

梁秉鈞：香片

Jasmin

By P. K. Leung

Translated by Jane Lai

Introduction

“Jasmin”: an adaptation and re-creation.

IN 1986, the Seals Theatre Company Foundation staged the *Hong Kong Trilogy*: “Jasmin”, “Bazaar” 賣物會 and “General Guidelines” 一般守則 in an attempt to review life and attitudes in Hong Kong from the 1930s through the present. When Seals’ director Vicki Ooi asked me to write the first part of the trilogy, my immediate response was: Is there a topic about Hong Kong in the thirties and forties which still has relevance today? In the end I focused on the relationships between people from the mainland and people in Hong Kong: partly because even in the 1980s, certain tensions and barriers still exist between these two groups; and also because of what I have come across in my research on the literature of the time, particularly concerning what Chinese writers had written about Hong Kong.

In the 1930s and 1940s, many Chinese writers who fled the war in China took shelter in Hong Kong and recorded their impressions of the place in their notes and essays. But because of cultural differences, these impressions were not free of prejudice. There was little in the way of in-depth study and analysis, but much subjective denigration and reproof, often the result of misunderstanding. Although quite a few writers took refuge in Hong Kong, and some engaged in creative work here, few used Hong Kong as the setting for their writings. The people and the landscape here rarely impinged upon their vista. Among them, Eileen Chang is a notable exception. She came to Hong Kong in 1939 to study Western literature at the University of Hong Kong, and began to take an interest in this unusual place. When war broke out in the Pacific, she was forced to discontinue her studies and return to Shanghai, where she started to write about Hong Kong for her Shanghai readers. In *Rumours*, an anthology of her essays, she described Hong Kong during the war. In her short stories such as “The Love that Felled a City” 傾城之戀, “Jasmin Tea” 茉莉香片, “Sandal-wood Dust—The First Whiff of Incense” 沉香屑——第一爐香 and “Sandal-wood Dust—The Second Whiff of Incense” 沉香屑——第二爐香, she used Hong Kong as the background, and these form a distinctive group among her works. Although Chang did not set out to give a full portrayal of Hong Kong, her keen powers of observation as a novelist,

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her willingness to let experience prevail over judgment, her sensitivity to, and curiosity about, the interflow of Eastern and Western culture, and her insight into and sympathy for the intricacies of modern consciousness, all enabled her to capture some chapters of the legends of this city.

I embarked upon the task of adapting Eileen Chang's story "Jasmin Tea" for a number of reasons: first, to offer a tribute to the author; second, to experiment with freedom and constraint in the process of revising a literary work for the stage; and finally, to attempt to create a dialogue between Hong Kong and China. I re-read this short story about Hong Kong written by a Shanghai writer in the 1940s from the point of view of a Hong Kong person in the 1980s, and hoped that I could glean from it something of relevance to the situation here and now. All the stories Chang wrote about Hong Kong are placed within a "frame". Before she tells her story, she lights some incense, makes a pot of jasmin tea and then proceeds to tell her Shanghai readers a story about Hong Kong, thereby keeping a kind of distance from the tale. But my adaptation was written in Hong Kong for a Hong Kong audience, so I decided to remove the Shanghai frame to accommodate a Hong Kong perspective, and occasionally to shift the Shanghai perspective we find in the original. In the process of adaptation I used a method akin to collage, blending in material from Chang's other stories like "Sutra of the Heart" 心經, from essays like "Words of the Innocents" 童言無忌, and cutting in impressions of Hong Kong from works of other 1940s writers like Hu Chunbing's 胡春冰 "The Love of Shum Shui Po" 深水埗之戀, and the works of Yang Yanqi 楊彥岐 and Li Lianjun 李廉俊. It is hoped that these different images and voices, thus juxtaposed, would clash, complement, harmonize with and even even contradict one another. In the original story, both Nie and Yan are from Shanghai; I've changed it so that one has come from Shanghai while the other has grown up in Hong Kong, to bring out the effect different cultural environments have on people. The misunderstanding caused by these differences, and the difficulties in communication are still present as they were forty years ago.

In the process of growing up, Nie is overwhelmed by two dominant father figures, making it difficult for him to find his own identity. One figure represents violent reality; the other an intellectual idea. These are the images many young Chinese people associate with the older generation. We were unable to find a suitable actor to portray Yan Ziyue. For this reason, and in order that he remain an ideal image in Nie's mind, the character does not appear on stage. Nie's step-mother seemed too stereotyped, so I replaced her with Nie's own mother, Feng Biluo, to provide a fully-realized woman's point of view to engage in a dialogue with the man's point of view, just as there is a dialogue between the Hong Kong and mainland points of view.

Adapting a short story into a play is a process of dialogue between two different genres. I wanted to preserve what is distinctive in the original, and to avoid altering the text unnecessarily just to leave my mark. Guided by this respect for the original, my contribution consists in adding and juxtaposing some extraneous material, a few in-jokes, which aficionados of Chang's work may appreciate and approve of or find outrageous and unforgivable. The whole of Scene IV is my creation. Duan Lengqing is borrowed from another story. The reference to jasmin tea, the preamble in the original, has become part of the props and action in the play, and I have tried to keep the leisurely pace and the relaxed mood one associates with sipping tea. I like the word "jasmin" because this story, a fragment of Hong Kong life, is like a faint whiff of fragrance.

I am grateful to Mr Stephen Soong for his assistance in seeking Eileen Chang's approval for the adaptation of her story in this form, and to Ms Chang herself for granting it. The play is a variation on the theme of the original; whatever its merits or faults, it does not attempt to tarnish the brilliance of the original.

As a writer of fiction, the experience I have gained in the exercise has given me a new awareness of the art of writing dialogue, and of creating momentum and poignant stasis on stage. I am also grateful to Vicki Ooi and Jane Lai who worked with me on the adaptation and production of the play.

Scene I

University canteen.

[NIE CHUANQING, YAN DANZHU and several students.]

When the curtain rises, Nie is sitting at a square table, centre stage. This is the University canteen. Half-hidden behind the pillars are one or two other tables where several students are seated, chatting. They break out in laughter occasionally. Behind Nie, on a stand, is a vase with peach blossoms placed so that it forms the background for his face. Nie is reading a collection of short stories. He takes the lid off his tea-cup, raises it and drinks from it. He purses his lips, blows into his cup, finds the tea too hot and puts the cup down.

Yan Danzhu enters, walks smiling towards Nie's table and sits down next to him. Nie frowns and puts down his book with the cover facing upwards.

YAN: Have you chosen your courses?

NIE: *(There is a burst of laughter from the students behind them. NIE is a bit hard of hearing. He leans slightly towards YAN to catch what she is saying.)* Hm?

YAN: *(repeats herself in the same tone)* Have you chosen your courses?

NIE: Mm.

YAN: Which ones have you signed up for?

NIE: Nothing special. Just the Chinese and the English subjects.

YAN: My father's course, Literary History, have you signed up for that?

NIE: *(nods)* Yes.

YAN: *(smiles)* Do you know, I've signed up for it too.

NIE: Does your father know?

YAN: *(bursts into a short laugh)* Ha. He didn't want me to take his course, at first. He said he didn't like the idea of his daughter sitting in his lectures.

NIE: Oh.

YAN: What's more, he said, he's so used to joking with us at home that if I should be too familiar with him in class and ask him silly questions, he wouldn't know whether to joke with me or put me down. He wouldn't know what to do. In the end I had to swear that I wouldn't say a thing in class whatever I thought. Then he let me sign up.

NIE: *(sighs)* Well, Professor Yan . . . he's a good scholar.

YAN: *(smiles)* Oh? Isn't he a good teacher? Don't you like his classes?

NIE: It's not that. Just look at my grades in his course last term and you'll know he doesn't like me.

YAN: That's not true! He expects more of you because you come from Shanghai and are bound to be better in Chinese than we are, that's all. I've heard him praise you . . . he did say, though, that you could have worked harder.

NIE: I wouldn't have come to Hong Kong if the Japanese hadn't taken Shanghai. I can't get used to this place . . . people here don't care about Chinese at all. I really wanted to do well in Professor Yan's course, but . . . I just couldn't

YAN: Why?

NIE: *(shakes his head)* . . .

(Pause)

NIE: I don't know why, I seem to be scared of him. I should really feel quite close to him. He teaches Chinese Literary History, which I know so well. He doesn't wear a suit, he wears a Chinese robe, which I . . .

YAN: Oh yes, he likes to wear a robe . . .

NIE: But . . . but I feel so distant from him.

YAN: Lengqing and the rest all say he looks nice in a long robe.

NIE: When he asks me a question, I can't ever give a proper answer, even when I know it. I can't ever give him a satisfactory answer no matter how hard I try. The trouble is not with him. It's with me.

YAN: You don't have to be scared of him. He's not all that frightening.

NIE: All the literary people in the old magazines look just like him. They all took part in the May Fourth Movement; they wear gold-rimmed glasses, and have all studied abroad; they are all getting grey at the temples; they all know so much about classical *and* modern literature . . . When he looks at you, it is as if he hoped you'd come up with some brilliant idea. And then I open my mouth, and come out with . . . rubbish.

YAN: But my father isn't greying at the temples. (*Pause*) He doesn't wear gold-rimmed glasses either

NIE: For a man like your father, life in Hong Kong must be agony.

YAN: (*surprised*) Eh? Why should that be?

NIE: There is no culture in a place like this. (*as if quoting something*) What culture is there? Why, even simple signs at tram-stops don't make sense: "If you want to stop the tram, stop here". It doesn't even make sense.

YAN: Oh yes. My father is often quite angry with the students here for not working harder on Chinese.

NIE: Hong Kong is such a cultural desert! (*passionately moved*) And people in Hong Kong wallow in dreams and luxury! (*In his passionate outburst, he brings his fist down on the table and upsets the teacup. His outburst attracts the attention of the other students. They stop chatting and turn to look at him. YAN takes out a handkerchief and wipes the tea off his sleeves.*) (*oblivious to what has happened*) When we got here from Shanghai, when we docked, when we saw the neon lights, I knew this was a place of decadence and debauchery.

YAN: (*wipes off the tea that spilt onto his book*) What are you reading?

NIE: Short stories.

YAN: Any good?

NIE: Yes. (*Pause. Looks at YAN, thinks*) Actually, there is one that you should read. It is about a girl in Hong Kong

YAN: (*interested*) Really? Which one? Show me, show me.

NIE: (*turning the pages*) This one.

YAN: (*reads from the book*) "Towards the end of 1938, I came to Hong Kong. On New Year's Eve I met her."

NIE: It's by a Chinese writer, about a young man from the mainland who falls in love with a Hong Kong girl

YAN: (*doesn't notice what he is saying, reads on*) "She had a tall, tall figure, a dark, dark face, and round, round eyes . . ." Why all these double adjectives? And there are some strange expressions as well: "She was a girl 'between her teens'. When we first shook hands, she held my hand firmly and did not move. Her two round eyes, like open windows, clear as crystal, gazed steadily at me. Was it wonder? adulation? I was embarrassed. When the laughter subsided around me . . ."

NIE: The young man told her about the situation in the motherland, and for the first time she learned about her country . . .

YAN: (*goes on reading*) "I went on talking. She was holding my hands in hers. Whenever her grip became firmer, her body would jerk, or she would let out an 'Oh' or 'Ah'. When her body jerked, my heart leaped with it . . ."

NIE: I want to adapt this story into a play.

YAN: Then our drama group can put it on.

NIE: You can play the girl . . .

YAN: Oh good . . . I love acting . . . But it's not all that easy . . . all this popping up and down, and exclaiming . . .

NIE: That's just one little bit.

YAN: Do adapt it, and soon too, please. But don't make it sound too literary, sort of more colloquial, and it'd be nice.

NIE: You should read the story. Would you like to take it home? (*hands her the book*)

YAN: There's no hurry. Why don't you adapt it first, and then I'll read it.

NIE: (*talking to himself*) A Hong Kong girl . . . in the end, she goes back to her own country . . . Have you been in Hong Kong all your life?

YAN: I was born here. Never been anywhere else.

NIE: Wouldn't your father object to your acting in a play?

YAN: Object? (*She laughs.*) Ha, ha . . . Let me show you something. (*She takes out a leather wallet, draws out a photograph and shows it to him*) Do you know who this is?

NIE: It's a girl . . . wearing a scarf . . . looks as though she is acting. It's you . . . in a play?

YAN: No.

NIE: But it looks like you. Ah, it must be your mother when she was young.

YAN: Wrong again. I'll tell you, though you're never going to believe this. It's my father when he was young. He dressed up as a girl in a play . . .

NIE: What! (*incredulous*) That's *not* possible! You're joking. (*examines the photograph*) It can't be true. A serious scholar like Professor Yan . . . He'd never dress up as a girl.

YAN: (*taking back the photograph*) Well, if you don't believe it you don't believe it.

NIE: (*smiles*) It's a joke. I know you're having me on. To test me.

YAN: Oh, you *are* strange. You always think of my father as if he were one of those people you read about in your textbooks. He is a real human being, he's flesh and blood. At home, we play all the time!

NIE: Play?

YAN: Yes. We joke and play, all the time!

NIE: Joke?

YAN: Why yes. He is very democratic at home. He doesn't make any rules for us; in fact, we are the ones who make rules for him: don't eat so many sweets, don't drink so much, don't stay up too late reading. He's very naughty, if he can't sleep he'll get up and read until dawn. In the end, we were forced to impose a lights-out curfew. His health is not as good as it was, you see.

NIE: He must have worked himself too hard, for the sake of his ideals in education, and made himself ill . . .

YAN: Oh no. He just likes reading, and doesn't know when to stop, that's all.

NIE: When a man gets old . . .

YAN: (*cutting in*) My father is not old. He's only forty. (*pauses*) Once, a friend in the choir even mistook . . .

NIE: Mistook what?

YAN: One Sunday, she suddenly asked me, "The man you were with the other day at the film show in Lunar Park, was that your boyfriend?" It was so funny. Makes me laugh every time I think of it. Ridiculous!

NIE: (*muses but says nothing*)

YAN: And what does *your* father do?

NIE: (*doesn't quite know how to handle this sudden question, flustered*) My father is very old . . . Since we came here from Shanghai, he's been . . . in business. He's not like your father . . . my family is not like yours at all . . . not at all . . .

(NIE falls silent, as if the effort of talking has tired him and he doesn't want to go on. He turns round and looks behind him.)

YAN: Last time . . . what I said about Dequan . . .

NIE: (turns to her and leans forward a little to catch what she is saying) I'm sorry. What did you say?

YAN: What I told you about Dequan writing me letters . . . please forget it.

NIE: Why?

YAN: Why? I thought about it afterwards and realized that I shouldn't be telling people things like that. I'm so stupid, sometimes I can't help saying what's on my mind.

NIE: (leans forward. Doesn't look at YAN, bows his head over the table) . . .

YAN: (leans slightly forward too, says solemnly) Chuanqing, I hope you haven't got me wrong. When I told you about it, I wasn't bragging about it. (pauses) I had to talk to somebody. Sometimes I don't understand why things turn out all wrong. (pauses) Like Dequan, when I turned him down, I lost a friend. Why can't men and women be . . . just friends? I like him as a friend, I like many other people as friends. Why are men like that?

NIE: (pauses, staring ahead)

YAN: (pauses a moment) Are you bored talking about such things?

NIE: (shakes his head)

YAN: I don't know why I can only talk to you about these things.

NIE: I don't know either . . .

YAN: I suppose it's because . . . perhaps because I treat you like one of my girl friends.

NIE: (smiles bitterly) Is that so? You have lots of girl friends. Why me?

YAN: Because you're the only one who can keep a secret.

NIE: (sighs) That's true, because I haven't a single friend, no one to tell it to.

YAN: (hurriedly, trying to put things right again in the conversation) Oh, you've got me wrong again.

NIE: . . .

YAN: (Pause)

YAN: (sighs) I always say the wrong thing. But . . . but why don't you try to make some friends? That'd be a bit of company, when you study, and when you want to have a bit of fun. Why don't you invite us to play tennis at your house? I know you have a tennis court at home.

NIE: (smiles bitterly) We don't use our tennis court for playing tennis. We dry the laundry there. When it's warm, they refine opium there. Isn't it enough that you have a happy home? Why must you ferret out the misery in mine?

YAN: (speechless for a moment because she is stunned by the reaction to her friendly overture)

. . .

NIE: (wants to drink his tea. He takes the lid off his cup, and then puts it down. He looks at YAN.) Why . . . why are you crying?

YAN: Why should I be crying? I never cry . . . (sobs) Why . . . why do you always make me feel as if I've done something wrong? As if it's wrong to have friends, wrong to have a happy family, as if I have no right to be happy. What have I done to make you so unhappy?

NIE: (pauses) You don't understand . . . (sighs)

(Pause)

(takes up the lecture notes that YAN has put on the table, wipes off the tears which have fallen on them) Are these Professor Yan's new lecture notes? I haven't bought a copy yet. Come to think of it, I've been studying with him for the better part of a year, and I don't even know his full name.

YAN: I love his name. I always say, his name is even nicer than his looks.

NIE: (*reads the name on the lecture notes*) Yan Ziye . . . it means, "talking in the still of the night," doesn't it? (*He puts the book down, cocks his head and muses for a while, takes up the book and reads the name again.*) Yan Ziye . . .

YAN: What is it? Don't you think it's a nice name?

NIE: (*smiles*) It's nice. It's just that I seem to have come across it somewhere before.

YAN: That's not unusual. You might have come across it at the university, or in some literary magazine.

NIE: No. It was on the inside cover of an old magazine. I remember . . . it was addressed to my mother, her name was on it, and this was the signature.

YAN: Oh, that means my father knew your mother! What is her name? I'll go home and ask him.

NIE: Her name is . . . I'd better ask my mother first. But then I might be mistaken.

YAN: If they had kept in touch, perhaps we would have met much earlier. If we had grown up together we might not have become so different.

NIE: If I had had a chance to be you . . . to be Professor Yan's son . . . would he have been nicer to me? Would I have been better?

YAN: You're letting your imagination run away with you! Perhaps you've got the name wrong? (*Pauses*) Oh, it's time. I've got to meet somebody. Got to fly!

NIE: (*muttering to himself*) Yan Ziye . . .

YAN: (*turns round*) See you. (*Exits*)

NIE: (*mutters to himself*) Father.

(*Pause*)

CURTAIN

Scene II

The stage is divided into two acting areas: the study and the garden of Nie Chuanqing's home.

[NIE CHUANQING, NIE'S FATHER, MOTHER, YAN DANZHU, DUAN LENGQING, *and* AH FU, *the servant.*]

In the garden, the servant Ah Fu is spraying insecticide on some old books put out to sun. Nie is sitting on a bench reading, trying to adapt the story into a play.

At one end of the study is an opium couch. Nie's father, lying on it, dominates the room. He is smoking opium; the room is full of smoke. He keeps his eyes closed, opening them only occasionally when he talks to the others. He is wearing an undershirt, and over it a grease-stained green satin vest. Nie's mother is sitting in front of a mirror at the other end of the study. She is wearing a dark embroidered cheongsam. Head down, she knits in silence.

(*In the garden.*)

NIE: (*reads aloud from the book in his hand, getting up*) "I have never loved you. What I loved was what I took to be the embodiment of the shadow of the motherland."

(*looks up from the book, tries to put the line into more colloquial speech*) "I have never

loved you. I loved you because you were the embodiment of the shadow of the motherland.”

...

The embodiment of the shadow of the motherland, that's awkward. . . . The embodiment of the motherland . . .

(In the study.)

FATHER: *(coughs loudly, and spits)* . . .

NIE: *(hears his father coughing, raises his head apprehensively. When the coughing subsides and his father hasn't called for him, he bows his head again. Mutters to himself)* The sun is too strong. So strong that the plants and the flowers don't have a chance. They have all died. Since we moved here, none of the things we planted have survived. All dead. *(softer)* The opium fumes probably killed them.

(watching AH FU) Ah Fu is spraying insecticide again. He's like a giant monster spraying the bugs till they scatter screaming, "Here come the bombs again!" Their homes gone, their families scattered. Such a sorry sight. And Ah Fu looms above them, laughing . . .

(Pause)

Our tennis court . . . nobody ever plays tennis here.

(Pause)

The sun is too strong . . .

FATHER: Chuanqing!

(NIE hurries into the house. When he reaches the door, his father calls again)

FATHER: Chuanqing!

NIE: *(goes to the foot of the opium couch, timidly)* Father.

FATHER: Hm!

(Pause)

FATHER: Have you paid your fees?

NIE: Yes.

FATHER: What courses have you picked?

NIE: English History, Nineteenth-century English Prose . . .

FATHER: Your English! . . . Forget it! You'll never catch up with the others.

MOTHER: Coming from the mainland, his English is bound to be a little behind the others. Why don't we get him a private tutor to give him a bit of help . . .

FATHER: I'm not going to waste money on a private tutor for him. *(pauses)* *(to NIE)* What else have you picked?

NIE: Chinese Literary History.

FATHER: You're going to have it easy, aren't you? Tang-dynasty poetry, Song-dynasty *ci* . . . you studied all that ages ago. Idle good-for-nothing, always taking the easy way out!

(When his father stops asking him questions, NIE sits down in a rattan chair.)

FATHER: The standard of Chinese here is so wretched. "If you want to stop the tram, stop here."

Ha, ha, . . . *(laughs sarcastically)* *(NIE bows his head, crouching, leaning forward until his head almost touches the ground.)*

FATHER: Now, Shanghai is different! Even grocery store boys recognize smoked fish when they see it. The Cantonese don't even know what it is. You've got to hand it to the Shanghainese. The Cantonese don't know anything. Bloody Cantonese! They don't even know about smoked fish.

(NIE is still sitting hunched up, in the rattan chair. He is fidgeting with the metal tips of his shoe-laces, scratching his shoe with them.)

The Cantonese! Don't even know how to cook pork. They just bloody burn it. *(laughs sarcastically)*

MOTHER: Chuanqing, go and wash your face. Now that term has started, you should start reading your new books.

(NIE stands up and is about to leave the room.)

FATHER: Stop there! Don't you dare move unless I tell you to.

(NIE sits down again disconsolately, hunched up. He fidgets with his shoe-laces again, scratching his shoe with them.)

FATHER: (looks at NIE, picks up a roll of newspapers and hits him on the head with it, shouting)

Bloody hands! Leave them idle and they will destroy things.

(NIE looks up and stares vacantly at his father.)

FATHER: Come, come, fix me my pipe.

(NIE goes to a teapoy and moulds pats of opium into balls.)

FATHER: Look at you. Sneaky bastard. You don't even look like a man.

(Pause)

It'd be a miracle if any one falls for you.

(Having finished scolding his son, he closes his eyes again.)

(NIE glances up at his father, and the opium on the pick drips onto the opium lamp. NIE is startled and frightened that his father might see it.)

(NIE's MOTHER observes him, doesn't say anything, comes over and takes over the chore from him.)

NIE: (stands beside her) Mother!

MOTHER: (shakes her head, says nothing, bows her head and wipes her eyes) . . .

(NIE stands idle by her side. After a while, he goes to a corner of the room and pulls out a large rattan chest. The chest is fastened with a thick leather strap. He can't be bothered untying the strap, but lifts one end of the top far enough to put his hand inside. He puts his hand inside, rummages in the chest, and pulls out an old magazine. He throws it on the floor and begins to leaf through it.)

MOTHER: Why don't you do some reading.

NIE: Sure.

(NIE answers inattentively. When he finishes leafing through one magazine he reaches into the chest to pull out another.)

NIE: Mother.

MOTHER: Hm?

NIE: Mother, have you read most of the magazines here?

MOTHER: Yes.

NIE: Did you use to subscribe to these New Literature magazines?

MOTHER: Hmm.

NIE: And you used to join in the demonstrations?

MOTHER: Hmm.

NIE: Were people then very different from people nowadays? Why is everything so different now?

MOTHER: (preoccupied with moulding opium balls, she says nothing) . . .

NIE: Mother, do you know a man call Yan Ziye?

MOTHER (spills opium over the lamp. She is startled. Usually calm and composed, she is now flustered and awkward, and tries clumsily to clean up.) . . .

NIE: Mother . . .

MOTHER: . . .

NIE: I remember we used to have an issue of *Dawn Tide* magazine. There was an inscription on the inside cover: "To Biluo . . . from Yan Ziye" or something like that. I don't know if I got it right.

MOTHER: No, you are mistaken.

(NIE pulls out more magazines from the chest, and leafs through them in search of an inscription. The magazines lie scattered all over the floor.)

NIE: Where is it?

MOTHER: (softly) You are mistaken.

(FATHER coughs and spits.)

FATHER: Have you nothing better to do than to mess up the place? You'd better put those wretched old books away or I'll sell them to the rag-and-bone man.

(THE SERVANT enters.)

SERVANT: Young master, there are two young ladies to see you.

NIE: (flustered and embarrassed) What? It can't be. Must have come to the wrong place.

FATHER: I'm still alive, and he thinks the house belongs to him already. Inviting all kinds of riff-raff here. He has gall, this one!

NIE: I don't know anything about it. It must be a mistake.

(exits)

FATHER: Young lady, indeed! What girl would look at you twice, if it weren't for your money!

What good are you? You look only half human, like death warmed over . . .

(Pause)

Every one has his eye on my money! I won't leave a cent behind! I'm going to take it all with me in my coffin! (breaks into a coughing fit.) (NIE goes into the garden and is surprised to find YAN and DUAN LENGQING there.)

YAN: Hello, Chuanqing.

NIE: Why are you here?

DUAN: The sun is so strong out here. Aren't you going to ask us in?

FATHER: (in the study) What are they getting up to out there?

NIE: We're spring cleaning. The place is in a mess. Are you going to the University to sign up for your courses?

DUAN: We've signed up already. Didn't see you there. We're passing by so we thought we'd call.

YAN: We wanted to ask if you have finished the play, the adaptation?

NIE: Ah . . . almost. I haven't been feeling well.

FATHER: Why don't they come in? What are they saying behind my back? (orders MOTHER) Go!

(MOTHER goes out.)

DUAN: The sun is so strong out here. (looks round) Your plants are almost dead!

NIE: Mother. This is Duan Lengqing, this is Yan Danzhu. Her father is Yan Ziyue, our Professor in the Chinese Department.

MOTHER } Oh!

DUAN } (simultaneously): Hello, Mrs Nie.

YAN } How do you do, Mrs Nie?

NIE: They happened to be passing . . .

FATHER: (inside the study) Hasn't even got a man for a friend, what girl would be interested in him! Interested in his money more likely!

YAN: Mrs Nie, Chuanqing said you knew my father, is that true?

MOTHER: Oh, no. He was mistaken.

FATHER: What was that? (He tries to follow the conversation outside, and yet doesn't seem to hear much of it.)

MOTHER: How old are you now, Danzhu?

YAN: Eighteen.

MOTHER: You were born here, weren't you?

YAN: Yes. Father went abroad from Shanghai, and then came to work in Hong Kong. I was born here.

FATHER: (*in the study*) Hong Kong people think only about your money. When they make friends with you, it's because they're after your money.

MOTHER: (*to NIE*) Why don't you ask Miss Yan and Miss Duan in?

NIE: (*hurriedly*) Oh, no. We're going to read my script out here. There's a bit more room here.

DUAN: Is the script ready?

YAN: (*to MOTHER*) Actually, my father is about your age, he was in Shanghai too. You two might have met.

NIE: Her father was interested in drama too.

YAN: Were you interested in drama, Mrs Nie?

MOTHER: (*smiles, holds YAN's hand*) You are so pretty, Miss Yan . . .

FATHER: (*in the study*) (*shouts*) Come in, all of you! What are you doing outside, talking behind my back? (*MOTHER goes into the study. YAN and DUAN look at each other, embarrassed.*)

YAN }
DUAN } : Is something wrong?

FATHER: I'm not dead yet!

NIE: Oh, nothing. Let's try going over the script. Danzhu, would you read the last bit of dialogue?

FATHER: (*in the study*) Fix me another pipe.

(*MOTHER sits down next to the opium couch.*)

YAN: (*reading from the script*) " . . . I have never loved you. What I have loved was the shadow of the motherland . . ." (*to NIE*) Is that how you read it?

NIE: Louder, with more feeling!

(*In the study*)

FATHER: I never wanted to leave Shanghai, even when everyone advised me to. Even cancelled the booking for the cabin . . .

(*In the garden*)

YAN: (*reading from the script*) "But now, I have returned to the embrace of my motherland, to enjoy her warmth and caresses! I've left my shadow in Shum Shui Po . . ."

DUAN: Oh dear. That's really rather "literary", isn't it?

FATHER: (*in the study*) If it weren't for the wretched political situation, who'd come to a wretched place like Hong Kong . . .

YAN: The last bit does sound a bit odd. (*Pause*) I don't think I really understand this story, "The Love of Shum Shui Po". (*Pause*) The heroine seems a bit simple-minded.

NIE: She's not. This is a story about a girl who grew up in Hong Kong and how she meets a young man from the mainland, who helps her to understand her country, to shake off the yoke of her bourgeois life . . .

YAN: (*shakes her head*) . . .

FATHER: (*in the study*) What's so marvellous about Hong Kong! It's not as if it's got lots of skyscrapers! (*Pause*) It's best not to go out at all unless you have to, you'll only get diddled.

NIE: That last passage, you should read it with more pride.

YAN: But I can't read it like that.

NIE: You must try.

YAN: (*shakes her head and will not speak.*)

FATHER: (*In the study*) The first day here, we didn't know which bus to get on so we had to go by rickshaw. (*coughs*) The wretch pulled us all over the place, for almost an hour. Probably out to cheat us too, I'd say. Gave me a fright too. Ugh, Hong Kong . . . !

YAN: But it doesn't sound natural.

NIE: You must try!

FATHER: (*In the study*) and then I had to change my money. When I came out I'd lost half of

what I had in my pocket. Highway robbery!

YAN: I can't read it the way you want me to.

MOTHER: (*in the study*) You have to change your money wherever you go. It's not the fault of the place!

NIE: (*shouts*) No! You must read it like that! You must!

FATHER: (*In the study. Shouts*) What!? How dare you talk to me like that?! So you know everything and I'm just plain ignorant, is that it? So you know everything just because you've been to school! You're just after my money, like everybody else!

(*Both MOTHER and YAN look down. MOTHER, on hearing the last accusation, holds back, calms herself and replies.*)

MOTHER: I don't want your money. You can take it with you.

FATHER: Now you're cursing me! You'd like me to take my money into my grave, wouldn't you?

You wish me dead! You damned slut! (*He slaps her.*)

(*At the same time, NIE is shouting in the garden.*)

NIE: You must! You must! You must!

MOTHER: (*cries out in pain and rage. She runs from the opium couch to the mirror and sits down there crying.*)

DUAN: Perhaps we'd better leave.

FATHER: (*jumps up, scurries to the door of the study, glances outside and turns back*)

What trash is he getting mixed up with now!

DUAN: You look just like your father.

NIE: I don't! I don't! I don't!

DUAN: What's wrong with that? Sons usually take after their fathers.

NIE: I don't. I don't. I'm not his son!

YAN: Chuanqing, we must go now. We'll rehearse again when you've finished the script, all right?

NIE: I'm not his son!

(*The two girls exit.*)

(*NIE walks back into the study, and wanders silently to his mother's side. He looks into the mirror, his hand touching his face.*)

NIE: (*as if in a trance*) I don't look like my father, do I? Tell me that I won't turn out like him.

I don't look like him. I look like somebody else . . . someone better . . .

MOTHER: (*talking to herself*) Chuanqing, you'll have to learn to look after yourself. I can't take it anymore. Sooner or later, I'll have to leave this house, I can't look after you anymore.

NIE: (*touching his face*) I don't look like him, I look like . . .

MOTHER: I remember when you were a child once, we were having dinner. Your father boxed your ears over some small thing. I shook all over; I tried to hide my face with my bowl. But the tears kept falling. I put down my bowl, dashed into the bathroom, bolted the door and cried and cried. I saw my face in the mirror. (*She looks at her face in the mirror, touching it.*) I watched the tears streaming down, I gritted my teeth and swore that I'd make him pay for it, I'd avenge your suffering.

(*Pause*)

The bathroom window faced the terrace. Suddenly I heard a noise. A ball hit the window and bounced back. You were playing, you had forgotten about the whole thing. You'd got used to it. I haven't cried since. I just feel sad. (*She hugs herself as if she were cold.*)

I've always thought that I could stay here to look after you if I only put up with things. I've always thought that you'd grow up one day, and be free. But, I really can't stand it anymore . . . Forgive me . . . please . . .

NIE: (*touching his face*) . . . (*The light fades out.*)

Scene III

Christmas Eve. In a park near the Peak.

[NIE CHUANQING, YAN DANZHU, and several other students]

In the park, there is a bench, a street lamp nearby, and a flight of steps to one side. The clearing is surrounded by trees casting dark shadows, and the wind is moaning in the trees. Now and then, the wind brings snatches of Christmas carols from the distance. In the dark shadows, we can make out a human figure, hunched up on the bench in a foetal position, his arms round his knees, his head bowed. He is dressed inconspicuously in dark clothes, and people passing by wouldn't notice him. This is Nie Chuanqing, hiding in the darkness, concealing himself in the darkness.

Three students enter descending the flight of steps. They have just come from a party, and are taking this path down the hill. They are singing Christmas carols. They may be a little tipsy too. One of the students is carrying a big flashlight.

STUDENTS A: (*sings*) Silent . . . night . . .

B: Holy . . . night . . .

C: All . . . is . . . calm . . .

A: All . . . is . . . bright . . .

(*He shines his flashlight here and there and discovers the figure on the bench.*)

Ooops! Look! What have we here?

C: A ghost! a ghost! (*scrambles behind B shouting*)

B: No! It's a rock!

A: It's moving!

C: Wah! (*hides behind B*) What sort of monster is it?

A: Looks like a man.

B: Not a man. It's a rock that looks like a man.

A: We three have been following a bright shining star, and have travelled far. And here we discover a Holy Child!

C: (*tiptoes over to the bench, kicks it and darts back behind B. There is no response.*) . . .

B: It's a rock. Let's bring our glad tidings to the rock.

(*The three move closer to the bench.*)

A: (*sings*) We wish you a Merry Christmas!

B: We wish you a Merry Christmas!

C: (*at the top of his voice*) And a Happy New Year!

(*B stretches out his hand to touch NIE, taps his head with his knuckles, as if testing a stone . . .*)

A: We wish you . . .

NIE: (*looks up*) Leave me alone!

C: Oh! (*The three back away from him.*)

NIE: Why are you bothering me?

A: Who's that? Who are you? (*shines the flashlight in NIE's face*) Why are you hiding yourself so sneakily here?

NIE: (*raises his hands to shield his face from the flashlight*) . . .

B: Oh, it's Nie Chuanqing.

C: Oo-oh. It's Miss Nie. Miss Nie, may I have the pleasure of this dance?

B: (*stands on the bench, looking down on NIE. Parodying their teacher*) "Nie Chuanqing, tell us about the origin of the 'seven-character verse form'."

C: (*kneels down, parodies NIE*) "The . . . the seven cha . . . character . . . character verse . . . verse

form . . . originated . . . in . . .”

A: (*bursts out in laughter*) Ha ha . . .

(*The three students crowd round NIE, laughing. NIE pushes C away.*)

B: “I never thought the seven-character verse form would be so amusing. I’m sorry I don’t see the humour.”

C: (*parodies NIE crying*) “. . . mommy, mommy . . .”

(*They burst out laughing again.*)

C: (*Encouraged by the laughter, C’s parody becomes even more outrageous.*) “Oh . . . Professor Yan, please . . . please don’t scold me . . .”

B: (*authoritatively*) “Crying at the slightest provocation is a sign of the weak. If every young man in China behaved like this, China would have been annihilated a long time ago.”

C: (*parodying unrestrained crying*) “. . . Professor . . . Yan . . . please . . . don’t order me out of the classroom.”

(*THE STUDENTS burst out laughing again.*)

(*NIE suddenly jumps up, and swings his fist at C. C is taken by surprise and takes a few punches from NIE. A and B rush over to separate them, and they too suffer from NIE’s wrath. NIE is like an enraged beast, lashing out at everything in its path. The students are no match for him and scurry away.*)

B: He can’t even take a joke. He’s mad!

C: He’s gone round the bend!

(*Exit A, B and C*)

(*NIE sits alone on the bench. The wind moans in the trees. Strains of carolling. Then the sound of people approaching again. NIE looks up, on the alert, thinking that the three students have come back.*)

(*YAN DANZHU, DUAN and two young students come down the flight of steps.*)

YAN: This stretch of the path downhill is so quiet. Every time I come this way I talk to myself.

D: Wouldn’t you reveal your innermost secrets that way?

YAN: I might.

(*YAN sees NIE, calls to him.*)

YAN: Chuanqing!

(*NIE makes no answer, as if he hasn’t seen her.*)

YAN: (*to her three companions*) Why don’t you go on ahead. I want to have a word with this temperamental lady of ours.

DUAN: We’ll wait for you. Somebody has to see you home!

YAN: It’s all right. Chuanqing can see me home. It’s all right.

E: We’d better wait for you.

(*YAN goes over to NIE, sits down beside him. The others exit.*)

YAN: Chuanqing, why didn’t you join in the dancing?

NIE: I don’t know how to dance.

YAN: What are you doing out here?

NIE: Nothing.

YAN: Would you like to see me home, hmm?

(*YAN stands up, waits for NIE to move.*)

(*NIE doesn’t respond.*)

(*YAN, seeing that NIE isn’t responding, sits down again.*)

YAN: Did you know that after class I looked all over the place for you? But you’d already left.

(*NIE does not respond.*)

YAN: What happened today . . . please don’t be angry with my father. He . . . he takes things too seriously . . . he always does. In this university, the standard of Chinese is not good, but

nobody thinks it's of any importance. How can he help feeling frustrated? And you . . . your Chinese is better than any of the others, but you . . . disappointed him. You couldn't even answer a question on the origin of the seven-character verse form. Just imagine . . . put yourself in his . . .

(NIE says nothing.)

That's why he lost his temper this morning. Now do you understand? . . . It was a bit much, but if you see why he did it, perhaps you could try to explain to him why you haven't been quite yourself lately. (Pause) You know that my father is a warm sort of person, I'm sure he'd try to help. (Pause) Or perhaps . . . why don't you tell me about it, and I'll tell him? Would you like that?

(NIE remains silent.)

(Pause)

YAN: Chuanqing, has something happened at home?

NIE: (looks up with a wan smile) You're too nosy.

(NIE gets up.)

(YAN is not offended. She gets up too, and touches his arm.)

YAN: (gently) Why are you upset? Is it because the drama club wouldn't stage your play? Or is it something to do with your parents?

NIE: (frees his arm from her hold) Why, why, why! I want to ask you a few questions myself: Why are you so nosy? Why do you follow me everywhere? It's shameless, a girl like you! You have no consideration for your father.

(NIE walks away from her.)

YAN: (sighs) Oh, yes. I have forgotten. You are a man and I am a woman and we must keep a distance between us! I keep thinking of myself as a child. It didn't matter then for boys and girls to play together. It's because they still treat me like a child at home, perhaps.

NIE: (turns back to her, and points an angry finger at her.) You never stop talking about your home! Oh, we all know you have an ideal family! It's a pity that even such a wonderful family doesn't seem to have done much to help you grow up!

YAN: (bows her head) You sound as though you can't stand me! As if my happiness makes you unhappy. (looking at NIE) . . . But, Chuanqing, I know you're not a mean person. But why? Has something happened at home . . . ?

NIE: (petulantly) Why? Because I'm jealous of you . . . jealous because you're beautiful, you're healthy, you get on with people!

YAN: (sighs) Why don't you take me seriously? (solemnly) Chuanqing, you must know that I'm your friend. I want you to be happy . . .

NIE: (in a rage) So you want to give me some of your happiness? Is that it? You've had your fill and now you're sweeping the crumbs off the table onto the floor to feed the dog, is that it?

(screams at her) I don't want it! I don't want it! I wouldn't take it even if I were starving!

(YAN stands there looking at NIE. A breeze stirs her white dress and her hair. She stares at him in silence with her eyes wide open. NIE meets her eyes, looks at her for a moment, casts his eyes down and bows his head.)

NIE: (after a moment's silence, looks up, asks softly) Do you want to go?

(YAN turns, goes to the bench and sits down.)

(NIE goes to YAN.)

NIE: (his voice trembling slightly) Danzhu, quite often, you seek me out . . . is it . . . do you . . . do you like me a little?

(YAN is sitting on the bench, resting her bare arm on the back of the bench. NIE goes to sit next to her. He too places his hand on the back of the bench next to hers. He bows his head, as if he wants to snuggle up to her. But he hesitates, and rests his cheek on the back

of his own hand.)

YAN: *(The wind stirs her dress. She pulls her cape a little tighter round her and smiles.)* More than a little. If I didn't like you why would I want to be your friend?

NIE: *(looks up, straightens himself, swallows)* Friend? I don't want you to be my friend.

YAN: But you need a friend.

NIE: It's not enough to be friends. What I need is love . . . intimate . . . close . . . like a father's love . . . like a mother's love . . .

(YAN stares at him in astonishment. He grips the back of the bench as if it were her hand. He gazes fervently into her eyes.)

NIE: Danzhu, if you love somebody, then you're nothing more to him than a lover. *(in earnest)* But to me, you are more than just a lover, you're like a father, a mother, a home, an entirely new environment, an ideal country. There is only you in my life, past, present and to come. You are like an all knowing, all-powerful god.

YAN: Chuanqing, I can't be all that. If I love someone, at most I can be his lover and his wife. As to the rest, I . . . I can't be all those things.

NIE: *(grips the back of the chair with both hands, bows his head, softly)* Then you don't love me . . . not a bit.

YAN: I never thought of love.

NIE: *(stands up and walks away)* That's because you treat me like a girl . . .

YAN: *(gets up and tries to explain)* No, that's not true. But . . .

(Pause)

YAN: *(frowns, and coughs a little wearily)* You get so upset whenever we talk about this, so why do you bring it up?

NIE: *(turns away, gnashing his teeth)* You treat me like a girl . . . You . . . you . . . you don't even treat me like a human being!

(His voice is hoarse and he practically screams out the last sentence.)

(YAN is stunned. She backs off from him a couple of paces. After a moment, thinking that she has over-reacted, she approaches him again and smiles.) Do you want me to treat you like a man? Well, I can do that. But you must behave like a man, you mustn't start crying at the least provocation, or be so sentimental . . .

NIE: *(laughs dryly, without looking at her.)* You do know how to coax a child! "You mustn't cry! Such a big boy, you wouldn't cry, would you!"

(NIE laughs bitterly. He turns, heading for the steps on the right, about to leave.)

(NIE gets to the steps. YAN runs after him.)

YAN: Chuanqing! Chuanqing! Wait for me! Please wait for me! *(YAN calls out to him as she runs after him, panting.)* I want to tell you . . . I want to tell . . .

(NIE is already on the second or third step when YAN catches up with him. She stands at the foot of the steps, just below him.)

NIE: I'll tell you something. I want your life! This world is not big enough for both of us. If you live, there is no place for me. If I want to live, you must go. Don't you understand?

(Standing above her, NIE grabs hold of her shoulder with one hand and presses her head down with the other, as if he wants to make her head disappear into her body, out of sight of the world. She struggles, he falls down the steps, and the two roll on the ground.)

(NIE gets up, and kicks YAN, who is still on the ground. He kicks and shouts.)

NIE: You thought I was some namby-pamby milksop, didn't you? So you dared to be with me in the middle of the night . . . I never counted for anything in your heart . . . You, and the rest . . . you're all the same . . . You talk and you laugh, and when people grow fond of you, you shy away. You say you've never thought about love! You've never thought of me as a man! You never thought that I would hit you, attack you, kill you, did you? "It's only Nie Chuan-

qing . . . It doesn't matter!" "It's all right, Chuanqing can take me home!" You've never thought anything of me at all!

(When he first starts kicking her, YAN cries out in pain. After that she makes no sound. After a moment, NIE's rage quiets down, and he panics. He leaves her and makes for the exit, left. He takes a few steps, turns round, sees that she is still moving and gasping for air. Realizing that she is still alive, he stands still for a moment. Then he starts to run down the hill . . .)

Scene IV

The study in Nie's house.

[NIE CHUANQING, YAN DANZHU, NIE'S FATHER and MOTHER, THE SERVANT.]

When the curtain rises, Nie's father is lying on the opium couch in the centre, smoking his opium pipe, dominating the stage as at the beginning of Scene II. But now Nie is at stage left. He is sitting on the floor, his head resting on the rattan chest as if he were asleep. He is facing the large mirror, and his reflection is visible in the mirror. Nie's father has closed his eyes too, and the two of them seem almost inanimate. Nothing happens for a while.

FATHER: *(opens his eyes)* Chuanqing!

NIE: *(does not move)*

(Pause)

(There is the sound of an explosion from outside.)

(Pause)

FATHER: Chuanqing!

NIE: *(no response)* . . .

(After a while, NIE seems to awaken from a dream. He looks up from the rattan chest. He stretches his arms, yawns. He turns to the mirror and looks at his own reflection.)

FATHER: Chuanqing!

(NIE gets up slowly, goes to the window, stage right, and looks outside.)

FATHER: Get me my medicine.

(NIE exits. Returns with the medicine. He moves slowly. He stands by the bed with the medicine.)

(Pause)

FATHER: Get me a cup of tea.

(NIE exits, and returns empty handed.)

NIE: There's no tea left.

(Pause)

FATHER: No tea?

NIE: You asked me that last time.

FATHER: Since when?

NIE: We ran out a long time ago.

(NIE moves slowly to the window and looks out.)

FATHER: What is the time?

NIE: The usual.

FATHER: Is it warm or cool?

NIE: Just as usual.

FATHER: Get me a cup of tea.

(NIE moves to stage left, stops half-way.)

NIE: We've run out of tea.

FATHER: Since when?

(Pause. NIE returns to the window.)

FATHER: Get me my medicine.

NIE: (looks out of the window) Out there you see people carrying their bags walking slowly down the hill. Sometimes they look up at the sky, as if they fear that something might drop out of it.

(Pause)

Sometimes they stop at our door and peer in, to see if we've left.

FATHER: You move when I tell you to!

NIE: Sometimes they just push open the gate and come right in, and rest a while in our tennis court. It doesn't matter. We don't play tennis anyway.

(FATHER snores.)

NIE: Two people have just come in.

(FATHER snores.)

Strange. They don't look . . . the dog isn't barking . . . Oh!

Mother! (He raises his voice.) Mother!

(FATHER snores.)

(MOTHER comes into the garden. NIE meets her there.)

NIE: Mother!

MOTHER: Chuanqing!

MOTHER: I hear that you are going back to the mainland soon.

NIE: Yes. Father said Hong Kong isn't safe. He wants to go to Guilin.

MOTHER: That's true. The Japanese have bombed Shenzhen, and they've set fishing boats and merchant ships afire at sea. Hong Kong won't be safe much longer.

NIE: Are you leaving too, Mother?

MOTHER: I haven't decided. I'll wait and see.

NIE: Why don't you come with us, Mother?

MOTHER: We can't go back to where we started. You take care of yourself.

(MOTHER puts her hands on NIE's shoulders. He rubs his cheek against her hand.)

MOTHER: When are you leaving?

NIE: Later. When Father can walk again.

MOTHER: Mm.

(NIE rubs his cheek against his mother's hand. In the background Father can be heard snoring.)

MOTHER: I brought someone with me today.

NIE: . . .

MOTHER: Since I moved out, she . . . her family has been looking after me. I know what you did to her, and I've brought her with me to see you . . .

MOTHER: (calling) Danzhu!

NIE: (back away from her) No! Don't. I don't want to see her.

(NIE backs away to his place in front of the mirror. He sits by the rattan chest, and covers his face so he won't see the visitor. YAN comes in.)

YAN: (as she enters) It's so dark in here. You can't see anything!

FATHER: (talking in his sleep) Chuanqing!

(NIE looks up hesitantly.)

MOTHER: I'll wait outside. (exits)

YAN: (looks round) Chuanqing!

FATHER: Get me a cup of tea!

(NIE realizes that his father is talking in his sleep, hides his face again.)

YAN: Chuanqing! (finds NIE, and goes to him) Chuanqing, I'm not here to settle old scores with you.

NIE: (looks up slowly, staring at his own reflection in the mirror) I didn't mean to hurt you . . .

YAN: I don't bear you any grudge . . .

NIE: (NIE puts his left hand on his own right shoulder.)

YAN: I stopped hating you a long while ago. I feel only . . . pity for you!

NIE: (rubs his right cheek against his left hand) . . .

NIE: (slowly) I didn't mean to hurt you.

YAN: What's the point in saying that!

NIE: I only wanted to tell you . . .

YAN: That's no way to . . .

FATHER: Chuanqing!

YAN: (Pause) When you were screaming, I couldn't hear what you had to say. When you shouted for me to read according to the script, I didn't know what you meant . . . But I could understand you much better when you were sitting quietly, drinking tea by yourself.

NIE: I just wanted to tell you . . .

YAN: I feel that although we are so different, we do have a lot in common . . .

(YAN puts her right hand on her own left shoulder.)

Our parents are different. You are a man and I am a woman. We grew up in different places. But, sometimes, (looking into the mirror, rubs her left cheek against her right hand) we think the same things . . . like the same things . . .

(to the reflection of NIE in the mirror) . . . a lot in common . . . (YAN turns round. She is no longer looking at the reflection of NIE in the mirror, but at NIE himself.)

(stretches out her hand and touches NIE's forehead) Look at you, daydreaming on that rattan chest, getting all these knobbly marks all over your forehead . . . I must have had such marks on my forehead too, once.

(She touches her own forehead.)

Sometimes I feel as if you were my long lost brother, who has grown up somewhere else. (Pause) If I have a happy family, and you don't, how could I be happy? If I am healthy, and have lots of friends, but you don't, how could I be happy?

(NIE begins to sob quietly.)

It's not true that I want to give you the crumbs of my happiness.

(She brushes away his tears gently.)

Since that day, for the whole of this year, I've done a lot of thinking . . . A lot has happened too, at home. I'm beginning to understand more about things. We didn't use to want to grow up. We wanted to have a father who could take care of us. And then, you gradually realize that fathers aren't perfect either . . . they have their own problems . . .

FATHER: (talking in his sleep) Cancel the booking . . . I don't want to go . . . don't want to . . . after my money, that's what they are . . .

YAN: . . . perhaps they even need our help . . .

NIE: (softly) You have a nice family . . .

YAN: I've always said I had a good father. I do have a good father; that's why when things took a turn at home, I didn't know how to cope. Perhaps I felt instinctively that my father belonged only to me . . . but now I try to see things from another point of view . . . nobody is a saint . . . from your mother's point of view, whatever she has done, she must have had her own reasons . . . perhaps you aren't quite ready to understand these things . . .

(the sound of shelling outside)

YAN: How these military manoeuvres sound more and more like the real thing! The war isn't quite here yet, but already so much is shattered. The simplest family life . . .

FATHER: (*in a nightmare*) Don't take my money! I'll give you money. Let me go! Let me go! Don't take my money! I've not stashed away! The gold is in the garden . . . I didn't bring it with me. I haven't got it on me, don't take it away from me!

(*the sound of cannons*)

YAN: It's as if someone is pounding on the door, but there's only us children here in an empty house . . . the grown-ups have all gone away, somewhere . . .

NIE: (*holding his head, weeping*) . . .

YAN: Don't be afraid, my brother . . .

(*MOTHER enters.*)

Mother is here . . .

MOTHER: (*watches as YAN consoles NIE, but doesn't go near them. She goes to the window and looks out.*)

Things are getting worse and worse. If war does break out here, Hong Kong may not hold out for very long. (*looking out the window*) So many people have come here to take refuge. Once war breaks out here, we'll all have to decide . . . I don't know whether to stay or go. But where would one go?

FATHER: (*moans loudly*) . . .

MOTHER: When things go wrong, we all want to hold on to something real. So much that is good has already been shattered, torn to pieces, and nobody knows whether we can put the pieces back together and make something good out of it. Standing here, by the window, you see only your own reflection in the glass. (*Pause*) But if you look further away, half-way up the hill, you can see the mountains stretching into the distance, as if leading to the peace and prosperity to come.

(*Pause*)

But that peace and prosperity won't be for our generation. (*as if talking to YAN and NIE*) Our generation will pass away, you, perhaps (*without conviction*) . . . may have a chance to see it . . .

CURTAIN