

UNBROKEN BLOSSOMS

A Full-Length Play By

Philip W. Chung

1-18-24

CHARACTERS

JAMES B. LEONG, late 20s (also late 60s), Chinese American male. One of the two Chinese consultants hired to work on the film *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*.

MOON KWAN, mid 30s, Chinese American male. The other Chinese consultant on *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*. (This actor will also play the role of *CECIL*--see below)

D.W. GRIFFITH, mid 40s, Caucasian male. The pioneering director of classic silent films including *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* and *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*.

LILLIAN GISH, early 20s, Caucasian female. One of Hollywood's first movie stars, D.W. GRIFFITH's main leading lady, and the female lead of *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*. (This actor will also play the role of *Gilda*--see below)

RICHARD BARTHELMESS, mid 20s, Caucasian male. The male star of *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*--playing a Chinese character in "yellow face". (This actor will also play the role of *Simmons*--see below)

The following roles can be double cast to cap the cast size to five:

GILDA BROWN, mid 20s, Caucasian female. A nurse who has recently moved to Los Angeles to take care of her brother's family following a tragedy. She is played by the same actor who plays *Lillian*.

CECIL KWAN, early 40s, Chinese American male. The grown son of *Moon*. He is played by the same actor who plays *Moon*.

WILLIAM JOSEPH SIMMONS, late 30s, Caucasian male. A preacher and the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. He is played by the same actor who plays *Richard*.

TIME AND PLACE

ACT ONE: Los Angeles, 1919

ACT TWO: Los Angeles, 1961 and 1919

UNBROKEN BLOSSOMS

ACT ONE

ON RISE: a Movie Screen. The scene from "The Birth of a Nation" where the Ku Klux Klan heroically rides to the rescue plays.

A spot on D.W. GRIFFITH. He watches the scene in silence until it ends.

D.W. GRIFFITH turns to speak to an o.s. reporter.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Of all the questions a reporter of your reputation can come up with, that's the one you choose to ask me--D.W. Griffith?

(laughs dismissively)

You want to know what I think of the bigotry in "The Birth of a Nation?" Yes, I know what those reviewers said about my picture. I can quote their pieces verbatim. This is from the New Republic: "Whatever happened during the Reconstruction, this film is aggressively vicious and defamatory. It is spiritual assassination. It degrades the censors that passed it and the white race that endures it." And the New York Globe: "The very name 'The Birth of a Nation' is an insult to Washington... To make a few dirty dollars men are willing to pander to depraved tastes and to foment a race antipathy that is the most sinister and dangerous of American life." Perhaps you hope that in the years since I made the film, I have seen the error of my ways. That I have come to realize my harshest critics were right?

(after a beat)

When Shakespeare wrote "Othello", he was accused of racism. When he wrote "The Merchant of Venice," anti-Semitism was the charge. But today, what we remember of those works is their enduring genius. History is the final judge and history always favors the artist.

(after a beat)

Am I comparing myself to Shakespeare? Allow me to rephrase your question to cut to your true intent--am I, a lowly motion picture director, saying that I am the equal of a giant like Shakespeare? Why, yes. Yes, I am.

His interview concluded, D.W. GRIFFITH attempts to exit, but he is stopped by a very excited WILLIAM JOSEPH SIMMONS.

SIMMONS

(thick Southern accent)

Mr. Griffith, Mr. Griffith, could I trouble you for an autograph?

D.W. GRIFFITH nods and signs

SIMMONS' notepad.

SIMMONS

Can you make it out to William Joseph Simmons? I am your biggest fan, sir. I drove out from Georgia with my wife and I said to her, "we are not leaving Los Angeles until I first meet the greatest living American, Mr. D.W. Griffith".

D.W. GRIFFITH

(hands SIMMONS his autograph)

You flatter me, Mr. Simmons.

SIMMONS

It's Reverend Simmons, I'm a preacher. Now, is it true that when President Wilson saw "Birth of a Nation", he declared it was like "writing history with lightning"?

D.W. GRIFFITH

That he did.

SIMMONS

I knew it! Knew he was one 'a us. "Birth of a Nation" changed my life. I was so inspired after watching your picture that I gathered a group of my friends and we climbed up to the top of Stone Mountain and decided right then and there that it was time to revive the Ku Klux Klan. It was freezing cold, but we burned a cross just like the KKK did in your movie and our wives sewed us white-hooded robes just like the KKK wore in your movie.

D.W. GRIFFITH

(not sure how to respond)

Well...I simply took the images of the burning crosses and white robes from Mr. Dixon's book, which I'm sure you already know was the basis of my film, so I can hardly take credit.

SIMMONS

But to see those things actually up on that big screen moved me in a way that just reading about them never could. And so many other God-fearing, patriotic white men felt the same way. Why just in the four years since that night on Stone Mountain, the KKK has gone from nothing to becoming the largest fraternity in the South. That's why I'm in California. As the Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan, it's my job to recruit new members.

Now, we've got our hands full with the Darkies back in the South, but out here, I understand you have a Chineese problem. Why I almost fell right outta my chair when I read that almost one in ten Californians are Chinks. What is happening to our great nation? Say, what if you joined our Los Angeles chapter? With your influence, I bet we'd become more popular than the President himself. What do you say, Mr. Griffith?

D.W. GRIFFITH

I...unfortunately, I'm very busy, but...I'll think about it.

SIMMONS

That'd be downright magnificent. You'll always have a place with us, sir.

As SIMMONS excitedly shakes D.W. GRIFFITH's hand, lights out.

Lights up on the waiting room of a movie studio office. JAMES B. LEONG sits, reading a newspaper.

MOON KWAN enters.

MOON

(re: seat next to JAMES)

May I?

JAMES nods. MOON sits. After a beat, MOON extends his hand...

MOON

Moon Kwan. And I'm assuming you are James B. Leong. The receptionist told me we were both up for this job.

JAMES shakes MOON's hand but seems more interested in his newspaper.

MOON

But you shouldn't see me as the competition. I've been told they're hiring two people for this position and considering we're the only two here, I'd say the odds are with us.

JAMES smiles, returns to his newspaper. After a beat...

MOON

Isn't this exciting? An interracial love story and between a Chinese man and a Caucasian woman no less. That's historic. How amazing it'll be if we--

JAMES

Moon, is it? You seem like a nice fellow. Can I offer a friendly piece of advice? Do you have a family?

MOON

Yes, a wife and two boys.

JAMES

That's lovely. But for their sake, keep your mouth shut. If the director asks you a question, just nod and smile. If he asks for your opinion, nod and smile. If he asks you to jump in front of an oncoming train, nod and smile. Understand?

MOON nods and smiles.

JAMES

There. You have it already.

Lights up on D.W. GRIFFITH in his office. JAMES and MOON enter as GRIFFITH scans their resumes.

MOON

Mr. Griffith, it's an honor to meet--

D.W. GRIFFITH

When can you start?

MOON

Aren't you going to interview us? See if we're qualified for the position?

JAMES nudges MOON reminding him not to talk.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Do you know what a motion picture director does?

MOON glances at JAMES and then nods and smiles.

D.W. GRIFFITH

As far as I'm concerned a director's job is simple...be decisive. Which lens do I shoot this scene with? Do I cut to a close up or medium shot? Do I cast the blonde or the brunette? There's no right answer to any of these questions. The director simply decides what is best for his film and that is the correct decision. I've studied your resumes and you both seem perfectly qualified to be the Chinese consultants on my next picture. I don't see any further need to waste my time or yours, do you?

JAMES

Today. We can start today.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Well then, welcome aboard, gentlemen.

MOON

And what is the title of your new movie?

Lights up on LILLIAN GISH speaking
to an o.s. reporter.

LILLIAN

"The Chink and the Child."

Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH, MOON,
and JAMES.

LILLIAN

Well, that's the title of Thomas Burke's original story on
which Mr. Griffith's new picture is based, but of course he's
going to change it.

(after a beat)

Because it's offensive and contrary to what you write to sell
your papers, Mr. Griffith is not and has never been
prejudiced. He is the most open-minded man I have known. To
say that "The Birth of a Nation" is anti-Negro is like saying
that I am against children, as the Negroes were our children,
whom we loved and cared for all our lives.

(after a beat)

I disagree. Have you seen Mr. Griffith's recent picture "The
Greatest Thing in Life"? Then surely you must remember the
scene between Edward and the injured Negro soldier in the
shell hole? Edward cradles the dying Negro who is calling out
for his mother; comforts him in his last seconds. If there is
any better argument against those of you proclaiming he is
against colored people, I can't think of it.

LILLIAN exits and enters D.W.
GRIFFITH's office.

LILLIAN

I can't believe "Birth of a Nation" is still all the press
asks about. I swear, it's as if they're determined to--

D.W. GRIFFITH

(holds up a letter)

What is this?

LILLIAN

Mr. Griffith, sir, you know I have nothing but the utmost respect for your artistry and I would do just about anything you ask, but...I cannot accept the role in your next picture.

D.W. GRIFFITH

So you composed this letter rejecting my offer? You couldn't come to me in person to--

LILLIAN

The girl, Lucy, is 12-years-old in Mr. Burke's book. I am not twelve. I haven't been twelve since...well, a good number of years. The moment the audience sees me playing a child, I'll be a laughingstock.

D.W. GRIFFITH

You are Lillian Gish--the greatest actress working in motion pictures. You are the equal of Duse and Bernhardt. When the audience sees you up on that screen, they will utterly believe you because you will do no less than completely transform into this character.

LILLIAN

I'm flattered you have such a high opinion of my talent but I'm afraid this is one journey that I cannot take with you.

D.W. GRIFFITH betrays no emotion. He crosses to the window and stares out silently. LILLIAN waits for him to say something, but he is mute.

LILLIAN

Mr. Griffith? Sir...?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Enough of this "sir" bullshit! We were lovers! We've fucked for Christsakes!

D.W. GRIFFITH pauses. As quickly and unexpectedly as his outburst appeared, it recedes.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Miss Gish...putting aside the issue of the character's age, which we can simply resolve by making the girl a few years older, are there any additional concerns you have?

LILLIAN

Actually...I do. It's a very violent story.

D.W. GRIFFITH

We have done a number of pictures together with their fair share of violence.

LILLIAN

But the scene where her father beats her and whips her--

D.W. GRIFFITH

A moment of brutality which I shall transform into poetry.

LILLIAN is silent, but there is clearly something on her mind.

D.W. GRIFFITH

What is it, Miss Gish? Spit it out.

LILLIAN

Well...she makes love to a...Chinaman.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Ah! So that's your real concern?

LILLIAN

Oh no, no. Not my concern. But the public's. I don't imagine they would stand for...well, America's sweetheart with an Oriental.

D.W. GRIFFITH

But you wouldn't be making love to an Oriental. You'd be making love to a fellow...broken blossom. A kindred lost spirit. The public will be so moved by our creation that they will not care if he is a Chinaman or a Negro or a man from the moon. And besides...Mary Pickford is America's sweetheart, Miss Gish. Mary Pickford.

LILLIAN

(after a beat)

Well...who would be playing the Chinaman?

Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH and LILLIAN. Lights up on RICHARD BARTHELMESS. He is speaking to an o.s. reporter.

RICHARD

Of course when a director of the caliber of Mr. Griffith asks you to star in his film, it is an honor of the highest order.

You see as an artist, our job is to--how shall I describe it--ah, to feed the truth to an audience that's been starving on lies because to become full on the truth is better than to go hungry on the bed of lies that we sometimes blindly sleep on when we're really looking for food...a solid meal really...and rest...like sleep...and, anyway, the point is Mr. Griffith is a true artist and I could be happier to embark on this journey with him. I mean I could not be happier. Not be happier?

(responding to another question)

Oh, that's a fine question. A very fine question indeed. I am a student of human behavior. I have already spent many hours studying our Chinese friends. For example, have you noticed the way the Chinese walk? It is very different from us. Here, let me demonstrate.

RICHARD walks across the stage--he walks on tip-toes and takes small steps but moves quickly. It's his version of a Chinese walk.

RICHARD

However, when we walk, it is slower and more deliberate.

RICHARD demonstrates.

RICHARD

But with the Chinese people...

Once again, demonstrates his Chinese walk.

RICHARD

I believe this physical difference stems from the fact that we think differently than the Chinese. Here in the West, we are always engaged with our environment. We are present and alive. While with the Chinese, it is as if they are trying to catch up to the future and falling behind. Their minds are racing ahead and they can't help but chase after it even though it is a futile effort. And you see that in the way they walk.

(after a beat)

Oh, by no means am I suggesting I'm an expert on the Chinese. In my constant striving for authenticity, I plan to immerse myself in every aspect of the Chinese culture. To do less would be to do an injustice to this strange but proud people.

MOON enters.

MOON

Are you ready, Mr. Barthelmess?

RICHARD

Please call me Richard. Ready for what?

MOON

Mr. Griffith told me I was to accompany you to Chinatown.

RICHARD

And why would I do that?

MOON

I'm sorry. I thought you discussed this with Mr. Griffith already. He said I was to give you a tour so you could soak in the environment as part of your preparation to play the role of the Chinese man.

RICHARD

Oh. Well, perhaps we can do that another time. I'm dreadfully tired and I'd really prefer to catch up on my rest. I'm sure you understand.

RICHARD exits. A frustrated MOON crosses to JAMES who is shuffling a deck of cards.

JAMES

He's an actor, don't take it personally.

MOON sits. JAMES deals cards.

MOON

Don't you think his behavior is unprofessional?

JAMES

Look at it this way--we save ourselves hours of walking around in the sun with a pretentious ass who can't stop talking about himself, play cards instead, and, hell, still get paid.

MOON

But that's exactly what's bothering me. We shouldn't be paid to play cards. We should be paid to do our jobs--help bring some Chinese authenticity to this picture.

JAMES shakes his head and laughs.

MOON

Why is that funny? Millions of people will see this picture. We have a chance to show the humanity of our people. To show that we are not heathens or celestials.

JAMES laughs harder.

MOON

So this is all a joke to you?

JAMES

Is this your first studio job?

MOON nods yes.

JAMES

Well, I've worked on at least a dozen pictures. And the one thing I can say without hesitation is that no one working on this film gives a rat's ass about Chinese authenticity.

MOON

Then why hire us? Certainly the money going towards our salaries can be better used elsewhere.

JAMES

Good publicity. They can tell the press how they've brought on two Chinamen because they care about portraying the Chinese in a positive light, but it's bullshit.

MOON

So none of this matters to you?

JAMES

Look, I want to be a motion picture director like Mr. Griffith. I plan to learn as much as I can about the craft of filmmaking so I can make my own movies about the Chinese, but none of this "Chink and Child" bullshit. That's why I'm here. To soak in all the knowledge that I can while keeping my mouth shut, and then move on.

MOON laughs.

JAMES

What's so funny?

MOON

An Oriental directing a picture? That'll be the day.

JAMES

We're about to enter a new decade with new opportunities. The 1920s will be exciting, modern, better. Mark my words. The future we've been promised is finally here. And, yes, as an Oriental man I plan on taking full advantage.

MOON

If that's what you really want, don't you see why we should--

D.W. GRIFFITH enters. He is in a panic. JAMES and MOON assume a more "formal" posture.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Boys, boys, I don't know what I'm going to do!

MOON

What is it, Mr. Griffith?

D.W. GRIFFITH

What is it you ask? Well, it seems my leading lady has been stricken with a bout of Spanish influenza.

MOON

Is Miss Gish alright?

D.W. GRIFFITH

No, she is certainly not "alright". How am I going to make my picture with a leading lady who is seconds from death? And worse--looks it. Boys, I don't think I have a choice but to replace her with Miss Dempster.

MOON

Miss Gish's stand-in? I mean Miss Dempster is a very nice lady and a fine actress in her own right, but can she truly replace someone of Miss Gish's stature?

D.W. GRIFFITH

What would you have me do?

MOON

Well, you could push the shoot until she is feeling better.

JAMES immediately knows that is not the right thing to say to D.W. GRIFFITH. He takes a step away from MOON knowing what's about to come.

D.W. GRIFFITH

You're suggesting I, D.W. Griffith, wait for an actress?!

MOON

What I meant to say is she's very talented and--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Let me explain something to you, Mister...

MOON

Kwan.

D.W. GRIFFITH glares at MOON. He didn't like being interrupted.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Well, Mr. Kwan, a true motion picture director waits for many things--the position of the sun to be exactly right for the shot where a thousand soldiers rush into battle, the river to freeze over to the perfect consistency so as to give the illusion that the ice is dancing on the water's surface--but one thing he never, ever waits for is...an actor. Have I made myself clear?

MOON nods.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Good. Now, why are the two of you loitering here anyway? Weren't you supposed to take Mr. Barthelmess on a tour of Chinatown?

MOON

He said he was tired and wanted to reschedule.

JAMES shakes his head. Once again MOON has said the wrong thing.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Actors are like children, Mr. Kwan. They are lazy and stupid and will whine and make excuses. You must be the strict parent who decides what's best for them. Is that understood?

MOON

Yes, sir, I--

But before MOON can finish, D.W. GRIFFITH exits.

JAMES

Well, that was entertaining.

MOON

Why didn't you say anything?

JAMES

'Cause I'm not an idiot? Nod and smile, remember?

JAMES sits and shuffles his cards.

MOON

What are you doing? Mr. Griffith said we have to get Mr. Barthelmess immediately.

JAMES

No, he said you had to get him.

MOON

This is your job too.

JAMES

Well, once we're in Chinatown I'll play the part of the knowledgeable tour guide to the best of my ability, but Mr. Griffith told you specifically to get him to go.

JAMES returns to his cards. MOON crosses to RICHARD's dressing room. RICHARD is taking a nap.

MOON

Mr. Barthelmess?

RICHARD

(stirring)

Is it time to go home already? There's nothing more refreshing than a nap in the middle of the afternoon, wouldn't you agree?

MOON

I've just spoken with Mr. Griffith and--

RICHARD

Marvelous man, isn't he? What an honor to be directed by such a giant.

MOON

Well, Mr. Griffith's very insistent that we take you to Chinatown today. Very insistent.

RICHARD

I see. And if I were to say "no", I'm assuming you would report my insolence to Mr. Griffith?

MOON

I...I mean you're putting me in a very awkward situation.

RICHARD

It's a very simple question--would you report me? Would you rat me out?

MOON stutters; not sure how to respond.

RICHARD

Come out with it, are you a rat?

MOON
Mr. Barthelmess, I don't--

RICHARD
Yes or no?

MOON
It's not that--

RICHARD
Yes or no?

MOON
No...

RICHARD
What? I can't hear--

MOON
No! I wouldn't say anything to Mr. Griffith.

RICHARD starts clapping. MOON is
confused.

RICHARD
That was splendid, Mr. Kwan. Absolutely marvelous.
(off MOON'S reaction)

Oh, I must apologize. I didn't mean anything by that line of
questioning. I simply wanted to study you. You are a Chinese
man, I am playing a Chinese man, I wanted to observe how you--
an actual Chinese man--would react under pressure. Under the
stress of my intense interrogation. And I have learned so
much in just these few seconds of observing you.

(shakes MOON'S hand)
Thank you, my dear man, for bringing me one step closer to
walking in a Chinese man's proverbial shoes. So, off to
Chinatown! Let my transformation continue! Now I was thinking--
seeing how my character falls under the sway of the opium
pipe, perhaps we could visit one of the underground dens of
iniquity I've heard so much about...

RICHARD exits. A still confused
MOON follows.

D.W. GRIFFITH enters. He is
speaking to the o.s. reporter.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Was it a difficult decision? No, not at all. When I heard my
leading lady had contracted Spanish influenza, my only
thought was for her well-being and to postpone the production
until she was fully recovered.

The truth is I can think of no other actress as talented as Miss Lillian Gish and I cannot imagine making this movie with anyone else but her. Oh, and I have decided on a new title for my motion picture..."Broken Blossoms." Beautifully poetic, isn't it?

Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH.
RICHARD, MOON, and JAMES enter.
They are touring Chinatown. RICHARD
is eating a bun.

RICHARD
This is simply delicious. What did you say it was called again?

JAMES
(before MOON can reply)
Cha siu bao. Barbecue pork-filled buns. It originated in the Guangdong region of China.

RICHARD
Cha..."see" *bao.* Amazing. I could eat this everyday and not grow tired of it. Boys, I have to thank you profusely for these past few days. What an education this has been. And to think how ignorant I had been about my Chinese neighbors.

MOON
Well, we're happy we could be of service.

RICHARD notices a make-shift plaque
with Chinese writing on it.

RICHARD
What's this? Can you translate what it says?

MOON
(reading and translating)
"On this spot on October 24, 1871, eighteen Chinese immigrants were killed when a racially-motivated riot broke out..."

RICHARD
Is this true, boys? Why that's...unacceptable. I didn't...why I never even learned about this history...this is an outrage! The fact that eighteen innocent Chinese were murdered for simply being Chinese is bad enough, but the silencing of our history and right in our own backyard...

JAMES
(to MOON)
"Our" history?

RICHARD

Something must be done to correct this injustice. Don't you agree?

(working himself into more of
a frenzy)

Sometimes I'm ashamed to call myself a member of the
Caucasian race! I hope you boys don't hold that against me.
Ah, but you should. You have every right to!

(an idea pops in his head)

I've got it. I know just what to do.

RICHARD exits, followed by a
confused JAMES and MOON.

Lights on LILLIAN sitting in D.W.
GRIFFITH's office. She is pale.
Griffith enters, sees her, and
walks right out. He returns a few
beats later holding a surgical mask
and puts it down in front of
LILLIAN. She puts it on.

LILLIAN

I can assure you that the doctor cleared me for--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Still, one can't be too careful. The government is projecting
that half a million Americans will die from this pandemic. I
do not plan on being one of them.

LILLIAN says something but the mask
garbles her words.

D.W. GRIFFITH

What was that?

LILLIAN

(enunciating)

Thank you for waiting for me. For delaying the shoot.

D.W. GRIFFITH

I don't know why I did considering you didn't want to do this
picture in the first place. We start rehearsals on Monday, I
expect you to be in perfect health by then.

LILLIAN nods. D.W. GRIFFITH turns
to his work expecting LILLIAN to
leave, but she doesn't.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Was there something else, Miss Gish?

LILLIAN

Yes...if you'll indulge me.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Don't I always?

LILLIAN

When I was sick, there was a moment where...you see, I was very ill and I...well, I thought I might not make it. And I lay there wondering--would I get the chance to act in another movie? To walk onto another set? To once again hear the loveliest word that an actress can ever know the pleasure of hearing--"action"?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Is there a point to your soliloquy, Miss Gish?

LILLIAN

What I'm trying to say is this is the only life I know. And you have been a significant part of that life and...well, I'm very happy to be back.

D.W. GRIFFITH

(genuinely moved)

I know, Lillian. Now will there be anything else?

LILLIAN shakes her head.

D.W. GRIFFITH

(back to his stern persona)

Good. Then I shall see you on Monday for rehearsal.

LILLIAN is about to take off her mask.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Miss Gish, please keep the mask on while you're in the studio.

LILLIAN nods and exits. Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH.

Lights on MOON and JAMES.

RICHARD (OFFSTAGE)

I'll be right out, boys!

RICHARD enters in full stereotypical "Oriental" garb--the clothes, cap, and "yellow face."

RICHARD

(in Chinese accent)

"Ah, it is such pleasure to meet honorable Mr. Kwan and honorable Mr. Leong."

RICHARD bows. Incredulous, MOON and JAMES don't know what else to do but bow in return.

RICHARD

What do you think? Because of your tutelage, I have been able to fully make the transformation to embody the body and soul of the misunderstood Oriental. This is what I was referring to back in Chinatown--by breathing life to this yellow man, I will strike a blow against the injustices that the Chinese in America have endured. And what a blow it will be. I know I'm only one man, but as a motion picture star, my performance can truly make a difference, don't you think?

JAMES

Yes. A huge difference.

MOON can't help staring at RICHARD's face with its exaggerated "slanted" Asian eyes. RICHARD notices.

RICHARD

Ah, you're wondering how I changed my facial features to make them more Asiatic. Unlike my good friend Lon Chaney who resorts to make-up and prosthetics to create a character, I felt a simpler solution would better suffice.

RICHARD lifts up his cap to reveal a large rubber band wrapped around his head. It is tight and stretched which pulls his facial features slightly upward giving him the illusion of "slanted" eyes.

RICHARD

Rubber band. I've used it to stretch my eyes back. That's all I need. I can build the rest of the character through my performance now that I have all the tools the two of you have been kind enough to provide me with.

MOON and JAMES are clearly aghast at what they're seeing and hearing.

RICHARD

Now, I know there's still more work to be done and I won't be resting on my laurels, I can assure you of that.

I was thinking what I might do this evening is stay in costume and pay a visit to Chinatown. Blend in with the locals.

MOON

Uh...

JAMES

Well, I don't know if that's such a good idea.

RICHARD

Oh? Why not?

JAMES

Well...because...Moon?

MOON

Because...it would ruin the surprise. If you went out in full costume now, the public would see you. Perhaps your picture would end up in the papers. And that would ruin the experience for your fans who desire nothing more than to see your amazing transformation with fresh eyes on the silver screen. Think of the joy and the...the...

JAMES

Elation...

MOON

Elation...you would be denying them if you let them see you this way before that magical moment in the darkened theater.

RICHARD

Yes, yes, you are absolutely right. I can't do that to my adoring public now, can I? I must keep my character under wraps until the moment of revelation in that dark theater. Thank you, boys, for looking out for me. Oh, where would I be without your guidance?

RICHARD exits.

JAMES

Probably hanging from a noose in a Chinatown back alley.

MOON

That was a close one. You don't think he's going to change his mind later and--

JAMES

It's five o'clock, Friday. If he wants to venture out into Chinatown looking like that over the weekend, it's not our problem.

MOON

Wait. My wife wanted to know if you could join us for supper on Sunday. She knows you're a bachelor and, well, she figures you must miss a decent home-cooked Chinese meal.

JAMES

That...that sounds lovely. Thank you for the invite.

MOON

It's my wife who insisted.

JAMES

Then I'll be sure to thank her in person on Sunday.

Lights out on JAMES and MOON.

The Movie Screen re-appears and "The Birth of a Nation" KKK scene once again plays. An inebriated D.W. GRIFFITH watches while drinking his whiskey.

D.W. GRIFFITH

"This film is aggressively vicious and defamatory. It is spiritual assassination. It degrades the censors that passed it and the white race that endures it." Is that so, New Republic?! You want "vicious"? You want "defamatory"? How about some real "degradation"?

D.W. GRIFFITH unzips his pants and urinates in the direction of the screen.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Now, get down on your hands and knees and clean up my piss, you New Republic assholes! No, lick it up. Lick up every last drop! You should be honored. There's more creativity in one drop of my urine than there is in your whole being, you New Republic pricks! My piss is the elixir of life. Hell, I should take a shit right here on the carpet and make you eat it so you can taste true creativity.

D.W. GRIFFITH turns off the projector. The film stops. He picks up the phone and dials.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Yes, operator, I'd like to place a person-to-person call. Tremont one-eight-nine-three. Thank you.

We hear the phone ring on the other end. O.S. LILLIAN answers.

LILLIAN (OFFSTAGE)

Hello? You've reached Lillian Gish...Hello?...Is anyone there?...Hello?

D.W. GRIFFITH doesn't speak so
LILLIAN hangs up. We hear the dial
tone as the line goes dead. But
D.W. GRIFFITH continues cradling
his phone.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Lillian...

Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH.

Spot on a bar. James nurses a
drink. A few stools down, Gilda
sits, enjoying her drink.

JAMES

(to o.s. bartender)

Another beer, barkeep.

(re: Gilda)

And another drink for the young lady, whatever she's having.

GILDA

Thanks, but I can buy my own drinks.

JAMES

(slides closer to GILDA)

James B. Leong at your service. And you are?

GILDA

Not interested.

JAMES

How about a toast?

GILDA

What part of "not interested" don't you understand?

JAMES

(lifts his glass)

To "good luck and health", how can anyone say no to that?

GILDA

Fine. To good luck and health.

They clink their glasses and down
their drinks.

GILDA

Well, I wish I could say it was a pleasure. Good night.

JAMES

You're leaving already?

GILDA

It's late.

JAMES

Is there a "Mr. Not Interested" waiting at home?

GILDA

(chuckles at JAMES' joke)

No, I am what the papers call a modern single woman.

JAMES

In that case, there's something I'd love to show you that I think a modern single woman will find utterly fascinating.

GILDA

If I had a nickel for every time some guy said something like that to me, well, I wouldn't be drinking in a dive like this.

JAMES

I promise I am nothing if not a gentleman.

GILDA

Said Jack the Ripper to his victims.

JAMES

Hear me out. What if I told you I can transport you three-thousand years into the past?

GILDA

And here I thought I heard 'em all. That's a new one.

JAMES

You can't tell me you're not intrigued by the opportunity to travel back in time?

GILDA is curious. But she takes a beat, deciding if she can trust JAMES or not. Then...

GILDA

Gilda. My name is Gilda Brown.

JAMES smiles. Lights out on the bar.

Lights up on the still standing
outdoor Babylon set from D.W.
GRIFFITH's film "Intolerance".
JAMES and GILDA enter.

GILDA
(impressed)

Well, you did promise to transport me into the past and I
have to admit you're not a complete liar.

JAMES
We are standing in the middle of the ancient Babylon set from
director D.W. Griffith's motion picture "Intolerance". The
most expensive and elaborate film location ever constructed.
Look at those walls, three hundred feet tall. And the
details...the elephant statues, you can almost see the
wrinkles on their skin.

GILDA
I don't think there were elephants in Babylon. But it's
impressive nonetheless. So how did you know this was here,
and right on the corner of Sunset and Hollywood? I live just
a few blocks away and had no idea.

JAMES
I work for Mr. Griffith.

GILDA
Wow, so I'm in the company of a Hollywood luminary?

JAMES
Not yet. But when I become famous, you can say you knew me
when. What about you? What's your story?

GILDA
Until a couple of months ago, I was a nurse in a small town
in Idaho you've probably never heard of.

JAMES
Don't tell me, you moved out here to be a movie star. Isn't
that what pretty girls from Idaho do?

GILDA
I'm hardly pretty.

JAMES
You kidding? You're gorgeous. You look like Gloria Swanson.
If you wanted to be in the pictures, you'd be a big star.

GILDA
Sorry. I'd rather be a prostitute.

JAMES

(chuckles)

Fair enough. But if you ever change your mind, I'm happy to introduce you to some people.

GILDA

Spoken like a pimp.

(off JAMES' reactions)

I'm sorry, that was uncalled for. My brother often reminds me that I should act more "lady-like". I've been trying to heed his advice. "Trying" being the operative word.

JAMES

Apology accepted. So why'd you move to California then?

GILDA

My big brother Matthew and his wife lost their youngest to the flu. And just two months after Matthew returned from fighting in the Great War.

JAMES

I am so sorry. That must have been horrible.

GILDA

When the city reopened their schools back in December, they said it was perfectly safe for the children to return to their classrooms. But a few weeks later, Matthew Jr. and three of his classmates fell ill. Two days later, he passed away and right before Christmas. I moved out here to help out my brother and his family. Speaking of which, I better get back before my brother sends the police out looking for me.

JAMES

I'll walk you home.

GILDA

Oh, no need.

JAMES

It's no bother.

GILDA

I appreciate your chivalry but the truth is, my brother's probably drunk like he is most nights. He was fighting with my sister-in-law earlier, that's why I left the house, to get away from that. It'd already be a scandal if he knew I went out drinking alone, a respectable lady just wouldn't do that, you see. But if he were to also see me...with you, well...

JAMES

I understand. He wouldn't want his chaste all-American sister defiled by an Oriental mongol.

GILDA

I wouldn't quite put it that way, but...yes.

JAMES

And you? Do you feel the same?

GILDA

Of course not! My brother may be prejudiced, but that has nothing to do with me.

JAMES

Then prove it. Let me take you out next Friday night.

GILDA

(thinks about it)

Alright, James, but I expect nothing less than a steak dinner with all the fixings. And dancing. I haven't been dancing since I moved to Los Angeles and I miss it terribly.

JAMES

Steak and dancing it is. Only the best for my girl.

GILDA

Your girl? We'll see about that.

JAMES smiles. Lights out.

Spot on MOON preparing a drink in his home. JAMES enters. MOON hands him a whiskey.

JAMES

I can't remember the last time I had a meal that good. You're a lucky man to be married to a woman with such culinary skills. And your children--they're adorable. Your youngest Cecil, how old is he?

MOON

Exactly four months come Thursday. What about you? Marriage in the cards?

JAMES

Once I find success as a director, I might consider settling down. Just last night I met this girl--so beautiful. Looked exactly like Gloria Swanson. I'm taking her out next Friday.

MOON

She's Caucasian?

JAMES

Don't look surprised, it's not my first time. Hey, as long as her overprotective brother doesn't find out...

MOON

Well, if you do become a famous director, I suppose anything's possible including marrying a Caucasian lady.

JAMES

(passionate)

"If"? It's "when", my friend. I'm already planning my first motion picture and it's going to be set in China and feature real Oriental actors, none of this "Richard Barthelmess pulling back his eyes with a rubber band" bullshit.

MOON

I can drink to that!

They toast.

MOON

James...can I ask you something? When you talk about your movie, you're so...passionate.

JAMES

And you find that odd? Should I be insulted?

MOON

No, I didn't mean it that way. It's just a different side of you that, frankly, I wish I'd see more often. When we're working on Mr. Griffith's picture, well, sometimes you don't seem to care.

JAMES

I don't. Not really. Look, I care in so much as I can apply what I learn from a talented director like Mr. Griffith to my own picture, but that's it.

MOON

I understand. But I suppose what's odd to me is why you can't care about both your picture and Mr. Griffith's?

JAMES

You think anything we do makes a difference?

MOON

Yes, without a doubt. Take Mr. Barthelmess for instance. I feel we've earned his trust. I think he would listen to us if we had more notes on how to make his character more Chinese.

JAMES

Moon, if I thought any of these people would actually listen to us, I mean really listen to us, I'd be the first to give a damn.

MOON

See, I don't think you believe that. Someone as passionate as you are about making an authentic Chinese picture can't feel that way. We can help improve things for our people.

JAMES

Was I ever as naive as you?

(MOON looks hurt)

Ah hell, what do I know? What do any of us know? Well, I do know I'm drunk and I should be going. It's late and we do start shooting "The Chink and the Child" bright and early tomorrow.

MOON

"Broken Blossoms." Mr. Griffith changed the title.

JAMES

"Chink and the Child", "Broken Blossoms", it's all the same to me.

Lights down on JAMES and MOON.

Spot on D.W. GRIFFITH.

D.W. GRIFFITH

In many ways, this will be my most intimate picture. Some may even say this is a small picture compared to my previous efforts. But they would be wrong.

Spot on LILLIAN and RICHARD in costume. RICHARD chastely tends to a wounded LILLIAN. They are acting out a scene from the film. JAMES and MOON observe from the wings.

D.W. GRIFFITH

"Broken Blossoms" is as epic as anything I've ever done. But it is a different sort of epic--an epic of the heart. The emotions these characters are experiencing are as big and expansive as the charge at the Siege of Petersburg in "The Birth of a Nation." This will be unlike any D.W. Griffith picture you've seen before. And...I've no doubt that this will be my enduring masterpiece.

As RICHARD leans in to kiss
LILLIAN...

D.W. GRIFFITH

Cut! What are you doing, Mr. Barthelmess?

RICHARD

I was about to kiss her.

D.W. GRIFFITH

You know we can't do that.

RICHARD

Sorry, Mr. Griffith, I forgot. I guess I got caught up in the moment.

JAMES appears disturbed about this exchange.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Let's call it a day. I'll see everyone at eight am tomorrow. Miss Gish, may I have a quick word?

LILLIAN

Of course.

JAMES looks like he has something to say to D.W. GRIFFITH, but he exits along with RICHARD and MOON.

D.W. GRIFFITH

I wanted to inform you that we've had to rearrange our schedule. We will be shooting the closet scene tomorrow so please prepare accordingly.

LILLIAN

It was my understanding we were saving that scene for last.

D.W. GRIFFITH

That was the original intent. But Mr. Crisp, whom I have cast as your father, is directing a picture of his own in just over a week so we have to move his scenes up earlier.

LILLIAN

But...I was expecting more time to prepare before--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Unfortunately, it is beyond my control. I hope this will not be an issue.

LILLIAN

No...no issue at all.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Splendid. I've always appreciated your professionalism.

LILLIAN exits, but looks concerned.

Light on JAMES and MOON preparing to leave for the day. JAMES still looks troubled. D.W. GRIFFITH crosses to them.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Oh boys, we're making adjustments to the shooting schedule. We'll start with the closet scene tomorrow but as soon as we've completed that, we will move to the scenes in Mr. Barthlemess' flat. But the current set dressing, it doesn't feel right. It's not sufficiently...Chinese. Wouldn't you agree?

MOON nods and smiles.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Here's what I need you boys to do, find and purchase items--decorative pieces, knick knacks--we can place on the set that will give it a more...authentic feel. Have everything ready by the time we finish shooting the closet scene.

MOON nods and smiles again. But as D.W. GRIFFITH is about to leave--

JAMES

Mr. Griffith, sir, if I may...I was curious about the scene you just shot...wouldn't it be possible for Mr. Barthelmess' character to kiss the waif? That feels like it would be the natural climax to the scene.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Mr. Leong, you know we would never be allowed to--

JAMES

I understand, but isn't this different? After all, Mr. Barthelmess isn't a real Chinese man. He's a Caucasian playing a Chinese so wouldn't the anti-miscegenation laws not apply in this case?

D.W. GRIFFITH

I don't think the American public would see it that way.

JAMES

Still, I think an artistic argument could be made to...

D.W. GRIFFITH

More importantly, I wouldn't see it that way.

JAMES

Yes, of course. I'm sorry I brought it up.

D.W. GRIFFITH exits.

MOON

As a friend may I offer you some advice? Just "nod and smile".

MOON laughs. JAMES is about to reply to MOON's dig, but then decides to shake it off and act as if the exchange with D.W. GRIFFITH didn't happen.

JAMES

Well, you heard the man. I'll hold down the fort while you go on your shopping excursion.

MOON

Wait, why am I the one who has to do the shopping?

JAMES

First of all, you have a better eye for these things than I do. But more importantly, you can't expect me to leave the set when Mr. Griffith is directing the most important scene in the movie. Think of all I can learn by observing a master at work. As my friend, I would think you would be the first to support such an opportunity for me.

MOON

No, you're right, of course. I'd be happy to do the shopping while you..."observe".

JAMES

Come on, Moon, show a little more enthusiasm.

MOON smiles and nods, then gives JAMES the finger.

JAMES

Now that's more like it. Oh, and pick up a few of those Chinese lanterns. One thing I know Americans love are Chinese lanterns.

MOON exits.

Spot on the closet set. It is small and claustrophobic--LILLIAN barely fits in there.

D.W. GRIFFITH and LILLIAN (in costume) enter. JAMES observes unobtrusively.

D.W. GRIFFITH
(to LILLIAN)

So your abusive father has just discovered that you have been cavorting with what he sees as this heathen yellow man and he is livid. When you're hiding in the closet, the audience must believe that you fear for your very life. That your father will do nothing short of murdering you and the only thing between you and him is the flimsy closet door that can give way at any second.

LILLIAN
When will Mr. Crisp be on set?

D.W. GRIFFITH
He's off today. He'll be in tomorrow to shoot his angles. Today is all about you. I will personally stand in for Mr. Crisp and play your father.

LILLIAN doesn't like the sound of that, but she nods.

D.W. GRIFFITH
(to o.s. cameraman)
Mr. Bitzer, are we ready to go?

D.W. GRIFFITH signals to LILLIAN. She steps into the closet, clutching her character's doll.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Alright, places everybody!

D.W. GRIFFITH watches as LILLIAN carefully slips into character.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Roll camera. And...action!
(to LILLIAN)
You've run into the closet and you can hear your father outside--banging on the door, screaming like a wild beast!

LILLIAN acts accordingly. JAMES watches with interest.

D.W. GRIFFITH

He's threatening you! If he breaks down that door, you know he will kill you! All you can do is pray for salvation, beg your father not to hurt you.

LILLIAN

Daddy! Please, it's not what you think!

D.W. GRIFFITH

Good. Explain to him that it's all a misunderstanding. Nothing happened between you and the Chinaman.

LILLIAN

Please. Daddy, please stop. If you'd only give me a chance--

D.W. GRIFFITH

I don't believe you're begging for your life.

LILLIAN

Please stop! Think of what you're doing!

D.W. GRIFFITH

I said--I don't believe you. Make me believe.

LILLIAN

No, daddy, no! They'll hang you!

D.W. GRIFFITH

Cut! Cut!

LILLIAN stops. She knows that D.W. GRIFFITH isn't happy.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Mr. Bitzer, can we do something about her backlight? It needs to be softer. Let's re-set and go again.

As they re-set for the next take,
spot on opposite side of the stage.
MOON is returning to the studio
with a bag full of Chinese props.
He runs into an o.s. group of MEN
who block his way.

MOON

Excuse me, gentlemen.

MOON tries to walk around the men,
but they won't let him.

MOON

Sorry, but I'm terribly late and if you'd just let me pass...

This scene should play concurrently with the closet scene in the studio--the theatrical equivalent of the signature cross-cutting in GRIFFITH's films.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Are we ready to try another take?

(to LILLIAN; ominously)

Whatever happens, do not stop until I call "cut". Understood?

LILLIAN nervously nods.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Roll camera and...action.

LILLIAN begins the scene.

The o.s. men knock the bag out of MOON's hands.

MOON

Please don't do that.

MOON bends down to pick up the spilled items.

D.W. GRIFFITH

(to LILLIAN)

You've been bad. You've been a naughty little girl. You have defiled yourself with a goddamn Chink! You know what that makes you, Miss Gish? A dirty whore! A no good, dirty whore!

At first, LILLIAN is shocked by D.W. GRIFFITH's words, but she reacts to it and doesn't break character.

James is still mesmerized by the scene, but he flinches when he hears D.W. GRIFFITH'S repeated use of the word "chink".

D.W. GRIFFITH

Of all things, a goddamn heathen Chink!

One of the men kicks MOON and sends him falling back.

MOON

Please, stop!

LILLIAN

Stop, daddy, stop!

D.W. GRIFFITH

I'm going to kill you! I'm going to throttle you with my hands until every last breath of life is knocked out of you! Because that is all a chink-loving whore like you deserves!

MOON is punched in the face.

LILLIAN

Please...

MOON

Please...

While the men continue to beat MOON, D.W. GRIFFITH grabs an ax and crosses to the closet door. Without warning, he starts smashing the door with the ax.

LILLIAN screams, clutches her doll tighter. Her fear is real.

D.W. GRIFFITH

(swinging the ax)

You're unclean! Unclean! And you must pay for that!

LILLIAN

No, daddy, it's not what you think! It's not what you think!

LILLIAN

Stop!

MOON

Stop!

D.W. GRIFFITH smashes through the closet door with the ax. LILLIAN lets out a final ear-piercing scream. He stands above her with the ax--a threatening sight.

MOON lies motionless on the ground. He's been badly beaten and left for dead.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Cut!

D.W. GRIFFITH drops the ax. The crew breaks out in thunderous applause. They know they've just witnessed something transcendent.

JAMES knows this too, but he can't shake his discomfort.

D.W. GRIFFITH knows he's captured magic. He takes off his coat and drapes it tenderly over the still shaking LILLIAN.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Get her maid, Mr. Bitzer, and that will be all for today.

Lights out on LILLIAN, D.W. GRIFFITH and JAMES.

Spot on the unconscious and battered MOON. Lights out on MOON.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

ON RISE: A SONG that would have been popular in 1961 plays (i.e. PERCY FAITH's "A THEME FROM A SUMMER PLACE")

JAMES, now 40 years older, sits talking to an o.s. interviewer.

JAMES

Oh yes, I remember that night well. It's been over forty years since we shot that scene, but it's as fresh in my mind as if it were yesterday. When Miss Lillian Gish was cowering in that closet--that was not acting. That was real. I've never seen anything like it and as you know, I've acted in over 80 motion pictures. Her screams were so loud and convincing that the neighbors called the police. They thought a woman was actually being murdered.

(chuckles)

The way Mr. Griffith got that performance out of her...well, it was unorthodox, but what I learned that night is there is no such thing as an unorthodox directing technique if it gets the results you need. After that experience, I was even more inspired to make my own movie. And I did a few years later: "Lotus Blossom". The title was my tribute to "Broken Blossoms".

(after a beat)

I was wondering when you'd get to that question. Yes, yes, it's true. It was during the shooting of "Broken Blossoms" when Mr. Kwan was severely beaten. This Caucasian fellow was upset that his sister had gotten involved with some Oriental man. He got drunk with his friends and...well, Moon--Mr. Kwan--was the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

(after a beat)

The studio covered up the incident. And those men were never identified, much less charged for their crime. I'm surprised you even knew about it. No one's ever asked me about that before.

Back to 1919. Spot on MOON in a hospital bed.

JAMES

I did visit him in the hospital. But he was unconscious. I don't think he knew I was there.

JAMES crosses to MOON and transforms back to his younger self.

GILDA enters. She is in her nurse's uniform and has a black eye which JAMES doesn't notice at first.

GILDA

How is he?

JAMES

Doctors don't know yet.

GILDA

I've asked my supervisor to transfer me to this floor. That way I can look in on your friend.

JAMES

You don't need to do that.

GILDA

No, I do.

GILDA looks around to make sure they are alone. That's when JAMES notices her black eye.

JAMES

Your eye...what happened? Are you...

GILDA

I'm OK. I am. When I got home from work last night, my brother was drunk. Well, that wasn't unusual, but his knuckles were bloody and torn. He had been in a fight. And when I saw the look on his face...I knew he had found out about us. He was angry. I've never seen him so angry. He...

JAMES reaches out to comfort GILDA.

GILDA

But I was more terrified for you. Of what I thought he had done. To you. I ran all the way back to the hospital. Imagine my relief when I saw it wasn't you. Look, I'm sorry about what happened to your friend. I really am and I promise I will make sure he gets the best care possible. But...it wasn't until last night when I thought you were...well, it wasn't until then that I realized...I want to be with you, James.

JAMES

Be with me? And what does that mean? Are you willing to turn your back on your brother for good? Or were you thinking you'd just keep lying to your family so your unhinged brother doesn't kill you or me?

GILDA

That's not fair. You know what Matthew's been going through. I can't just abandon him now--

JAMES

He almost killed my friend. And it looks like he did quite a number on you too. That's fair?

GILDA

James, you have every right to be upset, but I also know you feel as I do. We'll make this work somehow. Together.

JAMES

There were no witnesses to Moon's actual beating. No suspects or leads. No one knows anything. But you...

GILDA

(understands what JAMES is asking her)

No, don't...what Matthew did was more than awful, but I can't turn him in. He's already been through hell. He's already suffering so much. Isn't that punishment enough?

JAMES

(disappointed)

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. "Blood is thicker than water"--isn't that what they say?

GILDA

James, please...

GILDA reaches out for JAMES, but he pulls away.

JAMES

I wish you well, Gilda. I genuinely do.

GILDA knows there's nothing else to do or say. She turns to leave, but stops at the door.

GILDA

Are...are you going to report my brother to the police?

JAMES

Why? They'd never believe a Chinaman.

GILDA exits.

Lights out on the hospital. Lights up on D.W.

GRIFFITH, who is reading a newspaper in his office. JAMES crosses to him.

JAMES

You wanted to see me, sir?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Yes, would you like a drink?

JAMES shakes his head.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Nonsense. I'm about to have one and I never drink alone so I must insist. I was just reading in the paper that thanks to those good-for-nothing boshers in Congress, Prohibition will soon be the law of the land. So let's enjoy our refreshing, little vice while we still can.

D.W. GRIFFITH pours two drinks.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Have you heard there's been rioting in our nation's capitol? For the past three days and nights, Negroes and whites have been killing each other in the streets and the President had to call in the army to restore order. The newspapers are already labeling this the Red Summer, with more bloody violence predicted all across the country. Between these race riots, the Great War, and the global pandemic, I think history grew tired of being left behind and decided to run right past us altogether. So I say we need a drink now more than ever. Cheers.

D.W. GRIFFITH hands JAMES his drink.

JAMES

Cheers. Thank you.

D.W. GRIFFITH

But even with the state of the world, I can't seem to care about anything except my picture, my future. Does that make me shallow and vain? Narcissistic maybe?

(off JAMES' reaction)

Oh, don't look so worried. I don't expect a reply. So...how is Mr. Kwan?

JAMES

Not well. But he's expected to...survive.

D.W. GRIFFITH

It's just terrible what those hooligans did to him. Have the police found the men responsible yet?

(JAMES shakes his head)

That's unfortunate. But this incident has opened my eyes to how important my film is. I cannot help but think--if "Broken Blossoms" had already been completed and these hooligans had watched it, would things have turned out differently for Mr. Kwan? Would they have been able to see his humanity instead of seeing just a soulless Chinaman? I'm going to complete this picture in honor of Mr. Kwan and all the other Mr. Kwans who have suffered a similar racial injustice.

JAMES

I'm sure he would appreciate that.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Yes, and that is also why we must not breathe a word of this incident to anyone.

(off JAMES' confused expression)

Only a few at the studio know what happened to Mr. Kwan. Most of those working on this picture, including Miss Gish and Mr. Barthelmess, have no knowledge of the truth. All they were told was that Mr. Kwan found employment elsewhere and had to leave unexpectedly.

JAMES

Mr. Griffith, I'm afraid I don't understand. Wouldn't it be to our benefit to tell the truth? Like you said, what happened to Moon validates the very message you're trying to convey in "Broken Blossoms." It will bring a relevancy to your picture that--

D.W. GRIFFITH

I understand that. But...I do not wish to exploit a real tragedy to sell a few extra tickets. I'm sure you understand.

JAMES

Mr. Griffith...I mean...

D.W. GRIFFITH

Do you have a problem with my decision?

JAMES

It's just...Moon deserves better, doesn't he?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Do you have a problem?

JAMES

No...no problem.

D.W. GRIFFITH returns to his work.
This conversation is over.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Please give my sincerest regards to Mr. Kwan's family.

Lights out on D.W. GRIFFITH.

JAMES
(to o.s. interviewer)
That was bullshit of course. D.W. Griffith was as much a showman as an artist. He would exploit a tragedy--real or imagined--at the drop of a hat if he felt it would help sell tickets. No, he was afraid. Afraid the negative publicity would taint the picture. He knew if moviegoers learned what happened to Moon...that wouldn't be good for business.

(after a beat)
Well, the production continued. I felt bad for Miss Gish though. The closet scene set the tone for the rest of the shoot. Her character was constantly being beaten and abused--both emotionally and physically. And the way Mr. Griffith pushed her--it was as if he wanted Miss Gish to personally experience every second of her character's pain.

Spot on D.W. GRIFFITH and LILLIAN
(in costume). They are shooting the scene where LILLIAN's father forces her to smile against her will.
JAMES watches.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Let's try it again, Miss Gish. Remember you have no reason to smile, but you know you must or your drunken father will beat you again. Still it is the hardest thing you can do in the moment--you are broken and wish nothing more than to lay down and leave this cruel world behind. Do it again.

LILLIAN tries to smile "in character".

D.W. GRIFFITH
Cut! No, that's still not right.

LILLIAN
Mr. Griffith, we've been at this one shot all day. If you would only tell me exactly what it is you want, I will do it.

D.W. GRIFFITH
Miss Gish, what I want is for you to do this next take better. What I want is for you to do it right. Is that clear?

LILLIAN nods. She seems as tired
and worn as her character.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Now, I understand that it's late but no one is going home
until we get this shot. It's all on you, Miss Gish. Shall we
go again?

LILLIAN nods.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Roll camera and...action!

LILLIAN starts acting.

D.W. GRIFFITH

What the hell is that, Miss Gish? That is the smile of a
schoolgirl on holiday, not the smile of a waif who has been
kicked to the curb by life. Where is her heartbreak?

LILLIAN smiles again.

D.W. GRIFFITH

No, Miss Gish, show me her pain! I want to see her pain!

LILLIAN smiles again.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Her pain, goddamnit!

LILLIAN smiles again. Still
unhappy, D.W. GRIFFITH crosses to
LILLIAN, puts his hands on her
face, and pushes up the corners of
her mouth with his index and middle
fingers to form a smile.

D.W. GRIFFITH

That's what I want! That's not too hard for a thespian of
your stature, is it? Now, do it!

LILLIAN doesn't do anything. She
seems completely demoralized.

D.W. GRIFFITH

We're all waiting, Miss Gish. What's the problem?

LILLIAN doesn't respond.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Miss Gish? I am quickly running out of patience.

Finally, she looks up at D.W. GRIFFITH and the camera.

She puts her two fingers to her mouth and pushes up the corners to force a smile just as D.W. GRIFFITH did to her--perfectly recreating the famous shot that will eventually appear in the movie.

D.W. GRIFFITH is impressed. This is what he was waiting for.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Cut. I believe we can call it a day.

D.W. GRIFFITH approaches LILLIAN, but she gives him such a look of anger and defiance that he stops. She turns her back to him and exits. Lights out on the surprised D.W. GRIFFITH.

JAMES

(to o.s. interviewer)

As for Mr. Barthelmess...

RICHARD enters in costume.

RICHARD

I just don't understand it. I considered Moon to be a friend.

JAMES

He was very fond of you as well.

RICHARD

Then how could he just leave without a word? Without even saying good-bye? Those are not the actions of a friend.

JAMES

The job offer came suddenly. He had to take it right away or risk losing it.

RICHARD

How difficult is it to send a telegram? A simple "good-bye, it was lovely working with you." I suppose you never really know people the way you think you do. Still, it is disappointing. I believed Moon to be a man of true character.

RICHARD heads for the exit.

JAMES

Wait...please don't tell Mr. Griffith that I said this, but Moon didn't leave because of another job. It was...well...

RICHARD

What is it? Spit it out!

JAMES

He was beaten by a group of hooligans. Very badly beaten--he is in the hospital.

RICHARD

What? How did this happen?

JAMES

They attacked him because he was Chinese. They were upset for one reason or another at some other Chinese fellow and chose to take out their frustrations on Moon.

RICHARD

This...this is outrageous! The studio lied? Made up a story about a non-existent job?

JAMES

They didn't want the negative publicity. But please...you cannot tell anyone you know. I gave my word that I wouldn't speak about it.

RICHARD

Of course. Thank you for confiding in me, James.

RICHARD exits.

Spot on the unconscious MOON in his hospital bed.

JAMES

(to o.s. interviewer)

I think he went straight to the hospital. Didn't even take off his costume or make-up which must have been quite a sight. You can say what you want about Richard Barthelmess, but even if the rest of his body had no clue where it was, his heart was always in the right place.

RICHARD, still in costume, is at MOON's bedside.

RICHARD

I don't know if you can hear me, my friend, but I am here. Forgive me if I'm overrun by emotion. You have come to be like...like a brother to me. Which is why it is so difficult to see you like this.

I wish there was something I could do to...Damn it, I hate feeling so helpless!

(after a beat)

As God is my witness, I make this vow to you--a promise to bring life to my character in a way that will make you proud. I will do no less than give the performance of my life and it will be dedicated to you, my friend.

Lights out on MOON. RICHARD crosses to a table and sits. He lifts a cup of tea to his mouth, then puts the cup back down on the table.

RICHARD

I don't feel I'm doing that right.

JAMES enters.

JAMES

I'm not seeing what the problem is.

RICHARD

This. Everything. If I can't even believably lift a cup of tea to my lips as a Chinaman would, how can I be expected to do justice to the rest of my performance?

JAMES

It looked fine to me.

RICHARD

Don't flatter me, James. I want--need you to be honest with me. Brutally honest. Please, show me how to do this.

JAMES

Show you how to drink a cup of tea?

RICHARD

Yes, please.

JAMES sits. RICHARD observes him intently. JAMES is not exactly sure what to do. He carefully takes the cup in both hands and lifts it slowly up to his mouth.

RICHARD applauds.

RICHARD

Brilliant! It's that authenticity I'm missing. What am I doing wrong? What is it that my feeble Caucasian mind cannot grasp?

JAMES

I'm not sure I know how to answer that.

RICHARD

Yes, yes, of course, it's more of an ethereal quality that can't be verbalized...tell me everything you were thinking and feeling as you lifted that cup of tea to your lips?

JAMES

I...I suppose I was thinking of what I should be doing to best help you. I guess I just wanted to show you what you wanted to see.

RICHARD

Yes...yes, that is it. Why didn't I think of that? To the Chinese, even the simple act of drinking a cup of tea is a performance, isn't it? It's not for myself that I am drinking this tea, it's sharing the beauty of the act of drinking tea with the others around me which informs my actions. You are indeed a genius, James.

(shakes JAMES' hand)

Thank you so much for this incredible insight. I feel like you have just given me a peek inside the soul of this man.

RICHARD exits.

CECIL (OFFSTAGE)

Bullshit.

CECIL KWAN enters with a notepad.
He is the o.s. interviewer JAMES
has been speaking with.

JAMES

Excuse me?

CECIL

Your story--it has to be bullshit. By most accounts, Richard Barthelmess wasn't the most...motivated of actors. He clocked in, did his job, and clocked out as early as it was possible for him to do so. But according to you, he was the first method actor, the Marlon Brando of his day, so committed to his role as a Chinese man.

JAMES

You were what--just a few months old at the time of these events? I think I know what happened better than you--I was there, after all.

CECIL

Mr. Leong, I'm not questioning your... I just find it hard to believe that...I mean I've seen "Broken Blossoms" numerous times and if Richard Barthelmess and D.W. Griffith were intending to paint an accurate picture of a Chinese man, well, they have severely missed the mark.

JAMES

Cecil--may I call you Cecil? You have to understand that it was a different time. It's easy to look back on a film forty years later and find it lacking by contemporary standards, but this was the first picture Hollywood produced that showed an interracial love story in a favorable light. People all over America were seeing an Oriental man and a Caucasian woman as romantic leads--still a rare occurrence.

CECIL

I'd hardly call them romantic leads. They don't even share as much as a chaste kiss. And Richard Barthelmess is as far from Chinese as can be.

JAMES

Are you arguing that we've come so far since then? Wasn't "Breakfast at Tiffany's" just released earlier this year? Is Mickey Rooney's absurd comic portrayal of a Japanese man such an advancement? But that just begs the question, why have you gone to the trouble to seek me out? I doubt it was to engage in a philosophical debate on the history of Orientals in the movies.

CECIL

No. I came to you to talk about my father.

JAMES

Moon was a good man. But I didn't see him again after my visit to the hospital. Frankly, I didn't know him that well. We spent all of three weeks working on the picture together before...I don't know what else I could tell you about him.

CECIL pulls out a weathered journal.

CECIL

This belonged to my father. It was his journal. I didn't even know he kept one. I found it under his mattress as I was cleaning out his belongings. Working on "Broken Blossoms", being beaten and hospitalized, there's so much in here that I was ignorant about. Neither my father or mother ever told my brother or I any of this.

JAMES

So now that both your parents have passed away, you want to uncover the truth?

CECIL

Once I read my father's journal, I immediately set out to research more. I looked at everything I could find that had any relevance to the subject and while there was plenty written about the likes of D.W. Griffith, Lillian Gish, Richard Barthelmess, and Donald Crisp, there was not a single mention of my father.

JAMES

As I said, the studio covered up the incident.

CECIL

I'm not even talking about the incident, I'm talking about any proof that he even worked on the film--that he was even there.

JAMES

That's just the way things were back then. No one kept records of anything.

CECIL

There's no mention of you either. I only learned about you, about the movie you directed, and all the acting work you did because my father wrote about you in his journal. He saw every picture you had anything to do with. Despite what you did to him, he was always supportive, until the day he died.

JAMES

What I did to him? What do you mean by that?

CECIL

Come on, Mr. Leong, isn't that the reason you never visited my father again? Guilt. If it weren't for you, he wouldn't have ended up--

JAMES

That's not true! What are you--

CECIL

Look, I didn't come here to argue with you.

JAMES

Making unfounded accusations is a funny way of doing that.

CECIL

Unfounded? You know, what I personally don't understand is how my father went out of his way not to place any blame on you for what happened.

In fact, he was disappointed and sad that his friend--you--never came to see him, never replied to any of his correspondences. He thought he must've done something to offend you. He thought he was the one at fault.

(leaves the journal for
JAMES)

Here. Read for yourself.

JAMES

I don't want that.

CECIL

Throw it away. Burn it if you want. But it's yours. Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Leong. It's been...educational.

CECIL exits.

JAMES stares at the journal. He reaches for it, but decides not to pick it up.

JAMES

I didn't...I didn't do anything.

Spot on LILLIAN in her dressing room. She is crying. JAMES notices and crosses to her.

JAMES

Miss Gish? Are you alright?

LILLIAN nods. JAMES hands her a handkerchief. She takes it and wipes her tears.

LILLIAN

Thank you, Mister...

JAMES

Leong. But please call me James.

LILLIAN

Then you must call me Lillian.

JAMES

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to intrude. I'll get out of--

LILLIAN

It's quite alright, James. Actually, would you mind sitting with me? I could use some company.

JAMES

Sure. If that's what you want.

LILLIAN

(hands JAMES his
handkerchief)

Here, thank you.

JAMES

No, please, keep it.

LILLIAN

You're too kind, James. I'm sorry you have to see me like this. I'm normally not...

JAMES

You don't need to explain, Miss Gish.

LILLIAN

Remember--it's Lillian. And I'm sure it's been obvious to anyone on this production that this shoot has been...difficult for me. I'm afraid it's made me uncharacteristically emotional.

JAMES

But your performance has been...magnificent. I already know that this will be your finest work.

LILLIAN

You are a kind soul. Can you tell me again what your job is? I'm ashamed to say I don't even know that.

JAMES

No need to be ashamed. I'm the Chinese consultant. I mostly advise Mr. Griffith and Mr. Barthelmess to make sure the Chinese elements in the picture are as accurate as possible.

LILLIAN

And are we doing a fair job of it?

JAMES

Well, I know everyone is doing the best they can.

LILLIAN

I hope so. This is a very important picture for Mr. Griffith. I certainly want to give the best performance I can for his sake. I'm sure I'm not the only one here who owes a debt to Mr. Griffith.

JAMES

I've learned so much from watching him direct. Especially observing the two of you film the closet scene.

What you did there was transcendent. I was positive I was stuck in a Limehouse closet with a young girl fearing for her very life.

LILLIAN

James, if you don't stop flattering me...well, I don't know what I'll do.

JAMES

I'm sorry Miss Gi--Lillian, it's just...an honor to be able to work with such an accomplished actress as yourself. When I direct my own picture, I hope I'm lucky enough to collaborate with actors who possess half your talent.

LILLIAN

You have plans to direct?

JAMES nods.

LILLIAN

I've no doubt you'll be a fine director. If you show the same amount of sensitivity and compassion with your actors as you're doing with me...

A beat. LILLIAN leans in to JAMES. She kisses him. JAMES is surprised and pulls back.

JAMES

I should be going.

LILLIAN

There's no need to be afraid, James. It's just a kiss.

She smiles. He leans in and kisses her. It's cautious at first but quickly turns passionate. Lights out.

Lights up on D.W. GRIFFITH drinking whiskey and watching a cut of a scene from his film. ON SCREEN: The completed closet scene from "Broken Blossoms" which cross cuts from LILLIAN in the closet hiding from her angry father with RICHARD (in Chinese mode) rushing to save her.

JAMES enters.

JAMES

Your secretary said you wanted to see me, Mr. Griffith?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Come in. Hard to believe we'll be done with the shoot in just a few days. I can't remember the last time I shot a picture so quickly. Here, join me in a drink.

D.W. GRIFFITH prepares a drink for
JAMES and himself.

JAMES

Well, from what I can see so far, you have all the makings of a masterpiece.

D.W. GRIFFITH

I hope you're right. I'm not too proud to admit I need a hit. Such a fickle business. You can deliver one successful picture after another, but a single flop and suddenly your career is hanging on a string. Suddenly, everyone thinks they know better than you. Did I mention Mr. Adolf Zukor, the head of the studio, watched the first cut of "Broken Blossoms" last night? He claimed it was the worst thing he had ever seen--the work of a degenerate hack obsessed with exotic, race pictures. Said no one would pay to see something this depressing where everyone dies at the end. He was adamant the film will never be released unless I submit to a long list of his notes.

JAMES

So what did you say?

D.W. GRIFFITH

I told him to fuck off, of course. Then, I used my life savings to buy back my picture. This is my baby. And God knows I am not going to let that cheap Jew boshier or anyone else tell me what I should or shouldn't do. No, "Broken Blossoms" will be the first movie my new studio, United Artists, distributes.

(off JAMES' reaction)

What you must think of me, Mr. Leong? Are you wondering if I've gone mad? Or maybe you suspected I was a certifiable lunatic all along? What say you? You can be honest with me.

JAMES

Mr. Griffith, sir...well, I believe a man is only a man if he stands up for his principles. There's nothing mad about that.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Hmm... but enough about my woes, I trust everything is well with you?

JAMES

Yes, sir.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Good. And by all accounts you have done a splendid job here, especially considering the unpleasant circumstances with Mr. Kwan. You are well-liked and a hard worker. Which makes what I'm about to do...unpleasant. Unfortunately, I have to let you go, Mr. Leong. You have until the afternoon to clear out your belongings.

(off JAMES' confusion)

I know about your indiscretion with Miss Gish. That is clearly a violation of her morality clause and if word got out, her career would be in jeopardy.

JAMES

I'm so sorry, Mr. Griffith, I won't--

D.W. GRIFFITH

There is nothing to say, Mr. Leong, unless you can tell me I am wrong and no such indiscretion occurred.

(JAMES is silent)

Yes, well, I have already spoken with Miss Gish and she is deeply ashamed. Apparently you took advantage of her during a moment of...vulnerability and...she has already put the incident behind her. As far as the world knows, it never happened. I'm sure you agree with that?

JAMES nods.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Very well. It was a pleasure working with you, Mr. Leong.

D.W. GRIFFITH extends his hand.

JAMES shakes it. JAMES exits.

Lights out.

The older JAMES crosses to his chair and reads MOON's journal.

Lights up on MOON in his hospital bed. He rises and crosses to JAMES.

MOON

You acted in over 80 pictures. That's really impressive.

JAMES

It was easier to find work in front of the camera than behind. Everyone needs an Oriental in their film at some point. You really saw all of my movies?

MOON

I have. And the picture you directed too, "Lotus Blossom". You said you'd do it and you did. It was...inspiring.

JAMES

I read your journal. Your son Cecil was kind enough to leave it with me.

MOON

How is he?

JAMES

He seems like a good boy.

MOON

Oh? You didn't find him a little...abrasive?

JAMES

Well, now that you mention it...

JAMES and MOON share a chuckle.

JAMES

You never told him? About what happened.

MOON

I always felt that some things are better left...unsaid. Why burden our children with our problems?

D.W. GRIFFITH, RICHARD, and LILLIAN enter. They take various positions on stage.

D.W. GRIFFITH steps forward to speak to an o.s. reporter. Photo bulbs go off.

D.W. GRIFFITH

"A masterpiece in moving pictures." That's what the New York Times said about "Broken Blossoms". "Without an exception, it was conceded to be an artistic masterpiece." Variety. It was the first picture released by my studio United Artists, made on a budget of just \$80,000, and grossed \$1 million in the first six months alone. The movie business was on shaky ground because of the pandemic, theaters all across America shut down, no one knew if the industry would ever rebound. But the success of "Broken Blossoms" heralded the dawn of a new age in Hollywood. A Golden Age.

LILLIAN steps forward. Photo bulbs go off.

LILLIAN

Though I was initially reluctant to take the role, it was the best part I ever had and my favorite picture.

RICHARD steps forward. Photo bulbs.

RICHARD

Of course I'm immensely proud. Now, can someone point me in the direction of the buffet?

D.W. GRIFFITH, LILLIAN, and RICHARD
strike a happy pose for the
cameras. Lights out on them.

MOON

I saw the movie. In fact, it was the first one I went to after I got out of the hospital. Despite everything, I have to say I enjoyed it. What did you think?

JAMES

I never saw it.

MOON

What? Still to this day, you never--

JAMES

It would be like seeing an ex-lover you just want to forget.
(after a beat)

I am sorry, Moon. About...everything. About what happened to you.

MOON

So you did know?

JAMES

Even before Gilda confirmed it, I knew. When I heard the men who attacked you were waiting outside the studio to get even with the Chinaman who had defiled one of their sisters, I figured it was supposed to be me, not you.

MOON

Gilda...the girl who looked like Gloria Swanson. I guess you were right about her overprotective brother.

JAMES

I meant to visit you when you got out of the hospital but--

MOON

James, you don't have to...Cecil was correct, I don't blame you for any of this. I tried to make that clear in the letters and telegrams I sent.

JAMES

I suppose the great novelists got it right--you can try to run away from your past, but it always catches up to you, doesn't it? What a ridiculous cliché life is.

(after a beat)

You know, I worked with Mr. Griffith again. Ironically, it was also on "Broken Blossoms" and he was directing. A remake of the original--some fifteen or so years later. I was hired to play one of the Chinese extras.

D.W. GRIFFITH enters. He is drunk and looks dishevelled. JAMES crosses to him.

JAMES

Mr. Griffith, it is so good to see you again.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Yes, yes, I'm sorry, I can't place--

JAMES

James B. Leong. I worked on the original "Broken Blossoms" with you. I was the Chinese consultant.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Oh, yes, of course. It is good to make your acquaintance again, Mr. Leong. Very good. Excuse me, but I'm very busy as you can see.

D.W. GRIFFITH crosses the stage and paces nervously.

JAMES

A couple of days after that, while in a drunken state, he became violent and almost killed the lead actress while acting out the closet scene with her. Several of the crew had to pull him off her and restrain him until he sobered up. He was fired of course. I was passing his office as he was packing to leave the studio. He was on the phone with Miss Gish. I overheard their conversation.

D.W. GRIFFITH picks up a phone and dials.

Lights up on LILLIAN who answers her phone.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Lillian...

LILLIAN

Mr. Griffith? I'm...it's been a long time.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Too long, my dear. How are you?

LILLIAN

I'm well. Is everything OK?

D.W. GRIFFITH

Yes, in fact, I have some wonderful news to share with you. I am directing a new version of "Broken Blossoms". And this one will be even better than what we did before. Everyone considers that a masterpiece, but I know I can top it. And I want you to be at my side. Can you imagine the headlines-- Griffith and Gish collaborating together again for the first time in 15 years on a remake of their greatest picture.

LILLIAN

I...I'm flattered that you would ask, Mr. Griffith, but...I'm forty-years-old. It was a stretch to play a twelve-year-old girl back in 1919, but now it's impossible.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Nonsense. Nothing is impossible for a brilliant actress such as yourself and with me in the director's chair. We can make magic again.

LILLIAN

You know if there was any way for me to help you, I would. I owe you my career, Mr. Griffith, but I can't. I'm sorry, but I don't think I could go back even if I wanted to. The past is the past.

D.W. GRIFFITH

You ungrateful whore. How dare you turn me down? I made you, you little bitch! Before me, you were just an unsophisticated hick who didn't know the difference between a soup spoon and a salad fork! I gave you everything!

LILLIAN

I'm really sorry. I need to--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Wait, don't--please, Lillian, I need you to do this for me. I need you. Without you, they're going to...please. Please.

LILLIAN

I'm sorry. Good-bye.

LILLIAN hangs up. Lights down on her. D.W. GRIFFITH cradles his phone.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Lillian...

Finally, he looks up and locks eyes
with the eavesdropping JAMES.
Lights down on D.W. GRIFFITH.

JAMES

Yes, life really is a cliché. He was just a shell of the man he used to be. This man who was once a titan. This man who had practically invented cinema. Now drunk, destitute, fired from a pale imitation of a picture that he had originally turned into an enduring work of art. It was a pathetic sight. I felt embarrassed. Embarrassed and...ashamed.

MOON

Ashamed?

JAMES

Yes, because...seeing what Mr. Griffith had become reminded me...that I once had dreams of my own. But here I was, working on another version of "Broken Blossoms" where yet another Caucasian man was playing the Chinese lead. And this time, I was little more than an extra sitting in the corner of the frame, fighting for a few seconds of screen time. I could've been replaced by any Chinaman off the street. I was just as disposable as Mr. Griffith apparently was. Up until then, I had forgotten all about "Broken Blossoms", erased it from my memory, but, in the end, it still found me.

MOON

You shouldn't be so tough on yourself. You accomplished more than any other Chinese I know.

JAMES

But what did that amount to in the end? Your son said so himself--I'm not even a footnote in history.

Sound of a projector. On screen, a scene from "Broken Blossoms" with Richard Barthelmess and Lillian Gish. JAMES turns away refusing to watch the scene.

JAMES

(re: the scene on screen)

And that is all people remember. That is our true legacy, my friend. Turn it off.

RICHARD and LILLIAN step off the screen in character as the on-screen scene ends.

RICHARD

(Chinese accent)

"Ah so, why are you ignoring me, honorable James?"

JAMES

Enough! Drop the act already!

RICHARD

"Act? I'm as real and authentic in my own way as you are. Admit it, James, when you look upon this face, there's something...familiar about it, isn't there?"

JAMES

No. There's nothing familiar about you. You mean nothing to me.

D.W. GRIFFITH enters.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Then, direct him, Mr. Leong, make him mean something to you.

JAMES

What?

D.W. GRIFFITH

You claim to be a director, direct him. If you do not like the character before you, mold him to fit your vision. That's what a director does. Mr. Barthelmess, will you take your position next to Miss Gish?

RICHARD and LILLIAN stand together
and wait for direction.

D.W. GRIFFITH

Go ahead, Mr. Leong, direct.

JAMES

I can't just--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Let me help you by setting the scene. Miss Gish is the waif who has been abused by her drunken father. Mr. Barthelmess the yellow man who is an outcast in his adopted Western home. Two broken blossoms who have finally found each other. Here is your chance. Show me how it should be done.

A beat, then JAMES crosses to the
two actors.

JAMES

(to RICHARD)

Tell her...tell her she will be alright. Tell her that you will protect her and take care of her.

RICHARD

(to LILLIAN)

"Ah, honorable young miss, I..."

JAMES

No, not like that. Talk to her like a real human being.

RICHARD stares at JAMES--he's not sure what he's asking him to do.

JAMES

Why did you come here from China? There must have been a reason why you left your home to travel this far?

RICHARD

"Yes, I...I want to share the honorable teachings of my Chinese ancestors with the rest of the world."

JAMES

OK, but why?

RICHARD

"The West knows nothing of Eastern philosophy. I can teach it to them."

JAMES

I understand that, but why is that important to you?

RICHARD

"Because...because that philosophy is...beautiful."

JAMES

Now we're getting somewhere. Go on.

RICHARD

"Because it teaches us...that we are not alone in this world. None of us are."

(to LILLIAN; his accent disappearing as he talks)

Each of us may be damaged and...broken, but we can be made whole again. And love is the glue that can mend our fractured souls. It is said that being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage. But I never truly understood what those words meant until now. Until this moment. With you. Two broken blossoms who finally have the chance to be fixed. To be healed.

RICHARD'S performance is genuine and there is real chemistry between him and LILLIAN as they stare into each other's eyes.

JAMES

Now...kiss her.

No response.

JAMES

I said, kiss her. What's wrong?

RICHARD

I...I...

(reverts to Chinese stereotype)

"Ah, no can do."

RICHARD chastely bows to LILLIAN and the two separate.

JAMES

I'm the director, you have to do what I say.

LILLIAN

Mr. Leong, it's just that we find your direction to be...quite difficult to execute.

JAMES

I just want you two to kiss, how difficult can that be?

LILLIAN

Well, we...

JAMES

(to D.W. GRIFFITH)

You said this was my vision. That I could mold their characters and--

D.W. GRIFFITH

There are limits to what even a talented director can do. Even with my experience, I can't force a scene to work if it is fundamentally flawed. What you are asking of your actors must still be organic.

JAMES

They were sharing a tender connection. What could be more organic in that moment than a kiss?

LILLIAN

James, you of all people should understand the potential consequences of a kiss.

RICHARD

"Ah yes, it would be very wrong. Very, very wrong."

JAMES crosses to RICHARD.

JAMES

Go back there and kiss her.

RICHARD

"So sorry."

JAMES

Goddamn it, don't give me that bullshit, kiss her!

RICHARD

"So very, very sorry."

JAMES

I'm the director, this is my vision! Now, do it!

RICHARD

"Very sorry."

JAMES

Kiss her, you goddamn chink!

JAMES physically attacks RICHARD.

LILLIAN

What are you--

D.W. GRIFFITH

Mr. Leong, you must stop!

LILLIAN

Please...you're hurting him!

But JAMES ignores them, perhaps doesn't even hear them. He beats RICHARD severely. Even when RICHARD is curled up on the ground, JAMES continues to kick him violently.

MOON

Don't you think that's enough?

JAMES stops, catches his breath.

JAMES

I'm sorry, Moon. Cecil was right, it was my fault. It should've been me instead of you. It should've been me.

MOON

No. It shouldn't have been anyone.

On the big screen, the scene from "Broken Blossoms" where her father forces LILLIAN to smile plays. (*The scene plays over and over in a loop.*)

RICHARD stands and dusts himself off while JAMES looks up to the screen.

D.W. GRIFFITH

See? It's not so bad is it, Mr. Leong?

LILLIAN

It was the best part I ever had.

RICHARD

Ah, my favorite scene in the picture. Well, my favorite scene that didn't feature me of course.

Everyone watches the scene in silence for a few beats.

JAMES

It is beautiful...in its own way.

RICHARD

Now, that's the spirit. Let's toast to that.

D.W. GRIFFITH

It was my masterpiece.

LILLIAN

The best part I ever had.

MOON

You have nothing to be sorry about.

D.W. GRIFFITH

So smile, Mr. Leong.

RICHARD

Yes, smile, my friend. Do it for old times sake.

JAMES tries to smile, but his heart's not in it.

D.W. GRIFFITH

You can surely do better than that.

LILLIAN

Like this.

LILLIAN uses her fingers to push her mouth into a smile like she did in "Broken Blossoms".

D.W. GRIFFITH and RICHARD also use their fingers to push their mouths into smiles to demonstrate. Even MOON joins them.

Finally, JAMES uses his fingers to do the same.

Everyone applauds.

Lights out on everyone except JAMES. He is alone on stage, still holding his smile.

The scene now playing on the screen is of a different moment from the film when LILLIAN uses her fingers to force herself to smile--the one that happens right before she dies. It plays in SLOW MOTION, but still on a loop. This gives it an otherworldly, eerie quality.

Lights slowly fade on JAMES. Once he is gone, all we are left with is the haunting scene from "Broken Blossoms", repeating over and over--a distorted, ghostly image from the past.

Lights out.

END OF PLAY