

PERFECT PORCELAIN DOLL

A Ten-Minute Play

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>GRANDDAUGHTER:</u>	20s, Korean American female. American accent, possibly a slight Atlanta accent. (This cannot be comical. If it is, don't do it.)
<u>HALMEONI:</u>	late 60s, Korean female with a gentle face and robust personality. Heavy Korean accent.
<u>[HAL-ABEOJI]</u>	Non-speaking role. Can be unseen. 70s, Korean male, HALMEONI's widower, asleep.]

*In memory of Suncha Kim,
murdered on March 16, 2021 in Atlanta.*

Written for #CodeRed Playwrights

Playwrights Notes

While this play is in memory of Suncha Kim and contains details gleaned from the news media of her long life and tragic death, it is not meant to accurately represent her life, her family, or her relationships.

As a playwright of Korean heritage, I've used my own experiences as well. The way Halmeoni speaks is similar to the way my mother spoke. It is not intended as a caricature or stereotype of the way Koreans speak English, nor should it be treated that way. If it requires adjustment, let me know. It's important to get this right.

Dialogue in parentheses is for context only and is not meant to be spoken.

Scene

What used to be Hal-abeoji and Halmeoni's living room, but is now only Hal-abeoji's.

Time

Early morning. March 19, 2021

SETTING:

What used to be Hal-abeoji and Halmeoni's living room, but is now only Hal-abeoji's. March 19, 2021.

A sofa faces upstage on which Hal-abeoji has fallen asleep. There is also a coffee table, under which are two shoe boxes with brand new walking shoes.

There is another seat behind the coffee table facing downstage. There's a pillow on it.

AT RISE:

SPOTLIGHT ON HALMEONI (pronounced "hal-mo-nee") – a pleasant, sweet-faced Korean woman in her late sixties, plainly but neatly dressed. She stands poised and smiles.

HALMEONI

Sonnyeo. (sohn-nyah). Halmeoni ya ("It's Grandma."). You are so beautiful. Work hard at school. Work hard, hard, hard at all things. Grandma loves you.

(She freezes a moment. SFX: A BEEP.)

HALMEONI

Sonnyeo. Halmeoni ya.

(As she SPEAKS, LIGHTS SLOWLY RISE ON the living room. Hal-abeoji – a Korean man in his 70s (can be unseen or played by an actor) is asleep on a comfy chair or sofa facing upstage. In the other seat is GRANDDAUGHTER – a Korean American woman in her 20s. She sits looking at sleeping Hal-abeoji as she listens to her phone on earphones.)

HALMEONI

(Continuing without interruption.)

You are so beautiful. Work hard at school. Work hard, hard, hard at all things. Grandma loves you.

(She freezes a moment. SFX: A BEEP. By now, LIGHTS ARE UP FULL (though still low) indicating the glow of early sunrise and one table lamp. GRANDDAUGHTER taps her phone screen a couple times.)

HALMEONI

Sonnyeo. Halmeoni ya.

HALMEONI/GRANDDAUGHTER

You are so beautiful. Work hard at school. Work hard, hard, hard at all things.
Grandma—

(GRANDDAUGHTER taps the phone stopping the replay. The SPOTLIGHT on HALMEONI, which may no longer be visible anyway, goes out and she turns away.)

(GRANDDAUGHTER speaks above a whisper but soft enough not to risk waking her grandfather, never raising her voice even when she's emotional.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

I know you meant well, Grandma. But the constant “work hard, hard, hard.” I don't think it had the effect you wanted. Of course now... (What I wouldn't give...)

(GRANDDAUGHTER removes her earphones and puts the phone down on the coffee table, looking over at Hal-abeoji asleep.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

No one worked as hard as Grandma. Did they, Hal-abeoji? How many jobs? How many at the same time? Forty years at minimum wage. So many parents and grandparents work hard so their kids and grandkids don't have to. But Halmeoni...

HALMEONI

Grandma work hard to be good example, so you work harder, too.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Not that she didn't know how to have fun.

HALMEONI

Now that Grandma home from work, we go to Zumba!

GRANDDAUGHTER

Of course, she wouldn't be too thrilled with you sleeping on the couch. Or me letting you. But I couldn't bear to wake you. Not to another night without her in it.

HALMEONI

What if company come? They can tell you sleep on sofa!

GRANDDAUGHTER

She also wouldn't want us to be angry right now.

HALMEONI

Lord Jesus say to forgive. You must forgive.

GRANDDAUGHTER

But I don't want to forgive. I want to punish. I want to hate. I want to scream.

HALMEONI

Sonnyeo. What happens in family is nobody's business but family. We leave the house, we smile. You want to cry? You want to scream? Do it inside house. But only if you have to. Better not to cry and scream at all.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Because I'm Korean, I don't cry. Because I'm Korean, I don't scream.

HALMEONI

Instead, come with me. Take walk with Grandma. You feel better.

GRANDDAUGHTER

But I'm also an American. And Americans... We scream.

HALMEONI

Look what Grandma get for us.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Today is going to be three days.

HALMEONI

Grandma get sneaker!

(During the following HALMEONI takes out the sneakers and sets them on the coffee table.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

Three days and the police still haven't identified you.

HALMEONI

One pair for Halmeoni.

GRANDDAUGHTER

How is that even possible?

HALMEONI

One pair for you.

GRANDDAUGHTER

I can identify you.

HALMEONI

I text you picture!

(HALMEONI uses GRANDDAUGHTER's phone to take a photo of the shoes and send it. When she's done, she puts hers on.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

I can stand the blood. I can stand the bullet wounds. I am your Sonnyeo. Outside, in the world, I can stand anything.

HALMEONI

Then, when we go to Virginia on Easter vacation...

GRANDDAUGHTER

Can they really not tell you apart? Do we all still look alike? Even when we're dead?

HALMEONI

You and Grandma take long, long walk. Very beautiful.

GRANDDAUGHTER

And I know you don't want me to cry and scream, Halmeoni. I know you want me to be strong. And I will be, outside. I will be an iceberg outside. I will be a perfect porcelain doll when Grandpa wakes up. When everyone comes over, I will be strong even if they can't be. But right now, I can't stand it. Right now, I need to...

(GRANDDAUGHTER picks up a pillow and holds it to her face. Her body tenses as though she is screaming into the pillow and we just can't hear her. After a moment, SFX: HER PHONE BUZZES. She freezes and the pillow falls from her hands. There are no tears. She has not cried, She has not screamed. But her face is a mask of anguish. She grabs the phone and the buzzing stops. She breathes and all expression leaves her face. She clears her throat quietly and answers, checking Hal-abeoji is still sleeping soundly as she does.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

(Pronounced "yo-bo-SAY-yo")

Yeoboseyo. Hello. (...) This is his granddaughter. I'm his translator so you're authorized to speak to me. (...) Thank you, Detective. I will let him know. While I have you on the phone... Is there anything that can be done about the media coverage. We're very private people. I'm sure the other Korean families have told you the same... (...) Nothing...? (...) Any help would be appreciated. And when can we send the funeral home to...

(Pauses, lost in thought.)

Yes, sorry, I'm still here. I was just thinking of something my grandmother once said to me. She said...

GRANDDAUGHTER/HALMEONI

I am going to die in America!

GRANDDAUGHTER

Of course, she didn't mean... (...) That's kind of you. I will pass it on. My family will be in touch.

(GRANDDAUGHTER turns to HALMEONI.)

GRANDDAUGHTER

You've been verified.

HALMEONI

Come. Take walk with Grandma. You feel better.

(GRANDDAUGHTER slips the sneakers onto GRANDDAUGHTER'S feet. HALMEONI ties one pair and GRANDDAUGHTER ties the other. They stand together, facing each other. HALMEONI takes GRANDDAUGHTER's face in her hands.)

HALMEONI

Grandma loves you.

(They face upstage holding hands. GRANDDAUGHTER takes a breath and walks forward, but HALMEONI stays put. As she steps away, their hands separate. GRANDDAUGHTER stops and looks back at HALMEONI. Pause.)

(LIGHTS FADE)

END OF PLAY