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William Scott Whited
University of New Orleans

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Melting Dreams

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

William Scott Whited

B.A. University of Iowa, 1977
M.A. University of California, Irvine, 2001

December 2009

Setting:

August 8, a vacation cottage in southern California.

Characters:

Theodore (Li Chien) Chen – Businessman, Taiwanese national, fluent in English but with noticeable Chinese accent, residually handsome, tending toward bluster with self-importance, late 40's

Julie Chen – High school Spanish teacher, Midwestern WASP, attractive in a wholesome way, upbeat with the remnants of a romanticized college-co-ed worldview, mid 40's

Meiley (Mei Li) Chen – Sophomore-to-be in college, looks Caucasian with eye-catching hints of “exotic”, cultivates a self-assured façade, 19

Gabriel Del Rio – Construction worker, Mexican national, fluent in English but with residual Spanish accent, nobody's fool, 22

ACT I

(Dying sunlight warms the simple interior of an older vacation cottage. Furnishings are spare: a wooden table with 4 wooden chairs, a couple of comfortable club chairs with side tables and lamps.)

A portal to the kitchen and the rear of the cottage is at an upstage angle opposite the front door. Downstage from the portal is a door to a bedroom.

THEODORE CHEN opens the door, steps inside and closes the door behind him. He wears an expensive suit with his silk tie still tight under his throat.)

THEODORE

(fluent, but with unmistakable Chinese accent)

Ju-li? (accent on the second syllable) Shao-Mei?

(Hearing nothing, he leans against the door. After a moment, he slips his shoes off and places them neatly next to the door.)

THEODORE (continued)

Happy Bah-bah Day! It August 8, Bah-bah Day. Where the adoring wife and child who welcome bah-bah home from hard day at work?

(He stares into space, preoccupied, then shakes his head and continues with peppy voice.)

THEODORE (continued)

The master of the house is home, giver of wisdom, solver of problems. *Wah sur zher* (I am here).

(He drifts off in his thoughts again, then pulls his cell phone out of his jacket; he opens it, checks the call history, then closes it and returns it to his packet; thinks of something amusing.)

THEODORE (continued)

You funny man. Very funny.

(He laughs, then stops abruptly.)

THEODORE (continued)

Bu how. (Not good.)

(He checks his watch, then looks out the window. Finding nothing, he goes out through the kitchen portal, rummages a bit, then returns with a

medium-sized jade Buddha, which he sets on the table. He takes off his suit jacket, hangs it on the back of a chair, then takes a deep breath, sits on his feet and bows.)

THEODORE (continued)

Buddha, ni hao. Wah shur Chen Li-chien. Chi...

(He continues in *Chinese*, very sincere, bowing on occasion. After a modest-length imploring of the Buddha, he gets up and returns the statue to the kitchen. We hear a REFRIGERATOR DOOR OPEN, then CLOSE. He walks back onstage, opening a can of iced tea with Chinese lettering on it. He sits at the table.)

THEODORE (continued)

I come to America, land of milk and honey. I find my honey, but now I'm getting milked.

(laughs sardonically, then darkens)

Bu how. Ne guh bu how. (No good. It's no good.)

(He broods for a moment more, then gulps down the Chinese tea and crushes the aluminum can in his palm. He throws it into a corner, then slides his tie open and throws it after the tea can. He takes a "hero" pose, stomping his feet hard onto the floor, more than shoulder-width apart.)

THEODORE (continued)

Wah sur Chen Li-chien. Wah sur champion! I come to your country, I show you strength of Taiwan. Brave man of Taiwan. Hero of Taiwan!

(He rips open his expensive dress-shirt, buttons scattering on the floor. He tears it off and throws it after the other personal detritus. Now bare-chested, he looks good, even impressive, for a man his age. He takes a martial-arts pose.)

THEODORE (continued)

Haaaa-tzeehhh!

(he "attacks" an invisible foe, moving swiftly and powerfully forward)

Waaah-huuuu!

(he "punches" his foe, high then low)

Haaaa-tzeehhh!

(He does a vicious front-kick, but as he swings sideways into a straddle-kick, he suddenly grabs his side in pain.)

THEODORE (continued)

Gaaaahh!

(He struggles to straighten up. Very slowly, he returns to an upright posture.)

THEODORE (continued)

Damn. Damn damn damn.

(He eases himself into one of the club chairs.

Outside, CAR TIRES CRUNCH ON GRAVEL, then stop. A CAR DOOR OPENS. Theodore sits up, suddenly aware of his dishevelment. He strains to get up and retrieve his shirt.

As he fumbles to redress, JULIE CHEN pushes through the front door, her arms weighted down by grocery bags. She wears the comfortable blouse and skirt of a teacher in summer.)

JULIE

(stopping when she sees Theodore)

What in the world are you doing?

(He ignores her, other than to turn his back and continue putting his shirt on.)

JULIE (continued)

Fine. Don't talk to me.

(continues on her way to the kitchen)

There's more in the car – in the trunk. And the bags – the suitcases. I brought yours. You forgot it again.

(Theodore realizes he can't button a shirt with ripped-off buttons. He turns, stops, uncertain. Julie returns from the kitchen, also stops.)

JULIE

What the hell did you do to your shirt?

THEODORE

My shirt. I can do what I want to it.

JULIE

Fine. Are you going to help me with the groceries? And your suitcase?

THEODORE

Not now.

JULIE

Great. Thanks.

(She goes out the front door. TRUNK OPENS. She returns with more grocery bags, crosses past Theodore without a word and into the kitchen.)

THEODORE

(grimaces)

Wah bu yow! (I don't want to.)

(He goes out the front door. We hear Julie PUTTING THINGS AWAY in kitchen. Outside, the CAR TRUNK SLAMS. Theodore, in pain as he carries two suitcases, re-enters just as Julie, carrying designer-label water, returns from the kitchen. Their eyes meet, then he goes past her and off.

She sits in a club chair and sips from her bottle.)

JULIE

(calling to him off-stage)

You going to clean up the rest of this mess?

(He stalks back in, the dress-shirt tails still hanging out, and picks up his tie and the crushed tea-can. He goes into the DS bedroom, shutting the door behind him.)

JULIE

(loud enough for him to hear her)

You didn't get it, did you.

(No reply. He comes out of the bedroom, now wearing a silk short-sleeved shirt à la the tropics tucked into black slacks. He goes into the kitchen and returns with another can of Chinese tea.)

THEODORE

I got it. Mighty hunter kills dragon for woman and child.

(He sits at the table, takes several gulps of his tea, calms himself.)

JULIE

Thank you, dear. I bow down before your mighty hunter prowess.

(she raises her arms up and tilts at the waist in an energetic bow)

I'd ask you to tell me all about it, but I know you won't.

THEODORE

It doesn't matter.

JULIE

It might not matter to you, dear hunter. But poor defenseless me, left here all alone, afraid of my own shadow, needs to hear how her powerful mate slew the mighty dragon. It gives me something to tell the other teachers when we're down at the stream slapping our men's pantaloons and shirts on the rocks.

(he doesn't rise to her bait)

What was the big deal with bringing in the stuff from the car?

THEODORE

I didn't want to do it.

JULIE

Why not? You do it every other time I bring home groceries.

THEODORE

Maybe that's why I didn't want to do it this time.

JULIE

Theo, why are you being so difficult?

(to herself)

What am I saying? You're always difficult.

THEODORE

It's a gift. I was born with it. Some people are charming. I'm difficult.

JULIE

You weren't born with it. You weren't difficult when I met you.

THEODORE

You just didn't know.

(takes swig of tea)

I was being inscrutable. Mysterious Asian man.

JULIE

Cut it out. Did something bad happen at work?

(nothing)

Did something happen with your family? In Taiwan? Your mother?

(he gives her a sharp look, but says nothing)

Suit yourself. If you're going to be that way, be that way.

(They sit in silence for a beat, until:)

JULIE (continued)

How about this. Let's do me.

(he gives her a skeptical look)

Don't worry, I don't mean "do me" sexually. Heaven forfend.

THEODORE

“Forfend”? What’s that mean?

JULIE

It doesn’t matter.

(he goes back to his tea)

It means “protect.” Heaven protect me from you doing me sexually.

THEODORE

Oh.

JULIE

(after another beat)

Do you want to hear what happened at summer school today?

THEODORE

No.

JULIE

Good. Then I’m happy to tell you.

(clears her throat in preparation, then announces:)

The story of Julie Chen and what happened at summer school today.

(in a sing-song story-telling cadence)

It was the last day of summer school, and one of Mrs. Chen’s most sterling students brought a knife to her class. “What fun!” thought Mrs. Chen. Maybe it was to celebrate. He didn’t really tell her. But he had thought and he had thought and he’d figured out a way to get the knife past the metal detectors. “Now I wonder how he did that?” Mrs. Chen pondered. “I guess I’ll never know, but he got right past those nasty old metal detectors. I suppose I should be proud, because he seems to have done some very fine critical thinking in order to figure out how to get that knife into my class.”

(Theodore is looking at her, but makes no response.)

JULIE (continued)

(losing the sing-song cadence)

He said he was going to knife the kid next to him because the other kid was wearing a UCLA T-shirt. Isn’t that an interesting coincidence? Our daughter goes to UCLA. That kid he threatened with a knife could have been our daughter.

(considers whether to continue, then:)

Of course, our daughter is actually IN UCLA, whereas this kid was just wearing a UCLA T-shirt. But I digress. What happened was that I used those quick-thinking survival skills that I learned at that quick-thinking survival skills professional-development retreat up in Ojai last month. I lifted my skirt up way high in the air, high enough to blind him with the glare from my shining satin granny panties.

(Flaring in anger at his continued lack of response, Julie gets up and lifts her skirt's hem up to just below her breasts.)

JULIE

Like this, Theo. I lifted my skirt up. Way high in the air. Like this.

(She briefly raises the hem up as high as it will go.)

THEODORE

Cut it out.

JULIE

(lowers skirt)

Cut it out. Ya know, I never thought about that. That kid could have "cut it out" while I had my skirt up way high in the air. What the heck. Might as well have.

THEODORE

You're embarrassing yourself.

JULIE

Yeah, that's it. I'm embarrassing myself. By flashing my panties at my husband. Who could care less.

(he refuses to engage her)

Well, so anyway. The kid dropped the knife and grabbed his poor blinded eyes. I called the nurse so the school wouldn't get sued or indicted or anything. Or something.

(takes a sip of water)

I think I may get a medal. Maybe even be on TV. If I don't get sued or indicted or maybe suspended. One of those unpleasant things.

THEODORE

Was it a Mexican kid?

JULIE

Don't start that.

THEODORE

It was, wasn't it.

JULIE

No.

(after a pause)

Yes. Yes, he was a Mexican kid. You happy?

(Theodore looks off into space.)

JULIE (continued)

After that whole story, my big production number, complete with my attempt at a tantalizing tease, that's all you have to say?

THEODORE

I was right, wasn't I?

JULIE

Yes, you were right, but so what? It could have been a white kid just as easily. Or even, heaven forfend, a little Taiwanese kid.

THEODORE

But it wasn't, was it.

JULIE

What the hell is wrong with you?

THEODORE

I'm facing facts. I'm seeing the world like it is, not how I want it. You try it, too. It feels good, like a cold slap in the face.

JULIE

(considers, decides now is not the time for this fight)

Meiley called. She's bringing a friend.

THEODORE

What?

(beat)

Who? Why?

JULIE

What, who, why? Don't forget where and when. And how. *Hung how!* (Very good) You could be a reporter for the Taipei Times.

THEODORE

Don't do that. Just tell me what she said.

JULIE

Oh, so now you're all interested.

THEODORE

I'm always interested.

JULIE

No you're not. Well, not in me, and usually not even all that much in Meiley.

THEODORE

I'm interested. I just don't want to talk about every single thing that happens. People talk things to death here.

JULIE

At least we talk.

THEODORE

Fine.

JULIE

Fine. Dammit, you . . . piss me off sometimes.

THEODORE

(considers, reconsiders)

I don't mean to upset you.

JULIE

Good. Then don't.

THEODORE

It is not my intention. To upset you.

JULIE

Good. Then don't.

THEODORE

I apologize.

JULIE

Good.

(Uncomfortable silence, then Theodore goes to get another Chinese tea.
When he returns:)

JULIE (continued)

She's bringing a boy.

THEODORE

I don't like that.

JULIE

Theo, she's 19 years old. Boys are part of life.

THEODORE

She never likes the boys I like, the ones I introduce to her.

JULIE

Of course not. They're all sons of your business friends. This isn't some feudal principality where the families choose for the children. Taiwan isn't even like that anymore. We weren't like that.

THEODORE

We were different. Very different. And Taiwan IS like that – at least for some families.

JULIE

I think you're fantasizing.

(Theodore resents the comment)

And what was it about us that was different? I ask myself that question a lot these days. Why didn't you marry one of those girls your family picked for you? One of the "dim sum" girls.

THEODORE

Don't call them that.

JULIE

That's what they were, wasn't it? Dim sum girls? At the dim sum parade? Your family and their families meeting for dim sum, checking out the goods. Why didn't you choose one of those girls? They were just right for you, that's what your father said, right?

THEODORE

My father is dead.

JULIE

(pausing, but moving on:)

But he wasn't then.

THEODORE

You know why I chose you.

JULIE

Why?

THEODORE

Why do you ask me such a question? Such a question is not for asking.

JULIE

Because sometimes I don't know. Sometimes I want you to help me remember.

THEODORE

You know.

JULIE

Maybe I do, maybe I don't. I want to hear it from you. Why did you choose me instead of one of the dim sum girls? Why did you ignore your father and your family and come to America and marry me? Little Julie Anderson of Edina, Minnesota. Why, Theo?

THEODORE

Because I loved you.

JULIE

"Loved"?

THEODORE

Because I love you.

JULIE

Are you sure? Because sometimes it's damned hard to tell.

THEODORE

Yes, I'm sure. I love you.

JULIE

(after a beat)

I love you, too, Theo.

(she sits back, sated for now)

What's that line from *Fiddler*? "After twenty-five years, it's nice to know."

THEODORE

What is "Fiddler"?

JULIE

A musical. A musical play.

THEODORE

Did we see it?

JULIE

Yes.

THEODORE

When?

JULIE

Almost twenty-five years ago.

THEODORE

I don't remember it.

JULIE

It's not important.

(Pause.)

THEODORE

What boy is she bringing?

JULIE

I don't know. She was being mysterious. Like father, like daughter.

THEODORE

I don't like this. Today is Bah-bah Day.

JULIE

Today is . . . what? Oh God. I forgot.

THEODORE

It's not hard to remember. August 8. Eight-eight.

JULIE

I know, I know. Eight-eight. Bah-bah. Father's Day. I'm sorry. I just forgot.

THEODORE

It doesn't matter.

JULIE

It does matter, Theo. At least it used to. You know I never forgot Chinese Father's Day. It's just these last couple of years. You haven't been— I forgot.

THEODORE

It's OK. Don't worry about it. It must have been that kid. With the knife.

JULIE

I'm sorry, Theo. I really am.

(Gets up and heads into the kitchen.)

JULIE (continued)

(calling from the kitchen)

I'll bake a cake. Or make some almond jello.

(pokes her head back in)

With black cherries. You always like that.

THEODORE

That would be nice.

(As she returns to the kitchen, CAR TIRES CRUNCH on the driveway. She hurries back in.)

JULIE

Did you hear that?

(CAR DOORS OPEN and SHUT. FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH towards the front door.)

THEODORE

Shall I order dim sum?

(Julie moves toward the door.)

JULIE

Be nice.

(The door opens and MEILEY (pronounced May-ley) CHEN enters. She is in the prime of her young-adult vitality, and wears clothes to show that. She moves happily to her mother and gives her a hug.)

MEILEY

Hi Mom!

(she crosses to her father)

Hi Daddy!

(She tries to pull him to his feet, but he winces in pain.)

JULIE

Careful, Meiley.

MEILEY

What's the matter? Did your wallet get too heavy?

JULIE

Please show some manners. Your father . . . twisted . . . hurt . . . something.

MEILEY

I'm sorry, Daddy. Here, let me help you.

(She shows some tenderness in helping him stand, then gives him a too-vigorous hug.)

THEODORE

Aah—

(He cuts off a cry and hugs her back. She breaks away.)

MEILEY

Wow. You really are hurting.

THEODORE

I'm fine.

MEILEY

Are you sure? Because you really sounded—

THEODORE

I am fine.

MEILEY

Okay. Good. That's good, Daddy, because I brought you someone to inspect. You can just scowl if you want to.

(She turns and realizes that her friend hasn't followed her. Goes to open the door.)

MEILEY (continued)

What are you doing out there, silly? Come on in. I'll protect you.

(In comes GABRIEL DEL RIO, an imposing young man with the wind-blown aura of someone who works outdoors. There is a sensitivity to him, though, that textures any stereotypical first impression.)

MEILEY (continued)

(taking Gabriel by the arm)

Mr. and Mrs. Chen. I'd like to introduce my friend, Gabriel Del Rio. Gabriel, these are my parents, Mr. Theodore Chen and Ms. Julie Chen.

GABRIEL

Hello.

JULIE

It's very nice to meet you, Gabriel. Welcome to our . . . little vacation hideaway.

GABRIEL

(with a residual Mexican accent)

Thank you, Mrs. Chen. Nice to meet you, too.

JULIE

Oh, call me Julie. I only go by Mrs. Chen at school.

GABRIEL

Thank you. Julie.

MEILEY

Daddy, aren't you going to say hello to my friend?

THEODORE

(after a beat)

Hello.

MEILEY

(to Gabriel)

He's a man of few words.

(to Theodore)

You can just grunt the rest, Daddy.

JULIE

Don't be smart, Meiley.

MEILEY

But I can't help it, Mommy. You saw my SAT scores.

JULIE

Yes, we know, and we're very proud of you. Would you two like something to drink?

MEILEY

I'll get it.

(She goes into the kitchen.)

JULIE

Please, Gabriel, have a seat.

GABRIEL

Thank you.

(He and Julie sit in the easy chairs. Theodore stays standing near his wooden chair. Meiley comes back in with soft drinks and gives one to Gabriel.)

MEILEY

I forgot that we don't have any beer here.

(Julie and Theodore look at their under-age daughter)

MEILEY (continued)

We can pick some up later.

GABRIEL

This is fine.

MEILEY

(moving to hold her father's arm)

What do you think, Daddy? He's a big 'un, isn't he?

JULIE

(filling the awkward moment)

Do you go to UCLA with Meiley?

GABRIEL

No.

MEILEY

Gabriel learns the old fashioned way. He reads. A lot. He reads more than I do at the beautiful University of California at Los Angeles campus.

JULIE

I'm impressed. So few young people read as much as we teachers would like these days. Meiley's father read a lot on his own, too. When he first came to the US.

GABRIEL

Mr. Chen, Mei tells me you're from Taiwan.

THEODORE

Yes. She has also been there. To see her grandmother and our relatives.

GABRIEL

Cool. I'd like to see my grandparents more.

THEODORE

Grandparents are important. The whole family is important. They are part of you, and you are part of them.

GABRIEL

I'm with you. It's not so easy for me to visit them, though.

MEILEY

Gabriel no tiene un pasaporte. (Gabriel doesn't have a passport.)

JULIE

Usted ha perdido su pasaporte? (You lost your passport? – formal)

GABRIEL

Didn't lose it. Never had one. *Y "tu" por favor.*

JULIE

Gracias. Tu.

THEODORE

Could we speak English in this house, please.

MEILEY

Oh, Daddy, you're such a nativist.

THEODORE

I work hard to learn English. And your mother asked you to mind your manners. Listen to her.

MEILEY

Yes, Daddy.

THEODORE

And what's all this about his passport?

MEILEY

He doesn't have a passport, Daddy, because he doesn't need one. Gabriel is here in the home of his ancestors. Aztlan. They didn't need passports to be here, and neither does he.

THEODORE

Aztlan? What is Aztlan?

MEILEY

This is Aztlan. All of this. All the land that the United States, *los gringos*, stole from Gabriel's ancestors.

THEODORE

(to Julie)

What is she talking about?

JULIE

Meiley, why are you being like this? Your father asked about Gabriel's passport – which is pretty nosy of you, Theo. I don't think we need to talk about passports OR Aztlan.

MEILEY

Yes we do. Aztlan and passports are exactly what we need to talk about. And so does everyone else in this country.

GABRIEL

Mei, it's not a big deal.

MEILEY

Gabriel! It's a huge deal! You don't even know what Aztlan is, do you Daddy?

THEODORE

(his syntax lapses as his temper rises)

I don't know Aztlan! I don't care Aztlan! What is this no passport?

MEILEY

Aztlan is the ancestral home of the native peoples of America, and the Chicanas and Chicanos, y *las Mexicanas y Mexicanos*, y—

THEODORE

Be quiet about the Aztlan. I don't care about the Aztlan.

JULIE

Stop this! Stop it both of you!

MEILEY

No! This is important!

JULIE

I – said – stop – it.

(The tone in her mother's voice halts Meiley. She backs off. Gabriel looks into the distance. Theodore doesn't speak, but his anger continues to boil.)

JULIE (continued)

Gabriel, *desea que otro Coque?* (Would you like another Coke?)

GABRIEL

No. Thank you.

JULIE

Oh, now. You look thirsty. I know the drive must have been very hot. Meiley, please get your guest a fresh drink.

(Meiley resists, but then acquiesces to her mother's request and heads for the kitchen.)

JULIE (continued)

Well. That was far more excitement than we need on a Friday aft—

THEODORE

(suddenly erupting)

You . . . you . . . illegal!?!

MEILEY

(stopping and turning on her father)

He's not illegal, Daddy. People can't be illegal. Don't you dare call him that.

(Theodore's face is red, his knuckles white on the back of the chair. Suddenly, he turns and walks out of the cottage through the kitchen portal. The BACK DOOR SLAMS.)

MEILEY

(shouting after Theodore)

He's not illegal!

(She prepares herself for Theodore's counter-attack, but it doesn't come. She turns to the others, avoiding her mother's glare.)

MEILEY (continued)

(to Gabriel)

I told you he'd blow in the first ten minutes.

GABRIEL

I'm sorry, Jul— . . . Mrs. Chen.

JULIE

I'm still Julie.

(Uncomfortable pause.)

GABRIEL

I should go.

JULIE

No. You just got here. And look at all the excitement you've brought.

MEILEY

Don't worry. We're all too polite to kick out "honored guest."

JULIE

(to Meiley)

Step back over the line, young lady.

(to Gabriel)

Do you mind if I ask what your situation is? I mean about the passport and all.

GABRIEL

I'm here. Since I was 16.

JULIE

And when was that, if I may continue to be nosy?

GABRIEL

Six years ago. I'm 22.

JULIE

Mei-li (using her formal name) is 19.

MEILEY

Mother, he knows how old I am.

JULIE

Good. Please, continue.

GABRIEL

I work here. With my father and my brothers. My whole family's here. We all came when I was 16 – from Sonora. I don't have any legit papers.

JULIE

I see. May I ask what kind of work you do?

GABRIEL

Construction. Mostly roofing, but I'm a pretty good carpenter, too. My father's a master furniture maker. You should see what he can do with wood. He's really an artist.

MEILEY

Gabriel's an artist, too. Tell her, Gabriel.

(he declines, so she elaborates to Julie)

You should see the furniture he makes. Handmade. He even picks out the trees and cuts them himself. Totally from scratch. Doesn't even use power tools or electricity, just the old-fashioned saws and pegs and wooden hammers and stuff. It's amazing.

JULIE

That's nice.

GABRIEL

I'm nothing. My father's the real deal. *Mi padre es un verdadero artista.* (My father is a genuine artist.)

JULIE

Art is nice. *Importante.*

(She rises from her chair.)

JULIE (continued)

I need to excuse myself now. Please stay.

(Julie leaves through the kitchen portal.)

GABRIEL

(after a beat to make sure Julie's gone)

That was not cool.

MEILEY

Don't worry. It's all good. He's way too uptight all the time. He needs to blow now and then or he'll have a heart attack.

GABRIEL

I mean it wasn't cool using me to get to your father.

MEILEY

I wasn't using you. He needs to face the facts in the real world. You're a fact. The travesty of the so-called border is a fact. You and me – we're a fact.

GABRIEL

Then why do I feel like a stick you used to poke your father in the eye?

MEILEY

(going to him, caressing him)

Now now. Don't start talking about sticks and poking – you'll get me all excited.

GABRIEL

Don't be doing that.

MEILEY

Doing what? I can't help myself. You know you drive me wild with desire.

GABRIEL

Your parents will come back in.

MEILEY

So? They could use a little inspiration. My father's not exactly the most passionate guy.

GABRIEL

It's not respectful.

MEILEY

It's very respectful – of how I feel about you.

(Gabriel finally gives in and they kiss tenderly.)

GABRIEL

Flor bonita. Muy bonita.

MEILEY

Si. Soy tu flor bonita. Me bebes. Todo de me. Drink me in.
(the kiss becomes more passionate)

Te amo, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

Te amo, bella Meiley.

MEILEY

Don't let my father get to you. Or my mother, either. They're stuck in a time warp somewhere. They don't understand our world.

GABRIEL

I'm not sure I understand our world.

MEILEY

Just know that I love you, and you love me. That's all you need to understand. You do love me, *si?*

GABRIEL

Si.

(They kiss again. Julie appears momentarily in the portal, but steps back when she sees them kissing.)

MEILEY

I found a great place for us, down in Santa Monica. My friend is moving out, and she says we can have it. The manager's cool, so with the rent control it's really cheap.

GABRIEL

What a deal-maker you are.

MEILEY

Don't make fun of me. It's only five blocks from the beach.

GABRIEL

Esta bueno, cara, pero . . .

MEILEY

But what? Gabriel? But what?

GABRIEL

But I don't know. *Te amo, pero . . .*

(Julie chooses this moment to come in.)

JULIE

Sorry about that. He's had a rough week at work. Don't take it personally.

MEILEY

Am I disinherited?

JULIE

Don't make light of this, Meiley. Your father is very upset.

MEILEY

He needs to get over it. There's nothing he can do about us. We love each other.

JULIE

Yes, well it isn't easy for your father to think of you with a man.

MEILEY

Whooo, you hear that, Gabriel? Mom thinks you're a real man.

JULIE

You know what I mean. Gabriel, I'm sorry I'm talking about you when you're standing right here. How . . . oh, this sounds so old-fashioned, but . . . how serious is this?

MEILEY

Very serious.

GABRIEL

Your daughter means very much to me. Julie.

JULIE

OK. Well, there it is. She means very much to us as well. We just need a little time. To absorb the situation.

MEILEY

Take all the time you want, Mom. Nothing's going to change between us.

JULIE

I heard you, dear. Well. Let me go see if your father is ready to come back in here. Maybe we can avoid having another . . . awkwardness – at least for the first couple of minutes?

MEILEY

Fine. He's the one who has a problem.

JULIE

Be that as it may. I'll be right back.

(Julie exits through the kitchen. Meiley caresses Gabriel.)

GABRIEL

We can meet them half-way. We don't need to stuff this down their throats.

MEILEY

No! We will not meet them half-way. This is our world, the real world, and they need to figure that out.

(Before Gabriel can respond, the BACK DOOR OPENS. Julie and Theodore come in.)

THEODORE

(with difficulty, as from a distance)

I apologize. Gabriel. You are our daughter's guest. You are welcome.

GABRIEL

I appreciate that, Mr. Chen. Thanks.

THEODORE

My wife has asked me to "give this a try." I have agreed. I suggest that we start again. Would you like something more to drink?

GABRIEL

I think I still have some, but sure, something cold would be nice.

JULIE

I'll get it. You three sit down and get acquainted. Just don't talk about politics or religion. My mother always told me that no bridge club could survive such nasty discussions, and I've never discovered any reason to disbelieve her. Not that I've ever been in a bridge club.

(She goes to the kitchen.)

THEODORE

So. We're pretending to start all over. You work with your father?

GABRIEL

Yes. And my brothers, Manny and Joe. We sub-contract for a couple of big developers.

THEODORE

That's good. Working with family is good. I wish I could have worked with my father.

MEILEY

I don't think Mom would have wanted to live in Taiwan.

JULIE (o.s.)

Don't be too sure about that.

MEILEY

Well I don't think I would have wanted to live in Taiwan. The streets are so dirty.

JULIE

(re-entering with drinks, which she passes around)

But the houses are so clean. Everyone takes their shoes off as soon as they come in the house. Even here in America. Meiley's Dad doesn't, but most –

(notices Theodore's stockinged feet, looks to the front door where his shoes are)

Did you take your shoes off when you came in?

(Theodore nods slightly)

Why?

(he avoids the question)

Your sox are all dirty.

THEODORE

Excuse me.

(He goes into the DS bedroom.)

MEILEY

When we went to Taiwan, Daddy made us take our shoes off in the house. But not here.

GABRIEL

When's the last time you went?

MEILEY

A long time ago. I was in elementary school I think.

JULIE

It got very difficult to find the time to get back. Things are so busy here, what with Theo's business and my work and Meiley's – well, with everything that Meiley does. She's quite an active girl, as I'm sure you've noticed.

GABRIEL

Yes.

JULIE

Taiwan is certainly a different place.

(Theodore comes back in with slip-on shoes over clean sox.)

THEODORE

It's only different if you're not from there. America is a very different place. To me.

JULIE

Yes it is. Of course, Taiwan is on the other side of the world. It's such a long plane trip. What is it, 12 hours, Theo? More?

THEODORE

More than that going. Less than that coming.

GABRIEL

Why the difference?

MEILEY

Yeah, why the difference?

THEODORE

You're the one in college. You tell me.

MEILEY

I don't study airline schedules, Daddy.

THEODORE

Neither do I. But I know why it takes longer to go than to return.

JULIE

(joking to ease tension)

It's like the horse returning to the barn. They always go faster when they know they're going home.

THEODORE

Not when I go home. It takes a long time.

JULIE

Well that's your choice, isn't it? And this is your home. Remember?

GABRIEL

I think I know why.

JULIE

(surprisingly sharp)

Oh you do, do you? And what exactly do you think you know?

GABRIEL

Why it takes longer going to Taiwan. It's the jet stream.

JULIE

What?

GABRIEL

The jet stream circles counter-clockwise over the Pacific. The planes ride it. It's a more direct route coming back.

(Theodore gives him a grudgingly admiring look.)

MEILEY

Is that right?

(Theodore inclines his head an inch)

Oh Gabriel, you're so smart. I told you he reads a lot.

GABRIEL

How far north does the plane go? Going west?

THEODORE

Almost to the Aleutians.

GABRIEL

Long way.

(Theo nods. Meiley beams. Julie recomposes.)

JULIE

Here's an interesting difference between the U.S. and Taiwan. In Taiwan, you hardly ever see a homeless person, no beggars, but there are homeless dogs all over the place. Mangy animals, crippled, just in bad shape. Here, it's just the opposite.

MEILEY

I remember that! That was so weird. Why do they do that, Dad? Why is everyone in Taiwan so mean to their dogs, and where are all the homeless people?

THEODORE

It is great shame for family to let the world see a relative's failure. No one lets a brother or son or uncle live on the streets. It is unthinkable.

MEILEY

But what about the poor little dogs?

THEODORE

Only in America are dogs treated better than people. Dogs are not people.

MEILEY

I still feel sorry for the dogs.

THEODORE

That's because your mother and I take care of you so you can spend your energy worrying about homeless dogs.

JULIE

Theo.

(to Gabriel)

You haven't told us how you met? I'll bet it's a great story.

MEILEY

We met at a MEChA meeting. It was so romantic. I was there with my friends Rosa and Claire, and all of a sudden, I saw Gabriel. He was like an Aztec god walking through the room.

GABRIEL

Meiley, come on.

MEILEY

It's true. You were gorgeous. You still are.

GABRIEL

You're the one who's gorgeous, *dulce*.

(realizes he's just done a verbal PDA)

I wasn't even interested in the MEChA meeting. I just went along with a friend. We were going to go out later, after the meeting.

MEILEY

But then you met me.

GABRIEL

Yes. But then I met you.

THEODORE

What's a MEChA meeting?

JULIE

Uh-uh. No politics, remember?

THEODORE

MEChA is politics? I've never heard of it. What do they do?

JULIE

It's a student organization. *Estudiantes Chicano*, Chicano students of – something.

MEILEY

Mother, you're a Spanish teacher. You should know this. *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*. See, this is exactly why MEChA is so important, because of Spanish teachers like you. You don't teach your students about their culture, their heritage.

THEODORE

Chicano? What were you doing at a Chicano meeting?

MEILEY

What, just because I'm not a Chicana by birth? That's so unenlightened of you. Anyone can be a Chicana.

(reciting from her studies)

“Chicano” is a philosophy, not a nationality. *Chicanismo* does not exclude anyone. All who work towards the betterment of *La Raza* can be Chicano, or Chicana, like me.

THEODORE

“La Raza”?

JULIE

The indigenous peoples, Theo. Of America.

MEILEY

La Gente. The people, the folks. The real people of this land.

GABRIEL

Me. I am *La Raza*.

MEILEY

La Raza are the real owners of all Aztlan, no matter what their oppressors may think. Aztlan will once again be the home of *La Raza*, as it should always have been. The day is coming.

THEODORE

Again with the Aztlan. What are you talking about? What is this “Aztlan”?

MEILEY

Aztlan is here, right here. It's California. It's Arizona. It's all the land that was stolen from *la Gente* in the illegal war of imperialism against Mexico.

THEODORE

Did you hear this at UCLA? In class? Did I pay for you to hear this crap?

JULIE

Calm down, Theo. I think she's taking some of this out of context.

MEILEY

That shows how much you know. I am not taking anything out of context. I am telling you what MEChA is all about, and why it's fighting for what is right, instead of just what one people can force on another people by attacking them – in their homeland. Illegally!

THEODORE

(to Gabriel)

This is because of you, isn't it?

GABRIEL

Me? Don't look at me. This is her thing.

THEODORE

But you say you're this *La Raza* she talks about.

GABRIEL

I'm *La Raza*, but I'm not MEChA. I'm not *un estudiante*. I'm a carpenter.

THEODORE

I don't understand this. I don't understand any of this.

MEILEY

Of course you don't. You're privileged.

THEODORE

I'm privileged? I can't even speak the language when I come here. I know no one.

MEILEY

But your father sent you money from home. Nobody sent Gabriel's family money. His family sent money back home to Mexico.

THEODORE

(his accent increases with his agitation)

What you know? My father gave me money when I leave his home. Not much. He sent me no money. He have no money to send. He don't buy me car to go to big university. He don't pay my bills to go to big university. He don't pay for me to learn idiot teachings about people crying when they lose war. You lose, things change.

MEILEY

What would you know about losing? You're rich, you don't have to worry about anything.

THEODORE

So ignorant! My family lose everything in war. My grandfather – put in jail! You lose, things change.

MEILEY

In jail? What are you talking about?

THEODORE

Never mind. You don't need to know these things. You are little girl. You study, learn about good things. But not this MEChA. This is not good.

MEILEY

Don't you tell me what's good or not. I know what's good. And I'm not a little girl.

THEODORE

You are little girl. And I am your father. I tell you what is good and what is not.

MEILEY

Not any more.

THEODORE

Yes "any more."

MEILEY

No! I know what I believe and you're just going to have to accept that. And if you want proof that I'm not a little girl, what do you think Gabriel and I do when we're not being all polite and everything for you and mother?

JULIE

Meiley!

GABRIEL

Not cool, Meiley.

MEILEY

It is completely cool. It is good and right and natural, and he's got to get that through his head. I am not a little girl, Daddy. I am a woman! And I know what's right and what's wrong, and you are wrong!

THEODORE

(to Gabriel)

Why are you here?

GABRIEL

That's a very good question.

THEODORE

I mean why are you with Meiley? What do you want?

MEILEY

He's with me because he loves me.

THEODORE

Enough from you. I already hear you.

(back to Gabriel)

What do you want?

GABRIEL

I—

JULIE

Theo, that's a very personal question. It's really none of our busi—

THEODORE

It is my business. And it is personal. She's my daughter, very personal to me.

MEILEY

You're being rude, Daddy. Gabriel is my guest.

THEODORE

I'm being rude? Me?! You are rude little girl. I have no more patience for you. You be quiet while I ask this man what he wants with our family.

MEILEY

You can't—

THEODORE

Quiet!

(his tone stops everyone cold)

What do you want?

GABRIEL

I want your daughter. But I don't think I want you.

THEODORE

Good. I don't want you either. You not good enough. My daughter take a lot of work. Doesn't come cheap.

JULIE

Theo!

THEODORE

I talk now. When I'm done, you can talk.

GABRIEL

I'm not talking about Meiley like that. She's not a piece of property. And I'm plenty good.

THEODORE

Oh? You good enough to protect her? To take care of her?

MEILEY

I can take care of—

(Theodore's stare stops her.)

THEODORE

What happens you fall off roof? Can't work. No workman comp for you. You illegal. What happens government come to your job and arrest you? The ICE people. What happens they send you back to Mexico? You sneak back in? My daughter hold up fence for you to crawl under?

GABRIEL

I take care of myself. I always have. I can take care of Meiley, too.

THEODORE

Life is a contract, Señor (with an odd attempt to emphasize a Spanish pronunciation) Gabriel. We do things right, we get things right. We do things wrong, we get things wrong. Live in this country, it's a contract. We do what law says, the law supposed to protect us. Marriage is contract, too. How I expect you to deliver on one contract when you break another?

MEILEY

That's so unfair. The laws are wrong. They deserve to be broken.

(Theodore and Gabriel have not broken their mutual gaze.)

JULIE

That's enough, Theo.

THEODORE

(breaking the stare with Gabriel)

Yes. That's enough.

(An uneasy silence reigns, until:)

GABRIEL

I'm going to leave now.

MEILEY

No! You're my guest, my invited guest. He can't treat you like that. Don't let him get to you, he's just trying to manipulate you. He's in business-deal mode.

GABRIEL

I don't want to be here.

MEILEY

Please, Gabriel. Mother, please ask him to stay.

JULIE

You're welcome to stay, Gabriel. But I can understand if you want to leave.

GABRIEL

If you don't want to drive me, I'll walk.

MEILEY

You can't walk. It's ten miles to the highway.

GABRIEL

I don't care.

JULIE

Maybe you two can take a drive. Up to the promontory. It's beautiful up there, overlooking the ocean.

MEILEY

Let's do that, Gabriel. It is beautiful. I want to show it to you.

(Gabriel relents a little.)

Come on. You'll love it.

(They leave out the front door. CAR ENGINE STARTS, GRAVEL CRUNCHES, they depart.)

JULIE

What the hell is wrong with you today?

THEODORE

Wah shur Papa. (I am the father.)

JULIE

You're the father, not the king. Unless you're trying to be the king jerk.

THEODORE

What I say matters. I am the head of this family. I know what is best.

JULIE

Stop it. What I say matters just as much as what you say. And what Meiley says matters, too.

THEODORE

No! She is the child. I am the father. You are the wife. What I say matters most.

JULIE

You don't mean that. That's not how we work. Just calm down.

THEODORE

No, I will not. I have been calm too long. I am so tired – of fighting all the time.

JULIE

We're not fighting.

THEODORE

Not you – me! I am fighting all the time. Fighting at work, with customers, with suppliers, with contracts, with employees. Fighting in street. Strange people want my car, my money, now my family. Fighting in my home! My daughter, so strange to me. I want world to make sense! I try so hard, but I am failing. I demand my world make sense!

(He is lost, on the verge of tears. Julie goes to hug him. He pulls away, violently, hiding his tears. She gives him room.)

THEODORE (continued)

They are going to take me away.

JULIE

Who? Who is going to take you away?

THEODORE

I tried to help. I was a fool.

JULIE

What are you talking about?

THEODORE

A man at work. Philip. Chong Yao-ping. You don't know him. I had to lay him off a few month ago. One of the other men, Charles, he work for me long time. He tell me Philip is his cousin.

JULIE

OK. So Philip is his cousin.

THEODORE

So Philip doesn't have green card. He was getting green card through us, through the company. Charles is very upset, says Philip will have to leave country.

JULIE

I can see why he'd be upset, but that's not your problem. If you had to lay him off, you had to lay him off.

THEODORE

No. Not my problem. But I help Charles anyway. Keep paying Philip, tell government he still work for me.

JULIE

You paid him for doing nothing?

THEODORE

No, I just keep him on the books. For green card. I pay him, he pay me back every month. I don't lose money. It's just to help Charles' cousin.

JULIE

That's very nice of you, Theo. Kind of odd, but very nice. I'm actually a little surprised. Maybe a lot surprised. You must really like Charles.

THEODORE

I don't like him much. But he's very good worker. Always on time, never sick, always does good job.

JULIE

That's important.

THEODORE

But I don't really do it for Charles. Or for Philip.

JULIE

OK. No, not OK. I'm not following you. Did you do it for yourself for some reason?

THEODORE

No. Yes. I do it for Taiwan. For my country.

JULIE

What? How is helping them doing anything for Taiwan?

THEODORE

They are Taiwanese! I am Taiwanese. I help them, I help my country.

JULIE

I really don't get this. Since when are you Mr. Patriotic about Taiwan? You hardly ever go there anymore. You certainly don't help Meiley appreciate being half Taiwanese. She's off trying to be some kind of a Chicana, for Christ's sake. Pardon my French.

THEODORE

I am from Taiwan! I am always Taiwanese. I want to help my country!

JULIE

Fine. If you think that's helping your country somehow, then knock yourself out.

(Temporary impasse, and then:)

THEODORE

The government men – they will come for me. The immigration people.

JULIE

The immigration people – they're the ones you think are going to take you away?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Theo, stop this. Stop being all mysterious. Just tell me what happened.

THEODORE

Man call me on phone today. I don't know him, who he is. He say I am breaking law. Say he tell immigration men. Say they going to arrest me, put me in jail, send me back to Taiwan.

JULIE

Oh my God! Theo!

THEODORE

I don't choose this! This not what I want. I don't come to this country to go to jail!

JULIE

It will be OK, Theo. Just sit down.

THEODORE

I don't want to sit down!

JULIE

We can do this together. We'll be alright. I'll help you – if you'll let me.

THEODORE

I am such a fool.

JULIE

You were just trying to be nice. You can be a nice person, remember?

THEODORE

Don't you see? It's all falling apart. Not just the ICE-men, everything. Shao-Mei, you, everything. My whole life is fraud. I did everything I wanted to do, and it's all wrong!

JULIE

Are we all wrong? Am I all wrong?

THEODORE

I don't know. I don't know anything now.

(Julie considers, composes herself, sits.)

JULIE

Chen Li-Chien (his Chinese name). Are you having an affair?

THEODORE

What?!

JULIE

You heard me.

THEODORE

What is this? Why you ask this now? And why you call me Li-Chien? You know I don't like that.

JULIE

Just answer the question. It's a simple question. Are you having an affair? Yes or no.

THEODORE

No.

JULIE

Are you sure?

THEODORE

Yes! Yes, I am sure. No affair. I don't want anyone.

JULIE

Not anyone? Not me?

THEODORE

Why you do this? Don't talk of this. Stop.

JULIE

I want to know. Do you want me?

THEODORE

Stop it! Stop it stop it stop it!

JULIE

No! I will not stop! You say that everything is wrong, that your whole life is a fraud. You haven't touched me for a long time, Theo. A very long time.

THEODORE

I don't want to hear this!

JULIE

You will hear this.

(gets right in his face)

I am your wife, Theo. Why won't you touch me? Why won't you have sex with me? Am I that horrible? Am I that ugly? That disgusting?

THEODORE

No! You are fine. Fine! Just leave me alone.

JULIE

No, I will not leave you alone. What is wrong? It's not just this immigration thing. It's us. It's you. What is wrong with you?

THEODORE

I fail! I am failure! Don't you see? I fail, in everything!

(This takes Julie aback. She needs a moment, then:)

JULIE

You are not a failure. If you are a failure, then I am a failure. And I am not a failure.

THEODORE

No. You are not a failure.

(A beat. Uncertainty reigns. Then a smile flickers on Julie's lips.)

JULIE

"Enter the Dragon."

(no response)

That's where I first saw you. In Westwood. Remember?

(after a moment, Theo nods)

You were more handsome than Bruce Lee.

THEODORE

No one else ever thought that.

JULIE

You did. When I first met you, you were going to take over where Bruce Lee left off.

THEODORE

I was a fool.

JULIE

You had a dream.

THEODORE

Only fools have dreams.

JULIE

Everyone has a dream. Or they should have. I had a dream.

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

I came to Hollywood to see the stars. And lo and behold, I found a star of my own. I looked to the East and found beautiful Chen Li-Chien, a star from above, fallen down to earth to be my own lovely dream. It was a sacred moment. God, I haven't thought of anything being "sacred" for a long time.

THEODORE

Stop.

JULIE

I remember the first time we made love. On the beach at the end of Sunset Boulevard. Right there in the sand. Anyone could have come along and seen us. You were so surprised.

THEODORE

You were too bold.

JULIE

Not too bold for you. You were so ready.

THEODORE

No woman should be so bold.

JULIE

You were my dream. My fantasy. I wasn't being bold. I was living my dream.

THEODORE

You get naked. On the beach.

JULIE

By the ocean. They don't have oceans in Minnesota.

THEODORE

No woman get naked like that in Taiwan. No good woman.

JULIE

You weren't in Taiwan. And I was your dream, too. Remember?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Was I a good woman?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Am I a good woman?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Li-Chien. Theo. I want to be your dream again. I want you to be my dream again.

THEODORE

No. Ju-li. It cannot be.

JULIE

Yes it can. We're in America, where anything is possible.

THEODORE

Once.

JULIE

Yes. Once. Once upon a time. In America. A handsome warrior-prince came from across the sea to rescue the beautiful maiden from the snows of Minnesota and the white picket fences of her ancestors.

THEODORE

I cannot rescue you, Ju-li.

JULIE

You already have.

(As can be imagined, at some point during the previous sequence Julie has made her way to Theo. They are now very close.)

JULIE (continued)

Happy Bah-bah day, Daddy Bah-bah.

(She kisses him lightly. He resists, then acquiesces, then pulls away again.)

THEODORE

I don't feel very happy.

JULIE

I don't care. I have an idea for how to celebrate Bah-bah Day. No almond jell-o with black cherries for you.

THEODORE

I don't want to celebrate.

JULIE

Ah, but I do, my handsome warrior-prince. You have no choice. I am a handmaiden of Freyja, the Norse goddess of beauty and destiny. I shall cast a Scandinavian spell over us, and all will be well. We will return to the time of our dreams.

THEODORE

Dreams are for fools.

JULIE

(turning on mystically sensuous jazz)

Yes they are.

(She "casts a spell" with the flowing moves of a dancer.

As Theodore falls under the spell, lights FADE TO BLACK on the main set area. Theo and Julie move off quietly, in character, through the kitchen portal.)

SCENE 2

(BLUISH NIGHT BLOOMS on a small, off-set part of the forestage.

The DISTANT CRASH OF BREAKERS tells us we are not far from the ocean. MEILEY walks briskly onstage, calling back to Gabriel:)

MEILEY

This is wonderful. Come on, Gabriel, I found the perfect spot. The ocean's right there.

(GABRIEL moves onstage slowly, looking out to the "sea." Another WAVE BREAKS.)

GABRIEL

I can hear it, but I can't see a thing.

MEILEY

You will. Your eyes will adjust. The longer you're here, the better you'll see.

GABRIEL

OK.

(Meiley sits down and pats the ground next to her. Gabriel joins her. She snuggles up next to him, but he is not responsive.)

MEILEY

Oh don't be that way, *querido*. I'm cold. We can keep each other warm.

(Gabriel acquiesces and puts his arm around her.)

GABRIEL

I wish it was like that in life.

MEILEY

You wish what was like that?

GABRIEL

You said, "the longer you're here, the better you'll see." I've been in this country for six years now, and I don't think I see very well at all.

MEILEY

You see just fine. You saw me, didn't you?

GABRIEL

I don't mean that. I mean how things work here. Nothing is simple. I don't think anyone understands the rules, or if they do, they sure aren't letting me in on the secret.

MEILEY

There are no rules. That's the great thing. You can just do what you want to do, be who you want to be.

GABRIEL

But how do you know who you are?

MEILEY

You just make it up! It's fun, the best fun. Come on, you can do it. Who do you want to be?

GABRIEL

I don't want to be anyone else. I just want to be me.

MEILEY

Ah, yes, but who are you really? The big strong construction worker who all the girls die for? (whispers) They can look, but you better not let them touch. (back to normal voice) Or the sensitive artist, walking in the forests and listening to the Mother Nature wind tell him just which branch or tree trunk will make the most beautiful piece of furniture. Or the sneaky illegal alien, hiding in the shadows and hoping evil *La Migra* doesn't find him out and make him go back to hot and dusty old Mexico.

GABRIEL

It's plenty hot and dusty right here in LA. You should try getting out of the air conditioning once in a while.

MEILEY

Hey! I get out a lot. I go to the beach all the time. Didn't you notice my sexy tan lines?

(She lowers a piece of clothing enough to show him said tan lines.)

GABRIEL

Very nice.

MEILEY

Muy caliente, no?

GABRIEL

Muy caliente, si.

(They share a tender kiss.)

Your father sure got in my face.

MEILEY

Ignore him. He doesn't have a clue how the real world works.

GABRIEL

And you do, huh?

MEILEY

Yes.

(Gabriel smiles.)

MEILEY (continued)

What's that look supposed to mean?

GABRIEL

Nothing.

MEILEY

Don't "nothing" me. You don't think I know about the real world?

GABRIEL

Sure. You're fine. I didn't mean anything.

MEILEY

Listen here, Señor Del Rio, I am not just some pretty young thing you can patronize. Tell me what you were thinking.

GABRIEL

It's not a big deal. It's just that you haven't really had much of *la lucha* in your life.

MEILEY

La lucha? I can't believe you said that. You don't think I've had a struggle? You've met my father – do you think it's easy living with him?

GABRIEL

I can see where he's difficult. But you have to admit he's been *muy de apoyo* for you.

MEILEY

"*De apoyo*"? I don't know what that means.

GABRIEL

Supportive. He covers you for everything. You don't have to worry about anything, at least as far as money goes.

MEILEY

Money isn't everything. I thought that's what our relationship was all about. I don't care about money.

GABRIEL

That's because you have it. I worry about it all the time. As far as you care, money is just something you go to the ATM to withdraw. Do you ever put anything *in* the bank?

MEILEY

Why are you saying this to me? That is so mean.

GABRIEL

Sorry. It's just – your father got me to thinking.

MEILEY

I told you to ignore him. (beat) Thinking about what?

GABRIEL

Does he think we're getting married or something?

MEILEY

How should I know?

GABRIEL

That was a hell of an inquisition he put me through if he thinks we're just holding hands and roller-blading around your campus together.

MEILEY

I told you, he doesn't have a clue.

GABRIEL

OK. What he said made sense, though.

MEILEY

Oh my God, Gabriel. He thinks he's in Taiwan and any guy who touches me has to marry me or he'll commit hara kiri or something.

GABRIEL

I think that's Japanese.

MEILEY

Whatever. I don't care what he thinks. We're living our lives and that's all that matters.

GABRIEL

What was the deal with your grandfather being in jail?

MEILEY

I have no idea. I never heard that one before. Who knows, he might have been making it up to try to impress you or something.

GABRIEL

He seemed pretty real to me. You'd think he would have told you about it when you were little or something.

MEILEY

He never tells me anything about Taiwan. I met some relatives a few times, but I never knew what the hell they were talking about. They just jabbered away in Chinese, or Taiwanese, or whatever it was they spoke over there. Whatever.

GABRIEL

So why is it you don't speak Chinese or whatever it is?

MEILEY

I just never did. Why would I?

GABRIEL

Duh. You're half Chinese, you know.

MEILEY

Taiwanese. They're different. That much I know.

GABRIEL

Whatever. Ya know, the more I think about it, the more this is messed up.

MEILEY

What's messed up? Me?

GABRIEL

Yeah, sort of.

MEILEY

Gabriel? You are being so hurtful to me. That hurts me, do you know that?

GABRIEL

I'm sorry. I really am. But I don't get it. You don't know anything about who you really are, do you know *that*? You run around acting like some sort of little Chicana all up in arms about *La Gente* and Aztlan. But you're not a Chicana. Anybody who looks at you figures you're a WASP from a big house in Irvine or La Cañada or somewhere like that.

MEILEY

I can't help what I look like.

GABRIEL

Neither can I, but I don't pretend I'm Irish or Swedish or whatever.

MEILEY

This is so unfair! I am, too, a Chicana. It says I can be, right on the MEChA website: "all people are potential Chicanas and Chicanos." That's me. I'm all people.

GABRIEL

But you're not a Chicana.

MEILEY

It's a state of mind. Don't you get it? It's a philosophy, a way of thinking.

GABRIEL

Part of it. But a lot of it's where you come from, what you look like. What do you think the whole *La Raza* thing is about? *La Raza* – “the race.”

MEILEY

It doesn't have to be!

GABRIEL

Why is this so important to you?

MEILEY

(very upset)

Because I don't know who I am. I need to belong. Somewhere. With someone.

GABRIEL

You belong with your family, just like everybody else.

MEILEY

I don't even know my family. One side is just some pictures of me standing next to people I don't know and can't talk to. The other side is always just a little embarrassed that I've got a little Asian spice peeking through my eyelids. Oh, they wouldn't say it out loud, but I can tell by how they look at me, how they flinch just a little when they have to hug me.

GABRIEL

Is it really that bad?

MEILEY

Yes! You think I'm making this up? You think anyone would want to make something like this up?

GABRIEL

No.

MEILEY

And that's not the worst of it. Look at my father. Nobody can know him, not even my mother. She just pretends that all is well in this great big happy world we live in. She'd still be a flower-child hippie if her principal would let her.

GABRIEL

I thought your father was mad at me. For being a Mexican.

MEILEY

He doesn't care that you're a Mexican. Too much. He's just mad that you're a Mexican with his daughter.

GABRIEL

Is that why you're with me? To prove something to your father?

MEILEY

No! I love you, you know that.

GABRIEL

Yes. But is your father part of it? Getting his attention? Maybe hurting him a little for the way he's hurt you?

MEILEY

I don't know. Maybe. Part of it. Mainly I just want someone who wants me, no matter what I am or am not. I mean, you said it – everyone thinks I'm a spoiled little white girl, a WASP. But I'm not. I'm half one thing and half the other, and neither half wants the other. Not my family, not the kids at school, no one.

GABRIEL

I want you. Both halves.

MEILEY

Why? Why do you want me?

GABRIEL

Because you're a hottie and you let me fool around with you.

MEILEY

Gabriel!

GABRIEL

What? It's true.

(sees she's genuinely hurt)

I'm sorry.

MEILEY

It's not funny.

GABRIEL

I know. It's not an easy question, why you love someone.

MEILEY

Maybe it's not supposed to be easy.

GABRIEL

Maybe not.

(He tilts her head up to kiss her, but she turns away. He wraps his arms tighter around her as they look out into the darkness.)

GABRIEL (continued)

Big moon tonight.

(She lets him hold her, but does not look at him.)

MEILEY

Wah ai ni, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

What's that mean?

MEILEY

"I love you." In Chinese.

GABRIEL

You've been holding out on me. You do know some Chinese.

MEILEY

I forgot I knew it. My Dad used to say it to me when I was little.

GABRIEL

But not now?

MEILEY

It's been a long time.

GABRIEL

Maybe you should say it to him.

MEILEY

Yeah, maybe.

GABRIEL

So why be a Chicana? Why not something else. An Armenian? There's lots of Armenians around. You kinda look Armenian.

MEILEY

I do not.

GABRIEL

Kind of.

MEILEY

Really?

GABRIEL

Yeah.

MEILEY

Is that good?

GABRIEL

I don't know. It's not one way or the other. It just is.

MEILEY

I have some Armenian friends at school. From Glendale. They're very politically active, too.

GABRIEL

Is that common? For Armenians?

MEILEY

Duh. Very common. Haven't you ever heard of the Armenian Genocide?

GABRIEL

No. I never heard of Armenians until I crossed over.

MEILEY

They're very passionate. They have a right to be. The Ottoman Turks tried to kill them ALL. That's what "genocide" is, you know.

GABRIEL

Sounds bad.

MEILEY

It's terrible!

GABRIEL

Maybe you can join them – when you're done being a Chicana.

MEILEY

Gabriel Del Rio! I can't believe you said that. I'm . . . just . . . I can't believe you!

GABRIEL

Calm down. I'm just teasing.

MEILEY

It's not funny. This is serious to me.

GABRIEL

So I see. I'm sorry.

MEILEY

I don't accept. That was so cruel of you, to mock me like that. Being a Chicana is important to me. I'm not just playing some game. It's part of who I am.

GABRIEL

Come on.

MEILEY

Yo soy una Chicana!

GABRIEL

Tu no es una Chicana. Tu es una Americana.

MEILEY

No! Tu es equivocado! You are wrong, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

Ay, Madre Maria! Meiley, you can't just make this stuff up.

MEILEY

I'm not making it up! Will you stop that?! This is real to me. *Es la verdad!*

GABRIEL

It's not the truth. Cut it out. Look, you can't just pick some tribe out of the Nordstrom's catalogue that you want to wear for a season or two and then move on.

MEILEY

This isn't a "tribe."

GABRIEL

Damn right it's not. I'm not some "tribe." I'm me. And you're you. So cut this crap out and just be yourself.

MEILEY

I am being myself!

GABRIEL

Bullshit! You pretend you're some Chicana because you think it makes you cool. Like you're "authentic" or some crap. I hear you talking to your college friends. Well I call Bullshit. You're a rich girl from the Valley. You're "Whitey," you're "The Man," with a little over-achieving Asian thrown in to make you even less a Chicana.

MEILEY

(sobbing)

Stop it.

(Gabriel sees he's really hurt her, but he's still angry, too.)

GABRIEL

I'm sorry. But it's true.

(Meiley has huddled away from him, disconsolate.)

GABRIEL (continued)

Oh God.

(tries to comfort her, to no avail)

I'm sorry, Meiley. I really am. *Soy lo sentimos, querida.*

(She finally turns and presses her face into her chest.)

MEILEY

I need this, Gabriel. It's real to me. It's mine. I chose it and it's mine. Just like I chose you. You're real to me. You're right here. I chose you and you're mine.

GABRIEL

Si, querida, si. Soy tuyo.

MEILEY

Maybe it's not supposed to be easy.

(They look to each other, then out into the night. Lights FADE TO BLACK.)

END ACT I.

ACT II

SCENE 1

(LIGHTS UP in the cottage. The night glimmers atmospheric from the glow of shaded lamps.)

JULIE enters from the DS bedroom. She wears a throw-back outfit from the '80s, an amalgam of nods to San Francisco hippies, middle-class Midwesterners, and Hong Kong dragon ladies.

She blows dust off an old CD and inserts it, pushes "play." Overwrought HONG KONG ACTION-MOVIE MUSIC blares out. Julie claps her hands in delight.)

JULIE

Hurry, Theo. This is great.

(She does a Woodstock-inspired whirl or two, then mimics the mincing steps of a Geisha.)

JULIE (continued)

Theo Bah-bah, do I have to come in there and pull you out?

THEODORE (O.S.)

I don't think this is so good.

JULIE

It's not good. It's great! Hey, I bet you just need some more gaoliang.

THEODORE (O.S.)

I need something.

JULIE

(going to kitchen, returning with bottle)

You have to come out to get it. (enticing him) It's from Quemoy island. Best gaoliang in Taiwan.

(As she pours the liquor into two delicate Asian drinking cups, THEODORE steps out hesitantly from the master bedroom. He is barefoot below black silk "Bruce Lee" martial-arts pants and bare-chested underneath a beautifully embroidered crimson-and-gold Taiwanese jacket.)

JULIE (continued)

You look great!

(He takes a tentative “kung fu master” pose, but winces a little as he does.)

THEODORE

This not going to work. I hurt my side. Before you come.

(Julie moves quickly to him with a cup brimful of gaoliang.)

JULIE

Try this. It'll take away the pain. Happy Bah-bah Day, my handsome warrior-prince.

THEODORE

(after taking a swig)

Aaaagghhh. It takes away my throat.

(Julie takes a big sip from her own cup.)

JULIE

Yow! That'll put hair on your chest. Wanna see?

(She moves as if to unbutton her blouse.)

THEODORE

Not yet.

JULIE

No? Oh, I see. You need more gaoliang for that, too.

THEODORE

No no no. You are beautiful. I just – not ready.

JULIE

But I am beautiful, yes?

THEODORE

You are beautiful. Yes.

(She pours them each another cup of alcohol, gives him his, then sits down to admire him.)

JULIE

You are still very handsome, Li-Chien.

THEODORE

Handsome enough for Western woman?

JULIE

Oh, yes.

THEODORE

For any Western woman?

JULIE

Maybe. Which Western woman did you have in mind?

THEODORE

Not one single Western woman. I mean all of them.

JULIE

Any Western woman who doesn't think you're handsome is a fool.

THEODORE

Only the most handsome Taiwanese men get the Western women.

JULIE

I know. You told me that before. Before we were married.

THEODORE

Yes. It is true.

JULIE

I know.

(he slugs down his drink, goes to pour another)

You were very handsome, Li-Chien. You still are.

THEODORE

(knocks back another cupful)

Not handsome enough. Li-Chien never handsome enough.

(She moves to ease the bottle away from him.)

JULIE

You are always my movie star. Better than Bruce Lee any day.

(He seems to dismiss her, but smiles at her comment. He takes his "hero" pose from the beginning of the play, feet planted wide apart.)

THEODORE

Wah sur Chen Li-chien. Wah sur champion! I come to your country, I show you strength of Taiwan. Brave man of Taiwan. Hero of Taiwan!

JULIE

Come here, my hero.

THEODORE

No. Western woman come here.

(She goes to him. They share a tender moment, but not quite a kiss.

Offstage, CAR TIRES become audible, ROLLING TO A HALT. CAR DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE, FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.)

JULIE

That must be Meiley and her friend.

THEODORE

I don't want them to see us like this.

JULIE

Why not? It's our house. We're having fun. They should see the old farts having some fun. Pardon my French.

THEODORE

At least turn off music.

JULIE

Spoilsport.

(But she moves to stop the CD music.

The front door opens and MEILEY enters, followed quickly by GABRIEL. She stops short at the sight of her parents in their garish garb. She giggles.)

MEILEY

What happened to you two?

JULIE

It's Father's Day! Say Happy Father's Day to your father.

MEILEY

It's not Father's Day.

(sees the gaoliang)

Oh, you're drinking. Well Happy Grunyon Day, too.

JULIE

Don't be a brat, Meiley. It's August 8. Eight-eight?

MEILEY

Eight— ? Oh! Eight eight! Hey, we haven't done that for a while.

(to Gabriel)

Happy Chinese Father's Day.

GABRIEL

I don't get it. Father's Day is in June.

MEILEY

That's so Occidental of you.

JULIE

Sorry, Gabriel. "Eight" in Chinese is "bah." *Ee er sun suh oo lio chi bah.* So August 8 is "bah-bah." Eighth month, eighth day.

MEILEY

Bah-bah. Pa-pa. Father. Happy Father's Day.

GABRIEL

O-o-oh. I get it.

(to Theodore)

Happy Father's Day.

THEODORE

Thank you. And to you?

GABRIEL

What?

JULIE

Theo. Be nice.

GABRIEL

Oh. No. Not me. Not yet.

JULIE

You two came back just in time. It's time for a toast!

(She hurries to kitchen and returns with two more cups. Fills all four and distributes them all around.)

JULIE (continued)

Here you go, Gabriel. Theo. Mei-li. And me.

Ju-li. THEO

What? JULIE

She's nineteen. THEO

Daddy! I'm not a child. Will you please get that through your head? MEILEY

You always my child. THEO

Yes she is. But it's a celebration. JULIE

(runs to peek out window)
Nope. I don't see any ATF agents out there. I think we're in the clear. Come on, Theo. Make a toast.

THEO
(thinks a bit, then:)
Gam-bay!

(He knocks his cup back in a single gulp.)

GABRIEL
Gam-bay!
(aside to Meiley)
What's that mean?

JULIE
Gam-bay! Dry cup! Everybody drain your glass!

(Which she does.)

GABRIEL & MEILEY
Gam-bay!

(Gabriel empties his cup, though with difficulty. Meiley tries sipping, but starts a prolonged hacking-cough fit as soon as the burning liquid touches her throat.)

THEODORE
You see? Not so grown up.

GABRIEL

(patting Meiley on her back)

You OK? Take it easy.

(to Theodore)

That stuff's harsh.

THEODORE

Gaoliang. Pride of Taiwan.

(Meiley keeps coughing. Julie goes to help her. She and Gabriel get her into a chair.)

JULIE

Go get some water.

GABRIEL

Me?

JULIE

Yes you. In the kitchen.

GABRIEL

Oooh-kay.

(he leaves, quickly returning with a glass of water.)

Here you go, Meiley.

(Julie helps her drink some down. The coughing subsides.)

MEILEY

Why didn't you tell me?

THEODORE

You not a child. I got that through my head.

JULIE

Take it easy. You'll be okay in just a second.

MEILEY

Daddy, you're such a meanie.

THEODORE

(can't help but laugh)

That's me. Daddy Meanie. Chen Meanie Papa.

JULIE

Theo. She's hurting. Remember the first time you drank gaoliang?

THEODORE

No! I don't remember. I don't feel pain. No pain, no gain.

JULIE

Ha ha. Well I remember, and it's a shock. Right, Gabriel?

GABRIEL

It's got a kick.

THEODORE

Good. Time for another kick.

(He pours three more cups and passes them around.)

THEODORE (continued)

Sway-ee! As you please. All or part, you decide.

(He chugs his, as does Gabriel. Julie takes a sip, then sets her cup aside.)

THEODORE (continued)

(to Gabriel)

Good for you. Another?

GABRIEL

In a minute.

THEODORE

Good. More for me.

(He pours himself another cup. Julie gets up and eases it away from him.)

JULIE

Papa. We can have more soon. We don't want to fall asleep right in the middle of the celebration, do we?

THEODORE

Fine. More later. So, Mr. Gabriel. I'm glad you come back. How do you like how I dress?

GABRIEL

It's, uh, very Asian-looking.

THEODORE

You are right! That's because I am Asian man. Taiwanese man. But not just any man. I am Taiwanese hero!

(He strikes his "hero" pose. Gabriel isn't quite sure how to react.)

GABRIEL

You look, uh, good. Like a hero.

THEODORE

Exactly! Watch this.

(Theodore jumps to the floor and begins doing push-ups. If possible, he even does a one-handed push-up or two. He finishes and jumps to his feet.)

JULIE

How! Hung how! (Good, very good.)

THEODORE

(nods his head in a slight bow of acknowledgement)

Thank you. Now you, Mr. Gabriel. What kind of hero are you?

GABRIEL

I'm just a working hombre. Not much of a hero.

THEODORE

What?! Not a hero? Then how can you be with my daughter?

MEILEY

Daddy, leave him alone.

THEODORE

No. You be quiet, little girl. Papa knows. No hero, no Mei-li.

GABRIEL

Yeah, well. I think you make a better hero.

THEODORE

That right!

GABRIEL

I mean, you have the costume and all.

THEODORE

You! You insult me. Stand up!

No. GABRIEL

Daddy! MEILEY

Theodore. JULIE

THEODORE
No. You stay away. This man insult me. Stand up!

GABRIEL
I'm not standing up. I'm not fighting you.

(As Theodore seethes, a CELL PHONE RINGS. The unexpected sound stops them all. The PHONE KEEPS RINGING.)

JULIE
(to Theodore)
You. Stand right there. Do not move.

THEODORE
He insult me!

JULIE
Do. Not. Move.

(He obeys reluctantly, swaying slightly. She tracks the ringing to the master bedroom.)

JULIE (continued) (O.S.)
Hello. What? I'm sorry, I don't understand . . . Oh, wait a minute. Theo!

(She returns and gives him the phone.)

JULIE (continued)
It's for you. I'm pretty sure he's speaking Chinese. Straighten up.

THEODORE
Hello? . . . *Dway. Wah shur Chen Li-chien. . . . Dway. How. . . . Shunmuh?*
(he listens, growing more upset, interjecting in Chinese once or twice, then:)
Mama? Wah yow-- . . . Shunmuh . . . ?
(he is now more and more dejected as he listens, until:)

THEODORE (continued)

Liao tsyeh, Mama. Tsai chien.

(He places the phone on the table and stares off into nothingness.)

JULIE

Who was it? Theo, who was on the phone? It was your mother, right?

(nothing)

Theo, who was on the phone?

THEODORE

I make a big mistake.

JULIE

Was it about the immigration situation? How could your mother hear about that so—

MEILEY

What immigration situation?

JULIE

Meiley, not now. Be quiet for a second.

THEODORE

I did. I make a big mistake. I was wrong to come here.

JULIE

Here? This weekend? Where else would you have gone? Nothing's going to happen until at least Monday—

THEODORE

Not this place. This little house. I mean whole "here". America. I was wrong to come to America.

JULIE

Theo, what did your mother say?

THEODORE

I was a fool . . . to think . . . that . . .

JULIE

What? Talk to me, Theodore. Theo!

THEODORE

I was never strong enough to be here.

JULIE

Stop it, Theo! Talk to me. This isn't just about the immigration. It isn't just Meiley and this boy. What did your mother say? You need to talk to me. I can't understand if you won't talk to me.

THEODORE

Talk talk talk! Always more talk. I so sick of talk. You and your talk. Every minute of every day.

JULIE

That's the way things work, Theo. If we don't talk, if we can't communicate, then nobody knows what's going on. I want to know what's going on, Theo.

THEODORE

That's the way things work *here*. Not everyone thinks it's good to tear open the head and the body and just let things slide out into world for anyone to see. No good. *Bu how!*

JULIE

I'm not everyone, Theo. I'm your wife.

THEODORE

Yes. You are my wife. The love of my life. Why I am in America and not where I belong. Not where I should have been.

JULIE

Theo, you can't do this. You can't shut me out. I am trying to help you. I am your wife, you must talk to me. I want to understand. I need to understand.

THEODORE

You want to understand? Good for you. Understand this. When I was child, younger than Shao-Mei, before I come to America, I had dream. Dream of what my life be like, what I become, who I marry and what children look like. I show my father and my mother who I am and they would smile. Not big smile, not boasting, but good smile. They respect me, and I am happy.

JULIE

It's a good dream.

THEODORE

Yes. But I lose dream. Don't know why. I anger some powerful spirit, I insult ancestor some way. I betray my dream. I come to America. I want to be hero. Too proud. Too much boast. I betray myself. I am not self of my dream. I cannot respect this self I have become.

JULIE

(comes close to him)

Theo, whatever your mother said, whatever is happening that seems so terrible right now, you need to put it out of your mind.

THEODORE

Stay away from me.

(she reaches her hand out to him)

Don't touch me!

JULIE

You're scaring me.

THEODORE

No. It is you who scare me. You turn my dream into nightmare.

JULIE

Stop it! You cannot talk to me like this. I am your wife.

THEODORE

Yes. The wife I betray my dream with. I do not understand you. I do not understand us. I do not understand this daughter who is stranger to me. I do not understand how I fall in love with *lao wai*.

MEILEY

Lao wai? What does that mean? Daddy!

JULIE

Lao wai. Foreigner.

THEODORE

Lao wai. You are foreigner to me. Always *lao wai*.

JULIE

I am not a foreigner to you. I don't care how upset you are, this is wrong. It is wrong for you to say this to me.

(he stares at her with a stone face)

I have lived with you for 22 years. We have been married for 21 years. We have a child together, even if you don't understand her. I have shared a bed with you, given my body to you – well, tried to give my body to you – for almost half of both our lives, and I'm a *foreigner* to you?!

(She waits for him to respond, but he is silent.)

JULIE (continued)

You must say something to me. You can not be silent. You can not put on this mask. It is not an option.

(Still nothing. Suddenly Julie explodes.)

JULIE (continued)

You bastard! How dare you ignore me? You are the foreigner! This is my home, do you understand? You are in my home. You are the one who is wrong, not me – do you understand?

(Unable to stand his silence, she runs at him and pounds her fists around his head and shoulders.)

JULIE (continued)

How dare you blame me for your life?!? You weakling, you coward! You chose this, you bastard! I hate you! Hate you—

(Gabriel and Meiley rush to break them up. Suddenly, Theodore bursts into action.

With surprising speed and power, he punches and then kicks Gabriel, knocking him to the floor. Theodore punches him sharply in the upper chest, leaving him gasping for air.

Meiley jumps on her father, who shrugs her off and almost punches her. He stops himself at the last moment.

Julie attacks Theodore again, scratching and clawing at him. He grabs her around the torso and lifts her high in the air, squeezing as hard as he can.)

JULIE (continued)

(barely able to breathe)

Theo... Theo – you're hurting me. Theo! Let go!

(He keeps squeezing her, a horrible grimace contorting his face, until:)

THEODORE

AUUGGGHHHH!!

(His arms burst apart and Julie drops to the floor. He walks away, holding his face in his hands. Julie slumps on the floor in pain, trying to catch her breath. When she can finally speak:)

JULIE

Get out.

(Theodore cannot look at her.)

Get out I said.

(He walks out the front door, his face an unreadable blank. GRAVEL CRUNCHES under his feet as his FOOTSTEPS FADE AWAY.

Julie struggles into an overstuffed chair and huddles there, holding herself with both arms.

Meiley is torn between helping her mother and helping Gabriel. Unable to choose, she cries silently.

After a long pause:)

MEILEY
What happened?

JULIE
Are you OK?

MEILEY
Yes.

(Meiley finally goes to Gabriel. She tries to help, but doesn't know what to do)

JULIE
Water, please. Some water.

MEILEY
Sure.

(She hurries out to the kitchen, then back with two bottles of water. She unscrews one for each of the wounded parties.)

JULIE
Thank you.

(She takes a few tentative sips.)

MEILEY
(to Gabriel)

Are you OK?
(he nods)
I don't understand. Why did he do that?

JULIE
Don't worry, honey, it's OK.

MEILEY
It's not OK. You're hurt and Gabriel's hurt and Daddy cannot do this! I'm calling the police.

(She picks up the cell phone her father had used.)

JULIE

No. Stop it.

(Meiley starts to dial)

I said stop it! Listen to me when I talk to you. I told you I'm OK.

MEILEY

I don't understand this! What is his problem tonight?

JULIE

Life isn't treating him very well, Meiley. And he's treating life even worse.

MEILEY

He's sure treating you awful. He's being awful to all of us.

JULIE

You got that right. Gabriel. Are you all right?

GABRIEL

(recovering)

I'm OK.

JULIE

Are you sure?

GABRIEL

Yes. I'm OK. Just . . . leave me alone. Please.

MEILEY

She's just trying to help. What's wrong with men?

JULIE

It's life, Meiley. Everybody has a different idea of what life should be like. Of what marriage should be like. What love should be like. Right now your father and I have very different ideas on all of those.

MEILEY

Are you getting divorced?

JULIE

I don't know. Not tonight.

(Gabriel moves slowly to the front door and stands looking out.)

MEILEY

Do you still love him?

JULIE

I don't know. Right now I— just don't know.

MEILEY

So what was that with the phone call? I have a right to know.

JULIE

I don't know. It seems your grandmother said something to your father, and now he's insane.

GABRIEL

Meiley, I'm going to go. You need to be with your Mama.

JULIE

It's OK, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

No, I need to go. I'll take your car and come back tomorrow to pick you up. Or you call me and tell me—

MEILEY

She said it's OK, Gabriel. And I . . . want you here.

GABRIEL

Comprendo, pero . . . I need to go.

JULIE

You may not believe this, but nothing like this ever happens around here. I mean nothing. We are not a fireworks couple, let me tell you.

GABRIEL

It's OK. I just . . .

(He leaves. Meiley runs to the door and yells after him.)

MEILEY

Gabriel! What are you doing? Come back here!

(His GRAVEL FOOTSTEPS QUICKLY FADE AWAY.)

MEILEY (continued)

Gabriel! I said come back here!

JULIE

Meiley. Let him go.

MEILEY

What is he doing?! I didn't do anything wrong.

JULIE

We never think so.

(she crosses to the gaoliang bottle, pours a cup and downs it)

I'm tired. It's been a long day. I'm going to bed.

MEILEY

I just don't understand. Why did he leave? Why is Daddy crazy?

JULIE

It's my fault. And yours.

MEILEY

No! I will not accept that responsibility. And I won't let you, either.

JULIE

Oh, but we must. Responsibility is thrust upon our weary shoulders when Atlas shrugs and runs away. Sometimes the sacred demands a sacrifice.

(Julie pours herself another cup, then offers one to Meiley.)

MEILEY

No, Mother. Please don't drift away on me.

JULIE

Oh, I'm right here.

(she sips at the gaoliang, unable to help but wince)

It's also their fault, of course. And work. And family. And family in Taiwan. And hopes. And dreams. And dreams that never had a hope.

(another sip)

Remember when we used to make up songs? When you were little?

MEILEY

I don't want to sing, Mother.

JULIE

Neither do I. But sometimes that's exactly the time when you need to sing. Or at least make up the lyrics to songs.

MEILEY

Music sucks.

JULIE

Everything sucks. Sometimes. Pardon my French.

(Meiley can't help but smile a little at her mother's unexpected mild vulgarity.)

MEILEY

You don't know French. You teach Spanish.

JULIE

Si. Soy Profesora Chen. Eso me.

MEILEY

OK, Profesora. You want to make up lyrics, you start.

JULIE

Why, thank you.

(she considers, then:)

"I wish I were a superstar" . . . OK, your turn.

MEILEY

(after a beat)

"I hope I'll travel very far." OK, now you.

JULIE

"I wish I were a sexy ho."

MEILEY

A "ho"?! Don't wish for that. Do you even know what "ho" means?

JULIE

Sure. I think. It's what all the Grammy-winning stars are always wishing for.

MEILEY

Trust me, Mom, you do not want to be a ho.

JULIE

Probably not. But I do wish I were sexy.

MEILEY

Oh god. I'm not going there.

JULIE

Don't worry. I'm probably not either.

(She takes another sip.)

JULIE (continued)

Your turn. You have to rhyme with “ho.”

MEILEY

That’s easy. “I hope I’ll have a lot of dough!”

JULIE

You have plenty of money.

MEILEY

I mean a LOT!

(They both laugh at the enthusiastic greed.)

JULIE

OK. Now we need to sing it.

MEILEY

Mother.

JULIE

A song’s not a song until you sing it.

MEILEY

All right, all right.

JULIE

Come over here. We need to be together to sing this.

(Meiley walk to her. Julie puts her arm snugly around her daughter’s shoulder.)

MEILEY

You haven’t done this for a long time.

JULIE

I haven’t done this, either.

(she leans over and kisses Meiley on the forehead)

OK, time to sing.

JULIE & MEILEY

I wish I were a superstar
I hope I’ll travel very far
I wish I were a sexy ho

(Giggles from both of them.)

JULIE & MEILEY (continued)

I hope I'll have a lot of dough!

(They hug each other with silliness, then tenderness. The hug lasts quite a while.)

JULIE

I hope all your dreams come true, little Mei-Mei.

MEILEY

You too, Mom. You too.

JULIE

And now I'm going to bed.

MEILEY

Me, too.

(They walk to the DS bedroom arm-in-arm, then hug before Julie goes inside. Meiley exits through the portal, turning off the lights as she goes.)

SCENE 2

(Same dim-lit stage. Slowly, out of the shadows, THEODORE peeks in from the portal hallway. Seeing no one, he enters and sits in an easy chair.

After a beat, GRAVEL CRUNCHES VERY SOFTLY outside. Theodore tenses, moves to front door to investigate.

He peeks out the window, then pulls his head back. Hesitantly, he opens the door.)

THEODORE

(very quietly)

What do you want?

GABRIEL (O.S.)

(also quietly)

Nothing.

THEODORE

Good.

(he closes the door; after a beat, he opens it again)

You. Come inside.

GABRIEL (O.S.)

I'm fine out here.

THEODORE

I say come in, you come in.

(GABRIEL enters, shivering a little against the coastal chill. Theodore shuts the door behind him.)

THEODORE (continued)

Why you out there?

GABRIEL

I had to get out of here.

THEODORE

Yes. Me too.

GABRIEL

So I saw.

THEODORE

Yes. Are you hurt?

GABRIEL

No.

THEODORE

Good.

(Neither knows what to do or say.)

GABRIEL

You pop a good punch. For an old man.

THEODORE

Yes. Old man. (beat) You want gaoliang?

GABRIEL

No.

THEODORE

No. No more for me.

(sees opened water bottle)

Water.

(He drinks it all down, then sees the other water bottle and drains it as well.)

THEODORE (continued)

You don't know how hard I work in this country, how hard I work to get what I get.

GABRIEL

Congratulations, Mr. Hard-working-Asian-man.

THEODORE

You don't know!

GABRIEL

You don't think I work hard? Try roofing on top of a four-story apartment in the middle of the stinking summer. 115 degrees with the heat blazing up off the asphalt shingles. It's hot up there!

THEODORE

You used to it. Hot in Mexico.

GABRIEL

That's right. It's hot in Mexico. Hotter than here, even. That's why we left.

THEODORE

Illegal!

GABRIEL

Yes. So what? At least I'm happy.

(Impasse. As the air hangs heavy over them both, MEILEY comes out from the portal hallway, dressed in an over-sized T-shirt.)

MEILEY

(quietly)

What are you doing here? Either of you.

(No response. Theodore stares at the floor, then walks to an overstuffed chair and sits down, suddenly a zombie in exotic Asian costume.)

MEILEY (continued)

(still quiet)

I asked you what you're doing here.

THEODORE

(dead eyes)

I got nowhere else to go.

(As he says this, JULIE, in silk long-sleeve, long-pants pajamas, appears in the DS bedroom door. Meiley doesn't see her, her eyes riveted on a sight she's never seen before: her father with tears in his eyes.)

MEILEY

Daddy, don't . . . you can't . . .

(She kneels down and takes one of his hands in both of hers. He turns his eyes to her and smiles ever so slightly. Julie comes in to the room and sits. Meiley, startled by her mother, jumps back.)

MEILEY (continued)

Mother!

JULIE

Sshhh.

THEODORE

I'm sorry.

JULIE

It's not that easy.

THEODORE

I don't know what to do. I don't know who I am.

JULIE

I don't know who you are, either, Theodore. Or are you Li-chien now?

THEODORE

No. I don't know. It doesn't matter.

MEILEY

Who's Li-chien?

JULIE

Your father. But he never lets anyone call him that. Not any more.

THEODORE

(hollowest of echoes of his former war cry)

Wah sur Chen Li-chien.

JULIE

Except his mother. You still let your mother call you Li-Chien, don't you, Theodore?

THEODORE

She hate me.

JULIE

What did she say to you, Theo? On the phone.

THEODORE

She gives everything to my brother. House and everything. Everything from my father, all to my brother.

JULIE

Oh. But that makes sense, doesn't it? He's there and you're here.

THEODORE

I am oldest son! *Er-dah!*

JULIE

But you're not there.

THEODORE

You not understand? I am oldest son. Not for her to decide. Me! *Er-dah!*

JULIE

But you're not there.

THEODORE

Yes. But I not there. I am dead to her. I am dead to Taiwan.

JULIE

You're not dead to her. She called you, didn't she?

THEODORE

Not her. Lawyer. She only speak to prove lawyer telling truth. I have nothing in Taiwan now. I am dead to Taiwan.

JULIE

Your family is there.

THEODORE

I am dead to them.

MEILEY

It's no big deal, Daddy. You're not from Taiwan any more.

THEODORE

Taiwan is my home!

JULIE

Theo. You left Taiwan a long time ago. That's what you chose. Remember?

THEODORE

I was born there. It is my home.

JULIE

This is your home. We are your family.

THEODORE

I told you. I make a big mistake.

JULIE

Theodore Chen. You are a small, small man.

THEODORE

I am not! I am Chen Le-Chien! *Wah sur Chen Li-chien!* Hero of . . .
(lost again)
. . . Taiwan.

GABRIEL

(somewhat helpful, somewhat mocking)

You were looking good there – at first. You had it down. The look, the costume, the attitude.

THEODORE

You still here? Why are you still here?

JULIE

Gabriel, you're not helping.

GABRIEL

I'm just saying. You could've been in the movies.

MEILEY

Be quiet, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

You got it. No problem.

THEODORE

I was supposed to be in the movies. That's why I come to America.

GABRIEL

No way.

THEODORE

(bristling)

You don't think I can be movie star? I beat you bad. I beat you easy. And I'm old man.

GABRIEL

Yeah. Maybe you could. But you're not.

THEODORE

No. I'm not.

JULIE

But you could have been. Easily.

MEILEY

You're not making this up, Daddy? You wanted to be a movie star?

THEODORE

I was a fool. Only fools have such dreams.

MEILEY

Don't say that, Daddy! Dreams are all we have sometimes. I have big dreams. Great dreams.

THEODORE

Yes. My daughter, the Chicana.

MEILEY

Yes! It was my dream. And now it's my reality.

THEODORE

Foolish.

JULIE

Dreams are not foolish, Mei-mei.

MEILEY

(taking a different tack)

What happened, Daddy? Were you in any movies?

(Theodore turns away.)

JULIE

It's very hard to be in the movies. You know that, Meiley. You have to know someone, or be very lucky. Especially an Asian man. Especially twenty-five years ago.

MEILEY

Of course! You were discriminated against. I should have known. See, Gabriel? Asians are discriminated against, too.

GABRIEL

Good for you.

MEILEY

Why didn't you go to Hong Kong? That's where all the Asian movie stars begin their careers.

THEODORE

No! I come to America! America is Hollywood. Hollywood is the movies. The best movies. Not Hong Kong.

GABRIEL

You ever meet Bruce Lee?

THEODORE

Fool. See what you know.

JULIE

Bruce Lee was dead when Theo came here.

THEODORE

Ten years! More than ten years. 1973. I come more than ten years after Bruce Lee die.

GABRIEL

At least he was a star.

MEILEY

Stop it, Gabriel.

JULIE

Your father could have been a movie star. If the sacred had been aligned. But the sacred had a better idea. He found me. And now you're here, little Mei-Li.

MEILEY

Why didn't we go back to Taiwan? I mean, if you weren't going to be a movie star, why didn't you take us back to your home? Things aren't so messed up in Taiwan.

(Theo snorts in disbelief, shakes his head.)

JULIE

No place is easy, Meiley.

GABRIEL

You got that right. My father always tells us that Sonora was messed up.

MEILEY

Why didn't you at least tell me about Taiwan? Why didn't you ever teach me Chinese?

THEODORE

We are in America, I want you to be an American. America is my dream. I do everything like American. I don't speak Chinese, I am always Theodore, never Li-chien, I don't put shoes by door, I listen to wife.

MEILEY

I am an American. But I'm Taiwanese, too.

THEODORE

No. Only I am Taiwanese. And now I am dead to Taiwan.

MEILEY

I never had a chance. You took half of me away! You stole half of my life. You didn't have the right to do that! I want it back!

THEODORE

You are American!

MEILEY

Not only. What happened to my great-grandfather? Why did they put him in jail?

THEODORE

Doesn't matter. That was many years ago.

MEILEY

It does so matter. To me. You owe me. I want to know.

JULIE

She wants to know, Theo.

THEODORE

Fine. You want to know, I tell you. My grandfather work in Japan. Japan own Taiwan. Taiwan likes Japan. War come, Japan lose. Now China own Taiwan. China fights China, Chiang Kai-shek lose, come to Taiwan. Army takes over. No one can speak Taiwanese, only Mandarin. Taiwanese people say, "No, you cannot do this." Chiang Kai-shek says, "Yes, I will do this." Put people in jail. Put my grandfather in jail. Because he said "no." My grandfather lose everything.

(Theodore turns on Gabriel.)

THEODORE (continued)

You remember what I say? You lose, things change. Japan lose, things change for Taiwan. Things change for my grandfather. Things change for me. Why you Mexicans not understand this? Mexico lose war, things change. This is not a hard idea.

MEILEY

It's a stupid idea, and we don't have to listen to it. And stop attacking Gabriel. Who are you to tell us anything? You don't even know who you are.

THEODORE

You right, little girl. I don't know who I am. And I god damn don't know who you are. You think it's easy being your father? I can't talk to you. It's not even me. When I speak English, it's like I pretend to be another person, a person who can speak English. They are my words, but it's not me thinking them. It's that guy who can speak English. Can you imagine it? I can't even speak to my own child using my own words.

JULIE

Whose fault is that, Theodore?

THEODORE

My fault! I know that! I say that! I make mistake!

MEILEY

So I'm a mistake?

JULIE

You and me both, kid.

THEODORE

I am no one. Li-chien is no more. Theodore is no one. I am a fool.

GABRIEL

He sounds like you, Meiley.

MEILEY

I'm not a fool. No way. I am nothing like . . . that.

GABRIEL

I mean when he says he's no one. You said you don't know who you are.

MEILEY

Gabriel! I said that to you in private.

GABRIEL

I'm sorry. It's just that . . . these are your parents.

MEILEY

It doesn't matter. I said that in private.

GABRIEL

I'm sorry.

JULIE

It's OK, Mei-mei. You fit right in with this family. None of seems to know who we are tonight. I'm certainly not sure where I fit in at this point.

THEODORE

You are fine. You are always fine. You can always go back to Minnesota. To the picket fence.

JULIE

How can you say that? You know I can't go back. I chose you. This is it. You can never go home again. None of us. Haven't you learned that in all this time in America?

THEODORE

(indicating Gabriel)

He can. You. Go back to Mexico.

GABRIEL

I don't live in Mexico. I live here. With my family. Unlike you.

THEODORE

Yes. Unlike me. I follow law, I lose my family. You break law, you keep family.

JULIE

You didn't follow all the laws.

THEODORE

You. Be quiet.

JULIE

Don't worry. I'm not telling any secrets. You broke the law of your family, of your father. You fell in love with me.

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

And I broke the law of my family. I fell in love with you.

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Are we lost?

THEODORE

Yes.

(Silence. Nowhere to go. Until:)

MEILEY

I wish “lost” would never exist.

JULIE

You and me both, kid.

MEILEY

Aztlan was lost. But now it’s found.

JULIE

Don’t start with Aztlan. You are not Maria. You are Mei-li.

MEILEY

It doesn’t matter. Don’t you see? This is the “sacred” you always talk about.

JULIE

There’s nothing sacred about Aztlan. It’s just some story. Like Camelot.

MEILEY

No! You’re so wrong. It’s real. And it’s here right now. And it’s perfect for us. All of us!

THEODORE

Stop it. Stop the Aztlan.

MEILEY

Daddy! It’s the answer to your problems. To all of our problems. I see it now. It’s just like Gloria Anzaldua said!

JULIE

Anzaldua? Where did you hear about her?

GABRIEL

Don’t get her started.

MEILEY

This is for you, too, Gabriel.

(to her mother)

I read all about her in college.

THEODORE

With my money.

MEILEY

Yes, with your money. But this will help you, Daddy.

THEODORE

I don't want help. Not from Gloria and your Aztlan.

MEILEY

It's perfect. Just listen. It's all about *mestizaje*.

GABRIEL

Dios mio.

MEILEY

Mestizaje is when we all come together, all become part of *la raza cosmica*. It's a psychological and spiritual blending of cultures within each individual! That's me!

THEODORE

You are not Chicana!

MEILEY

I am! It's what I choose to be. Daddy, you don't have to be a slave to your birth. This is America, the land of the free and the home of the brave. You can be free!

THEODORE

Stop this! Stop this . . . dreaming! I insist that you face reality.

MEILEY

I am. This is completely real.

THEODORE

No! I will not allow this. I have lost my home. I have lost my family. I may lose my work, my company—

JULIE

Theo . . .

THEODORE

I may lose my wife. But I will not lose my daughter. You are all I have left to show for my life. I will not allow you to reject me and choose this . . . this . . . illegal Mexican! This must not stand!

MEILEY

He is not illegal! The border is illegal! The border is a “1,950 mile-long open wound dividing a *pueblo*, a culture, but the skin of the earth is seamless.” That’s what Gloria Anzaldua says. And she’s right!

THEODORE

They lost the war!

(to Gabriel)

Did you not lose the war?

GABRIEL

I didn’t lose anything. *Soy un carpintero*.

THEODORE

Your people lost. That matters. You are illegal.

GABRIEL

OK, I’m illegal. You’re legal. What’s it done for you?

(Theodore’s shoulders slump.)

MEILEY

It doesn’t matter what happened in the past. This is now. *Mestizaje* can save us from the past. It can save us from racial prejudice and sexism and homophobia and so many terrible things. All of us! Gloria said it!

(reciting)

“The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian – our psyches resemble the border towns and are populated by the same people. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.”¹

(quietly)

That’s us, Daddy. All of us.

(A long beat.)

JULIE

That sounded pretty sacred.

(No one responds.)

¹ Qtd. in Watts, Brenda. “Aztlán as a Palimpsest: From Chicano Nationalism Toward Transnational Feminism in Anzaldua’s Borderlands.” *Latino Studies* 2.3 (Dec. 2004): 315. Print.

JULIE (continued)

You did fall in love with me, didn't you Theodore? Chen Li-chien?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Do you still love me?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Shall we try Meiley's dream? This *mestizaje*?

THEODORE

It's for fools.

JULIE

Maybe. Probably.

MEILEY

Mother! It's not for fools! *Mestizaje*—

(Julie turns on Meiley with a surreally calm but incredibly penetrating gaze. The look shocks Meiley, stopping her in mid-protest.)

JULIE

Fools fall in love. Maybe only fools can stay in love.

THEODORE

What fools we were.

JULIE

What fools we are. I hope. Was it a mistake, Theo? To fall in love?

THEODORE

Yes.

JULIE

Yes. Maybe. Probably.

(They look at each other in a long-forgotten way.)

JULIE (continued)

Well then it was one hell of a mistake.

(They come together and tentatively hug. A quiet, gentle kiss.)

JULIE (continued)

Maybe wounding is the entrance to the sacred. Maybe that's all we can dream of – some sort of wounding. Followed by some sort of sacred. You're my sacred.

(opens to Meiley and Gabriel)

All of you.

(She turns back to Theo. Another kiss. **LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.**)

THE END

VITA: William Scott Whited was born in O'Neill, Nebraska. After graduating from West Waterloo High School in Waterloo, Iowa, he attended the University of Iowa, where he earned a B.A. degree in Speech and Dramatic Art – Theatre Emphasis. He worked in private industry, including ten years in the film and television business in southern California, before beginning a second career in education. He received his M.A. in English and Comparative Literature from the University of California at Irvine in 2001. He is currently a Lecturer in the English Program at Colorado State University-Pueblo.