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Outside People

Zayd Dohrn

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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OUTSIDE PEOPLE was originally produced by Vineyard Theatre and Naked Angels in New York City on December 21st, 2012. The performance was directed by Evan Cabnet, with sets by Takeshi Kata, costumes by Jessica Wegener Shay, lighting by Ben Stanton, and sound by Bill BC Du Boff. The Production Stage Manager was Charles M. Turner III. The cast was as follows:

MALCOLM..... Matt Dellapina
XIAO MEI Li Jun Li
DA WEI “DAVID” WANG Nelson Lee
SAMANYA Sonequa Martin-Green

CHARACTERS

MALCOLM – 20s

XIAO MEI – 20s

DA WEI “DAVID” WANG – 20s

SAMANYA – 20s

SETTING

Beijing, PRC

TIME

Present

AUTHOR’S NOTES

Some of the dialogue is in pinyin, a romanization of Mandarin characters. In the script, English translations are given in brackets, but in performance there should be no supertitles or other assistance for the English-speaking audience.

For Rachel

SCENE 1

(A private room in an upscale neon expat bar in Beijing.)

(Chinese hip-hop playing)

(A Chinese girl, XIAO MEI, sits across from an American guy, MALCOLM. She's dressed up to go out; he wears jeans and a rumpled T-shirt, fresh off a transcontinental flight, uncomfortably aware of how he might look or smell.)

(There are a bunch of empty Yanjing beer bottles on the table and two unoccupied chairs, draped with a purse and jacket.)

(The song ends, and there's a long, awkward pause.)

(MALCOLM and XIAO MEI glance at one another.)

(He shrugs, laughs. She smiles.)

XIAO MEI. Sorry, my English...

MALCOLM. It's okay. My fault. My Chinese should be way better than it is by now. Really. Duì bu qǐ...Wǒ de zhōng guó. *[Sorry...for my China.]*

XIAO MEI. Méi shì. *[No problem.]*

(They both look around, hoping to be rescued.)

(An American pop song starts to play.)

MALCOLM. Um, so...

XIAO MEI. Hm?

MALCOLM. *(pointing to the speakers)* Bon Jovi.

XIAO MEI. Yes...?

MALCOLM. I used to – in fifth grade? Like – “Slippery When Wet”? I thought was like...

(He can't explain. Gives up.)

XIAO MEI. *(doesn't get it)* So how – do you meet Dà Wéi?

MALCOLM. Oh, Wang? *(The way he pronounces it rhymes with “bang”.)* We were roommates. In college. We lived together?

XIAO MEI. Ah.

MALCOLM. I mean – I don't know if that came out – um. “Lived together” as in we were placed in a room. Via lottery. Nothing – romantic, or anything. Tā shì wǒde péngyou *[He is my friend.]* is all...friends?

(She smiles politely.)

XIAO MEI. Duì le. Wǒ tīng dǒng le. *[Yeah. I understand.]*

MALCOLM. Nǐ ne? *[And you?]* How did you – um...

(He takes out a little red Chinese/English dictionary, flips through it.)

MALCOLM. Shit. Sorry...

(XIAO MEI looks around, waiting.)

Nǐ shì zěnmē rènshi...? *[How do you know...?] Fuck.*

(DAVID and SAMANYA enter from the bar, laughing.

DAVID *is Chinese, SAMANYA from Cameroon. They are both beautiful, expensively dressed, and speak fluent English and Mandarin.)*

(DAVID is balancing a bottle of liquor in one hand and four glasses in the other.)

(He shuts the door, blocking out the music.)

DAVID. Hey – sorry about that, guys. Bartender's a bit overwhelmed in there...*(He sets it all down on the table.)*

But it was worth the wait, uh? Wǒ men dài lǐwù lái le!
[We come bearing gifts!]

(pours out four drinks, sloppily)

Gān bēi *[Cheers]*, motherfuckers!

SAMANYA. Gān bēi!

XIAO MEI. Gān bēi.

(They all slug their shots, except MALCOLM.)

MALCOLM. *(catching on)* Oh. Sorry. Guan bay...

(He drinks his. They all watch him. He coughs.)

MALCOLM. Hahhh...

SAMANYA. You all right?

DAVID. *(laughing)* Don't hurt yourself now. Your first night.

MALCOLM. Uch – what the fuck?!?!

DAVID. *(refilling the glasses)* It's *erguotou*, man. Chinese fire liquor. Made from – sorghum grass or something. Hundred-twenty proof. For toasting special occasions...

MALCOLM. I'm honored.

SAMANYA. It's Xiao Mei's birthday.

MALCOLM. Oh, sorry. Can you tell her – "Happy Birthday" for me?

DAVID. It's more polite if you look at her when you talk.

MALCOLM. Happy. Birthday.

XIAO MEI. Thank. You.

MALCOLM. I feel like we should be speaking Chinese though...if I'm the only one here who doesn't –

DAVID. She understands a lot, don't worry.

MALCOLM. Yeah, but I should at least try. Feel like I'm confirming every stereotype of a provincial American redneck, with my –

DAVID. You are. With that outfit.

MALCOLM. Why? What's wrong with my –

DAVID. You look like a blind hobo, Malcolm. Make an effort. This isn't Africa, y'know. We do have running water here.

SAMANYA. We have running water in Africa, shǎ bī. *[stupid cunt]*

MALCOLM. I wanted to take a shower at the hotel, remember? You were the one who said we had no time to –

SAMANYA. I think he looks kinda cute and cuddly, actually.

DAVID. Oh yeah?

SAMANYA. You should try it some time, Dave. Relax. Dress it down a bit.

DAVID. No thank you. Chinese guy dresses like that, looks like he's about to deliver some moo shu pork.

SAMANYA. Well deliver then, bitch! I'm hungry!

(they laugh)

DAVID. *(raising a glass)* Hey – to Malcolm's long-awaited arrival in Beijing, uh? Huānyíng wàì guó de guàibīn. Gān bēi! [*Welcome honored foreign guest. Cheers!*]

ALL. Gān bēi!

(They drink again. MALCOLM almost hacks up a lung.)

MALCOLM. Ach. Sorry...I'm sorry. I haven't eaten anything but peanuts in like – eighteen hours...

SAMANYA. What're you doing here again?

DAVID. I told you, he's come to work for me.

MALCOLM. No. No, we're talking about that, as a possibility, Wang. I'm just – visiting, for the moment. Didn't have much going on in the States, so...

SAMANYA. You want to fā cái [*strike it rich*] like Dà Wéi, huh? Come to China and become a rich dà wàn er [*big shot*]?]

MALCOLM. Um?

SAMANYA. "Big shot."

MALCOLM. Oh, ha. I don't think I'm actually constitutionally capable of that kind of –

DAVID. *(interrupting)* Hey – what were you guys talking about? Before we so rudely interrupted?

MALCOLM. Oh, I'm afraid I wasn't much of a –

XIAO MEI. Bon Jo-vi.

DAVID. No, God, Malcolm. Not Bon Jovi...*(to the girls)* When we were at Stanford, Malcolm used to blast Eighties hair bands and synth-pop like twenty-four hours a day. Prince. Erasure. Depeche Mode, like we were –

MALCOLM. Long time ago, Wang.

DAVID. Not really. Our whole suite thought the two of us were *tóng xìng liàn* [*homosexuals*], I think, with all the –

MALCOLM. We were eighteen.

DAVID. And I guarantee if we go through your iTunes right now, it's at least ninety-five percent showtunes and glam rock. Am I wrong?

MALCOLM. Yes. Actually –

DAVID. Really?

MALCOLM. Yeah. Completely. In fact. (*glancing at SAMANYA*) I have lots of um...hip-hop in there...

(DAVID cackles.)

DAVID. Okay, Tupac...

XIAO MEI. (*rescuing him*) I also like Era-sure.

DAVID. Oh, see? Well then. You guys have a lot in common, huh? Maybe you should get to know each other better. *Biblically*...

(*an uncomfortable pause*)

XIAO MEI. Bib-li-lee...?

MALCOLM. Nothing. Nothing, he's just being a –

(DAVID slaps some money on the table.)

DAVID. (*to SAMANYA*) Here! Wanna grab us another bottle, *qīn'ài de* [*sweetheart*]?

SAMANYA. Sure. (*to XIAO MEI*) Hey, come on – Let's go pee and let the men talk about us, *hǎo bù hǎo?* [*all right?*]

XIAO MEI. Hǎo de. [*Okay.*]

(SAMANYA and XIAO MEI stand.)

DAVID. Don't take too long.

SAMANYA. Mind your own business.

(*The girls exit together, holding hands. MALCOLM watches them go.*)

MALCOLM. Holding hands...

DAVID. Yeah. Friendly thing here. Guys do it too, hey – how're you feeling now? All right?

MALCOLM. Good. Yeah.

DAVID. You look like shit.

MALCOLM. I'm tired. And a little bit wasted. Take it easy on me.

DAVID. Seems like she's digging you though, uh? Not bad, your first night.

MALCOLM. Who is...?

DAVID. Who do you think? Xiao Mei.

MALCOLM. What? Nah.

DAVID. Definitely! She's feeling it. I can tell.

MALCOLM. How?

DAVID. How? Because she's giving off some major vibes! You can't feel the vibes?

MALCOLM. No, I can't – understand a single fucking thing that's happened so far, Wang, since I got here. "Vibes," or...I just want to go to bed. I think it's – (*checks his watch*) – noon in Brooklyn? I'm gonna die.

DAVID. Here. Have some pills. Help with the jet lag.

(*He offers a little paper envelope.*)

MALCOLM. What is it?

DAVID. Ground up cow scrotum or something. Traditional herbal remedy. Give you lots of macho energy.

MALCOLM. (*laughs*)

DAVID. Come on. I insist you take her back to your hotel tonight and ravish her like a true pale-skinned barbarian.

MALCOLM. She doesn't seem the type...

DAVID. The type? Show me the respect of assuming I know how to read signals here, man. Believe me. She's down!

MALCOLM. She's way out of my league...

DAVID. Yeah, but that's the best thing about being a *lǎo wài* [*foreigner*] here! You climb a step or two up the totem pole just from having a US passport. You rate a five in the States, you're at least like...a seven in Beijing.

MALCOLM. Well that's – flattering, I guess.

DAVID. Like bald Eurotrash in LA with the starlets in the convertible? That's you in China, man!

MALCOLM. Anyway, we can't even talk. It's so awkward. I wouldn't even know where to –

DAVID. I thought you studied Chinese at school.

MALCOLM. I did! For a year. But apparently it was actually – Pig Latin or something, because she didn't understand a thing I said. Not a word.

DAVID. Tones. Takes some time getting used to. You'll have *biāo zhūnde Běijīng huà* [*nice sounding Beijing-speak*] in no time. Trust me. You know the best way to learn a new language, Malc? Pillow talk. That's why my Bantu has gotten so – (*He kisses the tips of his fingers.*)

MALCOLM. Samanya is really – stunning, by the way...

DAVID. Oh? Thanks.

MALCOLM. Look like 50 Cent over there...keep half-expecting you to break out a bottle of Cristal and start cutting up a kilo on the tabletop.

DAVID. Well, I would – I would, you know, but possession of narcotics is a capital offense in China, Malcolm, so – we'll stick to the *erguotou* and cow balls, huh? Gān bēi!

MALCOLM. Gān bēi –

(MALCOLM swallows the contents of the envelope.)

(*They drink.*)

(MALCOLM coughs.)

MALCOLM. Ah. Fuck...again.

DAVID. (*laughs*) Good to see you, man...Forgot what a lightweight you are.

MALCOLM. Yeah? You've changed a lot, Wang.

DAVID. You think?

MALCOLM. In a good way...

DAVID. Older?

MALCOLM. No. No, you look the same. Just –

DAVID. In my element.

MALCOLM. Yeah. Maybe...

DAVID. Hard to understand somebody until you see where he comes from, eh? You look the same too. Bit fatter.

MALCOLM. Thanks, man. For setting this all up. I really –

DAVID. Oh, it's nothing.

MALCOLM. It's not nothing. I needed it. A change of scenery...I wanted to let you know, I appreciate –

(The girls return to the table, SAMANYA dancing and holding a new bottle.)

SAMANYA. Heeeey! Miss us, ge menr? *[boys?]*

DAVID. Dāng rán. *[Of course.]* What took so long?

SAMANYA. Bartender was hitting on Xiao Mei. She told him to bì zuí *[shut up]* his wack-ass pickup line. I like this one, Dave! Nà me lì hài. *[Super hardcore.]* Where'd you find her?

DAVID. Around.

MALCOLM. *(to SAMANYA)* Your Chinese is – amazing, by the way.

SAMANYA. Oh, thanks. I've been here since forever. My dad works in the Cameroonien embassy. So – I basically am Chinese, right? *(to XIAO MEI)* Wǒ shì bù shì Zhōng guó rén? *[I'm Chinese, right?]*

XIAO MEI. Duì, xiàng gè lǎo Zhōng guó tóng. *[Yeah, she sounds like an old China hand.]*

SAMANYA. Went to Beijing elementary and everything.

DAVID. I can picture you. As a sixth grader. With the little blue Mao suit covering the crotchless panties from Milan...

SAMANYA. You know it.

XIAO MEI. *(a bit drunk)* “Beijing United.” Bù shì Zhōng guó rén de xué xiào. Tā men kěn dìng bù chuān máo zhǔxí dē Zhōng Shān Zhuāng! *[That's not a Chinese school. And they definitely don't wear any Mao suits there!]*

(Everybody laughs except MALCOLM, who didn't quite catch it.)

MALCOLM. What?

DAVID. She says Samanya went to this – international academy. Not authentic Beijing public school. She’s a poser.

SAMANYA. You’re the fucking poser, “Dave.” I’m way more Chinese than you are.

DAVID. You think so?

SAMANYA. Hell yeah. Xiao Mei, who’s more Chinese? Me or Dà Wéi.

XIAO MEI. (*without hesitation*) Dà Wéi.

DAVID. (*laughs*)

SAMANYA. Bitch! I was just starting to like you!

XIAO MEI. Dà Wéi is very Chinese. Wú lùn tā zěnmā xiǎng, tā zǒng huì shì yǐ zì wǒ wéi zhōng xīn. [*Even though he doesn’t really want to be, he can’t erase this true part of himself.*]

SAMANYA. (*laughing*) Oh shit!

MALCOLM. What? What’d she say?

DAVID. Nothing. Ignore her. Little Red Guard propaganda slogans.

SAMANYA. No, she thinks Dave’s a traitor. He’s hurt the feelings of the Chinese people by becoming so – westernized.

DAVID. She’s just jealous ‘cause she never got to go overseas.

SAMANYA. Well, she didn’t have your guānxi [*connections*], right?

DAVID. Or my test scores.

MALCOLM. “Guānxi”?

SAMANYA. Connections.

MALCOLM. Ah.

DAVID. You think guānxi got me into Stanford, Sam?

SAMANYA. Didn’t hurt, Dave. At least got you your student visa, no?

(*beat*)

DAVID. Well, that's true...here, to Uncle Feng, eh? And his NPC post. Gān bēi!

ALL. Gān bēi!

(They all drink again.)

SAMANYA. Hey – You said you had a good story, right? Tell.

DAVID. Oh, yeah – Okay. So. Check this out, Malc. Guess where I spent yesterday afternoon?

MALCOLM. Where?

DAVID. Police department. Character witness.

SAMANYA. For who?

DAVID. A friend.

SAMANYA. You don't have any friends. Or character.

DAVID. Kind of a dirty story anyway. Not so suitable for female friends...maybe I'll tell Malcolm later.

SAMANYA. *(laughing)* Asshole – tell! Nǐ shuō de shì shuí? *[Who are you talking about?]* One of your other girlfriends?

DAVID. One of our janitors, actually. Mister Zhang? All right, so. We had this American lǎo wài *[foreign]* accountant with us last week. Doing the books, right? Blonde lady from Texas. “Barbara.”

SAMANYA. Get to the dirty bits.

DAVID. Okay, so. Barbara's in the ladies room Tuesday morning. From what I understand. In the stall, minding her own business. Suddenly Mister Zhang busts in on her. Middle of her pee!

(He grabs SAMANYA's knees, spreads her legs apart. She squeals, bats him away.)

So. She screams. Like that. Thinking he's about to... have his wicked Oriental way with her. Guards come running. And when they get there, Mister Zhang is already on his hands and knees. *Kao tao-ing* on the bathroom floor. Apologizing for his rude behavior. Police take him in for questioning, and he confesses

right away: “I’m very sorry, officers. I don’t mean to offend the kind Miss. I just have to know – does the foreigner’s máo [*body hair*] match her tóufa [*head hair*]?” (for MALCOLM’s benefit:) “Does the rug match the drapes?”

SAMANYA. (*laughs*) Man, your English is good...

DAVID. (*cocky*) It is, right?

XIAO MEI. Wǒ bù xǐ huan nǐ zhè ge gùshì. Gào sù tā bù hé shì. [*I don’t think this is a very nice story to tell your friend.*]

MALCOLM. He wasn’t trying to rape her or –

DAVID. No. No, see – the cops want to cut off his balls or something. But he was just curious about foreign girls! This is what comes from a national policy of sexual repression, Malcolm. Ten, fifteen years ago, Chinese people are still being taught to love only the State, right? Beijing women wearing shapeless blue potato sacks to work, look like fucking Jackie Chan. Now, all of a sudden – (*indicating XIAO MEI*) – Chinese girls are decked out in the Louis Vuitton! Prada. Mini-skirts, *thongs*. Whole nation popped one big collectivist boner, all at the same time. People don’t know what to do with these feelings. It’s overwhelming. Which is why a nice guy like Mister Zhang can be literally driven insane by the mystery of blonde bush!

(SAMANYA *laughs*.)

(DAVID *glances at MALCOLM, who is slowly nodding off*.)

DAVID. Hey – Guībān! [*VIP!*] We boring you?

MALCOLM. (*starting up*) Uh? What?

(*They all laugh*.)

MALCOLM. Sorry – no, I’m just really – (*He slugs his drink*.) Okay? Gān bēi...

(*He puts his head down on the table*.)

DAVID. Why didn’t you sleep on the plane, motherfucker? I told you –

MALCOLM. I tried. But there was this – really fat guy sitting next to me? Overflowing his armrest –

XIAO MEI. Americans are very fat.

DAVID. Should have let me upgrade you.

MALCOLM. No, it was fine. I don't want to be –

DAVID. Got a zillion miles banked. What am I supposed to do with 'em if not fix up my boy?

MALCOLM. It's fine. I don't like flying business anyway –

SAMANYA. Why not?

DAVID. Because. Malcolm took "Intro to Marxism" in college and now he thinks he's a communist. Spent the last five years bumming around the U.S., growing a beard like Che Guevara. Living in his car and making a documentary about like – vegan goat herders or something.

MALCOLM. (*overlapping*) Subsistence farmers.

DAVID. I only got him to come to China because he thinks we're still Socialists here. So now he gets all self-righteous when you try to talk to him about *business*.

MALCOLM. No. No, that's not – it's not a political statement, just –

XIAO MEI. I think Mal-c olm have correct feeling about this...

MALCOLM. Oh. Thanks.

DAVID. Yeah, whatever. You can't talk to a Chinese about economics. She was brought up on Party propaganda. Probably never even been on an airplane before. And she actually believes in the *sì xiàng jīběn yuánzé* [*Four Cardinal Principles*], so –

XIAO MEI. No, this is not why, Dà Wéi...

DAVID. It is why.

XIAO MEI. Bùnéng shuō dàjiā zài jīngjì shàng dū yīnggāi píngděng. Shēng yì jìng zhēng ma, yě zhòng yào, dànshi měi gèrén dōu yīnggāi yǒu zuì jīběn de rénquán hé réngé. Nǐ shuō bù duì ma? [*It's not that everyone should be economically equal. I understand the need for*

competition and business interests. But everyone should have some kind of basic human rights and dignity too, don't you think so?]

DAVID. Eh – nǐ yào ràng wǒ diū miànzi mā? Zài wǒ péngyou dē miàn qián? [*Hey – You want to make me lose face? In front of my friend?*]

XIAO MEI. (to **MALCOLM**) Sorry. I don't mean –

(**MALCOLM** doesn't respond. He has fallen asleep at the table.)

DAVID. Ah. Poor fucker. Nǐ sòng tā huí “St. Regis” bīn guǎn, xíng ma? [*You'll help him get back to the St. Regis hotel, huh?*]

XIAO MEI. Méi wèn tí. [*No problem.*]

DAVID. Good. I have to pee. Come on, yáng guǐzi [*foreign devil*], you can hold it for me.

SAMANYA. Sure, let me just get out my miniature chopsticks...

(**DAVID** laughs, staggers out of the bar.)

(**SAMANYA** hesitates.)

SAMANYA. Hey, Xiao Mei – (*rummaging through her purse*) Listen, I was thinking maybe – we could get together sometime, you know? Hang out, or –

(*She offers XIAO MEI her card.*)

XIAO MEI. (*taking it with both hands*) Nà tài hǎo le. [*That'd be great.*]

SAMANYA. Yeah? Cool. I'd love it. Really. Xiǎo xīn yī diǎn, uh? [*Be careful, huh?*]

(*She exits after DAVID.*)

(**XIAO MEI** looks at **MALCOLM**, who is fast asleep with his head on the table, snoring softly.)

(*She taps him gently on the shoulder.*)

XIAO MEI. Hm – excuse me...Mal-c olm...? Hello?

(*He opens his eyes, sees her.*)

SCENE 2

(MALCOLM's hotel room)

(The lights are off. An unzipped duffel lies on the floor next to the bed – he hasn't yet unpacked.)

(On the bedside table are several bottles of prescription medication, a Beijing guidebook, some U.S. dollars.)

(The sound of a keycard in the lock outside, and the door opens.)

(MALCOLM and XIAO MEI enter, both a bit wasted.)

(He gropes blindly for the switch, turns on the lights.)

MALCOLM. Here we are...

XIAO MEI. Hǎo de. [Great].

(She takes off her shoes, using him for balance.)

MALCOLM. Um...you want something to drink, Xiao Mei? We got uh – (He opens the fridge.) Standard mini-bar fare...

(showing her)

Jack Daniels? Tanqueray?

XIAO MEI. Bùyòng xiè. [No thanks.] I am – too drunk already.

MALCOLM. Oh. Me too. Yeah. How 'bout – uh. Kě kǒu kě lè [Coca-cola]?

XIAO MEI. No...

MALCOLM. Sprite? How do you say in...?

XIAO MEI. Xuě bì. [Sprite]

MALCOLM. Xuě bì.

XIAO MEI. Bù shì “bì”. [Not “bi”.] Fourth tone.

MALCOLM. Bì.

XIAO MEI. (laughs) Oh. No – this is – very bad word the way you say, Mal-colm.

MALCOLM. Really? Wow. Sorry. You want a – Sprite...?

XIAO MEI. No. Xiè xie. [*Thanks.*]

MALCOLM. Okay. My bad. (*He closes the fridge.*) My Chinese...

XIAO MEI. Méi shì. [*It's fine.*]

MALCOLM. Bù hǎo yìsi. [*I'm embarrassed.*] I have to –

XIAO MEI. Hm?

MALCOLM. Um...I gotta – Y'know.

(*He gestures toward the bathroom, mimes peeing.*)

(*She laughs, covering her mouth with her hand.*)

XIAO MEI. Xíng. Qù ba. Méi shì. [*Okay. Go ahead. It's fine.*]

(*He goes into the bathroom and shuts the door.*)

(XIAO MEI looks around the room, wanders over to the closet, checks her lipstick in the mirror.)

(*She picks up one of the prescription bottles on the bedside table, looks at it curiously.*)

(MALCOLM's voice comes through the bathroom door, singing drunkenly.)

MALCOLM. (*offstage*) Oh-oh – Make it I swea-ar...Whoa-oh – Livin' on a prayer...*

(XIAO MEI laughs to herself, not covering her mouth this time.)

(*The sound of the toilet flushing. Water running in the sink.*)

(XIAO MEI puts down the pill bottle.)

(MALCOLM comes out of the bathroom, a bit unsteady.)

MALCOLM. Hey – Sorry.

XIAO MEI. (*gesturing at the bottles*) So many medicine.

MALCOLM. (*crossing to her*) Oh. Yeah, I know.

XIAO MEI. (*reading a label*) “Shan-ash”?

MALCOLM. Xanax. It's a – anti-anxiety...I get – nervous sometimes? Around people? No big deal. I can handle it, pretty much, just –

*See Music Use Note on page 3

XIAO MEI. *(another label)* “Wal-tresh”?

(MALCOLM opens the drawer of the bedside table, sweeps the pill bottles inside, closes the drawer.)

MALCOLM. It’s ridiculous, I know. Take more pills than my hypochondriac grandmother...Wǒ shì lǎo tóu. *[I’m an old fart.]*

XIAO MEI. Ah! Very good Chinese!

MALCOLM. Yeah. Speak better when I’m drunk. Remember more words, y’know? Fewer inhibitions...or whatever.

(beat)

(She looks around, biting her lip, waiting for him to make a move.)

(when he doesn’t)

XIAO MEI. I will put on some mu-sic now, hǎo bù hǎo? *[okay?]*

MALCOLM. Oh, I don’t have a stereo, but...

(She turns on the TV, finds a cheesy Hong Kong music video channel.)

(An Asian boy band is singing a romantic ballad.)

XIAO MEI. O-kay?

MALCOLM. Great, yeah.

(She sits on the bed, bounces a little.)

(He sits next to her.)

(They both laugh nervously.)

Thanks. By the way...for coming out, Xiao Mei. My first night. On your birthday and everything. Makes me feel really welcome, and –

(She kisses him.)

Wow.

(They kiss again. She starts to take off his shirt.)

MALCOLM. (*cont.*) Mm...Okay.

XIAO MEI. Wǒ de tiān! Zhēn duō máo! [*Oh my God! Lots of hair!*]

MALCOLM. What? Máo?

(*She tugs on his chest hair.*)

XIAO MEI. Nà me duō! [*So much!*] Lot of this.

MALCOLM. The hair? Yeah, I know. Sorry...it's a Jew thing, you know. Even my mom is like –

XIAO MEI. You are Jew?

MALCOLM. Me? Yeah...

XIAO MEI. Jew are very smart.

MALCOLM. Oh. Thanks. Smart, cheap, and hairy.

(*She doesn't get it.*)

XIAO MEI. Chinese man máo zhēn shǎo. [*have very little hair.*]

MALCOLM. Mm. Sorry. I didn't catch –

XIAO MEI. Suàn lē ba. [*Never mind.*]

(*They kiss.*)

(*She starts to unbutton his pants. His passport belt is in the way.*)

MALCOLM. Oops. Sorry.

(*He unbuckles the belt, drops it on the floor.*)

(*She unzips his fly.*)

Whoa. Wait – hold up a second...sorry.

XIAO MEI. Zěn me le? [*What's wrong?*]

MALCOLM. I uh – have something – I hafta tell you first, Xiao Mei, if that's – uh. Wǒ...gàosu...shìqíng...? [*I... tell you...thing...?*]

XIAO MEI. O-kay?

(*He stands up, takes a deep breath.*)

(*She watches him.*)

MALCOLM. Sorry. Don't mean to ruin the moment. Too late. *(laughs nervously)* It's a bit awkward, I know...if this were the States, it'd probably be a bit easier to – I'm pretty much a verbal person, I think, and uh...

(He paces.)

MALCOLM. *(cont.)* See, thing is, Xiao Mei – You seem really great to me...you know? But if we're about to do – what I think we were about to do? Which I would love to do? I have to tell you something first. If that's –

(He takes a deep breath.)

So. I think it's pretty obvious at this point that I'm not much of a "player"? Right? I mean I've only been with – a couple people. In college. And one time after...but apparently, one of those four "lucky ladies," unbeknownst to me, she had – this problem? You know? This issue...? Uh – Herpes?

(another deep breath)

I'm not supposed to be – contagious. If that makes any difference. I'm on medication. It's in remission. There are no open sores or – which is completely disgusting, I realize, to say "sores." But there's very little chance of your getting it from me, is all I'm trying to – and I'd still – like to be friends, or...

(beat)

XIAO MEI. I – sorry, Mal-c olm. Some of this I can no –

MALCOLM. All right, yeah. I'll boil it down for you, all right? I have...herpes.

(He winces.)

XIAO MEI. Her piece?

MALCOLM. Ha...

(He takes out his Chinese-English dictionary, flips through it.)

(He can't find the word.)

Nope. I can't – shit...

XIAO MEI. I think I will – (*starting to leave*) Sorry, if I am –
MALCOLM No no no no, it's not you. It's not you, just –

(*beat*)

Can you hang on one sec?

(*He fishes in his pocket for a business card. Picks up the hotel phone, dials, waits.*)

Hey – it's me, man. It's Malcolm...yeah, sorry. I know. I got a second wind...she's – here, but – Hey, Samanya...no, I just wondered if you could translate something for me real quick, Wang? Sorry to be – I just need you to tell her about my...issue? If you could explain – right. And hopefully say it in such a way that it's not a complete deal breaker? Because I'd really like to – I mean I think she's super cool and...okay, thanks, man. Sorry to be calling so late, I –

(*He hands the phone to XIAO MEI.*)

XIAO MEI. Wèi? [*Yes?*]

(*She listens.*)

XIAO MEI. Unh...unh...

(**MALCOLM** *watches her.*)

Unh...unh...? Unh...

(*beat*)

Xíng. Wǒ tīng dǒng le. Zài jiàn. [*Okay. I understand. Bye.*]

(*She hangs up the phone.*)

MALCOLM. You got all that? Nǐ tīng de dǒng? [*Understand?*]

XIAO MEI. Duì. [*Yeah.*]

MALCOLM. I'm really...sorry, Xiao Mei, I –

XIAO MEI. Méi shì. [*It's nothing.*] I can – understand this, Mal-calm. I think. Happy that you tell me now.

MALCOLM. You are? Good, 'cause I thought it'd be – just to say it out loud, so...and if you don't want to do anything, now, that's cool. I'd understand why –

XIAO MEI. Mal-colm?

MALCOLM. Yes?

XIAO MEI. I am like this also, you know.

MALCOLM. What?

XIAO MEI. I am also like –

MALCOLM. You are...?

XIAO MEI. Duì. [*Yeah.*] The similar situation.

MALCOLM. You're kidding. Really?

(beat)

Does Wang know?

XIAO MEI. Mm. Yes, he know this about me I think...

MALCOLM. (*confused*) Wow. Is that why he figured we'd – get along or whatever? That we had this in common, or...?

XIAO MEI. Maybe?

MALCOLM. Huh. That's – wow, I mean that's really...great, Xiao Mei. Smart of him. In terms of...y'know, I know it can be – really tough to meet people in this – with this type of situation.

XIAO MEI. Yes.

MALCOLM. Yeah. So...it's been a really – long time for me...All right? Just so you know. If I'm not like – up to snuff or whatever, in terms of your expectations... for anything – that lasts longer than thirty-five seconds, or...

(She holds his face, looks into his eyes.)

(He's surprised at first, tries to look away, but she keeps him there.)

(They look at each other.)

MALCOLM. Okay...Yeah.

(They kiss, and she pulls him back onto the bed.)

SCENE 3

(The hotel room)

(Grey Beijing dawn seeps around the edges of the window curtains. The sounds of early morning traffic.)

(MALCOLM lies across the comforter on the bed, in his underwear, asleep.)

(The bathroom door opens silently, and XIAO MEI enters, fully dressed, her hair wet from the shower.)

(She tiptoes around the room, hunting for something.)

(She looks under MALCOLM's passport belt.)

(Suddenly, there's a loud knock from outside. She freezes.)

(MALCOLM stirs, opens his eyes, sees her)

(another knock, more insistent this time)

(She puts down the belt.)

MALCOLM. Hello...?

DAVID. *(offstage)* Malc? Wake up, man! It's me –

MALCOLM. Oh. Hey –

DAVID. *(offstage)* Open the fucking door.

(MALCOLM rolls out of bed, falls on the floor, pulls on his jeans)

MALCOLM. 'kay...Hold on a sec...? *(whispering)* Sorry. I didn't know he'd be –

(XIAO MEI shrugs – "What can you do?")

(MALCOLM tries to make the bed. It's a lost cause. He gives up, pulls on his shirt.)

(DAVID knocks again.)

Okay! One second...

(XIAO MEI opens the door)

(**DAVID** enters, wearing a different suit, carrying a cardboard tray with three Starbucks cups and a brown paper bag.)

(He takes in the room with a glance.)

DAVID. Morning, all...

MALCOLM. Hey –

DAVID. (to **XIAO MEI**) Nǐ zhēn kuài. [You work fast.]

XIAO MEI. Měi yǒu nǐ nèm mā kuài. [Not as fast as you.]

DAVID. I brought coffee. Muffins.

MALCOLM. Thanks.

DAVID. Méi shì. [No problem.] Everybody sleep well?

XIAO MEI. Nà wǒ xiān zóu lē. [I should go.]

(she puts on her shoes)

(While her back is turned, **DAVID** takes a pen from his pocket, snags her underwear from where they've fallen underneath the bed, and holds them out to her.)

DAVID. Don't forget your nèi kù, Xiǎo jiě [panties, Miss]. Kind of breezy outside...

(She takes them, looks him in the eye, puts them on under her skirt.)

XIAO MEI. Xiè xie nǐ [Thank you], Dà Wéi. (to **MALCOLM**) So it is – nice to meet you, Mal-calm. I will – see you some later time, maybe, okay?

MALCOLM. Oh. I – wǒ...hěn...[I...really...] Sorry. Zuó tiān...Hǎo wán...[Yesterday...Fun...]

DAVID. God, you sound like a fucking retard, you know that?

MALCOLM. Yes, I am aware of the problem, Wang. Thanks. (to **XIAO MEI**) Duì bù qǐ...[Sorry.]

XIAO MEI. Méi guān xi. [It's okay.]

MALCOLM. Wǒ...xī wàng...[I...hope...] Uh. Xang – Xiǎng...? [Want...?] No.

DAVID. Jesus Christ. Who does Stanford have teaching Chinese these days, deaf-mutes? Xiao Mei – nǐ yào bù yào gōng zuò? [*You want the job or not?*]

XIAO MEI. Shénme? [*What?*]

DAVID. Yībǎi wǔshí kuài yīgè xiǎoshí, zěnmē yàng? Jiāo zhège lǎowài shuō biāo zhǔnde pǔtōnghuà. [*How about a hundred fifty an hour? Teaching this old foreigner how to talk standard speak?*]

(XIAO MEI glances at MALCOLM)

XIAO MEI. Liǎng bǎi sān shí wǔ. [*Two thirty five.*]

DAVID. Liǎng bǎi. Wǒ yào tā dào chūntiān yǐqián jiù néng shuō de liúli, hǎo bù hǎo? [*Two hundred. And I want him fluent by Spring, all right?*]

(beat)

XIAO MEI. Xíng. [*Okay.*]

DAVID. Good. Twice a week, after work. Chinese lessons. Here in the hotel. How's that sound?

MALCOLM. Really?

DAVID. Yeah, we'll have you up to speed in no time. Pay her two hundred rénminbì [*people's currency*] per session. Cool?

MALCOLM. (reaching for his money belt) Now?

DAVID. No, not now. She's not a fucking drug dealer, Malcolm. After the lesson.

MALCOLM. Oh. Okay. Xiè xie [*thanks*], Xiao Mei. That's really –

XIAO MEI. Bù kè qì. [*You're welcome.*]

MALCOLM. (to DAVID) How much is...?

DAVID. Twenty nine. Thirty bucks. Don't worry, I'll pay.

MALCOLM. No. No, I just – (whispering) I thought maybe we should pay her more.

DAVID. (mock whispering) No, we should not pay her more. I just bargained her down from two-thirty-five.

MALCOLM. What? Why?

DAVID. Because. That's how it works here, man. You negotiate.

MALCOLM. But – I don't care about an extra...six bucks, Wang. Jesus.

XIAO MEI. Méi shì, méi shì – [*It's fine – It's fine –*]

DAVID. What are you, UNICEF? Two hundred is what it costs. You want to insult her by paying extra like she's some kind of third world refugee?

XIAO MEI. No problem, Mal-coltm, o-kay? Suàn le ba. [*Forget it.*]

MALCOLM. Okay. Sorry. Um. Míngtiān...wǒ...xī wàng...xué Zhōng guó. [*Tomorrow...I...Look forward...to learning of the China.*]

(**XIAO MEI** smiles)

XIAO MEI. Okay. Bye-bye.

(*she exits, shutting the door softly behind her*)

DAVID. So. That went pretty well, uh?

MALCOLM. Jesus Christ, Wang! What the fuck?

DAVID. What?

MALCOLM. Why'd you have to be such a – you made her feel like – we just had this *encounter* here, y'know, and I'm trying to be –

DAVID. She's fine, Malcolm. Trust me. Chinese girls are very practical in this regard. She doesn't expect your – American-style romance. Like in the movies. She's happy to get the work.

MALCOLM. “Like in the movies”? This from the guy who wept openly during *Titanic*?

DAVID. (*laughs*) Yeah, that's why I don't date Chinese girls anymore! After five years in the States. I like someone with a bit more – Hollywood in her.

MALCOLM. Anyway. I don't think you know what you're talking about. Xiao Mei doesn't seem “practical” to me. At all. In fact she's actually really –

DAVID. Different?

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