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Film Chinois

by

Damon Chua



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"*FILM CHINOIS* premiered at Grove Theater Center in Burbank, California. Kevin Cochran, Artistic Director. Charles Johanson, Executive Director.".

Opening Night: 7 July 2007 at GTC Burbank

Real. Live. Fun.

Grove Theater Center

Kevin Cochran, Artistic Director
Charles L Johanson, Executive Director

film chinois

written by . . . . . **Damon Chua**
directed by . . . . . **Kevin Cochran**

Cast (in order of appearance)
Chinadoll . . . . . **Elizabeth Pan**
Randolph . . . . . **Sean Dougherty**
The Man . . . . . **Sam Mak**
Simone . . . . . **Joyce F. Liu**
Ambassador . . . . . **Frank Simons**

Lights . . . . . **David Darwin**
Set & Costumes . . . . . **Leonard Ogden**
Sound . . . . . **Hunter Stephenson**
Projections . . . . . **Walter Lutz**

Film Chinois was developed through the GTC New Play Initiative (www.gtc.org).
Literary Manager . . . . . **Sondi Kroeger Foley**
Primary Reader . . . . . **Ruth Seigle**

Produced for Grove Theater Center by Kevin Cochran & Charles Johanson

CHARACTERS

CHINADOLL - Early thirties, a Maoist/communist spy. She is the Chinese equivalent of the classic femme fatale.

RANDOLPH - Early thirties, an American operative. Smart, cool and collected, but in many ways, an innocent abroad.

SIMONE - Twenties, a Chinese songstress with a few tricks up her sleeve. Willful, emotional and a little silly.

AMBASSADOR - Fifties or older, from Belgium. Seedy, amoral and dryly funny, he is a steadfast admirer of Asian women.

THE MAN, who plays:

WAITER (Scenes 1 & 13)

CHINESE BUSINESSMAN (Scenes 2 & 16)

SERVER (Scene 3)

CHINESE MAN (Scenes 7, 11 & 15)

HOTEL CLERK (Scene 14)

WOMAN (Scene 17)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A silent, black-and-white short film is required for the last scene of the play. In the absence of such a film, the effect may be suggested by a flickering square of dim white light.

Scene One: Restaurant

(A dimly lit space with a sense of after-hours lethargy. **CHINADOLL**, *smoking, nursing a coffee, watches in cool contemplation the smoke curling up into the darkness of the ceiling.*

She composes herself and faces the audience.)

CHINADOLL. The year, 1947. The city, Beijing. Location, a quiet restaurant in the Diplomatic District. A beautiful girl sits smoking and drinking coffee. It is late. The beautiful girl is tired from a hard day's work looking for a film. As her thoughts turn to sleep, a stranger walks in.

(**RANDOLPH** *enters.)*

CHINADOLL. Her thoughts change, quickly.

(Immediately noticing the beautiful girl, **RANDOLPH** *takes a seat at the table next to hers.* **WAITER** *enters, gives him a menu, and exits.)*

CHINADOLL. There are stories of coincidences. Amazing tales of luck. But nothing like this. This is fate. The beautiful girl, still tired, knows exactly what she must do. Out of the corner of her eyes, she takes in the man's every move. She knows that if she does her job well, she will be free. Then, suddenly, his voice.

RANDOLPH. I was wondering…

CHINADOLL. The beautiful girl's heart skips a beat. No, she isn't attracted to him. Not yet. That comes later. Now she has to sustain his interest. In an indirect way. Which is, as she knows, the only way.

RANDOLPH. I was wondering…if you had a light.

*(***CHINADOLL** *pulls out a lighter.* **RANDOLPH** *goes up to her with a cigarette. She lights it.)*

RANDOLPH. Thank you. *(Beat)* What is your name?

CHINADOLL. It isn't the hardest of questions. And the beautiful girl has several answers. It depends on who's asking. For now, she says: *Chinadoll.*

RANDOLPH. Chinadoll. What a pretty name.

CHINADOLL. When a man says 'what a pretty name,' it may be difficult to know what he means. It could be, simply, I find you pretty. Or it could be, I find you repulsive, only your name is pretty. To know the truth, one has to listen carefully. Was it…

RANDOLPH. What a pretty *name.*

CHINADOLL. In which case it's only the name that appeals. Or was it…

RANDOLPH. What a *pretty* name.

CHINADOLL. In which case there is hope. I would like to think he meant the latter.

RANDOLPH. What a *pretty* name.

CHINADOLL. I've been called pretty all my life. But I prefer 'beautiful.' At the age of three, my Uncle's neighbor, an old man with large Buddha ears, called me a pretty little Princess. At the age of eight, I blushed when a cousin visiting from *Wuhan* called me pretty to my face. But by the time I was ten, I knew how to deal with 'pretty.' I would say, to the hordes of pre-pubescent boys with bad teeth and bad breath, 'and what do you have in mind?' They would cower and run away, almost surprised that a girl would come up with such a remark. So the beautiful girl almost said: *And what do you have in mind?*

RANDOLPH. Well…

(Beat.)

CHINADOLL. It works for boys. But not for men who know a thing or two about women. So, I say nothing.

RANDOLPH. My name is Randolph. I'm from America.

CHINADOLL. But she knows that already. Randolph Edward Dean, aged thirty-two, born and raised in Nebraska,

educated at Yale, working for the U.S. Government in an undefined capacity.

RANDOLPH. I'm a tea trader.

CHINADOLL. That's what they all say. Tea trader. So she says: *How's the tea harvest this season?*

RANDOLPH. Good. Very good.

CHINADOLL. The conversation is going nowhere. She knows she doesn't have much time. She tries: *How do you like Beijing, or Peking, as you people call it?*

RANDOLPH. I'm liking it more and more each day.

CHINADOLL. That was weak; she has to try harder. So the beautiful girl asks him a question to which answer she already knows: *What do you think of that rebel Mao Tse-Tung? He's been in the news a lot lately.*

RANDOLPH. That's a question of some delicacy.

CHINADOLL. He knows how to spin it.

RANDOLPH. He's striking a chord with the masses out there – the peasants and farmers who are the backbone of this country. Support is growing. What do you think?

CHINADOLL. He knows his stuff. The beautiful girl decides to play along: *That's exactly the problem – appealing to the masses and leaving the intellectuals behind. It's tearing the country apart.*

RANDOLPH. Perhaps it's for the better. Change is not always a bad thing.

CHINADOLL. Which was not what he said. At a meeting in Baltimore. A secret meeting. Just a month before.

RANDOLPH. But why talk about Mao when we can talk about the beauty of Peking. Or Beijing, as you people call it.

CHINADOLL. That was a nice segue. I have to give it to him. *You find Beijing beautiful do you?*

RANDOLPH. Very much so.

CHINADOLL. More beautiful than America?

RANDOLPH. In many ways.

CHINADOLL. More beautiful than your wife? *(Beat)* No, she didn't actually say that, even though the words were at the tip of her tongue. Now they are on firmer ground. She says: *If you're looking for something authentically Chinese, this is not the restaurant. Perhaps you'd like me to take you somewhere, somewhere that will set your taste buds on fire.*

*(***RANDOLPH** *is almost at a loss for words.)*

RANDOLPH. I'm game.

*(***CHINADOLL** *finally meets his eyes.)*

CHINADOLL. Shall we?

*(***RANDOLPH** *stands up.)*

CHINADOLL. It works every time. But that's just the start. And there are many steps in this mysterious process. The beautiful girl sets aside her fatigue and mentally prepares herself for what is to come. She has a deadline after all. And things, as the future Chairman Mao would say, will only get more interesting.

*(***CHINADOLL** *stands up and extends her beautiful hand, as lights fade.)*

End of Scene

Scene Two: Nightclub

(A lone spot on a beautifully-clad **SIMONE**, *on stage, singing a Zhou Xuan song.*

As lights go up, we see **AMBASSADOR**, *sitting at a table near the stage, nursing a cognac. He is lost in Simone's voice.*

CHINESE BUSINESSMAN *enters, tentative, carrying a briefcase. He is dressed in an ill-fitting suit.*

The following action takes place over the song.

CHINESE BUSINESSMAN *scans the room and spots* **AMBASSADOR**. *He moves towards an adjacent table.*

AMBASSADOR *does not acknowledge Chinese Businessman. Instead, after a beat, he stands up and moves to exit. Along the way he very discreetly drops a small but bulky envelope onto Chinese Businessman's table.* **AMBASSADOR** *exits.*

CHINESE BUSINESSMAN *quickly picks up the envelope and looks into it. It is stuffed full of cash. It is only then that* **CHINESE BUSINESSMAN** *smiles.*

He opens his briefcase, takes out a larger envelope containing something. This he leaves on the table. After a beat, **CHINESE BUSINESSMAN** *picks up his briefcase and exits.*

Momentarily **AMBASSADOR** *re-enters, waving to the still-singing* **SIMONE** *who flirts back in acknowledgement.* **AMBASSADOR** *spots the larger envelope and picks it up discreetly on the way back to his table.*

As he sits, he opens up the envelope, revealing a CAN OF FILM. Just then Simone's song draws to a close. **AMBASSADOR** *claps, as* **SIMONE** *blows him a kiss, making her way to the exit.)*

AMBASSADOR. Leaving so soon?

SIMONE. Mister Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR. *Mon petit pois.* Won't you come join me for a while?

*(***SIMONE** *weighs her options, and goes to sit with her suitor.)*

AMBASSADOR. I love your singing.

SIMONE. You say that every time.

AMBASSADOR. Because you're good. Always.

SIMONE. *(Not meaning it)* You're too kind.

AMBASSADOR. So what is my little chanteuse up to these days?

SIMONE. You know what I do.

AMBASSADOR. *(Mock surprise)* Do I really?

*(***AMBASSADOR** *takes a good look at* **SIMONE**.*)*

AMBASSADOR. Want a little drink? I'm buying.

SIMONE. Any news of my transit papers?

AMBASSADOR. Ah, the transit papers. Alas, I have no news. No news at all.

SIMONE. I'm tired of this game.

AMBASSADOR. Game? You think this is a game?

SIMONE. I can't do this much longer.

AMBASSADOR. What do you suggest?

*(***SIMONE** *has no response.* **AMBASSADOR** *laughs.)*

AMBASSADOR. You see. You need me. And I need you.

SIMONE. I'm really tired.

AMBASSADOR. Poor little baby. So tired. So uncooperative.

SIMONE. I saw the man with the briefcase. Maybe he likes you. Maybe you can try him.

*(***AMBASSADOR***'s smile vanishes.)*

AMBASSADOR. Watch what you say.

SIMONE. Whatever *thing* he gets you, I can get it too.

AMBASSADOR. Thanks but no thanks.

SIMONE. Just tell me what you want.

AMBASSADOR. You know what I want. *(Beat)* So?

SIMONE. What about tomorrow?

AMBASSADOR. I'm busy.

SIMONE. The day after then.

AMBASSADOR. No. It's tonight or nothing.

SIMONE. I need to do something first.

AMBASSADOR. I'm not falling for that.

SIMONE. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR. I give you one hour. You know where I live.

SIMONE. You're hateful.

*(***AMBASSADOR** *smiles.)*

SIMONE. Give me a cigarette.

*(***AMBASSADOR** *does so, and lights it.)*

AMBASSADOR. By the way, have you heard of "The Twins?"

SIMONE. The Twins?

AMBASSADOR. Chinese. Maoists. Operate around Peking.

SIMONE. No. Why?

AMBASSADOR. No reason.

SIMONE. Why are you interested in them?

AMBASSADOR. I'm always interested in 'them.'

SIMONE. I'm a Maoist too.

AMBASSADOR. You?

SIMONE. Why not? I think I'd look really good in a Mao suit.

AMBASSADOR. Maybe so. But you're like me, a true capitalist.

*(***AMBASSADOR** *takes out a wad of cash from his jacket.)*

AMBASSADOR. Right?

*(***SIMONE** *tries to take the cash, but the* **AMBASSADOR** *moves it away quickly.* **SIMONE** *laughs, despite herself.)*

SIMONE. You know why I like you?

AMBASSADOR. *(Mocking)* You like me?

SIMONE. Stop it.

AMBASSADOR. Tell me why you like me.

SIMONE. Because, well, you do what you want, say what you like.

AMBASSADOR. And you like that?

SIMONE. Sure.

AMBASSADOR. That's what you see in me? I thought I'm just your, how-do-you-say, meal ticket.

SIMONE. That too.

AMBASSADOR. How easily I fall for your sweet lies.

SIMONE. But you like it.

AMBASSADOR. I'm just humoring you.

SIMONE. You're making fun of me.

AMBASSADOR. What else is there to do? For me it's just wine, woman and song.

SIMONE. You're the Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR. Of a small, unimportant country.

SIMONE. Belgium is not small. Right?

AMBASSADOR. Wrong. It's tiny.

SIMONE. But it's beautiful. I know it's beautiful.

AMBASSADOR. Perhaps so.

SIMONE. It would be nice to live there.

AMBASSADOR. We shall see.

SIMONE. Europe – the center of the world. The culture, the cities, sophisticated people, where the air is fresh and food is good…

AMBASSADOR. Enough of this chit-chat.

*(***SIMONE** *looks annoyed.*

AMBASSADOR *takes a bill from the wad of cash and gives it to* **SIMONE**.*)*

AMBASSADOR. I give you one hour.

*(***SIMONE** *smiles, slips the cash into her dress, as lights fade.*

End of Scene

Scene Three: Imperial Palace Gardens

(Evening. Sounds of a Chinese orchestra playing.

Lights up on **RANDOLPH**, *standing in an outdoor pavilion, being served drinks by* **SERVER**. *As* **SERVER** *exits,* **CHINADOLL** *enters.*

There is a beat as **RANDOLPH** *registers the beautiful girl before his eyes.)*

RANDOLPH. Can this be real?

*(***CHINADOLL** *contemplates the question.)*

CHINADOLL. There is a Chinese saying. A fly never visits an egg that is not cracked.

RANDOLPH. You look more beautiful than ever.

CHINADOLL. You're not interested in what I have to say.

RANDOLPH. Hi.

CHINADOLL. What brings you to the Imperial Palace Gardens?

RANDOLPH. I wanted to ask you the same.

CHINADOLL. I asked first.

RANDOLPH. It's obvious, isn't it? Look at this place. It is like heaven on earth.

CHINADOLL. It used to be more beautiful. Before the war.

RANDOLPH. The war.

(Beat.)

CHINADOLL. You didn't answer my question.

RANDOLPH. I was invited.

CHINADOLL. You came alone?

RANDOLPH. I chose to come alone. And you?

CHINADOLL. I was invited too.

RANDOLPH. We're both invited.

CHINADOLL. How nice.

RANDOLPH. I have been thinking. About you.

CHINADOLL. Have you?

RANDOLPH. Yes.

CHINADOLL. What have you been thinking?

RANDOLPH. That our meeting at the restaurant wasn't an accident.

CHINADOLL. Is that what you think?

RANDOLPH. Yes.

CHINADOLL. Why?

RANDOLPH. Call it intuition.

CHINADOLL. I wasn't there to meet anyone.

RANDOLPH. I didn't say you were.

CHINADOLL. You spoke to me first.

RANDOLPH. It was quite courageous of me, don't you think?

CHINADOLL. Not really.

RANDOLPH. When in a public place a man speaks to a woman whom he doesn't know…

CHINADOLL. That is not courage. That's foolishness.

RANDOLPH. Then I'm glad I was a fool.

(The Chinese orchestra strikes up again, this time playing "In a Sentimental Mood.")

RANDOLPH. Would you like to dance?

CHINADOLL. I'd rather not.

RANDOLPH. Can I not persuade you?

CHINADOLL. You can try.

RANDOLPH. I'd really like to.

CHINADOLL. I have a confession to make.

*(***RANDOLPH** *contemplates this peculiar remark.)*

RANDOLPH. A confession.

CHINADOLL. Well… I…

(Beat.)

RANDOLPH. What is it?

CHINADOLL. I cannot dance.

RANDOLPH. That makes two of us. Please?

*(***CHINADOLL** *concedes. They move towards each other, tentative, but once they start engaging with the rhythm, it's like they've been dancing together all their lives.)*

RANDOLPH. Did you grow up here?

CHINADOLL. Nobody grows up in Beijing. I was born in a village in *Hubei*. Didn't see a city till I turned twenty.

RANDOLPH. I grew up in a small town too. Have you heard of Franklin, Nebraska?

CHINADOLL. No.

RANDOLPH. It's right in the middle of the country.

CHINADOLL. Do you miss it?

RANDOLPH. Do I miss home?

CHINADOLL. Yes.

RANDOLPH. Sometimes. Do you?

CHINADOLL. Beijing is my home now.

RANDOLPH. Your family?

CHINADOLL. They are all dead.

RANDOLPH. I'm sorry.

CHINADOLL. They died during the war.

RANDOLPH. I'm really sorry.

CHINADOLL. I like being by myself, to tell the truth.

RANDOLPH. You're not alone anymore.

CHINADOLL. We're just dancing.

RANDOLPH. Enjoying yourself?

CHINADOLL. What you want me to say?

RANDOLPH. Say yes.

*(***CHINADOLL** *stops, pulls away even as the orchestra continues to play.* **RANDOLPH***, unhappy, follows her.)*

CHINADOLL. Who do you think are the people who come to this party?

*(***RANDOLPH** *surveys the crowd.)*

RANDOLPH. What do you think?

CHINADOLL. I think all of them have a little secret in them.

RANDOLPH. Is that so?

CHINADOLL. Don't you have one too?

RANDOLPH. I have too many.

CHINADOLL. Tell me one.

RANDOLPH. You don't know me. It won't mean anything.

CHINADOLL. I have seen many Americans come and go.

RANDOLPH. So I'm just one of them.

CHINADOLL. Just another tea trader.

RANDOLPH. If you know me so well, then tell me my secret.

*(***RANDOLPH** *moves close.)*

CHINADOLL. A fly never visits an egg that is not cracked.

RANDOLPH. I heard you the first time.

CHINADOLL. You know what it means?

RANDOLPH. I'm not a cracked egg.

CHINADOLL. Did I say that?

RANDOLPH. If you knew my secret, I'd have to kill you.

(A moment of uneasy tension, broken by **RANDOLPH***'s laughter.)*

RANDOLPH. Can't you take a joke?

CHINADOLL. Not here. Not now. You don't know what's happening.

RANDOLPH. What is happening?

CHINADOLL. Many things. You have to learn fast. Otherwise…

(Beat.)

RANDOLPH. So, who are you, really?

CHINADOLL. I'll tell you my secret if you tell me yours.

RANDOLPH. How would I know you're telling the truth?

CHINADOLL. You just have to trust me.

RANDOLPH. And should I?

CHINADOLL. *(Turning to the audience)* It could have been so easy. The beautiful girl and the American who calls himself a fool. But he isn't a fool. And she's used to

playing the same game too many times. Perhaps she cannot change. Perhaps it's all too late. So she leans in close, close enough for him to kiss her.

*(***CHINADOLL** *does so. As he goes for it, she gently pulls away, but only slightly.)*

CHINADOLL. There is a time and place for everything.

RANDOLPH. I'm married. But I'm leaving her. Now your turn.

CHINADOLL. I don't love you.

(But she is lying, and he knows that.)

RANDOLPH. Good. I don't love you too.

(They kiss, as lights fade.)

End of Scene

Scene Four: Ambassador's Residence

(**AMBASSADOR**, *in a smoking jacket, sits next to an oil lamp, reading.*

There is a knock on the door.

He rises, heads towards the door and opens it.

SIMONE *enters. She appears tentative, unsure.)*

AMBASSADOR. What took you so long?

SIMONE. I saw something on the way here.

AMBASSADOR. Spare the excuse.

SIMONE. I'm not lying.

AMBASSADOR. Come here.

(Only then does **AMBASSADOR** *see that* **SIMONE** *is shaking.)*

SIMONE. It was terrible.

AMBASSADOR. What?

(No response.)

AMBASSADOR. Out with it.

SIMONE. I was taking a short cut, through this dark alley. I shouldn't have, but I did. Then suddenly a car drives past really quickly. I don't think they saw me. Otherwise they wouldn't have done it. It all happened so fast.

AMBASSADOR. What happened so fast?

SIMONE. I saw the men push something out of the backseat. I thought it was a sack. Like a sack of rice. But it was too big.

AMBASSADOR. A body?

SIMONE. It was a dead body.

AMBASSADOR. You sure it was dead?

SIMONE. There was blood all over. It was horrible. Horrible.

AMBASSADOR. *(Taking her in his arms)* Poor baby.

SIMONE. I don't know what to do. You have to help me. What should I do?

Hungry for More?

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