

1. SKY DREAMING (“Temple of Heaven” Theme)

(Wind. Sky. Distant mountains. A Chinese BOY flies a kite; it has a tiger on it. A haunted tune plays. A feminine SPIRIT OF CHINA, or is it MADAME CHIANG?, appears on the edges of the action.)

(Downstage right, a MOTHER and her BOY sit in a church pew. She faces front, listening to the unseen minister. The BOY is looking out the window, where a magnolia tree blossoms.)

MOTHER

Sit up straight, Claire Lee. Pay attention, preacher’s talkin’. What’re you lookin’ at?

CLAIRE LEE

Lookin’ out the window.

MOTHER

You can look at that old magnolia when we’re outside. This is God’s time.

CLAIRE LEE *(Looking back at the window, transfixed. In a mystical reverie. A boy tenor?)*

**THERE’S A PLACE BEYOND THE WINDOW
WHERE I WISH THAT I COULD GO
WHERE THE RIVER GENTLY PASSES BY.
THERE’S A CLEARING NEAR THE RIVER
WHERE THE TREES HAVE PULLED AWAY
SHOWING THE EARTH THE SKY.**

**IN THE CLEARING, FROM A TRICKLE
FROM THE RIVER, THERE’S A POOL
IT’S A FAVORITE OF THE DRAGON-FLY.
WITH MY WINGS UPON THE WATER
I AM FLOATING ON MY BACK
WATCHING A CLOUDLESS SKY.**

**SPREADING MY ARMS, I’M DREAMING
WHERE I MIGHT ONE DAY BE.
SOMEPLACE THAT’S OLD,
TEMPLE OF GOLD.
THAT’S THE PLACE FOR ME.**

(Upstage, the Chinese BOY is confronted by two other Asian BOYS, who pull his kite down. The azure sky turns gray. HE flees and disappears, and the BOYS follow him slowly. CLAIRE LEE looks at the window again.)

NO, IT ISN’T THE MAGNOLIA

**THAT I'M LOOKING AT, AT ALL,
THOUGH I KNOW THAT I COULD CLIMB IT HIGH.
BUT, THEN, ONCE I REACH THE TOP
I WOULD NEVER WANT TO STOP
I WANT SKY! I WANT SKY!**

(All church folk stand and sing, interrupting. HE looks out window before disappearing. Transition begins to older CLAIRE LEE and his wife, NELL.)

CONGREGATION

**THERE'S A FRIEND YOU HAVE IN HEAVEN,
HE IS WAITING THERE FOR YOU,
AND HE OFFERS YOU A LOVING HAND.
HE IS GUIDING YOU TO FREEDOM,
HE IS SHOWING YOU THE WAY:
HEAVEN, THE WONDER LAND!**

(Stage left a pew appears with NELL and CLAIRE LEE, facing front and listening to the preacher. CLAIRE LEE wears a military uniform. Congregation sits. He turns and looks out the window.)

NELL *(Under her breath, as the preacher speaks.)*

Quit day dreaming, Claire Lee. Whole congregation's lookin' at you, lookin' out that window. *(He looks straight ahead.)* And why wouldn't they? That uniform's distractin'. Last day before it goes into the attic. We'll fold it nice, Claire Lee.

CLAIRE LEE *(Looking back at the window.)*

**SPREADING MY ARMS, STILL DREAMING
WHERE I MIGHT ONE DAY FLY
INTO THE BLUE
SOMEPLACE THAT'S NEW...**

(HE loosens his collar and exits the church before the service is over, and NELL follows. They are outside.)

NELL

What's got you so distracted? This is what we've waited for. Retirement. A place to really spend time with the children: Fishin'. Swimmin'. Gardenin'. Puttin' roots down. Why're you so itchy? Is it the uniform? You don't have to wear it anymore.

CLAIRE LEE

I've been asked to go to China, to teach pilots.

NELL

No, sir. No more flyin'. After Texas, Hawaii, Shreveport, the only flight I want to see is a white egret over Lake St. John. (*Terse.*) The Army Air Corps – after all your battles with the brass, and the “health retirement” they imposed – wants you back the minute you leave? Shame on them. Tell them this family is turnin' down the invitation, thank you very much.

CLAIRE LEE

Family's not invited. It's a war zone.

NELL

A war zone? Whose war? The Air Corps?

CLAIRE LEE

This is a civilian position. The Chinese need –

NELL

The Chinese need? What are you talkin' about? No, sir. Let's go home. (*She turns to go.*)

CLAIRE LEE

I could send you orchids by air mail.

NELL

I prefer magnolias. I think you know that. I'll see you at home. (*She exits.*)

(The SPIRIT OF CHINA beckons. She may or may not speak. A vision of NELL appears opposite side of stage.)

2. NOTHING IN LOUISIANA

A soliloquy-like verse, very freely.

**AFTER A LIFE LIVED ABOVE AND ABROAD AND AWAY FROM HERE,
I WOULD BE LYING IF I SAID THAT THIS WASN'T HOME.
THE SCENT OF MAGNOLIA,
THE SHADE OF THE LIVE OAK,
THE SOUND OF THE BAYOU AT NIGHT,
ARE TELLING ME STAYING IS RIGHT.
IT'S A PLACE THAT THAT I KNEW, IT'S A PLACE THAT I KNOW
IT'S A PLACE WHERE I GREW AND MY CHILDREN CAN GROW.
ONE LIFE IS DONE!
STAY ROOTED, STAY GROUNDED
ANOTHER MISSION HAS BEGUN:
GARDENING,
GOLFING,
AND PICKING UP STICKS.**

**HUNTING
AND FISHING
AND FENCES TO FIX.
ALL OF IT YOURS,
AND AT AGE 46.**

(He is sour. He ruminates for a moment, as the light changes.)

**AND YET
NOTHING IN LOUISIANA EVER MADE ME FEEL
SO ALIVE AS WHEN I'M WEARING WINGS OF STEEL.**

**NOTHING IN THE SOUTHLAND IS AS PRECIOUS TO BEHOLD
AS HORIZONS WHEN THEY'RE FILLING UP WITH GOLD.**

**AND I SEE ME THERE
LEADING PILOTS IN A PATTERN,
ON A NOBLE QUEST,
NEVER WONDERING THE "WHY?"
IF I'M FORCED TO CHOOSE
LET ME CHOOSE THE RINGS OF SATURN.
I WANT SKY!
I WANT SKY!**

(His family appears in the background.)

**NOTHING IN LOUISIANA, NOTHING HERE AT ALL,
EVER MADE ME FEEL THE HEIGHT IS WORTH THE FALL.**

(His family walks off, but NELL watches him, coolly, before exiting.)

**NO ONE IN THE BAYOU, NOT MY CHILDREN OR MY WIFE,
WOULD BEGRUDGE A MAN A CHANCE AT SECOND LIFE!**

**LET MY BRIDGE BE BURNED
I'LL COME BACK AND BUILD IT LATER
WHAT'S THE POINT OF WINGS
IF YOU'RE NEVER GONNA FLY?
IF I'M BREAKING VOWS
(I'LL) TAKE IT UP WITH MY CREATOR
IN THE SKY!
GIVE ME SKY!
I WANT SKY!
I CHOOSE – SKY!**

(The SPIRIT gestures upward and a window, with Chinese lattice woodwork, appears in the sky. Light pours through it. Blackout.)