

THE LADY AOI

❀ CHARACTERS:

YASUKO ROKUJŌ

HIKARU WAKABAYASHI

AOI

NURSE

❀ A ROOM in a hospital. It is late at night. To stage-right is a large window draped with a curtain. At the back, a bed in which AOI is sleeping. To the left is a door.

HIKARU

(Enters, led in by the NURSE. He wears a raincoat and is carrying a suitcase. He is an unusually good-looking man. He speaks in an undertone.) She's asleep, isn't she?

NURSE

Yes, she's sound asleep.

HIKARU

It won't waken her if I talk in a normal voice, will it?

NURSE

You can talk a little bit louder if you wish. The medicine is taking effect.



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HIKARU
(*looking down intently at Aoi's face*) How peaceful she looks as she sleeps.

NURSE
Her face looks peaceful enough now.

HIKARU
Now?

NURSE
Yes, but late at night . . .

HIKARU
She's in pain?

NURSE
In terrible pain.

HIKARU
(*reading the chart at the foot of the bed*) "Aoi Wakabayashi. Admitted at 9 p.m. on the 12th." . . . I wonder if there's anywhere I might spend the night here.

NURSE
Yes. (*She points to the left-rear.*) In the next room.

HIKARU
Is there bedding and all?

NURSE
Yes, there is. Would you like to lie down now?

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HIKARU
No, I'll stay up a bit longer. (*He sits on the chair, lights a cigarette.*) I was on a business trip when I got word she was sick. They said it was nothing serious. But when somebody gets put in the hospital it must be serious, mustn't it?

NURSE
Your wife has often had attacks like this, hasn't she?

HIKARU
It's not the first time. But it was a very important business trip. I managed this morning to get through my work and I rushed back as fast as I could. Being away made me worry all the more.

NURSE
I'm sure it did.
(*The telephone on the table tinkles faintly.*)

HIKARU
(*lifting the receiver to his ear*) I can't hear anything.

NURSE
It often rings that way about this time of night.

HIKARU
It's out of order, I suppose. But why should there be a telephone in a hospital room?



NURSE

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Every room in this hospital has a telephone.

HIKARU

Who would want to telephone a sick man?

NURSE

It's for the patients' use. There aren't enough nurses to go round, and we ask the patients to call for one on the inside line in case of an emergency. Or, supposing a patient would like a book, he can telephone the bookshop himself. That's on the outside line. We have three operators working twenty-four hours a day in shifts to take care of the outside line. Of course, when patients require absolute quiet, no calls are accepted.

HIKARU

And isn't my wife absolutely quiet?

NURSE

She tosses around a good deal after she falls asleep. She lifts her arms, groans, moves her body from side to side. You really can't say she's absolutely quiet.

HIKARU

(*getting angry*) You mean to say, in this hospital . . .

NURSE

In this hospital we accept no responsibility for the dreams of our patients.

(*Pause. The nurse shows signs of restlessness.*)

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HIKARU

What are you so nervous about?

NURSE

It's not necessarily because I've been attracted by you.

HIKARU

(*laughing in spite of himself*) This hospital seems crazier every minute.

NURSE

You're a very good-looking man, you know. A real Prince Genji. But the discipline for nurses in this hospital is terribly strict. We've all been under psychoanalysis, and our sex complexes have all been cleared up. (*She spreads open her arms.*) All of them. Things are arranged so we can always satisfy our demands. The director of the hospital and the young doctors are very competent in this respect. Whenever necessary they administer the medicine as prescribed, the medicine known as sex. We never have any trouble with one another.

HIKARU

(*impressed*) You don't say?

NURSE

So, you see, it's perfectly obvious to all of us, without having to make any special analysis, that your wife's dreams all result from sexual complexes. There's nothing for you to worry about. She should be placed under analysis so she can be freed from her complexes. We're giving her the sleep treatment as a first step.



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HIKARU

You mean, my wife, with this sleep treatment . . .

NURSE

Yes. (*still fidgeting*) That's why I can't have the least of what they call "understanding" for the patients or, if you'll excuse me, the patients' families or visitors. Don't you agree? Every last one of them is the ghost of a libido. Even that strange visitor who comes here every night . . .

HIKARU

Every night? Here? A visitor?

NURSE

Oh—now I've said it. It's been going on every night, ever since your wife entered the hospital. And it's always late, around this time, because the visitor isn't free any earlier. I've been strictly forbidden to mention it, but it came out before I knew it . . .

HIKARU

Is it a man—this visitor?

NURSE

Please set your mind at ease—it's a middle-aged woman, a very beautiful one. . . . She'll be coming any minute now. When she arrives I always take advantage of her visit to go out and rest for a while. I don't know why it is, but it makes me feel oddly depressed to be near her.

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HIKARU

What sort of woman is she?

NURSE

A very stylishly dressed lady. The upper bourgeoisie—that's the impression she gives. You know, surprisingly enough, it's in bourgeois families that you find the worst sexual repressions. . . . Anyway, she'll be here before long. (*She walks to window at right, raises the curtain.*) Look. There's hardly a house left with its lights burning. All you can see are the two sharp lines of the street lamps. Now is the hour of love. Of loving, of fighting, of hating. When the daytime combat ends, the war by night begins, a gorier, more abandoned struggle. The bugles of the night that proclaim the outbreak of hostilities are sounding now. A woman sheds blood, dies, and comes back to life time and time again. And she must always die once before she can live. These men and women who fight wear black badges of morning over their weapons. Their flags are all pure white, but trampled on, wrinkled, and sometimes stained with blood. The drummer is beating his drum, the drum of the heart, the drum of honor and shame. . . . How gently they breathe, they who are about to die. Look at them die, brazenly flaunting their wounds, the gaping, fatal wounds. Some men go to death with their faces in the mire. Shame is the decoration they wear. Look. It's not surprising you can't see any lights. What lie before you, row on row, as far as the eye can see, are not houses but graves, foul, putrefied graves. The light of the moon will never glitter on those granite slabs. . . . We're angels compared to them. We stand aloof from the world



of love, from the hour of love. All we do, and that only occasionally, is to produce in bed a chemical change. No matter how many hospitals like this there may be, there aren't enough. The director always says so. . . .

Oh, she's come. She's come! In that car she always rides in, a big silvery car. It will race here as if it's on wings, and pull up smartly in front of the hospital. Look! (HIKARU goes to the window.) It's going over the viaduct now. It always comes from that direction. There—you see—it's taking the long way round. . . . Oh, it's here already, in the front of the hospital, before it seems possible. The door of the car has been opened. I'll be leaving you. Good night. (She bolts precipitately from the room by the door to the tinkle. Pause. The telephone gives forth a faint, choked phantasm of YASUKO ROKUJŌ. She is dressed in Japanese clothes of an expensive cut. She wears black gloves.)

Mrs. Rokujō!

HIKARU

MRS. ROKUJŌ

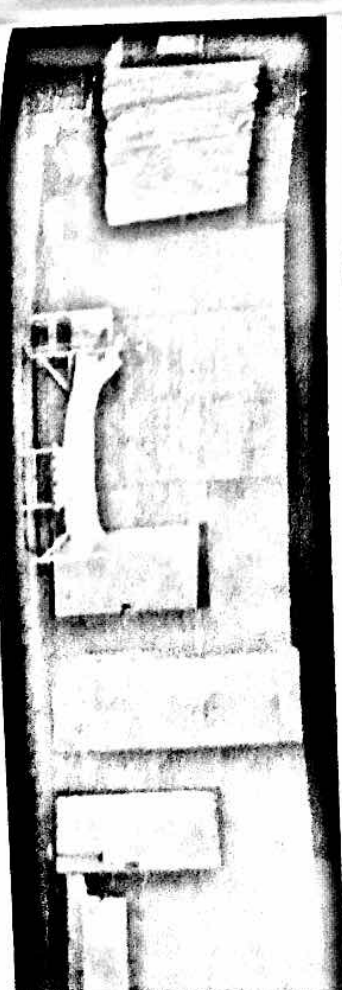
Hikaru! What a long time it's been, hasn't it?

HIKARU

So it was you, the visitor in the middle of the night.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Who told you about it? (HIKARU does not reply) It must have been that nurse. She's such a chatterbox. . . . You know, I've not been coming here to pay a sick-call—it's



ABOVE: Set for the yacht scene

BELOW: A set





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HIKARU

Excuse me, but Aoi is my wife, and I won't permit you to bother her any further. Please be so good as to leave.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

(*even gently*) I will not leave.

HIKARU

What do you—

MRS. ROKUJŌ

(*She approaches and gently takes HIKARU's hand.*) I came tonight because I wanted to see you.

HIKARU

(*He wrests away his hand.*) Your hand is like ice.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

That's not surprising. There's no blood in it.

HIKARU

Those gloves of yours . . .

MRS. ROKUJŌ

If you dislike my gloves I'll remove them. Nothing could be simpler. (*She slips off her gloves as she walks across the room, and puts them next to the telephone.*) At any rate, I have business, important business, that must be disposed of. That's why I have been running about this way—don't think it hasn't been a nuisance—in the middle of the night. The middle of the night . . . (*She looks at her*

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(*wistfully.*) It's already after one. The night is not like the day, it's free. All things, people and inanimate objects alike, sleep. This wall, the chest of drawers, the window panes, the door—all of them are asleep. And while they sleep they're full of cracks and crevices—it's no problem to pass through them. When you pass through a wall not even the wall is aware of it. What do you suppose night is? Night is when all things are in harmony. By day light and shadow war, but with nightfall the night inside the house holds hands with the night outside the house. They are the same thing. The night air is party to the conspiracy. Hate and love, pain and joy: everything and anything join hands in the night air. The murderer in the dark, I am sure, feels affection for the woman he has killed. (*Laughs.*) What is it? Why do you stare at me that way? You must be shocked to see what an old woman I've become.

HIKARU

I thought you swore never to see me again.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

You were very happy to hear me make that vow. Then you married Aoi. (*She turns fiercely at the sleeping Aoi.*) This weak, sickly woman! (*emptily*) Since then every night has been sleepless. Even when I shut my eyes I have not slept. I have not slept a wink since then.

HIKARU

Have you come here to be pitied by me?



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MRS. ROKUJŌ

I really don't know myself why I've come. When I feel I want to kill you, I must be thinking that I'd like to be pitied by your dead self. And amidst feelings of every sort, simultaneously, there is myself. Isn't it strange that I should be present at the same time with all those different existences?

HIKARU

I don't understand what you're talking about.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

(*lifting her face to his*) Kiss me.

HIKARU

Stop it, please.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Your beautiful eyebrows, your terrifyingly clear eyes, your cold nose, your—

HIKARU

Stop it, please.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

—your lips. (*She kisses him quickly.*)

HIKARU

(*jumping back*) Stop it, please, I say.

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MRS. ROKUJŌ

The first time I kissed you, too, you shied away like a deer, just as you did now.

HIKARU

Yes, I did. I wasn't particularly in love with you. All I had was a childish curiosity. You took advantage of it. I suppose you've learned now the punishment a woman gets for taking advantage of a man's curiosity.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

You were not the least in love. You studied me. That, at least, was your intent, wasn't it? How adorable you were! I hope you'll always stay that way!

HIKARU

I'm not a child any more. I am in fact the head of a household. Have you no sense of shame? That's my wife who's sleeping there next to you.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

My only purpose in coming here has been to dispose of my business. I have nothing to be ashamed of.

HIKARU

What business have you?

MRS. ROKUJŌ

To be loved by you.





HIKARU
Are you in your right mind, Mrs. Rokujō?

MRS. ROKUJŌ
My name is Yasuko.

HIKARU
I am not obliged to call you by your first name.

MRS. ROKUJŌ
(*Suddenly kneels, throws her arms around HIKARU's knees, and rubs her cheek against them.*) I beg you, please don't be so cold to me.

HIKARU
This is the first time I've ever seen you lose your pride so. (*to himself*) It's funny. It doesn't feel as if a human being were holding me, and yet I can't move my feet.

MRS. ROKUJŌ
I had no pride, from the very beginning.

HIKARU
You should have confessed it earlier. Perhaps things might have lasted awhile longer.

MRS. ROKUJŌ
It was your fault not to have realized it. Couldn't you tell that my eyes had long since lost their pride? The clearest sign that a woman has lost her pride is when she talks in a highhanded way. A woman longs to be a queen because a



queen has the most pride to lose. . . . Ah, your knees—
your knees are a cold, hard pillow.

HIKARU

Yasuko . . .

MRS. ROKUJŌ
I could sleep on this pillow. A cold, hard pillow that would never get warm. . . . My pillow becomes scalding hot as soon as my head touches it, and my head spends the night fleeing from the pillow's heat to the cold. A man who could walk barefoot over burning desert sands could not tread on my pillow.

HIKARU
(*somewhat gentler*) Please be careful. I am a very weak man when my pity is aroused.

MRS. ROKUJŌ
Now I understand! You married Aoi out of pity too! Didn't you?

HIKARU
(*pushing her aside*) Don't jump to any conclusions like that. (*He sits on the chair. MRS. ROKUJŌ still clings to his legs and rubs her cheek against his knees like a cat.*)

MRS. ROKUJŌ
Please don't abandon me.



HIKARU
(*smoking*) You were abandoned long ago.

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MRS. ROKUYŌ
You still love me.

HIKARU
Did you come here to tell me that? (*teasingly*) I thought you said you came to torture Aoi.

MRS. ROKUYŌ
I was aiming to kill two birds with one stone. Give me a cigarette, please. (HIKARU offers her one, but MRS. ROKUYŌ snatches the half-smoked cigarette from HIKARU's mouth and puffs at it. HIKARU, at a loss what else to do, puts the cigarette he had offered her into his mouth and lights it.)

HIKARU
In those days I was unstable, shaky on my feet. I wanted to be chained. I wanted a cage to shut me in. You were that cage. Then, when I wished to be free again, you were still a cage, a chain.

MRS. ROKUYŌ
I loved to look at your eyes, those eyes searching for freedom inside the cage that was myself, the chain that was myself. That was when I first really fell in love with you. It was autumn, the beginning of autumn. You had come to visit me at my house on the lake. I went to meet you in my sailboat, as far as the yacht harbor next to the station.



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... It was a wonderfully clear day. The mast was creaking gently. The boat . . .

HIKARU
The sail above the boat . . .

MRS. ROKUYŌ
(*with sudden asperity*) Don't you find it disagreeable to share the same memories with me?

HIKARU
They're not the same. We happened to have been together, that's all.

MRS. ROKUYŌ
But it was the same boat. The sail was flapping madly above us. Oh, if that sail were here again! If only it stood over us again!

HIKARU
(*staring at the window*) Is that it coming from out there?

MRS. ROKUYŌ
It's come!
(*Wild music. From the right a large sailboat glides on-stage. It moves forward with the deliberation of a swan, and halts between them and the bed, where it stands like a screen shielding the bed. HIKARU and MRS. ROKUYŌ act as if they were aboard the boat.*)



We're on the lake!

MRS. ROKUJŌ

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A wonderful breeze!

HIKARU

MRS. ROKUJŌ

This is the first time you've come to my country house, isn't it? It's on the side of the lake below the mountain. Soon you'll be able to see the roof, behind that clump of trees. It's a pale-green roof. Foxes prowl around the house when it gets dark, you know, and you can hear them yelping in the mountains. Have you ever heard a fox's cries?

HIKARU

No, never.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Tonight you'll hear them. And the shrieks that a chicken lets out before it dies, when a fox is ripping its throat.

HIKARU

I'd just as soon not hear such things.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

I'm sure you'll like my garden, I'm sure of it. In the spring parsley grows along the borders of the lawn and fills the garden with the most delicious scent. Then, when the spring rains fall, the garden becomes submerged and completely disappears. You can see the hydrangea blossoms



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drowning as the water creeps up through the grass. Have you ever seen a drowned hydrangea? It's autumn now and swarms of tiny insects will be flying up from the reeds in the garden to skim over the surface of the lake, like sleds on the ice.

HIKARU

That's your house over there, isn't it?

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Yes, the one with the pale-green roof. You can tell it from much farther off in the evening, because of the sunset. The roof and the windows sparkle, and the light is like a beacon that tells from afar where the house is. (*Pause.*) What's the matter? You're not saying a word.

HIKARU

(*gently*) There's no need to say anything.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

It's medicine to me to hear you talk that way, a medicine that cures all my wounds in an instant, a marvelous medicine. But I know the kind of person you are—you give the medicine first and only afterward inflict the wound. You never do it the other way. First the medicine, after the medicine the wound, and after the wound no more medicine . . . I understand well enough. I'm already an old woman. Once I get wounded I won't recover quickly like a girl. I tremble with fright whenever you say anything affectionate. I wonder what horrible wound awaits me after



so efficacious a medicine. Of late, the less affectionate you talk the happier it makes me.

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HIKARU

You seem convinced that you're going to suffer.

MRS. ROKUYŌ

Pain comes, as night follows the day, sooner or later.

HIKARU

I can't believe I have the strength to cause anybody pain.

MRS. ROKUYŌ

That's because you're young. One of these days you will wake up in the morning with nothing on your mind, and while you are out walking with your dog, perhaps, you will suddenly become aware that dozens of women somewhere, unseen by you, are suffering, and you will understand that the very fact you are alive is in itself a cause of suffering to many women. Even though you can't see them, they can see you, and it is useless for you to turn your eyes away, for you are as plainly visible as a castle that rises on a height over a city.

HIKARU

Why don't we drop the subject?

MRS. ROKUYŌ

Yes, let's. As long as I can still talk about such things I should count myself lucky.

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HIKARU

I can see your house very clearly now—the latticework of the second-floor windows, the wooden railing of the balcony. There's nobody at home, is there?

MRS. ROKUYŌ

No, the house is empty. That's where I'd like to live with you until I die.

HIKARU

Until you die? You shouldn't talk of such uncertainties. Who knows—we may die tomorrow. Supposing, for example, the boat capsized . . .

MRS. ROKUYŌ

The boat capsized! I wonder why I didn't buy a boat for you which would instantly capsize? Obviously I hadn't my wits about me.

HIKARU

(shaking the mast) Look! It's going to turn over!
(MRS. ROKUYŌ throws her arms around HIKARU. They embrace.)

AOI'S VOICE

(faintly, from the distance) Help! Help!
(As her voice is heard, the shadow of AOI, writhing on her sickbed with her arms thrust out, appears on the sail.)

HIKARU

Wasn't that a voice somewhere just now?



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MRS. ROKUJŌ

No, it must have been a fox. In the daytime, when the lake is still, you can hear the fox yelps gliding over the water, all the way from the mountain.

I can't hear it any more.

HIKARU

MRS. ROKUJŌ

I wonder why there must be a left and a right to everything. Now I am standing by your right side. That means your heart is far away. But if I move to your left side I won't be able to see your right profile.

HIKARU

The only thing for me to do is to turn into a gas and evaporate.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Yes. When I am on your right I am jealous of everything to your left. I feel as if someone surely is sitting there.

HIKARU

(He makes the motions of leaning over the side of the boat and dipping his hand in the water.) The lake's the only thing sitting on my left. What a cold hand it has! . . . Look at that! *(He shows her his wet hand.)* It's almost frozen. And it's only the beginning of autumn. *(There is a groan behind the sail.)*

HIKARU

What was that?

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MRS. ROKUJŌ

What?

HIKARU

I couldn't hear. It sounded as if someone were groaning.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

(She listens intently.) It's the creaking of the mast.

HIKARU

The wind has shifted, hasn't it? *(He makes the gestures of manipulating the sail.)* I see the reeds on the shore plainly now, bending in the wind. The wind is shaking spasms over the surface of the lake.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Yes, isn't it? . . . I was just thinking that, if you fell in love with some woman much younger and prettier than I, and you married her . . .

HIKARU

Yes?

MRS. ROKUJŌ

I don't think I would die.

HIKARU

(Laughs.) That's fine.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

I wouldn't die, but I think I would certainly kill her. My spirit would leave my body even while I was still alive.



and it would go to torture her. My living ghost would afflict her and torment her and torture her, and it would not cease until it killed her. She, poor creature, would die haunted night after night by an evil spirit.

AOI'S VOICE

(faintly, from the distance) Help! Help!

HIKARU

That voice again. What can it be?

MRS. ROKUJŌ

It's just the sail flapping in the wind. It's the sound of the wind.

(The shadow-image of AOI thrusting out her arms in anguish is clearly projected on the sail.)

AOI'S VOICE

(fairly loudly this time) Ah-h! Ah-h! Help! Help!

HIKARU

(aghast) I'm sure I heard a voice.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

It was the shriek of a chicken whose windpipe was gnawed by a fox. The wind carried it here from the shore. That shows how close we are.

HIKARU

I wonder if someone isn't drowning.



Mrs. Rokujō and Hikaru. "I had no pride from the very beginning."





MRS. ROKUJŌ

Drowning? Who would be drowning? If anyone's drowning, it's us!

AOI'S VOICE

(clearly) Help! Help!

HIKARU

It's Aoi!

MRS. ROKUJŌ

(Laughs.) No, it's a chicken.

HIKARU

I'm sure it's Aoi's voice.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

Don't leave me!

HIKARU

You're responsible! You've been torturing Aoi.

MRS. ROKUJŌ

No, it's not my fault. It's your—

AOI'S VOICE

(Groans.)

HIKARU

Aoi!



[At the last "hello" from the telephone, Aoi thrusts out her arms.]



THE LADY AOI



MRS. ROKUJŌ 170
Try to get hold of yourself! You're not in love with Aoi.
Look at me. Make no mistake. You're in love with me.
With me.

HIKARU

(Shakes his head.) No, I am not.
(The two confront each other in silence. Weird music.
MRS. ROKUJŌ turns from HIKARU and attempts to pass behind the sail. HIKARU stops her. MRS. ROKUJŌ twists herself free and disappears behind the sail. HIKARU follows her. The stage becomes dark. Amidst weird music the sailboat slowly moves off stage to the left. When it is no longer visible the stage becomes light again. MRS. ROKUJŌ is not to be seen. HIKARU stands alone in apparent stupefaction.)

HIKARU

(As if struck by a sudden thought, he picks up the telephone receiver on the desk.) Hello, hello. Yes. Outside line, please. . . . Is this outside? Please give me Nakano 999. . . . Hello. Is that Mr. Rokujō's house? May I speak to Yasuko? Yes, Mrs. Rokujō. . . . She retired some time ago? Yes? In her bedroom? . . . I'm sorry, it can't be helped. Please wake her. Tell her Hikaru is calling. It's urgent. Please wake her. Yes. . . .
(Pause. HIKARU looks anxiously at AOI's bed. She is sleeping peacefully in a supine position.)

HIKARU

Hello, hello . . . Is that you, Yasuko? What? Have you been at home all evening? You've been asleep? This is



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Yasuko I'm talking with, isn't it? (to himself) Yes, the voice is certainly hers. . . . Then what I saw was a living ghost. . . . Yes, hello, hello.

(There is a knock on the door to the left.)

MRS. ROKUJŌ'S VOICE

(from outside the door. She speaks very distinctly.) Hikaru, I've forgotten something. I forgot my gloves. My black gloves, next to the telephone. Do you see them? Please get them for me.

(HIKARU distractedly picks up the black gloves and, leaving the receiver off the hook, walks to the door to the left. He opens the door and goes out. As soon as HIKARU leaves, MRS. ROKUJŌ's voice on the telephone suddenly becomes loud enough for the audience to hear.)

MRS. ROKUJŌ'S VOICE

(from the telephone) Hello. Hello . . . What is it, Hikaru? What's the matter? You wake me up in the middle of the night, and then suddenly you don't say a word. What do you want? Why don't you answer? . . . Hello, Hikaru, hello, hello . . .

(At the last "hello" from the telephone, AOI thrusts out her arms as the telephone and with a horrible cry collapses over the bed and dies. The stage immediately blacks out.)

CURTAIN

FIVE

MODERN

NŌ

PLAYS

TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE BY DONALD KEENE

BY

YUKIO

MISHIMA

BOOKS BY YUKIO MISHIMA

The Sea of Fertility, a Cycle of Four Novels:

Spring Snow

Runaway Horses

The Temple of Dawn

The Decay of the Angel

Thirst for Love

Forbidden Colors

The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea

After the Banquet

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion

Five Modern Nō Plays

The Sound of Waves

Confessions of a Mask

Madame de Sade

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