

An American Piano

Written by

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. KOSHIDA FAMILY GARDEN - DAY

1

SUPER: "19 February 1945"

Sunlight dapples through trees. YOUKO, a young Japanese girl, is lying on her back, looking at the sky through the branches, trying to discern shapes in the clouds. Wind gently tugs at her hair.

YOUKO

Rabbit!

(scanning the sky)

Crane!

The low drone of a B-29 high altitude bomber begins to percolate through the clouds.

YOUKO (cont'd)

Dragon!

The clouds reveal nothing as the drone intensifies. Youko eyes the heavens, curious.

The low drone is joined by the wail of an air raid siren.

MRS KOSHIDA, Youko's mother, hearing the siren, looks out of the living room window to see Youko playing in the garden.

MRS KOSHIDA

Youko! Come inside, quickly!

In the far distance, the drone becomes punctuated by the muffled thump of bombs detonating.

Youko runs towards the house, reacting to the fear in her mother's voice.

2 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

2

Mrs Koshida takes Youko by the hand and leads her to a GRAND PIANO. She motions to Youko to get underneath it, then follows. A radio is broadcasting warnings to stay indoors and extolling the virtues of the brave Imperial Japanese Army.

MRS KOSHIDA

We need to stay here until it's safe.

(CONTINUED)

YOUKO

What's happening mama?

MRS KOSHIDA

It's the war. The Americans are bombing us.

YOUKO

Why?

Mrs Koshida gently strokes Youko's hair and stares into the distance. Eventually she speaks.

MRS KOSHIDA

(whispering)

Shhhh. You're safe in my arms.

Youko doesn't reply. They both huddle under the piano as bombs explode in the distance.

3 LATER

3

Youko is practicing the piano, playing a simple piece by Chopin. MR KOSHIDA, her father, sits next to her on the stool, guiding her. Mrs Koshida sits on a sofa, drinking tea and watching the two of them.

Youko finishes the piece and looks at her father expectantly.

MR KOSHIDA

Good! If you want to go to music school and be a famous pianist like me, you have to practice every day. Now let's try again.

Youko begins to play the piece again. She is interrupted by a knock at the front door. Mr and Mrs Koshida look at each other.

MR KOSHIDA (cont'd)

Keep practicing.

As Youko begins playing again, Mr Koshida gets up and walks to the door. He slides it open. A POLICEMAN bows to him.

POLICEMAN

Mr Koshida.

Mr Koshida returns the bow.

MR KOSHIDA

Yes?

(CONTINUED)

The policeman looks at Youko playing.

POLICEMAN
Still playing the enemy's music I
see.

He pauses for a few seconds, listening.

POLICEMAN (cont'd)
Those barbarians really created
some beautiful music, didn't they?

MR KOSHIDA
Are you going to arrest me?

Youko stops playing, turns and looks fearfully at her
father.

POLICEMAN
Of course not.
(pause)
Mr Koshida, have you noticed the
recent activity next door?

Mr Koshida nods.

POLICEMAN (cont'd)
Well, you will soon have new
neighbours. The Army is turning the
place into a prisoner of war camp.
We are recommending that everyone
living around the camp evacuate.

MR KOSHIDA
What?! Where would we go? This is
our home. And besides, the war
rages everywhere. No one place is
any safer than the next.

YOUKO
We can't leave the piano!

Mr Koshida looks at Youko, then Mrs Koshida. He turns back
to the policeman.

MR KOSHIDA
No. We will stay here.
(pause)
Thank you for letting us know about
the camp.

The policeman nods, then bows to Mrs Koshida and Youko. He
turns to Mr Koshida.

(CONTINUED)

POLICEMAN

Okay. I understand. Have a good day.

He turns and leaves. Mr Koshida closes the front door. He walks back to the piano and sits down next to Youko again. She looks at him expectantly.

MR KOSHIDA

That's enough for today.

Youko looks crestfallen.

MR KOSHIDA (cont'd)

Tomorrow you can practice some more.

Youko gets up and runs out of the room. Mr Koshida watches her leave, then looks at Mrs Koshida.

MR KOSHIDA (cont'd)

It's okay. Nobody knows it's an American piano, and even if they did, why would it matter?

She gives him a worried look.

SUPER: "9 March 1945"

Mrs Koshida is preparing a basic meal as Youko looks on. The radio is tuned to the voice of Tokyo Rose.

MRS KOSHIDA

Youko, go to the garden and get me some carrots, and some leeks.

YOUKO

Okay.

Youko bounces out of the kitchen.

A tall, barbed wire fence bisects the garden. On the other side, what was once old houses is now a prisoner of war camp.

Youko steps into the garden and slows down, looking across the fence to see if any prisoners are there. There aren't.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

She walks gingerly over towards the fence, where the vegetable garden lies.

Neat rows of raised dirt lie barren in the sun, fresh soil clumps bearing mute witness to recently removed vegetables. Only a single row of vegetables lies untouched - the row furthest from the fence, out of arm's reach.

She squats down and picks the remaining vegetables, places them into a basket, and heads back to the house.

6 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

6

Youko steps into the kitchen bearing the meager supplies.

YOUKO

They took all our vegetables!

Mrs Koshida takes the basket from Youko and begins to prepare the vegetables.

MRS KOSHIDA

We'll make do. You should go and practice. Your father will be home soon and he'll want to hear your new piece.

Youko smiles, empty stomach suddenly forgotten.

YOUKO

Okay!

She turns and runs out of the kitchen. Mrs Koshida smiles after her.

7 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

7

Youko sits down at the piano and opens a book of Chopin's sheet music to the piece she is practicing. She begins to play; hesitantly at first, but quickly growing in confidence as she picks up the rhythm of the piece.

At first she doesn't notice the PRISONER OF WAR watching her from a small window in the building on the other side of the fence.

Pausing for a moment, she looks out the large window. The prisoner smiles weakly at her as she catches sight of him.

She clasps her hands across her mouth as if to stifle a scream. She stares at him like she has seen a ghost. But he doesn't look threatening and after a few moments she slowly

(CONTINUED)

lowers her hands, looking around to see if her mother is watching. She isn't.

For a long time Youko and the prisoner stare at each other, neither moving. Then the prisoner motions for her to play the piano.

Youko looks around again. She is alone in the living room. A clock ticks on the wall like a metronome.

One eye on the prisoner, Youko slowly begins to play. The prisoner watches intently. Soon she is no longer watching the prisoner, but rather concentrating on the sheet music in front of her.

She is oblivious as the sky once more begins to buzz with the drone of heavy bombers flying overhead, only noticing when the air raid sirens start and Mrs Koshida comes running in.

MRS KOSHIDA
Get under the piano Youko!

Youko looks back to the prisoner, but he is no longer at the window.

She gets off the stool and crawls under the piano to join her mother.

As the explosions get closer, Mrs Koshida hugs Youko tightly. But Youko is not scared today. She manages a slight smile. Today, for the first time, she had an audience.

The bombs continue to drop, but the Koshida residence seems untouched. Mrs Koshida and Youko huddle together under the piano to keep warm. A solitary candle flickers in front of them.

Suddenly, the front door opens and Mr Koshida stumbles in, disheveled and dusty.

Mrs Koshida quickly extricates herself from Youko and rushes to tend to him.

MRS KOSHIDA
Are you okay? What happened? Are
you okay?

Mr Koshida hugs her.

(CONTINUED)

MR KOSHIDA
I'm fine. Is Youko okay?

MRS KOSHIDA
Yes, she's here with me. She's fine. What happened?

MR KOSHIDA
They hit the factory. I didn't see much. There was so much noise, so much smoke. I just ran. I ran as fast as I could go, away from the factory. There was nothing I could do.

He begins to cry, tears streaking the black dust covering his face.

MR KOSHIDA (cont'd)
It's a miracle you're alive. A miracle.

Youko crawls out from under the piano and joins her parents in a hug.

YOUKO
We're okay daddy. It's okay.

They hold each other tightly in the darkness.

9 INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

9

Mr Koshida is standing next to the piano, looking out the window. Mrs Koshida and Youko are sitting on the sofa.

MR KOSHIDA
It's amazing. They bombed so many places, but they must have known that the camp was there.

He places his hand on the piano.

MR KOSHIDA (cont'd)
Or maybe they didn't want to destroy such a beautiful instrument.

Youko smiles.

There is a knock on the front door. Mr and Mrs Koshida both get up. Mr Koshida motions for her to stay where she is, and goes to answer it. It is the policeman.

(CONTINUED)

POLICEMAN

Good morning Mr Koshida. I'm
relieved to see you are okay.

He bows to the family as Youko stands by her mother's side.

POLICEMAN (cont'd)

Mr Koshida, I'm afraid that with
last night's attacks, the
government has an urgent need for
more metal with which to continue
the fight. I've been ordered to
collect all the metal and wiring in
the house effective immediately, on
the Emperor's orders. Electrical
wire, baling wire, piano wire -

YOUKO

No!

Youko rushes to protect the piano.

YOUKO (cont'd)

You can't take my piano!

She bursts into tears as Mrs Koshida goes to comfort her.

YOUKO (cont'd)

Mama, don't let them take my piano!

Mrs Koshida looks to Mr Koshida, a pained expression on her
face. Mr Koshida turns to the policeman.

MR KOSHIDA

Can't you make an exception? Just
this once? We'll give you all the
wire in the house. All the metal.
Just please, please leave the piano
alone. For Youko. Please. I beg of
you.

The policeman looks at Youko, who looks back with tears in
her eyes, but also a look that almost dares him to try to
take the piano. A mix of fear and defiance radiates from
her.

The policeman slumps his shoulders a little, defeated by
this little girl with fire in her eyes.

POLICEMAN

I'll be back in thirty minutes.
Have all the wire in the house
ready for me or there will be hell
to pay.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

POLICEMAN (cont'd)
(pause)
Leave the piano wire.

Youko squeals with joy.

YOUKO
Thank you! You won't regret this!

POLICEMAN
See that I don't. You better grow
up to be the best pianist the world
has ever seen young lady.

Youko nods forcefully.

The policeman bows, turns and leaves. Mrs Koshida hugs Youko, tears in her eyes. Mr Koshida bows deeper than he has ever bowed before.

MR KOSHIDA
(bowing)
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

10 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

10

SUPER: "6 August 1945"

Sun streams into the living room as Youko gracefully plays the piano. Cicadas chirp loudly outside in the heat. At the window of the prisoner of war camp building, several PRISONERS including the original prisoner watch Youko play.

The original prisoner waves to her. Youko stops playing, then tentatively raises her hand in return. She waves timidly. The prisoner smiles. She smiles back.

Suddenly the sound of crockery crashing to the floor emanates from the kitchen. Youko quickly runs to the kitchen to see what is wrong.

11 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

11

Mrs Koshida is transfixed in the middle of the kitchen, crying, crockery on the floor all around her, listening to the radio which is giving reports of massive casualties in the city of Hiroshima, with witnesses describing a flash brighter than the sun and terrible fires.

Youko listens, unable to move, in shock at what she is hearing, shaking.

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

12

SUPER: "16 August 1945"

Youko is sitting on the piano stool but she is not playing. She looks out the window for the prisoners, but there are none to be seen.

Mr and Mrs Koshida are sitting on the sofa. The radio is broadcasting the Emperor's surrender speech and both of them listen intently, holding each other's hands. Mrs Koshida is crying.

There is a knock at the door. Mr Koshida looks at Mrs Koshida, then gets up and walks to the door to open it. She follows, standing near the entrance way.

Outside stands the policeman, holding his cap in his hand. He bows deeply to Mr Koshida, revealing the original prisoner standing behind him, holding a box.

Mrs Koshida gasps.

POLICEMAN

Mr Koshida, Mrs Koshida, I... I...
I'm sure you've already heard... on
the radio, they... we...

MR KOSHIDA

Yes, we heard.

POLICEMAN

I'm sorry, but one of the
prisoners, I mean, one of the
soldiers, he insisted on coming
here. I don't know why...

Youko, now hiding behind her mother, peers out slowly to look at the prisoner. Their eyes meet. For a moment, both are transfixed by each other. The prisoner takes a step forward, then another, into the doorway and past the policeman, the box held in front of him like a security blanket.

PRISONER

(speaking English)

I... I wanted to... I wanted to
give these to you and...

He begins to sob.

PRISONER (cont'd)

I just wanted to say...

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

Tears begin to stream down his face. He drops the box and its contents spill out onto the floor. Some army soap. Tins of food rations. A small, handwritten note, scrawled on toilet paper.

He sinks down to his knees, crying, trying to pick up the items through the haze of tears and failing. It's too much for him. Deep sobs wrack his body.

Youko comes out from behind her mother. She walks over to the prisoner and squats down in front of him. She begins to pick up the items to put them back in the box. The prisoner looks at her and cries even harder.

PRISONER (cont'd)
You kept me going... you kept us
going... I couldn't save them...
you saved us...

Youko gently puts a hand on his shoulder and smiles at him.

YOUKO
It's okay.

He breaks down completely. Youko remains with him, taking his hand in hers as he cries.

FADE TO BLACK.

13 INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

13

Youko sits alone at the piano, staring at the keys.

She comes to a decision.

She closes the keyboard lid.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: "Youko would not play the piano again for almost fifty years."

BEGIN CREDITS

FADE IN:

14 INT. MRS YOUKO KOSHIDA'S HOUSE - DAY

14

SUPER: "9 September 2012"

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

12.

14

SUPER: "Mrs Youko Koshida, 83 years old, mother and grandmother"

THE REAL MRS YOUKO KOSHIDA plays the real American piano of the story as the credits roll.

END CREDITS

FADE OUT.