

沙葉新、李守成、姚明德：假如我是真的

The Impostor (If I Were Real)

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Translated by Daniel Kane

With twelve illustrations by Ah Wu

Characters:

THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO:	Director of a Theatrical Troupe
DIVISION HEAD QIAN:	Head of the Political Division of the Organization Department
SECTION HEAD SUN:	Head of the Cultural Affairs Section
LI XIAOZHANG:	A "rusticated intellectual youth"
ZHOU MINGHUA:	A worker in a cotton mill; Li Xiaozhang's girlfriend
SECRETARY WU:	The Secretary of the Municipal Committee
FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG:	Director of a State Farm
JUANJUAN:	Section Head Sun's daughter
VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG:	Responsible Cadre from the Central Committee's Discipline Commission
PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICERS A & B	
BYSTANDERS A, B, C, D, E & F	
THEATRE ATTENDANT	
A MIDDLE AGED MAN	
RESTAURANT ATTENDANT	
INTELLECTUAL YOUTHS A & B	
JUDGE	
ASSESSORS A & B	
PROSECUTOR	

"Can't a concept serve the same purpose as its opposite? Can't comedy and tragedy express the same sublimity? Can't an examination of shamelessness delineate high moral standards? Does not all illegality and lack of discipline, scandal and debauchery show us what law, duty and justice really ought to be?"

Gogol: At the Theatre's Door

PROLOGUE

The theatre has its basis in life.

This play of ours is also based on life, on a true story.

Since the curtain has not yet risen, why don't we start our play from the actual living situation in front of us?

All right then. Take a look at our dear, loyal audience, which has flocked to this theatre tonight. Of course, at this stage, they know nothing about our play, "If I were real", and perhaps they are sitting in their seats, thumbing through the programme notes, hoping to find out what the play is all about. Or perhaps they are standing around in the foyer, part of the motley crowd out there, chatting with their friends, and trying to guess the plot. Or perhaps they are having a smoke, or eating some ice-cream, carefree and leisurely, not caring to use their brains at all. . . .

Before long, urged along by the bell, the audience files into the theatre, sits down quietly, and, with bated breath—or perhaps without any interest at all—waits for the curtain to rise.

At last, the play is about to begin. The lights are dimmed, the music starts, the audience open their eyes wide, concentrating on the stage. But suddenly the music stops and the lights are turned on again. Behind the screen, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO can be heard shouting "Turn the lights off! The curtain's about to rise!" But the curtain, which has just separated slightly at the centre, closes again. A short time later, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO walks on to the stage, from the side, and moves to the centre.

ZHAO: Comrades. My deepest apologies. It's time for the play to begin but—er—there are two leading comrades and an honoured guest who

haven't arrived yet. Please wait a little longer. This sort of thing often happens here—there's nothing unusual about it. Don't worry, comrades, the play will be performed, just wait a while. As soon as they come, we'll start immediately. I'm terribly sorry. My deepest apologies.

When THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO has finished, she walks off the stage. What sort of reaction does the audience have to this? Helpless grumbling? Expressions of deep discontent? Fierce protest? Loud cursing? Each of the audience expresses his opinion about this sort of thing in his own way. Or at least he ought to.

There is a flurry of murmuring, and THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO pokes her head out from the side of the stage, and looks towards the exit. Suddenly, a look of pleasant surprise appears on her face. The audience, of course, follows her gaze towards the exit at the side of the theatre.

Then, under the gaze of the audience, the Head of the Political Division of the Organization Department, DIVISION HEAD QIAN (who is the wife of the Secretary of the Municipal Committee) enters, carrying herself with great dignity. She is followed by the Head of the Cultural Affairs Section, SECTION HEAD SUN, who is looking particularly solemn. The audience must think that these two are the honoured guests for whom they have been respectfully waiting so long, but this is not, in fact, the case. They beckon, and a young man enters the theatre. This is the real honoured guest. His name is LI XIAOZHANG, but he is using the name ZHANG XIAOLI. DIVISION HEAD QIAN and SECTION HEAD SUN say to him, respectfully, and in hushed tones "After you, after you. . . ." Then, clustering around him, they go straight to three empty seats in the front row, just off the aisle. After they have settled themselves, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO's voice can be heard from behind the curtain "They've arrived! Get ready to raise the curtain!"

The music starts again. Suddenly, again from the exit at the side of the theatre, two armed officers of the Public Security Bureau come in, and quickly move to where LI XIAOZHANG is sitting.



PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: (to LI XIAOZHANG)
Li Xiaozhang, you're under arrest!

DIVISION HEAD QIAN: (greatly surprised) What?
What? His name isn't Li Xiaozhang. You can't
just go around arresting people!

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: (showing the arrest
warrant) This is the arrest warrant! (Another
PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER puts handcuffs on
LI XIAOZHANG.)

SECTION HEAD SUN: Let him go! You've made a
mistake! Do you know who he is?

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: You tell me!

SECTION HEAD SUN: His name is Zhang Xiaoli!

DIVISION HEAD QIAN: He's the son of a Central
Committee member—one of our leaders!

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: No. He's an im-
postor!

QIAN, SUN: Eh?

(THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO runs from the
side of the stage, to the centre.)

ZHAO: What's going on? What's happening? How
can you expect us to perform our play? (To the

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER): Comrade, would
you mind explaining what this is all about?

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: Very well. (The two
PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICERS, LI XIAOZHANG,

DIVISION HEAD QIAN and SECTION HEAD SUN
all go on to the stage.)

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: Comrades! My deep-
est apologies for having disturbed you.

PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICER: This man is an im-
postor. His name is Li Xiaozhang, but he has
been going under the name of Zhang Xiaoli. He
is really a "rusticated intellectual youth", but
he has been pretending to be the son of a
Central Committee member and he has been
swindling his way all over this city. There was
a danger that he would escape, so we have to
take emergency measures to arrest him here.

ZHAO: What?! (To LI XIAOZHANG) Is this true?

LI XIAOZHANG: Aren't you performing a play here
tonight? I have just been acting out a role, too.
Now my performance is over. You can continue
with yours!

ZHAO: Eh?

QIAN: You . . . !

SUN: Oh!

(The spotlight settles on the faces of LI
XIAOZHANG, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO,
DIVISION HEAD QIAN and SECTION HEAD
SUN, one after the other. Then the lights
dim.)

ACT I

Early evening on a day in the first half of 1979.
The main entrance of the theatre.

(If this play has the good fortune to be performed in a theatre, the stage setting for this act should be exactly the same as the main entrance of that theatre, or at least should closely resemble it.)

There is a large advertising poster on the wall of the theatre. "Such-and-such Theatre Company is Performing the Russian Satirical Comedy 'The Inspector General'." There is a portrait of Khlestakov on the poster.

It is obviously a full house. A number of people are waiting around, hoping that some one will turn up with extra tickets. They have money in their hands, and, whenever anyone approaches, they rush over and say "Do you have any tickets?" If anyone has, a great crowd of people mills around, pushing and shoving. Those who get a ticket are deliriously happy, and can't stop thanking whomever sold it to them, and they enter the theatre, very pleased with themselves. Those who miss out are disappointed but not discouraged; they continue to ask around. This scene should be played realistically and naturally, so as to make the audience believe it is genuine. They will then identify with the players on the stage—or, they will believe that they themselves are in the play.

LI XIAOZHANG is wearing an old military uniform, and has a soldier's satchel over his shoulder. A cigarette is hanging from one side of his mouth; he occasionally blows smoke rings. He is nonchalantly watching the scene at the main entrance of the theatre. He throws his cigarette butt away, and fishes something out from his pocket. One of the bystanders quickly goes over to him.

BYSTANDER A: (*urgently*) Do you have a ticket?

LI XIAOZHANG: A ticket?

BYSTANDER A: Yeah.

LI: (*with a drawl*) Well . . . yes!

BYSTANDER A: (*extremely excited*) Great!

(*Other members of the crowd hear that LI XIAOZHANG has a ticket, and he is immediately surrounded. They are shouting "Give it to me! Give it to me!" or "I want it! I want it!" LI XIAOZHANG is almost knocked off his feet, and is forced to the wall.*)

BYSTANDER A: You should give it to me. I got

here first!

BYSTANDER B: I'll swap your ticket for ten movie tickets!

BYSTANDER C: Give it to me! I'll give you three *yuan* for it—how about that?

LI: Don't quarrel. I've got enough for all of you. Just queue up now, queue up!

(*The crowd, muttering, lines up in front of LI XIAOZHANG, in a long queue.*)

LI: Calm down, calm down! I've got plenty of tickets. Everyone has. Some you can use all over China, some are just local ones!

BYSTANDER A: What?

BYSTANDER B: You can use some all over China? And local ones, too?

BYSTANDER C: What sort of tickets are you talking about?

LI: (*Taking out his wallet, he takes out a few ration coupons.*) Here! Ration tickets!

BYSTANDER A: Eh?

BYSTANDER B: What sort of a joke is this?

LI: Aren't ration tickets tickets? They're the most important kind of tickets. If you don't have these, you'll go hungry!

BYSTANDER B: Bloody fool!

BYSTANDER D: Bash him!

LI: (*without changing the tone of his voice*) Do you want to try? Well?

BYSTANDER B: Forget it. Let's go. Let's go.

(*They leave, dejected.*)

BYSTANDER A: Comrade, you shouldn't deceive people like that!

LI: I'm just playing a joke on them, that's all. Anyway, what's wrong with deceiving people? Isn't performing a play deceiving people? There is so much acting going on in the real world, but you don't notice it—you just want to go to the theatre to watch plays instead. Isn't that deceiving yourself?

BYSTANDER A: You are ignorant. The play being performed today is the world-famous "The Inspector General".

LI: Oh. "The Inspector General"? Is it good?

BYSTANDER A: It's really interesting. It's about an ordinary twelfth-grade clerk of St. Petersburg who happens to be passing through a certain city. The Mayor of that city thinks that he is the Inspector General, so he crawls and panders

- to him, gives him money and presents—even wants to marry his daughter off to him. You'll split your sides laughing!
- LI: Oh? The Inspector General was an impostor?
- BYSTANDER A: Yes. An impostor.
- (LI XIAOZHANG immediately goes over to the advertising poster, and looks at it with great interest. After a few moments he glances at his watch, and looks into the distance. Before long, ZHOU MINGHUA hurries onto the stage, carrying a small satchel.)
- ZHOU MINGHUA: Li Xiaozhang!
- LI: Minghua! Just look—you're late again.
- ZHOU: My father wouldn't let me come out.
- LI: The silly old fool . . .
- ZHOU: How can you . . . ?!
- LI: He is a silly old fool. Last time I went to your place he took no notice of me at all!
- ZHOU: You can't talk about my father like that. (She takes a bottle of maotai out of the satchel) Look. My father told me to give this back to you.
- LI: (surprised) Eh? He drank it?
- ZHOU: Drank what? He didn't drink anything!
- LI: (taking the bottle) Oh.
- ZHOU: Why did you give him a bottle of maotai?
- LI: To butter up my future father-in-law.
- ZHOU: You're really extravagant. Fancy buying such an expensive wine!
- LI: It's not real.
- ZHOU: What? This maotai's not real?
- LI: Do you think I could afford it? The bottle's genuine enough—I bought it at a junk shop—it cost me twenty fen. Inside it's just one yuan twenty low-grade plonk!
- ZHOU: Eh? Weren't you afraid my father would notice?
- LI: People only ever look at the outside appearance of things . . . your father's no exception.
- ZHOU: Why did you do it?
- LI: To get your father on our side—because of you—and me . . .
- ZHOU: You'd better get transferred back from the countryside then, and fast. Otherwise, no matter what you give him, he'll never approve of our being friends. Get transferred back, quickly!
- LI: (worried) It really is a problem.
- ZHOU: I'm trying to think of some way out. In fact, you're very smart and capable, too. You should be able to find a way. Other people get transferred back—why can't you? A lot of the people I used to go to school with got transferred back long ago.
- LI: What do their fathers do?
- ZHOU: One of them is the Party Secretary of our factory, another is a Deputy Commander in the Navy . . . another—the father of one of my friends—is the Head of the Cultural Affairs Section.
- LI: No wonder they can get transferred back. But what does my father do? (He makes a thumbs-up sign, and says sarcastically)—he is a member of the so-called "leading class"—he's a worker—one of the selfless working classes. What bloody use is that? I should have been transferred back last year, but my place was taken by them.
- ZHOU: If only your father were more important. Then everything would be all right.
- LI: When I'm reincarnated, I'll make sure first that my father is an important cadre—otherwise, I may as well just die in the womb!
- ZHOU: Don't talk such rubbish. We'd better think of a way of getting you transferred back soon. We can't keep on putting it off, you know . . .
- LI: All right, all right. Getting upset about it won't help. Why don't we get a couple of tickets, and go and see a play.
- ZHOU: A play?
- LI: I've heard this play is not bad.
- ZHOU: I can't. I sneaked out.
- LI: You can't go with me?
- ZHOU: I'm afraid my father will find out.
- LI: It's up to you!
- (ZHOU MINGHUA hesitates for a moment, but then leaves.)
- (LI is about to follow her, when he stops on hearing the sound of a car approaching. Light from the headlights of the car is seen, and the sound of brakes can be heard. THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO comes running out of the main entrance of the theatre, pushing the crowd gathered around out of the way. In a moment, SECTION HEAD SUN and his daughter, JUANJUAN, come onto the stage. THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO hurries out to meet them.)
- (LI XIAOZHANG eyes them off, aloofly.)
- ZHOU: (warmly) Section Head Sun! (Shakes

hands) How are you?
 SUN: I'm well. How are you?
 ZHAO: How has your health been recently?
 SUN: Not bad at all.
 ZHAO: You should look after yourself. This must be Juanjuan, I suppose?
 SUN: Say hello to Auntie Zhao.
 JUANJUAN: Hello, Auntie Zhao.
 ZHAO: She's so beautiful! You've been transferred back from the countryside, I suppose?
 JUANJUAN: Long ago.
 ZHAO: And your husband?
 JUANJUAN: He's still in the North-East.
 ZHAO: Oh dear. How can a young married couple live apart?
 JUANJUAN: Daddy's making some arrangements
 SUN: Who said so? Nonsense!
 JUANJUAN: *(to THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO, in a low voice)* I'm not talking nonsense. It's he who's talking nonsense!
 ZHAO: *(smiling)* Come inside! *(Takes out two tickets)* I've kept these for you.
(Another car approaches from the distance; again there is a light from the headlights and the sound of brakes.)
(THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO and SECTION HEAD SUN stop, and look towards the car.)
 SUN: Who's that in the car?
 ZHAO: It seems to be Division Head Qian—the Head of the Political Division of the Organization Department.
 SUN: Division Head Qian?
 ZHAO: The wife of Secretary Wu of the Municipal Committee.
 SUN: Oh yes. Of course, of course
 ZHAO: *(smugly)* An old comrade-in-arms of mine. We're on very good terms.
(DIVISION HEAD QIAN enters.)
 ZHAO: *(immediately going over to welcome her)* Sister Qian! What good fortune brings you our way?
 QIAN: Ah, Little Zhao! How could you have forgotten me? You didn't invite me to come and see your play!
 ZHAO: I thought of inviting you, several times, but I was afraid you'd be too busy. Would you like to see it this evening?
 QIAN: Do you have any tickets?
 ZHAO: Of course—for *you* we have tickets. As

many as you like.
 QIAN: I only need one.
 ZHAO: Isn't Secretary Wu coming?
 QIAN: How does he have the time to go and see plays? He's busy from dawn to dusk—I keep urging him to take a rest but he refuses to—he says he has so much time to make up for that he lost due to the Gang of Four.
 ZHAO: Secretary Wu really works so hard. His responsibilities are so onerous.
 SUN: Division Head Qian, let's go in. The play's about to begin.
 QIAN: Who are you?
 SUN: I'm from the Cultural Affairs Section.
 ZHAO: This is Section Head Sun. Haven't you met before?
 QIAN: Oh. Your immediate superior. *(To SUN)* I haven't seen you for ten years—your hair's gone white.
 ZHAO: Section Head Sun, you accompany Division Head Qian, and go inside. I'll just wait here for Department Head Ma.
 QIAN: Department Head Ma?
 ZHAO: Head of the Propaganda Department of the Municipal Committee.
 QIAN: Oh, Old Ma! He's going on an overseas trip tomorrow—he won't be able to come here this evening.
 ZHAO: Oh? In that case we'll go in.
 QIAN: After you!
(QIAN and SUN go through the main entrance of the theatre). (THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO is called over by LI XIAOZHANG, who has been standing at the side of the stage, eavesdropping on their conversation.)
 LI: Hey, comrade!
 ZHAO: What do you want?
 LI: Do you have any tickets?
 ZHAO: No. None at all!
 LI: Aren't there any tickets in your hand?
 ZHAO: They are reserved tickets. For high level cadres.
 LI: Didn't you just say that Department Head Ma wasn't coming?
 ZHAO: Even if he doesn't come, I can't sell you his tickets.
 LI: If there are some unused tickets, why can't you sell them?
 ZHAO: Because they're reserved for high level cadres.

LI: What about that girl who just went in? Is she a high level cadre?

ZHAO: Her father is. Is yours?

(ZHAO goes into the theatre.)

LI: Damn! You can't even get to see a play without an important father!

(LI XIAOZHANG is about to leave, but, as he walks past the advertising poster, he stops. He keeps looking at the poster, unable to leave it. He thinks for a few moments, then walks to the side of the stage, where a telephone has appeared. He lifts the receiver and dials a number.)

LI: Hello? Backstage, please . . . I'm from the Propaganda Department of the Municipal Committee; I'm the Department Head—my name is Ma . . . right . . . I want to speak to Theatre Director Zhao. (Waits a few moments)—Yes, yes, it's me . . . Is that Theatre Director Zhao? . . . I'm going on an overseas trip tomorrow, so I won't be able to come and see your play tonight . . . Oh, Secretary Wu's wife told you . . . good. I'd like to ask you a favour . . . the son of one of my old comrades-in-arms in Peking would really like to see your play, but he just rang me to say he wasn't able to get a ticket—could you help him? . . . No problem? . . . Good. He only needs one ticket. His name is Zhang Xiaoli. You'll wait for him at the door? Good. He's not far from the theatre right now, so I'll tell him to go and see you.

(LI puts down the phone, and stands at the side of the stage, leaning against the wall, looking at the main entrance of the theatre.)

(In a few moments, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO comes running out of the entrance, a ticket in her hand. She stands in the middle of the crowd, looking around. After a while, she walks up to BYSTANDER E.)

ZHAO: Comrade—what's your name?

BYSTANDER E: Wu—what's it to you?

ZHAO: Oh! I'm sorry. (ZHAO approaches another member of the crowd, BYSTANDER F.)

ZHAO: Comrade—what's your name?

BYSTANDER F: Ji. Do you have any tickets?

ZHAO: No, no! None at all! (THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO looks at her watch, extremely anxious.)

(LI XIAOZHANG walks over to her.)

LI: Comrade, are you Theatre Director Zhao?

ZHAO: Yes, that's right. And you're . . .



LI: My name is Zhang Xiaoli.

ZHAO: (surprised) Eh? You?

LI: Yes. Did Department Head Ma phone you about me?

ZHAO: Yes, yes. Oh dear—why didn't you tell me before who you are. It's a misunderstanding! A misunderstanding! You shouldn't have disturbed Department Head Ma about such a little thing like this! In the future, whenever you need any tickets, just get in touch with me directly.

LI: I really am a terrible nuisance. A terrible nuisance.

ZHAO: Not at all. Department Head Ma introduced you . . . this is the least I can do . . . your father is Department Head Ma's . . .

LI: My father and Department Head Ma are old comrades-in-arms.

ZHAO: Oh, oh! Please go ahead. After you. After you. (THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO ushers LI inside the theatre. From then on, LI XIAOZHANG becomes ZHANG XIAOLI.)

BYSTANDER B: Hey! How come that fellow can get in?

ZHAO: His father is a high level cadre. Is yours?

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

The same evening, after the performance.

The VIP room of the theatre. A door at either side; one leading to the stage, the other backstage. Armchairs line the walls. Photographs of a performance of "The Inspector General" hang on one wall, and a poster advertising the same play hangs on the another wall.

As the curtain rises, enthusiastic applause from the audience, and the shuffling of feet as they leave the theatre can be heard.

THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO leads ZHANG XIAOLI into the VIP room through the door leading from the stage.

ZHAO: (*warmly*) Sit down, relax. Just sit anywhere. This theatre is not very comfortable—nothing like those in Peking, I suppose.

(A THEATRE ATTENDANT *brings in two cups of tea, gives them to ZHAO and ZHANG, and leaves.*)

ZHAO: Well, give me your valuable opinions!

ZHANG: (*sincerely*) It was very good. In fact, I've never seen such a good play.

ZHAO: Do you have any valuable suggestions?

ZHANG: Really, it's really very good. Er . . . I must go now . . .

ZHAO: Why don't you stay a while longer?

ZHANG: I really must go.

ZHAO: No, don't go yet. I told Division Head Qian and Section Head Sun that you were here. They want to meet you.

ZHANG: (*surprised*) They want to meet me?

ZHAO: They're just chatting with some of the actors backstage, but they'll be here in a moment.

ZHANG: No no no—er—leading comrades are so busy, I don't want to bother them.

(ZHANG *gets up and is about to go, but ZHAO, full of enthusiasm, stops him.*)

(The THEATRE ATTENDANT *brings in some refreshments, then leaves.*)

ZHAO: Just a while longer. Here, have some supper. (*She puts a cake in front of ZHANG.*)

Wouldn't you like something to eat? Here, try this. (ZHANG *has no choice but to sit down and eat the cake, but he appears uneasy.*)

ZHAO: How's the weather in Peking?

ZHANG: Not bad. It's snowing.

ZHAO: Snowing? In such hot weather?

ZHANG: No . . . er . . . I mean, it snows in winter. Like everywhere else in China. It snows in winter.

ZHAO: Yes, that's right. Why have you come down from Peking this time? Do you have a special assignment?

ZHANG: No. I try to avoid special assignments. They're a nuisance.

ZHAO: Did you come to see some friends?

ZHANG: Yes, that's right. I came to see some friends.

ZHAO: Did you have anything else in mind?

ZHANG: (*cautiously*) No, nothing else in mind.

The only reason I came to see you today was that I wanted to see this play, that's all.

ZHAO: What I meant was—do you have anything in particular to do—apart from seeing your friends, that is.

ZHANG: No. Just stroll around. See a few plays.

ZHAO: A few plays? Well, I've got plenty of tickets—(*takes out some tickets*)—here are some tickets for some "restricted movies"—American, Japanese, French . . . here, take all of them.

ZHANG: (*delighted*) Great. How much?

ZHAO: But you've come so far—from Peking—how could I charge you for them?

ZHANG: No, no—I couldn't.

ZHAO: The least I can do is to invite you to see a few movies.

ZHANG: (*taking the tickets*) I really couldn't take them . . . oh, I nearly forgot . . . (*He takes the bottle of maotai out of his satchel*) I don't really have anything suitable to give you, but . . . please accept this, Auntie Zhao.

ZHAO: *Maotai?*

ZHANG: It's nothing much.

ZHAO: But I don't drink.

ZHANG: Well, keep it—you can use it as a gift. Please take it—when I want to see a play again, I won't feel bad about coming to you for tickets!

ZHAO: (*taking the wine*) Now you're making me embarrassed! You must have bought this wine in a guesthouse, I suppose.

ZHANG: No, you can't even get it in the guesthouses. This is special quality. For export.

ZHAO: Oh? So it's even classier than ordinary *maotai*?

ZHANG: Well . . . you could say the taste is a bit different.

ZHAO: Does your father often drink this special quality *maotai*?

ZHANG: Oh yes. Often. At least thirty bottles a month.

ZHAO: Oh! And your father is

ZHANG: You mean, my father's

ZHAO: Is it confidential information?

ZHANG: No. Not to you.

ZHAO: Well—who is he?

ZHANG: Guess. My surname's Zhang.

ZHAO: Is your father Zhang Jingfu?¹

(ZHANG smiles mysteriously, and shakes his head.)

ZHAO: Zhang Qilong?²

(ZHANG shakes his head.)

ZHAO: Zhang Dingcheng?³

(ZHANG shakes his head.)

ZHAO: Then he must be . . . Zhang Tingfa?⁴

(ZHANG continues shaking his head.)

ZHAO: Aaah . . . Zhang Wentian?⁵ No, that can't be right. He's dead . . . oh yes! It must be Deputy Chief of Staff Zhang Caiqian!

(ZHANG continues to shake his head.)

ZHAO: Then he must be . . . er

ZHANG: Keep guessing. He's not Zhang Chunqiao.⁶

ZHAO: Of course not, of course not. He's . . . well —which one of our leading cadres is he?

ZHANG: He's just an ordinary cadre.

ZHAO: Impossible. He can't be. He must be a high level one. (Suddenly gets excited) Oooh—it must be

ZHANG: Who?

¹The Communist Party First Secretary of Anhui Province.

²A member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

³A member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

⁴Commander of the Army.

⁵Secretary of the Communist Party during the Long March.

⁶One of the "Gang of Four".

ZHAO: It's . . . (whispers in ZHANG's ear) Is that right?

ZHANG: What do you think?

ZHAO: It must be. I'm sure it is.

ZHANG: (laughing) Well, if you say so

ZHAO: (surprised, gleeful) Ah! So it's really him. Good Heavens! Such an important father! You're really lucky.

ZHANG: The sad thing is that not everyone can have such an important father.

ZHAO: Seeing your father is a former superior of Department Head Ma, he must know Secretary Wu, too.

ZHANG: Secretary Wu?

ZHAO: Don't you know him? Municipal Committee Secretary Wu.

ZHANG: Oh—Municipal Committee Secretary Wu? I've heard my father speak of him.

ZHAO: Secretary Wu's wife, Division Head Qian told me that, in the summer of 1953, when Secretary Wu went to Peking to attend a meeting, he went to your home to see your father. You were probably still a baby-in-arms then! On that occasion Secretary Wu presented your father with a rare and unusual cactus. Your father noticed that Secretary Wu was a heavy smoker, so he presented him with two cartons of exclusive cigarettes . . . Division Head Qian said that Secretary Wu hasn't seen your father for more than twenty years. I'd better go and find her. When I tell her who you are, she's sure to be thrilled. Just wait a minute. (ZHAO goes off through the door leading backstage.)

(ZHANG gazes in the direction ZHAO has just left, shaking his head. Then he takes a packet of cigarettes from the table, takes out one and puts it in his jacket pocket, and is about to sneak off. He quietly opens the door leading towards the stage, and is about to go. However, he takes one look outside, and quickly retreats into the room.)

(DIVISION HEAD QIAN and SECTION HEAD SUN arrive.)

(ZHANG XIAOLI, full of confidence and charm, walks over to welcome them.)

ZHANG: Auntie Qian!

QIAN: (surprised) Who . . . ?

ZHANG: Department Head Ma arranged for me to come here tonight to see the play.

- QIAN: Oh yes—I've heard about you . . . where's Theatre Director Zhao?
- ZHANG: She went out to look for you.
- QIAN: Sit down. Relax.
- ZHANG: How is Uncle Wu?
- QIAN: Not bad.
- ZHANG: Does he still smoke as much as he used to?
- QIAN: (*curiously*) You little devil! How did you know about that?
- ZHANG: My father told me. He's given up smoking, now. He said Uncle Wu should cut down a bit, too.
- QIAN: (*confused*) Your father? Oh . . . is your father well?
- ZHANG: Yes. But he's so busy, he doesn't have time for gardening nowadays. But he still likes that cactus Uncle Wu gave him in 1953, when he went to Peking to attend a meeting.
- QIAN: (*delighted*) Oh! So you're . . . —oh—why didn't you tell me? No wonder you even know about Secretary Wu's smoking habits!
- (SECTION HEAD SUN *turns towards* QIAN, *enquiringly*. QIAN *whispers in* SUN's ear.)
- SUN: (*greatly surprised*) Oh! (SUN *hurriedly sits down, at one side*.)
- QIAN: Well, that's marvellous. Come on now, come over here. (*She pulls* ZHANG *towards her, and sits him down at her side*.) How many children are there in your family now? Are you the oldest?
- ZHANG: When Uncle Wu went to Peking in 1953, I was still a baby-in-arms.
- QIAN: So you must be . . . the fifth child . . .
- ZHANG: Yes, that's right. I'm the fifth in the family.
- QIAN: You little devil! What's your name?
- ZHANG: You can call me Little Zhang, if you like. (ZHAO *comes hurrying through the door leading from the backstage*.)
- ZHAO: Ah, Sister Qian! Ah . . . you know each other already!
- QIAN: Of course we do! Secretary Wu knew his father more than twenty years ago—Secretary Wu even carried him in his arms. Sister Zhao, do you know who his father is?
- ZHAO: Oh yes. I know. I guessed.
- QIAN: You needed to guess? One look and you can tell! Just look how much he resembles his father!
- SUN: My word! A striking resemblance! The spitting image!
- QIAN: Sister Zhao, he can stay with Secretary Wu and me, as our guest. Be sure to invite him to see some plays!
- ZHANG: Auntie Qian, you must have a lot to do. I'd better be off now.
- QIAN: There's no hurry.
- ZHANG: But I have to fly back to Peking tomorrow.
- QIAN: Why don't you stay a little longer?
- ZHAO: You've got tickets for some "restricted movies" next week!
- ZHANG: I'll catch a plane back, just to see them. Auntie Qian, I'll come and see you next time, too.
- QIAN: Don't go yet. Stay a little longer. (*She draws* ZHANG *closer to her, and sits him down*.) We haven't had a chance to have a chat yet. Why did you come down from Peking this time?
- ZHANG: I came to see a friend.
- QIAN: A girlfriend?
- ZHANG: No—a young man.
- ZHAO: Oh, you're fibbing!
- ZHANG: I never lie.
- QIAN: Where is your friend?
- ZHANG: At the East Sea State Farm.
- QIAN: Oh. Hasn't he been transferred back yet?
- ZHANG: His father's just an ordinary worker—he hasn't got the right connections—I'm really very worried about him.
- ZHAO: Why don't you get your father to use his connections?
- ZHANG: But my father doesn't know the Farm Director.
- ZHAO: (*suddenly remembering*) Section Head Sun—aren't you an old comrade-in-arms of Old Zheng, the Farm Director of the East Sea State Farm?
- SUN: Mmm. Yes. That's right.
- ZHAO: Well then, Little Zhang. You can ask Section Head Sun to call on Farm Director Zheng, asking him to pay particular attention to this matter.
- SUN: (*embarrassed*) Er (ZHAO *makes a sign to* ZHANG XIAOLI, *suggesting he say something to* DIVISION HEAD QIAN.)
- ZHANG: Auntie Qian, do you think we could



bother Uncle Sun with this matter?
 QIAN: Come on, Old Sun. Why don't you just pop over there?
 SUN: (*quickly*) Oh, very well then. I'll try. Mmm ... what's his name?
 ZHANG: His name is Li Xiaozhang. He's in the May Seventh Brigade.
 SUN: (*writing in his notebook*) All right.
 ZHANG: (*surprised and extremely happy, but not changing his expression*) That's great. If Uncle Sun can help Li Xiaozhang get transferred off the farm—I won't go back to Peking for the time being.
 QIAN: That's good. Stay here a while longer. Enjoy yourself for a few more days.
 ZHANG: Uncle Sun, when do you think I can hear from you—about this matter?
 SUN: Em Come to my place in a week.
 ZHANG: All right. I'll call on you in a week's time then.
 QIAN: Well, that's that. Where are you staying now, Little Zhang?
 ZHANG: (*off the top of his head*) The South Lake Guesthouse.
 QIAN: Your room number?

ZHANG: Room 102.
 QIAN: Seeing you're not going back to Peking yet, you'd better come and stay with us.
 ZHANG: No no no . . . the guesthouse is just fine.
 QIAN: My home is not bad, either!
 ZHANG: But I'll have to check out . . . it's a lot of bother . . . forget it
 QIAN: It's no bother to check out. (*Lifts the receiver*) I'll speak to them.
 ZHANG: (*hurriedly taking the receiver*) No, I'll do it. You just sit down. Don't you bother about this.
 QIAN: Do you know their number?
 ZHANG: Yes. (*ZHANG dials a number at random.*)
 (*A telephone appears at the side of the stage. A middle aged man answers.*)
 ZHANG: Hello? Is that the South Lake Guesthouse?
 MAN: What? South Lake Guesthouse? No! This is the Funeral Parlour!
 ZHANG: (*nodding his head to QIAN, indicating that he has been connected*) My name is Zhang. Room 102.
 MAN: You've dialled the wrong number. This is the Funeral Parlour.

ZHANG: Oh, Comrade Ba Le... No, nothing wrong... just that I won't be spending tonight in my room, that's all.

MAN: *(talking to himself)* Eh? Since when have I been called Comrade Ba Le? *(Into the telephone)* My name's Ding!

ZHANG: My things? Oh, never mind. I'll pick them up in a few days.

MAN: *(exasperated)* Are you crazy? Is this some sort of joke? It's getting on for midnight. Come on now, what are you after?

ZHANG: My father? Oh, no letters? No telegrams? Nothing at all?

MAN: *(shouting)* You must be off your rocker! *(Slams the phone down, and leaves.)*

ZHANG: You're too kind! Thank you, thank you very much. *(He hangs up.)* The service there is really excellent.

ZHAO: Of course—so it should be, it's one of the top guesthouses!

QIAN: *(rising to her feet)* Come along then, Little Zhang.

ZHANG: Coming. Uncle Sun, I'll get some news from you in a week, I hope.

SUN: All right. All right.

(ZHANG gleefully pounds SUN on the shoulder. Suddenly he remembers who he is supposed to be, and quickly pulls back his hand, smiling sheepishly.)

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

One week afterwards.

Morning.

SECTION HEAD SUN's lounge-room. There is a door on either side, one leading to the bedroom, the other to the kitchen. In the middle there is a third door, leading to a veranda and the courtyard. In the room there is a colour television set, a console radio set, a sofa, a rattan reclining chair, a low table and a telephone.

The curtain rises. ZHOU MINGHUA is barefoot, her trousers rolled up, kneeling on the floor, scrubbing it. She has obviously been working for a long time, and is covered in sweat. Suddenly she feels nauseous and is about to vomit, but, with a great effort, she restrains herself. She rests for a few moments, then continues scrubbing the floor. SECTION HEAD SUN comes in from the veranda and walks into the lounge room.

SUN: *(dissatisfied)* Oh, really! This is a waxed floor. How can you scrub it with water?

(ZHOU MINGHUA is surprised. She is at a loss.)

SUN: There are guests coming for dinner today—just look at what you've done. Oh well. All right. You may as well stop now.

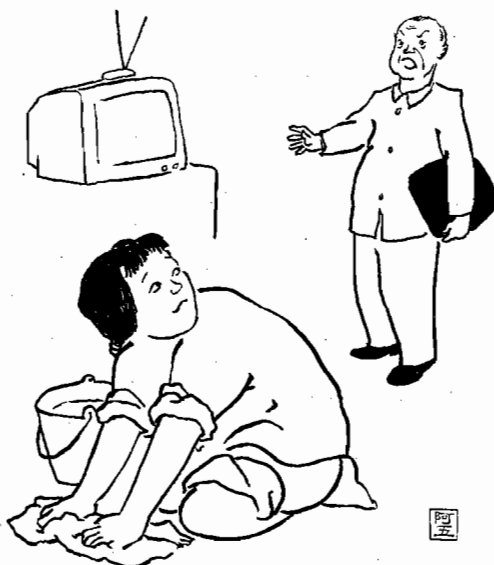
(ZHOU MINGHUA picks up the bucket and the mop, and walks through the door to the kitchen. JUANJUAN comes in through the other door, carrying a book.)

JUANJUAN: Hello, Daddy! You're back!

SUN: Have you just got up?

JUANJUAN: I woke up at nine, but stayed in bed. I was reading a novel.

SUN: You really know how to enjoy life! Just because your mother's not at home, you even employed a servant!



- JUANJUAN: I didn't.
- SUN: Well, who was that scrubbing the floor just now?
- JUANJUAN: Oh—she's a friend of mine—from school.
- SUN: From school?
- JUANJUAN: She's very capable. Rough work, delicate work—she's good at everything. Just look (*pointing at her skirt*) she made me this skirt yesterday. She said she's going to knit me a sweater, too.
- SUN: Eh? How is it that I haven't seen her here before?
- JUANJUAN: She's come here because she's after a favour—from you.
- SUN: (*annoyed*) I'm already too busy!
(ZHOU MINGHUA enters, carrying a big basket of clothes.)
- JUANJUAN: Minghua, come over here. Let me introduce you. This is my father.
- ZHOU: Hello, Uncle Sun.
- JUANJUAN: Her name is Zhou Minghua. She was transferred back from the countryside last year, and now she works at a cotton mill.
- SUN: Oh... I thought you'd come to.... (*He points at the clothes-basket ZHOU MINGHUA is carrying.*) Put it down! Let Juanjuan do the washing!
- JUANJUAN: Really. How can I wash so much? I told you to buy a washing machine, but you still haven't bought me one. You'd better send them to the laundry!
- ZHOU: (*worried that she might miss the chance to wash the clothes*)—No no no! I'll wash them.... (*ZHOU is about to leave, carrying the clothes basket.*)
- JUANJUAN: Just a minute, Minghua. Daddy!
- SUN: What do you want?
- JUANJUAN: Minghua has a boyfriend—he's still in the countryside. They've known each other for years, and they'd like to get married, but her father won't agree to it. He insists that her boyfriend must get transferred back from the countryside before he'll agree. I feel so sorry for her. Do try to think of a way to help her!
- SUN: She's your friend. You go and talk to her father—a bit of "ideological persuasion", eh! Tell her father that his attitude is incorrect, that in our country there's no distinction between high and low occupations—all work, whether on the farm or in a factory, is the same—all work "serves the people" and all workers have a bright future.
- JUANJUAN: You make it seem so simple—you go and tell him! As if anybody is willing to listen to that sort of stuff nowadays!
- SUN: Well, they can wait a couple of years before getting married. Her boyfriend will be transferred back sooner or later, I suppose.
- ZHOU: Uncle Sun—we can't wait....
- SUN: You're still young—you should concentrate on your work and your studies.
- JUANJUAN: Daddy, don't be like that! You know the Director of the East Sea State Farm, Farm Director Zheng, don't you? Just a few words will do—just ring him up, even!
- SUN: How can you ask your father to do such a thing? I'm a government official—how could I do anything so unprincipled?
- ZHOU: Juanjuan, I think we'd better forget it. We shouldn't give Uncle Sun so much trouble.
- JUANJUAN: He's just putting on an act. All right then (*she takes the clothes basket off ZHOU MINGHUA and thrusts it in SUN's hands*)—you go and wash these clothes, then! She's been helping us so much for the past few days, but it's all been for nothing!
- SUN: You, you.... Come on, now. We'll talk about it another time (*He takes JUANJUAN to one side.*) I have some guests coming from Peking. Pekingese like to eat *mantou*—go and buy some for me, will you?
- JUANJUAN: It's too far! I'm not going.
- SUN: Use the car.
- JUANJUAN: I want to read.
- ZHOU: Juanjuan—what's the matter?
- JUANJUAN: He wants me to go and buy some *mantou*.
- ZHOU: Uncle Sun, you don't need to buy them. I know how to make them.
- SUN: Oh? Good. Off you go to the kitchen then. But be sure to have them ready by midday.
- ZHOU: I will.
- JUANJUAN: Minghua, you're marvellous.
(ZHOU MINGHUA leaves, by the door leading to the kitchen.)
- JUANJUAN: Daddy, you're rotten. People help you so much, but you're not willing to help them.
- SUN: Juanjuan—when you're talking in front of people outside our own family you should

watch what you say.
 JUANJUAN: Everything I said is true.
 SUN: But you have to consider the circumstances.
 JUANJUAN: So when you're telling the truth you have to "consider the circumstances", do you? What about when you're telling lies?
 SUN: Who's been telling lies?
 JUANJUAN: You. I hear you telling lies all day.
 SUN: You . . . ! You're getting worse and worse. Wait till your mother gets back. I'll get her to take you in hand!
 JUANJUAN: *I'm not afraid of Mummy. You're the one who's afraid of her!*
 SUN: You, you . . . what can I do with you? Nothing at all. *(SUN shakes his head, resignedly, and leaves by the door to the bedroom.)*
(JUANJUAN sits on the sofa, and starts to read her book.)
 JUANJUAN: Minghua . . . what are you doing?
(ZHOU MINGHUA's voice from offstage: Kneading the dough.)
 JUANJUAN: Come and sit with me.
(ZHOU comes in, carrying a basin of flour.)
 JUANJUAN: Mummy's not home—I have to rely on you for everything.
 ZHOU: It doesn't matter. If you and your father are able to get my boyfriend back from the countryside, I'll do anything for you!
 JUANJUAN: Don't worry. My father's just putting on a righteous front. At the moment he's busy making some arrangements for me. When that's fixed, I'll talk to him again.
 ZHOU: Arrangements for you? But you were transferred back long ago.
 JUANJUAN: My husband's still in the North-East. A few days ago my mother went up there, carrying a letter Daddy got some VIP to write for him. She's going to see my husband's boss, so as to get my husband transferred back there.
 ZHOU: What are his chances?
 JUANJUAN: Daddy will be able to fix it.
 ZHOU: I really envy you.
 JUANJUAN: Your boyfriend will be transferred back, too. Minghua—I haven't met your boyfriend yet. Is he handsome?
 ZHOU: *(shyly)* Just ordinary.
 JUANJUAN: Do you love him very much?
 ZHOU: I used to
 JUANJUAN: Used to?
 ZHOU: When he first arrived at the farm he was

marvellous—idealistic, intelligent, able to turn his mind to anything—he was good at acting, too. But afterwards life on the farm got worse and worse, and the ones with connections managed to get transferred out. According to the official policy, he should have been transferred back the year before last, but his place was taken by other people, and he became very despondent. He took up smoking and drinking, and he's been getting
 JUANJUAN: So you don't love him any more?
 ZHOU: It's not that. I think he'll get better.
(THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO enters, from the veranda.)
 ZHAO: Juanjuan!
 JUANJUAN: Auntie Zhao!
(ZHOU MINGHUA leaves.)
 ZHAO: Look. I've bought you some tickets.
 JUANJUAN: Oh—that's great!
 ZHAO: *(holding out the tickets)* These are all for foreign movies. Restricted circulation. For reference purposes.
 JUANJUAN: *(taking the tickets)* Do you have any more?
 ZHAO: You're really greedy! There are three hundred people in our Company, and we only get ten tickets for each movie. Everybody scrambles for them as soon as they arrive and there are always awful fights—but I've given you two tickets for each film—aren't you satisfied?
 JUANJUAN: Oh yes. Thank you, Auntie Zhao.
 ZHAO: Where's your father?
 JUANJUAN: Inside. *(calls out)* Daddy! Auntie Zhao's here! *(JUANJUAN leaves.)*
(SECTION HEAD SUN enters, from the bedroom.)
 SUN: *(coolly)* Oh? What are you doing here today?
 ZHAO: Didn't you say you'd have news for that Little Zhang from Peking within a week?
 SUN: *(unhappily)* So you're involved in this, too?
 ZHAO: Just making a little extra effort. Everyone knows what a concerned person I am. *(She takes the bottle of maotai out of her satchel)* I managed to get this for you.
 SUN: *(surprised and gleeful, but suddenly looks serious)* What's this for?
 ZHAO: I don't drink, and there's no point leaving it at home. I know you like *maotai* so I've brought it for you.



SUN: I don't like people to be . . . like that . . .

ZHAO: You're right. If it were any other sort of wine, I wouldn't have brought it. But this isn't just ordinary *maotai*. It's specially made for export—I think it has some sort of tonic in it.

SUN: Oh? Specially made? It's not ordinary *maotai*?

ZHAO: Of course not. It wasn't easy to get hold of.

SUN: Well . . . all right, just put it down there. But I insist, I must pay for it.

ZHAO: If you offer me money, I'll take it back!

SUN: (*laughing*) You! Very well then, we'll talk about it later. (*SUN puts the maotai in a cupboard.*)

ZHAO: Now—what about Little Zhang?

SUN: We'll talk about it when he arrives.

ZHAO: (*enquiringly*) Has Juanjuan's husband been transferred back from the North-East yet?

SUN: Don't listen to Juanjuan's prattle. I don't do that kind of thing.

(*Silence*)

ZHAO: Section Head Sun—about my accommodation . . .

SUN: Haven't I told you already? There's nothing

I can do about it.

ZHAO: But you're the Section Head!

SUN: Your flat is perfectly satisfactory—why do you need a bigger one? You're a party member and a government official. What about "hard work and plain living", eh?

ZHAO: But some people who joined the revolution when I did already have more than seventy square metres living space!

SUN: There will always be differences . . .

ZHAO: Section Head Sun!

SUN: You'd be better off talking to the Propaganda Department of the Municipal Committee!

ZHAO: (*takes out a report*) I've written a report on the matter. Would you mind passing it on to Department Head Ma?

SUN: Department Head Ma's gone overseas.

ZHAO: Well, give it to his secretary.

SUN: That's no good. If I pass it on, that implies that I approve. I think we should let this matter rest for a while.

ZHAO: What about Little Zhang's problem? Aren't you dealing with that?

SUN: That was given me directly by the wife of

- the Secretary of the Municipal Committee herself. If my superiors gave me the nod about your problem, I could fix that, too.
- ZHAO: Section Head Sun.
(The phone rings. SUN is about to answer it when JUANJUAN runs in from the door on the right.)
- JUANJUAN: Daddy, I'll get it. *(Lifts the phone)*
Yes, yes—that's right. *(Excitedly, to SUN)*
Daddy, it's a long distance call from Mummy, in the North-East!
- SUN: Don't make such a racket! *(To ZHAO)* Come on, come along and sit down inside . . .
- ZHAO: All right then. *(She stands up slowly, then suddenly deliberately twists her ankle)* Ouch! *(She nimbly falls back onto the sofa again)*
Oooh!
- SUN: What's up?
- ZHAO: I've twisted my ankle.
- SUN: How opportune.
- JUANJUAN: Is it serious?
- ZHAO: I'll have to massage it. *(ZHAO massages her ankle.)*
(SUN is extremely agitated.)
- JUANJUAN: *(into the phone)* Mummy? It's me, Juanjuan! . . . What? . . . The letter Daddy got that VIP to write was very useful? . . . Marvellous . . . Great! They've agreed to transfer him back? *(Excitedly, to SUN)* Daddy! Did you hear? Did you hear?
- ZHAO: Section Head Sun, Juanjuan's asking you whether you heard or not?
- SUN: Hang up! Hang up!
- JUANJUAN: *(into the telephone)* Oh . . . good. *(Hangs up, to SUN)* Mummy said that they've agreed to let him go, but you must get the transfer arranged here, and send the forms to them immediately.
- SUN: I'm not responsible for your affairs. None of you! It's none of my business!
- JUANJUAN: None of your business? Ha! *(JUANJUAN leaves through the door on the right.)*
(SUN is very angry. He is about to leave through the door on the left. The sound of a car horn outside is heard.)
- SUN: *(turns to THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO, in an urgent tone)* Do you have anything else?
- ZHAO: *(pretending to be in pain)* Oooh! My poor ankle.
(SUN leaves via the door to the veranda.)
- (In a few moments, SUN and ZHANG XIAOLI enter, together. ZHANG is carrying a platter of fruit.)*
- ZHANG: Uncle Sun, Auntie Qian asked me to give you this platter of fruit.
- SUN: Oh! When you go back, please thank Division Head Qian for me.
- ZHANG: It's only a small gift. No need to say thank you.
- ZHAO: Hello, Little Zhang!
- ZHANG: Auntie Zhao! Nice to see you again!
- ZHAO: Come and sit down.
(ZHANG XIAOLI sits on the sofa.)
- SUN: *(offering ZHANG a cigarette)* Would you like a cigarette?
- ZHANG: No, thanks all the same. *(Takes out an exclusive brand)* Try one of these! *(ZHANG hands the cigarettes to SECTION HEAD SUN and THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO.)*
- ZHAO: Did you come by car?
- ZHANG: Yeah. Secretary Wu's car.
- ZHAO: Oh? Secretary Wu's car?
- ZHANG: Uncle Wu's gone to Huang Shan⁷ to attend a meeting. He left the day I shifted in. Auntie Qian's letting me use his car.
- SUN: So you haven't met Secretary Wu yet?
- ZHANG: He doesn't even know I'm here.
- ZHAO: Auntie Qian is very good to you.
- ZHANG: She has no children, so she's treating me like her own son. Uncle Sun, Auntie Qian asked me to ask you if you've fixed up that matter yet?
- SUN: *(embarrassed)* It's not so easy.
- ZHANG: *(attentively)* Why's that?
- SUN: I went to see Farm Director Zheng yesterday. He said that the whole business of transferrals back from the countryside and people jumping the queue has been in a terrible mess recently, so much so that it's come under criticism from the Municipal Committee. At the moment they're taking disciplinary measures and re-organizing the system, and all transferrals have been temporarily halted.
- ZHAO: What a lot of bureaucratic humbug!
- ZHANG: Didn't you tell him that Li Xiaozhang is a special case, and that his case had been given to you personally by the wife of the Secretary of the Municipal Committee?

⁷A famous mountain resort.

- SUN: I told him, but it did no good. Farm Director Zheng said that it was Secretary Wu himself who issued the order to "close the door". If we want to open the door again—either the front door or the back door—we'll need a note, personally signed by Secretary Wu.
- ZHANG: Is it absolutely necessary to get a note signed by Secretary Wu?
- SUN: Well, as they say, "an oral order offers no proof" and he's worried that if there's an investigation afterwards, he'll be in trouble.
- ZHANG: Do you mean to say that the word of the wife of the Secretary of the Municipal Committee counts for nought? Hmmph! All right, I'll go and tell Auntie Qian
- SUN: Little Zhang, just wait a minute
- ZHANG: I've already waited a week!
- SUN: Without that note . . . no one will take the responsibility!
- ZHAO: I've heard Sister Qian say that Secretary Wu is a man of very high principles. Perhaps he won't be prepared to sign such a note.
- SUN: I'm afraid that's right.
- ZHANG: Auntie Zhao—what can we do?
(*Silence*)
- ZHAO: (*pensively*) I think we'll just have to get your father involved.
- ZHANG: What's that?
- ZHAO: You could tell Secretary Wu that Li Xiaozhang has a "special relationship" with your father.
- ZHANG: What sort of special relationship?
- ZHAO: (*suddenly inspired*) He saved your father's life!
- ZHANG: He saved my father's life?
- ZHAO: Yes! (*Thinking out loud, getting more and more excited*) Tell him that when the Cultural Revolution started, Li Xiaozhang went to Peking to "exchange revolutionary experiences" with other Red Guards . . . um . . . and that he just happened to see your father being beaten, and that he saved his life, and hid him, and . . . um . . . hid him for several months. When your father's name was cleared, and he was reinstated, he still remembered this, and is very grateful to him, so that's why he's sent you specially to ask Secretary Wu to help Li Xiaozhang get transferred off the farm. As soon as Secretary Wu hears you've been sent by your father, and that Li Xiaozhang once protected him, he might very well sign that paper.
(*Pleased with herself*) What about that?
- ZHANG: (*nodding his head*) Uncle Sun, what do you think?
- SUN: Well, it will do no harm to try. No harm at all.
- ZHANG: All right then. Auntie Zhao, thank you for thinking up such a good story. I'm sure Secretary Wu will sign.
- SUN: If he does, the rest will be easy to arrange.
(*A restaurant attendant comes in, carrying a multi-tiered food container.*)
- SUN: Just put it over there!
(*The attendant sets the food out on the table, and leaves.*)
- SUN: We have no adequate way of entertaining you, Little Zhang, but we'd like you to have a simple meal with us here. I'll see if the *mantou* are ready yet. Please sit down, everyone. (SUN leaves via the door on the right.)
- ZHAO: It's a pity my flat is so small—otherwise I'd invite you home for a meal, too.
- ZHANG: How big is your flat?
- ZHAO: Oh, don't talk about it—it's so small—three people living in just over fifty square metres. I've written a report on it, applying to exchange it for a larger one, but I'm afraid our leading comrades are so busy, they have had no time to deal with it . . . Little Zhang . . . I wonder if you could help me to get my request directly to Department Head Ma . . . or, better still, give it directly to Secretary Wu . . . Yes? Just mention my housing problem to him, in passing—just a word from Secretary Wu will solve everything.
- ZHANG: All right. No problem. Leave it to me.
- ZHAO: (*handing over the report to ZHANG*) Thank you so much.
- ZHANG: It's I who should thank you.
(*SECTION HEAD SUN comes in, from the door on the right.*)
- SUN: The *mantou* will be ready soon. Come and sit down.
- ZHAO: Section Head Sun, I'll have to leave now.
- ZHANG: Are you leaving now?
- ZHAO: My ankle's better now, so there's no reason for me to stay.
- SUN: Well, don't let me detain you.
- ZHAO: Goodbye. See you later. (ZHAO leaves through the door leading to the veranda.)

SUN: Little Zhang, did Theatre Director Zhao ask you to do something for her?

ZHANG: Oh, only a minor matter. To hand over a report. About her accommodation.

SUN: Little Zhang, you belong to a family of high officials—you should pay attention to the impression you make on people. You really oughtn't agree to help people who come to you directly, asking you to fix things for them, instead of going through the correct channels.

ZHANG: It doesn't matter. I always help whenever I can.

SUN: (*surprised and gleeful*) Oh? Really?

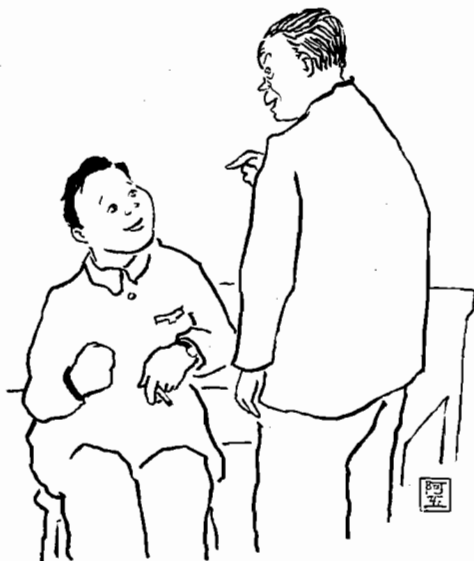
ZHANG: Really. Uncle Sun, if I can help you in any way, just say the word.

SUN: Er (*He is about to say something, but stops*) No no no—it's so embarrassing to trouble you.

ZHANG: Come on now, it's not as if we were strangers—what are you afraid of?

SUN: Er I have a son-in-law—in the North-East. His unit there has already agreed to let him come back, but we have to arrange the transfer from here

ZHANG: Ah. Yes. All right, all right. Just write a report about it, and I'll say a few words to Secretary Wu—no problem



SUN: Oh, good. I'll write it immediately.

(SECTION HEAD SUN *excitedly leaves from the door on the left.*)

(ZHANG XIAOLI *walks around admiring the furniture and fittings in SECTION HEAD SUN's apartment.*)

(ZHOU MINGHUA *brings in the mantou and puts them on the table. She is about to leave when she notices ZHANG XIAOLI. She stops, trying to make out who he is. At last she realizes it is LI XIAOZHANG.*)

ZHOU: Li Xiaozhang!

(ZHANG XIAOLI *jumps with surprise.*)

ZHOU: Li Xiaozhang!

(ZHANG XIAOLI *slowly turns his head.*)

ZHOU: Li Xiaozhang—it is you!

ZHANG: (*extremely surprised*) Minghua! (*He runs over to her.*) What are you doing here?

ZHOU: It's all for you.

ZHANG: For me?

ZHOU: I used to go to school with Section Head Sun's daughter.

ZHANG: (*realizing what she means*) Oh (*He looks ZHOU MINGHUA up and down; he is obviously moved. Full of gratitude, he takes MINGHUA by the hand.*) Minghua, you (*ZHANG takes out his handkerchief, and lovingly wipes away the sweat on her forehead.*)

ZHOU: And what are you doing here?

ZHANG: Don't ask me that now. I'll tell you later. (*JUANJUAN comes in through the door on the left.*)

JUANJUAN: Minghua!

(ZHANG XIAOLI *and* ZHOU MINGHUA *hurriedly separate.*)

ZHANG: (*goes over to greet JUANJUAN*) You must be Juanjuan!

JUANJUAN: Yes, I am. Hello! Er—Minghua—do you know him?

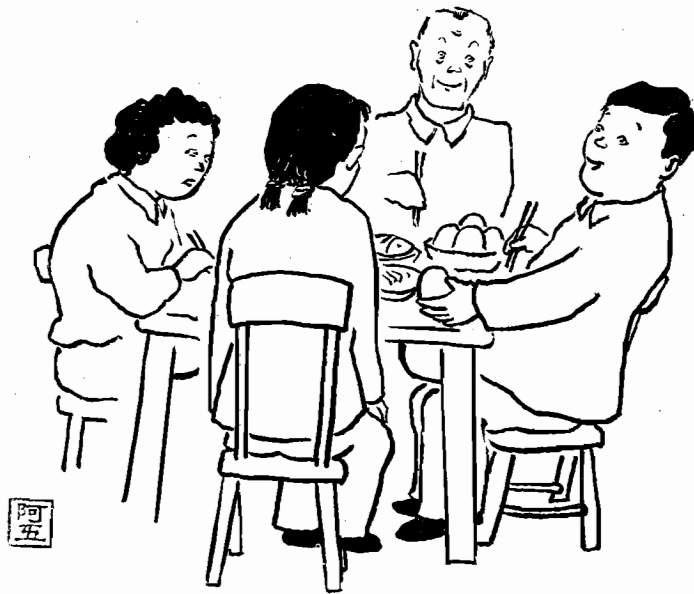
ZHOU: He's my boyfriend

ZHANG: (*hurriedly interrupts her again*) Her boyfriend's friend—Li Xiaozhang's friend.

JUANJUAN: What? Do you know Li Xiaozhang?

ZHOU: He's

ZHANG: Li Xiaozhang is a "rusticated intellectual youth" assigned to the East Sea State Farm; he's the same age as I am, and looks a bit like me. I've known him for a long time. I've come down from Peking, to try to get him transferred off the farm, back to the city.



JUANJUAN: Oh? Great! Minghua, his father is a high-level cadre—he's got more ways and means than my father has!

ZHOU: His father is a high-level cadre?

JUANJUAN: You didn't know? I just heard my father say so.

ZHOU: Eh?

ZHANG: I suppose you didn't realize . . .

ZHOU: You . . .!

ZHANG: I'm doing this for Li Xiaozhang and you!

JUANJUAN: That's great. I'll go and tell my father that the matter's fixed! (JUANJUAN runs off through the left door.)

ZHOU: (angrily) Li Xiaozhang! How can you deceive people like this?

ZHANG: Minghua, they're also deceiving people. Don't be so naïve.

ZHOU: But it's not right!

ZHANG: Don't you want me to find a way of getting transferred off the farm?

ZHOU: It's still not right to go about things this way.

ZHANG: Well, what way is there then? You want me to marry you as soon as possible, don't you? Didn't you say you can't wait?

ZHOU: (calming down, to herself) That's right. We can't wait much longer . . .

(SECTION HEAD SUN and JUANJUAN enter

through the left hand door.)

JUANJUAN: My father's finished it. You're really great—able to solve two problems at once. No wonder my father's invited you to a meal!

SUN: Come on, come on, all sit down.

(SUN, JUANJUAN and ZHANG XIAOLI sit down. ZHOU MINGHUA is about to leave through the door on the right.)

ZHANG: Zhou Minghua!

(ZHOU stops.)

JUANJUAN: That's right, Minghua is here too—why don't you join us . . . ?

SUN: Juanjuan!

ZHANG: Uncle Sun—she's Li Xiaozhang's girlfriend—and she's a friend of mine, too.

SUN: Oh! Well, in that case, let's all sit down, then, together . . .

ZHANG: Uncle Sun, move the table over here. Juanjuan, you sit here. Uncle Sun, you sit here.

(Goes over to ZHOU MINGHUA, and leads her over.) Minghua, you sit here.

(ZHOU MINGHUA sits at the table, her body slanted to one side, not daring to move.)

ZHANG: (passing a mantou to ZHOU MINGHUA) Eat them while they're hot!

(ZHOU MINGHUA lifts her head, and stares in amazement at ZHANG XIAOLI.)

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV

A week later, in the morning.

The home of the Secretary of the Municipal Committee, SECRETARY WU.

What does a Municipal Secretary's home look like? Unfortunately, the authors of this play, and the vast majority of the audience watching it, have never been to one, so there's no way of knowing.

If the homes of Municipal Committee Secretaries were not so heavily protected, such absolutely forbidden places, such deep inner sanctums (as they always have been), but instead were places where Comrade Municipal Party Secretaries could be visited by anybody, where ordinary folk could be invited for a meal . . . then the authors would not have to make such outrageous guesses as to what the inside of a Municipal Committee's Secretary's home looks like.

As the curtain rises, ZHANG XIAOLI is sitting in the lounge room, reading a book.

DIVISION HEAD QIAN arrives.

QIAN: Little Zhang! You're up already!

ZHANG: Hello, Auntie Qian. Is Uncle Wu up yet?

QIAN: Not yet. The meeting at Huang Shan lasted two weeks—he's dead tired. He only got back last night, so I'm letting him sleep in a little this morning.

ZHANG: Have you mentioned Li Xiaozhang to him yet?

QIAN: Yes.

ZHANG: What did he say?

QIAN: He said that the decision to suspend the transfers back from the countryside for the time being, and to clean up the business of people coming back out of turn, was a decision of the whole Municipal Committee—he can't disregard it.

ZHANG: Oh? Did you tell him that Li Xiaozhang protected my father—that he has a special relationship with my father?

QIAN: I told him. I told him that Li Xiaozhang had saved your father's life—even that he himself had been wounded while protecting your father. I made the story more detailed than the version I heard—even more realistic! *(Laughing)* I even had myself believing it!

ZHANG: What did Uncle Wu say?

QIAN: He said that even though Li Xiaozhang has

a special relationship with your father, one can't use one's personal feeling to sabotage Party policy.

ZHANG: It's not that serious!

QIAN: The old man's just like that—"scrupulous and methodical"—always quoting some policy or other. He's the same with me. On his trip to Huang Shan this year, I asked him to bring me back a monkey—a Golden Hair Monkey—but he absolutely refused. Another thing—the Central Committee's going to send a large delegation overseas soon—I asked him to get me included in the quota—a couple of places would be better—so that we could both go on an overseas tour, but he wouldn't agree to that! I'm afraid he really does suffer from "ultra-leftist thinking"—he really hasn't liberated his thoughts at all!

ZHANG: So it seems there's no hope at all for Li Xiaozhang.

QIAN: If only you had come a month or two earlier—before the Municipal Committee made its decision—it would have been easy to fix.

ZHANG: But how was I to know that? Sometimes they tighten up, sometimes they relax, sometimes they allow some liberalization, and then they draw the reins in again . . . I've already written to Li Xiaozhang, and gave him a guarantee his problem would be solved. But now I'll have to . . . *(He suddenly starts sobbing.)*

QIAN: You poor devil—don't worry, don't worry! I'll think of something.

ZHANG: It doesn't matter—but when my father finds out that this matter was not resolved, I'm afraid he might have something to say . . .

QIAN: Don't tell your father yet. All they've done is to stop transfers for the time being. Wait until this phase is over, and I'll make sure that Li Xiaozhang is the first to be transferred back.

(SECRETARY WU enters, from an inside room.)

WU: What's up?

QIAN: Just look! You won't agree to sign that note, and the poor devil's started crying!

ZHANG: *(wiping his tears with a handkerchief)* Uncle Wu!!

WU: It's hard for you to understand, isn't it? This

- matter's not easy to handle—it would make a bad impression—it would be no good for that “intellectual youth” of yours, or for your father, or for you.
- QIAN: Aren't you worried his father might have something to say, if you carry on like this?
- WU: We're having difficulties here. I might ring him up this evening, and explain the situation to him.
- ZHANG: (*surprised*) You want to telephone my father?
- WU: What do you think? I haven't seen him for more than twenty years—just a quick phone call to pass on my best wishes. (*Paying closer attention to ZHANG's expression*) Don't you think that's a good idea?
- ZHANG: (*quickly regaining his cool*) Of course it is. Then he won't blame me for this, and think I'm not able to fix things. All right, Uncle Wu, let's do it that way. Well, you must be busy (*ZHANG is about to leave.*)
- WU: Where are you going?
- ZHANG: I've been going to the movies every night for the past few nights, and I'm feeling tired. I think I'll take a nap.
- WU: Stay a while, come on now. Sit down. Would you like a cigarette? (*Gives him a cigarette*) Here you are.
- ZHANG: Thanks. I'll help myself.
- WU: You were born and brought up in Peking, I suppose?
- ZHANG: Yeah.
- WU: No wonder your Mandarin is so good. Where did your father come from?
- ZHANG: My father?
- WU: Mmm.
- QIAN: You silly old fool—his father's from Sichuan—who doesn't know that?
- WU: Just making conversation
- ZHANG: Auntie Qian's right. Dad's from Sichuan.
- WU: And he joined the revolution in 1934, it must have been
- QIAN: How could it have been in 1934?
- WU: (*interrupting QIAN*) You know everything, don't you!!
- ZHANG: Uncle Wu, your memory's let you down. It wasn't 1934, it was 1924. He joined the Party in June, 1925 and went to Jingtangshan⁸
- in October, 1927. In 1928 he was promoted to platoon leader, in 1929 he became a regimental commander, he was wounded in 1930, in 1931 he
- QIAN: Oh, damn. Why does the old fool want to know all this? (*She hands the book ZHANG has just been reading to SECRETARY WU*) This is his father's memoirs—it's all in here, in detail.
- ZHANG: Uncle Wu—was there anything else?
- WU: No, no . . . nothing else. Just chatting. I'll phone your father, and explain about that matter. You go and rest.
- ZHANG: All right. (*ZHANG leaves.*)
- QIAN: Are you really going to ring him up?
- WU: Just to find out what's really going on. You didn't look carefully at this whole business at all, but you put my car at his disposal . . . how will it look if there's something wrong?
- QIAN: What's so special about your car? He rides around in a *Hongqi*⁹ in Peking. Oh . . . you're suspicious of him, are you? No wonder you asked those questions.
- WU: But you kept interrupting, and stopped me from pursuing my questions.
- QIAN: I tell you, he's for real. If he weren't, why would have Department Head Ma have introduced him to Theatre Director Zhao? If he were an impostor, how could he have known that you visited his home in 1953, and that you gave his father a cactus?
- WU: It doesn't hurt to investigate things. Avoids making mistakes.
- QIAN: There's no mistake! He must be real—who would have the gall to shift in here with us if he weren't real? In my opinion, you'd better just fix that matter for him and be done with it.
- WU: We'll discuss signing that note afterwards.
- QIAN: I've had enough! You're just looking for an excuse. You just don't want to help him at all. When I ask you to fix something for me you're just the same—why didn't you bring me back a Golden Hair Monkey!
- WU: I'm a Municipal Committee Secretary—how can I get on a plane carrying a monkey? It'd look ridiculous.
- QIAN: Well, what about getting me a place on that overseas delegation?

⁸The main Communist base area.

⁹A luxury limousine.

- WU: There are no places left.
- QIAN: Can't you get in touch with the Central Committee, and wangle a couple of extra places?
- WU: You think that's easy?
- QIAN: You never care about me. Some people get a lot of extra tickets. How come you can't even wangle one or two?
- WU: You're the Head of the Political Division of the Organization Department of the Municipal Committee. Why do you want to go overseas?
- QIAN: To make a study tour of inspection so as to make greater contributions to the Four Modernizations!
- WU: You want to go to a capitalist country to study Party political and ideological work? Ridiculous!
- QIAN: It's you who's ridiculous. A lot of people—some of them have only been cadres since 1938—have taken their wives on overseas trips! And you? Have you ever taken me? Eh? What about the ten years of the Cultural Revolution? Haven't we been through enough trouble—we were treated like criminals—almost killed! Now that the Gang of Four has been overthrown, you and I should go on an overseas trip to recuperate—what's wrong with enjoying ourselves? (QIAN sits to one side, angry.)
- WU: (comforting her) All right, all right. We'll talk about it later.
- QIAN: Later? When? When you retire? When they hold your memorial ceremony?
- WU: Very well. I'll reconsider the matter . . . if I can wangle it, I'll let you go. Come on now, what's wrong with that? Oh dear! What can I do with you? (SECRETARY WU leaves.)
- (At the same time, ZHANG XIAOLI rushes onto the stage on his bike, and stops in front of the curtain. A telephone appears at the side of the stage. He lifts up the receiver, dials a number, and the telephone in SECRETARY WU's lounge room rings. DIVISION HEAD QIAN answers.)
- QIAN: Hello . . . Who?
- ZHANG: Is that the residence of Secretary Wu?
- QIAN: Yes, it is.
- ZHANG: This is the Garrison Command Headquarters. There's a long distance telephone call from Peking for you. Please stand by. (He imitates a Sichuanese accent) Hello! Who's that?
- QIAN: I'm Secretary Wu's wife. Who's speaking, please?
- ZHANG: I'm Zhang Xiaoli's father.
- QIAN: (surprised and happy) Ooooo! Venerable Comrade Zhang!
- ZHANG: Your name must be Qian.
- QIAN: Yes yes yes yes!
- ZHANG: We've never met . . . should I call you "Old Qian" or just "Little Qian"?
- QIAN: Oh—Little Qian—Little Qian, of course!
- ZHANG: Well, Little Qian, my lad, Xiaoli, wrote me that he's living in your house . . . that's such a bother . . . you are both so busy with your work, and he's given you so much extra trouble . . . you shouldn't let him stay there—you ought to throw him out!
- QIAN: No, no—we're really happy to have him here—I invited him here—don't worry about it!
- ZHANG: He's just a kid—there's a lot he doesn't understand. Very wild, too—discipline him if needs be—you'll have to be strict with him!
- QIAN: No, no—he's very good—Secretary Wu and I both like him. Er—Venerable Comrade Zhang—how's your work been recently? Very busy, I suppose?
- ZHANG: Yes, very busy. I'm responsible for organizing a large overseas delegation.
- QIAN: (very happy) Oh? Venerable Comrade Zhang—are there a lot of people in this large delegation?
- ZHANG: Of course—it's a large delegation.
- QIAN: Have the members of the delegation already been decided?
- ZHANG: Not completely—are you interested?
- QIAN: Of course. I'm interested in going overseas—er—for study purposes, of course. Secretary Wu's also interested.
- ZHANG: In that case I'll include your names.
- QIAN: Marvellous!
- ZHANG: Er—is Old Wu home?
- QIAN: Yes, he is. Just wait a minute. (Towards the inside room) Old Wu! (SECRETARY WU enters.)
- QIAN: (excitedly) It's Venerable Comrade Zhang—for you!
- WU: (quizzically) Oh? (He lifts the phone) Is that Venerable Comrade Zhang?
- ZHANG: Yes, yes—is that Old Wu?
- WU: Yes, yes.

ZHANG: Hello!

WU: Hello!

ZHANG: I've just been telling Little Qian that the Central Committee has decided to include the two of you on an overseas delegation.

WU: (*surprised*) Oh? (*Looks at QIAN*) Did you . . . ?

QIAN: It's been decided by the Central Committee!

ZHANG: What do you think about that?

WU: I'm afraid I might not be able to spare the time to get away!

QIAN: (*snatching the phone from him*) No—no—he'll be able to get away—he'll manage!

ZHANG: You can give the responsibility of running the Municipal Committee to someone else.

WU: I can't just do that!

QIAN: (*directly into the receiver*) Of course he can. Quite easily done!

(*SECRETARY WU and QIAN argue, through hand gestures.*)

ZHANG: This is an organizational decision—you'll just have to put up with it!

QIAN: (*directly into the receiver*) Yes, of course—we don't mind suffering!

ZHANG: In that case it's decided. Old Wu, how's your health nowadays?

WU: Not bad, Venerable Comrade Zhang. How's yours?

ZHANG: My leg's still playing up.

WU: Oh? Why is that?

ZHANG: When I was being beaten up by the Red Guards, somebody threw me off a platform, and I hurt my leg. Luckily there was a young fellow there who protected me; otherwise my leg would have been finished for good!

QIAN: (*into the phone*) Was that young man's name Li Xiaozhang?

ZHANG: That's right, that's him. I like him very much—like my own son I've heard he's still in the countryside and hasn't been transferred back yet

WU: Mmm

(*QIAN is making desperate hand gestures to WU, exhorting him to offer to help.*)

WU: Don't worry about it—we should be able to solve that problem.

ZHANG: Good. Now I can put my mind at ease. How's production down in your area nowadays?

WU: Much better this year than last. Now we're

acting according to the Party's "Eight-Character" policy.¹⁰

ZHANG: And how about the discussion on "Practice is the Only Criterion of Truth"?¹¹

WU: We're catching up. It's not going too badly at all.

ZHANG: Good, good. Well, good luck in your work—I'll visit you when I get a chance.

WU: Good. We'll look forward to your visit!

ZHANG: I might be with you very soon, in fact!

WU: We would like that very much.

ZHANG: Goodbye for now.

WU: Goodbye, goodbye.

(*As soon as ZHANG XIAOLI hangs up, he cycles off the stage. The phone at the side of the stage also disappears.*)

QIAN: Isn't that marvellous! I didn't realise Venerable Comrade Zhang cared so much about us!

WU: I suppose you're satisfied now?

QIAN: Hmmph. No thanks to you! Good old Venerable Comrade Zhang! And you were just wondering if his son is real or not!

WU: I was worried about being taken for a ride.

QIAN: I'm sure there's no mistake. I'm very good at telling a person's character. If he's not real . . . well, I think he's even realer than real! He can't be an impostor. You'd better get Li Xiaozhang transferred back quickly. Venerable Comrade Zhang fought for decades in campaigns all over the country . . . it's such a small favour. You'd better agree to do it.

WU: All right, all right. I'll sign that note.

QIAN: Now you're doing the right thing! Write it immediately.

(*SECTION HEAD SUN enters.*)

SUN: Hello, Division Head Qian!

QIAN: Ah, Section Head Sun. Secretary Wu's agreed to help us with that matter. Look—he's writing a note right now.

SUN: Great! (*He takes the bottle of maotai out of his satchel.*) Division Head Qian, I've heard that Secretary Wu has a taste for *maotai*. Here's a bottle—here—you have it

QIAN: But he's got plenty! You keep it for yourself!

¹⁰Tuanjie, zhengdun, gaige, tigao: unite, rectify, reform, raise standards—a common slogan in 1978.

¹¹A slogan launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

- SUN: Perhaps you don't have this sort of *maotai*—it's not ordinary *maotai*. It's specially made for export—it has different ingredients.
- QIAN: How did you get it?
- SUN: The XXX Foreign Trading Company.
- QIAN: I'll put it there, then. Please sit down. I'll go and get Little Zhang. (QIAN puts the *maotai* in a cupboard, and leaves.)
(SECRETARY WU finishes writing the note, and stands up.)
- SUN: Hello, Secretary Wu.
- WU: Section Head Sun—you can make the necessary arrangements about Li Xiaozhang now.
- SUN: (taking the note) Ah, that's good.
(QIAN enters.)
- QIAN: That young fellow really sleeps like a top. I kept calling him for such a long time before he woke up. I told him his father telephoned us—such a grin he had on his face—he's really still a kid!
(ZHANG XIAOLI runs onto the stage, buttoning up his coat as he does so.)
- ZHANG: Uncle Wu—did my father ring you?
- WU: Mmmm. Well, I've written that note, and I've given it to Section Head Sun.
- ZHANG: Great!
- QIAN: Section Head Sun—deal with that as a matter of priority, won't you?
- SUN: Of course. I'll go to the State Farm now. Little Zhang—would you like to go with me, to see Li Xiaozhang?
- ZHANG: Eh? Me? Oh no . . . I'll see him tomorrow.
- SUN: Well, I'm off.
- ZHANG: (walking in front of him) Uncle Sun—I've been an awful nuisance.
- SUN: No problem. Nothing at all. (In a low voice) How are you managing with that problem of mine?
- ZHANG: It takes time. Secretary Wu only came back yesterday.
- SUN: All right then. Well, I'm off now. (SECTION HEAD SUN leaves.)
- ZHANG: Uncle Wu, I'd like to borrow your car for a while.
- WU: Do you want to go out?
- ZHANG: Just on a private matter.
- WU: Very well. Get Auntie Qian to have a word with the driver.
- ZHANG: Thanks.
- WU: The little devil! (SECRETARY WU leaves.)
(ZHANG XIAOLI jumps for joy.)
- QIAN: The little devil—just look how happy he is!
- ZHANG: Auntie Qian, as soon as Li Xiaozhang's problem is solved, I'll have to go back to Peking.
- QIAN: Can't you stay a few days longer?
- ZHANG: I've been away a long time already.
- QIAN: You must be homesick, poor boy. All right—but next time you must stay with us again—just make yourself at home.
- ZHANG: It's much better here than it is at home!
- QIAN: You little devil! When you go back to Peking, I'd like to give your father a present—Secretary Wu brought it back from Huang Shan, specially for you . . . (She takes the bottle of *maotai* out of the cupboard.) It's a special kind . . .
(ZHANG XIAOLI accepts the bottle.)
- ZHANG: Thanks a lot! (He laughs heartily.)
(CURTAIN)

ACT V

Immediately following the previous act.
Afternoon.

The Office of the Director of the East Sea State Farm. It is very disorderly. All sorts of office equipment are mixed up with everyday kitchen utensils, none in their proper place. An old silk banner is hanging, close to the floor, on a tattered wall. An old broom is tied to a string leading to the light switch. Instructions issued from an office

such as this would obviously not be very effective—perhaps they die young, after just having left the door. The most symbolic thing is the clusters of weeds running riot in one corner of the room—from this the audience can get some idea of what the general appearance of the fields must be like.

As the curtain rises, FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG enters, carrying a herbicide spraying container on his back. He lackadaisically sits down at the office

desk, and has a few mouthfuls of wine.

YOUNG MAN A runs onto the stage.

YOUNG MAN A: Farm Director Zheng!

ZHENG: Whad'ya want?

YOUNG MAN A: *(takes out a telegram; with a mournful expression on his face)* My grandmother's suddenly been taken ill. My family's sent me a telegram, wanting me to hurry back!

ZHENG: What's wrong with her?

YOUNG MAN A: Cancer!

ZHENG: Don't try to scare people, do you mind? If you want some leave, just apply for it—why do you want to wish cancer on your grandmother?

YOUNG MAN A: She's really got cancer!

ZHENG: You're not a doctor. If you go back, will it cure her cancer? If it does, and I ever get cancer, I won't need to go to hospital—I'll just get you to call me every day, and my cancer will disappear.

YOUNG MAN A: *(imploringly)* Farm Director Zheng!

ZHENG: All right, all right. Have you spoken to your company commander?

YOUNG MAN A: The company commander's father is sick—he went home two days ago.

ZHENG: What about the deputy company commander?

YOUNG MAN A: The deputy company commander's mother's sick—he left yesterday afternoon.

ZHENG: How come they're all sick? It must be some sort of contagious disease. Oh well . . . how many days leave do you want?

YOUNG MAN A: That depends on how long it takes my grandmother to get well again.

ZHENG: When the relatives of people like you get sick, they never get well quickly. It takes them at least a fortnight, sometimes half a year. How many days do you want?

YOUNG MAN A: How about a month for a start?

ZHENG: Very well. Leave the telegram there.

YOUNG MAN A: Farm Director Zheng—you're really great!

(YOUNG MAN A leaves happily. YOUNG MAN B comes running in.)

YOUNG MAN B: Farm Director Zheng!

ZHENG: Is your father ill?

YOUNG MAN B: No.

ZHENG: Then it must be your mother.

YOUNG MAN B: No, it's my sister—she's getting married. Oh—*(taking out a letter)* I just got a letter.

ZHENG: And you want leave to go home.

YOUNG MAN B: Yeah.

ZHENG: I suppose if you don't go back your sister won't marry her boyfriend, eh?

YOUNG MAN B: No, it's not that—I just want to go to their wedding, that's all.

ZHENG: Have you spoken to your company commander?

YOUNG MAN B: The company commander's brother is getting married—he's left to attend the wedding.

ZHENG: What about the deputy company commander?

YOUNG MAN B: His sister got married not long ago—he's not back yet.

ZHENG: Oh well. The contagious diseases are over. Now it's time for collective marriages. How many days do you want?

YOUNG MAN B: Not many. A week.

ZHENG: All right. Leave the letter there.

YOUNG MAN B: Great! I'll bring you back a piece of wedding cake!

(Without lifting his head, ZHENG waves the young man out. YOUNG MAN B leaves.) (ZHENG sighs, deeply, and starts to hum a song from the Korean War. The sound of a car horn is heard. ZHENG leans through the window to take a look. The sound of brakes. In a few moments SECTION HEAD SUN enters.)

ZHENG: I've been expecting you for quite a few days—I knew you'd come!

SUN: Eh? . . . Have you been drinking?

ZHENG: Would you like a mouthful?

SUN: Drinking during office hours! Really! If you're not worried about the impression you make, I am!

ZHENG: More hypocrisy! What office hours? There's no office to have hours in! Just look through the window at the fields. Who's at work? Who's doing anything? Come on, have one!

SUN: *(taking a drink and talking at the same time)* You shouldn't stay here drinking. You should go around the work teams doing ideological work—"getting close to the masses", eh?

ZHENG: What masses? They've all run off into the cities. Some have jumped the queue, some have wangled transfers, and some have left through the "back door".

SUN: Why are you complaining? It's your management which is at fault.

ZHENG: My management at fault? You come here and manage the place, then! I'll kowtow to you, and beat my head on the ground so hard you'll be able to hear it!

SUN: All right, all right. *(Takes out the note from SECRETARY WU, and hands it over to ZHENG.)* Look at this.

ZHENG: *(takes it, very surprised)* Oh? The Secretary of the Municipal Committee has really written a note?

SUN: Before coming here, I went to the Labour Office. As soon as they saw this note, I was able to wangle a transfer. You'd better transfer Li Xiaozhang's registration at once. Secretary Wu says the quicker the better.

ZHENG: Can't be done. You're one step behind.

SUN: What?

ZHENG: The State Farm Party Committee has decided that, in view of the fact that the whole policy of transferrals is under investigation, we should "restrict the backdoor battlefront" as much as possible. So it has been decided that, for the second half of this year, a quota of no more than twenty will be allowed to leave through the back door.

SUN: The case that Secretary Wu has asked you to handle can hardly be considered "leaving through the back door"!

ZHENG: Oh, come now, Old Sun—don't feel bad about it. *(He fingers SECRETARY WU's note.)* This is one-hundred-per-cent backdoorism!

SUN: Are you daring to insinuate that the Secretary of the Municipal Committee dabbles in backdoorism?

ZHENG: Not only the Secretary of the Municipal Committee... even Ministers of the State Council and members of the Central Committee—they all do it!

SUN: You're drunk! This isn't backdoorism!

ZHENG: It is backdoorism!

SUN: It's not!

ZHENG: It is!

SUN: It's definitely not. It's frontdoorism! *(Realizing he's made a slip of the tongue)* Oh



no, it's not—no—that's wrong, that's wrong. I must be drunk, too. All right then. What do you think we should do about this matter?

ZHENG: He'll have to ease someone else out of the quota.

SUN: How can you call this "easing someone out of the quota"? It's "paying attention to that which is important". Get out the quota name list, and let me have a look at it.

ZHENG: *(handing over a list of names to SUN)* There are twenty names here. Which one do you think we can ease out?

SUN: *(pointing at the list)* What about this one?

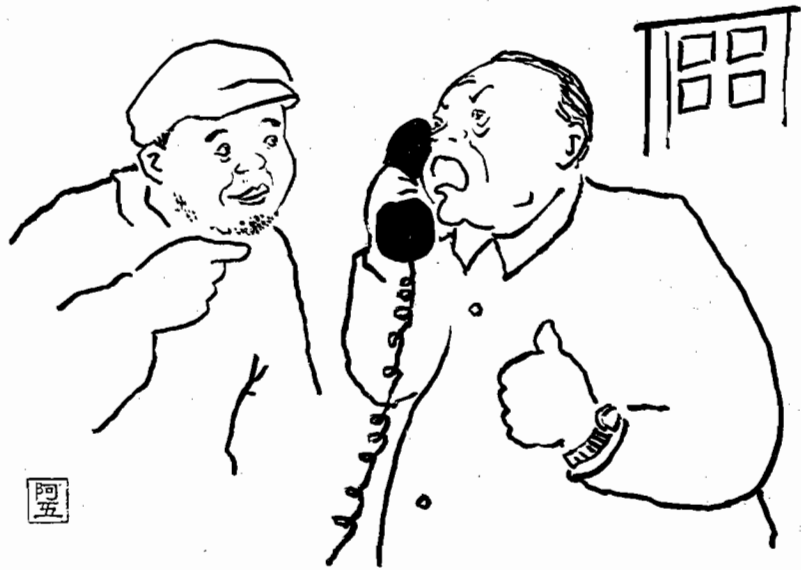
ZHENG: No chance. He's the nephew of the Chief of Staff of the Local Command Garrison.

SUN: Oh. *(Pointing at the list)* What about this one?

ZHENG: The niece of the sister of the Vice-Minister of Health!

SUN: Good Lord! *(Points at the list)* This one?

ZHENG: The grandson of the brother-in-law of the cousin of the Vice-Premier!



SUN: Bigger and bigger! I suppose this one's got relatives who are high-level cadres, too.

ZHENG: No—they're not high officials.

SUN: Oh? Well, that's good then.

ZHENG: But there's no chance there, either. She's the girlfriend of the State Farm Party Committee's Secretary's son!

SUN: Damn. Isn't there someone just related to an ordinary official?

ZHENG: (*pointing at the list*) This one. His father is the Eighth Deputy Section Head of the Housing Bureau.

SUN: Only a Deputy Section Head! And number eight, at that! Fine—he can wait until next year. Give his place to Li Xiaozhang. All right?

ZHENG: All right. Of course an Eighth Deputy Section Head has to cede to a Municipal Committee Secretary. The higher up an official is, the greater his power—power, power, power—you can do anything if you have power—that's the truth of the matter—and practice is its criterion!

SUN: Well, that's how we'll do it, then.

ZHENG: (*opens a drawer and takes out some papers*) This is Li Xiaozhang's file—the amount of oil and grain he's entitled to, his residence

transfer permit... here—you take the lot.

SUN: Oh? You've already completed all the formalities for him to leave the farm?

ZHENG: A case handed me by my superiors... that young man obviously has the right connections... of course I smelt it coming, so I made some preparations.

SUN: You've been having me on!

ZHENG: Not at all. I was only waiting for the note from the Municipal Committee Secretary.

SUN: (*taking up the file*) Are you going to notify Li Xiaozhang right away? Then he can leave the farm as soon as possible.

ZHENG: Of course. I'll phone now. (*Takes up the phone*) May Seventh Company, please... Is that the May Seventh Company? Is that Company Commander Chen?... Farm Director Zheng here... Is Li Xiaozhang in your Company at the moment? Oh? He's just come back this afternoon? No, don't criticize him—he's about to leave—transferred out—back to the city—yes, that's right. What? You won't agree to it? Good! Still a bit of the old rebellious spirit left, eh? You want to know if it's all in accordance with the prescribed rules and regulations? Or if it's a case of backdoorism?

Wait a minute (*He gives the phone to SECTION HEAD SUN*) Here—you answer him!

SUN: (*taking the phone—slightly drunk*) Hello—you want to know who I am? You'll jump when I tell you. I'm the Municipal Committee Secretary

ZHENG: (*surprised*) You're the Municipal Committee Secretary?

SUN: . . . Secretary's special envoy!

ZHENG: Oh! You really did make me jump.

SUN: Oh! You're asking if all this is in accordance with the prescribed rules and regulations? I can tell you quite categorically, that it certainly doesn't

ZHENG: Eh?

SUN: . . . deviate at all from the prescribed rules and regulations.

ZHENG: Good grief!

SUN: Officials ought to have special privileges . . . "backdoorism" is completely legal

ZHENG: What?

SUN: . . . that's what the Gang of Four said.

ZHENG: Come on now, that's enough. Just leave this to me. (*Takes the phone off him*) Hello—Old Chen? The Secretary of the Municipal Committee has written me a note, specifically requesting that Li Xiaozhang be transferred out. Immediately. Yes yes yes. Eh? You refuse to go along with this? I'm afraid you won't be able to resist the pressure . . . you'd better get Li Xiaozhang himself to come to the State Farm Office. Yes. Get him to come here immediately. (*He hangs up.*) Do you want to wait, and leave with him?

SUN: No—he'll still have to do his packing, and I can't wait that long. I'd better leave first—I might look as if I'm a bit drunk—no! I'm not drunk, I'm not drunk! Goodbye!

ZHENG: All right. I won't see you off.

(*SUN leaves. After a few moments, the sound of a car door is heard. FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG looks through the window watching SECTION HEAD SUN leave. He shakes his head, and continues drinking. Suddenly, he picks up a piece of paper from his desk, and starts writing furiously.*)

(*LI XIAOZHANG, having returned to his real identity from ZHANG XIAOLI, looks around cautiously inside and outside the office. He then steps in. His manner of speech and his*

actions are the same as before he assumed his new role.)

LI: (*cheekily*) Li Xiaozhang, valiantly battling May Seventh warrior in the glorious May Seventh Company on the East Sea State Farm reporting for duty, sah!

ZHENG: So you're Li Xiaozhang.

LI: The real thing. One metre 76 high, 66 kilos in weight, 26 years old, and in sixty-six days

ZHENG: Well?

LI: I will have been valiantly battling in the East Sea State Farm for eight years. Let's have a drink to celebrate it!

ZHENG: Don't be so cheeky. You might laugh a lot, but you're depressed as anything inside.

LI: Wow! Farm Director Zheng really has insight!

ZHENG: Has the Company Commander told you you're being transferred out?

LI: I heard something about it.

ZHENG: All the formalities have been completed. Your file and identity papers have all been taken away by Section Head Sun. You can leave our farm now.

LI: Thank heavens for that!

ZHENG: Should I offer you my congratulations, or my apologies?

LI: Your apologies?

ZHENG: This farm hasn't been managed well . . . we've wasted a lot of land, and . . . we've wasted your youth. So . . . so . . . everybody wants to leave . . . every time someone leaves, I feel . . . just so . . . so sad, as if I owe them something. But then—what could I have done about it? Even the Municipal Committee Secretary abuses his power and demands special privileges . . . he dabbles in backdoorism and doesn't care about running the State Farm well—he doesn't care . . . how can we "work flat out for the revolution"—there's no point . . . Not only you young people want to get off the Farm through the back door, even the State Farm's leading officials want to leave the same way

LI: (*not unsympathetically*) What about you?

ZHENG: I'm so depressed. (*He points at the wine*) I rely on this to drown my sorrows . . . the farm should be managed, but . . . not this way. If it goes on this way, I don't . . . I don't want to stay here any longer. The longer I stay here the less I can stand it

LI: (*surprised*) You want to leave too?
 ZHENG: (*sadly*) I've written a report, requesting a transfer. You know some high official's son, don't you—his name is Zhang Xiaoli. Couldn't you ask him . . . to help me . . . to have a word to the Municipal Committee Secretary . . . to get me transferred out, too?
 LI: (*stunned*) How . . . how could I do that!?
 (YOUNG MAN A enters.)
 ZHENG: Why can't you? (*He takes SECRETARY WU's note*) Just ask him. He wrote you a note, authorizing you to leave . . . why can't he write me a note, authorizing me to leave too? (*He takes the report he has just written, requesting a transfer*) This is my request for a transfer—I've got two reasons—one is that my grand-

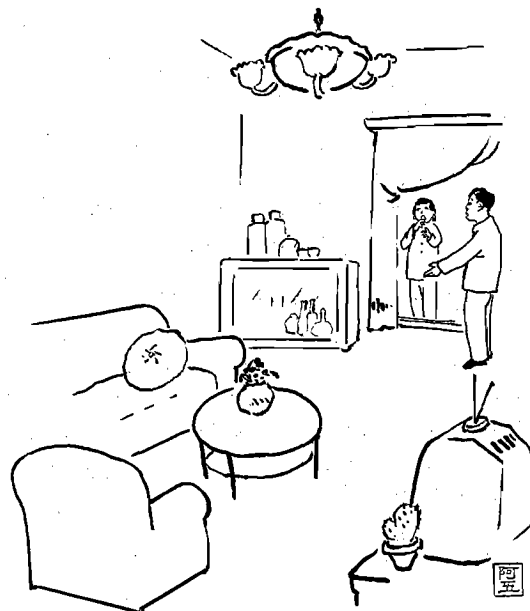
mother has cancer, and the other is that my sister is getting married!
 (ZHENG hands the transfer request to LI XIAOZHANG, but LI is stunned, and doesn't move. Suddenly, ZHENG withdraws his hand, and sorrowfully shakes his head. He waves LI away.)
 (LI leaves.)
 (ZHENG slowly, but firmly, starts to tear the transfer request into small pieces.)
 ZHENG: (*loudly*) Oh! My farm! (*He holds his head in his hands and sobs.*)
 (YOUNG MAN A stands behind ZHENG, and tears his own leave application form into small pieces.)
 (CURTAIN)

ACT VI

A few days afterwards. Afternoon.
 SECRETARY WU's home. The setting is as in Act IV. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. After a few moments ZHANG XIAOLI's voice can be heard offstage, saying "Now just turn your attention this way, please". ZHANG XIAOLI leads ZHOU MINGHUA onto the stage.

things like that—when they're not even at home?!
 ZHANG: It doesn't matter. It's my special privilege. Come on now.

ZHANG: (*standing at the side of the door, politely*) Please come in! (ZHOU MINGHUA stares at the furnishings, stunned.)
 ZHANG: (*like a tourist guide*) Kindly observe—this is the guest room of a Municipal Committee Secretary's home—it's like this both upstairs and downstairs—electric lights and telephones, steel windows and built-in cupboards, carpets and sofas, television, radio and tape-recorders—air-conditioning too. (*He points towards a room at one side.*) The bedroom's inside. Please come in.
 ZHOU: (*standing at the door, and looking at ZHANG*) What?
 ZHANG: Would you normally be allowed to come in? Please do!
 ZHOU: No, no, no!
 ZHANG: (*opening a cupboard*) Would you like a glass of orangeade? (*Pours a glass for ZHOU*) Here we are!
 ZHOU: How can you just take other people's



ZHOU: No! I've never taken anything off somebody without their knowing about it.

ZHANG: Oh, I take a lot. The more I take, the happier they are.

ZHOU: Is this the way you've been living for the last ten days or so?

ZHANG: Yes. Do you envy me?

ZHOU: No.

ZHANG: Minghua . . . all the time I've been enjoying this I've been thinking of you—as if I could see you again in Section Head Sun's house, barefoot, covered in sweat, washing clothes, polishing the floor . . .

ZHOU: Did you ask me to come over here today to see how rich you are nowadays?

ZHANG: I wanted to show you what sort of changes can happen to a man's life if he pretends he has an important father. There's something else I want to show you.

ZHOU: What?

ZHANG: Guess.

ZHOU: You're up to so many tricks . . . I can't guess.

ZHANG: (*takes out his work transfer permit*) Just look at this.

ZHOU: (*takes it and looks at it, wildly happy*) What? You've got it? Wow!

ZHANG: Yes, I've got it. Section Head Sun has arranged all the formalities. Tomorrow I can report for work at the most up-to-date factory in the whole city!

ZHOU: I . . . I must be dreaming . . .

ZHANG: No. The dream is over.

ZHOU: Wonderful!

ZHANG: (*imitating ZHOU*) Wonderful! Didn't you scold me for pretending to be the son of a high official?

ZHOU: It's still not right. Not proper.

ZHANG: But if I hadn't done it (*waving the transfer permit*)—could we have ever got this? And how about the year before last, when I should have been transferred back, but my place in the queue was taken by some high official's son—was that "proper"?

ZHOU: It's still . . .

ZHANG: Minghua—I'm not a crook. I haven't stolen anything, or robbed anybody, I haven't killed anyone or set fire to anything, I didn't conspire with the Gang of Four to usurp Party and State power, I didn't try to start the Third

World War. I just played a little trick on some officials, that's all.

ZHOU: I've been worried sick about you every day.

ZHANG: I've been pretty scared myself, too. Anyway, from tomorrow on, the scheming and cunning, Zhang Xiaoli will be changed back into honest, law-abiding Li Xiaozhang, and I won't have to run this sort of risk again. This is the first and last time.

ZHOU: Really?

ZHANG: Of course. Aren't you unhappy with me the way I am? (*Serious, in a way he has not been before*) I'm that way because I felt empty inside, my life was meaningless . . . I had no future . . . I'd written myself off, hated myself—and I could only take it out on other people . . . but from tomorrow on—I can guarantee you'll be one hundred percent satisfied!

ZHOU: Good—well—I—er—I'd like to tell you some good news . . .

ZHANG: You poor devil—how could you have any good news?

ZHOU: Haven't you noticed?

ZHANG: Noticed what?

ZHOU: (*shyly*) I'm already . . .

ZHANG: Already what?

ZHOU: Oh, really! You . . . (*She whispers in his ear.*)

ZHANG: (*surprised and happy*) Eh? Really? Minghua, Minghua! (*He takes MINGHUA in his arms and caresses her.*) Thank you . . . thank you . . . Why didn't you tell me earlier?

ZHOU: Didn't I tell you we wouldn't be able to wait much longer?

ZHANG: Oh!

ZHOU: When do you think we'll be able to . . .

ZHANG: Ummm. I'll register tomorrow . . . perhaps next month . . .

ZHOU: No, no . . . we can't put it off till then!

ZHANG: Well—what do you think?

ZHOU: Let's get married tomorrow!

ZHANG: (*excited*) All right then, tomorrow. Minghua, from tomorrow on—I'll be someone you can really like . . .

ZHOU: (*seriously*) I hope so much that you will. You are not satisfied with yourself the way you are—and, to tell you the truth, I'm not happy with the way I am at the moment, either. I wasn't happy with your recent activities, but I've forgiven you—perhaps that's because I'm

- selfish, too—I'm only concerned about getting married to you, and about our child. So instead of saying I've forgiven you, I should say I've forgiven myself.
- ZHANG: Why are you telling me all this?
- ZHOU: Perhaps to rekindle our lost ideals, our lost enthusiasm. We should be grateful for this chance. In the future we should work hard, and act like decent citizens. Promise me that from tomorrow on you won't smoke anymore!
- ZHANG: (*sincerely*) I promise.
- ZHOU: And you won't drink anymore?
- ZHANG: I won't.
- ZHOU: And you won't deceive people anymore, either!
- ZHANG: That's for sure.
- ZHOU: For ourselves, and for the sake of our child
- ZHANG: Don't worry. I'll be a good father.
- ZHOU: I believe you.
- ZHANG: (*holding MINGHUA's hand, emotionally*) Minghua!
- ZHOU: We'd better leave here soon.
- ZHANG: I can't. My performance is not over yet. The last act is tonight.
- ZHOU: What's happening?
- ZHANG: I told them that first thing tomorrow morning I'd be flying back to Peking and Division Head Qian is insisting on taking me to a play tonight. I'll have to wait until tomorrow before I can say goodbye to this place, and to that impostor, Zhang Xiaoli.
- ZHOU: I'd better leave first.
- ZHANG: Stay a while longer.
- ZHOU: I have to go and tell my father about you being transferred off the farm—and I'll have to make some arrangements about tomorrow.
- ZHANG: Will the old fool—er—I mean, my future father-in-law—still be against it?
- ZHOU: No. I'm sure he won't.
- ZHANG: If your father agrees, you must come and tell me.
- ZHOU: How can I tell you? There are too many people here.
- ZHANG: If your father agrees just wear your most beautiful dress—and you won't need to say a word—I'll know
- ZHOU: All right.
- (ZHOU MINGHUA leaves. ZHANG follows her lovingly with his eyes. DIVISION HEAD QIAN enters, excited.)
- QIAN: I've got some good news for you!
- ZHANG: More good news? What is it?
- QIAN: Someone's come to see you.
- ZHANG: Who is it?
- QIAN: Guess.
- ZHANG: Do I know whoever it is?
- QIAN: Of course you do.
- ZHANG: Auntie Zhao?
- QIAN: Wrong.
- ZHANG: Section Head Sun?
- QIAN: Wrong.
- ZHANG: I don't know anybody else here—except Li Xiaozhang, that is. Oh . . . is it Department Head Ma?
- QIAN: I'll tell you . . . it's your father.
- ZHANG: (*shocked*) My father? What father?
- QIAN: What? How many fathers do you have?
- ZHANG: No . . . what I meant was—whose father?
- QIAN: Your father, of course! He's just come from Peking.
- (ZHANG's whole body feels weak. He collapses into the sofa.)
- QIAN: What's up with you?
- ZHANG: Oh . . . I'm just so happy . . . so happy
- QIAN: You scared me.
- ZHANG: Where is he now?
- QIAN: He'll be here any moment.
- (VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG arrives, and takes one look at ZHANG XIAOLI. ZHANG XIAOLI slowly rises from the sofa. He and VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG stand at opposite ends of the lounge room, staring at each other, without saying a word. VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG inspects ZHANG XIAOLI in silence—ZHANG XIAOLI looks as if he is expecting a storm to break at any moment.)
- QIAN: (*twittering*) Venerable Comrade Zhang—please sit down—do sit down—oh—why don't you sit down? And you, Little Zhang—why are you looking at your father as if he were a tiger? (*She looks at VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG, and at ZHANG XIAOLI again, but they are still staring at each other, silently.*) It's really strange to see the two of you there, father and son . . . when you meet you just stand there, without uttering a word. Oh! I know what it is! Just like in a play: "a reunion

after a long separation"—you're both so choked with emotion you can't even talk!

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: I certainly can talk. I have something I want to say. To him.

QIAN: (*continuing to twitter*) Oh, you don't want to talk in front of me, is that it? Of course, of course. I should let the two of you have a good little tête-à-tête. Little Zhang, you stay here with your father—but you will still have to come with me to see the play tonight. I'll be off now. You two have a nice little chat! (QIAN leaves.)

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Don't just stand there. Sit down.

(ZHANG XIAOLI sits down, as does VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG.)

(*Silence*)

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Is your name Zhang?

ZHANG: No—it's Li.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: This is really a case of "Zhang's hat on Li's head"! What is your full name?

ZHANG: Li Xiaozhang.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: So—you're back to being yourself again. How old are you?

ZHANG: Twenty-six.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Are you assigned to the East Sea State Farm?

ZHANG: (*nods his head, surprised*) Yes.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Why did you pretend to be my son?

ZHANG: I was miserable. I wanted to be transferred out.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: You didn't commit any criminal acts?

ZHANG: I could have. But I didn't.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Did you manage to get yourself transferred out?

ZHANG: (*glaring at VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG*) It's all been destroyed by you. You've destroyed my hopes, you've destroyed my happiness—the happiness of three people.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Three people?

ZHANG: I was planning to get married to my girlfriend tomorrow.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: And the third?

ZHANG: Our unborn child.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Why did the two of you conceive a child before you were

married?

ZHANG: Partly out of love. Partly because we were bored.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Why didn't you get married, then?

ZHANG: If you get married you've got no hope of getting off the farm.

(*Silence*)

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Why did you impersonate my son? Why did you deceive so many people?

ZHANG: (*excitedly*) Surely I'm not the only one guilty of deception. On the contrary, this hoax is a communal effort. Aren't the very people I am deceiving, deceiving others in their turn? Not only did they provide me with the means and opportunity to perpetrate this hoax—some of them even showed me how to set about deceiving others. I can't deny that I used your position and status to achieve my own personal aims, but didn't they try to make use of my assumed position and status to achieve their much greater personal aims?

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: They? Who are they?

ZHANG: (*taking out a pile of reports, letters and papers.*) Look at these. This is from Theatre Director Zhao—she wants to get a bigger flat; this is from Section Head Sun—he wants to get his son-in-law transferred back from the North-East; this is a personal request to you, written last night by Division Head Qian, trying to get herself and Secretary Wu on an overseas delegation. Almost all of them had requests to make of me, but to whom can I address my requests? They all crawl to me, wanting me to solve their problems—but who's going to solve my problem?

(VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG leaves through the letters, papers and reports. He frowns and he walks up and down the room, in deep thought. He seems to forget that ZHANG XIAOLI is there.)

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*in a low voice, but forcefully*) They're all corrupt! Were you going to help them?

ZHANG: They're insatiable. I kept these things just in case I ever needed evidence to prove that they're not as pure as they make out!

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Did you want to

- use that evidence to bring a lawsuit against them?
- ZHANG: No. To stop them bringing a lawsuit against me!
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: You thought of everything.
- ZHANG: I have no power or influence—this was the only way I had of protecting myself.
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: But do you realize what you're guilty of? Fraud! That's illegal!
- ZHANG: Because I impersonated your son.
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: It is fraud to impersonate anybody's son!
- ZHANG: But why did I impersonate *your* son? Because when I did, they became so flattering, so toadying—they made everything so easy for me—so easy to do all sorts of things I'd never even dreamt of doing before. If I were to impersonate an ordinary worker's son or a peasant's son, would they have swarmed around me like that? Would all those doors have opened so easily for me? Of course not. Why? Isn't it because you—or people of your status—have special privileges which give you unimpeded access to everything—which give you unrestricted power? If you didn't have such special privileges, neither I, nor anyone else, would want to impersonate your son!
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Surely that's no justification for you to commit fraud. Because special privileges exist, you want to abuse them—because other people practise deceit, you want to deceive people too? That's a swindler's logic—it's not what decent young men ought to think. It's true that our present cadre system affords a few people unreasonable privileges—but not all officials abuse their special privileges!
- ZHANG: So you're the Grand Lord of Incorruptibility, are you?
- (ZHANG XIAOLI *guffaws sarcastically*. VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG *glares at him with such an authoritative air that ZHANG XIAOLI gradually stops his sniggering*.)
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: You may have impersonated my son, but you don't understand me at all. You lack a basic understanding of our Party, of our cadre system. I'd like you to give those notes and reports to me.
- ZHANG: Why should I give them to you?
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: It's my responsibility to deal with such matters.
- (ZHANG XIAOLI *hands him the papers*.)
- ZHANG: All right then. Are you going to arrest me?
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: The departments concerned will deal with you in the appropriate manner.
- ZHANG: I see. I know what to expect then.
- (SECTION HEAD SUN *enters*.)
- SUN: Come along. Little Zhang. Come and see the play. I've come to pick you up.
- ZHANG: (*to VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG*) You see how friendly they are—they've even specially sent a car to pick me up.
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Who's he?
- ZHANG: Section Head Sun—Head of the Cultural Section.
- SUN: Er . . . Little Zhang, who is
- ZHANG: My father!
- SUN: (*surprised*) Oh! Venerable Comrade Zhang!
- ZHANG: (*to VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG*) Can I go and see the play?
- SUN: Venerable Comrade Zhang—it's the last performance tonight—let him go, eh?
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*to ZHANG XIAOLI*) You're responsible for your own behaviour!
- (SECRETARY WU *and* DIVISION HEAD QIAN *enter*.)
- QIAN: Venerable Comrade Zhang! This is Comrade Wu.
- WU: How are you, Venerable Comrade Zhang.
- ZHANG: I'm well. And you, Old Wu?
- WU: Have a seat. I didn't expect you so soon.
- QIAN: Old Sun, I suppose you've come to take Little Zhang to the play?
- SUN: That's right. It's time now. We should be off.
- QIAN: Good, let's go, and let them have a chat. Come along Little Zhang!
- (DIVISION HEAD QIAN *leads ZHANG XIAOLI off, followed by SUN*.)
- WU: Venerable Comrade Zhang, I suppose you've come about
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: I've been sent by the Committee for the Investigation of Party Discipline!
- WU: Oh?
- VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*taking out a*

letter) This is a letter to the Committee for the Investigation of Party Discipline, sent by the Director of the East Sea State Farm. He's sent a note, signed by you.

WU: Er . . . don't you know about this?

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*taking it*) Don't I know about what? You've been had! Swindled!

WU: What? Oh . . . (*suddenly understanding*) Zhang Xiaoli . . .

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Zhang Xiaoli isn't my son.

WU: But he's been using your name . . .

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Even if I'd asked you personally, you should have refused. (*Takes out the letters and reports written by DIVISION HEAD QIAN and the others.*) Look at these! Even worse!

WU: Theatre Director Zhao, Section Head Sun—even my wife!?

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*angrily*) It's really sad. Our Party wasn't like this before—it had glorious revolutionary traditions! Don't you remember, Old Wu, during the war, how your children were lost? We gave up everything, in those days—for the revolution. When we took the cities we were still wearing straw sandals, sleeping by the roadside, going through thick and thin with the ordinary people. But what's happened to all those revolutionary traditions nowadays? Of course we can blame the Gang of Four—but they fell more than two years ago, and some comrades still haven't realized that things have changed. This is our Party's tragedy! Old Wu, we've been in the Party for decades—surely this must make us stop and think.

WU: You're right. I'm going to write a self-criticism for my role in the whole business to the Central Committee. And a bit of "ideological re-education" within the ranks of the Party for the other comrades, eh?

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Yes, they need some "ideological re-education". But those comrades have been involved in a criminal act. The Ministry of Justice might want to prosecute Li Xiaozhang, and the comrades involved might have to appear in court.

WU: I'm not worried about that. But it concerns me that, seeing the prestige of the Party is particularly low at the moment, if this case comes to court, it might . . .

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: That's the rub. But it can't be covered up. The masses will find out about it sooner or later, and, if they can't tell you what they think to your face, they'll talk behind your back. This sort of thing has been going on for a long time now, and the Party's prestige is getting lower and lower. We can only make our Party open and above board if we allow it to be subject to criticism—only if we openly expose the abuse of privilege and the corruption of some Party Members can the Party overcome its defects—only then does it have any hope!

(ZHOU MINGHUA *runs on, wearing an extremely beautiful dress.*)

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: We should try Li Xiaozhang in open court. This will give our cadres a lesson, and will also educate our young people—it will save them, get them on our side—and this will avoid a second or third Li Xiaozhang appearing under the name of Zhang Xiaoli.

(ZHOU MINGHUA *is shocked. She loses colour.*)

WU: All right. I'll ring the Public Security Bureau. (SECRETARY WU *goes over to the phone, and is about to dial.*)

ZHOU: (*crying out*) No! Don't!

(ZHOU *screams and faints.* SECRETARY WU and VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG *run over to her.*)

(CURTAIN)

EPILOGUE

Unfortunately, we can't remember who it was that said "the stage is a forum". In any case, at the moment our stage is a courtroom, and our respected, loyal audience have become spectators at an open trial. We hope that, after they have witnessed the whole proceedings, they will be able to come to their own conclusions about the correctness of the Court's decision.

The JUDGE and the two-ASSESSORS are on the podium. LI XIAOZHANG is in the dock. Two bailiffs are sitting behind him. SECRETARY WU, DIVISION HEAD QIAN, SECTION HEAD SUN, THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO and STATE FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG are on the witness stand. VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG is sitting at the desk of the defence attorney. The prosecutor sits at this desk. As the curtain rises, the prosecutor is reading the indictment.

PROSECUTOR: ...and the investigation shows that the case is absolutely watertight. So we have decided to prosecute in Court. That is all.

JUDGE: We have just heard the prosecution read the indictment, and explain the circumstances of this case. Li Xiaozhang—do you admit that the case as presented by the prosecution is true?

LI: (*standing up*) Completely true.

JUDGE: Do you believe what you did constitutes a crime?

LI: I'm not familiar with the law—but I do admit I made a mistake.

QIAN: What?! A mistake? As simple as that?

ZHAO: What was your mistake? Tell us!

JUDGE: Silence!

LI: My mistake is that I was not real. If I were really Venerable Comrade Zhang's son—or the son of some other high official—then everything I did would have been completely legal.

ZHAO: What's that supposed to mean?

QIAN: What impertinence!

SUN: He must be dealt with severely!

JUDGE: Witnesses may not speak without permission of the Court!

LI: I would like to express my thanks to the witnesses in this case. The fact that I was able to do all I did, and that I almost succeeded in getting off the farm, all began with Theatre Director Zhao giving me a start, Section Head Sun giving me a way, Secretary Wu and Division Head Qian giving me a note and Farm Director Zheng giving me a transfer. (*He bows deeply to the witnesses.*) Thank you very much for all your good intentions, thank you for making



things easy for me, thank you for all your kind assistance!

(THEATRE DIRECTOR ZHAO *is choking with anger*, DIVISION HEAD QIAN *is fuming, silently*, SECTION HEAD SUN *just stares vacantly, his mouth open.*)

ZHAO: Comrade Judge, please permit me to say a few words.

JUDGE: Go ahead.

ZHAO: What the accused just said is irrelevant to the case. Please direct him to remain silent!

FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG: No! Comrade Judge, please permit me to speak.

JUDGE: Go ahead.

FARM DIRECTOR ZHENG: I think what the accused just said is completely relevant: it's the truth.

JUDGE: What do the other witnesses think?

WU: (*rising*) I agree with Farm Director Zheng. We should let the accused tell the whole story. That will be—er—helpful.

JUDGE: What else do you have to say, accused?

LI: I would like to ask why Zhou Minghua is not in court.

(*The JUDGE and the two ASSESSORS converse in a whisper.*)

ASSESSOR: Zhou Minghua has been taken ill. She's in hospital. She can't attend the court.

LI: What's wrong with her?

ASSESSOR: She's undergoing emergency treatment.

LI: (*stunned*) What?

JUDGE: Do you have any other questions?

LI: (*weakly*) No. None. (LI XIAOZHANG *holds his head in his hands and sobs.*)

JUDGE: Now the defence attorney will conduct the defence.

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: (*standing*) I didn't expect the accused to ask me to be his defence attorney. But, seeing I had a clear understanding of the circumstances of the case, I had several conversations with the accused and decided to accept. In the first place, I believe that what he did does constitute the crime of fraud, and that the judicial organs should prosecute him. Otherwise we will not be able to maintain social order, and save young people from straying from the straight and narrow. But two questions presented themselves to me, and I would like Comrade Judge

and Comrade Assessors to consider them in their deliberations. First, apart from subjective factors concerning this young man's attitudes and character already existent when he embarked upon this erroneous and dangerous course, I think there are also deeper social and historical factors involved. In my opinion, during the decade of the Cultural Revolution and rule by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, the policy of sending young people "down into the villages and up into the mountains" was distorted, and this poisoned the minds of many young people. This is a major factor in understanding Li Xiaozhang's behaviour. From this standpoint the accused, Li Xiaozhang, is also a victim. This being the case, should we not deal with the accused leniently? Please consider this. Secondly, the reason the accused could proceed so smoothly in his deceit and his swindling was not due to any particularly brilliant methods he may have employed, but due to the fact that our society still tolerates special privileges and unreasonable ways of getting things done—these can provide any swindler with a fertile ground to perpetrate his fraud. For example, some of the Party members and high officials who were taken in by Li Xiaozhang actually helped him in his crime. Those comrades acted the way they did because, on the one hand, they were influenced by certain feudal ways of behaviour, and, on the other, because they wanted to satisfy their own selfish desires. Consequently, they were not only victims of this fraud—they were accomplices. They should accept that responsibility. When the Court is deciding the punishment for this crime, it should also take that into account.

ZHAO: What? We're accomplices?

SUN: Why should we accept any responsibility for it?

QIAN: Venerable Comrade Zhang! Really, that's too much! I can't understand—I can't agree with you! We're all victims of the Gang of Four!

VENERABLE COMRADE ZHANG: Are you the only victims of the Gang of Four? Our Party, our Country, our People—have suffered much more than you have. Why are you all so concerned with your own interests, and not the interests of the Party—of the Country, of our



People? Just reflect for a moment: while we were being persecuted by the Gang of Four, and longing for liberation from them, what was in our thoughts? Weren't we all looking forward to getting back to work, so as to dedicate our efforts to the revolution? At that time, the masses gave us unlimited sympathy and support. They hoped that we would be able to save the country, and bring happiness to the people. But now—you've forgotten all about that! You let the masses worry about the future of the country, you let them work for the common good—while you worry about getting better accommodation and looking after your own private interests. You let other people's children settle in the countryside, while you

dream up thousands of plots and schemes to get your own children back into the cities. You expect the ordinary people to "work hard and live plainly", while you yourselves long for an even more luxurious life. If we don't go through thick and thin with the ordinary people, how can we expect them to be "of one heart and one mind" with us? What really concerns me is that many of our officials—even those who survived the Gang of Four—will fall victim to their own corruption. So, Comrades—watch out! Otherwise some of you who are in the witness stand in this court may well end up in the dock of the Party's Discipline Committee!

(CURTAIN)