

Rice Girls

Emily A. Kim

RICE GIRLS

*A novel
by Emily A. Kim*

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For My Family

Chapter 1

If you secretly miss someone every day but choose to lead your life on a fake stage of your creation, then your life must be full of shit. If you are called by a name that is different from the legal name on your driver's license, causing you to have to explain your so-called life story, about your multiple names, then your life must be full of shit. Or at least that's how I felt.

My life was full of shit—full of lies, secrets, and disguises. It may have appeared a mystery to some, and it was definitely a magnetic force that attracted numerous guys. To me, it was a chronic sickness. Every waking moment felt like a lucid dream that I couldn't escape from. Then, one day I was forced to confront my dark past.

One of my recurring nightmares returned on the day my long-lost younger sister, Jinhee, arrived in the United States—June 21, 1999. I hadn't heard from her in three and a half years. Then, out of the blue, she simply announced in a letter that she was coming to America. She wrote, "You promised to buy a house for me and *Umma*. This is your second chance. Last chance!"

My fiancé, Jason, inherited the classic Italian man's strong features from his father's side (the Delucas) and Woody Allen's neuroticism from his mother's side (the Schwartzes). His personality was part liberal innocence and part underground DJ. He had no clue about my past. It didn't really matter to him who I was or where I came from as long as I looked good and made him feel good. That was probably why I was attracted to him in the first place.

In this particular nightmare, Jason and I were passing through the security checkpoint of the Tom Bradley International Terminal of Los Angeles Airport (LAX), and then the next minute we were exiting the gate of the Gimpo International Airport in South Korea. A wave of humid

heat riding on a salty breeze embedded with pungent fish and the odor of garlic enveloped us as we walked through the identical narrow alleys of Busan, my hometown. Jason kept repeating, “Are we there yet?”

Bearing many wrapped gifts, Jason and I finally reached my shabby childhood home. As I walked into the dingy room, Umma (Mom) was stunned to see me and hugged me tightly without saying a word. I called to her in Korean: “*Umma, it’s me, your daughter, and this is my fiancé, Jason,*” but Umma was mute. She cried and held my hands.

Next to Umma was little Jinhee, who was playing with my childhood doll, Dawn. I approached her and said in Korean, “*Hey Jinhee, it’s me.*” She looked into my eyes but didn’t recognize me, replying bluntly, “*Who are you? You’re not my Unee. She is prettier than you are.*”

I asked for my mother’s help. “*Umma, tell her it’s me. She knows it’s me,*” but Umma was already gone. I stood there, devastated, then turned to Jason. “Please, Jason, tell her I’m her older sister!”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t speak Korean,” he said heartlessly. I grabbed my sister’s shoulder and shook it, repeating, “*Look at me, closely! It’s me. I’m back.*”

Jinhee started to scream. “*No, go away! Leave me alone!*”

“Noooo! Jason!” I screamed, but at that point Jason had disappeared. I charged out of the room, yelling, “Jason, where are you? *Umma, where are you?*” I ran through the tiny dark alley in front of my house until I hit a gray cement wall with cracks and holes. The wall was covered in red graffiti that read “Yankee, Go Home” and slimy moss that grew right in front of my eyes. Then, the moss began to stretch out toward my body, entangling me. I tried to break free, but I couldn’t move or breathe.

I was sweating and hyperventilating when Jason's voice pulled me out of my dream. "It's OK, baby. I'm here. You screamed something in Korean and English. That's awesome that you have bilingual dreams."

It was 5 a.m.

After recalling the vivid nightmare, my mind went completely blank for a moment, as if all of my senses were dead. Then, I felt nauseated, and my head was spinning. My body apparently couldn't hide the excitement over the fact that I would finally be seeing Jinhee. I rushed to the bathroom. "*Blehh!*" Vomit poured from my mouth and into the toilet. Jason hurried after me into the bathroom, coming to my rescue like Tarzan. "What's wrong? Are you all right?"

"Nothing's wrong."

"You freak!" he said, beaming. "I'm the one who should throw up. You've been hiding the fact that you have a biological family that you haven't seen for the past sixteen years?" He stared at me for a moment then headed for the kitchen.

"At least I'm not pregnant or anything," I said after I washed out my mouth, looking at my face in the mirror on the closet door.

It was time to pick up Jinhee. I grasped Jason's arm with visible anxiety as we traveled in silence to LAX, getting stuck in typical Highway 405 traffic on the way. As we inched along, we saw a plane fly low across the clear sky, lurching toward the airport in the distance. Jason turned on the radio, and the theme song from *Titanic* filled the car.

“Gosh . . . I’m so sick of this song,” Jason said. Annoyed, he switched to the Power 106 FM station, and TLC’s “No Scrubs” blasted from the car speakers. *Thump, thump, thump*—my heart was pounding.

“Just put up with her for one year. I’ll do anything you want. I’ll be your slave for at least a year,” I said, looking out the window at the palm trees, buildings, and strip malls along the 405.

“Anything? Like, can you swallow . . . it?” Jason said, grinning.

“Eww . . . anything but that.”

When Jason and I entered the Tom Bradley Terminal at LAX, it was very crowded and noisy—like closing time at the stock exchange—with many people of different ethnicities shouting at each other in their native tongue. People in the crowd either leaned forward against the banister or stepped back like us to peek over the shoulders of others. Jason said, “Dude, this is so freaking annoying. Why can’t they speak English? This is America.”

“What?” I suddenly couldn’t pay attention to what he was saying. My thoughts blurred as the nausea returned.

“Why don’t they speak English?” Jason repeated, his voice echoing in my ear.

“Well, it just doesn’t feel natural, I guess . . . like wearing a thong.”

“You want your sister to be like those people who can’t speak English after twenty years of living in America?”

After a trip to the bathroom, I returned sipping a Diet Coke, my antinausea remedy. Jason was holding a bouquet of flowers for my sister. I teased him, planting a short kiss on his cheek. “I guess you want to make a good impression on my sister, huh?”

“Maybe . . . although being your 24-7 chauffeur is enough for ya, isn’t it?”

Just then, the computer monitor flashed “KAL: On Time,” arriving from Seoul, and I suddenly felt agitated, jumping from my seat. Shortly after, a horde of Asians, as well as a few bewildered foreigners, filed out of the narrow ramp and into the terminal. Holding Jason’s hand, I tried to spot my sister’s face. The face I searched for was from her high school graduation photo she had sent me years ago. In that photo, she had a stern face like a police officer, and she wore a school uniform. I wondered whether she would still be shorter than I was or what kind of hairdo she would have.

Jason grinned as he noticed many Korean women hauling massive suitcases double the size of their bodies. “How come all the old Korean women have the same hairdo? Look! They all have identical short perms,” he whispered.

“I don’t know, maybe they are afraid to look different,” I mumbled. Just then, I spotted someone, and my heart clapped like thunder. I walked toward her, with Jason trailing behind me.

I uttered, “*Jinhee! Is that you?*”

The young lady stared at me, then replied, in a perfect Californian accent, “Huh? Do I know you?”

It wasn’t Jinhee. Jinhee’s eyes didn’t bulge like that. I turned 180 degrees and made eye contact with another girl. A fragile, pale, and frightened young woman was anxiously scanning the crowd. She wore a simple yet elegant black blazer and blue jeans, stood about five feet, six inches tall, and had straight, shoulder-length dark-brown hair. It was Jinhee! She wasn’t a little girl anymore. We glided simultaneously toward each other. And unlike my nightmare, she recognized my face.

“*Mehee Unee,*” she said gently. As I hugged her, my eyes welled up with tears and my throat and chest tightened. I struggled to speak. We held each other, sobbing, until a stout Korean

ajumma (a middle-aged woman) bumped into me, poking my right arm with the edge of a golf club from her luggage.

“Ouch!” I murmured, wiping away my tears. The lady vigorously marched away as if I were invisible. Jason handed Jinhee the bouquet of flowers, then took her two suitcases, smiling awkwardly.

“Oh, Jinhee, this is my fiancé, Jason. Jason, my sister, Jinhee,” I said.

Jinhee nodded shyly. “Hi, nice meeting you.”

“Hi! Welcome to America!” As we walked out of the terminal, Jinhee said, “Nice weather! Air so clean!” She inhaled the Los Angeles air deeply, closing her eyes and stretching out her arms like Tim Robbins in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

As Jason loaded Jinhee’s luggage into his ’85 blue Volvo, she asked in Korean, “*Is this really your car?*”

“*No, it’s Jason’s car, but it runs well and is solid. I don’t have a car! Jason works nine to five, and I work a night shift, so it works well,*” I explained. She seemed shocked to hear this.

No one said much on the way home from the airport, although I had so many things I wanted to say to Jinhee. I wanted to tell her how much I’d missed her. I wanted to say that I hadn’t forgotten her. I wanted to tell her how I’ve been working hard to bring her, and eventually Umma, here, but I couldn’t say a word. It was as if I were mute. After what seemed like an eternity, Jason broke the silence and asked, “How was the flight?”

“OK, but bad food,” she replied, then asked, “So, what you do, Jason?”

“I’m an aspiring screenplay writer, and your sister will be the first Asian actress to win an Academy Award.” Jinhee stared at me disapprovingly. Jason asked her, “What about you?”

“I worked for Daewoo Group as a secretary.”

“Cool!” Jason replied.

“No, Daewoo’s luck is sinking,” she said. She turned to me and spoke under her breath in Korean, “*Maybe you’re not that lucky, Unee.*”

Upon our arrival at our apartment near Bundy Drive and San Vicente Boulevard in West Los Angeles, Jinhee was impressed by our unit’s courtyard, where Jacaranda trees blossomed, tossing the fresh scent into the marine air. This seemed to quell her initial disappointment about my current situation. “Nice smell! *This is like Gangnam, the most upscale neighborhood in Seoul.*”

My neighborhood wasn’t a ghetto, but it wasn’t upscale, either. Our apartment was in a 1950s two-story courtyard building with twenty units. Ninety percent of the tenants had lived there for decades because of rent control, and half of them were already cashing in their Social Security checks. They would probably die in their one-bedroom apartments. The rent control, wood floors, and our garage space appealed to Jason and me. The reason we were able to beat out other competitive prospective tenants was that I convinced my apartment manager, who had an arrhythmia, that I could teach him how to lower his cholesterol using a green tea and seaweed diet.

I showed Jinhee around our two-bedroom apartment, and then guided her to the room where she would be staying. She austerely examined the mismatched, used furniture, which was like something out of a love motel because I couldn’t afford to buy anything new. Of course, she didn’t have to know that I picked up a used futon from Jason’s sister, Ellen. Jason and I had driven it home on the top of his car. While he was driving down La Brea Avenue, the mattress slid back and forth, even though Jason had tied it down. So we each held on to it with one hand—like our lives depended on it—while the wind blew it around.

Jinhee beamed slightly at the WELCOME HOME! balloon floating up against the ceiling. Then, she handed me a box and a handwritten letter from Umma. The gift was an exquisite 18K gold cross necklace and matching earrings. An inexpressible sadness burned through my body as I gazed at the gift. Whenever I missed her and had wanted to call her, my self-pity over not having anything to brag about held me back. After all, I had opted out of becoming one of those overachieving Asian housewives with a rich husband, kids, and an SUV, which was what Umma had wished for me. Instead of opening the letter, I put it in my pocket.

Attempting to release the tightness in my throat, I asked Jinhee in Korean, “*How’s Umma doing? She doesn’t have anybody now.*”

“*She is living in a Catholic church in the suburbs of Seoul cooking for a priest and nuns, and she loves it. All she wants is our happiness, you know. She has her God. I think she finally has found peace after Abeujeo died.*”

As Jason stood by the door sheepishly, Jinhee held up a gift that she had prepared for him. It was a traditional smoking pipe that our ancestors had used a century ago. It was a reproduction, but it looked authentic. “Thank you! It looks really cool. This pipe reminds me of a bong I had in high school!” Jason said.

“What is it, bong?” Jinhee asked.

“Oh, it’s a special kinda pipe Americans use . . . er, for pleasure,” I answered, eyeing Jason. He chuckled, but my sister still looked puzzled. Then Jason said, “OK ladies. We’d better hurry. Do you guys want to eat first before we see *Austin Powers*? ”

“I’m tired,” Jinhee said. “It’s long day today. I sleep.”

“Come on. This is our first night together! Go with us,” I said.

Jinhee shook her head strongly. Although I didn't feel right about leaving her alone at home on her first night in America, I was relieved to temporarily escape from this new version of reality and, most of all, from the awkward silence between Jinhee and me.

When Jason and I returned from the movie, darkness enveloped the living room except for a dim light coming from a streetlight outside. Jinhee's room was dark. As I was about to fall asleep, I heard Jinhee sobbing through the thin wall. I went to her room, flicked on the light, and asked her in Korean, "*What's wrong?*" When she didn't answer right away, I sat on the bed next to her.

"*Nothing.*"

"*Why are you crying?*" I pressed on.

"*Unee, you have changed too much. You even have an accent when you speak Korean. Like a foreigner! How could you go to the movies and leave me alone?*"

I was ashamed. "*You told us you were tired from the long flight. Sorry, but Jason scheduled his vacation for this week for you and me. So. . .*"

"*Jason doesn't like me. You told me Jason is like Hugh Grant in a romantic comedy.*"

"*He's a very reserved guy, and, besides, everything is new to him.*"

"*And why did you have to bring him to the airport? I wanted to have our moment. Just you and me. . .*" She started to cry bitterly.

I said, "*I'm sorry . . . I was too nervous to drive today.*"

"OK, I'm sleeping now," she said. I turned off the light, remorsefully looking at Jinhee, who was covered in a blanket from head to toe. I had rehearsed my reunion with her a thousand times in my mind . . . and it wasn't even remotely close to this.

I returned to bed only to toss and turn. "*Why is she crying?*" Jason asked.

“Uh . . . nothing, really. She is overwhelmed by everything,” I replied.

“Don’t worry. It will take time to be a tough American woman like you. By the way, do you remember Eddie Murphy’s movie *Coming to America*? ”

“Yeah, that’s a comedy,” I sighed.

“Well . . . it’s up to her how she writes her own drama.”

“That’s easier said than done.”

Jason gave me a big hug and kiss, but then I turned my back to him.

Chapter 2

Jinhee and I weren't always like this. I pretended to fall asleep, shutting my eyes tightly. My mouth was as dry as the Sahara desert as I was forced to use Jason's snores as a Sleep Easy Sound Conditioner. My mind was flying a thousand miles away to my motherland, the Republic of South Korea. I'd been trying to hit the "delete" button on my memories of Korea for the past sixteen years, yet a day never passed that I didn't think about my biological family.

My parents met through a matchmaker in 1970, and they got married just one month after their first blind date. They made their marriage vows not out of love but out of moral obligation to each of their families. I have no memory of seeing Abeujee (Father) kissing, hugging, or holding Umma affectionately. My mother, who in her late twenties without a college degree was ostracized as an old spinster, willingly honored her parents' lifelong lesson: that being a mother was the way to live as a woman. My father, who had been helping out at my uncle's small grocery store, received an offer from my grandmother to set up his own store on the condition of his marriage. At the age of thirty, my father had no other way to leave his older brother's house. After my parents' one-night honeymoon at a second-rate motel, they moved into a rugged house and rented a small space to open up a convenience store. It was located in the tiny back alley across from the main gate of Camp Hialeah, the US Army base in Busan.

My parents were able to eke out a living thanks to the Vietnam War troops stationed in Busan. Westerners today know Busan as a cosmopolitan city and home to the Busan International Film Festival, skyscrapers, white apartment buildings, the Golden Gate-like Gwangan Bridge, the massive Centum City Mall, and Haeundae Beach. But in the 1970s, before Samsung, before the Miracle on the Han River, Busan was a third-world city.

My neighborhood was located near Seomyeon, which was the midtown from the harbor. It was a village of brown, ramshackle one- and two-story dwellings nestled against a backdrop of mountains. Like the Great Wall, the high walls of the army compound were topped with barbed wire and separated the neighborhood from the base. My army-support village was situated across the road from *M*A*S*H*-style army roofs that stood among big evergreen trees and the main gate of Camp Hialeah. The block was lined with a dozen stores on each side, and the small missionary church was located at the end of a dead-end alley. There were always a few male villagers playing Korean chess (*badook*) and chatting under a weeping willow tree in front of the church.

My parents' store sat in the middle of the alley between a small barbershop and a glittering disco-era clothing store for bar girls called Beautiful Tonight. Across from the store, there were a few bars, a club called Moon River, and a Korean-Chinese fusion restaurant. Like Las Vegas, the nights in my village were usually brighter than the days.

The name of my parents' store was Mr. Lee's, like my father's last name. You could find practically everything in the five-hundred-square-foot store, from fresh fruit, to toilet paper, to matches, to food such as ramen and sandwiches or gourmet dishes such as Umma's handmade *gimbop* (Korean-style California roll). The store had one room and a small kitchen as part of a U-shaped, bungalow-style house with an ash-tiled roof. Four families lived there, including us, like some sort of commune. The landlords, the Kims, had two bedrooms, an attic, and a kitchen. The other tenants, the Chois and Susie, had one room and a kitchen, just like ours. A square wooden bench stood in the middle of the open space of the house, and twelve people shared one communal toilet with a wooden door. Just outside the toilet was a well and one faucet where we bathed and washed up. Against the wall of the toilet and next to the main gate of the house, a

large pomegranate tree covered the edge of the roof and hung over the cement wall. In the fall, the red flowers blossomed and pomegranates hung like red lights on a Christmas tree. When the fruit fell, it cracked open like crystallized candy, painting the house red with its red seeds and tossing its scent everywhere. Jinhee and I were born and raised here.

I was born three weeks premature, as if I couldn't wait to taste the bittersweetness of life. I pushed from Umma's womb on August 16, 1973, toward the end of the Vietnam War era and during the heat of the Watergate scandal. My parents had been married almost three years by then, so their anticipation of me was indescribable. Umma had felt a sharp pain after dinner and called to my grandmother, *Halmoni* (my father's mother). Halmoni attempted to deliver me herself, just as she had done with her other ten grandchildren, but I put up a fight, rebelling against her will.

While Umma was bleeding and screaming in a room under Halmoni's unprofessional supervision and without proper sterilization, an American GI, who was a regular customer at my parents' store, heard Umma's dying voice from inside the store. The American Samaritan, a tall, clean-cut, broad-shouldered figure in a perfectly ironed army uniform and polished boots, was Sergeant George Grant. George was in his late twenties, and his calming charisma and killer smile alluded to a military version of a young George Clooney. He asked Abeujee what was wrong, to which Abeujee answered in broken English: "Baibee, oh, baibee coming soon!" As Umma's voice became higher and more hysterical, George said, "Bring her to the hospital! Quickly!"

Abeujee said, "No doctor, no money, OK! OK! Mom can do it!" But after Umma lost consciousness, a worried Halmoni finally gave up. "*Aigoo!* Duck-tor, Duck-tor!" she screamed.

George ended up taking Umma to an emergency room at the army clinic. He saved us just like in a *M*A*S*H* episode. Regardless of my intention, I owed my birth to the US government.

After I was released from the army clinic, Abeujeo crowned me *Mehee*, a name that could be interpreted as “beautiful joy” in Chinese. But because George signed my name “Sally Lee” at the clinic at the time of my birth (for administrative purposes), I was also called “Sally.” The camp town called me by my American name, Sally, pronounced as “Sahl-lee,” which means “I’m going to live” in Korean.

I ignored my name “beautiful joy,” rejecting my role as a dutiful daughter, and instead became a nuisance. One summer day in 1974, when I was about a year old, I further cemented Umma’s vicious cycle of life. That day I cried obnoxiously and hysterically, and a rash was spreading all over my body. Perhaps I was allergic to the dusty and stale air of our tiny room that was filled with ramen boxes and reeked of anchovies. Perhaps I was lactose intolerant when Umma attempted to feed me powdered milk due to a deficiency of her natural milk. My parents didn’t know the cause of my mysterious rash but assumed that I was born a feeble child, destined to suffer.

The weather was hot and sticky without a breeze, so everyone in the household had their doors open. Susie yelled out, “*Mehee might be an opera singer someday!*”

Mr. Kim’s wife, a heavyset woman with almost no eyebrows, poked her puffy face through the screen door and yelled to Umma, “*Gosh, can you make your baby girl shut up? I can’t watch my morning soap.*”

The landlord of the house, Mr. Kim, yelled, “*Shut up everyone! A woman’s voice should not be heard outside the household.*”

Mr. Kim worked in the cafeteria of Camp Hialeah. He was a stout, bald, sly-eyed man in his forties. He snuck tons of American goods, such as sugar, canned goods, peanut butter, butter, coffee, soda, and candies, from the cafeteria, and his wife sold these items to people in our neighborhood and at the black market downtown. Mr. Baldy made more money from illegal trade than from his salary. People said he earned a lot of money in Vietnam as a merchant, so he bought the house in cash. Abeujee wasn't lucky enough or brave enough to be like him. Mr. Baldy and his wife always had a condescending demeanor. It was as if they were mocking people like my parents and our flatmates Mr. and Mrs. Choi, sending an unspoken message of "*You can't make money by being good. You choose to be poor!*"

Abeujee held me. He was a well-built man of average height with a sharp nose and a marine tattoo on his right arm. He tried to stop me from crying, but I continued with my staccato wailing. Abeujee finally gave up and put me down on a blanket. He said, "*Aigoo! This troublesome kid can't be my daughter. Where did she get this terrible temper?*"

Umma, a woman with milky skin and a breathtakingly radiant face, even without makeup, and vibrating *Han* (the unbearable presence of the collective sadness of Koreans, which results in endless emotions), picked me up and attempted to feed me. "*What are you talking about? If it's not your daughter, then whose is it? She's got your short temper, you fool!*" I refused Umma's milk and kept crying, "*Wahhhhhhhhhhh!*"

Abeujee stormed out, grabbing a bottle of *soju* (Korean hard liquor) from the shelf of his store. Umma murmured, "*I wish I could go away with this baby! I want to disappear!*" The sunlight streaming in through the window shined on my face. Then only Umma's voice echoed through the room, singing a lullaby. "*Sleep my baby, my cute baby, the beautiful roses blossomed like your face. . .*"

Suddenly a large shadow appeared in front of her, and she looked up to find an American soldier standing there. It was George! He placed milk, diapers, and canned goods next to Umma, then held me tenderly as Umma watched coyly.

“Wow . . . my princess is getting bigger every day. Look at her smile!”

“Yes! Yes, thank to you!”

At that moment, Halmoni entered the store with a *mudang* (traditional exorcist / fortune-teller). A woman in her midsixties, Halmoni wore an ivory *hanbok* (traditional Korean dress) and her hair was accessorized with a jade ornamental hairpin. She turned to Umma and ordered, “*Lay Mehee down here. Look at her! She doesn’t even look Korean. Her mouth is full, her eyes are too big and brown, and her eyebrows are thick. Her features are too strong to be a nice Korean girl. I’m going to expel her Yankee ghost today.*”

“But mother, you didn’t tell me about this. She just fell asleep,” Umma protested.

“*If I had told you, you wouldn’t have agreed. I wouldn’t have approved this marriage if I had known you were a Catholic!*” Halmoni yelled at Umma.

George continued to hold me firmly, feeling awkward but wanting to protect me. Umma said to him, “Please, Sergeant Grant. Go now!”

“Please, Mrs. Lee. Let me help you!”

“Sorry, Sergeant Grant. Family business. Please understand.”

“Are they trying out some kind of superstitious ritual on her?”

Halmoni stared at George with hostility, then snatched me from him, shooting him a dirty look in the process. George didn’t want to leave, but eventually he exited the store.

The old mudang came dressed in an outfit entirely accentuated with colorful silk and wore a red top hat. She held two bronze knives in each hand and carried a *jhanggoo* (traditional

Korean drum). She danced around me, tapping on her jhanggoo and making a twittering sound with her knives. Halmoni prayed next to her, “*Please expel the Yankee ghost from this child! Please expel the bad spirit in this house! Please give me a grandson. . .*”

Soon a crowd formed, including a few GIs who were fascinated by the ritual—they must have initially thought it was some kind of exotic feast or a special promotional event at the store. And there I was again, wailing as if mudang was going to kill me. Annoyed by my reaction, the crowd dispersed and mudang stopped her ritual short, cursing Umma. “*Gosh! This girl’s Yankee chi is too strong. My guardian ghost can’t bend it. She has to go far away across the ocean.*” The mudang packed up her stuff, refusing to take a fee. “*Tsk, tsk. . . Don’t pay me. I couldn’t change her path. She was born with a harsh fate as a woman.*” Halmoni was mortified by the disastrous and terrifying news, and stared at Umma with resentment, believing that I was a bad omen, the cursed child.

The shaman lady had accurately predicted my life since in the end I chose a harsh dream. It was challenging for me as an Asian woman to get even the most basic acting gig. I went to an audition about once a month, but 99 percent of the time I didn’t get the part. Whenever I looked in *Backstage* for a part, I was only able to find one or two casting calls a month that fit my physical description. Most of the casting calls were for white females with the body type of a Victoria Secret model. The description would go something like: “Caucasian females, 20–29, attractive, glamorous model type with sexy hard body, etc.” Although I considered myself a confident, attractive female, and definitely above average (even for LA standards), I didn’t think my body was compatible to the tall, fake-boobed model type. If by chance I found a “petite Asian female in her 20s” description, it usually came with the following qualification (in bo