

163288

Yee Heng Yeh

MING, 30 years old

GAN, 30 years old

SPIRIT, immortal

/ indicates where the next line is spoken, creating an overlap in dialogue.

[Beat.] means a short pause, but one that indicates a shift nevertheless.

[Silence.] means a long pause.

[Night-time. A forest clearing. A tree with a red rope tied around it. MING and GAN are praying before the tree. There are two lit joss sticks and some offerings. The tree SPIRIT is standing there, half in the shadows, unnoticed by MING and GAN but perhaps seen by the audience.]

MING and GAN kowtow three times, then wait expectantly. Silence. MING turns to GAN.]

MING. Hey. You sure this is the right place?

GAN. Yeah, yeah...

MING. Or is your friend simply making up stories, huh?

GAN. No, no... J-just wait... I think... *[He searches through his phone.]* See, the picture shows the same place, and there's the offerings from other people here...

MING. *[He examines the photo on GAN's phone.]* Right, it's this tree! *[He hands the phone back, folding his arms.]* Then what now? Where are we supposed to ask for the lottery number?

GAN. *[Scrambling to his feet, turning away and looking around.]* Uh... I'm not sure... Hold on... *[He walks a distance and holds his phone up, comparing the tree to the photo.]* Yea, even the rope is there, same—AHHH!

[He shrieks, having spotted the spirit. MING is spooked and jumps.]

GAN. There, there! See, there!

MING. What! Oh shit!! What, what! Where!

GAN. There!

[They both suddenly fall silent and shiver. They glance at each other, slowly sneak a terrified glimpse at the SPIRIT, then turn back to each other. They slowly get to their knees respectfully.]

GAN. See, it's real, I told you, /it's real, my friend said...

MING. *[Gulping.]* Good! Then why did you shout? As if you saw a ghost /or something.

GAN. But I did see—!

MING. Tsk you know what I mean, idiot! Don't scare me like that!

GAN. I just got shocked...

MING. We came here for this. *[They both still dare not look at the SPIRIT, still on their knees.]*
Then what now?

GAN. We... we tell it what we want...

MING. Then what are you waiting for?

GAN. You ask!

MING. It should be you!

GAN. H-hah? Why me? You're the one that needs to repay the Ah Long—

MING. Because you didn't pay me back my 50k!

GAN. I told you already, I just need more time.

[Their husbed argument slowly gets louder as they get riled up.]

MING. You said you'd pay me back by this week!

GAN. I was planning to! I just had an emergency, okay! It's not like I wanted to break my promise.

MING. What, your chicken rice business is losing money, is that it?

GAN. My chicken rice business is doing good, okay!

MING. Hmph, then where's the money?

GAN. I'm saving as fast as I can! Would it have killed you to wait instead of borrowing from the Ah Long?

MING. Eh, it's my money, I have the right to ask for it whenever I want.

GAN. Don't think I don't know why you were in such a rush to get the money. Because you wanted to bet on the football match last week, right!

MING. What I do with my money is none of your business!

GAN. But you didn't use your money, you used the Ah Long's money!

MING. I was going to win it back! Just like last time!

GAN. And how are you supposed to repay them if you didn't win?

MING. Well, my good friend promised me he'd pay me back by now!

GAN. We're not talking about that now. Brother, your problem is, you're addicted to betting!

MING. Hypocrite!

GAN. I never bet! Betting's for idiots who think the world owes them something! That's why they always think they might win!

MING. Huh, but when this idiot won big the last time and lent you that 50K for your sister's tumour operation, you just happily /took the money, right?

GAN. If I knew, I wouldn't have taken it!

MING. As if you didn't know!

GAN. Did I /ever ask you?

MING. Then where did you /think I got the money—

GAN. No, right? How was I supposed to know you had a betting /problem back then!

MING. You didn't ask because you didn't even care!

GAN. Because my sister needed an operation then!

MING. Oh stop using that as an excuse.

[Pause.]

GAN. Since /when did I—

MING. Just because you needed that money for her operation, doesn't mean you don't need to return it!

GAN. I told you I would return it! It's just that /back then...

MING. Not this again!

GAN. No, let me ask you, what exactly did you say when you gave me that money?

MING. [*Scoff.*] Did I say you don't have to return it?

GAN. You said, "Don't worry about it!"

MING. Yeah, so you can focus on her operation! "Don't worry about it", as in, "do the operation first, pay me back later"! I was trying to be a good friend; I didn't mean you don't have to repay me! Sorry, brother, I'm not a fucking saint! /It's 50K!

GAN. I would have saved up earlier if you clarified that—

MING. I'm supposed to clarify when you're the one who misunderstood? When I'm the one who did you a favour?

GAN. And I'm grateful, really I am! You know /how grateful I am!

MING. So to show your gratitude, go and talk to that spirit!

[*Pause.*]

GAN. Shit.

MING. Faster, it's waiting.

GAN. [*Turns to the SPIRIT, still looking at the ground.*] Uh, Honourable Spirit, we're very sorry to disturb you at night... or maybe you're more active at night, I don't know if you even sleep, hahaha... I mean, uh, sorry to disturb you. Oh, also thank you for meeting us. Uh, and sorry. We hope you're not angry, do you like the offerings we got you? If not, you can tell us what you like—

MING. [*Interrupting.*] Mr Spirit... um, or Ms Spirit. My idiot friend here is trying to say that we have a request. We want the lottery number for tomorrow. May I know if you can help us with that?

[The spirit steps out from the shadows. It moves slowly, like it's underwater.]

SPIRIT. I can. For a price.

GAN. /Price?

MING. Did your friend say anything about a price?

GAN. He uh... he said the spirit will ask for something we can give.

MING. Huh? What does that mean?

GAN. I don't know! Ask the spirit, not me!

MING. What is the price for the lottery number?

SPIRIT. I want... a monkey's hand.

[Beat.]

GAN. A monkey's hand...

MING. Did it just say "a monkey's hand"?

GAN. Where do we find a monkey's hand?

MING. I don't know. Shopee?

GAN. What's the deadline?

MING. What deadline?

GAN. To get the monkey's hand!

MING. Look, Spirit, we need the lottery number by today. How about you give us the number first, then we bring you the monkey's hand afterwards?

SPIRIT. I want it now.

MING. We don't have it now!

SPIRIT. *You* do.

MING. We don't!

SPIRIT. I want a monkey's *hand*.

[Silence. Then MING scrambles backwards, terrified. GAN retreats instinctively, then turns to MING.]

GAN. What? What?

 [*MING just shakes his head.*]

GAN. What? You have some sort of monkey's hand at home? Some kind of medicine, is that it?

MING. No, no. I don't! [*The spirit takes two steps forward. Screaming.*] Stay there! You-you wicked! Evil! Stay back! In the name of Amitabha, Jesus, Allah!

GAN. What? Hey, what is it?

SPIRIT. I will not touch you. [*Goes forward, walks around the two.*] I can only take what is offered. [*Returns to the shadows of the tree.*]

GAN. What is it talking about? Tell me! [*Shakes MING.*]

MING. [*Staring at GAN, sudden realisation.*] Wait, you're the same age as me, right? 1992?

GAN. Yeah—

MING. So you're a Monkey too!

 [*Beat.*]

GAN. Oh shit! /It wants a HAND!

MING. Yeah!

GAN. You're the monkey!! /Shit!

MING. Eh, you owe me, so you be the monkey!

GAN. I was born in January!

 [*Beat.*]

MING. Stop saying nonsense.

GAN. I'm a goat!

MING. Last year we celebrated our birthdays together in September, /have you forgotten?

GAN. No, we celebrated your birthday. Just yours!

MING. Hah?

GAN. Sorry brother, I'm a goat!

[*Beat.*]

MING. Show me your IC.

GAN. You don't believe me?

MING. /I do! But—

GAN. You think /I'm lying!

MING. I just want to see, okay! Maybe you remember it wrongly?

GAN. You think I've forgotten my own birthday?

MING. People forget these kind of things all the time! Eh, sometimes I even forget how to write my own name!

GAN. Fine! Here!

MING. Oh. Really is January.

GAN. Told you! [*Beat. Sarcastically.*] Can I have my IC back now, please?

MING. [*Handing it back.*] Fuck!

GAN. Okay, i-if you don't want to give your hand—

MING. Of course I don't want /to give my hand!

GAN. Okay then don't! Just forget about it! [*Bowing to the spirit.*] Honourable Spirit, we thank you for /your offer, but—

MING. No, no, wait!

GAN. What!

MING. [*Urgently.*] Tomorrow's the last day, you understand? If I don't pay the Ah Long—

GAN. Are you crazy? You really want to /give up your hand?

MING. They say if I don't pay up, they'll take my kidneys and sell!

[*Beat.*]

GAN. Are they serious?

MING. I don't want to find out!

GAN. Maybe it's better to lose a hand than two kidneys...

MING. You think so?

GAN. If you lose your kidneys, you can't drink anymore!

MING. Then it's settled! Better to give up a hand!

GAN. I agree!

MING. Since that's the case, let's ask the spirit if it'll take a goat hand!

GAN. Okay! [*Beat.*] What?

MING. Well, you would rather lose a hand, right?

GAN. No way! Hey, this is about you now!

MING. My kidneys are on the line because you didn't /pay me back!

GAN. Did I ask you to borrow from the Ah Long for your betting? That's why I never never borrow from them! Not even when I was starting my business! You made that choice, so this is your responsibility, not mine! Leave my kidneys out of this!

MING. [*Laughing awkwardly.*] Well... the thing is... your kidneys are kind of involved already.

GAN. What are you talking about.

MING. See, when you borrow such a large sum from the Ah Long, they need a guarantor...

GAN. You made ME your guarantor???

MING. I couldn't think of anyone else! Plus you owe /me—

GAN. Shut up about me owing you money! I know I owe you money! But that doesn't give you the right /to rope me into this!

MING. I'm sorry! But it's done! So if my kidneys aren't enough—

GAN. You think your kidneys won't be enough?

MING. How should I know?

GAN. I thought two kidneys would be worth a lot...

MING. You know these Ah Longs, they always try to short-change you and squeeze you dry...

GAN. My kidneys! My poor innocent beautiful kidneys!!

MING. How about it? Better to lose a hand, right?

GAN. [*Reflexively.*] Fuck you! [*Pause.*] I guess you're right. [*Determined.*] Okay, fine. If it accepts goat, I'll give up my hand. If it still wants monkey, you have to give up yours.

MING. Fine!

GAN. Deal!

MING. [*Shudders.*] This is the biggest bet I've ever made...

GAN. You really have a problem. [*GAN approaches the spirit. Acting brave.*] Honourable Spirit, will you take a goat's hand instead of a monkey's?

[*Silence. GAN is visibly nervous but tries not to show it, unconsciously shaking his head.*]

SPIRIT. I want... a monkey's hand. I'm in the mood for a monkey's hand.

GAN. [*Relief.*] Aha! Heard that?

[*Pause.*]

MING. It said *a* monkey's hand. So any monkey's hand will do! It doesn't have to be mine!

GAN. Who do you think will give up /their hand?

MING. I know people!

GAN. [*Sceptical.*] And you can get their /hand by tomorrow?

MING. Yes, yes! I'll win it through a bet if I have to!

GAN. [*Shooting him a disdainful look, then turning to the spirit.*] Can we bring you a monkey's hand tomorrow in exchange for the number?

SPIRIT. You may. But I will only give the number to the owner of the hand.

MING. Come on! We're giving you the hand!

SPIRIT. Only the owner.

GAN. Okay, uh, how will you give the number? Will you write it on a piece of paper or— should we bring dice, or sticks, or—

SPIRIT. The number will be revealed to the owner of the hand.

MING. What does that mean?

[*SPIRIT doesn't reply, just stares at them.*]

GAN. Okay, if it goes to someone else, why would they tell us the number? What's stopping them /from just getting the jackpot—

MING. We tie them up! We'll torture the number out of them, we'll make sure they /can't go anywhere, then—

GAN. Brother, are you listening to yourself? You want to KIDNAP somebody /and torture them?

MING. But, but I just, I can't /I can't I can't—

GAN. It HAS to be YOU.

MING. [*Desperate.*] You can't trust me either! I might keep the number to myself, cash the jackpot in myself! You won't see even a drop of that 50 million! That's the kind of person I am, I'm selfish and untrustworthy!

[*Beat.*]

GAN. [*Surprised.*] But of course the money should go to you.

[*Beat.*]

MING. Oh. We're not splitting it?

GAN. You're the one who needs to repay the Ah Long, just take it.

MING. But, but you're the one who came up with this lottery idea in the first place...

GAN. Just take that as my way of making up to you for not repaying you on time.

MING. Oh. [*Pause.*] Hey... if I can't repay the Ah Long tomorrow... don't you have at least 10k? You can pay them that first, they do instalment plans these days, you know... Or, or... I know this is a lot to ask, but if your chicken rice business is

doing well, can't you... I don't know... sell it? [*Silence.*] It must be worth a lot, but I'll help you start a new one—

GAN. It's sold.

MING. What? [*Beat.*] When?

GAN. Just last week. My sister's cancer came back a month ago. We needed the money, so... I sold it. Gives me more time to look after her anyway. But money runs out so fast, like water. I don't even know where I'll get the money for the next round of treatment. [*Beat.*] That's also why I couldn't pay you back on time.

MING. Why didn't you say earlier?

GAN. I didn't want you to think I was making excuses.

MING. I didn't mean that...

GAN. No, that's not it. In fact, I was afraid you would make me pay you back instead of paying for /her treatment first.

MING. I would never ask that!

GAN. Wouldn't you? The Ah Long is visiting you tomorrow.

MING. I would never...

GAN. You know, I really think I would give up my hand if I could. Just think about what can be done with 50 million. I'll get the best doctors, the best treatment for my sister. The best in the whole wide world. So what if I lose one hand, I won't need it to sell chicken rice anyway, I won't even need to work again. To make up for it, I'll hire five servants to serve me around the clock, one for each missing finger! And of course, I'll pay you back, so you can pay off the loan sharks. Huh, 50K, that'll be a drop in a bucket! You should throw it in their faces, watch them scramble for it! What gives them the right to terrorise people just because we borrowed a little bit from them? Meanwhile they get fat and rich and happily enjoy the pleasures of life. No, with 50 million, they'll be borrowing from me! I'll be knocking on their doors, selling their kidneys! That's the kind of power money buys you, peace of mind for the rest of your life! And that's priceless, you can't put a price on that... I'll trade a hand just for those six little numbers, and my life will be forever changed...

MING. *[Quietly but excitedly.]* Alright I'll do it.

GAN. I'm not asking /you to do it.

MING. No, no, I'll do it. *[With building passion.]* I'll do it! What's a hand compared to 50 million? It's nothing—that's what you're saying, right! It's an ant next to an elephant! Come on, I'll do it! I feel so much better now! Hahaha, really, I won't get a better deal than this, to put just one hand on the line, for a future like that!

[Beat.]

GAN. Okay! /Alright!

MING. It's all /or nothing!

GAN. We'll show /them!

MING. 50 million!!

GAN. 50 fucking million!

MING. Spirit, take my hand!

SPIRIT. Oh? You'll have to offer it to me.

MING. How? Quick, before I change my mind!

SPIRIT. *[Pointing at the base of the tree.]* You'll find a cleaver there.

MING. /Clever? Can't you just... vanish it or something!

GAN. Oh I'm going to be sick!

SPIRIT. I can only take what is offered.

MING. Brother, you have to do it!

GAN. What if I mess up?

MING. Take that cleaver and just pretend you're chopping some chicken!

GAN. *[Laughing hysterically.]* You know what, brother, you're right!

[He goes to take the cleaver while MING rests his hand against the tree's roots. They're both business-like.]

MING. Make sure it's sharp!

GAN. Oh it's sharp alright!

MING. Do you need to practise?

GAN. Let's just do this! *[Pause.]* Are *you* sure?

MING. Let's just do this! *[Muttering, eyes closed.]* 50 million, 50 million, /50 million...

GAN. Stop distracting me... Actually, 50 million, 50 million, 50 million... 3, 2, 1...!

[GAN brings the cleaver down but MING flinches away, both of them screaming.]

MING. /It hurts! Ahhh!! I can't do it!

GAN. Ahhh! Shut up! I haven't even done it! Why did you move!

MING. Fuck, why did you count /down, idiot!

GAN. Okay I won't count this time!

SPIRIT. You may use the rope.

[Beat.]

GAN. Oh?

MING. *[Pale.]* Ri-rig-right...

[GAN puts down the cleaver, picks up the rope, and begins tying MING's hand.]

MING. Why is there a rope here? Is that why you have the rope? /Spirit, is that why? Hahaha what a clever spirit... Haha...

GAN. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry...

MING. Make sure the knot's secure... Hahaha...

GAN. There.

[MING rests his hand against the roots again, stretching the rope taut so that he could not pull away any further if he tried. GAN raises the cleaver, when suddenly MING speaks.]

MING. *[Giddily.]* You know, I never said what I'll do when I get the money.

GAN. *[Humouring him.]* So what will you do?

MING. First. I'll get those loan sharks off my back, hehe. And then, brother, I'll forgive your debt. That's right, you really /won't have to pay—

GAN. No, no, /I can't let—

MING. No, you listen to me, it was never about the money, it's the principle of things, hahaha! I just couldn't stand it that you assumed you didn't have to... But anyway, with the jackpot, forget about the 50k, I'll even pay for the rest of your sister's treatment!

GAN. [*Moved, delighted.*] Really?

MING. I promise you, brother!

GAN. I don't know what to say!

MING. Say nothing! We're like family, aren't we? So your sister is my family, too, and no matter how big a burden family is, we have to help, right? Even if they relapse at the worst timing—just look at you, you even sold your business! That's family! I can't lose to that! [*A strange expression crossed GAN's face, but MING doesn't notice.*] Let's do this!

[Without hesitation, GAN brings the cleaver down. Lights out. A dull squish. MING screams. The lights start flashing, quickly at first, then slowing down. We see that MING is still tethered to the rope, but his hand is dangling at an unusual angle.]

MING. [*Jerking around from agony.*] /FUCK!! I SEE THE BONE! AH HH! AREN'T YOU A PROFESSIONAL!! IDIOT!! DO IT PROPERLY!! FUCK! IT HURTS, I WANT TO DIE! AH HH—

GAN. [*Trying helplessly to aim the cleaver.*] STOP MOVING I'LL DO IT PROPERLY JUST SHUT UP STOP MOVING YOU FUCKER SHUT SHUT SHUT SHUT SHUT UP—

[GAN bashes MING on the head with the handle of the cleaver. MING seems stunned, almost puzzled, and looks around in bewilderment.]

GAN. [*Continuing the bashing.*] THAT'S RIGHT, SHUT UP. SHUT THE FUCK UP. MY SISTER IS NOT A BURDEN. YOU UNDERSTAND? SHE DIDN'T CHOOSE TO GET SICK. DON'T YOU CALL YOURSELF HER FAMILY. SHE TOOK CARE OF ME. SHE TOOK CARE OF ME.

[MING drops to the ground. Silence. The lights are flashing on and off very slowly now. We see GAN methodically reposition MING's hand and bring the cleaver down swiftly, confidently. There is a sharp thud as lights flash out for the last time. Silence. Then loud smacking sounds. When the lights come back on, SPIRIT is squatting on the roots, happily gnawing at the hand, chewing, licking, sucking, gibbering to itself, ravenous, delirious, gleeful.]

GAN. Honourable Spirit... *[SPIRIT gives no response.]* What, what's the lottery number?

[SPIRIT suddenly freezes, then looks at GAN.]

SPIRIT. *[Seriously.]* The number has been revealed to the monkey. *[Resumes snacking.]*

[GAN looks at MING, whose head is bleeding profusely by now, then turns back to SPIRIT.]

GAN. I... I've given you... *[Sudden outburst.]* TELL ME THE NUMBER. TELL ME. *[When SPIRIT continues ignoring him, he turns to MING, raising the cleaver in threat.]* TELL ME THE NUMBER. I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME. DON'T PLAY DUMB— *[Breaking into sobs, sinking to his knees, cradling MING.]* I beg you... Don't leave me here... It's just six little numbers, you still have time to tell me... Don't go, don't go...

[GAN cries quietly. SPIRIT has finished with the hand by now, sucking the bones, licking its fingers, smacking its lips. Then it looks at GAN again. Dead silence. GAN, sensing the silence, looks up, terrified.]

SPIRIT. Now. Dessert. I'm in the mood for goat.

[GAN looks at the cleaver, which he is still holding. He does not let go. Lights out.]

[END]