

NOTE

As playwright Jiehae Park observes in the opening stage direction, peerless is a comedy...until it's not. Dramaturg, Carol Ann Tan, sheds light on the realities inspiring this adolescent send-up of The Scottish Play.

Adapted from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *peerless* follows two Asian-American twin sisters, M and L, who are determined to win the one early decision admission to The College.

Qualified Asian applicants may be disadvantaged by race-conscious college admissions policies, which seek to maintain a certain demographic makeup within the student body. And *peerless* critiques a society which, despite its apparent commitment to diversity, ends up compromising the nuance of culture for the superficiality of visible difference: M is passed over for an essentially white person with only a tenuous connection to a heritage he barely understands.

To be fair, M and L's conviction that it should have been them smacks of elitist entitlement. But Asian students often face significant cultural pressure to excel. M and L may be "parachute kids": sent abroad by their (notably absent) parents to obtain an American high school education, so as to increase their chances of gaining admission to a prestigious American college.

Living abroad without parental supervision during one's formative years often takes a serious mental toll. Feeling lost and isolated, many such students have lashed out; one notable recent case involved 3 Chinese teenagers attacking 2 others in Rowland Heights, LA.

For much of *peerless*, the twins behave indistinguishably, relying only on each other for support. Likewise, the real-life "Silent Twins", June and Jennifer Gibbons, only communicated with each other through a secret language of their own. Eventually, overwhelmed by their mutual, paradoxical need and disdain for each other, the Gibbons decided one of them needed to die so that the other could live a normal life.

Certainly, M and L are twins who can pass as Chinese—but do all Asian people really look alike? Can all Asian cultures be so simply conflated? Above all, how should we qualify and assess "diversity" to ensure policies relating to the concept remain tenable?

-- Carol Ann Tan