

# "SHADOW CURE"

A Mary Margaret Park Original

Co-Produced by: **Sekrett Scilence**

## **"SHADOW CURE"**

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For “*Jessica*” and “*Samuel*” -- and for “*Sekh*”, who inspired and taught me to believe again.



# Acknowledgement

In memory of “Pat Morita”, “Victor Wong”, and “Mako”, whose performances have inspired us to become masters of ourselves and our lives \*



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## Part I

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**S**he needed a new heart -- Xiu's coughing grew louder as the night progressed, harsh and rattling, like an old radiator. In the next room, her brother Lao felt lost in her failing health. He tossed and turned, burrowing further underneath the covers, trying to block out her struggling breaths. He heard his Father Lei's footsteps outside the door and relief washed over him -- Once his Father was with Xiu, he knew she'd be alright. Their Father went into Xiu's room; her lips were ashen - Alarmed, Lei rushed to his daughter and pulled her up into a sitting position, thumping her back to help loosen her clogged breathing. Xiu's chest hitched, and when her breathing settled down into a more normal rhythm, he lowered her carefully back on the bed, making sure she was propped up with enough pillows. His heart ached for the suffering she was going through, his mind seethed at the insurance company for not helping them finance a new heart, an impossible feat for this modest family of four, for his precious girl - After seeing to his daughter, Lei decided to head toward Lao's room. He knocked twice before entering, "Lao, are you sleeping?" Lao burrowed deeper into his covers then looked to his Father, "No. I stay awake, making sure she takes another breath." "You need to rest; she's peaceful now." Lei's weary eyes washed over with relief, "She's lucky to have a big brother like you; now go to sleep." Lao sighed, resigning to his Father's wishes, trying to push thoughts of his sister from his mind. Listening to her rattling coughs was like having a death march in the next room. Finally, her coughing fell silent and soon, he was fast asleep.

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Lao joined his Mother at the breakfast table. His Father had already left for work and Xiu was in her room drawing. He'd eaten a bowl of cereal to keep his stomach tamed before school, "Lao, did you hear back from Mr. Jameson about the filing work?" "He didn't hire me Mom."

Terri narrowed her eyes, looking to her son in disbelief, “Why not? You’re perfect for the job.”

“Well, he heard from his son Gary about the trouble I had with Mr. Miller at school, said he didn’t think I was suited, but Mom, I don’t think it has anything to do with skill, more like he doesn’t trust the troubled Asian kid, at least that’s what I think.”

“Your reputation precedes you.” Terri exhaled deeply, “I guess, doesn’t matter, you’ll find another job.”

Lao grabbed his book-bag, giving his Mom a kiss on the cheek as he headed out the door. As he hurried toward the bus-stop, he became care-free. When he arrived, his friend Johnny-O was there, “Hey Chino, what’s up?”

“Oh, you know, just left your Mom’s house.”

Johnny-O cracked a smile, “Oh yeah? She didn’t mention it.”

The two broke into laughter and Johnny grew serious for a moment, “How’s Xiu?”

“She had a bad night.”

“Well, but she’s okay though, right?” Johnny nodded, “At least for now?”

“Not really.” Lao shook his head, “But until she gets a new heart, I couldn’t say anyway.”

Johnny patted Lao on the back, “Hey man, I care about her too, so don’t feel bad that I asked.” he averted his eyes self consciously, “I just don’t get many chances to ask you about her.”

Lao bowed his head, a faint smile playing over his lips - The bus lumbered up, extending a red stop sign; the boys quickly hopped aboard.

Lao sat in his chemistry class and doodled on his notebook. Mr. Walters frowned in his direction, “Lao, is the equation on the board oxidation or reduction?”

“Misdirection...?”

The room filled with laughter - Mr. Walters laughed along but quickly grew serious, “Lao, oxidation or reduction?”

Lao paused thoughtfully, hoping to recall the answer from his jumbled thoughts, “Reduction.”

“Good job.”

Mr. Walters continued with the day's lesson -- The bell cut sharply through the room, "You're not paying attention." Mr. Walters called out to Lao, "I know you know what we're doing but where are you?" "I dunno'." Lao sheepishly grinned.

"Well, I think you do."

"Things are just tough right now." Lao admitted, chagrined.

"Hang in there." Mr. Walters concluded, acknowledging Lao's hesitance to discuss his problems, "Things are bound to get better. Until then, know that I'm here if you ever need someone to talk to, okay?"

Lao nodded gratefully then headed off for his last class of the day.

Johnny and Lao rode in the back of the bus when they headed home, bouncing along as it pitched and yawed over the uneven roadway, "Hey, I've gotta' tell you, I was talking to Hector, and he said there's a fight tonight, we gotta' go."

Lao looked to Johnny incredulous, "Who'd Hector piss off now?"

"Not Hector." Johnny shook his head, "It's a pit-fight, at that old clothing factory in the barrio."

Lao shrugged his shoulders, "Why the sudden interest?"

Johnny smoothed a strand of hair from his forehead, "I dunno', just thought it'd be cool to place a bet, maybe win some money?"

"You're crazy. Besides, the money's in the fighting and you're no fighter."

The bus pulled to a stop and the boys swayed to a stand, "The fights at seven; are we on?"

Lao scrambled down the steps, hopping onto the sidewalk, "I'll see you at seven." he shouted back over his shoulder.

Lao entered the house; the curtains were drawn, which gave the room a cave-like feel. He heard Xiu fighting for air in the next room so he placed his book-bag by the front door and cut through the shadows towards her room. His Father's voice floated out from the shadows.

Lei sounded weary. Lao could hear reluctant tears straining at the edges of his Father's voice, "The appeal has come back from our insurance company. We've lost. They won't pay for Xiu's new heart."

Lao placed his hands on his Father's shoulders, "Then we'll find another way."

A tear slipped down Lei's cheek as he sank further into the couch, suddenly feeling very small, "Your Mom has contacted the church and they have assured us they'll help, but even that won't be enough to raise the money in time. I don't know what to do."

He gulped before resigning to his worst fears, "Oh God Lao, we've got to save her."

Lao sunk into the couch alongside his father, "How's she doing, really?"

Lei casted his eyes downward, "Not good. Her heart is failing. The doctor said he won't be able to increase her medicine much longer. The fluid filling her lungs happens because her heart isn't functioning properly. Eventually she'll drown. There's little else that they can do short of transplanting a new heart, and time is running out. For now, the best thing you can do is pray."

Lao tensed up and balled his hands into fists, "No Dad, I'm not giving up, there's got to be a way to raise more money, there just has to."

As if in answer, Xiu's coughing grew more severe, then rattled to a wheezy stop, Lao ran into her room in time to see her gasping for breath. Her lips had taken on a dusty purple shade while her eyes glazed with tears.

"Xiu, you okay?"

The tiny girl looked to her brother and her eyes transformed from weary to defiant as she raised herself up on her elbows, "I'm fine, just couldn't catch my breath for a minute. Hey, want to play checkers?"

Lao ruffled her shiny black hair, thinking of how fragile she looked. His heart stuttered, attempting to dive into despair, but he stopped the feeling short, "Sure kid, you're on."

They could only play one game of checkers because sitting up had become difficult for Xiu. She captured the last piece triumphantly, "I'm so tired, gotta' rest, will you play with me later?" she asked in a wheezy, tired voice.

Lao nodded, reaching out to hug her - Xiu's tiny frame was all ribs and little else, "Love you. Sweet dreams." he said quietly - Her lashes had already fluttered closed as he eased his way from the room. He was overcome with his love for her, suddenly swept away by profound sadness.

Lao and Johnny set out for the fight over at the old clothing factory. There was a pleasant breeze blowing, but as they grew closer to their destination, the brownstones crowding the streets stifled it into submission. Soon, the boys were covered in sweat. They walked along the streets as only the young and unhurried did. The light drained from the sky; the streetlights popped on with a low unpleasant hum. The sidewalks were bathed in a yellow haze; halo's of bugs fluttered around each lamppost. They'd crossed over into the old industrial district.

Residences gave way to old businesses and run-down factories, many of them boarded up, vouching of unpleasant emptiness. The further they traveled...the more desolate and desperate the neighborhoods became - The streets and sidewalks were increasingly dotted with debris; visual comings and goings of the drug dealers and prostitutes, "I don't think this was such a good idea." Lao turned to Johnny.

"Don't worry. When I was a kid, I lived in a neighborhood just like this." Johnny said, attempting to seem more confident than he felt, "Besides, we're almost there."

## "THE PIT"

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A smattering of cars lined the streets ahead; Lao's first thought was that there must be a party nearby, but the old clothing factory was just one block up. He soon realized that the cars belonged to eager spectators.

The building's entrance was blocked by a burly black-man; his eyes narrowed at the sight of the two boys, until Johnny mentioned his friend Hector.

**Reluctantly**, he let them through.

They were surprised at how spacious it was inside. The interior was bathed in dim lighting with splashes of neon spiraling down onto the raging crowd. In the center of the factory floor was the pit; simply a large open expanse with a line of chalk drawn around it. The crowd was gearing up for the fight, so the boys had to shout in order to be heard. Within all of the excitement, Lao found a new spring in his step; they surveyed the crowd for Hector. Johnny

motioned swiftly towards a makeshift bar in the corner, "Odelay, you made it, you guys know the routine?"

"I've heard but I only got twenty bucks, you still let us stay?" Johnny replied.

Hector puffed his chest like a peacock, "Is it safe to say that you two have 50 between you?"

Johnny looked to Lao, "Yeah, we're good."

"Cool." Hector relaxed, "Just so you guys remember, next time, if you're here to bet, they start at 50, and it's best to get here early if you want a stake." he popped his neck then looked back at them, "So, who do you want to put your money on?"

Lao looked over at the two men preparing to fight. One of them was a short-squat Hispanic man, his upper body thick with muscle, the other was a tall Caucasian; his bulky upper body looked out of place on his thin legs.

Lao stood thoughtful, "Which one of them carries the odds tonight?"

Hector stroked his chin, "Esta Latino aya, he usually fights pretty good, but whitey is a monster in most of his matches, even when he loses, so it's rare but, tonight is kind of up in the air. I say it's a good night for a first bet, so take your pick."

Lao handed a wad of money to Johnny, "I hope we win."

"You pick."

Lao studied the two fighters, pulling his mind into another zone, "I'd bet on the Latino any day of the week."

The PA system screeched on; an old man wearing a bowler hat entered the pit, "Fighting in the green trunks, weighing in at two-hundred, ten pounds, the white fright, Sean O' Grady..."

Applause and booing erupted as the announcer's excitement rose, "And his opponent, wearing the white trunks, weighing in at one-hundred, seventy pounds, is this city's very own; change your face with my fist, Pedro Rodriguez..."

The crowd swelled with renewed cheers and the bout began.

The white fighter comes out slow and off balance, his gait awkward. The Latino is a flurry of punches and power as he jabs and lands several kicks to Sean's kidneys -- O' Grady staggers, then plows forward, slicing Pedro with a lightening quick kick in the guts. The crowd oh's and ahs as Rodriguez falters, gasping for air.

Fast & furious, he lands a solid upper cut upon Sean's jaw. Johnny and Lao watch the fight, entranced by the raw action. Blood pours from a cut on Sean's cheek, bathing his front in red; Rodriguez lands each punch that follows. Blood and sweat scatter into the air. Lao can feel a fine mist settling onto his skin. He cheers for Pedro with renewed vigor; Rodriguez lands another disabling punch - O' Grady falls to his knees; Pedro grabs him, slamming him down onto the floor.

**A gout of blood** *squirts* from Sean's nose.

Johnny turns to Lao, taking note of his friend's fascination, "He's gonna' kill him man."

Lao spikes his fist into the air, "Pedro, Pedro, Pedro."

The Latino hammers the white fright's head into the concrete once more and the crowd grows uncertain; a sickening blanket of expectation tethers the air.

O' Grady is no more than a slack-slab of meat; he's lost consciousness.

Pedro pulls up off of his opponent, raising his arms in a victory stance.

Lao goes wild, "We won Johnny; we won." jumping up and down as he celebrates.

As the boys made their way over to the pay-out cages, Lao repeatedly slapped Johnny on the back. He collected a huge wad of cash and waved it ceremoniously under his nose, "Ah, the smell of money." then raised his arm into the air in a triumphant wave.

"Okay, chill already." Johnny nodded, "It's time to go home."

Lao looked over to the pit, "Just a minute." disappearing into the sea of people.

The announcer was in an animated conversation with several Mob looking gentlemen. They were all muscle and one of them had a gash that ran from his nose to his jaw; the scar was a fat and twisted mess. Lao waited patiently for a moment with him, finally taking advantage of a lull in the conversation, "How would I get in on a fight?"

He assessed Lao for a moment, "Fights open to everybody, so when you're ready, go see the handler."

The announcer pointed to a slab of a man over by the betting cages then slid back to his conversation. Lao asked the handler several questions then worked his way back through the crowd towards Johnny. He returned wearing a huge smile. He slapped his friend on the back once more, "Let's go."

Lao couldn't contain his excitement, "I spoke with the announcer; he told me that the fights are open to anyone who is willing. I asked the handler what the purse runs and he said it varies, but usually between 5 and 10 thousand, with the big fights bringing upwards of 25 thousand. How 'bout that my friend?"

Taken aback, Johnny said nothing.

The city's streets had taken on a hushed tone, and the buildings looming on either side made them feel closed in, like they'd entered some strange sinister maze. Johnny tried telling Lao how creepy it seemed, but he was oblivious, chattering excitedly the whole journey home. Lao didn't grow still until he dropped Johnny home. As he headed back towards his house, his excitement drained.

By the time he opened the front door, he was draped in a blanket of melancholy quiet. He checked on Xiu - The moonlight fell over her unlined brow. She was sleeping peacefully. He leaned down and placed a kiss upon her forehead, overcome by his love for her once again.

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The excerpt you've just experienced is from a larger work titled, "**Shadow Cure**" -- Written by Mary Margaret Park (and co-produced by Sekret Scilensce), the full-length production consists of seven parts total - Follow the links above to learn more (or to make direct contact with the authors).

**Thanks** *for* reading!

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