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LOVE CALLS
Ovidia Yu

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ovidiaYu@starhub.net.sg

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LOVE CALLS...

CAST:

SANDRA

MIN

HARRY

CALLERS' VOICES

Give divorced Sandra bad husband memories... photos? Videos? A daughter living with husband & 2nd family? She worries about bad internet influence on the girl.

Present view that closing our eyes to what's there & banning it doesn't solve anything. What's illicit/underground is always more alluring. Have to show that sex is not wrong when seen as part of the whole relationship package. It's only wrong when obsession with it grows at the expense of everything else. Can I have Sandra, Min, Harry on stage all the time, in their separate areas unless they crossing into each others—linked by phone & internet & busy about their own activities the rest of the time?

Compare: computer simulated porn (no real people hurt) is it any worse than eating vegetarian mock duck (no real animals killed)

ACT 1

Open with SANDRA handling Love Calls, her radio phone-in programme. We hear SANDRA on radio, complete with a touch of car radio static, before the lights come on fully so that we can see her.

SANDRA

I know—yes, Jennie, you've always been more than generous... you've always given him more of your time than... [*overlapping*]... anyone would expect you to...

CALLER1

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And not only that! Every time we go out together, like on a date or only just to see show, he must buy back something for his mother!

SANDRA

Sorry, Jennie? I didn't quite understand that?

CALLER1

And not just food you know! I don't mind it if it is just, you know, like we are having dinner or something and she didn't eat yet, or you want to buy supper for her, I would not stop anybody from doing that, but even if we go and see show together, no matter what kind of romantic mood we are feeling ah, or what kind of traffic on the road, he must stop somewhere and buy back for his mother something...

SANDRA

But Jennie—

CALLER

Jen Ee. My name is Jen Ee...

SANDRA

Sorry, Jennie. You see, Jennie, you are actually a very lucky girl! Love for a mother is a love that many Asian men aren't very comfortable expressing! Comfort yourself with the thought that if he treats his mother well now, he'll probably be good to you when you reach her age.

CALLER1

When I reach her age I don't know maybe she will still be around. Her that kind of woman can live forever like that!

[SANDRA is examining her fingernails during the above section, then preparing the next piece of music to put on...]

SANDRA

Well Jennie, as long as you know he loves you, that's the main thing isn't it? I have a feeling that there are quite a few women who wouldn't mind being in your position... and now, we'll have a break...

CALLER1

But you haven't told me what to do!

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SANDRA

You already know what you should do, Jennie. Deep inside you, I think you already know. So listen to the voice deep inside you and then go ahead and do what you really

want to do.

CALLER1

But that's the same thing that you told that nineteen year old girl who phoned in earlier, the one who was crying because her boyfriend's seventeen year old mistress is pregnant and his wife threatened her with a scissors thinking that she was the one having the baby!

SANDRA

Well, she did know what she had to do—she had to tell the homicidal wife that she was threatening the wrong girlfriend. But I'm afraid we must be moving on... this is Sandra taking your Love Calls—when Love calls You, will you be ready?

[SANDRA puts on the music, which comes on as background to her conversation with MIN]

[If we're having girl group singers, this could be their first appearance]

[SANDRA autodials MIN. MIN comes on on other side of stage]

SANDRA

Min! Hey, I got your page. Sorry I couldn't get back to you sooner. Are we still on for tonight? Tell you what—if you're having second thoughts about meeting this American guy, let's just go and have a couple of drinks somewhere. Just don't cancel on me altogether okay? It's been a bad enough day as it is!

MIN

Of course tonight's still on. I only paged you because I was listening to your show in the car just now and I thought you were sounding a bit—you know—stressed out...

SANDRA

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Me? Stressed? Why would I be stressed? You were listening to the show? It's been such a crazy night. This was supposed to be a program where people could call up to chit chat about who they were in love with and then dedicate romantic love songs to them, I don't know how all this Agony Aunt business started. But boy, did it take off!

MIN

It's because you're such a good listener, Sandra!

SANDRA

That's rubbish and you know it. I'm a hopeless listener!

MIN

Just goes to show how much worse everybody else must be.

SANDRA

It's unbelievable. They start talking about some fantastic chap and how wonderful he is and then the next thing I know they're talking moaning about how embarrassing he is when he flosses his teeth at red lights or how he never remembers their birthdays or doesn't spend time with them on weekends.

Hey, I have to go, Min. The music's coming to an end. Isn't there anybody out there who's in love and happy about it? Anyway, I've got to go. See you later!

MIN

Oh! No! Wait! That's also actually partly why I called. I'm just downstairs. I'll come on up when you're done, okay?

SANDRA

You're downstairs? Here? In the station?

MIN

Well, I didn't have anywhere else to go and I didn't want to just drive around until I got caught for talking on my handphone—I thought we could go together—

[SANDRA notices that the music has ended]

SANDRA

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Right. Great. I'll see you.

[*back on air*] I hope you all enjoyed that song... and I hope you took full advantage of that moment of romantic silence... to be with your Loved One... or pat your cat.

And now, I'll just take one last Love Call before the news, Hello?

CALLER2

Hello! Hello!

SANDRA

Yes, I can hear you, Hello. Who am I speaking to, please?

CALLER2

Hello? Am I on air?

SANDRA

Yes, we can all hear you. Welcome to Love Calls. And your name is?

CALLER2

I have a problem,

SANDRA

[*mock aside*] Don't we all!

[*aloud*] And your problem is? By the way, what is your name?

CALLER2

I am quite a nice person, personality-wise. I know that I am not beautiful but then I don't look so bad also. I would call myself average. I am quite sure I don't have bad breath or BO. And once I am in a romantic relationship I already know all the right things to do and not to do and I will never be unfaithful... but nobody has ever given me the chance to show them what I am capable of doing! Can you please tell me what I should do about my problem?

SANDRA

Nowadays there are places where you can go to meet other people in the same situation, you know. I wouldn't even call it a problem, actually. It's just a situation that you have to deal with, that's all.

CALLER2

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But I don't want to—you know—I don't want to look as though I am looking for somebody when I actually find him... so that means that I cannot go to those places where people go specially to meet other people.

SANDRA

Look, we're all looking, whether we say it or not. We're all looking, whether we know it or not, all right? Just meet the guy first. If he's right for you and you're right for him you can make up your romantic first meeting story together later, all right?

CALLER2

That doesn't sound very honest. One thing about me is that I am always honest. My honesty is another of the advantages that I will bring to the relationship that I am looking for... I mean, the relationship that I will be a part of without looking for.

SANDRA

Look, Miss Anonymous. You can have honesty or you can have romance. And I suggest if you value honesty as highly as you say you do, you take a look at being honest with yourself. It sounds to me like you're just—

[Engaged tone: Beep-Beep-Beep]

SANDRA

Well, if she's taken her phone off the hook let's hope the great love of her life doesn't try to call through right now!

This is Sandra Logan, taking your Love Calls! And remember, all you romantic listeners out there, when Love calls you, you better be ready to answer!

[MIN, in the other corner, starts singing... perhaps backed by the girl group. Some song about waiting for love to call or show up or something]

[SANDRA takes off headphones and sits for a moment with her face in her hands]

SANDRA

[To herself] If I'm trying to give that man an excuse to fire me—

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[right on cue her phone rings]

[SANDRA picks it up, listens]

SANDRA

[phone] Yes, Mr. Lim.

The thing is, I have an appointment right after this. Why don't you just tell me what you want to say over the phone now?

[SANDRA listens]

SANDRA

[phone] All right Mr Lim. I'll be right up.

[SANDRA picks up then slams something hard onto her desk before exiting. MIN moves centrestage and continues her song as the rest of the stage darkens]

[Song ends. SANDRA enters]

SANDRA

Min! Sorry I'm so late. Thanks for waiting. I finished on time, then as usual whenever I've got somewhere that I want to go after work my bleddy producer comes and makes me go up to his office to listen to some long story that ends off with the moral that I should not talk so fast on air and should not say anything that might offend listeners even if it happens to be something I personally believe in. Anyway, your guy isn't going to be there till after nine, right? We still have plenty of time to get there. Honestly, that man is So irritating!

MIN

[facetiously] Maybe he's got a thing for you...

SANDRA

What!

MIN

I've heard you saying so on your show often enough what. If somebody seems to be going out of his or her way to irritate you, maybe he or she just doesn't know any other way to get your attention!

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SANDRA

Right. If somebody seems to hate you for no reason, he probably loves you, right?

MIN

I'm only saying what you're always telling people on air, you know.

SANDRA

And I'm only telling you what some callers say back to me.

Of course those bits get censored so listeners don't hear them.

[SANDRA starts packing up stuff, getting ready to leave the studio]

SANDRA

We can't have people voicing romantic doubts on the airwaves, you know. All our listeners would get depressed and commit suicide; our ratings would go down, and the next thing you know, the sponsors are withdrawing their support and that boss of mine uses it as an excuse to fire me!

MIN

Well, he hasn't fired you yet!

[suddenly worried] Has he? He hasn't, has he? You said that he just called you up to his office—it wasn't anything serious, was it?

SANDRA

Nah. The man just likes the sound of his own voice. And if there's nobody in the room with him when he talks the echo in the space between his ears gives him a headache. That's when he gets me up to listen to him.

MIN

You see? Not even after you were so horrible to your poor callers tonight he didn't fire you. I tell you, that boss of yours has definitely got something for you, Sandra!

SANDRA

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Please! He's not human enough to have anything for anyone of this species!
All he cares about is publicity and ratings! And he's so wooden. There's a
major chip on one of his shoulders, I just can't tell which one!
Sometimes it really makes me sick working under him. He's so stiff... when he
tries to tell a joke [*SANDRA imitates a high pitched laugh*] it's so fake you can
tell he's been studying self-help books again.
[*The set begins changing behind them, or they start walking towards the
CAFÉ-BAR set*]

MIN

If you really feel that way...
What I don't understand is why you're still doing this programme, then!

SANDRA

Hey, what are my options? What are my alternatives? I don't think I would
have been any better off doing some morning drive time show that gets me
out of bed and into the studio before five in the morning!

MIN

You don't even have to stick with radio, what...

SANDRA

Oh sure. And what else do I know how to do? It would be great starting out
fresh at the bottom of something at my age, right? The only job I think I would
enjoy now is being a laid back tai-tai type. Worrying about hairdressing
appointments and when my foot massagers are going away on holiday. But I
didn't stay married long enough and I think it's a bit late to start over in that
department too.

[*By now they have settled down at a table*]

SANDRA

One thing about doing radio. It doesn't matter how you look when you're on
air... I don't have to worry about hair and accessories and complexion flaws
like the TV side has to.

MIN

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Pity we can't all live on radio...

[*pause*]

SANDRA

Are you getting one of your anorexic turns or are you even more down than me tonight?

Min... what's wrong? If you're so worried about meeting this pen pal of yours we can just leave him a message and go off, you know.

MIN

Nothing's wrong. And he's not a pen-pal. He's a cyber significant other.

SANDRA

Oh, right. Sorry. I'm just one of the retards still living in the twentieth century. Tell me, what are the implications of being a cyber significant other—can you be significant to more than one cyber other at the same time or do you swear cyber monogamy till death do you part, something like that?

MIN

Oh, come on.

SANDRA

And while we're on the subject, how do you know that he's not going to turn out to be some cyber conman or cyber serial rapist?

MIN

Never mind, never mind, never mind... so, are we going order something first or do we just sit here until he shows up or what?

Maybe he's not even coming.

SANDRA

Oh right. This friend of yours takes leave, arranges to get temporary work in a hotel here, flies all the way to Singapore just to see you... just so that he can stand you up at the very last minute, right? Come on, Min. You don't believe that. What's really wrong?

MIN

Nothing.

It's my birthday next week.

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I'm going to be thirty-five. Thirty-five years old, Sandy!

SANDRA

It happens to all of us sooner or later. It happened to me...

It's happened to me several times, in fact.

I can hardly remember how many thirty-fifth birthdays I've had!

Then of course I got divorced and that's when I turned twenty-one all over again!

[They laugh, and then MIN starts to cry]

SANDRA

Min! Why—what's wrong—what did I say—whatever it was, I'm sorry!

MIN

You know, all the time you're growing up, you're taught to believe that good girls don't have anything to do with boys and if you're a good girl and study hard and wait everything will work out all right for you?

SANDRA

Min, Darling. I—

MIN

Well, I was a good girl, I studied hard. I got my degree. And now people are asking me what I've got against marriage and all the decent men are already married—you see them walking around supermarkets with their pregnant wives and horrible children—and I'm making blind dates with some total stranger on the internet. It's not fair! I was a good girl, you know!

SANDRA

Min, please, you're getting all upset for nothing—you're just nervous.

MIN

I don't understand when the right time was! Not when you're studying! Not when you're in the U! Not when you're just getting starting with a new job! Not when you're up for promotion! And now suddenly it's going to be too late! You know I'm not that crazy about having children, but I'm going to be thirty years old! Not twenty-something any more! I resent the fact that I'm reaching the end of my

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optimum child-bearing years without any man wanting to plant his sperm in my womb! And now my last hope is some stranger and all I know about him is he's got a computer and a modem.

SANDRA

Min, you're just getting hyped up so please calm down. Remember you told me how you used to vomit every Christmas Eve because you got so worked up about pretending you didn't really know about Santa Claus? Please don't get that worked up now. Don't vomit. Anyway, this guy who's coming isn't a stranger, right? He's told you about himself, hasn't he?

MIN

Oh sure, he's told me. But how much is wishful thinking? I told him I was well-built.

SANDRA

You are. In a manner of speaking.

MIN

That's because you're a woman thinking shoulders and posture. You know what men think when you say 'well built'

[MIN makes a buxom bosoms gesture]

[They are both laughing by now]

SANDRA

If this friend of yours turns out to be worth it, I know a very nice plastic surgeon...

[Enter HARRY, who stands for a moment watching them]

MIN

That sounds like something you would say to one of your callers—when you're in a good mood, of course!

SANDRA

I promise you, Min! Romance these days isn't dead... it's just a little deeper beneath the surface. People don't dare to show their true romantic selves until they know you well enough to be sure that you're not going to laugh at them!

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And people today are taking their time about it too. Why not? We're all living longer these days. We spend longer studying and preparing for adult life... you don't want to go back to the days when girls got married at fourteen or fifteen, would you?

MIN

Twenty-four or twenty-five I wouldn't mind.

SANDRA

I think you're being silly about this age thing. If you're going to be so sensitive about turning thirty now, what are you going to be like when you turn forty?

MIN

You really know how to cheer a girl up, don't you?

SANDRA

I promise you, Min. Some day, some day soon, when you least expect it, someone is going to come up to you and say,

[HARRY steps forward at this point]

HARRY

Good evening. I'm guessing you're Siew Min. My name is Harry. Harry from Minnesota. May I join you?

MIN

[Gasps. Looks HARRY up and down then turns on SANDRA, beaming widely]
He's here!

SANDRA

I see. *[low, to MIN]* I'd say you better get to work on the bosoms.

HARRY

I'm sorry?

SANDRA

No, no... just a stupid joke. I'm sorry.

HARRY

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Well, anyway, I'm Harry Fisher. You must be Siew Min? I'm sorry I was a bit late. I wasn't very sure it was you at first, I didn't know you'd be bringing anyone.

SANDRA

When a woman's meeting a strange man for the first time it's a good idea to have a chaperone around.

MIN

Oh, but Harry's not a strange man. Please, come and sit down, Harry. I feel as though I know you so well already. It's just a bit of a shock seeing you... you're exactly as I

imagined you, you know. Even your voice.

HARRY

I'm glad. You don't know how glad I am!

If you didn't like what you were seeing you could have gone off quietly and I would never have been quite sure whether that lovely woman in the corner was my Min.

SANDRA

[laughing] Oh, Please! I'm starting to feel diabetes coming on!

HARRY

Sorry?

MIN

She's just being funny. Trying to be funny. Oh, Harry! I don't know what to—

HARRY

I know. It's a bit awkward, isn't it? On one hand we are complete strangers... and on the other hand we've been having intimate talks and exchanging secrets for months!

But you know something, Min? No matter how this works out between us, I'm glad we decided to meet up in person. I know I'm going to have no regrets about coming out to Singapore...

MIN

Ohhh...

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[SANDRA watches HARRY and MIN eyeing each other with some curiosity & interest. Decides to cut in.]

SANDRA

So—how are you finding Singapore so far?

HARRY

[eyes on MIN] Well, speaking as one who has been here for less than twenty-four hours, I love it!

MIN

[eyes on HARRY] I'm glad...

HARRY

[eyes on MIN] So am I...

MIN

[eyes on HARRY] So glad...

HARRY

[eyes on MIN] So am I...

SANDRA

So—any plans about how long you're going to stay? What you're going to be doing while you're here?

HARRY

[eyes on MIN] A friend got me this post, second Chef in the main restaurant, it's temporary, three weeks, but they've already let me know that if I'm interested in staying on... perhaps a two year contract...

MIN

[eyes on HARRY] I'm glad...

HARRY

[eyes on MIN] So am I...

MIN

[eyes on HARRY] So glad...

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HARRY

[*eyes on MIN*] So am I...

SANDRA

[*clearing her throat loudly*] So you'll actually be working in this hotel! Have you seen the famous rooftop gardens with the world's second highest man-made waterfall yet?

HARRY

[*eyes on MIN*] No, but I would really love to...

MIN

[*without conviction*] It's not really that hard to find... once you know where it is. But I suppose if you don't know where it is—

SANDRA

Go on. Show him. Do your bit for tourism in Singapore.

HARRY

Oh, I'm not a tourist. I'm working here!

SANDRA

You see? Better still! Go on! [*to MIN*] Go on and give it a chance!

HARRY

Why don't you join us? We can all go for a nice walk...

SANDRA

No. I'm an indoors person. I don't take nice walks. Min's the one who likes walking around jasmine bushes to the sound of trickling water in the moonlight...

MIN

I'll just show him the rooftop waterfall and I'll be right back.

SANDRA

[*whisper*] Promise to tell me all about it if I'm not here when you get back. And remember, no sex on the first date!

MIN

[*whisper*] Sandra! You're disgusting!

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[*out loud*] Of course I'll be right back, Sandra. You sure you'll be okay on your own for a while?

SANDRA

I came here for my cappuccino and I'm going to have my cappuccino!
Of course I'll be fine. Go-go-go!

[*gestures of farewell... SANDRA settles down comfortably on her own*]

MIN

Come on. It's faster if we go across to the lifts on the other side of the lobby... well, not really faster, but it's a nicer walk...

HARRY

I am so pleased to meet you, Min. And I think your Mum's really sweet.

MIN

Sorry? What's that about my mother?

HARRY

I think your mother's really nice—

MIN

My—[*looks in the direction HARRY's gesturing in & gasps, half in amusement, half in horror*]

That's not—she's not my Mum!

[*MIN & HARRY exit with MIN giggling uncontrollably*]

SANDRA

[*to waitress*] Two cappuccinos. That's right. No, just leave them both.

[*out to audience*] That's the advantage to having a table to yourself. You can drink anything and everything that comes to your table.

It must be very flattering to have a man come all this way just to meet you...

Because it's so obviously not something that a man does all the time, you are forced to believe that something in You has brought out this side of him...

that's going to make any woman feel a bit special, isn't it?

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[looks at her watch] She'll be back soon. They'll be back soon. I wonder if he'll take her down to look at the kitchens he's supposed to be working in. *[laughs to herself]* So he's a cook. Imagine Min dating a cook!

[SANDRA's pager sounds & she looks at it, frowns, then switches on her handphone & dials]

SANDRA

[phone] Yes, Mr. Lim. No, Mr. Lim, nobody else. I'm just sitting all alone drinking coffee. What?

No, nothing's wrong. Why, has somebody called in to complain about something?

What?

No... I left the station quickly because I wanted to leave, that's all. There's more to my life than sitting in a room talking into a microphone, you know!

No. I don't think I can come in early on Thursday. Why don't you just write down your new idea on a sticky note and leave it on my door with all the others!

Well, I'll see. I'm sorry Mr. Lim but I have to go now.

[SANDRA switches off phone and puts it down quite hard]

SANDRA

I stayed at the station until my program was over. I should think that that's all that concerns him! That man. I leave the premises one bit faster than usual and he's checking up on me!

And as usual by phone. If I meet him face to face he just nods at me without looking me

in the eye—and runs.

All my relationships. Whether good or bad, all conducted over the phone or the radio, these days. And when I talk about 'good' relationships I'm referring to those that don't threaten to fire you *[picks up phone & thumps it down again]* or talk about having kinky sex with you when they phone up at three-thirty in the morning!

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Except for Min. I suppose we need each other, in a way. We can irritate the hell out of each other, but when it comes down to the bottom line we know that we can count on finding the other alone and relationshipless when that condition gets to be a bit much to bear...

[MIN appears, very breathless, very excited]

MIN

Sandy, Darling—

SANDRA

Uh-oh...

MIN

I know that this is terrible-terrible-terrible of me, but well something's sort of come up; we were talking and there are some places that I know he's going to like better than this one... he's not going to be here very long, I feel like we already know each other so well, he's not married, and I already told him that you wouldn't mind...

[SANDRA looks at MIN]

MIN

[very fast] You don't mind, do you? If I really thought you would mind I wouldn't dream of just going off like this, but I know you don't really mind, right? You know you're the one who's always telling me that I should be more in touch with what I really want to do and do it, right?

[looks around her, HARRY not in sight yet] He thinks I've come to ask you to come with us, but you'll say 'no', won't you? Won't you, please?

Look, I'll make it up to you, I promise I promise I promise!

[HARRY enters]

HARRY

So, sorry for stealing her away. We're off to investigate the night life around here. You'll join us, of course, won't you?

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[*SANDRA looks at HARRY, then at MIN, a small smile that she hides. MIN's smile, as she listens to SANDRA, is a big smile, not hidden*]

SANDRA

No... I'm afraid I can't...

HARRY

Oh, come on. We'll just have a look in at a couple of places... have a couple of drinks... you must come with us!

MIN

She's already said that she can't come. She was going to go home soon, anyway. Even before you came... Sandra's a real early bird.

HARRY

But I can't just break up your evening like that—

SANDRA

[*Heavily, with painful, brave smile... fake, of course*] It's all right.

[*cough, cough*] Anyway, I have to go home soon to take my medication...

HARRY

Your medication? Do you need help... do you have a car here? Can we get you a taxi...

[*to MIN*] We can't just leave your friend alone here like this!

SANDRA

That's all right. I'll just get them to bring my wheelchair round...

HARRY

Wheelchair! Min! We can't just leave her here—maybe we should...

MIN

She's just having you on.

[*to SANDRA*] Sandra!

HARRY

But we should make sure that she gets her wheelchair at least—

[*MIN whacks SANDRA, part playfully, part in genuine frustration*]

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MIN

[*hisses*] Sandra Norris!

SANDRA

Okay, okay. It's all right. See? I can stand. I'm not all that old. I can get myself home just fine. Harry, you're a real gentleman. More so than Some people around here that I could point a finger to! Hey, you kids just go on and have a good time, all right?

HARRY

If you're sure—

MIN

She's sure, she's sure!

[*SANDRA waves and shoos them off as MIN takes HARRY's arm and exits with him.*]

[*unseen by HARRY, MIN turns and mouths 'Thank You' to Sandra*]

HARRY

[*as he exits*] Your friend's voice sounds very familiar... I'm sure I've heard it somewhere before...

MIN

[*as she exits*] I'm sure you haven't. It's a very common voice in Singapore. A lot of women here sound exactly the same...

[*SANDRA moves away from the 'café' area of the stage to a desk with a phone. When MIN & HARRY appear on the other side of the stage they have changed into more casual clothes that suggest they have got more comfortable with each other and got to know each other a lot better*]

MIN [*phone*]

Look, Sandra, I'm really sorry that I'm not going to be able to make it for the show tomorrow night... but Harry really wants to go and walk through Chinatown and see what's left of traditional Singapore...

SANDRA [*phone*]

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That's okay. It's only, what, the third or fourth time you've canceled on me in the last two or three weeks? I suppose it must be true love, right? Again. Have you moved him into your apartment yet? Remember how you had to change the locks after you gave

your key to that bankrupt old Peruvian?

MIN

[*phone*] Thanks, Sandra. I knew you would understand. I knew that you would be happy for me! He likes you, you know. He said so!

SANDRA

[*phone*] I do want to be happy for you. I'm trying. That guy's there with you now, right? Oh Min, I just think you're moving a bit fast. You've given him the keys to your apartment haven't you? And your POSB ATM code? And your cyberway password?

MIN

[*phone*] I'm glad you liked him too. I'll let him know...

SANDRA

[*phone*] You know what I really think, Min? I think you're overreacting to all this turning thirty business...

MIN

[*phone*] Wait, wait. He wants to say hello to you! Hold on!

SANDRA

[*phone*] Shit! Min! No! I don't have anything to say to him! Min! Min!

MIN

[*to HARRY, overlapping*] It's Sandra, Harry. She wants to say hello to you. Come on.

HARRY [*phone*]

Hello Sandra? Good Morning. How are you today?

SANDRA [*phone*]

Fine, Harry. Fine, fine. Good. I'm good... and you?

HARRY [*phone*]

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Good. No wheelchair for you today, huh! [*laughs*] You really had me on there for a moment!

SANDRA [*phone*]

Ha-ha. No. Harry, I'm in a bit of a hurry—in a big, big hurry, actually... I would love to go on chatting with you but I really, really have to go. Tell Min good bye for me, all right?

[*SANDRA puts down the phone*]

[*Lights out on MIN and HARRY*]

SANDRA

Of course I'm happy for her. At least I'm trying very, very hard to be really happy for her. Really sincerely trying...

It's not easy.

It's not that I don't trust Harry. Harry seems like a nice enough guy, from what little I've seen of him. From what very, very, very little I've seen of him. Not that I've seen much of Min since those two got together.

He's not some bigtime executive like most of the corporate Americans you see around here. He's a cook. A *Chef*, Min calls him. He does French stuff. Not *haute cuisine*, provincial French stuff. He's a farm boy from Minnesota who learnt to add some dried herbs to the same recipes his mother fed him and his six brothers on and call it French Provincial.

Actually his cooking's not bad. He and Min invited me over to Min's place one night last week to try it. We had ox kidney stewed in wine with fresh mushrooms. What was really amazing was seeing Min eating—actually eating something with cream, brandy, white wine and butter in it. And eating quite a lot of it, too. I kept expecting her to bring out the Perrier to rinse everything fattening off her mushrooms.

Harry thanked me for introducing them. For 'chaperoning this lovely vibrant woman into his life' that's what he said.

Well, it's true. If I hadn't insisted that Min meet him that night—if I hadn't gone with her that night to meet him—they would never have got together. I know

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what Min can be like “He’ll think my bum is too big” “He’ll probably be five feet tall with bad breath” and Harry didn’t have her address or phone number then... nothing but an e-mail address... I don’t think Min even remembers that. She seems to think that she met Harry through some act of fate or act of God when it was really just me being a bit curious and wanting a decent cup of coffee. They’re not kidding when they tell you that caffeine is bad for you!

[looks at cold cup of coffee on her desk, lifts it, puts it down again]

It’s always been this way, you know. My good friend Siew Min has always been like this. For as long as we’ve been friends. When there’s something wrong with her, I’m the one who’s expected to drop everything and make time to listen to her problems. And when nothing is actually wrong with her, I’m the one who’s expected to drop everything and listen to her latest set of plans for changing her life or exercising regularly or whatever. There never seems to be a time when she’s listening to me or just around for me.

Listen to me. I actually sound jealous!

All right, so I’m jealous.

It’s not even that I’m attracted to that Harry myself, you know. I don’t want that little American man for myself. I just want... some standards to believe in. I don’t want things to work out badly for Min, but guys you make contact with over some computer singles thing shouldn’t be good for you.

It’s not fair. Everybody else seems to be being irresponsible and having fun, and I feel like I’m the only one hopelessly trying to maintain some kind of personal standards by keeping an empty apartment clean.

[pause]

I wonder if all convent girls feel like this. Maybe it’s just this place.

[pause]

I know. I’m at a difficult time for a woman. A bit too old to have babies but a bit too young to get on with menopause and go off on irresponsible trips to Australia.

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*[Lights down on SANDRA & up on MIN & HARRY. MIN is on the computer.
HARRY is hovering, holding the newspapers]*

HARRY

You're always working so hard on the computer. Hey, I'm here now! What about taking a couple of days off and going to Australia? Just the two of us?

MIN

Hmmm?

HARRY

Australia. I can get some time off, I'm sure you could, you've been working so hard—Min? Are you listening?

MIN

Of course I am. Why Australia?

HARRY

It's cheap. It's big. It's got farms and trees, less cars and more kangaroos and very

affordable package tours...

MIN

It's got Pauline Hanson and One Nation. "Stop immigration!" They should send all those loud mouthed whites back to Britain. In chains—the way they came.

HARRY

All right. Indonesia, then. Or Thailand. I saw some tours advertised somewhere for Bali, for Phuket, for P. Langkawi... what does the 'P' stand for?

MIN

Nothing. Just means that it's an island.

HARRY

[Coming up close behind her] And no man is an island, right?

MIN

Harry! Do you mind! I'm trying to work!

HARRY

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Come on, Darling. It's the weekend. I don't need to go in till six and you need to take some time off. Come on, take a break and I'll give you a back massage, all right Sweetie? A back massage with some extras thrown in...

MIN

Look, it's all right for you—as long as your knives are sharp and your pots are clean you're ready to go to work. But some of us have to put in a bit more time and effort to keep up with what we do, all right!

[HARRY moves away from Min, to where he addresses audience directly]
[When VOICE comes on, it is accompanied by clicks as though on a computer keyboard. In a more sophis production, we would have the words appear on a projected computer screen; here we hear them spoken. MIN speaks as she types on her keyboard. Note that no matter how passionate the spoken exchanges are the 'signed__' is in prosaic computer tones. Nice touch if all the lascivious computer voices could be recordings of

HARRY's voice]

HARRY

Most men would be a bit hurt by that, but not me.

I'm lucky that I don't have the kind of sensitive male ego that needs attention paid to me all the time. If I did I would hardly have gone into cooking, you know what I mean? When you're a cook, nobody notices you unless something has gone wrong.

All the world's top chefs are men. And if you look at the men who are trained to do their own cooking... like commandos and marines, you soon see that there's nothing about knowing how to handle yourself in the kitchen that makes you any less a man. The trouble is, most people tend to see things in stereotypes

MIN [*comp*]

SweetMissMary Logging on... my password...

[getting on line sounds from computer]

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HARRY

Back home, anyway. People here don't see things the same way as they do back home. I haven't been here in the East very long and already I think...maybe I'll try to figure some way of staying out here.

MIN

[singing as she waits for her connection] Start spreading the news, I'm leaving today

I want to be a part of it, New York New York...

HARRY

Of course, Siew Min is a big part of that. She's so sweet. She's so sweet and I like it that she's so smart on the one hand, and at the same time she's so innocent...

MIN

[comp] SweetMissMary here, looking for LoverBoy. Where are you, LoverBoy? Signed SweetMissMary.

HARRY

I know that Singapore's supposed to be a modern, up-to-date twenty-first century city and all that, but face it—back home you don't get very many women who are so up to date and so naïve at the same time!

VOICE *[comp]*

Hi there, SweetMissMary, if LoverBoy doesn't have the sense to show Up when you do, how about spending some warm line time with me? Signed HardUPAndOn.

MIN *[comp]*

Just how hard up are you? Signed SweetMissMary.

HARRY

And another thing I like about Min is...

Well, we fit very well together. Physically, I mean. Sexually...

VOICE *[comp]*

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Why don't you come on over and find out for yourself, SweetMissMary?

Signed, HardUPAndOn.

MIN [*comp*]

I'm coming over, HardUPAndON. I'm squeezing, squeezing, squeezing your enormous bulge and my, I can hardly get my two little hands around it!

Signed, SweetMissMary.

HARRY

I mean, Min was a virgin when we met. She didn't exactly tell me so, but a man knows these things. And, well, face it, I haven't exactly been around that much myself.

VOICE [*comp*]

You sure know a thing or two about men, don't you, SweetMissMary? Signed, HardUPAndOn

MIN [*comp*]

I know I like it hard and I like it up so I think we'll be getting along just fine, Signed SweetMissMary.

HARRY

So we're starting out together, learning about each other at the same time as we learn about ourselves. I frankly can't think of a better way to do it!

And another thing I like about Min...

VOICE [*comp*]

By the way, how old are you, SweetMissMary? Signed HardUPAndOn.

HARRY

She's so honest. It's an Asian thing, I think. Min wouldn't know how to tell a lie even if she wanted to.

MIN [*comp*]

I'm nearly twenty-one, Big Boy, and I'm a 38-24-34 and ready to take on anything you have for me. Signed SweetMissMary.

HARRY

And she's so transparent. I just have to look at her and I can almost see what she's thinking...

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VOICE [*comp*]

I'm spreading you wide open, SweetMissMary, I'm spreading you with my hard, huge hands, wide open enough to hurt... Signed HardUPAndOn.

HARRY

For instance, look at her now... look at her at the computer. She wants me to see how much work she has to get through so that I'll know how busy and important she is.

It's almost funny, you know. So many women both here and back home have got such a low self-image that unless they're impressing You, they can't be happy with themselves.

I know that because I used to read *Cosmopolitan* to get an insight into the workings of the modern woman's mind. Turn's out it's banned in Singapore. Pity for you guys here. It has some good pictures too. Not dirty. Nothing hardcore. Just sort of inspirational.

VOICE [*comp*]

I am running my hands all over you... I'm deep, deep, deep inside you... Signed HardUPAndOn.

[*HARRY walks over*]

MIN [*comp*]

Oh yes! Yes! Yes! Don't stop! Don't stop! Don't—

HARRY

[*grabbing her from behind in an affectionate lock*]Hi, Sweetheart. How about a kiss?

MIN

[*in shock, bangs on the keyboard*] Ahhhh—Harry!

HARRY

What's all this that you're working so hard on?

VOICE [*comp*]

Wow, SweetMissMary talk about simulating a mega-orgasm! Signed HardUPAndOn

MIN

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Harry, what are you doing! It's rude—it's confidential—it's an invasion of privacy!

HARRY

A mega-orgasm?

MIN

You know it's very bad manners to read over other peoples' shoulders!

[MIN tries to get rid of what's on screen, but in her panic doesn't seem able to...]

HARRY

Wait—wait, let me see—simulating a mega-orgasm? Who's Sweet Mary? What on earth is a Hard-Up-And-Onward?!

[MIN saves herself by pulling the cable out of the computer monitor]

HARRY

Hey, hey... let me guess. You're writing a novel or something in secret, right?

MIN

Let go of me. You don't understand anything!

[MIN pulls impatiently away from HARRY and past SANDRA on other side of stage]

SANDRA

Hi, Min! How's Harry?

MIN

Why does everybody ask me how Harry is! Who cares how he is! How about how I am!

[Sandra is stunned]

[MIN exits]

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[*HARRY picks up the phone and dials. SANDRA's phone rings & she answers*]

HARRY [*phone*]

Sandra please. It's Harry.

SANDRA [*phone*]

Sandra here. Hi, Harry.

HARRY [*phone*]

Can I talk to you?

SANDRA [*phone*]

Sure. Talk.

HARRY [*phone*]

Not over the phone. I don't like—I can't get used to—I just prefer dealing with certain things face to face instead of over the phone...

SANDRA [*phone*]

I prefer dealing with things over the phone. And I'm sorry, but I really don't have the time to meet up with you somewhere.

[*pause*]

SANDRA [*phone*]

Look, Harry. There must be somebody else here you can talk to. You know that Min and I have been friends for a long, long time... I don't want to—

HARRY [*phone*]

I know. You know my Siew Min very well.

SANDRA [*phone*]

One thing I know is you probably shouldn't be calling her 'Your' Siew Min.

HARRY [*phone*]

That's exactly why I want to talk to you. I would really like your help, Sandra.

SANDRA

[*to herself*] All right. Say the word 'help' and this bleeding heart is ready to take you on.

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[*on phone*] I really can't make it any sooner than tomorrow... I'm in the middle of a show right now... What about tomorrow, twelve noon. At the main entrance of Tangs, all right? I really have to go pick up something from there... Just inside the automatic doors so that I can wait in the air-con and look at perfume if you're late.

HARRY [*phone*]

I won't be late. Thanks a lot, Sandra. I really appreciate it.

[*If we have a song, Karen can sing it offstage here: Other people's loves/ And other people's lovers / Are always on my mind...*]

SANDRA

They're probably just having a tiff that will soon blow over. I hope so, anyway. There are enough people out there with Real problems. Though I suppose that every problem

that's yours is real to you...

I like this guy Harry. I still have my doubts about meeting people over the computer network or whatever... but Harry's a nice boy. A nice man. I hope Min doesn't go and do something stupid.

It isn't just that Harry knows how to cook an ox kidney for three people—though most of the men I know wouldn't recognize an ox kidney if it hit them in the face. And we're talking about men who've been through NS. Singapore men! Their idea of survival cooking is instant noodles. Their idea of meal planning is telling you in advance that tonight they want dinner on the table as soon as they walk in the front door!

But Harry—he didn't just cook the main dish. He gave us Les Crudites to start with; very firm, sliced tomatoes, dressed with a minuscule amount of oil, lemon and seasoning, sprinkled with finely chopped parsley; very thin slices of cucumber dressed the same way; radishes, washed and trimmed but otherwise left as God intended them to be rather than mutilated into roses or water lilies... and very young, raw broad beans still in their pods and piled on a dish to be eaten with salt...

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You just know that a man who can treat vegetables with such respect is a man with a sensitive soul.

And he did it all calmly, generously, you could see how much pleasure he was getting out of giving us pleasure.

In the days when I was still married, my ex-husband would occasionally take himself into the kitchen to produce a meal. Usually a major fry-up. When he finished, there would be a dirty plates and oily frying pans everywhere, egg shells underfoot, my best kitchen towels on the floor soaking up spilled mayonnaise and ketchup... his philosophy was that when I cooked, I should wash up. And when he cooked, since he had already done the cooking, I did the washing up. It would take me at least a week to eradicate all the damage he did.

But Harry cleaned up Min's kitchen. I went in to get myself a glass of water and saw. What hadn't been washed had been scraped out and was soaking in the sink. The counters were clean.

[aside she cannot resist] There were lemon slices in the cold water jug in the fridge!

And Min looked happy. She was eating what he put on the table and she looked happy. I think that that more than anything else helped me to believe that this man was good

for her.

Min was eating as though she never in her life had a problem with food.

[Lights change abruptly]

[SANDRA in her radio studio. Flashy Musical/ drumroll introduction to the phone-in]

SANDRA

All right, it's phone-in time on Love Calls again! Our Languages Of Love competition is now open to all callers! Remember, all that you have to do is call in and let us hear how you would express your love to your very own

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Loved One, in language that hasn't been used here before, and you could stand to win _____!

So, who will our lucky first caller be?

[SANDRA looks out in audience. She picks someone, preferably a volunteer. Maybe the first should be planted each night to give the others some idea of what is expected?]

SANDRA

And yes, what would you say to your loved one, in the language of love?

[some possible plants:]

CALLER

I would just say that I love my husband very much because he even does the laundry when we are both under work pressure.

CALLER

I would say to my wife that she is more beautiful today than the day when we got married twenty-five years ago!

CALLER

I would say that no matter what she does or doesn't do I will always love her because who she is is more important than what she does...

CALLER

I haven't met the great love of my life yet, but when I do I'll say "what took you so long!"

CALLER

I would say [*giggle, giggle, giggle*] that I love him! [*giggle, giggle, giggle*]

[of course, no matter what the audience members say, they get the giveaway prizes...]

[MIN appears on other side of the stage with phone]

[SANDRA's phone rings]

SANDRA

And now on line with us we have—

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MIN [*phone*]

Sandra? I have to talk to you.

SANDRA

Min? Min, good to hear from you... welcome to Love Calls!

[*hisses*] Look! you're on air, all right! Either say something commercially viable or get off the line!

MIN [*phone*]

I tried calling you on your own phone, why aren't you answering?

SANDRA

Because I'm answering this line, you dope! I can only talk on one line at a time! This is work! This is my work! This is the time I have to answer this line!

MIN [*phone*]

That's why I called this line.

SANDRA

This line is for people who want to talk to me about love and their love problems!

MIN [*phone*]

Well, I want to talk to you about my love problems! I think you should listen because it's all your fault I got into this in the first place.

SANDRA

All right. All right.

Well, Min. Now that you've got our attention, why don't you tell all of us about your love problem?

MIN [*phone*]

You mean—everybody's listening?

SANDRA

Everybody out there who's tuned in to Love Calls! Yes, Min. We're all listening, so don't be shy. What's your problem?

MIN [*phone*]

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This guy who I won't name that I've been seeing? He gets upset just because I'm on the computer. Isn't that so ridiculous? Especially when that's how we two met!

SANDRA

Usually it's the other way around! Women calling in complaining that their husbands or boyfriends are spending more time with DOOM and QUAKE than with them! Can't you get one of those two player thingmajigs that will let you spend time together as well as with the computer?

MIN [*phone*]

I'm not playing games! I'm Surfing. Surfing the net and... and Chatting. You know, making contact with new people, new ideas, new ways of looking at things...

The world is becoming smaller, we should all be aware of what is going on in other places, instead of doing our best to shut our eyes and ears to anything that doesn't directly affect us!

SANDRA

Isn't that something the two of you could do together?

MIN [*phone*]

He wouldn't be interested. He thinks that the computer is just there to do what needs to be done. And once he's got what he wants out of it it's time to switch off. He just shuts his mind to anything new and he thinks that I should do the same thing.

SANDRA

I see...

MIN [*phone*]

I'm just realizing... you know you can talk to somebody every day. Nearly every day for months and not know them at all. Because they're only showing you what they want to. And they're only seeing the parts of you they want to see.

[MIN hangs up & exits. HARRY enters. Stands listening to his radio]

HELPER-WHO-HAS-BEEN-GIVING-OUT-FREE-GIFTS: Does she get a prize?

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SANDRA

No she doesn't. We're not giving out any more prizes today. I have a show to get on with, you know! Well, there we heard it from an upset lady who doesn't seem to be able to make up her mind between her man and her computer.

[SANDRA's own phone rings.]

SANDRA

[to herself] Min!

A little music, I think!

[SANDRA puts on the music then picks up her own phone]

HARRY [phone]

Sandra?

SANDRA [phone]

Harry?

HARRY [phone]

Hi, Sandra.

SANDRA [phone]

Oh, Harry. We're still meeting tomorrow, right?

HARRY [phone]

I heard you talking to Min just now. On the radio. I was listening to your show. I just wanted to—you know—clarify something... she isn't just chatting to people on the net... I saw some of the things they say there... I want to stroke your this with my that... I want to take your this in my that and let you do this and that to me until I this in your that...

Stuff like that. It's disgusting!

And this is with people she doesn't know and doesn't know anything about!

SANDRA [phone]

Harry, why are you so upset? It's just over the Internet, you know. Some people actually do it in person, believe it or not! And you got to know Min on the Internet too, didn't you?

HARRY [phone]

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We were on a different site. We were on a site where people only talked with all our clothes on.

I thought people in Singapore weren't into stuff like that.

SANDRA [*phone*]

Some are and some aren't. That's why the government's worried about our population

growing older faster than it's growing larger.

Harry, some people just want to try different things first before they know what they want to settle down with.

HARRY [*phone*]

I thought Singapore was going to be such a safe clean place... with safe clean people. You know, I never told Min this, I thought it was something that she would shock her too much, I thought that it might shock her too much, I suppose, all right, I was just trying to be the big gentleman and protect her from all the whatever out there...

The first week I was here, just a couple of nights after I met the two of you in that café place? I was just wandering around, trying to see a bit of Singapore here and there. I was alone down outside Victoria Concert Hall? This woman came and offered me a blow job for fifty dollars!

I was shocked! I was stunned! I was—

SANDRA [*phone*]

It *is* shocking. She probably inflated the price because she saw you were a tourist.

HARRY [*phone*]

What?

SANDRA [*phone*]

If you were interested you could probably have bargained her down to thirty... thirty-five, maybe. But you'd have to provide your own condom. Which is really a better idea.

HARRY [*phone*]

Sandra! I can't believe you're saying what you're saying!

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SANDRA [*phone*]

Harry, things like that are going on! You don't have to be a part of it if you don't want to, but you can't pretend they're not there and you shouldn't want the people you know to pretend they're not there.

HARRY [*phone*]

What about getting upset over my fiancée having sex on line with total strangers?

SANDRA [*phone*]

Your fiancée? Did you say 'your fiancée'?

[*HARRY puts down phone exit HARRY*]

SANDRA

His fiancée.

Well, back to the show...

[*Enter MIN*]

SANDRA

Min! What are you doing here!

MIN

You've been talking to Harry. Don't try to pretend you haven't. He said you told him you're on his side.

SANDRA

Min, I never—look, I'm working right now, I can't just—

MIN

You've been talking to Harry. It's none of your business what happens between us.

SANDRA

Min. How come you never told me that you two got engaged? When did that happen?

MIN

We're not engaged. That's why I didn't tell you. What are you talking about.

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SANDRA

He called you his 'fiancee'?

MIN

So you did talk to him! I was just guessing, but I was right! The guy gave me a ring. Does that automatically make us engaged?

SANDRA

I suppose it does if you took it!

MIN

I took it because it was a diamond with a ruby setting! It was pretty! If he gave me a painting or a paid for a holiday cruise or something that cost just as much would that make us engaged? He didn't say anything about getting married. He gave me a ring. I took it. That's all.

Anyway, I'm Chinese. I don't have to go by these Western ring engagement routines.

SANDRA

He says you've been having sex on line with complete strangers. He says that you spend all night on the computer having sex with complete strangers.

MIN

We've gone out together a few times. Suddenly he's talking about bringing me back to the States to meet his mother and father... telling me what we're going to name our children... and he's telling me how he wants our children to speak Chinese and be proud of their heritage—please! I don't exactly speak Chinese all that well, you know!

SANDRA

I think that's sweet...

MIN

All right then, why don't You marry him and have his precious half Chinese children for him, then!

[SANDRA looks at MIN coldly]

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MIN

[insincerely] Oh, I'm sorry. One quarter Chinese children, then.

SANDRA

I don't know what's wrong with you, Min! I thought you liked Harry. I thought you liked him so much. I had my doubts at first, but the two of you were getting along so well! Didn't I hear you say it was high time you tried for a long term relationship, as opposed to a long distance relationship? I'm pretty sure I heard you say that. I thought you wanted to settle down and have a stable family and babies that don't have to be conceived in a test tube!

MIN

I do... *[pause]* want those things... *[pause]* some day.

SANDRA

Well then. Is this just cold feet?

[longer pause]

MIN

I want to see what else is out there before I settle down forever.

SANDRA

You've been seeing what's out there for thirty years already. Don't you think that at some stage you should stop and say okay, I'll make a commitment now?

MIN

For a woman who's not married yourself you're very quick to talk about making commitments.

SANDRA

I've been married, remember? I tried it. And even though it didn't work out, it wasn't all bad. There were some good parts, there were some bad parts. I won't say I'd want to go through it all again... but I'm not sorry I did. I don't regret making a commitment even it didn't last.

Of course it's easier to say that after you've put a bit of distance between you and the event.

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MIN

[*without looking at her*] I think that a bit of distance Would help. It would be just what I need right now.

SANDRA

Distance? You can talk to Harry face to face now. He's right here. You don't have to talk to him over a computer connection any more!

MIN

I like a bit of distance. Sometimes. When you're on line you get directly in to someone's innermost thoughts... and if you don't like what you see there you can just hang up. If you want to put him out of your mind for a while and just watch TV or something, you can. You don't have to remember what you disagreed about and whether you're going to talk to him about sleeping on the sofa tonight.

SANDRA

Well, some of us have to put up with men in our lives we can't stand and we don't even get the bedroom benefits!

MIN

Oh, Sandra, why don't you just stand up to your boss for once instead of just griping about the poor man!

SANDRA

The poor man? What about poor me? He thinks that if you put enough hours into the job it makes up for your not having any humor or imagination to put in... if you ask me, he's just jealous because I get all the letters—

MIN

All you do is gripe about Mr. Lim. You should try telling him how you feel for once.

[*exit MIN*]

SANDRA

Oh, sheesh.

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[then she suddenly realizes that the program is still on, the song is long over and her microphone is live]

SANDRA

Oh Shit! I guess I just told all Singapore...

[Beep]

SANDRA *[phone]*

Yes, Mr. Lim. I know, Mr. Lim. Yes, I realize I shouldn't use words like that on air, Mr. Lim. Yes, I'll be right up, Mr. Lim...

[Exit SANDRA]

[LIGHTS up on MIN and HARRY on other part of stage. If we're having girl group singing, they sing in the background now. Otherwise HARRY flips a magazine & MIN flips TV channels until SANDRA enters and goes over to join them]

SANDRA

Well. I'm here. What's so urgent that I had to come over?

MIN

He doesn't like computers. If you ask me, he's got a hang up about them. In this day and age it's ridiculous! Do you want a drink? Go and help yourself. I can't believe that he's American!

HARRY

[going to get SANDRA a drink] Here you go, Sandra. Thanks for coming. Not all Americans spend the best part of their lives staring at a computer screen! Some of us have real lives! I don't know where you got whatever impression you got, but you better

check it against reality, that's all I can say!

SANDRA

I can't believe you two. Still the same old pathetic problem. *[to HARRY]*

Thanks.

[looks at both of them now silent]

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SANDRA

I see.

It wouldn't be fair of me to listen to only one of you, so I'll listen to you both, all right? Here in front of each other so that you'll know that nothing is being said behind your back. If you don't mind I'm getting myself another drink.

[SANDRA fills her glass then takes the half full bottle of scotch back with her]

All right. Who's going to start?

[Both MIN and HARRY start talking loudly & simultaneously]

MIN

I don't know how he can think it's any of his business if—

HARRY

I don't understand why she has to be so secretive about what she's doing if she says there's nothing wrong with it!

[When SANDRA turns to one of the other characters, they speak out loud. The rest of the time (s)he continues miming indignation with the sound off. Not everything said has to be heard. No physical contact here. Only words pass between them. Spread out across the stage if possible]

MIN

I mean, he doesn't like anything new. And face it, he doesn't even have a degree! You may call him a French chef but he's not French and frankly he's not a chef, he's just a cook!

HARRY

Cooking is a skill. It's a trade. After the nuclear holocaust that may be coming any day now, it will probably be more useful knowing how to cook than knowing how to play computer games!

MIN

Frankly, he wanted some dumb girl who would think he's wonderful, or why would he come looking for an Asian woman!

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HARRY

If she really believes that she's putting herself down more than I would ever put her down. And if I was really looking for some dumb girl, believe me, there are lots of dumb girls where I come from!

MIN

Why doesn't he just admit it! He was looking for some sweet Chinese virgin and she had to be a virgin because he didn't want her to have anything to compare his performance to!

HARRY

Oh, and you've had so much experience, have you? You honestly think that every guy you roll around with on line is really carrying twelve to fifteen inches on him!

MIN

The thing about Harry is, he doesn't understand the concept of privacy! He thinks that you can't have a thought in your head that doesn't pass through his censor first!

HARRY

Privacy! What are you talking about privacy! You and WellHung and StudMan and BigBoy all being private on line together!

MIN

Don't forget Friendly Freddie! Well, better on line than in person, don't you think so? At least I know how to separate fantasy from reality!

HARRY

[*directly to MIN*] You were so innocent when I was getting to know you on-line...

MIN

[*directly to HARRY*] That's because you were so innocent... it was nice, you know. Getting linked up with a guy who wanted to get to know you and talk about things like what's your favorite dessert instead of wanting to go directly to a private area to... you know...
You were kind of sweet...

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HARRY

I was kind of stupid, you mean.

MIN

No. I don't mean that. I think you're a wonderful sweet guy and you deserve a wonderful sweet girl... it's just that I don't think I'm it.

[HARRY and MIN look at each other, temporarily forgetting SANDRA]

SANDRA

Hey, you guys. Now that you seem to have your problems temporarily sorted out, guess what? I just lost my job. Actually, technically I quit. I got the words out of my mouth just before Mr. Lim got them out of his mouth, so technically I resigned with immediate effect, but it really comes to the same thing, you know what I mean?

Some news, huh.

[SANDRA looks at the other two but they don't seem to have heard her]

MIN

Oh right. I introduce you to my friends and while we're sitting there in Boom Boom Room waiting for Kumar to come on you start telling them about the right way to pick carrots. Carrots, Harry! About the best way to make sure that what you pick off the vegetable counter is fresh. About how courgettes should be eaten the same day they are bought. Scintillating conversation, right!

[awkward pause. SANDRA takes a deep breath]

SANDRA

Well, even speaking as someone who's now jobless and may soon be homeless, there are worse things in life than being able to pick your own vegetables and knowing how to tell if they are fresh.

HARRY

You probably already know. You use your eyes, your nose, your fingers, your common sense...

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MIN

Don't encourage him!

SANDRA

Hey, maybe I want to listen to something that will take my mind off my problems right now, okay? Harry?

HARRY

With vegetables, with fish, with meat, you can tell the age, the quality, the ripeness, just by looking, by touching, by smelling... it is only people that are deceptive. Because it is only people who set out deliberately to deceive you!

[MIN snorts derisively]

SANDRA

No, that's true. But people deceive themselves as well as other people, you know.

HARRY

[nodding] I find food very comforting. Because no matter who you are or where you come from, if you give it a chance, it will nourish you. But for this you have to be there. It is immediate. It is physical. If you want the warmth, the contact, the nurturing, you have to be in the same room. Otherwise it doesn't work. It is not something that will suit the telephone or the computer line.

MIN

Oh, right. I heard that. Don't think I missed that dig!

[MIN moves away, leaving HARRY's area. SANDRA moves with her]

SANDRA

Min, I can't believe that for a moment of fun you're throwing away everything that's most important to you.

MIN

[calling out to HARRY] You see! Even Sandra agrees with me!

SANDRA

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I was not agreeing with you!

I was just pointing out that all your life you've been going "if only—if only— the right man etcetera' and now that he's here you're not—well, you're not as over the moon as I thought you would be.

Well, for a while maybe, but you didn't stay up there as long as I expected.

MIN

And just how long am I supposed to be floating somewhere over the moon?

SANDRA

Well, I was hoping for 'forever' or 'the rest of your life' but at least for more than one and a half months!

I mean, you agree that when you guys first met something clicked, right? How often does that happen? How often does the right man come along? You're not going to tell me it's because he's not Chinese or because he's not a doctor or something are you?

MIN

No.

[*SLOWLY, meaningfully*] It's so important to recognize the right man when he comes along. And it's very important—that when he does come along—I'll be free.

What I value—things like meeting new people, trying out new things... I'm suddenly realizing that these things are important to me. And if being with Harry means giving them up... well, I really don't know...

Remember when we went to see Woody Allen's Alice? You kept saying that if you were her you wouldn't have left the rich husband and the big, beautiful house and the maid and the cook and all that money?

SANDRA

I still think that she shouldn't have. So she felt that her life was empty. I think she could have done volunteer work and helped Mother Theresa a lot more effectively if she had kept all that money—I feel the same way about Princess Di, by the way.

MIN

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Sandra, maybe you have to have everything before you can see why there's a reason for giving it all up.

It's easy for you to say, 'keep the money', 'keep the chauffeur', 'keep Harry' because you can only imagine having these things on top of what you already have. On top of what you already are. You're good at doing your show, Sandra. People out there who've never seen you relate to you, look forward to listening to you every day... depend on you. You've got something that a lot of women with diamonds and boyfriends would envy you for!

SANDRA

You really weren't listening when I told you that I quit my job.

MIN

What?

SANDRA

A split second before I got fired.

MIN

What?

SANDRA

Dead air time. Expletives heard by anyone who might be listening in. Friends walking in and out of my studio whenever they feel like it.

[*pause*] Some comments on his holiness himself that he would rather not have heard.

MIN

Oh Sandra. That's awful. That was when I was in... oh Sandra, I feel awful.

SANDRA

Ratings have gone up, actually. People seem to be tuning in by the hundreds to find out what bizarre thing am I going to say or do next. But it's not good for the Station's image. Oh no, not good. Actually even the Station's quite okay about it. Sees it all as a joke. It's just one little man... one big man, rather.

MIN

Mr. Lim?

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[*SANDRA nods*]

MIN

Men don't like it when things don't run according to plan. To their plans...
Oh Sandra, I am sorry...

SANDRA

You've got security staring you in the face, why don't you just take it!

[*Lights down on SANDRA & MIN. Lights up on HARRY on other side of stage*]

HARRY

I was thinking of it as a chance meeting that might just blossom into the
flowering and

fruiting of love. And I thought it had. But obviously she doesn't feel the same
way.

MIN's VOICE

I like you very much. I think I even love you a little. But that's only for right
now. I'm afraid that it's not going to last. In fact, I'm sure that it's not going to
last so it's better to let it go now, right? Right?

HARRY

I wish I was a smoker. This would be the perfect time to light up a cigarette.
Then at least I know I would be dying of cancer soon. It would be nice to know
for sure that there would be an end to my misery!

I think that in the few weeks I've been here with Min, I've realized what the
problem is. It's not that I'm too different from her. No, we're so alike in so
many ways, in fact. It's just that I'm not different enough. Not exotic and
exciting enough. Not American enough...

[*Beginning of HARRY's comic monologue. The lights may change, giving him
a spot*]

HARRY

Singapore girls meet American guys

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With mega-expectations
Of kinky habits, corporate accounts
And posh dinner reservations
They get that way from watching Friends
And fantasizing 'bout Hugh Grant
Some people really live that way
But—I—can't!

Well, some Americans have style
Some have sophistication
And some like adding bits to tits
For pleasurable mastication!
So I'm a cook! I happen to like being a cook! I happen to enjoy cooking!

[lights down on HARRY. Other light up on SANDRA on other part of the stage]

SANDRA

[holding bunch of flowers] The day after I quit my job, I was wondering whether it was more practical to kill myself or to sell my apartment and spend the money on a face lift and liposuction before trying to get a new job... when these came for me.

Nobody's sent me flowers in such a long time.

Not since my ex-husband proposed to me. He brought me a bunch of roses, red roses, that night, how many years ago, and I said 'Yes' to him and that was the last time I got flowers from him. Maybe if he had kept that up we would still be married...

Maybe I should have said 'no' or 'not yet' and kept him in suspense for a bit longer...

[HARRY moves back to join her]

HARRY

Nice flowers.

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SANDRA

Are they—?

HARRY

Yes, they are nice. Really.

SANDRA

No, I meant Are they from you?

HARRY

From me? No. Don't you know who sent them?

SANDRA

[*bending over her flowers & inhaling, shaking her head slightly*] I don't think all the aromatherapy will ever come up with anything to match the scent of fresh flowers.

HARRY

Maybe I should never have come to Singapore.

SANDRA

Maybe you shouldn't judge all Singapore women by the one Singapore woman you've met.

HARRY

I know. Sounds so racist, right? You know, last week I told my mother that I just met someone really special in Singapore. I called her long-distance, just to tell her that. It's the first time I've done such a thing. We get along all right, but we don't talk all that often.

Even over the phone I could tell that she was worried as well as excited. And happy for me, of course she was trying hard to be happy for me, but she was worried, too. I knew that my mother was working overtime not to ask 'what race is this person?'

Not that my mother's at all racist, you understand. But race is one of those things that mothers of all races worry about. Or so I thought, anyway.

I wanted her to have lots of time getting used to the *idea* of Min, you know, before actually meeting Min, so that when they actually met up... you know... at that time I still thought that I would be bringing Min back home with me...

Anyway, I said, "Min is Chinese. She is Chinese-Singaporean, Ma,"

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And my Mom took a deep breath [*does so & holds it*] Breathes out [*does so*] and said, "It's a 'She'! Harry, you're talking about a Woman! Of course I knew you were talking about a woman all along, but still—oh, I'm so glad, Son! Chinese, you say? Wonderful!"

It hardly seemed to matter to my mother what race Min was once she knew that Min was the right gender.

SANDRA

I suppose different things are important to different people. At different times. I've always liked these dark little flowers that smell good rather than the big showy ones that just look good, you know what I mean?

HARRY

You think you know someone... you think you're getting along fine with someone... and then one day you find out they don't know you at all...

[*pause. SANDRA touches him gently*]

SANDRA

It sounds like it's important to you that your mother and your wife get along.

HARRY

Right. I know that sounds so—

SANDRA

No. I think it shows that you take your family seriously, and that's good. At least the right woman would probably find it good.

[*HARRY looks at her wonderingly*]

HARRY

May I kiss you?

[*SANDRA hesitates, then responds by closing her eyes*]

[*HARRY kisses her on the cheeks demurely*]

[*SANDRA waits, waits for a long moment, then realizes that nothing else is coming and sits up, straightens her clothes etc*]

HARRY

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I realize I have learnt one thing about you Singapore women.
You are like eggs.

SANDRA

Eggs!

HARRY

The egg is one natural ingredient that does not tell you whether or not it is fresh when you look at it. The egg preserves its privacy. But you can get to know it better. If you drop an egg in water it will either float or sink and from that you can tell how long it is since it has been laid.

SANDRA

Does a fresh egg float or sink?

[HARRY smiles at her sadly, but does not answer]

HARRY

Thank you. You've been so wonderful, listening to me like this.

SANDRA

[gentle mocking] If I had known the right answer to the bit egg question would you have considered transferring your affections to me?

HARRY

I wish—no. I don't even know what I wish any more. Thanks for listening, Sandra. Thanks for being so patient with the both of us.

SANDRA

Well Harry, that's what friends are for!

HARRY

I've never told you before, have I, how much I love the way you've always got a quote for every occasion that comes up?

SANDRA

You do what I've been doing for long enough and you have quotes for occasions that Never come up!

HARRY

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Well, the taxi's waiting. Perhaps we'll meet again someday. You know, Sandra, you're really good at what you do. I can tell that listening's not just a job to you!

[*exit HARRY*]

SANDRA

It's not even just a job to me any more.

But it's amazing how your spirits can be lifted by anonymous flowers... even if it's nothing more than that, somebody out there paid twenty dollars and knows your address...

[*phone rings*]

[*SANDRA looks at it for a long moment as it goes on ringing*]

[*Finally she picks it up and holds it to her ear without speaking*]

SANDRA

[*finally, dead voice*] Yes. I'm here, Mr. Lim. Yes, yes. I can hear you.

No. No, I'm not sick.

Just tired. I'm a bit tired.

What?!

[*SANDRA picks up the bunch of flowers, shock breaking through her numbness*]

Yes... yes I got the—I got the flowers...

What?

No... no, I'm fine. Really I am...

No. No, I haven't done anything about another job yet...

All right. I mean, yes, I suppose I would like to come back... I would. No, no...

I know I got a bit—I've been a bit under stress, you know what it can be like... consider it paid

leave? Oh—well, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lim... I'll see you when I get back to the station, then... Good bye...

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Oh, Mr. Lim? Thank you for the flowers. And thank you.

[Looking at the flowers she wonders, maybe...then she starts to laugh]

[SPOT on MIN, on phone]

MIN *[phone]*

Oh, you did call her, Mr. Lim? And did she like the flowers? You see? Didn't I tell you that everything would be all right? No, I told you she doesn't hate you... but Sandra... Sandra is sensitive you know, because of the divorce and everything... you have to take things slowly... and you musn't ever, ever mention to her that I ever talked to you...

THE END

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