HORACE MANN
OFFICE

PEKING MAN

Characters

PETER

Zeng Mao -- Old patriarch of an old family residing in Peking; 63 years old.

ISAO CHIN

Zeng Wenqing -- His oldest son; 36 yrs.

LORI

Zeng Siyi -- His eldest daughter-in-law (Wenqing's wife) 38 yrs.

TSAI

KIM

Zeng Wencai -- His daughter, 32 yrs.

FRED

Jiang Tai -- Zeng Hao's son-in-law, Wencai's husband, and an old student who studied abroad. 37 yrs.

KEENAN

Zeng Ting -- The son of Wenqing and Siyi. 17.

RAYJEN

BENNY

Zeng Ruizhen -- His grandaughter-in-law. Ting's wife. 18 yrs.

KITTY

Su Fang -- His niece-in-law (on his wife's sister's side) 30 yrs.

ME

Chen Naima -- Zeng Wenqing's former wet-nurse; around 60 yrs.

SHAOZHUAR

WICKY

Xiao Zhuer -- her grandson; 15 yrs.

SUN

JAY

Zhang Shun -- a servant of the Zeng family.

HENRY

Yuan Rengan -- A scholar researching anthropology; 38 yrs.

MARCIA

Yuan Yuan -- Rengan's only daughter; 16 yrs.

Collectors A, B and C.

PHILIP

Policeman.

Scenarios

Act I: Mid-Autumn Festival -- in the parlor of the Zeng family in Peking.

Act II: About eleven o'clock in the same evening -- the parlor of the Zeng family.

Act III: Still in the same parlor.

Scene One -- Approximately a month after Act I; at dusk of a certain day.
Scene Two -- About five o'clock the next morning; before dawn.

~~WED 8PM 2/27~~

~~FRI 7PM 2/28~~

~~SAT 8$^{30}$ PM 3/1~~

~~SUN 2$^{30}$ ACT I 3/2~~

7PM

~~TUES 3/4 7PM~~ P. 122-141

WED 3/5 9$^{30}$ PM 141-154

~~WED~~ 3/6 NOON ACT II

~~THURS~~ 2PM 158-166

~~FRI~~ 3/7 1PM 166-180

SAT 3/8 3PM ACT III SC I

SUN 3/9 2PM PP. 195-208

2PM PP. 208-217

TUES 3/11 2PM ACT II SC 2

3PM

7$^{30}$ PM ACT I

WED 3/12 3$^{30}$ PM ACTS II & III

7$^{30}$ PM

THURS 3/13 2PM WHOLE PLAY

7$^{30}$ PM

FRI 3/14 NOON MON

TUES

SAT 3/15 11

SUN 3/16 1$^{30}$ PM

MON 3/17 7$^{30}$ PM

TUE 3/18 7 PM

WED 3/19 1 PM

1$^{30}$ PM

THURS 3/20

FRI 3/21 2PM

SAT 3/22 3 PM

SUN 3/23 1 PM

P.P. 56-7-8

82-3-8-90

10 5-8-9-10-11-12-13
14-15-20-21-23-
125-6

Previews
21-22-23

FRI 3PM Rehearsal

ACT I P. 8-9-10-11-12-13
15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22
(ENTER 55) 56-57-58
(" 81) 82-83-88-90
(" 104) 105-

ACT II P. 108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-120-121-122-123
(ENTER 125) 125-126 EXIT
(" 152) 152-153 EXIT+ENTER

VOICE ↗ ENTER

# "PEKING MAN"

by

Cao Yu

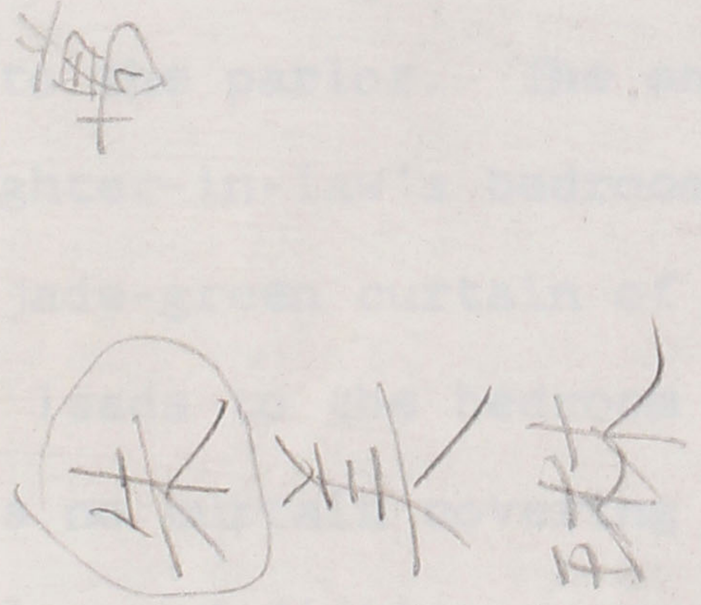
TSAO

ACT III P. 158-9-160-62-63-65-66-67
(ENTER 199-) 200-1-2-8-9-13-EXIT 14-ENTER 16-EXIT

Translated by

Leslie Lo

with Don Cohn and Michelle Vosper



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# ACT I

It is almost noontime in Peking on the Mid-Autumn Festival (Harvest Moon). The scene takes place in the parlor of the Zeng family over which hovers a gloomy silence. There is no one in the parlor; one hears only the ticking of the old Soochow (grandfather)clock. Outside, the flock of pigeons, which the master of the house raises, is circling and cooing in the air. The sounds are peculiarly loud and pleasing. Looking out from the row of well-washed windows in the living room, one sees light clouds in the blue sky.

This parlor serves as a foyer for the living room and the bedrooms of the eastern wing of the house. There are four entrances (doors) to the parlor. The one on the right-hand side leads to the daughter-in-law's bedroom. In front of the door is an exquisite jade-green curtain of the finest gauze. The door on the left leads to the bedroom of the daughter, Zeng Wencai. There is no curtain covering this door; the door frame is a little smaller and dirtier suggesting that the decor inside that room is also less elegant. Two-thirds of the back wall of the parlor is a folding door, covered with blue satin, which leads into the living room. It serves as side entrance

to the living room. The remaining part of the back wall is partitioned by a bookcase that forms a small study cove. Separating the parlor and the living room at the base of the threshold is a stone ledge that one must stride over in order to enter the living room. (These ledges are usually about 10 inches high). Through the opened folding doors one can see the living room which has an air of elegance. One can tell that this family was at one time very powerful and wealthy. The main entrance off the living room is on the right-hand side, and is opened wide onto a garden or courtyard. In the garden can be seen date trees, wisteria and aspens. Sunlight is pouring into the living room through the row of sparkling windows. Above the entrance to the partitioned study is a placard bearing the three Chinese characters --"Yang Xin Zhai", meaning "Studio of Cultivation of the Mind" -- written in seal script style (ancient style Chinese characters). On the left-hand side of the small study is a small door (which can hardly be seen). This door leads to the back yard and onto Old Master Zeng's bedroom. Along the wall of the study are rows of book cabinets filled with books bound in the traditional Chinese style. In front of the window are the elegant cedar desk and teakwood chair. On top of the desk are writing instuments -- brushes, ink, grinder, and some exquisite porcelain ware and curios. The masters of the household would come here to compose poetry and paint. At times they would come here to read the classics, to discuss religion and philosophy, to cast fortune, or simply to take naps.

The parlor used to be the place for private conversations. When the Zeng family was at its peak of glory and prosperity, the house was often graced by important guests. At that time Great-grandfather De Gong, the founder of this once-powerful family, had established a rule: only important and intimate guests would be invited to this parlor. Decades later, this parlor has remained a place for the Zeng family members to congregate. Now, the mistress of the house, Jing De Gong's grand-daughter-in-law (Zeng Siyi), lives with her husband (Zeng Wenqing) in the bedroom on the right-hand side. Thus domestic matters are discussed in this parlor only. Even though the family's financial decline has made it necessary for them to rent out the living room and western bedroom (which cannot be seen by the audience), the Zeng's are still unwilling to sell the house. The house is the last shelter for the Zeng family.

The decor of the house is maintained so as to serve as a reminder of the glory of yesteryears, not at all betraying the family's financial misfortune. The octagonal window looking into Zeng Siyi's bedroom is still highly polished. (In the old-style mansions in Peking, there were often indoor windows betweem rooms.) Behind the window are heavy apricot-colored curtains. Zeng Siyi is a secretive person who would never let anyone see what se is doing in her bedroom, and it looks as though there are innumerable secrets locked away in there. In front of the clock in the parlor is a jade "ru yi" wrapped in gold threaded brocade. (A "ru yi" is a sceptre that expresses "fulfillment of

wishes, or happiness".) This sceptre has been passed down from their ancestors. Placed on either side of the sceptre are arranged pots orchids, and a pair of ruby-colored antique vases that were a part of Zeng Siyi's dowry twenty years ago. (This display of objects -- the clock, "ru yi", plants and vases -- is most likely on top of a long high table.) In front of the long table is a square redwood table that looks a bit old and damaged, and is covered by a purple tablecloth. At mealtime, this table is pulled out and converted into a dining room table. On the table is a big bowl of sweet candied fruits. Around the table are two or three chairs and a low stool, all of which have been carefully polished. Along the right-hand wall of the parlor and near the entrance to the daughter's bedroom is a sandalwood table in the shape of a half moon. On the table is a bowl of bergamots (citrus fruit), several snuff bottles wrapped in green satin, and two or three books of the classics. In the middle of the table is a transparent fish tank with several goldfish swimming around peacefully among the seaweeds. In front of the sandalwood table are two or three small sofas and one low end table. On the left-hand wall is a scroll of calligraphy of Cursive [redacted] script written by Dong Qichang. The mounting is old but elegant. On the wall near the corner of the study hangs a seven-stringed lute in an elegant holder made of plain color brocade, orange with a tassle hanging from it. A beautiful ink painting of bamboo hangs on the wall between the study and the folding panels of the living room. The mounting

still looks quite new. To the right of the painting is a lamp which hangs from a five foot black dark wood lamp-stand carved in the form of a dragon. From the dragon's mouth is suspended a string to which the lamp shade is attached. The four-sided lamp shade is made of silk on which is painted colorful birds and flowers. On the left-hand side of the painting is a wide-mouthed white porcelain urn with blue flowers. This imitation Ming antique contains more than ten scrolls of paintings. Next to the urn are two small square stools on which is placed a slightly opened leather suitcase.

The room is quiet, and outside one hears the intermittent cooing of the pigeons. From the long lane outside can be heard the sound of the "single-wheeled water cart", a vehicle unique to Peking in those days. Rolling along the uneven cobblestone surface, the cart makes a monotonous sound, "zi niu niu, zi niu niu". Occasionally the gloomy silence is also broken by the sound of a "knife-sharpening" hawker who blows a battered trumpet.

Zeng Siyi is the mistress of the house. Born and raised in a family of wealthy scholars, she is proud that she is educated and knows well the etiquette that is a way of life in a family like the Zeng's. She is clever and level-headed; and wears a lingering smile on her face all the time. And yet she is also pretentious, selfish, loquacious and suspicious. She considers herself to be a generous and gracious person, but she is really calculating and conniving. For one who loves to plot and scheme, she somehow manages to put on the airs of a good wife in a feudal

society -- kind, filial, and loving. She is a woman of small stature who does not like to look people straight in the eye. She has a wide forehead, straight nose, thick lips, and buck teeth. Her dark heavy eyebrows are pencilled into the form of two blades. Always alert, she steals glances to detect the expression of her audience while she speaks. Even though she is not yet forty years old, she is overweight and has a puffy face. Wearing a pale yello "qi pao" of a floral print (A "qi pao" is a fitted Chinese dress with a Mandarin collar and snaps across one or both sides of the chest.) And a pair of gold satin shoes, she enters angrily with a stack of bills in one hand and a chain of glittering keys tied under her arm.

Zhang: (smiling) What do you think should be done, Da Nai Nai? (which means Madam)

Siyi: (annoyed) Ask them to wait in the hallway.

Zhang: But they said the bill has to be paid right now.

Siyi: (glancing sideways) Not right now.

Zhang: They said (embarrassed), they said...

Siyi: (frowning) They said what?

Zhang: They said that Old Master Zeng was extremely fussy about how the coffin was to be varnished and would not accept anything less than thirty coats. Now that they've put on the Fukien varnish and delivered the coffin (smiles apologetically) they would like some money from you. Money would...

Siyi: (laughing aloud slyly) Why don't you ask them to get the money from the Old Master and tell them that the coffin is not for me to sleep in. If they ~~cannot~~ can't wait, tell them to take the coffin away. Having such a gloomy thing around gives me the creeps.

Zhang: (earnestly) I think you should just let them have a little money, ~~Madam.~~ DaNaiNai This is the Mid-Autumn Festival and the coffin has already been varnished.

Siyi: (annoyed) How much did the paint shop pay you off to stick up for these ~~good-for-nothings~~ bums.

Zhang: DaNaiNai No, Madam. You see...

(Chen Naima, an old woman in her sixties, enters unsteadily through the living room door. She was a servant in the Zeng household for many years and was the wet-nurse for Siyi's husband, Master Wenqing. Forty years ago when the Zeng family was at its peak of glory and prosperity, she entered the household as the personal maid of the late Mrs. Zeng. She is a straightforward woman of peasant background who treated the Zeng children as her own. Of late, her son has been continually urging her to return to her native village. She finally returned home for brief stays, but found that she missed the Zeng children tremendously. She has returned to visit them often, always bringing them small gifts from the countryside. This time she returns with her grandson for the Mid-Autumn Festival. Her steps are unsteady and her hair frosted by streaks of white hair. Her face

SPEAK LOUD!!!

shines with the glow of health although she is a little deaf. Her voice is loud and clear and her face is covered with smiles. Apparently she is enjoying her stay with her son. A good-hearted whiner, she knows more about the Zeng family affairs than anyone else. She speaks her mind and is respected by all members of the Zeng household. She is wearing a white shirt under a green shawl, black pants and black cloth shoes. A small red flower is planted on the grey bun on her head.

[LIVING ROOM]

Zjang: (surprised) Oh, Mrs. Chen, here you are.

Naima: (hurriedly, bowing to Siyi) Da Nai Nai, really, the way these merchants come and collect money! (turning to Zhang indignantly) Zhang Shun, tell them to get the hell out of here! I've never seen anything like this, Da Nai Nai. (still panting with anger)

Siyi: (smiling) When did you arrive, Naima? ("Naima" is a Chinese term for "wet-nurse".)

Zhang: (apologizing) Oh come on, Mrs. Chen.

Naima: (pointing at Zhang) Tell them to get the hell out of here! (turning to Siyi and smiling with disdain) I have never seen anything like this, it really gets me mad! Can you believe they're actually blocking the doorway? (turning to Zhang in anger) You go and tell them that this is a respectable household! If old Mrs. Zeng were still here we'd have these bums locked up in no time! What is a few dollars to us? Even a poor old

lady like me has had thousands of dollars pass through my hands. (furious) They even tried to keep me from coming in here.

Siyi:(catching on; to flatter Mrs. Chen she says jokingly to Zhang) Heavens, who could have the audacity not to even recognize our Naima, Mrs. Chen?

Naima: (smiling happily) Da Nai Nai, I don't care whether they can tell who I am or not. What really bothers me is that they don't know who they're dealing with here. When I first came here, only the powerful and wealthy were admitted. (to Zhang) Take your old grandfather, Zhang Cai, for example. With all the tips he collected from the guests in this household he bought himself land, got himself a wife, and had children and grandchildren. (laughing and pointing at Zhang) And you, little rascal, where do you think you came from?

Zhang: (encountering this seasoned colleague of his grandfather, he can hardly disagree and smiling, says) Yes, yes, Mrs. Chen.

Siyi: Have a seat, Naima.

Naima: Hmmph! Who are these slippery bastards anyhow? When I first came to this household, old Master Zeng was still the young master, (indicating height with her hand) And young master was only this big. Then it was...

Siyi: (helping her to sit down, consoling) Sit down and don't

get so upset. How's everything, Naima?

Naima: Hmph! Once the Mid-Autumn Festival is over...

Siyi: Namima, how did they treat you?

Naima: (Hard of hearing) What?

Zhang: She's hard of hearing, she can't hear you. Da Nai Nai, don't pay any attention to her. She'll never stop.

Naima: What was that?

Zhang: (loudly) Da Nai Nai wants to know if those collectors pushed you around.

Naima: (understanding, takes several bills out of her pocket) SHAKE BILLS Look! They blocked the doorway and shoved these into my hands. They asked me to give them to you.

Siyi: (takes the bills from her) Oh, this!

Naima: (hitting the back of her hand against her palm) ~~Good-~~ See, what's the meaning of this? Those bums! ~~for nothing!~~ GO TO CHAIR & SIT DOWN

Siyi: (going through the bills) Hmmph. Even the painting mounters are sending us bills. Zhang, tell ~~the~~ their messenger ~~from the mounting shop~~ that the master isn't home.

Naima: Oh, how is Master Wenqing?

Siyi: (takes out some money) Give them twenty YUAN dollars and tell them to deduct it from the down payment. We'll have to wait for the Master to com_e back to find out whether he likes the mounting job. Then we can settle our accounts with them.

Zhang: But how about the tailors', the fruit market, and then there's the coffin makers...

Siyi: (impatiently) That can wait, that can wait. We'll talk to the Old Master later.

Zhang: (pointing to the door on the left, in a low voice) Gu Lao Ye (old Mr. Zeng's son-in-law) has been complaining all morning that the garden wall by his room is starting to collapse. He wants to know whether it will be fixed or not.

Siyi: (displeased) Tell him that it's not a matter of whether or not we want to fix it, but whether or not we have the money to do it. Tell him to be patient because the Master has plans to sell the house.

Zhang: (unwittingly) Da Nai Nai, the servants' quarters is also leaking, on rainy nights, like last night...

Siyi: (coldly) I'm sorry, but I don't have the money. I'll talk to the Old Master and have him build a mansion especially for you.

(Zhang does not know how to reply. Outside voices calling his name can be heard: "Mr. Zhang, Mr. Zhang".)

Zhang: Coming! (exits through living room door)

Siyi: (turning to Chen Naima says warmly) Naima, you must be tired after your trip. Are you all right?

Naima: (disappointed, but unwilling to accept not seeing her Master Wenqing) What a pity, Da Nai Nai, that my young master is not home...

Siyi: Don't worry, your young master (pointing to the door on the left side) is still sleeping) He will be out shortly to pay his respects to his Naima.

Naima: (laughing) ~~Madam~~ Da Nai Nai, please don't make fun of me. Even though I'm his Naima, a servant is a servant and a master is a master. Since when does a Master approaching forty, with a son and daughter-in-law come to pay me...

Siyi: (faking respect) In that case, Naima, let me bow to you first.

Naima: (on her feet immediately, helping Siyi up) Enough, enough. God forbid! You, ~~Madam~~ Da Nai Nai, are already a mother-in-law! Ei! BOW WITH HANDS CLASPED

(The two continue this game briefly; Siyi, naturally, does not really want to bow to this servant. Then...)

Siyi: (ending with a giggle) Ei! But I must! HELP DA UP.

Naima: (delighted) Yes! I was startled by what you just said! I was thinking the reason I walked all the way to town was...

Siyi: (interrupting) To see your Master ~~Wen Qing~~ Wenqing.

Naima: (her intentions exposed, startled, she giggles nervously) Oh you, you're so clever. SIT (clears her throat) I'm also here to see you, ~~Madam~~ Da Nai Nai, Miss Su, the Old Master, Madam Cai, the Young master Ting and his wife. And you know, before I can see all these people, I have to go already.

Siyi: But why?

Naima: I told my son and daughter-in-law that I"ll be back this evening...

Siyi: How can that be? You can't come all the way to Peking from the village without staying a while.

Naima: (still proud but touched) Ha, I've already spent forty years of my life here! I didn't even go home when my son got married. Tell me, which family is really mine? Da Nai Nai ~~Madam~~, my grandson brought along some little presents from the country for you.

Siyi: Really, Naima, you shouldn't have!

Naima: (sincerely) Oh, it's only a few little things. (walking towards the living room, smiling) If I weren't such a shameless fool, I wouldn't be ...(searching in vain) Xiao Zhuer! Xiao Zhuer! This kid can disappear in no time. Xiao Zhuer! Xiao Zhuer! (calling, she leaves the living room and walks into the courtyard in seach of her grandson)

(The cooing of a flock of pigeons overhead is like the sound of a bamboo flute, soothing and relaxing. Beyond the wall, a cold-drink hawker is knocking on a "bing jiang" -- a shiny brass instrument in the form of two cups which, when knocked together, make a clear ringing noise. Full and resonant, the beat is, "DING cha, DING cha, DING DING cha, cha cha DING DING cha." The hawker has a clear Peking accent and yells as if he were very happy: Cool as ice, sweet and nice, rosey flavor try

it twice. At this point the hawker raises his voice and sings with the beat. "Sour plum soup, Peking's finestflavor! Sour plum soup!" Bing jiang rings continuously: "DING cha cha, DING cha cha, cha cha DING DING cha.")

Siyi: (walks quietly over to the suitcase and slowly arranges the clothes inside) Wenqing, are you up yet?

No response.

Siyi: Wenqing, your Naima is here.

Voice from the room on the right: (hollow and weary) I know. Why don't you invite her in?

Siyi: Invite her in? Reeking of garlic? The whole room stinks of it when she's here. Maybe you can take it but I can't. Are you really leaving today or not? Your suitcase is all packed.

Voice of Wenqing from inside: (drawn out) Have you let the pigeons out yet?

Siyi: (paying no attention to him) Are you leaving or not?

Voice of Wenqing from inside: (contemplative) The pigeons are really flying high today! I can hardly hear their cooing.

Siyi: (walks towards door on right) Hey, what do you really plan to do? What do you really...

Voice of Wenqing from inside: (drawing out his voice, troubled) I'm leaving, I'm leaving. I really have to leave.

Siyi: (walks to bedroom door, raises curtain, pushes open the door, and horrified by what she sees, lets out a small cry) Oh, How ~~could you?~~ MY GOD! COULD YOU come ~~you're~~...

(At this point Naima's voice and footsteps can be heard in the living room. Siyi turns her head and listens attentively. The two bedroom doors are closed immediately from the inside.

Naima walks in with Xiao Zhuer, her grandson. Xiao Zhuer is 14 or 15. His head is shaved and he is wearing new clothes which peasant children only wear at New Years and during other important festivals -- cotton socks, cloth shoes; his pants are tied at the ankle with strings. He is wearing a coarse, blue cotton "chang shan" [Chinese gown worn by men] with short sleeves and a loose collar. The "chang shan" is too small for him and does not even reach his knees; the color has faded from overwashing and is mended behind the collar with red cloth. It has shrunk and fits him very tightly showing his plump physique. He is holding a clay toy in one hand, a "kuo da dzui" in the form of a rabbit or pig [a moveable toy animated by a string running through the center]. In his other hand is a bamboo pigeon cage and under his arm a live hen. The servant, Zhang, follows with a big bamboo basket containing chickens, eggs, and vegetables. The two of them stand on the side dripping wet.)

Push

Naima: Get in here, get in here! (grumbling) Look at you, sweating like a pig. Who said you could drink sour plum soup.

Here it's already autumn and you're still drinking cold things. You'll get an upset stomach for sure, (turning to Zhang) Zhang Shun, you were with him. How could you let him get away with this. (pointing at the toy) Who bought this for you?

Xiao Zhu: (looking sideways at the servant) He did, Mr. Zhang.

Naima: (turning to the servant, half smiling, half scolding) What are you smiling about? You can't butter me up by buying things for him.

Siyi: Let him go.

Naima: Xiao Zhuer, you haven't kowtowed to Da Nai Nai yet. Put those things down first, put them down.

(Xiao Zhuer puts the pigeon cage right down and throws the hen into the basket that Zhang is holding)

Siyi: There's no need for that. He must be tired from the long trip.

Naima: (seeing that Xiao Zhu has not put the toy down, grabs it from him) Put that thing down, no one is going to steal it from you. (hands the toy to the servant; Zhang is helpless, already overloaded with the things he is carrying)

Siyi: No, no, it's too much trouble.

Naima: (laughing) Look at this little bumpkin. I've been telling him what to do all the way here, and once he gets to town he forgets everything. (she walks up to

the grandson and tries to push him down) Kowtow, you little rascal. (she says this affectionately)

Move around Pigeon

(Xiao Zhuer looks dumbfoundedly at his grandmother not knowing what to do. When Naima lets go of him, he suddenly goes down on the floor, nods his head once and gets up immediately.)

Siyi: (has a red money envelope ready in her hand) Xiao Zhuer, you clumsy little thing, I wish you a long and happy life. Come, take this and buy yourself something to eat.

(Xiao Zhuer stands there dumbly)

Naima: (to Siyi) Oh really, you're spending money again. (to grandson) Go ahead, you can take it. It's a gift from your grandmother's friends. (Xiao Zhuer walks up and takes it) Say thank you! (to Xiao Zhuer) (Xiao Zhuer takes the toy back from the servant and looks down with a stupid grin on his face.) This kid can't do anything right. He can't stand up right, he can't sit right, and he can't even kowtow right. Da Nai Nai ~~Madam~~, please sit down. Ei, it's such a long trip in this hot weather. (pulls out a stool and sits down) And the whole way I had this kid to take care of...

Zhang: (growing impatient) Mrs. Chen, what about all this stuff?

Naima: (turns and smiles) Oh, see how forgetful I am! Da Nai Nai (bringing Siyi over to the basket, rummage through as she talks) there's really nothing fancy to bring you from the country. I've just picked some leeks, celery, kohlrabi, cucumbers, green peppers, cowpeas, these few things...

Siyi: Oh, you shouldn't have brought so much.

Naima: Oh, and there's a little millet, some eggs and a couple of old hens.

Siyi: It looks like you're moving your whole house over here. Honestly! And to carry these things such a long way, we really can't... (turning toZhang) Zhang Shun, take them inside.

Naima: (to Zhang) And there're two big turnips here somewhere. (rummaging)

Zhang: (laughing ) Don't bother looking. I ate them already. (hurriedly carries the basket out through the living room door)

Xiao: (Secretively) Grandma.

Naima: What?

Xiao: (in a low voice) Should I take it out or not?

Naima: (puzzled) What?

(Xiao Zhuer gives his grandmother a sudden sharp glance and lifts the pigeon cage.)

Naima: (suddenly remembering) Oh! (very nervously) Where is it? Where is it?

Xiao: (looking very apologetic, pulls a tiny grey pigeon out from under his shirt; its head feathers are ruffled, its wings are a glossy color, it has several purple spots on its little body; it is obviously a rare species) Here it is!

Naima: (picks up the pigeon, her voice trembling with joy, she says to it) Good boy, my dear, so here you are! No wonder I felt there was something missing. (to Siyi) Look at this little fella! They were a pair and I got them especially for Master Wenqing. On the way here, he (meaning the grandson) couldn't stop playing with them and one flew away just like that. The Master is very fortunate. The better-looking one didn't get away. Da Nai Nai, just feel those feathers. (forcing the bird into her hands) Feel that little heart beating.

Siyi: (doesn't like little animals like pigeons, moves away, but manages to force a smile) OK, OK, OK. (calls to the door to the right) Wenqing, your Naima also brought you a pigeon!

Naima: (cannot restrain herself from calling) ~~Young Master~~ Master Wenqing!

Voice of Wenqing from inside: Naima.

Naima: (with pigeon in hand, wants to present it to the young master immediately) I'm going to show it to him. (walking towards door as she speaks)

Siyi: (hurriedly) Don't go in yet.

Naima: (little startled) Why?

Siyi: He, he's not up yet.

Naima: (still very happy) That doesn't matter. I can still talk to him while he's in bed.

Siyi: No, don't go in. The room is a mess.

Naima: (kindly) Oh, it doesn't matter.

Siyi: (calling out) Wenqing, are you dressed?

Voice of Wenqing: I'm getting dressed now.

Naima: (laughing wholeheartedly) At my age, there's nothing to be shy about. (approaching the door and pushing it)

Voice of Wenqing: (loudly) Don't come in. Don't come in!

Siyi: (blocking the way) Just a second, he doesn't like people watching him getting dressed.

Naima: (a little disappointed) Oh well, never mind. You can't change people's ways. (kindly) Da Nai Nai, I was still dressing him when he was already sixteen years old. (handing the pigeon to her grandson) Put this back. (unable to refrain from calling to the door) ~~Young Man~~ Master Wenqing, how have you been?

Siyi: (pulls out a stool while saying) Sit down here.

Voice of Wenqing: (warmly) Fine, and how about you?

Naima: (loudly) Oh fine! (her face shines with happiness.) I have a new granddaughter. (At this time Xiao Zhuer quietly places the pigeon back in its cage.)

Voice of Wenqing: Congratulations.

Naima: (loudly) Yeah, and she's a fat one too! (sits down)

Siyi: He said "congratulations".

Naima: Congratulations for what? It's a girl.

Voice of Wenqing: You should stay longer this time.

Naima: (craning her neck, says loudly) Yeah, and she's almost a month old.

Siyi: He asked you to stay longer.

Naima: (shaking her head) No, I have to go soon.

Voice of Wenqing: (didn't hear what she said) Oh?

Naima: (loudly)(as she stands up) I have to leave soon, Young Master. Get up

Voice of Wenqing: Why so soon?

Naima: Oh?

Voice of W enqing: (loudly) Why so soon?

Naima: (still not hearing well) What?

Xiao: (cannot resist laughing) Grandma, you're really deaf. Move To Ci'AO He asked you why you're in such a hurry to leave.

Naima: (her voice strained from shouting, she unconsciously re- WALK BACKD SAY LOUD! peats what he said.) In such a hurry to leave? (slightly anoyed, but managing to laugh) What a way to carry on a conversation, it's enough to give me a heart at- PUT STOOL BACK UNDER tack. ~~Enough of this,~~ I'll wait for him to come out. WALK ~~Madam,~~ I'll go into the courtyard and see Miss Su first. DANAINAI TO OVER TO CIAO

Siyi: Fine. I'll have someone go fetch you later. (takes a

string of red candies from a plate on the table) Xiao Zhuer, these candies are for you. (handing them to him)

WALK FURTHER DOWN

Naima: Say thank you. (Xiao Zhuer grins stupidly, takes the candies and starts eating them immediately.) Always eating, always eating! (She tries to take the candy out of his mouth.) Stop eating that! Look at you! (Xiao Zhuer keeps staring greedily at the red candies in her hand.) And put that toy down and come with me!

(Xiao Zhuer puts the toy down reluctantly. Naima takes him by the hand and exits through the small door of the study.)

Siyi: How obnoxious! (sets the colorful toy aside and picks up the pigeon cage)

Voice of Wenqing: Naima!

Siyi: She's gone.

(Zeng Wenqing, Siyi's husband, strolls in through the bedroom door on the right. He is tall and thin and is wearing a long loose gown of a very subdued but elegant color. There is a certain laziness in his appearance and mannerisms. His coloring is pale; he has a wide forehead and high cheek bones. His bloodless lips are extremely sensitive. A look of despair clouds his sunken-in eyes -- sad and lifeless. He often loses himself in aimless stares and the veins on his forehead protrude. He was born and raised in a family of scholars in Peking. Chess, poetry

and painting naturally occupy most of his time. Life in Peking is leisurely -- kite flying in the spring, yachting on the North Sea on summer evenings, admiring the foliage at the Western Mountain in the autumn and painting on the snowy winter mornings. When lonely he writes poetry, when relaxed he indulges in tea drinking. Half of his life has been spent in this hollow and leisurely existence.

He was spoiled from childhood by his mother. Although not in good health, he married early. He is a very clever person in small matters, but appears to be lazy and lethargic. He seems too lazy to move, to think, to talk, to walk, to rise, to meet people or to attend to any serious matter. His pessimistic attitude towards life has depressed him to the extent that he is even unable to express the torment in his heart. He is too lazy to feel the emotions within himself, so lazy that one can see that "his life is an empty shell."

He is still buttoning his shirt as he enters.

Wenqing: (smile fading on his face) Is she gone? Why did n't you ask her to stay a little longer?

Siyi: (ignoring his question) Here'sthe pigeon that she brought for you. (handing it over to Wenqing.

Wenqing: (lifts up the pigeon cage) Poor old woman; and she had to walk all this distance (admiring the pigeon) Look, this is a "phoenix head"! "Short beak!" (happily) There should be a pair, how come...

Siyi: Wenqing, why did you have to start smoking that stuff again?

(With a very sad expression on his face, Wenqing sets the pigeon cage down.)

Siyi: (grumpily) Only yesterday, the Old Man was asking about you. He wanted to know whether you've kicked that opium habit of yours. I told him you had. (shrieking) I just can't believe it! You know what we have to put up with around here. You kicked the habit already and now just when you're about to go you still want to mess everything up again!

Wenqing: (sighs as he sits down) Ei, ~~leave me alone~~ don't bother me. Just let me smoke in peace.

Siyi: (disdainfully) ~~Who cares?~~ Who's bothering you? I just want you to know that we do have to be a little careful about maintaining some respect around here. Are you really going to live up to what your brother-in-law said about you! He said that you wouldn't dare leave this place, that you'll never find a decent job, and that you'll just waste your life away smoking opium, drinking tea, playing with pigeons, painting and all that ~~crap~~ nonsense!

Wenqing: (unaffected) Who cares what they say? Aren't I leaving soon?

Siyi: If you have to leave, quit messing around with that opium.

Wenqing: (miserably) Don't I do everything you tell me to do? What more do you want? (stares ahead aimlessly)

Siyi: (picking a fight, coldly) Don't be so pathetic. I'm not a witch. And don't act as if I've been unfair to you all this time. I don't want you to give me the reputation of being some kind of indominatable bitch. I can't live up to it. (walks up to the suitcase)

Wenqing: (stares at the pigeon cage expressionlessly) Drop it. I'll be gone by tonight.

Siyi: (opens the suitcase, turns to Wenqing) Listen here. I'm not forcing you to go out and find a job. So don't let anyone think that that's my idea. If you run into any trouble out there, all your good ol' relatives will blame it on me for sure. It's the same old story: you go out there and suffer while I stay home having a fine time; its my fault again. (grumbling as she goes through the contents of the suitcase) Let me tell you, I have had enough of this household. When your mother was alive, I was her punching bag. Now that she's gone, I get the same abuse from my daughter-in-law. The old people, the young people, and then there's you in the middle.

Wenqing: (getting tired of her grumbling, searches for a new topic) Yi! (an interjection of surprise) You finally hung up this bamboo painting.

Siyi: (looking sideways) There it is, all right...

Wenqing: (walks up to the painting) It's nicely mounted.

Siyi: (unsympathetically and sarcastically) I think the painting

is even better. Really, extraordinarily fine! One can paint, and the other can write. The scholar and the beauty -- what a perfect pair.

Wenqing: (feels stifled) Let's not make something out of nothing. You're making fun of Miss Su again.

Siyi: (disdainfully) Strange! Why are you being so defensive? What did I say about you two! What's so remarkable about her painting that you decided to grace it with your own poem and even take it personally to be mounted? If my husband wants a concubine, I'm all for it 100%. (exaggerating) If I were a man, I'd have as many concubines as I could. Men! They're all alike! What do they care about besides wine and sex and money. But women like Miss Su...

Wenqing: (a bit annoyed) Don't talk like that. She's still an unmarried lady!

Siyi: That's strange. (says penetratingly with a strange grin on her face) What's she to you that you have to stick up for her like that?

Wenqing: (sincerely) Don't you have any sympathy for a poor orphan?

Siyi: (cunningly grinning) Sympathy? You give her your sympathy, do you think she has any for you? (pointing at Wenqing) You think she's a quiet, kind and unassuming lady. (proudly) I know what kind of a woman she really is! (grumbling) Women like that are all so conniving. The less they talk the more they're scheming. You think

she's still single because she likes being with the Old Man? You think such a pretty and talented woman chooses to remain an old maid just so that she can take care of the Old Man, and suffer? (laughs coldly) I'm not making any wild accusations. You think about it for yourself.

Wenqing: (looks at her coldly) I can't think of anything.

Siyi: (exploding) If you don't know what she's up to then you're a fool!

Wenqing: (loneliness and sadness come across his face; he sighs.) Lets drop this clever guessing game of yours! (head down, strolls towards the study and stops at the desk, tries to find something)

Siyi: (provoked by her husband's action and comments) Me clever? ~~Hmmph!~~ Hmmph! No clever person would stick around here for twenty years. I should have learned from those liberated wives (women) a long time ago. I should have spent my time in restaurants and movie houses, and handed this household over to my daughter-in-law so that she could take care of it. That would have saved me a lot of trouble. At least the Old Man wouldn't sulk at me all day as if I owed him the world. (self-pitying) Ai! (an interjection of regret) Why do I have to deal with nonsense like this! I am almost forty, and yet I still worry about answering to my father- and daughter-in-law and to you too. (picks up a cup of ginseng soup gingerly) Enought of that. Here, drink this ginseng

soup before it gets cold.

Wenqing: (frowning, tolerates the conversation. Rummaging he suddenly pulls a scroll of unframed painting out of the drawer. Furiously) Look, look, who did this? (A big hole about the size of a palm can be seen in the mid-section of the painting. It looks as if some animal has been chewing on it.)

Siyi: (sets the cup down) What?

Wenqing: (shaking the painting) Look, look at this!

Siyi: (enjoying the misfortune of her husband, lightly) Don't tell me that your dear brother-in-law did this.

Wenqing: (returns to the desk, searching through the drawers) Rats! It must be the rats! (walks up to his wife, waving the damaged painting in the air) Haven't I told you that this old house is infested with rats? I asked you to get some rat poison but you didn't do it.

Siyi: I already did, my Master. (sarcastically) But they are just as bad as before, only a bit more cunning. They won't touch the poison; instead, they just nibble on your favorite things.

Wenqing: (disappointed and hurt) This painting is ruined.

Siyi: (coldheartedly) What's the big deal? Can't you just go and ask Miss Su to paint you another one?

Wenqing: (growing more and more impatient, loudly) You...(suddenly realizes the futility of reasoning with her and feels a numbing sense of disappointment creeping up his chest; sitting very still with his head lowered, stares

at the damaged painting in silence) Oh! My painting.

Siyi: (slightly surprised, but maintaining a cool tone of voice) That's strange. A few little rats chew up your painting. Why does that bother you so much? But you don't give a damn that a pack of rats has been eating up all our property year 'round.

Wenqing: (sighs, throws painting on floor, stands and smiles reluctantly) Ai, we have to share whatever we have.

Siyi: (angrily) Share whatever we have? What did your ancestors hand down to you that's worth bragging about? While the Old Man is alive you can claim half of it. But when he dies...

(A cursing voice is heard suddenly from left stage. The tone is condescending and arrogant; the voice is rambling on and on, typical of the way in which a "young master" would reprimand servants.)

Voice from stage left: Get out, get out, get out. Lousy bastards, sons of bitches!

Siyi: (to Wenqing) Listen!

Voice from left stage: (voice is now screaming into courtyard as though window has been opened) Zhang Shun! Zhang Shun! Lin Ma! Lin Ma!

Wenqing: (walks to the parlor door as if to help the voice in calling) Zhang Shun, Zhang...

Siyi: (pouting, opens her eyes wide as though to pick a

fight) Who are you calling?

(Wenqing falls silent)

Siyi: (in a low voice) Let him yell. If he's not screaming at the chickens, he's yelling at the dogs. (laughs angrily) Hmnph, this must be his going-away gift for you.

Voice from inside: (cursing) Zhang Shun! It's only the Mid-Autumn Festival. Have you all dropped dead or what?

Siyi: (laughing maliciously) Listen to him!

Voice from stage left: (drawn out) Zhang Shun!

Siyi: (blocking his way, firmly) Don't help him. I want to see how he blows up this time!

(Noise of shattering glasses and plates, followed by the sound of a woman sobbing.)

(A short while later.)

Wenqing: (in a low voice) Sister just got over her illness. Now she's crying again.

Siyi: (laughing coldly and disdainfully) That useless bum. He has nothing better to do than pick on his wife all day long. And to think that he has even studied abroad. What shit!

Voice from leftstage: (right after Siyi's line) Goddamn bastards!

(shattering noises)

Voice from stage left: (barking) Has everyone dropped dead?

Siyi: (getting angrier and angrier, takes a stride forward) This time he is really going too far! These things belong to our family, we had to pay good money for them!

Wenqing: (blocks her way, in low voice) Siyi, don't start with him.

(Servant walks hurriedly through living room door.)

Zhang: (very worried) Did Gu Lauye (son-in-law) call me?

Wenqing: Hurry up and get in there.

(Zhang runs into left room)

Siyi: (furious) "We have to share whatever we have" Hmmph! (to Wenqing). Do you think a person like him appreciates your generosity? Who does he think he is? He's nothing but a corrupt official, and there're still people after him. He's hiding here in his father-in-law's house. He might as well give up that arrogant air of his. (pointing to the door) And I suppose he's celebrating the holidays by smashing things. I just don't understand why...

(Zeng Ting, son of Siyi and Wenqing, is covered with sweat and walks excitedly and hurriedly through the living room door.

He is a child of 17 years old and has already been married for two years. His wife is a year older than he. When they were still infants, their grandparents decided that the two families were well-matched and arranged for their marriage at that time. Since they've been married, the grandparents have been waiting for them to have a child. Two years after he entered high school, Zeng Ting's friends were playing ball and romping in the snow. He, however, was already involved in the serious matter of being a husband. In the midst of deafening fire-crackers, this little couple -- he 15 and she 16 -- like a pair of lambs, frightened and confused, was ushered before the glow of marriage candles, bowing, bowing and bowing...From then on they were left to share their cold quarters for two years and seven months. No great-grandson was born, the grandmother dies after the first month of marriage. Zeng Ting and his wife are like strangers, they seldom talk and suffer together through time. They are like mistreated animals. He returns from the study every night and must go to his grandfather's quarters to recite the classics. Every now and then he would have to practice his calligraphy or compose poetry. At the second watch he would return/to his room and face his silent wife. Then without saying a word he would fall asleep.

tired

After seven months in school he begins to show signs of change. Under the influence of his peers, he has regained some

of his vivaciousness. It was then that people in the family began to realize that this quiet little man still posseses some childlike qualities. This sudden change of attitude has caused the displeasure of his elders. The distant relatives are also very surprised. This is because the Zeng family has always believed that its children should be very mature (lit. -- should be born with beards and walk with an adult posture). He is increasingly tempted by life outdoors, begins to love the wind, the sun, little animals and child's play. He even loves to fly his kite alone by the moat of the Forbidden City.

This is especially the case since an anthropologist and his daughter have moved into the household. She even invites him to play with her. For some reason unknown to himself, he has been following this vivacious girl around, like one would follow a torch in the darkness. She plays with him and asks him many interesting questions that he is unable to answer. Zeng Ting begins to feel that his life is expanding to a new world and he feels like a man who is in love for the first time -- as a matter of fact, this <u>is</u> the first time he has experienced this kind of emotion. He gradually forgets how he should behave and at times is even tempted to get rowdy with her. On certain occasions she even forces him to wrestle with her. He occasionally forgets what his mother and grandfather have told him -- that he is a man of 17 years old and one who bears the burden of the family.

He is slender and handsome like his father. His face is pale and thin. His dark, sunken eyes are like a calm lake. He

is wearing a long gown of subdued color, walking shoes, white pants, and has sweat around his eyebrows.)

Ting: (sees his mother, stops abruptly) Ma!

Wenqing: Back from school?

Ting: Yes, Father.

Siyi: (continues her grumbling) Remember, Ting, don't ever be like your uncle -- just hanging around the house like this -- even if you have to starve. Now our tenant, Mr. Yuan, he's different. He pays for his room and board on time. No one looks down on him even if he is a little odd. I've never seen anyone like Gu Lauye, just like a stone in a shithole, both foul and tough.

Voice of a girl from the courtyard: (gayly) Ting, Zeng Ting!

Wenqing: Listen. Who's calling you?

Voice of a girl from courtyard: Zeng Ting, Zeng Ting!

Ting: (can't help but answer, even in the presence of his mother) Yes!...

Voice of girl from courtyard: (yells laughingly) Come on out, Zeng Ting, I've taken my clothes off already!

Siyi: (severely) Who's that?

Ting: Uncle Yuan's (the anthropologist) daughter

Siyi: What does she want?

Ting: (a little frightened)(timidly) She, she wants to have a water fight.

Siyi: (very surprised) What? A girl having a water fight without her clothes on!

Ting: (trying to explain) She, she's always like that.

Siyi: (scolding sarcastically) And you still play with her?

Ting: (ashamed) She wants to.

Siyi: (sternly) Don't you go out there! Water-fighting on Mid-Autumn Festival, you must be crazy! That's one thing about the Yuan family, absolutely no discipline. He's really spoiled that daughter of his!

Voice of girl from courtyrard: (raising her voice) Zeng -- Ting!

Ting: (wants to answer but dares not to) Ai!

Siyi: (interrupts immediately) Don't you answer her!

Ting: (wants to tell the girl what's happening) Then let me... (takes a step)

Siyi: (stops him) Don't you dare! (to Zeng Ting) You think you're still a child? You're seventeen and you're married. Your grandfather had already had a son when he was your age! (suddenly) Is your wife home yet?

Ting: (listening to her painfully, and replies in a low tone) We already called her up.

Siyi: What'd she say?

Ting: (timidly) I didn't call. I asked Auntie Su to.

Siyi: (angrily) Why didn't youcall her yourself? Why didn't you?

Voice of Girl from courtyard (almost simultaneously) Zeng Ting, where're you hiding?



Ting: (perturbed, not knowing who to answer to) Auntie Su wanted to ask her to buy some sandalwood incense.

Voice of girl from courtyard: (impatiently) If you don't answer me, I'll get mad at you.

Siyi: (seeing that Zeng Ting still wants to go out, when he begins to take a step she blurts out angrily) Don't you move! If Auntie Su wants sandalwood incense, ask her to go buy it herself. (stubbornly) I asked you to call Rui Zhen and you wouldn't listen to me. Why don't you listen to me?

(Zeng Ting stares at her briefly and lowers his head without a reply.)

Wenqing: (sighing) The two of them have nothing to say to each other so why make them talk? Why force it? Forcing them doesn't do any good.

Voice of girl from courtyard: (raising her voice, loudly) Zeng --- Ting!

Siyi: (facing direction of voice) What a pain! (turns to Wenqing) Forcing them doesn't help! You're going to spoil them to death. Let me ask you this. Who told her she could go back to her family's house on Mid-Autumn Festival? She knows we're having problems here now and that we're short of servants. Even I have to help Zhang Shun in the kitchen. (cold-heartedly) Hmmph. She's not even from a wealthy family and she's developed this little princess attitude. (to Zeng Ting, angrily) Tell her that she's to keep us better informed of

her whereabouts. She's married into a family of scholars here; and though we might not have any rules or regulations, we do have manners.

(A big and healthy Miss Yuan enters through the parlor door -- the only daugher of a scholar who has devoted his life to anthropology. She has a bucket of water in her hand and is wearing a short-sleeve shirt, sneakers and shorts that only boys would wear showing muscular legs. She is looking around at the door as though nothing bothers her. She looks like a mischievous kid, one who would raise hell around the house all day without ever resting. She also has a habit of playing with boys. She has an air of simplicity, straightforwardness and honesty. Her hair is short and her glowing face covered with perspiration.)

Miss Yuan: (pointing at Zeng Ting) Zeng Ting, here you are! I've been looking high and low for you. (gaily runs up with a bucket of water as she speaks, causing Zeng Ting to be very embarrassed. He is absolutely helpless in the presence of his mother.)

Zeng Ting: (screaming) Water! Water! (hiding behind his father)

Siyi: (surprised and a little frightened) Don't splash that cold water around here! (restraining Miss Yuan) Let me ask you a question, Miss Yuan.

Miss Yuan: (turns with a big smile on her face) What's that?

Siyi: (searching for a question) Where is your father?

Miss Yuan:(sets down bucket and pretends to be serious) He's in his room making a drawing of the "Peking Man". (screams suddenly and catches Zeng Ting) So you're running away. Let's just see how far you can get!

Zeng Ting:(laughs embarrassed) Let me go!

Miss Yuan:(excitedly) Let's go and settle this outside.

Siyi: (displeased) Miss Yuan!

Miss Yuan:Come on, let's go!

Wenqing: (smiling kindly) Yuan Yuan, do you want a little gift?

Miss Yuan:(realized suddenly but unwilling to let Zeng Ting go) Oh yes, Uncle Zeng, you promised me a big kite. Oh, won't you give it to me?

Wenqing: (laughingly) Autumn is not the season for flying kites.

Miss Yuan: (stubbornly) But you promised! I want to fly it, I want to fly it!

Wenqing: (smiling) I found you a "caterpillar" kite.

Miss Yuan:(leaps for joy) Where is it! (holding out her hand) Gimme it!

Wenqing: (cannot help but smile) The rats ruined it.

Miss Yuan:(suspicious) I don't believe you.

Wenqing: What could I do? The rats were hungry and ate the glue off the kite.

Miss Yuan:But you said! (about to cry)

Wenqing: (trying to calm her down) Don't cry, don't cry. I still have another one.

Miss Yuan:(smiling behind tears) Really? I don't believe you.

Wenqing: Ting, bring that goldfish kite in here from the study (pointing in that direction).

Zeng Ting: (almost leaping for joy) I'll get it.

Siyi: (stops him with a bark) Ting, what do you think you're doing? (Zeng Ting suppresses his joy and walks to the study like a grown man.)

Miss Yuan: (follows him) Zeng Ting! (takes his hand) Hurry up! (drags him over to the study and sees a colorful kite covered with dust. Overjoyed, she lets out a little cry.) Oh, it's so big! (grabs the kite in her hand)

Zeng Ting: (trembling with joy) Let go, let me do it. (holds up the kite)

Miss Yuan: (quarreling) Let go. Let me!

Zeng Ting: You'll mess it all up.

Miss Yuan: (screaming) Come on, let me do it! Your father made it for me! (the two of them fight over the kite)

Siyi: (while they're fighting) Ting!

ZengTing: (out of breath) No, no. (looking at Miss Yuan, fights over the kite with her excitedly and happily. He grabs the kite with his ten pale and almost translucent fingers, almost losing the kite to the strong arms of Miss Yuan.)

Miss Yuan: (yelling) Give it to me, give it to me!

(Zeng suddenly lets out a cry, sets down the kite and stares at his bleeding finger.)

MissYuan: (little frightened) What happened?

Siyi: (blaming) See what happens? (walks up to Zeng Ting reprimanding) You're bleeding!

Wenqing: (to Zeng Ting) Did you scratch yourself?

Zeng Ting: (holding his injured finger) Yes.

Miss Yuan: (very concerned) Does it hurt?

Zeng Ting: (embarrassed) A little.

Siyi: Let me put some medicine on it.

Miss Yuan:(confidently) Oh, you don't need to do that. (She puts his finger in her mouth and sucks on it.)

Zeng Ting:(taken aback by this, flushed with excitement, ignoring his mother's help) Ma, it's O.K.

Miss Yuan:(spits and lets go of his hand happily) Does it still hurt?

Zeng Ting:(in a low voice) It's all right.

(Miss Yuan picks up the bucket of water suddenly.)

Zeng Tingand Siyi: (speaking at the same time excitedly) Oh no!

Miss Yuan:(smiles at Zeng Ting) I'll let you go this time. (pushes Zeng Ting) Let's go fly the kite. (Zeng Ting takes the kite in his hand.) See you later, Mrs. Zeng.

(Miss Yuan skips out pushing Zeng Ting with her. Water spills all over the floor.)

Siyi: Ting!

Wenqing: (calming her down) Let them go.

Siyi: Mind your own business! (to the outside) Ting!

(Zeng Ting comes back in , followed by a puzzled Miss Yuan. Zeng Ting looks at his mother.)

Siyi: (picks up a bowl of Ginseng soup) Drink this, your father doesn't want it.

Miss Yuan:(looking surprised and envious) Ginseng soup!

Zeng Ting: I don't want any.

Siyi: (severely) Drink it!

Zeng Ting:(takes a sip and spits it out) Yuk!

Siyi: Nonsense! (She takes a sip herself, finds something wrong with it, and sets the bowl down.) Hmmph!

(Miss Yuan waves mischievously to Zeng Ting behind his mother's back and walks over and pushes him out of the room. Zeng Ting walks through the door and Miss Yuan almost gets out.)

Siyi: (suddenly) Miss Yuan!

Miss Yuan:(surprised and a little frightened) Yes. (turns her head)

Siyi: Come over here.

Miss Yuan:(walks over) What's the matter?

Siyi: (smiling) We want to invite you and your father to celebrate Mid-Autumn Festival with us today. Have you told him yet?

Miss Yuan:(with disdain) Invite us for lunch?

Siyi: (flattering) We especially want to invite this beautiful young lady, Miss Yuan.

Miss Yuan:(rudely) Come on! You really wanted to invite Father and Miss Su. I know all about it.

Siyi: How do you know?

Miss Yuan:(arrogantly) Uncle Jiang [redacted] told me so.

Siyi: (with kind expression) Well, wouldn't you like a new mother?

Miss Yuan:I don't have a mother and I don't want one.

Siyi: (trying topersuade her) It's good to have a mother. Wouldn't you like Miss Su to be your mother?

Miss Yuan:(not understanding what she means) Me?

Voice of Zeng Ting from courtyard: Hurry up, Yuan Yuan, it's getting windy now.

Miss Yuan:(suddenly hands an envelope over to Siyi) This is for you.

Siyi: (surprised) What is it?

Miss Yuan:Our rent. (runs out the living room door)

Siyi: (with disdain) What an undisciplined child!

Wenqing: (nervously) What are you and Jiang Tai up to? What do you two have in mind for Su Fang?(Miss Su)

Siyi: (rolling her eyes) What do youmean? She has to get married sometime, doesn't she? She can't wait on your old like an old maid man/for the rest of her life, can she?

Wenqing: She hasn't said anything about it. How do you know she wants to get married?

Siyi: (grinning slyly) Does she have to say it out loud? I think I should do some good for others in my lifetime. I hate to see her burying herself away.

Wenqing: Marriage is of course a good thing. But to someone like Dr. Yuan, who does nothing but play around with dried out skulls all the time...

Siyi: What's it to you? What are you so concerned about? (maliciously) Do you want to marry her away to be a servant who will wait on someone hand and foot, or would you rather marry her away like a concubine?

Wenqing: (angry) Who do you think you are? Talking behind

people's backs like this?

Siyi: (also furious) What?! And who do you think you are? I don't know why you're being so protective of her!

Wenqing: She's an old maid, and she's been in this house waiting on father for so many years...

Siyi: (finally saying what's on her mind) I can't stand having an old maid like her hanging around the house, doing nothing but painting and writing and taking care of the Old Master. And she acts as though she's the smartest thing in the world.

Wenqing: (sighs) Oohh. At any rate, I have to be going. As long as father agrees, you all can...

Siyi: He has no choice. First of all, we're so broke that we've even had to rent out the living room to strangers. And we can't afford to support all these relatives. (looks at him sideways with disdain) And what's more, if she feels like getting married, who are you to...

Wenqing: (fed up, impatiently) Who says I don't want her to get married? Who saysso? Who says so?

Siyi: (suddenly realizes that Miss Su has entered through the small door of the study, laughs slyly) I don't want to quarrel with you, my Master. Why, it's Miss Su!

(Miss Su looks around thirty years old. She was born in a well-to-do family from southern China. Her father was a famous scholar who had a penchant for women and pleasure. He didn't leave much to the family after his death, and Miss Su's mother

passed away shortly after his death. After both of her parents died, Mis Su's aunt (Old Mr. Zeng's wife) invited her to their house. Following her dead mother's advice, Miss Su stayed on with the Zeng family in Peking and has never returned to her home in the south. She was treated very well by old Mrs. Zeng before she died and since the old woman's death, Miss Su has been caring for Mr. Zeng with utmost attention. This is especially true now that Mr. Zeng is getting on in years and his health is failing. Su Fang is almost indispensable to him and yet throughout all these years nobody has really taken her future into consideration.

The first impression she gives people is that she is the silent type. Her reticence makes it almost impossible to detect all the pain and hopes suppressed in her heart. Having lived alone for so many years in her relatives' household she has developed an extraordinary tolerance. When needled sarcastically by others, she will always retreat without fighting back. Every now and then she would paint and write poetry together with Wenqing. It was only on those occasions that she would allow herself to express her emotions.

She conducts herself with natural grace and her clothes are always of subdued colors. Here she walks in wearing an old navy blue wool "chang shan" (long Chinese jacket with a mandarin collar) which is slightly loose but fits her well.

Siyi: (to Miss Su with a big smile on her face) Do you see

how nasty he is, Su Meimei? (means little sister) Here he is getting ready to leave, and he's ranting and raving at me like this. (going into the same nonsense again) Someone who didn't know the situation around here would say that I was a horrible woman, that I've been a real terror at home. Those who know the whole story realize that I'm nothing but a punching bag. Not only do I have to take his abuse (pointing at Wenqing) day in and day out, but I also have to put up with what his father, brother, and sister-in-law dish out. (self-pitying) Even the kids treat me like dirt! (intimately to Su Fang) You, Su Meimei, are the only one in this house who shows me any kindness and respect, you're the only one...

(Su Fang doesn't really catch on to what she's saying, but manages to smile quietly)

Wenqing: (impatient with his wife, interrupts) Is father up yet?

(Siyi stops talking. Complete silence falls over the house.)

Su Fang: (calmly) Uncle has been up for a long time. (sees the damaged painting on the floor, picks it up) Isn't this your painting?

Siyi: (starts up again) Oh yes, it's because his painting was destroyed by rats that he's making such a fuss so early in the

morning.

Su Fang ~~Miss Su~~: (kindly) Oh its not so bad, I can have it sent out to be fixed.

Wenqing: (smiles apologetically) Oh don't bother, it's not worth it.

Siyi: (glances sideways at Wenqing, cynically) Why don't you let her fix it for you? (to Su) After all, you two have been so very close. Now that you're leaving, you should have something to remember one another by.

Su Fang ~~Miss Su~~: (detects her sarcasm, not knowing what to do with the painting, stammering) I - I'll...

Wenqing: (trying to get her out of this) Why don't you go ahead and fix it then? It's a shame to give us such a painting.

Siyi: (rolls her eyes) Oh it really would be a shame. (sighing to herself) I always wanted to have a pair of talented hands like Su Meimei's, good at needle work and at painting and calligraphy. (laughs affectedly) Want to hear something funny? Sometimes when I think about it, I really feel like picking up a meat cleaver, (behind the smile is a spark of poison) and hacking off (makes hacking gesture) those lovely hands and attaching them to myself.

Su Fang ~~Miss Su~~: (frightened) Oh! (suddenly draws back her pale hands.)

Wenqing: What kind of a joke is that?

Siyi: (laughs victoriously) How ~~careless~~ thoughtless of me. I didn't mean it. (Picks up Miss Su's hand and rubs it gently)

Su Meimei, please don't be mad at me. I am always so direct. I can never be graceful. I've often told Wenqing that (glances sideways at Wenqing) if I were a man I would never marry someone like me. (Even more intimately) Don't you agree, Su Meimei? Don't you...

(Just when Miss Su feels totally embarrassed and helpless, and tries to find the appropriate thing to reply toSiyi, Zeng ~~Ruizhen~~ Ruizhen -- the wife of Zeng Ting (daughter-in-law of Siyi) enters hurriedly through the living room door. She is carrying a big bag of incense. Zeng ~~Ruizhen~~ Ruizhen is eighteen, but her tired face causes her to look much older. She has been living in this extremely oppressive environment, and it has caused her to develop a hidden but strong, rebellious attitude. One can detect from her eyes a feeling of sadness, discontent and bitterness. She seldom smiles and seems hardened. Against the advice of her mother-in-law, she neither wears make-up nor colorful dresses. To say the least, Siyi is not particularly fond of her.

Whenever Siyi picked on her, she would stare at her coldly, expressionless and indifferent. She would never shed tears in the presence of other members of the family, most of whom she dislikes tremendously. Even though she is constantly sad, she would not show any sign of weakness. Threatened by the lonely years ahead, she has contemplated suicide. On the other hand, she also realizes the vitality of her inevitable departure from this oppressive household. She has already made up her mind to

seek, at all cost, a new beginning for her own life.

When she married Zeng Ting, she was only sixteen years old, a secondary school student. In retrospect, it seems as if she has been caged in this household for decades. In this family of scholarship and refinement, she has been driven, in the shortest span of time, from a girl's natural naivete and ignorance into sadness and worries of womanhood. With all the hardship she has suffered, she has changed into a sad, reticent person, much to the surprise of her old friends. She and her husband have nothing to talk about and she doesn't want to lower herself by playing the subservient role of a daughter-in-law. She reluctantly fulfills the ceremonious obligations of a grand daughter-in-law in the Zeng family and knows that she will not be living here forever.

In this gloomy family, only Miss Su is her friend. She often weeps quietly in front of a sympathetic Auntie Su who cares for her very much and shares her pain. Yet the two of them belong to different generations -- Ruizhen is full of hope and knows that her future does not belong to this small world. Auntie Su's way of thinking, on the other hand, has prevented her from breaking away from the confines of the Zeng family. Ruizhen likes to read, and books have taught her about the modern world. With the help of several sincere friends who share her interest in reading, she has been introduced to different aspects of life. Every now and then she will confide in Auntie Su with these matters, but the other members of the family are unaware of her new exposure to the world.

She has not been feeling well lately. The sudden physical change in her body has stirred up a frightening contradiction within herself. This new life inside her has been causing her to lose sleep because she realizes the aimlessness of surviving in this family. She still does not understand why she is married to this "boy"; and is now even more confused since she is carrying his child. Because of this dilemma, she has been going out a lot and looking for ways to resolve her problem.

She enters hesistantly, for she knows that the subdued color of her clothes will displease her mother-in-law.

Rui: Mother! Father!

Siyi: (sarcastically) I'm surprised to see that it only took a phone call to get you home. I was just talking with Auntie Su earlier about sending a car to pick you up.

Rui: I, I'm not feeling very well.

Siyi: (meanly, with high-pitched shrewish laughter) But isn't this your home? Don't you think I can take good care of you, my little mistress?

Su: (on Rui's behalf) Cousin Siyi, she is not feeling well.

Siyi: (feeling compelled to ask) Are you feeling better now?

Rui: (in a low voice) Yes.

Siyi: (severely, giving her a look) Then Go ahead. ~~Are you~~ (I'm JUST afraid that you ~~are~~ OK ALRIGHT) hurry up and go burn some incense for your ancestors.

Rui: Mmmm. (turning toward the study to leave)

Siyi: (beaming, to Su Fang) I give in too easily. I'm simply

not suited to be a mother-in-law. As soon as I see... (abruptly turning toward Rui) Hey! Rui Zhen, how can you leave without even greeting your father-in-law?

Rui: I did.

Siyi: (displeased with her daughter's defiance, her mien darkens suddenly; to Wenqing) Did you hear her? (without waiting for his answer, she turns at once to Rui) I didn't.

Rui: (coldly glancing at her mother, she turns again to Wenqing) Father!

Wenqing: (with pity for her) Be on your way now.

Siyi: (to Rui) What about Auntie Su?

Rui: (mechanically) Auntie Su.

Siyi: (to Su Fang, laughing slyly, seeming to be at once kind and nasty) Our young mistress really has no manners at all. (turning to Rui with a very kind expression on her face) You still haven't thanked Auntie Su. You know she really cares about you -- it was she who telephoned you.

Rui: Thank you, Auntie Su.

Siyi: Do you know that Ting is back from school already?

Rui: I know.

Siyi: Did you see him playing with Miss Yuan?

Rui: (in a low voice) Yes.

Siyi: (pointing at Rui, says to Su Fang) Can you believe anyone could be so foolish? She knew, and she even saw them

(turning to Ruizhen suddenly) Then why didn't you hurry back and keep an eye on him? (self-impressed, advising) Don't be foolish, he is your man, your husband. He's your support for the rest of your life.

Wenqing: (lonely) They're just kids playing. Why do you have to make a big deal out of nothing?

Siyi: (purposely antagonizing) Who's making a big deal? You really enjoy defending this kind of woman. (naturally glances at Su Fang) I can always spot them -- they'll do the lowest things to get a man. Ruizhen, go and tidy up the ancestral altar and tell Ting to stop fooling around with that crazy girl and get in here and put on his ceremonial jacket. It's time for him to pay respect to the ancestors too.

(Ruizhen picks up a big bag of sandalwood incense)

Siyi: Come back here. Who asked you to buy that incense?

Rui: (silent)

Su Fang: (low voice) Cousin Siyi...

Siyi: (pretends not to hear, keeps on talking to Ruizhen) Have you struck it rich or something? Who told you to buy that big pile of junk? Who is that obnoxious busy-body?

Su Fang: (calmly) It was I, Cousin Siyi.

(Silence)

(Ruizhen exits through the small door of the study)

Siyi: (laughs through the gloom) Honestly, you know how I am, I say whatever's on my mind. But really, no offense. I

just can't keep my big mouth shut. How rude of me! (feigning apology) Oh, if I had only known that it was your idea...

Su Fang: (calmly) Uncle wanted it for his evening prayers.

Wenqing: Father asked for it several days ago.

Siyi: (paying lip service) Oh, our Old Master is such a fuss-budget, he's so hard to please. He asked me for it a long time ago and I bought it for him. (intimately) Su Mei Mei. You justdon 't know how grateful Wenqing and I are to you. If you weren't here, I just imagine how often the Old Master would let off steam in front of us. (in a low, concerned voice) Was the Old Master sick again last night?

Su Fang: (nodding slightly) Yes.

Siyi: (satisfied, to Wenqing) See? What did I tell you? (to Su Fang) I heard the Old Master coughing all night, and I said to Wenqing, "the poor Old Master is having trouble breathing again." (with a worrisome expression on her face) After I heard him like that, I couldn't sleep all night. I poked Wenqing and said, "Listen to that. Here it's the middle of the night and Su Mei Mei has to go all the way down to the kitchen and fix his hot water bottle. How awful..."

Wenqing: What's wrong with Father?

Su Fang: (quietly) His legs were bothering him and he wanted them massaged. (This kind of massage involves pounding gently with the fists.) He also said that he is worrying

about something.

Siyi: (quickly) That must be...

Wenqing: (sympathetically towards Su Fang) So he asked you to massage him all night?

Su Fang: (with a sad smile) After a massage, Uncle can sleep a little better.

Siyi: (surprised) No wonder I saw that you were up early this morning.

Wenqing: (sympathetically) In that case, you still haven't gone to bed yet.

Siyi: (raising her voice, feigning sympathy) How could you stay up all night like that. (fondly) Why didn't you ask me to take over for a while. Good gracious, why don't you get some sleep now. (ushering Su Fang out) You're frail enough as it is, how could you go a whole night without sleep like that? (feigning concern) This is such a shame. Go and get some sleep, my dear little sister. If you get sick, I really wouldn't know what to do.

Su Fang: (sadly) There's no need. I really couldn't sleep now.

Siyi: Wenqing, have you ever seen a more filial person than Su Mei Mei? I truly admire her kind of personality. (flattering Su Fang) She's quiet, friendly, kind and always agreeable. (turns to Wenqing suddenly) Wenqing, if I were a man, I'd consider myself lucky to have a woman like Su Mei Mei as a wife. I'd be happy for the

rest of my life.

Wenqing: (to save Su Fang from embarrassment) Su Mei Mei, didn't you come to get Ginseng soup for Father?

Su Fang: Oh, that's right.

Siyi: Why didn't you say so before, it's all ready for you. (picks up the bowl of Ginseng ~~tea~~ soup)

Wenqing: Isn't that the one that Ting wouldn't drink before?

Siyi: Don't pay any attention to him. Let me take it over to him while it's still warm. (giggling) This is really a case of "the ugly woman finally meeting her father-in-law." Even though she's ugly and he doesn't want to see her, it can't be helped. (takes two steps and turns) Oh, those two bowls of food in the kitchen... did youmake them for Wenqing's trip?

Su Fang: Oh...yes.

Siyi: (needling) Wenqing, see how lucky you are? Su Mei Mei is so good to you. It's the eve of your departure and Su Mei Mei who hasn't had a wink of sleep, has still gone to the trouble of making all this food for you. Aren't you even going to thank her? (laughing as she exits through the small door of the study)

(Silence, cooing of the pigeons can be heard in the sky, outside of the room.)

Wenqing: (feeling sorry with tears in his eyes, says sadly)

Su Fang...I...I...

(Su Fang lowers her head, says nothing)

Wenqing: (gazing at her, also lowering his head, stutters)

Chen Naima, she has come to see us.

Su Fang: (controlling her grief) She...she is in the front yard...

(Siyi suddenly turns back hurriedly through the small door of the study. Her head is visible in the doorway.)

Siyi: (her face full of smiles, waving her hand) Wenqing, Chen Naima is outside waiting for you. Since you're leaving soon, why don't you chat with her a bit. Come on, Wenqing!

(Su Fang gazes at Wenqing who lifelessly follows Siyi and exits through the small door of the study.)

(The crisp cooing of the pigeons is heard. The monotonous noise of a single wheel of a water cart on the stone pavement is heard. From a distance the far-away, gentle, even sound of a blind fortune teller's copper cymbal is heard: "Ding cha cha cha cha." Fragments of the cold-drink hawkers' call, "Sour plum soup...," are heard from the distant streets.)

(Su Fang stands still lost in thought. She suddenly sits down on a solitary stool and starts sobbing softly.)

(A breeze blows in, the scrolls swayed against the wall, making a banging noise.)

(From the outside the voice of Yuanyuan, who is playing with the kite, clapping her hands: Higher, higher, up higher!)

(Chen Naima enters, bringing Xiao Zhuer through the door of the main parlor which leads to the front yard. Xiao Zhuer stares back fixedly at the kite in mid-air. The sunlight shines

straight into his rosy round face.)

Naima: Miss Su!

Xiao: (uncontrollably claps his hands) Grandma, look at the goldfish in the sky! (Pointing outside the window at the sky, he shouts regretfully.) Oh, no! The goldfish is falling down again...the goldfish...

Naima: (sees that Su Fang is crying alone, looks back at her grandson, and softly says) Don't yell. Go out and look.

(Xiao Zhuer is happily surprised, with a skip and a jump goes outside.)

(Naima silently walks to Su Fang.)

USE MATTER OF FACT TONE

Naima: (slowly) What's wrong, Miss Su?

Su Fang: (lowers her head) Well, I...(sobs softly again)

(momentary silence)

Naima: (sighing, puts her hand on her slightly heaving shoulders) Miss Su, don't cry. I've been gone over half a year and when I come back, you're still crying?

Su Fang: (raises her head) I want to cry and let it all out. Naima, what kind of life is this? (She plunks herself onto the table and begins to cry.)

Naima: (lowering her head, almost in tears) Don't cry. My dear Miss Su, last year I told you, I don't know how many times, (grievously) Get married, that would be best for you. Even if you marry a widower. (simultaneously

wiping away her tears and forcing herself to smile) Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about, but how can a lady of your age live in your uncle's house for the rest of your life? (Su Fang begins to sob softly again.) For better or worse, get married, my dear Miss Su. After all, this home can never be your own. (Su Fang begins to cry aloud.)

Naima: (in a low voice, secretly) I was just in the front yard, and I sneaked a glance at Mr. Yuan. He is quite a...

Su Fang: (sniffling) Naima, please don't talk about this.

Naima: (affectionately) OK, have your horoscopes been matched?

Su Fang: (imploring her not to go on) Please, Naima.

Naima: (shaking her head) Da Nai Nai is such an intolerant woman. My poor Master Wenqing, has to take so much from her every day. Whenever I think of it, it hurts me so! (sorrowfully, a sigh) In this world nothing works out like you want it to, you see. You and Master Wenqing, the two of you... (Ruizhen hurriedly comes in from the small door of the study.)

Rui: Auntie Su, Grandfather wants you.

Su Fang: Oh. (She gets up instantly, wipes her eyes, and walks to the study with her lowered head.)

Ruizhen: Grandfather is in the front room.

(Su Fang, with her lowered head again turns around the walks toward the door to the living room. Ruizhen sees that she is crying and follows her.)

Ruizhen: (in a low voice) Auntie Su, you're...(Su Fang keeps on walking with her head down.)

Voice of Siyi from backyard: Ruizhen!

Ruizhen: (stops and answers) Yes!

Voice of Siyi in the background, shrieking: Where the hell have you been, Ruizhen?

Ruizhen: I am here. (She keeps on following Su Fang.)

Su Fang: (stops at the threshold of the living room) Go ahead!

Ruizhen: Un uh.

(Su Fang walks on, both of them entering the living room. Su Fang leaves from the door to the front yard. Siyi enters from the door of the study.)

Siyi: Ruizhen, you must be...(catches sight of Naima) Ah, Naíma, (face beaming, pointing to the backyard) hurry, Master Wenqing has been looking for you everywhere!

Naima: (excitedly) Ah, Master Wenqing, where is he?

Siyi: In the yard.

(Naima happily waddles out from the study. Ruizhen walks through the living room door and quietly approaches Siyi.)

Ruizhen: Mother.

Siyi: (severely stares at her) Are you deaf? (looks around) I told you to call him. Where is he?

Ruizhen: Well, I...

Siyi: (with a harsh voice) Get lost, you good-for-nothing(dead person). (Ruizhen with head lowered walks past her.)

Siyi: (clenching her teeth) Look at you!(stamps her feet) Why don't you just drop dead?

(Ruizhen silently exits from the door of the study.)

Siyi: (simultaneously walking to the living room, calling) Ting...Ting.

(Zeng Ting enters from the door to the living room which leads to the front yard.)

Ting: (his face sweaty) Mother.

Siyi: (coldly reprimands) I've been calling you, didn't you hear me?

Ting: (apologetically smiles) Yes.

Siyi: (anger diminishes) Hurry up and put on your ceremonial jacket and make your offerings to your ancestors.

(Zeng Ting immediately turns and heads toward the study)

Siyi: (grabbing him, uncharacteristically kind) My child, don't go playing with that Miss Yuan any more, she's like an Amazon, no manners at all. (half encouraging and half angry) If you don't think Ruizhen is good enough for you, I can get you another wife after you graduate from high school. In the meantime you have to study hard so your mother can be proud of you. In the future...

(As Zeng Ting is growing more impatient with her, Zhang Shun, the servant enters from Jiang Tai's bedroom on the left-hand side. Zeng Ting seizes the opportunity and exits through

the door of the study. As the door opens screams can be heard from the bedroom, "Get the hell out, just get the hell out of here!" The door is slammed shut, closing off the sound of the screaming.)

Siyi: What's the matter, Zhang Shun?

Zhang Shun: (catching his breath) ~~Madam~~ Da Nai Nai, Zhang Shun would like to request an extended leave of absence.

Siyi: What's the matter this time?

Zhang Shun: (gesturing) I can no longer wait on Gu Lao Ye. All day long he does nothing but pick on us servants and curse our ancestors for eight generations. (holds up eight fingers)

Siyi: (angrily) He's like a mad dog. Don't pay any attention to him!

Zhang Shun: (cannot suppress his anger) No, go find yourself another servant. Not only do I have to fend off all these collectors...

(Next door can be heard the shout, "That bitch!" A woman's voice crying: "Don't go in there, don't go." Male voice screaming: "Let go of me, I wanna see her!")

Siyi: (as if realizing suddenly, lowers her voice to Zhang Shun) Let's go over there and talk. Let him scream.

(Zhang Shun follows Siyi and both exit through the door of the study.

The struggling Jiang Tai and his wife, Wencai, enter as the other two leave. Jiang Tai shakes her off, ashe looks at him helplessly. Jiang Tai gestures angrily with a handful of cash.

Jiang Tai formerly studied chemistry abroad. When he came to Peking, he exploited the comfortable life style there to the fullest and became rather debauched. His attitude and life style are no different from those of the local playboys. He is about 37 years old and has somewhat of a wasted look about him. Although he looks quite intelligent, he is not up to par with his more worldly peers. Consequently he always tries to catch up by taking advantage of others in small ways, but in important matters he usually ends up the loser. Down deep he is not a bad person; when he returned frm studying abroad, he really intended to become successful in his career. For some unknown reason he gave up his profession tobecome a government official. He has had several different posts, none of which have been satisfying to him. In his last appointment he became involved in a huge embezzlement scandal and had to resign in disgrace. He does not have much money left and has to live with his wife in his father-in-law's home. [This, for a Chinese man, is the ultimate disgrace.] He complains constantly and loses his temper after he's had a couple of drinks. The poorer he gets, the more ornery he becomes. He is often known to scream at people and to smash plates and bowls. However, he also has his likeable traits. He is straightforward, frank and often fair. Yet he is always bullying his ailing wife. On the rare occasions when her spirits are lifted and she says something that he does not agree with, he will answer with condescension,

"What do you know?" He also has another strong point: he knows everything about Peking's restaurants, theaters and other places of entertainment. Moreover, he is very particular about eating and is a known connoisseur. Not only does he have very discriminating tastes, he is also very familiar with rare recipes. His descriptions are as convincing and as vivid as an essay by the famous writer, Yuan Mei (Zicai). He also loves to brag about his glorious past and about how his friends admired and adored him, unbelievable though it may seem. He is always talking about mapping out his road to prosperity, but most of the plans remain on paper. This charade is merely for the purpose of building his ego. Once he wanted to embark upon the venture of manufacturing soap and put together a make-shift stove in the deserted garden of the Zeng residence. On the first day he stirred up a wok-ful of thick yellow liquid that ended up looking like soft lumps of butter. He blamed the failure on the inaccuracy of his chemistry text and the whole pot of liquid was poured down the drain never to be mentioned again.

After this fiasco he did not talk about striking it rich for a while. After hiding away in his room for a period of time, he could not resist whining to his wife: "Someday I'll invent a medicine like Wan Jin You (tiger balm) and then I'll be..." So he has many dreams of prosperity that will always remain dreams. His fortune teller has proven to be inaccurate in his predictions, for in the years during which he was supposed toget rich nothing happened. Recently he has come up with a sudden brainstrom. He wants to get into business and has been trying to persuade his

father-in-law to lend him the money to start up an export business in Shanghai. He has also suggested that if the old man does not have enough cash for this endeavor, he could always sell the old house. His father-in-law habitually refuses, but knowing his son-in-law's temper tries to evade the issue by hemming and hawing. As a result, Jiang Tai is very displeased.

He is a man of small stature with a wide forehead, full nose and thick lips and a nice little mustache. He has restless eyes that complement his fidgety ([redacted]) movements.

He is wearing a well-tailored suit of good quality brown material; his tie is pulled halfway down. His hair is uncombed and he looks generally untidy.

His wife, Zeng Wencai, is 33 years old. Ten years ago she was a great beauty, kind and demure. During her first few years of marriage, her husband was very loving towards her. Later, she fell ill and lost her looks, becoming thin and frail. She is now even paler than the other members of the Zeng family and retains no trace of her past beauty. She is an extremely weak and indecisive woman and received several years of traditional education (for women). Consequently she adores her husband and caters to his every command, accepting willingly all his condescension and insults during the past several years. She has been ill for a long time and therefore enters unsteadily. Her lips are pale and her hair slightly unkempt. She is wearing a well-worn bluish-grey Qipao. Her green satin shoes are also worn out.)

Wencai: (begging Jiang Tai) If you do this, how would it look?

Jiang: (furiously) How would what look? I'm just going to give him this money. We live here, so we pay for our room; we eat their food, so we'll pay them for board.

Wencai: (weakly) Please don't shout like that. The servants'll laugh behind our backs if they hear you.

Jiang: (still angry) What's there for them to laugh about? We're going to move out of here after I pay them this. (waving the roll of bills in his hand, shouts in a rage) Why didn't you give him the money when I told you to? (taking strides towards the direction of Old Master Zeng's bedroom) I'm going to give this money to your father myself!

Wencai: (holding on to him, shaking like a dying butterfly) Jiang Tai, please don't embarrass me anymore/ this is here, still my father's home.

(Siyi's face can be seen stretching out from the study door, trying to listen to the argument.)

Jiang: (spits on the floor in disgust) Your father's home! You'd find more hospitality in a hotel than here! (points at the backyard) If you take one penny from the Old Man when he dies, I'm going to divorce you just like that.

Wencai: (appealing pathetically) Where did you pick up such horrible gossip? No one ever said that you're after your father-in-law's money. And whoever mentioned that Sister Siyi minded our staying here?

Jiang: (condescendingly) That's funny. Me after this spare change? (angrily) Listen here. The people in your family are all bloody fools! Peasants who have never seen real wealth! Worst of all is that sister-in-law of yours!

Wencai: (nervously in a low voice) Don't shout like that. She may be in the next room.

Jiang: (lets himself go to his heart's content) I'm shouting so that she can hear me. I want to see what she's going to do about it. I dare her to do anything! I'll kill her, I'll shoot her!

(Siyi, about to intrude, is sent backstage by that horrible threat.)

Wencai: (sighing ) No matter what you say they are still our relatives.

Jiang: What relatives? (complaining) This kind of relative isn't worth shit! They only knew me when I was rich and making it big. Now that I have no money and no job, take a look at their goddamn faces! (getting angrier) Good-for-nothings! Why don't you go and ask them and see if they can remember asking me for a loan to buy land? It's because of them that I had to resign from my post. And you think they care about that? I asked your old man to lend me three thousand dollars yesterday, and wouldn't you know he...

Wencai: (interrupting) I'll talk to Father about that later!

Jiang: (angrily) Don't embarrass me any further! You think your father is a kind man because he's a vegeterian and prays all day long? I'd say he's a criminal. Here he has his own coffin all lacquered and polished (ready to die), sitting in the house, and yet he still won't let go of the Old Maid ~~Su Fang~~!

Wencai: (weakly) Stop that nonsense!

Jiang: Hmmph. (fiercely) Now tell me, is he scared of dying or not?

Wencai: (smiles dryly) All old people are.

Jinag: Well, since he knows that he has to die soon, why is he being so choosy and objecting to people proposing to Miss Su?

Wencai: (goodheartedly) I suppose that's for her own good.

Jiang: (furiously) Nonsense! He's selfish! Selfish! Selfish! The old saying's right: "Out of sight, out of mind." I'm getting out right now! I'm getting the hell out of here! I'm getting out!

(Zeng Ting enters through the study door.)

Ting: Auntie, Uncle, Grandfather wants you to go and pay respect to the ancestors.

Jiang: I'm not going.

Wencai: Ting, don't listen to him. We'll be there shortly.

Ting: Mother said she'll wait until you get there before she lights the candles.

Jiang: I'm not going until we've worshipped my own ancestors first.

Wencai: (imploring) Come on, please go and put on your ceremonial clothing! (Su Fang enters through the study door with a bag of infant's clothes in her hand.)

Su Fang: (looking around) Do you know where Ruizhen is?

Wencai: She's not here.

Su Fang: (to Jiang Tai) You're still here, Cousin. Uncle's waiting for you at the ancestral altar!

Wencai: (almost begging) Please go, for my sake!

Jiang: (rolling his eyes) Go tell him I don't have time for that. (exits through living room door that leads to the front yard without even turning his head)

Wencai: (chasing after him) Jiang Tai, stop, I have to talk to you. (exits through the same door)

(Zeng Ting is about to exit through the living room door.)

Su Fang: (desperately) Ting, don't leave yet.

Ting: Auntie Su.

Su Fang: You...(unable to continue)

Ting: What's the matter?

Su Fang: (finally) Why can't you and Ruizhen get along?

(Zeng Ting does not reply.)

Su Fang: (sadly) You two are supposed to be husband and wife.

Ting: (painfully) Please don't bring that up again.

Su Fang: Suppose, suppose she were your sister, how could you be so cruel as to...

Ting: (imploring) Auntie Su, please!

(They sense someone approaching. As they turn to look they see a painful Ruizhen entering hurriedly through the study door with her head lowered.)

Rui: (surprised to see Zeng Ting there) Oh, you, you're here too.

Su Fang: (instantly) You two go ahead and talk. (hurriedly walks toward the living room.)

Voice of Yuan Yuan from the front yard:

Zeng Ting, come on out!

(Zeng Ting has nothing to say to Ruizhen to begin with. Now he hears Yuan's call, and seizes the opportunity and instantly hurries past Su Fang towards the living room.)

Su Fang: Ting, you...(Without turning, Zeng Ting exits through the living room door that leads to the front yard. Su Fang turns and walks slowly yp to Ruizhen, with an extremely sad expression on her face.)

Rui: Auntie Su! (starts to cry, holding onto Su Fang)

Su Fang: (in a soothing low voice) Don't cry, Ruizhen.

Rui: (still sobbing) I, I'm not, I'm not.

Su Fang: (holding her hand) Why don't you go and lie down for awhile.

Rui: (shaking her head) No. His mother has asked me to set the table for lunch.

Su Fang: (worriedly, inquiring) How come you went out so early today?

Rui: I had, I had something to take care of. ~~something.~~

Su Fang: (touching her face, pityingly) I think you should take a nap. Your eyes are all red.

Rui: (grievously) Well, his mother will say that I'm pretending to be sick again.

Su Fang: (sympathetically) Are you still feeling nauseous?

Rui: I'm OK now.

Su Fang: (unintentionally) Ruizhen, let me tell them. It's better if I do it for you.

Rui: (resolutely) No, no.

Su Fang: Then let's tell Ting first.

Rui: What does he know? He is just a child.

Su Fang: (trying to persuade) But why not tell him?

Rui: (shaking her head) Auntie Su, you just don't understand.

Su Fang: (not understanding) Why? (with a look of joy) What is there to hide?

Rui: (painfully looking at Su Fang) Auntie Su, if only I could stay unmarried my whole life like you.

Su Fang: (quietly, sorrowfully gazing into space) How can you be so childish?

Rui: (woefully) But Auntie Su, we are children. At the end of the year I'll be eighteen and Zeng Ting is only seventeen. Somehow or other the two of us got thrown into this mess together. We hardly know each other, we have no feelings for each other, we have nothing to say to each other. It's been going like this for two years,

(painfully) and now... now this...

Su Fang: (kindheartedly) But this will make your grandfather very happy.

Rui: Exactly, Auntie Su, and I want to know why. Why must we two miserable creatures, be forced into having more little miserable creatures simply because Grandfather wants to have great grandchildren?

Su Fang: (consoling) People say it helps to have children; once a couple has children, their relationship improves.

Rui: (gravely shaking her head) No, Auntie Su, I don't believe that. Things between us won't get any better. (with certainty) Even if Zeng Ting treated me better, I couldn't go on living in a family like this. (deploringly) I'm scared to death of looking my elders in the face. (tugging Su Fang's hand) Auntie Su, if you weren't here I would have killed myself a long time ago.

Su Fang: (moved) Don't talk like that. You're still so young. All of us will be so happy when the baby comes.

Rui: (sorrowfully) How could anyone be happy here? We can't even pay the money we owe the Du Family. Grandfather is even talking about selling the house...

Su Fang: (lowering her head, in agreement) Hmmm.

Rui: The baby'll only add to the burden, and Zeng Ting hasn't even finished high school.

Su Fang: (smiling affectionately) Now don't you go worrying like a grownup. So we suffer a little for our children, isn't

that what life's all about? When the little one is born, I'll take care of him for you. I'll come and help you, don't worry. If things get really desperate, we can always use the money my mother left me.

Rui: (deeply moved) Auntie Su, you are really...

Su Fang: (her eyes tear out of happiness) Well then, Ruizhen, let me go and tell them the news about you. First I'll tell Cousin Siyi -- she's so anxious to have a grandchild that she'll treat you much better than she does now.

Rui: (instantly) No, no, you don't understand. I especially don't want her to know about it. No, don't, you mustn't tell them no matter what. (emotionally) Auntie Su, you're the only one, only you...Oh, Auntie Su, I'm so confused. Last night I dreamt my mother was still alive and I was living like a little girl at home. (painfully) Oh, Auntie Su, if I only didn't have to grow up and get married! (starts sobbing again)

Su Fang: (consoling her lovingly) Don't cry, don't cry any more. I've got something to show you! (opens the packages and showing her some beautiful woolen baby clothes) Ruizhen, you think you can use this one?

Rui: (staring at the dresses, dumbfounded) Oh?

Su Fang: Do you like them?

Rui: (shaking with emotion) You've even got this already? (although slightly embarrassed, cannot hide her smile) But, it's too early.

Su Fang: Oh, I can't really knit; I just do it for fun.

Rui: (admiring the dresses one by one) Beautiful, beautiful, they're really beautiful. (suddenly sets them down) But Auntie Su, you don't even have enough money for yourself. How could you spend so much on me?

Su Fang: Why? Because I love you and care about you, that's why. Don't be angry with me. Both of our parents aren't here and we're both living in a house where we always have to live according to other people's wishes.

Rui: (lowers her head, holding firmly onto Su Fang's hands) Auntie Su. (tears roll down her cheeks)

Su Fang: (sadly but kindly) You're almost a mother and then you'll be a real adult. How would you even consider not having the baby? When the baby comes, Ting will treat you better. (wiping the tears off Ruizhen's eyes) Be nicer to him, he's just a little boy, you know. (shaking her head sorrowfully, sighs) You two are just kids, you're eighteen and he's only seventeen. I can't blame you for not knowing about these things. (holding firmly onto Ruizhen's hands, sincerely) Ruizhen, what you were talking about last night, promise me you'll never do that.

Rui: (in a low voice) Why should we have a baby? (gazing into space) He doesn't even like me.

Su Fang: (sincerely) Ruizhen, the fact that Ting doesn't like you isn't the baby's fault. He'll change as he gets

older. If nothing else, having a baby in the family will make him more responsible. (staring at Ruizhen) Are you really going to listen to your girlfriends and run away to some strange place? Where can you go? (sadly) Ei, [redacted], where is our home, really!

Rui: (angrily) I don't want a family, especially not this one.

Su Fang: (instantly presses on her hand, shaking her head) No, you're still young. You don't understand what it's like to be a woman without a family of her own. (gently) Always feeling lonely inside. (cannot control herself) Ever since I was a little girl...(suddenly manages to suppress her own sorrow, turns swiftly, and says with a painful expression on her face) Ruizhen, listen to me, you can't do it, you can't get rid of the baby.

Rui: Hmmm.

Su Fang: Did you go see that dreadful doctor again?

Rui is silent.

Wenqing's voice from the backyard: Ruizhen!

Su Fang: Tell me the truth.

Rui: (looking at Su Fang) Yes.

Wenqing's voice from the backyard: Ruizhen!

Su Fang: Then don't ever go back there again.

Rui: (painfully) All right.

Su Fang: (sincerely) Promise? (As Rui zhen nods slightly, Wenqing enters through the study door, his head lowered.)

Wenqing: (startled, as he raises his head and sees Su Fang) Oh, you're here! (to Ruizhen) Ruizhen, go and fetch my ceremonial jacket.

Rui: Yes, Father! (enters Wenqing's bedroom)

(Momentary silence; Su Fang and Wenqing face each other without exchanging a word.)

Wenqing: (lets out a long sigh) Su Fang, I'm leaving soon. From now on, there there'll be no one for you to...

(Suddenly Yuan Yuan barges in through the living room door that leads to the front yard.)

Yuan: (calling) Uncle Zeng, Uncle Zeng!

Wenqing: (smiles as he turns towards Yuan Yuan) What is it?

Yuan: Xiao Zhuer said that his grandma brought you a pair of beautiful pigeons.

Wenqing: (points at the pigeon in the cage) There it is.

Yuan: (picks up the cage) But there's only one in here?

Wenqing: ( painfully) The other one flew off when they were bringing it over here.

Yuan: (appreciatively pointing at the pigeon in the cage, in a naive manner) Does it have a name?

Wenqing: (nodding leisurely) Sure.

Yuan: (excitedly) What is it?

Wenqing: (quietly)"Solitude."

Yuan: It's beautiful! (she plays up to his kindness and begs -- with the gesture typical of a Chinese girl manipulating an older man -- coquettishly) Uncle Zeng, can I have it?

Wenqing: All right.

Yuan: (joyously) Thanks, Uncle Zeng! You're really a great uncle! (picks up the pigeon cage and dashes off) Ziao Zhuer! Ziao Zhuer! (calling as she exits through the living room door that leads to the front yard) (Silence. The pigeons' cooing can be heard.)

Wenqing: (musters up his strength) Thank you for the painting. (Su Fang, with her head lowered, is wordless.)

Wenqing: (pulls out an elegant-looking sheet of paper from his pocket slowly) I composed several little verses for you last night. (shyly hands it over to her) Here, here they are. (Su Fang takes it into her hands.)

Wenqing: (gently and sincerely) Read them later.

Su Fang: (looking at him) I don't think I can see you off later. (Siyi suddenly enters through the study door.)

Siyi: (surprised) Oh, I didn't know you two were in here. (to Su Fang) The Old Master wants to see you.

Su Fang: (still unaffected by Siyi's intrusion, holds onto the paper) Oh. (instantly walks to the study)

Siyi: (catches sight of the piece of paper she is holding and rolls her eyes) Hey, you dropped a piece of paper.

Su Fang: (turns her head, unaware) Oh?

Wenqing: (anxiously) Where? (anxiously searches the floor with his eyes)

Siyi: (laughing ruthlessly) Oh, there it is, it's in your hand.

Voice of Old Master Zeng Gao from outside: (wearily) Su Fang.

Su Fang: Yes? (exits through the study door)

Siyi: (her face darkens) What's going on behind my back this time?

Wenqing: (apprehensively) What?...oh, nothing.

Siyi: What did you just give her?

Wenqing: (looking for an excuse) Nothing.

Siyi: (in a loud voice) You goddamned liar. You think you can hide it from me? Well, tell me then, what was in her hand? Tell me...

Wenqing: I...

(Ruizhen enters from bedroom on the right-hand side with ceremonial jacket.)

Ruizhen: Father, your jacket. (Wenqing takes the jacket from her)

Siyi: (disgusted at Ruizhen) Get going. Your Auntie Su is waiting for you. (Ruizhen exits through the study door. Wenqing puts on his jacket in silence.)

Siyi: (nagging) I've been a generous person my whole life and as a result I've been taken advantage of time after time. I don't care what kind of a game you two are playing behind my back. (changes her tone to that of the accepting and tolerant wife) After all, you can hardly call this a family. As the saying goes: "When the tree falls, the monkeys scatter." After the house is sold,

you can either live with your son and daughter-in-law or you can go away with your darling little Su Mei Mei. As for myself, I plan on entering a convent and devoting my life to Buddha. There I'll find peace. (fearing that he doesn't believe her) And don't think I'm just putting you on. I've already picked out a convent and made the arrangements with the nuns there.

Wenqing: (Although he sees through this charade, he cannot help but get angry and says in a shaky voice) What would you do that for? What would you do that for?

Siyi: (complaining) After all, I've raised a son for the Zeng family. I've had my share of hardships. I don't owe this family anything. After the Mid-Autumn Festival, tomorrow, I'm going to hand the household over to your sister and move into the convent. (walks toward the bedroom) (Zhang Shun enters hurriedly through the living room door that leads to the front yard.)

Zhang Shun: (out of breath) Da Nai Nai, the collectors from the coffin shop...

Siyi: Tell them to go talk to the Old Master.

ZhangShun: (desperately) But Da Nai Nai, they insist on talking to you...

Siyi: (rolls her eyes) Tell them that Da Nai Nai just died. She just stopped breathing. (enters her bedroom)

(Wenqing stares at the bedroom door. Zhang Shun sighs as he exits through the living room door leading to the front yard.)

Wenqing: Siyi! (pushing on the bedroom door) Open up! What are you doing in there?

Voice of Siyi from inside: (angrily) I'm hanging myself.

Wenqing: (pounding on the door) Open the door! Open up! What are you doing? Speak up! You're going to...(turns and looks and says in a low voice) Here comes Father!

(Zeng Hao enters through the study door, accompanied by Ruizhen, Su Fang and Chen Naima.

Zeng Hao looks no more than 65 years of age; he has frosty white hair and a puffy, yellowish face. He looks frail and sickly, has a small greyish goatee and a pair of lifeless eyes which are always watering. It is only when he pulls himself together to speak that he manifests the air of elegance characteristic of the Zeng children. He is miserly, selfish and terrified of dying. He spends the entire day taking fortifying potions and believes in prescriptions that boast of being effective in prolonging life. He has spent the past few decades living comfortably off of the family inheritance, occasionally going to different areas to assume government posts, all of which have been sinecures. He would inevitably leave the position after a short time to return to the comforts of home and Peking. But now things are drastically different, and he is gradually beginning to suffer hardship. His children are his biggest disappointment in life. Much of the family property has been sold and now very little remains. The Old

Man has no means of supporting himself and therefore is always anxious and worrisome. He places great importance in the superficial aspect of traditional rituals and mannerisms and believes that such etiquette is a mandatory part of the education of an enlightened family. Every so often he would purposely exaggerate his awesome role as head of the family, but deep down he is a bit leery of his daughter-in-law Zeng Siyi. Although Siyi observes all the superficial courtesies that he merits as the eldest member ofthe family, he never knows what she is really up to. He also despises the arrogance and abrasiveness of his son-in-law -- his quarrelsomeness and his foolish ideas about the road to riches. Old Master Zeng never mentioned his wealth [wealthy Chinese men never did], but now he doesn't care to mention that he is broke either. Crying poor would get his son-in-law off his back, but that would not be worth dealing with his daughter-in-law's reaction to a blatant confession of poverty. She, after all, has the household under her thumb. Up until now his daughter-in-law has not dared to exhibit any disrespect to his face. Yet he is fearful of how his children might treat him should they learn that he is leaving them nothing behind.

Naturally he may be overreacting to this situation, but he is truly feeling poor. As far as he is concerned, his status as the head of an enlightened family will inevitably be threatened because of this. At times he doubts whether or not all this education has actually had any effect on his children. The safest

step for him at this time is to "tolerate" (Confucian Virtue)the attitudes of his family members. However, this "tolerance" is having a disquieting effecting on him. As a result, he cannot help but complain, and once he gets started he can't stop. Most of the time, however, he simply pretends that he is oblivious to the entire situation. Aside from the two needs of tending to his coffin and taking his medicine, he tries not to be a burden to his children. Most of his time is spent in his room, writing calligraphy and reading the Buddhist texts. His philosophy is "What you don't see, you don't desire"; therefore, seclusion is economical and effortless. Occasionally problems will intrude upon his tranquility and cause him tothrow a tantrum, releasing years of pent-up frustrations. Even when he loses his temper, he can never be as feisty as he was in his prime. He complains constantly as though accusing others of committing innumerable injustices against him. He reprimands his children for their lack of filial piety and their worthlessness, and bemoans the decline of the family fortune. On the one hand, he criticizes his neighbors (who are nouveau-riche) as being crass and uncivilized because they have not maintained the etiquette of the traditional, "cultured" society. Now that he is financially ruined the only thing of which he is proud that he can leave to his children is the refinement and culture so typical of a scholarly family. [This includes the traditional etiquette as well as painting, poetry, calligraphy, etc.] He is now in despair to realize that this "gift" to them is fast vanishing.

He is subconsciously selfish. As in the case of Su Fang,

he believes that he is protecting a helpless orphan. Actually Su Fang pities him, protects him in her silent way and shelters him from worries and numerous heartbreaks. When he senses her weak moments, he becomes totally helpless and is beside himself. Aiming to touch her deepest sentiments for him, he would then exaggerate his plight as a helpless old man suffering from the pain of sickness, thus guaranteeing her life-long slavery to him. He is constantly thinking of his own welfare or absorbed in self-pity. He sees only his own suffering and is oblivious to that of others.

He is wearing a slightly oversized dark brown "chang pao" [a long gown for men].On top of that is a jacket, which Su Fang made for him. Even though he says he is exceptionally sensitive to the cold, the jacket is open at the collar. [In other words, this is partially an act.] He is wearing a pair of felt shoes. The bottoms of his pants are tied with grey satin ties. He is carrying a string of exquisite Buddhist prayer beads.

Su Fang and Ruizhen are supporting him on either side at the elbows. Chen Naima stands next to them with a covered bowl in her hands.

Hao: (eyes closed, as though listening, nodding his head incessantly.) Hmm, Hmm.

Wenqing: (uneasily) Father. (Zeng Hao is lost in thought , he doesn't seem to hear.) (Naima is laughing and talking, everyone stops walking for a moment and listens to her)

LIVING ROOM

(Living Room) STUDY

Naima: (excitedly, to Su Fang) The way I figure it, it's been 15 years now, hasn't it? (To Zeng Hao) This coffin has been lacquered for 15 years! (with envy and amazement) My oh my.
/How many coats of lacquer does it have now?

Hao: (contented) Over a hundred. (supported by them, he walks toward a long narrow table.)

Naima: No wonder it's almost three inches thick (shows with her fingers, puts down covered bowl)

(Siyi comes out of the bedroom, her face is beaming peacefully, as though she has forgotten what just happened) Father is here. (she rushes ahead to help support him) Come sit here, father, its more comfortable. (she helps Zeng Hao over to the sofa on the other side, hurriedly to Ruizhen) Ruizhen, ~~adjust the~~ easy-chair for him! (helps Zeng Hao sit down, to Wenqing) What about the cushions?

Wenqing: Oh! (goes into study to get cushions, Ruizhen also follows.)

Hao: (eyes closed, fondling Buddhist prayer beads.) Give it another four or five years of lacquering, then maybe it will be ready for me to rest in. (Ruizhen comes out of the study with the cushions)

Siyi: (Affectionately, pointing) Put it behind his back, Ruizhen. (Feeling that Ruizhen has placed the pillows incorrectly, she bends over) Eh, let me do it. (to Ruizhen) Go and get a blanket and cover him up.

Hao: (opens his eyes) Don't bother. (again closes his eyes and meditates)

Siyi: (more humbly) Are you feeling a little better?

Hao: I'm all right.

Wenqing: (walks ahead) Father.

Hao: (slightly nodding) Uhh. (pretending to be surprised) Oh, you haven't left yet?

Siyi: (glancing at Wenqing, and then to Hao) Wenqing will be leaving in a little while.

Hao: (to Wenqing) Did you kowtow to your ancestors?

Wenqing: No.

Hao: (displeased) Well then hurry up and do it. (starts coughing)

Wenqing: Yes, father. (Walks toward the door of the study)

Naima: (again getting the opportunity to talk with Wenqing) Master Wenqing, I'll keep you company. (Both Wenqing and Naima exit from the door of the study)

Hao: Su Fang, go out and get my spittoon. (Su Fang is just turning around to go into the study)

Siyi: (instantly smiling, says) Don't trouble cousin Su Fang, there's one in my room. Ruizhen, get it for your grandfather. (she brings the covered bowl of tea to Zeng Hao) Father, have some tea! (Ruizhen enters Siyi's bedroom. Zeng Hao rinses his mouth with the tea, Su Fang hands over a spittoon, Zeng Hao spits in it.

Hao: There's such a bitter taste in my mouth. (closes his eyes again)

Su Fang: Are you still feeling dizzy?

Hao: (glancing at her, again closing his eyes, half talking to himself) Dizziness and this bitter taste are signs of a bad liver! No wonder I have all this phlegm and feel I can't breath. (slowly rubbing his chest)

Siyi: (attentively) I think we ought to have a western-trained doctor look at you.

Hao: (opens his eyes, disgusted) Whose idea is that?

Siyi: Or we can have Zhang Shun call in Dr. Lo?

Hao: (opens his eyes, shakes his head) Dr. Lo uses ancient prescriptions from the Tang dynasty. They have very strong side effects and for someone of my age in my condition, they're... (unwilling to continue, sighing, he closes his eyes and coughs lightly.) (Ruizhen enters from Siyi's bedroom, handing a small spittoon over to Zeng Hao. He spits out another mouthful of phlegm into it, and then holds the spittoon.)

Siyi: The Du family sent their bookkeeper over again to collect the fifty thousand dollars.

Hao: Oh!

Siyi: Also, this years charge for lacquering the coffin --

Hao: (impatient) Money, money, all my life I've worked like a slave and when I'm sick I have to worry about it!

Momentary silence

(Siyi's face darkens.)

Su Fang: (consoling) This year the coffin was lacquered especially well.

Hao: (does not want to embarrass Siyi further, nods in acknowledgement as his face brightens a little) Yes, yes, maybe, -- maybe next spring we'll put a couple more coats of Sichuen lacquer on it and pay off all our debts to the Du family. Then I'll feel I've closed my accounts for this damned life. (sighs unconsciously, and looks at Ruizhen) If I'm really lucky, I'll be a great-grandfather next year...

Siyi: (breaks into a big smile) Oh yes! When we were kowtowing to the ancestors a while ago, I asked Ruizhen to say a special prayer for children. Hopefully the ancestors will have mercy on her so that she can give you a great-grandson soon.

Hao: (wrinkles of laughter begin to surface on his puffy face) Ruizhen, did you really say that?

(Ruizhen lowers her head)

Siyi: (pushes her and in a sharp tone) Your grandfather asked you whether you prayed or not? (Ruizhen turns her back on her)

Su Fang: (being consoling and persuasive) Ruizhen!

Ruizhen: (turns toward Zeng Hao) Yes, grandfather, I did.

Hao: (smiles, satisfied) That's good.

Voice of Wencai from outside: Jiang Tai! Jiang Tai!

Siyi: (grumbling about Ruizhen) Just look at this child. Now what areyou crying about?

(Wencai and Jiang Tai enter through the living room door leading to the front yard, pushing and shoving.)

Wencai: (begging) Jiang Tai! Jiang Tai! (pulling him in)

Jiang: (mutters angrily as he enters) All right, I'm coming! You don't have to drag me!

(All turn toward their direction as they approach.)

Hao: What's the matter?

Wencai: Father! (turns to Jiang Tai in a low voice) Just kneel down and kowtow. You don't have to change your clothes.

Siyi: (makes fun of Jiang Tai intentionally) Your son-in-law is here to pay his respects to you, Father, on the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Hao: (thinking that Jiang Tai is going to kowtow to him, bends forward and makes a gesture to help him up) Oh! No need for that, no need for that (Jiang Tai gives Siyi a dirty look. As Zeng Hao is bending forward, about to stand up, Jiang Tai bows lazily and sits down before Zeng Hao does)

Jiang: (looks around the room as he waits for Zeng Hao to sit down again and instangly says) I have something to say. (points at his bedroom) That wall by my room is just about to collapse! Are you going to fix it or not?

Wencai: (hurriedly, in a low voice) Are you going to start that again?

Jiang: (to Wencai) You mind your own business. (Turns to Siyi and Zeng Hao) Are you going to fix it? If not, I'm

going to get my stuff together and get the hell out of here!

Hao: (not knowing what is going on) What?

Siyi: (gently, but making sure that she gets the stern message across to him) ~~Son is too~~ Gu Laoye, you don't understand. ~~I wouldn't tell you if we weren't going to fix it,~~ NEVER THINK OF NOT FIXING IT BUT SINCE I when I heard that Father wants to sell the house and start a business.

Hao: (displeased) Sell the house?

Siyi: To our neighbors, the Du family.

Hao: (slightly angry) Says who! Who told you that?

Siyi: (glances over to Jiang Tai, smiles sarcastically) Who knows who said it?

Jiang: (about to explode) I said it. (stares at Zeng Hao disdainfully) And I don't remember who the liar was who told me in the first place.

Hao: (getting more and more intolerant as he is being reprimanded in front of the members of the family) Jiang Tai, is this how you talk to your elders?

Jiang: All right, I'm leaving. (gets up and starts to walk away)

Wencai: (almost in tears in a low voice) Jiang Tai, sit down now.

Su Fang: (appealing) Cousin!

(Jiang Tai, being subtly restrained, sits down reluctantly) (Silence, during this time, Wenqing enters quietly through the study door and stands aside.)

Hao: (stares at Wenqing for a moment and says in a trembling voice) All right, I said it, I said it. I had to say it for the sake of this whole bunch of worthless children. We're going through hard times now, and there's not a single one of you who's earning any money...(glances angrily at Wenqing)...and my oldest son is a ~~good-for-nothing~~ loafer! The family next door is after us every day to pay our debts and is pressing us to sell our house. But are we going to hand over our house to them just like that, just because they bid ten or twenty thousand? (gets angrier as he speaks) These ~~hot-shot~~ nouveau-riche textile manufacturers, they think they can buy people and kick them around. This guy even sent someone over to buy the coffin I've been lacquering for fifteen years. (shaking in anger) People like that are so uncivilized! You think I would sell my very own precious coffin? (to Wencai) Say something Wencai. (to Wenqing) You're the oldest, Wenqing, you say something! (Wenqing lowers his head) You are my children... (Chen Naima enters through the study door.)

Naima: (happily) Master Wenqing! (seeing that Siyi is pointing at Zeng Hao and signaling at her to stop by waving her arm, she falls silent abruptly and sneaks out through the living room door.)

Hao: This house was handed down to us by our ancestors. Every blade of grass, every tree here now comes out of blood and sweat of Jing Degong who started with nothing. We

eat here, we live here, from youth to old age, we have all been living off his fortune. (tapping lightly on the arm of the sofa) Maybe you people don't appreciate this, but how do you think I could sell this house to a bunch of nouveau-riche pigs like them, sell it to that kind of...

Jiang: (raises his hand) Listen, leave me out of this. I have never given a damn about your selling this house.

Hao: (taken aback briefly by what Jiang Lai said, and continues angrily) Those ~~hot-shot~~ up-star textile manufacturers, those ~~rotten creeps~~ rats who would go so low as to buy someone else's coffin, those... (Suddenly the deafening sound of firecrackers can be heard from next door.)

Hao: (flabbergasted) What's that? (tries to get up but collapses back onto the sofa as if overwhelmed by excitement) What is that? What is it?

Su Fang: (tries to scream in the midst of the noise) Don't worry, they're only setting off firecrackers!

Hao: (covers his ears, excitedly) Close the door, close the door!

(Wenqing and Ruizhen rush to the folding door of the living room and close it. The sound of firecrackers fades, but continues for a while.)

Wencai: (inhales deeply amidst the noise) Whose family is setting off all those firecrackers?

Jiang: (grins sarcastically) ~~Hmmph!~~ Hmmph! Isn't that the nouveau-riche Du family?

Hao: (shakes his head) Look at them! They make such a big deal of the Mid-Autumn Festival you'd think they were marrying off their daughter. (Chen Naima enters through living room door.) LEFT OF MISS SU

Naima: (clapping her hands happily) Miss Su, that family is so funny! The daughter calls her father "old ape", and the father calls the daughter "little monkey". And there's also a strange thing that looks like a wild gorilla sitting in their room. While the old ape draws pictures, the little monkey climbs all over him. (bending forward and backward as she cannot control her laughter) They're going to turn the room upside down...

Hao: (puzzled) Who's that?

Naima: Who else but Mr. Yuan and his dauther? Mr. Yuan seems to be a very nice man...a little odd, but --

Siyi: Chen Naima, why don't you go into the kitchen, see if everything is ready, and then set the table. The Old Master invited Mr. Yuan to lunch in honor of Miss Su!

Naima: Oh, oh, yes, yes! (happily exits through the living room door.)

Siyi: (brings up a serious matter to Zeng Hao's attention) I hear that Mr. Yuan will be leaving in a few days. I wonder how you feel about Su Meimei marrying...

Hao: (shakes his head disdainfully) I think this fellow...

(Jiang Tai knows exactly what is on Zeng Hao's mind, and before the old man can go on, Jiang lets out a loud "hmmph" in disgust).

Hao: (glances over at Jiang Tai, and says angrily to Su Fang, who is about to leave the room) All right, Su Fang, don't go yet. Since you're here now we can all discuss this matter.

Su Fang: I have to go and make your medicine.

Jiang Tai: (with good intentions, but cannot help being sarcastic) My dear Miss Su, haven't you made enough medicine yet? (rapidly says) Sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down. (Su Fang sits down reluctantly)

Hao: Su Fang, how do you feel about this? (Su Fang lowers her head in silence.)

Hao: Su, tell me what's on your mind? Leave me out of it, just think about yourself. This uncle of yours won't be able to take care of you for long. But the way I look at it this fellow Mr. Yuan...

Siyi: (hastily) Oh yes, Su Meimei, you really have to take this seriously, you mustn't continue disregarding your uncle's best intentions. Later, you may regret wasting your life away...

Hao: (also interrupts hastily) Siyi, why don't you let her think for herself. This is a once in a lifetime decision, so she should make up her mind herself. (faking a smile) We can only give her our advice. Su Fang, tell us, how do you feel?

Jiang Tai: (cannot tolerate Zeng Hao's pretension any longer) What's the matter here? Mr. Yuan isn't a horrible mon-

ster! He's a scholar, an anthropologist. First of all he's a good person and second he's well-educated; what's more, he has an income. It, it only seems right that...

Hao: (tries to slow Jiang Tai down) No, no, why don't you let her think for herself? (turns to Su Fang anxiously) Su Fang, you have to understand, you are my only niece, and I've always treated you like my very own daughter. Wouldn't I keep on taking care of my own daughter if she didn't want to get married...?

Siyi: (interrupting) That's right, Su Meimei, daughters who can't find husbands aren't... (Wenqing, who cannot bear to listen to this any longer, starts walking towards the study)...

Siyi: (stares at Wenqing from the corner of her eyes wickedly) Hey? Where are you going ? Where are you going? (Without turning back, Wenqing exits through the study door.)

Hao: What's wrong with Wenqing?

Siyi: (smiles sarcastically) He probably went to prepare your medicine! (Turns to Su Fang affectionately) Don't worry, Su Meimei. We brought this up because we care about you. No one'll spread gossip around even if you spend the rest of your life here in the Zeng family. (maliciously) Who wouldn't take care of a daughter whom no man wanted? What's more, Su Meimei, your parents are dead, and you have no close relatives...

Hao: (knows what she's insinuating, interrupts without waiting for her to finish...) All right, that's enough, DaNaiNai you can keep all that kindness to yourself. (a cold look descends suddenly over Siyi's face.)

Hao: (turns to Su Fang) Well, Su Fang, have you made up your mind?

Siyi: (to Su Fang urgently) Tell us!

Wencai: (has been listening and nodding in agreement all along, suddenly breaks her silence and says kindly to Su Fang) Go ahead, Su Meimei, I think...

Jiang [redacted]: (to his wife, abruptly) Mind your own business! (Wencai is silent as Su Fang quietly gets up and heads for the living room door.)

Hao: Su Fang, say something, my little lady. You should at least let us know your opinion.

Su Fang: (shakes her head) I, I have no opinion. (exits through the living room door )

Hao: Ai, how can you not have an opinion on such a matter?

Jiang: (growing intolerant) Are you people going to listen to me?

Hao: What?

Jiang [redacted]: If you're going to listen, I'll tell you. If not, I'm leaving right now.

Hao: All right, go ahead. Of course you can say what's on your mind.

Jiang [redacted]: (satisfied, in a straightforward tone) In that case, I think you should all leave Su Fang alone. Can't you see

something's bothering her? Why do you go on bickering and insulting a poor lonely woman like her? Why...

Siyi: Insult her?

Wencai: Jiang Tai.

JiangTai: (outraged) You certainly were insulting her. She's been working like a dog for all these years waiting on the old and the young, the living and the dead, the old Master, the young Masters, the old Mistress, the young Mistress. She's been taking care of this family all along. And now she's over thirty, and yet you still want to hold on to her, you won't let her go, what are you trying to do?

Hao: You...

Wencai: Jiang Tai!

Jiang Tai: Do you want her to follow you into the coffin too, so she can be burnt to ashes and sacrificed to your ancestors? Shouldn't we listen to our consciences? I'm leaving now, here's a letter (pushes a letter into Zeng Hao's lap) for you to read.

Wencai: Jiang Tai! (Jiang Tai stalks out of the parlor angrily, and exits through the living room door.)

Hao: (apparently displeased) What, what's the meaning of this? I, I have never heard such nonsense in my life. (simultaneously opens the letter with shaky hands: some banknotes and a small piece of paper are inside the en-

velope. While Zeng Hao is reading the letter, Zhang Shun enters quietly with some bowls and chopsticks in his hands. Ruizhen goes over to help him move the tables and chairs noiselessly. They set the table.

Hao: (reads through the letter quickly, and is furious) What's the meaning of this? (he raises his arm, with banknotes in his hand) He wants to pay me rent? (to Siyi) What's this all about?

Siyi: (grins sarcastically) I don't know what's wrong with him.

Wencai: (already on her feet reading the letter, says painfully to Zeng Hao with signs of helplessness and confusion all over her face) Father, please don't be mad at him. He has been so unhappy the past few years...

Hao: (angrily) Let's forget about Jiang Tai. He may be my son-in-law, and supposedly my half-son, but he is not a real Zeng. (to Wencai) But you're my daughter, so, you should know what the Zeng family is all about. In this family, the scholarship comes first and no one ever worries about money. If the two of you want to stay here, fine. But if you don't, it's fine with me too. No matter what, there's no need to talk about paying room and board to your Father...

Wencai: (speaks in a choking voice) Father, just pretend you never had me as your daughter... EXIT

Hao: (shaking in anger) Uh uh, nobody is going to walk a-

round the Zeng family showing off his money! Not in the Zeng family!

Wencai: (bursts into tears as she cannot bear to hear her father's reprimands) Oh, MOther, why did you have to die and leave me here. Oh my dear, dear Mother!

Siyi: Gu Nainai! (Wencai, still weeping, runs into her own bedroom.)

Hao: (lets out a deep, long sigh) Bunch of good-for-nothings! Can't even talk to them anymore. Serve lunch now, Zhang Shun, and invite Mr. Yuan over. (Zhang Shun exits through the living room door.) (Wenqing enters through the study door.)

Wenqing: Father!

Hao: Are you leaving?

Wenqing: I'm going to take the one o'clock train.

Hao: Have you quit smoking that opium of yours?

Wenqing: (lowers head) Yes, I have.

Hao: You really have?

Wenqing: (ashamed, blushes) Yes, really.

Hao: How about cigarettes?

Wenqing: (lowers his head) I've quit smoking those too.

Hao: (stares at Wenqing's nicotine-stained, yellowed fingers) Don't lie to me. (scolding) Look at those smoke-stained fingers of yours. (sighs as he shakes his head) Look at you. How, how can you find work looking the way you do?

Wenqing: (examines without realizing it) I, I'll wash them later.

Hao: Where's Ting?

Siyi: (instantly runs to the living room door that leads to the frontyard and calls) Ting! Your grandfather wants you.

Hao: What's he doing out there?

Wenqing: I think he's flying a kite with Miss Yuan.

Hao: Flying a kite! Instead of studying his Classical Literature (literary collection of poems, prose and other major works compiled during the Liang dynasty, 500's AD) he's flying a kite!

Wenqing: Ting!

Voice of a screaming Zeng Ting in the living room: My grandfather's inside! My grandfather's inside!

Voice of a rowdy Yuan Yuan: Just try and get away! Just try and get away! (The folding door of the living room is thrown open. Zeng Ting rushes in, still yelling; a sweaty Yuan Yuan follows, carrying an empty bucket in one hand, and holding a string of ignited firecrackers in another. They are followed by Xiao Zhuer who has a stick of burning incense in one hand, and the pigeon under his other arm.)

Hao: Stop it now! Where are your manners?

Ting: (still running from Yuan Yuan) Grandfather, she she...

Yuan: (shouts laughingly) You can't get away! You can't get

away! Let's see where you can hide...

(As Zeng Ting approaches where Zeng Hao is sitting, and ducks behind his sofa, Yuan Yuan throws the ignited fire-crackers at them. Zeng Ting and Zeng Hao both scream in fear, amidst the "pic-paaa" noise of the firecrackers. While Yuan Yuan roars at her own mischief, Xiao Zhuer is rolling with laughter by the living room door.)

Hao: What's gotten into you, you little devil?

Yuan: Grandpa Zeng!

Hao: What's all this ruckus about?

Yuan: (playing cute with a pouting manner) Look, Grandpa Zeng (stretches her neck and shows him her wetted hair, and points at Zeng Ting) He threw water on me first!

Voice of a man from out-side: (laughing) Where are you, my little monkey?

Yuan: (mischievously) I'm in here, Old Ape! (laughing and skipping, exits through the living room door)

Hoa: (to Siyi) See that? Now how can we set up Su Fang with such an uncouth family? (turns to Zeng Ting) Did you throw water on her?

Ting: (timidly) She, she dared me.

Hao: Get down on your knees!

Siyi: Grandpa...I think...

Hao: Get down on your knees! (knowing that there is no way out, Zeng Ting kneels down)

Hao: May as well let the Yuans see how we discipline our chil-

dren here in the Zeng family. (Yuan Yuan enters happily, hand in hand, with her "Old Ape" the anthropologist, Yuan Rengan) (The"Old Ape" isn't actually that old, he looks about forty years of age. Yet the bald spot on top of his head is prominent. The few remaining hairs are combed across his shiny bald spot, suggesting that he had a full head of hair once upon a time. He is not a tall man, but he stands very straight, and looks healthy and well-fed. He is wearing yellow riding pants, and muddy riding boots, and a brown shirt open at the collar. His clothing looks like that of a car mechanic. His eyes are alert and full of humor, with a trace of cynicism. They bear the contemplative expression often characteristic of scholars.)

Yuan: (speaking as they walk into the room) And so then, Father, Xiao Zhuer comes along with this stick of incense; so I lit my firecracker with it and started chasing him. I aimed right for his leg...

Mr. Yuan: (nods smilingly as he listens) Uh-huh...uh-huh...oh. (sees that Zeng Hao is already standing to greet him) Old Master Zeng. Thank you so much for inviting us today. Here we are imposing on you again.

Hao: Oh it's just a little gathering to celebrate the Mid-Autumn festival. (Zeng Hao guides Mr. Yuan to Zeng Hao's own seat.) Please have a seat Mr. Yuan. Sit here.

Yuan: (seeing Zeng Ting kneeling on the floor, yells) Look

father, look! He's kneeling on the floor.

Hao: Don't pay any attention to him. Please have a seat.

Mr. Yuan: (shocked as he looks at Zeng Ting) What happened?

Hao: My grandson here was very naughty! He splashed a bucket of water on your daughter...

Mr. Yuan: (smiles apologetically) Oh my god! Get up! I'm the one who gave him that bucket of water...

Hao: (dumbfounded) But, but (not knowing how to end this matter, looks at Ting with a stern face). But he's still a bad boy.

Mr. Yuan: (smiles) Oh there's nothing wrong with being a little mischievous, there's nothing wrong with that. Come on, get up now.

Siyi: (takes the opportunity to free her son, taps him) Get up now, Ting, and thank your Uncle Yuan.

Ting: (gets on his feet) Thank you Uncle Yuan.

Mr. Yuan: (to Zeng Ting) I'm sorry about this. Next time you should throw water on me.

Hao: (can't bear to listen to this nonsense any longer) Mr. Yuan, please have a seat. Ruizhen, pour the wine. (heads toward the dinner table)

Mr. Yuan: (still smiling) My little friend, you should never kneel alone. When you kneel, you know, you're much shorter than everybody else and that doesn't look good at all.

Siyi: Mr. Yuan, come sit here.

Mr. Yuan: Oh yes, time to eat. I'm going to make myself at home. Yuaner... (Zhang Shun carries in a plate of hot food, sets it on the table and exits)

Siyi: Come over here, Miss Yuan and sit next to your father. (After those two are seated, the rest of the family take their places) (See diagram #1 for seating arrangement)

Hao: (raises wine glass) Today is the Mid-Autumn Festival and my son Wenqing is leaving. Since he has seldom had the chance to enjoy your good company, Mr. Yuan, we're happy to take this last opportunity to get together. Come, come let's drink to you.

Mr. Yuan: Thank you, thank you. (downs the whole glass of wine) I hear that Mr. Zeng is a real connaisseur of tea... (sounds of quarrelling can be heard from the outside)

Hao: Ruizhen, why don't you go out and see who's making all that noise.

Yuan: (to Ruizhen) I'll go for you. (Siyi whispers something to Wenqing. Wenqing gets up, picks up the wine decanter, and walks over to Zeng Hao with Siyi following him.) (Yuan Yuan puts down her chopsticks and runs out through the living room door.)

Siyi: (wine glass in hand) Your daughter-in-law would like to make a toast to you. (a traditional gesture of respect)

Hao: (still sitting) Oh, there's no need for that.

Siyi: (respectfully) Wenqing wants to say goodbye to you, Father.

Wenqing: (in a low voice) Father, this is to bid you farewell. (Wenqing gets down on his hands and knees and lowers his head to the floor three times.) (Ruizhen and Ting both get up. Mr. Yuan looks on wide-eyed with curiosity. During all this the sound of cursing voices can be heard.)

Cursing Voice of Collector A: Are you gonna pay up or not?

Voice of Collector B: (almost simultaneously) This is the Mid-Autumn Festival and you've already made us wait all morning.

Voice of Collector C: (almost simultaneously) Pay up this time and your credit's good. But if you don't give us any money, how can we give you credit? You are really --

Hao: What's going on?

Siyi: Must be people quarrelling next door.

Hao: (relieved, to Yuan Yuan) (NOTE: No stage directions are given for her re-entrance maybe it's an oversight) Help yourself. (to Zeng Ting and Ruizhen, kindly) You two should also say good-bye to your father. (Ruizhen and Zeng Ting then get up together and walk over to Wenqing's place with the wine decanter. Zeng Ting pours wine for Wenqing.)

Siyi: (showing how facile she is with all this etiquette, says with an instructive air) Now say, "We wish you a safe journey, father."

Ruizhen and Zeng Ting together: (repeating in rote fashion) We wish you a safe journey, Father.

Siyi: (still instructing) Now say, "Please write to us often, Father."

Ruizhen and Zeng Ting together: (mechanically) Please write to us often, Father.

Siyi: Now say, "Your son and daughter-in-law are sorry to be unable to serve you."

Ruizhen and Zeng Ting: (mechanically) Your son and daughter-in-law are sorry to be unable to serve you. (They make a move to return to their seats.)

Siyi: (hastily) Kowtow, you silly kids! (looks at Mr. Yuan, proudly)

(Ruizhen and Zeng Ting kowtow together three times. Wenqing gets up. The cursing noises start up again.)

Voice of Collector A: How can you even celebrate this festival?

Collector B: (almost at the same time) You still owe us money from the Dragon Festival last May. And now you won't even give us a cent.

Collector C: (almost at the same time) Why are you giving us such a hard time? It's not even $500.

Voice of Zhang Shun: (trying to persuade them) Don't stand around here

screaming and yelling like that. Get out of here! Get going! The Old Master is right inside there.

Collector A: (sarcastically) So what if he's in there! What does he think he is, some kind of rich man?

Collector B: (almost simultaneously) He's no different from us if he can't pay his bills.

Collector C: (almost simultaneously) Bunch of bankrupt good-for-nothings! (literally this is a Chinese term for a powerful family which has collapsed financially) (The quarrelling continues. Mr. Yuan turns his head and listens attentively)

Hao: What's really going on out there?

Siyi: Could be the people next door...

(Su Fang hurries in through the living room door amidst the sound of quarrelling)

Hao: Who is that?

Su Fang: (concealing the truth) Oh, nobody.

Siyi: (smiles slyly) Mr. Yuan. Let me introduce you to Miss Su. (Mr. Yuan gets up)

Siyi: (turns to Su Fang) This is Mr. Yuan! (Chen Naima, an old apron wrapped around her, enters hurriedly through the living room door with a big plate of food. Xiao Zhuer follows her, one hand holding her apron, and the other holding the pigeon.)

Naima: (saying as she walks, in an annoyed tone) Let go of me, Xiao Zhuer. Don't be such a pest! (sets the plate down on the table and shakes her hands) Oooh! That's hot!

Su Fang: (in a low voice) Cousin Siyi!

Siyi: (raises her chopsticks) Mr. Yuan, this dish is Miss Su's... (Su Fang tugs on Siyi's sleeve)

Siyi: (turns to Su Fang) Huh?

Hao: (raises chopsticks) Please, please. (he is encouraging the guest to eat more)

Su Fang: (simultaneously, with a worrisome tone) The man from the coffin shop, he... they...

Siyi: (without paying attention to her, rolls her eyes and says merrily) Please don't stand on ceremony. (to Mr. Yuan) Our Miss Su (pointing to Su Fang) went to a lot of trouble to make this dish especially for you! (unconsciously looks and smiles at Wenqing)

Hao: (raises his chopsticks again) Please have some more. (The living room door is thrown open and all the collectors barge in with Zhang Shun in the middle, unable to block their entry.

Zhang Shun: Stop, stop, our guests are in there!

Collector A: (pushes him aside) You keep out of this! Give us our money, we're not asking for your lives. Old Master, (extending his hand) if you have the money, pay up.

Don't you think it's about time?

(They slowly approach Zeng Hao)

----Curtain----

## ACT II

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Around 11 O'clock the same evening, in the small living room of the Zeng house. In the distance, a lonely blind fortuneteller bangs his cymbals intermittently in a desolate alley, making his way home. The Zeng house is surrounded by a deathly silence. Occasionally the sounds of women and children's voices can be heard. These are the sad, slow calls of peddlers coming from the long, bleak streets far away.

In the room, the light from a bulb beneath a gauze lampshade throws a dim glow in the shape of a small circle; the calligraphy, paintings and antiques on the walls are partially obscured in the darkness. The bamboo painting on the wall looks particularly obscure. All the curtains are tightly drawn. A streak of light coming through a tear in the curtains falls on the door leading to the main living room. All the white papered partitions are shut. Except for the wooden carvings on the extreme lower edge of the partitions, the doors all appear as huge snow-white paper screens. Threads of light seep through the cracks between the partitions, as human shadows play about on their surfaces. Occasionally, muffled sounds of coughing and talking can be heard from inside, (the main living room). Several candleholders stand on the long, narrow table along the left wall and in one of these holders stands a half-burned candle. A low table stands in the middle of the room. It holds a tiny red clay (portable) burner which looks brand new, on top of which sits a small iron kettle. The fire is burning merrily, flickering from out of the small opening in front of the burner.

The water in the kettle is making a moaning noise as if there were a little man trapped inside crying sadly. Next to that is an elegant and lovely redwood table holding a small exquisite teaset. Wenquing is sitting on a low stool next to the burner which illuminates his pale face, lost in thought. A small sofa has been moved in on the other side of the room. Chen Naima is sitting on a small sofa which has been moved in. She is holding a pair of scissors and cuts Xiao Zhuer's fingernails; he is dozing on a small stool. In the study there is a single dim light, by the light of which we can see Zeng Ting alone, contentedly reciting in a low voice (the prose-poem) "Autumn Sounds". At the end of a long alley, in the distance, there are the beating sounds of the night watch. (indicating the time)

Naima: (cutting Xiao Zhuer's nails and chatting) Really, ~~young master~~ Master Wenqing, are you still thinking of leaving tomorrow?

(Wenqing nods)

Naima: I think you should forget it. Since you missed the train, you might as well stay another two or three days and see how it works out between Mr. Yuan and Miss Su.

(Wenqing shakes his head)

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Naima: Do you think Mr. Yuan knew what was going on?

Wenqing: (lowers his head, and answers reluctantly) I didn't pay any attention.

Naima: (grinning) I could tell that Mr. Yuan knew what was going on. He was looking in Miss Su's directions all during lunch.

(Wenqing stares at Naima as if he does not understand her).

Naima: Young Master, you think this whole thing...

(Wenqing cannot withhold a long sigh)

(Naima glances at Wenqing without continuing what she wanted to say.)

(Xiao Zhuer starts and wakes from his nap. He mutters something incomprehensible after a long yawn and dozes off again.)

Naima: (clipping Xiao Zhuer's nails) Ai! I think we should go home. (Points at Xiao Zhuer) His mother's expecting us home tonight. (Xiao Zhuer starts again, as Naima tries to support him with her hands) Don't move, my precious! Or else your Grandma'll cut you! (lovingly) Ai, this kid must be very tired. He walked here all morning, then he played with Miss Yuan all day long. Country children aren't like city kids: they eat when they are hungry, and sleep when they're tired. He's not like...(glances over to Zeng Ting who is studying in the study and says tenderly, in a low voice)..Master Ting, Master Ting!

Ting: (reciting in a low voice) "Jie fu, (a Chinese expression that represents an exclamation), Plants and trees have no emotion, at a given time they wither and fall; man too, is a living creature, the most blessed and gifted of all. Countless thoughts vex his mind, a myriad of activities wear on his body. What moves him within in turn disturbs the essence of his being. Man's thoughts reach far beyond his powers of attainment; his worries are such that his wisdom is of no avail."

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Wenqing: Let him study, his Grandfather is going to quiz him on that soon. (The night-watchman's gong can be heard from the alley).

Naima: He's up so late studying! It's the Mid'Autumn Festival! Ai, is that the third watch already? (the drum is beaten by nightwatchmen to tell the approximate time of the night)

Wenqing: Yes, it must be.

Naima: By this time, children in the village are all fast asleep. (Finishes clipping the last finger of Xiao Zhuer) Alright, get up and go to bed. You've suffered enough already. (It's generally an ordeal for a vivacious Chinese boy to sit still while his elder tidies his hands and fingers.)

Xiao: (rubs his eyes) I don't, I don't want to go to sleep.

Wenqing: (smiles) But it's late, it's almost eleven o'clock.

Xiao: (musters his energies) But I'm not tired.

Naima: (a bit annoyed but still very lovingly) Alright, in that case you stay up all night. (To Wenqing) Really, these country bumpkins find everything in the city so fascinating. Look at him, he's so curious that he can't sleep.

(Xiao Zhuer takes a piece of peanut candy out of his pocket and throws it into his mouth, and then without thinking picks up and stares at his toy, the "gua da tsui", which has been lying next to him.)

Naima: Ai, On the very night of the Harvest Moon Festival, we can't even see the moon...What's going on? Why is Da Nai Nai staying inside? (Calls) Da Nai Nai! (To Wenqing) What's she doing in the bedroom? (Gets up) Da Nai Nai! Da Nai Nai!

Wenqing: Don't, don't bother her.

Naima: Master Wenqing, then, then you should go in there.

Wenqing: (Shakes his head and begins to mournfully recite "Chai Tou Feng" (Coiffeured Phoenix) by Lu Yu (1122-1210), the prominent

poet of the Sung dynasty) " . . . The eastern wind blows cruelly and scatters my joy. Once bound by melancholy, there follow years of desolation--I am torn, I am torn, I am torn!"

Naima: (sighs) Ai, Young Master, you are an innocent victim of an evil fate! You must have been indebted to Da Nai Nai in some previous life, so now she's come back to take you to account. What, what's really going on? She hasn't said a word all evening . . . what does she want?

Wenqing: Who knows? She said her stomach was bothering her, and she felt nauseous.

Naima: (turns and sees that Xiao Zhuer is beginning to get fidgety; scolds him as he starts playing with the tea pot sitting on the red coffee table) Xiao Zhuer, put that down! Have you got ants in your pants?

(Xiao Guier puts the tea pot down obediently.)

Naima: (turns to Wenqing) Isn't it strange? Wasn't Gu Lao Ye (Jiang Tai) making a big fuss about moving out of here tonight? How come he's . . .

Wenqing: (sighs) He's all full of hot air. (suddenly in a complaining tone) He's like me. I don't say much, and I don't get anything done. He raises hell all day long, but he hasn't accomplished anything in his life either.

(Wencai enters through the study door, holding in her hands an unlit candle and a pair of chopsticks, a plate of cooked meat, preserved soy beans, and an assortment of dried nuts, which she has bought from the Dao Shiang Tsuen Restaurant.)

Wencai: (tiredly) Naima, you're still up!

Naima: Oh, yes. How come Gu Lao Yeh is drinking again?

Wencai: (hiding her embarrassment) Oh no, it's not him, it's me.

Wenqing: You? . . . Ai, don't let him drink anymore.

Wencai: (sighs and puts the chopsticks and the plate down) Brother, he was crying to me again tonight.

Naima: Gu Lao Yeh? (Him)?

Wencai: (with tears in her eyes, draws her handkerchief) He said that he let me down, and he feels sorry about it. He said that his whole life has gone down the drain. When I saw him in that state, I felt that I've been a burden to him. Ai, it must be my awful fate that got him implicated in that embezzlement and made him lose his job. (Tears run down her cheeks.) Naima, where are the matches?

Naima: I'll look . . .

Wenqing: (picks up a box of matches from the red low table) Here they are!

(Naima takes it from him and lights the candle for Wencai.)

Wencai: (picks up a copper candlestick from the table) He said he was very depressed and wanted a drink. You know, Brother, he's so unhappy, I . . .

Wenqing: (lets out a deep, long sigh) Let him drink then, maybe it will do him some good.

Naima: (hands the lighted candle to Wencai) Is the Old Master still turning the lights off at eleven o'clock?

Wencai: (puts the candle into the candlestick) Yes. (thoughtfully) That's why I'm getting this candle ready. If the lights go

out while he's drinking, he'll get mad again, for sure.

Naima: Let me help you carry this.

Wencai: Don't bother. (picks up the chopsticks, the plate, and the lighted candle, enters her bedroom)

Naima: (shakes her head) Ai, it's so hard being a woman.

(Wencai puts her stuff down and reenters hastily through her bedroom door.)

Wencai: Where's Jiang Tai?

Naima: He just went into the living room.

Wenqing: I suppose he's chatting with Mr. Yuan.

Wencai: (has already walked over to the stove) Brother, do you still want this water?

Wenqing: (shakes his head, tiredly) Wencai, you have to take care of yourself, don't strain yourself.

Wencai: (forcing a smile, sorrowfully) No, I won't. (takes the pot and exits through her ~~living~~ Bed room door)

(Wenqing finds another exquisite-looking teapot--in this case, it is a Yi Xing pot, which is known in China as the best of pottery teapots, manufactured in Yi Xing, Kiangsu--and places it on top of the stove, then fans the flame lazily.)

Ting: (picks up the book that he has been reading, already on his feet) Father, I'm going over to Grandfather's ROOM.

Wenqing: (still attending to his teapot, with his head lowered) All right, go ahead.

Naima: (walks up to Zeng Ting) Master Ting! (in a low voice) If your grandfather asks you, don't tell him that your father is still here.

Xiao: (has been sitting there like a well-behaved boy, turns his head

all of a sudden and says cleverly) Just tell him he caught an early train.

Naima: (amused) Who told you that?

Xiao: (winks his little eyes) You told me yourself.

Naima: My dear little child! (to Zeng Ting) Go ahead, Master Ting. When you're done studying, you should go to bed. If the Old Master still wants to test you, just tell him that Chen Naima told you to.

Ting: Hmmm. O.K. (walks towards the study)

Wenqing: Ting!

Ting: What's the matter, Father?

Wenqing: (concerned) What's the matter with you the last two days?

Ting: (tries to avoid his question) Nothing, Father. (quickly exits through the study door)

Naima: (follows Zeng Ting's exit with an appreciative expression on her face, and then unconsciously turns and points at Xiao Guier) You should follow his example. He's only two years older than you, and the number of the books he's read is more than all the grains of rice you've stuffed your face with. As for you, you eat four big bowls of rice at every meal, and your belly's filled with . . .

Xiao: (suddenly) Grandma, listen, who's calling me?

Naima: Nonsense! You think I'm totally deaf just because I can't hear things so well.

Xiao: It's the truth. Listen Grandma, isn't that Ms. Yuan . . .

Naima: Where?

Xiao: Listen.

Naima: (listens attentively) Ms. Yuan is helping her father draw

pictures of apes.

Xiao: (teasing his grandmother intentionally) Really, listen! Isn't that Ms. Yuan calling me: "Xiao Zhuer! Xiao Zhuer!" Listen: "Xiao Zhuer, come over and help me feed the pigeons!" (suddenly grins broadly and mischievously) It's the truth, Grandma, she's calling me to help her feed the pigeons. (slips away instantly and starts running towards the living room)

Naima: (chases after him laughing) You tricky little monkey, you think you can fool your grandma.

(Xiao Zhuer, laughing and running, gets to the sliding door of the living room, which appears like a huge screen. All of a sudden, the whole house is in complete darkness as, according to habit, all the lights in the Zeng residence are turned off at eleven o'clock. Almost simultaneously, the large crouching shadow of an ape jumps onto the snowy white broad screen of the sliding door.)

Xiao: (sees the shadow and screams in fear) Grandma! (runs back to Chen Naima and throws himself into her arms) BACK UP.

Naima: Oh! What's that?

Wenqing: (gets up, to Chen Naima) Light a candle!

Naima: Alright. (goes to light the candle)

Voice of Yuan Rengan in the living room: You see, this is the original Peking Man. People in those days made love when they wanted to, hated when they wanted to. They cried when they were sad and they shouted when they were angry. They lived freely, without the restraints of morality, without the trappings of civilization. There was no pretension, no fraud, no deceit, no slander. The sun shone, the wind blew, and the rain fell. They had none of our dehumanized morality and culture. Yet

they lived very happy lives.

(Suddenly one section of the folding door is opened, as the glow of the gas light in the living room shines into the parlor. Jiang Tai is holding the small, remaining part of a lit candle as he makes his entrance with Yuan Rengan. Jiang Tai is wearing a western-style sleeveless jacket, while Yuan Rengan still has his brown shirt on, with sleeves rolled up. He is holding a pipe in his mouth out of which smoke is curling.)

MOVE TO CORNER NEAR WENCHING'S ROOM

Jiang: (a bit intoxicated, responds to the last sentence very agreeably) And yet they lived very happy lives.

Voice of Yuan Yuan in the living room: Xiao Zhuer, come over here!

Xiao: O.K.! (leaves what he is doing and runs into the living room)

Jiang: (still savoring the meaning of Mr. Yuan's comment, sets down the candle excitedly, and repeats as if to himself) And yet they lived very happily. Right you are, Mr. Yuan, it's so true! You couldn't be righter! Look at how we live! Either we walk around depressed all day or we never stop complaining about something. Or it's that endless worrying about death, or about life, or about our lack of accomplishments, or about not having the proper spiritual attitude, or about not having enough to eat, or not having the right coffin to die in. Day in and day out we hope, we hope, but never any real hope! For instance, (points at Wenqing) he . . .

Wenqing: Stop grumbling, or else Mr. Yuan'll think you're ~~insane~~ being silly!

Jiang: (positively) No, no, Mr. Yuan is an anthropologist, he won't make fun of the weaknesses of the human race! Sit down for

TAKE TIME TO PICK UP CANDLE & PUT ON TABLE NEXT TO WENCHING'S COT & GO BACK TO STAND

MOVE AS JIANG TAI MOVES

a while, Mr. Yuan, let's talk. (sits around the stove with Mr. Yuan and picks up a cigarette from the redwood coffee table, says suddenly) Now, where was I?

Mr. Yuan: (smiles) You said, (points at Wenqing) take him, for instance!

Jiang: Oh, take him, for instance. Oh, (to Wenqing, miserably) I really don't want to go on complaining, but if you won't let me say a few things, then I, what else can I do? What else can I live for? (to Yuan Rengan) All right, take him, for example, that brother-in-law of mine. He's a good man,one-hundred-and-twenty-percent good! But I know he is suffering greatly inside.

Wenqing: Don't be ridiculous!

Jiang: (smiles shrewdly) Oh, you can't hide that from me, I'm not <u>that</u> stupid. (pointing at Wenqing, to Yuan Rengan, in a straightforward tone) He suffers because he wants a happy family and he wants to spend the rest of his life with a woman who truly understands him. (excitedly) Of course, his desire is only natural and reasonable and he deserves our sympathy. Not only that, many years ago he found a woman who understood him. But he didn't have the courage to go after her; when he finally did meet her, he was too scared to make her his own, so he let her grow up from a child to a young woman, and from a young woman to an old maid; he let her wither and die like a flower. And the whole time he stood by suffering. And she suffered too, til this very day, this woman is still . . .

Wenqing: (cannot bear to listen to this any longer) You're really drunk!

Jiang: (laughs and waves his hand disapprovingly) Don't worry, I'm not

drunk. I promise you I'll stop right here and say no more. (to Yuan Rengan) You know, letting this woman rot away in a family like this--like a coffin rotting in an old graveyard, decaying slowly--so that all she can do is sigh and dream, sitting around waiting and suffering all day long, getting lazier and lazier, to the point that she can't even move anymore. She's too scared to love, too scared to hate, too scared to cry, and even too scared to scream. Now <u>that</u> is degeneration, human degeneration. Now, (points at himself) take me, for example . . . (strikes a match and lights his cigarette, puffing away as he speaks) after studying for more than twenty years . . .

Mr. Yuan: (smiles with pipe in his mouth) I knew you'd finally get to this.

Jiang: (talks endlessly and fluently) Naturally. I won't just criticize others and say nothing about myself. Take me, for instance, I love money, I want money, and I never stop thinking about how I can get my hands on a pile of money so I can give it to my friends and all the poor people to spend. I want to follow what Tu Fu (712-770; one of the most prominent poets in Chinese history, who lived and wrote during the Tang Dynasty) said in a poem and build numerous elegant mansions for all the poor people in the world so that they can eat, drink, and live for free. They can do scientific research, study the arts and literature, or do whatever they want to do, for the benefit of China and all of mankind. And yet, Mr. Yuan, I'm an unlucky man. No matter where I go I'm always rejected. I've never had a lucky break. For some strange

reason, whenever I start a new career, the whole thing falls apart. We're always making lofty plans in heaven, yet we're brought back down to earth with compromises all the time. All we can do is sigh, fantasize, and feel miserable. We live only to deprive worthy people of their daily bread. We are the living dead, the ghosts, and the dying! Like JUST ~~something~~ you said, (pointing at his own chest) it's people like us who are really (pointing at the huge shadow of "Peking Man") his prodigal sons!

Mr. Yuan: (has been listening to him, silently nodding in good humor all along; picks up a teacup smilingly) Have some tea!

Jiang: (takes the teacup from him) Right, now take tea-drinking, for instance. My dear brother-in-law is a true connoisseur of tea. Before he drinks he must first wash his hands, rinse his mouth, burn incense, and sit quietly in meditation. The tip of his tongue can determine the character of the leaves, their age, their origin, and the manner in which they were processed. He can also tell us whether the water is from a mountain, a stream, a well, or melted from snow; he can also tell if the water was boiled on a charcoal fire or with gas or wood. We drink tea when we're thirsty; but once it enters his mouth, it takes on endless implications that run the gamut from vulgarity to refinement. Yet, what's the use of all that? He can't grow tea, he can't sell tea, he can't even export tea. All he can do is drink tea. No matter how refined and good he is at it, it's still merely drinking tea. So what's the use? Tell me, what's the use?

(Wencai enters from her bedroom.)

Wencai: Tai!

Jiang: I'll be right there!

Naima: (walks over and taps him) Hurry up, Gu Lao Yeh!

Jiang: (gets up, but still reluctant to leave) Take me, for instance . . .

Naima: Enough of this endless "take me for instance," "take me for instance," or else Mr. Yuan'll think you're just a ~~big mouth~~ chatterbox.

Jiang: I say, Dr. Yuan, you don't mind my saying a little more, do you?

Mr. Yuan: (smiles) Oh, of course not, please do!

Jiang: So, for instance . . . (Wencai comes over and tries to persuade him to go back to their bedroom; he says to Wencai almost in a pleading tone) Wencai, let me continue, just let me say a little more! (to Yuan Rengan) Take me, for instance, I love good food, I know how to eat, and I can take you to all the best restaurants in town. (gets a bit conceited and starts to run down speedily his endless list of favorite restaurants and their specialities) For instance, there is the mutton firepot at the Noonday Towers, roast duck at the Economy Foodshop's, baked rolls at the Harmony House, mullet caviar at the Sunrise Restaurant, and stewed duck at the Temple of Perfection. As for snacks, there's minced pork noodles at the Comfy Kitchen, fried dumplings at Mu's Ranch House, sizzling tripe soup at the House of Jin, fried wontons at the Capital Restaurant, not to mention . . .

Wencai: Let's go!

Jiang: . . . not to mention spiced lamb at the Full Moon House, pickled vegetable at Six Time Around, fermented bean curd at Wang's Restaurant, sour plum soup at The Distant Memory's, multi-colored pudding at Three Serendipity House, stuffed rolls at

the Generosity House, sliced pork at the Crockpot Place, rice wine at Apricot Blossoms [redacted]. All the managers there are my buddies. In all these places there isn't a single chef, a single waiter, a single cashier who doesn't know me. And yet what's the use? I can't cook and I can't run a restaurant, I'd never be able to open up a big Li Hung-Zhang Chop-Suey House abroad and earn foreigners' money. All I can do is eat! (unintentionally talked of his own weaknesses; like pinching his own nerves, starts pounding on his own chest) Whatever I do, I fail at! We went into the red when I worked for the government, I owed money when I went into business, and my whole education's been useless! (painfully) I just hang around my father-in-law's place all day long, talking, complaining, criticizing, and yelling at people. I can't even control myself anymore; all I can do is say things no one wants to hear.

Wencai: (interrupting) Tai!

Jiang: (choked) All day long I show people how unhappy and useless I am. They call me a good-for-nothing behind my back. Oh, Wencai, I'm such a good-for-nothing, deep down I know I've let you down! (suddenly bursts into tears) I'm such a burden to you!

Wencai: (cries continuously) Tai, Tai! Don't be so upset, it's me who's no good, it's me who's been a burden.

Naima: Let's take him inside, he's had too much to drink again. Close Door

Jiang: (shakes his head) I haven't, I haven't, I just feel so miserable, I feel so miserable.

(Jiang Tai, supported by Chen Naima and Wencai, exits into

the bedroom.)

Wenqing: (sighs) Have a cup of tea.

Mr. Yuan: I've already had a lot of water today, and I ate so much at lunch. Mr. Zeng, I want to ask you to do me a favor . . .

Wenqing: Yes . . .

Mr. Yuan: I . . .

(Su Fang enters through the study door,with a blanket in one hand and a candle in the other.)

Mr. Yuan: Miss Su.

(Su Fang nods at him.)

Wenqing: Is Father asleep?

(Su Fang shakes her head.)

Wenqing: Mr. Yuan, you were saying?

(Jiang Tai reemerges from his bedroom, holding half a bottle of brandy.)

Jiang: (laughing) Would you like to come in and have a couple of drinks, Mr. Yuan?

Mr. Yuan: No thanks, (points at the huge shadow) he's still waiting for me!

Jiang: (raises the bottle) Good brandy, Wenqing, you . . .

(Wenqing does not reply, but glances over at Su Fang.)

Jiang: (puzzled) Oh, why are the three of you . . .

Voice of Naima from his bedroom: Gu Lao Yeh!

Jiang: (shakes his head and sighs) Ai, no one pays any attention to me, no one pays any attention to me. (exits into his bedroom)

Wenqing: Mr. Yuan, you were saying . . .

Voice of Yuan Yuan from the living room: Father, Father! Come over and look, I've finished the "Peking Man"'s silhouette.

Mr. Yuan: (glances at Su Fang and Wenqing) Tell you later. (then humorously and knowingly) It's nothing important. My Little Ape is calling me.

(Yuan Rengan opens one section of the screen-like folding door and exits. The glow from the living room escapes briefly into the parlor, until the door is closed again. The huge shadow of the "Peking Man" stands out on the snowy white screen. Silence, and the distant gong of the night-watchman can be heard.)

Wenqing: (expectantly) Did Naima give you the note?

(Su Fang nods in silence.)

Wenqing: (in a low voice) I, I still want to see you once more before I leave.

(Su Fang unconsciously glances at the door of Wenqing's bedroom.)

Wenqing: (points at the door) She always closes the door when she goes to sleep. She's sleeping inside. (lowers his head)

(Su Fang sits down.)

Wenqing: (suddenly) Su Fang!

(Su Fang gets up again.)

Wenqing: What is it?

Su Fang: Uncle asked me to bring him the medical books.

(Naima enters from Wencai's bedroom.)

Naima: Oh, you're here, Miss Su. (instantly walks towards the study door)

Wenqing: Where're you going, Naima?

Naima: (finds an excuse) I want to see if Master Ting has finished his

homework. (exits through the study door)

(From the distance comes the lonely double gong of the night-watchman.)

Wenqing: Su Fang, I'm leaving tomorrow for sure. I don't think (pause) I'll ever come back to this house again.

Su Fang: (affirmatively) It's only right that you never come here again.

Wenqing: Yes, I've decided never to come back again. I've been thinking about it all night, and I really feel that it's me, that I'm the cause of your wasting the last ten years of your life. I've hurt you and I've hurt myself; and it's all because I always thought, I've always thought that maybe one day, we could . . .(sees that Su Fang has an uncomfortable expression--knits her eyebrows--on her face and rubs her forehead) Su Fang, are you all right?

Su Fang: (tiredly) I'm exhausted.

Wenqing: (sorrowfully) Poor Su Fang, I don't even want to think about how you're going to live here from now on. You're like that pigeon locked up helplessly in a cage. Waiting, waiting, waiting, until some day . . .

Su Fang: (shaking her head) No, don't say that!

Wenqing: (heartbroken) Why, why do we have to be separated from each other and suffer so much? Why can't we have wings and fly away together? (shakes his head) Oh, I really can't bear it [illegible] like this!

Su Fang: (despondently) Isn't this enough? What would satisfy you then?

Wenqing: (suddenly) Su Fang, come south with me! (then instantly

becomes hesitant) [redacted] Come with me!

Su Fang: (shakes her head sorrowfully) Why must you bring that up again?

Wenqing: (regretfully, saddened, says slowly with his head lowered) If not, then, you must agree to what was said this morning.

Su Fang: But, but why?

Wenqing: (looks at Su Fang as he painfully continues) After I leave here I know I won't come back for the rest of my life. Su Fang, I want you to promise me something. No matter what, you can't go on living here. (sincerely) Just think, besides the rats that've been chewing up our paintings, what's left in this house? (Su Fang stares at him sadly.) What's on your mind? What are you waiting for? Don't just sit there, talk to me. (suddenly gathers enough courage to say boldly) Su Fang, you, you should get, get married, and get away from this prison as soon as you can. I think Mr. Yuan is a reliable person, you . . .

(Su Fang gets up slowly.)

Wenqing: (also rises, begging her) What do you plan to do, tell me.

(Su Fang walks towards the study.)

Wenqing: (painfully and heavily) You can't walk away without saying anything, you can at least say yes or no.

Su Fang: (turns around) Wenqing! (hands a letter to him and then walks away slowly)

(Perturbed, Wenqing takes the letter in his hand.

Naima enters hurriedly through the study door.)

Naima: (urgently) The Old Master's coming, he's right behind me. (pushing Wenqing) Go inside, go inside, or else there'll be

TAKE ARM - GO LEFT SIDE OF WENQING FACE DOOR - TURN WHEN HAO COMES IN

trouble. Go inside . . .

Wenqing: Naima, I . . .

(Still muttering something, Chen Naima pushes Wenqing into his bedroom. Su Fang stands dully. Resting on a cane, Zeng Hao enters through the study door with an oil lamp in his hand. He is wearing a long quilted jacket and a pair of slippers, and has a velvet scarf around his neck.)

Hao: (sees Su Fang, anxiously) I've been waiting for you for a long time. (to Naima) Who just went inside?

Naima: It was Da Nai Nai.

Hao: (sees the red clay stove) Why, who's been making tea here?

GESTURE TOWARDS OPPOSITE BEDROOM

Naima: It was Gu Lao Yeh. He was here drinking tea with Mr. Yuan a while ago!

Hao: (smiles condescendingly) Tsk! What do they know about tea drinking! (suddenly sees the huge shadow on the door) And what's that?

Naima: It's the "Peking Man" that Mr Yuan's been drawing. ~~They call that out from Mr. Yuan's picture of the "Peking Man."~~

Hao: (scornfully) "Peking Man"? What nonsense! ~~Is this some kind of joke~~?

Naima: Old Master, I think you should go to bed.

Hao: No, I want to stay up for a while. You go to bed now.

Su Fang: Naima, I've made your bed for you.

Naima: Oh, thank you. (touched by Su Fang's kindness) Oh, Ms. Su, you . . . (very pleased) Yes, I'll go see. (exits through the study door)

(Zeng Hao begins his nightly ritual inspection of the house.)

Su Fang: (follows Zeng Hao around) It's late, Uncle, you should go to sleep. Everything's all right.

Hao: (says as he is checking out a corner of the parlor) This house was passed down to us as the fruit of our ancestor's hard

work
~~duties~~, so we must be extremely careful with these candles.

(suddenly) What's that smoke and that glowing thing over there?

Su Fang: It's a cigarette butt.

Hao: (warily) That's very dangerous. It must be Jiang Tai's. He's always been like that, he never puts out his cigarettes properly.

(Su Fang picks up the cigarette butt, and is about to throw it into the stove.) There's still so much left and yet he still threw it away! How wasteful! (Turns and sniffs) Su Fang, do you smell something?

Su Fang: No.

Hao: Did anybody come to visit?

Su Fang: Nobody.

Hao: (sniffs) That's strange, it smells like somebody's smoking opium.

Su Fang: It could be that you've smoked a little too much tobacco yourself today.

Hao: Oh, I'm getting old, even my own nose is failing me. (Suddenly) Did Wenqing really leave?

Su Fang: Yes.

Hao: Don't lie to me.

Su Fang: He's really gone.

Hao: Ai, that's good. This son of mine alone has caused me so much anguish. After so many tries, he finally kicked the opium habit, and now he's gone.

Su Fang: It's late, you should go to bed.

Hao: (sits on a sofa and starts complaining) They lie to me all the time. Life's so meaningless once you get old. My children

are all ~~good-for-nothings~~ worthless, and there's not a single one of them who'll take care of me. (Tragically) There's not a one of them who cares for me, sympathizes with me, or really loves me. ~~I slaved away for so many years, and now they're all just waiting for me to die.~~

Su Fang: Uncle, please don't talk like that.

Hao: But I know, I know. (Bitterly) My daughter-in-law's the worst of them all. All she thinks about is how she can get her hands on my money. I knew she purposely lured that bunch of thugs in here this afternoon just to embarrass me. (Gritting his teeth) You know, she wouldn't even let that coffin stay in the house, her own Father's coffin. Have you ever seen such an inconsiderate, unfilial, heartless woman? And she's supposed to come from a scholar's family; she's supposed to be...

(The pattering sound of a sudden downpour can be heard from outside: the leaves are stirred and reply "sa sa"murmurs)

Hao: And she even thinks she deserves to be a good mother...

Sur Fang: (listens attentively by the small window of the study) Look Uncle, it's raining outside. Go to bed now. You've done enough talking tonight.

Hao: (shakes his head) No, I don't sleep. I'm old, and my children are good-for-nothings. It's so awful to be all by myself in the middle of the night with no one to keep me company. (Rubs his thighs painfully) Oh!

Su Fang: What's the matter?

Hao: (moans) Oh, it hurts, my legs really hurt!

(Gong of the night-watchman outside)

Su Fang: (Brings over a low stool and rests Zeng Hao's legs on it. After covering his legs with a woolen blanket, she pulls another low stool over and sits next to him, pummeling his legs gently) Feel better?

Hao: (moans) Yes, yes. My feet are cold as ice. Su Fang, have you filled my hot water ~~bag~~ bottle yet?

Su Fang: Yes.

Hao: (recollecting) Your Aunt was so good to me when she was alive. When it got a little chilly at night, she would immediately light the charcoal stove and warm some rice wine for me. And then she would always warm my bed long before... (As if suddenly remembers something) My hot water bottle, where did you put it?

Su Fang: (still pummeling his legs) I already put it under your blanket. (Yawns)

Hao: (very pleased) Oh, there isn't much ~~desire left in the old people~~ that we old people wish for. First comes food, clothing and warmth, then comes obedient and filial children. As you can see, (starts complaining unthinkingly) none of them are obedient. They're all filled with strange notions. Not one of them will listen to me and look out for their old man! (Sees that Su Fang has lowered her head) Su Fang, do you want to go to sleep?

Su Fang: ~~(startled as she is awaken from her doze)~~ Oh, no.

Hao: (sympathetically) You must be exhausted. You hardly got a wink of sleep last night and you've been waiting on me all day today, no wonder you're so ~~exhausted~~ tired. Go to bed now. (With disappointment in his voice) I know you're not listening to me anymore.

Su Fang: (rubs her eyes, and yawns slightly) No, uncle, I'm not ready to go to sleep yet. I'm listening.

Hao: (cannot resist complaining again) Who can blame you? They're all asleep already. I've been so unfortunate in my old age, not even my own flesh and blood spend any time with me, they think that I'm a burden...

Su Fang: (lowers her head) No, Uncle, I don't feel that way, I've never...

Hao: (grumbles incessantly) Su Fang, don't try to fool me, I understand. Even if they haven't said anything to you, I know you can't bear this any longer. (Moans) Oh, I feel so dizzy.

Su Fang: No nodbody has said anything to me. I, I just felt a little tired.

Hao: (nagging) You're still so young, and yet you spend so much of your time with an old man like me. I understand your frustration. (lets out a long sigh) Ai, what good does it do you to follow me around? I don't have money anymore, there's no happiness in the present and there's no hope for the future. (lamenting with a sigh) My future lies in that coffin, that coffin. I ... (pummels his own legs) Oh!

Su Fang: (pummels harder as she tries to explain again) It's true, Uncle, I had a tired spell a few minutes ago.

Hao: (looks at Su Fang with tears in his eyes) You can't hide it from me, Su Fang, (half imputing, half complaining) I know you hate me inside, you're not a child...

Su Fang: Uncle, I want to take care of you.

Hao: (waves his hand) Su Fang, you don't have to massage me anymore.

Su Fang: But I'm not tired.

Hao: (presses on her hand) No, don't. I want to tell you something. (Nagging) I don't want you to suffer like this for the rest of your life. I'm looking out for you. If you marry a reliable person, I'll have peace of mind even if there's no one to take care of me. (Su Fang suddenly withdraws her hand unconsciously.) Then I'll know I did right by you and didn"t let your mother down, I...

Su Fang: No, Uncle. (gets up slowly).

Hao: But ...(his face darkens suddenly) at your age, you're not really young anymore...

Su Fang: (lowers her head in agony) Please Uncle, please don't say anymore. I have no intention of leaving you.

Hao: (mercilessly) Let me go on. You're not young anymore, and the best an old ~~man~~ maid can hope for is to marry a widower. That situation is fine if his first children are nice, but if by some chance they're bad, and you have no savings of your own, then life would be...

Su Fang: (Cannot bear to listen to him any longer) Uncle, I, I've never thought about...

Hao: (smiles bitterly) But, it's better for you to marry a widower than to rot here for the rest of your life. I understand that.

Su Fang: (painfully) I, I...

Hao: (carries on incessantly) I understand. As a woman gets older it's hard for her to find the perfect match. Once she gets past thirty, (gets crueller as he talks on, stressing his every phrase) Her parents are no longer alive, she has no husband, she's all alone, with no one to be close to, and

then she finally gets old, and no one's there to take care of her, no children, no children or relatives. She gets older and older, as old as me.....

Su Fang: (murmurs continuously with grief and fear in her eyes) No, no, (Suddenly bursts into tears and cries) Uncle, why are you talking like this too! I have no intention of leaving you!

Hao: (painfully) Oh, I'm only looking out for you, looking out for you!

Su Fang: (Still sobbing) Uncle, please don't worry about me. I've told you that I'm not going to get married.

Hao: (lets out a long sigh) Don't cry Su Fang, your Uncle won't be around for very much longer.

(A solitary blind fortune teller passes through the long, spooky lane outside of the house, tapping his copper-cymbals).

Hao: What's that?

Su Fang: It's the blind fortune-teller on his way home. (Dries her ~~his~~ tears in silence)

Hao: Don't cry. I won't live that much longer. And even if I'm a bother to you, it won't be too many years more. I know Siyi and Jiang Tai can't wait for me to die, so that they can divide up my money. But Su Fang, you're my only devoted child!

Su Fang: But you, you won't. (Starts to weep silently) Why do you always have to think that way? I haven't offended you in any way today, have I?

Hao: (Stroking Su Fang's hand) No, you've been nice, you're a good girl. But they all think your Uncle's a rich man, (Su Fang gently withdraws her hand) all they see is money pasted all

over my face. To them, my heart isn't filled with love and kindness for them, but only full of gold and silver, (Coughs) They're all waiting for me to die, ai, life when you are old is so meaningless. (Rubs his forehead) Oh, my head hurts so much. (Wants to get up).

Su Fang: (helps him up) Then go to bed.

Hao: (sits up, and starts searching his pocket). But there is no money left. It was all spent on your Aunt's funeral, for the maintenance of her grave, fixing up this house, and lacquering my coffin every year. (Pulls out a red bank book from his pocket) This is the bank book that Siyi is so curious about, (hands it over to Su Fang) See how much is left? Su Fang, what a pity, there's hardly anything left for you after I'm gone (gets up)...

Su Fang: (painfully) Uncle, I've never even thought about your money!

(Ruizhen ~~Rui Zhen~~ enters through the study door).

Rui: Grandfather, your medicine is ready, I put it in your room.

Hao: Oh!

(Gong of the nightwatchman. Dogs barking in the dark alley).

Hao: Let's go.

(Zeng Hao, with the help of Ruizhen ~~RuiZhen~~ and Su FAng, about to make his exit through the study door, when Zeng Ting enters through the study door with a book (bound in traditional Chinese style--the pages of the book sewn together with thread)).

Ting: Grandfather, I've finished copying, do you still want to continue with your lecture?

Hao: (shakes his head) It's late, (turns to Rui Zhen) Rui Zhen isn't coming with us, so why don't the two of you go and get

some sleep.

(Su Fang helps Zeng Hao out through the study door. Rui Zhen stares at the stove while Zeng Ting walks up to the huge shadow, looks at it momentarily, and starts pacing back and forth in the parlor).

Ting: (trying to find something to say) Is Mother still up?

Rui: I think she's asleep.

Ting: (hesitantly) How come you're not in bed yet?

Rui: I just finished preparing Grandfather's medicine. (Suddenly feels nauseous, sits down).

Ting: (a bit anxiously) Why are you sitting here then?

Rui: (rubs her own chest) Oh, [illegible] nothing. (Disappointedly) Do you want me to leave?

Ting: (tries to tolerate the situation) No, no.

(The sound of falling rain, and the deep desolate voice of the hawker calling: "Noodle cakes!"

Ting: (looking out the window) It's raining really hard!

Rui: Oh, yes it is. (Distant lonely sound of "Noodle cakes, Noodle cakes")

Ting: (lonesomely) The old man who sells noodle cakes is back again.

Rui: (looks up) Are you hungry?

Ting: No.

Rui: (gets up) You, you don't want to go to sleep yet?

Ting: No, I don't. If you are tired, why don't you go ahead?

Rui: (lowers her head) Alright. (Slowly walks towards the study door).

Ting: Why you...why are you crying?

Rui: I'm not crying.

Ting: (Suddenly in a sympathetic tone, but hesitantly halting at intervals) If you need any money... Mother just gave me twenty dollars today... it's on the pillow in the room...go ahead and take it if you want.

Rui: (sighs hopelessly) Hmmm.

Ting: (with sympathy on his face, but somewhat reluctant) If, if you don't want to go back to the room alone, you can stay here for awhile.

Rui: No, I'll go back now.

(Zeng Ting almost sneezes but manages to hold it back).

Rui: (turns) Are you cold?

Ting: No, I'm alright.

(Rui Zhen starts for the study door again).

Ting: (suddenly remembers something) Oh, Mother just said...

Rui: What did ~~Mother~~ she say?

Ting: Mother said she wanted you to massage her legs.

Rui: Oh. (turns and walks towards Wenqing's bedroom).

Ting: (Suddenly stops her) No, don't go now!

Rui: (listlessly) What's wrong?

Ting: (trying to win her sympathy) Do, ~~you~~, do you hate this family?

Rui: Who me?

Ting: (pursuing) Yes, do you?

(Rui Zhen lowers her head, ~~and~~ depressed).

Ting: (in a low voice disappointedly) Go ahead.

Rui: (Halfway to Wenqing's bedroom, suddenly turns her head; says half-hopefully half-worriedly) I want to tell you something.

Ting: What's that?

Rui: (blushes a little in embarrassment) I, I haven't been feeling

too well recently.

Ting: (anxiously) Why didn't you tell me earlier?

Rui: I, was a little scared...

Ting: (directly) Scared of what? Why aren't you feeling well?

Rui: (speaks haltingly) I'm nauseous all the time, I think...

Ting: (muddle-headedly) Oh, then throw up, (calls out) Mother!

Rui: (stops him as fast as she can) What are you doing?

Ting: Mother has some special pills in her room, they'll make you feel better.

Rui: (grumbles) You!

Ting: (perturbed) Why, tell me, what else is wrong?

Rui: (disappointedly) Nothing. I, I.....(walks towards the bedroom).

Ting: Why are you crying again?

Rui: (halts) I, I'm not crying. (suddenly turns and looks at Zeng Ting and says sorrowfully) Ting don't you realize that you're a grown man now? Ting, we are...

Ting: (explains hastily) We're friends. You told me that we should be friends. We didn't choose to marry each other. Your girlfriend's right, I'm not your slave, and you're not mine. We're no more than friends to each other. We each should have our own freedom to go our own ways. You, don't you think that's right?

Rui: (suddenly says firmly) Yes, I do!

(The voice of Siyi calling from the right hand bedroom) Rui Zhen, Rui Zhen!

Ting: Mother wants you.

Rui: (startled momentarily, then turns to Zeng Ting) In that case, I'll go.

Ting: Hmm.

(Rui Zhen exits into the bedroom on the right hand side).

Ting: (seeing that Rui Zhen has left, gathers up his courage, and calls through the crack of the folding door in a low voice) Yuan Yuan! Yuan Yuan!

(Rui Zhen re-enters from Siyi's bedroom).

Ting: (a bit embarrassed) How come you...

Rui: Mother wants me to go get Auntie Su. (Exits through the study door).

Ting: (hesitates a little, sighs, and then) Yuan Yuan! Yuan Yuan!

(A section of the folding door is opened, and light leaks through from the living room Yuan Yuan enters.)

Yuan: Oh, it's you again?

Ting: My dear Little Sister, did you read my letter?

Yuan: (muddleheadedly) Yes, I did.

Ting: (abruptly) Did you read the poem that I wrote for you, the one in the letter?

Yuan: (nods, and naively) Yes I did!

Ting: (happily) You did?

Yuan: (nods) Yes, and my Father said your handwriting is much better than mine.

Ting: (utterly surprised) Your Father saw it?

Yuan: (suddenly wises up) Don't be embarrassed, it doesn't matter. Father said that you only spelled a few words wrong, but you're still much better than I am.

Ting: Then, what about the poem...

Yuan: (nods) I let Father read it.

Ting: (more frightened) You let him read it too?

Yuan: But I couldn't understand it.

Ting: Then your Father...

Yuan: (shakes her head) He said your style is really old fashioned.
(apologetically) He couldn't understand it either!

Ting: What else did he say?

(Rui Zhen and Su Fang enter through the study door. As they are walking out of the study, Rui Zhen suddenly sees Zeng Ting and Yuan Yuan from out of the corner of her eyes, halts abruptly and stands in the study. Su Fang with a knitted baby dress in her hand, also stands there silently.)

Yuan: He said...(rashly) he told me not to play with you anymore. But don't pay any attention to him, we'll go out and fly our kites tomorrow.

Ting: (in a low voice) Why can't we play together?

Yuan: (casually) Auntie Su just had a talk with Father.

Ting: (frightened) What about?

Yuan: She said that your wife's going to have a baby.

Ting: (hearing this horrifying news) What?

Yuan: That you're about to become a father! (Curiously) Is it really true?

Ting: (in the clouds, confused) Who me?

Yuan: As soon as Auntie Su left, my Father told me I shouldn't ~~fool~~ play ~~around~~ with you anymore.

Ting: (still puzzled) Me, a father?

Yuan: (suddenly) I'm fifteen, how old are you?

Ting: (idiotically) Seventeen.

Yuan: Oh, only seventeen and you're going to be a father. (Clapping her hands) Oh, Daddy, a seventeen year old Daddy!

(Zeng Ting suddenly cries aloud).

Yuan: Don't cry, if you don't stop crying I'll get angry.

(Zeng Ting still cries)

Yuan: Don't cry, Zeng Ting. Look, I'll even give you my pigeon.

(raises "Solitude" in front of him)

Ting: (shakes his head) No, no, I just want to cry!

Voice of Yuan Rengan: Yuan Yuan!

Yuan: (in a low voice) My Father is calling me now, I'll see you tomorrow. We'll go kite-flying or fishing, OK?

Voice of Yuan Rengan: Yuan! Yuan!

Yuan: I'm coming Father.

(Yuan Yuan opens the folding door, runs in, and closes the door hastily. Strong wind, rain, and the desolate voice of the noodle cake hawker can be heard from the dark alley outside of the house).

(Zeng Ting throws himself onto a sofa and starts sobbing again).

(Rui Zhen slowly enters from the study, while Su Fang still stands quietly inside.)

Rui: (walks up to Zeng Ting, bends over, and taps him on the shoulder, and says in a pitying tone) Don;t cry now, Ms. Yuan's gone now.

Ting: (raises his head) Auntie, Auntie Su wasn't lying was she?

(Rui Zhen looks at him and sighs).

Ting: (weeps uncontrollably and in a bitter tone) Oh, who was it that got us into this mess? (gets up) Oh I could (stamps his feet) kill myself! (Runs toward the study).

Su Fang: Ting!

(Zeng Ting does not even turn to look, and dashes out the study door).

(Rui Zhen falls on the stool clumsily).

Su Fang: (walks over) Rui Zhen!

Rui: Auntie Su!

Su Fang: (strokes Rui Zhen's hair) Don't, don't you...

Rui: (suddenly wraps herself around Su Fang) I really want to die too!

Su Fang: (gently) Rui Zhen, my little sister.

Rui: (uncontrollably shedding tears and voicing her grievances) Auntie Su, why did you have to tell Uncle Yuan about it? Why did you tell Miss Yuan not to have anything to do with him?

Su Fang: (sorrowfully) Rui Zhen, I love you too much, I can't bear to see you suffering like this any longer. (muddled and confused) I don't know why I went and told him about it. Like a fool, I just went to talk to Mr. Yuan. I can't even remember what I told him, and then I ran back out. Rui Zhen, if from now on Ting could.....

Rui: (painfully) Don't be silly, Auntie Su, you know he doesn't like me. Can't you tell? He doesn't like me one bit!

Su Fang: (mournfully) No, he's still a child and someday he'll treat you better. Ai, Rui Zhen, wait, wait patiently, someday this will all be over.

Rui: (gets up shaking her head, and says painfully and slowly) No, Auntie Su, I can't wait any longer. I have to leave this place, I've already waited two years.

Voice of Zeng Hao from outside: Su Fang! Su Fang!

Su Fang: Where are you going?

Rui: (staring into space) This girlfriend of mine told me that there's a place, where...

Su Fang: (sadly and slowly) But what about your baby? (Hands Rui

Zhen the little baby dress)

Rui: (takes the dress and looks at it) The Baby. (sighs deeply, and drops the dress without thinking).

(Zeng Hao's upper torso can be seen through the study door).

Hao: (raises the candle) Su Fang, the water bag's leaking. My whole bed is wet.

(Su Fang and Zeng Hao exit through the study door).

(Siyi enters with an account book from her bedroom, while Rui Zhen quickly picks up and hides the little dress).

Siyi: (catches a glimpse of Su Fang's back) Miss Su! Miss Su! (To Rui Zhen) Isn't that your dear Auntie Su?

Rui: Uh.

Siyi: Why was she in such a hurry to leave when she saw me come in?

Rui: Grandfather wants her for something?

Siyi: (harshly) Go and bring her here, and tell her that your Father's looking for her.

(Rui Zhen, head lowered, exits through the study door. The distant gong of the nightwatchman can be heard. Wenqing enters from the bedroom. Siyi walks up to the table and starts counting money).

Wenqing: (anxiously) What do you want?

Siyi: (rolls her yes) I don't want anything.

Wenqing: What do you want, Tell me, tell me!

Siyi: (faking obedience and tolerance) Nothing bothers me anymore. Life is so meaningless. Sooner or later the coffin will be nailed, I'll stretch out my legs and everything will become unreal. (Walks toward her bedroom).

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Wenqing: What are you doing?

Sivi: (Turns her head) What am I doing? I'm going to hand this account book over to somebody. (walks into the bedroom).

Wenqing: (facing the closed door of the bedroom) Why do you have to do this? Why do you have to do this? What do you really want? Tell me!

(Siyi re-enters from the bedroom, still carrying the account book).

Siyi: (revealing the whites of her eyes) I don't want anything. All I want is that in the future you just don't forget how well this honest person's been treating you. Bright and early tomorrow morning I'm moving into a convent. I've already sent them a letter.

Wenqing: Oh, my god, please be honest with me. What's really on your mind? I'm no stranger to you. We've been together now for twenty years. Why are you doing this?

Siyi: (takes out the letter that Su Fang has given Wenqing earlier, and says with sarcasm and disdain) Hunmph, she must think that I'm some sort of a ~~pussy cat~~ PUSH OVER. She even had the nerve to hand poems and letters to you right in front of my very own eyes. (Becomes malicious all of a sudden) One more thing, I want you to give this letter back to her right here in front of me.

Wenqing: (evasive) I, I'm going to leave tomorrow.

Siyi: (severely) Then you give it back to her right now. I've already sent for her.

Wenqing: (scared) What, what for?

Siyi: (sarcastically) Oh, to ~~give you back~~ claim Receive the love letters you wrote to her!

Wenqing: (lets out a painful cry) Oh! (About to turn and run back to

his bedroom).

Siyi: (harshly) Where do you think you're going?

(Wenqing stops).

Siyi: (through her teeth) A mouse that can't even steal cheese shouldn't make hungry faces in front of a cat. I'm going to show her.....

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(Suddenly the lights go out in the living room, and the huge shadow also vanishes. Yuan Yuan has already changed into her pajamas when she opens and enters through a section of the folding door. She is cradling "Solitude" (the pigeon), holding a candle in one hand and a piece of paper in the other).

Yuan: (vivaciously) Yo, (hands the letter to Wenqing) Uncle Zeng, a letter from my Father! (Turns to face Siyi, pointing) The two of you are still up, we're going to bed now. (Turns and exits, skipping into the living room, as the door quickly shuts behind her).

Wenqing: (lets out a long sigh after reading Mr. Yuan's letter) Ai.

Siyi: What is it?

Wenqing: (hands her the letter) Mr. Yuan ~~said~~ SAYS his fiancee is going to be here any day now.

Siyi: He has a fiancee?

Wenqing: Yes, and he wants you to find them a nice place to live.

Siyi: (finishes reading the letter, sarcastically) Hunmph, in that case, our good Ms. Su is going to.....

(Su Fang enters through the study door, holding a candle).

Su Fang: (in a low voice) Did you want to see me, Cousin Wenqing?

Wenqing: Uh? (Wants to leave).

Siyi: (harshly) Stay there! Do you really want me to ~~blow up~~ lose my temper?

Wenqing: (imploringly) Su Fang, go away now, don't listen to her.

(Su Fang turns and looks at Siyi, then about to turn around).

Siyi: (to Su Fang) Don't move! (To Wenqing, ominously) Take this and give it back to her.

(Wenqing takes the letter from her in defeat).

(Su Fang looks at Wenqing uncomfortably, stands stiffly).

Siyi: (grins malignantly) I suppose this is the letter you wrote Wenqing? Wenqing says he cannot accept the honor, so would you please take it back.

450 line 7

(Su Fang takes the letter from Wenqing in her shaking hands.)

(Wenqing lowers his head).

(Silence).

(Su Fang exits quietly through the study door).

(Wenqing turns and follows Su Fang's exit with his eyes, then collapses on the sofa and starts weeping).

Siyi: (maliciously in a low voice) What are you crying about, did your Father just die or something?

Wenqing: (shakes his head) Don't torture me like this, I can't take it much longer.

Siyi: (sighs deeply) The Du family's book-keeper came over to pick up their money again tonight. The Old Man's still holding on to that bank-book of his. He's not parting with a penny! Wenqing, let's see which one of us is going to croak first, these people are driving me crazy. (Exits hurriedly through the study door).

(Wenqing, still beside himself, gets up, and walks slowly toward his own bedroom. A sudden loud noise can be heard behind the door of the bedroom on the other side of the parlour. The noise sounds like a

stick has been thrown against the door. Wencai rushes in from her bedroom, crying as she runs).

Wencai: (fearfully in a low voice) Brother!

Wenqing: What happened?

Wencai: He's on a rampage again!

Wenqing: (tiredly) Then, I, what can I do?

Wencai: (anxiously) Brother, what do you think we should do now?

(Suddenly the sound of things being smashed is heard from the same bedroom, followed by the snarling voice of a person cursing).

Wencai: (holds onto Wenqing's arm) Did you hear that? He's destroying things again.

Wenqing: (holds his head in both hands) Ai, let him do it!

Wencai: (painfully) He, he's crazy. He was going to beat me, he wanted to divorce me....

Wenqing: (smiles tragically) Divorce you?

Voice of Jiang Tai from the bedroom: (pounding the table) Wencai! Wencai!

Wencai: Brother.

Voice of Jiang Tai from the bedroom: (still pounding on the table and yelling) Wencai! Wencai! Wencai!

Wencai: (holds onto Wenqing) Brother, listen!

Wenqing: Let go of me!

Wencai: (anxiously) He's going to do something dangerous! Brother, he's going to do something dangerous!

Wenqing: Leave me alone, ~~I've got my own problems.~~ I CAN'T Help YOU (Shakes off Wencai's hands, and staggers into his own bedroom).

(Wencai takes a couple of steps toward her own bedroom when the door is suddenly thrown open. A drunken Jiang Tai stumbles in, with a

slipper on one foot, and the other bare).

Jiang: (The sad and pitiful expression that he wore on his face earlier has all but vanished. He leans against the door-frame with his blood-shot eyes wide open) Where the hell have you been? Do you know who I am? My name is Jiang Tai, I called you, I called you, why didn't you come?

Wencai: (painfully) I, I, you.....

Jiang: I don't live here in your house without paying my dues! I've been taking crap from other people my whole life, and now I have to take this crap from all of you? I get whatever I want around here. If I want to drink, somebody buys it for me. If I want something to eat, somebody makes it for me. If anyone tries to pull one over on me, I'll take care of them----Let's go---(grasps Wencai's hand) get him!

Wencai: (blocks his way) Who are you looking for?

Jiang: Zeng Hao, your Father, he let me down. I'm going to set things straight with him!

Wencai: Tomorrow, we'll do that tomorrow. Father's sleeping now.

Jiang: Then tell him to get the hell up right now. (Starts walking).

Wencai: (tries to restrain him) No you don't!

Jiang: You keep out of this!

Wencai: (an idea dawns on her suddenly, turns her head) Oh, look, Father's here now!

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Jiang: Where?

Wencai: Here! (Eases Jiang Tai toward their bedroom door and suddenly pushes him inside, locking the door immediately).

Voice of Jiang Tai from the bedroom: (pounding on the door) Open the door! Open the door!

Wencai: Brother! (Quickly runs over to Wenqing's bedroom) Brother!

Voice of Jiang Tai from the bedroom: (pounding on the door) Open the door! Open the door!

(Wencai goes to Wenqing's door and lifts the door curtain).

Wencai: (as if she has just seen a horrifying thing) Oh, god, you're still smoking that stuff!

Voice of Wenqing from his bedroom: (deep sigh) Leave me alone! You've got your problems, and I've got mine.

Voice of Jiang Tai in his bedroom: (Screaming and yelling) Wencai! (Pounding on the door furiously) Open the door or else I'll burn the house down! I'll burn the house down, I'm starting the fire, I.....

(A "thump", as if Jiang Tai has fallen flat on the floor).

Wencai: (Simultaneously runs towards her own bedroom, screaming at the same time) Oh my god, Jiang Tai, wake up! Haven't you started enough trouble?! And you want to scare me to death now! (Opens the door).

(Wencai instantly rushes into her bedroom, and slams the door behind her. The sound of Jiang Tai moaning and groaning can be heard from inside).

(Zeng Hao enters immediately through the study door, helped by Su Fang. With a rather thin lined robe over his shoulders, he is shivering and trembling, and carrying a lantern).

Hao: (nervously) What happened? What happened? (To Su Fang in a low voice) Let, let me go and see who, who's making all this noise! Hurry now and bring me my quilted robe.

(Su Fang exits through the study door. Jiang Tai is still moaning in

his bedroom. Zeng Hao, catching a glimpse of the light in Wenqing's bedroom, walks quietly up to his, lifts the door curtain and looks inside).

Voice of Wenqing from the bedroom: (hoarsely) Who's there?

Hao: Who's there? (As if struck by some unimaginable force) What?

You, you haven't left yet?

(Wenqing is scared dumb by his Father's discovery, but somehow manages to enter sleepily with the opium pipe in his hand).

p. 453 line 15

Hao: Why, why you're smoking again!.....

Wenqing: (head lowered) Father, I....

(Zeng Hao is so shocked that he cannot speak. When he staggers toward Wenqing, Wenqing timidly retreats to the dining table. Suddenly Zeng Hao falls on his knees before Wenqing).

Hao: (heartbrokenly) I beg of you as if you were my father and I were your son! I beg of you to stop smoking that stuff. I will kowtow to you if you would only... (Starts knocking his head on the floor).

Wenqing: (suddenly realises the intense and deepening effect of his sin, throws down the opium-pipe) Oh, my god! (Throws open the living room folding door and runs out).

(Simultaneously, Zeng Hao chokes on his phlegm, and passes out next to the sofa just as Su Fang enters through the study door with the quilted robe. Seeing what has happened to Zeng Hao, she rushes to his side).

Su Fang: (frightened) Uncle! Uncle! (Helps him to the sofa) Uncle, are you alright? Uncle, wake up! Uncle!

Hao: (opens his eyes a crack, weakly) Is, is he gone?

Su Fang: (shaking) Yes.

Hao: (grinds his teeth) A son like that ought (stamps his foot) to be shot! (Stamps his foot again) Dead! (Trying to get up, feeling that his tongue is not responding to his command) My tongue....is all....numb...you....

Su Fang: (in a shaky voice) Uncle, sit down. I'll bring your Ginseng soup, Uncle!

(Zeng Hao, with his mouth and eyes wide open, is unable to speak. Su Fang rushes out through the study door).

Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: (crying) Jiang Tai! Jiang Tai!

Voice of Jiang Tai from the same bedroom: (roaring) Get ~~out of here,~~ away from me you!

Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: Jiang Tai!

(Jiang Tai quickly opens the door, and locks it behind him immediately).

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Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: Open the door for me! Open it!

Jiang: In the flickering light of the candle, we see Zeng Hao sitting very still on the sofa. Jiang Tai says angrily) Oh, so you're meditating here!

(Zeng Hao still has his mouth and eyes wide open).

Jiang: You don't have to stare at me like that, I'm definitely leaving tomorrow! I'm definitely leaving! Even if I don't get rich I can still feed my own wife. (Angrily and bitterly) But before I go, you and I have got to set things straight.

Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: (yelling anxiously) Open the door! Open the door! Jiang Tai, who're you talking to?! (Pounds

on the door) Open up, Jiang Tai, Open the door! (Yelling whenever Jiang Tai pauses).

Jiang: You have to pay back what you owe me. I've never said this to you before, but you can't play dumb with me anymore. Because of you I lost my job with the government; because of you, I got involved in an embezzlement. Now the law's out to get me. My reputation's ruined. I'll never be anybody for the rest of my life. That's what you owe me, and that's what you're going to pay me back for. You can't just brush me aside as easily as that! You're going to give me one more chance! Don't just sit there and say nothing. Do you know who I am? I'm your son-in-law, and you're going to pay it all back to me. Zeng Hao, Zeng Hao, do you hear me?

Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: (frightened as she heard Jiang Tai) Open the door! Open the door! (Yells continuously) Father! Father! Don't pay any attention to him! He's just talking nonsense, he's crazy. Father, Father, Oh Father! Open the door, Jiang Tai! (Inserted between Jiang Tai's speeches) Open the door! Father! Father!

Jiang: Zeng Hao, are you going to pay up or not? Are you going to pay me back? I know all about your savings, all that gold, silver, all your stocks and real estate.

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(suddenly sincere)

Oh, just loan me three thousand dollars, only three thousand, I could go into business, and after I make a little profit, I'll pay you back, with interest too. Did you hear me? I'll

pay you double! Old Master Zeng, it's Jiang Tai talking to you. What are you sitting on that money for? You're an old man and you're not getting any younger. Your coffin's all ready for you. It's even been lacquered several hundred times, you.....

Voice of Wencai from the bedroom: (pounding on the door as Jiang Tai spoke) Open the door! Open the door!

(Siyi enters angrily through the study door holding Zeng Hao's red bankbook. She glances at Zeng Hao momentarily, walks over to Wencai's bedroom and opens the door).

Jiang: (unaware that someone has walked in, still looks at Zeng Hao and says loathingly) What are you laughing at? What are you laughing at me for? (suddenly very fiercely) Why aren't you dead yet? Oh, why aren't you dead? (Madly rushes up to Zeng Hao, and shakes the shoulders of the already unconscious old man).

(Wencai rushes in from her bedroom, with tears running down her face).

Wencai: (tries to pull Jiang Tai away, screams in an exhausted and hoarse voice) You monster! You devil!

Jiang: (Being pulled by Wencai towards his own bedroom, but still unrelentingly shouting in great agitation) Let me go, let me go, I'm going to kill someone I'm going to kill him, and then I'm going to kill myself.

(Wencai finally succeeds in dragging Jiang Tai back into the bedroom, and slams the door shut. Su Fang hurries in through the study door with the Ginseng soup. Siyi still stands by gloomily).

Su Fang: (feeds the Ginseng soup to Zeng Hao) Uncle! Uncle! Drink

a little of this Uncle!

(Zeng Ting runs in through the study door.)

Ting: What happened?

Su Fang: (unable to feed Zeng Hao the Ginseng soup as he is not responding)

Grandpa's in bad shape, hurry up and call Dr. Lo.

Ting: How is he?

Su Fang: He had a stroke. Uncle! Uncle!

(Zeng Ting runs out through the living room door as Chen Naima hurries in through the study door, still putting her clothes on.)

Nai Ma: (trembling) How's the Old Master? How is he?

Su Fang: (anxiously) Come and hold up his head. I'm going to force it down.

(The phlegm begins welling up in the old man's throat.)

Nai Ma: (still holding his head) No, no, oh my god! There's too much phlegm in his throat....his jawbone is locked tight. We'll never get it down.

Su Fang: Uncle! Uncle!

(Wenqing enters through the living room door).

Wenqing: (walks up to the old man and cries aloud shamefully) Oh Father! Oh Father! It's all my fault! It's all my fault!

(Wencai runs in from her own bedroom)

Wencai: (embracing the old man's leg) Father, father, oh my Father!

Su Fang: Uncle! Uncle!

Nai Ma: Old Master! Old Master!

Siyi: (abruptly) Stop this screaming and yelling! Send him to the hospital now, we can't wait for the doctor.

Su Fang: (raises her head) But Uncle doesn't want to go to the hospital.

Siyi: (to Chen Nai Ma) Get someone over here!

(Chen Nai Ma exits through the living room door).

Wencai: (hurriedly) I'll go next door and borrow the Du's car. (Runs out through the living room door).

Su Fang: Uncle, Uncle!

Wenqing: (sobbing) What are we going to do? What are we going to do?

Siyi: ~~Hmph,~~ Hmnph, what are we going to do? (angrily) (Throws Zeng Hao's red bankbook in front of Wenqing) See for yourself.

(Nai Ma leads Zhang Shun through the living room door. Zeng Ting enters following them.)

Siyi: Where's Zhang Shun?

Nai Ma: He's right here. STOP TO SIYI - THEN MOVE RIGHT

Siyi: (to Zhang Shun) Carry him to the car.

(Zhang Shun is about to lift the Old Master.)

Su Fang: (suddenly holds on to Zeng Hao) We'll never get him to the hospital in time. I don't think Uncle's going to make it.

(The old man cannot speak but looks on painfully).

(Zhang Shun looks at Su Fang and stops).

Siyi: (pulls Su Fang away, to Zhang Shun) Go on.

(Zhang Shun lifts Zeng Hao and starts moving towards the living room).

Ting: (starts crying) Grandfather! Grandfather!

Siyi: Stop crying!

Wenqing: (follows Zeng Hao) Father, it's all my fault!

(As soon as Zhang Shun reaches the threshold, the pale hand of the old man suddenly grasps the folding doors, unwilling to let go).

Ting: (turns) Grandfather won't let go of the door.

Siyi: Use your strength!

Su Fang: (grievingly) Oh, he doesn't want to leave home. (Everyone hesitates momentarily)

Siyi: Hurry up, hurry! His life is in danger. Who's giving the orders around here, me or her? Move him out!

(Zhang Shun forces his way forward)

Su Fang: His hand, his hand!

Siyi: (to Ting) Pry his hand away.

Ting: I'm scared.

Siyi: Let me do it, stupid.

Wenqing: Father! Father!

Ting:(points, horrified) Look at Grandfather's hand! Look at Grandfather's hand!

(Siyi forcibly pries Zeng Hao's hand loose)

Wenqing: (furious) You witch! You've cut his hand!

Siyi: Move him! (maliciously, in a low voice) We're going to sell this house. Do you want someone to die here?

(All of them, except Wenqing, follow Zhang Shun and exit through the living room door.)

(Sounds of the night watchman's wooden rattle).
(Sound of the hoarse voice of the "noodle cake" hawker).
( A painful drunken moan can be heard coming from the bedroom).

(Wenqing enters his bedroom and immediately walks out again, carrying an old jacket and a battered hat, with a scroll under his arm. He lets out a long sigh, exits slowly through the living room door and closes it behind him.)

(The autumn rain is swept into the parlour by a draft. The living room door quietly opens by itself as the glow of candle'light cast flickering shadows on the walls. Stirred by the draft, the hanging scroll bangs against the wall. Outside the lonely gong of the night watchman can be heard in the distance.

----- Curtain ----

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## ACT THREE

## SCENE ONE

Towards the end of the 9th lunar month, people in Peking are already wearing their winter clothes. The late autumn sky is exceptionally peaceful and clear. In the older gardens,as dusk approaches, one can see flocks of crows circling above the old elm trees like dots of ink. They make unpleasant noises cawing at each other. Later, when darkness begins to descend, the crows return to their nests. In the sea of evening mist, one hears the bugle of a diligent soldier high up on the city wall. Distant and solitary, it touches the deepest recesses of man's heart with a mixture of warmth and loneliness, like a sentimental spirit pursuing in solitude the memories of a past that has forever vanished into thin air. Grieving and mournful, filled with bitter but tender yearnings, it trembles as it makes its way through the chilly dusk air.

The days are getting shorter. It is barely six o'clock, and yet the sun behind the stone towergate is already sinking into the haze of light-purple mist. Late at night, the strong west wind sweeps through, stirring those half-withered trees in the gardens. Then early the next morning, the sun once again graces the glimmering glazed tiles on the roof-tops. The sky is clear, the air is clean, and the ground is covered by a sheet of white frost. The fallen leaves, brutalized by the strong wind of the previous night, carpet the courtyards and the sidewalks. The weather is really getting cold, especially in the early morning hours. The breath of early-risers turns into milky-white clouds in the cold air; the begetables bought from the market occasionally are covered with a layer of ice; those who stay indoors find their feet feeling cold; flies struggle as they knock against the paper windows, and finally fall weakly on the ledges.

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In the past, the wealthy families --the Zeng family among them--would by now have fires buring under their "kangs." The whole house would be warm and cozy. In front of the partitions that surround the living room and in front of the huge windows, there would be potted chrysanthemums of every conceivable color: green, white, and yellow, with both large and small petals, all of them famous breeds. Some pots are on stands and others are on the floor. And of course there is the purple thousand-headed chrysanthemum which hangs upside down, as if from a steep cliff, from a red sandalwood stand in front of a blue silk screen. Glittering and dzzling, they seem to be competing for one's attention. Occasionally the hosts would celebrate by throwing a party for the appreciation of the beauty of these flowers. In the company of rich wine and close friends, with the steaming fire-pot filled with mutton, they would indulge in drinking games and poetry composition. Their ears reddened by the wine, they reveled without a care in the world. The whole house took on an aura of exuberance and festivity.

But now, all traces of the joy and celebration of those days are gone from the Zeng house. Gloominess has replaced the grandiosity of yesteryear. At the dusk of a late autumn day--a little more than a month from the close of Act Two--the house is scarred by signs of desolation and decline. The blue silk partition is fading rapidly, and the silk has been torn from several screens. They have been replaced by ordinary Korean mounting paper, but that, too, is already yellowed ny age. A pot of white chrysanthemums stands in front of the partition, but the leaves have dried out and the flowers have withered. On a half-moon shaped redwood table which stands by the wall, three or four lifeless chrysanthemums in a big dark-blue vase rest. Their petals have fallen all over the table. In this rapdily declining family, those droopy flowers somehow symbolize the occasion. Most of the decorations have been stored away. There is a landscape painting on the wall which is apparently by an unknown artist. Its mounting has turned dull gray, and there is only one ornamental end on the mounting-rod left at the bottom.

The wallpaper is beginning to peel. The seven-stringed lute, hanging in one corner of the room, is without its case. Its orange silk tassel still hangs dumbly from it, but its color no longer retains its former brilliance. Spiders have woven webs from the lute up diagonally to the ceiling. Some of the torn window paper have been patched over, and some which have been patched have been torn again. A couple of square stools stand casually along the wall, one empty, and the other holding a sewing basket. It seems no one has bothered to clean the octagonal glass window for some time as it is covered with dust. A teapot and two teacups rest on the dining table; a high back chair is placed next to it.

The weak glow of the setting sun filters in through the windows, caressing the fallen chrysanthemum petals and the ~~tassel of the web-shrouded lute~~ with its dim glow. The light brightens momentarily, as if announcing its presence to the room, and then quickly dims again. Outside, as the crows caw, the single-wheel water cart passes sounding its same monotonous tune: "zhu-nui-nui, zhu-nui-nui." The room darknes as the sun sinks behind the mountains.

As the curtain rises, Wencai is sitting on the high back chair knitting a shawl. She is wearing a black flannel robe pleated in front and a pair of black felt shoes. She appears anxious. Every so often she stops knitting as if in anticipation of something. As if he were a million miles away, Jiang Tai is leaning on the sofa totally absorbed in reading "The Taoist Physiognomy."

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Wencai: (very concerned, in a low voice) How is it going?

(Chen Naima stops, turns her head towards the window and listens attentively. Wencai looks at her sadly, awaiting her reply)

SEATED - LOOK TOWARDS LIVING ROOM

Naima: (Shakes her head helplessly) They're still here, they refuse to leave.

(Wencai sighs with disappointment, sits down and picks up the shawl, lowers her head and starts knitting sbwly)

(JiangTai turns his head slightly and glances at the two women. His expression is one of disdain. He goes back to reading his physiognomy text.)

(Chan Naima lets out a long sigh, looks all around her, and dries the corners of her eyes with her sleeve. She walks up to the stool and sits down, and in the fading light of the sunset begins silently patching the slipper soles.

(Jang Tai suddenly rubs his uncomfortably cold feet)

Wencai: (raising her head and looking at Jiang Tai) Are your feet cold?

Jiang: (disturbed) Hmm (continues looking through his book)

(Wencai lowers her head and goes back to her knitting)

(Momentary silence)

Wencai: (Glances at Jiang Tai from out of the corner of her eye, lowers her head and knits two stitches. She is unable to bear it any longer)

Tai!

(Jiang Tai hears her, but goes back to his book)

Wencai: (kindly) What are you doing?

(Jiang Tai pays no attention to her)

(Chen Naima looks at Jiang Tai briefly, turns her head in another direction in dissatisfaction)

Wencai: (puts down her knitting) Tai, what time is it now?

Jiang: (picks up the mirror and looks into it without turning his head) I don't know.

Wencai: (looking outside) It's probably about six.

Jiang: (puts down the mirror, turns his head, points with his finger, and says coldly) There's a clock right here!

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Wencai: That clock is broken.

Jiang: (rolls his eyes) If it's broken, then take it to be fixed. (picks up the mirror again)

Wencai: (timidly) Tai, please go into the living room and see what's going on there, would you?

Jiang: ((Impatiently) I don't care, I don't give a dman, I can't do anything about it anyway. Your family affairs are too complicated, there's nothing I can do.

Wencai: (Imploring) Please go take another look, alright? Find out what the Du's are really up to.

Jiang: What they are up to? They're here to collect money from your family. If you don't have the money, they'll take your house. If you don't give them your house, they'll take the old man's coffin, that old cedar box they've been varnishing all these years.

Wencai: (weakly) But that coffin is Father's life! His whole life!

Jiang: Since you know this situation is impossible, why are you asking me to go?

Naima: (long ago having stopped her sewing to listen, interrupts) Forget it! Let ~~Naimai~~ Da Nai Nai deal with them by herself. Anyway, we're broke and we have not place to live.

Jiang: Then the coffin...

Wencai: Father would never part with it.

Jiang: (glares at Wencai) Now do you understand? (Picks up the mirror again)

(Wencai lowers her head with a sigh, takes out her handkerchief and dries her tears)

(Momentary silence. Crows calling outside.)

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(murmuring sound of the passing water care---zhu-niu-zhu-niu-niu)

Naima: (patching the slipper soles, occasionally running the needle through her grey streaked hair, then forcing the needle back into the sole. Here she stops, raises her head, and sighs.) I'm leaving, I'm leaving. I'm going to leave tomorrow. What a pity the old master has to be so miserable on his birthday. Ai! If he has to go on living like this, wouldn't it have been better if the other night he just...(sudden change) If only it could be like the master's father's birthday parties were...The house was all full of guests. There was even an opera performance. The garden and the living room were filled with chrysanthemums. There were banquet tables everywhere, and crowds of people came to pay their respects. If the whole world were filled with birthday peaches, long-life noodles, bright red hangings, nothing like the way it looks now...

Wencai: (contemplating the present difficulties, dumbly staring at Jiang Tai, as if she had heard nothing Chen Naima said. She attempts to compose herself and makes a sincere attempt to talk to Jiang Tai) Tai, what are you doing?

Jiang: (rolls his eyes) What do you think I'm doing?

Wencai: (forces a smile) What are you looking for in that mirror?

Jiang: (already annoyed, stands up) I'm looking at my nose! Do you get that? I'm looking at my nose. My nose! My nose! (picks up the mirror and the book, walks to another chair and sits down)

Wencai: Don't shout anymore, we should be grateful that father's still with us.

Jiang: (somehow feels that Wencai is intentionally picking on him, points at her with a frustrated and helpless look on his face) Look at you! Look at you! Every single time you open your mouth, you're insinuating that I'm the one responsible for your father's illness. But go ask anybody and see who doesn't mention that brother and sister-in-law of yours...

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Wencai: (trying as hard ~~as~~ she can to defend herself) Who would think of such a thing? (lowering her voice and swallowing her pride, tenderly) What I mean is, father just came back from the hospital today. Why don't you go up and see him in his room, just this once, on his birthday, alright?

Jiang: (still very angry) I don't understand you. If he doesn't want to see me, why are you trying to force me to go and see him? So, I was drunk that night, said a lot of bad things to him, but I went to see him in the hospital last month, but he wouldn't even let me in, he wouldn't let me see....

Wencai: (explaining) Ai! The old man is in a bad state now.

Jiang: Well how do you think I feel?

Wencai: (with difficulty) But father is home now, do you mean to say you never want to see him again? Just pretend that we're guests here, and the host just came home, shouldn't we go and say hello, and you...

Jiang: (Knows he's wrong. Arrogantly walks up to her and points in her face) You, you, where did you ever pick up that sharp tongue of yours? You're so subtle! I, I better stay away from you. Are you satisfied now? (in a huff he takes the mirror and exits through the study door)

Wencai: (sadly) Jiang Tai!

Naima: Ai! Let him go!

(Jiang Tai hurries back in and begins rummaging about where he was before exit)

Jiang: Where is my fortune-telling book? (rummaging) Oh, here it is. (exits)

Wencai: Jiang Tai!

Naima: (very sympathetically) Ai. Let him go. Better if they don't see each other. If he sees Gu Lao-yeh, the old master may very well be reminded about Master Wenqing, and that would make him feel even worse.

Wencai: (sighs hopelessly) Are you done with those soles yet?

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Naima: (smiles) I've got a few more stitches to go. (puts down the soles, removes her wire-rimmed glasses and rubs her eyes) The shoes are ready now, but he's not here to wear them.

Wencai: (forcing optimism) He'll come back sooner or later.

Naima: (pauses, and picks up the long front of her apron with both hands and wipes her tears. Sorrowfully) Yes, I really hope so.

Wencai: (bleakly) Naima, don't leave tomorrow, brother will be back in just a few more days.

Naima: (The troubles of the last month have drained the ruddy glow from her face. Her head trembles and her dry toothless mouth jerks in spasms. In her heart she cannot bear to leave, but she goes on talking, stubbornly) No, no, I have to go, I have to go. (stands up and puts her needle and thread into her sewing basket while rubbing her red nose) I waited and waited ...I've already waited more than a month. I've made my vows, and burned incense, but we haven't heard Move To Door a word from him. Poor Master Wenqing, when he left, all he had on was a light Door jacket...(calls outside) Xiao Zhuer? Xiao Zhuer?

Wencai: Maybe Xiao Zhuer is helping Mr. Yuan with his luggage.

Naima: (taking asmall piece of cloth out of her basket and wrapping up the SIT pair of unfinished cloth shoes) If, if he comes back SOME one day, let me know as soon as you can, and I'll rush right back from the village to see him. (weeping uncontrollably with many tears) When, when you find out where he is, would you HIM please send this pair of shoes to him (turns her head and calls again) Xiao Zhuer! (to Wen Cai) Tell him that they were made by his old Naima, and ask him to send me a note (smiles through her tears) Whenever that is, as long as I'm Move To TABLE still around, I'll go to him no matter how far away he is. (can't help but sob again)

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Wencai: (walks over to console Chen Naima) Don't, don't be so upset! He'll be alright out there. (forces a smile) He's almost 36 years old, and he's almost a grandfather, how could...

Naima: (tears glistening in her eyes) No matter how old he is, he'll always be a child to me. He never left home before, and he still can't even take care of his own food and clothing...(calling as she walks towards the living room door) MOVE TO CHAIR WALK IN FRONT OF WENCAI Xiao Zhuer! Xiao Zhuer!

Voice of Xia Zhuer: Yes? Grandma?

Naima: What are you doing now? Go get yourself ready for bed, we have a long trip tomorrow.

Voice of Xiao Zhuer: I'm helping Miss Su feed the pigeons.

Naima: What are you doing now? Go get yourself ready for bed, we have a long trip tomorrow.

Voice of Xia Zhuer: I'm helping Miss Su feed the pigeons. TO WENCAI

Naima: (Walks towards the living room, grumbling) Poor Miss Su! She'll be here all by herself. What a waste of food, feeding pigeons at this time of day? (exits through living room door)

Wencai: (half talking to Chen Naima and half to herself, sighing heavily) She's doing that for someone who really loves pigeons.

(call of crows from outside, Wencai shivers and goes on with her knitting)

(Jiang Tai enters through study door looking dejected)

Jiang: (abandoning his previous mood of arrogance, as if soaked thoroughly by a rainstorm on a gloomy afternoon, he shakes his head in an inexpressable combination of despondence, anger, and sorrow) I give up! I give up! START I GIVE UP! In a house as big as this, no mater where you go, you can't even find one warm spot. It's winter already, and they still haven't put on the heat. I'm freezing my feet off. All your sister-in-law knows is how to SQUEEZE screw money out of people! All your father cares about is his coffin. I really can't see what's the use of living here like this. What's the use?

Wencai: Stop complaining. No matter how tough things get, we must go on.

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Jiang: When I'm totally bored to death, I'll join the revolution too! (from half joking and letting off steam, he gradually begins shouting in anger) I'll join the resistance, I'll revolt, I'll go make friends in the revolutionary party like that kid Rui Zhen! We'll resist and attack, attack and resist! They can all go to hell! We'll overthrow the whole bunch of them! We're going to start this goddamn ~~motherfucking~~ revolution right now! But...(suddenly puts his hand into his pocket, realizing that he is about to make a fool of himself, laughing nervously) But I've only got a ~~dollar~~ YUAN left to my name, (feeling around in his pocket and blinking his eyes) No, I even spent my last dollar on a fortune teller! (rolls his eyes, thinking, in a low voice)

Wencai: Jiang Tai, you...

JIang: (suddenly shaking his head, as if he were mourning his mother's death, emits a long deep sight) Wouldn't it be great if I could only invent something like Tiger Balm Oil? That would be great!

Wencai: (mournfully) Tai, stop stalking gibberish, if you keep on like that, you'll drive yourself crazy.

Jiang: (as if he hasn't heard her, suddenly pulling himself together) Wen Cai, let me tell you. I was walking around in the market this morning, and I went to see a fortune teller. He told me because of the placement of my nose, and how full it is, and how perfect it is for storing up wealth. (very seriously) I was just looking at this nose of mine myself, really it isn't bad at all! (fearing Wen Cai's reprimand) There must be some truth in this kind of fortune telling, otherwise, how could he have know so much about my past?

Wencai: Then you should go get in touch with some of your friends.

Jiang: (somewhat self-confident) Yes! I'll do that, I'll look up some of ~~these~~ those rich classmates of mine. (encouraging himself with his own words) I'll find them, I'll get in touch with them right away. I think, this time, I'm really going to make it big.

Wencai: (encouraging him) Jiang Tai, all you have to do is put in a little effort, and your're bound to succeed.

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Jiang: (joyfully) Really? (suddenly) Wencai, I just went to see your father in his room.

Wencai: (also happily) What, what did he say to you?

Jiang: (cleverly) It isn't my fault if he wasn't there.

Wencai: He went out again?

Jiang: Yes, I don't know where he...

(Chen Naima enters through the study door)

Naima: (somewhat anxiously) Gu Xiaojye, go look ~~for~~ him!

Wencai: What's the matter?

Naima: Ai! The old Master took his cane and went back to the storeroom by himself to look at his coffin.

Wencai: Oh...

Naima: (painfully) The old master's in there all by himself, standing right in front of the coffin and crying.

Jiang: Where's Ms. Su?

Naima: Maybe she's making soup for Da Nainai in the kitchen....Gu Siaojie, those Du people will never be able to take this coffin away from us no matter what, why don't you go and tell him to come back?

Wencai: (tearfully) Poor father! I'll go...(walks towards study)

Jiang: (sarcastically) No, Wencai , why don't you go and try to talk to your dear sister-in-law first?

Wencai: (s eriously) But, she's right in the middle of getting the Du's to drop the whole matter.

Jiang: Drop the whole matter? No, shes right in the middle of talking to the Du's about sending the coffin over there. Why don't you tell her to have a little heart. Tell her not to try so hard to hold on to the house, because the mortgage is in their hands. If we wait till the day she sells off the house at whatever high price, it'll be too late to bring up your father's coffin. Don't forget, when your father left the hospital today, Miss Su paid all his medical bills out of her own pocket.

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Meanwhile, your sister-in-law's locked herself in her own room feasting on chicken, playing poor, and treating us all like suckers. Do you remember the day your father went into the hospital, it was she who made his hand bleed? Hunmph! That bitch of a sister-in-law of yours!

(Siyi enters through the study door)

Naima: (hears the footsteps, turns and looks, warns in a low voice) Da Nainai is coming!

(Jiang Tai falls silent and walks to the side)

(Siyi has a gloomy expression on her face, knits her eyebrows, appears totally penitent. She is wearing a coffee-colored long sleeved qipao embroidered with black flowers, the shoulder section of which is a bit worn. The collar is unbuttoned, and she wears a pair of dark green satin shoes).

Wencai: (timidly) What happened, Da Sao!

(Siyi walks to the sofa without saying a word.

(Momentary silence).

Naima: (both concerned and timid) Did the Du's agree or not?

(Siyi remains on the sofa without saying a word)

Wencai: Da Sao, the Du's...

Siyi: (suddenly throwing herself into the armrest of the sofa and cries) Wenqing, where are you now? Wen Qing, when you ran away, you left all the problems of this family in my hands, what do you expect me to do? If you were here, at least we could talk things over. But you're gone. How do you expect a mere housewife like me to deal with all these headaches?

(Jiang Tai stands to the side, staring cooly at her)

Naima: (touched by her outburst) Da Nainai, tell us, are they going to let us put off the payment?

Siyi: (drying her tears and her nose, but still sniffling, scolding) Just think,

p. 469 line 16

the Du family has their own textile factory, the clever bastards! Now that they've backed us into a corner, why should they give up? They know as well as we do that there isn't a man in the house (Jiang Tai signals his disagreement with a "humnph"). We're all either too old or too young, no wonder they've taken advantage of us and forced us into going along with them, the greedy bastards!

Wencai: (hopefully) In that case, do they insist on taking father's coffin?

Siyi: (still rubbing her swollen eyes with her handkerchief, shoulders quivering as she cries) What can I do? We don't have any money to give them, we have to live in this house, and there's all these mouths to feed. Old Man Du has had his eyes on that coffin for years, and now, he 's insisting he...

Jiang: (leaning against the door of his own bedroom, cynically) Well then, why don't we send it over there...

Naima: (shocked) What? Send it over there?

Siyi: (disregarding Jiang Tai) Not only that, they want it today?

Wencai: (Takes a deep breath) Today?

Siyi: Yes. They say Old Man Du is ready to die and in his will, it...

Jiang: (speaks for her) Old Master Zeng's coffin!

Wencai: (instantly) Father would never allow this.

Naima: (interrupting) Even if he were willing, who would even mention it to him?

Wencai: (immediately follows) But father just came back from the hospital.

Naima: (interrupts) And today is also Old Master's birthday?...

Siyi: (suddenly starts up again) Just, just like I said! Wenqing, where are you now? What can I do? I have to take care of my father-in-law. I have to feed all the members of this family. I can't possibly fulfill all my obligations to them now. Wen Qing, what do you want me to do?

p. 470 line 15

(while Siyi cries, the door of the study opens, Zeng Hao enters shakily, supporting himself with his cane. He is wearing a wine colored silken padded long gown with a black longsleeved jacket and black felt shoes. His worried face is yellow and emaciated, but from the way he enters we see he has recuperated. He is trying to maintain his dwindling dignity, and from his eyes we see that he is mounting a final struggle amidst all the hopelessness surrounding him, and that he despises all the people there.

They all turn their heads in his direction and stand up. As soon as Jiang Tai notices Hao, he creeps along the wall and sneaks into his own bedroom.

Wencai: Father! (runs over to help him)

Hao: (waves her away, trying to raise his already weakened voice) I don't need any help, I can walk by myself. (walks towards sofa)

Siyi: (well-meaning) Let me help you back to your room. You should be resting now.

Move To Stool

Hao: (sits on the sofa and addresses all present) Sit down everybody, no need for all this formality...

Hao: (looks around) Where's Tai?

Wencai: He...(suddenly recalls) He is in his bedroom. (shamefully) He's waiting for you father, he wants to apologize to you.

Hao: Is there any word from Wen Qing?

Siyi: (bleakly) Somebody said they ran into him on the street in Jinan, then someone else said they saw him in a small inn in Tientsin...

Wencai: We've tried to find him everywhere, but he seems to have vanished without a trace.

Hao: Then don't bother looking any more.

Wencai: (mobilizing sufficient energy to soothe the old man) I'm sure brother was so ashamed of himself that this time he'll go out there and make a career for himself before.....(he returns)

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Hao: (shaking his head) ~~"Father knows best."~~ "Nobody knows a son better than his father" He doesn't have enough will power. Sooner or later he'll.....(dismissing the subject, suddenly addressing Wencai) Why don't you go ask Jiang Tai to come in.

Wencai: (takes a step, turns to her father suddenly) Father, we, we're all terribly ashamed of ourselves, father, really...

Hao: Ai! Go get him. You don't have to say all that. (To Siyi) Go and bring Ting and Rui Zhen here. too.

(Wencai goes up to the bedroom door and calls, SiYi exits through the study door)

Wencai: Jiang Tai! Jiang!

(Jiang Tai immediately slips back in)

Jiang: (Zeng Hao has his eyes on him the moment he reappears. He speaks shamefully) Father, you, you...

Hao: (motioning to him) Sit down, sit down.

(J iang Tai sits)

Hao: (to Chen Naima with concern) Go tell Miss Su to take a little rest. She just came back from the hospital. Tell her not to do any hard work in the kitchen.

(Chen Naima exits through the living room door)

Wencai: (all along gesturing to Jiang Tai, and as Chen Naima turns her back, begins in a low voice) Get up and apologize to father!

Jiang: (going through the act of standing up) I, I...

Hao: (waves his hand) We can forget about everthing that happened in the past. Everything....

(Jiang Tai sits down again and during the ensuing silence, Siyi enters leading Ting and Rui Zhen through the study door. Rui Zhen is wearing a grey cotton gown decorated with small red flowers. Ting is wearing a long gown with a blue cotton jacket.

(Zeng Hao points at the chairs. They all sit down in their appropriate places,

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according to family rank. Rui Zhen stands behind Wencai)

Hao: (gazing sorrowfully) The whole Zeng family is here now, except for Wenqing. (looks around the room and coughs lightly) This house was passed down to us by your great grandfather Jing De. For generations, ours has been a family of scholars. All the sons of the Zeng family have always been held in the highest esteem by the community until now, when one worthless, unfilial offspring (points to himself), like me comes along...

Siyi: (pained and sorry for him) Father!...

(all stare at each other solemnly, then lower their heads)

Hao: The reputation of the Zeng family---ruined! I have brought up a bunch of stupid, lazy, unfilial children who can't even hold on to the little we have...

(Jiang Tai beginning to be a little impatient)

Wencai: (Raises her head shamefully) Father, father, you...

Hao: I have been a great disappointment to my ancestors, and I can only tremble at the thought of seeing my father Jing De Gong again, (coughs)

(Rui Zhen walks over and starts pounding on his back)

Jiang: (impatient, turns away shaking his head, sighs audibly, muttering) At a time like this, what's the use of putting on such a big show? What's the use?

Wencai: (in a low voice) Are you losing your mind again?

Hao: (gently pushed Rui Zhen's hand away) Don 't bother now. (turns towards the rest) I'm not blaming all of you, that wouldn't do any good. (with a pitiable and hopeless expression on his face, and in a hostile tone of voice) What a bunch of stupid idiots, what a bunch of useless, big-mouthed fools!

(Suddenly gathering courage) ~~Jiang Tai you too...~~

(Jiang Tai is about to reply)

Wencai: (on the alert) Tai!

(Jiang Tai falls silent)

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Hao: (half scolding, half complaining) You sit around all day thinking you're going to strike it rich. Day-dreaming. You don't know a thing about the outside world. You're just like Wenqing. All that studying for nothing, I don't know what's gotten into you two, you're just a pair of...

(starts to cough and hits himself on the chest twice)

Wencai: Ai! Ai!

Jiang: (forcing himself to respond) What's the use? What's the use?

Wencai: Father, father!

Hao: Siyi, you are a mother and your son's been married for two years. In fact, soon you will be a grandmother yourself. (tries to suppress his own anger) I can't blame you because these problems began with me and they didn't only begin today. (increasingly more self-pitying) After you sell the house, you can start pretending that I'm dead, that I don't exit, that I, I... (on the verge of tears)

Wencai: (bursts into tears) Father! Father!

Siyi: (expression already changed) Father, I don't understand what you are saying.

Hao: (surprised) You, you...

Wencai: (furious) Da Sao, how dare you insult father like that!

Siyi: (returning the question) Like what?

Wencai: (an innocent bystander compelled to speak) How can anyone have so little heart?

Siyi: Who has so little heart? Tell me who? May Heaven strike me dead, and right here in front of your father's face, tell me, who, who?

Ting: (painfully) Mother?

Wencai: (belittled by Siyi's presumptuousness, she trembles in anger) You're forcing Father right to the edge of a cliff.

p. 474 line 8

Jiang: (powerlessly) Stop arguing, the two of you!

Wencai: You've even forced your father to sell his very own coffin! You've made him...

Hao: (stops her) Wencai!

Siyi: (sarcastically) You're right. It was I who pushed father over the edge. It's me who's been living off him (gets up) like a parasite for the last four years, and I've even brought my husband along for the ride!...

Ting: (has been trying to stop her, extremely agitated) Ma! Please don't! Ma! You...

Jiang: (upset) Bullshit! I've paid my share!

Hao: (wheezing, tries to stop them) Stop this screaming?

Siyi: (simultaneously) You paid your share? Hunmph! You're full of...

Hao: (stamps his foot angrily during the argument) Siyi, stop it! (in a wail) I , I'm dying?

(everyone stops suddenly, only Siyi's sobbing can be heard)

It begins to darken outside. In this silent atmosphere, Su Fang enters through the living room door. She is wearing a beige serge gown, and her face appears somewhat more drawn than a month ago. Her eyes are bigger and brighter, but she is more calm, settled, and relaxed. She holds a kerosene lamp in her right hand, and carries two scrolls under her arm. As she enters, Rui Jen hurries up to her and takes the lamp from her. She whispers something hurriedly in Su Fang's ear. Su Fang nods in silence, and tragicaly looks at the solemn faces in front of her. She places the two scrolls in an urn and then exits quickly through the study door. Rui Zhen has followed her every movement.)

Hao: (sighs) You're all a bunch of stupid idiots? What's the use of arguing at a time like this?

Rui: Grandfather, you should go to your room and rest!

Hao: (touched) Aren't you people ashamed of yourself, arguing like this in front of Rui Zhen and Ting? (emotionally) Let's forget about it all now.

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Our days together are numbered. Siyi, go, you go tell the Du's bookkeeper, tell him...(with difficulty) Tell him to take my coffin away! But, but, (bleakly) leave, leave us the house!

Wencai: Father!

Hao: Su Fang told me what they wanted

Wencai: Who asked her to tell you that?

Siyi: (straightens up) Me!

Hao: Lets not think about petty things like that.

Jiang: (hesitantly) Then you're really going to give it to them?

(Zen Hao nods)

Siyi: (unwilling to break the news, but finally revealing) But they said that ^ They want it today.

Hao: Alright, alright. Whatever! Let those blessed sleep in it. (Siyi is about to exit, suddenly Zeng Hao turns to Jiang Tai) Jiang Tai, go tell them to take it away now, right now! (extremely hurt) I, I never want to see that God-forsaken thing again! (lowers his head in silence, Siyi stands in place)

Jiang: (suddenly sympathetic) Father! (takes several steps and stops)

Hao: Go ahead, go tell them!

Jiang: (suddenly turns around and walks up to Zeng Hao, speaks with kindness) Father, there's really no need to get all upset about this! When a person dies, he just dies. What's the difference if the coffin they put you in has been lacquered hundreds of times? (gets carried away as he talks; his sympathetic consolation immediately reverts to his old habitual character, as he continues his endless chatter) You don't seem to understand. Let's say if they put you in a coffin with only one coat of lacquer on it!

Wencai: (fearing what's to come) Jiang Tai!

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Jiang: (turns to Wencai loathingly) Be quiet! (Turns back to Zeng Hao and tries serious to persuade him with a smile on his face) Now what's the difference if you don't have a coffin at all when you die? (gesturing and pointing) This is only a kind of custom, a point of view! (inspired by his own words, he gradually forgets about his originally benevolent intention, now gesticulating dramatically) For example, (sits on the sofa) I look good sitting like this, (gets a clever idea) but if I (suddenly rests his leg on the back of the sofa) sit like this, don't I look good too? (To Siyi) Da Sao, (totally absorbed in his own words, speaks to Siyi as if he were slightly intoxicated. By now seems to have forgotten about their recent argument) This is only an example! (Points at her) You look good with clothes on;; but don't you look good without them?

Siyi: Gu Lao Ye!

Jiang: (talks incessantly) I don't think so, I don't think it's true at all! It's only a matter of opinion, a matter of habit!

Hao: (tries to interrupt) Jiang Tai!

Jiang: (not letting anybody interrupt him, chatters on) Now take me for instance, (sits down again) When I die (turns to Wencai seriously, but nobody know whether he is joking or not) I want to be cremated! Then you can dump my ashes into the sea and have a sea-burial. It's the finest cemetary in the world, and best of all, it's free! (as if he is lecturing a class) But this is only a matter of opinion. This can also become a custom! Then, Father, if you....

Hao: (cannot stand it any longer, raises his voice in order to stop him) Jiang Tai! The way you want to die and the way you want to be buried is your own business. (distressfully) I just get over a bad illness, and no matter what, today is still my birthday. You can save your opinion for.....

Jiang: (unaffected by the rebuff, still peacefully) Okay, okay, okay, you don't agree! That doesn't matter! That doesn't matter! We all have our own preference.....

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...Actually from the very beginning I knew I was wasting my time trying to persuade you. As I was talking t o you a while ago, I kept on saying to myself, "Don't say it? Don't say it!" ( apologetically) But I couldn't help myself...

Siyi: (has appeared rueful all along) In that case, Gu Lao Yeh, lets stop here. (Gets up.) Then Father, I'll, I'll (seems unwilling to continue, rubs the corners of her eyes) follow your instructions and talk to the man from the Du family?

Hao: (hopelessly) Alright, this is our only way out.

Siyi: Ai! (Takes a couple of steps).

Wencai: (heartbroken) Oh, Father!

Jiang: (suddenly gets up) No, wait, wait just a minute! (Runs into his bedroom hurriedly).

(Siyi stops).

Hao: (puzzled) What's he up to now?

(Zhang Shun enters through the living room door).

Zhang: Somebody came over from the Du's home and told me the fortune-teller insists that the coffin was to be moved into their house before ~~5~~ 8 a.m. ~~tonight.~~ TOMORROW MORNING They want to ask Da Nainai if.....

Wencai: You.....

(Jiang Tai rushes in again with a torn hat and a cane in his hand).

Jiang: (to Zhang Shun excitedly) Go and tell those bastards over there to wait in the living room. Tell them that we're going to pay them, and Old Master Zeng's coffin is going to stay right here, even if we have to use it for firewood?

Wencai: What are you.....

Jiang: (to Zeng Hao earnestly) Father, you just wait here. I'm going to look up a friend of mine. (To Wencai) Chang Ding Jai is the Police Commissioner, and I'm sure he can help us. (To Zeng Hao, confidently) He's an old friend of mine. This won't be any problem for him. (Clearheadedly) First of all, he can tell the Du family to stop stirring up trouble around here. Secondly, if the

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Du's won't budge, I can ask him to help us out. (Condescendingly) What's a few dollars to him? There won't be any problems here, there won't be any problems at all.

Wencai: (almost unable to believe her own ears) Tai, you can really do that?

Jiang: (taps his cane) Naturally, naturally. Well, Father, I'll be going. (Waves at Siyi) Da Sao, you heard me. I give you my guarantee, you take my word for it! (walks towards the living room door)

Siyi: (surprised and threatened by Jiang Tai's reassurance, feels totally at a loss) Then Father, what about.....

Wencai: (happily) Father!

(Jiang Tai takes one step into the living room, and then hurries back).

Jiang Tai: (holds out his hand swiftly to Wencai) I don't have any money on me.

Wencai: (immediately takes out a roll of banknotes from her pocket) Here!

Jiang: (takes it from her and starts counting) Thirty.....(exits complacently through the living room door).

Hao: (confused by his action, finally manages to breathe a sigh of relief) What's Jiang Tai up to now?

Wencai: (fearing that others don't trust her husband, whom she has felt respect for all along, says to Zeng Hao with conviction) Don't worry, Father, he never breaks his promise. If he says he can do something, he'll do it.

Hao: (half-suspicious) Oh!

Siyi: (having a difficult time with the change of events) Hunmph, I think he.... (stops herself, turns to Zeng Hao with a flase smile) I think things will be alright now, Father, with the coffin....

Hao: (seems to be soothed by this dose of hope, sighs) Yes, we should do whatever we can. Let's just do what he says.

Zhang: (can't restrain his joy) Then, Da Nainai, I'll tell them to....

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Siyi: (her suppressed anger begins to surface as she says harshly to Zhang Shun) What good will that do? (walks towards the living room swiftly and angrily)

Hao: (adds hastily) Siyi, be very nice to them. But no matter what, get them to wait just a little longer.

Siyi: Oh! (Exits through the living room door).

(Zhang Shun follows and exits through the same door).

Wencai: (with a big happy smile) Rui Zhen, you see how crazy your Uncle is? He had to wait for the last minute until.....

Rui: (preoccupied by her own troubles, echoes Wencai's utterance) Yes, Auntie.

Hao: (becoming more hopeful, says right after Wencai) Ai! If we could only keep that coffin, then everything would be fine. (Turns his head to address Zeng Ting) Ting, do you think it's possible?

Ting: Sure, Grandfather.

Hao: (nods) Let's hope that from now on, our family fortune will change for the better.....Yes, who knows. (Starts to get up. Rui Zhen goes over to help him) How have you been feeling?

Rui: I'm fine, Grandfather.

Hao: (gets up, looks at Rui Zhen, and then sentimentally) Just think, you'll be a mother soon! (Wencai signals to Zeng Ting to go over and help his grandfather. Ting walks quietly over).

Hao: (looks at his grandchildren, suddenly says very hopefully) I see that you two are very happy together. From now on, the future of this family is in your hands.

Wencai: (signals to Zeng Ting to respond) Ting!

Ting: (glances at Rui Zhen before responding) Yes, Grandfather.

Hao: (still very hopeful as he speaks to the third generation of the Zeng family) If we can keep the coffin here, and if we don't have to sell the house, I'll go out when spring comes and see what I can do for you. For your children.

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I'd go work like a dog! (Rubs the corners of his eyes with a handkerchief) Ai, may our ancestors grant me good health. And don't forget to pray ~~hard~~ diligently for me. (Walks towards the study). EXITS

Wencai: (goes over to help Zeng Hao, chiming in) Oh yes, when spring comes, Father will be all better, Rui Zhen will bring you a great-grandson, and Brother'll... (Su Fang appears as the study door opens. She has just finished arranging flowers, as there are a couple of chrysanthemums in her wet hands.)

Su Fang: (brushes off the hair in front of her face with her hand, says gently) Uncle, go back to your room and rest. It's all ready for you.

Hao: (happily) Fine, fine! (nods to Wencai in agreement as he walks towards the study door) Oh yes, as soon as spring comes!..... Rui Zhen, early next spring, next spring.....

(Rui Zhen helps Zeng Hao to the study door, looks at Su Fang, turns and points secretly at the parlor. Getting the signal, Su Fang nods and taks over Zeng Hao's arm, helping him out of the parlour. Wencai follows them.)

(Ting is still standing in the parlour. Rui Zhen glances at him, and walks quietly back from the study door).

Rui: (in a low voice) Ting!

Ting: (as if he is too afraid to look her in the eye, ruefully) Are you leaving tomorrow morning?

Rui: (also not looking at him, says slowly but firmly in a low voice) Yes.

Ting: Are you going with the Yuans?

Rui: Yes, we're leaving together.

Ting: (looks around, and puts his hand in his pocket trying to find something) I've already written the note.

Rui: (stares at Zeng Ting) Oh!

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Ting: (takes out a piece of paper, looks around again, and starts reading in a low voice) "Miss Xieh Rui Zhen and Mr. Zeng Ting are hereby divorced. Married at a very young age, we are now faced with an insolvable conflict of interests. Living together has become a hardship. The two of us hereby voluntarily dissolve the bond of...."

Rui: (grief-stricken) Don't read anymore.

Ting: (hesitates, but mindful of the procedures pertaining to this ordeal, says haltingly) How about our signatures, and our seals, and....

Rui: Well do that in the bedroom later.

Rui: (agaonizing) Ting, I really feel terrible that I've made you write this.

Ting: (dumbfounded, says to her with unprecedented tenderness) No, you've suffered enough in this family for the last two years. (Suddenly) Did you tell Aunti Su you decided not to have the baby?

Rui: (recollects reluctantly) Yes! I'm even thinking of giving her back the clothing she made for the baby. Why?

Ting: Oh, I figure at least one person in the family should know about it.

Rui: (with concern) Ting, after I'm gone, what, what are you going to do?

Ting: I don't know. (sadly) I can't go back to school now.

Rui: (very sympathetically) Don't give up now.

Ting: No, I won't.

Rui: (soothingly) We can still write to each other all the time.

Ting: All right. (Tears start running down his cheek).

Voice of Yuan Yuan from outside: Rui Zhen!

Rui: (grief-stricken) Don't be so upset. For so many things we have to go through tremendous suffering before we can get to a real understanding.

Ting: That understanding is so painful sometimes!

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(Yuan Yuan, whistling happily, enters through the living room door. She is wearing a knitted skirt, an "Indian" dark red sweater, and a pair of white sneakers. She looks like she has been packing as her hair is a bit disheveled. She is holding a bird cage--with the pigeon "Solitude" confined in it--in one hand, and carrying the big torn goldfish kite in the other.

Yuan: (loudly) Rui Zhen, my Father's been looking for you all day, he wants to know whether your luggage.....

Rui: (hushes her up immediately, smiles) Could you lower your voice a little bit, please?

Yuan: (sticks out her tongue, then starts instantly whispering) My Father.... wants to know....whether you and your friends.....have packed.....your bags or not?

Rui: (prompted by Yuan Yuan's funny expression, laughs) They're all packed.

Yuan: (still whispering) He said....he can only.....take you half-way,..... and he also asked you.....(finally breathes a sigh, and recovers her usual tone) This is ridiculous. This is ridiculous. Why don't you come with me. My Father still has a million things to ask you.

Rui: (genially) Fine, let's go.

Yuan: (instead of leaving with Rui Zhen, she walks up to Zeng Ting with her things, and says to him seriously) Zeng Ting, since your Father isn't here, (raises the torn kite) I'm giving this torn kite back to your Mother (sets down the kite by the table, and raises the bird cage) And I'm giving this pigeon to Ms. Su! (places the cage on the table).

Ting: (nods, as if forgetting the feeling he had for Yuan only about a month ago) Alright.

Yuan: (to Rui Zhen) Rui Zhen, let's go!

(Pushing Rui Zhen on the back, Yuan Yuan ushers her out through the living room door). (At the same time, Siyi enters through the same door. As they run

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into each other, Rui Zhen looks at her mother-in-law, startled. She is then immediately pushed out of the room by Yuan Yuan, who exhorts her with a "let's go.") (Zeng Ting looks at them as they make their exit, and then let's out a low sigh.)

Siyi: (Turns her head and looks at them momentarily out of the corner of her eye, then walks up to Zeng Ting) Rui Zhen is hardly home these days. She's always out with her friends. What do you suppose she's up to?

Ting: (looks at her briefly, and shakes his head) I don't know.

Siyi: (detesting her son for being so dense, but also feeling helpless about the whole matter, sighs, and says spitefully to him) Ai, my child, after all, she's your wife. I guess I should mind my own business! (Suddenly) Where is everybody?

Ting: They've all gone to Grandfather's room.

Siyi: (complains woefully) Ting, do you see how badly they treat your mother? (Zeng Ting looks at her briefly, then lowers his head)

Siyi: (gets out her handkerchief) Your Mother was destined to suffer. Your Father abandoned us and ran away. The only reason I stay here and take all this from them all day long is for the two of you. (rubs her tearful eyes).

Ting: Mother, please don't cry.

Siyi: (caressing Zeng Ting) From now on, you must tell your Mother everything! (grumbling) If I didn't find out all by myself that Rui Zhen was pregnant last month, the two of you wouldn't have told me, would you? (Points at Zeng Ting) Why did you do that? (then suddenly becomes very concerned) Did she take the medicine I gave her? [redacted]

Ting: I don't think so.

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Siyi: No, I'm talking about the medicine that Dr. Lo prescribed for her pregnancy.

Ting: (feels terrible inside and getting increasingly impatient) No, she didn't!

Siyi: (her expression changes abruptly to that of anger) Why didn't she? Tell her to take it, force her to take it! If she won't then tell me, and I'll force it down her throat! She thinks she isn't a member of this family, but that little baby inside her belongs to us! Since she's pregnant, we let her do whatever she wants, but she's going too far! (In a low voice) Ting, don't be stupid. The last few days, Rui Zhen's been up to something. I don't like the look of those friends of hers, ...(lowers her voice even further) I'm worried she'll steal things from here, so I'm locking all the doors at night. You better be careful, I'm afraid that.....

(Su Fang enters through the study door carrying a pottery jar of medicine).

Su Fang: (gently) the medicine that Dr. Lo prescribed is ready now.

(Siyi glances at Su Fang).

Su Fang: (seeing that Siyi does not respond, says again) Do you want to take it here?

Siyi: (coldly) Warm it up on the charcoal stove in my room!

(Su Fang takes the jar of medicine, and walks in front of Zeng Ting, and enters Siyi's bedroom).

Ting: (glances at the jar of medicine, and then turns to his mother with a look of surprise and ignorance on his face) Mother, how come you're also, also taking the medicine that Dr. Lo prescribed for Rui Zhen?

p. 484 line 8

Siyi: (slightly embarassed by his question at first, quickly manages to calm down, mumbles vaguely to Zeng Ting) I, I haven't been feeling well lately (tries to find an excuse) and for the past few days, I've been lucky to have your Auntie Su take care of me....(then abruptly changes the tone of her voice after she coughs lightly) But listn to me, my son. (her face darkens) Auntie Su is (shakes her head) She... she is really.....

(Su Fang enters from Siyi's bedroom).

Su Fang: Cousin Siyi, Uncle's looking for you!

Siyi: (nods indifferently, then turns to Ting) Ting, come with me.

(Ting follows Siyi and they ex it through the study door.)

(It is getting even darker. The cackling of geese can be heard from outside as they sweep across the darkening late-autumn sky).

(Su Fang looks a bit tired as she sighs softly. Suddenly she sees the bird cage on the table, picks it up and stares at the caged pigeon inside).

(At this time, Rui Zhen enters carrying a rattan trunk stuffed with infant clothing. She puts the basket softly on the other small table, and approaches Su Fang quietly).

Rui: (in a low voice) Auntie Su!

Su Fang: (startled, turns to her) You're here! (puts down the cage).

Rui: Have you read the long letter that I left in your room?

Su: (nods) Yes.

Rui: Are you angry at me?

Su Fang: (smiles woefully but kindly) No,.....(suddenly) Do you really have to leave?

Rui: (unwilling to part with her, says sadly) Ai.

Su Fang: (sighs, not trying to dissuade her, but actually distressed by her imminent departure) Don't go!

Rui: (gets emotional all of a sudden) Aunti Su, are you asking me to go on living like this?

p. 485 line 8

Su Fang: (seems to be reminiscing about something: she speaks slowly as a gleam of determination appears in her eyes) I understand, there's always a time when you cannot take it any longer

Rui: (there is a spark of expectation in her eyes as she grasps Su Fang's pale fingers) Then. how about you?

Su Fang: (looks at Rui Zhen sorrowfully, and says in a mournful quiet tone) Rui Zhen. let's not talk about it. After you leave, I'll be even more lonely. Maybe from now on I won't have to speak at all, I'll be even more....

Rui: (grasps her hand even tighter, gently urges her to sit down) No, no, Auntie Su, you can't act like this, you can't be like this for the rest of your life! (imploring her anxiously) Auntie Su, I have to leave soon, so why can't you say something that will make us both happy? Why can't you tell me your.....(Su Fang's tearful, big eyes shine ine the dimming twilight. She manages to suppress an outburst).

Su Fang: (slowly) What do you want me to say?

Rui: (haltingly) You for instance, you, you.....(suddenly) why don't you get out of her? ?

Su Fang: (lonely) Where can I go?

Rui: (excitedly) There're so many places you can go. First of all, you can come with us.

Su Fang: (shakes her head) No, I can't.

Rui: (sits next to her, intimately) Did you read the book I gave you?

Su Fang: Yes

Rui: Do you think that it's right?

Su Fang: Yes.

Rui: Do you think that it's right?

Su Fang: Yes.

Rui: (smiles) Then why don't you leave with us?

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Su Fang: (answers calmly, but with determination) I can't

Rui: Why not?

Su Fang: (looks at her) I just can't!

Rui: (anxiously) But why?

(Su Fang is about to tell, but again shakes her head).

Rui: At least you can give me a reason!

Su Fang: (with great difficulty) I feel that.....I have some unfinished business here.

Rui: I don't understand.

Su Fang: (smiles, and gets up) That's alright. You don't have to understand. I don't think I could explain anyway.

Rui: (pressing her, directly...) But why don't you go and look for him?

Su Fang: (a bit uneasy) You mean....

Rui: (straightforward) Find him, go and find Father!

Su Fang: (calms down, and contemplates) Why should I?

Rui: Don't you love him?

(Su Fang lowers her head).

Rui: (asserting more pressure) Then why don't you want to look for him? Why don't you? (very directly) Auntie Su, I'm not foolish as I used to be. A month ago, I wouldn't have asked you these questions. I suppose you could tell then that I knew what was going on. (sorrowfully) I have to leave soon. There's no one here but you and I. Aunti Su, please tell me, why don't you go look for him, why don't you?

Su Fang: (sighs) Do you think we can be happy just by meeting again?

Rui: (rebutting) Then are you happy here?

Su Fang: At least I, I can take care of.....(suddenly becomes tongue-tied).

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Rui: (anxiously) Go on, Auntie Su, you told me you wanted to tell me everything.

Su Fang: Alright, I'll tell you.....(a beautiful glow gradually appears on her face, as her pale cheeks begin turning rosy. Her voice trembles with emotion....) Since he is gone, I am taking care of his Father and watching over his children. I'm taking care of the calligraphy and paintings that he treasures and feeding the pigeons that he loves. Even the people whom he dislikes, I feel I should be kind to them, like them, and love them, because.....

Rui: (interrupts, still pressuring her) But why?

Su Fang: (pauses, but has not changed her tone...moved) Because at least all those people he doesn't love were close to him once! (Full of joy as she finally manages to express a feeling long kept from others. She is also surprised at the way that she has expressed it in her own words).

Rui: (takes a deep breath) So you even gave your whole life up in order to take care of someone like Ting's mother, my Mother-in-law, and watch over her.

Su Fang: (smiles bitterly) After your Father left, don't you think she needs a little support?

Rui: Really Auntie Su, can you forget the way she treated you in the past, and even now, the way she.....

Su Fang: (woefully but also sympathetically) Do we have to remember all that unhappiness? If it's for him, for him alone, for his...

Rui: (cannot bear listening any longer) Oh, my dear Auntie, you're so devoted. But why can't you devote yourself to something more important? Why can't you just forget about him? Why surrender yourself to such a worthless nobody, such a worthless.....

Su Fang: (as if something has pierced her heart) Don't talk about your Father like that.

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Rui: (defending herself) Didn't Grandfather say the same things about him?

Su Fang: (agonizing) No, don't talk like that. Nobody understands him.

Rui: (lets out a sigh, and then mournfully) Then you mean you'll never see him again?

(Su Fang lowers her head slowly).

Rui: (severely) Tell me, Auntie Su!

Su Fang: (as if she didn't hear Rui Zhen) Hmm.

Rui: Then why did you let him go?

Su Fang: (recollecting) I, I could see he was suffering here, I felt sorry for him.

Rui: (without thinking) Now that he's gone, are you happy?

Su Fang: (very quietly) hmm.

Rui: (sighs) Oh. How can the two of you go on living like this?

Su Fang: (a smile sweeps gently across her face) Wouldn't you be happy if someone you cared for were happy?

Rui: (with great concern, slowly) Then you don't miss him here?

( Su Fang lowers her head).

Rui: And doesn't he miss you?

(Tears start to run silently down Su Fang's pale cheeks).

Rui: So for the rest of your life, you'll be all alone.....how can the two of you go on suffering like this?

Su Fang: (gazing into the air) Suffer, maybe, but not all alone.

Rui: (deeply moved) My ~~dear~~ poor Auntie Su, I know, I understand, now I understand! But I'm afraid. Maybe Father'll come back one of these days. And when he comes back, everything will be the same as before: we'll still be suffering with what little we have left, staring into nowhere and hoping for who knows what. We'll all suffocate here, and no one will.....

Su Fang: (shivers, but suddenly shakes her head with determination) No, he'll never be back here again.

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Rui: (stubbornly) What if by some slight chance he does....

Su Fang: (wipes away the tear stain from the corners of her eyes) He won't, he'd rather die than come back here to live. (stares at the moistened handerchief as she lowers her head, and says slowly in a low voice) He ~~already~~ came back once.

Rui: (shocked) He came back here without letting anybody know?

Su Fang: Hmm.

Rui: (surprised) When?

Su Fang: The day after he left.

Rui: (still a little shocked by the news, breathes a deep sigh) Oh!

Su Fang: He said he wanted to be somebody, and that he'll never come back even if he is dying. (so moved that she cannot prevent herself from going one, uncharacteristically rambles on) He said he has been a horrible son to his father, a bad father to his son . And he mentioned you over and over again. He told me to take care of everybody; his family, his paintings, his pigeons. Finally he started crying. He also said, he also said, that the person he really cared about the most is....(smiles behind her tearful eyes) Rui Zhen, he's just like a child. It's so hard to believe he's almost a grandfather.

Rui: (solemnly) So from now on you're going to take care of the family for him?

(the following questions and answers follow without a pause).

Su Fang: (calms down) Hmm.

Rui: (keeps on pressing with her questions) And you'll follow our dying Grandfather around all day long?

Su Fang: (nods in silence) Yes.

Rui: And take care of his son?

Su Fang: (looks at Rui Zhen, frowns a little) Hmm.

Rui: And wait on the whole family?

Su Fang: (stubbornly) Yes.

Rui: (slightly annoyed) And put up with my mother-in-law every single day?

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Su Fang: (shudders slightly) Uh!.....Yes.

Rui: (pressing her) Just like her punching bag?

(Su Fang stares fixedly).

Rui: (pressing even harder) And keep on taking it like that?

Su Fang: (still staring) Yes.

Rui: (heatedly) For the rest of your life? (pounding on every single word) until you die?

Su Fang: (lowers her head, and rubs her forehead, replies slowly) Until I die!

Rui: (explodes, and sorrowfully) But my dear Auntie Su, why do you have to do this?

Su Fang: (raises her head) For....

Rui: (interrogating her) Yes, for....

Su Fang: (with difficulty) For...I don't know how to say this,.....(suddenly a convincing smile appears on her face) for....for the sake of living my life.

Rui: (forcing a question) You really think that Father'll never come back?

Su Fang: (smiles) Will the sky fall down?

Rui: You've really made up your mind to stay here in the Zeng family for the rest of your life in this prison. All for this one dream, this fantasy of yours, all for one person...

Su Fang: (gently) Perhaps I'll leave one day...

Rui: (anxiously) When?

Su Fang: (smiles) It'll be the day the sky falls, when the deaf and dumb begin to speak!

Rui: (commiserating) Auntie Su, giving up your own happiness for the sake of one person is dangerous; there's no reason to do that. (emotionally) I was a fool once, but Auntie, you're still....

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(As Rui Zhen speaks, the soldier's bugle from the city wall can be heard echoing intermittendy in the desolate night air. The bugle call continues until the curtain).

Su Fang: Please stop, Rui Zhen. (Suddenly raises her head and looks out) Listen, what's that?

Rui: (knows that Su Fang is unwilling to continue the conversation) They're blowing the bugle from the city wall.

Su Fang: (listens attentively) It's so sad!

Rui: (nods) Yes, it's getting dark out. When I was alone in my room I used to hate listening to it. It made everything so gloomy!

Su Fang: (tearfully) It sounds so sad! (suddenly grasps Rui Zhen's hand affectionately, says in a low voice) But Rui Zhen, suddenly I feel so happy! (rubs her chest gently) My heart is so warm! It feels like spring time! (excited) Isn't this what life is all about? Just days and days full of sadness and happiness. (cries emotionally) Sometimes it makes you want to cry, and sometimes it makes you want to laugh!

Rui: (Takes out a handkerchief and dries Su Fang's tears, calls to her in a low voice continuously) Auntie Su, why are you crying again? Auntie Su, are you...

Su Fang: (listens to the distant bugle) Leave me alone, just let me cry! (still with tearful eyes, forces out a smile) But I really was smiling! Rui Zhen.... (Rui Zhen lowers her head sadly, covering her nose with her handkerchief)...Rui Zhen, you don't have to cry for me! (tenderly) Even though I'm sad inside, I am crying because I'm really very happy!....

(Rui Zhen raises her head and looks at Su Fang momentarily, then starts sobbing. Su Fang rubs Rui Zhen's hands, then in a low voice that reflects a mixture of happiness and sorrow, begins to console, and at the same time, make an appeal to her)

Su Fang: .....Don't cry, Rui Zhen. I haven't talked so much for I don't know how many years. Now I feel that my heart is opening up, and the sun is warming it

for me. Rui Zhen, you're so nice! If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be so happy now; if it weren't for you, I wouldn't have been able to talk about him so much, and so warmly. (even more excitedly) Rui Zhen, if you think you can be happy out in the world, then go on, go out there! I'll still be happy here. Don't cry, Rui Zhen. You think this is a prison? It isn't, it really isn't.....

Rui: (sobbing) No, no, Auntie Su, I really feel sorry for you! I'm afraid! Don't get so excited. Oh, your face is burning again, I'm afraid....

Su Fang: (imploringly) Rui Zhen, don't pay any attention to me! I've never felt so happy before! (walks over to the table where Rui Zhen has put her trunk) Rui Zhen, why don't you take this box of baby clothes with you. (ruefully) After you leave, you should do your best to help others! Give the good ones away, and keep the bad ones for yourself. We should help whoever's in need. The purpose of life is much more than looking out for ourselves
just feeding our own faces. (Opens the trunks) If you don't need this clothing anymore, give it to the children who have nothing to wear. (Suddenly pulls out a red cotton cape) you like this cape?

Rui: Yes, it's very pretty.

Su Fang: (cheerfully pulls out a small white cap) Isn't this cute?

Rui: Yes, it really is.

Su Fang: (happily pulls out another item: a small green silk dress) How about this one?

Rui: (also happily) That's really beautiful!

Su Fang: (blithely as her face glows with a beautiful tenderness) No, this is nothing! There's another one here.... (giggles unpretentiously, and lowers her head and starts rummaging through the trunk,.....)

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(The sound of the mournful bugle floats incessantly into the parlour. At this moment the living room door is being opened slowly and gently. In the dimming twilight, Zeng Wenqing appears. He looks paler, tired, and sad. A worn lined gown covers his frail body as he shuffles into the parlour, head lowered, with a scroll of painting under one of his arm).

(Su Fang has her back towards him and continues rummaging through the trunk with her head lowered. Rui Zhen faces the door.....)

Rui: (Sees Wenqing and cries out as if she is having a nightmare) Oh, my god....

Su Fang: (elated as she raises with both hands a big, beautiful stuffed doll, with black hair and bright eyes which is wrapped in a piece of red silk swaddling cloth (or, carrying band). She smiles broadly and looks expectantly at Rui Zhen) Look! (Suddenly detects the changed expression on Rui Zhen's pale and nervous face) Who's that?

Rui: (stares dully) I think, the sky....the sky is falling. (Suddenly hides her face in her palms).

Su Fang: (turns and sees Wenqing as he hesitates. He then looks towards them but it is as if he cannot see them clearly) Oh!

(Wenqing immediately lowers his head and quietly walks straight into his bedroom.)

(Right after he enters his room, Siyi enters, running through the study door)

Siyi: (pleasantly surprised) Is Wenqing back?

Su Fang: (dumbfounded) He is back?

(Siyi immediately runs into her own bedroom).

(Su Fang stands there, frozen).

(The sound of the distant bugle through the lonely night air).

—Slow curtain—

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## SCENE TWO

( About ten hours after Act Three, Scene One, it is the darkest period before dawn. A bright kerosene lamp turned to its brightest setting lights up the whole parlor. The torn goldfish kite has disappeared, but the pigeon cage still sits on the table by itself. The pigeon is sleeping very peacefully inside it, with its head hidden under a wing. It is very cold in the parlour. Sitting there at this time of night, only the warmest clothes can ward off the chill of the late-autumn air. A strong west wind is swirling outside, stirring through the aspen trees in the garden and forcing them to moan as if they were being battered by rain. As the brutalised trees prompt our sorrow and inspire loneliness, the torn paper windows are flapping in the wind. The nightwatchman's distant gong can be heard occasionally. The howling wind brings every now and then the strained voice of the old hawker who sells (noodle cakes) in the long dark alley outside. His voice, carried by the temperamental wind, quivers, fades out and becomes audible again.

This is one of the most agonizing nights in the history of the Zeng family. Most of them have not gone to bed. The ailing Old Master has hardly slept a wink. All night long, Old Master Zeng sits brooding over the imminent removal of his precious coffin---the one that has been lacquered over and over again for so many years. Realizing that in a few hours he will have to relinquish this prized possession to others, he feels an unbearable pain that is even worse than being broiled alive.

The Du's have insisted that the coffin be moved before five o'clock in the morning. They have been advised that the "welcome the coffin" ceremony must take place no later than at the end of the "yin" hour, that is, fi ve in the morning. In the meantime, Jiang Tai, who left the previous evening to negotiate for a loan, has still not returned. Zeng Wencai has been running around frantically trying to

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locate her husband, and at the same time attempting to console her disheartened father. She has telephoned various places and sent out messengers, but Jiang Tai is still not to be found. Seeing how much the Old Master is suffering, the rest of the family members feel obliged to keep him company. Naturally, some of them sincerely hope that Jiang Tai comes back with the money, so that they can drive away the inconsiderate messengers from the Du family. Others voice the same hope, but are actually worried that if Jiang Tai returns with a loan, their chances of making a handsome profit will be jeopardized. This same evening, other family members are packing busily, shedding tears over and yet rejoicing in their departure. Both mournful and hopeful, they reminisce about the past and long for the future; the future which belongs to the "Peking Man" of tomorrow and has nothing to do with those who spend most of their lives in coffins.

In this cold and desolate parlor, Wenqing sits motionlessly on the sofa, as if he is in a daze. He has changed into a worn dark gray quilted silk gown. With his hands drawn into the long sleeves of his gown, he sits and stares into space. From his eyes, the arch of his brows, and the corners of his lips, we detect weariness, hopelessness, and boredom. He listens glumly to the distant gong, the sound of the wind and the leaves, and is barely stirred intermittely by the incessant chatter of Siyi beside him.

Siyi is wearing a light blue linen quilted gown. She has been talking for a long time as she appears tired waiting for Wenqing's reply. Holding a bowl of medicine in one hand and an empty bowl in the other, she pours the medicine from one bowl into another in order to cool it down. Finally, she drinks the rest of the medicine in one gulp and drinks a cup of water to wash away the bitter taste in her mouth.)

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Siyi: (puts down the bowl, starts speaking again.....) Thank God you're back, at least no one in the Zeng family can blame me anymore. (Grins sarcastically) It just shows how wrong your dear sister was that I didn't force her brother to stay away from this family and never come home.

(Wenqing raises his head and looks wearily at her.)

Siyi: (glances at Wenqing from out of the corner of her eye, looking very serious) How about it? What do you think?....Well, in that case, I take it that you agree? (Then looks as if she does not understand) Yi! How come you're not saying anything? I'm not forcing you into this!

Wenqing: (sighs, helplessly) What, what are you going to do this time?

Siyi: (with eyes wide open, appears to be indignant with the injustice done to her) Strange, I don't know what I can do to please you. (with an expression that indicates determination) As far as I'm concerned, I think I've done everything I could to be nice! Only today, your Brother-in-law humiliated me in front of your Father and my children; and for your sake, I put up with him! I also went to see [redacted] just now, and tried my best to invite her over here, so that we can discuss the matter, and talk things over together....

Wenqing: (growing increasingly impatient with her haggling, finally raises his head and asks) To talk about what?

Siyi: Talk about what? To talk about what we've been discussing, of course! (thinking that she knows unmistakably of Wenqing's intention, says sarcastically) This isn't child's play. Don't be like a kid who really wants candy but is too shy to ask for it. I'm a straightforward person, I'll always say what's on my mind. I just can't stand wishy-washy men.

Wenqing: (wearily) It's almost sunrise, why don't you go to bed!

Siyi: (without acknowledging what he said, continues on in the same tone) I told your sister all about it just awhile ago,.....

Wenqing: (shocked) What, you even told my sister.....

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Siyi: (scowls at Wenqing) Why? Why can't I tell her?.....

(Wencai enters through the study door. She is wearing the flannel gown from before, but this time she has also put on a brown sweater. Having not slept a wink all night long, she looks exhausted and her hair is a bit dishevelled.)

Wencai: (brushing her hair with her fingers in an attempt to tidy it up a bit)

Why Brother, it's almost five, and you're still up?

Wenqing: (forces a smile) Oh, yes ~~i[illegible]right.~~

Wencai: (turns to Siyi, asks anxiously) Is Jiang Tai back yet?

Siyi: No.

Wencai: I thought I heard someone opening the front-gate just now.

Siyi: (bleakly) That must have been the coffin-bearers sent over by the Du's to move the coffin.

Wencai: Ai! (The chills of disappointment gradually invades her heart. She shivers and curls up on the old sofa) Oh, it's so cold!

Siyi: (listens attentively, says intentionally) Listen, they're locking the gate up again! (Brings up the matter again) Well, what do you think? (smiling, though she addresses Wencai somewhat stiffly) Sister Wencai, about the matter I was discussing with you just now,.....

Wencai: (still perturbed....at a loss) What?

Siyi: (glances over at Wenqing with a fawning smile) About Miss Su marrying into the family.

Wencai: (remembers, but knowing that Siyi is scheming again, says with an uneasy grain) Well, don't you think it's inappopriate?

Siyi: (very veraciously) What's wrong with it? (Then affectionately) My dear Sister, don't go on thinking that my heart is as (raises her little finger) small as the "head of a pin". I'm not the kind of woman who needs a husband around all day long. I can never be "virtuous" no matter how hard I try, but I still have a little generosity in me.

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(Then very humbly) Actually, it's not a matter of generosity, it's a cousin marrying another cousin. That can only draw the family closer together. It's natural and it happens all the time.

Wencai: (earnestly) No, I still think that we should talk to Cousin Su about it first.

Siyi: (laughs unsympathetically) Hai! Why? How can she refuse? I'm a honest person, so I'll be frank with you. I'm not the only person who knows what's on her mind. After all, Cousin Su is really a good person, we can't ignore that. So, (sincerely to Wenqing) "my dear Cousin", it's now your turn to speak your mind. Since Gu Nai Nai's here now, I want you to give me your honest opinion right in front of her.

(Wenqing glances over at Wencai, then lowers his head without saying a word).

Siyi: (pressing him) Tell me everything so I can make all the preparations for you!

Wencai: (seems to realize her brother's predicament, speaks in his behalf) I don't think this is such a good idea.

Siyi: (rolls her eyes) Why not? Don't worry, my dear Sister, I could never be cruel to Cousin Su. This can only draw us closer than ever before! (tries even harder to show her generosity) I'm a very open kind of person. Late last night, I was going through some of the jewellery I brought with me to the Zeng family. And what a coincidence, the first thing I saw was this elegant set of pearls. I decided I'm going to give them to Cousin Su as an engagement present from Wenqing. (As she speaks, she picks up a pair of old pearls that were removed from a hairpin, and hands them over to Wencai) Now, what do you think?

Wencai: (reluctantly takes the pearls from her, and praises with studied politeness) Oh, they're not bad.

Siyi: (becomes even more talkative) You know how impatient I am, I've even found a

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place for the two of them to live. The moment the Yuan's step on that train, I'm going to send for the plasterers immediately. If everybody chips in and helps, I can guarantee you a wedding feast in no time. I've got just about everything ready.....(looks at Wenqing with an expression of blended mockery and praise) Our Wenqing's so kind and considerate, he's worried that his Cousin Su won't get the proper treatment. I've already told myself that, from now on (goes ahead and talks to her heart's content) ai, this sounds absurd, but from now on, there're going to be two bosses in this house. (Laughs vulgarly) We'll even be nice to each other!

Wencai: (full of anxiety, but forced to laugh nervously with her) Oh yes, but don't you think we ought to consult Father first?

(Zhang Shun enters through the study door. With sleepy eyes, he looks like someone has just gotten him out of bed. He is still not dressed properly).

Zhang: (calls out as he enters the parlor) Da Nai Nai!

Siyi: (without paying any attention to Zhang Shun, pretends that she has not heard Wencai clearly) Oh?

Wencai: I said we should consult Father first.

Siyi: (very confidently) Hai, with such a nice daughter-in-law (insinuating) to take care of him, doesn't it make the whole situtation more "official?" (Suddenly) But there's only one thing. I don't care how people address her at home. Yet in front of strangers, she'll still be "Miss Su". If we call her "Madam" ~~"Mistress"~~ or "Mrs. Zeng", people will laught at us.....(turns and glances at Wenqing) Actually, I don't really care, but Wenqing insisted. It's his idea. (Wenqing is about to respond, but she suddenly turns to Zhang Shun.) What's the matter, Zhang Shun?

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Zhang: The Old Master wants to see you.

Siyi: You mean he still hasn't gone to bed yet?

Zhang: Hmn,.....

Siyi: (to Zhang Shun) All right, let's go. Hai! (exits hurriedly through the study door).

(Zhang Shun follows her and exits).

Wencai: (watches Siyi exit, gets up and walks over to Wenqing, and slowly consoles him) You haven't eaten anything yet, have you?

(Wenqing looks at Wencai, shakes his head, and hopelessly stares into space).

Wencai: Let me go and get you some date pastries.

Wenqing: (waves his hand impatiently) No, no, no (then again wearily) I can't eat anything now.

Wencai: Then come into my room and freshen up a bit, and lie down for a while.

Wenqing: (still absent-mindedly) No, I don't want to go to sleep.

Wencai: (hesitates, but finally asks) Why...why isn't she letting you into the bedroom tonight?

Wenqing: (smiles bitterly) Humnph, she wants me to apolize to her.

Wencai: Well, did you?

Wenqing: (hopelessly but firmly): Of course not! (Closes his eyes again)

Wencai: (sympathetically but helpless) Ai, whoever heard of such a thing! Her husband just comes back, and within two minutes, she's back to her old ways again.

(Strong west wind is still blowing outside. Chen Naima enters through the study door. Following a whole night of exhuastion, she is very pale and her eyes appear sunken. She enters, yawning, wearing a quilted jacket.

Naima: (sees that Wenqing has his head lowered and his eyes closed, she imagines he is sleeping. She turns to Wencai, and speaks in a low voice)

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Is Master Wenqing [redacted] sleeping?

Wencai: (also in a low voice) I don't think so.

(Chen Naima walks up close to Wenqing, who still has his eyes closed, unwilling to speak)

Naima: (looks at Wenqing, and shakes her head sympathetically, then turns to Wencai and says compassionately in a low voice) I think he's asleep. (Sighs softly, and takes off her jacket and covers Wenqing with it).

Wencai: (still in a low voice, but anxiously) No, no, you'll catch a cold. I'll go and get....(walks towards her bedroom).

Naima: (stops Wencai, and says anxiously in a hoarse voice) I'm fine. It's all right, Gu Xiao Jieh, why don't you go check on the Old Master?

Wencai: (worried) What's the matter?

Naima: (painfully) We tried to get him to lie down for a while, but he just wouldn't do it. He's so restless. He sits down and gets up, and sits down again. All he cares about is whether Gu Liao Yeh is back or not.

Wencai: (heart-broken) What are we going to do? What are we going to do? There hasn't been a word from him all night, God knows where he.....

Naima: (shakes her head) Ai, what a pity! (Then not wanting to wake Wenqing, takes Wencai to a spot away from where he is sitting) Isn't this awful? Earlier today he promised his coffin to someone; now in the middle of the night, he suddenly realizes that he's giving away this old thing he's been keeping so many years,.....just imagine, wouldn't you be upset! Wouldn't you.....

(Zhang Shun enters through the study door).

Zhang: Gu Nai Nai!

(Chen Naima immediately points at Wenqing, who looks as if he is sound asleep, waving at Zhang Shun and signalling him to quiet down).

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Zhang: (instantly lowers his voice) The Old Master would like to see you.

Wencai: Ai! (Turns after taking a couple of steps) Where's Ms. Su?

Naima: She was giving the Old Master's legs a rubdown just now....I think she's ~~doing something~~ packing or something. in her room.

(Wencai follows Zhang Shun out the study door)

(The wind is calmer; but the fallen leaves are still being blown about the front yard, making light chafing sounds. The sound of the night-watchman's gong fades into the distance, and finally disappears. The hoarse voice of the old, lonesome "noodle cake" hawker is heard from the alley again).

(Chen Naima yawns, and walks up to Wenqing).

Naima: (lowers her head and looks at Wenqing. Seeing that he still has his eyes shut, she calls out to him softly and compassionately) My poor Master Wenqing!

(Wenqing opens his eyes, which still have that hopeless weary look. He props himself up with his arms.....

Naima: (startled) Master Wenqing, you're awake?

Wenqing: (as if being awakened from his sickly drowsiness, raises his head slowly) Oh, it's you, Naima!

Naima: (rubs the corners of her eyes as she looks at Wenqing) Yes, it's me, my Master Wenqing! (Looks at him again and shakes her head, says fondly) My poor dear, you've gotten even skinnier! Why are you sleeping out here?

Wenqing: (mumbling) Hmm, Naima.

Naima: Ai, my Master Wenqing, it must have been so awful for you out there! (dries her tears again) Ms. Su and I have been missing you every single minute. Poor Ms. Su.....

Wenqing: (suddenly grasps Chen Naima's hand firmly) Naima, oh my dear Naima!

Naima: (heartbroken) Oh my Master, my dear, dear Master, my dearest Master Wenqing! ~~Since you, [illegible] you've been back, have you seen Miss Su yet~~?

Have, have you seen Miss Su since you've been back?

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Wenqing: (cannot reply to her: all he can do is grasp Chen Naima's dry and wrinkled hand) Naima! Naima!

Naima: (aware of his deepest feelings, says affectionately) I've already asked her to come here.

Wenqing: (shocked, and very emotionally) No, no, Naima!

Naima: Oh my God, my dear Master! My Master Wenqing! How could anyone ever know that you're going to be a grandfather soon!

Wenqing: (perturbed) No, no, don't let her come here! Why do you have to.....

Naima: (watches the study door) Don't, don't, maybe it's her!

(Su Fang enters through the study door).

(She has changed into a black woolen "qi pao" which attractively sets off her long black hair, pale complexion, and her calm expression. Her large eyes gently suggest sorrow and fatigue. She enters the room softly like a beautiful spirit.

(Wenqing stands up, deeply moved).

Su Fang: Chen Naima!

Naima: (purposely tries to appear casual) Oh, Miss Su, you're still up?

Su Fang: Hmm, (cannot find anything to say) I, I'm here to see how the pigeon is doing. (Walks over to the table holding the pigeon cage).

Naima: (casually) Sure, go ahead! (suddenly remembers something) I better go see if Young Master Ting and the Young Mistress are up or not. Da Nai Nai asked the two of them to see Mr. Yuan off. (Walks towards the study as she speaks).

Wenqing: (picks up her quilted jacket, in a low voice) Naima, your jacket!

Naima: Oh! Oh! My jacket, (smiles at them) you see how poor my memory is getting.

(Takes the jacket, and exits through the study door, muttering something).

(It is still a little before dawn. The wind is beginning to blow again, and the aspen trees shake with sounds resembling a heavy rain. In the distance, the first cock-crow can be heard echoing in the wind).

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(Wenqing and Su Fang face each other in silence. Not a word is spoken. Wenqing lowers his head, and starts walking slowly towards his bedroom).

Su Fang: (finally takes her eyes off the pigeon cage) Wenqing!

(Wenqing stops, but is still too afraid to turn and look at Su Fang).

Su Fang: Naima told me that you're looking for me.

(Wenqing turns around, slowly raises his head, and looks at Su Fang).

(Su Fang also looks at him).

Wenqing: Su Fang! (lowers his head again).

(Su Fang unconsciously turns and stares at the caged pigeon).

Wenqing: (searching for something to say, mournfully) The, the pigeon's still here.

Su Fang: (calmly) Because it can't fly anymore!

Wenqing: (startled and dumbfounded) I....(suddenly realizes the implication, covers his face and starts sobbing).

Su Fang: Wenqing.

(Wenqing is still weeping).

Su Fang: (frowns) Don't do that, why are you crying?

Wenqing: (weeps bitterly, as he throws himself on the sofa) Why did I come back! Why did I come back! I knew I shouldn't, but why did I come back!

Su Fang: You couldn't fly anymore, so you came back.

Wenqing: (sobs as he voices his grief) No, no, you don't understand.....out there.... out there in that stormy world.....

Su Fang: Wenqing! (Takes a key out and hands it over to Wenqing).

Wenqing: Oh?

Su Fang: This is the key to the trunk!

Wenqing: (puzzled) What?

Su Fang: (quietly) All your paintings are in that trunk. (Puts the key on the table).

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Wenqing: (shocked and helpless) What's the matter, Su Fang.....

(momentary silence. From outside, the sound of the wind and the leaves.....)

Su Fang: It's so wind y out there!

(Through the sound of the wind blowing, calls of "Auntie Su! Auntie Su!" can be heard from outside)

Su Fang: (listens attentively) Is someone calling me?

Wenqing: (also listens, but cannot hear) No, I don't think so?

Su Fang: (very firmly but calmly) Yes, there is!

(Siyi enters through the study door).

Siyi: (to Su Fang, half-sarcastically and half-innocently) Oh! I just knew that you'd be here! (Affectionately) Oh Cousin Su, my back's hurting me again. Could you come and massage me a little? Please? I forgot to tell you. When Cousin Wenqing came back, he brought a very nice present.

Wenqing: (extremely embarassed) You.....

Siyi: (paying no attention to him, she picks up the pair of pearls from the table and hands them to Su Fang) Look at the pearls. Look how big and round they are!

Wenqing: Siyi!

(Zhang Shun enters through the study door, and seeing that the master and mistress of the house is talking, stops abruptly).

Siyi: (simultaneously.....laughs ignoring Wenqing) Your Cousin Wenqing said that he wanted to give this to you as a .....

Wenqing: (trembling with rage, suddenly bursts out in anger) You make me sick! (Instantly runs into his bedroom).

Siyi: Wenqing!

(He slams the bedroom door shut).

Siyi: (her face darkens as she says bleakly) Ai, I really don't know how to please this husband of mine!

Zhang: (walks up to her, in a low voice) Da Nai Nai, the Du's book-keeper said

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that it's already past 5 o'clock, so we better move the coffin over there now.

Siyi: All right, I'll be right there.

(Zhang Shun exits through the living room door).

Siyi: (abruptly) Well, Cousin Su, we'll talk later. (Starts for the study door, then turns around, smiles, and says very affectionately) You know, my stomach's bother ING me again, could you please go to the kitchen and make a hot salt compress for me to put on.

(Su Fang lowers her head).

(Siyi exits through the study door).

(Su Fang stares at the pigeon).

(The sound of a gust from outside).

(Rui Zhen enters through the living room door).

Rui: Auntie Su!

Su Fang: (without moving) Yes.

Rui: (anxiously) Auntie Su!

Su Fang: (turns to Rui Zhen slowly) Rui Zhen, you're right, this place is really a prison!

Rui: (startled, suddenly grasps Su Fang's hand firmly) Oh my God! The deaf-mute s have finally begun to speak! (excitedly) It's getting late, Auntie Su, let's go.

Su Fang: (ruefully and softly) Can I really walk out through this door?

Rui: We're supposed to see Mr. Yuan off, but we'll get on the same train. I'm sure that he'll understand.

Voice of Siyi from outside: Cousin Su! Cousin Su!

Rui: She's coming! (hides behind the living room door).

(Siyi immediately enters through the study door).

Siyi: Oh, you're still here all by yourself! Father wants his Ginseng soup right now. Let's go.

(Su Fang nods in agreement, and is about to make her exit).

Siyi: (suddenly becomes affectionate) Oh, Cousin, I just remembered somethi-

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(Suddenly spots Rui Zhen.) What are you doing in there?

(Rui Zhen simple stares at her).

Siyi: What are you staring at, you good-for-nothing?! Have you ~~woken~~ AWAKENED your husband up yet?

Rui: I have

Siyi: Make sure that he has enough to wear when he goes to see the Yuans off.

(Glances at Rui Zhen in disgust, and then to Su Fang) Let's talk in the side-room. (Dragging Su Fang along as she exits through the study door).

(Yuan Rengan enters through the living room door, wearing a heavy coat).

Rui: Mr. Yuan.

Mr. Yuan: (smilingly) Well, are you leaving with us?

Rui: (suppresses her own excitement) Yes, Auntie Su's things are all packed in your trunk. We've sent it ahead already.

Mr. Yuan: (surprised) Oh!....you've finally talked her into it, eh?

Rui: (nods) Yes, she's leaving with me.

Mr. Yuan: (understands partially, but still finds it incredible) Hmm, where are you two going to go?

Rui: Mr. Yuan,.....(looking a bit distressed).

Mr. Yuan: All right, you don't have to tell me. (Sincerely) But I hope there's someone to take care of you along the way.

Rui: Yes, there will be.

Mr. Yuan: That's fine. We'll leave in twenty minutes. (Goes back to the living room).

(Su Fang enters simultaneously through the study door).

Rui: (runs over to her happily) Auntie Su! Auntie Su.....(suddenly sees Su Fang's dreadfully pale face) How come you're so pale? What happened? What did she tell you?

Su Fang: (mournfully) Yes, I think I must leave this place.

(A sudden uproar of gongs, drums, and oboes can be heard from outside. It is so

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loud that it dwarfs the sound of the wind).

Rui: (startled, and turns) What's that?

Su Fang: It must be the Dus' "welcoming party" for the coffin.

Rui: Forget about that, let's go.

Su Fang: (woefully) No, you go first.

Rui: (surprised) Why aren't you...?

Su Fang: I'll be there in a minute. I just want to see him one last time.

Rui: (a bit annoyed) See who?

Su Fan: (sorrowfully) My poor Uncle!

Rui: (finally understands) Oh! (also a little sad) All right, I'll go ahead and wait for you at the front-gate.

Voice of Wencai from outside: Jiang Tai! Jiang Tai!

(Rui Zhen exits immediately through the living room door).

(Su Fang takes several steps towards the study as Wencai enters through the study door with her face full of tears).

Wencai: (anxiously) Is Jiang Tai back?

Su Fang: I don't think so.

Wencai: Where could he be now? (as she speaks, she falls on the sofa and starts sobbing) Oh my Father, my poor Father!

Su Fang: (also anxiously) What's the matter?

Wencai: (dries her tears with a handkerchief and complains) The Du's are insisting that the coffin be moved over there right away, but Father wouldn't know it (sobs) I just couldn't bear to look at his face! (raises her head, and looks at at a very mournful Su Fang) Su Fang, please go ask him to come in here. It's too much watching him hold on to that coffin!

(Su Fang walks sorrowfully towards the study door).

(Su Fang exits through the same door).

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Wencai: (at the same time, to herself.....) Father, Father, what good are children like us? (Repeat) (Gets up, and calls out) Brother! Brother! (walks towards Wenqing's bedroom) What ~~kinds of children are we~~ are we? What kind of children ~~are~~ we ~~are~~?

(The deafening sound of fire-crackers from outside is heard)

(Wencai stops and turns).

(Zhang Shun enters through the study door, somewhat tearfully).

Wencai: What's that?

Zhang: (annoyed and sad) The Du's are setting off firecrackers to welcome the coffin! They're moving it now. We've opened the gate for them to bring it through.

(Amidst the sound of firecrackers, we hear the well-paced steps and the low and heavy voices of the bearers murmuring "Ai-ho, Ai-ho" carrying out the coffin. Mixed with this is the shouting of the Du family's book-keeper. Outside the study window the lights of numerous wobbling lanters move back and forth with their bearers. At this moment, Zeng Hao, supported by Chen Naima and Su Fang, enters through the study door. He is as white as a sheet; ~~her~~ his eyes are badly blood-shot. Having suffered through an extremely tense experience, he is almost delirious, and refuses to enter the parlor despite virgorous exhortations. Chen Naima, busily drying her own tears, is relentlessly trying to console him and at the same time to drag him into the parlor. Su Fang looks at Zeng Hao sorrowfully. Siyi follows behind them. She is rubbing the corners of her eyes with a handkerchief. Of course, we cannot tell whether she is really drying her tears or if something has gotten into her eyes).

Naima: (repeatedly) Come on in, Old Master.....It's no use looking anymore!

Come on in.....

Hao: (turns and yells hoarsely) Wait, wait! Tell them to wait just a little longer!

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Tell them to wait! (Turns to Siyi, wobbling, speaks incoherently)

Go tell them that the money's coming, he's coming back soon, he's going to bring the money back soon! Wait! Ask them to wait!

Su Fang: Uncle! you.....

(Su Fang helps Zeng Hao to sit down. Seeing that the old man is gasping in his agitation, she suddenly recalls something she can get for him and immediately hurries through the study door).

Naima: (still consoling) Let them go, Old Master, (struck with abhorrence) let them put their stiff in that thing!

Hao: (almost begging) Siyi, please go talk to them!

Siyi: (cannot help but feel a little sorry for the old man; feeling helpless, she tries to console him in the way an adult would treat a child) Don't worry, Father! When we get the money, we'll buy you a better one.

Hao: (furious) Wencai, you go talk to them! Go talk to them now! (Stamps his feet) Is Jiang Tai coming back?

Wencai: ( pained by this fiasco all along.... He is, Father! Oh, he'll be back!

(The sound of firecrackers is getting louder. The coffin-bearers are approaching as their footsteps get louder and louder. They get so close that one can almost feel them passing by).

Hao: (shouts) Jiang Tai! Jiang Tai! (to both Wencai and himself) Where is he! Where is he!

(The living room door is thrown open all of a sudden. His face red as a beet, Jiang Tai staggers into the parlor. His hair is dishevelled and his clothes are all wrinkled).

(The sound of firecrakcers gradually subsides).

Hao: (almost cannot believe his own eyes) Jiang Tai, you're finally back!

Jiang: (Like a clown, his facial expression exhibits both laughter and sorrow, complacency and dejection. He nods to Zeng Hao and mumbles) I.....

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am.....back!

Hao: (overwhelmed by joy) Oh, good, you've come back just at the right time! Zhang Shun, tell them to wait! Give them the money, and tell them to go to hell! Zhang Shun, go ahead.

(Zhang Shun immediately exits through the study door).

Wencai: Simultaneously walks up to Jiang Tai) Where, where is the money you borrowed? (Holds out her hand).

Jiang: (claps his hands once, happily and excitedly) It's right here! (takes a roll of toilet paper, and slams it onto Wencai's palm) Take it!

Wencai: You, you're.....

Jiang: (turns towards the door at the same time) Get in here! Get the hell over here!

(Sure enough, it is a policeman who enters through the living room door. He is followed by a very embarassed Zeng Ting, who is carrying a half-full bottle of brandy).

Jiang Tai: (still staggering, but very self-righteous) That's him! (points to the policeman, speaks very clearly) He....is....the one! (Turns to the rest and starts defending himself) I checked into a room at the Peking Hotel, and spent the night there. And today they said I stole something. They said I stole something from them....

Hao: What....?

Policeman: (Knowingly) Excuse me, but this gentlemen has had the great inconvenience of spending last night at our station.....

Jiang: You're full o' shit! I stayed at the Peking Hotel!

Policeman: (still very politely) He was at our station!

Jiang: (irate) Peking Hotel! (Points at the policeman) Look, your commissioner's a good friend of mine! (staggers around the parlor as he speaks; his anger has suddenly and totally vanished.) Here, this is my family! And this is my old lady! (Forgets totally about the quarrel that he had with the polic

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starts getting carried away) And this is my Father-in-law, Mr. Zeng Hao! (Raises his head suddenly, and laughs) Look! (Points at his bedroom) That's my bedroom! (looks at the policeman, still laughing, and starts mumbling and acting as if he were a tourist guide) This is my table! (And walks up to the door of his bedroom) And this, my door! (He staggers into his bedroom, still mumbling) And this is my.....

(A soft abrupt "thud" can be heard coming from Jiang Tai's bedroom.....)

Wencai: Tai, what happened.....(runs into her own bedroom).

Policeman: Ladies and gentlemen, you can see for yourselves that I've done my best to escort the young master home safely (gives a casual salute to the people in the parlor and exits through the living room door).

Voices of men outside: (excited) Move it out!

(A roar of laughter can be heard, followed immediately by low and heavy footsteps. (Zeng Hao again turns around abruptly).

Chen Naima: What are you doing? MOVE TO BACK OF CHAIR

Hao: I want to take a look,....one last look,....

TAKE LEFT ARM

Chen Naima: That's alright, Old Master,.....

(Zeng Hao walks towards the ~~study~~, Chen Naima hurries over to help him. At the same time, Siyi also goes over to help. Chen Naima and Zeng Hao exit through the ~~study~~ door).

(The noise and footsteps from outside gradually become more remote and finally subside).

Siyi: (helps Zeng Hao to the study door, then comes back to Zeng Ting and asks with curiosity) Ting, what did that policeman say?

Ting: He said that Uncle was very drunk and went shopping in a store where they sell imported things, and stole a bottle of brandy when he was there.

Siyi: Did they catch him red-handed?

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Ting: Yes, and somehow he managed to finish half the bottle at the police station. And for some strange reason he even admitted to stealing it. This, (raises the half-empty bottle) This is what's left! (sets the bottle on the table, and then sits down on the sofa, with an expression of pain on his face).

Siyi: (rejoicing in Jiang Tai's misfortune) Good! Well, your Uncle has finally learned a trade! (Walks towards her bedroom) Wenqing, (reaches the door) Wenqing, I was talking to your Cousin just now, and I think she's pretty happy about it. It'll be so nice from now on. You'll be all settled down, and so will I. You can enjoy her company whenever you want; and after I have my baby, someone will be there to take care of me!

Ting: (his mother's last sentence pierces his ears like a needle; shocked, he jerks his head up) What did you say, Mother?

Siyi: (surprised by his question) What.....

Ting: (gets up slowly) You said you're also.....eh....

Siyi: (a little embarassed) Yes?.....

Ting: (fearfully) Having a baby?

(Siyi: (her expression confirms Zeng Ting's fear) Well?

Ting: (looks hopelessly at his mother; after a moment of silence, he says, pounding on every word) Ai! Go ahead and have it! (Suddenly runs out through the living room door).

Siyi: Ting! (wants to run after him; but stops after taking a couple of steps) Ting! (painfully) Oh my Baby!

(Wencai enters hastily from her bedroom).

Wencai: Where's Father?

Siyi: (stands there dumbly) He went to say goodbye to his coffin.

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(Just as Wencai is about to walk towards the study door, Chen Naima enters through it supporting Zeng Hao. Zeng Hao stands by the door refusing to move. He faces outside and shouts his objections at the group of bearers. Wencai quickly runs up to the door. The light of the lanters fades quickly as the bearers march away into the distance.

Hao: (still facing the outside, shouts at the bearers in the distance) No, don't! Don't do that! They're not carrying it properly!

Chen Naima: (simultaneously) That's fine, Old Master, please!

Wencai: (incessantly) Father! Father!

Hao: (As the coffin is being moved further away, Zeng Hao, still attached to it, points and shouts) Oh, no, not that way! You can't knock it around like that! (To Chen Naima) Go tell them to stop bumping it into the wall like that! That coffin's got Szechwan varnish on it! It can't be knocked around like that! It can't take it!

Siyi: Don't pay any attention to them, Father, if the coffin gets damaged, let them worry about it!

Hao: (having been reminded of the cruel reality by Siyi, he suddenly quiets down and stares into space. After a moment of silence, he suddenly bursts into tears) Oh my [redacted] Wife! My Dear wife! You're lucky you died so long ago. And here I am, an old man who's letting his very own coffin be.....(stamps his feet on the floor) What's the use of staying alive and having children! What's the use of having so many rotten children around! (painfully throws himself on the sofa).

(Suddenly part of the mud-wall collapses with a loud noise).

(All are silent).

Wencai: (in a low voice) The wall just collapsed.

(During the momentary silence, Jiang Tai staggers in again from his bedroom).

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Jiang: (with good intentions, says to Siyi in a very friendly manner) I've been telling you, I've been warning you ever since the Mid-Autumn Festival that it's going to collapse! Collapse! Tell me now, was I right or not! (Siyi glances at him in disgust, turns around abruptly and exits through the study door).

Jiang: (shakes his head) Ai, nobody wants to listen to me! Nobody pays any attention to me! Nobody! (While he is speaking, he picks up the bottle of brandy and re-enters his bedroom).

Wencai: (anxiously) Jiang Tai! (Follows him into the bedroom).

(The cock crows again in the distance).

Naima: Ai! MOVE 3 STEPS LEFT

(At this time, the whimpering voice of women can be heard coming faintly from next door. Su Fang enters through the study door with a bowl of Ginseng soup in one hand, and a blanket hanging over her other arm. The blanket, actually, will accompany her on her forthcoming journey).

Hao: (raises his head) Who's crying?

Naima: I suppose Old Master Du has breathed his last, let me go check.

(Zeng Hao lowers his head again).

(Chen Naima hurries out through the study door). LIVING ROOM

(The cock crows).

Su Fang: (Walks up to Zeng Hao, and says softly) Uncle!

Hao: (raises his head) Oh?

Su Fang: (tenderly) Your Gingseng soup (Hands it to him).

Hao: Oh, did I ask for it?

Su Fang: Yes! (places it in Zeng Hao's palm).

(Suddenly, Yuan Yuan enters very quietly through the living room door. She is still wearing the same clothes; only this time she wears an additional jacket the same color as her skirt. A black silk scarf with white dots is tied loosely

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around her neck).

Yuan: (stands at the door, says anxiously in a low voice) It's late, hurry up!

Su Fang: (nods).....Hmm.

(Yuan Yuan smiles and withdraws to the living room, shutting the door behind her).

Hao: (takes a sip, puts the bowl down on the end table next to the sofa, and then sighs weakly but deeply) Ai! (lowers his head and shuts his eyes).

Su Fang: (with concern) Are you feeling better!

Hao: (mumbles) Yes, yes.....

Su Fang: (mournfully and commiseratively) Uncle! I'm leaving now!

Hao: (nods) Yes, go rest for a while.

Su Fang: Ai, (says slowly) I'm going away now!

Hao: (absolutely exhausted, says in a weak voice) Yes!

(Su Fang turns around and takes a couple of steps. Then she turns her head and takes another look at the pitiful old man. She is unable to walk away without squeezing her last drop of care for him, covering him gently with the blanket she was going to take with her)

Hao: (mumbles suddenly) Come back later!

Su Fang: (tearfully) Yes, I'll be back. (stares at Zeng Hao as she walks backwards).

Hao: (still with his eyes shut) And you'll give me a good rubdown.

Su Fang: (tears running down her cheeks) Yes, I'll give you a good one! A good one!.....I'll give...(seems to hear someone entering the parlor; immediately turns towards the living room and exits there).

(The moment Su Fang steps out, Wencai enters from her bedroom).

Wencai: (sees that Zeng Hao is dozing off, says to him softly) Father, your Gingseng soup's getting cold!

Hao: No, I don't want it now.

Wencai: (consoles him mounfully) Father, don't be so sad! Everything will be alright, no matter what happens. (sheds tears) Just wait, Father. Next spring, you'll feel much better, your great-grandson will be born, Jiang Tai'll

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turn over a new leaf and Brother'll find a good job for himself.....

(Suddenly a low groan from Wenqing's bedroom; and then the sound of someone falling out of bed).

Wencai: (Frightened) Oh! (Turns to Zeng Hao) Father, I'll go look. (Rushes into Wenqing's bedroom)

(Chen Naima enters through the study door). LIVING ROOM

Hao: (weakly) The Du family....Is he dead!

Naima: He's dead, it's all over now.

Hao: Oh, my eyes hurt so! Will you turn the lamp down for me please?

(Chen Naima turns down the kerosene lamp, dimming the whole parlor. The light of dawn slowly filters through the closed folding doors of the living room.

(Wencai re-enters, running nervously through Wenqing's bedroom door).

Wencai: (anxiously, in a low voice) Chen Naima, Chen Naima!

Naima: Oh!

Wencai: (horried, in a strained voice) Don't scream! Go get Da Nai Nai, tell her that Brother just swallowed opium. His pulse has stopped.

Chen Naima: (frightened) Oh! (About to weep.....)

Wencai: (restraining her) Please don't cry, Naima, I don't think the Old Master could take it. Hurry up and tell her!

(Chen Naima runs out of the study door).

Wencai: (forcing herself to be ~~calm~~ calm, walks over to Zeng Hao) Father, the sun's coming up now, let me help you in to bed.

Hao: (gets up, and takes a couple of steps) What was that in the bedroom just now?

Wencai: (mournfully) Rats, it's infested with rats.

Hao: Oh

(Zen Hao walks slowly towards the living room door, with the help of Wencai. A

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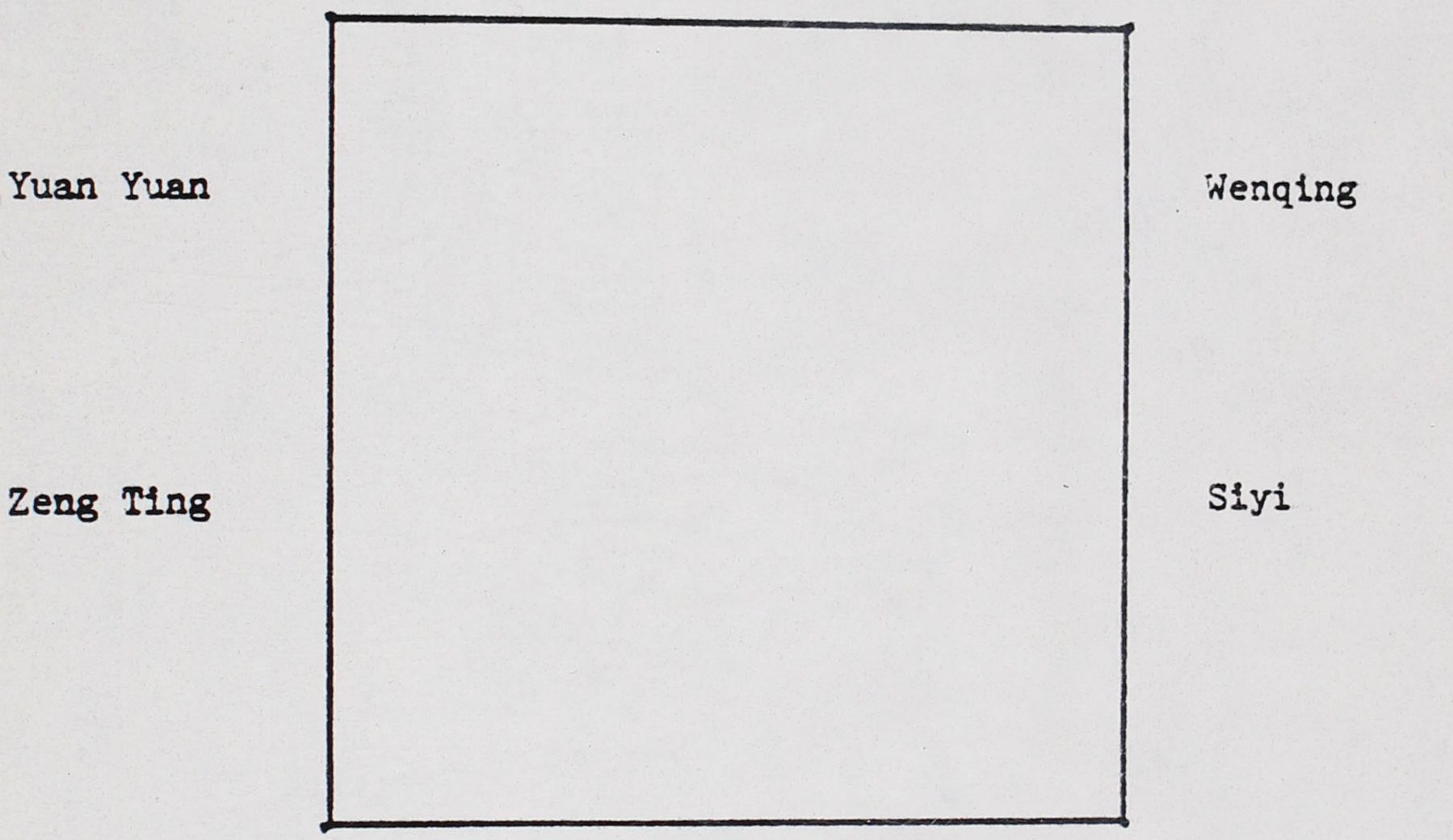
cock crows again. Morning has broken. A slow mule cart rolls through the long alley. In the distance, a train signals its departure with its sharp whistles.

-------SLOW CURTIAN----------

## DIAGRAM I

## SITTING PLAN FOR THE LUNCH

BACK OF STAGE




AUDIENCE

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