

7-2-25

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE RESTAURANT IN ARCADIA CA.: NIGHT

(A Chinese restaurant It's empty, except for Lilly, Pat, and George. George is a half-Chinese and half-Caucasian American. Lilly is Chinese-American. Pat is Caucasian-American. All are about 27 years old. George is reviewing a script. George's face exhibits a rough handsome edge. He's strong and tall. He moves to get a pen on a near table and we see that he limps slightly. Pat sits leisurely at a table, pouring tea for himself. He's taller and lankier than George...less athletic. His legs are stretched out and, with one hand, he grips a walking stick stabbing the floor with it. He's handsome, with the flamboyant appearance of a young, roguish and high bohemian, Ezra Pound. Lilly is pretty with fine features and casually dressed. Her tar-black hair is cut in China-Doll 20's style. Lilly's pacing about, looking at photos on her phone while nervously tugging the tufts of hair around her ear. You can feel past events floating through her mind. She carries herself with a matter-of-fact beauty that may come from aching teen years. George drops the script to his side and looks at his phone.)

George. *(to himself)* Damn, where is she? *(shakes his head and goes back to the script.)*

Pat *(As Lilly passes him looking at her phone...he tugs at her... aside)* Your boyfriend is *(whistles and twirls his finger at his head)* tonight. *(Lilly puts a "hush" finger to her lips to Pat.)*

George. Aunt Amy is holding her hostage.

Lilly. *(still looking and swiping her phone)* George... She'll be here.

George: Who knows?! Aunt Amy knows how to fuck with me. Been like that since Mom died. We need Rose to rehearse.

(There's silence as George goes back to the script and Lilly begins swiping her phone again. Shows phone-shots to Pat who's been fondling the C-shaped top of his walking stick and rocking on the back legs of his chair...and occasionally sipping tea.)

Pat. Where those from?

Lilly. Tea party in San Marino...2 years ago...where I met George.

Pat. Oh, I remember. We were working charity for his mother...fancy house...big lawn. I broke some teapots and a coupla old white hairs snarled at me in Chinese.

Lilly. *(looking up and speaking to a preoccupied George and holding her phone out toward him.)* Remember?

George. What?

Lilly. The tea party where we met. I was volunteering with the Lion's Club.

George. (*looks*) Oh yeah. You know, all those empresses are married to Chinese spies. I told Mom. She didn't care. She loved those rich ladies and their English teacup culture. Funny, not one spoke English.

Lilly. God, I was happy that day. You were irresistible in your floppy pants and cockeyed buttoned shirt. You drank too much wine and said my face shined..."shined"...you said that as I re-buttoned your shirt.

George. (*nodding, smiling*) Yeah. (*leans in and tenderly touches her face.*) Still does.

Lilly. (*glancing on-again-off-again at her phone photos*) Went to your mother's house after. You showed me her birds...the parrots...the canaries, finches.

George. Yeah...too bad they died after Mom did. The parrots hated Aunt Amy...always pinched her finger. The canaries and finches made it for a while...brains too dumb to be lonely. But the parrots...just faded away.

Pat. Like old soldiers.

George. (*goes back to the script...looks up*) Aunt Amy...just wanted to get her foot in the door of our house. Mom made a mistake puttin' her in the will and making her executer. Felt sorry for her. (*back to the script*) Now, she's Mao Tse fucking Tung of the family.

Pat. You know, *you're* awful cranky these days...like an old man who can't squeeze out a shit.

Lilly. (*to George*) Maybe you're just uncomfortable about moving in with me.

George. (*turns to hug Lilly*) Awwww...come on..stop. I love ya, baby. I ain't cranky... just busy.

Lilly. Your face is (*moves up to him and presses his cheeks fondly with her palms*) gettin' all crinkly from scowling too much.

Pat. Lilly...he's miserable on the outside but he's got goodness, right here...where it counts. (*thumps to his chest*)

(Lilly and George shake their heads with amusement)

Lilly. George, I guess I'm not supposed to tell you. Your Aunt Amy called me.

George. Called you? How'd she get your number?

Lilly. Don't know...Rose maybe.

George. What she want?

Lilly. Wants to talk to you. Says you won't talk to her.

George. The house...always needs me to do shit with the house. I ain't her handyman.

Lilly. It's your house too. Come on...she wants me to get you to talk to her.

George. Ok...you did your job.

Lilly. Says your mother would have wanted it...for you to talk to her...*(holds up in hands)* It's not me...I'm just repeating.

George. Boy...Just like her to blackmail me. Even her husband couldn't stand her. Took all her cash and ran back to China. What do they call that kinda wife who breaks her husband's balls? *(rolls his hand with impatience)* Pat...come on...

Pat. A shrew?

George. *(snaps his fingers)* That's it...Pat...you got that vocab down...a shrew. *(to Lilly)* Back in the shit, this guy edited the important emails for us dumb dog-faces.

Lilly. Your aunt's just trying to help.

George. *(distracted again looking away from the script)* She's feng shuing the hell outta the house. *(shoves a chair, shoves another and we again see he limps)* Shoving beds, moving tables this way and that. And even makes Rose to go to those Chinese quacks...drinking tree branch juice for a cold. Pat, ever hear of anything like that?

Lilly. Just talk to her...ok?

George. Oh God...Ok. **Only**, cuz I love ya. Boy, **that Amy**, she's been a bossy bitch.

Pat. Ain't he a literary lion, Lil...with all that alliteration?

(George shakes his head, grinning grimly and continues editing script)

George. *(sighs)* This whole thing's got me thirsty. Lil, think your unc would mind if I took a beer?

Lilly. Go ahead. They're busy burying grandma in Bejing.

George. *(exits limping into the back kitchen. Pat begins performing rifle drills with his cane.(OS)* Want one, baby?

Lilly. No. One sip and I'll fumble all over. You shouldn't be drinking. I don't like it.

George. *(OS)* Pat, want one?

Pat. *(shaking his empty teacup)* Sure.

George. *(OS)* I'll leave a ten on the counter. *(returns limping with two beer bottles. Begins to hand a bottle to Pat...but suddenly pulls back)*. You ain't gonna forget your lines are ya?

Pat. *(snatching the bottle)* You doubt my skills! *(lifts his cane in the air)* I'll clobber your skull, you cretin.

George. *(sipping beer and leaning against a table)* I gotta get this short done for class...and maybe even send it to some shit-town film festival. *(goes back to a script)*. And...I gotta get outta PCC. I'm the oldest guy in my class. *(to Pat)* How'd you get your degree so fast, asshole?

Pat. Had to. Who's gonna watch your ass and act in your movie for free?

George. *(Sips beer...looking around. To Lilly.)* You know, I always appreciated your uncle helping Mom in a pinch, but I hated her working here.

Lilly. *(stops looking at her phone)* I used to cut vegetables and shuck peas as a girl at that table, right where you're standing.

George. I bet you were cute...with your itty-bitty fingers cracking peapods.

Pat. Did they pay ya for your pea popping skill?

((Lilly shakes her head.))

George. See what I mean...Cheap Chinese...no offense to your uncle.

Lilly. Don't be a jerk...you're Chinese.

George. Only half. And I know you fell in love with my Nordic side...*(poses)* **my Brad Pitt profile.**

Lilly. *(moves to a mirror on the wall... scratches off something under her eye.)* Of course...hooray for the Aryan race.

Pat. Lilly... George has the love and fiery heart of Siegfried. *(sings Nazi national anthem)* "Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles". *(pause)* Hey, what say we all go to the track...bet the ponies? That track's the only culture Arcadia's got...other than your uncle's joint, of course.

George. Come on, what are we gonna do, guys? No Rose...gettin' late.

Lilly. *(turns away from the mirror)* We can rehearse around her.

George. Yeah, but we're not here to rehearse **around** her. She's the mistress in the story and has that final dance I wanna record.

Pat. Lilly's right. We can rehearse the merry-go-round scene without her...you know...till she gets here. I'm a nimble thespian. I can even act her role. (*gets up, looking stagey...in a woman's voice and exaggerated hip-movements.*) "Oh, for muse of fire that would ascend the brightest heaven of invention..." (*no one reacts to his histrionics as though used to them...and he sits back down and sips his beer*)

(*George saunters toward the entrance and back again...using his phone.*)

George. No ringing even.

Pat. Come on, George. I'm bored.

Lilly. (*Lilly pushes open the front door, then peers out the window as though on the lookout for Rose*) Maybe your aunt is just protecting a teen girl...it's a school night and...

George. Protecting her from what...me?! Fuck that!

Lilly. (*moves toward him forcefully*) Quit saying "fuck" to me. You're not in your army barracks anymore!

George. All right, all right...sorry. Look, I'm just protecting an orphan from the claws of her stepmother.

Pat. (*drinking beer, wiping mouth*) Oh, man...I love that..."claws of her stepmother". You and your sister...both orphans now...how Grimm...fairy-taily.

Lilly. Orphans! You aren't kids. Besides, your dad's alive...isn't he?

George. (*shrugs and gulps beer wearing a wise guy grin*) If a guy ain't around... he's dead.

Pat. George don't need no stinking parents! He's a family anarchist. Lilly, when he got wounded and they shipped him to Germany, he never told his mother or sister, or Aunt Amy. Only I knew...and I snitched and told the family. Now that's telling the world to go to hell.

Lilly. (*to George*) Is that true?

George. He's full of shit.

Pat. (*standing pacing about...talking with manic fervor*) George is as free as a lion on the Serengeti. You mischievous lad, you! Hey, Lilly, your man back then was very popular with those (*accent*) frauliens in Germany...so we heard back in the barracks. There's a photo of him somewhere with the Rhine River behind...on crutches...with two Brunhildas beside him trying to please and poison his passionate heart as he crutched (*imitates a man on crutches*) around the

Rhineland's sleepy villages, all heroic and Hemingway handsome. He had a little mustache then, thin and Chinesy...but sharp. You should be pleased...those maidens cured him of the PTSD he was sure to catch otherwise. Why, now he's as cleared-eyed and fresh as he was running the fabulous football fields of old San Gabriel High...Go Matadors!

George Cool down...you're babblin' again, buddy.

Pat. *(Suddenly sits back down, but gets up again Pat and moves to the mirror. Lifts his hair up at the front hairline.)* Think I'm going bald? How about growing a goatee? Whaddaya think, George? Let's do it together. Gives us a look of High Bohemia. Think your sister would like an older man with a goatee?

George. Okay, I give up. *(moves toward Lilly and Pat with scripts)* We'll do the merry-go-round scene without her.

Pat. Now you're talkin'.

George. Lilly, *(hands her a script)* you take the Alice part for now. *(Gets up to set up furniture)* *(hands Pat a script)* Pat, you're Tory, you know the lines and what's goin' on?

Pat. *(Swirling, suddenly)* I'm always off-book. Oh, when will these Mongol troops be conquered, and I go back to my beloved wife? Oh, look at her! Her cheeks are heated. She's been ravished by an enemy invader. How often have you pierced my heart? Now, it is your turn.

(Pat sword- fights with his cane and pretends to stab Lilly in the heart. Lilly grabs her chest as though stricken. George ignores their antics and begins marking up the script...very seriously.)

George. *(walks Lilly and Pat their spots)* Ok. The dream sequence ... just before Rose's, or Alice's, final dance number. *(turning pages)*. Alice is standing cozy with Tory next to the merry-go-round horse. All right, page 6, Scene 2, middle of the page. I'll play **Anna**. Oh shit, *(moves to the table with the gear)*...I almost forgot. *(He digs into canvas bag and pulls out a gun)* Rose will be carrying this.

Lilly. Where did you get that?

George. Know a guy in a prop shop in North Hollywood. He...

Lilly. *(waves script pages)* That isn't in the script!

George. Well, it is now. It's much more dramatic, this way. Don't you see? Besides, how ya gonna shoot someone without a gun?

Lilly. I thought it was a dream...symbolic...I don't know. I don't like it.

George. Look, it's a short way of telling people how serious she is. Now, the scene's got balls.

It's only a 10 minute thing, but we gotta pack-a-punch...people get bored. *(approaches her)*
Here, feel it.

Lilly. Keep it away. I don't want to touch that thing. It looks real!

George. It was...not now. Come on Lilly...you gotta. It's in your part. *(Lilly touches it and jerks her hand back as though she's being burned.)* No, no...feel it. Please...It's okay. *(she takes it)* I wanna see what it looks like in your hand. See, it's big and I want it to look too big for you.

Lilly. Ok, ok, ok...I'll do it later. *(Gives the gun back to George)* It's your part now. Let's get on with this. *(moves close to Pat, opening the script)*

(George has the gun. He goes back crouching behind a chair set to direct. Lilly positions herself on the chair. Pat remains standing moving close to Lilly)

(Rose enters carrying a gymbag, panting and smiling.)

Lilly. Rose!

She drops the gymbag. With her thin arms and nimble fingers, Rose puts up her long hair. Her buoyant nature is keen and isolated as a flower in the bland half-darkened restaurant. There isn't a hint of deceit in her.

George. *(To Rose.)* Where have you been? You were supposed to be here an hour ago.

When Rose drops a hair clamp, Pat rushes forward to pick it up for her. Lilly moves forward to greet Rose. George slides the gun under a script.)

Rose. Hello.

Lilly *(sing-songy...hugging her.)* Good to see you.

Pat. Welcome to our ball, Cinderella.

Rose. Sorry about being late.

George. *(looks at his phone)* You didn't use my Uber account. How did you get here?

Rose. She drove me.

George. Aunt Amy?

Rose. Yes. *(unzips her gymbag)*

George. She's out there?

Rose. She'll wait in the car. It's ok.

George. Why doesn't she just go home? I'll give you a ride back.

Rose. She doesn't like being alone in the house. (*Rose sits and takes a pair of comfortable shoes from her gym bag*). I think there's a problem with the plumbing in the house.

George. Yeah...Lilly gave me a head's up. More house problems. Why doesn't she just come in?

Rose. (*sitting and looking up and putting on soft shoes*) She's all right. **She's knitting** under the light. You know, George...I do hear bubbling sounds coming from the bathtub...I looked...dirty water...stinky stuff.

George. I know what she's doing...she's making us ask her to come in...to feel sorry for her.

Rose. Just let her sit out there. But she is upset you won't talk to her.

Pat. (*reaching out toward Rose with a "camera frame shot" gesture with his hands. To Rose.*) "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"

(*Rose smiles up at Pat*)

George. (*ignoring Pat*) Oh, she's got you lobbying me now. Doesn't like being alone in the house...shit. Let her be lonely alone.

Rose. Geez, George...

George. All I know is...Mom would never have let her in the house in her right mind. We had a three-bedroom house to ourselves...we all could have moved in.

Pat. A commune of artists! I'd only take the smallest bedroom.

Rose. It's a big house. I'm ok with her in it.

George. What I shoulda...

Lilly. How many times you gonna repeat this thing about your aunt? We get it...you don't like her there.

Rose. It's what Mom wanted...her there. (*jumps to her feet and to limbers up*) Ok, I'm ready. (*Pat pulls out a single rose from his backpack and presents it to Rose.*) What's this? Pat...

Pat. Pulled it from my landlady's garden. It was going to waste, parched in the sun...so... (*Pat bows formally and theatrically to her*)

Rose. How sweet! Thank you. Let me get it some water to put it in. Oh... got your text about the Botticelli exhibition...thanks...we should go.

(Rose hurries toward the kitchen. But George stops her)

George. Where ya goin'?

Rose pulls back and places the rose on a table.

Rose. *(under her breath, to Pat.)* Sorry.

(Lilly has been noticing Pat's affectionate actions toward Rose and her sweet reaction. But George hasn't been paying attention...he's preoccupied and has been scrutinizing the script.)

George. Ok. We're gonna do the merry-go-round scene. Rose, do you have your dance music for the last scene?

Rose. Here. *(Rose takes hold up her iPhone...to Lilly)* You got bluetooth for your speaker? *(Lilly nods)* Great. I's all cued up. I just tap the arrow.

(Rose taps Pat's shoulder pleased with his romantic gesture as he gets back to his original scene position.)

George. All right... Rose, Pat...over here...*(George returns to the front of the restaurant where he had set up chairs to act as a merry-go-round.)* Ok...Alice...Tory will help you on to a merry-go-round horse. Oh, Rose...remember we go to the Merry-Go-Round in Griffith Park on Tuesday at dawn. Ok...*(guides Rose to a spot)*

Rose. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Aunt Amy wants to know if you can change that rehearsal to another day...not a school day.

George. *(backs-up and sighs, holding back his impatience)* Rose, I can't. I can only get Tuesday morning. I'm paying the guy 300 bucks to open at 5AM.

Rose. I know, George...

George. I'll get you to school on time. I promise. Tell her that.

Rose. I'm sorry. I'm just passing you a message. Can you change it?

George. Rose, you're 18 now. Quit being afraid of her.

Rose. I'm not afraid, George. I just want to get along. And you should feel sorry for her a little bit. Her husband ran off...just like our father did.

(George sits back and slouches on a chair.)

Pat. We can work this out, George. Maybe do it at the merry-go-round late in the afternoon...you know when it's closing.

George. *(up again)* The lighting...it's dawn. At dusk, the fucking sun's behind the hill. *(slams down the script)* All right...I'll go out and talk to her. *(moves toward the door)*. She always gets her way.

Rose. Don't lose **your** temper, George. She's a good person.

(George Exits. Pat moves off from the set of chairs and swings his cane like a baseball bat.)

Pat. Oh boy...the actor's complaint...like being in the army...hurry up and wait.

(No one talks. Rose begins stretching like a experienced dancer. Pat is obviously enamored with Rose...trying hard not to appear so... tries looking-on casually...without seeming to leer at her. Lilly notices him watching Rose...grins, shakes her head to herself and moves to exit toward the back.)

Rose. Poor George, he's so frustrated by everything...our aunt in the house...Mom not making him...uh... exe...uh...exe...the main person on the will.

Lilly. When George returns, tell him I'm in the back, resting on the couch in the girl's bathroom. *(Lilly exits)*

Rose. *(re: Lilly)* I hope she's not mad at me. I know she wanted to play my role. I told George I didn't want to do it if it meant making her unhappy. But she came to me and said she'd quit if I didn't play the role.

Pat. A stalwart gal...for sure...a good actress. But you're a true ingenue.

Rose. *(moves to the table where the rose was left. She takes up the rose and sniffs it.)* What do you think about George's little movie?

Pat. I like it. I like revenge stories. I like dream stories. I like you in it. You'll bring an aura and fantasy to the role.

Rose. *(stretches muscles)* You know, I wanted to tell you...I enjoyed your texts. The poetry you sent me. How did you get so good with words? I've never thought about poetry before.

Pat. It's ea