

FOR the new quarter, the last in Biliu's junior year, her schedule consisted exclusively of classes held in the building of Department of Mathematics.

Whenever there was a long enough break between classes, she could have gone to the Department library, which occupied one of the oldest corners of the main building and was only a few steps away from the classrooms. The ceiling was low, the windows small, and little of the bright California sun was allowed in. It was befitting that it creaked with history, exemplified by numerous important works on the discipline encased in leather-bound tomes. The Gothic font in faded gold and the Roman numerals on their spines added to her discomfort, although she knew that the weight of the past was almost negligible compared to what she was used to in China. 'Extremely poor,' had been her first impression of the agility of American students in numerical manipulation and mathematical abstraction. In classes for math majors, however, the Americans appeared far superior to her in comprehending abstract notions and concepts.

The library was too small to accommodate more than two independent study areas with tables, desks, and chairs. She lost her concentration whenever she saw her fellow students with their books open in front of them, absorbed in the way the passenger in the seat next to her had been on the airplane from Ēmng to California. When they had a heated discussion about mathematics, she became even more doubtful of her decision to major in the field. It was difficult to pin down the cause of her inability to join in such conversations. Was her aptitude for mathematics so inferior to theirs? Was her English insufficient to join in talks about math? Was it the problem of her Chinese upbringing, which taught her the virtue of modesty? Was it her cautious nature that was a handicap in heady debates? Was it because she was a sore loser or because she was not mature? Her uneasiness and doubt only deepened as she tried to identify its sources; all seemed to play a role.

The place of her choice was the undergraduate library, the one she had gone to when she had been enrolled in topology class. It was much larger and gave her calming anonymity. She was also among students whose mathematical skills were mostly abysmal by Chinese standards. It was a week or so into the quarter. On her way to the big library, she noticed that something

had changed. The fountain of the plaza, which she had to pass through, was not exactly as before. The droplets no longer had curious irregular shapes but simply formed a dull flow. Since then, she looked at the water whenever she passed by the fountain to check if it had regained life. Somehow connected to it was Terry's voice when he called her by name. And perhaps his melancholy on the answering machine. Two weeks passed without a sign of him around the plaza; by then, her thoughts had begun to fly to the fountain as soon as she left the classroom. A couple of days later, every *Q.E.D.* at the end of a proof was transformed into a clue for the morbid flow of water as she copied the letters in the notebook. Why it bothered her so much, she could guess. She could also guess that contemplating it would not give her a conclusion that she could embrace, whatever it might be. Probably only by calling him a more palatable answer would present itself. But what is there to tell him? What could it be to him that they were not seeing each other on their way to classes? One day she was looking at her notebook which seemed to be filled with *Q.E.D.* Liz had left the room earlier with her boyfriend for a movie.

It was his roommate, George, who answered the phone.

"Terry? Umm, he's taking a leave of absence right now. He left the campus at the end of last quarter."

She tightened her grip on the receiver.

"Are you Terry's girlfriend by any chance?"

"No, I'm not."

It made her feel caught by something that she did now know.

"I suppose you're a good friend of his, though?"

"... Yes."

"Well, he's a nice guy, but he became really withdrawn before he left and didn't want to tell me anything, so I thought you may be his girlfriend. I'm not sure if he's coming back at all because things sounded really, really bad. You know that his dad passed away?"

"No."

"You don't?"

Whether he was truly surprised or not, she could not tell.

"Well, his dad's business hadn't been going well for some time, and it finally went belly up, I think late last year. And then it looked like for collecting insurance money, his dad drove his car into a lake, and he didn't exactly try to come out. You see? He had a shitload of debt, so even with the insurance money their big house had to be sold. I saw pictures of the

house, and it was really humongous with a swimming pool and a huge garden fit for a big party and all that, in La Jolla or somewhere. They had houses in other places, too, but they all had to be sold.”

He paused.

“And then his mom. You know his mom?”

“No.”

“She came here once to see Terry, and that’s how I met her, but she’s like, you know, that French actress. What was her name? Ah, Catherine Deneuve. You know. That kind of allure. When you look at her, you can’t take your eyes off her, although she’s my mom’s age. Gorgeous. So she came and spoke to Terry in French. I guess Tea-ry, to be more correct. I think I’m close enough. You see, I don’t know French, but she was just so elegant in that language. Anyway, after some time she noticed me, just standing there like an idiot. Usually I’m a blabbermouth, but I was just looking at them with my mouth open, so she smiled and said something to me in French. Terry followed it up in English right away. They wanted to know if I was interested in going out for dinner with them. Too bad that I had an exam the next day, so I said I couldn’t go. Then his mom again smiled at me and said, ‘Good luck, George’ with a real French accent. I guess that’s how they say ‘George the Fifth,’ but of course, something else for ‘the Fifth.’ Anyway, it tickled me when she said ‘George.’ I don’t know, but it was altogether quite something. I kept on standing there for a few seconds after they closed the door. Her accent, her clothes, her perfume, her look, her way of interacting with people, her whole presence. Very European. I suppose French, to be precise.”

He paused.

“Well, Terry was kind of French sometimes. He one time said there were things that could be said only in French. So I asked what they were. He grinned and said, ‘Love, for example,’ and winked. The whole thing was so French to me, you know. Then he turned serious and said there were things that could not be described in any language. He became absorbed, his eyes focused somewhere far, far away. You know the way he is sometimes? Then he said, ‘But I’m an American.’ I said that was what I thought, although it was the only time when I did not think so. Funny, isn’t it? Strange guy. Well, basically very nice. You know what I mean?”

Another pause, but she knew that an answer was not expected.

“Getting back to his mom, she had a nervous breakdown after his dad’s thing and everything had to be sold. Not so hard to imagine, you know. So

Terry, being the only child, had to quit school, at least for now, and take care of things at home, although I'm not quite sure if they have a real place to live. It must be awfully hard because I think Terry really liked his studies here, unlike the rest of us."

George and she were on the same side, Terry on the other.

"Oh, you know what?"

She pressed the receiver more firmly to her ear.

"That reminds me." He slowed down before accelerating in full. "There was another time when I thought Terry wasn't really American. I guess things started going really awry during last quarter, and his mom would call him quite often. One time when I came back to the room, he was on the phone with his mom and in his unique blend of English and French, sadness and anger. When he finished talking, he said something loud in French. So I turned around and asked him what he was saying. He was looking at the phone really intensely. His face was distorted. I thought he was going to burn a hole in it by staring at it.

"He said, 'You wouldn't live if you didn't believe.' I didn't know what he meant by that, so I said, 'What do you mean?' 'That's what my mom says,' he said. I asked him if he always had philosophical conversations like that with her. He didn't answer right away. Only after a good half a minute, he said, 'She's French' with a lot of vulnerability in his voice. Then he perked up as if he had forgotten his troubles and said, 'Doesn't everybody believe?' I had no idea how I should answer that question, but I thought I'd better not contradict him. I just said, 'I suppose' as lightheartedly as possible. And that was it."

She heard faint noises of paper being shuffled.

"Yeah, his home phone number. I should have it somewhere. Now, where is it...? Here."

The area code indicated that it would be a long-distance call from the university.

"You wrote it down?"

His happiness at the moment made a contrast to the rest of his talk.

"Yes..."

"I got really scared last quarter."

His voice was again grave.

"When I came back to the room, it was dark, and I put my hand on the light switch. Then I noticed this tall guy standing, his head bowed like a wilted flower and looking at the floor. That was spooky, so I turned on

the light to let him know that I was back. He didn't make any move when the light came on, and I could see his facial expression. There was great suffering. I had never seen anything like that before. It scared the shit out of me. I kept looking at him. Then he raised his head with a twitched smile. I wanted to ask him what was up, but somehow I couldn't. He looked like he didn't want to say anything either."

George took a breath.

"He could get kind of creepy too. We were both in the room, doing our homework or something. Suddenly he speaks French. So I said, 'What?' He says, 'How can I translate this?' and some French again. I wasn't really interested in what he was going to tell me, so I kept quiet. Then he said, 'Scents, colors, and sounds. They respond to each other.' Does that mean anything to you?"

Scents, colors, sounds, respond.

"It doesn't to me, so I thought it was my turn to say something weird. I said, 'Women are like scent.' He was like, 'What?' Really puzzled. 'They're nice when you're not used to them, but you soon get used to them and you don't even notice that they're around. You always have to look for a new one.' He was shocked. I just repeated what my brother told me some time ago. To tell you the truth, I don't know if I fully agree or understand what he meant. Because you get used to foul smells, too, you know?"

Women, scent, foul smells.

"It made Terry shut up for the next few hours, though. Anyway, when you call him, say hi for me and ask him to call me sometime. Will you?"

"... All right."

The receiver was off her ear, and she looked at the holder where it was supposed to rest. Then she heard a click, followed by the dial tone. She realized that she had been holding on to the receiver.

A week passed. She still did not know what to say to his mother in case she answered the phone, or to him. That night she was in the cafeteria, trying hard to find the missing step in the proof of a theorem. In an attempt to refresh her thinking, she shifted her gaze from the notebook. Somebody had left a newspaper on the table, and she had pushed it aside when she sat down. She reached out, drew it toward her and flipped the pages. A small article in the world news section caught her attention. 'Chinese Bank Official Imprisoned for Embezzlement in Xiamen,' read the headline. The name of

the official appeared in the first sentence of the main text. It was identical to her father's name, not in the Mǐnnán language but in Mandarin. The city was Xiamen, which was the Mandarin reading of Ēmîng. After all, the name was very common in the region. Phone calls were forbiddingly expensive between the US and China, more so from China than the other way around. It was she who made calls, and that once a semester and just long enough to say hello to everyone in the family.

Several days later she was surprised by the voice on the other side of the line.

"Bíliú, you have to come back home."

It was her mother.

"Right now? Why? I have classes."

"Probably in a few days. I can't tell you why over the phone. It's serious. Please do as I say."

"I don't understand."

"Somebody from the Chinese Consulate is going to come over to your dormitory, I think tomorrow. Follow their orders. They will give you a ticket for traveling to Ēmîng."

"Is that what Apâ wants too?"

There was no answer.

"I read in the newspaper that... "

She did not know why she remembered the article from the other day.

"Is it related to Apâ?"

"Aiiâ! It's in the newspaper in America too?" Abú's voice was so taut that it was about to break. "In any case, the Chinese Consulate, tomorrow. Be polite. Don't protest or resist."

"It must be a mistake. Besides, why does it have anything to do with me?"

"They think there is a connection."

"I really don't get it. My studying in California and... the bank? It doesn't make any sense."

"Bíliú! We cannot talk like this over the phone."

"But we're right in the middle of the quarter."

"You may be allowed to stay until the end of the quarter. You'll find out from the Consulate. But please, do not argue with them. You do it for the entire family."

She knew that it was not in Abú's power to decide such matters.

“I have to hang up now.”

Abú did so before Biliú could say anything.

It was in the morning, two days after the phone call from home. Liz had already left the dormitory room. When Biliú opened the door to go to her class, she found two men standing in front. They identified themselves as officials from the Chinese Consulate and entered the room. They declared that they were instructed by the Chinese Government to conduct a search. She understood from the voice and manner that these men could not be stopped. Each started from a different end of the room, one from the closet near the door and the other from the desk by the window. They opened the drawers and closets and quickly examined all items. They threw most of them on the floor except for some letters, which they stuffed in their attaché cases. They neither helped nor obstructed each other and carried out the task without a word. She sat on Liz’s chair and watched. It all looked too strange to be real. Soon the floor was completely covered with her clothes, notebooks, books, pencils, and such. After less than a quarter of an hour, the operation appeared to be finished. One of the men turned to her.

“You will be leaving the country on the 25th of May. We will be escorting you to the airport and give you the ticket then. Be ready by 8am. The plane leaves around noon.”

The other man gave her a piece of paper. It was an itinerary with the date, time and names of two cities in Chinese, but no airline name or flight number. While she was looking at it, they closed the door behind them. She let go of the paper and watched it land on the mound of items on the floor. Then she left the room, convinced that it would bear no evidence of the visit when she returned. What she witnessed would turn out to be a dream.

There was a note on the door of the dormitory room when she came back in the afternoon. ‘Biliu! What happened??? Please clean up! Liz.’ She took out the room key from her pocket but put it back again. Back in the library she found it impossible to concentrate on her homework and decided to return to her dormitory. If it were not for some noise of paper behind the door, she could have turned around and gone back to the library again. She had to see what it could be. It was Liz’s boyfriend trying to push back the mound of clutter that had invaded the other half of the room.

“Biliu! Great that you came back now. Carl and I were trying to make some space here. What on earth has happened?”

A quick glance at the room convinced her that there was no sense in denying what happened that morning. She looked at Liz and Carl. Would they be able to differentiate jasmine tea according to its strength and point out the properly prepared one? It was impossible to tell them about the incident in a way that did justice to its seriousness. It was better not to make an attempt rather than to try and fail. She turned around to face the pile of papers and clothes and started to sort them. Her back was turned to the two, but she felt she could see them looking at each other.

“I can help you.”

Liz came to her side.

“No... thank you.”

Biliu’s voice and tears were drifting into a territory where they should not.

“Well... ” said Liz and stepped back.

She was out of her sight again.

“Let’s go to the library then, Carl.”

They left with a bang of the door.

The loudness of that noise was reassuring and relieving. She went through the papers and noticed that the officials from the Consulate had only taken letters from her friends and family in China. Nothing else appeared to be missing. At the bottom of the mound was a piece of paper that looked unfamiliar to her. She picked it up. The date of departure was two days after the end of the spring quarter, the last quarter of her junior year. She could continue her study until the end of the year but not long enough to obtain her degree.

How she reached that place again, she did not know. The flowers had wilted, and there was no fragrance.

Just then a person stepped out of the building behind the bush. She felt pressed enough; she overcame her usual cautiousness and posed a question to a stranger.

“Does somebody play the piano in this building sometimes?”

“A piano? I have had an office here for more than ten years, but I don’t think there is any piano,” he said, not even stopping to answer the question.

The moon had glistened like silver, enveloped in the fragrance of jasmine. It was the very place but so little resembled what she had seen that night. She wondered what Terry had seen.



The word spread fast, and the Chinese students on campus no longer greeted her. The vast majority of them were graduate students, and she had little contact with them anyway. Nonetheless, it was an unpleasant reminder of the unfavorable turn of her fate. There were rules of behavior that she considered unique to China, and the Chinese in California were ignoring those rules. She confided in Sarah about her ordeal.

"It's totally against what Confucius taught us."

She was embittered.

"Oh, grin and bear it."

It was a novel piece of advice. She understood 'to grin' and 'to bear,' but not the combination of the two. The Chinese do not take their culture lightly, but they were acting in violation of Chinese courtesy. It was a glaring case, and she could barely grin.

It was the sound of destruction that she listened to, as she tore off a sheet of paper from a spiral notebook. The perforated edge that held the paper to the ring was now gone. Instead there was something that looked like a wound inflicted by slowly rubbing oneself against barbed wire. Any Chinese person who received a letter written on a ruled sheet of paper from a notebook, and that with a ragged end, would have good reason to be offended. She remembered Sarah writing letters on such sheets. She felt satisfied by the thought of using the paper that she had just torn off for a letter to China.

*Dear Kiông,*

*I hope you are enjoying the jasmine flowers on my behalf. There aren't any of those in California. I also hope that you have managed to keep your spirits high. I don't understand anything. Why such a fate befell us, why I am Chinese, and what the Americans are thinking. They carry on with their studies as if there were nothing worth caring about in the world except their courses. They do not seem to have the slightest knowledge of the hardship of a Chinese student like me. Don't you think it unjust that they enjoy their carefree lives while I may not be able to finish my studies? Do you think because I am Chinese nobody asks me any serious question about math? Do you think I am not as smart as they are? I don't know why they often do not greet me although I never fail to greet them. I have been trying to act as if they were not there, because that is how they treat me.*

Such a letter could not possibly be sent to anyone back home. She tore the paper into pieces and made them into a ball. She then stretched herself up from the chair, as if to make the first serve in volleyball, and threw the ball into the wastebasket. A contraction followed a stretch, and she shrunk back onto the chair. When that very short process ended, she quickly stood up and walked to the basket to retrieve the shredded pieces. There was no problem in finding a place for them in the back of a desk drawer.

“You haven’t taken my advice.”

That was the first thing she heard from Sarah on the phone.

“You mean ‘grin and bear’? You haven’t understood my situation.”

“I don’t think you have either. Look, I have to go now. But if you hate Americans so much, why bother? Why be so angry about them? Shouldn’t you be happy that you’re going back to China?”

With that, Sarah ended the call. Biliu knew that Sarah’s admonition could not be dismissed and became even more incensed. According to Taoism, one had to accept the given situation. She used to disagree, but now it appeared so applicable to her life. The difficulty in putting her mind into work only worsened, and she was delighted when Sarah called several days later.

“It’s over between Melanie and me,” said a cracking voice.

“Why? Did you have a fight?”

“No. She told me she has found somebody else.”

Sarah had never sounded so downcast before.

“I’m sorry.”

Biliu was happy to think about other people’s misery rather than her own for a change. After a moment of silence, she added, “It’s funny.”

“What’s funny?”

“I always think that Americans don’t have anything to worry about. Particularly Caucasians. But that’s not true. It’s hard to believe.”

“Biliu! You’re so mean. I’m telling you that I broke up with somebody who I think is the love of my life, and you tell me that I don’t have any problems. Maybe you don’t know, but we, Caucasians, have emotions too. Besides, I’ve been meaning to tell you this for some time, but racism does not exist in the US, okay? You’re just imagining things. Did anybody tell you that because you’re Chinese you can’t do this and that? I bet nobody has. You should stop talking about it.”

Biliu started writing another letter to Kiông.

*Dear Kiông,*

*I have to confess that America is not what I expected it to be. Yesterday I was in the library when I overheard a conversation between American students. They complained incessantly about the class they were taking, from the inappropriateness of the teaching material to the personal character of the professor. They dare criticize the content of the course when they have very little knowledge of the field. They don't seem to realize that a professor is also a human being and that he has to be treated with some care to not hurt his feelings. Not because he would strike back with a low grade for the course but because he is a person. At the same time students would challenge professors much less than other students. I cannot understand how democracy could work with such attitudes. I decided to leave the library for a quieter place. I smiled as usual to the person at the door who checks bags. He did not return my smile, as usual. My fellow math-major students act as if I do not exist because in American society one has to be heard to be seen. In China verbosity is equal to shallowness of mind, as you know well.*

Nobody in Ēmng would believe that America was mistreating her. Rather it was her fault that she was not adapting well after almost three years in California. As she had done with the previous letter, she tore the paper into strips and crumpled them into a ball. She then threw it into the wastebasket. As the ball landed with a dry and soft sound, she noticed that somebody was practicing Chopin's *Raindrop*. The melody was only barely recognizable. The person at the keyboard did not seem to mind that the lack of skills was on full display.

"Americans," she said to herself.

"I'm sorry about the other day. Are you feeling better?"

Sarah was at the other end of the phone.

"Yeah. I think I will get over it if I don't talk about it too much. What's up?"

They agreed to meet later in the cafeteria.

With Sarah she felt little inhibition and could have explained almost everything, but, facing her, much of what she remembered appeared absurd. Something precious was being lost, piece by piece, as she talked. She chose not to tell her about the moon that she saw; Sarah often mocked her for taking unverifiable details seriously.

Sarah rocked her paper cup, and the ice cubes at the bottom jingled.

"I don't know what to say, Biliu."

She lifted it above her to sip the last few drops of lemonade.

"He may be a nice guy but a bit neurotic. I have no idea what he was thinking."

As she put it down on the table, the cubes slid back to the bottom and jingled again.

"You like him. Correct?" she continued.

Biliu nodded.

"Hey, he's an American, even though he seems a bit confused about being French and all that. I thought you didn't like Americans, although you were annoyed that you're not American. Well, you're confused, too, so maybe that's why he was nice to you."

Then Sarah's eyes turned serious.

"Let me make use of my knowledge of philosophy. According to the ancient Greeks, there are three kinds of love: *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. *Eros* is the easiest, the ordinary love, the kind of Romeo and Juliet. *Philia* is a brotherly kind of love. *Agape* is love that God would have for his subjects. I think, I'm not totally sure, but Terry had this *philia* for you."

"*Philia*."

"I don't think he sees you as a woman from the way you described him. I think he's gay."

"Oh, no!"

"What's wrong with that?"

"No, no, nothing, it's just that... "

"I know what you're thinking. But this is a guy who had so many opportunities to make an advance and didn't. Clearly he's not thinking with the lower half of his body. I firmly believe that there's no guy faced with a potential mate who does his thinking with the upper half of his body."

"All that men want is sex... "

"You got it. You know, I worked in a deli in the city, I mean New York City, for a summer job when I was in high school, and it was just amazing. We had a tip bin next to our register. I would be ringing people up, and

if I smiled really nicely, men would be dropping a dollar bill, sometimes a five-dollar bill. With women it was a lot harder. The problem with men is that they perk up when you smile at them and start chatting them up. They want to go out with you and do the thing. I had so many invitations. One guy was particularly tenacious, and he waited for me every night for, like, two weeks. Finally I had to tell him my sexual orientation. Then he said, 'What a pity, a nice, pretty girl like you!' You see, men, especially heterosexual men, are totally useless. In fact, worse."

Sarah leaned forward and whispered.

"I hadn't told you this, but I was accepted for the Honor's Program in Philosophy. I'm not a straight-A student—my ideas are too off-the-wall for them—so you may wonder why. I did too. Well, I'm pretty sure that it's because one particular professor wants to sleep with me. He's been acting weird."

Bíliû looked at her friend carefully. She was pretty with dark, wavy hair and a chiseled face. Her eyes were black and large, adorned with long eyelashes.

"I want to be a lesbian."

If she had been one, she would be closer to gay men, and that included Terry.

"Too bad, huh." Sarah leaned back in her chair. "That's not something you can change unfortunately."

The final examination period for the quarter approached its end. She did not think she did poorly, but as she said to Sarah, "I don't think I aced it all." Ace it. What should she do with the secret notebooks filled with hundreds of other like entries?

She asked Sarah out to the cafeteria again. As she feared, she could not present an accurate picture because she omitted the details that would not be objective according to Sarah.

"Do you think Veronica is Terry's girlfriend?"

"Could be. Does it matter? He may be gay, Veronica may be his girlfriend. In any case he could have told you that he was leaving if he really..."

Sarah watched a student park and lock his bicycle close to where they sat.

"Why don't you just ask him? You have his phone number, right?"

"I have the number, but I can't."

“What do you mean you can’t?”

“Somehow I get really nervous.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed that when you talk about him you sound tense. Do you really like him? I got an impression that he was as nice to Veronica as he was to you. My theory is that he is gay, and that’s why he’s capable of this *philia* thing to women. But I think you should find out yourself. Call him, okay? By the way, let’s party before you leave. There are lots of parties organized this time of the quarter, and you haven’t been to any of them.”

It was the night that they agreed to meet. Several steps away from them, the windows poured out light, music, and chatter. They were discussing whether they should enter the fraternity when a figure emerged from the dark.

“Sarah, are you still angry?”

It was Melanie.

“I think I made a mistake.”

“You mean... ” Sarah started.

Under faint streetlight, they stared at each other.

“I’ll go inside and wait for you,” said Biliû after a moment.

She watched them exchange gaze without words for a few more seconds. Then she turned around and went through the doorframe. The party had been going on for some time.

“Welcome, welcome, welcome! To Alpha-Beta-Gamma! No, it’s Theta-Kappa-Zeta! No, it’s actually... who cares?” shouted one student. He looked at her and continued in a lower voice, “Madam Chiang Kai Shek, I presume.”

His remark brought a smile to her face. She was from mainland China, and Chiang Kai Shek was the enemy.

“Ah, you smiled! Yes, you must be Madam Chiang Kai Shek, not Madam Mao Zedong! Let’s drink to capitalism, Madam. The final exams are finally over. Finale, finito.”

“What’s this?”

“It’s orange juice and a splash of our secret ingredient. Try it. It’s good.”

She took a sip.

“It tastes like orange juice.”

“You see, it’s good. Here, finish that glass, and I’ll make you another one.”

He poured some more into her empty glass.

“I’m Paul, by the way. Now let me introduce you to some other gorgeous fraternity boys.”

He looked around and called a student named Fabian.

"Fah-bee-en?"

"Yeah, Fabian. I think it's kind of French."

Her heart made a big beat.

"Fabian, here's Madame Chiang Kai Shek and I would like you to take good care of her while I entertain... Ingrid Bergman!"

A blond student who had just arrived started to giggle.

"What are you having?" said Fabian.

He went to fetch a glass for himself. She talked about student life with Fabian, who turned out to be an American. She remembered talking about Chinese culture. She remembered asking him whether his name was French and if he spoke French. Did he play tennis? Was his hometown the same as his birthplace? She could not remember his answers. She knew that she had never talked this much to an American student, save Sarah. She knew that no American student had talked this much to her, save Sarah. She could not remember how many glasses of orange juice she had. At some point she noticed that he looked just like Terry.

The morning light on her face woke her up. She felt chilly and knew that she was not in her bed in the dormitory. Could she be back in the pink room at Jim and Carrie's? A quick examination of what was around her indicated that she was in another dormitory room. Next to her lay a snoring student, whose hairy chest was left uncovered and whom she barely recognized. She noticed that all her clothes were scattered among men's clothes on the floor. She picked up hers, clothed herself as quickly as possible, and ran out of the room and the fraternity house. Soon she was back alone in her own room, grateful that Liz had left the campus for the summer break already. She took out the paper on which she had written the phone number. She dialed quickly enough so that there was no time to change her mind. It rang in search of him. She heard a message recorded by the phone company, whose mechanic voice contrasted with his recording on his answering machine. The number had been disconnected.

A couple of days before her departure, the phone rang in her room.

"Sorry, I wanted to call you earlier, but, you know, I had so many exams," said Henry.

After her father's news spread, she had been avoiding him as much as she did other Chinese students.

“Do you want to have afternoon tea?” he continued.

It was just like the time when she had been full of hope about America, having a snack in the afternoon with him. When they met in the cafeteria, he was much less confident than usual, and for once he searched for what to say.

“You see, it’s not the Americans but the commies who let us down,” he finally said.

The meeting was short. They climbed down the terrace steps outside the cafeteria. When they were almost at the street level, his pace slowed.

“Let me do something American,” he said.

He smiled shyly and gave her an awkward hug.

“Take care,” he said in English.

A few more steps and they arrived at the bottom. They waved good-bye.

Jim and Carrie had not contacted her since the phone call about a night of piano performance at their house. Besides she only had the time to call Sarah to say good-bye. Sarah said her campus life would be more difficult without her; it was a kind of comment that she had not expected at all.

“I’ve found a great poem by Goethe. I know you don’t have time, but it’s short, and I’m going to read the first few lines anyway. I really can’t let you go without listening to this. You’re ready?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, the title is *On the Divan*. Here we go.”

Sarah took a breath.

*“He who knows himself and others*

*Here will also see,*

*That the East and the West, like brothers,*

*Parted ne’er shall be.*

It’s a nice counterweight to Kipling that you cited some time ago, you don’t think? In any case I’m sure you’ll be back. Believe me, Biliu. See you soon.”

The Consulate officials escorted her to the airport and waited until she went through the walkway. The plane took off with roaring engines, and she heard the sounds of wheels being folded into the aircraft. California was getting smaller and smaller, and the distance between her and Terry was growing at an enormous speed. After a few minutes she could only see clouds from the window. A stewardess asked her in Mandarin what she preferred to drink.