

# An American Dream

*An opera in one act*

*Libretto by*

**Jessica Murphy Moo**

*Music by*

**Jack Perla**

## **Characters**

**Jim Crowley**, in his mid-40s, an Irish-American, Christian, who served in the US army during World War I. He is retired from service.

**Eva Crowley**, Jim's wife, mid-30s. Eva is a Jewish German immigrant.

**Setsuko Kobayashi**, Japanese American, 15

**Papa, Makoto Kobayashi**, Setsuko's father, an American citizen

**Mama, Hiroko Kobayashi**, Setsuko's mother, originally from Japan

**2 FBI Agents**, male actors

**America, the 1940s**

***Winter 1942***

A farmhouse on a Puget Sound island. American veteran Jim Crowley and Eva, his new wife, have come to buy a home. A German Jew, Eva desperately wants her parents to leave Germany, where their lives are in danger. She hopes her family will find peace and sanctuary in this place so far from the war. Meanwhile, inside the home, a Japanese American family, the Kobayashis, has heard that the FBI has been searching homes and taking away people of Japanese descent. The family burns their precious Japanese belongings and photographs of their family members in the hopes of avoiding arrest.

Eva waits outside as Jim, knowing he has the upper hand, tries to get the father, Makoto Kobayashi, to sell the land for a fraction of what it is worth. The FBI arrives at the home and tells Makoto he is under arrest; the FBI found some old dynamite in the shed out back, and they say this contraband makes him a threat. Makoto has no choice but to sell the land to Jim. As the FBI agents take Makoto away, he promises to return for his teenage daughter, Setsuko.

### ***Spring 1942***

Setsuko and her mother, Hiroko, have packed up the house. Setsuko holds her suitcase, ready to leave, when a postman delivers a letter. Setsuko sees that it is from Germany, for a woman named Eva. Angry that she is being forced to leave her home, the girl steals the letter.

### ***A few weeks later***

Jim and Eva move into their new home; they designate a room for Eva's parents. Jim tries to keep Eva's hopes up. Eva notices that small items have been left behind in the home. When she finds a beautiful Hinamatsuri doll hidden beneath a floorboard, Eva asks Jim about the previous owners. Jim tells her that they were "Japs," sent to the "camps." He tells her to throw away the doll, that it doesn't belong in a room for her parents. Eva defies Jim's wishes and hides the doll, promising to find its owner and return it at war's end.

### ***May 1945***

Jim and Eva hear an announcement on the radio of Germany's surrender. Eva writes to Setsuko, telling Setsuko she has something that belongs to her.

### ***Later that month***

While still incarcerated, Setsuko receives the letter. When her mother, who is gravely ill, inquires about the letter, Setsuko lies and explains that the letter is from her father, telling them to keep hope because the war is nearly done.

### ***August 1945***

When Eva reads Setsuko's response, Jim tells Eva that Setsuko is not allowed in their home. President Truman announces the dropping of the atomic bomb.

### ***September 1945***

There is a knock on the door. It is Setsuko, who confronts Jim, reminding him that he coerced her family to sell their home for next to nothing. Eva asks Jim if this is true.

Jim tries to explain his actions to Eva. She leaves the room to retrieve the doll she has promised to return to Setsuko. While she is gone, Jim confronts Setsuko, and Setsuko admits to another reason for coming. She is here to return Eva's letter. Eva returns to the room, and Setsuko gives her the letter. From the stolen letter, Eva learns of her parents' fate, and she collapses. Setsuko must finish reading the letter for her. Jim tries to comfort Eva as Setsuko faces her future.

## SCENE 1

*(A scrim reads March 1942. EXTERIOR of Puget Sound farmhouse. Eva and Jim approach the home.)*

### **Jim**

Our new home,

*(Jim gestures toward the house.)*

*(to himself)*

if all goes well,

if I can convince them to sell.

*(to Eva)*

Eva! Look!

If all goes well, this will soon be our new home.

### **Eva**

This beautiful place almost makes  
the war a distant dream.

### **Jim**

Just wait, it won't be long!

### **Eva**

Nature thrives in the open air,  
betraying my hidden fears.

I'll write to Germany at once.

Come, Mutti, I'll say.

Come, Papa,

come soon!

We've found you a home,

a farmhouse

on an island,

far from war,

where strawberries grow,

where the shores do not bleed,

and mountains shelter the setting sun,

and Jews can live here, work here,

without fear.  
Come, Mutti, I'll say!  
Come, Papa,  
come soon.  
If this beauty exists,  
then they must too!

**Jim** (*Jim comforts Eva.*)

Eva, stay here. Walk the land.  
Stay here, I won't be very long.

**Eva**

Tell me, why would anyone want to leave this beautiful place?

*(It's clear she still doesn't want to stay outside without him. He tries to reassure her.)*

**Jim**

People may have their reasons. But that's not any concern of ours.  
I made a promise to your parents.  
They had their doubts—  
an American, (*gestures to himself*)  
a Christian, too. (*Eva nods.*)  
It was hard for them,  
but they wanted you safe.  
We'll bring them here.  
I'm a man of my word.  
Eva, wait here.  
I won't be very long.

*(Lights off on exterior of house, up on INTERIOR. Setsuko's family sits around the home's wood fire stove. Setsuko stokes the fire and picks up her Hinamatsuri doll.)*

**Mama** (*to Setsuko*)

Setsuko, is the fire ready?  
It's time.  
It's time.

*(Setsuko nods to her mother.)*

Anything that ties us to Japan must go.  
The FBI will be here soon.  
They've already searched the Yamada's house,  
pouring out sacks of rice and flour.

**Setsuko**

Looking for what?

**Papa**

Any excuse to call us traitors,  
any excuse to lock us up.

*(Setsuko goes to him, holds his hand. Papa picks up a record.)*

This one here is my favorite.

Sakura, Sakura

Miwatasu kagiri

Miwatasu kagiri.

*(He hands it to Mama, who breaks it into small pieces. Together they slip them into the stove. One piece falls to the ground. Mama then takes a photograph from a frame.)*

**Mama**

My mother and father,  
gone so many years.

I'll burn their image here.

*(She touches her heart.)*

Gomen nasai ne. [Forgive me for what I'm doing.]

*(Setsuko, who has begun to cry, tries to stop her mother. Mama gestures toward Setsuko's doll.)*

**Mama**

Setsuko, your doll is next.

**Setsuko**

No.