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LIFE CHOICES
Ovidia Yu

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LIFE CHOICES

For Leena

Introduction

ANA (V.O.)

Please make sure that all handphones, pagers and any other beeping devices are switched off. Latecomers please find your seats quickly, or wait for a pause in the action.

It's a difficult choice to make, isn't it? Whether to make a dash for it, or stand waiting, muttering about traffic, about parking difficulties...

Life is so full of choices.

Of course, you may think that whether you are standing or sitting right now makes little difference. But look around. You may be standing next to (& meeting for the first time) your future wife. And your girlfriend, who you dropped off earlier before driving up to Fort Canning, may be sitting next to the man she is going to be spending the rest of her life with...

How can you tell which choices are going to matter long term?

Very often, you can't. Sometimes, you can't even tell you've made a choice until much, much later.

(Red Curtain opens)

I. Schoolday Choices

(Ana in school uniform)

(Here she is full of teenage discontent, all sullen and pouting)

(Soundscape: school sounds alternating with bursts of loud music. Other voices. Her mother shouts, but words are indiscernible)

ANA

(calling out) Ya Ma! I'm going now! All right! Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up.

What's the Big Deal!

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My mother! Makes such a fuss just because I'm late for school a few times.
Just because I skip school a few times.

(calling out) Ya Ma! I know all your friends' children do better in school than me!

Ya Ma! I know the neighbours always telling you how clever their daughters are!

(Stops walking)

ANA

Look at those buses. So crowded with people all going to places they don't like to do things they don't want to do!

(Looks around, walks away from bus stop & sits down)

ANA

I don't even know why I'm going to school.

My mother is always saying how she never got a chance to study...

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I only want what is best for you. You mustn't end up like me!

ANA

Then she looks sad, like going to cry like that, and says I must take this chance to get a good education and a good job... huh!

The first half of my life I must study hard at subjects I can't stand, so that the second half of my life I can work hard at a job that I can't stand!

(pause)

And then end up in a retirement village surrounded by people I can't stand.

(Looks at watch)

It's bad to go to school late. If I go now I'm going to be late. Better don't go.

(She is distracted by someone at street level)

ANA

(To unseen workers) What are you doing?

Yes, I can see you are getting flowers ready for the market, but you are cutting off and throwing away so many. Wasted, right?

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They laughed at me. They told me that the only wasted flowers are flowers they cannot sell.

(To unseen workers) But if you keep those, they'll open up later and then you can sell them, right?

It seemed like a waste to me. All those flower buds being thrown onto wet newspaper and stepped on.

But they just told me I didn't understand. Here in the flower business, a flower has to open by a certain time to a certain size or that's it.

I know how they feel. It's how I feel in school.

(Sits)

I know I can't spend the rest of my life sitting in McDonalds instead of going to school.

(Looks around her) At least here there's air con. Maybe I should work here instead of going to school. At least I would get paid. Going to school doesn't teach anybody anything useful!

Oh!

(Ana is startled by somebody poking her in the side)

ANA

Hey! How dare you! What do you think you are—

(abrupt change in tone) Oh! Ma!

What do you mean what am I doing here—what are you doing here! All right, all right, all right, Shh—no need to make so much noise—

Ma—

(Ana edging round table away from her pursuing mother)

ANA

Ma, I tried to go to school, but then I remembered that today is a school holiday—they are fumigating the school building, so they told us no need to go, and so I just came in here for a while—

Ow! Ow! Don't hit me, Ma! All right! So you walked past the school just now—maybe they finished fumigating early!

Ma! Stop it!

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(Ana grabs invisible mother's invisible umbrella and holds it so that her mother cannot hit her with it any more. She continues edging round the invisible table, away from her mother.)

ANA

Look, Ma. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I lied about going to school. I know you think education is important but look, no matter what you say I still hate going to school!

All right, so I don't have to like it. But you know very well that even if I just go there and sit every day, chances are I am not going to pass. Why can't I start working in McDonalds now—

(pause)

If you think studying is so important, you go and study yourself lor!

(Another roar from mother. Ana moves away faster. We hear umbrella thumping on table top)

ANA

All right! All right! But look, Ma—you can't expect me to do all the things you wanted to do—

What do you mean 'Why not?' Because I am not you, that's why not!

What do you mean, 'Look at Jun'? Why, Ma! Why would you want me to be more like Jun—Jun is so ugly and skinny why would I want to be like her! Ow! Ma! Look—being married to somebody like Jojo isn't my idea of being happy ever after, okay!

No, I'm not going to get married just so I got somebody to pay the bills and give me three square meals a day!

How else am I going to survive?

I'll—I'll get a job! I'll get my own job! That's what I'll do—I'll earn my own living!

No, that doesn't mean I have to spend more time in school. There are lots of things I can do without some stupid certificate!

No, Ma. I don't see why I should listen to you. Look how you ended up—working so hard and married to some useless man who does nothing except eat too much and spend all your money and drink beer in front of the TV—

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(There is the loud snap of a hard slap)
(Ana's head swings sideways. Her hand goes up to hold the side of her face and holds it where she just got slapped)

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I'm your mother! How dare you talk to me like that!

ANA

Ma...

(Ana watches as her mother goes off)

ANA

Ma? I'm sorry...

But it's true. I don't want to end up with the kind of life she is living. And if I go on doing what she tells me to, that's where I'll end up.

(Ana gets up and walks)

ANA

With her kind of husband. Her kind of husband and her idea of a career.

(pause) Maybe even that is better than no husband and no career...

(Ana looks miserable. She takes a step in the direction in which her mother exited. She stops. A new determination comes over her)

ANA

No. No, that may suit some people but not me.

I don't know what kind of life I want yet, but I know that's not it.

If my mother was me, she would stay in school and work towards getting a safe, boring job, right? That's why I am going to get out of school as soon as I can, and get a job doing something exciting, something I can feel passionate about...

(During the following section, Ana straightens her shoulders, primps up her clothes & approaches different seats)

ANA

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Excuse me, I'm looking for a job, something that will give me a chance to develop my interest in PR... Qualifications? Oh... heh-heh... I'll make copies and get back to you...

(to herself) Qualifications! Think you so big deal can ask for 'qualifications'.

(moves on)

ANA

Excuse me, about that job you were advertising, I think I've really got all the qualifi—what? Take a number? Number three hundred and forty-two. You mean three hundred and forty one other people already applied for this job? (she looks disheartened, just for a moment) No! I want this number—go and get your own!

Even if I don't get the job at least I have a new bookmark. Look on the bright side, right?

What? Sorry?

(Someone catches Ana's attention)

(She listens attentively sideways as somebody whispers to her)

ANA

Who is he? That guy over there?

(Ana looks and shrugs)

ANA

You mean talking so loudly that one... I guess he must be some big shot...

Oh... Manager of the company... is he?

Why are you—What are you doing?

(With a small shrug, Ana hitches her skirt upwards an inch or so in imitation of unseen co-applicants)

ANA

If this is what we're supposed to do...

(Then she sashays across to the point she was looking at and back again. Music starts)

(Ana sings **SONG**)

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(After song ends, Ana continues trying to sashay but is clumsy on unaccustomed heels & trying to keep skirt hitched up short. She trips and nearly falls... an unseen arm comes forward to support her)

ANA

Oh—thank you!

I'm not used to these clothes and shoes... not used to them yet, I mean...

(pause)

Me? You noticed me? I was only doing what all the others...

Oh yes, of course I'm interested... what kind of job? My public relations are very good—what do you mean... what about my private relations?

(Ana seems a bit lost)

What do you mean?

ANA

No, this is the first job I am applying for. Yes, I am still in school, but I will be stopping if I get this job.

(Ana turns, watching the unseen man as he walks around her, examining her up and down and sizing her up)

ANA

Oh yes. I'm very good at following instructions.

Really? Thank you...

Why? I suppose—I suppose I just want my independence? I would rather learn on the job than learn out of books. What? You agree with that? I can have the job?

Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!

(Ana turns to face front)

ANA

I got the job. I actually got it! My first job! I rushed back home to tell my Mum that I could quit school because I found a job!

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Since she was always telling me how hard it is to get a job, I knew that she would be happy for me!

(Ana rushes into apartment)

Mum! I'm home! Where are you! Mum! I've got something to tell you!
Come on, Mum, I'm going to take you out to celebrate! I'm going to buy you dinner! Where do you want to go? Guess what? I got a job today, Mum! No more school and I'll be earning my own money from now on!

(Pause as she takes in mother's reaction)

What do you mean I'm a slut. Mum—Why are you calling me a slut!
No! I'm not staying in school! I'm not going back! I told you, I've got a job! I thought you would be—
Of course it's a decent job! I'll be doing secretarial things and clerical things and PR things...

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

(shouted) I only want what's best for you. You mustn't end up like me!

ANA

Ma, you don't know what you're talking about!

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I'm your mother! How dare you talk to me like that!

(Pause. She listens, looks around.)

ANA

(calls out to the side) Sorry—sorry...

Mum! Quiet! The neighbours complaining already!
Look, you are always saying how hard you have to work—when I am earning money I can help you—
All right, you don't want my money, done. I'm still not going back to school!
So? So you think if you throw me out I cannot find anywhere else to stay is it!
Okay. Fine. I'll get out!

(Ana walks out)

(Sound of door slamming)

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(Ana stands uncertainly for a moment)

ANA

Well, I wanted my independence, right?

Independence wasn't quite what I expected.

Something told me that it wasn't too late. If I turned around and sad sorry, of course my mother would take me back. But for the rest of my life I would be hearing;

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I only want what's best for you. You mustn't end up like me,

ANA

And...

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I'm your mother! How dare you talk to me like that!

ANA

And when I try to point out that I want more out of life...

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

Life is like that. What do you expect?

(Ana looks resolute)

ANA

My mother would advise me to go back. Therefore I won't.

(She picks up a newspaper & puts a coin in a coin phone)

ANA

(Phone) Hello? You got room for renting right? How much?

(pause)

And that is two people sharing?

(pause)

With bed how much?

No-no-no, I don't need a bed. I'll take the mattress.

Independence. Alone on a mattress in a rented room. Nobody to care whether I sleep or not. Nobody to care whether I eat or not.

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That was when I realised that nagging is a form of caring.

II. Early Career & Choices

(Dynamic new music)

(Ana puts on work clothes and kicks chair aside. Curtain opens)

ANA

The most exciting thing about starting work is getting your own money and meeting new people.

(Ana rolls office chair forwards)

It's exciting for about two months.

(Dynamic music winds down)

(Ana walks around then flops down into a seat looking totally exhausted)

ANA

I can't believe I got to go and do it all over again tomorrow. Not just the work. The smiling, the uncomfortable shoes, the getting coffee for all the people who've been working there longer than me...I didn't know that smiling all the time can make your face ache so much!

Well, isn't this what I wanted? Freedom, independence, my own space, my own pay cheque? I'm tired all the time. I'm broke all the time. Can you believe I even miss somebody nagging me to eat better and get more sleep?

I miss the cooking and the clean bed sheets.

I miss my Mum.

But today in the office was the worst.

That Danny came and started hanging around my desk.

(to Danny, nervously)

What do you want?

Oh. Of course you can stand there if you want to.

Is it what? No, I'm not saying it's my private space.

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(Ana continues working, but takes occasional
glances at Danny who is making her
uncomfortable by standing next to her desk)

ANA

Every time I looked up he was there, looking at me. Every time I got up,
(Ana stands up, starts to walk out from behind her
desk but finds her way blocked)

ANA

Every time I got up he was in my way.

Danny, do you mind?

What? No, I wasn't looking at you in any particular way!

I've got a what?

(Ana turns & bends to examine the back of her
stocking)

(Almost immediately she jumps up, hand on her
butt)

ANA

(Angry but on the verge of tears) Oh! How dare you! How can you just put
your hand—

No! I was not doing it on purpose so that you would...

No! I don't want you to—

(Ana finds herself grasped and kissed)

(When she wrestles herself free she crosses her
arms over her chest protectively)

ANA

(crying) How can you say I was asking for it! I hate you! I can't stand the sight
of you! No! Stay where you are! I'm going to report you! I'm going to report
you to the police!

What do you mean, it's no use reporting you—I will, you know! I'm going to!

That's when the boss came in.

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(Ana looks round as another man enters. At first she steps away from him, afraid of more of the same)

ANA

Mr. Lim... Danny was—

(Pause as Danny speaks)

ANA

No! I wasn't getting hysterical over nothing! Danny put his hands here! And here! And then he pulled me over and squeezed me and kissed me!

It's true, Mr. Lim! Why don't you believe me!

You do believe me?

Danny's done it before?

Then why doesn't somebody...

(Pause. Ana listens to Mr. Lim talking to Danny)

ANA

Mr. Lim told Danny that he had to stop molesting women. He told him that if he didn't stop, even being the major shareholder's nephew was not going to save him.

And he said he wasn't just talking about his place in the company. He was talking about making it a police case.

Mr Lim believed me instantly. He was completely on my side.

(Ana turns to look upwards at Mr. Lim with a look of trust & gratitude)

ANA

Mr. Lim said that he was going to see to it personally. If Danny ever bothered me again, I was to tell him immediately and he would deal with it.

So there, Danny!

(Ana watches Danny slink off. Then back to Mr. Lim)

ANA

Thank you, Mr. Lim. Yes, yes I think I'm all right now. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come just then...

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(to audience) Mr. Lim was so strong and understanding. He made me sit down (she sits), he brought me a hot drink and told me to drink slowly. He said he could understand I was shocked, because I was so young and innocent.

It was the first time I had a man look after me like that. (pause) I liked it.

(to Mr. Lim) Thank you, Mr. Lim. What? Call you Reginald? I couldn't do that!

(giggles) All right then—'Reginald'—(giggles) of course you're already calling me 'Ana' (giggles) Oh, that's why it's fair? Well, I suppose so.

(to audience) He told me to take all the time I needed to pull myself together... but once he was there I was already feeling so much better.

(to Mr Lim) Take some time off? No, I don't think I need to. I'm fine.

I wanted to stay in the office. I felt safer when he was around.

(Ana gazes adoringly at Mr. Lim)

[SONG]

ANA

(To Mr Lim) Oh, what's that, Reginald? Stay back late to work? Of course I will! You'll drop me home after we finish? You don't have to, you know. Once I've taken the feeder bus to the MRT station, changed trains at City Hall and caught another bus, I only have to walk about twenty minutes to get to my room... You really want me to see your new car? All right, then.

(To audience) It was a very nice car. Reginald was a very nice man.

(To Mr Lim) What? Oh, all right. (shyly) Reggie... of course I'll listen if you want someone to talk to—you've already done so much for me...

The poor man is married to a wife who doesn't understand him. Reggie is really a very sensitive man and she just takes him for granted! He works so hard—he puts in such long hours in the office, and all she does is nag at him and spend his money! Poor Reggie.

Anyway, since he's the one who hired me to work here and protected me from Danny, I owe it to him to work as hard as I can, right?

But then, after a while, I wasn't sure if this was working or playing... (giggle)

Oh! Mr. Lim—I mean, Reggie!

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(Brief smooch episode)

ANA

Reggie—don't be sorry. It wasn't your fault. I—I think I love you too...

(Ana watches Mr Lim leave)

ANA

...Reggie... When it finally happened I realised I had been waiting for it to happen. I had been waiting for a long time.

The poor man needed somebody so much... just as I did.

I was just beginning to think that maybe leaving school wasn't such a good idea. But if I hadn't left school, hadn't found this job, I would never have met Reggie.

Nothing else matters now, except what we mean to each other...

(pause)

But then something else happened.

Or rather, at a certain time of month, something didn't happen...

(to Mr. Lim) What do you mean it's all my fault? It's your fault too, you know! You're the one who refused to wear you-know-whats because they deaden the sensation!

(Change of tone) Yes... I know you love me...

He asked me to have it taken care of. He said he would pay for everything. I wouldn't even have to stay in hospital overnight. He said it wasn't a major procedure at all, much less major than having silicon put in or cellulite sucked out. He told me to think about it...

(Another change of tone) No! I don't want to get rid of it!

(Ana storms around the stage, holding her abdomen protectively)

This is a new life, Reggie! I can't just cut it out of me like it's excess cellulite! Yes, I've decided!

(Aside) And this was the one decision I've ever made that I knew was right once I made it.

Yes, I've decided, I'm keeping the baby!

(Ana walks around stage some)

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(Wheedling) Reggie, when are you going to tell your wife? You keep saying soon, soon, soon... How soon, Reggie?

You don't want our child to be born in this dump, do you?

(To audience) He got me a larger apartment!

(To Mr Lim) But I want you in it with me!

(To audience) My mother always told me, make sure the man gives you the house before you let him into Your house. Maybe I didn't do that in the right order but I was trying to make up for lost time.

(To Mr Lim) You Still haven't told her about me? All right, if you won't—I will! No, I am not being selfish—I Am thinking of somebody else—this child that we're going to have!

(Ana picks up phone and dials. She has to fend off
Mr. Lim as it rings)

ANA

You don't come and disturb me! (Phone) Hello? I want to speak to Mrs. Lim,

(To Mr Lim) Once we're married you'll thank me for doing this.

(Still struggling with Mr Lim)

ANA

You'll find you're so much happier and you'll want to get home to me much earlier than you get home to her.

(Phone) Hello, Mrs. Lim? My name is Ana. I am a colleague of your husband's. Actually I am more than a colleague...

(Ana nudges Mr. Lim with her foot, on the floor
where he has collapsed, moaning)

ANA

How much more than a colleague? Well, you listen and I'll tell you!

(To audience) Of course his wife wasn't too happy, but I try never to dwell on past mistakes... whether they're mine or somebody else's.

My dear Reggie had made a mistake. But I was going to put that right for him. And I thought my mother would finally be happy with me. After all, I know that she always hoped I would get married...

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(Phone) Yes, Ma. Probably in November. Why November? Well, we can't apply for a licence until his divorce comes through.

(Mother's voice heard scolding loudly indistinctly. Ana has to move it away from her ear)

(Phone) Ma—you are not being fair. You never even met Reggie how can you say things like that about him.

No, Ma. I don't want to postpone it for a year to think about it some more. I cannot afford the time... (pause) I only have... five months more.

(Ana lowers phone slowly)

(To audience) My mother started crying. She said, 'As your mother, I hope your children never put you through what You put me through,'

III. Marriage & Choices

(**SONG** maybe just music)

ANA

And so, on to the honeymoon...

Oh, Darling! I can't believe we're alone together, finally!

(Ana purses her lips for a kiss. She waits. Nothing happens.

She opens one eye, then the other, lips still pursed)

(Husband is heard talking on the phone)

ANA

This was supposed to be our honeymoon! Our romantic, "just the two of us" (sung) honeymoon that we would remember for the rest of our lives and he was talking business on the telephone?

I got so mad at him! Without thinking I just picked up the nearest thing, which happened to be a vase of flowers, and—

(Ana picks up 'flowers' and throws them at 'husband'. There is a pause while she stares at him. Perhaps a grim nod of satisfaction at the water trickling down him)

(Husband might be heard saying 'Why the hell did you do that!')

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ANA

What do you mean, why did I do that? You should know why I did that. This is our honeymoon. We're supposed to be spending time together. This is supposed to be loving, romantic, our time...

That's when there was a knock on the door...

(A knock on the door is heard)

ANA

And there was one of the hotel staff with a tray of champagne and caviar. I wasn't expecting that. So that was what he was doing on the phone?

Ordering champagne and caviar?

That was so romantic, right? The hotel staff looked at my new husband sitting there with his wet hair and wet face and yellow butterfly orchids down the front of his new shirt...

I thought I was going to die of embarrassment.

All the man said was, 'I'll have more flowers sent up' and then he left.

I felt so guilty I didn't even feel like eating the caviar.

(I heard it's made of fish eggs, right? I'm not sure I wanted to try it anyway)

Oh, Darling! I'm so sorry... I feel so guilty I don't even feel like eating the caviar... where are you going? Oh, to change your shirt.

(Waits for husband. Tastes caviar. Makes yucky face & pushes it away)

(Sees husband returning)

ANA

(to unseen husband) Oh Darling, I'm sorry about the flowers—no, I don't know if they're charging us extra for the replacements—I want so much for this to be a special time for the two of us! Yes, yes... I know you've done all this romantic honeymoon business before, but it's my first time. Yes, I love you too, Darling!

It was like all my dreams had suddenly come true! There I was, looking up into the face of my dear husband-of-seven-hours, knowing we were going to live happily ever after when...

(Phone rings)

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ANA

The phone calls went on, non-stop, through the whole of our 'romantic' honeymoon.

(to unseen husband) Darling? Do you think we can have a candlelight dinner on the balcony? And then I'll show you the negligee I bought specially for you...

No, no! For me to wear, but I'm wearing it for you!

(Phone rings. Ana waits, a bit more impatiently)

ANA

Come here—kissy kissy... (pursed lips again get rejected as papers are shuffled)

You have an important business meeting tomorrow morning? But this is our honeymoon!

That's why this is where we're having our honeymoon? Right here in the conference hotel...

(Phone rings)

ANA

I hate that phone!

(turns away, pouting)

There's nothing so romantic as a honeymoon alone with your husband. And all your husband's business associates.

(turns to accept something) What's that? A wedding present—oh! A credit card? My own platinum card! Thank you, Darling! But can I... Really?

Anything? I can't tell you how much I appreciate this—but I'll show you if I can't tell you...

(Ana starts to undress, to show appreciation)

(Phone rings. Music starts. Ana is rebuffed and decides to sing instead)

(**Love Song** sung running around because she can't find husband to sing it to)

ANA

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One of the best things about marrying a busy man is learning to live the life of a tai-tai!

(music comes on as Ana darts around stage, shopping)

(flowers descend from the bars above)

ANA

Yes, I like these shoes. I'll take them. One pair in each colour, please. And two pairs in black. You can never have too many black shoes. Yes please, I'll have twenty sticks of those chrysanthemums. You only have eighteen? All right, I'll take them. And twenty of those orchids. Which colour? All of them. I think twenty each. You deliver, don't you?

Everything must be just right, just perfect, at home for my darling husband. I am going to make him so happy now that we are married...

Hmm... they don't match the colour scheme after all. Too bad. I'll just have to get new curtains... get the walls repainted... I am going to work so hard at making him happy!

'But as they all say, the honeymoon doesn't last forever.'

(Ana puts on a maternity dress, pats the still fairly flat tummy and turns to smile at audience)

ANA

I am doing everything I can to be a good wife to my new husband. Everything that will make his man friends jealous of him and his woman friends jealous of me. Hair technicians, skin therapists, facial steaming, body wrap, pore tightening... as long as he can afford it, I can undergo it. The only really frustrating thing is that they can't air brush my face in real life. Those photos of our wedding look so much better than I do...

But don't think life is so easy for me now. I have to choose my own clothes, my own accessories, I have to decide who I want to invite over for my little afternoon get-togethers... to the perfect house, of course. Next to your body accessories, your women friends envy you most for your house accessories!

(Phone rings. As Ana talks on the phone she goes around putting up, arranging stalks of bright yellow chrysanthemums)

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(Phone. Puts on very pseudo posh accent) Hello? Today, at four. Here, at my place of course. Yes, yes. I know everybody's on a diet...

(Puts down phone)

Everybody is always on a diet. (calls to maid) Make sure you put out those expensive Belgian chocolates and fattening French pastries where my friends will see them.

They Will go out with more calories than they came in. Resistance is futile. Even though I have two maids, I still have to supervise housework. Yes. And every stalk of flowers you see in this house was chosen by me, personally.

(turns to tweak a flower)

Luckily my husband appreciates how hard I work.

Doesn't it look good?

(Turns to accept something from unseen husband)

ANA

Thank you, sweetie pie. You are such a darling!

(flirtatiously) Another surprise? You have another surprise for me? Tell-me-tell-me-tell-me... (with little kisses)

(in shock) What? Your children are coming over? Here? Here into my beautiful house?!?

(Ana takes a deep breath)

(blankly) Oh. How nice.

(returning to life) But when? Why? How?

You want them to meet me. You think that we should get to know each other.

Wait! Where are you going?!

(numbly) You are sure that we are all going to get along so well.

(Ana watches unseen husband depart)

ANA

It is so amazing how dumb a supposedly smart man can be!

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(Ana bustles around getting things ready. She is taken by surprise when she realises the children have arrived and are standing, watching her)

ANA

Come, come here and see what Aunty Ana has got for you... do you like this pretty dress? Nice, right? I specially chose this one with the lace on the bottom... you know when I was a little girl I always wanted—hey, hey, hey, how can you drop it on the floor like that! No, don't step on it with your dirty shoes—that is a new dress okay! You know how much I paid for it or not! Where are you going?

(To herself) Your mother never teach you to pretend-pretend to be polite, is it?

But you like the computer games that Aunty Ana bought for you, right? Your Daddy told me how much you like to play computer games. Your Daddy has told me so much about you—Ow!

(Ana holds the side of her head as though she has just been struck on the forehead by a computer gizmo)

ANA

Ouch! How dare you throw that at me! Come here! You come back here right now—I'm going to kill you—

(Ana runs after the invisible children who dart about, eluding her)

ANA

What do you mean you hate me! You got no business to hate me! You hate me, I hate you more! You wait! You just wait until I tell your father!

'What am I going to tell their father?'

I'm going to tell their father that I don't get along with his children? His darling children?

He should see what they did to me!

I was only trying to be nice to them. Why isn't he here to see what those monsters did to me! I purposely went to get things for them that I know they

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like. They purposely don't like—just to spite me. And, you see? See what she did to the dress? Here, torn. I want to return and get my money back also cannot. Wicked. I never before saw children so wicked!

'So I'm going to tell the man I love, the man who loves me, that his children are wicked?'

(Ana pauses to take this in)

ANA

I'm not saying that his children are bad.

(Ana squirms a little)

The children are not so bad. It's that ex-wife of his. She is always telling them lies about me. That's why they are like that. I should tell him what a bad influence she is on them! I should tell him all the evil, wicked things she teaches them to do! A woman like that has no right to be a mother!

Take the children? To live with us?

(Ana stops, thinks. Obviously this is not an idea that appeals to her)

ANA

No, no, no... Children need a mother's touch... and she's a good mother, (just a bit irrational, unreasonable and homicidal)

I can't blame him for wanting to have his children around.

(Ana pauses to change her pregnant dress to one that makes her look even more pregnant—even bigger abdomen)

ANA

Soon we'll have our own children here. Then those two won't be so important to him any more.

'And that will be a good thing?' (Ana holds her tummy protectively)

It will be a good thing for me! And that's what's I have to think about right now.

He can't go on taking them out and buying them things every other Saturday afternoon. I need him to take me for my exercise walks.

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No, we can't bring them with us. They upset me and what upsets me upsets the baby.

(Ana smiles as she gets her way. Then uncertainty sets in)

'I know they are his children too, I know their mother was once his wife...'

So? It's not my fault she's not his wife now. If she wanted to keep him she shouldn't have all the time been nagging at him, telling him what to do...

(Ana puffs up her hair and checks her nails)

ANA

I try to do the right things to keep a man happy. Looking gorgeous, making him feel hungry for me...and I know just how to do that. That's why he's right here with me...

(Looks around. He's not there)

ANA

Right here—

(Turns to look in other direction. He's not there either)

ANA

Darling? Darling?

(Phone rings. Ana answers)

ANA (phone)

Hello—yes, darling. Just waiting for you to come back and have dinner... I prepared your favourite pulot panggang and beef asam...

What? Oh, but...

Still working? But it's already... (looks at watch) past eight-thirty—nearly nine pm.

(slightly sharper tone) If you're calling from the office, why are you using your handphone?

No, no, no. I'm not questioning—

No Darling, I'm not doubting what you say—

Darling, how can you say I don't trust you—

(Ana looks at the phone. She can't believe that her loving husband has just hung up on her)

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(Ana suddenly clutches at her abdomen and cries
out)

ANA

Aargh!

(Somebody helps her to sit down)

ANA

Yes, my doctor's on her way down...

I don't know if my baby's coming out—it's the first time I'm doing this!

Somebody call my husband! He's supposed to be here!

What? Aaargh! Then go and call him! He's in the office! He's working late—
call him, then!

Aaargh! No! I'm not going to push till my husband gets here! No, I won't!

We started this baby together and we're going to have this baby together—
hold it in—hold it in—hold it in!

(There is the sound of a baby crying)

(Slowly, Ana takes off her pregnant dress)

(The background sound of a crying child is heard
through the rest of this section)

ANA

They did call his office. They said the woman who answered said that he was
busy. Too busy to come and see his child being born.

Who's the woman who was in your office! What do you mean, see one birth
you've seen them all!

It was my first baby. He should have been here.

(Phone rings, Ana answers)

ANA (phone)

You have to stay back late again? Yes, I know you have a lot of work, but—
I'm trying to be understanding. I just want to see more of you. Jojo also wants
to see more of his Papa! He's so cute you know—you should see him trying
to turn over...

No, I am not using our son to manipulate you!

If you don't want to come home, don't come home. Fine!

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(Puts phone done)

(Ana sits motionless with her face in her hands)

(Song intro music begins)

ANA

A lot of his excuses were beginning to sound familiar. Only last time, I was listening to him say them to somebody else.

But I am not going to give up. This is just a fling. Men do things like that. I cannot believe he will really leave me for somebody else. After all we went through to be together...

I am sure he will come back to me. He has to come back to me.

(SONG)

(Phone rings, stopping the song abruptly)

ANA

(Phone) Yes?

No, Reggie's not in but he will be—

What? You saw him where?

With who?

(Pause. She takes several deep breaths, frozen to the phone)

ANA

Tell me for what!

(Ana slams the phone down)

ANA

You are no friends of mine!

(Mimicking) 'I think you should know'. Some people, cannot wait to make up stories and spread bad news!

(Phone rings)

ANA

(Phone) Yes!

Oh, Reggie—yes, I left a message with your new secretary—sorry, I mean with your new personal assistant—about the President's Star Charity? The invitations aren't out yet, but they want to know whether...

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What?!

You are going with Who?

Your personal assistant?!

What do you mean this is really more a business function than anything else—this is a social function! You're supposed to go with me! With me wearing my designer gown and my designer jewellery!

What do you mean you've already made up your mind—Reggie! Reggie?

(Ana lowers phone. Husband has hung up)

(To audience) He's going with Her. He's going to be seen by hundreds of other people with Her. To be photographed by Tatler with Her hand on his arm... all our friends will see them! All the people who've been jealous of me will be laughing at me!

How dare she! How dare he! How dare they do this to me!

(Ana collapses)

I don't even know what I did wrong!

Maybe I shouldn't have married him... maybe I shouldn't have believed he loved me... maybe I should have listened to my mother, I don't know...

IV. Divorce & Choices

(Ana looks at the apartment around her)

ANA

I don't know where I would be now if I had listened to her. All I know is, I wouldn't be here—and right now I hate being here!

(MUSIC)

(Ana dances around stage, tearing down the flowers that she carefully put up earlier in the marriage section)

(Finally she stops, exhausted)

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ANA

No, no, no. Mummy's all right. Mummy's just a bit upset.

I've got to start thinking calmly. I've got to start thinking of the future. My future and my son's future.

(stroking unseen child's hair) He's fond of my Boy-Boy. He takes him out for a couple of hours every weekend.

(to child) What? Papa took you where? Papa—and a pretty lady—took you to McDonalds?

A pretty lady, huh. And the pretty lady gave you that toy, did she? Give it to me!

(Ana takes toy from child, smashes it on the floor
& stomps on it)

(Loud wails from child)

ANA

Mummy had to do that. Do you know why? Toys from that pretty lady will come to life at night and Bite you! Bite you until very painful!

Anyway, she's not really that pretty. Come Boy-Boy, come let Mummy tell you about Papa's wicked girlfriend...

(turns away from child) I know, I know it's wrong. But look. She's already taken my husband away from me. I'm not going to let her take my son as well! I still can't believe he would do this to me!

Even though he did it to somebody else to be with me.

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

Life is like that. What do you expect?

ANA

I don't know what else I can do now.

(Ana catches sight of somebody)

ANA

Hello! Haven't seen you two for a long time! Your mother sent me some photographs? Let me see,

(Ana takes photographs)

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ANA

When you become an ex-wife yourself, the children of the ex-wife before you suddenly don't seem so terrible—in fact, the ex-wife before you suddenly doesn't seem so terrible herself.

(Ana looks at the photographs)

Oh. Photographs taken in your father's new house? Hmm... very expensively done with very little taste. (next photo) And that's—that's—

That's him with the woman that he—that he—

(Ana looks at the photographs for a long moment)

The one time I met her she was still her personal assistant. She was so nice to me, maybe I should have been warned.

Yes, yes of course you can have your photos back.

What? Oh, yes, of course, this one too...

Your mother wants to meet up with me? No, I don't want to talk to your mother right now. I already know what she'll say; 'This woman is only doing to you what you did to me,'

I really believed we were meant to be together.

I really believed we would be together forever.

(**SONG** of loss?)

V. Power Woman—Your Choice

(Stage darkens, rainstorm sounds are heard)

(Ana seats herself disconsolately)

ANA

The skies are dark, the atmosphere is so heavy... my whole life is one big gloomy mess. Even my dreams are dark and growing mould and fungus.

What's that, Boy-Boy? It's really raining? Not just in my life? Thank you for telling me that, Darling. Now go and play somewhere else.

So it's really raining. (glumly) Makes me feel so much better! It's really wet, drippy and gloomy outside, not just in my imagination!

Why should I feel so lousy? He doesn't deserve to have me miss him so much! He is stingy with alimony, he pays child support late, claims he is so

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poor even though his new wife is driving a BMW and wearing designer labels she can't pronounce.

I know. I don't have anyone to blame except myself. But I cannot regret the choices I made, because without them I would not have some of the things I have today. My son, for instance.

(To child) What, Jo-jo? There's an Aunty here to see me?

(Stage lightens)

(Ana turns to look at person interrupting her reverie)

ANA

Oh, it's you. Yes, your children showed me the photographs. I really don't see why you would—

You think we may have more in common than I realise? All right, we're both ex-wives, we both started out working for him, what else is there?

You want to take me out to dinner to discuss it?

(shrugs) Why not? Nobody else is offering me dinner at the moment!

(Ana goes into restaurant with unseen person)

ANA

(Looking around—to herself) Nice... posh... expensive... She must be getting more alimony than I am if she can afford a place like this—

(to other ex-wife) You are paying for this, aren't you?

(settles back) Yes, yes. Of course... well, what did you want to talk about?

You have a business suggestion? I'm sorry, I don't know anything about business. It was always Reggie who—oh. This suggestion is about Reggie? I don't understand how... well, yes, explain it to me by all means...

(Ana listens as dinner companion expounds)

ANA (half to herself)

But did he really buy and sell shares in my name that he—yes, I remember him saying, 'leave it all to him and he would make us both rich'. Really? He said the same thing to you? That man—cannot change his lines so change wife instead.

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He did for you and he must have for me and he's probably doing for his new wife now?

This would be very bad for him if it got out?

You don't know Reggie, he's got connections...

You do know Reggie and even his connections won't help?

His connections will be rushing to disconnect from him?

Lucky for him he's not part of the ruling party?

You want to totally, utterly and completely destroy him?

And I thought I was bad. All I wanted is more money and an apartment within 5 km of a good school for my son!

(Ana continues eating while listening & thinking)

(She finishes & lays down her cutlery)

ANA

Why are you telling me all this?

You want me to make up things and say I remember him saying them?

No?

Oh, you'll make up the things. I only have to say I remember him saying them.

(pause)

Why should I? What's this?

(She accepts something handed to her, reads it)

The guest list of his third grand wedding... a description of all the locations they visited on their honeymoon... photographs of the happy couple in front of their new house... you brought all these with you just to make me jealous enough to take part in your plan, right?

And you'll give me how much money?

(Ana raises her eyebrows, impressed by the sum)

ANA

You Are getting more alimony than me.

Oh, sorry. You're making your own money. What you want now is Revenge.

(Ana turns away from her companion)

ANA

I was unhappy in school. I didn't like my job. My marriage ended badly.

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Now... am I going to become some kind of lying, scheming, vengeance-craving ex-wife?

I must admit it's a tempting suggestion.

Seeing his name in the newspapers... accused of fraud, convicted for insider trading, his new wife crying in court, both his ex-wives looking wise, 'Luckily we got our divorces in time... Reginald was always a bit crooked...'

Maybe he'll even get colon cancer...

(Ana's son runs in & disturbs her)

ANA

(To son) Not now, Boy-Boy. Don't disturb me. Mummy's thinking.

I don't even know where to start deciding. I don't owe her anything. I don't owe him anything. She says she will give me money, but can I trust her?

What she is doing is no better than what he's been doing...

(To son) Jo-jo! Stop making so much noise! Go outside if you're going to run around like that!

And it's not so bad, what. Neither of them killed anybody. Neither of them increased pollution or decreased wildlife habitat... one of them did something illegal and I got some money out of that. The other one is asking me to do something illegal and promises me more money out of that. I have to decide what to do! She needs to have my answer! I have to decide—

I need the money—who doesn't!

(Ana jerks as something is poked into her)

ANA

Ow! How dare you do that!

No! I will not play with you! And that is not a light sabre! That's my umbrella!

Ow! That hurt, all right! I am going to hantam you!

(Child shouts something)

ANA

(shouting) I'm your mother! How dare you talk to me like that!

(Ana raises her hand to slap her son)

ANA'S MOTHER V.O.

I'm your mother! How dare you...

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ANA

(slowly & reflectively) How dare you talk to me like that...

(Ana lowers her hand without slapping. She
reaches over to pull the child to her)

ANA

It's all right. Don't be scared. Mother's sometimes say things they don't mean.
But that doesn't mean they don't love you...

It doesn't mean that I don't love you.

(looking out into audience, back into the past) Ma, I know. I know it doesn't
mean that you didn't love me.

(Lights change)

ANA

I called him. At first he didn't want to talk to me, but once he started listening
he had so many questions... (shakes her head with wry smile)

The next day he sent over an enormous bouquet of yellow butterfly orchids. I
never in my life saw so many orchids in one bunch. (laughs).

My Boy-Boy said, "I think Papa still loves you,"
(shakes head, still smiling)

They say that in the language of flowers, a red rose means love, a yellow
rose means friendship and an orchid means business. I suppose what we've
got here is friendly business. A whole big bunch of it.

For most of my life I wasn't making choices. I was just jumping out of one bad
place into the next bad place.

But now, looking back, it's not so bad.

It's true. Not every bud gets to become a blossom.

But remember—even though you may not find yourself holding the flowers
you were brought up to expect, that doesn't mean that each blossom isn't
special in its own way. And every bud is still just as precious.