

Eyes of the Heart

A DRAMA BY

Catherine Filloux



Playscripts

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To John Daggett

Cast of Characters

THIDA SAN, a Cambodian woman, 50.

KIM, a Cambodian man, 40s.

DR. LYNN SIMPSON, an American eye doctor, 30s.

SEREY / OUN, a Cambodian woman; Americanized, 18 (*Oun is Thida's daughter, 18, seen in flashbacks.*)

SAVATH / K.R.SOLDIER / SIPHA / BARBER / MUGGER, a Cambodian man, 20s.

CHHEM, Cambodian woman; traditional, 50s-60s.

(RESIDENT 1, 2 & 3, voices are taped or live.)

Time

Late 1980s

Place

Long Beach, California and Cambodia

Production Notes

Set: Scenes are played in different areas of the stage, locales are suggested. There are altars both in Kim's apartment and the Buddhist temple; a window in Kim's apartment by which Thida sits.

Because Thida is blind the play has a soundscape which helps create the context of her world.

Note: We are sometimes in Thida's mind and she uses a microphone to distinguish her internal thoughts from her dialogue. (In the text Thida's internal thoughts, are italicized.) In one instance, Dr. Simpson also uses a microphone for internal thoughts.

The play runs approximately 90 minutes and is performed without an intermission.

Acknowledgments

Eyes of the Heart premiered at National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO) in New York City, in October, 2004 and had the following cast and staff:

THIDA SAN.....	Mia Katigbak
SAVATH/	
KHMER ROUGE SOLDIER/	
SIPHA/BARBER/MUGGER.....	Alexis Camins
KIM	James Saito
SEREY/OUN	Eunice Wong
DR. LYNN SIMPSON.....	Nadia Bowers
CHHEM.....	Virginia Wing
RESIDENTS' VOICES.....	Krista Apple
	John Daggett
	Adam Erdossy
Director	Kay Matschullat
Assistant Director.....	Catherine Ward
Set Designer	Mimi Lien
Lighting Designer.....	Clifton Taylor
Costume Designer.....	Suttirat Larlarb
Sound Designer	Dave Morreale
Fight Choreographer	Michael G. Chin
Original Music	PraCh Ly
	Silong Chhun
Postcard Photographer.....	L. Kathy Herre
Company Photographer.....	Ching Gonzalez
Stage Manager	Sarah Izzo
Assistant Stage Manager	Suzie Cho
Costume Design Assistant	Nicole Frachiseur
Wigs	The Broadway Wig Company
Props Coordinator.....	Toni Iacolucci
Production Assistants.....	Morgan Allen
	Maggie Coleman
	Heather LeBlanc

Production ConsultantSophy Theam
(Fund for Cambodian Culture, NEFA)
 Theatre Apprentice/
 Royal University
 of Phnom Penh Khul Tithchenda
(Fund for Cambodian Culture, NEFA)
 Intern for School Outreach.....Jenny Lavery
 PressSam Rudy Media Relations

The play received the Roger L. Stevens award from The Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays, and the Eric Kocher Playwrights Award from the O'Neill.



Alexis Camins in *Eyes of the Heart*, National Asian American Theatre Company, INTAR, New York City (2004). Photo: Ching Gonzalez.

Notes on Bowing/Praying/Sitting/Serving/Coining:

Bows: (Prayer position with elbows down and relaxed.)

To friend or cousin:

Hands in prayer position to cleavage area.

To teacher, or elder (*i.e. Serey to Chhem*):

Hands in prayer position to lips.

To family/grandparents (*Serey to Thida; once you marry into a family you change to family bow; husband and wife are equals and their bowing is not based on ages.*):

Hands in prayer position to nose.

To god/monks who are chanting:

Prayer position to hairline.

A couple bows when they give rings (*Recipient bows and then the donor bows to say you're welcome.*)

Bow when you receive present and when you say hello.

Bowing at temple: Bow three times to 1) Buddha 2) Teachings 3) Monks at a particular temple. Sitting on floor, prayer hands and put hands to floor. Or bow once to floor, covering everything.

Non-Buddhists don't have to bow.

Sitting at temple or at home:

For women, legs to the side, men can sit Indian style, except at temple or engagement party. Women's feet/legs may get numb and then they switch sides.

Serve food:

By putting dish in front of person, not handing it directly to them. Since Thida is blind, put dish on her lap.

Coining:

A traditional dermal technique in which oiled skin is rubbed rigorously with a coin, for healing purposes.

Pronunciations

Thida...Tee-DAH

San...Sahn

Serey...Say-RAY (*With a rolled R; accent on RAY; rhymes with day; it means free*)

Lok...Low (*k*)

Savath...Suh-VAHT

Chhem...Chime

Oun...Own (*As to own a possession*)

Teak-Dos-Ko...Tuck-DACH-ko (*Milkfruit*)

Bina...BEE-na

Prak...Prah (*k*)

Sovandy...SovannDEE

Meng...Meng

Chantha...Jann-TA (*Accent on second syllable*)

Li...Lee

Ang...Ahng

Malay...Ma-LIE (*Rhymes with die*)

Navy...Nah-VEE

Hun...Hoon (*Rhymes with hood*)

Khmer...K'mare*

Siem Riep...Seam Re-up (*With a rolled R*)

Sipha...See-PAH (*Like the term for father "Pa"*)

Phnom Penh...Pa-num Pain (*Tilde on last N; Or simply Pen*)

Sin Si Samouth...Sin-See-sa-MUHT

Tuol Sleng...Tool-Slaing

Takeo...Tah-KI-uo (*Ki rhymes with die*)

Kep...Kaip

Sampot...Sam-B/PUT; unaspirated P, and very soft U, in between *Pot* and *Put*)

* In Cambodian, people say Khmer/K'maille; in English: Khmer/C'mare

Note: Thida, Kim and Chhem speak with an Asian accent when they speak in English to Dr. Simpson.

EYES OF THE HEART

by Catherine Filloux

Scene 1

(We hear a flight announcement mixed with airport sounds. The loud wail of a security alarm. A Cambodian woman, THIDA SAN, 50, blind, using a cane, is escorted in by a Cambodian man, SAVATH, 25. THIDA shrinks back from the assault of sounds. KIM, a Cambodian man, 40s, rushes to her. He bows with palms together.)

KIM. Thida! Sister, you are finally here! We've waited so long. I'm pleased to welcome you to my new home.

(He embraces her.)

KIM. Thida? It is me your brother, Kim.

(KIM looks at THIDA.)

SAVATH. She isn't speaking.

KIM. *(Confused:)* Isn't speaking? Why?

SAVATH. I'm not sure. They didn't mention it in the papers. She must be overwhelmed.

KIM. *(Maintaining cheerfulness:)* Okay. *(Speaking louder:)* We are so happy to see you. It is a miracle you have finally arrived. How was your trip? Are you all right?

SAVATH. She can hear you. She's probably just not talking.

THIDA. *I asked to stay at the temple.*

(KIM quickly motions to SEREY, an Americanized 18-year-old woman.)

KIM. This is Serey, your niece.

(SEREY lightly touches THIDA's shoulder.)

SEREY. Hello, Aunt.

THIDA. *Like Oun...*

KIM. You remember, how she liked to visit you. In your house you had so many lovely things?

SEREY. Dad.

THIDA. *(Patting something under her shirt, near her heart.)*

Like Oun, in the photograph.

(KIM introduces SAVATH.)

KIM. And you met Savath Chin—he's the man who got you here! He never gave up. He flew to the Embassy in Phnom Penh. The paperwork sat there for ages.

SAVATH. Welcome to Los Angeles, Mrs. San.

THIDA. *Los Angeles?*

KIM. We're very relieved to see you. How was your trip? Comfortable?

(KIM touches a plastic bag THIDA is clutching. SEREY has moved away.)

KIM. *(Calling:)* Serey!...You have no baggage? Nothing?

(THIDA pats something under her shirt.)

THIDA. *It is all here.*

KIM. Just crackers from the plane?

(KIM watches THIDA.)

SAVATH. The papers say she sat in the dark in the temple for years.

SEREY. She didn't want to come to America.

(THIDA pats her shirt, as SEREY becomes a young woman, OUN, and lights shift. Note: Oun may say the line below, "No I will be a midwife.")

THIDA. *Miracle. A schoolgirl who eats, she breathes, she goes to school. When she comes home everything is normal. Her father teases her, "Will she be a doctor?" One day my daughter says, "No, I will be a midwife."*

"Why not a doctor?" he asks her. His pride hurt, perhaps. She shrugs her shoulders. She walks away, to her room. To study. She is stubborn...

Stop.

(Lights are restored to the airport.)

KIM. Let's go home.

Scene 2

(DR. LYNN SIMPSON, 35, wearing eyeglasses, shows slides, addressing her residents, who are the audience. Behind her, squiggly, abstract shapes float. We remain with her in this strange world.)

DR. SIMPSON. Everything is spectacularly ordered. *(Pointing to first slide on scrim.)* See, there's nothing on this retinal cell—it's clear. You wait for the oddity. It comes rarely. *(Showing second slide on scrim.)* There it is. In night blindness you know exactly what to expect. The retina has this white, murky surface, sometimes like a floating string. This is a floating world, a world where there is no speed, no weight. It's all here in front of us. Everyday you wonder what you will discover?

(Lights cross-fade to KIM leading THIDA to an altar in his apartment, as CAMBODIAN MUSIC plays.)

KIM. I've made a small offering at the altar for your well-being in America. Rest—we have prepared some food, fried shrimp, rice.

(An older woman, CHHEM, sets down dishes. KIM lights incense.)

CHHEM. Welcome to Little Phnom Penh, Mrs. San.

THIDA. *Little Phnom Penh? They have renamed an American city?*

KIM. Chhem will be your guide. She is Savath's grandmother. She will take you to the temple.

THIDA. You said I could live *there*.

CHHEM. Yes, I will show you how to take the bus.

THIDA. *The bus?*

CHHEM. I've added some extra sauce. We must be generous, this is your first meal! (*Handing her a bowl.*) Don't be shy.

KIM. Please, take some food, Thida. I insist.

(*THIDA takes the bowl.*)

THIDA. *When I used to find food, I would cut off the smallest piece for me and give Oun the rest. This is for you.*

(*THIDA smells the food. SEREY enters with a book bag.*)

KIM. Come, Serey, sit—eat with us. Thida, you will have your own room with Serey. She has put clothing for you in her closet. (*To SEREY:*) Come and talk to your aunt.

SEREY. She doesn't talk.

(*THIDA eats.*)

THIDA. *Delicious.*

SEREY. (*To THIDA:*) I'm sorry, I have to go, I'm late.

KIM. Your aunt has just arrived.

SEREY. I know. She stole my room.

THIDA. (*Eating.*) *So flavorful.*

KIM. Stay, she has come from so far away.

(*KIM goes to a window, lighting a cigarette. SEREY puts on lipstick.*)

KIM. Who is that outside?

CHHEM. His name is Trouble.

THIDA. (*Smelling.*) *Smoking.*

SEREY. It's Lee Var, Father. He's helping me with an assignment.

CHHEM. Have you asked Savath for help? He's very intelligent.

KIM. (*Following SEREY; lowering voice:*) That lipstick is very red.

SEREY. "Karma-red"—for energy. I thought you'd like that, dad. The "karma" thing.

KIM. No, I don't.

THIDA. *Karma lipstick? Is she this old? The age of Oun?*

(CHHEM inspects SEREY. She speaks under her breath.)

CHHEM. The short skirt.

SEREY. This is short?

KIM. Don't talk back to your elders.

SEREY. This is the eighties, Dad. I'll be right back.

(THIDA eats.)

THIDA. One more taste. So delicious.

KIM. One hour. I'm watching the clock.

(SEREY exits.)

THIDA. *Alone, in my rice world.*

CHHEM. *(To KIM:) You know, the young do the "slow dance" with the bodies pressed so close together.*

(CHHEM demonstrates the closeness with the palms of her hands.)

CHHEM. I have seen it on TV. Skin-to-skin. The "slow dance."

THIDA. "Slow dance"? Is that an English word?

(THIDA stuffs more rice in her mouth as CHHEM approaches and picks up the bowl. THIDA jumps.)

CHHEM. Come, look, Kim! Your sister is eating all the food.

THIDA. *The loud one!*

(KIM goes to THIDA, comfortingly.)

KIM. When we first came we were so tired we couldn't stop sleeping, couldn't stop eating. We'd look at the food in the grocery stores and our stomachs would ache with longing. We wanted to eat, but then it would make us sick. We had to take it slow.

(KIM leads THIDA to the altar where there are family photographs.)

KIM. There is a green mango on the altar for you and a few flowers from my garden. I want to tell you—here above there are photographs. The few I was able to hide. They're on the wall. Even here our ancestors protect us.

(THIDA pats something under her shirt as KIM watches.)

KIM. You're *home* now, I will take care of you. We'll bring you to an eye doctor, take you for a physical exam—we'll go to the herb market.

THIDA. They said you promised I'd go to the temple.

KIM. Sister, may I ask? I never knew, what happened to your daughter? What happened to Oun?...

THIDA. *(Patting under her shirt.) Still here? Are the photos still here?*

(Lights shift as the young woman, OUN, appears in front of THIDA. She is weak and malnourished.)

KIM. Why don't you talk? We've waited so long. I still have Serey. I wonder what happened...?

(OUN works in a rice field.)

THIDA. *She is hungry. The soup—or so they call it—is mostly water now, with only a few grains of rice floating on the surface. We see ourselves in the grains of rice, disappearing. We count them everyday. One, two, three. They barely color the water anymore.*

(A YOUNG K.R. SOLDIER appears watching OUN.)

THIDA. *Stop. Swimming. On a beach, there were magnolia trees. Clear aqua water.*

(Another memory intrudes.)

Another magnolia tree. I want to die.

Scene 3

(THIDA stares off as DR. SIMPSON studies a chart, speaking to KIM.)

DR. SIMPSON. Before she came, they told you she was blind. It's true, she displays all the outward symptoms, but her exam reveals no physical problem. She has normal visual acuity. Her vision should improve to normal.

KIM. I don't understand.

DR. SIMPSON. Her eyes are sending signals to her brain.

(He motions to a printout in the chart.)

KIM. May I see the results? Yes, it is very strange. Her eyes work but she cannot see. She's not lying.

(DR. SIMPSON makes a quick hand gesture in front of THIDA's eyes. THIDA doesn't react.)

DR. SIMPSON. Can you explain how this might have happened?

KIM. No. There are many others like her.

(DR. SIMPSON looks at THIDA for a moment.)

KIM. She refuses to speak.

DR. SIMPSON. All the outward signs of blindness but her eyes are healthy.

KIM. It defies all odds.

DR. SIMPSON. Let me try something else.

(DR. SIMPSON exits.)

KIM. You're in America now, sister. Perhaps you can explain to the doctor and somebody can help. I've brought you to a specialist. If you could tell me when you lost your sight? What happened? You can trust me.

(THIDA pats under her shirt. OUN and the blue of ocean appears.)

THIDA. *Swimming. We went only months before the schoolgirl photograph where all is normal. She was a fish. Standing at the shore, calling to her. "You are a fish! You are a fish!" And when she finally walked out of the sea at Kep, unconcerned, vain in her unawareness, simply...Oun...we would laugh. Sipha and I would laugh. We were so mad. It was late, we were hungry and she would force us to stand on the shore calling to her,*

screaming for her. Her black head bobbing up and down in the waves, against the line of the horizon. But when she came, she was transformed. From so much time in the sea. And she would spray water through her teeth...a trick she learned...and we would laugh...We would laugh and walk under the magnolia trees...

(DR. SIMPSON reenters and tapes electrodes to THIDA's forehead.)

Stop. All because there were also magnolias at Kep on the shore... Swimming, swimming ...Anything to turn the clock back... Because the moments after, they are all accounted for, every detail, every movement. In my head I want it to stop.

(KIM watches DR. SIMPSON tip back THIDA's head.)

DR. SIMPSON. Now I'm going to tip back your head and insert this contact lens in your eye...

(THIDA flinches.)

KIM. I'm sorry, in Cambodia touching the head is considered very personal.

DR. SIMPSON. Perhaps it would be better if you put in the lens. It has an electrode on it.

KIM. Yes, I'll do it. Thank you.

DR. SIMPSON. You may want to tell her not to close her eye or the lens will come out.

KIM. We know English, we were educated. She was a midwife and I was a doctor. But she doesn't speak.

(DR. SIMPSON studies THIDA.)

THIDA. *This doctor's quick – she has no time. Empty – without a soul. She drinks coffee, smokes. Sipha smoked.*

DR. SIMPSON. So she can't tell me what she sees?

(THIDA stares off as colored lights flash in front of her. DR. SIMPSON and KIM watch lines with jagged peaks dash across a screen.)

KIM. Thida? If you see something, can you nod your head?

(THIDA *does not do so.*)

THIDA. *Darkness.*

DR. SIMPSON. If she can't talk it makes it difficult to examine her.

THIDA. *Don't cry.*

DR. SIMPSON. Ask her if she sees the lights.

KIM. Sister, did you hear the doctor? Do you see the light?

THIDA. *I see nothing.*

(DR. SIMPSON *consults THIDA's chart.*)

DR. SIMPSON. How did she lose her sight?

THIDA. *Don't cry.*

KIM. I don't know, it was during the Pol Pot regime. We were separated.

DR. SIMPSON. Did she have eye problems before that?

KIM. I know she wore glasses. For far distances.

DR. SIMPSON. But with the glasses she could see.

KIM. Yes. The Khmer Rouge tried to eliminate all intellectuals. They killed people who wore glasses.

DR. SIMPSON. Does she have any other kinds of physical problems?

KIM. Not that a physical exam detects.

(DR. SIMPSON *untapes the electrodes, as the flashing lights fade.*)

DR. SIMPSON. Her eyes are sending signals to her brain.

KIM. Yes, I saw the ERG.

DR. SIMPSON. Your sister may be malingering, Mr. Lok. Is she applying for disability? Benefits for blindness are higher in California than anywhere else. I'd like to check something.

(DR. SIMPSON *looks through charts, as KIM touches THIDA.*)

KIM. Are you there? What would happen if you spoke? Would it be so bad? They've taken the time to see you, they want to help.

(THIDA keeps her head lowered.)

DR. SIMPSON. Does your sister know Bina Prak? She also lives in Long Beach.

KIM. No, why do you ask?

DR. SIMPSON. Well, she came in to be tested. She was applying for disability benefits too and she had the same problem as your sister.

KIM. Doctor, my sister just arrived from Cambodia. She's not applying for disability.

DR. SIMPSON. Isn't it sort of strange, two women the same age, from the same country, living in the same city? It sounds suspicious.

KIM. I said before, my sister would not lie. It's not strange. I've seen many other women like her. They are not making it up.

DR. SIMPSON. How do you know?

KIM. Because I've lived among them. Those of us who survived ended up in refugee camps in Thailand.

THIDA. *Don't cry, don't cry or they will kill you.*

DR. SIMPSON. How did you get to Long Beach?

KIM. My friend's grandson worked to bring us here.

DR. SIMPSON. Have you seen the blind women here too?

KIM. Yes.

DR. SIMPSON. It's odd...Perhaps I could see more of them. Could you help?

KIM. Why not? *(Looking at her, curious.)* If you are interested.

DR. SIMPSON. Yes, yes, who knows? Clinically, it might prove useful.

(DR. SIMPSON looks at him, taking parking stickers from her doctor's coat and cigarettes fall out.)

DR. SIMPSON. I don't smoke.

KIM. Me neither.

(She nods, then scribbles.)

DR. SIMPSON. Make sure you give this validation to the parking guy, or he'll charge you an arm and a leg.

Scene 4

(In KIM's apartment THIDA sits by an open window as light from a street lamp shines in. She unpins a plastic bag inside her shirt and takes out a photo. She passes her hand over it. A man, SIPHA, wearing a white doctor's coat, appears in the shadows.)

THIDA. He stands in the back of the truck. With other doctors in white coats.

(He mimes for her to be quiet.)

THIDA. He puts his finger to his mouth, telling me to be quiet.

(She nods. He gestures.)

THIDA. He motions for me to take off my glasses.

(She mimes.)

THIDA. I take them off. He gestures to get rid of them.

(She mimes.)

THIDA. I throw them on the ground and I crush them with my foot. My sight is now blurred as I look at him. The man I love. He simply looks. The truck starts to go. I look at him but I cannot see him clearly. The truck begins to move away, a cloud of dust.

(She reaches out her hand.)

THIDA. Sipha.

(The sound of GUNFIRE comes through the window. THIDA holds the photo to her breast as SIPHA disappears. A SIREN wails, she crouches down.)

(KIM and SEREY enter.)

KIM. Sister? What are you doing? What's happened to you?

SEREY. What's wrong with her? What's her problem?

(KIM puts his arm around THIDA as SEREY takes books from her bag.)

KIM. Please don't be frightened. It is simply the police. I had to go outside and retrieve Serey from her own folly. You are safe.

SEREY. You're not actually that safe. There are gangs.

THIDA. *Are there boys with guns...?*

KIM. Serey don't tell her that.

THIDA. *Smoking cigarettes, brother?*

SEREY. They live in our building.

KIM. That was a police siren. You are fine inside. There is no problem.

(KIM helps THIDA to her seat by the window. SEREY starts to go.)

KIM. Don't think I have forgotten what I saw.

SEREY. Forget it.

KIM. His car is enough.

THIDA. *His car?*

KIM. If your mother was alive she would agree with me about Savath.

SEREY. You're the one in love with Savath.

KIM. That isn't funny. You liked him, you told me so. He's very respectable.

SEREY. Maybe too much. Have you seen how he dresses?

KIM. Is it because I like him, suddenly you don't? You've been out with him once, was it so bad?

SEREY. Yeah, I'm not ready. I need to have some fun.

KIM. One thing you won't have is fun with (*Pointing outside:*) the guy with the car, I can assure you.

SEREY. Oh and you know this by telepathy?

KIM. I know you are very clever but in this case you are not seeing clearly. You are too American. Try again with Savath. He was friends with your brother.

(KIM lights a cigarette.)

My daughter has driven me to smoking.

THIDA. *You always smoked.*

KIM. Oh god, why won't you say anything?

THIDA. *You don't want to hear what I have to say.*

(KIM exits as SEREY gets some books.)

SEREY. We yell all the time. Sorry I said that about the gangs. It's scary but it's not that bad. Besides a few bullets coming in through the front door, just kidding. No there were some once, but it's okay. He hardly ever mentions my mother. You really think she'd want me to marry Savath? Sometimes I pray to her. Savath is good-looking but who wants someone your dad picked out? My father was different when my mom was around. We used to have some fun. We'd catch fish together. Sing songs, we were just crazy. But that was before Pol Pot. Now I'm supposed to marry Savath because he was friends with my brother? Everyone's dead. Good way to guilt people, huh? (*To herself:*) Asking *you*? What was I thinking?

(SEREY passes her hand in front of her aunt's expressionless eyes.)

SEREY. Can you see? He's wanted you to come so bad. You were supposed to save us from something.

(SEREY takes her mirrored sunglasses and puts them on THIDA.)

SEREY. Hey, when you're around people maybe you wanna wear these.

(THIDA feels them, surprised.)

THIDA. *Are they eyeglasses?*

(SEREY looks at herself in the mirrored glasses.)

SEREY. You can see yourself in them. They're sunglasses.

(THIDA stares out wearing the sunglasses.)

THIDA. *Words won't bring them back, Serey.*

(SEREY exits. THIDA sits by the open window in KIM's apartment in darkness. Night slowly turns to day. THIDA listens to the sound of CONSTRUCTION VEHICLES, followed by the sound of a JACK HAMMER. She takes out another photo from the plastic bag pinned to her shirt. She passes her hand over it.)

THIDA. *A cloud of dust. Sipha disappears. I dress myself and my daughter as peasants, we work in the fields, pray to the spirits that the soldiers will not see us, that we will disappear. They find us – try to force Oun to marry.*

(Rays of sunlight shine in THIDA's eyes and she shields them from the glare. OUN appears with the Young K.R. SOLDIER, in the shadows.)

K.R. SOLDIER. *(Commanding; to THIDA:) You, come here! You are the mother, you must watch!*

THIDA. *Sun shines in my eyes – I leave my hut, walk towards the tree. (Stopping the memory.) Stop.*

K.R. SOLDIER. You must watch your daughter!

THIDA. *The people watch, expressionless. I search their eyes for clues. Stone faces.*

(Communist propaganda music from loudspeakers becomes louder and louder.)

THIDA. *Magnolia flowers fall. She is tied with rope. No.*

(Lights are restored as KIM enters in gardening clothes.)

KIM. You never sleep? I want you to come outside to my garden for a little fresh air – *you must.*

THIDA. *Fresh? Where is this city that smells so bad?*

KIM. *(Giving her a lime.)* Here is a lime from California. Take it. I have avocados, too. They will soon be ripe. I never tasted avocado in Cambodia, did you? *(A new thought.)* Sister, do you remember that fruit we had in our garden, when we were young? With the milky white flesh and the black seed? *Tek-DAH-ko?* So delicious. It doesn't exist here. It has no name. But with time, it will come. Some Cambodian will learn to grow it. And then it will have a name, Americans will learn to love it and they will mass-produce it. The fruit will become bigger and bigger, the colors more vibrant, and finally it will lose all its flavor so that it tastes only like water.

(She drops the lime. He returns it and sees the photos on her lap.)

KIM. Can you see the photos, Thida?

(THIDA finally responds by nodding.)

KIM. *(Looking at her.)* Ah, you made a sign. Finally. You said yes. You can see the photos. I don't understand.

THIDA. *I see Oun and Sipa.*

(He sees THIDA put her hands together, praying.)

KIM. You want to pray. Yes we will bring you to our new temple like I promised. *(Lying:)* It is much like the temples in Cambodia. Well, it is a haven for many, let us say.

THIDA. *I want to become a nun. I have nothing to hope for but the next life.*

(The construction sounds. She looks toward the sound.)

KIM. Do you hear? They are repairing the road outside. It's a bulldozer. The other noise is a machine to break up the cement. All the soil they cover it with cement here. Concrete. They want to seal away the earth.

Scene 5

(Sounds of busy traffic. CHHEM looks up at a bus stop sign as she guides THIDA. Underneath the sign is another sign which reads, "NO STANDING.")

CHHEM. The bus stops here but we cannot wait here, Thida.

THIDA. *I would prefer to go home.*

CHHEM. Don't worry. We'll wait on the next corner, it's safe on the next corner.

(CHHEM leads THIDA away from the bus stop sign.)

THIDA. *The city's loud, always a hum like rushing water, an electric current. Is the city breathing?*

CHHEM. *(Stopping.)* Here, we will wait here. Your brother is very worried about you. Poor man, he must work during the day and cannot take you to the temple. You are safe with me. No problem, I'm a good guide. Serey, she is driving your brother to madness. The boyfriend, the car! The car is called a "Trans Am"! Very, very big. Very white! New, when the sun shines on it, it gleams like a jewel in her eyes.

(We hear a bus approaching.)

CHHEM. The bus is coming, Thida! Now we must run!

(CHHEM tries to run, and pull THIDA to follow.)

THIDA. *Why must we chase the bus?*

CHHEM. Hurry, Thida! Please!

(THIDA drops her cane. CHHEM goes to pick it up. The sound of the bus pulling away.)

CHHEM. *(Upset:)* Well this is unfortunate, the monk is waiting at the temple, we'll be late. Don't worry, it is not your fault. Come.

(CHHEM leads THIDA back to their position away from the bus stop.)

CHHEM. The sign says we cannot stand there. "No Standing"! There is an ARROW that points in both directions!

(CHHEM points to something offstage near the bus stop.)

CHHEM. Oh, I see a man is standing right next to the forbidding sign! Maybe we can stand behind him. This way if something happens, he will be punished first.

(CHHEM leads THIDA, as lights cross-fade to KIM with DR. SIMPSON in a teashop, sampling tea and smoking.)

DR. SIMPSON. I drink Lipton.

KIM. *(Horried.)* In a teabag?

DR. SIMPSON. What else.

KIM. I'll buy you some tea on the way out so you can *enjoy* it.

DR. SIMPSON. What would I put it in?

KIM. A pot?

DR. SIMPSON. I drink coffee anyway.

KIM. You need to take a little time—Go ahead, sip it slowly. Sustenance. Of course the cigarette doesn't help. But we can't have everything.

DR. SIMPSON. No.

KIM. The temple is an old union hall on Willow Street. Some of the blind women pray there. Afternoons are best to find them.

DR. SIMPSON. They'll have to come to my office. When did you see the first blind women?

KIM. Among the refugees, in the Thai camps.

DR. SIMPSON. It couldn't be malnutrition or they would have regained their sight.

KIM. In our country the head is considered the place where the soul resides. It's the window through which life enters and exits.

DR. SIMPSON. Would you consider bringing your sister by my office again? I want to start by looking for an organic basis in the women. What do they have in common?

KIM. That's what you have to find out. You know doctors like myself, in Cambodia, are...were more experimental. My sister knew much about herbs and I used many of her remedies. I used to love seeing the whole world.

DR. SIMPSON. What do you mean?

KIM. Before Pol Pot I looked at everything. From my head to my feet. My heart, my brain. And outward. The infinite. Now it's the opposite. I see only limits. I walk on a tightrope: How will I survive?

(She looks at him a moment.)

DR. SIMPSON. What is your answer?

KIM. My family. If I can save them. That's all that matters.

(He looks at her.)

What about your family?

(She does not answer the question.)

DR. SIMPSON. If I can find the physical reason for their problem I can help them. What would make them see again?

KIM. You didn't answer my question. *(Looking at her.)* You're right. What would make them see again? *(Asking about her.)* What would help?

(CHHEM guides THIDA into the darkness of a Buddhist temple. Above the altar are the faded letters of a sign: "OIL-CHEMICAL AND ATOMIC WORKERS UNION LOCAL 1-128". THIDA kneels as CHHEM exits. SIPHA appears in the shadows.)

THIDA. *Sipha you're here! I should never have forced her. I was always stubborn. Please say something. Say something to me. Come, sit.*

(He sits next to THIDA.)

THIDA. *Tell me where you go.*

(He stares straight ahead.)

SIPHA. I travel through jungles where the forest's so thick I can barely squeeze by. Swim in rivers where you can catch the fish in

thin air. At the seaside the sand is mixed with bones and teeth of farmers.

THIDA. *The temples, tell me about the temples!*

SIPHA. I dance with the celestial dancers—and there are thousands—on the walls of the ancient city.

THIDA. *Are you so popular?*

SIPHA. Yes, in the nighttime, serenaded by the soft rush of the wind, so seductive with their necklaces of jasmine falling on their breasts. The thieves in the night cut off the statues' heads, they reappear in foreign lands, chopped-off, eyes gouged from their sockets.

THIDA. *The dancing!*

SIPHA. Vines grow through the rock, strangling, squeezing the stone, cracking the faces, erasing the shrines, soon the temples of Angkor will vanish.

THIDA. *Dancing.*

SIPHA. In the distance you can hear the snap of land mines, another little boy running home, too careless.

THIDA. *Sipha.*

SIPHA. Near Siem Reap in an empty schoolhouse there are rusted shackles from its days as a torture center. Bones piled high to the sky, mountains and mountains of bones. When the air is still you can hear the skulls whispering to each other. *(He whispers menacingly:)* SSSsssssssss... SNAKES...

(THIDA speaks for the first time.)

THIDA. STOP!

(CHHEM reenters.)

CHHEM. *(Shocked.)* Thida? You can talk? You are finally speaking.

(THIDA is silent.)

Who are you talking to? Who is here?

(THIDA watches SIPHA slip away.)

THIDA. Sipha. He is not what I want him to be.

CHHEM. Sipha?

(THIDA stares at the place where SIPHA was.)

THIDA. *(To CHHEM:)* I cannot speak about it. I am sorry. It is too difficult. I...

(CHHEM leads THIDA out.)

CHHEM. Come, you are haunted. You are speaking! At home I will coin you to make you feel better. Are you glad you came to the temple today?

(Graffiti appears and we hear street sounds as THIDA walks with CHHEM, who looks up.)

CHHEM. The sign is usually right here, but it has disappeared. Perhaps the wind blew it down in the storm.

THIDA. What storm?

CHHEM. All the buildings look the same. Ugly, so ugly. *(Panicking.)* No trees. Always the gangsters on the corners. One in my block has a TIGER on his arm, a tattoo. Always smoking, just boys, painting the buildings all different colors like children!

(THIDA hears the construction sounds in the distance.)

CHHEM. It is pitiful, we are lost, so lost.

(THIDA begins to speak aloud, soothingly.)

THIDA. I believe I know the right direction, Chhem. I do hear the sound of the road construction. My brother told me they are repairing the road. Cement. *(With vigor.)* Yes, come now!

Scene 6

(CHHEM coins THIDA, as KIM stands near the altar.)

CHHEM. And she told me to follow the bulldozer and got us home!

KIM. She spoke to you? Truly!

CHHEM. Yes.

THIDA. How else was I ever going to get home?

KIM. Thida!

CHHEM. She said *you* told her there was roadwork on the street — she heard it. And she was talking to ghosts at the temple. She's getting better.

KIM. I hope.

CHHEM. Your daughter Serey is getting older. She is very studious. (*Ominously:*) And very beautiful.

KIM. Thank you. You are kind.

CHHEM. (*Teasingly.*) You know without my grandson your sister would still be in Cambodia.

KIM. We are very grateful.

THIDA. (*Muttering.*) No, we are not!

KIM. (*Looking at THIDA.*) What, sister?

CHHEM. Savath is at the agency from dawn to midnight, never stops. Meetings with bigwigs from government offices, visits to shelters, casinos. He goes because other people lose their shirts, not him! You know that they had a date...I did not hear that it was a failure. They did not run in opposite directions.

KIM. Perhaps we should adapt to the American way, encourage another date.

CHHEM. My grandson is old enough to be a monk.

KIM. Serey is younger, I worry...

CHHEM. In a blink of an eye, all this will change. (*Threateningly.*) In a car.

KIM. You don't need to tell me. But she is a good daughter. We have lost so much, I want to protect her.

CHHEM. Exactly! We're all that's left. Our families knew each other. Savath is the right choice, the best insurance a father could

buy. He is Cambodian. A good man. College—educated. We will bring two families together. I will consult the astrologer and we can arrange a marriage.

KIM. Go ask him.

(KIM exits with CHHEM.)

THIDA. *I am in between a tiger and a crocodile. Please let me out of here — I need to go home.*

(DR. SIMPSON, alone, exhausted, drinking coffee, clicks through slides of healthy retinal cells. She shuts off the machine, getting up, searching the darkness.)

DR. SIMPSON. Tom, are you there?

(She lets down her guard to someone in the darkness.)

Can you see me?

(She searches a moment longer, putting her armor back up.)

I don't believe in ghosts.

(Lights shift as DR. SIMPSON clicks through slides of healthy retinal cells, addressing her residents, who are the audience.)

Sovandy Meng: her job was to carry bodies to mass graves. Fifty-two years old. Blind in 1977. *(Referring to slide.)* Healthy retinal cell.

Chantha Li: Last child died of starvation. Age sixty. Blind in 1978. *(Showing slide.)* Healthy retinal cell.

Ang Malay: Saw a baby thrown against a tree. Age, fifty-four. 1976. *(Showing slide.)* Healthy retinal cell.

Navy Hun: Saw her sister killed, because of her white skin? At the beginning of the genocide. In her fifties. 1975. *(Showing slide.)* Healthy retinal cell.

Thida San: She won't talk about what happened to her family...All of them should see.

Scene 7

(THIDA listens to a siren as she sits at her usual seat by the window. At the altar KIM smokes, showing SEREY astrological charts.)

KIM. The stars say yes, Serey. Chhem has made a very substantial offer but more importantly I want to join Savath to our family. This will please our ancestors and tie us to our lost country.

SEREY. I'm not in love with him, Father.

KIM. You will grow to love him, as I grew to love your mother.

SEREY. But that's not the way things are here. People date before they get married, they fall in love!

KIM. We do too. Simply in reverse. Since you were a little girl, you have known that your mother and I would arrange your marriage. Now that she is gone it is up to me to make the right choice, to honor her. It is the single most important way you can show her your respect.

SEREY. Everything has changed. We aren't in Cambodia.

KIM. We must honor our dead and preserve our traditions.

SEREY. But we live in a new country.

KIM. It is very important. Please don't contradict me, Serey. I am your father. You will thank me later.

SEREY. I can't start having babies now. What if I want to go to college?

KIM. Then you will go. You are no longer a girl. Savath is a sensitive soul, refined and ethical. He will make a good husband for you.

SEREY. I won't marry him.

(Haunted, THIDA hears the communist propaganda music. She addresses KIM.)

THIDA. Yes, she will, she will. Give me a moment. Let me speak to her. Say yes, Oun—my girl. You must say yes.

(KIM touches her.)

KIM. Sister what are you saying?

(She pushes him continuing out loud.)

THIDA. Rays of sunlight shine into my eyes. The loudspeakers are hanging in the tree. There are flowers on the tree. She is tied. Water drips from a tiny hole in a bucket, on her head. The drops of water mix with her tears. They tied Oun to a tree. A magnolia. They're forcing her to marry.

SEREY. *(To KIM; softly:)* Her daughter Oun?

THIDA. The official he unties her. He points to young soldier. "Will you marry him?" She shakes her head no. She is stubborn. Will not accept. The official takes out his blade. He grabs Oun by the hair. They cut off her head.

KIM. Sister...

THIDA. He looks at me. He holds her head. He throws it into a fire where a pile of corpses and body parts burn...Smoke got in my eye...Don't cry, don't cry, or they kill you. *(To KIM:)* Please. Let me die.

KIM. No, it is important to live.

(KIM holds her. Lights black out.)

Scene 8

(Morning. THIDA wears the mirrored sunglasses as ROCK MUSIC PLAYS. A punk BARBER watches, as she enters the barber shop with her cane.)

THIDA. *There is very loud music in the barbershop but it is cool, it smells of smoke and soap.*

(The BARBER spins around a chair for her.)

BARBER. Woah, first customer, you're an early bird. Sit.

THIDA. *He ties something around my neck.*

BARBER. Hey, how'd you want it cut?

THIDA. Shaved, please.

BARBER. Sure you want it shaved?

THIDA. Yes. Please.

I am going to the temple. Now I must become a nun.

BARBER. What's your name?

THIDA. *This is not the practice in my country to ask the name of the customer.*

My name is Thida San. *(Politely:)* What is your name?

BARBER. The Spider.

THIDA. Hello, the Spider.

Am I wrong in remembering that the spider is an insect?

(She stands, with her cane. The BARBER reveals THIDA's scalp, now entirely shaved except for a spot with her initials: "T S". She feels the letters.)

THIDA. Thank you.

(Lights rise on KIM's apartment; KIM is near the altar, frantic, waiting on the phone, with SEREY and CHHEM.)

KIM. You call the police, you get put on hold...I trusted you to watch her, Serey!

SEREY. Dad, I stayed up until five AM with her, she was asleep.

KIM. You promised me you'd stay awake. We said we'd take turns.

SEREY. I dozed off!

KIM. I can't trust you. *(On phone.)* What is taking so long?

SEREY. It was terrible what she told us. What do you think she'll do, Dad? I'm scared.

CHHEM. *(Confused:)* Nowhere in the neighborhood. Perhaps she took the wrong bus.

SEREY. She kept on saying she wanted to be alone.

KIM. I can think of nothing scarier for her than to be alone outside in Long Beach. *(To SEREY:)* How could you let this happen?

SEREY. It's not my fault. She hates it here, she can't rest. We yell too much.

KIM. She's been keeping Oun's death inside all this time.

I didn't know what to say. I've tried so hard to forget. (*Listening on phone.*) Yes...I'll repeat it again. Thida San, Cambodian, blind...T-H-I-D-A. 245 Seventh, Little Phnom Penh...And please, I'll be right over. (*Hanging up.*) I'll go to the police station, then check back with the doctor.

CHHEM. We will find Thida. Thida knows more than she pretends. We will look everywhere. Savath always knows what to do.

KIM. Chhem will you go back to the temple and check again? And go with Serey so you don't get lost too!

(Lights shift to THIDA, head shaved, wearing the sunglasses, walking with her cane, as we hear street sounds.)

THIDA. *I walk in a quiet place, the sun is so hot—hear only an occasional car. The wind blows sharply as if through a tunnel.*

(Behind her a MAN appears.)

MAN. Hey! Your money, man. Hey!

THIDA. *Grabs my arm so tight.*

(He spins her around, knocking her glasses to the ground.)

MUGGER. Your money!

(He pulls a knife. THIDA unpins the plastic bag pinned to her undershirt.)

THIDA. My brother tells me to carry it always.

MUGGER. Whatever, lady.

(She pulls American bills from among her photos. Sound of a car approaching. The MUGGER grabs the plastic bag with photos and exits, crushing the sunglasses. THIDA feels on the ground.)

THIDA. *Sipha. Oun.*

(She feels the discarded plastic bag, the glasses.)

THIDA. *I feel only crushed eyeglasses.*

(She stands putting her hand to her breast where her photos just were. We hear the sound of cars speeding by. Against the blue THIDA bends down and feels the ground with her fingers.)

I am now walking on earth not on cement. In the distance I can hear the sound of strong wind in the trees...or perhaps it is the sound of waves.

(The sound slowly becomes crashing waves. Lights shift to SAVATH, holding a map, hurrying to SEREY and CHHEM outside KIM's apartment.)

CHHEM. What took you so long? We've searched every street...

SAVATH. Everyone's looking, my agency, the temple, the community center – I've broken up the area into sections on the map.

(THIDA is walking.)

THIDA. Yes, I must be walking near the sea! Soon I will reach down and feel the sand. White. I say to Sipha as we walk, "Look at the sand, not the bones."

(SAVATH instructs CHHEM and SEREY.)

SAVATH. *(To CHHEM:)* I want you to go to every neighbor and ask what they saw, she could be hiding right around here, that can happen. *(To SEREY:)* You go with her, page me on my beeper. What was she like last time you saw her?

SEREY. I think she probably wanted to kill herself.

SAVATH. You should've told me that on the phone.

SEREY. She told us something bad about her daughter.

SAVATH. That makes a big difference for the police.

(THIDA continues to walk.)

THIDA. I'm going to the sea. Back to Cambodia.

(SAVATH speaks to SEREY.)

SAVATH. Where would she go?

SEREY. Rushing traffic, the ocean? I don't know. It was a shock for her to let it out. I can't believe I let her run away.

SAVATH. It's okay, we'll report that too, we've got about a hundred people looking—Even the monks. Your father is out with the detective.

SEREY. What she told us. It makes me feel so empty. Like the worst part of the Thai camps.

SAVATH. I know...that's how I felt when I lost my sister.

(He looks at her; calm and optimistic.)

Hey, she survived the killing fields she'll survive it.

(THIDA sits cross-legged as the sun colors her face fiery orange. She listens to the rhythmic sound of oil pumps.)

THIDA. *(Lifting head; sun on face.)* Ah, sun. Was it waves I heard, lapping on the shore? No, I was tired, from walking. *(Listening.)* But what is that strange "Whir, whir, whir." I don't recognize that. It comforts me...I'm floating. Below are the trees. And blue-green as far as I see. *(A beautiful vision.)* The beach at Kep!

(She meditates as lights fade to night. THIDA sits, listening to the oil pumps, as SAVATH holding a flashlight walks over to her and leans down, touching her gently so as not to frighten her.)

SAVATH. Mrs. San? It's Savath. Your family is here now. We've been looking since yesterday. The police that found you said you didn't want to talk.

(KIM and SEREY rush in, exclaiming relief.)

KIM. Thida! Thida! *(Laughing from panic.)* I'm about to have a heart attack and you're calmly meditating. You shaved your head?

THIDA. I tried to walk to the sea.

SEREY. You went in the wrong direction. If something had happened I never would've forgiven myself.

KIM. You shouldn't have run away.

SAVATH. L.A.'s a dangerous place.

(SEREY touches the initials on her scalp.)

SEREY. Where did the letters on your head come from?

THIDA. The Spider.

KIM. I am more and more astonished.

(SEREY touches THIDA's ripped clothing.)

SEREY. What happened to your shirt?

(THIDA feels where the plastic bag was pinned to her shirt.)

THIDA. They robbed me of the photographs of my family.

SAVATH. She got mugged.

THIDA. After that I felt I must finally return.

KIM. Return where, sister?

THIDA. To the beach at Kep. I am not alive.

KIM. Of course you are, we see you right here in front of us. Living, breathing.

THIDA. My soul left my body and traveled to Kep.

KIM. I was mistaken to leave you alone with Serey. Now I understand why you wanted to hide in the dark for so long in our country. I wish I could've been there to comfort you.

THIDA. You promised I could go to your temple to live. Now I've waited long enough.

KIM. You wouldn't be safe at the temple. It's with your family that you'll finally get better, surrounded by those who care for you.

SEREY. My dad's right. We want you to get better now, auntie.

THIDA. Without my vision I am useless.

KIM. I sometimes feel that I can't live but we go on for our ancestors. The doctor got money from the university to study your case. Here's someone who wants to solve the problem. Of course there's a scientific answer. And one day you'll see again. You will see Serey's children.

SEREY. I may not have children.

(KIM gives her a dirty look.)

But if I do, sure, you can see them. Or not. Whatever. We just want you to be happier. We meant no disrespect.

(KIM holds THIDA to him.)

KIM. We're the last survivors of our family. You have to trust me.

THIDA. I want to become a nun. THAT IS FINAL.

SEREY. The temple is a warehouse with peeling paint. You wouldn't want to live there.

THIDA. He said it was like the temples in Cambodia.

SEREY. He lies sometimes.

KIM. Serey.

SEREY. Sees things through rose-colored glasses. I'll take you to the temple more often, I promise.

(THIDA listens to the oil pumps.)

THIDA. Where am I?

SAVATH. You're in an oil field.

Scene 9

(THIDA taps her cane impatiently as DR. SIMPSON shows KIM her research in her office.)

DR. SIMPSON. There are about 150 survivors, a cluster of women in Long Beach, who don't know each other—I can't find any anywhere else. We're testing blood pressure, heart rate—doing neurological tests. My colleagues are looking forward to meeting you, Thida.

THIDA. I am not here.

KIM. You need to stop saying that now. You are clearly here in front of us. *(To DR. SIMPSON:)* She says her soul left her body and traveled to the beach at Kep. *(To THIDA:)* A soul is a mysterious thing. It wanes like the moon, but it comes back to full, you'll see.

DR. SIMPSON. We'll do an ERG, and an MRI so we can look at your brain.

THIDA. Do so at your own risk.

KIM. Stop that with your cane. They want to ask you some questions about your background.

THIDA. She doesn't listen.

DR. SIMPSON. What kind of suffering could be so great that it would blind someone? It's the grief that interests me and how that effects the eye.

THIDA. You do not understand.

KIM. What?

THIDA. I see the same things over and over in my head. At night I cannot sleep. My head it pounds, as if a nail is being twisted into it.

DR. SIMPSON. We need to give you some medicine for your headache, Thida. That will help.

KIM. Of course. Why didn't you tell me this?

THIDA. *(To DR. SIMPSON:)* I do not want the medicine. It's bad for you. *(To KIM:)* I want to go to the temple. Plan a ceremony for Sipha.

KIM. What are you talking about now?

THIDA. Release him.

DR. SIMPSON. Who is Sipha?

KIM. Her husband.

DR. SIMPSON. Medicine will help for your headache. *(To KIM.)* I'll need her to come with me to the resident presentation, and if she could come back for more tests, I have the women scheduled all week.

KIM. I'll be interested to see if you can find any organic basis for this.

DR. SIMPSON. Yes, the funders were generous with something that could easily be interpreted as psychosomatic. (*Joking:*) It also helps my reputation for not being a “people person.”

KIM. I see. I loved doing research. Here in this country I’m a lab technician. This is more exciting than doing blood work.

DR. SIMPSON. I’m sure you were a good doctor. I’m grateful to you.

THIDA. I feel sick.

KIM. You must go with Dr. Simpson.

THIDA. (*Muttering to herself:*) The walking dead. (*To DR. SIMPSON:*) Can you make yourself useful and bring me to the temple, doctor?

KIM. Thida!

DR. SIMPSON. (*To KIM.*) I’ll make sure someone gets her home, about five. Will someone be there?

KIM. Yes. Just don’t lose her.

(KIM exits and lights shift as DR. SIMPSON addresses her Residents, who are in silhouette, examining THIDA.)

DR. SIMPSON. No country has lost such a sizable part of its population in such a short time and was stripped of an entire generation of people with education. (*Staring off.*) I’m sorry...The earth leaves me sometimes...Who had a question?

(We hear the RESIDENTS interrogating THIDA.)

RESIDENT 1.(*V.O.*) You see nothing at all, Mrs. San?

THIDA. No.

RESIDENT 2. (*V.O.*) Did the insomnia and headaches come with the onset of the blindness, Mrs. San?

THIDA. I can’t remember.

RESIDENT 3.(*V.O.*) Can you describe the nature of the forced labor, Mrs. San?

THIDA. Leave me alone.

RESIDENT 1. (V.O.) How long were the periods of starvation?

DR. SIMPSON. Trust in society was eroded; the perpetrators were often victims—many young boys were forced into the Khmer Rouge during the imbalance of the Vietnam War bombings and the country's own civil war...

RESIDENT 2.(V.O.) Did you experience shell explosions, Mrs. San?

RESIDENT 3.(V.O.) Did you suffer injuries to the back of your head?

RESIDENT 1.(V.O.) Do you have a history of cataracts, glaucoma, Mrs. San?

RESIDENT 2. (V.O.) Can she speak?

RESIDENT 3. (V.O.) Were there remnants of Agent Orange in that area?

RESIDENT 2. (V.O.) Is this a symptom of PTSD?

RESIDENT 1. (V.O.) Does her culture somatize illness?

RESIDENT 3. (V.O.) Has she worn a halter monitor while she's questioned about trauma?

RESIDENT 1.(V.O.) Have you repeated the MRI, Mrs. San?

ALL THE RESIDENTS. (V.O.) Mrs. San?

Scene 10

(SEREY enters as THIDA sits by the window.)

SEREY. You're really pissed at my dad. (*Explaining the word.:*) Angry.

THIDA. Correct.

SEREY. He has that effect on people. When you ran away it made me think of the camp. We lived in a hole, Aunt, before we got assigned a refugee number in Thailand. It was just he and I, and a jerry-can of water. He'd stay up at night, wouldn't let me stray

anywhere. I found out later it was 'cause the Khmer Rouge from the next camp raped girls.

THIDA. On the day the Khmer Rouge came into Phnom Penh a Statue of the Buddha cried real tears.

SEREY. I'd ask him to show me my mother's photograph over and over. The only thing pretty. I'd ask, where was she in the photo. At home? Where would she go after the picture was taken? The color of the blouse? The little scarf? If I could just get back to where she was in the picture. He'd never say anything, just stare off. He'd put the photo back in the plastic bag, fold it in a square and pin it back to the inside of his undershirt. I miss her so much but I didn't even really know her.

(SEREY is filled with grief for what she can't have and won't ever know.)

THIDA. Serey? The photo as you describe it would not be taken in her house. She would be in the studio at a photographer's: a room with a red velvet drape. After the picture was taken she would accompany your father for a tea at an outdoor café with white tablecloths and silver. They would hold hands and watch the sun setting, the villas changing color, there would be a soft wind. They would have sandals, which they would slip off under the table. Their feet would touch. Her blouse is pink I'm certain, and the scarf blue.

SEREY. I'm sorry about Oun.

THIDA. You are a stubborn one, like her. She was a fighter.

SEREY. Did you choose your own husband?

THIDA. No it is my parents who chose him.

SEREY. Did you love him?

THIDA. He saved my life warning me take off my glasses. Our last moment together, I understood what love was.

(SEREY kisses her aunt and exits.)

THIDA. *I stand in the blue-green water, feel my baby kick. Hear the sound of waves breaking, smell the salt air. At Kep I waded in the aqua water, lay on the white sand beach. Sipa would rub my shoulders...*

Scene 11

(SEREY and SAVATH are sipping espresso after dinner in a restaurant. The room is turning.)

SEREY. I like the way this restaurant spins. So you can see different parts of the city all the time. Not that the smog makes it possible. I'd like to live in a house that spins.

SAVATH. Why?

SEREY. So you could see the world from all different sides. It's boring to look out a window and see the same thing. In my case a trash dumpster, thank you. But think if you saw a waterfall, a volcano, a cabana, and a child playing. It was always changing.

SAVATH. A cabana?

SEREY. Like in Hawaii. I really want to go there. I want to scuba dive.

SAVATH. So do I. Think of how good you'd feel if you breathed underwater. Like a fish. Want to go to Hawaii?

SEREY. Isn't that the big "honeymoon" place?

SAVATH. *(Noticing:)* Are you hyped on coffee?

SEREY. My head's spinning a little. It feels good. I thought you were the big Buddhist-of-the-year, you drink double espressos?

SAVATH. Of course. With my job I need all the help I can get. Living in court rooms, the DMV? Writing petitions so Khmer people don't get arrested for child abuse when they "coin" their kids? Plus this espresso is good.

SEREY. We should go dancing. Except not that corny Khmer stuff. We should go to a club. Get all sweaty. It makes you forget.

SAVATH. I love the Khmer stuff. Sinn Sisamouth.

SEREY. He died at Tuol Sleng, you know. It's like if America sent Elvis to a concentration camp. Why would anyone do that?

SAVATH. You're right. I don't know why anyone would do that.

SEREY. Okay. *(She gulps her espresso.)* So we've been on their "second date." I like this place, I like the tablecloths, and the silverware.

SAVATH. I'm glad you like it so much.

SEREY. My aunt would like it. She's classy. I used to lust after her makeup when I was little. I wished I could steal her lipstick.

SAVATH. You look very classy in that silk.

SEREY. My dad's never seen this.

(She shows a tiny tattoo on her skin above her breast.)

SAVATH. A lotus. It's sexy.

SEREY. You found my aunt. You know everyone. It's good the way you never get freaked.

(He touches her hand.)

SEREY. So. I have an idea. It's bold. These two weirdoes are breathing down our necks. *(Quoting them.)* "We want to adapt to the American ways, go on a date." They think they're trying to be so smart. So we one-up-them.

SAVATH. I think I may know what you're talking about. But I may just be dreaming.

SEREY. I mean, I hate to say this, it sounds, I don't know, but doesn't it always come down to...? I mean if THAT doesn't work, if that part's not happening, then it's a kind of a big commitment to make for an entire lifetime.

SAVATH. *(Teasing her.)* I like that you're bold. I really like that.

SEREY. I thought...

(He leans over and kisses her.)

SEREY. I think you're really good-looking. Sometimes I worry you're too serious.

SAVATH. I am serious.

SEREY. (*Making up her mind:*) Okay. Let's check into the spinning hotel.

SAVATH. Get the biggest, most expensive room, with a tape player. Make it beautiful. I have my credit card.

SEREY. You know the hotel part doesn't spin.

SAVATH. We might be able to make it spin. I'm not as square as you think.

(*She looks at him.*)

SEREY. It's my first time.

SAVATH. Me too. (*Protectively:*) It will be our secret.

Scene 12

(*DR. SIMPSON talks to KIM near the altar as THIDA sits by the window.*)

DR. SIMPSON. Has she spoken since the residents' presentation?

KIM. No.

DR. SIMPSON. They were asking her questions and she stopped suddenly. She wouldn't say anything.

KIM. Sister, Lynn needs you to answer when people ask questions. If you see, then perhaps it will stop the memories in your head. They will be replaced by new ones.

THIDA. She knows nothing.

KIM. Thida!

DR. SIMPSON. I had to reschedule. We'll see if she can do it next week. It's hard to get all the doctors in the same room.

KIM. Yes, she'll be better next week.

DR. SIMPSON. And she refused to have another MRI so we could look at her brain.

KIM. Perhaps she got overly tired. How did the MRI research turn out?

DR. SIMPSON. They do have similar problems: high blood pressure, heart palpitations, but it's still somewhat of a mystery. I should go.

KIM. May I ask? Do you eat, Doctor? You look thin.

DR. SIMPSON. I drink too much coffee and smoke. (*Ironic.*) In some ways it really functions almost better than food.

KIM. Did I tell you? I'm quitting.

DR. SIMPSON. Really?

KIM. Soon, very soon.

DR. SIMPSON. Just about the time I do.

KIM. Perhaps stay for dinner? Any good doctor knows one must eat. Shrimp with lemongrass and pepper, squash soup. Chicken in coconut milk and lime, with Chinese broccoli?

DR. SIMPSON. I better run. I'll check in with you tomorrow and see how she's doing.

KIM. We received good news. My daughter just got into college.

DR. SIMPSON. Congratulations.

KIM. But I ask myself over and over, what can happen in four years?

DR. SIMPSON. I think by then we'll find a cure for your sister.

KIM. Yes. I always cook too much food, and my sister eats none of it, Serey's always at the library. Can I put some food in a container for you? I hope you don't stay up all night with that research. You need to sleep too.

DR. SIMPSON. It's a fantastic project, there has to be something, I just know it.

KIM. Sit and have tea, while you wait for the food. Take a breath. Enjoy yourself. You're so lucky.

DR. SIMPSON. Lucky?

KIM. You have everything.

DR. SIMPSON. Everything?

KIM. I miss my work. I miss a lot of things.

DR. SIMPSON. I'll stay and eat. It smells good.

(He touches her hand.)

KIM. Just sit, I'll serve you — don't worry about anything.

(KIM starts to exit and runs into SEREY. KIM and SEREY try to keep their voices down as THIDA sits in her chair by the window and DR. SIMPSON waits.)

KIM. Chhem has already rented an entire restaurant!

SEREY. SO WHAT? I'm not doing it. I told you that already. We both told you.

KIM. I wish your mother was here. *(Putting his hands together.)* I wish to Buddha and all the gods in the sky and all the gods in the Long Beach cement that she was here.

SEREY. What's gotten into you?

KIM. *(To himself.)* Why do I have to be the one to do this? WHY?

SEREY. Do what? Cool out. Take a breath.

KIM. Cool out?

DR. SIMPSON. *(Starting to leave.)* I'll go.

SEREY. *(To DR. SIMPSON.)* Sorry he's acting so strange.

KIM. Forgive us, this is poor timing. Please come back for dinner.

DR. SIMPSON. Yes.

(DR. SIMPSON exits.)

SEREY. Savath's grandmother is having a bad influence on you, dad.

KIM. *(Trying to gather his courage:)* Okay, okay, okay.

SEREY. Jesus.

KIM. Don't swear.

SEREY. "Jesus" isn't swearing, plus we're not Christian.

KIM. So why do you talk about Jesus? We're off the subject. If you do what the Americans do...You know...the...(Trying to explain sex; partly using the-palms-pressed-together-'slow dance'-analogy CHHEM used.) You know...I can't say it.

SEREY. Dad, you are so goofy.

KIM. Don't call me goofy! Have you had conjugal relations with a man?!

SEREY. Look...it's different here.

KIM. What are you saying?

SEREY. I had to "check it out"...

KIM. "Check it out"?

SEREY. ...I've had sex with Savath.

KIM. Oh, no, god. (An aside.) Do you think your aunt can hear?

THIDA. Every word.

SEREY. I don't want a marriage where in ten years we hate each other.

KIM. Serey? You are a fallen woman! Why did you do this? What is wrong with you?

SEREY. It's fine.

KIM. No, it's not fine!

SEREY. It was good...

KIM. You've ruined my life. (Repeating; deadpan.) "It was good." (To THIDA:) America has turned her into nothing!

SEREY. I can't help who I am...He's a lot different than I thought.

KIM. Oh. (Deadpan.) Wonderful. (Freaking about what they are discussing; to THIDA:) Why me, sister?

(To SEREY:) You are worthless! WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

SEREY. It's none of their business.

KIM. IT'S EVERYONE'S BUSINESS! You'll see! You have to get married right now, Serey.

SEREY. Thanks for trusting me.

KIM. I don't. And now I don't trust Savath.

SEREY. He loves that I'm going to college first, he wouldn't care if I went to graduate school.

KIM. Graduate school? NO! What am I saying? Yes, go to graduate school, get your PhD. (To THIDA:) I don't care what she does anymore.

THIDA. (To KIM:) Maybe you picked the right man for her after all.

(He takes a pen from his pocket.)

KIM. You want me to undo all the plans with Chhem? Cancel everything? Pay her back for what she has bought?

SEREY. You're not listening. You never do.

KIM. I *did* listen and it was a disaster.

SEREY. Well, too bad my mother isn't here. Too bad there isn't anyone here who *gets it*. It's hard. You think I like being the only child left? We're supposed to look to the future, that's what you say, but all you do is live in the past. I'm going to college and maybe I'll transfer. Transfer right out of here.

KIM. Fine, transfer. Be like all the other American families, SEPARATED and alone.

(SEREY looks at the pen he is holding.)

SEREY. Why do you steal pens, dad? You take them from everywhere, banks, gas stations, stores?

(SEREY takes another pen out of his pocket.)

THIDA. The officials killed us because we could read and write, then they kept pens in their pockets to show us their power.

KIM. I guess I can't help myself.

Scene 13

(CHHEM is in KIM's garden, calling to THIDA, who sits inside. SAVATH enters.)

CHHEM. *(To THIDA:)* What were you thinking to get those initials on your head?

SAVATH. Grandma?

CHHEM. His sister is slowly going crazy. Kim is so patient, but we have to watch her every minute.

(CHHEM has gathered some fruit.)

CHHEM. My mother used to give me a hook and let me climb the ladder to gather the ripe ones. How I loved to see the trees from above.

SAVATH. Grandma, I need to talk to you. Don't bug Serey anymore. *(Taking out a letter.)* Listen, and try not to talk.

CHHEM. I should go inside and attend to Thida.

SAVATH. This is Serey's college acceptance letter. She showed it to me...out on our "date." She's very proud.

CHHEM. But the wedding will be next month. We have already purchased the bedroom set.

SAVATH. Look, it's generous to get the bedroom set, but that's really not what we need.

CHHEM. She will have children! When your mother died, I prayed that you would stay with me and promised in return I would do good.

SAVATH. You're seeing all this in your head, but it's not going to happen that way. She'll go to college for four years. Then if we want, maybe we'll get married.

CHHEM. Four years? Who will cook your food?

SAVATH. I eat out.

CHHEM. Who will do your laundry? Clean your house? You will wait for four years, to be “together”? To have children?

SAVATH. It’s a whole different thing here, grandma...

CHHEM. No engagement? No party? No announcement? No invitations? No prayers?—I want to give back to the monks.

SAVATH. None of that. We’ll date, maybe take a trip to Hawaii at her break, go out dancing?

CHHEM. Slow dancing?

SAVATH. I think she likes rock.

CHHEM. (*Hearing “rock”.*) I will go buy her a ring tomorrow!

SAVATH. I already bought one. (*Taking out a box with a ring.*) You want to see it?

CHHEM. Ah, why did you not let me pick it out?

SAVATH. I think your tastes are at opposite ends of the planet.

CHHEM. I want to pay for it. The rock is too small, the band too thin.

SAVATH. She likes it.

CHHEM. No! She cannot see it before the wedding!

SAVATH. I showed it to her in a window, I didn’t say it was for her. It’s a double thing,: college, engagement. And actually something else...Love.

CHHEM. Love? You must get married now, Savath. I have already made the invitations and reserved the temple.

SAVATH. Well, unreserve it! Tear them up.

CHHEM. You are disrespectful.

SAVATH. I need to respect Serey.

CHHEM. All the evil we saw, we must preserve our customs. The astrologer is very optimistic.

SAVATH. We're not getting married because of the stars!

CHHEM. Think, the gold I hid in the soles of my shoes, the chains in my clothing's seams. They did not find it. It is for you and your new family. She is "easy," she'll sleep with anyone.

SAVATH. I won't listen to that.

CHHEM. You will make me lose face with Serey's father.

SAVATH. It's not about *you*. (*Vulnerable:*) Look, it may not work out, okay? We don't know. It's a risk I have to take.

CHHEM. You'll see everything good about our country will disappear!

Scene 14

(DR. SIMPSON and KIM smoke in KIM's garden. Sirens are heard in the distance.)

KIM. Now the three women in my life aren't talking to me. My sister is angry at me, my daughter hates me and my daughter's fiancé's grandmother has taken out a contract on me by now.

DR. SIMPSON. You're very funny.

KIM. Why?

DR. SIMPSON. I don't know. You just are.

KIM. My daughter says "goofy". Thida refuses to see you. I wondered what happened. Ever since the meeting with the residents she seems worse.

DR. SIMPSON. Let me talk to her.

KIM. Anything new on the research?

DR. SIMPSON. There are no links. They have some of the same symptoms, that's the best conclusion. I won't be able to get the second part of the funding if I can't prove more. There may have been something I missed. The other women are reacting like your sister, they're withdrawing, don't want to be tested, don't want to be seen. It's hard to do a study when the subjects don't want to get better.

KIM. Why not visit the temple on Willow Street? Take a look.

DR. SIMPSON. I ask myself this question: You saw trauma, why didn't you go blind?

KIM. Have you ever had a moment when medical science doesn't help?

DR. SIMPSON. ...Yes.

KIM. We discovered recently Thida's daughter refused to marry a Khmer Rouge soldier and was killed in front of her. We did not know this before. Her daughter was beheaded. Thida saw her burn.

DR. SIMPSON. You can't reverse that.

KIM. I promised my wife I'd take care of our children. As a doctor I was a marked man. I pretended I was a farmer, rubbed my hands in the dirt until they had calluses. (*Looking at his cigarette.*) You know the Khmer Rouge rolled their cigarettes with pages from books and plays. Serey is all I have left. You're lucky your eyes have not seen such horror.

DR. SIMPSON. This is a beautiful garden.

KIM. Thank you. Sometimes solutions are found outside? Prayer, food, family? Growing beans, a nap?

DR. SIMPSON. A nap would be good.

KIM. Sitting around and doing nothing at all.

DR. SIMPSON. Laughing a lot.

KIM. Who knows?

DR. SIMPSON. I don't.

KIM. Go talk to Thida. Let me get some food for you to bring home.

(Lights up on THIDA, who sits as DR. SIMPSON approaches.)

DR. SIMPSON. In this country we get so carried away with the diagnostic procedures, we lose sight of the patient.

THIDA. You smoke too much.

DR. SIMPSON. I'm sorry.

THIDA. I will never again have a test.

DR. SIMPSON. Were they uncomfortable?

THIDA. Everything is uncomfortable. I am a prisoner.

DR. SIMPSON. Let me ask you this. You said your soul left your body and traveled to the beach at Kep. How does a soul leave a body?

THIDA. How does it, Doctor?

DR. SIMPSON. Yes, that's what I asked.

THIDA. What do you think?

DR. SIMPSON. Well, perhaps because the pain is too great?

THIDA. Yes. What do you do with your day?

DR. SIMPSON. Work.

THIDA. Do you ever go to sleep?

DR. SIMPSON. Not much. What was at the beach at Kep?

THIDA. Such beauty. Do you have a family? Are you married?

DR. SIMPSON. Yes. My husband Tom is dead.

THIDA. How did Tom die?

(DR. SIMPSON *sees* THIDA, *waiting*.)

DR. SIMPSON. He had an illness.

THIDA. What type?

DR. SIMPSON. I can't talk about it.

THIDA. I know.

DR. SIMPSON. A disease of the nervous system.
It was like a bomb that went off in his body.
And in mine.

THIDA. Where did your soul go?

DR. SIMPSON. Nowhere beautiful.

(DR. SIMPSON takes a photo from her wallet. She takes THIDA's hand and passes it over the photo.)

DR. SIMPSON. We were everything to each other. I lost my only family. It happened fast...I don't know.

(DR. SIMPSON breaks down.)

I couldn't bear it. That kind of illness can't be explained, it's too cruel.

THIDA. You see, telling the story is very difficult. Almost like being strangled.

(KIM enters with a food container. DR. SIMPSON puts away the photo. She takes the food container and leaves.)

KIM. What happened to the doctor?

THIDA. She lost her husband sometime ago.

KIM. She wears the ring.

Why did you talk to her if you are so unwilling to talk?

THIDA. I must find you and her some herbs. Margosa, coconut milk...Release of stress for you, sleep for her.

KIM. *(Puzzled:)* Why did the doctor make you feel better?

THIDA. I felt useful.

She did not know something and I knew.

KIM. I need your help too, sister. You're useful to me. I need you to live.

THIDA. Why not take me to your garden? I'm sorry I've always refused your invitations.

KIM. Really you'd like to come?

(He starts to take her to his garden. Lights shift to DR. SIMPSON slowly entering the temple. She speaks to herself; with a microphone.)

DR. SIMPSON. I add my shoes to the mountain of shoes. The temple is crowded with bright silk, an American flag, a stray skeleton from Hallow-

een. Monks in orange robes sit cross-legged on dainty satin pillows eating from an array of bowls. People kneel talking. The altar is filled with baskets of tea, money, cigarettes, Oreos. A statue of Buddha is cloaked in the same robe as the monks. Blind women, shoulders slumped, eyes staring off, expressionless, holding canes. Life whirs around them but they aren't there. Where?

How can they come back? (A realization.) You almost have to die first before you live again.

Scene 15

(KIM takes a photo of SEREY and SAVATH, as DR. SIMPSON sits in KIM's living room with THIDA. CHHEM serves dessert.)

CHHEM. *(To DR. SIMPSON:)* After this engagement party, I have four years to wait for my grandson's marriage. I have taken up embroidery, doctor. A very long project. I hope I don't die before the wedding.

DR. SIMPSON. I'm sure it will be okay.

CHHEM. Okay? The tradition is ruined.

(KIM, SEREY and SAVATH join the others, as DR. SIMPSON gives THIDA a box, which she opens. Outside we hear SIRENS.)

THIDA. I would like to preserve the wrapping. *(Showing a skirt.)* It is a sampot.

DR. SIMPSON. Red and yellow. Serey told me about the shop.

SEREY. The lady gets the silk from a co-op in Takeo, it's pretty...

CHHEM. And I helped pick it out.

THIDA. *(To DR. SIMPSON:)* You must take it, I will never again have the occasion.

DR. SIMPSON. It's for you. I wanted to thank you. The tea helped me sleep. I started thinking.

THIDA. About what?

DR. SIMPSON. Memories.

THIDA. You've changed. You seem lighter.

(THIDA feels the fabric.)

You have good taste. Why do you not try it on? It would give me so much pleasure to see you dressed in something different for once.

DR. SIMPSON. You can't see me.

THIDA. I do know what you wear. I asked my brother to tell me.

KIM. I said you dressed very well. *(To THIDA:)* Why don't you try it on.

THIDA. *(To DR. SIMPSON:)* I do not feel like changing.

DR. SIMPSON. Serey says you were a city lady. I'm sure you were very elegant.

THIDA. I adored clothes. It was another life...I cannot imagine. It would give me pleasure if you would try it on...just to see.

(THIDA holds out the long skirt.)

Take it.

(DR. SIMPSON takes the skirt and tries it on.)

It is from my country. Let me feel.

(THIDA feels and adjusts it. DR. SIMPSON stands in the skirt.)

THIDA. You have given me something very beautiful.

DR. SIMPSON. What?

THIDA. A way to imagine something different. I always admired doctors. And now there's you.

SEREY. It's nice. *(To SAVATH:)* You should buy me one!

(SAVATH puts his arm around SEREY.)

CHHEM. They show the world. They are a mystery to me.

(THIDA touches SEREY, speaking softly.)

THIDA. You know, I was a midwife. I will be able to help you someday.

(KIM *listens to sirens.*)

KIM. Why don't these gangs stop? War follows us everywhere.

THIDA. It's always that way.

A little girl drops a grain of rice on the floor and a lizard grabs it. A cat sees the lizard and pounces, which brings the dog. The cat's owner starts to beat the dog and this angers the dog's owner. The two men start to fight and the families, neighbors join in until everyone is fighting. Word reaches Angkor that a fight is raging. The king thinks it's an attack by foreign enemy and rushes out with ten thousand men and elephants. The king of Siam thinks the Khmers are mobilizing to attack him and rushes out with his men and elephants. All because a careless little girl drops a grain of rice, a war breaks out. I never thought war could touch a place like Kep, but we've always had fighting. Siam. Vietnam. The U.S. We are a small country.

KIM. I'm so happy you told us that story. My sister was always an excellent storyteller.

SEREY. You know, aunt, maybe only big countries survive? A simple law of size.

(SAVATH *puts on some Willie Nelson music.*)

CHHEM. Ah, now is the time! Would you like some more to eat?

(THIDA *listens to the music.*)

THIDA. Sipa loved him.

KIM. Who?

THIDA. Willie Nelson.

DR. SIMPSON. Your husband loved Willie Nelson?

(SAVATH *puts the ring on SEREY's finger.*)

CHHEM. Finally the ring.

(SEREY *looks at the ring.*)

SEREY. Okay, we've made a commitment to each other.

We think we want to have children but I really need to go to college. We'll probably have a traditional wedding but we also want to help plan it.

(Taking something out.) I have a ring.

CHHEM. Another?

(SEREY puts it on SAVATH's finger.)

SEREY. *(To KIM.)* I want to honor you. And my mother. I know we can never forget what happened, dad. *(To THIDA.)* You know, maybe big countries like this survive because of the stuff from the little countries?

We're family. We have to stay together and we have to grow up.

KIM. I don't know. Fate has put part of you here and part of you there.

(KIM looks, anxious, at SEREY. THIDA turns in KIM's direction.)

THIDA. She's intelligent. A fighter. You must trust her.

KIM. Yes.

Scene 16

(We see the blue of ocean and hear waves. THIDA sits with DR. SIMPSON who looks out to sea.)

DR. SIMPSON. Do you see colors?

THIDA. Yellow powder spread on a woman's body after giving birth. Green lemon leaves steamed for the new mother to bathe in. Brown Star of Anise with its delicate flower. Cook it in a curry and take her to the sea. Let her play until she gets hungry then feed her the dish. When she is finished tell her your stories, take her to the top of the mountain and show her how beautiful when the sun goes down. *(She points out:)* Look...

(Turning to DR. SIMPSON:)

Thank you for bringing me here.

What is the color of the water?

DR. SIMPSON. It's blue-gray, darker in the parts where there's seaweed.

The shore is flat all the way to the sea, the sand is brown. The waves, you hear them?

THIDA. Yes.

DR. SIMPSON. They break in one place, then ripple in a straight, white line.

(THIDA hears the sound of a wave breaking. She wades into the water, holding up her dress.)

THIDA. Colder than Kep.

DR. SIMPSON. Blindness. That's how you survived.

THIDA. There was once a lady who poured all her misfortunes to the Buddha. He told her these miseries would go away if she obtained a seed from a house that had never known sorrow.

When the Buddha asked the woman if she had found the Seed of Happiness, she replied, "No". I went to every house seeking it and found no house that had not known sorrow.

(The two women stand in the water.)

In my country we believe your husband's spirit will always protect you.

(THIDA faces far out.)

THIDA. Lynn?

DR. SIMPSON. Yes?

THIDA. I still see her head bobbing up and down against the line of the horizon. I still hear Sipha and myself calling her name. She said no to them.

(OUN appears against the blue. She slowly walks out of the sea. Lights fade.)

End of Play

(A projection reads:)

("At least 150 Cambodian women living in Southern California have functional blindness, a psychosomatic vision loss linked to what they saw in the years of Khmer Rouge rule." *The New York Times*, August 8, 1989)

Full-length plays from Playscripts, Inc.



Language of Angels

by Naomi Iizuka

Drama

Full-length, 70-80 minutes

4 females, 4 males

Flexible set

An eerie cycle of ghost stories, set in the cave country of North Carolina. After a young girl is lost in a cave on the edge of town, there is a Rashomon-like investigation of her disappearance and the fate of those who survive her.

Hell to Pay

by John Andreini

Comedy

Full-length, 90-100 minutes

1 female, 5 males

(3-6 actors possible)

Office set, with some minor pyrotechnics



Advertising executive Danny Laws is having a Devil of a time. He's on the verge of losing his agency's biggest client, along with his job and his reputation as Manhattan's savviest ad man. When things look bleakest, he's offered a deal that could save his hide but cost him his soul. What begins as a simple Faustian contract turns into the hottest account Danny could imagine – an ad campaign for Hell itself.

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Memory House

by Kathleen Tolan

- Comedy/Drama
- Full-length, 80-90 mins
- 2 females
- Working sink; working oven and stove; counter or table; couch; shelves.

One winter night a woman bakes a pie as a girl tries to finish her college essay. As the deadline looms, unexamined issues of the girl's adoption from Russia, the rupture of her parents divorce, and the fear of leaving home break through the surface as the mother cajoles, deflects, and maneuvers around her own feelings of sadness and loss. Unfolding in real time, *Memory House* is about a young and an older woman who are forced to grapple with the past as they face an uncertain future.

Five Flights

by Adam Bock

- Comedy/Drama
- Full-length, 85-95 mins
- 3 females, 3 males
- Bare stage

Siblings Ed and Adele inherit an enormous aviary that their late father built for his deceased wife

whose soul, he believed, had transformed into the body of a wren. The grown children are faced with the dilemma of what to do with the crumbling structure – sister-in-law Jane wants to build tidy new houses; friend Olivia wants to build The Church of the Fifth Day honoring birds and the Fifth Day of creation; Ed wants to let the building fall to the ground. Folded into this debate are issues of religious conviction, fear of commitment, the way Russian ballet resembles a hockey game, and the courtship of Ed by Tom, a gay professional hockey player.



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This author was a resident playwright at New Dramatists.

About New Dramatists

Founded in 1949 by a playwright, Michaela O’Harra, New Dramatists is a unique resource for the American theatre. The company is dedicated to the playwright and serves as an artistic home, research and development center, and national writers colony. The company finds and nurtures new talent through a competitive selection process and a seven-year playwright development program tailored to the writers’ individual needs.

New Dramatists gives writers the tools that they need—time, generous theatre space, a pool of talented and experienced actors and directors, writing equipment, meeting space, and a gifted peer community—to grow artistically and strengthen their commitment to theatre. The company augments this central focus on artistic growth through programs that advocate and distribute each writer’s work to theatre producers, through grants and fellowships, and with annual playwriting retreats in Lake Placid and New York City, and exchange programs with the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, the Australian National Playwrights Conference in Sydney, and theatres in Hungary, Serbia, and The Czech Republic.

Writers pay nothing to join and participate in New Dramatists. In return for this gift of time and resources, member playwrights write and create new works for the theatre. The company organizes an average of 100 readings and workshops of new plays and musicals by its members each season.

This unique organization has fostered the work of over 500 playwrights early in their careers, such as: August Wilson, William Inge, Robert Anderson, John Guare, Maria Irene Fornes, John Patrick Shanley, Emily Mann, Horton Foote, James Baldwin, Donald Margulies, Paula Vogel, Mac Wellman, Joe Masteroff, Suzan-Lori Parks, Nilo Cruz, and Doug Wright.

Resident playwrights and alumni have won 13 Pulitzer Prizes, including the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Drama to alumnus Doug Wright, 24 Tony® Awards, 59 Obie Awards, 18 Drama Desk Awards, and 12 Susan Smith Blackburn Awards. On June 3rd 2001, New Dramatists was the recipient of a special Tony® Honor for Excellence in Theatre.

New Dramatists

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