

Po Boy Tango

by

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Represented by:

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Cast of Characters

RICHIE Po (50's) - Chinese immigrant. Factory worker at a warehouse. World-class palette.

GLORIA B (40's) - African American nurse. An amateur gourmet.

PO MAMA (70's) - A Taiwanese television personality. A chef of the highest order. There's magic in her hands.

Settings

RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN - Merrick, New York. (Long Island)

PO MAMA'S KITCHEN - Kaoshiung, Taiwan.

A CHINESE MARKETPLACE - Flushing, New York. (Queens)

GLORIA B's KITCHEN - Roosevelt, Long Island. (Long Island)

A POND, by a hospital in Syracuse, New York. (Upstate)

Notes:

1 - "/" in the text indicates overlapping.

2- *The following is the dialogue that should be used for the DVD voice over in Act Two Scene Two.*

PO MAMA (V.O.)

Hello friends! It is so good to see you today again. Good friends are the flame that warms every kitchen. As I always say "Live well. Love much and eat often!". (APPLAUSE). It is so cold today, I thought it would be wonderful to make a delicious plate of stir-fried milk. Oh! I'm telling you it is the most wonderful dish for a cold day. But I can tell that many of you are thinking, "Po Mama! Are you cooking fusion style? Milk is Western food! I thought you only made traditional dishes!". Well Smarty-Pants, let me tell you, I learned to cook this dish from a ninety-seven year old grannie in a little shack in Hong Kong and she learned to cook the dish from her grandmother. The Chinese have cooked with ingredients from all over the world. This is a Chinese dish. Any dish can be a Chinese dish!

ACT ONE

SCENE I: RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN

At rise: Springtime. Early morning.

LIGHTS rise on RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN, a neat well equipped kitchen. The lights are turned off. RICHIE PO, a middle-aged Chinese man is asleep at the counter. A kitchen counter television/VCR blinks before him.

He wears dusty jeans, a flannel. He wears a back brace. There are wrist braces on his arms. There are bags of groceries at his feet.

Lightning. A huge clap of thunder.

There is insistent pounding at the door off-stage. Rapping on a pane of glass.

RICHIE stirs.

GLORIA B (O.S.)

HELLO! HELLO! MR. PO! RICHIE PO! WAKE UP!

Lightning! Another clap of thunder.

GLORIA B (O.S.) (cont'd)

(terrified)

OH LORD!

RICHIE startles awake. He looks around the darkened kitchen.

GLORIA B (O.S.) (cont'd)

MR. PO! It's Gloria!

He stands.

RICHIE

Gloria?

GLORIA B (O.S.)

Help! It's going to rain!

RICHIE rushes off stage and opens the door.

GLORIA B rushes in. She is a middle-aged Black woman.

She is dressed head to toe in Syracuse Orangemen paraphernalia. She carries a travelling salesman's suitcase and a plastic bag from the Syracuse book store. She rushes to the window and looks up. As she does, the deluge pours down.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Half a second and I'm in that! You see that?!

RICHIE

Big storm.

GLORIA B

Thank God you in the kitchen. I was ringing out front 'til the sky looked to split rain and you know how I get around storms. Thank God you in the kitchen. (Beat.) You always keep it so dark?

RICHIE turns on the kitchen lights. He looks a disheveled mess.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

I'm early.

RICHIE

No.

RICHIE takes his braces off. He runs his fingers through his hair and tucks his shirt in. He smiles sheepishly.

GLORIA B

Told you my bus gets in early.

RICHIE

Yes.

GLORIA B

You said, "I'm always up at that time. /Come on over."

RICHIE

/Right.

GLORIA B

You asleep in this kitchen?

RICHIE

I just come home from work.

GLORIA B

Still the night shift.

RICHIE

Yes. Watch a little TV. Fall asleep by accident.

GLORIA B

Can't tell you the number of times I fall asleep with a teacup in my hand.

RICHIE

Just by accident. Big storm.

GLORIA B

Yeah.

RICHIE

Gloria B.

GLORIA B

Richie Po.

RICHIE

Good to see you.

GLORIA B

Good to be seen.

RICHIE

Long time no see.

GLORIA B

Ten years.

She looks around.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

New kitchen.

RICHIE

We renovate. Not too long ago.

GLORIA B

Very nice.

RICHIE

Thank you. (Beat.) Uh ... you want something to eat?

GLORIA B

No, I'm-

RICHIE

Sit, sit. You come back from a long trip.

GLORIA B takes a seat at the counter.
RICHIE rushes to the refrigerator and retrieves a piece of Tupperware.

He sets plates and utensils before
GLORIA B. He dishes the food out of
the containers.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Chinese cold dishes. Appetizer.

GLORIA B
You make these yourself?

RICHIE
Yes. I'm cooking now. Try.

Pause. She tries some.

GLORIA B
That's alright.

RICHIE
Good.

RICHIE tries some out of the
Tupperware.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Hm. I think it taste a little bland.

GLORIA B
Nah.

RICHIE
No. No. Just a little bit more salt. It taste better.

RICHIE takes a big handful of salt and
tosses it in GLORIA B's bowl.

GLORIA B
Thank you.

RICHIE
Better. Oh-

He takes a spoon and stirs up the
contents of GLORIA B's bowl.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Have to mix it up just a little bit. Yes.

GLORIA B
Right.

He puts the spoon in his mouth.

RICHIE

Oh, now too much salt! I use some sugar, off-set.

He takes a handful of sugar and tosses it into GLORIA B's bowl.

RICHIE (cont'd)

I was thinking maybe I should use more fish sauce-

GLORIA B covers her bowl.

GLORIA B

Richie Po, you put one more thing in my bowl, I'm going to lose my mind!

RICHIE looks down at GLORIA B's bowl. It's a sloppy mess.

RICHIE

Adjust, adjust. With cooking, this always my problem. It never taste quite right. No. You don't eat this.

He dumps GLORIA B's food out.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Sorry.

GLORIA B

Nah, that's alright. I know those Chinese dishes is hard, but ... You hungry, really?

RICHIE

Me?

GLORIA B

Want me to make you something?

RICHIE

Of course!

GLORIA B

Okay, come on, take the rest of these away.

RICHIE obliges.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Now, wash your hands and sit down. I got something for you.

RICHIE obliges.

She opens up her suitcase and produces a propane camping stove, some small pans and ingredients for Po' Boy sandwiches. Her efficiency is a marvel to behold.

She hands RICHIE the Syracuse bag.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Those are gifts. No time to wrap them. Did I tell you Kelvin's got a scholarship up at Syracuse now?

RICHIE

Meilan saw his picture in Newsday.

She takes a small loaf of French breach and gouges out the middle. She spreads some pink mayonnaise in the indentation and puts some lettuce and tomato on top of it.

GLORIA B

He averaged two points off the bench last year. Yeah!

RICHIE takes a Syracuse sweatshirt out of the bag. It's pink and girly. About a size medium. She goes over to RICHIE.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Oh! That one's for my baby. I know you and Meilan think she's your child, but that's my baby. That's my Emma Sunshine. I sweated for half an hour about the size. Been ten years since I've seen the child. Ten years. And Merrick just one town over from Roosevelt. Some kind of world. How's my guess?

RICHIE

Perfect.

GLORIA B

You don't have me convinced.

RICHIE

She will like this very much.

GLORIA B

You got that same look you had when Emma tried to get out of doing her exercises. Try to make me think she did them already. I got your number, Softie Daddy.

RICHIE

She ... like to wear it a little big.

GLORIA B

A little big?! You know, skinny'll drive a person crazy, don't you?! Don't get me wrong. Everybody's crazy, but skinny people always the craziest. They fragile. Don't trust their insides to meet something from the outside. You got to get Emma out of that. Practically the same size she was ten years ago, and she was coming off chemo then too. Give it to Meilan, I guess.

RICHIE

No. This is perfect.

GLORIA B

I figured Emma would have grown'd. You know what?

She wipes her hands. She takes another sweatshirt out of the bag and exchanges with RICHIE.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

This is the one I got for Meilan. No frills. Always liked that. A woman named Beautiful Orchid with no more frills than a daisy. I'll exchange this other one when I go back next weekend.

She puts the pink sweatshirt in the bag and returns to her ingredients. She takes out a long-nosed lighter.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

No offense to your new kitchen, but we have not been introduced and I already knows this flame.

She lights the stove. She pours some oil in the pan and takes some pieces of duck out of an insulated bag and puts them in the pan.

RICHIE

I thought you were coming back from Syracuse.

GLORIA B

I go up every Friday.

RICHIE

All the way to Syracuse?!

GLORIA B

Ten hours each way. Coach says he's got to put on weight. And you know that son of mine was always nose up in the sky like he was Zagat's. So, I cook all his meals for the week, and all Mr. Fussy's got to do is heat it up.

RICHIE

Hm. Well, thank you for the presents.

GLORIA B

Here's yours. Give that a try.

She takes the pieces of duck and puts them in the sandwich. She puts the sandwich on a plate from her suitcase and presents it to RICHIE.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

I like the meat a little cold, but I wanted to give that crisp back to you. Go on. You don't have to be polite.

He smells it. It's divine.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Go on.

RICHIE takes a small dignified bite. He smiles. HEAVEN!

GLORIA B (cont'd)

That's what I thought.

She starts to clean-up with an efficiency that rivals her set up.

RICHIE

The bread's the best part.

GLORIA B

You watch your mouth around my ingredients! They all prima donas. Talk like that's going to turn my butter.

RICHIE

Sorry.

GLORIA B

Bread's pretty good though, isn't it? Bread's the hardest part. You know bread's a living thing, don't you? I got a ball of dough in my refrigerator and you feed it and you feed it and it grows like a monster, then you cut off a finger when you want a loaf. Just like God. Don't feed it and it dies.

RICHIE

Sauce is also good.

GLORIA B

I knew you would like that. You a barbecue man, 'course you'll like it. This time I went up, Kelvin took me to a place called Dinosaur Barbecue. Whole joint knew who he was.

RICHIE

He's a big star now.

GLORIA B

Don't go on. Mr. Big Head. They don't got the meat quite right. You got to go to Indiana before you start finding places that get the meat to the right texture, but they sauce is pretty good. What I did was I mixed the tiniest bit of sauce in with the mayonnaise. You see that? I'm only using organic eggs these days. It makes a difference. It does.

RICHIE

Duck is excellent.

GLORIA B

I used that trick your momma showed us on TV with the bicycle pump. The grease goes right out. It's the best thing. You tell me whenever you want fresh duck. I got a client now in Riverhead, his momma's got colon cancer, awful business, but he can bring fresh duck to me whenever I want it.

RICHIE

Duck is my favorite.

GLORIA B

What kind of cook forgets somebody's favorite?! Can you tell I mixed the oils?

RICHIE takes a dollop of mayonnaise and tastes it.

RICHIE

One part Cannola, one part vegetable and ... two part grape seed.

GLORIA B

Freak of nature! Always said you got a tongue like a snake tastes air. I used to use some truffle oil, but with barbecue sauce, that's a pile-up on the interstate.

RICHIE

It's perfect. I always said you were an artist.

GLORIA B

I don't know about that, Richie.

RICHIE

You are.

GLORIA B

You know what they say? They say that cooking is an art and baking is a science. You ever hear of that? Yeah.

(more)

GLORIA B (cont'd)

I have a friend, Darlene, white lady down in Chattanooga, makes the world's best deep dish pecan pie, got the medal to prove it. I ask her, "You a artist or you a scientist?" "I don't know," she says. "What does an artist do and what does a scientist do?" And I think and I say, "Well, a scientist wants to know how the world works, and an artist wants to know if the world works." "Oh, then I'm a scientist," she says. "How do you know?" says me. She cuts me a piece of her pie, caramel pecans on top, molasses so sweet it's purple and she says, "I know the world works." Now who's going to argue with that? Not somebody who wants pie, and that somebody was me-body.

She packs everything up.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Maybe for a great chef like your mother it's an art. For Miss Gloria, a science is good enough. So you like your barbecue.

RICHIE

Very much.

GLORIA B

I know it's not breakfast food, but you know I never put much stock in foods for meals. Try to tell me hash browns is any different than french fries.

RICHIE

It's perfect.

Beat.

GLORIA B

So, what's going on?

RICHIE

I'm sorry?

GLORIA B

House echoes like an empty drum. Where is everyone?

RICHIE

Meilan and Emma go to Taiwan. For my mother's funeral.

GLORIA B

That's right, Richie. I heard that. Thought to call.

RICHIE

Gone two weeks already. Much to take care of.

GLORIA B

Why're you here? You got to be with them.

RICHIE
I don't like plane.

 GLORIA B
Still, it's your Ma-

 RICHIE
I have a big project. I want to show you something.

 RICHIE picks up an ornate wooden box.
He opens it. It is filled with little scraps of paper with Chinese letters written on them. RICHIE takes these papers and sets them out carefully before GLORIA B. Some of the papers are napkins, some are pieces of parchment, there is even a piece of wood that has writing on it.

 GLORIA B
What is it?

 RICHIE
This is my mother's Great Banquet.

 GLORIA B
The *special* banquet!

 RICHIE
Yes.

 GLORIA B
The one Bill Clinton travelled to Taiwan an extra time a year to eat.

 RICHIE
Best diplomat Taiwan has ever had.

 GLORIA B
There's supposed to be no recipe to that banquet. No one is supposed to have a recipe.

 RICHIE
After she die, they send these to me. These are her notes. She never cook with recipe, but she write down what she is thinking.

 GLORIA B
You're holding a box of magic. You got- (Beat.) Okay. Why you got me over here, Mr. Po. We got ten year's drought and the bridge don't cross no water. What's going on?

 RICHIE
Do you think you can make these dishes?

He holds some of the recipes out to
GLORIA B. She takes one.

She examines the recipe closely.

GLORIA B

I can't even read what this says.

RICHIE

I will translate. I will fill in the missing parts from my
memory. From the taste in my mouth.

GLORIA B

I don't even know any of the techniques.

RICHIE takes videos out of the box.

RICHIE

My mother make these tape. Tape herself making banquet.
(Beat.) For me to learn. After she die, they send them to
me. No one else have copy. You can watch. She speaking
Chinese, but you can watch for technique.

GLORIA B

Richie, I-

RICHIE

18-89 Woodfield Road. Next to the train station.

RICHIE picks up a photograph and shows
it to GLORIA B.

GLORIA B

Golden Gardens?

RICHIE

I bought it.

Pause. GLORIA B laughs.

GLORIA B

Come on. Ain't nobody gonna want stir fry that come to them
from a black woman. Spoils the whole effect. Person going
to a Chinese restaurant's going to want food made by people
who are smart and skinny, not fat and black. Before you know
it, all you'll be serving is chicken wings and Dr. Pepper,
and I know you don't want that.

RICHIE

No stir fry.

RICHIE takes a piece of paper out of
the bottom of the box.

It is a menu that's been created in
crayon and markers. The name of the
restaurant is Emma Sunshine's.

He puts on his reading glasses.

RICHIE (cont'd)
(reading from the menu)
"Cheese Straws, Fried Chicken ..."

GLORIA B puts her hand to her mouth.

RICHIE (cont'd)
"... Gumbo, Hot Brown, Cheese Grits, Hoppin' John, Red Beans
and Rice, Collared Greens, Spoonbread, Guava Jelly, Jam
Cake." All sounds very good to me. All these little "E's"
/mean ...

GLORIA B
/... are the one's that Emma picked.

RICHIE looks carefully.

RICHIE
The only thing you pick is Spoonbread.

He hands the menu to GLORIA B.

GLORIA B
's the one thing I can't live without. Lord. Me and Emma's
dream restaurant. I can't believe you kept this.

RICHIE
Emma is getting married.

GLORIA B
Married?

RICHIE
Boy she meet at Stony Brook. Doctor. Nice boy. She and
Meilan take one last trip together and when they come back
... in one month Emma will be the daughter in someone else's
house. The Great Banquet is her wedding present. The taste
is her dowry. My mother make tape for me, hope I can learn.
I don't go to Taiwan, instead learn. But, you know I cannot
cook. Even if I could, my hands are arthritis. Next to my
mother, you are the best chef I know. If you can make this
banquet for me. If you can recreate the taste in my mouth, I
will go partner with you for Emma Sunshine. You always say
you want your own restaurant. What do you say?

GLORIA B

I say you got a lot of nerve, Richie Po. I haven't heard from you once in ten years. Not once! This the first thing you have to say to me.

RICHIE

This taste is best gift I have. Please, Gloria.

GLORIA B

Time my bus coming. Used to be I prayed to God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. Now my soul's aligned to the MetroBus.

RICHIE

Gloria-

GLORIA B

No, Richie.

RICHIE

Listen-

GLORIA B

I said, "No."

RICHIE

You won't help me.

GLORIA B

No.

RICHIE

Okay. (Beat.) It's okay.

GLORIA B

I'm sorry.

RICHIE

Okay.

Beat. RICHIE starts to clean up. He puts all the cassettes in a box.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Thank you for sandwich.

GLORIA B

No problem.

He sits, the box in his lap, dejected. GLORIA holds out the menu.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Hey-

No. No. You keep. RICHIE

For real? GLORIA B

You keep. It's your restaurant. RICHIE

Thank you. GLORIA B

Okay. RICHIE

GLORIA B turns to leave. She looks down at the menu. It stops her in her tracks.

Now what does a person like you mean when he says, "Parnters?" GLORIA B

We do together. RICHIE

Beat.

See, to me, it means fifty-fifty. GLORIA B

Fifty-fifty. RICHIE

And I make the menu for my restaurant and you're not up in my grill. GLORIA B

You're the artist. RICHIE

Going to need a contract. GLORIA B

I call my lawyer (Beat.) or we use yours. RICHIE

Nah. Your lawyer fine. GLORIA B

Contract say, you recreate my mother's Great Banquet and I will partner with you for Emma Sunshine's. Fifty-fifty. RICHIE

GLORIA B

Yeah. Sounds right.

RICHIE

Good.

GLORIA B

Good. See you tomorrow. What I got to bring?

RICHIE

Just umbrella. It's supposed to rain.

She exits.

RICHIE sits before the television. He turns it on. He REWINDS. He presses PLAY.

End of scene.

Seamless transition into:

SCENE II: PO MAMA'S KITCHEN

LIGHT UP on PO MAMA an elfish and lithe Chinese woman. She is dressed beautifully and she appears ageless, almost a spirit. Her hair is stark white.

LIGHTS FADEOUT on RICHIE.

PO MAMA

April Eighth. Seven a.m. Kaoshiung, Taiwan. Video number fifty-seven. A lesson for my son.

She nods.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Good morning, my son. Time for a new lesson. Before we begin, I want you to ask yourself, "How many hours did I sleep last night?" If it is not at least eight, you stop this tape immediately and close your eyes. Food is a gift from the gods. You have the honor of refining it. You must be responsible. You must be alert. And, I hope that you took my advice and ate something before you went to bed last night. Food before you fall asleep will make you dream and those dreams are what you must bring to your dish. Last night, I recommended a slice of orange peel under your tongue. Sweet dreams. Tonight you try a spoonful of salt. Yes. Do not wash it down with water. Tonight you sleep with salt in your mouth. So, good morning, My Son, and welcome to Po Mama's Kitchen! This time we are really in Po Kitchen. I made lessons one to fifty-six from the studio.

(more)

PO MAMA (cont'd)

But, now that I am three quarters of a century old, I am beginning to see the wisdom of all the people who told me that my apartment is at the top of too many steps. "Taiwan has too many earthquakes!" I said, "No earthquake can topple Po Mama!" and I raced them up to the roof and looked at my view of the Pacific, breathing salt air while they were still panting on the second floor. But, sooner or later, the earthquake topples everyone. I came home from the hospital last night and my nurse had to carry me all the way to my bed.

She holds up a pinkie.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Skinny little thing from the Philippines. I say, "You're just a little thing!" She says, "I'm bigger than you." And oh, she was.

PO MAMA pats her cheeks.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Po Mama lost so much weight in the hospital. Doctors! From now on, I am going to drink a glass of milk every morning and do exercises, like this:

She marches in place for a few moments and stops just before she is winded.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

I will be plump again in no time! It's a nice kitchen. You would like it. Look, you can see the ocean from this window. See? I have had this pepper plant since you and I were living in Taipei. Yes! Do you remember it? See how they grew? When the peppers fall, I give them to the little girls and they braid them into crowns. I tell them not to touch their eyes. Oh! I tell you now, just in case you need to know someday.

She picks up a garbage can and lifts out the liner.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

This is where I keep all my jewelry. Thieves never look in your garbage! Of course you have to worry about someone throwing it away by accident, but that's why I've never had servants anyway. Now my nurse comes everyday, but I don't know how much she wants to use the garbage. If I change my spot, I will tell you. (Beat.) It is a nice kitchen. Maybe someday you will see it. Someday you will bring your family. Ha-ha. You know, when I was in the hospital, they wouldn't let me eat anything that had any taste and they took my blood every day. "For tests," they say. They took my blood out and they put the blood of a stranger back in. "To make me stronger," they say. Now that is just ridiculous.

(more)

PO MAMA (cont'd)

How do they know what they are putting back inside of me? They don't know what that person eats. How will they know it will make me strong? You want to make a person strong? You feed them the right things! If that is no use, The Sky is looking elsewhere and it's time to close one's eyes. Feeding a person blood with tubes or salt water with tubes! Ah! A person eats with his mouth, his tongue, his nose, his eyes! Your ear hears everything you chew! You feed from your arm and all you taste is the wound. Doctors! What do they know about the basics of things? Today, I show you real medicine. Today, My Son, I teach you ... broth!

LIGHTS fade out.

End of Scene.

SCENE III: A CHINESE MARKET ON MAIN STREET

A flash of lightning and a clap of thunder.

Rain begins to fall.

Umbrellas descend from the skies and hover in space.

The raindrops thrum on the umbrellas.

The sound of a bustling New York City street. The sound of cars, splashing puddles, people. Lots, and lots of people.

As the umbrellas descend, lights FADE UP on GLORIA B and RICHIE. They are shopping at a CHINESE MARKET. It is crowded and noisy and rainy. They each hold a plastic shopping basket in their hand filled with beautiful fruits, vegetables, meats and other ingredients.

GLORIA B

How is it they take a look at every beautiful piece of fruit or vegetable and send it right over to Chinatown. I mean, what about the rest of us?

RICHIE

You would not appreciate it.

GLORIA B

Ha!

RICHIE

A Taiwanese boy goes to sleep at night dreaming about the mango. Everybody else dreams of cake. There's no comparison.

GLORIA B

All your daughter ever wanted to eat was my chocolate cake.

RICHIE

That doesn't count.

GLORIA B

How come?

RICHIE

She had cancer.

GLORIA laughs.

GLORIA B

You a mess! You know what this reminds me of? I had a teacher once in grammar school. Miss Tylda. Second grade. And she read us a story about Alladin. And she said that when Alladin was in the cave of treasures he saw jewels that looked so much like fruit he wanted to eat them. Now I'm seeing fruit that look so much like jewels I don't want to eat them. How do you like that?

A trucks drives over a grate. GLORIA B startles.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

What was that?!

RICHIE

I don't know.

GLORIA B

Was that thunder?

RICHIE

I don't think so.

GLORIA B

I don't know how you got me out in the rain like this.

He picks up some beautiful jewel-like fruit.

RICHIE

Treasure.

RICHIE picks up a handful of tiny green and peppers.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Beautiful, no? These are the hottest peppers. They are ...
"Peppers Facing Sky." They grow pointed up. Pointing up
means hot. This is what you feed a parrot if you want it to
speak.

Another truck.

GLORIA B

Lord?!

RICHIE

Just a truck. See? Nuzzolese Ice. Why so nervous?

GLORIA B

You're going to think I'm crazy.

RICHIE

No.

GLORIA B

No you are.

RICHIE

Why?

GLORIA B

Oh, Hell. Okay. My mother used to tell me people on her
side of the family were magnets for lightning. Four men died
from lightning.

RICHIE

Four.

GLORIA B

See, you think I'm crazy.

RICHIE

No.

GLORIA B

Her father and all her brothers, all on the same night.
That's why I never let Kelvin play outside in the rain. The
men in my family have special salts in their blood.

She shakes her head.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Oh, just talk for tender ears, I guess. But, sometimes an
idea takes hold in your mind. Storms are danger.

GLORIA B reaches for a piece of dragon
fruit.

RICHIE

No, not that kind. That's not in season anymore.

GLORIA B

Oh, okay.

RICHIE

Even when it is in season, it is not sweet. It just looks sweet.

GLORIA B

Hell, I'm going to try some anyway.

RICHIE shrugs. She puts it in the basket.

They browse some more.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

You been promising to bring me here since the first day I met you.

RICHIE

Really?

GLORIA B

I said I loved to eat Chinese food and you said we was going to come here for soup dumplings.

RICHIE

We can go for soup dumplings today. (fiercely, to an imaginary vendor) *Yi da! Laoban, yi da! Shangci wo hai daile yige si de hue jia!* (back to GLORIA B) You have to watch these guys. They try to give you dead crab, and they don't taste the same after they are dead, even for a few seconds.

RICHIE takes a paper bag full of crab and puts it in GLORIA B's basket.

GLORIA B

What you say we are going to do with these crabs?

RICHIE

(distracted by the produce)

Drown them in wine. Did you watch video?

GLORIA B

No, I have not made it to "Give Crab Ecstasy In Death" yet.

RICHIE

Yes. It passes through their gills and infuse every bit of meat.

GLORIA B

And it tastes good.

RICHIE

Of course!

GLORIA B

Guess that's the way to go if you got to go.

RICHIE

Yeah.

GLORIA B

Kelvin was very excited when he heard we was meeting up again. He said, "Mr. Richie used to teach me to skip stones."

RICHIE

Mm-hm.

GLORIA B

Told me when Emma was having her bad days and I had to have him dropped off at your house, you would take him to skip stones 'cause he was scared of all that sickness. I never knew that.

RICHIE

He had a very strong arm for such a young boy. His shoulders were especially strong. Hm.

He holds an imaginary shoulder in his hand. It's the size of a grapefruit.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Do you think he can be professional?

GLORIA B

All the rest of them are giants.

RICHIE

He's pretty big too.

GLORIA B

Not the same way. (Beat.) Emma ever ask for me?

RICHIE picks up a large ginger and puts it in GLORIA B's basket.

RICHIE

She like your Christmas card. I saw Kelvin on the TV last month. March Madness.

GLORIA B

Oh yeah, they did pretty good this year, didn't they?

RICHIE

Elite Eight.

GLORIA B

That's right. Richie, let me ask-

RICHIE

How did he break his nose?

GLORIA B

Huh?

RICHIE

Commentator said he had to wear a mask because he broke his nose.

GLORIA B

Oh. Oh, him and his damn fool best friend messing around as usual. I don't know. Kelvin's got this friend and they been giving each other bloody noses since the third grade. Followed Kelvin right up to Syracuse. Doesn't go to school. Sits in their living room on the Xbox. I told Kelvin if he's not careful, that Kwame'll follow him right into his wedding bed! (Beat.) Kelvin's with a girl right now. She's studying Pharmacy down in Binghamton.

RICHIE

Pharmacist good job.

GLORIA B

Yeah. Nice girl.

RICHIE

You tell Kelvin to invite her to the wedding.

GLORIA B

Sure. He'd like that. Anyway, he broke his nose 'cause they was riding an ATV!

RICHIE

ATV?!

GLORIA B

I know! In the middle of the damn street! I told him he was a fool, messing with his scholarship like that. God knows his Momma's got no Syracuse money under the mattress!

RICHIE

Maybe after Emma Sunshine's opens.

GLORIA B

Maybe after I find a diamond in my cereal. His coach said he was a fool too. Kwame Octavian Washington. Seven years old this boy coming over my house acting the thug.

(more)

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Whole family of illiterates. Kwame Octavian Washington. If I couldn't read no write, I'd name my kids One, Two and Three.

Something catches GLORIA B's eye.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

(pointing)

Oo! What is that!

RICHIE

Soft-shelled turtle.

GLORIA B

Good Lord, why does anyone need to go to the pet store when all they need to do is come on to Main Street? What was that fish you showed me? Mr. Buffalo ... Buffalo?

RICHIE

Buffalohead.

GLORIA B

Yeah, that thing was bigger than most dogs I know, and I've never seen one on a menu.

RICHIE

White people think carps are dirty.

GLORIA B

Poor giants in a little bit of water.

RICHIE

Very strange, because Chinese people think carp is one of the best fish. The carp is supposed to be what a dragon is before he jumps to heaven.

GLORIA B

Don't even get me started on what white people will or won't eat. I knew all these ladies when I worked at the hospice, lift they nose at this, lift they nose at that. Some of them could be dropped on a desert island with a mountain of crawdads and they would starve to death, but buy them a lobster dinner and you they daddy. How do you make these?

RICHIE

Mostly chopped up and stir fried with vegetables. Lots of ginger.

He shivers.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Lots of it.

GLORIA B

I think I heard these make good soup. When I was growing up, my uncle used to bring home these giant alligator snapping turtles. Not little regular snappers, big alligator snappers. He would pick them up next to the railroad from Rednecks who were selling raccoons. He never bought a raccoon, but he'd bring home a turtle if it had a few days life left. When he got home, he'd put it, hissing and screaming in a garbage can so it could get rid of all its filth and after a couple of days he and my daddy would tip the can over and my daddy would cut the neck off with giant scissors. Then they would hang the turtle from a tree and let the blood run. After a while, Momma'd take a skinny sharp knife and take the turtle out of the shell. And that is a naked sight, I swear. (Beat.) "Gloria B, scrape that fat!" And I took all that yellow flab off the thing. I guess we used it for something. Frying? I don't know. Seems like we saved everything back then. I still remember, my daddy using an turtle shell to catch the drip when he changed his motor oil.

RICHIE

Was it good?

GLORIA B

The soup?

RICHIE

Mm.

GLORIA B

Turtle soup tastes like spice and butter.

RICHIE

Sounds good.

GLORIA B

You want to try to make some tomorrow?

RICHIE

It's not on the banquet menu. Maybe we can serve it at Emma Sunshine's.

GLORIA B

You'd better call it clam chowder if you want to sell it.

RICHIE

Strange looking clam.

GLORIA B

Godzilla clam chowder!

RICHIE

Right. (Beat.) I liked your joke before.

Joke?
GLORIA B

One, Two, Three.
RICHIE

Oh, ha-ha.
GLORIA B

RICHIE
I used to complain because my name is so complicated to write in Chinese. I used to say that I lost a minute to everyone else during school examinations.

GLORIA B
I bet you liked school, didn't you?

RICHIE
Very much. I came to America to go to school.

GLORIA B
What happened?

RICHIE
Baby. Night shift. Cancer. Avalanche. Disaster.

GLORIA B
Sand in the bread.

RICHIE
In the bread, in the soup. Sand. You ever go back to school? You say you want to finish degree for nursing.

GLORIA B
You know that school was never for me. I got enough letters following my name.

RICHIE
School not for everyone.

GLORIA B
Nah. And I don't know. My line, chasing enough death. Don't need no schooling to bring me closer to it. You work with cancer and ghosts is your friends. Time Gloria B stopped setting with ghosts. Emma Sunshine's going to take me out of it.

RICHIE
That's good. What time is it?

GLORIA B
Almost four.

RICHIE

So late. I have to sleep before I go to work. Soup dumplings next time.

GLORIA B

Aw, you ain't reliable.

RICHIE

Really. Next time.

GLORIA B

'salright.

RICHIE

Okay, I have to get a chicken, and then I go pay.

GLORIA B

Wait. Your name. What's it look like? All long and complicated.

RICHIE puts down his basket and writes with his finger in the palm of GLORIA B's hand.

RICHIE

Hm. Chinese people would say you have lucky hand. There is meat on your fingertips.

He takes her basket and moves to exit.

GLORIA B

What's your name mean?

RICHIE

One Who Can Communicate With Spirits. I go pay.

He exits.

She looks at her hand, rubs the tips of her fingers against her palm.

GLORIA B

(Calling after him)

What does it sound like?!

A truck rolls over a grate.

LIGHTS FADEOUT.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV: PO MAMA'S KITCHEN

PO MAMA is just finishing up on plucking a whole chicken. She is pulling out the tiny hairs with a pair of pliers. There are black feathers all around. The chicken's skin is purple/black.

She holds it up.

PO MAMA

Look at that. When is the last time you really looked at a chicken? They are really beautiful creatures. Especially the black ones like this one. I know it's mostly white ones in America. White ones are all meat and muscles but they are locked in cages. You eat a black chicken, you still get a chance to taste some sunshine. Po Mama only cooks with black chickens.

She pulls the last bit of feather out of the bird.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Okay. That's right. Mm. And today, we are going to cook this whole chicken into stock. A whole chicken.

She begins to butcher the bird.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Can you think of anything more decadent? You know, Po Mama has never made stock with a whole chicken before. Really. So many famous chefs tell me that this is the best way to make stocks but still I'm always resistant for myself. Such a waste, I think, to make stock from flesh. Chinese stock is not like Western stock. It should be clear, almost like water. Chinese stock is not made from flesh. It is made from bone. The essence of the bird leached into the water. You want to eat a chicken? Eat a chicken! You want to taste a spirit, you drink broth. Broth should be available to anyone. The poorest of the poor. You shouldn't need a whole chicken to taste broth.

She takes a breather.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

But, you live in America so long. I think, maybe your taste have changed. Maybe this is what you want now. So, today, we'll try with a whole bird. *You see how I'm doing this? Nothing fancy, just cut it at the joints.*

She resumes her butchering.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Do you remember the last time you ate a whole chicken? Maybe you don't remember. Maybe you were too little. But, I remember. Your Baba died and we were first starting our poultry stand in the night market. And we were so poor at the time we had to eat everything. So, sometimes we would have young hens who were not quite good mothers yet, and a cat would come by the coop at night and the hens would crack their own eggs before the chicks could hatch and I would peel the chicks out of their shells and deep fry them. Are you starting to remember now? We just fried them and ate them whole. Puffy blue eyes, wet feathers and everything. Then we crushed up the shells and fed it back to the chickens. Mm. We used everything. I'm telling you, the poor are the only ones who do things properly. *High heat now.*

She puts a large stock pot on the stove and turns on the heat.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Do you remember how we got our first eggs? Yes, you and I had to steal eggs from farm chickens who escaped to the jungle, do you remember? You learned to crow like a rooster and when you crowed in the jungle, the wild roosters crowed back and we would follow that crowing all the way to their nests. Then you would distract the mother hens and I would steal the eggs. Little tiny eggs, remember? Not like the ostrich eggs you see in the supermarket today. Hideous-huh! These eggs were beautiful. Mm. And those wild chickens were beautiful, no? What is it that happens to animals who return to the wild. I remember, goldfish bought from the market and returned to the stream to improve your karma? They had long, flowing fins when the fishermen caught them in their nets. After a few generations, pigs who returned to the jungle would have legs that were so long, they had to kneel to root for food. Those wild roosters had the most beautiful green feathers and the brightest red combs. Our chickens never looked like that. *Okay. Once the water boils, in you go.*

She puts the pieces of chicken in the stock pot.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Ah-hah! I remember when I gave you your first goose. Do you remember? Yes, the Kuomintang had come from China, not too long ago, and those invaders were handing out a thousand new rules, insisting that all the children wear shoes in the classroom. Their own riff-raff soldiers were in grass sandals, but our children had to wear shoes in the classroom! Thank you Ch'iang Kai Shek! Do you remember? So, I used all our savings to buy you a pair of shoes, one size too big, and I said, "These have to last. Put them on when you get inside and take them off when you get out!"

She laughs.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

Oh, thinking back, I was so young and stupid. But, I knew you would grow out of those shoes, so we went to the market and I traded chicken feathers for a handful of baby geese. I said, "These little geese are your shoe money. You are in charge of them. By the time they are ready for market, you will have grown out of your shoes."

She checks the pot.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

That's good. So now we want to boil all the blood out of the flesh. High heat. Yes. And you went everywhere with those geese. You played with them. Sang songs to them. You learned to honk out of your nose like a goose. You snuck them into our neighbor's yard so they could mate with the other geese, and that was good, and before we knew it, you had a whole flock of baby geese following you around. But, when you started to feed them from your own rice bowl, I said, "Stop that! That's dirty." But, really, I didn't want you to stop because they were dirty. I wanted you to stop because you had soft eyes for a boy and I didn't want you to love things that could never really be yours.

She stirs the pot a bit.

PO MAMA (cont'd)

A little agitation. Just a little. It's different with all the meat in here, isn't it? Usually, I'm knocking bones around. But, mm, I can already tell it smells richer. So, what happens? What always happens. Chinese New Year comes, the price of goose flesh is so high, we have to sell them. Baby geese and all. So I say to you, "I sold your geese to Mr. Zhou on Confucious Street. Quick, take them and come home for dinner." And you were an obedient boy, so no back-talk, everything is okay, no problem-no problem. You go. But, I know you love those geese, so I followed you to make sure you sold them to Mr. Zhou. You do as you are told, but you don't come home for dinner. Instead you climb a tree and you sit up there and you cry. I go to you. I say, "Come down. Time for dinner. I made all your favorites," and I see a gosling in your hand. It's neck is broken. You tell me Mr. Zhou would not give you money for it because you pet it so much on the way to his shop, you broke its neck. Aiyah. That is when I knew to worry for you. You are a person who pets things until you break them. Okay. Let's get rid of all this blood and grease now.

She puts a strainer over her sink. With great effort, she pours the steaming liquid over the strainer catching the chicken meat and bones.

She is winded and takes a moment to compose herself.

LIGHTS FADEOUT.

PO MAMA exits. She leaves her stockpot on the range.

End of Scene.

SCENE V: THE RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN

GLORIA B enters RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN and puts on the range, a set of steaming pots and sizzling woks. She chops vegetables furiously on a chopping block with a formidable looking knife. She is frustrated and feeling out of her depth.

A pot begins to boil over.

GLORIA B

Shit!

RICHIE enters the kitchen.

RICHIE

Uh-oh-uh-oh-uh-oh ...

RICHIE rushes over to the stove and turns the heat down.

RICHIE (cont'd)

You have to be careful.

GLORIA B

Richie, I've got my hands very full here!

RICHIE

Okay, just be more careful. The heat should be turned very low.

RICHIE looks around for something.

GLORIA B

What you looking for?

RICHIE

My checkbook. Ah, there.

RICHIE picks up his checkbook and makes to exit.

GLORIA B

Richie Po, you cannot run off and leave me all by myself in this kitchen!

RICHIE

I have to pay. They are starting renovation for Emma Sunshine's tomorrow. He is right outside in his truck. I pay and come right back.

GLORIA B

Lord!

RICHIE

I'll be right back.

RICHIE exits.

Something flops loudly in the sink and startles her.

Beat.

GLORIA B

OH LORD! STILL ALIVE!!!

GLORIA inches over to the sink. A flounder is flopping around. She's horrified.

She cuts the fish's throat. She walks away. It keeps jumping. She finishes it off.

GLORIA B wipes her brow and takes a deep breath.

RICHIE re-enters.

RICHIE

Ai-yah!

RICHIE rushes over to the pot and begins to skim the blood off the top of it with a spoon.

RICHIE (cont'd)

If you're not careful, the blood will break down and return to the broth. Then your stock will be cloudy. You can't do anything with cloudy broth.

RICHIE tastes the broth.

GLORIA B

Don't start with me.

RICHIE

There is nothing more important in Chinese cooking than the broth. The broth is the foundation for everything. It should be your most important task.

GLORIA B

You tell that to Mr. Flounder whose jumping out the sink.

RICHIE looks in the sink.

RICHIE

You killed it!

GLORIA B

It was flopping all over the place, thunk! thunk! thunk! Scaring me half to death, and here I am, holding a guillotine ready to chop off my hands.

RICHIE

It's freshest if you kill it right before you cook it!

GLORIA B

How much fresher do you want it?!

RICHIE

It's heart should be beating when it goes in the pan.

GLORIA B

(looking up at the ceiling,
deadpan)

Savior, I'm going to hurt this man.

RICHIE

I woke up early to go to Captree Pier to get the freshest.

GLORIA B

This is a kitchen! It's not a zoo! I was pinched by your crabs six times to day! Six! This one broke the skin. Angry little bastards. God, I haven't killed so many things in a day in my whole damn life! Not like we're living in the back water panhandle where we stringing up turtles. If you had your way, Stop 'n Shop would be Bow 'n Arrow.

RICHIE

It's for quality. Your quality is slipping.

GLORIA B

Quality slipping?! Quality?! I don't even know what any of this stuff is supposed to taste like and you complaining that it don't taste right. That's some nerve. Especially when I can't hardly follow your translation.

She picks up a piece of paper and reads aloud.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

"Three eights of a silver halfspoon of cornstarch." I don't even know if that's English. Three eights of a silver halfspoon. What the hell are you trying to do to me?

RICHIE

It's based on what's in this kitchen.

GLORIA B

No one on the planet but you is going to know what any of this means. Show me three eights of a silver halfspoon.

RICHIE searches around picks up the right silver spoon and indicates, with his thumb, the right amount.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

That's a pinch. Just say, "A pinch."

RICHIE

I want it exact.

GLORIA B

It's exactly a pinch.

RICHIE

I will taste it. I will know. You say yourself, it's a science.

GLORIA B

Even science got to wiggle! What if you made a spill, got a little extra in there. You going to throw the whole thing out?

RICHIE

Yes.

GLORIA B

How you plan on running a restaurant like that?

RICHIE

For my daughter's banquet it should be exact.

GLORIA B

It's never going to be exact. Fire's a different creature every single moment.

RICHIE

Please, just do it like I ask it. You are supposed to be matching the taste in my mouth.

GLORIA B

And I'm doing my best. But, I can't read your mind, so I can't read your recipe which means you can't be running off leaving me with angry animals with claws.

RICHIE picks up a sliver of ginger.

RICHIE

When you make Key Lime Pie, your zest is paper thin. Ginger is supposed to be like needles.

GLORIA B

Well, maybe they'd be like needles if I weren't trying to slice them up with a flapjack skillet!

RICHIE

Flapjack skillet?

GLORIA B

This thing is dull, and that's why your ginger looks to' up from the flo' up!

Beat.

RICHIE

(confused)

To' /up-?

GLORIA B

It's dull!

RICHIE

Let me see that.

RICHIE takes the knife. He touches the blade. It is, indeed dull.

RICHIE (cont'd)

Hm.

GLORIA B

"Hm," And you don't have a sharpening steel or I can't find it and you're running off to pay the workers.

RICHIE goes to a drawer and takes out a sharpening stone.

RICHIE

Usually I never let the knives get dull, but, we have been very busy.

GLORIA B

And you know a dull knife's the dangerous knife.

RICHIE
(conciliatory)
Okay, I'm sorry. Here, I'll fix your knife.

GLORIA B
I'd do it myself if I had a steel.

RICHIE
We use a stone for these knives. Here, I'll show you. This is the job I used to do for my mother. She said I was good at patience work.

He sits down at the table with a bowl of water, a towel a dark Japanese water stone and the knife. He soaks the stone in the bowl and sets it on the towel. He dips the knife in the bowl and begins to hone the blade.

RICHIE (cont'd)
You see? Very sharp. Come you try.

RICHIE holds out one of the knives. Begrudgingly GLORIA B takes it. She begins to hone. She's a natural.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Okay. Don't forget the water. Don't forget to whet the stone.

GLORIA B
Right.

RICHIE
Yes. Yes. Easy. Gently. Coax the sharpness out of the blade. This is better than steel. This is more gentle.

RICHIE takes out another stone. The two start to sharpen all the knives.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Today, I call the dealer, ask about get you a car.

GLORIA B
Really?

RICHIE
Car is a tool. Not a luxury. You like Saturn?

GLORIA B
Going to hold off on that for a while.

RICHIE
How are you going to get to Syracuse?

GLORIA B

Bus.

RICHIE

Long trip.

GLORIA B

No, it's alright. (Beat.) You know how we said that baking's a science? Well, so is love. In baking, what do you have, your ingredients, your heat, your time. In love, you the ingredients, God's the heat, and time is time is time. If you do what you are supposed to do for someone you love, you in love. If you don't, you're not and no amount of "if only, if only, if only" is going to change a damn thing. I sit under God's heart for twenty hours every weekend. The world works. My son is loved.

RICHIE

Get you a car and get you there in half the time.

GLORIA B

Richie Po, you know it don't work like that. You fixing to burn the whole thing.

RICHIE

Hm. (Beat.) Hey, your broth taste pretty good.

GLORIA B

I thought you said it was too bloody.

RICHIE

I say there is danger to turn bloody. It's still too cloudy. But, to a blind man, it will taste good.

GLORIA B

Smooth talker.

RICHIE

Came out wrong. The taste is the most important is what I meant. I taste ... you used neck bones for the broth, right? Living bones. Bones that move.

GLORIA B

(chuckling to HERSELF)

Freak of nature. Ha-ha-ha. That's all the butcher had today.

RICHIE

Tastes good. Good. Taste is most important.

GLORIA B

Hell, it's all important ... Including the dining room.

RICHIE

It will look very nice. I have a picture of the wall's in my mother's restaurant. They say they can match perfectly. Emma Sunshine's will be beautiful.

GLORIA B

Chirping like a bird.

RICHIE

When they are done there, I will have them come to fix this house. Before? Always the mortgage, pay the mortgage. House is not yours, how do you fix it, you know? Now, mortgage paid off. Gone. Yesterday, I throw out my bed. Meilan and I sleep on the same bed for thirty years. I throw it out yesterday. This is a bed that we pick up from the street when we first came to America. Someone else's garbage we sleep on for thirty years. My wife, she never complain. I complain for her, I say, "You marry me, you sleep on garbage for thirty years." She pretend she cannot hear. That kind of woman is my wife.

GLORIA B

Married an angel.

RICHIE

That payment was so hard. One time, winter coming, boiler needs to be replaced. Old boiler? covered in asbestos. Boiler man wants \$900 just to remove it. Not even counting the new boiler yet. I go down and do it myself. Asbestos everywhere. All over your skin. You can't help but breathe it. After that, I worry for cancer. Sometimes that payment was so hard I wish it was cancer.

RICHIE chuckles.

GLORIA B

That's some kind of joke.

RICHIE

I'm not serious.

GLORIA B

No, you is. Night shift all the time. Two other jobs besides that one, right?

RICHIE

Life insurance and drive a truck. But now, no more insurance, no more truck. Just night shift.

GLORIA B

What they got you hauling at night?

RICHIE

Feathers.

GLORIA B

What?

RICHIE

For jackets. Supposed to be the lightest thing in the world, right? But a pound of feathers just as heavy as a pound of iron. You still feel just the same.

Beat.

GLORIA B

Why you still at it?

RICHIE

Pension in seven months.

GLORIA B

But, why? Aren't you a rich man now?

Beat.

RICHIE

Not yet. Po Mama Enterprise very big. Take maybe a year for lawyers to work out details. So I have time to finish what I start. After that?: Emma Sunshine's.

GLORIA B

Right. (Beat.) You in charge of the stock room.

RICHIE

No! I'm going to be the host.

GLORIA B

You?!

RICHIE

Yes.

GLORIA B laughs.

GLORIA B

Richie Po going to welcome you for a dish of collared green.

RICHIE laughs.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

You're going to cross a couple of wires-that's-alright. That's alright. That's soul food.

RICHIE

(struggles with a Southern
accent)

Welcome to Emma Sunshine, y'all!

(more)

RICHIE (cont'd)

Hep youself to some chitnin' and gravies! I 'specially recommend our delicious corn pone, Pahtnah!

GLORIA B

You a mess! Getting your South and your West all mixed up.

RICHIE

Our fry chicken is best chicken in three county.

GLORIA B

How 'bout me? Hep yo'self some Drunk-Ass-Crab, and Live-Ass-Fish and Clear-Ass-Soup! Lord, we crazy!

RICHIE

So what?

GLORIA B

Yeah. So what? (Beat.) You a mess! "Parntah!" You a mess. You sure can work though. Can't nobody take that away from you. I always thought you had too many horses for your size. Always thought that was hard on you. Serious, how'd you ever make it through all this time?

He goes to the refrigerator and takes out a pint of ice cream.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Butter Pecan.

RICHIE

Also, for your family, everything is worth it, right? But, real truth is, now that I'm almost finished, I feel myself again. I don't know if you understand.

He picks up an orange that is on the counter and slices it into pieces. He gives one to GLORIA B and he sucks on one himself.

RICHIE (cont'd)

The orange that is so sweet needs the sun for sugar. You try to grow it in New York and the winter kills it. You come here when you grew in the soil of another place, hm, you don't even know how to breathe the air. Take me thirty years to finally feel plant. I tell you, I'm going back to school?

GLORIA B

Yeah?

RICHIE

I'm taking Tango.

GLORIA B

Tango?!

RICHIE

You know, for the wedding. (Beat.) Meilan is a beautiful dancer. Whenever we go to weddings, she dances with someone else because I can't dance. She wants to dance. But she don't like it and comes sits next to me after one or two. I'll surprise her when she comes back. We will all have the wedding banquet at our new restaurant and hire a band and pay them to play only Tangos.

GLORIA B

She might want to dance something other than Tango, you know?

RICHIE shakes his head.

RICHIE

I watch. I know all the dance. Tango is the best dance. No need for any others.

GLORIA B

Hey, show me what you got?

RICHIE

What?

GLORIA B

Your Tango.

RICHIE

Dance? Oh, no.

GLORIA B

Come on.

RICHIE

I only start to learn.

GLORIA B

Richie Po, you got me all riled up before. Now you have to atone. Sweep a woman off her feet, Don Juan. Else? No more cooking.

RICHIE

Gloria-

GLORIA B

I will walk out that door!

RICHIE

Okay.

GLORIA B

Come on, Don Juan, show me what you got!

Okay. Okay.

RICHIE

He takes a CD and puts it in a stereo. He presses the play button and a Tango come on.

RICHIE goes to the coat rack and he takes off the back brace. He takes a wrist guard out of the pocket of his coat. He holds the back brace before himself like the body of an unseen partner. He holds the wrist brace up like the hand of an unseen partner clasped in his own.

He begins to dance in plodding awkward movements.

RICHIE (cont'd)
One, two, three, four. One, two, three four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

As he begins to speak his movements become more fluid and beautiful.

RICHIE (cont'd)
Tango is a dance from Argentina that comes from fighting. Late at night, after hours and hours of work, the men go to bar and drink. They fight. Men fight. But, instead of fist, they dance Tango. Tango. Tango is love. Tango is the dance you dance when you are too tired to fighting.

He ends his surprisingly well-choreographed movement with a dip and a flourish.

That's it.

RICHIE (cont'd)

GLORIA B claps.

Very nice. Very nice, Richie.

GLORIA B

She puts her arms out.

Come on.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

What?

RICHIE

GLORIA B
Take me for a spin. I learned that Tango when I worked at
the country club.

Beat.

Okay.
RICHIE

RICHIE and GLORIA B get into position.

Ready?
RICHIE (cont'd)

Yes.
GLORIA B

RICHIE glances at GLORIA B 's watch.

Wait! What time is it?
RICHIE

Almost six.
GLORIA B

No!
RICHIE

Five fifty five.
GLORIA B

RICHIE begins to rush around the room
assembling things.

How did we get so late?
RICHIE

We're cooking. We always get so late.
GLORIA B

I have a make up class today. I forget. Teacher was sick
last week.
RICHIE

You going now?
GLORIA B

The meal has to go faster, Gloria! We cannot go this slow!
RICHIE

I'm going as fast as we can.
GLORIA B

RICHIE

It has to be faster. Come, I take you home.

GLORIA B

How are you going to take me home, I got stock on and dead fish and crabs to make. We don't finish the stock we can't work tomorrow.

Pause.

RICHIE

I don't go to class. I'll stay and help you.

GLORIA B

Don't be stubborn.

RICHIE

No. Really.

GLORIA B

Just leave me the key. I'll take the bus home.

She holds out her hand.

Pause. RICHIE stands speechless.

GLORIA B (cont'd)

Oh.

Beat.

RICHIE

No.

GLORIA B

Jesus Christ, Richie.

RICHIE hurriedly removes his key chain. He holds out the key to GLORIA B. She doesn't take it. He puts it on the counter.

RICHIE

I did not know what you were asking for.

GLORIA B

Yeah.

RICHIE begins to pack up some of the dishes the GLORIA B has made in plastic containers. He puts them in his lunch box.

RICHIE

I will try these when I'm on my break. We'll compare notes tomorrow.

GLORIA B

Okay.

RICHIE

You just give me the key back tomorrow. No problem.

GLORIA B

Yeah. No problem.

RICHIE

Okay. I see you tomorrow.

GLORIA B

See you, Richie.

RICHIE

The stock is really turning out quite good.

GLORIA B

Thank you, Richie.

RICHIE

Okay.

RICHIE exits.

GLORIA B stands at the counter fuming. She takes a plate from the counter and drops it on the floor. It shatters. She picks up another one. Shatters it. She pulls a drawer out and empties the contents on the ground. She pulls another drawer out. *What is this? It's the tape RICHIE took out of the TV/VCR in Scene One.* She takes the tape and puts it in the TV/VCR. She presses PLAY.

LIGHTS FADEOUT in the RICHIE PO'S KITCHEN.

PO MAMA (FROM THE T.V.)

(translated into Chinese)

April 4th. Seven a.m. Kaoshiung, Taiwan. Video number fifty-seven. A lesson for my son. Good morning, my son. Time for a new lesson. Before we begin, I want you to ask yourself, "How many hours did I sleep last night?" If it is not at least eight, you stop this tape immediately and close your eyes. Food is a gift from the gods. You have the honor of refining it. You must be responsible. You must be alert.

End of ACT ONE.