

HOUSE OF SONG
(excerpt)

by

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*A first draft was written in residency at the Edward F. Albee Foundation's "The Barn."
HOUSE OF SONG is the third of three tragedies from THE HOUSING PROJECT.*

THE FAMILY

HE	<i>Late 20's. A Korean soccer player, member of the Korean national soccer team. A recent American immigrant.</i>
SHE	<i>Late 20's. He's Korean wife, descendent of a traditional, royal Korean family.</i>
IT	<i>Late 60's. The spirit of He's father, materialized 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 ribbon-dancer, 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 accompanied by traditional Korean music, costumes, and dance, and with no intermission.

ACT I

At rise: A low-income one-bedroom tenement in LA's Korea-town. A flat-screen 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 wears a red shirt and shorts. The shirt reads: "Korea: Fighting!" He reads a local Korean newspaper.

A pansori song begins.

HE

(song)

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. The song ends.

A kkwaenggwari is heard. SHE screams
off-stage and runs into the living room.

SHE

Dang-shin, your Father'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 grandchildren. Dang-shin! *Get up!*

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

HE

Father, we are honored you have visited us.

SHE

Again.

HE

You must be tired of traveling from Korea.

SHE

Every week.

HE

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

IT

Children, eat!

SHE

Yes, your Grandchildren have been fed.

HE

Times are tough, but we try our best.

IT

Children! First concern.

The sounds of the kkwaenggwari stops.

He breaks in tears.

HE

Father, 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

Never mind your Son's silliness. He is overwrought with typical Korean male feelings of frustration and impotence.

HE

(a capella reprise of He's earlier song)

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

SHE

Dang-shin, don't overreact. Father's getting upset.

HE

I'm not overreacting. 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! Father, can you forgive me for leaving the team? You disapprove of me because I left it, don't you?

SHE

Father's here to see his Grandchildren.

HE

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

SHE

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

HE

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

SHE

Yes, quite the *clever* one. Your son made the suggestion that I give birth to your Grandchildren in America so that they can grow to claim a Green card.

HE

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

IT

Children, eat!

The sounds of the kkwaenggwari resume.

Yes Father. SHE

Eat, children! IT

It dances his way out. The sounds of the
kkwaenggwari stop.

Overreacting, yo-bo? HE

It was your idea to come here. SHE

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.

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's 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 OF THIS HOUSE and I say it's Capricorn.

She stomps off-stage. She returns 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

At least feed two of them.

SHE

They bite! Especially Scorpio. He likes to cling on my breasts and he nibbles on my nipple when I try to take him away. I don't particularly enjoy feeding him. In fact, I become 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're 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 that one. *That* one isn't Capricorn... Capricorn's the one in the middle of... No, he's... 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. Then, there's Scorpio, who likes to suck my breasts dry. That's Gemini: I think he's bi-polar. That's Libra, she tries to keep the babies quiet but gets beat up. Sagittarius, who's constantly trying to run-away, with Aquarius, who, I'm afraid, is crazy. Aquarius keeps on kissing Virgo, who has learned to cry only when she wants to poop. That'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? Then there's Taurus, who fights to have as much space as he can and finally, Aries, who's learned to undo her diapers and refuses to wear them. So again, which one is Capricorn?

HE

That one.

SHE

Good.

She covers the crib.

HE

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

SHE

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

HE

Maybe you should call your parents. They might give us a loan to leave the country.

SHE

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

HE

But not *twelve* of them!

SHE

You know my parents disowned me since 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 the circumstances... Tell them we're in a *slight* complication—a small *urgency*. If you stress your discontent and *cry* a little—

SHE

I will not *cry*. Do not make me a *beggar* as well. You are a soccer god; you should go to our community and raise the money we need 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 for us. 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 died in the Korean War, and I was separated from my family when Korea was divided. I had to live in poverty so I decided I would not fight yet *another* war and left the country instead.

SHE

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

HE

It seems perfectly normal to me that my children run the risk of becoming immigrant criminals. That is a far better fate than what *my* forefathers provided to *their* children.

SHE

Your forefathers 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 forefathers' bad-fortune, but a weak education as well. You 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, 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 know of a way in which your body will earn us the money we need. And you can do it just in time.

HE

What is that, yo-bo?

SHE

Prostitution.

HE

Are you insane?!

SHE

No, just listen. I 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'm only saying this because I'm a good mother. I am putting my babies' lives in front of mine. And as a father, you must do the same. When a boat shipwrecks, it is customary to *believe*: "Women and children first." As a woman, I simply think "children" first. But you, as a *man*, must sink to the deep end so that your wife and children can rest afloat.

HE

But why must I sink? I *know* that we're in a tight situation but trust me, unlike this reasoning of yours I do not see the boat as sinking. 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 L.A.

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. 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. Our love marriage 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 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 American women 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; with you, I *have* had that kind of sex. Yet it is a foreign notion to them to bear children with responsibility.

HE

You learned this in Showtime?

SHE

Dang-shin, don't be afraid. As your wife, 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. That is the strength of your manhood. The women out there will see that and they will want to pay for it too.

HE

You're mocking me.

SHE

I am thinking about *them*! My first concern!

HE

In *theory*, it does seem like this is the only way. But it isn't *right*, is it? To prostitute myself? It's not true to who I am.

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. Raise issues about money, politics, and wars: creations men have made to create suffering instead of peace until they fall in love with you, want you, and pay for you. When you return, having known all the crimes you have done, I will bear the 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. In return, they will worship and admire your sacrifice.

HE

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

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 anything they ask. If they want to have sex with you, ask for one thousand dollars. Cash—only take cash.

HE

Cash is the only thing we need.

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

SHE

Here, go out now and play soccer.

HE

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

SHE

Yes?

A pansori song begins.

HE

(song)

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
we 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 to believe
that going out there, to play soccer,
I will be blessed
with my forefathers' forgiveness?

SHE
(spoken)

You are doing what any other man would do.

HE
(song)

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.

A second song begins. She cries one tear. No
more.

SHE
(song)

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.
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.

Kkwaenggwari 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 dances with It.
Together, they dance a shamanistic dance.

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. The sounds of the
kkwaenggwari stop. She enters.

SHE

Oh Father, you scared me.

IT

Eat, children!
Children, eat!

SHE

Yes, I have come for the children.

IT

Bow, I am Father.

She bows in front of him.

SHE

Father, your 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 Father, please share with me your wisdom. What should I do with my children?

IT

Above.

SHE

I always place them above me. I'm 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 Son, my husband, doesn't understand. For him, truth is based on our past and he has *accepted* the future to come. *Even worse*, he has deceived me into doing so as well Father! He said we should come to LA because he wants your Grandchildren to have Green cards and be able to 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 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 play anymore. Foolish me, I thought this was for the children's sake! He *lied* to me. He tricked me! I have nothing Father; my husband has destroyed it all.

IT

*Above, children,
eat.*

THIS PLAY HAS BEEN ABANDONED.

**BUT, IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE REST, PLEASE EMAIL ME AT
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THANKS!