

Answer Me
A Ten-Minute Play in One Act

CAST

MOTHER, 40s

FATHER, 40s

SON, 12

(Characters are Asian)

SETTING

[Kitchen of suburban house in the 1970s. The furniture is sparse and functional. It is after dinner and MOTHER is at the sink washing dishes. This can be mimed. FATHER and SON are at a plain kitchen table. The SON has a stack of papers and books in front of him. One of these books is open.]

FATHER: The sum of the angles in Triangle ABD are equal to what?

SON: One hundred thirty-five.

FATHER: Thus, the supplementary angle CDF is equal to? [SON starts flipping through pages in the book.]

FATHER: The answer is not in the book. It is for you to deduce.

SON: Father, *ah*, I do not know.

FATHER: You do not know? My own son – he cannot even make a basic deduction.

SON: I am sorry, father. I will try harder.

FATHER: When I was your age [he points to the book] I already know all of this. My teacher in China, do you know what he would do if I did not know this material? Now, the supplementary angle CDF is equal to?

SON [Starts to panic, does not know]: Father, I...

FATHER: This is the easiest problem in the entire chapter.

MOTHER [Stops doing dishes, walks over]: Maybe we stop for now. He is only twelve. Maybe he does not know.

FATHER: He is a Chinese. He can do better. [to SON] We already do things your way. You want to be like American. We let you play the baseball with your friends at the place –

MOTHER: Finn-Benn field.

SON [Correcting MOTHER]: Finberg Field.

FATHER: Finn-Benn, Finn Benn. That is all we hear! FINN-BENN. Is that what you want to do with your life?

SON: No, father. [SON raises a knuckle to his eye]

FATHER: Look. My son is crying.

MOTHER [Comes over to watch, as if inspecting a broken appliance]: Yes, I think you are right. He is crying.

FATHER: *Ah*, what do I do now? I have a son who cries.

[Throughout the next exchanges, SON avoids direct eye contact with FATHER and MOTHER. He may flip pages in the book or write in an attempt to look busy.]

MOTHER: Maybe we push him too hard. Geometry is one year ahead of his classmates.

FATHER: He is one year ahead of his American classmates, but he is behind cousin Chou-Chiang.

MOTHER: Cousin Chou-Chiang is a genius.

FATHER: Still we must not fall too far behind cousin Chou-Chiang. I talked to his father.

MOTHER [Surprised, looks at FATHER]: You talked to his father? When?

FATHER: This morning. Cousin Chou-Chiang is taking the early entrance exam to MIT.

MOTHER: Already! Cousin Chou-Chiang is only thirteen. You must go to his father to ask how to do this.

FATHER: His father has been teaching him Calculus nights and weekends. So bold! I did not anticipate this. Besides, I cannot talk to him again on this matter. If I call him, he will ask about our son.

MOTHER [Sits down, looks at SON, considers. SON continues to stare down at his paper]: You can spend more time with our son, like Chou-Chiang's father. One extra hour every night. Then maybe he can get into MIT too.

FATHER: Our son will never get into MIT.

MOTHER: He might.

FATHER: He will never get into MIT.

MOTHER: Maybe he will get into a school like Georgia Tech or Illinois.

FATHER: Ah, Illinois! No! Public school! Not my son.

MOTHER: Then maybe Carnegie-Mellon or Purdue.

FATHER: Purdue is public.

MOTHER: No, it is not. Purdue gets private money. They have an endowment. I saw it in *Time* magazine.

FATHER [Picks up a book from table, flips through pages. SON pretends not to notice and tries to look busy]: *Ah*, I will spend an extra hour with him every night and maybe he will get into Purdue and be a mathematician or an engineer.

MOTHER [Gets up]: Our son has stopped crying. Maybe we should send him to his room.

FATHER [Still flipping through book]: It is too early. We still have time to work. Besides, if you send him to his room he will start to draw again.

MOTHER: He promised not to do the art anymore. But sometimes I catch him. He still does the drawings.

FATHER [to SON]: Son, why do you do this? Why do you do this to us?

SON [Looking down]: Father, I am taking the art class in school.

FATHER: It will look good on your resume. That is why I told you to take it.

SON [Perks up a little bit]: The art teacher told me to draw what I see. So, I draw what I see around me. In my room, I look out the window and draw the trees, the cars parked on the road, the house across the street. [Voice becomes slightly more sensitive] When I draw it makes me feel good. The light is always changing so I can draw the same thing again later and it gives me a different feeling. Later, I can take out the drawing and it reminds me of the feeling I had when I made the drawing.

FATHER [to MOTHER]: He is this way because of you.

MOTHER [Shakes head]: No, I take the drawing supplies away from him, but he comes home with more. That art teacher. He gives him more pencils and drawing paper every day. Maybe we can enroll him in the Chinese school in Boston. They do not teach art there.

FATHER: He will never pass the entrance exam. Look at him. His *pee-goo* (*translation: buttocks*) is so small. Why does my son have such a small *pee-goo*?

MOTHER: His *pee-goo* will grow.

FATHER: What if it does not? When I was his age my *pee-goo* was twice the size.

MOTHER: His *pee-goo* is bigger than last year. I will feed him more meat.

FATHER: If his *pee-goo* does not grow, then maybe he will become [eyes become wide] HOMO-SEXUAL!

MOTHER [laughs, waves away]: No, impossible. Not our son.

FATHER: Do not laugh! Did you not hear about cousin Wen-Lu? *Ahhh*, his poor mother!!

MOTHER: Wen-Lu is at the top of his class.

FATHER: He is at the top of his class, but he is going to music school! *Ah*, I have a son who likes to draw and has a small *pee-goo* and cannot make simple deductions in geometry. Why does he do this to me?

MOTHER [Moves close to FATHER, puts her hand on his arm]: We can do this tomorrow. It is getting late. We should put him to bed.

FATHER: We have not even begun the next section in geometry.

MOTHER: Maybe –

FATHER: Maybe what?

MOTHER: Maybe making him do his normal algebra homework for school and then making him do geometry is too much for him.

FATHER: It is not too much. Cousin Chou-Chiang is already performing differential equations. If our son learns geometry now, we can move him on to calculus next year.

MOTHER: Maybe we quit for tonight and do extra work tomorrow night.

FATHER [looks at SON]: *Ah*, maybe you are right for tonight. After he cries, he does not learn much anyway. [Gives textbook to MOTHER, who closes it places and it on the table.]

MOTHER: He is shivering.

FATHER: He does that after he cries. Go get him his blanket.

[MOTHER walks offstage and returns with an old worn blanket. She wraps it around SON]

MOTHER: My son, *ah*, we try to do the best for you. We give everything to you. We let you do whatever you want. You want to be like the Americans. We even let you watch the game show on the TV last week. Why do you treat us this way? Son?

[MOTHER brushes her hand against SON's face and gives a gentle hug through the blanket]

MOTHER [softly]: Answer me.

End of Play