**DREAMING Under the Southern Bough**

**(Version 2 – China 2016 Tour)**

*The stage is bare except for a ‘curtain’ of cloth strips at the back of the stage and a clothes rail that is covered with costumes. These strips are made of unbleached cotton and can be projected on to or lit. They form a tree with roots’ that actors may move between.*

*Music is heard. We hear the start of recorded narration; suddenly an actor wearing all black seemingly and clearly not ‘in character’ comes on to stage and gestures towards the control desk for the music and play to stop.*

*He walks to the front of the stage and stares at the audience. He starts to speak.*

**Introduction**

Liam: Hi, look, sorry about this but… aaah….

*He suddenly realises that he is speaking to an audience who may well not speak English fluently or possibly at all. He looks around and beckons somebody from off stage. Xinyi enters and they both move the edge of the stage.*

Liam : *(in Broken Mandarin)* Hello I’m Liam and this is Xinyi

*Xinyi looks at him as if to say – ‘if you are going to speak Mandarin why drag me out here?’*

Liam: *(in English)* Hi, I’m sorry I had to stop the play but I think there’s something we need to explain before we carry on.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: We are the stage@leeds company from the UK. Hello!

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

*Liam beckons to the wings and around the theatre and the full cast emerge, shyly like deer in a forest. Only George remains unseen.*

Liam: About a year ago we started working on a play honouring Tang Xianzu and the 400th anniversary of his death, and also that of William Shakespeare.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: The play we chose, as you know, was *Nanke Ji*,

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: We adapted it as a spoken word drama,

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: We wanted to share Tang Xianzu with the world.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: And we wanted to find out what the original story means for us

now.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: But it's difficult... how could we get everyone to see Tang's beauty, subtlety and elegant complexity?

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: It's been hard, really hard. For some people there seems to be a wall, a 400 year old wall blocking their view.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: So we’ve decided to break it.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

*At this point the cast move down into the audience and ‘greet’ people with hellos in English and Mandarin.*

Liam: *Nanke Ji* is a story about one man’s quest for answers.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: It’s a story about regret, hope, ignorance and arrogance.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: It’s a story about trying to find an answer when you don’t know what the question is.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: It’s a story about now.

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

Liam: It’s a story that starts… now

Xinyi: (translates in Mandarin)

*Xinyi translates and adds her own orders for the cast to take their places.*

Xinyi: Places! *(she says this is English and Mandarin)*

*The actors have been getting into their costumes. The music and projection restart.*

**Scene 1.**

*Projected text (all projected text is in Mandarin)*

**Autumn arrives to find a lonely tree.**

**Each leaf hums the sound of fall.**

Chunny *(voiceover)*: My life went all ragged... and spiky.

I came out of the army, tried to adjust,

I wanted to do something for people...

…ended up a warehouse manager

…stationery supplies...…

ended up miserable, and drunk a lot of the time... most of the time.

Everything seemed pointless.

I lost my job, so I went looking...for…

something... …because my life had gone...

all ragged... and spiky. I had to get away,

escape, so I came here,

came to this island... it's peaceful...

Sam *(offstage)*: He drinks a whiskey drink,

He drinks a vodka drink,

He drinks a lager drink,

He drinks a cider drink

Chunny: Sam. Sam!

Sam: I got knocked down... I can't get up again.

Sergeant Samuel Bryan reporting for duty sir!

*He salutes – he is clearly drunk. As he does so four cast members in black stand behind him mimicking his salute. As he mentions each comrade who dies the cast member also falls to the floor in a manner representing the way the soldier died. Only one remains*

Chunny: Stand down sergeant we’re not in the army any more.

Sam: No we’re not and we’re not bloody dead either.

Chunny: That’s not funny

Sam: No it’s not! We could have ended up like Baz or Tom or

Ross or...

Chunny: ...Danny.

Sam: Yeah, just a goodbye video posted on YouTube before

shooting himself in the mouth.

*The final ‘shadow’ actor walks to the side of the stage mirroring Chunny’s words.*

Chunny: He walked down to the banks of the Tigris. The sky was so blue ... it was a Monday. Why do I remember it was a

Monday?

*He raises his glass.*

To Danny.

Sam: To Danny!!

*Maya enters.*

Maya: What are we toasting?

Sam: Fallen Comrades.

Chunny: To fallen comrades

*They ‘chink’ their drinks. Maya has a half full bottle of white wine. She begins to sing – her voice is sweet and the song creates a sadness and a tension.*

Maya: Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling

From glen to glen, and down the mountain side. The summer's gone, and all the flowers are dying. Oh Danny boy, oh Danny Boy I love you so.

*‘Danny’ leaves*

Chunny: About Danny… If he’d only said…. I mean... I just didn’t know he planned…

*She cuts him off by putting her finger to his lips, she is also clearly drunk. At this point the fallen actors stand and walk offstage unseen by the onstage characters.*

Maya: Ssshh. I know, I know… Look me and Sam didn’t come all this way to see you just so you could be sad. Cheer up! It’s your birthday.

*She gives him a hug that sits on the borderline line of friendship and intimacy. It’s a moment of tension that Sam breaks.*

Sam: The big '30'! Lieutenant, sorry, ex-lieutenant Charles Fenn is 30. Thirty long years on this earth. How does it feel?

*The fallen Danny stands and walk straight past Chunyu.*

Chunny: Unbearably sad.

Maya: You just need another drink mate.

*She passes the bottle, which Chunyu finishes.*

Chunyu: We were badly equipped, badly led and no one knew what the hell we were even supposed to be doing. When I tried to speak up, they politely suggested I might like to leave the army

Sam: Forget about it, it’s history.

*Sam passes Chunyu a can.*

Chunyu: Is it… Do you know you're the first familiar faces I've seen in weeks?

Sam: Wouldn’t have missed it mate.

Maya: You know what… I bet…we’ve had a drink for every one of your thirty years on this earth.

Sam: And it’s going to hurt on the boat home tomorrow.

Chunyu: Tomorrow? Surely you can stay for a few more days?

Sam: We have to get back...

Chunyu: Please…. please stay.

*Pause.*

Maya: *(hugs him) '*Course we will Chunny. Course we'll stay with you... won’t we?

*She looks at Sam.*

Sam: Alright, alright we’ll stay. One for all…

*All three put their arms round each other and leave, singing 'Danny Boy' gently.*

**Scene 2**

*Chanting:* Namo he la da na dwo la ye ye

*(repeated).*

*Four women enter, chanting. Juana the leader of the group sits and meditates. The chanting continues. After a while Chunyu enters – he is clearly very hung over.*

Chunyu: Oh, what a night!

*Pause.*

What is that noise?!

Juana: Ni zhen ying jun... ni zhen ying jun

(你真英俊，你真英俊)

You are beautiful... you are beautiful.

Chunyu: I’m sorry

Juana: Ni you da ma fan le.

(你有大麻烦了)

You are troubled.

Chunyu: I am hung over.

*She looks down.*

Juana:You see this ant?

Chunyu: No.

Juana: Look... come closer, closer.

Chunyu: Okay, I see it. It’s an ant.

Juana: Many lifetimes ago I accidentally spilt hot oil from a lamp into an ant hole much to the alarm of my companion who was walking with me. I asked her （Ni Wei Shen Me Ru Ci Shang Xin?）你为何如此伤心?

(Juana:) Why are you so unhappy? Was it because I had wasted the precious oil? No she said, it was because there were eighty thousand ant families living in the cave where the ant hole led, so the hot oil must have killed many ants.

Chunyu: You’re from that hippy commune aren’t you?

Juana: Jiushu he qi shiyongyuannengzaizuibukeneng de di fang zhaodao.

(救赎和启示永远能在最不可能的地方找到)

Salvation and enlightenment can often be found in the most unlikely places.

Chunyu: Can it now? Look, I’ve got a headache. I may actually be sick at any moment and the backs of my eyes itch.. I’m not really in the mood for incense and fake philosophy.

*Juana begins to chant again.*

I didn’t mean to be rude.

*She continues chanting*

Chunyu: I was just…

Nun 1: Why don’t you just ask her.

Chunyu: Sorry?

Nun 2: Ask her about it?

Chunyu: Ask her about what?

Nun 3:` Your ‘unbearable sadness’.

*Chunyu looks at Juana. There is a long pause which seems to break Chunyu’s last resolve.*

Chunyu: How do you know I said that?

*Pause.*

Juana: Hai yang zhushizhedaoyu

(海洋注视着岛屿)

The sea also contemplates the island.

Look at the leaves. Look at the autumn leaves.

Chunyu: What’s that supposed to mean?!! Hey don’t just walk off... hey!!!

*The nuns leave quietly, leaving Chunyu alone on stage.*

**Scene 3**

*Projected text:*

**The autumn tints fade out the hectic world.**

**Among a great tree's roots, a kingdom spreads.**

*The Princess is dreamily picking petals off a flower.*

Princess: He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he...

Qionying: The Queen wishes to speak to you.

*The Queen enters accompanied by Itty*

Princess: I am your one and only treasured child, always obedient.

Queen: Really, is that so? Then go to your books.

Itty: Are you sure about this? What about the oracle's warning?

Queen: I have made my decision. Qiongying.

Itty: But the warning was quite clear, outsiders will bring only harm to the kingdom

Queen: Qiongying!!

Qiongying: Your Majesty.

*The Princess leaves, picking the petals of the flower.*

Queen: I have a job for you of the utmost importance and delicacy. The Princess has reached womanhood and needs a husband but there is **no-one** in all of the kingdom suitable for her hand. Up there, above our sprawling roots, the community will soon be having their annual saint's day. This day brings many visitors to the island. You must attend the event in human guise and seek out a handsome and worthy young man for Princess Yaofang.

Qiongying: Of course! Your wish is my command.

*She kowtows and is about to leave.*

Queen: Wait, take these.

Qiongying Your Majesty.

Queen : Place them in the offerings box as a token of my devotion, oh and take Sister Itty with you. She knows the ways of the human world and will provide good counsel.

Qiongying: Your Majesty*. (She kowtows and leaves).*

*The Queen sweeps out followed by Itty*

Queen: With your influence I’m sure everything will be fine.

Itty: Of course your Majesty*. (She kowtows and leaves)*

Princess: Take me with you? Please!!

Qiongying: This is a delicate task requiring a woman of experience, charm, and sophistication...

Princess: Surely I should get a say in who I'm going to marry?

Qiongying: You said it yourself, you are the ‘always obedient’ daughter so go to your room!

**Scene 4**

*Music, actors hand out small lights to the audience as the nuns place the offering book on stage on the rock. A few audience members are taken on to stage and given small red enveloped and asked to sign the prayer book. There is a general sense of a party atmosphere. As the audience members are returning to their seats Chunny, Maya and Sam enter.*

Sam: What’s goin' on?

Chunyu: It's a festival... saint's day I think. Families come over from the mainland on the boat for an –

Maya: Happy bloody families.

Sam: Cheer up Maya,

Chunyu: Yeah, cheer up, you've got to get over it.

Maya: Get over it! Get over it! What, like Danny?

Chunyu: I didn’t mean that. Have a drink.

*She ignores him.*

Maya:I don't want a bloody drink! And I'll tell you something. When Danny came home on leave, he used to wake up screaming every night. And look at you, here on this bloody island in the middle of nowhere. It’s eating you up from the inside out. We're all stuck, imprisoned by it... I'm not me, you're not you. I'm someone *playing* me, an insect stuck on its back, flailing around, unable to turn itself over. I can’t move forward! so don't tell me to get over it! Don't you *bloody* dare!

*Pause.*

Sam: Look…maybe we should go.

*Sam attempts to take Chunny by the arm but is brushed off.*

Chunyu: It's a free world Sam and I'll drink myself stupid anywhere I want to. Anyway, I think I might join the commune...

*Maya storms off*

Sam: Maya!

*Sam goes after her. Itty and Qiongying enter (possibly through the audience) The audience are encouraged to turn on their lights. Qiongying wears heeled shoes; it’s clear this is the first time she has done so. She looks at the lights in the audience and at the tree.*

Qiongying: Look Itty, it’s all so beautiful.

Juana: Huanying.

(欢迎 - Welcome).

*Qiongying replies in Mandarin. They sign their names. Itty holds the phoenix pins and Qiongying the jewel case (a twig and a nut).*

Qiongying: Xièxie. Please accept these gifts as a humble offering.

Juana: Fozu baoyou

(佛祖保佑).

Welcome.

*Juana places the gifts by the book on the floor. Chunyu heads across to Juana and gives her a can of* *beer.*

Chunyu: Please accept *this* gift as a humble offering.

Juana: Fozu baoyou, thank you.

*Juana places the can on the floor net to the other gifts.*

Are you on your own?

*she doesn’t wait for an answer. It’s almost a statement*

May I introduce....

Qiongying: My name is Qiongying and this is Itty.

Chunyu: Charles Fenn, but everybody calls me Chunny.

Qiongying: Chunny... Chunny.

*She tries out the name a couple of times. She is very close to him, almost invading his personal space.*

Chunyu: It was a nickname I got in the army.

Juana: Charles Fenn, look at this beautiful craftsmanship.

Chunyu: It was a pleasure meeting you. *(he kisses her hand)*

Itty: And you.

*Chunyu goes to leave, staying at the edge of the stage.*

He's definitely not a MONK. I know what a monk looks like.

Qiongying: He seems a little tired.

Itty: He seems drunk.

Qiongying: He's got kind eyes and a sad smile. I think we need to see him with his shirt off.

Itty: Qiongying! Are you sure about him? He looks sad and lonely Let’s just go home, tell the Queen we couldn’t find anybody suitable and let everything carry on as normal…

Qionying: *(not paying attention to Itty)* ...I think he’s the one.

Itty: What about the oracle's warning?

Qiongying: Forget the oracle, he’s got potential. He was in the army, so he must be brave and loyal. I'm sure he's got lots of talents. He just needs –

Itty: A good slap?

Qiongying: No, he needs a sense of direction, a purpose in life...and maybe

Itty: a bath! Are you really sure about this?

Qiongying: Completely. He's the one!

**Scene 5**

*Chunyu is drinking the dregs from a bottle, staring at his reflection in the glass and talking to himself.*

Chunyu: So Charles, let's make a list... what are your achievements? Family, wife, girlfriend, significant other? No, oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Career? No? Well maybe the army wasn't for you. Good reputation – I guess not. Interest in life – one big zero, one gigantic­...

*He falls asleep. Qiongying and Itty enter.*

Qiongying: Charles Fenn…. Chunny….. Chunny……

Itty: Wake up!

*She shakes him and kicks him.*

Help me Qiongying.

One…, two…., three….., push!

Chunyu: Huh? What’s going on? Leave me alone.

Qiongying: We are two messengers from the ant kingdom.

We have come to collect you so that you may be married,

to the beautiful and resplendent Princess Yaofang.

Chunyu: This isn’t funny. Leave me alone.

Qiongying: Let our elegant and slender hands guide you on your journey

Itty: Get up. Get upright now or you'll feel the back of my hand.

Chunyu: What are you talking about?

Qiongying: We will guide you through the crimson gate at the foot of the great tree.

Chunyu: I really must stop drinking...

Qiongying: There is nothing to fear. I, the very attractive Duchess Qiongying and my companion Priestess Itty, will accompany you so that we may fan your fevered brow.

*As they 'move on' in the cart, lights give the impression of movement – music and projection across their faces.*

Chunyu: Where am I? Is this a cave?

Qiongying: We are now passing through the crimson gate.

Chunyu: What are those lights?

Qiongying: We are here, we are at the station.

*Qiongying and Itty leave. Chunyu does not move – he is in daze. He stands and all around him people are moving ant-like through the space. We hear many muffled voices speaking in Mandarin. It is the sound of a bustling, busy city but an ancient city. Slowly, one voice becomes louder than all the rest:*

Queen *(voice over):* We are millions –

out of the millions rise thousands,

out of the thousands rise dozens,

and then there arises a Queen.

(Queen:) I am the Queen of the Great Kingdom of Sophora. My only daughter, Yaofang, Princess of the Golden Bough, has flowered this summer. Now, in the first chill of autumn, the trembling poplars wear yellow coats and she is ready for marriage.

Prepare yourself Chunyu.

Chunyu: I’m sorry I think you’ve got the wrong person. I’m not…

*More street sounds, and then a group of ants enter being drilled by Sam dressed as an ant commander.*

Sam: Left, right, left, right, left right,

Chunyu: Sam!

Sam: Attenshun!

Chunyu: What are you doing here?

Sam: The ants thought you might need some company. They offered me a job in the army.

Chunyu: I can’t believe it. Sergeant Sam!

Sam: Commander actually. Sorry I can't stop to chat, lots to do. Company by the left, quick march. Come on you useless bunch of formicidae. Call yourselves ants, you’re more like lice with heavy shopping. See you at the wedding. Left, right, left, right, left right.

Chunyu Wedding? What Wedding! Sam… wait, I don’t understand, I……whoa!! What are you doing? I say, excuse me!! I'm not sure... oh.

*Ants 24602 and 1616 quickly enter and remove his shirt. Itty and Qiongying stand at the rear of stage. They nod approvingly as Chunyu is taken off stage.*

**Scene 6**

*Projected text:*

**All tunes now seem to purr the theme of love.**

**Has a great beauty come of marriage age?**

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*A lot of sudden running around. An Actor (Ellise) hands out streamers to the front rows of the audience.*

Ant 1616: So much work to do, 843

Ant 843: Too much to do, 1616.

Ant 24602: That's the life of a worker ant, the hint’s in the name

Ant 843: Work, work, work... work until you drop. While the queen just sits there on her fa –

Sam: Haven’t you got work to be doing 843!

Ant 843: Sir! Yes sir.

Sam: 24602 we need to get these flowers in place.

Ant 1616: It's so very very exciting – Princess Yaofang is getting married. Will there be souvenirs? I’d like a mug, no a plate. Maybe a nice scarf or some commemorative toothpaste,

Ant 24602: A pair of matching egg cups!

Ant 843: Never mind egg cups and toothpaste, they’re almost here!

*Music. Sergeant Sam re-enters, leading the wedding party consisting of Itty, the Queen and Chunyu. Louder music. Ellise will encourage the audience to stand and applaud when the queen enters.*

Itty:Her Royal Highness, Queen of the glorious Kingdom of Sophora, defender of the realm and all its territories.

*Ants cheer and audience applaud loudly. The music quietens. The audience sit.*

Queen: My only daughter, Yaofang,

has flowered this summer.

Now, in the first chill of Autumn,

she is ready for marriage.

I have summoned her a lover

fished from the sea of men.

Chunyu, formerly known as Charles Fenn,

welcome.

*Again ants and audience applaud loudly. The ants talk over the applause*

Ant 1616: He seems quite nice.

Ant24602: I heard he drinks too much.

Ant 843: He’s a bit old.

*Music. Yaofang enters. Itty whispers rapidly and quite loudly in the Queen's ear.*

Itty: Your majesty, we must not ignore the oracle. This union of human and ant will bring disaster and catastrophe to our great Kingdom.

Queen: If you value your position as my priestess, Itty, you will begin the rite without delay.

*Pause.*

Itty: Speak the oath child. Speak the oath and make your vow.

Princess: I am Yaofang,

(Princess:) Princess of the Great Ant Kingdom.

Being the golden bough of ancient roots,

it falls to me to grow new branches.

Itty: Bliss fills our underground city

beneath the great tree.

Our caverns swell with joy.

*Itty turns to loom at the queen. This is her last chance to stop the marriage but the queen does not respond*

Itty: Let the marriage ceremony commence.

*More loud applause from Ants and audience. The handfasting.*

Princess: I am your royal wife.

Chunyu: I do not know you.

Princess: I was... waiting for you.

Chunyu: I was... I was...

*Pause.*

Princess: Yes?

Chunyu: I was so lonely.

Princess: I will be your friend.

Chunyu: I am getting older.

Princess: We will grow older together.

Chunyu: Can you... love me?

Princess: It is my duty.

I hope it will become...

my pleasure.

*Chunyu touches her cheek, and the Princess his.*

... Chunyu.

Chunyu: Yaofang.

Ant 1616: The first soft touch

and all is sighs and breath

not knowing this marriage

was written in the stars.

*Sam produces a phone out of his pocket. He organises the wedding party in front of the audience and takes a photo of everyone as if the audience were wedding guests; at this point Ellice encourages the audience to throw the streamers.*

Sam: One, two, three, ‘Cheese’

*As he says 'cheese', the audience members with streamers throw them at the bridal party. The bride and groom then lead the party off stage.*

*Led by Sam, Qiongying and the Queen leave, followed by Chunyu and the Princess. The ants applaud and then begin to clean.*

Ant 843: It's us again. Look lively.

Ant 1616: Very nicely done,

Ant 24602: Lovely ceremony.

Ant 1616: No souvenirs though, seems a shame

Ant 843: Forget the souvenirs – there’s enough to clean up!

*They clean up all the streamers.*

**Scene 7**

*Sam gets dressed for battle. Ellice has a sign that says ‘Sha’. Sam uses a combination of stylised Chinese movements as he is repelling the enemy. The rest of the cast create tableaux throughout the battle scene behind Sam as if Sam were leading a charge into battle against the audience. They throw ‘fighting shapes’. the audience are encouraged to join in with* Shā! (杀 *etc*.).

Sam*(Off)*: Once more, once more... Charge! Beat them back, beat them back. Down with the Prince of Rattan Sandalwood! Die you bastards. Shā!

(杀 - Die!)

*During the fight a number of the cast fall down dead as in the first scene. They scream as they fall but Sam seems unaware of this. As the noise dies down.*

*(Entering)* Well that's seen them off for another day. Ow, ow... bloody ow! I swear I can't take much more of this... we need more troops, a couple of crack regiments at the border to attack Sandalwood on their own ground. We need Chunny. He’ll know how to deal with that lot. 843, 843!

*Ant 843 rushes in.*

Sam: Get me a jug of wine and find me a volunteer.

Ant 843: Sir! 24602!

Ant 24602: Sir!

Sam: Take this letter to the palace.

Ant 24602: The palace... but that’s two days walk!

Sam: Then I suggest you run?

Ant 24602 Yes sir!

**Scene 8**

*Chunyu and the Princess enter, smiling hand in hand. The Princess has a fan.*

Princess: Do you love me?

Chunyu: I think... I might!

*She pretends to be shocked.*

Princess: You *might*!

Chunyu: I have only known you for six weeks

*The Princess and Chunyu begin to fight in a playful flirtatious manner. The Queen sweeps in, followed by Qiongying and Ant 24602,who is exhausted and puffing... a lot. Chunyu and the Princess haven’t noticed.*

Queen:Daughter, son-in-law… I have news. The kingdom of Sandalwood has once again launched an attack on our borders. Chunyu, you are to travel without delay to our troubled territory of Southern Bough where you will take up the esteemed position of Regional Prefect. Yaofang, the administrative headquarters of Southern Bough are a good distance from the frontline so you will be safe in the royal mansion until the baby is safely delivered.

Chunyu: Baby! When? How? I mean, that's... fantastic news... I should get a job.

Queen: You have a job.

*The Queen sweeps out with Qiongying and the ants.*

Chunyu: Yes, of course I... I... I love you

**Scene 9**

Ants 1616/24602: Final stop, end of the line.

Zhongdianzhandao le(终点站到)

Welcome to Southern Bough

Huanyinglaidaonankejun(欢迎来到南柯郡)

where the mountains are greener

zhe li shangeng lv (这里山更绿)

the waters clearer

shuigengqing (水更清)

the trees lusher

shu mu geng fan mao (树木更繁茂)

and the animals plumper

(Ants 1616/24602:) dong wudouyuan gun gun (动物都圆滚滚)

*(Ant 24602 repeats everything 1616 says in Mandarin, like a bilingual announcement).*

Chunyu: So this is Southern Bough?

Princess: Where the mountains are arid, the waters are fetid, the trees are... sparer and the animals thinner. Hot, sticky, lawless and Itty... Itty!

Itty: Good morning..

Princess: You’re drunk

Itty: It’s a side effect of my medication.

Chunyu: What medication?

Itty: Wine!

Princess: What are you doing here?

Itty: Your *mother* felt that my services would be better used here

in this lawless shi…

Maya: Shall we get you some coffee?

*Itty throws her arms around him.*

Itty: Chunyu..., lovely Chunyu, I should never have questioned you…

Chunyu: Maya?

*Pause.Chunyu hugs Maya.*

Why... why are you here*?*

Maya: I have just been appointed High Treasurer of Southern Bough. I think the Queen thought you might appreciate some help and a friendly face.

*Itty staggers into Maya*

I see you’ve met my new best friend Itty, who is –

Itty: I'm... the mistress of the Chief Minister.

Princess: But you're a priestess!

Itty: The Chief Minister is a very, spiritual man. He also has a huge –

Princess: Itty!

Itty: Bank account, because of all the taxes that go straight into his

pocket. And you know what they say about big pockets...

Chunyu: And where is the Chief Minister now?

Itty: Last seen in bed. Big Pockets.

Princess: Well, it appears you have quite a job ahead of you. Immorality, dissipation and corruption ! Welcome to Southern Bough.

Maya: I think Itty would benefit from a cold bath.

Itty: No, no, no, no, nooooo...!

Princess: Run the bath.

Ant 1616/24602: Right away your highness.

Itty: You are supposed to be my friend! I don't like water, it's too wet.

Chunyu: Let her sleep it off. Meanwhile I think I will go and introduce myself to this Chief Minister and you, my love, need some rest.

Itty: Yes, that’s right. A lady in your condition... remember the oracle

*The Princess drags Itty out, followed by Chunyu and Maya.*

Princess: Bring the bags.

*Ant 24602 mumbles curses in English and Mandarin, interspersed with phrases like* ‘Why do they make me do this? I’m too old. It’s just not fair’*. She fails to pick the two bags up. Liam comes on and takes one, Xinyi takes the other*

**Interval interlude**

*Xinyi speaks in Mandarin. As she does so the tree roots grow. Itty, Chunyu, Maya and Sam each have a root that they unroll.*

Xinyi: and so twenty years pass and Chunyu’s stewardship ensures that Southern Bough flourishes. Priestess Itty banished to the Southern Bough by the Queen because of her continued reminders of the oracle's warning has managed to cut down on her drinking... and has been a constant and loyal companion to princess Yaofang. Sam and Maya have both been promoted and enjoy positions of power and respect in the kingdom. Maya remains a devoted and loyal friend to Chunyu who’s own power, popularity and influence continue to increase.

And as for Princess Yaofang….

**Scene 10**

**All generations live in peace;**

**the population has increased**.

Qiongying: How many years have you been in Southern Bough?

Ant 1616: Ooo now let’s see... must be twenty years now. I got my transfer from the capital soon after Chunyu, I mean Lord Chunyu, first came here. Just before he and the Princess had their first child – they’ve got four now. Things have certainly changed since those days.

Qiongying: So I believe.

Any 1616: There’s no crime, food is plentiful, crops are growing and every village has a shrine honouring the wise and equitable Chunyu, I mean Lord Chunyu. May he and his family prosper.

Qiongying: And how is the Princess?

*Itty has quietly entered. Ant 1616 does a double take.*

Ant 1616: The Princess remains weak. Four difficult terms in labour and the savage southern heat have taken their toll.

Qiongying: I will see her shortly and offer what comfort I can.

Itty: She is to be found in the new Jade Tower beyond the gates of the city on the Sandalwood border.

Qionying: Itty!

*(Qionying embraces Itty)*

Itty: Yaofang will be very happy to see you. The Tower enjoys a refreshing northwest breeze but very few visitors. Come.

*She gestures Qionying to go with her. They leave, talking excitedly.*

**Scene 11**

*Maya and Sam are drinking, Sam much more than Maya.*

Sam: Look at those stars, infinite and glorious.

Maya: That’s a bit poetic for you

Sam: This is the fine life! Great wine, great friends, great job. To Chunyu!

*He drinks, Maya does not.*

Maya: Don’t you think you should lay off that stuff a little?

Sam: Why?

Maya: Think of your position!

Sam: My position… esteemed High Treasurer Maya!

Maya: Exactly General!

Sam: Come on, what harm has a little wine ever done?

*(Maya looks unconvinced by this last statement)*

Maya: Do you think he’s happy?

Sam: Who, Chunny? Why not? He’s rich, successful, everybody loves him, even when he raises taxes and he’s married to a princess. He has everything he’s ever wanted.

Maya: But is he *happy*?

Sam: I suppose so. To be honest, I don’t see him much, he’s always busy.

Maya: Exactly!

Sam: What?

Maya: He’s always busy, he built a tower for Yaofang because she was dying from the heat but he won’t stay there for more than a couple of days at a time.

Sam: What’s he supposed to do? Southern Bough doesn’t run itself you know.

Maya: Yeah, I suppose so, give me a drink.

*Pause*

Sam: Do you ever think of...?

Maya: What? Up, there. *(She points).*

Sam: Yeah and...

Maya: What Danny?... Yeah, of course I do but…

*She sees Chunyu and Yaofang.*

Look...

*Chunyu and Yaofang enter, Sam leaves, Maya hangs back.*

Princess: I love the moon... it reminds me of my grandfather's face whenever he saw a gliding frog. He loved those frogs.

Chunyu: Are you happy here? I built this place for you.

*Yaofang seems a little absent from the conversation and tired. Chunyu seems not to notice. She leaves, humming 'Danny Boy' very quietly*

Chunyu: A toast.

*Ant 24602 hobbles in with wine, like an ancient retainer, muttering in Mandarin.*

Chunyu: A toast to the moon, the harvest moon... and gliding frogs

Princess: Yes, to gliding frogs... *(She is clearly unwell).* I’m sorry, I'm shaking again... I’ll be fine but I had better go inside. I'm sorry, sorry...

*The Princess falls, 24602 catches her. Chunyu shoos 24602 away.*

Chunyu: Yaofang!

Yaofang: Too many babies, too much heat… Why are you never here?

*Chunyu picks her up and carries her out carefully.*

Any 843: My apologies your Lordship but I have news from the palace.

*Chunyu instructs 24602 to assist Yaofang.*

Chunyu: Take her inside. What is the news?

Ant 843: The Queen requests your immediate assistance. The Rattan Sandalwood Army is attacking the kingdom on two fronts.

Chunyu: Assemble as many troops as you can and find Sam. Inform the General that he will lead the attack on one flank and I the other. And tell him to have his wits about him. If the Queen has asked for assistance, then their forces must be well trained.

**Scene 12**

*Rattan Sandalwood, a warrior in a half mask, is doing martial arts exercises efficiently but clumsily. He stops, exhausted.*

Warrior 1: Prince Rattan Sandalwood, esteemed liege lord, most outstanding, fine featured, handsome, tanned and –

Sandalwood: Yes, yes, get on with it.

Warrior 1: Our armies continue to march on Southern Bough, we move ever closer...

Sandalwood: Very good but what of our other endeavour? What news from the Jade Tower? Did you deliver the flowers to Princess Yaofang?

Warrior 1: My liege.

Sandalwood: Was she as radiant as the sun?

Warrior 1: Um... I thought she looked a bit peaky.

Sandalwood: But radiant as the sun?

Warrior 1: Ur... yes.

Sandalwood: Did she like the flowers, the fragrant yellow sandal and the starry rattan ?

Warrior 1: Well she threw... And then she...

*Sandalwood is getting very angry. Warrior 1 coughs and takes a deep breath.*

...placed the blooms in her hair and called for her looking glass, and sighed most delicately.

*She sighs.*

Sandalwood: Of course. She loves me. I have been a widower for almost three weeks now. The time has come for a new bride. Whilst her current husband and his cronies are miles away in the capital, I shall personally lead the raiding party and free the delicate Yaofang from the tyranny of her Jade Tower.

Servant! Servant, bring me my trusty weapon!!

**Scene 13**

Itty: Qiongying. Qiongying! Wake up! For somebody so small, you sleep like an ox.

Qiongying*(from off)*:Okay, there’s no need to be rude.

Itty: What's on earth is that?

Qiongying: It is not the season for the foxes to mate.

*Ant 24602 rushes in.*

Ant 24602: The castle is besieged. The castle is besieged. The castle is lasciviously besieged by the shouty Prince Rattan Sandalwood and his uncouth warriors. I have mobilised the voluntary garrison

Qiongying: Who are they?

Ant 24602: Seven of the palace servants.

Itty: *(sarcastically)* Seven. Well that's okay then. For a minute there I thought we were in trouble. Send a runner to Chunyu immediately.

Ant 24602: That will leave us severely outnumbered

Itty: We’re already severely outnumbered!

Princess: What is that noise? I was sleeping, I –

Qiongying: I fear that noise is Prince Rattan Sandalwood come to attack the Tower.

Ant 24602: Princess Yaofang, the Prince of Rattan Sandalwood has asked to talk to you in person. He says he wishes to make you his wife

Princess: Does he indeed!

Itty: We have sent a runner to Chunyu…

Princess: Tell him I will speak to him

Qionying: But madam you are far too weak to...

Yaofang: Don’t worry

Like a heavenly warrior, I'll descend from the clouds.

Like a flaming torch, I'll burn the Sandalwood.

Let him in blank amazement gawk.

I'll slash and stab, cut off his wilting stalk.

*They exit. Sandalwood enters.*

Sandalwood: Princess Yaofang!

*Yaofang enters.*

Princess Yaofang, so good to see you again.

Yaofang: You dare to invade the Southern Bough and speak in platitudes?

Sandalwood: The other day you graciously accepted my flowers, the yellow sandal and the starry rattan.

Sandalwood: I crushed your flowers and spat upon your stinking servant.

Sandalwood: Your husband is away I see. It is neither wise nor kind to leave such a beautiful flower unattended. Such beauty will only wilt if uncared for.

Princess: Your concern for my wellbeing is touching. Now surrender or suffer the consequences.

Sandalwood: I admire you spirit, we will make a powerful team.

Itty: Keep the oaf talking. Chunyu and his army are almost at the gates.

Princess: Your arrogance is only matched by your ignorance. I am Princess Yaofang of the Golden Bough, first Daughter of the Kingdom of Sophora. Stand down or prepare to die.

Sandalwood: You spur my advances.

Princess: I would rather die than succumb to them.

Sandalwood: You insult the kingdom of Rattan Sandalwood and die you will.

Princess: You’re too late, my husband returns with his army and you will be crushed like the vermin you are.

*Sandalwood shoots his arrow, wounding her.*

Everyone: Yaofang!

24602: Mistress!

Chunyu: Get her to a doctor.

Itty: Where are you going?

Chunyu: To make sure the Prince of Rattan Sandalwood remembers this day for the rest of his short life. Take Yaofang to the Queen.

Maya:Though lovely and fair as the rose of the summer

Yet, 'twas not her beauty alone that won me.

Oh no! 'Twas the the truth in her eye ever beaming…

**Scene 15.**

Chunyu: Report.

Maya: Sam’s returning to town on horseback all by himself.

Chunyu: He must have gone on ahead e mustto announce his victory personally.

*Sam enters, dishevelled and drinking. Chunyu enters, accompanied by ants.*

Chunyu: Welcome General Sam Bryan, there will be a banquet for your triumphant return.

Sam: Just some bread.

Maya: Are you drunk?

Chunyu: Where’s your regiment?

Sam: We were surrounded… at Red Rock Cliff.

Chunyu: Surrounded?

Sam: It was just some Dutch courage to prepare us for battle

Chunyu: What happened? How did you all manage to escape?

Sam: I hid, slipped away in the night. Someone get me some wine.

Chunyu: Two thousand of our best troops went with you. Where are they?

Sam: I… don’t…. I don’t know... I lost them somewhere.

Itty: You mean they are all dead.

Sam: I don’t know… maybe… probably

Chunyu: You were responsible for two thousand lives.

Sam: It was supposed to give them courage. Wine for the troops before the glorious battle. We were sleeping when they attacked…

Chunyu: I'll have you court-martialled and executed.

Sam: Yeah. 'Cos you're the king of the world!

Chunyu: How dare you talk back to me! *(SLAP)*

Sam: I gave them the wine 'an...they all got drunk except me because I can take my drink. I never, ever... get drunk. I survived. I'm a hero!

Chunyu: Take him away and behead him for treason!

*The ants look unsure about what to do.*

Sam: *(laughing)* You expect them to obey you. They love me!

Chunyu: Take him away.

Maya: Chunny, don’t do this. This is Sam, our friend, , who came here to support you, your best mate, Sergeant Sam. Think of everything you’ve been through together. Think of Danny... what would he say? What you're doing, it's just... cruel.

Chunyu: You can rot in a cell. How could you possibly have lost the battle Sam? I was counting on you.

Sam: It must have been something in the wine. Someone must have spiked it.

Chunyu: Throw the drunk in jail. The Queen will decide his fate.

*Qiongying enters. She is upset.*

Maya: What's the matter?

Qiongying: The Princess died on her way to the city.

*Chunyu looks broken.*

Itty: The golden apple's turned green and sour and withers on the tree.

Qiongying:*(sings)* She was lovely and fair as the lotus of summer,

and found more than beauty alone in that hour

And then, 'twas the heart in her strength newly dawning

That made him love Yaofang, his warrior flower.

**Scene 16.**

Qiongying: Have you heard the news? Chunyu has been promoted to Prime Minister because of his fearless defence of the realm.

Itty: And the pointless loss of his wife.

*The Queen has entered quietly.*

Queen: What was that?

Itty: I was just remarking how deeply saddening it was that Chunyu’s victory came at such a heavy price.

Queen: Yes… indeed...

*(She sighs)*

but we are indebted to Chunyu for his loyal service.

Qiongying: We are all in his debt and I told him so at a reception yesterday evening.

Itty: Yes, Chunyu has attended a great many social events lately.

Queen: Once again, do you have something to say?

Itty: Remember the oracle's words. Charles Fenn has no place in our kingdom .

Queen: After all these years, you forget yourself again! Remember to whom you speak.

Itty: Of course your Majesty.

*She kowtows.*

Queen: Good day.

*The Queen leaves.*

Itty: I imagine Chunyu must be quite lonely.

Qiongying: Poor man.

Itty: Perhaps we should offer some comfort and support.

Qiongying: What do you mean?

Itty: A home cooked meal, maybe some wine, a little company.

Qiongying: Is that proper?

Itty: Is what proper? Anyway, we are all adults.

*They leave. The Queen and Chunyu return; they look out at the lake.*

Chunyu: The willows have lost nearly all their leaves.

Queen: And soon the lake will be iced over.

Chunyu: Your grandchildren will love to skate over it.

*Pause.*

Queen: We received a message about General Bryan. Do you still wish him to be executed?

Chunyu: That won’t be necessary. Sam died in jail.

Queen: Aren't the Mandarin ducks resplendent, all those colours?

Chunyu: Absolutely, resplendent.

**Scene 17.**

*Enter Itty and Qiongying singing. Enter Ant 1616, who eavesdrops on them.*

Itty and Qiongying:There were two drunken maidens –

Itty: *(spoken)* Maidens!

*They laugh. They are clearly inebriated. A cast member encourages the audience to clap along to the music.*

Itty and Qiongying:There were two drunken maidens

who went to the city of light

They drank from Monday morning.

didn't stop till Saturday night.

When Saturday night would come me boys,

they wouldn’t then go out

And these two drunken maidens,

they pushed the jug about.

Itty: Chunyu, Chunyu, we're so happy to see you.

Qiongying: Is that your sword, or are you just pleased to see me?

*They fall about laughing.*

Itty: My apologies, we are both a little giddy.

Qiongying: And your recent widowed state is of our concern.

Itty: Princess Yaofang… such a tragedy. We shall provide what support we can in these difficult times although we cannot compare to her beauty or grace.

Chunyu: You are both blessed with great beauty and... ample grace.

Itty: Always the gentleman.

Qiongying: Will you join us for drinks in our private quarters? You must be tired of all those public engagements you have to go to.

Itty: No chance to relax.

Chunyu: I would be delighted, if it’s not too much trouble.

Itty: No trouble at all.

Chunyu: Will anybody else be joining us?

Qiongying: No, just Itty and myself. We thought you would prefer that.

Just an intimate threesome.

*Ant 1616 has clearly overheard the conversation and follows them off stage.*

*24602 enters, shivering and yawning.*

24602: Work, work, work, from early morning to the middle of the night, then trudging back home in the pitch dark... and it's cold. I'm weak and old,

I could slip, I could break my leg, I could d –

*She breaks off, hearing Maya humming and 'hides' herself.*

Maya: The summer's gone, and all the flowers –

*(To herself)* Chunny, chunny, chunny chunny... What am I doing! I'm right here if you’d only open your eyes… but you’d rather get drunk.

M*aya leaves, singing to herself.*

24602: And so the wheel turns. Esteemed High Treasurer Maya pines for the grief stricken drunkard Chunyu... and I pine for a couple of hours of sleep before everything begins again

tomorrow.

**Scene 18.**

*Projected text:*

**Once the palace gates shut behind your back,**

**You're nothing but a stranger on the street.**

Queen: You’re late this morning, Qiongying.

Qiongying: I am sorry your Majesty. I have had a hard couple of days...

Queen: Have you seen Prime Minister Chunyu at all?

Qiongying: I….

*Itty enters.*

Itty: Good morning, your majesty.

Queen: Ah, I’m glad you could join us. Now that I have you both together, there have been some rather unsettling rumours circulating the palace over the last couple of days…

Itty: Your Majesty they are all true! We humbly throw ourselves at your mercy. We have acted rashly, we sought only to comfort Prime Minister Chunyu after the loss of the beautiful and courageous Yaofang. But he beguiled us with his charm and plied us with wine. We were powerless to resist his advances.

Queen: You have been absent from court for two days!

Qiongying: His advances were very hard to resist.

*Chunyu enters, slightly wobbly and sishevelled. He is clearly still drunk.*

Chunyu: You called for me your Majesty.

Queen: Chunyu, son-in-law, you have disgraced this family and you have disgraced the Great Kingdom of Sophora. Do you have anything to say in your defence?

Chunyu: Your Majesty. I'm sorry, it didn’t mean anything, it was just a bit of fun I…

*Qionying looks distressed at Chunyu’s words. The Queen looks furious, appalled and hurt all at the same time.*

Itty: He should be sent back to where he came from!

Chunyu: Look, I said I’m sorry… I

Queen: Charles Fenn, you have been away from your home for a very long time.

Chunyu: This *is* my home!

Queen: No, Priestess Itty is right. You belong in the human world.

Chunyu: But my children are here!

Queen: And they will be taken care of.

Chunyu: You can’t do this, I want to see my children,,,

Queen: It is time for you to go.

Chunyu: What about Maya, where’s Maya? Maya!

Queen: 1616. 1616!!

Ant 1616: Your Majesty.

Queen: Collect Charles Fenn's possessions. He will be waiting here for your return.

Ant 1616: Your Majesty.

Itty: An excellent decision your Majesty.

*All leave, except for Chunyu. He is angry and confused.*

Chunyu:What That’s it! All these years and not even goodbye!

Where are my servants? Where are my children? Where are my… where..

*(Sings)* But when I came to man's estate

'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate

With a hey ho the wind and the rain

For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came at last to wife...

*He falls asleep.*

**Scene 19.**

Chunyu: Oh my head, my poor aching head...it feels like there's a whole army marching around inside it.

*Sam enters.*

Sam: I wondered what had happened to you:

Chunyu: Sam? Sam! You’re alive. I thought you’d….

*Chunyu stares at something on the ground.*

Sam: Are you alright?

Chunyu: I had a wife... a princess, four children… Yaofang.

*For the first time Chunyu notices where Sam is standing. He is standing on the ants' nest, which is teeming with ants. Sam has unknowingly smashed the nest. Chunyu screams at him and grabs at his feet. Sam is confused.*

Sam!!!, You're standing on the mound...the ants!

Sam: Ah! Get them off me. *(He swats at his legs).*

Chunyu: You’re destroying the kingdom!! They’re all going to die. Get off them!

*Chunyu pushes Sam out of the way.*

Sam: You’re a bloody psycho!

*Sam leaves in a bad mood. Chunyu ignores this and searches on the ground.*

*Juana enters.*

Juana:Zao (早)

Good morning Charles Fenn

Chunyu: Look at the ants, the colony is smashed!

Juana: Wokandao le (我看到了) I see them.

Have you been dreaming, Charles Fenn?

Chunyu: No, no... I don't know. No, I was there, it was real.

*He stares at the site of ruined ants' nest, slightly unsure.*

Look, look here. This is the Sophora Kingdom and this must be Southern Bough. Here’s the Jade Tower where…

*Pause.*

I lived here...there... for twenty years.

Juana: And were they happy years?

Chunyu: Yes, of course, I was a Lord… I was Prime Minister… I had Yaofang – I had…I had...

Juana: Everything you ever wanted.

Chunyu: ...What?

Juana: Everything you ever dreamed of?

Chunyu: Look... yes… no, I mean, that’s not the point…

*He scrambles on the floor, trying to fix the ant mound.*

Chunyu:The ants... it... can't have been a dream. It was so real...

*Juana takes his hand, pulls him up and looks at him straight in the eye.*

Juana: Does it matter?

Chunny: I governed the Southern Bough. The people loved me! I was a hero.

Juana: Sometimes we fail to recognise that which we see.

(In mandarin first)

Chunyu: I loved her…

*Pause.*

Juana: And were you there for her when she needed you?

Chunyu: Yes... I…. I…

(Pause)

No.

Juana: To reach the clarity of emptiness,

One has to get beyond desires.

Chunyu: I don’t understand…

*Pause*

The trappings of success are counterfeit

A person’s spirit is the real root for one’s life

*Juana repeats the last line in Mandarin, Chunyu then also repeats it to himself which seems to make him realise that he needs to get back to ant kingdom.*

Chunny: The ants... I need to go back... just for a moment…. I …

*The lights change and the music swells. Images are projected on the screen much like the montage at the start of the piece.*

***Projection:***

*1616, Qiongying, Itty, the Queen and finally Yaofang walk on stage and pass Chunyu. Only Yaofang pauses. They each then take a position on stage at the end of one of the great tree’s roots.*

Chunyu: *(All in Mandarin only)*

*(To 1616)* (Thank you for your loyalty).

Xiexieni de bang zhu (谢谢你的帮助)

*(To Qiongying)* (Thank you for your friendship).

Xiexieni dui wozhe me you hao (谢谢你对我这么友好)

*(To Itty)* (Thank you for the lesson you taught me).

Xiexienijiaogeiwo de (谢谢你教给我的)

(*To the Queen)* (Thank you for your faith).

Xiexienixinrenwo (谢谢你信任我)

*Yaofang appears.*

Chunyu: Yaofang… Thank you for… everything

Xiexieniweiwozuo de yiqie

(谢谢你为我做的一切)

Woaini我爱你

*(In English)* I love you.

*Pause.*

*Juana points to the remains of the ant mound.*

Juana: 'A long dream doesn’t take much time.

A short dream won’t be noted down.'

Chang mengbu duo shi (长梦不多时)

Duanmengwubeiji (短梦无碑记)

Does it matter if the flower we see does not exist?

You were still dreaming when you woke up. Goodbye Charle Fenn and remember. 'People are like ants dreaming under the Southern Bough. 'Putianxiameng nan kerensiyi (普天下梦南柯人似蚁)。

*She touches him gently on the shoulder and leaves. Maya enters.*

Maya: Are you ok? Sam thinks you’ve lost it.

Chunyu: Actually…

*Pause.*

I think I’m fine. How about you?

Maya: I’m getting by.

Chunyu: I think about Danny a lot.

Maya: It wasn’t your fault you know.

Chunyu: I know, it wasn’t yours either.

*He reaches his hands out to her and, after a slight hesitation, she takes them.*

*(In Mandarin only)* PuTian Xia Meng Nan KeRen Si Yi

(普天下梦南柯人似蚁)

Maya: What?

Chunyu: 'People are like ants dreaming under the Southern Bough.'

They walk off stage. The projections from the start of the show play again finally each cast member comes on to stage and removes their final ‘costume’ placing it at their feet. George remains dressed as Chunyu and is the last person to walk on stage. They bow

**FIN**

*eC*