

**UW- Stevens Point**

# **THE IN-LAWFULS**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION**

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5-2-2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the direction and tireless support of my thesis project committee chair, Professor Cary Elza. She has so graciously and fearlessly steered me in the undertaking of this highly experimental project, even when we both realized we were in uncharted waters and had to make up the rules as we went along. Elza never gave me time to doubt myself, and selflessly supported the project even when I began waver. Through it all, Elza taught me a great deal many things. Namely patience, the importance of beats, and faith that everything will fall into place... somehow.

Just as importantly, I would also like to thank my family for their unwavering support and belief in me throughout the course of this program. I especially owe my wife, Erin Alaire Liu, my sincere gratitude, as she has had the misfortune of proofreading the many incarnations this project has undergone, yet she still remained entirely optimistic and amused throughout the many sleepless nights she shared with me. She truly has the patience of a saint. I would also like to thank my parents for their belief in me and their financial support, and to my uncle, Matthew Liu, for his consistent reminders that I should finish this program before getting married.

I'm sorry I couldn't keep that promise!

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the rest of my committee, Professors Chris Shofner and Kelly Wilz. They both graciously agreed to sign on to this project in spite of not knowing what they were getting themselves into, and still stayed on after! Thank you both, and I'm sure I also owe a thank you to Elza in convincing them to stay.

But in all seriousness, thank you each and all. I hope you enjoyed this journey as much as I have, and I will be forever grateful for being able to work with you.

**INTRO:**

Every family has its black sheep. What's their story?

'The In-Lawfuls' is a timely soap opera that is neither wholly American, nor wholly Singaporean. Although set against the backdrop of Singapore, 'The In-Lawfuls' is a show that takes the familiar American tropes of a wealthy family and the outsiders that seek both acceptance as well as the insiders that seek distance that has defined American soap operas for many generations, and applies them to a fish-out-of-water setting in a culture foreign to most American audiences. Ultimately, the show is focused on understanding family politics from the perspective of the black sheep, and in order to do so, applying the framework of the black sheep effect to family dynamics.

To understand this effect, consider a family as an in-group. When a black sheep is introduced to this group, how damaging is the potential for that individual's actions to the group, when compared to a member of an out-group? The black sheep effect assumes that the potential for damaging negative effects of this in-group black sheep far outweighs the potential for any member of an out-group to inflict upon said group's identity, whether that be personal identity or group identity (Marques & Paez, 1994). 'The In-Lawfuls' will have Jamison, the son of the Goh family, representing the black sheep effect as we watch his actions affecting the family to a greater scale than the slights made by characters not directly related to the Gohs'.

Yet what is there about this hypothesis that lends itself to a timely television program?

In the intervening years since 2015, the American media began a process of change. The surprising success of several television series and movies (such as ‘Jane the Virgin,’ ‘Fresh off the Boat,’ ‘Master of None,’ ‘Crazy Rich Asians,’ etc.) not only featured diverse casts, but more importantly, focusing on the narratives that directly address their respective cultures, and navigate issues of intercultural communication. Until this point, these groups had gone underrepresented within the mainstream American media due to the commonly held belief that these shows would be aimed at too niche an audience, that white audiences would find it hard to empathize with the “other.” (Freeman, 2002)

Yet these shows and movies have “received more than their share of media and awards attention, as well as devotion from fans, who have long been hungry to see a more representative array of characters depicted on the small screen” (Ryan, 2016). When considering the growing appetite of American consumers for diverse voices that are different and yet relatable, ‘The In-Lawfuls’ can be seen as a timely soap opera that trades the convention of a mainly white cast of characters that occasionally deals with race for dramatic effect, for a mainly diverse cast that consciously examine how race shapes their daily interactions.

‘The In-Lawfuls’ will center on a Singaporean-Chinese family, whose two adult children return from the United States for their patriarch’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Both adult children bring with them their partners, both Americans of different races. As is typical for a soap-opera, conflict is guaranteed, and in this series, that conflict will be examined through the

lens of the 'black sheep effect.' How will the family contend with the son, the black sheep, when racism is introduced through the matriarch? And how will that racism, directed at the favored daughter's black spouse, factor into the complex narrative of family politics, when an out-group member is viewed more highly than the in-group black sheep?

So why then Singapore as a location? If the show is to appeal to an American audience, why not set this within the States and feature an Asian-American cast instead?

The answer lies in racial politics. If we are to understand this wealthy family's view on race relations (which factors heavily into the nature of the show), we would need to do so from the perspective of this family belonging to the upper echelon of society, where they turn their noses down on marginalized races, never having experienced discrimination themselves and therefore unable to relate to the experience of being the 'other.' In the United States, while there certainly are members of marginalized groups that enjoy this privilege, setting this in a similar but not too culturally different country allows an American audience to contrast these experiences with their own. (Wing Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007)

There already is a precedent for this narrative. Consider the success of the 2018 romantic-comedy 'Crazy Rich Asians,' a story about an Asian-American visiting her boyfriend's home in Singapore. Despite sharing the same racial ethnicity as her boyfriend's family, her American upbringing still marks her as a complete outsider to their Singaporean

culture. This movie was embraced by a large segment of Asian-Americans, many of whom understood the trials of being viewed as more of an outsider to their countries of origin when compared to members of a different race entirely (Yap, 2018). If this sounds familiar, consider the Asian-Americans as members of an in-group, and members of an entirely different race as members of the out-group, and how those black sheep are perceived to be more damaging than the latter, all playing their parts in the ‘black sheep effect.’

Much like the aforementioned ‘Crazy Rich Asians,’ the story of ‘The In-Lawfuls’ depicts a clashing of two cultures. The Singaporean culture, and the American culture. In order to examine the conflict for this soap opera and the context of the story, a better understanding of the Singapore is required.

Although Singapore is often studied as a model nation by social-economists (Lee & Morris, 2016) due to their perceived racial harmony and strict laws, it still is driven by racial and political divisions, just as any other country. There are various racial groups competing for a significantly limited set of resources, there is the growing elitism of the older generation’s due to an accumulated wealth, and their conflict with what is perceived as an interloping expat community. With all these factors combined, the small island nation is not significantly different, statistically speaking, than any other developed country in terms of divisiveness (Barr & Skrbis, 2008). Racism, although controlled by a strict set of laws, is no less prevalent than it is in the United States. In fact, the breakdown

of this society in many ways mirrors that of the United States, which will allow for American audiences to recognize themselves in this population breakdown.

Consider for a moment the three racial groups of Singapore- the Chinese (also known as Huarens) that migrated generations ago to become the local majority, the Malay population that was indigenous to Singapore and now become a stigmatized minority, while the working class of Indians that were brought over during colonial rule that have ended up being chastised as the other (Chua, 2009). This, of course, echoes the history of the United States- the migration of European settlers, the stigmatization of the indigenous native-Americans, and the African American experience. However, this odd skew of racial politics does differ in one unique perspective. As a result of colonialism and its lasting aftereffects, Western civilization is seen as a culture to aspire towards above all else (Selvaraj, 2017), and yet the inverse cannot be said for the United States. This provides a trove of opportunity for the series to examine how these various race-related matters can be played out, and how the American romantic-interests of the family's children will find their perception of race both challenged and changed throughout the views of race that the native Singaporean characters hold.

This brings us to our primary cast of characters. While much of the conflict will be in matriarch Lisa Goh's open embrace of racism, we explore how various aspects of family politics play out, and how that mirrors the racism that Lisa's children, both engaged in interracial relationships, face both at home, and within that culture.

The central driving conflict in this story will be an examination of how the races of the two future spouses of the younger Goh's ties into the family discourse. We will be introduced to Penelope, a white woman, and Stan, a black man, both outsiders in a Singaporean-Chinese family that share no common ground with their own understanding of American racial-politics, different as that might be. As a symbolic understanding of intercultural communication drives this show, the theories will be represented in the ways these outsiders, Penelope and Stan, work with the Goh's towards some kindred racial parity. This will allow both the marginalized American minority, represented in Stan, to reconcile his own inability to relate to the Goh's, while the story plays with conventions in upturning the white privilege of the American majority, represented in Penelope. Ultimately though, the purpose of this is to lead the characters to a shared sense of "thick solidarity," an understanding of shared oppression and their respective roles in propagating that cycle that can be seen reflected in the family dynamics (Liu & Shange, 2018).

Thick and thin solidarity can be understood through a brief explanation of thick and thin identities when talking about marginalized groups. Whereas a thick identity is based around a conscious decision to avoid cultural assimilation, instead choosing to celebrate the cultural elements that make one group marginalized, a thin identity considers racial differences as "a vague social marker imposed from outside." (Shelby, 2007). In his work on promoting cultural autonomy, Shelby creates an extension of the terms of thick and thin identities in his definition of thick and thin solidarity. Thick solidarity is seen as dangerous as it leads towards embracing a sense of marginalization, whereas thin

solidarity needs to be avoided as “it becomes mere shallow rhetoric.” (Patterson, 2006). With thick and thin solidarity, neither thick nor thin is therefore wholly preferable, but a happy medium is sought to resolve the injustice through collective solidarity. In reducing this theory into a symbolic relationship within ‘The In-Lawfuls,’ the story will begin with Jamison’s embrace of thick identity at the start of the ‘The In-Lawfuls,’ as opposed to the perceptions of the thin identity attributed to his standing when viewed from the outside. Much like how thick identity is predicated on racial experience, whereas thin identity is based upon visible, inherited traits (Shelby, 2007), Jamison’s representation as one of the marginalized characters in this story will be used to understand this theory.

The ‘In-Lawfuls’ will also focus on how the family unit deals with the black sheep that has returned, and how much of the conflict is based on limited and biased sharing of information that results in conflict. The black sheep hypothesis predicts that in-group members limit their exchange of information with the black sheep, due to their status as black sheep, which ultimately contributes to the black sheep maintaining a marginalized status. (Peña & Gamze, 2014). Future storylines will be built around this conceit, as we find how much has been withheld from Jamison, and how that contributes to his furthered marginalization within his family unit.

On the other end of the spectrum, we will also be introduced to Lisa, Jamie’s sister, a character whom we learn is adopted. Through the course of the show, this will then represent the polar end of the black sheep effect, as her actions as a member of both the

in-group and the out-group ultimately leads the family to view her as less of a threat than the black sheep represented by Jamie.

When the story begins, we are introduced to the family through the eyes of the family, and how they appear from the outside. We are made to feel the same way about Jamison that they do in the pilot as we watch these events unfold from the perspective of the outsiders, Stan and Penelope. This representation of thin identity will slowly change to one of thick identity as the viewer, through the course of the series, begins to find the perspective changing to that of Jamison as the gradual building of micro aggressions allows the two outside characters to view the family dynamics for what they are, and how they got to this point.

In essence, this series will ask how do you break the cycle of being a black sheep? What if you want to make a change, but the systems that have been established in place only cause the social dynamics to be locked in place? What if by your actions, you begin to become the lesser evil, but you are still seen as the black sheep of the family? And what are the ramifications of the black sheep effect on the out-group cast of characters?

To answer those questions, we turn next to the story of the In-Lawfuls.

**PREMISE:** This will be a multi-character ensemble with a diverse cast, told through shifting perspectives. The central focus will be on Jamie, the grown outcast of a wealthy Singaporean family, who struggles to understand and reintegrate into his family, while his family comes to terms with their own failing relationships with each other. Lisa and Thomas, heads of the household, struggle with keeping their family together, while dealing with a looming threat of divorce. Lilith tries to introduce Stan, her African-American fiancée to her unexpectedly racist mother, all the while trying to reconcile her own estrangement with her brother.

There will be shifting allegiances throughout the show. The show will be focused on how the Goh elders deal with the different races of their children's spouses, the buried racism that begins to surface, and how their valuation of their children reflects racial politics and illustrates the black sheep effect. Equally important will be Singapore as a character, where the spouses (that had been living in the U.S.) will find themselves in a country not too dissimilar from the one they just departed from.

One drastic difference from previous American stories set in foreign countries will be that the perspective of this show is told through the lens of the 'foreigners.' This serves as an important distinction to remove any presumptions from an American audience as to how a culture operates, and also serves to sidestep the potential for the series to "white-splain" racial dynamics.

Yet while race is important to the events of the 'In-Lawfuls,' the story will use family in a metaphorical way. Often the source of drama and conflict (but also the source of heart), the family, through a complicated series of politics, ultimately loves and hates each other in equal measure. This series will examine how the constant push and pull dynamic works in black sheep; of marginalized family members wanting to place some distance between themselves and the rest of the family, and how the family in turn still wants to have the estranged members included. But at the end of the day, the black sheep still wants to be a part of the family, and the family has excluded the black sheep for good reason. Through that logic, one can never truly leave their family, they simply have their standing within their family readjusted.

Set in the island nation of Singapore, the series will mainly be told through the physical setting of the Goh household. A clean, sterile environment, the mansion visually contrasts the Midwestern and Californian locales that the returning Goh children call home. The story will mainly unfold within the walls of the labyrinthine Goh mansion, reflecting both the claustrophobic nature of the small island country, and to highlight the dramatic tension of the characters as they are thrown chaotically together. As a reflection of the Goh family, the house is not Asian in design, nor completely western in appearance, but rather an amalgamation of the two in order to represent the coming together of the two cultures.

**FORMAT:** Hour-long soap opera.

**TONE:** Much like the characters, this show will always border on the melodramatic.

Much of the driving conflict will be derived from cultural clashing and racial politics, and the constant push pull of the in-group identity when faced with an out-group and a black sheep. However, the tone will not be overly sentimental or overbearing, more suspenseful and reflective.

**CHARACTERS:**

JAMISON: (26) Newly engaged, stubborn, and sensitive. Jamie is reluctant to return home to his family. The product of a chaotic household, Jamie left for college in the Midwest and never looked back, that is until he decided to marry Penelope, whose world revolves around family. Jamie loves solitude, a slow paced journey, and being able to escape the noise of the big city and the stressful family drama, which is why he chose the Midwest in the first place.

Though Penelope regards him as a mature and worldly man, the truth is that he childishly stopped talking to his sister and mother over a decade ago for petty reasons, and still clings to the decisions of his teenage self even now. This has cast him as the outsider in his family, where they refuse to understand him simply because he had long ago decided not to understand them.

Jamie represents the black sheep in this family, and the character through whom the audience will come to understand the black sheep effect. Jamie represents the black sheep in many families, albeit one that hopefully can be better understood by the audience. He is a stubborn individual who attempts to think in objective terms, but only reduces every argument to an absolutist one. The kind of person that enjoys the fruits of privilege in one country, and decries the fairness of racism in another, but only because his worldviews are too narrow to realize the difference.

PENELOPE: (21) Jamie's fiancée. Penelope met Jamie in college, and is intimidated by meeting his family, a group literally and figuratively a world away from where she came from. Having been born and raised in the Midwest in a lower middle-class family, Penelope never fully trusted in her own abilities, having hidden behind her overprotective family. Kind and overly trusting in the goodness of others, Penelope will soon have her own beliefs challenged by the Goh family, and discover her own inner strengths in the process.

She tries to see things objectively, but can't help but take things personally. The daughter of an electrician and a secretary, Penelope has issues with her own self confidence as she keeps comparing her small-town upbringing to the Goh's. She's the girl next door with an inferiority complex, never attempting anything on her own for fear of failure.

THOMAS: (60) The patriarch of the Goh family. Although coming from an established family, Thomas is still a self-made man, having built his own wealth entirely on his own. While he may have many similar traits to Jamie (such as, for example, his introversion, a fiery temper, a stubborn disposition, etc.), he's worked hard to suppress them for the sake of his success. Because of this, he is unable to understand why his only son is nothing like him. Though Thomas's world is built upon networking and putting on facades to build professional relationships, he can't understand why his son refuses to adapt. As a husband, Thomas is trapped in a loveless marriage, where he does little to relate to the marital joys and struggles of his children, and even openly questions the purpose of marriage in the first place.

As a father, Thomas was largely absent in the formative years of Jamie and Lilith. He could relate to them little as children, and relates to them even less as adults. This allows for continual conflict as he insists they behave as adults, but insists on treating them as children.

LISA: (52) The matriarch of the Goh family. She is a housewife, a social butterfly, valuing wealth and obsessing over social status and perception. She considers herself religious, but is overtly narcissistic. She refuses to see the bad in herself, but is quick to call out the flaws in others. As Thomas Goh's wife, she rarely finds herself called out on this hypocrisy, especially when she hides her emotions from the social circles she dedicates herself to.

Lisa was born into wealth, and married an even wealthier man, and thus is unable to relate to the 'common man.' She comes across as quirky and able to switch emotions at the drop of a hat, especially with regards to how she treats her family. In the middle of a heated family argument, for example, she is able to hide within seconds any anger behind a pearly white smile for the sake of a guest entering the room. All this, however, will be tested when she welcomes outsiders into her family, and how she hides her deeply ingrained racism when dealing with her daughter's fiancé.

LILITH: (31) Jamie's sister. She chose to leave Singapore at a young age for Los Angeles to pursue a failed career in acting, and all that gained her was a more entitled

demeanor and a fiancé. Praised by the Goh family, she barely hides her disdain for them with a sarcastic and surly attitude, and holds no pretense in her disdain of Jamie, the one member of the Goh family who refuses to speak her. She believes herself to be an intellectual equal to Thomas, however shares more in common with Lisa than she would like to acknowledge.

STAN: (mid 30s) Lilith's fiancé. A charmer, a moderately successful rapper, and the son of a somewhat prominent family, Stan has had an easy life; these are almost all the things that Lisa wants in a son-in-law. Except for his skin color. Stan's puppy dog devotion to Lilith means sharing in her hatred of Jamie, all while charming the rest of her family, which serves as a source of confusion for everyone involved. Though he shares many of the same interests as Thomas, his intentions are gradually called into question when we discover his large debts played an equally large role in his engagement to Lilith.

However, Stan is the first representation of out-group we will find in this portrayal of the black sheep effect. In an inverse of 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,' Stan is a deeply flawed character in contrast to Poitier's perfect John Prentice, with Lisa consciously coming to terms with her own racism towards Stan. As the out-group, Stan's actions will be evaluated and compared to the black sheep by members of the in-group.

MARIO: (33) Family friend to the Goh's and business partner to Thomas Goh.

Intelligent, humble, diplomatic, and well mannered, he's known the Goh's ever since he was born; his late father was Thomas's former mentor. His father was the founder of

what became the most successful bank in Europe, and the apple fell not too far from the tree, which is why Mario is consistently dragged into the Goh's politics and held as the model son that the Goh's never had.

As he has his own family drama to contend with, Mario tries unsuccessfully to disentangle himself with the soap opera that the Goh's force upon him. Too polite to say no, his passive-aggressive behavior is the source of conflict amongst the Goh's.

DANIEL: (26) Jamie's childhood friend. Daniel is a funhouse mirror image of Jamie, and irony personified. Daniel is a working class devout Buddhist, dedicated to his family, but at the same time builds his life around parties, and sleeping with anything that moves, while lecturing others on the dangers of immorality. Other than Jamie's family, Daniel is Jamie's sole remaining link to Singapore; a comrade in arms but a source of conflict as well.

Having just been married, Daniel is trying desperately to leave his working class nature behind, and trade up his own lifestyle to match his wealthy spouse's.

JOANNA: (late 40s) The Goh's primary housemaid, Joanna has barely known her own children, having left her family behind at a young age to move to Singapore from the Philippines to work for the Goh's, caring for their then young children. She is quietly diplomatic, having survived multiple maids being hired and fired, and her greatest contribution to the family is understanding Lisa. She has spent many years surviving the

chaotic Goh household, and although she picks her battles carefully, she is ready to return home, and has started caring less what her actions bring.

1<sup>st</sup> Episode:

A STORY:

Jamie and Penelope arrive at Changi Airport to celebrate Jamie's father's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party. As they arrive, Jamie reveals that he has not been completely honest about his being an only child. Penelope struggles to come to terms with this major omission of Jamie's. This is major omission, though taken lightly by Penelope (though perhaps outwardly), may hint at further secrets down the road.

Jamie clearly wants nothing to do with his family, but he has been talked into returning home for a week to appease Penelope, and in the hopes that he can show her how he has not exaggerated in describing how dysfunctional his family is. She is convinced he is wrong, and he is adamant that he will stay out of sight so that he is able to avoid any confrontation with his family.

Despite repeated pleas by Thomas and Joanna for Jamie mend his estrangement, and an attempt by Mario to convince Lilith to mend fences, Jamison refuses to cooperate and instead, stubbornly ignores his family as they communicate with him. We also find an old friend and ally, Daniel, has been likewise spurned in the past by Jamie's unwillingness to face conflict. Jamie is willing to run away as soon as he is made to feel uncomfortable by his family, but he has to be talked out of it by Penelope.

All this eventually comes to a head when we find Daniel learning, in small doses, to empathize with his mother, and realizing that the cost of his own estrangement has made his family unwilling to communicate with him on his mother's cancer diagnosis and upcoming surgery. Because of all these things adding up, he decides to stay for a little while longer.

#### B STORY:

Stan and Lilith have gotten engaged, and although Lilith is excited to reveal this to her parents, Stan struggles with how to break the news to the family after a rocky introduction to Lisa. After minor slights and insults, such as Lisa misremembering Stan's name, being reluctant to acknowledge Stan and Lilith's relationship, and even openly talking about Lilith's past engagement to an ex in front of Stan, Stan is understandably wary of the reception of their own engagement.

Still, Stan is willing to push forward on account of Lilith's excitement, but he encounters another roadblock when Thomas, dealing with his own marital troubles, bemoans the futility of marriage when living together is an option on the table. To further complicate matters, Penelope reveals to Stan the marital troubles that Stan and Lisa are going through, and asks him not to reveal this information to anyone.

At the dinner party, Stan overhears thinly veiled racist jabs by a dinner guest at his relationship with Lilith. He chooses not to acknowledge this, but finds solidarity with

Penelope, an outsider much like himself. Thankfully, the chaotic events that Lilith faces that day (dealing with her brother's estrangement, the death of Ah Kwee, etc.) cause this potential powder keg to be saved for another day. We know this will happen, just not today.

#### C STORY:

Penelope is introduced to Jamie's parents, who seem to like her at the outset. In the aftermath of various skirmishes, Penelope consistently tries to defuse the situations and play peacekeeper. While Lisa tries to invite an unreceptive Jamison to visiting an elderly employee of her mother (Ah Kwee), Penelope convinces Jamison to appease his mother at a later date, and decides to keep Lisa company on her visit to Ah Kwee.

When she visits Ah Kwee, Penelope is made all the more aware of the cultural and language barriers that she faces in this new country. While she is forced to have Lisa be her translator, Penelope learns a bit more about the family dynamics and Lisa's own humanity.

Later that day, Penelope tries to win Lilith over with a dress to replace the one Lilith forgot to bring with her, which she purchases beyond her means. After giving a gift to Lilith, she finds that same gift discarded. This is followed by a perceived slight by Lisa on her weight, which causes her to give up on trying to convince both herself and

Jamison that the family can be salvaged. She is willing to stay though, on account of Jamie reconsidering his estrangement.

**STORYLINES BEING FORESHADOWED:**

The following storylines will have seeds planted in the pilot. We witness the beginning of two marriages as they navigate issues of race, identity, and shifting loyalties. But behind all of this are the heads of the Goh household, Thomas and Lisa. We watch as their own marriage begins dissolving in front of us while no one else notices, as old wounds are reopened, and an old flame from Lisa's past re-enters her life, which places into perspective at least some of her prejudices. We watch as Stan's gambling debts leads to Lisa feeling justified in her suspicions about him, and we find Joanna prepared to return home and giving up on her own diplomacy, meeting the prejudices of how the hired help always steals by stealing things (if you can't convince them you're a good person, then live up to their expectations), and generally stirring the pot.

We see mirrored in the primary cast of characters the same problems of racial identity in Daniel, who has just returned from Shanghai but is seen as too Singaporean and not Chinese enough for China. In subsequent episodes, this leads to a heated debate with Jamie about what race means from the perspectives of one in the majority, and one in the minority.

**Future Storylines:**

Every proceeding episode will be structured, first and foremost, around the development of the relationships of these characters. These characters are continually pushed and

pulled from each other as they deal with their dependency on each other, but a constant reanalysis on where they stand in the family. This all relates to the overall theme of the show of examining the relationships as it pertains to the black sheep effect, as the characters are left wanting to have a black and white view of their world, but being trapped in a world of grey. Every conflict, and by extension, every storyline will thus be built with that as its guiding principle.

-Lisa and Penelope's relationship is pushed to the brink of turmoil as Lisa begins second-guessing every intent of Penelope, and tries to warn Jamie away from spending time with her.

-A surgical complication causes Lisa to be bedridden, and Penelope and Jamie to remain in Singapore longer than expected beyond the birthday party.

-Everything comes to a head at Thomas's birthday party near the end of the season, when Stan begins to distance himself from Penelope on account of his loyalty to Lilith, and when Lilith finds that the harder she tries to communicate with Jamie, the harder he pushes back against her.

-Jamie reconciles with Daniel, but is surprised to learn how much his friend has changed in racial beliefs and attitudes, now that he has become a self-hating Asian.

-Stan's heavy debts are discovered by the family, which spurs more distrust against him by the Goh's.

-Mario and Daniel pursue an investment opportunity in China, where we learn how casually racist Daniel is against mainland Chinese.

-Stan's parents visit Singapore, and find their beliefs on race both challenged and enforced. As a result, Stan's parents are treated to a convex view of the world that they had known before.

-Daniel gets into a fight with a group of racist expats, and holds all westerners to be guilty for what he perceives as a cultural exploitation- moving to Singapore without integrating, living through entitlement left over from Singapore's colonialist past. However, he tries to reconcile those beliefs with his dependency on Mario.

-Find out how the other members of the Goh's extended family compare to the Goh children, and how they view the Goh's children.

-The successful cousin enters the picture and is used as the shining light that the Goh's wish their children would be. Where does all this fit in when she begins an unexpected affair with Mario that is caught on the Goh's security surveillance?

-Lisa is caught cheating by Mario, and places a great strain on their relationship

-While the Goh's had spent millions of dollars to fund a failed Lifetime movie written and directed by Lilith, we learn that this stemmed partially from guilt over what they consider to be a personal failure in raising Lilith, as well as to buy her affections.

-The reason why Jamie moved away from his family is revealed, and it threatens the relationships of all involved.

**Once we are further established:**

-Jamie will enlist in the Singaporean Armed Forces, forcing his personal storyline to diverge from the others. There, he finds himself a pariah amongst the locals, and forces him to reevaluate his standing in the local community, and challenges his perception of his own sense of belonging.

-Penelope and Stan individually get involved with expat communities, and find themselves further separated from the world of Singapore

-A flashback episode- thirty years ago, younger versions of Thomas and Lisa are about to get married.

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THE IN-LAWFULS  
"PILOT"

by

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FOURTH DRAFT  
05/02/19

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

TEASER

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE-UP on an East-Asian BOY, 8 sitting on a couch in a sparsely decorated, windowless office, in front of a female, Malaysian PSYCHOLOGIST in her late 20's. A rich, warm glow from several incandescent bulbs lights the room.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Thank you Jamie. Why don't you send  
in your mother.

The boy flashes a big toothy smile, gets up and runs out.

A beat later, LISA, a stylishly dressed East-Asian woman, mid-30's, with a heavy Singaporean accent walks in.

PSYCHOLOGIST (cont'd)

Lisa, please have a seat.

Lisa smiles patronizingly at the PSYCHOLOGIST as she sits down on the couch.

LISA

You see what I have to deal with.

Without missing a beat, the Psychologist ignores that statement.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I'm just a little concerned about how  
Jamie is feeling...

Lisa sits up straighter in her chair, cocking her head to one side. She tries to keep her voice level, but her tone betrays her, barely concealing her emotion.

LISA

(suspiciously)

Why? What did he say?

PSYCHOLOGIST

How are things at home?

LISA

(defensively)

Fine. Fine. You know, with Lilith,  
it's been a struggle. We really want  
her to feel at home, like she's part  
of the family.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Isn't she part of the family?

Lisa glares at the psychologist angrily.

LISA  
Of course, what a stupid question.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Does Jamie know?

LISA  
...that Lilith's adopted? SHE doesn't even know yet... Why should we tell him? We really don't want to make her feel like she's not family, you know?

PSYCHOLOGIST  
I understand, but from what I'm gathering, Jamie is feeling left out, like you and Thomas are giving too much attention and leeway to Lilith. That you're harsher to him when he slips up, perhaps?

Lisa sits back into her seat, turning her head sideways, and staring irritably at a wall.

LISA  
Nonsense.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
I am just concerned about the long-term implications that this might have on your relationship with your children. Lisa, have you heard of the Black Sheep Effect?

The Psychologist pauses, awaiting a response, but none is forthcoming, so she continues.

PSYCHOLOGIST (cont'd)  
It's a relatively new theory. As social animals, we always form groups. Take for example family as a group. We tend to treat those that we are related to differently than those that are not part of our family. You told me in our last session that you and Tom struggled with guilt about adopting Lilith so soon before you had Jamie, right?  
(MORE)

PSYCHOLOGIST (cont'd)  
That you felt like you had given up  
hope on conceiving a child?

Again, the Psychologist waits for a response. Lisa does a  
slow blink as she dramatically turns her head to face her.

LISA  
Yeah? So? If we had known that we  
would have Jamie, do you think we  
would have adopted Lilith?

PSYCHOLOGIST  
That's what I'm getting at. If you  
really want Lilith to be part of your  
family, I really want you to ask  
yourself if you consider her so.  
Because according to the Black Sheep  
Effect, group members... Let's say  
family members, they tend to treat  
members of their family, (children in  
this case), harsher than they would  
those that they do not consider part  
of their group. This is because of  
how those actions of their family  
members may negatively impact their  
group image.

LISA  
Excuse me?

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Well, think of Mississippi Masala.  
Like how the Indian main character  
was spurned by her family over her  
Americanization, and her relationship  
with Denzel. And how her family  
treated her worse than they did  
Denzel and his community when  
confronting the issue?

LISA  
(dryly)  
You're comparing our family to  
Indians?

The Psychologist ignores her racist statement.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
My point is that sometimes we treat  
our own worse than people we perceive  
to be not our own.

LISA  
Oh, so you're saying I don't PERCEIVE  
Lilith as my daughter?

Lisa stands up. Clearly enraged, this time she drops her poise as she leans forward with heavily aggressive body language as she yells at the Psychologist.

LISA (cont'd)  
I don't have time for this. This is  
bullshit. You want to tell me that I  
don't love my daughter? BULLSHIT.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Mrs. Goh, please. I am not saying  
that. But I want you to be very  
careful and think about how you treat  
your children. Studies have shown  
that the implications of these  
attitudes negatively impact...

Lisa leans forward again.

LISA  
BULLSHIT!

Lisa turns around and walks towards the door. Her rage causes her to fumble when she tries to open the door, causing her to comically struggle with the door handle.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Please, Mrs. Goh. I just want you to  
understand that there is a very real  
danger that if you continue down this  
path, Jamie might only learn to  
resent you.

The door finally opens. As it swings open, we see that the SECRETARY has opened it from the other side. Lisa turns around, getting the last word as she leans forward one last time.

LISA  
BULLSHIT!

Lisa slams the door shut.

ON SCREEN: EIGHTEEN YEARS LATER

INT. AIRPLANE ECONOMY CLASS - MORNING

A sea of Asian passengers populates a crowded economy class cabin. We CLOSE-UP on one aisle. JAMISON (late 20's, East-Asian) sits in the middle seat of a window row, and PENELOPE (early 20's, Caucasian) in the window seat beside him. The aisle seat on that row sits empty.

JAMISON

...I don't remember why, but I do vaguely remember my mother forcing me to go to a lot of shrinks when I was a kid.

Penelope bursts out laughing.

JAMISON (cont'd)

Hey, I just want to prepare you for what you're walking into. What YOU are making us walk into.

PENELOPE

It can't be that bad.

Penelope leans in to kiss Jamison on the cheek.

PENELOPE (cont'd)

You should give her a chance. You haven't spoken to each other for a decade.

JAMISON

Don't push it, you already got me flying home.

PENELOPE

It's not everyday your dad turns 60.

JAMISON

Yeah, well, I'm just saying... There's a reason why I haven't come back to Singapore.

CAPTAIN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

Cabin crew, please prepare for descent.

Penelope and Jamison sit back in their seats, their faces hard to read.

ON SCREEN: THE IN-LAWFULS

"CHAPTER 1: THIN SOLIDARITY"

ACT ONE

EXT. CHANGI AIRPORT TARMAC - MORNING

Planes arrive and depart on the tarmac.

INT. CHANGI AIRPORT TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Jamison and Penelope emerge from the sky-bridge, and walk down the brightly lit and busy airport corridor. Penelope grins from ear to ear in excitement.

JAMISON  
Welcome to Singapore.

PENELOPE  
This is so exciting!

JAMISON  
(sarcastically)  
Yeah. Yay, exciting! It's like being dragged back to purgatory.

PENELOPE  
Don't be so dramatic! This is your home!

JAMISON  
Dramatic? I tell you what. I'll prove it to you. I'll give you a taste of my childhood. At the end of this trip, you can tell me if I'm being dramatic!

Penelope shakes her head. Grins. *I won't let this party pooper bring me down!*

JAMISON (cont'd)  
Anyway, let's just get this week over with so we can go back home. That's one luxury I didn't have when I was a kid.

Jamison does a double take as he sees a heavily tanned East-Asian WOMAN in her early 30's in expensive designer clothes walking out of a nearby sky-bridge.

JAMISON (cont'd)  
(under his breath)  
Lilith.

Lilith, clearly not surprised to see Jamison, breezes by with her companion. An African-American in his early 30's, STAN.

LILITH

Hi Jamie.

Lilith doesn't break her stride or make eye contact as she passes. Stan jogs to keep up. Penelope and Stan exchange confused glances.

Jamison and Penelope watch for a second as Lilith and Stan disappear into the crowd.

PENELOPE

Who was that?

JAMISON

Lilith.

PENELOPE

Who the hell is Lilith?

JAMISON

My sister.

Penelope stops dead in her tracks. She turns to face Jamison, clearly trying to make sense of this.

PENELOPE

Excuse me?

JAMISON

It's no big deal... Really...

JAMISON tries to continue walking, but PENELOPE stops him. She stares at him questioningly.

PENELOPE

You have a sister that you failed to mention until now... And that's no big deal?

JAMISON

It's complicated, alright? It's just easier if we both don't talk to each other. Which is why we haven't... for a decade.

PENELOPE

I thought you hadn't spoken to your mother in a decade.

JAMISON

That too.

PENELOPE

Jesus. I feel like I should be surprised.

Penelope looks around, agitated. Jamison takes her hands in his, and tries to catch her eyes in his gaze.

JAMISON

Look, I'm sorry. I should have told you. I just stopped thinking of her as my sister a long time ago.

PENELOPE

Will you tell me why?

JAMISON

Can't we talk about this some other time? I don't want to ruin today.

PENELOPE

Just promise me there's nothing else you're not telling me.

Jamison shifts uncomfortably.

JAMISON

Yeah... Yeah.

Penelope nods, and on her cue, they both continue walking down the terminal. A moment of silence passes.

JAMISON (cont'd)

So. Second thoughts?

PENELOPE

(annoyed)

It's not like I exactly have a choice...

INT. CHANGI AIRPORT TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

LILITH stands in front of Stan on a moving walkway, looking straight ahead in her sunglasses. Stan glances behind his shoulder, then back at Lilith.

STAN

That's your brother?

LILITH

Yup.

STAN

Do you... want me to say something?

LILITH

Like what?

Lilith turns around to face Stan.

LILITH (cont'd)

Convince him to talk to me now all of a sudden? Big manly man?

(teasingly)

Maybe that'll be your engagement present?

STAN

You know what I mean.

LILITH

I love you babe, but not even a miracle could break his silence. Forget him. Besides, all I want to think about right now is our wedding.

STAN

Yeah, about that. I still don't understand when we're telling your parents.

LILITH

Same time we're telling yours. Everything just happened so fast. I just want to make sure they get to know you first, you know?

STAN

Yeah, but what if they don't like me?

LILITH

No. But they'll love you.

STAN

They don't care that I'm...

LILITH

Black?

STAN

...not Asian.

LILITH

What are we? In the 1940's? You could be green for all they care. Us Goh's are modern folk! They'll love you, babe.

Stan nods, his mind not quite made up yet.

As they near the end of the walkway, they see two men holding separate signs for Lilith and Jamison. As Stan and Lilith approach the man holding a sign for Lilith, Stan turns to look behind him at Jamison and Penelope in the far distance.

LILITH (cont'd)

That's us.

INT. GOH MANSION - BREAKFAST DINING ROOM

An open-air breakfast dining room faces the intricately manicured garden circling a koi pond. LISA, now in her early 50's, sits at the breakfast table across from her husband, THOMAS, East-Asian, days away from 60. In front of them sits a typical Singaporean breakfast spread of tropical fruits, Won-Ton Mee, You-Tiao, and fresh soy milk. Joanna, the maid, begins pouring the soy milk for them.

LISA

I spoke to my girlfriend Janice. Three under par! She asked me to be their team captain next month, said that Ong is so terrible! Keeps complaining about the heat! Can you imagine that!

Thomas has been married too long. He can't hear a word, staring at his phone. We see a notification that flight arrivals are on time.

THOMAS

Good. Excellent.

Thomas picks up a newspaper and begins reading it.

LISA

For your birthday, they can do the red ang ku kueh for the starters, or they can do do oysters.

Thomas doesn't look up from the paper.

THOMAS

Up to you.

LISA

Up to me? You tell me. It's your birthday. We can do the ang ku keuh, or...

THOMAS

(exasperated)

It doesn't matter.

Lisa sits back a little in her chair, her face suddenly devoid of emotion. She stares out at the garden for a moment, silent. Thomas doesn't notice, still engaged with the newspaper.

They both sit at the table, but might as well be miles apart. A moment passes.

LISA

Why do you want to tell her?

THOMAS

Lilith deserves to know.

LISA

Yeah, but what does it matter? It's not like it's going to change anything.

Lisa waits for a response. None is coming.

LISA (cont'd)

At least we wait until after your birthday. You know what she's like. She's going to be mad. Why ruin the party.

EXT. CAR - DAY

We watch through the reflection of Penelope's window as Singapore spills across the frame, a metropolis pulsing full of life and energy. Along with skyscrapers, we see a quick montage of colonialist architecture merged with traditional Chinese flourishes. Mosques, Buddhist temples, and Sikh temples whiz in rapid succession. Penelope is impressed.

CUT TO Stan's window of the same landscapes. Through the window, we see him lean over and kiss Lilith. She looks down, and takes off her engagement ring. Stan sees this, and wordlessly turns away, hiding his pained expression.

The city landscape in the reflection changes from busy skyscrapers to quiet jungles to large, private estates.

EXT. GOH MANSION - DAY

The sedan pulls through the gates of the GOH MANSION and down a long, winding path towards the house. A dramatic set of double-doors welcomes them, the entrance to the Goh Mansion. The car keeps going, finally coming to a stop beside Stan and Lilith's car at the KITCHEN door. The servant's entrance.

INT./EXT. CAR - DAY

Penelope stares at the house in front of them, dumbfounded.

PENELOPE  
Are you kidding me?

JAMISON  
Yeah, no. Actually, I thought this would be funny. I don't know whose house this is. Our house is actually two blocks down... a shack, really...

Penelope reaches for the door handle, but Jamison stops her.

JAMISON (cont'd)  
Before we go in, what you're going to see in there... Don't judge them based on what I've said. I want you to just tell me I'm not crazy. Or I am.

PENELOPE  
Crazy in what sense? That your mother, who you haven't spoken to in a decade, is welcoming you and your sister home, whom you also haven't spoken to in a decade? What's crazy about that?

JAMISON  
Yeah, you laugh, but when I was younger, I'd have to invite my friend Daniel over just so I wouldn't have to talk to these people at meals. Thank God he's coming over soon.

PENELOPE

(laughing)

I didn't know you could be so dramatic. You're an adult now, I'm sure whatever problems you had were in the past. Besides, I'm sure your parents have changed as well.

JAMISON

You think I'm being dramatic? This family bleeds drama. Just wait. You'll see.

Penelope is still smiling, unconvinced, as Jamison opens the door.

INT. GOH MANSION, MAIN FOYER - DAY

We follow Penelope and Jamison as they enter through the kitchen and walk into the main foyer, where Stan and Lilith are standing. They exchange glances, Penelope amazed, and Jamison hesitant, resigned. The air is quiet and still.

Behind them, the chauffeurs drop off the suitcases for Lilith and Stan. The maids quickly rush forward to collect the bags, while Lilith announces herself boisterously.

LILITH

MA! PA! Come say hi to your children.

To the left of the MAIN FOYER is a grand staircase leading to the upper floors and bedrooms, from which Lisa descends.

LISA

Eh! You're all here! TOM! TOM!

Lisa turns to one of the maids as she excitedly makes her way down the stairs.

LISA (cont'd)

Joanna, go tell Mr. Goh they're here.

She turns her attention to the people gathered.

LISA (cont'd)

(enthusiastically)

You made it! How was your flight? Wah, Lilith! you're so skinny now! Jamie, ah? You're putting on some weight! Have you been working out?

Lisa gives Lilith a warm hug, after which Lisa turns to Stan.

LISA (cont'd)  
Jamie, who is this? Your friend?

Jamison ignores her. Lilith rolls her eyes.

LILITH  
Ma, this is Stan.

LISA  
(surprised)  
Oh!

A wave of awkwardness passes through the room.

Sensing the discomfort, Stan looks at Lilith who glances sideways, clearly irritated.

STAN  
Hello Mrs. Goh.

Stan shakes Lisa's hand as she forces a smile.

LILITH  
(suddenly affecting a  
Singaporean accent)  
Hi Ma. Wah, I really have to go da  
pian. I've been holding it in since  
the flight.

As Lilith exits up the stairs, Lisa turns to Jamison and walks towards him with her arms outstretched.

LISA  
Jamie! I'm so happy to see you.

Jamison takes a step back, causing Lisa to stop in her tracks. Her smile betrays a momentary frustration. When Lisa speaks, she speaks in what might be seen as broken English, but is just a Singaporean parlance.

LISA (cont'd)  
How are you, ah?

Jamison doesn't answer, and instead turns to walk in the opposite direction. Lisa stares at him as her smile quickly fades. Lilith rolls her eyes as Stan looks confused. Penelope quickly steps in.

PENELOPE

Hi, Mrs. Goh, I'm Penelope! Jamie has told me so much about you.

Jamison snickers sarcastically and turns away. Lisa either doesn't see this, or chooses to ignore it. Penelope gives Jamison a dirty look.

LISA

Call me 'auntie.' You look tired, was it a long flight?

Before Penelope can answer, Thomas enters, walking down the staircase. He speaks with a vague accent, not quite Singaporean, nor fully American, almost Spanish but not quite.

THOMAS

Hello, hello!

He reaches forward and shakes Stan's hand, followed by a hug for Penelope.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Hi, I'm Tom. Nice to finally meet you both.

LISA

Stan, why don't you help bring Lilith's things to her room. We are making lunch. You all hungry? Come Penelope, let me show you the house.

Lisa grabs Penelope's arm and begins walking up the stairs. Jamison makes a hasty exit for the kitchen.

As Stan begins reaching for Lisa's bag, Thomas looks at him and shakes his head.

THOMAS

Leave it. Come on, let me show you the guest house.

INT. GOH MANSION, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Jamison walks into the empty kitchen, where he begins to rifle through the fridge. Behind him, DANIEL (late 20's, East-Asian) enters. He walks into the room with a restrained demeanor, holding a gift bag.

DANIEL

The infamous son returns.

Jamison turns around.

JAMISON  
(surprised)  
Daniel!

The two of them embrace.

DANIEL  
I heard you were back in town. But I  
just had to come see it to believe  
it.

JAMISON  
Well, it's not every day my father  
turns 60. How the hell are you?

DANIEL  
Me? Surprised. I just came by to drop  
this off.

Daniel pulls open the bag, revealing a Goodwood Park durian  
cake inside. He hands it to Jamison, who shakes his head,  
smiling. *He shouldn't have.*

Jamison sets the cake on a nearby table.

JAMISON  
You're staying for dinner, right?

DANIEL  
I'm sorry, no can do. I've got plans.

JAMISON  
You sure? Lunch tomorrow.

DANIEL  
Where did you have in mind?

JAMISON  
Probably here.

DANIEL  
Nope.

Daniel lingers on the nope. Relishing that syllable.

JAMISON  
You're killing me, Danny boy. You  
know I need you there.

DANIEL

You know, dinner at the Goh's was never as fun for me as it was for you.

JAMISON

That's not fair. You know how I feel around my parents.

DANIEL

(indifferent)

What about how I feel? Being the only one in the room talking to your dad? Thanks, buddy.

JAMISON

This isn't... You're not still mad about...

Daniel clearly is. Whatever "it" is.

JAMISON (cont'd)

Look, you can't hold that against me. You know I don't deal well with drama. You knew how my mother is! I had to come home to that! You knew that she would disapprove when you and...

DANIEL

You disappeared, Jamie. When I needed your support the most.

JAMISON

Danny. I just got in. Can't we... do this some other time?

Daniel picks up the bag and hands it to him.

DANIEL

Give me a call sometime, yeah? When we're getting dinner OUT side.

Daniel walks towards the door, stopping momentarily before exiting.

DANIEL (cont'd)

And say hi to Lilith for me.

Jamison looks on in shock as Daniel exits.

EXT. GOH MANSION, POOL - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas and Stan walk by the pool, across from which sits the GUEST HOUSE.

STAN

That's an amazing pool Do you do a lot of swimming?

THOMAS

What, me? Are you kidding? I'm an old man. I'll leave that up to you young people!

Thomas and Stan arrive at the front door of the guest house.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Anyway, get comfy and come back over. We should be having lunch soon.

Thomas is about to leave when he pauses, and turns back around.

THOMAS (cont'd)

(resignedly)

You have to excuse Lisa. She says some interesting things sometimes. But don't take it personally.

STAN

(laughing)

No problem at all, sir. Back home in Georgia, my family always speak their minds. I'm used to it.

THOMAS

Has Lilith met your family?

STAN

She has, matter of fact. They really love her. What's not to love?

THOMAS

Excellent! Just... don't tell Lisa about that.

Stan smiles earnestly in response.

INT. JAMISON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jamison stands by his desk. On the desk are various pictures of him wearing an uncomfortable frown. But one picture stands out. His entire family during his childhood. All smiles on everyone.

He turns the picture face down.

He walks to the door, and turns the lock. Then he returns to the desk. He reaches into his backpack, and pulls out an engagement ring, still in the box.

A knock on the door disturbs him. He quickly shoves the ring back in his backpack.

JAMISON

Yeah?

Silence.

He gets up and walks over to unlock the door. Thomas walks in.

THOMAS

Your mother wanted me to give you this.

Thomas walks over to the desk and sets down a hideous red shirt. He pauses when he sees the picture frame lying face-down. Jamison stands to one side, avoiding eye contact.

JAMISON

(in Chinese)

Thank you.

THOMAS

(in a mixture of  
Chinese and English)

Your mother bought that for you. You should wear that. It would mean a lot to her.

JAMISON

(in Chinese)

Maybe.

THOMAS

(in Chinese)

You know, you didn't need to ignore her. You could have just said "hi."  
Even if it's just a simple "Hello!"

(MORE)

THOMAS (cont'd)  
How are you," she's your mother. You  
only get one of those.

Jamison stares at the floor, silent for a moment. When he  
speaks, his words surprises himself.

JAMISON  
(quietly and  
sarcastically in  
broken Chinese)  
I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment.  
Guess I'll never be like Lilith to  
you, huh.

THOMAS  
(in Chinese)  
Jamie, why can't you let that go.

Jamison seems emboldened by standing up for the first time,  
but his body posture still is hunched, wary. Like a moody  
teenager. He raises his voice slightly to a more normal  
level, but avoids eye contact.

JAMISON  
(some what louder  
now, in Chinese)  
Why? Why am I always the one punished  
and she always gets a free pass?

Thomas sighs to himself in resignation.

THOMAS  
(in Chinese)  
My birthday is coming up. All I want  
is for us to be together as a family  
one last time.

JAMISON  
(in Chinese)  
"One last time?"

THOMAS  
(in Chinese)  
Your mother and I...

Thomas pauses for moment as he considers whether he should  
say the next words.

THOMAS (cont'd)  
(in English)  
I think we're getting a divorce.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. GOH MANSION, DINING ROOM - DAY

All the Goh's (with the exception of Lisa and Lilith) and the two guests are seated for dinner in front of a large lazy Susan containing an elaborate Chinese lunch, composed of six different dishes. Mee Goreng, Nasi Lemak, three types of Satay, and Chicken Rice.

Everyone is all smiles, engaged in conversation. All except Jamison, who discreetly stares at Thomas. Lisa enters with a large serving spoon for the rice. She takes a seat gingerly.

LISA  
Please. Go ahead, go ahead.

PENELOPE  
Do you need any help, auntie?

Lisa smiles and shakes her head.

Lilith enters the room looking upset.

LILITH  
(in a mock  
Singaporean accent)  
Ai yo. I didn't pack that dress I  
brought for Pa's birthday. I was  
looking and looking...

LISA  
That's okay, Lilith. I have dresses  
you can wear.

LILITH  
Yeah, but it's Shanghai Tang. I *only*  
wear Shanghai Tang.

THOMAS  
(interrupting)  
Stan, Lilith tells me you want to be  
a rapper?

Lilith perks up and smiles at Stan.

STAN  
Yes sir. I've been trying to get my  
work out there, but it's been a  
struggle.

LILITH

(proudly)

Stan's being modest, lah! His last record got nominated for a Golden Mic, right honey?

PENELOPE

Wait, were you part of the JZ-Brothas? I used to listen to that!

STAN

(modestly)

That was a long time ago.

JAMISON

(confused)

Since when do you listen to rap?

Penelope grins and shrugs at Jamison.

LISA

(to Lilith)

Michael Danvers hired them for your movie, didn't he?

LILITH

(annoyed)

Ma...

LISA

(indifferent)

What? You almost married Michael didn't you? I still don't know why you turned him down. We spent a million investing in that movie...

LILITH

(in disbelief)

MA!

Thomas looks bewildered. Jamison looks up and grins at Penelope.

LISA

What? Are you and Sam living together?

LILITH

Stan, Ma.

(in a mock

Singaporean accent)

You always ask, ask, ask so many questions, you know? So kaypoh one.

PENELOPE  
(quickly interjecting)  
Jamie and I live together.

Lisa sits back in her chair, looking defeated. Thomas seems unfazed by that exchange.

THOMAS  
In my day, people had to get married to live together, that was just the way it was. But if you didn't like each other? Doesn't make sense why anyone would want to get married.

JAMISON  
(in Chinese)  
What about for their children?

THOMAS  
Yeah, sure. But I mean if you don't need to, why get married? I don't understand why you'd want to rush things. If things are going well, then why ruin it.

Lisa gets up and walks out of the room silently, with a sullen expression.

INT. GOH MANSION, DINING ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

As the maids clear the dishes, only Jamison and Penelope remain seated at the table.

PENELOPE  
(surprised)  
He said that to you?

JAMISON  
Hey, it's not all bad. Maybe I'll get some space, finally.

PENELOPE  
I know you don't mean that.

JAMISON  
Maybe it's better this way. Maybe this week will go by pretty fast.

PENELOPE  
This is your family...

JAMISON

(coldly)

...And you had no idea what it was like being a black sheep for 18 years. Why do you think I never came back?

Penelope reaches out to hold Jamison's hand.

PENELOPE

(sympathetically)

You're right, I don't. And I still don't know what made you feel like you are?

JAMISON

It's not just one thing. It's all the little things, all added up over the years.

PENELOPE

Like what?

Jamison turns away and harrumphs in annoyance.

PENELOPE (cont'd)

I don't know Jamie, I think they're really trying. Back there, with your mother, you didn't have to be such a dick.

JAMISON

(incredulous)

So you're saying I should try to fit in more?

PENELOPE

It wouldn't hurt.

JAMISON

You don't think I tried?

Lisa walks in abruptly, dressed up and holding her purse.

LISA

Jamie, You remember Ah Kwee a-not? Ah Kwee ah? I'm going to visit her now. She's 93 years old, you know? Amazing. You want to come with me? You free? Come lah.

Penelope looks over at Jamison who sits, unresponsive. He ignores Lisa. Trying to minimize the awkwardness, Penelope attempts to fill in the silence.

PENELOPE

Who is Ah Kwee?

LISA

Ah Kwee, ah? She's my mother's old cook. She used to love Jamie.

Lisa turns to look at Jamison.

LISA (cont'd)

You should go see her, you know? All the time: "Where's Jamie? How is Jamie?"

Penelope smiles at Jamison, who continues to pretend Lisa is not in the room.

PENELOPE

You should go see her. Sounds like she really misses you.

Jamison shrugs without making eye contact.

LISA

You're not doing anything? Come, let's go. She's very old, you know?

Penelope looks back and forth at Lisa and Jamison, deciding how to improve the situation.

PENELOPE

If you want, I can go ask Lilith if she wants to come.

At hearing this, Lisa looks away and shakes her head.

LISA

No... So how? I'm leaving now. You want to come?

Jamison stares ahead. Lisa finally takes the hint and leaves the room. Jamison finally looks over at Penelope.

PENELOPE

Do you want to go see Ah Kwee? It sounds like she really loves you.

JAMISON

Go with my mother? You kidding?

PENELOPE

If you don't want to go with her, we can ask for her address and go ourselves.

JAMISON

That would be awkward. I don't even know Ah Kwee's family. Besides, Ah Kwee only speaks Hokkien, and my mother's the only person I know that can translate, so...

PENELOPE

(pleading)

Jamie... Will you go? For me?

Jamison slumps back into his chair, looking down at the floor.

JAMISON

(annoyed)

It's not like she's got other plans. Fine. But maybe the end of this week. I just need to lay low and get through this week.

PENELOPE

Well if you're not going, I will.

Penelope stands up and is about to leave.

JAMISON

You don't have to impress anyone.

PENELOPE

Who said I was trying to impress anyone? I just want to get to know her better.

Penelope hurries out of the room, running after Lisa.

INT. GOH MANSION, LILITH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lilith is unpacking her things. In the rear of the room, we see an open door. From inside her room, we watch as Stan walks past the door, turns around, and knocks on the open door before entering.

Lilith turns around, relieved to see him. She runs to give him a hug, pulls him in, and closes the door.

LILITH  
I feel like I'm back in high school,  
sneaking boys back to my room!

STAN  
Oh, you did that a lot, did you?

LILITH  
(jokingly)  
Why? Does that make you jealous?

STAN  
(playfully)  
I have a right to be jealous of my  
future wife!

LILITH  
Oh, this is so exciting! I can't wait  
to tell my mom about us! What did you  
think of them?

STAN  
Lilith, after what happened earlier,  
I don't know if it's such a good idea  
to tell them just yet.

LILITH  
I know, they can come off a little  
strong at first, but just give them  
time. My family can be a bit of an  
acquired taste. We'll tell them  
tonight. At dinner.

STAN  
Are you sure about that? We just got  
here, I don't know if I can afford a  
ticket back home already.

LILITH  
Trust me.

Stan nods, smiling halfheartedly.

INT. CAR - DAY

As Lisa and Penelope drive through the streets of Singapore,  
Penelope takes photos on her phone of the colonial  
architecture lining the city streets.

LISA  
Jamie doesn't want to see Ah Kwee?

PENELOPE  
I think he just needs time to get  
some rest.  
(uncertainly)  
I hope it's alright that I tagged  
along?

Lisa stares at the road, her face devoid of emotion.

LISA  
(unconvincingly)  
Yeah, sure.

A moment of silence passes.

PENELOPE  
Singapore is nicer than I thought it  
would be!

Lisa glances over at Penelope.

LISA  
(perking up)  
Have you been to Asia before?

PENELOPE  
No this is my first time.

LISA  
Do you travel a lot?

PENELOPE  
(sheepishly)  
This is my first time traveling out  
of the US, actually.

LISA  
(disappointed)  
Oh.

They drive on in silence.

EXT. HDB (GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZED APARTMENTS) BLOCK - DAY

We follow Lisa and Penelope as they make their way through a  
labyrinth of towering residential towers. Penelope is struck  
by the sheer height, as we PAN UP towards the top floors.

INT. AH KWEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lisa is greeted by AH KWEE'S CARETAKER as they enter the apartment. LISA introduces Penelope in Hokkien to the caretaker, and she hands an Ang Bao (Chinese money envelope) to Ah Kwee.

Ah Kwee is in a wheelchair, skin and bones, but sharp and alert. She is happy to see Lisa, who kneels in front of her to hold her hands. They speak in Hokkien. Penelope smiles.

INT. GOH MANSION, TELEVISION ROOM - DAY

Lilith and Stan are watching television when Jamison walks in. As soon as he sees the two he turns and walks right back out.

The adjoining MASTER BEDROOM door opens and Thomas shuffles in to the Television Room.

THOMAS  
Was that Mario?

LILITH  
Mario is here?

STAN  
Mario?

Right on cue, MARIO, a rotund European man in his late 30's with a pleasant face, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts walks into the television room. He smiles widely at everyone.

Lilith squeals loudly and runs over to give him a big hug. Mario begins, in a mock-Singaporean accent:

MARIO  
Wah, you didn't call me to tell me  
you were coming!

LILITH  
I left a message with your secretary!

MARIO  
You have my personal number!

MARIO reaches over to shake Stan's hand congenially.

MARIO (cont'd)  
How are you?

LILITH  
Stan, this is Mario. Mario's my dad's  
business partner.

MARIO  
Wah, so formal? Old family friend.

THOMAS  
Okay old man, come upstairs and help  
me fix my Mac.

MARIO  
...and service technician too.

Thomas shuffles out the door. When the door closes behind  
him, Mario raises an eyebrow and turns to look at Lilith.

MARIO (cont'd)  
Wow, congratulations.

Lilith and Stan look at each other in confusion.

MARIO (cont'd)  
You two lovebirds been out in the  
Californian sun quite a bit, have  
you? Your ring tan is showing,  
Lilith.

Lilith beams with happiness. Mario lowers his voice.

MARIO (cont'd)  
(sincerely)  
Lilith, go make peace with Jamie.  
Trust me, when you decide to tell  
everyone, you'll be thankful for  
another fan in your corner.

LILITH  
That's not happening.

As Mario begins to head out, he stops at the door to turn to  
Stan.

MARIO  
Please man, talk to some sense into  
her.

Lilith clearly overhears this statement directed at her, and  
as Stan turns to look at her, she looks away in  
contemplation.

INT. AH KWEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lisa still kneels in front of Ah Kwee, holding her hand.

AH KWEE  
(quietly in Hokkien)  
Sun came back from KL last night when  
she heard Lilith was going to be in  
town.

LISA  
Thomas doesn't think it's a good  
idea.

Ah Kwee turns her head and waves her hand at Lisa in  
frustration.

AH KWEE  
(in Hokkien)  
You still haven't told your daughter,  
have you? You need to tell her.  
Tonight. No matter what happens,  
she's still your daughter.

Lisa is silent as she stands up and waves Penelope over.

Penelope kneels in front of Ah Kwee and holds her hands as  
Ah Kwee greets her.

LISA  
She says she is happy to see you.

PENELOPE  
(speaking slowly)  
It is very good to meet you.

EXT. HDB BLOCK - DAY

Outside the apartment, Ah Kwee follows Lisa and Penelope to  
the door. Lisa bids her goodbye. Ah Kwee responds in turn,  
talking to Penelope in Hokkien. Lisa smiles.

LISA  
She says for you to take good care of  
Jamie.

INT. CAR - DAY

Penelope looks out the window as Lisa drives.

LISA  
 Amazing, isn't she? I come visit her every month, and she still is so sharp! At her age! Wah!

Lisa gives a thumbs up.

PENELOPE  
 Every month? She must be like family to you for you to visit her that often!

LISA  
 She was very good to my mother. She worked for her for sixty years, you know! Sixty years! Can you believe it?

Lisa turns to glance at Penelope.

LISA (cont'd)  
 Well, I just hope Jamie will come next time. Talk to him, okay? I'm sure he will listen to you if you ask him, right?

PENELOPE  
 I can try, but I don't know. Mrs. Goh...

LISA  
*Auntie.*

PENELOPE  
 Auntie,  
 (hesitantly)  
 whatever happened between Lilith and Jamie?

LISA  
 You know Jamie, lah. He's very unreasonable. I don't know why he treated Lilith like this for so many years. You know how bad it made her feel? You know, you should get him to stop this nonsense, okay? Maybe talk to her too. Poor girl.

Lisa glances over at Penelope.

LISA (cont'd)  
 Anyway, he listens to you. He seems... happy.

(MORE)

LISA (cont'd)

(pause)

Happier than I've seen him in a long time.

Penelope smiles, things are finally going well. Maybe she can make things work out for everyone. CUT TO her cell phone as she begins typing.

PENELOPE

(typing)

On way home. Still alive. I love you. Wuss.

INT. GOH MANSION, KITCHEN - DAY

Jamison glances down at his phone and grins as he reads the message. He sits down at the kitchen counter and places the phone down. Joanna hands him a soda.

JAMISON

Joanna, who told Daniel that I was coming home?

JOANNA

I don't know. Mario?

JAMISON

Mario? I wonder how my mother feels about that.

JOANNA

Jamie, you're only here for a week. Talk to your mother.

JAMISON

It's better this way.

Joanna smacks her hand down on the table in frustration.

INT. GOH MANSION, LILITH'S BEDROOM - DAY

CUT TO Stan standing by the window, peeking out the overly large windows at the kitchen two stories below at Jamison. Lilith sits on the bed typing on her laptop. Her laptop screen reveals a screenplay in progress.

STAN

Lilith, you know I always have your back. But I just don't understand why you won't just go talk to him.

(MORE)

STAN (cont'd)  
Apologize or whatever. If we're going to be family...

LILITH  
You think I haven't tried? He won't even listen to Mario, and Mario's more of a sibling to him than I ever could be. Anyway, if you don't mind, I need to get these notes back before Wednesday. I can't believe they want me to say such cliched garbage.

STAN  
It's just that... If things go south tonight at dinner, it would be good for us to have someone on our side.

Lilith stops typing, and glares at Stan.

LILITH  
What's the point? He refuses to talk to anyone, for all I care that little shit can go to hell. You have no idea. You have a normal family.

STAN  
You met my family, they're not 'normal.'

Lilith slams down her laptop, and glares at Stan.

LILITH  
You know what? Fine. Come on. Let me show you.

Lilith storms out of the room like a woman on a mission, as Stan trails behind uncertainly.

INT. GOH MANSION, KITCHEN - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lilith strides into the kitchen boldly. STAN lags a little bit behind. Jamison is still sitting at the kitchen table, and glances up when he sees the two approaching, before quickly looking out the window into the distance.

Joanna, mid-conversation, sees them coming and quickly walks out the back door.

Lilith stands directly next to Jamison.

LILITH  
HEY JAMIE!

Jamison continues to ignore her.

LILITH (cont'd)  
HELLO! HELLO YOU LITTLE SHIT! HELLO!

Jamison takes a drink from his glass, and continues staring out the window.

LILITH (cont'd)  
YEAH HELLO! WELCOME HOME! THANK YOU  
FOR TALKING TO ME!

Lisa and Penelope walk in through the front door, thoroughly confused. Stan quickly walks forward and pulls on Lilith's hand.

STAN  
That's enough.

In no great hurry, Jamison slowly stands up and walks out of the kitchen. Lisa and Penelope both look confused.

LILITH  
(laughing  
sarcastically)  
See what I mean?

LISA  
What happened?

Lilith walks out of the room as Lisa follows her.

Penelope looks over at Stan, they're the only two people left in the room.

STAN  
I'm sorry about that. Lilith can be quite passionate sometimes.

PENELOPE  
So I heard.

STAN  
She's not usually this bad. Don't take it personally, she's just mad at Jamie, not you. I think that family just gets to her. I've never seen her get this worked up before over anything else.

PENELOPE  
I thought I was alone! I've never seen Jamie act this way either.  
(MORE)

PENELOPE (cont'd)  
It's like I'm suddenly dealing with a  
ten year old. And everyone's been so  
nice...

Stan cocks his head to the side to look at her.

PENELOPE (cont'd)  
(laughing)  
You know what I mean.

STAN  
So this your first time in Singapore  
too?

PENELOPE  
It is.

Penelope smiles at Stan.

PENELOPE (cont'd)  
It is nice to have someone to talk  
to.

Jamison returns to the kitchen, and looks surprised to see  
them both talking.

JAMISON  
I forgot my phone.

Jamison walks to pick up his phone. Stan nods at him, and  
Jamison ignores him. Stan and Penelope exchange glances as  
Stan leaves.

JAMISON (cont'd)  
So staying out of the limelight seems  
to be working for me...

PENELOPE  
I still don't understand. What  
happened between you and Lilith?

JAMISON  
What happened? When we were kids, I'd  
always get punished anytime I did  
something wrong, and you know what?  
Fair enough. But every time she did  
the same thing, my folks would just  
turn a blind eye.

PENELOPE  
And that's it? THAT'S what drove the  
two of you apart? Are you serious?  
There's got to be more to this story.

JAMISON  
(half nodding)  
There always is.

PENELOPE  
And are you going to tell me?

JAMISON  
It doesn't matter.

Before Penelope can get a word in, the landline rings. Jamison walks over and picks up the phone.

JAMISON (cont'd)  
Hello? I'm sorry, she's not in right now, can I take a message?  
(shock)  
I'm so sorry.

Jamison looks stunned as he places the phone down.

PENELOPE  
Is everything okay?

JAMISON  
That was Ah Kwee's daughter. Ah Kwee was just taken to the hospital. What happened?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. GOH MANSION, TELEVISION ROOM - DAY

Thomas, Penelope, and Jamison sit in the room in silence facing the television. Penelope holds Jamison's hand, gently stroking his hand with her thumb.

THOMAS

Ninety-three. We really should be happy for her. That's really a full life.

Lisa enters the room from the adjoining master bedroom entrance.

LISA

I spoke to Ah Kwee's daughter. They're waiting for her grandson to come back from Australia for the funeral.

PENELOPE

Maybe we can come?

LISA

No, it will probably be after you leave for the States. He's working on his PhD, his family is so proud of him! Can you believe it? His grandmother was a cook and her grandson is going to become a doctor. Amazing, isn't it? And her daughter, Kwee Sun...

Thomas quickly interrupts her.

THOMAS

What are we doing for dinner?

LISA

(offended)

What do you mean?

THOMAS

Dinner tonight is canceled, right?

LISA

No, why? We're still having dinner tonight.

Penelope and Jamison glance at each other.

THOMAS

We don't have to, we can always do it again sometime this week.

LISA

(irritated)

I said I'm not canceling dinner, okay? Where is Lilith? Can you tell her that we're having dinner?

Thomas looks at Penelope and Jamison, and shrugs his shoulders dramatically before walking off to the adjoining Master Bedroom. Lisa is quiet for a moment, before redirecting her anger.

LISA (cont'd)

I have to go make sure that dinner is ready. These maids are so stupid. You leave them alone, and they screw up one. All the time.

Penelope looks surprised at this sudden vitriol. Lisa departs the room.

Jamison turns to Penelope.

JAMISON

I should go have gone with you.

PENELOPE

I'm sure she understands.

JAMISON

No. I don't know. Before my grandmother passed away, she suffered a major stroke. Left her paralyzed. She didn't look like the grandmother I knew anymore. So I stopped seeing her. Ah Kwee kept telling me to go, but I...

As if he hits a brick wall, Jamison stops, unable to finish his sentence. Penelope hugs Jamison.

JAMISON (cont'd)

I'm just glad you got a chance to see Ah Kwee. She's quite something, wasn't she?

PENELOPE

I didn't know what she was saying, but she said your name a lot. I wish I could have known her.

(MORE)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

Oh, and one more thing... She also repeated one phrase over and over again. What does Ang Moh Gwai mean?

Jamison bursts into laughter. That phrase is a common derogatory term for white people in Singapore, which translates to 'red-haired devil.'

EXT. GOH MANSION, POOL - DAY

Lilith and Stan sit on the pool deck. Stan is holding on to Lilith as she lays back against him.

LILITH

I can't believe she's gone.

STAN

She's not gone. I'm sure she's still with you, watching over you.

Stan kisses her head.

STAN (cont'd)

You know, no matter what happens. I'll be here for you, right? We're family now.

LILITH

We'll tell my parents about us, okay? Right now.

STAN

Lilith...

LILITH

Please.

STAN

If that's what you want.

Penelope walks towards them.

PENELOPE

Lilith? Lisa wanted you to know that we're having dinner at eight.

LILITH

Seriously? We're still doing that?

PENELOPE

Um, that's what she said. Anyway, I needed to go get a couple things, and Lisa mentioned you might have a GPS I could...

LILITH

Are you kidding me? This isn't a good time right now.

Penelope looks stunned at the hostility. Stan seems shocked at Lilith's cold demeanor. He looks over at Penelope.

STAN

I'll drive you. There's a couple things I need to pick up as well.

Penelope smiles at Stan while Lilith glares at him.

PENELOPE

I'll get my purse.

Penelope walks out of the room. Stan furrows his brows at Lilith and gives a questioning shrug. Lilith glances away.

LILITH

Are you kidding? Ah Kwee dies and she wants to go shopping?

INT. GOH MANSION, TELEVISION ROOM - DAY

Jamison sits watching television. Mario enters.

JAMISON

You're still here? I thought you went back to the hotel.

MARIO

I heard what happened... You alright man?

JAMISON

I'm fine. Really. Daniel was just over, did you get a chance to talk to him?

MARIO

You know your mother. It's probably best he's not here.

JAMISON

Are you kidding? You can do no wrong for her. For you, she'll overlook anything.

MARIO

Not that.

Mario takes a seat beside Jamison.

MARIO (cont'd)

You should talk to your mother. You know you're being unfair.

JAMISON

Look, all I want to do is lay low this week, get it over with, and avoid any drama. Is that too much to ask?

MARIO

I'm just saying that Ah Kwee was the last link to your Ah Ma for her too.

EXT. NGEE ANN CITY - DAY

We see an establishing shot of NGEE ANN CITY, a shopping complex in the heart of Orchard Road, and then CUT TO:

INT. NGEE ANN CITY, SHANGHAI TANG - DAY

Stan and Penelope walk slowly into the store together, clearly unfamiliar with the directions. They are greeted by the salespeople as they walk around the store.

PENELOPE

I think this is the place. I just need to pick up a couple of things, is there any shops you want to check out before we head back?

STAN

Anytime I go out shopping, it's a dangerous combination!

PENELOPE

Thank you again for coming with me, it's just nice to get out of the house and clear my head.

STAN

I know how you feel.

PENELOPE

Okay, weird question, but what size dress does Lilith wear?

STAN

That *is* a weird question.

(hesitantly)

Size 4. Why?

PENELOPE

I just wanted to get her a dress for her father's birthday. She mentioned that she lost hers...?

STAN

You know you don't have to...

PENELOPE

I just wish there was something I could do to bring this family together.

STAN

Tell me about it. How can you not talk to your own sibling for so long? I don't know how anyone can ever be a part of a family like that.

PENELOPE

You don't know what happened between them?

STAN

I don't think even Lilith knows why Jamie hates her so much.

PENELOPE

Makes you wonder... Maybe she got more allowance than he did when they were kids! Maybe he had to wear her hand-me-downs. Maybe she killed his teddy bear in cold blood!

Stan laughs.

STAN

Maybe all of the above. Is it crazy for me to think I can be a part of this?

PENELOPE

What do you mean?

STAN

Between you and me, we got engaged. Lisa wants to tell her parents, but... I don't know if it's such a good idea. But if that's what she wants...

PENELOPE

I don't know if now is a good time.

STAN

What do you mean?

PENELOPE

Listen, it's not my place, but... Jamie said that Thomas and Lisa are getting a divorce?

STAN

What?

PENELOPE

Well... Just promise me you won't tell Lilith.

Stan's phone begins ringing. He glances down, worried.

STAN

I didn't hear it from you. Excuse me, I have to take this.

Stan walks out of the store to take the call.

INT. GOH MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas walks into the bedroom to get pick up some work-related papers. As he ruffles through his files, Lisa walks slowly out of the MASTER BATHROOM, drying her hair with a towel. She glances up and is surprised to see him.

LISA

Kwee Sun called again, she wanted to know if she could see Lilith.

THOMAS

What did you tell her?

LISA

I told her to come tonight.

THOMAS

Lisa...

LISA

(clearly angry)

What did you want me to say?

INT. NGEE ANN CITY, SHANGHAI TANG - DAY

CUT TO Penelope at the register with a dress and a matching belt. Penelope hesitates when she sees the price flash across the register. She looks down at her and takes out a credit card. The cashier swipes, but the card is declined.

Penelope picks up a second credit card from her purse.

PENELOPE

Can I... pay with more than one card?

INT. GOH MANSION, OFFICE - DAY

Mario and Thomas are sitting in front of two computers. Beside Thomas sits a stack of old photo albums. Thomas is scanning old photographs, while Mario reviews an unrelated spreadsheet.

Jamison enters the room. When he sees the two of them there, he hesitates, and is about to leave, when Thomas looks up and sees him.

THOMAS

(in Chinese)

Where have you been all day? Your mother was looking for you. Dinner is at eight.

JAMISON

(in Chinese)

Penelope and I... might be going out for dinner.

THOMAS

(in Chinese)

It's your first day back. Everyone is expecting to see you.

Jamison shifts, visibly uncomfortable.

THOMAS (cont'd)  
 (in Chinese)  
 You can go out for dinner tomorrow.  
 Eat with us tonight.

Jamison nods, and quickly leaves the room. Thomas turns to Mario and shrugs.

INT. GOH MANSION, KITCHEN

As the preparations for the dinner are underway, Lisa enters. She sees Jamison sitting at the table, and sits down by him. As she speaks, her voice wavers.

LISA  
 I wish you could have come today. You know, Ah Kwee was asking about you. Every time I talked to her, she always asked about you. Well, at least they say she passed away peacefully.

Jamison doesn't acknowledge her, but he also does not leave the room.

LISA (cont'd)  
 Her family was there for her, and that's all that matters, you know? Her daughter rushed back to say goodbye, and I wish...

Finally, Jamison looks over at Lisa. She seems momentarily taken aback. She places her hand on his. Jamison doesn't flinch.

You were Ah Ma's favorite, you know?  
 Your Pa and I, we really love you.  
 All we want is for this family to...

Before she can continue...

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)  
 Forget it Ma, you're wasting your time. You think if anything happened to us, he would come see us either?

Lisa turns to see Lilith entering the room. Jamison quickly withdraws his hand.

LISA  
 Lilith...

LILITH

Oh I get it. He thinks he's the only one with problems. What, you think you're better than us? You feel bad that you're not included in this family? You want to know why? Because at least I try! Maybe if you tried even a little to fit in to talk to us and not be such a dick, it wouldn't be all about me, would it?

Before anyone can get a word in edgewise, Lilith exits.

EXT. GOH MANSION - LATER

We watch as the sun begins to set over the Goh Mansion, and transition to the kitchen as the maids begin the finishing touches on the dinner party preparations. Lisa stands watching, with a glass of white wine in hand.

A car begins pulling up outside the gates. We see the gates swing open and watch as Stan and Penelope drive inside.

INT. GOH MANSION, MAIN FOYER - EVENING

Stan and Penelope enter through the front doors. As Stan sets down the car keys on a tray by the front doors, his phone rings.

STAN

Excuse me, I need to take this.

Penelope, carrying her shopping bag, begins to walk towards the stairs as Stan answers the phone.

STAN (cont'd)

Hello. Look, you need to stop calling.

(looks around the room)

But I sent that check last week. Look, this isn't a good time...

INT. GOH MANSION, SECOND FLOOR CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

As Penelope runs up the stairs, she sees Lilith walking out of her room. Lilith gives her the side-eye very briefly, and yells down the railing:

LILITH

STAN!

PENELOPE

Lilith, I know we didn't get a chance to really talk to each other, but I hope we can be friends. Oh, here, I wanted you to have this.

Penelope hands Lilith a SHANGHAI TANG gift bag. Further down the hallway, Jamison opens the door, hearing Penelope's voice.

LILITH

(coldly)

Thanks.

PENELOPE

Yeah, I umm... I picked that up earlier. Jamison always talks about how much your family loves this brand...

As Penelope continues, Stan appears walking up the stairs, and as soon as he reaches the landing, Lilith promptly grabs his arm and walks with him into her room. Jamison quickly walks up to Penelope.

JAMISON

What was that?

PENELOPE

Just a dress and a belt. She said that...

JAMISON

From Shanghai Tang? How could you afford that?

PENELOPE

(hesitates)

Um...

Penelope spots something on the ground. The belt must have fallen out of the Lilith's bag.

JAMISON

Jesus, Penelope. Why are you trying so hard to impress these people?

Penelope doesn't hear him. She bends over as she picks up the Shanghai Tang belt. She hurries after Lilith as Jamison looks on incredulously.

INT. GOH MANSION

STAN

Aren't you being a little hard on  
her?

LILITH

Her? Who? I didn't see anyone.

As they walk away, Lilith dumps the bag she just received in  
a trash. Stan pauses, but does not object.

Just as Lilith gets rid of the bag in trash, Penelope  
approaches from behind with the belt in her hands. She stops  
and stares, unseen by Stan and Lilith.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. GOH MANSION, GATES - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP of the front gates as the light sconces flicker on.

INT. GOH MANSION, JAMISON'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Jamison stands in his bedroom, carefully repacking his belongings into his suitcase. Penelope enters the room.

JAMISON

There's nothing you can say that will change my...

Penelope storms over, and begins helping Jamison pack.

JAMISON (cont'd)

(puzzled)

Did I miss something?

PENELOPE

You're right. What made me think I could ever fix this? She's crazy. She's crazy!

Jamison takes a step back to watch as Penelope furiously throws items into the suitcase.

JAMISON

I uh... take it she didn't like the dress?

Penelope is not amused. She takes a deep breath, trying to calm herself down. Failing miserably.

PENELOPE

You try to do something nice for her, and this is how she treats you. What was I thinking? All I wanted to do was to...

JAMISON

To what exactly?

PENELOPE

I don't know. To fix this.

JAMISON

See? I'm not crazy. Welcome to the family.

PENELOPE

All I want now is some semblance of normal. Just a quiet day to ourselves. Let's go home, let's stay in and order a pizza and get mad at trivial things, but smile and forgive each other in a minute or two like NORMAL people.

JAMISON

I think you're overreacting just a tad.

PENELOPE

Jamison. Don't.

JAMISON

(carefully)

I'm just saying, you can be a bit sensitive sometimes...

Penelope ignores his words.

PENELOPE

When's the next flight out?

Jamison nods in emphatic understanding.

INT. GOH MANSION, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lisa is standing in front of a full length mirror in the living room, already dressed for dinner and in the process of putting on a pair of earrings. Joanna stands beside her, holding on to a selection of jewelry.

LISA

Joanna, almost time, right?

JOANNA

Yes mum.

LISA

When the guests come, make sure you call Mr. Goh.

Stan enters the room behind Lisa. He hesitantly approaches.

LISA (cont'd)

And make sure you put all the jewelry back in my room, okay? I will check later one, ah? And if anything is missing...

STAN  
Mrs. Goh, do you have a minute?

Lisa turns around, looking uncomfortable. She begins waving her hand away at Joanna.

LISA  
(to JOANNA)  
Go! Go! Go!

Joanna hurries out of the room.

LISA (cont'd)  
Sam? Now is not a good time. I have to get ready.

STAN  
It will only take a minute. I wanted to...

LISA  
Sam, let me tell you something. When I was Lilith's age, I had a big family. Six sisters, one brother. Now, this is my family. It is small, but we like it that way.

STAN  
Ma'am?

LISA  
I don't know that we need anyone else in our family. Do you understand?

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

We watch as a car drives through a congested city street, pulling up to a red light.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Penelope rides shotgun as Thomas drives the car. Jamison sits in the backseat staring out the window.

THOMAS  
But your grandfather is okay?

PENELOPE  
Oh it's nothing to worry about, but my parents think I should be home just in case.

Jamison glances over at Penelope, and then back out again.

THOMAS

Do let us know once you get back.  
It's too bad you have to cut your  
trip to Singapore so short though.

JAMISON

(in Chinese)  
There's always next time.

THOMAS

You know you're always welcome to  
visit us again.

PENELOPE

Thank you.

THOMAS

Jamie, you really should think about  
staying until your Ma's surgery.

Penelope turns around to look at Jamison. He sits upright, surprised. He speaks in heavily American-accented Chinese, and struggles to find the correct Chinese words to use.

JAMISON

(in broken Chinese)  
What surgery? What are you talking  
about?

THOMAS

For her pancreatic cancer. Don't you  
know?

JAMISON

She has cancer?

Thomas shakes his head.

THOMAS

You don't know?

JAMISON

(in Chinese)  
How am I suppose to know? No one said  
anything to me.

Thomas out an audible sigh. Penelope looks clearly confused.

THOMAS

The surgery's next week.

JAMISON  
(in Chinese)  
After your birthday?

Thomas nods.

JAMISON (cont'd)  
(in Chinese)  
Let's go home.

INT. GOH MANSION - NIGHT

Loud voices fill the room. Two dozen new faces are there, guests for dinner. Lisa, Stan, and Lilith sit talking with guests. The door opens, and Penelope, Jamison, and Thomas enter.

THOMAS  
Louise! Can you get the bags?

Lisa walks with an OLDER MALE GUEST (Indian, late 40's, wearing a button down shirt and khakis) towards the three new arrivals as a maid runs to fetch the suitcases.

LISA  
Eh? What happen?

Thomas looks at her and shrugs as he walks past her. Lisa turns to the guest to introduce Penelope.

LISA (cont'd)  
Uh, this is Penelope. Jamie's friend.

PENELOPE  
(smiling)  
Hello.

LISA  
Where did you go? Eh? You're wearing that, ah? Do you have anything... else?

PENELOPE  
(confused)  
I have a different shirt I could wear?

LISA  
Hai ya, I maybe have something... big enough to fit you.  
(to the guest)  
Excuse me, you go on ahead, ah?

Lisa departs, calling after Joanna as she does so.

CUT-TO Thomas, who notices Daniel in the room. He walks up to Mario.

THOMAS  
Daniel's here?

MARIO  
I invited him.

THOMAS  
You know how Lisa feels...

MARIO  
You know how I feel.

Thomas shrugs. Mario waves over Daniel, who smiles back at him.

CUT-TO Lilith and Stan at the pool grounds, sitting on patio furniture with a group of younger guests around their age. All the guests are dressed in expensive cheongsams and tailored suits.

FEMALE GUEST  
Where's Jamie and this mystery girl?  
We're all dying to see her. What else  
can Jamie do this time?

LILITH  
Who the hell knows.

MALE GUEST  
So Lil, Stan's a rapper, right? Did  
he go to school for that?

FEMALE GUEST  
(laughing)  
Leave him alone.

That stings. Stan is silent, shoulders slumped, thinking hard of how he can prove that he isn't just some country hick.

LILITH  
Why ask me? Ask him. He's right  
there. Anyway, all Jamie's going to  
do is ruin this family.

The female guest leans in to the group, lowering her voice.

FEMALE GUEST

Hey, did you hear? Mario brought Daniel. Your mother is going to kill him!

Lilith rolls her eyes.

LILITH

Ai ya... She worships the ground Mario walks on. You know he can do no wrong in her eyes...

STAN

You know, marginalization was the focus of my graduate work, and...

MALE GUEST

(laughing)

You went to school for rap?

LILITH

(in a heavy, mock-Singaporean accent)

Ai yo, this is my lao gong, okay?

Stan's phone starts ringing.

STAN

(quickly rising)

Excuse me.

Stan gets up to thankfully address his phone. He walks towards the guest house and looks around him before glancing back towards his phone. There is a voicemail waiting. He looks clearly irritated as he brings the phone to his ear, playing the voicemail.

FEMALE VOICE

(O.S.)

Mr. Parker, this is your third notice. We still haven't received payment for your outstanding bill at this time...

Stan puts down the phone, and makes his way through the shadows of the trees back towards the table, when he hears the rest of the conversation.

FEMALE GUEST

You two are serious?

LILITH  
 (upset)  
 Why? What's wrong with that?

MALE GUEST  
 (uncomfortable)  
 You know...

The female guest nudges the male guest in response. They remain oblivious to Stan's presence.

LILITH  
 You know what?

Before he can hear the rest of what Lilith has to say, Stan lowers his head, and walks away.

INT. GOH MANSION, MASTER CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

Lisa looks through her drawers, searching for a dress, unaware that Jamison has entered.

JAMISON  
 I heard about the surgery tomorrow.  
 Are you okay?

Lisa begins the conversation without making eye contact.

LISA  
 Am I okay? Dr. Gnoi thinks that I should get this done. There is a chance for complications. A chance that if this goes wrong, I'll need to wear a bag for the rest of my life. Can you imagine that?  
 (laughs grimly)  
 Knock on wood!

JAMISON  
 I didn't know.

LISA  
 Go mingle! Everyone is here to see you!

Jamison pauses at the door, and turns to leave.

LISA (cont'd)  
 Jamie?

Lisa walks over and holds him in a long, silent embrace. She finally looks him in the eyes.

LISA (cont'd)  
I miss you.

Lisa hands him a dress.

LISA (cont'd)  
Here, here. Give this to Penelope. I don't know if this will fit her a-  
not. But try.  
Try, okay?

Lisa rubs his arm. Jamison nods and exits.

EXT. GOH MANSION, FRONT GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Penelope sits on the front porch as Stan walks out. He sees her and sits beside her.

STAN  
You alright?

Penelope stares out in silence. Stan nods and begins to leave.

PENELOPE  
You ever get the feeling that you're  
out of place?

Stan turns around.

STAN  
What?

PENELOPE  
No matter how hard I try, I just feel  
like I'm failing at every turn.

Stan looks around him.

STAN  
Did someone do something to you...?

Penelope stops and stares at Stan for a moment before continuing.

PENELOPE

Like there's some barrier that I can't cross, some invisible force that keeps telling me that I'll never be one of them. You won't understand.

STAN

(incredulously)

I won't?

Penelope looks at Stan, and is mortified as she realizes her gaffe.

PENELOPE

I'm sorry. I just don't know what I should do.

Stan takes a seat beside Penelope.

STAN

You know, I've had quite an interesting experience with Lisa today, so I think I can relate.

Although she tries to hard it, Penelope cracks a smile at this remark.

PENELOPE

Yeah, I noticed. I'm sorry about that, I can't imagine what you must be going through.

STAN

Ditto. It's funny, I studied Shelby, Coates, Appiah in grad school, but I never thought I'd have to think about their work on race while I'm on vacation. In a different country.

Penelope grins, more relaxed now.

PENELOPE

Is there anything they said that could help us survive this week?

Stan mulls this over for a second.

STAN

Actually, I did my thesis on Shelby's thick and thin solidarity. I think the former is pretty apt, considering our situation.

PENELOPE

Oh yeah? I'll take anything.

STAN

Well, so thin solidarity is just having the physical features that mark us for marginalization, and then experiencing marginalization as a result.

Penelope nods.

PENELOPE

Check.

STAN

...And you need it for thick solidarity. Thick always needs thin solidarity, but you can have thin without thick.

PENELOPE

So what is thick solidarity?

STAN

Ah, there's the million dollar question! Thick solidarity is when there are different groups of marginalized people. Now these people, see, they're going through different types of marginalization. But they all bond through a shared empathy for each others struggles, and they lean into and celebrate the things that made them marginalized.

PENELOPE

So... Like 'Norma Rae'?

STAN

Norma Rae?

PENELOPE

Old movie. Way before your time, young man!

Stan chuckles at this.

PENELOPE (cont'd)

True story. It's about a factory forcing its employees to work under awful conditions.

(MORE)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

So Norma Rae, a factory worker, begins unionizing, and identifies and aligns with her black coworkers against the system.

STAN

So Norma Rae and her black coworkers... They share different types of marginalization?

PENELOPE

Exactly. I mean, the root cause of oppression is the same, but she finds common ground with them and empathizes with the discrimination they experience due to their race. So they all lean into this and celebrate their marginalization.

STAN

There's some intersectionality going on there, but yeah, that sounds about right to me.

PENELOPE

So what you're saying is... We should celebrate what makes us different from... the man?

Stan chuckles.

STAN

All I'm saying is that if you need someone to talk to, I can relate.

Penelope nods, and turns to stare down the road. Penelope jokingly raises a fist in the air, and with a serious expressions, says:

PENELOPE

Down with the man.

Stan raises a fist in solidarity. They both turn and stare down the road.

INT. GOH MANSION, FOYER - NIGHT

Mario and Daniel separate from their group, and walk up to Lilith, who's sitting with her guests. Mario taps her on the shoulder, and waves as he walks away.

LILITH

Mar! You're not leaving already, are you?

MARIO

I'm sorry, lah. Early conference tomorrow. Besides, you need some quality family time!

Lilith gets up and gives Mario a hug. Daniel walks quietly out the door.

LILITH

Was that Daniel?

MARIO

Lilith, promise me one thing.

LILITH

You know I won't say anything about him.

MARIO

No, not that. Lilith, go a little easy on your brother. You don't want to lose him.

INT. GOH MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thomas sits in bed, working on his MacBook. From his vantage point, we see him looking at old pictures of him and Lisa from their youth. Before the kids.

A knock on the door, and Joanna enters.

JOANNA

Sir, mum says dinner is ready.

THOMAS

Tell Mrs. Goh to go ahead first.

Joanna closes the door behind her as she leaves. LONG-SHOT of Thomas as he continues looking at the photos.

INT. GOH MANSION, DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

WIDE-SHOT behind Lisa, as she sits at the head of a large round table sits full of guests. Beside her, a conspicuous empty chair and place setting sits.

Lilith enters, taking a seat. She smiles at Jamison, who is now wearing the hideous red shirt she gave him. He ignores her. Instead, he turns to Penelope.

JAMISON

Penelope, I...

PENELOPE

We can stay for as long as you need.

JAMISON

Will you be okay?

Penelope smiles and kisses Jamison on the cheek.

Lisa glances over and then quickly away. Joanna enters, and whispers into her ear. For a moment, we see a flicker of irritation, then resignation. And as if neither emotion existed, she perks right up, smiles at the table. CLOSE-UP on her face.

LISA

Let's eat.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. GOH MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC plays over scenes of the family and guests having dinner. Maybe something like 'Anything Goes,' except in Chinese.

Thomas walks in, greeting the room. CLOSE-UP on various faces of each family member as their emotional states up to this point is reflected. Confusion is seen by everyone as Jamison talks to Lisa in this montage.

Abruptly CUT TO:

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - MORNING

It is a different office from the teaser. More certificates, less light. The room is darker, windowless, bathed in a bright LED light.

However, the Psychologist remains the same. She now is visibly older and grayer, and she is seated in a white shirt and khakis, in front of Lisa.

Lisa is at the tail-end of a sentence, laughing at her own words.

LISA  
...Such a long time ago, you know?

The Psychologist smiles while remaining hard to read.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Yes, I remember now. How are things with...

LISA  
Jamie and Lilith.

Lisa clucks her tongue. As she speaks, she waves her arms wildly for emphasis.

LISA (cont'd)  
Jamie doesn't want to talk to me for years... YEARS, you know? And when he finally shows up he tells me that he forgives me. ME! Why, ah?

Lisa turns her head to laugh sarcastically. She turns back to face the Psychologist.

LISA (cont'd)  
What makes him think he has any  
right? I'm his mother!

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Is that such a bad thing?

Lisa leans back and folds her arms across her chest.

LISA  
I didn't do anything wrong.

The Psychologist places her notepad down on her lap.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
Lisa, what made you look me up after  
all these years?

She was expecting this question, but still it stings.

LISA  
(quietly)  
You were right. He grew up hating me.

PSYCHOLOGIST  
What makes you say that?

LISA  
What makes me say that?

Lisa pauses to laugh bitterly.

LISA (cont'd)  
He thinks that we are ashamed of him  
and so he said that's why he wanted  
to give us our space. Chose not to  
talk to me for years. Crazy, right?

PSYCHOLOGIST  
And how does Lilith feel?

LISA  
Great! She said that she will stop  
talking to him. Good for her!

PSYCHOLOGIST  
You said that Lilith's adopted,  
right? Have you heard of the Black  
Sheep Effect?

It doesn't register.

LISA

Excuse me?

PSYCHOLOGIST

So your relationship with Lilith is going well?

Lisa sighs and sits up.

LISA

Poor girl, her grandmother died.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You keep in contact with her birth mother?

LISA

Of course lah! Her grandmother used to be my mother's cook!

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT