

SCENE 2 & SCENE 3 from ***JOKER***

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOE: Filipino immigrant, 40s

LIN: Joe's wife, owner of a Chinese restaurant, Chinese American, early 40s

RAY: Lin's son, Joe's step-son, Chinese American, 18

FRANK: A journalist, Filipino male, late 40s

PLACE:

The prep room of a small Chinese restaurant in Honolulu.

TIME:

ACT I & ACT II. 1, 2 Autumn of 2013

ACT II. 3 Spring of 2014

THE SETTING

The prep room links the dining room to the kitchen. This is the room where people who work here rest during the day and store food supplies. A table and a few chairs are on stage. Left of the door is an old coat rack and a dressing mirror. Upstage right is an open doorway to the dining room, through which part of the dining area can be seen. Wind chimes are tied to the unseen entrance to the restaurant. A door stage left leads to the unseen kitchen.

SCENE TWO

(LIGHTS UP. A few weeks later. Late night. Through the door we can see chairs stacked on tables in the restaurant. JOE is taking fortune notes out of a jar and inserting them into cookies. Containers marked with different categories are on the table. He makes a phone call.)

JOE

Hey, still up? Great. I'd hate to wake you. No, I don't sleep much. Just working on the cookies. Oh, fortune cookies; we just started last year. Funny story, a few months ago, some guy didn't have enough money for a tip, so instead he taught me something interesting about fortune cookies. No, they're all the same flavor, honey, how could you not know that? So anyway, he taught me how to take out the original slip and put in my own. That's when I started to make my own fortunes. I sort them into Relationships, Friendship, Family, Success, Luck... Then I give different cookies to different people, based on what they need to hear. I can tell by their faces. I used to give friendship fortunes to this girl who always ate alone. She loved chopsticks and peanuts. She brought two guys here later that month, ended up in love with both of them. I gave her lots of relationship fortunes after that. But I guess she loved peanuts more than them. I dunno, after a while she went back to eating alone again. One day I got busy, forgot to make my notes, and I gave her an original cookie. No idea what it said. She read it, asked me for a bunch of chopsticks and left. I never saw her again. I still wonder what was on that fortune. Or maybe it wasn't about the fortune; it was just about her, just about time. Everyone, at some point in their life, leaves without a reason. So did I. (Beat) I dunno. Maybe I'm bored. Maybe I want to keep myself busy. Being busy makes you feel needed. Being needed makes you feel alive. (Beat) No. Don't tell me to go to sleep. I hate my dreams.

(LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE THREE

(LIGHTS UP. Midnight. Ray's bag is on the table, along with a few scattered fortune cookies. RAY enters, flipping the dining room lights off as he passes through the curtains. A crumpled magazine sticks out of his pocket. He is dressed in his work uniform. He stands in front of the mirror as he changes into an old shirt which is slightly over-sized. JOE enters from the kitchen with a beer, and pauses to watch until RAY turns around and spots him.)

RAY

Drinking? Without me?

JOE

Wait three years for that conversation, kid.

RAY

Oh, I thought we were celebrating.

JOE

What?

(RAY takes the magazine out of his pocket
and starts to read.)

RAY

“This cute little Chinese place, located a few blocks north of the Capitol, may be small, but it’s legit. The decoration is reminiscent of Hong Kong in the ‘80s, and the innovative cuisine fuses traditional Chinese and local flavors. ‘Every bite is like a little trip to heaven,’ says the owner.” (Looking at JOE) That doesn’t sound like you.

JOE

I’m not the owner.

RAY

It doesn’t sound like mom either.

JOE

Of course not. It sounds like someone who’s never eaten here before.

(They chuckle. Ray continues reading.)

RAY

“On top of everything else, the owners are famous for their supportive attitude toward the local community. The gay-friendly vibe” --

(JOE grabs the magazine.)

JOE

“*Odyssey*, serving Hawai‘i’s diverse lifestyle.” Where did you get this?

RAY

Someone left it on the table. Now I know why we were so busy this week. Is this the promotion thing you guys were talking about?

JOE

Seems like it worked.

RAY

How come we're super gay-friendly?

JOE

The whole island is gay-friendly. We got rainbows on our damn driver's license.

RAY

Yeah, I get that, but why are we like "super" friendly?

JOE

It doesn't say that.

RAY

It's sorta implied. See? Events, Beaches, Hotels, Clubs. We're like the only one under the "Restaurants" heading.

JOE

(Faking enthusiasm) Great, right? Our first time in the paper, and we got an exclusive.

RAY

Okay, but I'm just curious, like why are we all of a sudden opening our doors for gays?

JOE

Hey, just because the decorations are from the '80s doesn't mean we have to be old-fashioned.

RAY

Oh, I'm not against anything. The popular kids in school are almost all playing for the other team. Or both teams. Or at least they pretend to be.

JOE

Huh. Back in my day, the popular kids beat the crap out of the ones who were different. I guess no one wants to reminisce about that, huh?

RAY

I just don't see any history of us being connected to them. It feels like we're just trying to make a quick buck.

JOE

We are.

RAY

But... that's like cheating.

JOE

Just be glad we're making some money. You heard your mom singing in the kitchen tonight.

RAY

She was so happy. I don't think we've ever extended evening hours before.

JOE

Then be cool with it, kid. With all the tips you're gonna make, you can take Jeanel to see *The Lion King* when it comes.

RAY

(Embarrassed) Oh please.

JOE

But when you get married, I'm only paying for the reception, cuz that girl's family is rich.

RAY

Oh God, shut up.

JOE

Come on, I saw the pictures, that beach house is sick!

RAY

Would you stop, please? It's not funny.

JOE

What, I can't joke about her anymore? (Beat) What's the matter?

RAY

She's way out of my league.

JOE

Who said that? What's wrong?

RAY

No one. I'm good.

JOE

Something happen in school?

RAY

I'm fine.

JOE

You know you can talk to me.

(RAY leans back on the chair. JOE takes a cookie from the “relationships” container and tosses it to RAY. RAY opens it, eats the cookie, reads the fortune, hesitates. He drops the fortune on the table.)

RAY

Am I... ugly? I mean, like, not attractive at all?

JOE

Where did that come from?

RAY

You're not answering.

JOE

You have beautiful eyes.

RAY

That's a “yes”.

JOE

(Chuckles) “Yes” would be something like “you have a charming personality” or “I like your taste in clothes.” But trust me, if someone tells you she likes your eyes, then she's already falling for you. You're a handsome young man, Ray. (Beat) What's with all the negative energy? That girl say something to you?

RAY

No, but... she's turning eighteen next month, but I'm not even invited.

JOE

Oh... Well, October's got midterms. She probably forgot. It's just a party.

RAY

It's not just a party. She's always talking about how excited she is about finally turning eighteen, and I wanna be there. She sent out the invitations a long time ago, but I didn't get one. I thought maybe she liked me, but --

JOE

What are you talking about? That May Day hula you guys did was the cutest ever! It was even on TV!

RAY

Please, that was like, what, fifth grade?

JOE

More like third.

RAY

Ages ago.

JOE

Seems like yesterday. You were this big boy, but you still wanted your dad to carry you on his back.

RAY

I was tired!

JOE

So was your dad. I remember I said I'd do it, but you'd only let me if I bought you --

JOE & RAY

(Together) Ice cream.

RAY

(Chuckles) And you did.

JOE

And I did. And after a while, whenever you saw me--

RAY

(Chuckles) I'd just jump on your back.

JOE

And scream, "ice cream, vanilla ice cream"! Other kids liked chocolate, strawberry, coconut, but you had to have vanilla. Once I got you this new flavor -- let me see, what was it?

RAY

Honeydew.

JOE

Yeah, honeydew, and you just threw it on the floor! Good thing that Velvet liked it -- she licked everything up and your mom never knew.

RAY

(Chuckles.) I miss Velvet. (Beat.) Jeanel has a cat like that.

JOE

Uh...

RAY

Ah, forget it, I'm so stupid. I was even planning on asking her to prom. Oh fuck, I told Jeffrey I was gonna ask her -- They're gonna give me so much shit. Ugh, screw prom. I'm just gonna stay home and get drunk.

(JOE holds out a beer to RAY. RAY takes a big swallow, and almost chokes.)

RAY (CONT'D)

(Coughing) What the hell? That's awful.

JOE

Alcohol's not gonna fix anything. If you wanna go to prom with her, go to prom with her.

RAY

Have you ever seen me dancing with a girl? Even a clown would be like ten times better than me.

(JOE drags RAY to an empty space.)

JOE

Come here.

RAY

Why?

JOE

Dance with me.

RAY

What?!

JOE

Dance with me.

RAY

That's stupid.

JOE

You'd rather be a wallflower.

(RAY hesitates. JOE coaxes RAY into a slow dance, letting him lead.)

JOE (CONT'D)

Hands. Lower. More. Relax. Find a spot and leave them there. Right now it feels like you're trying to unhook my bra.

(RAY laughs, then steps on JOE's foot.)

JOE (CONT'D)

Ow!

RAY

I told you I can't do this.

JOE

Shhh. Relax, you're too stiff. Now swing. Slower. Where are your eyes looking? Close them. No, look at me. Okay now that's better. Don't think about dancing, think about enjoying the music with a girl you like. A lot.

(JOE hums a melody.)

JOE (CONT'D)

It's dark. Everyone else is dancing. No one's paying any attention to you. No need to feel nervous. At this moment, the world only belongs to the two of you...

(The dance slowly gets smooth. RAY closes his eyes. JOE rests his head on RAY's shoulder.)

JOE (CONT'D)

What if she does this?

(RAY does the same thing.)

JOE (CONT'D)

What if she raises her eyes, looks at you, smiles at you? What would you say?

RAY

You have beautiful eyes.

(Silence.)

The dance continues for a while, then the wind chimes ring, pulling them out from their moment. They break apart; both seem a little awkward.)

JOE

And then sometimes, her cellphone rings...

RAY

Thanks. That was... helpful.

JOE

You're always welcome, kid.

(The lights in the restaurant are turned on.)

LIN (OFF STAGE)

Joe?

RAY

Please don't tell Mom about Jeanel.

JOE

Who's Jeanel?

RAY

Coolest. Dad. Ever.

JOE

(Moved, but covering it) Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LIN (OFF)

Joe, you there?

(LIN enters, carrying a big box that blocks her view of Ray.)

LIN

Joe, why don't you come and help me? (Seeing the beer) Seriously? Perfect.

(LIN drops the box on the table. Some condoms slip out.)

JOE

(Coughing) Ray's here. We're having a little father-and-son talk. Well, in this case, stepfather-and-son.

LIN

(Shoving the condoms back into the box) Here we go again. How many times have I -- Just tell him, Ray, tell him how much we love him. The man is deaf.

JOE

No need. (Drinking) I love taking care of you two troublemakers.

LIN

Well, someone's either drunk or happy tonight.

JOE

Drunk it is. (Raising his bottle.) Here's to five years.

(JOE finishes the bottle and exits to the kitchen. LIN searches inside the box for something.)

RAY

Mom, you need some help?

LIN

No, just stay there. I need you for something.

(LIN sees the fortune RAY dropped on the table earlier, and reads it.)

LIN (CONT'D)

"Trust him. It's sincere." Sounds promising.

RAY

Mom, that's my fortune.

LIN

It's fine, we're family.

RAY

It doesn't work like that.

(LIN takes out a rainbow T-shirt.)

LIN

Here it is, size small. Come over here.

RAY

What's this?

LIN

Try it on.

RAY

Um, I don't think so.

LIN

Too small?

RAY

Too ugly.

LIN

What? It's so cute! Put it on, you're always bugging me for new clothes.

(Ray reluctantly takes off his shirt.)

RAY

Good clothes. Seriously, mom, I need some new shirts. You've got to stop giving me dad's old clothes. See, they don't even fit me.

LIN

It's not my fault you didn't grow like we thought you would. I thought you'd be bigger, like your father. When I stood next to him, I was here, to his shoulder. See, I come up to your nose. (Small beat. Taking RAY's shirt and hands him the t-shirt) Oh don't give me the sad eyes. Go drink some milk, you still have a chance. Your father was handsome, never out of fashion. These shirts look good on you.

(RAY starts to put on the rainbow Tee.)

LIN (CONT'D)

I swear if I squinted, I'd think it's him standing in front of me. He'd be sad if he knew you don't like his clothes.

RAY

I didn't say I don't like them.

LIN

Look at you! See, not bad at all!

RAY

Really?

(RAY goes to the mirror.)

LIN

It looks fabulous on you.

(JOE enters.)

JOE

What's with the ugly shirt?

RAY

See?

LIN

Don't listen to him. Turn around. Look.

JOE

What? It's blank.

LIN

I'm printing our name on the back, so it looks more official!

JOE

What official?

LIN

Our new uniforms.

JOE

You didn't plan to discuss that with me first?

LIN

I talked to you about this last night.

JOE

Last night?

LIN

Before bed.

JOE

I don't remember that.

LIN

Maybe you drank too much again.

JOE

And it never occurred to you to talk to me again today?

LIN

Well, sorry if I'm busy too.

(LIN shoves the cookies to make room for the box. JOE takes the box from her. He grabs a handful of condoms.)

JOE

Busy doing what? What are -- ? Ray, go wait for us in the car.

RAY

But...

JOE

Go -- turn on the radio as loud as you want. God I need another beer for this. You wonder why I drink?

(JOE exits to the kitchen.)

RAY

Mom, you really should've told us about this. He's pissed.

LIN

How was I supposed to know? He was just lying there with his eyes closed -- as usual.

RAY

Can I take this off?

LIN

No, keep it on, I like it. You're with me on this, right?

RAY

I just --

LIN

Please. I can't deal with both of you at the same time.

(She falls to the chair, with one hand supporting her forehead, looking tired.)

RAY

You want me to stay?

LIN

No, go get some air. (As RAY exits) Hey, don't take the car anywhere.

(RAY stops by the door.)

RAY

Mom, why do you have a box of rubbers?

LIN

Believe it or not, it's for you.

(RAY gives LIN a confused look.)

LIN (CONT'D)

Not FOR you! For your future, for the restaurant. I'll explain later.

(RAY goes to kiss LIN on the forehead.)

RAY

I love you, mom.

LIN

Okay, enough, just go.

(RAY exits into the dining room. The sound of the chimes is heard as he leaves the restaurant.)

LIN

I love you too.

(LIN gets herself some tea and picks a fortune cookie from the pile on the table. She eats it, and reads the fortune. She drops the fortune on the table. JOE enters with bare hands.)

JOE

I'm out of beer.

LIN

Did you check your stash behind the water chestnuts?

JOE

I hide them to keep them away from Ray. (Sighs) And I checked. No more.

LIN

You sure? You keep the cookies in so many different places, maybe you did the same thing with your beers.

JOE

I like things organized.

LIN

(Suggesting the cookies left on the table) How about these?

JOE

I haven't had a chance to work on them yet.

LIN

(Pouring the condoms out) Well, now you have something new to work on.

JOE

What are they doing on my table?

LIN

From now on, we don't serve fortune cookies. Instead, we give out condoms.

JOE

As dessert?

LIN

God only knows what those boys wanna put in their mouths.

JOE

Are you out of your mind?

LIN

Just because we've stopped having sex doesn't mean everyone else has.

JOE

(Throwing the magazine at her) This isn't enough for you? Business is better already!

LIN

This is only a start. I'm tired of just getting by. (Reading the magazine) Hey, he's good. We're moving up! One day we'll get take-out calls from Kahala! Wait... recommended specials, address, hours... Why's there no number? He forgot to put our number in here. But I gave him a card...

JOE

What?

LIN

Nothing.

JOE

You did what?

LIN

I said we should've given him a card!

JOE

Are you meeting with him behind my back?

LIN

What are you talking about? I just saw him once.

JOE

(Grabbing a handful of condoms) Well that explains this. There's no way this was your idea.

LIN

(Nervous) Why not? I read it somewhere, there's a place in Asia doing it.

JOE

Where?

LIN

Bangkok? Shanghai? I don't remember.

JOE

Where did you read it?

LIN

Some magazine.

JOE

You don't read magazines. You don't even read.

LIN
Someone told me.

JOE
Who?

LIN
People.

JOE
What people?

LIN
Normal people, who don't question their wives! What's the matter with you? Why do you even care where it came from as long as it's a fabulous idea?

JOE
Fabulous? Do you hear yourself? Don't try to fool me. I was his friend. I know how infectious he can be -- like herpes.

LIN
Okay, okay! Maybe I have met him a couple of times, but only because he knows how to bring this place back to life! Didn't you see how much we made today? Numbers don't lie!

JOE
So you lied to your husband to be with some guy so you can make money. They have a name for that, y'know.

LIN
Look, I didn't want to upset you. I know you don't like him -- and honestly I'm not surprised. He always makes such a scene, I dunno how you managed to stand it. (Seeing JOE frowning) But come on, he's not that bad. He's nice. He's friendly, funny. He's likable. I mean, you know, I don't like him, he's just -- Wait, you can't be jealous. You know it's not even possible, right? He's a homosexual. Even I feel like the man standing next to him.

JOE
You are not making it better.

LIN
But you do know, right?

JOE
It's kinda hard not to notice.

LIN

Then why not make some use of it? Support, sympathy, respect... they dig that kind of stuff. Why do you think he keeps coming back to you when you give him the cold shoulder? They're dying for attention from people like us! (Grabbing another rainbow shirt from the box) I say let's do it up, a theme thing, a pride restaurant. With the whole marriage thing, the timing's perfect! What do you say?

JOE

Can we discuss this tomorrow? I have a headache.

LIN

I know what "let's discuss this tomorrow" means. You don't have to like it. We are doing this. (Throwing the t-shirt at him) It's settled.

JOE

(Throwing the t-shirt on the ground) I've taken care of this fucking place, five years, twenty-four/seven, non-stop, and I'm in charge! I'm in charge and I said no! You understand? No one's getting into my place, not Frank, not anyone, one faggot in here is enough!

(Silence.)

LIN

Joe, are you...?

JOE

Shut up.

LIN

You are -- that explains everything.

JOE

You're crazy.

LIN

You're a homophobe!

JOE

(Confused) What?

LIN

That's why you cut Frank out of your life.

JOE

He told you that?

LIN

Just seems natural. Did he ever come on to you?

JOE

No, never. But he does make me uncomfortable. So we probably shouldn't --

LIN

Look, I don't get it either, but they're still people. You shouldn't call Frank names like that. When my parents brought us here, I didn't speak any English. In school, all the kids made fun of me -- even the Chinese ones. I used to go home and cry. My parents couldn't help. That's why you never heard me speak Chinese with Shan.

JOE

I loved the way you both spoke Chinese.

LIN

Frank? That guy in school? Just imagine. Why can't we be nice to him? Why can't we have dinner? You know this place is important to me, and you've worked so hard. Let's take this opportunity. You and Frank were really close before. What do you say?

(Silence. JOE thinks.)

JOE

How do you say "what's for dinner" in Chinese?

(LIN smiles, she leans forward and hugs him.)

LIN

I knew you'd come around. It's getting late. Let's go home.

JOE

You guys go. (Indicating the cookies) Lemme finish these.

LIN

Don't take too long.

(JOE nods. LIN kisses him on the cheek then exits. Sound of the wind chimes is heard. JOE cleans the table, he finds the fortune from the cookie that LIN opened earlier.)

JOE

(Reading) "Change is coming".

(He collapses to the chair. A moment later, he notices the white shirt Ray left on the table. He takes it, spreads it out, carries it with both hands. Slowly, he feels it with his skin, his face, his nose, his lips. Finally, he holds it in his arms, tightly.)

(LIGHTS FADE. End of ACT I.)