

But what if they are willing to secure the position of the Emperor?

KIDO

They talk of surrender without conditions. Can you get them to change that demand?

TOMIKO/TOGO

I can... try. I can try.

KIDO

Prime Minister, we need to craft some response. Before we find things out of hand, amongst both civilians and the army.

SUZUKI

Yes, I have been thinking. *Mokusatsu*.

KIDO

*Mokusatsu*. “A wise silence.”

ANAMI  
(unimpressed)

The tactics of ancient courtiers...

SUZUKI

And proven effective, through the centuries. We will respond to this Declaration by not responding. We will... kill it with silence.

TOMIKO/TOGO

Is that what we should allow the public to hear: *mokusatsu*?

SUZUKI

Yes. Our people will understand. That we are judicious – and unhurried. And we will take our time to consider further our response.

TOMIKO/TOGO

But, Prime Minister, may we not say –

SUZUKI

We will say nothing. *Mokusatsu* is our response.

KIDO

Very well. I will advise the Emperor.

(The men take their leave of each other and disperse, apparently satisfied that they have handled the crisis. TOMIKO and FRANK meet together again – less certain.)

FRANK

Have we changed anything there?

TOMIKO

I can't tell. Like your President, our Prime Minister is deciding... not to decide.

FRANK

But the wheel of history rolls on. With each day that passes, lives are still lost. Your people, and ours. Someone will have to decide something.

TOMIKO

We stepped in to make a change. But things are not going as I expected.

FRANK

Turns out it's not so simple, playing God.

TOMIKO

We're not playing God! If we were gods, we could control what happens.

FRANK

What makes you think God can control what happens?

TOMIKO

Isn't that what makes him God?

FRANK

(shaking his head)

That's not how we see it. In the west. God doesn't – dictate everything.

TOMIKO

Then what's the point of your God?

FRANK

No, He... He gave man free will. So we have a say in how things go.

TOMIKO

You mean you have a say? And I do? And everyone?

FRANK

Yes! Well... some more than others.

TOMIKO

Well, if we have our say, why aren't they thinking the way we want them to?

FRANK

I guess we can't... control any of them. We can only try to influence how they think.

TOMIKO

Then anything could still happen!

FRANK

Yes. It could. Tomiko...

(A pause.)

Even if the bomb isn't dropped... We don't know what will happen.

TOMIKO

(soberly)

I know. You might still marry –

FRANK

Alice. I might. But I might die, I mean die young – who knows? If bombs are dropped on the beaches of Kyushu, if your army moves us prisoners to the front as human shields...

TOMIKO

And I might still die.

FRANK

You might. There could be more fire bombs or... if there's a long invasion... starvation.

(Silence.)

TOMIKO

I know.

FRANK

Are you still glad we've tried to change things? Not knowing what will happen... do you still want to live?

TOMIKO

Yes. I do. I want to walk under the cherry blossoms again. And go down to the harbor, holding my little brother's hand. Buy him a sweet bean cake – he loves those. And dance the bon odori for my grandmother, when she passes. I want to live. Even if it's just one more day, to see my parents. See them happy. Get to touch their faces. Yes. I want to.

FRANK

Are you still – glad we met?

TOMIKO

Yes.

(He comes to her, and takes her hands in his.)

FRANK

Then we will see... what happens.

TOMIKO

Yes.

(Our focus shifts to an area of the stage where TRUMAN reviews some papers. BYRNES enters, waiting to catch his attention. Once he does, BYRNES sits, as TRUMAN paces restlessly.)

TRUMAN

Ahh, Jimmy, come in. Any word from the Japanese?

BYRNES

Not through the regular channels. Nothing. Just that word that's leaked out in their press.

TRUMAN

Yes, that – what is it? *Moku* –

BYRNES

*Mokusatsu.*

TRUMAN

That's it. What do you make of it? Stimson says he thinks it means "to reject." But if that's really it, why don't they come out and say so, like men?

BYRNES

Well, I had someone consult a professor of East Asian Studies about it. He said it's a very ancient word. Means something like "ignore." But more like "ignore with contempt."

TRUMAN

Ignore with contempt? Well. Where does that leave us?

BYRNES

Well. I think the path is clear.

TRUMAN

Is it?

BYRNES

You're not going to tell me we've spent all these years, and all those taxpayers' dollars, building a weapon that can bring this war to a close – and we're not going to use it?

(Silence.)

I can just see the Congressional hearings after the war investigating *that* one.

TRUMAN

I don't make decisions based on fear of Congressional hearings.

BYRNES

Then, damn it, Harry – what *are* you afraid of?

(Pointedly.)

Damn it, *Mr. President.*

TRUMAN

Listen, Jimmy, we don't know what this thing can do –

BYRNES

It's been tested. We know it works. We know it's *big* –

TRUMAN

I mean *do* besides making an impact on one city –

BYRNES

Big enough to put a scare into Joe Stalin, and I'm telling you, if you don't use it before the Soviets come into the war, they're going to want a piece of the spoils afterwards. They're going to want Korea and Manchuria, and we're going to have Communism on the Asian coast, just looking across the Pacific at us... We've got to think about what this world looks like *after* the war.

TRUMAN

That's what I'm looking at. If the scientists say we're letting a genie out of the bottle –

BYRNES

It's past time to be listening to the scientists! They've done their work. Now it's time for us to do ours.

TRUMAN

(clearly ending the conversation)

All right, Jimmy. You should get some sleep. It's been a hell of a week.

BYRNES

Are you sending me to bed, Harry?

TRUMAN

(smiling to soften it)

Well, you can stay up if you like, Jimmy. But I've got to write my letter to Bess.

BYRNES

(reluctant to go)

Well, all right then. Just remember this, though.

TRUMAN

What is it?

(BYRNES pulls a paper out, and finds his place in it.)

BYRNES

The decrypt of that message we intercepted – from Tokyo to the Japanese envoy in Moscow. “...with regard to unconditional surrender... we are unable to

consent to it under any circumstances whatsoever. Even if the war drags on and it becomes clear that it will take much more bloodshed, the whole country as one man will pit itself against the enemy in accordance with the Imperial Will so long as the enemy demands unconditional surrender.”

TRUMAN

Was that before or after the Potsdam Declaration?

BYRNES

Few days before. But since then we've gotten nothing but -

TRUMAN

(shaking his head)

*Mokusatsu*, right?

BYRNES

Right.

(BYRNES turns, and goes. TRUMAN gets out pen and paper, and starts to write. As he does, we see TOMIKO quietly drift behind him, unseen, a ghost. She watches him, and tries to see what he is writing.)

TRUMAN

(writing)

Dear Bess. Well, we're wrapping things up in Potsdam. Never been readier to come home – except I don't much like the weight of the decisions that are waiting for me there. Sure wish you could have been here, to help me talk things through. Oh, I'm surrounded by advice, all right. The strongest voices seem to be fellows who've got their minds made up. I can just hear you reminding me, “The only things worth learning are the things you learn after you know it all.”

(TOMIKO moves in closer, whispering to him, barely audible.)

TOMIKO

(barely audible)

Call a meeting... bring everyone together...

(In another spot on the stage, we see EINSTEIN, also writing. FRANK drifts in towards him, also like a ghost.)

EINSTEIN

(writing)

With all the energy I have devoted, in my later years, to peace – I cannot escape the feeling that I have failed. Twice I have managed to gain the ear of a President of the United States. The first time the result was the creation of the most

destructive weapon ever to be seen in this world. And the second time – ? The heads of state meet in Potsdam, they issue ultimatums, knowing they have this weapon up their sleeve. They feel invulnerable, the masters of the universe. And I should never have spoken...

(FRANK moves closer, urgently whispering.)

FRANK

No, don't stop! We must not stop talking to the politicians. They need to hear.

TRUMAN

(writing)

You remember I told you, when I first got my feet under me in this job, that working with the Cabinet wasn't much different from running Jackson County. You know what you've got to get done, you know who's running things – and I've always taken pride in being able to take the measure of a man.

It's not the same, though, dealing with the Japanese. They play their cards so darn close to their chest, you start to wonder if they're holding some royal flush, and you'll never know about until your chips are down on the table. And Comrade Stalin's not easy to read, either. Remember when I wrote you that he didn't bat an eye when I told him about our new weapon? I'm starting to wonder whether the sly fox already knew.

TOMIKO

(more audible, whispering to him)

Call a meeting... listen to every voice...

EINSTEIN

(writing)

I have always believed that the most important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing – but these politicians... Once they hear what they want to hear, they stop asking questions. “Now we have this fantastic weapon – no one can touch us.” But they do not ask themselves, what will happen if scientists to come are emboldened to create bigger weapons, more powerful, more destructive? But they have no imagination – there is no talking to them.

FRANK

(to Einstein)

We must keep talking to them!

TRUMAN

(writing, but getting sleepy)

Bess, a job like this makes a man question what he knows. Here I am, the top man, for better or worse. And I know I've got to make the decisions – I know

they're mine to make. But I don't think a man in history has ever had to make a bigger decision than this one.

Trouble is, I've got to look decisive, and keep getting things done. If I don't - Well, I swear, if I take a nap some afternoon I'm going to wake up and find Jimmy Byrnes sitting in my place.

TOMIKO

(urgently whispering)

No – take the time! Take the time to listen.

(As EINSTEIN speaks, we see TRUMAN nodding off, and finally putting his head down on his writing table.)

EINSTEIN

(writing)

We must not become that which we despise. And we still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us! We do not know what will happen if we let this atomic genie loose in the world...

FRANK

Keep talking to the people in power. You must keep talking...

(Lights shift so that we are aware of TRUMAN sleeping at his desk. Around him are images and voices, perhaps from the figures in Bardo – more whispering ghosts. If the Chorus is visible, it is possible that they wear Noh masks, such as we saw in the opening scene in Bardo, when Frank and Tomiko were masked.)

PILOT

A bright light filled the plane. The first shock wave hit us. We were eleven and a half slant miles from the atomic explosion, but the whole airplane cracked and crinkled from the blast...

FEMALE SURVIVOR

The cloud is called a “mushroom cloud” and indeed it does look like a mushroom.... When I was washing my face stained from my nosebleed, big drops of rain came down. Somebody screamed “The Americans are dousing us with gasoline!”

OBSERVER

After I noticed the flash, white clouds spread over the blue sky. It was as if blue morning-glories had suddenly bloomed up in the sky. It was funny, I thought. Then came the heat wave...

## PAUL FUSSELL

When the atom bombs were dropped... when we learned to our astonishment that we would not be obliged in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo, assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared and shelled, for all the practical phlegm of our tough façades we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all.

## MALE SURVIVOR

Then, I heard about ten of my surviving classmates singing our school song. I remember that. I could hear sobs. Someone was calling his mother. But those who were still alive were singing our school song for as long as they could. I think I joined the chorus. We thought that someone would come and help us out. That's why we were singing a school song so loud. But nobody came to help, and we stopped singing one by one. In the end, I was singing alone.

## OPPENHEIMER

If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one... We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent.

(Suddenly we see TRUMAN jolt awake, as if from a nightmare. He looks around, haunted – searching for the voices and images we have just heard. In another pool of light we see EINSTEIN, lost in thought – perhaps he too has heard the voices. Then we hear FRANK and TOMIKO, and perhaps an entire chorus of Ghosts, still whispering, still urging.)

FRANK

Keep talking...

TOMIKO

Listen....

FRANK / TOMIKO

Keep talking. Listen. Listen. Keep talking. Listen.....

(They continue to whisper, as lights fade to black.)

END

All tragedies deal with fated meetings; how else could there be a play? Fate deals its stroke; sorrow is purged, or turned to rejoicing; there is death, or triumph; there has been a meeting, and a change. No one will ever make a tragedy – and that is as well, for one could not bear it – whose grief is that *the principals never met*.

Mary Renault, *The Mask of Apollo*

This play explores the political, ethical and moral implications of America's atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, at what proved to be the end of World War Two. It does so through the device of "alternate" history, and specifically by asking the question: What if Harry Truman, President of the United States, had met Albert Einstein, perhaps the foremost scientist in human history, and Einstein had pled with Truman not to drop the bomb?

Following are the characters and their relationship to the narrative, in their order of appearance:

**Frank** -- An American WW2 veteran, who has just died of old age. He finds himself in the Bardo (the Buddhist afterlife, a "way station between reincarnations). Frank was a prisoner of the Japanese, held for a time near Hiroshima.

**Tomiko** -- A young Japanese woman, killed in the bombing of Hiroshima. Tomiko and Frank are "joined souls," whose paths constantly cross in each reincarnation. Frank and Tomiko met when he was working as a POW laborer.

As Frank and Tomiko talk, they become aware that in the Bardo they are not limited by time or space. Tomiko, angered by Frank's explanation of how the war ended with Japan's total defeat, and horrified by his explanation of the nature of the weapon that killed her, her family, and city, resolves to try and change the course of history by intervening in the past and preventing the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**Harry S. Truman** -- President of the United States, having succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt when the latter suddenly succumbed to ill health at the start of a record Fourth Term. Trying to get his footing as president, Truman values decisive action in life and worries about projecting weakness at a time of national crisis. A self-taught student of history, Truman is capable of insight and sympathy looking well beyond what some many would expect of a "Midwestern American provincial" and failed haberdasher. Even though a leading Senator and then Vice President, Truman knows nothing about the "Manhattan Project" to develop the atomic bomb until told of it shortly after becoming president.

**Henry Stimson** -- "Colonel" Henry Stimson, United States Secretary of War. A classic American statesman in the American patrician mold, Stimson served

President Taft as Secretary of War, and Herbert Hoover as his Secretary of State, before agreeing in an act of bipartisanship to become FDR's Secretary of War in 1940, just as France was falling to the Nazis. Stimson worries that nothing shock of atomic "shock treatment" will induce the Japanese to surrender short of an invasion of the Home Islands.

**James Byrnes** -- James "Jimmy" Byrnes of South Carolina has been a Congressman, Senator, Senator Majority Leader, US Supreme Court Justice, and finally FDR's head of war mobilization (before resigning that post in early 1945). Bitter over not being selected as FDR's running mate in 1944, this undeniably brilliant man and able politician finds himself right back in the center of executive decision-making when Truman, who considers Byrnes a mentor, asks Byrnes to become first a key White House adviser and then Secretary of State. Byrnes sees the atomic bomb as an instrument of power, to be used against Japan as a possible way of bringing a speedier end to the war and in any event to demonstrate American power to Josef Stalin and his Soviet Union.

**Albert Einstein** -- the foremost physicist of the age, who emigrated to the United States following the Nazi takeover of his native Germany. In 1939 Einstein was persuaded by other émigré scientists to send a letter to FDR warning of the danger of a Nazi atomic bomb, thereby helping to set in motion what has become the Manhattan Project. Einstein is a pacifist, whose treatment at the hands of German authorities and colleagues during World War One for his unwillingness to support the German war effort has soured him on politics. Reluctantly he has sent a *second* letter to FDR, in March 1945, asking FDR to meet with a group of scientists involved in the Manhattan Project (with which Einstein has no connection), who intend to plead with the president not to use the bomb against Japan.

**Leo Szilard** -- one of the émigré scientists who persuaded Einstein to write to FDR in 1939, Szilard (a Hungarian by birth) turned against the idea of using the bomb upon learning at the end of 1944 that the Germans in fact never had a serious atomic bomb program. Szilard is a brilliant physicist whose contributions to the development of modern physics and of the atomic bomb rank with Fermi's and Oppenheimer's. Szilard is the leader of a dissenting group of Manhattan Project physicists, and it is he who is to lead the group with which Einstein has asked FDR to meet.

**General George C. Marshall** -- Chief of Staff of the United States Army, the brilliant, utterly principled and hard-driving planner whose efforts have done more than any other member of the American military to bring the United States to the verge of victory over the Axis. With victory against Germany nearly in hand, Marshall has turned his full attention to "Operation DOWNFALL," the conquest of the Japanese Home Islands starting on November 1, 1945 with "Operation OLYMPIC," an invasion of the island of Kyushu that alone will dwarf the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, in June 1944.

**Admiral William Leahy** -- a Five Star Admiral of the Navy with no active command but serving as FDR's personal "National Security Adviser," Leahy has stayed on in that capacity at Truman's request. Leahy is opposed both to an invasion of the Japanese Home Islands, and to the use of the atomic bomb. Leahy is convinced that the Japanese can be induced to surrender by a combination of blockade and conventional bombing. Leahy also considers the atomic bomb a horror weapon akin to poison gas, whose use would constitute a criminal precedent.

**Shigenori Togo**<sup>1</sup> -- Foreign Minister of Japan. A member of the "Big Six," the six members of the cabinet who form the inner counsel of the Japanese government. Togo is one of three civilian members of the Big Six, who are locked in conflict with their three military ministerial counterparts over the next phase of the "Great East Asian and Pacific War" with the United States and its allies. The military maintains that Japan must first bloody the Americans in a "Decisive Battle," after which an honorable peace can be achieved. The civilians doubt the ability of the military, after so many defeats in so many promised decisive battles, to achieve a victory that can alter America's apparent determination to subject Japan to a humiliating defeat. They look instead to the "good offices" of the Soviet Union, with which Japan signed a Friendship Treaty in 1941, to bring about a compromise peace that will avoid an outright occupation of the Home Islands.

**Kantaro Suzuki** -- Prime Minister of Japan. An elder statesman, Suzuki has been called back from semi-retirement to become Prime Minister following the American invasion of Okinawa. Suzuki is acutely sensitive to the danger of violent action by the younger members of the Army and Navy officer corps, having nearly been assassinated himself during an uprising in February 1936 by junior officers opposed to "moderation" in Japan's China policy (an event that contributed to the outbreak of war between Japan and China the following year). An opponent of going to war with the United States, Suzuki has kept his present views on how best to achieve an "honorable" end to the war very much to himself.

**Korechika Anami** -- War Minister of Japan. A graduate of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy, Anami has spent his life in the Imperial Japanese Army, serving ably in a variety of positions including combat commands against the United States in the Pacific until being appointed War Minister at the same time as Suzuki became Prime Minister. As War Minister, Anami holds a uniquely powerful position within the Japanese government; should he resign Suzuki's Cabinet would fall, because by an unwritten rule of Japanese governance the War Minister must be a member of the military and if that minister resigns no other member will support the existing government by taking their place. Anami is an ardent ultranationalist and believer in the "Decisive Victory" resolution of the war. He also is devoted to following the expressed wishes of the Emperor.

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of audience familiarity we use the Western convention of listing the Japanese surname second.

**Marquis Koichi Kido** -- Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, Kido is Emperor Hirohito's closest adviser, and in his capacity attends all meetings of the Big Six, over which the Emperor presides. Kido had opposed war with the United States, and by 1945 was seeking away to achieve a surrender that would preserve the imperial house. Kido recognizes that the Emperor's theoretically absolute power is in fact severely constrained by the custom that the Emperor should not express his own choice as to policy, but await the presentation of a consensus recommendation for action by the Big Six.

The play uses the classic theatrical device of the mask, by which Frank and Tomiko will move from the Bardo to the past, and intervene in the flow of history by taking the roles of certain of the characters.