

Rice Futures

A ten minute play

Characters

Mr. Kusakabe, 34, Japanese, a McDonald's chef who wants to be more

Miss La Coeur, 36, an American transplant in Tokyo who trades rice futures but misses Robert and home

Robert, 38, a Cajun chef in New Orleans who's perfectly happy there.

Time

Almost 1:00 a.m., Tokyo time, the present

Place

A McDonald's in Tokyo and, briefly, a Louisiana Public TV studio

Synopsis: Miss LaCoeur wants her New Orleans voodoo ritual to bring Robert back to her. Mr. Kusakabe wants to be a great chef and throw off the yoke of McDonald's. Miss LaCoeur makes a trip to McDonald's where she meets Mr. Kusakabe. Miss LaCoeur finds comfort in Mr. Kusakabe's trans-fat laden French fries, and Mr. Kusakabe finds that his humble job provides true comfort for Miss LaCoeur.

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Rice Futures

A harsh fluorescent blue/ purple light illuminates Mr. Kusakabe, 34, Japanese, mopping the floor. He is dressed in a McDonald's uniform, including a visor. There is a McDonald's-style table with trays and McDonald's trash. There is Japanese pop music, perhaps the Pizzicato Five.

MR. KUSAKABE

Ah, night and silence.

In another part of the stage, a hazy orange-red light illuminates Miss LaCoeur, 36, white, American wrapping some cloth around the innards of a small doll, a bit larger than her palm. Miss LaCoeur sews the cloth closed around the doll innards. The same Japanese pop music plays.

MISS LaCOEUR

Ah, night and silence.

MR. KUSAKABE finishes mopping and examines the trays of McDonald's trash from the table.

MR. KUSAKABE

Ah, night and silence.
Brief respite from burgers, shakes,
"You want fries with that?"

MISS LaCOEUR finishes sewing the cloth on the doll, takes a straight pin with a blue head and holds it. She plunges the blue pin into the heart of the doll.

MISS LaCOEUR

If you love me, Robert (*roh-bear, the French way*), my phone will ring and you'll be there.

A yellow light illuminates ROBERT, 38, white, in a chef's outfit, mashing a wooden spoon against the side of a stainless steel pot. The music changes suddenly from Japanese to Zydeco.

ROBERT

(with a Cajun accent) You mash up dem red beans nice and good now, nice and good, even pour on a little butter dem last ten minutes or so.

*MISS LaCOEUR checks her cellphone.
Heartbreak. The Japanese music is back.*

MR. KUSAKABE

Half-eaten nuggets.
Half-used tubs of dipping sauce.
American filth!

Quarter-pounder buns
At least the pigs ate the meat.
I hope Trans Fat kills.

*MR. KUSAKABE angrily throws the trashy trays off stage.
MISS LaCOEUR takes a paper from a pocket and reads.*

MISS LaCOEUR

“A blue pin to the heart of a lovingly constructed voodoo doll is sure to bring the loved one nearer.”

The Japanese music changes suddenly to Zydeco.

ROBERT

Den go ahead and add yourself some of dat cayenne pepper, as much as you like.

MISS LaCOEUR

“...especially if the loved one is a true Cajun.”

ROBERT

And you let dem beans gently embrace a gorgeous bed of Loosiana rice like a man wrappin’ his arms round his secret lover. Mmm, mmm!!

The Zydeco music changes suddenly back to Japanese.

MR. KUSAKABE

I am a great chef
I was meant for more than this
Fuck Filet-o-Fish.

Give me salmon, eel,
Avocado, cucumber,
Teriyaki sauce

As MR. KUSAKABE fantasizes, ROBERT becomes his assistant chef and brings him some culinary items. The harsh fluorescent light softens.

Delicate seaweed
Glistening sharp knives like moonbeams
Sturdy rolling mats

Flaky tempura
Golden, like a woman's face
In late summer sun

Sashimi slices
Tuna, salmon, fluke, whitefish
On a moist rice bed

Bowls of steaming rice
Master chef's opalescent
Path to the future!

My knives fly faster
Than a lover's cry of joy
Becomes a whimper

Ebony chopsticks
Miso soup in china bowls
Served on tablecloths

ROBERT assists MR. KUSAKABE in setting up his table to prepare a fine Japanese meal. Everything's arranged nicely on a tablecloth.

MISS LaCOEUR

A blue pin to the heart of a lovingly constructed voodoo doll is sure to bring the loved one nearer!!

She stabs the pin into the doll again and again.

MR. KUSAKABE

Ladies, Gentlemen
Shintaro Kusakabe!

Tokyo's Master Chef!

ROBERT applauds MR. KUSAKABE, then returns to his former position as MISS LaCOEUR keeps stabbing. ROBERT rubs his chest. Zydeco music.

ROBERT

Whoo-woo. You ever get some o' dat ol' heartburn after a good ol' meal? I'm gonna have to get me some of dat bicarb o' soda!

Japanese music.

MISS LaCOEUR opens her cellphone, thinks about calling, then stabs a pin into it and slams the phone shut. She yells at the doll.

MISS LaCOEUR

You know, Robert, Tokyo is only 15 hours ahead of Louisiana! You can still call!

Zydeco music. ROBERT rubs his heart and belches.

Japanese music. The light on ROBERT fades.

MISS LaCOEUR begins walking slowly towards MR. KUSAKABE.

MR. KUSAKABE

Why stop at sushi?
Shrimp tofu, hibachi steak
Sizzling perfection

Tender green mussels
Sautéed in sweet and sour sauce
A tongue's pure pleasure

Fleshy sea scallops
Dripping in lemon butter
Like a woman's kiss

Wasabi chicken
Bone-in breasts smothered by
Colossal mangos...

MISS LaCOEUR

I'd like a number three meal, please.

ROBERT quickly gathers the table cloth and its contents and all traces of MR. KUSAKABE's fantasy disappear. The harsh fluorescent light returns.

MISS LaCOEUR

A number three meal, please. And an apple pie.

Oh, are you closed? The door was still open.

No, you're open 'till one. Number three. See? Num-ber-three.

What's the matter with you? NUMBER THREE. And a PIE! Fix-y, fix-y!

God, I hate this fucking country!

Moron.

MR. KUSAKABE

I do speak English.

MISS LaCOEUR

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

MISS LaCOEUR turns to leave, ashamed. She has left the doll.

MR. KUSAKABE

You left your strange little doll.

MISS LaCOEUR

I don't want it.

MR. KUSAKABE

Oh, I'll clean up. Fine.

MISS LaCOEUR goes to retrieve the doll, but MR. KUSAKABE already has it and examines it.

MR. KUSAKABE

Are you killing it?

ROBERT is heard belching.

MISS LaCOEUR

No. I don't think so.

MISS LaCOEUR starts to leave again. Then –

MISS LaCOEUR

You use a pink pin if you want to kill someone. In New Orleans voodoo, that is.

MR. KUSAKABE

Is that where you're from?

MISS LaCOEUR

I didn't believe in voodoo when I lived there. But when you're away from someone for a long time...

MR.KUSAKABE

This is a blue pin.
If a pink pin is to kill,
What's a blue pin for?

MISS LaCOEUR

He's color blind, too.

MR. KUSAKABE nods in understanding. He gently hands the doll to MISS LaCOEUR.

MR. KUSAKABE

In Japan, if you want
to curse someone you take a doll
with some hair or blood
from the one you curse
and you nail it to a shrine
during the ox hours.

MISS LaCOEUR

When is that?

MR. KUSAKABE

1 o'clock a.m.

MISS LaCOEUR

Very soon.

MR. KUSAKABE

Very late.

MISS LaCOEUR

I'm always up then.

So am I.

MR. KUSAKABE

I trade rice futures.

MISS LaCOEUR

I wipe special sauce off tables.

MR. KUSAKABE

I can respect that.

MISS LaCOEUR

You move here just to trade rice?

MR. KUSAKABE

It's not just...well...yes.

MISS LaCOEUR

You can see futures?
What does the future hold for rice?
Or for anything?

MR. KUSAKABE

ROBERT approaches MISS LaCOEUR with a dish of red beans and rice.

ROBERT

N'awlins best, with a little Andouille sausage, and a dash o' hot sauce, just like you like it.

ROBERT offers a spoonful of the red beans and rice to MISS LaCOEUR.

You think you know rice.

MISS LaCOEUR

ROBERT pulls the spoon away as she is about to eat.

And then rice disappoints you.

ROBERT is gone.

It's hard to know rice.

MR. KUSAKABE

Are there rice futures
For a master chef who's trapped
In a French Fry world?

MISS LaCOEUR

I don't really know
I'm not very good at rice.
I do what they say.

*MISS LaCOEUR absently sticks the pin in the doll
again. ROBERT is heard belching again.*

MR. KUSAKABE

Do you have his hair or blood?

MISS LaCOEUR

No.

MR. KUSAKABE

It was worth asking.

MISS LaCOEUR

It's nice of you to ask.

MR. KUSAKABE

It is also thought
if you tie an image doll
up with a short rope,
that person will fall
instantly in love with you.

I could find you rope.

A long pause.

MISS LaCOEUR

I think...I think I just would really like a number three. And an apple pie.

MR. KUSAKABE

This food is no good.

MISS LaCOEUR

I know.

MR. KUSAKABE

I could make you great sushi.

MISS LaCOEUR

I'm sick of sushi. I've been here six months. And six months to go. At least.

MR. KUSAKABE

You deserve sushi
Vegetables, smooth rice, fresh fish
Not overcooked crap.

MISS LaCOEUR

I know it's crappy
I know it clogs arteries
It just...tastes like home.

MR. KUSAKABE

I could fix tuna
Steaks in crusted pecans, cups
Of cool, crisp rice wine...

MISS LaCOEUR

All I want is fries.
Really, what I need is fries.
Trans-fatty French fries.

And maybe a hot apple pie. And a Coke. And a milkshake.

ROBERT carries in some McDonald's French Fries on a silver tray. He presents them deferentially to MR. KUSAKABE. ROBERT belches, rubs his heart and disappears.

MR. KUSAKABE

Here are your fries, Ma'am.
I hope you will enjoy them.

He bows.

"I am loving it"

MISS LaCOEUR eats some of the fries with gusto.

MISS LaCOEUR

These are terrific.
 Warm, soft happiness fingers
 You have a true gift.

I'll never forget
 These wonderful fries. Or you.
 May I ask your name?

MR. KUSAKABE

Shintaro

And yours?

MISS LaCOEUR

Victoria LaCoeur

MR. KUSAKABE

That means "winning heart".
 I know a little French, too.

So you like my fries?

MISS LaCOEUR

Have one with me, please?
 You really ought to sample
 The magic you make.

MISS LaCOEUR offers MR. KUSAKABE a French fry. He eats from her hand. He smiles. MR. KUSAKABE takes a French fry from the box. He takes the pin out of the doll's heart and pins the French fry to the doll's heart. ROBERT belches again. MISS LaCOEUR and MR. KUSAKABE each take a French fry from the box and offer them to each other. They eat and smile. Blackout.

End of Play.