

**HOUSE OF SONG**

by

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HOUSE OF SONG is the third of three tragedies from THE HOUSING PROJECT.*

## THE FAMILY

HE	<i>Late 20's. A Korean soccer player.</i>
SHE	<i>Late 20's. He's Korean wife.</i>
IT	<i>Late 60's. He's grandfather's spirit in the form of a cow. Performed by a man with a cow mask.</i>
THEY	<i>He and She's twelve children, Aries, Scorpio, Leo, Gemini, Aquarius, Cancer, Libra, Sagittarius, Pisces, Capricorn, Taurus and Virgo. Performed by one man, wearing twelve glowing balls around his body.</i>

## TIME AND PLACE

A low-income one-bedroom tenement in LA's Korea-town.  
July 2002.

The action takes place in one day.

*The play should be performed with no intermission.*

## ACT I

*At rise:* A low-income one-bedroom tenement in LA's Korea-town. A small Samsung TV, hooked up to cable, a lazy-boy chair, and pillows on the floor.

HE sits on the lazy-boy, in a state of trance, somewhere between agony and defeat. He reads a local Korean newspaper.

HE

Oh Korea! Sea of red fury!  
Frowns you have created,  
on the faces of your children—  
their spirits are deflated!

In your own land, which you  
defend with such pride,  
you couldn't stand strong  
against your enemies' stride.

Oh Korea! Someone else's children smile,  
while in defeat, yours retreat.  
Your children's tears are nothing  
but mud on the streets.

The world observed you,  
Asia's hope lied on your feet,  
but in a country made of losers,  
victory did not fit!

Oh Korea! Appendix of Asia,  
wart of China, look at yourself  
in the map! Break apart,  
sink alone, no one will see you depart.

He cries. A kuen-ga-ri is heard. SHE screams off-stage and runs into the living room.

SHE

Dang-shin, your Grandfather's come visit! *Dang-shin!* Stop crying and get off that lazy-boy. He mustn't see you like this. He'll disapprove your demeanor. And you know how important it is for elders to give approval of their children and grand-children. Dang-shin!  
*Get up!*

IT dances on-stage. As he enters, He and She bow in front of him and remain on the floor.

HE

Grandfather, we are honored you have visited us. *Again.*

SHE

You must be tired of traveling from Korea.

HE

*Every week.*

SHE

Please excuse the mess, I have been busy taking care of the children and had no time to clean.

IT

*Children, eat!*

SHE

Yes, your Great-Grand children have been fed.

IT

*Children! First concern.*

SHE

Times are tough, but we try our best.

He breaks in tears.

HE

Grandfather, have you heard the news? Korea has lost another war. If only I had been there to fight with them, maybe we could have had a chance.

SHE

Please excuse your Grandson's silliness. He is overwrought with typical Korean male feelings of frustration and impotence.

HE

Oh Korea! You land of losers!  
If only I had been there to  
fight against your defeatist confusion!

SHE

Dang-shin, please do not over-react. Grandfather is getting upset.

HE

I am not over-reacting. You are *under*-reacting. For shame! This time it was Turkey, in a defeat most foul!

SHE

It was just a soccer game!

HE

NOT SOCCER, THE *WORLD CUP*. World Cup 2002: Korea-Japan. Our team got past the Americans. We beat the Italians. Even the Spanish. And we made it to the *semi-finals*, only to lose! On my lips, I could taste the golden cup held by the French. In Korean hands it belonged, but they couldn't have won it without me. Grandfather, can you forgive me for leaving the team? You disapprove of me because I left it, don't you?

SHE

Grandfather is here to see his Great-Grandchildren.

HE

Don't be blind. He is upset that I have left the national team to come to America.

SHE

We are *temporarily* here, Grandfather. We do not intend to *live* in LA. It's just that the children have given us unexpected financial strains—

HE

But there is a reason to why we're here.

SHE

Yes, quite the *clever* one. Your Grandson, my husband, made the suggestion that I should give birth to your Great-Grandchildren in America, so that they may grow up to an age where they can claim a Green card.

HE

Now that they are apt for travel, we will return home.

IT

*Children, eat!*

SHE

Yes Grandfather.

IT

*Eat, children!*

It dances his way out. The sounds of the kuen-ga-ri stop.

HE

Over-reacting? *Over-reacting?*

SHE

It was your idea to come here.

HE

I was making a sacrifice: my soccer glory for my children's Green cards. No matter how much success I have had *fighting* for Korea; our children do not deserve to be raised in such a loser country. Their Green cards will allow them to have a good American life and education to be *freed* from our country's woes. So don't think I am over-reacting. If anything, you are not showing enough appreciation for the genius risk I took.

SHE

For the risk *we* took.

HE

All you had to do was to carry the children across the border.

SHE

And give *labor*. Labor is not a simple thing, it is *work*. Very painful work I might add. I delivered, not one, not two, not three, but *twelve* children into life, *at the same time!* Out of my weak body I pushed every single one of them out. So yes, dang-shin, I think, *if I may*, that you are over-reacting.

A baby cries off-stage. Then another. And another. More babies cry, until we hear a discordant symphony of twelve babies crying.

HE

That damn Capricorn, he does this for the attention.

SHE

How can you not recognize your own son's cry? It's not Capricorn, it's Leo.

HE

No, it was Capricorn. I can tell by his attitude he likes to cause trouble. He's always hiding the other babies' pacifiers.

SHE

*That's Leo.*

HE

I AM THE MAN IN THIS HOUSE, and I say it was Capricorn.

She stomps off-stage.

HE

Grandfather, are you there? Please excuse my wife. She has married me in a *love* marriage, and her parents have disowned her. She comes from an ancient line of Korean royalty, but having married a soccer player, rather than a business man, she has brought shame to her family. Apparently, for kings, talent with balls is not good enough! But she is a good wife. She's just not used to a simple man's life. Please accept my apologies.

She enters with a large crib, rolling it across the floor. The crib is covered with a mantle, so that we cannot see the babies. The crying persists.

SHE

Dang-shin, here are the babies. Tell me which one is Capricorn.

HE

Do you dare test me? I believe a father knows who his children are.

SHE

That's what you *believe*. But do you really *know*?

She lifts the mantle. The crying intensifies. We *still* don't see the children.

SHE

Point at Capricorn.

HE

Isn't there something you can do about this noise?

SHE

I am a woman, not a dog. I can't feed them all at once.

HE

Well at least feed two of them.

SHE

They bite! Especially Scorpio. He likes to cling on my breasts with his two paws and he nibbles on my nipple when I try to take him away. I don't particularly enjoy feeding him. In fact, I have become quite tired and weak by doing so. The little food we have, they take away from me, and we don't eat enough so that I can regain my strength. But look.

She gently rocks the crib.

SHE

This keeps them quiet.

The children's crying diminishes to a stop.

SHE

So tell me, which one is Capricorn.

HE

Yo-bo, you are being ridiculous. Capricorn is that one over there.

SHE

*Which one?*

HE

The one with the hair on its head.

SHE

They *all* have hair.

HE

Of course, they do. But I didn't mean the one you're thinking of. *That* one isn't Capricorn... He's, you know... The one in the middle of... Aside... No, he's... I—I don't know. They all look alike!

SHE

Dang-shin, we will do this for the last time. I want you to *know* every single one of your children. *That* one's Capricorn, but he doesn't start the crying, it's Leo. Leo is *that* one, with the soft-head constantly needing nursing. And then there's Scorpio, who likes to suck my breasts dry. And there's Gemini, who I think is bi-polar. And that's Libra, she tries to keep the babies quiet but gets beat up. And Sagittarius, who's constantly trying to run-away, with Aquarius, who, I'm afraid, is gay. Aquarius keeps on kissing Virgo, who has learned to cry only when she wants to poop. And there's Cancer, terminally shy, playing with Pisces, terminally moody: but they seem to get along. They've finally discovered they enjoy sucking each others' toes, see? And then there's Taurus, who fights to have as much space as he can and lastly, Aries, who's learned to undo her diapers and refuses to wear them. So again, which one is Capricorn?

HE

That one.

SHE

Good. You must remember who they are. I *do* dare to test you.

She covers the crib.

HE

You're mad at me, aren't you?

SHE

Mad is too short of a word. I am enraged, outraged, *super*-raged. I should have known better than to follow the genius spurts from the mind of a *soccer* player. You are *too* simple of a man, dang-shin, and I have fallen in carnal desire with a body infinitely greater than its mind. That is my fault. And I accept the consequences. But as you sit on that lazy-boy waiting for our tourist visa to expire, I cannot but feel *super*-raged that you do nothing about this. And for the sake of the children, I refuse to accept *those* consequences. Our being stranded in America is *your* responsibility and rather than earning enough money so that we may return to Korea, you're letting the American Homeland Security make criminals out of us.

HE

We are not criminals.

SHE

After today, we will have illegally stayed past our time in the United States. We *will* be criminals. And not just you or me, but them. All twelve of them.

HE

Maybe you should call your parents. They might give us a loan so that we may leave the country.

SHE

Dang-shin, marriage was a contract where you promised to provide what your children and I needed.

HE

But not *twelve* of them!

SHE

And you knew my parents would disown me when we legally bound ourselves to our love marriage. When I left Korea, I could have told them I had terminal cancer rather than a pregnancy—to my family, I am short of being dead.

HE

But you're their daughter. Maybe if you make them understand, explain the circumstances, tell them this is a *slight* complication, a rather small *urgency*, and if you stress your discontent, and *cry* a little—

SHE

I will not *cry*. I will not plead. Do not make me a *beggar* as well. You are a soccer god; you should have gone to our community and tried to raise the money with your popularity. Every Korean person in the building knows who you are; they stare at you in the elevators with adoration.

HE

But these people are poor. They do not have the cash to help us buy plane tickets. And there isn't any work I could have done with my *body* to raise enough money. As you said, a mindless body is not worth much these days. That's why I thought, if our children get a good American education, they will be able to survive in better terms than we have.

SHE

But you are forcing them to become *criminals*!

HE

Yo-bo, we are not criminals, but victims of the imperialist nations of the world. I mean, look at my lineage: my Great-Great Grandfather was killed in the Mongol invasion, my Great-Grandfather was killed by the Manchu, my Grandfather was killed by the Japanese. My father was separated from his wife and family when Korea was divided and I had to live in poverty past the Korean War. And when I decided I would not fight yet *another* war and left the country, it seems perfectly normal to me that my sons run the risk of becoming immigrant criminals. It is not their fault—it is the world outside that creates our wars.

SHE

YOU DIDN'T LEAVE A WAR, YOU LEFT THE WORLD CUP!

HE

Which is just as bad as *real* war.

SHE

No one was going to kill you.

HE

Well *thank* our fate I am not dead! Our children being criminals is far better than what *my* fore-fathers did with *their* children. Including myself. I am a very hopeless man.

SHE

Your fore-fathers were *blind* to their fate.

HE

How dare you insult my father, my Grandfather, and my Great-Grandfathers?

SHE

That wasn't an insult.

HE

All Korean men *know* there is no hope.

SHE

But it didn't stop you from *believing* there is. Dang-shin, you must admit that you have inherited not only your fore-fathers's bad-fortune, but a weak education as well. You tend to misunderstand what I say, or not understand things at all.

HE

*I am trying to learn.* Not everyone was born with the advantages you had. And not many *women* received them, even when they were born to royal families like yours. *Besides*, it wasn't my smarts that made you fall in love with me.

SHE

It is true. You I couldn't resist. But do you agree that between you and me, I have the better smarts?

HE

If that makes you happy, *sure*, you be the smart one.

SHE

Then let me share with you a thought. I *think* I know of a way in which your body will earn us the money we need. And you will be able to do it just in time.

HE

Which is what, my darling yo-bo?

SHE

Prostitution.

HE

Are you insane?

SHE

No, just listen. I have noticed past Korea-town, near the high-way, beautiful men stand on the streets and sleep with desperate people for money. So you should join them on the curb and do it. Have sex with those who can provide us with the cash we direly need.

HE

No! You demented woman, what possesses you to be this way?

SHE

I only say this because I am a good mother. I am putting my babies' lives in front of the mine. And as a father, you must do the same as well. When a boat shipwrecks, it is customary to *believe*: "Women and children first." As a woman, I simply say "children" first. And you, as a *man*, must sink to the deep end so that we may rest afloat.

HE

But why must I sink? As I endanger *my* children, and endanger *my* wife, do you think I do not recognize I have endangered *myself*? I do *know* that we're in a tight situation; but trust me, unlike this reasoning of yours, I do not see where the boat has sunk. There is no shipwreck, maybe a slight miscalculation in our course, a *detour* if you will, but no shipwreck.

SHE

With this short amount of time, there isn't much else we can do. You must sleep with the rich people of LA. I noticed when reading magazines that even *men* have a desire for a body like yours.

HE

You American woman! No Korean wife would say such things.

SHE

We are no longer in Korea, dang-shin. In America, a wife can speak her mind. And that is a relief, I confess. Before we left, I *believed* by tradition that Korean women must be docile and accepting, but there was a moment, between the tenth and eleventh baby coming out of my uterus, that I realized there is something about life that you, sitting next to me, with your fingers crushed by my laboring fists, would never understand. Once Aries left my womb, and there were no more children to bear, I was enlightened, by the pain, that this love marriage we have, is beyond what love or marriage are.

HE

Huh?

SHE

See? I told you that you wouldn't understand.

HE

Where did you learn these things?

SHE

Showtime. I've seen how American women may read all the books they want, decide whether they want to cook or not, and they discriminate what to wear as diligently as the food they eat, but they do not know how to be a woman. Let alone a mother. Here, in America, women consider equality as the ability to have sex irrationally and passionately as men; and with you, I *have* had that kind of sex, but it is a foreign notion to them to bear children with responsibility. They have reasons to *not* have children; but when they want them, they simply *want* them. They do not have reasons beyond the illogical to bear them.

HE

You learned this in Showtime?

SHE

I guess not. I assume I learned the opposite. I *am* a Gemini. There are two sides to what I think. Dang-shin. Don't be afraid. I know I am your wife, and it is assumed that I will say this, but *truly*, you do have a great body. You are strong and have conceived in me twelve children in one night. The women out there will want you. And they will pay.

HE

You are mocking me.

SHE

I am not. I am thinking about *them!* My first concern.

HE

If I do this, *which I won't*, would I *have* to sleep with men?

SHE

Should they want to pay—yes.

HE

But I have to draw a line somewhere. I have a reputation to keep. Your suggestion will make me a prostitute, but it shouldn't make me a homosexual as well. I mean, in *theory*, it does *seem* like this is the only way. But it isn't, *right?* Is it? To prostitute myself? And to other men?

SHE

*Only if it's necessary.* And if it's of any comfort, know this: I have seen homosexual men on the streets. I *think* they do not want much more than company from beautiful bodies they don't possess. You can speak with them, talk about issues, excluding sports, and for that, they too, will pay.

HE

Well, what am I going to talk about if I can't talk about sports? I don't know of anything else to discuss! Except, for the weather, but that doesn't seem to be *worth* much.

SHE

That is very true. Talking about the weather is *quite* stupid, but people do it all the time. That's why, I *think*, you can even make money from homosexual men.

HE

As long as I don't have to have *sex* with them, *sure*, I'll tell them a word or two.

SHE

There you go! Just *talk!* Have a chat, raise issues about money, politics, and wars: creations men have made to create suffering instead of peace. And when the conversation reaches an end, tell them you want *more* money than you normally charge. And confess to them, that you know their wives.

HE

But I don't know their wives.

SHE

Then *lie.* Lie to the world. You must prostitute yourself entirely; lie and deceive for money, like *any* other proper father would do for the sake of his children. And when you return, having known all the crimes you have done, I will bear your burden with you, as a proper wife should.

HE

Yo-bo, I haven't said I will prostitute myself.

SHE

Of course you haven't because you wouldn't be a simple *prostitute*. You will be a *god* people have been waiting for. You will give them love. And in return, they will worship and admire your sacrifice.

HE

Yes! Because this *could be*, once again, a sacrifice I make. Not only my soccer glory and pride, but my body—

SHE

To those in need, you will give it.

She tidies He's hair and clothes.

SHE

Should you do this, which I am not saying you *will*, charge one hundred dollars to get in the car, and add another hundred for everything they ask. If they want to have sex with you, ask for one thousand dollars. Cash. Only take cash.

HE

Of course only cash. Cash is the only thing we can use.

She goes to a corner and picks up a soccer ball.

SHE

Here, you should go out now, and play soccer.

HE

Yes, it's been some time since I've played with my ball. Yo-bo?

SHE

Yes?

HE

I believe that our love marriage  
was meant for us by destiny.  
Our twelve children are a sign of  
good luck and prosperity.

No one so fertile can ever be doomed.  
There is greatness implied  
in the number of babies  
you have birthed.

As a young boy, I slept  
with poverty as my bed sheet.  
I made myself a life based  
on the dexterity of my feet.

My ability to score, and not to *think*,  
has brought me great joy,  
but there is no greater happiness  
than the one you have bore.

I have done this for their future,  
because they do not deserve the life  
I have had. And it will bring me pride  
when they end Korea's strife.

There are many problems with  
the Korean people, but our ability  
to raise children is always our  
first concern.

Do you *think* I'm wrong, if I believe,  
that going out there, to play soccer  
that I will be blessed,  
with my fore-fathers' forgiveness?

SHE

You are doing what any other man would do.

HE

Very well then...  
I will go out now, to play soccer.  
*Maybe* I will find the means for us,  
to get away. If I am lucky, I will bring cash,  
to take us home, where we belong.

He exits. She cries one tear. No more.

SHE

Oh children, forgive your mother as  
she weeps! How foolish I have been,  
to fall in love with such green feet.

Your father has too much of a body,  
and your mother too much of a mind.  
Right solutions, together, we cannot find.

I have become destitute and bitter.  
Your father placed sacrifice over money,  
but in reality, he is nothing but a phony.

Tomorrow you will be criminals.  
You will be black-listed by Homeland Security.  
And I must set you free, that *is* my duty.

Mind, what tricks you play in my head!  
Only blood and bones I see ahead!

She exits. Kuen-ga-ri sounds are heard.  
It enters dancing on-stage.

IT

Come to me Great-Grandchildren.  
Come to your Great-Grandfather.

From the crib, THEY rises and dance with It.  
The dance looks like a soccer play.

THEY

Oh what silly fools has destiny  
made our parents!  
We don't want to be American.  
We want to be what we are.

IT

But they don't know what their choices are.  
Just accept their mistakes as acts of *love*.

THEY

But *we* don't love our mother.  
She doesn't feed us enough!

IT

At least your father is a soccer God.  
The world admires who he is!

THEY

*We* don't love our father.  
He is a clown to us!

It and They laugh.

IT

It is grand that I am in the past.

THEY

It is grand that we are in the future.

IT

But the present?

THEY

It's here. It's gone.  
It's the present now.

IT

And now it's past.  
Here comes the future.

THEY

It never stops coming.  
And here is the present.

IT

It is always ending.

They laugh.

IT

Your father has made horrible  
mistakes.

THEY

Worse are the ones mother will make!

IT

But do not fear. I am here to help!

THEY

We are not afraid. We just want to play!

IT

Shh! I hear her coming.  
Children, return to bed.

They return to the crib. She enters.

SHE

Oh Grandfather, you scared me.

IT

*Eat, children!*  
*Children, eat!*

SHE

Yes, I have come for the children.

IT

*Bow, I am Grandfather.*

SHE

I'm sorry.

She bows in front of him.

SHE

Grandfather, your grand-son has made a fool out of me! People here think I'm a prostitute. When I go out on the streets, and tell the crude boys on the corner to stop calling me a bitch, but Mrs. Ho, they laugh and call me a bitch even louder! I am sorry to use this language, but there are still things in America that I don't understand... How I long to be Ms. Song again! It is not my wealth I miss, or the poverty I mind, but there was respect in the work and fortune my family earned that *here*, has been lost. People in America live in poverty and this housing project leaves much to desire. I assume this is where we all start, in a poor house, and move forwards, but there are people that have suffered living here for generations! This building is not apt for children, no matter how poor their parents are, there is very little concern to the standards in which they live. Half the families we have met work in America illegally; hiding from a government that instead of helping their *children* will deport them! I am pained, Grandfather, please share with me your wisdom. What should I do with my own?

IT

*Above.*

SHE

I always place them above me. I am not a selfish mother. If anything, I have placed too much worth on my children. Not financial worth, my family won't support me in doing so, but I am torn *because* of this. My love marriage has brought shame to my family, my children have caused strains to our marriage, and the world will cause pain to my babies. *This* truth is what your Grandson, my husband, doesn't understand. For him, truth is based on our past; and he has *accepted* the future to come. *And even worse!* He has deceived me into doing so as well, Grandfather! He said we should come to LA because he wants your Great-Grandchildren to have Green cards and be able to receive an American education and live an American life, but I know that's not true. His body is weakening with time. He cannot play soccer and that's why we have left. He left at the peak of his glory and without an explanation, he ran away from Korea because he knew he wouldn't be able to fight anymore. And foolish me! I thought this was for the children's sake! But he *lied* to me. He has tricked me. I have nothing Grandfather; my husband has destroyed it all.

IT

*Above, children,  
eat.*

SHE

I understand. Come children. It is time to make the food.