

THE ONE

By Vanessa Bates (Rehearsal Draft)

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ACT ONE

One – Dumplings

A dark space. Along the walls, flickering home video type footage (or slides), children, young people, 1990's or earlier, mixed up Asia and regional Australia, Slides/footage ends with a clattering sound, projector unspooling.

ERIC enters, a little bewildered unsure of what is around him.

Sudden Spotlight on: MEL, dressed in ballroom dancing frock. Looks fabulous.

MEL (to audience)

Imagine with me. Close your eyes and listen for... the click of heels, the ruffle of taffeta, the scratch of lace... breathe in now... the lacquered perfume of hairspray, the whiff of Jasmine Impulse, the scent of Lynx desperately masking some teenage B.O, and somewhere in the distance, the golden fragrance of a perfectly fried spring roll.

Open your eyes. You are here. *Jim's Oriental Restaurant... and Milk Bar.*

The most glamorous place in the world.

A flurry of music as ERIC (in regular clothes) takes her hand. They dance.

ERIC (re: the audience)

They'll be confused. It's changed a bit since then. *(gestures around them)*

MEL

But they can imagine. They can dream! Heavy red velvet drapes. Lanterns. Images of pink lotus and red goldfish and white plastic toothpicks in carved wooden boxes.

ERIC

Paper napkins folded neatly into swans.

MEL

Fish tank, with one big shiny silver fish. Kids used to tap on the glass to try and make it move. Every weekend. How did we do all this?

ERIC

We had no choice. And no social life. We were kids.

MEL

We were fantastic! We won a trophy!

ERIC

A distant memory.

MEL

A slight stabbing sensation in my ankles.

ERIC

Think of Ginger!

MEL (*to audience*)

Think of Ginger Rogers who did all the same dance steps as Fred Astaire but backwards and in heels. (*she points to Eric*) Exactly the sort of spiteful thing *he* would say. Think of Ginger.

ERIC

Think of Ginger!

Music ends.

MEL (*smile at the audience*)

This is Eric. My little brother. Very serious, slightly nerdy. Used to be one of those short kids with fat cheeks and sticky-out ears. Sooo cute! And all the grownups would grab his face like this... (*she grabs his face like he's a 4 year old*)... 'cause he's such a cute little bubba!

ERIC

Mel! Ow!

MEL

Brown skin. Brown eyes. Used to cuddle his elbows! Like a cutie-pie!

ERIC

(*to audience*) This is Melanie.

MEL (*a wave*)

Mel.

ERIC

Mel. Big sister. Feisty. Fearless. Fierce.

MEL

Really? Feisty, fearless, fierce?

ERIC

A baby cobra pops up through a hole in the backyard. Between your feet! Doesn't phase you at all!

MEL

In Penang. Malaysia. Wow, I *was* fierce back then. Hang on you weren't there. Well you were, but a baby.

ERIC

I've seen the photos. Heard the stories. Just say the words "baby cobra" I see it all: you in the front yard, woman who used to herd the ducks hanging on the gate, I hear the ocean behind us, see the coconut palms sway. (*slight pause*) I was there.

MEL

Baby Bruvver Eric. With his cute little bubba cheeks...

ERIC (*dodging her outstretched hands*)

You *were* fierce. Now you're... anxious.

MEL

Anxious. Are you sure it's me?

Or... Is this about our mother? About to land on our doorstep. Visiting from the old country? Seeing how we've messed up? Judging our choices?

ERIC

Um... I didn't say that.

MEL

Which of her children is The One? Her anxious artistic daughter? Her meek librarian son?

ERIC

I didn't say any of that! Whose dream sequence *is* this, anyway?

MEL

You and I. Older sister. Younger brother. Such a great team! Remember the year we won?

ERIC

1995. Best Lead and Follow, Young Asian Australian Ballroom Dancers – regional division!

MEL

The exotic hundreds-and-thousands sprinkled on the fairy bread of regional Oz!

A couple of halfies. Eurasians. I'm twelve, Eric is nine... and we totally rock!

(Spotlight on them as they take start positions.)

Ready Mr Music Please!

A burst of music. They dance!

ERIC

Foxtrot!

MEL

We're amazing!

ERIC

Swing!

MEL

We're luminous!

ERIC

Rhumba!

MEL

We're outstanding.

ERIC

Outrageous! Look at us go go go!!

MEL

Did someone say... Go-go!

They do, frenzied and ecstatic. Music builds and then stops. They look round. Puffed.

ERIC

And then... it stopped.

MEL

Wonder why.

ERIC

Lost power?

MEL

Lost something. I *was* twelve. You get easily distracted when you're a twelve-year old girl.

ERIC

And I was a nine-year old boy.

MEL

It might have been... the others?

Slight pause.

ERIC

The other dancers?

MEL

The other *kids*.

ERIC (*looks at her, a little taken aback*)

They were just kids Mel.

MEL

(to audience) You heard him folks. Just kids.

And so somewhere, after *outstanding* and *outrageous*.

With *luminous* way back in the distance, we just... stopped. All that talent! All that promise! All those sequins! *(beat)*... lucky this bit's not real. *(she smiles at Eric)*

ERIC

What?

MEL

All in your head. Turns out this *was* your dream sequence after all...

She starts to exit as Eric calls after her

ERIC

Are you saying I'm imagining all this? Does that mean... she's not coming?

Mel looks back. A small smile.

MEL

Oh... she's definitely coming. See you soon baby bruvver. Cha cha cha!

(She blows him a kiss as she goes. Sense of magic disperses)

JESS (VO)

Stop. Clicking! It comes on when it's ready!

Lights up, revealing a dingy room cluttered with old tables, chairs, piles of tablecloths etc.

Eric is standing by the door, his outstretched finger on the switch. Horrified at the sight.

JESS stands by him, holding a large torch.

JESS

There! See! (*the lights*) What did I tell you. Just needs time... no don't click it... no!

The lights suddenly go off with a bzzzt plunging the room into darkness again.

JESS (*mutters*)

Why don't these people ever listen?!

Torchlight appears.

JESS

Please be careful. There are breakables... ah there we go...

Bzzz. Lights go on again.

ERIC

Are you sure this is... the room?

JESS

This is the room! She asked for it specially.

ERIC

There must be some mistake. This is not... a function room. It's a shit heap.

JESS (*admits*)

When it's not used, we store things in it. It can be cleaned. I mean if you want it clean. No judgement.

ERIC

Yes we want it clean! (*looking around*) The windows are dirty. The carpet's sticky. And... (*sniffs*)... there's a smell. Did something die in here?

JESS (*sniffs*)

I might have to clean the grease trap... Look, this room. It's... magic. It's what you make of it. Like life.

Maybe you can all dress up? That's always fun. Last group of people dressed up. Lot of latex and baby powder.

ERIC

We are not "dressing up". We will be dressed. For dinner. I am bringing my Mother here. She has standards. *We* have standards.

JESS (*checks notes*)

Of course, of course. Now a little bird may have told me... It's her birthday? So... a cake?

ERIC

No. I mean Yes. But she doesn't want it to be... She says this is a *family* event. No cake.

JESS (*disappointed*)

Fine. So, the rule is... hose the place down when you finish. Or vacuum if you use baby powder. Or glitter, that stuff's a bitch.

ERIC

What sort of functions do you have here?

JESS

We don't *do* functions, we do *food*. You do... atmosphere.

It's all about, what do they call it? Personal Responsibility. You take it, you use it, you clean up when you're done. That's the rule.

So, can you sign...?

She holds out a form. Eric shrinks back.

ERIC

I think she might have made a mistake.

JESS

A what?

ERIC

My mother, she had a picture in her mind, from long ago, we used to do ballroom dancing here, part of our childhood... you know what old people are like.

JESS

Of course, of course. But your mother has a very strong... *emotional* connection to *Jim's*.

As of course *Jim's* does to your mother. (*hesitant*) You may not have realised that.../

ERIC (*impatiently cutting her off*)

Yes. Yes. Friend of Uncle Jim's, years ago, I *know* that, but...

JESS (*cold*)

Then of course you would know. Your mother has already booked this room. And paid.

ERIC

... none of us have been anywhere near... *Jim's* for... years. Wait. She paid? Really?

JESS

And she was so happy when I told her the function room was indeed available for her... what did you call it... "Family Event".

ERIC

I don't want to offend you/

JESS

Oh no. It's not me who'll be offended. This is your mother's gift... a gift of love. A strong maternal love. The kind a good son never messes with. You saying you don't want your mother's love? You want to throw it back in her face?

Mel enters. Normal clothes.

ERIC

Obviously I'm not saying that! *(to Mel with relief)* Oh great, you're here. *(to Jess)*

This is my sister.

MEL *(stares around)*

Oh My God. This is the room.

ERIC

I know, right. She booked, she paid, she's clearly off her meds/

MEL

Isn't it... fantastic?

ERIC

I can think of... other words.

MEL

She booked and paid, who are we to judge?

(to Jess as she squeezes Eric's cheeks) This is my baby bruvver Eric!

ERIC/JESS *(surly)*

We've met.

MEL *(to Eric)*

How's the date stamping?

ERIC

You obviously haven't set foot in a library for years.

JESS *(has been staring at Mel)*

You're famous. I recognise you.

ERIC

Here we go.

MEL *(to Jess)*

You probably don't.

JESS

I probably do! That tv show. *The One And Only*. You nearly won the One!

MEL

Ages ago. Five years...

JESS

But you didn't get married on the show.

MEL

Ah no...

JESS

Thankfully. Because *that* guy was such a moron.

ERIC

Um...

JESS

Right? Every time he opened his mouth, I just wanted to punch him right in the face!

MEL (*polite smile*)

Cal and I *do* actually live together.

ERIC

And they *are* getting married. But very very slowly.

MEL

Just a piece of paper.

JESS

Ooh! You could have your engagement party here!

A horrifying thought for Mel, for so many reasons...

ERIC (*a dig at Mel he can't resist*)

There's a thought!

MEL

It's not a good thought.

JESS

And your mother would be so happy with you.

ERIC

And we love to have our mother happy. Don't we Melanie?

MEL (*smiles, teeth gritted*)

Of course Eric!

JESS

After all, you are getting a bit/

MEL

Getting a bit... what?

JESS (*hastily*)

What did people used to call you two? (*thinks*) Something like *Beauty and the Beast*?

MEL

It was a while ago, I really don't know...

ERIC

Years!

JESS

The Villain and The Virgin! That was it! But the question is... who was who?

ERIC

This is fascinating but I need to head back to the city so can we just decide about the room.

MEL

This room is the vibe we want.

ERIC (*to Mel*)

This room is a mistake.

MEL

It just needs a bit of TLC. Spray and Wipe. Nifty. (*to Jess*) Yes.

ERIC (*mutter*s)

Napalm.

JESS

Big yes! Great. I need one of you to sign a/

MEL

I'll sign!

She scribbles on Jess's form.

JESS

Great! Lovely to meet you both. Eric and... the

MEL

Mel!

JESS

Mel! Your mother will be very happy with you. Each of you. Both of you.

ERIC

That's the plan. Make Mummy happy.

MEL

Equally. Because you know, this was *both* our idea.

A birthday dinner for mummy

ERIC (*corrects*)

A Celebration of Survival.

Jess looks at them both. A small smile.

JESS

No judgement.

She exits.

Two – Fried Rice

A park. A bench. A rubbish bin. Sound of distant children.

We hear a loud happy bark. Cal walks onstage, carrying one of those ball chucker things. He throws the ball to one side, watches for a moment and then takes out a cigarette and lighter. The cigarette is bent. Obviously been tucked away for a while. He carefully straightens it. As he is about to light his cigarette, a ball rolls towards him.

He ignores it, turning away, tries to light his cigarette. It's about to light when... Sudden sound of the dog barking loudly offstage. Cal drops his cigarette. He throws the ball at speed to the other side of the stage. He doesn't feel like a cigarette now. He sits. Calms.

CAL (to audience)

Is it just me?

Say you've got a dog you walk every day.

It's like... a magnet for every other dog.

Schnauzers, staffies, kelpies, labradoodles... little weird yappy fluffy things on legs.

You know every dog like they're your own, you're on an intimate patting, licking, stroking basis with them all, you love them and yet... you wouldn't have a clue about the actual humans on the end of the leash.

You might see a hand. A polite face, nodding head, murmuring voice, gender doesn't really matter. Or age. Or race. But the person...?

It's almost like... dog owners are an entirely new human species of patting, feeding, washing, poo-picker uppers, warm blooded apparatus for the entire canine race.

(thinks) We are... dog... 'enablers'.

(quickly) Not 'servants', obviously. I'm not talking cats.

(suddenly sees) Fifi? Fifi! Put that down!

He's picked up something he wants to eat. I think it's still alive.

Let it alone Fifi! Let it run... (*grimaces*) ok just let it go.

He, yes Fifi is a boy, belongs to Mel's mother. Helen.

Fifi is... Helen's darling, her baby, her short hairy son, her reason for living!

Fifi. Fi-fi. (*admits*) Yes alright. I hate it. The name. I don't know why it jars. It grates.

It brings out the darkness in my soul. (*thinks*) Ridiculous. I know, but. What's in a name anyway? He comes when he's called, surely that's all that matters.

Mel says Fifi is the real reason Helen's coming back to Australia.

First class of course.

Mel asked me, am I anxious? Me? Because Helen's coming?

No! Pfft. She's not *my* mother.

Let's be frank. She's not even my *mother-in-law*.

He reaches into one pocket, taking out a ring box. It has obviously been in his possession for months, possibly years. It was never the right time for him to ask.

The truth is... yes. I am... slightly uneasy.

I'm man enough to admit it.

Just, not to Mel. Yet.

Fifi barks again. Cal throws the ball. Smiles fondly.

Fifi. Who's my big hairy boy?

Cal walks off.

Three – Satay

Lights change, we are now in the apartment of Cal and Mel.

Mel is zooming with her mother who looks huge on a screen.

MEL

But Mummy, it will be a great celebration. I'm so excited for you.

HELEN (*on zoom*)

What are you saying darling? Speak clearly. It's difficult to hear you.

MEL

I said: It will be great Mummy! Eric and I could have picked a place but... You have made a *wonderful* choice of restaurant. All those memories.

HELEN

I find your voice through the computer very harsh, very unpleasant.

MEL

I'm talking about the memories, the wonderful memories! Have you turned up the volume?

HELEN

Let me show you what I can do. Roger showed me. (*jabs at the keyboard*) Look... I can put a hat on my head. Or a bird. And now I'm wearing some funny glasses.

(A pause. nothing has happened)

MEL

No... you aren't... Mummy.

HELEN

Darling, it's not real. It's just a funny computer thing. Look at my background, now it looks like I'm in Rome! Now I'm in Paris! Now, I'm in a jungle.

MEL

(holds back the sigh) You're not. Who's Roger?

HELEN

I know I'm not. It's completely fake. You have no sense of humour darling. Roger's part of the on-board entertainment. Call Cal, he's amusing- he'll understand, tell him I am in the jungle.

MEL

He's not home Mummy. But also... you're not actually...

HELEN

Yes I know. I'm in a luxury cabin on an ocean liner.

MEL

Mummy, you are being careful yes? Because the *last* time ocean liners came here...

HELEN

Of course, *of course* darling. You are such a spoilsport Melanie. All passengers exercise personal responsibility. I bought Gucci hand tranquilizer in the duty-free shop.

MEL

Sanitizer. Mummy. Sanitizer. That's great. That's... ahh!

She suddenly catches sight of something on the floor nearby.

MEL

I have to go Mummy. I'm sorry I've just seen something...

HELEN

You haven't told me how Fifi is?

MEL

Fifi is... happy!

HELEN

Can I see him?

MEL (*slight wince*)

No, he's exercising. With Cal. Must dash. See you soon Mummy. (*She ends the zoom, Helen disappears.*)

Mel hastily picks up bits of chewed up Lego as Cal enters.

CAL

We've done three laps of the park, sniffed the butts of about twenty dogs, terrified five tiny fluffy things and possibly... eaten a possum. Which doesn't at all affect his appetite because as we speak he's in the laundry chomping down his... (*sees it*)

AHH!

MEL

Ah. (*she gingerly holds out a handful. No point in hiding this.*) Yup.

CAL (*horrified*)

These used to be... a Millennium Falcon. The New New *New* version. New but retro-nostalgic but new. Just released. Arrived on Monday!

MEL

I'm sorry.

CAL

Eighteen hours to unbox and build. Where's the rest? The minifigures? The stormtroopers! Boba Fett! Chewie!

MEL

Either buried or swallowed. Remember, it is a privilege to be entrusted with Fifi. A badge of honour! This (*the pieces*) is just a... downside.

CAL

Downside?! Fifi is a force of destruction.

MEL

It's not like he's Darth Vader.

CAL

You think? That time your mother tried to have Fifi flown to KL?

MEL

Here we go. We talked about this and we agreed... That wasn't Fifi's fault. He was lonely.

CAL

Fifi bit, nay *savaged*, the baggage-handler who put his hand in the cage and tried to pat the Poor Lonely Dog.

MEL

Look at it from Fifi's point of view...

CAL

Fifi's point of view was raw meat.

MEL

Maybe you should go out again, without Fifi... have some fresh air?

CAL

I've been out! I have had fresh air.

MEL (*snaps*)

Then have another one!

He nods curtly and leaves. Mel looks at the audience.

MEL (*to audience*)

He thinks I don't know about the smoking. He'll have one sad lonely cigarette...

he'll calm down. (*she looks at the scattered pieces*) Oh Fifi, you monster.

(*to audience*) Don't get me wrong. I like that Mummy trusts me, her oldest child with her beloved dog, it shows something doesn't it?

She trusts me, believes in me... Fifi is proof.

Mummy thinks... I'm the one... to look after Fifi... but... to be completely honest... I have to say...

I might be more of a fish person.

Four – MaPo Tofu

Jim's Oriental Restaurant. Place looks neater. Eric going through boxes of crockery.

Mel enters with a seating plan.

MEL

Baby bruvver! I have a seating plan!

ERIC

Excellent!

She flourishes the plan as he twirls her.

MEL (*shows Eric*)

See! You, me, Cal, Mummy in the big chair in the middle, Ken and Rosie, the Goh's...

ERIC (*interrupts*)

Wait, you're putting Mummy next to Cal? Is that wise?

MEL

What's wrong with Mummy next to Cal? She likes him. She told me: Cal is amusing.

ERIC

Are you sure?

MEL

Cal *is* amusing. It's one of his endearing traits. That and secretly smoking whenever he takes Fifi for a walk.

ERIC

Well at least Fifi's not coming to dinner.

Mel looks at her seating plan, silent. Eric frowns.

ERIC

Fifi's *not* coming to dinner.

Mel concentrates on her plan. Eric is outraged.

ERIC

Mel! Is Fifi coming to dinner?

MEL (*conflicted*)

Eric... Mummy wants Fifi here... you know what she's like.

ERIC

Oh my god. Mel! She'll probably put him at the head of the table.

MEL

Don't be utterly ridiculous!

Cal walks in with a large dog bowl.

CAL

Do you really want this at the head of the table?

Eric glares at Mel.

ERIC

(*to Mel*) You are enabling her! Does the restaurant even know you're bringing a dog? That's about seventy Health Regulations you just broke, right there. Just saying the word dog in a restaurant.

CAL

A Chinese restaurant.

MEL

You're being racist. And Fifi is more than just a dog.

CAL

Fifi is exactly a dog. And I'm agreeing with your brother.

MEL

He's just pissed off because Fifi was given to us.

ERIC

Excuse me? There is no place for a dog in my flat. Much like this restaurant.

Although, if you're asking if I would be the more responsible owner...

MEL (*to Cal*)

You think I'm enabling her?

CAL

Think of the restaurant owner.

MEL

Actually, Jim is thrilled Mummy's celebration will be here, Jess told me. Bookings must be a bit low. Uncle Jim has said Mummy should treat the restaurant like her private house.

ERIC

That's because nobody thinks, in Mummy's house, she'd let a dog sit at the dinner table.

CAL

Who is Jess?

MEL

Jim's niece.

ERIC

The waitress from hell.

CAL

And why would she be surprised that bookings have been low? Look at the place!

MEL

Cal can you make the paper napkin swans? Twenty, just in case?

CAL

This is what I'm reduced to. I have built the entire Island of Manhattan, brick for brick, in Lego. Now I'm making twenty paper napkin swans.

MEL

But can you do it without whining?

ERIC

I'll help... paper napkin swans are my spirit animal.

Cal and Eric start folding...

Mel walking around the room a little. Breathes in. Eyes closed.

MEL

Wow... That kitchen smell, it takes me right back. This place has so many memories.

ERIC

Like Proust and madeleines.

CAL

Like meat pies with a dash of tomato sauce.

ERIC

(To Cal) Can you smell... sewerage?

They both sniff.

MEL

Stop it. Both of you... Like... incense and ash.

Lighting change, a dreamy atmosphere.

MEL

Here's a memory. From Penang. There's this shop.

And hanging on the walls...

Paper Suits. Paper ties. Paper watches.

ERIC

Paper shoes?

MEL

Paper shoes!

CAL

Paper books! Is this a library thing?

ERIC

(ignoring him) Paper shirts?

MEL

(yes) Paper shirts. Paper jackets, paper underwear, paper handbags
Paper money. Paper houses

ERIC

Paper... Walkmans, clicky four coloured pens, cassettes, TV's, credit cards
Raincoats.

CAL

Raincoats? That won't work.

ERIC

What?

CAL

In the rain. If they're made of paper.

ERIC

What are you talking about?

CAL

Paper things. Are these for libraries?

MEL

For funerals. *(beat)* Paper things to burn when someone dies.
Everything gets torched, barbequed
Blossoms into ash.

Lights normalize.

MEL

What would burn for you?

ERIC

Paper date stamp, paper paleolithic diorama, *(smiles to himself)* paper Gruffalo.

You?

MEL

Perfectly sharpened 6B pencil, paper laptop, paper coffee mug.

CAL

Paper motorbike...

MEL

You don't ride a motorbike.

CAL

But I might. If I knew I was about to die. Maybe a Harley. *(to Eric)* You remember this?

MEL

Of course he does.

ERIC

(disappointed) I... don't. I want to. I think I'm meant to. Know more, right? About all this stuff? This... Penang stuff. Asian stuff? *(to Mel)* It's alright for you. You were really there.

MEL

You were really there too. As a baby.

CAL (*to Eric*)

How are you meant to remember everything?

MEL

I can remember for you. (*a pause*) I'll get more napkins.

She exits. Leaves Cal and Eric.

ERIC

Sometimes I lay awake at night and I try and remember things: markets, the streets and the temples and Melanie and the baby cobra.

Do you know what I actually remember? It's the photos. Photo after photo after photo. Just pictures. All my IRL memories are made here. In this country.

CAL

But that's ok isn't it? You're Australian too.

ERIC

Yeah but. Is it enough? Half Australian, half a blank. Sometimes, I don't know what I am.

Lights change.

Five – Black Bean Sauce

HELEN on zoom... Mel nearby.

HELEN

Sings (to the tune of Oh My Darling Clementine)

Bangun pagi, gosok gigi,
cuci muka, pakai baju,
makan roti, minum susu,
pergi sekolah, senang hati.

MEL

That was beautiful Mummy. Very soothing. It was like I was your little girl all over again.

HELEN

Is he asleep?

MEL

Cal?

HELEN

Fifi. He used to love his mummy singing him a lullaby.

MEL (a teeny bit sharp)

Sorry was that for Fifi? Cal took him for a walk. Because Mummy, Fifi is a dog.

HELEN

Again, walking?

MEL

As I said, Fifi is a dog.

HELEN

Cal seems to have a lot of time to walk with Fifi...

MEL (*knows where this line is going*)

Mummy...

HELEN

Has Cal got a job?

MEL

Yes Cal's *got* a job Mummy. You know that.

HELEN

Playing with toys is not a job. What about the old job? It paid money!

MEL

Yes but it wasn't creative. He was unhappy. Unfulfilled!

HELEN

Unfulfilled? Melanie!

Let me give you a little bit of advice.

MEL

Mummy don't say what I think you're going to say...

HELEN

Melanie. I think it might be time for you and Cal to be married.

You're not a... (*looking for the right word*) baby chicken anymore.

MEL

Spring chicken Mummy. The word is “spring”.

Baby chicken is frankly creepy.

HELEN

Tell me. When are you two getting married? So slow!

MEL

It’s just a piece of paper. It’s complicated. I don’t know!

HELEN

Cal is “unfulfilled” and you say “I don’t know” Why not?

You know who I blame?

MEL

Yes Mummy.

HELEN

I blame that silly tv show. “*The One and Only*”.

True Love is practical. Listen to your mother. I know.

MEL

If it hadn’t been for that show Cal and I would never have met.

HELEN

You are getting old. And no one likes a dry old chicken.

MEL

A what?!

HELEN

Do you need me to speak to Cal? A little push? At my party?

MEL

No! (*trying to change subject*) It's a celebration of *you* Mummy, it should be all about you. There are guests coming, old friends, Ken and Rosie, the Gohs, Connie...

HELEN (*admits*)

It's true, I am looking forward to my celebration of survival.

MEL

Most people just say 'birthday'.

HELEN

I am not most people.

And we must celebrate! I shall wear my Versace!

MEL (*slightly worried*)

Versace? Mummy, you did say you booked... the restaurant we used to go to?

HELEN

I asked them to choose the menu, lovely young lady said to leave it to them, so wonderful. A weight off my shoulders. I will give her a big tip!

MEL

I'm just not entirely sure what you might be expecting...

HELEN

Something simple...

MEL

Oh Good.

HELEN

Yet elegant.

MEL

Jim's Oriental Restaurant and Milk Bar is not elegant.

HELEN

I hope they serve Jim's Chicken and Sweet Corn Soup. Lots of tasty chunks in it that were neither chicken, nor corn.

MEL

I think they're probably a bit more modern.

HELEN

Chicken and sweet corn is modern.

MEL

Maybe in the regional suburbs last century. You don't last thirty years without updating the menu. Mummy, I wonder if I can talk with you about something else... important.

HELEN

Fifi?

MEL

No.

HELEN

Eric?

MEL

No.

HELEN

Cal?

MEL

No! It's about... our father.

HELEN

Who?

MEL

Daddy. Iain. Do you ever speak to him? Has he ever wanted to speak to us?

Helen is suddenly wearing sunglasses (zoom filter)

HELEN

Aha! I told you I could do it! And now...

Her background changes to become Ancient Rome.

HELEN

You see Melanie! I am in Rome!

MEL *(ignoring it)*

You told us when he left, he wasn't interested in being part of our lives anymore.

Background goes back to cabin.

HELEN

Your voice. Very difficult to understand you darling.

I'll be there soon. I miss my baby.

MEL (*a beat, nods*)

That's Fifi isn't it?

Helen looks guilty. Screen goes black. Mel sits back, worried.

Six – Salt and Pepper Prawn

The park bench.

CAL enters. He holds a ball chucker. A ball rolls onstage towards him and he expertly scoops it up and throws it offstage. Deep breath.

CAL

Fifi is happy. Fifi is happy. Fifi is well and happy.

He searches his pocket, finds and lights a bent cigarette. Relaxes, briefly. Sees something distantly and hastily puts the cigarette out. MEL rushes in.

MEL (*horrified*)

Oh my god.

CAL (*flapping smoke away*)

Fifi is happy.

MEL

Where is Fifi?

Have you called the police?

CAL

Calm down. He's fine, alright. Fifi is happy. Breathe. On my phone... there's this YouTube TaiChi thing I think could help. We can do it together. (*jabs at his phone*)

MEL

I was in a meeting Cal. You texted.

CAL (*trying some moves*)

Flying bird, open the door, close the door... you'll get the hang of it

MEL

Cal!

CAL

Hug the tree, hold the moon... breathe Mel, breathe.

MEL

I am breathing. You said Fifi had been abducted.

CAL

Ah... That's not the word I used. It's important to be accurate.

MEL

You said our dog has been abducted. You said that.

CAL

I said Fifi was "taken."

MEL

That's the same thing.

CAL

No it's not. Fifi was not "abducted." I was very clear.

MEL

You said: Fifi has been taken by a person or persons unknown.

CAL

(slight pause) Yeah. That's not strictly true. Unknown...

MEL

Callum! I'm in a meeting, I say I'm ducking to the pastry basket for a croissant. I leave, I get a text, I never go back.

CAL

I think it was the Warriors. Not the New Zealand ones obviously. Fourth Division.

MEL

The who?

CAL

Or at least their fans. Fans of the Warriors more likely. Fans can be crazy. You remember that tv show we were on?

MEL

This is about a team? Is that what you're saying?

CAL

Maybe both. Team *and* fans. They saw me walking Fifi and there was a bit of good-natured ribbing. Your dog is a poofers' dog that sort of thing.

MEL

A "poofter's dog"? What year are we in? Oh yes Australia 2022.

CAL

Obviously, I told them... poodles can be very fierce. *(at Mel's face)* There were words in the pie queue.

MEL

Pie queue? What pie queue?

CAL

The one I was in. Buying a pie. And also I needed some *ahem* fresh air and a break from the job.

MEL

Your “job” is to record yourself on your phone, building children’s toys, some might say “playing” with toys.

CAL

Whoa! (*testy*) Some *might* say that but they would be wrong and petty and fail to understand modern marketing techniques. *Who* says that? Your mother? Do you want me to go back to the agency? Is that what you are saying? The job that ripped out my spleen and devoured it, still bleeding? Is that what you want?

MEL

What did you say in the pie queue?
Did you place our dog in a dangerous situation?

CAL

Stop saying he is our/

MEL

Aah! Fine! He is my *mother’s* dog and he was in our... up till this point... very good care.

CAL

Calm down.

MEL

I AM CALM. And if you can’t see why Fifi being my mother’s dog is far worse than him being *our* dog, I pity you because you do not want an angry Malaysian-Chinese woman for a mother-in-law. How could you do this?

CAL

Wait! Did you say mother-in-law? Have we gone there?

MEL

No, we haven't.

CAL

I knew it. Our being married is based on Fifi? You think our love has four legs and terrible breath.

MEL

Fifi was in Your Care.

CAL

Until he was shaved. At that point he was in Somebody Else's care.

A beat. Mel is gobsmacked.

CAL

Yes. I did say 'shaved'. One minute he was with me, enjoying himself, eating a pie, suddenly he's gone. Let me paint you a picture. I'm talking to the coach, about the poofter thing, and I look down, back, sideways... nada. I walk round calling-casually, then shouting- angrily, then begging- pathetically and then... I see him. I call Fifi! He comes running. He leaps into my arms. I'm practically in tears I'm so happy he is safe and well and then I see... I see...

MEL (*steely*)

Fifi has been "shaved"?

CAL (*brave*)

Yes.

MEL

Shaved. With a razor. Shaved...

CAL

You keep saying that.

MEL

Because apparently it keeps being true!

CAL

Look it was a joke ok? Some guys got him and they shaved him for a joke. He'll be good as new well before Helen gets here. She will never ever know.

Pause. As Cal speaks Mel suddenly catches sight of Fifi, in the audience. She is horrified. She stares at him.

MEL

Fifi! Mummy *will* know.

CAL

Is that a Malaysian thing?

MEL

It's a mother thing.

She will know. She knows everything. She probably knows right now.

No! Don't call him over! I don't want him anywhere near me.

She angrily grabs the ball and throws it off stage. They watch as Fifi follows.

MEL

God, look at him! She told me she misses her baby. She wasn't talking about Eric or me. She was talking about Fifi.

CAL

How long does hair take to grow?

MEL

Human hair is different. I get it trimmed and dyed. He has been shaved.

CAL

(a grimace) He's... been dyed too. On the other side. When he turns... there you go.

Mel stares.

MEL

Red and blue.

CAL

Team colours. I didn't think you could see it from here...

They both turn their heads to the side.

Cal

Yeah but no, you can.

MEL

What is... that word?

CAL

It's... a word. One of several. I'm not going to repeat them. It'll upset you. Puerile. Undergraduate type humor... stay calm. (*glances at her*) Mel, are you breathing?

MEL

She said I'm a baby chicken. Now, she'll think I'm hopeless.

CAL

You mean she'll think I'm hopeless? Maybe if I was Asian none of this would have happened. Maybe if you had a Malaysian boyfriend, Fifi would still have fur.

MEL

Oh not this bullshit *again*. I have never said you should be Asian. I have never said to go back to the real job at the agency. I have never said...

CAL

What? What else have you 'never said' to me, Mel?

MEL

She could have asked anyone to take Fifi. Like my brother!

CAL

Eric the Librarian? There's no way he could handle a dog like Fifi. A pet rock would be too boisterous.

MEL

Eric told Mummy he was prepared to mince raw turkey by hand. But she gave Fifi to me. Me. Because she thought I was trustworthy. Dependable. Reliable.

CAL

That's the problem. You don't think of us as a couple. She gave Fifi to us, Mel. As a couple. Remember? A trustworthy, reliable, dependable couple.

MEL

Well she won't think that now. And she's right.

We're not reliable or dependable or... parenting material.

CAL

Stop right there. Don't say that. She's not right.

MEL

The dog is red and blue. He's been shaved and covered in expletives. What else could it mean?

Slight pause.

CAL

Why did your mother call you a baby chicken?

MEL

My anxiety levels... that croissant! I'm going to be sick.

CAL

The fur will grow back.

MEL

But the swear words...

CAL

I'll use turps and a brillo pad. Fifi will be fine. *(beat)* Everything will be fine.

Sound of a squeaky toy. They watch. Mel calms.

MEL

He actually looks... happy.

CAL

Fifi Is Happy.

MEL

Fifi Is Happy.

CAL

And, when Fifi is happy, then Helen is happy. And when Helen is happy then Mel is happy. And when Mel is happy then Cal is happy.

MEL

And Fifi is happy.

CAL

And Fifi is... happy. Here boy!

The balls rolls past. Cal picks it up and throws it, happily calling at Fifi. He exits.

Mel watches him and groans to herself. She does not look happy.

She strikes a vaguely Tai-Chi pose.

MEL

Hug the tree, hold the moon... breathe. *(pause)* Fuck.

Seven – Sweet and Sour Pork

Cal and Eric contemplate a blow up palm tree... Jess is lugging boxes out.

JESS

People come for miles to eat at *Jim's Oriental Restaurant*... do you want me to leave the blow-up palm tree? Or the bubble machine?

ERIC

We're going with the mid 90s Regional Chinese Restaurant ambiance. So no, thanks.

Jess carries out the palm tree, unconvinced as Mel joins the others.

CAL

"People come for miles" Is she serious? This entire building should have been condemned years ago. And your mother wants you to celebrate *here*?

MEL

She's loyal.

ERIC

Jim's Oriental was a family tradition. Once upon a time.

CAL

Sure, once upon a time. Kind of amazing *Jim's* held onto the place. He must be loaded.

MEL

I hope he's here on the night, it would be great to see him again.

ERIC

Don't get your hopes up. I asked Jess if I could talk to him about the menu. She swore at me, in Cantonese.

CAL

Do you speak Cantonese?

ERIC

No but I knew *that* word.

MEL

What are we up to? We've got bowls, chopsticks...

CAL

Forks?

ERIC

Mel telling me memories about Penang.

MEL

Ok. What about this one... There is this festival, for the dead, once a year

ERIC

Hungry Ghost Festival!

MEL

You remember! IRL!

ERIC

No. SBS.

CAL

So... you can't speak Cantonese, can you speak... um

MEL & ERIC

Mandarin.

CAL

Right. Can you speak Mandarin?

MEL (*patient*)

No. Eric?

ERIC

No.

CAL

No. Right. (*beat*) And... you don't speak Malaysian. Malay?

MEL & ERIC

Bahasa.

CAL

Bahasa. No?

MEL (*no longer patient*)

No, we don't speak Bahasa. We don't speak Cantonese. We don't speak Mandarin. We pretty much only speak English. Eric? Got any other language I don't know about?

ERIC (*to Mel*)

You speak French. *Je m'appelle Melanie*

MEL

I did French in high school. That means I *can't* speak French.

ERIC

I can't speak Gaelic. Or Auslan. Or German. Or Arabic.

MEL

Ooh neither can I! I can't speak Italian! Or Latin!

CAL

I'm just wondering, why you never learned the language. Of your mother.

MEL

We lived in Australia. Not Malaysia.

ERIC

I don't remember any other kids like us.

CAL

But don't you think it would be cool?

MEL

You think it would be *cool* to speak the language of our mother? Obviously Cal, it would be *cool*. But the 80's. Assimilation, you know. Not integration. Or multiculturalism or inclusion. Our mother thought we should try to fit in.

ERIC

Speak English lah!

CAL

What about your father?

ERIC

We don't know what he thought. We actually don't know where he is. Even now.
(*To Mel*) Did she ever tell you?

MEL

Ah... no. She just said: He's gone now. If we want to survive, we move on.

ERIC

And sometimes it feels like we never stopped moving.

Lighting change. The dreamy atmosphere.

MEL

A table in a tiny temple. There was roast suckling pig, clusters of bananas
lucky last of the dark purple skinned
Sweet fleshed, gleaming white jewel hearts of mangosteen.

ERIC

There was incense?

MEL

There was incense! The breath of Penang. Wreathed in grey, wispy swirls of
smoke and magic, joss sticks smouldering
whole fistfuls of spiky burning sticks of grief

ERIC (*screws up his face with the effort of remembering*)

And... a theatre? Was there a theatre for dead people?

MEL

Yes. A theatre. And the front row of seats left empty

ERIC

For them

MEL

Those they loved and lost or hated or killed or nursed or wept for or grieved for or hid from.

And all the insatiably, bored, culture-deprived, smoke-addicted, pork eating Hungry Ghosts, take their seats.

Lights change back. Cal applauds.

CAL

Bravo! I've got no idea what happens to white ghosts. I think they end up in cartoons and Harry Potter books. I'll take these out.

(He grabs the bags of rubbish. Pauses)

When you talked about assimilating. That's one of the only times I've heard you mention your father. Both of you.

MEL

He left us. So...

CAL

I should probably give Fifi another scrub. I'll see you at home.

ERIC

You know I would never have said before that Fifi was a particularly good looking dog but/

CAL

Mate! The fur is coming back!

ERIC

Yup. So you say.

Cal leaves.

ERIC

I was prepared to...

MEL

Mince raw turkey... yes we know.

ERIC

By hand. What about when she sees him at the dinner.

MEL

She won't. You're getting what you wanted, no dog in restaurant.

Mel looks at Eric.

MEL

Would you want to know where Dad is? If you could? I always assumed...

ERIC

It would have been good to have a choice.

MEL

I guess they didn't think we were old enough.

ERIC

I have decided to take up my Chinese name. Ming. I'm going to announce it at the dinner.

MEL

Ming. Ok. Good one. She'll be happy with that.

ERIC

It's not for Mummy.

MEL

Sure, if you say so. Ming.

ERIC

I have a couple of other things I want to tell her. At this dinner.

MEL

She's so excited. She could barely list her duty free.

ERIC

I'm going to tell Mummy I'm gay.

MEL

Whoa... what? No no no, that's not a good idea

ERIC

Why? You know.

MEL

Of course I know. Cal knows. The lady at the bakery knows. We all know.

That's not the point. *Mummy* doesn't know because Mummy doesn't live here.. It's a big thing. It's too big. What if / want to talk to her about something... big?

ERIC

Well you *can* do it. You just have to wait for me to go first.

MEL

What if I don't want to wait for you to go first? I'm the oldest.

ERIC

And I'm the boy. Sorry but we all know that takes precedence. I want her to know.

MEL

She can't handle too many Big Things at the same time.

ERIC

Ok, me first, you second, me third.

MEL

But then it's like a shit sandwich and you're the bread.

ERIC

So why didn't you tell her your secret Big Thing when you were zooming?

MEL

Why didn't *you* tell her anytime over the last thirty years? What's the big hurry now?

ERIC

I want to live an authentic life. I never felt it was the right time to tell her before. I'd be uncomfortable, she'd be uncomfortable...

MEL

And now I'll be uncomfortable too. We'll all be uncomfortable. (*she looks at him*)
Have you met someone?

ERIC

You could say that...

MEL

Aha! I knew it. Someone. At the library, I bet.

ERIC

At the library. Sure.

MEL

Great so you've got... Ming, gay, boyfriend, at the library... is there any point me even being in the room? What's his name?

ERIC (*slight pause*)

Lazy Susan

MEL

Lazy?

ERIC

Susan.

MEL

Lazy Susan. Is that... a drag queen? You are in a relationship with a drag queen? You said you met at the library. I thought he must have been a meek mild PhD student who wanted help with his booklist!

ERIC

You can be both!

MEL

Is he?

ERIC

No! Drag Queens Reading Children's Books. It's a thing. And they wanted me to find a reader. And I did...

MEL

And sparks flew.

ERIC

You could say that.

MEL

Well... great. I'm happy for you.

ERIC

I'd actually really like Mummy to meet... Susan.

Mel stares at him.

MEL

You will kill her. She is a little old Malaysian lady. She will have a heart attack if she sees a drag queen at her birthday dinner.

ERIC

You're exaggerating.

MEL

No. I'm not. This is the first time we have seen her in years. Don't bring Lazy Susan. Can't Ming be enough?

ERIC

I've always been Ming. I'm just... reclaiming my POC status.

MEL

But you're only half, so that makes you a PPOC, partly Person Of Colour. Like me.

ERIC

Not like you. People were nice to you. You were... exotic.

MEL

And you were cute! People loved you.

ERIC

The kids who beat me up didn't love me.

MEL (*scoffing*)

Beat you up? With a big fierce sister like me? What kids?

Slight pause

ERIC

The kids that called me slopehead and gook. The kids that plastered my bike with human shit.

Slight pause

MEL (*aghast*)

Eric Ming... I didn't know. You... should have told me. I could have done something.

ERIC

Like what? I've always been different to you.

MEL

How can you be different?

ERIC

Mel, come on. You... pass more easily.

MEL

Same mother, same father.

ERIC

But we look different, ok.

You look more Aussie. I look more Asian. I cop more abuse from... everyone. The 'ladies' who come in the library and tell me I'm responsible for the 'Chinese Flu'...

MEL

What?

ERIC

On the bus when I'm talking on the phone and an old white guy yells at me to go back to where I came from if I can't speak English... and... I am speaking English!

MEL

Eric... Ming

ERIC

The woman in the gift shop who follows me around with sanitizer and sprays anything I pick up and look at.

MEL

People like that/

ERIC

That's right. "People like that..."

They don't know what I am. They look at me and they can't place me...

Where do I belong? Outside of them, yes, but where?

Because... they're the centre, you know? They put *themselves* right in the centre and they don't know where they should put me.

They don't know where I belong.

(It's painful to articulate)

But here's the thing, I don't know where I belong either.

He calms.

MING

What about your Big Secret?

(beat)

MEL

I'm not getting married.

ERIC

Ah, No. Nooo. You can't tell her that. You think *I'm* going to rock her world?

MEL

It's not that I don't want to get married. It's that... I don't want to get married to Cal.

ERIC

But you and Cal seem so... comfortable.

MEL

Exactly.

ERIC

Like... a pair of ugg boots.

MEL

Really comfy ones that fall down at the back because they're been trodden on over many a long winter. *(she is packing up her bag)* Don't say anything to Cal ok?

ERIC

You haven't told him yet?

MEL

Not exactly.

She starts to leave.

ERIC

Mel! You have to tell *him* before you tell *her*. You owe him that.

MEL

What, that he's an ugg boot? And I've realised I want bare feet?

I might need you there when I tell him. Can you come tonight?

ERIC

No! I now have a social life! *(beat)* You look really stressed.

MEL

I'm anxious! I just want her to be happy! See you later.

She leaves. He calls after her.

ERIC

She will be happy. I promise!

A pause.

ERIC (*to himself*)

And when have I ever let you down?

Lights change

Eight – Spring Roll

Darkness. A spotlight. 1995. A memory.

VOICE

Ladies and gentlemen. It's time now to meet the two young winners of Best Lead and Follow, 1995 Young Asian Australian Ballroom Dancers – regional division! Brother and sister... Eric and Melanie! ... Eric and Melanie!

MEL, (mostly) dressed to dance. Flustered. Awkward.

MEL

(to audience) I'm here. I'm here! Eric is... *(laughs)* Boys! He's here somewhere. I saw him, I was going back for more hairspray, flyaway hair Mummy calls it... But he's coming. He promised. Thankyou. We thank you for this great honour! *(she looks around at the audience, decides to improvise)*

So hey... how about a big round of applause for our sponsor and venue?

Jim's Oriental Restaurant and Milk Bar!! Lot of love for Jim!

(She's the only one clapping. She stops)

And I want to thank the minor regional judges

And I'd like to thank all the Young Asian Social Dancers,

And the Rotary and Lions' Ladies representatives

And the Prime minister and the Queen and... God and um

(As she speaks Mel looks around desperately for someone)

And thankyou to our mother! Thankyou for the amazing catering.

Especially the amazing spring rolls, right? Where are you? *(looks)* Mummy?

And our dad, Iain, for coming, he's here somewhere... Dad? I can't see you.

(she looks offstage, checks) Eric? No?

(jokes) It's like my whole family's disappearing!

Eric?

(Eric walks onstage. He is in current time, not 1995. Mel can't see him.)

MEL (*calls*)

Where are you Eric?

ERIC (*to audience*)

There she is. My big sister who could fix everything from fly away hair to baby cobras. You couldn't fix this. For a minute, I thought maybe she could. If anyone could.

MEL (*calls*)

Has anyone seen Eric? Is something wrong?

ERIC

Was something wrong?

Me, aged nine, beaten up at the back of the dance school. That was wrong.

MEL

Eric?

ERIC

My bike totally covered in shit. I mean... kudos, those little pricks must have shat in a bucket for a week. And the smell. Yeah that was very wrong.

MEL

Eric?

ERIC

And then when I limped back to find my mother and father, hearing them, arguing again, and realising what was about to happen. The best moment of our life, winning that stupid ballroom dancing trophy... was also the worst moment. But the thing that was *most* wrong? I could hear my sister calling, but I left her there, alone.

Eric looks at Mel, she is still awkwardly smiling at the audience.

Mel. I'm so sorry. And I have no idea how you were able to get off that stage.

A familiar voice sounds. They both look up.

HELEN (VO)

Ladies and gentlemen, judges and dancers.

Unfortunately, the deep fryer is kaput so its first in best dressed for the spring rolls.

The loud sound of chairs scraping, people moving.

Mel darts off.

Eric is left alone. He looks at his watch. Present time again.

ERIC

Looks like it's nearly dinner time. Hello Mummy.

END ACT 1

ACT TWO

One – Chicken And Sweet Corn Soup

The restaurant, like a stage before the audience enters.

Helen IRL moves into the space.

A sense of her remembering as she looks around.

HELEN

Once upon a time, a woman and her two children came to the land of her husband.

A small girl and a smaller boy.

The wife and the husband had talked about this country.

The river. The beaches with clean sand.

It was just like home, but better.

He didn't tell her about the dry, or the dust.

He didn't tell her about the flatlands with hardly any trees.

He didn't tell her that the people who lived there wouldn't like her, wouldn't trust her, wouldn't invite her to their house.

He didn't tell her that their children would be called names.

He didn't tell her he would one day leave her. Her and their children.

They were not her children, not completely.

They were his children too.

And they were not of his land, not completely. They were of her land too.

A foot on each side of an ocean.

They were from both and from neither.

A pause. Jess enters.

JESS

Helen! Helen, your daughter and son should be here soon. What do you want to inspect before proceedings?

HELEN

You make it sound like a military operation.

JESS

Not at all. We're very grateful to you. Running a restaurant is an expensive business. If it wasn't for your regular and generous payments.

HELEN

Especially since

JESS

... the Pandemic yes,

HELEN

Since Jim passed.

Slight pause.

JESS

Jim passed, yes. It was quite sudden. Unexpected and very very...

HELEN

Sad.

JESS

Inconvenient. But we carry on. I myself have had to take on a variety of additional roles just to ensure our doors stay open. Cook. Maitre de. Cleaner. Security.

HELEN

Jim has gone/

JESS

But *Jim's Oriental Restaurant and Milk Bar* is still here.

HELEN

For the moment.

JESS

Jim kept an item on the menu, in memory of you. Chicken and Sweet Corn Soup.
With extra chunks. Not very modern, but he was quite insistent.

Helen smiles.

HELEN

I think I'll freshen up before dinner.

Helen leaves, Jess pauses a moment and then follows.

Two – Sweet and Sour Fish

Lights! The Restaurant. Red drapes. A hint of fish tanks.

A table, centre stage. Set for 10. Large throne like chair in the centre. Gentle music.

A bell rings.

A door opens and a trolley is pushed through by Jess with a smile plastered on her face.

JESS

Welcome, relatives, friends and cherished guests to Jim's Oriental Restaurant and Milk Bar for the birthday celebrations of Helen, our dear and valued friend.

She notes no one is present at the table.

Checks her watch. Checks her notebook.

She picks up her tongs, clacks them ferociously and starts placing dumplings onto the empty plates. She exits. Slightly disgusted.

A distant bark.

CAL enters. He is holding the ring box. He looks for somewhere to conceal it. Puts it on the table with a couple of paper swan napkins on top. Rushes out.

MEL appears, sees the room is empty, hurries out, grabbing her phone and making a call as she does.

CAL enters from the other side. Checks the ring box is still there. Pours himself a glass of wine which he hurriedly drinks as Mel enters. They stare at each other.

MEL

Cal?

CAL

Mel!

MEL

Cal.

CAL

Mel?

MEL

Fifi...

CAL

Car.

MEL

Cal!

CAL

Yes. Fifi. Restaurant. Dog. No.

Distant barking.

CAL

When I get back we can speak in more than single words.

MEL

Great.

CAL

Good.

Cal nods and exits.

Mel sees the piled up swan napkins and lifts them to see the box.

MEL

Fuck.

She looks at the box and then checks out the ring.

MEL

Oh, ring, fuck!

She closes the box and throws the swan napkins back on top as Cal enters.

CAL (*suspicious*)

What are you doing? I spent hours on those swans.

MEL

And aren't they fabulous. Mummy will be thrilled. How's Fifi?

CAL

Fifi's happy. More wine? (*pours*) While we wait?

MEL

Where is everyone? There should be ten people here. They're not here!

CAL

There *were* dropouts, you know that: sickness, jury duty, forced isolations.

MEL

But... Ken and Rosie? Weren't they coming?

CAL

Absent.

MEL (*a wail*)

No! My seating plan!

CAL (*slightly ruthless*)

Also... Connie. Not coming. And the Blah Blahs? Nyet.

MEL

These are highly esteemed friends of my mother's...

CAL

... that you never introduced me to, so I wouldn't know them from Adam... Let's face it, I am persona non grata to your mob.

A bell rings.

Jess enters with her notebook and a tray. Mel is relieved to see her.

MEL

Jess! Great. Look, we're not all here yet. We can't start.

JESS (*coldly*)

And, there have been cancellations. So disrespectful!

MEL

I couldn't agree more!

CAL

Disrespectful. Exactly.

Jess peers at her notebook...

JESS

Wait... one of these bookings was for a guest named Fifi - requesting raw turkey.

Minced by hand. Did someone make a booking for a dog? *(She glares at Cal)*

CAL

Of course not. Dogs don't belong in restaurants.

MEL *(to Jess)*

I thought you liked dogs!

JESS *(curtly)*

Another cancellation.

She begins packing away crockery and Fifi's dog bowl onto her tray.

MEL *(to Cal)*

Tell her. We are like *family* to Jim.

CAL

That word "family" - I'm not actually sure we are.

MEL

Just tell her!

CAL (*eating a dumpling*)

You tell her. She's scary. I'm pretty sure she tried to punch me when I was signing in.

MEL

Why would she do that? Jess has never seen you before. Except on... (*realises*)

JESS

No exemptions. No refunds. (*a glare at Cal*) No villains.

Jess goes out with the crockery.

Mel checks her phone. Cal pours himself another glass. Fiddles with the ring box in the other hand.

Drinks his glass in one.

CAL

Mel, what's going on? Can we talk?

MEL (*on the phone*)

I'm trying to call Jim. Again!

CAL

Oh God. I've got the same feeling in my gut as when I nearly completed the replica Death Star and I couldn't find the Lieutenant Pol Treidum figure.

MEL

He's not answering my call! He hasn't answered any of my calls. God, where is everyone? Has there been an earthquake? A volcano?

CAL

The loss of that one mini figure rendered my whole timelapse recorded demonstration utterly useless.

MEL

Mummy will be so disappointed. She's come all this way! We'll have to work hard to jolly her up.

CAL

I have no idea what could jolly up your mother. Diamonds? Drowning kittens?

MEL

I just want my mother to be happy.

CAL

You want more than that, this competition between you and Eric Ming, it's ridiculous.

MEL

What competition?

CAL

She's your mother she loves both of you.

MEL

I know that!

CAL

Equally.

MEL

There is no competition. (*beat*) I am oldest therefore she should love me most.

CAL

Ok Mel I was going to wait for everyone but maybe it's better if it's just us.

Drops to one knee, to her horror.

MEL

What are you doing? Get up! You have no idea what's been on this floor. No!

As Cal begins to open the box to a horrified Mel...

A bell rings.

Mel shrieks. Cal leaps up dropping the ring as he does. He starts groping about on his hands and knees on the floor for it.

Jess appears loaded up with a large basin. She serves it out into two bowls.

JESS

And now! Please enjoy some MaPoh Tofu! Delicate. Comforting. Reassuring.

Cal is looking on the floor for the ring. As Jess exits she steps on his hand. He silently screams.

MEL

Are you alright?

CAL

She is literally *none* of those things!

MEL

We can't possibly eat an entire banquet for ten people.

CAL (still on the floor, following her on his knees)

Mel, I am asking you to marry me. Do you hear me?

MEL

Of course I hear you... but...

CAL

But what?

MEL

Mummy and Eric Ming are not even here.

And we've got too much food... And can you get off the floor?

CAL

I am trying to find the ring! What has Eric Ming and your mother got to do with this? Stop talking about food! Mel... Do I mean anything to you at all?

MEL

Of course you do. You're like... my ugg boot.

CAL

Your what? Did you say ugg boot?

MEL

You give me warmth and great comfort. We are comfortable, you and I.

CAL

Do we need counselling?

MEL

We need doggy bags./ What's the matter?

Cal has remembered something.

CAL (*getting up*)

Bugger/ I forgot to feed Fifi.

MEL (*idea*)

Fifi! Let's sneak him in. Mummy will be jolly if Fifi is here!

CAL

No! No dog in restaurant. What if Jess sees? Also, I can't be sure those words won't show up. Under these lights...

MEL

We can wrap him in a tablecloth. Like robes. We'll say you're being creative.

CAL

I'll take him for a walk around the carpark and give him a dumpling in the car.

He grabs some dumplings and shoves them in his pockets.

MEL

He can't have a dumpling in the car! Let him in. We need him. *(beat)* I need him.

Pause. Cal looks at her, sadly.

CAL

And *that's* something you have never said about me.

A bell rings.

Flashes of lights. Like the entrance of a rock star. Maybe the sound of cheering?

A radiant Helen enters.

MEL

Mummy! Oh thank goodness! You're here. At last!

CAL

Helen. Here at last.

HELEN

I'm here, darlings, I am here! *(waving majestically)* Welcome, everyone! Welcome!

Behind her, Jess is clanging little cymbals together behind her in a festive manner.

JESS

(sings unenthusiastically) Happy birthday to Helen. Happy birthday to Helen...

MEL

No!

JESS

No...?

MEL

I thought we were clear about this.

JESS

This is *not* her birthday?

CAL

Maybe. Probably. But no.

MEL (*hastily explains*)

Not birthday. Celebration of survival.

CAL

Huzzah!

JESS (*unimpressed*)

Yeah, well unfortunately I don't know the words to that one... (*she exits*)

HELEN

Darlings I'm so sorry. Have you been waiting long? (*A hard stare at the eaten food*)

Oh silly me, you have not been waiting at all.

A bell rings. *Jess pokes her head in the door.*

JESS

Reminder: we don't do refunds.

She disappears again.

HELEN

I find that young woman *very* strange.

CAL

Probably not good to say that out loud. (*He gestures at the walls*)

MEL

Mummy. Welcome. (*a gentle hug*) Not exactly what we planned. There's been a sort of... mix up.

HELEN

A mix up?

CAL

A weeny sort of mix up.

MEL

But everything is fine. It's better than fine. It's great.

HELEN

Melanie... my eldest child. So... good. Isn't she Cal?

CAL

Oh yes. Very good. Marvellous. Better than being *comfortable*.

HELEN

She looks after Eric. She looks after Fifi...

CAL (*remembering what he was about to do*)

And Fifi is happy! Will be happy. Any second.

He hurriedly exits. Mel tries to calm herself with a glass of wine.

MEL

I tried to call Jim, I thought he might join us, but he didn't answer.

HELEN

That is because... Jim is dead.

Mel chokes on her wine.

MEL

Jim is dead...?

HELEN

Jim is dead.

A bell rings. Cal appears.

CAL (*awkward*)

I'm back!

MEL

Jim is dead!

CAL

Aha. That explains it

A bell rings. Jess stands in door again.

JESS

I would like to pass on Jim's apologies for not being present. Or alive.
And also to say... tonight the very expensive and quite difficult to make bamboo
and fungus dish will be substituted with... a platter of mini sausage rolls.

(She hastily exits. Cal points at the walls with a "see I told you" expression.)

CAL

I think she's pissed off.

MEL

You think? She's serving us mini sausage rolls?

HELEN

In the words of The Buddha: Nothing can survive without food.

CAL

I believe there are some forms of moss/

MEL *(hissing)*

Shut up Cal.

HELEN

Will Eric be here soon? And Fifi, darling Fifi. And don't I have friends? Where are
my friends?

MEL (*flustered*)

Mummy, sadly, your friends... have cancelled... except Eric who told me he was coming but hasn't turned up. So it looks like... it's just you and me. (*hastily*) And Cal.

CAL

Good old reliable Cal

MEL

That's right

CAL

Good old reliable, dependable, dog minder and potential parent Cal

Mel glares at him. Helen sees the box on the table. She picks it up.

HELEN

What is this?

CAL

It's the door prize.

HELEN

It's empty.

CAL

I mean... floor prize. (*He starts looking on the floor again.*) It's here somewhere

As he crawls over the floor, Mel throws napkins back over the ring box as...

A bell rings. Jess appears with a tape recorder. Very unimpressed. She pushes the button and then passes it to Mel. She exits.

Loud music as Eric/Ming appears, in drag. False eyelashes, heels, sequins, the works.

MEL

Dear God In Heaven.

CAL

Mate?

HELEN

Darling?

MEL

I thought we agreed! This could kill her!

HELEN

My goodness! Is that my baby? In high heels?

Eric is a vision of loveliness. He scatters glitter about him. Jess appears suddenly, now wearing dark glasses and white gloves and grabs at his handbag.

MING

No, I said NO. Get your mitts off! You are ruining my number.

Music goes OFF

JESS

All bags must be checked by Security, your sister signed the agreement.

MEL

Did I?

Ming hands over his handbag, pouting.

JESS

I have already confiscated a set of handcuffs, a pair of nunchucks and a fully charged taser from your mother. *(exits)*

MEL

Mummy?

HELEN

Those cruise ships darling. Hell afloat. Now, where is my darling Eric.

MING

Mummy... *Enchante*. You don't look a day over twenty five...

MEL

Sucking up!

MING

Shut up!

HELEN

I love the couture! So wonderful. *(at Mel)* At least someone has made an effort for Mummy.

MEL

My jacket is quite expensive, actually.

CAL

Drink anyone?

He begins to pour more wine.

MEL

Better late than never I suppose Eric Ming.

HELEN

Ming?

MEL (*drinking*)

Yes, Ming! All about Ming! He's like the door of a grocer shop. Ming Ming Ming!

MING

Don't you love it when your big sister gets trolled?

HELEN

Ming. Traditional name.

MING

Mine, Mummy. All mine!

CAL

And you look hot, mate. Ming. Or are you someone else?

MING

You can call me... Lazy Susan.

MEL

Seriously? How many names do you want?

CAL

How many has he got?

MEL

Enough. Now Mummy, can I speak to you/

MING

For special events like tonight you can address me as Susan. Otherwise, I'm just Ming.

MEL (*gritted teeth*)

Bravo. Just Ming.

HELEN

Darling is this for fun?

MING

Basically yes, but it's also to loudly and passionately signify that I have gone through a change. Mummy, prepare yourself...

MEL

You scumbag. You were meant to wait!

CAL

Mel, steady on. He is your brother.

MEL

He's a bitch. I told him I was going first.

MING

I've got something to say!

MEL

I've got something to say!

CAL

Well I've got something to say but no one seems particularly interested.

MING (*hurriedly, hiding Mel's fury from view with his dress*)

Mummy, I am gay and this is a new and exciting part of my life. My drag life may not be my whole life, but it's looking promising. Mel doesn't want me to announce it to you first but to me it is all consuming and far far more significant than Melanie and Callum's sham of a relationship!

CAL

Pardon?

MEL (*horrified and suddenly sober*)

Ming! Don't say that!

MING

Ok bad choice of words.

HELEN (*lovingly*)

My little Ming...

Ming darling you have always been gay.

MING

Have I/ I mean yes I know that but how do you?

HELEN

I am your mother.

She embraces Ming/Eric.

CAL

Can we just back up a bit to that thing about me and Mel?

MEL (*to Ming*)

Alright Lazy Susan, you got your big announcement. Now/

MING

Shut up please. This is *my* moment. With *my* mother.

MEL

She's my mother too. Why don't *you* shut up? Mummy can you stop him? He's such a brat.

MING

You're such a brat.

CAL

I think you're both brats to be honest.

MING

Just because she's older she thinks she can butt in whenever she likes!

MEL

I hate the way you think you can crawl your way into mummy's favour. You suck!

MING

If I'm crawling then I'm only following my big sister. You suck!

HELEN

That's enough. You're worse than starlings.

Ming, darling, I'm proud of you, know what you are and own it.

In the words of The Buddha: Express yourself.

CAL

Actually, I think that was the words of Madonna.

MING

Shouldn't there be more people here? I want my audience!

HELEN

I want some Soup.

CAL

People in hell want iced water.

A bell rings. Jess enters with trolley.

JESS

Our next course is Singapore Jaffles. And... Pot Pourri of Party Pies.

CAL

Singapore Jaffles. Is that a thing in Singapore?

EVERYONE

No.

Jess begins serving food.

HELEN

Two courses at once?

JESS

Stringent reservation times. And of course, please be aware...

EVERYONE

No refunds!

Jess throws the last bowls into place and exits.

HELEN

Someone is having a very bad day.

CAL

(to Helen) More wine? I find it helps.

HELEN

We used to come here all the time. *Jim's Oriental Restaurant*. Do you remember my darlings?

MING

Yes Mummy. We remember.

MEL

Here's a memory for you.

Gradual lighting change. The dreamy atmosphere.

MEL

Imagine. With me now. Close your eyes and see... me. Just a young thing. Still in my ballroom dancing costume, seated alone in the restaurant.

A bowl of rice steaming softly before me.

Lighting change. Story time. Actors emerge from characters. Nb. It is important that audience can see this is not a literal moment i.e. characters. Instead these are now ACTORS who support MEL in her storytelling/memory.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS CAL

She hears a voice, saying 'Fucking slope heads.'

MEL

I look to one side and I see...

ACTOR WHO PLAYS CAL

A table of men, stuffing their faces with honey chicken, sweet and sour pork, laughing and laughing.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS HELEN

Talking. Very loudly... Where To Get Sex in Penang.

MING

Just a bunch of redneck boof-heads Mel, don't think about it.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

She hears: One voice of dissent.

MEL

And I think Thank God, this guy's going to say stop but then...

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

He says: All Slopes Have Disease and I wouldn't touch them with A Ten Foot Pole
Let Alone My Dick.

MING

Mel. It was years ago. Ignore!

MEL

Because you don't think it could happen today? The library ladies? The guy on the
bus? I can't ignore something I remember. Something inside me.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS CAL

The roars of laughter from the other men.

MEL

And I remember the feeling as my face burns. God. *(She holds her hands to her
cheeks.)*

ACTOR WHO PLAYS HELEN

She asks herself: Don't they see where they are?

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

Can't they see the young Chinese waitress hovering nervously behind the counter?

MEL

Can't they see me...?

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

She stays sitting at her table... neatly pressing at the pleats in her skirt, staring at the paper napkin swans, the white plastic toothpicks in the carved wooden box.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS CAL

And the anger, the unfairness... a bad taste in the back of her throat

MEL

I get up to leave.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

She stops in the doorway... Makes a point of thanking the young Chinese waitress. She smiles and her eyes slide past to the men. The table of men. Still laughing. Still stuffing their faces.

MEL

As I'm about to leave she says suddenly:

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

You are Chinese?

MEL

Chinese? Um...

and quick as a flash I say: No... my mother is Malaysian, my father is Australian... you see I am half and half.

MING

Half and half. And where is that place? A foot here, a foot there. Each side of the ocean.

MEL

It's the place where we live. You and I. It's what we are.

MING

But it's not the same place, is it Mel? Your half and half is not the same place as mine. Because...

You pass. I don't.

A pause. This is painful for Mel to admit.

MEL

Yes.

I'm your sister and you're my brother.

And I'm half and half like you... but it's the white half those people see.

The ladies in the library. The men in the restaurant.

And... you get beaten up behind the dance hall.

And your bike gets covered in shit.

And after that night, you and I, we never dance again.

I do pass. I do.

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

The young Chinese waitress looks... confused.

MEL (*composes herself*)

And I say to her: I really like your fish.

A large beautiful silver fish floats by. They watch it. Mel and Ming hold hands.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JESS

The waitress smiles. We can cook him for you, she says.

*Lighting and sound normalizes. **Actors normalize.** Become their characters again.*

Ming hugs Mel.

HELEN (*to Cal*)

You see. My children. Kind, clever. Both of them.

CAL

So why do you have to pick... one? (*beat*) For the five years I've known them these two have been, very kindly very cleverly, at each other's throats.

They both want to be the One.

A bell rings.

Jess appears.

JESS

Ladies and gentlemen, I am about to serve the final main course. Any MSG allergies? No? Good.

HELEN (*calls*)

When is my soup coming?

Jess exits hastily.

Ming tinkles his chopstick on a glass.

MING

In honour of our mother... I did have a number picked out to perform and everything. So...

He begins to walk into position.

HELEN

You did?!

MEL

Ming, you don't have to perform.

MING

Yes I do.

CAL

Yes he does!

HELEN

Yes he does. I came all this way. Nothing could make me happier.

MEL

It's only us, he has no audience...

HELEN

And when has that ever stopped either of you?

Ming is in position on the dance floor.

MING

Ready Please Mr Music!

Cal hits the player and Ming's gay anthem comes up!!

Lights!

Brilliance. Ming lipsynchs and dances.

He puts a hand out to Mel, they dance.

They all get up and dance. Music ends. Applause.

MEL

That was fabulous!

HELEN

So wonderful Ming, thankyou!

And now, my turn to speak.

As you know, I kept in touch with Jim all these years.

MEL

Actually Mummy we don't.

HELEN

Jim was once my sanctuary.

MING

You mean *Jim's*. The restaurant, not the man. Otherwise it sounds like you mean that you and Uncle Jim... you know

HELEN (*a smile*)

I know what I mean. Over the years I have invested wisely. Jim showed kindness to me, and so I could be kind to him in return.

MEL

How kind?

HELEN

I made regular payments for *Jim's Oriental Restaurant and Milk Bar*.

Mel, Ming and Cal are gobsmacked.

MING

How regularly. And how much?

CAL

Enough to keep this place going when every other restaurant in the street went belly up.

HELEN

As you know, Jim recently passed on.

I have now decided this restaurant will no longer be my concern.

Tonight, my celebration of survival represents a final payment.

MING

That's it? No more money for *Jim's*?

A bell rings.

The door opens and JESS enters with a last tray of food. She looks maniacal.

JESS

This course is... Random Ingredients I Found In A Cupboard.

She pours it all onto the table.

HELEN

Will you be back?

Jess freezes and stares at them.

JESS

Oh yes.

She exits.

HELEN (*unconcerned, to Mel*)

Now, Cal, Melanie, darlings... When is the wedding?

MEL

Mummy, we're taking it slow. Aren't we Cal?

CAL

If you say so.

MEL

It's just a piece of paper!

HELEN

Did I see a ring?

Slight pause, Mel and Cal look at each other. Cal stands up. Takes the ring out of his jacket.

CAL

This ring Helen? The one I was going to offer to Mel today?

Yeah, I thought a Celebration of Survival was the perfect time to propose to the woman I love, but it turns out I was wrong.

(looks at her) Because I'm not the one, am I Mel? That's what you've been trying to tell me.

(beat)

MING

Cal, no. She doesn't mean that.

MEL

I do.

HELEN

No wedding?

MEL

No wedding. I'm sorry Mummy, I know you were looking forward to it.

Cal, you're kind and warm and secure/

MING

And comfortable.

CAL

Like an ugg boot?

MEL

Like my best friend.

But you're right. You're not the One. I'm sorry.

CAL

(shrugs) Shock horror. TV show gets it wrong.

HELEN

Cal, you have shown such love and care...

CAL *(to Helen)*

Yep, thank you Helen, Fifi is waiting in the car.

HELEN

Fifi! I was talking about Melanie!

CAL

I am taking him. I'm feeding him dumplings. And I'm changing his name to... Spike.

(He leaves, Mel almost follows)

MEL

Mummy I want you to be happy. But this wasn't what I wanted to say. It had nothing to do with weddings or Fifi or Cal and I. It's about... Dad.

HELEN

You said you want me to be happy!

MEL

We do.

HELEN

We don't want sad memories.

MEL

But the thing is... yes we do want sad memories. If that's all the memories we have. All that we get. We want them, don't we Ming. We need them.

MING

All of them.

MEL (*to Ming and Helen*)

I talked to Dad. He lives in Hong Kong. And one day he saw me, his oldest daughter, on a television show. With my *One and Only*, Cal.

Helen has turned away.

MEL

Mummy?

HELEN

It's true.

MEL

You knew where he was.

MING

You never told us.

MEL

Never spoke about him.

HELEN

What was I supposed to do? Living here. An Asian woman and her two children.

What did they used to call you? Half breeds?

MEL

He tried to contact us. Over the years. But *you* stopped him.

HELEN

I did what I thought was right to hold you close. So you could survive.

MEL

Survive what? And who? Whose survival are we celebrating today, exactly
Mummy?

HELEN

Darling

MEL (*angry*)

No. Stop it! Stop with the darlings alright! Ming and I, we have no idea who we are.
Sometimes we're too Asian.

MING

And sometimes we're not Asian enough.

MEL

We don't know who we are. What we are. You're not protecting, you're white
washing. Or brown washing.

MING

Mel and I... need more than photos and happy memories.

MEL

We need the truth.

A bell rings. Jess enters.

JESS

Under the current system of personal responsibility, Jim's Restaurant, deceased,
are imposing their own time restrictions, sudden lockdowns and punishments for
quarantine law breeches, I therefore ask that you comply with any requests.

MEL (*gestures at the table*)

Party pies? Random Ingredients? This is not what we booked!

JESS

No refunds.

MING

And paid for!

JESS

No refunds.

HELEN

What would Jim say?

JESS

No Refunds. No Excuses. No Mercy.

She exits. Outside the windows lights flash. A siren wails.

MING

Is this about drugs? We don't have drugs! (*To MEL*) Do we?

MEL

Of course we don't!

MING

Mummy what kind of boat did you actually come on?

MEL

Is it Border Force?

MING

Have we done something wrong?

HELEN

We are Australian Citizens!

MEL (to MING)

Get out your drivers licence!

MING

I don't drive, you know that.

MEL (to Ming)

Get out your fucking library card then!

Sound of a dog barking. They look up.

MEL

That's Fifi!

HELEN

My darling Fifi!

Everyone calls.

EVERYONE

Fifi! Fifi!

A scream from Cal.

MEL

That's Cal!!

A bell rings.

The door opens and Cal staggers back in. He is bleeding profusely.

He is followed by Jess who casually peels off her bloodied gloves.

MEL

Cal! My god! What happened?

HELEN

He's bleeding on Jim's floor.

A bell rings.

MING

Quickly, the paper swan napkins!

HELEN

Where's Fifi?

CAL

You mean Spike. He saw me attacked and he leapt to my aid. That is one magnificent dog!

MEL

Ming call an ambulance. *(she shouts)* Help someone!

A bell rings.

HELEN *(to Jess)*

Young lady, I am not giving you a tip.

Ming is jabbing at his phone agitatedly. Mel and Helen sit Cal down and dab at the blood with serviettes.

A bell rings.

MING

I can't get through. It's like they've blocked the service.

JESS

Yes. Almost as if we don't want you blabbing?

HELEN

I exercised personal responsibility. I used Gucci hand tranquilizer!

Jess is done.

JESS (*snaps at them*)

Right! All of you.

CAL (*feeble*)

Does that include me?

JESS

You make me sick. You think you're special? You are not special.

People rely on this place, not just customers, there are *people* who work here, real people, one real person, like me, I work my fingers to the bone, cleaning up the mess and the talcum powder and the glitter and the shit and...

In the words of The Buddha: you all suck.

Oh and by the way... (*she turns to Ming*)

That first day we met, I told you there was no judgement.

THERE IS JUDGEMENT. Plenty.

Jess is now brandishing a small box that sparks. Everyone backs away in panic.

MEL

What is that?

HELEN

That's my taser! It was duty free!

CAL (*to Jess*)

Why have you got her taser?

He moves towards her, she tasers him. Screams from the others. He falls to the ground.

MING

This is about the glitter isn't it? We can vacuum, I promise, we can vacuum!

JESS

NO REFUNDS!

There is the electric buzz and blue flash of a taser and Ming falls to the ground.

MEL

This is not the vibe we want.

Jess tasers her and she too falls to the ground. Helen holds up her hands.

HELEN

I'm leaving quietly. No need for any of that nonsense.

Jess stops and watches as a dignified Helen begins to walk away. She stops and turns back.

HELEN

You forgot my soup!

JESS

Chicken and Sweet Corn?

HELEN

With extra chunks.

JESS

Yeah. Sorry 'bout that.

Another bzz and a flash. Jess strips off her gloves, drops them on the table and follows. The siren stops. The lights stop flashing.

Jess walks to the light switch and bangs smartly on the wall. Blackout.

The sound of waves on a beach.

Three – Fortune Cookies

Waves continue and then the chirp of insects, shriek of monkeys, wash of rain.

Lights.

Mel. In Pearl Of The Orient type shirt. Gleeful tourist.

MEL (*to audience*)

Imagine. With me. Now. Close your eyes and listen for... the drama of airports, the fall of the rain... breathe in now... the hot wet air, the petrol fumes and monsoon drains, the spiky durian, the night fragrant mangosteen...

Open your eyes. You are here. Penang. Home of orchids and monkeys and a long time ago... Home of us.

Ming enters

MING

Pearl of the Orient!

MEL

Malaysia truly Asia!

MING

And monkeys. Did you say monkeys? Because I actually remembered them. IRL

MEL

I said monkeys.

MING

A real memory. Hairy things. Scary things. Like tiny angry children. Thin, grey, wiry looking, reddish faces, spindly fingers...

MEL

Batik. Satay. Baby Cobras... and our father.

MING

Meeting us here. Penang Hill. With the monkeys.

MEL

You're fixated on the monkeys.

MING

Don't take their side.

MEL

People used to buy bags of peanuts to throw at them and years have gone by, and they're still

MING

Working for peanuts?

MEL (*laughs*)

Hungry. And less nuts in any one bag. Smaller nut bags.

MING snorts a little.

MEL

What?

He shakes his head, he is smirking.

MEL

It's 'nut bag' isn't it.

MING

No.

MEL

Puerile little brother!

She takes out a joss stick.

MEL

Lighter?

MING

Don't smoke. *(sneaky side look at Mel)* If only we knew *someone* who did.

How is he?

MEL

He's ok. He's Cal. He's a survivor.

MING

He was just on the wrong TV show.

MEL

Maybe we both were. Hotel matches. Here.

Mel lights the joss sticks. Ming inhales.

MING

That smell. Brings it back.

MEL

Like madeleines and Proust.

MING

So... for Jim. Who it turned out was actually The One for our mother.

MEL

For Jim.

MING

And for little Ming. And little Mel.

MEL

For our childhood. For the ballroom dancing. And the bullies who shit on our bikes.

And for all the shitty bikes.

MING

For the racists and the lone fish in the tank.

MEL

For the darling drag queens. And the magical monsters.

MING

For the ladies in the library and the man on the bus.

MEL

For the foot in each world.

MING

For our mother. For our father. For Fifi

MEL

You mean Spike. And for Cal.

MING

You're sure Cal's not The One?

MEL

Maybe you and I are our own One.

MING

Our own one.

MEL

Come on. We should go. We're meeting Dad for dinner remember.

MING

Fingers crossed it's nothing like Mum's.

Mel puts the stick into a pot. Leave it to smoulder.

Ming stands. He is wearing heels. Mel starts to walk. He glances down...

MING

Mel... can we just wait a sec... these heels are a bitch.

MEL *(a grin as she strides off)*

Oh Ming... come on! Think of Ginger!

Ming strides after her. As he goes...

MING

Think of Ginger!

A distant bark.

Music: The One

END