

PEOPLE'S WAR

by Lauren Ennis

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CHARACTER LIST

Yu-Min Zhao: A Wuhan car manufacturer; age 30's to 40's

An-Mei Zhao: Yu-Min's wife and a nurse at Wuhan Central hospital; age 30's to 40's

Tao Zhao: Yu-Min and An-Mei's son; age around 10

Chee-Ying Yan: A Hong Kong lawyer visiting for New Year's and Yu-Min's childhood friend; age 30's to 40's

Shao-Long Yan: Chee-Ying's father and the Zhaos' neighbor; age 60's to 70's

Su-Nan Yan: Chee-Ying's mother and the Zhaos' neighbor; age 60's to 70's

Ziyi Yan: Chee-Ying's orphaned niece and Shao-Long and Su-Nan's granddaughter; age around 10

Officers in the People's Armed Police:

Officer Li

Officer Wu

Officer Chen

Officer Ho

Building Workers 1 and 2

Resident 1

Scene 1: *January 18, 2020 The dining room of An-Mei and Yu-Min Zhou's apartment in Wuhan, China. The apartment is decorated for Lunar New Year, the Year of the Rat and there is a banquet of traditional New Year's dishes prepared on the table in the center of the room. An-Mei is hanging red paper lanterns from the ceiling when the door opens and her husband, Yu-Min, and their son Tao enter the room carrying paper bags. She jumps back, startled, and accidentally rips the lantern in her hand.*

An-Mei: Ma de!

Tao points at An-Mei and snickers

Tao: Mama said a bad word

Yu-Min: She did. And what do we say about bad words?

Tao: Don't say them on New Year's

Yu-Min: Don't say them any time.

Tao: But especially on New Year's because it's bad luck.

Yu-Min removes a firework from his bag and holds it up.

Yu-Min: That's right, but I think we brought just enough fire power to chase the bad luck away.

An-Mei: I wasn't expecting you home so soon.

Yu-Min: Soon? The line was wrapped halfway around the store. *(Checks his phone)* The Yans will be here any minute.

An-Mei turns to read the clock on the wall

An-Mei: How did it get to be so late?!

An-Mei rushes around the room checking the decorations while Yu-Min and Tao unpack the fireworks

An-Mei: I still haven't finished packing the envelopes and my hair must be a mess...

Yu-Min playfully runs his fingers through her hair

Yu-Min: It's been so long since I've seen you out of that uniform for more than five minutes I almost forgot how your hair looks when it's down.

An-Mei teasingly bats his hand away.

An-Mei: Like a hostess who isn't ready for her guests, that's how. That reminds me, they asked me to take on an extra shift at the hospital tomorrow.

Tao rolls his eyes and sighs in exasperation

Tao: Again?!

An-Mei bends down to Tao's level.

An-Mei: *(Imitating him)* Yes, again.

Tao pouts and folds his arms in front of him

An-Mei: But I just might be home in time to take someone out for a little New Year's shopping.

Tao: Promise?

An-Mei: I promise that I'll try my best.

Tao: You're very best?

An-Mei nods

An-Mei: My utter, absolute, and very best!

Tao: *(Skeptically)* Alright

Yu-Min helps her hang the remaining lanterns

Yu-Min: You've been working extra shifts for weeks...

She glances over her shoulder at Tao

An-Mei: *(Quietly)* We keep getting more patients every day. If this keeps up I don't know how much longer we'll have beds for all of them.

Yu-Min: It'll slow down soon. After all, it can't spread between people.

An-Mei looks skeptical but half-heartedly nods and starts filling red New Year's envelopes. There is a knock at the door. Yu-Min opens the door and their neighbors, Su-Nan and Shao-Long Yan enter with their granddaughter, Ziyi

Yu-Min: Come on in.

Shao-Long: Happy New Year!

An-Mei rushes to greet their guests

An-Mei: It's so good to see you all! Where's Chee-Ying?

Su-Nan: He had a call from the office, something about a contract. He'll be along any minute.

Su-Nan admires the decorations

Su-Nan: An-Mei you outdid yourself, it looks like something out of a magazine.

An-Mei: Hardly, but it was the best that I could do between shifts.

Shao-Long: You're too modest, you always have been.

Ziyi runs across the room to greet Tao with a bag of candy in her hands

Ziyi: (*Proudly*) We brought candy.

Tao taps his hand against the bag containing the fireworks

Tao: That's nothing, we brought fireworks

Ziyi reaches into the fireworks bag

Ziyi: I wanna see!

Tao pulls the bag away from her

Tao: Not until after midnight. (*Turning to Yu-Min*) Isn't that right, Baba?

Yu-Min exchanges a mischievous glance with An-Mei

Yu-Min: That's right, you don't want to chance a whole year of bad luck, do you?

Ziyi looks at the fireworks and then reluctantly shakes her head

Yu-Min: I didn't think so. Besides, the best things are worth waiting for.

Shao-Long and Su-Nan's son, Chee-Ying, appears in the doorway

Chee-Ying: I hope that goes for late guests.

Yu-Min: Old friends are always worth the wait.

An-Mei: You're just in time, I was right about to put dinner on the table.

Su-Nan: Let me help you.

An-Mei and Su-Nan start putting the food on the table while both families seat themselves around it

Ziyi: Can I sit next to Uncle Chee-Ying?

Chee-Ying does an exaggerated bow

Chee-Ying: *Teasingly* I'd be honored.

Ziyi turns to Tao

Ziyi: *Proudly* Uncle Chee-Ying's visiting from Hong Kong. He's been all over the world.

Tao: Really?

Chee-Ying: Not exactly, but I did study in England for a few years.

An-Mei and Su-Nan take their seats at the table

Tao: My teacher says that England is proof of the West's decline into decadence.

An-Mei gives Tao a reprimanding look

An-Mei: Did Mr. Yan ask for your teacher's opinion?

Tao shakes his head

Tao: No, but--

An-Mei: *Sharply* Then there's no need to share it.

Tao sighs in exasperation and moves his food around on his plate with annoyance

Shao-Long: It's good to see you boys back together. It seems like just yesterday that you two were the ones in school.

Yu-Min: And getting into plenty of trouble along the way.

Ziyi: *To Chee-Ying* Were you really a trouble maker?

Chee-Ying: Talking us both *out* of trouble was more my specialty.

Yu-Min: Spoken like a true lawyer.

Chee-Ying: Says the car salesman.

Yu-Min: Manufacturer, thank you.

An-Mei: From the stories that I've heard it's a wonder either of you made it out of school at all.

Yu-Min: Thankfully I had you to reform me.

Su-Nan: If only we could find a nice girl to reform our Chee-Ying.

Shao-Long: At the rate he's going you two will be grandparents before he gives me any grandsons. He finally meets a decent girl in Hong Kong and the minute that things start to get serious--

Chee-Ying: I already told you--

Ziyi: At least you still have me, Grandpa.

Su-Nan: Of course we do, and thank goodness for that.

Chee-Ying and Shao-Long exchange uncomfortable glances while both families sit in awkward silence.

Su-Nan: I have an idea; why don't we all go around and say one thing that we wish for in the New Year? I'll start; this year I wish for health and for Shao-Long's cancer to go into remission.

Ziyi: Me too!

Chee-Ying: We all wish for that.

Su-Nan: What about you, An-Mei?

An-Mei: I just wish that work at the hospital would slow down.

Chee-Ying: Is this because of the flu they've been talking about on the news?

An-Mei nods

Shao-Long: I heard that the hospitals were filling up.

Yu-Min: It's bound to start slowing down soon.

An-Mei: It seems like we admit more patients every day; I'm not sure how much longer we can keep admitting them for.

Chee-Ying: They must be in close quarters then.

An-Mei: Probably closer than they should be

Yu-Min: They've already said that it can't pass between people.

Su-Nan: Is it true that they haven't been giving the hospitals protective gear?

Ziyi: My friend Li-Meng says her grandmother has it real bad.

Tao: *Anxiously* Can it spread to kids?

Yu-Min: *Firmly* It can't spread to anyone. Anybody who says otherwise is spreading rumors.

Fireworks are heard exploding outside

Su-Nan: It's not even midnight yet.

Shao-Long shrugs with a laugh

Shao-Long: This impatient generation

Tao: Let's go watch!

Tao leaps out of his seat and rushes to the window

Ziyi: Wait up!

Ziyi runs after him

Chee-Ying: In that case, I call for a toast.

Chee-Ying raises his glass

Chee-Ying: To twenty twenty, the year of the rat. Good health, more wealth, and a happy family.

The adults raise their glasses

All: To twenty twenty

Chee-Ying: May it be our best year yet

Scene 2: *January 20, 2020 the Yans' apartment. Ziyi is practicing the choreography for her upcoming ballet recital for Shao-Long, Su-Nan, and Chee-Ying while ballet music plays on Chee-Ying's phone. She is wearing a leotard, tights, and ballet slippers.*

Su-Nan: *To Chee-Ying* Didn't I tell you that she's a regular Pavlova?

Chee-Ying: Don't you mean Li Cunxin?

Su-Nan: No, I mean Pavlova. She honored her art and her people.

Chee-Ying: That all depends on how you define honor

Su-Nan: I wouldn't define it as defecting not once but twice.

Shao-Long: *Jokingly* It's bad enough to be unpatriotic without being indecisive about it.

Ziyi pauses

Ziyi: You're not watching!

Su-Nan: It's my fault; I was just telling your uncle how excited we are about your recital.

Ziyi resumes dancing. Chee-Ying's cell phone flashes as he receives a text message. He looks down and reads the message and turns off the music. Ziyi continues dancing a few steps and then looks around in dismay.

Chee-Ying: *Quietly* Turn on the television.

Su-Nan and Shao-Long exchange bewildered glances. Chee-Ying begins frantically searching for the remote.

Chee-Ying: Where's the remote?

Su-Nan and Shao-Long look around while Ziyi watches in confusion. Chee-Ying turns on the television by hand and begins hurriedly searching through the channels. Shao-Long finds the remote and hands it to him.

Shao-Long: Here.

Chee-Ying changes the channel to the state broadcasting network as epidemiologist Dr. Zhong Nanshan is speaking on the air.

Television Broadcast: Meanwhile there are two patients from Guangdong who have not been to Wuhan, but who caught the novel coronavirus after their family members returned from Wuhan...

Su-Nan and Shao-Long exchange wary glances

Television Broadcast: Thus, we can confirm that cases of the virus passing from person to person definitely exist.

Chee-Ying sits down and lets the remote drop to his side with a weary sigh.

Chee-Ying: So much for spreading rumors.

Su-Nan: They just found out now.

Chee-Ying: And in the meantime it's had the New Year to spread.

Shao-Long: At least they're going to start taking precautions now.

Chee-Ying: Patients started filling the hospitals a month ago; where were these precautions then?

Ziyi: Li-Meng's grandmother is sick, does that mean that she could get sick too?

Su-Nan: Li-Meng is a healthy little girl—

Ziyi: Could she?

Su-Nan glances from Shao-Long to Chee-Ying and back to Ziyi

Su-Nan: *Quietly* I don't know

Su-Nan takes Ziyi's hands in hers

Su-Nan: But I do know that we have some of the best doctors in the world right here in China; if she does get sick they'll make her well.

Ziyi: Do you promise?

Su-Nan nods and then takes Ziyi by the hand.

Su-Nan: I promise. There's nothing for you to be worried about.

Ziyi looks skeptical.

Ziyi: Nothing?

Su-Nan: Nothing except getting plenty of sleep before your performance tomorrow.

Shao-Long: Your grandmother's right. After all it wouldn't do for China's rising ballet star to be caught yawning between pirouettes, now would it?

Ziyi shakes her head and smiles

Ziyi: Goodnight, Grandpa. Goodnight Uncle Chee-Ying.

Shalong: Goodnight

Chee-Ying: Sweet dreams

Su-Nan leads Ziyi offstage

Chee-Ying: She shouldn't be making promises that she can't keep

Shao-Long: And what would you do, send the child into a panic?

Chee-Ying: I'd tell her the truth.

Shao-Long: *Gesturing to the television* They just said that they don't know the source or fully understand how it's transmitted. There's no point in frightening her before we know more.

Chee-Ying reluctantly returns his attention to the television and sees that the broadcast is discussing the ongoing protests in Hong Kong

Television Broadcast: With nightfall masked rioters continued vandalizing public facilities...

Shao-Long: It's disgusting what they've done to that city. They're terrorists, every one of them.

Chee-Ying: I'm sure that Chiang Kai-Shek would have said the same of Chairman Mao.

Shalong glances around as if someone may be listening

Shao-Long: *In a low voice* That kind of talk is the last thing that we need Ziyi hearing.

Chee-Ying: As opposed to the steady diet of party sponsored lies that she gets at school?

Shao-Long shakes his head

Shao-Long: The point is, the new security laws are meant to protect us from—

Chee-Ying: Like they've been protecting us from this virus?

Shao-Long: You've always had too many opinions.

Chee-Ying: *Scoffs* I almost forgot, any opinion here is one too many.

Shao-Long: If it's one sympathetic to extremists it is.

Chee-Ying: The only extremists that I see are the ones censoring, tear-gassing, and imprisoning their own people.

Chee-Ying turns off the television and tosses the remote aside.

Chee-Ying: And you can be damn sure that I don't have any sympathy for them.

Chee-Ying storms off stage. Shao-Long sits down with a weary sigh and turns the television back on.

Scene 3: *January 23, 2020 the Zhous' bedroom. Yu-Min and An-Mei are asleep in bed when an emergency alert is heard on both of their cell phones. Yu-Min reaches for his phone on the dresser next to the bed. He glances at the message, rubs his eyes and re-reads the message. He pats An-Mei's shoulder.*

Yu-Min: *Quietly* An-Mei.

An-Mei turns over and pulls the blanket over her head. Yu-Min pulls the blankets down and gently shakes her.

Yu-Min: Wake up

An-Mei reluctantly sits up with a yawn and looks over Yu-Min's shoulder at his phone.

An-Mei: What time is it?

Yu-Min: Get your phone.

An-Mei retrieves her phone

An-Mei: Is everything alright?

Yu-Min takes her phone and then reads the same message before handing it back to her.

Yu-Min: They're locking down the city.

An-Mei: What do you mean?

Yu-Min: Read it

An-Mei reads the alert on her phone and takes in a sharp breath.

An-Mei: But they can't...

She shakes her head in disbelief

An-Mei: They can't. If Wuhan is locked down it would be a disaster for all of Hubei.

Yu-Min: They can and they are.

She starts typing into her phone

An-Mei: But what about the plant? What about all of the plants in the city?

Yu-Min: We'll have to close.

An-Mei: And Tao's school?

Yu-Min: He'll have to learn from home.

She shakes her head, and throws her phone down onto the bed in frustration. He puts his arm around her

Yu-Min: It will only be for a few weeks.

She shrugs his arm off and flings the blankets aside.

An-Mei: How do you know that?

Yu-Min: It says right here—

An-Mei: And before that it would have said that the virus couldn't pass between people and before that it would have said that there was no virus at all.

She glances at the clock on the nightstand and then leaps out of bed and turns on the lights.

Yu-Min: What are you doing?

She begins gathering her clothes and belongings and laying them down on the bed. He glances at his phone.

An-Mei: Go wake up Tao.

Yu-Min: Are you serious? It's after two.

An-Mei: That gives us eight hours to pack and make arrangements. Call your sister and see if she'll let us stay with her for the first few days.

She pauses and looks at him in confusion as he remains sitting on the bed.

An-Mei: Fine, I'll do it.

She shakes her head in irritation, picks up his phone and makes a call. He jumps out of bed and tries to grab the phone from her.

Yu-Min: No, you won't.

He takes the phone from her and hangs up the call

Yu-Min: I won't chance exposing her to it.

An-Mei: Then we'll get a hotel room.

Yu-Min: We'd be exposing every guest and staff member.

An-Mei: None of us are sick.

Yu-Min: That you know of. How many sick patients have you treated? Any one of them could have transmitted it to you. We can't take that kind of a chance.

An-Mei: But you'll take the chance of staying here?

Yu-Min: It's only for a few...

He meets her skeptical gaze and sighs in resignation.

Yu-Min: It's our duty.

An-Mei: To who?

Yu-Min: Your patients to start.

She turns away from him and retrieves a suitcase from under the bed

Yu-Min: You know that they depend on you and so do your coworkers.

She starts putting her clothes into the suitcase.

An-Mei: Tao depends on me, and I'm not going to let him down by allowing them lock him up like a caged animal.

Yu-Min: You'll be letting him down just the same.

An-Mei: *Scoffs* By keeping him safe?

Yu-Min: By running away. Is that the example that you want to set for him; to run away from his problems?

She slams the suitcase shut

Yu-Min: It's not just Tao. I'm supposed to be a leader to my employees. How can I hold my head up if I run out on them when they need me most?

She sits down on top of the suitcase and buries her head in her hands

Yu-Min: How could we face our friends and neighbors after leaving them behind?

He puts his arm around her and she rests her head on his shoulder

Yu-Min: You're right, China does need Wuhan. And right now Wuhan needs us.

An-Mei: What about what we need?

Yu-Min: The three of us have each other; that's all that we need.

Scene 4: *The Yans' apartment, early February. Chee-Ying is teaching Ziyi and Tao how to play chess. Tao is wearing a face mask.*

Tao: What was that?

Chee-Ying: What was what?

Tao: That thing that you did...it's the same way you started the last game.

Chee-Ying: It's called the Queen's Gambit.

Ziyi: What's the queen gambiting on?

Chee-Ying: Gambit not gamble; it's an opening when you—

They all turn at the sound of knocking at the door. Chee-Ying gets up and walks to the door.

Chee-Ying: I'll get it, you two keep playing.

Chee-Ying answers the door for a distraught An-Mei. She is wearing a mask hanging around her chin in disarray.

An-Mei: I'm sorry to bother you, I've been looking for...

She looks past Chee-Ying and sees Tao and Ziyi playing chess. Tao slinks down into his seat as Ziyi waves with a smile

Tao: *(Whispering to Ziyi)* Now I'm in for it.

An-Mei storms into the room and grabs Tao by his shoulders.

An-Mei: There you are! Do you realize how much you've worried us?

Tao: I wasn't gone that long.

An-Mei: You were gone long enough for me to turn this building upside down looking for you. And long enough for your father to ask for a pass to leave the building.

She looks at Ziyi and Chee-Ying and pulls up her mask.

An-Mei: Not to mention long enough to infect the Yans.

She grabs his hand and pulls him out of his seat.

An-Mei: Now apologize to the Yans.

Tao: We were only—

Chee-Ying: I'm the one who should be apologizing.

An-Mei lets go of Tao's hand and he contritely stands next to her.

Chee-Ying: Tao came by looking for a book that he lent Ziyi at New Year's and saw that we were playing chess. I offered to teach him as long as he wore his mask and we all kept our distance. I should have made sure that he had permission first.

An-Mei: Yes, you should have.

An-Mei turns back to Tao.

An-Mei: Time to go. Baba will be looking for us.

Tao sighs with exasperation.

Tao: Yes, Mama.

Chee-Ying: Tao, could you help Ziyi clean up while I talk with your mother?

Tao looks from Chee-Ying to An-Mei

Chee-Ying: Just for a minute.

An-Mei looks skeptical but reluctantly follows Chee-Ying into the hallway

Scene 5: *The hallway outside of the Yans' apartment. An-Mei stands against the door with her arms folded in front of her as she waits for Chee-Ying to speak.*

Chee-Ying: I know that I shouldn't have let him visit. I'm sorry.

An-Mei: Sorry won't keep the virus away, and with your father so sick you of all people should understand that.

Chee-Ying: He had a mask on and we kept our distance.

An-Mei: I doubt that the neighbors will see it that way. Or the neighborhood committee once someone reports it.

She turns and starts to turn the handle on the door.

Chee-Ying: Did I ever tell you about the time that I was reported to the neighborhood committee?

She pauses and shakes her head

Chee-Ying: I had saved up for months and bought a black market Bob Dylan album.

An-Mei: You don't strike me as a folk fan.

Chee-Ying: The point is that when a neighbor overheard me playing it and reported me Yu-Min spoke to the committee in my defense.

An-Mei: What does this have to do with Tao?

Chee-Ying: It was a close call but Yu-Min saw that I made it through. He did that a lot when we were growing up.

An-Mei: You aren't children anymore—

Chee-Ying: But Tao and Ziyi are. They're confused, their isolated, and their scared; they could both use a friend to help see them through all of this.

An-Mei: I've been trying my best with him...

Chee-Ying: Our best isn't always enough. Ziyi was finally starting to recover after losing her parents in the accident last year, but my parents and I can't take the place of her friends, her school, and her ballet classes.

An-Mei: And Tao can?

Chee-Ying: Probably not, but he was able to get the first smile out of her that I've seen since all of this started.

An-Mei: There hasn't been much to smile about lately, has there?

She glances at the door handle and then lets her hand drop to her side.

An-Mei: Why did you stay?

Chee-Ying: My family's here.

An-Mei: You all could have left; there was still time that last morning.

Chee-Ying: My mother said that we had to stay close to my father's doctors. And both of my parents were worried that a move might be too much for Ziyi. I tried to warn them, but they insisted that it would just be for a few weeks...

He sighs in defeat

Chee-Ying: What about you?

An-Mei: My patients are here.

Chee-Ying: They're lucky to have you.

An-Mei: If they were lucky they wouldn't be in Wuhan.

She shakes her head

An-Mei: I'm sorry it's the lack of sleep talking. I've been pulling double shifts all week and—

Yu-Min runs up the stairs from the floor below wearing a mask

Yu-Min: *Out of breath* An-Mei I've been looking for you.

An-Mei: I'm sorry, but it's alright now—

Yu-Min: *Frantic* I tried getting a pass, but the committee refused. You can show your badge and say that the hospital paged you, and then—

Tao opens the door and enters the hallway

Yu-Min: Tao?!

Tao hangs his head

Tao: I'm sorry, Baba, I—

Yu-Min: You'd better be sorry; do you have any idea what you put your mother and I through?!

Tao contritely nods

Yu-Min: What are you even doing up here?

Chee-Ying: It was my fault.

An-Mei: It was just a misunderstanding.

Yu-Min: What kind of misunderstanding?

An-Mei: The kind best told over a cup of tea downstairs.

Ziyi calls out from the apartment.

Ziyi: Uncle Chee-Ying the dumplings are ready.

Chee-Ying calls back over his shoulder

Chee-Yi: Don't touch those hot pans!

Chee-Ying turns back to the Zhous

An-Mei: It sounds like you have your hands full.

Chee-Ying nods

Chee-Ying: My father had a bad night and my mother was up with him until almost dawn, so I took over the house work for the day.

Yu-Min: Is it his stomach again?

Chee-Ying nods

An-Mei: I'm so sorry, I thought that he was doing better.

Chee-Ying: He still has his good days and bad days.

Chee-Ying glances over his shoulder into the apartment

Chee-Ying: I'm just trying to give them both a chance to rest for a bit.

Yu-Min: Of course, we didn't mean to disturb you all.

Yu-Min turns to An-Mei

Yu-Min: We'd better be making dinner ourselves.

An-Mei: Send our best wishes to your father.

Chee-Ying: I will, good night.

Yu-Min takes Tao by the hand and leads him down the stairs.

Tao: Can we make dumplings too?

Yu-Min: Dumplings?! You should consider yourself lucky that you won't go to bed without dinner. If I pulled a stunt like that at your age...

An-Mei starts to follow Yu-Min and Tao down the stairs and then stops and turns around.

Chee-Ying: Did you forget something?

An-Mei: I was just thinking about that album that you mentioned. You never said why it was banned.

Chee-Ying: The seller never said. Maybe the times were a-changing a little too fast for the censors.

An-Mei: Was it worth being reported on?

Chee-Ying: It was like nothing I'd heard before; it shook the windows and rattled the walls. Or at least that's what my neighbors thought. *Pauses* I'm sorry again about Tao.

An-Mei: Maybe a little rattling and shaking for one afternoon wasn't the worst thing for him.

Tao: *Calling from downstairs* Mama aren't you coming?

She starts to rush down the stairs and then pauses to glance over her shoulder

An-Mei: Good night.

Chee-Ying: Good night

She exits down the stairs

Scene 6: *February 7, 2020 the Yans' apartment. Su-Nan, Shao-Long, Ziyi, and Chee-Ying are seated around the table eating dinner. Chee-Ying is despondently checking his phone without eating. Su-Nan pushes her plate away with a sigh of defeat.*

Su-Nan: I don't understand it. They've been treating you for years; we've always paid our bills on time. We even gave Doctor Huang a gift at New Year's. The least that they could have done is see you. What sort of doctor refuses to see his own patients?!

Shao-Long: *Halfheartedly* You can't blame him, it's hospital policy.

Su-Nan: The hospital's policy is to refuse patients who test positive; they wouldn't even test you.

Shao-Long gently pushes Su-Nan's plate towards her

Shao-long: You should finish eating. You need your strength and—

She pushes the food away

Su-Nan: I'm not the one who was denied treatment!

Chee-Ying: Mama, please.

Su-Nan: We've stayed inside, we've avoided our friends and neighbors, we've followed every order given to us. And for what?

Shao-Long: Not in front of the child.

Su-Nan: To be cast out like stray dogs, that's what.

She pushes her food around on her plate

Su-Nan: Taking whatever scraps they care to throw to us.

Shao-Long puts his hand on Su-Nan's shoulder but she turns away

Shao-Long: You waited all week for approval to go shopping for these particular scraps. Not to mention hours in line at the market to buy them.

He pushes the plate towards her

Shao-Long: You need your strength.

She quickly wipes her eyes to keep Ziyi from seeing.

Shao-Long: *Quietly* And I need you.

She nods and squeezes his hand.

Su-Nan: I need some air.

Su-Nan rises from her seat, walks to the window, and pulls the curtain open, revealing that the windows of the neighboring apartments are lit with candles.

Su-Nan: Chee-Ying, come see this.

Chee-Ying: What is it?

Chee-Ying rises from his seat and follows her to the window. He looks at the candles in confusion and opens the window as mournful cries are heard echoing from outside.

Su-Nan: *In hushed tone* What are they doing?

Chee-Ying stares out of the window in disbelief and then checks his phone.

Chee-Ying: *Quietly* They're mourning for Doctor Li.

Chee-Ying shows Su-Nan his phone

Chee-Ying: Look, they're doing it all over the city. It's the hero's farewell that he deserves.

Su-Nan gestures to Chee-Ying to lower his voice

Su-Nan: *In a hushed tone* That poor man, I still can't believe it.

Ziyi jumps out of her seat and rushes to the window.

Ziyi: What's going on?

Shao-Long gestures to all of them to return to the table

Shao-Long: Dinner's getting cold.

Ziyi: It looks like a second New Year with all of the lights. What's everyone celebrating?

Su-Nan warily looks at Chee-Ying

Su-Nan: Your grandfather's right, we don't want dinner to be cold.

Su-Nan starts to lead Ziyi away from the window

Chee-Ying: They're not celebrating, they're saying thank you.

Mournful cries echo from outside

Chee-Ying: And goodbye.

Su-Nan: It's getting late and you still have homework to finish.

Ziyi: To who?

Chee-Ying: Doctor Li Wenliang.

Ziyi looks out the window and then back at Chee-Ying

Ziyi: Who's he?

Chee-Ying: He was—

Shao-Long: He's not someone whose name will be on your history test tomorrow.

Su-Nan: Which you still need to study for.

Ziyi: But I haven't finished dinner.

Shao-Long: Your grandmother can bring it into your room and you can finish while you work

Su-Nan nods and closes the curtains

Su-Nan: It will be easier to concentrate in there.

Ziyi: But I—

Su-Nan: Come along.

Su-Nan walks to the table and picks up Ziyi's plate and silverware. Ziyi turns back to look at the window.

Su-Nan: Before your dinner's completely ruined.

Ziyi hesitates

Su-Nan: *Firmly* Now.

Ziyi sighs in exasperation

Ziyi: Fine

Ziyi follows Su-Nan offstage. Shao-Long starts to follow after them and then pauses and listens to make sure that they are gone.

Shao-Long: Li Wenliang is one name that I don't want to hear in this apartment ever again.

Chee-Ying: Doctor Li was a hero; his name should be on the lips of every man woman and child in this city.

Chee-Ying pulls the curtains open

Shao-Long: And how many of them will remember his name by this time next year? How many will remember five years from now?

Chee-Ying: This city won't forget.

Shao-Long points at the candles glowing from outside

Shao-Long: They will, ever last one of them.

Chee-Ying: *I* won't.

Shao-Long: You know who else won't? The authorities; they'll remember him and any every fool reckless enough to follow in his footsteps.

Shao-Long stands and walks to the window.

Shao-Long: The most dangerous weapon a man has is his own tongue.

Chee-Ying: And it's the one weapon that they can't take away from us, so why not use it?

Shao-Long: You've always kept too sharp a tongue, and one of these days you'll cut your own throat with it.

Chee-Ying: Better to cut my own throat and open one man's eyes than to stay silent and let this entire country remain blind.

Shao-Long: But you wouldn't just be cutting your own throat, would you?

Chee-Ying glances towards Ziyi's room

Shao-Long: You've always wanted to play hero, but there are no heroes in China, only survivors.

Shao-Long abruptly pulls the curtains shut, walks back to the table and stacks his and Su-Nan's plates.

Shao-Long: And I'll do whatever it takes to ensure that your niece and your mother are among them.

Shao-Long picks up the plates and exits the room. Chee-Ying sits down at the table with a weary sigh, picks up his fork, and then throws it down in exasperation. He walks back to the window and then climbs out of it onto the fire escape.

Scene 7: *The rooftop of the Yans and Zhous' apartment building. An-Mei is standing on the roof leaning against the parapet and gazing out at the city scape. There is a lit candle resting on top of the parapet wall next to her and the door to the staircase leading inside the building is ajar. She turns with a start as Chee-Ying climbs up the fire escape onto the roof and blows out the candle. She stands in front of the candle to block his view of it. She breathes a sigh of relief when she recognizes him*

An-Mei: Chee-Ying? What are you doing up here?

He looks at the candles lighting the windows surrounding them and then points to the candle on the parapet wall behind her

Chee-Ying: The same thing that you're doing by the looks of it.

He retrieves a lighter from his pocket and lights the candle

Chee-Ying: Did you know Doctor Li?

An-Mei: No.

He leans over the parapet with a weary sigh

An-Mei: It's strange isn't it?

Chee-Ying: What?

An-Mei: How we're mourning a man we've never met.

He shrugs

Chee-Ying: When I lived in Hong Kong I used to go to a vigil every June fourth to mourn and honor the students in Tiananmen Square.

An-Mei: And you couldn't have known any of them.

He shakes his head

Chee-Ying: But I've known plenty of people like them.

She cups her hands around the candle to protect it from a breeze.

Chee-Ying: You know, I hadn't even heard what really happened in eighty-nine until I went to Hong Kong; can you imagine that?

An-Mei: I only learned about it from a friend in nursing school who had been abroad.

She wearily sighs

An-Mei: I hope that the next generation won't have to wait so long to hear about Doctor Li.

Chee-Ying: If people like my father have their way they never will.

An-Mei: *Quietly* And people like Yu-Min.

He looks at her with a quizzical expression

An-Mei: He says that the Party is right; any man who would put his own family and patients at risk is a disrupter, not a hero.

Chee-Ying: *Shocked* When did he say that?

An-Mei: Tonight. *Pause* But he was really talking about me.

Chee-Ying: You?

She nods

An-Mei: These last few months...

She puts her head in her hands and takes in a sharp breath.

An-Mei: *To herself* I tried to tell them, I tried, but they wouldn't listen.

Chee-Ying: Who wouldn't listen?

An-Mei: They called me a rumor monger.

Chee-Ying: At the hospital?

She nods again and looks up

An-Mei: And when I told Yu-Min he blamed me. He said that I was picking fights and stirring up trouble.

Chee-Ying: He never should have said that to you.

An-Mei: And then tonight when I told Yu-Min about Doctor Li he said that I would do well to take a lesson from what happened to him.

She turns around and leans back against the parapet with a sigh of defeat

An-Mei: Lately I feel like I don't even know him.

Chee-Ying: It sounds like he's so scared that he doesn't even know himself right now.

An-Mei: *He's* scared? He hasn't had to see the overcrowding, or the tears, or the bodies. He doesn't go to bed every night hearing rattling coughs and moans of agony and cries of grief echoing in *his* head.

He reassuringly puts a hand on her shoulder.

Chee-Ying: I know, but—

She shrugs his hand away

An-Mei: No you don't know! *Pause* There's so much that you haven't seen.

Chee-Ying: No, I haven't, and I need to. This whole city needs to.

An-Mei: They won't.

Chee-Ying: They will; I came here to make sure of it.

An-Mei: I don't understand.

Chee-Ying: When I came here at New Year's it wasn't to see my parents, or at least not just to see them. I'd been hearing stories about the virus for weeks, but I had to see for myself.

He gestures to the candlelit windows

Chee-Ying: It's not enough to light a candle, I need to see the things that you've been seeing. The whole country needs to see.

He takes her hands in his

Chee-Ying: Will you help me to show them?

Yu-Min appears in the open doorway leading to the roof carrying a blanket in his hands, and pauses when he sees An-Mei and Chee-Ying together

An-Mei: I...

They both turn as Yu-Min pushes the door open and steps onto the roof

Yu-Min: I was worried about you being alone up here in the cold.

Yu-Min crosses the roof and puts the blanket around An-Mei's shoulders

Yu-Min: But I guess that you weren't alone after all.

Chee-Ying holds up the candle and lighter

Chee-Ying: I just came up to light this.

Yu-Min looks from the candle to the windows in the distance

Yu-Min: You should be more careful, lighting fires. On a windy night like this you never know how far they'll spread.

An-Mei: It *has* gotten windy; I think that it's time that I went inside.

An-Mei walks to the door and Yu-Min follows her. Chee-Ying waves as they reach the door

Chee-Ying: Goodnight

An-Mei: Goodnight

An-Mei goes back into the building. Yu-Min looks over his shoulder at Chee-Ying and then follows her inside.

SCENE 8: *The Zhou's apartment, mid-February, 2020. Tao is sitting at the kitchen table working on his homework and Yu-Min's voice can be heard from his and An-Mei's bedroom. Tao types something into a calculator, checks it against his work and then scratches his head in confusion.*

Tao: That can't be right.

He works on the calculation again and shakes his head in irritation. He stands, walks to the bedroom door and knocks.

Tao: Ba?

He waits a moment and then walks back to the table with a sigh of exasperation. He sits down at the table, turns the page, and begins working on another problem. He types into his calculator and then throws it down onto the table in frustration. He stands, walks back to the door and knocks again.

Tao: Ba, can you look at this problem?

He waits a moment and then knocks again more loudly.

Tao: Are you still in there?

Yu-Min flings the door open as Tao resumes knocking

Yu-Min: *In an angry whisper* I'm on a call

Tao: I'm sorry, I just need you to—

Yu-Min: You need to work quietly and let me finish this call.

Tao: I'm trying, but it's not coming out right.

Yu-Min: Ask your mother to help you, and if she can't I'll take a look.

Tao: But she's—

Yu-Min: *Firmly* After I finish my call.

Yu-Min enters the bedroom and closes the door behind him.

Tao: Not home.

Tao watches the door a moment and then walks back to the table, sits down with an exasperated sigh and resumes his homework as the lights fade.

Scene 9: *The Zhou's apartment later that night. Tao is sitting at the table playing a game on his tablet and eating a snack. His school books are stacked on top of one another on the table. Yu-Min enters from the bedroom with a yawn.*

Yu-Min: I was starting to think that call would never end.

Yu-Min turns and sees Tao eating.

Yu-Min: Better put that away before your mother sees.

Tao shrugs. Yu-Min sits down at the table and reaches his hand out.

Yu-Min: You know the rule, no spoiling your dinner.

Tao reluctantly hands over the snack and slumps down into his seat

Tao: It's not like she's here to see anyways.

Yu-Min looks around the kitchen

Yu-Min: She's still not home yet?

Tao nods. Yu-Min pulls his cell phone from his pocket and checks his messages

Yu-Min: She would have left a message if she was taking on an extra shift.

Yu-Min calls An-Mei and waits for her to pick up

Yu-Min: She must have gotten held up in traffic.

Yu-Min listens as the call goes to voicemail.

Yu-Min: *Into the phone* Hi, it's me. Just making sure that everything's alright. Call me when you get this. Love you.

He hangs up with a sigh of defeat and then starts typing on his phone.

Yu-Min: I'll send a text in case she can't get a signal.

Yu-Min puts his phone back into his pocket and turns to Tao.

Yu-Min: And while we're waiting let's get dinner started.

Tao: Finally

The lights fade as Yu-Min and Tao start preparing dinner.

The lights turn back on revealing Tao asleep on the couch while Yu-Min paces the kitchen typing into his phone. He looks up as he hears voices in the hallway and then crosses the room and opens the door into the hallway.

Scene 10: *The hallway outside of the Zhous' apartment. An-Mei is wearing her nursing uniform standing at the landing of the staircase leading upstairs to the Yans' apartment. She is whispering to Chee-Ying as he lingers on the staircase. Yu-Min enters from the corner of the hallway and peers around the corner as An-Mei takes Chee-Ying's hand and discreetly puts a flash drive into it.*

Chee-Ying: *In a hushed tone* Be careful.

Yu-Min storms down the hallway towards them.

Yu-Min: What exactly should she be careful of?

An-Mei jumps back and Chee-Ying puts the flash drive into his pocket.

Chee-Ying: *Awkwardly* The virus; what else?

An-Mei: Chee-Ying was asking how things are going at the hospital.

Yu-Min: *Sarcastically* That explains all of the whispering then.

An-Mei and Chee-Ying exchange uneasy looks.

Chee-Ying: You know how it is these days; everyone's so on edge and you never know when the neighbors are listening.

Yu-Min: Or when husbands are listening.

Chee-Ying: You don't understand.

Yu-Min: Really? Because after seeing you holding hands just now I think I understand plenty.

An-Mei: We weren't holding hands, we—

Yu-Min: Then tell me, what were you doing?

Chee-Ying: Yu-Min listen to me—

Yu-Min: *Gritting his teeth* I'm not talking to you. *Turning back to An-Mei* Well?

She looks down at the floor. Yu-Min shakes his head in disgust.

Yu-Min: That's what I thought.

Yu-Min turns away from her and starts down the hallway but then pauses and turns around.

Yu-Min: Just tell me one thing; did you ever think of what this would do to Tao? Even once?

An-Mei rushes after Yu-Min and grabs his arm to stop him

An-Mei: Everything that I've been doing these last few weeks has been for Tao.

Yu-Min warily looks from An-Mei to Chee-Ying and back again.

Chee-Ying: She's telling the truth.

An-Mei: I can explain everything.

She nervously looks around at the doors lining the hallway

An-Mei: Just not here.

Chee-Ying starts up the stairs and gestures to them to follow him. An-Mei nods and leads Yu-Min to the stairs.

An-Mei: This way.

Scene 11: *The apartment building's rooftop. An-Mei and Yu-Min follow Chee-Ying out of the door to the building and onto the roof. Chee-Ying glances around to be sure that no one else is around and then hands the flash drive to Yu-Min.*

Chee-Ying: *This is what we were doing.*

Yu-Min holds the flash drive up and examines it. An-Mei questioningly looks to Chee-Ying. Chee-Ying nods to her.

An-Mei: There are things happening at the hospital, at all of our hospitals that this city needs to know about.

Yu-Min: *Warning* You know what they do to anyone spreading rumors....

Chee-Ying: The only rumors are the ones that the state's been spreading.

An-Mei: We don't have enough beds, protective equipment or tests to go around. The only treatments that we're offering are to isolate at home and hope for the best or take one of our beds and wait to die.

Yu-Min: That kind of talk is dangerous.

An-Mei: No, *lies* are dangerous. And the state's lies are killing people faster than any sick bat ever could.

Chee-Ying: If you don't believe us take a look for yourself; it's all there.

Yu-Min stares at the flash drive in horror

Yu-Min: This is treason against the party.

Chee-Ying: The party's been betraying us since nineteen forty-nine.

Yu-Min turns to An-Mei and holds the flash drive up in front of her

Yu-Min: *Mortified* Is this what you said you were doing for Tao, conducting a counter revolution?

An-Mei: I'm telling the truth, just like we always taught him to do. People are dying and people are disappearing right in front of our eyes and—

Yu-Min: And do you want the three of us to join them?!

Chee-Ying anxiously looks around at the windows of the nearby apartments to see if anyone is listening

Yu-Min: Because that is exactly what will happen if you do this.

Yu-Min throws down the flash drive in disgust

Yu-Min: You want to help people so badly; start with your own family. Start with Tao.

An-Mei: I'm doing this for him

Chee-Ying: And for Ziyi and all of the other kids out there, they deserve to grow up in a better China than we did.

Yu-Min: You two want to save China, fine. I'm going to keep my son safe and if that means keeping him safe from his own mother then so be it.

An-Mei: You don't mean that!

Yu-Min: I mean that it's your family or your cause; you pick.

Yu-Min points to Chee-Ying

Yu-Min: And if I see you, anywhere near my family or hear that you've said so much as hello to them I'll turn you in to the authorities for subversion.

Yu-Min storms off across the roof, opens the door to the building and then slams it shut behind him. An-Mei races after him.

An-Mei: Yu-Min, wait!

Chee-Ying watches her leave with a pained expression and starts to follow after her but pauses when his foot brushes against the flash drive lying on the ground. He bends down and picks up the flash drive as the lights fade.

SCENE 11: *The Yans' apartment, March, 2020 early morning. Chee-Ying is sitting at the kitchen table recording a video of himself on his laptop.*

Chee-Ying: You can see in the video that the lines outside of the crematoriums grow longer every day. One crematorium employee I spoke with said that there were enough urns on the premises to fill a warehouse. I wasn't able to record inside, but every employee who I spoke with agreed that the death count is much higher than the official state count.

Footsteps echo from the one of the apartment's bedrooms. He pauses to listen and then breathes a sigh of relief when they stop. He waits a moment and then redirects his attention to the laptop.

Chee-Ying: The supply chains continue to worsen with shortages at all of the supermarkets, and now many neighborhoods have forbidden residents from leaving their designated block and in some cases their building. My own neighborhood has erected a barricade this week, leaving residents to rely on the government to provide them food. The state delivers food to the barricade, but its first come first serve and residents have started to fight amongst themselves over even the most basic supplies. There's also no guarantee as to the quality of the food, forcing many to live off of food that's starting to spoil. I...

He shakes his head with a weary sigh.

Chee-Ying: Several weeks ago citizen reporters Chen Quishi and Fang Bin were detained by the police. Before his arrest Fang Bin said, "Everyone must act to spread the truth—"

He looks up as pounding is heard at the door. He snaps the laptop shut.

Tao: *From the hallway* Mr. Yan? Is anyone home?

Chee-Ying: *To himself* Tao?

Tao: Please help us!

Chee-Ying races across the room and opens the door to find a visibly distraught Tao on the other side.

Chee-Ying: What's going—

Tao: They're locking us in! You have to come with me!

Tao grabs Chee-Ying's arm and starts to pull him into the hallway

Chee-Ying: Slow down. Who's locking you in?

Tao: They found out that my mother's sick and now they're locking us in, you have to help us!

Ziyi enters from the bedroom wearing her pajamas

Ziyi: I thought that I heard you up, uncle. Were you having trouble sleeping too?

She sees Tao in the doorway and gasps.

Ziyi: Tao, what are you doing here? I thought that you weren't supposed to visit anymore.

Chee-Ying: He's not visiting.

Ziyi: Then what—

Chee-Ying: I'm going to bring Tao home now. I'll be right back, go back to bed and don't wake your grandparents.

Ziyi: But—

Chee-Ying: *Sternly* To bed.

She pouts and then reluctantly turns and walks to her bedroom

Chee-Ying: And if anyone comes to our door besides me don't answer it.

Ziyi: Who would come to our—

Tao insistently pulls Chee-Ying's hand.

Chee-Ying: *To Ziyi* I'll be right back.

Chee-Ying follows Tao out of the door as Ziyi watches in bewilderment. Ziyi closes the door behind then and starts for her bedroom, but pauses when she sees the laptop on the table. She sits down at the table and opens the laptop.

Scene 12: *The hallway outside of the Zhous' apartment. A group of people is gathered in the hallway watching as several men install a metal bar in front of the Zhous' door. Chee-Ying follows Tao down the stairs and signals to Tao to wait on the staircase as he approaches the crowd.*

Chee-Ying: What's going on here?

Worker 1 pauses from working on the door and turns to Chee-Ying.

Worker 1: The wife tested positive.

Resident 1: More than tested positive; when I first got here you could hear her hacking up a lung on the other side of the door.

Worker 2 shakes his head as he works

Worker 2: And neither one of them had the decency to notify the committee.

Resident 1: Who knows how many people in the building were exposed to her.

Resident 1 spits on the floor in distaste.

Worker 2: Selfishness, that's what it is. Pure and simple selfishness.

Resident 1 nods

Chee-Ying: So you're barricading them in?

Worker 1: *We're* not doing anything. The committee decided to block the doorway to keep them from infecting anyone else.

Chee-Ying: And did the committee also decide to keep them from accessing food and medicine or was that just an added bonus?

Worker 2: I don't think that you understand the seriousness of this virus. Now, if you'll excuse us...

Pounding is heard from the other side of the door.

Yu-Min: *(From inside of the apartment)* Open this door!

An-Mei: *(From inside of the apartment)* Our son is locked outside, please!

The workers continue their work as the sounds of someone kicking the door and trying to force it open are heard from the other side. Tao starts to run down the stairs but Chee-Ying turns around and signals to him to go back upstairs. Tao huddles at the top of the stairs while Chee-Ying pushes through the crowd and pulls Worker 1 away from the door.