

FUCHOU WITH BOURBON**A Play****By****Chris Collins.****LIGHTS UP**

(A cell phone rings in the back. Lara appears. She is Chinese/Caucasian, disheveled, holding a cell phone to her ear.)

Lara. No, no one's here. They all left.

(Lara taps her cell phone off and opens the front door. Rose enters with manic energy kicking off her shoes. Lara backs up slightly as though intimidated by her sister's force. Rose goes to the window to look out. Turns to Lara.)

Rose. I saw him with...uh...what's her name?

Lara. So, you're here to make trouble? After one year...just storm in and...

Rose. Was that her?

Lara. Yeah, that's her.

Rose. Where they going?

Lara. Dad's bar.

Rose. *(looks back out the window)* I noticed the vines are growing on the house. Mom knew what that meant...bankruptcy. She knew enough to cut them down. He's paid for that feng shui blunder. Girlfriend. Girl's the operative word. Trollope. *(turns away from the window)* I can't believe Dad took up with her...she's lewd. Did she move in?

Lara. Yes. And her name's May.

Rose. May. Looks like February to me in a Russian winter. Only a year since Mom's gone...and I see her calligraphies are down from the wall. Where'd you guys hide them?

Lara. Dad's having them re-framed.

Rose. How convenient. It had to come off the wall just in time...now May doesn't have to be reminded of Mom.

Lara. What are you talking about? Look around. The place is full is chocking with Mom's stuff. She surrounded Dad with her old world. Look where we she made him live. Who isn't Chinese here within 5 square miles? A hive of Mandarins.

Rose. Yes, like us. Don't be so bitter. Half, anyway, the good half. (*touches the wall where it once hung*) It's empty here. (*suddenly, out of her abstraction, talking rapidly*) He's still handsome. He could have at least shackled up with someone attractive and Chinese. Guess he's had it with Chinese women, huh? He's no Sinophile anymore? She's probably thinks she's pretty smart, a shiny trophy siren...luring him with guile. (*comes to Lara and rubs her face.*) You're skin is so pure.

Lara. (*breaking away*) You are nasty. But, no matter what you say, she's good for him. She calms him down.

Rose. (*moves restlessly around*) Calms him down...what's he, a Santa Anita racehorse? He's scared...that's what it is. He's paying for what he did. She can't help him. Don't you see, Mom is haunting him...whispering to him that he has to face what he's done?

Lara. You sound sick. I just want a normal life. I'm tired of being assaulted of your neurotic calls and texts and Dad's...anxiety. He was always so calm as a sheriff. I still see him in his uniform coming home, sitting near your violin smiling, wishing he could play, but proud you did.

Rose. Don't romanticize it. He was just tuckered out from working at the jail, boozing, and womanizing. (*pause*) But, you know, you're right. It's not healthy thinking and talking about it all the time. Even Conner refuses to listen to me anymore, says we need to be happy to be married. And that's why I'm here...to hash it out.

Lara. Dad has a girlfriend...so what? He's lonely and she pays attention to him. She's good at listening. Mom wasn't. She stopped listening...only wanted to listen in Chinese.

Rose. You don't understand. She had to go back to her Chinese roots. The dancing, the calligraphy, the artistic discussions. He tried to drive the spirit out of Mom.

Lara. Oh, that again!

Rose. And he buys that cheap bar? Who the hell does something like that? Mom knew what would happen: the whores, the drinking, the Mays of this world.

Lara. (*furious*) If you say anything more, I swear I'm not talking to you again. You understand!? Do you understand!?

Rose. (*Lara's fury startles her. She takes Lara's hand and sits with her on the couch.*) Okay, okay. I'm sorry. But, there's more going on than you know. Mom's still here.

Lara. What are you talking about? There you go, scaring me...Mom used to do that. She was always hearing things. Some ghost was always at the window or moaning in the hallway at night. Told me my room was haunted, switching the direction of my bed. She had Dad with his gun at night searching for nothing. Leave Dad alone. Mom's dead.

Rose. You say “dead” so easily. Doesn’t it hurt slamming out that word like a hammer on a nail?

Lara. There’s nothing wrong with that word.

Rose. It’s a harsh and hard. *(pause)* Look, I’m not out to destroy him. The opposite...I want to resolve this with him.

Lara. “Him”, “him”...he’s our dad.

Rose. What?

Lara. Well, say it...”Dad”, not “him”! He’s not a “him”!

Rose. Okay... “Dad”. *(Pause. Sits her down and combs her hair soothingly with her finger)* Jesus, you’re such a snarling and protective cub. I can’t even talk to you about this. *(pause)* Did I tell you? I was accepted into law school.

Lara. *(The hair massage calms her.)* Law school? Where!

Rose. USC.

Lara. That’s wonderful...Rose the lawyer! You’ll be a good lawyer. You’re stubborn and avenging.

Rose. But, I’m not sure I want to go.

Lara. Why not?

Rose. I’m not sure. I feel tied down by academics.

Lara. If your marriage is the reason, don’t get married.

Rose. *(turns and faces Lara then rubs Lara’s cheek)* Well, looky here, if it ain’t the militant feminist. But, I can just imagine you in love...you’d get all decked out in ceremonial colors like an emperor’s concubine.

Lara. How do you know I’m not in love? You’re never around. And when we do talk you never want to listen to anything...except about Dad...what’s he doing...how he’s failing. Isn’t your conscience ever bothered by trying to make Dad miserable? *(sniffs the air)* You’ve been drinking.

Rose. *(moves away)* I’m sorry for not paying attention to you. I’m scared for you. You’re still under his propaganda.

Lara. There's no propaganda, Rose. We're all just living here. *(sniffs again)* Are you're drinking in the daytime now?

Rose You don't have the history I've had. When Dad was younger, he humiliated Mom with his drinking. You didn't know Mom when she was nimble and healthy. Did you know Mom was a great dancer in Shanghai?

Lara. Don't play up her art as an excuse...like she was in the Peking Opera or something. She was married with obligations she threw out when things got tough.

Rose. I hope you know he met that woman while Mom was in her hospital bed.

Lara. Rose, I've known all that for a long time. What am I supposed to do...run away? You're strong. You're beautiful. You think you can afford to make Dad an enemy. You were Dad's favorite. If I acted like you, he'd toss me out and not think about it. *(Pause)* God, you're in love. You're getting married. How can you be so angry?

Rose. I'm sticking up for Mom, don't you see that? I'm her voice. I'm sticking up for truth.

(Lara gets up from the couch, exasperated.)

Lara. Mom died. There's no voice. That's truth.

Rose. She could've been lived longer. All he had to do was control himself or at least to hide his pig lust while she was sick.

Lara. I'm not going listen to your paranoid crap about Dad. Mom got sick. Everybody dies.

Rose. Dad bought that bar and when she asked him not to. She knew...

Lara. I know...it's a den of thieves and a harem of those white slave women.

Rose. Yes. That's right. And Mom asked him not to. *(drinks from a half-pint bottle)*

Lara. My God, looks who's calling the kettle black. You're drunk right now and you worry about a Dad's drinking.

Rose. Must be Irish in me. That's fate. But a bar...that's something different. He chose that. It's a brothel in legal disguise and Mom knew it.

Lara. Oh, God. You're a wonderful evangelist. Oh, the moral outrage. Is that what you got from Dad sending to St. Anne's school. You should be on TV with your own religious network. You can live with hypocrisy. You'll be a good lawyer.

Rose. Don't you see, Dad is walking around with a noose around his neck? And he's brought a stranger in the house. If he had met her after Mom died, I would have been happy for him...even if she is a nymphomaniac.

Lara. I'm not listening. Where's Conner? Did he come with you?

Rose. No. I drove alone.

Lara. I decided...when you get married, I'm not coming to the wedding unless you invite Dad.

Rose. Well, that's why I'm here...to work it all out. Jesus, that woman is in Mom's bed! Did she take the Chinese stuff out of the bedroom and replace with May's stuff...Renoir prints, Pottery Barn lamps, and pink slutty sheets. Don't you hear things in the bedroom? Oh, I couldn't listen to that.

Lara. I asked her to stay.

Rose. You what!?

Lara. I asked her to stay. She's in love with him and I knew she could help.

Rose. You shouldn't have done that.

Lara. It's not...

Rose. That was a mistake. You don't have a right.

Lara. (*breaking down*) Don't yell at me! I don't want to hear it!

Rose. (*sympathetic*) All right.

Lara. You don't know what it's like. Dad was acting weird. I can't control him. I hear him weeping. Dad, weeping?! Why? I don't know. He's better when she's here. But he's still...on a trip-wire. You're no good. You aren't around anymore.

Rose. This is something between Dad and me. You don't understand.

Lara. (*gets up*) Growing up we never bothered about money...did we? I mean, we never wanted much. We didn't need it. Dad was a sheriff. Mom cooked Dan Dan Mein, *jiǎozi*, and *sticky rice*. We had enough. Now, the whole house is exhausted. There's no smell of cooking. Everybody's tired from thinking about not having money and never talking about it

Rose. Mom's not here, that's why.

Lara. I bet May is giving him money.

Rose. Why do you say that?

Lara. Because that's what I would do if I loved someone. When he's not around, I can tell he's still in her heart. I don't think you can be happy unless you love like that. She loves him more than Mom did.

Rose. You're a hard-boiled girl.

Lara. I want what's best for Dad. Mom was no angel...could be a real Chinese princess. Always trying to get me to be "prettier". It took her an hour to get me pretty enough to go out, just to the bakery...she was a stage mother to me...but you...oh...

Rose. She could be brutally honest.

Lara. For you, the graceful one, it was just honest. For me, it was brutal. And how do you know she was so honest. Maybe she had affairs, maybe she didn't. But nobody can mop up the mess she made.

Rose. What do you mean?

Lara. I mean, later on Mom was always trying to be clever and sarcastic. Dad started to get on her nerves. Especially he left the sheriff's department. I could see it. Dad felt helpless...always walking on eggshells that he might say something stupid. She started bringing her artist friends around. They only talked Chinese with Dad around.

Rose. Speaking English made her tired when she was sick. He could have tried speaking Chinese.

Lara. Bullshit... you know Americans don't speak Chinese and never will. Mom got cynical and bohemian. She made him feel...dumb.

Rose. He got fired the County Sheriff. He didn't leave....and then bought a bar.

Lara. He shouldn't have been fired. He was attacked by that inmate. The bar...? He made an investment, that's all.

Rose. Ha...Investment in the drunk and harlot business.

Lara. You know Mom just married him to get into the country. You know that. She never loved him.

Rose. You're wrong. You never saw it...you were too young. But, sometimes, they couldn't keep their hands off each other. I remember during one Mooncake Festival, he came up behind her and fed her a morsel of mooncake and kissed her (*she touches Lara on the nape of the neck*) right there. (*pause*) And when she needed him most, he scrounges this other woman.

Lara. Dad was lonely. Loneliness weakens you. We need love.

Rose. Oh, Lara, don't you see, you and I need to get along because we're going to need each other. A huge wave hit this house. We can't ignore the debris floating around.

Lara. Oh, I hate you when you talk like this. The ocean's roaring, the sun is falling in on us...Oh it's the end of the world! You need a doctor.

Rose. What do doctors know about souls? They've cat-scanned my head and heart and it's all impulses. Only a God is wise enough to have pity on us and give us...inner calm. (*Lara stares at Rose with disbelief. Rose laughs*). Okay, maybe I get a little nuts.

Lara. You're from the moon. No, maybe I was the one dropped in from outer space. You and Mom were pretty. She could never understand me. I'm the odd one. I'm the ugly one.

Rose. Nonsense. Oh, I'm being selfish as usual...the vain older sister. (*hugs Lara*) I guess I've always been that way. Lara, we need to confide in each other. Now, what about you? Have you met anybody since we talked last?

Lara. Maybe I did. Maybe I met someone I like.

Rose. Well...

(*Lara shows her cell phone*)

Rose. Look at the hair coming out of that cap! Handsome. Is he Chinese? What's his name?

Lara. His name's Tim. He's Korean.

Rose. Korean? Mom would have hated that. Now, Japanese, that would have been different. She loved anything Japanese...all that bathing and cleaning toilets pleased her fastidious nature.

Lara. But, he never called. So, I figure it's because, well, look at my face, it's not pleasant...and my butt...You got Mom's pretty looks.

Rose. Your face is not unpleasant. You're sweet and pretty.

Lara. I think I gained 10 pounds just here in the last year. (*points to her butt*) It's like a big basket of food. I know Chinese girls aren't supposed to get fat...so I guess that's the Irish in me. The thing is, I still can't believe Tim doesn't love me. The longer it went and he didn't call, the lonelier I got and the more I dreamed of him But, it never happened... so, I asked him out.

Rose. (*delighted*) You asked him!?

Lara. Was that a mistake? I thought I was going to die when I asked?

Rose. No, no. That's okay. Well, what did he say?

Lara. He's meeting me at the teen center dance tonight.

Rose. (*embraces her*) Tonight! I love you for this!

Lara. He's handsome. He's had girls before.

Rose. What do you want...a dolt, a loser. Listen, you and I are going to start working out together. We'll both get into the shapes of our lives. We'll run...at the, no...yes, we'll run around the Rose Bowl in the evening and Saturday mornings.

Lara. How can you run with me? You live far away.

Rose. Once I deal with Dad, that all may change. And if I go to USC....I'll be close. Oh, I'm so happy for you. (*a half-pint of booze falls from Rose's pocket. Rose snatches it up while Lara looks in surprise. She falls back on the couch.*) God, I'm tired.

Lara. Don't drink in the daytime and you wouldn't get tired. You've turned into a lush.

Rose. I'm going to nap on your bed.

Lara. You can't. What if they come home? You can't meet Dad, drunk. No way.

Rose. Don't worry about it. I'll be gone by then. I just wanted to see my sister. But, I have to get some sleep.

Lara. You're car.

Rose. I parked around the corner. God, I can hardly stand up. Do you know how long it's been since I've slept at home? Come on, lie down with me. Remember you used to sleep with me when you had nightmares.

Lara. I'm not tired.

Rose. Just for a few minutes and you can talk to me about Tim, the football player.

Lara. Baseball, not football. You're not gonna laugh at me, are you? I can't stand anyone laughing at me.

Rose. Trust me. I've been in love. Only the cruelest person would laugh at loneliness. Come on...come on... please.

(*They Exit.*)

LIGHTS OUT

(Male inebriated laughter from outside the door. The front door opens. Paul and May enter. Paul is drunk and almost backs up into a Chinese vase on the floor.)

Paul. Whoa, whoa. Oh, man, that was close. *(Places the vase out of harm's way.)* Judy got this from Shanghai. Wanted to start a collection...Sorry, does it bother you I'm still bringing her up?

May. No, Paul. You always ask me that when you drink. It's okay. 24 years...a long time. It's hard not to knock over a memory around here.

Paul. I'm a maudlin drunk...What can I say? But, I'm glad you showed up here. I wouldn't blame you if you if you bailed on me.

May. Stop that talk...That is maudlin. And why should I take off? We've no secrets do we? *(Paul goes for a drink.)* Don't you think we should eat something?

Paul. Sure. Did you notice that the bar was kinda empty tonight?

May. I guess.

Paul. When I met you there a year ago it was always more crowded. Paying that bartender for nothing now.

May. You were sitting by the fireplace all handsome and forlorn. I think you still had lather on your chin from a quick restroom shave.

Paul. The place was full of sheriffs and cops...then. It's interesting how they peeled off after the firing...not immediately, but like they worked on it so I wouldn't notice right away.

May. It's still early Saturday night.

Paul. That's true. The football season's over. Maybe that has something to do with it...and the Lakers are shit these days.

May. Sure.

Paul. You want a drink?

May. No.

Paul. I've decided I'm gonna move some of those Chinese things out of the bedroom. They clutter.

May. You do that and I will leave.

Paul Look, you don't have be a trooper just cause...well...

May. I'm not being a trooper. I don't need consolation. I like the stuff there. It's pretty and it's part of your daughters' legacies.

Paul. You're a good woman.

May. I don't know about that...a fool sometimes.

Paul. *(hugging her)* I do. You're here and I hope for a long time.

May. Still have a lot back at my place. *(Paul goes back to table of booze and lifts up bottle of red)* Ok, I'll have a glass. Left my dog at mom's. I can see my mom's less lonely with her there. But, I miss walking Biscuit under the trees at night after work. Miss her sliding over the end of my bed. I like the weight on my feet. But, I think she likes Mom more than me. Mom leaks kindness and sadness that dogs lap up.

Paul. *(handing her the wine)* Bring the mutt over, for Christ's sake.

May. Have to take my mom with it. *(Paul snickers)* That's not a hint...ok?

(May takes a seat next...Paul joins her.)

May. She texted me this photo of herself with Biscuit in Griffith Park...near the merry-go-round. I never took her there. Never thought about walking my dog in the park. How stupid. Noticed how much mom looks like me now...with her prominent brow and squinting eyes.

Paul. Such beautiful eyes. Your mom's pretty...good genes. You're gorgeous. So young. Only a little older than my Rose.

May. *(gets up)* Don't think I haven't thought about that. It makes me nervous. She scares me when I talk to Lara about her.

Paul. What the hell did you see in me?

May. I told you many times. You need reinforcement? You're handsome, strong and a little frightened...boyish in that way. I know how we met was wrong, when your wife was still here. I still smell her perfume on the surface of the blankets and in the bathroom. But, you were so wonderfully sad...like me. *(returns to kisses him and moves off again)* Look, let me wrangle up some food. Lara must be hungry.

Paul. No, no, we're going out.

May. I'll fix us all something.

