

*It is Washington Square Park, New York City on Sunday afternoons in July and August 2007. There is a park bench facing the audience. The stage is bare of any other reference to setting. Lighting should change as characters do to underline the shift between past and present. Music should also be used to reinforce this time shift. I have included stage directions as a general guide because the roller-blading and time shifts require careful choreography.*

*(Eugene is sitting on the bench, his chessboard open and the pieces in position suggesting a game is ongoing. He glances up from the board looking for someone, gets up and moves down stage searching for his chess partner. He returns to the bench. Vanessa, who is just learning, roller-blades across the stage just as Eugene gets up again, she loses control as she approaches him and falls as music fades.)*

EUGENE Did you hurt yourself?

VANESSA No way.

*(Eugene offers his hand to help her get up.)*

EUGENE Maybe you should sit and make sure nothing's broken.

*(Vanessa refuses his hand as she gets up and sits on the bench, a little distrustful of his intentions.)*

VANESSA I'm like OK. My sock keeps sliding down and getting lumped up under my foot and it throws me off.

EUGENE It wouldn't have happened if you looked where you were going.

VANESSA Me? You're the one that got up without looking.

EUGENE On a Sunday afternoon in the park I should be able to stand up without worrying about teenagers on skates.

VANESSA Roller Blades!

EUGENE It's the same thing.

VANESSA Blades are much faster.

EUGENE There in lies the problem.

*(Vanessa removes her roller-blade and pulls up her sock.)*

When I was a kid we used to roller skate but we just had these metal skates that you clamped to your shoes.

VANESSA Ah hu.

*(Vanessa continues busily putting her roller-blade back on.)*

EUGENE Not like these things, they're practically molded to your feet, man and machine becoming one.

VANESSA I'm like—a girl.

EUGENE My reference was purely generic.

VANESSA Or geriatric.

EUGENE That remark was—

VANESSA I'll fix my skate and be out of here.

EUGENE I am not elderly and you just said skate.

VANESSA I did not.

EUGENE They're essentially skates but everything today is designed to make life go faster.

*(Eugene waits again hoping for a response, then continues.)*

Do you play chess by any chance?

VANESSA Why would I do that?

EUGENE It might slow you down for one thing.

VANESSA Duh.

EUGENE What does that mean?

VANESSA Chess is like for old people.

EUGENE You ever play?

VANESSA My father used to show me how when I was a kid. But it was like really stupid.

EUGENE What's stupid to one may be highly valued to another.

VANESSA Yea, right! Like you think blading is stupid.

EUGENE I like the idea of moving about on wheels without sitting in a box relying on a non-renewable energy source.

VANESSA You mean like a car?

EUGENE Exactly.

VANESSA Where's the other player?

EUGENE Hasn't shown up. I guess I'll give up for the afternoon.

VANESSA But, like you have the pieces already moving.

EUGENE It's where we left off last Sunday when it started to rain. That's the trouble when you get older, you run when the elements become a little chancy. I'll bet if it rains you'll keep skating.

VANESSA Blading!

EUGENE Sorry. Blading!

*(Vanessa has finished fixing her sock. She gets up and starts to exit.)*

VANESSA I love it when it rains. It's like everybody leaves and I get the whole park to myself.

*(Eugene calls after her loudly as she exits.)*

EUGENE Ruwang, khoon Pra choo-ay (Translation: Be careful – may Buddha help you)

*(Vanessa returns slowly.)*

VANESSA Khoon Pra choo-ay? You speak Thai? How did you know I was Thai?

EUGENE The Thai Buddha around your neck. Prod, nang-long. (Translation: Please, sit down)

VANESSA Prod, nan-long—That is like really weird.

EUGENE It's like really logical, just a matter of observation. That's something you learn from chess.

VANESSA I'll bet you were in Thailand in the army like a hundred years ago.

EUGENE I've never been in the service.

*(Vanessa circles the stage on her roller-blades while she speaks.)*

VANESSA So how did you learn Thai.

EUGENE By using the language daily.

VANESSA But like where?

EUGENE Mostly in Lop Buri.

VANESSA My Mom's from there. We went last year but I didn't like it. It was really hot and there was like nothing to do.

EUGENE That's the beauty of a place like that, there's plenty of time to think.

VANESSA Like think about going home.

EUGENE It's very different to Manhattan.

VANESSA So what were you doing there?

EUGENE I joined the Peace Corp—nineteen seventy-two.

VANESSA That is like ancient. I wasn't born till nineteen ninety.

EUGENE It doesn't seem like that long ago.

VANESSA But like what were you doing there?

EUGENE Roller-blading I guess.

VANESSA For real?

EUGENE I'm speaking metaphorically. When you're young you want speed, excitement, you only look forward.

VANESSA That's like blading. You're really free. Everything is behind you as soon as you see it, nothing to hold you back.

*(Vanessa continues to roller-blade stopping on occasion.)*

EUGENE I lived in a village just north of Lop Buri.

VANESSA My Mom's family lives there in one of those old wooden houses. And the mosquitoes are like insane.

EUGENE All the houses were like that. Simple wooden buildings built up off the ground. Airy but it does let in the mosquitoes.

VANESSA I'll bet you hated it.

EUGENE At first, but I adjusted and then it was wonderful.

VANESSA Yea, right.

EUGENE It changed my whole perspective on life.

VANESSA You mean you had a Thai girlfriend.

EUGENE Well after I finished the Peace Core I went to Bangkok and—

VANESSA And you met a girl.

EUGENE She was in my class, wanted to learn English to get a better job.

VANESSA That is so predictable.

EUGENE We had lunch together on the days she came for class. Her name was Sook-Jye.

VANESSA That's my cousin's name.

EUGENE We'd sit on a bench under a tree to eat. Sook-Jye always had some new food I hadn't tried.

VANESSA Everybody eats Thai food now. We have a restaurant a block from here. Sunday's I help my Mom but she let's me take a break in the afternoon.

EUGENE In Lop Buri most people don't even have that much free time.

VANESSA That's like another world.

EUGENE I went to Sook-Jye's house once. It was shaded by large trees.

VANESSA I'm late.

EUGENE The garden had mangoes, coconut palms, banana trees. A breeze made the house cool. It's funny; as you get older memories seem to crystallize.

*(Vanessa speaks as she checks her watch and exits hurriedly.)*

VANESSA I've got to go or my Mom will kill me.

*(Eugene gets up as he calls after her.)*

EUGENE It was nice meeting you. I'm always here on Sunday afternoons. Just my chessboard and me. *(beat)* Sook-Jye, thirty years and I still remember you.

*(Lights fade as spotlight comes up down stage and Thai traditional music begins indicating a flashback. Vanessa speaks from off stage as Sook-Jye. Eugene becomes his younger self.)*

SOOK-JYE You will come Eugene?

EUGENE Sook-Jye why did you invite me?

SOOK-JYE You want to see a family together living in the house. You will come?

EUGENE I will come. What should I bring?

SOOK-JYE There is no need to bring anything. My family will be happy you come to visit them. See you Sunday afternoon.

EUGENE I'll be there. *(Pause)* I'll always be there.

*(Lights come up suggesting a time shift to the following Sunday. Park music plays, and then fades. He sits as Vanessa enters roller-blading passed him circling the stage. She has a small back pack.)*

VANESSA Hi!

EUGENE On your Sunday afternoon break again?

VANESSA Ah hah. Did you play chess this time?

EUGENE Just finished.

VANESSA Who won?

EUGENE I could lie.

VANESSA Don't think you would.

EUGENE I lost but there's always next Sunday.

*(Vanessa removes her backpack and takes out a photo album.)*

VANESSA Would you like to see something like really weird?

EUGENE You mean magical, unearthly, mysterious?

VANESSA Forget it. You probably wouldn't be interested anyway.

EUGENE I'm sorry. I have this habit of playing word games, too many years of teaching college students.

VANESSA I figured you were a teacher.

EUGENE I really would like to see.

*(Vanessa hands the album to Eugene.)*

VANESSA These are the shots we took last year in Lop Buri.

*(Vanessa points to a photograph as she sits.) That's my Mom.*

EUGENE What's her name?

VANESSA Malee.

EUGENE You look like her.

VANESSA Those are my cousins.

EUGENE They really look American.

VANESSA They don't act like it.

EUGENE That's because there's a thousand years of Thai culture under those tee shirts.

VANESSA Did you ever go back?

EUGENE I was too busy getting on with my life.

*(Eugene points out another photograph to change the subject.)*

That must be your father.

VANESSA It's my uncle. My Dad couldn't come.

EUGENE What's your Dad's name?

VANESSA His American name is David.

EUGENE Mine's Eugene.

VANESSA I'm Vanessa. You have kids Eugene?

EUGENE My wife and I decided against it.

VANESSA Is your wife American?

EUGENE Was—she died last year—breast cancer.

VANESSA Sorry.

EUGENE That's OK, it's been a while. I'm getting on with my life now.

VANESSA Did you want kids?

EUGENE At times, but it's a big commitment.

VANESSA Why is it guys are like afraid of having kids?

EUGENE Most do, but I wasn't so sure.

VANESSA What would you have done if your wife wanted a kid?

EUGENE Probably tried to talk her out of it I guess.

VANESSA What if she wanted one anyway?

EUGENE Well if you analyze all the factors—

VANESSA Analyze all the factors? You make it sound like your chess game.

EUGENE I do tend to dissect things, but I suppose in the end it comes down to how important the relationship is.

VANESSA And how much you care about kids.

EUGENE I have nothing against having children.

VANESSA Maybe its better, at least you didn't walk away from them.

EUGENE I would never—

VANESSA I took pictures of the monkeys at San Pragan. They stole my hat.

EUGENE Not everyone is good with kids.

VANESSA Why doesn't anybody stop them—put them in a cage or something?

EUGENE Maybe they see us as caged.

VANESSA Nobody keeps me locked in.

EUGENE If you ever decide to play chess I'm always here on Sunday afternoons.

VANESSA There's no way I'm going to play chess. Anyway I'm not blading next Sunday. We've got a special group coming to the restaurant and I've even got to get dressed up in Thai clothes. It's like a real pain.

*(Vanessa returns the photo album to the backpack while getting up.)*

I am so not into that stuff, you know, smiling at everybody. I never want to work in a restaurant when I finish school.

EUGENE What do you want to do?

*(Vanessa responds as she exits.)*

VANESSA Be a writer.

*(Eugene follows, calling after her as she disappears.)*

EUGENE What kind of writer? *(laughing)* *(beat)* A reporter for the Roller-Blade Gazette! Or maybe a poet.

*(Eugene slowly returns to the bench..)*

Maybe a poet.

*(Park music begins suggesting a time shift as lights fade and a spot comes up on Eugene speaking. Sook-Jye's voice is heard from the darkness.)*

EUGENE Come on Sook-Jye the monkeys won't hurt you. We'll sit on the temple steps. It's fun to watch them.

SOOK-JYE This is the spirit house of San Pragan. People ask him for help.

EUGENE Have you?

SOOK-JYE Many times, I ask him for help in school when I am small. My mother brings me to Lop Buri to visit San Pragan. He is very important to her. When my mother is sick I come with my brother to pray for her.

EUGENE Did you ever pray for other things?

SOOK-JYE Yes.

EUGENE I'll bet the other things are more interesting. Maybe he'll help me.

SOOK-JYE You do not believe.

EUGENE I believe in the power of the mind. I believed you would come with me to San Pragan and here you are.

SOOK-JYE I am glad I'm with you.

*(Music fades and lights come back up as Vanessa enters. Eugene is asleep holding a book. Vanessa does not have roller blades and is dressed in traditional Thai clothing, a sarong and high collared silk jacket. She quietly approaches Eugene, bending over him slightly to read the title of the book. She taps him lightly on the shoulder. He wakes up startled to see her, as though uncertain if he is still dreaming.)*

EUGENE Sook-Jye!

VANESSA It's me Vanessa. You OK?

EUGENE I was dreaming of being in Lop Buri.

VANESSA No, it's like, still Washington Square Park.