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THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE PRESENTS

White Pearl

by Anchuli Felicia King

White Pearl was first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Sloane Square, on Friday 10 May 2019.



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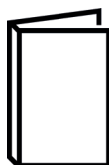
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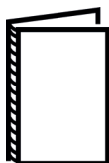


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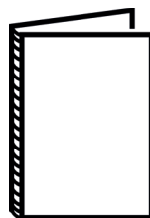
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anchuli Felicia King is a playwright and multidisciplinary artist of Thai-Australian descent.

As a playwright, Felicia is interested in linguistic hybrids, digital cultures and issues of globalization. Her plays are being produced at the Royal Court (London), Studio Theatre (DC), American Shakespeare Center (Staunton), Melbourne Theatre Company (Melbourne), Sydney Theatre Company, National Theatre of Parramatta and Belvoir Theatre (Sydney).

Formerly based in New York, Felicia has worked with a wide range of companies and institutions, including Punchdrunk, PlayCo, 3LD Arts & Technology Center, Roundabout Theater, 59E59, Ars Nova, the Obie Awards, The Builders Association, Ensemble Studio Theater, NYTW and Red Bull Theater. She is a member of EST's Youngblood Group and Roundabout Theater's Space Jam Program. With South African director Kim Kerfoot, she is the co-founder of experimental theater collective NPG.

Felicia continues to work internationally, and is based between London, New York and her hometown of Melbourne, Australia.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Casting this play is really fucking hard. If you want to put on this play, make sure you have the resources to cast it properly.

Generally speaking, we've found that you can be more flexible with the ethnicity of actors playing the "Westernized" Asians in the team: Priya, Built, to a certain extent Sunny. And of course Marcel. But the actors *must* have some ethnic or cultural resonance with their character. Have an open dialogue with the actors you're auditioning, reach out to your local Asian theater community, be culturally cognizant, and just generally don't be a dick about it.

With the "homeland" Asians (Ruki, Soo-Jin and Xiao), it is absolutely imperative that the actors be non-native English speakers from the specific cultural background of their characters. Trust me. I've seen the alternative. It doesn't work.

I don't mind if you move around some of the phraseology but generally speaking, stick to the text. The highly specific language in this play is the result of extensive development, as well as my life experience. There is no one way of speaking Singlish, or Californian English, just as there's no one way to define "dudebro-speak". Collaborate with the actors to determine their character's idiosyncratic mode of speaking and their level of English fluency, and be open to adjusting this as your process evolves.

I also strongly recommend you celebrate cultural difference – not just in casting, but in the rehearsal process. A *White Pearl* cast will be a global village, and you'll have a better time if you surround them with creatives and crew members who reflect that cultural multiplicity. I've had the privilege of working with extraordinary women of color throughout the development of this play, and their contributions have enormously informed this playtext.

The final note is about tone. As outlandish as they sometimes are, I don't think any of these characters are parodies. The people in *White Pearl* have absolute conviction about their actions and beliefs. Therefore while the play is certainly a black comedy, bordering on satire, the performances should be grounded, specific and multidimensional. That way it's more horrifying. And funnier.

“/” denotes overlapping dialogue

Underline denotes a projected title card

Bold denotes a YouTube comment.¹ These can be audio cues or projected. I strongly recommend projected.

¹As of this draft, all the comments are real (a few have been slightly edited for length and/or narrative consistency). I haven't changed any of the usernames.

CHARACTERS

PRIYA SINGH – Female. Indian-Singaporean. Mumbai accent, rounded out by years of British education.

SUNNY LEE – Female. Chinese-Singaporean. American dudebro-speak, becomes more Singlish/Hokkien depending on her audience.

RUKI MINAMI – Female. Japanese. Noticeable Japanese accent. Crisp English.

BUILT SUTTIKUL – Female. Thai-American. Californian. Verging on valley-girl.

SOO-JIN PARK – Female. South Korean. Strong Korean accent but excellent English.

XIAO CHEN – Female. Chinese. The weakest English speaker.

MARCEL BENOIT – Male. Strong French accent with fluent-ish English.

All characters are in their mid-twenties / early thirties.

TIME

Present Day.

SETTING

Clearday™ Headquarters, Singapore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the numerous theaters and institutions that have aided me in the development of this play – Smash the Box Collective, Columbia University, Roundabout Theatre Company, Yellow Earth Theatre, Playwriting Australia and the National Play Festival. At the time of publication, we're doing three productions of this play in three different countries; our world premiere at the Royal Court in London, then with Sydney Theatre Company/National Theatre of Paramatta in Sydney, and finally with Studio Theatre in Washington DC. I'm enormously thankful to all of these companies, not just for taking a chance on this play but for giving me the resources and support to stage it.

I am beyond indebted to the global family of actors, directors, and creatives who have lent their talent to this play, in particular my collaborator and friend Nana Dakin. When I asked Nana to direct the first ever reading of *White Pearl* in grad school (for no class credit, I should add), I don't think either of us could have ever imagined that we'd be staging it three years later downstairs at the Royal Court. I'm so thrilled and grateful that we've been on this journey together, and cannot thank her enough for her contributions to this play.

Thanks for the ongoing support of my friends and family, my agent Jean Mostyn, and especially m'coll, sister and co-conspirator A.N. King. I dedicate this play to all the gloriously idiosyncratic and ferocious Asian women in my life.

ACT ONE

Scene One: 19,643

A bathroom stall. Dim light.

A phone has been discarded next to the toilet.

It buzzes mournfully.

ADELE717 ~~Wtf~~!!!!!!?????!!!!!!!

ZHN0K THIS IS FUCKING FUNNY

We see XIAO.

She is curled up on the floor. Foetal.

JAY PLAYS GAMES Chinese people eat dogs so I'm not suprise

She is shaking.

ÉMILIE 94300 je.suis choquer

CHIANG SHANG 不是什么好人!

AZNYUNGTAH Lmao wow...

ACELAINE23 I'm too shocked to even get mad.

LIN LIN The Great Wall of China just got 10 feet higher

She sobs.

Scene Two: 20,478

Conference room. Frosted glass door.

A banner reading “Clear and Bright!”.

PRIYA *scours the news.*

SUNNY *holds an unhealthily large ice coffee.*

PRIYA What we at?

SUNNY Twenty K.

PRIYA So we start, yeah, drafting a statement. As in, draft a statement. As in, draft a statement now. As /in now.

SUNNY Yeesh, would /you—

PRIYA Before—

SUNNY Chill lah.

PRIYA This is a *catastrophe*. This is a *catastrophe*. *Chilling* is off the bloody agenda.

SUNNY Yo – is not.

PRIYA It’s not...?

SUNNY Catastrophe.

PRIYA How’d you figure that?

SUNNY Brand’s not even mentioned. And it’s like some French account. Who gives a shit about the French?

PRIYA For *now*, the /brand’s not—

SUNNY Yo, but for real, how somebody *French* get it?

PRIYA I don’t *know*. I don’t /*know*.

SUNNY It’s just – you don’t think of French people online, eh?
You think of them, like—

PRIYA It shouldn’t have *aired*.

SUNNY Smoking in turtlenecks. Eating baguettes and shit.

PRIYA I don't know what's *happening*.

SUNNY It the Chinese one?

PRIYA Yes.

SUNNY So call her.

PRIYA She's *here*.

SUNNY Huh? She not in Shanghai?

PRIYA Evidently not.

SUNNY She in the office?

PRIYA She went to the *loo*.

SUNNY Um. Okay?

PRIYA To the *loo*. *The loo*.

SUNNY ...Bro, why you say loo like that?

PRIYA Half an hour ago.

SUNNY Ah.

PRIYA I may have used...extreme language.

SUNNY Aw. Come on, man.

PRIYA I wasn't *heartless*, because, yes, she's *delicate*. But this is a professional – it's not an excuse for – I mean, did you *watch* it?

SUNNY Well, you email at three o' buttcrack dawn so I was barely awake, /but—

PRIYA And /what—

SUNNY —seeing as you obviously got no respect for a bro's *kopi*¹ or beauty sleep—

PRIYA Sunny!

¹ Coffee with condensed milk.

SUNNY I mean, yeah, man, like you say. It's last like fifteen secs that are the problem.

PRIYA Did I miss something? Because I thought I made myself abundantly clear.

SUNNY You did, man, you totally did.

PRIYA I thought we were all on the same page.

SUNNY Yeah, no, I know, it's whack that /she could—

PRIYA Right?

SUNNY For real.

PRIYA If something was lost in – because I know her English isn't – not to mention she bursts into tears every time – I mean that's another matter – but but but if this was just blatant disregard—

RUKI *enters, phone in hand.*

RUKI There is a reporter calling me?

PRIYA Shit. Shit. /Shit.

SUNNY Steady lah.

RUKI What do I – I have never talked to a /reporter—

SUNNY Which website?

RUKI It is not a website – he is from *Japan Today*?

PRIYA The Japanese have it?

SUNNY Ruki, how far ahead is Japan?

RUKI Huh?

PRIYA The Japanese have it?

SUNNY Hours, how many hours ahead is Japan?

RUKI Tokyo is – uh, I think only one hour ahead of us.

PRIYA The *Japanese* /have it?

SUNNY Shut up a fuckin' sec, bro – that an English paper?
Japan Today in English?

RUKI English? I – I am not sure.

SUNNY Okay – listen carefully ah? You say “No comment at this time. We will issue a statement shortly.” Then you hang up and you google *Japan Today*. We don't let this be reported in English. You dig?

RUKI “We have no comment at this time. We issue—”

PRIYA *Will* issue.

RUKI “We will issue a statement shortly.” I will tell him.

RUKI *hovers uncertainly.*

SUNNY ...Ruki?

RUKI Yes?

SUNNY ...

RUKI ...

SUNNY ...Now.

RUKI Oh. Sorry. (*On the phone*) Moshi moshi? Omatase Itashimashita².

RUKI *exits.*

PRIYA *grabs SUNNY's coffee and takes a sizable gulp.*

SUNNY *is visibly displeased.*

PRIYA Twenty-two – shit, twenty-three thousand.

SUNNY Okay. We draft a statement *now*.

PRIYA That's what I bloody */said*.

SUNNY (*grabbing her briefcase*) Imma grab my Mac.

PRIYA Oh, this is bad. This is so */bad*.

² Japanese, formal: “Hello? Thank you for holding.”

SUNNY Priya. Chill the eff down. (*the coffee*) Drink. US is hours behind. We got time lah.

PRIYA So we—

SUNNY Sûnhai kòngzhi³. Find this French ass-clown, get the video taken down. Say big sorry. It's gone before American peeps even wake up. Easy.

PRIYA The board will want blood for this.

SUNNY Oh, rest assured, my bro, they gonna KPKB⁴.

PRIYA Already think we're bloody inept.

SUNNY Not us /specifically. If you see what I'm saying.

PRIYA What? No? What are you saying?

SUNNY (*indicating the two of them*) Not us.

PRIYA Oh. You're saying like—

SUNNY Like maybe. I'm saying we got /options.

PRIYA Hold on hold on. Fuck.

SUNNY What?

PRIYA It's on Facebook.

SUNNY What? /Where?

PRIYA Look.

SUNNY Shit. Shit. Okay, uh – report it.

PRIYA Report—

SUNNY Click the – there.

PRIYA What?

SUNNY The – there – /ai-ya⁵.

PRIYA Where's the—?

³ Mandarin: “damage control”.

⁴ English slang: “lose their shit”.

⁵ Cantonese: expression of disappointment, annoyance.

SUNNY Just – move. Let /me – dude—

PRIYA What are we reporting?

SUNNY Duh. Copyright infringement.

PRIYA Oh. Smart.

SUNNY Yes, yes, I am.

PRIYA Wait, so what are we talking here? Are we talking – like,
a sacrificial lamb?

SUNNY Woah, okay bro, don't /be all weird about it.

PRIYA I'm totally not.

SUNNY You totally are.

PRIYA It's not scapegoating if she's, you know. At fault. Which—

SUNNY Maybe.

PRIYA We have to – right. Due /diligence.

SUNNY But we're not talking 'bout that now.

PRIYA No.

SUNNY This /first.

PRIYA But I mean – we're not talking about that? Because
somebody's getting fired /for this.

SUNNY Bro. Not now lah. Now we hustle.

PRIYA Hustle. Yes.

Beat.

SUNNY Pri.

PRIYA Mm?

SUNNY You steal my coffee, you better fuckin' drink it.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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