NOTE:
*A-Lob-oi* is an English phonetic spelling of *daughter* in Cantonese.
CHARACTER LIST:
(in order of appearance)

JADE, a Chinese-American teenage girl, trying to make up for a culture gap between her and her parents.

BOY IN COMPUTER, a possible but absent love interest.

MOTHER, an older Chinese woman, doing her best for her daughter but adjusting to America.

VENDOR, an old man, tired and hunched.

VILE MAN, racist.

ENSEMBLE (pedestrians, crowd of Chinese men and women, paramedics)
SCENE I

A Chinese-American girl — Jade.
She sits at a desk. A computer is open in front of her, the light from the screen reflecting on her face.
Jade is talking to a boy through the computer.

JADE
I wish you could be here.
Or rather, I wish I was there with you. Vacation in the Hamptons sounds fun.

Scuffling and breathing noises.
Jade is slightly miffed.

JADE
I would enjoy summer break significantly more if my family wasn’t so infuriating. You know?
My mother is always scolding me. Yelling at me about everything. And in Chinese, too.
I just want to scream right back at her and say, shut up! Shut up! Or at least speak English!
She doesn’t understand me. Not like you do.

BOY IN COMPUTER
Yeah.

JADE
He speaks.

BOY IN COMPUTER
I have to go. My mother is taking us horseback-riding on the beach.

JADE
I didn’t know you rode horses.

BOY IN COMPUTER
Yeah, well — we just started talking,
so there’s a lot you don’t know about me.
Anyways, um — I’ll try to call you later. (awkward). Bye.
The computer goes dark almost immediately.

JADE

— Bye.

She shuts the computer.
Mother enters. She has a Chinese accent and her English is choppy.

MOTHER
Jade, I’m going to market to pick up dim sum for ning-ning.

JADE
Okay.

She stands up and marks a ballet routine.
Her movements are awkward and clumsy, like a penguin’s.

MOTHER
I cannot go alone. Chinatown too dangerous now.

JADE
Go with Max. I’m practicing for my recital next weekend.
I need to get the four pirouettes right so I can be better than Bethany.

She does four pirouettes but stumbles, dizzy. Her technique is questionable. She looks annoyed.

MOTHER
Max is seven years old. He cannot protect me from men who beat you up.

JADE
But I can?

MOTHER
I would go with baba but he on business trip. You are oldest child. Come now.

Mother makes her way to the door. Jade continues to practice her routine.
A-Loi-ab, you are not a ballerina. Give up. Bethany cannot dance the yangge dance like you. Let’s go.

Mother exits. Her comment was meant to be a compliment but Jade takes it as a jab. Her shoulders slump. She kicks the air. Like a good daughter, she obeys Mother and exits.

SCENE II

The streets of Chinatown. Glowing Chinese lanterns hang on a string across the stage. Mother and Jade enter. Mother carries a basket. An old vendor pushes a fruit cart displaying traditional Chinese fruit: yumberries, starfruit, longan, lychee, etc. Pedestrians enter and exit. They look frightened, always walking in groups.

MOTHER

(to Jade:)
You want starfruit or lychee?

JADE
Neither. Why can't we just eat watermelon?

MOTHER

(to the vendor:)
One starfruit, two dozen lychee.

The vendor bags the fruit. Mother pays him.

VENDOR

Doh-jeh. (Thank you).

He takes out a wipe and cleans his cart. Jade takes the basket from Mother, sets it on the floor, and fills it with the fruits as she talks:

JADE
All my friends at school eat watermelon in the summer. I’m tired of you always buying Chinese fruit.
MOTHER
Are you tired of your heritage? A-Loi-ab, you are spoiled. So spoiled!

JADE
Mother —

MOTHER
When I was a child, we had no food. No electricity.
You are first in family to own computer! Huh?! First in family!
We were so poor. We ate scraps like dogs that run around wet markets.

Jade bristles. She's heard this lecture several times.

JADE
Yes, Mother.

Mother notices Jade's shoelace is untied.

MOTHER
Ayā, tie your shoes! Otherwise you trip and fall and break your face!
A-Loi-ab, so stupid-la.
How do you know how to do anything?!

Mother kneels down to tie Jade's shoelace.
The Vile Man enters. Unlike the other pedestrians, he walks alone.
Jade spots him. She freezes.
The Vile Man notices Mother squatting on the ground. His face twists nastily. He goes up to her.

VILE MAN
You can't squat in the middle of the street, chink. You're blocking my path.

Mother stands up and faces him, brave.

MOTHER
Go away.
VILE MAN

Or what?

MOTHER

Or I call the police.

VILE MAN

(laughing;)
I'm not afraid of you, chink!

He kicks Mother. She falls to the floor, covering her neck like she is bracing for a terrible earthquake.

JADE

Mother!

The Vile Man beats Mother up, kicking and punching her.
The old vendor and the pedestrians begin scrambling, running in every direction, shouting in Cantonese. It's chaos.

VILE MAN

Go back to China where all the diseases are, you dirty chink! Railroad-builder! Dog-eater!

JADE

(screaming;)
STOP! STOP!
You evil man, stop it!

She pulls out her phone and dials 911.

JADE

(to the operator;)
Help, please! Chinatown! Uh, Clay and Stockton Street! My mother is —

The Vile Man knocks the phone out of Jade's hand.
He pulls back his fist to make a punch at Jade
but a horde of older Chinese men and women, led by the old fruit vendor,
chase the Vile Man with brooms.
Mother is covered in bruises and her nose is bleeding.
Jade sobs as she holds her. The crowd gathers around them, hushed.
Mother reaches up and touches Jade’s face with her hand.
Sudden silence. The world falls away. Blackout.
Yellow spotlight on Jade and Mother.

MOTHER
(raspy:)
Jade —

Blackout.

SCENE III

Blue spotlight on Jade. She stands at the corner of the stage. She speaks to the audience.

JADE
I’d never thought about death before. I never needed to. I’m sixteen.
I have a good twenty years before I have to worry about which retirement home
to send my demented parents to and then
maybe another five years before they pass away from old age.
I have twenty-five years. Tick, tick. Twenty-five years, no,
three hundred months, no,
seconds. Three hundred seconds. Tick, tick. Tick, tick.
Clocks are beautiful inventions.
Five minutes. Tick, tick.
Someone should invent a giant clock that hovers in the sky with the birds and wisps of clouds
so anybody can just look up and know the time and never be late to anything —
(looking up to the sky:)
I have five minutes and counting.

SCENE IV
The stage floods with blue light, rippling as if reflected off a pool.
Jade walks back to Mother, who is still on the floor, and sits down, cradling her.

MOTHER

(raspy:)
Jade.

JADE

Shh.
You're okay. Help is coming. You're okay.

Mother tries to sit up but can't.
Jade brushes the hair out of Mother's face.

MOTHER

(humorously:)
A-Loi-ab, see what trouble happens when you don't tie shoes? Aya, you give me a headache.

JADE

(laughing softly through tears:)
I'm sorry, Mother.

MOTHER

My bell, Jade. The porcelain bell in my closet. Ring it.

JADE

(not really understanding:)
Okay, I will.

MOTHER

No. Listen. Take it. Ring it. My maamaa gave to me. I give to you now.
Take it from my closet. Hang it in your room. It brings comfort when you are sad.

JADE

Mother, the ambulance is coming and you'll be okay.
They're going to take you to a hospital and treat you well
and the man who did this will be caught and put in jail. I promise you.

MOTHER

Tell me a happy memory.

JADE

A happy memory?
(she pauses, thinking:)
A happy memory.

SCENE V

Two Memory Ghosts enter, carrying a lantern together.
They set the lantern down and sit
as if warming themselves by a fire. They mime the happy memory as Jade talks.

JADE

Before I got busy with school,
we used to make dumplings every weekend. Remember?
You would make the meat and vegetable filling the night before
and the whole weekend we would sit in the kitchen and
lay small, circular, thin sheets of dough on our hands and
dab the edges in water and fold hundreds of dumplings. Every weekend.
Your dumplings were always so beautiful — they looked like
little babies wrapped in wheat-colored blankets, dreaming about hot milk and steam.
And my dumplings were always so ugly and you used to say,
if you make ugly dumplings you won’t marry well.
Do you remember?

MOTHER

Yes.

JADE

Yes. And —
And on Monday you would pack some dumplings for my lunch
and all my friends were jealous of me because of how good my food looked.
But I wasn’t proud. I was embarrassed. I wanted a peanut butter jelly sandwich and chips like my American friends because I wanted to fit in. How stupid of me. How stupid. I’m so sorry, Mother. I was a disappointment. I am a disappointment. But I loved making those dumplings with you. Truly. They made me happy. I’m sorry, maamaa, I made the happy memory turn sad. I’m sorry. When I have money I’ll build you your dream house, with red paint and a fish tank and a big table to play mahjong. I’ll build it for you and we’ll live there together. Okay? I love you.

_The first Memory Ghost kisses the second Memory Ghost on the forehead._
_The first Ghost holds the lantern up as if trudging through a dark cave._
_The second Ghost grabs the back of the first Ghost’s shirt and walks, leading the first Ghost away backwards._
_They both exit._

MOTHER

_A-Loi-ab._

JADE

Yes?

MOTHER

It hurts.

JADE

I know. I’m sorry.

MOTHER

_A-Loi-ab, I am glad I came to America. Now you have better life._
Her eyes close.

JADE

Maamaa —
Maamaa, open your eyes.

Three paramedics rush onstage.

PARAMEDIC 1

Are you —

JADE

Yes, help her! Now!

PARAMEDIC 2

It looks bad.

PARAMEDIC 3

Check for a heartbeat.

Two of the paramedics lay a stretcher on the floor.
They lift Mother from Jade’s arms onto the stretcher.
They get out their medical kits and begin checking her heart rate.
The lights begin to dim.
The paramedics count to three.
They lift the stretcher into the air.
Spotlight on Jade as the paramedics begin to carry Mother offstage.
Something catches her eye.
She walks downstage.
She peers into the distance.
A porcelain bell rings,
delicately.
Blackout.

THE END