

# f\*ck m\*ss s\*\*gon play

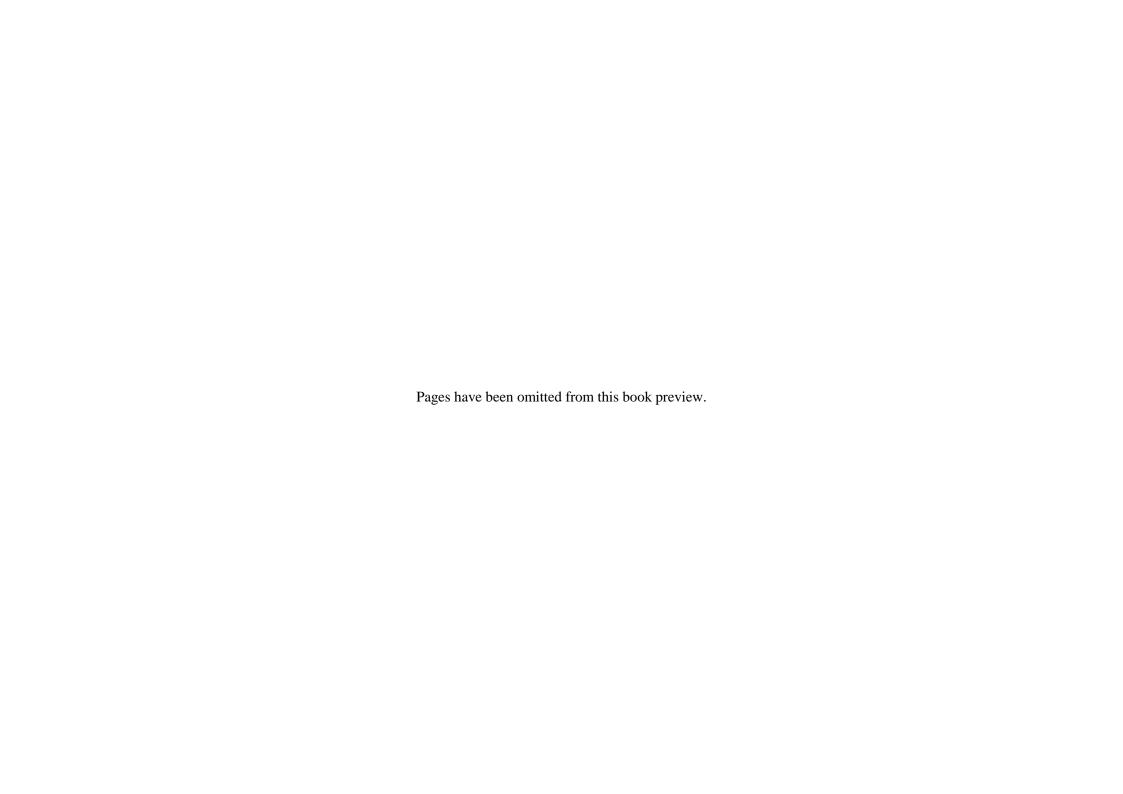
kimber lee

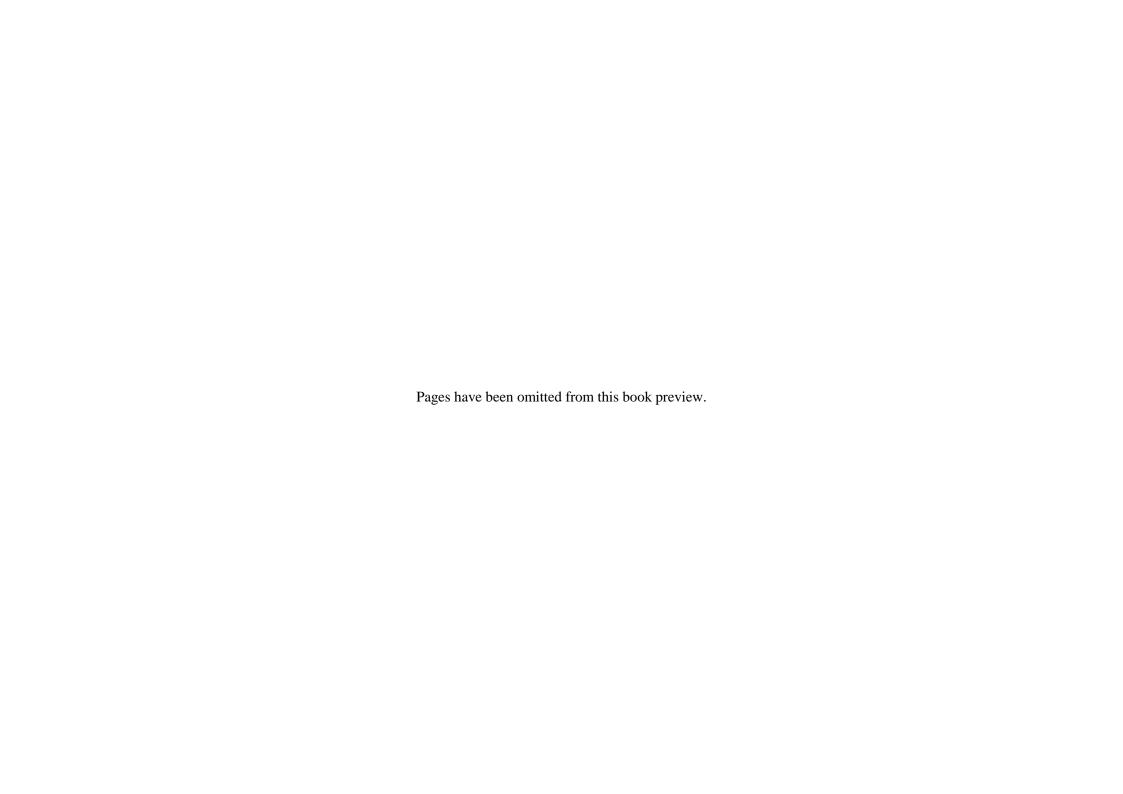
Produced by Royal Exchange Theatre, Factory International for Manchester International Festival, Young Vic and Headlong

Royal Exchange Theatre, Factory International for Manchester International Festival: 24 June–22 July 2023

> Young Vic Theatre, London: 18 September-4 November 2023

The first performance of *untitled f\*ck m\*ss s\*\*gon play* was at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, on 24 June 2023.





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untitled fuck miss saigon play (srsly, this is not the title) (oh well)

kimber lee

untitled fuck miss saigon play was first written and developed with the support of the Lark Play Development Center in NYC in 2017 and in 2018 the Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

The play was also developed during a residency at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference in 2019. (Wendy Goldberg, Artistic Director; Preston Whiteway, Executive Director.)

The play also received a workshop at the 2019 Ojai Playwrights Conference.

#### Acknowledgements

A play passes through so many hands while making its way in the world, and I'm forever grateful for the many brilliant and dedicated artists who have had a part in bringing this story to its fullest life on stage.

To all of the actors, directors, stage managers, dramaturgs and fellow playwrights who have given of themselves to support the journey: you have held the beating heart of this play with such care, generosity, hilarity and faith – thank you with all my heart for everything you have given. With special thanks to Tiffany Villarin, Jackie Chung, and everyone at the Lark who read pages for me.

Thank you to everyone at the 2018 Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep and especially Madeleine Oldham, the team at the 2019 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, the 2019 Ojai Playwrights Conference, and the readers and Judges of the 2019 Bruntwood Prize. Thank you to Manchester International Festival, Headlong Theatre, the Young Vic, and the team at the Royal Exchange Theatre, especially Suzanne Bell and Chloe Smith.

To Roy Alexander Weise, all my love and gratitude for your one-of-a-kind heart, unfailing advocacy, unmatched sense of humor, and incomparable artistry: this could not have happened here with anyone but you. Thank you for your faith in me and the play. I will buy you something at the Wait-rose.

To Lloyd Suh, Andrea Hiebler, Krista Williams: I don't know if you realize how much your support and love and insight and fierce kindness mean to the many playwrights who have been lucky enough to know you. I will never stop being grateful to you for everything you do for me as a person and as a playwright, so stop squirming and just accept the love.

And for Haze: thank you. For it all. I'll be home soon.

Love always, Kimber

'It is particularly sad and ironic that this controversy should surround a piece of theatre such as *Miss Saigon*, a tragic love story in which a young woman sacrifices her life to ensure that her Amerasian son may find a better life in America.'

Cameron Mackintosh

'Some people who are irritated by these criticisms of *Miss Saigon*'s enduring popularity will say, It's only a show, nothing more.

But the enjoyment of the show's fantasy is precisely why the show matters. Fantasy cannot be dismissed as mere entertainment, especially when we keep repeating the fantasy...

Racism and sexism are not incompatible with art... Our enjoyment of a work of art does not mean that the work cannot be racist or sexist, or that our enjoyment does not come from a deep-seated well of derogatory images of Asians and Asian women.

The unsettling paradox here is that we can indeed love and desire people whom we see in completely racist and sexist ways. That is the real, unintended universal truth of *Miss Saigon*.'

Viet Thanh Nguyen

#### Characters

KIM, female. Asian American. Early twenties (or can pass for early twenties)

ROSIE/CIO-CIO, female. Asian American. Forties-fifties (or can pass for forties-fifties)

AFI/GORO, male. Asian American. Twenties—thirties CLARK, male. White. Twenties—early thirties

EVELYN/RICHARDS, female. White. Twenties—early thirties

NARRATOR/BRENDA, female. Actor of color. Thirties

And THE BAND. Is there a live band? Maybe.

#### Note on Text

Stage directions in parentheses are not read aloud.

Actually anything in parentheses is not read aloud, though the NARRATOR will read all stage directions that are not in parentheses.

The NARRATOR speaks through a microphone.

Translations in square brackets can be projected as subtitles, or spoken by the NARRATOR, or both.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed.

#### 1906

Date of the NYC premiere of Puccini's opera, third draft, Madama Butterfly at the Metropolitan Opera.

NARRATOR (*on a mic*). Lights up on a muddy road through a muddy village, which, though muddy, is also misty and mysterious.

There's music – a swelling overture of some kinda vaguely shakuhachi/shamisen type of thing with a Western vibe laid over the top for dramatic tension.

Peasants shuffle to and fro, some might have baskets on their heads; they gesticulate, like peasants do.

KIM enters, she is young, virginal, frightened, plucky, hopeful, noble, dirt poor but very clean otherwise, and has really great skin.

A massive horn blast from a steamship arriving in the nearby harbor shakes the air.

The peasants gape at the sky in awe and exclaim unintelligibly: (*Like maybe they just mutter the same word over and over, like 'ohayo gozaimasu' for instance.*)

Another blast from the ship (*closer*, *louder*) the peasants exclaim and scurry.

KIM tries to scurry, takes one step, and falls down.

#### KIM. Oh!

NARRATOR. ROSIE enters, an older peasant woman wearing the standard Asian peasant pajama set but with a Western vest over the top and a pair of bright-red cowboy boots.

(She drags KIM to her feet.)

ROSIE. Kim!! The Americans are here! It's our chance to escape this cesspool of a country!

KIM. What?

ROSIE. Don't you want to go to America?

KIM. Uh -

ROSIE. It's our only hope!

KIM. Oh my god! Really? But I don't have any money for a ticket!

NARRATOR. ROSIE slaps KIM's ass.

ROSIE. That's your ticket right there, my little cherry blossom!

KIM (shy, embarrassed). Oh, Mother!

ROSIE. Just follow my lead and we'll wave sayonara to this shitstain of a village and be on our way to a new life in America where there are equal rights for women! Stand up straight, shoulders back, tits up – here comes your future!

NARRATOR. (*They stand at the side of the road.*) ROSIE arranges KIM's clothes and hair for the sexiest effect.

KIM stands quietly, like a doll being dressed.

(Lights shift), a romantic haze floods the stage as:

CLARK enters.

He is tall, he is boyish and rugged and handsome and clearly does weights, cardio and High Intensity Interval Training at least four times a week – he looks like he could lift KIM up and break her in half over his knee, but he also exudes a very attractive manly gentleness and social-consciousness which we can discern in the way he regards with revulsion the oily conniving peasant men scurrying around him, trying to sell him their daughters.

The scurrying peasants part like the sea as CLARK strides through the village.

(Text in square brackets should be projected as subtitles, or spoken by NARRATOR, or both.)

CLARK. Maki. [Greetings.]

Kimono sushi ohayo ichi ni san. [We come in peace from the West.]

Maguro! Saba! [We bring news of the modern world to you!] Kyoto dojo katana – [We hope to open trade and avert any conflict with – ]

NARRATOR. His eyes meet KIM's across the scurrying crowd. She lowers her eyes modestly, ROSIE grins and pulls her over to CLARK.

ROSIE. Welcome to our humble village, most Number One American Son.

CLARK. Onigiri. Sake. Hashi...? [Thanks. I'm happy to be here. And this is...?]

ROSIE. This is Kim.

Would you like to come over for dinner?

CLARK. Honto go! [Would I ever!] Okonomiyaki. [Say eight?]

ROSIE. Maybe earlier - at six?

CLARK. Kurosawa. [Wonderful.]

NARRATOR. He gently lifts KIM's chin, her eyes flutter shyly.

CLARK. Fujisan momotaro. [I can't wait.]

NARRATOR. He bows over her hand, kissing it respectfully yet also kinda sexy-sexy like.

KIM's eyes go wide, she's never felt man-lips on her skin and it awakens something inside her... something *sexy* like.

(CLARK smiles and strides away, the villagers murmuring around him.)

KIM (holding the hand CLARK kissed). What is happening?

NARRATOR. ROSIE cackles (*delighted*) whips out a shamisen and plays an upbeat song as the scene shifts – maybe something like 'Proud Mary', the Tina Turner version but with a shamisen.

1906

ROSIE. You are my golden ticket, girlie -

KIM. What? But...

ROSIE. – the way out of this stinking mudhole!

I mean do you really want to stay in this hut for the rest of your life?

KIM. Uh -

ROSIE. What other possible future is there for you?

KIM. I had so many dreams.

ROSIE. Psshh - what dreams? You can't eat dreams.

KIM. Well, but there was that one about having some kind of rice delivery business, I was going to call it 'Rice Now' but... but then the rice famine happened and the investors pulled out, so...

ROSIE. So... no dreams.

KIM. Goro the fishmonger's son has offered to marry me.

ROSIE. Goro the fishmonger's son is not a dream.

KIM. He likes my rice delivery idea. He was gonna do a fish side to go with it: 'Rice Now, Fish Later'.

ROSIE. Listen to your mama, you foolish girl. You gotta learn how to defer gratification. If you do your duty, you will have a rice delivery *empire* in America. And fishmongery? Really? Nothing gets that stink off you at the end of the day, trust me.

NARRATOR. GORO scurries past with a giant basket of fish on his head, leaving a strong smell of fish in his wake.

GORO. Hey Kim!

KIM. Hey Goro!

GORO. The mackerel are running today! I'll save one for ya!

ROSIE. Kim. My girl. Be better than Goro the fishmonger's son. Be better than all of this.

KIM. I mean...

ROSIE. Why have the gods made you so beautiful? For nothing?

KIM. I mean -

ROSIE. It's so you can go to America! Shake that tight ass and we will rise up from the mud and fishy smell of this place!

NARRATOR. (KIM *looks at her hand where* CLARK *kissed it.*) A waft of romantic CLARK-haze across the stage, KIM looks off into the distance, bravely.

KIM. Very well. I will do what I must do, Mother.

ROSIE. Great, now go take a bath. And be sure you get *everything* clean.

KIM (shy, embarrassed). Mother!

ROSIE. You never know where the night will take you, it's best to be prepared. I left some cherry blossom soap by the tub and we don't have a razor but I gave my fish knife a good going over with Kenji's sharpening stone, so, you know... be thorough.

NARRATOR. KIM bows, exits.

ROSIE cackles and plays the shamisen again, perhaps 'Celebration' by Kool and The Gang.

(She sings and whoever is helping with the set change sings along.)

DANCE BREAK.

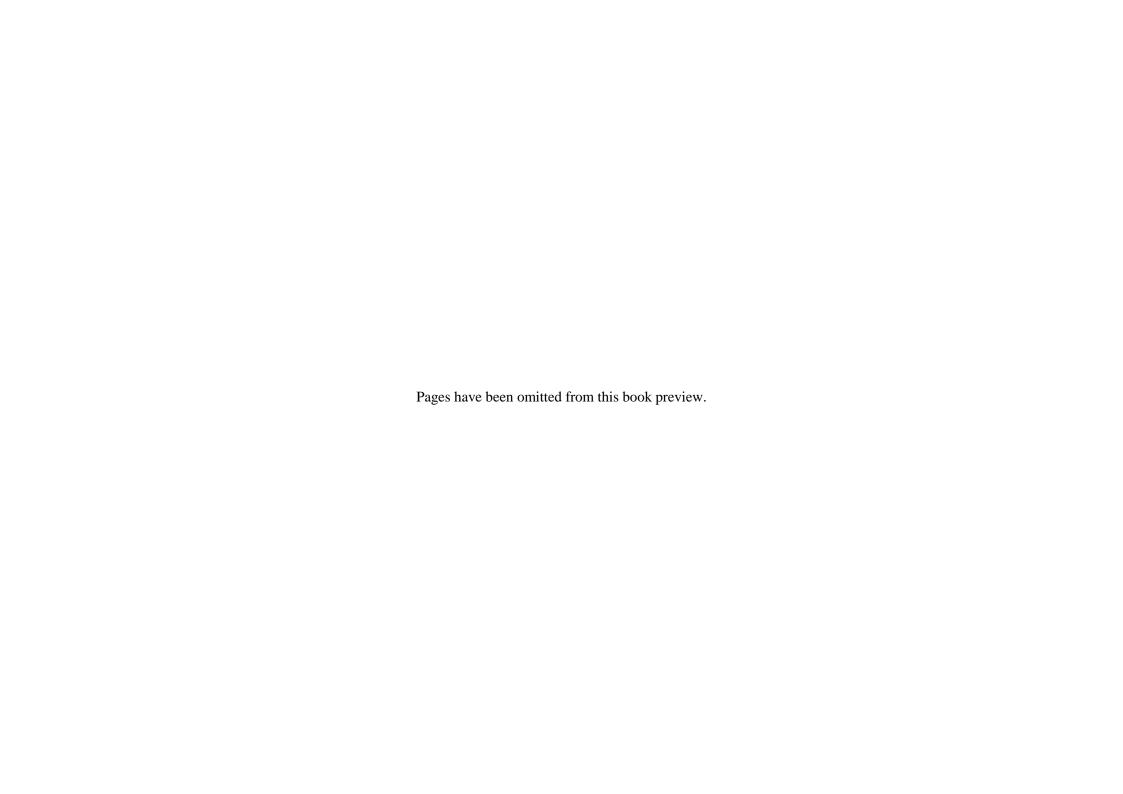
Happy villagers, happy in their simple village way.

ROSIE *and others*. Ceee-leh-brate good times come on! duh nuh nuh nuh, nuh nuh, nuh nuh...

(ROSIE and the others continue to sing the first refrain and verse of 'Celebration'.)

Meanwhile, a tiny hut-like dwelling has emerged...

So the interior of the hut is Asian in the sense that there is probably a lot of bamboo that has been distressed with a dark-brown stain to make a properly dark, mysterious locale; might be some noren curtains in the doorway, printed with bamboo patterns; cushions on the floor (*no chairs*) a low table, lots of oil lamps and candles.



### untitled f\*ck m\*ss s\*\*gon play







manchester international festival 2023

Young Vic



- 'We could stop here. We could stay here. It's not so bad, is it?'
- Kim is having one of those days. A terrible, very bad, no-good kind of day, and the worst part is... it all feels so familiar. Caught up in a never-ending cycle of events, she looks for the exit but the harder she tries, the worse it gets and she begins to wonder: who's writing this story?
- She makes a break for it, smashing through a hundred years of bloody narratives that all end the same way. Can she find a way out before it's too late?
- With breathless hilarity, Kimber Lee's untitled f\*ck m\*ss s\*\*gon play jumps through time, wriggling inside of and then exploding lifetimes of repeating Asian stereotypes, wrestling with history for the right to control your own narrative in a world that thinks it can tell you who you are.
- Winner of the International Award for the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting in 2019, the play was co-produced in 2023 by the Royal Exchange, Factory International for Manchester International Festival, the Young Vic Theatre and Headlong, and directed by Roy Alexander Weise. It was first performed at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, as part of Manchester International Festival, before transferring to the Young Vic Theatre, London.
- Kimber Lee is a playwright based in New York City, whose other plays include saturday, the water palace (Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Special Commendation), to the yellow house, tokyo fish story and different words for the same thing.