

## **Yellow Face**

by David Henry Hwang

*Yellow Face* takes place in New York City; Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Boston; San Francisco; and Guizhou Province, China between 1990 and the present.

### **Act One:**

It's January 30, 2006, DHH (David Henry Hwang) receives an email from Marcus G. Dahlman. After a minor scandal in the US, Marcus has decided he needs a change, and he found it with the Dong Tribe in rural China.

DHH discusses his success as the first Asian playwright to win a Tony for his renowned work, *M. Butterfly*. David receives a call from BD Wong, *M. Butterfly's* Tony winning actor, about *Miss Saigon's* transfer to Broadway and the producer's choice to cast a white man as an Asian character. DHH is prompted to write a letter to the actor's union to express his disapproval which elicits a negative response from producer Cameron Mackintosh. Multiple members of *Miss Saigon's* creative team respond to David, claiming he is just trying to start trouble. As a result, Mackintosh decides to cancel the American production. The theatrical community is upended. Actress Carla Chang urges David to join protests at the Actor's Equity union building. He's unable to justify putting himself further into the public eye - the union decided to push ahead with the American production of *Miss Saigon*.

DHH receives a call from his father who's excited about all the potential exposure the *Miss Saigon* scandal's press is giving David. After discussing the importance of "the American dream," David is inspired to write *Face Value* - a farce commenting on the construct of race as it pertains to Asian Americans. Auditions begin and after the audition of actor Rodney Hatamiya, the production team realizes they may struggle to find a suitable Asian leading man. Their search ends all the way in California, with a community theatre production of the war-play *Go For Broke*, where they first find Marcus starring with Rodney. In December of 1992, they bring Marcus in for an audition and debate whether he looks Asian enough to be cast. Despite doubts, Marcus begins rehearsals in Boston in early 1993 with Jane Krakowski and Mark Linn-Baker. Marcus shares with Jane his shock at receiving the role based on the fact he played a white man in *Go For Broke*. Following opening night, the production only receives negative reviews - it's a flop.

While in a porn shop, DHH is recognized by the shop owner who is surprisingly supportive of his work. He returns to writing and, after ruminating on a comment Jane made in the wake of *Face Value's* opening night regarding Marcus, David calls Rodney Hatamiya, who confirms his worst fear... Marcus is a white man. After doing some mental gymnastics to justify how Marcus's Siberian father makes him Asian, DHH asks Rodney to join the New York production of *Face Value*. David and his

agent William Craver discuss the implications of firing Marcus; and the potential of being sued by him for wrongful termination. During a speaking engagement with a group of Asian American students, DHH introduces Marcus as "Marcus Gee" and dilutes the truth of his history in the hopes it will help him to appear more Asian.

David makes the call to fire Marcus, followed by a brief and unsuccessful Broadway run of *Face Value*. He decides to make a drunken phone call to Margaret Fung, the Executive Director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, to see if *Face Value's* closing was a result of racism. She placates him with a yes. Back in 2006, DHH receives another email from Marcus about the importance of music in the Dong Tribe's culture. He's interrupted by thoughts of the 1990's, and a call from his father, he would like to offer David a position on the board of his bank. David accepts and flies to L.A. for his first board meeting where the board approves an office space in Beijing. One of the other board members tells David he's recently seen a production of *The King and I* and to David's surprise, the King was played by Marcus Gee.

## **Act Two:**

David reads newspaper clippings about Marcus's performance in *The King and I*, they rave about the racial inclusivity. DHH is honored as the recipient of the Asian American Artists Association's "Visionary Warrior Award" for his work promoting Asian stories - Marcus is also honored. Following the awards, Marcus and David share a tense conversation about Marcus's continued proclivity for acting Asian. Marcus invites David to a gathering of the Asian Leadership Council in Washington DC before they are interrupted by Marcus's girlfriend Leah. As Marcus returns to the award ceremony, David asks Leah if he knows that the two of them had once dated. Marcus does know, and David is now convinced Marcus is trying to become him. DHH tried to tell Leah that Marcus is not Asian, she wonders how David can be so bitter.

It's 2006 and Marcus has written another email about his experiences in China. Back in the 1990s, David calls Marcus's mother in a desperate attempt to reveal the truth. She sees no problem with Marcus pretending to be Asian, she only wants her son to succeed and thinks David should be grateful. However, Leah comes to David with a problem. Marcus is under federal investigation in connection with the unlawful donation of campaign funds. Marcus not only used a false name, "Marcus Gee," but he misrepresented himself. Leah hopes David will appear on behalf of Marcus at an upcoming press conference. David has decided to prioritize working on a television series with comedian Margaret Cho instead.

It's September of 1997 and a group of Asian Americans and Marcus, are filing a civil rights lawsuit claiming they have been harassed because the government believes China has interfered with the 1996 presidential election. Many Republican representatives testify on the supposed political influence of Asian Americans. One

man, Wen Ho Lee, is even accused of stealing nuclear secrets. Marcus faxes David asking if he will attend a rally in support of Wen Ho Lee. David decides not to attend, but Marcus keeps him abreast of the mounting dangers for Asian Americans. Although unconvinced in the 90's, 2006 DHH shares information from Wen Ho Lee's interrogation as a result of his preparation for writing *Yellow Face*.

As we return to the 1990s, David tries to flirt in an online chatroom when his mother calls with news that his father's bank is under investigation. Allegedly, Chinese officials have been using the Beijing branch to funnel money into the US - it's not good. The family tries to come up with a plan for the investigation but David's father hopes to be subpoenaed so he can share his story. During the investigation, a reporter reaches out to David for an off-the-record interview to give him the opportunity to prove he had nothing to do with the scandal. They meet and discuss David's time as a board member for his father's bank. In the interview, DHH is backed into a proverbial corner regarding his dealings with the bank but deftly manages to turn the subject onto the reporter and his latent racism. He threatens to write a play about their conversation.

Over at the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, David's father is denied an application to open a new federal bank. While becoming disillusioned with America, DHH's father is diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. Marcus reaches out with condolences about David's father. David is not happy to hear from him but in an attempt to save his father's reputation and the reputation of the other Asian Americans under investigation, he urges Marcus to come forward with his real identity and prove that these investigations are racially targeting. DHH agrees to come forward with Marcus, explaining the part he played in the mistaken identity.

The reveal causes a ripple effect in the federal investigations of David's father, Wen Ho Lee, and other Asian Americans being tried. Although cleared of charges, the forgiveness doesn't stop Rocco Palmieri, a former Senator's aide, from spewing racist and xenophobic rhetoric following 9/11. David's father, Henry Y. Hwang, dies on October 13, 2005. Marcus attends the service, and he and David have a fourth-wall-breaking moment where David must reconcile that he created Marcus as a way to build a world in which his father could have been everything he ever wanted.

Marcus pleads with David for a happy ending. And so, in one final email, Marcus shares with David that he has finally been accepted as a member of the Dong Tribe - without needing to be anyone but himself.

