

Plot

Stage 1

Mr Li looks outside his office window after his mother's burial.

- It is the day after the burial and Mr Li feels tired. He also feels that there is something he has left undone.
- He suddenly remembers that he has not counted the ships at the harbour for the day.
- It is his habit to count the ships every day.
- He picks up his binoculars and suddenly remembers that he bought them for his late mother so that she could see better.
- Suddenly, he is swept by memories.

Stage 2

Mr Li recalls some events before his mother's demise - flashback to the past.

- Mr Li was eager to show the binoculars to his mother the day he bought them.
- When he showed Ah-Ma the binoculars, she argued with him, saying she did not need them.
- They discussed the need to have her cataract operation. However, Ah-Ma adamantly refused to go through it.
- Ah-Ma agreed to try the binoculars if she could see Tanjong Rhu, where she used to live with her family.
- She recalled the time when her husband worked at a small shipyard in Tanjong Rhu.
- Mr Li was not interested to hear his mother's stories.
- In the end, Ah-Ma agreed to go to his office the next day only if she could see Tanjong Rhu from there.

Stage 3

Ah-Ma performed her prayers in the altar room - flashback.

- The next morning, Ah-Ma wanted to tell her husband, who had passed on, that she was visiting her son's office that day.
- Mr Li knew that he was running late but patiently waited for his mother.
- He heard Ying, his daughter, arguing with her grandmother over some joss sticks.
- Her grandmother said that Ying did not know how to perform the prayers properly.
- He reprimanded his daughter for being disrespectful.

Stage 4

Ah-Ma visited Mr Li's office - still in flashback.

- Mr Li wanted his mother to see the big ships at the harbour from his office window.
- However, Ah-Ma could not see any of them even with the binoculars.
- What she saw instead in her mind's eye was Tanjong Rhu in the past, where she remembered looking for crabs on the beach with a young Mr Li and looking at the half-built fishing boats.
- Disappointed, Mr Li refused to listen to her and snatched the binoculars from her.

Stage 5

Mr Li yearns to see Tanjong Rhu, too - back in the present.

- Mr Li looks at the binoculars lying next to the window and wishes that he had asked his mother what she saw that morning.
- Suddenly, he yearns to go back to the time when he was a little boy in Tanjong Rhu.
- He finds that his memory is very vague and there are plenty of things he does not remember.
- He regrets not asking his mother all the questions when she was alive.

Stage 6

Ah-Ma was ill in the hospital - flashback to the past.

- By the time Mr Li wanted to ask his questions, Ah-Ma had become too ill to provide him with answers.
- Mr Li remembered visiting her at the hospital.
- Ying took care of her grandmother and donated blood.
- Ying persuaded her father to speak to his mother to see whether she recognised him.
- It turned out that she did remember him but was too ill to answer his questions.
- Feeling uncomfortable, Mr Li scolded Ying for treating her grandmother as though she was a toy.
- As they were arguing, Ah-Ma mentioned something about a key.
- Her last words were about the key to the drawer of the altar which was hidden in a special place.

Stage 7

Mr Li remembers that he must take care of the altar - back in the present.

- As evening turns into night, Mr Li suddenly remembers that he must do one last thing for his mother, which is to take care of the altar.
- He rushes home and goes into the altar room.
- He puts his mother's picture beside his father's and looks at them both.
- With difficulty, he thinks about the things he needs to do such as lighting the joss sticks, only to realise that the drawer is locked along with other important things.
- Mr Li does not know where the key is so all he could do is talk to his mother.
- He begins to tell his mother that he finally sees Tanjong Rhu today.
- However, he soon feels awkward talking to the photographs, so he leaves the altar room.