

## Satellite Kids

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*Satellite Kids* is a *performed ethnography* based on findings from a four-year critical ethnographic case study (1996-2000) of a Toronto high school that had recently enrolled a large number of immigrant students from Hong Kong. Performed ethnography, also known as performance ethnography and ethnodrama, involves turning the findings of ethnographic research into a play script that can be read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences.

The play is set in the spring of 1998, nine months after Britain transferred Hong Kong to Chinese rule. Under the transfer agreement Hong Kong became a special administrative region of China. It was given some control over its government but no control over matters of foreign policy and defense. While it was intended that Hong Kong retain its capitalist economy within China's socialist system, many people of the educated middle class in Hong Kong felt uncertain about the quality of life under Chinese rule and emigrated from Hong Kong in the early and mid-1990s. Many of these people immigrated to Toronto and enrolled their children in Toronto elementary and high schools. The Chan and Lee families portrayed in *Satellite Kids* are part of this group of immigrants. However, as Dr. Chan explains in Scene 4 of the play, it wasn't always possible for Hong Kong professionals to find suitable work in Toronto, and some people decided to return to Hong Kong and resume their careers there. Rather than take their children back to Hong Kong, the Chan's and the Lee's decided to keep them in school Toronto where they could acquire the linguistic and cultural capital to become cosmopolitan citizens; members of transnational educated elite able to work across borders, cultures and languages. The presence of these cosmopolitan youth in Toronto schools in the late 1990s created new challenges and responsibilities for Toronto teachers and guidance counselors. *Satellite Kids* focuses on the ways a guidance counselor at Pierre Elliot Trudeau Secondary School works with the Chan and Lee families. It also dramatizes the ways that high school students Wendy Chan, Evelyn Chan and John Lee engage and disengage with the task of learning and speaking English.

I wrote *Satellite Kids* for school teachers and guidance counselors who work with students like Wendy, Evelyn and John. The play, along with the first play I wrote from the ethnographic case-study, *Hong Kong, Canada* (Goldstein 2003), can be seen as a response to the urgent and compelling call for educators in public schools to learn about their students' family and community lives. It is important for educators to have opportunities to engage in sustained conversations and thinking about their students' lived experiences. It is my hope that by collectively reading *Satellite Kids* aloud in teacher education classes and conferences and discussing the issues it raises, educators will have that opportunity.

### **Characters (in order of appearance)**

- Wendy Chan: 19-year old student in her last year at Pierre Elliot Trudeau (P.E.T.) Secondary School; Hong Kong-born Chinese; has been attending P.E.T. for the last three years. Wears clothes from The Gap and Old Navy.
- Evelyn Chan: Wendy's 16-year old sister; arrived from Hong Kong last fall and is in her first year of high school at P.E.T. Wears clothes that are stylish and popular in Hong Kong.
- Susan Rose: Guidance counsellor at P.E.T; born in Toronto; White, Jewish, late 40s. Wears a skirt, blouse, blazer and low-heeled shoes.
- Officer Wong: Police officer; Canadian-born Chinese; late 30s. Wears a Metro Toronto Police uniform.
- Dr. Chan: Wendy and Evelyn's mother; Hong Kong-born Chinese; living and working in Hong Kong; late 40s. Wears a skirt and blouse under a white doctor's coat.
- John Lee: Evelyn's boyfriend; 17 years old; arrived from Hong Kong last fall and is in his first year of high school at P.E.T. Wears clothes that are stylish and popular in Hong Kong.
- Alfred Yeung: The Chan's lawyer and family friend; Wendy and Evelyn's legal guardian; Hong Kong-born Chinese who has lived in Toronto since grade 12; early 50s. Wears a business suit.

### **Setting**

Pierre Elliot Trudeau Secondary School  
Toronto, Canada  
Spring 1998

*(At rise: The stage is empty except for eight chairs, a roundtable and a screen. The table is set downstage left and has three chairs around it. There is a telephone on the table. One of these chairs is occupied by MS. ROSE and the other two are empty. This is the Guidance Office. WENDY is sitting on one of two chairs set beside the guidance office, downstage centre. The chair beside her will be occupied by EVELYN. There is a brown bag lunch and a binder underneath EVELYN'S chair. The sixth chair is set stage right and is occupied by OFFICER WONG. DR. CHAN is sitting in seventh chair upstage centre. JOHN is sitting in the eighth chair upstage left. The chairs have been placed so that they represent satellites revolving around WENDY and EVELYN. The screen is placed upstage centre behind DR. CHAN'S chair. The stage remains lit for the entire play, but lights dim between scenes.)*

### Scene 1

#### VOICE OVER SCHOOL INTERCOM

Please excuse the interruption. Would Evelyn Chan please report to the Guidance Office immediately. Evelyn Chan. Please report to the Guidance Office immediately.

*(WENDY taps her foot. EVELYN enters stage right and sits next to WENDY.)*

WENDY

*(Looks at her watch)* Where have you been?

EVELYN

Mr. Majors gave us a surprise quiz. If I failed the quiz, things would be worse.

WENDY

Being late makes things worse.

*(EVELYN shrugs and looks for her CD player in her knapsack. MS. ROSE gets up to greet WENDY and EVELYN.)*

MS. ROSE

Evelyn, you're here. Come in. Both of you.

*(WENDY and EVELYN follow MS. ROSE and sit down.)*

Officer Wong phoned this morning and asked me to call your parents in Hong Kong.

WENDY

Our parents!

MS. ROSE

But before I do, I want to know what happened.

*(EVELYN lowers her head and looks at the floor.)*

Evelyn, this is serious. You and John are in trouble with the police.

*(WENDY lightly grasps and shakes EVELYN's arm.)*

EVELYN

*(Lifts her head)* We were driving.

MS. ROSE

Where?

EVELYN

In Richmond Hill.

MS. ROSE

Where were you going?

EVELYN

To a Karaoke Club.

MS. ROSE

You were out at a Karaoke Club on a school night!

WENDY

*(Quickly)* She never goes out unless her homework is done first.

*(MS. ROSE shakes her head and is about to speak.)*

And she's always home by 11:00. Besides it wasn't Evelyn who was speeding, it was John. He's the one who's always in trouble.

MS. ROSE

But Evelyn was in the car with John. This wasn't the first time John has been caught speeding. It was the second. And Evelyn was in the car both times.

WENDY

Please, Ms. Rose. It would be better if you didn't call my parents.

MS. ROSE

If Evelyn were my daughter, I'd want to know about something like this.

WENDY

I don't want them to worry. *(Beat)* Evelyn's doing very well in school. She got a 90 on her last math quiz.

*(MS. ROSE looks at EVELYN and nods her head.)*

MS. ROSE

I'm glad to hear you're doing well in Math, Evelyn. But your parents need to know that the police and I are concerned about you.

*(Lights dim. WENDY and EVELYN exit the Guidance Office. EVELYN returns to her chair and WENDY exits. OFFICER WILSON enters and he and OFFICER WONG walk over to the Guidance Office.)*

**Scene 2**

*(Lights come up on the entire stage.)*

MS. ROSE

*(Stands up and shakes his hand)* Officer Wong, it's good to finally meet you.

OFFICER WONG

Good to meet you too.

MS. ROSE

Please sit down.

*(They both sit.)*

John Lee didn't make it to school today. We'll have to postpone. I'm sorry. I called your office to cancel, but you'd already left.

OFFICER WONG

Is he absent often?

MS. ROSE

Yes.

OFFICER WONG

Why?

MS. ROSE

I'm not sure. But his ESL teacher says he finds learning English very difficult.

OFFICER WONG

Have you called his parents?

MS. ROSE

*(Sighs)* I've been trying. For two days now. When I call the family home in Hong Kong, no one answers. To be honest, I really don't understand it. I don't know how these parents can leave their kids alone.

OFFICER WONG

The families I've talked to say they don't have a choice.

MS. ROSE

I don't believe that. Parents need to put the welfare of their children first. When my husband's company transferred him to Singapore for five years, we decided that I would stay here with the

kids so they wouldn't have to leave their friends and go to school in a new country. *(Beat)* It's not easy being a single parent. And we all miss him terribly. But the kids are happier here than they would be overseas.

OFFICER WONG

*(Gets up)* Well, I won't take up any more of your time. Give me a call if you'd like to re-schedule.

MS. ROSE

*(Rises quickly)* Thank you. I will. But before you go, my principal told me to ask you about the program you run for astronaut families and satellite kids. She said that you're doing some great work.

OFFICER WONG

Thanks. But I need to tell you. I don't like hearing Chinese folks called astronauts.

MS. ROSE

*(Embarrassed, uncomfortable)* I'm sorry. *(Beat)* Why not?

OFFICER WONG

When you think of an astronaut, what comes to mind?

MS. ROSE

Oh, I don't know. Someone who travels in space?

OFFICER WONG

Right. A space traveller. Ready to take off to some place else. Uncommitted to life in Canada. An alien. Not Canadian, but alien.

*(Lights dim. OFFICER WONG returns to his chair.)*

### Scene 3

*(EVELYN sits downstage centre eating lunch, reading a magazine from Hong Kong, listening to some contemporary Cantopop on her portable CD player and singing loudly to the music. WENDY enters.)*

WENDY

*(Shakes EVELYN'S shoulder, speaks loudly over the music).* Hi.

EVELYN

*(Startled)* Hi. *(In Cantonese, also loudly)* [You're late.]

WENDY

*(Looks around in embarrassment, speaks at a normal volume)* Sorry. Turn off the music.

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese, still speaking loudly)* [What?]

WENDY

*(A little louder)* Turn off the music.

*(EVELYN turns it off. WENDY sits down.)*

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Where were you?]

WENDY

The newspaper office. Did you finish editing your speech?

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Yeah.]

WENDY

Did you practice it?

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Yeah.]

WENDY

How many times?

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Three.]

WENDY

Read it to me.

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Why?]

WENDY

So I can correct your pronunciation. *(Looks around)* And speak to me in English. You need to practice.

EVELYN

I don't like it when you correct my pronunciation.

WENDY

It's better than having people in your English class laugh at you.

*(EVELYN is silent then reaches under her chair and pulls out a binder.)*

WENDY

Go ahead.

*(EVELYN opens the binder and begins to read.)* EVELYN

Satellite kid: I hate that name. And parachute kid. I hate that name too. These are two names that people call Chinese teenagers whose parents live in Asia. Another name they call us is astronaut. I like the name astronaut. Astronauts are adventurous. They travel through space and explore new places. But when people talk about satellite kids, they don't talk about adventure. They talk about how much money we have and how our parents have left us alone.

*(Stands up, pretends to hold a microphone to her mouth and speaks as if she was a television reporter)*

Satellite kids. Many are from Hong Kong and their parents have left them alone. They live on the other side of the world. In Canada, their kids live in mansions. They can spend as much as \$1,000 in a week. They sometimes go to school and they sometimes get into big trouble. Satellite kids.

WENDY

*(Grins)* Very good. You can be the next Connie Cheung. Go on.

EVELYN

Although many people in Canada think that families from Hong Kong all live in mansions or monster homes, when we moved to Toronto three years ago, we moved into a two-bedroom condo with a small den. I –

WENDY

*(Interrupts)* I don't think you should say many people in Canada think we live in monster homes.

EVELYN

Why not?

WENDY

It's a generalization. You may offend someone.

EVELYN

I don't care.

WENDY

You should.

EVELYN

*(Closes the binder and stands up)* Well, I don't.



WENDY

Okay, okay. Never mind. Sit down. Continue reading.

EVELYN

*(Takes a long look at WENDY before she sits down and starts reading again)* I shared a bedroom with my sister Wendy. Our older sister Shirley slept in the den. I didn't like living in Toronto. I missed my friends in Hong Kong. Fortunately, six months after we moved, my parents and I moved back to Hong Kong and Wendy stayed in Toronto with Shirley.

WENDY

Fortunately?

EVELYN

*(Ignores WENDY)* Even though I missed my sisters, I was very happy to go back to my old school. It's not true that satellite kids get into big trouble. Whenever Wendy went out she had to phone Shirley and tell her where she was.

*(WENDY nods her nod in agreement.)*

Shirley knew what was going on at school, and attended all the school meetings. Now Shirley has gone to university in Montreal, and I've come back to Toronto to go to high school. It's Wendy's turn to take care of me. I still don't like living in Toronto but maybe someday I'll be happier here.

WENDY

*(Soft)* It's a very good speech.

*(Evelyn closes the binder.)*

*(Sighs)* Isn't there anything that makes you happy?

EVELYN

John.

WENDY

What's so great about John?

EVELYN

He makes me laugh. And he has a great stereo in his car and all the new CD's from Hong Kong. When he plays them, it's like being home. He's also hot. *(Smiles, holds WENDY's gaze)* Very hot.

*(WENDY breaks the gaze and looks away.)*

Besides, you're always busy. At least John has time for me. You never do. Like, today. You were a half an hour late and it's the only day this week we're eating lunch together. *(Pause)* You don't like hanging out with me, do you?

*(WENDY is silent. She looks at her watch, and stands up.)*

EVELYN

*(Stands up)* What did Mum said to you on the phone last night?

WENDY

*(Looks at her watch again, hesitates, but then begins to speak)* She reminded me about the time I got really sick at school. Shirley and I were living here and you were in Hong Kong. I told one of my teachers and she told me to go home. I did, but I was scared because Shirley wasn't there and I was home alone. I kept on vomiting. I didn't know what to do. When Shirley came home, she saw I was really, really sick. I couldn't move. I couldn't even get into the car to go to the hospital. So she carried me to the hospital. After that, Mum never worried about me living in Toronto with Shirley. But she *is* worried about you. I don't want her to worry any more. Just tell John that you can't drive with him anymore. *(Beat.)* When I went to see Ms. Rose this morn-

EVELYN

She called you in again?

WENDY

No. I went to see her.

EVELYN

Why?

WENDY

To tell her that Mum called us last night.

EVELYN

*(Shakes her head)* Why did you do that? This is none of her business. There are lots of other kids who are caught speeding by the police and she doesn't call them into her office. She's picking on us because she thinks that Mum and Dad are bad parents.

WENDY

That's why I went to see her. To show her that they know what's going on even though they don't live here.

*(EVELYN begins to walk away.)*

WENDY

*(Grabs her arm)* Wait. I'm not finished. When I saw Ms. Rose this morning she told me about a kid in our school who was hit by a speeding car. He's in a wheelchair now. That could happen to you and John. *(With mounting anxiety)* Do you want to be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life? How can I take care of you if you're in a wheelchair?

EVELYN

*(Shakes her arm loose)* I'll ask him to slow down.

WENDY

No. I want you to stop driving with him. He's dangerous. EVELYN *(Quiet)* When I drive with John I feel like a real astronaut. Like I'm floating through space. Like I'm weightless. Being

weightless is the best part of being in space.

WENDY

When you're weightless, there's nothing to hold you down. You need an anchor. I've been thinking about this all night. I want you to work on the newspaper with me.

EVELYN

Why?

WENDY

I need more artists. You draw very well.

EVELYN

But I don't know anyone who works on the newspaper.

WENDY

You'll get to know them.

EVELYN

What kind of music do you listen to?

WENDY

Music?

EVELYN

Yeah.

WENDY

I don't know. Whatever people are listening to. Stuff on the radio.

EVELYN

If I work on the paper I want to play some of my CDs from Hong Kong.

WENDY

I hate Cantopop. It's embarrassing.

EVELYN

*(Quiet)* You mean I'm embarrassing.

WENDY

What?

EVELYN

That's why you're too busy to eat lunch with me. You're embarrassed.

WENDY

That's not true.

EVELYN

You don't want people to hear you speaking Cantonese. You're worried they'll think that you're one of those ESL kids who can't speak English properly.

*(WENDY is silent. The school bell rings and WENDY looks at her watch.)*

WENDY

I'm sorry, I have to go. But it's not true that I'm worried about what people think. I speak English because I need to practice. And so do you. See you later.

*(WENDY hurriedly exits stage right. Lights dim. EVELYN takes her seat.)*

#### Scene 4

*(Lights up. MS. ROSE and DR. CHAN stand and read the note DR. CHAN has sent.)*

DR. CHAN

*(Reads)* Dear Ms. Rose: I am faxing this note to tell you that I have spoken to Wendy and Evelyn about your concerns. They were both very upset after their meeting with you yesterday.

MS. ROSE

*(Reads)* They are worried that you think we're bad parents. *(Looks up)* I never said that they were "bad parents". *(Continues reading)* Perhaps you don't understand why my husband and I have returned to Hong Kong." *(To herself)* I certainly don't.

DR. CHAN

When we first came to Toronto, we had a lot of trouble finding work. I'm a doctor and it's very difficult to get a license to practice medicine in Ontario. People think the training you've received in Hong Kong is inferior. There are licensing exams that you have to pass to prove that you are qualified to practice. The people that I talked to about the exams were unhelpful. Some were insulting. So we decided to come back to Hong Kong where I could practice medicine and my husband could make a living as a journalist.

MS. ROSE

But we wanted our daughters to stay and get a Canadian education so that they can work anywhere.

*(Lights dim. DR. CHAN and MS. ROSE sit down.)*

#### Scene 5

*(Lights up. A romantic Cantopop ballad plays. EVELYN gets up, walks over to JOHN and sits down beside him on his chair. A translation of what EVELYN and JOHN say in Cantonese is projected on the screen upstage centre. EVELYN and JOHN speak slowly, unhurriedly in this scene, imitating the weightlessness that astronauts feel in space.)*

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Did you go to your English class this morning?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [No.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [You should go.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [I feel stupid in that class.]

EVELYN

*(Taking his hand, in English)* I know.

*(EVELYN gives JOHN kiss on the cheek. JOHN tips EVELYN's chin up and gives EVELYN a long kiss on the mouth.)*

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [I was also tired. I've got another job and I worked late last night].

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [You found a job? Where?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Writing stories about teenagers for a newspaper in Hong Kong.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Why do you need another job?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [To pay for the speeding tickets. I also have to pay for my own car insurance now.]

*(EVELYN strokes JOHN's arm lightly.)* EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [What kind of stories are you writing?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese, grinning)* [Stories about rebellious teenagers who don't like going to school.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese, smiling)* [How often are they published?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Every day. But they aren't under my name. I use a fake name.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [So do you have to write a story every day?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [No. I write enough for a whole week. That's why I was up so late last night. I needed to write about 1,000 characters. And then I needed to fax all of the stories for the week.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Is it fun?]

JOHN

*(Smiling, putting his arm around her)* [Yeah. It's fun.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [My sister wants me to work on the school newspaper.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Are you going to do it?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [I'm thinking about it.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Don't do it.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Why not?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [You'll be busy every afternoon. I'll miss you too much.]

*(JOHN tips EVELYN's chin up once again to kiss her. EVELYN catches the kiss on the cheek. Lights dim. EVELYN gets up and walks back to her chair downstage centre. WENDY walks over to the guidance office.)*

## Scene 6

*(Lights up.)*

MS. ROSE

Getting Evelyn involved in the school newspaper is a good idea.

WENDY

It was my mother's idea.

MS. ROSE

*(Beat.)* I received a fax from your mother. She said that you and Evelyn were upset after our last meeting. Is that true?

*(WENDY is silent)*

Well, if it is, I'm sorry. Your mother explained why she and your father are living in Hong Kong. I still think it would be better if at least one of your parents was living here with you, but I understand that you do have a legal guardian here. Alfred Yeung. He's a lawyer?

*(Wendy nods.)*

And a family friend. Does he live close by?

WENDY

About an hour away.

MS. ROSE

How often do you see him?

WENDY

Once a month. He picks us up and takes us out to eat. His kids are in Hong Kong. So my dad meets Uncle Alfred's kids once a month and he meets us.

MS. ROSE

That isn't very often is it?

*(WENDY is silent.)*

Well, at least there is someone nearby you can talk to in an emergency. But -

*(The phone rings.)*

MS. ROSE

Excuse me a moment.

*(MS. ROSE picks up the phone.)*

Hello, Susan Rose speaking. *(Pause)* Yes, Ms. Harvey. How are you? *(Beat)* Good. Could you hold on for just a moment? *(Beat.)* Thanks. *(Covers the receiver)* Wendy, I need to take this call.

WENDY

Okay. Goodbye.

MS. ROSE

Goodbye.

*(WENDY exits the Guidance Office and exits the stage.)*

*(Uncovers the receiver)* Thanks for waiting Ms. Harvey. What can I do for you? *(Pause)* Well, what time did he show up? *(Beat)* Eleven! I see. *(Beat)* Well, I don't quite know what to say. I woke him up at 7:00 and when I left the house at 7:15 he was in the shower. I assumed he would

have breakfast and be at school in time for homeroom. I guess he went back to bed. He came home very late last night. Way after his curfew. I'll talk to him when I get home from school this afternoon. *(Pause)* Is a meeting really necessary?

*(Lights dim. MS. ROSE exits downstage right. EVELYN gets up, moves her chair to centre stage and sits down. JOHN gets up from his chair, moves it to EVELYN's chair and sits down.)*

## Scene 7

*(Lights dim even more so the stage is almost black. A low light comes up on EVELYN and JOHN at the same time as a tape recording of an upbeat contemporary Cantopop song begins to play loudly. Evelyn is singing and swaying to the music enjoying the speed of the ride until John puts his foot on the gas to drive even faster.)*

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Slow down. You're going too fast. *(With more urgency)* John, please. Slow down.] *(In English)* Slow down. *(With even more urgency in Cantonese)* [You're going through a red light.] *(In English)* Be careful --

*(Blackout. A tape recording of the sound of JOHN's car hitting another car is heard. It is followed by the sound of the first car hitting a second car. A low light comes up on JOHN and EVELYN.)*

JOHN

*(In Cantonese, standing up and walking over to EVELYN's chair)* [Are you all right?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Yes.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Get out and change seats with me.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [What?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese, grabs EVELYN's arm)* [Get out and get in the driver's seat.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [Why?]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese, pulls her out of the chair)* [Don't ask questions, just do it. Quickly.]



*(EVELYN gets up and sits in JOHN's chair. JOHN sits down in EVELYN's chair. The low light dims. JOHN walks his chair back upstage right and sits down. EVELYN exits centre stage left. )*

## Scene 8

*(Low lights come up on WENDY who has fallen asleep in her chair. EVELYN enters and runs over to WENDY. A translation of what EVELYN and WENDY say in Cantonese is projected on the screen upstage centre)*

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese, shakes WENDY's shoulder and speaks softly)* [It's me.]

WENDY

*(In Cantonese, still half asleep)* [What time is it?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [We had some trouble.]

WENDY

*(In Cantonese)* [What kind of trouble?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [We were in an accident.]

WENDY

*(In Cantonese)* [Are you hurt?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [No] *(Voice shaking, on the verge of tears)* [But we're in trouble. The accident. It was our fault.]

*(EVELYN falls to her knees, puts her head on WENDY's lap. Her shoulders start heaving.)*

WENDY

*(In Cantonese, stroking EVELYN's head, soothingly)* [It's okay, it's okay. You're not hurt. That's what's important. You're not hurt.]

*(EVELYN begins to calm down)*

*(In Cantonese)* [Tell me what happened.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [John hit another car.]

*(Lights dim. WENDY walks over to the table in the guidance office, places a white tablecloth on the table turning the guidance office into a restaurant and sits down.)*

*EVELYN returns her chair to downstage centre, walks over to the table and sits down. ALFRED YEUNG enters with a briefcase and sits down at the table. He opens his briefcase and takes out a notepad.)*

**Scene 9**

*(Lights come up.)*

ALFRED YEUNG

*(Takes notes)* A three-car collision. Just you and John were in the car.

*(EVELYN nods)*

John was driving?

*(EVELYN is silent)*

*(Sharp)* Evelyn, who was driving?

EVELYN

*(Her voice shakes)* John.

ALFRED YEUNG

Was he drinking?

EVELYN

No.

ALFRED YEUNG

Has he ever been stopped by the police before?

WENDY

Yes. Twice. Both times for speeding.

*(ALFRED YEUNG makes a note.)*

ALFRED YEUNG

Every time the police stops you for speeding you get demerit points. The amount of points you get depends on how fast you were going. Evelyn, do you know how many demerit points John already has?

EVELYN

No.

ALFRED YEUNG

If John is charged with careless driving, that's a serious traffic offense. It's like drunk driving. If he gets convicted, he'll get six demerit points. Depending on how many point he's already got, he could lose his license. And his insurance rates will go through the roof.

*(EVELYN takes a tissue out of her pocket.)*

WENDY

Is Evelyn in any trouble? Last week when John was caught speeding, the police came to the school and told our guidance counsellor to call Mum and Dad.

ALFRED YEUNG

No, I don't think so. (*Looks over at EVELYN who is shredding the tissue from her pocket*). Unless there is something that Evelyn isn't telling us.

(*EVELYN is silent.*)

Evelyn?

(*EVELYN is silent*)

WENDY

Evelyn?

EVELYN

It's very bad.

WENDY

Tell us. Tell us right now.

EVELYN

I changed seats with John.

WENDY

What?

EVELYN

Just after we crashed. It all happened very fast. John was afraid that he would lose his license and told me to change seats with him.

ALFRED YEUNG

And you did?

(*EVELYN is silent*)

Were you in the drivers' seat when the police showed up?

(*EVELYN nods*)

WENDY

But, you don't have a driver's license yet.

(*EVELYN looks down at the table*)

ALFRED YEUNG

What did you say when the police asked for your driver's license?

EVELYN

I told them I left it at home.

ALFRED YEUNG

Then what happened?

EVELYN

They asked for my name and address. And –

ALFRED YEUNG

And?

EVELYN

I told them it was Wendy Chan.

WENDY

You told them you were me?

ALFRED YEUNG

If the police find out that you lied, there could be some very serious consequences.

EVELYN

Maybe they won't find out.

ALFRED YEUNG

They could charge you with obstructing a police officer in the execution of his duty. That is criminal offense. Punishable by up to 14 years in jail.

EVELYN

Maybe they won't find out, may –

WENDY

Why would you take the chance? To protect John? What kind of boyfriend asks you to lie for him?

EVELYN

John said that would be charged with dangerous driving. Not careless driving, dangerous driving.

WENDY

And what does that mean?

ALFRED YEUNG

Dangerous driving is a criminal offense. If convicted, John would have a record. And that means he might have trouble crossing borders. And if he ever went back to Hong Kong, he could have trouble getting back into Canada. But it doesn't matter. Evelyn has to tell the police the truth.

EVELYN

Will you help John?

ALFRED YEUNG

I'll try.

*(Lights dim. ALFRED YEUNG remains seated. WENDY removes the tablecloth turning the restaurant back into the guidance office. EVELYN and WENDY return to their chairs downstage centre. JOHN walks to the guidance office and sits besides ALFRED YEUNG in the guidance office. MS. ROSE sits in her chair.)*

**Scene 10**

*(Lights come up.)*

ALFRED YEUNG

You already know that Evelyn and John were in a three-car collision two nights ago.

*(MS. ROSE nods)*

Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt. John's reported the accident to the police and is being charged with dangerous driving.

MS. ROSE

*(Looks at John)* I see.

ALFRED YEUNG

Wendy and Evelyn have asked me to assist John. I'm going to talk to the police and try to get the charge reduced to careless driving. John would lose his license for a while, but he wouldn't have a criminal record.

*(MS. ROSE is silent.)*

ALFRED YEUNG

John needs your help.

MS. ROSE

What kind of help?

ALFRED YEUNG

If I could show the police that John is doing well in school and is willing to take a driver's education program that would help me make the case that the charge should be reduced. When I talked to the principal, she suggested I talk to you.

MS. ROSE

Frankly, Mr. Yeung, I'm certain that none of John's teachers would tell the police he is doing well here. In fact, I've been trying to get in touch with John's parents in Hong Kong to talk about his frequent absences from school and the difficulties he's having learning English.

ALFRED YEUNG

I see.

MS. ROSE

I must tell you it's been quite frustrating trying to reach Mr. or Mrs. Lee on the phone. I can't help students in trouble unless I get support from their parents. And that is extremely difficult when they're living overseas.

ALFRED YEUNG

I'm sure it is. Given –

MS. ROSE

It would be much better for students like John if at least *one* of his parents lived in Toronto. *(Beat)* Well, now that he's here, I'd like to hear from John *(Looks at John, speaking slowly and a little louder than she has been)*. Why do you stay home so often?

JOHN

*(Struggles)* English is very, very difficult for me.

MS. ROSE

*(Lowers her voice, but still speaking slowly)* It's difficult for a lot of people, but they don't stay home. They come to school.

JOHN

*(Struggles)* I feel stupid. People think I am stupid.

MS. ROSE

That's not true.

ALFRED YEUNG

Did you know that John is a writer?

MS. ROSE

A writer?

ALFRED YEUNG

*(Hands her a page from a Hong Kong newspaper)* He writes stories for a paper in Hong Kong. *(Beat)* It must be particularly difficult to learn a new language when you are already a published writer in your first. I know when I began learning English, I felt like a two-year old.

MS. ROSE

*(Hands the page back to John)* Staying home won't make things better. Your parents sent you here to learn English and get a Canadian education.

JOHN

I know.

ALFRED YEUNG

I need to show the police that John is able to turn things around. Does the school have any kind of program to support newcomers to Toronto?

MS. ROSE

Just the ESL classes. We depend on parents to provide other kinds of support.

ALFRED YEUNG

Is there any way you could arrange for John to get some extra help in English?

MS. ROSE

You mean a tutor?

ALFRED YEUNG

Yes.

MS. ROSE

I'll tell you what. If John comes to school and goes to every class this week, I'll find him a tutor. *(To JOHN)* I want you to come visit me everyday so I know you're here. Everyday. Nine o'clock. Twelve o'clock. Three-thirty. Okay?

JOHN

Okay.

*(Lights dim. ALFRED YEUNG exits downstage right. JOHN returns to his chair upstage right. OFFICER WONG walks over to the guidance office and sits down.)*

## Scene 11

*(Lights up.)*

MS. ROSE

So what can I do for you?

OFFICER WONG

I'm here about your son.

MS. ROSE

Brian? Is he all right?

OFFICER WONG

He's fine. But he was picked up with some other kids for shoplifting.

MS. ROSE

Shoplifting?

OFFICER WONG

At the mall. During lunch.

MS. ROSE

I don't believe this. Brian has never been in any trouble before. What did he take?

OFFICER WONG

A few CDs from HMV. About \$100.00 worth.

MS. ROSE

Is the store going to press charges?

OFFICER WONG

I don't know.

MS. ROSE

Where is he?

OFFICER WONG

At the station. You need to go down and pick him up.

MS. ROSE

*(Stands up)* All right.

OFFICER WONG

*(Stands up)* Listen, before you go, is everything all right at home?

MS. ROSE

Yes, of course. Everything's fine. Why?

OFFICER WONG

When a kid is caught shoplifting for the first time sometimes it's because something is going on at home. When we asked Brian about contacting his parents, he said his father was out of the country.

MS. ROSE

Yes, Len is in Asia.

OFFICER WONG

That's right. Singapore.

MS. ROSE

He tries to come back every six weeks.

OFFICER WONG

A Canadian astronaut.



MS. ROSE

A Canadian astronaut.

*(Lights dim on the entire stage. JOHN walks over and sits beside EVELYN beside the guidance office.)*

**Scene 12**

*(Lights come up. EVELYN and JOHN wait outside the guidance office for MS. ROSE who is on the phone.)*

MS. ROSE

Len. It's 3:30 our time. Friday. This is the fourth message I've left on your machine since yesterday. It's very frustrating not being able to reach you. Everyone's fine, but I really need to talk to you about Brian. Call me as soon as you can. Bye.

*(MS. ROSE hangs up and then gets up to greet JOHN. Both EVELYN and JOHN stand up.)*

MS. ROSE

John. Good. You're still here. Hello, Evelyn.

EVELYN

Hello. *(Holds out a letter)* John asked me to write this letter for him.

*(MS. ROSE takes the letter)*

He wants to explain why his parents haven't returned your calls. John's grandfather had a heart attack a few days ago and his parents have been at the hospital. They're going to try to phone you tomorrow morning.

MS. ROSE

Thank you Evelyn. John, I am very sorry to hear about your grandfather. I hope he gets well soon.

*(John nods.)*

I found you an English tutor. He speaks a little Cantonese.

JOHN

Thank you.

MS. ROSE

You're welcome. You start Monday. He'll meet you here. After school. Okay?

JOHN

Okay.

*(MS. ROSE walks back to the Guidance Office. A translation of what EVELYN and JOHN are saying in Cantonese appears on the screen.)*

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Do you want to come over?]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [I can't. Not for a while. My parents are very angry. I've promised to work on the newspaper with my sister and to not see you outside of school. *(Pauses)* You never apologized.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [I didn't know what to say. So, I wrote you a letter.]

*(Hands EVELYN a letter.)*

*(In Cantonese)* [I got scared.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese)* [I'm scared now.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [Me too.]

EVELYN

*(In Cantonese, rummaging through her knapsack for her portable CD player)* [I have to go. My sister's waiting for me.]

JOHN

*(In Cantonese)* [I'll meet you for lunch tomorrow.] *(In English)* Okay?

EVELYN

*(In English)* Okay.

*(Lights dim. JOHN returns to his chair.)*

### Scene 13

*(Lights up. MS. ROSE is on the phone.)*

MS. ROSE

Hi Len. Sorry you're not there. It was great to hear your voice last night. I'm very glad you talked to Brian. Hopefully, this will be the first and last time he's ever in trouble with the police. We're lucky that the store didn't press any charges. Grounding Brian for a month will be as hard on me as it is on him. Only eight more weeks before summer vacation and we get on a plane to Singapore. I'm counting the days.

*(Lights dim.)*

**END OF PLAY**

References

- Goldstein, T. (2003). *Teaching and Learning in a Multilingual School: Choices, Risks and Dilemmas*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 221 pages. With contributions by Gordon Pon and Judith Ngan. Includes the play *Hong Kong, Canada*.