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Dramatic Publishing

KIMCHEE AND CHITLINS

(A Serious Comedy About Getting Along)

by

ELIZABETH WONG



Dramatic Publishing

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KIMCHEE AND CHITLINS

A Play in Two Acts

For 1f, 8-person chorus (3f, 5m, multiracial, multiple roles)

CHARACTERS

SUZIE SEETO a television reporter
MARK THOMPSON the news director
TARA SULLIVAN the television anchor

A BLACK CHORUS (three actors):

THE REVEREND LONNIE CARTER an activist
BARBER JAMES "SMOKEMAN" BROWN a barber
NURSE RUTH BETTY a nurse

A KOREAN CHORUS (three actors):

GROCER KEY CHUN MAK a store owner
SOOMI MAK THE NIECE the store cashier
WILLIE MAK THE NEPHEW a store worker

In addition, actors double in the following:

- Matilda Duvet, an Haitian woman, played by Suzie Seeto
- Haitian Man, played by Barber Brown
- Black Man With Eyepatch played by Reverend Carter
- Black Boy with Scars, a gangbanger, played by Barber Brown
- Mediator, played by Mark Thompson
- The Judge In His Sartorial Splendor, played by Mark Thompson
- Policeman In Riot Gear, played by Mark Thompson
- Pack of Reporters, played by Chorus

(continued)

- Korean Church Woman, played by Soomi Mak
- Korean Man With White Apron, played by Willie Mak
- A Pakistani News Vendor, played by Grocer Mak
- Offstage Voice/Stage Manager, played by Willie Mak

GENERAL NOTE - All roles of authority must be played by the Caucasian male, Mark Thompson. All characters, *including Mark and Tara*, must be on stage to witness the action at all times.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: New York City.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *SUZIE SEETO* looks longingly at the anchor chair.

VOICE (*offstage, heavily miked*). Two minutes to air. Two minutes.

(*A CHORUS, composed of the BLACK CHORUS and the KOREAN CHORUS, appear behind her.*)

SUZIE SEETO. The first time I ever saw an African American, it was *no big deal*.

KOREAN CHORUS. Ha! She was petrified.

BLACK CHORUS. She was calm. She was nonplussed. She was *smoooooth* as silk.

SUZIE SEETO (*to BLACK CHORUS*). Thank you. (*To AUDIENCE.*) I was five. Maybe I was six.

CHORUS (*ALL*). You were eight.

SUZIE SEETO. I was objective.

KOREAN CHORUS. You cried like a baby. Waaaaaaa!

SUZIE SEETO (*to KOREAN CHORUS*). Do you mind?

BLACK CHORUS. She smiled.

KOREAN CHORUS. She was scared.

SUZIE SEETO. I was not.

BLACK CHORUS. She was friendly.

KOREAN CHORUS. She rolled up that car window, lickety split! Practically snipped off the man's nose.

TARA. We girls have to stick together.

SUZIE SEETO. Thanks. I owe you one.

TARA (*watches SUZIE dash off to her assignment*). Don't mention it.

(In the street. Flatbush Avenue and Church Street.)

SUZIE SEETO. With only ten minutes to air. Finally, my crew and I arrive at the New Way Grocery Store, fresh from being hopelessly *lost* in the bowels of Brooklyn. Those morons on the desk. (*To unseen cameraman.*) Can you make out these directions? My point exactly. (*To self.*) Okay. I've got ten minutes. (*Surveying the scene.*) Some fifty black people on this side, and three Koreans on that side. And...what's that in the middle?

CHORUS (*ALL*). What in the world is it?

SUZIE SEETO. Oh, it's a wonga!

(MARK and TARA watch from the newsroom.)

MARK THOMPSON. What's a wonga?

TARA. What's a wonga?

KOREAN CHORUS. What's a wonga?

BLACK CHORUS. Don't look at us! Hell if we know.

SUZIE SEETO. It's Haitian. You know, voodoo. (*Aside.*) I learned a few things on my last vacation.

CHORUS (*mysteriously*). Wonga, wonga, wonga. Voodoooo!

(The newsroom.)

MARK THOMPSON. Nice live shot, Suzie, fine work, and you said you didn't want the assignment. No story is beneath a good reporter.

(SUZIE returns to newsroom from the field.)

SUZIE SEETO. Face it, Mark. It's the only kind of story you ever send me out on. If it's got Asians, Latinos, Blacks, Jews, women...and/or cute fluffy animals, I'm your man. Why is that, Mark?

MARK THOMPSON. Yup, bad day. What's the matter, Suzie? You seem a little miffed. Have a dumpling?

SUZIE SEETO. No, thanks. Please, this is serious. Don't kid with me. I'm not in the *mood*.

MARK THOMPSON. I never kid about *food*. *Food* is a serious subject. Have you noticed that every major relationship you have or ever will have...was and is solidified, destroyed, or reconfigured at the dinner table. Now get out of my office, or grab a chopstick.

SUZIE SEETO. Look at this. The desk got the location wrong, wrong, wrong. (*Grabs chopsticks.*) Let me have that.

MARK THOMPSON. I tell them more plum sauce. They never get it right. Give me back my chopsticks.

SUZIE SEETO

I want some justice.
I don't want to anchor the
five o'clock.
I don't want a raise.
I want retribution. Yes!
Divine vengeance!

MARK THOMPSON

I want my plum sauce.
I want an antacid.

You are a pain in the ass.
I want you out of my office, yes!
Get out of my office.

(*She breaks the chopstick in two, unbeknownst to him.*)

SUZIE SEETO. Mark, compared to where I've been, Dante's trip to purgatory was a joyride. I want someone's head on a plate with a kaiser roll.

MARK THOMPSON. Oh, stop blaming the assignment desk. Next time, get yourself a map of the city. Get out...and give me my chopsticks.

SUZIE SEETO. Get a map yourself. You don't know this city from one end of your elbow up to your fine white ass.

MARK THOMPSON. I beg your pardon. I'm a man who blushes.

SUZIE SEETO. Mark, I had ten minutes to air. That's just not enough time to do a good job. Who do you think I am, Lois Lane? I want to lodge a formal complaint.

MARK THOMPSON. Look, Suzie, you'll go where we tell you to go. If it were up to me, you'd be *on* the space shuttle, I mean, *covering* the space shuttle. I know you're disappointed. But you *handled* it, like a pro. I expect no less.

SUZIE SEETO. You bet I *handled* it, and it wasn't easy. (*She hands him his chopsticks and starts to exit for the street.*)

MARK THOMPSON. Can I ask you something?

SUZIE SEETO (*almost in the street*). What?

MARK THOMPSON (*to AUDIENCE*). Do I really have a fine white ass?

(*Meanwhile, in the street.*)

GROCER MAK (*looks into basket*). *E-guh-mwa-ya?* [What is this?]

SUZIE SEETO. I wish I spoke Korean.

CHORUS (*ALL, mysteriously*). Chicken heads. Lizard skins. Feathers from the sacrifice. Chicken heads. Lizard skins. Feathers from the sacrifice.

GROCER MAK. *E-guh-mwa-ya?*

CHORUS (*ALL, in the round*). Lizard heart. Soomi's lost bracelet. Willie's lost watch.

GROCER MAK. Hey, this looks like my hair.

CHORUS (*ALL, whispering*). Your soft black hair.

GROCER MAK. Can't be, I'm not losing any hair! No grey, either!

CHORUS (*ALL*). Don't be too sure.

GROCER MAK. *E-guh-mwa-ya?*

CHORUS (*ALL, in the round*). The tip of the index finger.

Index finger. Index finger. All shriveled up.

SUZIE SEETO. That's it. Excuse me, pardon me, coming through. Watch the skirt!

CHORUS (*ALL, sotto voce*). Wonga, wonga, wonga. Voo-doooooo...

SUZIE SEETO. I survey the sea of black faces.

BLACK CHORUS. Who do you talk to? How do you choose? Do you pick them? Or, do they pick you?

KOREAN CHORUS. Talk to me. Don't talk to me. Talk to her. Talk to him. Don't talk at all.

SUZIE SEETO (*approaches the BLACK CHORUS*). Are you in charge?

BLACK CHORUS. No, we're not.

SUZIE SEETO. Do you know who is?

BLACK CHORUS (*in rotation, different persona*). No, I don't. No, not me. I don't know. No, I don't. No, not me. I don't know.

(Meanwhile, from the newsroom.)

MARK THOMPSON. Nine minutes, Suzie!

SUZIE SEETO (*still in the street*). I pick...YOU!

NURSE RUTH BETTY. Go away, Korean girl!

SUZIE SEETO. Oops! Try again.

BLACK CHORUS (*in rotation*). No, I don't. No, not me. I don't know. (*Together.*) This is a grassroots movement.

SUZIE SEETO. Look, I don't know why you are hiding, but if you are an organizer of this protest, please step forward. Or will all non-organizers, please step backward. Don't be shy.

NURSE RUTH BETTY (*left standing in front*). Send her back! Tell teevee to give us an African-American reporter. Go away, Korean girl!

SUZIE SEETO. Boy, I'd like to pop her one.

BARBER BROWN. Ruth Betty, she's not Korean, she's Chinese. She's Suzie Wong, the teevee reporter.

SUZIE SEETO. That's Seeto. S-e-e-t-o. You're getting me confused with that actress in that old movie.

CHORUS (*ALL*). "The World of Suzie Wong." A good-time girl with a heart of gold. Good movie. William Holden looked great!

BARBER BROWN. Right! I like that old movie.

SUZIE SEETO. What's going down?

BARBER BROWN. Down as in the direction of gravity? Or down as in, what's happening?

SUZIE SEETO. I get your point, sorry. I mean, can you tell me what's going on?

BARBER BROWN. Only if you, you know, point that camera in some other direction.

SUZIE SEETO. Camera shy?

BARBER BROWN. It's just...I'm a little uncomfortable being here, you know, cameras and all. I'm not political in any way, just a businessman out for a little stroll...is that camera on?

SUZIE SEETO. What's your name?

BARBER BROWN. James Brown. Not related. I own and operate the best barbershop in all Flatbush, if not all Brooklyn. Baldy Brown's Sartorial Hair *Saloon*. I'm working on

an advertising slogan, Wild West theme. "We shoot your hair off your head."

NURSE RUTH BETTY. Hey, Smoke! The protest, remember? You promised to do the protest, Smokeman. The fire's burning. Don't wait to put on your p.j.'s.

BARBER BROWN (*to NURSE*). Hey, do you mind? (*TO SUZIE*.) That's so tired. Something happens to a man in a crisis situation, and people won't let you live it down, know what I mean?

SUZIE SEETO. I have a feeling there's a story behind that name.

BARBER BROWN. I'd rather not talk about it. Is that camera on? Could you have them...I really don't want to be, you know, bad for business. See that big guy, the one who needs a better barber? He's your man. Point your camera in that direction.

SUZIE SEETO. Thank you. Thank you very much.

MARK THOMPSON. Eight minutes, Suzie.

SUZIE SEETO (*to MARK, calling back*). All right. Eight minutes.

NURSE RUTH BETTY. Hey, wait a minute! Hey, reporter! You can talk to me. This is a grassroots movement here. For months, I have been calling you news media on the telephone. We've been boycotting for months. How come...

REVEREND CARTER (*takes over, interrupting*). Are we going to forget what those Korean bloodsuckers did to our sister Matilda Duvet? I ask you, what are we going to do about it?

BLACK CHORUS (*as a group, no individuals*). Boycott, let it rot! Boycott, let it rot!

REVEREND CARTER. That's right!

SUZIE SEETO (to AUDIENCE). At last! The leader of the pack.

BLACK CHORUS (speak and move in the polyrhythm of the "fraternity step"). Boycott, let it rot! Boycott, let it rot!

REVEREND CARTER (joins in). Boycott, let it rot!

BLACK CHORUS. Boycott, let it rot! Boycott, let it rot! Boycott, let it rot! (The KOREAN CHORUS have been watching the BLACK CHORUS, until...)

WILLIE MAK. Call the police. Yes, better do it now. Call the police. 911! (To BLACK CHORUS.) You better go! The police are coming. They'll be here. I said, the police are coming.

REVEREND CARTER. Call all you want, yellow man! They won't come.

WILLIE MAK. Yes, they will. You'll see.

GROCER MAK (to KOREAN CHORUS). Willie, Soomi, come on. Let's go inside.

REVEREND CARTER. Where are you going, Korean coward?!

GROCER MAK. I was in the Korean army.

NURSE RUTH BETTY. Is that guy speaking English? Sounds like gibberish to me? What's the matter? Can't you speak English?

BLACK CHORUS. Speak English! Speak English!

KOREAN CHORUS. You speak English! You speak English!

SUZIE SEETO. Incredible. Just incredible. (To unseen cameraman.) Are you getting these pictures? Go around and get another angle.

REVEREND CARTER. Get your filthy Korean trash off our streets!

SUZIE SEETO (to unseen cameraman). Oh, oh! Let's move. Do you want to get clobbered? Move your butt. But don't

drop that camera! Okay. Deep breath. What am I going to do next?

REVEREND CARTER (*overlapping*). What are we going to do with Korean garbage?

Playwright's Note: The BLACK CHORUS hurl words, not actual trash.

BLACK CHORUS. Sit on it. Wreck it. Toss it. Off the street, off the street! Sit on it. Wreck it. Toss it. Off the street, off the street!

The KOREAN CHORUS must only respond to words. No gathering up trash.

GROCER MAK. Hey! Hey, get away from my trash! Now I'm hopping mad! Get off my garbage! Leave my garbage alone! This is my trash! This is my garbage! My trash! My garbage!

REVEREND CARTER. Matilda Duvet is in a coma. And that Korean is responsible.

(SOOMI MAK steps from the KOREAN CHORUS.)

SOOMI MAK. Forget the trash, Uncle.

GROCER MAK. Willie, help your sister.

WILLIE MAK. Let's go inside, Uncle. The police will come soon. Let's go inside, and pray to God for peace.

GROCER MAK. Why, Willie? Why do they do this?

SOOMI MAK. It's America. It's called *boycotting*.

GROCER MAK. Leave your *boyfriends* out of this, Soomi. I don't care. I fight them. I fight them. Do you hear me, you devils? I fight you until I am dead!