

Cao Yu's *The Thunderstorm*

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Abstract

This thesis is a new translation of the prologue and first act of Cao Yu's drama *Leiyu* (*The Thunderstorm*). Also included is an introduction explaining the historical context of the play, the Western influences on the play and its author, a brief summary of the plot and the characters, and an explanation of how this translation differs from previous efforts. Cao Yu was significantly influenced by Western playwrights and dramatic theory, as evidenced by *Leiyu* conforming far more closely to the Western idea of a drama than the traditional Chinese dramatic forms as exemplified by the *jingju* and related opera styles. The portrayals of the characters provide a commentary on contemporary Chinese society through their actions and interactions. The translation itself aims to create a natural, conversational tone in modern English that reflects the original language used, and provide a completely new translation of the prologue to the play, which was left untranslated in the previous commercial translation.

The Oncoming Storm: *Leiyu* and Modern Chinese Drama

Cao Yu's famous drama *Leiyu* (*The Thunderstorm*) exemplifies the new Chinese dramatic form of *huaju*, or vernacular drama, and provides insight on the conflict between traditional and modern culture in China. As one of the first examples of the *huaju* dramatic style, it represents a shift in the Chinese perception of drama, and the influence of Western dramatic theory on Chinese playwrights. Cao Yu was undeniably influenced by the West and the May Fourth Movement, both of which had a long-lasting impact on Chinese art and literature beginning in the 1920s and continuing on until today. In this introduction, I plan to argue that *The Thunderstorm* is an exemplary representation of May Fourth drama, standing between the traditional dramatic forms and the culture that they represent, and the later developments of drama that occurred during the Communist revolution.

The Rise of Chinese Spoken Drama

The rise of the Chinese spoken drama coincides with the May Fourth movement, which advocated, among other things, writing in the modern vernacular instead of classical Chinese.¹ The scholars of this movement had an extremely strong impact on Chinese art, literature, drama, and culture, spurring Westernization in China and reform of the old traditions. Before the May Fourth movement, Chinese theater was mostly

¹ For more information on the May Fourth movement, consult Zhou Cezong's *Research Guide to the May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China, 1915-1924*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963. –See also *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium*, Benjamin I. Schwartz, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972; Vera Schwarcz's *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

dominated by various forms of opera-style theater. The most famous style is the *jingju*, or Beijing Opera, which formed in the late Imperial era, was especially popular in the Qing dynasty, and named after the city in which it was most popular. Before the *jingju*, the earliest Chinese operas can be traced back to the Yuan dynasty. Possibly the most well-known example of Yuan theater is Wang Shifu's *Story of the Western Wing*, which according to Stephen H. West and Wilt Idema's introduction to their recent translation, "outshone all other works in the [*zaju*, or comedy play] genre because of its format and quality, and it quickly established itself as the preeminent *zaju*."² From the text of the play, we can see that there were both sung and spoken portions, and that during each act, only one character was given the sung lines. However, by the time of modern Beijing-style opera, nearly every character would sing, and what spoken lines existed were delivered in an exceedingly stylized form. It is not uncommon for modern productions of Beijing opera to be performed with subtitles displayed on screens beside the stage, to aid modern audiences in understanding the already-difficult literary-style lines being spoken. Despite the fact that *jingju* is the most popular opera style today, Beijing-style opera is certainly not the only form. There were (and still are today) hundreds of different styles of regional opera, usually defined by geographical region or province. Yue opera, developed in Zhejiang province in the early 1900s, is today the second most popular style of traditional opera, but nearly every province or historically distinct region of China has

² Wang, Shifu. *The Story of the Western Wing*. Edited and Translated by West, Stephen H and Wilt L. Idema. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 3.

its own specific style, usually defined by the singing style, costuming, and common type of performance.³ However, all of the regional forms share certain commonalities:

Singing, gesture, dialogue, poetry, and dance constitute the delivery. Although there are variations in costume and makeup, these, too, carry across regional styles. And in all the regions, emphasis is generally given to costume rather than to scenery or props.... The operas often share the same stories as well, although the versions might have different endings, additional characters, and so on.⁴

There are four general categories of regional operas, as defined by the musical accompaniment: “high music,” which uses a very high falsetto voice in its singing; “clapper music,” which commonly uses a simple stick-and-wood-block percussion instrument and the *yueqin* in its instrumental accompaniment; *pihuang* style, a combination of two melodic patterns from the south which was adopted by the Beijing opera; and folk music styles.⁵ The classical styles of opera had many different types of performances, but the stories on which the operas were based were generally epic romances and legendary battles, with the emphasis in performance placed on singing, costuming, and martial arts. *Story of the Western Wing* was based on an 8th Century poem, and most of the most famous Chinese folktales, such as the *Journey to the West* (also known as *Monkey*), or the *Butterfly Lovers*, had at least one *jingju* version, some of which remain popular even today. Emotive acting, much like in early Western opera, was played to the audience through ritualized gestures and facial expressions, and the music also helped the audience to understand what was happening onstage, as certain types of

³ Siu, Wang-NGai and Peter Lovrick. *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997. p. 19.

⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁵ Ibid, 13-14.

melodies or instrumental music were associated with certain emotions.⁶ However, with the influx of Western culture that spurred the May Fourth movement came a multitude of exemplary Western dramas, from Aristotle, to Shakespeare, to Harriet Beecher Stowe. One of the earliest of China's modern drama groups, the "Spring Willow Society," performed during its existence "a stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* under the title of *The Black Slave Cries out to Heaven...* as well as two nineteenth century French dramas of social mores...."⁷ The political themes of African-American oppression resonated with many young Chinese nationalists, who were incensed by China's treatment by the West, and the difference in style between Western drama and Eastern opera allowed for a more realistic portrayal of interpersonal and political drama—one that could be more easily turned to portray the playwright's personal and political opinions. Many of China's students began to realize that, instead of simply relying on foreign playwrights, they needed to create a theatrical parallel to the vernacular literature advocated by Lü Xun and his compatriots: a new medium that took the best parts of the old Chinese tradition and the new Western tradition, and created something that could be easily accessible and provide commentary on the problems facing China. According to Li Ruru, the aim of this movement was to create a form of theatrical expression that was "new not only in its abandonment of the conventional media of singing, reciting, acting, dancing, and martial arts, but also in its adoption of the

⁶ Guy, Nancy. "Beijing opera." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51764> (accessed November 23, 2009).

⁷ Eberstein, Bernd. "Introduction: Thepsis in the Peargarden: The Rise of Modern Chinese Drama." In *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949: Volume 4*, edited by Bernd Eberstein, New York: E.J. Brill, 1990, p. 10.

vernacular spoken language as its basic form to spread new ideas.”⁸ The resulting theater was called the *huaju*.

The Thunderstorm, the West, and huaju

From the beginning, this new *huaju* in China was associated with the West. The early years of *huaju* performances essentially consisted of Chinese translations of Western plays, often those that had been recently translated and released onto the market. However, these plays were not entirely Western in their production. Even adaptations of foreign plays retained certain aspects of classical drama, in that the adapted characters tended to fit a certain type of traditional theater character, and in the acting methods used. Often characters would stand on the stage expounding on the current issues facing society, regardless of whether or not it was relevant to the plot, as was common in student theater productions of opera.⁹ Early *huaju* adaptations of Western works, particularly early Shakespearean productions, were occasionally based only on a synopsis of the play, and then expanded by the production company.¹⁰ However, by the 1930s, Chinese productions of Western plays had settled down into well-constructed, accurate translations from English to Chinese, and were even staged with period costuming on a Western-style stage. However, despite the fact that quality productions of Western plays were not available until the 1930s, the Chinese people, especially college students, had become familiar with Western dramatic forms much earlier. This familiarity with the

⁸ Li, Ruru. “The Bard in the Middle Kingdom.” In *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 51.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 53-54.

Western classics, as well as the modern playwrights such as O'Neill and Ibsen, left its mark on the up-and-coming playwrights of the 1930s, including Cao Yu.

Cao Yu wrote *The Thunderstorm* while in his final year of study at Qinghua University in Beijing, and if legend is to be believed, he wrote it in one day's time. While he was an actor and a translator, producing a translation of *Romeo and Juliet* during his time at college, *The Thunderstorm* is his first original work. It is typical of the new Chinese drama in that its characters are everyday people rather than the traditional opera archetypes. The main characters can be divided into two halves: a businessman named Zhou Puyuan, his wife Fanyi, and his sons Ping and Chong; and Puyuan's abandoned first wife Lü Shiping, her husband Gui, her son Dahai, and her daughter Sifeng, who works as a maid in the Zhou's house. Over the course of the play, it is revealed that Dahai is Puyuan's son, although neither of them know it, and is a labor agitator in Puyuan's mine. Zhou Ping is also unaware that he is actually Shiping's son. The play opens with Ping in an established relationship with Sifeng, and during the first act it is revealed that he was also in an unwilling sexual relationship with his stepmother Fanyi. This is a common plot of Chinese drama, especially those critical of the traditional family structure. Zhou Chong is also in love with Sifeng, although this love is unrequited. At the climax of the play, all the relationships are revealed, to the dismay of everyone involved. Dahai and Ping kill each other offstage, Sifeng is unable to cope with the fact that she was sleeping with her half-brother and runs outside into the aftermath of a thunderstorm, electrocuting herself on a downed electrical wire. Chong tries to rescue her, but is killed in the attempt. Fanyi and Shiping both go mad from the shock of the revelations and losing all of their children within the span of five minutes. Zhou Puyuan, having set off



the whole tragedy, is left to face the consequences of his actions in the prologue and epilogue. The drama of the play comes from the interpersonal conflict and the fated, inevitable slide towards the tragedy of the final act.

The play conforms far more to the Western ideal of the dramatic plot, based on the classical Greek dramas, than the traditional Chinese tragedy: there is no karmic backlash that causes the destruction of essentially the entire cast, but only a sense of cruel fate, that would lead two people to meet coincidentally, fall in love, and then discover that they are half-siblings. *The Thunderstorm* also conforms to Aristotle's three classical unities which prescribe the structure of the perfect tragedy: a unity of action, where the play should have one main plot with no subplots, a unity of place, where the play occurs within a single space, and a unity of time, where the play should occur over the space of a day or less. The play also conforms to his idea of how to set up the main character's downfall in a tragedy: "It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty..."¹¹ The events of the play stem from Zhou Puyuan's decision to comply with his parents' wishes and remarry a rich girl, instead of the servant girl he fell in love with, and this unwilling abandonment is what leads to his downfall. On a personal level, Puyuan is quite despicable, treating his family like servants or strangers, distancing himself from his wife Fanyi to the extent that she initiates a sexual relationship with her stepson in order to relieve her loneliness, and forcing her to take medication for her depression that she decidedly does not want. However, he seems to still deeply love Shiping, and repeatedly tries to give her money in order to make up for the years of hardship she suffered because of him. And fittingly, his well-intentioned attempt at

¹¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*. S. H. Butcher, trans. Accessed through Project Gutenberg 17 Dec. 2009. < <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1974>>. 13.

allowing his son to meet his birth mother, coincidentally occurring just as the entire rest of the cast had worked out their problems and were seemingly about to live happy, if unwittingly incestuous, lives, makes the entire ugly affair come to life, and directly causes the climactic scene. Despite the fact that the tragedy is all Puyuan's fault, he is one of the few characters to make it to the epilogue unscathed. His business remains successful, he remains healthy, and only the destruction of his family could be interpreted as any kind of karmic punishment. In a play based on traditional Chinese morality, be it Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian, there is no way that Puyuan would have ended the play alive, and a classical playwright would have been justified in having Puyuan commit suicide, like Shiping's daughter Sifeng did, in order to cleanse himself of his sins. However, Puyuan remains alive, in order to make the Aristotelian tragedy more poignant: he is forced to live with his mistakes until he dies.

The Thunderstorm's Characters in Society

The Thunderstorm's characters are representative of the era in which it was written, and their portrayal is an apolitical commentary on contemporary society. Puyuan is the head of a mining company, while his unknown son, Lü Dahai, is a worker in his factory. Dahai is elected representative of the striking workers, but as the play progresses, it is clear that he has been tricked, and that his "comrades" have already given in and gone back to work. Cao Yu sides with neither person; their conflict is merely to add a further level of irony to the situation, and neither is presented as a heroic figure or a role model. Even during the Communist era, Cao Yu never rewrote *Leiyu* to be more compliant with the dominant political thought, despite making several unsatisfactory

attempts and writing other political plays. However, the play does take aim at the traditional culture that persisted into contemporary society. While the setting is modern in every respect, with Westernized furniture, architecture, clothing, and even employment, the interpersonal dynamics remain squarely in the realm of tradition. Puyuan is the absolute master of his house, with his sons and wife deferring to his wishes. He is also a devout Buddhist, keeping a vegetarian diet. However, the plot setup also reveals his family's dedication to Confucianism, which forced him to leave his low-class wife but keep the son that she bore him. Fanyi, Puyuan's second wife, is a sad commentary on the status of the wife in the Confucian household. She attempts enters into a quasi-incestuous relationship with her stepson out of sheer loneliness, as her husband rarely interacts with her, and certainly does not love her. Her stepson, Zhou Ping, at first complies, but after falling in love with Sifeng, attempts to leave what he sees as an immoral relationship for a (supposedly) better one. This drives Fanyi absolutely off the edge, and she desperately attempts to get him back through getting rid of Sifeng. At the climax of the play, both of her sons die because of Shiping: Chong tries to save her from her own suicide and is instead electrocuted along with her, and Ping dies offstage to his half-brother's gun. As a result of this, she snaps completely, and in the prologue and epilogue she is a resident of a mental hospital. The purpose of the play is to comment on this aspect of Chinese society, and show through example the hardship and tragedy caused by traditional "morality," but the methods it uses to do it are undeniably Westernized. By using the trappings of modern society, which was rapidly Westernizing, especially among the young and educated, the wealthy, and those living on the Eastern seaboard, Cao Yu emphasizes that the problems portrayed in the play are still extant. This is entirely in line

with the goals of the May Fourth movement, the *huaju* movement, and the general purpose shared by both: use what is good of the West to improve what is good of the East.

The Thunderstorm in Translation

While *Leiyu* is somewhat well-known in China today, having been adapted into a Bruce Lee movie in 1957 and used as the basis of the plot of Zhang Yimou's 2007 *Curse of the Golden Flower*, its status in the West is sadly obscure, to the point where this thesis may in fact be the only existing English translation of the prologue. There has been only one commercial translation, published by the Foreign Language Press in Beijing in 1978 and translated by Wang Tso-liang and A. C. Barnes, and the only recorded English language productions of *The Thunderstorm* occurred in 1986. This production probably used either the Foreign Language Press translation or their own house translations, which have disappeared if they existed in the first place. The most important thing to note is that the Foreign Language Press translation does not include the prologue or the epilogue, meaning that there is no easily accessible English translation of the play in its entirety. In addition, the translation, while certainly good, has become slightly dated in its language. The names of characters and places are all presented in the Wade-Giles format, which was standard at the time but has since been replaced by the Pinyin romanization. The translation is also slightly stilted, sounding at times quite unnatural. For example, consider the following exchange between Fanyi and Zhou Chong:

FLP Translation:

Fanyi: You're reckoning without your father—he may not approve.

Andreas Translation:

Fanyi: You're not afraid that your father won't be pleased with you?

Chong: This is my own affair.
Fanyi: And if people talk when
they hear about it?
Chong: That would worry me even
less.
Fanyi: Like mother, like son.

Chong: This is my own business.
Fanyi: And when other people know
and start gossiping?
Chong: I'm even less worried about
that.
Fanyi: That's my boy.

In the FLP translation, the characters sound oddly formal, but the aim of this thesis is to provide a translation into the English vernacular, in order to reflect the *huaju* movement. The characters in this play speak like normal people, complete with accents, nicknames, and profanity—quite far from the formal ideals of the *jingju* tradition and the classical Chinese it was based on. One of the major obstacles in this translation was how to handle such colloquialisms, and often they were translated into the closest English equivalent that had the same feel and connotation. In this way, I aimed to preserve the spirit of the play rather than the letter. In the end, the point of this translation is to provide an alternative to the existing translation, with spelling and dialogue updated to current standards of speech, and with annotations to aid in the understanding of the play in its historical context.

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Characters

Nun A

Nun B

Young Girl—age 15

Young Boy—age 12

Zhou Puyuan—CEO of a coal mining company, age 55.

Zhou Fanyi—His wife, age 35

Zhou Ping—His ex-wife's son, age 28.

Zhou Chong—Fanyi's son, age 17.

Lü Gui—A servant at the Zhou residence, age 48.

Lü Shiping—His wife, a maid at a school, age 47.

Lü Dahai—Shiping's son by her ex-husband, a coal miner, age 27.

Lü Sifeng—Daughter of Lü Gui and Lü Shiping, age 18, maidservant at the Zhou residence.

Assorted servants at the Zhou residence: Servant A, Servant B... Head Servant.

Scenes

Prologue: In the special guest hall of a church hospital.

--One afternoon in the winter.

Act 1: 10 years ago, on a stifflingly hot summer morning.

--In Mr. Zhou's living room. (The set is roughly the same as the prologue's guest hall.)

Act 2: Scene same as previous.

--That afternoon.

Act 3: At the Lü house, a small bedroom suite.

--About 10 PM that night.

Act 4: The Zhou family living room. (Same as Act 1.)

--At 2 AM the same night.

Epilogue: Returning to 10 years afterward, on a winter's afternoon.

--Set same as prologue.

(Acts 1 through 4 occur in the space of only one day.)

Prologue

Scene—a large set of guest rooms. Winter, 3 PM, in a church-run hospital.

In the middle of the room are two brown doors, opening to the outside; the doors are very heavy, and carved with half-Westernized flowers. A spotted, faded, piece of heavy screening cloth, in a deep purple color, is hanging in front of the doors; its original pattern is already frayed at the edges, and there is already a hole in the middle section. On the right—stage right—is a door, opening to the current sick wards. The lacquer on the doors has already been worn away. The golden brass doorknobs shine dully, and along with the grey doorframe decorated in yellow flower patterns, and the bumped-and-pitted, uneven, old-style Western wooden decorations on the doors, make one think that this room's previous owners were mostly China's old students who had studied abroad, and, after returning to the country, lived for a time in wealth and prosperity.¹² In front of the door hangs an aging, deep purple velvet cloth, half opened, its ripped, ragged edge is dragging on the floor. There is another door stage left, double-leafed, leading to the dining room at the front of the house, from which one can ascend to the second floor, or exit to the outside of the building. The double-leaf door is more elaborate than the middle door, and the color is even deeper; occasionally, when someone goes through, the door turns heavily on its hinges, giving off a groaning noise, like a quiet, gentle old man, who has experienced many stories. In front of this door, there is no screen cloth; its chipped and missing lacquer and outlines are obvious. Right next to the right side of the door is an alcove in the wall, indented in like the niche made for a religious icon; the hole is sharp-edged, in the shape of a half circle. The upper half of the alcove is inlaid with a tall, narrow-paned French bay window, with each edge being a pane of glass, very finely done; the bottom is simply a flat, half-circle shelf raised off the floor, on which one could put things, or sit; the area in front of it is covered by a broken-stripped heavy velvet curtain, drawn aside. When the curtains are drawn, the niche can be completely concealed, so one cannot see the window or the sunlight, and the room is dark, and a little gloomy. At the start of the scene, this curtain is closed.

The walls are dark brown in color, old and in disrepair, faded in the dark. All of the furnishings in the room are very luxurious, but now give the appearance of being in decline. —Close to the front of the right wall is a fireplace, the hearth inlaid with rectangular marble tiles, the whole front inlaid with speckled, multicolored tiles; there are no furnishings on top of the fireplace. It is bare except for a crucifix hanging on the wall. Currently, a coal fire is burning in the fireplace, with very bright flames, illuminating an old circular chair placed in front of it. The fire projects a red light; in this way, a thin warmth gives this old room a little life. A pile of coarse coal stacked like firewood is beside the fireplace. On the left side of the door on the right, there hangs a scroll painting; even farther to the left side, close to the back, the corner has been plastered into three to four feet of flat space, and leaning there is an old-style red sandalwood dresser, half as tall as a man; the corners of the dresser are all plated with copper. On top of the dresser are a thermos of water and two white rice bowls, all placed on an old copper platter. In

¹² It was quite common during the early part of the 20th century for young Chinese intellectuals to study abroad, especially in Japan and the West.

front of the dresser is a rectangular carpet; on top of that, parallel with the dresser, is a low red sandalwood table, probably used previously to hold a display of elaborate porcelain antique curios or figurines; now it holds a pile of snow-white tablecloths, white bed linens, and the like, newly washed and not yet put in the dresser. As seen from the front, between the dresser and the alcove is a round stool. On the left side of the alcove (to the right of the center door) is a rectangular, mahogany dining table. On the table are two old candlesticks; on the wall is a large, old oil painting. A red sandalwood cupboard with elaborate glass stands on the left side of the central door. Originally, it contained antiques, but now it is empty; in front of this cupboard is a long, narrow, low bench. Not far from the corner of the left wall, and perpendicular to it, is a wide, dark-colored sofa placed crookedly. Behind the sofa is the long table; in front of it is a short desk, both empty. On the left of the sofa is a yellow standing lamp; the left wall near the edge of the alcove, forms a corner with the stag left side of the upstage wall. The alcove has a tea table; a small oil painting is hung low on the wall. Beside the tea table, and further to the front, is the left door, which leads to the dining room. There is a carpet in the middle of the room. On top of it are two large sofas, placed slantwise; in the middle is a round table, covered in a white tablecloth.

[At the start of the scene, the distant sound of bells is heard outside. The choir in the church is singing with organ accompaniment, preferably is Bach's High Mass in B Minor—Benedictus qui venait Domini Nomini¹³--the room is silent and empty.

[After some time: the central door opens slowly and heavily, and Nun A enters; her dress is like an ordinary nun in a Catholic church, hair bundled under a snow-white cloth, thick like a woman from Holland, wearing a dark blue gown of coarse cloth; the dress almost drags on the ground. A cross hangs in front of her chest, at her waist hangs a ring of keys, making a jingling noise when she walks. She quietly walks in, her face very gentle. She turns around to face the outside.

Nun A (*Kindly*) Please, come in.

[A pale old man walks in, wearing a very tasteful, old leather overcoat. He takes off his hat when he enters, his hair is graying, and his eyes are quiet but sad. His chin has a short, pale beard, and his face is full of wrinkles. He is wearing a pair of gold-framed glasses, which he also takes off after he enters, and puts them in a glasses case, his hand trembling a little. He fiddles with it for a second, and then coughs weakly. The sounds of music from outside stop.]

Nun A (*smiling*) It's freezing out!

Old Man (*nods*) Yes—(*concerned*) Is she all right?

Nun A (*sympathetic*) Yes.

Old Man (*quiet a time, then points to his head*) And up here?

Nun A (*pityingly*) Well—it's still the same as always. (*sighs softly*)

Old Man (*quietly*) I think it's difficult to cure.

¹³ The Benedictus from the High Mass in B minor has no organ, and is actually a bass singer accompanied by a flute and a harpsichord.

Nun A *(sympathetic)* Sit down for a while and warm up, sir, and then you can see her.

Old Man *(shakes head)* No. *(walks towards room to the right)*

Nun A *(walking forward)* You're going the wrong way, sir, that's Mrs. Lü's room. Your wife is upstairs.

Old Man *(stops, dispirited)* I—I know. *(points towards the room to the right)* Can I see her now?

Nun A *(kindly)* I don't know. Another nurse takes care of Mrs. Lü's room. Why don't you go upstairs to see your wife first, and then afterwards you can see her, alright?

Old Man *(perplexed)* Yes, that's fine.

Nun A Please follow me upstairs.
 [Nun A exits from the dining room on the left, leading the old man.]
 [The room is quiet for a time. The sound of footsteps comes from outside. Nun B leads two children inside. Nun B, except for being a little younger and more vivacious, is exactly like Nun A. The two children who entered are sister and brother, both wearing new winter clothing, with faces as red as an apple, and just as round and plump. The girl is 15 years old, with her hair in two short braids trailing behind her; her brother is wearing a red woolen cap. Both enter happily, the two of them together, with the girl being a little calmer. When they enter, the girl is in front.]

Nun B *(with joy)* Come in, young man. *(Boy enters facing his sister, the two of them holding hands)* It's cold out, isn't it. Miss, you and your brother can just sit right here, alright?

Sister *(smiling)* Okay.

Brother *(pulling on his sister's hand, whispering)* Hey, Sis, what about Mom?

Nun B Your mother will come here when the examination is over, so you can sit down and warm up a little, okay?
 [Boy turns his eyes towards his sister]

Sister *(understandingly)* Brother, I've been here before, so let's just sit here, and I'll tell you some jokes.
 [Brother looks all around happily.]

Nun B *(looks at them with interest)* That's right, ask your sister to tell you some jokes, *(points towards the fire)* and the two of you can sit by the fire together.

Brother No, I want to sit on this little bench! *(points towards the small stool in front of the left leaf of the middle door)*

Nun B *(kindly)* That's fine too, you both sit there. But, *(whispering)* Young man, you must sit very nicely and not make a fuss! There's a sick person upstairs—
(points at the hospital room on the right) and there's one here too.

Bro, Sis *(nod heads obediently)* Okay.

Brother *(suddenly, to Nun B)* My mom's coming back soon?

Nun B That's right, she's coming. You two sit down, *(the two sit on the bench together, look at Nun B)* and don't move! *(facing them)* I'll go in first.
 [They nod, Nun B enters the room on the right, exits.]
 [Brother stands up suddenly.]

Brother *(to sister)* Who was she? Why was she wearing those clothes?

Sister (very worldly) A nun, they take care of the sick people at the hospital. Brother, sit down.

Brother (not listening) Hey, Sis, look, look! (bragging) Look at the new gloves Mom bought for me.

Sister (unimpressed) I saw them, now sit down. (pulls brother down, the two of them sitting nicely again)

[Nun A enters from the room left of the stage. Walks towards dresser at right corner, not seeing the people in the room.]

Brother (stands up again, low voice, to sister) Another one, sis!

Sister (low voice) Shh! Don't talk. (pulls brother down again)

[Nun A opens dresser at right, and starts putting the pile of linens in the dresser.

[Nun B enters from the room to the right. She sees Nun A, both nod quietly, and Nun B helps Nun A put away the washing.]

Nun B (to A, curtly) It's over?

Nun A (doesn't understand) Who?

Nun B (quickly points up) Upstairs.

Nun A (perplexed) Yes, she's sleep again now.

Nun B (asks curiously) She hasn't hit anyone?

Nun A No, she just laughed for a while, and broke the glass again.

Nun B (lets out a sigh) That's fine, then.

Nun A (to B) And her?

Nun B You're talking about Downstairs? (points to the bedroom to the right) She's always like that, crying most of the time, doesn't speak. I've been here for a year, and I've never heard one word from her.

Brother (whisper, urgently) Sis, tell me a joke.

Sister (whisper) No, brother, listen to them talking.

Nun A (sympathetic) It's a pity; she's been here nine years, only one less than the one upstairs, but neither of them are any better. —(happily) Oh, right, Upstairs' Mr. Zhou came.

Nun B (surprised) What?

Nun A Today's the thirtieth day of the twelfth month by the old calendar.

Nun B (spooked) Oh, today's the 30th? —Then Downstairs might come out today, and come in here.

Nun A What, she's coming out here too?

Nun B Yes. (elaborating) Every year on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month, Downstairs comes out of her room, into this room, and stands in front of this window.

Nun A What is she doing?

Nun B Probably hoping her son will come back, he ran off one night ten years ago, and never came back. It's sad, her husband isn't around anymore either— (whispered) I heard he worked in Mr. Zhou's household as an errand boy— one night he drank too much and died.

Nun A (thinks she understands) So every time Mr. Zhou comes to see his wife, he always asks after Downstairs. —I think, Mr. Zhou will come downstairs in a bit to see her.

Nun B (*devoutly*) Mother Mary bless him and protect him. (*starts folding laundry again*)

Brother (*whispering, as a request*) Sis, can you just tell me half a joke?

Sister (*very interested in listening, shakes head, pressingly, whispers*) Brother!

Nun B (*thinking again*) It's strange. The Zhou family has such a nice house, why would they sell it to the hospital?

Nun A (*softly*) It's not very clear. —I heard three people committed lover's suicide in one night in this room.

Nun B (*startled*) Really?

Nun A Yes.

Nun B (*naturally thinks*) Then why does Mr. Zhou keep his sick wife upstairs, and doesn't move her out?

Nun A That's true. But his wife went crazy upstairs, and wouldn't move out no matter what.

Nun B Oh.
[Brother suddenly stands up.

Brother (*protesting loudly*) Sis, I don't like hearing this.

Sister (*urging him to stop, softly*) Good brother.

Brother (*ordering, even louder*) No, Sis, I want you to tell me a joke!
[Nun A, B turn their heads towards them.

Nun A (*surprised*) Whose children are these? I didn't see them when I came in.

Nun B Someone who came for a hospital visit's, I let them in to sit a while.

Nun A (*carefully*) Don't leave them there. —In case something scares them.

Nun B There's nowhere else; it's cold outside, and all the wards are full.

Nun A I think it's better if you find their mother. If Upstairs runs down here, they'll be scared out of their wits!

Nun B (*obediently*) Alright. (*to siblings, who are both staring at the nuns*) Miss, please wait here a little longer, I'll go find your mother for you.

Sister (*politely*) Okay, thank you!
[Nun B exits from the central door.

Brother (*hopefully*) Sis, is Mom coming soon?

Sister (*still blaming him*) Yeah.

Brother (*happy*) Mom's coming! We'll all go back home. (*claps palms together*) Let's go home and eat New Year's dinner.

Sister Brother, don't be noisy, sit down. (*pulls him down*)

Nun A (*shuts the dresser, towards siblings*) Young man, you and your sister need to sit quietly for a while, I'm going upstairs.
[Nun A exits toward the dining room to the left.

Brother (*is suddenly interested, stands*) Sis, what's she going to go do.

Sister (*thinks this is a worthless question*) She's going to go find Upstairs, of course.

Brother (*impatient*) But who's Upstairs?

Sister (*softly*) A crazy.

Brother (*jumping to conclusions*) A crazy man?

Sister (*also very certain*) No, a woman—a rich old lady.

Brother (*suddenly*) What about the one downstairs?

Sister (still certain) She's crazy too. —(knows he will keep asking and asking) Don't ask me again.

Brother (curiously) Sis, they just said three people died in this room.

Sister (not as confident) Yeah—Brother, I'm going to tell you a joke! One year, there was a king—

Brother (already interested) No, tell me about how those three guys died. Who were they?

Sister (timid) I don't know.

Brother (doesn't believe her, cleverly) No! —You know, but you won't tell me.

Sister (unwillingly) Don't ask here, this room is haunted.
[Suddenly, the sound of wildly falling things comes from upstairs, the sound of chains, the sound of footsteps, a woman's crazed laughter, and wild cries.

Brother (a little scared) Hey, listen!

Sister (holding Brother close by the hand) Brother! (the siblings raise their heads, nervously look at the ceiling)
[Silence.

Brother (calms down, very clearly) Sis, that was Upstairs, I know it!

Sister (afraid) Let's go.

Brother (stubborn) No, I won't go unless you tell me how the three people died here.

Sister Don't be noisy, or mom's going to spank you later!

Brother (doesn't care) No!
[The right door opens, a graying, shaking, old woman enters, stops in the middle of the room, her eyes unseeing. She walks incredibly slowly over to the window, turns towards the gap in the cloth, and walks back onstage, like she is listening to something. The siblings watch her nervously.

Brother (in a normal tone) Who's this?

Sister (low voice) Shh! Shut up. She's crazy.

Brother (low voice, secretively) That's probably Downstairs.

Sister (shaking voice) I, I don't know. (the old woman's body has no strength left, and she gradually collapses) Brother, look, she's fallen over.

Brother (courageously) Let's help her up.

Sister No, stay here!
[The old woman suddenly leans over, kneels in the middle of the stage. The stage gradually darkens, the chorus from outside starts again.

Brother (drags sister forward, looks at the old lady) Sis, tell me, what happened here? What did the crazy woman do?

Sister (frightened) No, you ask her, (points at the old woman) She knows.

Brother (urging) No, Sis, tell me, three people died in this room, who were they?

Sister (urgent) I told you to ask her, she knows for sure!
[The old woman slowly falls to the floor, the stage is wholly dark, and we hear the Mass and organ from outside.
[Brother's voice: (very clearly) Sis, you go ask her.
[Sister's voice: (softly) No, you ask her, (behind the grand drape) You ask her!
[Loud sound of the Mass.

Act I

At the beginning of the scene, the whole stage is dark; wait 30 seconds, and gradually lighten.

Scene—approximately the same as that of the prologue, but the whole feeling of the room is more elegant. This is a summer afternoon, ten years ago, in the living room of the Zhou household.

The bay window niche is still shielded by a cloth, and a strikingly beautiful vase of flowers is inside. The central door is open, revealing a metal screen door; if one looks through the screen door, the trees of a small courtyard garden are dappled green, and one can even hear cicadas chirping. The dresser on the right has a yellow tablecloth over it; a lot of small decorative objects are on top of that. The most obvious is an old photograph, placed quite inharmoniously among these delicate things. The long narrow table in front of the dresser has an expensive ashtray and a few other odds and ends on it. There is a vase of fresh flowers placed on the mantle over the fireplace; on the wall hangs an oil painting. There are two circular chairs in front of the fireplace, with their backs towards the wall. The glass case in the center-left is filled with antique curios, and the little stool in front of the wall has a green flower-patterned cushion on it. The long couch at the left corner is still in good condition, and there are three or four satin pillows placed on it. The small table in front of the sofa has smoking paraphernalia and other assorted things on it; the two small sofas and round table in the center of the stage are both quite beautiful, and there is a Luzon cigarette case and a fan on the table.

All of the curtains in the room are brand new, and give off an atmosphere of prosperity; the furniture in the room is extremely clean, and the metal accents all gleam. It is quite stuffy in the room, and oppressively hot, the air feeling pressed down. There is no sunlight outside, the sky is dark and gray, and there is the feeling that there is going to be a rainstorm.

[When the act begins, Sifeng stands beside the long rectangular table that is against the central wall, her back to the audience, straining medicine. She constantly waves a cattail-leaf fan, one hand wiping away sweat. Lü Gui (her father) is beside the sofa, wiping the silver odds and ends on top of the small table with great effort; his forehead is beaded with sweat.

[Sifeng is about 17 or 18 years old, her face is rosy and smooth-skinned, a healthy girl. Her whole body is well developed. Her hands are large and pale. When she walks down the road, her too-well-developed breasts tremble obviously beneath her clothing. She is wearing a white spun silk jacket, pants of rough Shandong silk, and a pair of slightly older cotton slippers. Her whole body is extremely neat. Although her movements are quite lively, because she has spent two years training in the Zhou household, she speaks with poise, frankly and straightforward, but within the bounds of propriety. The limpid eyes beneath her thick, long eyelashes can move quite keenly, and she can draw her eyebrows upward, gazing solemnly. She has a large mouth, with naturally vermillion lips, very broad, very full, and when she smiles, she shows her straight teeth, and a pair of dimples at the side of her mouth. And yet, the outline of her face is very solemn, revealing sincerity. Her complexion

is not extremely fair; in the hot weather, the tip of her nose is slightly sweaty, and she occasionally uses her handkerchief to wipe it. She loves to laugh, and knows that she is good looking, but right now she is knitting her brows. [Her father—Lü Gui—appears to be in his forties, his manner withered. The things that draw the most attention about him are his coarse, messy eyebrows and swollen eyelids. His lips sag downwards, and he has black bags under his eyes, both of which show extremely warped carnal desires. His body is rather fat, and his face is jowly, but he is always smiling in a pleasing manner, like most servants of large families. He is quite smart, especially when it comes to etiquette. His back has a slight hump, as if he lacks his body's answer of "yes" towards its landlord. His eyes are sharp, and often greedily peering around, like a wolf; he is good at calculating. In spite of that, he isn't very courageous; looking at him as a whole, he still appears withered. His clothes, although fine, are not tidy. Right now he is using a rag to dust things, and under his feet are the brown leather shoes he just cleaned. From time to time, he uses his own collar to wipe the sweat and oil from his face.

- Gui *(panting)* Sifeng!
- Sifeng *(acts like she didn't hear, and continues to strain the medicine.)*
- Gui Sifeng!
- Sifeng *(gives her father a look)* Drink up, it's hot. *(walks toward the dresser at right, looks for a palm-leaf fan, walks back by the tea table at center and fans)*
- Gui *(looks at her, stops working)* Sifeng, did you hear me?
- Sifeng *(annoyed, looks coldly at her father)* Yes! Dad! What do you want?
- Gui I asked you, did you hear what I just said?
- Sifeng Yeah, I did.
- Gui *(is always treated this way by his daughter, can only protest)* Fuck, this kid!
- Sifeng *(turns her head around, face towards the audience)* You should complain less, sir. *(fans herself, huffs a breath of air)* Ah! When the weather is this muggy, as soon as you turn around it's raining half the time. *(suddenly)* Did you shine those shoes, the ones the Master wears when he leaves the house? *(walks in front of Lü Gui, grabs a shoe, smirks)* Oh, these are the ones you shined, sir! These are done so sloppily—well, you know the Master's temper.
- Gui *(grabs the shoes)* I don't need you to mind my business. *(throws the shoes to the floor)* Sifeng, you listen up, I'm talking to you. Go look for your mother, and don't forget to take out all the new clothes for your mother to see.
- Sifeng *(impatiently)* I heard you.
- Gui *(arrogantly)* Tell her to think about it. Is it your father who's the capable one, or your mother?
- Sifeng *(smiling with contempt)* Well, of course it's you, sir!
- Gui Don't you forget to tell your mother, while you work in the Zhou house you eat well, and drink well, and all you have to do is serve the Master and Madam during the day, and at night you would still be able to listen to your mother, and go home to sleep.
- Sifeng Oh, I don't need to tell her, she'll ask on her own.
- Gui *(pleased with himself)* And, y'know, there's the money, *(smiles greedily)* you've got some money in your hands too!

Sifeng Money!?

Gui The pay from the past two years, the bonuses, and (*slowly*) the odd bill here and there, they...

Sifeng (*hurriedly breaking in, unwilling to hear what he's saying*) Didn't you already ask for a few dollars? You drank it up! Gambled it away!

Gui (*laughs, defending himself*) Look, look at you, you're doing it again. You hurry and worry and what for? I'm not asking you for money. Hey, I said, what I mean is—(*low voice*) he—doesn't he slip you money all the time?

Sifeng (*startled*) He? Who's he?

Gui (*might as well say it*) The young Master.

Sifeng (*red-faced, her voice creeping slightly higher, walking up to Gui*) Who said the young Master was giving me money? Father, don't say such stupid things all the time, like you're crazy.

Gui (*sneering*) Okay, okay, okay, I won't, I won't. Haven't you been saving up a little these past two years? (*stingily*) I'm not asking for your money, don't worry. I say, wait until your mother comes, let her get a look at this money, it'll be sure to open her eyes.

Sifeng Hah, Mom's not like you, losing his mind when he sees money. (*goes back to the center table and strains medicine*)

Gui (*sits on the long sofa*) Money or not, where would you be without your father? If you hadn't come to this big mansion and worked for Master Zhou, and instead listened to whatever your mother said for the past two years, how would you be able to eat and drink like this, and wear silk even in this hot weather?

Sifeng (*Turns her head back*) Hah, Mom's somebody who knows her place, she's educated, she likes to keep face. She would hate to let others order her daughter around.

Gui What face? It's just another one of your mother's tricks! Whose family do you belong to? –Fuck! The Devil's daughter, helping people and then falling into disgrace.

Sifeng (*so angry she can only look at her father, suddenly loathing*) Dad, look at that oily face of yours—you should shine the Old Master's shoes again.

Gui (*Enraged*) Keeping face, you're learning from your mother's poor example again. You see her—she likes to keep face! Running that fucking eight hundred *li*¹⁴, working in the women's college as a servant, for eight silver dollars a month, only able to come back home once in two years. She says this is “knowing her place,” and she's even been educated—what a loser!

Sifeng (*controlling herself*) Dad, save some words for home, this is the Zhou mansion!

Gui Huh? The Zhou mansion can't forbid me from talking household business with my daughter! I tell you, your mother...

Sifeng (*suddenly*) I can't take this anymore. I'll tell you first, Mom can't come home very easily. This time, she came to see my brother and me. If you make her miserable again, I'll tell my brother what you've been doing for two years.

¹⁴ A *li* is a unit of measurement about equal to a third of a mile.

Gui I, I—what did I do? (*feels like he's lost face in front of his daughter*) Drink some, gamble a little, play a little—just these three things. I'm almost fifty, and I should still be afraid of him?

Sifeng He wouldn't care about those things! —But he sends Mom money every month from the mines, and you spend it on the sly. If he knew, he would never agree to it!

Gui What's he going to do then, (*loudly*) His mother married me, so I'm his father.

Sifeng (*ashamed*) Quiet! Yelling like that here. —Madam's upstairs recuperating.

Gui Hah! (*torrentially*) I told you, when I married your mother, I still held an old grudge. Look at how clever I am—all these people in the Zhou house, who doesn't call me "Can-Do Lü Gui"? I had barely been here two months, when my daughter also found work here. And your brother—if it wasn't for me, would he have gotten work in the Zhou's mine? Ask your mother, is she successful? —Even now, your brother and your mother really disapprove of me. When she came back this time, your mother wanted to still act like a widow, and so I wouldn't admit to knowing her, on account of your brother. Maybe I'll leave her, and not see the daughter I raised with her, and your luckless brother she brought in.

Sifeng (*doesn't want to hear*) Oh, Dad.

Gui Hah, (*feeling better for the complaints*) who knows which bastard's son I raised.

Sifeng What did Brother ever do to you? Why are you yelling at him like that?

Gui When did he ever not let me down? Joining the army, dragging the payment cart around, being a repairman, going to school, which route did he follow through? I worked hard to get him a job in the Zhou's mine, but he gets into a fight with the foreman and hits somebody.

Sifeng (*carefully*) I heard, didn't the Master first tell the police at the mine to open fire, that he led the workers to do something after that?

Gui Anyway, the kid's a hoodlum. If he eats somebody's food, he should listen to them. It was all going fine, but he had to go on strike, and now he's got to depend on me to go begging to the Master again!

Sifeng You heard wrong, Brother said he wants to see the Master himself today, he's not looking for you to apologize.

Gui (*proud of himself*) But unfortunately, I'm his father, I can't not take care of him.

Sifeng (*looks at her father with contempt and disdain, sighs*) Alright, you rest up, I need to take this medicine upstairs to Madam. (*carries the bowl of medicine, walking towards the dining room at left*)

Gui Stop for a minute first, I've got one more thing to say.

Sifeng (*changing the subject*) It's lunchtime, is the Master's Pu'er tea steeped yet?

Gui I don't need to be bothered for that, those house boys have already taken care of it.

Sifeng (*dodging*) Oh, great, then I'm off.

Gui (*blocking her*) Sifeng, don't forget, I want to discuss something with you.

Sifeng What?

Gui Listen, wasn't yesterday the Master's birthday? The young Master gave me four silver dollars bonus as well.

Sifeng Great. (*quick and unthinking*) If I was the young Master, I wouldn't give you a penny.

Gui (*sneering*) You're absolutely right! Four dollars, what can it do? —Settle a little debt, that's all.

Sifeng (*smiling wittily*) Then you should go ask Brother for some money.

Gui Sifeng, don't—When did your father ever borrow money and not repay it? Right now it's easy for you to do it, could you just share seven or eight dollars with me, alright?

Sifeng I don't have any money. (*stops, puts down the bowl*) You really repaid your debts?

Gui (*cross his heart*) If I would lie to my own dear daughter, I'd be the king of all bastards!

Sifeng Don't try to trick me, but to tell the truth, I can think of something for you.

Gui Really!?!—Now that you mention it, it wasn't my fault. That pocket change from yesterday, it wasn't enough for a big debt, but it's too much for a small one. So, I played a bet or two—if I won wouldn't I have been able to pay back everything? Who knew my luck was bad? I had one loss after another, and now, with the drinks, I'm ten dollars in debt.

Sifeng Is this true?

Gui (*sincerely*) Not a single falsehood.

Sifeng (*deliberately mocking*) Then I truly told you, I don't have any money! (*as soon as she's done talking, grabs the bowl*)

Gui (*nervous*) Feng'er¹⁵, honey, is this how a child should think? You're my own daughter.

Sifeng (*jeering*) Even your own dear daughter doesn't have any way to sell herself to cover your gambling debt!

Gui (*seriously*) Child, you should understand. Your mother says she loves you, but it's just words. Everything you thought was important, I always kept it in mind.

Sifeng (*understanding, but doesn't know what con he's running*) What else would you like to say, sir?

Gui (*stops, looks all around, presses even closer to Sifeng, pretends to smile*) I say, the young Master often talks about you. The young Master, he said—

Sifeng (*can't control herself*) Young Master! Young Master! You're crazy! —I'm leaving, Madam is calling me.

Gui Don't go! I want to ask you one thing. Two days ago! I saw the young Master buying fabric—

Sifeng (*her face sinking*) What about it? (*looks at Gui coldly*)

Gui (*measures Sifeng with his eyes*) Hmm—(*slowly grabs Sifeng's hand*) The ring on this hand, (*smiles*) didn't he send that to you?

Sifeng (*disgusted*) The way you're talking really makes me want to puke.

¹⁵ This is a common form of nickname, especially for northern China. It should be pronounced “far.”

Gui (a bit angry, but continues happily) You don't need to hide it like that, you're my daughter. (suddenly smiles greedily) It's not unusual that a servant's daughter can accept a few things from them, use some of their money. It's alright, I understand.

Sifeng Alright, then say it. How much money do you want?

Gui Not much, thirty dollars will be fine.

Sifeng Oh? (with malice) Then you should go get it from the great young Master. I'm leaving.

Gui (enraged) Kid, you think I'm confused, and I don't know what you're doing with the shameless young Master?

Sifeng (provoking him) You're a father? Does a father talk like this to his daughter?

Gui (with an evil look) I am your father, I need to take care of you. I'm asking you, two nights ago—

Sifeng Two nights ago?

Gui I wasn't at home, and you finally came back at midnight, what were you doing before that?

Sifeng (trying to cover it up) I was getting something for Madam.

Gui Then why did you come home that late?

Sifeng (belittling) A father like you isn't qualified to ask me.

Gui So civilized! And yet you haven't said where you went.

Sifeng What haven't I said!

Gui What? Say it!

Sifeng Madam heard that the Master had just returned, and wanted me to check the Master's clothes again.

Gui Oh. (softly, menacingly) But just who brought you back home at midnight, then? Riding in the car, drunk off his ass, talking nonsense to you—who was it? (smiling faintly, proudly)

Sifeng (shocked) That, that's—

Gui (laughing) Oh, you don't have to say it, that's just the Lü family's rich son-in-law! –Hah, suddenly, a boyfriend with a car comes to our ramshackle house, looking for this servant girl daughter! (suddenly serious) I'll ask you, who is he? Say it.

Sifeng He, he's—

[Lü Dahai enters—Sifeng's older brother, Lü Gui's stepson—his build is big and strong, his coarse, black eyebrows almost hide his sharp eyes. His cheeks are slightly concave. His cheekbones are exceptionally prominent, and together with his sharp chin show his stubborn personality. He has large, thin lips, which are a strong contrast to his younger sister's red, thick lips, which bring with them the warmth of southern lands. He has a bit of a stammer when he talks, but when he's angered, his diction is sharp. Right now he's returned from the mine 600 li away, where there is a strike happening, and he is one of the instigators. The nervous energy of the past few months have left him with a look of tiredness now. His beard is scruffy, and he looks old enough to be Gui's younger brother, and only on close inspection, by looking at his eyes and voice, would you find he was of an age with his younger sister: the same heat, both erupting like a volcano, both of them people who are full of white-

hot energy. He wears a worker's blue cloth jacket, oiled straw hat in his hands, a pair of black leather shoes, with one of the shoelaces already lost who-knows-where. When he enters, he is a little uneasy, and he puffs his chest out a little, and re-does a few buttons on his jacket. He speaks very shortly, appearing cold-hearted.

- Dahai Feng'er!
Sifeng Big brother!
Gui *(to Sifeng)* You, talk! Why are you pretending to be a mute?
Sifeng *(looks at Dahai, starts the conversation meaningfully)* Brother!
Gui *(despite this)* You have to talk even if your brother's here.
Dahai What's happening?
Gui *(looks at Dahai for a bit, and turns his head again)* You go first.
Sifeng Brother, it's nothing important. *(towards Gui)* Alright, Dad, we'll discuss it later, alright?
Gui *(understanding)* Discuss it later? *(confirms, gives Sifeng a look again)* Then that's the way it is. *(turns to look at Dahai, arrogantly)* Hey, what's this coming in all casually?
Dahai *(simply)* I waited at the gatehouse for a long while. Nobody would acknowledge me, so I just walked in.
Gui Dahai, you are a vulgar mine worker after all. You don't understand the manor customs even a little bit.
Sifeng I am not the Zhous' servant.
Gui *(justified)* When he eats at the mine, it's still the Zhous' food.
Dahai *(coldly)* Where is he?
Gui *(deliberately)* He? Who is he?
Dahai The chairman.
Gui *(instructing)* The Master is the Master. Whether or not he's also a chairman, here we must call him Master.
Dahai Okay, you call him for me, and say that there's a worker's representative from the mine here that wants to see him.
Gui The way I see it, you should go home first. *(with certainty)* Let your old dad handle the mine's problems for you here. Later, you can be with your mother and sister for two days. After your mother has left, you can go still back to the mine, and this business will still be there.
Dahai You're saying that while we're all striking together at the mine, I should rely on you to intercede for us, and return to the mines by myself?
Gui That's nothing too difficult, either.
Dahai *(has no choice)* Okay, you talk to him for me first. I've got something else that I want to talk with him about first.
Sifeng *(hoping he leaves)* Dad, go and see if the Master's guests have left yet, and then take Dahai to see the Master.
Gui *(shakes his head)* Hah, I'm afraid he won't see you.
Dahai *(confident that he is righteous)* He ought to see me, I'm the mineworkers' representative. Yesterday, we all saw him at the company here.
Gui *(with doubt)* Then I'll go ask him for you.
Sifeng Then go.

[Gui walks to the door of the Master's study.

Gui (turns around) If he sees you, try to be a little less vulgar, do you hear? (Gui walks into the study with an experienced servant's gait)

Dahai (eyes follow Gui into study) Hah, he's forgotten he's still a person.

Sifeng Brother, don't talk like that, (stops, sighing) No matter what, he's still our father.

Dahai (looking at Sifeng) He's yours, but I don't acknowledge him.

Sifeng (looks timidly at her brother and suddenly thinks of something, runs to the door of the study, looks around.) You'd best be quieter when you're talking, the Master's in the next room!

Dahai (looks at Sifeng belittlingly) Okay. Mom'll be back soon. I think you should quit this job at the Zhou house and go home.

Sifeng (shocked) Why?

Dahai (curtly) This isn't the place you should live.

Sifeng Why?

Dahai I—hate them.

Sifeng Oh!

Dahai (poisonously) Most of the Zhou family are bad people. These past two years I've seen everything they've done at the mine. (stops, slowly) I hate them.

Sifeng What did you see?

Dahai Feng'er, don't you see that this dark, dreary, magnificent house was bought with the suffering workers buried in the mines!

Sifeng Don't speak such nonsense, I heard this room is haunted.

Dahai (suddenly) I just saw a young man, resting in the garden. His face was pale, his eyes were closed, looking like he was about to die. I heard that it was the Zhou family's oldest son, the young Master, the son of our chairman. Ah, it's revenge, it is.

Sifeng (angry) You—(suddenly) He treats people really well, did you know that?

Dahai His father's an evil miser, so naturally he can do good works himself.

Sifeng (looks at Dahai) I haven't seen you in two years, you've changed.

Dahai I've worked at the mine for two years. I haven't changed, but I see you have.

Sifeng I don't really understand what you're saying, you sound like—a little like the Master's youngest son.

Dahai Do you want to curse at me? "Young Master"? Hah, those two words don't exist in this world!

[Lü Gui enters from the study at left.

Gui (to Dahai) The Master's guests had just left, and I was about to speak up, but then another one came. I think we should just go and sit down for a while.

Dahai I think, I'll go in myself.

Gui (blocks him) What are you doing?

Sifeng No, no.

Dahai Alright, we wouldn't want to have him see that we laborers don't understand etiquette.

Gui Look at you, behaving like a poor man with pride. If your elders say you can't see him, then you can't see him. Wait in the servant's room, what does it matter? I'll go with you, you don't want to go running around lost in this big

of a house. (*walks toward the middle door, turns head back*) Sifeng, you stay here, I'll come back soon, you hear me?

Sifeng Go.
[Gui, Dahai exit together.]

Sifeng (*wipes at her forehead tiredly, talks to herself*) Oh, hell.
[We hear a young, lively voice from the garden, calling "Sifeng!" Quick footsteps mixed with skipping slowly move towards the central doorway.]

Sifeng (*a little panicked*) Oh, the younger Master.
[Sounds at the door:
[Voice: Sifeng! Sifeng! Where are you?
[Sifeng quickly hides behind the sofa.
[Voice: Sifeng, are you in here?
[Zhou Chong enters. His build is small, but he has a large heart, and it seems like he has a child's fantasies. He is young, only 17, and he has already fantasized about so, so many impossible things. He lives in a beautiful dream. Right now he is waving happily: red-faced, sweating, he is laughing. He has a racket held under his left armpit, and his right hand is using a white handkerchief to mop his face. He is wearing white sports clothing. He calls for Sifeng in a soft voice.]

Chong Sifeng! Sifeng! (*looks all around*) Huh, where did she go? (*tiptoes towards the kitchen at right, looks in the door, low voice*) Sifeng, come on out. Sifeng, I have something to tell you. Sifeng, it's good news. (*he walks softly over to the study door, even quieter*) Sifeng.
[Voice from inside: (*sternly*) Is that Chong?

Chong (*timidly*) It's me, Father.
[Voice from inside: What are you doing?

Chong Oh, I'm calling for Sifeng.
[Voice from inside: (*as an order*) Go away, she's not here.
[Chong takes his head from the doorway, makes a face.]

Chong Huh, that's strange.
[He walks towards the kitchen at right dejectedly, calling for Sifeng in a whisper the whole way.]

Sifeng (*sees Chong has left, sighs in relief*) He's gone! (*looks at the door to the garden, deeply worried*)
[Lü Gui enters from the central door.]

Gui (*to Sifeng*) Who was that calling for you just now?

Sifeng The Master's younger son.

Gui What was he doing, calling you?

Sifeng Who knows.

Gui (*criticizing*) Why didn't you acknowledge him?

Sifeng Oh, I, (*wipes away tears*)—didn't you tell me to wait?

Gui (*comforting*) What's this, you're crying?

Sifeng I'm not crying.

Gui Kid, there's nothing to cry about, so what are you crying for? (*as if he were acting*) Who told us to be poor? Poor people don't have anything pretty. We

can't do anything but put up with whatever happens, but everybody knows that my kid is a good kid.

Sifeng (*raises her head*) Alright, why don't you just talk straight to me.

Gui (*embarrassed*) Look, when I went to the servants' quarters, just about all of those bastards came running to the mansion to collect my debts. I haven't even got twenty bucks, I just can't show my face anymore.

Sifeng (*takes out money*) All of my money is here. This is the money I was going to give Mom to buy clothing with, but now you can use it first.

Gui (*pretending to decline*) Then you won't have any money to spend, will you?

Sifeng Stop it, you don't need to be polite like that.

Gui (*takes the money, smiling, counts*) Only twelve dollars?

Sifeng (*honestly*) I only have that much cash.

Gui Then, how will this settle my debts with the Zhous?

Sifeng (*holding off her anger*) You tell them to come to our house tonight to get it. In a while, when I see Mom, we'll think of something. This money is for you.

Gui (*happily*) You gave this to me, and that shows that you've got the proper respect for your father. —Oh, what a good child, I always knew you were a filial child.

Sifeng (*shrugs*) Now let me go upstairs.

Gui Who's stopping you? Go, talk to the Mistress, and tell her Lü Gui hopes that the Mistress is feeling better.

Sifeng I know, I won't forget. (*takes the medicine and walks away*)

Gui (*proud of himself*) Right, Sifeng, I still have to tell you one more thing.

Sifeng You stay here and we'll talk later, I really need to get this medicine to the Mistress.

Gui (*hinting*) Hey, this is about you. (*smiles fakely*)

Sifeng (*face darkens*) What do you have to say now? (*puts down the medicine*) Alright, we'll talk it all out today before we go.

Gui You take a look at yourself, you're hurrying again. You're truly becoming a little princess, good at getting yourself into a huff.

Sifeng Go ahead and tell me—I can take it.

Gui Kid, don't be like that, (*seriously*) I'm asking you to be careful.

Sifeng (*teasing*) I'm broke right now, what use is being careful?

Gui I'm telling you, the Mistress's spirit hasn't been quite right the past two days.

Sifeng What does the Mistress's spirit have to do with me?

Gui I'm afraid that, when the Mistress sees you, she gets a little unhappy.

Sifeng Why?

Gui Why? Wake up. The Master is a lot older than the Mistress, and the Master and Mistress aren't close. The young Master isn't the Mistress's child, and he's not that much younger than her.

Sifeng I know that.

Gui But the Mistress is more affectionate towards him than her own son, and treats him better, thankfully.

Sifeng As the stepmother, she can only be like that.

Gui Do you know why nobody comes to this room at night, and when the Master's at the mine, nobody comes in the day either?

Sifeng Isn't it haunted at night?

Gui Do you know what kind of ghosts they are?

Sifeng I only heard that before, you could often hear the sound of sighing from this room; sometimes crying, sometimes laughing. I heard someone died in here, and there's a wronged ghost.

Gui A ghost! Exactly right, —I've snuck in and seen it.

Sifeng What, you saw it, what did you see? A ghost?

Gui (*conceited*) That's your father's good luck.

Sifeng Say it.

Gui At that time you weren't here yet, the Master was at the mine, and in a courtyard that big and gloomy, there were only the Mistress, the young Master, and the youngest son. Back then this room was haunted, and the youngest son, a child at that time, was timid, and wanted me to sleep by his doorway. It was fall, and in the middle of the night the youngest son suddenly woke me up, saying that the living room was being haunted, and told me to go check it out by myself. The youngest Master's face had gone green, and I was scared, too. But, I was a new servant. If the master said it, how could I not go?

Sifeng Did you go?

Gui I drank two cups of *baijiu*, passed the lotus pond, and snuck into the hallway beside the door. I heard wailing from inside the room, like a woman's ghost crying. Such sad weeping! The more afraid I was, the more I wanted to see it. I gathered up my courage, and from this very windowsill, looked in.

Sifeng (*gasps*) What did you see?

Gui There was a guttering candle on this very table. I saw, entranced, two ghosts wearing black clothing, like a man and a woman, sitting with their backs to me. The woman ghost was crying on the male ghost's shoulder, and the male ghost had his head down, sighing.

Sifeng Oh, this room really is haunted.

Gui Exactly. I was under the influence, facing the windowsill, and I coughed softly. I saw the two ghosts move away from each other like the wind, both of them looking towards where I was: their faces were clearly facing me, so I really was seeing a ghost.

Sifeng Really? What did they look like? (*stops, Gui looks all around*) Who were they?

Gui I saw the woman ghost, (*turns his head, softly*)—it was the Mistress.

Sifeng The Mistress? —And the male?

Gui The male ghost—don't be afraid—was the young Master.

Sifeng Him?

Gui It was him, he and his stepmother were haunting this room.

Sifeng I don't believe it, weren't you mistaken?

Gui Don't kid yourself. So, daughter, accept it, and don't be confused. The Zhou family has that kind of people.

Sifeng (*shakes head*) No, you're wrong, he wouldn't do that.

Gui You forgot, the young Master is only six or seven years younger than the Mistress.

Sifeng I don't believe you, it's not, it can't be.

Gui Alright, it's up to you to believe it or not, but I'll tell you now, the Mistress's attitude towards you right now isn't very good, because you, you and—

Sifeng (*isn't willing for him to talk about this*) If the Mistress were to know that you were at the door, she would never forgive you.

Gui Yep, I broke out in a cold sweat. I didn't wait for them to come out, I just ran.

Sifeng Then, the youngest Master didn't ask you afterwards?

Gui He asked me, I said I didn't see anything, and he should forget it.

Sifeng Hah, a person like the Mistress would have just forgotten about it?

Gui Of course she's a scary lady, she's interrogated me a few times, and I didn't let anything slip. After two years, maybe they think that it really was a ghost coughing that night.

Sifeng (*to herself*) No, no, I don't believe it—if something like this happened, he would tell me.

Gui You say that the young Master would tell you. You think about it, who are you? Who is he? You don't have a good father, you're a servant to them, you think they'll treat you sincerely? Keep dreaming your princess dreams. You...

Sifeng (*suddenly sighs gloomily*) Be quiet! (*stands up suddenly*) Mom will be back home today, do you think I'm too happy? You're saying these rumors—a pack of rumors! Oh, go away.

Gui Look at you, I'm telling you the truth, so you can act smarter. And yet you're actually angry, ah, you! (*gives Sifeng a rough look over, unyieldingly, like he is pleased with how this conversation will end, and thinks he's smarter than everyone else. He walks to the tea table, takes a cigarette from the cigar case, prepares to light it, but suddenly remembers this is the Zhou mansion, and changes his mind, and skillfully steals a few leaves of tobacco and cigars, putting them in his own cigarette case, which is brass that is losing its silver plating.*)

Sifeng (*watches Gui finish his theft with disgust, with disdain*) Oh, so just this little thing? That, I know.
[Sifeng grabs the medicine bowl and walks away]

Gui Don't leave, I'm not done talking yet.

Sifeng You're not done?

Gui We've just gotten to the point.

Sifeng Sorry, sir, but I won't hear it. (*turns around and walks*)

Gui (*grabs her hand*) You have to listen!

Sifeng Let me go! (*nervous*)—I'll scream.

Gui I'll only say this one thing, and then you can get worked up. (*in Sifeng's ear*) Your mother will be here in a while, looking for you. (*lets go of her hand*)

Sifeng (*becoming angry*) What?

Gui As soon as your mother gets off the train, she's coming to the mansion.

Sifeng Mom doesn't want me to work at the mansion, why did you tell her to come here looking for me? I see her every night when she's home, what good does calling her here do?

Gui It wasn't me, Miss Sifeng, the Mistress wanted me to bring her here.

Sifeng The Mistress wanted her?

Gui Hm, (*mysteriously*) isn't it strange? Your mother has no relation to this place, and yet the mistress wants to have her come for a chat.

Sifeng Oh, God! Stop mumbling like you're hiding something, all right?

Gui Do you know why the Mistress is all alone upstairs, writing poetry and calligraphy, pretending to be sick and never coming down?

Sifeng Whenever the Master comes home, the Mistress is always like that.

Gui Is it wrong this time?

Sifeng Then, spit it out.

Gui Couldn't you feel it, even a little bit? –The young Master hasn't brought it up?

Sifeng I know that for the past half-year or so, he hasn't talked with the Mistress much.

Gui Really? –Then how does the Mistress treat you?

Sifeng For the past few days, she's been treating me better than before.

Gui That's right! –I told you, the Mistress knows I don't want you to leave here. This time, she wants to talk to your mother herself, and tell her to take you away, to get lost!

Sifeng (*softly*) She wants me to go—but—why?

Gui Hah! You know why. –And—

Sifeng (*softly*) What does bringing Mom here accomplish?

Gui Right, she wants to tell your mother a very important thing.

Sifeng (*suddenly understands*) Oh, Dad, no matter what, you can't let Mom know that I'm here. (*at the intersection of fear and regret, grieving*) Oh, Dad, do you remember, when Mom left me last year, she told you to keep a good eye on me, and don't let me go work at the mansion. You didn't listen; you wanted me to come. Mom doesn't know about it, Mom's fond of me, Mom loves me, I'm Mama's good girl, I couldn't tell her about this even on my deathbed. (*throws herself on the table*) Goddamn it!

Gui Sifeng! (*he knows how far this act of his should go, he pats Sifeng lightly*) See, now you see your father is good. Dad loves you, don't be scared! Don't be scared! She wouldn't be like that, she won't abandon you.

Sifeng Why wouldn't she? She hates me, she hates me.

Gui She hates you. But, hah, she can't not know that there's someone she's afraid of here.

Sifeng Who's she afraid of?

Gui Hah, she's scared of your dad! You forgot that I told you about those two ghosts. Your dad's a ghost hunter. Yesterday night, I asked for a leave of absence for you, and she said that when your mother comes back, she wanted me to tell her to come here. I saw her spirit those two days, and I guessed half of it. I casually brought up the business during that midnight twice. She's a clever woman, there's no way she didn't get it. –Hah, if she played dumb with me, right now the Master's home, we'd just be an annoyance. I know she's a scary lady, but if anybody bullies my daughter, I'll fight them.

Sifeng Dad, (*lowers her head*) please don't cause trouble!

Gui I don't respect anybody in this house except for the Master. Don't worry, Dad's here. Anyway, maybe I made a blind guess, but she acted like it wasn't

the case. She actually told me it was because she had heard that your mother could read and write, that she wanted to see her, and have a chat.

Sifeng (*suddenly listening attentively*) Dad, stop talking, I think I heard someone in the kitchen, (*points to the left*) coughing.

Gui (*listens*) It isn't the Mistress? (*walks to the door to the kitchen, peers through the keyhole, returns hurriedly*) It was her, strange, that she would come downstairs.

Sifeng (*wiping away tears*) Dad, am I clean?

Gui Don't be flustered, don't expose yourself, don't say anything. I'm off.

Sifeng Hm, when Mom comes, please tell me first.

Gui By the way, when you see your mother, act like you don't know a thing, understand? (*walks to the middle door, turns his head back*) Don't forget, tell the Mistress that Lü Gui hopes she feels better.

[Lü Gui exits in a rush from the central door. Sifeng carries the bowl of medicine towards the kitchen door; when she is right in front of the door, Zhou Fanyi ripples in. With one look, you can tell she is a courageous, yet malicious woman. Her complexion is pale and wan, and only her lips have any blush of color. Her large, gloomy eyes and large nose make others think she is frightening. However, one can see from her facial features that she is depressed; below those still, long eyelashes, because of the pent-up fire in her heart, the light of her eyes is full of the suffering and anger of a young wife after she has lost hope. The corners of her mouth are bent back, showing that she is a woman that has been suppressed, and is now controlling herself. Her snow-white, slender hands are often pressed to her slim, weak chest when she coughs softly. She waits until she pants out a breath, and only then does she wipe her own red, swollen cheeks, and gasp for breath. She is a woman of China's old culture: her gentle frailness, her calm sorrow, her brilliance—she has an interest in poetry, but she also has an even more primal wildness: in her heart, her courage, her crazed thinking, in her subtle strength that comes suddenly in the time of decision. If you look at her whole self, she appears as crystal. She can only give spiritual comfort to a man, and her bright forehead shows deep understanding, as if she is only allowed to offer idle talk; but when she is caught in thoughts of love, she will suddenly laugh cheerily; when she sees the one she loves, a happy flush will scatter across her face, and when her dimples are shown, only then will you think that she can be loved by others, only then will you know that she is indeed a woman, the same as all the other young women. She will love you like a dog that has been starved for three days gnawing at its favorite bone; when she begins to hate you, it will also be like a ferocious dog snarling—no, more like one which will silently, maliciously devour you. Yet, her demeanor is quiet, or vexed. She will be like a leaf lightly falling beside you on an autumn evening, who thinks her own summer is already past, and the Western Paradise's sunset glow has already turned to night.

[Her whole body is in black. Her *qipao* is inlaid with silver-grey lace. She holds a round screen fan, hanging below her fingers, as she enters. Her eye sockets are a bit sunken, and she looks at Sifeng quite naturally.

Sifeng (*strangely*) Mistress! Why did you come downstairs? I was just preparing to send your medicine up.

Fanyi (*cough*) Is the Master in his study?

Sifeng The Master is receiving a guest in his study.

Fanyi Who is it?

Sifeng Just a moment ago it was the engineer building the new house, but right now I don't know who it is. Did you want to see him?

Fanyi No. —Amah told me that this house was already sold to a church, so they can turn it into a hospital, is that right?

Sifeng Yes, Master said we should get all the small things together, and there's already been a few big pieces of furniture moved to the new house.

Fanyi Who said we should move?

Sifeng When the Master returned, he pressed us to move.

Fanyi (*stops, suddenly*) How did I not hear anything about this?

Sifeng The Master said that the Mistress wasn't feeling well, and was afraid that if you heard, you'd dislike the trouble.

Fanyi (*stops again, looks at Sifeng*) I haven't been down for two weeks, and this room has changed.

Sifeng Yes, the Master said that the way it looked before was ugly, and moved the new furniture that you added away. The Master arranged this himself.

Fanyi (*looks at the dresser at right*) This is that dresser he likes so much, taken out again. (*sighs*) Naturally, I want to be in accordance with him on everything, he won't compromise on anything. (*coughs, sits down*)

Sifeng Mistress, you look like you have a fever, you should go upstairs and drink your medicine.

Fanyi No, it's too hot upstairs. (*coughs*)

Sifeng The Master said that the Mistress's illness is very serious, and ordered us to ask you to rest upstairs.

Fanyi I don't want to lay around in bed. —Hm, I forgot, when did the Master return from the mine?

Sifeng The night before last. The Master saw that you had a bad fever, told us not to wake you, and slept downstairs by himself.

Fanyi It seems I haven't seen him come up during the day, either.

Sifeng Yeah, the Master has been busy meeting with the mine's board of directors for the past two days, and only had time to go upstairs to see you at night. But, you locked the door again.

Fanyi (*carelessly*) Oh, oh—how is it that it's this hot downstairs, too?

Sifeng That's right, it's too muggy. Dark clouds started covering the whole sky this morning, so maybe it will storm today.

Fanyi Get me a larger fan, I'm having a little trouble breathing.
[Sifeng gives her a fan, she looks at Sifeng, and purposefully turns away again.]

Fanyi How haven't I seen the Master for two days?

Sifeng He's probably very busy.

Fanyi I heard he wants to go to the mine as well, right?

Sifeng I don't know.

Fanyi You didn't hear anything?
Sifeng Actually, the servants who care for the young Master have been helping him prepare his clothing for the past two days.
Fanyi What is your father doing?
Sifeng Probably went to buy sandalwood for the Master. —He asked after your health.
Fanyi He's actually worried about me. (*pauses, then suddenly*) He still hasn't gotten up yet?
Sifeng Who?
Fanyi (*didn't think that Sifeng would ask her this, hurriedly gathers herself*) Ah—the young Master, naturally.
Sifeng I don't know.
Fanyi (*gives her a look*) Hm?
Sifeng I haven't seen him this morning.
Fanyi What time did he return last night?
Sifeng (*red-faced*) Think, Mistress. I go home every night to sleep, how would I know?
Fanyi (*not of her own will, sharp and acidic*) Oh, you sleep at home every night! (*feels she has made a slip of the tongue*) When the Master has returned home, and there is no one in the house to serve him, how can you go home every day?
Sifeng Mistress, didn't you give the order, and tell me to go back home to sleep?
Fanyi That was when the Master wasn't at home.
Sifeng I'm afraid the Master is practicing Buddhism again, reading the scriptures and keeping vegetarian, he doesn't like me serving him. I heard that the Master hates all women.
Fanyi Oh. (*looks at Sifeng, thinks of her own experience*) Yes, (*mutters*) it's quite difficult to say. (*suddenly lifts her head, eyes widening*) Did you say, he'll only be here for a few days, and then he'll be going? Where is he intending to go?
Sifeng (*timidly*) You're talking about the young Master?
Fanyi (*looks at Sifeng askance*) Yes!
Sifeng I haven't heard. (*stammeringly*) He, he's always coming back at two or three o'clock. I think I heard my father gossiping this morning that he's opened the door for him past midnight.
Fanyi Was he drunk again?
Sifeng I'm not certain.—(*wants to find a new subject*) Mistress, please take your medicine.
Fanyi Who said I want to take any medicine?
Sifeng The Master ordered it.
Fanyi I haven't seen any doctor, where did the medicine come from?
Sifeng The Master said that you've been struck with melancholia. This morning he remembered your old prescription, and told us to get some. He said to cook some up for you as soon as you awoke.
Fanyi Is it done cooking yet?
Sifeng Yes, its been cooling here for quite a bit.
[Sifeng carries the medicine bowl over.]

Sifeng Please drink it.
Fanyi *(takes a sip)* Quite bitter. Who made it?
Sifeng I did.
Fanyi It tastes too awful, pour it out!
Sifeng Pour it out?
Fanyi Hm? Yes, *(thinks of Puyuan's strict face)* –on second thought, why don't you put it down over there first. No, *(disgusted)* you should still pour it out.
Sifeng *(hesitating)* Okay.
Fanyi I've been drinking that kind of bitter medicine for these past few years, I've probably had enough.
Sifeng *(takes the bowl)* Why don't you grin and bear it. Only bitter medicine can cure an illness.
Fanyi *(her hatred suddenly springs forth)* Who needs your advice? Go away! *(thinks she's lost her dignity)* I heard that when the Master returned this time, Amah was thinner.
Sifeng Yeah, she's a lot thinner, and darker too. I heard that the mine workers are striking right now. The Master's quite nervous.
Fanyi The Master is unhappy?
Sifeng The Master's the same as always. Outside of receiving guests, reading the scriptures, and meditating, he doesn't say a word in this house.
Fanyi He hasn't spoken with the young Masters?
Sifeng He saw the older young Master and nodded. They didn't speak. He actually asked the younger young Master about what was going on at school. –That's right, the youngest Master asked after you this morning as well.
Fanyi I'm not willing to talk at all right now. Tell him I'm better.—After that, tell the finance office to give the youngest Master forty silver dollars, and say it's for buying books.
Sifeng The youngest Master is always wanting to see you.
Fanyi Then tell him to come upstairs and see me. –*(stands up, walks two steps)* Oh, this old house is always so muggy, all the furniture is moldering, and everyone is skulking around, like ghosts!
Sifeng *(thinks)* Mistress, I wanted to ask you for a leave of absence today.
Fanyi Is your mother coming back from Jinan? –Yes, your father mentioned it.
Fanyi [In the garden, Zhou Chong is yelling again: Sifeng! Sifeng!
Go answer, he's calling for you.
[Chong yells: Sifeng.
Sifeng I'm in here.
[Zhou Chong enters from the central door, wearing white Western-style clothing.
Chong *(sees only Sifeng when he enters)* Sifeng, I've been looking for you all morning. *(sees Fanyi)* Mom, why are you downstairs?
Fanyi Chong'er, why is your face so red?
Chong Just now I was playing tennis with a classmate. *(affectionately)* I've got a lot of things I want to talk with you about. Are you feeling better? *(sits beside Fanyi)* I've been going upstairs to see you for two days now, why did you always have the door locked?

Fanyi I wanted a little peace and quiet. How does my complexion look? Sifeng, go get the young Master a bottle of soda. Look, your face is so red.
[Sifeng exits from the kitchen door.]

Chong (*happily*) Thank you. Let me look at you. I think you look a lot better, not sick at all. Why do they always say that you're sick? You're always cooped up all alone in that room, and look, Dad's been home for three days and you haven't seen him at all.

Fanyi (*looks at Chong with melancholy*) I'm feeling a little bad.

Chong Oh, Mom, don't be like that. Dad's not good to you, but he's old. I'm your future. I want to marry a really good woman, Mom, and you can live together with us, and we can definitely cheer you up.

Fanyi (*the shadow of a sliver of faint smile flashes onto her face*) Cheer me up?
(*suddenly*) Chong'er, you're seventeen now?

Chong (*likes that his mother is strange like this sometimes*) Mom, look, if you forget my age again, I'm really going to be angry with you!

Fanyi Your mom isn't a very good mother. Sometimes I even forget where I am.
(*contemplating*) —Oh, eighteen years—in this old house—isn't your mother getting old?

Chong No, Mom, what are you thinking?

Fanyi I'm not thinking about anything.

Chong Mom, did you know we're moving? To a new house. Father told me yesterday that we're moving the day after tomorrow.

Fanyi Do you know why your father wants to move?

Chong When does Father ever tell us before he does something? —But I think he's getting old. He's said that that after this he doesn't want to do stuff at the mine anymore, and also this house is unlucky. —Oh, Mom, did you know this house is haunted? Last fall, in the middle of the night, I thought I heard something.

Fanyi Don't say any more.

Chong Mom, do you believe it too?

Fanyi I don't believe it. This house is very strange, but I like it a lot. I always feel like this house has a spiritual presence. It pulls at me, and won't let me leave.

Chong (*suddenly happy*) Mom. —
[Sifeng enters with the soda.]

Sifeng Young Master.

Chong (*stands up*) Thank you. (*Sifeng blushes*)
[Sifeng pours the soda.]

Chong Bring a glass for the Mistress, alright? (*Sifeng exits*)

Fanyi (*staring at them*) Chong'er, why are you both so formal with each other?

Chong (*drinking*) Mom, I want to tell you, it's because, —(*Sifeng enters*) —I'll tell you in a while. Mom, what about the fan you painted for me?

Fanyi Did you forget that I'm ill?

Chong Right, pardon me. I, I, —How is this room so hot?

Fanyi The window probably hasn't been opened.

Chong Let me open it.

Sifeng The Master told us not to open them. He said it's hotter outside than in.

Fanyi No, Sifeng, open it up. When he goes out, he'd be gone for two years without coming back home. He doesn't know how stuffy it is in this room. (*Sifeng draws aside the curtain in front of the bay window*)

Chong (*sees that Sifeng is struggling with the flower pot in front of the window*) Sifeng, don't bother. Let me get it. (*walks over*)

Sifeng I'll get it myself, young Master.

Chong (*disagreeing*) Let me. (*the two of them pick up the flowerpot, but when they put it down, it crushes Sifeng's hand. Sifeng cries out softly in pain*) What happened? Sifeng? (*takes her hand*)

Sifeng (*snatches her hand away*) It's nothing, young Master.

Chong Don't worry, I'll get you a bandage.

Fanyi Chong'er, that's not necessary. —(*turns her head towards Sifeng*) Go to the kitchen, and ask them if the Master's vegetarian meal is done yet. [Sifeng exits from the center door, Chong watches her go.]

Fanyi Chong'er, (*Chong returns*) Sit down. Speak up.

Chong (*looks at Fanyi, with a hopeful and happy expression*) Mom, I've been really happy the past two days.

Fanyi In this house, if you can be happy, that's a good thing.

Chong Mom, I've never wanted to hide anything from you. You're not an ordinary mother. You're so courageous, you have the best imagination, and, you've got so much sympathy for my thoughts.

Fanyi I like that very much.

Chong Mom, I want to tell you something, —no, I want to consult with you about something.

Fanyi Let me give it a listen.

Chong Mom, (*mysteriously*) you won't yell at me?

Fanyi I won't yell at you, child. You speak up.

Chong (*happily*) Oh, Mom—(*stops again, hesitating*) No, no, no, I can't say it.

Fanyi (*smiling*) Why?

Chong I, I'm scared you'll be mad. (*stops*) After I've said it, will you like me the same?

Fanyi Silly boy, Mom will always like you.

Chong (*smiles*) My good Mom. Really, you'll still like me? You won't be mad?

Fanyi Yes, really—spit it out.

Chong After I've said it, you can't laugh at me.

Fanyi No, I won't laugh at you.

Chong Really?

Fanyi Really!

Chong Mom, I like somebody.

Fanyi Oh! (*confirming her suspicions*) Oh!

Chong (*looking at Fanyi's staring eyes*) Mom, look, your reaction seems to say I shouldn't.

Fanyi No, no, what you said made me think—made me feel like I... —Oh, no, no, no. Say it. Who is this girl?

Chong She's the world's most—(*looks at Fanyi*) No, Mom, you're laughing at me again. Actually, I think she's the best girl. She's pure-hearted, she knows how

to live happily, she's sensitive, she understands that hard work has meaning. The best thing is, she isn't one of those pampered little princesses.

Fanyi But don't you like educated women? Has she been to school?

Chong Of course she hasn't. It's her, it could be said it's her only flaw, but it's not her fault.

Fanyi Oh. *(her eyes darken, has no choice but to ask the next question, heavily)* Chong'er, you're not talking about—Sifeng?

Chong Yes, Mom. –Mom, I know the others will laugh at me, but you won't, you'll sympathize with me.

Fanyi *(stunned, stops, to self)* How, even my own child...

Chong *(deeply worried)* You don't want to? You think I'm doing something wrong?

Fanyi No, no, that's not it. I'm afraid that a girl like her won't be able to bring you happiness.

Chong No, she's smart, and expressive, and she even understands me.

Fanyi You're not afraid that your father won't be pleased with you?

Chong This is my own business.

Fanyi And when other people know and start gossiping?

Chong I'm even less worried about that.

Fanyi That's my boy. But still, I'm afraid you're making a mistake. First, she is and has always been an uneducated servant. If you like her, of course she'll think this is her good fortune.

Chong Mom, do you think she doesn't have an opinion?

Fanyi Chong'er, you always think highly of everyone.

Chong Mom, I think what you said doesn't really suit her. She's the purest, most opinionated, good woman. I proposed to her yesterday—

Fanyi *(even more stunned)* What? Proposed? *(that word makes her want to laugh)* You proposed to her?

Chong *(very seriously, doesn't like his mother's attitude)* No, Mom, don't laugh! She rejected me. –But I'm really happy, this makes her even more noble. She said she wasn't willing to marry me.

Fanyi Oh, she rejected it? *(this she also thinks is completely hilarious)* She still “rejected” you. –Hah, I understand her.

Chong You think she didn't respond to me, that she was deliberately false? No, no, she said, she has another person in her heart.

Fanyi She didn't say who?

Chong I didn't ask. It's always her neighbor, or someone she sees often. –But true love can't avoid twists and turns. I love her, so she'll gradually come to understand me, and like me.

Fanyi My son wants to court her and yet he can't get her.

Chong Mom, why do you hate her like that? Sifeng is a nice girl, behind your back she always says she has a great admiration for you. She respects you deeply.

Fanyi What are you going to do now?

Chong I'm going to tell Father my intentions.

Fanyi Did you forget what kind of person your father is?

Chong I definitely need to tell him. I might not actually end up marrying her. If she won't have me, I'll respect her anyway, and help her. But I hope she's getting

an education now, and I hope Father will allow me to give her the tuition to go to school part-time.

Fanyi You really are a child.

Chong (*unhappily*) I'm not a child. I'm not a child!

Fanyi Your father is going to break all of your dreams in a single sentence.

Chong I don't believe you. *—(a little dejected)* That's enough, Mom, let's not talk about it. Oh, I saw my brother yesterday, he said that this time he really wants to go to the mine to take care of things. He's leaving tomorrow. He said he's too busy, and he told me to tell you something, that he won't go upstairs to see you. You won't blame him?

Fanyi Why would I blame him?

Chong I always thought that your and my brother's feelings weren't like they were before. Mom, think about it. He hasn't had a mother since he was a baby, it would be pretty easy for his personality to go a little strange. I think his mother definitely has very deep emotions too. Brother is a really emotional person.

Fanyi Your father has returned home. Don't speak of your brother's mother so much, so we can avoid your father going stone-faced again, and making the whole family unhappy.

Chong Mom, but Brother's really a little strange right now. He drinks a lot, and he's got a hair-trigger temper, and sometimes he goes to the foreign church and I don't know what he does.

Fanyi He's still like that?

Chong Three days ago he was completely drunk. He grabbed my hand, and he said he hates himself. He said a lot of things I didn't really understand.

Fanyi Oh!

Chong At the very end he suddenly said that he once loved someone he really shouldn't have been in love with!

Fanyi (*to self*) Once?

Chong When he was done talking he just cried, and started pressuring me. He wanted me to leave his room.

Fanyi What else did he say?

Chong Nothing. He looked really lonely. I felt sorry for him, why is he still not married?

Fanyi (*muttering*) Who knows? Who knows?

Chong (*hears the sound of footsteps outside the door, turns to look*) Hey, Brother's coming.

[The central door opens, and Zhou Ping enters. He is about 28 or 29, very pale. His torso is a bit longer than his brother's. His features are delicate, even beautiful, but he isn't the kind of man where the ladies take one look at him and are intoxicated. He has thick, dark eyebrows, broad earlobes, and large, coarse hands. At first glance, sometimes people are made to think he is a simpleton, but if you sit a while longer with him, one perceives that he doesn't have that unsophisticated, heartening air. He has been sculpted. Although the rough, tart dregs of his personality have been refined by education, becoming fine and elegant, but a kind of blazing, refineable, unformed primeval

savagery, because of depression stemming from having long ago left the open air, has become suspicious, weak, and ineffable. When he speaks even two or three sentences, you know even more that this is a beautiful emptiness, like a wheat seedling sprouted in an open field that has been transplanted in a warm room. Although it will still flower and bear fruit, it is hollow and frail, unable to bear the winds and frosts of reality. In the murky light of his eyes, you can see instability, hesitation, weakness, and conflict. When his eyes darken, and his pupils flicker slightly, you know he is reviewing his own heart's mistakes, and fears that someone will pry into these inabilities. He only discusses these things within the small circle of himself and his heart. But, do you jump to the conclusion that he can't accomplish astonishing things, that he has not a man's courage? No, when his emotions bubble up, —Oh, you just have to see that the corners of his eyes constantly move in changing circles, and his extremely impulsive and incisive, red, thick lips and you will know that at that time, he will rashly do something that will be a lifelong curse, and his life will not have a plan. The corners of his lips sag downwards. A little weariness makes his pupils appear lost in thought, and make you think that he cannot control himself, and he cannot do one thing with discipline all his life. However, he knows his own illness, and he is correcting it, no, better to say he regrets it, and is always repenting the his mistakes wrought from intuition; because when a new urge comes up, his passion, his cravings, rush forth again like a flood, and drowning him. His star-like intellect is only a bunch of dead twigs twisted into a vortex. In his disorientation, he does the things he thinks he shouldn't do. This kind of action naturally leads to one mistake after another even bigger mistake. Therefore, he has a moral viewpoint, he has passion, but at the same time he thirsts for life, and thinks himself a man with a physical body. Thus, he suffers, he hates himself, he envies those people without any scruples who dare to do evil things; thus, he can sympathize with Lü Gui. At the same time, he adores those who are able to embrace an undertaking and move it forward, who comply with what most people call a "moral" life, the "model citizen" and "model head of household;" thus, he admires his father. His father, to his knowledge, other than being a little stubborn and unfeeling, —but he likes that too, because he has neither of those kinds of personalities—is a flawless man. He thinks that deceiving his father on that aspect is wrong, not because of how he loves his father (admittedly, he can't say he doesn't love him.) He thinks acting like that is despicable, behaving like a mouse stealing a bite while the lion is sleeping, and at the same time, like every introspective yet impulsive person, by his past intuition, when reason becomes cold, he hates himself even more venomously, feels even more deeply that this is against human nature, and drags the suffering of committing a crime on to his own shoulders. He wants to rescue himself; he needs new strength, no matter what it is. He just needs someone who can help him, who can save him from out of the depths of misery and conflict, and he is willing to look. When he saw Sifeng, at that moment he felt she was fresh, and she had "life"! He discovered that the thing he most needed permeated and flowed within Sifeng's being. She had "youth," she had "beauty," she had

overflowing warmth. It's true that he also saw her coarseness, but his intuition was that that was what he wanted. Slowly he detested every woman that was too melancholy; melancholy had already gnawed away his heart. He hated, too, all the educated women (because they would call attention to his faults), and similarly, all delicate sentiment was felt to be "soft"!

[Of course, the ripples from this kind of feeling float vaguely in the heart, concealed; he himself is simply following the flow of his own feelings. He can't rationally, unfeelingly dissect himself. He is afraid: he sometimes fears the deformities in his heart. Now he can't help but love Sifeng, he wants to unswervingly love her, he thinks that this will make him forget himself. Of course he also understands, this time his love is not the medicine that will save his soul, but he still has a place that is thirsty. But on this level he doesn't actually feel his former impulsiveness; he wants to serve her well, and in his heart he feels that this will also end as previously said. After passing through her tepid scent, which is the scent of a maiden, he feels in a flash of insight his heart is clean and bright. He sees the sun within his own heart, and he thinks, "The woman that can save him is probably her!" Thus he gives his soul to this girl; however, the memory of bygone days, like a gigantic iron fist, seizes his heart frequently, especially in front of Fanyi, where he feels a thin stab of remorse. Thus he wants to leave this place—this old house that leads men to unbridled nightmares, and go anywhere. Yet before this lantern is even lit, when Sifeng can neither understand nor console his remorse, he even more dependently indulges in liquor, in enthusiastic parties, in every outside excitement. Thus, his spirit is demoralized, and always becoming unstable. [He is wearing a navy blue silk gown, Western-style pants, and patent-leather shoes. His face is undecorated. His whole appearance is untidy, and he yawns.

- Chong Brother.
Ping You're here.
Fanyi (*thinks he's not paying attention to her*) Ping!
Ping Oh? (*dips his head, raises it again*) You—you're here as well.
Fanyi I just came downstairs.
Ping (*turns his head to ask Chong*) Father hasn't gone out yet?
Chong No, are you preparing to meet with him?
Ping I want to talk with Father once just before I leave. (*walking straight towards the study*)
Chong You shouldn't go in.
Ping What is the old sir doing?
Chong He's probably talking about work with someone. I just saw him, he said he'll come here in a little while. He told us to wait here for him.
Ping Then I'm going back to my room first to write a letter. (*wants to leave*)
Chong No, Brother, Mother said she hasn't seen you in a while. Don't you want to all sit together and talk?
Fanyi Let your brother rest a bit. He wants to sit by himself.
Ping (*a little bothered*) That's not necessarily so, I'm just afraid that Father will come back. You're always so busy, so—
Chong Didn't you know that Mother was sick?

Fanyi Why would your brother be worried I was ill?
Chong Mom!
Ping Are you better?
Fanyi Thank you, I just came downstairs.
Ping Oh, I was going to leave for the mine tomorrow.
Fanyi Oh. *(stops)* That's very nice. –When will you be returning?
Ping It's not certain, maybe two years, maybe three. Oh, how is this room so muggy?
Chong The window's already open. –I think, there's probably going to be a big rainstorm coming.
Fanyi *(stops a moment)* What will you do at the mine?
Chong Mom, you forgot, Brother specialized in mining science.
Fanyi Is that the reason, Ping?
Ping *(takes the newspaper and reads it, covering himself)* I couldn't say, it seems like I've lived in this house too long. I'm getting really bothered by it.
Fanyi *(smiles)* I'm afraid it might be because you're a coward.
Ping What do you mean?
Fanyi This room was haunted, you've forgotten.
Ping I didn't forget. But I've come to loathe living here.
Fanyi *(laughs)* If I were you, I would loathe everyone here, and I would leave this dead place, too.
Chong Mom, I don't want you to talk like that.
Ping *(sullenly)* Hah, I don't even hate myself enough, so I how should hate other people? –*(sighs)* Little brother, you should go to your room. *(stands)*
[The study door opens.
Chong Don't go, this is probably Dad coming.
[Sounds from inside: *(the study door is half open, Zhou Puyuan enters, says with half his body hanging inside the door)* I mean we should do it like this, no problem, great, goodbye, I won't see you out.
[The door opens, and Zhou Puyuan enters. He is about 50 or 60, his temples already whitening, and he wears oval, gold-framed glasses, and a pair of black, hawk-like eyes flash beneath them. Like all characters that started their own business, his dignity before his descendents seems particularly formidable. The clothing he wears is still the new clothing from twenty years ago: a large, official-style cotton jacket, beneath which is a white silk shirt. The collar of the long gown is loosely buttoned, exposing the flesh of his neck. His clothing smoothly fits his body, and is tidy, without dirt. He is a little fat, and his back is slightly bent. His face is pale, his jowls sag, and his eye sockets are a little sunken. His pupils have brilliance flashing within them, yet he often shuts his eyes in exhaustion. His face brings many years of worldly experience and weariness. There is a kind of cold, threatening light in his eyes, and an occasional cold smile on the corners of his lips, and you can see his everyday imperiousness, self-conceitedness, and stubbornness. The arrogance and rashness from his youth have already been covered by the deep wrinkles on his face, and not a single trace of them can be found. Only his salt-and-pepper hair still preserves the elegance of bygone days, shiny and

swept back. Under the sunlight, his face appears very white, and most people would say this is a rich man's trait. So only then did he have such a big mine. The beard below his chin is already graying to white, and he commonly uses a little ivory comb to brush out the tangles. His index finger has a ring on it. [He is full of energy right now, and walks out heavily.

Ping, (together) Dad.

Chong

Chong Has the guest gone?

Puyuan (nods, turns towards Fanyi) Why have you come downstairs today, are you completely well?

Fanyi The illness originally wasn't very bad—Now that you have returned, are you feeling well?

Puyuan I'm alright. —You should go back upstairs and rest. Chong'er, how do you think your mother looks, compared to before?

Chong Mother wasn't sick at all.

Puyuan (doesn't like his sons to answer their elders like that, seriously, eyes turning upward) Who told you? When I wasn't here, did you come ask after your mother's health very often? (sits on the sofa)

Fanyi (fears he will lecture again) Puyuan, you're looking a little thin. —What is the result of the strike at the mine?

Puyuan They started working again already yesterday morning, it's not going to be a problem.

Chong Dad, then how is Lü Dahai still here wanting to see you?

Puyuan Who is Lü Dahai?

Chong Lü Gui's son. He was recommended the year before last, and this time he's the representative.

Puyuan That man! I thought that one had a history, and the Guang Fang has already fired him.

Chong Fired! Dad, that guy's got a clear head. I just now talked with him a while. The worker that represents the strikers shouldn't necessarily be fired.

Puyuan Hah, young people today. They talk with the workers, they say two or three unimportant, sympathetic sentences, as if it were a fad!

Chong I think these people are only working hard for their own people, and we should be sympathetic towards them. And also, it's not right that we—who live in luxury—have to fight with them for food. It's not about fads.

Puyuan (rolls his eyes upward) Do you know what a society is? How many books about society and the economy have you read? You remember, I studied this in Germany, and I consider my thoughts on this quite a bit more comprehensive than your dabbling!

Chong (repressed, however) Dad, I heard that the mine isn't paying any compensation to the workers that were injured this time.

Puyuan (lifting his head) I think you've said far too much this time. (to Fanyi) Over the past two years he's learned to be a lot like you. (looks at clock) I have another guest coming in ten minutes. Hm, what do you all have to say about yourselves?

Ping Dad, I wanted to meet with you.

Puyuan Oh, about what?

Ping I would like to go to the mine tomorrow.

Puyuan Did you finish up that thing for the company here?

Ping It's just about done. I would like it if Father would give me something concrete to do; I don't like staring at things that are already finished.

Puyuan *(stops, looks at Ping)* Can you deal with hard labor? If you do something, it should be done to the utmost. I won't have my son being talked about by bystanders.

Ping It's been too comfortable doing things here for two years. My heart wants to go inland, to the countryside.

Puyuan Let me think. *-(stops)* You can leave tomorrow. As for the kind of work—I'll send a telegraph when you get to the mine.
[Sifeng enters from the kitchen door, carrying a bowl of Pu'er tea.]

Chong *(hesitatingly)* Dad.

Puyuan *(knows he has a trick up his sleeves)* Yes?

Chong I have something important that I want to discuss with you.

Puyuan What?

Chong *(bows his head)* I want to separate out a part of my tuition.

Puyuan Oh.

Chong *(drums up courage)* And I want to give that part to—
[Sifeng sets the bowl of tea in front of Puyuan.]

Puyuan Sifeng, *-(to Chong)* Wait. *-(to Sifeng)* What happened to the medicine I told you to prepare for the Mistress?

Sifeng It's finished.

Puyuan Why didn't you bring it?

Sifeng *(looks at Fanyi, is silent.)*

Fanyi *(perceives her surroundings and has a bad feeling)* She brought it to me a little while ago, but I didn't drink it.

Puyuan Why? *(stops, to Sifeng)* And the medicine?

Fanyi *(talking quickly)* It's gone, I told Sifeng to pour it out.

Puyuan *(slowly)* Poured out? Oh? *(even slower)* Poured out! *-(to Sifeng)* Is there any left?

Sifeng There's still a little in the medicine jar.

Puyuan *(low and unhurried)* Bring it here.

Fanyi *(resisting)* I don't want to drink bitter things like that.

Puyuan *(to Sifeng, loudly)* Bring it here.
[Sifeng walks to stage left to get the medicine.]

Chong Dad, Mom doesn't want to, why are you forcing her like this?

Puyuan You and your mother both have no idea what your illness is. *(softly, to Fanyi)* When you drink it, you'll feel better. *(sees Sifeng hesitate, points to the medicine)* Bring it here, to the Mistress.

Fanyi *(endures and obeys)* Alright, put it here first.

Puyuan *(not happily)* No. It's best if you drink it now.

Fanyi *(suddenly)* Sifeng, take it away.

Puyuan *(suddenly strict)* Drink it. Don't be headstrong, like a child.

Fanyi *(voice trembling)* I don't want to drink it.

Puyuan Chong'er, bring your mother the medicine.
Chong (*rebellingly*) Dad!
Puyuan (*glaring*) Go!
[Chong has no choice but to put the medicine in front of his mother.
Puyuan Speak up. Ask your mother to drink it.
Chong (*holds the medicine bowl, hands trembling, softly*) Dad, please don't do this.
Puyuan (*loudly*) I want you to say it.
Ping (*bowed head, in front of Chong, softly*) Listen to Father, you know his temper.
Chong (*unable, holding back tears, to his mother*) Please drink it. Drink a little, for me, otherwise Father won't be able to calm down.
Fanyi (*entreatingly*) Oh, can't it wait until this evening?
Puyuan (*grave and stern*) Fanyi, as a mother, you should always think of your children. Even if you don't want to take care of your body for yourself, you should still be an example for your children, one they can obey.
Fanyi (*looks all around, gazes at Puyuan, and again at Ping. Takes the bowl, tears falling, and suddenly puts it down again*) Oh, no! I won't drink it!
Puyuan Ping'er, beg your mother to drink.
Ping Dad! I—
Puyuan Go to your mother! Kneel down, and beg her.
Ping (*looking for forgiveness*) Oh, Dad!
Puyuan (*loudly*) Kneel!
[Ping looks at Fanyi and Chong; Fanyi's face is stained with tears, Chong is shaking.
Puyuan I told you to kneel!
[Ping is about to kneel down.
Fanyi (*looks at Ping, not wanting him to kneel, says urgently*) I'll drink, I'm drinking it now! (*grabs the bowl, takes two gulps, so emotional that her tears are flowing again. She stares at Puyuan's pitiless eyes and the distressed Ping, chokes down hatred and drinks it all in one go*) Oh... (*crying, exits running to dining room at right*)
[Time passes.
Puyuan (*looks at watch*) I still have three minutes. (*to Chong*) What did you want to say a while ago?
Chong (*raises his head, slowly*) What?
Puyuan You said you wanted to separate out a portion of your tuition? —Hm, how?
Chong (*softly*) I don't have anything to say, now.
Puyuan You really don't have any new problems?
Chong (*crying voice*) It's nothing, it's nothing, —Mom was right. (*runs towards the dining room*)
Puyuan Chong'er, where are you going?
Chong Upstairs, to see Mom.
Puyuan And that's why you're running?
Chong (*suppresses himself, walks back*) Yes, Dad, I want to go. Do you have any orders to give me?
Puyuan Go.
[Chong takes two steps towards the dining room.

Puyuan Come back here.

Chong Dad.

Puyuan You tell your mother, I've already asked Dr. Ke from Germany to come examine her.

Chong Didn't Mom already take your medicine?

Puyuan In my opinion, your mother's mental state isn't normal. She seems fairly sick. (*turns head to Ping*) I think you're the same way.

Ping Dad, I'd like to go rest a while.

Puyuan No, don't go. I've got things to say to you. (*to Chong*) You tell her, Dr. Ke is a famous expert on neurological diseases, and I met him in Germany. When he comes, tell her he must see her. Did you hear me?

Chong I heard. (*walks two steps*) Dad, is that all?

Puyuan Go upstairs.
[Chong exits from the dining room.]

Puyuan (*turns towards Sifeng*) Sifeng, I remember I told you before that if you don't have a reason to be in this room, you should leave.

Sifeng Yes, Master. (*also exits from dining room*)
[Lü Gui enters from study.]

Gui (*looking at the Master, seemingly forced, seems unable to speak*) M-m-m-master. The—the guest is here!

Puyuan Oh, please bring him to the guest hall first.

Gui Yes, Master. (*Gui exits*)

Puyuan Why is this window open?

Ping My brother and I opened it.

Puyuan Well close it. (*wiping his glasses*) I don't want the servants coming and going from this room as they please, I've prepared for a guest to rest here in a while.

Ping Alright.

Puyuan (*wiping his glasses, looking at the Zhou compound's furniture*) Most of the furniture in this room are things that your birth mother liked. I moved from the south to the north—I don't know how many times I've moved—and I was never willing to give them up. (*puts his glasses back on, coughs*) The way this room is set up now, I wish it looked the way it was thirty years ago. That way it would give comfort to my eyes. (*paces to the front of the table, looks at the photographs*) Your birth mother always liked to have the windows closed in the summer.

Ping (*forcing a laugh*) But Dad, if you want to remember Mother there's no need to—

Puyuan (*suddenly raises his head*) I've heard that you're doing something that you should be ashamed of.

Ping (*startled*) W-what?

Puyuan (*softly walks to stand in front of Ping*) Did you know what you're doing now is embarrassing to your father? Moreover—(*stops*)—it's embarrassing to your mother?

Ping (*at a loss*) Dad.

Puyuan (*benevolently, taking Ping's hand*) You're my oldest son. I didn't want to discuss this in front of others. (*stops, coughs once severely*) I heard that while I was away these past two years, you haven't been very well behaved.

Ping (*even more scared*) I haven't done anything, there's nothing, nothing.

Puyuan If a man dares to do something, he should take responsibility for it.

Ping (*pales*) Dad!

Puyuan The people at the company say you're always hanging around the dance hall, especially these past few months, drinking, gambling, and staying out the whole night.

Ping Oh, (*sigh of relief*) You're talking about—

Puyuan Is this true? (*long pause*) Tell the truth!

Ping It is, Dad. (*blushes*)

Puyuan A person nearing thirty should understand "self-respect"! Do you still remember why you're named "Ping"?

Ping I remember.

Puyuan Say it yourself.

Ping It's because my mother's name was Shiping, and on her deathbed, she named me herself.

Puyuan Then I ask you, for your mother's sake, to change your present behavior completely.

Ping Yes, Dad, that was a temporary absurdity.
[Lü Gui enters from the study.]

Gui M-m-master. The g-g-guest has been waiting.

Puyuan I know.
[Gui retreats.]

Puyuan I think my family is the most satisfactory, most orderly family. I think my sons, too, are all strong, and I'm absolutely unwilling to hear gossip about the children I taught from anyone.

Ping Yes, Dad.

Puyuan (*summoning a servant*) Come. (*to himself*) Oh, I'm a bit tired.
[Ping helps him up from the sofa.]
[Lü Gui enters.]

Gui Master.

Puyuan Ask the guest to come sit in here.

Gui Yes, Master.

Ping No, –Dad, you rest a while.

Puyuan No, you don't need to take care of me. (*to Gui*) Go, ask the guest in.

Gui Yes, Master.
[Gui exits. Puyuan takes a cigar and Ping lights it for him. Puyuan smokes slowly, and sits up straight.]