

MANIFEST DESTINY

A full-length play

By Emma Y. Lai

CHARACTERS

LAURA-25-Asian, has supernatural powers that let her do almost anything she wants. Calls herself a pacifist who hates power.

PAIGE-25-White, en route to become President of the United States in the next 12 years, an advocate against the anti-Asian sentiment

KYLE-25-Asian, an actor consistently under the public eye. A teacher. Enjoys musing over difficult things.

JOHN-30-White, military engineer and supposedly the team lead, is married to Laura to help protect her rights

MICHAEL-30-Asian, marine biologist, weapons specialist, characteristics of a hero

THE SEA MONSTER-dragon-like, haunting, created by Laura, has all of her memories

SETTING

The American war on Asia

A research base at the bottom of the ocean.

The surface.

THE BASE

There is a training room with punching bags and weapons. There are two small bedrooms. One is Laura's. One is Michael's. A clear window is at the end of the base.

THE SEA MONSTER

There is no firm design for the Sea Monster. It can be anywhere from 7 feet tall to the size of the set. Inspirations: Tower of God, lions in traditional lion dancing, dragons.

Vocal Inspirations: Princess Mononoke, Attack on Titan, subtitles

WORLD CONTEXT

This American war is taking place on the mainland of Asia.

Meanwhile in America:

We are at the beginnings of an overpopulation crisis. There is a severe lack of housing and the wealth disparity is at record heights.

Due to the growing paranoia surrounding Asian spies and Camp 44, the government created stricter guidelines surrounding families and marriage, making it harder for people of color to marry outside their race and approval is given on a case by case basis.

Contrarily, Asians are only able to have children if their partner is non-Asian (the subtext is White). To prove their loyalty to America, Asians are encouraged to take birth control and can only stop if they're in a marriage to a non-Asian person. Marriages between White men and Asian women have the highest approval rate in court.

Host camps: heavily surveilled housing for Asian-Americans that are deemed suspicious based on surveillance of their daily activities. The government says it isn't the same as internment camps because they're indoors. It's free rent so it's actually a **benefit** of racism and of course when it comes to racism, the government can afford to create housing.

Camp 44 is a military base that was overtaken by the Asian-Americans imprisoned in the 44th host camp that was attached. It is now a safe haven and the rebels at the head of it are planning to expand their territory to create safe, anti-racist spaces. This is the rebel group Michael is a part of. The Democratic Government refuses to remove previously installed racist policies but understands they will lose the election if they attack Camp 44.

On the Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which officially apologized for the incarceration on behalf of the US government and authorized a payment of \$20,000 to each former detainee who was still alive when the act was passed. The legislation admitted that government actions were based on “**race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.**” (Wikipedia)

On Manifest Destiny

Manifest Destiny is the idea that the United States is destined by God, its advocates believed--to expand its dominion and spread its philosophy of democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent. The philosophy drove 19th century U.S. territorial expansion and was used to justify the forced removal of Native Americans and other groups from their homes.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

PROJECTION: 1

It climbs

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35
 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65
 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80
 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95
 96 97 98 99

Until it reaches

PROJECTION: 100

We are at the bottom of the ocean. A research base glows through the darkness. A distance away, Laura is in a small exploration pod. She stares out into the darkness.

Kyle, at the base stares out the clear glass window.

KYLE

I think the Little Mermaid is a disgusting story.

It's an assimilation story.

Our heroine leaves her home behind and more than anything in the world wishes to become this other ideal thing. A human.

But if you are unable to assimilate, you should just disappear out of sight or at least die for them.

So clearly, she doesn't die for love.

She dies because that is the inevitability of trying to live with a species that romanticizes the violence they cause.

But in the end she reaches heaven despite never having done a thing.

Laura holds out her hand. A light begins to glow in front of her. It glows brighter and brighter, larger and larger.

The Projection ticks down. Fast.

99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 88 87 86 85
 84 83 82 81 80 79 78 77 76 75 74 73 72 71 70
 69 68 67 66 65 64 63 62 61 60 59 58 57 56 55
 54 53 52 51 50 49 48 47 46 45 44 43 42 41 40
 39 38 37 36 35 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25
 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9
 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

PROJECTION: 1

Laura stumbles back, dizzy. She glances down at the number on her arm.

KYLE

In the version where the Little Mermaid lives happily ever after

It doesn't make me disgusted. It makes me angry.

The Little Mermaid successfully assimilates. Her people either cheer her on as she abandons them or they are beaten back and defeated. Heroically.

I think mermaids are beautiful and yet. Leaving it behind is going to be the end of every version of that story because of the people who get to tell it.

So let's call this our twist on the Little Mermaid. And it ends just how it should end.

Once upon a time, a Sea Monster appears at the bottom of the ocean.

Light explodes onstage. The light slowly fades revealing the Sea Monster. It is huge, beautiful, and terrifying in the dark ocean.

Laura slowly leans forward towards them.

The Laura/Sea Monster scene fades away.

KYLE

If someone asked me why the Sea Monster chose me, I would guess it was because of my past background as a teacher.

Laura always claimed that I had an offensive energy of always needing to help people and teach people. Perhaps it was offensive to her but I like to believe it was at least an aura of safety.

After all, despite what she said, Laura had spent more than 15 years being my friend.

It reminds me of her actually.
 But admittedly, it terrifies me.
 Why does it speak to humans?
 Why does it speak to me?
 I think I would be less scared if it didn't talk and just tried to eat me.

SCENE 2

A few days later.

PROJECTION: 100

Laura walking into her room when suddenly she gives a surprised yelp as she sees someone in her room. She turns to find John who puts his hand over her mouth. She turns on the lights.

LAURA

John!

JOHN

Sorry sorry. I just suddenly realized you might scream and I didn't want to scare everyone.

LAURA

You could've just waited outside of my door instead of in my bedroom.

She begins to tidy up her room and get ready for bed.

JOHN

You never let me in when I do.

LAURA

I'm really tired, is there any way this can wait?

JOHN

No. Seriously. I know you don't like me.

LAURA

I like you.

JOHN

But I need to show you this.

He takes a small piece of paper out of his pocket.

JOHN

This came in with the supply shipment today.

LAURA

There is evidence of a spy on your team. Please keep--

JOHN

Not out loud. I'm the first one to get access to the supply box, so it's definitely for me. So. What do you think?

LAURA

Um. Wow. It's kind of surprising. I don't know what to think.

JOHN

You don't need to play polite. Just tell me the first thing that came to your mind.

LAURA

Are you talking to me because you think I'm the spy?

JOHN

No.

LAURA

Are you suspicious of someone?

JOHN

Michael.

LAURA

Michael? Hm. Why?

JOHN

It's classified. I know you vouched for him for this mission and I'm not accusing you because of it or anything. But I know Paige is trying to get to know him better too. I'm just telling you this so you watch your back. And hers.

LAURA

Did they charge his parents as spies?

I'm right aren't I. That's why he hasn't been able to reach them lately.

JOHN

For someone who says they don't want to be involved in anything you sure think a lot.

LAURA

I just like to know what's going on but it's not like I'm going to do anything about it. I can't do anything about it.

JOHN

They could be wrong. It's against policy for us to accuse him for spying just because his parents are.

LAURA

Mhm. Sure.

JOHN

Just be careful. And keep an eye out for Paige too.

LAURA

Got it. Goodnight.

A shift.

JOHN

Do you want me to stay?

LAURA

So you can protect me from a scary monster?

JOHN

Ok, I'll take the hint.

He turns to leave. Laura grabs his arm.

LAURA

Sorry. I'm not very funny.

Laura kisses him. Lights out.

Laura wakes up in the middle of the night. She makes her way to the glass window at the end of the base. The Sea Monster appears outside the glass.

THE SEA MONSTER

Your team is interesting to watch. You feel interesting things about them. But then you do different things about them.

LAURA

I'm just trying to keep the peace.

THE SEA MONSTER

Do I have your permission to speak to them?

LAURA

You don't need my permission. I created you so you would do what you want. There's no fun in talking to someone who doesn't say what's on their mind.

The sound of a door opening and closing.

LAURA

Visit me at my bedroom window next time.

THE SEA MONSTER

Then you don't want them to speak to me.

LAURA

Speak to them all you want. I just don't want to be involved when you do. Goodnight.

The Sea Monster disappears into the dark.
Michael exits the Training Room.

MICHAEL

Can't sleep?

LAURA

Hey, Michael. Yeah.

MICHAEL

Is this a favorite spot of yours?

He sits down with her.

LAURA

Nah. Kyle really likes this spot though. He likes to think really hard about things here.

MICHAEL

What are you thinking about?

LAURA

Nothing really. Just that it'll be a shame after we're done building the full base this window will get blocked off.

MICHAEL

You can't see anything out there.

LAURA

It's the principal of it.
Were you working out in the middle of the night?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Couldn't sleep. And I try not to go all out in front of other people.

LAURA

Wow. I wish I was cool enough to say something like that out loud.
Bet Paige would love to see you go all out.

Laura gets up and walks back to her room.
Before going in she pauses.

LAURA

Are you a spy?

MICHAEL

What?

LAURA

Someone told me that you were a spy.

MICHAEL

Who?

LAURA

...Kyle. So are you?

A beat.

99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91

PROJECTION: 90

MICHAEL

Yes. Do you want to do something about it?

89 88 87 86 85 84 83 82 81 80 79 78 77 76 75

PROJECTION: 74

LAURA

Go back to your room and forget we talked about this. Goodnight.

Laura listens to Michael footsteps pass her and go into his room.

73

PROJECTION: 72

Paper and pen appear in front of Laura. She writes a note and leaves it at Michael's door.

SCENE 3

Morning.

LAURA

I've known Paige for a long time so I knew if Paige found out that John had told me something then told me to keep it a secret from her, she'd be very mad. See, she's the kind of person who really likes helping people. Using all her energy on one goal. She's wanted to be President of the United States since we were kids. And now that our President is handling the war...poorly...she especially has the same goal.

Lights up on Laura and Paige in the training room. Paige at the punching bag. Laura barely stretching on the ground.

PAIGE

Do you think Michael is scary?

LAURA

I'd get it if you thought so.

PAIGE

Do you know why I think he's scary? It's the fact that he only says nice things to me.

LAURA

Say more.