



THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS

BY
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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The world premiere of THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS was produced by the Goodman Theatre (Robert Falls, Artistic Director; Roche Schulfer, Executive Director), in Chicago, Illinois, and Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer), in New York City. It was directed by Eric Ting; the scenic design was by Mimi Lien; the lighting design was by Tyler Micoleau; the sound design was by Mikhail Fiksel; and the costume design was by Jenny Mannis. The production stage manager at the Goodman Theatre was Kimberly Osgood; the stage manager at the Manhattan Theatre Club was Catherine Lynch and the production stage manager was Winnie Y. Lok.

The cast at the Goodman Theatre was as follows:

SUNNY	Jennifer Lim
PETE/RAN FENG/DJ HAPPY	Ruy Iskandar
LI HAN/JAMES LIN	Donald Li
OLD LAO/GAO CHEN/MR. DESTINY	Francis Jue
ARTEMIS CHANG/WANG HUA	Jodi Long
QING SHU MIN/XIAO LI/MING-MING	Jo Mei

The cast at Manhattan Theatre Club was as follows:

SUNNY	Jennifer Lim
PETE/RAN FENG	Telly Leung
LI HAN/JAMES LIN	James Saito
OLD LAO/GAO CHEN/MR. DESTINY	Francis Jue
ARTEMIS CHANG/WANG HUA	Sue Jin Song
QING SHU MIN/XIAO LI/MING-MING	Jo Mei

THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS was originally commissioned and developed by South Coast Repertory with support from the Elizabeth George Foundation. THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS was produced in a developmental production by the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, in the 2012 New Stages Festival.

CHARACTERS

SUNNY, 18–20. Female. Migrant factory worker.

PETE, 16–18. Male. Sunny's brother.

Also plays: RAN FENG, 20–36. Coal miner.

LI HAN, 25–45. Male. Sunny's father. Coal miner.

Also plays: JAMES LIN, 51. Factory owner.

OLD LAO, 65. Male. Head of Sanitation at Shenzhen Factory.

Also plays: GAO CHEN, 50. Public Security Officer.

MR. DESTINY. 60. Self-help guru.

ARTEMIS CHANG, 52. Female. Vice President of Price-Smart China.

Also plays: WANG HUA, 40–60. Midwife turned fix-it woman.

QING SHU MIN, 26. Female. Police officer.

Also plays: XIAO LI, 22. Sunny and Pete's mother.

And: MING-MING, 23. Factory worker.

PLACE AND TIME

Rural and urban China, 1992 and 2011–2012.

The People, the so-called People, are simple-minded loafers who linger on in any steadily worsening situation, people who have been dulled and forsaken by the deceptions of culture, their personalities deprived and lost, they are people who have abandoned their rights and responsibilities, who walk like ghosts on the ever-widening streets, and whose true emotions, dreams, and homes are long lost. They will no longer feel warmth in the night, no longer have expectations, and they shall not dream again.

—Ai Weiwei,
November 20, 2006

THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS

1.

Rural China, 1992. A dilapidated brick house in a town along the Yangtze River. Faded spring couplets flank the exterior door. Inside, Wang Hua assists Xiao Li, who is in labor. Outside, Li Han squats by a tin slop bucket, shelling peanuts. He tosses the husks into the bucket. A lit cigarette is perched between his lips. His hands and face are smudged with coal dust. He has a dejected, morose air about him.

XIAO LI. (*Screaming.*) Get out of me you son of a turtle!

WANG HUA. Push!

XIAO LI. Get out before you crush my guts!

WANG HUA. Harder!

XIAO LI. (*Through pushes.*) For nine months you've been eating me like a plague. Robbing my breath. Stealing my blood. (*Gasps.*) Fuccck!

The labor continues in the house, mostly in the form of pacing and labored breathing. Li Han continues to smoke and shell peanuts. Ran Feng enters, squats beside Li Han, and lights a cigarette.

RAN FENG. Put all your love in one basket and you live in fear of losing it.

LI HAN. Is that why you fuck so many whores?

RAN FENG. What if your favorite gets killed by her pimp? What if she gets pregnant, or hangs herself and stops being such a nice fuck?

Spread your love in many places, and you will never experience heartbreak.

LI HAN. Go home.

RAN FENG. It's only been a week. Don't lose hope.

LI HAN. What if she was kidnapped, or shot down by gangsters? What if I receive a ransom note, strapped to a severed leg?

RAN FENG. That only happens in Taiwan.

WANG HUA. Come out, baby. You have a nice house, and a pretty mom, even though she has the mouth of a farmer.

XIAO LI. (*To Wang Hua.*) Fuck your mother.

LI HAN. Yesterday I dreamed Xin Xin came to my bed and sat on my face. As she rocked back and forth, making soft little sounds, I lay still, savoring her warmth on my skin, weeping fat tears of joy because my heart had come back to me. Suddenly, I felt something hot and gooey slide down my cheek. For a moment, I was confused. Then, I realized Xin Xin had laid a turd between my eyes. It mixed with my tears, slid towards my lips, and melted on my tongue. It was salty, and sweet. Like tofu, fermented with black beans. What do you think that means?

RAN FENG. Li Han. She shat on your face.

LI HAN. The turd was still warm. That could mean she's alive and trying to get back to me.

RAN FENG. Li Han. She shat on your face and you ate it. The symbolism's obvious. You accepted the shit of your lost pigeon into your mouth and digested it.

LI HAN. She can't be lost. It must be a good omen. What if it means—

RAN FENG. If your beloved bird doesn't make it home, I'll give you the offspring of my best breeding pair and you can find your heart all over again.

LI HAN. I don't want your second-rate pigeon. I want Xin Xin! If she's not back by evening I'll die in my sleep from heartbreak.

Ran Feng and Li Han continue to smoke and shell peanuts. Focus shifts to the inside of the house, where Xiao Li is doubled over and moaning. Wang Hua rubs Xiao Li's swollen belly.

WANG HUA. It's crowning!

XIAO LI. Does it have balls?

WANG HUA. PUSH!

XIAO LI. (*Through pushes.*) What. Is. IT?!

WANG HUA. Say something nice!

XIAO LI. You can be the first son and cherished heir. Everything we have will be yourssssaiighhiyyiyiyiyiyahyuhhhhh!

Wang Hua catches the baby as it comes out.

WANG HUA. It's done.

XIAO LI. How does his penis look?

Wang Hua checks the baby's genitals, then wraps it in newspaper and tucks it under her arm.

Sometimes you can't tell. The balls hide in the stomach, and you—

WANG HUA. (*Interrupting.*) Shut up before you get us in trouble.

XIAO LI. You said that if I ate more meat—

WANG HUA. It's not that simple.

XIAO LI. I can't read. I can't just look in a book and find instructions.

WANG HUA. You want the recipe for boy babies? Lose weight, comb your hair, and get your husband to fuck you. You must have been very bad in your last life to be punished so much in this one.

XIAO LI. I want a son.

WANG HUA. Don't waste your breath wanting. Just make one.

XIAO LI. (*Screaming.*) I want a son!

Wang Hua approaches Li Han and Ran Feng. Li Han lifts the lid off the slop bucket. Wang Hua drops the newspaper bundle inside. Li Han hacks a loogie, spits into the slop bucket, and replaces the lid.

WANG HUA. Make a soup with flour and water. She'll need it to regain her strength.

LI HAN. I paid for a son.

WANG HUA. My job is to deliver a child.

LI HAN. A boy is a child. A girl is a thing. Five times I've paid for a child. Five times you've given me things.

WANG HUA. It must be fate that all the Li family deserves is things.

Li Han slaps Wang Hua. She staggers backwards, pulls a wad of bills out of her pocket, and throws them at Li Han.

LI HAN. One more “thing” and you’ll never work this village again.

Wang Hua kicks Ran Feng. Peanuts fly across the floor. Li Han lights a cigarette.

RAN FENG. Ma! What the fuck was that for?

WANG HUA. Get up. Grow up. Find a wife.

Wang Hua spits at Li Han’s feet, then exits. Ran Feng follows her out. Xiao Li whimpers in the next room.

LI HAN. The neighbors are mocking us. If we don’t have a son, we’ll be the laughing stock of the village. Try harder, okay? The fate of seven generations rests on us.

Li Han picks up the slop bucket and heads towards an off-stage barn.

XIAO LI. Three months she’s been kicking. She was so fierce. So demanding.

Li Han doesn’t respond. He is frozen, listening to something.

Why would a girl do such things?

LI HAN. Do you hear that?

XIAO LI. Hear what?

LI HAN. That sound. That beautiful, precious sound.

Li Han faces offstage, sees his missing bird, and gasps in delight.

My heart! You’ve come back! Oh no, a broken wing? You must have hopped home, you poor thing. Don’t worry. Daddy will fix you up.

Li Han scoops up the unseen bird and carries her to an off-stage pigeon loft.

(*Offstage.*) Xiao Li! Perfect Girl needs a treat.

XIAO LI. The pig needs to eat.

LI HAN. (*Offstage.*) Have some mercy. She’s suffering!

XIAO LI. Look in the slop bucket. There might be some yam scrapings.

Li Han enters and lifts the lid off the slop bucket.

LI HAN. (*Screams.*) Aughiyiyaiyah!

XIAO LI. What?

LI HAN. It's still alive! And—fuck me! It's smiling!

XIAO LI. Foolish girl. Tell her to die.

LI HAN. She's smiling, like I'm the sun on a cold winter day! I've never seen such a pathetic thing.

XIAO LI. Close the lid. She'll die soon enough.

LI HAN. What if this is a good omen?

XIAO LI. Horse shit. Girls are bad luck.

Li Han scoops the soggy newspaper bundle out of the slop bucket and places it into Xiao Li's arms.

LI HAN. (*Chuckling.*) Look at that. Born into a bucket of pig slop, and she's smiling like a Buddha. We'll name her Sunny. Heheh.

XIAO LI. I want a son.

LI HAN. Then make one.

Li Han pulls yam scraps from the bucket, then heads to the pigeon loft.

Nurse her. Keep her soft. We'll sell her once she's old enough to fuck. (*To pigeon.*) Here you go, my beauty.

XIAO LI. (*To bundle in her arms.*) Stupid girl.

LI HAN. (*Offstage.*) Who's the prettiest birdie?

XIAO LI. Why are you alive?

LI HAN. (*Offstage.*) Who loves you so much?

XIAO LI. And still smiling?

LI HAN. (*Offstage.*) Daddy loves his Perfect Girl. Yes he does.

XIAO LI. Don't you know the lives of girls are full of misery?

Baby gurgles.

(*To baby.*) Once upon a time, on a mountain of flowers and fruit, a pregnant rock released a stone egg, from which hatched the King of the Monkeys. He found a teacher and learned the 72 Transformations, so he could change into any form. One day, Monkey used his powers to break into Hell and erase his name from the Book of Life and Death, stealing immortality. Then he stormed heaven and ate peaches meant for the Queen. Buddha caught Monkey and trapped

THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS

by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig

3M, 3W (doubling)

Unwanted from the moment she's born, Sunny is determined to escape her life in rural China and forge a new identity in the city. As naïve as she is ambitious, Sunny views her new job in a grueling factory as a stepping stone to untold opportunities. When fate casts her as a company spokeswoman at a sham PR event, Sunny's bright outlook starts to unravel in a series of harrowing and darkly comic events, as she begins to question a system enriching itself by destroying its own people.

"Some playwrights have a gift to amuse; Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig has a darker gift. Anyone with romantic notions of Chinese culture will be unsettled by [her] jagged, un sentimental portrait of modern urban China... Cowhig shows us the dysfunctional world as is, in all its stupidity and brutality. ...Cowhig has written a play to open our eyes, to unsettle."

—Chicago Reader

"...roar[s] with anger... the final three scenes slam into place like heavy doors, turning the funny, brutal show into something red with real fury."

—Time Out (New York)

"...fearless, zippily-paced, and satirical, shining a light on Chinese society's necessary doublethink, be that willful blindness to the political past, or an equally blind belief in an impossibly brilliant future."

—The Independent (London)

"The beauty of Cowhig's play is that it offers a window on a hidden world. The play has an epic scope—charting the effects of the Cultural Revolution, the 1989 crushing of the pro-democracy movement, and the cultural shift that has seen China's urban population grow by 400 million in the last 30 years—but it tells history through the lives of those looking for a better life."

—The Guardian (UK)

Also by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig
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