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boom



a play by  
jean tay

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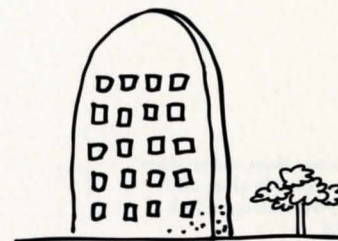
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boom



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EPIGRAM BOOKS / SINGAPORE

Third printing, 2013

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Published in Singapore by  
Epigram Books  
www.epigrambooks.sg

Cover illustration by  
Michelle Andrea Wan

National Library Board, Singapore  
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Tay, Jean, 1974-  
Boom : a play / by Jean Tay.  
— Singapore : Epigram, 2009.  
p. cm.  
ISBN: 978-981-08-4017-4 (pbk)  
ISBN: 978-981-07-5500-3 (epub)

I. Title.

PR9570.S53  
S822 -- dc22 OCN436106267

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First Edition  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

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CONTENTS

Preface	i
Production Notes	v
Characters	vii

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PROLOGUE 1

ACT 1 5

SCENE 1	The Show Flat	7
SCENE 2	Moving Out	11
SCENE 3	The New Burial System	15
SCENE 4	Housing Agents – Teasing Boon	18
SCENE 5	Boon's Dream	20
SCENE 6	The Servant and the Corpse	21
SCENE 7	Persuasion – Mother and Son	26
SCENE 8	Memory of the New House	28
SCENE 9	Corpses and Ghosts	30
SCENE 10	A Neighbourly Chat	31
SCENE 11	Chorus of Civil Servants – Complaint Letter	33
SCENE 12	Cubicle Chat	35
SCENE 13	Memory of the Red Underwear	38
SCENE 14	Corpse Monologue	40
SCENE 15	Jeremiah and Boss	41
SCENE 16	Argument between Mother and Son	43
SCENE 17	Memory of Young Mother and Father	46
SCENE 18	Graveside Scene	48
SCENE 19	Housing Agents	51
SCENE 20	Flashback – Painting	53

---

	ACT 2	57
SCENE 1	Flashback – The Loan Sharks Come	59
SCENE 2	Getting Busted	61
SCENE 3	Director and Jeremiah	63
SCENE 4	Boon’s Monologue about the Tree	64
SCENE 5	Columbarium Advertisement	65
SCENE 6	Corpse and Jeremiah	67
SCENE 7	Chat with Male Neighbour	70
SCENE 8	Reunion	73
SCENE 9	Corpse Finally Remembers	75
SCENE 10	Final Neighbourly Chat	77
SCENE 11	Jeremiah Talks to Colleague	79
SCENE 12	Boon Breaks the Bad News to Mother	83
SCENE 13	Mother’s Dream	86
SCENE 14	Revelations	88
SCENE 15	Accepting the Truth	93
SCENE 16	Boon Talks to the Tree	95
SCENE 17	Boon Cuts Down Tree and Jeremiah Talks to Corpse	96
SCENE 18	Mother and Boon	98
SCENE 19	Mother Dreams of Becoming a Mynah	101
SCENE 20	Cremation	103
	Notes	106
	About the Playwright	111
	About the Publisher	112

## PREFACE

In 1997, I wrote a play, titled *Plunge*, about the Asian Economic Crisis and the impact that the stock market crash had on the lives of ordinary individuals in Asia. While workshoping the play during my residency at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2007, I was asked to think about how to update this decade-old play. Half-jokingly, I suggested writing a sequel, titled *Boom*, seeing how soaring property prices were starting to impact ordinary Singaporeans’ lives at that time. Indeed, I had even begun to wonder whether progress and prosperity could really be as destructive a force as an economic meltdown.

In particular, the property market boom in 2007 threw the spotlight on the phenomenon known as the en bloc sale (or the collective sale) in Singapore. This is basically the process by which a group of owners can come together to jointly sell their property, and thus command a higher price than if they were to sell their units individually. During this period, a large number of older condominium estates came to be sold en bloc to property developers for redevelopment, reaping large windfalls for many owners. Under the law, as long as a majority of at least 80 per cent of owners in these older estates (i.e. greater than 10 years old) were agreeable to the sale, the en bloc sale could proceed. Unfortunately, this also meant that there was a small but increasingly vocal minority of owners who objected to the sales, but had to sell their homes against their will. Their plight has been vividly documented in numerous media reports which have described the destructive impact of such collective sales, and how they have turned friendly neighbours into bitter enemies.

Divisive as it may have been, the debate surrounding en bloc sales is merely one facet of a larger issue—namely, the question of how to hang on to our history and heritage in the face of redevelopment, even as iconic buildings fall victim to the wrecking ball. For this play, I wanted to put a

face to some of the quieter tragedies that might go unnoticed during the inexorable march of progress. I also wanted to explore the tension between the aspirations of the younger generation of Singaporeans, and the desire to hang on to the past and memories, as embodied by these old buildings.

Even the dead have not been spared in the relentless onslaught of progress and land redevelopment. Since 1998, the government has limited the burial period for all graves to 15 years, in view of the limited land available for cemeteries. This has resulted in the mass exhumation of a large number of graves, during which time the remains have been either cremated and placed in columbariums, or reburied according to the deceased's religious requirements. In any case, this mandatory "relocation" of the dead has led to some uncanny parallels between en bloc sales and exhumations, which I have enjoyed exploring in this play.

I would like to thank the Royal Court Theatre in London for their encouragement in developing *Boom*, as well as Gaurav Kripalani, Tracie Pang and the rest of the team at the Singapore Repertory Theatre for their support in shaping the script and first bringing it to the stage. Last but not least, I would like to thank God, who has made all of this possible, and my long-suffering family for their unconditional love and support.

JEAN TAY, 2009

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PRODUCTION NOTES

*Boom* was first produced in Singapore by the Singapore Repertory Theatre on 18 September 2008. The production was directed by Tracie Pang; costume design was also by Tracie Pang; set design was by Wong Chee Wai; lighting was by Yo Shao Ann and sound was by Darren Ng. The cast was as follows:

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BOON	Sebastian Tan
MOTHER	Fanny Kee
JEREMIAH	Chua En Lai
CORPSE	Zachary Ho
YOUNG FATHER	Brendon Fernandez
AGENT 1	
COLLEAGUE	
MALE NEIGHBOUR	
YOUNG MOTHER	Chermaine Ang
AGENT 2	
DIRECTOR	
FEMALE NEIGHBOUR	

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**CHARACTERS**

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BOON	A property agent, male in his mid- to late twenties
MOTHER	Boon's mother, female in her sixties
JEREMIAH	A civil servant, male in his thirties
CORPSE	Male in his forties
YOUNG FATHER	Male in his forties
AGENT 1	Male in his forties
COLLEAGUE	Male in his forties
MALE NEIGHBOUR	Male in his forties
YOUNG MOTHER	Female in her thirties
AGENT 2	Female in her thirties
DIRECTOR	Female in her thirties
FEMALE NEIGHBOUR	Female in her thirties

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# PROLOGUE



## PROLOGUE

*Lights up on a cemetery. We see a headstone, standing in the silence. The sound of construction begins, booming so loudly, even the ground shudders. One of the headstones topples over amidst the booming. As we watch, a hand slowly emerges from the grave, and sets the headstone upright again. The booming fades away. Lights fade.*

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ACT 1



## SCENE 1:

## THE SHOW FLAT

*Boon, an enthusiastic property agent, bursts forth triumphantly, leading a chorus of property agents in their long-sleeved shirts and ties.*

---

1 BOON Ladies and gentlemen, welcome! To heaven!  
AGENT 1 Paradise.  
AGENT 2 Eden.  
BOON Your dream home!  
5 AGENT 1 Luxurious living!  
AGENT 2 Spacious layout!  
BOON Designer decor!  
AGENT 1 En bloc potential!  
AGENT 2 Guaranteed returns!  
10 BOON Bring cheque!  
AGENT 1 Must view!  
AGENT 2 Highest offer secures!  
BOON Facing north!  
AGENT 1 South!  
15 AGENT 2 East!  
BOON But never west!  
AGENT 1 Panoramic view of the city!  
AGENT 2 Of the sea!  
BOON Of greenery!  
20 AGENT 1 Of the swimming pool!  
AGENT 2 Of other people's swimming pools!  
BOON Other people's living rooms!  
AGENT 1 Other people's backyards!  
AGENT 2 And other people's dirty laundry.

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Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

“Jean Tay is one of the most gifted playwrights I have come across in years.”—*Gaurav Kripalani, Artistic Director, Singapore Repertory Theatre*

Welcome to the surreal world of *Boom*, where civil servants wake the dead, corpses are terrified of cremation, old women are besieged in their own homes, and ah bengs still dream of being Superman. *Boom* tells the story of an elderly woman and her property-agent son, who are struggling over the potential en bloc sale of their home in Singapore. Their destinies become intertwined with that of an idealistic civil servant, Jeremiah, who is facing the greatest challenge of his career—persuading a reluctant corpse to yield its memories. *Boom* is a quirky yet poignant tale about the relocation of both the dead and the living, and how personal stories get left behind in the inexorable march of progress.

Written by economist-turned-playwright Jean Tay, *Boom* was conceptualised at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2007, and developed and first staged by the Singapore Repertory Theatre in September 2008. It was nominated for Best Original Script at *The Straits Times Life!* Theatre Awards in 2009 and has been selected as an ‘O’- and ‘N’-Level literature text in Singaporean schools.

ISBN 978-981-08-4017-4



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