

OCEAN DEBRIS

A one-act drama by
Cassandra Hsiao

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

EMIKO MATSU, a girl of Japanese descent.

TOMI AOKI, a boy of Japanese descent.

SETTING

2017, six years after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. A dive shop in Japan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Ocean Debris was originally produced in the Blank Theatre Young Playwrights Festival in Los Angeles, CA. It was mentored by Jennie Webb and directed by Angela Oh. The cast was as follows:

EMIKO MANSU.....Mallory Low
TOMI AOKI.....Mark Daugherty

"I have no choice but to keep looking for her. I feel closest to her in the ocean." - *New York Times*, 8/7/16

(A dive shop: where divers would put on their equipment and wait for further instruction. A family-run-business made for tourists. The shop's seen better days. A desk with tourist pamphlets, maps, pictures of coral reefs. Perhaps a poster of divers. Perhaps a couple hanging wetsuits, or flippers, or goggles, or diver's mask. There is a pile of papers – simulations of currents, detailed marks on maps – on the corner of the desk. EMIKO is on the bench/chair, putting on her wetsuit and adjusting her equipment. TOMI, in swimwear, enters just outside Emiko's line of vision. He hesitantly rings a bell on the table. A beat. Then he rings it again incessantly. Emiko turns around, a Japanese greeting on her lips until she realizes who it is. A moment of shock, and then she recovers.)

EMIKO: *Irasshaima* – you're going to be late for school.

TOMI: Woah. Hey. Is this how you talk to customers?

EMIKO: No, just five-year-olds who think ringing a bell ten million times is how you politely grab someone's attention.

TOMI: Sorry.

EMIKO: So you're just gonna skip school today? For a visit to the dive shop?

TOMI: I've heard that you don't even go to school.

EMIKO: I'm homeschooled.

TOMI: Your mom's too busy diving to teach you.

EMIKO: I teach myself.

TOMI: So the rumors are true.

EMIKO: *(Turns to face Tomi, customer service voice:)* I don't believe we've met. I'm –

TOMI: Emi Matsu, right?

EMIKO: Emiko Matsu.

TOMI: Do you really not know who I am?

EMIKO: Should I?

TOMI: *(Beat.)* Aren't you supposed to offer assistance? This customer service sucks.

EMIKO: *(Strained:)* How can I help you?

TOMI: *(A breath:)* Teach me how to dive.

EMIKO: We're not open for business.

TOMI: Yes, you are.

(Pointing at the "open" sign hanging on the door; then, looking around.)

And business is looking a lil slow.

EMIKO: And that is exactly why we're closing up shop. Anyways, customers can't just walk in—

TOMI: Oh look, I just did!

EMIKO: You didn't register for a slot online.

TOMI: I did. 58 days in advance, may I add.

(Emiko walks over to check her computer. She pushes the maps behind the computer, where Tomi can't see.)

EMIKO: Oh yes, I remember now—you're the one who put Shakira as your emergency contact.

TOMI: I filled out the form. I'm ready to go.

EMIKO: Your form is a joke. Not to mention you're a minor and you can't dive without adult supervision. The law won't allow it, my mom won't allow it, and neither will Jiro—

TOMI: You *do* know who I am!

EMIKO: *(Catching herself after her slipup:)*—so the answer is no.

TOMI: You know how to dive. I want to learn how to dive. I don't see what the problem is here.

EMIKO: Besides the fact that it's *illegal*, you could *die*, and most importantly, we're *closed*, I don't see a problem either.

(On "*we're closed*," she flips the sign on the door.)

TOMI: Great. I'll pay for all of it and more to cover the costs and—

EMIKO: Are you listening to me? It's illegal!

TOMI: Not going to school every day is illegal—

EMIKO: —says the person committing truancy. And for the last time, I'm homeschooled.

TOMI: If you know my father, then you know why I'm here, and why—

EMIKO: Listen. You, diving, not going to happen.

TOMI: Then you don't really know me—

EMIKO: Your name is Tomi Aoki. Your father is Jiro Aoki. Your father dives with my mother in the day and is a factory worker by night. Every day he shows up here at 5 a.m. with his wetsuit on, ready to go. He hardly gets any sleep, spending all his waking hours studying for the scuba test to be authorized to remove ocean debris.

TOMI: Big deal, so you know who my father is—

EMIKO: You, Tomi Aoki, go to Fujiyoshi Secondary School. Your favorite color is orange, your lucky number is seven, and you love Hot Cheetos.

(*Beat.*)

Tell me where I went wrong.

TOMI: ...How did you know—

EMIKO: Your father...

TOMI: ...talks about me like I'm an open Facebook profile?

EMIKO: No.

(Beat.)

Mostly it's the little things he does. How he wears orange on the seventh of every month. How he always gets you Hot Cheetos from our vending machine before he leaves.

TOMI: ... I don't even like Hot Cheetos anymore.

EMIKO: But you still eat them, right?

TOMI: Of course.

(Beat.)

So you know why I'm here.

EMIKO: I know why your *father* is here every morning.

TOMI: He told you?

EMIKO: Like you said, he hardly speaks. But after consistently coming to our shop nearly every day for the last six years, I think I've got him figured out.

(Beat.)

You don't challenge the ocean unless you have a good reason to.

TOMI: A good enough reason to face the sea.

EMIKO: To find someone you lost.

(Beat.)

We admire your father, you know. Looking for his wife's body even six years after the tsunami —

TOMI: Yeah, that's what everyone says.

EMIKO: No, I really mean it.

TOMI: I know you mean it. That's the worst part. When news of the old man diving every single day started getting around, people said, "That's admirable! What an inspiration! Old Jiro desperately looking for his wife—now that's *true love*." I couldn't stand it when people came up to me to praise my father, cause at first, you know, he's just doing the right thing. Everyone was doing the right thing. But then he kept doing the right thing for years and years and years. So I guess they were right. Spending that much time searching for someone who's very much dead—he really, really loved her.

(*A sobering beat.*)

I love my mom too. I have to start because that's the right thing to do. And I won't give up because that's what love is.

EMIKO: (*Beat.*) Six years.

TOMI: What?

EMIKO: You waited six years to do the right thing?

TOMI: My dad would never let me—

EMIKO: So you let your dad face the sea every day, never once thinking to yourself, hmm, maybe I should help out?

TOMI: You can't expect a ten-year-old to jump into the waves to find a body!

EMIKO: I started diving when I was nine!

TOMI: (*Enthusiasm, reverence overflowing:*) Yeah, but you're Ama! The legendary women divers of Japan, long ago pearl hunters... You guys are like mythical sea women!

EMIKO: I am in *training* to be an Ama.

TOMI: A technicality. They call you guys the last mermaids of Japan.

EMIKO: Mermaids?

TOMI: Mermaids who are going *extinct* because of people like you. You know how to dive but most of the people you teach here are tourists! Westerners! That's where the money is, I know, but you're not teaching enough Japanese the tradition.

EMIKO: What's your point?

TOMI: I will further the line of the Ama! I volunteer myself to be a mermaid – man. Teach me how to dive!

(He throws himself on the ground. Emiko nudges him.)

EMIKO: You can't be Ama.

TOMI: Now that sounds a little sexist to me.

EMIKO: Look, I'm going to close up shop now and you'd –

TOMI: Emi –

EMIKO: Emiko.

TOMI: Look Emi – ko, you're qualified. You're the only one who can teach me. You know Dad won't let me and of course your mom won't let me and –

EMIKO: For a good reason. You don't know what it's like to outswim danger.

TOMI: But you're Ama! You have what it takes, you can teach me and –

EMIKO: Are you stupid?

TOMI: Aren't you an expert?

EMIKO: *No!*

TOMI: You've been diving for seven years –

EMIKO: Don't call me an expert, I'm not an expert –

TOMI: You literally dive every day –

EMIKO: Tomi, I don't dive with amateurs! That'd be like diving alone!

(She realizes she's said too much, but quickly recovers.)

TOMI: Don't you understand how important —

EMIKO: You have no idea what it's like —

TOMI: Like. What?

EMIKO: You have no idea. The danger of the sea. Currents strong enough to rip your limbs. Rocks to break your bones. Animal stings. Equipment failure. Water temperature fluctuations. Blood pressure. Lung popping. Drowning. Should I go on?

(With every listed danger, Tomi looks sicker.)

TOMI: But...you can teach me, and if anything happens you can save me —

EMIKO: I can't save anyone for shit, Tomi! [I can't save you no matter how hard I try, Tomi!]

(Beat.)

The Ama have a rule. Don't dive alone, because you are the other person's fail-safe. If their equipment breaks, you share yours. If their bones break, you tow them to the surface. I can't—I just can't dive with someone like you with zero experience because when it comes down to it, your lives are in each other's hands and I can't dive like this because I swear to God I'll lose it. Snap out of your mermaid fantasy.

TOMI: "Mermaid-man" fantasy.

(Emiko tosses Tomi the keys and pauses at the desk.)

EMIKO: You can wait for your father here. Or if you decide to leave early, lock up and hide the keys under the mat.

(She puts two lunchboxes in her bag and heads towards the maps on the desk. Tomi intercepts her.)

TOMI: So then who's the expert you're diving with today, huh?

EMIKO: None of your business.

(Tomi takes one lunch box from Emi, reads the name.)

Hey!

TOMI: Who's Megumi?

EMIKO: Give it back.

TOMI: Who's Megumi?

EMIKO: Like you said, an expert.

TOMI: *(Reading:)* Megumi Matsu... You have a sister?

EMIKO: Give me my lunch back.

(She reaches for the lunch. He holds it out of her reach.)

TOMI: Must be nice to have a sister.

EMIKO: Yeah, it was.

TOMI: Who makes your lunches? You?

(He looks inside.)

Man, this is really poor plating. You've got to work on your sushi-rolling skills.

EMIKO: My MOM wraps them, you rude piece of—

TOMI: So both of you continue the tradition of mermaids—

EMIKO: It was— we were never meant to—

TOMI: And since there are TWO experts, I don't see why I can't come along—

EMIKO: I'm not an expert!

(Tomi takes out a piece of sushi. Emiko freaks.)

Put that back — that's not for you —

TOMI: I just think it must be fun to dive with her —

EMIKO: For her. I dive for her, okay?

(Beat. Tomi figures it out.)

TOMI: What?

(Beat.)

What do you mean you dive for — Oh shit. [Oh man.]

(Beat.)

I really screwed up, didn't I?

EMIKO: Yeah.

TOMI: *(After a beat; jaded, a barely subdued anger:)* Seems like everyone's lost someone in this town, huh?

EMIKO: *(Cutting:)* No shit [duh], Sherlock.

(Beat.)

Why do you think my mom dives with your dad every day?

TOMI: I thought my dad pays —

EMIKO: Yeah, he does. But like I said, you need a good reason to face the ocean every day. Money alone isn't good enough.

TOMI: How did Megumi...?

EMIKO: What do you think, genius?

(Beat.)

In the tsunami, like everyone else.

(Beat.)

Except unlike everyone else, she was...with me.

TOMI: What happened?

EMIKO: Forget it.

(A beat.)

TOMI: Look, my therapist says you gotta let it out otherwise you'll explode like New York in *Independence Day*. Also, the more you say "forget it," the more we'll both remember it. It's kind of like the pink elephant thing.

EMIKO: Great, now I'm thinking of a —

TOMI: Don't change the subject on me. *(Beat, softening:)* It hurts, I know. But you have to say something.

EMIKO: ...They say...they say water's the best place to be in a tsunami. I learned that only applies if you're in deep open water. So when the tsunami hit, the ocean floor engulfed us in a big cloud of dust. It's like you're in an endless washing machine with coral cutting your skin and knocking your equipment around. I spun and spun and spun until I grabbed onto the boat line. And Megumi—I couldn't see her but I felt her grab my hand and I held on tight... The next moment, she was gone.

TOMI: ...It's not —

EMIKO: That's such a cliché. It's not your fault, Emiko, it's not your fault. But no matter how many times you tell yourself that, the truth is, you let go. She slipped. Right through your hands.

TOMI: You're right. It is your fault.

EMIKO: Wow. You should be a therapist.

TOMI: Hey, my therapist always says that!

(Beat.)

You know, it's incredible.

EMIKO: What?

TOMI: You. Incredible. Getting back into the water after all of that.

EMIKO: I didn't. For the longest time, I didn't.

(Beat.)

But it's in my blood. The Ama. It took me a while but I got back in.

TOMI: *(Beat.)*

So then... who's the lunch for?

EMIKO: *(Taking back Meg's lunch box from Tomi:)* This...this was her favorite. Megumi loved pork cutlet and sushi.

TOMI: You drop it off in the ocean?

EMIKO: It's...it's just something my mom started to do once every month after the tsunami. Sometimes I'll do it for her. Walk to the pier and set it afloat.

(Tomi opens his mouth, about to say something.)

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