

# FILIAL PIETY

By

Lionelle Hamanaka

## FILIAL PIETY

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## FILIAL PIETY

### CAST

4 Women

3 Men

NORI SASAKI	50, middle sister, banjo player
EMI SASAKI	40's, youngest sister, ambitious
DAKOTA SASAKI	60, oldest sister, revolutionary
FUMI SASAKI	79, mother
TAK SASAKI	80, father, an actor
EVELYN	30's home health aide (Voiceover)
GRANDMA SASAKI	Ghost (Voiceover)
DR. EGBERT WILLIAMSON	60's, suave psychiatrist
CORLISS GERMAINE	40's Philosophy professor
MINISTER GAMAN FRIEDRICH	40's Buddhist Minister

TIME: January, 1998 to September, 2001.

PLACE: Upper west side, Manhattan, New York

FILIAL PIETY

# FILIAL PIETY

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

*NORI (middle daughter, 50) and EMI SASAKI, (youngest daughter, 48) are seated in two armchairs. FUMI and TAK SASAKI's living room. January, 1998. There is a small night table with a lamp and a small bookcase. On DSR, a TV. USL, a door that leads to the hallway; next to it, a coat rack. They have just interviewed the 33<sup>rd</sup> home health aide for their mother and are satisfied that everything is finally resolved.*

**NORI.** There's not even a peep coming from her room. No talking at all.

**EMI.** That woman's hefty; I'd do what she said.

**NORI.** Finally! *(She stands up. Suddenly from offstage, the Voiceover of a screaming woman.)*

**EVELYN.** Help! Help! *(FUMI SASAKI passes from USR to USL--in her wheelchair, wielding a large kitchen knife. NORI and EMI jump up. The door slams.)*

**FUMI.** Get out of here! Get out of my house!

**NORI.** You forgot your coat!

**EMI.** *(Emi runs in and catches the wheelchair by the back and restrains her mother.)* Mother, please hand over that knife. Someone might get hurt. *(Emi wrests the knife out of her mother's hands.)*

**NORI.** I'm so sorry Miss--! *(Nori runs to the coat rack, takes Evelyn's Coat off, and runs out the door.)*

**EMI.** Why are you mad? Evelyn's so nice.

**FUMI.** I don't like that woman!

**EMI.** But Nori and I have to work outside; then what would you do?

**FUMI.** Daddy can help me then.

**EMI.** Daddy can't lift you up anymore, to go to the bathroom.

**FUMI.** I don't care! I hate that woman!

## FILIAL PIETY

**EMI.** I'll put you in bed. You need to be calm. Just think it over. *(EMI pushes the wheelchair offstage)*

**NORI.** *(Nori returns and flops in an armchair).* Again!

**EMI.** What rotten luck! We almost got her to stay. Then mom flipped out!

**NORI.** Mother with a knife. I can't believe it. Like a Devil that flew out of hell.

**EMI.** Doctors! We need one. They can prescribe meds!

**NORI.** She's afraid of outsiders. But put her on drugs?!

**EMI.** You don't want to visit mom in jail, do you?

**NORI.** 33 aides! All gone with the wind. Not one stuck it out.

**EMI.** Mom's not normal.

**NORI.** Remember that baseball player? Who thought his mother was crazy?! She was demented!

**EMI.** I'm going bankrupt. My mind's unraveled. I can't take anymore. *(She drops her head in her hands)*

**NORI.** This is winter, when it's dark, and the ice freezes over. I tried to call Dakota; it was like Earth to Mars. Dakota still hates dad. Key's in California, far away. And he hates Fumi. And dad thinks everything will work out.

**EMI.** We've tried everything! We're stuck here alone. We need help!

**NORI.** How about dinner? We could use some hot food.

**EMI.** That's true. I'm famished. *(She gets up and gets a menu off the table. Blackout.)*

## SCENE 2

*DR. WILLIAMSON's office, Central Park West, the San Remo building, a medical office on the 76<sup>th</sup> Street side. February, 1998. An office crowded with children's toys, books, extra chairs and a couple of warm, effusive lamps. There is a large couch that TAK, EMI and NORI are seated on. Fumi is in her wheelchair. DR. WILLIAMSON, slim with a heavy beard, is standing over Fumi.*

## FILIAL PIETY

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Charmed to meet you, Sasaki family.

**TAK.** I'm Tak Sasaki. She is my wife, Fumi, and these girls are my daughters.

**NORI.** I'm Nori, this is Emi.

**FUMI.** *(She is clearly impressed)* So you're a real doctor?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** I got a degree from medical school. *(He points to his diploma)*

**FUMI.** *(She giggles and looks around)* What nice toys you have here.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Some patients have kids. It's so they can play.

**FUMI.** This one has a nice smile. *(She picks up a stuffed toy)*

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Help yourself, madame. *(He turns to Nori and Tak)* To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?

**NORI.** We were wondering--if she had some dementia? *(She points as an aside to Fumi)*

**EMI.** She's been acting strange. We thought. . . there was a possibility.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** How has she been acting strange?

**EMI.** She attacked a home health aide with a knife. Just the other day. *(Fumi plays with the toy)*

**NORI.** She was our 33<sup>rd</sup> home health aide for the past year.

**EMI.** Nobody will stay. It's devastating.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** *(to Emi)* How has all this affected you?

**EMI.** My career's falling apart. I'm aghast. I just can't stand it.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** And what do you do?

**EMI.** Write. Mother's always helped me. I never expected her to . . .

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** It's a shock to see someone fall apart. Did you bring records? *(Nori hands over the records. HE examines them and turns to Fumi)* So, you don't like having strangers at home?

**FUMI.** No. They invade my house!

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Are you afraid they might do something bad?

**FUMI.** A strange woman comes in.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Your daughters love and worry about you. What are your feelings, Mr. Sasaki?

**TAK.** Could her wandering mind be caused . . . by a stressful life before this?

## FILIAL PIETY

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Did your wife have a stressful life before? Researchers link stress to inflammation. Stress causes depression. Both are risk factors for Alzheimer's.

**NORI .** Aha!

**EMI.** We thought it might be ...

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** I'm better at deciphering a physician's chicken scratch than you. That's what it indicates in her records.

**TAK.** We met--in World War II. In camps for Japanese Americans.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Trauma causes disease, shortens life span. And you've been together ever since then?

**TAK.** Yes.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Congratulations!

**TAK.** We would rendezvous on a hill. At the edge of the barracks. We had to be careful. There were armed guards in watchtowers, and searchlights.

*(FLASHBACK: 1942, Rohwer. Denson, Arkansas. Tak and Fumi are seated on the ground on a little rise at night. The background is bleak.)*

**FUMI.** I haven't seen you lately.

**TAK.** My father just died of cancer.

**FUMI.** I'm so sorry for you!

**TAK.** He never hurt anybody. They said he'd die six months ago.

**FUMI.** Did he die in the room?

**TAK.** They gave him no medicine. A painful death for all of us. How my mother suffered! The funeral is tomorrow.

**FUMI.** Can I go to the church?

**TAK.** They can't stop you.

**FUMI.** I'd like to honor him.

**TAK.** My wife's in love with the pastor!

**FUMI.** Are you jealous?

**TAK.** I caught them together. It's not gossip.

**FUMI.** My husband left me for a white woman who lives in the demilitarized zone. Our community's falling apart.

**TAK.** I can't get a divorce right now.

**FUMI.** You want to divorce her?

## FILIAL PIETY

**TAK.** Of course I do. But what about my son Key? I'm going to Chicago after the war. Do you want to come with me?

**FUMI.** I'm a disgraced woman.

**TAK.** My wife made me lose face also. She says I'm crazy for being a pacifist, against war! A few people want to conquer the world. So millions of people will die. I refuse to participate. Even if they throw me in jail.

**FUMI.** Don't go to jail for that!

**TAK.** I refuse to be a liar! Excuse me, I have to go help my mother.

**FUMI.** Goodbye, Tak.

*(CROSS FADE TO DR. WILLIAMSON'S office.)*

**TAK.** Later, we moved to Chicago. My first wife wouldn't divorce me! I have a son I haven't seen since then. Fumi and I never married.

**NORI.** Dad! You never told me! Dakota told me.

**TAK.** What good would it do? Did it make any difference? Many marriages are a sham. But we really loved each other. I was a penniless student. Our home-- the slums of Chicago. She worked as a maid to feed us. I studied to be an actor.

**NORI.** Why did you keep this a secret?

**TAK.** You weren't born yet.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** *(to Nori)* You said your father cannot lift Fumi?

**NORI.** No.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Mrs. Sasaki--he can't pick you up. Your husband's lost the strength he used to have.

**FUMI.** *(She sighs).* You can say that again.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Sometimes it helps to have someone around. To go to the store, to the doctor, or lift you. *(whispers to Nori)* Anti-anxiety medication. *(Fumi continues to play with the toy and talks to it in a whisper.)*

**EMI.** We worried you might overdose mother--unintentionally.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** You are the younger sister, aren't you?

**EMI.** *(She preens)* Do I look like it?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Have you felt like this was a heavy load?

**EMI.** I usually write award winning kids' books. Caring for her drains me.



## FILIAL PIETY

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Did you see the children's books around here? Why don't you bring books for the waiting room.

**EMI.** I'll look for extra copies at my home. If there are, I will.

*(Emi gets up and starts preparing Fumi in the wheelchair to leave. She waves goodbye to the toy. Tak, pushing his walker, exits.)*

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Nori, call me any time you want to. And by the way, watch out for "Little Flower."

**NORI.** You're worried about her?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** She seems used to having an assistant around. Clearly, you're the head of the family now.

**NORI.** Please don't say that.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** When parents switch roles with you, you may resent it. But if they weren't protected, you'd neither forget them nor enjoy life. Your mother's happy with her children around. When you get old, you see happiness isn't wealth or possessions. *(He sits down and writes a prescription. He gives it to Nori.)* I'll give your mother the lowest dose. *(He reaches out to Fumi and shakes her hand.)*

Thanks so much for coming to see me. Please come back. Okay?

**FUMI.** Sure I will.

**NORI.** Dr. Williamson, is a check okay?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Actually, I prefer cash--\$250. You'll get reimbursement from Medicare. *(He signs a form and gives her a stamped envelope.)* Here you go. Just mail it in.

**NORI.** Thank you. *(She gets the cash and gives it to him.)*

Ready?

**FUMI.** Yes. Goodbye, doctor. See you soon.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Why thank you again, Mrs. Sasaki. Everything will be all right. *(Nori, Emi, Tak & Fumi exit. Stage to black)*

### SCENE 3

*FUMI and TAK's living room, March, 1998. NORI is seated at a desk doing the books. It is early evening, and the lamp is on. FUMI is asleep. EMI comes bursting in.*

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** Why are you alone?

**EMI.** I lost dad.

**NORI.** *(She gets up)* That's impossible.

**EMI.** It isn't—he's lost!

**NORI.** You mean you lost him.

**EMI.** He wanted ice cream. We got off at Penn Station, and I ran upstairs to get a cab. I said, "Don't move." He didn't pay attention!

**NORI.** Do you think he was kidnapped?

**EMI.** An 80 year old? They don't get kidnapped. Nobody wants them.

**NORI.** But this is New York.

**EMI.** 80 year old men, who look poor like him?!

**NORI.** Then what happened?

**EMI.** If I knew, would I be here asking you?

**NORI.** Did you go to the police?

**EMI.** No.

**NORI.** First mistake. There's a network of cops there.

**EMI.** You're so negative. What's wrong is always the first thing out of your mouth.

**NORI.** I was trained to blame. To see shadows, not sun. Now it's a habit.

**EMI.** A glass half empty. And don't blame mother.

**NORI.** We have to report him Missing.

**EMI.** We have to wait 24 hours.

**NORI.** Maybe he's in a thrift shop.

**EMI.** The nearest one is two buses away!

**NORI.** What about mother?

**EMI.** She won't know he's gone. Not for a few days, or maybe a week.

**NORI.** Isn't she more serene now?

**EMI.** She's got a twinkle in her eyes these days. It's the medicine.

**NORI.** I'm out of sick days. And this winter's cold. But she's on Medicaid now. *(Nori gets up and paces)*

**EMI.** Medicaid's the best!

**NORI.** At least Dad won't go broke on Medicaid. Now we can get 24 hour home care!

## FILIAL PIETY

**EMI.** You did a good job. You're a good daughter. You'll fall apart soon though.

**NORI.** Thanks! I can't fall apart! If something happens to me...

**EMI.** How will you handle mother?

**NORI.** We'll tell her this: the aide's for dad, not her. He needs one too now.

**EMI.** You've got your marbles! Hurray! Mother will swallow whatever you say!

**NORI.** Why are you surprised? You never think I've got brains. You or Dakota.

**EMI.** You're weird. You haven't smiled since second grade.

**NORI.** Did you ever think there might be a reason?

**EMI.** *(She sinks down into a chair)* I can't listen now. I'm going bankrupt. I'll get evicted. Before, mom and dad would bail me out. Not now! Landlords are barracudas.

**NORI.** You just found that out? Mother and dad can get SCRIE. Thank goodness! *(The telephone rings. Nori answers it.)* Hello? Dakota? You won't believe what happened! Dad is lost. We don't know. *(She covers phone).* We're not idiots. When are you coming to see Mother? You're always busy! *(She hangs up)*

**EMI.** You know what I noticed about Dakota? She says she's a revolutionary, an egalitarian! But she's so scornful.

**NORI.** Remember that earring business she had in high school? We were her slaves, hooking beads together. She believes in women's lib, but puts down mother all the time.

**EMI.** She says mom was dad's slave.

*(The telephone rings. Nori answers it.)*

**NORI.** Hi? Yes, this is the Sasaki home. Tak Sasaki, yes. *(She glances at Emi)* A stroke of genius! He wore his ID! *(to AMTRAK)* 11:00 a.m.? Tomorrow, Amtrak. You have a Lost and Found? What's your name? I'd like to write a letter to your President! Thanks, Julie. *(She hangs up)* There are good people out there.

**EMI.** I can't believe it! He climbed on a train. Why?

**NORI.** Maybe he wanted to sit down?

**EMI.** I told him, don't move!

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** The important thing is, he's okay.

**EMI.** *(She collapses in a chair)* It's role reversal! They've abdicated!

**NORI.** But not on purpose. Let's get that distinction clear.

**EMI.** I've had weird headaches. My vision's going. Income's down the tubes. The only good thing is. . .*(She looks up)*--I met Corliss.

**NORI.** The philosopher?

**EMI.** He uplifts me.

**NORI.** You need common sense. Not drifting amid the clouds.

**EMI.** Forget making jokes. Just be guided by the higher things in life. Everyday things can drive you nuts! Daddy gets on Amtrak! Mom plays with stuffed toys.

**NORI.** Mundane things swamp me.

**EMI.** I can't go bankrupt! We could put mom and dad in nursing homes.

**NORI.** Old people die quickly there. After a year they give up.

Mother was in rehab at one and I visited her; patients were in line at the elevators, waiting for visitors who never came.

**EMI.** You work so hard. All of this schlep work.

**NORI.** Did you learn that from – What's the professor's name?

**EMI.** Corliss. We should have dinner. *(She walks to the door)* Tell dad I'm sorry. *(Emi exits.)*

**NORI.** Good night. *(Blackout).*

## SCENE 4

*The next day. The same room about lunchtime. Tak pushes a walker through the door followed by Nori.*

**NORI.** You scared us, dad.

**TAK.** Sorry. The train conductor was nice. He saw I didn't belong there. In Maine, they put me up at a hotel. The ride coming back was pleasant. Is losing passengers some kind of crime?

**NORI.** You had no ticket, so you weren't a passenger! You're safe and got a free ride.

## FILIAL PIETY

**TAK.** Just curious. There's something I . . . wanted to talk to you about.  
*(He sits in an armchair)*

**NORI.** *(She sits facing him)* What is it, dad?

**TAK.** On the way back, I worried about taking care of mama. I couldn't sleep! She supported the family, until I made it as an actor. I give her whatever she wants. She thinks it's because she nags me. The train ride made me think of the old days. A train evacuated us from home to the camp. I hated that! But when camp closed, we took a train to Chicago!  
*(FLASHBACK to 1943 in Jerome Concentration Camp during WWII. Tak waits as Fumi runs to him.)*

**FUMI.** Tak!

**TAK.** Fumi! Thanks for visiting me when I was in jail.

**FUMI.** I bribed my way in with cookies.

**TAK.** I thought those cookies were for me.

**FUMI.** When you were held in jail, at the Fort, I missed you so.

**TAK.** My mother cried every night! I had to get out of that jail.

**FUMI.** You were a medic in the Army. You didn't kill people.

**TAK.** No. Didn't kill anyone.

**FUMI.** You were true to yourself.

**TAK.** I asked my wife to divorce me. She said no. We can't marry. Do you still want to come with me?

**FUMI.** She can't stay that stubborn.

**TAK.** You don't know her. I can't offer you much. We can't afford a good apartment.

**FUMI.** If we say good-bye now...my heart will be broken forever. You're the one I want. Cousin Chiyo lent me money. I can work as a maid.

**TAK.** I saved money from the army. There's a school I want to go to in Chicago.

**FUMI.** Why not go together? *(Tak kisses Fumi.)*

*(CROSS FADE TO TAK'S APARTMENT, where he has fallen asleep. Nori sees starts to move his wheelchair. Tak wakes, briefly.)*

**NORI.** Sorry I woke you, dad. I'm moving you to your room.

**TAK.** Thanks, sweetie. Just dreaming about the old days.

**NORI.** Mother being must wear on you. It's tough.

## FILIAL PIETY

**TAK.** She had a hard life and she's old.

**NORI.** Remember she fell? When mother had her ministrokes, I thought you'd pushed her.

**TAK.** No, I didn't push her.

**NORI.** When you were younger, you had a terrible temper.

**TAK.** *(He laughs. US we see photos of evacuation)* I admit it. Did you wonder why? A tidal wave swept us up, like --

Hokusai's Great Wave off Kanagawa.

Two generations' work was lost;

The car, our land, restaurant, hotel, home--

We sold them all in a week, to make the deadline.

Farms, communities, and our lives—demolished!

**NORI.** You were both in shock, always on the edge. It was from the concentration camps.... You scared us. But you've mellowed out. And I do what I can. *(to herself)* I only wish the others... Ah, forget it!

*(She reaches in her pocket for a piece of good news)* I have good news. Key's getting married.

**TAK.** He is?

**NORI.** I got a letter. Do you want to see him?

**TAK.** Doesn't he hate me? He lived with us in Chicago, you know. My wife refused to divorce me, and Fumi kicked him out. His mother picked him up.

**NORI.** I can email him. Maybe he's not vindictive.

**TAK.** So he's getting married! Thank heaven!

**NORI.** Would you mind paying transportation? Air fare's a couple thousand.

**TAK.** I owe it to him. We can pay his airfare. *(He waves his hand to dismiss this)* For years, I wondered if he was okay. I'm an artist. I shouldn't have tried to be a father too. But then, you wouldn't have been born.

**NORI.** I'm glad I was born.

**TAK.** Sometimes happy things come out of misfortune.

**NORI.** I have to apologize. Mother had ministrokes. The doctor saw it on her CT scans. I never told you. Our family keeps things from each

## FILIAL PIETY

other. Then we're haunted with ghosts. *(She hugs him)* So you two never wed. At my age, learning I'm a Love Child!

**TAK.** You were just beginning life. We didn't want to drag you down.

**NORI.** I'd have understood.

**TAK.** Dakota's hated me so long.

**NORI.** She couldn't get it. I understand you because I was an artist too.

**TAK.** You didn't give up music to take care of us, did you? I haven't heard you practice lately.

**NORI.** You're more important. I can do it later. But there is something I want to tell you, now that secrets are coming out.

**TAK.** What's that?

**NORI.** Remember how Dakota used to babysit for me and Emi?

**TAK.** Yes, when I was in school or went on auditions.

**NORI.** Dakota hated me because I was your favorite. She despised me. So she'd leave me alone in the apartment and take Emi out.

**TAK.** What a bastard!

**NORI.** I was lonely. Then one day, a man came to the door.

**TAK.** Who was he?

**NORI.** I don't know. He was tall, with brown hair. He asked if my parents were home; and I said no. So he put his foot in the door and came in. He was a pedophile!

**TAK.** No! Why didn't you tell me?

**NORI.** He said he'd kill my family. And I was a kid and believed him. He did oral sex on me.

**TAK.** Oh, my God! How terrible.

**NORI.** That's why I was crazy later. I've never understood myself, really. I started to figure it out after they talked about boys abused by Catholic priests. I figured I was just like them, only nobody knew.

**TAK.** I'm so sorry. Why didn't I watch out for you better?! I didn't know Dakota would do that.

**NORI.** Nobody knew but Dakota. So I've never liked her. She bullied me. But Emi was her little doll.

**TAK.** I'd give anything to take that away. And I can't! I've always loved you so much. Forgive me, Nori. *(He starts to cry)*

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** You can't do anything about it. I never blamed you. Our family was so messed up. Maybe . . . that's why I always felt . . . defective. Maybe I could get help, somewhere.

**TAK.** Do it! I don't care how much it costs!

**NORI.** You really mean that? It might be \$5,000 a year.

**TAK.** Take it, take it! Take \$50,000 out of my account and put it in yours. I can't believe this. You were my favorite.

**NORI.** They all knew it. And they were jealous. *(She drops her face into her hands)* It ruined my life.

**TAK.** I've been crazy since the camps. After the war, I'd have lost my mind. I had to be an actor. Your mother never understood that kind of thing. Dakota either.

**NORI.** Dakota's fine. She carved out an identity for herself—she's a revolutionary!

**TAK.** She thinks I'm a bum.

**NORI.** You sat on the couch, reciting great poets and practicing diction. We were just toddlers. That was our education! Shakespeare, Eliot. Lorca, Neruda.

**TAK.** I never realized that. *(The Home Health Aide calls from the back.)*

**EVELYN.** Mr. Sasaki!

**TAK.** Whaddya want?

**EVELYN.** You want your bath before I go?

**TAK.** Okay. I gave her a hard time today. *(HE looks back)* Don't forget! I don't care how much it costs! Coming, dear! *(Nori gets up and pushes the wheelchair offstage. Blackout)*

## SCENE 5

*Tak & Fumi's living room September, 1999. Nori works at the desk. She has a calculator and is trying to sort out receipts. She hums a tune.*

**NORI.** Just what I wanted. To become...an accountant. *(She dials a number on the phone)* Hi, Access-a-ride? Could I have a pick up please? 11 am. You recognize my voice? Yes, it's Sasaki. And you're Irma,



## FILIAL PIETY

right? To 60<sup>th</sup> Street. Thank you, Irma. *(She gets up and opens at a bank notice. SHE dials another number.)* Emi? Call me back. Someone tried to access Dad's bank account. I got a notice.

*The bell rings. She answers it. EMI enters.*

**NORI.** I just called you. For the 100<sup>th</sup> time, of course, you're not in town often.

**EMI.** Yes, I have to do book tours on my own now. What is it?

**NORI.** *(She shows her the bank notice)* See this notice? Someone pried into dad's account! I'm the Executrix. Now who was that?

**EMI.** I don't know. Could you bring mom out please? I want to say hi. *(Nori goes offstage and returns with Fumi who looks at Emi.)*

**EMI.** Hi, mom. Sorry I haven't been around. I lost so much money, and tour dates.

**FUMI.** Who are you?

**EMI.** What do you mean? I'm Emi. Your *favorite* daughter.

**FUMI.** I don't know you.

**EMI.** You're joking! *(to Nori)* She's making a joke.

**FUMI.** No, I don't know you. *(to Nori)* Take me back to my room. *(Nori pushes the wheelchair offstage)*

**EMI.** You can't do this, mom! *(She runs after Nori and Fumi; Nori slams the door after they get to the Bedroom)* All my life, I've been your favorite! You licked postage stamps for me. Sent my books to universities. Called book clubs. You've had a bad day. Is that why? It's impossible. How could decades-slip out of your mind-- and now you just can't remember?! Say you know me! Your darling daughter, who you bought special treats for. Way after Nori went to bed, you'd rock me to sleep. Read me stories. You sang lullabies! This must be a dream. It's only been six months! What are six months compared to a lifetime? I counted on you. Mom; I thought--*(She collapses into a chair)* Everyone in the world could shut me out--but not you.

**NORI.** Did you see her look? She smiles when she sees me coming. She looks right in my eyes.

**EMI.** You're so callous! Didn't you see that?

**NORI.** She forgot your name. Lately she forgets a lot.

**EMI.** But she can't forget me!

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** She hasn't seen you.

**EMI.** It hasn't been that long.

**NORI.** It's been over a year. That's ages to her.

**EMI.** You're a dinosaur!

**NORI.** What?!

**EMI.** You're a dinosaur. You can spare the time, and sacrifice EMI. everything--because you haven't accomplished much! I have a career to save. I've won awards! Published 30 books!

**NORI.** I wouldn't have the time either, if I didn't care about mother and dad.

**EMI.** That's your choice!

**NORI.** Yes it is, isn't it?

**EMI.** There's competition, even in kids' books. *(She gets a Kleenex or napkin, sits down again and starts crying)* You love seeing me this way, don't you?!

**NORI.** No. You were her princess. And you were Dakota's princess. She'd take you out and leave me to fend for myself, alone in the apartment.

**EMI.** You still hung up on that?

**NORI.** Yes, I'm really crazy in my own way. Though it never would occur to you, because I swallowed it.

**EMI.** I thought you were just weird.

**NORI.** No, I was crazy! I asked dad for help. He put aside money for me to see a shrink.

**EMI.** Is it that bad?

**NORI.** Yes! So don't be jealous; and don't tell Dakota. I'll tell her myself. But to go back to what you really care about: You've been gone too long, and mother has a disease. Just accept it. She's the one who's sick.

**EMI.** She's had a bad day. I'll come again tomorrow and bring flowers.

**NORI.** Wait. I asked you something.

**EMI.** What?

**NORI.** Daddy's bank account. \$250,000.

**EMI.** Someone stole it? Well, it wasn't me.

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** They tried to steal it. Any idea who? *(Emi backs up against the desk. She gets very nervous and begins to shake.)*

**NORI.** Who'd know the numbers?

**EMI.** Ask yourself.

**NORI.** Am I in a nuthouse?

**EMI.** I don't understand.

**NORI.** I'm juggling ten balls up in the air. One wrong step and they all fall down! You're into book tours. I'm wearing ten hats here.

**EMI.** You talk in riddles.

**NORI.** This is a koan. Life isn't reasonable.

**EMI.** Koans are Buddhist things. *(She looks down and draws all her things together)* Ask Dakota about it.

**NORI.** *(Nori walks toward Emi)* You do know something!

**EMI.** A little bit. You scare me sometimes.

**NORI.** I feel guilty.

**EMI.** Why?

**NORI.** When we were latchkey kids, we fought every day. I was bigger than you, so I used to beat you up. I felt so guilty about that. I'd punch you and you'd kick me. Because I was jealous. Mother loved you so. I thought that I made you a coward. *(She sinks down into a chair and buries her face in her hands)*

**EMI.** I'm no coward! You underestimate me! What is this, Confession?!

**NORI.** When parents get sick, old garbage fills your mind. You're "Little Flower." You act like a two year old. That's what the shrink said.

**EMI.** I'm a shark! A helluva nerve! \$250 an hour for that?! I integrated the publishing world for people of color! "Little Flower?" Yes, I'm a flower. In a dark abyss.

**NORI.** I saw this notice. And Dakota flashed before my eyes. Dad's bank is not her cookie jar!

**EMI.** She might think it belongs to her.

**NORI.** How's that?

**EMI.** Dakota hates Tak.

**NORI.** So what. What about this? *(She waves the bank account slip)*

**EMI.** This was her last chance. Half Tak's money belongs to mom. She wants to take mom. And take her money, too.

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** Kidnapping's a felony! It would really be ironic if Dakota, the revolutionary, did time for a personal crime.

**EMI.** She wants to save mom. Don't tell Dakota I told you. She'll kill me!

**NORI.** You can't make this up.

**EMI.** She has a temper like fire, and she never forgets anything! She'll be here soon for dinner. *(CROSS FADE TO EMI'S APARTMENT. She stands in front of a table, covered with papers. She looks through a pile of papers. She picks up each piece and holds it close to her eyes. Then she picks up a magnifying glass and looks at them. Nori sits at the table.)*

**NORI.** What are you doing?

**EMI.** My God, these are bills! *(She throws them down)* Mother used to help. Now I'll have to hire a secretary. I couldn't see mom, but how could she forget me, her favorite?!

**NORI.** She knows who I am.

**EMI.** I am not jealous!

**NORI.** She looked in my eyes. Mother looked and smiled. For the first time. What time is dinner?

**EMI.** Oh, I've got to clean! *(She looks around and sees the night table. She brings a pile of papers and puts it on the night table.)* That's neat enough.

**NORI.** Sort of.

**EMI.** How's my hair?

**NORI.** You've got enough. Why are you using a magnifying glass? When are you going to see an eye doctor?

**EMI.** It's not important. My Eye doctor's the best! He got the Eye Doctor of the Year Award in 1995! *(There is a knock at the door. CORLISS walks in. HE is 5'7," chubby, in his 40's, with a moustache, beard and glasses. HE carries a valise.)*

**CORLISS.** Emi! *(They kiss.)*

**EMI.** My sister Nori.

**CORLISS.** How nice to meet you!

**NORI.** How are you today?

## FILIAL PIETY

**CORLISS.** Emi's my soul mate, my anchor. *(He edges closer to Emi)*  
Did you know we're going to Africa?

**NORI.** No.

**CORLISS.** Elephants are an endangered species.

**NORI.** My parents are endangered too.

**EMI.** Making books is my living.

**NORI.** But how will you get to Africa?

**EMI.** I got a book advance and a travel grant.

**NORI.** So your future's not as bleak as you said.

**EMI.** I've got name recognition, national awards. For that they throw you a few bucks.

**NORI.** I know.

**CORLISS.** Why don't we live together? It's so much cheaper.

**NORI.** You're already going to Africa.

**CORLISS.** I've never been.

**NORI.** Me neither.

**EMI.** Corliss, the table?

**CORLISS.** Of course, Schmoopie. *(He scurries to set the table)*

**EMI.** Thanks, honey.

**CORLISS.** What are we having for dinner tonight?

**NORI.** Schmoopie?

**CORLISS.** That's my love name for her.

**EMI.** Let's go to the store. We'll pick something out!

**CORLISS.** Anything you choose will be wonderful. *(There's a knock at the door. DAKOTA enters. In her hand She carries a bouquet of lilies.)*

**CORLISS.** Dakota!

**DAKOTA.** I didn't mean to break anything up.

**NORI.** It's been a long time.

**DAKOTA.** Likewise.

**NORI.** Can I talk to you?

**EMI.** Corliss, let's go down.

**CORLISS.** Okay, Schmoopie. *(They exit.)*

**DAKOTA.** What's going on?

**NORI.** See this bank notice? Someone tried to access dad's bank account. *(She gets up and shows Dakota the email from the bank)*

## FILIAL PIETY

**DAKOTA.** Why are you asking me about that?

**NORI.** I asked Emi.

**DAKOTA.** She can never keep her mouth shut! Law and justice . . . are not always the same.

**NORI.** What does that mean? You wanted some cash?

**DAKOTA.** Mother deserves half of Tak's estate. She can finally get away from him now!

**NORI.** Mother and dad have been together over 50 years!

**DAKOTA.** Let's go to their house. I want to talk to the old coot, if he's awake!

**NORI.** He's not an old coot!

**DAKOTA.** He is.

**NORI.** He paid for your operation! That was \$25,000!

**DAKOTA.** I did a lot of slave labor for them.

**NORI.** Don't start ranting and raving. Talk to him like a human being.

**DAKOTA.** I won't curse. Let's go. *(She gets up)* Why didn't she ever leave him? I can't understand it.

**NORI.** Half of the Japanese American women in camp fell apart. They got PTSD. Your dad abandoned mother and lived with a white woman in the demilitarized zone.

**DAKOTA.** I never even got to talk to my father. Let's go.

*(CROSS FADE TO TAK and FUMI's LIVING ROOM. Dakota sits at the table. Nori stands).*

**DAKOTA.** You take after mama. Always thinking about the other.

**NORI.** Seniors die in nursing homes. After a year, mother and dad would die there.

**DAKOTA.** You're such a "goody-two-shoes!"

**NORI.** I'm the accountant, assistant home health aide. And I do their trust funds.

**DAKOTA.** You love being a martyr!

**NORI.** Did she throw you out when you were a kid?

**DAKOTA.** Remember the fistfight Tak and me had when I was 18?! I left and survived. I worked nights, and went to school days.

**NORI.** I remember that. I'm sorry.

**DAKOTA.** You don't have to feel sorry for me.

## FILIAL PIETY

**NORI.** I never knew you were so unhappy.

**DAKOTA.** That was a madhouse. You were his little angel, so maybe you don't remember it that way. Let me talk to him.

**NORI.** Make it fast. The home health aide's going home soon. (*SHE goes to the back room and returns with Tak in a wheelchair*)

**DAKOTA.** Hello, Tak.

**TAK.** Dakota.

**DAKOTA.** I wanted to talk to you about something.

**TAK.** Yeah?

**DAKOTA.** I've never been alone with mama.

**TAK.** No, you haven't.

**DAKOTA.** Mama needs a lot of care. I was thinking, she'd love California.

**TAK.** But I live in New York.

**DAKOTA.** The weather's nice. Mama could dress lighter outside. I'd drive her to doctor appointments. I want to live with mama in her last days. She's free for the first time in her life.

**TAK.** What if she doesn't want to?

**DAKOTA.** Can I take mama to California?

**TAK.** She's my wife!

**DAKOTA.** Everybody wants a change now and then. If she doesn't like it, she can come back. You never did anything for me. No. Remember you beat the hell out of me?

**TAK.** You were a snarky teenager who hated me for not having a day job. And for taking your father's place.

**DAKOTA.** You never wanted to be my friend! You couldn't stand the obligation.

**TAK.** I wasn't a mule!

**DAKOTA.** No, mama was the mule!

**TAK.** Success doesn't fall in your hands. It takes a long time to make it.

**DAKOTA.** You pretended to be my parent.

**TAK.** But there's no excuse for that fistfight. That was wrong. I'm sorry. I was an adult and I lost control.

**DAKOTA.** I'm surprised you can admit to your crime.

## FILIAL PIETY

**TAK.** But I see you're still full of piss and vinegar. I didn't beat that out of you.

**DAKOTA.** What about mama? I missed mama. I'd like to make up for those lost years. I know we can be happy together. I'll bring her back to visit you!

**Overlap.**

**TAK.** She can go for a little while-to visit with you.

**DAKOTA.** Isn't she old enough to decide?

**TAK.** Ask her. I'm not keeping her in chains.

**DAKOTA.** I'll need money to take care of her.

**TAK.** How much?

**DAKOTA.** Well, half of your money.

**TAK.** I don't care about money. Mama gets what she wants. She kept food on the table working as a maid or secretary. Paid the rent until I made it. I'd share my last penny with her!

**NORI.** What are you saying? What are you agreeing to?.

**DAKOTA.** Leave him alone. He's old enough to make up his own mind.

**NORI.** He's a pushover. He gave Emi a quarter million dollars. And paid your rent at Harvard.

**DAKOTA.** Mama gave me the money.

**NORI.** Just because you're a big shot, the head of this, Director of that, you think you can call the shots here. We haven't even seen you in over a year.

**DAKOTA.** Tak can make up his own mind!

**NORI.** Money is endless to him.

**DAKOTA.** All right, I'll be fair. Bring mama out here. *(Nori leaves the room and re-enters with Fumi in wheelchair.)*

**DAKOTA.** Hi, mama. Here's some flowers. Lilies. I remembered they were your favorites.

**FUMI.** Who are you?

**DAKOTA.** What do you mean, who am I? I'm Dakota.

**FUMI.** I don't know you.

**NORI.** Emi went away. She didn't know her, either.

**DAKOTA.** Mama! Have they put you on drugs?

**NORI.** It's the lowest dose.



## FILIAL PIETY

**DAKOTA.** She's doped up. You knew I was coming! You set me up! She'll say anything you want!

**NORI.** You neglected her and she can't remember you.

**DAKOTA.** You've made your own mother a drug addict!

**NORI.** You know what she did? Attacked the aides with a knife!

**DAKOTA.** You're the lowest scum of the earth!

**NORI.** Late stage Alzheimer's. She's better off here than jail. *(She waves the bank statement).* I won't report you.

**DAKOTA.** It's too late, it's too late. *(She starts to cry)* Good bye, mama! *(She exits. Blackout).*

## SCENE 6

*Later the same night, in a grocery store with boxes of vegetables. Emi and Corliss peruse a display.*

**CORLISS.** Broccoli rabe!

**EMI.** One of my favorites!

**CORLISS.** Not many women love broccoli rabe.

**EMI.** There's a million and a half Italian women in New York.

**CORLISS.** Who else would know that? What about my question the other night?

**EMI.** What was that?

**CORLISS.** Why don't we move in together? *(He picks up a spaghetti squash)* How's spaghetti squash?

**EMI.** That takes an hour. Where's your contribution by the way?

**CORLISS.** *(He reaches in his pants and pulls out \$5).* There you go. I'd always chip in my share, don't worry.

**EMI.** Where would we live?

**CORLISS.** I had to know how you felt. If I was just a mad affair to you, or you saw us inextricably entwined.

**EMI.** I got the travel grant to Africa so we could both go. If you were just an affair, I'd distance myself. On the other hand, my landlord wants

## FILIAL PIETY

to evict me. I feel wobbly, it's hard to tell how I'm wending. Even my eyesight's fading.

**CORLISS.** You're a great artist! You need your eyesight.

**EMI.** Renoir was a great artist.

**CORLISS.** I prefer Toulouse Lautrec.

**EMI.** Well--we don't have to agree on everything, do we, Corliss?

**CORLISS.** That would be no fun. I was hoping to meet a unique woman. Someone who was simpatico to revolution. Whatever happens to us, we'll face it together.

**EMI.** Even eviction? Aren't you kind of broke? We're two broke people!

**CORLISS.** Material conditions can't rule us.

**EMI.** I want to go with you to Africa. To do the elephant book. That's all I can think of now. Sometimes you remind me of dad.

**CORLISS.** What does your father have to do with us?

**EMI.** "Us against the world, I don't care about material things." That's what he told my mother long ago. Philosophizing. He almost got his Ph.D. There were a lot of Jewish professors at the New School. After World War II they hated Japanese and they failed him. Even though he was the best student there, they wouldn't pass him.

**CORLISS.** Nobody graduated the New School. In those days they just went there for fun.

**EMI.** You've got a blind spot.

**CORLISS.** I hate prejudice against anyone. FDR's reign was tainted by the camps! And I don't care what your dad told your mom!

**EMI.** Only stupid people repeat mistakes. That's why I'm fearful.

**CORLISS.** Then you're saying I'm prejudiced!

**EMI.** Doesn't everybody have a blind spot?

**CORLISS.** I can't compete with that man in the back!

**EMI.** Watch your tone!

**CORLISS.** I insist I'm an individual!

**EMI.** Yes. But you're a broke individual!

**CORLISS.** I have money, I just don't have enough.

**EMI.** Your situation sounds like mine. Why should I embrace my clone?

## FILIAL PIETY

**CORLISS.** We'd both gain by moving in together. Even the dumbest book on the shelf knows—

**EMI.** Are you saying that I'm the dumbest book?

**CORLISS.** My IQ's in the Mensa range, Schmoopie. Could I love the dumbest book on the shelf?

**EMI.** *(She grabs him).* You've never said you were in love with me!

**CORLISS.** I admit it, I am. I follow you around; I'm sleepless at night when we're apart. I get off at the wrong subway stops! Even at school, where I've taught for six years!

**EMI.** I've been waiting for this all my life!

**CORLISS.** How's that possible?

**EMI.** When I was little people adored me. They said I was cute. Then later I turned out beautiful art. But I was lonely. My first husband yelled, and even hit me! I was too young then.

**CORLISS.** Where is he? I'll kill him!

**EMI.** He's dead.

**CORLISS.** Good.

**EMI.** He got my kids in a custody fight. Because he was rich! And they suffered; and I suffered too.

**CORLISS.** You know money isn't everything!

**EMI.** The system adores Mammon, not children! I feel bad I'm going to Africa. I want to help Nori with mom and dad. My folks always rescued me in a pinch. Now it's my turn to help them. But I'm on the edge and almost bankrupt. How can I make decisions about you now?

**CORLISS** *(He hugs her)* I always learn something new about you.

**EMI.** Both of us are still broke.

**CORLISS.** Don't you see that we belong together?

**EMI.** Let's go to Africa and see.

**CORLISS.** We're lucky to find each other. Most people never find a soul mate. We've already been through failed marriages. We could make this work! And work is the only thing of value.

**EMI.** You're hysterical, you realize that? *(They kiss. Blackout)*

FILIAL PIETY

**SCENE 7**

*January, 2001. DR. WILLIAMSON'S office. Nori is there with Fumi.*

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** How's your mother?

**NORI.** She's much calmer. She doesn't get violent. I miss her old self: Cantankerous, salty. The aide is staying. But things have ruptured between my sister and me.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Was that the sister who came with you the first time?

**NORI.** Another sister. She tried to take mother, steal my dad's money.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Was it just a fantasy?

**NORI.** It was a fantasy on her part. Mother didn't recognize her, she'd been away so long.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Where did she intend to take her, do you know?

**NORI.** California.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Hmm. A long-standing frustration of hers?

**NORI.** How did you guess it was long standing?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** I hear about everybody's business. How is 'Little Flower' doing?

**NORI.** Emi?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Yes. She said she might drop off extras for my children's book shelf.

**NORI.** Oh, you'll wait a long time for that. Her book sales fell off. She came by after three months and mother didn't know her.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** She needs help.

**NORI.** She's going away to Africa with her beau. I feel abandoned.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** By one less albatross around your neck? She's found a substitute for her mother. Try to help her.

**NORI.** After doing books. Doctor's appointments. Giving vitamins. Doing the banking! Are you trying to kill me?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** If you want therapy, I'll be glad to recommend –

**NORI.** One of your friends? I've got so many appointments now, between the two of them.

## FILIAL PIETY

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** This lady is my primary concern. Your mother's calmed down. Keep in touch. *(to Fumi)* Good-bye. *(Fumi looks vacantly away)*

**NORI.** At least caretaking isn't rocket science.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** By helping mother, I help all of you. It's about family.

**NORI.** Mother's barely responsive now.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** It's to be expected, unfortunately.

**NORI.** Are you saying we should prepare for the worst?

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** Check her symptoms with her medical doctor. There are certain signs.

**NORI.** *(She gives him cash)* Here's your fee.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** *(He gives her the medical form)* I'm glad to hear all the good news. When you get old, you'll take comfort in knowing you did your part.

**NORI.** Part?! I'm doing all of it.

**DR. WILLIAMSON.** *(He touches the top of Fumi's head)* Thank you. *(Blackout)*

## SCENE 8

*August, 2001. Fumi and Tak's living room. Nori stands holding the phone, next to the hospital bed where Fumi lies, dead. Background music under: Buddhist drones. She bends her head and wipes tears from her eyes.*

**NORI.** Hello? Emi? You've got to come right away. Mother's dead. I want you to get dad from Rehab and bring him here, so he can see her for the last time. It's your last chance to see her. They're going to take her away! You're driving Herman to the vet? He swallowed a tennis ball?! Your mother's more important! Get rid of the dog and come, immediately! *(Nori hangs up and stands next to Fumi)* This is ridiculous. *(Nori dials another number)* Hello, medical examiner? Listen, a Medical Examiner came here with five students. To use my

## FILIAL PIETY

mother as a laboratory specimen! A corpse for teaching purposes?! Her name was . . . Jennings. I threw them out! When will the police be here? Okay. *(She sits on a chair)* Mother, when the aide called me this morning, I was terrified, because I felt time was up. I tried CPR; I was afraid to hurt you. I didn't know it might save your life one day. The EMS people were so incompetent. Then the Medical Examiner came. Even on the last day, there had to be an insult. The only consolation was, your face. You had a divine aura of happiness. I had to let you go. I never had your courage. If I was abandoned by my husband. In a concentration camp with a kid; had to work as a maid in Chicago, holding a family together? I'd have cracked up. Your inner fault lines showed up at home. You never got over the camp Even after daddy made his nut, doing commercials and in Broadway shows. Those were times when you flaunted your success—for it was You carried us through the storm. You wanted us to stick together, Instead we're strewn apart like scattered leaves. Cast far from the tree. *(Nori wipes her eyes, gets up and picks up the phone.)* Can I speak to Tak Sasaki? *(Blackout)*

### END OF ACT I

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