

# The Magic Flower

*An example of a  
'Theatre-in-Education'  
project in  
Singapore*

BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CHUA SOO PONG

Nanyang Girls' High School has, since 1986, revitalized its 'Theatre in Education' programme, providing students with opportunities to attend drama workshops, specially arranged series of drama lectures and more importantly to present stage plays.

In the last five years, the school has produced locally written plays (*Love Under the Willows* by Felix Chia, *When the Sea Boils* by Chua Soo Pong) as well as eastern classics *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Twilight Crane* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Sichuan*. The School has also chosen to present an adaptation of an Indonesian epic *Princess Jasmine*, in both Chinese and English.

The wide coverage of theatre styles over the years has enabled the young students and the alumni of the school to see the variety of performing genres in the East and the West. Brecht's play, *The Good Woman of Sichuan*, for example, showed the students the ways theatre can depart from the illusionistic stage. Brecht's 'epic theatre' demonstrated that important human experiences are often not personal stories of individuals but rather, significant social events and social forces. His technique of alienating the audience by breaking up the structure into separate events delighted the young cast of Nanyang Girls.

*Dream of the Red Chamber* is totally different in style. In the 1987 production, I borrowed the acting technique of Chinese Opera in the staging of this Chinese classic. It was in that production that the cast went through a year of training in of voice, speech modulation and traditional Chinese theatre movements. They also were requested to read the Ming Dynasty novel thoroughly and went through many indepth sessions. The reading helped the students enormously in the process of creating their complex roles. In that same year, the junior students of the school were involved in another production, a childrens' play written by Wang Ji Hou and Liu Xiteng, called *The Ginseng Boy* and participated in the Youth Theatre Festival, organized by the Ministry of Community Development. To help the students develop their acting skills, an intensive training programme which included a series

of exercises on concentration, observation, imagination and improvization was conducted.

A year later, an Indonesian legend *Princess Jasmine* was adapted in two languages, Chinese and English, and performed by the same cast. The challenge was not merely the demand of commanding two languages but also to learn a style



that was alien to the students, the *wayang wong* of Indonesia. For many months, students spent time learning Indonesian court dances, as well as games and mime, aimed at combatting inhibitions and stimulating imagination. It was an exceptionally difficult play for the young students as *Princess Jasmine* deals with the complex issues of betrayal of love, power struggle and court politics. The actresses were guided to analyse the core ideas of

the play to establish their basic interpretation. Gradually, they developed the ability to adapt to the highly stylised acting technique and communicated the full meaning of the text sincerely.

Since then three more small scale productions were presented; *Twilight Crane*, *Princess Ma Lang* and *When the Sea Boils*. These productions helped to pave the way for *The Magic Flower*. Based on the story by Ren De Yao written thirty years ago, my version of *The Magic Flower* is different from the original script, though the theme of the story remains unchanged. *The Magic Flower* with a live Chinese orchestra choir and large group of dancers, provides an excellent opportunity for mass participation. Over 150 students participated in this production. In the creative process of staging *Ma Lan Flower* the cast, as well as the backstage crew learnt to test their limits, refine their ability to articulate and to work cohesively for a common goal. The experience of struggling for artistic excellence was both joyful and painful.

In short of six years, the Nanyang Girls' High School has accumulated a wealth of experiences in staging drama and trained over five hundred students in theatre production.

Drama activities have become part of the very substance of education that can develop the students creativities. I hope that an annual public performance will continue to make colourful contributions to the development of Singapore youth theatre.

## The Magic Flower

AUGUST 1991

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### PRELUDE: THE VILLAGE OF EVERGREEN

*The full moon is seen against the dark blue cloudless sky. Silhouette of trees and a well at the back while Da Lan is seen lying on a couch, admiring herself in the mirror. She yawns frequently and finally decides to sleep.*

*(Lights off.)*

*A girl in silhouette appears near the well. She is Xiao Lan. After fetching water in the two buckets she brings, she sings the 'Song of Ma Lan Flower'.*

*(Lights off as she goes out.)*

*Morning Glory and her lover, chatting under the mushroom. They stop chatting and smile at each other attentively, full of admiration.*

*(Music.)*

*When the lights come on again, mountains are seen in the background. The moon seems to be so distant yet as bright as before.*

### SCENE I: THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDERS

Monkey: You rascals, don't run away! How dare you come to our forest to steal fruits.

Black Cat: You would better keep your mouth shut. If you wake the others up, with that loud voice of yours I will kill you.

Monkey: Who are you?

Black Cat: None of your business. Listen, take two of these bananas and let us go.

Monkey: Leave all the fruits you have stolen and get lost!

Black Cat: You can get all the fruits back if you answer a question.

Monkey: What question?

Black Cat: Isn't it true that the Ma Lan flower will bloom tonight?

Monkey: Of course. It blooms once a year on the mid-autumn full moon night.

Black Cat: When it blooms, it will grant wishes to whoever picks it up?

Monkey: No. Only to those who know the secret code!

Black Cat: Here are your two bananas. And I can give you more, if you can tell me the secret code of Ma Lan flower.

Monkey: You rascals. Give me back all the fruits you have stolen.

Black Cat: No! You can have the fruits only if you reveal the secret code.

Monkey: Nobody would reveal this secret code! Only diligent people are entitled to learn the secret code. Not thieves like you! Now, I demand that you return the fruits immediately.

Black Cat: Fat hope! Stupid monkey. Bye-bye!

*Black Cat and two other cats try to run away. The monkey attempts to block them. The cats are angry. They attack the monkey. The monkey grasps a branch and tries to hit Black Cat. They*

run away.

Monkey: Thieves! Thieves! Don't let the rascals run away!

Ma Lang, Shu Gong Gong and Mama Deer rush in.

Ma (Asks the others.): Did you hear the monkey scream?

Morning: Yes! There must be intruders somewhere. Let me hurry Glory with you. Mama Deer and Shu Gong Gong should stay back and alert everybody else here.

Mama: Indeed I should. See you later.

Fern: Let us rush off.

Gong Gong: Be careful. The bandits are very cunning nowadays!

*The bird, rabbits, squirrels, and the baby deer all awake from their sleep.*

Rabbit A: What was that noise? I am scared.

Bird: Don't be frightened. Shu Gong Gong and Mama Deer ask us to stay together whenever they are not around.

Baby Deer: Let's go back to the house.

Rabbit B: We are scared. Can we go to your house for a while?

Baby Deer: Of course you are welcome. Why doesn't everybody come to my house until Shu Gong Gong and Mama Deer come back?

*Everybody cheers and agrees. They all go to the deer's house happily.*

*The Monkey is back again with a branch fighting with Black Cat and two smaller cats. They push the Monkey down the hill. The Monkey screams for help.*

*Ma, Morning Glory and Fern are back. A fierce fight begins. When the Black Cat is about to be overpowered by Ma, it turns around to throw sand into Ma's eyes and rushes off with its fellow cats. Morning Glory is also hurt by one of the aggressive cats.*

*Fern is disappointed the cats get away and is about to rush off.*

Ma: Fern. You better remain here to look after Morning Glory. She is hurt. I will rush off to look for Monkey. I heard him screaming for help.  
(Ma rushes off.)

Fern: Certainly! (Turns to his girlfriend.): Oh my dear Glory, I am sorry that everything happened so fast and I couldn't look after you while fighting with those rascals.

Glory: Not to worry. You are just not alert enough otherwise you wouldn't be blinded by the sand that cunning creature threw at you and Master Ma.

Fern: All right my dear, I promise to be more alert.

Glory: Stop your endless promises. Actions speak louder than words! Shu Gong Gong and Mama Deer come in.

Mama: Are you hurt?

Glory: Just a cut at the elbow, not to

worry.

Shu: Where is the monkey?

Ma carries Monkey in his arms. Xiao Lan's father follows.

Ma: He was wounded when he rolled into the valley. Fortunately this kind man saved him from being killed.

Mama Deer sees that Monkey's left leg is wrapped up with a bandage.

Mama: Thank you, Uncle Wang from the village of Evergreen?

Uncle Wang nods his head.

Monkey: Let me down, I am alright now. Morning Glory, are you hurt too?

Uncle Wang: What is the matter? Let me help you.

Uncle Wang approaches Morning Glory and applies herbal medicine on her left elbow.

Shu: Uncle Wang is the expert on herbal medicine in the village. Year in and year out, he climbs up to the most dangerous cliff to pick the precious herbs for the patients in the village. I am sure, Morning Glory, you and the monkey will recover in no time.

Ma: Uncle Wang, do you know the girl who sings beautifully in the village of Evergreen?

Uncle: You mean...

Ma: The girl who always sings the song about Ma Lan flower on our

mountain.

Uncle: Ha ha ha... She likes singing but her voice is quite ordinary and doesn't measure up to that of a nightingale's.

Fern: We all like her sweet voice and Ma Lang always secretly hopes that one day he could meet the girl and propose to her.

Uncle: Really?

Ma: Fern, don't tease me! What about you and Morning Glory? When is your big day?!

Fern: Whenever you are ready to get married! Ma Lang, I know that you are full of admiration for that diligent village girl. Why not ask Uncle Ma for a favour and send the message to her...

Uncle: Do you really like the girl? You are sure that you will love her forever?

*Ma nods his head sincerely.*

All right! I will convey your message to her. And I am certain that she will say yes to your proposal.

Shu: Ha... ha... ha... When is the wedding?

Fern: Tomorrow night!

Glory: Tomorrow night? So soon?

Mama: Make hay while the sun shines!

Shu: Strike while the iron is hot!

Uncle: Storm or rain, the arrangement will not be changed.

Ma: How come you are certain that she will agree?

Uncle: You will find out tomorrow night! Bye for now.

Shu: Congratulations, young men!

Ma: Oh, I forgot to ask Uncle Ma the name of the girl!

Mama: Well, you can ask her yourself tomorrow right! Ha ha ha...!

Ma: We must be more alert from now on. Make sure that the intruders will not have any chance to get away with our fruits again.

Shu: Indeed, we must remain vigilant and keep our guard up all the time.

*(Black out)*

## SCENE II: AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL

*Xiao Lan is sewing while Aunty Wang is pacing up and down, full of anxiety. Da Lan has fallen asleep soundly.*

Xiao: Mama, why don't you go to bed first. I will wait for Papa.

Aunty: No, I can't. Your father seldom comes back this late. It is almost midnight.

Xiao: Not to worry, Mama. Maybe he has to help out in an emergency.

*(Dogs bark)* Papa is back. Papa is back. *(She rushes off stage.)* Papa, Papa!

Da: *(Da Lan awakens.)* Papa is back. Where is Papa? Mama, Papa promised to buy me some silk materials to make new clothes!

Aunty: Silk materials? You are not getting ready for your wedding, why ask Papa to buy such expensive things?

Da: Mama, should I not wear something nicer at the Lantern Festival night? If I don't have nice clothes to attract people, how do you expect me to ever find a suitor?

Aunty: What nonsense! Not all that glitters is gold. Wise men never judge girls by their appearance. Putting on a fake exterior will only attract the wrong kind of people!

*Xiao Lan comes back. Looks disappointed.*

Da: Where is Papa?

Xiao: It is Ah Fu, not Papa!

Da: *(Delighted)* Ah Fu? Oh, Ah Fu.

*She makes a move.*

Aunty: Da Lan, don't go near him. Although he is your cousin, it is best to avoid him. No decent girl would go near such a notorious person!

*Ah Fu is drunk and he holds a bottle in his right hand.*

Fu: Da...Da Lan. Cheers!

Da: Ha ha ha..... You look so funny.

Cheers! Ah Fu, why are you so happy tonight? What brings you here at this hour?

Fu: I won lots of money gambling in the town. 3,000 yuan in two hours! So I have brought you some presents! Come! Aunt Ma, this..... this..... this cosmetic powder is for you. ...Xiao...Xiao Lan, you can have this .....this perfume. ...Da...Da...Lan, may I give you this.....this silk scarf!

Aunt Ma: No thanks. Ah Fu, I really do not use anything like that.

Xiao: Thank you, Ah Fu! You should keep the perfume for your sweetheart!

Da: Well, I don't mind having all these. They are really lovely.

Aunt Ma: Da Lan! You should not take advantage of your cousin's drunken state don't think that these presents are really for us. Give them back to him, Papa will buy a new silk scarf for you later on.

Da: Mama.

Aunt Ma: Da Lan.

Da Lan returns the presents reluctantly.

Xiao: Ah Fu, it is getting late, you should go home now. Come, let me help!

Aunt Ma Wang and Xiao Lan support the drunk man who walks with faltering steps.

(Exit.)

Da: (Sigh.) With a strict parent like her you will never get free gifts from anybody. Do you know, Xiao Lan and I are twins but

we are quite different. I was born one hour earlier. Now I made up for my eagerness to be born first by opting for a slower pace of life. I prefer to have a more relaxed way of life, like getting up late in the morning, having a long nap in the afternoon and going to bed as early as possible...

Dog barks.

Uncle: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan! (Finds only Da Lan in the house.) Da Lan. Oh what a surprise to find you awake at this hour. Where is Mama and Xiao Lan?

Da: Papa, where is the silk material you promised to buy?

Uncle: Da Lan, Papa didn't go to the town today. But I have brought back something special.

Mama and Xiao Lan come back.

Aunt Ma: What is so special?

Uncle: I was in the Ma Lan Mountain gathering herbs and met the man who guards the Ma Lan flower.

Xiao: I heard so much about this kind man. It is said that he is helpful to those who travel through the Ma Lan Mountain. Isn't he called Ma Lang.

Da: So what?

Uncle: Do you know what he is looking for?

Da: Well, none of my business.

Uncle: He is looking for a diligent girl to be his wife.

Da: Well, did he inherit any wealth from his parents? Does he own land? How many workers or maids does he employ?

Uncle: Unfortunately he has none of these things you entrusted me with this.....listed. But he is diligent, talented and sincere. Look, he has entrusted me with this beautiful flower to give it to the girl who is willing to marry him.

Da: A flower? A flower as a betrothal gift? What a joke!

Aunt Ma: Well, as long as he is sincere, it does not matter whether it is a flower or a jade bracelet.

Da: Sorry, I am not interested!

Xiao: Papa....

Uncle: Xiao Lan, would you like to accept this gift?

Xiao: Papa.....

Aunt Ma: Well, our good girl has agreed!

Da: Agreed? Xiao Lan. It is tough living on the mountain. Are you sure that you will be happy there?

Xiao: Dear sister, happiness is not necessarily measured by material wealth. I would like to believe life with Ma Lang would be a rewarding challenge.

Da: Well, good luck then.



INTERLUDE:  
AH FU'S FRUSTRATION

*The Black Cat is sleeping. Suddenly the little cats rush in, screaming. They are obviously frightened by Ah Fu.*

Fu: (Drunk) You bad luck devils! Everytime I see you, I lose money when I gamble. Let me warn you for the last time. If you follow me to town again, I will kill you !

*Ah Fu sits on the floor, continues to mumble.*

*The Black Cat awakens. Opens his eyes, the Black Cat yawns and looks at Ah Fu with scorn.*

Fu: Oh yes, I must go to see Da Lan. Maybe I can borrow some money from her, I have been treating her well, giving her presents whenever I win money. I think she should be grateful! I don't like Xiao Lan, she is a workaholic, always reminding me to study! Da Lan is much better, she knows how to be excused from all the housework and she never urge me to.....

*The Black Cat listens attentively and realizes that this is the right time for his plot.*

Cat: And she is always ready to help people who are in difficulties!

Fu: (Shock) Who... who are you?

Cat: I am your Black Cat!

Fu: What... What do you want?

Cat: I've come to help you!

Fu: Help me? What do you mean?

Cat: Don't you want to have more money to go back to the town to drink wine, to gamble and buy more presents for your sweetheart Da Lan?

Fu: Da Lan?

Cat: Now, there is an excellent opportunity!

Fu: An excellent opportunity?

Cat: Come, listen!

*The Black Cat whispers to him.*

*(Black out.)*

SCENE III:  
THE WEDDINGS

*The weddings of Ma Lang and Xiao Lan as well as Morning Glory and Fern. All the animals are exceedingly happy. They present a joyous dance to celebrate the occasion.*

Uncle: May you both have a happy marriage!

Monkey: Like the happy marriage of Uncle Ma and Aunty Ma!

Aunty: Xiao Lan, take care.

Ma: Mother-in-Law, I will take care of Xiao Lan. Don't you worry.

Uncle: (To Fern) You too, should take good care of your wife ! Ha ha ha!

Shu: Next year, when spring comes again, they will bring you a baby! Ha ha ha.....

Mama: A safe journey home, Uncle Ma and Aunty Ma.

*All the animals join in to bid farewell to Uncle Ma and Aunty Ma.*

INTERLUDE:  
THE BLACK CAT'S PLOT

*Da Lan carries the buckets unwillingly. She rests and sighs.*

Da: What a boring task! Fancy fetching water for my mother, everyday! Do you know, since Xiao Lan was married off a year ago. I have been doing all these mindless tasks. Worse still, I have to help my mother to cook and to wash the dishes! I could have married Ma Lang and enjoyed my life in the mountain. Life can sometimes be so unfair. Do you remember, Papa in fact had asked me first whether I was willing to marry Ma Lang. And I rejected the proposal ! How silly I was!

*The Cat grins with delight.*

I heard that Xiao Lan is doing so well there. She eats well, she dresses well and she has a husband who loves her!

Cat: Well, you can always find someone who loves you ! For example, your cousin Ah Fu, has long been in love with you for a

long tune.

Da: Who are you?

Cat: I am Ah Fu's black cat! And I bring with me a message from him.

Da: From Ah Fu?

Cat: Yes, Ah Fu! Well, it is more than a message. It is a joint-venture!

Da: What do you mean? I don't understand you!

Cat: Well, your sister is coming back tomorrow. You will see for yourself, she will be wearing a beautiful dress, a new pair of ear-rings, and she will also bring back a lot of presents. She is rich, very rich now! Do you want to be as rich? When you are rich, you can be a lady of leisure! You don't have to work and you just eat and sleep, sleep and eat!

Da: You must be joking!

Cat: Not at all. Listen, let me tell you a secret.

*Gestures to Da Lan and whispers to her.*

*(Light dims down gradually.)*

#### SCENE IV: SPRING ON THE MA LAN MOUNTAIN.

*Everybody on the Ma Lan Mountain is seen in the 'Dance of the Springtime', depicting the sowing process.*

Ma: Well, it was a job well done, everybody! We should expect a good harvest this year if we have good weather like last year. Let us help Xiao Lan get ready. Today is the day she promised Uncle Ma to return home and she plans to go off before the sun sets.

Monkey: Of courses let's not forget, we have a surprise for sister Xiao Lan. Friends, let us sing the song!

*Everybody sings the specially composed 'Song of Presents' expressing their gratitude to Xiao Lan for her kindness and exemplary diligence.*

*Xiao Lan is very moved.*

Xiao: Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Thank you for your generosity. You all shouldn't have spent so much time to prepare all these for my mother and father and my sister. Thank you. But I too have a surprise all of you. Come, try this chrysanthemum tea I prepared.

Rabbit: Chrysanthemum tea?

*Everybody is curious. But once they tasted it they like the tea.*

Deer and Squirrel: Sister Xiao Lan. Please come back soon and make more chrysanthemum tea for us. We don't like you to be away for too long.

Rabbit: Sister Xiao Lan, please remember to bring some carrots back from the village for me.

Xiao: Of course, I will not forget! I shall be back the day after tomorrow!

Ma: Xiao Lan, why don't you stay a few more days?

Xiao: No, there is so much work here. Besides, I don't like to be away from you all for too long. Ma Lang, please don't forget to meet me by the river the day after tomorrow.

Ma: Xiao Lan, please take the magic Ma Lan flower with you. If you are in difficulties, you can recite this secret code :

*'Ma Lan flower, Ma Lan flower, the magic flower, withstanding storm and thunder. Please bloom immediately as the diligent person is now seeking for your help.' Can you remember this!*

Xiao: Of course, I can.

Bird: Hey, everybody. It's getting late, let us see Sister Xiao Lan off!

Animals: Let's us send Sister Xiao Lan off!

*(Light dims.)*

#### SCENE V: HOME COMING

*Courtyard of Uncle Wang's house. Xiao Lan has obviously been distributing presents. Uncle Wang and Aunty Wang stack all the new clothes, fruits and table cloths on the table. A few girls from the neighbourhood are admiring the materials Xiao Lan has given to them.*

Girl A: Thank you Xiao Lan, this is



wonderful! *(She puts the material Xiao Lan gave her on the chair.)*

Girl B: Xiao Lan, you should not have bothered about the present. We are just so happy to see you!

Aunty: Xiao Lan, you have no idea how much mum missed you!

Girl C: Please tell us more about life on the Ma Lan Mountain!

Xiao: What shall I say about Ma Lan Mountain? Everybody works together, ploughing the field, planting trees and collecting fruits, everybody does one's share of work!

*Da Xiao happily rushes in with a new apron.*

Da: Thank you, Xiao Lan, how did you find time to embroider such a beautiful piece of apron! Look, what do you all think? *(She turns around and discovers the piece of material Xiao Lan gave to Girl A.)* My goodness, what a lovely piece of material. Xiao Lan, may I have this as well?

Uncle: No, this is for Xiao Yuan. Papa will buy a new one for you.

Xiao La: Why don't you follow me to Ma Lan Mountain tomorrow afternoon? I can teach you how to weave this.

Da: Follow you to the Ma Lan Mountain? *(The Black Cat winks and reminds Da Lan)* Yes indeed I always wanted to go to see you! Too see how you all live there and how you embroider.

*Uncle Wang and Aunty Wang are surprised that Da Lan has changed, they are delighted.*

Aunty: Good idea! Xiao Lan take you sister with you. Da Lan, stay there for a month or two, until you master the technique of weaving and embroidering.....

Girl C: And you could come back and teach us!

Uncle: Well, children, let's go in to the house now. Dinner is getting cold.

*Uncle Wang and Aunty Wang as well as the village girls go in gradually.*

Xiao: Da Lan, after the dinner, I will help you pack your clothes for tomorrow!

Da: Don't bother I will only go to your house for a day or two!

Xiao: Didn't you want to learn how to....

Da: No, not really, I just wanted to do some of sightseeing.

Xiao: *(Disappointed, but she realizes it is difficult to persuade Da Lan)* All right. You could come and stay for a longer time whenever you like.

Da: Xiao Lan. Do you think you could do me a favour?

Xiao: Of course.

Da: Can you give me this new dress that you are wearing.

Xiao: Certainly!

Da: And... and... I also like your earrings very much.

Xiao: You can have them too, my dear sister.

Da: Thank you very much, you are a great sister!

*Aunty Ma shouts from the kitchen inside the house.*

Aunty: Da Lan, Xiao Lan, dinner is getting cold!

*Da Lan and Xiao Lan giggle and rush in.*

*(Light dims.)*

#### INTERLUDE: SQUIRREL'S NIGHTMARE

*Raining heavily. Thunder roars.*

Rabbit: Oh dear, such heavy rain.

Baby deer: I hope the rain will stop. If the rain does not stop. Sister Xiao Lan can't come back.

Squirrel: Brother Monkey, Brother Monkey, I am frightened.

Monkey: Don't be frightened, the rain will be over soon.

Mama: What is the matter? Why are you frightened?

Squirrel: I... I... dreamt that Sister Xiao Lan lost her way and she is now caught by a witch. What can

we do now?

Monkey: Ha ha ha, silly billy! Why do you worry about what you have dreamt?

Mama: Dear Squirrel, don't worry. Sister Xiao Lan will find her way home. Have you forgotten that she has the Ma Lan flower with her? Even if there was a witch trying to cast a spell on her, she will be able to overpower the witch using the magic of the Ma Lan flower and come back!

Rabbit: I hope Sister Xiao Lan comes back soon, with many carrots for me!

Mama: I am sure she will. Children, let's us go back to bed.

#### SCENE VI: STORMY DAY'S HORROR

*Thunder storm. Lighthing.*

*Aunty Ma carries umbrella.*

Aunty: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan! Da Lan, Da Lan!

Uncle: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan! Da Lan, Da Lan!

Aunty: Da Lan, Da Lan! Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan!

Uncle: *(Sigh)* Hai. I think Ma Lan has probably received them long ago and they have reached home safely.

Aunty: Well, I hope so.

Uncle: Shall we go home now? I am sure they will be all right!

Aunty: I hope that Ma Lan did not forget to meet them by the river.

Uncle: I am sure he didn't forget. Shall we go home now?

Aunty: All right! I hope that this terrible rain will be over soon.

*The Black Cat appears.*

Cat: What a nuisance to have this awful rain! Worse still, Ah Fu is not here to help me. He is now in the jail! You must be wondering what's wrong with him. He used the money he had won from gambling to buy himself tons of wine and had drunk more than what his system could handle. Then in his drunken state, he got into a fight with the members of the Green Dragon Gang. He set fire to a row of shops and was finally arrested. The magistrate gave him a seven-year sentence. I can't wait for him for seven years to get the Ma Lan Flower. Besides, after so many years in the jail he might regret what he has done and change his mind. So, I have to handle Xiao Lan by myself tonight. Shhh! Xiao Lan and Da Lan are coming.

*Xiao Lan is holding an umbrella while Da Lan is seen wearing Xiao Lan's new dress and ear-rings in Scene V.*

Xiao: Be careful, Da Lan, The rocks are as slippery as eels.

Da: If I had known that the journey

was this uncomfortable, I wouldn't have come!

Xiao: My good Sister. Don't you think that we have to pay a price for everything we want in life?

Da: Xiao Lan, nevertheless, I envy you. You always have many wonderful friends.

Xiao: Da Lan, you too can make wonderful friends if you get out of your little room.

Da: How I wish I too can find a caring and loving husband, and be given all the nice jewellery and clothes.

Xiao: My good sister, if you like anymore of my clothes, I will willingly give them to you.

*The Black Cat calls, giving Da Lan the hint.*

Da: I have enough of your clothes, I am asking for only one more thing.

Xiao: What is the 'one more thing' you would like to have?

Da: That pretty flower on your head.

Xiao: I am sorry my dear sister. This is a magic flower, the Ma Lan flower, given by Ma Lang as a betrothal gift. I am afraid I can give everything else but not the Ma Lan flower.

Da: Are you sure that you can't give me this little flower?

Xiao: Indeed I can't. I am sorry.

Da: All right, then I have no choice but to snatch it from you.

Xiao: Please don't joke like this.

Da: I am not joking at all, I am serious.

*Thunder roars. Da Lan begins her attack and Xiao Lan tries to run away. But the slope is so slippery that Da Lan falls down. The Black Cat then jumps out. It snatches the flower and tries to push Xiao Lan down the slope at the same time.*

*The Bird appears and is astonished to see what the Black Cat is about to do.*

Bird: Stop it, Black Cat!

*The Cat continues to push Xiao Lan and finally it overpowers Xiao Lan and she falls down to the river.*

Bird: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan.

*The Black Cat quickly uses a stone to hit the bird. She is hit and falls too. Da Lan hears the scream and is shocked.*

Da: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan.....

Cat: Ha ha ha ha... 'Ma Lan Flower, Ma Lan Flower, the Magic Flower, withstanding storm and thunder. I demand that you bloom immediately as I am now seeking your help!'

*Nothing happens. The Black Cat is very anxious.*

Cat: 'Ma Lan Flower, Ma Lan Flower, the Magic Flower, withstanding storm and thunder. Bloom without further delay as I am now

seeking your help.' (Silence) How terrible. It doesn't work! Do I remember the secret code correctly? *The Black Cat approaches Da Lan.*

#### INTERLUDE : THE CAT'S INTIMIDATION

Cat: Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan! Do you know the secret code?

Da: I am not Xiao Lan. I am Da Lan. How would I know the secret code?

Cat: (Irritated by Da Lan) Remember, you are Xiao Lan, NOT Da Lan! The whole purpose of getting you to dress up like Xiao Lan is to deceive Ma Lang. So you must remember all the time that you are Xiao Lan. You must talk like Xiao Lan, walk like Xiao Lan, eat like Xiao Lan. Can't you remember!!? Now that we have the Ma Lan Flower, the only thing left for us to do is to get the secret code from Ma Lang. This is why it is most important for you to convince Ma Lang that you are Xiao Lan. Do you understand?

*Da Lan is annoyed and frightened. She decides to leave but is blocked by the Cat.*

Cat: What's wrong with you?

Da: I want to go home!

Cat: Go home? You must be out of your mind! Xiao Lan has fallen into the river and is probably drowned

by now. How are you going to face your parents? Besides, Ma Lan is coming here to fetch Xiao Lan soon. If he knows that Xiao Lan is drowned, for sure he will kill you!

Da: What... What can I do now? *She is very distressed and starts weeping.*

Cat: You can't do anything except disguise yourself as Xiao Lan. After all, once you become Ma Lang's wife, you will learn the secret code and once you learn the secret code, you can get anything you want! You will be rich, you will be famous on the Ma Lan Mountain, you will have.....

*Ma Lan's call is heard, 'Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan'*

Cat: Now, stop weeping immediately and remember, you are a happy Xiao Lan. Ma Lang is taking you home up there!

Da: Taking me to the Ma Lan Mountain? What shall I do? What shall I do?

*Not knowing how to deal with Ma Lang, she rushes off.*

Cat: Stop running Da Lan. Why do you worry? I will be with you all the time!

Da: But... but... I have no idea what I should say to him.

Cat: As long as I am with you, you will be all right. I will protect you, I will guide you!

*Ma Lang's call is heard again.*

Cat: Quick, answer him!

Da: Hey, I am here.

Ma: *(Ma Lang rushes in)* I am terribly sorry I am late. I went to the other side of the mountain to gather herbs and was caught in the heavy rain. How is Papa and Mama? How is your sister? Xiao Lan, Xiao Lan are you all right?

Da: Yes, I... I am all right. *(The Cat calls)*. No, I, I... I have a bad headache. *(The cat calls again.)*

Ma: Is this your cat?

Da: No, it is my cousin Ah Fu's cat.

Ma: Hey. Go home, go back to where you come from.

*The Cat gives Da Lan a hint.*

Da: Ah Fu is in the jail now and nobody is looking after him at the moment. He is sick and hungry rather pitiful!

*The Cat presents a miserable look.*

Ma: All right, let him follow us then.

*The Cat jumps for joy. Ma looks at him with suspicion. Da Lan kicks the Cat to remind him to behave.*

*(Light dims)*

## SCENE VII: SHOCKING REVELATION

*Ma Lan brings Da Lan and the Black*

*Cat into his house. Da Lan is delighted.*

Da: Oh, what a beautiful house you have.

Ma: Well, it is the same old house. There isn't any change, Xiao Lan.

Cat: I think Xiao Lan misses home so much that the house looks lovelier to her now after being away for two days.

*'Song of Fruits' is heard. The little animals come in with trays of fruits.*

*Da Lan picks the biggest apple in the tray presented by the squirrel and gobbles it up.*

Da: Mm,! Delicious! Plain heaven!

*Da Lan notices the peach in the tray brought by the rabbit.*

Da: What a lovely peach here! This is great!

*Da Lan picks up the peach and throws away the half apple she has eaten. She bites the peach with delight.*

*The squirrel, the rabbit and the baby deer are all amused as Da Lan seems to be so hungry.*

Deer: Sister Xiao Lan, are you very hungry?

Mama: Poor Xiao Lan, you must have been starving!

Rabbit: Sister Xiao Lan, have you forgotten to bring the carrots from the village you promised?

*Da Lan is not sure how to answer. The Black Cat quickly makes up a story.*

Cat: Of course sister Xiao Lan hasn't forgotten, She brought lots of carrots for you but the riverbank was so slippery because of the storm that the basketful of carrots landed into the river when she fell.

Ma: Xiao Lan, were you hurt?

*Da Lan shakes her head.*

Glory: Sorry that we are late, Sister Xiao Lan.

Fern: Welcome home, sister Xiao Lan.

Glory: We have brought your favorite chrysanthemum tea for you.

Da: Chrysanthemum tea? Sorry, I don't drink chrysanthemum tea.

*Everybody is surprised. The Black Cat senses that it is probably a wrong answer.*

Cat: Oh, sister Xiao Lan has a bad headache so she doesn't feel like drinking the chrysanthemum tea now.

Ma: Perhaps you should go to the bedroom to rest.

Da: That is a wonderful idea! Where is the bedroom?

*Everybody is puzzled.*

Cat: You see, sister Xiao Lan's headache is so bad that she can't even remember where the bedroom is!

*The Monkey jumps in and accidentally steps on the Black Cat's tail. The Black*

*Cat screams and rolls. The way it rolls surprises Ma Lan, Fern, Glory and the Monkey as it looks very very familiar although they could not recall immediately where they saw it.*

Monkey: Welcome home sister Xiao Lan, did you see the bird?

*Da Lan and The Black Cat answer at the same time.*

Da: No..... I.....

Cat: Yes.....

Monkey: She went to the river bank in the afternoon to wait for you.

Cat: You see, we were late because of the storm. I think she might have gone to the village to look for us. Don't you think so?

Da: Yes, maybe, maybe she lost her way in the storm.

Mama: It is very very unlikely! Oh, what shall we do now?

Ma: Not to worry, let us ask the Magic flower to find the bird. Xiao Lan, may I have the Ma Lan flower.

Da: *(Frightened, she does not know how to answer)* I..... I don't have it, it was the Black Cat.....

Cat: Yes, I was the last one who saw it!

Ma: Where was it? When was the last time you saw it?

Cat: I remember..... I remember seeing it in Uncle Ma's house.

Ma: Didn't you wear it all the time?

Da: Yes... Yes... I did.

Cat: I still saw it on the way here.

Monkey: Then where is it now?

Cat: Don't you remember, the storm was very violent. The wind was so strong. It blew and blew and blew. The Ma Lan Flower was blown away!

Ma: Where has it been blown to away?

Da: I... I can't remember.

Cat: I remember now! It was at the river bank. When Xiao Lan heard your call, she was so happy and she rushed to you. I remember seeing it fall into the river. I thought it was just an ordinary flower so I did not bother about it. If I had known that.....

Ma: Are you sure that you remember it correctly?

Cat: Sure!

Ma: Let us go to the river bank immediately friends.

Cat: Ma Lan. What is the secret code of the Magic flower? In case I find it first, I can recite the secret code and help to find the bird. Maybe she is in serious trouble and needs to be saved immediately.

Mama: Once you find the magic flower, you should return it to Ma Lang and let him recite the secret

code. Only diligent people are entitled to seek help from the Ma Lan flower.

Cat: I am diligent too. Everynight I stay up to catch mice....

Ma: *(He is now very suspicious of the Black Cat.)* It is not the right time to squabble. Friends, let's go to find the Magic flower and the bird. Xiao Lan, you take a rest at home. I shall be back soon.

Rabbit: Ma Lan, do not worry we will look after sister Xiao Lan.

Mama: I will stay back too. You all go immediately as we cannot afford to lose any time.

Ma: Let's go!

*The Monkey, Morning Glory and Fern followed Ma Lan exit while others bring Da Lan to the bedroom. Only the Black Cat remains on stage.*

Cat: Humph, they will never find the Magic Flower nor the bird. The bird is probably dead and floating on the river now and the Magic flower is still here, with me! Ha ha ha ha ha.....

*(Light dims.)*

#### INTERLUDE: MANOEUVRING IN THE MIST

*Shu Gong Gong is seen on stage, snoring. Uncle Wang and Auntie Wang hurry in.*



Aunty: It is very odd, Da Lan didn't come back last night. She didn't tell me that she was going to stay with Xiao Lan.

*Shu Gong Gong is awakened by their voices.*

Uncle: I thought she said she will stay on at the Ma Lan Mountain for a month or two, to learn weaving and embroidering.....

Aunty: Yes, she did. But she changed her mind hours before she left. She took Ah Fu's cat with her and told me that she will send Xiao Lan to the riverbank and then come home. You know, Da Lan seldom goes out, I am worried that.....

Uncle: Oh , Shu Gong Gong, good morning.

Shu: Good morning! Is Da Lan missing?

Aunty: Did you see her?

Shu: No, but the bird told me yesterday that Xiao Lan came back with a cat. I don't think Da Lan was accompanying them.

Aunty: Oh dear, where could she have gone? Where could she have gone?

Shu: Not to worry, I will ask everybody on the Ma Lan Mountain to help you look for Da Lan.

Aunty: Meantime we better continue to search for her.

Uncle: Thank you Shu Gong Gong. Da Lan.... Da Lan.....

Aunty: Da Lan..... Da Lan.....

*Two smaller cats appear and whisper to each other. Ma Lan, Morning Glory, Fern, and the Monkey come in.*

Ma: Shu Gong Gong, did I hear some one calling for Da Lan?

Shu: Yes, it was Uncle Wang and Aunty Wang. Da Lan has been missing since last night!

Monkey: Ma Lan, this is very strange, you mean Da Lan disappeared with the bird?

Glory: It is strange too that sister Xiao Lan has changed so much overnight!

Ma: I am more uncomfortable with the Black Cat. Somehow I am not convinced by whatever he said.

Fern: I feel the same.

Ma: We must be fully alert.

Shu: Hurry up everybody, I think the bird is probably in great danger!

Ma: Indeed. Let's continue to search!

*The two cats come out from their hiding place and whisper to each other again and exit.*

*(Light dims)*

## SCENE VIII: THE REUNION

*The Black Cat appears with two of his gang. When he hears that someone is approaching, he signals them the two cats to hide behind the rocks.*

*Ma Lang and his friends rush in and discover the wounded bird.*

Ma: What happened? Are you all right?

Bird: The..... The Black Cat hurt me and..... he pushed sister Xiao Lan down to the cliff ..... Quick..... go and look for her..... I..... I am all right.

Ma: Shu Gong Gong, you take the bird up to the mountain. Fern and I will go to rescue Xiao Lan and hunt for the Black Cat.....

Fern: We must look for the missing magic flower too!

Ma: Yes, let's rush to the river!

Glory: I will stay around here in case the Black Cat passes through.

*They all exit except Glory.*

*The Black Cat suddenly jumps out and grabs Glory.*

Cat: Ha ha ha ha.... Where are you going? Were you looking for me? Now, what can I do for you?

Glory: Release me at once, or else I will.... Help! Help!

*The Black Cat angrily covers her mouth.*

Cat: I warn you for the last time! If you shout for help again, I will kill you! Tell me, what is the secret code?

Glory: I don't know!

Cat: *(The Black Cat twists Glory's arm.)* Humph, do you know now?

Glory: *(Suddenly she realizes that the only way out is to lie to the Black Cat.)* All right, I.... I will tell you, but you release me first!

Cat: No! You will not be released until the Magic Flower grants me wishes! What is the secret code? *Twists her arm again.*

Glory: All right, all right, stop twisting my arm! It goes like this : Ma Lan Flower, Ma Lan Flower, withstanding storm and thunder. I need your help to do wonders.

Cat: *(Takes the Ma Lan Flower and happily recites.)* Ma Lan Flower , Ma Lan Flower, withstanding storm and thunder. I need your help to do wonders. Give me tons of salmon and mackerel. *(Nothing happens. Angry.)* You swindler! Why your secret code doesn't work?

Glory: Of course it doesn't work. After all, you are not holding the real Ma Lan flower.

Cat: What? This is not the real Ma Lan Flower?

Glory: The real one has two golden leaves. I am afraid you have been cheated.

Cat: *(Furious)* Tell me, where is the real one?

Glory: I can't tell you!

Cat: *(Twists her arm forcefully)* Can you tell me now?

Glory: All right! It.... it is in Ma Lang's house..... in in his bedroom.

Cat: *(He throws away the Ma Lan flower and turns to the two cats)* Let's go!

*Once they exit, Glory quickly picks up the flower. Ma Lang ..... Ma Lang.....*

*The Cats return and they see her holding the flower.*

Cat: *(Extremely angry)* You cunning woman I will not forgive you!

*Ma Lang and Fern enter.*

Ma: We will not forgive you for drowning Xiao Lan and killing the bird.

Fern: You disguised as good guy and fooled the people around. You are more dangerous than any other outright bandit!

Cat: I don't waste time talking nonsense. Give me back my

flower, cunning woman.

*They engage in a fierce fight and the monkey and other animal appear to give Ma Lang moral support. At the end the Cats are cornered and pushed down the cliff.*

Ma: *(Ma Lang holds the Ma Lan flower which he managed to get back from the Black Cat and recites the secret code.)* Ma Lan Flower, Ma Lan Flower, the magic flower, withstanding storm and thunder. Please bloom immediately as the diligent person is now seeking your help. Please help us to find Xiao Lan.

*Music. Xiao Lan, escorted by four waterlily fairies is back. Everybody cheers.*

Da: *(Da Lan comes in, she feels ashamed.)* Xiao Lan.... Xiao Lan, can you forgive me?

Uncle: *(Uncle Ma and Aunt Ma is heard.)* Da Lan... Da Lan....

Aunt: Oh, so you are here! What has happened?

Uncle: We had been searching for you all night.

Shu: Well, Uncle Ma, let bygones be bygones. Children, let us celebrate the reunion!

*Everybody sings and dances happily.*

*End of Play.*