

不伦不类的梦想 —— 杨阡戏剧文学五种

Unclassifiable Dreams: Five Plays by Yang Qian

Translated by Mary Ann O'Donnell

Published for inclusion in the Sino-Swiss Food-Scape Project
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About the Authors

Yang Qian studied at the People's University, graduating in 1984 and then working as a journalist. In 1994, the National Experimental Theatre produced Yang's play, "Intentional Injury". In 1997, Yang Qian founded Zero Sun Moon, working with non-professionals to create "History and Sculpture" and "Hope". In addition to playwriting, Yang Qian has contributed to the development of Shenzhen theatre through scholarship, criticism, dramaturgy, translation, and acting. Yang Qian is the artistic director of Fat Bird Theatre, a collective of professional and non-professional thespians dedicated to transforming Chinese theater.

Translator Mary Ann O'Donnell's collaboration with Yang Qian began during Zero Sun Moon's production of "Sculpture and History". O'Donnell trained as a cultural anthropologist at Rice University and has researched the meaning and practice of reform in Shenzhen since 1995. Her analyses of the Shenzhen theatre scene have been published in various academic journals. O'Donnell is a founding member of Fat Bird Theatre.

**Unclassifiable Dreams:
Five Plays by Yang Qian**

Hope

Crossroads

Neither Type Nor Category (Unclassifiable)

Draw Whiskers, Add Dragon

FBI: 2009 Shennong Project

Introduced by the Author

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“Crossroads,” a three-act play, *Writing Macao* 3, 2005 online at: <http://www.geocities.com/writingmacaoissue3/dramas/crossroads.htm>

“Neither Type Nor Category,” *TheatreForum* (Summer/Fall 2005), 50-1.

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Yang Qian, Shenzhen Playwright

By Mary Ann O'Donnell

Written in 2003, this brief article introduces the social background that shaped Yang Qian's choice to leave journalism and become a playwright, his decision to immigrate from Beijing to Shenzhen, and his determination to make Fat Bird as collaboratively democratic as possible.

In 2003, Yang Qian's ten-minute skit *Neither Type Nor Category* won six gold medals at the annual Cao Yu awards, China's highest awards for theater. This event was remarkable for three reasons. First, the play explores issues of personal identity, rather than topics sanctioned by the Central government. Other gold medalists, for example, included pieces that treated the necessity of SARS awareness and the benefits of prison reform. Second, with respect to style, *Neither Type Nor Category* departed from socialist realism, which uses normative types to represent reality as it should or would be according to the government. Third, the unexpected success of this play indicates a strong movement within Chinese cultural circles to expand and redefine the range of acceptable forms of theater within the state apparatus itself.

Many of us in the West are used to thinking of Chinese experimental theater as being defined through explicit opposition to society. However, the experimental theatre that is actually staged in Mainland theaters instantiates complex negotiations of diverse aesthetic standards, prevailing interpretations of policy, and economic considerations. Thus the success of *Neither Type Nor Category* also suggests that the possibility of experimental theater in China is defined more by subversion and ironic redeployment than it is by explicit forms of opposition.

Born in 1962, Yang Qian attended high school during the final years of the Cultural Revolution and matriculated in the journalism department of the People's University during the first years of China's post-Mao period of reform. Thus, much of his college education consisted in not simply deconstructing what he had been taught to believe in primary and secondary school, but also trying to come up with concrete alternatives: what might Chinese "post-Mao socialism" be? Upon graduation, he worked as a journalist, covering issues that ranged from the re-establishment of minority rituals, which had been suppressed under Mao to new forms of economic activity, including private businesses that operated outside the planned economy. Yang Qian remembers the eighties as a time of infinite possibility.

“We felt that it was just a question of imagination. Of course, suddenly we could think and feel and do things that had been forbidden. But we also discovered that we didn’t know what else was possible. What hadn’t even been imagined? That’s the question we starting thinking about.”

However, the violent conclusion to the 1989 democracy movement ended Yang Qian’s confidence that the work of imagining alternatives could be done through explicitly social venues like newspapers. In the early nineties, he turned to fiction more generally and theatre specifically as vehicles for exploring these alternatives. The Chinese National Experimental Theatre (today a subdivision of the Chinese National Theatre) staged his first play, “Intentional Injury” in 1994. The piece presented the final moments of a sado-masochistic affair. In order to punish her lover for leaving her, the female protagonist sues him for emotional and corporeal injuries. Believing that the court will be unable to imagine that she consented to the activities that led to the scars on her body, she brings her lover to trial. What she doesn’t anticipate is that her lover isn’t ashamed to admit that he enjoys hurting women during sex and counter sues her for the suffering caused by being falsely accused of a crime.

“The point,” Yang Qian has emphasized, “is that to establish something as true you have to tell a story and you have to have a system for evaluating competing stories. In China, we’re still trying to find both new ways of telling stories and new systems for judging those stories. In ‘Intentional Injury’, I wanted to challenge our idea that truth is objective. It’s not. It’s permeated by desires.”

By this time, Yang Qian had transferred from Beijing to Shenzhen, the oldest and largest of China’s Special Economic Zones, working as an editor at the Nanshan District government branch of the Shenzhen television station, where he worked from 1993 until 1999. Unlike other Chinese cities, Shenzhen did not have an established theatre troupe, except for a Cantonese opera troupe (now disbanded). Instead, particular ministries and federations produced plays and skits for particular events and competitions, hiring directors, playwrights, and actors as necessary. So Yang Qian began to collaborate with thespians like himself, who worked in non-theatrical government bureaus to produce educational skits. He also began working with faculty from the Shenzhen University Department of Acting, which was established in 1996 to produce more experimental plays.

According to Yang Qian, “What you have to understand is that in China there is basically two kinds of theatre – plays and skits. Plays are like Western plays, but skits are special to China. Skits began as vehicles to teach socialist values in schools, but have now also become a commercial form of entertainment. Everyone in Shenzhen has seen skits, especially the comedic skits on the Central China TV’s national broadcast of the Chinese New Year

Party. But if you ask them if they have seen a play, they'll say, 'no.' That's how great the distance between the two forms of theatre is – people don't realize that a skit is actually a short play.

"I left my job because I don't want to be forced to write educational skits. Many thespians in government ministries have to make educational skits as part of their job. What's more, because of their popularity, comedic skits are also a good way to make money. So, many professional thespians consider commercial skits to be dramatic 'fast food', no aesthetic value. However, if we are going to popularize theatre in Shenzhen, we have to begin from what's popular, or rather, what people already understand. So I want to use skits to introduce a broader audience to dramatic topics and forms. That's why I wrote 'Neither Type, Nor Category'."

Yang Qian's appropriation of skits to broaden the audience for plays exemplifies his understanding of experimental theatre as an artistic response to a specific time and place.

"I don't think there the word 'experimental' has a particular content or a concrete form. I think it's an attitude. What form would reach a certain group of people? How can new desires be represented and explored? What can we learn from the confusion of boundaries between different categories?"

"Right now in China we're undergoing a kind of globalization. It's not the first time. Imperialism and colonialism were also forms of globalization. So was socialism. What's important about the present is that capitalism is expanding in China, and that expansion is causing a re-invention of the social categories that we used to take for granted. All of a sudden, we became Chinese and socialist and global in a different way, but we don't really understand what that means. Why could the revolution be overturned? Is utopia still possible? How do individual desires make us work against ourselves?"

"Since Sun Yat-sen led the Xinhai Revolution [and overthrew the Qing Dynasty in 1911], Chinese people have tried to build a new China. Throughout this history, we have experienced ourselves as other to the West. Usually, we talk about this as a question of 'normalization'. As if all we have to do is make adjustments for 'cultural difference' and then everyone will understand each other. In this fantasy, understanding brings about equality and ends the pain of being a subordinated other. But I have never thought about this condition as question of 'normalization'. I think the problem is more of 'identification'. We want to become the West. Or maybe it's more accurate to say, we want to take the West's place. But of course we can't, because when capitalist forms move from one place to another, they change. Simply by coming to post-Mao China, capitalist categories have begun to transform, even for Westerners. Nobody lives in the world of his or her childhood anymore. Where do we live?"

“For example, in ‘Neither Type, Nor Category’ I imagined a Western woman imagining China. Whitey wants to become Chinese and a Chinese woman plays all her supporting characters – Woman, George, and Husband. So Whitey’s trying to be what she’s not, and she needs China in a supporting role in order to do that. Woman thinks she can escape her fate by becoming Western, but she keeps transforming in response to Whitey’s desire, which keeps getting interrupted by Chinese conditions. In the end, nobody gets what they want, they just keep changing because nobody else likes them.”

In addition to “Intentional Injury” and “Neither Type, Nor Category”, Yang Qian has written “Crossroads”, which explores the tensions between personal freedom and economic necessity in the new economy and “Hope”, which satirizes the social consequences of multi-level marketing. “Hope” was recently given a staged reading at the Schaubühne Theatre’s fifth Festival of International New Drama. Yang Qian has summarized his work to date with respect to the work of constructing a new kind of city in South China.

“People say that Shenzhen is a cultural desert. And in a sense that’s true. Shenzhen produces award-winning educational skits. However, it’s also true that we don’t have the same constraints as in other places. Whatever we make is Shenzhen theatre. Our so-called ‘experiments’ can become ‘mainstream’ by default. Or that’s what we hope.”

Playwright's introduction to Hope

A version of this introduction was first presented to the Anthropology Department of Rice University in the Spring of 1999. In other words, Yang Qian wrote this introduction ten years ago about events that had taken place even earlier. The differences between Shenzhen then and now (2009) not only point to the City's addiction to both progress and velocity, but also remind us that quantitative repetition of the same action – mass production, for example – does produce qualitatively new cities.

In 1997, Zero Sun Moon's production of Xiwang (Hope) won a bronze medal at the Shenzhen Golden Autumn Arts Festival, which is held every two years. The last performance took place in Shenzhen's largest theatre, the Shenzhen Grand Theatre, with twelve hundred cushioned seats, central air conditioning, a computer-programmed light system, a sound system imported from the United States, and a revolving stage. But Zero Sun Moon didn't just step onto this stage. In fact, the troupe first occupied a street, then a square, entering the Grand Theatre after a year of negotiation and luck.

It may seem odd that China's first and largest Special Economic Zone (SEZ) does not have a municipal theatre troupe when every other Chinese city with a population over one million does. But the majority of these troupes have been unable to support themselves through ticket sales, so the government has had to supplement their production costs. In return, these troupes have performed plays for the government. During an anticorruption campaign, for example, the troupes write and perform plays denouncing corruption. In addition, tickets to these plays are distributed by the government apparatus rather than sold to outside viewers. In order to make money, *huaju* actors and directors have turned to the movies and television. I suspect that, given these practical constraints, the Shenzhen government decided to save itself the trouble of establishing a municipal troupe. Or perhaps they thought that the round-the-clock performances in Shenzhen's ubiquitous nightclubs provide sufficient cultural entertainment. Whatever the reason, if Shenzheners want to see *huaju* their only option is to go to Hong Kong, Shanghai, or Beijing.

In the summer and fall of 1996, my wife and I lived in Beijing and actively participated in the *huaju* scene. When we returned home, she felt the lack of theatre in Shenzhen and encouraged me to establish a troupe. Her plans were a little simplistic, however. Except for the Shenzhen Grand Theatre, all theatres in Shenzhen are used to screen films, rather than stage performances. Even if I were to establish a theatre troupe, meeting an audience face to face required support from another system. Fortunately, in order to maintain the appearance of respectable administration, our

government must periodically provide entertainment. In 1997, two such moments presented themselves: the first was in June and July during the celebrations for the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty; the second was in November and December during the Shenzhen Arts Festival. Thus, Zero Sun Moon was able to seize the moment and take the stage.

Shenzhen is situated next to Hong Kong. To quote Deng Xiaoping, "To establish a special zone next to Hong Kong is to demonstrate to the world that Socialist China is willing to experiment with the good things from capitalism." During the handover phase, the Shenzhen leadership decided to beat the drum and announce the SEZ's special connection to Hong Kong. The Shenzhen leadership realized, however, that only Jiang Zemin could establish connections between Hong Kong and any city in China. Consequently, they hoped that he would stop over in Shenzhen on his way to Hong Kong, thereby staging apolitical hierarchy: from Beijing through Shenzhen to Hong Kong. They were to be disappointed, however, as Jiang Zemin flew directly from Beijing to Hong Kong. In the post-Deng map of China, Shenzhen did not exist. Moreover, Shenzhen was absent from the political map of China performed during President Clinton's visit: his itinerary included Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. In a sense, then, Shenzhen's handover activities were simply a case of "cheering oneself up." In total the Shenzhen municipality spent 600 million RMB on ten projects to celebrate "the end of one hundred years of humiliation" (from China's defeat in the Opium War to the handover). Nanshan District, where we live, sponsored a project as well, a sculpture exhibition called "*Yongyuan de Huiguo*" (Eternal Return).

In China, the success of a project depends on two things: the support of the government and the attention of the media. As a government project, Eternal Return had already secured government support. But its organizers had yet to attract the media's attention. The head organizer and I discussed how to distinguish Eternal Return from contemporaneous sculpture exhibitions with a similar theme. I suggested staging performance art in conjunction with the exhibition.

The collaboration between Eternal Return and Zero Sun Moon was a unique opportunity. This opportunity had two aspects: first, we had obtained de facto government approval by performing in an approved event; second, given this status, we were able to obtain funding from the exhibition. Nevertheless, we emphasized our difference from the exhibition by choosing a title for our work that was related to but different from "Eternal Return." We called our performance "*1997 Yundong Huaju: Lishi yu Diaosu*" (1997 Active Theatre: History and Sculpture.) Our goal was to question the relationship between facts (represented by particular sculptures) and interpretation (through performance). The performance consisted of six acts taking place on successive weekends over a two-month period. From

Shenzhen University students we recruited actors. For a stage we used the exhibition hall, plaza, and park where the sculpture was exhibited. The audience was composed of people who had come to see the exhibition, tourists, drivers, and curious pedestrians. Thespians from Hong Kong, Beijing, and Guangzhou also came to see the performance, while there were media releases both on the hinterland and in Hong Kong.

Our second opportunity in 1997 was the Shenzhen Golden Autumn Arts Festival. During this citywide festival, representatives from each district compete in calligraphy, *huaju*, dance, painting, and singing. Nanshan District entered two pieces in the *huaju* competition: the District Culture Station produced one; Zero Sun Moon produced *Hope*. Unlike the first time we took the stage, the second time we conformed more closely to modernist norms. In addition, this time we were unable to use the aegis of another project and had to persuade the government to support us directly. This process was difficult. Would the government provide money for the production of a play? Would the government allow the play to be staged at the municipal level? How many times would we be permitted to perform?

Certainly, *Hope* provoked intense debate. Some thought the play intended to give people hope through a message against dishonesty. Others thought the play meant that contemporary Chinese people live in the grip of money and materialism. Still others suspected that I was attacking government policies. Because of the controversy, *Hope* was awarded the lowest possible prize in the festival. (At best, controversial plays are awarded the lowest prize in a competition and often are not given any prize at all.) I believe that the controversy surrounding *Hope* arose from the relationship between the stage and everyday life that obtains in contemporary China. Chinese people often use the stage as a metaphor to describe politics, education, history, and life itself. In the political world, a person (such as President Clinton) or a group (such as the Democratic Party) is said to "take the stage" (*shangtai*) at the beginning of their political career. At the end of the political term, they are said to "leave the stage" (*xiatai*). With respect to pedagogy, there is a Chinese proverb "*Wentai jiaohua*." Roughly translated, this maxim asserts that education about how to be a person and attend to one's affairs is taught from a stage, which is elevated above the audience.

Concomitantly, the process of performing a play has been understood as the process of historical evolution. Just as act follows act, an orderly organization enables people to understand the progression of history. Finally, we Chinese understand ourselves as living within social relationships: mother, father, son, daughter, friend, relative, classmate, and officemate, for example. Therefore, we often think of ourselves as performing a "role" in those relationships. Because people will play many roles throughout their lives, there are often conflicts among these roles. A person whose life roles

are always in conflict is said to live a tragedy; a person whose life roles are in harmony is said to live a comedy.

In fact, the "stage" can be expanded to any social space that is defined by human will. For example, we would call the United Nations "the world's stage" and the universe "the resources stage." Thus we can see that the stage takes on many meanings: the source of political influence; the source of truth, morality, and knowledge; the source of necessity; and the source of the meaning of human life and experience. It is especially important to stress the interpenetration of the political and the theatrical in modern China. (Both Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing began their political activities in the theatre, for example.) Any play that takes Shenzhen as its object is making not only political statements but also moral judgments. Indeed, it was the burden of *Zero Sun Moon* to prove that we were not making political statements.

The relationship between the theatrical metaphors, politics, and the specific history of Shenzhen determined the form of *Hope*. Shenzhen, as noted, is Deng Xiaoping's project. In less than twenty years, from 1980 to the present, it has become a city of four million people with the highest per capita income in China. One might read the geography of economic liberalization through a theatrical metaphor: Shenzhen was an overnight success, suddenly bursting onto the national stage. Hong Kong and Shanghai are also stars, of course, but, after all, Hong Kong was directed by the British and Shanghai is enjoying a renewal. And although Shanghai remains a memory and a latent hope, its practical value has not yet exceeded that of Shenzhen.

To press this metaphor a little further, Shenzhen's dramatic style can be summarized in three words: new, strange, fast. But the Shenzhen script—new, strange, and fast—has been difficult to reproduce, even in coastal cities with fast-growing economies. Excepting Zhuhai, which neighbors Macao and Hainan Island, all of these cities have at least a hundred years of history, so they aren't exactly "new." Likewise, it is also difficult to be "strange" in those cities because Chinese people live in relationships. In a city full of acquaintances, friends, and relatives, even wearing an unusual shirt becomes a problem. There is an old Chinese expression, "*Renyan kewei*," which means the talk of people is terrifying. If the proverb lacks the adjective "intimate," it is because the talk of strangers does not matter. In contrast to these cities with deep histories, Shenzhen is a city of migrants where there is no need to be embarrassed by gossiping relatives and friends; Shenzheners lack a sense of shame. Indeed, Shenzhen was the first Chinese city to have a sex industry. (Rumor has it that Wen Xi, a best-selling author who specializes in novels about second wives and prostitutes, was once a second wife.)

Given the difficulties of promoting the new and the strange throughout the rest of China, Deng Xiaoping's script called for velocity. Outsiders marvel at the speed at which Shenzheners have accumulated money. One

could call this experience "the Shenzhen Dream." Although Shenzhen lacks a long history and marvelous relics, it still has many tourists. Most of these tourists are from the rest of China, Hong Kong, and Macao. The former head of Shenzhen's tourist industry traced Shenzhen's popularity to the appeal of a new civilization: skyscrapers, discos, bright lights, and fast food. I believe these tourists come to experience the rapid coming and going of money.

Most Shenzheners have nothing good to say about Shenzhen, but all of them recognize that Shenzhen is the Chinese city with the most economic opportunities. I have seen rehabilitation center doctors threatening recovering drug addicts with immediate transportation back to their hometowns. Indeed, Shenzhen is a substitute for drugs – at least in the sense of stimulating people into action. In *Hope*, Zero Sun Moon wanted to explore how Shenzhen acts as a social drug.

HOPE

Hope opened in November 1997 at the Shenzhen Golden Autumn Arts Festival. Yang Xuejun directed. Li Jun oversaw set design.

CAST

SALES AMBASSADOR	Yang Dongmei
MR. MONEYSACK	Zhang Xiaolong
AMBASSADOR CLONE	Yang Qian
MRS. MONEYSACK	Mary Ann O'Donnell
GUI-GUI	Yang Xuejun
FOUR WORKERS	Xiong Ting, Li Jun, Cheng Zhanglan, Liao Haiyan

Costumes should be highly stylized and actors go barefoot. The SALES AMBASSADOR wears an elaborate, almost Liberace-esque costume. MR. MONEYSACK'S costume has two parts. Underneath he wears the ratty, unwashed clothes of a migrant laborer. Over this, he wears a silver sack, almost like a toga. He also wears a large, bulbous red clown nose. The AMBASSADOR CLONE wears the same clothes as the SALES AMBASSADOR with one difference: the CLONE wears a baby's bonnet with a hand growing out of it. MRS. MONEYSACK wears a Cantonese opera costume symbolizing a beautiful woman. GUI-GUI wears loose-fitting clothing and should have some tumbling skills.

Stage right is a small table and chair; stage left nine chairs. All characters except the SALES AMBASSADOR sit in these chairs. As needed, CAST enter the stage with the SALES AMBASSADOR; when not needed, they play the part of an audience, interacting with the SALES AMBASSADOR.

As the play goes on, the FOUR WORKERS build a pyramid structure at the back of the stage. It can be hung from the ceiling and gradually raised. In the original production, bamboo was used. In front of the bamboo pyramid was a three-step platform. There was also a screen onto which images were

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projected. Throughout the play, music is used to emphasize points and to give the SALES AMBASSADOR a chance to break and change the rhythm of presentation. Initially, Zero Sun Moon wanted to use "The Internationale," a reference to international communism and the Chinese revolution, but were requested to use less provoking music and in the end used Beethoven.

VOICE: Seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

As the counting comes to an end, the SALES AMBASSADOR runs onstage.

SALES AMBASSADOR: (*Alternately addressing individuals in the nine chairs and the audience.*) Welcome and welcome back. This is too wonderful, you've brought a new friend. And you, you're new, too, aren't you? Welcome. Why don't you sit in the front row? Hey, let's give the front seats to our new friends. Come on, don't be embarrassed, we at Eternal Gold always give the best seats in the house to first-timers. Why? Because you are the source of all wealth, you are the reason for hope.

What do we at Eternal Gold call our new lines? A little louder! I can't hear you. That's right, we call them our precious darlings. Let me make a quick count. How many precious darlings have come today? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. This is too wonderful, nine precious darlings.

Let me tell each and every one of you, today fortune has smiled. You are on a one-way trip to the top of the world. Not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today you have struck gold. You're here. Once you get home, be sure to light a few incense sticks to those virtuous ancestors whose benevolence led you here, to the Eternal Gold Multilevel Marketing Seminar. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. This is destiny calling each and every one of you. Today you will witness with your very own eyes the unbelievable come true!

Let me introduce myself. My surname is Wan – that's the "wan" in the expression "millionaire," – and my name is Ren'ai. The "ren," of course, is the Confucian virtue of benevolence and "ai" is the love that never surrenders. Originally, this wasn't my name and, truth be told, this isn't what I looked like. Originally, I was a paragon among women, staying at home taking care of my husband and educating my children. The perfect wife and mother. My previous name reflected my quiet, submissive, and elegant femininity. I was called Xian. You know the character, it has two parts. First write "woman" and then add a "xian." You guessed it, the

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"xian" in the expression "bored to tears." Originally, my name was Wan Renxian.

Ever since I entered Eternal Gold, my life has been completely changed. From the inside to the outside, from my name to my gender, everything is new and improved. Check it out!

Now I want you to take a look at this (*points to screen*) and tell me what this is. Speak up, the only mistake is not trying. That's right, this is the multilevel marketing sales chart. It is also called a pyramid. Every one of us at Eternal Gold is familiar with this structure. Each and every one of us is striving to reach the top.

Before we go any further, I want to show you another chart. This is a picture of the successful cloning of one of the cells of my body. And look at this, who is this precious darling?

CLONE: (*Standing on top of the platform*) Guess who I am?

SALES AMBASSADOR: This precious darling is already three years old. What a cutie-pie he is. From birth he had three little hands. Can you guess? Who is he?

CLONE: I'm him! I was cloned from a cell taken from his chest when they removed his breasts during the other operation. In fact, they could have avoided the third hand altogether but he wanted a guarantee that what came out was a man and not some prissy girl like I was, so he had the doctors fix my chromosomes. I think they may have fixed more than the necessary if you hear what I'm saying. So I was born with a hand growing out of my head. . . .

SALES AMBASSADOR: He's just too wonderful!

CLONE: You can't begin to imagine how proud I am of myself. I have surpassed natural man. I believe that once little *moi* has grown up, I will be the next international superstar, beloved by everyone and not only by my Eternal Gold darlings. This will happen not because of my strange beginnings or my rarity, but because I embody the future: Eternal Gold clones!

This brave new world lies before you. Those who accept the challenge will prosper; those who do not face certain death. At that time, family

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planning and the one child policy will be just a joke left over from history. The death penalty will be a game of self-extinction. Our ancestors drank wine and gambled while watching crickets fight to the death. We will give odds on how our old selves will die. Precious darlings, this magnificent future can be yours today! (CLONE *returns to his chair.*)

SALES AMBASSADOR: What? Still no takers? You haven't really thought it over. I can see you're panting, though, ready to grab the future. No time like the present. But look, here's the real hero of the day.

(GUI-GUI *stands and performs.*) Can you see it? He has all the characteristics of a successful sales ambassador. One hand clenching money, the other grasping power, his sparkling eyes fixed on the road ahead.

(SALES AMBASSADOR *approaches* GUI-GUI.) Okay, let go now. That's right, give me the money. 800 RMB. This is too wonderful, you've just joined our family. Welcome home precious, another Eternal Gold sales line.

No one else? The future doesn't interest you? Well, then, let's talk about what Eternal Gold can give you today. I'm living proof that multilevel marketing works. I broke my shoulder, bought a new one. Got tired of being a woman and had a sex change. I used to hug other people's children and then I cloned a precious darling just to see what it would be like to hug myself. All this has happened since I joined Eternal Gold five years ago. Look carefully. I'm only a junior-level sales ambassador, three whole levels away from the emperor's throne. But even now I can remake the world in my own image.

(MRS. MONEYSACK *raises her hand.*) Put your hand down and let me finish. I know what you want to ask. "What if I don't want a sex change? What if I'm satisfied with natural reproduction? What's in it for me?"

Let me tell you. You think there's a reason for everything a person does? I'm hungry, so I eat. I'm thirsty, so I drink. Do you really think it's that easy? That people have reasons, naturally? Use the intelligence that brought you to Eternal Gold. I'll give you a hint. Think about those corrupt bureaucrats and greedy politicians. Why does their greed know no limits? Why do they keep taking and devouring, taking and hoarding, world without end? It's not about nature. They do it because they can. In

Hope

other words, there are people who don't need reasons to do something. They just do it. Like the rest of us who overeat and get drunk, we do it because we can.

Are you with me? That's right, I'm saying there are people who can act out their wildest fantasies without restrictions. And do you think they were just born that way? Not so. The secret's right here in the organization of multilevel marketing. Cell cloning, sexual difference, the economy, even the United Nations – they're all just so many pyramids. If you can climb to the top, you can make your dreams come true. Call this Eternal Gold Philosophy 101 and learn it by heart. In your mind's eye see the world as it really is: a pyramid!

Next, we will be initiated into the mysteries of Eternal Gold. However, that privilege is reserved for Eternal Gold family members. Unfortunately, I will have to ask people who haven't joined us to leave. You have fifteen seconds to consider. The rest of you, do you remember the Eternal Gold slogan? Clench your left fist, struggle, struggle; clench your right fist, endure, endure; raise both fists, success, success!

(To MRS. MONEYSACK:) Have you thought it over? In or out? Let's see the color of your money. No money? Don't waste my time, the exit's that way.

(MRS. MONEYSACK exits stage right. SALES AMBASSADOR addresses clone.) What's up with you? You have the money, but you're still looking for it. Okay, why don't you hang around until you find it because the moment you've been waiting for has arrived. Open sesame! I now have the pleasure of introducing you to this elderly statesman, the highest ranking of all the Eternal Gold Imperial-Level Sales Ambassadors, Mr. Moneysack! The Imperial Ambassador has just flown in from the annual board of directors' meeting in Hawai'i. Originally Mr. Moneysack had six hotels in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but he decisively rejected those businesses in order to become an Eternal Gold First-Level Sales Ambassador. He was the first son of this Chinese dragon to become an Imperial Ambassador and has been entertained by four American presidents: Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.

When the Imperial Ambassador makes imperial visits to the White House, they send a private jet to make sure he's comfortable. High above the silver seas, beautiful women cater to his every whim. But Mr. Moneysack wants *you* to know this luxury, too. The last time he

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addressed the Eternal Gold board of directors, he advocated that they change the company bylaws. All Imperial Ambassadors are to receive the same reward for their efforts: an all expenses-paid, month-long vacation anywhere in the world. This is the man, ladies and gentlemen, who's making your dreams come true!

Mr. Moneysack, share some words of wisdom with us.

MR. MONEYSACK declines.

SALES AMBASSADOR: You see, the movers and shakers know that silence is golden. Mr. Moneysack is my benefactor. And because of him, I am here before you today. Sir, allow me to tell your story, please. No? Then let me at least tell Gui-gui's story. Thank you. When we met, I was sitting alone on the railroad tracks, my heart already dead. Sir, do you remember?

Sound of passing train. SALES AMBASSADOR sits at the table, MR. MONEYSACK comes down off the platform.

MR. MONEYSACK: Who are you?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Just another unloved schoolteacher.

MR. MONEYSACK: NO! You are the Lady of the House, a future ambassadress who'll discuss world affairs over cocktails with the UN Secretary. Do you know what the most difficult thing in the world is? To die. The easiest thing? Again, to die. But between these two extremes lies a wonderful thing called pyramid marketing. Or you can call it life.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Who are you?

MR. MONEYSACK: My name is Hope. (*Hangs a gold necklace around the SALES AMBASSADOR'S neck.*) From this day forward, you are my own precious darling.

SALES AMBASSADOR Then, the Imperial Ambassador told me Gui-gui's story.

This story is performed in traditional jingju style while the SALES AMBASSADOR narrates. If possible, workers can play the instruments. MR. MONEYSACK moves stage left and GUI-GUI joins him.

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SALES AMBASSADOR: Once upon a time, Mr. Moneysack had a small dog, the kind of dog that old ladies love, with long white fur. It was called Gui-gui, Gui-gui, the well-behaved. That year, Mr. Moneysack's business went bankrupt. He was forced to leave his home and then his wife left him. Only later would another woman take him in. This was the second Mrs. Moneysack.

High-pitched cry offstage announces the arrival of the beautiful woman.
MRS. MONEYSACK *enters stage right and joins* MR. MONEYSACK.

GUI-GUI: Woof! Woof!

SALES AMBASSADOR: The second Mrs. Moneysack refused to take in the first Mrs. Moneysack's litter and forced her husband to dispose of Gui-gui.

MR. MONEYSACK takes GUI-GUI on a motorcycle ride and dumps the dog in the country. Both are crestfallen, but MR. MONEYSACK returns alone. MRS. MONEYSACK welcomes him home.

SALES AMBASSADOR: But Gui-gui had followed Mr. Moneysack home. This forced the second Mrs. Moneysack to take matters into her own hands. She boarded a train for the hinterlands and then, seventy miles outside of town, threw Gui-gui out the window of the speeding carriage. That evening, the second Mrs. Moneysack returned home very late and had just finished dinner when, *thump*, Gui-gui arrived. Her rage overwhelmed her. Mrs. Moneysack stuffed Gui-gui into a burlap sack and beat the obedient canine mercilessly with a heavy pole. When she saw the bag had finally stopped twitching, she made her husband throw the bundle into the deepest part of the ocean. When they arrived home that night our heroes were exhausted beyond endurance, but still they did not sleep. They waited with ears pricked. Only as the first rays of sun appeared did their fear abate; they had seen the last of Gui-gui. Just then, *scratch scratch*, they heard a faint noise at the door and when they opened it, *splat*, an unrecognizable lump collapsed at their feet. It was Gui-gui. Mr. Moneysack lifted his eyes to heaven and cried.

MR. MONEYSACK: If only people were like dogs and could persevere no matter how hopeless the situation, then what couldn't we achieve? Eh, wife?

MRS. MONEYSACK: All right, we'll keep him. But first we must rectify his name. Let's call him "Xiwang."

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MR. and MRS. MONEYSACK and GUI-GUI pose as the perfect family.

SALES AMBASSADOR: “Xiwang” is Chinese for hope. Ever since then, Mr. Moneysack has pursued multilevel marketing with the tenacity of a dog, finally becoming the Imperial Ambassador who stands before you today.

GUI-GUI and MRS. MONEYSACK return to their seats. MR. MONEYSACK returns to the platform.

SALES AMBASSADOR: I can't tell you how much that story touches me. Every time I think about Gui-gui, it's all I can do to keep from crying. Maybe a woman's heart still beats softly in my chest. Anyway, now that you've heard the story, let's see your money.

(To CLONE.) What? You're still scratching your belly instead of opening your wallet? All you people see is money. Do you think you're giving me 800 RMB? Frankly, at this point if there were 1,000 RMB just lying in the street, I wouldn't waste the energy to bend over and pick it up. This 800 RMB expresses your commitment to the future. With the money comes commitment, belief, courage, and willpower. This money is a guarantee-proof that there's success only where there's effort. In fact, we don't want your money. If at any time you want to resign from Eternal Gold, we will return your investment, no questions asked. If I've cheated you in any way, you can sue me.

(To CLONE.) How about it? Stop making the rest of us wait. Open your eyes and take a good look at the Imperial Ambassador. You still have doubts? You're standing at the opening level to the largest marketing kingdom in the world, and all you have to do is pay 800 RMB to enter. Not only that, once you're in, other people will give you the money back. Where else can you get a deal like this?

CLONE reaches for money.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Here, let me help you. What's it doing stashed in your undies? *(To audience waving cash.)* This money's still damp.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've told you Gui-gui's story because I wanted you to know that Sales Ambassadors aren't made of stone, we have feelings, we cry. Now, I have to report some tragic news. Our Imperial Ambassador, Mr. Moneysack, has cancer. At first I refused to believe

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this news, but now. . . oh, sir, let me see your face one more time before you die. (*SALES AMBASSADOR falls to his knees.*)

Great-Grandfather Heaven, Mother Goddess of the Sea, where are you? Oh, sir, let me die in your place. You've been better to me than my biological parents and grandparents. What did you say?

No, I won't stand up. When I think that even with cancer at this advanced state you risked dying in a foreign country. . . . How's this? Let me kowtow three times and call you "father." (*SALES AMBASSADOR stands up.*) Let our precious darlings be my witness, I swear to fly your ashes around the world and into the heavens in a pure gold plane.

Now, before we say good-bye, let us recite our slogan one last time: Clench your left fist, struggle, struggle; clench your right fist, endure, endure; raise both fists, success, success! My precious darlings, our seminar is over, thank you each and every one. Good-bye.

SALES AMBASSADOR bows; CLONE, GUI-GUI, and MRS. MONEYSACK exit. MR. MONEYSACK comes down off the platform and collapses.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Hey, get up. Don't go playing dead dog on me. (Tying to take the sack off MR. MONEYSACK.) Don't think you can use the sack to blackmail me, either. (Tries again.) Don't be so greedy. We had an agreement. Okay, okay, here's an extra fifty cents. Now give. (Rips sack off MR. MONEYSACK and starts packing up to leave.)

MR. MONEYSACK: I had a dog named Gui-gui. A good dog, more faithful than flies on a warm pot in winter. One flick of the wrist, smack, dead. That year, it didn't rain and nothing grew. First, we ate the food, then next year's seeds, finally, tree bark. In the end, we had to come to the city. Gui-gui wanted to come, too. But they don't let you raise dogs in the city, so we left him tied to a tree in the village. Who'd have thought he'd gnaw through the rope and follow us?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Hey, I hold the copyright to that story.

MR. MONEYSACK: In a city of strangers, hearing Gui-gui – woof woof – gave me a feeling of homecoming.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Hey, the seminar's over and nobody's listening. Take off your nose and give it to me.

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MR. MONEYSACK: I never let anyone hurt Gui-gui, not anyone. How long can a dog live? Thirty-two years. Gui-gui made it to four. They used a rope to strangle him.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Hey, give me the nose. It's time you and I said *ciao*. (*Tries to get the nose and fails.*) I said, give it to me.

MR. MONEYSACK: You want to steal my things and then throw me away, don't you?

SALES AMBASSADOR: That nose is mine.

MR. MONEYSACK: Princess, why don't you treat Daddy a little better? You remember who I am, don't you? I fly in gold planes to have afternoon tea with the American president Bushton. I wear the emperor's crown and am served by beautiful girls just like you. I eat what I want, drink what I want. You think your father is a piece of trash? At this rate, in five years you won't even recognize me. This is your last chance to be good to me. Don't make me go. (*Suddenly changes attitude.*) And another thing. If you don't acknowledge me, in the future I won't acknowledge you. The Imperial Ambassador has spoken.

SALES AMBASSADOR: (*Amused.*) You said you're who?

MR. MONEYSACK: Your father.

SALES AMBASSADOR: (*Furious.*) Who?

MR. MONEYSACK: The Imperial (*Fixes nose.*) Ambassador.

SALES AMBASSADOR: (*Relieved.*) And just where did this ambassador come from?

MR. MONEYSACK: America. No? Hong Kong.

SALES AMBASSADOR: And where is he? *MR. MONEYSACK points to himself*
You? Jackass, I wrote that script.

MR. MONEYSACK: No, he was just here, standing here in all his glory. (*Looks around and points.*) He was wearing that sack.

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SALES AMBASSADOR: Talk about typecasting. You're by far the biggest fool I've ever met. No wonder your daughter kicked you out. Now, give the nose back to me. I haven't got time to humor a half-wit. Every minute of every day is money to be made.

MR. MONEYSACK: But you called me the Imperial Ambassador.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Class is over and you're out.

MR. MONEYSACK: Then who are you?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Give me the nose. Imperial Asshole.

MR. MONEYSACK: And then what?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Each of us goes their own way.

MR. MONEYSACK: And then?

SALES AMBASSADOR: I don't know you, and you don't know me.

MR. MONEYSACK: And then?

SALES AMBASSADOR: I move on to another city.

MR. MONEYSACK: And I'll go, too.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Just don't ever get in my face again.

MR. MONEYSACK: I'm not the Imperial Ambassador?

SALES AMBASSADOR: So? It's not like I'm Wan Ren'ai.

MR. MONEYSACK: But I love my title.

SALES AMBASSADOR: You love it? I'll give it to you.

MR. MONEYSACK: You're not my daughter?

SALES AMBASSADOR: You want that, too. I'll call you dad one last time.

MR. MONEYSACK: So I'm useless to you.

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SALES AMBASSADOR: What do you think?

MR. MONEYSACK: Couldn't I be your precious darling like once you were mine?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Oh! In that case, hand it over.

MR. MONEYSACK: (*Momentarily confused.*) What? Heh, heh, heh. This is the 20 RMB I made hauling cement this morning, and this is the 10 RMB that you gave me tonight.

SALES AMBASSADOR: This it? (*MR. MONEYSACK looks on the ground for the fifty cents that the SALES AMBASSADOR had thrown at him earlier.*) Don't bother looking. It's like this. You simply don't have what it takes to be a sales ambassador. You want to make it in this business. You have to walk over other people. You only become a giant by standing on the shoulders of giants. People like you are merely stepping stones for the rest of us. To use the lingo, you'll never have a new line. You see this pyramid? You're the lowest rung, maybe not even that. You're just a speck of dust on the floor. You'd better learn to be happy being garbage. Because you're never gonna have a dream-come-true. Now, as I care about people who've helped me, I'm telling you this free of charge.

MR. MONEYSACK: Then you can't take me in?

SALES AMBASSADOR: Why? You think you've got hidden potential?

MR. MONEYSACK: I don't want to get rich.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Then what do you think you're doing here with me?

MR. MONEYSACK: I want to wear the sack.

SALES AMBASSADOR: You think I can't find people to wear this sack?

MR. MONEYSACK: I'm really that useless?

SALES AMBASSADOR holds out hand for nose and this time MR. MONEYSACK hands it over, but doesn't let go of SALES AMBASSADOR'S hand.

MR. MONEYSACK: Actually, you're an intelligent person who ought to

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understand a basic truth. Not only people but rats, cockroaches, and ants are all the same. Queen ants grow wings but they never fly. When they move, the worker ants carry them willingly. The queen bee gets fatter and whiter every day she eats the honey that the worker bees have made. The workers sacrifice without reward. But why? The question is: why settle for this life?

When I first stood inside your sack, it was dark and suffocatingly hot. I was so dizzy I didn't know where I was. But after you told the story about the little dog, I understood. It didn't matter that his master beat him, yelled at him, practically drowned him. In the end, he still came back as devoted as ever. Why? It was hope.

Don't laugh at me. When I stand in your silver sack on stage, I feel like I'm flying in that golden airplane. Everyone fixes their gaze on me alone. Never in my life have people looked at me in that way. It's like when the little clone talked about his third hand. Your body feels light, and your sweaty stench becomes pleurably fragrant. This is what it means to be a human being! Besides eating and drinking, what can a human being strive for if not to feel human? And now I have that feeling and you want to steal it from me. Just like my daughter stole everything from me and then left me on the street.

I'm begging you to let me go with you. Except for money, I've got everything your precious darlings have and more. I'm willing to follow you. Everything you say, I've memorized. Next seminar, I'll give the class for you. But if you don't want me to open my mouth, I guarantee that I won't even fart even if I constipate myself to death, just like today.

The game you're playing is simple: make lies seem true. But that doesn't bother me because everyone likes happy endings. Every time you lead a seminar, I want to lick up the words that spill like honey from your mouth. Your seminars even have educational value. All I want is to go where you go. Hit me, scold me, drown me, none of that matters because I'll always come back. You were the first person who named my heart – Hope. I'm willing to be a beast called Hope.

MR. MONEYSACK attacks SALES AMBASSADOR.

SALES AMBASSADOR: What do you think you're doing? How much do you want? Name your price. (*Starts throwing money at MR. MONEYSACK.*) 100, 200, 300...

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MR. MONEYSACK: I don't want your money.

SALES AMBASSADOR: Then what do you want?

MR. MONEYSACK: I want Gui-gui back!

MR. MONEYSACK grabs the sack and nose. As he climbs into his costume, the countdown begins and the other characters return to their starting positions for the next seminar.

CURTAIN

Crossroads

The Road Not Taken

—Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Act One

Characters

ZHANG CHI: William's live-in helper;

SONG JIERU: Zhang Chi's wife;

ZHANG JIN: Zhang Chi's sister;

ZHANG BA: Zhang Chi's father;

WILLIAM: An older Englishman, who has retired in China;

KATHY: William's daughter;

ZHAO SHOUHAI: a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Culture;

A LONG: one of Zhang Ba's workers.

Time: A Southern Chinese city in the early 1990s, just after Deng Xiaoping's famous "Southern Tour".

Place: William's house.

Note: The translation of Chinese names follows Chinese custom—Surname first and then given name. For example, Zhang Chi's surname is Zhang, his given name is Chi. I have used pinyin to transliterate Chinese names.

Scene 1

WILLIAM lives in a typical Chinese apartment complex with one important difference—it has been filled with shards and other junk that he has found on his "archaeological digs" in the new city. As the old landscape of villages has been razed to construct modern buildings, many archaeological sites have been discovered and then just as quickly, those sites have been buried again. WILLIAM's "archaeological digs" are in fact salvage missions. Pieced together and reconstructed pots from the Paleolithic era are neatly lined up on floor to ceiling shelves. Against another wall are two large trunks with rusted locks. A quilt is spread out on the trunks; this is a bed.

Part of the space on the bed is used as a bookshelf, and at the head of the bed is an oxygen tank. A breathing tube dangles for easy use in case of an emergency. On a table, is a pot that has been partially copied. Next to the pot is a tube of superior strength glue, a magnifying glass, a pair of tweezers, a notebook, and a vase full of Chinese writing brushes. There is an enlarged picture of ZHANG CHI, ZHANG BA, and WILLIAM squeezed into an empty space on the wall. There are three doors. One leads to the garden on the patio; one leads to the kitchen; the other leads to the sauna.

WILLIAM is a tall, thin, and slightly stooped old Englishman. He enters, carrying a watering can in one hand and steel spade in the other. He rests at the table, puts down the spade and watering pot, and after catching his breath, goes out again, this time returning with an unplanted orchid. He turns to the shelves to look for a suitable pot.

WILLIAM (Talking to himself, but with traces of the college lecturer he once was): Glasses, hmm, where are my glasses? (He takes down an exquisite pot, holding it up in front of his eyes.) No matter how you think about it, this is a successful creation, the apex of 17,000 years of human industry and civilization. And those brilliant creators, when they lived here 17,000 years ago, what did they look like? Did they speak Cantonese, too? (He examines the pot again, and then puts the orchid in it.) It has a percolation rate of only five percent. That's even lower than the clay pots used in contemporary Cantonese cooking. An altogether remarkable accomplishment. These small yet precise decorations are perfectly designed and proportional. The ancient Greeks, no less intelligent, based natural mathematics on similar notations. That's why I have always said industrial design is the cradle of civilization. (A thought suddenly occurs to him. He turns toward the sauna door.) Lazy brute, come here!

ZHANG CHI (offstage): William, a little patience. I'm almost ready.

WILLIAM: Even crabs could have been steamed by now.

ZHANG CHI: Just another minute. Okay, William, now.

WILLIAM opens the door and ZHANG CHI comes out. Except for a towel, ZHANG CHI is naked, revealing a plump figure.

ZHANG CHI: This is the third time I didn't get a thorough steaming.

WILLIAM: But I'm hungry.

ZHANG CHI: William, even for you, this is too much. Can't I simply and quietly enjoy myself for a few moments?

WILLIAM: What? Of course. Go steam yourself.

ZHANG CHI: Forget it. As soon as I get comfortable, you'll need me again.

WILLIAM points to the vase and flower on the table.

ZHANG CHI: It is beautiful. But, I'm willing to bet that 17,000 years ago people didn't spend two days making a pot so they could arrange flowers.

WILLIAM: Of course not. Luxury has always been a fool's glory.

ZHANG CHI: So what was it for?

WILLIAM takes an identical pot, turns it upside down and gently places it on the mouth of the still unfinished pot.

ZHANG CHI: Slow down a minute. The lip on this pot opens out. How can you put on the lid like that? Oh, I know. First you put them together and then you fire them.

WILLIAM nods.

ZHANG CHI: But that's the problem. What did they do with a sealed pot?

WILLIAM: Is there a myth? No, not a myth. It was a religious artifact, for rituals.

ZHANG CHI: A religious ritual? What kind of ritual?

WILLIAM: Death.

ZHANG CHI: Death?

WILLIAM (*Nods. Then fixes his eyes on ZHANG CHI.*) How do we die? And after we die, what happens? All religions are concerned with death.

ZHANG CHI: Who said that? Saint Augustine?

WILLIAM (*Ignoring ZHANG CHI's gentle sarcasm.*) No, William. William Anderson. Have you thought about death, Zhang Chi? Seriously thought about it?

ZHANG CHI (*Suddenly nervous, ZHANG CHI shakes his head no.*) No. I've been busy thinking about life.

WILLIAM: Dying is the last thing we do. Possibly the most important question we face is how to die. Of course, young people don't have to worry about death.

ZHANG CHI: So you really haven't eaten?

WILLIAM: Are you trying to change the topic?

ZHANG CHI: If you would spend money on a maid, I wouldn't have to ask.

WILLIAM: This is the tragedy of old age; we have to endure friendly aggression.

ZHANG CHI: William.

WILLIAM: I'm not complaining. And, no, I really haven't eaten.

ZHANG CHI: Because you can't use the microwave?

WILLIAM: Of course not.

ZHANG CHI: Then why go hungry?

WILLIAM: There was a black out.

ZHANG CHI: A black out? Why didn't the sauna go off?

WILLIAM indicates he doesn't understand either.

ZHANG CHI: All right. I'll go make dinner.

Crossroads

WILLIAM: Wait a minute. Zhang Chi, you've been avoiding me. You don't want to tell me what happened at the meeting today, do you? Come clean. Do we have a chance or not? The answer won't kill me.

ZHANG CHI: William, why do you pressure me like this? Do you know what I need more than anything? To relax. But all you do is put me on edge.

WILLIAM (*Gesturing to the trunks and picking up his spade.*) Then crawl onto my bed and I'll help you relax.

ZHANG CHI: All right already. I'll tell you.

WILLIAM: Speak only the truth.

ZHANG CHI: Only the truth.

WILLIAM: So?

ZHANG CHI: You won!

WILLIAM: Is this a Chinese version of the truth?

ZHANG CHI: No.

WILLIAM: Then I want to hear you say it again.

ZHANG CHI: You won. They are going to designate it an historical landmark site.

WILLIAM: Really? Thank you Zhang Chi. I told you we would win. You didn't believe me, but look what happened. What did they say about my report?

ZHANG CHI: Most of the experts agreed with your findings. They said that excavating the ruins buried there had 'great scientific value'.

WILLIAM: Of course it does. You can't find another site in China with an indoor burial room. They know the real thing when they see it. (*Picks up the unfinished pot on the table and kisses it.*) Ah, darling...

ZHANG CHI: You know, they were actually as excited as you are.

WILLIAM: You're a poet. How did they take my hypothesis that these people kept their dead relatives with them at night because sleep reunited them.

ZHANG CHI: They didn't think you had established that this was an indoor burial room, let alone prove that for Neolithic humans sleep was the door between the living and the dead. I quote, 'You can't extrapolate cultural beliefs from unanalyzed data'.

WILLIAM: Don't be such a prig. Imagine souls talking. How do they communicate?

ZHANG CHI: You believe this?

WILLIAM: Probably. At least... *(suddenly cajoling)* We should celebrate with a drink, right?

WILLIAM turns to get a bottle from the cupboard. ZHANG CHI stops him.

ZHANG CHI: You know the rules. No drinking before 4:00.

WILLIAM: This is a toast.

ZHANG CHI: Toasts are drinks, William.

WILLIAM: Just one glass?

ZHANG CHI shakes his head no.

WILLIAM: Half a glass? Just this much?

ZHANG CHI: You promised.

WILLIAM: Fine, then. Just go make me something to eat. I'm famished. You take my money to wine and dine a bunch of corrupt officials, leaving an old man like me so hungry that I can't even breathe. And you're still just standing around. Get to work!

ZHANG CHI *(Holding the towel in place, Zhang Chi approximates the bow used by Qing officials when they received an imperial order.)* Immediately, master.

ZHANG CHI doesn't leave, but stares deliberately at WILLIAM.

WILLIAM: Why are you looking at me like that? Am I a plate of roasted ribs?
Or maybe a deep-fried chicken wing?

ZHANG CHI: You still want to drink, don't you?

WILLIAM: Of course not! After all, I gave my word...

ZHANG CHI: In that case, why don't you go outside and tend your flowers?

WILLIAM: I just came in from there.

ZHANG CHI: But today I managed to get fresh duck shit for you. I put it near
the Belgium peonies, next to the pond.

WILLIAM: You really are the good news herald!

ZHANG CHI: Go fertilize your plants, William.

WILLIAM (*Shaking his head as he walks out*) Times have changed. We used
to have twelve gardeners and three cooks in our Yunnan compound.
Your father helped in the kitchen. Then he went off to join the
revolution, and the country went with him.

ZHANG CHI: Thank you for the history lesson. William, an old colonist like
you should have given up those dreams when the empire fell.

*WILLIAM reaches into his pocket, pulls out a harmonica, and starts playing a
song on his way out.*

ZHANG CHI: I'll call you when the food's ready.

ZHANG CHI opens a drawer for clothes. SONG JIERU enters.

SONG JIERU: How's my favorite museum curator?

ZHANG CHI: (*Startled, ZHANG CHI drops the clothes and replaces his towel.
When he sees SONG JIERU, ZHANG CHI relaxes.*) Jieru! Hey, you look
really great.

SONG JIERU: Thank you. I am very, very grateful for the compliment. Do you realize this is the first time in three years you've noticed what your wife is wearing?

ZHANG CHI: Huh?

SONG JIERU: No, I don't mean anything other than I'm glad you noticed me. I still notice you. (*SONG JIERU caresses ZHANG CHI's chest, but seeing that he isn't responding, she changes the topic.*) So, where's the museum director?

ZHANG CHI: He's outside taking care of the plants. You shouldn't call him museum director, he can hear the sarcasm.

ZHANG CHI finally manages to start dressing. Occasionally the sound of WILLIAM singing drifts into the room.

SONG JIERU: So what stinks so badly?

ZHANG CHI: I just bought duck shit from the botanical garden.

SONG JIERU: Duck shit?

ZHANG CHI: The old man thinks that chemical fertilizers aren't effective. He said that in the past, the gardeners collected horseshit in the street and brought it home. He then thought it would be a good idea for me to go get him some. Thanks to my scrupulous attention to details, he and I both know now that horseshit isn't readily available in the city because there aren't any horses. Not even an ass. So duck shit it is.

SONG JIERU: He doesn't see contemporary China, does he? He just sits in here and remembers what Kunming used to be when his parents and their wealthy friends traveled in horse carts or were pulled by coolies. Maybe he'd like you better with a Qing queue.

ZHANG CHI: That may be the style next year. It could even be what sells your dolls. Here's an idea, next year design a line of Gu Hongming dolls, and when they pull the queue the doll will sing Ai Luote's version of "Wilderness"...

SONG JIERU: If you're starting to worry about business that could be Gu Hongming's greatest posthumous achievement.

WILLIAM hits a particularly high note.

SONG JIERU: What has he dug up lately that's got him so happy?

ZHANG CHI: He has every reason to be happy. Why don't you sit down while I make lunch. He still hasn't eaten.

SONG JIERU: This late? Are you trying to starve him?

ZHANG CHI: I just arrived myself.

Finally dressed, ZHANG CHI goes into the kitchen. Song Jieru inspects things in the room.

SONG JIERU (*Speaking to herself.*) They've added another shelf's worth of junk.

ZHANG CHI (*From the kitchen.*) What?

SONG JIERU: I said you've bought new furniture.

ZHANG CHI (*Coming out of the kitchen.*) What new furniture?

SONG JIERU (*Kicking the shelf.*) This. It wasn't here last month.

ZHANG CHI: Oh. I excavated those artifacts. Ever since William's come back from the hospital, he hasn't had the strength to go to Fenggang.

SONG JIERU: I didn't realize you had planned on taking over this particular family's business.

ZHANG CHI: I'm just a pair of hands and legs. I go to the site and bring back the shards, but everything else he still does himself. In fact, I don't help all that much.

ZHANG CHI returns to the kitchen.

SONG JIERU: What era does this stuff belong to?

ZHANG CHI: It's from the Neolithic. Probably Xinglong hollowware.

SONG JIERU: So very professional. The old colonial ghost hasn't passed away, but his spirit already lives in your body. Do you know your sister calls the pair of you? She calls you the 'Neolithic tool' and William, the 'Paleolithic remnant'.

ZHANG CHI: Are they all well?

SONG JIERU: Are you referring to your father and sister?

ZHANG CHI: Who else? Are they well?

SONG JIERU: You can go home and see for yourself. I'm not your intermediary. (*Waits for an answer.*) Cat got your tongue? I know what you're thinking; every day I can put it off, is another day I can hang out here. The Old Ghost is your excuse for everything you're not doing. You don't want to defend yourself? Or can't you think of a reason for not coming home to live with your wife? You want to see us, right? Or maybe you don't. Maybe you think taking care of the Old Ghost day in and day out is a meaningful existence. But who is he to you? You treat him better than you treat your own father. (*SONG JIERU picks at the oxygen tank.*) But even you must realize he'll be on the shelf soon enough. He won't survive another year. I'll tell you something, after I read the report, I stepped out of the hospital and smiled. I surprised myself. Then I pinched my nose to make myself stop grinning. But I couldn't. I know it wasn't right, but I admit to feeling relieved. I had stopped hoping you'd come back.

ZHANG CHI (*Comes out of the kitchen and catches SONG JIERU offguard.*)
What are you talking about?

SONG JIERU: You scared me. I was just saying I had lost hope.

ZHANG CHI: What's wrong? You're the business communities' it girl this year. No other woman entrepreneur gets the press you do.

SONG JIERU: So what? I became a great entrepreneur after I gave up on other things. And I'm not the only one.

ZHANG CHI: What exactly were you hoping for?

SONG JIERU: I hoped you would love me like you did when we first met. That you'd talk to me like you used to when we were first married. That you'd make good on your promise 'for better or worse'.

ZHANG CHI (*Startled.*) What are you trying to say?

SONG JIERU: I still love you. (*ZHANG CHI looks away.*) I love you. Are you deaf? This is real, Zhang Chi. I can't lie to myself. I want to be with you. I don't feel anything with other men. Are you listening to me? Am I making you uncomfortable? I miss you. (*SONG JIERU moves toward ZHANG CHI, but he puts the chopping knife and a bowl of peanuts between them.*) Now maybe, no, in fact it doesn't matter what you feel for me. You can keep ignoring me. The problem is with yourself. Can you really split your time between taking care of an eccentric Old Ghost and steaming yourself in the sauna?

ZHANG CHI: What's wrong with the way I live? Didn't you use to say that artists aren't like everybody else?

SONG JIERU: So now you're an artist?

ZHANG CHI: Compared to you, yes, Ms. General Manager of the family toy factory.

SONG JIERU: Art and running away are two different things. All you're doing is avoiding reality.

ZHANG CHI: What reality is that?

SONG JIERU: Reality is the era you're born to. And people of this era don't have the luxury of pursuing art. We have to feed ourselves first.

ZHANG CHI: I'm not on the street begging.

SONG JIERU: That's because you had the fortune of having a good father.

ZHANG CHI: Don't bring him into the discussion. I don't want anything of his.

SONG JIERU: I'm grateful to him. Six years ago, if it hadn't been for him, I would have wasted another two years in graduate school. Instead, I went

to work for him at the toy factory. Otherwise, no matter how good a painter I was, today, I'd be just another art instructor at some school.

ZHANG CHI: So you sacrificed your art and married me to pay back you debt to my father? Surely you've overcompensated the man?

SONG JIERU: Sacrificed art? Don't even go there! I will never again let imaginary things dictate my life. In the real world, people don't care about how or what you express, they care about what you can do. Your father may not have much in the way of taste, but he can get things done. In a word, he's got the power.

ZHANG CHI: Correct. And that's all he has. I'm sure he uses it frequently and well. But, what about your aesthetic principals? Aren't you avoiding the issue, too? Of course you are. Otherwise, all those imaginary things would dictate your life. *(Pause.)* So, have you had another child?

SONG JIERU: Sarcasm won't solve the problem.

ZHANG CHI: I still don't know what the problem is.

SONG JIERU: You two want to excavate the site at Fenggang.

ZHANG CHI: So?

SONG JIERU: But all you can do is beg the Ministry of Culture for help. Whether or not you'll succeed depends on the good will of others. But I can buy that site. That's the difference. You have a desire, but I have the means. The problem is that you haven't faced this reality.

ZHANG CHI: I'm starting to.

SONG JIERU: You're too late. Didn't they tell you? I already bought that site.

ZHANG CHI: Really?

SONG JIERU: I'm the landlord.

ZHANG CHI: So you want me to beg you for the land, rather than the Ministry?

SONG JIERU: I'm telling you that either you've got power or you've got to be of use to the powerful.

ZHANG CHI: Oh. In that case how do you make General Cao's chicken, oh she who is both powerful and ever of use?

SONG JIERU: What?

ZHANG CHI: For some reason, I've never mastered any of your cooking techniques. Especially the peanuts. They're either soggy or burnt.

SONG JIERU: Peanuts. Soak them in boiling water to remove the skins. Then fry them until the tip splits. Once the tip splits take them out of the oil and put them to the side. This way they'll be crunchy and white. Next add the chicken pieces to the oil. When you add the seasoning, you don't want to burn the chilies. Then add a few slices of ginger. And finally stir in the peanuts. Now I've told you the secret to my success. What'll you give me in return?

ZHANG CHI: I've already paid.

SONG JIERU: If so, who embezzled the payment, because I'm still empty-handed?

ZHANG CHI: I listened to you lecture me without interrupting. (*ZHANG CHI returns to the kitchen.*)

SONG JIERU: Hey, artist. I don't see any of your paintings.

ZHANG CHI: I'm not interested in cloning Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian or Shi Lu. And I'm definitely not willing to take responsibility for William's eyes going bad.

SONG JIERU: Then what are you interested in mangling?

ZHANG CHI: Poetry.

SONG JIERU: Ah. You're going after his ears instead.

ZHANG CHI: What about you? What precious beauty have you given birth to this time?

SONG JIERU (*Taking out a carefully packaged box from her bag. It is clear that it is for an upscale market.*) We've opened a new line of dolls to sell in Europe. I brought one for you to see. The first order was for half a shipping container, over one million U.S. At today's rates that eight million renminbi.

SONG JIERU *looks for a place to put the doll, but can't find an appropriate spot. She ends up holding the doll. WILLIAM walks in.*

WILLIAM: Hello. What are you holding?

SONG JIERU: Our baby.

WILLIAM: (*Loudly*) Zhang Chi, Zhang Chi.

ZHANG CHI (*Running out of the kitchen.*) What's the matter?

WILLIAM: I want a drink!

ZHANG CHI: The food's almost ready. Eat first.

WILLIAM: No. I want to drink a toast to your baby. To congratulate the two of you for giving birth to the next generation.

ZHANG CHI: The next generation? (*Looking around.*) Her? But I'm not responsible in anyway for that pregnancy. So there's no need for you to toast me.

WILLIAM: That makes me sad. It's also cause for regret. Why don't you do something meaningful with your lives? Aren't you ashamed? I, for one, am.

SONG JIERU: William. What's the matter? Zhang Chi, what's the matter?

ZHANG CHI: William thinks that if the two of us had acted like a normal Chinese couple and had a baby a year or two after we got married, then our relationship wouldn't have become what it is.

SONG JIERU: There are times when William actually understands what it means to be human. William, forget that child has nothing to do with him, I thank you.

WILLIAM: What about him?

ZHANG CHI: I'm not thanking you for anything.

WILLIAM: He's a cruel one.

SONG JIERU: He's a tool.

WILLIAM: Huh?

SONG JIERU: Sorry, a Neolithic tool.

WILLIAM: I'm ashamed because I've missed another opportunity for a drink.
So don't thank me.

WILLIAM walks off in a bit of a tiff. ZHANG CHI smothers his laughter and heads into the kitchen. SONG JIERU gets red in the face. Suddenly, WILLIAM returns.

WILLIAM: Zhang Chi!

ZHANG CHI (*Coming out of the kitchen.*) What is it now?

WILLIAM: Someone stole our hoe!

ZHANG CHI: What hoe?

WILLIAM: The one I made to loosen the soil around the plants.

ZHANG CHI: Who would steal that old thing? Don't you remember? You put it on top of the plastic basins to keep them from blowing away.

WILLIAM: Oh. But that's not what I wanted to tell you. I'm not an alcoholic and didn't just come in here to sneak a glass.

ZHANG CHI: Then what were you doing back inside before I called you for lunch?

WILLIAM: Our strawberry plants have flowered.

ZHANG CHI: Really?

WILLIAM: This spring we'll be able to enjoy the juicy sweetness of fresh strawberries from our own garden. Strawberry on your lips is as fragrant a delicacy as a young girl's kiss.

ZHANG CHI and WILLIAM leave together to look at the strawberry flowers. SONG JIERU starts to get angry and then shakes her head. She puts on an apron and heads into the kitchen.

Scene 2

ZHANG BA enters, bringing a traditional New Year's cake.

ZHANG BA: Isn't anyone home?

ZHANG BA shuts the door. He goes over to the table and fiddles with the pot that WILLIAM has reconstructed, picks up the magnifying glass and looks around the room. His gaze rests on the picture of him, ZHANG CHI, and WILLIAM. As ZHANG BA looks at the picture, ZHANG CHI enters.

ZHANG CHI: Dad!

ZHANG BA: This is palm leaf I brought back from Zhaoqing. I bought the New Year's cake for you at Panxi Restaurant, but I know it's not as good as you mother used to make.

ZHANG CHI: Where's Jieru?

ZHANG BA: When I came in the door was open, but no one was here.

ZHANG CHI: We must have really pissed her off if she actually left. Anyway, I still have to make an ever-hungrier William lunch, so why don't you sit down and make yourself comfortable.

ZHANG BA: About William... Jieru told me it's cancer. I'm very sorry.

ZHANG CHI doesn't respond.

ZHANG BA: Your sister is, too. If you need anything, anything at all, all you have to do is ask.

ZHANG CHI: If we ever need anything, I won't hesitate.

ZHANG BA: We're your family.

ZHANG CHI: I know. I... know.

ZHANG CHI tries to go to the kitchen.

ZHANG BA: Does William know the prognosis?

ZHANG CHI: No.

ZHANG CHI tries to go to the kitchen again.

ZHANG BA: So what are you going to do?

ZHANG CHI: Do?

ZHANG CHI remains in the room, but once exasperated he's no longer fully present to his father. This makes his father more agitated.

ZHANG BA: We need to talk about this whole situation.

ZHANG CHI: Now? Couldn't you find a more appropriate time?

ZHANG BA: I'll be brief. You've already loafed around here for six years. That's five more than enough. Now I didn't raise a son just to watch him waste his living like a wild dog.

ZHANG CHI: Ah...

ZHANG BA: So speak. Defend yourself.

ZHANG CHI: You're all fine, right? Isn't that what's important?

ZHANG BA: Who in the family has let you down? Me? Your sister? Or is it your wife? Why can't you tell us what's going on?

ZHANG CHI: It's not any of you, it's me, I'm simply not good enough. I see all of you and feel ashamed that I haven't done more with my life. I'm even worse than that wild dog you mentioned.

ZHANG BA: Don't change the subject. I'm asking you, why have you been avoiding us?

ZHANG CHI: I'm just not actively seeking you out, and if I knew why, then I probably would go home.

ZHANG BA: You don't live with your wife, why's that? Has she taken up with someone else?

ZHANG CHI: You'd have to ask her.

ZHANG BA: But you're the one who moved out, so the reason is here. She lives a respectable life, not like you, sneaking around...What have you done that you're so ashamed of that you can't come home?

ZHANG CHI (*Laughing.*) You really are an expert in pathological psychology.

ZHANG BA: Screw your pathological psychology. I didn't go to college, but I understand that when a couple can't get along they either split up or make up. Not like the two of you, maintaining a polite distance and then occasionally flirting with each other in public places. What's that about? I don't get it. Is this what you learned in college? You get so smart you can't even keep a family together. And that's another thing, when will I hold my grandson?

ZHANG CHI: Why don't you get remarried, then my stepmother will give you a son, who will give you a grandson.

ZHANG BA: Don't play games. I'm serious; you owe us an explanation.

ZHANG CHI: There is no explanation. I'm just a little unsatisfied.

ZHANG BA: Unsatisfied?

ZHANG CHI: Maybe nauseous is a better word. I look around and feel like vomiting.

ZHANG BA: See a doctor.

ZHANG CHI: Doctors leave me unsatisfied, too. It's always the same. They say their prescription will cure your disease, and maybe even help you

feel younger. I often wonder what actually success nourishes their self-confidence.

ZHANG BA: So you're not sick. What's the problem?

ZHANG CHI: I'm healthy. I'm beginning to think that in the world today, good health is the sign of a serious problem. One that induces vomiting.

ZHANG BA: I didn't come here to entertain you. I've held my tongue for five years, thinking I could find an appropriate time to talk with you.

ZHANG CHI: And now because William is dying, you think that time has come? Dad, you're not seriously worried that I won't be able to find another sugar daddy as tolerant and generous as William? Surely, you underestimate me.

ZHANG BA: Zhang Chi, I'm not Huang Shiren or even Mu Renzhi. I didn't barge in demanding the rent you can't pay. I'm your father. You are my only son. Maybe I should consider taking your advice and remarry, but right now you are the only son I have. When I see you wasting your life, when I see you unhappy, I hurt. (*Pause.*) Don't look at me like that. When you were a little boy and looked at me like that, I boxed your ears. Or have you forgotten that, too?

ZHANG CHI: Maybe if you boxed my ears it would help.

ZHANG BA: How could it? You're a man. A man has his dignity, he has his pride, and that's all he has. Son, I know what's eating at you. You can't live with the fact that your wife is more successful than you. You wanted to show her what's what, so you've ignored her, and now she's come crawling to you. You've made your point. Why are you blushing? What's to be ashamed of? You've never heard me say similar things in the past? Your father is also a man. I see that your wife can't live without you, but do the two of you meet more than once a month? Before I read "Woman's Report" Magazine, I didn't understand what you were up to, but now I know that modern couples sometimes need to separate for a while in order to "rekindle love's eternal fire". But you've gone overboard. I even understand that you needed an extreme method to "provoke her deepest feelings", but now you're just sulking. Don't be so concerned about who's number one in the eye's of the world. Frankly speaking, if it weren't for your wife, our family company would never

have become what it is. She risked a million yuan loan and paid it back in a year. Not even a year, ten months! She's a real doll.

ZHANG CHI: Dolls are cold.

ZHANG BA: Warm her up, then. Your mother and I were more traditional. We fell in love day by day, and didn't need constant stimulation. But modern women aren't like your mother, they're...you see, one day you need to slap their butts, and the next you need to kiss their hands; there's a rhythm to modern love. But you...

ZHANG CHI: Dad, if you understand women so well, why haven't you remarried? It's been eight years already.

ZHANG BA: Because the door God won't let any other women enter.

ZHANG CHI: My sister? If you set someone up outside, what could she do?

ZHANG BA: Do you ever stay on topic? It's impossible to have a serious conversation with you. So, let me tell you why I came. I'm retiring and I want you to take over as Chairman of the Board.

ZHANG CHI: Huh?

ZHANG BA: What do you mean "huh"?!

ZHANG CHI: Aren't you doing a fine job?

ZHANG BA: I want you to think about it.

ZHANG CHI: Think about what?

ZHANG BA: I want you to promise me that you will carry on the family business.

ZHANG CHI: You think I'm qualified?

ZHANG BA: Cut the crap. What can't a person do if they put their mind to it? Do you remember the old miser who pushed a broken-down cart, selling candied apples when you were a child?

ZHANG CHI: Yes, but I remember he was always generous to children.

ZHANG BA: He was a self-made eunuch. He wanted to enter the Qing court so badly he castrated himself.

ZHANG CHI: My desires aren't equal to his.

ZHANG BA: Your wife will help you, and you can sit back and enjoy being Chairman.

ZHANG CHI: Then why don't you just give the company to her?

ZHANG BA: What? And let everyone think I've been sleeping with my daughter-in-law? Do you know they'll say about me? That I cuckolded my own son and that's why he'd rather serve a foreigner that work in the family business. Son, I want to retire, not make a spectacle of myself.

ZHANG CHI: But I'm not interested in the family business.

ZHANG BA: Then I'll have to give the job to your sister. You know as well as I do she'd take the job for all the wrong reasons. Even now, I have to stop her from making major decisions at the company. If she were half the person your wife is, then I wouldn't be here. But if Zhang Jin gets control, sooner or later, she'll run the company into the ground. I loose sleep thinking about her running a board meeting.

ZHANG CHI: You actually loose sleep over that?

ZHANG BA: What's worse, if you don't take the position, your wife won't agree to let your sister take over. Jieru's no saint and with forty percent of the company stock, she doesn't have to accept my decision. I don't want the family divided simply because I want to retire and enjoy my old age. Right now, if I retire, I'll be eating cold soup, alone.

ZHANG CHI: You worry too much.

ZHANG BA: I hope it's just my imagination. Listen, carefully. I'm telling you that whether or not you agree to be Chairman has grave consequences for the family. So don't play the dilettante with our future. I'm also thinking about what's best for you. With your personality, who else would hire you? And what about your all-too honest wife? If one day, she really did leave you, how would you feel? Maybe you think you live a bohemian life forever, but nothing in this world comes with a lifetime guarantee.

Yesterday, I read an article about a foreign lady who slept her way into the king's bed. Once she had the crown, she organized a large feast. She invited all the nobles in the land, except of course for the men who had once helped her. Those she executed while dinner was served. When one of her ladies-in-waiting asked her why she had executed her former lovers, the queen said, "I can't endure the thought that my enemies once touched me." You see, women everywhere make practical and expedient decisions. I've heard rumors that your wife is starting to go to church. (ZHANG CHI stares at ZHANG BA, who continues with special emphasis.) She's studying foreign ways.

SONG JIERU: (*From the kitchen.*) Where's the ginger?

ZHANG BA: She's here?

ZHANG CHI: I thought she'd left.

ZHANG BA: Then...why don't I go say hello to William. I never thought he'd... William.

ZHANG CHI: Dad. He doesn't have long, so if you really are his friend, then treat him like you always have.

SONG JIERU (*From the kitchen.*) The ginger?!

ZHANG BA hesitates a moment and then leaves out to the garden. ZHANG CHI sits down and covers his face with his hands. He is visibly upset. SONG JIERU comes out, sees ZHANG CHI, and returns to the kitchen, where she again calls for the ginger.

SONG JIERU: Zhang Chi, where is the ginger?

ZHANG CHI (*Walks over to the kitchen.*) Second shelf in the refrigerator.

SONG JIE: (*Enters.*) Go get William. The food will be ready in a minute. What's wrong with your eyes?

ZHANG CHI: Too much chili.

SONG JIERU: I use chili in my chicken and peanut stirfry?

ZHANG CHI: I'm completely allergic. Even a little bit and my eyes swell up.

SONG JIERU: The two years we lived together you didn't seem to have a problem.

ZHANG CHI: You really want to know everything I endured to be with you?

SONG JIERU: Yes.

ZHANG CHI (*Caught off guard.*) Why?

SONG JIERU: That way I'll know if you ever really loved me.

ZHANG CHI: I'll go get William. Oh, my father's here.

SONG JIERU: Would you like me to leave? The two of you have a lot to talk about.

ZHANG CHI: And one of those things is you. You have been the perfect daughter.

SONG JIERU: If he really were my father, there wouldn't be a problem. I wouldn't have to humiliate myself begging you to take your place in the family just so I could take mine.

ZHANG CHI: They treat you better than they treat me.

SONG JIERU: That's a matter of courtesy; it's not the same as having a proper place. Your father is going to retire. Who will be the next Chair? Not me.

ZHANG CHI: You knew?

SONG JIERU: Uncle A Xiang told me.

ZHANG CHI: How is Uncle A Xiang?

SONG JIERU: Already retired. Now he heads a Cantonese Opera appreciation club. They organize trips to hear different troupes all over the delta. Your father's going to join as soon as he has time.

ZHANG CHI: He wants to sing Cantonese Opera? Can he even speak Cantonese?

SONG JIERU: Better than you. Your father is a chameleon, and wherever he ends up, he adapts and succeeds. He'll be sixty-eight this year. But even so, there are still women interested in him. If it weren't for your sister's ferocity, you would've had a stepmother years ago. Strange that you've never had a problem with that.

ZHANG CHI: With what?

SONG JIERU: Desire. A craving to be with someone else no matter what.

ZHANG CHI: You have?

SONG JIERU: What do you think?

ZHANG CHI: You have. You can't fall asleep without hugging something. (*Abruptly.*) I've almost forgotten what you look like asleep.

SONG JIERU: You know, some men are interested in me.

ZHANG CHI: I'm happy for you.

SONG JIERU: Yesterday evening I looked at myself in the mirror and realized I'm okay. I look younger than most women my age. Once I thought I'd never be thirty, but I blinked, and that was it. Thirty.

ZHANG CHI: You don't look in the mirror and realize that your flesh is decaying? The only thing that might not succumb is your heart; this doesn't terrify you?

SONG JIERU: No. I don't worry about my 'flesh', so to speak, because it's not my livelihood. Haven't you heard the expression 'brains don't sag at forty'?

ZHANG CHI holds SONG JIERU by the should and looks at her chest.

SONG JIERU: What are you looking at?

ZHANG CHI: So seductive.

SONG JIERU: Me? Or them? (*SONG JIERU pushes her breasts into ZHANG CHI's face.*)

ZHANG CHI: Your cross.

SONG JIERU fingers her cross, disentangling herself from ZHANG CHI's grasp.

ZHANG CHI: How could you fall in love with someone like me? What could we possibly have in common?

SONG JIERU: You haven't figured it out?

ZHANG CHI: No.

SONG JIERU: Neither of us wants what's been given to us, but we're still afraid that simply working for things won't make them the things we want, once we get them.

ZHANG CHI: I've never worked for anything. But I do fear gifts that I'll never be able to repay.

SONG JIERU: It's never easy.

ZHANG CHI: But if you have the same fundamental doubt that I do, what are you working so furiously for?

SONG JIERU: Because a person can't live rejecting everything; you can't not want something.

ZHANG CHI: And what do you want?

SONG JIERU: I want what's mine.

ZHANG CHI: I see. You came today to talk about the business, but that's not a problem. I've already recommended you to the old man.

SONG JIERU: You think I came to make my claim for the business?

ZHANG CHI: Weren't you the one who announced that he wants to sing Cantonese opera?

SONG JIERU: I shouldn't stick my nose in your family's business. Just pretend I didn't say anything.

ZHANG CHI: This isn't the time to get queasy! You have more ties to that company than I do. You even have stock. What do I have?

SONG JIERU: You're his only son.

ZHANG CHI: Fuck.

SONG JIERU: You're also my only husband.

ZHANG CHI: I don't want to be anybody's only anything; it sucks.

WILLIAM and ZHANG BA enter.

WILLIAM: So your car can move freely between here and Hong Kong?

ZHANG BA: Yes.

WILLIAM: That's perfect. Can I ask a favor?

ZHANG BA: What do you need?

WILLIAM: Magazines. At the moment there's no one to help me get magazines.

ZHANG BA: What magazines can't you get here?

WILLIAM: Playboy and Penthouse.

ZHANG BA: What?

WILLIAM: Zhang Chi, explain to him.

ZHANG CHI: American smut. Two of the foreign English teachers at the University are missionaries. Their church pays for a post office box across the border in Hong Kong. That way, any sensitive material doesn't need to go through the mail here. William asked if he could use their post office box and they agreed, bringing him his magazines after their monthly service. However when William's mules discovered they weren't delivering "impossible-to-get-in-China" archaeological journals, they gave him a stern lecture and stopped the deliveries.

ZHANG BA: What kind of smut?

ZHANG CHI: Just naked women. You want to see an example? I can get you...

ZHANG BA (*Looking at SONG JIERU.*) Never mind. The border guards are more interested in large packages than small, so it shouldn't be a problem. William, I'll do my best.

WILLIAM: Thank you.

ZHANG BA: Don't tell your sister.

SONG JIERU laughs, goes back into the kitchen.

WILLIAM: That's right, Young Zhang, you and I need to toast my latest discovery. (*WILLIAM glances at ZHANG CHI slyly, and then gets two glasses and a bottle from the cupboard. He pours two generous drinks and invites ZHANG BA over to the table.*) There is no other site like Fenggang, where the dead and the living met as they slept. Fenggang should be preserved because it reveals the beginning of your civilization. Your ancestors have been buried for ten thousand years and now you've been reunited. Few others have the opportunity to explore their origins; you are truly fortunate.

ZHANG BA (*Touching the reconstructed pot.*) I remember when I was a child, when a child died they put him in a covered jar, which they placed at the head of an adult's grave. And you say they were doing this ten thousand years ago? But not exactly, right? You said they buried the dead in the house? Wouldn't that be like living on a graveyard?

WILLIAM: Cheers!

ZHANG CHI: William!

WILLIAM ignores ZHANG CHI and downs the drink in one shot. SONG JIERU comes in.

SONG JIERU: Zhang Chi, lunch is ready. Have William eat.

ZHANG CHI: William, go have your lunch.

WILLIAM: These past few days have been some of the happiest in my life. Thank you. (*WILLIAM exits.*)

ZHANG CHI: Dad, Jieru, I have to tell you something. About Fenggang. The Ministry of Culture has already approved closing the site to development. They asked several experts to review our request and initial findings. This morning those experts announced that excavating the site had great value. I didn't know you were interested in the site.

ZHANG BA: But Chinese people don't live on graveyards! We live as far away from them as possible.

ZHANG CHI: Anyway, you won't be able to build on the site.

SONG JIERU: The Ministry of National Land Use sold us that piece of land.

ZHANG CHI: Then you'll just have to take the hit. What's more, according to the laws protecting cultural relics, the owner of a site that has been designated for preservation has to contribute to the costs of excavation...

SONG JIERU: Do you have any idea how much it cost us to purchase that piece of land? We're not going to build a museum there. You did this deliberately, didn't you?

ZHANG CHI finally realizes how SONG JIERU and ZHANG BA have been taking his announcement.

ZHANG BA: Did you do it for William?

ZHANG CHI nods.

ZHANG BA: Jieru, we have the money and it's a family matter. I owe William's family a debt of gratitude. The year your uncle and I were orphaned, it was William's father who took us in. William taught us to read. And now William is dying. Let's just say, Zhang Chi is repaying a debt that the family owes William's.

SONG JIERU: William, William, it's always William. I don't understand, who's the father here? You or that person in the other room?

ZHANG BA: Jieru!

SONG JIERU: I won't shut up. As long as I'm married to Zhang Chi, I have the right to speak about family matters. Zhang Chi, answer me, is William your real father?

ZHANG CHI: Couldn't you ask a more intellectually challenging question?

SONG JIERU: I'm asking you, whose idea was it to go to the Ministry of Culture?

ZHANG CHI: William's.

SONG JIERU: Do you support his claim to preserve the site for the dead or our claim to develop it for the living?

ZHANG CHI: That's a good question.

SONG JIERU: Don't dodge the issue. Whose side are you on? Or is it that you don't even know?

ZHANG CHI: I don't know.

SONG JIERU: You don't know? You haven't made up your own mind in thirty-one years. Do you still need a mother to tell you to brush your teeth after meals? Is this indecision the stuff your art is made of? Grow up and decide: whose side are you on?

ZHANG CHI: You're absolutely right. Maybe because my mother died so early, I never learned to make up my own mind. But Confucius taught that at thirty we "stand up straight", and I'm thirty-one, which means I should be acting like an adult. (*ZHANG CHI goes over and hugs SONG JIERU.*) Thank you, Mommy. I promise I will brush my teeth every day.

SONG JIERU (*Speaking TO ZHANG BA.*) This is your responsibility.

ZHANG BA: Zhang Chi, do think everything is a joke? Your wife is correct. You have to decide. Especially now.

ZHANG CHI: What's special about now?

ZHANG BA: It's not just your future.

ZHANG CHI: You want to force the issue? Fine. Bring your latest baby doll to me.

SONG JIERU hands the doll to ZHANG CHI, who has picked up the reconstructed pot.

ZHANG CHI: You want me to choose between the dead and the... *(ZHANG CHI looks at the doll, puts the pot back on the table and then pats the doll, which says, "I love you, too.")* You're right, no there's no contest. I'll take the living doll to keep me company. I am truly, truly grateful to the two of you.

A silence.

ZHANG BA: Son, those dolls travel across the ocean, remitting dollars and pounds to families at home. Can you?

ZHANG CHI: No. Absolutely not. No. Look, my hands are shaking. I get nervous sitting here all day, where would I find the stamina to become migrant labor just so my family could spend dollars and pounds in China? I'm not rich, but it doesn't mean I don't care. Well, that's said. I'm going to steam myself. If there's nothing else, the two of you can see yourselves out. *(ZHANG CHI walks toward the sauna, as he enters, he turns back and sees ZHANG BA staring at him.)* Dad, would you like to join me?

ZHANG CHI smiles and closes the sauna door. SONG JIERU marches over and opens it. ZHANG CHI speaks offstage.

ZHANG CHI: I'm undressing. I mean everything.

SONG JIE: Strip! Maybe I'll faint.

ZHANG CHI: You're letting the steam escape.

After a silence, ZHANG CHI finally comes out.

SONG JIERU: Who do you think you are?

ZHANG CHI: Fifty years ago, my father worked in William's family's kitchen. Now I'm working in their kitchen. I don't think taking my father's place

is an affront to family honor. Dad, do you think I've embarrassed the family?

SONG JIERU: Are you done yet?

ZHANG CHI: Or maybe, you'd be satisfied if I joined the revolution. Dad, are there any rural uprisings taking place? I'll sign up to help protect the people's harvest from capitalist running dogs.

ZHANG BA: Zhang Chi, why do you think everyone in the family works hard? The money we earn is yours, too. But you don't see it that way. You're not just anybody's son.

ZHANG CHI: Is that so? That's why William and I are living below the poverty line?

WILLIAM comes out carrying his glass.

WILLIAM: Zhang Chi, you really outdid yourself today.

ZHANG CHI: You'll have to thank Song Jieru.

WILLIAM (*Bowing to SONG JIERU.*) Are we going to eat this well everyday from now on?

ZHANG CHI: As long as the cost of living keeps going down.

WILLIAM: Then I think I'll drink to deflation.

WILLIAM takes the bottle and exits with a flourish.

ZHANG BA: Are you two really having money problems?

ZHANG CHI: William invested a portion of his life savings in the Fenggang project, but he didn't calculate the cost of paybacks. So now we're living on just under 40 yuan a day. I've even started translating things I can't bring myself to read in order to supplement his pension.

ZHANG BA: Why didn't you say something? William is my friend, too.

ZHANG CHI: Right, you met in his family kitchen.

ZHANG BA: Whatever the circumstances, I wouldn't stand by and watch the two of you suffer. But you didn't tell me.

ZHANG CHI: Maybe it's just that all your money makes us poor folk feel even dirtier; we're afraid to come too close.

SONG JIERU: Dad, it's not a crime to have money. Why do you keep begging him to take your place? Can't you give it to someone else? (*SONG JIERU realizes she's said too much.*)

ZHANG JIN enters.

ZHANG JIN: What's going on? Dad, Jieru, didn't the two of you realize my older brother has been unhappy? And still you came over to yell at him. Chi, how's William?

ZHANG CHI: He's eating.

ZHANG JIN: I came with good news.

SONG JIERU: We can always count on you for good news.

ZHANG JIN: It really is good news. Jieru, maybe you don't understand how kind-hearted my brother is, so you haven't noticed the toll that William's illness has taken on him. Anyway, I have long suspected that in today's environment and with the proper incentive even a doctor's professional ethics might bend a little, so I took William's results to an old and respected doctor for a second opinion. And guess what? He said that William was suffering from ailments common to all old people, but not from cancer. Chi, you don't have to worry.

ZHANG CHI: You came to comfort me?

ZHANG JIN: When have I ever lied to you? We're a family that tells each other the truth, no matter what. What did mom say before she died? Once family members start lying to each other, they're no longer a family.

SONG JIERU: Of course, when either the truth or a lie will get the same result, why bother lying?

WILLIAM sticks his head in and, seeing ZHANG JIN, he rushes over to give her a vigorous hug.

WILLIAM: Princess.

ZHANG JIN: William, you look even better than the last time I saw you.

WILLIAM: And you know I'd be even better with more wine and women to keep me warm.

ZHANG JIN: There's an old Chinese saying, "a clean heart and no desires keep a person healthy".

WILLIAM: I know. Your brother is my inspiration; look how healthy he is. Princess, what good news did you bring me today?

ZHANG JIN: The weather report for today is clear skies and pleasant breezes.

WILLIAM: That calls for a drink!

ZHANG CHI: William!

ZHANG BA: Let him drink already. I want a drink, too. William, let's drink to each other's health.

SONG JIERU: I'll join that toast. *(SONG JIERU gets two more glasses and pours. Then she proposes a toast.)* William, long life. *(SONG JIERU finishes her glass in one shot. Then she offers the glass to ZHANG JIN.)* Do you want to drink to William's health?

ZHANG JIN: I can't really drink, but William, you can give me a kiss.

ZHANG JIN walks over and lightly kisses WILLIAM, who waits for a second, but ZHANG JIN has already returned to her place.

WILLIAM: Obviously, an old fart can't be too greedy. Zhang Chi, this time I really promise to finish fertilizing the plants. *(On his way out.)* It's nice to see you all together today.

ZHANG JIN: It's been too long since we've all been together, don't you think, Jieru?

SONG JIERU: The two families, yes.

ZHANG BA: Jin-jin, is it true about William?

ZHANG JIN: If you don't believe me, check it out for yourselves.

ZHANG JIN hands an envelop to ZHANG CHI.

ZHANG CHI: It's true! (*ZHANG CHI hands the report to his father.*) William isn't going to die, thank Heaven.

ZHANG JIN: Chi, you should thank me.

ZHANG CHI pats his sister's arm.

ZHANG CHI (*Pulling out another medical report.*) So Jieru, what's the meaning of this report?

SONG JIERU: If William really were a Paleolithic remnant, he wouldn't need all this. Do you really mean to tell me that none of you saw that he gets out of breath walking to and from the garden? He's going to die. Soon.

ZHANG BA: Everyone dies, but we don't wish for their deaths.

SONG JIERU grabs the medical report out of ZHANG CHI's hands and rips it up.

SONG JIERU: Yes, but some people's lives aren't as valued as the dead's, especially when they have to work themselves to death for those who don't know how to live.

SONG JIERU throws the doll on the floor and storms out.

ZHANG JIN (*Knowingly.*) Why is Jieru in such a bad mood today?

ZHANG BA: Tonight I'm going to treat everyone to dinner at Panxi. Eight o'clock. Chi, you bring William to the restaurant and we'll celebrate his success. I'll also invite Department Head Zhao from the Ministry of Culture.

ZHANG CHI: What about Jieru? She's not going to want to see Zhao Shouhai.

ZHANG BA: Leave her out of this. She doesn't want to see William either.

ZHANG CHI: You really care for William?

ZHANG BA: You have to ask. William and I are older friends than the two of you.

ZHANG CHI: If you want to... if...

ZHANG BA: I want to give the two of you enough money so you won't keep suffering like this. I can't stand it.

ZHANG CHI: Dad, I'm not asking you for money! I'm saying that if...you said that our family owes William's a debt of gratitude... Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

ZHANG BA: I'll think about it.

ZHANG CHI: Good. This way William won't die as quickly.

ZHANG BA: William isn't going to die as soon as we thought anyway. This is very good news. But you have to consider my offer. So it's decided, we'll meet tonight for dinner.

ZHANG CHI: Tonight.

ZHANG BA and ZHANG JIN exit.

Scene 3

ZHANG CHI looks at the doll on the floor, picks it up and places it on the table. He makes the doll speak. Since he learned that WILLIAM's condition isn't as critical as he thought, ZHANG CHI is noticeably excited. Unnoticed by ZHANG CHI, WILLIAM enters, straightening himself before speaking.

WILLIAM: Zhang Chi, are we friends? Good friends?

ZHANG CHI: Why ask that? Do you think I haven't been a good friend? Could a poor, old, and stubborn colonial like you have any other friends?

WILLIAM: Why did your family come today?

ZHANG CHI: To see you.

WILLIAM: Song Jieru came to see me?

ZHANG CHI: You and she are friends, why wouldn't she come?

WILLIAM: You aren't a friend. You never tell me the truth. I went into the hospital for tests because I've been sick for a long time now. But you didn't tell me the results. You don't trust me. You don't have the right to conceal this truth from me; my life is mine. I want to have the chance to arrange the last days of my life, to enjoy this last opportunity. You can't take that from me. You can't lie to me anymore. What you've done is wrong. It was unethical. Unethical. If you think I'm a pain in the ass, you can leave now. Go. Take your things and go. I don't need this kind of friendship. *(This speech has taken its toll on WILLIAM and by the end, he's gasping for air and red in the face.)*

ZHANG CHI: William, William.

WILLIAM: Just leave me alone.

ZHANG CHI: I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I didn't want to believe it. I don't want you to die. You are closer to me than anyone else; you are my family.

WILLIAM: Wrong. The people who just left are your family.

ZHANG CHI: In another world. We belong to this world. In this world, I only have you and you only have me. Family.

WILLIAM: Wrong again. I have a daughter, admittedly off-the-wall strange, but a daughter.

ZHANG CHI: But here, in China, we rely on each other. Didn't you once say that we fell for each other as quickly as young lovers?

WILLIAM: Me? Impossible. I'm not filling my last days with a homosexual fling. Another lifetime, perhaps.

ZHANG CHI: William, believe me. I'm not lying to you. You really are okay. My father invited you to dinner tonight to celebrate your success and

your health. If you don't believe me, take this medical report (*noticing it's ripped*)...to any doctor and ask. This w..is your medical report. Thank the god who protects old colonial friends. (*ZHANG CHI helps WILLIAM over to the bed.*) Do you need oxygen?

WILLIAM shakes his head no.

ZHANG CHI: Good, then just lie down and rest.

WILLIAM sits up.

ZHANG CHI: What's wrong? Do you need anything? Something to drink?

WILLIAM: Why didn't you fight with me? That's right, you're Chinese. Polite, patient, a gentleman. It doesn't matter how unhappy you are, you're not going to loose control of your emotions, ah, my Chinese friend. What aren't you telling me? How beautifully you've hidden the truth from me, from each other... They came to pressure you into going home, didn't they? They told you there's no future in living with me. Tell me what's bothering you; let me help you. All you feel for me is pity, and when I need something you humor me. Thank you, merciful angel.

WILLIAM lies down and turns away from ZHANG CHI. ZHANG CHI sits for a bit looking at him. When ZHANG CHI moves to stand up, WILLIAM grabs his arm.

WILLIAM: I'm sorry. That wasn't fair. You have been a good friend. I am grateful. But I want to do something for you. You're a good person. Too lonely and too isolated, but good.

ZHANG CHI: And useless.

WILLIAM: Sit with me for a while. Don't worry, I'll keep you so busy, no one will be able to call you useless. That I can do. (*WILLIAM takes a few breathes from the oxygen tank before speaking.*) When I first met you, you were even more anxious than you are today. If I had blown up like this a few years ago, you really would have left me.

ZHANG CHI: That's because I was completely lost at the time. Frightened by everything, but especially too scared to think clearly. More cautious than a rat.

WILLIAM: And now?

ZHANG CHI: At least I'm not afraid of you. William, why did you let me stay with you?

WILLIAM: Isn't it obvious? I kick you in the ass to keep you moving, and then when I pause, you return the favor. We're both running away, but because neither of us is faster than the other, you think this mad race counts for intimacy. I'm joking. But I've been running for a long, long time. When I left England to come back to China, my daughter asked me if I wasn't tired from all this running away. Now at least I know why I'm running.

ZHANG CHI: To get away from yourself? Or to get closer?

WILLIAM: Both. Zhang Chi, I know that I can't run anymore. We won't be together much longer and then you'll have to run this race alone.

ZHANG CHI (*Silent before speaking.*) But you give me something no one else can.

WILLIAM: What? A kick in the ass?

ZHANG CHI: Calm. You make me believe I really can start again, anytime.

WILLIAM (*Chuckling.*) Why don't you just say, that you're never ready to start. Like that poem by Robert Frost "The Road Not Taken".

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

ZHANG CHI picks a volume from the shelf and turns to the poem.

ZHANG CHI: Why do you always recite the last stanza? There are three others.

WILLIAM: That's the heart of the matter. How is it translated in that book of yours?

Crossroads

ZHANG CHI: Many years later, I'll sigh and tell this story: I stood at the crossroads of a deep forest, and decided to follow the road that few others took as far as I could. That is all.

WILLIAM: A travesty! What fool translated this poem?

ZHANG CHI: I did.

WILLIAM: It's a translation that makes me look at you in a whole new way.

ZHANG CHI: William, does every Old Ghost intentionally mystify what is actually quite simple? I think that Frost liked to trick people as much as you do. In the past, when you came to the crossroads, didn't you want to take both? Frost admits as much in the first stanza. It's only because he couldn't take both roads that he finally chose one, but at the time, he couldn't see any real difference between the two. Why then in the last stanza does he rewrite the inevitability of incompleteness as an example of free will and moral choice? Isn't this just how old people convince themselves that they haven't lived in vain; even when they're dying, they're still trying to keep up appearances?

WILLIAM: And you young people don't even know when you've come to a crossroads. You think you've run into a dead end, don't you?

ZHANG CHI: A draw. Again.

ZHANG CHI and WILLIAM shake hands and smile. However, WILLIAM doesn't let go, just grips tighter and tighter.

ZHANG CHI: What do you want? A drink? This is the last one today.

WILLIAM: God bless you.

ZHANG CHI goes to pour their drinks. When he returns to the bed, WILLIAM has already died.

End Act One

If there is an intermission, it follows Act One.

Act Two

Time: Christmas season, five years later.

Place: WILLIAM'S apartment.

WILLIAM'S apartment has been transformed into a children's playroom. Several low tables and chairs are in the middle of the room. More chairs are stacked against the wall. To the side is a sculpture that has been made out of building blocks. There are several chests for toys. The shelves that once held pottery are now filled with children's books. Colorful education posters, including posters of food groups and the animal kingdom have been stuck to the walls. They are all hand painted. Most teach the names of different nouns and activities in English and Chinese. In preparation for Christmas, the room has been over-decorated with bright decorations, including a tree, lights, ribbons, and wrapped presents. On the CD player, a woman sings children's songs in English and Chinese. The overall effect is one of unintended jumbling.

ZHANG CHI is setting the children's table. He is wearing red Santa pants, his red coat, hat and white beard are laying on one of the chairs next to the walls. After finishing the table, ZHANG CHI counts the places. There aren't enough and he goes into the kitchen. The apartment bell rings.

ZHANG CHI (Offstage.) Just a minute...I'm almost ready.

ZHANG CHI rushes across the stage and puts on his coat, hat and beard. He suddenly remembers that there aren't enough place settings and runs back toward the kitchen. Just then SONG JIERU enters. ZHANG CHI recognizes her, but SONG JIERU doesn't recognize him.

SONG JIERU (Holding a key in her hand.) Excuse me, I must have entered the wrong room. But this key is the right key. Strange. Anyway, my ex-husband used to live here. We divorced five years ago and I thought he was still here... So, don't worry about me coming back. I'll just leave this key with you. (SONG JIERU hands the key to ZHANG CHI, who is still standing in shock.) Again, I'm very, very sorry.

SONG JIERU turns to leave, but is unable to resist looking around at the room.

Crossroads

ZHANG CHI: You don't want a closer look? It's changed a lot five years.

SONG JIERU (*Turning back toward ZHANG CHI.*) But the voice hasn't changed.

ZHANG CHI (*Excitedly.*) What are you doing here?!

SONG JIE: I'm still not welcome?

ZHANG CHI: No, of course not. I just wasn't expecting...You've changed.
Completely different.

SONG JIERU: Just my hair.

ZHANG CHI: No, your demeanor. You're unruffled. You barge into a stranger's house and remain completely unaffected.

SONG JIERU: So after... I didn't recognize you. Why are you wearing...this?
At home? Or no, it's a nursery school?

ZHANG CHI (*Taking off his hat and beard.*) If I recruit another twelve, I'll have two dozen.

SONG JIERU: Weren't you the one who wanted peace and quiet? (*SONG JIERU looks around the room and shakes her head in disbelief.*) Twelve children?! What were you thinking?

ZHANG CHI: I wasn't. It's their Auntie Zhang's idea.

SONG JIERU: Oh. You have a new friend.

ZHANG CHI: And thus so much change in only five years.

SONG JIERU: A new life. But it's the same old apartment.

ZHANG CHI: Are you going to sit down? Or is someone waiting for you?

SONG JIERU: No. I haven't had your luck in finding new friends.

ZHANG CHI: I'll get you a bigger chair.

SONG JIERU: I couldn't sit still.

ZHANG CHI: How are you? Still making toys?

SONG JIERU: Yes. We've actually gotten quite large. Some friends and I started a new company and the shares have already gone public. We produce for both domestic and foreign markets. You've probably got some of our stuff. *(SONG JIERU goes over to the building block sculpture and picks up a couple blocks.)* These are ours. *(SONG JIERU replaces the building blocks. She looks around the room again, unable to digest the difference. SONG JIERU finally sits on a large toy chest.)* She studied preschool education?

ZHANG CHI: Who?

SONG JIERU: Your friend.

ZHANG CHI: She didn't go to college. You have a master's.

SONG JIERU: Younger than you?

ZHANG CHI: Twenty.

SONG JIERU: She's twenty years younger than you?

ZHANG CHI: She's twenty.

SONG JIERU: Is she pretty?

ZHANG CHI: You can see for yourself. They should be back now.

SONG JIERU: Where did they go?

ZHANG CHI: Every morning they go to the park, while I prepare lunch. That's the division of labor.

SONG JIERU: You really have changed.

ZHANG CHI: More attractive?

SONG JIERU: More unexpected. I always thought you weren't interested in pretty girls. You liked complicated, experienced, slightly used women. Yes? You found me bland, unstimulating, and way too respectable. Right?

ZHANG CHI: Maybe I've matured.

SONG JIERU: Enough to take advantage of young girls. That's something.

ZHANG CHI: Is that a compliment?

SONG JIERU: Your defenses haven't changed either.

ZHANG CHI: Were you just in the neighborhood, or are you on business?

SONG JIERU: Neither. I came here on purpose.

ZHANG CHI: Not to see me?

SONG JIERU: No, you're not that important. Your father wrote me a letter asking me to come.

ZHANG CHI: I figured I had overestimated my charm. But even so, I'm happy to see you.

SONG JIERU: What's wrong with your father?

ZHANG CHI: Him? He's not sick. Yesterday, the evening news broadcast a story about him donating money to flood victims.

SONG JIERU: In his letter, he said he wanted to see me before he died.

ZHANG CHI: He's always saying he's going to die. It's as if death is some great honor that needs to be flaunted.

SONG JIERU: I think William's death frightened him because there was no warning. Suddenly, he was gone. I still remember that day. He had planted Belgium peonies and wanted you to get some horseshit to fertilize them. In the end, you went to the botanical garden and bought him duck shit. I can still smell that rancid odor.

ZHANG CHI: William's sickness was always serious. My father doesn't even catch colds. He'll probably outlast me.

SONG JIERU: Then I don't understand why he wrote to me. (*SONG JIERU reaches into her purse.*) I remembered to bring it.

ZHANG CHI: He really wrote you a letter? Hm. You know, all these years, except to borrow money and sign his will, I don't think he's written a single character. He even paid someone to ghostwrite his memoirs.

SONG JIERU (*Handing over the letter.*) Look, it's his handwriting.

ZHANG CHI: Indeed. You should keep it in a safe place. He wrote me a letter over twenty years ago, when I was a junior at college. He wrote to tell me that my mother had died, been buried, and there was no need for me to come home. That was my one letter. You know, I think my father truly cares for you. You may be the one person who ever touched his heart. And if you returned the feeling, he would definitely marry you. After all, you're single, he's still single...

SONG JIERU: I'm not so desperate that I need my ex to play matchmaker. You think no one else wants me?

ZHANG CHI (*Explaining.*) I was just saying my father likes you. That's all. Why would someone like you need someone like me as her matchmaker? You're sensuous, charming...

SONG JIERU: Still nothing on you. You're sleeping with a twenty-year old. Was she a virgin?

ZHANG CHI: You know better than anyone I'm not into that.

SONG JIERU: What's that supposed to mean? You were my first.

ZHANG CHI: Is that your biggest regret?

SONG JIERU: And now I'm wondering if I'll live to regret another decision.

ZHANG CHI: What?

SONG JIERU: I've decided not to become your stepmother.

ZHANG CHI: Do you want me to call you 'mom'?

SONG JIERU: Why else would I marry your father? Money? The one thing I have absolutely no need of is more money. Sex? Your father isn't a great

choice as a bedmate. My standards are higher than they were. I used to wait until I had fallen in love with a man before I slept with him.

ZHANG CHI: And now?

SONG JIERU: He has to love me.

ZHANG CHI: Maybe I'm just a bumpkin, but I've heard that men are willing and quite able to tell a woman they love her, if that's all it takes to get in her bed.

SONG JIERU: Of course it's easy to say. I remember one guy, who panted after me, claiming that no one on the planet loved me more than him. I said I was truly honored, but how could I be sure of him? So I told him to place a half-page advertisement in the daily paper, asking if in fact there was anyone on the planet who loved me more. The ad had to run for one month. His picture would be on one side of the ad and any information about his competition could be placed on the other side. If no one came forward, that would prove the truth of his claim.

ZHANG CHI: Half a page for a full month? That's a lot of money. We wanted to place an ad for a teacher's helper, but once we heard the price, we didn't.

SONG JIERU: I'd have paid for the ad. I wanted to know how serious he was. I was willing to pay. All he had to do was show his face.

ZHANG CHI: But...

SONG JIERU: He hasn't spoken to me since.

ZHANG CHI: He thought you were playing games with him.

SONG JIERU: I was dead earnest. I laid my cards on the table. After which, he told everyone I was psychologically unstable.

ZHANG CHI: Only an idiot would turn himself into a laughingstock.

SONG JIERU: Exactly. Only an idiot would dare risk everything in love. You can't fake that kind of idiocy. It has to be real.

ZHANG CHI: Your standards have risen tremendously.

SONG JIERU: They serve me well.

ZHANG CHI: Of course, it's none of my business, but are you really keeping yourself pure?

SONG JIERU: What do you think?

ZHANG CHI (*Looking at her.*) That you're joking. You wouldn't fall for an idiot. Even if he wasn't as smart as you, he couldn't be as stupid as you just described.

SONG JIERU: Smart people have bitter fates. I'm the perfect example.

ZHANG CHI: You have a bitter fate? Who'd believe it?

SONG JIERU: My heart is bitter. And there's more than bitterness. It hurts. The pain wakes me up in the middle of night. I have a recurring nightmare, where a bug eats away at the core of a great big beautiful apple until only the shiny shell remains.

ZHANG CHI: I never thought of you as an apple.

SONG JIERU: True enough. I never tempted you.

ZHANG CHI: No, you intrigued me. Why were you so healthy, so perfect, so flawless? If we're using food metaphors, you're more of a ... vitamin.

SONG JIERU: You might as well call me an X-ray. It's even less flavorful and exciting.

ZHANG CHI: Exactly. When someone is with you, every bone, organ, and sickness is revealed; there's no protective shield.

SONG JIERU: Are you being sarcastic?

ZHANG CHI: No. I'm complimenting you. I hardly ever rate anyone this high. You have incredible insight into people.

SONG JIERU: Then why did I marry you?

ZHANG CHI: A necessary step in the process. I was a test product. When you divorced me you demonstrated the exceptional precision of your judgment making apparatus. It's impossible not to admire it.

SONG JIERU: Are you implying that I dumped you? I wish I had.

ZHANG CHI (*Deliberately changing the topic.*) You mentioned dreaming about a bug. What kind of bug was it?

SONG JIERU: It seemed...I couldn't see it, but it was a bug. You can feel it inside you, as you get eaten one bite at a time. Here and then there...all that remains are things that look like light grey balls of cotton fiber, kind of like the dust bunnies under your bed. And as soon as you touch them they crumble into dust.

An alarm goes off in the kitchen. ZHANG CHI goes in. Caught in her memory, SONG JIERU keeps talking.

SONG JIERU: Everything is drifting. That's how I've lived these past few years. It doesn't matter if I'm negotiating a business deal or touring a foreign country, it's like not having a self. I'm not nervous, not excited. It's all drifting...it's pathetic! Going through meaningless motions...

ZHANG CHI (*ZHANG CHI enters, carrying a freshly baked cake.*) One of the monsters is having a birthday and screamed for a cake. I learned my craft from William. Want to try a piece?

SONG JIERU: Let's leave it for the kid.

ZHANG CHI: If you're complaining that nothing you have is anything you want, why don't you do something else?

SONG JIERU: That's not what I'm saying. But how to say it? It's...it's like there's something wrong with me. Why do the men I love run away? I was with you the longest of any...I can't keep the people I love with me...it's like I've been cursed. I'm not proud anymore. All I want is to find someone who loves me and spend my life with him. I've retreated, or maybe I've just accepted that this is it. Maybe it's because I'm older. Before, if this was all I wanted, I couldn't have born it. (*Suddenly stopping.*) Hey, while you've been listening to me blather, it's delayed your lunch preparations. You are different. You're taking care of twelve,

maybe thirteen people. Have you really become someone who takes care of others? It's too big a change.

ZHANG CHI: I changed when I was with William.

SONG JIERU: I'm meeting with your father this afternoon, so I can help if you need it.

ZHANG CHI: No thanks. Everything's ready.

SONG JIERU: I came early with the thought that if you were here, we could have lunch together.

ZHANG CHI: We still can. As soon as they come, we can go. And for that matter, why haven't they come yet?

SONG JIERU: Call and ask.

ZHANG CHI goes into another room to call. SONG JIERU examines the children's books on the shelves until ZHANG CHI returns.

ZHANG CHI: She forgot her cell phone.

SONG JIERU: So we wait. Are you still writing poetry?

ZHANG CHI: Not for a long time.

SONG JIERU: Do you still paint?

ZHANG CHI (*Pointing to the posters on the walls.*) That's my work.

SONG JIERU: Can I ask you a question?

ZHANG CHI: Huh? (*Suddenly nervous and then forcing himself to relax.*) So we're back to our standard format. Should I strip? It would make things a bit more official.

SONG JIERU: Don't get nervous, I'm not going to put you on the spot.

ZHANG CHI: I'm not nervous. Ask.

SONG JIERU: Did you stay here because of that girl?

ZHANG CHI: Stay? Where would I have gone? I don't understand what you're asking...

SONG JIERU: I'm asking why you stayed here after William died. You never liked your family. I know that. So what? Maybe you wanted to be independent and not rely on them. But couldn't you have gone somewhere else and tested yourself? That's why I'm asking if it's because you fell in love with that girl that you stayed.

ZHANG CHI: I don't want to go anywhere. I didn't realize how fun it is to be with children.

SONG JIERU: You're here because you love children?

ZHANG CHI: There is no reason. Even without the kids or their teacher, I would still be hanging out here. I don't want to go anywhere. And I have even less desire to prove myself. I know who and what I am.

SONG JIERU: Got it. I was right. Five years ago I said that even if the Old Ghost died, his spirit would linger. Where have you hidden him?

ZHANG CHI: His spirit?

SONG JIERU: His ashes. I bet you put him in one of those pots he dug up and then placed him somewhere in the two of yours house.

ZHANG CHI: You really did predict it. Look. (*Points to the corner of one of the shelves, where the pot that William had reconstructed is nestled between piles of books.*) The rest of the ashes I buried at the Fenggang ruins. There's now a skyscraper there with glass walls and spotlights. Day and night it shines brilliantly. William never thought his gravestone would be so luxurious or such a landmark. I'm satisfied. He still lives with the living, which is the true value of a ruin. William can rest in peace.

SONG JIERU: But does anyone know he's there?

ZHANG CHI: He didn't yearn for that.

SONG JIERU: And you plan to spend your life in the same obscurity?

ZHANG CHI: What's wrong with that?

SONG JIERU: Sometimes I seriously question my perception. What did I see in you?

ZHANG CHI: There are times when that kind of perception should make you question yourself. Why does a man have to prove himself worthy, influential, and powerful? Look how ridiculous my father is, surrounded by a pack of lackeys and bimbos.

SONG JIERU: So your father struts a bit. But in today's world, it wasn't easy to become as successful as he has. He was an uneducated farmer. You can be proud of him. If you don't believe me, try walking one day in his shoes. You'd end up crawling. And it wouldn't be just from lack of training.

ZHANG CHI: Why don't you marry him?

SONG JIERU: How does that follow?

ZHANG CHI: Is it because you have a master's and he didn't graduate from elementary school? Or is it because you're from the city and he's from the country?

SONG JIERU: This has nothing to do with anything.

ZHANG CHI: Maybe it's because you used to be his daughter-in-law. But we've already been divorced five years.

SONG JIERU: How could your father and I even consider marriage? We were talking about you. How did the conversation turn to me?

ZHANG CHI: But you said that all you wanted was someone who loved you.

SONG JIERU: But he wouldn't be someone like your father.

ZHANG CHI: That's the point. You don't respect him.

SONG JIERU: You're speaking nonsense. Respecting someone and loving him are different.

ZHANG CHI: But if you don't respect someone, how can you love him?

SONG JIERU: When you truly love someone, you still can't let him go even if he's dog shit.

ZHANG CHI: Now who's speaking irrational nonsense?

SONG JIERU: Love is love. It's not logic.

ZHANG CHI: No. Everything has a logic. It's only that some of them are unconscious, so you don't realize it. You just said, "It wasn't easy to become as successful as he has. He was an uneducated farmer. You can be proud of him." It sounds like you're complimenting him, but actually your unconscious is telling you that he doesn't deserve your respect. Don't debate with me. I'm not saying this is a rational hypothesis, I'm telling you it's unconscious. I am too familiar with how deep this attitude goes. You want to shake yourself of it, but you can't, because it's branded onto you like cattle.

SONG JIERU: You wanted another father. So you pretended the Old Ghost was your father because you didn't want to recognize your real father. Maybe that's what was unconscious? (*Sudden realization.*) I wanted to ask you something, but didn't have the appropriate words, but now you've reminded me. Why did you always want to leave home? Leave a place where you were loved? Leave the sides of people who loved you? What kind of unconscious is that? Did you distrust their feelings for you? Or is it that you can't bear other people's love? I truly can't figure it out. Are you insensitive to it when other people are good to you?

ZHANG CHI: (*Chewing on a fingernail.*) I, I don't know... I'm not...in fact, I understand that...I have my issues, but...

SONG JIERU: What makes you tick? I used to hate you...but, now we're apart. Think of me as an old friend you can tell exactly what you think to. I'm sure a twenty-year old girl isn't interested in this question.

ZHANG CHI: But what practical use could that have for you?

SONG JIERU: I could die knowing what happened.

ZHANG CHI: You're judging me. Do you want me to confess my sins?

SONG JIERU (*Feeling hurt.*) Forget it. It's all over anyway. Pretend I didn't ask you anything. All right then. I wish you well, a happy New Year, and that everything works out for you. Have a good life with the new joy in your life. I'm going. Good bye. (*SONG JIERU gets up and walks to the door.*)

ZHANG CHI: You know what was most comfortable about being with William? He was him, I was me. Even if he hurt me, I could forgive him because he didn't do it deliberately. Or if he did, you knew that because of cultural difference, he had no way of knowing your weak spot. When I was with him, I didn't feel ashamed.

SONG JIERU (*Sarcastically.*) Shame is your weak spot? I lived with so many years and I hadn't figured it out.

ZHANG CHI: (*Seriously.*) I never got close to a woman, but without a woman I can't sleep.

SONG JIERU: (*Infuriated.*) Bullshit. The two years you lived with the Old Ghost, I was the one who lost sleep. You're trash. You're not willing to be a filial son. Not willing to be a somewhat loving husband. But willing to be an Old Ghost's servant. Your choices were unequivocal. Not willing to be loved, but willing to be humiliated. If that's not the definition of trash... You know why I finally made myself divorce you? It wasn't because you refused to take over your father's position as chair, in spite of how many years I labored for your family. I divorced you because even after the Old Ghost died, you still did everything possible to preserve the site at Fenggang. It was like his soul inhabited your body. It prevented you from seeing that you're living with us today, on this land. I won't pass judgment on the Old Ghost. Because he was a foreigner, he had his own baggage, and he had a right to his own dreams. But you? It's like you're not Chinese. Like you've forgotten that this is where your roots are. It's like...suddenly someone asks, 'Why am I using two sticks to eat?' when you know he's used chopsticks his whole life, and then plays innocent. That's when you want to slap his face. Do you understand what I'm feeling? You don't want to live with us, and then act like we owe you something. I get enraged thinking about it. We don't owe you anything; you wanted this life. You have the fate of a fucking slave. Do you still read literature? You're the kind of person Lu Xun criticized—every pore of your body oozes obsequious servility.

ZHANG CHI: Are you happy now? Or will slapping my face get it out of your system?

SONG JIERU: (*So excited she's started to tremble.*) Zhang Chi, you really are an asshole, a complete and utter asshole.

SONG JIERU starts to cry. ZHANG CHI approaches to comfort her.

SONG JIERU: Don't touch me. Don't come near me. (*SONG JIERU visibly forces herself to calm down.*) You hurt me. Cruelly. And I hate you. You cannibalize people and don't bother to spit out the bones. Don't come near me. I'll be fine in a minute. I've stuffed this for all these years. It just needed to come out. (*More quietly.*) But I didn't come here to yell at you.

ZHANG CHI: I know.

SONG JIERU: Before I came, I repeated to myself over and over, I'm just here to see you. I'll ask how you are and leave. We're divorced. We should part amiably, speak civilly, be kind to each other. (*Getting upset again.*) After all we were husband and wife...but I see this apartment...I see you... Maybe I shouldn't have come. I am going. I won't be seeing you again.

ZHANG CHI: I'm sorry. I...

The doorbell rings.

SONG JIERU (*Wiping her eyes.*) Is the bathroom were it was?

ZHANG CHI: Yes.

SONG JIERU (*Stopping at the door to the bathroom.*) I didn't come to yell at you.

ZHANG CHI: I know.

SONG JIERU exits. ZHANG CHI looks at the door, but instead of opening it walks to the door SONG JIERU exited.

ZHANG CHI: Jieru...

ZHANG CHI *doesn't know what to say. The doorbell rings again. He walks over to the door, slapping his face twice before opening it. ZHANG BA enters. ZHANG BA is dressed like a playboy.*

ZHANG BA: Where's my daughter-in-law?

ZHANG CHI: She left five years ago.

ZHANG BA: But returned a half hour ago.

ZHANG CHI: Your information is current.

ZHANG BA: Don't forget whose town this is!

ZHANG CHI (*Calling to Song Jieru in the bathroom.*) The person you came to see has arrived. Why don't you come out?

SONG JIERU *enters. She looks as if nothing has happened, showing the extent of her self-control.*

SONG JIERU: We were just talking about you, and here you are. Wow, how have you been taking care of yourself? You haven't aged at all.

ZHANG BA: It sounds like you're criticizing me, but I know that's not what you meant. But I really am an old fart who refuses to die. How are you? Even more elegant! No, the kids would call you really 'cool'.

SONG JIERU: Then you 'slay me'. Those sunglasses go well with the shape of your face.

ZHANG BA: I'm "playboy" from my head to my feet. People are saying that the older I get, the more garish I am, the older, the less decent. But I don't care. If it weren't to maintain neighborhood standards, I would have brought a "bunny" to meet you. I tell you...

ZHANG CHI: (*Interrupting*) Right now twelve little bunnies and their mother bunny are on their way here. They're not wearing sexy clothing, but each one pouts charmingly. I suggest that if the two of you want to discuss business, it might be better to find some place quieter.

ZHANG BA: You're actually being considerate. Thank you. However, I already sent your twelve little toys and your one big toy to McDonald's. They won't starve, so don't worry.

ZHANG CHI: Why are you being so generous today? This is the first time that the richest company in the neighborhood has donated anything to our poor nursery school. Hey, wait a minute. I want to make it clear, this is a free lunch? You're picking up the tab?

ZHANG BA: Rubbish. I said I invited them. Who invites someone to eat and then doesn't pay the bill?

ZHANG CHI: Then as you've condescended to honor this humble shack with your presence and invite me to eat, even if it is only to eat fast food garbage, I feel the great distinction that you have bestowed on both me and even this wretched hole. But you could have called. Why come all the way over here? You've outdone yourself. If I'm not mistaken, this is the first time in five years you've come over; I'm overwhelmed. Just let me change my clothes and I'll be ready to entertain such an important guest.

ZHANG BA: You've made your point. I didn't come to see you.

ZHANG CHI: (*ZHANG CHI steps out of character to analyze ZHANG BA'S explanation.*) Of course not. Am I that important?

ZHANG BA: I just needed to use your place.

ZHANG CHI: Of course you did. There really is no such thing as a free lunch.

ZHANG BA: So don't thank me for anything.

ZHANG CHI: Of course not. I never developed that particular habit.

ZHANG BA: What's wrong with you?

ZHANG CHI (*ZHANG CHI returns to character.*) What do you want?

ZHANG BA: Water. I'm parched. It's already December and it still feels like summer. I sweat the entire way here.

ZHANG CHI: Why didn't you take your new Hummer for a spin?

ZHANG CHI goes into the kitchen for a glass of water. He returns sometime during ZHANG BA and SONG JIERU'S conversation.

ZHANG BA: That would have been the same as announcing that I was here.

SONG JIERU: You're still hiding from Zhang Qin? Why not give the company to her and enjoy your retirement.

ZHANG BA: Have you seen her lately?

SONG JIERU: No.

ZHANG BA (*Pretending to smoke opium.*) She's taken a liking...

ZHANG CHI: Maybe you should check out the family genealogy to see if any of our ancestors smoked opium. Maybe she inherited that gene.

ZHANG BA: Not only one. She has every possible vice.

ZHANG CHI: History's a strange thing. Historic cycles aren't endless repetition, but branches, randomly thrown. One person inherits this trait, and another inherits that. For example, our ancestors fought in two opium wars. You inherited the warrior spirit, my sister inherited the predilection for opium, and I inherited the ability to enjoy others' misfortune.

SONG JIERU: You have to stop her! It's not a game; addictions kill.

ZHANG BA (*Waving his hand.*) Let's not talk about it.

A speaking alarm clock goes off, it says, "wake up, baby".

ZHANG CHI: It's time for the children's nap.

ZHANG BA (*Looking around the apartment with interest, including the books on the shelves.*) I haven't been here in five years...big changes.

ZHANG CHI: (*Sarcastically.*) Did you deliberately turn this place into a secret meeting place, saving it for the most critical discussions? If so, you're a great strategist.

ZHANG BA (*Chuckling.*) Your sister will never think of looking for me here.

ZHANG CHI: What I admire most about the two of you is that you can always turn the most unfavorable of circumstances to your own advantage. It's a kind of genius. Anyway, I bid you adieu. I'm off to enjoy my free lunch, earned at great cost.

ZHANG BA: You can stay. I'm not worried about you finding out. After all, we're still family.

ZHANG CHI: I worry.

ZHANG BA (*Seriously.*) I want you to stay.

ZHANG CHI: Don't start. My hands are already trembling, and we got rid of the sauna.

ZHANG BA: Apparently I'm not important enough. Jieru, ask him to stay. I needed someone close to witness today's business, but I couldn't think of anyone appropriate.

ZHANG CHI: Then can I go change? It's like I'm onstage in this red suit.

ZHANG BA: I don't care what you're wearing!

ZHANG CHI: I care.

ZHANG BA (*Issuing an order.*) You can't sit down?! All your swaying hurts my eyes.

ZHANG CHI: Hello everyone, come on. I am Santa Claus. Ho ho ho, merry Christmas. (*ZHANG CHI performs a comic dance, while singing 'Jingle Bells'.*)

ZHANG BA (*Abruptly.*) Sit down. Listen. Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm telling you to sit down. (*ZHANG CHI and ZHANG BA go still and look at each other. Zhang Chi breaks eye contact but he doesn't sit down.*) All right. You want me to beg. I'll beg. Please sit out of respect for me. You want me to kneel? Fine. I'll kneel.

ZHANG BA kneels. SONG JIERU immediately tries to pull him up, but the old man refuses. He cries. ZHANG CHI swears wordlessly. SONG JIERU gives the

glass to him to go get water. ZHANG CHI exits. SONG JIERU kneels beside ZHANG BA and hugs him, gently patting his back.

ZHANG BA: All I want is to get so sick that everyone worries about me. Takes care of me. (*Ssnorting, getting hold of himself.*) How did I father those two bastards? I'd be better off dead. I can't get sick, but I don't feel well.

SONG JIERU: (*Helping ZHANG BA up.*) Don't think like that. It's a blessing to be old and healthy. People who are sick all the time just disgust others. Jianhua's grandmother was bed-ridden for eight years, and who visited? You're just saying this because you're angry. Living well is more important than anything.

ZHANG BA (*Forcing a smile.*) You always understand me. (*ZHANG BA sits on one of the children's chairs. It's uncomfortable, so he moves the chair on top of the table and sits.*) I won't get sick. I'll just hang on and refuse to die. Let's see who gets upset then! I'm a farmer. And the only good thing about farmers is our tough fate. When you're tough, it doesn't matter how bitter your days are, you can still stand up.

ZHANG CHI (*Entering with water.*) Stop looking at me like that. I'll get chairs. (*ZHANG CHI brings over three folding chairs.*) Say whatever you have to say to me. I'm listening.

ZHANG BA: (*Bitter laugh.*) Listening? Right, you've listened your whole life. But who knows what you've heard.

ZHANG CHI (*Stepping into analytic mode.*) Correct. He has listened his whole life, listened just like this. Without protest, without action, becoming a child able to do whatever he is told to do.

ZHANG BA: Ever since you were little, this is how you've fought me. Making me so angry, I used driftwood to beat your legs.

ZHANG CHI: Whether a father teaches his child with or without violence, that teaching will be branded into the child's innocent flesh. In the end, what remains is indifference.

ZHANG BA: Forget it. It's not like you have to pretend you're filial. I won't pressure you any more. Do what you want. I'll cry for myself, get upset for myself. You can continue acting like a lukewarm, half dead hermaphrodite.

ZHANG CHI returns to character.

ZHANG CHI (*Furiously.*) Why is a son nervous when he sees his father? Why does a father want a nervous son? Why?

ZHANG BA: We won't get you dirty. Listen up, what happens today has nothing to do with you. All you have to do is witness. (*Getting angry as he speaks.*) Fuck, I really did choose the right person. If nothing really bothers you, and you really are undeterred, why not become a monk?

ZHANG CHI looks at ZHANG BA without speaking.

ZHANG BA: (*Speaking to SONG JIERU.*) You see? Again with the loser attitude.

SONG JIERU: How can someone who took a twenty year old's virginity be pure?

ZHANG BA: You didn't know? That piece of ass worked the street.

SONG JIERU (*Provoked.*) Zhang Chi, I swear, sometimes I think you bring home the riff raff just to piss me off. But thank God, we're not related any more.

ZHANG CHI looks at SONG JIERU and laughs softly.

ZHANG BA: Did you two ever tell those children's parents just what you plan to teach their daughters?

SONG JIERU: They're all girls? Christ. What on earth were you thinking? Get to a psychiatrist's.

ZHANG CHI still looks at them expressionlessly.

ZHANG BA: Let's not talk about him. Let's get on with our business.

ZHANG BA puts on a pair of reading glasses and pulls out a stack of papers from an inner coat pocket.

SONG JIERU: You're really something. Why write a letter that scared me to death? I came running as soon as I got it.

ZHANG BA: I'm dying. I wanted someone I trusted to handle my affairs.

SONG JIERU: Don't say that.

ZHANG BA: It's true. I can feel it. You've seen how I just start crying without cause; I've changed. I've gone soft here. I even cry watching the evening news. I didn't cry before. In the sixties during the famine, everyone tried crossing over to Hong Kong. Everyday at high tide, a corpse would be washed up. When people are starving, they can't swim across even this shallow bay. At the time, I was the head of the civil guard, so collecting the corpses was my responsibility. We dug a deep hole right there on the beach, throwing in however many bodies. Then we covered them with dirt and stones. I buried friends and even distant kin like that. I don't remember crying. I've always thought that human life isn't worth a dime. But these past years, I donate money and supplies wherever there's a flood or earthquake. And it's not because I'm worried about my reputation. I don't know any of them. My heart's gone soft!

ZHANG CHI (*As if waking up.*) It's now fashionable to eat vegetarian and recite sutras. Vegetarianism helps you lose weight. Reciting sutras tricks people. That's all that happens when people turn over a new leaf.

ZHANG BA: Are you referring to me?

ZHANG CHI: No, I'm answering the question you just asked. I haven't become a monk because I don't follow fashion *du jour*.

SONG JIERU: Give it a rest. You're part of the audience today, not the star.

ZHANG CHI: Ah, right. I'm merely an onlooker, but specially invited. Why did Lu Xun always criticize passive onlookers without considering that onlookers have to be asked, even forced to appear. That was the master's blind spot.

SONG JIERU (*With sudden realization.*) You're not comfortable watching? Feeling unnatural? Is...is it because you're in the audience? I'm beginning to understand your weakness.

ZHANG CHI: Don't act so conceited.

SONG JIERU: No. I'm surprised that what you actually want is for people to look at you. You want to be the center of attention. But why then are you always staging your dirty laundry?

ZHANG CHI: You think you can analyze me?

SONG JIERU: Let me try. Do you know what your most distinctive trait is? You have horrible stage fright, but when you should applaud someone's performance, you heckle.

ZHANG CHI: Your hypothesis is...

SONG JIERU: You figure it out. (*Returning to ZHANG BA.*) What do you need me to do?

ZHANG BA: I had a letter of intent written this morning and want to go over it with you. First, let me see that everything's in order...

ZHANG CHI (*Stopping ZHANG BA.*) Wait a minute. I'm sorry, but you see that your audience can't find his seat. You can raise the curtain again in a bit. (*To SONG JIERU.*) Are you saying that because I was jealous of you, I was cold to you. Is that your hypothesis about our relationship?

SONG JIERU: I waited – how long? – before you finally asked me what I think about our relationship.

ZHANG CHI: I never asked you?

SONG JIERU: I don't remember you asking. Maybe you asked yourself. Who knows?

ZHANG CHI: But that's your hypothesis, right? You secretly put out a chair and labeled it: for the shameless and petty person with a small heart, dark psyche, cowardly personality, and a mouth that shows no mercy. And now you want me to sit in it, right?

SONG JIERU: Hm. That was a pretty complete summary. I see that you have asked yourself.

ZHANG CHI: Of course, I've asked myself. But do you really think...

ZHANG BA: Son, don't get so upset. Knowing yourself is a virtue. It makes me realize that you have some good qualities.

ZHANG CHI: Did you two plan to come and gang up on me today?

SONG JIERU: Ai, look who's talking. You can't stand it when someone criticizes you. You should think long and hard about how that mouth of yours hurts others.

ZHANG CHI: Fine. I'll be quiet.

ZHANG BA: I don't understand what you mean by that. Have you retreated because a hero never admits defeat in public? Or is it because a gentleman never strikes a lady?

ZHANG CHI: Dad! When did your sarcasm become so acute?

ZHANG BA (*Chuckles.*) Hanging out with you I've learned a few things.

ZHANG CHI (*Bitter.*) Ah...

ZHANG BA: Son, just now you unintentionally called me 'Dad'. This is the first time in five years, you've called me that. I feel so much better. Could you do it again?

ZHANG CHI (*Reluctantly.*) Dad.

ZHANG BA (*Laughing stupidly.*) Son.

(*ZHANG BA goes over and punches ZHANG CHI'S arm.*)

ZHANG CHI: Dad, I have to go get changed. I can't take it any more.

ZHANG CHI exits. Enjoying the moment, ZHANG BA reads his letter of intent. In it, he offers to make SONG JIERU Vice President of his company. SONG JIERU is slightly hurt, and can't look at ZHANG BA. The reading is mimed, not spoken, and the content of the letter should be clear from the staging. In the quiet stage, one of the posters falls to the ground. SONG JIERU makes to tape it to the wall again, but doesn't.

Lights out.

Act Three

Act Three continues where Act Two left off. ZHANG CHI has changed clothes. SONG JIERU is taping pictures to the walls. ZHANG BA is reading his papers.

ZHANG CHI: It doesn't matter. If they fall, they fall.

SONG JIERU: It's an apple.

ZHANG CHI: Huh?

SONG JIERU: An apple fell.

ZHANG CHI: Definitely not because some bug ate it.

SONG JIERU: Do you know what wormy apples taste like?

ZHANG CHI: A little bitter.

SONG JIERU: The bitterness inside sweetness is even more bitter.

ZHANG CHI: Okay. Let's begin.

The doorbell rings. The person ringing the bell doesn't let up.

ZHANG BA: Are the kids back?

ZHANG CHI: Doesn't sound like them. Your shadow has arrived. When, out of the kindness of your heart, you treated the kids to McDonald's, it wasn't the wisest part of your plan to ditch our million-dollar baby. It leaked.

ZHANG CHI opens the door. ZHANG QIN enters. She's dressed in black leather and stiletto sandals. Her toenails are painted bright red, and she's wearing black lipstick with glitter. ZHANG QIN is both decadent and sexy.

ZHANG QIN: How come I wasn't invited to the first family reunion in five years?

ZHANG CHI: You're not the only one in the family caught by surprise.

ZHANG QIN: Then I'm the only one sad about it. Where's my seat?

ZHANG CHI (*ZHANG CHI brings his chair to ZHANG QIN.*) Please.

ZHANG QIN (*ZHANG QIN looks at the chair, then flops onto the floor.*) I'm more comfortable on the floor. Did I miss anything interesting?

ZHANG CHI: It hasn't started yet. After so much time, we had to update each other. And as you know, in our family that means someone gets ripped into. Fortunately for you, you came late. Don't worry.

ZHANG QIN (*ZHANG QIN appears convinced, takes off her shoes, and lies flat on the floor.*) These shoes exhaust me.

SONG JIERU: Qin, high heels aren't good for your back. I always wear flats.

ZHANG QIN: Thank you, but I exercise every night, and every part of my body. So I don't need a health consultant. Chi, what do you have to drink? Yesterday I discoed all night. I had just gone to bed when the phone rang to tell me that an important guest was coming today.

ZHANG CHI: You want coffee?

ZHANG QIN: Beer. I'm thirsty.

ZHANG CHI hands ZHANG QIN the beer at some point in her speech.

ZHANG QIN: Last night I ran into this guy. The Fujian Province kick boxing champion. And a captain in the military police. He looked like a donkey, dark skinned strong. Although his little eye slits were actually quite bright. I invited him to meet me a "True Colors" for a drink tonight.

ZHANG CHI: Well at least he's not a professional boxer.

ZHANG BA: It would be better for you if you did find someone who could take you on. Right now, who can control you?

ZHANG QIN: Father dear, you do actually worry about me. For that thought alone, I'll go one-on-one with him to see who's dominant. (*ZHANG QIN starts speaking languidly, but becomes more and more excited as she speaks. Her movements combine martial arts, akido, dance and love-making.*) A policeman. A captain. He slowly takes off his uniform,

revealing pimply arms, tendons, a dancing dragon tattooed on his chest. His gloves are swollen red, his black hair glistens. He presses closer to me, slowly, his face comes into focus, a crushed nose and two burning eyes. I feel a spark burning in my belly. I tell myself, he is an animal, a rapist, a cold-blooded killer. I stare at him to see what this killer's first move will be. Mother-fucker, Thai boxers kick and hit, using both feet and hands. (*panting*) he enters me. Cruel, wild, violent, no one stronger. Ahh, I can't resist the blows. That moment, the spark ignites. My enraged mouth opens, and I spit fire. The dragon also trembles fearfully. I extend my tongue, flaming, smooth as water, sweet, concealing a poisonous snake. The death thrust and he collapses like an avalanche. I kneel to better appreciate my prey. Nothing more than a softie, a newborn, lifting a shiny thumb, wet with mother's milk. I don't hesitate. I swallow him whole. I bark. I howl like a mother bear smelling honey after hibernating a long winter, or a wolf seeing a round, full moon. No sympathy, no fear, just this song. A free and happy song, and in the peaceful earth, whoever hears this song will cry. Howling...

SONG JIERU (*Clapping.*) A howl...brilliant.

ZHANG QIN: Chi, do you have anything to eat? I'm hungry. (*Still wired, ZHANG QIN collapses. Her responses are those of an addict.*)

ZHANG CHI: There's a birthday cake that will probably go uneaten.

SONG JIERU: A woman's bed is a boxing ring, is an arch of triumph, is our temple. Exquisite. Zhang Qin, you're more of a poet than your brother.

ZHANG QIN eats the cake with her hands, washing it down with beer. Only then is she able to calm down.

ZHANG BA: Poet? Ask if she does anything besides fool around with men. Everyday.

ZHANG QIN: I want to do something else, but I'm not allowed.

ZHANG CHI: If women's beds really are that dangerously divine, we men might as well castrate ourselves and call it a day. It'll save us from having to sing this one's praises, and having to beg for that one's mercy. You're performance standards are way too high.

SONG JIERU: It was men who first turned it into a battleground, so women have the right to choose a duel to the death.

ZHANG QIN: When did you become a feminist?

SONG JIERU: I really wish I were.

ZHANG CHI: Dad, it looks like you found the right adversary in this negotiation.

ZHANG QIN: Negotiating what?

ZHANG BA: Nothing to do with you.

ZHANG CHI: We're onlookers. And whether you were specially invited or came of your own accord, the rule for onlookers is look don't speak.

ZHANG QIN: Who made the rules?

ZHANG BA: This is between me and your sister-in-law. Don't interrupt.

ZHANG QIN: My sister-in-law? Which one? If there's another one around, why doesn't she join us?

ZHANG CHI: Watch your language. 'Which one?' Your mind's shot. There isn't any.

ZHANG QIN: Ai, what kind of person takes off his pants and then pretends otherwise?

ZHANG CHI: There's no sister-in-law here. And don't any of you go thinking to force me into a marriage.

ZHANG QIN: I don't care if you admit it or not. Any of the women you've fucked, I call sister-in-law. Middle-aged or underage virgins. You tell me, if I don't call them 'sister-in-law', how should I address them? I can't be calling them 'stupid fuck'.

SONG JIERU: That might be the most appropriate term. But then again, it doesn't matter how you address them, what matters is what's in your heart.

ZHANG QIN: Dad, did you hear that? It's what's in your heart that matters. Maybe you should be a little more egalitarian. After all, all of us have been fucked, so the correct attitude is to treat everyone fairly.

ZHANG BA: I actually want to talk about serious matters with you, but just look at you.

ZHANG QIN: Ah, I've finally seen the day. A man who doesn't want to do me, but wants to talk with me about serious matters. Okay, talk. I can follow the conversation. Isn't it just about the company's liquid and fixed assets, real estate and factories, stocks and futures, and the odd creditor's rights? What's so great about that, that you treat yourself like the god of wealth?

ZHANG BA: Used to be it would have been strange, if I didn't beat you for that.

ZHANG QIN: This is now, and things are different. You're a man of position and standing, who's started to worry about his influence. Hey, you still don't know? The farmer standing before you has just been appointed to a government post; he's now a member of the Municipal People's Political Consultative Conference. That counts as important in our city government. There's even a special window for them at customs. But, dad, I'm still your daughter. There's a saying, 'a whipping is kinship, a scolding is love'. If you really want beat me, go ahead. You're a farmer. Don't learn your breeding from fake billboards. And anyway, I really need you to care for me right now. It doesn't matter how. Let me know you love me. Otherwise, I'll go crazy.

ZHANG BA: Do you ever stop?

ZHANG QIN: See, that's correct. When you get angry with me, it means you still notice me. Dad, you realize it's been several days since anyone fucked me. My whole body aches. Maybe if you kick me, it'll stimulate my body, and I'll feel better. Hey? That's right, dad, why don't you fuck me? All the money you spend on those women is wasted because they won't thank you. If you do me, you not only save on expenses, but also make me feel like I'm useful to you. Who wouldn't take advantage of a win-win situation? Let's do it!

ZHANG QIN unzips her jacket and lets her breast fall out. ZHANG BA comes over and slaps her so hard ZHANG QIN falls to the ground. Everyone freezes. After a pause, ZHANG QIN raises her head and laughs softly.

ZHANG QIN: There's no place like home. Dad, here, you don't have to be afraid of doing whatever you want. (*ZHANG QIN heads slowly toward the bathroom.*)

ZHANG BA (*Addressing SONG JIERU.*) Go see how she's doing.

SONG JIERU goes into the bathroom.

ZHANG BA: What sin did I commit in my past life?

ZHANG CHI: You didn't have a past life, and won't have a next one.

ZHANG BA: You're saying it's all my fault? But I raised you, sent you to college. I've earned more for you two than you could spend in this life and the next. What else do I owe you?

ZHANG CHI: There's no reason to get so upset. Don't people say, 'unfavorable things make up 80 to 90 percent of life.' You still have your 10 to 20 percent. What you should be doing is taking your good times.

ZHANG BA: I want to enjoy myself. But how can I?

ZHANG CHI: You need a little spiritual enlightenment.

ZHANG BA: Can you speak so I understand?

ZHANG CHI: All I'm saying is that you should change your perspective. Then you'll be happy. That's the teaching in the proverbs 'there's no end to the bitter sea, but turn around and there's the coast' or 'put down your assassin's knife, become Buddha immediately'.

ZHANG BA: Then can the master teach me?

ZHANG CHI: Look at your attitude. You're rejecting the idea before you've tried.

ZHANG BA: Try convincing me. If you can make feel happy, I'll believe you. Who knows, maybe I'll leave home and become a monk. At least I could avoid listening to shit.

ZHANG CHI tries to start, but, unable to find the words, makes several false starts. ZHANG BA encourages him.

ZHANG CHI: I know. Just think that we're not your blood children.

ZHANG BA: I've tried. It doesn't work. For five years, I've stopped myself from knocking on your door. I've been forcing myself not to acknowledge that you're my son. But I saw you today, and you inadvertently address me as 'dad'. It made me so happy my butt wiggled. And then right away, I want to grab a stick and beat you. Your sister, she never leaves my side. I want to ditch her, and I can't. You just saw how she tests me, but I can't fuck her because I still look at her and see my daughter.

ZHANG CHI: Then take a broader view. You could think: it's the end of the world, and everyone will die but you.

ZHANG BA: You think I'm not alone now? Living alone doesn't make you happy. Anyway, I couldn't wish for everyone's death but my own. I just couldn't.

ZHANG CHI: Dad, you really are different from before.

ZHANG BA: How was I before?

ZHANG CHI: Frankly speaking, you used to be the kind who hated it when other people had anything, and smiled when they didn't.

ZHANG BA: Before we had nothing. Now I can't be bothered to pay attention to other people.

ZHANG CHI: Economic status does change a person's emotions and attitude. Now you need to be even more thoroughgoing.

ZHANG BA: If you have something to, say it.

ZHANG CHI: There really are a lot of people you can't be bothered by. According to you, they're useless, worthless, maybe they should be

thrown directly into a cremation kiln...What's the expression? Right, they're called 'dregs'. One day, you looked into the mass of human dregs and saw two familiar faces, your son and your daughter. I admit it's hard to take. But you can't not be bothered by us. What to do? This is the time to add spiritual seasoning to the pot your heart has set to boiling. It'll change the flavor, from acid to a slightly bitter sweetness. That's probably like what Song Jieru meant with the bug-hollowed apple. If you can stomach this flavor, you can stomach the fact that this world needs the existence of human dregs. It's because we're your foil. Because of our bitterness, your sweetness appears. Because of our inferiority, your greatness appears. Because of our devaluation, you can buy cheap. Because of our evil, your righteousness appears. All in all, you should look on this world with a tolerant and benevolent smile. It's because the world is like this, your smile becomes a miracle.

ZHANG BA: I'm not that conceited. And you don't have to ridicule me. You've raised the question I've been puzzling over. Why aren't you striving for more? Why must you...

ZHANG CHI: ...be the dregs?

ZHANG BA: You had a much better education than I did. If things were right, you would do better than I have.

ZHANG CHI: Do you want to tell the story of the ant and the cicada again?

ZHANG BA: It's a good story. While the ant worked tirelessly all summer to bring food home, the cicada perched on the highest tree singing. When winter came, the cicada...but you didn't go hungry! You're more self-satisfied than anyone.

ZHANG CHI: Sure. Don't they say, 'Heaven won't starve a blind pet sparrow.'

ZHANG BA: I'm the ant. All I did with my life is work so you could eat good decent and wear warm clothing. I sent you to good schools so you could be fully human. I don't know what I did wrong.

ZHANG CHI: I'd like to supplement that story. You're an uncommon ant, the elite of your type. Today, almost all the other ants agree that you're their hero. You achieved what you set out to do. You have all the virtues. But why does such an ant still insist on working tirelessly, bitterly to bring

food home? You should rest. Dad, I truly want to encourage you to let it go. That way you can let us go.

ZHANG BA: You still think I'm wrong?

ZHANG CHI: Do you think right and wrong are that important? If so, do you think you're wrong because you used to lead anti-capitalist movements and now you're at the forefront of socialism with Chinese characteristics?

ZHANG BA: It's not the same.

ZHANG CHI: I know it's not. For you, it's always been a question of being useful. You never thought about what kind of person you wanted to be.

ZHANG BA: I don't understand what's wrong with being useful. What about it do you despise?

ZHANG CHI (*Going wooden.*) Nothing.

ZHANG BA: (*Suddenly smiling.*) Now you understand why you were always getting beaten?

ZHANG CHI: Yes. Because a chopstick can't ask the same questions as a pole. (*Feeling insulted, ZHANG CHI counter attacks.*) But I just don't understand why a successful ant, a hero in the bug world, still has to run around in a bitter rush. Why? Don't you realize there's a black abyss waiting just in front of you? Even if you lug everything back to your anthill, it won't fill up that abyss. (*ZHANG CHI walks over to the shelf and takes down the pot with William's remains.*) In the end there's just this. See, William.

ZHANG BA: (*Wanting to touch the pot, but recoiling.*) You put him in there?

ZHANG CHI: There's also some at Fenggang.

SONG JIERU enters. ZHANG CHI and ZHANG BA look awkward.

ZHANG BA: She's okay?

SONG JIERU: Nothing major, just a nose bleed.

ZHANG CHI: How are you?

SONG JIERU (*SONG JIERU looks at them strangely and smiles.*) I saw a demon that sprung from the vial in your hand. It hovers above you, winking at me. It says not to tell you. (*laughs*)

ZHANG CHI realizes what she means and charges into the bathroom. He drags ZHANG QIN back onstage, slapping her face.

ZHANG CHI: Wake up already. Do you know where you are?

ZHANG QIN: The bathroom. I always do hits in the bathroom

ZHANG CHI: In a disco.

ZHANG QIN: Where am I?

ZHANG CHI: This is a nursery school. It's the death penalty if those kids get near it.

ZHANG QIN: When did you get so righteous?

ZHANG CHI (*Forcefully pulling her toward him.*) Do you still recognize me?

ZHANG QIN: Hit me or fuck me. I'm willing. I just want to get high for a bit. Now. (*ZHANG QIN kisses ZHANG CHI'S cheek.*) I love you, brother mine. There aren't many more men like you. (*singing*) You've already deeply moved my heart... (*love song from Taiwan.*)

ZHANG QIN collapses on the floor. SONG JIERU takes the beer that ZHANG QIN had been drinking from and raises it for a toast.

SONG JIERU: For our fifth year reunion. No, in honor of our next fifth year reunion.

ZHANG CHI: (*Looking at each of them and nodding.*) You came here today to settle accounts. I admit that five years ago, I became indebted to you all. Now do you feel better?

ZHANG QIN: You owe us? Chi. Why can't I recall the debt?

ZHANG CHI: I owe you a filial son. I owe you a tender husband. And my dear sister, I owe you a penis. If I could cut mine off and attach it you, you wouldn't be so unhappy.

ZHANG QIN: Christ. Killing myself would be the right thing to do. (*ZHANG QIN approaches SONG JIERU, and stares directly into her eyes.*) We should go crawl into a crack, right? (*ZHANG QIN takes SONG JIERU'S hands and starts dancing. It gets more and more suggestive.*)

ZHANG CHI: Five years ago I left you to hide out next to an Old Ghost. You're still angry with me. Still unable to forgive me.

ZHANG BA: We didn't come here today to settle accounts. Son, stop with the psycho-babble. You're nothing. You don't have the right to act like you're suffering. You want to see what actual suffering is? (*ZHANG BA takes his papers, and holds them out, screaming*) This is. This is suicide! Suicide. (*ZHANG BA rips the papers, and then goes over and cuts in on ZHANG QIN to dance with SONG JIERU.*) I asked Song Jieru to come because I wanted to tell her that I had bought 40% of her company's stock. I wanted to hire her to be vice-President, second only to me in the family enterprise.

SONG JIERU (*SONG JIERU points her finger at ZHANG BA, it's almost like she's taking aim. Then she points to herself.*) Loaded fingers. Everything I touch explodes. Fireworks. It rises to heaven, a trail of smoke, and disappears. A beautiful red flower, silver-edged, blooms for a second in inky darkness, flashing.

ZHANG CHI has retreated again into himself, the monologue that follows takes place inside his head.

ZHANG CHI: Will you only release me if I give you a satisfactory explanation? All right, I'll tell you everything. Right now. I wanted another father, because I despise the one I had. I wanted another lover, because I didn't want to be like it was, being with someone only because I wanted to sleep with her. I didn't want to accept the responsibilities of being the oldest son because my having a penis robbed someone else of her dreams. Everything that happened five years ago was really that simple. I erred by not voicing my reasons. Although I still don't understand everything that happened.

ZHANG BA: But now I've changed my mind. I want to sell the entire business to her. If it's too expensive, I'll reduce the price. If necessary, I can give it to her. I want an end to the misery of being Chair and CEO. Can I go through with my decision?

ZHANG BA and SONG JIERU continue dancing. ZHANG QIN uses her finger like a gun, shooting the others onstage. Everyone's movements become very slow. Lights dim.

ZHANG CHI (*Still inside his head*). But I wonder, even if I had told you the truth, would you have let me go? You wouldn't have! Because I still haven't explained my deepest crime. You all believe that I deliberately set out to make things difficult for you. In other words, that I hate you. I need to explain where my hate comes from. These past five years, wherever I've thought about it, it's driven me crazy. Honestly, I haven't dared put on a rational face and see you, not like you can just assume a rational attitude and face me. All along, I've wanted to apologize to you. I made you despair. I emptied your hopes for this life. I deeply, deeply apologize for that. But I've never said it because it's fluff. It doesn't sound like regret, it sounds like sarcasm. I frequently ask myself, why do I make people who love and care for me cry bitter tears? Sometimes I even think I intentionally tortured your hearts. Unconsciously, I wanted to embarrass you. Look at how you act outside, in front of other people. So cool. Houses, cars, stocks, status, respect. You have everything. (*Screams out loud so that the others hear.*) You're so successful, so perfect. But what's in your heart?

ZHANG QIN: Hey. Quiet. Let's guess what each other is thinking. Can you hear what anybody else is thinking? Is there anyone who hears what's inside your head?

ZHANG BA: I want to talk seriously with you. (*ZHANG BA squeezes SONG JIERU, who gets nervous.*) We definitely have to talk.

SONG JIERU disentangles herself from ZHANG BA's arms. They look at each other.

ZHANG CHI: (*Back inside his own head.*) No respect? Contempt. It makes people uncomfortable. I'm a stain. Humiliation. A cancer cell. Simply because I didn't respect your image of yourself? Ha. My hand did beautifully, came knocking on the door where it hurts. I don't want to admit it was intentional, but all I brought with me was a capacity to be

the object of your disdain. So you made wise decisions. Divorce. Severed relations. But then why come back here, today? Why can't you forget me? Or maybe my spirit lives in you, like the Old Ghost's lives in me. You want to excavate me, and then place the blame on me. You want to make me admit that all the horrible things you've done, you've done because of my sins. All the dissatisfaction and hatred you feel for yourself is because I cursed you. Like at any judgment, you're looking for a scapegoat to redeem your original purity. Sorry, but that's not my fault. I won't cooperate. I tell you now, you've brought this on yourselves. Go live with the hate you have for me! I've already burrowed into your hearts, ate it hollow. What a precise metaphor. I'm the bug in your heart. But everything I represent was already there to begin with. Vulgarity, infidelity, and dissipation. (*ZHANG CHI'S voice gets slowly louder, and the others can hear*) Bug, bug, heh heh, bug.

SONG JIERU: What's got into him?

ZHANG QIN: I guarantee that if he took a hit, he wouldn't be feeling that way.

SONG JIERU: I really should leave.

ZHANG BA: We still haven't discussed the details.

SONG JIERU: I'll meet you in your office. (*SONG JIERU throws down her key and exits.*)

ZHANG QIN: You're really leaving? Then I won't see you out. This war is for family members only. It's always been like that. Right? Chi?

ZHANG BA: You're right, little girl. Our family's always been at war. Now I want peace.

ZHANG CHI: Dad...it's a little late for peace. Remember when you beat my mother because she bought me a harmonica? You could afford it, but you believed that a farmer's son wasn't good enough to have musical talent. That's just the way you look at life. A son has to do whatever his father did. Otherwise, that son is useless. Now do you understand why I don't want to be someone as useful as you? To live like you is to be a family slave. In the best circumstances, you get to be a happy slave.

ZHANG QIN (*Singing.*) You have deeply moved my heart.

ZHANG BA *doesn't say anything and goes to leave.*

ZHANG QIN: You want me to drive you home? I won't get into trouble.

ZHANG BA *leaves wordless. ZHANG QIN picks up the torn papers on the floor and throws them back down.*

ZHANG CHI: It's like you don't care who gets the business.

ZHANG QIN: If you knew you had less than two years to live, would you care?

ZHANG CHI: What's the matter?

ZHANG QIN: I've only got one breast left. Now you know.

ZHANG CHI: Dad doesn't know? You didn't tell him!

ZHANG QIN *shakes her head no. ZHANG CHI moves to comfort her.*

ZHANG QIN: Don't bother; you can't comfort me. (*Laughing.*) Today I am fabulously happy! Ecstatic! Crazy happy! I have got to find someone to fuck me. I want to celebrate. He was terrified. This is the first time I've seen him go soft. You think he's giving away his kingdom because he's turned philosophical? Several days ago, he found a bright and shiny object in his new Hummer. About the size of a lighter. He reported it to the police, who told him it was the latest GPS location device. He was terrified, terrified that it'll explode in the night like fireworks. Boom. (*Stretching out her hands.*) Loaded fingers. Do you really love that piece of ass? You almost broke my arm just now. I've never seen you that agitated. Is it specially smooth?

ZHANG CHI: I let down Song Jieru. I never told her why I left her.

ZHANG QIN: It was...?

ZHANG CHI: Because I was useless to her.

ZHANG QIN: (*Kicking ZHANG CHI.*) I had forgiven you, thinking that you really loved this girl. Now I'm paying you back for hurting me. Mother fucker, men are all of a piece. Cold all over except for your dicks.

Crossroads

ZHANG CHI: (*Singing.*) You have already deeply moved my heart...

ZHANG QIN: It's not the same when you sing it. Anyway, you shouldn't be liking garbage. Poet.

ZHANG CHI: A useless person. Like you. And now no one wants us.

ZHANG QIN: No. Haven't you figured it out? What the difference between us is? I'm not trying to justify my uselessness.

CURTAIN

Curtain call:

WILLIAM: The foreigner who had the most influence on China, never even came. His name was Karl Marx.

ZHANG CHI: Sooner or later everyone realizes that momentary pleasure is better than a lengthy maturity.

SONG JIERU: If you want to suffer, fall in love. If you want a steady life, be loved.

ZHANG BA: I am involved in no great projects, but endless family minutia. These are my special Chinese characteristics.

ZHANG QIN: Does anyone here want to fuck me tonight? No? Okay then. I'll fuck you.

THE END

NEITHER TYPE NOR CATEGORY (UNCLASSIFIABLE)

Representing the Nanshan District Arts Federation, Wei Ping produced Neither Type Nor Category to compete in the 2003 Cao Yu xiaopin (skit) award competition. Wang Weibin directed.

CAST

WHITEY	Ma Li
WOMAN	Yu Miao
PETER (Played by WOMAN)	Yu Miao
HUSBAND (Played by WOMAN)	Yu Miao

Place: A room

Time: Night

WHITEY and WOMAN sit facing each other, as if each were looking at her reflection in a mirror. WHITEY brushes her hair as she does every night before sleeping. WHITEY and WOMAN size each other up, asking pensively.

WHITEY: What are you looking at?

WOMAN: What are you looking at?

WHITEY: A foreigner.

WOMAN: A foreigner.

WHITEY: What's your name?

WOMAN: What's your name?

WHITEY: Why are you mimicking me?

WOMAN: Why are you mimicking me?

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY: You're a foreigner studying Chinese.

WOMAN: Actually, you're the foreigner; you're in China right now.

WHITEY: Thanks for the update. In China, I am constantly reminded – “You're a foreigner.” “Did I mention? You're a foreigner.” “You speak Chinese really well.” “You use chopsticks so effortlessly.” “You certainly relish Chinese food.” “Do you understand Chinese proverbs?” “Can you recite Tang Dynasty poems?” “Aiya, you're even better than our child.” So I ask, “And how old is your child?” “Two. She just started speaking... E, e, e...”

WOMAN: Singing, a goose crooks its throat to heaven.

WHITEY: White feathers float on green water,

WOMAN: Red webs paddle through turquoise waves.

WHITEY: This is the only poem I've memorized.

WOMAN: And why do you want to become Chinese?

WHITEY: Because I can't stand Chinese people staring at me and they stare every single day.

WOMAN: You turn heads! How great is that?! Just to get that second glance, Chinese women put themselves through the ringer. After beauty treatments, diets, perms, and breast enlargements, all that's left to do is trade in their faces. Are you sure it doesn't feel good to be the center of attention?

WHITEY: You try it. 2.5 billion eyeballs crawling up and down your body. Suitable entertainment for young and old, male and female, no exceptions. And some of the women are even more outrageous. They pretend to be your friend, sidle up to you, and then surreptitiously rub your back to see if you're wearing a bra. I mean, if you think I'm stuffing a little extra, ask. And if you won't take my word for it, I can always strip.

WOMAN (*addresses audience*): Stupid foreigner.

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY: I know what you're thinking. A stupid foreigner. Correct, I am a stupid foreigner. I have stupidly lived in China for six years, stupidly learning the latest political phrases, like 'when two hands grab, they should both be firm' and 'the four supports and three representations'. I've even been stupid about learning teeny-bopper slang like 'hot babe', 'rocking'; and 'word'. Stupid moi, I make friends with every Chinese person I meet, even the vendor who cheated me in the free market yesterday. Today when I meet up with him, I'm going to smile my same stupid smile.

WHITEY becomes motionless and looks at WOMAN. Again, the two again size each other up.

WOMAN: You've been in China six years already, but you're still a foreigner. Why keep trying to master Chinese?

WHITEY: I was once a visiting scholar at a major American Center for China Studies.

WOMAN: I know that. But you aren't under any obligation to study Chinese. A lot of sinologists can't speak Chinese.

WHITEY: It's not about language. I wanted to become Chinese.

WOMAN: Why?

WHITEY: Because I'm not.

WOMAN: You're you, and ain't ever gonna be me, sister.

WHITEY: You think you know my destiny? At any rate, I've already left the United States.

WOMAN: Because...?

WHITEY: One day, the Director came looking for me.

WOMAN: Peter, a third generation Chinese-American who can't speak Chinese, but when he insists on opening his mouth, it comes out guttural: *ni hao...*

Neither Type Nor Category

WOMAN portrays *PETER*.

PETER: What's this funding application for? When I invited George to speak, we agreed there'd be no honorarium.

WHITEY: The school has specially designated funding to use on academic exchanges.

PETER: But George agreed to waive the honorarium. Did he change his mind?

WHITEY: No.

PETER: Then why did you apply for funding?

WHITEY: A little extra money and we can make your friend's visit that much more comfy. The money's there, why not apply?

PETER: Come again? Are you saying you applied for funding in George's name?

WHITEY: Correct.

PETER: But you have no intention of telling George that he's eligible for an honorarium?

WHITEY: You and he already agreed he'd come for free, so why mention money? It's not like he's expecting anything.

PETER: I'm still confused. Then what's the point of applying for funding?

WHITEY: We don't gain anything by not applying, right? But with a little extra money, we can show George a better time.

PETER: Are you operating under Chinese pretences?

WHITEY: Excuse me?

PETER: Rumor has it you're studying Chinese. Is this pre-trip practice in how to privately network public funds?

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY: I'm not sure how a Chinese scholar would act in this situation. However, if they went for the money, I'd say they were smart, too.

PETER: You probably will succeed in China.

WHITEY gestures angrily at PETER, who disappears as WOMAN takes her place across from WHITEY.

WOMAN: We might do an experiment to test your Chinese mettle.

WHITEY: Chinese daughter-in-law, right?

WOMAN: I'll play your Chinese hubby.

WHITEY: Would a Chinese household welcome me?

WOMAN: Ha. I think any Chinese household would welcome you.

WHITEY: Really?

WOMAN becomes HUSBAND. HUSBAND sits to the side reading a newspaper. He puts down the newspaper and shows his face.

WHITEY: How should we start?

HUSBAND: With a kiss, of course.

WHITEY: Huh?

HUSBAND: I'm joking. First things first. Ugly daughter-in-law must meet parents-in-law. *(Places a chair at the front of the stage.)*

WHITEY: Am I ugly? *(WHITEY looks in the mirror.)* A little fat, but I've been dieting recently.

HUSBAND: Who doesn't want to eat delicious food? I suspect that's why she stayed in China.

WHITEY: I stayed because I love you.

HUSBAND: Say it again.

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY pulls HUSBAND to his feet.

HUSBAND: We're home.

WHITEY: That's your mother?

HUSBAND: Yup, that's mom.

WHITEY: Your mother, not 'mom'. Remember she's your mother, not our 'mom'.

HUSBAND: Technically, she's my mother, not yours, but now she's ours.

WHITEY: So you want me to call her 'mom'.

HUSBAND: If you don't call her 'mom', what are you going to call her? Grandma?

WHITEY: But she's your mother, not mine.

HUSBAND: That's not the point. You have to call her 'mom'.

WHITEY: You don't have to call my mother 'mom'; you use her name.

HUSBAND: Over there in your country. Here, in the territory of the People's Republic of China, you call my elderly mother 'mom'.

WHITEY: Have to.

HUSBAND: Absolutely.

WHITEY: No way around it.

HUSBAND: None. Imagine what it took for my mother to raise me. How I finally brought home a daughter-in-law. And then, no 'mom'. Even if it doesn't give her a heart attack, she'll still never recover from the shock.

WHITEY: It's not that I don't want to call her 'mom', it's just awkward. You do realize she's your mother. I only call my mother 'mom'.

Neither Type Nor Category

HUSBAND: Then pretend she's your mother. Same older woman, same wrinkled eyes, and when she laughs, it's the same toothless mouth. The image of benevolence.

WHITEY: Your mother has teeth.

HUSBAND: False teeth. If she gets sad and starts to cry, they'll fall out. Is that what you want? Her teeth on the floor?

WHITEY: No.

HUSBAND: If you don't call her 'mom', she'll cry. I'm just guessing, but I think if you don't call her 'mom', she'll force herself to smile that benevolent smile, gritting her false teeth until the sobs gush forth.

WHITEY: You're kidding, right?

HUSBAND: Would I lie to you? Yes. Okay, let's change our perspective here. I'm begging you to do me a favor because you're my wife and wives help their husbands out of tight spots. We're going to pretend to be a model husband and wife. Put your heart into the script, and play the part of a warm, submissive Chinese daughter-in-law. For a few minutes, close your eyes and imagine the person in front of you is your mother. Say 'mom'.

WHITEY: I can't.

HUSBAND: You want to commit suicide, fine, I won't stop you, but before you do, you have to call the person in front of you 'mom'.

WHITEY positions herself in front of HUSBAND.

WHITEY: Mom.

HUSBAND: Correct.

WHITEY: Mom.

HUSBAND: See how easy it is.

WHITEY: It's easy to call you anything. Because you're my husband, I could call you my beloved rat or little piggie...

Neither Type Nor Category

WOMAN laughs.

WHITEY: I mean, how did you call her 'mom' the first time?

WOMAN: Chinese women do harder things than this. If you want to be a Chinese daughter-in-law, start by saying 'mom'.

WHITEY: Okay. Anything Chinese women can do, I can do. Let's go call her 'mom'.

WHITEY links arms with HUSBAND for several steps, suddenly stops.

WHITEY: You don't have a father, do you?

HUSBAND: Listen to her. Do I have a father? Of course I have a father.

WHITEY: I'm not trying to insult you.

HUSBAND: No, you're flattering me.

WHITEY: I just wanted to know if your father was still living...

HUSBAND: I apologize, but my father is still alive and well.

WHITEY: Do I have to call him 'dad'?

HUSBAND stares at WHITEY without speaking.

WHITEY: I'm really sorry, but I can't call your mother and father 'mom and dad'.

HUSBAND: So in the end it's dad who breaks mom's heart. Will she never hear her daughter-in-law call her 'mom'? Listen, my father is even more virtuous than my mother. When he walks, he keeps his eyes on the ground to avoid stepping on ants. This is goodness. Neighbors call him the living Buddha.

WHITEY: I'm sure your father's a saint.

HUSBAND: And yours isn't?

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY: Exactly. My father wasn't, isn't, and has no plans to be good to me. I've never called the man anything other than his name. So, how am I going to use paternal endearments in your house?

HUSBAND: Tell me, do you have any intention of respecting our marriage?

WHITEY: We could forget it.

HUSBAND: Forget it? No. I make concession after concession and she says, 'forget it' and we forget?! Unacceptable. Today, I'm taking you home to meet my mother. Because you're a foreigner, we'll respect your human rights, but you have to consider our customs. When we enter our family home, you do daughter-in-law. I don't care how you do it, but you have to respectfully address my mother. That said, whatever else you do, I'll support. Okay?

WHITEY (*addressing audience*): I need a lifeline. Eh, could I call your mother 'mother-in-law'?

HUSBAND: Women only call men's mothers 'mother-in-law' behind their backs. Who says it to their face? (*beat*) Although, theoretically, it's permissible.

WHITEY: But you promised, all I had to do was respectfully address your mother. Now, I can call her 'mother-in-law' most respectfully.

WHITEY prepares to rush over to the chair.

HUSBAND: Wait a minute, I'll announce you first. (*HUSBAND approaches the chair.*) Mom, this is my wife, your daughter-in-law. Hey, listen up. This is my mother, your mother-in-law.

WHITEY (*WHITEY curtsies in traditional style*): Mother-in-law.

The two performers freeze.

WOMAN: Who are you?

WHITEY: Who are you?

WOMAN: You don't recognize me?

Neither Type Nor Category

WHITEY: You're the Chinese person I dream of being but never will become.

WOMAN: But it's no big, sad deal. Why agonize over it? It's not like you're not already part of me.

WHITEY: So now neither of us is pure, unclassifiable, we become ourselves by way of somebody else.

WOMAN: It's not that complicated. When someone doesn't like you or what you do, you change, become another. And we all know someone like that.

CURTAIN

Draw Whiskers, Add Dragon

Commissioned by the Guanshanyue Museum of Art, Draw Whiskers, Add Dragon premiered on June 22, 2007. A video installation of the performance was on display from June 26 through July 22. This translation is based on the version performed at Guanshanyue Museum of Art. Yang Qian, Song Jie, Mary Ann O'Donnell conceived of the project. Yang Qian wrote the script. Song Jie directed. Zhang Yang was responsible for multi-media. Mary Ann O'Donnell contributed digital images.

Cast:

OLD MOON	He Lemiao
GUANYIN	Yang Qian
CLASSICAL SCHOLAR	Zhou Yanyan
OLD PROFESSOR	Kang Kang
CLASSICAL PATIENT	Jia Wenhui
MODERN DOCTOR OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE	Kang Kang
CLASSIC/CONTEMPORARY WANDERING SWORDSMAN	Zhang Yang
FOREIGN TOURIST	Mary Ann O'Donnell

Stage: A solid black raised platform is placed before a solid black backdrop. Four censors sit at the base of the platform, forming OLD MOON's altar (left) and GUANYIN's altar (right). A bell chimes three times. OLD MOON and GUANYIN enter, assume their place on their respective alters. Incense burns the entire show. The first time OLD MOON and Guanyin introduce themselves they chant in the manner of reciting a sutra. They speak in classical Chinese.

OLD MOON: I am Old Moon;

GUANYIN: I am Guanyin;

OLD MOON: I decree the coupling of man and woman;

GUANYIN: I fate their children's birth;

OLD MOON: Red thread of passion;

GUANYIN: Sweet stream of life;

OLD MOON: Men desire, women love;

GUANYIN: Dragon shaft, jade womb;

OLD MOON: At my altar, drums are beaten;

GUANYIN: At my altar, sutras chanted;

OLD MOON: Steady beat of copulation;

GUANYIN: Amitaba aids conception;

OLD MOON: If you asked me: where is paradise? I would say: in the mists of passion;

GUANYIN: If you asked me: where is heaven? I would say: in a room filled with descendents.

OLD MOON and GUANYIN realize that no one has paid any attention to them. They repeat their self-introduction. They still speak in classical Chinese, but this time try using the inflections of modern advertising. After this has failed to attract anyone, they turn to each other, speaking in a modern-classical Chinese patois.

GUANYIN (*sighing*) Our incense diminishes;

OLD MOON (*sighing*) They've all but forgotten us;

GUANYIN: If it goes on like this, we're finished;

OLD MOON: If it goes on like this, we'll die;

Draw Whiskers, Add Dragon

GUANYIN: Old Moon, what is to be done?

OLD MOON: Does anyone remember us?

GUANYIN: Yes.

OLD MOON: Where are they?

GUANYIN: In our paintings.

OLD MOON: If I sent them amongst humans...;

GUANYIN: I could give them children...

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: And every subsequent generation would remember us.

OLD MOON: Bring them forth. (*Gesturing to both Guanyin and audience.*) Please look.

Various classical paintings are projected onto the black background. OLD MOON and GUANYIN eventually chose a portrait of CLASSICAL SCHOLAR.

OLD MOON / GUANYIN (*Chanting to bring Classical Scholar to life.*) The earth gave me form, which to keep, I labor. This body is a fearful thing. Yet no sentient being, plant, animal, or human being lives or dies. Death arrives, snow falls silently. Death arrives, an orchid blooms unnoticed. Death arrives, the stage becomes a funeral hall.

OLD MOON and GUANYIN move to the side of the stage to watch. OLD PROFESSOR comes into a gallery to look at the paintings. OLD PROFESSOR pauses in front of the portrait of CLASSICAL SCHOLAR. A bell chimes...

OLD PROFESSOR: Death arrives, long night mourns the shooting star. (*Zither music accompanies the recitation of Li Yu's (___) poem, "Corn Poppy".*) Spring flowers, autumn moon... Spring flowers, autumn moon, when... Spring flowers, autumn moon, when ends the cycle? How much history have they seen?

Music fades. CLASSICAL SCHOLAR slowly begins to interact with OLD PROFESSOR. As the poem progresses, their interaction deepens.

GUANYIN (*singing*) Spring flowers, autumn moon, when ends the cycle? How much history have they seen?

OLD PROFESSOR: Last night, the west wind stripped the trees,

GUANYIN (*singing*) I climbed the tower alone,

OLD PROFESSOR: And gazed at the horizon.

GUANYIN: I grow thin for faithfulness, your disappearance wears me out.

OLD PROFESSOR: I languish...

CLASSICAL SCHOLAR directly approaches OLD PROFESSOR. As GUANYIN recites the rest of "Corn Poppy," CLASSICAL SCHOLAR and OLD PROFESSOR enact the classical courtship expressed in the poem. As the poem closes, they exchange tokens of an unconsummated love; CLASSICAL SCHOLAR and OLD PROFESSOR will eternally yearn for each other, but they will not have children.

GUANYIN: Tonight, winter cicadas' cold cries mark our leave-taking. At the city gate, the downpour breaks, and we imbibe numb farewells. You would remain, but the ferryman rushes your departure. Clasp hands, we gaze at each other with tear-filled eyes, words muffled.

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: Clasp hands, we gaze with tear filled eyes, words muffled.

GUANYIN: Departing passion wounds, makes autumn that much colder;

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: Departed passion wounds, makes autumn that much colder;

OLD PROFESSOR: After a night's intoxication, where am I? At river's edge: willow trees, a breeze, and fading moon. I leave, forsaking romance that might have been. Even if I live to see the beauty of one thousand autumns...

GUANYIN (*singing*) who will listen to my lament...

CLASSICAL SCHOLAR and OLD PROFESSOR slowly exit.

OLD MOON (*sighing*) We wail;

GUANYIN: We sigh;

OLD MOON: Ever since the Dragon King returned to Heaven and the Beetle Lord disappeared in the earth,

GUANYIN: The evil rampage, their cousins strut arrogantly.

OLD MOON: Oceans have become mulberry fields in the snap of a finger.

GUANYIN: Waves have eliminated deserts; Everyday brings change.

OLD MOON: You see it, I see it, everyone sees it—

GUANYIN: Mortal and divine worlds no longer touch.

OLD MOON: Adversity!

GUANYIN: Infertility!

OLD MOON: Failure.

A bell chimes.

GUANYIN: Another one...

OLD MOON: Once again!

OLD MOON and GUANYIN use red threads to bring CLASSICAL PATIENT to life. OLD MOON and GUANYIN anxiously look for an appropriate partner for CLASSICAL PATIENT.

OLD MOON: Where is the one?

GUANYIN: Where is the one?

OLD MOON: Where is the one?

GUANYIN: Where is the one?

Bell chimes. MODERN DOCTOR OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE enters.

DOCTOR: Should I prescribe Bishop Wort Qi Regulating pills or Domperidone tablets?

OLD MOON and GUANYIN use the red threads to tie DOCTOR and PATIENT to each other.

DOCTOR: You've come to see the doctor?

PATIENT: (*softly*) Hmm...

DOCTOR (*impatiently*) Then come in. Where does it hurt?

PATIENT: My head...

DOCTOR: What does it feel like?

PATIENT: Like stinging wasps and swarming ants.

DOCTOR: When did it start?

PATIENT: The fourth day of the third month of the last sixty-year cycle.

DOCTOR finally looks up from desk in order to examine PATIENT.

DOCTOR: You have a cold.

DOCTOR and PATIENT begin to feel the effects of the red threads. This is a case of examination as seduction.

DOCTOR: Does it hurt anywhere else?

PATIENT: My stomach.

DOCTOR: Your stomach? Inhale... Exhale... Where else does it hurt?

PATIENT: My chest.

DOCTOR: Where else does it hurt?

PATIENT: My legs.

DOCTOR: Where else does it hurt?

PATIENT: My ears.

PATIENT takes control of the threads, reversing the relationship.

PATIENT: Where else does it hurt?

DOCTOR: My chest.

PATIENT: Where else does it hurt?

DOCTOR: My legs.

PATIENT: Where else does it hurt?

DOCTOR: My whole body aches.

PATIENT: You've come to see the doctor?

DOCTOR: Yes.

PATIENT: Where does it hurt?

DOCTOR: My stomach.

PATIENT: When did it start?

DOCTOR: The fourth day of the third month of the last sixty-year cycle.

PATIENT: What does it feel like?

DOCTOR: Like you cut out my heart...

DOCTOR grabs a scalpel and manages to cut one of the threads. DOCTOR begins to come out of the trance. PATIENT is unaware.

PATIENT: Let me look...

When PATIENT finally touches DOCTOR, DOCTOR strangles her. DOCTOR then arranges PATIENT in a beautiful pose.

OLD MOON (*Flicks DOCTOR offstage with a disdainful finger*) Human hearts change;

GUANYIN (*Blows PATIENT offstage*) The gods die;

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: No way forward;

OLD MOON: Dejection;

GUANYIN: Frustration;

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: Utter defeat;

A bell rings. WANDERING SWORDSMAN steps out of picture without having been called up. Suddenly OLD MOON and GUANYIN sense a possible miracle.

OLD MOON: Elation;

GUANYIN: Jubilation;

OLD MOON / GUANYIN: An unexpected reprieve!

WANDERING SWORDSMAN takes up a red thread and begins search for a mate. However, he gets enthralled to his own shadow. As lights shift, WANDERING SWORDSMAN follows himself. A bell rings. Suddenly, advertisements starring WANDERING SWORDSMAN are scattered throughout the audience. WANDERING SWORDSMAN happily retrieves them and then solemnly delivers them to OLD MOON and GUANYIN.

OLD MOON: Ahh... We have descendents!

GUANYIN: We have descendents! (*pause*) Something isn't right... They can reproduce themselves.

OLD MOON: This means there's nothing left for us to do...

FOREIGN TOURIST comes onstage and takes a picture of OLD MOON.

Draw Whiskers, Add Dragon

OLD MOON: Couldn't we also copy ourselves?

FOREIGN TOURIST poses with GUANYIN, a friend from the audience comes up and takes their pictures.

GUANYIN (*Simultaneously posing and talking with OLD MOON*) We could. That's how we can achieve immortality!

OLD MOON and GUANYIN turn to the audience and invite them onstage to pose with them. As their descendents multiply, the gods smile benevolently.

CURTAIN

FBI: 2009 Shennong Project

Script developed through a series of workshops in the Fall of 2008. Participants: Yang Qian (dramaturge/performer), Song Jie (director/performer), Zhang Yang (technology/performer), Huang Liguang (design/performer), Jia Huiwen (performer), Kang Kang (performer), Liang Zi (performer), Mary Ann O'Donnell (translator)

The entire play is organized as a series of public announcements, propaganda events, and onstage performances that are adapted to local audience concerns.

ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT. During a pre-show press conference, FBI Chair Yang Qian explains how recent Chinese food crises are in fact signs that human evolution is entering a new stage. Specifically, toxic food allows the earth to weed out food dependent people, revealing the new human as the ones who directly ingest elements. All human beings are welcome to join FBI's pursuit of a new and glorious future humanity.

ORGANIZATION OF PROPAGANDA EVENTS. At each of the onstage performances, FBI sets up an information table, where an FBI believer challenges passersby and audience members with the questions: "Are you afraid of China food?" and "If so, would you consider joining FBI?" (See Appendix A for translation of propaganda materials.

ORGANIZATION OF ONSTAGE SCENES (for Hong Kong performance, January 10-11, 2009; time 30 minutes; 7 participants). Each scene is comprised of: multi-media and performance. FBI handouts and propaganda materials will also be available at each performance.

SCENE 1: THE INSTITUTE

(1) Opening images (10 minute movie/montage) of: 1 planetary evolution; 2 the degradation of the environment; 3 statistics from ten years of deaths to due disease; 4 the God of Agriculture's prophecy of a new kind of human being; 5 the emergence of element eaters as the fulfillment of this prophecy; 6 the appearance of FBI enables the organization and scientific management of human evolution and the pursuit of new humanity.

At part 4 of the movie, members of the FBI come on stage and begin silent ritual. These rituals are based on traditional Chinese and Communist

collective action. Rituals include: prayer/meditation, the Institute Anthem and chanting slogans. As the movie ends, FBI members begin to add their voices to the ritual.

FBI (*Sung to the Olympic Theme*) You and I, heart to heart, living together in a global village. Drinking milk, growing kidney stones, we're the elementals. Come, dear friends, bring your precious little stones, your kidney stones. FBI welcomes you, eternal member of the clan. (*Slogans chanted.*) Transcend your food dependencies! Overcome your come-phobias! Evolutionize your biological imperatives! Advance the cause of species differentiation! Eugenics is destiny, and we want you!

(2) The ritual is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a comephobic.

THE OVERHEAD SPEAKER ANNOUNCES (IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH): Attention all members of the FBI. Today, there was an infectious disease outbreak in the eater population. According to a spokesperson for the eater CDC, the number of eaters suffering from comephobia has reached 100, with an additional 56 suspected cases. FBI identifiers report immediately for orders. This is a red alert. Repeat, red alert.

(3) Onscreen images of comephobics and their identifying symptoms.

At the same time as images of the comephobics are projected, the identifiers approach the comephobic to test response to the following foods: hamburger, Chaozhou marinated duck parts, raw seafood, barbequed kabobs, lamb hotpot, spaghetti with meat sauce, steak, bubble milk tea, soda, beer, and Three Deer milk.

(4) As the testing ends, three-dimensional models showing foods and their related contaminants are brought onstage: Rice coated in paraffin; ham preserved with panaplate; salted eggs treated with tonyred; spicy sauce treated with tonyred; hotpot laced with formalin; fungus and jujubes preserved with sulphur; tree ears treated with copper sulphide; Three Deer milk's protein content boosted with melanine.

At the same time as the models are displayed, a puppet undergoes an examination to identify food dependencies. (The puppet is made from dissection maps of a human body and plastic organs.)

THE OVERHEAD SPEAKER ANNOUNCES THE RESULTS OF THE EXAMINATION:
Symptoms. Left-brain lobe swollen. Abnormal levels of white brain matter. Sympathetic nerve endings excessively stimulated. Red blood count low. Mediterranean anemia. Diagnosis: omnipresent comephobia. The patient is afraid to eat anything.”

(5) THE OVERHEAD SPEAKER PLAYS THE FBI ANTHEM AND ANNOUNCES:
Attention SubGroup A, Attention. We have discovered our target. Immediately implement FBI salvation plan 120. Salvation will begin at _____ o'clock. Repeat, salvation will begin at _____ o'clock.

SubGroup A immediately hauls boxes of milk onstage. The identifiers have the comephobic drink the milk. The comephobic is then scanned for kidney stones.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: As a result of milk drinking, kidney stones have accumulated. Kidney stones are composed of the elements calcium and carbon.

Blackout.

(6) Projection: an explanation of the relationship between kidney stones and elementals.

Projection: pictures of comephobics.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: Ladies and gentlemen, the FBI welcomes you to the elemental garden. We rejoice that you have joined our family. We congratulate you on shedding the nightmare of comephobia. Let us together stride into a new era of human evolution.

(7) Lights slowly come back on. Smoke rising.

Audio: Mystic music.

FBI members dance.

SCENE 2: HOSTAGE SITUATION

(1) A gunshot disrupts the dancing. A comephobic crashes into the Institute and takes a hostage.

(2) FBI members and the comephobic begin a tri-lingual dialogue (Cantonese, Mandarin and English).

FBI: What are you doing?

COMEPHOBIC: I want medicine ration coupons.

FBI: What kind of medicine?

COMEPHOBIC: I want pills to suppress my comephobia.

FBI: There is no medicine that prevents fear. Instead, the only way to overcome comephobia is to drink milk. If it makes you sick, you are one of us and we can save you. We provide FBI members elemental nutrition caplets. If the milk doesn't make you sick, there's nothing to be afraid of. Milk isn't your poison.

(2) FBI identifiers examine the puppet.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: Symptoms: Right-brain lobe shriveled. Loss of white brain matter. Motor nerves excessively stimulated. Increase in white blood cells. Papua New Guinea hemorrhagic fever. Diagnosis: Aggressive comephobia. Fear of eating results in anti-social behavior.

(3) The overhead speaker plays the FBI anthem.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: Attention SubGroup A, Attention. We have discovered our target. Immediately implement FBI salvation plan 911. Salvation will begin at _____ o'clock. Repeat, salvation will begin at _____ o'clock.

SubGroup A immediately hauls boxes of milk onstage. The identifiers have the comephobic drink the milk. The comephobic is then scanned for kidney stones.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: As a result of milk drinking, kidney stones have not accumulated. Repeat, no sign of kidney stone accumulation. Kidney stones are composed of the elements calcium and carbon.

AN AUTOMATED VOICE ANNOUNCES: Ladies and gentlemen, the FBI celebrates your return to the eaters' garden. Congratulations on shedding the nightmare of comeophobia. All of us at the FBI give our heartfelt blessing: May your immunity to milk induced kidney stones help you to overcome your fear of other foods. May you live the rest of your life as a happy milk cow!

The COMEPHOBIC relaxes and is immediately arrested. The COMEPHOBIC refuses to leave without the milk products.

SCENE 3: HAPPY FUTURE!

The FBI propaganda cartoon is screened. In the cartoon, elementals meet, get married, and breed more highly evolved human beings.

SCENE 4: INITIATION

(1) The FBI anthem plays.

Projection: The future of humanity is the elemental future.

Onstage, the first COMEPHOBIC is initiated into the FBI.

(2) All FBI members begin prayer/meditation.

Projection: A montage of food commercials.

CURTAIN

Appendix A

FBI REPORT TO HONG KONG CITIZENS: THE CHINESE FOOD PROBLEM AND A NEW STAGE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION

People of Hong Kong:

Greetings! Recently, under the pressure of population, environmental, rapid urbanization, and globalization, the quality of Chinese food has become increasingly questionable. Chemical residues in food and chemical additives with no nutritional value are now common. In addition, there are constant reports of industrially processed foods. This year, the “Three Deer Milk Powder Incident” transformed the question of food safety into a focus of social concern. “Three Deer” milk products carried the prestigious “No National Food Inspection” label because in previous years their products had all passed inspection. The contamination of Three Deer” milk products resulted in the collapse of confidence in national food safety regulation. This crisis and the high level of distrust of all food was the background for the appearance of a new illness—comephobia. Comephobics display high levels of anxiety, suffer from hallucinations, and are frequently aggressive. There is a danger of comephobic outbreaks in the richest of China’s eating regions. According to our information, health departments throughout the country are as yet unable to cure or control this disease.

However, the crisis in Chinese food safety is actually a signal that humanity has entered a new stage in evolution. Accordingly, FBI has a special announcement: the results of our research show that there is a special class of human being that does not depend on ordinary food in order to live. They are among us. We call the “elementals” because they are able to secure nutrition from other sources. Elementals are uniquely adapted to the current environment and do not suffer from comephobia. Given ongoing environmental degradation, they embody the hope of human survival and evolution.

FBI is the acronym of Fat Bird Institution, the department of the Global New Life Diversification Federation that is responsible for researching and optimizing the opportunities for human evolution caused by the pressure of the Chinese food environment. We have been secretly tracking the existence of elementals for a long time. However, we were unable to develop an easy method for distinguishing elementals from the rest of the population. The Three Deer Milk Powder Incident enabled a breakthrough in FBI’s work on identifying elementals. Our research shows that children who drink melamine-contaminated milk powder and develop

kidney stones are in fact elementals. When this research was extended to the adult population, our identifications were 99.46% accurate. FBI decided to announce our presence and research to offer an invitation to all people. Come to an FBI identification station and take the melamine milk test and determine your true nature. The mass distinguishing of human natures is the second core mission of the “2009 Shennong Plan”.

During the January 2009 Hong Kong Fringe Festival, FBI will set up an identification station in the basement of the Fringe Club. We welcome every Hong Kong citizen to begin self-identification. We will also provide entertainment.

