

## ABSTRACT

The notion that the past never fully recedes into the past, and that memories and trauma can be passed on to another subsequent generation is one that is particularly relevant to second generation individuals, or the “post-generation” as Marianne Hirsch describes in her work. Cathy Caruth, a scholar in trauma theory, also notes how trauma is an event that cannot be entirely witnessed by one’s self nor fully integrated into one’s experience.

Just as the idea that trauma can haunt a subject for generations is not new, neither are adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, nor the conversation about the role and place of adaptations in the Shakespearean literary realm. This project can best be thought of as one branch of the Shakespearean rhizome, a notion that adaptations are not completely beholden to the original text and its power, but have a life and creative force of their own.

The goals of this project were to use fiction as a way of understanding the experiences of the post-generation as well as understand and contextualize the ways in which trauma is passed down between generations, particularly within Asian American communities. My aim in using a Shakespearean text to do this work is to also critique the “universal” white western audience that was *Macbeth*’s intended audience, as well as to use the themes of haunting and the supernatural to help contextualize the ways in which trauma and memory are transmitted.

This project contains both a critical theoretical component as well as a creative component, though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The theoretical portion of this project explores how memory and trauma are passed down between generations as well as understand how fiction can aid in interpreting and contextualizing those memories. The creative portion of this project consists of a full length play adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The adaptation explores how a young girl growing up in a Chinese American family navigates and understands her family’s history and the intergenerational trauma that grows from that. Much of the play focuses on the ways in which this young girl acts as witness to the effects of the trauma and memories of her parents and ultimately how this affects the ways in which she sees and understands herself.

***Tending the Ghosts***

A Contemporary Adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* Through the Lens of Intergenerational Trauma and Transmission Within the Chinese American Community

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in English

Mount Holyoke College  
May 2020

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help of so many incredible and generous people.

Thank you to my amazing thesis advisor Professor Amy Rodgers for her guidance and support, both in this project and in life. She consistently believed in and had so much confidence in this project from its early beginnings and has had so much faith in my ability to create and see this project through, even when I didn't think I could.

Thank you to my committee members Professor Iyko Day and Professor Tian Hui Ng. Thank you to Professor Shin-Yi Gao and Professor Franklin Odo for their continued support. You all have been so generous with your time and unwavering in your support in all the courses I have taken with you. This project would not have been possible if it hadn't been for your incredible teaching and belief in me as a student and a person.

Thank you to Mary Stettner for her generous research support and being quite literally able to find absolutely anything. And thank you to Cindy Meehan for her amazing assistance throughout my time as an English major.

Thank you to all my friends whom I have struggled and triumphed through four years of Mount Holyoke. Thank you for being there for the tears and the laughs. I could not imagine being at MoHome with anyone else.

Thank you to the Asian Center for Empowerment (fondly known as the ACE House) for giving me a home to grow, write, find community, and for the many mentors I have found there.

Thank you to my sisters, Jenny, Karen, and Mae for their support during the worst and best of times.

Thank you to my parents (马莉 and 张学成), who this piece was written for out of love and without whom I would not be here. Thank you always for your unconditional love and support of all that I do and am. And thank you for passing on your invaluable stories, of which I will do my best to always remember, as I know they will always help me find my way home.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
Tending the Ghosts	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
OPENING STATEMENT	5
DESCRIPTION	7
NARRATIVE	15
SCHOLARLY/THEORY	25
LANGUAGE	35
FUTURE AFTERLIVES OF PLAY	43
RELATIONSHIP TO MACBETH	46
Cast of Characters	55
<i>Tending the Ghosts</i>	58
APPENDIX	201
BIBLIOGRAPHY	202

## OPENING STATEMENT

*“You cannot imagine...”*

-a constant saying of, Ma Li (马莉), my mother.

“You cannot imagine,” is something my mother has always said when telling stories of places and times that are far from the present that we both live in. In her mind, there are many things that cannot be imagined unless one has seen it or otherwise experienced that moment. For me, my mother’s and father’s childhoods, their time living through the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, and the things they saw, exist both in a time and place I can never fully access. I have never been able to see their childhood homes or picture fully what they had been like before immigrating to America, and I can only understand parts of the languages they speak so casually.

When I was growing up, I didn’t realize what or how many stories were being told around me. But for some reason, the images always stuck in my mind, even if I didn’t fully understand what they meant or the stories and people that they belonged to. When I got older, I asked about details. But even so, there were still unfamiliar names, unfamiliar places--some that no longer existed, and some I had never seen. There were many things about my parents that I didn’t know. It took me years to piece together their “immigration story,” and even now, some of the details still elude me. Part of me always felt that by sharing something from the past that they remembered, they were opening up in some way. Even the stories that weren’t really about them,

but people or places they had known, felt like they were giving me permission to see something others hadn't. There was a special feeling knowing that there was only something that I could know and share between my parents--and that became all the more important when I realized, growing up, how little they would share about themselves. There was also something to be proud of, in that there was a piece of my history and myself in them that no one else outside of my family could claim.

With the storytelling also came the fear of forgetting. Part of me has always felt in some way that it was futile to try and record their stories. Even the ones I had heard multiple times, contained details that never made sense to me or that I could never remember correctly. Part of me has tried to reckon with how much of their history I know will be lost because it will never be recorded in some way. I realized how little my memory contains compared to theirs, and it feels like a heavy burden to try and stave off that loss. It felt like I could never really carry the weight of both their memories and mine.

I didn't realize that what I felt was a sort of haunting in some sense.

Part of me felt that it was the language I needed to understand better, that it was always the language that was getting in the way of me fully understanding what exactly lived in their minds, their histories. Growing up, I didn't realize that the language my mother spoke at home was different from the one my father grew up with. I grew up confusing two words that had the same meaning. I grew up hearing some form of Chinese and English in the same two breaths. There were things that didn't need translation until I stepped out of our home. I grew up listening

more than speaking the languages of my mother and father. And there was always a guilt ridden part of me for never learning to speak.

In Spring 2020 I realized how close to home this project was when I found out that my maternal grandmother had been in a stroke-induced coma and still hadn't "woken up." (Though, at present, she is slowly recovering.) As of the time of writing this introduction, the last time I had been back to Shanghai or Shandong to visit family was about seven years ago. It had finally come to a time for me to start reckoning with what I would be able to preserve and what I would not. With my limited language skills and poor access to the places and people my parents had grown up with, I knew there were always going to be things that I would never be able to know fully. There was a sense of loss at the things that I knew I would never be able to access or to know things in the same way my parents did.

I have also struggled with what it means to have so much of my memory of myself, who I believe I am, and my personal history be composed from my parents'. With this project, I have begun to think more about what it means to remember and what it means to carry memory. Although this play is not "factual" or autobiographical/memoir in any strict sense, I hope that the truths from the memories, stories and experiences of my parents and of listening to them has found a home in this piece.

## DESCRIPTION

This play is a contemporary full length adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. This adaptation follows several of the main plot points of the original play, such as King Duncan and Banquo's death. However, this play focuses more heavily on the themes of haunting and the

supernatural as modes of exploring cultural and intergenerational trauma within a Chinese American family unit, as well as the particular Chinese American community that this family unit resides in and of which it is a part. The three main forms of haunting and the supernatural that the original play uses are the presence of the three weird sisters or witches, the presence of Banquo's ghost, and the relentless handwashing of Lady Macbeth. All three of these are incorporated into the adaptation as well, though in varying degrees.

This adaptation's structure is episodic and, unlike *Macbeth*, does not follow a single linear narrative nor stay within a linear chronology. This adaptation also follows a two-year span within the present as well as several flashbacks, both to the daughter's own past and her parents'. This lack of linear temporality speaks to the ways in which trauma and the traumatic event (or "rupture" as Hirsch calls it) does not,<sup>1</sup> and in some cases cannot, exist in diachronic temporalities, and how trauma/traumatic events may exist in their own time and space outside of traditional linear time.

Along with the incorporation of the supernatural are the imaginative works created by Nu'Er. Part of her imagination is composed of flashbacks, either to her own past or that of her parents. Nu'Er also creates stories/narratives, based on Chinese folktales such as the "Butterfly Lovers," in order to create context and to form understanding and meaning out of her parents' history and family histories.

An important role that Nu'Er also plays is that of the omniscient, sometimes semi-omniscient narrator. (Part of this narration was inspired by the way in which narration was used in the film adaptation of Amy Tan's generational novel, *The Joy Luck Club*.) This narration

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<sup>1</sup> Hirsch, Marianne. "The generation of Postmemory." *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 33.



allows access into the ways in which Nu'Er tries to piece together her family's history and her own role in it. Questions about how Nu'Er's narration changes over time and in different spaces, especially in times and places in which she is not directly involved, arose as this project formed.

There is intentionally a multilingual element of the play, which I discuss in more detail in a later section. This play incorporates English, Chinese Mandarin and Shanghai dialect, along with different forms of syntax and representations of those languages.

For this adaptation, there were several changes made to the characters and their positioning within the story. These changes were made to better suit the goals and themes of the adaptation. For example, in the original play, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth never have a surviving child. In order to show the effects of intergenerational trauma, I chose to create a full-fledged daughter character, initially named Nu'Er (daughter in Mandarin), to represent the second generation (or post generation as described by Hirsch).<sup>2</sup>

I have also chosen to expand upon the depth in which certain characters have been given in the original play, especially the female characters. The two primary examples of this are Lady Macbeth/Xiao Jie and Lady Macduff. I have chosen to give Lady Macbeth/Xiao Jie a broader backstory as well as give Lady Macduff a broader familial context in order to expand on the characters that Shakespeare did not. I also chose to have these two women be neighborhood friends and to create a female sphere not present in the original play. It was important to have that kind of space because I wanted to explore how Xiao Jie/Lady Macbeth's character would have changed and how she would have grown in an environment very different from the original play in which she lacked that possibility. Having a space in which Xiao Jie could exist outside of

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch, Marianne. Introduction. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 3.

her relationship or responsibility and dependency to the men in her life was important because I wanted my female characters to have as full of a self as possible and to highlight other aspects of their identity, such as her upbringing in Shanghai. It was important that Xiao Jie could exist in a space where her voice was not as silenced by the patriarchy and sexism she and the other Chinese women in the play experience, both in China and in America. It was also important to highlight her relationship with her daughter as well as her own mother and other female mentors/guides/supports in her life and to have that as a generational thread that runs throughout the play.

I have also made Duncan, the murdered king in *Macbeth*, a more metaphorical presence and used his absence in the play to contribute to the haunting nature of memory throughout the play. There is a certain sense of loss in knowing that you cannot easily access or be with members of your family. Although those family members may still be living, the kind of life that would have been shared between Xiao Jie, Macbeth, and their family in China, had they not immigrated, is lost in a sense. Part of the haunting comes from the irreplaceable loss of that time that could have been shared. When Xiao Jie and Macbeth go back to visit China, it is not as though they could easily slip into the lives they had left before they had immigrated. For Xiao Jie and Macbeth, there is no easily available route of “going back” or “returning” to who they were before and the lives they would have led if they did not leave for America.

For some of the main characters of the play, their names were changed from the original. Much of this was intentional, and I have listed below the reasons for doing so.

Lady Macbeth as Xiao Jie (小姐): The original intention of naming Lady Macbeth as “Wife” or “young woman” in Mandarin was to play with the idea of the “universal” and whose

“universal.” The “universal” I aimed to question and critique with this adaptation was the white, cis-male, western, literary canon to which Shakespeare belongs. I also aimed to critique the notion that there is a “universal.” Too often the term is used to describe a certain relatability to the text as well as the ability to describe all human experiences within a certain framework or text. Often, this “universal” tends to be one that belongs to the white, western world. I am interested in critiquing these tenets through this play because I wanted to challenge the idea that there is a “universal” and that there can only be one “universal.” What kinds of things can a non-Asian, western audience take from a play on a Chinese American family? This play also aims to decentralize the centrality of whiteness and western dominance that accompanies the idea of the “universal” and to highlight the validity of experiences outside of that white western “universal.” When I was first envisioning this play, I focused more on the issues of being an immigrant woman and the isolation that can come from that status. I wanted the audience to be able to step into her shoes by giving a more generic name. But after having written the play, I am looking to change this name to something more specific, as the story and character has evolved. I think there is something more powerful in being specific with this story.

Nu’Er (女儿): Nu’Er’s name translates to “daughter” in Mandarin. I also chose a daughter character purposefully because of the space created by having the mother-daughter relationship. I wanted the story told through a young girl’s eyes because of the sexism and issues of gender that also come up with living in a Chinese American household. Oftentimes (though arguably somewhat of an older construct), having a son is preferable to having a daughter in Chinese culture. I also wanted another young girl to witness the sexism and gender dynamics that her mother had experienced in China and after her immigration as well, whether it be the

financial dependence her mother has at times on her father, or the way that certain roles are assigned in the home. It is also the power dynamics that come with this sexism and seeing how certain female voices are silenced in the presence of men. I felt that having a gendered, generational connection was important to this adaptation, especially with the goal of also critiquing the idea of whose “universal” becomes pre-eminent in much of Western literature. (I have briefly considered giving Nu’Er both an American name and a Chinese name, something that I was also thinking about for her parents as well, to help signal her hybrid identity as Chinese American.)

Macbeth as Wang Jin Hai (王金海): Macbeth’s Chinese name translates, literally, to King Golden Sea. I chose the surname Wang or King to tie back to the original play. I chose Golden Sea to refer to his immigration and to also refer to the history of Chinese American immigration due to the gold rush.

Many of the other characters continue to use the names of those in the original play, however it is possible that will change in future edits/versions of this project. Several characters have the names from the original play, as I used those to help position them in the narrative and to think about what new roles they might embody in the adaptation. It is possible in future edits or future versions/revisions of this play, that these names will change to reflect the identities and cultural heritage of the characters in the adaptation. Lady Macduff is an example of a character in which I will most likely give her a new name in future edits.

I also took into consideration the ages of the characters. Especially for the main characters, I wanted their ages to also reflect a certain aspect of their identity and history. Macbeth/Wang Jin Hai and Lady Macbeth/Xiao Jie are parents that are older than most

parents/old for their parental generation, due to their immigration to America. I chose to have Nu'Er as an early teenager because of the interesting space being that age takes up. Nu'Er is at an age where her awareness of self and family history is growing, yet she still lacks the agency of a young adult/adult and is still seen as a child despite her growing consciousness of self and identity.

The audience for this play was also taken into careful consideration, and the intended audience for this project has changed over the course of writing and envisioning this play. Originally I wrote the play with a more mixed generation Chinese American audience in mind; however, I now imagine it speaking to a wider variety of audiences. It is possible that a more Chinese American audience might relate closer to the cultural references and languages used within the play. Though it is hard to say that the dialects used will be as universal as the Mandarin, it might be familiar to some. However, depending on the generation of Chinese American and other varying experiences within the community, such as an adoptee vs. an individual who grew up with immigrant parents, the level of fluency with certain languages will also differ. In that sense, it is possible that some first or second or even third and onwards generations might relate closer to how Nu'Er's level of access to her parents and family history changes and is constantly a point of tension in the play because of her own varying level of fluency with both of the languages her parents speak at home. It is also possible there might be points of relation with growing up in a multilingual household and the unique environment that brings to one's own experiences and identity formation.

Despite certain cultural markers, I believe that the ideas about (intergenerational and cultural) trauma and haunting found in this play might be more legible to an Asian American

audience, but could also speak to those who are not Asian American. Other communities that have their own understandings of haunting and trauma, not necessarily dissimilar though unique in their own contexts, are the African American communities, Native and Indigenous communities, and Jewish communities, to name a few. There is also a gendered aspect of the haunting within the play, that might also be accessible to certain communities, though by no means limited to, women and women of color. I think especially with the stigma around mental health specific to Asian American communities, certain ideas about silence and social stigma around what should and shouldn't be spoken about might be more accessible to an Asian American audience. There are definitely certain cultural things more related to Chinese/Asian cultures, such as the unwillingness to speak openly about death. But I think the feelings of hauntedness and incompleteness about family history in any context might be one that translates to many audiences outside of an Asian American one.

Another aspect of the audience I considered is generational difference or age. Many first generation Americans/immigrants tend to be on the older side, though that might not always be the case. I think education level and exposure to theater might also influence how the play is interpreted, especially by older generations of Asian Americans/elders in the community. It is possible that some of the immigrant generation, like my parents, might not have seen *Macbeth* or anything similar, depending on their immigration history and education before and after coming to America. I think references to the original work might not be as clear, and so perhaps the relevance of certain aspects of the character in that sense or reasons for how the narrative is structured might not be as clear. And depending on the age and also education background,

Mandarin or dialect may be the only access point and the fluency in English might differ depending on the person.

## NARRATIVE

I came to this project through taking Activist Shakespeare in the Fall of 2018 and exposure to ideas relating to memory in another course in Spring 2019. The initial idea for this adaptation was written as part of the final project for the Activist Shakespeare course, in which I tried to look at Shakespeare's work through a critical activist lens. The one I chose was to find a way to voice intergenerational and cultural trauma within Chinese American communities, as well as highlight the issue of the isolation of the immigrant woman/mother. With that in mind, I also aimed to give more depth and complexity to the women of the play than Shakespeare did.

I wanted to start a productive conversation around trauma and provide space/context for healing. Initially, I was caught between doing a film screenplay and a script for a play. But I ultimately decided to write a play because, aside from my lack of film and screenplay experience, I wanted to have the in-person experience of watching a play in real time be an active part of the creative work. I believed that there was something important about having that person-to-person interaction over such a difficult and complex topic and to have the messages in the work be communicated in real time with a live audience. Though I drew a lot of inspiration from *The Joy Luck Club*'s film adaptation and liked the idea of using subtitles and other special effects that come with film, I also appreciated the closeness and kind of intimacy that comes with sitting in the theater and wanted there to be less distance between the audience and the story.

There were many Asian American literary inspirations for this project; in particular, those that deal with the themes and emotional tensions I was trying to incorporate into the play. The

first, and perhaps main, influence of this project has been Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* (and in some places her companion book *China Men*). I first read *Woman Warrior* during my sophomore year in Introduction to Asian American Literature. I found young Maxine's journey towards understanding her own family history and her identity to be a compelling one, and I found the same emotions and experiences of confusion and fragmentation to be something close to my own experiences growing up in a Chinese American family. Kingston's writing style and adaptation/incorporation of different Chinese folklore and stories (such as the story of Mulan) was something new and very powerful to me. It granted me the permission to work with folktales and other cultural resources freely in my play. This, in turn, gave me room to experiment with how I could use more public cultural resources, or public archive,<sup>3</sup> to tell a more personal history. It also gave me more personal confidence, in that being Chinese American and having grown up in America, it didn't feel like I had much claim to these resources. But seeing Kingston use these resources so freely and adapting them to her own needs gave me the validity to say that these are my cultural resources too and that they shouldn't be put on any authenticity pedestal or barred from certain groups because they identify as part of the diaspora. I also appreciated how genre-bending Kingston's work was and how it drifted on the borders of memoir and fiction, something that I feel my own play does at times.

Another text that influenced my thinking about the women in the play was Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. I felt a certain closeness to the story of Gogol's parents, and found similarities in the stories of his mother, Ashima, and my own. The struggles and isolation due to language barriers as well as Ashima's dependence on her husband in her initial years in America

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<sup>3</sup> Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 34-35.



was something I had heard about from my own mother growing up. I was inspired by the honest depiction of those struggles and even more so at how Lahiri was able to dive into the emotions of those struggles and make them speak in a way that I hadn't fully understood on my own when I first heard them from my own mother.

As mentioned previously, Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* film adaptation is also a major inspiration for this play. Of the inspirations/influences I gained from the film was the narration of June throughout the narrative and her commentary and presence throughout the story. It was one of the voices that haunted me while writing Nu'Er's narration, particularly how I thought of her presence in the narrative as omniscient and, at times, looking backwards in time from another place. I also found June's narration in English an important aspect of her Chinese American identity. The themes of intergenerational issues and the comfort found within a female sphere were themes I was keen on exploring more in my own work. I was especially keen on exploring more issues surrounding the sexism and misogyny the mothers faced in the novel and how some of those issues translated to the next generation in different ways. For some of the women, this became very literal in that they ended up with husbands who treated them in similar (and sometimes violent) ways that their mothers faced with their husbands. For others, there was the constant pursuit of impossible familial expectations made by the previous generation. One of my initial ideas had been to do some sort of literal translation of the issues of one generation to the next, similar to the film, in which the issues the daughters were facing within their own families and lives were very similar and almost reflections or even repetitions of what their mothers had gone through. Later on in the brainstorming and writing process, I realized that I wanted a less tangible/direct way of representing that transmission of trauma. I also found the ways in which

time was played with, both in this film and in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, productive for my conceptual process.

My writing was also inspired by Viet Thanh Nguyen's short story collection *The Refugees*, and his talk given at UMass Amherst two years ago as part of the distinguished Five College Asian Pacific American Lecture. Speaking about writing for white audiences, he spoke about what it meant to write for a different audience in mind and how to reflect that in one's writing. I remember he used the example of how someone would never explain what a sandwich was, but how someone might feel inclined to explain what *Pho* was. I was particularly inspired by the ways in which Nguyen was able to talk about memory, cultural memory, cultural trauma, and haunting in his short story collection.

Along similar lines, I was also interested in the themes that arose from Aimee Phan's short story collection *We Should Never Meet*, which dealt with the aftermath of the Vietnam war, both in America and in Vietnam. I was interested in the various characters she built and how she also dealt with time and memory. One of her short stories, closer to the end of the collection, talked about a Vietnamese American adoptee's journey back to Vietnam and discussed ideas of cultural and national trauma and memory. Playing with temporality, she explored how a certain kind of Vietnam existed both in memory and in the present.

I was inspired by other film adaptations of *Macbeth* shown in the Activist Shakespeare course, particularly Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2004) and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1961). In *Maqbool*, I was interested in how some details and plot points were omitted or kept in the adaptation and how the storyline had been changed to follow more of a tragic romantic narrative. Within that new narrative, I was also interested in the ways in which Lady Macbeth

was portrayed as being trapped within a male sphere, building off of the original play's queen but also within a different cultural context. I was also fascinated by the way in which Kurosawa was able to use the play's original storyline to highlight different issues in feudal Japan, as well as discuss issues in the Japan Kurosawa currently resided.

I would also say other influences were my interactions with different Chinese American community members around whom I grew up. Many of the characters I modeled on people I knew or that my parents knew well. I learned many things from the relationship and friendships my mother had with a few of the other neighborhood Chinese women/mothers, and modeled Lady Macduff and Xiao Jie's relationship off of those. I also thought about the female spheres that I didn't realize that I was a part of until much later, such as the hair salon in Boston's Chinatown or the dentist's office run entirely by Chinese women that my family and I attended.

All of these works, as well as personal memory, scaffolded the creative process of this play, from brainstorming and envisioning the play, to writing each scene as well as the challenges and questions that came up along the way. Part of the brainstorming process was deciding what I wanted to contribute to the Asian American literary canon, and in particular the Asian American playwriting community. Part of this process included research to see what Asian American theater projects were already out there. One of the more interesting discoveries I made was the National Asian American Theater Company, because they take plays with no Asian context and realize it with a full Asian cast. I was also amazed at how many theater companies/projects for the Asian American community that exist. In the midst of that research I discovered that the first female Asian American playwright to make it to Broadway was Young Jean Lee in 2018. After finding that out, I thought more about what it meant to be an Asian

American doing this kind of creative work and wanting to be a part of that small-but-growing community.

Within the brainstorming process, I also tried to find different mediums that would help me gain access into the emotions that I wanted to write about. That ended up being a listening session to Teresa Teng (邓丽君), who was one of the most famous Taiwanese singers across Asia in the 70s and 80s, and trying to also think back to the stories my parents had told me about their experiences.

During the summer before senior year, I also read through general contextual literature on trauma, especially Cathy Caruth and her book *Trauma: Explorations In Memory*. I also relied upon other courses, such as Asian American Film and Visual Culture, when I had read theory on postmemory, especially the work done in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* by Marianne Hirsch.

Before I wrote any scenes, I watched different adaptations, both film and play, of *Macbeth* or of plays by Shakespeare. I had watched *Haider*, Bhardwaj's film adaptation of *Hamlet*, as well as a Beijing Opera version of *Macbeth* called *Kingdom of Desire*. During the writing process, I read several plays relating to different family dramas and trauma, such as *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *Fences* by August Wilson, and *Thunderstorm* by Cao Yu. These were plays that were helpful to this project because they focused on the histories and stories of people often left out of the dominant white western literary culture. I found that *Fun Home* was especially productive in thinking about the narrative voice as well as the relationship the narrator had to her father and his own history. The way the narrator used flashbacks and a nonlinear chronology was also similar to what I had in mind for my project. What I found particularly

helpful/similar was how the characterization of the father and his memory was all told through a young Alison's point of view. While the father was the main focus of the story, it was mostly narrated and witnessed from Alison's perspective. This generational witnessing by the daughter of the father was something that I was trying to accomplish in my own play. I read *Thunderstorm* much later on in the writing process, but I found it interesting to read a translation of a play from Chinese to English and what things I noticed about the sound and the meanings of the words. It got me thinking more about what the benefits and losses that come with translation and how that might affect my play's life in other versions later on. *Fences* was helpful to see how generational conflict and trauma was both resolved and unresolved in the ending. August Wilson's play was also a good example of how tension could be built between characters and how that tension could be a driving force in the narrative. This build up of tension was very similar to my play in that the relationships between certain characters, such as Nu'Er and her parents or Banquo and Macbeth/Wang Jin Hai, drove most of the conflict of the play.

In addition to reading, I wrote several character sketches, trying to fill in the characters before I wrote any scenes, adding and changing details as the scenes developed. As I wrote the play, I kept many of the names similar to that of the original play to help me think about their relationship and purpose in *Macbeth*. I have changed some names to fit the cultural and narrative context, however, as of now, many of the names still reflect that of the original. However, it is possible that will change in future edits/versions as I continue editing and developing this narrative.

In terms of the writing process, I began each scene by thinking about either an emotion or theme that I wanted to talk about, or maybe a moment that I thought would lead well into the

scene. Most of the time I would start off with thinking about the scene's setting. When I wrote Act 1 Scene 3, (actually the first scene I wrote), I had an idea of it being not only a very cold time of the year but also a very cold and silent atmosphere to the scene. I also found that sometimes I would use my own experiences/memories/stories as a bouncing off place. Other times, if I struggled to understand the context or setting of the scene, I would start with a piece of dialogue and imagine a few of my characters talking with one another and later elaborate on where/when they were and what the atmosphere would be like. Many of the early drafts had extensive stage directions as I tried to get a clearer picture of what was happening in the scene. Given that I came into the writing process from a more short story/novella fiction and poetry writing background, having scenery in place was very important to me. I noticed that in my early drafts, I wrote as if I were still writing a short story or a more developed piece of creative writing. However, I realized later on that much of the action and details needed to be shown through the dialogue rather than relying on stage directions. For the first few scenes, I wrote as if I were still in the same short story mindset. When I was writing, I also had a very filmlike image in my head and thought about how the space looked to the narrator and how she moved around the space.

This adjustment speaks to another challenge of writing this piece: I was unused to writing so much dialogue and having that be the main focus of the piece. I was also less confident in the dialogue writing than I was in writing the narration. At times it felt like the narration was closer to my background in short stories and being able to describe characters and setting from afar was definitely more comfortable for me. It also took me time to realize that there was also a lot of room for exploration because I was working with a play. What was written on the page was no

longer just resigned to the page, but would rather ideally be translated to the stage with several moving parts.

In terms of my personal connection to the narrative, there were moments where I enjoyed being able to embody Nu'Er and create something out of the stories that I had heard and emotions that had come from certain experiences. At some points, when I was relying on some more biographical elements from my own family history, it felt like I was recording and preserving some aspects of that history in the story and also giving relevance and visibility to those stories. In the beginning, especially with the brainstorming and pre-writing process, I struggled a lot with how much of myself and my own identity and history to put into the work. I felt that I had to draw a line somewhere, but I also realized that it felt more honest to myself and to the work to allow parts of myself and my history to bleed into the narrative and the story that was being created. I don't think I could have written this play without thinking about and incorporating some parts of my own experiences. There were also several issues that I was worried about, such as falling into the trap of relying on tropes, such as the standard hard-working immigrant narrative stereotype, or my own fears about appropriation of stories and memories that were not necessarily my own, especially when I relied on my family history and especially that of my parents. There were times in which I wrote scenes and realized how close to home it was, even if the exact situation or characters had been changed. I felt a lot of the same emotions when writing those scenes as I did when I thought about my own similar experiences. Part of that was unsettling, other times I wondered whether I should continue. Sometimes I would question as to whether these stories were really mine to tell and what would it mean to have my parents read/see this work?

However, in addition to considering the emotional web of the play, I also had to think about its structure. Early on in the process, I wrote out a constellation of what the adaptation would look like, where I thought about which plot points and parts of the original narrative I wanted to use in the adaptation. This exercise helped me to map out generally how and when I wanted the adaptation to connect back to the original play and how I could use the play as a guiding narrative for the adaptation. Later on, after I had written a few scenes, I also created another map of the play, in which I took stock of what I had already written and what themes had arisen. I also looked at what ideas had changed from the beginning of the project to where I was after I had started writing. I could already begin to see the play taking on a life of its own and moving in a different direction than I had originally planned. One example of this is how the role of the historical event of the Cultural Revolution changed in the narrative of the play. Originally, I was planning on giving it a more central role in the play and having that be where the main source of conflict, tension, and confusion arose from. But I realized that the story soon shifted away from that as the central focus and more on the relationships within the family. The Cultural Revolution soon shifted to more of a backdrop/context for the relationships and the tensions created by Nu'Er's parents' immigration to America.

During the writing process, each scene went through multiple drafts. Many edits involved cutting down on stage directions and working on the general formatting, as well as thinking more critically about what role each scene plays in the narrative and what "work" the scene was doing to further the narrative and to give needed information to the audience. Towards the end of writing the last few scenes, I drew a graph of the play I had written. This allowed me to see the



shape of the narrative and to gain a better understanding of how the story looked overall. (See appendix.)

## SCHOLARLY/THEORY

*“Post Memorial work [...] strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. In these ways, less directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory that can persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone” (Hirsch 33).*

For this project, I read several theoretical works on trauma, memory, cultural trauma, and intergenerational trauma. Some of these works I read outside the context of working on this project, many times for other courses I was taking. Others I read the summer before writing the play and some during the creative writing and editing process. All of these pieces helped to contextualize my thinking and provide a broader framework in which I could further envision the haunting and supernatural realm that I wanted the play to discuss. During the time I was taking Activist Shakespeare, I also took Asian American Film and Visual Culture. Within that course I read Marianne Hirsch’s chapter entitled “Generation of Postmemory” from her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* as well as Foucault’s ideas of counternarrative and countermemory.<sup>4</sup> We also read several pieces on national memory, especially in the context of the Vietnam/American War. Over the summer of 2019 while I was still in the midst of the brainstorming process, I read several chapters of Cathy Caruth’s book *Trauma: Explorations In Memory*, as well as a few chapters from the *Keywords for Asian American Studies* and the introduction to Marianne Hirsch’s book *The Generation of*

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Vintage Books, a Division of Random House Inc., 2010, pp. 76–100.

*Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*.<sup>5</sup> During the writing phase, I read Stef Craps's book *Postcolonial Witnessing*, Jeffrey Alexander's "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," Joshua Pederson's "Speak, Trauma: Towards Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," Eva Rein's "The Search for the Lost Parent in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Ene Mihkelson's *Ahasveeruse Uni* (The Sleep of Ahasuerus)," Ron Eyerman's "The Past in the Present Culture and the Transmission of Memory," and Nancy J. Lin and Karen L. Suyemoto's "So You, My Children, Can Have a Better Life: A Cambodian American Perspective on the Phenomenology of Intergenerational Communication about Trauma."

However, there were a few pieces that I found to be more useful in the writing and conceptualization of this play. While all these works informed my writing in different and in important ways, I will discuss three works in particular that were most influential in working on this project.

Eva Rein writes about two novels that detail "The Search for the Lost Parent." One is Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, which details the narrator's journey in putting together her family's history, especially the previous generation's time spent in the internment camps during World War II. The second novel is Ene Mihkelson's *Ahasveeruse Uni* (The Sleep of Ahasuerus), which follows a narrator also piecing together her own family history in the backdrop of Estonia during alternating occupations by the Soviets and the Germans. Both works deal with transgenerational haunting. Rein discusses how each work does so and the ways in which each narrator pieces together their own narrative, raising important questions about memory, history, and the archive.

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<sup>5</sup> Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, K. Scott Wong, and Linda Trinh Vo, editors. *Keywords for Asian American Studies*. NYU Press, 2015.

There were several concepts that I found to be useful in developing my project. Although several of the scenes had already been written when I had read this work, I found that it was still able to help organize my thinking and put into words what exactly I was trying to do with some of the characters and parts of the narrative. Rein references Eva Hoffman when discussing how the main characters of the two novels' journeys in piecing together their family history demonstrates the kind of relationship children of trauma survivors have. Rein writes that it is a "paradoxical and vexatious relation to the social catastrophe" because they "both know and do not know about it" (Rein 234). Rein quotes Hoffman when talking more about the contextualization and conceptualization that the two narrators, Naomi and M., go through in order to gain a fuller understanding of the trauma that their lost parents went through: "For the generation after, memory work proceeds in the opposite direction: 'While the adult world asks first "what happened," and from there follows its uncertain and sometimes resistant route toward the inward meaning of the facts, those who are born after calamity sense its most inward meanings first and have to work their way outwards toward the facts and the worldly shape of events' (16)" (234).<sup>6</sup> This idea that first- and second-generation memory work proceeds in different ways helped me to understand the nature of Nu'Er's relationship with her parents and their history as well as her own partial understanding of their memories. Many of the scenes are written from Nu'Er's point of view and narration and are from her view of understanding the emotional and "inward meanings" of her parents and their past first, and then the "facts" of the situation come much later. For example, in the scene in which Nu'Er and Eric eavesdrop on their parents, while the two children perceive the seriousness and anxiety that pervades the

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<sup>6</sup> Inner quote from Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

conversation, the facts or context of the situation is left unclear and unresolved by the end of the scene. Another example would be when Nu'Er, as a young child, seems to recognize and understand partially the overprotectiveness and anxiety that permeates Xiao Jie's behavior around both her and Wang Jin Hai, but does not/is not able to comprehend fully as to why that behavior gets activated or the full context of that behavior.

Rein's description of how cultural resources, such as "works of literature, research papers, parables, legends, fairytales, and songs" (238), are used by both narrators was especially helpful because the play references a number of cultural resources and are one of the main ways in which Nu'Er contextualizes her family history and trauma. "In addition to the stories told by survivors and the archive, Naomi and M. draw on a multiplicity of additional cultural resources and intertexts [...] According to Skultans, the significance of such cultural resources 'lies primarily in the power which they give to individuals to organize their experience rather than in any direct access to the past' (27). Skultans emphasizes that the ways in which individuals tap into these cultural resources differ from person to person, and she adds that they are tailored to personal needs (27)" (Rein 238).<sup>7</sup> Nu'Er relies on various cultural resources throughout the play, such as the "Butterfly Lovers" folktale, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and traditions such as Lunar New Year celebrations.

Additionally, Rein discusses the genre of the novels and the reasons for which they are more useful as "fiction" than technically autobiography. The kind of writing that Kogawa and Mihkelson do stretches and wrestles with what can be told in a narrative. Robson writes: "Where autobiography implies a knowing subject who can claim and narrate his or her own experience,

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<sup>7</sup> Inner quote from Skultans, Vieda. *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

trauma renders such (self)knowledge impossible; and questions how we can be sure of the ‘truth’ and the reality of experience and memory” (qtd. in Rein 231). Rein continues to say how “life” and “writing” is not simply a narrative that is being told, but “instead they foreground the very question of how such experience can be narrated” (231). This idea is particularly helpful in framing and contextualizing my own relationship to my play and the characters and narrative involved. Though there are some autobiographical influences and presences in the play, it is ultimately a work of fiction--a relationship that I struggled with in the beginning to fully understand and embrace. This theory also helps to justify in some sense how choosing to create a fictitious play creates a space that is malleable enough to tell the story and narrative that I intended.

Lin and Suyemoto’s essay “*So you, My Children, Can Have a Better Life: A Cambodian American Perspective on the Phenomenology of Intergenerational Communication about Trauma*” summarized the investigation and findings of a study conducted on how intergenerational trauma was communicated within the family unit of a sample group of Cambodian Americans. This study interviewed several younger Cambodian Americans, some first or second generation Americans and with different family members of different immigration and refugee history. The term the researchers use to describe this transmission and communication of trauma-related information between generations is Intergenerational Communication about Trauma or IGCT. They define it as: “...communication that is voiced or silent, intended or unintended, in which information about the older generation’s trauma experiences is expressed, received, and interpreted between generations of a family” (401). This concept was especially helpful in thinking about how and when trauma-related information

was/is passed down between generations within a family unit. The motivation to learn about trauma and active participation by both generations is important in the process of transmission as well as influential on the overall emotional connectedness of both parties (414).

The paper also outlines how opportunities for learning influence the kind of information passed down to the younger/next generation. However, this is also dependent on the next generation's level of participation and engagement. Examples from the study that closely relate to my own adaptation are the eavesdropping on older generations and friends as well as being in the right place at the right time, such as when Nu'Er convinces Eric to eavesdrop on their parents' conversation in Eric's kitchen.

The many ways in which transmission occurs between generations is also broken down in Lin and Suyemoto's study. Understanding the differences between passive versus more active engagement and transmission allowed me to better understand the ways in which Nu'Er was learning from her parents and family friends and also gave me language to think about how I was trying to use my own experiences within the play. It was also validating to read this study because there was truth and weight given to how these transmissions happen and how they are often embedded into the mundane and everyday interactions between generations. For example, Lin and Suyemoto write: "Participants reported that each piece of information from any given source was incomplete and provided a different perspective on family trauma that helped them construct a working theory of what they believe really happened" (409). This theory helped to frame how the information Nu'Er gained from her parents' conversations and stories was always in some ways incomplete; however, their partial nature does not render them irrelevant. Instead, these different pieces provide different perspectives on the context of the family trauma. For

example, although Nu'Er, and Eric especially, were present for most of the conversation between their parents in Act 1 Scene 3, the information discovered by them is only partial and its place in the wider context of their own family histories has still yet to be determined.

Lin and Suyemoto also write about the limits of these opportunities to learn about family trauma. They write: "Opportunities for learning about parents' experiences of trauma were described by participants as discrete, fleeting instances in which discussion of family trauma was encouraged, permitted, or imposed; when the window of opportunity closed, the chance to engage in IGCT in that moment was lost" (409). This idea that opportunities for learning about family trauma as fleeting and often unplanned was a helpful framework for translating my own experiences with transmission into the play and how Nu'Er would experience them in the narrative. This theory helped give me language to figure out how in daily life would Nu'Er approach or be approached by her family's trauma and how exactly would that contact look like in a day-to-day setting? One such example in the play is when Nu'Er chooses to ask her mother about her own immigration, just as Fleance has finished making his own journey to the U.S and is soon to arrive at their own home.

In addition, Lin and Suyemoto state: "When parents engage in IGCT, the degree to which their communications were successful at imparting information or creating meaningful interaction depended on whether communication was encouraged or permitted from both sides or imposed or avoided from either side" (411). There are times in the play in which Nu'Er tries to actively engage with her parents about their past/familial trauma. However, depending on the timing and context of the situation, her efforts range from mildly successful to little gained at all. The times when she seems to be more fruitful are often in less direct ways, such as overhearing

or being at the right place at the right time (i.e. watching Chinese movies with her father). The times when Nu'Er is able to ask directly often involve a social context that is not always quite right. One example is when Nu'Er asks her mother about her own immigration as she is preparing for Fleance's arrival. In another scene, a younger Nu'Er asks Macbeth about his family situation in China while Macbeth is preoccupied and also slightly avoidant of the topic of speaking with his family earlier that day. The reasons for their lack of engagement is not always made clear in the play, yet it is clear that the level of engagement is less than that of Nu'Er's and the opportunity for learning closes quickly and often is not very encouraged.

The role of silences and their variations that present themselves within the acts of transmission are also explored somewhat in this paper. Though not expanded upon much, these ideas validated the ways in which I was trying to explore the different kinds of silences that seemed to come with the transmissions of trauma. According to the paper, silences could either be encouraging or discouraging depending on the context of the transmission and the emotional charge of the silence (413). When there was a negative charge to the silence, there was discouragement. But when there was an ambiguous silence this would pique curiosity, and when there was no charge, participants would infer this to mean that the information wasn't important (413). Throughout the play Nu'Er encounters and exists within different kinds of silences. In the scene in which Nu'Er is left alone with her father after Xiao Jie's father has passed away, silence indicates to Nu'Er that something has happened and there is a broader context/history for that silence. In the scene after Banquo has died, Nu'Er also encounters a negatively charged silence when talking about Banquo's death. This theory was also validating and helpful in framing how



silence is not only a symptom of trauma but also a way in which trauma can be communicated between generations.

Marianne Hirsch's work in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* helped me negotiate Nu'Er's character and position in her own narrative. It is what ultimately helped me to decide that having Nu'Er's character and the presence of a second generation as integral to the aim of the story. It was through Nu'Er's character that I was able to create a narrative voice shaped through the act of witnessing by the "post-generation" as well as address the ethics of memory and the way memory is transferred between generations.

For this project, I focused a lot on Hirsch's chapter entitled "The Generation of Postmemory." Much of Hirsch's work lies in the field of Holocaust studies and in this chapter in particular, she details how different artists have spoken to the ideas of witnessing and remembering traumatic events that previous generations had survived. Hirsch calls the generation of individuals who are born/have lived after the traumatic event has occurred the "post-generation" as well as the memories that are created after as "postmemory" (3-4). Hirsch also details theories about how the traumatic events create a break or "rupture" between generations, as well as tries to interrogate the ethics of appropriation when it comes to memory and transferring memory.

One of the lines that stuck with me the most when I was still brainstorming and trying to imagine what the project would look like was when Hirsch quoted Spiegelman: "My father bleeds history" (30). This was sort of a guiding idea for me, especially in the early stages, and was an idea that influenced and inspired a lot of the themes that I was hoping to explore further

in the play. When writing, I began to think about how that bleeding of history could be shown, and in what forms or in what spaces or interactions that bleeding could occur.

Before writing the play, I thought a lot about the silence that seemed to accompany trauma; in particular, that which accompanies certain taboo topics or things that were culturally or socially stigmatized and therefore not talked about openly. (One of the things that automatically came up for me when thinking about silence was mental health and its tabooess within the Asian American population.) I was intrigued by the idea of verbalizing trauma that Hirsch wrote about. She writes: “‘Once verbalized,’ Aleida Assmann insists, ‘the individual’s memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property....they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed--and, last not least, written down’” (32). I began to think about verbalization and silence no longer as mutually exclusive. This notion of verbalization is one of the themes I thought about a lot when it came to visualizing the transmission of trauma. How did I want Nu’Er to be a part of that verbalization and to be a witness to when it did and did not happen? It was not until a little later when I thought more about the behavioral side and unspoken/silent side of trauma and how that was a form of transmission on its own, when I figured out that was how I wanted Nu’Er to feel the impact of the trauma of her parents. I realized I did not want something that was concrete and pinpointable to a single incident, but rather a collection/lifetime of behavior and silence that Nu’Er gradually witnesses and comes to realize. She writes: “Memory signals an affective link to the past--a sense, precisely, of a material ‘living connection’--and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony” (Hirsch 33). Memory therefore also represents a

relationship between past and present and the fluidity of the nature of time that memory as a space represents. I found this helpful in being able to think about Nu'Er's connection and understanding of memory and how her imaginative works were also in some sense constructing a form of the past. Within her imaginative works she was also using the space of memory to bring the past into the present and perhaps even the present into the past at times.

## LANGUAGE

As mentioned previously, I use multiple languages in the play. Initially, I had set out to write the play in English with some incorporation of standard Mandarin. However, as the characters have grown and their histories have evolved and taken on a life of their own, I have decided to include particular dialects and possible places in which languages are used in combination with one another. With this multilingualism has also come with its own set of challenges, such as syntax, and how this multilingualism is represented both on the page and on the stage. In terms of syntax, I have struggled with formatting and how best to represent each language in a form that is accurate to the sound as well as meaning of the words. I have also contended with how best to represent Nu'Er's access to the language and how, or whether to, represent the translation of certain languages in the text. At times I use stage directions; other times I write in Chinese characters, but attempt to create a consistent format for this system. In any case, trying to accurately represent the meaning and sounds of both Mandarin and Shanghai dialect while simultaneously trying to represent Nu'Er's access has been (and will likely continue to be) one of the bigger challenges of this play. In addition, the play's live performance becomes especially tricky when thinking about audience and accessibility of certain languages

over others and the incorporation of real life variables, such as director and actor ability with certain languages as well as the audience's ability to understand such languages.

Before I describe in further detail the challenges and ways that I represented each of these different languages on the page, I will discuss my goals in and purpose of incorporating several different languages. One of my initial goals for using both various forms of Chinese and English was to highlight the bilingualism, sometimes trilingualism, of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as Chinese American immigrants. My primary purpose, though, was to use this multilingual household as another way of representing the varying access that Nu'Er had to understanding and being a part of her family's history and trauma. As a daughter of Chinese immigrants born in the U.S, Nu'Er's first/primary language is English and has varying fluency in Mandarin and Shanghai dialect as she grows up. In this play, language not only serves as a cultural marker and identity, but also as a tool from which Nu'Er is barred or able to gain access to her parents' histories and their trauma.

The questions that arose during this process were: How does Nu'Er's access change over time/as the narrative progresses? How can I (or is it possible to) represent this change in access to a live audience?

Among the many challenges that I ran into were deciding when it was most effective to best use English, Chinese, or a mix of both. My general process was based on instinct, and it was later on in the revising stages where I tried to think more critically about when and how I was using what language. I have detailed below my reasoning for each scene. I recognize that not all formatting will be uniform as this is an ongoing question in this project that I will continue to finesse in future edits. A major complication is that there is little standardization of how the

Shanghai dialect is written, especially in terms of phonetic pronunciations. Chinese characters are one of the more universal ways to represent the Chinese language, allowing speakers of multiple dialects to read the same text and garner the same meaning, though the pronunciation, grammar structure, phrases, etc. are different.

The incorporation of the Shanghai dialect was important because of the inclusion of a “minority” language as well as an important cultural marker and identifier for Xiao Jie. Part of the choice to use Shanghai dialect for Xiao Jie was also a personal one. My mother is a Shanghainese speaker and aside from English, is the language she would use to speak to me in the most. While writing this play, I would often hear the voices of my characters in the way my mother, my aunt, and my grandmother would speak. To me, the language they spoke was just as much a part of who they were as their given name was. In terms of wanting to include a “minority” language/a dialect, there was also a personal desire to remember it in some way, even if I wasn’t able to speak it fluently. Before starting this project, I had seen an article about how those under 50 in Shanghai could no longer speak the dialect. To me that felt like an irreparable/irreplaceable/irreversible loss of culture. I also wanted to decenter, in some ways, the heavy focus on Mandarin as the formal/standard language, both within China and abroad. Although I understand the need to have a unified/universal language, similar to the goals of questioning the universal in western literature, I also wanted to question the dominance of having a universal language. I not only wanted to highlight the experiences of multilingualism and decenter English, but also to decenter a more standard/universal language of Mandarin as well.

Note: any mistakes in language, either in Chinese or in English, are my own.

Inventory of the Play:

Nu’Er’s Opening Monologue, (ACT 1 Scene 1, (Written 9th in the sequence) )

- Written primarily in English because from Nu’Er’s point of view

- Sets up Nu’Er’s voice and place as narrator
- Use of phonetic/pinyin pronunciation for “firefly”
  - Instinctive choice
  - Indicates Nu’Er’s partial access to Chinese
    - Nu’Er’s partial understanding would lead her to focus more on sound rather than being able to gain full understanding of word from Chinese characters

Duncan’s Death, (ACT 1 Scene 2, (Written 7th in the sequence))

- Macbeth and Xiao Jie’s conversation--use of stage directions “(in Chinese)” and “(in Shanghainese)” for Xiao Jie
  - Came out of limits from my own translation skills
  - Lack of phonetic standardization for Shanghainese
  - Macbeth can understand Shanghainese
  - Probably a section in the future that would be translated entirely into Chinese or could have multiple versions depending on artistic freedoms
- Familial terms, such as Angku/grandfather, are left phonetic (my own phoneticization of the Shanghainese terms)
- Mike and Macbeth conversations
  - Use of stage directions “(in Chinese)”
  - Can be assumed Mandarin, but also a place where in the future could be translated to entirely Chinese or a different dialect (i.e. Shandong dialect if Mike is from a similar area)
  - Similar for when Mike is talking to Nu’Er
    - No translations though, because Nu’Er doesn’t really have access/the things he is talking about Nu’Er doesn’t really understand
- Use of Chinese characters is very instinctive, mostly based upon my own (limited) translational skills

Xiao Jie and Lady Macduff Prepare for Fleance’s Arrival, (ACT 1 Scene 3, (Written 1st in the sequence))

- Xiao Jie and Lady Macduff conversation
  - Use of Chinese characters, lack of translation in brackets/in text translations because it is their sphere, but also Nu’Er is not fully accessing/understanding their conversation (and the full implications/context/emotional subtext)
  - Xiao Jie switches to Mandarin with a southern accent when speaking to Lady Macduff
  - Could be some freedom in future depending on how actors/director would want to mix English and Chinese parts together
- Lady Macduff/Macduff/Xiao Jie conversation
  - Mix of English and Chinese characters
    - Put in text [bracket] translations to show the things Nu’Er understands (fully/with some context)
    - Also a marker of the parents’ fluency in both languages and a marker of their identity as Chinese Americans

- Nu'Er and Eric's eavesdropping
  - Nu'Er uses phonetic/pinyin to represent the limit of her understanding the sound, but not being able to "visually"/fully understand what is being said in Chinese characters, unlike Eric or their parents

Nu'Er and Xiao Jie Flashback: Grocery Shopping, (ACT 1 Scene 4, (Written 4th in the sequence))

- Nu'Er + Xiao Jie
  - Use of stage directions for Shanghaiese, Chinese characters, and mixed in English with no in text translations
  - Instinctive to not put in translations and to use the mix of syntax and languages
  - Wanted to show that Nu'Er didn't need translations because she also exists in a certain kind of intimate sphere with mother where she grew up hearing these certain kinds of words/phrases and doesn't really need them to be translated (but this does raise the question of consistency across different scenes with syntax and how translation/lack of translation is being used)
  - Could be some freedom with how actors/director want to use the mix of languages and dialects
  - Xiao Jie speaks to Nu'Er in characters, but Nu'Er responds with phonetics, similar to Act 1 Scene 3, phonetics are like the surface understanding Nu'Er has that is different from her mother
- When Macbeth and Xiao Jie talk later on, reasons are similar
- Macbeth speaking on phone
  - Use of stage directions "(in Chinese)"
  - Probably will eventually be translated to full Chinese later on, or in a particular dialect
- Nu'Er and Macbeth practicing characters
  - Macbeth speaks in Chinese characters, but no in text translation, for a similar reason as when Xiao Jie speaks to Nu'Er -- phrases/words that Nu'Er has grown up hearing
  - Though this isn't necessarily clear to audience, so might have to rethink later on
  - Could be some freedom with how actors/director want English and Chinese to be mixed/used together in this part of the scene

Banquo's Visitations 1 + 2, (ACT 1 Scene 5, (Written 5th in the sequence))

- Banquo and Nu'Er
  - Stage directions "(in Chinese)," but written in English
    - Wanting to show a certain kind of constructedness/supernaturalness--also a way to get around realistic fact that Banquo cannot speak/understand English and Nu'Er's fluency in Mandarin/Shanghai dialect is limited
  - Could also be a place for multiple versions/artistic freedom in future if want to have Banquo's or Nu'Er's dialogue translated fully into Chinese or if there were to be a mix of both somehow
  - Noticed a few inconsistencies with in text translation -- things Nu'Er can understand, but mostly done for benefit of reader/audience

- Nu'Er and Xiao Jie at party
  - Used Chinese characters, as well as Shanghainese and in text bracket translations
  - Xiao Jie speaks to family in Shanghainese, but will switch to Mandarin with southern accent to those outside of the family
  - Might be some inconsistencies with when some things are translated
  - Also some freedom with how want English and Chinese to be mixed together when Nu'Er and Xiao Jie speak with one another
- Xiao Jie and Mrs. Liu
  - A place to be translated fully in Chinese, though using stage directions now due to my own limitations with translation
  - Could also be a place for different versions/artistic freedom depending on how want to mix languages and dialects

## ACT BREAK

Nu'Er's Imaginative Work: Butterfly Lovers, (ACT 2 Scene 1, (Written 2nd in the sequence))

- Banquo/Macbeth/Matchmakers
  - Place for multiple versions/eventually being translated fully into one language/dialect or another
  - Used stage directions “(in Chinese)” but written in English -- also wanted to show constructedness/space of imaginative work, places where Nu'Er knows enough Chinese are translated, also used a mix of phonetic and characters in some places when Nu'Er did know what to say
- Macbeth and Mother short scene
  - Similar reasons as above for using stage directions instead of writing in Chinese characters
  - Space for artistic freedom/multiple versions
- “Butterfly Lovers” Storyline
  - Similar reason as above for using stage directions and writing in English
  - Space for multiple versions, also could add in whether Xiao Jie speaks in Shanghainese or if Macbeth also speaks in a dialect

Xiao Jie's Haunting, (ACT 2 Scene 2, (Written 10th in the sequence))

- Macbeth and Xiao Jie fighting
  - “(In Chinese)”/ “(in Shanghainese)” stage directions
  - Could be another place to be translated fully in future/multiple versions/artistic freedom for mixing English and Chinese/playing with places Nu'Er does have access to/understands

Fleance's Arrival, (ACT 2 Scene 3, Written 6th in the sequence))

- Nu'Er and Xiao Jie
  - Stage directions for languages (“(partially/in Shanghainese),” “(in Chinese),” etc.)
  - Mix of English and Shanghainese
  - Could be place for artistic freedom/multiple versions depending on how want to use multiple languages



- When Fleance arrives, Xiao Jie switches to Mandarin with a southern accent
  - Lack of in text translations indicate Nu'Er's lack of access, brackets only appear when she understands/can follow along
  - Fleance speaks in Mandarin, though could speak in Shandong dialect, maybe in future versions
  - When Nu'Er speaks Chinese, it is left untranslated because she is the one speaking (though could also translate for audience benefit and for keeping consistent with other scenes)
- Use of phonetic/pinyin is instinctual, though might change for consistency with other scenes

#### Xiao Jie's Childhood Flashback 1950s Shanghai, (ACT 2 Scene 4, (Written 3rd in the sequence))

- Place for multiple versions/artistic freedom, especially when it comes to Xiao Jie's narration
- Premise is that Xiao Jie is telling Nu'Er a story, so Nu'Er is given access in some sense, but there is still a filter, and the story that Xiao Jie is telling also exists fully only to herself
  - Didn't put any in text translations because it is Xiao Jie's world, and what is translated/given access to Nu'Er is filtered through Xiao Jie first
- Used stage directions for language, mainly because of my own translational limits, as well as lack of standard way for representing Shanghainese

#### Hairdresser--4 Witches, (ACT 2 Scene 5, (Written 11th in the sequence))

- Stage directions for language
- Lots of room for multiple versions/artistic freedom with what dialect/language want hairdressers and Xiao Jie to use as well as when to mix languages (especially when talking to Nu'Er)
- Did not use in text translations because Nu'Er's ability to access is less important in this scene/not the central focus
- Also used stage directions for "(in English)"-- though this hasn't been a consistent thing throughout the play. This could be one way to decentralize one language over another/also another place for multiple versions/artistic freedom for director/actors, especially when staging

#### Banquo's Death, (ACT 2 Scene 6, (Written 8th in the sequence))

- Macbeth/Banquo Flashback 1
  - Stage directions "(in Chinese)" -- place where could be translated fully in future/could have multiple versions
  - No Nu'Er translations/in text translations because a space in which Nu'Er doesn't really need to exist/shouldn't have access to
- Fleance/Nu'Er
  - Fleance uses characters, untranslated, but Nu'Er still has access, after spending time with him, similar to how she understands some things with parents
  - Familial terms are phonetic (pretty consistent across play, though a few instances where it's not)

- Could be a place of artistic freedom with how want to mix both English and Chinese
- Xiao Jie/Nu'Er (phone conversation)
  - Used stage directions for languages with characters, in text translations to show Nu'Er understands (though not consistent across play)
- Banquo/Nu'Er
  - Stage directions for language, used for similar reasons as other times Banquo has visited Nu'Er (see ACT 1 Scene 5)
  - Noticed a few inconsistencies with in text translation and some places with phonetic/pinyin rather than characters or English -- things Nu'Er can understand, but use of pinyin was also instinctive (and used for similar reasons as mentioned in Act 1 Scene 3 as well as to show constructedness of the supernatural)
- Macbeth/Fleance (phone)
  - Stage directions for "(in Chinese)"
  - My own translational limits but also a place for multiple versions/freedoms, whether to fully translate or use a mix of languages/dialects
- Nu'Er/Fleance (phone conversation)
  - Translated some parts in text for Nu'Er's access, though will probably change to make consistent across play
- Banquo/Macbeth Flashback 2
  - Similar reasons as 1st Flashback
  - Some things are translated into Chinese -- limits of my own translational skill
  - Stage directions for "(in Chinese)"

Eric (ACT 2 Scene 7, (Written 12th in the sequence))

- Lady Macduff/Macduff Fighting
  - "(In Chinese)" stage directions
  - Place for multiple versions/artistic freedom if want to mix English and Chinese
  - Did not include in text translations for Eric like I might have done for Nu'Er because Eric's level of access is different
  - Eric can understand, but chooses not to/doesn't really want to have access

Return to China (ACT 2 Scene 8, (Written 13th in the sequence))

- Used stage directions for languages
- Lots of room for multiple versions/artistic freedom
- Did not really include in text translations because space has changed and whether Nu'Er has access or not is not as main of a focus, rather Nu'Er gains access in other ways like through her cousin or watching her parents
  - Access has moved beyond just with language

## FUTURE AFTERLIVES OF PLAY

This adaptation does not end here, as there are a number of other possible next steps in which this play could continue to live on. Among the project's next steps is to hold a staged reading, perhaps back at Mount Holyoke in Fall of 2020. As the play continues to develop, I want to think about how the play's multilingualism will be communicated to the director/actors and how much freedom I would like them to have with language choice. Another idea that would be interesting to explore is to draft different versions of the play, in which one language was used more often than another. This would be particularly interesting in scenes in which the Chinese language was put in stage directions rather than translated directly, or when there would be a mix of languages and allowing differences in choice to influence how that particular part of the scene would be staged.

In terms of putting this work onstage, challenges include how a mix of languages are used throughout as well as trying to communicate Nu'Er's access (or lack thereof) to them. I have struggled with ideas of access and how different directors and actors might interpret the play as well as the role of multilingualism in the play. Although part of language is how it is aurally received, there is also a part of visual aspect as well, especially when it comes to access and understanding of a language. While on the page I could provide in-text translations in some places, how that would look like on the stage would have to be thought about differently. How would I show Nu'Er's changing level of access if not even the audience could access the same parts of the play? A classmate of mine from the Advanced Projects Creative Writing class in Spring 2020 showed me examples of projection mapping that was used in a few plays she had seen. My classmate, Sophie Willard Van Sistine, suggested that this might be a possible way of

showing visually the access that Nu'Er had or lacked during various parts of the play. Another possibility was to have constant subtitles for both English and Chinese so that there would be constant access for the audience.

In terms of casting and directing of this play, there have been several Asian American films and tv shows in which actors of different ethnicities would play one that was not their own. An example of this can be seen in the father of the main family in *Fresh off the Boat*, who in real life is Korean American yet plays a Chinese American. While I think there is an importance in recognizing the differences and diversity of the Asian American community and being wary of the ease in which one ethnicity can play another at least superficially, I also think that shared casting can create a sense of community and shared experience by opening up the casting to include actors of Asian descent, though not necessarily of Chinese heritage. After all, ideas of intergenerational and cultural trauma are not by any means limited to the Chinese American community. And many of the works and theories that have influenced this play have been written by and about other Asian communities outside of the Chinese American community. Ideally, I think it is important to have at least a few native speakers who can speak dialect as well as Mandarin, especially for characters whose identity is strongly tied to their language, such as Xiao Jie. I also would be careful about who would play the immigrants, as the bilingualism as well as accents are something that I intentionally want in the play, but also want to be honest and true from the actor themselves as well. While I think accents can be learned and performed well by others who do not possess them themselves, I think having actors who naturally have that accent speaks more in the context of this play. It is important to me to have actors who naturally have accents because they understand what it is like to live with one and possibly understand the

implications of having an accent in a place that constantly pushes one to assimilate and speak English only. With this production I want to highlight actors that come from immigrant and multilingual backgrounds, as well as showcase that having an accent is not a source of shame but rather a marker of experience. Having a director who is able to understand the languages used in the play is also important to me, as I believe having an ear that is more in tune with how the language sounds will benefit how/when to use certain languages over another.

There are a few places in the play where I have had to think about the logistics of the staging. Coming from a more short fiction/novella background, I didn't realize how many stage directions I would eventually need to cut or rethink. The first scene that I wrote, I had included a dog and could clearly imagine the behaviors that would come along with that but later realized that it would be something too difficult to stage in the way that I had pictured. Another interesting issue in terms of staging is Banquo's ghost, particularly how his presence as ghostly, but also human and personable could be made clear to the audience.

Another characteristic of this adaptation that would need to be considered is how best to represent Nu'Er as the omniscient narrator. I think in some places having Nu'Er present on stage would be helpful or interesting, but in other places her lack of presence is also important. When I was writing her character and the scenes she narrated, I imagined her as an omnipresent and omniscient narrator, however I didn't always imagine her physically with the characters at the time. In some scenes I liked having her more distant from what was happening. Having a voiceover, similar to the *Joy Luck Club* narrator, was something that I had envisioned primarily when writing. However it would be interesting to play with when and where her physical presence on stage could be used.

Ideally, there would have been a staged reading of the play, which would have helped in the editing process. I would have been curious as to how different actors would have interpreted the use of multiple languages as well as how they felt about the characters and if they were or were not easily relatable. I would have also been curious to hear what the play sounded like, especially with the mix of languages, and if it sounded as natural out loud as it did in my own head when writing it. It would have also been interesting to have gotten someone from the Mount Holyoke theater department to look at the play and to give a perspective more related to staging and the logistics of performance, something that I am not very knowledgeable about. Most immediately, I am hoping to organize a staged reading at Mount Holyoke sometime next year (originally, I was planning to have one this semester, but due to the campus closure, it did not occur). It is also possible that the next life of this work might take place in playwriting workshops or festivals for new playwrights. It would be interesting to hear what others within the play/theater world thought of this work and how it might look on stage. It would also be important for me to understand how this work fits into the genre/world of Asian American theater and what other spaces might this play fit into as well. Are there messages or themes that those outside of the Asian American community can relate to? If someone has never seen *Macbeth*, will the play be seen differently?

#### RELATIONSHIP TO *MACBETH*

Before starting this project in full force, there were inklings of similar ideas and themes that I had thought about in my own personal writing projects. Yet some of them still felt/remained incomplete and ungrounded in some sense. In one story I had tried to write, I focused on the idea of what was passed on to the second generation and stories of the parents

imagined in adapted folklore, primarily relying on themes from the *Joy Luck Club*. However, one of my biggest troubles was finding a structure or a scaffolding to hang my story on to guide the narrative. Nothing I came up with myself was fitting.

In all honesty, I did not see a lot of possibility in adapting Shakespeare before I had seen *Maqbool*, *Throne of Blood*, or *American Moor*. I still had that image of the superficial and lackluster adaptation from high school that I had been given by a young Leonardo DiCaprio and modern warring gangs *Romeo + Juliet*. The dialogue was mostly the same as Shakespeare had written it, yet the actors existed in a time of cellphones and were on Verona Beach. After seeing that film in a high school English class, I thought all adaptations meant/could only be simple translations from text to stage or text to film. And, these translations would still have to adhere to the original storyline, though one had the freedom to trade out actors from different time periods. Swords were now guns, letters were now cellphones and bulky desktop messages. There was nothing new in the adaptation that I saw, except what one director's vision was for a modern retelling of the older-than-Shakespeare star-crossed lovers tragedy.

It was only until I had seen *Throne of Blood*, *Maqbool*, and *American Moor* that I began to see Shakespeare's plays as less of an outline/guideline/playbook and more as a malleable space in which to experiment with the characters and to pull out and string different themes together. In these adaptations, the text was alive in the sense that the creators were not limited to what was given to them on the original page. Unlike *Romeo + Juliet*, the creators of those adaptations were not bound to the original dialogue and did not solely swap this for that from the original play. I also saw how creators from a diverse range of backgrounds were able to interpret Shakespeare's work in ways that resonated with their own cultural and personal backgrounds,

and in doing so, they managed to take Shakespeare down from his academic pedestal and bring him to a wider audience and a more accessible/readable place. It was also a telling moment for me to see how these creators were also not part of the original intended audience, yet were able to fashion the play in which their culture and even personal history were not only backdrops for the play, but also were able to change and even question who the audience of the play was and who it was written for.

There were many issues I had with Shakespeare that I wanted to address in a possible adaptation. I had seen how Keith Hamilton Cobb had addressed race in his piece *American Moor* and his own relationships with Shakespeare, Othello, and the theater. I had trouble finding space to talk about certain issues pertaining to Asian America in many of Shakespeare's plays. I found that there was a specificity in experience that was present in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* that I knew I couldn't or didn't have enough justification to really touch/play with. One of the issues I had wanted to talk about was the experience of Chinese women and the isolation that comes with being a female immigrant (something that had been sparked again by watching *Maqbool*). So for a time I had thought about reworking *Much Ado About Nothing*. But I soon realized that particular play lacked the kind of depth I needed to be able to work with the issues I wanted to talk about.

Though it took much prodding and inspiring, I started to see the space I needed open up in *Macbeth*. My exposure to pre-college *Macbeth* was limited. The only time I had really sat with it was in 7th grade drama class when we had acted out a few key scenes/an abbreviated version of the play. I was reading in the role of Banquo. Most of what was emphasized in the play by the teacher was the role the murders played in the narrative and ultimately the quick downward



spiral of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The handwashing or haunting of Macbeth had never been fully explored and the role the witches had played were necessary and key to the plot, though their wider significance was somewhat peripheral (though to be fair, this was middle school drama with students of very short attention spans and most of us never having seen or read the original work).

I still had remaining ideas of haunting and hybridity and new/different ideas of memory and postmemory from different courses floating in my head when I had decided to work with *Macbeth*. I had enjoyed how Kurosawa had experimented with the role of the supernatural and silence in his film, and I had liked how *Maqbool* had tied in its own romantic storyline and played around with the relationship that Macbeth had with Duncan and Lady Macbeth. My original inklings about the adaptation were that it would still follow the general plotline and relationships outlined by the original work. Yet the cast would be entirely/mostly Chinese and the time and place would be somewhat more contemporary. The language and writing would be completely different from the original and there would be a “daughter”/child of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth added. Both haunting and supernaturalness would be present in some form, though in the first scenes I had written for the final project of the course, much of it relied on the witches and the handwashing scene.

The current adaptation takes more liberties than I had originally imagined. I didn’t realize before how much space my ideas could take up in the original play and how many new spaces I could start to carve out from the original work. It soon became a “loose” adaptation, in which most of its recognizableness/references were in the themes and in a few of the characters’ relationships with one another. I had carved out spaces for certain characters to grow more than

the original work had allowed, especially for the women in the play. This adaptation also experiments with temporality. While most of this occurs with the prophecies in the original play, my play also experiments with a non-linear chronology of events in the hopes of developing key characters. The use of a non-linear chronology is also representative of the ways in which trauma and traumatic events are never quite “over” and that they in some ways exist in a time and place all their own. Nu’Er’s ability as an omniscient narrator is key to this non-linear chronology.

Another major difference of this play is the way in which Macbeth has been removed from his position as the main character and namesake of the play. Rather, a young Chinese American girl is the main protagonist of the play, and much of the events are narrated and witnessed by her.

As mentioned before, much of the narrative is not necessarily plot driven, and there aren’t as many action driven conflicts such as the murder of Duncan and Banquo in the original play that cause an exponential spiraling down for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Rather, much of the narrative is strung together through memories of the characters and the relationships between characters and tensions arising from those relationships. Looking at the shape of the narrative, there are peaks in which tension is high, but most of the play is a slow gradual buildup to those moments, and there is no exponential downward spiral towards the end. Many of the things that connect the characters and the narrative together are the histories that form the characters’ identities as well as the history that is shared between characters. It is how this history comes into the present that conflict and tension becomes a driving factor of the narrative. The arrival of Fleance in America or the visitations of Banquo’s ghost are examples of how these histories come to reside in the present and change the ways in which Nu’Er understands herself and her parents. We see indications of how the past is never really separate from the present, but in

reality pervades throughout much of the play, in the flashbacks narrated by Nu'Er or some of the other characters, as well as the imaginative works and imaginings of Nu'Er. Unlike the original, the haunting within the play is not due to one singular event, and it is hard to pinpoint the cause or understand the broader context of it, even by the end. While the original play fixates around the murders and the decline of Macbeth's state, both in terms of power and mentally, this adaptation has multiple threads of haunting that do not stem from a single event in the plot/narrative.

I have also changed many of the male characters from their original characterization. I wrote in Eric as a male supporting character for Nu'Er, as well as another example of the second generation. I wrote Fleance somewhat after one of my real life maternal cousins, who always seemed like the kinder big brother type. I wanted to recognize their positionality as boys or men in the play and the possible power dynamics that comes with that, but I also wanted to create characters that were less aggressively stereotypically masculine, which the original play was full of. I wanted to create male characters that broke away from that, and instead could build real relationships with the women and girls in the play. In the original play, Fleance is motivated by his vengeance for his father. Part of the characterization of Fleance and Eric came from wanting to write characters that would break away from the misogynistic male archetype that their fathers/previous generation inhabit.

Douglas Lanier's essay "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value" discusses the complex relationship between adaptations and the authenticity of Shakespeare. Lanier's essay also discusses how this relationship can be thought of in terms of a Shakespearean rhizomatic scheme. He borrows this concept of the rhizome from Deleuze and Guattari: "Gilles

Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome' can provide a model for conceptualizing this adaptational field. At the heart of DG's philosophy is an emphasis upon differential 'becoming' rather than Platonic 'being'" (27). This idea of the rhizome also describes the process in which unrelated "beings" evolve "aparallel" to one another (27). More importantly, there is a lack of "central organizing intelligence or point of origin" and this rhizome can be thought of as a more horizontal root system rather than an "arboreal" or treelike one, in which there is a single point of origin (28-29).

Lanier also explains how this concept can be used to describe the adaptation's relationship with the Shakespearean text. He writes: "A rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare situates 'his' cultural authority not in the Shakespearean text at all but in the accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation, the multiple, changing lines of force we and previous cultures have labeled as 'Shakespeare,' lines of force that have been created by and which respond to historical contingencies" (29). Here the two "beings" are Shakespeare and its adaptations. Within this rhizomatic scheme laid out by Gilles and Deleuze, Shakespeare's "text is an important element but not a determining one; it becomes less a root than a node that might be situated in relation to other adaptational rhizomes" (29). Rather than placing Shakespeare as the one originary source of all adaptations, his work is placed in a complex, horizontal, and decentered system that exists and can really only continue to exist in relation to adaptations of his work (28-29).

Part of this adaptation's activist lens was to question the pedestal on which Shakespeare had been placed in the western literary canon. When thinking about where this adaptation fits in the world of Shakespeare, I think it is fitting to think about it as one branch belonging to a larger rhizome of Shakespeare. This notion that there is not one source material that all adaptations

belong to is one that my project's mission aligns well with. Rather than seeing my project as one branch of Shakespeare, with the original source text as the main inspiration, my project belongs in a wider frame of reference, in which it combines multiple sources of inspiration both related to and unrelated to Shakespeare's original text. My adaptation's relationship to the original text is a complex one, in that there are several ties to the original play. But the original *Macbeth* is not the only foundational building block of the piece. As mentioned above, I have been inspired by other works part of the Asian American literary canon, as well as intermedial and transcultural adaptations.

It is important to recognize how this adaptation fits into or is a part of the rhizome, because of what it says about the pedestal in which Shakespeare has been put on. The rhizome allows for spaces to be created in which works inspired from Shakespeare as well as other bodies of work can exist. By placing my work in the rhizome, it indicates that it is just as valid and authentic in its own sense as well as in the Shakespearean sense. As this play is about a Chinese American family and is written by a young, female, Asian American writer, being a part of this root system further deconstructs the idea that Shakespeare exists in its own vacuum and is untouchable. As part of the Shakespearean rhizome system this project neither falls solely under/is not solely subsumed under the Shakespearean realm nor is deemed a lesser or less authentic version of Shakespeare. To be a part of the Shakespearean rhizome as someone who was never the intended audience for Shakespeare's work also speaks to how this project chooses to question the "universal." Shakespeare's plays do not describe all audiences. And Shakespeare is by no means "universal" but has been accepted as such for centuries.

The placement of this adaptation in the Shakespearean rhizome also says a lot about the audience of this play. This adaptation recognizes the issues that come with the intended audience of the “universal.” Much of this universality leads to the exclusion and erasure of certain identities and experiences. By including this work in the rhizome of Shakespeare, I am including audiences and experiences that have been left out of the world of Shakespeare. Ultimately, the play questions the notion that there *is* an intended audience for Shakespeare. It also looks at how Shakespeare as a body of work speaks to and is negotiated by a wider range of audiences and thinkers. In doing so, I hope the play contributes to the growing body of work that questions the power of “authentic Shakespeare” and makes space for those from more diverse backgrounds to experiment and negotiate these canonical works.

As Lanier states, adaptation is not only a product, but also a process (27). Much like the themes of haunting and the engagement with the past that pervades this project, this adaptation is not a stagnant finished product. Rather, this adaptation is a process itself/is a culmination of many threads and processes drawing from many different fields, cultures, and histories. This work is living and will continue to grow and adapt and be adapted by other works. It does not sit isolated on its own or caught in a binary of authentic Shakespeare and adaptation. Rather, it is a part of a living structure in which it will continue to draw from Shakespeare as well as other sources of inspiration, and also itself be a possible source of inspiration for other adaptations and projects, and especially for those writers that have not seen themselves in, or as the intended audience for, Shakespeare’s work.

### Cast of Characters

<u>NU'ER (女儿):</u> acts as narrator.	12-14 years old. Daughter of Xiao Jie and Macbeth. Also
<u>NU'ER (女儿):</u> Jie and Macbeth.	5-7 years old. Younger version of Nu'Er. Daughter of Xiao
<u>MACBETH/WANG JIN HAI (王金海):</u>	late 40s. Youngest son of Ye Ye and Nai Nai. Younger brother of Banquo.
<u>XIAO JIE (小姐):</u>	late 40s. Eldest daughter of Abu and Duncan/Angku. From Shanghai. Speaks Shanghainese, but will speak Mandarin with a southern accent to others outside of Macbeth and Nu'Er.
<u>BANQUO:</u> and Nai Nai.	early 50s, older brother of Macbeth, eldest son of Ye Ye
<u>FLEANCE:</u> Qing.	18-20 years old, son of Banquo and Banquo's Wife/Ai
<u>LADY MACDUFF:</u>	early 40s, a few years younger than Xiao Jie.
<u>MACDUFF:</u>	early 40s. Male. Husband of Lady Macduff.
<u>ERIC:</u> of Nu'Er.	13-15 years old. Son of Lady Macduff and Macduff. Friend
<u>MEI MEI:</u> Eric's younger sister.	5-7 years old, daughter of Lady Macduff and Macduff.
<u>BANQUO'S WIFE/AI QING:</u>	mid 40s. Migrant worker. Leaves village to go to the city for work. May also be referred to as sister-in-law.
<u>YE YE (爷爷):</u>	mid 70s. Macbeth and Banquo's father.
<u>NAI NAI (奶奶):</u>	early 70s. Macbeth and Banquo's mother.

<u>XIAO JIE'S ABU (外婆):</u>	late 80s. Xiao Jie's grandmother.
<u>DUNCAN/ANGKU (外公):</u>	early 80s. Xiao Jie's father. Nu'Er's grandfather. Does not appear on stage in his older years. But does appear in his younger years during Xiao Jie's childhood flashback.
<u>ABU:</u>	mid 80s. Xiao Jie's mother. Nu'Er's grandmother.
<u>XIAO HE:</u>	mid 30s. Xiao Jie's second youngest sister. Can also double as family friends at New Year's celebrations or Neighbors in Butterfly Lovers story.
<u>XIAO MEI:</u>	early 30s. Xiao Jie's youngest sister. Can also double as family friends at New Year's celebrations or Neighbors in Butterfly Lovers story.
<u>DA YI (大姨):</u>	mid 30s. Xiao Jie's aunt. Eldest daughter of Abu/Xiao Jie's grandmother.
<u>ER YI (二姨):</u>	early 30s. Xiao Jie's aunt. Second eldest daughter of Abu/Xiao Jie's grandmother.
<u>XIAO TU ZI (小兔子):</u>	8 years old. Son of Er Yi. Xiao Jie's cousin and Xiao Mei's older brother. (Name translates to "Little Rabbit.") Can double as children of family friends at New Years celebrations.
<u>XIAO NIAO (小鸟):</u>	11 or 12 years old. Daughter of Da Yi. Xiao Jie's cousin. (Name translates to "Little Bird.") Can double as children of family friends at New Years celebrations.
<u>XIAO ZHU (小猪):</u>	6 or 7 years old. Childhood version of Xiao Jie. Could also double as a younger 5-7 year old Nu'Er or Mei Mei. (Name translates to "Little Pig.") Can also double as children of family friends at New Years celebrations.
<u>XIAO MEI (小妹):</u>	3 or 4 years old. Daughter of Er Yi. Xiao Jie's cousin. Can also double with Mei Mei (Eric's younger sister).
<u>LAO DA (老大):</u>	late 60s. Eldest hair salonist.
<u>LAO ER (老二):</u>	mid 60s. Only a couple years older than Lao San. Second eldest hair salonist.
<u>LAO SAN (老三):</u>	mid 60s. Third eldest hair salonist.
<u>LAO SI (老四):</u>	around 55 years old. Youngest/fourth eldest hair salonist.



- ZHU (祝): early to mid 20s. Imperial Academy scholar. Played by Xiao Jie.
- LIANG (梁): early to mid 20s. Imperial Academy scholar. Played by Macbeth.
- ELDEST MATCHMAKER: played by Lao Da.
- 2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER: played by Lao Er.
- 3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER: played by Lao San.
- 4TH ELDEST MATCHMAKER: played by Lao Si.
- GARDENER: male. Works for Zhu's family. Minor character. Can double as one of the neighbors/family friends as well.
- ZHU'S GRANDMOTHER: mid 50s. Present in Butterfly Lovers marriage scene. Doubles as Xiao Jie's Abu.
- ZHU'S MOTHER: late 20s. Present in Butterfly Lovers marriage scene. Doubles as Xiao Jie's mother/Nu'Er's Abu.
- NEIGHBORS: background characters for Zhu's marriage scene in Butterfly Lovers as well as flashbacks to Macbeth's home village. Mix of men and women. Middle age to elderly. Can also double as the neighborhood family friends during the Chinese New Years celebrations.
- LI AIYI (李阿姨): early 30s. Neighborhood auntie in Xiao Jie's childhood neighborhood. Can double as Mrs. Luo and Mrs. Liu. Could also be doubled by Xiao Jie's aunts Da Yi or Er Yi.
- MRS. LUO (罗太太): early 40s. One of neighbors/local aunties in Macbeth's childhood village. Present in village market scene. Could also be doubled by Xiao Jie's aunts Da Yi or Er Yi. Can also double as one of neighbors from Butterfly Lovers or during Chinese New Years celebrations.
- MRS. LIU (柳太太): mid 40s. One of Xiao Jie's neighborhood Chinese friends. Present at the New Year's party. Could also be doubled by Xiao Jie's aunts Da Yi or Er Yi. Can also double as one of neighbors in Butterfly Lovers story.
- MIKE CHEN: late 30s. Male. One of Macbeth's co-workers. Can be doubled with Gardener or one of neighbors in Butterfly Lovers.

## Tending the Ghosts

ACT I  
Scene 1

*Setting: Wheat fields in northern China. Early dusk. Sun is just going down. Fireflies start to come out.*

*At rise: A young girl, perhaps a younger version of XIAO JIE, wanders through the field. Her hands brush against the stalks.*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My mother says she hasn't seen them in years. She can barely remember some things. Others, I think she chooses not to. Perhaps there are some things that are just too painful to hold onto. Maybe it is easier to forget at times. It makes it easier to learn new things, like how to survive in a new land.

(*Pause.*)

In Chinese they call them "ying huo chuo."<sup>8</sup> Fire is right in the name. She tells me they were a common sight in the early summer evenings. I like the way their light flickers in and out of existence--one moment they are there, and the next, they are gone. They flicker in and out of the corner of my eye like a distant memory, like a memory remembered and then forgotten.

(*A young boy walks onto the stage and joins the young girl.*)

My mother says she cannot really remember what she was like before America. Like a dream. As if there was not enough space for her to exist fully in either place. As if there would always be some part of her left behind in each place, in a time she couldn't go back to.

When I ask her to tell me stories of what she was like, she says, always she says, you cannot imagine.

It is hard for me to picture her in a time when she is not only just surviving.

Maybe it is only right. Maybe it is meant to be that a child should never really know their parents in the moments before they are born. Maybe she cannot exist both in her mind and my mind fully.

---

<sup>8</sup> Pinyin for "Firefly"

ACT I  
Scene 2

*Setting: Close to midnight on Sunday. Raining and thundering outside. Mid April or May. NU'ER is four years old, sleeping in her room down the hall. Apartment.*

*At rise: XIAO JIE sits at the kitchen table, head in her hands. MACBETH stands by the counter with the landline held up to his ear. Bills and papers are scattered across the table.*

MACBETH

*(On the phone, in Chinese.)*

Mmm.

*(Pause.)*

Mmm. Are you sure? How long, did you say?

*(Pause.)*

I'll let her know. I know, I know. I understand. We want to see him just as much as he does. It's just... Yes. We'll try. I'll call you back tomorrow. Let us know if anything changes.

*(MACBETH hangs up the phone. MACBETH and XIAO JIE wait in silence for a few moments.)*

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

He doesn't have much longer.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I know.

*(Pause.)*

It's the same news every time.

*(Silence. Rain continues to patter on windows. Lightning strikes outside.)*

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Maybe we should go this time. There might not be another chance.

*(MACBETH pulls out the chair beside XIAO JIE and sits down.)*

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

How can we just leave? You just started work and Nu'Er will need someone to watch her. Where is the money?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

If we both can't go, you should at least. Nu'Er will be fine. We can ask one of the aiyi's down the hall to look after her.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

With what money? With only you working, we can barely afford the rent.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Then take her with you. She should at least get to meet her own maternal grandfather. She never got to meet her yeye.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

No. I don't want her to see him like that.

*(Pause.)*

Besides, we can barely afford one plane ticket, let alone two.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

This was back when they subsisted on phone calls and paper letters.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

So much time has passed. How can I possibly show my face?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

How will you be able to show your face if you do not go?

*(NU'ER is awoken by her parents' voices. She walks to the kitchen and leans on the open door frame. They do not notice.)*

*(MACBETH continues.)*

We can find the money. We'll borrow. I can ask my uncle. Nu'Er will be fine, whether you take her with you or not. But you should go.

*(Pause.)*

He's your father. He'll want to see you no matter how long it's been.

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

I can't. I can't.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

You will regret it if you don't.

*(Pause.)*

I will take care of Nu'Er. I'll bring her with me to work. You'll only be gone for a week or so. We can manage.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I think she was worried about saving face. But my father had been through that before, and he above everyone knew it wasn't worth it. I wonder when that attitude of my father's changed.

*(Pause.)*

I think she did regret, later, not going sooner. By the time they had settled on a date, had found the money, it was already too late. (Some part of me believes they had lied to her about how much time he had left. Perhaps it was to make her feel better about being so far away.) She made it in time for the funeral processions. I spent a week at work with my father at his new job.

*Setting: Early morning on the day XIAO JIE has left for Shanghai. MACBETH has just returned from sending XIAO JIE to the airport. He has not slept all night.*

*At rise: NU'ER sits at the kitchen table eating breakfast. MACBETH gets ready for work.*

MACBETH

Come on, Nu'Er. We have to get ready to go now.

NU'ER

Where are we going?

MACBETH

To work.

NU'ER

Where did Ma go?

MACBETH

The airport.

NU'ER

What's an airport?

*(MACBETH picks NU'ER up and places her on the ground. He puts her coat on and puts on his computer bag. He picks up her small backpack and hands her a toy while he helps tie her shoes on.)*

MACBETH

She's going to see Angku.

NU'ER

Who's Angku?

MACBETH

Your grandfather.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

There was a certain kind of quiet in the house, even though my father had been bustling around the apartment since the early morning, trying to find where my mother had placed all of my things. There was an emptiness that accompanied the quiet that seemed to throw everything off balance. It was unusual for me to see my father so flustered. Perhaps he wasn't used to being on his own so suddenly. It had been quite a few years since they had been apart.

*Setting: Office in the city.*

*At rise: Office parking lot/elevator.*

MACBETH

Come on, come on. We don't want to be late. Hold the elevator!

*(NU'ER and MACBETH make it to the elevator. One of MACBETH's coworkers, MIKE CHEN, and another woman are already in there.)*

MIKE

Hey, Jin Hai. How was your weekend?

MACBETH

Ah, good good.

*(The elevator stops. The woman gets off. MACBETH and MIKE wait until the doors close before speaking.)*

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

Is this your daughter?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. I dropped off Xiao Jie at the airport this morning.

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah.

*(Pause.)*

How are the in-laws?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

She's helping her sisters with the preparations. The ceremony is on Wednesday.

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

Well, it's good she's there.

*(To NU'ER in English.)*

Ay. How old are you?

NU'ER

I'm four!

MIKE

Wah, so big! Do you know who I am?

NU'ER

Noo. Who are you?

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

I work with your Ba. You can call me Uncle Mike. Can you say Uncle?

*(To MACBETH.)*

I'll see you at the 2 o'clock meeting.

MACBETH

Ok, ok. Nu'Er, come sit here. Where's your bag? Ok, sit here and read your book. Ba has to work now.

*(A few hours pass.)*

NU'ER

Ba, I'm hungry.

MACBETH

Ok, ok. Can you wait? I just have to finish something before the meeting.

NU'ER

Ba! I'm bored.

MACBETH

Shh..shh. Just read your book.

MIKE

*(Walking by.)*



Hey, Macbeth. Did you eat yet?

MACBETH

Not yet. I still need to finish this summary before the meeting.

MIKE

Ah.

NU'ER

Ba, 我饿了!<sup>9</sup>

MACBETH

Aiya, just wait, Nu'Er. I'm working now.

MIKE

Hey, do you want me to take her out?

MACBETH

Take her out?

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

To eat. I can take her to the cafeteria downstairs. She seems hungry.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

No, no. That's too much trouble. I couldn't bother you with her.

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

Nonsense. I was going downstairs to eat anyway. I'll bring her back before the meeting. You can keep working.

MACBETH

Ok, ok. Nu'Er, Mike is going to take you to lunch.

MIKE

Ay, come on Nu'Er.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My father never spoke much about his social life around me. Uncle Mike was perhaps one of the only close friends my father had in America. He'd been in the states a few years longer than my father.

---

<sup>9</sup> I'm hungry!

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

What do you like to eat?

NU'ER

French fries!

MIKE

*(To himself, in Chinese.)*

Your Ba is very busy today. He's worried about the meeting this afternoon.

*(To a passing coworker, in Chinese.)*

Hey, Brian, how's it going?

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

Uncle Mike could talk to himself for hours if he had the chance.

MIKE

*(In Chinese.)*

Hmm, let's look over here. You know, I have a daughter a little bit older than you. Maybe you can meet her next time the company has a holiday party. She started school just last year. What else do you like to eat? Do you eat Chinese food at home? Of course you do. Your Ba seems very traditional. Your Ba would get upset if you only ate french fries for lunch. Oh, there's an empty seat over there. Let's go sit down.

NU'ER

Ma went to the airport today.

MIKE

Your Ba told me all about it.

NU'ER

What's an airport?

MIKE

It's a place where people go to ride a plane.

NU'ER

Why?

MIKE

Sometimes they need to go far away, but it's too far to drive a car.

NU'ER

So Ma went far away.

MIKE

She did. She went to China.

NU'ER

How far away is China?

MIKE

Far. Very far.

*(In Chinese.)*

Like going to the moon and back.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It was a long week of lunches with Uncle Mike. While at home there was the constant feeling of anticipation that comes with waiting. It was strange to see my father so unaccustomed to being alone. The waiting translated into silence. The silence created a space that couldn't be filled, no matter how much I tried to talk and be with him. I realized it was a silence that could only be filled when the wait was over.

*Setting: End of first day XIAO JIE is gone.*

*At rise: MACBETH and NU'ER eat together at the kitchen table. MACBETH reads while he eats.*

NU'ER

Ba, when is Ma coming home?

MACBETH

Sunday.

NU'ER

Sunday? When is that?

*(Silence. MACBETH clears his throat.)*

Ba, what do you do for work? What do you do at meetings?

*(Silence.)*

Uncle Mike took me to the cafeteria. He likes to talk a lot. He says he has a kid too. Can I meet Uncle Mike's kid?

MACBETH

Sure, sure.

NU'ER

Why did Ma go to China?

MACBETH

To see Angku.<sup>10</sup>

NU'ER

How come you didn't go? Will I get to see Angku too? How come Angku doesn't come here to see Ma?

MACBETH

I have to work this week, so I can't go. Go to your room if you're done eating.

NU'ER

Okay. Can we play a game tonight?

MACBETH

No. I have to work tonight. Maybe tomorrow.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

It was like he forgot how alone he was when my mother wasn't around. He was awkward and distant around me, as if he realized how little history he shared with me. It was perhaps one of the first times I remember him that way. Maybe part of him wished he had gone with her. Maybe her absence made him realize just how far away he was and how hard that distance was to overcome. Maybe part of him was mourning too.

---

<sup>10</sup> Maternal grandfather in Shanghai dialect. (Phonetic translation mine.)

ACT I  
Scene 3

*Setting: It is early evening in February.*

*At rise: XIAO JIE and NU'ER stand at the front door of LADY MACDUFF's home.*

*(XIAO JIE adjusts the bag of oranges in her arms as she reaches her right hand out to ring the doorbell. Almost instantly, a dog can be heard barking from indoors. NU'ER shrinks behind her mother, grabbing onto the edge of her winter coat.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My mother has never liked dogs. They are loud and always ask for more than they need.

*(The door of the house opens inwards and a woman, around the same age as XIAO JIE, holds the dog by its collar. She looks up at XIAO JIE and smiles.)*

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, 你好你好！快点进来<sup>11</sup>！Come in! It's too cold outside.

*(XIAO JIE steps into the house. NU'ER follows behind, wary of the dog. The kitchen is to the left of the entrance, two sitting rooms branch off, one to the right, and one ahead.)*

XIAO JIE

I brought these for you.

LADY MACDUFF

Aiya, this is too much. Take some of it back with you. Nu'Er likes oranges.

XIAO JIE

哪里哪里<sup>12</sup>。It's getting colder out.

LADY MACDUFF

*(Calls for her son.)*

Eric, can you come here? I need you to take the dog and find some slippers for Auntie Jie.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

So she speaks English to her son as well.

ERIC

---

<sup>11</sup> Hello, hello! Come in quickly!

<sup>12</sup> Nonsense.

*(ERIC enters, running down the stairs, waves to NU'ER and nods his head to XIAO JIE.)*

Hi.

XIAO JIE

*(Beaming at ERIC.)*

哎呀，你长大的很快！今年多大？<sup>13</sup>

LADY MACDUFF

他十三岁。<sup>14</sup> Almost in 7th grade.

XIAO JIE

那真好。<sup>15</sup> What a good age for a boy.

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, Eric. Help Mrs. Jie.

*(ERIC takes the bag of oranges from XIAO JIE.)*

XIAO JIE

*(Gestures to NU'ER.)*

快去帮他。<sup>16</sup>

*(LADY MACDUFF leads XIAO JIE into the living room ahead. This living room is connected to the kitchen by a swinging door. NU'ER follows ERIC and the dog into the kitchen.)*

LADY MACDUFF

我泡点茶把，啊？<sup>17</sup>

*(ERIC places the bag of oranges on the kitchen counter. NU'ER stands by the small kitchen/dining table. A young girl comes running into the kitchen through the door connecting to the sitting room. The girl's name is MEI MEI. She is about three or four years old.)*

MEI MEI

Eric! I'm hungry!

*(MACDUFF comes walking into the kitchen after her, waves to NU'ER.)*

---

<sup>13</sup> Aiya, you grew up so fast! How old are you this year?

<sup>14</sup> He is 13 years old.

<sup>15</sup> That's great.

<sup>16</sup> Go help him.

<sup>17</sup> How about I make some tea?

MACDUFF

Ay, hi Nu'Er.

*(MACDUFF smiles and picks up MEI MEI.)*

Eric, can you stay, watch Mei and Nu'Er.

*(MACDUFF puts down MEI MEI on the counter beside ERIC and the oranges. He walks back through the swinging door into the living room without waiting for an answer. ERIC turns to MEI MEI.)*

ERIC

What do you want to eat?

MEI MEI

Cheese!

ERIC

*(To NU'ER.)*

Do you want anything?

*(ERIC walks over and opens the fridge to take out a bag of cheese sticks.)*

NU'ER

I thought your parents didn't like you eating American food.

ERIC

They also don't like that I talk back in English.

*(Pause.)*

Someone's mom brought in cheese sticks for snack and now Mei can't stop asking for them.

*(Pause.)*

Do you want to do something?

MEI MEI

Fish fish!

ERIC

She means "go fish." Someone also showed her that, now that she can finally count up to more than 10.

MEI MEI

*(With a mouth full of cheese.)*

Fish fish!

ERIC

Ok, ok. I'll get the cards from my room. Can you watch her?

*(NU'ER nods and ERIC leaves the kitchen. MEI MEI stares at NU'ER for a moment.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

This is not the first time we have met. I met her a few years ago when Ma came to send gifts for her first year birthday and to help Lady Macduff make the celebratory red eggs. But children forget easily.

MEI MEI

How old are you?

*(NU'ER pulls out a chair from the table and sits down. The dog rests under the table.)*

NU'ER

I'm 12.

MEI MEI

How big is that?

NU'ER

I'm one year younger than your brother.

MEI MEI

Oh. I'm four.

*(ERIC walks back into the kitchen holding a box of cards. He sits down and begins shuffling and dealing the cards out.)*

ERIC

So why is your mom here?

*(MEI MEI eagerly snatches her cards.)*

NU'ER

I don't know. She said it's been too long since she's seen Macduff Aunty.

MEI MEI

Do you have a five?

ERIC

Go fish.

*(Pause.)*



Do you have a seven?

NU'ER

Go fish.

*(Pause.)*

Do you have a three?

MEI MEI

Aw, here you go. Do you have a five?

NU'ER

Go fish.

ERIC

Your mom was here a couple of weeks ago.

NU'ER

So?

ERIC

Do you have a four?

MEI MEI

No! Go fish!

ERIC

She's over here a lot. They sit in there and talk for hours.

NU'ER

Do you have an eight?

ERIC

Go fish.

NU'ER

What do they talk about?

ERIC

They always tell me to go to my room.

NU'ER

Does your dad talk with them?

ERIC

No. Just this time.

MEI MEI

Do you have a two?

NU'ER

*(Hands over card to MEI MEI.)*

Don't you ever try to listen?

ERIC

Why?

NU'ER

Why not?

MEI MEI

Eric, it's your turn!

ERIC

Sorry, Mei. Do you have a four?

MEI MEI

Nope, go fish!

ERIC

I don't understand most of it anyway.

NU'ER

I thought you went to Chinese school on Sundays.

ERIC

That's not what I meant. I don't understand *who* they're talking about. It's always about someone in China anyway.

MEI MEI

Your turn!

NU'ER

Oh, sorry. Do you have a seven?

*(ERIC hands the card to her. ERIC continues to pair off his cards. NU'ER walks to the door and crouches on the floor by the stove.)*

ERIC

What are you doing?

NU'ER  
Come over here.

MEI MEI  
It's my turn now.

NU'ER  
Let's play a different game.

MEI MEI  
What kind of game?

NU'ER  
A listening game.

*(ERIC reluctantly gets up and picks up MEI MEI from her chair. They both sit down next to NU'ER by the door.)*

ERIC  
So what are the rules?

*(NU'ER puts MEI MEI in her lap.)*

NU'ER  
First, we listen.

*(Lights turn on in sitting room.)*

MACDUFF  
If you let them ask for money once, they will keep asking for more.

*(MACDUFF sits in the one seater recliner next to the couch that LADY MACDUFF and XIAO JIE sit on.)*

LADY MACDUFF  
How can you say that? They are family.

MACDUFF  
They are not *her* family. 她不一定帮助他们。<sup>18</sup>

LADY MACDUFF  
他们要多少钱?<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> She doesn't have to help them.

<sup>19</sup> How much did they ask for?

*(XIAO JIE remains silent.)*

MACDUFF

*(Shakes his head in frustration.)*

Too much to be said out loud.

LADY MACDUFF

那怎么办呢? <sup>20</sup>

XIAO JIE

没有别的办法。我们一定要给他们钱。他是金海的大哥，一定要给。 <sup>21</sup>

LADY MACDUFF

金海有什么想法呢? <sup>22</sup>

XIAO JIE

我知道他也不要给他，但是他也没有别的办法<sup>23</sup>。He made a promise. But I still worry about Nu'Er. What if we cannot support her in the future? 如果他们不能回收，那怎么办? <sup>24</sup>

MACDUFF

This is why you can't give it to them. Once you give it to them, they won't stop asking.

XIAO JIE

那我怎么办呢?!<sup>25</sup>

LADY MACDUFF

Shh, shh. 静一点。孩子在厨房里。 <sup>26</sup>

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

They do not want us to hear, and yet they are afraid of letting us go too far. They are willing to risk our hearing if that means they do not lose us. Perhaps they think we will not understand even if we are able to hear them.

*(Lights go down in the sitting room with parents.)*

ERIC

<sup>20</sup> What can be done?

<sup>21</sup> There is nothing we can do. We have to give them the money. He is Jin Hai's (Macbeth's) older brother, of course we have to give it to him/them.

<sup>22</sup> What does Jin Hai (Macbeth) think?

<sup>23</sup> I know he also doesn't want to give it, but there's no other way.

<sup>24</sup> If they cannot pay it back, then what will we do?

<sup>25</sup> Then what can I do?

<sup>26</sup> Quiet. The kids are in the kitchen.

Who are they talking about?

NU'ER

Shh. I don't know. Just listen.

ERIC

Do you have family in China?

NU'ER

Don't you?

ERIC

I think so. But I've never been back to see them.

*(Lights go up in the sitting room with parents.)*

XIAO JIE

他是老大的大儿子。我们不能拒绝他们的请求。<sup>27</sup>

LADY MACDUFF

他多大?<sup>28</sup>

XIAO JIE

十八岁。比女儿大六年。<sup>29</sup>

MACDUFF

他在美国上大学吗? [Is he going to college in America?]

XIAO JIE

Mmm. 他们付不起学费。<sup>30</sup>

LADY MACDUFF

他什么时候要来? [When is he coming?]

XIAO JIE

A few months from now.

*(Lights go down in sitting room.)*

NU'ER

Do you have cousins in China?

---

<sup>27</sup> He is the eldest son of the eldest son. We cannot refuse their request.

<sup>28</sup> How old is he?

<sup>29</sup> 18 years old. He's 6 years older than Nu'Er.

<sup>30</sup> They cannot afford the tuition.

ERIC

I don't know.

NU'ER

I think they're talking about my cousin. But I can't remember who he is.

ERIC

Maybe it's not your cousin. I don't know. Let's just go back to playing the game. I'm tired of listening.

*(ERIC, NU'ER, and MEI MEI go back to the kitchen table.)*

NU'ER

How come you don't know if you have cousins back in China?

ERIC

I don't know. I can't remember the last time I went back.

NU'ER

Do your parents ever talk about them?

ERIC

I guess. It's not like they do it in front of me though.

NU'ER

"Da Ge" means older brother, right? They're probably talking about my uncle.

ERIC

Why does it matter to us?

NU'ER

Did you pick up anything else from what they said? Your Chinese is better than mine.

ERIC

You understood the college part, right?

NU'ER

Sort of. What's "xue fei"?

ERIC

Tuition. That's not surprising. They're always talking about money.

NU'ER

They sounded really frustrated.

ERIC

They're always mad about money. My dad always gets angry when my family brings up money.

NU'ER

Why would they be mad about my cousin coming? It doesn't make sense.

ERIC

See what I mean? There's no point in listening. You'll never really figure out what they're talking about.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

Maybe Eric was right. Maybe there was no point in listening in on their conversations. But there was still something pulling me toward them anyway. It was something deeper than just curiosity. It was like a deep, almost raw, need to understand. It was a need to be closer to the truth, and in some sense, a need to be closer to them. It seemed that understanding the truth was the only way to do that.

ACT I  
Scene 4

*Setting: About 5 years ago from present day. NU'ER is 7 or 8 years old. Afternoon on a Sunday in the middle of winter.*

*At rise: XIAO JIE walks NU'ER out of the college and to the family car.*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My parents sent me to a local community college every Sunday for a few years, when they still thought it was worth it to teach me Chinese like their other Chinese friends' kids.

NU'ER

Lao shi told us we had to buy a new book for class. She said I'm getting better at writing too.

*(XIAO JIE unlocks the car door.)*

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

好好，上车吧。<sup>31</sup>

NU'ER

Today she taught us a new song and then told us about the twelve different animals that raced on the new year.

*(XIAO JIE climbs into the driver's seat and turns on the car.)*

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya, 太冷了。<sup>32</sup>

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

We had been driving a used car that was on its last leg. It took forever for the heat to turn on. I remember my toes were always so numb.

NU'ER

Lao shi<sup>33</sup> told me I was born in the year of the rooster.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

鸡。<sup>34</sup>

NU'ER

---

<sup>31</sup> Ok, ok. Hop into the car.

<sup>32</sup> It's too cold.

<sup>33</sup> Teacher

<sup>34</sup> Rooster



Ji!<sup>35</sup> Lao shi says everyone has an animal. What animal are you mom? What animal is dad?

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

我属猪。你爸属猴子。<sup>36</sup>

NU'ER

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Hou zi?

XIAO JIE

Monkey.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I tried to imagine my father as a clever and mischievous monkey. But my father with his opaque reflecting glasses and mild humor-- I could not imagine the two being any more different.

*(They arrive at the grocery store.)*

XIAO JIE

*(Basket in one arm.)*

Come, come, hold my hand.

NU'ER

What are we buying today? What are we eating for dinner? It's so cold in here.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I talked a lot more when I was younger, before I realized no one was really listening.

NU'ER

Can we get cereal? Sarah from Chinese class shared her snack with me today, and it was really good. I think it was this new kind of cereal with a green person on the box.

XIAO JIE

American food has too much sugar. You have Chinese food at home, much better.

NU'ER

Sarah always gets these different kinds of snacks. One time she gave me oval cookies, and she said next week she'll bring me something different.

XIAO JIE

Sarah's mother always buys too much American food. It's not good for your health.

---

<sup>35</sup> Rooster!

<sup>36</sup> I am a pig. Your father is a monkey.

NU'ER

American food is bad?

XIAO JIE

Chinese food is better for you. You live longer. That's why I always cook Chinese food at home.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My mother never cared much for American tastes.

XIAO JIE

(*Partly in Shanghainese.*)

Ay, Nu'Er, help me hold the basket. I need to get some 菜<sup>37</sup> from over there.

NU'ER

What kind of cai<sup>38</sup> are we getting?

XIAO JIE

(*In Shanghainese.*)

番茄, 青菜, 茄子。<sup>39</sup>

NU'ER

I like qing cai.<sup>40</sup> Are we eating qing cai tonight?

XIAO JIE

(*Partly in Shanghainese.*)

No, we're eating 青菜<sup>41</sup> tomorrow. We're eating 番茄炒蛋<sup>42</sup> tonight.

NU'ER

What kind of cai<sup>43</sup> does Ba like to eat?

XIAO JIE

Come put the basket down here. Can you bring me a bag from over there?

NU'ER

When are we eating the qie zi?<sup>44</sup> Does Ba also like qing cai?<sup>45</sup> What cai<sup>46</sup> do you like Ma?

---

<sup>37</sup> vegetables

<sup>38</sup> vegetables

<sup>39</sup> Tomatoes, bok choy, eggplant.

<sup>40</sup> Bok choy

<sup>41</sup> Bok choy

<sup>42</sup> Fried eggs and tomato

<sup>43</sup> vegetables

<sup>44</sup> eggplant

<sup>45</sup> bok choy

<sup>46</sup> vegetables

XIAO JIE

Come, come. Here, you can give me the basket now.

NU'ER

Are we done shopping? Are we going home now?

XIAO JIE

Come, give me your hand. It's getting dark outside now.

*(XIAO JIE and NU'ER walk offstage. Lights go down.)*

*Setting: At the apartment. Early evening.*

*At rise: NU'ER and XIAO JIE arrive home after shopping.*

XIAO JIE

Hold the grocery bag while I find my key.

*(XIAO JIE opens the door. In Shanghainese.)*

Macbeth! 我们回家了。<sup>47</sup>

MACBETH

Ay, you're back. Let me help you with that.

*(MACBETH takes the bag of groceries from NU'ER.)*

NU'ER

It's so cold in here.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

多穿衣服。<sup>48</sup>

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My parents never turned the heat all the way up to save money.

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er, come into the kitchen and help me cook.

*(In Shanghainese.)*

帮我烧饭。<sup>49</sup>

NU'ER

Where's the stool?

---

<sup>47</sup> We're home.

<sup>48</sup> Put on more clothes.

<sup>49</sup> Help me cook the rice.

XIAO JIE

Over there, by the fridge.

NU'ER

Is this enough rice?

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese. Cutting vegetables.)*

够了。明天爸带剩饭。<sup>50</sup>

*(MACBETH can be heard talking on the phone in the other room.)*

NU'ER

Who is Ba talking to?

XIAO JIE

No one. Just his family.

NU'ER

What are they talking about?

XIAO JIE

Family stuff.

NU'ER

Is his family my family?

XIAO JIE

His family is your family, just like my family is your family. His brother is your uncle, who you call 伯伯。<sup>51</sup>

NU'ER

Bo Bo. Dad has a brother? Do you have a brother?

XIAO JIE

No, only sisters.

NU'ER

Oh. Do they have an animal too?

XIAO JIE

Animal?

---

<sup>50</sup> That's enough. Ba will take the leftovers (for lunch) tomorrow.

<sup>51</sup> Uncle/Father's Eldest Brother (Bo Bo)

NU'ER

Lao shi said everyone has an animal.

XIAO JIE

Oh, oh. Yes, they do. That should be enough water. Go put the pot in the rice cooker.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It didn't occur to me then that my mother was perhaps also trying to listen in on the phone call.

XIAO JIE

Go set the table. You can go play after that.

*(NU'ER moves into the living room. The table is covered in papers and books.)*

NU'ER

"The Secret to Success: How to Manage Your Finances." "15th Century Chinese Literature." Health insurance? "English Language Structure."

MACBETH

*(In Chinese, muffled in the next room.)*

I know, I know. I promise, next time I come home I'll bring her to see you.

*(Pause.)*

I don't know when the next time will be. She's in school here. Yes, yes. I'll send it in the next...

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er! 吃饭! [Time to eat!] Jin Hai! 吃饭! [Time to eat!]

NU'ER

Coming!

XIAO JIE

Careful, it's hot. Here, eat this, it's cooled down a little.

NU'ER

Ba!

MACBETH

How was Chinese class?

NU'ER

Lao shi taught us a new song and told us about the different animals.

MACBETH

Animals? What kind of animals?

NU'ER

The twelve animals that raced during the new year. Lao shi said I was a rooster. She said everybody has an animal.

XIAO JIE

Don't talk, eat. Your food is getting cold.

MACBETH

Animals. Can you name all twelve of them?

NU'ER

Dragon, rat, rooster, dog, monkey, pig.

MACBETH

What about the rabbit and the ox?

NU'ER

Oh, oh, and the snake, the sheep, and the horse.

MACBETH

And the tiger too.

XIAO JIE

Aiya, eat, eat, Nu'Er. The food is getting cold.

NU'ER

Ba, what did you do today?

MACBETH

Ah, nothing really.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My father never shared much about himself.

NU'ER

Did you stay home today?

MACBETH

Mmm. I did. I went to the library too. I got some books for you. They're in your room.

NU'ER

Really? What kind of books?

MACBETH

Mystery, I think.

*(XIAO JIE begins to clear the table and moves to the sink.)*

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er, if you're done eating, go sit with Ba and work on your Chinese homework.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My father grew up in a village where he was told his wife would take care of everything. Or perhaps it was a form of self-sacrifice. My mother had given up her schooling, her time, for my father's own success. Perhaps it would have been my mother teaching me my letters if things had been different.

MACBETH

来来。<sup>52</sup> What did you learn today?

NU'ER

Lao shi gave us another worksheet for next week. She said my writing was getting better.

MACBETH

Ah. Let's see then.

*(Takes out scrap paper from table.)*

Can you show me what "water" looks like?

*(NU'ER writes.)*

Hmm. 不错。<sup>53</sup> Try "house".

*(NU'ER writes.)*

Ay, 你忘了一个点。<sup>54</sup>

NU'ER

Where does it go?

MACBETH

Here, like this. See? Try again.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I believe my father was a perfectionist in some things. He never forgot his characters, something my mother has always struggled to keep. I am afraid I am more like my mother in that sense. I

---

<sup>52</sup> Come, come.

<sup>53</sup> Not bad.

<sup>54</sup> You forgot the little dot.

can barely remember how to write my own name in Chinese, no matter how hard my father tries to never let me forget.

MACBETH

Ah, there you go. Write it out five more times so you don't forget.

NU'ER (*writing.*)

Ba, how come you never forget how to write these words?

MACBETH

Practice. You have to keep practicing so you don't forget.

NU'ER

Oh. Ba, who were you talking to on the phone?

MACBETH

On the phone?

NU'ER

Before dinner. Ma and I heard you talking.

MACBETH

Oh, oh. I was talking with your 伯伯<sup>55</sup> and your 奶奶。<sup>56</sup>

NU'ER

Have I ever met them?

MACBETH

You met them when you were just a baby. We brought you back a few months after you were born. You couldn't remember anything about it.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

How interesting to think that someone has a memory of me that I don't even have of myself.

NU'ER

Will I get to see them again?

MACBETH

Your 伯伯<sup>57</sup> and 奶奶?<sup>58</sup> Maybe next year, during your summer break. I don't want you to miss school for them. I don't know. I'm not sure. Can you show me how to write "dog"?

---

<sup>55</sup> Uncle (Bo Bo)

<sup>56</sup> Paternal Grandmother (Nai Nai)

<sup>57</sup> Uncle

<sup>58</sup> Paternal Grandmother



NU'ER

Like this?

MACBETH

Yes, just like that. Do you remember how to write your name?

NU'ER (*writing.*)

Do you miss them, Nai Nai and Bo Bo?

MACBETH

You're forgetting the line that goes through here. And this curve has to go to the right, not the left.

NU'ER

Oh, is this right?

MACBETH

Almost. This is what it should look like. Write it again five more times. You should always remember how to write your family name, that's what we call this first character.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

I didn't realize how little my father was listening.

NU'ER

Do you miss them?

MACBETH

奶奶和伯伯?<sup>59</sup> 他们特别想见你。<sup>60</sup> Do you want to see them again? Do you miss them? Maybe I will take you back.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

I wondered how I could miss someone I never truly met.

---

<sup>59</sup> Your Nai Nai and Bo Bo?

<sup>60</sup> They really want to see you again.

ACT I  
Scene 5

*Setting: Weekend before the Lunar New Year. The Macbeths have thrown a dinner party with their neighborhood friends in celebration. A few months before FLEANCE arrives.*

*At rise: NU'ER sits in her bedroom. MACBETH is on the phone in his office and XIAO JIE is downstairs with the guests.*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My parents, my mother especially, have always liked to display our family photographs on the shelf in the living room. Whenever we have guests over, they always comment on how youthful my parents still look, and how thick I was. They will say things like, especially Aunt Macduff, "Oh, Xiao Jie, you haven't aged a day! You still look like the young girl from Shanghai." They do not comment on my father's appearance. Once an aunty said, jokingly, "Oh what a handsome young man, no wonder Xiao Jie put up with you." And to me they will say, "my, my, she really grew into her clothing. What a big girl now. How old are you now?" There was one photograph that always stuck out to me, one of the few pictures taken of my father's family. My mother says they were taken when my father first went back after settling in America. There was one of his entire family, and another taken with just his brother, my uncle. My mother says Bobo had insisted. He didn't want my father to forget his face in a new land. The first time I saw him was when we were still living in our small apartment. He was sitting on the sill of one of the windows, swinging his leg back and forth in the empty air and smoking a cigarette. He was young, younger than he was when the photo was taken. And I could see how much taller he was than my father. He had sun-tanned skin and big muscular forearms. He was there, and he wasn't. Like one of those false created memories. When he spoke, it sounded muffled, quiet, like he was somewhere far away.

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Ay, good afternoon, 小孩 [child] !

(*NU'ER looks around.*)

Up here. Hi there.

NU'ER<sup>61</sup>

Who are you?

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Don't you recognize me? Ah, of course you wouldn't. Last time I saw you, you were a baby, just born. But surely your father has told you about me.

---

<sup>61</sup> 7 or 8 years old at the time

NU'ER

I've never heard about you.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I'm your uncle, your Bo Bo. I'm your father's older brother. Didn't he tell me about you? I quite miss him.

NU'ER

Why are you here? Shouldn't you be in China?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I am. But your father never brings you to see me. And I miss talking to him.

NU'ER

He was on the phone with you last night.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

It's not the same though.

*(Pause.)*

Am I in the right place? I thought I would stop by for a visit, but I got a bit lost. It's quite a long journey.

NU'ER

Ba is still at work. He's not home.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh, then can I wait with you?

NU'ER

Okay. But I have homework, so you can't be too loud.

*(BANQUO follows NU'ER into the apartment. XIAO JIE is in the kitchen by the sink.)*

XIAO JIE

Ay, Nu'Er, you're home. Are you hungry?

NU'ER

Not really. Is Ba home?

XIAO JIE

He won't be home for another two hours.

NU'ER

Okay. I'm going to my room.

*(To BANQUO.)*

You should put on some slippers. You can wear Ba's since he's not home yet.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh.

*(To XIAO JIE.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie. How are you?

XIAO JIE

*(Not hearing.)*

Nu'Er, I folded the laundry over there on the couch. Can you bring your clothes to your room?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese. To himself.)*

Ah, so this is where 弟弟[younger brother] lives. It is nice, clean.

*(To NU'ER.)*

Do you share a room with your parents?

NU'ER

No, I have my own room. Do you share your room?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

When I was your age, we only had a small kitchen and a bedroom we all shared. So this is your room?

NU'ER

Mhm. Ba helped me to put up the pictures.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese. Wandering around.)*

You have so many books.

NU'ER

Ba takes me to the library every weekend.

*(NU'ER spreads her homework out on the floor and lays down on her stomach. BANQUO takes a seat on her bed.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

What are you working on?

NU'ER

I'm practicing my characters. Ba says I should practice everyday, even before I do my other homework.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, your Ba is right. He always was better at writing and reading than I was.

*(Pause.)*

I have a son who isn't much older than you are. You met him once, too.

NU'ER

Really? How old is he?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

He's almost 13 years old now. He also likes to study. He's very good at reading.

NU'ER

What does he like to read?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I don't know. The next time I come to visit, I will let you know.

NU'ER

Is this your first time in America?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I think so. I am not sure why 弟弟 [younger brother] likes it so much here.

NU'ER

How come you didn't come too?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I don't know.

*(Pause.)*

We always thought he would come back.

*(Two hours pass.)*

MACBETH

Ay, Xiao Jie, 我回家了[I'm home].

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

你回来了! [You're home!]

NU'ER

He's back! Come on.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Nu'Er, 吃饭! [Come eat!]

MACBETH

Ay, Nu'Er. How was school?

NU'ER

Okay. We learned about the life cycle of a butterfly.

*(MACBETH moves to the living room to take off his coat.)*

XIAO JIE

*(To NU'ER. XIAO JIE does not hear NU'ER talk. XIAO JIE moves around in the kitchen, bringing food and dishes to the table.)*

Come sit down. The food is getting cold.

NU'ER

*(To BANQUO.)*

Come, you can sit down too. You should eat something before you leave.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh, of course. Ay. 弟弟, I've come to visit.

*(MACBETH does not hear BANQUO as he returns to the kitchen table.)*

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er, have some 菜 [vegetables].

MACBETH

*(Not hearing BANQUO.)*

So, the butterfly life cycle. What does that look like?

*(To XIAO JIE in Chinese.)*

Ay, did you get a chance to go to the post office today?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Perhaps it is time for me to go.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I did. The package you sent was expensive.

NU'ER

*(To BANQUO.)*

But Ba just got here. Maybe you can talk after dinner. Ma doesn't like it when we talk too much.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Well, there's not much we can do about it. We have to do it. They're family.

XIAO JIE

*(To NU'ER.)*

Come, eat.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

It's alright. Perhaps another time he will be ready to listen.

*(BANQUO disappears.)*

NU'ER

Wait, don't go.

MACBETH

Ay, Nu'Er. Who are you talking to?

NU'ER

Nobody. I thought I heard something.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

He disappeared. I questioned his existence, like one of those half formed memories. It was hard to tell what was real, what really happened. Or was it just another story that made its way into my dreams?

*(Transition back to lunar new year dinner party in present time.)*

XIAO JIE

*(From downstairs.)*

Nu'Er! Can you help me?! I can't remember where I put my gift for Mrs. Liu!

*(NU'ER walks downstairs.)*

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, Nu'Er. How nice to see you. I'm sorry Eric couldn't be here. He has something for his soccer team tonight.

NU'ER

Oh, hi Macduff Aunty.

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er, come here. I can't find it anywhere.

NU'ER

Did you check the closet in your bedroom upstairs? You were putting a lot of stuff in there earlier today.

XIAO JIE

No, I already checked. Ah, 真不好意思 [how embarrassing]。

NU'ER

Does Ba know where it is?

XIAO JIE

Ah, how would he know. He doesn't know anything that goes on in this house. Where is he? He should be down here.

NU'ER

He's on the phone upstairs.

XIAO JIE

Of course he is. Go ask him. If he doesn't know, at least tell him to come downstairs. It's rude to talk on the phone when we have guests. Mr. Zhou has been asking about him.

MRS. LIU

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, don't fuss, Xiao Jie. This is a wonderful party.

*(NU'ER goes upstairs and knocks on the office door.)*

NU'ER

Ba, do you know where Mrs. Liu's gift is? Ma wants you to come downstairs.

MACBETH

I'll be down in a minute. Just go downstairs.

NU'ER

So much for that.



*(NU'ER goes back to her room. She is taken aback by something in front of her.)*

Bo Bo?

*(BANQUO sits on the windowsill of NU'ER's room. He is holding a book.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Nu'Er, 好久不见 [long time no see]. So you recognize me this time?

NU'ER

What are you doing here?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I brought you this. This is what Fleance likes to read.

NU'ER

Ba is on the phone with you. Why are you here?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

He is talking to my son, Fleance. He is coming in a few months, so I wanted to come see your new home 弟弟 [younger brother] keeps telling 奶奶 [paternal grandmother] about.

NU'ER

Do you want to see Ba? He's in the next room.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I do not think he will listen.

*(Pause.)*

Fleance thinks you will like this book. It's his favorite.

NU'ER

It's in English.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

He read it in middle school. Are you having a celebration? We are also preparing for the new year. This will be Fleance's last one at home for awhile.

NU'ER

Do you want anything to eat?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I'm alright. Would you show me around?

NU'ER

Alright, but I'm not going downstairs. There's too many parents down there.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

It seems like 弟弟 [younger brother] has a lot of friends here. Xiao Jie must be happy.

*(NU'ER walks out of her bedroom.)*

NU'ER

I guess you could say that.

*(Pause.)*

Why is Fleance coming here?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

To study. He is going to an American university.

NU'ER

How old is he?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Not much older than you. He is almost 18. His birthday is in another month.

NU'ER

You must be happy. I know Ba would be if I went to a big school.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I am. I am sad he must go so far, just like your father. I wonder if he will choose to stay as well.

NU'ER

Which school is he going to?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I cannot remember. It is a big school in New York, I think.

NU'ER

Well that narrows it down.

*(Pause.)*

I'm sure he'll come home. He sounds like a good son.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Would you come home, even after leaving home so far and for so long?

NU'ER

I don't know. Ma would definitely make sure I came back though. Are you sure you don't want to see Ba?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

No. I do not think he will listen. It has been too long since he has actually seen my face.

NU'ER

He went to visit a couple of years ago, didn't he?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Yes, for a couple of weeks. But I am afraid it has been too long. He seems to have forgotten what it is like to be home. I know that distance upsets him. I do not want to disturb him.

NU'ER

I'm sure he misses you.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, yes. I miss him too. Though it has been many years since I have seen my brother the way he was before he left.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I did not know my father the way he was before he left for America. I wonder what I am missing.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

It is time for me to return. It is a long journey back.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

That was the last time I saw him in that form. The next time I saw him was after he had passed on. His spirit looked a little different. I almost didn't recognize him.

ACT BREAK

ACT II  
Scene 1

*Setting: It is early evening, the sun is going down.*

*At rise: NU'ER sitting beside MACBETH while watching TV.*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

Some years ago, I sat down with my father while he did taxes in front of the TV. He had put in one of the few Chinese DVDs he had found in the public library. There were no English subtitles and all the closed captioning was in Chinese. There were tall thin Chinese women floating in long dresses in the air with massive updos. Every coordinated fight scene happened in the air and there were a lot of quick one-liners. Your family this. Your family that. How dare you betray me. I must avenge my honor. I must avenge my cousin's once-removed honor.

*(Sounds from TV.)*

NU'ER

Ba, what are they saying?

MACBETH

*(Without looking up from his paper.)*

Nothing important. Just try listening.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

I tried to. I really did. But there were some things that just couldn't be learned on one's own. It always took a little improvising on my part.

*(Lights go down.)*

NU'ER

*(Narrates off stage.)*

My father told me about how he met a matchmaker once. But I didn't know they still existed. How old was my father? Perhaps he was that old, though he did not always look it. Perhaps he did age like the gods and goddesses that ate from the heavenly peach trees.

*(Pause.)*

I imagine they met at the market.

*(Lights go up on a crowded village market.)*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

It is a typical day at the market. My father and his brother accompany their father, my grandfather (whom I have never met). They are, I suppose, 14 and 12. Perhaps they came to exchange a few things--buy some seed for the new year, new cloth for a shirt, and fresh vegetables for the next few days or so.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Macbeth, come here! Come quickly! Mrs. Luo brought her dogs. I heard she had puppies!

MACBETH'S FATHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Where are you going? Don't go too far. We have to return home soon. Your ma is waiting for us.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

We'll be back. Come on Macbeth!

*(BANQUO grabs MACBETH by the arm, and they run down to where MRS. LUO is.)*

Good afternoon Mrs. Luo!

MRS. LUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Wang's<sup>62</sup> boys. You look so thin! Have you been eating enough?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

我们没瘦了！<sup>63</sup> We heard you got new puppies.

*(The mother dog barks. MACBETH hides behind BANQUO.)*

Haha, it's ok 弟弟。<sup>64</sup>

MRS. LUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Would you like a puppy? Name your price.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh, I don't know if Ba would let us. We already have a guard dog.

*(MRS. LUO and BANQUO go back and forth for awhile. MACBETH turns to see the four matchmakers.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

---

<sup>62</sup> Surname, meaning "king"

<sup>63</sup> We haven't gotten thinner!

<sup>64</sup> Younger Brother

Their cackling can be heard through the crowd. They remind me of the hairdressers who work long days at the salon. They like to gossip, and they like knowing the names of their customers and their boyfriends and girlfriends and their in-laws too. They all have graying hair, yellowing teeth, and small, small feet. How they ran or walked about with those feet, I do not know.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

We should get back now. Come on Macbeth.

MRS. LUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Tell your mother I said hello.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese. With a wave.)*

Take care Mrs. Luo!

*(They walk back to where they had left their father, passing the four matchmaking sisters/elderly women.)*

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese, calling out.)*

Ay, Wang's boy! Come here, come here! Let me take a look at you. I haven't seen you since the day you were born.

*(MACBETH and BANQUO walk over to the table.)*

BANQUO

Lao aiyi!<sup>65</sup>

*(BANQUO and MACBETH walk over to the tea shop.)*

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Wang's sons! Banquo, Macbeth, come here!

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

How do you know our names?

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

I know everything about everyone in this village.

---

<sup>65</sup> Aunty!

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My father grew up in a small village. *Everyone* knew everyone.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Come, have a seat. We'll make some tea and tell your fortune.

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Aw, we can't impose. Ba is waiting for us.

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Na li, na li.<sup>66</sup> He can wait. It'll just be a moment.

(*BANQUO and MACBETH take a seat on a bench that the 3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER has pulled over for them.*)

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese, pointing at BANQUO, sighing.*)

Eldest son of eldest son. Your future path does not take you far from the village you were born in. You are a good son. You take care of your parents. Such a filial son. You will have a good son too. Such a filial son should have a filial son.

(*Turning to MACBETH.*)

You.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Your path takes you far from here.

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Farther than the next village.

4TH ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Farther than the next province.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER

(*In Chinese.*)

Across mountains.

---

<sup>66</sup> Nonsense.



3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

Deserts.

ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

And the wide open sea.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

You will come to a land with yellow stars buried deep in the ground.

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

Mountains of gold.

4TH ELDEST and ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

Caves of yellow fire.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

Wait. Back up. That is not quite right.

*(Actors freeze on stage.)*

My father immigrated to Ohio. And he came some 200 years after the gold rush. But continue.

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

They speak a language that is not ours.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

They eat food that is bland and tasteless and unfamiliar.

ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

Your roots will grow in a land that is far from the one of your ancestors.

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

Your seed sprung

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER  
*(In Chinese.)*

In a land far from your ancestors' graves.

ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

And your wife

2ND ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

Found in the South.

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

Not in this village.

4TH ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

You will not see your brother for many years.

3RD ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

And when you do

4TH ELDEST MATCHMAKER

*(In Chinese.)*

You will be unrecognizable.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

The first picture my father ever had taken of him was in college. I wonder if they recognized him when he returned home. I wonder if they had forgotten each other's faces, if they were surprised at the wrinkles and lines that etched across every canvas with time. At how memory always wipes the canvas clean. I wonder if it becomes harder to pick up the brush again each time. What is the use of trying to remember something you know you will end up forgetting?

*(Lights go down on stage.)*

*Setting: Just before dawn on the day Macbeth will leave to take the imperial exam. Ancient China. (Setting up premise for "Butterfly Lovers" story to follow.)*

*At rise: MACBETH sits at a low desk in a small, sparsely furnished room. It is a traditional ancient Chinese home, with paper walls and doors.*

NU'ER

*(Narrates from offstage.)*

The matchmakers were right. My father did meet her in the South. One thing the matchmaker had left out was how exactly my father would meet my mother. My parents have never spoken

about it in much detail. Perhaps they are so old they do not even remember. Perhaps it all happened in some other lifetime ago. Perhaps they were other people entirely.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

If the emperor receives a gift of two horses, one black, one white from a neighboring province, and they have just closed a trade deal, then--

MACBETH'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Jin Hai!

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ma!

MACBETH'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Jin Hai!

MACBETH

*(In Chinese. More emphatically.)*

Ma!

MACBETH'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, you never answer me!

*(MACBETH'S MOTHER slides open the door and walks into the room.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I imagine my grandmother would do the same as my own mother. I imagine she would not think to knock either.

MACBETH'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Jin Hai, what are you doing? It is almost time to leave. Breakfast is ready. I have all your things packed.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ma, it will be alright. I will be there in a moment.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I imagine he uses the same placating tone as he does with my mother, but perhaps with a more playful note, as if he knows he will always listen to her in the end.

MACBETH'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Alright, alright.

*(MACBETH'S MOTHER leaves the room.)*

*(Lights go off.)*

*(Lights go up.)*

*Setting: Late morning in late spring at the imperial academy. Ancient China. MACBETH and XIAO JIE study at the same academy. XIAO JIE pretends to be a man in order to study, a fact of which MACBETH is unaware.*

*At rise: MACBETH stands on a bridge over a pond. XIAO JIE stands beside him dressed in men's clothing. They read poetry out loud to each other.*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

When I bothered to ask, they said they had met during their time at school. The details are still unclear, but perhaps it happened something like this.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I have received a letter from home. My family wishes for me to return as soon as I can.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

How soon will you return?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I have made arrangements to leave in the next two days. I do not know if I will ever be able to come back here.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Then I will come with you.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

What are you saying?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

I will accompany you. I will send you off. I will be with you as long as I can.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

That puts my heart at ease. I am glad to be with you a while longer.

*(Blackout.)*

*At rise: MACBETH/LIANG and XIAO JIE/ZHU are on the way to XIAO JIE/ZHU'S home.*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It is a few days later when Liang accompanies Zhu home. The story goes that Zhu, dressed in men's clothing, is arranged to be married to another man. It is also said that Liang does not know Zhu is actually a woman, even after she has dropped several hints. (I think my father was willfully ignorant, rather than clueless.)

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Look, look! Over there, by the stream.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

What? What? Where?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Over there! Don't you see those two ducks? What a beautiful couple they make.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, yes, the ducks. They are quite beautiful. Though it seems it is getting too cold for them now, don't you think?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese. Miffed.)*

Yes, yes, too cold for them.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My mother had a sense of humor once.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Why must you return home so urgently?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

My horse died.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

What?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I am playing with you. If I told you, you would not believe me.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Why is that?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

If I tell you, will you promise me something?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

You need not ask. I would promise you anything.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Then do you promise to come and visit me?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

That is something that does not need a promise. I would have come without your asking.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I am glad to hear it. There is someone I would like you to meet.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Who would that be?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

You will have to wait and see.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

You still have not told me why.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

My parents have found me-- a wife.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

A wife? How exciting. Have you met her yet?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

No, I have not.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

You are not happy though.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

No, not quite. But it puts my parents at ease. That is all that matters.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

What about your studies? The imperial examinations are at the end of this year.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I do not know. It is unlikely I will ever be able to return.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

But why? You are the eldest son. Surely you have some freedom in that.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Why? Why? There is no why. There is only family. There is no freedom. Only obligation.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Is there truly nothing you can do?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Unless I sprout wings and fly off to the next province, I do not think there is a way out.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

Liang accompanies Zhu only so far. Zhu makes the rest of the journey home alone.

*Setting: Four months later at ZHU's home. LIANG comes to visit ZHU as promised. End of summer/beginning of Fall.*

*At rise: ZHU sits at a small desk, still holding the letter LIANG sent ahead of his visit. She is still dressed in men's clothing.*

GARDENER

*(In Chinese.)*

Zhu! There is someone waiting for you by the gate.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

He has come as promised.

*(ZHU follows GARDENER to the front gate where MACBETH/LIANG waits.)*

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese, waving.)*

Zhu! 我来了!<sup>67</sup>

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

好久不见!<sup>68</sup>

*(GARDENER unlocks the gate and MACBETH/LIANG steps into the inner courtyard.)*

Come, hurry inside. You must be tired. I will pour us some tea.

*(MACBETH/LIANG and XIAO JIE/ZHU move indoors.)*

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

You are well?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

---

<sup>67</sup> I have come!

<sup>68</sup> Long time no see!



*(In Chinese.)*

Well as can be. How did the examinations go?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Well as can be. It will be another month before I hear back.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

There is someone I would like you to meet.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

I have not forgotten. You must have read my curiosity in my letters.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

How could I have missed that? Your excitement about anything other than imperial records and poetry is a rarity. I will be back shortly.

*(XIAO JIE/ZHU retreats into a room near the back of the house. She changes into women's clothing and reappears.)*

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese. Chokes on tea.)*

You are playing with me again.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

No, I am done playing with you. I am the only daughter of the Zhu family. I could not have studied unless I became a man. Now you see why I could not escape fate so easily.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

But why did you hide this from me?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

I was afraid you would not understand.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

So this wife that your parents have arranged is actually your husband?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

He is a rich merchant from a city east of here. I have never met him, nor do I mean to. If it were up to me, I would have stayed with you at the imperial academy.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Perhaps there is a way for you to return.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

How? My parents would never let me return to the academy.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

What if you came to live with me?

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

What do you mean?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Perhaps that was not the best way to say it. I meant, what if I asked for your hand in marriage? Then you could come to live with me. Once I've gotten a job as an imperial magistrate, I'll have enough money to provide for both of us to study. You could continue to dress as a man, finish your studies at the academy, and then take the imperial examinations.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

That would never work. My family would never approve of you.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It is true that my grandparents had a different kind of man in mind for my mother. It would not be the last time my mother would disappoint them.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

I have a small stipend from the academy that I could offer as a dowry. I am well-educated and a soon to be imperial magistrate. Surely that will count for something. I will find a highly esteemed matchmaker and have her compare our birth charts. Surely that will have some sway.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Liang, it would never work. Why must you try so hard?

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

I do not wish for you to be sent away to a place I can never reach. I do not wish to see you trapped in a joyless fate. If we were to be together, I would leave you free to do whatever you wish.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

There is no such thing as freedom from fate.

MACBETH/LIANG

*(In Chinese.)*

Then my heart will never be at rest if yours is not.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Neither will mine.

*(Lights go down.)*

*Setting: Three months since ZHU has last seen LIANG. She has just received a letter from a teacher from the academy about LIANG. It is now late fall/early winter. It is a very windy day.*

*At rise: ZHU stands in traditional wedding dress in front of her home surrounded by family and neighbors from the village. The marriage procession to the temple is about to begin.*

XIAO JIE/ZHU'S GRANDMOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Little Zhu, it is time.

*(ZHU'S GRANDMOTHER covers ZHU'S face with the red cloth. ZHU climbs into the red covered bridal chair assisted by her grandmother.)*

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese. To herself.)*

It is so cold. My hands are shaking.

BRIDAL CHAIR BEARERS

我们走！<sup>69</sup>

*(NEIGHBORS/FAMILY MEMBERS begin to sing traditional wedding songs and blessings. The chair rocks unsteadily back and forth from the wind.)*

---

<sup>69</sup> Let us head out!

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese. Holding onto the edges of her chair.)*

I am going to die before I even get there!

NEIGHBORS/FAMILY

恭喜恭喜！百年好合！恭喜恭喜！早生贵子！<sup>70</sup>

*(The bridal carriage rattles so violently in the wind that the marriage procession stops. In Chinese.)*

This is a bad omen!

FAMILY MEMBERS

*(In Chinese.)*

Why have we stopped? We must keep going.

NEIGHBORS

*(In Chinese.)*

It is bad luck to stop in front of a burial site!

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

The marriage procession did not make it past Liang's grave. The winds were too strong.

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

What is happening?

*(ZHU pokes her head around the red curtain. She sees Liang's grave ahead.)*

Liang! Liang!

*(ZHU jumps from the bridal chair and runs to the gravesite of LIANG.)*

XIAO JIE/ZHU'S MOTHER

*(In Chinese.)*

Zhu, you must come back here!

*(The red cover over ZHU'S head flies away in the wind. When ZHU has reached LIANG's gravesite, the wind stops.)*

XIAO JIE/ZHU

*(In Chinese.)*

Liang, forgive me. I only hope your heart is at peace now.

---

<sup>70</sup> Congratulations! May you have a harmonious union that lasts a hundred years! Congratulations! May you soon give birth to a son!

*(ZHU kowtows three times.)*

I only wish our fates had not been so unbreakable. If only I could join you now!

*(The ground shakes and LIANG's grave opens up. ZHU jumps in without hesitation.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

The legend goes that after Zhu throws herself into the grave, the bodies of the two lovers turn into butterflies. Part of me wonders if in that metamorphosis, some part of them died, left behind. Part of me is sure of it. It is impossible for me to believe that one could remain unchanged after being pulled apart in so many directions. It is hard for me to believe that they were able to escape with everything that they were before their separation, before their migration. I am still trying to figure out what it is that they gained after. I wonder if it was worth it. Some part of me tells me that in some ways it was. Part of me also believes that in some ways their mourning never really ended.

ACT II  
Scene 2

*Setting: Present time. School night.*

*At rise: NU'ER is sitting upstairs in her room at her desk doing homework. XIAO JIE is cutting fruit in the kitchen downstairs.*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I think part of me believes she didn't even realize what she was doing. At first, I didn't think much of what she did as out of the ordinary. (Or out of *an* ordinary). I had grown up with her and that kind of presence. I thought it was normal for kids to be constantly monitored by their parents. I realize now it was "*a*" normal. A certain kind of normal for her. There were days where I would wake up in the early mornings to find that some of the things in my room had been moved around, as if tripped over, or played around with fidgety hands trying to pass time. There were a few days in which I found my mother sleeping on the floor, head resting at the foot of my bed. I remember the first time it happened was when I was seven years old.

NU'ER

Ma?

*(Pause.)*

What are you doing here?

*(Pause.)*

Did you have a bad dream too?

XIAO JIE

I'm ok, Nu'Er. I just needed to check something. You can go back to sleep.

NU'ER<sup>71</sup> *(narrates.)*

There were nights when Ba would come home late from work. My mother would sleep in my room with me until he came home. I remember the night I realized this wasn't right. I was doing homework. It was like waking up from a dream.

XIAO JIE

Ay, Nu'Er. I brought you some fruit.

NU'ER

Oh, thanks Ma.

*(XIAO JIE continues to stand in the room.)*

Do you need something?

---

<sup>71</sup> Nu'Er is around 13 years old.

XIAO JIE

Ay, not really.

*(Pause.)*

What are you working on?

NU'ER

Just some homework.

XIAO JIE

*(Partially in Shanghainese.)*

Oh. 开灯。 [Turn on the light.] You'll hurt your eyes that way.

NU'ER

Ok. Ok.

XIAO JIE

That's why your Ba has such big glasses. When he was growing up, he only studied by candle and oil lamp. He didn't have lights like yours.

*(Pause.)*

What did you do in school today?

NU'ER

Uh, not much.

*(Pause.)*

I had a presentation.

XIAO JIE

Oh, a presentation.

*(Pause.)*

You have so many books. Where did you get all these? Did I buy you these? Ay, this one is in Chinese.

NU'ER

Um, Fleance got some of them for me.

XIAO JIE

Oh, oh. Did he give you this one? I've never read this. I never finished high school. When I had you, I didn't get a chance to finish college either.

NU'ER

Oh, yeah, Fleance gave that to me. You can read it if you want.

XIAO JIE

But you can't read Chinese?

NU'ER

I know. He told it to me in English. He said once I learned Chinese I could read it.

XIAO JIE

Oh. Maybe we should send you back to Chinese school.

NU'ER

Mmm.

*(Silence.)*

XIAO JIE

Do you want more fruit? I can cut some more.

NU'ER

I'm ok. I'm still full from dinner.

XIAO JIE

Oh, oh. Ok.

NU'ER

Is Dad coming home late today?

XIAO JIE

Mmm. He said he doesn't know when he'll be back. I left some rice in the pot for him.

NU'ER

Mmm.

XIAO JIE

Have you read all these books?

NU'ER

Mmm. Sort of.

XIAO JIE

*(Picking up a book.)*

Where did you get this?

NU'ER

A friend gave it to me.

XIAO JIE

*(Picking up another object.)*

Oh. What about this? I've never seen this in your room. Did a friend give that to you?



NU'ER

Ma, I have a project due tomorrow.

XIAO JIE

Oh, oh. Ok ok. I'll stop talking.  
(Pause.)

NU'ER

You can read the book if you want.

*(XIAO JIE ends up falling asleep on NU'ER's bed.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

My mother would argue with my father a lot about how late he would come home. At first I didn't understand why it made my mother so anxious. I suppose that's what being alone in another country does. My father was her safety net. I think she resented it a little, but she also knew she didn't have a choice.

*Setting: NU'ER is 12 years old. It is raining outside. School night.*

*At rise: XIAO JIE pacing the floor. NU'ER sitting at the dinner table.*

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er?

NU'ER

Ma?

XIAO JIE

Do you hear his car?

NU'ER

What?

XIAO JIE

Ba's car. Do you hear it?

NU'ER

Oh. No. I don't think he's home yet.

XIAO JIE

Aiya. The food is getting cold. He should have been back by now.

NU'ER

Ma, he's always back a little late. Don't worry so much.

XIAO JIE

Aiya. He never comes home *this* late. I should call him.

NU'ER

He's probably driving home right now.

*(Pause.)*

Ma?

*(Pause.)*

Ma?

XIAO JIE

Ay?

NU'ER

Just come sit down and eat. He'll be home soon.

XIAO JIE

Aiya. Not now. You go, go eat before it gets cold.

*(Half an hour passes. NU'ER has finished dinner and gone upstairs to do homework. MACBETH comes home.)*

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, I'm home!

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya. You need to let me know when you're coming home.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, don't worry, don't worry. I'm back now. You know I come home late sometimes.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You always say don't worry. Of course I'm worried. What happens if you don't come home one day? Then what am I supposed to do?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya. You always think of the worst case scenario.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Forget it, forget it. Just go eat. The food is already cold.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

They fought like this every time my father would come home late. It was almost ritual at this point. But I think it was one of the few things that my mother could control, even if she couldn't control what happened to him. Maybe it gave her some kind of comfort. I think it reminded my father who he was leaving behind every day. I wonder if she ever got tired of it--doing the same thing almost every night. And I think she did, which is why she would fight with him constantly. I think she got tired of imagining the worst.

ACT II  
Scene 3

*Setting: NU'ER's house. Early evening on a Saturday night in late June. MACBETH is driving to the airport to pick up FLEANCE. There is a nervous energy in the house.*

*At rise: XIAO JIE is getting the guest bedroom ready. NU'ER is in her room studying.*

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er! I need your help with the sheets!

NU'ER

Just a second!

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My mother was always concerned about the appearance of her home. It was as if her house was like some representation of her outer appearance. It was like how she chose to wear makeup only on some days. It was easier for her to let others believe what they saw.

XIAO JIE

I need help making Fleance's bed!

NU'ER

I'm coming!

XIAO JIE

Huh? Are you doing homework? It's ok, it's ok. You can go back to studying.

*(NU'ER comes downstairs to the guest bedroom.)*

NU'ER

Ma, it's ok. I'm already here.

XIAO JIE

Ok, ok. Take that corner.

*(NU'ER and XIAO JIE make Fleance's bed in silence.)*

XIAO JIE

The pillow cases are in the basket over there.

NU'ER

What time is Ba coming back?

XIAO JIE

Mmm, probably another hour. After this we need to make dinner. Fleance will be hungry after the flight.

NU'ER

Which school is Fleance going to?

XIAO JIE

NYU. They gave him the most money.

NU'ER

Oh. When does he start?

XIAO JIE

August.

NU'ER

So is he staying with us until then?

XIAO JIE

Yes. Can you get an extra towel from the bathroom?

NU'ER

Ok.

*(Goes to get towel.)*

Is this his first time in America?

XIAO JIE

Yes.

NU'ER

Do you think he's scared?

XIAO JIE

Mmm.

NU'ER

Were you scared the first time?

XIAO JIE

*(Partially in Shanghainese.)*

我? [Me?] Yes, a little. But Ba was with me, so I was less afraid.

*(Pause.)*

Ok, 帮我烧饭。 [Ok, help me make dinner.]

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I wondered what he would look like. The only picture I had seen of him was when he was just a boy.

XIAO JIE

*(Partially in Shanghainese.)*

Nu'Er, can you get me a plate? The 菜 [vegetables] should almost be done.

MACBETH

Xiao Jie! 我们回家了! [We're home!]

XIAO JIE<sup>72</sup>

Ay, 快进来! 我们马上吃饭。女儿, 快帮他们穿拖鞋。<sup>73</sup> Fleance, welcome, welcome. 你累不累?<sup>74</sup>

FLEANCE

不累, 不累。谢谢阿姨。<sup>75</sup>

XIAO JIE

Ay, 没事。在飞机上吃饭了吗?<sup>76</sup>

FLEANCE

吃了, 吃了。别担心。<sup>77</sup>

*(Sees NU'ER standing beside XIAO JIE.)*

Ay, 你好小妹妹! 好多年没见过你。<sup>78</sup>

MACBETH

去休息。<sup>79</sup> 我们马上叫你吃饭。<sup>80</sup> Nu'Er, go show him his room.

FLEANCE *(walking.)*

小妹, 今年多大? 好久不见。第一次见过你很小。<sup>81</sup>

NU'ER

*(Heavily American accented.)*

Oh, uh. 我十二岁。<sup>82</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Xiao Jie speaks in Mandarin when talking to Fleance.

<sup>73</sup> Come in quickly! Dinner is almost ready. Nu'Er go give them slippers.

<sup>74</sup> Are you tired?

<sup>75</sup> I'm not tired. Thank you aunty.

<sup>76</sup> Ay, of course. Did you eat on the flight?

<sup>77</sup> I ate already. No worries.

<sup>78</sup> Ay, hi there little sister. It's been many years since I've seen you.

<sup>79</sup> Go rest.

<sup>80</sup> We'll call you soon for dinner.

<sup>81</sup> Little sister, how old are you? Long time no see. The first time I saw you, you were so small.

<sup>82</sup> I'm 12.

FLEANCE

Ah, 你长大长得很快。你上中学吗? <sup>83</sup>

NU'ER

上了, 上了。 <sup>84</sup>

FLEANCE

Ah. 你喜欢看什么书? 我带了很多书, 可以借你。你喜欢看书吗? <sup>85</sup>

NU'ER

Uh. 我喜欢看 science fiction. <sup>86</sup>

FLEANCE

Ah, science fiction. 没看过。你有最喜欢的吗? <sup>87</sup>

NU'ER

有, 有。叫 “Fahrenheit 451.” <sup>88</sup>

FLEANCE

没看过。一定要借给我看看。 <sup>89</sup>

NU'ER

Hmm. 一定。 <sup>90</sup>

XIAO JIE

*(From kitchen.)*Nu'Er, Fleance! 吃饭! <sup>91</sup>

FLEANCE

哦, 我们去吧。 <sup>92</sup>*(FLEANCE and NU'ER walk to the kitchen.)*

MACBETH

<sup>83</sup> You grew up fast. Are you in middle school now?<sup>84</sup> I am.<sup>85</sup> What books do you like to read? I brought a lot of books with me. You can borrow them. Do you like to read?<sup>86</sup> I like to read science fiction.<sup>87</sup> I haven't read that before. Do you have a favorite book?<sup>88</sup> I do. It's called "Fahrenheit 451."<sup>89</sup> I haven't read that one. You definitely need to let me borrow it.<sup>90</sup> Of course.<sup>91</sup> Time to eat!<sup>92</sup> Oh, we should go.

Ay, Fleance. 可以坐在这里，在女儿的旁边。女儿，帮Fleance 拿一条筷子吧。请坐，请坐，不要客气。我们都是家人。<sup>93</sup>

XIAO JIE

金海说对了。我们都是家人。快坐吧，不让菜冷了。<sup>94</sup>

FLEANCE

啊，谢谢阿姨，叔叔。<sup>95</sup>

NU'ER

*(Handing over chopsticks.)*

Here.

FLEANCE

Ah, 谢谢。<sup>96</sup>

*(They eat in silence for a few moments.)*

XIAO JIE

*(Looking around.)*

Ay, 班机如何？<sup>97</sup>

FLEANCE

顺利，顺利。<sup>98</sup>

XIAO JIE

那真好。<sup>99</sup>

MACBETH

什么时候要上学？<sup>100</sup>

FLEANCE

八月二十三号，开始 orientation.<sup>101</sup>

MACBETH

---

<sup>93</sup> You can sit over there next to Nu'Er. Nu'er, can you get Fleance a pair of chopsticks? Please sit, sit, you don't need to be polite. We're all family.

<sup>94</sup> Jin Hai is right. We are family. Sit, we don't want the food to get cold.

<sup>95</sup> Ah, thank you, Aunt, Uncle/father's younger brother.

<sup>96</sup> Ah, thank you.

<sup>97</sup> How was the flight?

<sup>98</sup> Very smooth/no hassle.

<sup>99</sup> Good.

<sup>100</sup> When do you start school?

<sup>101</sup> Orientation starts on August 23rd.



开始上课以前，我带你去看看。我们可以去城市玩。有很多地方可以看。<sup>102</sup>

FLEANCE

那真好听。谢谢你。<sup>103</sup>

MACBETH

女儿七月上暑期班。我跟你去城市玩。<sup>104</sup>

XIAO JIE

七月女儿要上暑期班。<sup>105</sup>

FLEANCE

她学什么？<sup>106</sup>

XIAO JIE

科学和数学。<sup>107</sup>

FLEANCE

*(To NU'ER.)*

Ah, 女儿, 你喜欢学科学吗？<sup>108</sup>

NU'ER

What's "ke xue"? <sup>109</sup>

XIAO JIE

Science.

NU'ER

Oh, yeah. I guess.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I hadn't followed most of their conversation. It had been awhile since my parents had spoken only in Chinese. There had only ever been silence or some mix of English and Chinese. I wonder what that must have been like for them. Did they no longer feel like the odd one out, speaking this way to my cousin? Would they ever feel that way speaking to me?

FLEANCE

---

<sup>102</sup> Before school starts, I will show you around. We can go into the city. There are a lot of things to see.

<sup>103</sup> That sounds great. Thank you.

<sup>104</sup> Nu'Er will be in summer school in July. I will take you around the city.

<sup>105</sup> Nu'Er is going to summer class in July.

<sup>106</sup> What is she studying?

<sup>107</sup> Math and science.

<sup>108</sup> Nu'Er, do you like to study science?

<sup>109</sup> Pinyin/phonetic for "science"

(To MACBETH and XIAO JIE.)

她说中文说得很好。<sup>110</sup>

XIAO JIE

哪里，哪里。她听不懂。好几年没学过中文，好几年没说过。她听不懂我们说话。<sup>111</sup>

FLEANCE

哦。哪，我说英文吧。<sup>112</sup>

XIAO JIE

没问题。她不管我们说话，平常不听我们说的话。<sup>113</sup>

FLEANCE

哦。<sup>114</sup>

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

They talked that way for about an hour after dinner. After Ma had cleared the table, I hid in my room for the rest of the night. I wonder what Fleance must have felt like, sleeping so far away from home, a place where the sun was now rising. I couldn't bring myself to be around him for too long. The awkwardness and uncertainty that surrounded him was something I was scared to touch. The summer passed by very slowly after that. My father kept his word. He came home early from work at least once a week to take Fleance out. My father would come home even before my mom started cooking dinner. Fleance spent most of the day in his room. And I went to summer school every day for three weeks. By the time I got home from class, Fleance was usually out with my father.

*Setting: Morning when Nu'Er has finished summer school. NU'ER and FLEANCE are at home. XIAO JIE and MACBETH are at work. Early August. A few weeks before Fleance leaves for school.*

*At rise: NU'ER walks downstairs. FLEANCE is in the kitchen.*

FLEANCE

Oh, hi.

NU'ER

Hi.

---

<sup>110</sup> She speaks Chinese well.

<sup>111</sup> Nonsense. She doesn't understand. It's been many years since she's studied and spoken chinese. She doesn't understand what we're talking about.

<sup>112</sup> Oh. Then I'll speak in English.

<sup>113</sup> No worries. She doesn't care about what we're talking about, she usually doesn't listen to what we're talking about.

<sup>114</sup> Oh.

Um, Ayi<sup>115</sup> and Shu Shu<sup>116</sup> went to work.

FLEANCE

Mhm.

NU'ER

你吃了早饭吗? <sup>117</sup>

FLEANCE

Not yet. Have you eaten yet?

NU'ER

吃了。阿姨做了粥。你要喝吗? <sup>118</sup>

FLEANCE

No, it's ok. I'll just make some cereal.

NU'ER

Ah. 我泡点茶吧。你要喝吗? <sup>119</sup>

FLEANCE

It's ok. I don't really drink tea.

NU'ER

Ah.

FLEANCE

*(NU'ER turns to go upstairs with her cereal bowl.)*

What are you doing today?

NU'ER

Nothing really.

FLEANCE

Oh.

*(Pause.)*

Shu Shu<sup>120</sup> is working today.

---

<sup>115</sup> Auntie

<sup>116</sup> Uncle

<sup>117</sup> Have you eaten breakfast yet?

<sup>118</sup> I ate. Auntie made rice porridge. Do you want some?

<sup>119</sup> I'm going to make some tea. Do you want any?

<sup>120</sup> Uncle

*(NU'ER sits back down at the dining table.)*

NU'ER

Did you want to do something today? I don't really have anything else to do.

FLEANCE

Well, what do you like to do?

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

He reminded me of his father in that moment. *Oh, then can I wait with you?*

NU'ER

Mmm, do you like watching TV?

FLEANCE

No, not really.

NU'ER

Hmm.

*(Pause.)*

Well, you never showed me the books you brought.

FLEANCE

You're right. Would you like to look at them?

NU'ER

Sure.

*(FLEANCE goes to his room and scatters an armful of books across the dining table. He takes a seat next to NU'ER.)*

NU'ER

You brought that many? How did they all fit in your suitcase?

FLEANCE

*(Laughs.)*

I did not have much else to bring. I bought everything I needed when I came here.

NU'ER

Okay. Which one should I read first?

FLEANCE

*(Picking up a book.)*

Can you read Chinese?

NU'ER

If it's not the twelve zodiac animals or my name, then no.

FLEANCE

Oh. Well maybe there is a translation of this one somewhere.

*(FLEANCE moves about half of the books in the pile to the other side of the table.)*

NU'ER

Wait, so I can't read any of those?

FLEANCE

You just said if it's not 十二生肖<sup>121</sup> or your name, then you can't read it.

NU'ER

That's not my fault.

FLEANCE *(shrugging.)*

You can read these.

*(FLEANCE pushes the smaller pile of books to NU'ER)*

And these can be for me.

*(FLEANCE takes the bigger pile, smiling.)*

NU'ER

Your pile is bigger than mine.

FLEANCE

Yours would be bigger if you could read Chinese.

NU'ER

That's not fair.

FLEANCE

Why is that "not fair"?

NU'ER

Because then I don't get to read the story.

FLEANCE *(teasingly.)*

Hmm... That is true. Those are some very good stories. My favorite stories are in my pile.

NU'ER

---

<sup>121</sup> 12 zodiac animals

Well, then can you at least tell me what happens?

FLEANCE

Why? Wouldn't that take all the fun out of reading them? You have a lot of good stories in your pile too.

NU'ER

*(Disappointed.)*

I've read most of these in school already.

FLEANCE *(laughing.)*

Maybe you should learn to read Chinese.

NU'ER

Hey!

FLEANCE

I am joking. I did not want to learn English at first either.

*(Pause.)*

Which story do you want to hear first?

*(NU'ER scans the titles laid out on the table. She points to one with a red cover with three characters on the cover.)*

NU'ER

That one.

FLEANCE

This one?

*(FLEANCE picks up the book.)*

红楼梦。

*(Pause.)*

*Dream of the Red Chamber.* Well, this is a very long story. It's a very good one, very famous, but also very long, and very sad at times. Are you sure you want to hear it?

*(NU'ER nods.)*

Okay. Let me make some tea first.

*NU'ER (narrates.)*

And for the last few weeks he had before he left for school, he told me the story of the stone, narrating to me a chapter every day. He still went out with my father, but not as much as he did in the beginning of the summer.

*(Transition to a few days before FLEANCE will leave for school.)*

*At rise: NU'ER is in the kitchen helping XIAO JIE to set the table. MACBETH is in his office. FLEANCE is in his room writing home.*

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er, can you get Fleance for dinner?

NU'ER

Okay.

*(NU'ER walks to FLEANCE's room. His door is slightly open.)*

Fleance?

FLEANCE

Ay?

NU'ER

It's time to eat.

FLEANCE

Oh ok. I'm just finishing something. You can come in if you want.

*(NU'ER pushes open the door and walks in. FLEANCE is sitting at the desk writing.)*

NU'ER

What are you doing?

*(NU'ER takes a seat on the bed which is next to the desk.)*

FLEANCE

I'm writing a letter.

NU'ER

To who?

FLEANCE

My Ba.

NU'ER

Back in China?

FLEANCE

Mhm.

NU'ER

Wouldn't it be faster to email him or call him? Dad calls him all the time.

FLEANCE

Phone calls are expensive. And my Ba doesn't know how to use a computer.

NU'ER

Oh.

*(Pause.)*

What are you telling him?

*(FLEANCE pauses his writing.)*

FLEANCE

Hmm. Well, what it was like to come to America. All the places Shu Shu took me to, and how I'm telling you the story of 红楼梦.<sup>122</sup> My Ba always wanted to see you when you grew up and to know what it was like to grow up in America.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I briefly considered telling him about seeing his father's ghost. But I myself wasn't even sure if I had really seen him.

FLEANCE

I am going to send it to him before I leave. Shu Shu is taking me to the post office tomorrow.

NU'ER

Are you happy to be going to school?

FLEANCE

Mmm. I don't know. I think I am.

*(Pause.)*

And I am scared.

*(Pause.)*

You won't tell Shu Shu will you?

NU'ER

What are you afraid of?

FLEANCE

I cannot say. I do not know how to put it into words.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

Perhaps he was scared of losing some part of himself, just like my father, his Shu Shu. Scared he would forget something he promised he wouldn't.

---

<sup>122</sup> *Dream of the Red Chamber.*



*Setting: Day of departure. MACBETH is about to send FLEANCE to New York. MACBETH will be gone for the weekend. XIAO JIE will be at home to watch NU'ER.*

*At rise: MACBETH is carrying FLEANCE's things to the car. XIAO JIE fusses over FLEANCE. NU'ER watches from the kitchen.*

XIAO JIE

你没忘了东西吗? 如果你忘了, 我们可以送给你。<sup>123</sup>

FLEANCE

我没忘了。<sup>124</sup>

MACBETH

我去把你的箱子在车里。<sup>125</sup>

XIAO JIE

路上你会不会饿?<sup>126</sup>

FLEANCE

我刚刚吃饭, 不会饿。<sup>127</sup>

XIAO JIE

好好。慢点开。小心。<sup>128</sup>

FLEANCE

再见小妹妹。<sup>129</sup>

NU'ER

Oh wait!

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er they have to go now or they're going to be stuck in traffic.

*(NU'ER runs to get something.)*

NU'ER

*(Holding a book.)*

---

<sup>123</sup> Did you forget anything? If you forget anything, we can always send it to you.

<sup>124</sup> I didn't forget anything.

<sup>125</sup> I'll put your suitcases in the car.

<sup>126</sup> Will you be hungry on the road?

<sup>127</sup> I just ate lunch. I won't be hungry.

<sup>128</sup> Ok, ok. Drive slowly. Be careful.

<sup>129</sup> Bye, little sister.

You almost forgot this. It was in my room.

FLEANCE

Oh, 红楼梦。<sup>130</sup> It's ok, you can keep it until I come back. You know the story. Maybe you can learn to read it now.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

It was a hopeful sentiment, but not one I was sure I could live up to.

MACBETH

Okay, the car is ready. We should go now.

XIAO JIE

Be careful!

(*To FLEANCE.*)

We'll see you during break.

FLEANCE

Bye Ayi. Bye Xiao Mei.<sup>131</sup>

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

When they turned to walk out the door, I thought how much Fleance looked like my father's older brother. I wonder if Fleance was still scared. I wonder if my father knew what he was feeling. Or perhaps it had been too long since that time. Maybe it was one of those things that is hard to forget but one chooses not to remember.

---

<sup>130</sup> *Dream of the Red Chamber.*

<sup>131</sup> Bye aunty. Bye little sister.

ACT II  
Scene 4

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

My mother had an absent mother, stolen by the revolution, at least for the majority of her early years. She was working as a nurse at the time and was eventually sent to the labor camps for a few years. Details like the year or the month were never very clear, but my mother would tell me stories about the Red Guard, the things she was told to read in school, and the day she learned to cook from her grandmother. My mother was always close to her grandmother and her aunts. Her aunts never ended up moving very far away. She had two of them. (Her mother was the youngest daughter and her aunts were only two years apart.) They loved taking her on long walks.

*(Lights go on.)*

*Setting: Streets of Shanghai, 1955, early spring.*

*At rise: A young XIAO JIE (about 6 or 7) walks between her two aunts, holding both their hands.*

XIAO JIE

*(Narrates off stage.)*

They called me 小猪, little pig, or piglet, because I had been born in the year of the pig. The last to cross the finish line in the race of the twelve zodiac animals.

DA YI<sup>132</sup>

*(In Shanghainese.)*

健康地长大。<sup>133</sup>

ER YI<sup>134</sup>

*(In Shanghainese.)*

高高和好美美的女儿。<sup>135</sup>

*(Both aunts pick up XIAO JIE and swing her back and forth for a few paces.)*

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Xiao Niao is excited to see you tonight. She keeps saying she wants to show you something.

XIAO JIE (*narrates.*)

They would often take me to their homes, invite me to play with their sons and daughters when my mother was not home.

---

<sup>132</sup> Eldest aunt

<sup>133</sup> You will grow up to be a healthy child.

<sup>134</sup> Second eldest aunt

<sup>135</sup> A tall and beautiful one too.

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

我们一定去买菜把。我打算做妈妈喜欢的菜。<sup>136</sup>

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

胡说！我家有很多菜，不要多买菜。<sup>137</sup>

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

你说什么？我们一定多买。今天晚上也要给小猪吃饭。她长大。<sup>138</sup>

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

她不一定吃那么多！你给你的儿子吃太多，所以他胖下去了！<sup>139</sup>

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

我怕他饿！我怕他瘦，跟你的大儿瘦的一样！<sup>140</sup>

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

好好，我们别吵，没意思。我们去买菜吧。<sup>141</sup>

*(Accelerated market scene.)*

*Setting: DA YI's home. It is early evening, sun is just starting to set.*

*(DA YI, ER YI, and XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE step into DA YI's home.)*

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

我们回家了！<sup>142</sup>

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

<sup>136</sup> We should stop by the market on the way. I was planning on making the dish Ma likes.

<sup>137</sup> Nonsense! We have plenty of vegetables at my house. We don't need to buy more.

<sup>138</sup> What are you talking about? Of course we need more. We also have to feed Xiao Zhu tonight. She needs to keep growing.

<sup>139</sup> She does not need to eat that much! This is why your son has trouble keeping up with the other children. You feed him too much!

<sup>140</sup> I do not want him to be hungry! Or thin like your first daughter!

<sup>141</sup> Fine, fine. Have it your way. There's no point in fighting. We'll stop by the market.

<sup>142</sup> We're home!

妈，我们回来了！<sup>143</sup>

ABU<sup>144</sup>

*(In Shanghainese. Carrying XIAO MEI in her arms.)*

Ay, you're back! It's so late. What took you so long?

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Mei mei wanted to buy more vegetables. Xiao Zhu is eating with us tonight.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Your sister is always working in the hospital. This is why she never sees her daughter. One day her own daughter won't recognize her.

DA YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma, you shouldn't say those things in front of her.

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, Xiao Zhu, why don't you go play with Xiao Niao and Xiao Tu Zi?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese. Taking XIAO ZHU's hand.)*

Come on, let's go outside. The neighbors have put in a new bird feeder.

XIAO JIE *(narrates.)*

It is true, I never saw my mother much. In my earliest memories, my Abu was always there. I didn't think much of it when I was younger. I always just thought that was the way it was meant to be. I did not think it odd that Xiao Niao and Xiao Tu Zi saw their mothers more than I did mine. I did not think it odd that I would eat at my aiyi's homes more often than I did at mine.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Wait for me! I'm coming.

*(Running out the door.)*

I'll race you to Li Aiyi's house.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

What do we get if we win?

---

<sup>143</sup> Ma, we're back!

<sup>144</sup> Maternal grandmother in Shanghai dialect.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You should be asking what you get when you lose.

*(XIAO TU ZI takes off running down the street.)*

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

He always does that! Come on, Xiao Zhu.

*(XIAO NIAO takes XIAO ZHU's hand and they chase after XIAO TU ZI.*

*They quickly catch up to him as XIAO TU ZI runs out of breath.)*

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aunty was right. You did get slower.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Shut up.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Good afternoon aiyi!

LI AIYI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, Xiao Niao. What are you doing all the way here?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

We came to see your new bird feeder.

LI AIYI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

How nice! There haven't been too many birds. Not warm enough yet. Go have a look though!

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Come on Xiao Zhu. I think you'll like this.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I don't see anything.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Shhh. You have to wait and be quiet.

*(They wait for awhile.)*

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Why aren't the birds coming?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I don't know. Maybe it's like Aiyi said, it's still too cold. See? The flowers still haven't bloomed on the trees.

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Why do the birds like to come to the bird feeder?

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Because they like to eat, duh.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Not so different from you.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

At least I don't look like a twig.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese. Rolls eyes.)*

I think it makes the birds happy. They have somewhere to go when they can't find food anywhere else. It's like a second home.

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Birds can be happy?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I don't know. I think so. Why wouldn't they? They have a home. They have food.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Eating makes anyone happy.

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Of course you would say that.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

It's getting dark. We should go back so we don't miss dinner.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I'll race you home.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You'll just lose again.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You don't know that.

*(XIAO TU ZI takes off running.)*

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Have a good night Aiyi! Come on Xiao Zhu. He won't win this time.

*Setting: DA YI's home. After dinner.*

*(ABU sits down with XIAO ZHU, XIAO NIAO, and XIAO TU ZI after dinner while DA YI and ER YI take care of the dishes/housework.)*

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You must take good care of your health, otherwise how will you be able to take care of your parents when they get older?

XIAO JIE

*(Narrates, somewhat to NU'ER.)*

I didn't fully understand her advice then.

XIAO NIAO, XIAO ZHU, XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

We understand, Abu.



ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You have to be good to your parents. They do so much for you.

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

We understand, Abu. Can you tell one of your stories now?

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ha ha, always in such a rush. Which one have I told you already?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

“Sun Wukong.”<sup>145</sup> You told us that one yesterday.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Hmm, so I did. What about “Niulang Zhi Nu?”<sup>146</sup>

XIAO TU ZI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You told that one the day before yesterday.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

What about “Liang Zhu?”<sup>147</sup>

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You told that two days before yesterday.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Hmm. Why don’t I tell you something about your mother’s father?

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

You mean Angku?<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> “Journey to the West.”

<sup>146</sup> “Cowherd and Weaver Girl”

<sup>147</sup> “Butterfly Lovers”

<sup>148</sup> Maternal Grandfather in Shanghai dialect (phonetic translation mine)

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Yes, your Angku. I'm surprised you remember. I don't think Xiao Zhu or Xiao Tu Zi remember him very well. He was not born in Shanghai, like you all were, but came from a small town in Beijing. He was there when the Japanese came.

XIAO JIE

*(Narrates, somewhat to NU'ER.)*

This is one of the few stories that I remember, though some of the details have begun to fade.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Angku had two brothers and one sister. He lost one brother in the war. And he was very close to his mei mei,<sup>149</sup> who was only two years younger than him. But he lost her to sickness before marriage could take her from him.

XIAO JIE

*(Narrates, somewhat to NU'ER.)*

I would have liked to meet him.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

He took care of your mothers the same way he did his mei mei. He didn't let his parents bind his mei mei's feet. He wanted her to still be able to play with them. He fought with his father a lot, I remember that. They didn't agree on a lot of things. I believe his father always wanted him to be more like his older brothers. Angku always liked to study, while his brothers were always working outside. His father didn't think studying would help them. Studying did not end the war or bring back favorable weather.

XIAO NIAO

*(In Shanghainese.)*

How did you meet Angku?

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

He came to Shanghai looking for work after his mei mei was gone. He didn't see much point in staying after that.

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma! Xiao Zhu's father is here. Xiao Zhu, come out here.

XIAO NIAO

---

<sup>149</sup> Younger sister

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Can't Xiao Zhu stay over for the night?

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Her father is already here. She will be back again.

XIAO ZHU'S FATHER

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, good evening, Yue Mu.<sup>150</sup>

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ah, so you've come.

XIAO JIE

*(Narrates, somewhat to NU'ER.)*

I did not realize then how little my grandmother approved of my father.

ER YI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, da ge,<sup>151</sup> why don't you take a seat, have some tea.

XIAO ZHU'S FATHER

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I can't. Xiao Zhu's mother will be home soon. I'll be outside.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Xiao Zhu, Xiao Zhu, come here.

XIAO ZHU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

What is it Abu?

*(ABU places a jade pendant in XIAO ZHU's hand.)*

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

It is about time you got one. Ask your mother to put it on you when you go home. It will keep you safe. Never take it off.

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

---

<sup>150</sup> Mother in law

<sup>151</sup> Big brother

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Never?

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Keep it on even when you sleep. Especially when you get to Xiao Niao's age. When you are 12, you will have to wear it every day to ward off bad luck.

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

What will happen if I don't wear it?

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

It will be much harder to protect you. Do you understand?

XIAO ZHU/XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I understand.

XIAO JIE *(narrates.)*

And like a parrot, I did the same for my own daughter.

ACT II  
Scene 5

*Setting: Chinatown (or close to Nu'Er's neighborhood with large Chinese population, somewhere sort of like Quincy, MA.) Nu'Er is 13/14. Present time. Before Banquo's death. It's warm out. Late morning.*

*At rise: NU'ER and XIAO JIE walk into the hair salon owned by four "sisters." LAO DA is cutting hair. LAO ER is at the front desk/register. LAO SAN is in the back getting supplies, LAO SI is hanging out in one of the salon chairs.*

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie. You here for a cut?

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

We had been coming to this salon for years. I never really figured out how the four aunts were related, if they were at all. It seemed like they had always been here, as if their life before the salon couldn't possibly exist in the present. It seemed like they would be here forever. It was always a bit too warm and a little stuffy, as if the space they rented had trouble holding all of them.

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, aunty. How are you?

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie. Oh, Nu'Er is also here. Lao San come out here. Look it's Xiao Jie and Nu'Er.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie, how have you been?

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie. Nu'Er is also here.

LAO ER

*(In English.)*

Ay, Nu'Er. You're so big now.

*(In Chinese.)*

How old is she now, Xiao Jie?

*(In English.)*

Are you getting a haircut today too? I can cut it for you today.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, leave her alone. Look how short her hair is. Let it grow out.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

She could always use a trim.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

You always say useless things like that. Na<sup>152</sup>, Xiao Jie let's go wash your hair.

LAO DA

*(In English.)*

Nu'Er, you can come sit over here.

LAO ER

*(In English.)*

Ay, Nu'Er. How is school?

LAO SI

*(In English.)*

How old are you now?

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Have you gotten thinner?

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

No, she's gotten bigger.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Are you hungry?

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

We can get you something to eat.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

---

<sup>152</sup> Now then

Look at her face. She's like her Ma, no?

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, your eyes are so bad. She's more like her Ba. Look at her nose.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, you're one to call someone blind. Look at her face. She has that nice gua zi lian<sup>153</sup> like her mother.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

What are you talking about? Her forehead is like her father's. Look, even her hands are like her Ba's.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Hands? Aiya, you always say the weirdest things. She needs a haircut. Look at her bangs.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

She does not. She needs to let it grow.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

It's almost the new year. We should cut it.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

No. That's bad luck.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

No, it's bad luck to cut it after.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

You're wrong. It's before that's bad luck.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

You're both wrong! It's bad luck to cut it on the day of!

---

<sup>153</sup> Melon seed face

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

They might as well have been my actual aunts with the way they talked.

LAO SAN

(*In Chinese.*)

So how have you been Xiao Jie? How is Macbeth? We haven't seen him in awhile.

XIAO JIE

(*In Chinese.*)

Ay. Macbeth is good. He's busy at work these days, but it makes him feel good to get out of the house.

LAO SAN

(*In Chinese.*)

And what have you been up to? Anything new with the family?

XIAO JIE

(*In Chinese.*)

Ay, I don't know. Still the same worries. Macbeth and I have been talking about going back to China to visit. But he's been busy with work. My sisters have been asking about me. They say Ma is asking to see me. Nu'Er's cousin is in the U.S. now. Only a few more years and he'll be done with school.

LAO SAN

(*In Chinese.*)

Mmm. It would be good for her to go back, Nu'Er.

XIAO JIE

(*In Chinese.*)

How have things been at the salon?

LAO SAN

(*In Chinese.*)

Ah, well. You know those three. Lao Da says I shouldn't say. But we've been struggling with rent for the past few months. But it's ok. We'll get through it. There's not much else to do. It's just hard on Lao Er. We all know she's still trying to send money back to her sons, though she won't say. Anyway, have you heard, they're doing construction a few blocks over? And just last week, one of our neighbors took a bad fall down the stairs.

LAO ER

(*In Chinese.*)

Lao San! Stop spreading rumors!

LAO SAN



*(In Chinese.)*

I'm not! I'm just catching up Xiao Jie. Poor woman hasn't been out of the house in ages!

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Well it shouldn't take you forever to wash her hair. Lao Si is ready to cut her hair.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, you're always picking on me! Why don't you go bother Lao Si.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Lao San! Stop fighting with Lao Er! And we wonder why we don't get enough people.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Hao, hao hao.<sup>154</sup> Xiao Jie is ready. Lao Si, come help Xiao Jie to the chair.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

I always wondered how they managed to get things done.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Right this way Xiao Jie. Are you comfortable? Now how short do you want it? Maybe we should try something new?

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, don't do anything stupid Lao Si.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Shush.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, Lao Er, just leave Lao Si alone.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Yeah Lao Er, just leave Lao Si alone.

---

<sup>154</sup> Ok, ok, ok.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

You're one to talk Lao San. Remember that time you cut Mrs. Liu's hair too short?

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, she wanted it that short. Besides, it was summer. It would have been too hot to have hair that long.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Or that time you dyed Mrs. Wong's hair the wrong color? Why else do you think we only let you wash hair now.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

I remember when Lao San used the wrong shampoo one time.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh, I remember that. Who was it that complained after?

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya! You three are always so mean to me.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Maybe if you did your job better we'd be nicer to you.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha, you know that's not true either.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Xiao Jie. So how is the family? Nu'Er looks good.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

How about Macbeth?

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

How is your mother?

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Macbeth never comes because he's always at work.

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay. My mother's doing alright. She's been calling more often.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Parents are like that, especially when they're getting older.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

They all get lonely at that age. What about your sisters?

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, they're doing alright.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Have they been fighting again?

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Not as much as they used to. There's not much left to fight about at their age.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. I wish you could say the same for these three.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

We don't fight that often.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Anyway. And your nephew? He's in the U.S. now?

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Started school just this year.

		LAO SAN
Where?	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		LAO SI
In the city?	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		LAO ER
New York?	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		XIAO JIE
New York.	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		LAO SAN
Mmm. I knew it.	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		LAO ER
Ah. Columbia?	<i>(In English.)</i>	
		LAO SI
NYU?	<i>(In English.)</i>	
		LAO SAN
Cornell.	<i>(In English.)</i>	
		XIAO JIE
NYU.	<i>(In English.)</i>	
		LAO ER
Mmm. Knew it.	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		LAO DA
Ah. Big school. What's he studying? I heard there's lots of Chinese students there.	<i>(In Chinese.)</i>	
		XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Some kind of engineering. He stays over with us during his breaks. He's a good boy. He likes to read a lot, like Macbeth.

LAO ER

Mmm. Engineering.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Does he look like his parents?

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay. It's been awhile since I've seen his father, but I think he does. Nu'Er still has a long way to go before she gets to his age. I'm not so young anymore; I'm getting tired now. I worry sometimes whether I'll still be able to take care of her.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, don't talk like that. It's not good for your health.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Besides, growing old isn't so bad. You get to play Mahjong a lot more often than when you're young.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Don't worry. Nu'Er will grow up just fine. Look how healthy she is now.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

And how grown up and looking like you.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

Or her Ba.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

She'll be fine. I can feel it. You should worry more about yourself.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. And one day Nu'Er will grow up strong enough to take care of you. Isn't that right, Nu'Er? You'll grow up strong enough to take care of your Ma.

LAO DA

*(In Chinese.)*

Na<sup>155</sup>, see? Look how she is now. She'll be fine Xiao Jie. She'll be just fine.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Trust us, Xiao Jie. We've been around a long time. She'll grow up just like you-- strong.

LAO SI

*(In Chinese.)*

And looking like her Ba.

LAO ER

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, Lao Si. Your eyes really have gotten worse.

LAO SAN

*(In Chinese.)*

She'll be fine. Just fine. And so will you, Xiao Jie, in time.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

They always somehow knew what to say. And yet they said it like they always knew it would happen, as if they had been through the same things many times before. It was a self-assuredness that my mother always lacked-- that my mother always needed from another. It was the kind of security that could only be given by one who had been through the same thing before.

---

<sup>155</sup> Now/now then

ACT II  
Scene 6

*Setting: Late summer. Night before MACBETH set to leave for America. XIAO JIE is back in Shanghai with her parents, waiting til MACBETH gets things settled before bringing her over to the U.S. MACBETH visits home before flying to America for grad school. NAI NAI/MACBETH's Ma and YE YE are inside. Some of the village kids are playing in their courtyard.*

*At rise: MACBETH sits outside his home, facing the fields. It is close to sunset. BANQUO steps out of the house, smoking.*

*(BANQUO offers MACBETH a cigarette as he sits next to him.)*

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, no I can't. Xiao Jie wants me to quit. She hates the smell of smoke in the house.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Aw, come on. She'll never know. Besides, I've already put some of the good kind in your suitcase.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Remind me to take those out before I leave.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ha, well, I guess they must have better ones in America anyway.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

America in Chinese is "beautiful country."

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Pssh. You exaggerate too much-- America this, America that.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Says the one who's leaving for America tomorrow. Where are you going to anyway? New York? California?

MACBETH

*(In English.)*

Cincinnati.

BANQUO

*(In English.)*

Cin-ci-nna-ti.

*(In Chinese.)*

Hmm. How long will you be gone?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

It'll be two years of grad school, if I finish on time. And I'll have to find work after. I don't know. It's too early to tell.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ma will worry.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

How is she doing?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Well, I've tried convincing her, like the good older brother I am, that your soul won't be lost forever just because you're leaving home for awhile. But she's still worried about what the matchmaker/fortune teller said.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, I thought I told her not to go there. That woman just cheats people out of their money and good sense.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, she'll be fine. It makes her feel better. Besides, Ba and I will be here to take care of her. And my wife will be here for a few weeks before she heads back to the city.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

All set?

MACBETH



*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Ma helped me pack this afternoon.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ha. I saw. I meant, are you ready?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ma certainly doesn't think so.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

She never does. What do you think?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

I don't know. Whether I'm ready or not, I've made a decision. I'm going.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. And you'll be sure to bring me along later to see this "Cin-ci-nna-ti."

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, once Xiao Jie and I get ourselves settled. I'll bring you over.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

And you'll be back one day to visit. I won't let you forget. Ma will be upset if you do.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, ah. I'll be back. I won't forget.

*(Lights go down on MACBETH's home. Lights go up on small Chinese restaurant.)*

*Setting: Chinatown, small Chinese restaurant. FLEANCE has taken NU'ER out to lunch. It is a Thursday afternoon and the restaurant is decently crowded. XIAO JIE is out shopping with LADY MACDUFF. MACBETH is at work. FLEANCE and NU'ER are on winter break.*

*At rise: FLEANCE and NU'ER sit at a small busy table by the window.*

FLEANCE

Did you finish it?

NU'ER

Finish what?

FLEANCE

The book I sent you. Did you finish reading it? I thought you might like it.

NU'ER

Oh that one. It was good. The main character was annoying sometimes.

FLEANCE

Ah, haha. I'll send you another book when I get back to school. My friend is good at picking out books. He has a younger sister at home.

*(Pause.)*

Do you like the food?

NU'ER

Mmm. The chicken is good. How do you like the food at school? Ma says you have to pay a lot to eat at school.

FLEANCE

Mmm. It's all American food, makes my stomach hurt sometimes. I go outside to eat a lot.

NU'ER

Where do you go to eat?

FLEANCE

New York has many Chinese restaurants.

NU'ER

Is it expensive?

FLEANCE

Mmm, not too bad. I have a job now, so it's ok.

NU'ER

Where do you work?

FLEANCE

In the library at school. And then at night I work at the restaurant, like this one.

NU'ER

What do you do there?

FLEANCE

I shelve books. Wash dishes.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

I did not know much about visas then. I did not know he was not allowed to work outside the school. He is one of the invisible workers, paid in cash, under the table. He might as well have been a ghost.

FLEANCE

What are you learning in school? What grade are you now?

NU'ER

I'm in 7th grade. And I had a test in pre-algebra before break. I'm mad though, because my biology teacher gave us homework due when we get back. What are you learning in school? Ba says in college everyone has a "major."

FLEANCE

Haha, Shu Shu is right. I'm studying Chemistry.

NU'ER

I thought you liked to read. That's why you brought all those books with you, right?

FLEANCE

I do. But I heard some of the other students say chemistry might help me get a better job.

NU'ER

Do you think you'll stay in America after you graduate?

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

I didn't realize what kind of a question I had asked. I didn't think about how it must have been the same one my father had asked himself.

FLEANCE

I don't know yet.

(*Pause.*)

I would like to see Ba and Nai Nai again. I know they're waiting for me to come back.

(*Long pause.*)

Maybe after I finish school, I'll take you with me. You can spend the summer at my house. I know Ba would be excited to see you and Shu Shu again.

NU'ER

Ba says he keeps promising to take me. I barely remember the last time I visited.

FLEANCE

Have you seen your Lao Lao<sup>156</sup> and Lao Ye<sup>157</sup>?

NU'ER

Only once. But it was a long time ago too. Do you visit your Lao Lao and Lao Ye a lot?

FLEANCE

They both passed away before I was born.

NU'ER

Oh. So is it just Nai Nai and BoBo at home? What about your Ma?

FLEANCE

Ah, my Ma goes to the city to work. I only see her a few times a year. She didn't like staying in the village. She said she's always wanted to see the city.

NU'ER

Do you like the city? You go to school in New York after all.

FLEANCE

Mmm, the city is okay. There is always something happening. Sometimes I miss the quiet.

*(Checking his watch.)*

Oh, we should probably go.

*(To the waitress.)*

买单!<sup>158</sup> We can probably make it to the next train if we leave now.

*(FLEANCE and NU'ER leave the restaurant.)*

NU'ER

Does it feel lonely when you're home? Since it's just Nai Nai and Bo Bo?

FLEANCE

Hmm. Sometimes. You're my only cousin, and I'm not able to have 兄弟姐妹<sup>159</sup> because of the policy. But I would go to my friend's house a lot. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to have a 兄弟<sup>160</sup> or a 姐妹。<sup>161</sup> Do you ever get lonely?

NU'ER

Sometimes.

FLEANCE

---

<sup>156</sup> Maternal grandmother in Mandarin

<sup>157</sup> Maternal grandfather in Mandarin

<sup>158</sup> Check please!

<sup>159</sup> Siblings

<sup>160</sup> brother

<sup>161</sup> sister

Well, maybe we can be each other's 兄弟姐妹。<sup>162</sup>

(Pause.)

Or, maybe you should get a dog.

NU'ER

A what?

FLEANCE (*jokingly.*)

A dog. I hear lots of American children have dogs. You should get a dog too.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

It had been two years, back and forth between school and my house. He might as well have been an older brother. I noticed some things had changed with him. He was less awkward around me, but I could see each time he came home he was a little more anxious and a little more tired. A little more worried. He would call Bo Bo more often. And he would grow anxious at the mention of going back to school. Maybe some part of him knew that the worst was coming. Maybe he knew that some things just couldn't last forever. I think the worst part was knowing that there wasn't anything to be done about it.

*Setting: Wednesday. Last school bell has just rung. LADY MACDUFF has been told by XIAO JIE to pick up ERIC and NU'ER from school. FLEANCE has been back at school for about a month. It is mid-January.*

*At rise: NU'ER walks out of class towards the school busses. ERIC rushes through the crowd of students to find NU'ER.*

ERIC

Hey, Nu'Er! I need to tell you something!

NU'ER

I have to catch the bus, Eric.

ERIC

(*Slightly out of breath.*)

No, no. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

NU'ER

What are you talking about?

ERIC

I'm not joking. Your mom called my mom to say you have to come home with me. Something happened to your uncle.

---

<sup>162</sup> siblings

NU'ER

Ok, wait, what? I should go home then. I'll catch the bus.

ERIC

No, no. You'll get in trouble. Your mom doesn't want you to go home yet. My mom's here to pick us up. You're going to spend the night with us.

NU'ER

Why doesn't she want me to come home?

ERIC

I don't know. It'll be ok. Mom said your mom already dropped off some extra clothes for you for tomorrow.

NU'ER

We should--we should tell Fleance. He's at school right now. We should tell him. I don't know what his phone number is, but we should tell him, right?

ERIC

Who's Fleance?

NU'ER

He's my cousin.

ERIC

Does he go to school here? He's not in China?

NU'ER

No. He's in college in New York now. We should tell him.

ERIC

Maybe your mom already told him. Adults think of that kind of stuff, you know? Maybe he already knows. My parents called everyone, even their second cousins and stuff when my Nai Nai died.

NU'ER

How old were you when that happened?

ERIC

I'm not sure. Maybe nine or ten? Oh look, that's my mom's car. Let's go.

*Setting: Later that night, after dinner, around 8pm. ERIC and NU'ER sit in the living room with MEI MEI doing homework.*

*At rise: LADY MACDUFF brings a plate of fruit over to the kids.*

MEI MEI

Why are you here Nu'Er? Did you come over to play?

ERIC

Go finish your worksheet, Mei.

MEI MEI

I already did. I'm bored.

ERIC

Then go and play or something.

MEI MEI

Nu'Er, do you want to play with me?

NU'ER

I'm doing homework, Mei. Maybe later.

*(LADY MACDUFF walks back into the room, holding the phone.)*

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, Nu'Er, can you come to the kitchen? Your Ma wants to talk to you.

NU'ER

Hello?

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, Nu'Er. 你好吗? 你吃饭了吗? [How are you? Did you eat yet?]

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It was like she was pretending everything was normal. But it felt wrong.

NU'ER

I'm ok. Aiyi<sup>163</sup> made dinner.

XIAO JIE

Good, good.

*(Pause.)*

So I'll pick you up tomorrow after school.

NU'ER

---

<sup>163</sup> Aunty

Why can't I come home tonight? Eric said something happened with Bo Bo?

XIAO JIE

Your Ba needs some time alone.

NU'ER

Why? What happened?

XIAO JIE

I think it's best to wait till you come home.

NU'ER

Ma, just tell me. Does Fleance know? Did you tell him what happened?

XIAO JIE

No, not yet. He needs to focus on school now, almost midterm.

NU'ER

Ma, what happened? You're starting to scare me.

XIAO JIE

I can't, I can't. It's not right.

NU'ER

Ma, tell me now or I'll walk myself home.

XIAO JIE

*(Long pause.)*

Your Bo Bo died last night.

NU'ER

*(Long pause.)*

So is Ba getting ready to go back? I can go with him.

XIAO JIE

No, no. He's not sure yet when he can leave. He just needs some time alone to think. Things will be fine tomorrow, ok? You'll come home tomorrow and everything will be fine.

NU'ER

You should tell Fleance. He should know now.

XIAO JIE

Tomorrow, tomorrow. It's late now. You should go to sleep soon. We'll talk more tomorrow.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*



I had only ever seen my father break his composure twice before. I should have been less surprised at the outburst and more surprised at how he had managed to keep it down for so long. Perhaps I should have been even less surprised at how my mother learned to walk around it and pretend that nothing was wrong. When I came home the next day, I was confused at how little had changed -- my books were all left in the same place, the tv remote in its usual place, the tea kettle still sitting empty on the stove, dirty dishes left in the sink--as if an earthquake had never happened. My father left the next week, after the funeral. He had arrived too late. Nai Nai was waiting for him. Flevance was still at school when he finally found out. There's not really much more to say about that.

*Setting: Early February. Chinese New Year Dinner party hosted at Lady Macduff's home.*

*At rise: NU'ER is hanging out with ERIC, MEI MEI, and some of the other family friends' children. Adults talk around the dining table, drinking, laughing, gossiping, complaining.*

NU'ER

Hey, Eric. I'm going to go to the bathroom.

ERIC

Ok. We'll be in the living room.

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

He was wearing nice clothes. Paler, thinner, almost smaller, than usual. He was walking into the kitchen. When I followed him, I found him wandering around their pantry trying to read labels.

NU'ER

Bo Bo, is that you? What are you doing here?

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Who are you? Where am I?

(*Pause.*)

I am looking for my son. Is he here? Can you help me find him?

NU'ER

It's me, Bo Bo, your niece.

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Xiao Mei?<sup>164</sup> Ah, you look different. You're taller now.

NU'ER

What are you doing here?

---

<sup>164</sup> Little girl

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I am looking for my son. Is he here? I know he is in America.

NU'ER

He's not here. He's at school in New York, remember?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh. Yes, yes. That's right. How do I get to New York?

NU'ER

Um, maybe you should talk to Ba. I can go get him if you want.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh, yes. 弟弟[younger brother]. I remember him too. Can I come with you?

NU'ER

Okay.

*(They walk into the kitchen towards the dining room.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

This is a nice house. Very warm. Did you move?

NU'ER

No, no. We're at Auntie Macduff's house. She's Ma's friend.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah. How nice. Just in time for the new year.

*(They stand in silence while NU'ER scans the room for MACBETH.)*

NU'ER

Did it hurt?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Did what hurt?

NU'ER

You know, the “dying” part.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. I was sick, but it did not hurt too much. My body doesn’t hurt as much anymore. Though I would have liked to see my son come home again.

*(Pause.)*

Are you afraid?

NU’ER

Of what?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Of “dying”?

NU’ER

A little.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

You are young. You should not be afraid.

*(Pause.)*

Oh, 弟弟。<sup>165</sup> I see him. I almost forgot his face. Do you think he has forgotten mine? It has been many many years.

NU’ER *(narrates.)*

It was perhaps one of the first New Year’s in which my father had not called home.

NU’ER

Do you think he’ll see you this time?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

See me? I think he’s always been able to see me. I believe he just chooses not to.

MACBETH

*(Walks to NU’ER.)*

Ay, Nu’Er. We’re going home soon. Get your stuff together.

*(MACBETH walks to the kitchen past BANQUO and NU’ER.)*

NU’ER

---

<sup>165</sup> Younger brother

Come on, he can't ignore you forever.

*(NU'ER leads BANQUO back to the kitchen.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Perhaps it is better this way. He is happy. That is all that matters now.

NU'ER

Ay, Ba.

MACBETH

Ay, Nu'Er. What are you doing? I thought I told you to get your stuff. Ma and I are heading out soon.

NU'ER

You don't see him?

MACBETH

See who? No time for games, Nu'Er. I have work tomorrow. Go say bye to Eric and get your coat.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Xiao hai,<sup>166</sup> it is ok.

*(NU'ER and BANQUO leave the kitchen.)*

I would, if you can help me, like to see my son again.

NU'ER

Hmm, well I can't bring you to New York. But I can ask Ba to call him if you want.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Yes, I'd like that.

*Setting: NU'ER's home. Same night.*

*At rise: NU'ER, BANQUO, XIAO JIE and MACBETH arrive home. MACBETH heads upstairs to his office.*

NU'ER

---

<sup>166</sup> Child

Ba.

MACBETH

Mmm?

NU'ER

Can we call Fleance?

MACBETH

What?

XIAO JIE

You should go to sleep Nu'Er.

NU'ER

Ba, can we call Fleance?

XIAO JIE

You shouldn't bother your cousin now, Nu'Er.

NU'ER

Ma, it's fine. Ba, can we call Fleance?

XIAO JIE

Look how tired your Ba is. He has work tomorrow.

NU'ER

Ba?

XIAO JIE

Nu'Er!

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Maybe there is another way.

MACBETH

Come upstairs, Nu'Er.

XIAO JIE

Aiya. Nobody listens to me in this house. Just don't talk for too long.

MACBETH

*(On the phone, in Chinese.)*

Ay, Fleance. Hello, hello. How are you? This is your uncle. Are you busy? Ah, thank you. Happy New Year to you too. Are you celebrating this week? Mmm. Mmm.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

What is he saying? I can't hear him.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Mmm. Uh, Nu'Er wanted to wish you a happy new year. Do you want to talk to her?

*(To NU'ER.)*

Here you go. Don't talk to him too long. He has an exam tomorrow.

NU'ER

Hello?

FLEANCE

Ay, Xiao Mei<sup>167</sup>. 你好吗? 新年快乐。[How are you? Happy New Year.]

NU'ER

Happy New Year.

MACBETH

I'll be downstairs.

*(MACBETH steps out of the office and closes the door behind him.)*

XIAO JIE

*(In the hall.)*

You shouldn't bother him.

MACBETH

It's ok. She just wants to talk a little.

*(NU'ER puts the phone on speaker and takes a seat.)*

FLEANCE

How are you? After my exam I'll send you another book.

NU'ER

I'm okay. I came back from Auntie Macduff's dinner party. Really? What book is it? When are you coming home again?

---

<sup>167</sup> Little sister

FLEANCE

Aw, well, I can't tell you that, otherwise it wouldn't be a surprise.

NU'ER

That means you haven't found one yet.

FLEANCE

Ha, ha. You don't know that.

*(Pause.)*

I'll come visit you in March.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Has he eaten yet? Is he well? When is he coming home?

NU'ER

Did you eat yet?

FLEANCE

Mmm. I just finished eating after my shift at the restaurant.

NU'ER

When's the next time you're going back to China?

FLEANCE

Hmm? Oh.

*(Long pause.)*

Well, since everything that's happened, I'm thinking of going back this summer. I haven't told Shu Shu yet, but I've been saving up to buy my own plane ticket.

NU'ER

You'll take me with you, right?

FLEANCE

Ha ha. I'll try. I don't know if Shu Shu will let me.

NU'ER

I'll find a way to get Ba to say yes. I'll save up for my own ticket if I have to.

FLEANCE

Ha ha. Ok, ok. Just don't tell him yet. Ok. I have to go study now, but we'll talk later.

NU'ER

Okay.

*(NU'ER hangs up the phone.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

How long until the summer? I have lost track of time.

NU'ER

Mmm. I'd say that's about three months away.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

San ge yue.<sup>168</sup> That's not bad at all. I've waited longer before. I can wait just a little more.

*(BANQUO and NU'ER step into the hall. MACBETH is lying down on the couch in the downstairs living room.)*

MACBETH

Oh, you're done Nu'Er? I'll be upstairs in a minute.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Before I go, will you show me the books Fleance sends you?

NU'ER

Sure. He sends me a few each year. He said he has a friend at school who gives him recommendations. He studies chemistry now, but he still likes to read. This is the one he sent me a few months ago.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh. Is that dream of the red chamber? I've heard him tell me parts of it. Oh, that one, what is that book? I can't read it, but I've seen it before, once.

NU'ER

Oh this one? This is the book you told me Fleance liked. You brought it to me. Remember?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Oh. I remember now, yes. Would you be able to read me some of it? I never had the time to know what Fleance was learning in school.

NU'ER

Ok. But it's in English. Is that okay?

---

<sup>168</sup> Three months



BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

That's alright. I would just like to hear the words my son spent so much time with.

NU'ER

Ok then. Well, "Chapter 1..."

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It was close to midnight when I had finished reading the first three chapters of the book.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Perhaps I should go now. You look tired.

NU'ER

I'm alright. Where are you going?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I'm going home. I'll wait for my son there.

*(They walk downstairs.)*

Oh, it seems Di Di<sup>169</sup> is sleeping.

*(BANQUO walks over.)*

Ah, always like him to sleep without a blanket.

*(BANQUO places a blanket on MACBETH.)*

I will see you home again brother.

*(To NU'ER)*

I'll see you soon.

*(BANQUO walks out the door. A draft comes in as he steps out. The door closes behind him. MACBETH wakes up at the noise.)*

NU'ER

Ba, you should go upstairs.

MACBETH

Nu'Er, was that you? What are you doing up so late? It's a school night.

NU'ER

I came to wake you up. Are you ok?

---

<sup>169</sup> younger brother

MACBETH

I'm ok. I'm ok. Just tired.

*(Transition to flashback.)*

*Setting: MACBETH has arrived home back in his village. This is one of the first times MACBETH has come back since leaving for America. XIAO JIE has gone back to Shanghai for a few days to be with her family. She will join MACBETH later in his village. BANQUO has a son who is now three years old.*

*At rise: MACBETH gets out of the cab and walks toward the home. BANQUO runs out to meet him.*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Di di<sup>170</sup> has come back! Ma, Ba, didi is back! Fleance, where is Fleance? Fleance, come meet your uncle!

*(BANQUO takes MACBETH's suitcase. BANQUO'S WIFE/AI QING leads out FLEANCE from the house, holding his hand.)*

MA/NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

My son has come home!

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Ma, Ba. You look well.

MA/NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya. You look so thin. Have you been eating?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ay, Ma. 我没瘦了。<sup>171</sup> Oh, who is this? Don't tell me this is--

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

That's my son. He's three years old.

MACBETH

---

<sup>170</sup> Younger brother

<sup>171</sup> I haven't gotten thinner.

(*In Chinese.*)

Really? 叫叔叔。<sup>172</sup> It's nice to meet you.

BANQUO

(*In Chinese.*)

Go on, say hi to your uncle.

FLEANCE

(*In Chinese.*)

你好叔叔。<sup>173</sup>

MACBETH

(*In Chinese.*)

你叫什么?<sup>174</sup>

FLEANCE

(*In Chinese.*)

我叫 Fleance.<sup>175</sup>

MA/NAI NAI

(*In Chinese.*)

Come, let's go inside. Dinner is almost ready.

MACBETH

(*In Chinese.*)

Ay, 你好 sister-in-law.

SISTER-IN-LAW/BANQUO'S WIFE/AI QING

(*In Chinese.*)

Ay, 你好 金海. 小姐没来?<sup>176</sup>

MACBETH

(*In Chinese.*)

She's seeing her parents in Shanghai. She'll be over in a few days.

*Setting: Later that night.*

*At rise: MACBETH and BANQUO sit outside in the courtyard. FLEANCE plays with his mother and NAI NAI/MA. BA/YE YE is talking with the neighbors, sitting on small stools around a table drinking tea.*

---

<sup>172</sup> Say "uncle."

<sup>173</sup> Hello Uncle.

<sup>174</sup> What is your name?

<sup>175</sup> My name is Fleance.

<sup>176</sup> Hello Jin Hai (Macbeth). Xiao Jie didn't come?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

No smoking for you anymore?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Well, maybe once in awhile. My wife doesn't like Fleance breathing in the smoke.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah. He's growing well. He looks like Ma a little.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Really? I think he has Ba's nose.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ha ha, let's hope not.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha.

*(Pause.)*

I think he will look like his Ma when he grows older.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

How have things been at home?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, not much has changed. Ma is much happier now with Fleance around. It keeps her occupied.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah. That's good. And Ba?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ba? He's alright. The same. But he's been starting to get a bit tired these days. He sleeps a lot earlier now, and he's had this cough that hasn't gone away.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Maybe it's just his age. Has he been to see the doctor?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ma's been trying to get him to go. But he's so stubborn. He doesn't trust doctors. So Ma settled on taking him to the Chinese medicine store.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, what's he so worried about? He should go see the doctor.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

He's worried about the cost. But I think he's more scared to find out if something is actually wrong.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Not knowing it won't fix it.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

But that's what he thinks. You know Ba. There's no changing his mind. It's like Ma and the matchmakers. Once they've made up their mind, not even heaven could move their will.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Tell them I'll pay for it.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ha, like they'll ever let their youngest son pay for them for anything.

*(Pause.)*

It's ok, it's ok. You're only home for a couple of weeks. Don't make them upset by bringing this up. Maybe now that you're back home, they'll feel a little better. Don't worry. I'll look after them. That's what I'm supposed to do, right? Besides, you shouldn't have to worry about them. You're living a good life there in America, right? You just live a good life over there. They'll be happy.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha, just because you're a few years older than me doesn't mean you can tell me what to do.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha. Maybe.

*(Pause.)*

How is life in America? Have you gotten to see all the tourist attractions, like New York and DC?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha, no Xiao Jie and I haven't really had much time to travel. I just managed to find a job, so we won't be able to travel for some time.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah, well. You were always the smart one. I'm sure you'll manage to figure something out.

*(Pause.)*

You'll promise to bring me over some day, right? I'd like to see why you talk so much about this place called 美国<sup>177</sup>.

FLEANCE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ba, ba! Look what I found!

BANQUO'S WIFE/SISTER-IN-LAW/AI QING

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya, don't run like that! You have to watch where you're going!

FLEANCE

*(In Chinese.)*

Ba, ba, look what I found!

*(FLEANCE holds out a bug.)*

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Wah, how clever! Where did you find it?

FLEANCE

*(In Chinese.)*

Over there by Nai Nai.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Wah, go show your uncle.

---

<sup>177</sup> America

FLEANCE

*(In Chinese.)*

Look Shu Shu!

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Wah, how beautiful! He's just like you, always picking up everything.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I think your memory is starting to go. Go show Ye Ye. He's good at identifying things like that.

YE YE

*(Sort of off to the side, in Chinese.)*

Ay, what's that! Do you see the wings?

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

So, you'll bring me over to see your new American life? Maybe next time I'll bring Ai Qing and Fleance too.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

If you can stand the journey, I'll take you.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

I'm not that much older than you.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha. By the looks of it you're almost as old as Ba now.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

And I'm sure you're as youthful as ever.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

Haha.

*(Pause.)*

I will take you. One day I will.

BANQUO

*(In Chinese.)*

Ha. Maybe I'll even like it enough to stay.



ACT II  
Scene 7

*Setting: Late evening, probably around 9 or 10 o'clock. School night. Post Banquo's death. Eric-15-. Mei Mei - 6. Sometime in the present. Lady Macduff's House. Raining. Thunder and lightning outside.*

*At rise: LADY MACDUFF and MACDUFF are fighting in the kitchen downstairs. Fragments of conversation can be heard from upstairs. ERIC is in his bedroom room upstairs doing homework. MEI MEI opens ERIC's door after being woken up.*

MEI MEI

Eric? Eric? Are you awake?

ERIC

What are you doing? Shouldn't you be asleep?

MEI MEI

I can't sleep. It's too loud.

ERIC

It's ok. You can stay in here until Ma goes to sleep.

*(ERIC helps MEI MEI sit on the bed. He returns to the desk.)*

ERIC *(narrates.)*

It was the third night they had fought like this. After awhile, I stopped trying to figure out what or who they were talking about. In the end it didn't really matter. They would always find a way to hide the truth anyway.

MEI MEI

Can we play a game?

ERIC

What game do you want to play?

MEI MEI

Go fish!

ERIC

Ok, let me get the cards.

*(ERIC shuffles around the room.)*

Where did I put them? Are they in your room?

MEI MEI

Mmm. I don't know. We played yesterday.

ERIC

Oh, you're right. We did play yesterday. They're probably downstairs then. In the living room, I think.

*(Pause.)*

LADY MACDUFF

*(From downstairs, in Chinese.)*

It's because of you that they keep asking for more. What do you think is going to happen after? How will we be able to take care of those two?

MACDUFF

*(From downstairs, in Chinese.)*

What do you think I'm trying to do? You always talk about what's wrong with me but never yourself. If I were back in China, this would never be a problem. I could have a second wife easily.

ERIC

Do you want to play a different game? I can read you a book.

MEI MEI

Go fish!

ERIC

Ok, ok.

*(Pause.)*

I'll go get them.

*(Pause. Fighting downstairs continues.)*

MEI MEI

What's wrong?

ERIC

Nothing. Just stay here. I'll be back.

*(ERIC walks downstairs. Voices of his parents get louder. He steps into the sitting room and finds the playing cards. His parents are in the kitchen. They do not notice him right away.)*

ERIC *(narrates.)*

Their words had just become noise at that point. Their tones sounded the same; they just played at different octaves.

LADY MACDUFF

Eric?

ERIC *(narrates.)*

She seemed almost to look past me, as if she had forgotten I had been in the house the entire time. It was as if she was looking through me to another place in time.

MACDUFF

*(In Chinese.)*

Eric, go back to bed.

ERIC

Ok, I was just getting something.

MEI MEI

*(From upstairs.)*

Eric!

LADY MACDUFF

*(Confused/startled.)*

Is Mei Mei awake?

*(MACDUFF walks away further into the kitchen.)*

ERIC

It's ok, Ma. I got it.

*(ERIC runs upstairs.)*

MEI MEI

Eric?!

ERIC

What is it Mei? I'm right here.

MEI MEI

What took you so long? It's scary up here.

ERIC

It's ok. I have the cards now.

MEI MEI

Go fish!

*(ERIC stands in the middle of the room, waiting.)*

MEI MEI

Eric, are you ok?

*(Pause.)*

Why is it so loud downstairs?

ERIC

It's nothing. Do you want to play?

*(ERIC sits on the bed with MEI MEI and begins shuffling the cards.)*

ERIC *(narrates.)*

If I tried hard enough, I could make their voices disappear into the rain. Or I could understand every word. But it didn't matter. It was just rain on the windows.

ACT II  
Scene 8

*Setting: MACBETH, XIAO JIE, FLEANCE, and NU'ER arrive in Shanghai. It is late evening, close to 10pm on a Friday night.*

*At rise: MACBETH, XIAO JIE, FLEANCE, and NU'ER enter ABU's apartment.*

NU'ER (*narrates.*)

We had finally arrived. I was anxious the whole way to my grandmother's apartment. It had been years since I had been back or had seen my mother's family. It felt like there was nothing that could really prepare me. What could one expect after so many years being absent?

XIAO MEI

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Ma! Ma! Xiao Jie has come back!

ABU

(*In Shanghainese. From the bedroom.*)

Ah? What did you say? I couldn't hear you?

XIAO HE

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Jie Jie is here!

ABU

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Ah! Why didn't you say that earlier?

XIAO JIE

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Ma, I'm home.

ABU

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Come in quickly. Wear your slippers. Xiao Mei, where are Xiao Jie's slippers?

XIAO HE

(*In Shanghainese.*)

Here, give that to me Xiao Jie.

(*To NU'ER.*)

Who is this? Oh! Nu'Er!

(*NU'ER takes a step back towards FLEANCE.*)

FLEANCE

*(Whispering, to NU'ER.)*

Don't be scared. I'll make sure you won't get lost.

MACBETH

*(In Mandarin/Shanghainese.)*

Good evening mother-in law.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

All of you quickly, come in. The AC is running.

XIAO MEI

*(In Shanghainese)*

Come and have a seat here, Nu'Er.

NU'ER

*(In English. Whispers to Fleance.)*

What's happening?

FLEANCE

*(In English.)*

I'm not sure. I don't understand Shanghai hua<sup>178</sup> very well.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It was strange to hear so many strangers speak like my mother. She wasn't the only one anymore, like she so often was at home. It was new. But it also felt right.

XIAO HE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Jin Hai-- you can put the suitcases in your room over there.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ah! So this is my granddaughter. Are you hungry? She's so thin. Xiao Mei, go make some tea for them. You all must be tired.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

We're okay, Ma.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

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<sup>178</sup> Shanghai dialect

Who is this?

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

This is Jin Hai's nephew. We're going with him to Shandong next week.

FLEANCE

*(In Mandarin.)*

Good evening grandma.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

That's right, you told me earlier on the phone.

XIAO HE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Hi, Fleance. Let me show you your room. You'll be sharing a room with Jin Hai.

*(To XIAO JIE.)*

You'll be sharing a room with Ma and Nu'Er.

*(XIAO HE leads FLEANCE and MACBETH to their room.)*

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Come, come, sit down over here, Xiao Jie.

*(ABU and XIAO JIE walk over to the couch and sit down. NU'ER stands awkwardly to the side.)*

Ay, Nu'Er. Come here, too.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

She can't speak Shanghainese very well.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I believe she'll still be able to understand. She must hear you speak it all the time at home.

*(To NU'ER.)*

You can call me "Abu." Understand?

*(NU'ER nods. ABU laughs.)*

What a quiet girl. Surely she talks more at home.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma, you are well? I brought you the things you asked for. Does your back still hurt? Are you still coughing?

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya, Xiao Jie. You forget that I was a nurse. I know when there's something wrong with me.

*(Pause.)*

You look tired, Xiao Jie.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Mmm. The flight was long.

*(Pause.)*

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Is there something bothering you?

*(XIAO MEI comes from the kitchen with a tea set. She turns to NU'ER.)*

XIAO MEI

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ay, Nu'Er. Let me help you get ready for bed. Where are your things?

*(XIAO MEI takes NU'ER to her room. ABU and XIAO JIE watch them leave before speaking again.)*

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

I can see these past years haven't been easy. I knew I never should have let you go so far. I regret not keeping you here longer.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma, it's okay. We've been over this before. I left for a reason.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya. I know.

*(Pause.)*

It still hurts sometimes. I can't even see my own granddaughter until she's all grown up.

*(Pause.)*



But I guess there's not much to be done at this point. At least I still have your sisters to look after me when you're gone.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya. I'm too tired for this now.

XIAO JIE

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Ma, I'm sorry.

ABU

*(In Shanghainese.)*

Aiya. It's okay, Xiao Jie. We should go to sleep now.

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

It was the first night in a long time since I had slept in the same room as my mother. It was my first time sleeping in the same room as my grandmother. It was cramped, I will admit. And I couldn't imagine getting through a whole week of sleep like that. But there was also a comfort and safety in the closeness. It was also the first time I remember seeing my mother so relaxed. It was like she was another person entirely.

*Setting: Train to Shandong*

*At rise: MACBETH and XIAO JIE are asleep in the row behind FLEANCE and NU'ER.*

FLEANCE

Did you ever manage to read hong lou meng on your own?

NU'ER

No, I didn't have the time to learn. Besides, it's a really big book.

FLEANCE

Mmm. You're right. Maybe your Chinese will get better while you're here.

NU'ER

Maybe.

*(Pause.)*

Are you happy to be back?

FLEANCE

Me?

*(Long pause.)*

I am happy to see my mother again, since she is coming back from the city to see me. I'm glad I'll be there to take care of Nai Nai too.

*(Pause.)*

I'm sure they're excited to see you too. Nai Nai always talks about never getting to see us anymore.

*(Pause.)*

Are you excited to see them?

NU'ER

I'm not sure what to expect. I'm scared, but I don't know why.

FLEANCE

Mmm. I think I'm scared too. It's been a long time.

NU'ER

Do you think things have changed since you left?

FLEANCE

They might have. There are some places I would like to take you to, if they are still there. It seems like things change faster the longer you're away from them.

NU'ER

I'm scared for Ba.

FLEANCE

Mmm. I think he is scared too.

*(Long pause.)*

NU'ER

I'm bored.

FLEANCE

You should go to sleep. We still have a few more hours. Or do you want something to eat? I can go buy us something.

NU'ER

No, I'm not hungry. And I'm still jet lagged from the flight.

*(Pause.)*

Can you tell me a story?

FLEANCE

A story? What kind of story?

NU'ER

I don't know. I'm just tired of staring at the back of this seat.

FLEANCE

Haha. Okay. My Ba told me a story once about how your Ba almost drowned by the river.

NU'ER

Really? How old was he?

FLEANCE

Hmm. I want to say that your Ba was six or seven years old and my Ba was 11 or 12.

NU'ER

How did it happen?

FLEANCE

It was early in the summer, I think. They were playing with some of the other boys in the village and maybe a few of their cousins too. And all of them went to the river, or was it a lake? Well, let's say it was the river. They went there to cool off, because there was no air conditioning or things like that. My Ba says your Ba always wanted to be with the older boys. Ba says some of them were seeing who could go farthest into the water. Your Ba was always shorter than everyone else. But he tried to go with some of the older boys. Ba says it was so quick how the current pulled him under. One second he was there and the next he wasn't.

NU'ER

What happened then?

FLEANCE

Well, Ba and one of their cousins pulled him out. It took them awhile to find him though, especially with your Ba being so small. I remember Ba saying he was so worried he had lost him to the current for good. He was so worried what Ye Ye would do to him if he didn't bring Shu Shu home. He told me he would rather run away from home than face Ye Ye and Nai Nai if he didn't bring him home.

*(Laughs.)*

He was so scared. He told me, "I don't think I'm going home tonight."

*(Laughs.)*

But one of his cousins managed to find him. He had gone pretty far downstream. They pulled him out and laid him on the rocks by the edge of the river.

NU'ER

What did they do then?

FLEANCE

They laid him out on his stomach and waited around him. Eventually he started coughing up water and woke up.

NU'ER

Really? How is that possible?

FLEANCE

Mmm. I'm not sure. Ba says maybe it wasn't his time to leave yet. Ba was superstitious about things like that, though he liked to pretend he wasn't. So, that's a story. Are you still bored?

NU'ER

Haha no. Not anymore.

*(Pause.)*

Did Ye Ye and Nai Nai ever find out that it happened?

FLEANCE

Mmm. Ba didn't tell me about that part. All he said was he didn't need to run away that day, so maybe not.

*Setting: Early morning. Sun is not yet up.*

*At rise: FLEANCE walks into the room that NU'ER, XIAO JIE and MACBETH are sharing. MACBETH and XIAO JIE are asleep.*

FLEANCE *(whispering.)*

Nu'Er. Nu'Er. Wake up.

NU'ER

Fleance? What are you doing up?

FLEANCE

I want to show you something. Get ready. I'll wait for you downstairs.

*(Fleance leaves the room and Nu'Er starts to get dressed. She goes downstairs. The front door is open and Fleance is standing outside in the courtyard.)*

NU'ER

Where are we going? What time is it? It's so early.

FLEANCE

There's a nice place where you can watch the sun rise, but it'll take us some time to walk there.

*(NU'ER and FLEANCE walk in silence. There is a tree at the edge of a large field. The sun is just about to rise. BANQUO's ghost is sitting by the tree, facing the sun.)*

NU'ER

What's so special about this place?

FLEANCE

Ba would come here with Shu Shu a lot when they were younger. He would take me with him sometimes too.

*(NU'ER notices BANQUO'S ghost sitting by the tree but does not say anything. BANQUO does not turn to face them.)*

NU'ER

Why'd they like this place so much?

*(FLEANCE walks to the tree and sits down by BANQUO. NU'ER follows.)*

FLEANCE

Ba said it made him feel like he and Shu Shu were the only ones in the world. He didn't need to worry about anything else when he was here.

*(They sit in silence.)*

FLEANCE

We should probably go back. They're probably awake now and getting breakfast ready.

NU'ER

Can we come back again tomorrow?

FLEANCE

Sure, if you still want to wake up early.

NU'ER

I can do that.

*(NU'ER and FLEANCE stand up and begin walking home. BANQUO continues to sit by the tree.)*

*Setting: FLEANCE has taken NU'ER to the shops in the nearby town. MACBETH helps NAI NAI take down the laundry. XIAO JIE and BANQUO'S WIFE/AI QING work on cleaning up after dinner.*

*At rise: MACBETH takes down the laundry and hands it to NAI NAI to fold.*

NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Macbeth, pull that stool over here. My back is getting tired.

*(MACBETH gets the stool for NAI NAI. NAI NAI sits down.)*

You're so good to me, taking care of me while you're here. I'm so happy you're home.

*(MACBETH does not say anything.)*

Is something wrong?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

It's nothing.

NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Ah. Quiet as ever. Even when you talked with me on the phone, I knew you were holding something back.

*(Pause, looking at MACBETH.)*

What is it? Now that you actually come to see me you still hold back? You cannot hide it forever. Otherwise it will always come back to haunt you.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

I know.

NAI NAI *(sighing.)*

*(In Chinese.)*

Your brother missed you. Even when he was at his worst, he had some hope he would get to see you again.

*(Pause.)*

You're back now. You came back in the end. He's happy now. I can feel it.

*(Long pause.)*

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

You don't blame me for not coming back? For leaving?

NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Blame you?

*(Pause, sighing.)*

I did, for a long time. I asked myself why my son didn't love me enough to come home. Why did he leave? Why didn't he stay?

*(Pause.)*

But I am older now. I don't have time for those things anymore. You have a good life now--a better one than you could have found here. You have Xiao Jie. You have Nu'Er. You are happy. How can I blame you?

*(They continue working in silence.)*

Ay, who's shirt is this?

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

That's Fleance's shirt.

NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Really? It's so ugly. And big.

*(Laughing.)*

I almost thought it was yours. Aiya, he's almost as tall as his father now.

MACBETH

*(In Chinese.)*

We had to get him a new coat.

NAI NAI

*(In Chinese.)*

Aiya.

*(Laughing.)*

*(They continue working in silence.)*

XIAO JIE

*(In Chinese.)*

Nai Nai, Jin Hai! Nu'Er and Fleance are home!

*(They go to meet FLEANCE and NU'ER.)*

NU'ER *(narrates.)*

There were many things still left unknown to me. Perhaps they would always remain that way. But there was also more known to me than there was before. I could begin to see the spaces open up, in which I could begin to see them more fully. I could begin to see the spaces in which they could exist both here and in America. In which their past selves could also exist in the present.

*(Pause.)*

My father took a recording of a sunset on the day I was born, on the first camera he ever bought, a bulky JVC VHS recorder. He was waiting in the hospital cafeteria and saw it through the window. He had a good view because they were so high up. He wasted a lot of film, my mother said. We need to save it for her, my father said. When I watched it years later, it was grainy, and

you could see the reflection of my father holding the camera in one corner of the glass, like a ghost. I had forgotten all about that until Fleance had woken me up that morning, and I had felt the sun grow long on our faces.

*(Pause.)*

I understand why my father decided to waste so much film that day.

*(Lights fade out.)*





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