

"A Decision of Extraordinary Magnitude"

by

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CHARACTERS:

HENRY WOO - An award-winning writer.

JOHN TAN - An interrogator.

SUKE TAN - John's brother.

SIMON - Henry's agent.

Darkness.

We see a heavy metal door swing open and light spills through the frame. Silhouette of a man falling into the room. Two other men enter, pick him up, and tie him to a chair. The door slams shut. Darkness.

A narrow shaft of light falls upon Henry Woo, who is bound and gagged to a chair. His eyes are shut. We hear JOHN but don't see him.

VOICE OF JOHN

Are you there? Are you there?

Henry opens his eyes.

HENRY

(sniffs)

Is that roast beef?

VOICE OF JOHN

Please state your name for the record, please.

Pause.

HENRY

What record?

SUKE speaks, in broken English.

VOICE OF SUKE

Hey, you no ask the question. We ask the question. Understand?

VOICE OF JOHN

Please answer the question.

VOICE OF SUKE

Yeah, answer question mister big shot! "Hi, I Henry Woo! I big shot writer from China!"

JOHN
I would do as he says, Mr. Woo.

HENRY
But he just SAID my name...and so did you!

Pause.

JOHN
Ummm....Well, state it for the record anyway.

SUKE
Yeah! For the record!

HENRY
My name is Henry Woo. For the record.

A flood of lights come up and we see John and Suke in ski masks. Suke wears a ball cap and glasses over his mask. They encircle Henry.

JOHN
See, that wasn't so hard was it, Mr. Woo? If you cooperate with us, I promise things will start to look better.

HENRY
Where am I?

JOHN
We ask the questions, Mr. Woo. Not you.

SUKE
(Taunting Henry with a gun)
Yeah! Not YOU, Woo. Not YOU!

JOHN
(To Suke)
Put that away before you shoot somebody.
(To Henry)
Mr. Woo, please state your nationality.

HENRY
Your friend just said I was a big shot writer from China. That would imply that I am Chinese. Also, Woo is a Chinese name.

JOHN
We know that, thank you.

HENRY
Listen, I'm starving. Can I have some food?

Silence.

I know you have some. I can smell roast beef in here.

JOHN

There's nothing here.

SUKE

John, let me hit him. Huh? He need to learn manners.

JOHN

(to Suke)

What did I say about using names! We only go by code names here.

SUKE

I'm sorry. He making me nervous. He making me forget.

JOHN

What is my code name?

SUKE

Red Fox.

JOHN

Right.

SUKE

And I am Black Viper.

JOHN

I know that.

HENRY

Viper as in a snake?

SUKE

Yes. As in Black Viper Snake that will bite you on your asshole if you don't shut up!

HENRY

Really? My asshole?

SUKE

You shut your mouth!

HENRY

But--

SUKE

I said no more talk!

There is a long pause. Finally, Henry mumbles something.

JOHN
What did you say?

HENRY
Nothing.

SUKE
You said something. Tell us!

HENRY
I was just talking to myself.

JOHN
Tell us, Mr. Woo.

HENRY
I was just saying that Vipers aren't black. They're either yellow or green.

SUKE
Red Fox, mission has been compromised. Target must be handled with force. Please confirm Red Fox.

HENRY
Yo, secret Asian man. You can stop referring to me as the target.

SUKE
How you know I Asian? Who told you?

JOHN
Calm down, Black Viper.

HENRY
Well, you sound...Asian.

SUKE
What you mean by that?
(To John)
What he mean?

JOHN
He means your English is a little broken and he's making a racist remark about it.

SUKE
What wong with my English? Huh? I sound like both of you. Right?

John and Henry are silent.

JOHN
Listen Black Viper, we're getting off track. Let's continue the questioning of the target.

HENRY
Are you guys spies?

JOHN
We're not at liberty to say.

HENRY
Are you terrorists?

SUKE
Worse than that.

HENRY
Holy shit, you're not with the IRS are you?

SUKE
No.

HENRY
What do you do then?

JOHN
Hey! We're supposed to be asking you questions, not the other way around!

HENRY
Sorry, I can't help it. I'm just naturally like this.

SUKE
You s'pose to be sk-ehh.

HENRY
What?

SUKE
I say, you s'pose to be sk-ehhhh.

HENRY
Sk-ehh?

SUKED
Ske-hhhhhh. You know, Boo! Ahhh!

JOHN
He means scared.

HENRY
Oh, scared. Sorry, sometimes you're hard to understand.

SUKE
(Hurt, to John)
Why he so mean?

HENRY

I'm sorry.

SUKE

You just say sorry to make me feel better. You not meaning it.

Suke turns away to hide his crying.

HENRY

Listen, you really are scary. I mean it.

SUKE

Stop lying! Just shut your asshole!

HENRY (FEIGNING)

Oh my god! No, don't kill me! Please no, no no! Don't kill me, Black Viper!

SUKE

What? What I do?

HENRY

The way you said that, with a thousand lions in your breath. I saw my own death in your eyes. You are truly a venomous snake ready to strike!

SUKE

Really? I am skehhh to you, yes?

HENRY

Yeah, especially when you hiss at me like a snake.

SUKE

You mean....like this-ssssssssss?
(Henry acts scared)

HENRY

Oh my god. No, don't kill me! Please!

Like kids exhausted from running around in circles for no apparent reason, they both tire themselves out and the commotion fades.

JOHN

Oh. My. God.

Darkness. Sound of water dripping.

VOICE OF JOHN

Are you there? Are you there?

Lights up revealing John bent over
whispering in Henry's ear.

HENRY

Jesus! Yes! I'm here! Stop doing that.

JOHN

Please state your date of birth for the record.

HENRY

I was born on October 11, 1972. For the record.

JOHN

Please state your occupation for the record.

HENRY

I am a writer for the stage and screen. A prize-winning one.
For the record.

JOHN

Are you mocking me?

(Pause)

HENRY

I'm not sure how to answer that. I'm hungry.

JOHN

I said there's nothing here.

HENRY

There's roast beef in here somewhere. Don't you smell it?

JOHN

I do not.

HENRY

I know your tactics. You're just trying to starve me into
submission. I'm a writer, I've researched all this stuff
before, you know.

JOHN

We just want information.

HENRY

Give me the sandwich and I'll give you information.

(Beat)

Actually, you tell me something. Why am I here?

JOHN

Tell us about the role models you've had growing up.

HENRY

Are you kidding?

SUKE

Hey! Do we look like we're kidding?

SUKE and JOHN, still wearing ski masks, look at each other.

HENRY

You want role models? What are you, nine years old?

SUKE

Just question the answer!

HENRY

You mean, answer the question?

SUKE

Don't play smart with me! Just tell us!

HENRY

Captain Kirk. He's my role model.

JOHN

Just one?

HENRY

Yes, is that ok?

JOHN and SUKE glance at each other.

JOHN

Interesting.

HENRY

What do you mean interesting?

JOHN

Well, it's interesting that you have no Asian role models.

HENRY

There were no Asian role models when I was growing up.

JOHN

That's quite clear in your work.

HENRY

You know my work?

JOHN

It's also interesting that you are a writer of Asian descent yet out of all of the plays and movies you've written, none of them contain any noteworthy roles for Asians.

HENRY

That's not true. "In How the Earth Meets the Sun" my character Linda Chang was originally a psychotherapist. That's noteworthy.

JOHN

Yes, but in the final cut she ended up running a laundromat.

HENRY

The studios changed it. Not me. I had no say in it. That's what happens when you sell your screenplay.

SUKE

Or integrity.

JOHN

What about in your plays? Any noteworthy Asian roles in them?

(Pause)

I said were there any noteworthy-

HENRY

I'm thinking.

(Beat)

Listen, I didn't grow up around a lot of Asian people, so I didn't write about them. That's not what I know. If that's a crime, then I'm guilty of it.

SUKE

That's why you're here, fool!

JOHN

Mr. Woo, you mentioned Captain Kirk earlier as one of your role models. What about Sulu? He's Asian and he was on "Star Trek" as well.

HENRY

Sulu was a wimp. Captain Kirk kicked ass.

SUKE

What about Bruce Lee? He kick ass and he Asian!

HENRY

Really, he was Asian?

SUKE

Hey, I said don't play smart with me!

JOHN

Why Captain Kirk? He was vain and egotistical. Sulu was smart, he was a navigator.

HENRY

He's boring!

What about the time he ran around the Enterprise fencing with his shirt off?

SUKED

Yeah, he kick ass like Bruce Lee!

HENRY

Because he didn't get the girl! All right? Are you happy now? Can I go?

JOHN

That's it? That's the reason?

HENRY

I never got the girl growing up. I didn't know how. So I watched Captain Kirk swagger throughout the galaxy. He always got the girl. Sulu and Bruce Lee did not.

(Beat)

You know, my very first screenplay was an epic Asian film. It was to be my "Godfather," my "Lawrence of Arabia." It was a movie where the Asian guy rebelled from his family, saved the day, and got the girl in the end. I pitched it to producers and agents. Their eyes glazed over. So I started pitching what I thought they wanted to see. I put that script away and stopped thinking about it long ago.

JOHN

And now you're writing "Calamine."

HENRY

You're good.

JOHN

Our group prides itself on our resourcefulness. We've kept a close eye on you for a very long time. "Calamine" is your fifth screenplay.

(Reading from a file)

It's about a white family overcoming the burdens of their son who was just burned in a fire. In fact your first four screenplays were about white families with problems. Are you starting to understand why you're here?

HENRY

I'm here because you don't like my writing?

JOHN

You are here, Henry Woo, because you have failed to write any plays or films in which there are significant and progressive roles for Asians. If you don't begin to write better roles for us, we will be stuck with bad stereotypical movies where Asians say stuff like...

SUKE

"This is not a chawade. We need total concentration."

JOHN

Or...

SUKE

"It was a fighting force of extraordinary magnitude."

HENRY

There can only be two possible explanations for this situation. One, my friends are playing a prank on me. Or, Two, I'm dreaming. Now, I'm ruling out number one due to my friends lack of creativity needed in carrying out this elaborate prank. And I certainly can't be dreaming because I don't remember falling asleep. The last thing I remember was sitting in my Agent's office.

(Beat)

How did I get here? Did you knock me out somewhere?

SUKE

(To John)

Should we tell him?

JOHN

I think now is a good time.

Lights shift. JOHN and SUKE are in another place, another time.

JOHN

Black Viper, target is sitting third floor West office. We've got a clear shot through the two windows. Good thing his agent has a corner office.

SUKE

Copy Red Fox. I will wait for your signal and then I shoot the tranquilizers at target.

JOHN

Confirmed. Go on my mark.

HENRY

(Interrupting)

Um, excuse me. What are you guys doing?

SUKE

We just showing you how you got here.

HENRY

By acting out a flashback scene? Guys, I'm still here. You don't have to show me. Just tell me.

JOHN and SUKE return to HENRY.

SUKE

You part of our twelve step plan for progressive global Asian visibility.

HENRY

Really? And how are you going to do that?

SUKE

One. You going to write better roles for us in all your movies.

JOHN

Two. We're going to get an Asian guy on Saturday Night Live.

HENRY

And?

SUKE

And what?

HENRY

You said you had a twelve-step plan. Those are only two steps. What about the other ten?

JOHN

We haven't gotten that far.

HENRY

So you guys haven't done any prep work?

JOHN

Have you ever heard of the concept of preparation through artistic inspiration? It's the belief of letting things happen, opening yourself up to your inner muse.

HENRY

Oh yeah, I've heard of that. Funny, I've always called it laziness.

JOHN

Everyone has their own method-

HENRY

Wait a minute. We HAVE met before.

JOHN

That's not possible.

HENRY

Black Viper, you said you wanted me to write better roles for "us." You meant you and him, right?

SUKE

Umm...I don't recall.

JOHN

When he said "us", he meant for all Asians.

HENRY

What was your real name? John, right? Black Viper, wasn't that what you called him?

SUKE

Um...I don't recall.

HENRY

(To JOHN)

Your name is John. John and Suke Tan. The Tan brothers. You guys auditioned for one of my plays. You're fucking actors!

JOHN AND SUKE

Shit.

HENRY

I can't believe it! When I get out of this, I am going to sue you both!!!

Just calm down.

HENRY

And after I call the police and have you arrested, I'm going to call Actor's Equity and have you kicked out!

JOHN

Oh no no no no. You can't do that.

HENRY

Oh yes yes yes yes I can! And I will!

JOHN

No, you really can't.

HENRY

Why is that?

JOHN

Because we're not Equity.

HENRY

Are you kidding me? You mean I got kidnapped by a bunch of community theatre actors?

JOHN

Hey, we work downtown!

SUKE

Yeah, we're legit!

JOHN

Listen, all we want is for you to write us a good script with good Asian roles in it. Something that our kids can look up to.

HENRY

I want my sandwich. Somebody better get me that roast beef sandwich right now!

JOHN

Look around you. Do you see a roast beef sandwich anywhere?

HENRY

I smell it. I know it's here somewhere. You're hiding it aren't you? Well I want it! I want that sandwich!!!

JOHN

Ok, calm down. Just, please calm down. Listen, we didn't mean any harm.

HENRY

ROAST BEEF!!!! ROAST BEEF!!!

JOHN

He's losing it.

HENRY

I WANT ROAST BEEF!!!!

JOHN

Listen, I'm sorry. We'll let you go.

SUKE

What? What you mean let go? Why let go?

JOHN

It's useless Suke. He's right. We'd never get away with this. He know who we are now.

SUKE

If we let him go, he turn us in to police.

JOHN

This has gone too far.

HENRY

ROAST BEEF!!!! ROAST FUCKING BEEF SANDWICH!!!!

SUKE

(To Henry)

Hey! You shut up!

JOHN

It's over, Suke. I'm letting him go.

John goes to untie Henry's arms.
Suke pulls out a gun and points it
at John.

JOHN
What the hell are you doing?

SUKE
No John. What the hell you do, huh? Why you doing this?
This is way out for us!

JOHN
Put down the gun.

HENRY
Yeah, listen to him.

SUKE
(Pointing the gun at Henry)
I say you shut up!

HENRY
Okay, but can you point the gun back at him?

SUKE
Don't John, or I shoot.

JOHN
You're my brother, you're not going to shoot me.

Suke shoots John.

JOHN
Jesus. I can't believe you shot me.

John falls to the ground.

HENRY
Oh my god! What did you do. What did you do?

SUKE
(Speaking perfect English)
Shut up. Just shut the hell up. I need to think.

HENRY
Hey, what happened to your accent?

SUKE
I don't have one!

HENRY
You mean this entire time...

SUKE

Yes, I was acting, ASSHOLE! Look at what you did! You made me kill my own brother.

HENRY

I didn't do anything. I've been tied up in this chair the entire time.

SUKE

Shut up and let me think!

Henry tries to keep quiet.

HENRY

I'm sorry, I can't shut up. It's my one and only flaw in life. Listen, what you've done, and what you're doing right now, all of this, is it worth it?

SUKE

When I was nineteen, I was a young actor in college. One night I went to see Anything Goes at our town's community theatre. When the curtain went up, I was swept away by all of the great singing and dancing. The audience and I roared with laughter almost nonstop. Then these two Asian characters entered the stage. Characters, not actors. These actors were clearly not Asian, but they dressed the part. They were wearing conical rice hats and foot long Fu manchus. And not only that, their eyes were taped. The entire room was still laughing, but I had stopped a while back. The laughter went on and on and soon became unbearable. I thought to myself, if Blackface is deemed illegal and racist today, why is this acceptable? Why still today? Over the years, I became angrier because I began to realize the reason it is still acceptable is because we as Asians don't speak out about it. We are not vocal enough. I think most of us would rather shut our doors and stay inside. "Not be a bother", as my father would say. So now, here we are. You ask me if this is worth it? I think only time will tell.

HENRY

Wait a minute. Let's think about this. I'll help you think this through.

SUKE

Help? You're going to help me now? No. You've never helped anyone. Especially not your Asian brothers and sisters.

HENRY

Listen, just let me go and I promise, I will write something for you. A breakout role that will do our people proud.

SUKE

I don't believe you. I think you'll go right back to writing the same stuff because that doesn't scare you. I need this. I can't go back to playing stupid delivery boys...or kidnapers with broken English.

Suke aims the gun at Henry.

HENRY

No, please don't! Please, I swear I'll change. I'll change!

SUKE

Remember this moment, Henry Woo.

Suke fires the gun. Darkness. After a few moments, we hear the off stage voice again.

OFF STAGE VOICE

Are you there? Are you there?

Lights come up. Henry's agent, Simon, is sitting across from Henry at a desk. He is eating potato chips. Henry is seated at a chair. His eyes are closed but his mouth is wide open as if he were still screaming. His arms are twisted behind his chair.

SIMON

Henry? Are you there?

Henry slowly opens his eyes and looks at Simon.

SIMON

Where did you go?

HENRY

Huh? What?

SIMON

One minute we're laughing and chatting about "Calamine" and the next moment you completely blank out on me.

HENRY

I'm sorry. You must have been worried.

SIMON

I wasn't worried. I just can't stand awkward silence.

HENRY

Simon? Is that really you?

SIMON

See, this is what I'm talking about. We take a few months off from seeing each other and look what happens. You go cuckoo on me.

(Notices Henry's hands)

Why are your hands like that? Do you have something behind you?

Removes his hands from behind his chair. Inspects his wrists.

HENRY

I'm just stretching them out. That's all.

SIMON

Ok. So, let's talk about "Calamine." The studios love the first draft. We're looking at delivering a second draft to them by the end of next week. Is that doable?

HENRY

(Out of it)

Yeah. Sure.

SIMON

Great. I'll set up a conference call next Friday. How does 10am...

HENRY

No.

SIMON

Ok, we'll make it 1pm, right after lunch.

HENRY

I mean, NO. There's been a slight change.

SIMON

Are you ok?

HENRY

I'm not going to write "Calamine." I've decided to go in a different direction.

SIMON

The direction I'm interested in is West, not East.

HENRY

You know that film idea I pitched when I first signed on with you?

SIMON

No.

HENRY

Well, it was about this Asian family...

SIMON

No, I know what it was about and I know what you're going to say. I'm saying No, as in don't do it. It's career suicide.

(Awkward silence)

You know I can't stand awkward silence. Say something, please.

HENRY stands up to leave.

HENRY

Sitting in this office just now, I had a strange epiphany. Or a nervous breakdown, or both. I don't know. I told myself that no one was interested in my first screenplay, but the truth is, I was scared. I couldn't write about Asian people because, aside from my family, I didn't grow up in that world. I wanted to fit in with everyone else, people who were not Asian. So I didn't have a lot of Asian friends. I didn't want to. I robbed myself of every ounce of culture I had. By doing that, I'm robbing everyone else. Simon, this entire time, I had the power to write for the kind of person that I am deep down inside, but I thought I didn't have any right to. But I know now, I do have a right. And I'm no longer scared. I have to be vocal, and as silly as this is going to sound, I have to make people take notice of my Asian brothers and sisters and let the world know that we are a fighting force of extraordinary magnitude!

(Beat)

And one more thing. Are you gonna eat that sandwich?

Henry points at a sandwich sitting on Simon's desk.

THE END