

EXIT

by

Eleanor Wong

PART I - THE ARREST

The play opens with the auditorium in darkness. A single spotlight comes on, highlighting Wen.

5

Wen I remember the moment, the exact, black moment. (The spotlight narrows to a single spot on the floor right in front of him - like the dim glow of a TV in the dark).

10

It was (any date), 24 hours to the second after I made my decision.

Three knocks sound on the door.

15

Wife I'll get it, dear.

She walks down her aisle and turns up the one where the knocks came from.

20

The sounds of a TV program come on. In the background, a door opens. There is the muffled sound of voices.

Officer Hallo. Is this the home of Chen Tze Wen ?)This should)be going on

25

Wife Yes, what is it?) as Wen talks

Wen I had the TV on. You know the show. Prime time fare. Cops and robbers.

30

The TV emits sounds of gun shots, car tires screeching.

Wen Innocuously predictable. Twenty minutes of buildup. Twenty minutes of conflict, suspense, danger. Always resolved by 5 minutes to the half hour just in time for the advertisements to sweep in on a tide of well-being. That night when they same for me.

35

Clock strikes the hour.

40

Wen Yes, just at the point where the hero is in a jam. There's no help in sight and resolutions were not expected for a while yet.

45

There's a commotion as the officer barges in, in front of wife, stopping at the edge of the central stage.

Officer Are you Chen Tze Wen?

50

Wen Yes.

Wife Who is it, dear?

Wen I don't know.

Officer Officer Tay Khim In (as in "take him in"). Foreign
Affairs Department.

5 Wen I beg your pardon?

Officer F.A.B.

10 Wen Sorry, but I'm not familiar with...

Officer We're new. Dealing with exit problems.

Wen Oh.

15 Officer If you'll accompany me to the station, I have a few
questions....

Wen Station?

20 Officer motions, Wen starts to follow.

TV cop (in a sudden loud burst of sound) Up against the wall,
m_____f____er!

25 Officer Who's that?

TV crook Aren't you going to read me my rights? Look! You got
no call bargain' in here like this. Where's your f-
30 _____ warrant pig? I got rights man.

Officer motions again impatiently.

Wen Could you at least tell me what this is all about?

35 Officer If you're innocent, why worry, isn't it?

Wen (To the audience) Ah, but you see. I knew that I was
guilty. In my mind, before they told me the crimes of
40 which I was accused, I already stood convicted.

Officer (alertly) What's that? You have a confession to make,
maybe?

45 TV crook What do you think I am? A fool? You got nothing on
me.

Wen Except my sweat.

50 The others start walking around him in a circle, dropping their
characters, sniffing at him.

A Him. Yes. Smells of fear.

B I beg to differ. Fear is much stronger.

5 C Pungent, wouldn't you say?

B Nervousness actually.

D Not disorientation, leh?

10 C That too.

D Apprehension?

15 C Yes.

D Insecurity?

C Yes.

20 D Guilt?

A Fear. Definitely fear. Ammonia and salt, and
(sniffing) garlic. I know fear when I smell it.

25 B You know the best fear I ever made?

D Ah. What?

30 B It was a young boy. 13 maybe 14. Hefting a knife.
I went up to him. Had my gun out. Instead of running,
he came at me. I opened fire.

D You killed him, ah?

35 B Nothing so simple. (Pause. He demonstrates) "You're
under arrest". I had to get right on top of him. To
put the handcuffs on. He reeked of mingled blood and
excrement. Guilty as hell and knowing it. That is the

40 best fear.

A Wrong! The best fear is guiltless, the best terror
that of innocents.

45 C But if you're innocent why should you worry isn't it?

A You worry because you are innocent! (Pause for this to
sink in) Tell me, (addressed to C and D) have you
confronted your potential for guilt?

50 D No such thing, what.

A Then, what if there is the knock on the door?

B (Joining in, menacing A and C) Why, your heart like a drum, taut and thudding against body's cage, invents your sin, manufactures your wrongdoing; secretes the odor of uncertainty, doubt and fear!

5

C But since I'm innocent, I know there is nothing I'm guilty of,

10

A You may not know which one evil you've committed merits perdition. So all your potential crimes are of a level.

15

B And of those, you have thousands, do you not?

A Thus is the quality of innocent fear double-fold – once damned in the fear of punishment, which the guilty share; but before that, cut down by cruel anticipation – awaiting discovery of his wrong.

20

At the end of this segment, A and B have backed C and D into a cowering position as Wen looks on bewildered. Then, the mood breaks, the 4 guys laugh. C and D get up.

25

D You enjoy it? Working so close to fear?

B Practice helps. It's an acquired taste.

30

C And his fear? (pointing to Wen)

Wen It's not fear. Just nervousness.

C Perhaps, but what of it? Is it guilty or innocent?

35

Wen Innocent. Can't you smell how strong it is?

B We'll see.

40

C Don't you know (to B)?

D No lah. You can't tell from the fear one. Guilty or innocent, still stinks.

45

C (To A) How will we know then, if even he (referring to B) doesn't now?

D (To B) And have you been known to mistake one for the other?

50

B We're hardly infallible. But that is the purpose of the process.

Wen What process?

B How can I best describe it, this process we engage in?

D You mean engage isn't it?

5

B No.

10 There is silence as D thinks. All this while, they have been walking around Wen, inspecting him. Sometimes fast, sometimes slowing down, poking and prodding – which annoys Wen but which he can't do anything to prevent. Now, they stop and stand in a circle around Wen.

15 C Isn't this an investigation?

A That's how some would think of it.

D A trial?

20 A Quite perceptive.

C A study? A probe?

25 B Close.

D Like an test, is it?

B Closer.

30 Wen You've perfected a test for the truth?

The others laugh.

35 B Allow us to demonstrate.

PART II - THE INTERROGATION

40 The 4 players slowly line themselves up one aisle, on alternate sides of an imaginary rope, as in a game of tug-of-war. B directs them. They hunker down and get ready to pull. Wen stands up the opposite aisle uncertain of what to do.

45 B Pull against us. Surely you know this game.

Wen stands.

B Pick it up. We're ready.

50 Wen Why are we doing this?

B (as if explaining to a tiresome child) When the

referree flags the start of the contest, we pull against each other. The object is to haul the other side across this line (he indicates).

5 Wen Who is the referee?
D Who do you think? (indicating B) Hurry up and play.
B (Shushing D up) Quiet. Concentrate!
10 Wen What chance have I got? Who is on my team?
B Whoever you can afford. Or persuade.
15 The other three motion their unwillingness to join Wen. They indicate impatience, do warming up exercises.
Wen But what are you trying to prove? That you're stronger than me? I'm not going to dispute that. Four of
20 you...
B Oh no. Not at all. You're being charged with much more than being weak. Chen Tze Wen. You are accused of treasonous offences against the state. We are but
25 part of the process. It will determine your guilt.
Wen But I have done nothing wrong.
B That is precisely what we have yet to see.
30 Wen Of what are you accusing me? Of what crime?
B Enough. We will ask the questions.
35 He flags the start of the pull. The 4 pull in time to the following questions.
40 Inquis. You are Chen Tze Wen?
Wen Yes.
Inquis. Age 32?
45 Wen Yes.
Inquis. Married?
Wen Yes
50 Inquis. One child?

Wen Yes.

Inquis. How old?

Wen (Stumbling) Four

Inquis. Occupation?

10 Wen (Breathincr hard
Department...

All 4 (Interrupting) WHAT?!

15 Louder.

Wen Manager of Scrip Department at...

Inquis. How long have you been at this company?

20 Wen Three years.

Inquis. It's your first job?

25 Wen Yes.

Inquis. Says here in your CV. Four years' experience.

Wen Alright. Four then.

30 Inquis. Which is it? Three or four?

Wen /'m not sure.

35 Inquis. Three or four.

Wen I don't know. Four, I guess.

Inquis. We have your employer's statement. It says you've been
40 with them three years.

Wen I told you I wasn't sure.

Inquis. You put lies in your CV?

45 Wen It was coming up to four years.

Inquis. You stretch the truth, then.

50 Wen No. Not usually. (Realising the implication of what
he's just said) I DON'T.

Inquis. Stretched any truths with us?

Inquis. Told any lies?

Wen I can't remember.

5 They all stop pulling (in mock shock).

Inquis. Oh. You have lied to us?

10 Wen I don't mean to. I lose track...

All 4 Ahhh.

Wen Because I don't know what you are trying to get at.

15 Inquis D (trying to put on airs - just a little, imitating A and B no doubt) Totally irrelevant.

Wen But I can't [give you a proper answer if I don't know what you are trying to get at].

20 Inquis A (interrupting where the brackets begin, and referring to D's comments) Not necessarily.

25 The other three turn to A and they enter into the following discussion. By now, Wen is so tired that it takes only one or two pullers, merely holding the rope to counter him. Wen keeps pulling feebly.

30 Inquis B Surely anything short of total candor is falsehood.

Inquis D That's why.

35 [I have an idea for the next sequence that may or may not work. Can all the chairs be moved individually? If so, maybe you could actually get several members of the audience to move their chairs such as to form an actual maze, ie not just a row of chairs. Then you could get D or one of the other characters, put him/her in the center of the maze and get him/her to negotiate it. The dialogue would need to be changed slightly but this should not be
40 difficult].

Inquis A But are all lies born? Surely some grow. Slowly out
45 of thickets. To avoid the thorns. (referring to a member in the audience). Sir. Yes you. Please stand up. Imagine yourself, if you will, in a maze. The gentlemen and gentleladies around you thorned bushes. If I asked you. Simply. What is the best way out of the maze? Would you not indicate this (flourish). A path that negotiated your neighbours gingerly, avoiding
50 their sharpest points? Well?

If the person picked answers skip the next line and go straight

to A's next line.

D Or else how?

5 A Yet that is not the fastest way.

Slight silence of puzzlement

10 A You do know what they say about the straight line
between two points.

C Of course. If you want to get scratched, you can crash
through... (indicates a path straight from audience to
center stage)

15 D Who wants to do that? The other way is good enough,
isn't it?

20 A Exactly. But what if there's an emergency? Suppose
there is a fire, and you must get out.

D Then I don't care about the thorns already.

25 A So it's not true that this (indicates the path avoiding
the chairs) is the best way out of the maze?

D But you never said why you were asking.

30 A So it is with some lies.

Pause. Realization dawns on C and D

B Then our task is to light a match in the brush.

35 A Oh yes.

C What for?

40 B Call it an incentive to candor.

They resume pulling with even greater vigor.

Inquis. Salary?

45 Wen \$45,000

Inquis. Basic and bonus.

Wen Yes

50 Inquis. Corporate Card.

Wen Yes

Inquis. Club membership.

Wen Yes,... no. Why do you need to know this?

Inquis. Do you consider yourself ambitious?

10 Wen No, not really.

Inquis. Think you're not making enough?

Wen I'm comfortable.

15 Inquis. (Very deliberately) Then how do you explain it? The leaving.

Wen What?

20 Inquis. Never spared a thought for the less fortunate? Never done any community service I suppose?

Wen I don't see...

25 Inquis. (interrupting) Always dissatisfied?

Inquis. Not enough opportunities here, perhaps? Not enough scope for you, maybe?

30 Wen I never said that.

Wen, totally exhausted, lets go the rope. The four fall in a heap, tangled limbs and all. This sight is so surprising that Wen cannot stop himself. He starts to laugh hysterically.

35 At this, one Inquis (A?) gets up, livid with anger. The other three are still trying to untangle themselves from each other. There is dead silence except for Wen's giggles.

40 Inquis You liked that? Found it funny?

Wen (laughing uncontrollably) I'm sorry.

45 Another Inquis (C?) gets up and goes to Wen. It must be obvious to the audience that the inquisitors are now about to deploy some sell-rehearsed manouvre.

Inquis You see. It doesn't work if you don't pull (indicating the others on the floor).

50 Wen (trying to stop laughing) tired... I

C picks up the rope on Wen's side. During the next segment, A B and D are on one side pulling, C on Wen's side also pulling, creating a rythmn that lulls Wen. In fact, as the sequence developes, the Inquis (ie C) can move right up to Wen on the floor and cradle him, like a mother and child.

5 C (directing his remarks to A) Can't you see he's exhausted?

10 A Pick it up...

Wen I can't I just [can't]...

A Pick it up.

15 Wen Please, can't we stop?

A We can't stop till the process is over.

20 Wen Just for a while?

A You can rest when we're done.

25 C (To Wen) This can stop, you know. It need not continue.

A And we can't complete the process if he doesn't pull.

Wen See? He won't stop.

30 C Oh, you can't expect him to. It's our function to continue pulling regardless of whether you can.

Wen That's not fair.

35 C Have you been entirely fair with us?

Wen What?

40 A Enough of this nonsense.

C (Shhing A and addressing Wen chidingly) The law requires your truthful answer to all our questions.

45 Wen I've tried to...

A An 85% truth quotient is pathetic.

Wen ...tell everything....

50 A We have it on record.

C By right, we can't let you get away with that.

Wen But I....

5 C Shh. We understand. You're tired.

Everyone starts humming under their breath, creating a giant murmur. C moves up to Wen and cradles him.

10 A Stop wasting time.

C Why hold back? I'm sure you didn't do it maliciously.

Wen Do what?

15 There's a reaction of unhappiness at this response.

A He's playing with us.

20 C You see? That's exactly the kind of talk that complicates life. Pretending not to know why you are here. We told you. Many times. (Pause) It has to do with your decision.

25 The others chime in now.

D Remember? Your decision to leave?

B Pack up and go. Just like that.

30 A Look at him. Not even trying to co-operate.

C Shh. Give him a chance. (To Wen) Not all of us think you're being unhelpful.

35 D But you must return us something positive.

C Understand our position. Our boss expects results.

40 B We've already spent far too long on him.

C Think. I'm sure you were under pressure when you decided. Money problems? Thinking of children's schooling maybe?

45 Wen Not really...

D It could be bad influence, really. You watch Western programs, right?

50 Wen Some.

D Same for your books right?

Wen What do you mean?

5 D Anyway, you gave it a lot of thought, right? before making the decision?

Wen Yes.

10 C Ah you see. That's a good point.

D You can bring it up in mitigation.

Wen And then I can go?

15 C Well. Depends on the sentence.

Wen Sentence? I didn't even know it was against the law.

20 B Laws change.

A To suit the dictates of the time.

Wen I didn't know it was wrong.

25 A That's no excuse.

C (Thoughtfully) But they might reduce the term.

30 Wen I am so tired. (Slowly giving up)

B Then explain why.

C gets up and joins the other three who walk around Wen wrapping the rope around him.

35 Wen Just want to sleep.

C Make a clean breast of it.

40 D Yah, tell us. Successful person like yourself. Why would you want to throw it all away?

Wen You must understand. It's the most difficult thing I have ever done.

45 The other day I met an old school mate. Had not seen him for years. Just bumped into him on the street. For a while, I couldn't place him. The face was so familiar but I couldn't remember the name. Then it

50 came to me, together with images of short wooden desks carved into deformity by our penknives. We spoke for half an hour on the curb at the traffic lights. He

hadn't even been a friend back then. Not really. Yet, I shall have with him a history that I can never share with anyone where I go; no history, no color of skin, eye, hair...

5

A (Pouncing) Yet you decided to go.

Wen I know. Even the streets will sound different beneath my feet.

10

A Yet you decided to go.

Wen I suppose so...

15

All AHHH.

Wen But I want to explain....

C See how much easier it can be.

20

D A bit more, then you can sleep already.

A (Pouncing even more... this is the first time Wen has admitted that he made a decision) You heard him.

25

Sounds like premeditation to me. No one forced you?

Wen No, but...

A (To the others) Take that down. (He signals to the others. They draw the rope tight around Wen. Wen sees that he is trapped but has given up struggling). I believe we have this all wrapped up.

30

The stage goes dark.

35

PART III - THE TRIAL

40 As the lights come back on, the court clerk enters carrying a chair which he deposits in the the centre of the stage. He also has a rope around his neck, hung like a noose. He walks across the central area. At the edge of the audience, he secures the noose of the rope to a chair and proceeds to fence the "court area" in. When he has come full circle, he indicates to the trial participants (except Wen) to enter, then steps into the court and secures the other end of the noose.

45

The prosecutor and defense counsel (B and C?) tango to center stage together.

50

Defense 15 years for rape. Congratulations.

Pros Thankyou. The drug trafficker?

Defense Off on a technicality.

5 Pros Masterful.

They twirl.

Pros The Chen case, I suppose.

10 Defense Yes. You too?

Pros Aha (as in affirmation).

15 At that, they abruptly break apart and take up opposing positions.

Clerk Bangun (all rise). The supreme court is now in session, the honourable Justice See Yew Lai (as in See you lie) presiding. Public Prosecutor against Chen Tze Wen.

20

Pros May the charge be read to the accused.

25 Wen is outside the fence trying to get in, but there's no way. During this scene, while the witnesses are giving testimony, the flow of question and answer should be as uninterrupted as possible by the Wen dialogue that I write. That is, there should be some overlap as Wen responds to what is going on but everyone else ignores him.

30

Clerk (Addresses the empty chair) You, Chen Tze Wen, NRIC NO.0878271D ...

35 Wen You're going to start without me?

Clerk Quiet in the court.

Pros Just a minor disturbance outside.

40 Wen What's going on?

Clerk (Ignoring Wen and addressing the empty chair again - his dance could be a sort of military tattoo) You, Chen Tze Wen, NRIC No.0878271D are charged that you on or about the _ day of _ 1990 (ie one day before the date chosen at the beginning), in Singapore, committed the offense of treasonable disloyalty in that you wilfully harbored, singly or in consultation with another or others unknown, a prohibited intent, to wit the intention to quit the country without lawful excuse, and have thereby committed an offense punishable under

45

50

the Deportation Act of 1990.

Defense He pleads not guilty.

5 Pros (trutting with a great deal of flair... Susan Dey LA
Law style. Everyone in the court has seen this act
before and are not that impressed, rolling their eyes.)
Please the court. (Dramatic pause) The Prosecutions
10 case is simplicity itself. (another, yes yet another
dramatic pause, florid flourish at the empty chair)
The accused, ladies and gentlemen, was given every
opportunity; afforded every advantage. Yet, he decided
(long, long pause for effect) to leave. (Horrorified
15 gasp from audience) Yes. Mutiny. Desertion.
Betrayal. (Pause) And we have the evidence to prove
it.

Spotlight on airline rep.

20 Pros Prosecution Exhibit 1 please.

Stewardess holds up a blown up air ticket (or ticket is flashed
on screen). Concerted gasp.

25 Pros What (looking around satisfiedly) is Exhibit 1?

Air An airline ticket.

30 Pros To whom is it issued?

Air Chen Tze Wen.

Pros You mean the accused?

35 Air Beg your pardon?

Pros Chen Tze Wen, the accused (pointing at the chair).

40 Air Yes, Sir.

Pros When was it purchased?

Air _____ (The date of the charge).

45 PRos And what sort of ticket is it?

Air Sorry?

50 Pros What sort of ticket is it? Return?

Air Oh no. One way ticket, sir.

Pros Thankyou.

Pros puases as if the conclusion is self evident.

Clerk and Wen Is that all?

Pros Hardly. My second and only other exhibit (Pause) Is the accused himself.

10 Another gasp.

Pros Through the testimony of witnesses, we will paint a picture of the accused and that picture will prove our case. A man with on reason whatever to leave, yet who
15 decided to do so what, we submit, was his selfish and unreasonable whim; a man ungrateful of the the effort and expense devoted to him by the country of his birth , unwilling to shoulder his responsibilities as a loyal citizen. A traitor, ladies and gentlemen.

20 Wen It's not true.

Pros (to Defense) Did that come off alright?

25 Defense Yes, yes. Quite dramatic.

Wen Who would say these things about me?

Clerk Call your witnesses.

30 Spotlight on Mum.

Mum From the time he was a child, I tell you.

35 Wen Mum?

Mum He didn't like to play with other children. Such a serious boy.

40 Friend (the eager type) I can confirm that, I can. Not a group person. Good chap. Friendly. But had his own ideas.

Pros Uh, thankyou. I'll call you when it's your turn.

45 Friend Oh. Just wanted to help.

Pros Yes.... thankyou.

50 Pros (to Mum) Bookish?

Mum Not really. But we had a garden where he spent all his

time. He liked solitude.

Wen I was happy there.

Mum We used to worry about him, his dad and I.

Wen Why?

10 Pros Why? Did you feel his behavior was unusual?

Mum He would talk out loud sometimes. As if there was someone else there.

Wen There was.

15 Pros Someone else?

Mum We just wished he had more friends, lah.

20 Friend Oh he did. Like me (proudly). I was his friend.

Wen I thought so too.

Friend Just liked to have his own space, you know.

25 Pros PLEASE.

Friend Oh yes. (shuts up)

30 Pros You were saying, mam?

Mum Not healthy, you know, to spend so much time alone.

Wen But I loved those times. Freshly mown grass, clean
35 from the rain, prickling at the back of my neck while I lay looking at the sky.

Mum Couldn't tell what he was thinking, you see.

40 Friend That's what I mean. Had to have his privacy.

Pros For the last time.

Friend Sorry.

45 Pros Or I'm not going to call you at all.

Friend Oh no. Don't be a spoil sport.

50 Pros (Wearily to Mum) So you believe that might have been the start of it?

,\

Wen When I was 12 I followed the monsoon drain behind our house, to the forest reserve. If I needed to think, that's what would do. Sneak out, crash through the dead brown leaves and sit at the water's edge.

5 Mum Hah? What is that?

 Pros Do you think that might have been when he started to lose touch with reality?

10 Wen No.

 Mum (considering) Maybe.

15 Wen That was when I was most clear headed. Clear sighted. It broke my heart when we moved.

 Friend I remember that.

20 Pros Okay. That's it.

 Spot light goes off on friend.

 Friend (from the dark) But don't you want to know about... (there is abrupt silence as if someone clamped his mouth shut).

25 Pros Did this behaviour continue into adulthood?

30 Mum We hoped that he had settled down. Good job, promotions, marriage.

 Wen I could never find that peace, not till I saw it. [The mountain].

35 Pros Thankyou.

 Wen There was no where to go.

40 Pros By the way, what was his favorite color? Try the next sequence and see if the abrupt change in mood works. That is, just when everyone is settling into this rather sombre mood, I want to jolt them awake with the bizarre again. But it

45 may be too sudden. In which case, we can scrap the Head-Doc scene altogether. Let me know.

 Mum Blue. (She walks off)

50 All BLUE!!!

 Pros (Indicating that he has another witness) And what,

Professor Anna Lis (as in Analyst) are the implications of this?

5 Anna It is my considered opinion that people whose favorite color is blue are dangerously disposed to individualism.

Wen That's total bullshit.

10 Anna My conclusion is supported by research showing that subject used the word "I" or some variant thereof 8,329 times in his conversations over the past 2 weeks.

Wen I can't believe this.

15 Anna 8,330.

Boss dances in.

20 Pros Sir, you are the accused's employer? (Boss nods. Pros indicates that he proceeds).

Boss Yes.

25 Pros So. Did you too think the accused was dangerously individualistic? Selfish even?

Boss No, I wouldn't quite say that.

30 Pros Oh. But he was lazy?

Wen I worked my butt off for you.

Boss No, I thought he had potential.

35 Pros But couldn't make the grade?

Boss Wouldn't say that either.

40 Pros Lacked commitment?

Wen It was a job, damnit, not the search for the Holy Grail.

45 Wife (to Boss) How can you say that? Wen used to work late sometimes.

Wen What more did you want? I did my job. I put in the hours.

50 Pros Mrs. Chen!

Defense Objection. Uncorroborated testimony of an accomplice.

Wen But she's speaking up in my defense, you fool.

Wife Actually I didn't want to go. We just moved into a new flat. Then I got Bobbie enrolled in pre-school. But Wen insisited that we had to leave.

10 Defense Objection!

 Wen Let her speak.

 Pros Oh, it's alright. We don't need her anyway. Sorry about that, your Honor. Can't always control these non-legal types you know. They want to tell you everything. Now where were we?

15 Pros Soft?

 20 Boss Oh, that's too extreme.

 Pros Then how would you describe him?

 Boss Don't mistake me but, he always seemed a little restless.

25 Pros (settling for whatever crumb he can get) Ah restless!

 Boss Don't mistake me. It's usually the case, you know. From my experience. After a few years, when the ... er... learning curve, you know, levels out. Three years, that's my estimate. The younger ones get restless.

30 Wen I ran a glorified postal service for stocks and bonds, for God's sake. Learning curve? We never got off the ground!

 35 Pros One final question. Speaking with the benefit of your experience, is there any lack of opportunity for advancement for a young person with initiative and drive.

 40 Boss Oh really. No doubt at all in my mind. Of course not.

 45 Pros Thankyou.

 Wen (Shouting at Defense counsel) Aren't you going to ask him any questions? Aren't you going to ask him what the point is?

50 Defense No questions for this witness.

Wen Six days a week, I wake up, brush my teeth, shave,
 match ties to shirt and pants. I rush to make it in
 before the traffic snarls, my hair still damp from the
 shower. All day, I sit in an office with windows
 looking out over the garbage collection ramp. I leave
 work late, have dinner, watch TV. Sleep.

Pros That's my last witness.

10 Wen What's the point?

 Clerk (To Pros) Closing address?

15 Wen That's enough?

 Pros I submit that the witnesses' testimony is crystal
 clear. The accused had every reason to stay.

20 Pros gathers the witnesses into a conga chain. They take turns
 to sing in Carribean style the following lines. Each line is
 echoed by the rest of the chain after each soloist.

 Song What de problem with livin' her?
 Plenty comfort and plenty cheer.
25 Think about it, it very clear.
 Only traitors be leavin' here!

 They chant at the empty chair "Traitor, Traitor...", volume
 rising to crescendo.

30 Wan (shouting vainly at them from outside the circle, maybe
 running around trying to convince the audience members)
 No. You think I don't appreciate all that I possessed
 here? You think I didn't struggle against this easy
35 confort?

 Clerk (To conga frenzy) ORDER! ORDER!! ORDER!!!

40 Wen (As the conga chain slowly disperses) I'm not talking
 about THINGS. I'm talking about being HOME Not a
 guest, but a member of the family, with my special
 chair at the dining table, knowing my duties, sure of
 my place. I wold have stayed for that.. BEcasue of the
 belonging. Not the job, not the money. Don't you see?

45 Everyone has now settled down.

 Pros (Quite flustered from the exertion) The prosecution
 rests.

50 Defense Your Honor, the defense doesn't dispute the facts
 adduced by the prosecution.

Wen What?

Defence We accept that the accused voluntarily decided to go.

Wen Are you trying to get me convicted?

Defense But, Sir, as you well know, nothing is an offense which is done in the exercise of private defence. Necessity, in other words, completely excuses. The defense shall call expert witnesses to testify that the prospect of life here was so intolerable, the accused had no choice, indeed was compelled, to leave.

Clerk Not calling him ah? (indicating the chair)

Defense No.

Wen Why not?

Clerk Carry on.

Wen WHY NOT?

He runs around trying to get in. Finally, in desperation, Wen jumps over the rope and runs to the center of the stage. This sequence onwards, the timing must be very fast. Create the sense of confusion and escalating chaos.

Defence What are you doing here? Let me handle this.

Clerk Who is this?

Defense No one important

Wen I'm the accused.

Clerk Then who's this (indicating the chair)?

Defence This is most irregular. You must trust your lawyers to map out the best strategy for your defence. Truly now. You pay us for that.

Wen But you're screwing it up. Who are these experts?

Defense Precisely what I'm coming, to. Mr. Yap Pi Man (as in Yuppieman)

Yap The problem is. There is ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to do here. Quality of life. Totally missing. Art? Culture? Films? Books? What a joke. I have to subscribe to the New York Times Book Review to find out

what the latest in good reading is. It's disgraceful.

Pros Ooh. Let me at him.

Wen What has any of this got to do with me?

Clerk Order. Order.

10 Yap Material comfort isn't everything, you know. After a certain stage, you want something more. Graciousness. Class. Why don't people stand aside to let you off the trains in this country?

15 Wen You want to know why? I'll tell you.

Yap Yes. Why? It's so rude. They crowd the entrance. [You can't get out without shoving their shopping bags aside].

20 Wen (interrupting) I didn't mean that. I meant. I'll tell you why I am leaving.

Yap See? He doesn't know.

25 Defense Please. Sit down.

As Wen looks around.

30 Clerk (indicating the empty chair) Sorry, that's taken.

Wen What?

Clerk You can't sit there. It's taken.

35 Wen I don't want to sit.

Defense Sit!

40 Wen doesn't sit. Instead he starts pacing.

Clerk Cross-examination?

45 Pros Mr. Yap. Isn't it true that you frequent Hannigan's (consulting his notes) an "American style drinking hole boasting ambience, good music, flowing drinks and the chance to meet other young, upwardly mobile professionals"?

50 writer's note. Can you get me some ad blurbs so maybe a tourist guide description of Holland Village, Marina Village and other such yuppified hangouts? Better still, can you slot in where appropriate and

then consult with me. You get the idea, right? This is so that I don't have to mention the places by name - we want to delete direct references to

5 Yap Yes.
Wen No

10 Pros Also, hang around the Village? A "quaint assortment of pubs, small shops, cafes, fast food joints and karaoke lounges offering everything from Mexican food to Asian antiques"?

15 ~~Yap~~ Yes.
Wen No.
Pros Member of the sailing club?

20 Yap Yes.
Wen No.
Pros Gym?

25 Yap Of course.
Wen No.

30 Pros Attend the film festival. Drama Festival, Arts Festival every year.
Yap Yes, except that the Arts Festival isn't every year. You know that.

35 Pros Hardly a barren lifestyle, wouldn't you say?
Yap splutters a little.

40 Yap Perhaps not. But far from truly being gracious.
Pors (Proudly to everyone, as if saying You see?) Not enough, I submit, your Honor, to amount to a legal excuse for desertion!!!

45 Wen I don't care!
Defense You're distracting me.

50 Wen Please, let me tell them about the mountain.
Abrupt silence. Pause.

All Mountain?

Defence You see? You're confusing them. Err... I'd like to call my next witness. Ms. Artie Fah (as in Arty-fart).

Artie Where, I want to know, can a person go for intellectual stimulation in this blasted place? Government censorship keeps out the best works and this local stuff. I mean. You're kidding me, right?

10 Pros Your honor, it's clear that Ms. Artie is going to repeat the same evidence as the previous witness. The defense, your Honour, must prove legal excuse. Not this spineless griping. Must we waste further time?

15 Artie Much as I hate to be associated, in even the slightest way, with Mr. Yap, on occasion I must agree with him. This is a cultural desert. Where is the vibrance? The push and shove of ideas? The excitement of creation?

20 The refinement of history?

Wen That's enough! If you want to see pictures of nude people having sex hung on our museum walls, more power to you. I don't.

25 Defense You don't seem to understand. I am trying to build a case here. And I haven't even gotten to the political repression.

30 Pros WHAT?

Wen Maybe there is a case to be built. Maybe there are people who leave because of a case. Everything that's been said sounds some perverted echo in me so maybe deep

35 down, I'm leaving because of a case.

Defense Exactly. I wish to call Ms. Press. Ms. Foreign Press.

40 Pros Objection! Lack of standing!

Wen Wait. Let me finish.

Pros Ms. Foreign Press has no standing to comment on this case. Interference in domestic politics.

45 Press This is a city of fear and repression. Public opinion is stifled in the name of order, silenced by the heavy autocratic hand of the powers that be.

50 Pros Slander. Defamation.

Press There is no freedom of information or press...

Pros Gazette her!

Press ...without which a free society is impossible.

Pros Stop her. Immediately.

Wen What are you afraid of? If there's a case to be built we should hear all sides of it.

10 Defense That's the spirit. Carry on, Ms. Press.

Wen No!

Defense No?

15 Wen No. If there's a case to be built. We **should hear** every side there is to it. Loudly without **it fear..I'm the one** There's a place for that. But now. Here being tried not your case.

20 Defense You laymen! Forever getting it all mixed up (turning to Pros for assistance) Would you? Please?

Pros The only thing being tried is your case. It's what the judge gets to see. (Pause) Oh dear. You expected him to judge you? How endearingly innocent.

25 Defense We'd have won with him (indicating the chair) but no, you had to barge in.

30 Pros Oh, I wouldn't overstate my position if I were you. We have an airtight case.

Defense Nonsense. A trifle over the top, even for you.

35 Pros (anxious for approval) You think I shouldn't have gone that extra round in my closing, don't you?

Defense No. That was a nice touch. Not my style, naturally

40 but...

Wen This is a bloody masquerade.

Both Defense and Pros stop in their discussion.

45 Pros What DID YOU SAY?

Wen It's a farce, a charade. It's ludicrous.

50 Pros Contempt of court!

Wen And what is your precious process but contempt of me?

Pros Arrest him.

Clerk He's already under arrest.

5 Pros Do it again!

Press Another example of official oppression.

Pros Arrest her too!

10 Defense Now see what you've done?

If we go with the idea where Pros and Defense are played by extra people we can do this. Otherwise, skip the part between the square brackets.... or skip it anyway... I'll re-think it.

15 [Mum Aiyoh. Why so stubborn, Wen?

Boss What a waste of potential.

20 Anna Bordering on delusionary megalomaia.

Yap Just can't understand why they don't stand aside and let us out first.

25 Press (Scuffle, scuffle) Get your hands off me! I demand the right to an attorney.

Defense Here, have my card.

30 Artie Crass. Too crass.]

There is a scuffle as Pros (?) tries to restrain Wen.

35 Wen Let me go!

Wen punches Pros to the ground where he sits in sudden bemusement. This exchange shocks everyone else into silence.

40 Wen Listen. The first time I saw a mountain it seemed that tears grew from my belly, rose up and lodged in my throat.

Defense Not mountain talk again.

45 Wen But you see. Before that, my heights had always been mildly sloping or, if steep, had to be scaled in smooth, silent lifts. Sometimes the lifts spoke. Ground level. Good morning. Going up. (Pros says "I've seen those".... The effect should be of murmuring and remarks at the beginning of the monologue that gradually fall silent as Wen proceeds) But always they

50

were steel and glass and concrete, Always I was caged in.

Now, this mountain spoke. It too called. Ground level. Good morning. Going up. But it was earth and wood and snow. And at the top, when we stepped out, it let us run about its aged white crown. Imagine. It LET US RUN. So I did. Paddling my legs in the soft sinking snow. Waving my arms. To keep my balance you know. Like a mad person.

10

Yah. Really.

Not used to the snow. Never been this cold. I kept falling . . . running, running, falling, running, falling, running, running..

15

And that's when I met him again. After all those years. Under blue sky and blazing white sun. His color was high, his voice excited. He shouted – he dared to shout again – he shouted at the trees in the valley. Happy things, angry things, stupid things. Lay in the snow till his head started to ache from the cold but he could feel his nose peel with sunburn. Weird, right?

20

25

I knew then, I would only find him in wideness and open space.

30

Some months ago, I was riding in the subway. Just gone shopping. The wife wanted to. Weekend crowd was everywhere, pushing at me. Not anyone's fault. NOT ENOUGH SPACE. That's all.

35

I suddenly realised we hadn't seen each other for a long time, and if I didn't watch out, I would forget how to get in touch with him.

40

After that, everytime I was in the train, I would stand at the doors and stare out the glass. Maybe a mountain would speak. But the black tunnel only reflected my face.

45

So that is the reason. Very simple, actually, I am leaving to meet an old friend again.

There is a short silence. Then some of the on-lookers start clapping (we hope that this will set the whole auditorium off)

50

Some Bravo. Bravo.

Defence (Dancing in joy) Excellent. So touching. I'm really

rather miffed at you. Why didn't you tell me you could do this? I would have put you on the stand from the very beginning.

Pros I'don't see what the big fuss is about. Who is this friend? Sounds fishy to me. Is he going to corroborate the testimony?

10 Defense Your honor, you heard my client. I submit the Prosecution has no case.

Pros Not so fast. Since when has a social engagement constituted a defence to treason? In fact, the accused stands convicted by his own evidence.

15 Clerk Oooh. A confession. Always so much more fun with a confession (rubbing his hands in glee).

20 Defense He has a point there.

Wen Damn you all. I'm innocent!

Defense I told you to leave it to the experts.

25 Wen How is my decision evil? Why was it wrong?

Defense That's quite beside the point.

30 Pros I submit the accused's own confession proves the charge of treason. Conclusively.

Wen Tell me. What would have been a legal excuse?

35 Pros Also, your Honor will recall, you witnessed the accused in the act. Contempt of court, and might I add, assaulting an officer of the law in the conduct of her duty.

40 Wen Tell me. What reason would have been good enough?

Clerk Any previous record?

45 Wen Nothing would have been enough, right? That's what you're saying. Admit it. Nothing would have been enough.

Pros (responding to clerk) Nothing known.

50 Wen It's so perfect here, isn't it? It's paradise. No reason would be valid? Every leaving is a treachery?

Clerk Any submission on sentence?

Wen TELL ME !!!

They all stop for a while. Then, they ignore him and carry on.

Clerk Any recommendation on sentence?

Wen We don't all need the same things (tired now,
disheartened). Sometimes they just aren't here.

10

Pros The Prosecution presses for a deterrent sentence.

Wen Do you want to drive us all away?

15

Defence Oh surely. [The accused is a first time offender...]

Wen Find me guilty.

Defense Beg your pardon?

20

Pros Make up your mind.

Wen Find me guilty then. Stop this charade.

25

Clerk (Very alert suddenly) Does your client wish to amend
his plea after all?

Defence I suppose so. Are you sure?

Wen What's the use? I told the truth. It wasn't enough.
Because as far as you and your laws are concerned, as
far as your truth is concerned, nothing I could have
said would have been an excuse. Admit it.

30

Defence Well, actually, the process [isn't really about the
truth].

35

Wen And I am sick and tired of your bloody process.

Pros We're amenable to a plea of guilt I suppose. Really,
he could have said so sooner.

40

Clerk (to Wen) You realise the implication of your plea, do
you not?,,

Wen I really don't care anymore. What can you do? Lock me
up. I'm already caged. Still.

45

Clerk (Notes down) Chen Tze Wen. You plead guilty to the
charge against you?

50

Wen Yes.

Clerk Sentenced to deportation.

Defence (to prosecutor) Lunch after this?

Pros Your treat?

Every starts packing to go The clerk grabs Wen and is about to escort him offstage.

10 Wen Wait! Where are you taking me? How long is the sentence?

Clerk Life.

15 Wen Life! (He's totally stunned. Slumps. It's been too much for him).

All the other characters have left. Only Pros, Def and Clerk are still on stage.

20 Wen You can't do this to me. Not for life! Please.

Clerk You heard the judge.

25 Wen Don't lock me up like this...

Defense There you go again. You're all mixed up. No one's going to lock you up.

30 Wen (Perking up desperately) What?

Pros Didn't you listen?

35 Defense You wanted to leave? You get to leave.

Wen What?

Clerk The sentence is deportation. For life.

40 Wen I get to leave?

Clerk Yes. Yes. Go.

45 Wen I get to leave? (He starts laughing hysterically)

The three start to leave.

Wen Wait.

50 They turn with a "now what?" attitude.

Wen The term is life? What does that mean?

Defense You don't know?

Clerk Exactly what it says. DEPORTATION... FOR... LIFE.

Wen Does that mean I can't return?

Defense Amazing. And I thought his strategy so brilliant.

Pros Strategy?

10 Defense You know. Got to be cruel to be kind... guilty to escape.

Pros That would have been brilliant. You snake.

15 Defense Oh please (modestly) it hadn't occurred to me...

Wen I can't return? Ever?

20 Clerk Of course not. You think we want traitors here?

Wen But I'm not a traitor.

Clerk Well, you're not welcome here anymore.

25 Wen This is my home. You can't keep me out forever.

Pros, Def and Clerk

30 Oh yes we can

Wen Look, call the judge. I made a mistake.

Clerk Sorry.

35 Wen I HAVE TO CHANGE MY PLEA.

Clerk Too late.

40 Wen No... no, no no...

Defense Speaking of which, lunch reservations don't keep....

Pros Isn't that a fact___

45 Defense (as they tango off) I hope you like Indian...

Pros Oh excellent...

50 Clerk sashays out too, leaving Wen onstage. On his knees. House lights go on. Give the audience plenty of time to wonder whether the play is over.

A stage hand comes in, sweeping, picking up props.

Stage Excuse me, sir. You have to go now.

5 Wen breaks down. Sobbing.

CURTAIN