

CONFINEMENT

A 10-minute play

by
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CHARACTERS:

JOHN - late 40s, male, Chinese/Asian descent
JOY - mid 30s, female, Chinese/Asian descent
DA YEN - early 70s, male, Chinese/Asian descent
CINDY - under 10, child, female, Chinese/Asian
descent

Setting: Dinner time at an apartment in Chinatown in Chicago
Time: 2021

The door on stage opens. John, Joy and Cindy enter the apartment, carrying bags and boxes. Cindy starts running toward Da Yen, who is watching TV in the living room by himself.

CINDY

Yeye, look at this gift Daddy bought me.

JOHN

Cindy, be careful. People downstairs will complain. Help Mama with the bags to the kitchen, please. Baba. Hi.

Cindy stops running and walks back toward Joy grudgingly.

JOY

Help me with this bag. You can show it to grandpa later. (Joy hands the bag to Cindy.) Not too heavy, right?

JOHN

What are you watching, Dad?

DA YEN

(Without looking up.) Wo Bu Zhi Dao. Some soap opera. I lost track. Wuliao. I'm very bored.

JOHN

Are you hungry? Joy is going to cook dinner in an hour or so. Want some sweets? We got some from the bakery.

DA YEN

No. Wo Keyi Deng. I would like to go for a walk.

JOHN

After dinner, OK? We will go after dinner. Yi Qi. The whole family together. Cindy needs a short nap. Give us a couple of hours, OK?

DA YEN

I want to go out now. I haven't been out for days. I will come back in an hour for dinner.

JOHN

You have been out. We went for a walk yesterday. And the day before yesterday. We ate out last night, remember? We still got some leftover duck from the restaurant.

Joy walks from the kitchen, carrying a tray filled with sweets. She puts the tray down on living room table.

JOY

Baba, Chi Chi Tien Dien. Your favorite. Fish sounds good for dinner? Anything else you want to try? We still have the duck from yesterday.

DA YEN

Anything is good. I just want to go for a walk. NOW.

JOY

We just got home. Cindy is tired. She might need a nap. I need to cook too.

Joy turns to John.

Maybe after dinner? Right, John?

JOHN

That's what I told Dad.

Cindy walks over from the kitchen.

CINDY

Yeye, look at this figurine. Can I show you-

JOHN

Cindy, it's not a good time right now.

DA YEN

I want to leave the house now. By myself. XIAN ZAI. NOW.

JOY

Cindy, please. Go to your room. I know you are tired. Take a short nap. I will wake you up for dinner.

Cindy stomps and leaves the living room.

JOHN

Dad, we've had this conversation. Joy and I-

DA YEN

I want to see my friends. I want to have tea with them. I haven't seen them for days.

JOY

We can do that after dinner. Together.

DA YEN

I don't want company. Wo Zi Ji Qu. I will go by myself.

JOHN

Dad, I am sorry. I don't feel comfortable letting you out by yourself. I just can't. It's not convenient for us right now. You need to listen. Please don't argue anymore.

JOY

(Joy turns to John whispering). Maybe we should tell him the truth now?

DA YEN

You can't keep me at home forever. I am not your prisoner. I have been through that back in China. I didn't escape that place for this.

Da Yen stands up enraged. He paces back and forth in front of the TV.

JOY

(Joy physically positions herself in between them.) Dad, that's not what John meant. He is worried- John, it's best we explain-

DA YEN

It's the holidays. Tons of events at the center. I want to go there. I want to see my friends.

JOHN

Dad, it's not safe. It's during the pandemic. Better to stay home these days. Cindy is not vaccinated, so-

DA YEN

I wear a mask everywhere. I just want to walk around. That's all.

I don't need to go in anywhere. OK? I promise.

JOY

Dad, John is not being unreasonable. He is just concerned about everyone's safety. Yours too.

DA YEN

I can't even leave the house by myself? WEI SHE ME?! WHY?! I promise I will wear a mask.

JOY

How about this? You can have people over if you want, OK? Right, John?

JOHN

OK, we can plan something. I can ask your friends to come over. Tell me the people you want to invite. I will invite them. We will do that next week.

DA YEN

That's fine. I still want to go out. Like I used to. NOW.

JOY

When we have time to walk with you. When we- Just wait for a couple of hours. After dinner.

DA YEN

NO. BY MYSELF. XIAN ZAI.

JOHN

Dad, please understand-

DA YEN

Understand what! I can't even walk around anymore?

JOY

There is a reason. (Joy turns to Joy whispering). John, we should tell your Dad. You can't keep him in the dark forever.

JOHN

Baba, it's not safe right now. I just want you-

DA YEN

I wear a mask.

JOY

It's not that, Dad. John, we should just be honest with him about what's going on.

JOHN

Baba, it's not just about the virus. There are other things, OK?

JOY

John, let's treat him like an adult. He will understand. We can't keep him inside forever. He is getting upset-

JOHN

He is MY DAD. I am responsible for his safety. Our safety. I am the man-

JOY

He is MY Dad too. What's wrong with you? I know you are under a lot of pressure trying to protect us. I am simply saying- We are in this together.

JOHN

I don't want to burden him. It's too much for him.

JOY

He is going to find out no matter of what. He watches TV for God's sake.

DA YEN

She Me Shi? Tell me. Tell me now.

JOHN

Dad, the world is not safe right now. For you. Or Joy, Cindy or me. Particularly you and Joy. I need to protect you.

DA YEN

I understand. I can't live my life like this. We just need to be careful, wearing a mask-

JOHN

Not just the virus. It's not safe right now. It's my job to-

JOY

Dad, what John is trying to say is-

JOHN

We are the target, OK? Chinese people. Asians. Chinatown. When we are out and about- People are being harassed. Attacked. It's not safe. I can't-

JOY

Dad, people see us as responsible for the pandemic. (sigh). Hate crimes have shot up. We don't want anything to happen to you. Elders and women have been the target. We're worried. That's all.

DA YEN

Did something happen again? I know things. My friends and I at the bakery, we have been talking about this for a year. (Sigh). Do you really think I know nothing?

JOHN

I am sorry, Dad. I should have been honest. I-

JOY

WE should have been honest. WE. Both of us. John didn't want to worry you. He feels responsible. He-

DA YEN

What happened this time?

JOHN

Not too far from here. Woom Sing Tse. About your age. I don't think you knew him. (deep sigh). Shot 22 times. Like an execution. He was on his way to the newspaper stand. I can't take a chance with your life.

JOY

We went to the vigil a few days ago.

DA YEN

How come you didn't tell me? I would want to be there. What's wrong with you two? You think so little of me?!

JOY

I wanted to be honest, but John-

JOHN

I am sorry, Dad. It's my job as a son to keep you safe. Our elders in the community are being attacked. I can't do a damn

thing as a man. For two years now. I feel like I am failing- I don't like feeling this helpless.

DA YEN

How can you be so naïve? You don't think I have experienced racism before 2020? You don't think I know what it's like to be targeted? I got the word spy tattooed on my forehead. You think I have never been attacked before, huh? I kept quiet. I kept my mouth shut. To protect YOU. I say nothing, so I don't burden YOU. You think I will be safe if I don't go out by myself? How about Cindy's and Joy's safety? How about YOUR safety? You can be attacked too. You don't think I worry about you as your father? Remember, I raised YOU. Who taught you about anti-Asian racism in this country when you were a kid? ME. (silence). Am I that useless to you now?

JOHN

I don't know how else- I can't protect you when I am not around. I am sorry, Dad.

DA YEN

I understand. But you can't keep me inside forever. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. We can do our best to stay safe. But if people want to do harm, you can't stop them. People can still come for us. We are not safe at home. I still need to live my life.

JOY

Dad, maybe we can talk about how to keep you safe. Or keep us safe. Together as a family. We should have consulted you. It should have been a family decision.

JOHN

Thank you, Joy. (deep sigh). I am sorry. I dismissed you. We should have come up with a safety plan as a family. I should have listened to you. I am sorry.

DA YEN

We can talk later. Let me help you with dinner, Joy. I am good with fish.

JOY

Sounds good. Thank you.

DA YEN

You are still my son, John. I am responsible for you as long as I am still alive. Your whole family. That hasn't changed with my age. I am not useless. I am not. I will fight for you.

All of you.

*Da Yen embraces John and Joy.
All three turn around and walk
back toward the kitchen in
silence.*

Blackout