



## Living Shadows

**Characters:** Mani Rao (as Mani Rao), Dr Lo, Alysha, Daisy, Anita, Ms, Ted, Bax

### Synopsis:

- Scene1: Iris and Anita tell Daisy how much they love their Beauty Engineering Course. Daisy regret that she is studying Journalism and not Beauty Engineering.
- Scene2: Dr Lo has a tutorial with the students and sets up the next interview with a Hong Kong writer. He wants the students to write a story for Cyber News which portrays Hong Kong as a city for writers as much as a city for business people.
- Scene3: The students check out Mani Rao on the internet. They formulate some questions to ask her.
- Scene4: Interview with the poet, Mani Rao.
- Scene5: Dr Lo asks the students what they have found out from their interviews.

### Scene 1 In the corridors of UCC

- Iris: Hi Daisy.
- Daisy: Hi Iris.
- Anita: Hi Daisy.
- Daisy: Hi Anita. How's the Beauty Engineering Course going?
- Iris: Great.
- Anita: We learned how to give a facial yesterday.
- Daisy: Facials?! Really? Wa... you're so lucky.
- Iris: We can give you one if you like.
- Daisy: Would you?
- Anita: Yes... Hmm... your skin is a bit greasy.... so...
- Iris: We could start with a facial scrub.
- Anita: Then we could apply a crushed strawberry and mud face pack.
- Iris: Leave it on for half an hour.
- Anita: Then chip it off and give you a facial steam bath.

Iris: Dry your face with a soft towel.  
Anita: And you'll look all fresh and lovely.  
Iris: That greasy oily look you have now will be gone!  
Anita: Yes, no more shinning face.  
Iris: No more spots.  
Anita: Or blackheads.  
Daisy: My skin's not THAT greasy is it?  
Iris: Hmm... what do you think Anita?  
Anita: Hmm... I'd say it's very greasy.  
Iris: As greasy as an unwashed wok after a stir fry?  
Anita: Hmm... almost.  
Daisy: Hey girls... come one... I wash my face every morning and once in the day and then again at night.  
Iris: Too much soap.  
Anita: That's not good for the skin.  
Iris: Opens the pores.  
Anita: Let's the grease come through.  
Daisy: Okay... so when can you give me a facial?  
Iris: This Saturday? Is that okay with you Anita?  
Anita: Sure Iris.  
Daisy: Okay... come to my place in the afternoon.  
Iris: Okay... Um... Daisy... have you heard anything about changing your course yet.  
Anita: ... getting out of journalism and getting in with us at Beauty Engineering?  
Daisy: No, I asked but they said there were still no vacancies.  
Anita: So your stuck with journalism.  
Daisy: Yes... worse luck.  
Iris: What do you have to do in Journalism?  
Daisy: It's really hard.  
Anita: Is it? So like what sort of things do they make you do?  
Daisy: We have to interview people and then write it up for this dumb cyber newspaper.  
Anita: What's a cyber newspaper?  
Daisy: It's like a newspaper that's not made of paper.  
Iris: So what IS it made of?  
Daisy: I dunno... electricity I suppose.  
Anita: A newspaper made of electricity?!

Daisy: Yeah... Cyber News... you get to it through the internet... you know...  
by clicking on and then you read it on the screen.

Iris: You're writing stuff for that?

Daisy: Yeah.

Anita: Who are you interviewing?

Iris: Pop stars?

Daisy: No... writers.

Anita: What kind of writers?

Daisy: Well... last week we interviewed a novelist.

Iris: What's a novelist?

Daisy: Someone who writes story books?

Anita: A story book writer?

Daisy: Yeah.... A novelist... that's what they're called... novelist.

Iris: Was he nice?

Daisy: She.

Iris: Oh... well... was SHE nice?

Daisy: Yeah... Xu Xi.... that's her name... We went to her flat.

Anita: What was it like?

Daisy: There were... like... BOOKS... everywhere!... you couldn't see the  
walls... just books.

Iris: Wa... so many books.

Daisy: Yeah.

Anita: So what did you ask her Daisy?

Daisy: The others were asking her all these dumb questions about her  
writing... but I asked her about where she got her hair done.

Iris: Wa! Interesting!

Anita: What did she say?

Daisy: Well... she said that usually she gets her hair cut by...

**Scene 2 Dr Lo's office**

Dr Lo: So how did you get on with your interview?

Ted: It was great.

Aly: Oh Dr Lo.... Xu Xi was such an interesting lady.

Bax: Yeah... we learned a lot.

DrLo: Daisy?

Daisy: Yeah... she was nice.

Ted: (Laughing) Daisy asked her about her hair!

DrLo: Her hair?!

Ted: (Laughing) Yeah, we all just cracked up... like... ugh?... what's she asking this famous Hong Kong novelist about her hair for?

Bax & Aly: (Laugh with Ted)

Daisy: What's wrong with asking about her hair?

Ted: Cos she's a writer... not a model or something... you're supposed to ask writers what they write... not where they have their hair done!

Daisy: But we went on to talk about other things?

Dr Lo: Why did you ask her about her hair Daisy?

Daisy: Well why not? They were asking all these questions just for the sake of asking them and I thought... why don't I ask her a question I'm really interested in knowing the answer to?

Dr Lo: (Pause) Daisy... I seem to remember that last week you told me you had applied to study for a Higher Diploma in Beauty Engineering... is that right.

Daisy: Yes, yes it is... but the course was full.

Dr Lo: I'm sorry about that... but... well... you're studying Journalism now Daisy... maybe you don't want to... but you've got to make an effort to get into it or else you won't do well.

Daisy: I was okay.... I asked other questions.

Ted: (Laughing) You should have seen the look on Xu Xi's face when Daisy comes out with that question about her hair?!

Bax: I know we were like... what?!... did she REALLY ask that question?

Bax & Ted: (Laugh)

Dr Lo: But Daisy has got a point... she was asking a question she was interested in hearing the answer to... and as long as there were other follow up questions....

Daisy: We're writing up this story for Cyber News right?

Dr Lo: That's right.

Daisy: And who's supposed to read Cyber News?... other students right?

Dr Lo: Yes... students here in Hong Kong and all over the world.

Daisy: Well I reckoned some of the readers would be interested in more personal stuff... like hair... know what I mean... if it's all just stuff about writing some of them might turn off and leave the site.

Dr Lo: Well yes... you have got a point there Daisy... it IS good to be aware of the readership and we are writing as young journalists for young readers.

Daisy: So we should be a bit more modern, right?... not just write all the

serious stuff they write in regular paper newspapers.

Dr Lo: You've got a point Daisy.

Aly: One of my questions was... um... (clears throat)... (reading) 'Many people think that Hong Kong is about making money, not about writing story books... what do you think of this?

Dr Lo: Good... right on track Alysha... that's what this story for Cyber News is all about.... Trying to alter the perception of Hong Kong being just a commercial city.

Aly: We want to write about it as a cultural city Sir... culture not commerce.

Bax: Yeah... writers not bankers.

Ted: Poets... not stock brokers.

Dr Lo: Good... and I'm glad you mentioned Poets Ted because your next interview is with a Hong Kong Poet... her name is Mani Rao.

Aly: A poet?... I've never met a poet before.

Dr Lo: Well here's your chance.

Bax: You gonna ask her about her hair Daisy?

Daisy: Might do.

Dr Lo: I've set you up with an interview with her tomorrow at ten at her office.

Bax: Cool. A poet. Wonder what's she's like?

Dr Lo: What do you think poets are like Bax?

Bax: Dunno, never met one but I guess.... Well... old.... ad kind of... walking around with their head in the clouds... difficult to talk to.

Aly: Poets know a lot of things.

Ted: Yeah... some old guy who sits in a room all day looking into space.

Dr Lo: Um... well... that could be a starting point for your story... you could write something like... 'When you think of a poet do you think of an old man sitting in a room all by himself gazing into space? Do you think of someone out of touch with life, someone who may be difficult to talk to?'.... That would be a good introduction to your story because then you could follow it with a description of the poet you met... the reader would read on because they would want to know if your idea of what a poet was matched the reality of what the poet you met was really like... in this case... Mani Rao.

Bax: Hey, thanks Patrick... you've just given us some help with our assignment.

Aly: Yes, thanks Dr Lo.

Dr Lo: Yes... but only the start... You have an interview to do and then the rest of the story to write... Before the interview I want you to look up Mani

Rao on the internet and see what you can find out about her before you meet her... this will help you get some background and maybe formulate your questions.... Okay... so that's all for this tutorial...

Aly: Thanks, Bye Dr Lo.  
Bax: Bye Patrick.  
Ted: See ya Patrick.  
Daisy: Bye.  
Dr Lo: Have a good interview.

### **Scene 3 Computer Centre at UCC**

Ted: Okay... so let's see.... type in... what's the name of the poet?  
Aly: Mani Rao.  
Ted: How do you spell it?

(SFX: Keying in name on keyboard)

Aly: M-A-N-I R-A-O  
Bax: Do poets HAVE web sites.  
Ted: We'll soon find out.

(SFX: Taps 'Enter' key)

Daisy: Come on come on... why is it always so slow?  
Ted: It's coming, it's coming... look.  
Bax: Wow... so he has got his own web site.  
Aly: It's a 'she' not a 'he' Bax... look... it says... she now works at a television network in Hong Kong.  
Daisy: She works in TV?  
Bax: Cool.  
Ted: A poet working in TV...?  
Ted: Okay... what else? (Reading)... Mani Rao was born in 1965.  
Bax: So she's.... thirty six?  
Aly: Quite young.  
Ted: (Reading) Mani Rao has lived in India, New Zealand and Hong Kong.  
Aly: India?  
Ted: Yeah... she's like you Alysha.  
Aly: You know when I first heard her name I was wondering if she came

from India?

Ted: But she's lived in all those other places.

Bax: We can ask her about that.

Aly: Yes, that will be interesting... I want to ask her where she feels she belongs.

Bax: Where do you feel you belong Alysha?

Aly: Hong Kong.

Bax: But Alysha... you're Indian and Hong Kong people are Chinese.

Aly: Bax I was bom here... I grew up here... I speak Cantonese... does that mean I can't belong to Hong Kong?

Daisy: You belong to India.

Aly: Why?... I know Hong Kong much better than I know India.

Daisy: But you're not Chinese.

Aly: Daisy! You know I get really fed up with all that kind of stuff! Look at London! Look at New York! Look at Paris or Sydney or Johannesburg!... those cities are full of people from all over the world...nobody would say to a Chinese guy in London that he wasn't a Londoner... or say to an African in New York that he wasn't new Yorker! So why do you have to be Chinese to be a Hong Konger?!

Ted: Um... Can we get back to this?

Bax: Okay, go on, what else does it say?

Ted: Mani Rao is a literature graduate who knew better than to earn a living writing poetry, she re-incarnated herself in the world of media.

Bax: What does that mean... 'she knew better than to earn a living writing poetry?'

Aly: I think it means poets don't earn much money.

Bax: I'm going to ask her that.

Ted: Okay... and... (reading)... she has authored five collections of poetry.

Aly: Five? That's a lot.

Bax: Hey look, one of her books is called 'Salt.'

Daisy: Has she written one called 'Pepper?'

Ted: Very funny Daisy.

Bax: I'm gonna ask her why she called it 'Salt.'

Aly: And another book's called 'Living Shadows'... I like that... maybe I can ask her why she chose that title.

Ted: Hey look... if I click on here we can read some poems from that book if you want to.

Aly: Yes... go on Ted.

(SFX: Tapping keys)

Ted: Here we go.

Aly: Okay, let me read....  
My shadow comes home at night  
Howls at my grave  
till I open my coffin and  
let him in.  
In the sun I split open  
A seed  
And we walk  
me  
and my dog.

Daisy: Weird.

Aly: It's beautiful.

Bax: What does it mean?

Ted: I'm not sure.

Bax: She sounds like a vampire.

Ted: A vampire? Why?

Bax: Look....

(Reading)

My shadow comes home at night  
Howls at my grave  
till I open my coffin and  
let him in.  
It's like vampires sleep in their coffins don't they?

Aly: Yes, but not at night... they come out at night.

Bax: Oh yeah.

Aly: I think she means sleep is like death.

Daisy: You're nuts Alysha.

Aly: No I'm not! Shakespeare compared sleep and death... anyway... if you see a sleeping person how do you know they're not dead?

Bax: Click on where it says... 'Writing on the Wall' Ted.

Ted: Okay.

(SFX: Taps keys)

Bax: Hey look... she sprays her poems on the walls like graffiti.  
Aly: Oh, um... isn't that against the law.  
Daisy: I like it.  
Bax: And look... she's got poems up in shop windows.  
Aly: I've never seen that before.  
Bax: Hey, what kind of person is this poet?  
Ted: Well now we know he's a 'she' and she's not old and she doesn't sit in a room daydreaming.  
Daisy: No... she goes out and sprays poems on walls.  
Aly: I wonder what she's like?

### Interval

#### Scene 4 At Mani Rao's Office

Aly: Um... Miss Rao....  
Mani: Please... call me Mani.  
Aly: Thank you... um....  
Daisy: (Butting in) Why do you spray your poems on walls and stuff?  
Mani: That's funny. Em...it's not like I go around spraying walls as in when I like, that bit you might be talking about could from the festival.  
Daisy: Ah...I thought you went to housing estates and sprayed lovely poems all over the wall.  
Bax: Okay...so you mean it's legal to spray graffiti on the wall during the festival, right?  
Mani: That was just one time, there was a city festival that happened a couple of years back and there was a wall that I was allowed to put graffiti on.  
Bax: Wow...so where is...where is that wall located?  
Mani: It's actually in the toilet of the fringe club.  
Bax: Toilet? O...quite interesting.

(Laughing)

Aly: Well...Miss Rao?  
Mani: Yes?  
Aly: I really love the title of your poem "Living Shadows" and I wanted to ask what made you think of that name?  
Ted: We read some of your poems on the Internet...you know...on your

website and there was this poem...well...Bax thought it was like you were talking about vampires and Alysha you thought she was talking about...

Aly: (Interrupting) I thought she was talking about death.

Mani: What poem was that?

Ted: Em...okay...here it is while I read it to you, we printed it out.

(Reading)

My shadow comes home at night

Howls at my grave

Till I open my coffin and

Let him in.

Mani: I know the one. You're both right actually. It is about sleep and death and it is about vampires and it is about anything you might choose to interpret it as and if you go deeper into it, you can say it's about a person and a friend, you can say it's about the body and the soul. So there is a whole lot of ways of looking at it.

Bax: So why do you use the word 'shadow'?

Mani: Shadow becomes a metaphor for a whole lot of other things and the entire book is really taking off from the plot of shadow and then taking a creative leap into various other ideas...

Ted: O...I think I'm...I think I get what you're trying to say. What you're trying to say is that shadow includes a lot of things, right?

Mani: That's right.

Ted: And one of them would be death, that's what Alysha thought, and another would be vampire, that's what Bax thought. Wow...I love the way you simple words, but you mean different things and it's so deep.

Bax: O...yeah...and one of your books of poems is called "Salt". I mean like...why do you call the book of poems "Salt". Why not pepper, why not mustard, why not ketchup?

(Mani laughing)

Mani: Salt stands for the essence of something. It's like the crystallization of something bigger and salt is also essential like you need it. You could do without mustard but you can't do without salt. And salt also stands for experience and loyalty...and you know...all these other connotations.

Bax: So what type of poems are included in the book called "Salt"?

- Mani: Mainly the poems are very very condensed plots, they are very simple and they're short and it's like that little bit of salt that gives you the taste.
- Aly: We also read on your website that you had lived in India, New Zealand and Hong Kong.
- Mani: That's right.
- Aly: I want to ask you where you feel you belong and can people even if they're not Chinese still be Hong Kong poets?
- Mani: Hm...tricky question that is. Em...I don't know if it really matters whether you feel like you belong somewhere or not. If you want to belong to Hong Kong, you can and if you want to belong somewhere else, you can too. Em...it probably matters more in a social and historical context, and more for critics and people who sort of might analyze and your conclusions. If you're a poet, why should you care?
- Aly: Yeah...but like...I'm a student and many of my friends say that I should not think of myself as a Hongkonger because I'm an Indian.
- Mani: That they say more about them than about you.
- Aly: Okay...but I think I'm quite a Hongkonger than an Indian because I have been brought up in Hong Kong.
- Mani: Then you must be.
- Bax: O...yeah...you work in TV right?
- Mani: That's right.
- Bax: So how come a poet can work in TV?
- Mani: A poet could be a dishwasher, could be a newspaper...you know...delivery person...could do anything and television is just a profession, just like any other.
- Bax: Okay...so...you mean...writing poems is like a hobby, isn't it?
- Mani: Sort of...yeah...
- Ted: Well...what advice would you give to young people who want to write poems?
- Mani: I would say before you write, think, and live and what goes it comes out. Garbage in and garbage out. If the input is zero, then the output is zero.
- Ted: So to think and to make sure we have inputs so that what we come...what comes out is not garbage.
- Mani: That's right.
- Daisy: Em...can I ask a question?
- Mani: Sure.

- Daisy: I really like your hair.  
Mani: Thank you.  
Daisy: Where did you get it done?  
Mani: I usually get my hair done at a little salon in Central, by a girl called Kathy.  
Daisy: O...thank you. And I really really like the way you're dressing. You look so cool! How did you choose your clothes and where do you like to go shopping?  
Mani: Em...I choose my clothes mainly on the colours and on the textures and I go shopping anywhere. I don't shop a lot. I go shopping very occasionally. It could be anywhere, I might be traveling or I might be in Hong Kong...

**Scene 5 Dr. Lo's Office at UCC**

- Dr. Lo: So...now you've done both interviews, one with Xu Xi, Hong Kong short story writer and novelist, and one with Mani Rao, a Hong Kong poet. Okay...so...did you guys enjoy the interviews?

(Response from all students)

- Dr. Lo: So...I guess it was the first time you got to talk to writers directly. So were they the way you imagined they would be?  
Ted: Well...I don't know about the other people, but then I thought Xu Xi was kind of...she was cool, she was really innovating. And she wasn't the typical kind of storywriter that I thought, cos she goes to New York often, and she goes around and she really didn't have a generation gap between us and we could really have a conversation.  
Dr. Lo: Yeah...okay...so what do the other people think?  
Bax: Well...at first I thought poets and writers are like...people who just sit in their desk and write...write...write...write...write...they have completely no connection between the outside world and their inside world. But after I talked to Mani and Xu Xi, well...I found out that they really can...they really will go out and go to other places and countries and probably will go out to shop, like somewhat to the questions to Daisy asked.  
Ted: I agree, cos like Mani was really mysterious but then she had a way of communicating with people, she really knew how to inter-react with

us.

Dr. Lo: (Interrupting) Thank, thanks, thanks, Ted. Let's see what Daisy and Alysha think.

Aly: And they were so positive, you know. I mean...like...I mean you know in Hong Kong, you'd never see anyone who really find pleasure in their work. But I mean I could see it in both writers, I mean Xu Xi and Mani, they really love what they do.

Bax: Yeah...I mean Xu Xi and Mani, from them, I learn that writers...poets don't earn any money. At the very beginning, I thought...I thought it was a drag for being a writer, a poet, a journalist to...because they don't earn any money. But now...wow...I didn't know they could have so much fun.

Dr. Lo: So what about Daisy, what do you think?

Daisy: Well...em...Mani is so cool! She wears stuff which is so cool! She hardly goes shopping though. And she considers her clothes by colour and texture. But Xu Xi, she likes going to second-hand shops and that is so cheap.

Dr. Lo: Okay...maybe it's easier for us to talk about the two writers if we take them one at a time, so why don't we just sort of concentrate on Xu Xi first. So...em...what did you learn about Xu Xi.

Ted: Well...I learn that in order to write well, you have to know what you want to write. And you have to write about the topic which you know and you have to understand the world and be more observant. Once you're observant, then you'll have like inspiration and you'll know what to write.

Aly: And also...you should enjoy what you're writing about, and I mean...you know...that's what...that's how one can find pleasure in what they do.

Dr. Lo: What about Daisy? Did you ask any ...did you ask Xu Xi any interesting questions?

Daisy: Yes, I know that we can buy cheaper clothes in second-hand shops.

(Other student laughing)

Dr. Lo: Well...really? You asked her such questions?

Daisy: Yes, of course.

Dr. Lo: Why did you ask a writer these questions?

Daisy: It's interesting to know where they buy clothes and why.

- Ted: Because that's all that you can think of.
- Dr. Lo: Well...but do you think our readers will be interested in reading...in finding out about that?
- Daisy: Well...of course...they want to know what a writer's life is really like.
- Dr. Lo: Okay...now...well...because Xu Xi and Mani are writers, so maybe you should also...I mean in your report, you should also focus on their writing. So what did you find out about Xu Xi's writing?
- Ted: Well...Xu Xi likes to write real life based stories, she likes...she likes to put mixed realism with a bit of fiction, so her characters are fake, but then all the events, for example in her book "The Unwalled City", there's the handover which is real but then like she has four different characters and how they interact, and that's all made up.
- Dr. Lo: Yeah...good...did she...did you say...did she explain why she chose "The Unwalled City" as the title of the book?
- Aly: Well...yeah...because she said after the handover...I mean...there was some...well...after the handover...Hong Kong is not really...does not have a lot of barriers, but still there is this wall around Hong Kong that sort of remains.
- Dr. Lo: Yeah...so does anything...does anyone want to add anything about Xu Xi?
- Aly: I want to say something about Mani.
- Dr. Lo: Yes, please do.
- Aly: She used a lot of metaphors in her writing which is so beautiful. I mean...you know...it just captures a lot of meaning in one understands how they use and what they mean.
- Bax: And I really like the way she writes the poems in her book called "Salt", cos her poems is exactly like the title. Her poems consist of very very little words, but actually the inner meaning is...it means so much...it can have...there are a lot of things you can say in the meaning.
- Ted: I agree with Bax. I like the way Mani uses her words. She is so articulating and she likes using simple words, but then she is really careful about choosing them and how they can relate different things.
- Aly: And there is so much essence in her poems.
- Ted: It is really concentrated. And...em...I find one line that Mani said in the interview really really interesting, and that was no input and no output.
- Dr. Lo: Yes, yeah...okay. And Daisy, did you get to ask her about her poems?

Daisy: Ya, of course. I think the best way to express a poem is to spray on the walls of housing estates. Yeah!

(At an appropriate point fade out.)

**The End**