

DESMOND SIM

SIX PLAYS

AUTUMN TOMYAM • ELIZABETH BY NIGHT
FAIRY GODFATHER • POSTCARDS FROM ROSA • WIFE #11
THE SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR



FOREWORD BY EKACHAI UEKRONGTHAM

DESMOND SIM is an award-winning playwright, poet and writer. Almost all of his 30 plays to date have been performed in professional theatres in Singapore, Malaysia and the United States. He was TheatreWorks' first playwright-in-residence and has been the associate artistic director of ACTION Theatre since April 2004, running Singapore Theatre Oasis, an incubator programme for new and existing Singaporean playwrights. He has participated in the Shanghai Literary Festival and was awarded a Fulbright fellowship. Desmond has also co-written two movies: *Beautiful Boxer* and *The Wedding Game*. He is an acknowledged Peranakan painter who has held more than a dozen exhibitions on Peranakan figurative themes. Desmond also teaches playwriting, branding, marketing and communications at Temasek Polytechnic School of Design and Lasalle College of the Arts.

EKACHAI UEKRONGTHAM is a Thai-born, award-winning theatre and film director who also founded ACTION Theatre, a professional theatre company in Singapore. He has produced and directed many premiere productions of Desmond Sim's plays, including *Autumn Tomyam*, *The Swimming Instructor* and *Drunken Prawns*. Joint screenwriting credits with Desmond Sim include the Mandarin box office hit *The Wedding Game* and *Beautiful Boxer*, which has won 15 international awards around the world. His other film directing and screenwriting credits include *Pleasure Factory*, an official selection at the Cannes International Film Festival, and *The Coffin*, a co-production between Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong which was officially selected for the Rotterdam International Film Festival. Other theatre directing credits include *Chang & Eng—The Musical*, *Boxing Boys* and the Asian premiere productions of *Wit* and *Prelude to a Kiss*.

DESMOND SIM

SIX PLAYS

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To my late father Francis Sim Hak Chuan,
the original storyteller, who sat my siblings and I down on straw mats
on family evenings and taught me how to tell a good tale.

Also to the most supportive influence in my life, Tee Boon Peng,
for always pushing me to do something significant with all my zany ideas,
and for unreservedly supporting me through every imaginable journey.

Plus a special mention to Ekachai Uekrongtham,
for believing in me to the extent of directing and producing
so many of my works. Kob khun mak mak krub!

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FOREWORD

by Ekachai Uekrongtham

For me, Desmond Sim's works are at once quintessentially Singaporean and universally relevant. He writes from the heart and gives his characters soul.

Autumn Tomyam started its life at the dramatised readings in the backyard of ACTION Theatre as part of the First 42 Theatre Festival. Amidst very hot and humid weather, audiences packed into a very small area and hung onto every word as actors read out scenes from the unfinished play on a tiny stage. They say you can feel it when audiences embrace a piece of work. I felt it then in the backyard and knew Desmond had written something very special.

After the festival, Desmond went straight back to the drawing board—adding, deleting, writing and rewriting non-stop. Throughout this painstaking process, he was always cordial, patient and very collaborative. Almost two years later, the play was given its premiere staging at the Drama Centre. It was a box office success, received unanimous accolades and eventually went on to win the DBS *Life!* Theatre award for Play of the Year.

Despite creating characters that audiences may not have much in common with, Desmond has been able to channel important issues about prejudice and unconditional love through them in a way that's deeply moving, giving the play a beautiful universal resonance.

Many of us have sneered at or passed judgement on people who are different from us or who hold different values. Through his emotionally layered characters and lovingly crafted play, Desmond reminds us about the value of tolerance and understanding.

In one of the key scenes in *Autumn Tomyam*, Tid, a young massage boy from Thailand, is confronted by Sang Minh, an illegal immigrant from Vietnam. In this scene, Desmond creates a face-off between the two characters, both of whom have experienced their fair share of prejudice

throughout their entire lives. Yet, one is now passing judgement on the other unfairly—treating him exactly the way she’s been treated by others. By the end of this short scene, Desmond has succeeded in making us think about all the unnecessary prejudice in this world, and how we can, in our own small ways, make a difference.

The central relationship between Marge, a prominent Singaporean social worker and Joe, her retired American diplomat ex-husband who has come out after 24 years of marriage, anchors the piece and gives the play its charm, weight and many heartbreaking moments. What really makes us love one another? What happens when the one you love has changed but you haven’t? What do you do when you can’t stop loving someone when you should and must?

Despite the somewhat spicy title, *Autumn Tomyam* is the most tender play I’ve ever had the privilege of directing.

The Swimming Instructor is another play of Desmond’s that has received numerous stagings both in Singapore and abroad. I think the play has been immensely popular not only because it affords audiences the opportunity to see actors performing live onstage in swimming costumes most of the time, since most of the scenes are set at a public pool. Beneath the flesh and fun lie complex characters on the brink, swirling in the undercurrents in hopes of finding love, friendship and acceptance.

Jan is a “diver”, a precocious young girl seeking quick fixes and cheap thrills. Dave is a “swimmer” obsessed with doing lap after lap. Guan, on the other hand, is a swimming instructor, a “floater” content with just being still and not moving. They are who they are because of the scars etched within them. In the play, Desmond has created a wondrous pool for their emotions to glide in, make splashes and find healing from one another.

As a Baba, a descendant of Peranakan Chinese himself, Desmond is steeped in knowledge of Peranakan culture. He’s one of the country’s most celebrated Peranakan painters, and he is certainly more than qualified to write about the life of a Peranakan grandmother. So it’s not surprising that his one-person play *Postcards from Rosa* is one of the most well-researched

and true-to-life Peranakan plays ever written. But I think the play is also so heartfelt and real because Desmond wrote it as a tribute to his loving grandmother. His Bibik Rosa feels whole, complete with flesh and blood, blazing soul and a vibrant spirit. She’s also a dream role for actresses who are up for tough challenges and who are out to find opportunities to give tour-de-force performances.

It is to Desmond’s credit that *Postcards from Rosa* is as culturally specific as it is universally resonant. His timeless story of a grandmother on a soulful journey to reunite with her grandson speaks volumes about what it is about family that we treasure so much, why we need our families and why our families need us. By the time the play ends, you can’t help but agree that “love is leycheh”. But that’s okay and that’s the charm of it all—whether you’re Peranakan or not.

Elizabeth by Night is a short piece addressing issues concerning people stricken with AIDS. The play reflects on how different people come to terms with the disease differently. AIDS is used as a catalyst to let us enter the inner realm of the human psyche—both its dark side and its bright one.

Elizabeth by Night is a short 10-minute piece packed with passion and raw emotions. It’s also Desmond’s most lyrical work in this anthology. With very sparse and at times poetic dialogue, Desmond is able to tell us about his characters, their past together and what has happened during their time apart.

The play is alluring because one can sense a certain danger permeating the chance encounter between Liz and Marcus, two long-lost lovers. The suspense is palpable. And when the play comes to an end, its impact is so startling that you can’t easily get it out of your mind. Why did Liz do what she did? Was what she did justified? Was Liz the victim, or was the victim Marcus? And that’s the hallmark of a great 10-minute play: When it ends onstage, the story continues in your head. It doesn’t let you go easily—just like your past loves and old flames.

In some ways, *Fairy Godfather* bears certain similarities to Desmond’s earlier work *Autumn Tomyam*. There may be traces of characters from

his earlier work in *Fairy Godfather* but this time, Desmond goes beyond the theme of prejudice and uses the play to deal sensitively with issues concerning bisexuality, mother-daughter relationships and death.

When a young girl returns home to attend her father's funeral, she meets an unexpected guest: the godfather she never knew she had, who also happens to be her dead father's ex-lover. And you can just imagine the drama that follows—with the girl's mother in the mix.

With its clever plot twists and turns, *Fairy Godfather* offers a thrilling emotional ride. It is also possibly the first and only Singaporean play with a bisexual character placed front and centre in the story. Desmond uses this character to make the love triangle even more complex and heighten the conflict to great effect. In the end, the play lets you understand more about bisexuality, but the stronger takeaway concerns co-existence and finding trust in love.

Wife #11 had its genesis in an old photograph from the National Museum of Singapore. It depicted a polygamous family in Singapore during the 1940s. Desmond and I were mesmerised by it. We wanted to create a play using history as our inspiration; however, we didn't want the play to be just about history per se, but about how people during a particular era felt.

Just a matter of days after visiting the museum, Desmond came back to me with a very intriguing synopsis for a play. Inspired by the very photograph we had seen and the history of Singapore during that period, he'd tell the story of Wife #10 and her polygamous husband entirely through letters they write to each other from 1946 till 1962, from before they meet till after he decides to marry Wife #11.

Solely through what they've said to each other via the written word, Desmond has created two of the most vivid characters ever seen on a Singaporean stage. Instead of flattening his writing with expositional techniques, Desmond has managed to make us see and hear beyond the written word, which makes *Wife #11* even more impressive as a piece of theatre writing. The unsaid speaks louder in the play. The unexpressed is what keeps us glued to the stage as the story unfolds.

Interspersed between dramatic events that happen to the two characters are true historical events that not only change the country they live in, but also their personal lives. Chief of all is the coming into effect of the Women's Charter in 1961, which makes monogamy for non-Muslim Singaporeans the legal norm and effectively gives married women the same rights as their husbands for the first time.

In *Wife #11*, Desmond has created two characters so compelling and fully fledged that you can't help but love them dearly and root for them from the beginning till the very end. Even the supporting characters, who never appear onstage but are mentioned in the letters, are all well-drawn and painstakingly crafted. Most importantly, his play has illuminated a part of Singaporean history—allowing us to understand the social, personal and political dimensions of a world of the past.

If there's a uniting force that's present in all of Desmond's plays, it's probably that crazy, simple and complicated little thing called love. It comes unexpectedly, gives us pain, brings us pleasure, rewards us, punishes us, makes us better people, brings out the worst in us, leaves us with nothing, gives us everything.

In Desmond's world, love is not always a positive force. It can destroy as much as it can nurture. But with his positive outlook on life, Desmond never fails to offer us hope through his works. Not everything is pretty in his sphere, but even when things get ugly, you can always find some beauty that uplifts your spirit.

Ekachai Uekrongtham, 2013

AUTUMN TOMYAM

AWARDS

Autumn Tomyam won Best Original Script at the 2002 DBS *Life!* Theatre Awards, and its first staging with ACTION Theatre also won Play of the Year.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Autumn Tomyam was first staged in Singapore by ACTION Theatre in August 2001. The production was directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham. The cast comprised Tan Kheng Hua, John O'May, Sandy Phillips, Annie Ferroa and Edwin Lai.

CHARACTERS

JOE LERNER	57 years old, American, ex-diplomat, handsome, educated and comfortably retired
MARGE LERNER	45 years old, Singaporean, social activist, smart and articulate modern woman
TID ANAPORN	19 years old, Thai, former massage boy and go-go dancer
ANNA LERNER	55 years old, American, retired teacher and globe-trotter
TRINH SANG MINH	30 years old, newly arrived female Vietnamese immigrant
IMMIGRATION OFFICER	30–40 years old, stern-looking and officious
WAITER	25 years old, wearing a waiter's uniform

ACT 1

SCENE 1 *On one side of the stage, Marge Chang is seated behind a desk full of files and notes, one flask and a glass of water. Marge is an impressive woman: well-dressed, articulate and brimming with life and humour. She is typing on a laptop, editing a speech and rehearsing at the same time. On the other side of the stage, Tid is on a massage table. He is wearing tight white shorts and an equally tight tank top. Joe lies on the table, face down, nude except for a towel over his essentials. Tid is sitting on the small of Joe's back. He is massaging Joe, who winces.*

MARGE Mr Senator, sir, my committee thanks you for the opportunity to present to you the findings we have arrived at from our six months of research and interviews. I hope that at the end of this session, your council will get a clearer and fuller picture of the level of exploitation, violence and crime that the children of the Asian immigrant community are exposed to each day.

TID Is it pain, sir? I press too hard? Okay, I press not too hard. I am good massage boy. I make you feel good all over. This is your first time to Bangkok, sir?

MARGE It is not a pretty picture, sir. And it should not happen. Not here in America.

Joe's head pops up. Tid continues massaging.

JOE When I first met Tid, it was in a dimly lit room. The light was low and the room was scented with jasmine. Like all the farang¹ men who go to this establishment, I asked for a "special". That basically means getting jerked off. He's a sweet kid. He tries so hard to please. I can't believe he is studying in a Thai university. That's the third massage boy

I know who's an undergrad.

Joe's head pops down.

TID I think farang man like me. I think he will come tomorrow again. I tell him I university. Older massage boy tell me if you tell them you university, they give you more tip. They think they help you study, give more money.

Lights fade to black.

1 [Thai] Foreign white visitors

SCENE 2 *Marge's office, late at night. Marge is on the phone with her mother.*

MARGE Hello? Oh, hi Ma. I am fine...fine. How are things in Singapore? How are you...and Pa? Is he taking his medication?

Beat.

Good. Listen, I've been wanting to tell you something for the past few months...but it was never the right time, with Pa falling ill and all...Ma, Joe and I have split up. The divorce proceedings are on the way and—

Beat.

No, you don't have to fly out here tomorrow—

Beat.

Well...the marriage was just not working...no, Joe doesn't have a mistress. It's not about that. No...no secret second family...not like Uncle Boon...this is California, Ma. People don't keep secret families, they get divorced.

Beat.

It's a long story. I'll tell you about it sometime. I just wanted you to know that I am okay. You understand that? No, I am not hiding things...and I am not pretending to be brave. What do you mean I always pretend to be brave? I'm not going to sue him for half the property. Joe is giving me half of it without a fight. I have more than enough for myself...it's amicable. More than amicable.

Beat.

Of course I'm sure! Yes, we were happy. I mean, we still are—as friends.

Beat.

I don't want to go home. I have tons of things to do here in Orange County. Anyway, I've been away for so long and I'm

doing very well in my job. There's no reason to—
Long pause with interjection.

Yes, they pay me a salary to resettle Asian immigrants, to look after their needs and interests.

Beat.

They are not all “gang members, bar girls and dirty unwashed children”. What kind of movies do you watch, Ma? These people are like you and me, only they didn't have the education and the chances in life. Yes, yes...I am fine. I don't need anything. And if I do, Joe is always around...I told you, we are still the best of friends. There is somebody at the door. I've got to go. I promise I'll call again...

Beat.

Ma, don't worry, okay? I've got everything under control. Bye. *Marge puts down the phone. She massages her temples. She has a headache, but she allows herself only a brief moment. She shakes the troubling thoughts out of her head. She goes back to her work, and is swallowed up by it again.*

SCENE 3 *The stage is empty except for a park bench. Marge enters with a picnic basket and a big and colourfully wrapped box with an oversize bow. With almost perfect timing, Joe enters from the other side of the stage, with nothing but a straw mat and a small, exquisitely wrapped box in his hands. They meet in the middle.*

JOE Happy un-anniversary, sweetie...

MARGE This is crazy, Joe...

JOE Just play along...it will be fine...

MARGE *(reluctantly)* Well...happy un-anniversary then...

JOE I've seen happier faces on death row...
Marge gives a strained grin. They give each other a warm hug and a light peck on the lips.

MARGE Did you remember to bring the—

JOE Oh shit, the wine! I totally—

MARGE I knew you would. Aren't you lucky I brought some?
Disposable wine glasses even...

JOE What would I do without you, Marge...

MARGE You'd be doing men, that's what...

JOE *(mock laughter)* Ha ha. Ooh...you baked a carrot cake!

MARGE *(secretly pleased)* Don't pretend to be surprised. You know I know how to make you happy...

JOE Of course you do. And now it's my turn. Here!
He hands her the small box. She unwraps and opens it.

MARGE Joe...

JOE Like it?

MARGE Gee...*(holds up a macadamia nut)* it's a macadamia nut.
Joe grins.

JOE It's your favourite nut—coffee-flavoured, from Hawaii...
He brings out a can of coffee-flavoured macadamia nuts.

MARGE *(trying to sound touched)* Well...that's sweet, but you're already my favourite nut.

Marge pops the nut into her mouth, not looking too happy. Joe opens the can and pretends to take out another nut.

JOE *(replying to her last quip)* Ha ha. Open your hand...

MARGE *(obeying but curious)* Why?

JOE Close your eyes...

MARGE Joe...
Marge obeys and Joe puts something into her hand. She almost pops it into her mouth.

JOE Don't eat it!
Marge opens her eyes to have a look at what's in her hand. It's a large black pearl pendant. She holds it up, totally delighted.

MARGE Oh, Joe! A South Sea island black...it's beautiful...
Joe nods.

JOE Just shut up and say thank you...
Marge gives Joe a big hug. Joe helps her to put on the chain while she caresses the pearl. They pass the macadamia nut tin back and forth, munching while they talk.

I was just passing by this jewellery shop, you know, and there it was, sitting there. I just had to buy it. It was so...you!

MARGE Me? A pearl? Oh, I get it...I'm that bit of dirt that gets stuck in the soft vulnerable part of the oyster and irritates the hell out of it. Well, thank you very...

JOE Yes, there's that...

MARGE Idiot!

JOE But it's also...all the years have given you this lustre...and you came out more beautiful than ever, sweetheart...

MARGE *(obviously pleased)* Flatterer...

JOE *(looking at Marge appreciatively)* You like it...I'm so glad...
Marge is suddenly downcast.

MARGE Oh no.

JOE What?

MARGE I got you such a boring un-anniversary present. I thought

I'd be practical for a change...here.

She pushes her gift over to Joe, who starts unwrapping it. He tries to be enthusiastic.

I mean, I wasn't crazy about the whole un-anniversary idea in the first place.

JOE We LOVE our anniversaries, Marge. Why let some silly little divorce proceedings get in the way?

MARGE Madman. Only you would think of celebrating your anniversary while going through a divorce!

JOE (*referring to the gift*) What is it?

MARGE It's a magazine storage rack.

JOE (*trying to work up enthusiasm*) Gee...it's really...practical. It'll come in real handy...

MARGE It's by an Italian designer...

JOE Hmm...expensive.

MARGE You hate it. I should have gotten something romantic... meaningful...

JOE No, no...practical's good...I need practical in my life right now...

MARGE Will you stop being the diplomat? You've retired...

JOE But I DO like the rack, Marge. Now I have somewhere to put all my musclemen magazines.

MARGE Ha ha. You should go out and meet people instead of staying home and fiddling with your...muscle magazines.
She grins.

JOE Speaking of meeting people...I've met someone, Marge.

MARGE (*laughingly*) Really...

JOE Seriously...

MARGE See, this is SO unfair! With the remaining 95 per cent of the population straight, why do YOU get to meet someone else first?

JOE I'm prettier...

MARGE Ha ha. More desperate is more like it. (*animatedly, almost*

desperately) So tell me...quick! Quick! Who is he? What's he like? When do I get to meet him?

JOE (*laughing*) Which question do you want me to answer first?

MARGE (*mixed emotions*) I'm sorry, I'm just...happy for you.

JOE I didn't think you'd take it so well...I mean, this is sensitive territory, isn't it?

MARGE When we first split up, Joe, I was fretting about what people might think...oh God, how would I react when I met you with your new partner...all that baggage...

JOE And what changed?

MARGE I don't know. I guess, without you, I just simply got more organised. More independent. You know...got my life in order, got a career I could dive right into. I like where I am, Joe. So I am not in the least worried now about you dating and what you do with your life. I've basically freed myself of your concerns...

JOE (*sounding disappointed*) Oh. I see.

MARGE What's the matter?

JOE No, nothing.

MARGE Don't give me the "No, nothing" treatment. What's the matter?

JOE I just thought you'd miss me a little.

Beat.

I know I do...miss you, I mean.

Pause.

MARGE (*slightly vulnerable*) What do you think?

Pause.

JOE You're not dating anyone?

MARGE Who has the time? Anyway I want to hear about your guy...

JOE Well, he's lively...caring...has a sense of humour...oh, I don't know. He just makes me feel...so alive when I am around him!

MARGE (*quietly*) I am happy for you, Joe. Do I get to meet him?

JOE Well, not yet for now...but soon.

MARGE Promise?

JOE I promise.

MARGE So what does he do? Doctor? Lawyer? Architect? I'll bet he's an architect. They like all the arty-farty things you like...

JOE I'll leave all descriptions till when you meet him. I am just a little worried, you know...

MARGE What? Ex-wife meets new boyfriend...It's the new millennium. Grow up, Joe. I'm fine with it...I mean, you are happy and you are in love with him, right?

JOE I think so...yes, I am.
He smiles.

MARGE That's all that matters to me. Oops. That's the last macadamia. Here...for you.

JOE You are always giving me the last one. Why don't you eat it?

MARGE Because the other nuts before the last one, they are all common. But giving away the last one...that's got to be love. Say ahh...
Marge rolls the macadamia nut out of the tin and pops it into Joe's mouth. Joe smiles gratefully. She smiles a brilliant smile. Joe smiles back. Marge tries to close the macadamia nut tin. It slips. She gets agitated. The more she tries, the more it slips. Finally she tosses it aside, as if it doesn't matter at all. Joe is concerned as he watches her.

JOE Marge...

MARGE *(covering and holding her pearl pendant tightly as if it were her life)* When you tell him about me, make sure you tell him only the good things, okay?

JOE I couldn't find bad things even if I wanted to, darling.
Marge is reassured. They smile, look into each other's eyes and lean their foreheads against each other—the perfect image of ex-spouses.

SCENE 4 *Some candles are lit in the dark. A CD system is switched on and romantic Thai music wafts in. The lights come on softly, romantically. Joe is putting the final touches to a table setting for two. The setting is elegant—wine, candles, flowers on the table. The doorbell rings. Joe looks surprised. He opens the door. Marge comes in. She is familiar with the house.*

JOE Hi dear...I wasn't expecting...

MARGE Sorry to barge in, Joe. I came for the speech. Have you printed it out? Goodness, I'm so incredibly late...

JOE Oh okay. It's in my system. It'll only take a minute. Your printer's still being repaired, huh...

MARGE Back next week.
Beat.
(then noticing the table) Hey, hot date huh...oh my God...it's...it's your mystery man!

JOE Don't touch anything on that table, Marge.

MARGE Oh really now...would I?

JOE You managed my past diplomatic receptions perfectly, dear, but this little dinner, I'm doing myself.

MARGE Your napkins don't go with the candles. Use your floral ones.

JOE I'll do very well on my own, thank you.
He changes the napkins anyway.

MARGE Oooh...I'd give anything to be able to hang around and... I'll bet he's that handsome interior designer who's just moved in down the street. Interior designers are almost architects—and they like ethnic too! *(referring to the music)*

JOE Marge dearest...if I need a social secretary, I'll advertise.

MARGE Ohhh gee...I've really got to go...my speech?

JOE Um, I've got something to tell you, Marge...it's about my date...

MARGE Oh wait! I've got to tell you something that is more

sensational than your date!

JOE I doubt it, but try anyway...

MARGE I'm meeting the governor, and he's told me that he'll help us fund the migrant support programme. And they've nominated me for a public service medal!

JOE A medal? That's great, Marge! We should just open the wine now and celebrate!

Joe gives Marge a big bear hug.

MARGE I really don't have time. I have to run...

Joe is about to uncork the bottle.

No...no wine, you cheapskate. Champagne next time I'm here.

JOE (*mock hurt*) This wine is not...cheap. Insult me again and I'll burn the winter coats you've got stored in my closets. Speaking of which, how are the renovations coming along? You finished with your walk-in wardrobes?

MARGE Just two more weeks of your closet space, darling. Since you've come out, I'm sure there's loads of space in there now.

JOE As a matter of fact, I do have a need for that space now.

MARGE (*looking at her watch*) Oh goodness...my speech, Joe...go...go...
She pushes Joe on to go get the speech. Marge nosily goes through his mail, looks at the photos on the sideboard. The front door opens. Tid enters. She quickly puts down a photo.
Oh! Oh, well, you startled me. Ha ha...was just looking at my husband's...um...ex-husband's...photo. (*looking at Tid's cake box*) You are delivering the dessert? The owner of this house is in the back room.

TID Mrs Lerner?

MARGE Technically, not any more. But...yes, I was Joe's wife... well...(taking money out of her purse) here's a tip and I'll just take that...

TID Um, no, no...I no want money...

MARGE Oh...do take it. Tipping is commonly done in this

country. Are you newly arrived? I mean, I work with many immigrants...here...take the tip and...

TID I cannot. I live here.

MARGE Oh. Oh...I see. A summer exchange programme. How decent of Joe to...

TID I not here for summer, Mrs Lerner. Joe not tell you? I... live...here...

MARGE (*less certain of herself*) Oh, I see...

TID I come from Bangkok to live with Joe. I am...uh... (*grinning mischievously*) new Mrs Lerner.

MARGE I beg your pardon?

TID Joe and I are...we are together. (*singing*) "Together forever and ever tonight...together forever with you..."

MARGE (*getting it finally*) Oh. I see...

Joe comes in, brightly.

JOE This is a great speech, Marge...oh, I see you've both...

MARGE Yes, Joe, I've met the new Mrs Lerner.

JOE God...Tid, I told you never to introduce yourself as...it's a joke between the two of us, Marge, honey, I...

MARGE Cute joke, Joe...very...

Marge is at a loss for words. She grabs the speech and is about to exit.

I've got to go...

Marge exits hurriedly.

JOE Marge...don't...

TID I do something wrong, Joe?

JOE You did nothing wrong, Tid. I should have warned her earlier, that's all. Shit!

TID She very pretty, Joe. (*meaning it as the ultimate compliment*) She look like my mother.

JOE (*even more depressed*) I don't think she'd be too pleased to hear that right now.

SCENE 5 *Marge's office. Marge is on the phone.*

MARGE I'm sorry, Senator Jennings, sir. I don't see how this legislation will help the problem between the Vietnamese and black gangs.

Beat.

Yes, we have already sent you a very comprehensive proposal...

Beat.

I'll be there to present it myself, sir. And thank you for the opportunity. You have a good day too, sir.

Just as she puts down the phone, the door bursts open. Sang Minh runs in.

SANG MINH Miss Marge, Miss Marge, you must help...
Immigration come take me away!

MARGE Why are they taking you away? We got your papers settled. Your husband sent in the forms, didn't he?

SANG MINH Yes, he sent papers...but he not my husband...

MARGE You lied in your declaration?

SANG MINH He my dead husband brother. Now they find out, they want me go back Vietnam...Miss Marge, please help me...
Sang Minh starts crying.

MARGE But I already told you that you had to state the truth in those forms! I went through each question...

SANG MINH He same family as my husband. I think okay, same family no problem...

MARGE These applications are very, very strict about the facts. I told you, you cannot lie...

SANG MINH My son very sick in hospital. If they take me back go Vietnam, I cannot see him again. He is dying from white blood disease. Please help m—
An immigration officer comes in.

OFFICER Ma'am, this woman's an overstayer. We have to deport her in 12 hours.

MARGE Twelve hours? But it's a mistake. I can clear this up, but I need time.

OFFICER I'm sorry. I have to take her in.

SANG MINH I cannot go, Miss Marge...my son is dying...

OFFICER She's falsified her application and...

MARGE Look, she's got a young son dying of leukaemia at St Luke's. She's desperate to...could you just give me 48 hours to clear things up?

OFFICER Sorry, ma'am, I have orders to—

SANG MINH Miss Marge, you must help me! Only you can help me...

MARGE (*fiercely*) Just let her be with her son when he dies! Is that too much to—

OFFICER I don't make the rules, ma'am...

MARGE Screw the rules. I know something can be done! I just need time...

Sang Minh, who is more terrified than ever, begins crying loudly.

OFFICER (*to Marge*) With all due respect, ma'am, if you obstruct us, we will have to charge and detain you as well.

MARGE Well, why don't you do it then! Why don't you?

OFFICER Please don't make this any harder, ma'am. I've got to do my job, or I'll lose it. I have kids at home too, you know...

SANG MINH Miss Marge?

MARGE (*recognises officer's earnestness and relents*) I'm sorry, Sang Minh. You have go with him first. I will try to call someone. But you'll have to be brave for now...

SANG MINH I...I cannot leave my...Miss Marge!

MARGE (*to officer*) One minute...just one minute with her...please...
The officer relents. Sang Minh is trembling by now.

Listen here, Sang Minh...you have to be strong. When

things are bad, you have to be strong. Those you love...
they need you to be strong. I will do my best...

The officer bundles Sang Minh out.

To make sure that you stay here. I will make sure, all right?

SANG MINH What if I can never see my son again...

MARGE I will be there for him, whatever happens.

SANG MINH Miss Marge, Miss Marge...Miss Marge.

The officer and Sang Minh exit.

MARGE Damn!

Marge picks up the phone fiercely. She is about to dial a number when there is a knock on the door.

Oh God, what now...

JOE Marge...

MARGE This is NOT a good time, Joe.

JOE This will only take a minute.

MARGE I don't have a minute at this moment.

JOE You're avoiding...

MARGE *(calmly)* Listen, Joe. I am not fucking interested. I have things to do.

JOE But I need you to know...

MARGE I NEED you to get out. Now.

JOE Not till I've had my say...

MARGE *(bangs down the phone, ferociously exploding from the pressure)* No...I'll have my say first! What WERE you thinking, Joe?

JOE He's a lot more than he looks, Marge...

MARGE You look like his father. No...you look like his grandfather.
Beat.

Remember what you used to say when you saw old geezers pawing at their young wives...now you're like one of them...only worse.

JOE There are special reasons in this case, Marge...

MARGE There are special reasons between every dirty old white man and underage boy they meet in Bangkok, Joe. What makes your story any more special?

JOE He's not underage. He's 19. He's just...small.

MARGE Joe, do you know what you look like when you're both together?

JOE No, I don't. What do I look like?

MARGE Never mind.

JOE No, tell me...

MARGE I've got to go stop a woman from getting deported...

JOE No, just say it...get it off your chest, Marge! Go on, say it...

MARGE *(sadly and disappointedly)* You look like the kind of men they arrest in Pattaya for fiddling with little kids. I don't want people who respect you to think that you are a pervert...
Pause.

JOE You think I am one of those too, Marge?

Marge is silent.

All right...but let me tell you right now that you are wrong.
Pause. Joe starts to leave.

MARGE I have never wanted so much to be wrong, Joe. We won't discuss this matter again. And when it's all over, don't come crying on my shoulders—not this time.

JOE I think you are blowing it out of proportion.

MARGE Out of proportion...I just entertained a news conference to draw attention to the work I do for the migrant community here. A couple of reporters still remember your fabulous "coming-out-of-the-diplomatic-closet splash" two years ago.

JOE I am not doing anything illegal.

MARGE I work with Asian immigrants, Joe...I am a spokesperson against exploitation...of newcomers...of those who are underage. I am just beginning to get the larger community to see it my way...

JOE But I told you—

MARGE Yes, yes, yes! But when I am out there giving fine speeches, when I am out there answering reporters—

JOE You'll tell them the truth!

MARGE Orange County is still a very conservative town, Joe.

JOE Then you'll change it!

MARGE Not if your schoolboy fling spikes my chances of getting the funding I need. You are destroying my...oh, forget it. Just get out.

JOE I don't see how my private life is going to affect you. We're divorced. You are no longer responsible for what I...

MARGE You can't be so naive. I can see the headlines now:
 "PROMINENT SOCIAL WORKER SPEAKS OUT FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED WHILE EX-DIPLOMAT-HUBBY SCREWS THEM".
Long pause.
 For God's sake, Joe. Twenty-four years, I stood by you in all those countries...shaking hands...planning your diplomatic dinners...hours of cocktail talk with dignitaries...their wives...you still owe me!

JOE I know, I do...

MARGE Then just do this one thing for me. Send him back.

JOE He has nowhere to return to. I can't send him back, and I won't.

MARGE No...I don't run away from scenes any more. This is my office, Joe. YOU leave. And never, ever step in here again or I will have you forcibly removed.

JOE Marge...

MARGE Get the hell out of here! Get out, you lousy faggot! GET OUT, YOU FAGGOT!

SCENE 6 *At Joe's home. Tid is trying out a new Thai pop CD. Getting into the groove of the music, Tid starts dancing. He is youthful, energetic, sexy. Joe enters. Tid does not notice him. Joe is still in a deep blue funk from his encounter with Marge the previous day. He observes Tid's youth and vitality. As he watches, his tired, sad face slowly turns into a reluctant, and then happy, smile. He realises he is very much in love with Tid, who twirls and catches sight of Joe. He stops in mid-step and breaks into happy laughter.*

JOE *(laughing)* I thought you were doing homework.

TID Come...dance with me...
Tid tries to entice Joe to dance. Joe doesn't want to.

JOE Didn't you say the language school gave you lots to do?

TID Taking break...wait for you come home, do homework for me.
Joe turns off the CD player.

JOE That last sentence had three grammatical mistakes in a row. Come on then...you need remedial lessons...lots...and I'm not doing your homework.

TID You are a party popper!

JOE Party pooper. Party poppers are something else altogether...If you want to go work in McDonald's—heavens knows why—then we have to practise more to improve your English.

TID *(hamming it up)* Yes, sir! I want to work in McDonald in America! Sir, do you like to upside your meal?

JOE No, no, I don't want to upsize my meal. Okay, okay...so let's see...what shall I teach you today...

TID Homework from school. Teacher want us to learn what this magazine article mean...

JOE Let's see what it says..."I want to do you, baby...yeah I want your hot long throbbing..."

Tid is rolling on the floor, laughing.

JOE You monster! You tore this from one of my magazines!

TID It was old one, Joe. You ask me throw away...ha ha ha!

JOE (*laughing as well*) You come here, you wretch...

Tid slips away, laughing mischievously.

No, seriously. Come on. We gotta learn. I've gotta be confident that you won't get in trouble when you go around on your own. You've been here four months already...you should be speaking a lot better than this...

TID All right, all right. Serious. I want you tell me what this mean. I find book on shelf. There is photo of you and Mrs Lerner in this page. So I think it is important...

JOE This was Marge's book.

TID Khun² Veeraphol in next street, he go university...he tell me this famous writer, NO-ËL-CO-WARD, he say this very good...

JOE Noël Coward...It's a poem, Tid. It's very hard to understand...

TID But if you explain, I understand.

JOE Look, even people who can speak English sometimes find it hard...

TID You say you want to teach me, but you only want teach Tid what you want him to say, not what he want to know...

JOE Oh God...all right. I'll try, okay...I can't promise you will understand...

TID You explain. I understand.

JOE Let's see...this poem is called "This Is to Let You Know". You know...this was Marge's favourite poem too.

TID Pom kao jai! I understand. "This Is to Let You Know"...Mr CO-WARD want us to know something...see, it is easy!

JOE No...he wants his lover to know something...

TID Who is his lover?

JOE I don't know!

TID How long are they lover together? As long as we? One year? Two year?

JOE (*exasperated*) I really don't know, Tid!

TID (*quietly*) In Thailand, teacher are very very patient. They don't get angry so fast.

JOE Well, they don't get students like you. And you are not in Thailand. Do you want to know the poem, or don't you?

TID Only if you no shout.

JOE Okay...I will read it once though, and then I will explain. Yes?

Tid nods.

And no interruptions.

Tid nods again. Joe reads the poem.

"This is to let you know
That there was no moon last night
And that the tide was high
And that on the broken horizon
Glimmered the lights of ships
Twenty at least, like a sedate procession passing by.
This is to let you know
That when I'd turned out the lamp
And in the dark I lay
That suddenly piercing loneliness, like a knife,
Twisted my heart, for you were such a long long way away..."

TID And Mr Co-ward, he say that he cannot find English word to say how when he lover hold him, he no pain any more. And he say he miss lover, like forever, when he lover go away, even when it is only two hour they not together.

JOE But you already knew the meaning of the poem...

TID Khun Veeraphol explain to me already.

JOE Then why...

2 [Thai] A term of respect, similar to Mister, Missus or Miss

TID Because I want you know I feel like this when you no here. I feel like Mr CO-WARD. But I no read good. So I ask you read my feeling for you. You understand Tid heart, Joe?
Joe is visibly moved.

JOE And this is to let you know, that I miss you too, every time I am not here with you.
Pause.

TID Mr CO-WARD, he is good man like you.

JOE No. He is a good man like you.

TID I am not good man. I do something today, Joe.

JOE *(raising an eyebrow)* You did?

TID You not angry with me, okay?

JOE Tid, what did you do?

TID Remember, you say yesterday you and Mrs Lerner fight? I telephone Mrs Lerner today...

JOE How did you—

TID Her number on the fridge, you write—

JOE Why—

TID I want her not angry you. I want her know you good man. Want her understand you do good thing for me...

JOE Oh God...what did she say?

TID Nothing...

JOE Nothing?

TID Nothing. She not in. She have machine to answer...so I talk to machine.

JOE I hope you didn't aggravate her any more than I did in your one minute with the machine.

TID One minute too short for thing I want to say. So I call back...

JOE You left two messages?

TID I call five times.

JOE Oh, great...

TID You angry with me...

JOE Not angry, Tid. But could you please let me know when you have any more brilliant ideas?

TID Brill-yant?

JOE Brilliant same same as smart and clever.

TID Like Tid!

JOE Yes, you monkey. You are quite brilliant. Sometimes.
Lights fade to black.

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