

Don't Know, Don't Care by Haresh Sharma

Annotations by Teacher Jo

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Prologue

① He pauses to consider what he has said, then adds more evidence to support his point.
He doesn't know his grandparents because he doesn't communicate directly with them.

SON (to audience) My grandfather is like a million years old. Okay, not a million. Maybe a thousand. He's just really old. This is the thing with grandparents. They're there. They see you. You see them. You smile, nod... You pay your respects, like once a year or whatever... but... you don't really know them. (slight pause) Mummy would always be the interpreter. 'Your Gonggong^[1] wants to give you a present', 'Say thank you Gonggong, thank you Mama'.^[2] [CHARACTERISATION - MOTHER] She takes charge, almost like she assumes her SON wouldn't know what to do or say.

Those were the good times. When I was younger... when my Gonggong was healthy. Then last month Mummy suddenly announces that Gonggong was going to stay with us. Yes, Gonggong. Did I mention? He's like... a million years old. → He believes they have nothing in common. It suggests a lack of relationship. Something he puts up with for now.

[Exaggeration] To emphasize how old Gonggong is, relative to how young SON is.
[FORM] Very short sentences. Shows how little SON interacts with his grandparents, which explains why he doesn't really know them.
Why would he say this? It's like implying that these moments of minimal contact is good enough, sufficient. Play Happy Family for a few brief moments, then say goodbye.

Act One

Scene 1

SON is at home. GRANDFATHER and MOTHER enter. GRANDFATHER is in a wheelchair. MOTHER is pushing him into the house.

MOTHER We're home. The hospital these days... take so long just to discharge. And then the queue at the cashier... Pa, you will be staying in Jonah's room okay? Jonah. He's now staying at the hostel at the university. So the room will be all yours. Why is the door open? Ryan, did you go into Joe's room? ↳ Notices immediately when something is out of place and doesn't like it.

SON The Wi-Fi reception is better there.

MOTHER You have Internet connection on your own computer.

SON That's my desktop. But my iPad needs Wi-Fi. And the router's in Joe's room.

*Notice how SON hasn't yet greeted GRANDFATHER?

Again, this shows a lack of relationship, and we begin to understand why MOTHER has to tell SON what to do. *When she doesn't,

1. Gonggong: maternal grandfather he does not take what should be a natural initiative.
2. Mama: maternal grandmother The respect for GRANDFATHER is Artificial.

- Why is the imminent arrival of Grandfather a source of dramatic tension for Son? What is making him anxious?
- What do you note about the stage directions? What ideas do they convey? (Lines 12-13)

- MOTHER Pa, come...you need to get some rest. There's TV in the room ... with a set-top box. Later I'll call and subscribe to all your channels okay?
- 25 GRANDFATHER I can call. *[CHARACTERISATION - MOTHER] Again, the well-intentioned control. She has to do everything, according to what she thinks is right. We also see an insensitivity, because by wanting to do everything, she doesn't consider how she makes others feel.*
- MOTHER You rest. The doctor said you have to get plenty of rest.
- GRANDFATHER You don't know my channels.
- MOTHER Ryan, can get pen and paper? Write down all the channel numbers and I will call later.
- 30 SON I can do it. *→ It's just a simple task. Anyone can do it. But...?*
- MOTHER You're taking your O's⁽³⁾ this year.
- SON It's just a phone call.
- MOTHER Have you finished your homework?
- SON Yes.
- 35 MOTHER Mother Tongue?
- SON ...
- MOTHER Pa, how many pillows do you want? There's one pillow and one bolster in Jonah's room.
- SON His bolster stinks. *→ We see that MOTHER doesn't know everything. Yet, she takes control. SON would feel belittled, maybe insignificant.*
- 40 MOTHER I'll give you two pillows okay Pa? *Here, we begin to see the unrealised similarities between SON and GRANDFATHER.*
- GRANDFATHER Okay.
- MOTHER Do you need anything else? (suddenly) Where's the medicine? I put it all in the plastic bag. Did I leave it in the car? It's not here. I have to go back, I have to go back to the hospital. *Doesn't leave room for anyone to answer her. Just jumps to conclusion.*
- 45 GRANDFATHER (showing the plastic bag) I have it. It fell. In the car.

* How do GRANDFATHER and SON respond to MOTHER's overbearing nature?
They are passive and submissive. They try to have their way, but without much conviction.

3. O's: General Certificate of Education (Ordinary-Level) Examinations

~ How would you describe Mother's feelings in this scene?

MOTHER Thank goodness. I thought I left it at the hospital. I have to get back to work. Pa, just rest okay? (to SON) And you...

MOTHER and SON walk away from GRANDFATHER.

50 MOTHER I want you to stay away from Gonggong. He needs peace and quiet. Don't aggravate him. *Strange request. So far, we have seen how passive SON is. Why would he aggravate his old, sick grandfather? Once again, very befitting.*

SON Why don't we just get a maid?

MOTHER We don't need a maid. This is temporary.

SON Yah, but look at him. He needs to wear a diaper! Who's going to take care of him? *[CHARACTERISATION - SON] Practical. Note: Practical does not mean caring.*

55 MOTHER I am. I've asked my boss to let me work part-time. I'll be home in the morning, and when you get back from school, I'll go to the office for a few hours. *She is making so many sacrifices, and refuses help. Is she compensating for some weakness?*

SON I don't know how to take care of him.

60 MOTHER You don't have to do anything. You just have to be around. (slight pause) Ryan, we have always been independent. Even when you were younger you used to come home and fix your own lunch. Gonggong is here now. We have to make some adjustments but we'll manage. *Here, we get a hint. She wants to maintain her belief that she can be independent, without need for help.*

SON Why must it always be me? *[CHARACTERISATION - MOTHER] DOMINEE RING.*

65 MOTHER Your father is travelling a lot and Jonah is at uni so it's just the two of us. Okay? Listen to me, follow my instructions and everything will be fine. (slight pause) And stay away from him.

[CHARACTERISATION - SON]

MOTHER leaves. Pause.

GRANDFATHER and SON look at each other. Pause.

SELFISH. His mother asks so little of him - to just be around.

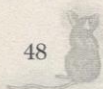
But his selfishness might stem from his practical nature. GRANDFATHER might need help when she is not around. Then what?

[STAGE DIRECTIONS] Implying that they are in the same, uncomfortable boat.

Stay away, you are bad for him. Stay away, he is bad for you. Which does she mean?

She might mean neither, but in her well-meaning intentions, may have unintentionally created opportunity for misunderstanding.

- ~ What clues are we given that point to the serious nature of Grandfather's illness?
- ~ How would you describe Son's attitude towards Grandfather? What does this reveal about his character? (Line 63)
- ~ Does Mother tell Son to stay away for Grandfather's benefit or for Son's? (Line 66)
- ~ What does the silence reveal about the relationship between Son and Grandfather? (Line 68)



Scene 2

Later that night. MOTHER is with GRANDFATHER in his room.

- 70 MOTHER Okay, last one ... (GRANDFATHER takes tablet) Are you sure you don't need another pillow? I'm going to leave the TV on but I'll come back later and turn it off. *[CHARACTERISATION - MOTHER] Tries too hard, to a point where she seems overbearing. We must remember that it comes from a place of love.*
- GRANDFATHER No need so much trouble.
- MOTHER It's nothing. You want the lights on or off?
- 75 GRANDFATHER On.
- MOTHER What channel?
- GRANDFATHER I can do it. *→ Trying to insist. To not be a burden, to not feel completely helpless.*
- MOTHER Just tell me. (slight pause) Okay, you do it. Nite Pa.
- GRANDFATHER Girl... when can I go back home? *→ We see that she is not completely oblivious. [SYMBOLISM] Going home as a symbolism of strength and capability.*
- 80 MOTHER You're sick Pa. When you get better, you can go back home.
- GRANDFATHER When? *→ Wants to go back so he can be his own master again, instead of feeling helpless.*
- MOTHER Don't worry about all that.
- GRANDFATHER I heard the nurse say I have a tumour.
- MOTHER You just rest, take your medicine... *[Message]*
- 85 GRANDFATHER Do I have a tumour? *How often do we talk about our loved ones like they are ignorant or unintelligent? We shouldn't assume senility, and treat them like idiots. It is very demeaning.*
- MOTHER You have something inside. But... Pa... you don't need to know so much... We just take things one day at a time okay? It's late already...
- MOTHER leaves. Pause. GRANDFATHER watches TV. *[Feelings] Resignation.*

~ In Scene 2, what does Grandfather want and what does Mother want? How does this place them in conflict with each other in this scene?

Scene 3

Two hours later. GRANDFATHER is sleeping. Pause.

90 SON enters GRANDFATHER's room.

He's trying to have a video chat on his iPad.

SON Can you see me? Can you see me? Can you—

GRANDFATHER —Hah?

SON Sorry... *Nevertheless, he has the decency to apologise.*

95 GRANDFATHER I can see you.

SON Sorry Gonggong, I wasn't talking to you...

GRANDFATHER Who were you talking to?

SON My friend.

GRANDFATHER Where is your friend? I cannot see anyone.

100 SON On the iPad... I was trying to Skype and... You won't understand.
Sorry... (he is about to leave)

GRANDFATHER Remember last time when you were small? Your mother always throw a big party for your birthday.

SON Erm... yah...

105 GRANDFATHER You like to sing. I always remember that...

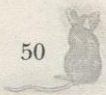
SON Yah. Do you need anything? Water?

GRANDFATHER You want to talk to your friend?

SON My friend? Oh! My friend... It's okay. It's kinda late... She's probably—I mean...

110 GRANDFATHER Your girlfriend?

~ What evidence do you have that Grandfather is quite perceptive about what is bothering Son? What does this reveal about Grandfather as a character?



opening up.

SON No! I don't know. She was my classmate. Her family moved to the States recently and I've been trying to keep in touch but the time difference and I want to see her when I talk to her but the computer in my room is ancient and—Sorry ...

As awkward as meeting someone for the first time, grasping at whatever little binds them.

115 GRANDFATHER Do you remember your grandmother?

SON A little. She liked to shout a lot.

GRANDFATHER Peranakan. They like to talk very loudly. (slight pause) You want to sit down?

Pause.

Budding relationship.

120 SON (to audience) I did. And my Gonggong and I talked some more. Then he got tired. (slight pause) For the first few weeks he was fine. He had his routine. Every morning he would wake up. Mummy would make Milo and a simple breakfast for him. Then I'd leave for school. When I got home, Mummy would be ready to leave for work. (slight pause) 125 Then he got worse. He was always in some pain ... The nurse from the hospice care started coming every day. Mummy told me not to interfere. So I would open the door, let the nurse in and just go to my room. (slight pause) My Gonggong needed more help. He needed more care. Something I couldn't provide.

[Stage direction] indicating change.

What is her fear?

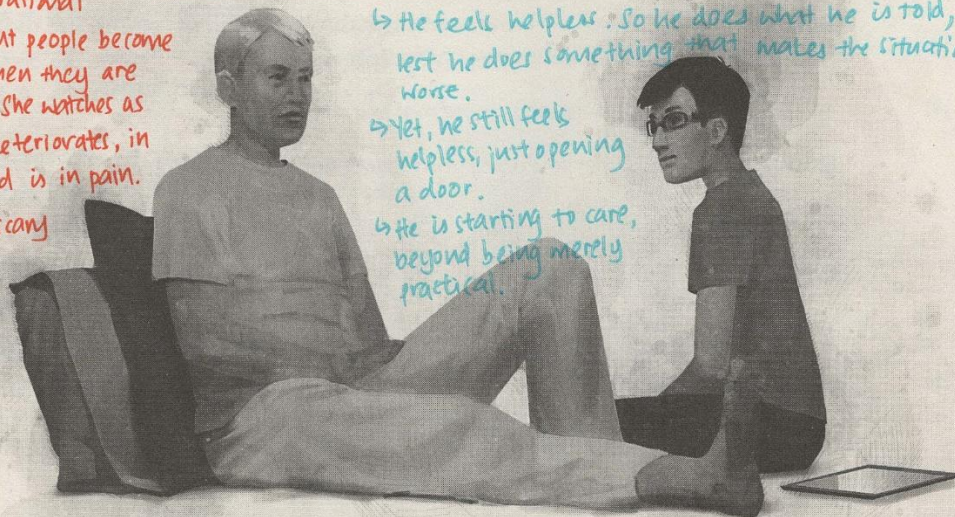
This is an irrational instruction, but people become irrational when they are frightened. She watches as her father deteriorates, in her care, and is in pain.

This is very scary for her.

↳ He feels helpless. So he does what he is told, lest he does something that makes the situation worse.

↳ Yet, he still feels helpless, just opening a door.

↳ He is starting to care, beyond being merely practical.



~ How are Son's words to the audience at this moment different from those spoken at the beginning of the play? What has changed? (Lines 120–129)

Act Two

Scene 1

130 *Two months later. SON is with his iPad.*

MOTHER has just come home from work.

MOTHER Did the nurse come just now?

SON Yup.

MOTHER Did she say anything?

135 SON Nope.

MOTHER Did she talk to you?

SON Nope.

140 MOTHER Pa? How are you feeling? How's your breathing? Better? The nurse said she gave you something to reduce the water in your lungs. She called me but I was in a meeting. I could only talk to her for two seconds. What is this new gadget?

GRANDFATHER For blood pressure.

MOTHER Blood pressure? What's wrong with your blood pressure? She didn't say anything about your blood pressure. *[Feelings - panic]*

145 *MOTHER gets her phone and makes a call.*

MOTHER (to SON) Have you done your homework?

SON Yes.

MOTHER Mother Tongue?

SON ...

150 MOTHER You have tuition in an hour.

She speaks on the phone.

Previously, we established how short sentences with nothing much to say implies a lack of relationship.

We see this same lack here.

Yet, he is being obedient. She doesn't allow him to get involved, so why should he have answers?

* She is constantly fussing, trying to keep up with her father and her sons. Must be exhausting.

~ Why does Son reply to Mother's questions in the way that he does? What does this tell you about how he feels about Mother at this moment?



155 MOTHER Hello? Yes, yes, everything is fine. Just a quick question ... what is this blood pressure—Oh ... right ... I see ... But he's not—No ... I understand ... Well, I'm not very good with all these gadgets ... No, I'd rather my son not get involved ... Well, you might think it's a good idea, but I don't. You know, never mind. I'll figure it out.

MOTHER hangs up. She tries to use the gadget. SON goes to her.

MOTHER I told you to stay away from this room.

SON I know how it works.

160 MOTHER Go!

SON walks away.

165 MOTHER I just need some co-operation. Is that too much to ask? I still have to work. I have to deal with my clients. I have to be the wife. I have to be the mother. I have to be the daughter. I have to be the nurse. I have to be smart. I have to operate equipment. I I I I.

Pause.

GRANDFATHER I am taking your time from you. When I die, you will have your life back.

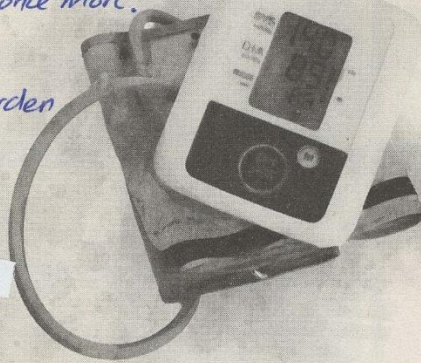
This is a loaded statement.

1) Insensitive of mum — to tell son off and then vent in front of GRANDFATHER, she makes him feel like a burden once more.

2) We see why she is the way she is.
All parents do not want to be a burden on their children.

GRANDFATHER doesn't want to be a burden to MOTHER.

MOTHER doesn't want her burdens to affect SON or his future.



- ~ Why do you think Mother lashes out at Son? What emotions are underscoring her words? (Line 160)
- ~ Why are Mother's words and actions making her an antagonist to both Son and Grandfather?

Scene 2

Later that night, SON is walking with his iPad.

170 SON
SON's dilemma:
He isn't empowered to help. Always told not to interfere or get in the way. He wanted to go in, but has internalised his mother's warnings. Out of fear that he might do something wrong, he follows instruction instead of instinct.

180
[MESSAGE]
What does it REALLY mean to care?

Can you see me? Can you see me? Now? How about now?

He hears a sound in GRANDFATHER's room.

GRANDFATHER is groaning in pain. SON wants to go in. Pause.

He walks away instead. Pause. SON talks to the audience.

(to audience) When I woke up. No one was home. Mummy later sent me a text to say that Gonggong was in the hospital. (slight pause) The whole time I was thinking ... why didn't I go to his room? Why didn't I help him? (slight pause) It's so funny. In school, we have civics class, moral ed ... sometimes there's a community programme where we go to a home and clean the floor or paint the walls. But deep down... we've lost our natural instinct to care. To really care for one another. No, it's not funny. It's sad.

Just like the artificial respect, there is artificial care.

Reflection, some self-criticism?



~ What decision is Son struggling with? Why is it so difficult for him to do what he thinks is right? (Line 172)

Scene 3

The next day. MOTHER and SON are together. SON is studying.

MOTHER He got quite sick in the middle of the night. Did you hear anything?

SON Hear anything?

185 MOTHER You're usually up late.

SON Yah ...

MOTHER He was having difficulty breathing.

SON I was in my room. You told me not to—

MOTHER —I'm not accusing you. I was only asking—

190 SON —What do you want from me Mummy? I want to help, you tell me to stay away. I know Gonggong is sick. But you want me to pretend as if nothing's happening.

Turning point. He is disgusted with his response the previous night. He wants to follow his mum's instructions.

MOTHER This is not your problem. You have more important things to focus on.

↳ Doesn't want her burdens to be her son's as well.

195 SON Like what? What is more important than my relationship with my grandfather? → Enlightenment.

But that cannot coexist with caring for his grandfather.

MOTHER You are taking—

SON —Your O's this year. I know. I know. Because you remind me every day.

200 MOTHER I remind you because that's your key. Education is the key to your future.

SON Mummy... a man is dying in that room. And you want me to just turn away? [MESSAGE]

MOTHER Yes. That's exactly what I want you to do. Because in this family we don't talk about death and illness. We just deal with it.

205 MOTHER walks away. Pause.

↳ Again: Irrational.

↳ But, it is, to her mind, what's best for everyone.

~ We know for a fact that Son is feigning ignorance as he does not want to tell Mother the truth. Why do you think Son does not want to be honest with Mother? (Line 184)

~ Do you think Son disagrees with Mother over every issue? Why do you think so?

SON (to audience) There's this book I studied in school. *Flowers for Algernon*.^[4] It's about a man who has low IQ. He's selected to undergo an experimental technique to increase his IQ. The technique was successfully conducted on a laboratory mouse called Algernon. So the man goes through the procedure and his intelligence increases. His IQ triples. Now that he's a genius the people around him can't relate to him. They are scared of him, and resentful. Then Algernon suddenly declines and dies. And soon the man returns to his former self. His final request is that someone puts flowers on Algernon's grave.

[* Monologue]
210 directly conveying his thoughts, and in turn, the message of the play, to the audience.
215

Pause. MOTHER enters, pushing GRANDFATHER in the wheelchair. He has just returned from the hospital.

→ remembering what was had, and forgotten.

Music. There is a flashback to happier times.

VOICE-OVER Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Ryan! Happy birthday to you!

220 Music starts. SON, MOTHER and GRANDFATHER sing a song together. They laugh and celebrate.

Pause.

[MONOLOGUE] SON (to audience) You know. I never really understood what the story was about. Intelligence is important right? Nobody wants to have low IQ. But having a heart... being able to care ... even for a mouse ... a laboratory mouse ... (slight pause) *Flowers for Algernon*. I get it. I finally get it. (slight pause) My Gonggong needs me—as much as I need him.

225

[MESSAGE]

IQ is necessary, but so is EQ.
He has no value, even if he has high IQ, if he has no EQ.



4. *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes is a short story in the science fiction genre that was first published in 1959. It was subsequently expanded and, in 1996, published as a novel.

- ~ How is this scene from the past so dramatically different from the present? Come up with a list of words to describe the characters' past relationships and present relationships with each other.
- ~ What lesson has Son learned from reading *Flowers for Algernon*? Why is this story relevant to his life right now? (Lines 223–227)

Act Three

Scene 1

One month later. It is late at night.

SON is with GRANDFATHER in his room.

230 GRANDFATHER Have you been practising your Mandarin?

SON A little bit... My oral exam is coming soon. The toughest part is when they show a picture and I have to talk about it. Like an old folks' home. 老样院。^[5]

235 GRANDFATHER That is not 'old folks' home'. That is 'old-fashioned garden'! The correct phrase is 疗养院。^[6]

SON 疗养院。

GRANDFATHER Why don't you talk about... your school, your friends.

SON Um, okay... er... 有这个女的...^[7]
[There's this female...]

240 GRANDFATHER Female?!

SON Girl?

GRANDFATHER Yes.

SON 有这个女同学, 我很喜欢...^[8]
[There's this girl in school I really like...]

245 GRANDFATHER You should say 'I like this girl in school.' 我喜欢上这位女同学。^[9]

SON Anyway, but 她走到^[10] overseas 读书。^[11]
[Anyway, she walked overseas to read.]

* This scene flows quite naturally.
(Unlike in ~~scene~~ Act 1 scene 3.
Shows us how the relationship has
developed that they can talk about
everyday topics without
awkwardness.

GRANDFATHER helps him with
his Mandarin, whilst incorporating
advice on SON's love life.
Like catching up on lost time,
doing everything that should
be done in a Grandparent-
Grandchild relationship.

5. 老样院 lǎo yàng yuàn

6. 疗养院 liáoyǎngyuàn

7. 有这个女的... Yǒu zhège nǚ de...

8. 有这个女同学, 我很喜欢... Yǒu zhège nǚ tóngxué, wǒ hěn xǐhuān...

9. 我喜欢上这位女同学。 Wǒ xǐhuān shàng zhè wèi nǚ tóngxué.

10. 她走到 tā zǒu dào

11. 读书 dúshū

- GRANDFATHER 'She walked overseas'? Ryan, what Mandarin have you been learning all these years? So horrible!
- 250 SON Sorry... I told you my Mandarin sucks. (*slight pause*) Actually I want to tell her I miss her.
- GRANDFATHER 其实我想告诉她我想念她。^[12]
[Actually I want to tell her I miss her.]
- 255 SON 但是我担心她会拒绝我。^[13]
[But I'm afraid she will reject me.]
- GRANDFATHER 'But I'm afraid she will reject me.' Perfect! Continue...
- SON 而且她和我们新加坡的^[14] time zone 很^[15] far apart, so 我们如果去^[16] Skype for a real-time chat is also 不容易。^[17]
[And her time zone is very far from ours in Singapore, so it's not easy for us to go on Skype for a real-time chat.]
- 260 GRANDFATHER Okay, okay... enough practice for now... Your Mandarin is like from another planet! (*slight pause*) Why don't you sing to her? *No more awkward formalities. Can relax now.*
- SON I don't sing any more.
- GRANDFATHER Last time—
[parenthesis] Interruption. Shows some irritability.
- 265 SON —Last time is over Gonggong... Mummy wants me to just focus on my studies. *Irritated because he doesn't want to think about wants that clash with instructions given.*
- GRANDFATHER Don't be afraid of following your dreams. You have to take risks, you have to try... If you want something, you have to work hard and get it. Your computer...
- 270 SON My iPad? *The age gap is still there, but it doesn't matter anymore.*

12. 其实我想告诉她我想念她。 Qíshí wǒ xiǎng gàosù tā wǒ xiǎngniàn tā.

13. 但是我担心她会拒绝我。 Dànshì wǒ dānxīn tā huì jùjué wǒ.

14. 而且她和我们新加坡的 Érqǐě tā hé wǒmen xīnjiāpō de

15. 很 hěn

16. 我们如果去 wǒmen rúguǒ qù

17. 不容易 bù róngyì

What is similar about the attitude of Mother here and that of Mother in *Absence*? What interesting comparisons can you make between them? What makes them different? (Lines 265–266)



GRANDFATHER Bring it here. Sit down ... and talk to her.

Pause. SON talks to the audience.

SON *(to audience)* And the next thing I knew I was Skyping with my friend ... with Gonggong next to me. A cheeky smile on his face.

275 GRANDFATHER One day, you sing to me again okay? You sing to your Gonggong.

SON I will ...

Scene 2

The next day. MOTHER is on the phone with the nurse. SON is reading.

280 *Acknowledging that she can't do things on her own. Nevertheless, doesn't want to burden SON.*

MOTHER I understand, but he's constantly in pain. Why can't he just stay at the hospital? I'm already taking no-pay leave. I can't take leave forever. He needs 24-hour medical attention, which we can't provide. *(slight pause)* My son is not involved in this. I know you come here every day, but what happens when you leave?

GRANDFATHER enters. He is gasping for air.

He suddenly falls to the floor.

285 MOTHER Pa, are you okay?
What's wrong? Can you breathe?

\ SON Gonggong!

SON grabs the phone.

SON Nurse! This is Ryan. My Gonggong is having shortness of breath ... He just fell. He collapsed! *He is being rational, calm, in control.*

290 *We hear a voice-over of the nurse. * CARE ≠ PANIC. He is caring without ~~pan~~ panicking.*

NURSE (V.O) How long has he been having shortness of breath?

SON I don't know. He was gasping for air and then he just fell to the floor ...

NURSE (V.O) Have you given him any medicine so far?

SON No.

~ In other moments in the play, the other side of telephone conversations went unrepresented. Why do you think we have one now via voice-over? Why is it important to hear what the other person is saying?

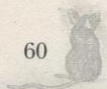
- 295 NURSE (V.O) Remember the medicine your grandpa is taking to relieve his pain? It's in the brown bottle. Check the label—it should say 'morphine syrup'.
- SON (to MOTHER) Morphine syrup. The brown bottle.
- 300 NURSE (V.O) Give him a dose and he should have some relief in an hour. Did you understand what I said? Can you repeat it to me?
- SON Give him a dose of the morphine syrup ... in the brown bottle ...
- NURSE (V.O) Good. I will call you back in one hour to check. If there's any other problem, call me.
- SON Okay, thank you ... thank you nurse.
- 305 MOTHER has given GRANDFATHER the dose. He is calmer.
- MOTHER We need to take him back to the hospital.
- SON It's fine. He's already feeling better.
- MOTHER For now, yes. What about tonight when we're all sleeping? What about tomorrow?
- 310 SON Mummy, this is not about you or me. It's about him, what he needs. You don't want him around because you don't want to deal with it.
- MOTHER That's enough from you. You're getting very rude lately.
- SON I'm sorry ... I just want what's best for Gonggong.
- MOTHER What do you know what's best?
- 315 SON I've been spending some time with him ... Sometimes at night, I go to his room. I can hear him ... his breathing ... Sometimes we talk a bit. Or we just sit in silence ... I hold his hand or give him a massage because his back hurts ...

*for all that his mum tries, the fact is he can help if he would just be allowed to.



↳ 180° change. From wanting to do everything to nothing. It isn't that she doesn't care. It's because she recognises that she can't save him, and now feels helpless. This makes her irrational.

- ~ How would you describe Son's words and actions at this moment?
- ~ Why do you think Mother sounds so defensive? (Line 314)



- 320 MOTHER I gave you specific instructions not to go to his room. What's wrong with you? Usually you're lost in your own world, just locked up in your room. You don't talk, you don't care about this family. And now you want to lecture me about my own father ... what's 'best' for him.
- SON I just want to help ...
- 325 MOTHER I know. And I'm happy that you do. But everything is fine. No need to get so sentimental. These things happen. People get sick. *Some people protect themselves from pain by being stoic.*
- SON I know Mummy ... But he can still live well, despite his illness. (slight pause) I spoke to the nurse when she came yesterday. There's a lot we can do to help Gonggong. Like just now ...
- MOTHER He needs medical care.
- 330 SON He needs family care. *He doesn't care about his fears. Only want to give GRANDFATHER more through time spent together. Being practical, accepting what's to come and not letting fear of pain get in the way of the time they have left together.*
- MOTHER Look at all this—folders, files, brochures, print-outs, prescriptions, pills, patches, gadgets ... Who's the main caregiver, tick this box; who's the main decision-maker, tick this box; helpline numbers, nurses' numbers, doctors' numbers, hospital, hospice, ambulance ... the casket company ... (slight pause) He's going back to the hospital. *Well prepared because it is how she feels in control.*
- 335 GRANDFATHER enters. He has been listening.
- MOTHER Pa, you should be resting. You're not well.
- 340 GRANDFATHER I know I am not well. I know I am sick. I spend so long at the hospital. In and out, in and out. I go for this test, that test. But when the doctor wants to talk to me, you say no. Talk to you. When I ask you what's wrong, you say nothing. Don't worry. Just rest. Watch TV. Have another pillow. *This is the most GRANDFATHER says to MOTHER. He is Frustrated.*
- MOTHER Pa, don't get so worked up. Your blood pressure ...
- 345 GRANDFATHER I don't care about my blood pressure. I don't care about my illness. I just don't want to be a burden.
- MOTHER You are not a burden.
- GRANDFATHER Then tell me the truth. If I'm going to die, just tell me.
- [MESSAGE] Treat patients normally. They don't become stupid or devoid of feeling just because they may be dying. They don't like to be lied to. They don't want facts about themselves withheld. They don't want to become a burden.*

- 350 **MOTHER** How can I tell you? What words do you want me to use? How can a daughter tell her father—(slight pause) All my life, you have taken care of me ... all my life. You have guided me ... provided for me ... Now I want to protect you ... from the pain ... from your illness ... Because it hurts Pa. It hurts seeing you like this ... And I don't know what else to do. *Confirmation: why she tried so hard, how helpless she feels.*
- GRANDFATHER** You are strong.
- 355 **MOTHER** I don't want to be strong. If I could, I just want to forget ... pretend this is not happening. I just want to be your girl. I don't want to take care of you Pa. I want you to take care of me. I want you to take care of me. *This seems selfish, but it isn't. It's very human and natural to*
- GRANDFATHER** I will always take care of you. I will always be your Pa. Okay? I will always be your Pa. *be weak. And we can't accuse her of selfishness because of all her effort and sacrifices, despite her feelings.*
- 360 They hug. Pause.
- SON** (to audience) That day, for the first time, I saw my mother not just as a mother, but as a daughter. She is someone's child, just as she is someone's parent. That day, for the first time, we spoke as a family about my Gonggong's illness. *[MESSAGE] Be open and honest. Give them the dignity of transparent conversation.*
- 365 Pause.
- GRANDFATHER** Girl, you can learn from your son. Look at him. He's becoming a man!
- MOTHER** Well, he has to stop playing computer games all day and start studying if he wants to become a man.
- GRANDFATHER** You didn't pamper him the way I pampered you. I spoiled you. Your mother always scolded me for giving in to you.
- 370 **MOTHER** Ma had too many rules. She was too strict.
- SON** I see where you got that from.
- MOTHER** Excuse me? I'm not even half as strict as my mother was. She not only checked our homework, she checked our fingernails, toenails, hair length ... no TV during dinner, no going out on dates, no phone calls with boys ...
- 375

- ~ What does Mother reveal about herself in this scene? How does this change your attitude towards her?
- ~ Why is this a pivotal moment in the drama? What is happening to the characters?



- SON Okay, okay, fine ... you are the best mother in the world.
- MOTHER Thank you.
- GRANDFATHER Haha ... but you always break her rules!
- 380 SON You always break her rules ... Tell me more ... \ MOTHER Don't you start ...
- GRANDFATHER Remember that time you sneak out at night because you wanted to go to the school dance.
- MOTHER She refused to let me go. I just wanted to dance with—(pause)
- 385 SON Too much information! (slight pause) So, did you dance WITH?
- MOTHER I did.
- GRANDFATHER He's your father!
- SON Aww ... so schweet ...
- MOTHER Don't so schweet me. I know what's been going on with you and your Skype friend.
- 390 SON Gonggong!
- GRANDFATHER I didn't say anything!
- SON She's just a friend! \ MOTHER A friend ...
- GRANDFATHER How do you say it in Chinese?
- 395 SON 女朋友。^[18]
[Female friend.]
- They laugh. Pause.
- GRANDFATHER So ... what's going to happen next? Am I going to the hospital? GRANDFATHER'S health.
- MOTHER No Pa. You stay home, with us.
- 400 SON We'll take care of you. → Monumental turning point.
- MOTHER As long as we need to.

* Conversation is flowing smoothly between the three of them. Relationship is developing.

First time we see SON & MOTHER talk casually about something that isn't related to studies or health.

↳ Allowing herself to receive help, acknowledging that she must allow SON to be a part of this journey.

18. 女朋友。Nǚ péngyǒu.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED...

& MESSAGE! give them what they want. They don't ask for much. There's no need to do so much in the way of unnecessary things.

GRANDFATHER This is all I want. To be with my family... *(slight pause, he brings SON aside)* Boy, after I am gone, you promise me okay? Promise me you will take care of your mother.

405 SON I promise Gonggong.

GRANDFATHER Good... you are a good boy...

GRANDFATHER walks away.

MOTHER You are... *⇒ Realisation at how much her SON has matured. Did not previously recognise it because she was focusing on other things.*

Scene 3

Two weeks later. SON sings at GRANDFATHER's funeral.

410 *MOTHER goes to SON. She gives him a book.*

MOTHER He wanted you to have this.

SON *Flowers for Algernon.*

MOTHER He wrote a note.

415 SON 'The spirit of caring transcends family. The more you give, the more you will receive.'

They hug. Pause. MOTHER walks away.



~ Why do you think Mother fails to finish her sentence? What emotions are preventing her from speaking? What do you think she was going to say? (Line 408)

Epilogue

SON (to audience) How do we care? We know how to text. We know how to Skype. We know how to chat on Facebook. Our communication has increased ... but our relationships haven't.

[*MONOLOGUE]

420 Ensuring that
audience
understands the
message.

I knew my Gonggong when I was growing up ... but I didn't really know him. I never talked to him, never really listened to him. He was just this old man.

425

But now I know him. I can say that I knew him. Gonggong passed away a few days ago. He left surrounded by his family and with peace in his heart.

A relationship shouldn't begin only when someone is dying. It should begin when they are living.

My grandfather managed to stay with us for a few months. Some might not be so lucky, having just a few weeks left to live.

430

So ... don't wait. Death ends a life, but not a relationship.

This sunflower symbolises remembrance, a celebration, of those close to us whose lives have ended.

I wish you well.

Lights fade.

Title: Don't know, Don't Care.

Is this the case? Should we choose
to be ignorant?

If we do, what do we stand to gain?

If we do, what do we stand to lose?

