

Notes on this Script

This story is a work of fiction, based on a traditional Chinese story about the monster Nián. I have lived in Shanghai since 2014, and it is 100% true that Chinese people hang red decorations, wear red, bang on drums, and set off fireworks on the eve of the Lunar New Year.

My script story is different from the one I've heard here in Shanghai. Like any story told in the oral tradition, this story has many different versions. In the version I've heard, the main character is not a little girl but a stubborn old woman who, like Ting Ting, discovers Nián's three fears by accident when she is outside at night on the eve of Lunar New Year.

What's part of the traditional stories

The story of Ting Ting is entirely my own invention, but I have left the major pieces of the legend intact. Generally, the different versions of this story (including my script) have several similarities:

- The monster is called Nián, which means “year” or “new year” in Chinese.
- Nián is a hungry monster waking from a long slumber.
- Nián lives either under the mountains or in the sea.
- Nián terrorizes the villagers by destroying crops and homes. Nián may also eat children.
- Someone accidentally discovers Nián's fears when he/she is out at night on the eve of the new year. I've also heard versions where a god or someone with divine knowledge tells the villagers about the monster's fears.
- In every version I've seen, the monster's three fears are: the color red, bright lights/fire, loud noises.
- The protagonist, the villagers, or both use the monster's three fears to chase him away.
- At the end, the villagers are safe from the monster's attacks because they know what he fears.
- I have not heard any version where the monster Nián dies at the end.

Reader's Theater

"Ting Ting and the Monster Nián"

Characters:

Narrator 1	Ye Ye
Narrator 2	Nián
Ting Ting	Kitten
Nai Nai	

Pronunciations:

Ye Ye (grandfather): YEH-yeah
Nai Nai (grandmother): NYE-NYE
Nián (year): knee-ENNE

Narrator 1: Many years ago, before the Shanghai Tower tickled the skies and the HZMB Bridge connected Hong Kong to the mainland, a little girl named Ting Ting lived with her grandparents in a small village in China.

Narrator 2: Ting Ting loved to play outside more than anything, but today was the eve of the new year. Playing outside wasn't safe.

Nai Nai: (shouting) Ting Ting! It's time to come inside! Hurry, child! Nián will come tonight!

Narrator 1: Ting Ting rushed inside, where her grandfather, Ye Ye, waited with a small bowl of steamed rice and a plate of dumplings for Ting Ting.



Ting Ting: Dumplings! My favorite!

Narrator 2: Nai Nai closed the front door and moved a chair to block the entry.

Ting Ting: Nai Nai, please tell me the story of Nián again. Do you really think the monster will come tonight?

Nai Nai: Ay, child, he will come tonight, as he always comes on this night each year. If we are lucky, he will only destroy a few crops and old buildings. If we are unlucky, he could destroy a whole lot more.

Ye Ye: Stop, wife, you are scaring our dear Ting Ting!

Narrator 1: Nai Nai nodded and sipped her hot tea. She smiled worriedly at Ting Ting and began her story.

Nai Nai: No one remembers how long ago the monster Nián started ravaging villages across China. Some believe Nián is as old as the sun. But every year, on the eve of the new year, Nián wakes from his long winter slumber. And he is hungry. He leaves his home in the sea and crawls up on land, in search of crops to eat and homes to destroy.



Ting Ting: Does he eat children, too?

Narrator 2: Nai Nai looked over to Ye Ye for assurance that she must tell Ting Ting the truth. It was for her own safety that she know how dangerous Nián could be.

Nai Nai: Ay, child, sometimes Nián has eaten children. This is why you must never go outside after the sun sets on the eve of the New Year. It isn't safe.

Narrator 2: Ting Ting nodded solemnly as her grandmother continued.

Nai Nai: When Nián comes, he stomps his massive paws and razor-sharp claws over our beloved rice terraces, tearing them to shreds and leaving them a muddy mess. He gnashes his teeth and helps himself to our corn, beans, potatoes, and carrots. He swishes his tremendous tail and knocks down our homes and our beautiful bamboo forests. There is no stopping him.

Narrator 1: Ting Ting looked terrified. Her face turned white, and she started to cry.

Ting Ting: I love the trees! Why would Nián do such a terrible thing?

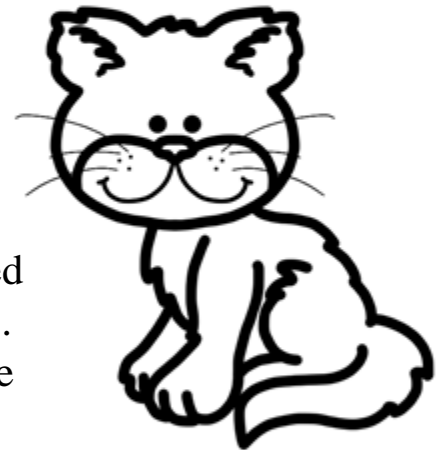
Ye Ye: Nián is a beast, and this is what beasts do. He is hungry after a long winter slumber, and he needs to feed to regain his strength.

Nai Nai: I have an idea! Why don't we all sleep in the family room tonight? We can move our mattresses and stay warm and safe by the light of the stove.

Narrator 2: As night fell, Ting Ting nestled into her blankets, worried about Nián but too tired to think on it for long. As the fire died, she and her grandparents slept peacefully.

Narrator 1: A few hours later, Ting Ting woke with a start. She'd heard a sound outside, a loud thump followed by a breaking branch. Ting Ting crept over to the window. It was cold in the room, and she saw that the fire had died. Shivering, Ting Ting pulled her hands inside the warmth of her red pajama sleeves and looked out the window.

Ting Ting: (whispering in a shocked voice) A kitten! What's she doing outside right now? Doesn't she have a home? What if Nián came and saw her?



Narrator 2: Ting Ting tiptoed quickly to the door and quietly moved the chair out of the way. She stepped outside, looking around for Nián. She saw nothing. All was silent and peaceful. She walked over to the tree where she had seen the little kitten.

Kitten: (in distress) MEOW!

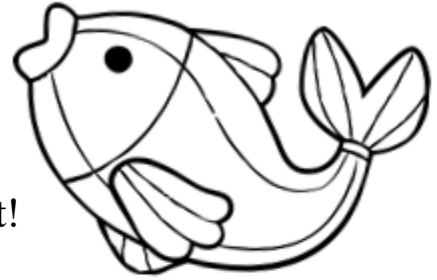
Ting Ting: Kitten! What are you doing out here at this time of night on the eve of the new year? Don't you know it isn't safe? Don't worry. I will help you get out of the tree. You can come inside with me where it is safe and warm.

Narrator 1: Ting Ting wasn't kidding when she said she loved the trees. She'd climbed them every day since she'd learned to walk. Ting Ting reached out for the lowest branch and pulled herself up. The tiny gray kitten watched her as she climbed.

Nián: (in a gruff, monster voice) Rawr! I smell a delicious snack! Forget these potatoes; tonight's dessert is my favorite: a little girl!

Narrator 2: Nián wasn't actually that close to Ting Ting, but his sense of smell was keen. He crossed the miles swiftly, with only his nose to guide him. Soon, he could see the tree where the little girl reached for a kitten.

Ting Ting: Ew, what stinks? Do you smell that, kitten? It smells fish and rotting trash!



Nián: (offended and growling) Hey! I may stink, but at least I won't be a monster's dinner tonight!

Narrator 1: Ting Ting looked up, and that's when she saw Nián's bright, glowing yellow eyes. Ting Ting picked up the kitten and cuddled him protectively.

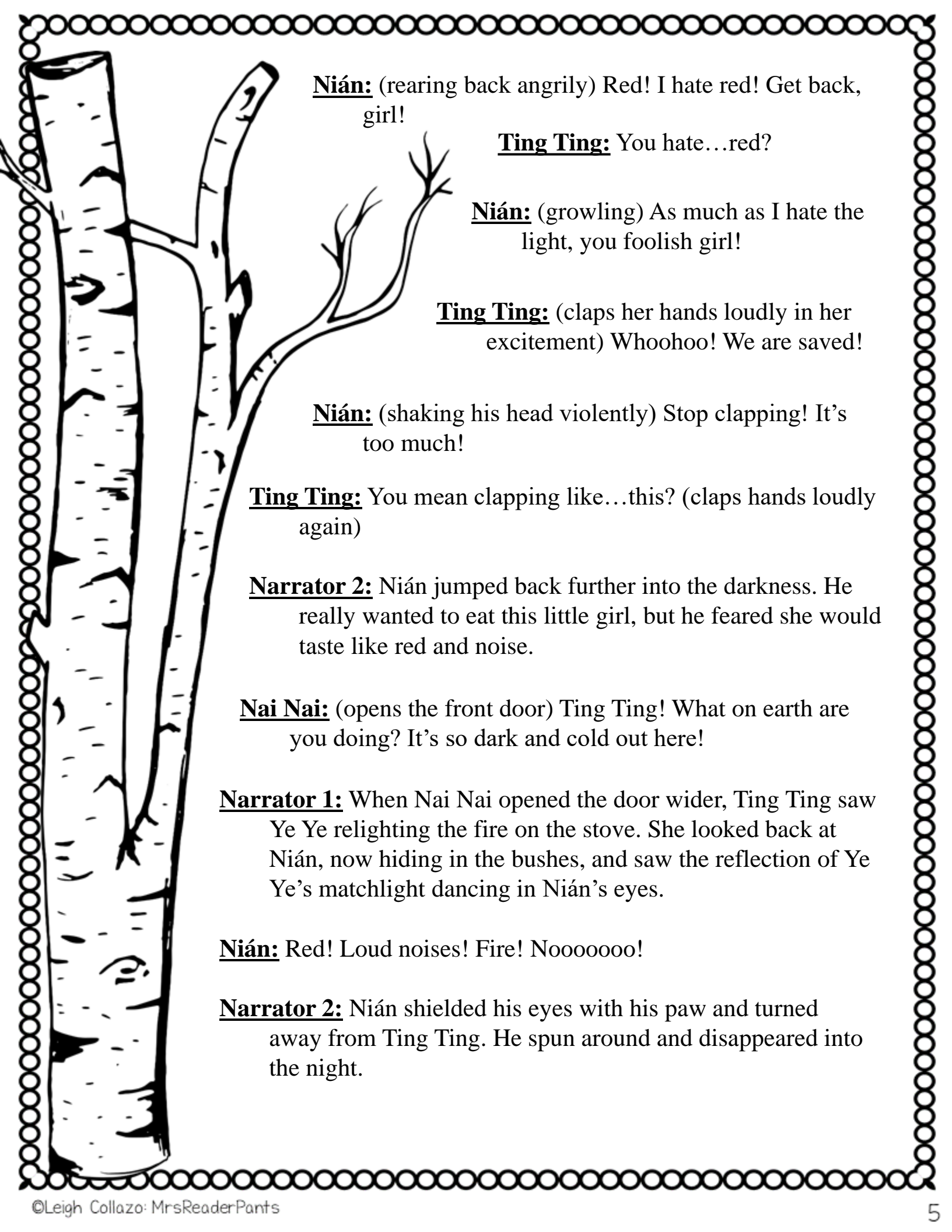
Ting Ting: Stay back, Nián! You don't want to eat us! We are so small and meek. You will find better treats somewhere else.

Nián: (in a monster voice) Little Girl, there are no others out here. No one else for me to eat. No one else to help you. Stay right where you are. I am coming for you.

Narrator 2: Ting Ting began climbing down from the tree with the kitten snuggled safely inside her night shirt. She had closed the front door to her house so her grandparents would not feel the cold or wake to find her outside. Nián was right; she and the kitten were truly alone.

Ting Ting: Kitten, we are going to try to make it to the front door. We cannot just stay here and wait for Nián to eat us up! On the count of three, I will jump out of the tree and run as fast as I can to the door. Nián may get us, but we must try to make it! One...two...three!

Narrator 1: Ting Ting's night slippers hit the soft ground with a light thud. She loved the beautiful red night slippers and matching pajamas Nai Nai had made for her birthday. Though they were a little muddy, the red silk slippers with gold embroidery shone brightly in the moonlight.



Nián: (rearing back angrily) Red! I hate red! Get back, girl!

Ting Ting: You hate...red?

Nián: (growling) As much as I hate the light, you foolish girl!

Ting Ting: (claps her hands loudly in her excitement) Whoohoo! We are saved!

Nián: (shaking his head violently) Stop clapping! It's too much!

Ting Ting: You mean clapping like...this? (claps hands loudly again)

Narrator 2: Nián jumped back further into the darkness. He really wanted to eat this little girl, but he feared she would taste like red and noise.

Nai Nai: (opens the front door) Ting Ting! What on earth are you doing? It's so dark and cold out here!

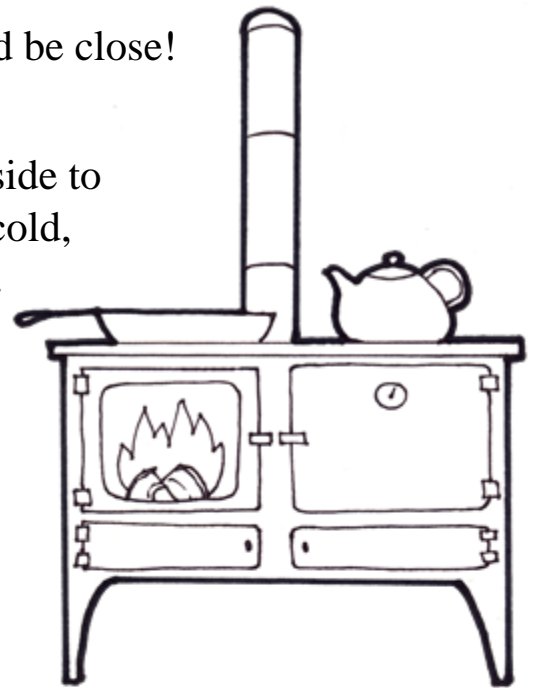
Narrator 1: When Nai Nai opened the door wider, Ting Ting saw Ye Ye relighting the fire on the stove. She looked back at Nián, now hiding in the bushes, and saw the reflection of Ye Ye's matchlight dancing in Nián's eyes.

Nián: Red! Loud noises! Fire! Nooooooo!

Narrator 2: Nián shielded his eyes with his paw and turned away from Ting Ting. He spun around and disappeared into the night.

Nai Nai: Ting Ting, come inside quickly! Nián could be close!

Ting Ting: Nai Nai, I saw Nián already! I came outside to bring this little kitten into our house. She is so cold, and I feared Nián might find her and eat her up. Nián came for me and the kitten, but I heard him say that he doesn't like red. I think he is afraid of red or it hurts his eyes. We were saved by my beautiful red pajamas and slippers.



Nai Nai: You saw Nián, and your night clothes saved you?

Ting Ting: And that's not all! I clapped my hands, and he backed away into the bushes. He said he hates loud noises, too! And then, when you opened the door, the fire from Ye Ye lighting the stove scared him even more. He turned around and ran away!

Nai Nai: This is great news! We now know three things that scare Nián. We must share this information with the other villagers. We are saved!

Narrator 1: Nai Nai wrapped her cloak around Ting Ting's shoulders. Inside, the fire was already starting to warm the chilly room. Ting Ting gave the kitten a small plate of fish while Ye Ye put a kettle of hot tea on the top of the stove. Ting Ting told her story to her grandparents again as the happy gray kitten fell asleep in her lap.

Narrator 2: The following day, the first day of the Lunar New Year, Ting Ting and her grandparents went into the town and shared what they knew about Nián with the other villagers. Now that the villagers knew that Nián feared the color red, loud noises, and bright lights, they knew Nián would never bother them again.

Narrator 1: So from that day to this, Chinese families decorate their homes with red lanterns and decorations to scare away Nián. They also create loud noises with drums and bright lights with loud firecrackers.

Narrator 2: Nián has not been seen in a very long time, but many people believe he is still out there, waiting for the day when the people of China forget what they know about Nián's fears. But as long as people remember Ting Ting, they will remain safe from Nián's terrible teeth.

THE END

