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Sisters & Senang

The Island Plays

Jean Tay



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Sisters & Senang The Island Plays Jean Tay



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For my daughters, Rachel and Emma

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Note that these plays employ the use of Malay, Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien. These non-English lines should be spoken in the original languages for performance; the translations that appear in italicised brackets [] are not meant to be spoken aloud, and are provided for contextual understanding and for projected audience subtitles.

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 AUTHOR'S PREFACE: RECLAIMING THE ISLANDS

The Call of the Islands

As a playwright, I have always been drawn to stories that get under my skin, stories that leave their mark on my imagination in one way or another. Of late, it happens that these stories have been increasingly drawn from history. With the country rushing headlong into progress, I have felt the urgency to excavate and reclaim some of these overlooked indigenous stories and find their relevance for the current generation. So it was perhaps unsurprising that my forays into history led me across the seas to some of Singapore's small, forgotten offshore islands—namely the Sisters Islands (or Pulau Dua) and Pulau Senang.

This journey began in 2010, when director Jeffrey Tan approached me to collaborate on a project featuring the little known Sisters Islands. The relatively simple myth of two sisters magically transformed into a pair of neighbouring islands gained additional resonance when I realised that the islands were also the location of a notorious 1963 murder featuring Sunny Ang, who was convicted of his girlfriend's death through circumstantial evidence. This led me to write *Sisters: The Untold Stories Behind the Sisters Islands*, a play that wove the myth and the murder case together. As I was doing research on this story, I stumbled upon another forgotten yet compelling piece of local history—the story of Pulau Senang. Few realise that this small island was the site of an offshore penal colony in the 1960s and the setting for the bloodiest prison riot Singapore has ever seen. This cautionary tale became the inspiration for a second play. *Senang* focused on the clash between prison superintendent Daniel Dutton and the prison inmates who eventually killed him and destroyed the prison settlement that they had built with their own hands.

What fascinated me about all these stories was that they were headline news and the focus of public attention in the 1960s, yet fifty years later they

were all but forgotten, relegated to dusty tapes in the Oral Archives and microfiche records in the National Library. In other words, they were all but erased from public consciousness, particularly for the generations that grew up post-independence. Yet these stories haunted me, partly because of my disbelief that safe, sterile Singapore could harbour tales of such violence and betrayal, and partly out of curiosity as to whether such dangers could still be bubbling below the peaceful surface as we know it.

In addition, I felt that the marginalisation of these stories was not merely due to the passage of time and their inevitable burial in the debris of history. There was a very real sense that this marginalisation was also due to location and the literal isolation of the islands from the mainland. Particularly in the case of the tragic events on Pulau Senang, I could not shake the sense that these dangerous men (and their cautionary tale) were deliberately contained well away from the mainland and the rest of Singapore society. It has become all too easy to forget the stories that took place on these isolated islands, especially if our feet no longer walk on that soil, and if the ruins of these tragedies are no longer in view to caution us against the mistakes of the past.

The Journey to the Islands

So it was with some trepidation that I began my journey of research to these islands. With *Sisters*, I had a slightly easier task. The stories were intimate ones—for the myth, I focused on the relationship between two sisters, and the pirate who came between them. There were several versions of this myth, but the basics were the same: two beautiful sisters love each other dearly, but one catches the eye of an Orang Laut pirate chief who kidnaps her to be his wife. She leaps into the sea in an attempt to escape and her sister jumps in afterward. When the storm has cleared, the girls are gone, but there are two islands in their place. The many different versions of this myth gave me the confidence and courage to invent my own version of the tale.

For the Sunny Ang murder case, things were a little trickier. Certainly, I knew the details of the trial as described by the newspapers, but I was left to my own devices and imagination when it came to fleshing out the relationship between the murdered girl, Jenny Cheok, and her younger sister, Irene. In this regard, I drew upon the relationship between my own young daughters for inspiration, and indeed part of my motivation in writing this story was to give them something that they could relate to.

In contrast, the story of Senang haunted me for a long time before I set pen to paper, because writing this play meant stepping well out of my comfort zone in more ways than one. While doing research for *Sisters*, I had stumbled upon the story of the Senang riots through Alex Josey's book *Cold-Blooded Murders*. I was intrigued by this violent yet seemingly buried tale, and thought that it would be a fitting companion piece to my earlier play *Sisters*, albeit one that focused on brotherhood instead. Coincidentally, the drowning of Jenny Cheok off the coast of the Sisters Islands and the prison riots on Pulau Senang both took place in 1963, mere months from each other, and also a few months before the merger of Singapore with Malaysia, which marked the end of British rule in the colony.

In 1960, Pulau Senang was used in a bold penal reform experiment, headed by prison superintendent Daniel Dutton, an Irishman who believed he could reform the inmates through hard work, and so he abolished the use of arms to police them. Over three years, the prisoners transformed the island into an Eden of sorts, a gaol without bars, as they constructed the settlement from scratch. However, on 12 July 1963, things went wrong when between seventy and ninety prisoners triggered a bloody riot. The prisoners specifically targeted Superintendent Dutton, hacking him to death and gouging out his eyes. Three other officers were killed, and 58 prisoners were arrested and charged with rioting and murder. A jury found 18 of the accused guilty of murder, and sentenced them to death.

I had no idea how I could possibly begin to reimagine and recreate these characters and the world they inhabited over fifty years ago, a world that was completely foreign to me. I finally decided to take the plunge when I realised I could use Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the lens through which to view Superintendent Dutton's perspective of the doomed prison settlement. At the same time, Shi Nai An's *Outlaws of the Marsh* (or *Water Margin*) seemed to provide a natural counterpoint to this—a Chinese perspective on brotherhood and loyalty. As such, the play *Senang* traces the genesis of the island settlement, from its initial promise as a new Eden, and its gradual corruption and subsequent descent into darkness and anarchy. Central to the play is the figure of Superintendent Dutton, whose story would be the tragic arc of an overreaching, fallen hero, frequently found in Western myth. Yet I also hoped to balance this against the diverse perspectives of the assorted detainees and prison wardens in *Senang*—ranging from the spiteful prisoner-turned-warden to the scheming mastermind behind the riot, the brash fighter, the elder “statesman” among secret society members—each distinguished by their individual quirks and spoken dialects (including Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese).

The research process for the plays, particularly for *Senang*, proved to be very laborious. The initial reading of Alex Josey's book painted Dutton as an idealistic but misguided man, betrayed by the men whom he had devoted his life to helping. However, subsequent research and clues gleaned from the oral interviews hinted at a darker reality, where corruption and brutality were part and parcel of the experience at the *Senang* penal colony. But given that many of these voices, particularly those of the condemned men, were silent, it was impossible to verify the “truth” of the events that led up to the *Senang* riots. Yet at the same time, it underlined the importance of giving these silenced men a voice, however flawed or imagined, as one way of transporting the audience back in time with me to this forgotten world.

The Reclamation of the Islands

As I worked on these two plays, one of the key questions I kept asking myself was: Would the audience be able to see themselves reflected in these marginalised stories from a buried past?

For *Sisters*, I wanted to explore the intimacy of sisterhood and the nature of betrayal and sacrifice in the context of such personal relationships. As such, I was very curious to see the audience's reaction to the play, especially that of the younger generation. Eventually, a large proportion of the audience for the play did comprise young people and school bookings. During the post-show discussions, it was gratifying to hear how the younger audience members identified with the fraught relationship between the two sisters, while older audience members were happy to share their own memories of the murder trial.

In contrast, I felt that the contemporary relevance for *Senang* lay more in the study of the dynamics of governance. In that sense, it was more ambitious in scope and had a much broader sweep than *Sisters*. While the play did examine brotherhood as a form of interpersonal relationship, I would say that the main emphasis lay in the concept of this brotherhood as a form of societal control. Thus, while the tragedy in *Sisters* is the loss of a loved one, the tragedy in *Senang* is the loss of order, of hope and of social redemption. And while a man's act of betrayal plays a key role in both plays, it is the impossible utopian ideal that eventually betrays the doomed men on *Senang*. Dutton tried to create a paradise where men were redeemed by work, and for his reward he descended tragically into darkness as the very people he had hoped to rehabilitate brutally turned on him. It was a tale that paralleled the post-war collapse of colonialisation, when the abject failure of the “civilised” world to impose its social order on the “natives” became ever more evident. At the same time, the detainees dreamed of a different utopia—one governed by the rules and values of secret society brotherhood, with men sworn to live in perfect fraternity with one another.

For their reward, they discovered the ugliness of their own character; they started with hope, but found themselves undeserving of redemption.

The contrasting use of Western and Chinese canonical texts in the play also provided the opportunity to illustrate the fundamental clash between Western and Asian cultures and mindsets. As a commentary, I believe it is eminently relevant as we witness, across the globe and locally, the empowerment of the individual, the rise of the politics of frustration, and the growing wall of distrust and rebellion towards authority. Indeed, I was heartened to find that some critics and audience members did indeed respond to these concerns, and were able to draw modern day parallels from this forgotten tale to events taking place in our current political climate.

Following the production of these two plays, it was encouraging to see the National Museum curate a wonderful exhibition during the 2014 Singapore Heritage Festival that focused on the stories of Singapore's offshore islands. I was also delighted to see the overwhelming response to this exhibition and the heritage tours conducted to bring participants to these islands. I believe there is a hunger amongst Singaporeans to learn more about stories from the past, and I hope that through these two plays, I can play my own small role in reclaiming the stories and histories of these islands for a wider audience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It takes a village to bring a play from the page to the stage (and then back again). So I have at least two villages to thank, in the creation of *Sisters & Senang*.

First of all, my deepest thanks to Jeffrey Tan and Kok Heng Leun, who directed *Sisters* and *Senang* respectively, and were my partners-in-crime in enabling me to turn these plays into reality. Jeffrey first introduced me to the stories of the Sisters Islands, and started me on my own journey to Singapore's offshore islands in search of buried stories. And I will always be so grateful to Heng Leun and Drama Box for taking a risk on a crazy ambitious idea, and providing such solid and rigorous dramaturgical support to bring *Senang* to fruition.

I have also had the privilege of working with two very talented sets of actors, who have been incredibly generous in helping me shape the script and bring the characters to full-blooded life. Not to mention the hardworking production and creative teams behind the scenes, who made these productions possible in the first place.

My heartfelt thanks to Cheow Boon Seng for helping me invoke the multilingual world of *Senang* with his beautiful translations into Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew, and to Aiman Khan for her assistance with the Malay translations for *Sisters*.

Thanks also to publisher Edmund Wee and editor Jason Erik Lundberg for making the publication of these playscripts a reality, and to the National Arts Council for their support throughout the production and publication process of these plays.

My daughters, Rachel and Emma, were my inspiration for *Sisters*, and my husband Kok Yam introduced me to the colourful world of the *Water Margin*. I would be nowhere without the love and support of these beloved muses. And last but certainly not least, I thank God, for His loving guidance as I journeyed through these plays, and for gently nudging me out of my comfort zone in the process.

Sisters

**The Untold
Stories Behind
the Sisters Islands**

PRODUCTION NOTES

Sisters: The Untold Stories Behind the Sisters Islands was first presented by Jean Tay and The Arts House, as part of the ninth anniversary celebrations of The Arts House from 13 to 19 March 2013 at the Play Den. This production was directed by Jeffrey Tan. The cast was as follows, in order of appearance:

ACTRESS 1 *Amanda Tee*

ACTRESS 2 *Cassandra Spykerman*

CHARACTERS

	ACTRESS 1, CHINESE FEMALE, PLAYS
JENNY CHEOK	Murdered bargirl
LINA	Mina's older sister
ORANG LAUT	Pirate
	ACTRESS 2, MALAY FEMALE, PLAYS
IRENE	Jenny's younger half-sister
SUNNY ANG	Murder suspect
YUSUF	Boatman (who speaks in Malay)
MINA	Lina's younger sister
UNCLE	Lina and Mina's old uncle
MANUAL	A scuba diving manual

SCENE 1

INTRODUCTION

House lights are on. Actress 2 is YUSUF, the old boatman, arthritic and in his eighties. Yusuf looks up, interested, as the audience comes in. He grins at them, trying to be charming. He shuffles over, says hello in Malay to a couple of the audience members, welcomes them. His English is poor.

He continues to welcome the audience members. When most of the audience is seated, the house lights go down. He speaks in Malay.

1 YUSUF Malam ini korang datang nak dengar cerita Yusuf
kan? Awak faham kata saya tak? *[You come here
to listen to Yusuf tell a story tonight? You understand
what I say?]* (still smiling broadly) Tak, awak mesti
5 tak faham. *[No, of course you don't understand.]*
My English...very terok *[difficult]* ah...

 Nama saya Yusuf. My name Yusuf. Saya
orang boatman. Saya dayung sampan. *[I am a
boatman. I paddle a sampan.]* Take people to
10 different islands... You know, sampan? Sampan
tu...macam bot... *[Sampan...like boat...]* Ah...
*(he sings "Dayung Sampan" and makes the paddling
motion)* "Dayung Sampan"... Awak faham?
[You understand?]

15 Tonight, Yusuf tell you story. This story so
old, many people forgot already. My story
about Pulau Dua. Sisters Island. *(to audience)*
Awak pernah pergi tak? *[You ever go there before?]*

1 I ask you who go there before? Aiyoh, you live
so many years in Singapore, never go to the
islands? You only go where, Sentosa?
Pulau Ubin?

5 Sisters Islands got no IR, but is Singapore
too, like me. We not very important, but we
Singapore too. Awak setuju? Agree? But people
say, Yusuf, why you waste your time, talk about
Pulau Dua? Better to stay at home, minum
10 *[drink]* teh tarik, makan *[eat]* mee goreng. Why
you disturb these young people? They no need
the past... Only need computer, iPhone, iPad.

15 But I say, "Poooi!" How to forget? These
stories are our history. The story of Pulau Dua
is about ordinary people, two beautiful sisters,
who lived in kampong by the sea. Older one
called Lina, and younger, Mina.

SCENE 2

PUPPET PLAY

*The LINA and MINA puppets emerge, puppeteered
by JENNY and IRENE. Actress 1 (who also plays
Jenny) handles the Lina and Orang Laut puppets.
Actress 2 (Yusuf/Irene) handles the Mina puppet.*

*Lina calls out to her sister. The puppets speak in
English, but with a strong Malay accent.*

1 LINA This one, is our story. The story of the sisters.
Right or not, Mina? Mina, Mina? Aiyoh...
where that girl go?
Mina suddenly pops up behind her sister.

5 MINA You call me, Kak?

LINA What you doing, Mina? I call you so long
already. We got story to tell...our story. About
two beautiful sisters who love each other so
much. How much, Mina? How much we love
each other?

10 MINA I love you this much, Kak!

LINA And I love you this much more!

MINA Well, I love you this much!

LINA Our love was so strong.

15 MINA So strong...it make people sick. Make them
want to vomit.

LINA Mina!

MINA Make them jealous of us.

LINA Because we cannot live without each other.

20 MINA I cannot live without you, Kak!

LINA And I cannot live without you, Sayang.

1 MINA But one day, when Lina was out drawing water from the well, she bumped into a fierce pirate. *The Orang Laut pirate appears. The puppets enact the following scene.*

5 ORANG LAUT Not just any pirate. I am the Orang Laut Pirate Chief. The fiercest pirate in the western seas!

MINA He saw Lina and fell in love with her.

LINA Eeewww, so ugly. I don't want!

MINA But he grabbed her and carried her off to his boat. And Lina jumped into the sea to escape... but she don't know how to swim!

LINA Help me! Somebody! Anybody! Save me!

MINA Lina, I'm coming! I'm coming! Alamak, but I also don't know how to swim.

15 LINA But even though Mina also don't know how to swim, she also jumped into the sea. Because she loved her sister so, so much.

MINA Aiyah, Lina...I...I...

LINA *(to Mina)* Oi! What are you waiting for? Jump! I said jump!

20 MINA I don't know...

LINA Don't know what? You're supposed to jump!

MINA But...I'm scared. I don't want.

LINA Jump! Mina! Jump!

25 MINA No...no...I don't want!

LINA Are you going to follow the story or not? Don't think so much! Just jump!

MINA But I don't want! I don't want I don't want! *Irene throws down the MINA puppet in frustration.*

30 IRENE *(in her own voice)* I don't want! Wa mai! Wa mai!

1 *[I don't want! I don't want!]* I don't want to play any more. *Irene emerges, annoyed, from behind the screen. Jenny also casts aside the LINA puppet and emerges. They speak in a mix of English and Hokkien.*

5 JENNY Oi! You come back here!

IRENE No! I don't want to play any more. This is a stupid story.

JENNY No it's not.

10 IRENE Of course it is. It's stupid. What kind of sister would be so siao *[crazy]* as to jump into the sea? Especially when she can't swim, huh?

JENNY Why not? I'd jump for you! Wouldn't you jump for me?

15 IRENE Jenny!

JENNY Wouldn't you?

IRENE You...you would jump for anybody. Cos you're stupid.

JENNY And you won't jump for me... Cos you're selfish.

20 IRENE Jie jie!

JENNY Mina did it because she loved her sister.

IRENE No she didn't. Who on earth would do something like that?

JENNY But it's true.

25 IRENE Come on, Jie. How stupid do you think I am? *(Jenny doesn't reply. It's clear that she wholeheartedly believes in the myth.)* Oi! You mean you actually believe the story?

JENNY Why not? It's a real story. They both jumped into the sea, and were turned into two islands.

30

1 Ma told us last time...remember?
 IRENE Please lah, Jie. Nobody would behave like that.
 It's just a story.
 JENNY No, it really happened. Jing eh! *[Really!]*
 5 IRENE Then show me...where's the proof?
 JENNY Proof?
 IRENE That they're real. Show me!
 JENNY They are real because...because...they're still
 there. They're islands now. But still there. Ma
 10 promised us. You remember? She promised
 she'll bring us there one day to see.
 IRENE Jie!
 JENNY One day I'll prove it to you.
 IRENE How can two piles of rock be proof, huh? You
 15 just don't think, Jie.
*Jenny doesn't respond. She goes and squats in a
 corner of the stage, facing away from her sister. Irene
 feels bad.*
 IRENE Jie... Mai ah neh kuan lah. *[Don't be like that lah.]*
 20 *(Still no response. Jenny ignores her.)* Aiyah you.
*Irene looks at her sister—still squatting, hunched and
 silent in the corner—and then at the discarded
 puppet/sarong on the ground. She gently picks up the
 “Lina” sarong, and shakes it out. Then she uses it to
 25 cover her sister, as she would with a blanket, leaving
 only Jenny's head showing.*
*Jenny doesn't respond. Irene shakes her head, then
 takes the “Mina” sarong and goes to sit at the other
 corner of the stage. She similarly wraps the blanket
 30 around her own body, facing the opposite direction.*

SCENE 3

ISLAND TALK 1

*Lights change, as the sisters transform into the silent
 islands, characterised as two grumpy motionless old
 sisters, Lina and Mina. They face opposite directions,
 one facing the sea and the other facing the land. They
 speak in English, their accents those of grumpy old
 Malay mak-ciks.*

1 MINA Eh. Lina.
Lina doesn't respond, continues to stare into space.
 MINA Lina.
 LINA *(grunts)* Mmm.
 5 MINA You still there?
 LINA Mmm.
 MINA You can talk or not?
 LINA Talk for what?
 MINA Don't like that lah. You still angry with me, is
 10 it? How long we sit here?
 LINA Can't remember.
 MINA Me too. *(short pause)* You like it?
 LINA *(beat)* I like the peace and quiet.
 MINA Can you remember being young?
 15 LINA Remember for what?
 MINA Aiyoh, you don't like that lah. I remember.
 Being young and human. Having long hair that
 can dance in the wind.
 LINA You got trees.
 20 MINA What?
 LINA You got trees. They also can “dance in the wind”.

1 MINA Aiyah, not the same lah. Lina...I cannot
 recognise my body any more. My feet have
 crumbled away, into sand. My breasts swollen
 into ugly, lumpy hills. Macham [*like*] monster
 5 like that. My eyes lagi [*even more*] worse. My
 eyes are small muddy lagoons. With toilet
 facilities! I got no more hair, only trees with
 their tangled branches. And inside, got ants got
 lizards make their homes. Lina, am I
 10 still beautiful?
 LINA (*after a pause*) Yes. You always beautiful.

SCENE 4

THE GREEN DRESS

*Irene is doing homework at home, and Jenny enters,
 holding something behind her back and singing "Tian
 Mi Mi".*

1 JENNY 甜蜜蜜你笑得甜蜜蜜
 (tian mimi ni xiao de tian mimi)
 好像花儿开在春风里
 (haoxiang huar kai zai chun feng li)
 5 开在春风里 (kai zai chun feng li)
*[As sweet as honey / your smile is as sweet as honey
 / just like the way flowers bloom / in the spring
 breeze / in the spring breeze]*
 IRENE (*clearly annoyed at her sister*) Jie...enough lah!
 10 JENNY 在哪里在哪里见过你 (zai nali zai nali jianguo ni)
[I wonder where I've seen you before]
 IRENE Mai cha lah! [*Don't make so much noise!*] I need
 to study!
 JENNY Don't you like my singing? I tell you, I'm going
 15 to be famous one day. You'll see my name in
 the papers, like 大名星 (*da ming xing*) [*a big
 star*] like that...then you want to hear my voice
 also cannot! Must buy my record.
 IRENE What are you talking about?
 20 JENNY 你的笑容这样熟悉 (ni de xiaorong zheyang shuxi)
 我一时想不起 (wo yishi xiang bu qi)
 啊~~在梦里 (A...zai meng li)
*[Your smile is so familiar / But I cannot remember
 where / Ah...in my dreams]*

1 IRENE Please lah, Jie... Stop it. I got a test tomorrow!
 JENNY Study later lah... I thought we were supposed to have dinner tonight.
Irene doesn't answer at first.

5 JENNY We were, weren't we?
 IRENE Yes! Yes...we were *supposed* to have dinner tonight. And you were supposed to come back two hours ago! Where have you been? I was starving!

JENNY What do you mean "was"?

10 IRENE I ate some instant noodles already, lah!
 JENNY Irene!
 IRENE I thought you weren't coming back any more.
 JENNY Aiyah, mai wayang lah! [*Don't pretend!*] I'm only one hour late. Sorry lah... I got...caught up.

15 IRENE You always get caught up. (*mutters, almost to herself*)
 I bet you don't even remember what day this is.
 JENNY What day, ah?
Jenny pretends not to remember. Irene throws the book at her in frustration.

20 IRENE Jenny...
 JENNY Of course, I remember! How can I forget? Happy Birthday, Irene! I was rushing to finish this for you. (*She hands over the present, and watches as Irene excitedly opens it.*) Sorry, still haven't finished hemming yet.
Irene takes out a beautiful green dress from the box. It is made of the same material as the sea cloth.

IRENE Jenny!
 JENNY Su kah bor? [*Do you like it or not?*]

30 IRENE You made this? (*Jenny nods shyly.*) I can't believe

1 it... It's really beautiful...
 JENNY Aiyah mai gong an neh zhue lah [*Don't talk so much*]. Try it on... See if it fits!

IRENE Me?
 5 JENNY Who else?
 IRENE Are you sure? But I... (*she hesitates*) I can't wear this.
 JENNY Why not?
 IRENE It's...it's too beautiful.
 JENNY What are you talking about?

10 IRENE No, really. It's like something a model would wear. But it's too beautiful for me.
 JENNY You don't like it, just say lah!
 IRENE No, Jie... Of course I love it. But buey sai lah [*cannot lah*]... I wear this, sure look like a ba zhang [*rice dumpling*] like that.

15 JENNY Boh lah [*No lah*]... I tell you, you will look beautiful in this.
 IRENE Jie!
 JENNY Look, if you really don't like it...I'll take it back... Use it to...make curtains or something.

20 IRENE No! Don't!
 JENNY Then you'll wear it?
 IRENE (*finally nods*) Even if I look like a ba zhang [*rice dumpling*].

25 JENNY It doesn't matter... (*She sings the last section of the song.*)
 你的笑容这样熟悉 (ni de xiaorong zheyang shuxi)
 我一时想不起 (wo yishi xiang bu qi)
 啊~~在梦里 (A...zai meng li)
 [*Your smile is so familiar / Yet I cannot remember where / Ah...in my dreams*]

30

SCENE 5

YUSUF AND HIS STORIES

As Jenny hums the song, there is a change in key and in the atmosphere. To something darker, more brooding and mysterious. Jenny transforms into the island Lina, while Irene becomes Yusuf.

1 YUSUF I've been a boatman all my life. Macam bapak saya, dan bapak-bapak yang. [*Like my father, and my father's father before him.*] We got the sea in our blood.

5 *As he speaks, Lina sings softly, the song "Dayung Sampan" in the background. This version should be significantly different in tone and atmosphere from the brighter version of "Tian Mi Mi". The Malay lyrics are as follows:*

10 *Naik sampan / Sampan didayung / Sampan pun m'laju hai nelayan / ke pantai nan biru*

Kalau tuan mencari jodoh / Jangan mencari hai nelayan / selalu cemburu

Ya ya ya ya

15 *Jangan selalu cemburu / Cemburu hatinya palsu / Dayung dayung dayung dayung sampan*

Naik sampan menjala ikan / Ikan di jala hai nelayan / di tengah muara / Kalau tuan mencari makan / Makan dicari hai nelayan / menarik suara

20 YUSUF Sometimes, in the distance, I can see Sisters Islands in the south. Pulau Dua. I wave to them, as though they are my friends. And sometimes, early in the morning, when the sea

1 breezes blow, I can hear a girl's voice, singing softly.

5 You ever hear the story of the mermaid queen of the Southern Seas? This mermaid... macham scary. She rules the seas south of Java. That one, a jealous woman. My father always tell me, never wear green into the sea. If you do, the Queen will be angry, and send violent waves to swallow you up. Green is her colour, only she can wear. I young that time, never listen.

15 One day, I wear my favourite green shirt go fishing. That day, sun shining so bright. But the moment I reach the open sea, suddenly... (*he reenacts the scene*) Wah...the sky turned black, and the waves went crazy. I can feel the sea, reaching out for me, pulling me under! I swallow so much water! But I cling to my sampan... Never let go... Keep praying... "Tolong, tolong, tolong! Bagi saya balik, tolonglah!" [*"Please, please, please! Let me go home, please!"*] (*beat*) That time, I lucky, never mati [*die*] lah... But I never wear that shirt again.

25 So I tell you, this sea is a hungry sea. Memang cemburu. [*A jealous sea.*] You must always be careful.

30 *As he speaks, Lina/Jenny takes up the sea-green cloth and starts to play with it, almost with childlike wonder. Then she wraps it around her torso, in so many layers that she soon looks unmistakably pregnant.*

SCENE 6

FIRST MARRIAGE

Lights change, a transition. The island Lina turns into a heavily pregnant Jenny. Jenny looks pale and sick. She retches and goes to vomit in a corner. Irene enters and approaches her, concerned.

1 IRENE Jie, why didn't you tell me?
 JENNY I don't know...
 IRENE How many months?
 JENNY Five.
 5 IRENE Five already! And I thought you were eating too much ba zhang.
In spite of herself, Jenny smiles.
 JENNY Ba zhang, still can bang sai [shit] out... This one... *(She sighs.)*
 10 IRENE You're not even twenty yet. How can you get married? To him, of all people...
 JENNY Irene...
 IRENE Aiyah, Jie...don't you know everything will be different once you get married?
 15 JENNY You think I want to get married, is it? Wa ya mai. *[I also don't want.]*
 IRENE Then why? I know my Dua Jie deserves better than that Ah Beng.
 JENNY Wa imm zai lah. *[I don't know lah.]* What else
 20 can I do? I don't know what to say to Ma. And I can't bring myself to... Boh bian lor *[No choice lor]...* I got to marry him.
 IRENE No.

1 JENNY No?
 IRENE No, you don't. You made a mistake, fine. But don't make another one. You want, I help you take care of the baby. You and me.
 5 JENNY What about Ma?
 IRENE I'll talk to Ma. She'll be okay. We can do this, together.
 JENNY How?
 IRENE We'll make it work. You can... You can do
 10 your dress-making. We'll set up a little shop together... You can sell your beautiful dresses. And I can quit school and help you take care of the baby, I really don't mind.
 JENNY You don't mind, I mind! Le xiao ah! *[You're crazy!]* Quit school for what, huh? Not even your baby you want to quit school and take care?
 15 IRENE Aiyah, your baby, my baby... What's the difference?
 JENNY Irene, le mai xiao lah. *[Don't be crazy lah.]* I quit school never mind. But you're the one with the
 20 brains hor. You've always been. Got brains, then must study! 好好读书 (Hor hor tak chek) *[Study hard.]* Don't waste your future on somebody like me, can or not?
 25 IRENE Aiyah, Jie.
She takes Jenny's hand.
 JENNY Irene...you really want to help me? *(Irene nods eagerly.)* Fine. Then you be my bridesmaid, can? *(Irene looks disappointed.)* Oi sai boh? *[Can or not?]*
 30

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Jean Tay's stage plays have been performed in Singapore, the US, the UK and Italy, and include *The Shape of a Bird* (2016), *It Won't Be Too Long: The Cemetery—Dusk* (2015), *Senang* (2014), *Sisters* (2013), *Boom* (2008, 2009, 2012), *Everything but the Brain* (2005, 2007, 2013), *Plunge* (2000), *The Knot* (1999) and *Water from the Well* (1998). In addition, she has written the books for the musicals *The Great Wall: One Woman's Journey* (2017), *The Admiral's Odyssey* (2005), the NUS Centennial musical *Man of Letters* (2006), and the children's musical *Pinocchio* (2010).

Everything but the Brain and *Boom* (both also published by Epigram Books) have been used as O-Level and N-Level literature texts for secondary school students. *The Knot* was awarded first prize for Action Theatre's 10-minute Play Competition 2010 and selected as a finalist for the Actors Theatre of Louisville's 10-minute Play Contest. Tay has been nominated four times for Best Original Script for the Life! Theatre Awards, and won for *Everything But the Brain* in 2006. Her prose fiction has received honours as well: the 1997 Weston Undergraduate Prize for Fiction for "The Story", as well as first and third prizes for the National Arts Council's Golden Point Award in 1995 and 2001, respectively.

Tay graduated in 1997 with a double-degree in creative writing and economics from Brown University, attended the monthlong International Playwriting Residency in 2007 (organised by the Royal Court Theatre in London), and participated in LaMama's International Playwrights' Retreat in Umbria, Italy, in 2010. She served as resident playwright at the Singapore Repertory Theatre (SRT) from 2006–2009, and helmed SRT's Young Company Writing Programme from 2012–2016. She was also involved in the 2015 NDP: Majulah Singapura, Singapore's Golden Jubilee, and the 2017 Home Team Show and Festival as scriptwriter.

Currently, she teaches playwriting as an adjunct lecturer at Nanyang

Technological University, and has conducted playwriting masterclasses at the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne) for students in the Master of Writing for Performance programme. She is also the founding Artistic Director of Saga Seed Theatre, set up in 2015 to bring Singaporean stories to the stage, and to provide a platform to showcase and nurture local talent.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

An independent publisher based in Singapore, Epigram Books is known for putting together well-designed and thought-provoking titles. It began as a division of Epigram, the award-winning design firm, but registered as a separate entity in July 2011 to champion local writing.

Epigram Books publishes all manner of fiction—novels, short stories, plays, children’s books and some poetry. Authors include pioneers like Edwin Thumboo, Lloyd Fernando, Goh Poh Seng, Stella Kon, Kirpal Singh, Robert Yeo, Boey Kim Cheng, Lim Chor Pee, Tan Kok Seng, Ming Cher and Lim Thean Soo. Contemporary authors include playwrights Tan Tarn How, Ovidia Yu, Chong Tze Chien, Jean Tay, Desmond Sim and Haresh Sharma. The company is best known for publishing the multi-award winning graphic novel *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, the middle grade series *The Diary of Amos Lee* which has sold over 240,000 copies worldwide, the *Sherlock Sam* series which has also been republished in the US, and the *Harry* picture book series. Other landmark publications include translations of Cultural Medallion winners and new editions of out-of-print classic Singaporean novels, as well as *Ministry of Moral Panic*, a debut short story collection by Amanda Lee Koe which unanimously won the Singapore Literature Prize for English Fiction in 2014.

Epigram Books also reflects Singapore’s obsession with food by publishing both recipe books and food guides. The imprint Wee Editions was launched to support local designers, photographers and artists through a unique series of compact coffee table books.

The company also made headlines in 2015 for initiating the Epigram Books Fiction Prize, Singapore’s richest literary award, in the hopes of uncovering the next great Singaporean novel.

“Jean Tay is one of the most gifted playwrights I have come across in years.” —Gaurav Kripalani,

Artistic Director, Singapore Repertory Theatre

The Sisters Islands and Pulau Senang: two satellite islands off the coast of Singapore, small but rich in story. This volume brings together two remarkable plays by Jean Tay, *Sisters* and *Senang*, which explore these two islands through turbulent events in the 1960s.

Sisters: The Untold Stories of the Sisters Islands blends a real-life murder with creation myth. The play alternates between two stories: one of Mina and Lina, the two sisters upon which the myth of the Sisters Islands is supposedly based; and the other of the shocking case in 1963 of Jenny Cheok, killed by her boyfriend Sunny Ang, which also involved her half-sister Irene.

Senang covers the prison riots on Pulau Senang in 1963. The island was used for a bold experiment, led by Superintendent Daniel Dutton, an Irishman who believed he could reform the inmates through labour, and abolished the use of arms to police them. This is one man’s attempt to create a utopian penal colony, which tragically led to his violent end.

PLAYS

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