

Nights Before

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SCENE 1: OPENING

SETTING: CORRIDOR BETWEEN FRONT DOOR & LIVING ROOM OF LAWRENCE'S CONDO. BAND EQUIPMENT AND A CHAIR WITH AN ENORMOUS HANDBAG BESIDE IT. ONE

MRS WONG sits on the chair watching GRANDCHILD (referred to as male but can be changed to female after casting) systematically assembling manger, animals etc.

Unobserved, LAWRENCE enters, stands behind and watches at them.

Scene set up like a Christmas tableau except with child instead of infant.

Mrs Wong toys with handle of travel bag, as though for security/comfort.

MRS WONG

Sam, there shouldn't be so many animals around Jesus' manger--

GRANDCHILD continues carefully arranging animals around the toy manger.

MRS WONG (CONT'D)

You can put the horse and the cow there but not that giraffe and hippo!

Grandchild continues arranging toys.

LAWRENCE laughs and comes forward.

LAWRENCE

He's just playing, Mum.

MRS WONG

Just like you at that age--so stubborn. Look at that! Whoever saw hippos and swans around Jesus' manger! Hiyah...

(to Grandchild)

Come--find a nice donkey and cow to put here and all the other funny animals Nai-Nai will keep back in the box, okay?

Mrs Wong puts a hand on Grandchild's shoulder as she reaches for the animals. Grandchild cries out in sharp angry protest and Mrs Wong withdraws immediately.

Both Lawrence and Mrs Wong tense, watching Grandchild.

GRANDCHILD

(not looking at  
adults)

The animals want to be here for  
Christmas.

MRS WONG

(to Lawrence)

Monkeys next to Jesus? Where did  
these things come from?

LAWRENCE

(looking at box)

It's a two-in-one Noah's Ark and  
Nativity Set--

## SCENE 2: CHRISTINE THE LAWYER

Doorbell rings.

Lawrence goes to open door.

MRS WONG

Ah, see? Your Mummy and Daddy are here already to fetch us already...  
(Grandson ignores her)

Now Nai-Nai is going to be staying with all of you, maybe I will have a chance to get through to you...

But Mrs Wong does not touch Grandchild again.

CHRISTINE enters.

CHRISTINE

Lawrence Wong, right?

LAWRENCE

(hesitantly)

Christine? Christine Cheong?

CHRISTINE

Hi Larry. Wasn't sure you'd remember me. Sorry to barge in on you on Christmas Eve--your brother's been chasing me to get these papers for your mum and his maid told she's moved in here with you so I thought--what the heck--I haven't seen you for years! How are you? Don't I get a hug?

LAWRENCE

Of course--Happy Christmas Eve girl!

They embrace.

CHRISTINE

Same to you. And hey--I'm sorry about your Dad.  
And sorry you weren't--you know--

MRS WONG

(fussing with things, careful not to touch Grandchild)

Who is it? Is Thomas here to get us already? Tell him we are ready already!

(MORE)

MRS WONG (CONT'D)  
 (sweeps toy animals  
 in direction of  
 box, avoiding  
 touching Grandchild)  
 Quick, keep your toys! After  
 your Mama thinks Nai-Nai is  
 teaching you all the wrong things!

Grandchild moves back and watches her.

GRANDCHILD  
 (enunciating  
 carefully)  
 I hate you.

Mrs Wong affects not to hear Grandchild and moves towards  
 entrance with a smile.

MRS WONG  
 We are all ready to go! I'm ready,  
 Larry can you just go and get  
 Sam? Oh--

LAWRENCE  
 Mum, you remember Christine right?

MRS WONG  
 (vaguely)  
 Of course...

CHRISTINE  
 Hello Mrs Wong, I'm Cheong Wing  
 Kee's daughter, Christine.

MRS WONG  
 Oh, of course! Of course I remember  
 you. Little Christina! You and  
 Lawrence used to go for Chinese  
 tuition together last time,  
 remember? How are your parents?  
 (to Lawrence)  
 Her father was our lawyer since  
 before you were born! He helped  
 your Dad buy the house at Frankel  
 when that man had no idea what a  
 mortgage is!  
 (laughs)

CHRISTINE  
 My parents are both dead, Mrs  
 Wong.

MRS WONG  
 Oh...

CHRISTINE  
 That's why I've been handling the  
 papers for your Frankel house,  
 Mrs Wong.

(MORE)

## CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Thomas tells me you're in a hurry to get everything settled?

MRS WONG

(dismissive gesture)

Thomas is taking care of everything. You go and talk to Thomas.

What happened to your parents ah, Christine?

CHRISTINE

Mum had cancer. Dad was from a heart attack. It was some time ago. Actually you and your husband came for both their funerals. Mrs Wong, I've already talked to Thomas. I know he wants to sell your house as quickly as possible that's why I just need you to sign these deeds over to him, Mrs Wong--

MRS WONG

(vaguely)

Oh no--not selling--renovating only--so there is enough space for Tommy's whole family to move in with me...

Aiyoh--your parents both gone ah? So many people dying I also cannot remember... if you don't see them so regularly better forget they are dead, right? So now you are the only one left--are you married ah? How many children do you have?

CHRISTINE

I'm not married, Mrs Wong.

MRS WONG

Pretty girl like you--why not? all you young people these days--this boy of mine also not married.

LAWRENCE

Pretty boy like me--

Mrs Wong makes impatient hushing sound/gesture at Lawrence then smiles broadly at Christine, affecting not to have heard him.

CHRISTINE

If you'll just sign here, here and here, Mrs Wong--

Mrs Wong ignores the documents.

MRS WONG

We will all be going to church  
together soon. Do you go to church?

## SCENE 3: SIGN HERE PLEASE

Doorbell rings. Lawrence goes to let people in.

PAMELA and THOMAS enter.

THOMAS

Hi. Mum ready? And Sam?

Lawrence gestures, inviting them in. He is not rude but it is clear the brothers are not close.

PAMELA

(looking around)

So this is the new place. Bit small isn't it?

THOMAS

Get Sam, we should get going--

Pamela goes to Grandchild and starts putting animals into to the box, careful not to touch him.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Come on, Mum, we have to go if we want to get a parking place.

(to Christine)

Oh. Hello.

GRANDCHILD

You put them in wrong.

PAMELA

Then pack them yourself. Quickly.

Grandchild empties animals out and starts packing them into box methodically. Pamela stands up quickly, frustrated, stumbles and notices Christine.

LAWRENCE

(to Thomas)

You didn't tell Mum you're selling the old house?

PAMELA

(with social smile,  
to Christine)

Hello. Are you a friend of Larry's? This is his brother Thomas and I'm his sister-in-law Pamela.

CHRISTINE

Yes, but I'm here because--  
(looks to Thomas)

THOMAS

She's the lawyer I told you about.  
(to Grandchild)

Take your things and go and wait in the car with your sisters and

(MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Nai-Nai. Quick, we mustn't be late for service.

(to Pamela)

Will you please--

(makes shifting gesture indicating Grandchild. Then turns to Christine with social smile)

So--we all settled?

Christine holds up the documents, tapping where Mrs Wong's signature is required. Thomas takes the documents and goes to Mrs Wong.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Mum, come, you have to sign some things...

MRS WONG

Aiyoh, sign more things ah? Do you have a pen? Aiyoh, where are my glasses ah?

CHRISTINE

Mrs Wong, let me just explain what these document are about--

THOMAS

Never mind. We don't have time... just sign, Ma.

Pamela, trying speed up Grandchild's packing, accidentally touches him and gets a howl of fury. She pulls back and lets him empty the animals out of the box and start packing them slowly carefully again.

Pamela stands up.

PAMELA

(social gaiety)

Look, does this have to be done now? Christmas Eve service only comes once a year--what will the pastor think if we're late! Larry, why don't you and your friend join us for the service?

MRS WONG

Yes Larry, bring your girlfriend to church with us--just for Christmas Eve service? It would make your poor Baba so happy if only he could see you in church sitting next to a nice girl--where are my glasses ah? I had them when I sat down there just now to wait for you--do I go to the toilet, I wonder...

(MORE)

MRS WONG (CONT'D)  
 (presses abdomen  
 tentatively)  
 Yes! I went to the toilet!

Mrs Wong starts to walk off. Thomas stops her.

THOMAS  
 Ma! Where are you going! We're  
 going to be late already!

PAMELA  
 (to nobody in  
 particular)  
 This time not My fault...

MRS WONG  
 My glasses--

THOMAS  
 You don't need your glasses! Just  
 sign your name only what--here...

Lawrence moves to Mrs Wong's other side.

LAWRENCE  
 Mum, you know you're selling your  
 house, right?

MRS WONG  
 You don't talk nonsense. Tommy,  
 you better explain to your brother!

THOMAS  
 Pamela, why don't you take Mum  
 down to the car first...

PAMELA  
 (challenging)  
 Oh. You think you can manage Sam  
 on your own?

THOMAS  
 Just take Sam then--

Without thinking, Thomas grabs Grandchild to lift him to his feet but Grandchild shrieks, kicks and tries to bite. Thomas lets go.

LAWRENCE  
 And I thought I knew how to throw  
 tantrums...

MRS WONG  
 Don't worry. From now on Nai-Nai  
 will be around to look after little  
 Sammy all the time. And one day  
 when I am gone at least he will  
 still have the old house to live  
 in...

(MORE)

MRS WONG (CONT'D)

(a look at Lawrence)

I know you are older, Boy-Boy.  
But you don't have children and  
Sam--because Sam is different he  
needs it the most--you understand  
why I am doing this, right?

LAWRENCE

Of course I understand, Mum. It's  
fine with me.

THOMAS

Mum, the thing is, your house is  
so far from the kids' schools and  
now that Pamela is thinking of  
going back to work part time every  
day she has to drive the kids to  
school and me to work before she  
can...

PAMELA

Just sign, Mum. Look, Tom--why  
don't you just sign for her--oh,  
fishcakes! I'll just do it  
myself...

(grabs and prepares  
to sign documents)

CHRISTINE

No.

Christine takes forms away from Pamela.

PAMELA

How dare you! Look miss! this is  
a family matter, we don't need  
outsiders interfering.

CHRISTINE

Look why don't we meet again to  
settle this when everybody's not  
in such a hurry--say after  
Christmas?

THOMAS

The thing you see is, we need the  
money quite urgently because--

PAMELA

(to Thomas)

Shut up! Why are you even bothering  
to talk to her?

(switches on bright  
smile for Christine)

We'll handle take it from here.  
Just leave the papers with us.

Christine looks to Lawrence.

Doorbell rings.

## SCENE 4: JUAN JESUS ARRIVES

Lawrence goes to door.

Christine hesitates, holding on to documents.

PAMELA

Look, you're Our lawyer right?

MRS WONG

And her father was Baba's lawyer  
for years! Did I tell you? I still  
remember the time when--

PAMELA

Not now, Mum.

(to Christine)

So just do what you're told, all  
right?

Pamela holds out her hand. Christine still hesitates.

JUAN JESUS enters with small inflight bag. Puts down bag  
and grins at Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

Christ! What you doing here!

JUAN JESUS

I told you to call me 'Jesus'  
Thought you could use a nice  
surprise for Christmas--

(moves to hug

Lawrence but

notices family in

room)

but I see you already have it.

(general wave)

Hello everybody!

LAWRENCE

Mum, Christine, everybody--this  
is Jesus--Juan Jesus de Alonso--a  
friend of mine from Mauritius.

CHRISTINE

Hi!

Christine shakes hands with Jesus

Pamela moves back suspiciously.

PAMELA

'Jesus' what a name!

THOMAS

Hello. I am Lawrence's brother  
Thomas and this is my wife Pamela.  
Are you visiting Singapore for  
Christmas?

MRS WONG

(loud whisper)

Since when Larry knows people  
from Mauritius?

JUAN JESUS

Actually we were college mates in  
New York. You are Lawrence's  
mother? A pleasure to meet you,  
Mrs Wong, Thomas, Pamela.

MRS WONG

Oh. Yes. Yes, of course.

PAMELA

If you intended to stay here with  
my brother-in-law Lawrence I'm  
afraid it's impossible--my mother-  
in-law is staying here with him--

MRS WONG

It's just temporary. All the dust  
and dirt from the renovations,  
you know--and dear Lawrence was  
moving here at the same time so  
he said--

PAMELA

(cutting Mrs Wong  
off)

So there is no room for you here.

JUAN JESUS

Oh but I--

LAWRENCE

It's fine. We'll manage. No  
problem.

MRS WONG

I don't want to be in anybody's  
way--

THOMAS

(to Pamela)

What's wrong?

PAMELA

(to Thomas)

Do you really want somebody like  
that around your Mum?

JUAN JESUS

(quietly, to  
Lawrence)

If there's a problem I'll just--  
(indicates exit)

LAWRENCE

(to Jesus)

Of course there's room here. Put  
your bag in my bedroom--  
(gestures)

With a smooth, powerful gesture, Juan Jesus rolls/tosses  
his bag off as others watch

THOMAS

Wow--guess you have gyms in  
Mauritius!

JUAN JESUS

Actually my last posting was South  
Korea--but it's really about how  
much you are willing to put in,  
right?

THOMAS

Yeah...

Thomas is relaxing, warming up Juan Jesus, and Mrs Wong  
follows his cue.

MRS WONG

Larry, you should get your friend  
a drink--he just got off a plane,  
you know!

PAMELA

And we should be going or we'll  
need a Helicopter to get us to  
Midnight Service on time--if you'll  
excuse us, Mr... I'm sorry, but I  
really can't use your name. Come  
on Sam--will you hurry up!

All this time, Sam has been silently and carefully  
inserting toy animals into the container on the floor.

Now Pamela scoops up a couple of remaining animals and  
tosses them into the box.

Sam gives a loud scream of protest.

GRANDCHILD

No! No--you are doing it all wrong!

Grandchild empties all his animals out of the box again.  
Pamela pushes him aside and starts scooping up animals  
and dumping them into the box.

Through following exchange Pamela keeps putting animals  
in the box and Grandchild keeps taking them out. It has  
become more a battle of wills than about cleaning up.

PAMELA

Look, I don't have time for your  
nonsense!

GRANDCHILD

No! Stop! It's wrong!

JUAN JESUS

Local time is not yet nine pm--

MRS WONG

(staring at Pamela  
and Grandchild)

Midnight service is at nine-thirty.

THOMAS

(uncomfortable)

Let's just go--Larry can clear up  
later, right?

LAWRENCE

Sure--no problem--

PAMELA

No! I always clear up the mess I  
make! I'm not like you people--

THOMAS

(puts hand on  
Pamela's shoulder)

Pam--

Pamela shakes Thomas off, much as Grandchild shook her  
off, then stands up and faces him.

PAMELA

They said God doesn't just send  
children--He handpicks them  
specially just for us. Well, I  
didn't deserve this--

(indicates Sam)

--okay!? So it must have been  
you!

MRS WONG

Pamela!

PAMELA

You don't come and 'Pamela' me!  
Look at what God sent you--one  
pervert son and the other one  
can't earn enough to pay for his  
own apartment! What kind of woman  
are you, huh? At least my daughters  
are normal!

THOMAS

(to Christine & JJ)

Pamela's a bit high strung.  
Christmas is a stressful time for  
her--the presents and the cards  
and everything.

CHRISTINE

I'm shocked someone actually said that to you--someone from your church? Because of--  
(indicates Sam)

THOMAS

They told us to read Proverbs and Colossians--they said that and the Focus On Family website were all the guidance we needed to bring up godly children.

MRS WONG

When we are all living together I will help look after Sam and the girls, then it will not be so difficult for you. I will help clean up.

PAMELA

Will you please just get it into your stupid head--we're not going to be living together! Not just because your old house is inconvenient, impractical and falling apart but because your precious son needs the money!

Sudden silence

LAWRENCE

I wish you'd let me know you were coming.

JUAN JESUS

I'll let you know next time I'm about to come.

MRS WONG

No.

Pamela sighs and shakes her head in exaggerated exasperation.

THOMAS

Mum, please don't be difficult.

MRS WONG

I should just go back to the old house. Larry will need his spare room.

THOMAS

Mum, you can't stay there alone.

LAWRENCE

Mum, that's your room.

PAMELA

(to Christine)

You're a lawyer right? Tell him  
his friend can't stay here with  
him.

\*

Though Pamela ostensibly addresses Christine, her eyes keep moving to Lawrence and Jesus as she speaks, to make sure they are listening. Her words are obviously directed at them.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

Tell his so-called friend this is  
Singapore and people like him are  
not welcome here. If he doesn't  
want to get into trouble with  
Singapore authorities he should  
leave now.

THOMAS

Pam, don't--

PAMELA

There are people in our church  
who can make things very difficult  
for him.

(shakes off Thomas'  
hand again)

I'm not saying anything that isn't  
true. It's your Mum's feelings  
and your family reputation I'm  
watching out for!

LAWRENCE

What reputation?

PAMELA

Just make your mum sign the damn  
papers and tell her she's staying  
here with you forever!

Pamela grabs hold of Grandchild and starts to drag him towards the front door. Grandchild starts screaming and hitting at her.

MRS WONG

I don't want to stay here, I want  
to go back to my own house.

Pamela and Grandchild, in passing, may knock Mrs Wong over.

## SCENE 5: BIG DRAMA (&amp; MUSIC)

((Big Explosion))

\*

Mrs Wong falters, stumbles and falls.

Rest of family remain in background.

Stage blacks out on them.

((Dyke Dancers and Action Angels come through led by Christine for big song & dance number around here--delivering love & peace on earth--the people who need it most want it least))

Lights out on stage except for one spot on Mrs Wong as she recovers from excitement, not sure if she imagined it. Juan Jesus helps her to her feet.

MRS WONG

What's happening?

JUAN JESUS

Some people call it a  
transcendental experience. Others  
just say it's too much information.

MRS WONG

You are one of those people, right?  
What does my son call you?

JUAN JESUS

Jesus.

MRS WONG

I can't call you that. It sounds  
wrong. How can you call yourself...  
(mouths 'Jesus')

JUAN JESUS

My parents named me.

MRS WONG

Well. I don't know what your  
parents were thinking.

JUAN JESUS

It's quite common in South America.

MRS WONG

That doesn't make it right.

(pause)

When the boys were small I was so  
afraid if something happened to  
my husband I don't know what to  
do. Now they are big, my husband  
is gone, I still don't know what  
to do.  
Families shouldn't fight at  
Christmas.

Grandson puts a rhinoceros next to the manger. Grandson looks at his arrangement and smiles.

MRS WONG (CONT'D)

Whoever saw a rhinoceros at the manger.

JUAN JESUS

If the rhinoceros is happy and the child is happy with the rhinoceros...

MRS WONG

Happy!

*(What does being  
happy have to do  
with it?)*

There's a proper way to do things--  
rules, standards, laws...

Lawrence enters to stand behind them. Other singers behind him till song ends. Then Lawrence takes JJ's place and JJ and singers leave.

## SCENE 6: MRS WONG'S EPIPHANY

MRS WONG

(to Lawrence)

Boy-Boy, you know of course I wanted to have you come to Baba's funeral. But you know the church people are so sensitive--

LAWRENCE

I know--it's all right Mum.

MRS WONG

I should have let you come--you could have been a happy rhinoceros... you and that nice girl Christine--

LAWRENCE

Ma, she has a girlfriend.

Mrs Wong plays with the animals around the manger.

MRS WONG

Tell me, is it because I was a bad mother?

LAWRENCE

Of course. That's why your bad son wants you to live with him!

Mrs Wong tentatively reaches out to Lawrence with the same gesture that reached out to Grandson. Lawrence meets her hand halfway and holds it.

Lights come on as rest of cast return to 'normal'. JJ and Grandchild on the floor packing the animals in the box together.

THOMAS

Mum are you okay?

MRS WONG

I'm all right. I'll sign your papers. Shall we go?

PAMELA

See? I told you we could have signed for her? Same thing. Save time!

(notices JJ &  
Grandchild)

You! What are you doing with my son!

Pamela takes a step forward but JJ, having finished packing up the animals, picks up the box and stands up.

JUAN JESUS

(to Grandchild)

All 42 animals are safely in place now. You can take them 14 steps down the corridor, out the front door and down in the lift to the car.

JJ hands box to Grandchild.

GRANDCHILD

16 steps. The corridor is 16 steps.

JUAN JESUS

I apologise. 16 steps down the corridor.

Grandchild takes box, gives JJ a sudden bright smile then exits, followed by Mrs Wong hurrying after him.

MRS WONG

Thanks--Thank you very much!

Thomas hesitates, turns to JJ, but Pamela grabs his arm.

PAMELA

You stay away from our son, you hear me? You--you--

THOMAS

(to Pamela &  
everyone)

Normally you're much better at handling him. We all know that. You know he needs us most. But Christmas and getting presents is stressful and upsetting...

Pamela allows herself to be placated/comforted. Thomas and Pamela exit, Christine following with a shrug, a grin and a wave.

LAWRENCE

Can you believe that woman? I don't know what my brother sees in her--

JUAN JESUS

Fair enough. They probably doesn't know what I see in you. It's much harder for some people to receive what they cannot control.

LAWRENCE

The greatest gift.

THE END