

BEIJING, CALIFORNIA

A play in Three Acts

By

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Episode Two – Love and Sex

Sandra (50) – Mother of Samantha and Robert

Samantha (23) – Sandra's daughter

Robert (21) – Sandra's son

Han Zhuoyun (46) – A high-ranking government official

Han Meng (40) – Han Zhuoyun's husband, a business man

Elaine (36) – Used to be Cole's aide, now Han Zhuoyun's assistant

Feng Guokua – Samantha's customer

Christopher – A doctor and a prostitute

Young Chinese Soldier – Christopher's customer

Scene 1

(Projection of the date: 2010. Then video montage of the sex industry in an Asian Third World Thailand, Vietnam, etc. Images of Mexican immigrants working for white people in California. Finally projection of the date: 2046.)

(SAMANTHA alone. She fixes her shoes with duct tape.)

SAMANTHA – You know what's "Good for America"? It's two years into the incursion and there is nothing good for America. So my mother and Rob and I had to take in boarders. Now we only have one bedroom and guess who gets to use it—some boarder's always in the toilet down the hallway.

This happened because when they took away our dollars, they gave us a new currency: the Yuan and "The Chinese Soldier". The 18-year-old patrolling our block makes more in a month than any of us can in a year. When he leaves you a tip, you can live for three days. You can buy potatoes, you can buy socks, you can pay the rent.

Scene 2

(SANDRA'S kitchen with a bed for SAMANTHA and SANDRA in the middle of the floor. A cord with a sheet hanging over it stretches across one corner of the room. This section is ROBERT'S room. For now we cannot see into it. SAMANTHA sits at the table, where she puts American cigarettes into empty packets of Asian cigarettes. SANDRA enters carrying a Walmart bag, patched with duct tape.

From her bag, SANDRA carefully takes out a pack of playing cards, a piece of steel-wool – of special value to her – a ball of tin foil, and a Styrofoam take-out box. Inside is a packet of ketchup. She

makes a note in a ledger she always carries with her.
)

SANDRA — 15, 18, 19.

(SAMANTHA gives her coins.)

What's this?

SAMANTHA — From last night.

SANDRA — That's it? 25. We need 75 for rent, and water — that's 80 and — anyway, we need at least 100.

(SANDRA locks things away in a drawer, then goes to the stove and puts one ladle of soup into a bowl. She spills a little soup.)

Hand me the dishcloth.

(SAMANTHA gets a new cloth.)

SANDRA — That corner there — there is nothing wrong with that part.

(SAMANTHA dabs at the spill with the old cloth.)

SANDRA gives SAMANTHA the bowl.)

SAMANTHA — What's this?

SANDRA— Rice soup.

SAMANTHA — Where's the rice?

SANDRA— If you want something else—

SAMANTHA — I have two jobs, Mamma, your soup is fine.

SANDRA — How much do you think you can make tonight?

SAMANTHA — 7. 8.

SANDRA — I knew they wouldn't buy American cigarettes.

(SANDRA switches off the light. The room is dim.)

SAMANTHA has trouble seeing.)

SAMANTHA — Mom!

SANDRA — It'll save us at least 4 or 5. How was school?

SMANTHA — I'm studying.

SANDRA – You know my friend, Dona? She says her daughter, Nancy, graduated with a masters degree and they gave her–

SAMANTHA – Nancy makes less than cigarettes. Did Dona tell you that?

SANDRA – Maybe if you choose something different from Nancy –

SAMANTHA – But I like history –

SANDRA – You know, I was thinking you'd do better with accounting or Chinese management. Your best asset is that you work hard. They like people who work hard.

SAMANTHA – (interrupting) Mamma, Luke and I want to start a catering business.

SANDRA – Where?

SAMANTHA – Shenzhen, Guangdong.

SANDRA – I don't have papers

SAMANTHA – We talked about it and we could go over, and set up, and send for you.

SANDRA – And I can't speak Chinese.

SAMANTHA – You could teach English.

SANDRA – I think this family's sunk enough money into people going to work in China.

ROBERT – (behind curtain) – Can you keep it down. I'm trying to study.

SANDRA – (lowering her voice so ROBERT cannot hear) You know my friend, Cynthia? She says Darleen's going to be with some people tonight.

SAMANTHA – A party?

SANDRA – Why don't you go after your work?

SAMANTHA – Yeah? Can Luke come.

SANDRA – So. Look what I got for you.

(SANDRA shows SAMANTHA a pretty new hair thing. Subtly, she starts to put it into SAMANTHA'S hair.)

Cynthia says there'll be a bunch of people, and there's this one fellow she thinks you'd like.

(SAMANTHA pulls away.)

SAMANTHA – I see.

SANDRA – We can talk about this, right? It's just being nice. That doesn't cost anything. They asked for you specially.

SAMANTHA – I can't . . . chat.

SANDRA – Bobby doesn't have class tonight, right? We'll look after things. Would you like to wear my blouse? Ta-da!

(SANDRA has finished SAMANTHA'S hair.)

Always be around people. Don't go to his place. Make sure you order a lot of food.

(SANDRA give the Walmart bag to SAMANTHA.)

See if you can get his business address.

(SAMANTHA alone. All is still; she is composing a letter.)

SAMANTHA – Dear Luke, I'm going to give you something. You can't eat it or sell it or save it. You can't even use it. It's silly. It's something no one needs, but it'll remind you of me. When we get to China, I'm going to hold you. I've pictured our home there – it's small, maybe just a room, and I'm going to hold you for a whole week in our room all alone. Love, Sammy.

Scene 3

(The balcony of the HAN'S home in Pacific Heights.
Fog horns.)

HAN ZHUOYUN - (to us) Two years after the Incursion,
Beijing sent me to San Francisco to investigate illegal
adoptions.

HAN MENG - Such a nice day.

HAN ZHUOYUN - (to us - aggrieved) I conducted the original
negotiations with Cole and Premier Zhang Kai. But now we
are stationed here. Tonight we host a reception.

HAN MENG - I love the climate here. . . Zhuoyun.

HAN ZHUOYUN - My hair's always messy. It's the fog. San
Francisco is too close to the ocean.

HAN MENG - I hear the climate gets nicer in the fall. Your
hair looks good, honey.

HAN ZHUOYUN (stressed out) - You should have hired someone
sooner.

HAN MENG - I'm sure he's doing the best he can.

HAN ZHUOYUN - They put a man on the moon. They just don't
want to try.

HAN MENG - We'll all adjust. It's probably hard for them
to understand our system-

HAN ZHUOYUN - I wish you'd try to understand me once in a
while.

HAN MENG - I'm sorry you're upset. I know it's not like
home, but we'll figure out how to hire staff. Let's give
ourselves time. Okay? Because soon we'll need someone if
ever we have a baby, right?

HAN ZHUOYUN - But if you continue to be nice to them, they
will take advantage of us.

HAN MENG - Calm down.

HAN ZHUOYUN - I'm calm. I'm calm.

HAN MENG - Then maybe let's give him five more minutes, and if he doesn't show up, we'll hire a new person. It's not like he's the only American in America!

(ROBERT enters.)

HAN ZHUOYUN - This is why. I am so stressed and you joke -

HAN MENG (teasing - a bad idea) - Zhuoyun, maybe if we actually had sex once in a while -

HAN ZHUOYUN - AGH!

(They notice ROBERT.)

Why are you late

ROBERT - Buses not running. Checkpoints.

HAN ZHUOYUN - No late excuses.

ROBERT - I stay extra. Time. Make up-

HAN ZHUOYUN - You will stay until the job is done.

ROBERT - Oh, then must to call-

HAN ZHUOYUN (to HAN MENG) - I want someone else.

HAN MENG - Absolutely.

ROBERT - No call. No call. Is fine. No calling.

(ELAINE enters and goes to HAN ZHUOYUN respectfully.)

HAN ZHUOYUN - I'm disappointed in the figures.

ELAINE - I think we need to work with better data. I'll call Beijing.

HAN ZHUOYUN - Good. (to ROBERT) This is how you should speak to us. At this level of employment, fluent Chinese.

ROBERT - But she is Chinese.

HAN ZHUOYUN - Elaine is like you. American. But she worked hard.

(The two women continue their conversation further away.)

HAN MENG (in English) - Hello! Um. I. Speak. English. Some.

ROBERT - Um. Question. Look, is it cool if I don't weed? It's really hard on my knees. See, I played foot ball-

HAN MENG (in English) - You call me Mr. Han. Mr. Han, do you understand?

ROBERT - Yes, sir.

HAN ZHUOYUN - Tell him the first thing is to get the garden weeded. Meng!

HAN MENG (to HAN ZHUOYUN) - I'm taking care of it.
(to ROBERT)
What is your name?

ROBERT - Liang, sir.

HAN MENG - No, no, your American name.

ROBERT - Rob.

HAN MENG - Ro-bert. Like that?

ROBERT - Yes, sir.

HAN MENG - Robert is Bobby, sometimes, yes?

ROBERT - Yeah, but I'm "Rob".

HAN MENG - (laughs and pronounces Bobby in funny ways)
Bobby, Bobby. Bobby, it's kind of funny. Weed um,
the . . .

ROBERT - Garden. Weed the garden. Right, but what you need to understand - there's special circumstances-I have this doctor's note-

HAN MENG - Weed. Garden. Bobby.

(HAN MENG is over his head in English and switches to Chinese)

And that flat of flowers, it goes in the lower section.

(ROBERT sort of understands and picks up the flat. It is large, awkward and heavy.)

ROBERT – Um. Sir. Wait. I see. You have shed. I fix up. I am student, sir. Chemistry, sir. I really, really want to become a doctor.

(HAN ZHUOYUN and ELAINE go to HAN MENG.)

HAN MENG – Oh. Really I don't think this can . . . curfews, passes. It's all so hard to arrange. You don't need the shed.

ROBERT – In the shed, then I am punctual.

HAN ZHUOYUN – Get up earlier. (to MENG) And what time are you coming home?

HAN MENG – I have a meeting until ten. Or eleven.

(All leave ROBERT holding the flat.)

ROBERT – Where's the rake and . . . And where's the garden? Mr. Han? Sir?

Scene 4

(Kitchen – SANDRA holds the empty Walmart bag and a single plastic fork. SAMANTHA fixes her shoes.)

SANDRA – I don't know what we're going to do in three days.

SAMANTHA – I should have brought the cig-

SANDRA – And Cynthia's upset.

SAMANTHA – I didn't eat any of her precious donuts.

SANDRA – And Darleen said you just sat there and your hair was in your eyes. What did you do with the ribbon. Where's the ribbon I gave you? And when he tried to give you something-

SAMANTHA – Who?

SANDRA – The man you were supposed to see.

SAMANTHA – He didn't pay any attention to me.

SANDRA – Did you talk Chinese?

(SAMANTHA will not answer.)

Cynthia says Darleen has a whole routine.

SAMANTHA – Darleen's so phony.

SANDRA – If you nod a little bit and smile once. How much would that cost you?

SAMANTHA – It isn't me.

SANDRA – Cynthia said Darleen got shoes. Pumps.

(ROBERT enters. ROBERT also has a bag and from it gives SANDRA a hoe. SANDRA is beside herself, she polishes it and makes notes and hides it.)

SANDRA – I can get at least 20 for this.

SAMANTHA – Where'd you get it?

SANDRA – Did you get the job?

ROBERT – Yeah.

SANDRA – Of course you did. (to SAMANTHA) See, they are not so bad, some of them. (to ROBERT) Did they pay you yet?

ROBERT – We're negotiating.

SAMANTHA – In Chinese?

ROBERT – Duh.

SAMANTHA – Let me know how that goes. "I talk happy Chinese, good, good." You sound like 4 year old in Mandarin.

ROBERT – How'd it go last night? I heard they had donuts. Did you get any donuts?

SAMANTHA — A retarded 4 year old.

ROBERT — Oh, and they're going to give me a place to stay.

SANDRA — We need 50 by tomorrow, and twenty-five the next day.

ROBERT — Maybe if she wore something nicer?

SANDRA — I think that's pretty much a dead end now.

(SAMANTHA alone. All is still; she is composing a letter.)

SAMANTHA — Dear Luke, You're the only one who gets me. These days, I think you're the only one who tries. I love our talks, but I think I'm going to need to get another job, maybe just for a month or so. A couple of the Chinese soldiers were riding around last night pretty drunk. Do they think we don't understand them? Be careful, okay. Oh, how much have you saved up? Love, Samantha

Scene 5

(A street. CHRISTOPHER stands in front of a restaurant, he wears a Stetson. SAMANTHA hawks cigarettes to Chinese soldiers walking by.)

SAMANTHA — Chinese cigarettes. Real cheep.

CHRISTOPHER — Hey, Samantha.

SAMANTHA — Hi, Christopher. Can you look at it?

(SAMANTHA shows her arm to CHRISTOPHER. He examines it carefully.)

CHRISTOPHER — Does that hurt?

SAMANTHA — Yes.

(He writes something on a cocktail napkin.)

CHRISTOPHER — It's definitely septic. Try to get this. It's around.

SAMANTHA – Thanks, Christopher.

How's business?

CHRISTOPHER – Slow. I hope my “daddy” comes by.

SAMANTHA – Is he still going to bring you over there?

CHRISTOPHER – It's hopeless. But one of my other “daddies” sent me a present – from China – didn't even tell me he'd gone back.

SAMANTHA – What is it?

CHRISTOPHER – It's an i-Pod.

SAMANTHA – Oh, I used to love those. I didn't think they still made them.

CHRISTOPHER – Must have got it at a flea market. It's got Golden Oldies: Beyonce and Lady Gagga, and Oh, guess who stopped by just now in a new car!

SAMANTHA – Who?

CHRISTOPHER – Darleen. How does she afford the gas? I mean her!

SAMANTHA – I wonder.

(YOUNG CHINESE SOLDIER walks up to CHRISTOPHER.)

SAMANTHA – Thanks for the prescription, Chris.

(SAMANTHA retreats, but watches CHRISTOPHER work.)

CHRISTOPHER – Hello.

CHINESE SOLDIER – Hey, cowboy, you have a menu?

(CHRISTOPHER hands him one.)

CHINESE SOLDIER – How much is it for–

CHRISTOPHER – Sh, sh, partner, I know what you're looking for. You beautiful man. Your hair is so silky. I love Asian hair. Let's go inside.

(But CHRISTOPHER does not move. CHINESE SOLDIER gets it.)

CHINESE SOLDIER – Oh, how much, Cowboy?

CHRISTOPHER – Well, for you, because you're special, 90.

CHINESE SOLDIER – That's . . .no. . . that's pretty high.

CHRISTOPHER – No, no, it's a bargain. Usually I charge 100, but for you (all business – feeling SOLDIER'S muscles) Mmm. You work out, don't you?

CHINESE SOLDIER – We have to; I'm in the army – we have P.T.–

CHRISTOPHER – Asian and ripped. You're like a Ninja – a law all unto yourself. 90.

CHINESE SOLDIER – The guy down the street? Enrique.

CHRISTOPHER – Oh, him, everybody does him. But he's not real home-on-the-range American. I'm the one who knows what you want. Can I tell you a secret?

CHINESE SOLDIER – What?

CHRISTOPHER – I've seen you here before, haven't I? Yeah, yeah. You're the reason I came out tonight. You're the one I've been waiting for. I turned down two other guys, 'cause I knew you'd come.

CHINESE SOLDIER – 40. I have 40 in my pocket. But I have to catch a cab later. Make it work for me, Tex.

CHRISTOPHER – Okay, buck-a-roo, 85. Because you are so beautiful.

CHINESE SOLDIER – 40. And maybe I'll come by tomorrow. And the next night – more 40.

CHRISTOPHER – You and me's gonna gallop tonight: 85.

CHINESE SOLDIER — You show me and I'll think about it.

CHRISTOPHER — (all business) 85

CHINESE SOLDIER — 41

CHRISTOPHER — 83

CHINESE SOLDIER — 45

CHRISTOPHER — 80

CHINESE SOLDIER — 45

CHRISTOPHER — 80

CHINESE SOLDIER — 50. Final offer

(CHINESE SOLDIER starts to leave.)

CHRISTOPHER — 80 final offer. 50 okay 50 —

CHINESE SOLDIER — (to CHRISTOPHER) Gonna ride you tonight,
Brokeback. Gee-up.

(CHINESE SOLDIER slaps CHRISTOPHER on the ass as they
go.)

SAMANTHA — Chinese cigarettes. Real cheep. Chinese
cigarettes.

(FENG KUO enters and notices SAMANTHA. He gives her a
card.)

Scene 6

(The kitchen. Noises. The locked drawer is open and
empty. SANDRA tears the place apart, sometimes
calculating in her ledger. SAMANTHA enters and
reaches for a bottle of water.)

SANDRA — I'm selling that.

SAMANTHA — What am I supposed to drink?

SANDRA – (manic) It's 10 for water, and 3 for the rice, 50 for the rent.

(SAMANTHA gives SANDRA a little money.)

SANDRA – That's 2! I had seventy-five. We were 25 short. We could have done it. If we didn't eat for a day and a half, we could have made the rent.

(ROB enters out of breath.)

ROBERT – I couldn't catch him. (to SAMANTHA) What the fuck are you looking at?

SANDRA – I had two bars of soap I put away right here.

ROBERT – I'll get it back for us. I'll get it back.

SAMANTHA – What are you going to do? Steal his whole garden?

ROBERT – Can you lay off for once.

SANDRA – And there was dried milk, two boxes of dried milk.

(SANDRA flies around calculating.)

SANDRA – (hysterical) And the steel wool's gone.

(SAMANTHA looks at the card FENG KUO gave her.)

Scene 7

(The kitchen. SAMANTHA and KUO are in ROBERT'S room. The curtain is closed. They are having sex. KUO mumbles sexually to SAMANTHA. Once in a while we hear SAMANTHA make an involuntary sigh. SANDRA is chopping something. KUO comes out of the room, zipping up.)

KUO – (laughing) What the hell kind of place is this?

SANDRA – What does he say?

SAMANTHA (off) – Mamma, can I get a tissue or something?

(SANDRA grabs the dish cloth and goes behind the curtain. In a moment, SAMANTHA comes out; her hair has fallen in her face. KUO gives SAMANTHA money and leaves. SANDRA comes out. They hear ROBERT, off. The women dash into his room and remove the bedding just in time for him to enter and see nothing.)

ROBERT – Here.

(ROBERT gives SANDRA very little cash.)

ROBERT – (to SAMANTHA) What did you bring in?

(SAMANTHA does not answer him. ROBERT goes into his room. SAMANTHA gives SANDRA money. SANDRA gets her book and calculates.)

SANDRA – You did a good thing.

ROBERT –(off) Who's been in here?

SANDRA – Thank you.

ROBERT – Sam, stay out means stay out, Jesus. I had everything just the way I liked it.

SANDRA – Don't hide your face.

Look down, of course, but peek at them.

And once in a while look at him – intensely.

SAMANTHA – They hate you looking at them.

SANDRA – He didn't – at the end, right? A little forbidden pleasure. See that hand, that hand – it can't be there.

ROBERT – And can you come translate this.

SANDRA – Do something female, be feminine.

ROBERT – Wait. My Joey Wang album's not here.

SANDRA – They are only boys.

(pause)
And talk a little more.

SAMANTHA – Like what?

SANDRA – Don't be shy with them. I'm your mom, we can talk about this, right?.

SAMANTHA – All right.

SANDRA – I didn't hear you making sounds. Like you're enjoying it.

SAMANTHA – All right. If I close my eyes—

SANDRA – No, you got to check whether he's enjoying the time with you. How long did you masturbate him?

SAMANTHA – 3-4 minutes.

SANDRA – Can you make it last longer?

SAMANTHA – Yes.

SANDRA – Good.

(SANDRA calculates. SAMANTHA looks at the page of numbers with her.)

And when he pays, make sure you ask him to come back. Not you know, speaking to him, but more in a physical way. Give him a little smile and go from head to toe. And when he leaves, you got to look at his penis, and if it gets harder, you know he'll be back, right? And if it doesn't, you go get another customer and make sure when he leaves, you see that penis.

We're a little over.

(SANDRA gives SAMANTHA money. She caresses SAMANTHA'S face gently and runs her fingers through her hair.)

We'll go get you a better bra.

(SANDRA shuts the ledger.)

There.

(SAMANTHA alone. All is still; she is composing a letter.)

SAMANTHA - Hi, Luke, I'm all right. We're fine. Have you managed to save any dollars or Yuan? Oh, you asked about the book. I asked my mom and we don't have it any more. I'll see you soon. I mean it this time, and I won't break it. Yesterday I had to go shopping with my mom. She feels safer with me. I just want to lie next to you and be held and hold you back. Did you send in your work papers for China? Love, Sammy.

. . . . (CONTINUED)