



# MAGIC ASTER

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS  
FOR CHILDREN  
BY JEN TEH-YAO



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*A Play in Three Acts for Children*

*By Jen Teh-yao*

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
PEKING 1963

CHARACTERS

AWARDED A SECOND PRIZE  
AT THE FIRST NATIONAL DRAMA FESTIVAL  
IN PEKING

## CHARACTERS

DADDY WANG  
MAMA  
TA LAN  
HSIAO LAN  
OLD CAT  
GRANDPA TREE  
ELDER SISTER RABBIT  
LITTLE SISTER RABBIT  
SPOTTED DOE  
DEER FAWN  
MONKEY  
LITTLE SQUIRREL  
MORNING GLORY  
DOG'S-TAIL GRASS  
MAGIC ASTER  
LITTLE BIRD  
MERMAIDS  
DADDY WANG'S NEIGHBOURS

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

*It is dawn. From over the horizon the sun gradually brings the silhouette of the tree-clad mountains in the distance into view and sparkles on the rivulet in the valley below.*

*Cocks crow. Daddy Wang's quaint ivy-covered cottage on the mountainside becomes more distinct in the morning glow.*

*With her sleeves rolled up and lifting the hem of her skirt in her hand, Hsiao Lan comes on the stage with two buckets of water on a carrying-pole.*

*Hsiao Lan (putting the buckets down quietly, dipping up water and pouring it over the flowers as she croons a tune):*

*Up with the sun and*

*Over the dewy mountain I go.*

*Every day listening to the birds' song,*

*I make friends with the wind, frost, rain and  
snow.*



Flowers grace the mountain all the year round,  
Vying with each other in beauty.  
Only the clusters of asters stand  
Nodding by the roadside without a sound.

When in March the asters awake,  
The valley is tinged as blue as the sky.  
Frosts have gone but spring is late,  
For the asters have still not appeared.

*(Daddy Wang emerges from the house.)*

Daddy Wang: Not so loud, daughter! Mama is still asleep.

Hsiao Lan *(putting her tongue out in a childish gesture)*: Good morning, Father!

Daddy Wang: Good morning! You're an early bird. Hurry now and make some griddle-cakes for my breakfast. I've got to go up the mountain for firewood.

Hsiao Lan: Yes, Father. *(Runs towards the house.)*

Daddy Wang *(as Hsiao Lan is about to enter the house)*: Be careful not to wake your mother. *(Daddy Wang inhales the fresh air and goes to open the chicken coop behind the house. The chickens and ducks run out noisily. He shoos them farther away from the house. Black smoke rises from the kitchen chimney. Sparrows chirp. As Daddy Wang sits down on the moss-covered bank*

of a small pond near the house and begins to sharpen his axe, he hums one of his woodcutters' ditties.)

(A short while later, Mama comes dashing out of the room carrying a basket.)

Mama: Goodness me! I overslept this morning. (Discovering Daddy Wang is already up, she runs over to him.)

Mama: Have you been up long? Why didn't you call me?

(Daddy Wang smiles but says nothing. He merely throws a glance at her and goes on singing.)

Mama: Are you still trying to sing? You sound like a duck!

Daddy Wang (laughing heartily): Don't be upset, Mama. I only meant to let you get another forty winks.

Mama: And let the chickens and ducks go unfed? (She runs over to the chicken coop and finds it open. Not a chicken or a duck is inside. She becomes flustered.)

Mama: Heavens! Where are my chickens and ducks?

Daddy Wang: What's the matter?

Mama: They aren't here! Not a one! (Looks around for them.)

Daddy Wang: What's not here?

Mama: My goodness! You're really something! The chickens and ducks are gone and you don't turn a hair.

Daddy Wang: No, they're not. Ha, ha, ha! Come here. (*Pulling her over to the bank of the river.*) What's that in the river there? (*The ducks are blithely swimming in the river behind the house.*)

Daddy Wang (*pulling her around to see the chickens*): Look, there in the backyard. (*The cheeping of baby chicks is heard in the backyard.*)

Mama (*letting out a suppressed giggle*): You're really a devil, you old fellow. . . . (*Then she suddenly remembers something.*) Oh, that's right! I've got to make some griddle-cakes for you to eat on the way. (*Just as she is turning to go to the kitchen to make the griddle-cakes, the kitchen window flies open and Hsiao Lan leans out. She has dough on her hands.*)

Hsiao Lan: There's no need for you to come, Mama. I've made them already. See, I'm putting the last of the dough on the griddle now. (*She turns and goes back into the kitchen. Mama does not know what to say. Black smoke pours from the chimney.*)



Mama: I see! So this is the game you two are up to!

Daddy Wang: We only wanted to let you get a little more sleep, Mama! You've not been well lately and last night were up so late weaving that rug. You're entitled to a rest. By the way, why are you in such a hurry to get that carpet woven?

Mama: Father, you don't know what's on my mind. Our daughters are big girls now and there's no telling when or where they'll select their husbands. It would be too bad if we had nothing to give them as a wedding present when they decide to get married.

Daddy Wang: Good gracious, Mama! People are right when they say the only two things in an old woman's mind are her chickens and her sons-in-law.

Mama: What's wrong with that? Can't I think like that if I want to?

Daddy Wang: Of course you can!

Mama: Hey, is Ta Lan up yet? Have you called her?

Daddy Wang: No, I haven't.

Mama: That girl, if you don't call her she'll sleep till noon. (*Shouting into the room.*)  
Ta Lan! It's time to get up, Ta Lan!

Daddy Wang: Get up, Ta Lan! I have to go up the mountain to gather firewood.

Ta Lan: Oh-h-h-h, I'm getting up now.

Mama: Get up, girl! The sun is high in the sky.

*(Ta Lan pushes open the window and stretches.)*

Ta Lan: Oh-h-h, I'm up already. You would have to wake me. I was having such a good sleep. What do you want?

Mama: Hurry up, daughter! Your father has got to go up the mountain to gather firewood and your sister is making griddle-cakes for him while you're still yawning there.

Daddy Wang: Come out and water the pumpkins before it gets too hot.

Ta Lan: All right. *(She promises, but does not make a move, just leans on the window sill as though glued to it. A short while later she falls fast asleep again and her long black hair falls down over the window sill to the pond.)*

Mama: Father, our two daughters seem not to be born of the same mother.

*(A cat jumps upon the window sill and wakes Ta Lan. She gives a start, but upon seeing that it is the cat, she caresses it.)*

*Being a tame pussy, it draws close to her and begins to purr.)*

Mama: That blasted cat has come back again. Ta Lan just sits around stroking it and does nothing else all day.

Daddy Wang: Where does it come from anyway? It hangs around here and just won't leave.

Mama: It belongs to an official in the village up the road. When its master goes out, it comes over here. Ta Lan is so keen to hobnob with the official's family that she simply won't do a lick of work in the house. In fact, she expects to be waited on. It looks as though she's going to become a member of the official's family before long.

Daddy Wang: There is no need to upset yourself, Mama. After all, she's no longer a child. Why don't you have a talk with her?

Mama: You can talk until you're blue in the face and she won't listen to you. But just let someone from that official's family say something and she never forgets it.

*(Hsiao Lan comes out of the kitchen carrying the griddle-cakes in a bamboo basket.)*

Hsiao Lan: Father, here are the cakes.

Daddy Wang (*looking at them*): So many!

I'll never be able to eat them all.

Hsiao Lan: There aren't many. Only ten.

You'll be able to finish them.

Daddy Wang: No, I won't.

Hsiao Lan: Yes, you will.

*(Neither will give in.)*

Mama: Now, Father, take them along. . . .

Daddy Wang (*mimicking Mama and cutting her short*): I know, take them along as a token of your daughter's kindness. Right?  
*(They all burst out laughing.)*

Daddy Wang: You two always treat me like this. This is really overdoing things. . . .  
*(Puts axe in his belt as he speaks, then picks up carrying-pole and rope, preparing to leave.)*

Daddy Wang: Ta Lan! Get up and give your mother a hand with the housework! I'm leaving now.

*(Ta Lan wakes up, hair still in disorder.)*

Ta Lan: Are you going now, Father? Oh, all right. *(Suddenly remembering something, she comes running out of house.)* Hey, Father! After you've sold the firewood, go to the market and buy me a length of cotton print, will you? I haven't a thing to wear.

Mama: Don't trouble yourself, Father. (To Ta Lan.) If you want a new jacket, weave your own cloth; there are plenty of looms around the house.

*(Ta Lan pouts and walks away.)*

Hsiao Lan: It's about time for the asters to bloom, Father. If you see any on the mountain, will you pick a few to bring back for me?

Daddy Wang: All right! *(Not too far away from the house, Daddy Wang starts to sing one of his wood-cutters' ditties.)*

Mama: Come straight back, Father.

Daddy Wang *(from a distance)*: All right!

Mama: Mind how you go on those steep paths.

Hsiao Lan: Don't forget the flowers, Father, the asters.

Daddy Wang *(from a still greater distance)*:  
I won't.

*(His singing fades into the distance.)*

*(Sitting on the bank of the pond, Ta Lan gazes languidly at her reflection in the water and combs her hair.)*

*(The cat is sound asleep on the window sill.)*

CURTAIN

## SCENE 2

Deep in the mountains there is a cliff and below it a still pool. The ancient trees are kissing the clouds and wild flowers are everywhere.

Spotted Doe and her fawn are basking in the sun on the mountain top.

Monkey is swinging about on the vines.

Little Squirrel is in a tree combing his tail.

The Rabbit Sisters are absorbed in a game.

Little Sister Rabbit (jumping and speaking in a clear ringing voice): Ha, ha, ha . . .

Elder Sister! Don't press me so hard. I'm quite out of breath. . . .

Elder Sister Rabbit: Ha-ha . . . I don't care . . . if you're caught, you lose. . . .

(Playing around Grandpa Tree, they brush against him, convulsing him with laughter, so that the vines shake. Monkey, who is swinging on the vines, is startled.)

(The two Rabbit Sisters, paying no heed to all this, continue chasing each other.

Little Sister Rabbit runs towards the cluster of flowers so fast that she runs head-on into Morning Glory who is just growing out of the ground.)



Morning Glory (*speaks angrily*): Watch where you're going, you little imp!

(*Frightened, Little Sister Rabbit runs over to her elder sister. Morning Glory pouts. From all appearances she had been angry when she was under the ground.*)

Little Sister Rabbit: What's wrong with her, Sister? Should I apologize?

Elder Sister Rabbit: Don't say anything; she's not angry with us.

(*A short while later, Dog's-Tail Grass sticks his dejected face above the ground.*)

Dog's-Tail Grass: Just look at you! What's there to be so angry about? I was only joking, but you took me seriously.

Morning Glory: Who took you seriously? You're only a blade of grass and dog's-tail grass at that; but me, I'm a flower, a morning glory.

Dog's-Tail Grass: What's the difference between flowers and grass anyway? We both sprang from the same soil, didn't we?

Morning Glory: Humph! We're not the same!

Dog's-Tail Grass: Don't flowers and grass make good mates?

Monkey (*cutting in abruptly*): Yes, they do! (*Everyone shouts "Hear, hear!"*)

Little Sister Rabbit (*laughing along with the others*): What do they mean by "make good mates"?

Elder Sister Rabbit: I don't know either. . . .

Little Squirrel: Ha-ha-ha . . . you mean to say you don't know what is meant by "make good mates"! That's rich! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Morning Glory: What's so funny? (*To Dog's-Tail Grass.*) Let's go over there and talk. (*Dog's-Tail Grass grimaces at everyone and obediently follows Morning Glory. Everyone laughs uproariously.*)

(*The distant sound of wood-cutting and Daddy Wang's singing ring out in the valley. The inhabitants of the mountains are alarmed over this. The two rabbit sisters prick up their ears. Little Squirrel climbs up to the top of the tree, exposing only his tail. Monkey lithely bounds onto a vine and looks in the direction of the singing. Protecting her fawn, Spotted Doe stands frozen in watchfulness.*)

(*The singing becomes louder and louder. Blocking Dog's-Tail Grass's way, Morning Glory motions for him to hide with her behind a rock. The little animals are in a flutter and are preparing to flee.*)

Grandpa Tree (after making a survey): Don't be afraid, children! That's Daddy Wang who always comes to this mountain for firewood. Don't run away, he wouldn't harm a soul.

(Not hearing clearly what he said, they all hide in a trice.)

(After the flurry, silence prevails in the valley. The tree leaves quiver, the flowers and grass bob, and the little birds wing through the air.)

(The sound of Daddy Wang's singing becomes louder and a short while later he arrives on the scene. He puts his half load of firewood to one side and picks up some more dead branches. Here he pauses, walks over to the pool, dips up some water to drink, takes out some griddle-cakes from his basket and begins to eat. That finished, he lies down on a slope to rest a while. He sees the tail of Little Squirrel, picks up a pebble and tosses it gently at it. Little Squirrel merely wriggles his tail a couple of times. Daddy Wang then pokes at the tail with a stick. Little Squirrel turns around, throws an angry glance at him, then hides among the leaves. Daddy Wang bursts out laughing. At this two pairs of