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HILLARY AND SOON-YI SHOP FOR TIES

A Vaudeville for the New Millennium

A Play in Two Acts

by

MICHELLE CARTER



Dramatic Publishing

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(HILLARY AND SOON-YI SHOP FOR TIES)

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It was Larry Eilenberg, artistic director of the Magic Theatre, who first spoke the unlikely sentence, “Someone should write a play about Hillary and Soon-Yi.” If not for his vision, will, and fearlessness, this play would not have been written, let alone produced. It is dedicated to him.

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*Characters in a play are all in the dark, and in the end
they're all not guilty.*

Alan Bennett

Hillary and Soon-Yi Shop for Ties was originally produced in San Francisco at the Magic Theatre (Larry Eilenberg, artistic director) on November 5, 1999: Joan Mankin, director; Randy Craig, music director; Richard Olmsted, set designer; Scott Cannon, lighting designer; Jane Sayer, costume designer; Ed Fonseca, stage manager. The music was composed by Randy Craig and Michelle Carter, and the musicians were Randy Craig (keyboards) and Hal Richards (woodwinds). The cast was as follows:

Hillary et al.: LORRI HOLT
Soon-Yi et al.: AMY TUNG

HILLARY AND SOON-YI SHOP FOR TIES

A Vaudeville for the New Millennium

A Two-act Play

CHARACTERS

Played by a young Asian woman:

Soon-Yi Previn Allen
Monica Lewinsky
Persephone

Played by a less young woman:

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Demeter
Marilyn Monroe
Maureen O'Sullivan
The Blessed Virgin Mary

ACT I

Prologue
Tempus Fugit
Tarzan
Shopping for Ties
Pizza Delivery
Waiting Room
Q & A
The Shoot
Hillary's Game
Soon-Yi's Game
Awards Night
Catwalk

ACT II

Feminist Studies 201
Feminist Studies Revisited
Io
Teiresias
Delphi
Prometheus
Arcadia

A Note on Music and Slides

In the Magic Theatre production, two onstage musicians provided live music, voice-overs, and sound effects. While the needs of that production were well served by that approach, subsequent productions are free to make their own musical choices, including the use of recorded music and new original scores. In the absence of live musicians, voice-overs may be used for the musicians' few lines.

An existing score can be obtained from the playwright's agent: Ron Gwiazda, Rosenstone/Wender, 3 E. 48th St., New York NY 10017.

For the slides in Act II, Scene I, neither the publisher nor the playwright have particular slides available for use. Designers are free to render these images in any manner that serves the tone and style of their productions.

ACT ONE

Prologue

(Sung, or in recorded voice-over.)

SOON-YI.

Hush little baby don't say a thing
Papa's gonna buy you a wedding ring
Hush little baby don't you whine
Papa's gonna buy you a valentine

HILLARY.

If that Valentine is blank
We'll put it in the savings bank
If the interest don't add up
We'll cash it in when you grow up

SOON-YI.

Hush little baby, where'd you go?
I'd sell my soul if I could know

HILLARY.

Hush little baby, call my name

TOGETHER.

Don't tell a soul what I became.

Tempus Fugit

HILLARY. The Sixties: Political activism and sexual liberation. A social movement in which women are now free to make coffee for SDS meetings *and* put out. *Soul on Ice* pronounces the rape of a white woman an insurrectionary act. Paul Kantner observes: "It wasn't that you could get into any girl's pants. It's that there were no pants."

The Seventies: Reclaiming pants. The dawning of the obvious—equal pay for equal work, affordable birth control, parity in the workplace, the bedroom, the laundromat, the classroom, the automobile, the dance floor, the boardroom, the kitchen. Ambition. Equality. Power *and* authority. Rage.

The Eighties: What we *meant* to say was: we want power and authority but we want some of that other stuff too. Babies. Motherhood. A nice enough home, little garden would be nice. Plus parity and so on. We want it all.

The Nineties: Love, too. Did we neglect to mention love?

The new millennium: don't look back

Tarzan

(SOON-YI in a plaid jumper and worn, dirty coat. She's sitting in an elegant chair, curled up tight as if she's afraid to touch anything.)

SOON-YI. My name is Soon-Yi. It has just been decided that I'm seven years old. Last night I was allowed to sleep in my coat because today it's to be thrown away. It has been thrown away before—I found it in a Dumpster behind one of the big hotels on Changchung-Dong. I slept many nights in this coat. Maybe tonight, in a Dumpster in New York City, another little girl will find it.

This morning the pretty woman named Mia decides my forehead is warm, so the man named Andre takes the other children to mass and Mia props me up on the couch with a blanket. I turn on the television. And there's a jungle... *(Jungle sounds...)*

...a hot-looking, wet-looking black-and-white jungle, whoops and growls and screeches coming from everywhere at once. A chimp creeps up on a tiger and pulls its tail, and the tiger chases the chimp till it shoots up a tree. In the tree, there's a man and a woman in their underwear. The woman is pretty like a magazine cover and she talks like royalty, through her nose. The man is all curly hair and muscles and cheekbones, and the woman is teaching him the best kind of English. He says

something the simplest way it can be said, and she tells him how to take longer to say it.

When the man looks at the woman, there's something in his eyes. A light. I've never in my life seen anything like it.

The woman named Mia peeks in the den and when she sees the man and the woman and the jungle she gets very excited. "Tarzan the Ape Man!" she shouts. "See the woman playing Jane? She's your grandmother, honey."

And so I have a grandmother, talking through her nose in her underwear. I must allow every day to be new.

(She stands, begins taking off her coat.)

"Once again, dahling," my grandmother tells the man. He closes his eyes.

(SOON-YI closes her eyes.)

"Tarzan. Jane. Hurt me. Love."

(She drops the coat to the floor.)

Shopping for Ties

(Sudden, broad vaudevillian music.)

BAND MEMBER OR VOICE-OVER *(broadly)*. Ladies and gentlemen... Hillary and Soon-Yi shop for ties!

(Music shifts to muzak. SOON-YI approaches a tie rack, begins examining ties. HILLARY strolls by, sees the ties, stops. Lets her fingers run over them.)

SOON-YI. Look how beautiful they are, all laid out like that. Don't you just want to make a robe out of them or something?

HILLARY. Nah. It's important to have things we can wrap around their necks.

(SOON-YI searches a tie for the label. Holds it up to HILLARY.)

SOON-YI. Is this silk?

HILLARY *(fingers it without looking)*. Twenty percent silk, forty percent rayon, forty percent polyester.

SOON-YI. Gross. *(She throws it back.)* It's silk or nothing.

HILLARY *(holds up a tie)*. Now this is silk. Hundred percent. *(She hands SOON-YI the tie.)*

SOON-YI. Not unique. *(She throws it back.)*

HILLARY. I guess if you're giving a man a tie this Sunday it better be unique.

SOON-YI. No one's given him a tie in a long time. Father's Day has been kind of a sore subject.

HILLARY. Any new tie shows up in my household's going right into the shredder.

SOON-YI. Father's Day issues?

HILLARY. Valentine's Day issues.

(Pause. HILLARY picks up a tie, holds it to her cheek. Music up.)

Ties have such innocent beginnings. Age four, Easter Sunday, or Christmas, or Thanksgiving. It's the first thing he's given to wear that's utterly without function, but it's years before he'll start thinking that way. In those first tie-wearing years, he flushes with pride: Look at me... Who knows what I might be capable of... *(She sings:)*

Paisley in green with a gravy spot,
His lapels are as wide as his grin,
Collar off-kilter, the Kennedy knot
Like a fist nestled under his chin

SOON-YI.

Next thing you know, the day comes along
When he's tying it proudly with ease—
One end is just about six inches long,
The other is down to his knees

HILLARY.

Next thing you know there's a girl with a thong
And he's busted in his B.V.D.s

(Music shifts to a melancholy 5/4.)

HILLARY.

They're so cute when they're little
They're swell when they're small
When time's just a riddle
Just a clock on the wall

SOON-YI.

The tie is like a winking eye,
An enigmatic chum
The tie contains the mystery
Of the man he will become

HILLARY.

They're so cute when they're little
No acquittal required
They get lost in the middle
They get muddled and mired
How soon the world directs them to
The things that make them dumb

SOON-YI.

The tie is what connects them to
The men they will become

HILLARY & SOON-YI.

The men they will become
The men they will be—

(Abruptly music shifts to a bass-and-percussion 8/4 ...)

HILLARY (*spoken/rapped*).

Soon the little boy plays bass in a band
And he's creeping in at dawn with his shoes in his
hand.

On the floor of his room, under your feet,
Soda can, pizza box, dirty sheet,
Bumper sticker from Mexico,
That little square wrapper? ... you don't want to know.
Under an ash tray, his father's tie
That he begged to wear to the dance at the Y,
Reeking of cheap perfume and beer ...

(Music stops.)

(Spoken, sunnily.) And it's all fucking downhill from here!

(They drop the ties. Blackout.)

Pizza Delivery

BAND MEMBER OR VOICE-OVER (*broadly*). Hillary and Soon-Yi get a delivery!

("Ding dong." HILLARY and SOON-YI face forward, each holding a pizza box. Each addresses a different delivery boy: the lines tumble quickly, overlapping.)

SOON-YI (*examining the pizza*). What's that, eggplant?

HILLARY. Tell me straight: who sent you?

SOON-YI. Feta? As in, feta cheese?

HILLARY. Just tell me who placed the order.

SOON-YI. I'm sorry but cheese is intrinsic to the very concept of pizza.

HILLARY. A male voice or a female voice?

SOON-YI. A topping of cheese therefore is redundant.

HILLARY. Was the call placed from an office line?

SOON-YI. What if somebody said to you, "I'll have a pizza with dough, tomato sauce, and cheese."

HILLARY. Surely you know the time of the call.

SOON-YI. I mean, wouldn't you say to that person, "You want a pizza, like, squared?"

HILLARY. All right. Tell me the toppings and the order in which they were requested.

SOON-YI. I don't care if he ordered the feta, we don't want it.

HILLARY. Were there any side dishes involved?

SOON-YI. Too much cheese is binding, I keep telling him that.

HILLARY. Was there discernible clicking on the line?

SOON-YI (*examining the pizza further*). Bell peppers, fine.
Garlic, excellent.

HILLARY. There was a special, rather unusual request?

SOON-YI. Red onions—I prefer the white but no matter.

HILLARY. *Oysters?* The caller requested *oysters?*

SOON-YI. I've given up trying to set him straight about
pepperoni.

HILLARY. Would you put powdered rhino horn on a pizza
if a caller requested it?

SOON-YI. He won't eat pizza without pepperoni, but this
is much too much of it.

HILLARY. A signal. Wink and a nod. Cute.

SOON-YI. He's like a little boy—pepperoni pizza, corn dogs.

HILLARY. *Oysters*. Trite, very trite.

SOON-YI. I don't mean to complain, it's adorable really.

HILLARY. This generation of women has no imagination.

SOON-YI. Pathetic and health-endangering, but adorable.

HILLARY. Balls, but no imagination.

SOON-YI. We'll need a different pizza, really.

HILLARY. Let's pretend this little delivery never hap-
pened, shall we?

SOON-YI. Surely someone else can eat this redundant pizza.

HILLARY. Bring back another one though. Sausage and
mushroom.

SOON-YI. Make it a small this time.

HILLARY. Extra large, no shellfish whatsoever.

SOON-YI. Ax the feta, and very light on the pepperoni.

HILLARY. Since you're coming back you can bring the
phone log.

SOON-YI. *Fresh* garlic—the powder repeats on you.

HILLARY. *Everybody's* got a phone log in this town, honey.

SOON-YI. A Diet Coke.

HILLARY. Do you do milkshakes?

SOON-YI. Salad, no dressing.

HILLARY. Some onion rings.

SOON-YI. Extra napkins.

HILLARY. Extra Parmesan.

SOON-YI. The little red peppers. On second thought, no.

HILLARY. And one more thing...

SOON-YI. One more thing...

(Pause.)

HILLARY & SOON-YI *(a little sadly)*. Could you make it a little hotter this time?